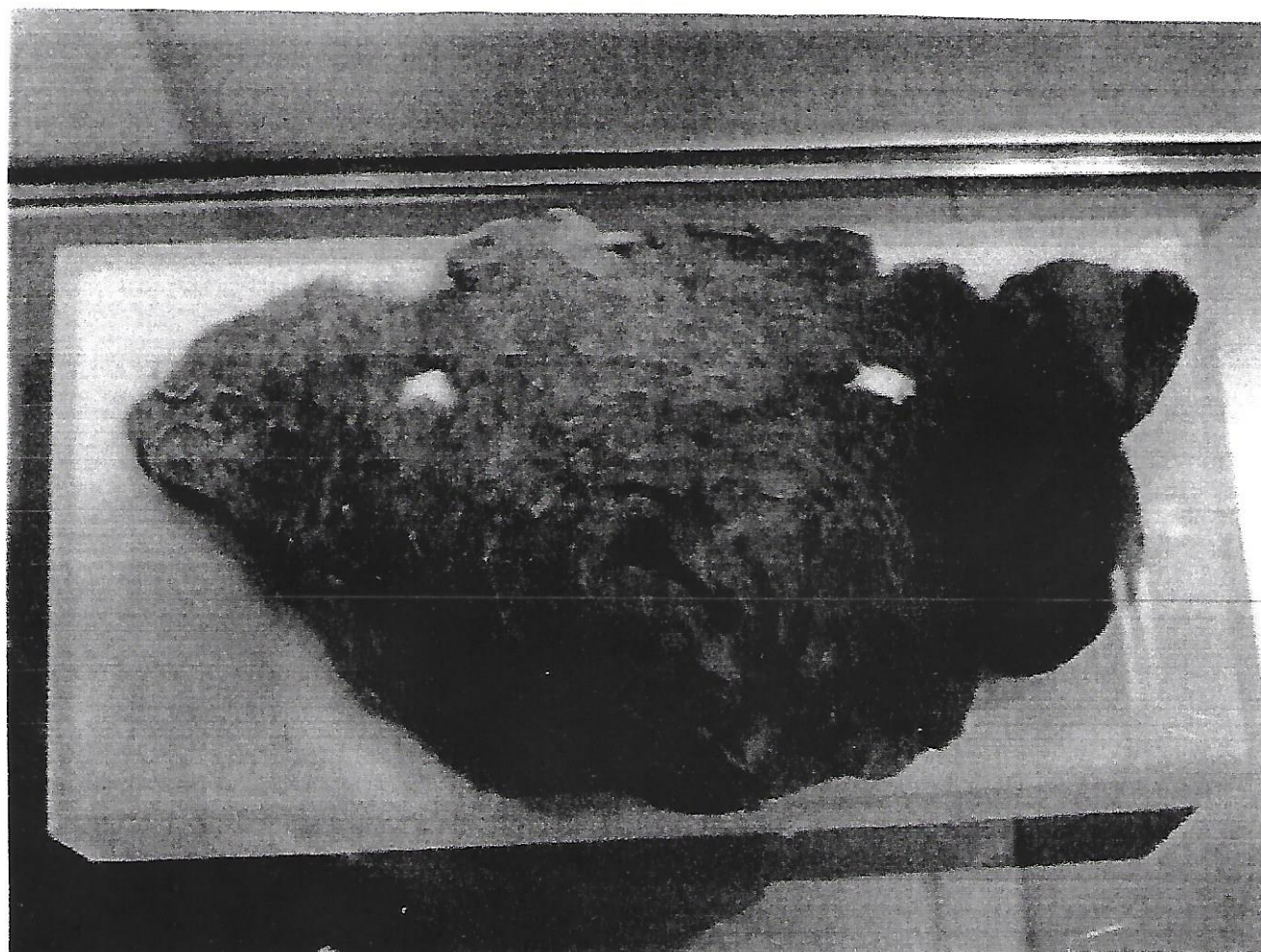


Hedeby masks



Baroness Cellach Dhonn inghean Mhic an Mhadaidh

April, 2018

I was introduced to felting in spring 2012 when I took a class at my local art store. I loved it immediately and still do. I continue doing project and doing a lot of research. At first, I had problem finding primary sources within SCA time period, now I can find more because I learn more about it, the research part is easier.

