

German Saxon Gowns

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The caveat: This is a rough document – it isn't pretty – it isn't meant to be an A&S submission. It's meant to be quick reference guide on some pictorial references on why I made choices to make my German-Saxon gowns the way I did and so you can see how I constructed my gowns. I have two versions; court gowns and landsknecht.

First: The Evidence



Figure 1: Hurnweibel c. 1545



Figure 2: Cranach the Elder c. 1528



Figure 3: Katharina von Boyra by Cranach the Elder c. 1529



Figure 4: Saints Genevieve and Apollonia by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1506.



Figure 5: Die Dame mi dem Pfauenwappen, allegorie der Hoffart c. 1506



Figure 6: St. Barbara Center Alterpiece by Cranach the Elder c.1540



Figure 7: Christ and the Adulteress (detail) Lucas Cranach the Younger, c. 1532
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Figure 8: Christ and the Adulteress by Lucas Cranach the Elder c. mid-1540s Christ and the Adulteress by Lucas Cranach the Elder c. mid-1540s



Figure 9: The Story of Joseph by Georg Pencz c.1546



Figure 12: Furrier – Woodcut c. 1568 from Das Ständebuch by Jost Amman

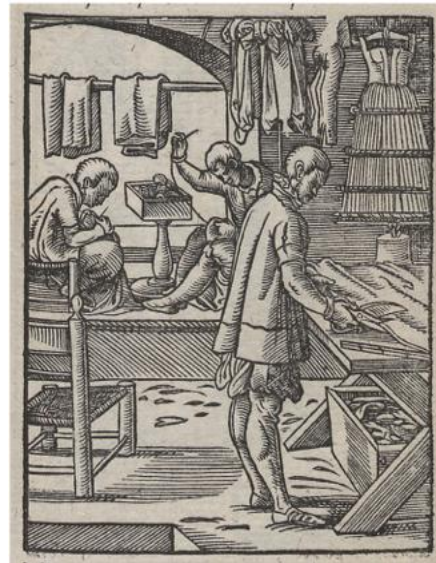


Figure 13: Tailor – Woodcut c. 1568 from Das Ständebuch by Jost Amman



Figure 10: Pregnant woman with multiple children (11) from Medical text of Ambrose Pare c. 1575



Figure 11: German pair of bodies buried with Pfaltzgräfin Dorothea Sabine von Neuberg in 1598



Figure 14: Extant Nuremberg Goldhaube c.1650



Figure 15: Portrait of a Lady by Georg Pencz

Second: Construction

My experience has firmly confirmed there is no one right way to do this. Even in examining the pictorial evidence above and the many more I have done over the last several years, the styles varied greatly from Cranach himself, let alone the various other contemporary artists. Even I have a couple different ways I have made mine.



For example, my high collared gown and the Landsknecht are in three parts (pattern seen here with no underarm seams) where my silk court gown is in five parts (having seams under the

arms). Some of gowns appear to have a circular skirt and other a straight panel; some have what looks to be smaller pleats while other very deep set pleats – these are usually the more upper class gowns. So feel free to experiment. Before going too far into the gown we should start with the bottom layers. A must is a linen shift. I choose a simple low neck and back style, as can also be seen in drawings and paintings, a version with a more gathered neckline was also popular.

For my Court gowns I also wear a silk partlet. While very faint, you can see the shirt line in Cranach's paintings. I used linen to hide elastic for the neckline, but this could also have been achieved through smocking, and is hidden by the collared neckline that was



popular.

For the Landsknecht or other less courtly versions of the gown a decorated linen partlet or decorated linen shirt with a smocked or trimmed collar could also be worn in place of or in conjunction with the shift.

With my court gowns, I wear an under dress that technically in period would have been lined in fur to help keep me warm. I use it to assist with shaping as I don't have the Cranach thin and willowy figure. There are multiple versions of this as well, and I have many version which are mostly modeled after the Dorothea corset (yes much later, but similar to what you can see in Figures 12 & 13 above). One, seen below is red silk with reeds all the way around and a cartridge pleated skirt. (It doesn't close because the dummy doesn't shape will and has a really low chest). I have a



second with reeds placed only where there are in the Dorthia corset, not pictured. And finally the blue pictured here is actually like the red with the stitching hiding using hemp cording instead of reed and a box pleated skirt. As you can see, pleating and materials make a difference.

Regardless of the understructure of my gowns, I always start with a stiffened bodice. My preference is linen canvas or hemp/cotton blend in three layers (cut on grain, cross grain and on the



bias) that is quilted together, as seen below. For my Landsknecht gown, since I wasn't wearing the undergown, I added hemp cord to the placard, just under the

bustline to help with shaping.

