

WOLF ZERKOWSKI / ROLF FUHRMANN



# Make your own medieval clothing

BASIC GARMENTS FOR MEN



Zauberfeder







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Zauberfeder



Wolf Zerkowski/Rolf Fuhrmann

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**Text:** Wolf Zerkowski

**Illustrations:** Rolf Fuhrmann

**Points/Tutuli:** Joachim Walther, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Würzburg

**Translation:** Tanja Petry

**Copy editor:** Shaunessy Ashdown

**Editor:** Miriam Buchmann-Alisch

**Art editor:** Christian Schmal

**Production:** Tara Tobias Moritzen

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Wolf Zerkowski/Rolf Fuhrmann

# Make Your Own Medieval Clothing

## Basic Garments for Men



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## PREFACE

What did the clothes of a medieval man look like? And how can someone interested in the Middle Ages sew such clothes himself? This book, with its richly illustrated and easily comprehensible instructions, presents typical men's clothing of the Middle Ages as well as corresponding sewing techniques.

The author Wolf Zerkowski has been re-enacting medieval history, with a special focus on clothes, for many years. According to his strict specifications, Rolf Fuhrmann created coloured drawings of the medieval characters and graphics for the instructions.

However, to describe the whole range of men's clothing during the Middle Ages would be an almost impossible task. The examples in this book are limited to "standard clothing" which could have been worn with few changes during the whole era of the High and Late Middle Ages, that is, from about 1200 to 1500, by men of poor and simple station as well as men of the gentry.

For further sewing projects or specific differences that have to be taken into account for regional portrayals, the reader would have to resort to further reading.

This book, revised and enhanced for the reprint, primarily contains instructions for interested hobbyists. The basic garments described can be remade with relatively little effort in terms of time, money or technical skill. We recommend buying fabrics at sales, or else to order from a wholesaler; leather scraps are available at leather shops. Also, try to avoid synthetic fibres or cotton, and you will get an acceptable garment fit for any kind of medieval event!

For those with deeper interest in medieval re-enactment, the appendix offers a list of further reading and recommendable organisations as well as sources for material and accessories of any kind.

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those who make an effort to achieve historically correct medieval re-enactment and to those who read up on the clothing of these times.

Furthermore, to my friends who share this hobby with me, and who have, over the years, helped me to collect the knowledge now found in this book.

And, of course, my family, as they often had to do without me when I was sitting in front of the PC to write.

I hope that the instructions can help all those interested in the Middle Ages, and that many can finally make the "medieval garment" they have always dreamed of.

My thanks go especially to my co-author and illustrator Rolf Fuhrmann, who turned my sometimes gruesome drafts into easily comprehensible instructions and beautiful drawings.

*Wolf Zerkowski*







## NOBLEMAN WITH FALCON c. 1300

Falconry was especially popular amongst the nobility, inspired by the famous falcon book by Emperor Frederick II. and, not least, the “Falcon Song” by von Kürenberg (*“Ich zôch mir einen valken mêre dane ein jâr, dâ ich in gezamete ...”*).

The man is wearing a burgundy-coloured cotte, made from finest woollen cloth, with tablet-woven or embroidered borders. The neck line is closed with a special, round fibula called by the German word *Fürspan*, which is surely made of precious metal. He wears his hood draped fashionably as a chaperon.

An embroidered alms purse hangs from his belt, which is decorated with metal fittings. Giving alms to the poorest was a Christian duty and was strictly practiced by the rich population – not least out of self-interest, as the recipient had to say several prayers for the donor, which secured his salvation as well as a place in paradise.

The obligatory eating knife is not missing either. As it was not common to supply guests with cutlery, you were forced to carry your own with you all the time.

The man is wearing spurs as a sign of higher nobility. Both his pose and his clothing clearly show his gentility.

## BEGGAR c. 1300 – a begging war invalid

The Middle Ages, on the one hand, followed the ancient tradition that poverty was stigmatised and poor people were looked down upon. On the other hand, the New Testament reversed this ancient judgement by often criticising wealth heavily and praising charity (*caritas*) as a Christian virtue.

The roles of the poor and the rich were largely defined by medieval belief. The rich were meant to give alms. The poor, as a gift in return, prayed for the salvation of the donors, as their prayers were said to be particularly effective. The gift returned to the sinner depended upon the value of the donation. For example, if the sinner gave a lot, generous beggars prayed whole rosaries for him; if he gave only a little, the beggar would often call out “Heaven repay you”.

Poor were all those who, in contrast to the “strong”, did not have physical strength or social power and could not defend themselves with a weapon. This included the

old, the poor, the handicapped, widows, orphans and prisoners, but also foreigners and pilgrims. Caring for the poor was traditionally left to monasteries. Beginning in the High Middle Ages, however, they reached the end of their economic capacities and threatened to sink into poverty themselves. The poverty movement of the High Middle Ages and the related “revolution of *caritas*” caused the foundations of new institutions around 1200: hospitals, quarantine houses, workhouses and leper colonies that disengaged more and more from churches and monasteries. Civil foundations contributed to a municipalisation of welfare.

This poor man is wearing the essential coife made of undyed linen. The flat wooden bowl is the beggar’s bowl. The picture shows a penniless man typical of the entire Middle Ages.

Comprehensive pictures and evidence for the coife can be found in the *Codex Manesse*, in Heidelberg.



## DOMINICAN c. 1360

**D**ominicans wore a white, girded tunic with a white scapular and a black hooded cloak. “White” in this case means the colour of natural, undyed wool from light-coloured sheep. Black could, because of dying techniques, rather have been a dark brown.

The Dominican order was founded in 1214 by the Spaniard Dominikus Guzman from Caleruega. Together with other preachers he worked against the heresy of the Catharists in southern France, and there he discovered his enormous gift for preaching. The centres of the missionary activities were sermons and the fight against the heretics. The Curia entrusted the Dominicans with the leadership of the Inquisition, which developed more and more towards a means of deploying the political power of the Catholic Church during the end of the Middle Ages. Because of their workings during the

Inquisition, the Dominicans were, in a play of words, sometimes called *Dominicanes*, the “tracking hounds of the Lord”.

