

Nålbinding Socks worked in the Brodén Stitch



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Summary

I created a pair of Nålbinding socks for my Lord to wear on cold winter evenings. These socks were created in a wool/mohair blend in the Broden's stitch using a modified pattern found in the "Lots of Socks" book by Larry Schmitt. If you look closely you can find the place were I ran out of wool and had to order more from the supplier. Even though it was the same color code and product, the color was slightly different from one lot to the other. This was a lesson in having enough material to complete the project. This was my first project in the Broden's stitch, and I am very pleased with the outcome. Even though this stitch is much slower to work than the Oslo stitch, the added thickness and warmth is worth the additional time. I would like to thank Gudrun Ottosdottir for teaching me this wonderful art. I've wanted to learn Nålbinding for years and took several classes but was unable to learn the art until Gudrun taught me. She is a wonderful teacher!

Documentation

History

Nålbinding is a form of looped needle netting that predates knitting. Nålbinding articles have been dated from centuries before Christ well into the twentieth century. After 1850 and the industrial revolution there was a decline in the creation of Nålbinding articles.



23 Child's sock from Antinöe, Egypt, in red, blue, green, yellow and violet wool. Sixth century. Foot 12 cm (4³/₄ in.) long.

The Nålbinding socks from Egypt shown here are especially interesting because they made the socks with a separate toe to accommodate the thong for their sandals. This is a child's sock done in red, blue, green, yellow, and violet wool.

In the Viking age Nålbinding was used for articles such as hats, socks, mittens, milk strainers, and shoes. Several different stitches were used, the simplest being the Danish stitch and the more complex stitches being the Asle and Omani stitches. With all these stitches, the work advances in spirals around the article attaching new lengths of yarn as needed. The new lengths of yarn are attached by felting the two pieces of yarn together using spit and heat from rubbing your hands together. Unlike knitting, which is worked from a skein of yarn, Nålbinding requires you to work with relatively short lengths of yarn that must be attached as the work progresses. For this reason, wool is the best yarn for this art. Often finished mittens and other articles were decorated with embroidery or other needle techniques in contrasting colors.

Tools

Nålbinding requires a large needle that resembles a blunt sewing needle. Needles in period were made from wood, bone, or bronze. Some needles have a single point with a hole in one end and some are double pointed with a hole in the middle of the needle. Nålbinding needles range in size from about 10 cm long to 15 cm long. The needle shown to the right, with a surviving mitten, was found in Denmark.





The needles pictured here are classified as writing styli made from bone. I disagree with the archeologists, I think these are decorated Nålbinding needles.

Any scribe would look at these artifacts and conclude that the point is not sharp enough to make pinholes in parchment, the butt end is not smooth enough to burnish gilding, and there is no reason for the holes to be drilled.

If you compare the bone "styli" with the iron writing stylus pictured here, the iron stylus does not have a hole in one end, has a smooth butt end, and has a much sharper point. Then if you compare the bone stylus to a needle that the archeologists classify as



a Nålbinding needle, pictured with the mitten above, the bone styli are of a more similar shape and size to the classified Nålbinding needle.

Materials Used in Period

Wool was the most common material used for the articles. However some articles are worked in other materials. A silk Nålbinding cap from Antinoe was recovered and a linen sock from Delemont Switzerland was recovered. I am not sure how the lengths of yarn were joined in the linen articles. Wool and silk can be felted together but I am unaware of how linen could be joined in this fashion. I plan to experiment with linen in the future to determine how it may have been joined.

Nålbinding stitches

There are several Nålbinding stitches used in period, each named for the location where it was found or the person who discovered it. They are the Danish stitch, the Oslo stitch, the Korgen stitch, the Broden's Stitch, the Dalby stitch, the York stitch, the Saltdal stitch, the Asle stitch, and the Omani stitch. The Danish stitch is the simplest stitch listed and the Omani stitch is one of the more complex stitches listed.

Please see the attached cards for examples of the stitches that I have learned how to do thus far. I have learned the Danish, Oslo, Korgen, Broden's, York, and Asle stitch. I am not sure if I did the York stitch right so that card may be incorrect.

