

## Men's Viking Age Clothing

The Viking age man wore a set of clothing that was similar throughout the Norse world. There were minor variations in style, color and cut of the garments for different times and geographies. This document will cover some of the most common cuts and layouts for these basic garments. This is not intended to be all-inclusive, but includes the best-documented constructions I have



found. The garments shown here meet Real Viking Project (RVP) Level 1, if made with the right materials.

The reconstruction from the National Museum of Denmark, shown to the left, provides a fairly good example of the overall look of the men's clothing. This reconstruction is based on finds from the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The Norse man wore an undershirt, a tunic, and trousers. These garments were usually made of linen or wool, though linen was favored for underclothes for reasons of comfort. The Icelandic sagas suggest that bright colors were used for men's clothing. Blue, red, yellow and orange are some of the colors that natural dyeing processes made available to the Norse people. Green and violet can be obtained by over-dyeing two colors and probably would only be worn by the wealthy. There is evidence for undyed garments, presumably undergarments, but nothing to suggest that clothes were bleached white. Clothing could be decorated with tablet weaving or embroidery, which was usually done with combinations of wool, linen, silk, silver, or gold thread.

### **Undershirts:**

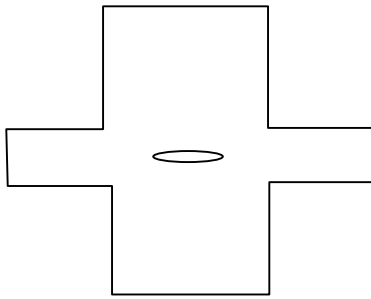
The sagas say that a man's undershirt was sewn only by his wife or mother. Presumably, this garment had intimate connotations because it was worn next to the skin. It was considered promiscuous for a woman to make an undershirt for anyone other than her husband or son. We know from excavations that the general cut of the undershirt or smock is similar to the cut of the tunic. I have found no evidence that the undershirt ever had short sleeves. Both wool and linen were used for the undershirts. See the layouts in the tunic section for guides to reconstruction, since the cut is similar. I usually cut the undershirt smaller than the tunic in order for the tunic to fit well over the undershirt.

### **Tunics:**

There are several styles of tunic found with varying constructions. The basic tunic is cut larger and longer than the undershirt and was usually highly decorated at the neck and sometimes at the hem with tablet weaving or embroidery. As the reconstruction above shows, the tunic length is about mid-thigh to knee length.

Below is a list of the tunics by place and time. Each is shown with a basic layout, description of the key points of construction, and some interesting archeological information. Each also includes a description of the difficulty level to make them, and comments on comfort and utility. You will have to calculate your own measurements.

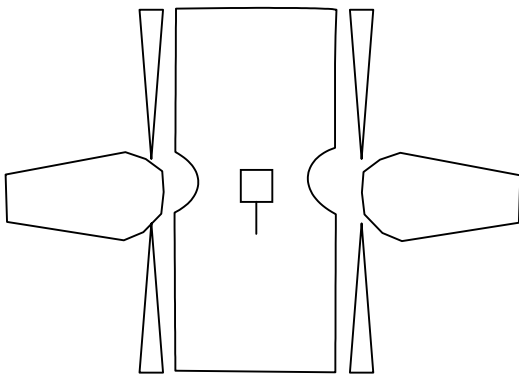
### **Reepsholt Mose Tunic: 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> Century Denmark**



edges from wear.

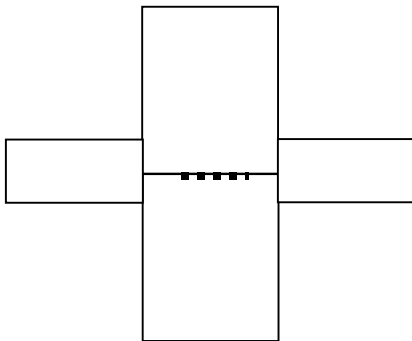
- The tunic was woven in this shape on the loom.
  - No gores or crossing wefts are found in the tunic.
  - The tunic, when sewn together has a slit along the side to increase freedom of movement. The sagas suggest that this slit could be closed with laces.
  - The garment was very close fitting.
  - The garment was often trimmed with decorative cords around the neck opening, over the shoulders and elsewhere, to protect the
- This tunic is easy to make, though the fit at the shoulders is not very good. It is the basis for the "SCA Generic T-tunic." While this tunic falls outside the "Viking Age," it is easy to make and is included here to meet RVP Level 1 standards.

