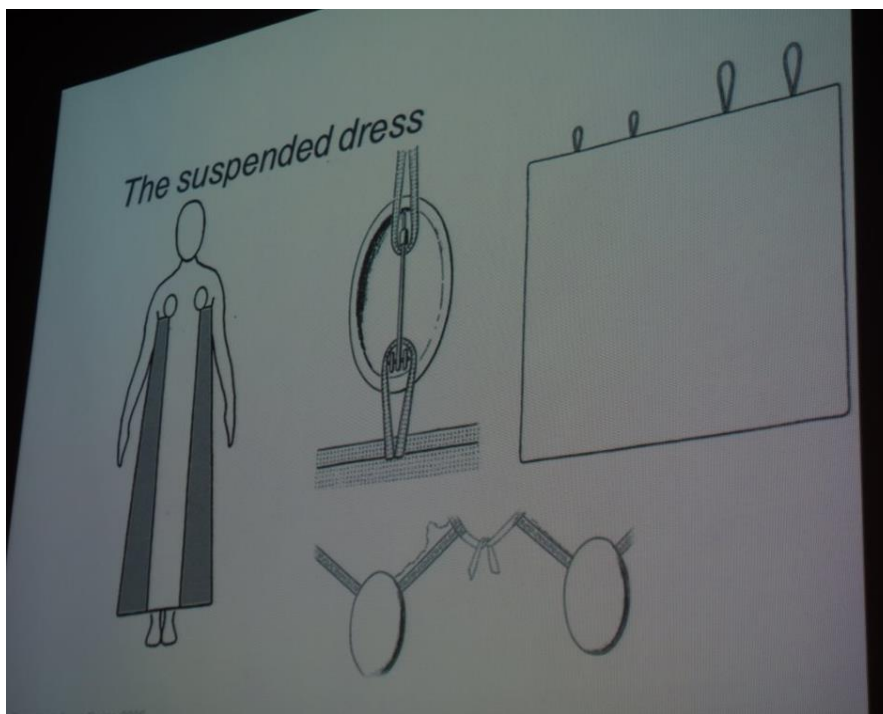


VikingGold mounts some hurdles

Having hit a major hurdle in the VikingGold project, the value chain and the project partners had a chance to meet during Norwegian Fashion Hub in Oslo, as the first day was dedicated to “From fibers to fashion”. The project was presented along with a very general description of the hurdle that now seemed impossible to overcome, to a room full of both project participants, but also students and other industry-related professionals. Marianne Vedeler from The Museum of Cultural History added a presentation on dress in the Viking era. Some interesting points arose around how status was signaled through the fastening of the capes, the capes being one of the most important pieces of clothing in Viking times. Interestingly, also that Vikings adhered to the zero-waste principle and used the material without cutting silhouettes that left any form of textile waste – textiles being too expensive for that. So there is little or no actual silhouette in the design itself, lines are straight and any frills are in the form of add-ons. The women’s dress was a full sheet of cloth that was swathed or wrapped around the body, and suspended from both the front and the back – though fastened in the front. She also pointed to the extensive use of animal imagery in more or less all Viking art and design; the belief in each person’s totem animal being a strong force.



After lunch, a group convened in the cafeteria to try to solve the problems at hand. The group consisted of (besides the three heading up the project):

Tom Podkolinski – project partner (designer and fiber specialist, owner Clothworx® UK)
Vala Arnadottir – project partner (designer Iceland)
Vala Schopka – project partner (designer Iceland)
Arild and Øyvind Myhr –

project partners (Hillesvåg Woolen mill Norway)

Ingvild Espelien – project partner (Selbu spinneri, breeding expert Norway)

Sylvi Sørensen – (Sjølinstad museum-mill Norway)

Signe Århus (Oleana Norway)

Gerda Sørhus (Oleana Norway)

Bente Kristiansen (sheep farmer Norway)

Årolilja Svedal Jørgensrud (academic Norway)

Tove Gulsvik (handicraft expert Norges Husflidslag Norway)

Observers from Innovation Norway: Tove Ingebretsen and Janne Ulven

Esben Rahbek Gjerdrum Pedersen (Copenhagen Business School DK) and Viktor Gautvik (Krivi Vev) were unable to attend (both are partners in the project).

As the Icelandic delegation had established the night they arrived that the Icewool project there is at a stand-still (they are in contact with a technician who has a good idea how to separate the cover hairs from the bottomwool, but has yet to build the prototype), and getting access to dehairing machinery in Europe is both difficult and expensive. Signe Århus and Tom Podkolinski both knew about the cashmere combing facilities in the UK (and one in Belgium), but explained all the “secrecy” surrounding these machines. Also this is wool that molts, so the farming is very labor-intensive, as the animals have to be watched 24-7.



