

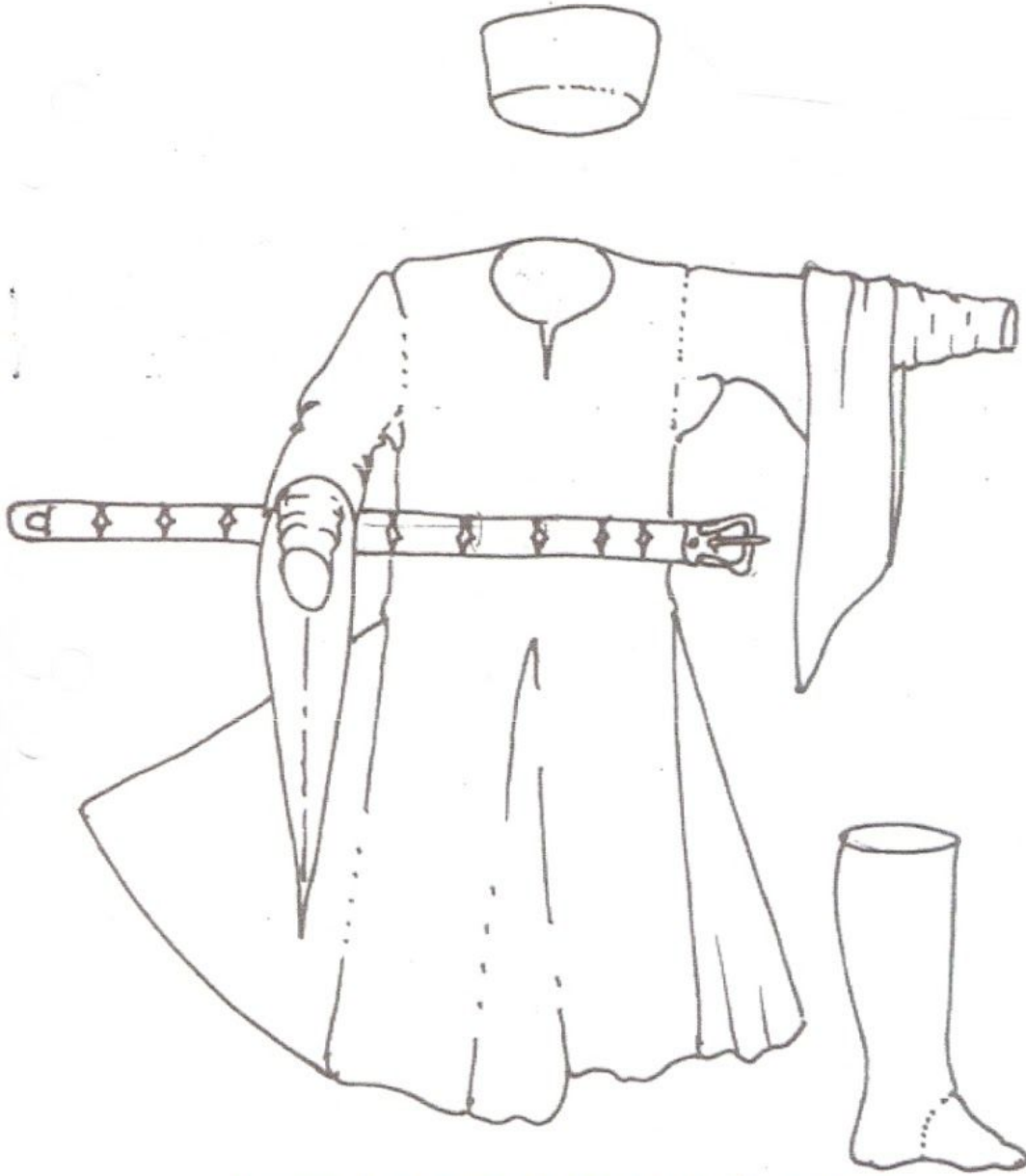


# Authentic Patterns



Trying to keep history alive.

## A HANDBOOK OF WOMES HIGH – MEDIEVAL DRESS



Members of the Darkages Charitable Trust. Charity Registration No. 1000072.



## PREFACE

As always, I begin with a disclaimer: this is not an exhaustive, authoritative tome containing everything you need to know about High Medieval costume. This is a digest and a condensed guide to the common dress of the period.

My target audience is that of re-enactors, live role players, costumiers and historical interpreters. Using this booklet, you can put together a decent, functional outfit that will not embarrass you or disappoint at a later date when you have done more research. It is a starting point, not an end. None the less, I have done my research thoroughly and can back every statement and illustration with a good reference from more than one source. I have been a re-enactor for 30 years and a costumier for 25 and I have brought that experience to this work.

This booklet covers a wide period of time from the late 12th century to the early 14th. Tailoring was simple and class, geography and income had as big an effect on style, if not more, than chronology. People wore their parents' or even their grandparents' clothes, even at high rank, without looking old-fashioned. The big change in clothing comes with the adoption of full plate armour in the second quarter of the 14th century. But that is another story.....

*Du*  
*March 2006*



## Materials

The most common material for all garments was wool. This could be of native production as with the patterned worsteds, and heavily finished Loden-Melton type cloths. It could be imported from as far away as Syria as with some of the fine black satin-faced worsteds found at Birka, and dating from two centuries before the period discussed here.

Linen was used for tough outer garments as in gambesons, or for fine undergarments like shirts and **smocks**. The process that gave a finer or coarser fabric, a whiter or duller thread was thoroughly understood and already of great antiquity.

Silk was expensive and hard to get, originating from the Byzantine Empire, Italy, and the Islamic East and the Mediterranean. But its high cost does not mean it was not worn. Gifts of multi-coloured, metal threaded, silk brocades were used as diplomatic levers by the Byzantine court, especially to loyal and victorious soldiers and friends in foreign courts.

Documentation makes it clear that silks were a major item of trade, and decorative elements in brocade have been found in the grave costumes of prosperous Eastern European peasants.

At this date the textile industry was of some antiquity and sophistication. Patterned cloaks, both in colour and weave, with tablet-woven borders using 90-120 tablets, have been found in Danish bogs dating to about 400 A.D. The same techniques were used to produce the applied borders and trims common on garments throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. Checked and striped clothes are among the most common textile finds in England, Germany and Denmark from this time.

Exotic cloths were traded all over the known world and when finished cloths were not traded, fibres, dyestuffs and their mordants (fixing agents) were.

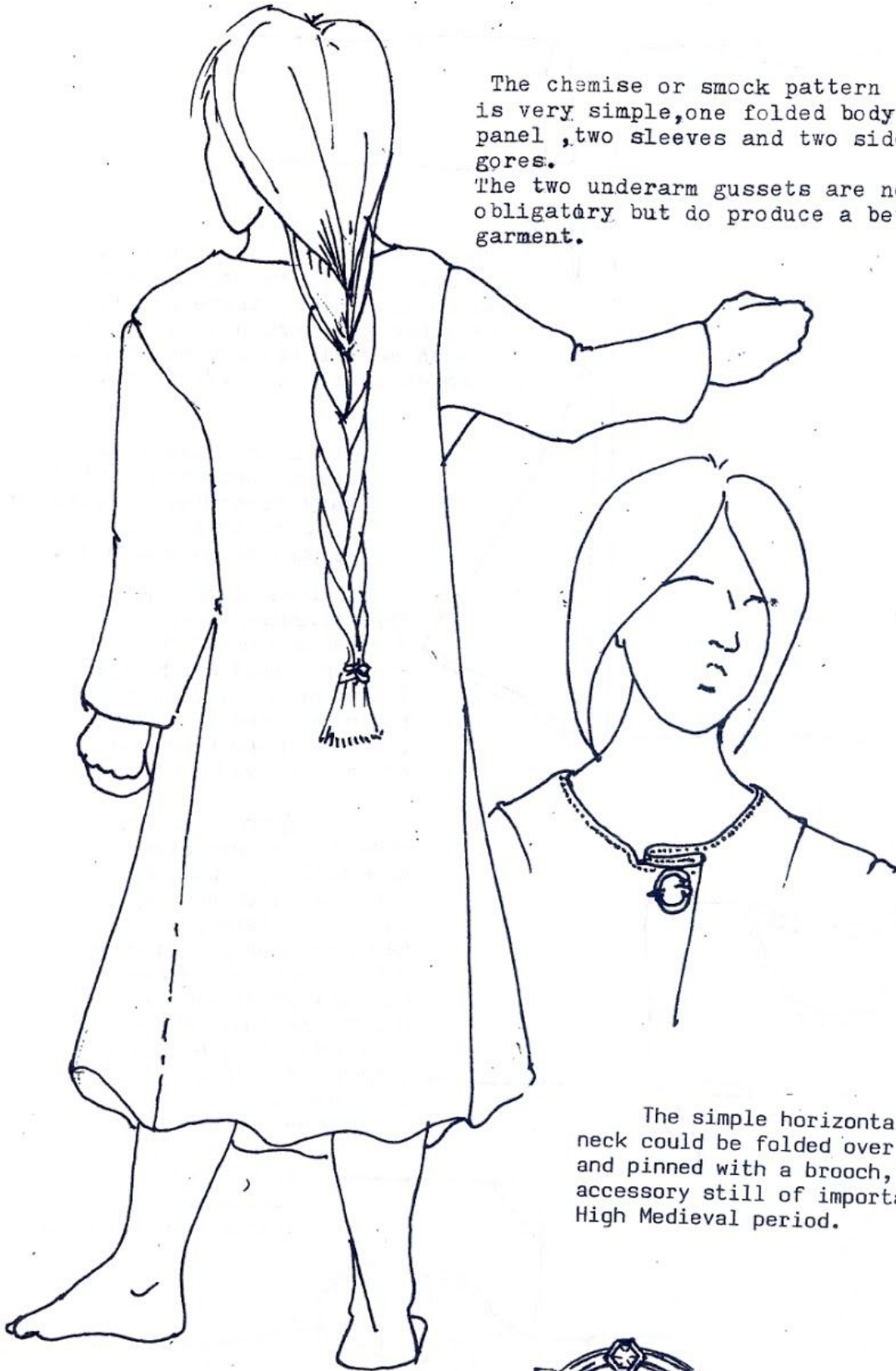
If the tailoring was simple, the textiles were not necessarily so. The lack of hot irons and general absence of linings, along with the use of easy-fraying worsted fabrics, led to a great deal of attention being paid to the construction and interior finish of seams.

There is a popular misconception that woollen cloth in the past was dull and limited in colour. Finds of cloth and dyers' waste prove on the contrary that bright, deep and varied colours were available to even the ordinary people of this era. Imperial purple was limited by law in its applications, but this distinctive colour was only one shade of purple. Purple cloth dyed with lichen, berries, or overdyed with madder and woad was popular and readily available. Madder produced deep reds and Kermes, an insect dye, produced a cochineal-type scarlet. Weld or Dyers' greenweed produces a yellow so bright it looks fluorescent. Woad produces blues from deep indigo to light plunket. Combinations of these allowed skilled dyers to achieve almost any colour - for a price.

Undyed wool was a mark of servile status and avoided by free men and women. Hoden grey, a wool of mixed natural black and white fleeces, was the distinctive fabric of the villein, tied to the land by law and custom and only a little better off in many cases than a slave.

CHEMISE or SMOCK.

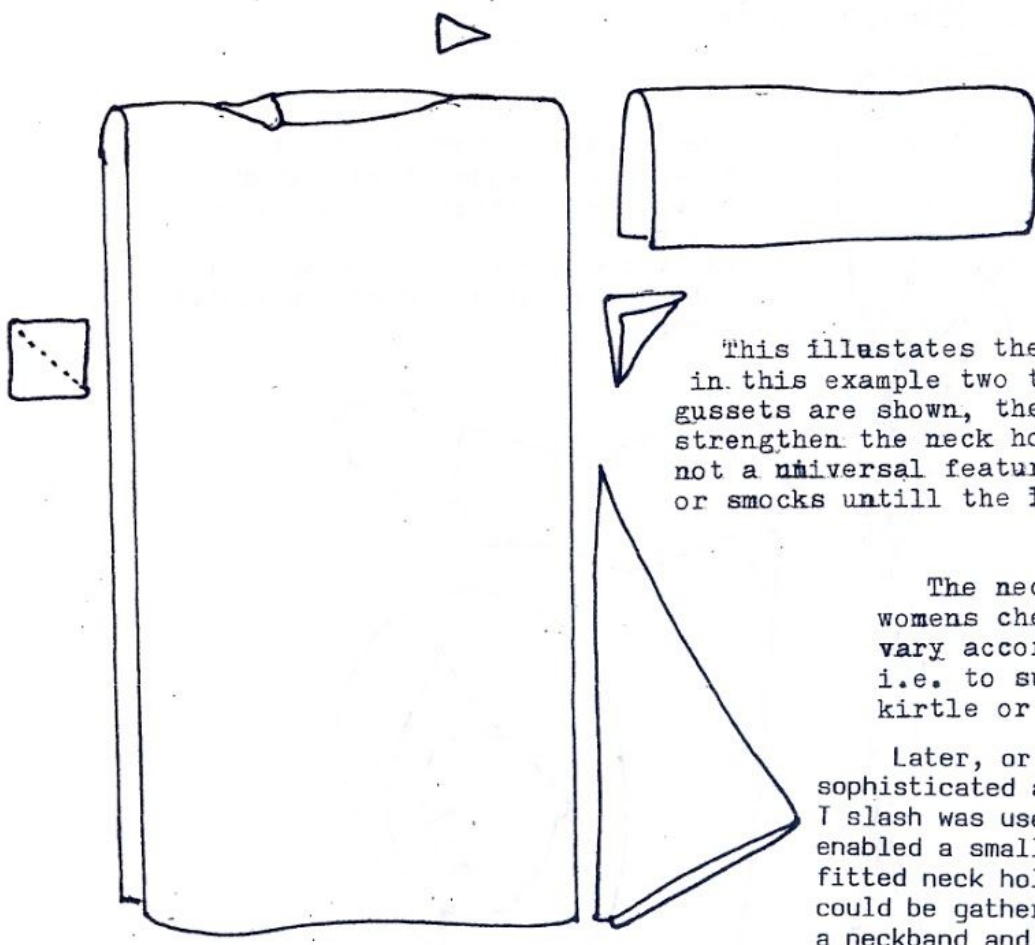
The chemise or smock pattern is very simple, one folded body panel, two sleeves and two side gores. The two underarm gussets are not obligatory but do produce a better garment.



The simple horizontal slash of the neck could be folded over at the front and pinned with a brooch, a dress accessory still of importance in the High Medieval period.





