



This is, to me, the most fascinating period for historical clothing. The transition from rectangular construction to fitted, fairly modern, techniques was in its infancy, very exciting times for a costumer. To truly understand the clothing of this period, its patterns and design, it is recommended that one have an understanding of rectangular construction and how bias works. This is from personal experience. I took a two year sabbatical away from 14<sup>th</sup> century clothing to learn in depth about rectangular construction and every minute was worth it. I return to my first clothing love with a renewed excitement to try out some of my new ideas.

There is no way to cover the finer details of this period in a four hour class. This is an overview of the basic garments and accessories with a good look at patterns and construction techniques.

My favorite block of time in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is, bar none, the time of the Luttrell Psalter, c.1338. No one knows exactly what year this work was completed but it is agreed that it took several years to do so and that it was in the decade of 1330. This is the time I will concentrate on.

## STOCKINGS AND GARTERS

Stockings for women and men were sewn from woven fabrics. While several techniques existed such as naalbinding and knitting, the socks found so far in graves and refuge dumps for this time period were constructed from woven fabric, usually linen or wool. Silk would not be unthinkable. The leg of the stocking was cut on the bias to give the most stretch across the breadth of the calf. There are several pattern types for stockings but I wear the socks that have no seam on the bottom of the foot. In winter for extra warmth, one could wear two pairs of stockings, one linen and the other wool.

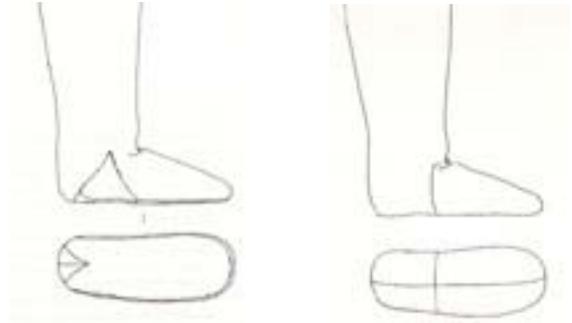


fig 1 & 2 Museum of London: Shoes and Pattens

One of the main things to remember when making stockings out of woven fabric is to cut the leg and top of the foot on the bias. (note the arrows on the pattern piece in the pattern section) When you cut on the bias the fabric stretches and flexes to the movement and shape of your leg.

Bias is the cross grain of fabric and is at a 45 degree angle from the warp or the weft of the weave. Cut a square of fabric, any woven fabric, along the weave threads and grasp opposite sides and pull. There is a resistance and very little stretch. Now take opposite corners of the square in your hands and pull. The fabric stretches and puckers across the center. Pretty cool. Wool tends to be stretchier than linen and silk

Stockings typically came up over the knee and were tied securely with a garter below the knee. It is much more comfortable to have the garter between the knee and the top of the calf and it also rests more securely at this narrow portion of the leg.

Garters could be as simple as a strip of wool or linen tied in a knot. There is evidence for many other types of garters as well. Woven strips of wool with integral fringe, card woven bands either tied or buckled on, and leather strips with buckles are all appropriate for garters. The most important part is that they hold up the stocking without cutting off circulation.

