

The Mysterious Hindeloopen Chintz Wentke Revealed

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Abstract:

The Fries (Frisian) Museum in Leeuwarden, preserves an interesting collection chintz gowns from the town of Hindeloopen, thanks to the fact that the peculiar culture of this tiny town in the province of Friesland was supposed to reflect the 'primal' Frisian culture. Hindeloopen chintz garments are not only preserved in Friesland, but are valued and kept by many museums all over the world. Their use and origins, however, are often misunderstood. This contribution aims at unveiling the origins and particularities of the traditional Frisian Hindeloopen costume. It will shed light on typical Hindeloopen garments called the 'wentke' – a woman's gown – and its shorter version more commonly known as 'kassekijntje' and how to recognise these garments.

Content:

Introduction / Hindeloopen Women's Costume / The Change in a Traditional Costume / The Colour System of the Hindeloopen Dress / How to Recognise a Typical Hindeloopen Wentke or Kassekijntje / References

Introduction

The collections of the Fries (Frisian) Museum represent the art and history of Friesland, one of the former Seven United Netherlands (Provinces) of the 'Dutch Republic' (1581-1795).

The purchase of the building in which the Fries Museum had started in 1881, was funded by the proceeds of a large *Historical Exhibition of Friesland* in 1877. Tens of thousands of visitors attended this exhibition at the former 'Royal Palace' in Leeuwarden to get a glimpse of their past. Especially the 'Hindeloopen rooms' with their strikingly colourful traditional costumes were a great success.

The next year, in 1878, Hindeloopen women's costumes with their Indian chintz gowns were shown as examples of 'traditional Dutch costume' at the World Exhibition in Paris. Since then, Hindeloopen chintz garments are not only preserved in Friesland, but are valued and kept by many other museums all over the world. Their use and origins, however, are sometimes misunderstood. A picture in *Cotton, The Fabric that made the modern world* by Giorgio Riello (2013) shows this point (fig. 1).



Fig. 1:

Figure 8.6 in Riello 2013, 166 and colour plate.

<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=2004.93>.

Hindeloopen Women's Costume

Most traditional costumes in the Netherlands are the remains of fashionable clothes from various periods in time (fig. 2). The peculiar traditional 'Hindeloopen costume' is a fine and early example.



Fig. 2:
Maker unknown, Twelve Dutch traditional costumes, c. 1850. Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.559456>.

Hindeloopen is a small town situated at the edge of the Zuiderzee (now IJsselmeer), in the southwestern part of Friesland. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most of the male inhabitants were involved in the Baltic trades to Scandinavia, Russia and the Baltic states. The wintering harbour for their commercial vessels was Amsterdam, because the sea around Hindeloopen was too shallow. At that time Amsterdam was the most important seaport town. It was the marketplace for goods like porcelain from China and cotton fabrics from India, brought by the VOC, the Dutch United East Indian Company, founded in 1602. Mainly because of the link with Amsterdam Hindeloopen flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Since the seventeenth century the traditional costume worn in Hindeloopen was different from the rest of Friesland. Around 1775 the Dutch publicist, physician and natural philosopher Johannes Le Francq van Berkhey (1729-1812) wrote in his historical magnum opus *Natuurlijke Historie van Holland*, that he considered the traditional dress of Hindeloopen to exemplify historical Dutch or historical Frisian dress. The main reason being that in his time items of clothing after patterns originating from the sixteenth century, were still in use there (fig. 3).



Fig. 3:
 Maker unknown, Unmarried woman in traditional costume of Hindeloopen, 1790-1792. Illustration in *Kabinet van Mode en Smaak*, Cabinet of Fashion and taste, fashion magazine. Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.515172>.

The headdress, for example, developed from wearing a head kerchief. The stays, with lacing that left a hand's breadth of space between the panels can also be traced to that period. Even the shape of the '*wentke*', the most remarkable piece of clothing, came from a long-sleeved gown dating from the sixteenth century. Jackets with narrow long sleeves, and laced stays had already become unfashionable throughout the rest of the Netherlands as early as the seventeenth century.