It was only after Dominikus’ death that the goals of the order developed: a life of poverty and obedience according to monastery rules, and a life as a travelling priest following Jesus’ example.

In 1205, even before the foundation of the male order, Dominikus founded the female branch, which calls itself the *Second Order*. In 1220 he founded the Soldiers of Jesus Christ, a layman movement meant to protect parochial possessions against attacks from Albigensians and other religious innovators. Towards the end of the 13th century the members of this branch united with another layman group to form the *Third Order*, the Tertiaries.

## WOODSMAN c. 1200

**T**o counter poaching and wood theft, monasteries and lieges deployed game keepers or woodsmen to protect their forests. Not everybody was allowed to hunt in the forest, and there were rigorous punishments for disregarding these laws.

Our woodsman is wearing simple, functional clothing in natural colours. To have a better field of vision, his hood is rolled back from the face. The dead bird is part of his pay.

Medieval forests were actually still a remainder of the old primeval forest. In contrast to later thinned monocultures,

the forest was used for various purposes by the peasant population. It delivered firewood, timber and raw wood and was used as wood pasture for cattle twice a year. The peasants used beechnuts and acorns for pig fattening, foliage as litter for stables, gathered mushrooms, seasoning and medicinal herbs and much more.

Normally a kind of forestry was practised in which every 20 to 30 years the trees in a parcel of land were felled and the wood used as fuel. In faraway and less accessible forests, only single trees were coppiced, a very ecologically compatible practice in which a tree is cut just above the ground.







## PATTERNS

An easy way of transferring patterns to your own measurements is copying the respective parts of your everyday clothes to either the fabric or pattern paper. Before transferring your body measurements to the desired fabric and cutting it, you should first make a test cut with newspaper sheets or cheap fabric, to be on the safe side. Once this sample fits well, the pattern can be transferred to the proper material. Using authentic fabrics for your garments is by no means cheap, and sometimes even acquiring the fabrics is not easy. When cutting the pattern, a seam allowance of about 1.5 centimetres should be kept in mind.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

Unpleasant surprises can be avoided by washing the fabric once before transferring the pattern and cutting it. With this the fabric will shrink at once – and not after the garment is finished!

## SEWING TECHNIQUE

A large number of very complicated stitches are documented for the Middle Ages. The quality of workmanship on the garments was very good. Stitching was sometimes so fine that it would not have been distinguishable from that of a sewing machine. To be precise, besides the total regularity of the stitches, the difference with a machine is – if you want to carry authenticity to extremes – that it sews with a top thread *and* a bobbin thread simultaneously.

We will present you with an easy hem seam as well as a joining seam, both of which will be sufficient for an authentic approach.

## LINING

Lining the garments didn't become common until the Late Middle Ages, and linen was used for it. Generally speaking, garments don't need to be lined at all. It was in no way common, as lining was so precious it was sometimes even handed down on its own, without the garment.

## PARTI-COLOUR

A popular feature in medieval re-enactment are garments divided in halves, or quarters, with contrasting colours, which are often a part of relevant Hollywood movies and especially worn by jesters and jugglers.

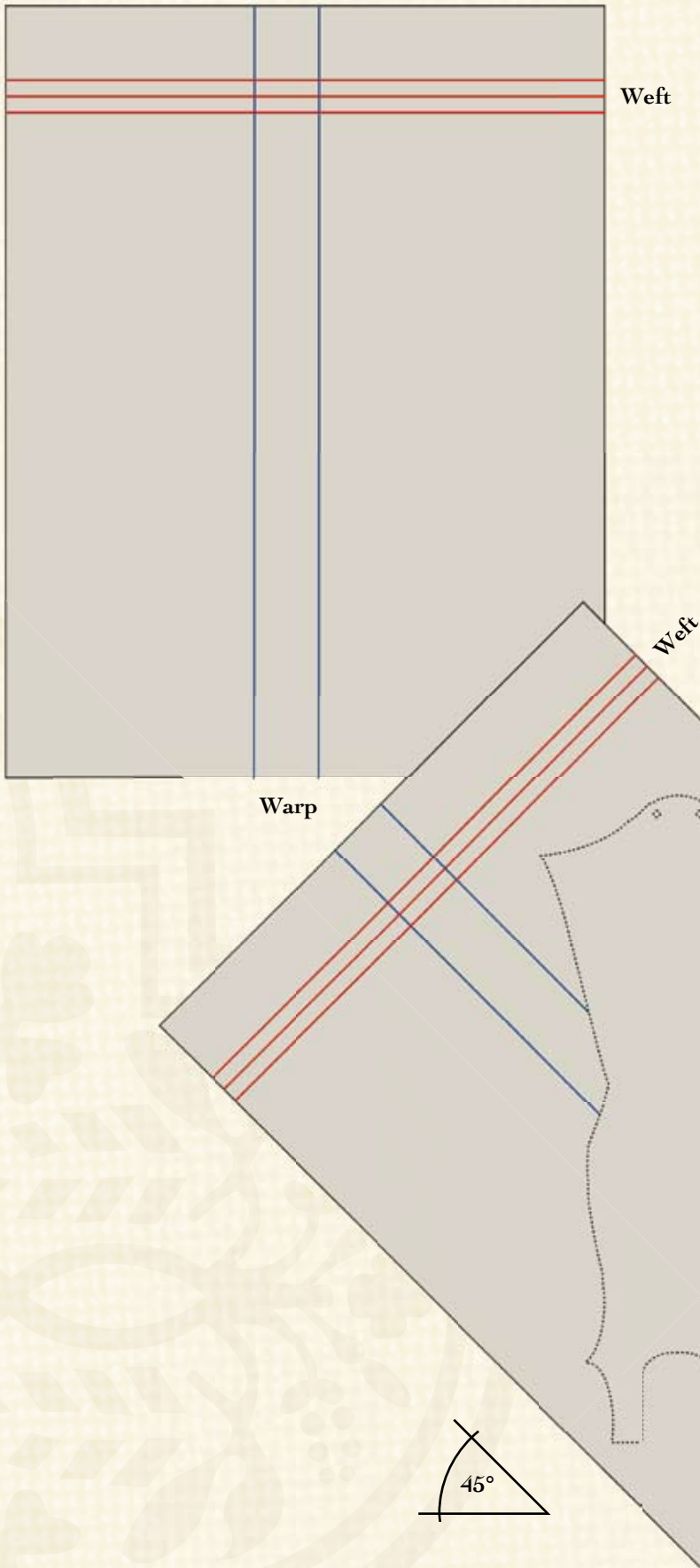
This clothing, called parti-colour, is surely quite decorative, but only came into fashion in a courtly environment around 1500. During the Middle Ages, parti-colour garments had one colour that covered the entire side of a person's body (see picture). Parti-colour clothing was a mark of serfs that were in the service of some master.



