

## Ring Pouch

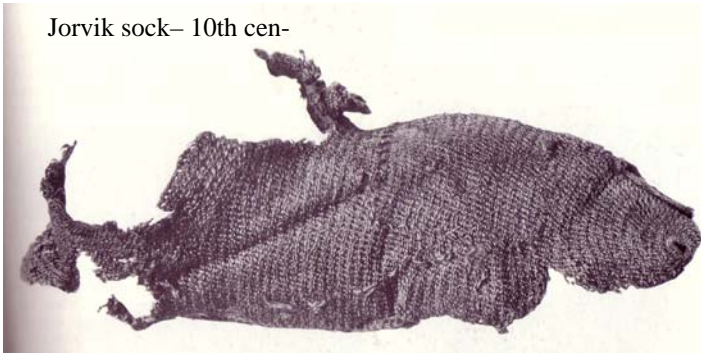


Ring pouch from the Ashmolean

I have always been curious about early period accessories. It is those little touches which make history come alive for me. I have been reading archeology reports from some of the 6th and 7th century Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and dig sites. They show evidence that women carried pouches that were probably suspended from a cloth belt. None of these pouches have survived the ravages of time. What they do have is some of the contents of these pouches; crystal balls, spoons, tweezers, cosmetic brushes and usually a very old natural item all found just underneath an iron or bone ring. I have been researching to discover more about the iron or bone rings and how it could be made into a pouch.

I approached this project from a few different angles. I chose a ring which I could put my hand through as a fist. It needed to be this size, if I wanted to retrieve anything from the inside of my pouch without dumping everything out. I wanted to naalbound the pouch. Naalbinding (also spelled nålbinding, nalbinding, nalebinding) is a needlework technique that produces cloth with similar characteristics to knitting. It is a more tightly worked cloth, which can be felted. The cloth will also stretch, but if a stitch is missed it will not unravel. Unlike knitting, naalbinding uses a length of yarn and a single needle (not a ball of yarn and two needles.)

I like to naalbind and a reasonable person can only wear so many pairs of yellow socks. I had received some feedback stating that my naalbinding stitches were too loose. I looked at a better picture of the Jorvik sock and the stitches are tighter than mine. So I got out my needle and practiced smaller, tighter stitches with my favorite single ply yarn. (Lightest weld sample.) Many hours later I had only made it around my ring a few times, irri-



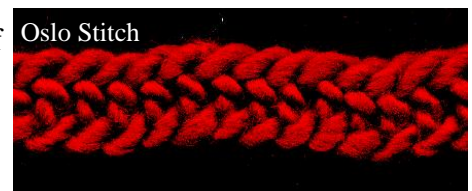
Jorvik sock- 10th cen-

tated I got out a thicker yarn and tried again. (Turquoise sample.) Time passed and I had similar results; the pouch was going to be very thick and fairly stiff. The tighter stitches had almost no stretch. Again, I decided that it must be a materials problem, so I got out the largest naalbinding yarn I could find. (Weld sample.) This time my stitches were larger, so it did not take as long to complete my circle. I stitched long enough to get a reasonable sample, yet it still had the same stiff characteristics, was very difficult to stitch and very time consuming. I did not think that a stiff fabric

would make the ring pouch work properly. The ring should flop down onto the body of the pouch to keep it closed. This way nothing falls out of the pouch when it is on your belt, yet it can be opened with a single hand.

The construction technique I used was to start one row down from the top of the pouch. I stitched my way around the circle to the size I wanted before reducing my stitches near the base of the pouch. I then added more yarn to the top of the pouch and worked around the ring. I experimented with starting at the top of the pouch with the ring as the first row. It made the project awkward to hold and very slow to stitch.

I tried another approach to creating smaller stitches, felting. I made my pouch nice and big using my normal Oslo naalbinding stitches. (Naalbinding stitches are gauged off of the size of your thumb. I have a medium sized thumb.) I have drawn the shape of the pouch before felting on this page. I felted the pouch by rubbing it with my hands and switching it between very hot and very cold water. This shocks the fibers and causes the wool in the fabric to tighten up. I was surprised that my pouch got narrower but not noticeably shorter. I did not anticipate this result or I would have made a shorter pouch to make the proportions a little better. The end result for my felted pouch is the look of smaller, tighter stitches. The fabric still retains its flexibility, has some stretch and could be made in a reasonable amount of time.



Oslo Stitch