

# Minimum Requirement: Garb

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Corpora (the governing documents of the SCA) state that the minimum requirement to participate in the SCA is to wear garb, specifically pre-17<sup>th</sup> century garb. We are not a spectator activity, and all people present at our events are participants. In order to create the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, all people are expected to wear an attempt at Medieval garb. What follows are some very basic points about garb, and a pattern for a T-tunic.

The first thing to learn about is, of course, fabric, because whether you make it yourself, or purchase your garb, you should be familiar with the fabric that is most appropriate.

## Fabric

Become familiar with the **fibers** used. What they used in the Middle Ages is worth trying to use now. Avoid man-made fibers like polyester, nylon, rayon, etc. They will be hot to wear in the summer, and cold in the winter, since they do not breathe properly. The man-made fibers are much more flammable as well, creating a potential hazard when cooking, or enjoying a fire circle.

**Cotton** is a reasonable fabric to use, and was somewhat available in the Middle Ages in Europe as an import from Egypt and India. It was very expensive, however, and does not provide the draping or shape to the garments we are recreating. It can be less expensive today compared to linen or wool, although there are some good resources available for linen and wool.

**Linen and wool** are the most ideal fabrics for garb. Linen is a plant fiber, and wool is an animal fiber (this is important due to how fabrics took dye) Wool was known to take dye very well, providing good color. Wool was most often the outer layer garment. Wool breathes very well, and a light weight wool is suitable even in the summer here. Air moves through it better than with cotton t-shirts. Linen does not take the natural dyes which were available in period very well, so most often it was bleached white, and used for undergarments. It served to keep wool off the skin, and it protected expensive outer garments from sweat and body oils. Linen is available today in a wide range of colors, and is often used in the SCA in place of wool for the over garment. Linen and wool do not tend to continue to burn once removed from a flame.

**Silk** was available in period to the rich, and took dye very well, providing vibrant color. It was used in small amounts by those who were “middle class” in places like the laces on a garment, or the trim.

**Velvet** was available to the rich for much of the Middle Ages and in that time it was often made of silk. Silk velvet today is different than it was then. It is often a silk and rayon mix, with most of the fabric being rayon. The pile of the velvet today is much thicker than it was in period. Cotton velveteen actually approximates the silk velvet of the time much better than the velvets available today.

It is best to start with **plain colors**, rather than stripes or patterns, and to avoid obviously modern colors such as fluorescent lime green. Bright colors are a GOOD thing such as red or royal blue. Black would have been considered a very expensive and a difficult color to obtain. The lower classes did not limit themselves to wearing brown and grey. Nice reds, yellows, blues, and greens could be readily obtained from plant dyes available throughout Europe, and wool being an animal fiber took the vegetable dyes very well.

## Layers

In the Middle Ages clothing was worn in layers, for both men and women. The **chemise or shirt**, made of white linen, is next to the skin. It breathes well, allowing air to move freely. It absorbs moisture quickly, and dries quickly. In cold weather it will help retain heat as well.

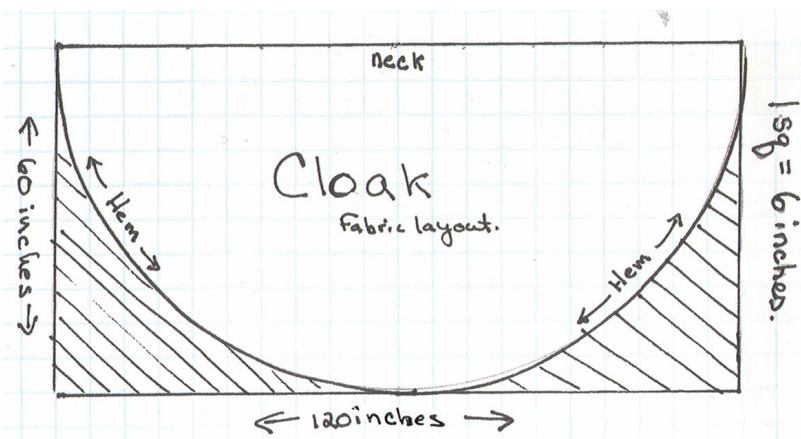
Next out from the skin is an under **cotte or tunic**. Generally, this garment would have made of wool and have long sleeves. Depending on the culture you are depicting there may have been decoration on the sleeves or at the neckline as well. In the SCA, people often skip this layer, or use linen rather than wool. It is a question of how authentic you wish to be.

