

Medieval Veil Wearing 101

Mistress Elen verch Phelip, OL (elen@opuselenae.com)

Introduction

Veils are a fantastic way to round out a medieval outfit, and also to hide a modern or short haircut. In this demo class, we will explore ways to wear an oval veil as part of a general medieval aesthetic. We'll be discussing underpinnings and accessories, veil and wimple sizes, a few styles in which to wear the veil.

Veil Underpinnings

One of the ways to keep a veil in place all day is to have the proper underpinnings. Material doesn't like to just sit on top of one's head without something to hold it there.

		
<p>Fabric Strip: A length of bias-cut fabric secured around the head like a headband, either with ties or elastic under the hair. Plain knit-fabric headbands can work well, too.</p>	<p>Kerchief: A triangular piece of fabric tied around the head and under the hair. Better than the linen strip for securing wimples. It should be comfortably big enough to either tie or pin at the base of the neck.</p>	<p>St Birgitta Cap: A coif that can be documented to sometime between the 13th and 16th centuries. Also good for securing wimples.</p>

Oval Veil

I prefer to use an oval veil, as I believe it is the most versatile. To decide how big your veil should be, measure from shoulder to shoulder, over your head, and from your forehead over the top of your head to where you'd like your veil to fall on your back. The veil we're using for the demo in this class is 28" x 32".

Drape the veil over your head (the longer dimension should be running front to back), making sure it's even on both sides and comes down about to your nose. Then pull the top of the veil back until there's a pleat about an inch and a half deep on the top of the veil. Pin the top of the veil, and one on each side at the temples, making sure the veil drapes nicely around the face.

One of the things that can be intimidating for people who want to wear veils is how to edge them. Mistress Eithni's Magic Veil Stitch is a great way to hem a veil. I'll be demonstrating the technique in a linked video, and a link to her handout can be found in the Sources section.



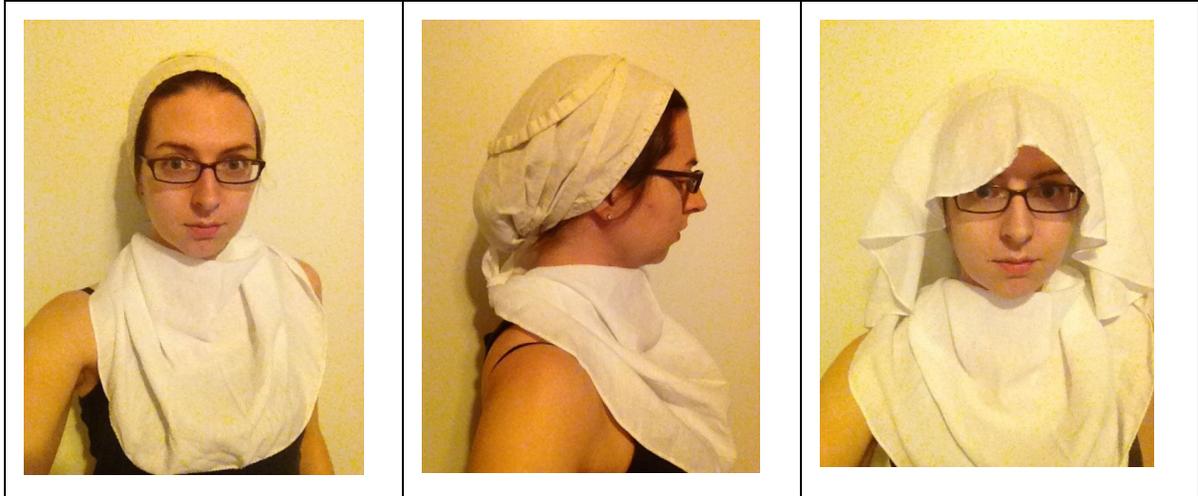
This type of veil can be seen in manuscripts and effigies dating from the 13th-15th centuries. It can be plain, or embellished with embroidery, gold trim, or beads around the edge.

