

# **Simple Viking Clothing for Women**

**Being a guide for SCA-folk  
who desire to clothe themselves in a  
simple but reasonably accurate Viking fashion,  
to do honor to the reign of  
King Thorson and Queen Svava.**

Prepared by Duchess Marieke van de Dal

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# Women's Undergown

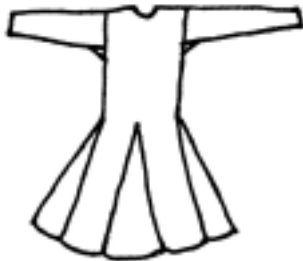
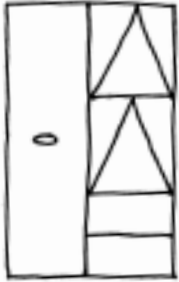
Very little is known about the authentic cut of the Viking-Age women's undergown. Any of these construction methods are acceptable for SCA purposes. If authenticity is a concern, the first layout seems to be the most likely.

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Preferred: "Authentic T-Tunic" style, below.

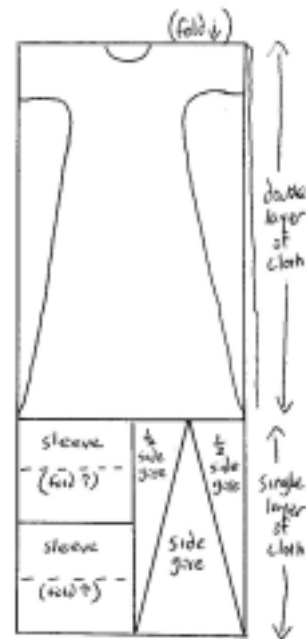
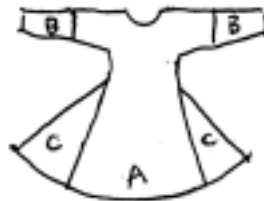
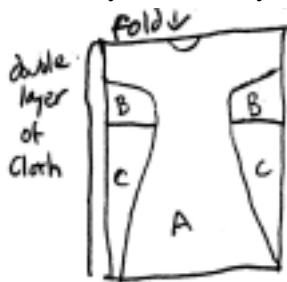
See Cynthia Virtue's website, [http://www.virtue.to/articles/tunic\\_worksheet.html](http://www.virtue.to/articles/tunic_worksheet.html) for full instructions.

A similar tunic worksheet website is from Maggie Forest: [www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Tunics/TUNICS.HTML](http://www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Tunics/TUNICS.HTML)



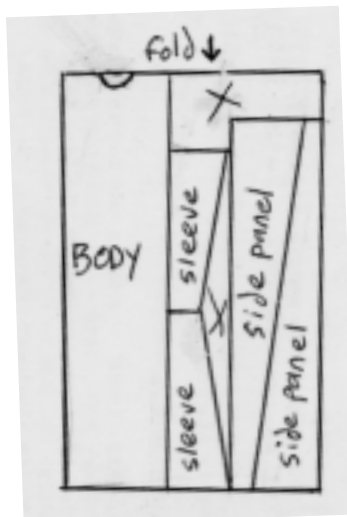
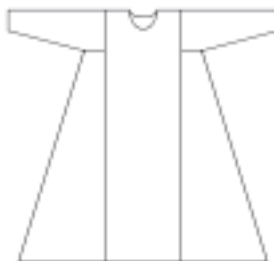
- 3.5 yds of 60" cloth works well for an average-sized person. If you are large and your center panel needs to be wide, you'll need another yard for the arms.
- Underarm gussets are optional; if they are omitted, make the upper arms roomy.
- The center front and center back gores may be omitted; if so, use wider side gores to give fullness at the hem.

If you're more comfortable using the standard (but not very authentic) SCAdian T-tunic model, try one of these: Modified T-tunic style from 3.5 yds of 60" cloth (below left), or 5 yds of 45" cloth (below right)

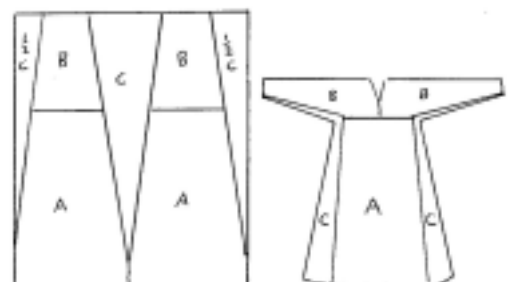


The simpler of the "Greenland" or "Herjolfsnes" kyrtles are sometimes used as Viking undergowns. One example is below. The style is probably post-Viking-age. See <http://sca-garb.freesevers.com/articles/cotehardie.html> for construction details.

