Hat Tricks!
Fourteenth Century Headwear

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Perhaps even more crucial to achieving an authentic period look than appropriate hairstyling, is proper headwear. (Possibly because headwear can hide a multitude of sins from modern haircuts to bright green locks.) I became convinced of the effectiveness when I attended an event with my hair properly styled (as opposed to flowing freely), wearing a wimple and a simple fillet and found that visiting nobles from Ansteorra wearing coronets would stop and bow at the neck. It was made clear that I had created that costume of a fourteenth century noblewoman, which is the aim for a most of us.

Noble or not, headwear was a vital and vibrant part of life for women in Medieval Europe. Not only were they prescribed for modesty, head coverings were a representation of fashion, tools for practicality, and symbols of status and wealth from low to high. For the modern recreator, not only is headwear part of accurately representing their period, it also is a simple way (and relatively easy way) to heighten the authenticity of an ensemble. Unfortunately, this is often the last item attended by the new reenactor, but, my advice is to prioritize appropriate hairstyles immediately after an appropriate outfit.

In order to be an efficient reference source, this handout describes common headwear accessories in order according to their proximity to the scalp. (Birgitta Cap, Crespine, Barbette and Fillet, and Veil and Wimple.) When it comes to the acquisition of these items, however, I recommend prioritizing them according to the commonality of usage: Rectangle Veil, Birgitta Cap, Barbette and Fillet, and Crespine. (Rectangle Veils can double as wimples.)

The reason that your first item should be a rectangle veil is that it was used throughout the majority of the medieval period, and is not only extremely easy to make or acquire, is a highly versatile garment. It can be worn simply, wrapped to form its own wimple and veil, knotted to give a Viking silhouette, or twisted twisted into a turban. Your second item should be a Birgitta Cap because they were used from the 13th century into 15th century, they're easy to wear, and were worn by everyone.

Materials:

Many items listed were commonly made with linen, but could also have been made with wool for a lower class woman or silk for a noblewoman. *(Note:*

Linen and Cotton can draw moisture from your hair, but silk will help it to retain moisture.)

St Birgitta's Huva/An Everyday cap (Late 13th Century-Early 15th Century):

The coif known as the St. Birgitta's Huva has become a hot-topic of discussion and everyone and her sister has made an attempt at one. The original piece is a 13th Century find and very well preserved, making it a treasure piece to give us greater understanding of medieval linen work, which is very hard to find in extant.

While this piece would have been worn by a noble woman to protect her hairdo while she slept, bathed, had personal time with her husband, or under her veil, it's important to remember that this item, for her, would have been underwear. For her servant girl, it would have been the cap she wore while milking the cows or carrying the laundry, or assisting with her lady's childbirth. Whereas today caps are considered the crowning piece to an outfit, for our medieval counterpart, they were much more common and personal.

Construction:

After scrutinizing photographs of the extant cap as well as replicas made by other re-enactors, I found that the easiest approach is to modify the Norse Dublin cap. This is a pattern that is done in two pieces, like the Huva, and both are of similar shape. The differentiation is to cut the cap a little shorter than the Dublin Cap and to gather the bottom edge into almost a smock-work. This yielded the desired results. You can attach the loop tie either as a casing to the front edge or simply hem the front and attach the ties to the bottom of the cap.

Note: To determine the length for the tie, double loop your measuring tape around your crown like a folded figure eight.

Crespine (13th century-15th Century):

Hairnets, called crespines, covered the entire head and, rather than holding up hair, simply encased styled hair. (Without elastic this would have been difficult and netting produces slightly larger holes than crochet.)

Crespines in period were typically made using netting and held with a fingerloop braid woven through the end drawstring style or sewn into a fillet. They were made with rich threads from silk to gold floss and were often dressed with pearls or other jewels. They could also be decorated with embroidery done in a cross-stitch style or dressed with embroidered shields.

There is one example of a crespine that appears to have been made by criss crossing fabric strips and tacking them in a net pattern using bezants. Also, it has been thought that the crespines were lined with silk and there are depictions in the Manesse Codex of women wearing brightly colored caps with criss-cross patterns upon them indicating, I think, the possibility of a crespine. (Germans seem to have LOVED opaque fabrics.)

