

VikingGold into a new phase

During the recent workshop in Oslo (September 4th), decisions were made for the further development of the spinning of the Old Spæl sheep wool which has been collected, classified, scoured and separated by Selbu Spinneri. Ingvild S. Espelien brought a bag full of wool in two shades and some hand-spun samples to show how the shades change slightly when spun. Her main challenge now – before the 200 kilos of wool get their final “spin” was what shades the designers wish for the weft and the warp. This had involved the wool station at Malvik, where the class F1s was selected. Norilia has donated the wool to the project. As the project budget is tight, this is good news. The wool is mainly from the fall shearing, so we had to postpone the processes – the spring sheared wool is not very well suited for the yarns we need.

As the weave will be a diamond twill, the question went to the weaving experts – Viktor Gautvik from Krivi Vev and Sylvi Sørensen from Sjølingstad: What would bring out the weave best? One color in the weft, another in the warp; or the same shade in both? They were unsure, and the discussion developed into some of the themes that had surfaced earlier in the project: How the Vikings often “hid” the decorative elements, and how the “hidden” also could have a value (ref our own use of very decorative under-garments that are not exposed except to whoever sees us undress, and inherent power of seduction). After a lengthy discussion it was decided that the warp would be whitish and the weft would be both whitish and grey, as the whiter shade was dominant in supply.

Another potential problem was the shade of the “white” yarn, as it is not white, but rather an off-white. Ingvild wanted to know if the designers wished her to mix in more modern Spæl sheep wool in order to achieve a whiter shade; Ingvild had already mixed in about 1/3 with modern white Spæl wool (F1 grade) which she had brought with her. She will spin half-worsted 1-thread yarns, while Hillesvåg will spin 1-thread woolen yarn; so this will be a little stiffer than the half-worsted.

The discussion also focused on lightfastness, as the pigmented wool may fade – or not. And it may fade unevenly, as wool is like human hair and susceptible to breeding and heritage traits. Some designers saw this as an exciting possibility that perhaps even could enhance the woven material, others were concerned. If the shade would change to a more brown-tone than a gray tone, was also discussed.

Some designers would want the material to be slightly felted, other were asking about the possibility to dye the fabric – with natural dyes. As the tunic from 400 AD the project is currently basing itself on, was undyed. These issues had not been discussed earlier. The challenges of letting new stakeholders into an already established project! The conclusion was that we need a field-trip to Sjølingstad to look at the felting results, and that designers can make individual decisions later in the project.

The hope is that the material will be woven before Christmas and made available for a select group of designers by January at the latest.

We have recruited some new designers, and several students at KHiO became engaged. Our plans for Iceland and a research trip there are still being developed. We are waiting for dates from the Icelandic Design Council.

Another positive aspect is that the commercial potential for the project has (finally) been defined. If it turns out that there is market uptake for the idea of VikingGold, the wool can be made available. The “make or break” issue will be if an industrial machine in line with the “dehairing” machines that actually handle the very long cover wool/guard hairs is developed. The current mini-mills (developed

for cashmere) do not handle the job well enough. That is the Icelandic challenge! As Signe from Oleana described, there were several dehairing facilities in Europe, but they have been sold to China. There is a lot of secrecy surrounding these machines. The Minimill has a fiber separator which works partly as a dehairer, but the fibers that are removed are the shortest, the longest and the coarsest fibers, while the rest of the guard hairs will be spun together with the wool. Thus, the yarn will be a “whole-wool” yarn, made from partly fine and long guard hairs and partly the very soft, fine fibers of the wool of the Spæl.

Viktor from Krivi Vev suggested that it could be interesting to challenge designers to create a “fest drakt” – or a new national costume. This could, possibly, limit the design process as the tunic we are basing the material on was 1) made from a very thin and very soft woven material 2) we are challenging the belief that Vikings wore mainly heavy and coarse. The designers are free to interpret Viking, but the challenge is also to actually increase the understanding of the finesse in their textiles!