		
<p>Detail from the du Berry Heures, June (late 14th early 15th c)</p>	<p>Detail from the Manesse Codex, 14th century. Note the embellished edging.</p>	<p>Memling, The Last Judgment c. 1469. Note the beaded edging.</p>

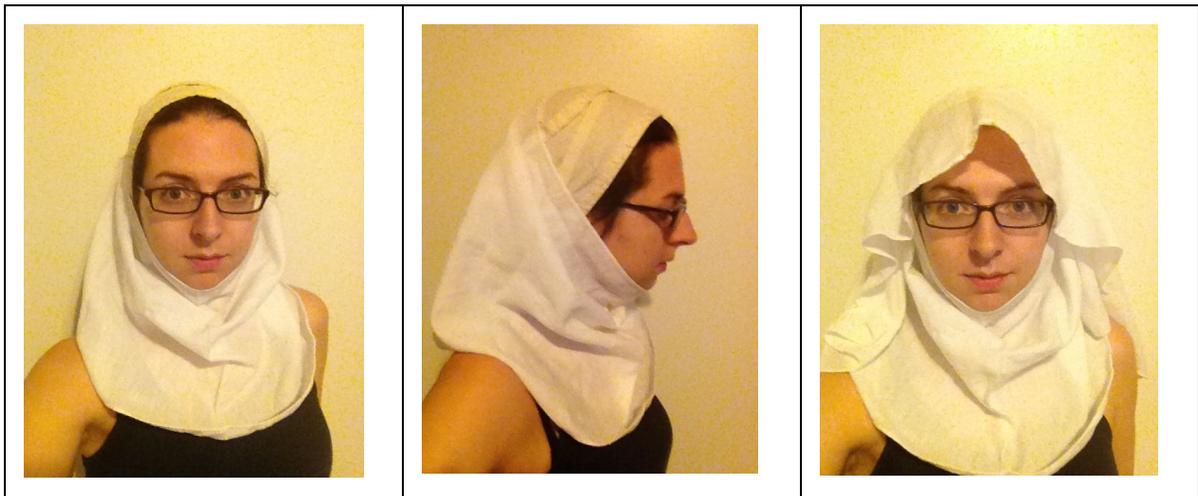
Wimple

A wimple is a length of fabric, either rectangular or a half oval shape, that is draped around the neck to hide it, and whatever indecently exposed décolletage a dress might reveal. The ideal length for a wimple is at least long enough to wind around the head from crown to chin and up again to crown, with a little overlap to pin, and should be wide enough to cover from chin to breastbone. The wimple we're working with in this class is 16" x 32".

There are a couple ways to wear a wimple. One is to wrap the wimple around your neck, crossing the ends in the back and tying or pinning them underneath in the front. This method can slip around a bit, though; if you find you're having problems with that, you can pin the edges of the wimple to your dress.



Another is to wrap the wimple under your chin and secure up at the top of the head. I prefer the kerchief or St Birgitta cap as an underpinning for this style, as the linen strip doesn't sit far enough back on the head to serve as an anchor for the wimple. The wimple can be adjusted to sit completely underneath the chin, or forward to cover the point of the chin. It may take some experimenting to find a position that you're happy with.



Wimples can be seen in manuscripts and effigies from the 12th to 15th centuries.

		
Matilda of Scotland, 13th C.	Maciejowski Bible, 13th c.	Robert Campin, Portrait of a Woman (1430)

Half Oval

This veil shape is created by folding the veil in half (more or less) widthwise. The length can be adjusted if it's too short folded just in half. It is worn draped with the straight side toward the face, and pinned at the top and temples. You may have to take a slight tuck at the sides to avoid a gable shape at the forehead.

