

Kostuum

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SUMMARIES

Seven centuries of knitting, seven millennia of needlebinding

Geeske Kruseman

This article explores the first chapter of the history of knitting in Europe, and connects it to its 'pre-history', the related but very much older craft called needlebinding or *nalbinding*, and also known as looping, knotless netting, or single-needle-knitting.

Since Richard Rutt's authoritative history of hand knitting (1987), more data on early knitting have been turning up all over Europe, in archaeology, painting and even literature, from about 1300 onwards. From the material surveyed here, it appears that all objects claiming to be knitting from before ca.1250 have so far turned out to be either not true knitting, or not reliably dated. The survey also indicates that the earliest knitting seems to have been done in the round; that multicoloured intarsia knitting may predate shaping by increase/decrease; that the decorative possibilities of intarsia, openwork and raised patterns were extensively explored well before 1550, while ribbing for elasticity was not in use at all; and that the elasticity of knitted goods was actively discouraged, up to at least 1600, by knitting extremely tightly, and often fulling the work afterwards as well.

Needlebinding is so basic to fibre crafts that all human societies have discovered it for themselves during their respective Stone Age periods – like twining/cording, braiding and knotting, but unlike spinning and weaving, whose invention was limited by the natural availability of suitable fibres. Needlebinding has been used for much more varied piecework than knitting: from basketry to lace and ropework, via nets, bags, and wildly varied coverings for the head, hands and feet. A short historical survey, limited to Northern Europe, starts in 4200 BC with the oldest find (from Denmark) and challenges the assumption that by 1700, knitting had displaced the older craft in all but the most marginal communities.

Current theory holds that knitting was invented in Egypt. The hypothesis was originally put together on the basis of some late Roman socks which were thought to be knitted, and some multicoloured knitted fragments with claimed dates from the 11th to the 15th century. However, all Roman 'knitting' has turned out to be needlebinding. As this became known, the Egyptian socks were interpreted instead as the immediate ancestors of true knitting. Examining this notion from a technical point of view, as a practitioner of both crafts, the author finds little or no chance of direct descent by accidental discovery, as the two techniques are mutually exclusive from a structural point of view. This leaves the Egyptian origin of knitting hinging on the dating of the medieval knitted pieces, which is neither precise nor secure.

The author therefore advocates treating the origin of knitting as a research question, without preconceptions, and looks forward to what archaeology may contribute to answering it.

Mittens and muffs from the Zaan region in the Zaan Museum

Inge Bosman

Mittens were an indispensable part of the regional costume of the Zaan region of the Netherlands in the second half of the 18th and the early 19th century. Recreating such a costume therefore means knitting mittens. For the best dress of a well-to-do woman, they may either be silk mittens knitted with a pattern of stripes in two or three colours, or in stockinet and decorated with embroidery, or in a pattern of knitted damask. Such mittens are edged with braid and bobbin lace, made of silver in the most expensive versions.

At home and at work, plain cotton mittens may be worn. These are unlined, with a simple knitted scalloped edging, and easy to wash. In winter, velvet or (fur)lined mittens may be used.

The fishing fleet and its many jerseys

Forgotten knitwear of the fishermen of Zeeland

Stefanie Huibregtse and Anja Geldof

The authors have been investigating the origin and distribution of fishermen's jerseys in the Dutch province of Zeeland. Their project, which dates back to 2011, was joined in 2012 by a similar one, the *Arnemuidse Visserstruien*, initiated by Jeanet Jaffari-Schroevers in 2010. In 2014 this resulted in a foundation called 'Stichting Zeeuwse Visserstruien', whose aim is to gather, document and make available knowledge and skills concerning the fishermen's jerseys of Zeeland.

According to British data, the jersey worn by sailors and fishermen, also called *guernsey* or *gansey*, may have originated from the island of Guernsey, where knitting was well established as early as the 15th century. From 1805 onward, both hand and machine knitted jerseys have belonged to the uniform of the British Navy.