Nålbinding socks fall into several common techniques, all shown to the right. The Coptic sock from 16-22 Coppergate seems to have been worked with a deliberate front slit with work started at the toe of the sock. This sock has what appears to be a two-triangle heel. The sock from Uppsala, Sweden has no front slit and could be worked from the ankle or the toe. This sock appears to have an "afterthought" heel worked in rounds. A stocking found in Delement, Switzerland from the 12th century is knee height, has a two triangle heel and has a very pointed toe. A pair of Nålbinding stockings excavated in the parish church at Delsberg was made of course linen.

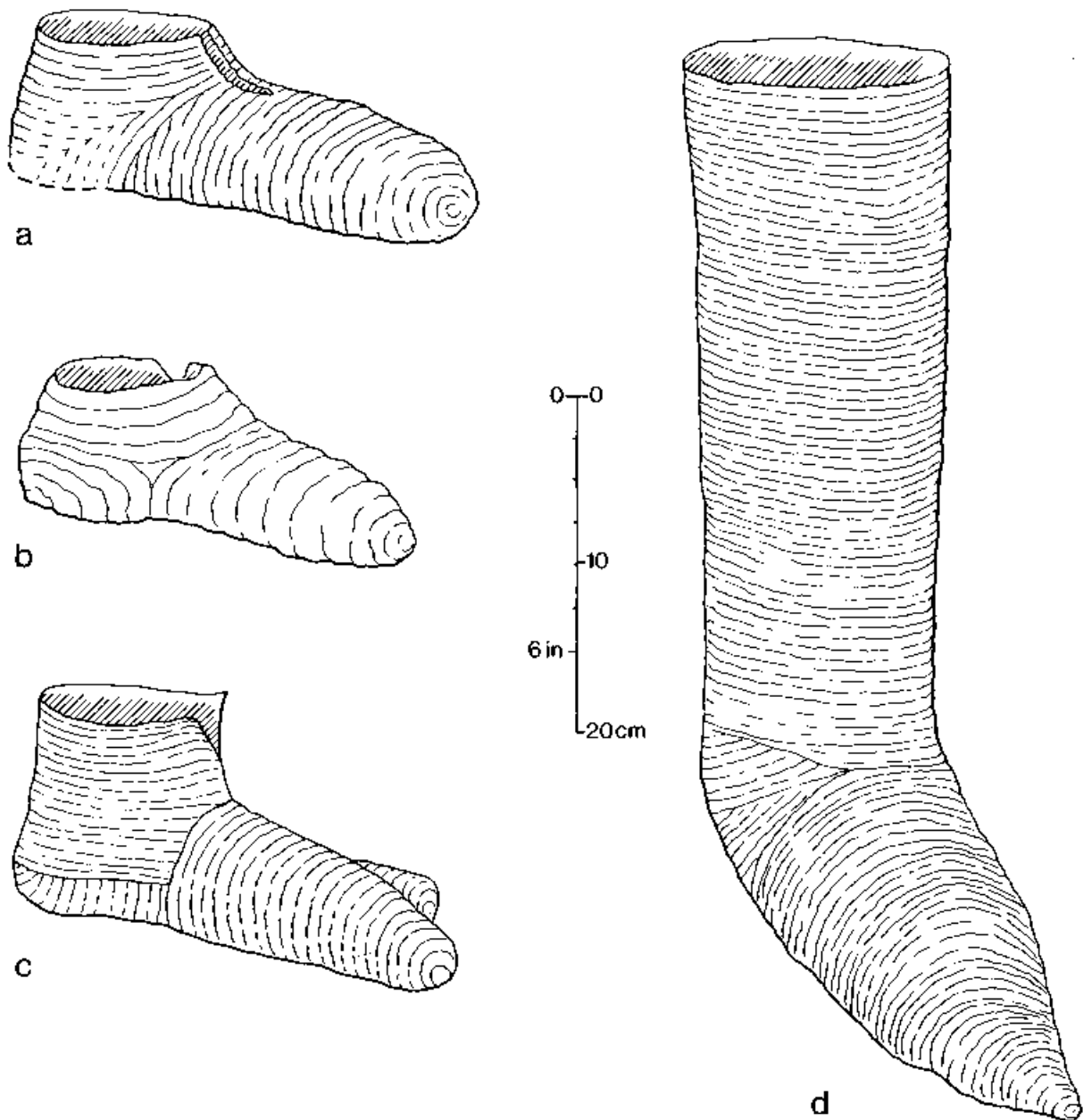


Fig.142 Construction of nålebinding socks/stockings from a, 16–22 Coppergate, 1309; b, medieval Uppsala (from photograph in Franzen 1963); c, 4th–6th century Egypt (adapted from Burnham 1972, 123); d, 12th century Delement, Switzerland (from photograph in Schmedding 1978, 99). Scale 1:5

Procedures and Materials

I choose to recreate a simple sock much like the medieval sock from Uppsala, Sweden in the Broden's Stitch. I used the pattern in Schmitt's book "Lots of Socks" as my guide for these socks. I adjusted the pattern by lengthening the ankle portion of the socks to give my Lord a little more warmth on cold winter nights.

Materials

- *Nålbinding needle and felting board (made by my lord)*
- *Lamb's Pride Worsted Wool in White Frost (85% Wool, 15% Mohair)*

I choose a wool/mohair blend instead of 100% wool for the socks because the texture of the yarn was much softer than the 100% wool. I also choose an off white color because the color was more pleasing than a pure white. I also think the off white looks more like a natural color for wool. It simulates an un-dyed pair of Nålbinding socks. As discussed in the Summary, I ran out of wool and, despite buying the exact same product and color to finish the socks, the color match was not exact.

The Brodén's Stitch

I choose to use the Broden Stitch because it is much denser than the Oslo stitch and would provide a very warm thick sock for my Lord. The Broden's stitch is worked as follows. The directions from "Lots of Socks" are so well written that I include them directly from the book:

