



Northwest Viking Alliance Authenticity Standards for Male Clothing

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Introduction

The standards outlined in this document and other authenticity documents will be the basic standards for all Alliance sponsored events, and most strictly enforced where the Alliance is engaged with and educating the general public. This includes the Althing, Market, museum demos and any other demo/event that is Alliance sponsored rather than by one of the member groups, in which case the requirements are determined by that group. A basic kit is the foundation upon which a reenactor or living history enthusiast may build their overall impression. From this foundation members can expand and personalize their impressions, keeping in mind that while some speculative elements and exploratory archeology are perfectly fine, these elements should be based in something substantial and realistic.

The Alliance is a place for discussion and education, and as such there is a wealth of information amongst its membership and people generally are happy to share what they know regarding patterns, colors, materials, grave finds, etc. Beyond this group, with proper attention given to the reliability of sources the internet can be an extremely valuable research tool. Facebook groups that deal with accurate clothing such as Viking Clothing, Viking Era Clothing, The Authenticity Office, Anglo-Saxons Clothing, and many others will also have a wealth of references, PDF's, and links to academic papers accessible by searching their posts or files.

One thing that the Alliance elders do not suggest is copying other reenactors. While another reenactor's outfit may be appealing, it may not necessarily be correct. If you find that you are intrigued by another person's kit, see if you can find evidence for the elements of it that interest you. Or even send them a message and see if they might be willing to tell you what they based those things on.

A basic kit truly is a great place to start your reenactment. Not everyone in the early medieval world had "Jarl" level clothing, jewelry, and weapons. The overwhelming majority of people in any time period have been average people. They were farmers, hunters, fishers and tradesmen, many of which rarely went further than 100 miles from their place of birth; among other aspects of life, their clothing would reflect this. Barring differences in status, wealth, etc, it can also be beneficial group groups to use fabric of similar quality and color when making clothing; while this is in no way a requirement, it can simulate a community's shared access to a common resource.

At the root of it all, as a living history organization we should reflect, to the best of our ability, the lifestyle of the people and time period we are recreating. Also remember, as living historians, that which we know to be accurate could change tomorrow with new discoveries, and as frustrating as it can sometimes be, we need to be willing to accept the changes and conform to them. Thank you for reading, and we hope that you find the following pages helpful in guiding you toward building a kit that meets the standards of the organization.

The Materials

Wool – The most common textile used for clothing during the Viking Age; natural fiber harvested from sheep. Fabric weights can range from heavy winter wools to super-light summer wools that can be even lighter than linen. Rare felted remnants have been found in Viking Age graves, but whether they were originally like that or if the felting is a product of being buried is unclear. In general, un-felted wool is preferred. 100% wool is suggested, but sufficient wool blends are accepted.

Linen – Natural plant fiber processed from flax; similar to cotton in texture. On average it was more expensive than wool, but only rare in Gotland and Western Norway. It was often used for undergarments due to the softer feel against skin, though a decent number of outer garments made from linen have also been found. Generally the linen undergarments would be made off of the same pattern as the outer garment, sometimes with a bit of the fabric showing at the edges on the bottom and sleeves. Note: Linen does not take natural dyes as well as wool. Blue (woad) dye impregnates the fibers rather than coating them, and is one of the few colors that will take well. Thus, undyed or blue linen is suggested, or potentially a pale shade if using a different color. In the absence of linen, a linen-look cotton fabric will be accepted; it just needs to look the part convincingly.

Hemp – Plant fiber; less common than wool and linen, but sometimes used for making garments.

Silk – Expensive, imported fabric from Central Asia, China and the Mediterranean; primarily used as trim or decorative strips for clothing. Should only be used to portray wealthy individuals.

Leather – Vegetable tanned animal product; generally used for accessories such as belts, pouches and shoes.

Fur – Due to decaying easily, there is very little evidence of use of fur in clothing. A few finds have yielded scraps of fur which appear to have been used for trim and linings, but this tends to be fur from short-haired animals rather than long hair which is often used in modern reenactment. Evidence has been found of shoes made from hide with fur left on.

Metals

Bronze/Brass – Copper alloy metal; used as a material for decoration on clothing and accessories. Also used to make brooches, rings and other small items.

Copper – Base metal; often used in production of bronze and brass but sometimes as a standalone, depending on application.