It seems clear that the herring fleets contributed to spreading its popularity, especially through the presence on board of the female gutters. They knitted stockings and jerseys in different colours; the farther North, the more refined and complex were the patterns, the most spectacular being found in Scotland.

The oldest known pattern for a fisherman's jersey is dated to 1822; the oldest photograph known so far of a fisherman wearing a *gansey* is from 1850, in the South of England.

It seems certain that it was the Dutch herring fleet which brought the jersey to the Netherlands, either as a result of contacts with other fishermen or of purchase or barter with merchant ships or possibly the Navy. The oldest images of fishermen from Zeeland wearing jerseys are from around 1890. Therefore it seems likely that hand knitted jerseys were introduced in Zeeland before that.

The patterns of fishermen's jerseys around the North Sea vary, but research into authentic Dutch and British jerseys shows that the technique is the same everywhere. These jerseys are knitted in the round on four or five needles, from the bottom up, the sleeves being added on last.

It was once assumed that the hometown of a fisherman could be deduced from the pattern of his jersey, but this turns out not to be true. Most patterns, such as cable and block designs, are found in many different fishing towns all over Zeeland. It has also been thought that the patterns of jerseys from Zeeland were simple because the people were so poor that they economized on yarn in this way. It now seems more likely that the strict sobriety and simplicity in dress enforced by the local churches made itself felt even in the knitting patterns. Families used to move from one port to the other as work demanded, and this may have helped spread the different patterns throughout the province. Few fishermen's jerseys from Zeeland have survived. Like all working clothes, they were not considered worth keeping, and were worn until they fell apart or were recycled. Since the 1950's, both the fishermen's jerseys and regional costume have disappeared as ordinary street wear.

At the time of writing (summer 2015), three original fishermen's jerseys have been located in Zeeland, and 27 on photographs. The patterns have been worked out, tried and noted down by the Stichting Zeeuwse Visserstruien. All the jerseys have been recreated, and in June 2015 the authors presented their book *Truien bij de Vleet, Zeeuwse visserstruien in verhalen en patronen*. The research project, however, is being continued.

A history of the teaching of knitting at school

Trijnne van Spanning

This short history of knitting as part of the teaching of needlework in Dutch schools is based both on the author's collection of publications on the subject and on her own experiences at school.

In the 19th century, learning to knit was considered important for girls because it enabled them to contribute significantly to the income of their family and would help them run their own future household. This is the context in which private knitting schools were started all over the

Netherlands. From 1853 onward some primary schools offered needlework lessons, although they were non-compulsory. The law on education adopted in 1878 did make needlework compulsory for primary school girls.

The author highlights a number of aspects of needlework lessons at school from her personal experience. One is the careful putting away of the school needlework projects between lessons. Another is how these were affected by the scarcity of materials following World War II: the girls were often made to unravel what they had knitted because the yarn had to be re-used for another object. A third theme is left-handed knitting. And the last subject is the training of teachers to obtain 'Akte K', the diploma for the teaching of 'useful needlecrafts' in the teacher training colleges, either as part of the teacher's certification or by special examination.

The teaching of needlework came to an end in secondary schools in the Netherlands in 1968, when the '*Mammoetwet*' (the new law on education) was enacted. It disappeared from primary education when pre-school and primary school were combined in 1985. Or rather, this was the end of the teaching of needlework as a practical and useful skill. It was replaced by '*creatieve vorming*' (creativity training), with a larger role for artistic expression.

Today, knitting is enjoying a renewed popularity as a social activity in numerous knitting clubs. Even in teacher training programmes, there is a tentative interest in knitting.

The myth of 'Frisian' knitted lace

Gieneke Arnolli

The authoritative needlework compendium called *Het grote handwerkboek* (B.C. Jelles, 1973) mentions some fine knitted lace as being characteristically Frisian. Although some '*floddermutsen*', the lace caps worn with the *oorijzer* (headdress frame) in Frisian regional costume, are indeed made of knitted lace, how specifically Frisian is this technique really?