While it may appear daunting, netting is not difficult to learn and Mistress Giraude de Benet is a wonderful teacher. However, if netting is not something you feel up to, Ecletic Claire on Etsy sells beaded snoods that have a netted look.

Barbette:

The barbette was a commonly used item from the late 12th Century into the middle of the 14th Century. It served not only as an anchor for veils, fillets, and wimples; it was also worn with Crowns and Coronets. Aesthetically, it creates a frame for the face using elegant fabrics such as linen and silk, and, for the older woman, it conceals any sagging along the jowls. (Personally, I think it brings out the eyes and accentuates the smile in a very flattering way.) In Germany during the late 13th Century, barbettes could be very ornate and even featured goffered or scalloped sides. In some examples they even appear to be edge with a cord or gold edging.

Not only did barbettes have great variety in the ways they were dressed up, they also appear to have come in a variety of fits. The first is the basic, band of fabric. The second, grows thicker at the crown of the head, and the third wraps from the top of the head, crosses under the chin, and the ends meet again at the top of the head.

I'm not 100% certain that scalloped barbettes were actually in vogue, but rather that perhaps we've mistakenly interpreted a representation of curling hair in the Manesse Codex for a wave in the barbette.

Construction:

The base is a simple band of fabric. You can measure it to the desired thickness and hem both sides or double the measurement and fold in half. Dress as desired with gold edging, scalloping, or a cord.

Note: This item is easiest worn pinned at the top of the head because the fabric stretches throughout the day and it is often desirable to tighten it as the day progresses. However, if you need to avoid or limit your use of pins, you can always sew the edges together.

Fillet:

The fillet enjoys a history even longer than the barbettes and with even more variety. Fillets can be thick, thin, linen, or tablet woven. They can worn by themselves, with a barbette, with a crespine, with a veil, or all the above. (And any variety of the above.)

During the late 13th and early 14th Centuries, it became very popular, especially in Germany, to wear a well decorated, thick, white fillet. These fillets could be goffered, rolled, dressed with cord, or left plain. Linen fillets were even worn WITH Crowns over them (I imagine to provide some comfort to the wearer.)

In the second quarter of the 14th Century and onward, fillets were less obvious, but more colorful and tended to be decorated with beads and bezants as opposed to frills.

Small Fillet:

Cut out a four inch strip a little longer than the circumference of your head, folded it in half twice, then iron it flat. Hand stitched the edges shut using whichever method is most convenient for you. (I prefer a discreet over stitch.). Stitch the two ends of the strip together and finished the seam using a rolled hem or hem both sides and attach two cord for ties. (Optionally, this can be closed with a pin.)

Silk Version: Cut a two inch strip of silk and a two inch strip of linen or cotton lining. Fold both pieces in half and iron them flat, then sew together. Sew desired decorations onto the "right" side of the silk and close using a discreet stitch. Hem both ends and attach two cords for ties.

Large Plain Fillet (13th Century):

Cut a piece twelve inches wide. Sew the raw edges together using a running stitch, folded in half again, and sew it down. Enough layers of linen will stand on its own without the aid of starch, but starch makes it look better.

Optionally, you can simply encase a three or four inch wide strip of buckram, felt, or leather in linen.

Goffered Fillet (Late 13th-Early 14th Century) :

There are several ways this look can be achieved. I think a slightly flared version of the large plain fillet could be rolled and starched to give the effect, or dressed with a cord slightly gathered. The following construction is the method that I used and worked well at the time, but there are many ways to skin a cat!

Make a large plain fillet and add a goffer up to twice the length of the fillet about an inch thick. Fold the bottom up to meet the goffer and stitch

closed by hand. (This part is painstaking and takes a while to complete tidily, but your patience will be rewarded!)

The Veil (and Wimple):

As mentioned previously, the veil was a staple of Medieval Dress in every culture and in during most time periods. The most common style, was the rectangle veil which would be made in varied lengths and widths.

(While I've seen wimples constructed as a tube, and even made one myself, I think that a rectangular piece of cloth pinned at the top of the head works much better as it can be adjusted to fit a variety of hairstyles and to accommodate natural fabric stretch through the day.)

