

# Getting Started with Tunics



Scene from the Bayeux Tapestry, early 11th Century

## Introduction

One of the first things you will need to do now that you have decided to become involved in the SCA is to get something to wear. Most groups have garb they are willing to lend to new people. However, it's much better to get started early on your own clothes. Most people when they first join don't know what era they are really interested in. So it's best to start with something simple. For the majority of the time period covered by the SCA, that is pre-1600, a simple tunic is acceptable for both men and women.

## Fabrics

The best choice for fabrics for most clothing in the SCA is linen and wool. Just about all periods and cultures used various grades of linen for their

undergarments. There were reasons for this. Linen was plentiful and relatively inexpensive (unlike today!). It was hardwearing and could put up with the repeated washings it would be given (yes, despite popular myth, they did wash in the Middle Ages!). The best type of linen for undergarments such as chemise or shirts is lightweight linen, which is about 3.5 oz in weight. You can also get 5 and 7 oz. weight. You could use 5 for outer garments and 7 would be suitable for armouring purposes.

For your out layers, both wool and linen would work well. In period, due to the climate of Europe, most people would have used wool for the outer layers. But we must make allowances for those living in hotter locations, so linen for outer wear is OK. The basic principle is that natural fibres such as linen and wool are better than synthetics. This is for a variety of reasons, firstly, they look better, secondly, they are usually easier to work with and to look after, thirdly they are more comfortable to wear as they breathe (synthetics will have you sweating in summer and shivering in winter) and lastly, they last very well.

One point of consideration is cost. Both wool and linen cost a lot of money and are often difficult to get hold of, so think outside the square. Second hand shops and op shops are a great source of wool, just don't look in the clothing section, look in the blanket section! A single bed blanket in plain colours will make a tunic for most average sized men. Women may need two blankets, as their tunics need to be longer. So for about \$20 you can have a lovely warm wool tunic.

Also think about layers, women can wear two tunics, one slightly longer than the other. For mild climates, try a linen under gown with a wool over tunic. Men try a linen tunic with a wool cloak or coat.



A Page from the 12th Century St Albans Psalter

## Colours



During the period covered by the SCA, all dyes consisted of natural elements – plants, minerals, animal parts, ocrex etc. These dyes could produce soft subtle colours or bright, strong colours. Some of the most common colours produced were:

- Reds
- Yellows
- Oranges
- Greens
- Blues
- Browns

If you stick to these sorts of colours, you should be producing something fairly authentic.

**Reconstruction of 10th  
Century Viking Clothing  
found at Mammen**



**Handspun Wool Thread Dyed with Natural Dyes by Mistress Yseult de Lacy (<http://www.goldgryph.com/>)**

## Design Inspiration

When looking for designs, there are many places to look. The best source of inspiration for tunic (and all clothing) design is in period artwork. For the earlier periods, the best place is illuminated manuscripts. There are many, many manuscripts online. Also look at paintings, stained glass, carvings etc. If you have the resources, there are many books about excavations with information about extant garments that have been discovered. There are also a limited number of garments that have survived in good condition.

### **Manuscripts**

- Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts - <http://www.kb.nl/kb/manuscripts/>
- Early Manuscripts at Oxford - <http://image.ox.ac.uk/>
- Dscriptorium - <http://www.byu.edu/~hurlbut/dscriptorium/>

### **Excavations**

- Some Clothing of the Middle Ages - <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/bockhome.html>
- Viking Resources - <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikresource.html>

