

SIDELESS SURCOATS AND GATES OF HELL: AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL GARMENTS AND THEIR CONSTRUCTION

BY SABRINA DE LA BERE



Source: Time Life pg. 79

Many myths have grown up around the sideless surcoat. This class will look at what is known and what is speculation. We will look at how the surcoat evolved in its 200 years of use by men and women. Lastly we will discuss how to construct one of each of the major styles. This handout is designed to be used in the context of the class.

Cloaks and overtunics of various designs exist from earliest history. Where the sleeveless surcoat originates is unknown, but it begins its known popularity in the 12th Century.

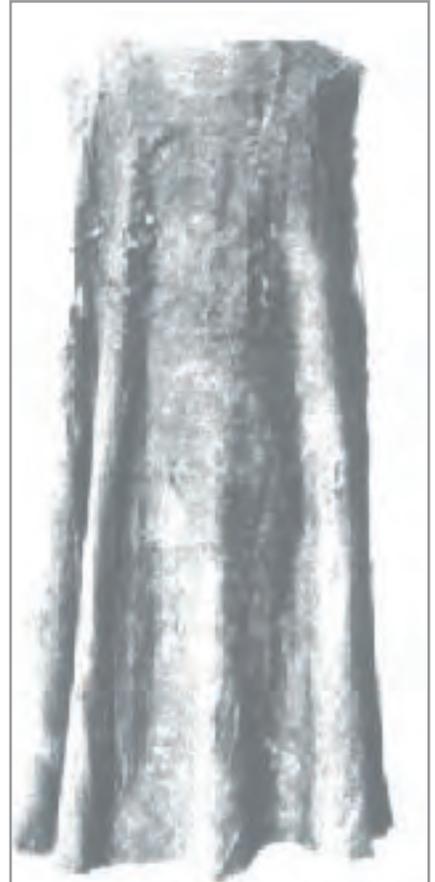
In the picture above, a knight on Crusade has an overtunic. These were as much a necessity as ornament. A necessity to have light reflect away from the armor underneath. Ornament to show the knight's lineage, arms, and loyalty of service. This simple rectangular tunic, may or may not have been the first fashion wave of sleeveless surcoats.

According to Boucher, the surcoat replaces the Bliaud in the 12th C as the gown worn over the cote or tunic.

Some were sleeveless and some not. Men's came in varying lengths and may be split for riding. In the 14th C women's had a very long and wide skirt.

Herjolfsnes 37 (right) is thought to be a man's surcoat from the 14th C. It has relatively small arm holes.

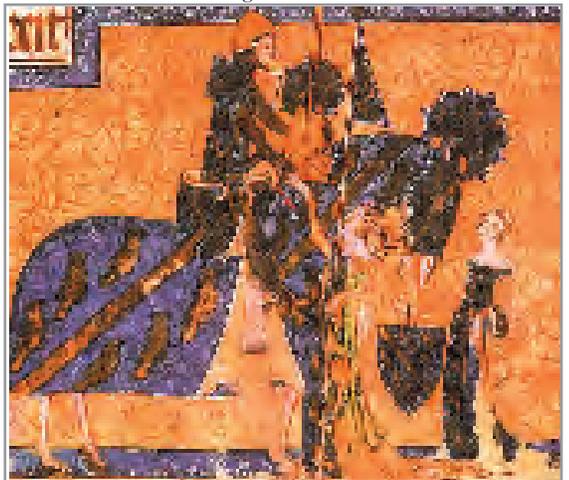
Below is a page from the Luttrell Psalter showing Sir Geoffrey Luttrell being attended by his wife Agnes de Sutton and daughter in law Beatrice le Scrope. Both are wearing sideless surcoats that bear their heraldic arms. There is great debate in cos-



Herjolfsnes 37

<http://www.forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/garments/H37/H37.html>

t u m i n g circles, as to whether such heraldic surcoats existed and, if they did, were they a limited purpose garment; such as court or ceremonial note.



From the Luttrell Psalter c. 1345 page 27
2 Ladies wearing heraldic surcoats.

<http://www.bl.uk/collections/treasures/digitisation1.html>

SIDELESS SURCOATS FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN SPAIN – 13TH CENTURY



Left - Alfonso X el Sabio - 13th C. manuscript - shows the young king in his pellote and “crown”

Left - Restored pellote of brocaded silk with silver gilt threads of Fernando de la Cerda (c. 1225-1275). Silk from the orient.

Below left - Restored aljuba of Fernando de la Cerda. Fabric is brocaded silk with silver gilt threads. Sides lace.

Below right - Restored pellote of Enrique I, Rey de Castilla (1203-1217). The fabric is “inferior” to Fernando and Leonor’s in that it has less decoration. The trim is 24 carat gold and silver. Fabric silk.

Pellotes of Fernando and Leonor were found in their tombs. Seams slant to provide fullness. The pellote is longer than the aljuba. The aljuba is of Castilian cloth. Leonor’s pellote is “very long” and probably trailed on the ground. The armorial bearings are repeated in the “cap”

Nearly identical cotes with side lacings and surcoats with wide arm opening were worn by the French branch of the Valois family, Boucher notes.

Sources: Boucher pg. 180-181 & Museo De Telas Medievales.





Top - Restored pellote of Leonor De Castilla, Queen of Aragon (c. ?-1244) Done with vegetable dyes in blue and green. Fabric is brocaded silk with gold threads. It has a key-hole neck. The front sides are cut slightly lower in front than back. Lined. The tunic, not shown, has side lacings.

Middle - Restored pellote of Fernando, hijo of Alfonso X. It is brocaded silk with a white and gold all over pattern. The pattern is "rhombuses". The ties at the neck are green. The Museum book comments that such an all over pattern of rhombuses is typically Coptic.