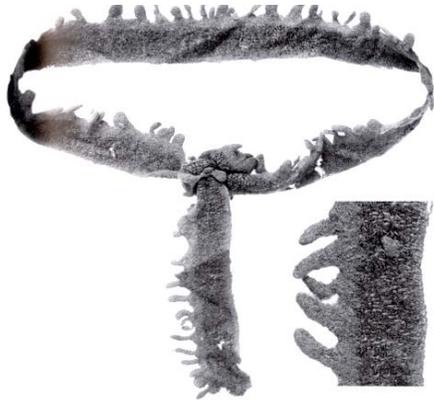


fig 3. garters Museum of London: Textiles and Clothing

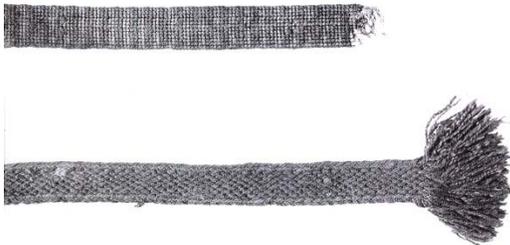


fig 4 garters? Museum of London: Textiles and Clothing

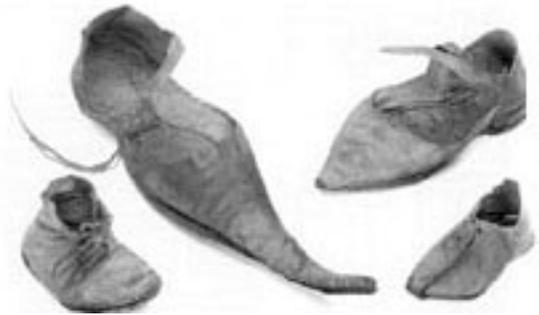


fig 5 Museum of London: Shoes and Pattens

The shoes were constructed in the turn-shoe method. The shoe would be sewn together inside out, either on a last or not, and once completed, turned right side out.

Shoes were made of leather, top and sole. This meant that you would feel every rock in the road and your shoes would be ruined in mud or wet. A thick layer of felt inside might cushion to some extent but not enough for complete comfort. To lengthen the life of the shoe an item called a patten would be worn over the shoe out of doors, especially in inclement weather. There are several different ways to construct pattens. Some were just a slab of wood with notches cut out of the bottom to ease walking. Some were cut to the shape of the foot with hinges at the ball of the foot to give even greater ease (fig 2).



fig 6 Museum of London: Shoes and Pattens

## SHOES AND PATTENS

Shoes were typically made of leather although there are some sumptuary laws from the 12-13<sup>th</sup> century that say that the peasants must only wear leather shoes. The implication is that some shoes were made of rich textiles. I have yet to find any extant proof of this for the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Shoes varied in style depending on the year worn and the class of the wearer. The later in the century the more pointed the toe became. Some shoes were cut very low with little straps across the insteps. Some shoes were more like little ankle boots lacing or latched at the upper instep (fig 1). There is an extant boot that comes up to about mid-calf and laces up the sides. The leather could be dyed or painted, etched, cut-put, or embroidered. Naturally special treatment of the shoes was more practical to the upper classes.

## UNDERCLOTHING

The shifts and shirts (chemise/French, camisia/Italian), were worn by everyone, male and female alike. The best reason for this, besides having it providing a certain amount of modesty, was the fact that linen, white linen, could be boiled to clean out all body oils. Wearing undergarments kept your outer garments clean. There is also reference to the garments being occasionally made of silk.

I have found documentation for three types of shifts. One is a sort of tank top. This shift is from the Kohler book, History of Costume. The garment did not survive World War II so there is no way of inspecting the seams and the cut. It may or may not have been cut on the bias. The second has long sleeves. The shift from Kohler (fig 7) has a torn hem but the Pogue (fig 8) shift clearly lets us know that the hem of the shift did not have to hang to the ground. A lady getting dressed from the Luttrell Psalter (fig 10) shows the hem to the ground. Determine your hem by how much fabric you have to use and by how much support the skirt of your kirtle needs. Although the middle picture is from about 1430, I still find it useful. I doubt under-things changed that much before about 1470.

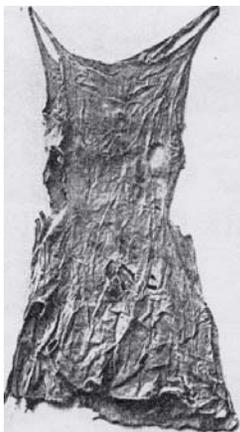


fig 7 Kohler



fig 8 Pogue



fig 9 Backhouse

As far as we can tell at this date women did not wear underpants of any kind. Now, I have to say that this is a big controversy. I don't care what kind of evidence or lack of evidence there is for women wearing underpants. Wear what is most comfortable for you. No one will know unless you tell them. I can not go without due to chafing. I find it hard to believe that some women in period didn't chafe too. So, if you must wear underpants here are what some of the men's underpants looked like (fig 10). I prefer the pair on the left for obvious reasons.



