

# Rapier Armor in the Style of 13<sup>th</sup> Century Men's Clothes

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### INTRODUCTION

This is a complete set of 13th century men's clothes. It consists of a set of undergarments (a shirt and braies), hosen (socks), and a tunic (see Illustration 1 for typical 13<sup>th</sup> century men's clothing). The shirt has been modified so that the combination of shirt and tunic is suitable for use as rapier armor. The shirt and braies are made of 100% linen; the tunic and hosen are made of cotton/linen fustian. The braies and hosen are hand-sewn; the body garments are machine-sewn and hand-finished.

### RAPIER ARMOR STANDARDS

In order for clothing to be used as rapier armor, it must conform to the relevant rules. The relevant portions of the Aethelmearc Rapier Rules are excerpted below:

No skin shall show anywhere on the fencer's body, regardless of the position or stance of the fencer. There shall be sufficient overlap between separate pieces of armor that the required protection for that body area is preserved.

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Torso and Arm Armor - Puncture resistant armor shall cover the body from the top of the shoulder to the base of the groin and the underarm area. Minimum underarm protection is provided by a triangle extending from the armhole seam, and covering the lower half of the sleeve, extending down the under side of the arm one-third the distance to the elbow. The edges of any closure must overlap by at least 3". The rest of the arm must be covered with abrasion resistant material.

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Lower Extremity Armor - All portions of the lower extremities must be covered with at least abrasion resistant material. Spandex, cotton gauze, and nylon tights are unacceptable. If skin can be seen through the material, the material is too thin. Footwear must completely enclose the foot with a minimum of abrasion resistant material.<sup>1</sup>

These garments fit all of these specifications; the shirt and tunic together provide puncture-resistant protection (tested using a drop test); the braies and hosen serve to cover the lower extremities with abrasion-resistant material. The garments presented here are worn with puncture-resistant hoods and leather gloves to complete compliance with Kingdom armor standards.

### SHIRT AND TUNIC

The shirt and tunic are made based on extant garments; I classify them as a hybrid between Nockert Types 1 and 5.<sup>2</sup> They consist of body panels, side gores that begin at

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<sup>1</sup> Aethelmearc Policies of the Marshal of Fence.

<sup>2</sup> Carlson 2003.

the waist, sleeves, and underarm gussets, as is shown in Illustration 1. Both garments were machine-sewn; despite the historical inaccuracy, I prefer to machine-sew clothing that will be worn in combat situations because the seams are stronger. The hems and necklines of both garments were finished by hand. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the layer of clothing closest to the skin would have been linen; in this set of clothes, the shirt is made from 100% linen. The outer layer should be wool; I chose to make it from fustian because I have not found a tightly-woven<sup>3</sup>, lightweight wool in my price-range.

In order to make the combination of these two garments to conform to the rapier armor standards, I double-layered most of the shirt; only the bottom half of the sleeves is single-layered.<sup>4</sup> In order to work with the doubled fabric, I used the zig-zag stitch on my sewing machine to hold the pieces together and then treated the doubled fabric as one piece. This is invisible on the outside of the garment except on the sleeves. The garment will never be worn without a tunic over it, however, so this “visible” stitching will not actually be seen under normal circumstances.

## **BRAIES**

These braies are made of 100% linen, handsewn with linen thread. The design is my own based on experimentation with a number of other patterns.<sup>5</sup> It consists of three rectangular pieces: two legs and a central crotch piece. The legs have one corner cut off and are draped on the bias with the truncated corner at the bottom, sewn with a spiral seam, and then attached to the crotch piece (see Illustration 3). The garment is held up with a braies-girdle. This should (and will eventually) be tabletwoven; for the moment, I am using a modern D-ring belt. The loose legs can be worn tied up to the braies-girdle or wrapped around the leg and tucked into the hosen. Both of these styles appear in Illustration 1.