### **Hedeby Style Tunic: 10<sup>th</sup> Century Denmark**



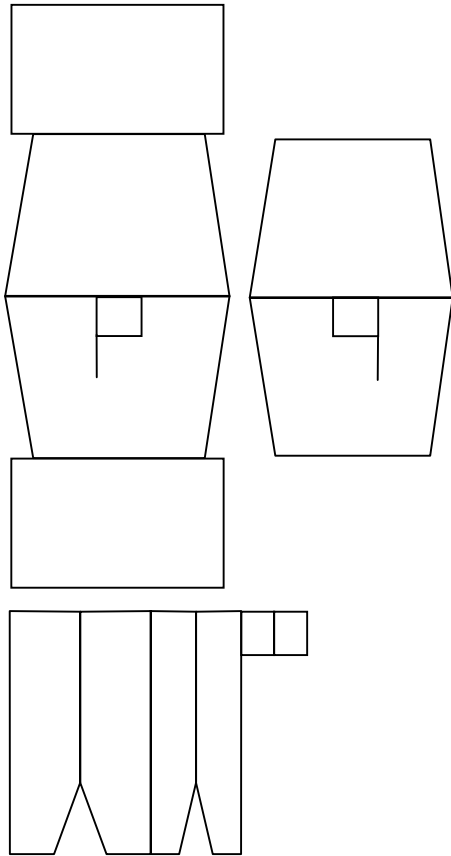
- Based from a Tunic found in Hedeby
- Basic tunic pattern with inset sleeves, which gives a more comfortable fit at the shoulders
- Gores added to the length of the tunic for more room
- Tight fitting tapered arms
- Square key-hole neck opening
- Choose a fine linen or wool for the fabric
- Gussets can be added under the sleeves
- This tunic is very comfortable and practical, and is slightly more difficult to make than the Birka tunic. My lord prefers this design for his tunics.

### **Thorsbjerg tunic: Migration Period Denmark**



- The shirt consists of four pieces of cloth, the front, the back and two sleeves.
- The neck opening is 3 1/2 cm deeper in the front than behind and is made simply by not sewing the center section and cutting away some of the front piece of fabric.
- The sleeves are fitted below the elbow, by taking in the seam so that the wrists fit tightly.
- The garment was decorated with tablet weaving along the cuffs and at the hem.
- This tunic is very easy to make.

### **Viborg Shirt: 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Century Denmark**

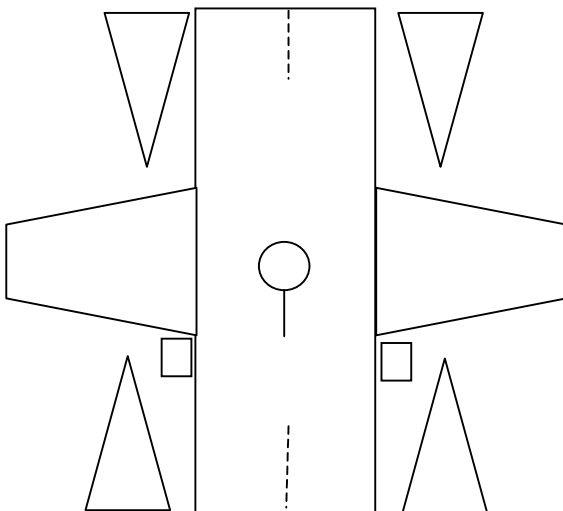


- Made of undyed linen in a plain weave
- Square neck opening with ties integrated into the edge binding.
- The torso is fully lined. The lining is made of the same material because it forms an overlap at the neck.
- The original had 8 different seam types.
- The seam along the top of the shoulders is optional.
- Each sleeve is two pieces tapering below the elbow.
- Square gussets expand the underarm area for better fit and freedom of movement.
- The front and back halves of the skirt panels overlap only at the top, and are sewn at a slight angle to drape better over the hips and provide freedom of movement.
- This tunic has an attractive tailored shape, but if your chest is larger than your waist, ensure you leave enough room in the waist to put it on over your chest.
- The original had wear marks in the center of the shirt, not at the waist or neck opening, so we believe it was not worn many times.
- This is believed to be a wedding undershirt, due to the material and the many complicated seam types

in the original garment.

- This shirt is difficult and complicated to make; I recommend that you try the pattern with low-cost material to verify the measurements.
- Contact the author for help if the layout does not make sense to you. Contact information is at the end of the document.

### **Birka Style Tunic: 8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> Century Sweden**



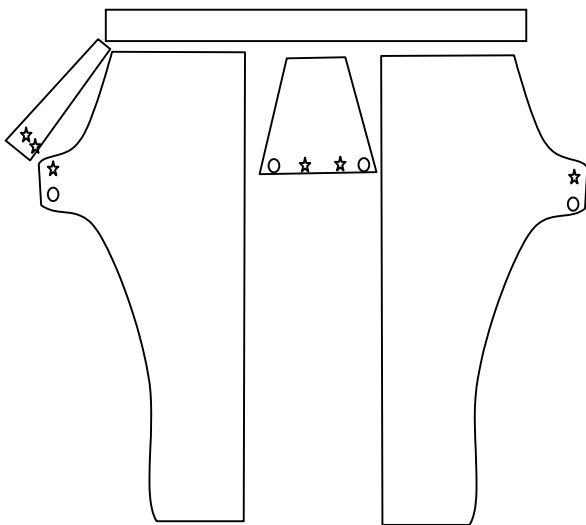
- No shoulder seams, the front and back are one piece of fabric.
- Round keyhole neck opening.
- Gussets under the arms and gores set in the sides.
- The front and back can be split for riding or left whole.(The dotted lines show the optional split in the front and back.)
- Evidence found that this pattern was used as both an undershirt and as a tunic. The difference is in the width of the cuts.
- This tunic is easy to make. The fit at the shoulders is good, and the gores make it drape nicely.

