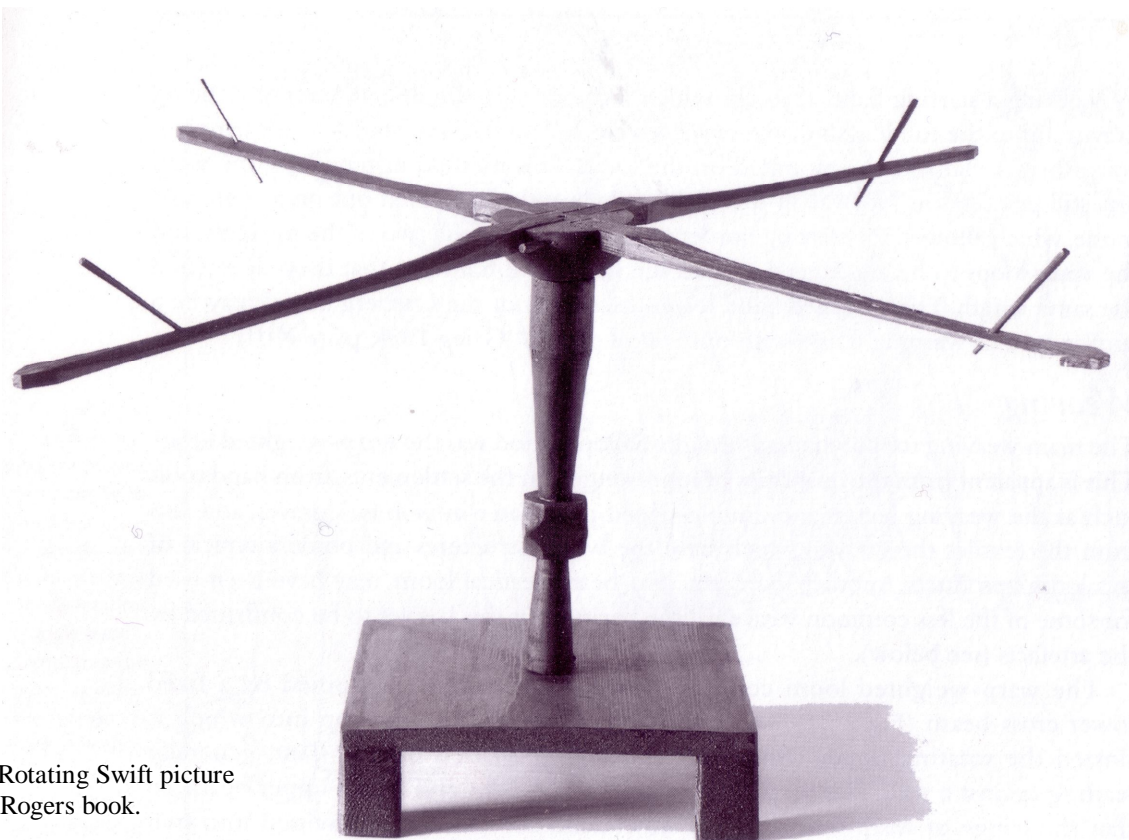


Rotating Swift

by Baroness Kaleeb the Green Eyed

Textile production was part of everyday life for the Norse. It was usually done by women and it consumed a large amount of time. As I do not like to waste my time, I have made a rotating swift to lessen my work load. It is the latest tool added to my collection of textile tools. A rotating swift is used to make balls of yarn into skeins of yarn. Storing yarn in skein form puts less stress or strain on the yarn. It makes it easier to measure, as the skein length is known and the number of repeats can be counted. It also makes it very convenient to dye, as the yarn is loosely bundled and ready for the dye pot. Archeologists have found a single rotating swift. It was on the Oseberg ship, a find from the 9th century. As the rotating swift is a useful tool, it can still be purchased today. Archeologists think that other rotating swifts probably were made and used, they have just not found them yet.

At this point I have been unable to find any measurements or additional information on the Oseberg rotating swift. All I have to go on is the picture below and it is a reconstruction. Having stated up front that there is little information available on this tool, I have had to make a number of assumptions on how this tool works. From the name of rotating swift, we can assume some part of it moves. The top of my swift spins very easily. It has a little hole drilled on the top peg to put a pin in, in case the top part tries to become airborne. So far, I have not needed to use a pin. Even at a brisk pace the swift seems well balanced and stable. The top part, middle part and base of my rotating swift come apart. This is purely for my convenience in storage and transportation. In looking at the picture below, it might be possible to remove the arms for better storage. I have drilled two sets of holes in the arms to place the diagonal pins. The inside set of holes produces a skein with a one yard length, while the outer set of holes produces a skein of 4 feet in length. Just as a reference point a modern umbrella swift produces a skein with a two yard pass. The diagonal pins are removable to make it easy to pick up your freshly wound skein. An other advantage of the diagonal pins is noticeable when you make a skein. The yarn neatly slides down the pegs and stays in order. I have tried to keep my swift at about the same proportions as the Oseberg example. I made the base of my swift heavy, so it would not fall over when I use it. For that purpose I chose a red oak. I have used modern tools to build my swift. (I am interested in the textile tool and less on its construction, however I did peg it together, when nails would have been much easier.) Finally I have put several coats of Tung Oil on my rotating swift to protect it from the elements, when it goes camping.



Oseberg Rotating Swift picture from the Rogers book.

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