"Vigdís' Undergown" is a speculative, but efficient, pattern. The website, [www.silverdor.org/viking/underdress.html](http://www.silverdor.org/viking/underdress.html) gives construction details.



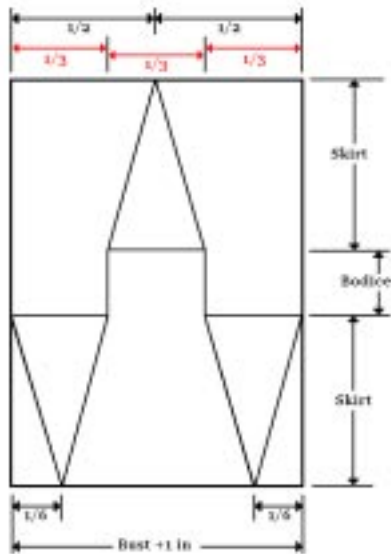
Below is the speculative cut for the Eura undergown, as shown in Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander's book, Ancient Finnish Costumes. It uses 3 or 3.5 yards of 60" cloth.



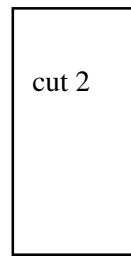
# Women's Apron-Dress

There are many guesses about how the apron-dress was constructed, and most likely, more than one style was worn during the Viking Age. The best-documented style is the one based on the fragments found in Hedeby Harbor, which seem to indicate a closed garment made of several tailored panels. This apron-dress is sleeveless and tube-shaped. It reaches from under the arms to an unknown length, possibly mid or low calf. In the Hedeby-style reconstruction, it is relatively tight across the chest, and flares gradually from hips to hem. Loops or straps reach across the shoulder from back to front, to hold the dress up, and the loops or straps are connected to the front of the apron with two matching oval brooches. For a good overview of the reasoning behind this style, see Monica Cellio's website, <http://sca.uwaterloo.ca/mjc/sca/aprond.html>.

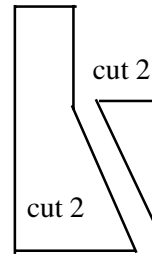
Cut by Vigdis, <http://silverdor.knownworldweb.com/viking/vikingad.html> (adapted from Monica Cellio)



Below: Cut by Thora Sharptooth (Carolyn Priest-Dorman) <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/image/apdress.jpg>

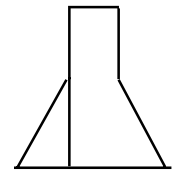


Center front,  
center back

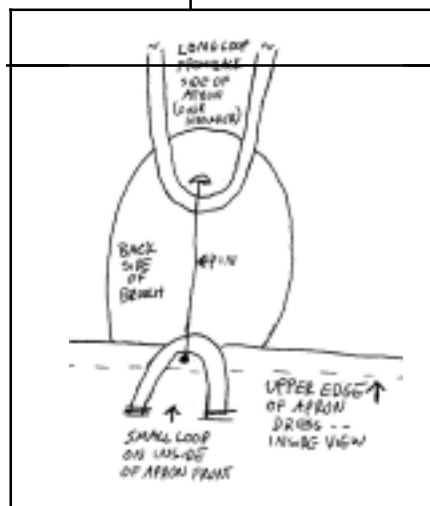


Sides

Flip the triangle piece,  
sew to side to get this:



Sew sides to front and back. Use leftover cloth for loops.



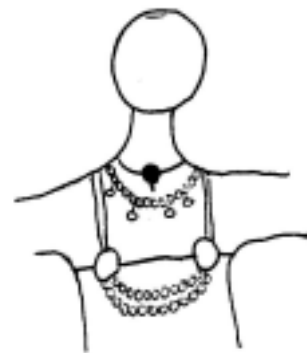
Some tips for the apron-dress: Use a solid color. There should be no trim around the bottom, but the top edge may be ornamented with a woven band or a plain band of a different color. Garment seams were emphasized, not hidden; you may embroider over the seams, or couch a braid or cord over the seams. Hand-sew the bottom hem for a more authentic look. There is some indication, from the Hedeby fragment, that this style may have been worn with a belt (tablet-woven, perhaps), but the artwork also shows unbelted apron-dresses.

What goes over the shoulders? In the SCA, wide straps of trim or fabric are common, but they aren't very authentic. A more documentable fastening involves long, narrow tubes of fabric (the same as the dress fabric) that are sewn into 1 cm-wide strips that are then doubled and bent into loops: a long one from the back to the front, and a very short one at the front of the apron-dress. A brooch connects the back and front loops.

