

A Ninth- or Tenth-Century Norse Era Coat

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Figure 1

*Bronze Amulet Birka,
Upplands, Sweden,
Viking Age,
Photo from Vikings The
North Atlantic Saga*

As with most of my projects this one started out with someone saying – “Hey, I like that. How did you make it? Where is it from? What time period is it from?” While I could easily tell them how it was constructed, I did not feel I had all the historical details to back it up. Before I made the coat I had reviewed books and online articles but found only enough information to give me a general idea on how to construct and decorate the coat. Knowing that I would be asked these questions again I decided to dive in and see how much more information I could find. Unfortunately, I found very little additional information about these coats. I visited websites of well-known “Viking Folk” such as [The Viking Answer Lady](#) by Christie Ward, where I found “guldgubbers” (see Figures 2 and 3) in which the female figures looked as though they were wearing long coats. There were also brief mentions of these coats in [A Quick and Dirty Look at Viking Women's Garb in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries](#) by Carolyn Priest-Dorman, [Simple Viking Clothing for Women](#) by Christina Krupp, and [“Female Viking Costume”](#) by Russell Scott. There are other sites out there but they don’t seem to add much to the information I had

already gleaned from previous sites. Some of these sites are listed at the end of this paper with my additional notes. Even though I have completed this guide I have not given up my search for more information. I am still trying to locate copies of works by Agnes Geijer and Inga Hägg, two archeologists who studied the archaeological finds from Birka (Hjalmar Stolpe 1873 through 1895) so I can read about their finds firsthand rather than through someone else’s eyes. As I find additional information I will update this guide.



Figure 2

Two Goldgubbes (guldgubber) depicting females that appear to be wearing long coats.

“Sheet-gold plaques with the embracing figures of the god Freyr and the giantess Gerd, from Hauge, Norway.”

Photos from The Vikings by James Graham-Campbell and Dafydd Kidd



Figure 3

As I said before, information on the female “Viking” coat is limited. What we do know is that it is an outer garment worn for either warmth or possibly just fashion. Knowing their use of textiles, they would have used wool, linen, or silk for the outer shell of the garment. The coat would have been lined in linen, silk, or fur and then elaborately decorated with trim made from strips of embroidered [silk samite](#), [tablet-woven](#) (Figure 4) wool or silk, and [embroidery](#) (Figure 5) using silk, wool, and gold or silver thread, or some combination thereof.



Figure 4
Silk Wristband (C 138) decorated with
tablet-woven band with gold brocade.
Mammen,

*Photo is Figure 100; page 112 of M. Hald's Ancient
Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials*



Figure 5
Piece of cloth from Mammen with
embroidered border with masks.

*Photo is Figure 94; page 109 of M. Hald's Ancient
Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials*

According to the archaeological finds from Birka (Hjalmar Stolpe 1873 through 1895), the female coats met in the front and were held closed by a brooch similar those shown in Figures 6 and 7.



Figure 6
Viking, 10th century AD Found at Roskilde,
Denmark. Copper alloy.
Photo from The British Museum



Figure 7
Viking, 10th century AD, Gotland, Sweden.
Silver.
Photo from The British Museum

Since there are no extant garments we do not have an exact pattern layout but we can assume that they applied construction methods similar to those used for other garments of the same era. I created my pattern layouts based on information presented by Priest-Dorman and Gunnes Felag (Figure 8) except I added a center back seam. I added a seam to the center back to accommodate my fabric width. One might theorize that those living in the ninth and tenth centuries would do the same thing to best utilize their resources. I noticed that most instructions for these garments place the shoulders on the fold of the fabric or on a straight seam (see Figure 9). I cut my shoulders at a slight angle to reduce bulk which makes the coat more comfortable (see Figure 10).

Figure 8

Outline on the summer coat given by Gunnes Felag an open air museum in Upplands Väsby, Sweden.

They cite Hägg, Inga: *Kvinnodräkten i Birka* (1974) as their original documentation.

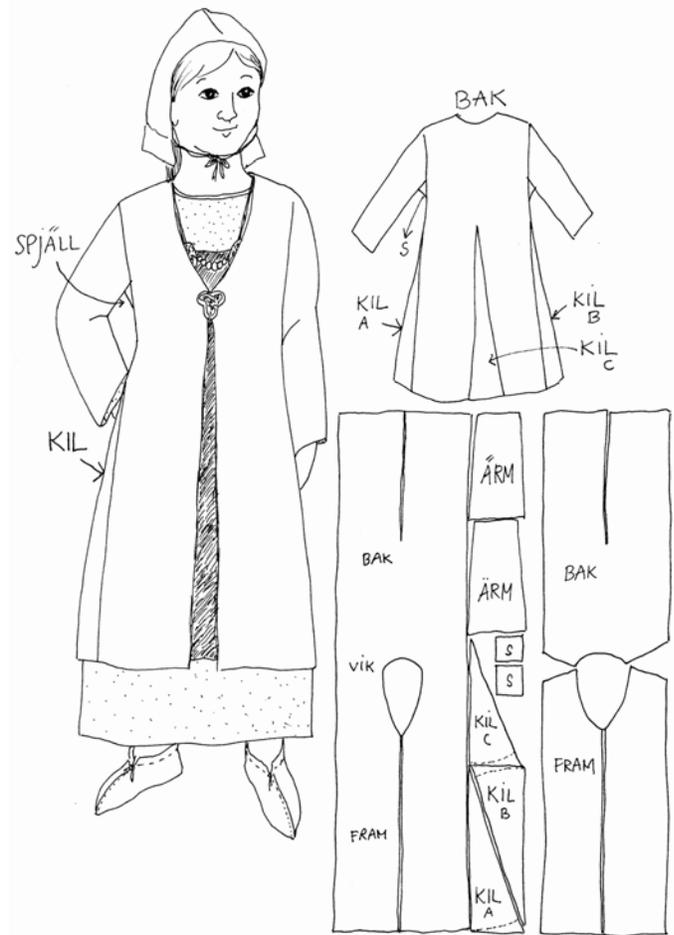


Figure 9

Ninth- and tenth-century Birka, Sweden

Pattern layout for a Birka, style coat from Priest-Dorman's Tunics - How to make an authentic Viking Era tunic and Hägg's pattern for the Viking kaftan (1984, p. 171).