The term 'Frisian knitted lace' is first coined in 1923, in a little book called *Naaldkunst kantwerk en handweven* (Needlework, lacework and handweaving), part 14 of the series *De Toegepaste Kunsten in Nederland* (The applied arts in the Netherlands), by Elis. M. Rogge (1858-1945).

The illustration shows a gauzy doily in knitted lace made by Minke Rodenburg-van der Schaaf from the Frisian city of Grou, and described as 'an ancient and purely Dutch pattern of Frisian folk art'. But in fact, in 1922 the pattern of this doily was obtainable from *De Gracieuse*, a Dutch translation of the German fashion magazine *Der Bazar*. Minke Rodenburg knitted the pattern in extremely fine yarn, to create a much smaller and more delicate object. She started using the same technique to knit the typical Frisian lace caps called *floddermuts*. From the agricultural crisis of 1878 onward, the women of Friesland had been wearing their costly regional costume less and less, and World War I had put an end to the production and export of the special Belgian bobbin lace used for the caps. Knitting with sewing thread, which was still available, offered an alternative for the Belgian lace.

The method was adopted by other women in Grou, amongst whom was Clare Hofstra (1900-1980), who supplied women in Friesland with the knitted lace version of the *floddermuts* until the late 1960's. Her sister Tine would read aloud to her while she knitted; Tine also finished the caps by washing, starching and setting them.

Thus the 'traditional Frisian knitted lace' turns out to be based on German patterns. *De Gracieuse* was a popular source, and so were the translations of the needlework books published by Otto Beyer in Leipzig. These were printed by the thousands in The Netherlands, and easily obtainable in all parts of the country.

Lace knitting was already well developed in Germany and Austria in the 19th century; in fact knitted lace is found all over Europe. It was often practiced as a cottage industry. The investment was modest: one needed only patience, nimble hands, stainless steel double pointed knitting needles for knitting in the round, and thin yarns with the longest possible running length — and good light to

work by. The patterns are formed by combining plain knitting or stockinette with 'holes'. Scotland, Scandinavia and the Baltic countries preferred geometrical patterns, whereas Germany and Austria developed many floral patterns of leaves and flowers.

Today, Frisian lace knitter Monique Boonstra (born 1969) takes her inspiration from knitted lace techniques from Estonia, the Shetlands and other sources. From the beginning, Frisian lace knitters have used and adapted patterns developed elsewhere. There is therefore no such thing as a 'purely Frisian knitted lace'.

How knitwear came into fashion

Jacoba de Jonge

England developed a large knitting industry in the 17th century, taking advantage of the excellent quality of its wool. It produced both hand knitted stockings, gloves and caps, and machine knitted stockings. The early machines produced plain stockinet; decorative patterns knitted by hand used the alternation of plain and purl.

In the 18th century, new inventions opened new possibilities for knitting. The first cotton yarn strong enough for knitting eyelet holes appeared, then the knitting machines were perfected to imitate openwork knitting, leading to the first machine knitted lace. The *warp frame* (1775) made vertical rows of loops to create the fabric, rather than the horizontal rows of traditional hand knitting. It produced sturdy fabrics that did not fray and could be used much like woven ones. The cotton yarns and the possibilities of openwork and decorative stitches also stimulated fashionable forms of knitting.

In the 18th century, knitting was a craft practiced only by poor people and country folk. From about 1800 on, decorative knitting comes into fashion for such accessories as mittens, baby bonnets, handbags, etc. The 19th century fashion magazines show the growing popularity of decorative knitting, and the simultaneous rise of crochet, with a multitude of patterns for all kinds of more or less useful objects. In time, the patterns come to cover children's garments, jackets for home wear, and larger dress accessories such as shawls and caps.