*Parti-colour scheme*



## STRETCHABILITY using the example of the hose



For making the hose, you should choose a stretchable fabric, as they should fit your leg tightly, but on the other hand the calf has to fit through the narrower knee area. Woollen fabrics, however, are generally quite inflexible. The warp threads that go through the whole length of the fabric are just as inductile as the weft threads crossing them. “Warp” is what a weaver calls the threads attached to the loom, forming the frame for the woven fabric. “Weft” is the crossing thread, which is “shot” through the warp threads with the shuttle.

However, if you turn the fabric by 45° before cutting it, so that warp and weft run diagonally, you will get a surprisingly stretchable fabric lengthwise as well as in cross direction!

Apart from the hose, medieval clothing was cut very wide and comfortable, and gathered with a belt or band.



## BRAIES

The braies as well are made of unbleached linen. They were worn inside the hose as underpants as well as separately without any outer garments, if work or climate made this seem practical. The half-open legs of the braies were, in this case, tied up in different ways or wound around the legs.

First, two pieces are made from unbleached linen according to the picture.

The base for the braies is two identical cuts (figure 1). The measures vary, of course, according to the individual measurements. The waistband length should roughly be twice the hip circumference, so that it can be gathered later on (see pictures).

It should reach below the knee (figure 2). The crotch breadth  $S$  is about 10 to 20 cm.