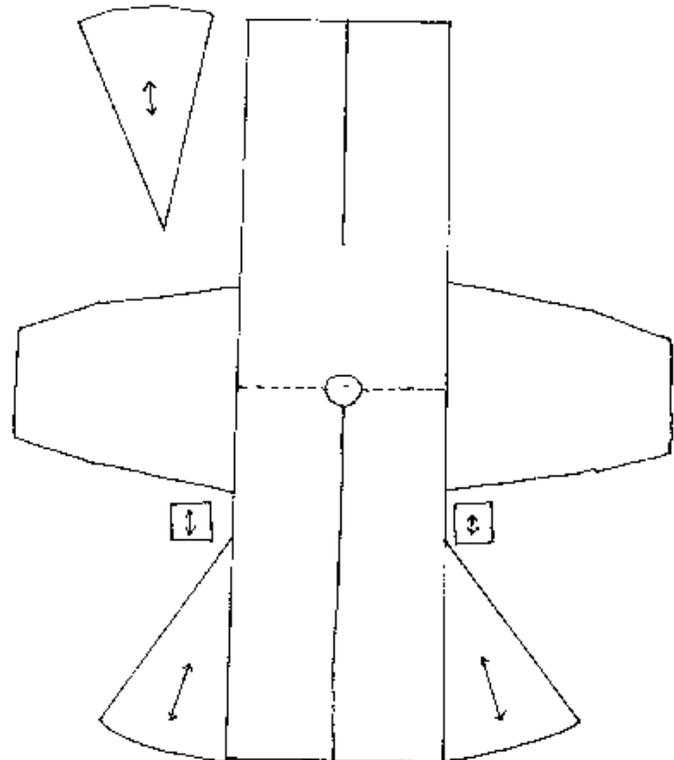
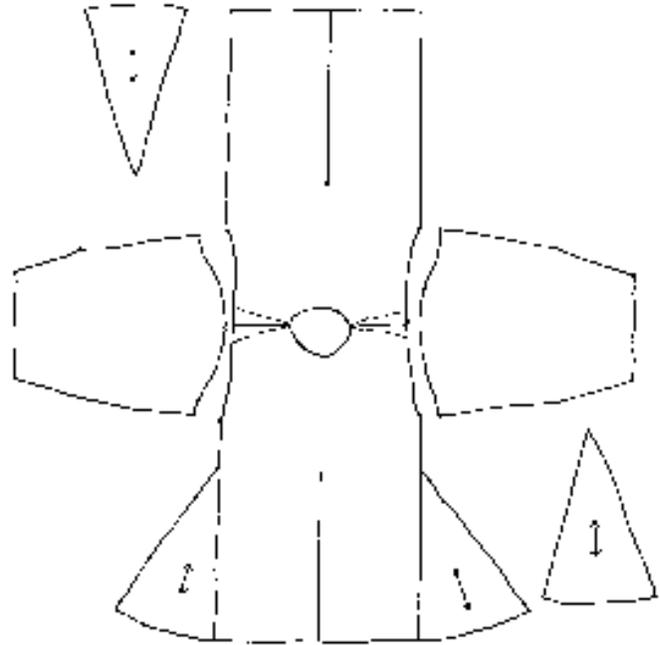


Figure 10

Another example from Priest-Dorman's Tunics - How to make an authentic Viking Era tunic. Pattern layout for a tenth-century tunic from Hedeby Harbor – “Here are found wool garment pieces that display rounded armholes for fitted sleeves, two-piece body construction with shoulder seams, and scoop-style necklines (Hägg 1984, 171). Evidence for torso styles includes both a narrow style with skirt slit at the sides, suitable for undergarments, and a wider style with closed skirt and gores for more flair, suitable for overgarments.”



This tunic layout shows angled shoulder seams which is what I used in the construction of my coat.

Now let's make a coat!

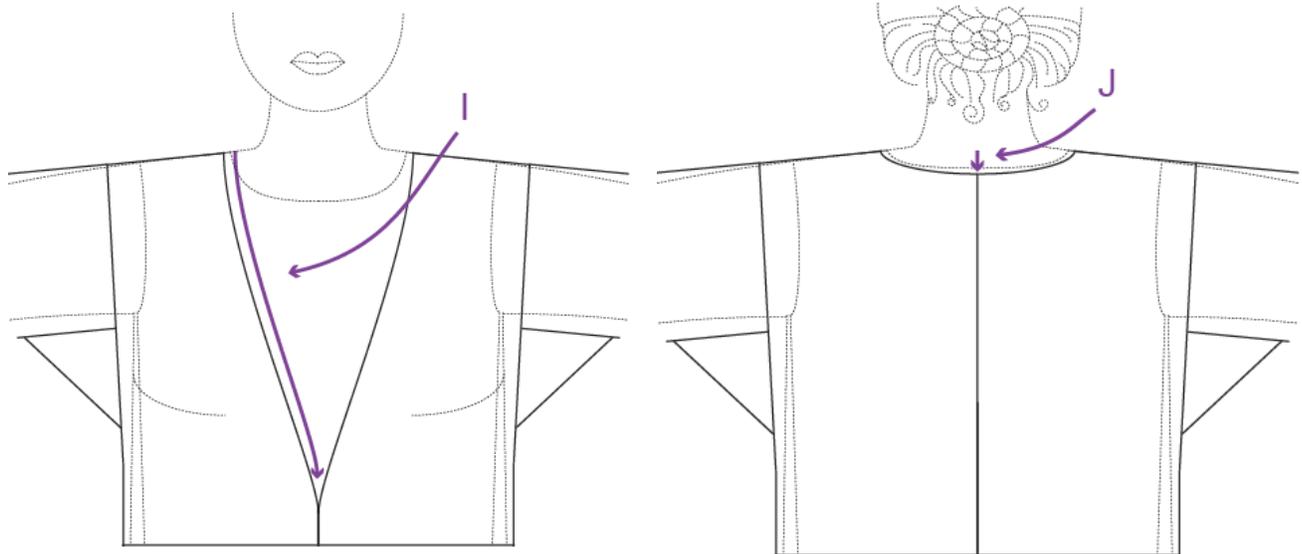
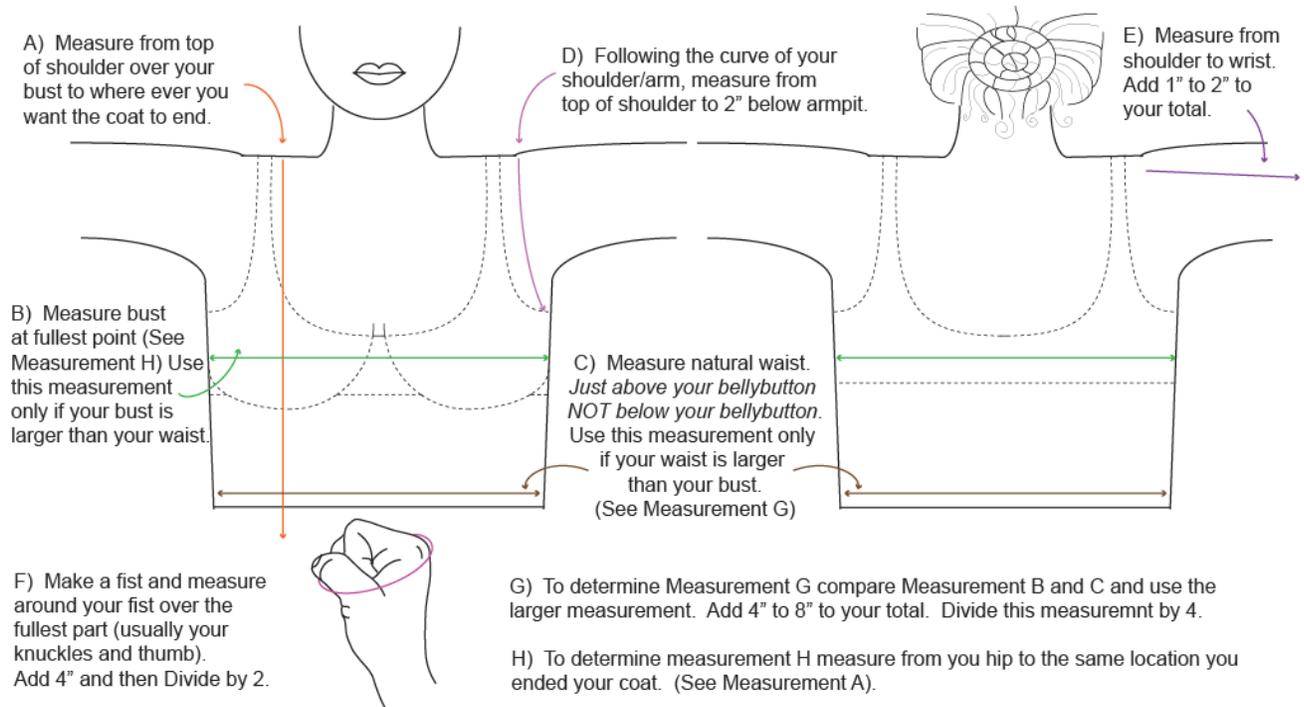
Before you begin let me give you the most valuable piece of advice I can offer...