fig 10 Historical Enterprises website

## KIRTLE

The kirtle or gown (kirtell, kertil/ English, gonella/Italian, gunna/German, tunica/French) is a fairly controversial garment. Later in the century, when it was worn by itself without an overtunic or surcote, it is called a cotehardie by many. In my opinion a kirtle is a kirtle. Mary Stella Newton says that in all the wardrobe accounts she has read there was only one reference to a woman's cotehardie and this garment was worn exclusively for riding

horses. The cotehardie was a man's garment, initially an arming cote that became a popular fashion statement. So, for the purposes of our discussion I will not be calling this garment anything but a kirtle.

The kirtle was typically worn over a shift and under a surcote or supertunica until around 1360 or later. Around 1390 the kirtle was hidden underneath the Houppelande, a coat-like garment that became popular around the beginning of the Little Ice Age of medieval Europe. Between those years, the kirtle was typically worn alone. According to the clerical writings this was very scandalous in its day.

The only extant kirtles or tunics that are complete are from the East Denmark grave finds, commonly referred to as the Herjolfsnes gowns. From the weave of the fabric and the lack of embellishment it seems clear that the people buried here were not of the nobility. They were buried in their best and their best is pretty plain. Even so, they are a wealth of information. The 10-gore gown is one of these garments. The Moy Bog Dress from Ireland is another gown from this period. Much of it is destroyed but there is enough to draw some conclusions. The Moy garment was of a simple 2/1 twill wool with no noticeable decoration. From the Museum of London finds, there are only pieces of garments. Using all of these bits of information it is possible to draw some very good conclusions as to what the kirtle looked like. It is good to remember one thing however. Fashions changed rapidly in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The kirtle of 1310 resembled the kirtle of 1390 until you look closely at the details.

Kirtles could be worn loose on the body or tight, the later the year, the tighter the kirtle. None of the Denmark gowns are skin tight as they typically have no body closures and had to have been slipped over the head. Generally it is assumed that the higher the social class, the more fashionable, and therefore tighter, the clothing. High Fashion in this time called for

tight, buttoned sleeves, and tightly fitted torsos. English grave effigies clearly show the lacing in the front of the gown that enabled the tight fit of the later kirtles. I am tempted to assume that if the kirtle was worn under an over tunic it didn't need to be so tight, especially for doing chores. Even the women of the upper classes had chores to do. Again, English grave effigies show that kirtles, when worn with the sideless surcote, were very tight fitting.

The Danish kirtles are made in an intriguing combination of rectangular construction and fitted modern techniques (fig 11 & 12).

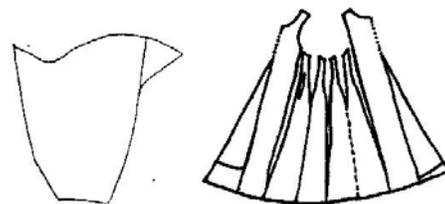


fig 11 Herjolfsnes 38: Norlund & Nockert

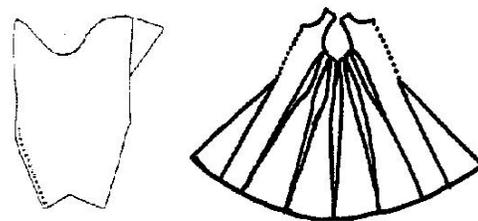


fig 12 Herjolfsnes 41: Norlund & Nockert

The sleeve openings are often cut rounded like a modern armhole. The use of gores at the sides make the appearance of an armhole even more noticeable. The sleeve heads themselves have taken on the modern reverse curvature. The bodies of the kirtles are quite often still rectangles with inserted gores. There are many different styles of cut to choose from. The 10 gore gown is but one of the many options available to the medieval tailor.