Silver – Precious metal; used for jewelry, clothing decoration and currency.

Gold – Precious metal; used to a lesser extent than silver for jewelry, clothing decoration and currency.

Iron – Base metal used primarily for manufacture of tools, equipment, weapons and other such purposes.

Steel – Iron alloy containing various amounts of carbon, which generally determine its use. Used for many of the same purposes as iron where a stronger metal is desired.

Lead – Primarily used for weights.

Dyes

Woad – Used to produce blue and (less commonly) green dyes. Can be mordanted with iron to produce a near-black midnight blue.



Madder – Used to produce red and orange dyes



Walnut – Used to produce brown dyes. Can be mordanted with iron to produce a near black color as shown below.



Weld – Used to produce yellow dyes.



Kermes – Used to produce red dyes. Only used for garments of wealthy people; commonly found in silks.



Cochineal – Used to produce red and pink dyes. Found in wealthy grave finds, usually on silks.



Yellow X – Used to produce yellow dyes. Unclear origin; almost always found along with indigotin.



Orchil Lichen – Used to produce purple and pink dyes. Not found in Scandinavia, but rather in Northern Germany, York and Dublin.



Dog Whelk – Used to produce purple dyes. Found only in Ireland.



Mordants

All natural dyes must be combined with a mordant, which allows the dye to better adhere to the fibers of the cloth. Generally, the cloth is soaked in warm water with the mordant for several hours prior to being put into the actual dye bath.

Alum – Most common mordant.

Iron – Used in some dye processes. Tends to darken colors, but must be thoroughly washed out afterward to get rid of residue.

Calcium Carbonate – Another common mordant.

Tannin – Derived from acorns.

Notes on colors:

Generally, deeper and richer colors were a sign of wealth due to the amount of dyestuff needed to produce them. Blues, reds and purples are primarily found in wealthier graves with blues being most common and reds and purples less so. This implies that blues may have been available to a wider range of people at least in the middle to upper class, but reds were generally limited to nobility and purple, if used at all, would have been an expensive import for royalty. Given that no Scandinavian grave finds have yielded purple-dyed cloth remnants, it is less used in a Norse context and more so for Hiberno-Norse and Anglo-Saxon kits. Kermes and cochineal were both expensive imports as well, but are appropriate for Norse nobility due to their being found in Scandinavian graves.

The Clothing

A beginning note: While inner seams may have serging and machine stitching as they are not visible, all visible outer seams such as cuffs, hems and necklines on ALL apparel must either be hand-stitched or discreetly machine stitched and overstitched with a more visible thread to create the look of handsewing. Should a person use contrasting fabric (silk is a prime example due to its tendency to fray) as a decoration on a garment, it is also completely acceptable to serge the edges and fold them under to sew it down.

Hats

It has been put forth that the pointed cap, as seen on many runestones and some manuscripts of the time, is highly accurate for nobility. This is one suggestion for a hat, and one that The Alliance highly recommends, at least for higher status impressions. There is an opinion by Doctor Neil Price that the pointed had could also not be a stiff hat but could be a soft hat; this is another possibility that is acceptable to portray.

The Skjoldehamn hood, though out of the period and of debated origin, is acceptable due to its versatility and the continuous overall tradition of hoods.

The “skullcap” style hat, in a four or six-panel form, can be a good hat option and is depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry, although there’s no real evidence for the use of fur trim as is often done. If fur is used, it should be a short-hair fur such as marten.

Fragments of “pillbox” hats have been found at Hedeby and are appropriate at least for Danish impressions.

Nálbound hats are acceptable due to the use of the technique during the period and its applicable use in hat-making, though there is not a ton of evidence for them.

In general, make sure that the hat goes with the impression in which you are trying to portray both in status and location.



Four-panel wool hat with tablet woven trim



Nálbound hat



Pillbox hat



Birka style conical hat with silk and bronze tip

Cloaks

A cloak can simply be a rectangle of wool or it could be a half round; no attached hoods. There are Migration and Vendel Era examples that are a rectangle with fringe, and this is acceptable for those eras. There are also examples of fur lining to cloaks; this is acceptable if found in your region and era. There are examples of weaving on some cloaks, such as the Mammen find in Denmark; this is acceptable if this is your recreation, but it would be more than a basic kit.