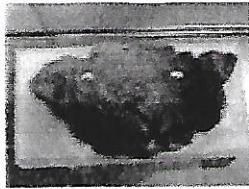
I decided to do a felted mask for our Baronial Russian Christmas Ball because it was custom that the people who was attending Novgorod Christmas Ball to wear one. Masks representing Farm or forest animal mask were the favourite populace choice. All the Novgorod mask found are in leather. Since, I remember from my previous research, that two felted mask were found in Hedeby and one of them look like a cow. I decided to make it without looking at my previous research. I was pleased at the finished look and wore it proudly. After the event, when I look at the research that I had started years ago I laugh at myself. My view of my felted cow mask was one of a modern classical education person. Well, what I mean and what you should understand by this statement is: you know a cow is a cow.

So, I decided then that felting the two Hedeby masks would be my entry.

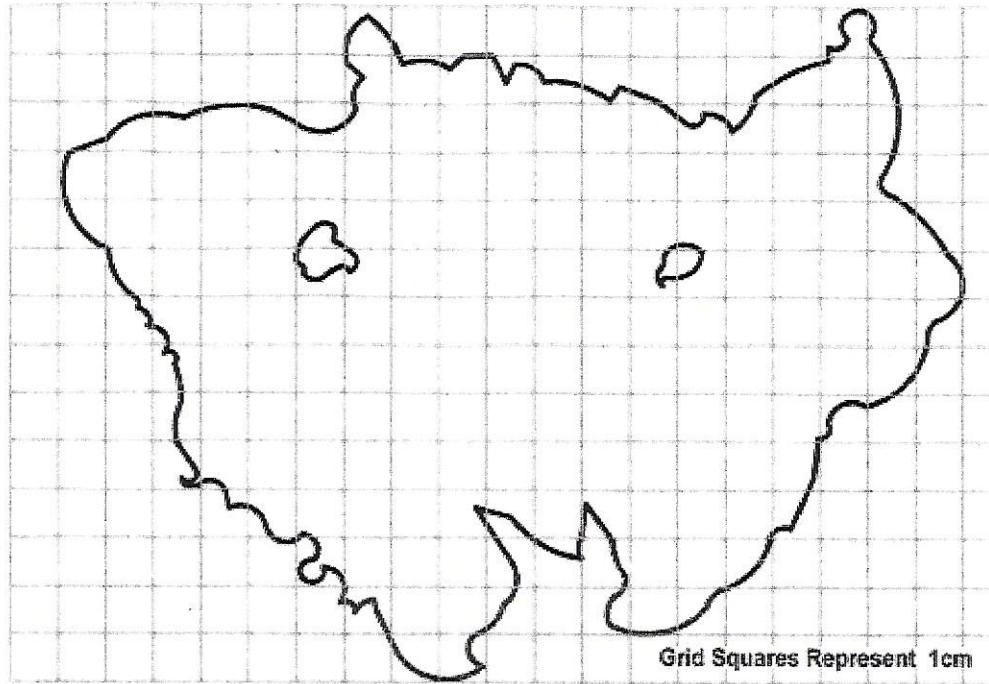
Hedeby felted masks

The felted masks are based on a 10th century finds from Hedeby. Hedeby was an important trading port in Scandinavia. See map below. Today, Hedeby is a city of Gemany. The originals appeared to represent a sheep and a cow. So, I've tried to make mine look like the originals but I should point out that Hagg (1984) do not know for sure if the Hedeby masks were meant to be a sheep, a cow, a dog, a fox or a wolf. The masks were found rolled in a ship discovered in harbour at Hedeby/Haithabu. They have been used as caulking of a hull. The originals are a part of the permanent exhibition in the Hedeby Viking Museum.