Read ALL of the instructions BEFORE you begin this project!

Here are a few other tidbits of information:

- * Before you cut your fabric it should be washed, dried, and pressed (unless it is dry clean only).
- * If you are using fabric with a nap, pattern, or obvious face it is extra important that you place your pattern pieces with the grain and make sure you cut matching pieces with the fabric face together. Example: The left and right fronts should be cut face to face. “Fabric face” is the same as the “right side” of the fabric. I am use fabric face throughout this document in order to reduce confusion between the “right side of the fabric” and the “right side of the garment”.
- * Use a thread that has the same fiber make up as your fabric. If you use wool fabric then use wool thread. If you use linen fabric then use linen thread, etc.
- * **DON'T FORGET TO ADD SEAM ALLOWANCE TO ALL CUT EDGES.** I do not list a specific amount to use for seam allowance as most people have a preference. But just as a FYI - I use 3/8” for seam allowance for lined garments. If you do not plan to line this garments then you will want to give yourself enough seam allowance to allow you to finish your edges in a period fashion. This may require a wider seam allowance as well as longer bottom and cuff hems.
- * For more accurate results always have someone else take your body measurements.

Taking Your Measurements



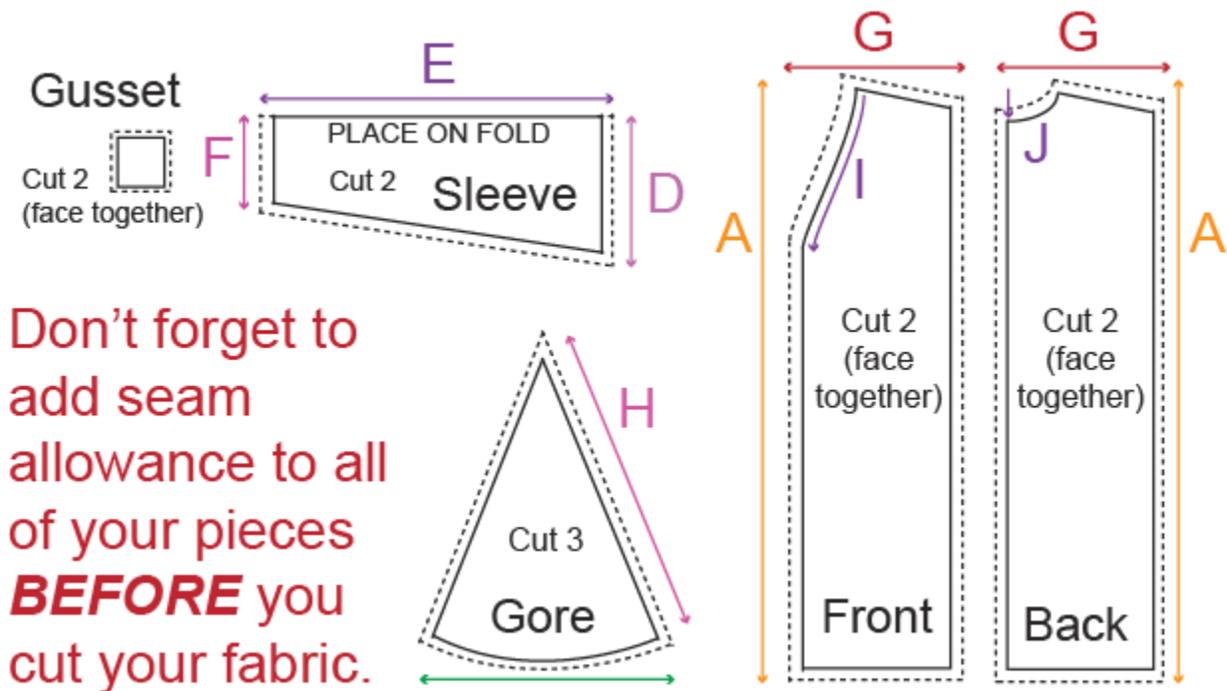
J) Front Neckline: Measure from the shoulder seam to the center front (at an angle) to determine the length and curve of your front neck opening. The opening should end about midway between the base of the sternum and navel.

K) Back Neckline: At the center back, measure down about 1" from the seam (this includes seam allowance). This is done directly to the garment. You do not need to log this measurement on your chart.

