

Simple Viking Clothing for Men

**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.**

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Men's Tunic

Very little is known about the authentic cut of the Viking-Age men's tunic. The Viborg shirt, below, is not typical in its complexity. Most likely, tunics were more like the first type shown.

Generic Viking Men's Tunic

See Cynthia Virtue's website, 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

This tunic is very similar to Thora Sharptooth's rendition of the Birka-style tunic, as described on her webpage,

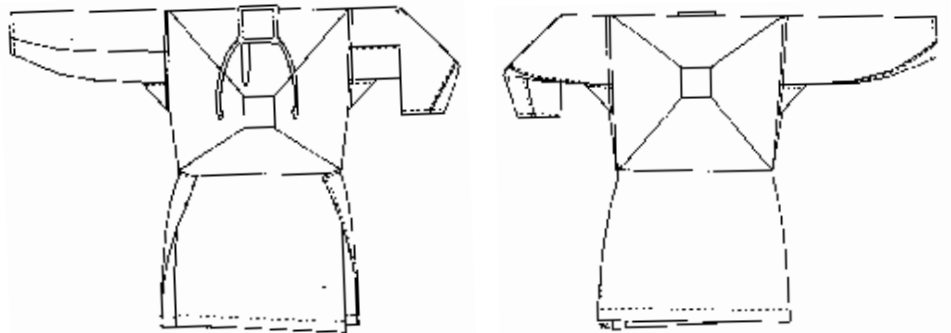
<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/viktunic.html>

2.5 or 3 yds of 60" cloth works well for this layout. Most Viking tunics look best at knee-length. Underarm gussets are optional, but if they are omitted, make the upper arms roomy. Usually the bottom half is sufficiently full with this cut, but for extra fullness, add a gore of fabric in the center front and center back. You may also omit the side gores and leave the side seams unsewn from knee to mid-thigh.



The Viborg Shirt

The "Viborg Shirt" was found in Denmark, and is dated to the 11th C. Enough of the shirt survived that the pattern can be determined; it was quite complex. An English summary of the original Danish article can be found here: <http://www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Viborg/VIBORG.HTM> Illustrations of the tunic are from the NESAT article; see the last page of this handout for a full citation.



Tunic Details and Embellishments

- Neck openings may be oval, "keyhole" (round with a slit down the front) or even square, as in the Viborg shirt below.
- Sleeve length is usually wrist, or mid-forearm. Very short sleeves are not represented in artwork or actual finds.
- An authentic and easy way to decorate your tunic is to edge it with strips of fabric in a contrasting color. These can go around the neck, on the sleeve ends, and around the bottom hem. In addition, any visible seams can be covered with braided cords or with herringbone-stitch embroidery.
- Card-woven trim is appropriate, but if strict authenticity is a concern, remember that most modern cardweaving trims bear little resemblance to what was used as trim by wealthy Vikings. The best card-woven trim to use is about a centimeter wide, it uses rather fine threads, and it's brocaded with silver or gold in geometric patterns. A description with illustrations is here: <http://www.housebarra.com/EP/ep06/10brocade.html>. This sort of trim was often mounted on a brightly colored strip of silk that was then affixed to the tunic. Metallic trim was generally not used below the waist (you'd ruin it by sitting on it.)

Men's Pants

Although “Viking stripey-pants” are commonly seen at SCA events, no evidence of actual striped pants fabric has been found in a Viking context.

Tight-Legged Style

There aren't many actual finds of trousers or trouser-bits from Viking-age digs, but some artwork from the Viking world shows tight-fitting pants. The snug, footed “Thorsbjerg” trousers (shown front and back, left- ill. by Inga Hagg) and the footless Damendorf trousers are a bit early for Vikings, but they show that sophisticated tailoring was possible. Both of these had gore panels in the crotch and seat to allow for greater movement. Information on the patterns can be found in I.Hagg, *Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu* or at Viktoria Persman's website, www.frojel.com/Documents/Document04.html

If you are daunted by the complexity of existing Iron-Age trousers, you could also cut apart an old pair of pants to use as a pattern. When worn with a tunic, the crotch seams are not visible.



