

Make your own Viking hand bag

*by Hrólfr á Fjárfelli of the Dominion of Myrkfaelinn, 2017
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Brief history

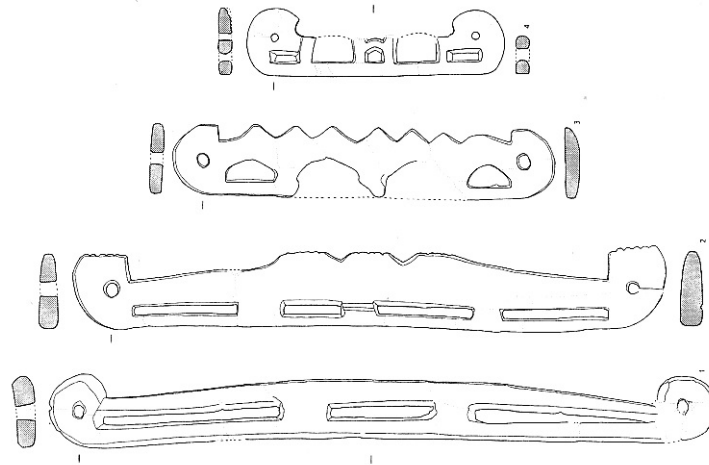
Walking around at any SCA event you may have seen these cute hand bags made of cloth or leather with two carved wooden handles. They are called “Haithabu” (German) or “Hedeby” (English) bags after the location of an archeological excavation in Germany. The excavation yielded a number of narrow carved wooden pieces, rounded and with holes on both ends and a set of narrow elongated slots along the straight length. The current interpretation is that they are bag handles after comparison with an earlier Sami find. They have a surprisingly simple but effective design; the wooden handles hold and maintain the shape of the bag and a single shoulder cord through the holes allows you to carry it and keeps the bag closed at the same time.



*Photograph of the wooden bag handles on display in the Hedeby Museum
(<http://europa.org.au/index.php/articles/21-bags>).*

A total of fourteen pieces were found at the Haithabu excavation site. Five are made from ash; five others from maple and the remaining four are not specified. They have rounded ends with holes drilled through for the carrying cord. The bottom edges are mostly straight, the top edges are wavy or with notches. Elongated slots along the bottom serve to attach the bag. Dimensions vary from 181 to 496 mm in length, a thickness of 7

to 13 mm, and 29-52 mm wide in the center part. The semicircular ends have diameters ranging from 31 to 61 mm, and have a 7 to 10 mm diameter (drilled) hole in the center. Two of the pieces were identical, i.e. a pair, and it is therefore assumed that the others should all have been part of a pair.



Drawings of four of the wooden pieces, ranging from a length of 181 to 496 mm (Florian Westphal, Die Holzfunde von Haithabu, Plate 59).

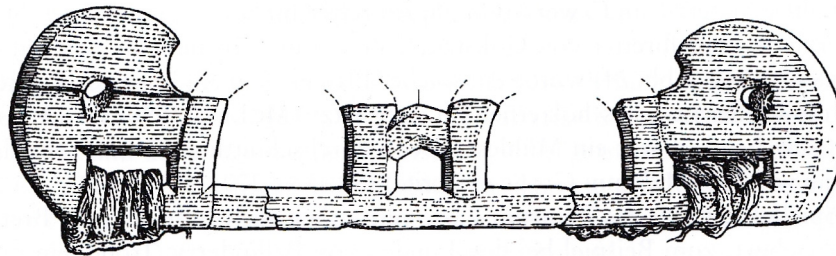


Abb. 66. Haithabu. Taschenbügel mit Fadenresten (HbH.119.003) in der Rekonstruktion (o.M.).

Reconstruction of the handle with fabric remnants (Florian Westphal, Die Holzfunde von Haithabu, p. 81).

Constructing the wooden handles

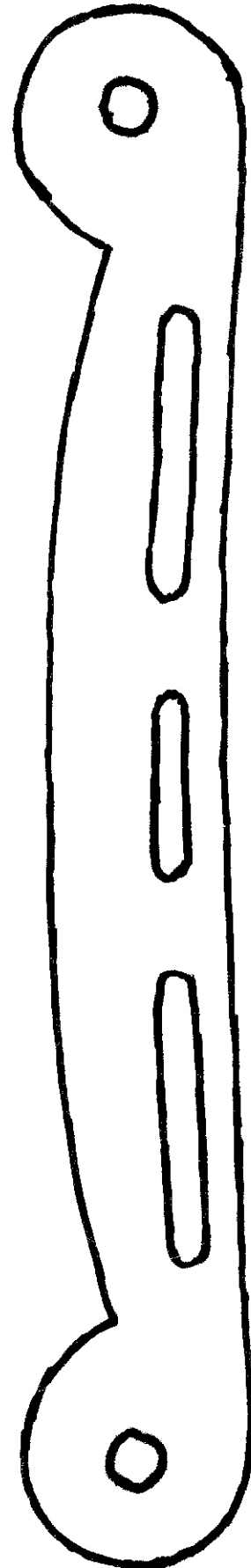
The picture on the right is a 1:1 scale outline of a bag handle similar to the ones used in the class and loosely modeled after those found in the harbor of Haithabu.