The outermost garment is the **surcotte or over tunic** ("sur" meaning "over"). You would choose your most expensive fabric for this layer to show off your wealth. So, if you are wearing a silk brocade, or a fine wool dyed to an expensive red, it would be displayed on this layer. This layer can have either plain long, or ornamental sleeves. The neckline and the ornamentation depend on the culture, as does the length of the garment.

Men and women generally kept their **hair covered** for most of our period. It was hygienic, and may have provided some protection from the elements. For most of the SCA's time frame it is appropriate for men to wear a coif, which is a white linen "bonnet" like hat. Women mostly wore veils and hair nets, but the style varied according to time and place. Sometimes things more like turbans were worn, by men or women, and sometimes actual hats. Covering your head is the one easiest thing to do that makes you look and feel more medieval.

**Shoes** worn at SCA events should not be obtrusively modern. Sneakers and tennis shoes look very noticeably out of place with an otherwise very nice medieval garment. You do not need to spend a lot on shoes. Simple brown or black slip-ons for both men and women, made of canvas or leather are appropriate. For both sexes "mary jane" styles are appropriate, shoe styles were the same or similar until very recently. The high-end options for shoes are ones made in a period style either by yourself after research, or purchased from a merchant who specializes in shoes. The other thought about shoes is what you will be doing in them. If you will be fighting or dancing, you will need to pay attention to whether the type of shoe you are looking at will work for those activities. They need to be comfortable if you will be on your feet or walking a lot.

The last garment to be covered here is a **cloak**. Generally, a cloak should be made of wool, unless it is ceremonial, then velvet or another "fine" fabric will do. It can be lined, for which silk or linen are good options. If you are using wool, wash it well in hot water and then a hot dryer before you cut it, so that it will be pre-shrunk and will "wash and wear." The easiest fairly accurate recreation cloak is the  $\frac{1}{2}$  circle cloak, which is exactly what it sounds like. It is a piece of wool, cut into a semi-circle. For a cloak that is 50-60 inches long you would need to purchase 100-120 inches of fabric (between  $3-3\frac{3}{8}$  yds).



This is a basic template for how to layout your fabric to cut out a  $\frac{1}{2}$  circle cloak. It can be easiest to fold into a big square and cut two layers of fabric at once.

## Styles

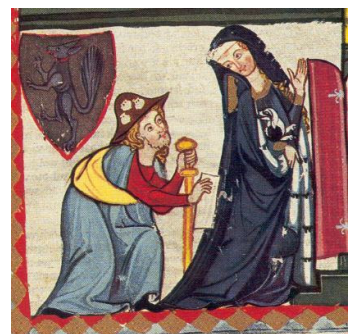
Since the SCA covers so very many time periods and cultures, you have much to choose from. People wear Roman garb, Viking, Saxon, Norman, Generic 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century European, 14<sup>th</sup> century fitted garments, Italian Renn, German Renn, Tudor, Elizabethan, Byzantine, Persian, Indian, Generic Middle Eastern, just to name a few generalized styles.

Most garb that is prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century fitted styles can be made using a T-tunic pattern. Visit Cynthia Virtue's web pages for very clear information as how to make a T-tunic (see the resources section). The following pattern is from "Forward into the Past" and is available on the SCA.org website under the newcomers' section.

12<sup>th</sup> century



13<sup>th</sup> century



This page contains some depictions of some of the styles appropriate for use within the period of the SCA. There are many other examples beyond these few. Talk to people you see who have garb you like, they will feel complimented by your attention and may have good resources to tell you about for how to recreate that style.