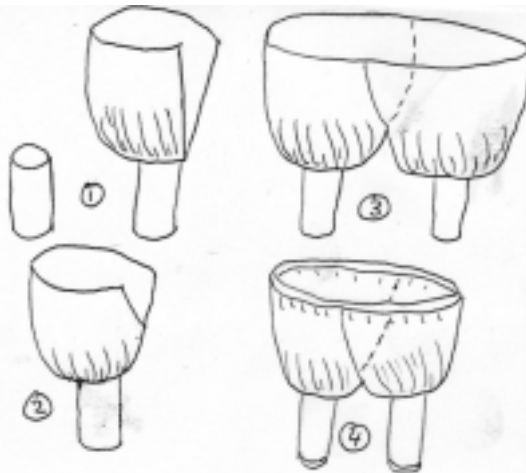
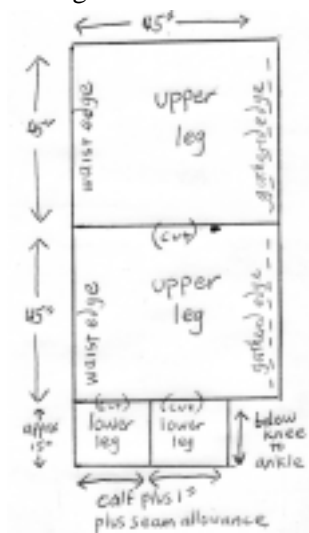
Loose-Legged Style

Four Vikings on a runestone from Tjangvide, Sweden, are shown with trousers that look like modern straight-leg chinos, falling in a straight line right to the feet. There's no sign of gathering nor of leg-wrappers. http://www.historiska.se/collections/shm-bild/visa_stor.asp?ID=5618

Poofy-Pants

The common SCA way to make these is to gather wide “uppers” (from waist to below knee) into separate narrow tubes that reach from below the knee to the ankle. This works, but it's probably not the way the Vikings did it. (Most likely, their poofy-pants stopped below the knee, like knickers, with hose or winding-bands worn to cover the lower legs.) The pattern and instructions below have been adapted from Mistress Nicolette Bonhomme's design at: www.eastkingdom.org/trh/viking_resources/outfitting_4.htm

A photo of a Rus trader wearing his poofy-pants the “right” way is here: http://users.bigpond.net.au/quarfwa/miklagard/Costume/Rus/Trader/Rus_description.htm



1. Sew both calf tubes along vertical seam. Gather one edge of big square to fit inside each tube, and sew into place.
2. Sew the open edge of the big squares shut, going upwards from calf tube, but stop halfway.
3. Join the two legs together by sewing the crotch seam. Reinforce this with another row of stitches.
4. Hem the calf tubes, and fold down the waist edge to make a casing for a drawstring to pull the waist tight. (These directions are courtesy of Mistress Nicolette Bonhomme.)

Leg Wrappers

The cross-gartering shown in so many Viking picture books is a fallacy. When a Viking wanted extra warmth or protection for his lower legs, he wrapped long, narrow bands of wool cloth spirally, between knee and ankle. The winding-bands were secured with “hooked tags” such as those found at Birka and Jorvik. For more about the leg-wrappers, see <http://users.bigpond.net.au/quarfwa/miklagard/Articles/legwraps1.htm>

Men's Accessories

Jewelry

- Bead necklaces were women's wear; but a pendant or amulet of amber, silver or gold (such as a Thor's hammer, a crucifix, or a small medallion) - with maybe a few glass beads on either side of it - is fine.
- Silver arm rings and narrow silver "cuff" bracelets with stamped geometric designs are appropriate for men.
- To fasten your cloak, try a pennanular brooch or a ring-headed pin.
- "Hooked tags" make handy fastenings for leg-wrappers. They can be found at Raymond's Quiet Press, on the page of Saxon belt fittings.

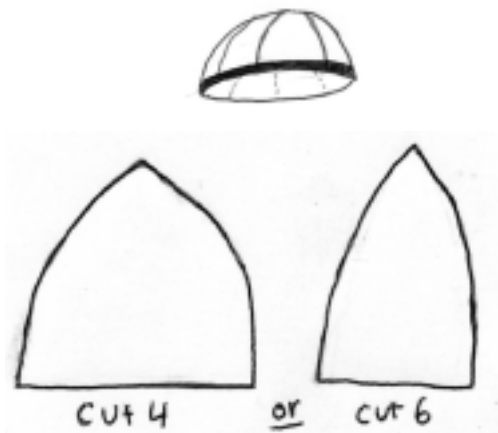
Online sources for jewelry:

www.ragweedforge.com/pins.html
www.quietpress.com/index.html

Cap

Viking men wore a variety of hat styles, some of which had tassels and pendants. Although we don't know much about the actual cutting patterns, we do know that some hats had trim around the edge. Thora Sharptooth has developed a simple but elegant man's hat pattern from four pieces: www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/manshat.html This makes a round, beanie-like cap. To see a replica hat of this type in a Danish museum (with a brocaded tablet-woven band around the bottom edge), click on "mossa" at this website: www.historiska.se/histvarld/eng/drakter/vherre/vherrefr.htm The pattern link is at the very bottom of the page. The Danish pattern is made with six pieces.