The rectangle veil, despite its versatility, does sometimes fail to meet expectations for the silhouette. During my sophomore period as a clothier, I was engaged in a few debates about whether oval veils were actually used. After scrutinizing several paintings and a few statues, I came to the conclusion that, while none of the veils remotely appeared to be ovals, the rectangle veil also left a bit to be desired. After that, I came up with the hair-brained idea of the trapezoid veil.

The bias edge causes a delicate wave and the drape matches that in paintings and statues. The edges were also rounded and even goffered, especially in Germany. A trapezoid also makes sense on a practical level. Linen was costly and our medieval counterparts have shown us that that they rarely wasted a thing. A trapezoidal veil could easily be the result of the left over fabric once gores have been cut for a shirt, whereas cutting an oval veil would result in a lot of excess fabric that is only usable for stuffing and buttons.

Regardless of the shape, veils were, according to the scolding clerics of the day, heavily decorated. The Birgitta Cap, as a rare linen survivor, contains examples of white embroidery which could explain why artists didn't feel the need to represent embroidery in manuscripts. There are also a few examples of gold edging and pearls on the end, and one example of striped veils.

Conclusion:

Hopefully, this summary will equip you as you embark on your quest to pad your wardrobe with beautiful accessories. With a few exceptions, most of the items can be created by cutting easy geometric shapes and sewing straight lines; a remarkably simple way to create such a striking effect!

Photo of the Huva in the Birgittine Convent in Uden.

Maciejowski Bible, 13th Century

Tacuinum Santiatis, 14th Century

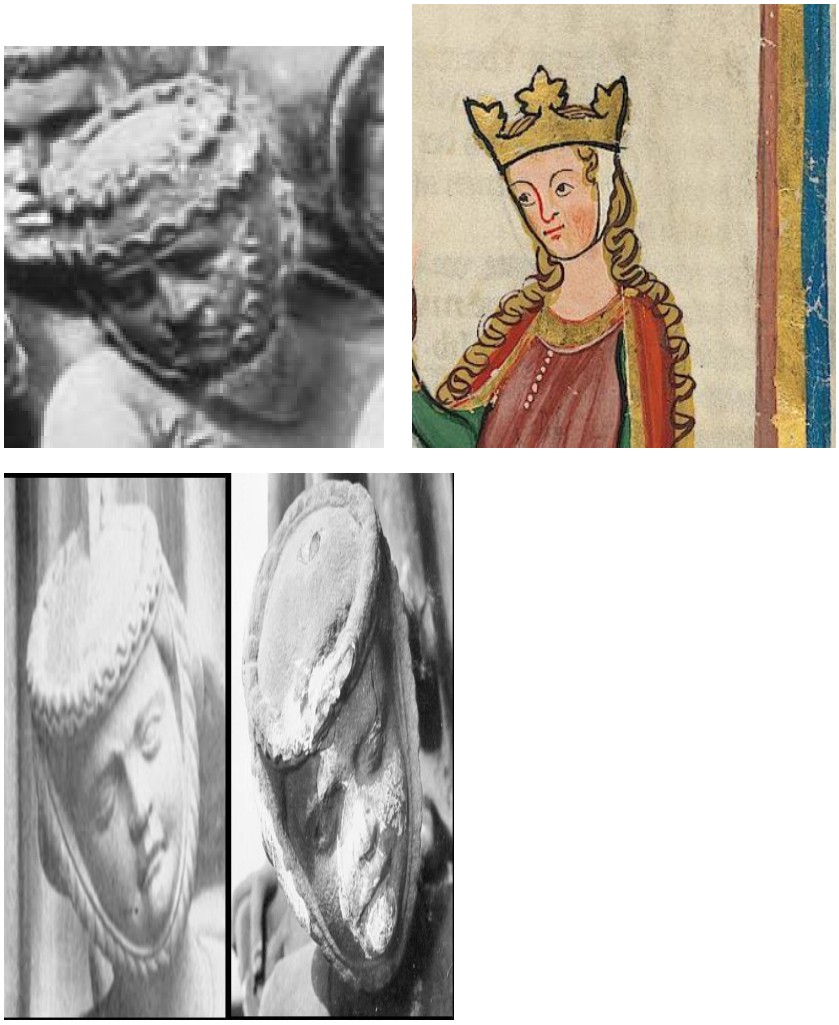


Figure 1 Double Goffered Barbette and Fillet. 1243, Mainz, Germany, Figure 2 Scalloped Barbette from the "Manesse Codex"Figure 3, Corded Barbette, 1280-1300, Strasbourg, France

Figure 4 Uta, 1250 Naumburg Cathedral. Note, there is some debate about whether or not gold edging is artistic license.