Take the following steps to make additional ones yourself:

- 1) Print this page and cut out the outline of the drawing.
- 2) Transfer the outline to a suitable piece of wood, like an 8mm or 5/16" thick board of ash, maple or oak.
- 3) Cut out the handle outline with a band or jig saw.
- 4) Mark the centers of the holes at each circular end and drill 8mm or 5/16" holes. These are holes for the carrying cord.
- 5) Mark the center of both ends of each of the three oblong slots along the lower edge and drill six 6mm or 1/4" holes. Then cut out the slots between each pair of holes with a coping saw. These are the slots that will be used to attach the bag to the handles.
- 6) Smooth the edges of the slots and holes with a hand file and sandpaper all outer surfaces.

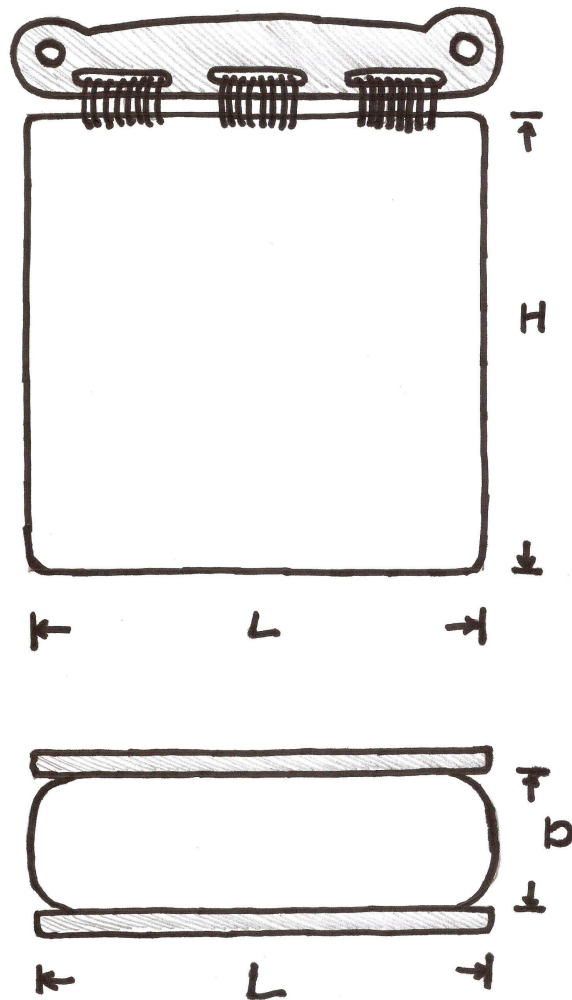
Repeat these for the second bag handle or start with a piece of wood that is twice as thick plus the thickness of your saw blade and rip it along the center after cutting out the handle outline (step 3). Then complete the remaining three steps on each individual piece (ripping after drilling the holes and cutting the slots has a high likelihood of breaking the piece).

I highly recommend impregnating the finished handles with linseed or Danish oil to protect them somewhat from the elements.