Body Measurements

Location	Measurement	Notes
A		
B		
C		
D		
E		
F		
G		
H		
I		
J		

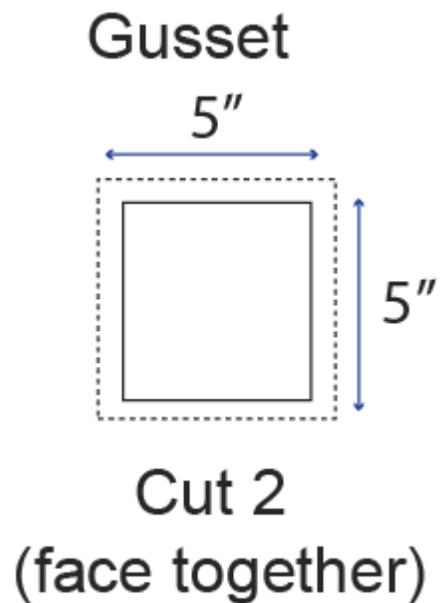
Pattern Pieces



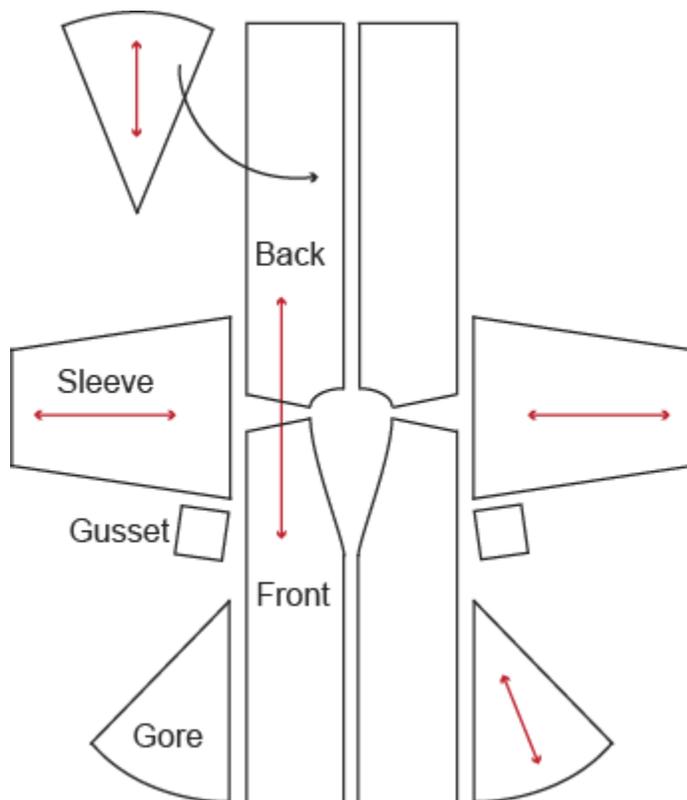
Don't forget to add seam allowance to all of your pieces **BEFORE** you cut your fabric.

I use a gusset with a measurement of 5" x 5" (See example below). This size allows movement but does not add too much bulk. If you wish to make your gusset larger or smaller you will need to experiment. Through my experience if it is too large it will add bulk under your arms. If it is too small it will not give you the movement the desired.

Don't forget to add seam allowance.



Pattern Piece Layout



This is the construction layout for my version of the "Viking" Coat.

Since most people cannot look at a layout, start cutting, sewing, and voilà have a garment that fits I am going to show you how to make a pattern and then construct this garment.

First we need to take your measurements. For best results have someone else measure you.

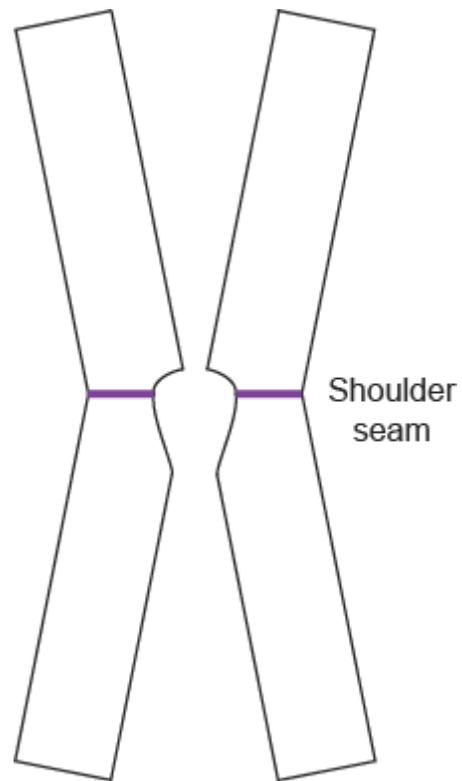
Step 1

Okay – You have cut out all of your pieces... and you remembered to add seam allowance. Right?

Now you are ready to begin assembly.

The next few illustrations show the order in which to construct your garment and how to line up and sew your garment pieces together.

Starting with your shoulder seams line up the shoulder seam of the left side front and back making sure that face of the fabric is together. Stitch the front and back together. Follow this same process for the right side front and back.



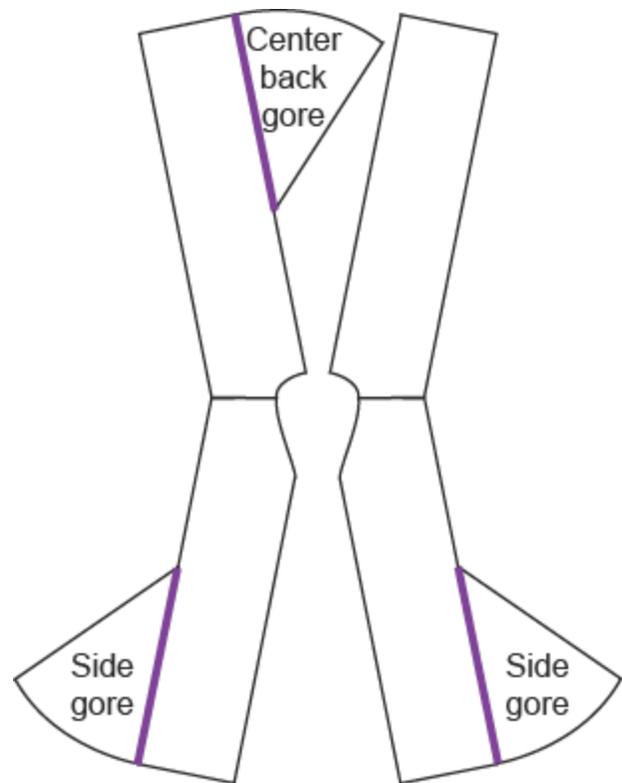
Step 2

Now let's add the gores.

We are starting with the left front. Line up the bottom hem and side seam of your coat and gore (see drawing). Make sure that face of the fabric is together. Stitch the gore to the left front side seam starting at the bottom hem. Follow this same process for the right front side.

Line up the bottom hem and center back seam of your coat and gore (see drawing).

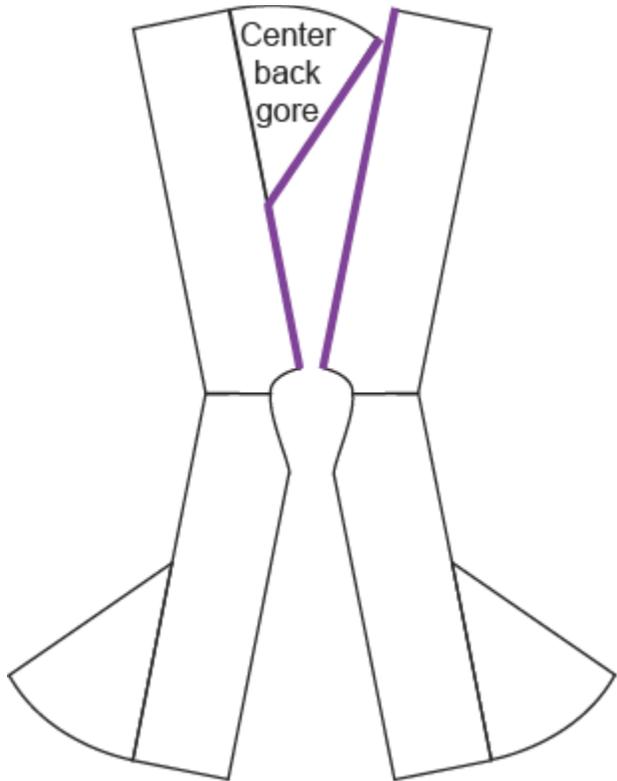
Make sure that face of the fabric is together. Stitch the gore to the right side of the center back seam.