Dead animal pelts around the shoulders, while looking cool, are an anachronism. The specific example that people use, the Berserker or Úlfhéðnar wearing these, is unfounded. There may be specific times that they are worn, as in religious ceremonies based on iconic imagery, however there is no archeological evidence. The sagas, while a fun read, are not always the best place to get information.

Cloak Clasps: A simple brooch, either penannular or ringed pin, is acceptable, or a bone/wood needle. Cloaks are most often pinned at the right shoulder or sometimes centered.



Viking with wool cloak



High status Mammen reconstruction with elaborately decorated, fur-lined cloak



Penannular brooch with Baltic style rolled terminals



Ringed pin brooch

Jewelry

Jewelry should be worn sparingly. Please research your region and era to find out what jewelry you would have worn. A single simple ring, a silver bracelet and the like are completely acceptable.

There are very few examples of men wearing necklaces; there are some, but make sure to research your region and era. The wearing of the Mjølfnir, while great to show your modern religion, was not common practice before the coming of Christianity and these pendants are only found in a few male graves after. If you're going to wear it, it's suggested that you make sure it's documentable to your specific grave or an appropriate grave in the area of your impression.

Note: As living historians, we are to set an example. The wearing of the Fylfot, or swastika will NOT be used in jewelry or embellishments. We as living historians know what this symbol means, and that it shouldn't be offensive, but it is. We will be above all reproach when it comes to our impression.



Danish Mjølfnir pendant, replica



Birka cross pendant, replica



Twisted silver arm ring

Tunics

Please check your region and era for specific examples, but for a basic kit you can't go wrong with a wool tunic that is mid-thigh length and long sleeved with a round neck, possibly with a "keyhole" slit at the bottom of the neckline. Full sleeves are highly suggested as there is no real evidence for the use of short or no sleeves, especially when most people would only have one or *maybe* two tunics and protection from the elements (sun or rain & cold) was important. Trim should be used sparingly. Runes, symbols and appliqué were not used at the time as there are no examples. Embroidery is extremely rare and only found on one tunic, that being the extremely high status Mammen find; even in that case it essentially acts as a trim.

Tablet woven bands and contrasting fabric are acceptable, but please check to see what was worn in your region and era. This may be a bit more advanced than a basic kit as it is not completely necessary for functionality. Likewise, silk can be used as trim for high status kits, but the use and patterns that are appropriate vary by region.



Wool tunic with side gores and keyhole neckline

Belts

Basic Early Medieval Scandinavian belts were simple, thin, narrow and most often made of leather. The wide belts that some reenactors wear are an anachronism, and wide belts should only be worn if you are doing a late Roman Foederati impression or you are intending on being an Anglo-Saxon King.

The buckle may be simple, with a tip and keeper. The length should not go more than a few inches past the keeper. There is much fancier examples but will not be discussed in the basic kit. Eastern style mounted belts should only be worn with Birka or Gotland impressions.

Colors: brown (all shades), white, red, green, and blue are acceptable.

Avoid hanging items off your belt such as drinking horns, axe loops or more than one pouch. A basic pouch (circle with lace closure), seax and small knife are perfectly acceptable.



Leather belt with bronze fittings, ~.75" wide



Heavily decorated Eastern style belt based on a grave find from Birka

Pouches and Bags

The most authentic option for a belt pouch is a simple circle of leather or wool with holes punch around the rim and a lace run through for a closure. These would typically be fairly small and used to store coins, hack silver, weights or other small items. In the context of Birka and Jämtland in Sweden, a tarsoly pouch can also be an option; be careful, though, as these are often made way oversized. If it fits a smartphone, it's probably larger than it should be. However, as long as it's not large enough to put your hand in with the fingers spread out we won't hassle you about it. There is absolutely no evidence for these outside of Birka and Jämtland in Sweden, so they should be limited to those impressions.

Lastly, for more or larger items, a shoulder bag either in a basic pilgrim bag style or a wood handled style is completely appropriate. Shoulder bags like this are ubiquitous across early and

later medieval Europe and are depicted in a number of sources. Wood handles interpreted as being parts of bags have been found in Hedeby, Birka and Sigtuna; but can be used outside of those areas with regards to impressions. It's advised, though, to use handles based on ones from the closest location as they differ in shape.