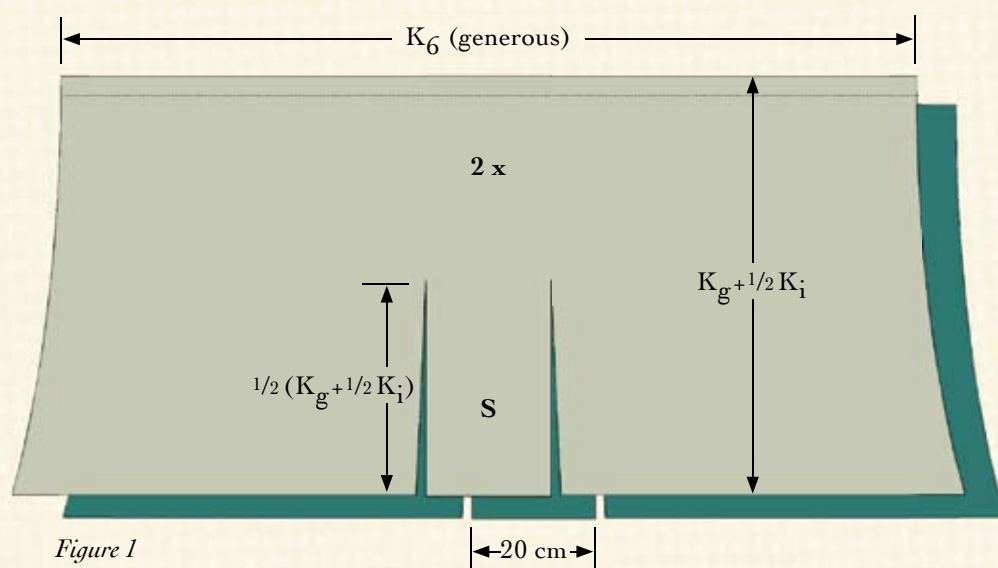


Figure 1

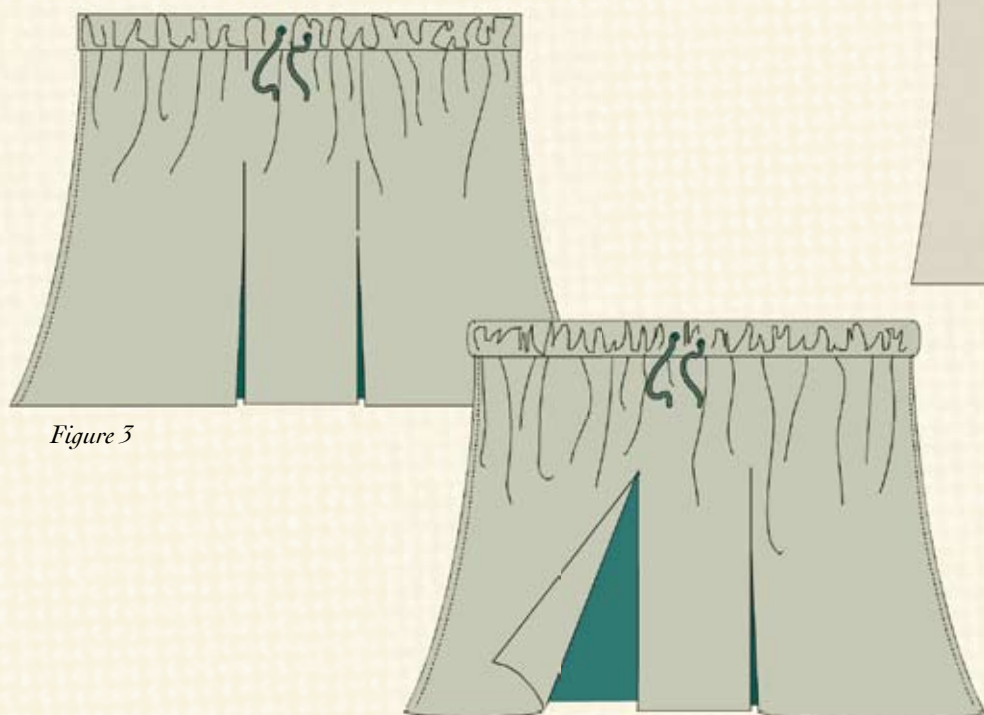


Figure 3

Figure 4

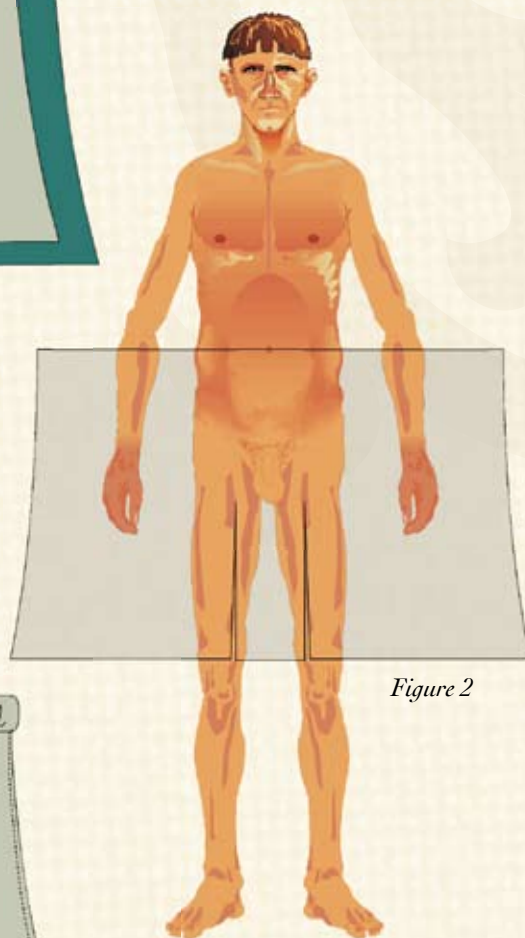


Figure 2



Figure 1: roll down the upper edge as a waistband to form a “tunnel”. The fastening band is later pulled through this tunnel.

Then sew together the outer edges of the two pieces (figure 3). The inside edges of the legs stay open and are not stitched to the crotch piece S (figure 4)! Sew together the two middle pieces S, which form the crotch, only with their respective lower edges (figures 5 and 6). Now you have a pair of “trousers” with open, knee-length legs!

There were different ways of preventing the loose-hanging cloth (figure 7) from flapping around when not worn inside hose. They could be tied up with string (figure 8). Alternatively they were wound around the leg with knotted ends or rolled up and secured by tucking them in (figure 9).

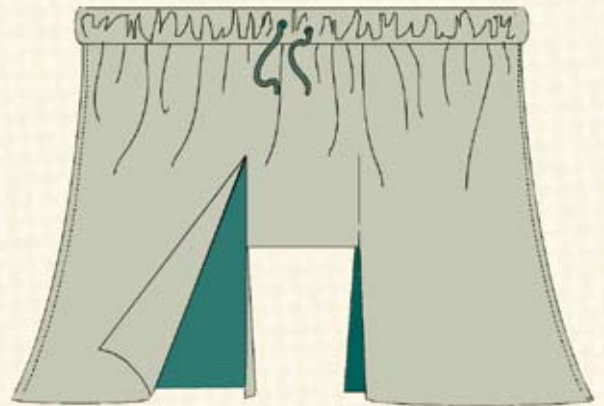


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



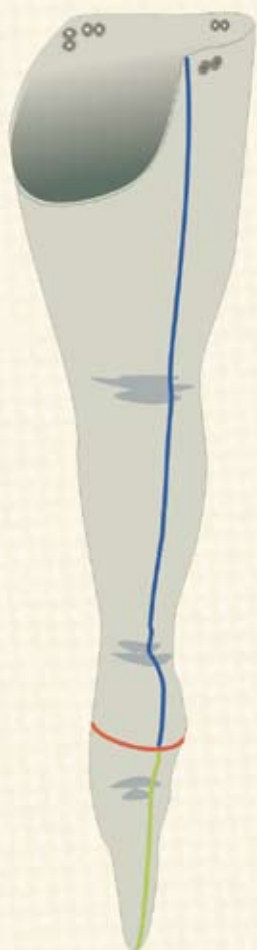


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 7: Sewing the pieces together is most easily done in the following order: first the blue seam, then the green one and afterwards the red one.

Figure 8 shows how the foot part is adjusted.

Attachment (lacing) of the hose to the waistcoat (see figures 9, 10 and 11). Please keep an eye on the direction in which you lace the agilets. The option pictured here (through the doublet or waistcoat from front to back, through the hose from back to front) insures that the two pieces of clothing overlap when fastened, instead of the hems knocking against each other!

Figures 10 and 11 show two different length options for the hose and waistcoat. Figure 10 shows the earlier way of wearing them, with a longer waistcoat und shorter hose (with or without leather soles), from around 1370/80.