The 19th century also saw a rise in the production of machine knitted garments, and underwear, nightcaps and stockings became available quite cheaply. Some patented garments are to be found among the patents for industrial items held in the archives of the Public Record Office in London. As early as 1850, the firm of Richard Harris & Sons in Leicester patented the *polka jacket*, a fashionable short housecoat in decorative knitting. People engaged in heavy or dirty work, but also in sports and games, would normally take off their outer garments to have more freedom of movement. When, about the middle of the 19th century, English boarding schools and American colleges transformed unregulated games into proper sports competitions with fixed rules, a demand for distinctive sports clothing for the teams arose. This led to the introduction of striped *shirts* or *vests*, patterned after striped stockings. Fashionable outdoor sports such as tennis, rowing and sailing also created a demand for less impeding clothing, and machine knitted fabrics, called *jersey*, started to be used for this. The Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey had a longstanding reputation for fine hand knitting, and they exported their products to many countries in Western Europe. The name *jersey* was adopted for the new fashionable knitwear, even in French fashion magazines and catalogues. Jersey jackets appeared for men; for ladies, there were dress bodices, sometimes finished with the fabrics of the skirt they were worn with.

About 1890, the *sweater* was introduced from America as sportswear, while in England the white jumper with a cable-knit design was already part of the 'whites' worn for cricket. In this fashion, knitted garments evolved from being used as underwear only to being worn as outer clothing at home and for sports. By 1900 it was completely normal for children to have formal clothes made of hand or machine knitted jersey, especially sailor suits. Ladies and gentlemen included it in their formal wear from about the 1920's. Ever since, jersey fabrics have been omnipresent and indispensable to everyone's wardrobe, from underwear to evening dress.

From the écharpe to the têtère...

Knitting and crochet in *De Gracieuse*

Sytske I.E.Wille-Engelsma

This article is based on the inventory of all knitting and crochet found in the Dutch fashion magazine *De Gracieuse* from 1875 to 1928, in the archives of the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden.

'*De Gracieuse, Geïllustreerde Aglaja*' was a fashion magazine published by A.W.Sijthoff in Leiden from 1865 to 1936. Lavishly illustrated with black and white engravings, it is not always an easy read, though its layout becomes more structured in the 20th century. This inventory was undertaken to collect all the data it contains on knitting and crochet.

The magazine's many and detailed illustrations show either isolated objects or patterns, or else carefully arranged scenes. In the latter, women are often shown standing full-length, to present the clothing to its best advantage. The scenes only rarely show them embroidering, knitting, winding yarn or crocheting. Interestingly, the crocheted products turn out to outnumber the knitting by far.

The magazine also devotes space to the boxes and rolls used to store knitting needles and crochet hooks, and to the workbags or baskets. Related techniques and their tools sometimes appear, such as peg-frame knitting, hairpin lace and Tunisian crochet.

Lace is an important subject, both for clothing and for soft furnishings. Knitted lace and crocheted lace are featured as well as bobbin lace, needlepoint lace, embroidered lace, tatting and netting. A particularly popular combination is crochet work incorporating ready-made materials such as ribbons, beads and pre-moulded figures. Sometimes the product is made in one piece, sometimes in several shaped pieces to be assembled afterwards. Some knitted lace is trimmed with ribbon or braiding, but not nearly as often as crochet is. The big difference between crochet and knitting is that the first is treated as an artistic technique, and the second as a useful craft.

Until about 1900, the inventory reveals a great many interior decorations, gifts for the traditional Dutch St. Nicolas celebration as well as for Christmas, and presents for poor children in charitable institutions or, during World War I, for soldiers, Red Cross nurses and other nursing personnel. Materials are more scarce during the war, and the magazine recommends replacing dresses by skirts and blouses.