The tighter fitting kirtles can be made using rectangular construction for the body or by using a four panel body. This look can be achieved either way. (The princess seam so

often discussed is a 15<sup>th</sup> century technique, the transition from straight technique to the very tailored use of bias in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.) I am of the belief that medieval women were just as concerned as we are today with the practical use of an expensive textile. The more often we can use rectangular construction the less fabric we will need. Now, this isn't to say that 14<sup>th</sup> century woman didn't waste fabric. They did, but not nearly as much as we think they did.

Lacings for the gown have been found in dump sites and include finger looped braid and tablet-woven round cord.

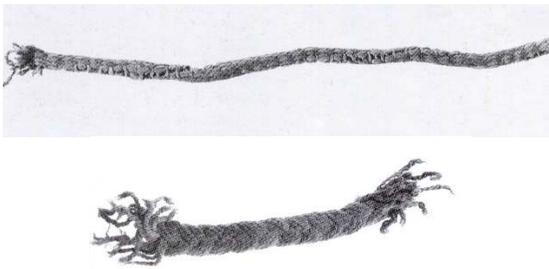


fig 13 Egan

Gowns like the Moy Bog Dress (fig 14) convince me that they were in a period of experimentation. The bog dress is the only woman's garment I know of that imitates the Grand Aisette of the pourpoint of Charles of Blois. The huge sleeve head with inserted gores fits into an extremely large armseye. The reason this armseye was so innovative was because it used the extreme of bias to create ease of movement in a fighting garment. Woman certainly could appreciate this ease for their daily tasks. Did they always have these large armseyes? No, they didn't. If you are intimidated by this technique, please feel entirely comfortable using the sleeves with the little inset gores. You will have plenty of radial movement.

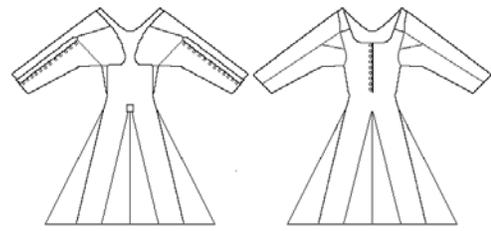


fig 14 Moy Bog Dress from \_Some Clothing of the Middle Ages\_ website

It has been said that prior to the use of buttons and lacing people were sewn into their garments. Hmmm. I have heard tell of a painting that showed a lady's maid doing just this. I haven't seen it myself. I have seen extant metal hooks and plates from Anglo-Saxon times for closing a tight wrosted sleeve as a precursor to the use of buttons (fig 15 & 16). I find being sewn into a garment to be highly impractical for most people especially those without a maid to dress them or sew them as the case may be.



fig 15 & 16 Gaulker Medieval Wares website

Sleeves were fairly loose at the wrist in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. As fashion changed the sleeves became tighter and tighter. In order to facilitate this style buttons became part of the fashion. I have made sleeves so tight that I can barely bring my spoon to my mouth. Not a good thing. Certainly doing my hair is out of the question. There is a picture from the Luttrell Psalter (fig 9) showing a lady in her shift having her hair done. She waited to put on the final garments until after her hair was done.

Initially there was only a need for 2-4 buttons to close the sleeve at the wrist. By late century there were buttons all the way up the back of the arm to the sleeve head (fig 17).