Figure 10

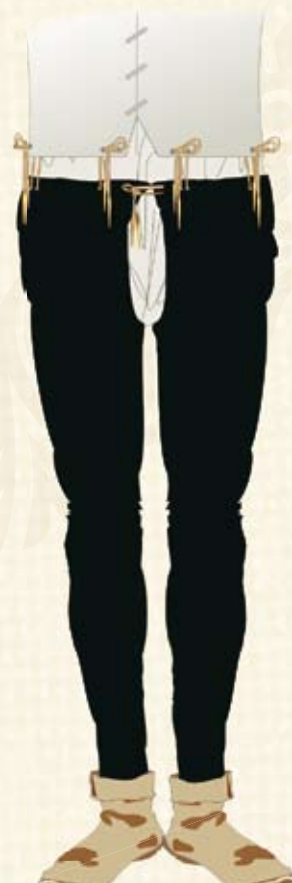


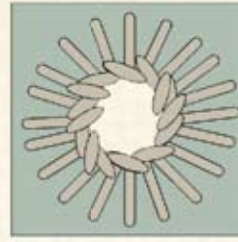
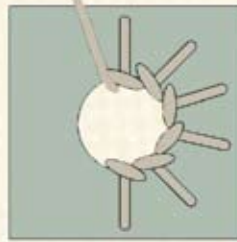
Figure 11



## AGILET HOLES

Above right: stitching of agilet holes (these instructions relate to the London findings from Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450).

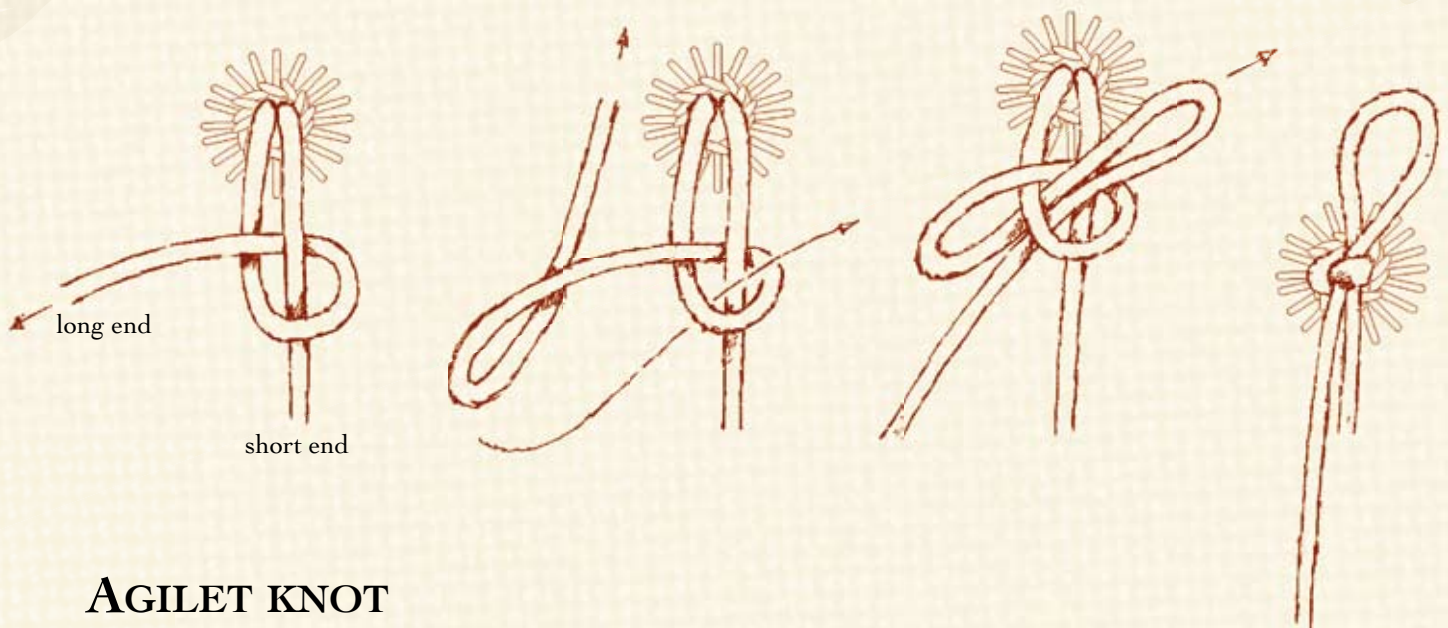
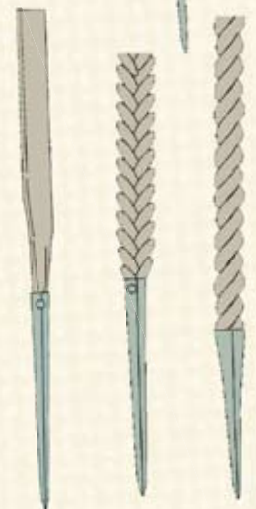
It is especially important not to punch the holes, but to only pierce the fabric with a pointed object and then stitch around the hole. This makes the agilet holes a lot more durable.



## AGILETS

Right: agilets can either be braided wool or tablet-woven bands. You should stay away from modern cords bought in department stores!

To make points, see the chapter "Points". Instead of a "modern" bow, a knot as in the picture above is used.



## AGILET KNOT

The step-by-step drawing above shows how an agilet knot is done. The advantage of this knot: it fastens automatically due to the pull of the

attached pieces of clothing. By pulling on the short end the knot is fastened, by pulling the long end it opens easily.