### **Extant Garments**

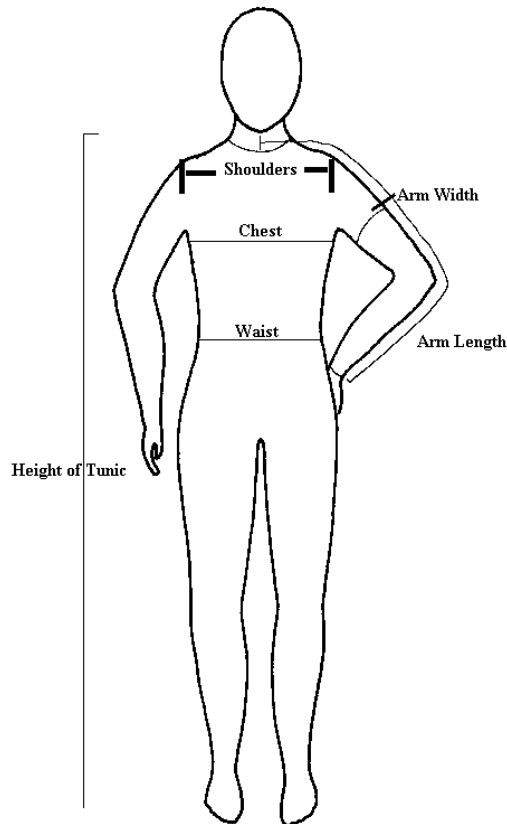
- Historic Needlework Resources - <http://medieval.webcon.net.au/>
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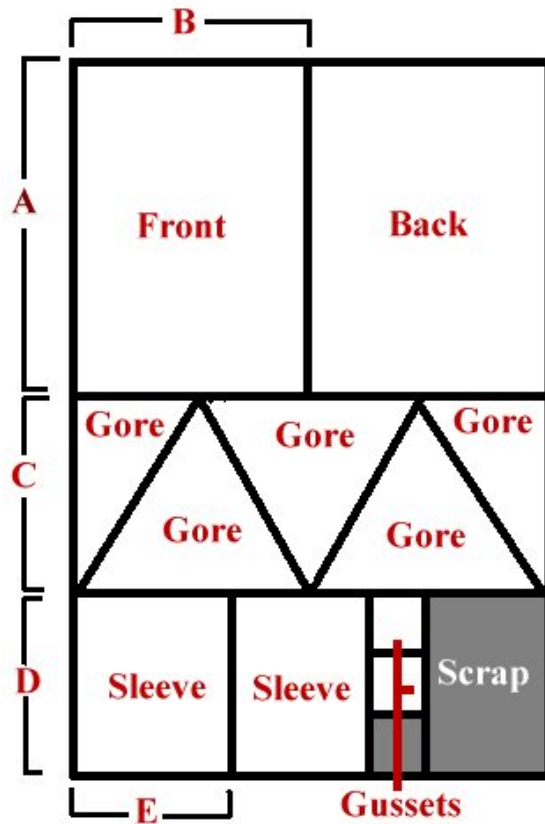
**Tunic Belonging to King Heinrich II (11<sup>th</sup> Century)**

## Measuring for the Tunic

This handout will give the instructions for a basic tunic. This tunic can be adapted (by changing lengths, fabrics, sleeves, and neck treatments) to make clothing suitable for just about any period or location covered in the SCA.. Your first step is to take some basic measurements:



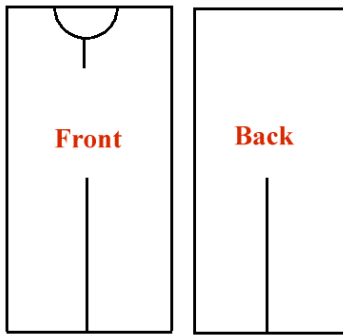
**Figure 1** – Torso with Where to Take Measurements for your Tunic



**Figure 2** – Cutting diagram for Tunic

Piece	Description	How to Measure	Measurement
A	Front/Back Length	From the shoulders to the length you want the tunic to be (floor length for women) + 8cm	
B	Front Back Piece Width	Measure all around the widest part of chest then divide by two and add 8cm. This is the width of each of your front and back pieces.	
C	Gore Length	Find the narrowest part of your middle – your waist. Measure from here to the desired length of the tunic (floor for women) + 8cm <b>NOTE:</b> The gores can be any width you want but the most efficient use of fabric is to work to the width of the material you are using.	
D	Sleeve Length	Sleeve length – measure from shoulder, around bent elbow to desired sleeve length + 8cm	
E	Sleeve Width	Measure around the widest part of your arm and add 5 cm. This is the width of your sleeve.	
G	Gussets	Cut 2 15cm squares for the Gussets	

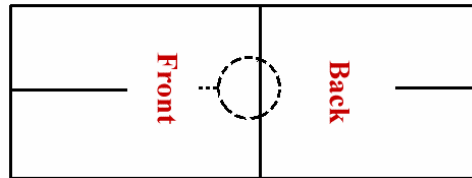
## Construction



**Step 1** – Fold your front and back pieces in half lengthwise. Then mark this middle line. Along this centre line, measure from the bottom of the front piece the distance for piece C (gores). Mark the top point. Repeat this process for the back piece.

You can put your gores in now or leave that til last, it really doesn't affect the construction of the rest of the garment. Personally, I tend to leave them to last. If you want to do them now, you will need to get the two half gore pieces you have and sew them together. You do this by sewing along the two STRAIGHT edges. Press the seams flat. You will insert this piece into the BACK piece of the tunic. Repeat with another full gore piece into the front.