Immediately a question arose whether we were discussing wild sheep or the old Norwegian spæl breed, as Ingvild Espelien postulated that the Vikings had a breed more similar to the wild sheep than the latter. The differences between the breeds could have potential impact in the following areas: Amount of bottom-wool vs cover-hairs. (Less of the soft bottom-wool on the spæl.) The husbandry and general care of the wool. (Over-all wild sheep farmers are less likely to shear the wool, as it molts, and if they do, the quality is variable – sheared too far out, etc. Better quality from the spæl sheep farmers.) The difference in pigmentation. (Wild sheep is in tones of grey, the spæl also in brown tones.) What the sheep actually ate in the Viking times vs what they eat now, could affect the wool in ways we are not able to know. The Icelandic designers explained that in Iceland the farmers hardly get paid at all for their wool, but the government subsidizes 75% of the price that Ístex gives for the wool¹. The wild sheep and the pigmented spæl wool is at the lowest end of the scale when it comes to subsidies in Norway; 5 NOK pr kilo. Much is therefore burned or buried, and one of the aims of VikingGold is of course to find alternatives and to ensure better use of wool that is wasted today. One estimate is that there is a total of 40.000 kilos wild sheep wool, little of it is used today. An old Norwegian spæl sheep yields on average 2 kilos of greasy wool, a wild sheep yields 1 ½ kilos greasy wool.

Several suggestions on how the separation of the fibers could be done manually, at least for the project, arose, as Ingvild gave a demonstration of how it is actually done. According to Thomas the separated specimen she handed over to him was such that it in itself was “ripe” for dehairing. There were i.e. still too many coarse hairs in the sample. Marianne had explained that in the tunica we are basing our “ideal” on, there are a few, but only very few coarse hairs left. (The wool is also lambs’ wool, which means we have to wait until fall to obtain samples – something Ingvild later concurred

¹ 72% of the rawwool is shipped to UK for the same price as government pays to the farmers. 12% of scoured wool is exported, 3% of wool scoured and spun in Iceland is exported and 13% of scoured and spun wool is sold locally. Highest price for wool in #1 category of lambswool is 39 NOK per kg (3.5% of the wool), for category #1 white wool they get 36 NOK per kg (35,8% of wool) and for category #2 White wool and other colors they get 31 NOK per kg (60%).

with – only fall sheared wool will be good enough to go forward with.) Signe’s suggestion to do as they had on the Orkneys – use prisoners to do the manual labor – elicited laughs, but finding idle hands in a school or old people’s home setting – could be an alternative. However the aim of the project is for an economically viable model, not “slave labor”!



Thomas had one point that the competence of actually judging the finesse of the wool is a skill that takes many years to hone, in Australia there are wool-sorters who can sort a fleece (as they do with Shetland wool) with an accuracy that is perhaps $\frac{1}{2}$ micron off. More sheep (specifically hardy breeds) and goats needed because of the cultural landscape disappearing (Kashmir from goats receives no subsidy from the Government). This goes to the pride of the farmers, in what they contribute with their good husbandry. There also is a need for better breeding (Thomas described in detail how they had done this with the Bowmont project, securing that every single sheep has its own breeding information digitally secured, and Ingvild described her project with the Grey Trøndersheep) and competence-building in relation to taking care of the wool.

We had a major break-through when the solution was suggested to divide the job of spinning the yarn for the material between Hillesvåg and Selbu, as Hillesvåg is a woolen mill, and can do only an s-twist; while Selbu is a semi-worsted mill and can do a z-twist. Combining the two twists will have an influence on how light reflects off the material when it is woven in a diamond twill. Hillesvåg will spin the weft (innslag) in available shades (the same shape as the warp and one or two additional shades); and Selbu will spin the warp (renning) in one shade – single thread which needs to be spun hard in order to cope with the weaving machines. Ingvild will look into buying between 200 – 400 kilos greasy wool (which will result in about half once scoured and spun). Costs need to be established, so that this can be coordinated with the limited budget, and to see if additional funds need to be

secured. Krivi Vev will also be contacted in order to find out what specifications/obstacles can arise in the next step: The weaving of the cloth. (Also for an estimate on amount.) The time-frame for the milestone of the project will be adjusted by the project team.

A lot of discussion of labelling of country of origin; fiber, processing, spinning and throughout the production. Signe was very much concerned about this, as so many companies hide the fact that much of the more labor-intensive operations are moved abroad. She asked about the sewing of the garments for VikingGold, and rather stumped us – but the next day she offered up sewing-capacity at Oleana for Sølvs next collection (who now cut and sew in Portugal). So her participation in the workshop certainly gave a valued contribution. All is a part of shaping the narrative which needs to be associated with our clothes – and their intrinsic value. Our cultural history has been misused and the materials that fed into this cultural history have not been used to their full potential – but slowly we are getting closer to the fruition of seeing both these travesties being rectified.

And the closer we get to the material actually being spun and woven, the closer we get to the designers having a go at creating something that potentially can have an economic value. Sølvs, as mentioned, presented their collection the next day, with materials woven from (modern) spæl sheep at Krivi Vev, spun at Hillesvåg – but this wool had not been separated and therefore has the coarse cover-wool – making the outer-wear more or less water-repellent; but rather itchy. As the Vikings also used materials with the coarse cover-hairs, this can certainly become part of the Viking project as a whole, but our ultimate goal is to create the softer yarns – as this is where the monetary value is the highest in the end.

PS This report does not include the on-going work project-partner With & Wessel are doing with Osterøy museum and artisans in Osterøy – working with another weaving technique related to the Varafell. This will be reported on when we have more conclusive information.



Signe Århus with Oda and Mari from Sølvs. The new collection features outer-wear with wool from Norwegian Spæl sheep, spun at Hillesvåg and woven at Krivi Vev. About to be sewn at Oleana?