"With a loop placed on the thumb and your running thread draped forward over the thumb, slide the needle behind the loop on the thumb and then first over, then under the first three loops at the back of the thumb. Do not pull the needle entirely through these loops. Adjust the direction of the needle picking up the two threads draped over the thumb so that it comes out "over" the loop on the thumb and "over" the thread that will form the next stitch. The new loop is drawn up around the thumb as the needle is pulled through all the loops." (Schmitt p.14-15)

The Sock Pattern

The sock pattern for the simple sock from "Lots of Socks" is very similar to the sock I was trying to create. Below are the instructions for the socks that I made, including my adjustments to the original pattern, which came from the aforementioned book.

Ankle

Start with a foundation of 81 loops.

Complete 10 rounds

Heel Opening

Work 42 loops free of previous row.

Reconnect to previous row on 43rd loop.

Complete this round, 81 loops.

Work two rounds here.

For the next 7 rounds

Decrease 1 on either side of the foot.

Toe Shaping

For the next 2 rounds

Decrease 4 on either side of the foot.

For the next 2 rounds

Decrease 6 on either side of the foot.

Stitch up the opening with whipstitches.

Heel Shaping

Start at the middle on the sole side, work around, adding extra loops in the corners.

For the next 1 round

Decrease 0 on either side of the foot.

For the next 4 rounds

Decrease 6 on either side of the foot.

Stitch up the opening with whipstitches. Full.

After completing the socks I fulled them. In order to full a Nålbinding sock, wet the finished sock with hot water and a mild soap, then rub it back and forth on a felting board (a modern washboard or window shutter would work if you don't have a felting board). Fulling the sock can shrink the sock in the same direction in which you rub the sock on the felting board. Rubbing the sock lengthwise makes the sock shorter, and rubbing it sidewise makes it narrower. When I fulled my socks, I did not full them completely, because I like the pattern created by the stitches. Over time, wearing the socks also fulles them.

UPDATE: I made another pair of socks in winter 2005-2006, adding a slit at the ankle to make them easier to put on and remove like in Figure 142.c above.



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