The trim on the cap sometimes matches the caftan trim - maybe the fabric matched, too.



Diagonal-Front Caftan

This is a long-sleeved, hip-length jacket with diagonally overlapping panels on the chest, like a short kimono-style bathrobe. It was probably belted shut. One example of this had fur trim on the hem, sleeves and front edge! These garments were often ornamented with tablet-woven trim, embroidery, and applique. For a clear illustration of a replica diagonal-front caftan, see: www.historiska.se/histvarld/eng/drakter/vherre/vherrefr.htm Click on "Kaftan," then scroll down and click on "Kaftan pattern."



Button-Front Caftan

This style of caftan opens straight down the center front, and is held closed by a series of small, cast-metal buttons on one side, and loops on the other. The length of this style is hard to determine. The buttons only went from neck to waist, but it may well have been longer. Although it looks plain and severe in this drawing, it was often embellished with bands of trim, brightly colored silk edging-bands, or knotted silver-wire ornaments. This website gives a pattern for a Magyar caftan that doesn't look far off from the Viking type: <http://woodshed.wccnet.org/projects/coat/Coat%20Documentation.htm>



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.

General Resources

- Thora Sharptooth's overview of Viking Men's Garb is a great place to start: <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/mensgarb.html>
- If you want to be a Swedish Viking or Rus-Viking, see Peter Beatson's article on the various parts of the Rus-Viking costume: http://users.bigpond.net.au/quarfwa/miklagard/Costume/Rus/Trader/Rus_description.htm.

Viking Men's Shirts or Kyrtils

- For in-depth information on men's tunics, start with Thora's excellent article: <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/viktunic.html>
- **Directions for making authentic tunics:** Cynthia Virtue's website is a good source for pattern information: www.virtue.to/articles/tunic_worksheet.html. Another good tunic construction website is by Maggie Forest, 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 the Kragelund, Moselund, and Skjoldehamn kyrtils.
- **Viborg Shirt:** see <http://www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Viborg/VIBORG.HTM>. The original article and illustrations are found in: *An 11th Century Shirt from Viborg Søndersø, Denmark*. Article by Mytte Fentz in *Archaeological Textiles in Northern Europe - Report from the 4th NESAT Symposium*. Ed: Lise Bender Jørgensen and Elisabeth Munksgaard. Tindens Tand 1992, nr. 5 pp 83-92.

Viking Men's Pants and Leg-Wrappers

- Viktoria Persdotter's article on narrow-leg pants construction is very interesting: www.frojel.com/Documents/Document04.html
- The full citation for the Hald book, which contains patterns for the Thorsbjerg and Damendorf trousers: Margrethe Hald. *Ancient Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials*. National Museum of Denmark, 1980.
- The drawings of the front and back of the Thorsbjerg pants are from Inga Hagg's book, *Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu*, Neumunster: Karl Wachholz Verlag, 1984, p.31
- The two-colored fragments of "poofy-pants" from Hedeby (which are only scraps, presumed to come from the crotch area) is written up in Inga Hagg's book, *Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu* (see above) pp. 32-34 and pp. 162-165.

Viking Men's Accessories

- **More on Caps:** There's not much to go on, but the metal tassels and trim that were found on the Birka caps are described in Geijer, Agnes. *Die Textilfunde aus den Gräbern*. Birka: Untersuchungen und Studien III. Uppsala: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akadamen, 1938.
- **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 *Textilfunde aus den Grabern (Birka III)*, described above, and "Die Tracht" in *Systematische Analysen der Graberfunde*, ed. Greta Arwidsson, pp. 51-72. Birka: Untersuchungen und Studien II:2. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986.
- **Card-Weaving:** A good book for brocaded-style weaving is: Spies, Nancy. *Ecclesiastical Pomp and Aristocratic Circumstance: A Thousand Years of Brocaded Tablet-Woven Bands*. Jarrettsville MD: Arelate Studio, 2000.
An article from *Early Period* magazine gives a quick overview of the technique: www.housebarra.com/EP/ep06/10brocade.html
Guntram has some examples of his stunning brocaded bands here: www.guntram.co.za/tabletweaving/gallery/gallery_brocade.htm
And Thora Sharptooth shows some of the Birka brocaded trim patterns here: www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/metaltrims.html