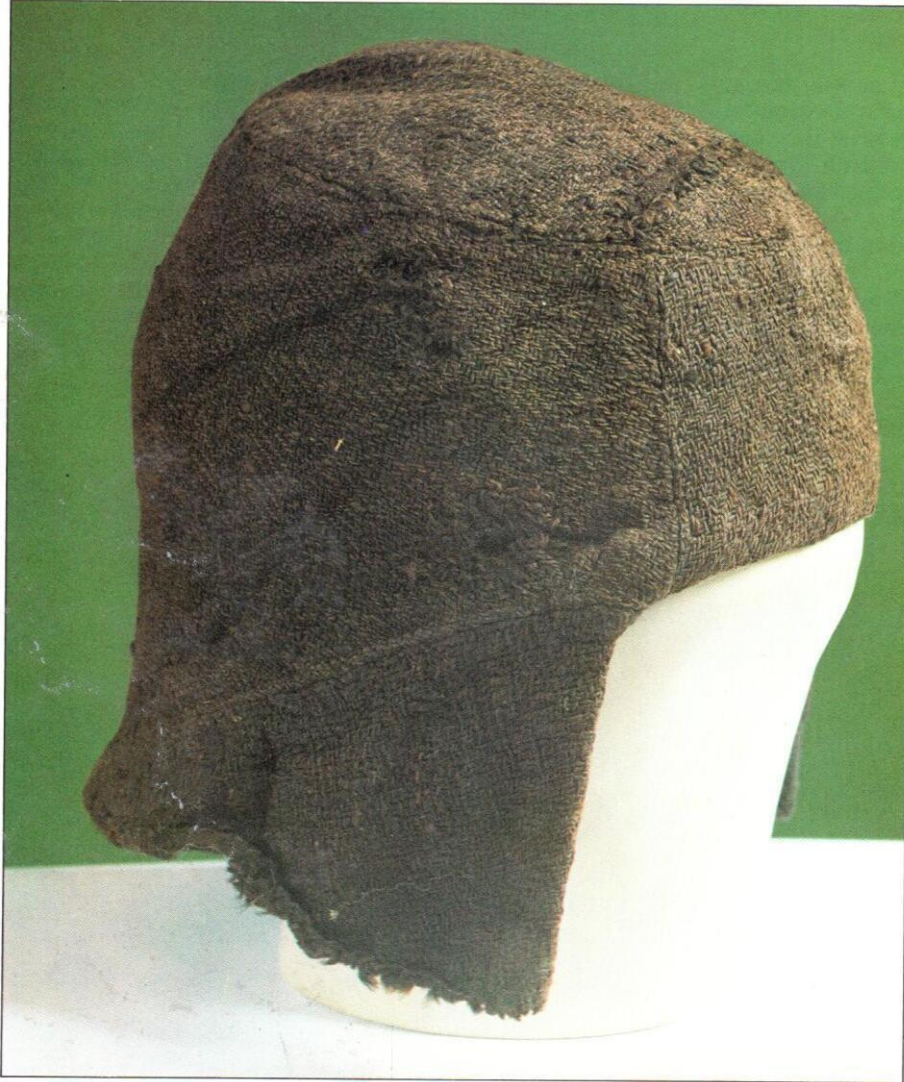


The hat from Aalsum



Introduction

The Netherlands, or Holland, is rather a small country but we have a lot of medieval history. Really, we are greater than we are small! And this has been my goal ever since I joined the SCA: ***to teach you about my country's fabulous history.***

Allow me to take you to the north of my country, a province called Friesland.



in red: Friesland in the north of The Netherlands



Greater Friesland in the year 716

Mounds are artificial dwelling hills created for habitation, as early as 600 BC. The constant battle against the tides made it necessary to create high hills to build houses on, to raise cattle and to grow crops and provide safe ground during high tide and river floods.



The mounds, or TERPEN as we call them, were up to 15 metres (49 ft) high to be safe from the floods in periods of rising sea levels. The first terp building period dates from 500 BC, the second from 200 BC to 50 BC. In the mid-3rd century, the rise of sea level was so dramatic that the north Frisian clay district was deserted, and settlers returned around AD 400. A third terp building period dates from AD 700. This ended with the coming of the dike somewhere around 1200.ⁱ

There used to be 955 mounds in Frieslandⁱⁱ, now there are only a few left. The Aalsum mound produced interesting items during extensive archaeological research some 30 years ago.

The location of Aalsum



During the excavations the mounds proved to be rich with interesting rubbish and personal waste deposited by their inhabitants during centuries, a true feast for archaeologists. The Aalsum hat was excavated in 1979.