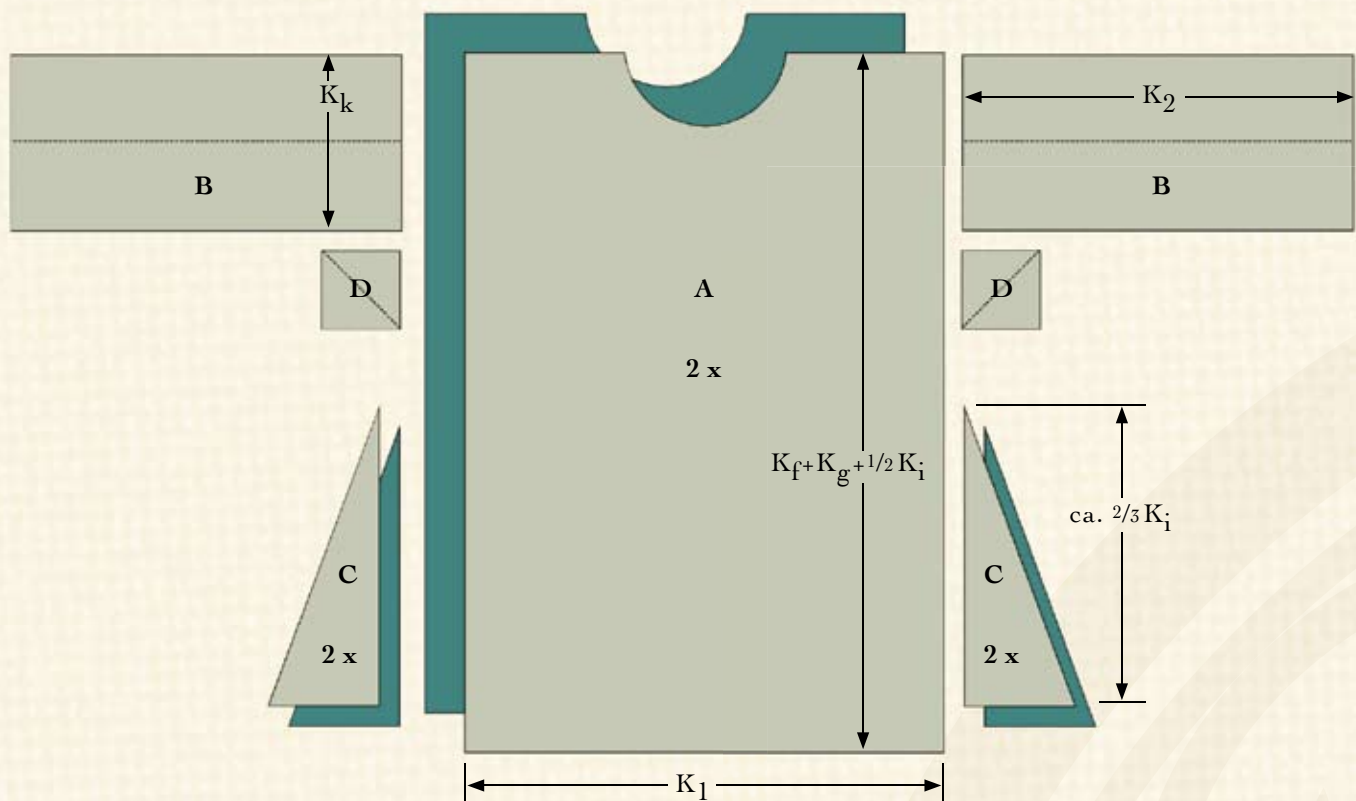
## TUNIC/COTTE

Above the braies, men wore a frock-like piece of clothing, which is often called a tunic. However, the proper term is *cotte*. During the High Middle Ages (about 1200 to 1350) this cotte was floor-length; in the Late Middle Ages (about 1350 to 1500) it generally reached down to the knees. But the knee-length version was already worn by the simple folk during the High Middle Ages, as “floor-length” was hindering to work. The cotte was either made of wool or of linen for the summer, though this latter type was rare. It was given a waist with a belt. On this belt one fastened an alms purse, a pouch and/or an eating knife, as there were no pockets.

**Material:** woollen cloth or loden. You can also use linen for the summer, but this was rather rare.

**Cut:** two big rectangles (A) for the front and back pieces; the measurements are defined by the shoulder length and the distance from shoulder to knee for length. For the High Middle Ages variant, it can be lengthened to the ankles, as at least wealthy people wore a fairly long cotte.

You need two smaller rectangles (B) for the sleeves, for which you take the arm length and upper arm circumference as measurements, two large triangles (C) to widen the cotte slightly, and two small rectangles as gussets beneath the armpits (D), to insure more arm room. The measurements vary, of course, and have to be taken individually!





## POURPOINT

The name is derived from French: *pour pointe* means “for the tip” and refers to the upper hem, or the top, of the leg wear, in this case.

The development of the pourpoint began in the second quarter of the 14th century and probably originated in the necessity to find possibilities of fastening the newly-emerging leg protection of the armour.

It was originally worn underneath a gambeson. The form is roughly that of a sleeveless cotehardie and has widely cut arm openings, to insure a maximum amount of mobility.

Linen or very thin wool served as material, as a pourpoint worn underneath armour was not meant to be bulky. It was cut tightly and close-fitting, especially at the hip. Because of that the pull of the attached leg protection spread at the hips instead of affecting the shoulders.

As it often happened in medieval fashion, this originally “military” piece of clothing quickly found its way into civil fashion, as you couldn’t only attach leg protection to it, but also hose, which made a belt or band around the braies unnecessary and led to much more comfort for civil clothing as well.

In civil fashion, the form changed so much that the pourpoint was, in time, only a short waistcoat, solely used to attach high hose to it. From these high hose, completely closed trousers developed.

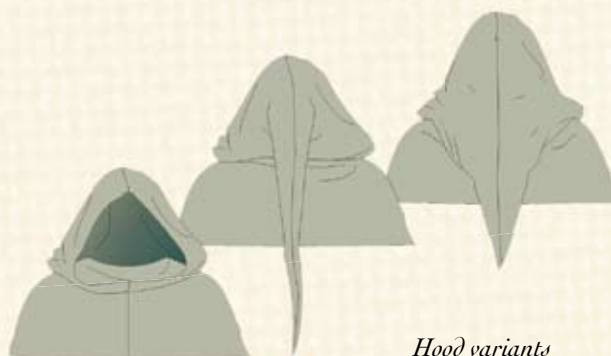
The cut presented here is just one example of many possibilities. The development of the length, the size of the arm openings and so on had great variety.