Most of the larger knitted and crocheted garments found in *De Gracieuse* are not meant to be seen: they are underwear. The ones that are worn visibly are jackets for home wear, shawls, stockings and caps. But in 1896, the first modern Olympic Summer Games are held in Athens and the first materials for sportswear are woven or knitted fabrics. In 1899, the magazine features its first 'Knitted sports shirt (*sweater*) for gentlemen' – using the English term, which betrays the origin of the garment. By 1910, it is offering knitting and crocheting patterns for single-colour, practical, hygienic garments. In the 1920's, the 'artistic' dresses appear, the 'kimono-shaped dress', the shift dresses and blouses, the shirt and pullover patterns; these are either entirely crocheted or knitted, or sewn from (knitted) fabric with knitted or crocheted insets, belts and decorations. Patterning – geometric, striped or checked – becomes very fashionable.

The inventory leads to the conclusion that *De Gracieuse* has featured an enormous number of knitted and crocheted objects during the whole of the 19th century, either for interior decoration or as dress accessories. It is not until the 20th century that knitting and crochet are used, first to make sportswear and then, finally, fashionable garments.

Beaded purses

Anke and Connie Grevers

The authors, Connie and Anke Grevers, grew up in a family where needlecrafts were much practiced. They specialized in knitting the everyday caps of the regional costume of the Dutch province of Gelderland as well as the beaded purses forming the subject of this article.

The beaded purses are decorated with traditional designs such as a guardian dog, a bouquet of roses, or a star. The star is particularly popular on purses from the Achterhoek region. It has 6, 7 or 8 points, and is also seen in other traditional items, such as knitted caps and mittens. It is found decorating the gable-ends of farms in the Achterhoek and Twente regions, on bridal chests, on coins and as a design shaped by paving stones. The star is also seen as the solar wheel, with four meanings attributed to it: God, Christ, Protection, Victory. The colours are often different shades of blue.

There are several ways of incorporating beads in knitting. The authors use two techniques for the purses they knit. One is done on two needles, with the bead positioned on the yarn connecting two stitches. The other is used for the purses belonging to the regional costume of East-Gelderland in the period from 1850 to 1945. It is worked on four working needles plus an auxiliary one, with the bead positioned on the stitch proper, which means the bead is pulled through with the yarn when the stitch is formed. In this technique the final result will be established before the knitting proper starts, as the beads are threaded by colour beforehand, according to the charted design.

“It looks as if they’re wearing sweaters”

Knitted cardigans in the regional costume of Staphorst, 1950-2015

Jacco Hooikammer

This article traces the introduction and gradual acceptance of the knitted cardigan into the regional costume of Staphorst, and describes its manufacture, use and evolution. The author interviewed women who wear such cardigans as well as male and female knitters.

The Staphorst cardigan seems to have made its appearance in the 1950's, when it was adapted from current fashion. It gradually came to take the place of the winter jacket in the female regional costume of Staphorst. Over time, the *Staphorst*s modified the shape and execution to meet their taste and needs. The first to wear cardigans were younger women, and some progressive older ones; it took quite some time for others to follow. The introduction of the knitted cardigan into this regional costume looks like a purely local choice, but it also fits in with the general evolution giving casual clothing a new and prominent role at that time. Even today, the knitted cardigan is not accepted as proper by everyone in all circumstances, especially in regard to Sunday wear.

The cardigans are always blue, but there are a great many varieties. From the beginning, they were machine knitted (both at home and in the knitting industry), as well as handmade by male and female knitters. Some of them knit only for their own use, some also for acquaintances; others sell their products.

Currently, a number of women who have abolished the regional costume are wearing the Staphorst knitted cardigan, and this not merely as a nice vintage-type garment. They have cardigans knitted to order, with some concessions to the traditional model, such as a lower waistline and fashionable colours. In a sense, the cardigan has come full circle.

'Such clothes are not to be found in our shops'

Knitting in communist Poland

Martha Kargól

This article analyses the changes in the knitting designs during the communist era in Poland. It discusses the main patterns and trends, and the relationship between knitting and fashion. The second issue is the role of homemade clothing in daily life. Knitting is analysed in the economic and social context of communism. The sources are books and magazines with knitting patterns and instructions for beginners, interviews with women who knitted during that period, and with people who wore the knitted garments as children.