Step 3

Let's join the center back seam, starting at the neck, line up the left and right back pieces at the neck opening. Stitch along the center back seam down to the gore making sure that you catch the top point of the gore in the seam. Continue stitching the center back seam to the bottom hem.

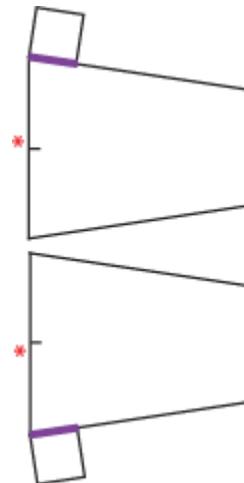
Be careful not to stretch the fabric while you are stitching or the bottom seam will not line up. I start at the top and work my way down because an uneven hem is more easily repaired than an uneven neck opening. You can pin the seam together to help reduce stretching.



Step 4

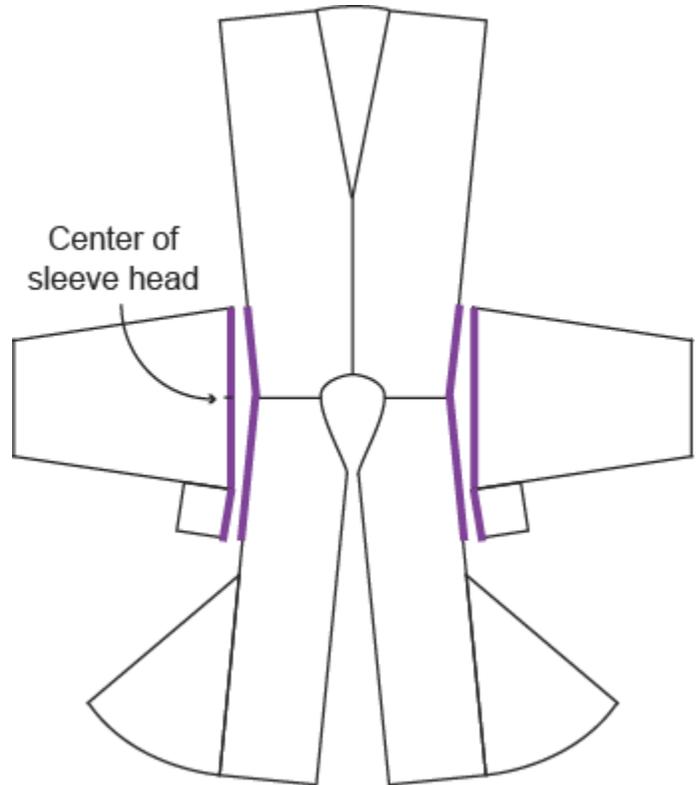
* Before stitching the gussets to the sleeves fold each sleeve in half from shoulder to cuff and mark the center point where the sleeve meets the shoulder. Mark or notch this point making sure it is less than the amount of your seam allowance or it will show through your final seam.

Line up the gusset and the shoulder/bottom seam of the left sleeve making sure that face of the fabric is together. Stitch the sleeve and gusset together. Follow this same process for the right sleeve and gusset.



Step 5

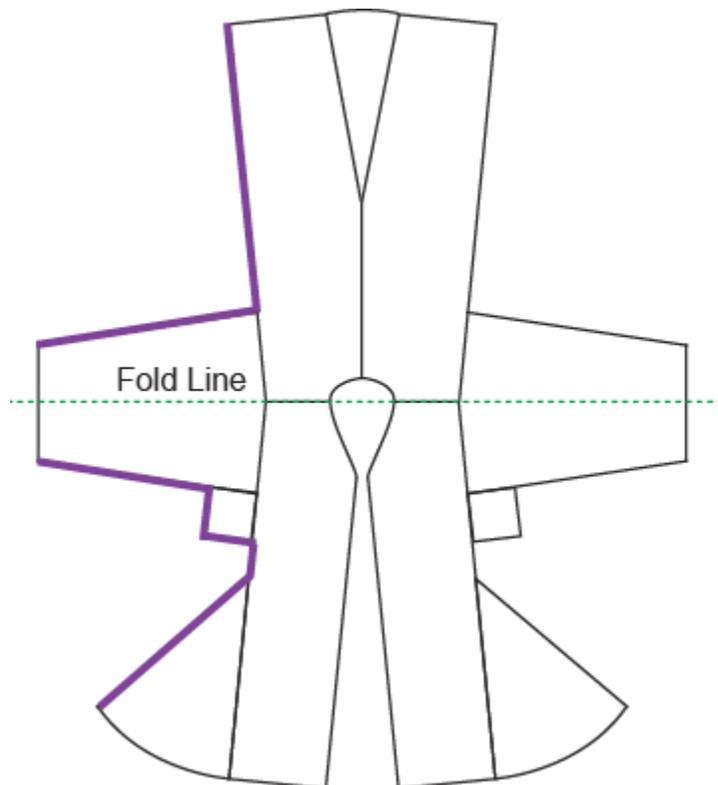
Starting with the left sleeve line up the sleeve center point mark with the shoulder seam (see drawing). Make sure that face of the fabric is together. Stitch the sleeve and gusset to the left side seam. Follow this same process for the right front side. Pinning the sleeve to the garment will reduce fabric stretch and shifting.



Step 6

Fold your garment in half along the shoulder seam making sure that the face of the fabric is together. Stitch the side seams together. Pinning the front and back together (especially in the gusset area) will reduce fabric stretch and shifting. Trim your threads and finish your seams. If you want to line your coat then move on to Step 7.

If you do not want to line your coat then hem your cuffs, bottom hem, and front and neck opening and turn your coat face side out and press seams according to your fabric type. Finish the seams and decorate your garment with appliqué, decorative stitches, or trim.