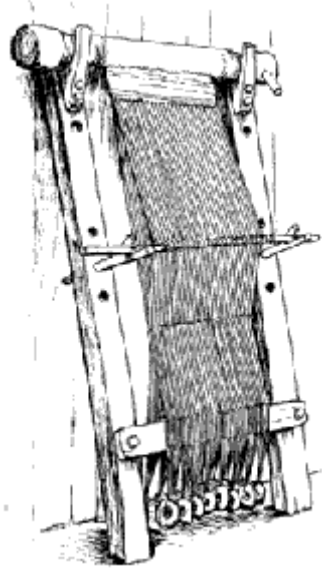
The textile itself wasn't easily dated, but carbon dating on beads and jewellery found right next to the hat indicated the items to be from 700-900 AD.ⁱⁱⁱ



other items found near the hat

The hat and my replica, technical details

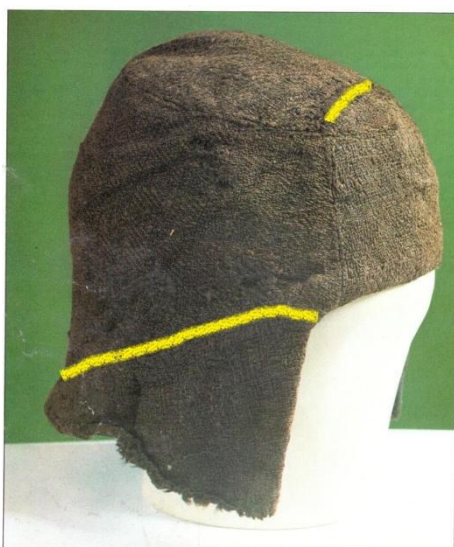
Although there was a lot of trade between the Terp inhabitants and the surrounding areas (we know this from coins from Scandinavia and Germany found during the excavation)^{iv}, most of the clothes and fabric for normal everyday use were made at home on the, for that time, familiar standing weaving loom.



These excavated textiles contain information not only about how a fabric was spun, dyed and woven. They also give information about finishing processes and about how a fabric was put together, sewn, used and repaired.

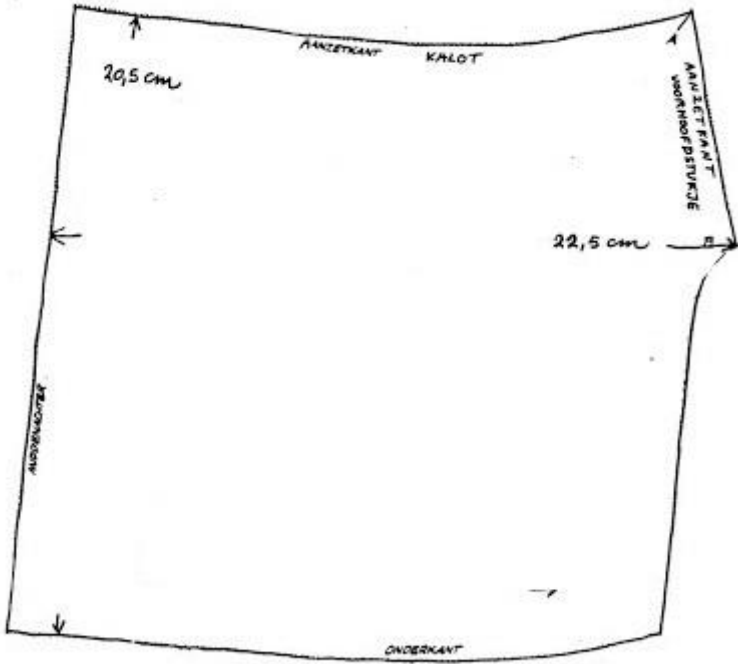
The Aalsum hat was made of different types of wool or tweed. The yarn was untwined and for the weft a single strand was used in all pieces of fabric.

It appears to have been a hat made of fabric “leftovers”. While carefully analysing the hat, the Frisian museum’s curator found that it was made of five pieces of fabric. The curator (also a hobby seamstress) decided to make a new reproduction pattern of three pieces, because this made no difference in the final result and style of the hat.

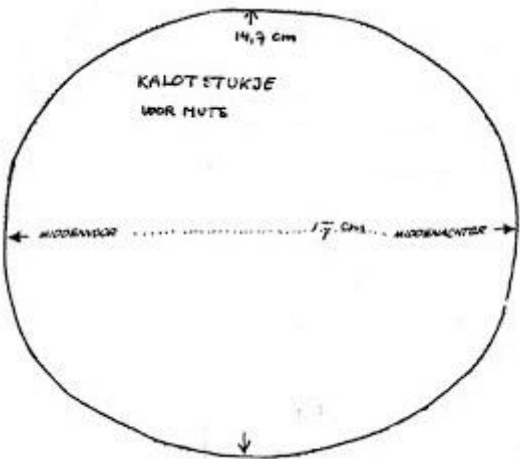


The yellow lines show the crown part consisted of two pieces and the right side flap also had two pieces. These two parts of the pattern were left out in the 'new' version. You will not find these two extra seams in my replica. The hat is handmade, no machine stitches!