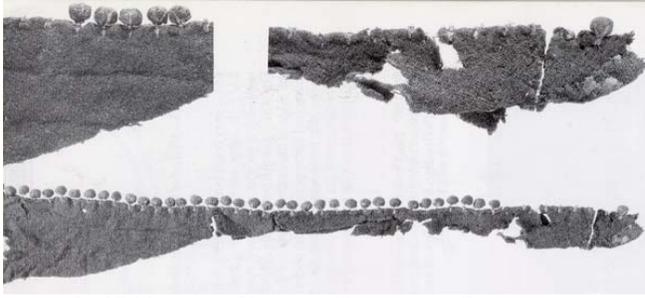


fig 17 Museum of London: Textiles and Clothing

How tight do you need to make your sleeves?  
 Loose enough that you can fit one finger  
 between the fabric and your skin without much  
 difficulty in my opinion. Any tighter is simply  
 very uncomfortable.



fig 20 Crowfoot

The skirts of the 14<sup>th</sup> century were full (fig 18 & 19). The drape was soft, no effort was made to make the skirts hang away from the body like in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This fullness was achieved by inserting gores front, back and side.



fig 18 Evans



fig 19 Evans

The front of the kirtle could be laced or buttoned closed (fig 19 & fig 20). The lacing was typically spiral lacing, not crossed. There is evidence of X-lacing but I'm still waiting for the book to arrive. The buttons could be metal or fabric. The fabric buttons would be either self stuffing or filled with a wad of scraps, sometimes glued into a ball, possibly even a wooden blank. The details of buttons and closures will be covered in the Construction Techniques handout.

## SUPERTUNIC

The supertunic is a mysterious garment in the fact that it has been called so many things that one must assume much when reading inventories etc. This garment has been called a supertunica (English), tunic (English), guyt (English) gunna (German), surcot (French), corssets ront (French),

rotendellas (French) and a ghita (English). In the end I have settled on supertunic to make it clear that we are talking about an outer garment. There are many pictures of this garment, mostly from around the time period directly before the Plague years. This garment has sleeves that are shortened above the elbow so that the sleeves of the kirtle underneath show. The sleeves are interesting because the back of the sleeve has what I call an integral tippet, a length of cloth that begins as a nubbins and eventually extends almost to the knee when the arm is relaxed at the side. This is the beginning of the white tippet that is a separate accessory that wraps around the upper arm and has an end that extends almost to the ground. I have only seen this accessory in white but in Czechoslovakia at the time, they were commonly black. Who knows whether they were embellished or not without an extant tippet or a detailed illustration.

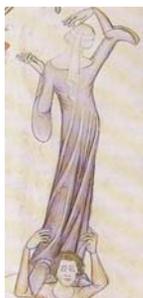


fig 21 Backhouse



fig 22 Newton



fig 23 Newton



fig 24 Hallam

This garment was often heavily embroidered or covered with little gold plaques called bezants. Naturally this wasn't embellishment for the lesser classes. The embellishment and the

sleeves would make it impossible to do any substantial work.

In fig. 24 you can see that there are white slits in the front of the garment. The ghita frequently had a slit in the front on either side that enabled the wearer to access the pouch that hung from the belt underneath. Fitchets could be slit into the fabric itself or on the seam. Fitchets have been found edged with braided cord or fabric.

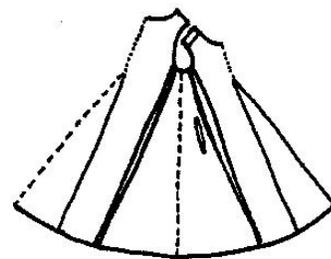


fig 25 Nockert & Norlund

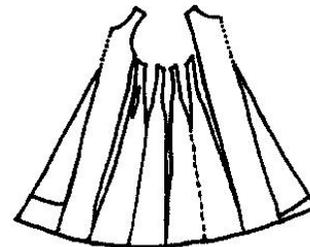


fig 26 Nocker and Norlund

## SURCOTE

The surcote, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, begins as an over tunic with no sleeves. Gradually, by about 1360 the garment becomes what we call the sideless surcote. By this time the garment was pretty much an upper class garment and worn for the best occasions such as burial and court.



fig 27 Backhouse



fig 28 Backhouse



sideless surcote  
fig 291 Evans

The garment that some refer to as the Gates of Hell, or the sideless surcote, evolved from the simple surcote of the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sideless surcote shows up in fashion after 1350. Fig 29 shows the extreme cut out in the side of the surcote. This garment was a formal garment and is usually seen in illustrations on royalty and worn at formal occasions, in this case, a burial.

