

Naalbinding: Oslo and Mammen Stitch

Handout by Lady Argent of Middlegate & Lady Æsa gylðir

Naalbinding (also spelled nalebinding, nalbinding, nålbinding, and nålebinding) is an ancient fiber craft which produces fabric through a method of sewing knots. A blunt needle, usually made of wood, bone, or antler is used to pull short lengths of yarn through loops to make a knotted fabric. This technique is believed to predate knitting and has been practiced all over the world, including places such as Peru, China, Egypt, and Scandinavia.

There are many different stitches, most of which are named after the area in which the stitch was found. This handout will focus mainly on the Oslo stitch and the Mammen stitch, which are two of the more simple stitches.

Oslo Stitch

The Oslo stitch is also known as the Lund stitch. Mittens made using the Oslo stitch have been found in Oslo, Norway, in Iceland, and in Lund, Sweden.

Most of the extant pieces found have been mittens, but at least one milk strainer in this stitch is known to have existed.

*Fig. 1
Medieval mittens made using Oslo Stitch*



Mammen Stitch

The Mammen stitch is also known as the Korgen stitch. Items made using this stitch have been found in Mammen, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, and Russia. It has been used to make thin liturgical gloves, socks, and mittens. It was also used in a decorative costume in the Mammen burial using threads of silver and gold.



*Fig 2.
Egyptian socks c. 400-600 CE*



*Fig. 3.
German Mitten c. 14th-16th Century*

Examples of Needles (Naals)



Above: Modern needles are made of wood, antler, bone or even metal.



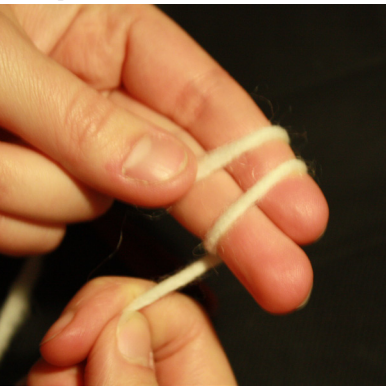
Right: Extant needles made from antler found in the Coppergate digs. It is believed that these needles may have been suitable for naalbinding.



Oslo Stitch - Step-by-step Instructions

A note: The Oslo and Mammen stitch both use a very similar “starting” loop method. Please note that the big difference is how many times you “wrap” the yarn around your fingers as shown in step 1.

Step 1A



Step 1B



Step 1C



Take a length of yarn approximately two arm lengths long and wrap it around your fingers **once** as shown in **step 1A**.

Pinch the loop on the back of your fingers and pull it off. Thread the long end of yarn through your needle and then insert your needle into the loop from behind. Twist it around so that the loop makes a figure-eight on the needle, shown in **step 1B**. With the yarn end over your needle, push the needle through the figure-eight and allow the yarn end to make a loop over your thumb.

Your piece should now look like **step 1C** and you are ready to begin making stitches!

Step 2:

Insert the needle up through the loose loop behind your thumb. (**Step 2A** is immediately following the starting step. **Step 2B** is what it looks like after the first stitch and for all following stitches.)

Step 2A



Step 2B



Step 3:

Twist the needle around and insert it down through the loop on your thumb and under the yarn end. (**step 3**)

Pull the needle and yarn through while slipping the thumb loop off your thumb. Allow the yarn to make a loop around your thumb.

Once the stitch is complete, you should once again have a loop on your thumb as in **2B**.

Step 3



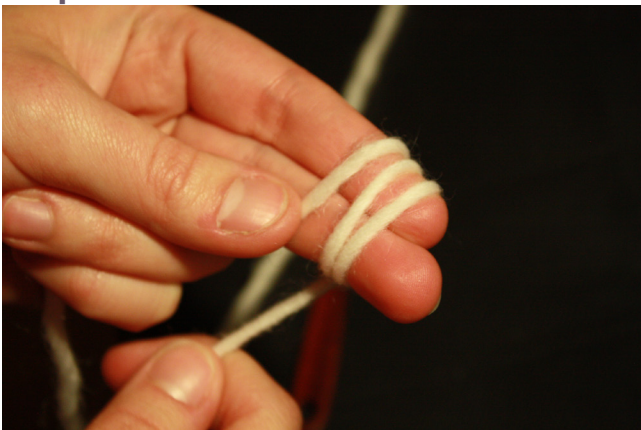
Mammen Stitch - Step-by-step Instructions

Step 1:

Take a length of yarn approximately two arm lengths long and wrap it around your fingers **twice** as shown in **1A**.

Pinch the loop on the back of your fingers and pull it off. Thread the long end of yarn through your needle and then insert your needle into the loop from behind. Twist it around so that the loop makes a figure-eight on the needle, shown in **1A**. With the yarn end over your needle, push the needle through the figure-eight and allow the yarn end to make a loop over your thumb.

Step 1A



Step 1B



Step 2:

Insert the needle into the loop closest to the back of the thumb, as shown in **2A**. Then, insert the needle into the second loop behind the thumb, as shown in **2B**.