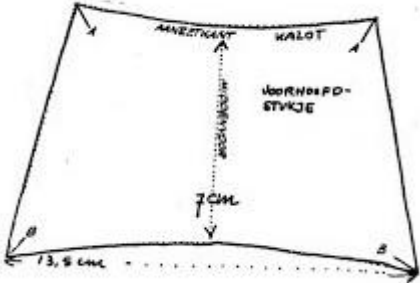
The round top part of the pattern was sewn to the rest of the hat with the braid stitch (see page 6). The other pattern pieces were sewn together with a back stitch and decorated with a blanket stitch around the face and around the neck.



Back & side pattern piece



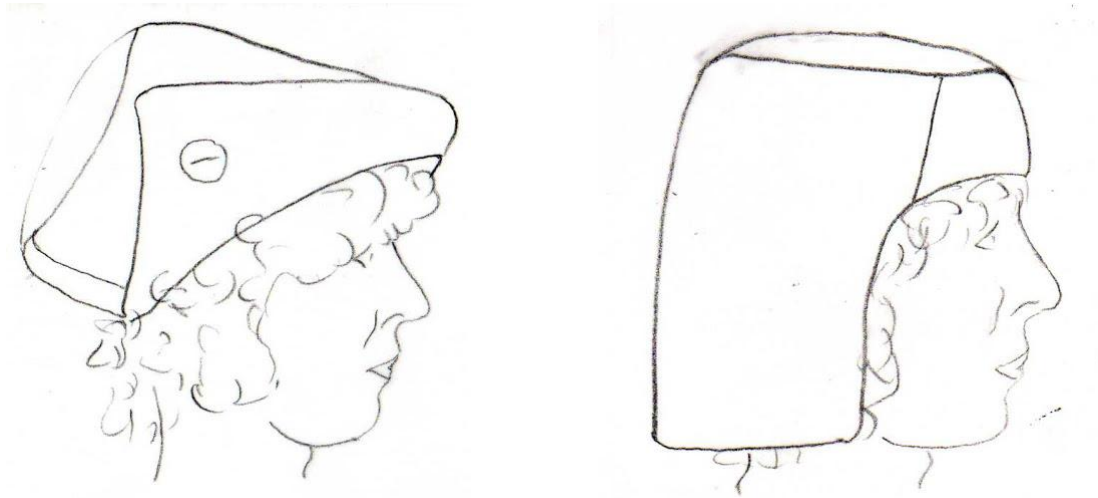
Top of head pattern piece



front piece



Interestingly enough, there are two ways of wearing the Aalsum hat, making it incredibly hard to define as a hat for a man, or for a woman?



Two ways of wearing the Aalsum hat

Though the hat was made of left overs, it was carefully sewn, with the use of fine sewing threads and small stitches. In my opinion, this was no simple hat made for one season.

I made two hats. One was a trial model, which during the Spring Crown Tournament will be worn by my representative Katharina van Antwerpen (mka Karin Dewilde) and the 2nd hat is according to the actual find made of diamond weave and tweed wool.

The braid stitch



The decorative braid stitch on the original hat is a complicated braid stitch of which you will find the drawing here. The stitch is time consuming, but very well worth it. Handmade of course!



Although this braid stitch lies on top of the fabric and can look a bit rough, it is rather subtle needlework. This stitch allows the fabric to stay flat and still sew the hat together, creating a seam that is not bulky; the braid was decorative as well as functional. The hat is comfortable to wear this way!

The use of decorative stitching is self-evidently more than simply functional. Probably the hat was valued for its colour, decoration and craftsmanship as well.^v

Conclusion

Textiles remnants, though difficult to date, still tell us a lot about the people who wore them. The area and time only add to the story and for us SCAdians those are wealthy resources. I chose this hat because of its versatility, after all, there are two ways of wearing it! It shows the flexibility of the craftsmen in those early days of my countries history: they knew how to make a lot out of limited resources. The 8th and 9th century were not the Dark Ages! They are filled with history and knowledge, and so were most of the people.



Finna Firisdottir (Ashley Jenkins) wearing the Aalsum hat at Drachenwald Fall Crown 2014

Written by:

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IMPORTANT

Use of English: I have chosen British English over American English. You will therefore find words that end with -ise, not -ize and so on. Oxford University itself advocates "-ise" instead of "-ize" in its staff style guide:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/public_affairs/services_and_resources/style_guide/index.html

Sources:

1. "Excavations in The Netherlands" Dr. L.P. Louwe, 1979
2. "Early Medieval textile remains from settlements in The Netherlands" PhD thesis by Chrystel R. Brandenbrugh, 2010
3. "Holland in the Bronze Age" Dr. J.J. Butler, 1969



4. "2000 years of Frisian history" P. Vogt, P. Terpstra & J. Spies, 2013
5. "Holland in Prehistory" Th. Holleman, 2000
6. "Charlemagne" W.F. Kalkwiek, 1970

ⁱ Holland in the Bronze Age, page 7

ⁱⁱ Holland in Prehistory, page 164

ⁱⁱⁱ Brandenburgh, page 30

^{iv} Brandenburgh, page 30

^v Brandenburgh, page 37