The Change in a Traditional Costume



Fig. 4:
 Ids Meines, drawing of Hindeloopen people, 1692. Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, PTA187-001.

In Hindeloopen inventories, the long garments or wentkes are mentioned since 1626, made of plain linen or woollen fabric in different colours, red, blue, white but mostly black. Almost all of the commonly worn woollen wentkes have disappeared since then. They were made of 'borato', a lightweight fabric of silk and fine wool. For the warp bourette silk was used, which has disintegrated. One example is preserved at the Hindeloopen Museum and one is in the collection of the Fries Museum (fig. 4).

However in the eighteenth century, Hindeloopen women discovered in Amsterdam the colourful Indian chintzes and gingham. Little by little these women started to include the cotton fabrics in their traditional costumes instead of wool and linen, to begin with the gingham, the lightweight plain-woven cotton cloth, typically checked in white and a bold colour. That made a great change in the attractiveness of their costumes. Chintz, the exotic colourful hand painted cotton fabric had slowly made its way into Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, but only became fashionable in the middle of the eighteenth century. At first it was used only at home in the informal atmosphere, for bedspreads, wall hangings and morning gowns. The Persian style banyan and especially the Japanese style kimono were exotic but became 'must-haves' in the Netherlands as a comfortable house-coat (fig. 5).



Fig. 5:
Indian Chintz morning gown in Japanese style Coromandel Coast, 1st quarter of the 18th century. Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T2016-038.

Audacious students even wore their morning gowns going to college and to church. It is quite possible that in Amsterdam Hindeloopen women were inspired by the colourful outfits they saw as street wear. The first reference to a chintz wentke is to be found in 1754 in the Hindeloopen inventories, so it had possibly been in use some twenty or thirty years before (Arnolli and Wille-Engelsma 1990, 34). In addition to these painted chintzes, the eighteenth century Hindeloopen costume also included as many different kinds of Indian gingham as possible (fig. 6).



Fig. 6:
Hindeloopen costume with chintz wentke, out of mourning, c. 1750-1775.
Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T08244A.

By using the not inexpensive chintz, the wentke became a gala dress for special occasions. More commonly worn was its shorter version which was known as 'kassekijntje'. The name was derived from the French casaquin, a jacket, which is associated with working-class or peasant women. The casaquin became a fashion item during the second half of eighteenth century and the Hindeloopen women wore their own version.

The Colour System of the Hindeloopen Dress

Especially for the Dutch market Indian craftsmen produced chintzes with only one colour in various shades. These must have been cheaper than the multi-coloured chintzes, which suited the Dutch traders. The 'red on white' were painted with alum mordant and 'black on white' painted with iron mordant, both dyed with saya wera, a kind of madder. For making the 'blue on white' chintz it meant the waxing of most of the cloth, a time consuming work, before the indigo dye bath. First the contours of the design would have been made with iron mordant.

In Hindeloopen the differently coloured fabrics made it possible to display an entire system of dress, indicating either joy or mourning. There were various stages of mourning, which were imaged by the Hindeloopen draftsman Hendrik Lap (1824-1874), around 1850 (fig. 7). By that time the Hindeloopen costume had practically died out. Since the special Hindeloopen culture was supposed to reflect the 'primal' Frisian culture, in the 1840s the Leeuwarden municipal archivist Wopke Eekhoff (1809-1880) had started his historical research into Hindeloopen culture. So he asked Hendrik Lap to do a series of drawings of Hindeloopen interiors as well as Hindeloopen costume.



Fig. 7:
Hendrik Lap, drawing of various Hindeloopen costumes, c. 1850. Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, PTA187-021A.