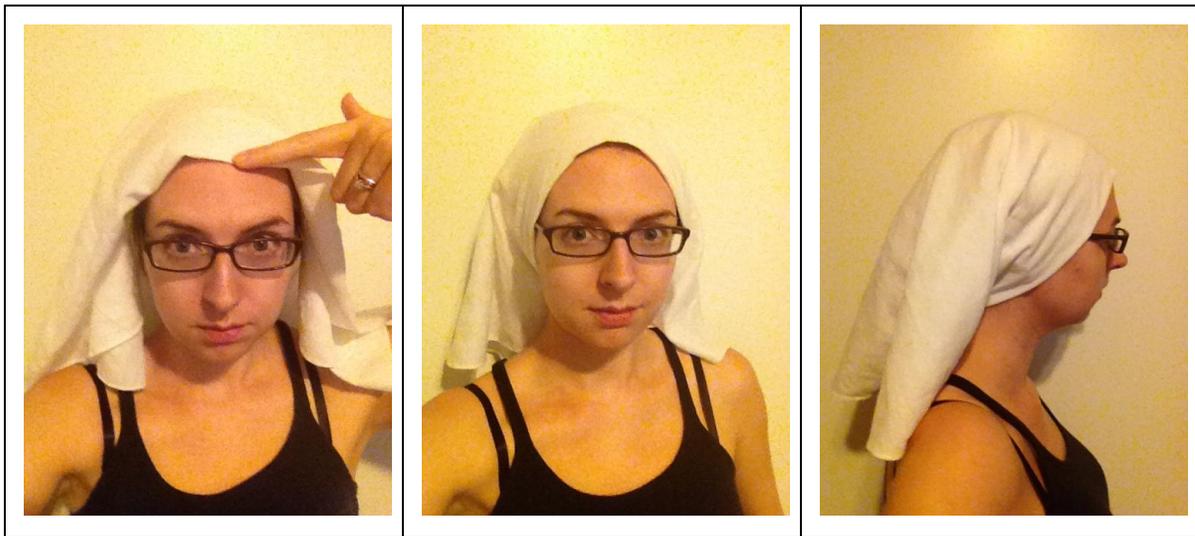


This style is can be seen in manuscripts from the 13th century and is similar to the frilled veils seen on funerary brasses and effigies from the 14th century and plain straight-front veils from Flemish paintings in the 15th century (see above example).

		
<p>Maciejowski Bible, 13th c.</p>	<p>Saint Ursula with two Angels and Donor, c. 1455/1460 (Note the black veil; veils don't always have to be white)</p>	<p>Maria, Älgå, 2nd half of the 14th century (note the frilled front edge)</p>

Half Oval, Pinned

This style takes the half-oval veil and pins it under the back of the head, like a kerchief. It's really good for performing manual labor, or for windy days where more loosely draped veils either get in the way or are blown around.



This style is similar to earlier styles of tied headwear found at Birka and Hedeby, and also bears a similarity to later Dutch kerchief styles. This is probably the least documentable style, but it one of the most practical.

		
<p>English Psalter, 13th c. This veil may be draped or pinned underneath, the piece isn't detailed enough to tell.</p>	<p>"The Ill-Matched Lovers" late 15th c.</p>	<p>Proposed Viking headwear based on finds from Birka and Dublin (Photo courtesy of Ciar's Stitch in Time)</p>

Sources and Bibliography

Tres Riches Heures: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tr%C3%A8s_Riches_Heures_du_Duc_de_Berry

Codex Manesse: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Manesse

The Last Judgement: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_\(Memling\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_(Memling))

Matilda of Scotland: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_consorts

Maciejowski Bible: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_Bible

Portrait of a Woman: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/robert-campin-a-woman>

St Ursula with two Angels: http://m-silkwork.blogspot.com/2012/03/01_archive.html

Maria Alga: <http://m-silkwork.blogspot.com/2008/10/new-project-swedish-frilled-veil.html>

English Psalter:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Embroidered_bookbinding_13th_century_Annunciation.jpg

Ill-Matched Lovers:

<http://dutchrenaissanceclothing.wordpress.com/2014/05/10/hovetcleet-research-paper/>

Ciar's Stitch In Time: <http://ciarsstitchintime.wordpress.com/2013/10/24/viking-age-head-coverings/>

Eithni's Magic Veil Stitch: <http://eithni.com/ReferenceDesk/EMVS.doc>

Video of the Magic Veil Stitch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zuFhuhYXUk>