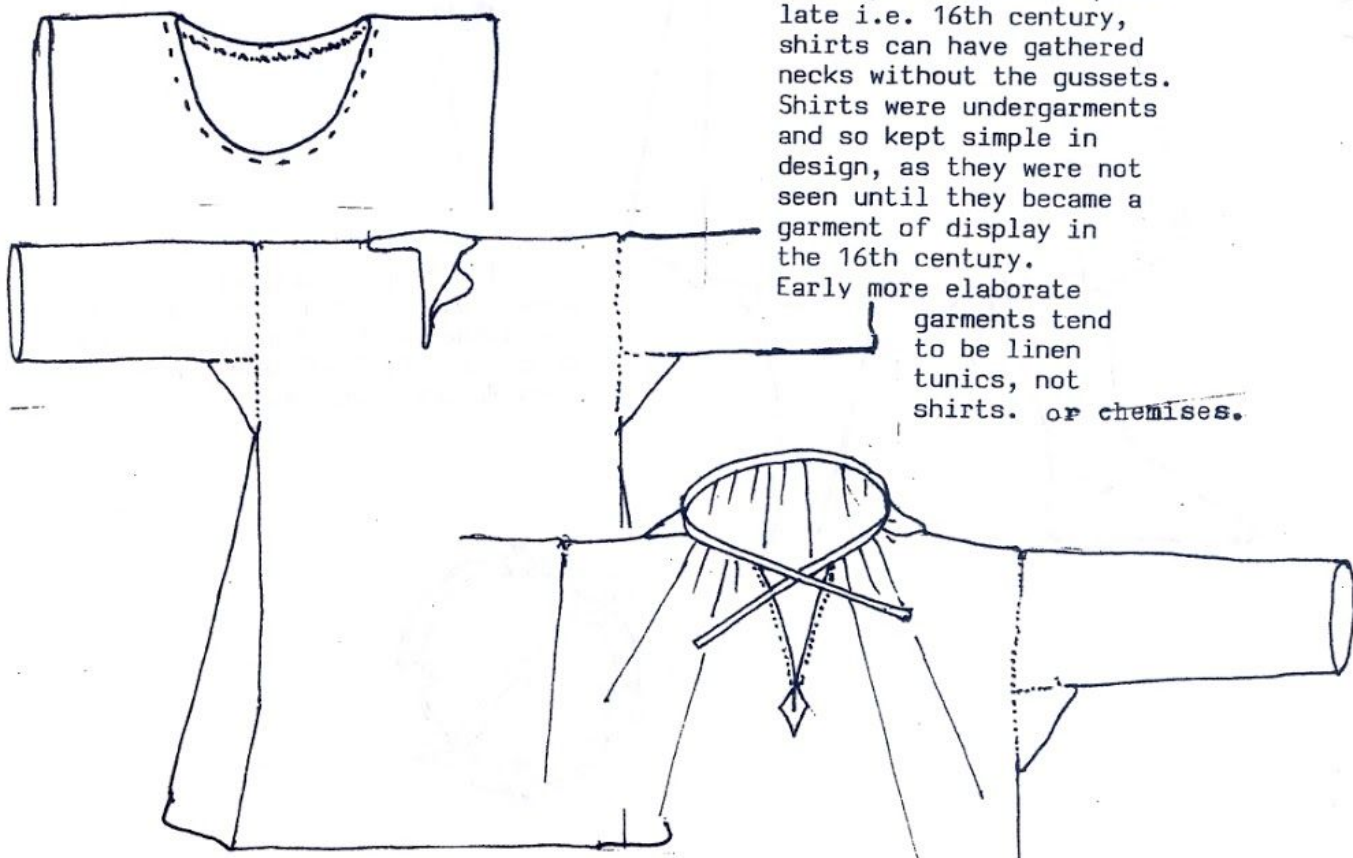


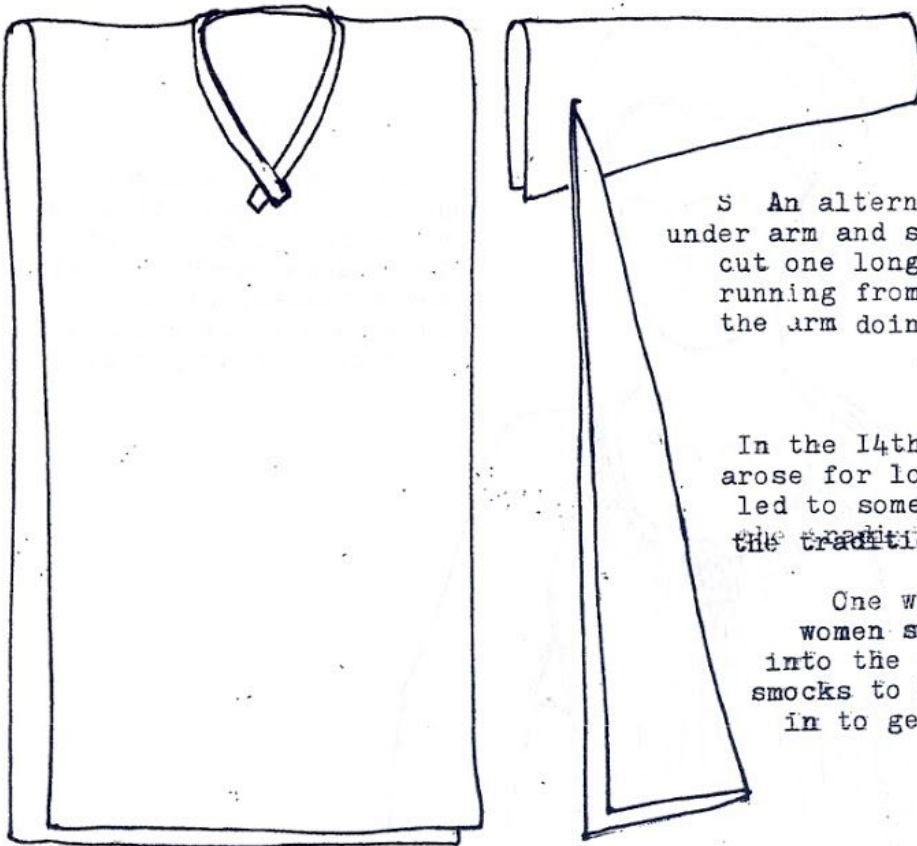
This illustrates the basic cut in this example two triangular gussets are shown, these greatly strengthen the neck hole, but are not a universal feature on shirts or smocks until the 17th cent.

The necklines of women's chemises would vary according to fashion i.e. to suite the kirtle or overgarment.

Later, or in more sophisticated areas, a T slash was used. This enabled a smaller, better fitted neck hole. This could be gathered into a neckband and tied shut or later hooked and eyed.

Gussets at the ends of the neck slash were optional. Even quite late i.e. 16th century, shirts can have gathered necks without the gussets. Shirts were undergarments and so kept simple in design, as they were not seen until they became a garment of display in the 16th century. Early more elaborate garments tend to be linen tunics, not shirts. or chemises.

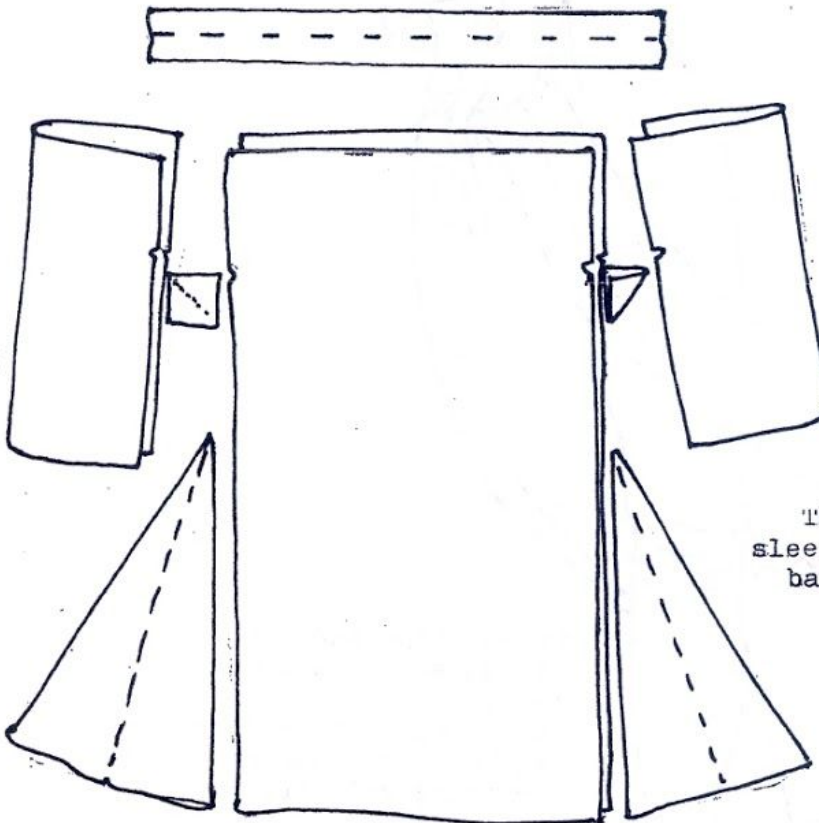




S An alternative to the separate under arm and side gusset was to cut one long triangular gore running from the hem into the arm doing duty for both.

In the 14th century the fashion arose for low necklines which led to some modifications to the traditional chemise.

One writer refers to women sewing two pockets into the front of their smocks to place their breasts in to get uplift



This pattern produces a low necked chemise with a pleated effect round the neck and shoulders

The sleeves are sewn parallel to the body with diamond shaped gussets at the join.

The top of the body and the sleeves are then sewn into the band above. This can be a casing with a drawstring or made to one size with the top gathered or smock stitched to fit.

This drawing illustrates the effect of the pattern shown on the previous page

The top of the chemise is gathered into a band with a drawstring or ribbon which allows some adjustment to match the over garment.



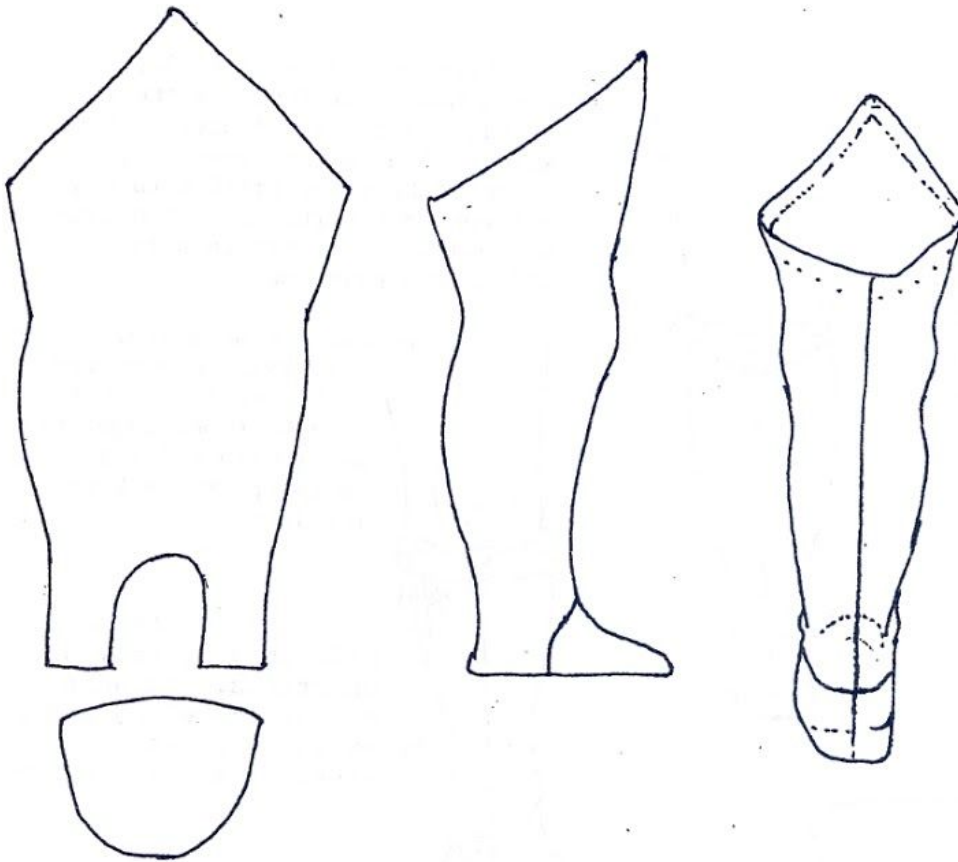
An original medieval drawing of Prague bathhouse girls shows them clad only in scoop neck, sleeveless linen chemises, but how common such brief dress was is a matter of conjecture.

On the legs and feet hose of cut and sewn cloth were worn.

These would be gartered below the knee by ribbons, braids or bias cut strips of cloth.

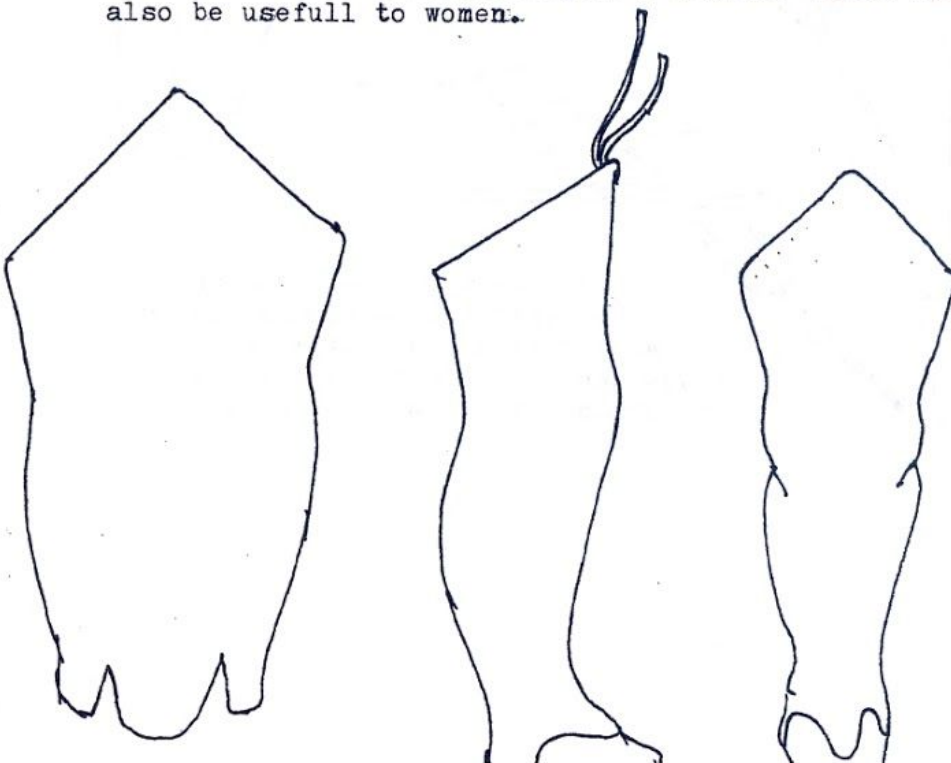


HOSE



Surviving fragments from the London riverside digs and whole garments from Scandinavia give us a very clear pattern of two pieces: a leg section that runs down to cover the heel and a foot section covering the instep and sewn along the sole to the toe.

