

## A Woman's Anglo-Saxon Garments, 450-650c.e., England



### Overview

The reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon apparel from the 5th to 7th centuries is based on burial finds from the north-eastern part of the British Continent with supplemental information from France and the Germanic areas from which the tribes originated before the migration. The costume is based on pre-Christian burials where the decorative elements and accessories tend to be more elaborate and ornate than the Christian counterparts. “There is extensive evidence about the costume of Anglo-Saxon women in the fifth and sixth centuries. It is distinct from the clothing of later periods and this costume, more than any other form of Anglo-Saxon dress, lends itself to illustration and reconstruction.” (Owen-Crocker, 36) For the sake of authenticity all attempts are made for a more accurate portrayal of the garments. Therefore, all sewing will be performed by hand with thread spun by team members. Tablet weaving is made from home-spun, dyed (using natural materials) linen and wool. For the sake of time and budget constraints period appropriate fabric was store bought.

### Under Tunic

As many burial sites no longer contain the fabric clothing worn by the individual, remnants occasionally remain on the backs of brooches and pins from which we can derive many concepts of what was worn by referencing artwork from the period and from burial sites from contemporary sources. “The long sleeved under dress would have tight-fitting sleeves, ending with a wide band of tablet weaving and commonly fastened at the wrist with a metal clasp. Textiles under the brooches tell us that the under dress could be linen or wool, twill or tabby.” (Anachronist, 22-23) There is evidence for either a keyhole opening or maybe a boat neck opening. (Rogers 155) “Many graves have clasps at the

wrists, suggesting that a narrow-sleeved tunic was worn beneath the gown. The clasps are distinctively Saxon.” (Ipsley, 66)

The layout of the gown includes side gores, center front and back gores and square underarm gussets. Straight cuts are used along the main body of the dress, shoulders and sleeves. Cutting a tapered sleeve with a slit from the wrist to half way up the forearm in order to create a tight-fitting sleeve with clasps and tablet weave at the wrists.

### **Tablet Woven Cuffs**

“The cuffs of the gown are occasionally made from folded textile...but generally they are tablet-woven and elaborate patterning is more common here than on the border of the peplos...Linen cuffs were usually found on linen sleeves and wool on wool. The cuff-band is stitched to the sleeve edge and raw end folded back under the clasp and stitched down, before the clasp is stitched in place.” (Walton Rogers, 156) Hand spun linen was used originally in a diagonal card pattern, but too many warp threads were being lost in the process. The warp was converted into a warp-faced tabby weave also known as inkle weaving so that the over-twisting of the threads was eliminated. This resulted in a wavy line pattern. The linen was dyed using blackberries as the dyestuffs, and alum and tannin as the mordants.

### **Wrist Clasps**

The copper alloy clasps are hand formed. “In England the most common variant is B7, made of a simple pair of sheet-metal rectangular plates, often with repousse ornament...” (Walton Rogers, 123) “Since the undergarment is the only item of female clothing from this date known to have sleeves, the little metal fasteners known to Anglo-Saxon archeologists as wrist clasps were probably attached to this garment...it is clear that wrist clasps were predominantly an Anglian fashion.” (Owen-Crocker, 56)

### **Peplos Overdress**

“Matching pairs of brooches at the shoulder suggest that Anglian women wore the peplos-style overdress. We have no archaeological confirmation of whether the gown was tubular or open-sided, but artistic representations from the Continent show a tubular gown, and an extremely well preserved Iron Age tubular gown was found in a peat bog at Huldremose, Denmark, not far from the Anglians’ homeland” (Migration from northern Germany to the Suffolk area of England in the fifth century) Given the Germanic origin of the Anglo-Saxon heritage it is not unreasonable to assume that they may have used the Warp-Weighted loom as opposed to the Upright Loom and therefore would have a side seam along the peplos. Loom weights have been present in Anglo-Saxon sites. (Walton Rogers, 30) Whereas the Upright Loom would create a continuous tube of fabric, the Warp-Weighted Loom creates a long rectangle.

The wearing of the peplos uses the selvedge edge at the top and bottom of the dress. “An early Scandinavian example survives and is displayed in the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen. This garment, which was recovered from the peat bog of Huldremose, probably dates from the first centuries AD. It consists of a tube of fabric 1.68 m long and 2.64 m in circumference and has been displayed as a gown long enough to be pouched over a belt or arranged with a cape effect at the shoulders.” (Owen-Crocker, 43) The artwork of the time gives no indication of an extra fold of cloth hanging

from the top, therefore the tablet band along the top of the peplos will serve as reinforcement for the brooches securing the gown.

### **Tablet Band on Peplos**

“The shoulder brooches often preserved a tablet woven band along the upper edge of the gown. Analysis has shown that this edging could either be sewn on or woven into the fabric as a starting border.”(Anachronist, 23) “The tablet band was usually plain but sometimes patterned and could be wool or linen, irrespective of the material of the gown.”(Walton Rogers, 146) A plain brown wool tablet band reinforces the wool fabric of the peplos in this example.

