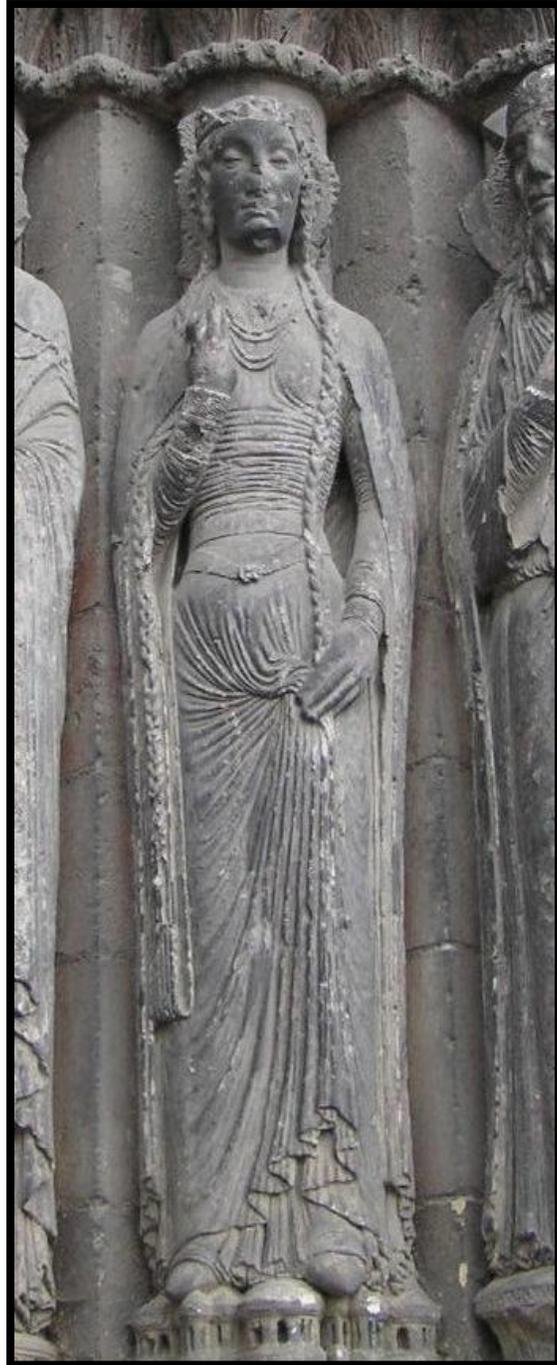


Mistress Louise de la Mare's Bliaut
Instructions by Sunneva de Cleia
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The cutting layout and pattern for this bliaut are based on a class taught by Mistress Louise de la Mare of Atlantia in 2004. All credit for the design belongs to her.



This pattern is NOT a period construction and utilizes a “split-neck” and a center seam. As far as we know, no bliauts were created using a center seam. However, making the dress this way is very easy and requires very few curved lines.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Determine the amount of fabric you need

The length of this dress will be much longer than a normal dress, as the torso is elongated to create the wrinkles across the stomach. Louise suggests this formula to determine total length:

$$\text{Your height (head to toe)} + \text{4-6 inches or more} + \text{seam allowance at shoulder} \\ + \text{hem allowance} = \text{length}$$

For example, I am 60 inches tall. My bliauts start out at 72 inches long before I hem them. When you have determined the total length, double it and that is the amount of yardage you need for your bliaut.

Next determine the width of the fabric. The fabric will be folded in half lengthwise, and the resulting width must be at least the length of your arm, from the hollow of your neck to your wrist. Decide whether you will need 60 inch or 44 inch wide fabric for the length of your arms. Remember that the pendulum cuffs will add a few inches to the length of the sleeve.

Step 2: Lay out your fabric

Fold your fabric into **QUARTERS**. The top folded edge will be the top of your dress, and the selvedge edge will be the middle of your dress. See diagram 1.

Step 3: Determine your measurements

1. See diagram 1
2. For the pendulum cuff pieces (also called maunches), you only need to cut out one, as you will be cutting four pieces at once. Align the wrist edge of the cuff with the **folded side** of your fabric, otherwise you'll just have to sew them together.
3. On underarm gussets: I never make them. I find that if you slightly curve the underarm area and extend the lacing up a few inches into the sleeve (see diagram 2), then just loosening the laces at that point takes care of any “give” I may need. However, many people do use gussets on their bliauts, so this is a personal choice.

Step 4: Cut out the pieces

This is the step where all good seamstresses and tailors stop and consider their layout. Make sure you've measured everything correctly and ask yourself these questions:

Is the middle of my dress aligned with the **selvedge** edge of the fabric?

Is the top of my dress aligned with the **folded** edge of the fabric?

Did I account for seam allowances?

If this dress shrinks in the wash will it still fit?

Have I accounted for the elongated torso?

Am I going to line any of these parts?