Photo



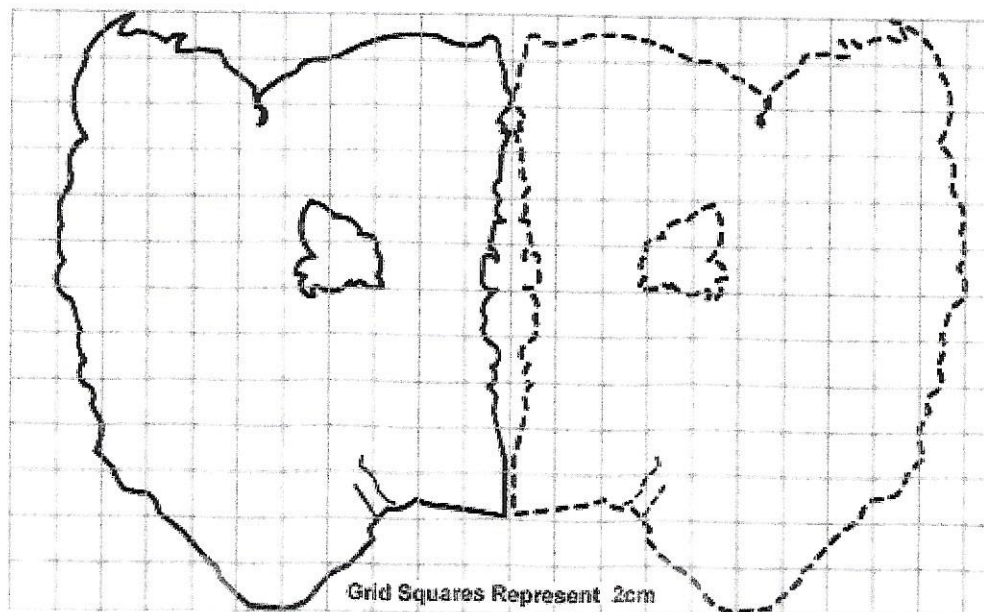
Diagram

The first mask, shown above, is thought to represent a sheep. This mask is form from reddish felt wool. Hagg said that the wool was probably dyed in madder. The dimensions are approximately 19cm wide by 14 cm high. On the upper edge extend two parts shaped like ears. Hagg think the face and muzzle were probably shaped by felting. The nose is formed by sewing the edge together to form the muzzle.

Notice the irregular edges on the Hedeby Sheep diagram must result from age and conditions in the ground. The original would have had smooth edges and symmetrical sides. Hagg



Photo



Diagram

The other explanation is that the Viking celebrated three annual festivals throughout the Viking Age Scandinavia. Snorri Sturluson recorded these festivals in Ynglingasaga. He wrote that the division of the year in three seasons among the Germanic peoples appears to be quite ancient. The most important celebrations were Yule. There is not a lot of information surviving about nature and activities associated with Yule celebration. We know that they were feasting, dancing and would have probably include animal sacrifice. (Vigfusson, vetr) We are not sure that mask and costumes was a part of the celebration but in the folk stories and saga, they were included.

Methods/Design

The two Hedeby felted masks were probably dyed in madder with alum as mordant. Hagg Wool was the most important textile fiber in the Viking Ages, was available in white as well as many natural shades of browns, greys and black. Wool dyes very easily and many finds of wool finds from the Viking Age were dyed in bright colors. Icelandic sheep offered white wool of good quality that dyed easily. This sheep is a primitive sheep in the Viking age period.

