

Anglo-Saxon Reel or Reol

By Baroness Kaleeb the Green Eyed



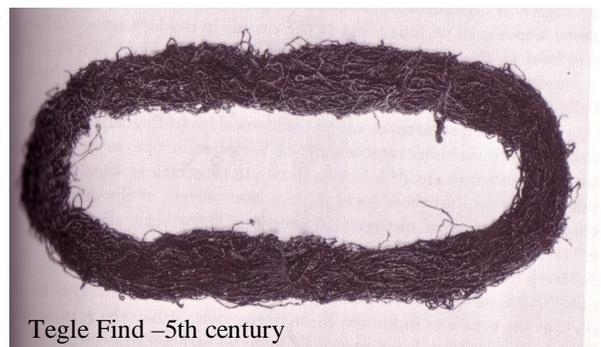
Oseberg Reels

The extent examples of migration era textile tools are rare. For the most part they are made from wood and do not survive in the ground, unless the soil is acidic and waterlogged. I have been unable to find an Anglo-Saxon reel, in any of my books or on the internet. I have found several different pictures of the Oseberg reels from the 9th century. I have also found word usage or word origin notes, which describe the word reel as an other word for stick. Martha Hoffmann in her book “The Warp Weighted Loom” has a section on swifts and reels. She uses the skein from the Tegle Find (3rd-5th century) and the advanced construction of the Oseberg reels to argue that yarn was being produced and bundled in skeins.

She feels that yarn cannot be sold unless it is bundled in skeins of a standard length, so the amount of yarn can easily be counted. A ball of yarn can be weighed, but that does nothing to indicate length of product. She feels the decoration and construction of the Oseberg reels indicate that this was tool, which had been in use for awhile. Hoffman also uses the argument that while yarn can be wound from a skein into a ball with two sets of hands, it is very time consuming. She also includes copies of several illuminations, which show the yarn path. I have not included them, as the earliest is 600 years past my area of study.

The Oseberg reel’s are 17 inches by 17inches, as is my reel. It produces a skein of about 2 yards in length. The Oseberg reels are made from three pieces of beech with the center section fitting comfortably in your hand. As does mine. I have chosen to decorate my reel with a ring and dot pattern, which is so common in Anglo-Saxon art, instead of a Celtic knot work pattern. I tried several different ways to put my design on my reel and did not find a satisfactory result. I was concerned about the rough edges that the pattern left on the reel, as I did not want to snag delicate yarn. Instead I have left the reel plain with a smooth finish.

I have used modern tools to make my reel. I am more interested in learning about the use of textile tools, than their construction. On the flip side of that coin, I have done all hand finishing on the reel, as well as needing to make a tool to produce the ring and dot patterns. (The tool worked; the design element did not.) I have also used a hardwood like the Oseberg reels. I have chosen to finish the reel with tung oil, so it will survive regular use and camping trips. I have made a second smaller reel, as it is a better size for winding yarn to be made into embroidery floss. It produces a skein of about xxx in length. All in all, I am very pleased with the start of my textile tool collection. Now I need to learn more about how the reel was used and what the phrase “set the twist” means.



Tegle Find –5th century