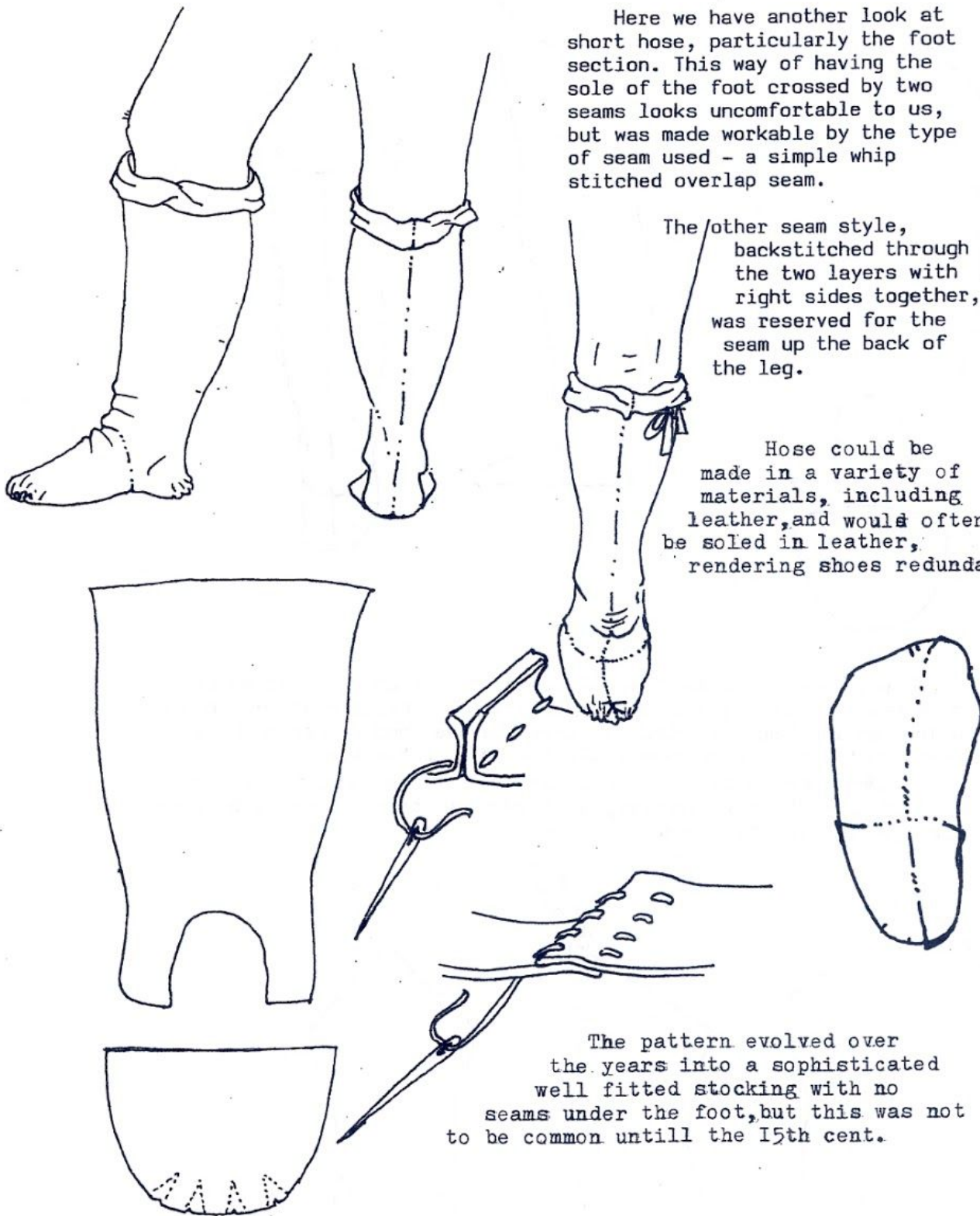
These are male hose with the pointed top and tie thong to lace them to a waistband, but I can see times when such would also be useful to women.



Here we have another look at short hose, particularly the foot section. This way of having the sole of the foot crossed by two seams looks uncomfortable to us, but was made workable by the type of seam used - a simple whip stitched overlap seam.

The other seam style, backstitched through the two layers with right sides together, was reserved for the seam up the back of the leg.

Hose could be made in a variety of materials, including leather, and would often be soled in leather, rendering shoes redundant.

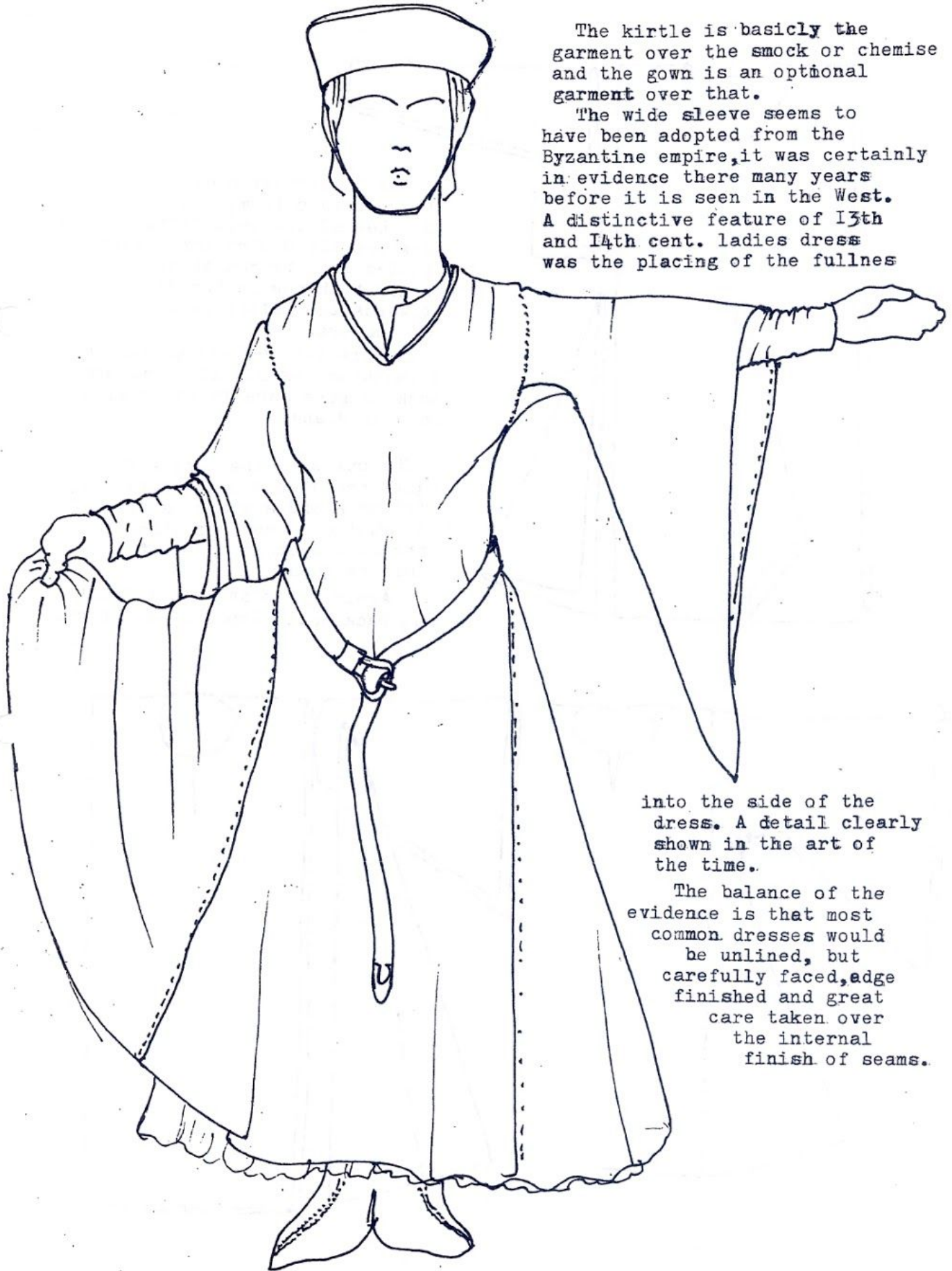


The pattern evolved over the years into a sophisticated well fitted stocking with no seams under the foot, but this was not to be common until the 15th cent.

KIRTLE AND GOWN

The kirtle is basically the garment over the smock or chemise and the gown is an optional garment over that.

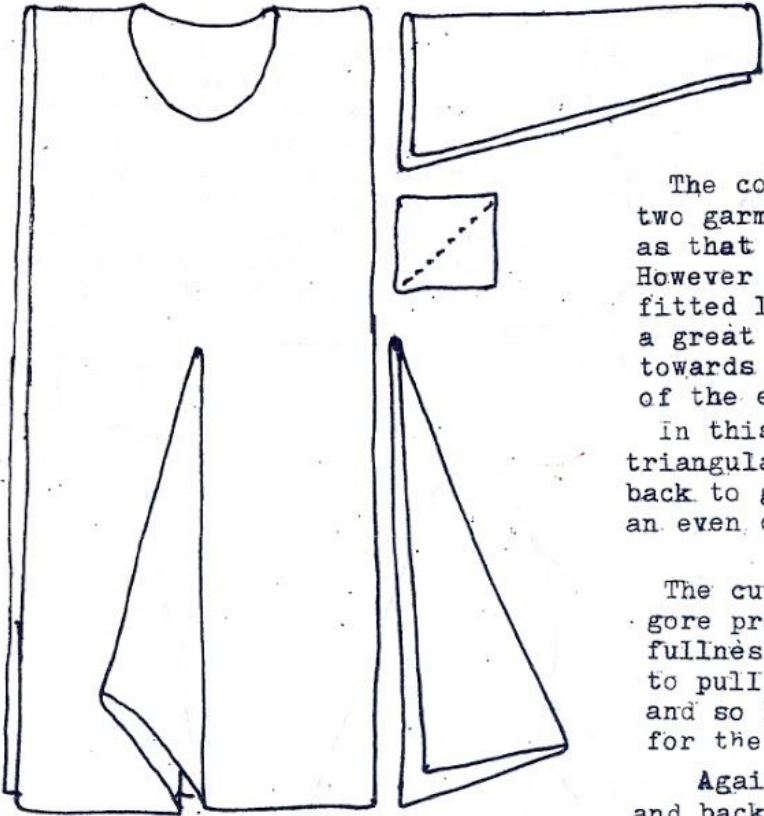
The wide sleeve seems to have been adopted from the Byzantine empire, it was certainly in evidence there many years before it is seen in the West. A distinctive feature of 13th and 14th cent. ladies dress was the placing of the fullness



into the side of the dress. A detail clearly shown in the art of the time.

The balance of the evidence is that most common dresses would be unlined, but carefully faced, edge finished and great care taken over the internal finish of seams.