## HOODS AND VEILS

Hoods were worn by all classes and by both sexes. Generally the women's hoods were open in the front with the option to close it with buttons and the men's were sewn shut. I haven't found any evidence to decry this but I hesitate to say they never or they always. Hoods were worn to keep out the cold or as a fashion statement. They could be made from

wool, silk, linen, velvet. They could be lined or not. The buttons could be metal or cloth. The tab at the tip of the back became longer and longer as the century progressed. This extension was called a liripipe.

According to inventories in Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince, these hoods were sometimes astonishingly embroidered. Entire tableaux told their story in silks and gold around the bottom edge of the hood mantle. One hood had a castle with a lady fair leaning out of tower while men rode out on horseback into a forest where workers took the pigs to eat acorns. I'd like to have seen that.

The hems of hoods could also be dagged (see construction techniques) by cutting the fulled wool. For the upper classes, the hood became so tight that it wasn't worn as protective clothing but simply as a style.



fig 30 Backhouse



fig 31 Backhouse

For the period between 1330 and 1340, veils were either linen or sheer, probably silk. Fig 32 shows a sheer veil blowing in the wind. It is clear that the veil is rectangular in shape as opposed to circular. There are several references to this shape in the Luttrell Psalter so I can only assume it was common. It certainly was a more judicious use of fabric than the wasteful circle. The spinner in fig 35 has her linen rectangle simply wrapped around her head and shoulders with the ends tossed to the back. The maid in fig 37 has a shorter linen veil with the beginning of a ruffle at the forehead. By about 1360, this ruffle

became very thick with many layers (fig 39). The Luttrell Ladies (fig 38) are wearing veils similar to fig 34, the circlets are visible as the neck wimple that covers their chins. In some copies of fig 38 you can see a red line that appears to be holding her false hair in place.



fig 32 Backhouse



fig 33 Backhouse



fig 34 Backhouse



fig 35 Crowfoot



fig 36 Evans

In fig 35 you can see the circle and braids, both at the side of the face and at the nape of the neck. If you didn't have enough hair to have braids in both places, there is evidence that false hair was used, attached to a thin tablet woven band (fig 41).

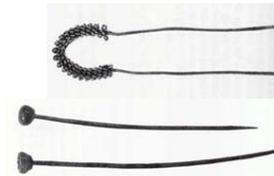


fig 37 Egan, Hair pin



fig 38 Egan, dress pins



fig 39 Egan, circlet



fig 40 Egan, circlet



fig 41, Egan, false hair

## POUCHES

Pouches were made from a variety of materials including leather, embroidery, and unembellished textiles. Pouches were still fairly simple in pattern, usually square or rectangular in shape. Pouches might be

simply sewn up the side or the seams might be card woven together (fig 43). Pouches hung from the girdle or belt and noble and common alike wore them. Tassels hanging off the bottom were very popular. It's hard to believe but heavily embroidered pouches quite often had the eyelet holes puncturing the embroidery itself. The drawstring holes did not necessarily get their own band of plain fabric.



fig 42 MOL: Dress Accessories



fig 43 MOL:



fig 44 Schuette

### **FABRICS: Fibers, Dyes, Linings, and Weaves**

Wool, linen, and silk were the common fabrics of this time period. Cotton was available at this time but not generally in this part of the world. Any cotton would have been exorbitant in price. So far, I have found no extant examples of cotton from 14<sup>th</sup> century England or France, always more research is needed.

Silk gauze and wool tabby have been found in England. Linen is very scarce but it too has been found in a tabby weave.

Wool was the common fabric for peasant and noble alike. The finer the weave and the more costly the dye, the higher the status of the wearer is the general rule. Wool could be broadcloth (very wide), twill woven (2, 3, & 4 over 1) or tabby (1 over 1). Looms varied in width from 22 to 60 inches or more.