*Figure 1: frock with attached hood*



*Hood variants*



*Figure 2: man in plain frock*



*Figure 3: frock with scapular; the scapular is the same length in the back as in the front; sleeves are rolled up*



*Figure 4: hood with wide collar over frock and scapular*



*Figure 5: hooded coat variant over frock*



*Figure 6: hooded coat variant over frock*



## POINTS/TUTULI

he who “lives” in the Middle Ages and prefers clothing as authentic as possible will have to close one piece or another with laces or cords. Those cords, also called *agilets*, often have metal tips on the end to prevent them from fraying and to make them easier to thread. Tips of polished brass, bronze or silver can, in addition, seem very decorative, even like a piece of jewellery.

Unfortunately these tips, also called *points* or, as derived from Latin, *tutuli*, are quite hard to come by. The main reason is that the effort of making them is much higher than the profit one can expect.

Even a professional needs more than 15 minutes to make just one point, and if the maximum price he can ask for is two or three Euros, he will most likely decide against it.

Because of this problem, some “makeshifts” disfigure many garments instead of improving them. The easiest way to avoid this is to make points yourself. It is not as difficult as it seems, and can be done on most kitchen tables.

The necessary tools can be found in most households and do not have to be bought additionally.

## TOOLS

- plate shears or a pair of strong household scissors
- a small hammer of about 150 to 250 grams. One striking face should be as pointed as possible.
- a file with fine teeth
- a bit of sandpaper and fine steel wool
- drawing material like a pencil, ruler and so on
- large adhesive labels

- For annealing the parts you can, for example, use a soldering iron, a gas camping stove or a gas cooker. Suitable only to a limited extent are bigger candles as well as alcohol burners or burning cubes and pots for fondues with burning paste. The latter have the advantage of not sooting the pieces.
- A small steel block or anvil on which we can pound. It doesn't have to be that big, as our work pieces won't be longer than a few centimetres.
- For sound deadening reasons, an old, folded towel on the table can be used, which might save you bother with the neighbours.

## PREPARATION OF THE SUPPORTING EQUIPMENT

- a power drill with 3 mm and 5 mm bits or a set of bits starting from 1 mm
- a 90 degree counterbore
- a metal saw

## MATERIAL

- a nail with a diameter of about 4 mm
- a small iron plate or metal strip with a thickness of 5 to 10 mm
- one or two small wooden blocks, preferably beech or oak – maybe also a screw clamp if you use two blocks



## PREPARATION OF THE IRON PLATES

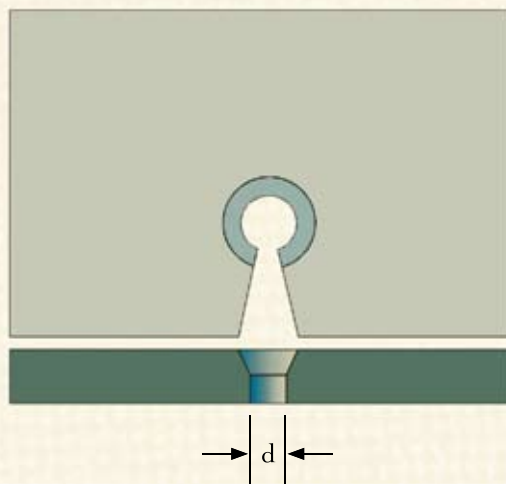
Drill a hole according to the thickness of the cord, about one centimetre from the plate's edge (measurement d). In this case, d equals 3 mm. The drill-hole is then counter-bored to roughly twice the size to form a funnel.

In case you don't have a counterbore, a bigger drill can be used for this. But as regular drills have a flat acute angle, it needs to be sharpened first. Such

drills often "clatter", and the desired counterbore becomes irregular and rough. This can be avoided by first making the counterbore and then the smaller drill-hole.

From the edge, a slit as wide as the drill-hole is sawn.

Of course any sharp edges need to be smoothed with the file. If the plate is big enough, you can drill several holes with different diameters for varying cord thicknesses.



## PREPARATION OF THE WOODEN BLOCK

For this, drill a number of holes into one of the sides. If you want to make points with different diameters, just use different-sized drills. Then saw the block apart exactly in the middle of the holes to get halved drill-holes (variant 1). They will be used to start bending the points.

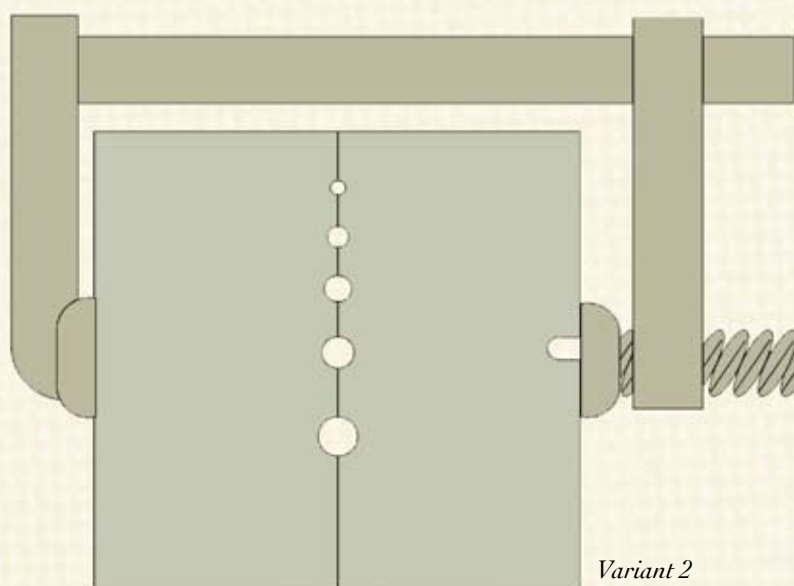
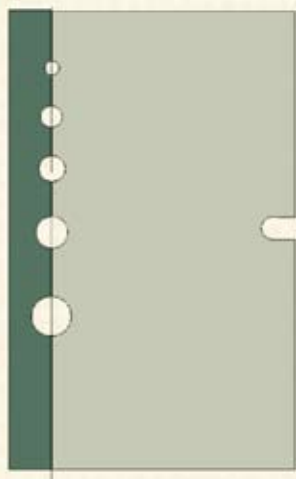
If you don't want to saw, just team two blocks with a screw clamp and drill exactly at the joint. This will leave you

with two identical blocks, which can be an advantage, as the blocks will not last forever (variant 2).