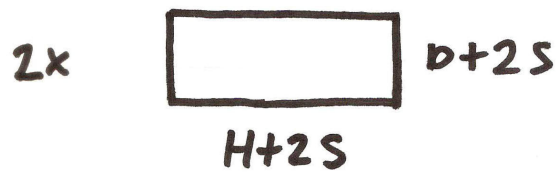
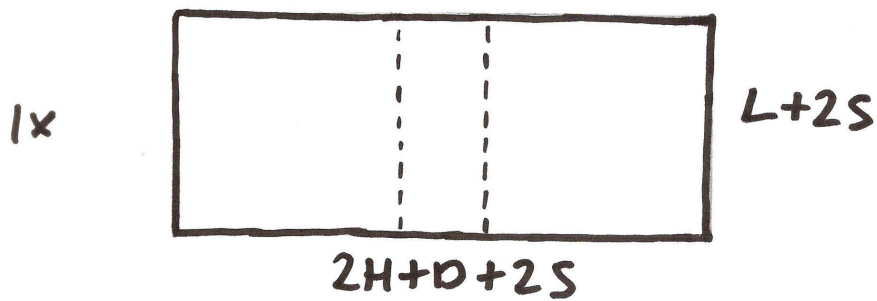
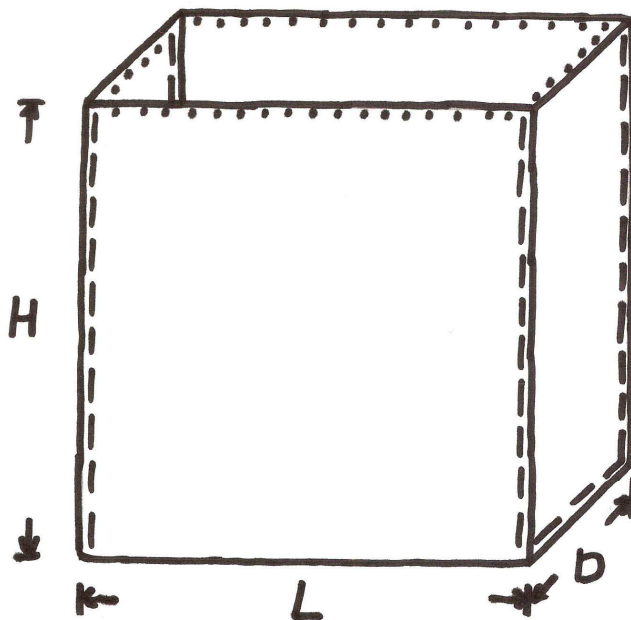
Creating the bag

No actual bags survived, but we can make an educated guess as to the shape and size. The width is dictated by the length of the handles, while pictorial evidence of period shoulder bags suggests an almost square form. Care must be taken to add a side gusset to allow the bag to open. Three reasonable designs with cloth dimensions are given below. Seams are indicated with dashed lines, hems with dotted. I suggest using a running stitch along each seam and finishing the edges with a whip stitch (either folded or not) and for the hems a single folded edge with either whip stitch or herringbone stitch. Attach the bag to the wooden handles with a thick yarn stitched through the hem and looped around the elongated slots.



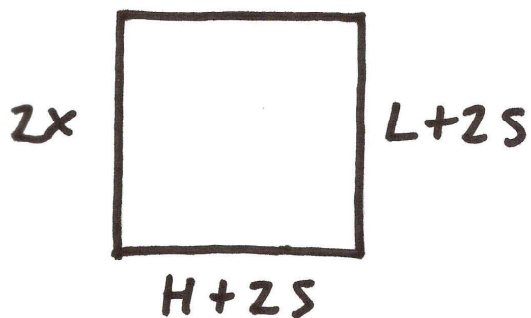
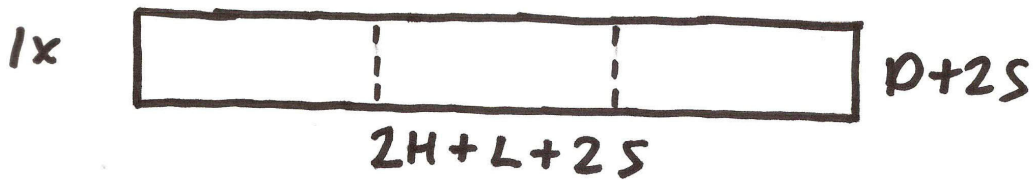
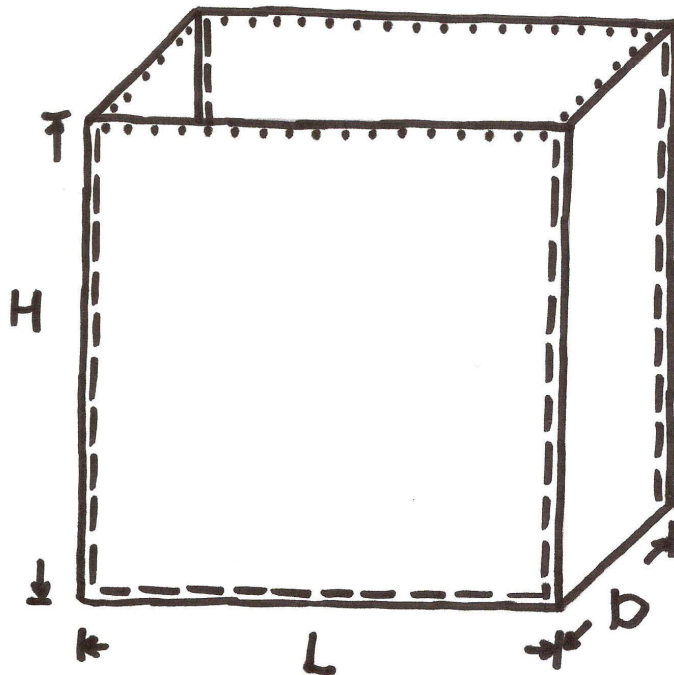
Basic shape and dimensions of the Hedeby bag.