**Step 2** – Sew the Front and Back pieces together along the shoulder seam.



**Step 3** - Sew the gussets to the sleeve as in Figure 3 along A. Now comes the tricky bit. You then rotate the gusset around so that you can sew along B on the other edge of the sleeve. Finish both A and B at the dot in the corner. Then sew the rest of the sleeve together. You should end up with a complete sleeve as seen in Figure 4 (view of the sleeve from underneath).

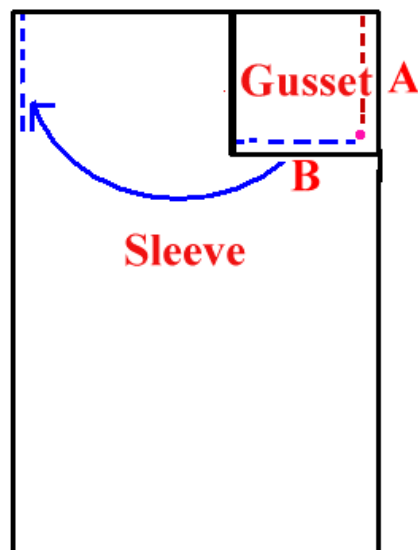


Figure 3

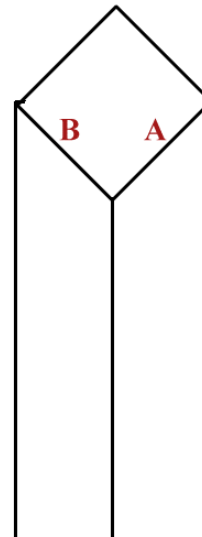
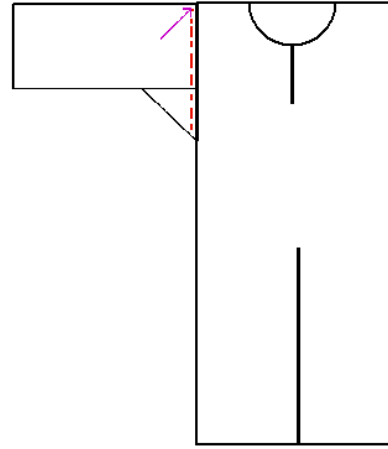


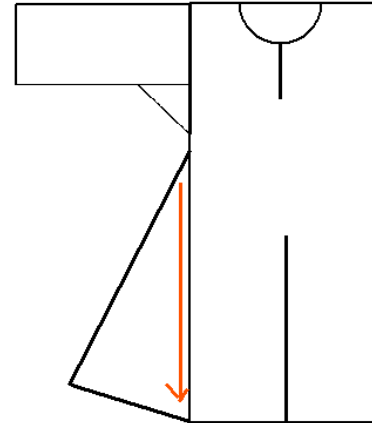
Figure 4

**Step 4** – Fold the completed sleeve in half lengthwise and mark the fold. You then line up this mark on the sleeve with the shoulder seam of the body of the tunic (where the front and back are sewn together). Starting at the bottom of the gusset, sew the sleeve to the body. You should finish sewing back at the bottom of the gusset. Repeat on other sleeve.



**?** *Why use gussets? Adding gussets under the arms allows for a much greater range of movement of the arms. You can make a tunic without the gusset but you may find that after wearing it a couple of times, you start to get a tear where the sleeve joins the body of the tunic.*

**Step 5** – Your tunic is now nearly complete. You now need to put in the side gores. For accuracy it is best to sew from the top (pointy) end of the gore down towards the bottom of the tunic. Do this for one side of the gore and then the other. Repeat on other side of tunic.

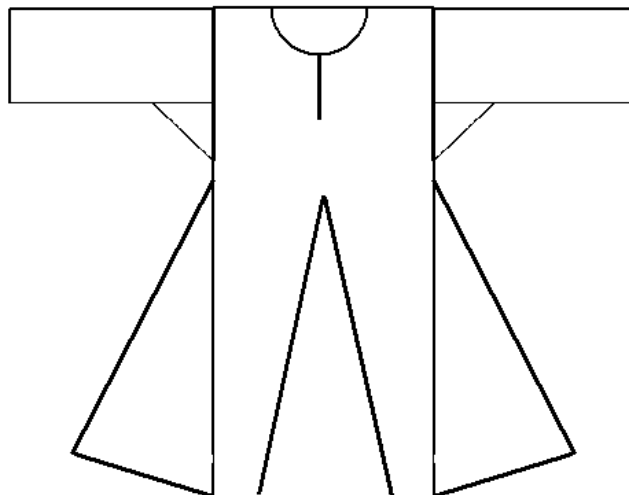


**?** *Why add gores? Adding gores serves a couple of purposes. For women, it gives a more comfortable fit over the hips. It also allows for greater movement. From a purely aesthetic point of view, it adds “swish” to a gown. For men, you have the option of only using the side gores, leaving out the front and back ones. However, if you are making a tunic that is longer than knee length it is recommended to use at least side gores for greater ease of movement when walking.*