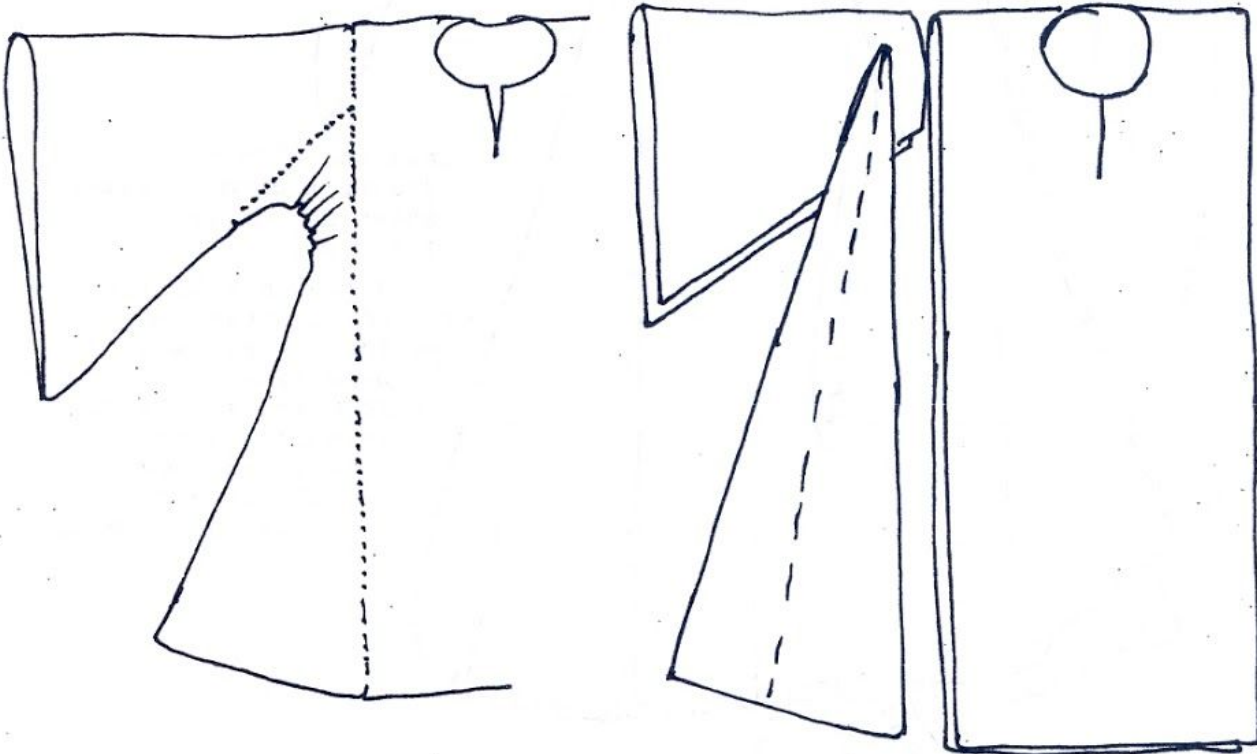


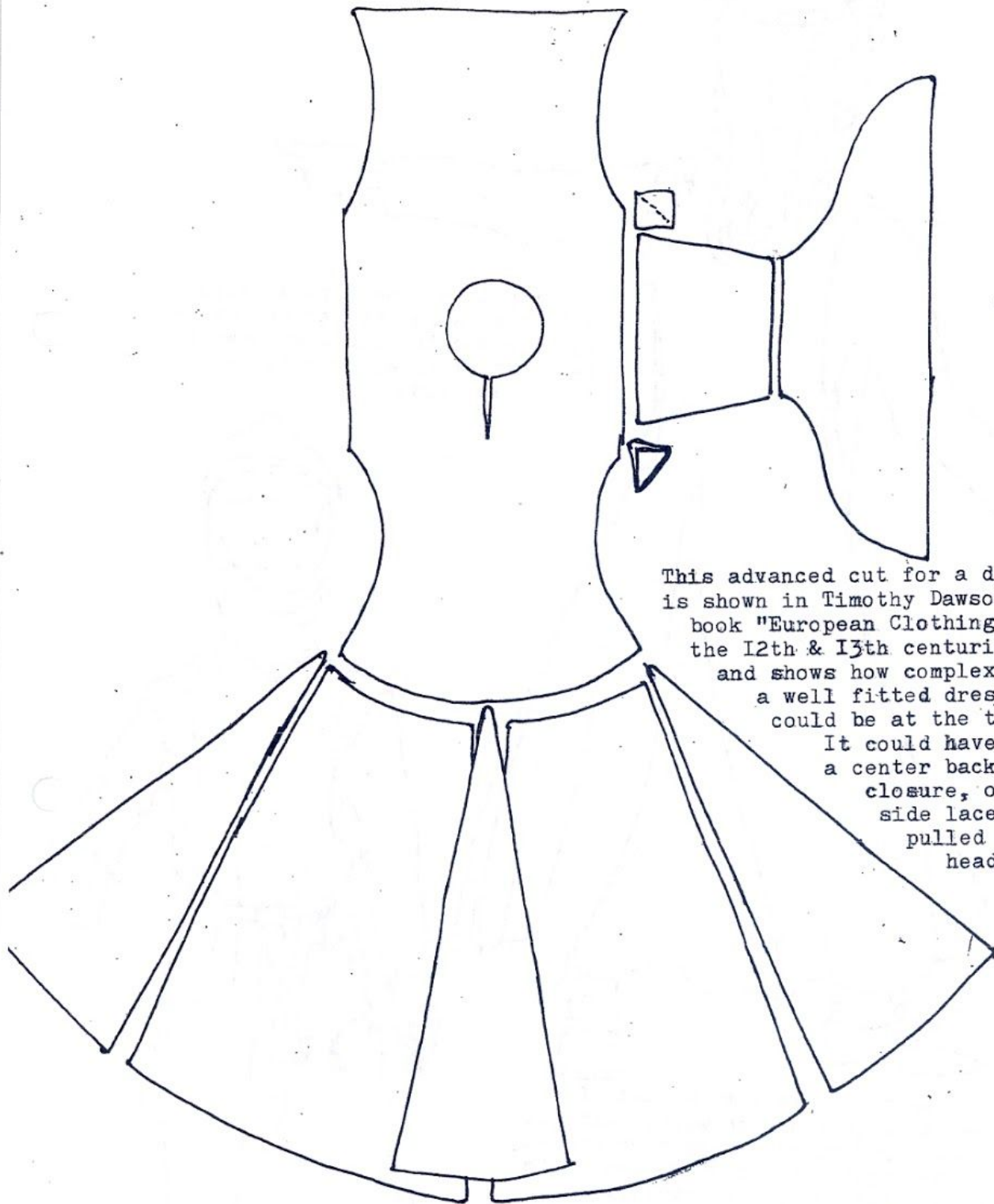
The construction of the two garments is much the same as that of the underwear. However the desire for a more fitted look brings about a great change in the cut towards the latter part of the era.

In this cut we have gores, long triangular inserts at front and back to give more fullness with an even drape..

The cut with the long side gore produces a dress with more fullness and a shape easier to pull over another garment and so I deem it the better for the gown.

Again gores at centre front and back would improve the drape.





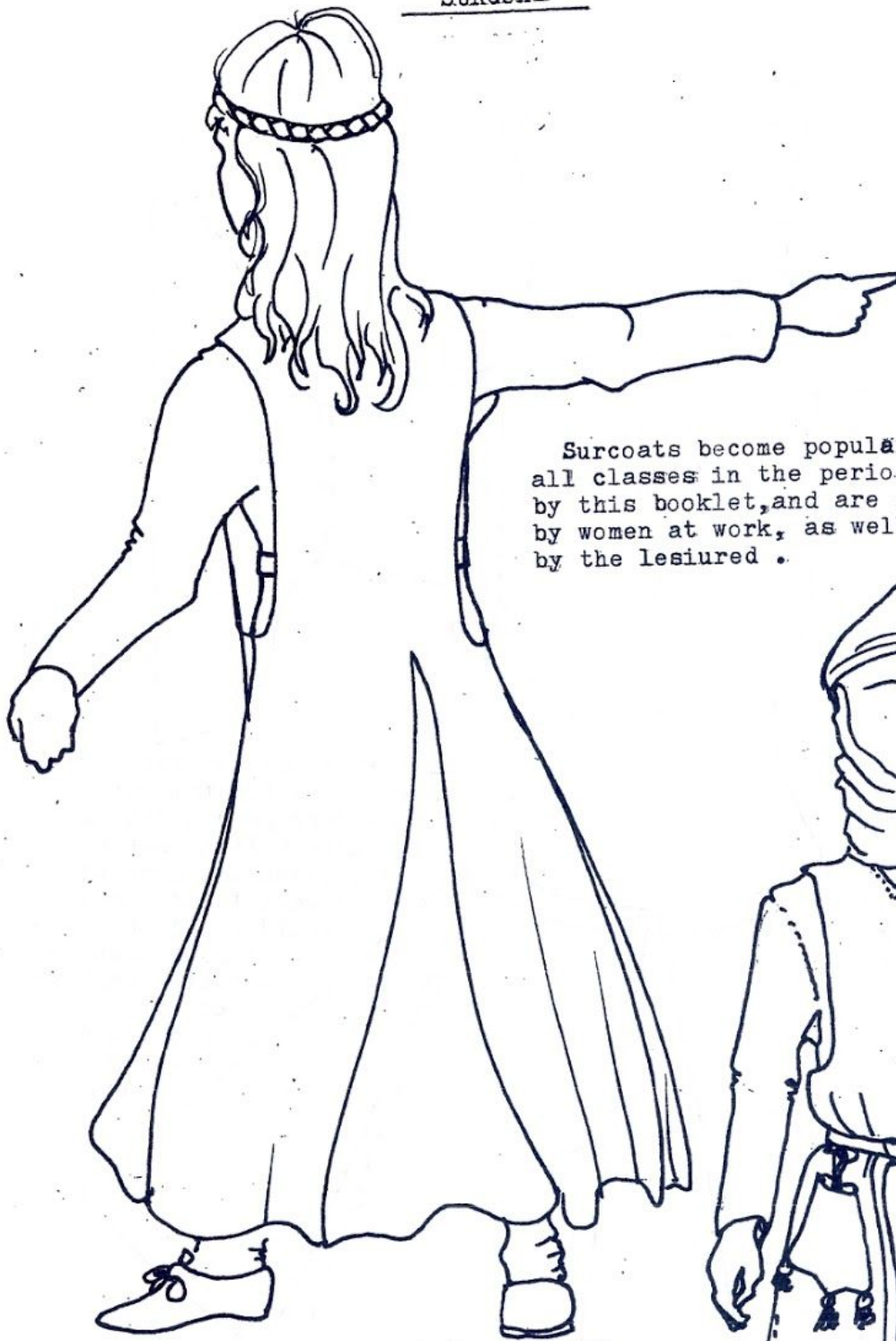
This advanced cut for a dress is shown in Timothy Dawson's book "European Clothing of the 12th & 13th centuries" and shows how complex a well fitted dress could be at the time.

It could have either a center back laced closure, or be side laced and pulled over the head.

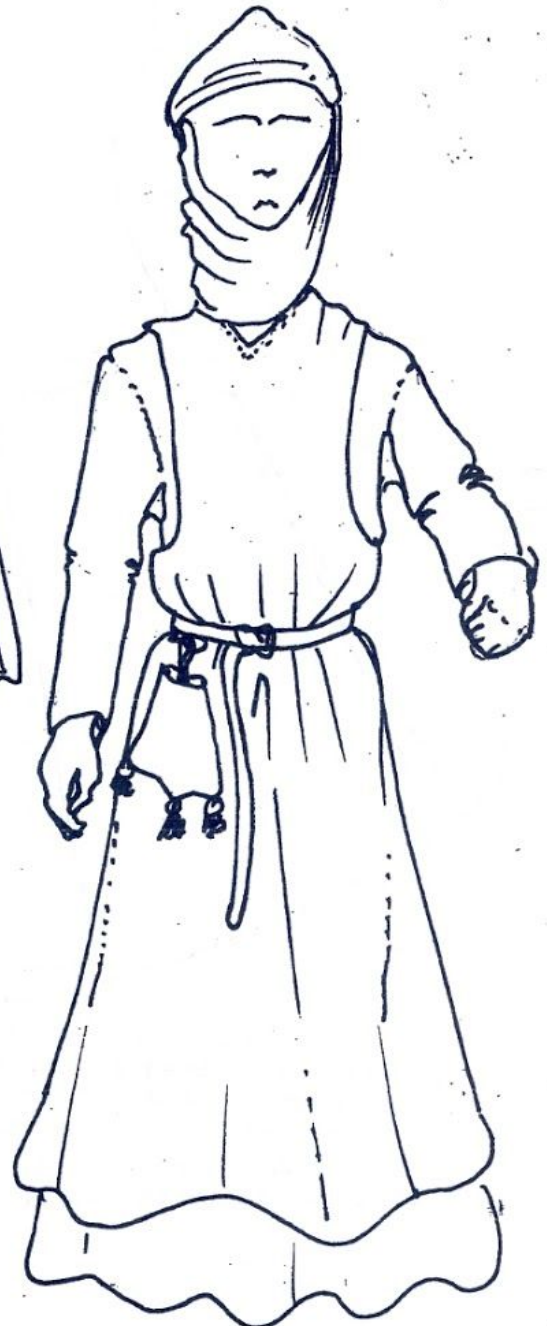
With this being a high class and complex cut, this would most probably have been lined. Original book illuminations often give the impression of lined garments, but they are cartoons, not detailed studies. I am inclined to treat them with caution as evidence.

The higher up the social scale, the more sophisticated the cut, the later the date, the more likely to be lined.

SURCOAT



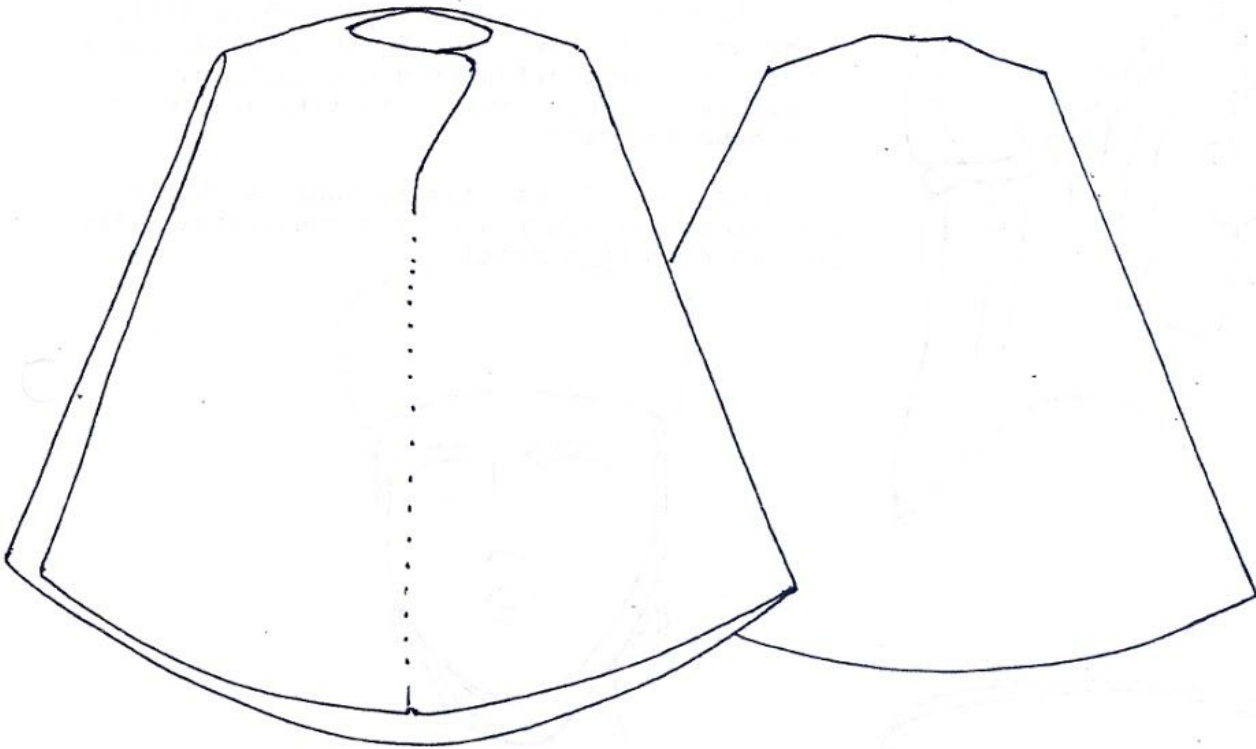
Surcoats become popular with all classes in the period covered by this booklet, and are shown worn by women at work, as well as by the lesiured .



The cut is very much that of all the other garments shown, but without sleeves and with large side openings. The tight fit and elaborate trim seen later has yet to evolve.



HUKE

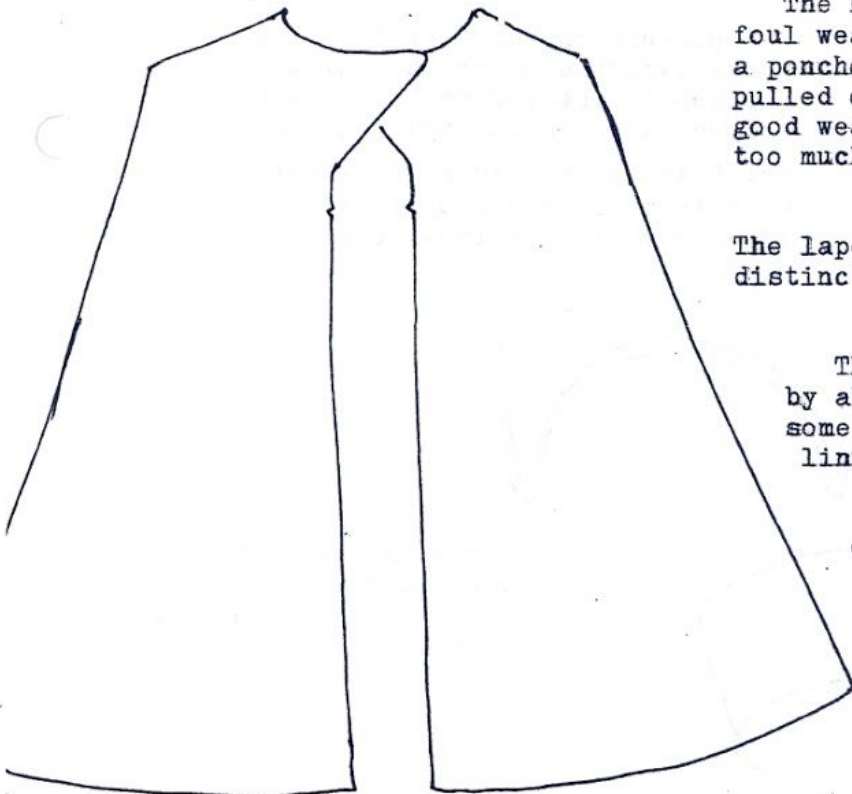


The huke was a very practical foul weather garment, rather like a poncho. Open at the sides and pulled on over the head, it gave good weather protection without too much restriction.

The lapel effect shown here is distinctive of the period.

They seem to have been worn by all classes and both sexes, some being very grand with fur linings.

It could be worn loose or belted round the waist, some times loose at the back and belted at the front.