FRONT-BOTTOM-BACK + 2 sides



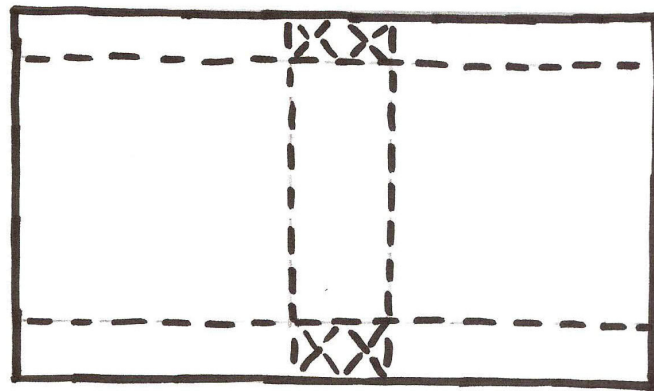
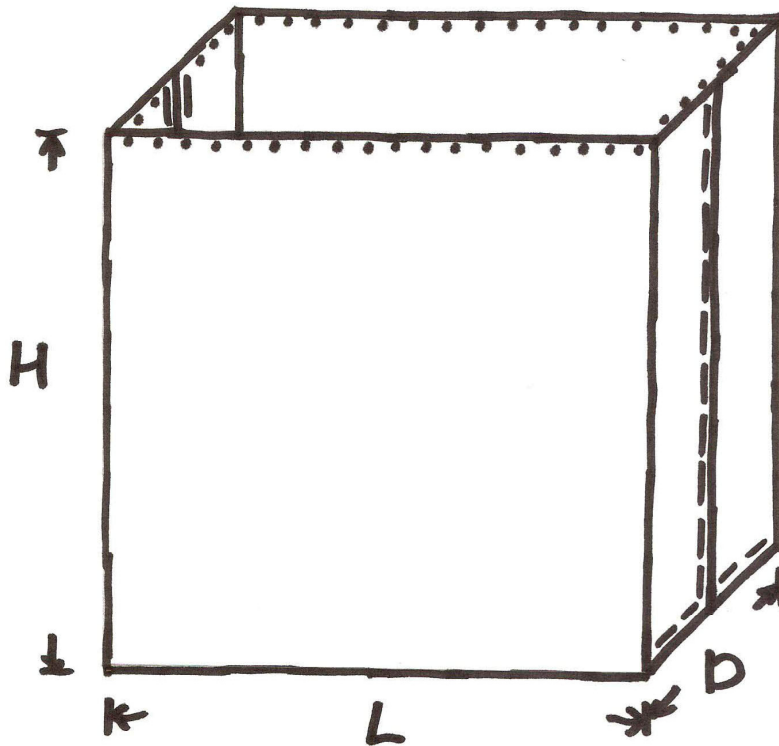
Design one: A single piece of cloth forms the front, the back and the bottom. Two additional pieces form the side.

side-BOTTOM-side + FRONT +
BACK



Design two: A single piece of cloth forms both sides and the bottom. Two additional pieces form the front and the back.

ONE SINGLE PIECE



$$L + D + 2S$$

$$2H + D + 2S$$

Design three: The bag is assembled from a single piece of cloth.

Bibliography

Florian Westphal, *Die Holzfunde von Haithabu*, Neumünster: Wachholtz, 2006.

Kurt Schietzel, *Spurensuche Haithabu: Archäologische Spurensuche in der frühmittelalterlichen Ansiedlung Haithabu. Dokumentation und Chronik 1963-2013*, Wachholtz Verlag, Murmann Publishers, Neumünster/Hamburg, 2014.

Hefðharkona Reyni-Hrefna, *Viking Stitchery* (class handout, no date).

For a collection of text and images from “Die Holzfunde” and “Spurensuche Haithabu”, as well as other historical images (last accessed at 01/25/17):

<http://sagy.vikingove.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/bag-handles.pdf>

Examples of other people’s work:

Náttmál, May 14, 2015 (last accessed at 01/25/17):

<https://nattmal.wordpress.com/2015/05/14/haithabu-bag-1/>

Linda Wåhländer (last accessed at 01/25/17): <http://linda.fortida.se/?tag=vaskbygel>

Jean Kveberg, *Wikinger Taschenbügel, A Wood and Leather Bag from Birka*, 2016 (last accessed at 01/25/17):

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<http://stonetracery.blogspot.com/2015/08/hedeby-harbor-wooden-handled-bag.html>



My own bag ☺.