Cover the bodice and placard in the chosen material, add the accent, trim, accordingly. The bustfleck is done separately, in the same manner. I make it just a tad shorter on the sides than placard and whip stitch directly on. You could also add hooks so that different bustflecks could be made easily interchangeable.

Add the lining and the lacing rings for the stomacher. These can be washers, D rings, or any other type of suitable loop you find.

The placard can be attached by either lacing or hook and eye. Both work great. I lean toward lacing as it is a bit more flexible to changes in body shape,

but with an underdress this becomes less of an issue.

My Landsknecht has detachable sleeves; my



court gowns do not. There are several ways to make sleeves. I will not go into all the ways. Have fun, experiment. For the curious, my court gowns the slashing was done by making strips, and



having material gathered to create the puffing. For the

Landsknecht, I took wool that was the exact size of the sleeve, but longer,

and cut it. The puffing of it is created by pushing it up. Both use a base sleeve on which the external fabrics are attached to create the sleeve. It is recommended that a silky fabric be used to help easily get the sleeve on and off with a linen shift.

I have chosen to make my skirt



with roll pleats based on my pleating experiment seen here, with roll pleats, double box, and knife pleats. The rolls provided the best look at the top with pleating all the way to the ground and in comparison didn't take any more fabric than the double box (actually less)

I have a whole excel spreadsheet calculation I do, but it basically boils down to figuring out how wide my fabric is, how many stripes I want and how long the skirt needs to be. My skirts need to be a finished length of 42". I use .25" seam allowance (I serge in addition to sew), with .5" hem and 1.5" needed at the top for finishing for rolling. Since most of my fabric is 60" wide I use 6-8 panels for my 36" waist, depending on the thickness of the fabric (wools less, linen more).

First I cut/tear the necessary number of strips (panels) for each of my stripes and then sew them together so I have one ridiculously long strip of a color. Then start sewing the other strips together into stripes for the skirt. This way, if the colored fabrics are different lengths, it



doesn't matter; seams don't have to match remember.

Now, why the 1.5" top? Here's why, it gets folded over an inch (iron it), then sew at the .5" mark. Fold this over and iron so the stitching is just inside. This finishes the edge and bulks up the area where you are going to roll making for a thicker and more voluminous roll without additional fabric.



Next, I make a "belt." Basically, this is another quilted piece that follows the curve of the bodice, including the placard. Take into account the overlap. It is an inch above and an inch below, and covered in the fabric of skirt.



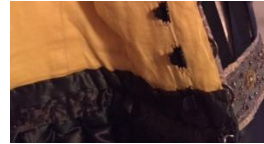
Next the belt is divided into sections based on the number of panels in the skirt, and then further divided into what looks to be an appropriate size for pleats. In the case of the Landsknecht gown, each pleat was roughly 1.33", which came out to 4 pleats per panel, 7 panels in the skirt. The section for each pleat is then folded in half and rolled. I stay stitch each roll, making them easier to handle and sew onto the belt. Be careful not to squish the roll flat.

The roll is then pushed against the lower one inch of the belt. What is basically a

ladder stitch is used to go through the belt over and through the belt again; through the roll, into the belt, over, through the belt, down through the roll, into the belt, etc. until the pleat is secure. A millners needle and pliers are good tools for this.



The belt is then attached to the bodice, being careful to not go through the outer layer. Don't worry that it doesn't go over



the placard. It actually stops where the placard attaches. Add hooks to the belt so it can close. When you lace/hook the placard it goes over top part of the belt.



At this point you have the shift and the partlet or a shirt, possibly and underdress, the main attraction - the GOWN, you now need accessories: Hosen are important. Typically linen socks up to the knees with garters, but I generally cheat and purchase knit socks. Be sure to note that most German socks are striped

on the vertical not the horizontal.

Another important accessory is the hair covering. Young, unmarried women wore their hair loose. Older women wore their hair covered, even in the nudes, the women had their hair covered or at least up in the braids. Up until very recently my hair went to the middle of my back, but even then I wore

fake braids to help pad the goldhaube.



The goldhaube is depicted in portraits as smooth and not a gathered cap. My best results in achieving this were by placing a series of darts along the sides of the cap, being sure to have the padded hair on



while patterning the cap. The darts are then covered by the decorative band seen on the goldhaubes. As s can be seen on Figure 14, a tie at the bottom is an acceptable way to tighten the cap. I have also found a hook and eye an effective method. I often secure the very top of the goldhaube with a pin through the silk band in the false hair to help prevent it from slipping.

Finally, add your jewels! Your belts! Your period footwear! Pouches! Strut your stuff! Have fun and enjoy your own unique outfit and German Saxon Gown!!