Circle pouch with coins inside



Tarsoly with decorative mounts



Basic pilgrim style shoulder bag



Shoulder bag with Birka style wood handles

Pants

Simple pants should be of wool or possibly linen, fairly tight, and conform to the Thorsberg/Damendorf style. These are shown in much of the iconic imagery of the time. While there are no known examples of full pants for Early Medieval Scandinavia, there are some that are nearly complete. They can either come to the ankle or have an attached foot.

Rus/Birka pants/high breeches: This style of pant is shown in iconic imagery in western and eastern runestones and tapestries, and an incomplete pair are believed to have been found in Hedeby harbor. While this is more advanced than basic kit, because of the amount of fabric and time to create, we wanted to add them here for an example.

Skjoldehamn pants, while interpreted as Sámi by many, are fair game to wear if they fit your impression.



Thorsberg trousers



A man from Hedeby wearing high breeches

Legs

Leg wraps, also known as winingas or wickerbanders, are wool strips that wrap around the lower leg, from the knee to the ankle and sometimes feet if they're long enough. They can have hooks at the top to secure them or you can use a woven band garter that attaches to itself.

NOTE: These are not a mandatory item for reenactment and have some what gone out of style at least by the later VA. Earlier impressions would have them.

An alternative that has more direct evidence to support it is the use of hose. Most often these go to above the knee and are secured to the belt, but it is acceptable, especially with high breeches, to wear short hose that go to just below the knee and are secured to the pants with hooks or laces.



Winingas in an Anglo-Saxon context



Wool hose with attached feet



Wealthy Birka reconstruction with high breeches and short hose

Shoes

Simple turn shoes of 1-2 pieces are easy to make and/or buy from a merchant. Shoes are a big thing with a kit, as one can have a great impression but if the shoes are modern it takes away from the entire look. It's better to go barefoot (and possibly many people did because shoes

aren't really needed when plowing a field or crafting) than have a modern shoe. Some of us also make simple shoes or teach how to make them. It is always good to take the classes or talk to someone who makes shoes to get pointers.



Jorvik style two-toggle turnshoes



Oseberg style laced turnshoe



Staraya Ladoga shoes (Rus)

Weapons

A good piece of advice is to not buy weapons and armor first. This is a classic blunder that many reenactors fall victim to, including a number of Alliance elders and other members. There are many inexpensive reproductions, and many of those are terrible in both accuracy and quality. The better approach is to start with a good quality soft kit and work up to quality armor and weapons over time, should you choose to do so. In a basic kit, you will not need more than a small knife for eating and utilitarian purposes.



Learn a skill

This goes a bit beyond kit, but we are, first and foremost, a demo organization. The Alliance was formed to do demos, to help regular people learn about Late Antiquity through the Early Medieval era. Is there something you've always been interested in? Blacksmithing? Weaving? Woodworking? Cooking? There are so many things in the daily life of the era that need to be demonstrated. Having trade skills and demonstrating them really brings a village life together for a demo. Even warriors had to have skills, whether it was sewing, making shoes, repairing or making armor, cooking etc. Find something you could be passionate about and study it. Ask questions of those already doing it. Find academic reports and books on the subject. Therefore, we do this; to learn so that we may teach.



Jorunn demonstrating food processing, prep and cooking



VilhjálmR demonstrating silversmithing

In Closing

This is but a basic guideline for Authenticity standards. Other organizations may have much more stringent basic authenticity standards, but we feel this effective while being feasible for most people to do. We understand that wool and linen are not cheap, nor is leather, and that you may not have the skill to make your own clothing. As mentioned above, while we strongly encourage creating a kit that is authentic as possible, it's acceptable to start out with a blend or alternative fabric that is convincingly close to the period fabric in order to get on your feet. For ready-to-wear items there are places on the internet such as Etsy and people within the Alliance who make clothing, shoes, belts etc.; and there are also a number of merchants in living history oriented Facebook groups who make excellent quality reproductions. Talk to people in your group or others in the Alliance; everyone is more than willing to help point you in the right direction if they can. If things seem too expensive, save your money and see if there might be loaner gear to get you by temporarily. The best advice is to take your time and get it right without compromising and regretting it later.

Thank you for reading,

The Elders of the Northwest Viking Alliance