# Women's Accessories

## Beads

Wealthy women wore beads, both as necklaces, and as strings of beads that draped between the two brooches on the apron dress. The common SCA practice of wearing extreme numbers of necklaces is probably not reflected in actual practice, so for maximum authenticity, stick with one or two strands. Most beads were of glass. Glass beads could be opaque or transparent, and were decorated with dots, lines, zig-zags, and inlaid pieces of millefiori glass. The Vikings prized their beads, and shaped them carefully. Raw amber chips and chunks, and for that matter chips of any semiprecious stone, are not authentic. To vary your glass-bead necklace, you could add a few shaped beads of amethyst, amber, jet, crystal, or carnelian. Beads of silver or gold were also used. Sometimes, special beads, coins or pendants were added as extensions on short wire loops attached to the main necklace.



## Other Jewelry

Rings and silver bracelets were worn by women, but earrings are very rarely found in Viking-age graves. Not all forms of Viking jewelry are easy to find nowadays. Here are some recommended styles:

Apron dress: tortoise brooches are common; animal-headed brooches in Gotland.

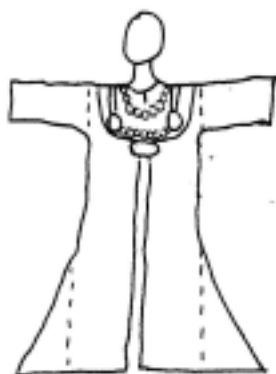
Caftan: three-lobed brooches.

Cloak or shawl; three-lobed brooch, or a ring-headed pin.

Neck slit of the undergown: small round brooch.

### Online sources for jewelry:

[www.ragweedforge.com/pins.html](http://www.ragweedforge.com/pins.html)  
[www.quietpress.com/index.html](http://www.quietpress.com/index.html)



## Caftan

The so-called “caftan” is an extra, outer layer, usually of wool, presumably for when additional warmth is needed. It tended to be most popular during the earlier Viking age. No whole caftans remain, so the cutting pattern is entirely speculative. The commonly accepted way to make one of these is to make a long-sleeved, floor-length gown, widened with gores from waist to hem, and open completely down the center front. We know from archaeology that the woman's caftan is held closed by a single brooch at chest height. Instead of going through the caftan fabric, the brooch pin slips through two small loops, one on each side of the caftan's opening edge. If you want your beads and tortoise brooches to show while wearing the caftan, you can cut the neck low and wide. The caftan layer was ornamented with tablet-woven trim, embroidery, and applique.

## Cap

The “Coppergate (Jorvik) cap” - a simple rectangle of linen, wool or plain tabby silk, folded in half (across the top of the head) and sewn up the back, is a known Viking-age headcovering. Start with a piece of cloth about 8 inches by 24 inches. Round the top of the back seam to fit the back of your head. Hem with a rolled hem. Attach two thin ties, one on each side, at chin level on the cap. For the ties, cut 1-inch wide strips of fabric, fold the raw edges to the center, fold in half along the center line, then sew along the length, close to the open edge. This cap looks something like a 13th century man's coif, but longer. A similar cap from Dublin left the pointy corner sticking up in back, with the seam still delineating the head curve.

Instead of the cap, you can wear a woven fillet around your head, circlet-wise.

Note that the triangular knotted kerchief shown in so many Viking picture books is probably not correct.



## Embroidery and Embellishments

The Vikings liked color and ornament! Embroidery, couched cords, colored strips of silk, woven bands, and applique work are some of the possibilities. See Thora Sharptooth's articles for more information on decorating:

<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/qdirtyvk.html> and <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikembroid.html>

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# Sources and Resources

## Disclaimer

What is described in this handout is a simple, generic, but reasonably accurate Viking outfit, suitable for most SCA gatherings. If authentic Viking clothing is of interest to you, and particularly if you wish to portray a Viking from a specific time and place, I highly recommend more research, because the details can be quite varied and interesting. Some sources are given below.

## Viking Women's Undergowns

-- **Directions for making authentic undergowns:** Cynthia Virtue's website is a good source for pattern information: [www.virtue.to/articles/tunic\\_worksheet.html](http://www.virtue.to/articles/tunic_worksheet.html).