Step 5: Assemble the halves

Construct each half separately.

1. With chalk, mark the top of the fold at the neck corner on BOTH body pieces (you will need this mark later when you determine where to start your neckline).
2. Attach the pendulum cuff pieces to the wrists.
3. If you are adding any trim to the bicep area, do it now.
4. Finish the open edges of the pendulum cuffs, if you are not lining them.
5. Starting at the dangling edges of the pendulum cuffs, sew the loose edges of the sleeve up to 2-3 inches away from the armpit. The last few inches are left open for lacing holes.
6. Starting at the hem, sew up the side to the top of the gore (this would be Gore B). Sew Gore B to the sides of the dress. Do not sew all the way up to the armpit.
7. Finish the edges from the top of Gore B to the place where you stopped sewing on the sleeve. This edge will be left open in the completed garment. I just roll under the edge and sew it down, or face it with bias or twill tape. Reinforce the stitching at the top and bottom of the opening.
8. Make your lacing holes. Either buttonholes or handmade, it's up to you. The number of holes you make is not important, but a good rule of thumb is one hole every 2 inches. See diagram 2.
9. Attach the two halves of the dress at Gore A. Stop sewing at the tip of each gore, leave the front and back open.

Step 6: Assemble the dress

This step is tricky. Unless you have a dress dummy, you will need another person to help.

1. Decide which side of the dress is the front and which is the back.
2. Lace the dress, but don't draw it tight. The laces you use should be very long, 2-3 yards each, as they need to be loose enough for you to get into before you tighten them.
3. Using the chalk marks you made in Step 5, pin the dress together with a safety pin at those marks. This is the very center of the top of your dress. Normally, when you create a neck hole, you move it off the center of this line, as our necks do not sit directly at the center top of our shoulders. Since this is a split-neck design, we need to start the neckline 2-3 inches **back** from this mark. Determine where this point is and pin it very securely. Take the first pin out.
4. Put the dress on. Have someone hold the front and back together while you determine how far down your neckline will go, and pin the pieces together securely at this point. Generally, one places the other end of the neckline at the middle of one's sternum.
5. At this point, have someone grip the open front and back parts together, or pin them together if you are using a dummy.
6. Draw the laces tight. **This will change the length of the dress on the sides.** Take time with this step. Draw the laces up so that the side edges of the dress are at the point which you will hem. Drawing the laces will also create gathers around your stomach and lower back, and this is what you want.
7. With the laces tight, pin the center edges to the curve of your body, leaving the neckline open. Do the back first. When the back is completed to your satisfaction, do the front. I generally have to repeat this step a few times in order to get it right. It is

tricky because you are pinning through all the gathers at your lower back and stomach.

Remember: this dress creates a form-fitted silhouette. It is **supposed** to be tight. The tightness lends support for your bosom and tummy. The laces can be loosened or tightened to accommodate changes in size (including pregnancy, I'm told).

8. Finish the neckline. If you've done this right, the selvedge edge should be at the neckline. Just turn under the fabric, press, and stitch in any way you like. You can add trim or embroidery at this point. I usually stitch my necklines down with brightly colored embroidery floss so the stitching creates a subtle but colorful effect.
9. Hem the dress. You must determine the hemline while the dress is laced up and either on you or on the dress dummy. When finished and unlaced, the sides will droop down further than the front and back. This is expected.
10. Congratulations! Your dress is finished! Go out and enjoy your new bliaut!

ACCESSORIES

Ceinture: "The belt, or **ceinture**, is worn wrapped twice around the wearer's waist, with the ends of the second wrapping coming down to a "V" in front. The two ends are knotted together, and several strings or cords hang down in front to the wearer's calves. The belt portion of the ceinture is patterned, and there are often knots shown in the hanging cords. We don't know how the medieval ladies fought gravity to keep their belts adjusted so one wrapping was tight and the other loose, but there are many options, including large snaps, safety pins, and short ribbons sewn to the belt and tied together. Take your pick, or figure out how they did it!"

From Lady Arianne de Chateaumichel, http://www.chateau-michel.org/bliaut_class.htm

After wearing my first bliaut, I discovered the ceinture is not purely decorative. When wrapped correctly, it acts as a girdle: it keeps the dress in place over your torso, and keeps the pleating in place as well.

Chainse: "The **chainse** is the undergown worn with the bliaut. We know that undergowns of this era were generally made of linen and thus were most likely white (as they are in the few coloured paintings of the era that show them). As they are always shown worn under the bliaut, little is known of the design of the chainse, only that it has a high keyhole neckline and extremely long sleeves that are tight enough to stay rucked on the wearer's forearms."

From Lady Arianne de Chateaumichel, http://www.chateau-michel.org/bliaut_class.htm

A note on chainse: I make a normal t-tunic type gown or a quarter-fold tunic gown out of handkerchief weight linen. I just make the sleeves tighter at the wrist and make the neckline a straight slit with facings. Of course, you can also make a keyhole neckline just as easily. I use tiny brass penannular brooches to hold the neckline of my chemise shut at the throat, but that's obviously open to interpretation.