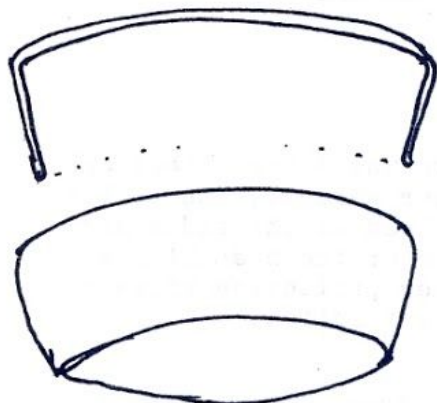


HEAD COVERING

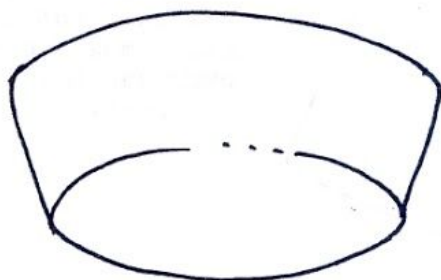
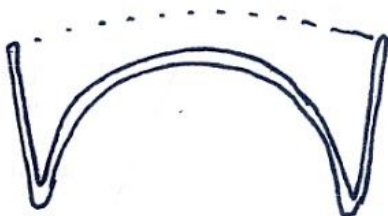


This is a complex area, unmarried girls appear not to have covered their heads other than for protection from the weather. Respectable women wore a variety of cloths turbans and hats.

I show a couple of easy options, a simple head cloth held in place by a band, rather like like an Arab head dress.



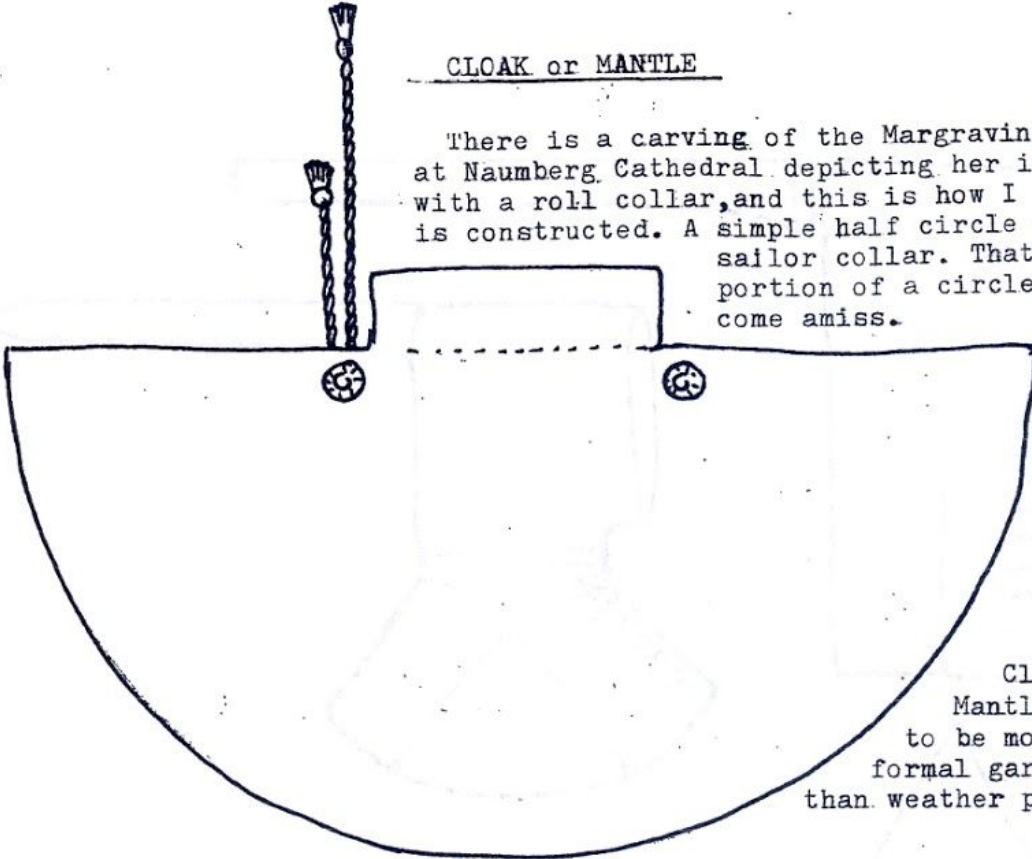
A pillbox cap worn with a cloth gorget, wrapped under the chin. Various cloths and veils could be wrapped and pinned about the cap which was most likely felt, plain or covered. I show 2 different ideas for its construction.



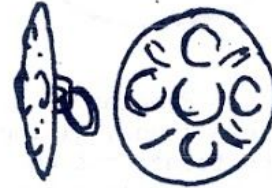
My guess is that both are correct and would vary according to what was done with them.

CLOAK or MANTLE

There is a carving of the Margravine Uta at Naumberg Cathedral depicting her in a cloak with a roll collar, and this is how I think it is constructed. A simple half circle with a simple sailor collar. That said a larger portion of a circle would not come amiss.



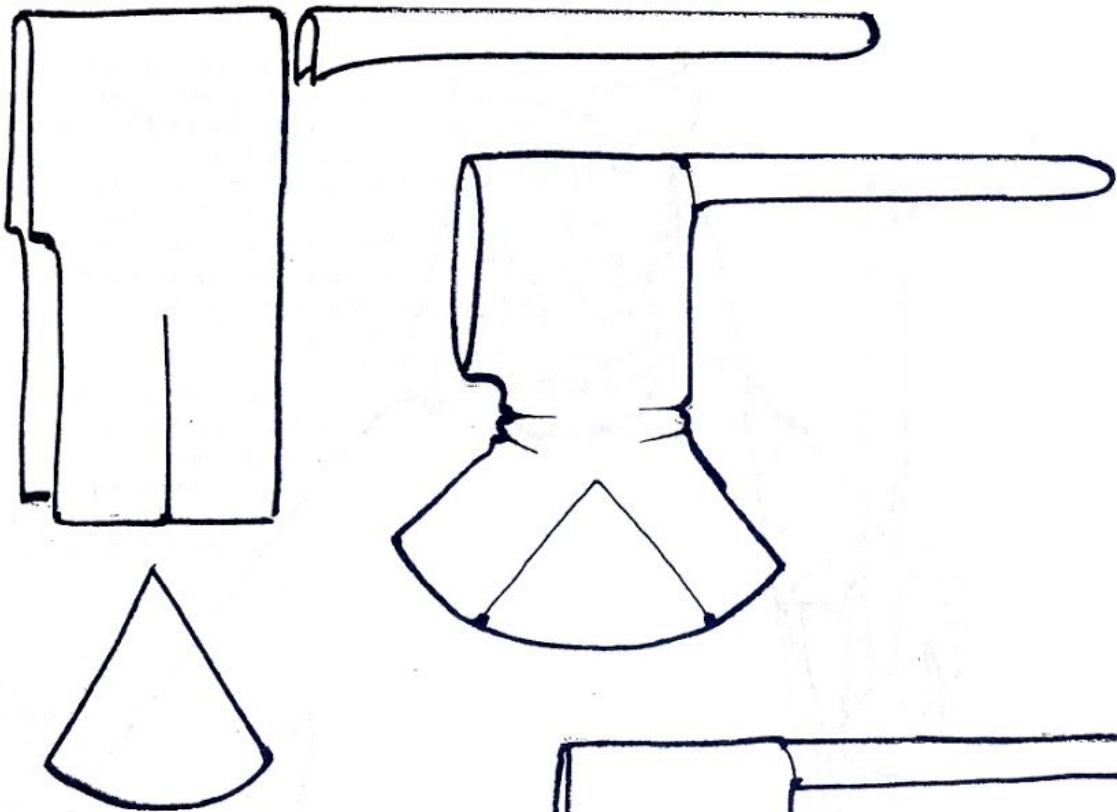
Cloaks or Mantles appear to be more of a formal garment rather than weather protection.



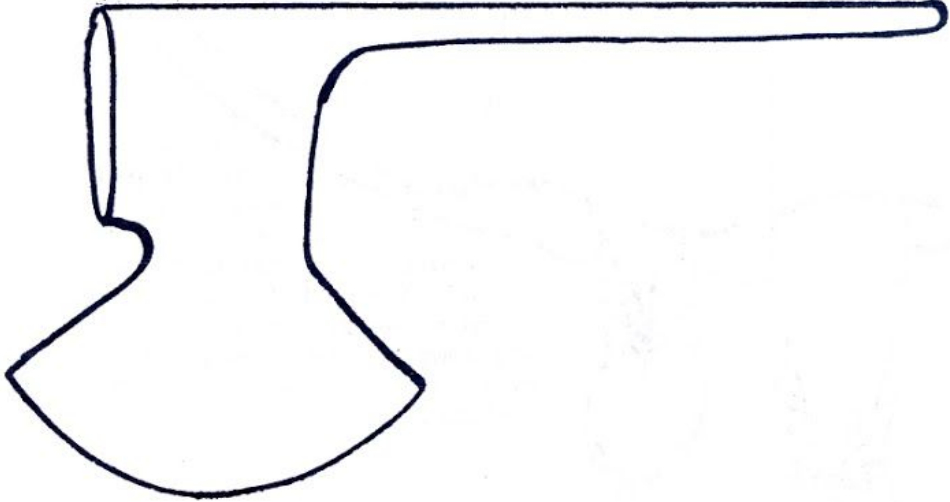
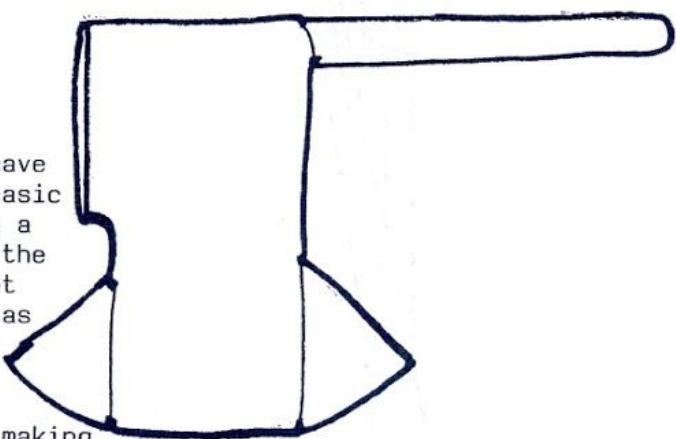
Half circles do not sit perfectly on the shoulders but larger compass mantles seem to appear later rather than earlier.

The fastening on all of these womens mantles looks like a large button like boss or brooch with a sturdy shank through which a tie cord passes.





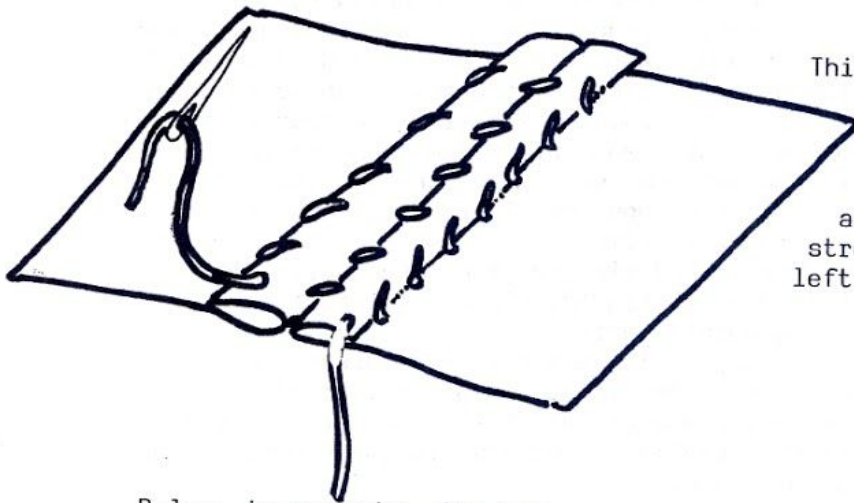
Remains of a few hoods have been found, giving us three basic patterns: cut and shaped with a gore in the sides to broaden the cape; shaped by gores at front and back of the cape; or cut as two complete halves and seamed down the middle. This latter used more cloth than the other cuts but suits the making of the fashionable two colour mi-parti garment very well.



CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

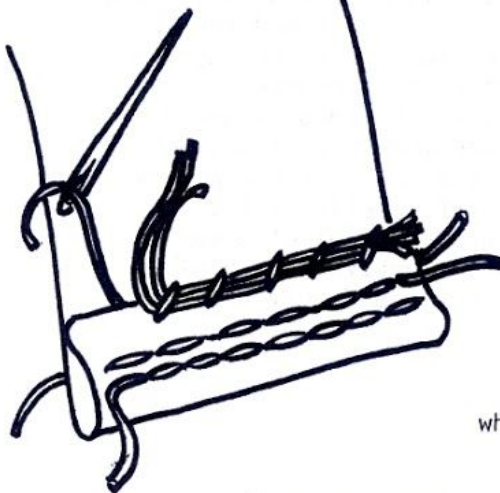


Here are illustrated two common seam finishes and two hem finishes. On the left, a standard 'run and fell', still used on cotton and linen, a low bulk, hard-wearing seam.

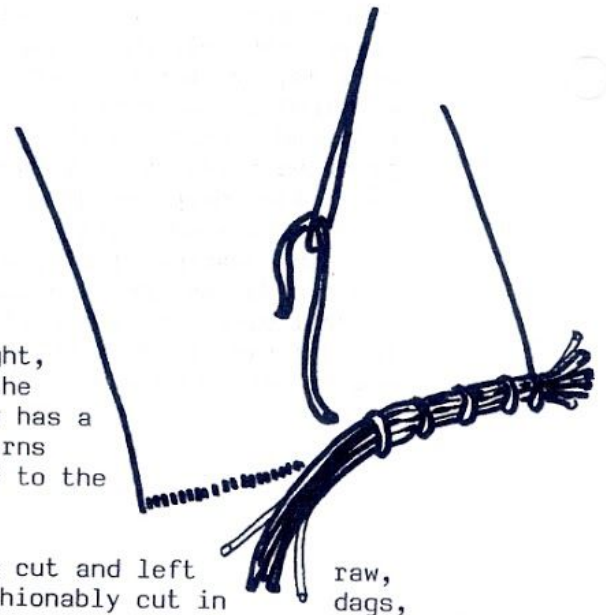


This is a simple seam with the seam allowance whip-stitched back. Again this gives a neat but also a stronger seam than if left.

Below, in one edge, the hem held back by two rows of double running stitch has the raw edge of the cloth covered by a bundle of yarn whip-stitched over.