**Step 6** – If you haven’t already done so, cut the slit previously marked on the back and front piece of the tunic. Insert gores as in Step 5.

**Step 7** – The final step in to cut the neckline of your tunic. A simple circle is enough or for a bigger opening, cut the circle and then a slit down the front. **Hint:** *Start small! It is very easy to cut the head opening too big. If you use the circle and slit, you only need a small circle to fit a big head! Also have  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the circle to the front of the tunic.*

Finish the edge of the neck hole. Then hem the bottom of the tunic and the sleeve ends and you are done!! Your finished tunic should look something like this.



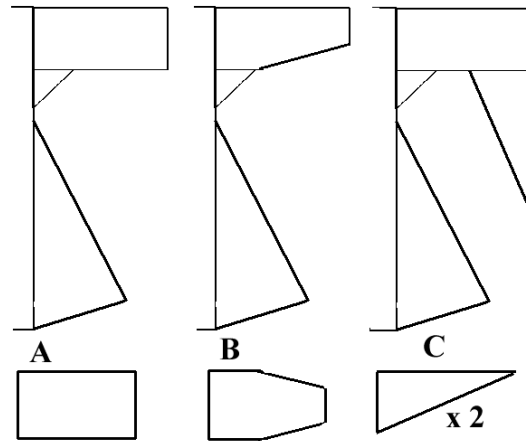
## Variations

There are many ways to customise the look of your tunic:

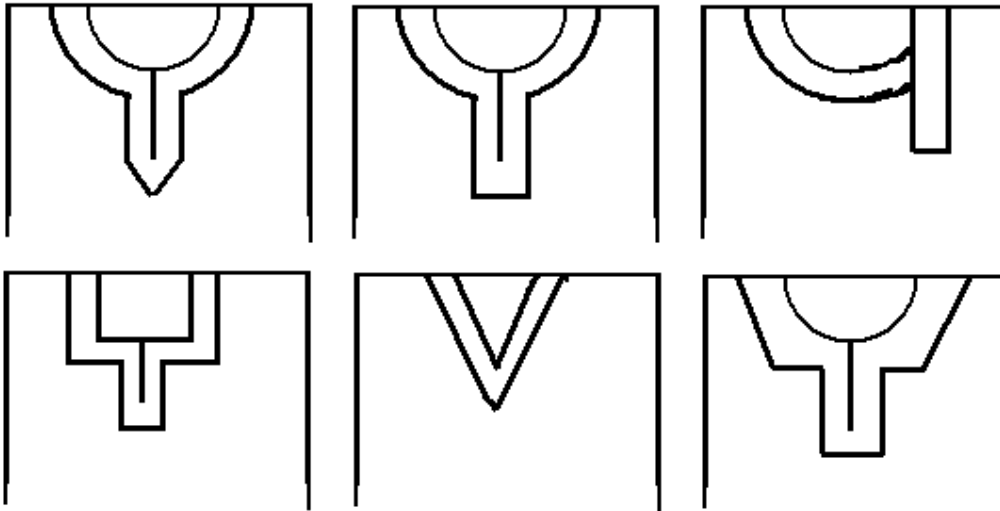
### Sleeves

Once effective way to individualise your tunic is with a different sleeve. The rectangular and tapered sleeves are very practical and great for working garments. The wing sleeve is slightly more fancy and looks great on tunics for more dressy occasions such as a Feast or Court.

A = Rectangular Sleeve  
B = Tapered Sleeve  
C = Wind Sleeve



### Necklines



### Trim

One easy way to add colour and variety to a tunic is to add trim. There are many period ways of making trim:

- Contrasting fabric – strips of plain or patterned fabric in a contrasting colour to the main body of the tunic
- Embroidery – embroidered patterns, sewn directly onto the tunic or onto a contrasting fabric and then sewn onto the tunic.
- Tablet Weaving – a popular and easy to do form of trim, popular in many periods and places.