NOTES ON THE FIT

The “split-neck” takes some getting used to. It can be slightly uncomfortable at first. However, constructing the neckline in this manner creates diagonal creases along the shoulders and chest. These creases match many existing images of bliauts in period.

I make my sleeves very loose, because I am not a good enough seamstress to make them as tight as they seem to be in illustrations. By all means, if you’ve got the skill, emend these instructions to create a tighter fitting sleeve (and share the knowledge!).

The tightness of the bodice will restrict your movement very slightly. I find that I can’t quite stretch my arms completely straight up over my head when I’m all laced in. It has never been a hindrance, however. More often than not the maunches get in the way much more than any lack of movement.

RESOURCES

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/12thcenturygarb/>

This is a Yahoo group dedicated to just about everything 12th century. I **highly** recommend browsing their FAQ section and archives.



Diagram 1

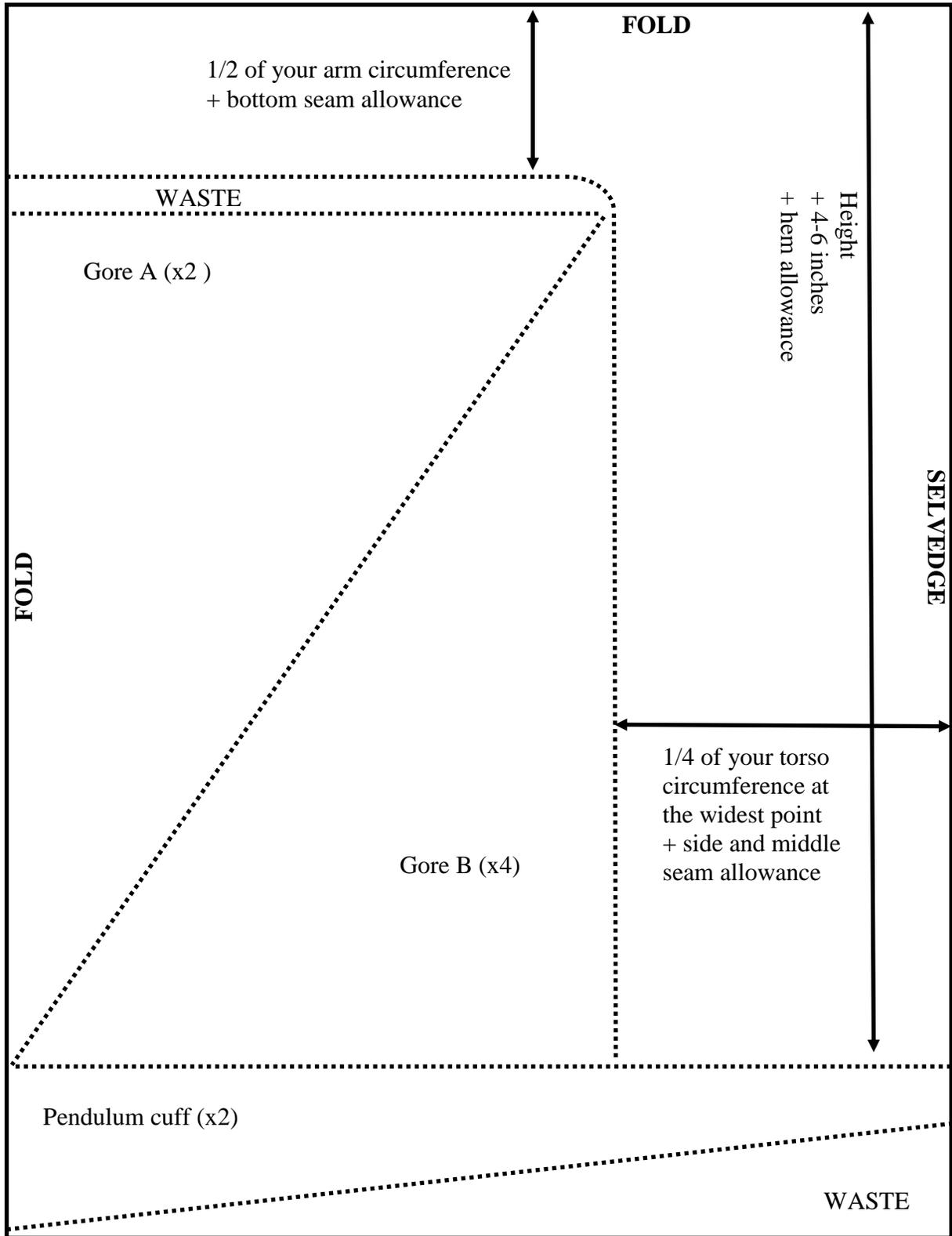


Diagram 2