## **HOSSEN**

These hosen are also based on extant garments, particularly the hosen known as Nockert Hose type 1 (see Illustration 4).<sup>6</sup> My pattern is slightly simpler than the extant hosen; it consists simply of a leg piece, cut on the bias, with a point at the top and a trapezoidal foot piece, which is also cut on the bias. They have a seam up the back of the leg, one that runs from the base of the heel and over the ankle, one along the bottom of the foot, and one at the toe. All of these seams are hand-sewn with linen thread and enclosed (“run-and-fell” seams) for strength and durability. The hosen are made of a cotton/linen fustian. These, like the tunic, should more properly be made of wool. I chose to make the hosen from fustian for reasons of cost and weight. I have attached linen fingerloop braids to the fabric points; these are used to tie the hosen to

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<sup>3</sup> Tightly-woven fabric is the most durable option when faced with the stresses of rapier combat.

<sup>4</sup> It takes two layers of this linen plus one layer of the fustian to pass a drop test.

<sup>5</sup> The braies are in fact part of a larger experimental archaeology project in which I am developing a method for making accurate-looking 13<sup>th</sup> century braies. So far I have worked with several iterations of an original pattern of my own design as well as patterns from Sarah Thursfield, Andy Goddard, and Maîtresse Aénor d’Anjou.

<sup>6</sup> Carlson 2005.

the braies-girdle, which is what keeps them up. They are worn with garters tied just below the knee to keep them from slipping down the calf and foot.

## **REFLECTIONS**

This is the third set of 13<sup>th</sup> century-style rapier armor that I have made, and it is by far the best. My previous armor projects consisted of three separate garments (a shirt and two tunics) rather than two, and featured a high neckline on one of the tunics in order to achieve the required “no skin showing”. That design had two flaws. First, it was less functional than I would have liked – in order for the high neckline to fit over the head, it had to be too loose to effectively serve as puncture-resistant neck protection. Second, I have found no support in 13<sup>th</sup> century iconography for what was essentially a turtleneck tunic. This set of clothes, on the other hand, looks entirely unremarkable; it can be worn as well for day-to-day living as it can for combat. In order to make myself completely list-legal, I add puncture-resistant hoods and a steel gorget for head and neck protection, a modern fencing mask and plastron (plastic chest protector) for head and chest protection, and leather gloves.

## Illustrations



Illustration 1: Typical 13<sup>th</sup> Century Men's Clothing  
(including tunics, braies, and hosen)<sup>7</sup>

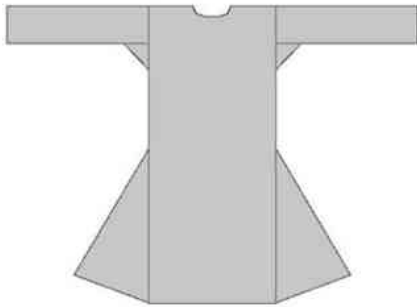


Illustration 2: Shirt & Tunic Layout

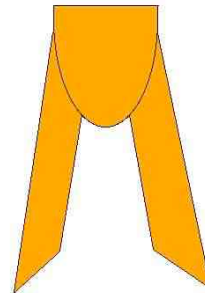
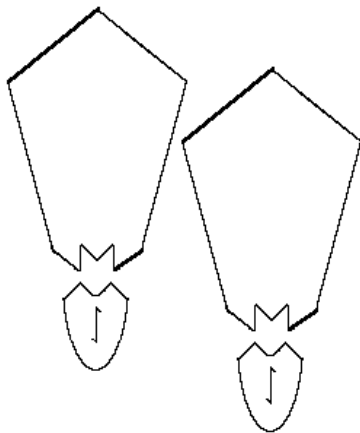


Illustration 3: Braies Diagram



Bocksten (Nockert Type 1) Hosen<sup>8</sup>



The Completed Armor  
(worn with a belt, garters, and coif)

<sup>7</sup>Old Testament Miniatures.

<sup>8</sup> Carlson 2003.

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