Linen was worn as underclothing and used as lining by all classes although linings were probably most likely in the upper classes. We have no way of knowing if linen garments were worn in the hot weather. The wardrobe inventories don't list complete linen garments but then there was the wardrobes of the royalty.

Silk was a fabric of the wealthy. Sometimes it was appliquéd on a garment in a strip so it is possible that in very small quantities some of the lesser classes wore silk. Silk was used for sheer veils, kirtles, surcotes, supertunics, hoods, and sometimes linings.

Dyes of the period could produce some very bright colors. Bright yellows, blues, greens, and rich browns, golds, and reds were all possible. Bright red (from the kermes insect) and tyrian purple (from a shell) were expensive dyes but reds, pinks, and purples were all possible to achieve in other ways. These dye stuffs, kermes and tyrian purple, are now extinct, probably due to the high demand for their dyes. Madder, lichens, weld, indigo or woad, walnut hulls, iron and other mordants such as tin and alum were used and the colors possible was astounding. Wool itself came in several natural colors from white to an almost black. Wool and silk dyed the easiest and truest and the color was more stable.

While linen could be dyed it had a tendency to fade rapidly.

The weaves of the time produced anything from a plain tabby to very complex brocade patterns. Brocades were typically silk and came from the Middle East and the Silk road or maybe as close as Italy. The patterns were either foliate scroll patterns or motifs usually placed in roundels. Velvet was still fairly new as a weave and was quite expensive.

Sometimes velvet was 100% silk but often the ground was linen or wool. Checks, stripes, and plaids were also popular designs in the weave of a textile.

Velvets and brocades were used not only for clothing but also for accessories like pouches. There is even some conjecture that it was used for shoes but I haven't found any evidence to date.

Fabric painting and block printing was known at this time as well. Gold was frequently painted on in the shapes of birds, animals, or shapes like the fleur de lis.

## **EMBELLISHMENT**

The first thing one notices when looking at manuscripts, illustrations, and extant garments is the lack of heavy embellishment. Garments in the Luttrell Psalter only show a gold band, sometimes with little dots, around hems, cuffs, and necklines. That is what I have seen on funeral effigies as well. The working class usually shows no embellishment of any kind. Archaeological evidence and wardrobe inventories of the time show us a different picture.

There has been precious little found in the dump sites excavated by the Museum of London. What has been found are bits of tablet woven strips and appliquéd fabric strips, sewn on to fabric. There was not enough of the strips or the fabric to determine where the embellishment was actually placed on the

body. One would assume from the illustrations of the time that the most popular placement was at neck, wrist, and maybe hem. To put a strip of weaving or cut fabric around the hem required some work and some expense so I would imagine this wasn't something the workers did very often if at all. There is some indication from funeral effigies that the very wealthy could afford hem embellishment.

The tablet weaving at this time was typically of silk and wool, sometimes both fibers combined in one band. The band could be one color and plain woven, one color and texturally woven with patterns, plain woven with a supplemental brocade of silver or gold, or finally very elaborately woven multi colored bands, some including a person's motto or a dedication or prayer to a saint such as Mary.

The strips of fabric were typically of silk and could be cut from a plain colored silk or an elaborate brocade, maybe imported from the Holy Land.

Embellishment in the form of embroidery shows up in the wardrobe inventories of King Edward III of England. It's truly incredible in its scope and ambition. Some of the embroidery is described in the sections on hoods, pouches, and surcotes/ghitas. The embroidery on these garments was primarily silk and metal work.

## **HERALDRY**

A discussion about 14<sup>th</sup> century clothing wouldn't be complete with at least a nod to heraldry. People of the noble classes lived and breathed heraldry and all its pomp and circumstance. Everything from pouches to garments to shields and horse trappings was a place to show off your heraldry, your heritage, and your standing in the

community. The most famous illustration of heraldry in clothing is the frontispiece of the Luttrell Psalter. The ladie's own devices are

on the left side, their husband's/father's on the right. See the cover page for a full size image of the Luttrell ladies.

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