The wentkes and all the other Hindeloopen garments in bright colours were the festive clothes worn on high days and holidays. The 'red on white' garments, so-called 'milk-and-blood' chintz wentkes were especially meant for the Hindeloopen bride. Meanwhile the bride would wear still the old fashioned black woollen wentke at the religious wedding ceremony (fig. 8).



Fig. 8:
Woollen wentke, 1700-1800. Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T06557A.

In the stages of mourning wentkes, kassekijntjes, under jackets as well as the gingham head kerchief, breast cloth and apron exhibited a succession of colour schemes: black with white motifs, called 'paslijk' or appropriate, white with black, called 'tussenbijden' or in-between, and white with blue, called 'bleek' or pale. In the last stage before going out of mourning, the colour red was applied.

The black and white Hindeloopen wentke in The South & South East Asia Collection of the V&A as well as the black and white kassekijntje in the collection of the Gallery of Costume in Manchester are Hindeloopen mourning clothes from the stage called 'in-between'. A detail of the kassekijntje is pictured in *Cotton: The Fabric that made the modern world* by Giorgio Riello as a 'fragment of European printed cotton, c. 1660-1700' (Riello 2013, 166, fig. 8.6 and colour plate). Although this piece lacks the beauty of colour, it is probably not as early as stated, and it is painted in India, c. 1750-1775. At that time the European cotton printers had reached their full potential. European printed cottons had got the same quality as the early Indian printed and painted cottons and were cheaper. This led to the decline and finally to the downfall of the Indian art of painting chintz fabrics.

How to Recognise a Typical Hindeloopen Wentke or Kassekijntje



Fig. 9:
Woollen wentke, detail, 1700-1800. Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T06557A.

The cut of the wentke and kassekijntje is the same, only the wentke has a long skirt. Shaping is given by gussets, set in at the waist. This is the same way the English embroidered jackets c. 1610-1620 had got their shaping (North 2011, 22-59). Unlike these jackets the black wentke fastens only at the neck and at the waist with pewter hooks and eyes, which leaves a slit at the breast. But it has shoulder wings like these seventeenth century English jackets (fig. 9). The chintz wentke and kassekijntje are open at the front which must have been inspired by the fashionable open gowns of the eighteenth century. The old fashioned shoulder wings had disappeared (fig. 10).

