

How I made it: the quick and dirty version

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What is it?

This is an interpretation of a 10th century apron dress from Hedeby, called a *smokkr*, in what is now northern Germany (also known as Haithabu).

What's it made of?

The fabric is Shetland wool woven in a 2x2 herringbone twill pattern, with cream-colored warp and green weft. It was sewn with Genziana wool/acrylic thread, color no. 87, Silver Grey, purchased from Sue Spargo. I used grey instead of green thread for several reasons:

- I didn't have the right shade of green
- the grey is nearly invisible on this fabric
- Sue Spargo doesn't carry Genziana thread anymore
- I haven't been able to find a reliable source for this thread in the United States

The straps are linen, left over from another *smokkr* that I made, sewn with Gutermann polyester thread in color no. 110. I used Gutermann because I didn't have linen thread the correct color and had no time to order any.

What pattern did you use?

I used a four-panel cutting pattern I got from Countess Svava when she was preparing to ascend to the Eastern Thrones in 2004. I developed a cutting layout with a measurements chart that has been very well-received throughout the SCA.

How did you put it together?

After cutting the pattern according to my measurements, I hemmed the edges of each pattern piece using herringbone stitch on the inside with a 3/4" seam allowance. Then, holding right sides together, I whipstitched the pieces together using close stitches -- whipstitching tends to stretch, and I wanted the seams on the bodice to be quite firm.

I hemmed the top edge using herringbone stitch and a 1/2" seam allowance. The bottom edge was hemmed using the same stitch and a 3/4" seam allowance. I wanted a bit more room on the bottom to take deeper stitches, away from the easily frayed raw edges. The herringbone stitching on the inside seams is closer together than on the hems specifically to cover those edges better.

I hear there are supposed to be darts on the Hedeby smokkr. Where are yours?

I wanted to put in darts. I really did. But when I tried the smokkr on it just didn't need them. I could have put darts in just for this competition, but I want to wear this dress, and I was concerned that I would damage the fabric trying to remove the stitches. So I put the braid on the back of the smokkr where I would have put the darts, had I needed them.

Speaking of the braid... the braid on the Hedeby fragments is two colors. Why isn't yours?

I thought about it. I was going to do the braid in green and white, but I thought that it would look odd and perhaps a little dizzying with the green and white herringbone pattern, so I opted for a solid color.

And those straps... why are they linen, and why don't they match?

They're linen because that's what was found in the graves, in the domed brooches. Linen doesn't stretch like wool can (I've never really had an issue, but then, I don't wear these clothes all the time). I took 2" strips, folded them in half and ironed them, then folded the raw edges inside and ironed them again. Finally, I sewed the edge with an overcast stitch, as seen in the archaeology. They were also sewn in place using the Gutermann thread. I thought the Genziana would wear badly being pulled through the linen fabric.

They don't match because the archaeology shows that they didn't always match, and because I made them from scrap linen I had in my sewing room – waste not, want not. If I find or make scraps out of a fabric that I think goes better with the wool, maybe I'll change them.

Where's all the decoration?

We don't really have any evidence for it, unfortunately. The top edge between the brooches might have had a strip of silk or some tablet weaving brocaded with metal threads, but the heavily decorated seams are an SCA thing. There might have been some wear cord sewn on garment edges to help preserve them, but that seems to be it. Yes, there is the Mammen find, but those embroideries are on a man's garment. We have no documentable evidence for that sort of decoration on women's clothing in Hedeby. They seem to have valued well-tailored, neatly made garments out of fine fabrics, and that is what I have endeavored to present with this smokkr.