Another good undergown construction website is by Maggie Forest, [www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Tunics/TUNICS.HTML](http://www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Tunics/TUNICS.HTML)

-- **Outlines of actual medieval garments:** Marc Carlson's website shows the cut of some actual early-medieval gowns that have the look we strive for (though they're a bit later than the Viking period). See <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/tunics.html>, especially Kragelund, Moselund, and Skjoldehamn kirtles.

-- **Information on the speculative "Eura Undergown"** comes from: Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander, *Ancient Finnish Costumes*. Helsinki: Suomen arkeologinen seura (The Finnish Archaeological Society), 1984. Examples of the "Baltic Viking" style are shown.

-- **Greenland Gowns/Herjolfsnes Gowns:** Norlund's 1920-ish interpretations of these gowns is starting to be a bit dated, as new examinations are bringing out better information. (If you are interested in these 14th and 15th-century items of clothing, watch for a new book coming out this fall, called *Woven into the Earth: Textile finds in Norse Greenland* by Else Ostergaard.) Many of Norlund's patterns of the various Greenland kirtles and gowns can be found on Marc Carlson's page, [www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/herjback.html](http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/herjback.html).

-- **Thora's Timeline** of Viking Women's Clothing: [www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/qdirtyvk.html](http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/qdirtyvk.html), in which Thora explains what was worn when - very useful if you want to be more accurate to a specific time and location.

-- **Note:** In this handout, the "underlayer" has been simplified into one garment, for comfort in our heated halls. In fact, there was sometimes a linen shift, a wool gown, and then perhaps a wool apron-dress layer over that.

## Viking Women's Apron-Dresses

-- Monica Cellio's reconstruction of the Hedeby-style (closed) apron is here: <http://sca.uwaterloo.ca/mjc/sca/aprond.html> This website also explains the reasoning behind this particular pattern.

-- Vigdis has improved the layout a bit, and give some good tips: <http://silverdor.knownworldweb.com/viking/vikingad.html>

-- Thora Sharptooth's reconstruction of the Hedeby-style apron dress is from her vast, informative website: <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikresource.html>

-- **Sources for Hedeby-Style:** The original pieces of fabric that these apron-dress patterns are based on, are described in Inga Hagg's book, *Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu*, Neumunster: Karl Wachholz Verlag, 1984, pp. 38-42 and 168-171. (It's in German.)

Shelagh Lewins has a website with an English translation: [http://www.gts-ltd.co.uk/shelagh/Hedeby\\_apron/Hedeby\\_apron.htm](http://www.gts-ltd.co.uk/shelagh/Hedeby_apron/Hedeby_apron.htm).

-- **Sources for Birka-Style:** For the completely different (and in my opinion much less flattering) Birka-style rectangular wrap-around aprons, Agnes Geijer and Inga Hagg are the published experts. One source that's accessible, and in English, is the book *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*. Eds. N.B. Harte and K.G. Ponting. (Pasold Studies in Textile History, 2). London: Heinemann, 1983. One article is by Agnes Geijer, "The Textile Finds from Birka," pp. 80-99, and another by Inga Hagg, "Viking Women's Dress at Birka: a Reconstruction by Archaeological Methods," pp. 316-350.

-- **Note:** It seems probable that not all Viking women wore apron-dresses.

## Viking Women's Accessories

-- **More on Viking beads:** [www.vikinganswerlady.com/vikbeads.htm](http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/vikbeads.htm) and [www.nfobase.com/html/viking\\_beads.html](http://www.nfobase.com/html/viking_beads.html)

A comprehensive catalog of actual Viking-age beads is: Callmer, Johan. *Trade Beads and Bead Trade in Scandinavia ca. 800 - 1000 AD*. Acta Archaeologica Lundensia 4th Series, No. 11. Lund: Munksgaard. 1977.

-- **More on Caftans:** The fragmentary caftan information comes from finds at Birka and Hedeby. See Inga Hagg's *Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu* cited above; and Agnes Geijer's *Birka III: The Textilfunde aus den Grabern*, Uppsala, 1938, and "Die Tracht" in *Systematische Analysen der Graberfunde*, ed. Greta Arwidsson, pp. 51-72. *Birka: Untersuchungen und Studien II:2*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986.

-- **More on Caps:** Two articles are useful: Heckett, Elizabeth. 1987. "Some Hiberno-Norse Headcoverings from Fishamble Street and St. John's Lane, Dublin." in *Textile History* 18, no. 2, pp. 159-174. And, "Some silk and wool head-coverings from Viking Dublin: uses and origins- -an enquiry." *Textiles in Northern Archaeology*, ed. Penelope Walton and John- Peter Wild, pp. 85-96. *North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles, Monograph 3*. London: Archetype Publications, 1990.