'Such clothes are not to be found in our shops' commented one author in her book of knitting designs in the 1980's, 'and when they are, they are very expensive'. What she had in mind was the shortage of consumer goods in the Polish shops, but also the very limited choice of mass-produced clothing in the communist economy. Homemade, and especially knitted, clothing was one of the solutions. The crisis in Poland was deepest in the 1980's, when clothing was difficult to obtain and even yarn often scarce.

A number of books published between the 1950's and the early 1990's reveals much about the popularity of home-made clothes and decorations. The authors emphasize that knitting is no longer a cause for jokes, seen as the work of grandmothers, but a pleasant occupation popular with modern young mothers. They encouraged young girls to learn how to knit their own clothes.

In the 1960's, the first patterns for knitted curtains were published. New possibilities were introduced, such as the combinations of knitted textiles with beads and bits of fur. Publications of knitting patterns became more and more specialized, offering clothing for babies, kids, teenagers, men, elderly people. Every kind of garment was made: children's knickers, bathing suits, sweaters, ponchos, headscarves, caps, dresses, skirts and coats.

According to the authors of the knitting books, knitted clothing had many advantages, such as practicality, hygiene, comfort and originality. Homemade clothing was also praised as giving much satisfaction and enabling girls to create their own original look. Knitting was the perfect pastime for long evenings, 'a kind of game', excellent relaxation and a nice leisure activity, the more so as television, especially in the first decades after World War II, was a luxury and not available to everyone.

After the communist regime fell, the Polish market opened up and shops sprang up everywhere offering second-hand clothing, mostly imported from the West. Homemade clothing gradually began to vanish. Readymade clothes were available widely, cheaply and in great variety. Today, textile crafts are becoming popular again, but mainly as an interesting hobby; they are no longer a response to the economics of daily life.

At the junction of craft, heritage and fashion

Knitting: an exploration of the relation between traditional and modern design practice

Charlotte Corstanje

Modern Dutch designers such as Soepboer & Stoker and Conny Groenewegen, but also Viktor & Rolf, make avid use of old techniques, translating them skillfully into a modern context. Combining old traditions with innovations in the design of fabric and collections, these designers work at the interface of mechanisation and handicraft, industry and craftsmanship.

Conny Groenewegen develops innovative knitting for her own label in the Tilburg Textielmuseum. Wool, silk, synthetic fibres, metals: in her work nothing is impossible. Unexpected and underestimated materials are successfully used in the realization of (couture) items or prototypes. Through this methodology, also called 'softtech', Groenewegen combines modern

technology with traditional handicraft. The manipulation of yarns by hand or machine will produce a fabric which is then given shape and silhouette by Groenewegen.

Prior to *Leeuwarden-Ljouwert Europese hoofdstad van cultuur 2018* (Leeuwarden-Ljouwert European cultural capital 2018), Groenewegen embarks on a four-year cooperation with the Wad & Design Foundation. During these years the signification of Frisian identity will be explored. What does it mean to be Frisian in the context of present-day society? And how does the local Frisian identity relate to a hybrid and intercultural context within Europe? Through the examination of fishermen's sweaters, experiments with materials and participating observations an old tradition will be translated to an present-day product: a modern Frisian fishermen's sweater. The sweater will be produced locally, the final result translating the sentiment of a local identity to a wider modern context of design.

The Serbian George Styler is a beautiful example of a fashion designer also using this concept. Styler uses the international fashion industry as a platform in the translation of local Serbian costume to (international) fashion: not in order to create a specifically Serbian fashion, but as an analysis of clothing in the form of garments based on traditional Serbian elements. His collections are the result of sociological research which he translates, amongst others, into elements of knitting, also called 'ethno design'. In this manner he manages to bridge a recognizable local identity and the continuous presence of a global context.