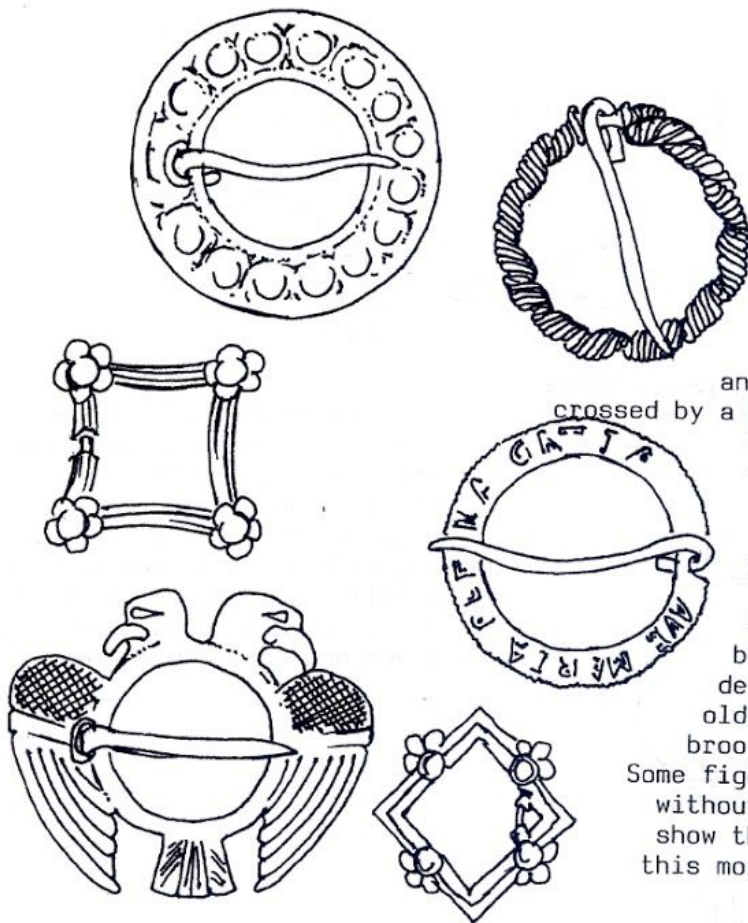
To the right, the edge of the cloth simply has a bundle of yarns whipped directly to the raw hem.



Heavily finished cloth could be cut and left especially if it was decoratively and fashionably cut in scallops or leaf shapes.

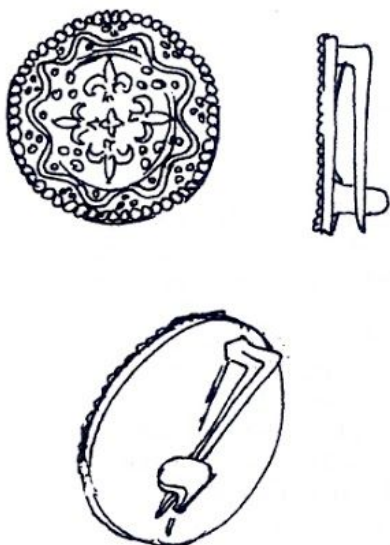
raw,  
dags,

BROOCHES



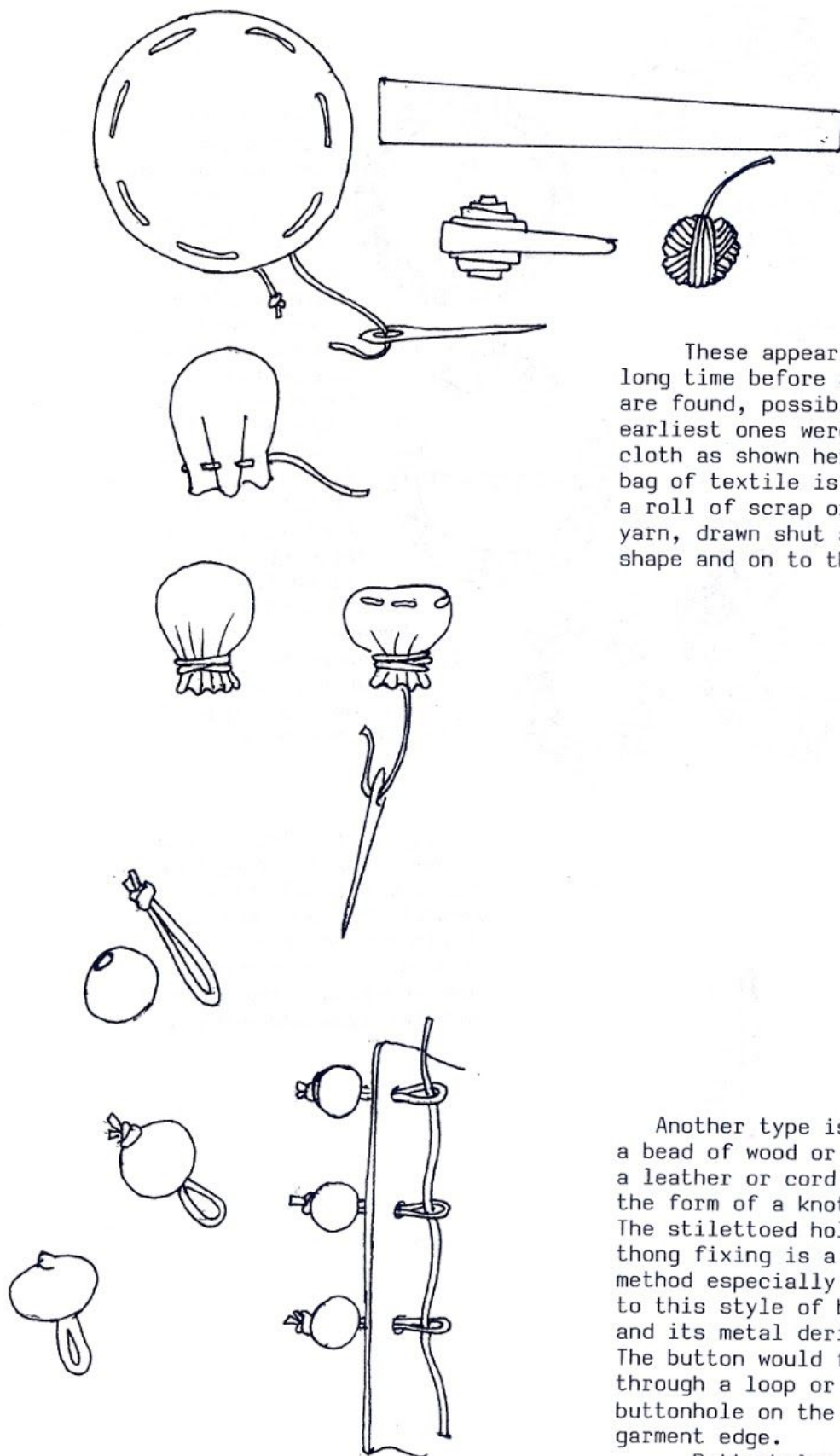
Despite the introduction of buttons sometime in the 13th century, brooches were still the most common garment closure, and the closed ring, crossed by a hinged pin is the brooch that is found most often. Made in a wide variety of materials and construction techniques, the basic principle derived from the old penannular brooch is the same. Some figures are drawn without the pin to show the seating of this more clearly.

Early in the 14th century a cast lead/tin alloy badge appears. Probably more decorative than functional, it mimics the cast Pilgrim badges that appear before the non-figurative secular type shown here.





## BUTTONS

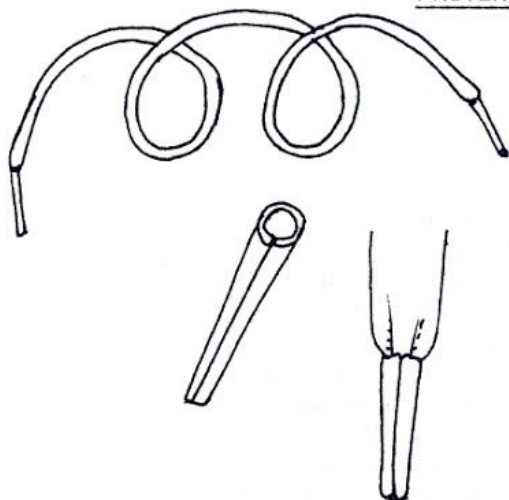


These appear in art a long time before actual examples are found, possibly because the earliest ones were made of cloth as shown here. A small bag of textile is stuffed with a roll of scrap or a ball of yarn, drawn shut and sewn into shape and on to the garment.

Another type is more like a bead of wood or bone, given a leather or cord shank in the form of a knotted loop. The stilettoed hole and thong fixing is a common method especially suited to this style of button and its metal derivative. The button would fasten through a loop or buttonhole on the other garment edge.

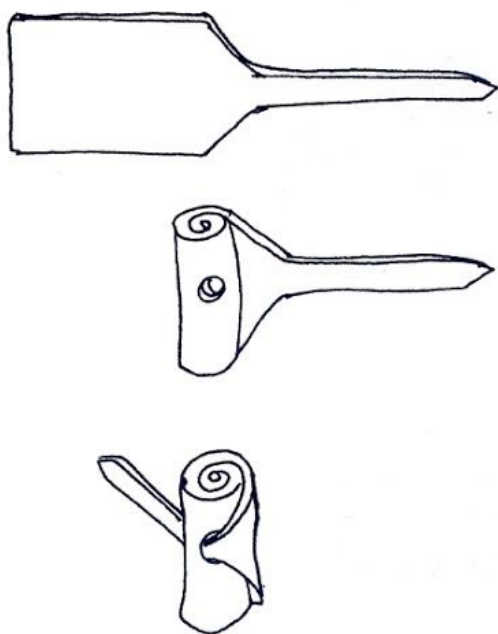
Buttonholes could be slashed and either simply whip-stitched round or finished with blanket or buttonhole stitch.

## FASTENINGS

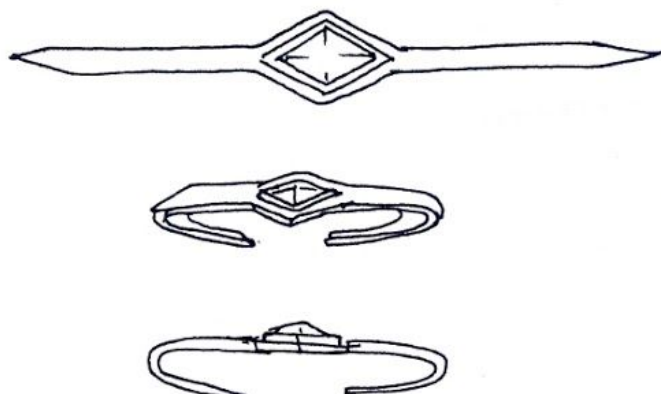


All through recorded history, simply tying a garment shut, or on, has been an option. From the late 13th century, metal tags called 'lace chapes' appear in the archeological record. Fitted to the end of leather or textile laces, the whole assembly was referred to as a 'point' or 'poynt'.

Generally speaking, the earlier the date at which the copper alloy fitting was made, the larger it was. Simply thin sheet metal wrapped around the end of a lace, they were made with a slight taper to facilitate passing through eyelets.



Leather toggles used to fasten shoes or close garments are found as early as Viking times. Made by rolling a T-shaped piece of thin firm leather, and passing the narrow end through a hole punched in the toggle head, they were very popular as a closure in the 13th century.



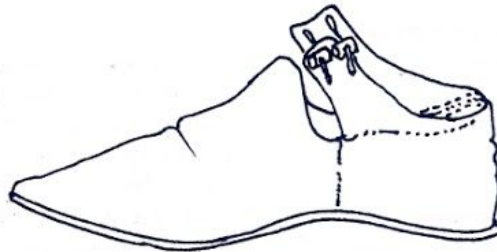
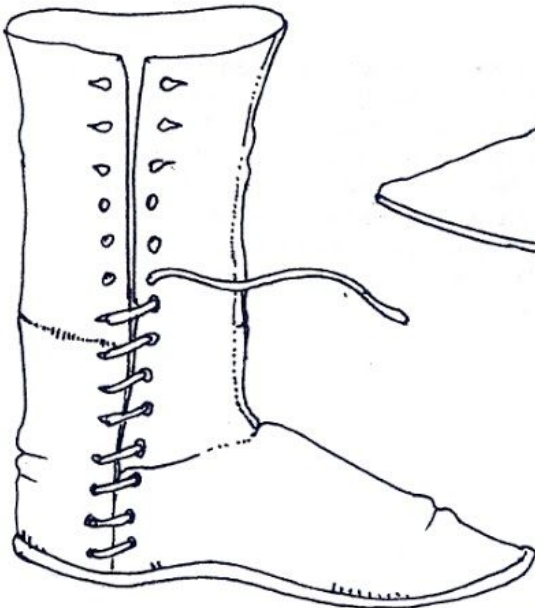
A little known variant on the brooch was the costume hook. Shaped very like a modern staple, double pointed, sometimes decorative, often plain, originals are found in a variety of metals, silver or copper alloys.

Both ends are simply hooked into the two opposing sides of the garment closure. Multiple dress hooks would look like very neat lacing from a distance or in a simple illustration.

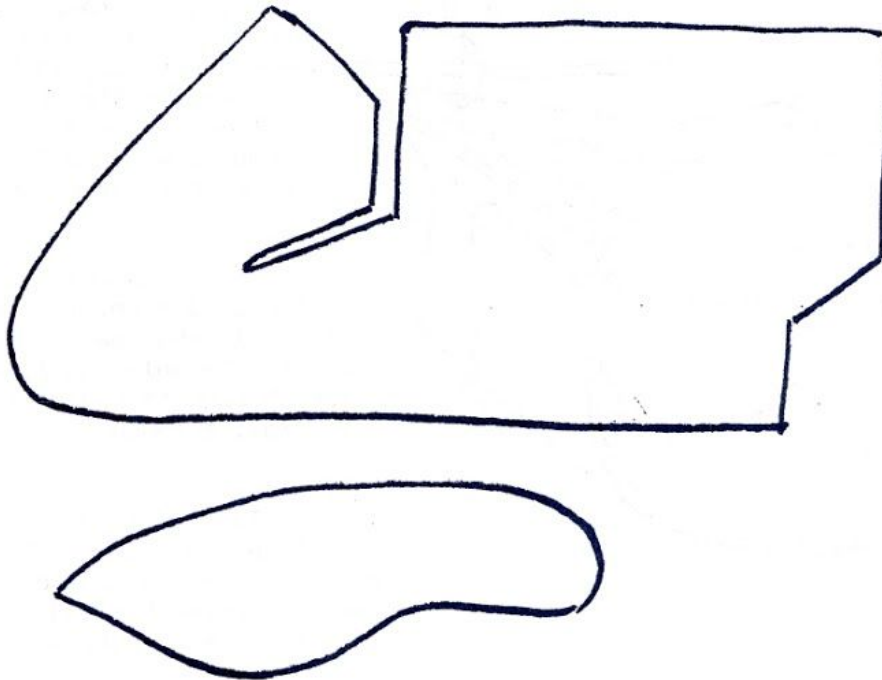
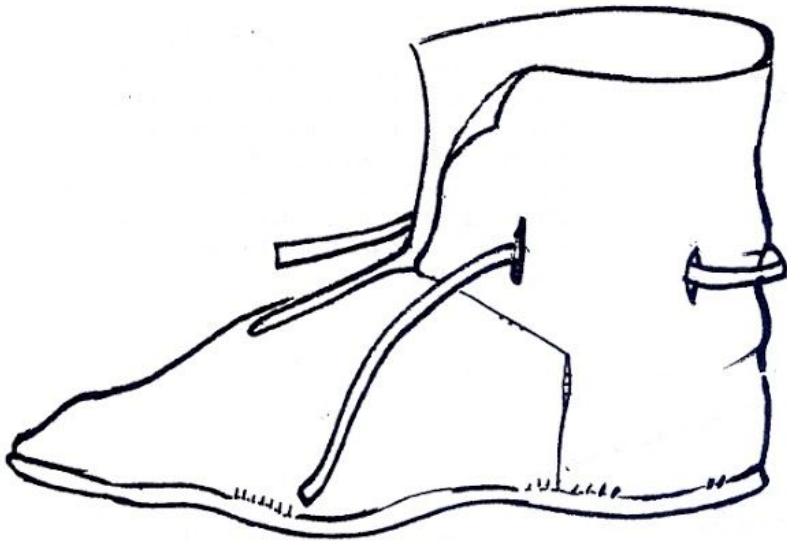
BOOTS AND SHOES

Carvings and book illuminations of the 13th and early 14th centuries show a wide variety of styles in footwear. Low slip-on shoes, high boots, latchet shoes and practical boots are all in evidence.