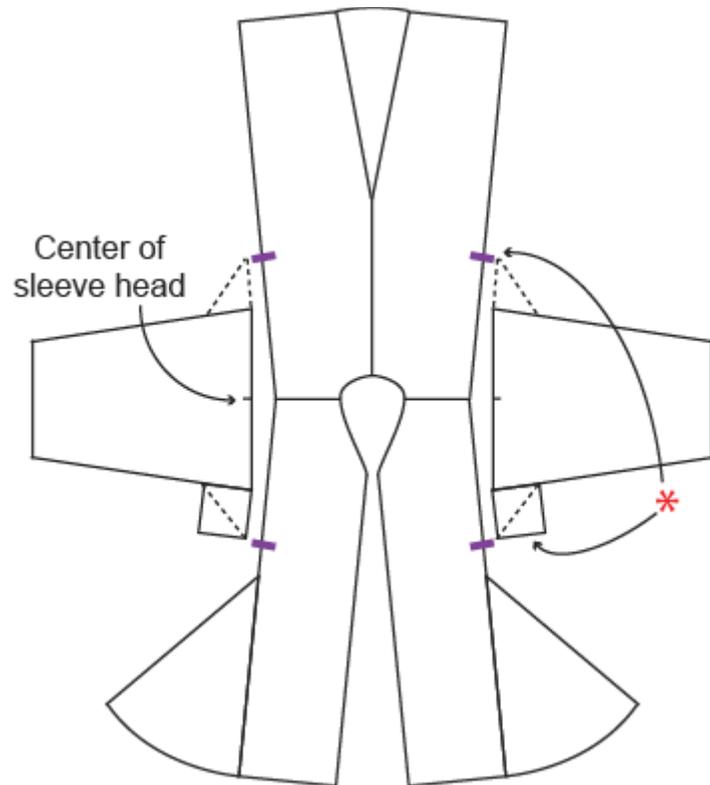
*If you want to line your coat then you will cut your lining out in the same manner as your shell fabric. Complete steps 1 through 4. Skip Steps 5 and 6 and move on to Step 7.

Step 7

Mark the locations of the left and right sleeves but **DO NOT** stitch them into place.

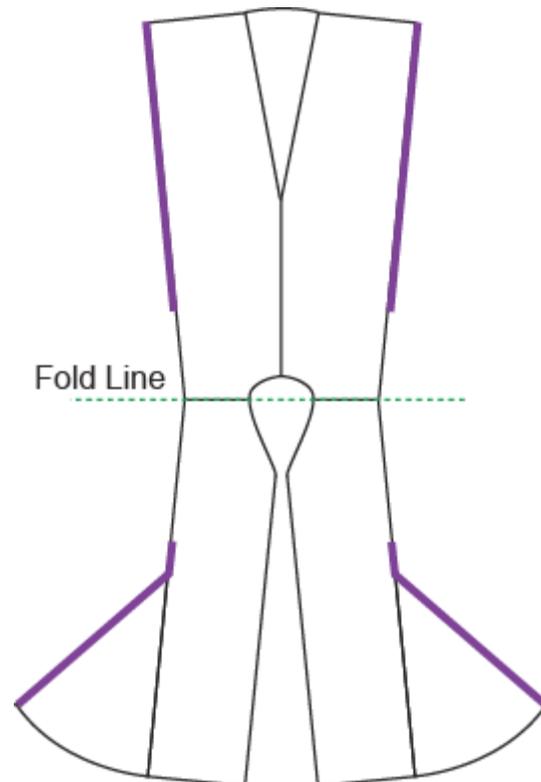
*

The gusset will join the back side of coat. Make sure you mark the end of the gusset and not the end of the sleeve on your coat.



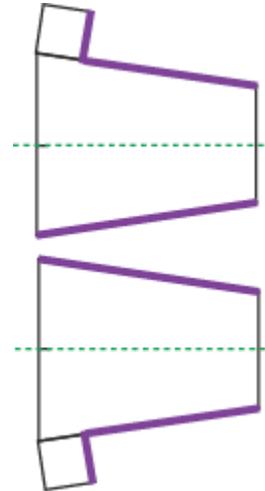
Step 8

Fold your garment in half along the shoulder seam making sure that the face of the fabric is together (See drawing). Stitch the side seams together just as you did with the shell fabric except stop at the marks for the sleeve openings.



Step 9

With the face of the fabric together, fold your left sleeve in half from shoulder to cuff and mark the center point where the sleeve meets the shoulder (See drawing). Stitch the sleeve together to create a tube. Follow this same process for the right sleeve.



Lining Inside Out

Shell Face Out



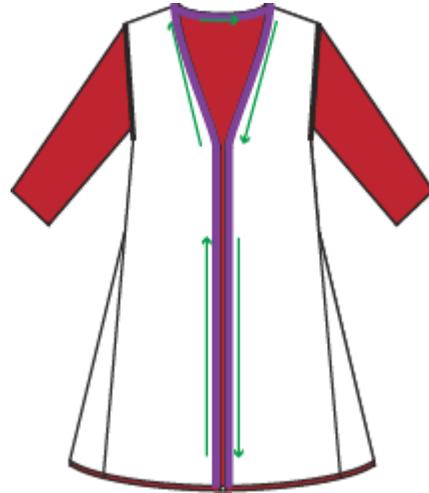
Step 10

Now we are going to insert your lining into your coat. Turn your lining inside out. Shell fabric should be face side out. Slip the sleeves of the shell through the arm openings of the lining fabric. Match the neck, front opening, and bottom hem of the shell and lining fabric. Pin them together so you don't have to deal with readjusting everything constantly.



Step 11

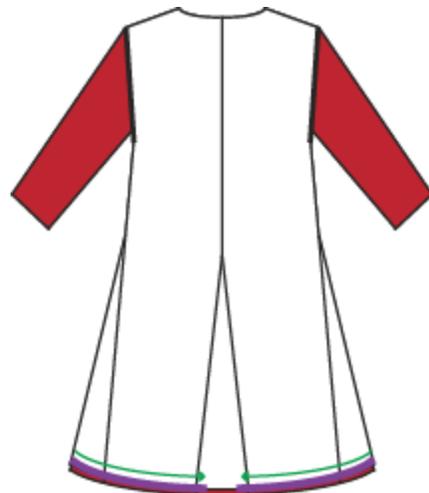
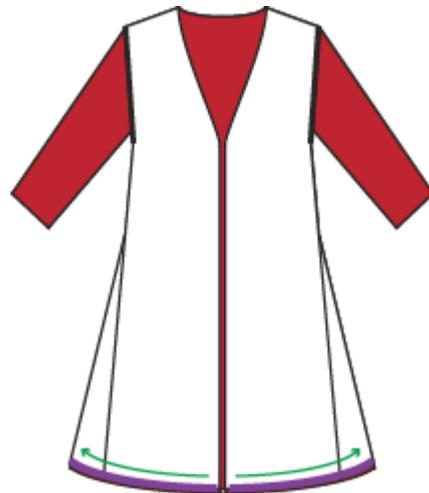
Starting at the bottom hem, going up the front opening around the neck and back down the front opening to the bottom hem stitch the shell and the lining together.



Step 12

Now starting at the front opening stitch along the bottom hem stopping about 5" to 10" from the center back (Do not stop before your gore seam. Crossing over the seam will help add strength and resists stretching or tearing while pulling your garment through the open seam). Repeat this process from the other side. You should have an opening along your bottom hem at the center back. This open seam will be used to pull your garment through to reverse your garment. If your fabric is heavy, thick, or stiff you will want a larger hole than if it is light, thin, and soft.

Trim all of your threads, corners, and clip rounded lines for a smoother seam.