Another hole is drilled on the other side of the block – this, as with the iron plate, about 1 cm from the edge – and slit just like the iron plate.

It doesn't need to be counter-bored. This hole serves as passage for the cord.

*Variant 1*



*Variant 2*



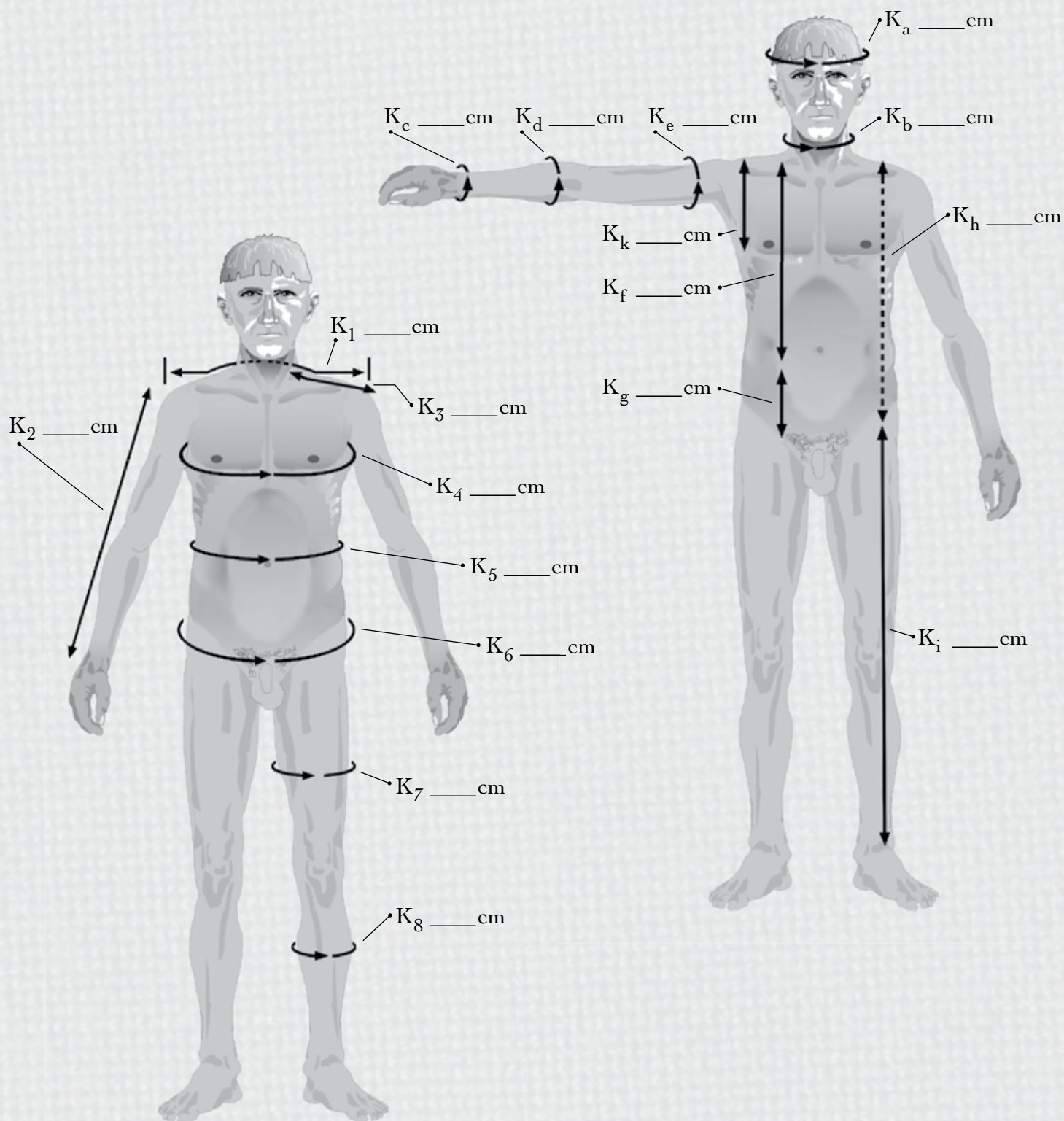
# BODY MEASUREMENT CHART

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_

Height: \_\_\_\_\_ cm

Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ kg





To be dressed historically correct as a medieval re-enactor – it could not be simpler. The range of garments that those interested in the Middle Ages can now make themselves stretches from the High to Late Middle Ages (1200 to 1500), and from a common beggar to lower gentry.

Panels with lifelike, coloured illustrations revive the different medieval classes through their clothing and accessories. Clear, easily understandable pictures lead you through all the processes.

Starting with the sewing techniques used in the Middle Ages even the layman learns how to neaten fabric edges, attach sleeves and make cords with metal points.

*“The book satisfies with a large number of details and an abundance of variations on the individual garments and accessories.”*

*Pax Et Gaudium, 2004*

*“The illustrations by Rolf Fuhrman, at times quite individualistic, make this book a genuine pleasure.”*

*Silvia Ungerechts, Tempus-vivit.net, 2005*