14<sup>th</sup> century



Tudor style gown



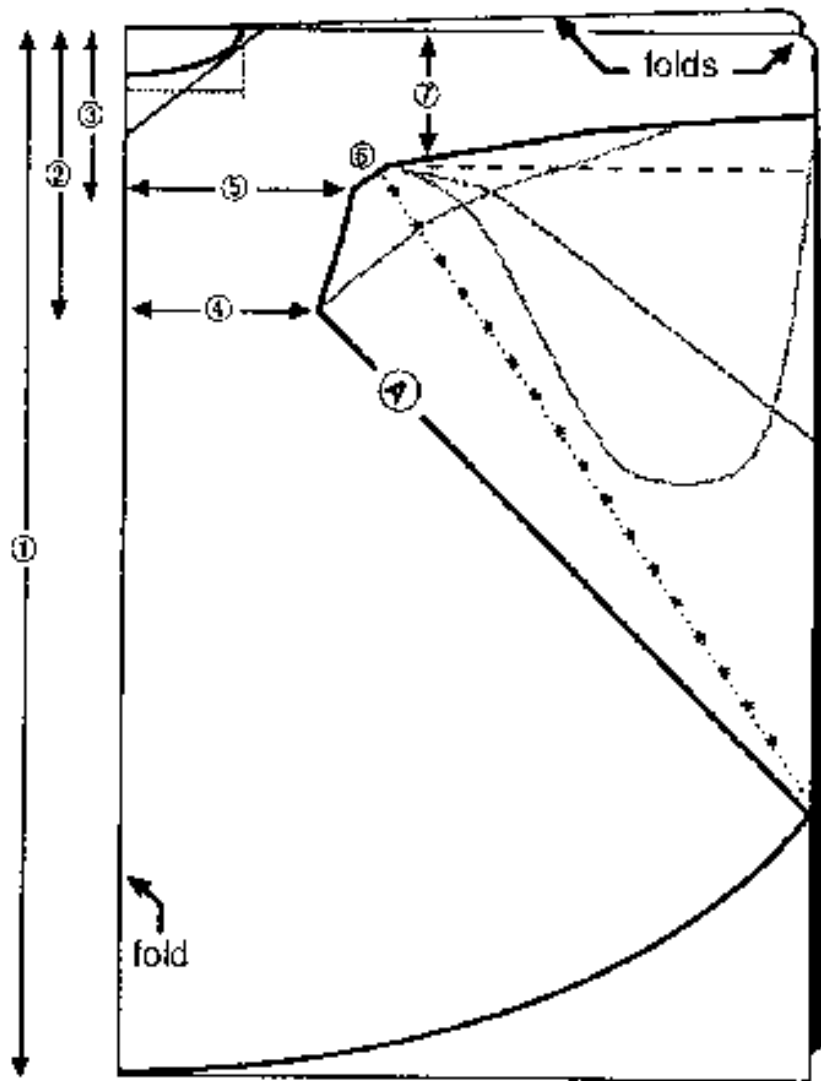
Cranach style German Renn



Rus Garb (Viking age Russian)



# PATTERN



## T-Tunic basic patterning:

Pattern from the SCA publication "Forward into the Past"

1=neck to floor

2=neck to waist

4=waist

5=widest point around chest

7=arm measurement plus 2-3 inches.

Cut the neck opening very small, about 2 inches wide, 1 inch deep at the back, and 3 inches deep in the front. If this proves too small, you can always cut more, but you cannot put back what has been cut away.

Sew two seams, one for each side of your body. They are the line marked "A" on both sides, which runs from the wrist of each arm to the underarm and down to the hem.

You will need to hem the wrist openings, the neckline and the hem at the bottom of the tunic.

## Sumptuary Laws

The East Kingdom does not have sumptuary laws, but we respect traditions that are found throughout the Society. Knowing these traditions can help you to avoid embarrassment. Here are some of the traditional items for certain members of our Society.

**Colored Belts**-**green** (apprentice), **yellow** (protégé), **white** (knight), **red** (squire). You are always safe with brown or black belts, or multi-colored in equal parts.

**Chains**-avoid heavy **gold chain** (knight), and heavy **silver chain** (squire), however the thin ladies-type jewelry chains generally go unnoticed.

**Laurel wreath**-avoid any **laurel wreaths** whether embroidered, or as jewelry, or other ornamentation

**Pelicans**-likewise avoid ornamentation involving **pelicans**

You may purchase ready-made clothing, or purchase clothing that you have commissioned and is fit to you. There are vendors at many events that carry clothing. There are also a few good sources from the internet such as <http://historicenterprises.com/>, and <http://revivalclothing.com/>. They both continue to expand their lines to carry more than one style or time frame. Buying clothing ready-made can be expensive, which is why many people learn to sew, or find a local person who sews to barter with.

For fabric, many people shop for linen at <https://fabrics-store.com/> which carries a wide selection of colors and weights/thickness of linen fabric.

For woolsens, <http://www.bblackandsons.com/> carries a variety of colors and weights, many of which were used in the medieval period. Look at the wool flannels, as flannel is a plain weave that would have been available in period, avoid wool crepe since that is a more modern weave. Herringbone weaves if you can find them are a good choice as well.