Step 13

Pull the garment through the open seam along the bottom hem. Stitch the open seam along the bottom hem closed.



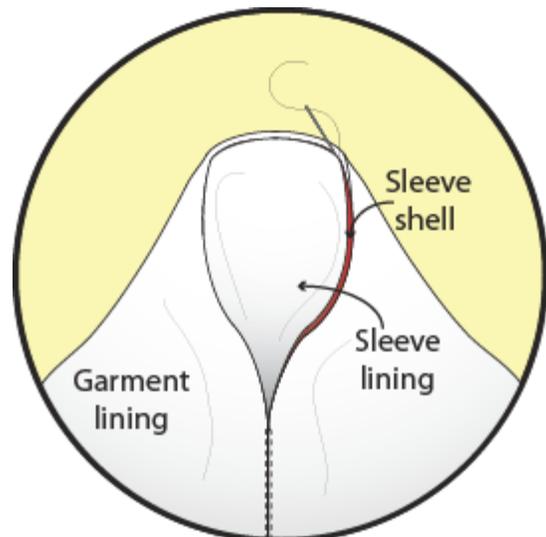
Step 14

Turn the sleeve linings inside out. Slip the right sleeve lining over the right sleeve shell with face sides together. Line up the sleeve seams and the cuff hem. Stitch the lining and shell cuff together. Trim threads and corners. Repeat for left sleeve.



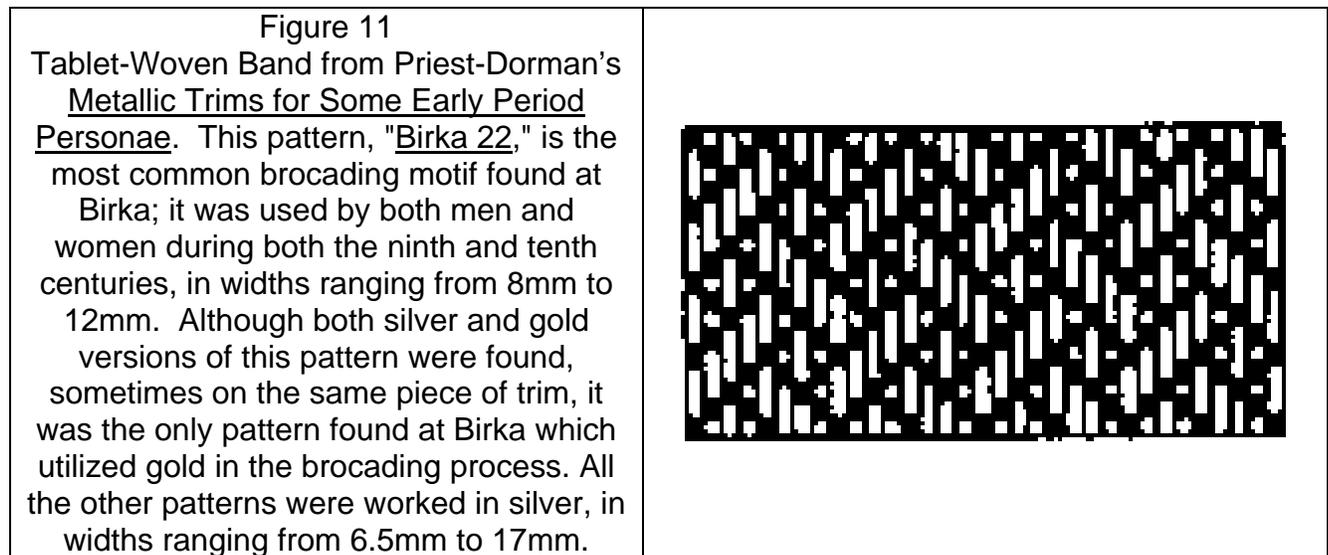
Step 15

Pull the sleeve lining up inside the shell sleeve. Inside the garment, turn under the sleeve head/gusset/shoulder edge of the sleeve lining, match the folded edge of the lining to the seams inside the garment making sure that the seam allowance for both the sleeve lining and garment lining are tucked inside so they will not be exposed once the seam is closed. Pin the lining in place and stitch it to the shell. Repeat for left sleeve. FYI – Some people only sew the lining fabric together at this point and leave it free flowing inside the garment. My personal preference is to catch the seam allowance of the shell fabric in my seam as I stitch in my sleeve lining.



Step 16

Turn the garment right side out, press, and decorate. Finish seams with wool or silk embroidery and appliqué plain or embroidered strips of silk samite to the coat along the front opening or trim the cuffs, hem, chest, arms, and seams with narrow tablet-woven bands made of wool or silk often with threads of gold or silver interwoven with the yarn such as in Figure 11.



This is my coat. The outer layer is heavy red linen and the lining is light-weight white and black woven linen. The garment is trimmed in yellow, black, white, and red woven trim and the seams are finished with yellow thread. I am currently working on embroidery and appliqué' ornamentation to add at a later date.



Front



Back

Please feel free to contact me if you have any comments, questions, corrections, advice, etc. Sabine@ParagonKeep.org

Sources

These are the sources I used to help create this document. During my search I noted that most documents I came across had a biography but very few referred to which sources they actually pulled particular bits of information. I would rather read the document myself so I wanted to know in which book, website, etc. they found the information. So to better assist others in their research I have added details as to what I found useful for my project.

Books:

Gramham-Campbell, James and Dafydd Kidd. The Vikings. England: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1980. *Beautiful photos of metal work, beads, carvings, etc. but don't pay too much attention to the illustration on page 103. Page 86 and 87 show the gold foil plaques I used as Figures 1 and 2 but it does not give a date.*

Fitzhugh, William W. and Elizabeth I. Ward. Vikings The North Atlantic Saga. Washington and London. Smithsonian Institution Press. 2000. *Photo of a bronze amulet Birka, Upplands, Sweden, Viking Age.*

Hägg, Inga. "Die Tracht." Birka II:2, Systematische Analysen der Graberfunde, ed. by Greta Arwidsson, pp. 51-72. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1986. *"In the ninth century women at some locations such as Birka and Hedeby wore a long-sleeved long coat or caftan."*

Hald, Margrethe. 1980. Ancient Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials, trans. Jean Olsen. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark. *Some discussion of the Bjerringhøj embroideries--motifs, techniques, and materials as well as examples of tablet woven trim.*

Websites:

Gunnes Felag. (No date). *Friends to Museum Society. February 2010.*

<http://www.gunnesfelag.se/>

Click on Länkar, then Dräkt then under the section called "gunnes felags hantverkssidor" click on Livrock - tröja – mantel and then scroll down to the drawing. This is an open air museum in Upplands Väsby, Sweden. There are a few interesting drawings but unfortunately I do not read Swedish – yet.