- My lord prefers this design for his undershirts.

## Trousers

There is not much evidence remaining for the Viking age trousers. We believe that the trousers in the Viking age were of two main types, the tight fitting trousers, and the very loose fitting ballon-type trousers. Two relatively intact finds are from Thorsbjerg and Damendorf. Both of these trousers are of the tight fitting variety.

### *Thorsbjerg Trousers: Migration Era Denmark*

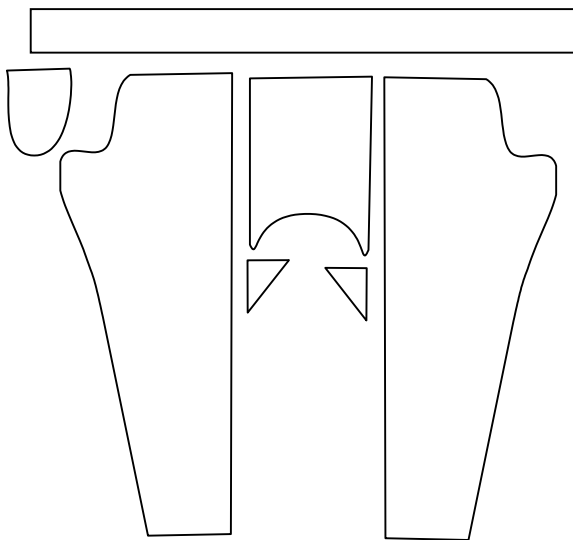


- The circles and the stars on the diagram help show how the trousers are sewn together. The design allows a great deal of space in the crotch, but they are very comfortable when sitting on the ground or riding a horse.
- These had belt loops along the top of the garment along the waist band.
- These also had attached feet like children's pajamas that I did not include in the diagram.
- They look very strange once sewn together. They do not look as strange when worn as when they are laying flat. Actually, they don't lay flat when sewn together.
- The waistband has belt loops sewn into it, and

was then designed to be turned down to conceal the belt material. Thus, a rope belt with belt loops or a drawstring would be suitable to tighten these.

- The construction of these is such that, with one extra piece of fabric, a concealed fly opening can be included. There are suggestions by archeologists that the crotch piece was tied, not sewn, but the documents I have seen do not make this clear.
- These trousers are fairly difficult to make; I recommend that you try the pattern with low-cost material to verify the measurements.
- A similar pair of trousers was found at Daetgen. The Daetgen trousers had a larger, oval crotch piece, but were otherwise similar to these.

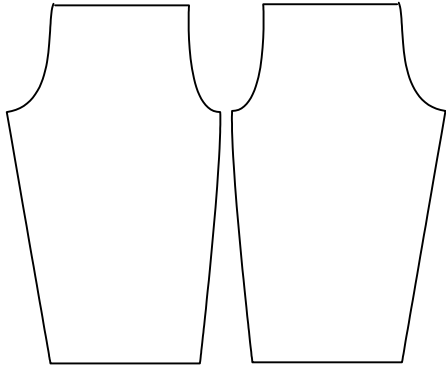
### *Damendorf Trousers*



- These are not as difficult as the Thorsbjerg trousers; there are more pieces, but the lines are more straight and easy to understand.
- The waistband has belt loops sewn into it, and was then designed to be turned down to conceal the belt material, as with the Thorsbjerg trousers.

- These trousers are fairly difficult to make; I recommend that you try the pattern with low-cost material to verify the measurements.
- There are suggestions by archeologists that the crotch piece was tied, not sewn, but the documents I have seen do not make this clear.

### **"Generic Viking" Trousers**



- For those who lack the sewing skills necessary to accomplish the above two designs, this easy design is presented for your use.
- These trousers can be cut tight to the leg, or loose, as you prefer.
- This design is suitable only for RVP Level 1, as it has no solid historical basis that I am aware of. If you can prove otherwise, let me know.
- Secure the waist with a drawstring or belt loops.

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About the Author: Isabel Ulfsdottir was born in Danish-settled Dublin, but now lives with her lord in Hedeby, during the latter years of Harald Bluetooth's reign. Managing her lord's three farms and her own beadwork shop has caused her to acquire many skills. You can meet them at <http://bjornsson.crosswinds.net> or contact them at [danr.n.isabel@juno.com](mailto:danr.n.isabel@juno.com).