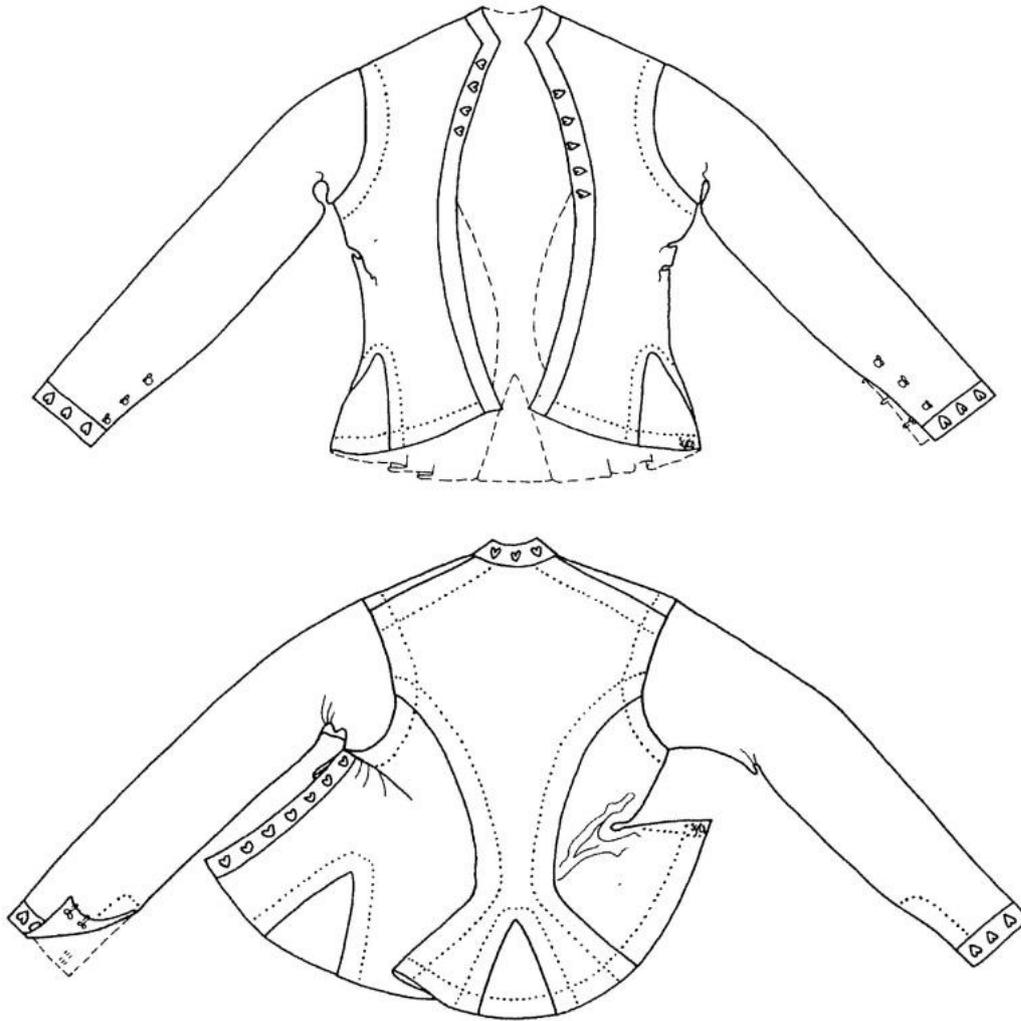


Fig. 10:
Pattern of kassekijntje, front and back. © Fries Museum Leeuwarden, drawing Syts Wille-Engelsma

Very special is the typical decorative overstitching about an inch along the seams. This always reveals the origins of the 'wentke' and 'kassekijntje' as Hindeloopen. In the picture of the fragment of the Hindeloopen kassekijntje in Manchester this overstitching is visible (<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=2004.93>). It is also to be seen on the Hindeloopen children's jackets, which were called a 'sliepwentke' or nightgown, and the long over sleeves or 'bears claws'. The earliest known reference to chintz garments for children dates from 1724 (Arnolli 1990, 49). In the nineteenth century many of the wentkes were reused to make bedcapes (fig. 11), in which the overstitched seams are still visible as is to be seen in at least two chintz capes in the V&A (Crill 2008, 106-7, fig. 59, 60).



Fig. 11:
'Skouldermantel' or bedcape made of Hindeloopen mourning wentke.
Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T1958-021.

After the Historical Exhibition of Friesland in 1877 and the following World Exhibition in Paris in 1878, there was a revival of the Hindeloopen culture. Since 1912 'Aald Hielpen', is one of the oldest costume wearing, choral and dance groups in the Netherlands. According to the founders, the colourful costumes, the special songs and the old customs and habits of Hindeloopen should not be lost.

As is stated earlier, the peculiar Hindeloopen culture was supposed to reflect the 'primal' Frisian culture. Indian chintzes have been preserved all over Friesland as a memento as well as a representation of this 'primal' Frisian culture. That is why so many objects made of chintz have survived in Friesland. Through Friesland some of them have landed in museums in London, Manchester, New York, Paris, Nurnberg, or Toronto. Only in Nurnberg the wentke is shown as part of the Hindeloopen traditional costume. Everywhere else the wentkes are preserved because of the beauty of the Indian chintzes, in their bright colours as well as in plain black or blue on white. Hindeloopen gowns are an essential part of the large and important collection of Indian chintz clothes and textiles in the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden.

Chintz, cotton in bloom is the title of a large exhibition on the collection of chintzes of the Fries Museum, which ran until 10 September 2017, in the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands A catalogue appeared as well (Arnolli 2017).

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