Krupp, Christina (Marieke van de Dal). (June 24, 2004). Simple Viking Clothing for Women. January 2010. *Thorson and Svava.*

http://thorsonandsvava.sccspirit.com/pdf_files/Viking_handout_women.pdf

Caftan The so-called "caftan" is an extra, outer layer, usually of wool, presumably for when additional warmth is needed. It tended to be most popular during the earlier Viking age. No whole caftans remain, so the cutting pattern is entirely speculative. The commonly accepted way to make one of these is to make a long-sleeved, floor-length gown, widened with gores from waist to hem, and open completely down the center front. We know from archaeology that the woman's caftan is held closed by a single brooch at chest height. Instead of going through the caftan fabric, the brooch pin slips through two small loops, one on each side of the caftan's opening edge. If you want your beads and tortoise brooches to show while wearing the caftan, you can cut the neck low and wide. The caftan layer was ornamented with tablet-woven trim, embroidery, and appliqué.

Marije. (2005). Viking Kaftan Female Version. *A Reenactor's household - A Medieval Wardrobe*. February 2010. <http://www.gelfling.dds.nl/viking%20kaftan.html>
Female version of a Viking coat (Unfortunately many of the reference links are broken on this page).

McDonell, Zoe (Lady Caoimhinn ingen Domnaille). (2006). Norse Metallic Tablet-Woven Trim. *Zoe McDonell*. March 2010.
http://zoemcdonell.googlepages.com/Norse_Brocaded_Tablet_Weaving.pdf
Page 11; Figure 9: "Silver trinkets from two Birka burials depicting women. There appears to be some horizontal, striped decoration on the front (indicated by red arrows), perhaps these are intended to be metallic tablet woven trim (modified from Geijer 1938)."

Priest-Dorman, Carolyn (Mistress Þóra Sharptooth). (February 3, 2007). A Quick and Dirty Look at Viking Women's Garb in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. *Carolyn Priest-Dorman's Home Page*. April 2009. <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/qdirtyvk.html>
"Caftan - The outermost layer of garb, it's a long-sleeved long coat which was pinned together at about the solar plexus with a large brooch; it too was heavily ornamented."

Priest-Dorman, Carolyn (Mistress Þóra Sharptooth). (October 15, 1996). Metallic Trims for Some Early Period Personae. *Carolyn Priest-Dorman's Home Page*. April 2009.
<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/metaltrims.html>
Use of gold and silver thread in tablet weaving.

Priest-Dorman, Carolyn (Mistress Þóra Sharptooth). (1993-1997). Tunics - How to make an authentic Viking Era tunic. *Carolyn Priest-Dorman's Home Page*. April 2009.
<http://gersey.tripod.com/history/tunic.html>
Pattern layouts for a Tenth Century Hedeby-style tunic (especially the angled shoulder seams). Quote: The excavations at Birka, Sweden, which cover the ninth and tenth centuries, did not include entire garments. However, the pieces of clothing that were found there yielded quite a bit of information on different types of tunic-type garments, including smocks, tunics, and coats. There is plenty of evidence for linen smocks, wool tunics, wool and linen coats, and even one possibly Byzantine-style linen long tunic. Construction details common to them all include front and back panels cut in one piece, rather than two-piece construction with shoulder seams, and small round or keyhole necklines. Triangular gores were added for additional width in the skirt area of many garments. Unique to Birka is evidence for the woman's pleated smock from the tenth century; this style of undergarment would not have required gores for widening. Also unique to Birka is the men's sleeved "riding" coat closed on the chest with small cast bronze buttons running from neck to waist; it is thought to be influenced by Persian riding coats by way of Byzantium and the Rus lands. Some Birka women wore a similar over garment, but instead of bronze buttons this coat was held together by a fancy brooch pinned through two small loops that were sewn to the two sides of the garment at the mid-chest. It is not known how long the women's coats were, but clearly if they were meant to be protective over garments they would need to be rather long--and require more than one closure point in front!

Priest-Dorman, Carolyn (Mistress Þóra Sharptooth). (June 30, 1996). Viking Embroidery Stitches and Motifs. *Carolyn Priest-Dorman's Home Page*. April 2009.
<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikembroid.html>
More than just embroidery, this article give information on wire weaving, appliqué, embroidery, etc. Examples of designs and bibliography are wonderful.

Scott, Russell. (2008). Female Viking Costume. *The Vikings*. February 2010. http://www.vikingsonline.org.uk/resources/authenticity/female_clothing/
“COAT - “Over some of the apron arrangement another garment, not necessarily a mantle, seems to have been worn. This had sleeves, but unlike the coat of the male graves; the item was not buttoned. Instead it was fastened with a single brooch, either a 'trefoil', 'large disc' or else a 'caterpillar' brooch. It was probably made of silk or woolen tweed, see figure 16-i. Given the decoration encountered elsewhere in the woman’s wardrobe, this item too was probably much decorated with braids. In fact it rather seems that this item has been confused along the archaeological way with the Over Garment, see figures 7-ii & 16-ii.” (I did not seek permission to use the drawings. They can be seen on the original website.)

Samite. (2010, January 2). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 16:24, April 1, 2010, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Samite&oldid=335525155> *Definition*.

Tablet weaving. (2009, August 26). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 16:25, April 1, 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tablet_weaving&oldid=310238929 *Definition*.

Ward, Christie (Gunnvôr Silfrahárr). (1990ish). Viking Age Hairstyles, Haircare, and Personal Grooming – women’s Hairstyles. *The Viking Answer Lady*. January 2010. <http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/clothing.shtml>
*This is the first location in which I discovered the “Guldgubbers” in which the female figures looked as though they were wearing long coats. I found another reference to these plaques in the book *The Vikings*.*

Willadsen, Lisa (Fru Isabel Ulfsdottir). (March 2003). 10th Century Danish Clothing. *The Willadsen Family*. 10/29/2009. http://willadsenfamily.org/sca/isabel_as/norse-garb/10th_Century_Danish_Garb.pdf
*This article contains a photograph of four amulets (one being Figure 1, the amulet on my first page from *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*). “Valkyrie figures recovered from various locations in Scandinavia give some insight to women's clothing. The figures are stylized representations. Only the very basic design elements can be taken from the figures. All four show an apron or dress over a flowing under dress. The far left and right figures seem to be wearing a shawl. The two center figures seem to be wearing a coat. Three of the four figures show decoration at the base of the apron-dress”.*

Wychwood Warriors. (No date). Coats. *Wikiwood*. February 2010. <http://wychwood.wikidot.com/kit-coats>
Female coats are discussed at the end of the article.

Turm A/S. (2008-2010). Dess. nr. 157. *Pendants from the Viking Age*. March 2010. <http://www.turm.dk/uk/default.asp?filnavn=/uk/pendants.asp>
I added this merchant’s link because it gives a description and time line items similar to the sheet-gold plaques in Figures 1 and 2. “Dess. nr. 157 The “Goldgubbe” from Lundeborg, South East Funen. The original was found when excavating a trading center from the Iron Age. The goldgubbe is a so-called doublegubbe: it depicts two persons a man and a woman, their clothing and hairstyle - a picture of the Iron Age man. The original was embossed in thin gold foil and originates from the time round 600 A.D. Produced in silver and bronze.”