Step 3:

Twist the needle around and insert it down through the loop on your thumb and under the yarn end.

Pull the needle and yarn through while slipping the thumb loop off your thumb.

Allow the yarn to make a loop around your thumb, and as you follow through pulling the stitch snug you will return to having two free loops at the back of your thumb as you did after your setup loops.



Mammen Stitch loops after doing first stitch.

Step 2A



Step 2B



Step 3



Practical Application - Making a Fingerless Mitten



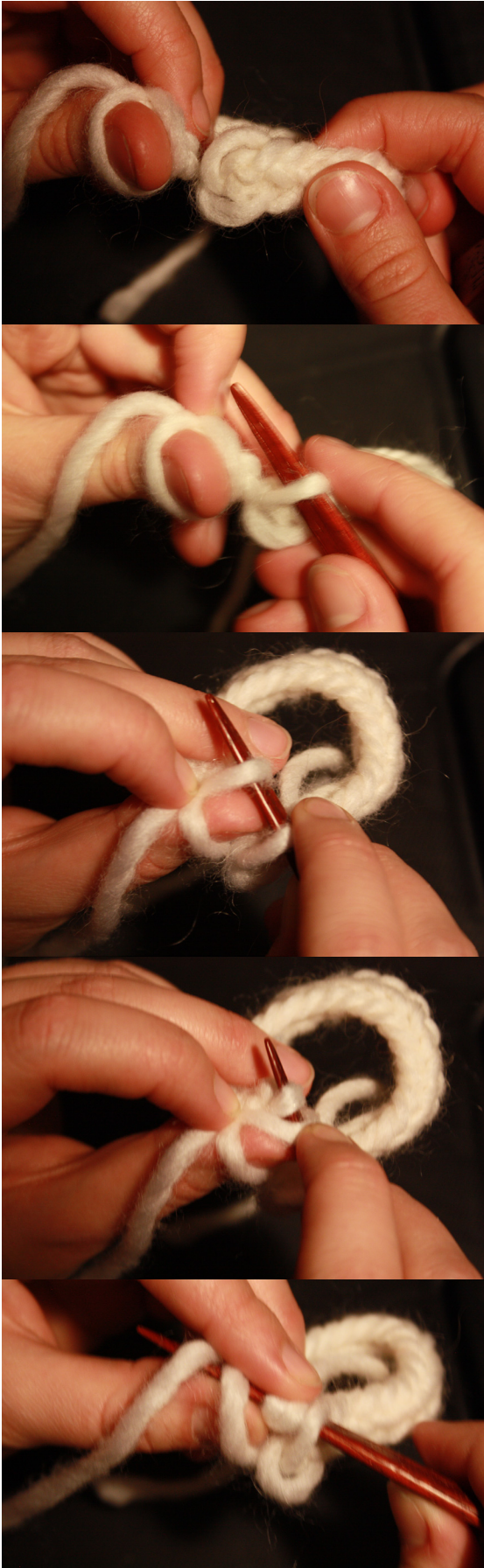
We will be making our fingerless mittens "top down" - meaning we will be starting with the part that covers the hands, and will work down to cover the arms.

Step 1:

Make a "caterpillar" of stitches in your chosen stitch until it is long enough to wrap around your hand. Naalbinding tends to not have a lot of "give" once it's done so don't stretch it, make it long enough that it naturally fits around your hand.

Step 2:

Connect your ends, as shown in the column below.



A Note about Connecting Stitches:

In naalbinding, when working on subsequent rows you must use what are called "connection stitches." This is how the row you are working on connects to the row below.

Most stitches will say F1 or F2. This refers to Forward 1 or Forward 2. Both the Oslo stitch and the Mammen Stitch use an F2 connection



Step 3:

Keep naalbinding around until the cuff of the mitten is as long as you would like! Add a thumb hole when it seems appropriate. I usually add mine 5-6 inches from the bottom.

To make a thumb hole:

Make several stitches without connecting them to the previous row. This will create a small "float" of stitches. Connect your next stitch to the previous row, skipping the number of stitches you just created for your float. One connected, this will create the hole for the thumb. Naalbind around, connecting all of your stitches until the fingerless mitten is as long as you would like it to be.

Make a second fingerless mitten to match the first and you are done!

References

Below are listed some great resources for stitches as well as for the history of the craft.

Briansdotter, Sigríð (Anne Marie Haymes); Naalbinding Made Easy; Tangle Fairies, Sultan, WA, 2004

Hald, Margrethe. Ancient Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials. pp. 278-312. National Museum of Denmark. 1980. ISBN 87-480-0312-3

Pihlajapiha, Sanna-Mari. Naalbinding - Nålbinding - Nålebinding. 2015.
<http://www.en.neulakintaat.fi/1>

Priest-Dorman C. Nålebinding Techniques in the Viking Age. 2001. <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/nalebnd.html>

Thank you for taking our class! Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments. :)

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