Surprisingly, finds of actual footwear show all these to have been based around one simple pattern.

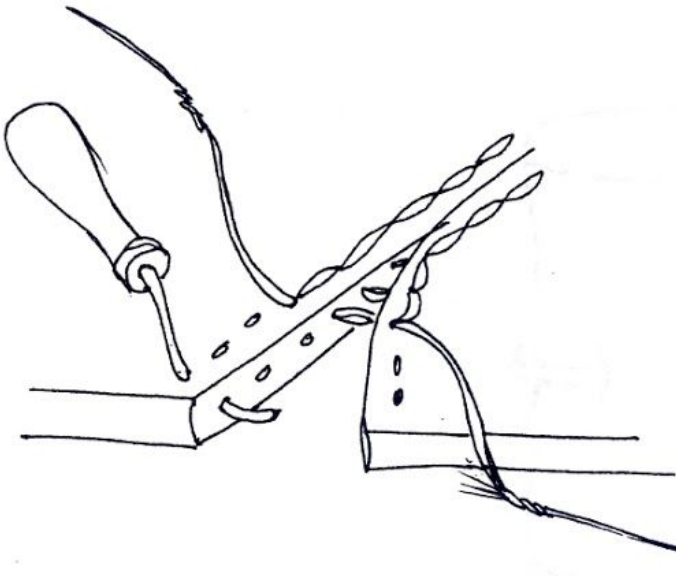




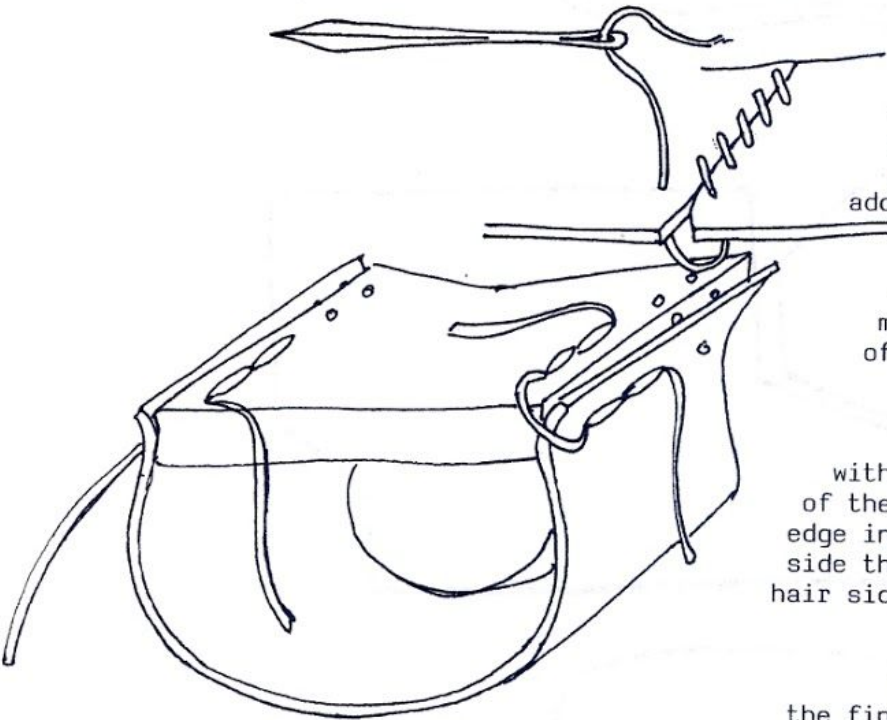


The archetype of all these styles has a one-piece upper, and a single piece sole, of the pattern illustrated. There are variations of this basic layout, but usually they are done in the cause of economy, using several pieces of leather to produce an upper of the same pattern as the one piece drawn here.

Unless it was a repair job, the sole was always a single piece. Both the upper and the sole were assembled inside out and only on completion was the shoe turned right side out, and so the type is given the name of 'turnshoe'.



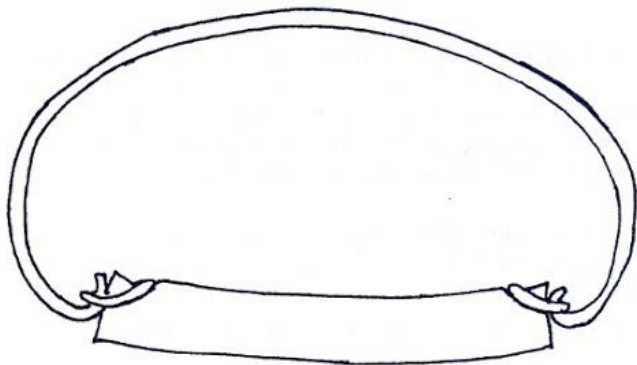
Seams in the shoe uppers were normally butt-stitched, using an awl to produce the hole from flesh side to edge. The waxed linen thread would be twisted at each end on to a hog's bristle which acted as a thin flexible needle to lead the thread through the joles.



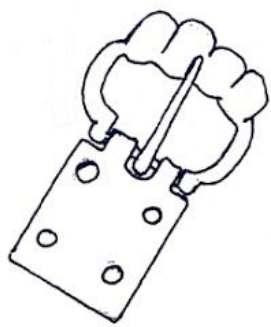
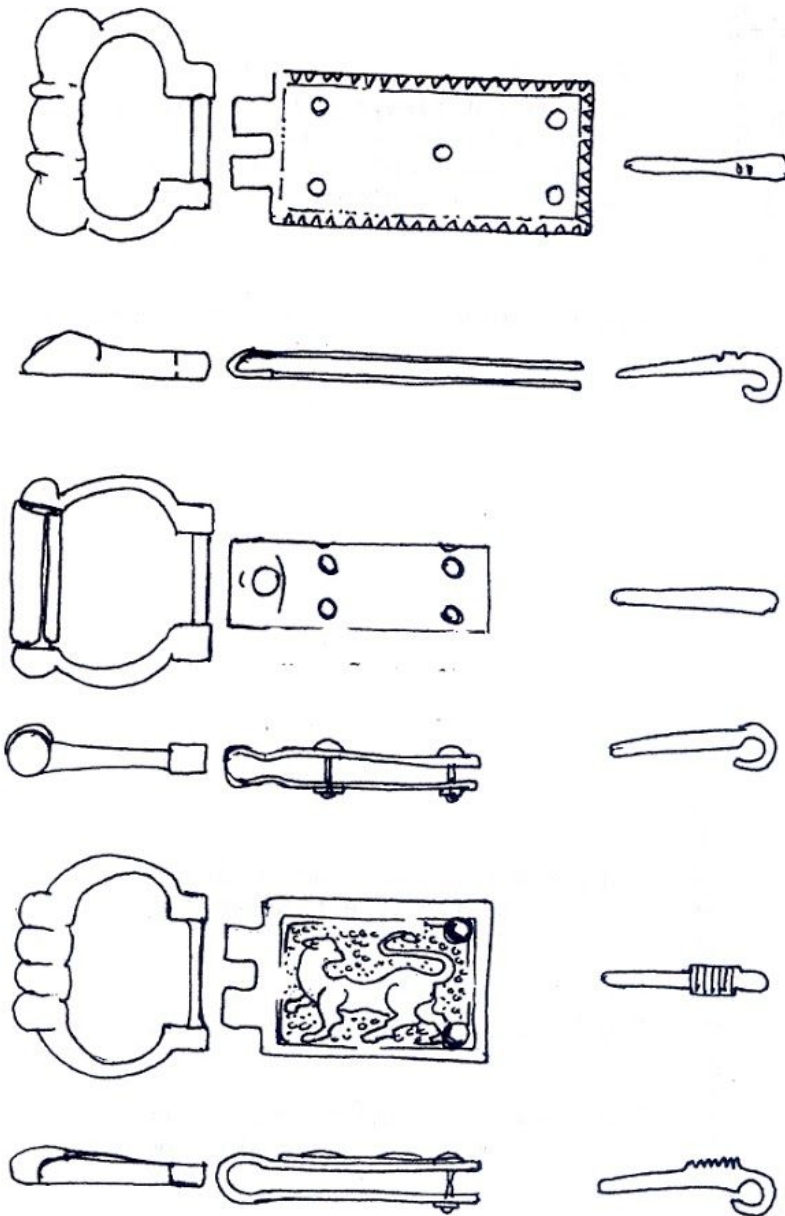
The binding seam drawn here done with a triangular section needle was used to attach small additions to the upper. Surviving leather needles from Medieval times are very like modern ones, but are made of bronze rather than steel.

Soles were sewn on with this seam, flesh side of the leather out to the edge in the sole and flesh side through to grain or hair side, through the upper.

To do all this and allow the final turning of the shoe, vegetable tanned leather, well-soaked in water to render it flexible, was essential.



BELT BUCKLES



Belts were a very important part of everyday dress, not just from a practical point of view but also symbolic. Metal mounted belts were a mark of free status and military privilege. For the two centuries covered by this book, the illustrated buckles were the most common type. Cast copper alloy buckles were fitted to sheet metal buckle plates of a variety of styles. The buckle pin could be cast metal, cut from sheet or bent from wire. Buckle plates were invariably rivetted to the belt, which could be leather or tablet-woven thread - wool, linen and silk were all used for civilian and military belts.



BELT ENDS

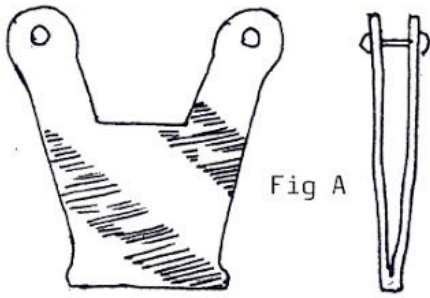


Fig A

Fig A-As well as a buckle, a belt usually if not always had a terminal, often called a 'belt chape'. This could be a folded strip of metal or a variety of more complex constructions:

Fig B - with soldered-in side pieces.

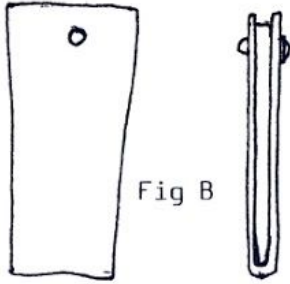


Fig B

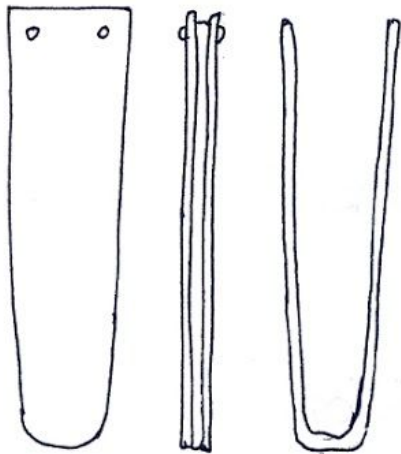


Fig C

Fig C - with a bent rod or sheet metal centre to a three-piece sandwich.

Fig D - with a cast centre layer.

Fig E - with a simpler three-part face, back and spacer plate design.

This is not an exhaustive list of possibilities, just the most common and most easily made.

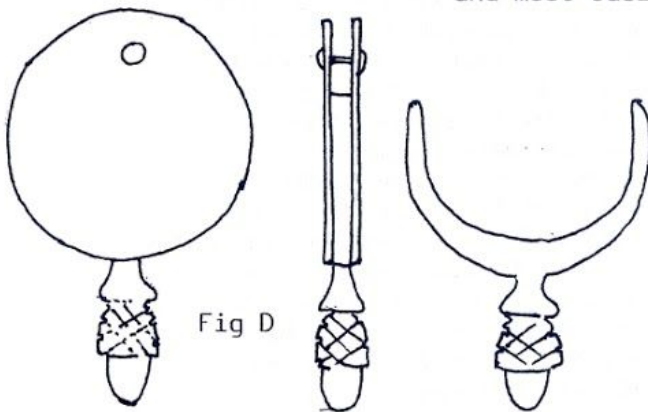


Fig D

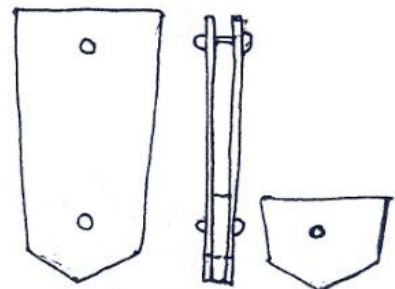
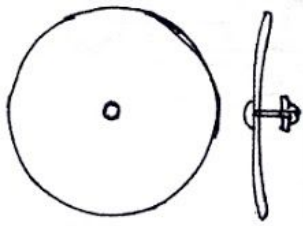
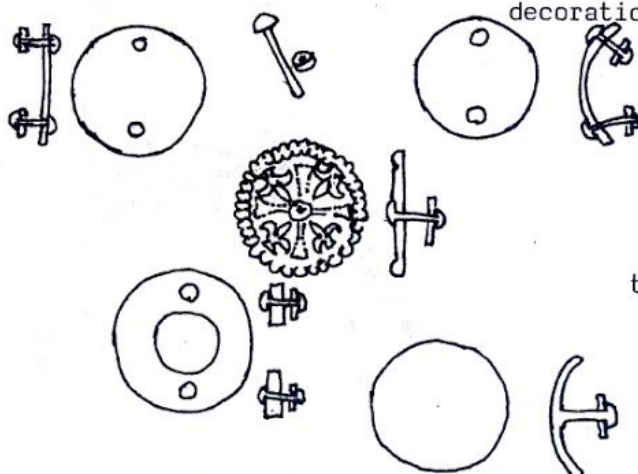


Fig E


## BELT FITTINGS




The belt itself could be decorated with tooled and dyed designs in leather, or woven designs in textiles. Both types could carry an array of studs and plates for decoration or function.