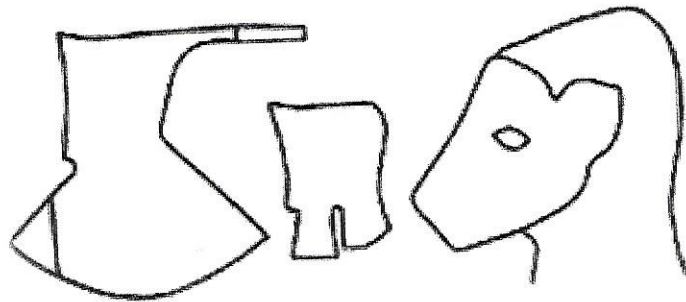
I decided that I would use Icelandic roving of 24 microns to make my project. I decided to dye my roving white wool in madder. I prepare wool by combing it, soak it in bleach for 5 minutes, then transfer it to a bath of water, let it soak one day. Then put the wool on a towel and proceed with alum and madder. I took one pound of wool and dyed it. Since, this was my first attempt to dye wool, I wanted to be sure to have enough wool to complete my project. For further explanations see appendices. Once the wool was dyed, I roll it on a towel and gently tap it. I did not want it to felt. And let it dry three days. Then comb it again. I am happy with the result and the texture of the wool. Next time if I want a brighter richer red, I need to let the water cool down a bit more.

The first thing to do with any felt project is to establish the amount of wool needed to do the project. I took 50 grams per mask. The items that were assembled: soap, towel, bubble mat, bamboo mat and yogurt plastic container. The most important is the soap as it encourages the felting process. I made my own soap using oil, fat and sulphur. I do not use urine in my soap.

My table is covered by bubble mat then I put on it a big bamboo mat. I started with covering the grid of the cow and sheep pattern with wool. Four thin layers of wool were laid on in opposing directions, wet down with soapy hot water. Cover the project with bubble mat. Then started flat felting it, by rubbing it a million times but before it is completely felted, take off the bubble mat, shape the mask on the yogurt container to form the muzzle of the animals.

The second mask is thought to represent a cow. They have found only half of it. Hagg believe that the cow mask would have been consisted of two sides sewn together in the middle. The dimension is 20 cm in width with 26 cm high. It is made in reddish felt, the archaeologist's thinks that the original would have been made with straight lines from the upper edge to the muzzle, a concave curve for the muzzle, a strong jawline and maybe some horns. Hagg is the leading archaeologist, she assumed that the original layout would be as described but were altered by felting and deterioration prior to recovery. (Hagg, Die Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu, pp. 69-72)

Hagg states in the same document that the felted animal masks found at Hedeby may possibly been attached to a hood by pins or simply being sewn unto it. They may have been worn in battle along with a body warmer. For example, the illustration below shows a diagram of two types of hoods found at Herjolfsness and how the cow mask might have been worn.



Utility

As exciting to find evidence of this sort, this archaeological finds cannot tell us why and when these masks were worn. Their function are uncertain, the archaeologists offered two plausible explanations based on literature and folks beliefs and practices.

The Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus referred in his Book of Ceremonies to a "Gothic Dance" performed by members of his personal Varangian guard, who took part wearing animals skins and masks. (Ellis-Davidson, Pagan Scandinavia. Dr. Davidson suggests that this type of costumed dance is also seen in figures from Swedish helmet plates as shown in the photos below. These figures often carry spears or swords and are dancing or running with the figures having heads of bears or wolves. Hagg believe that the masks agree and suggested that they could be connected with berserkers or ulfheonar.



Rubbing it again on both sides. Soap it in water and vinegar. Let it dry. Steps are shown in appendices. Sew one mask to a hood.

Felting is an easy and ancient process. I have not yet found any period accounts of the felt making process, which again, is logical given its simplicity and ordinary nature. The process is not a secret and it was so simple, so why write it down? In the Book of Batchulunn; he wrote that the Mongolians had ritual prayers that they would say while doing the felting. They are also some quotes of epic stories that mention felting. I did not find any Scandinavian period sources. It is an ancient and oral tradition.

Result

I feel that my masks are very accurate. They look period. I am happy with my work. I need to work with dyes more. I love my Yule cow mask it really looks like a cow. The second Hedeby mask could be any beast. There is no facial expressions, maybe it is due to the deterioration in the ground. It is sad.

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