

Norse Coat



Fig. 110 Mary and Elisabeth,
Genoels-Elderen Diptych

My husband is always cold, so that means any chores which need to be done in the raw cold are left to me. I have gotten tired of doing my chores one handed while I clutch my cloak closed to prevent a draft. I want one of those new coats that everybody in town is wearing. I told my husband that it was “get me a coat or learn to milk the cow.” The cow likes my new coat.

There is a lot of controversy about the Viking coat. Very few textile remains are large enough to answer all of the questions needed to reconstruct the coat, therefore some assumptions must be made. The first question which needs to be answered is were the coats worn by women? The *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* book has a nice section on coats for both men and women, it does mention some of the Norse in York. What fibers were the coats made from? The textile finds are large enough to answer

this question. At least one coat was made in wool with a silk lining. My coat has a twill wool outer layer and a heavy silk lining. I could not tell from the written references what weight the silk was. I chose a heavy weight silk for warmth. How were the coats closed? The men's' coats may have had buttons, but the women's did not. They were pinned at the neck with a three lobed brooch. There is textile evidence of card weaving and a heavy wool on the back of some brooches, where it would not make sense to pin the over garment to the under garment with an odd brooch. (I will have to get my husband to buy me a new brooch, I think I will wait until the next really cold spell before I ask.) Archeologists have found a few edges of garments, which might indicate the length of the coat. It seems to be below the knee, but not all the way to the ankle. This makes sense with the style of layering your garments, so you see a little bit of what is underneath from the previous layer. The cut of the coat is in great debate. I chose to cut my coat in the same manner as a tunic. It has very simple rectangular pieces, with gores or gussets added to make the garment comfortable. The Norse would probably not have used a shoulder seam, but that was the most conservative use of my cloth. The next time I make a coat I will cut it so the front panel has more of an overlap and the sleeves are fuller. Color of garment can be open to interpretation. Dye waste from madder (red), woad (blue) and weld (yellow) has all been found in the Coppergate digs. Those dyes could be used in different combinations to create a whole range of colors, including black. I might question the purity of the black fabric that I have chosen, not the color.



Twill fabric textile remains



Typical size of textile remains being
used to reconstruct garments