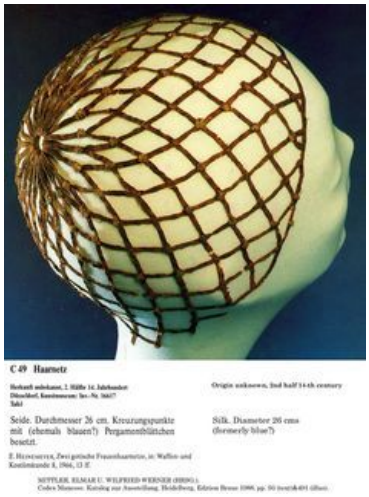
Small Fillet Worn Under Barbette, Smithfield Decretals, 14th Century

Figure 1, Plain Fillet. Not sure about date, probably Maciejowski Bible

Figure 2, Goffered Fillet, "Manesse Codex"

Figure 3, Luttrell Psalter, 14th Century: Decorated fillet. (Could also be a circlet.)

Taymouth Hours, 14th Century



C 49 Haarnetz

Herkunft unbekannt, 2. Hälfte 14. Jahrhundert
Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum: Inv.-Nr. 16617
Tafel

Origin unknown, 2nd half 14-th century

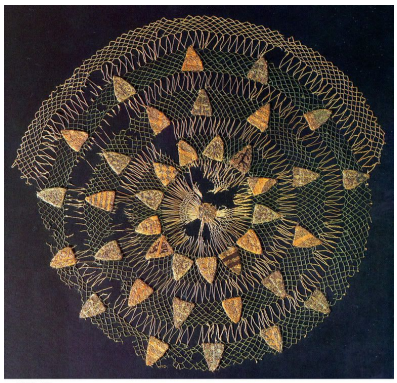
Seide. Durchmesser 26 cm. Kreuzungspunkte mit (ehemals blauen?) Pergamentblättchen besetzt.

Silk. Diameter 26 cms (formerly blue?)

E. Heinemeyer, Zwei gotische Frauenhaarnetze, in: Waffen- und Kostümkunde 8, 1966, 13 ff.

MITTLER, ELMAR U. WILFRIED WERNER (HRSG.),
Codex Manesse. Katalog zur Ausstellung. Heidelberg, Edition Braus 1988, pp. 91 (text)& 490 (illus).

The Malterer Embroidery, German, early 14th c.



C 48 Haarnetz

Herkunft unbekannt, 1. Hälfte 14. Jahrhundert
Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum: Inv.-Nr. 16870
Tafel

Origin unknown, 1st half 14th century

Seide. Durchmesser 33 cm. Weiß und grün in konzentrischen Kreisen wechselnd. Grüne Partien mit 38 Wappenschildchen besetzt. Im Zentrum sechsblättrige Rose. Schnur zum Zusammenziehen fehlt.

Silk. Diameter 33 cms. White and green in concentric circles alternately
Green parts with 38 coat of arms.
In the center 6-leaved rose.
String for drawing together is absent.

E. Heinemeyer, Zwei gotische Frauenhaarnetze, in: Waffen- und Kostümkunde 8, 1966, 13 ff.

MITTLER, ELMAR U. WILFRIED WERNER (HRSG.),
Codex Manesse. Katalog zur Ausstellung. Heidelberg, Edition Braus 1988, pp. 91 (text)& 490 (illus).

Figure 1 and 3, extant crespines made in two methods. Figure 2, a 14th C embroidery.

Taymouth Hours, 1325-40

Maciejowski Bible

Afb. 11 Agnes von Württemberg, Inv. Gd. 242. Ca. 1300. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Neurenberg

Afb. 12 Vrouw uit het Gobard geslacht. 1325-1350. Kerk van St. Andrew, Rippingdale, Lincolnshire (Scott: 1986, p. 23)

Two 14th Century statues, the left is German, the right is English.