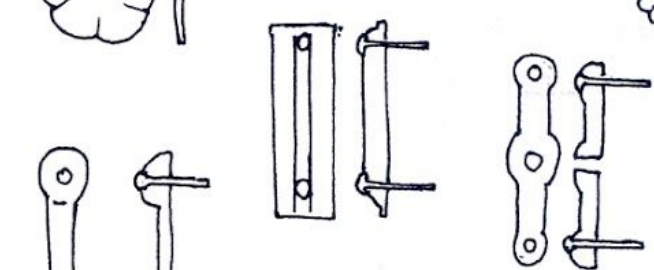
Generally the simpler designs are earlier and the more complex are later. The complex designs appear first in lead-tin alloy and later translate into copper alloy. Tin alloy fittings can be painted and copper alloy can be enamelled.



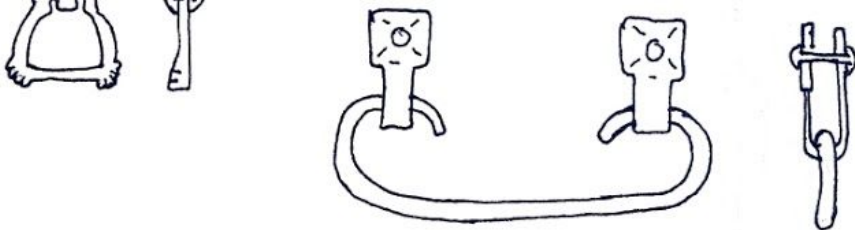
The long fittings with suspended loops are for ties from daggers, knives, purses and keys to loop to, and not fold or mark the belt.



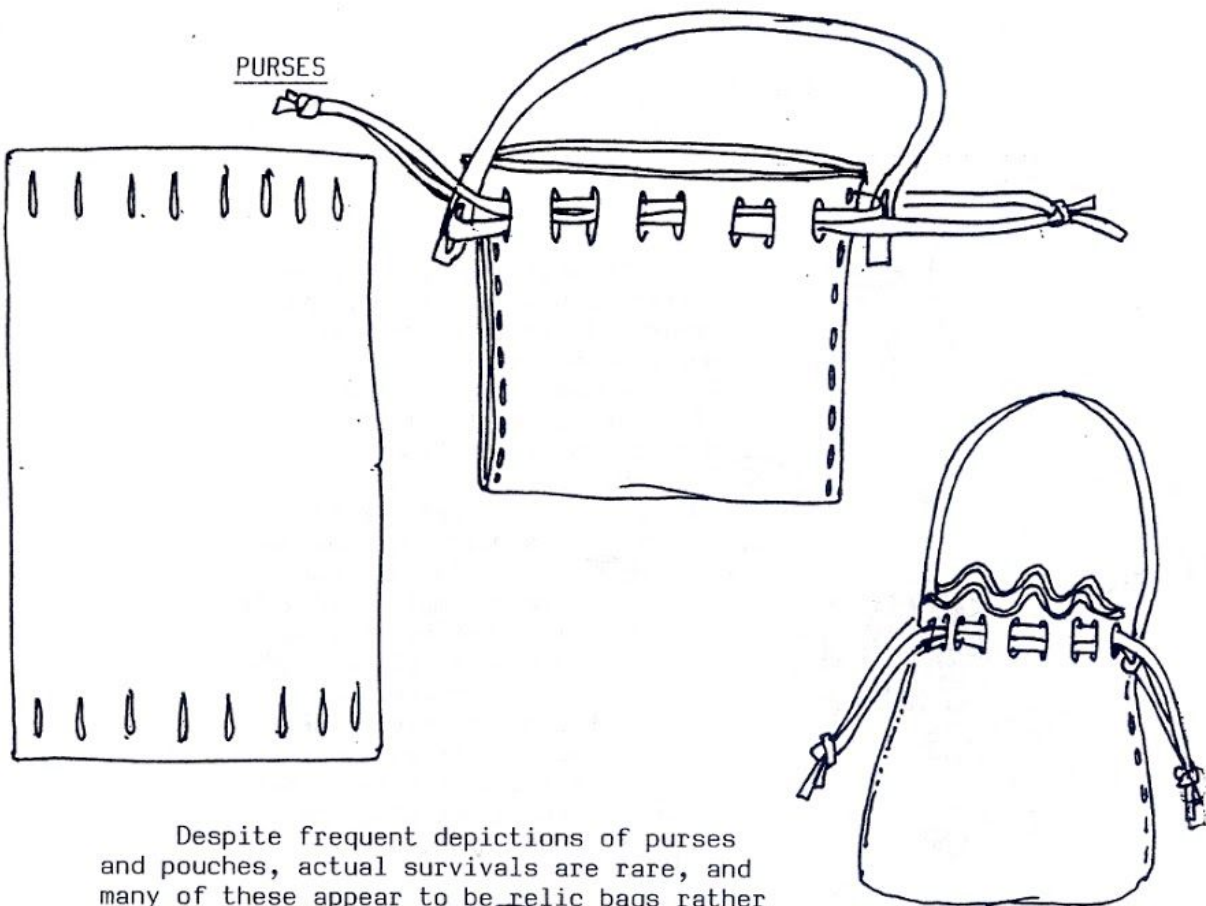
The round, ring and petalled belt mounts are generally considered to be decorative.



The bar type fittings appear on military effigies and probably have the purpose of stopping a heavily-laden belt from deforming i.e. a sword belt.



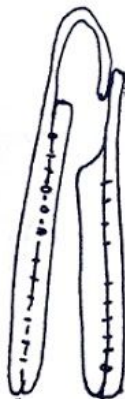
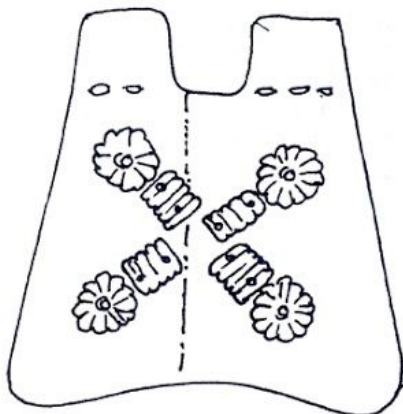
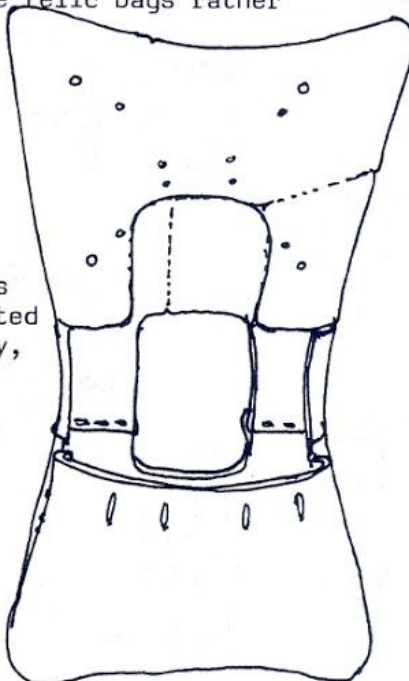
## PURSES



Despite frequent depictions of purses and pouches, actual survivals are rare, and many of these appear to be relic bags rather than items of wear.

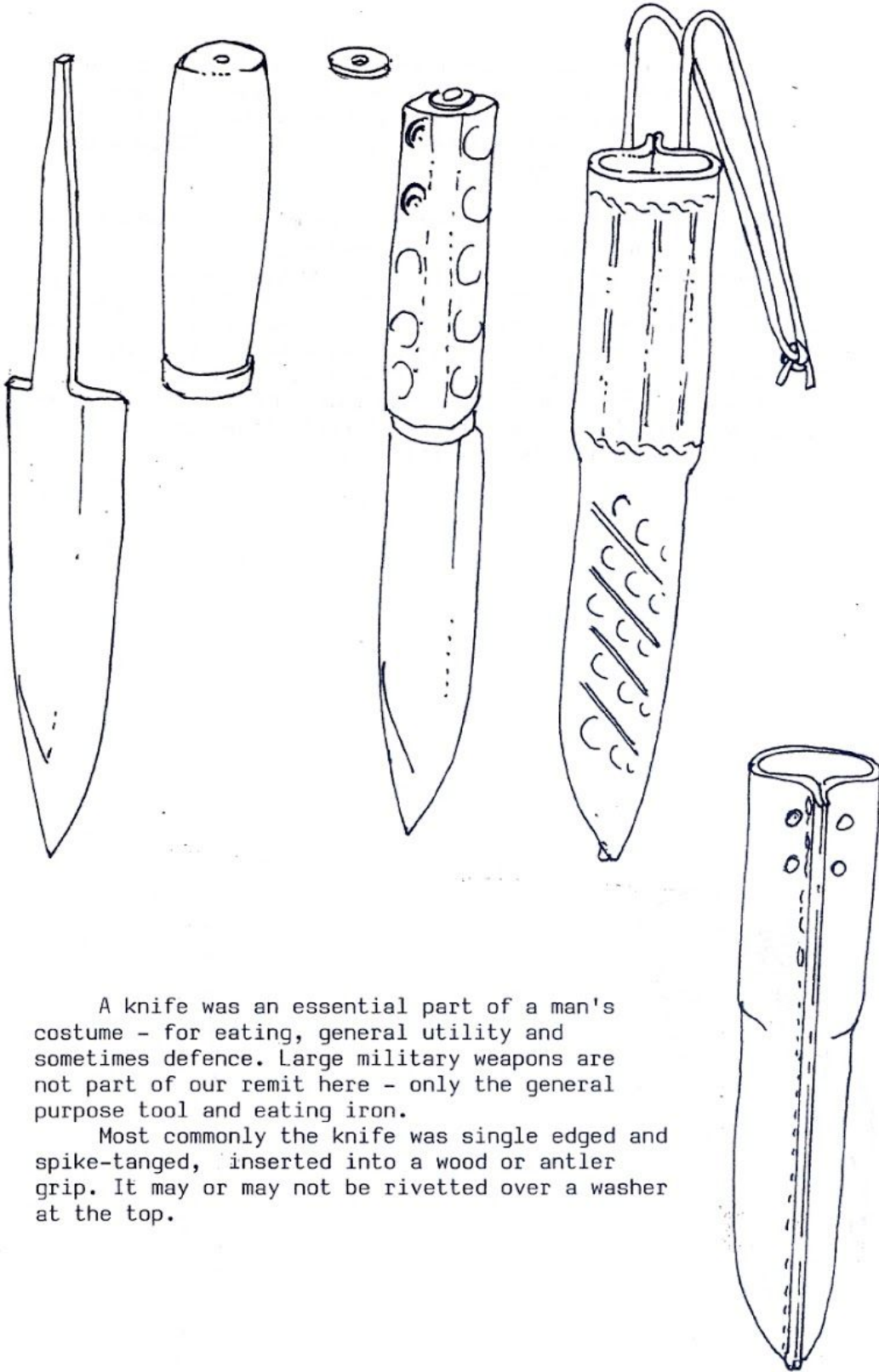
The most frequent survivor seems to be the simple drawstring bag in leather or textile, as illustrated at the top.

The belt-hung, front flapped bag shown here was found in London and is dated as being late 14th century, but resembles those illustrated in late 13th and early 14th century picture.





KNIVES AND SCABBARDS

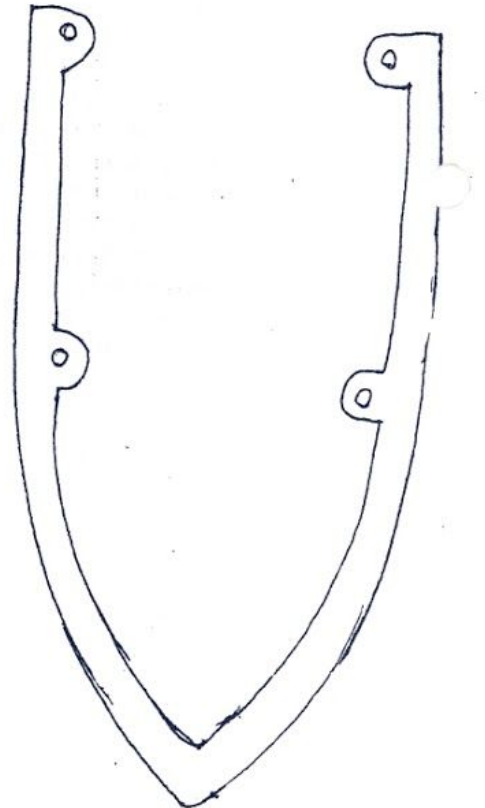
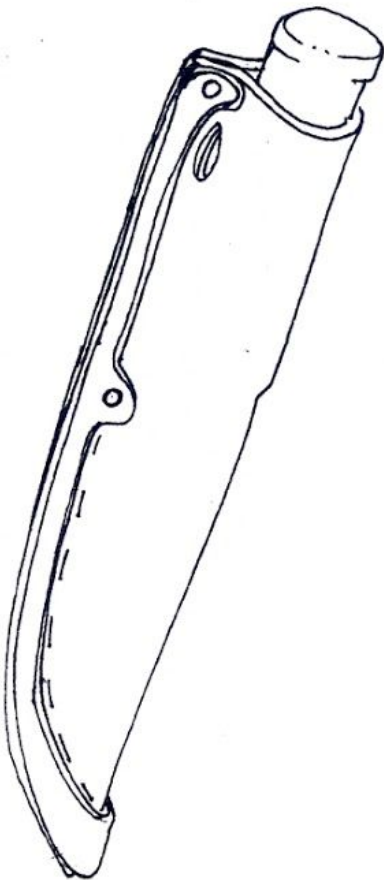


A knife was an essential part of a man's costume - for eating, general utility and sometimes defence. Large military weapons are not part of our remit here - only the general purpose tool and eating iron.

Most commonly the knife was single edged and spike-tanged, inserted into a wood or antler grip. It may or may not be rivetted over a washer at the top.

In England, a plain unmounted scabbard, seamed down the back and hung from a leather thong laced through four holes at the back, was the most common type. Usually this scabbard would be decorated with a tooled pattern and possibly colour staining.

In Scandinavia and Northern Germany, a metal-mounted sheath, very like the old scramsax style, is common in museum displays. Cut and folded from sheet metal, its construction is different to the old Viking type, but in appearance is very similar. Metal survives more readily than leather so its prevalence could be an accident of survival and more apparent than real. But it does have practical advantages and a handsome appearance, and given its geographical prevalence, it could be a genuine survival of the Viking tradition.



Suggested further reading

This is not an exhaustive list of reference but a guide to more detailed information:

Nockert, M.	Bockstensmannen och Hans Drågt	ISBN 9185720-30-5
Museum of London	Shoes and Pattens	ISBN 0-11-290443-2
"	Dress Accessories c.1150-1450	ISBN 0-11-290444-0
"	Textiles and Clothing c.1150-1450	ISBN 0-11-290445-9
Newton, S.M.	Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince	ISBN 0-85115-125-6
Recent Research in Archeological Footwear		ISBN 0950-9208
Whitehead, R.	Buckles 1250-1800	ISBN 1-897738-17X
Kendall, A.	Medieval Pilgrims	ISBN 85340-0067
Burnham, D.K.	Cut My Cote	Textile Dept, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto
Grierson, S.	The Colour Cauldron	ISBN 0-9510132-11