### **Brooches**

“Brooches are most often found impairs at either side of the upper part of the body of female skeletons..... In the overwhelming majority of cases, excavators describe theses as being found ‘at the shoulders’ or ‘at the clavicles’, though there are variations in the terminology used by excavators and evidently the precise arrangement of the brooches differed at individual sites and in individual graves.” (Owen-Crocker, 42) “The peplos was worn throughout the area of Anglo-Saxon settlement, although it was clasped with different brooches in different region. Annular brooches dominate Region 1 from Durham to Norfolk (78% of all shoulder brooches in Region 1 are annular)...” (Walton Rogers, 144) See Map in Appendices Annular brooches are constructed from a copper alloy.

### **Stockings**

No examples survive from Anglo-Saxon England however, the Arnegunde burial (end of 6th century at Saint-Denis near Paris) shows a lady wearing... “lightweight ankle-shoes with ornate clasps, stockings of woven linen and some form of gartering between the knee and ankle.” (Walton Rogers, 185-6) A Romano-Gaulish woman from the Martres-de-Veyre, Paris. The burial shows stockings made of a two-piece construction. The sock was sewn as a tube sewn up the back for the leg and a one-piece wedge for the foot with a seam running along the bottom of the foot. It is fringed at the top and possible evidence of garters (though none remain). (Goubitz, 359)

### **Trews**

There are no surviving examples of underwear from this period. However, due to the nature of the area becoming quite cold during the winter months and the nature of the female body and its cycles, we can surmise that a protective layer would have been worn between the skin and the finely woven under dress. Using period techniques of a square gusset for fit and comfort a pair of linen trews is included in this recreation. The thread is hand spun.

### **Belt**

The belt is woven of wool (hand spun and dyed) in a pattern of extent threaded-in tablet weave. (See Bibliography and Appendices) “...there is usually some indication that a belt or girdle was worn. There is sometimes a buckle at waist or hip, but more often the evidence is provided by objects found near the pelvis or thighs of the skeleton, which had

almost certainly been attached to a belt.” (Walton Rogers, ?) “Tablet-weave is sometimes preserved on girdle attachment, for example on a key from Ipswich, Suffolk and possibly on girdle hangers at Barrington A.” (Owen-Crocker, 63)

### **Ring Pouch**

“Though once thought to have been suspension rings or bracelets...these (ivory rings) are now generally interpreted as pouch frames.” (Owen-Crocker, 69) With the absence of ivory rings, we substituted a metal ring for the pouch opening. The leather is hand stitched to the ring and straps are added so as to suspend the pouch from the belt.

### **Shoes**

A shoe from Oberflacht, Southern Germany, made as a Gillie- like shoe with strips gathered around the toe and laced, was dated by dendrochronology ca 580 c.e. However, shoes from Scotland dated between 589-630 c.e. are low, one-piece shoes with a wide instep and seams at the front and heel. The front seam is formed by pulling the leather together in a dozen small folds covering the toes. The shoes from Ireland and the Netherlands closely resemble the shoes from Scotland.(Goubitz, 390-393) A decision was made to use the examples from the neighbouring designs of Scotland, and Ireland for the shoe design on the basis of trade, and the rainy nature of the British Isles not lending to an open design for shoes.

### **Cloak**

Statues of the period show rectangular cloaks ranging from small shoulder-capes to long, full ones. The brooch could be found at the center of the chest or at one shoulder. (Anachronist, 24) The small-long brooch was used to fasten the cloak at Grave 12 at Sewerby of a course twill. (Owen-Crocker, 71) The Small-long brooch forged of copper alloy is used to fasten the cloak. Embroidery of herringbone is sewn along the sides and is used to reinforce seams and decorate the edge.

### **Jewellery**

The festoons of beads between the brooches are glass beads using similar designs and shapes found at Anglo-Saxon burial sites, and strung on a linen thread. “Wealthy Anglian women sometimes fastened festoons of beads between the shoulder brooches.” Mainly the beads are of glass and amber strung randomly. Bead necklaces were rarer than bead festoons. (Anachronist, 24) “The two main classes of bead, blue glass and amber, were often combined in the same string with a range of monochrome and polychrome glass beads.” (Walton Rogers, 128) “For women, Saxon dress changes dramatically with the conversion to Christianity. Pagan graves commonly show large brooches on each collarbone, and festoons of beads connecting them.” (Ipsley, 65)

### **Hair/ Veil**

As there is no definitive evidence as to the arrangement of the hair or head coverings for the pre-Christian woman of the Anglo-Saxon persuasion the decision was made to leave the hair in a loose plait covered by a linen veil. “In short, any construction of the hair and headdress for this period is based on guesswork and no reconstruction should be considered authoritative. The best we can do is to compare continental and later

archeological finds, and images from art, to suggest some possibilities.” The Sutton Hoo ship burial shows bare-headed, with hair drawn back off the face. “Germanic women on Roman sculptures sometimes wear the hair unbound, draped by a loose veil.” (Owen-Crocker, 79) “In Regions 1 and 2 it is extremely common to find a lightweight linen tabby on the front of Brooches on the shoulders and upper chest.” (Walton Rogers, 157)

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