Bottom - Restored pellote of Fernando, hijo of Alfonso X. It is blue and white brocaded silk with gold. 1271-1333

Source: Museo De Telas Medievales



E CODEX OF THE CANTIGAS DE SANTA MARIA

Prologo, Cantigas 360 & 170

Written during the reign of Alfonso X (1221-1284).

<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cantigas/images/>



In the illuminations, men wear sideless surcoats similar to those shown of the Spanish royals previously. Note the shortness of the surcoats. The 2 musicians on the left have tighter arm holes and fuller surcoats. It is interesting to see both being represented in the same document.



A garment such as worn by the 2 above is noted in Houston pg. 46-7 as shown in “The Health Book” — a Flemish manuscript of the late 13th C, at the British Museum, Sloane MS. 2435. The description notes “surcoat of purple with white borders at armholes and neck.”. The picture differs slightly as it has a slit neck with 4 button closing.

LUTTRELL PSALTER 1345

<http://www.cgfa.sunsite.dk/index.html>



In these dining and backgammon illuminations, the ladies wear sideless surcoats that are solid color rather than the heraldic ones worn in the arming illumination. The wine sideless is very full in the skirt and appears to have a train..



CODEx MANESSE 1305-1340

http://www.manesse.de/manesse_start.shtml

“The Manesse Codex or Grosse Heidelberger Liederhandschrift is a book copied and illustrated between 1305-1340 in Zürich. It contains love songs in Middle High German by important poets, several of whom were famous rulers. The term for these poets, Minnesänger, combines the words for “romantic love” and “singer”, reflecting the content of the poetry, which adapted the Provençal troubador tradition to German. This manuscript has pictures of the authors which depict each poet as an idealized knight, dressed in his own heraldic colors and devices, making it possible for readers to identify them.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Manesse



Herr Bergner von Horheim



Markgraf Otto von Brandenburg



Herr Otto vom Turne



Left:Herr Jakob von Wart

Center: Herr Konrad von Altstetten



Right: Herr Hiltbold von Schwangau

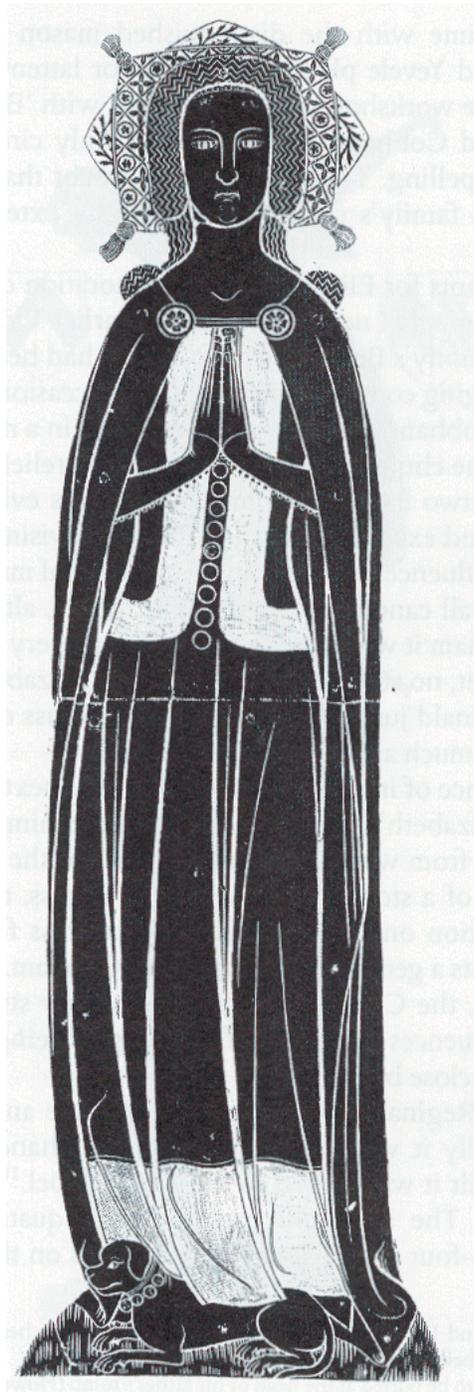
MONUMENTAL BRASSES

http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/pic_libl...



Westley -
Aleyne de Creke 1340-5

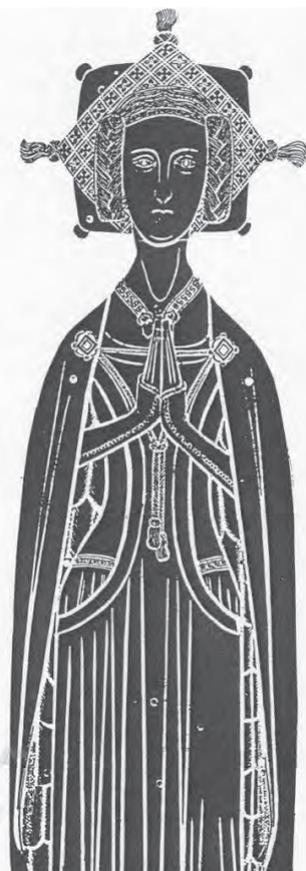
The funerary monuments in brass give us a good opportunity to look at the lines of the sideless surcoat in its most idealised depiction. The ones from the 14th C do not show a belted kirtle. All three have masses of fabric around the feet. The two later ones show fullness in the skirt. The upper portion appears to be rather narrow and trimmed in fur.



Lingfield - Elizabeth,
2nd wife of Lord Cobham 1380



Spitsby - Margaret Wylughby
1391



Baginton - wife of Sir William 1407

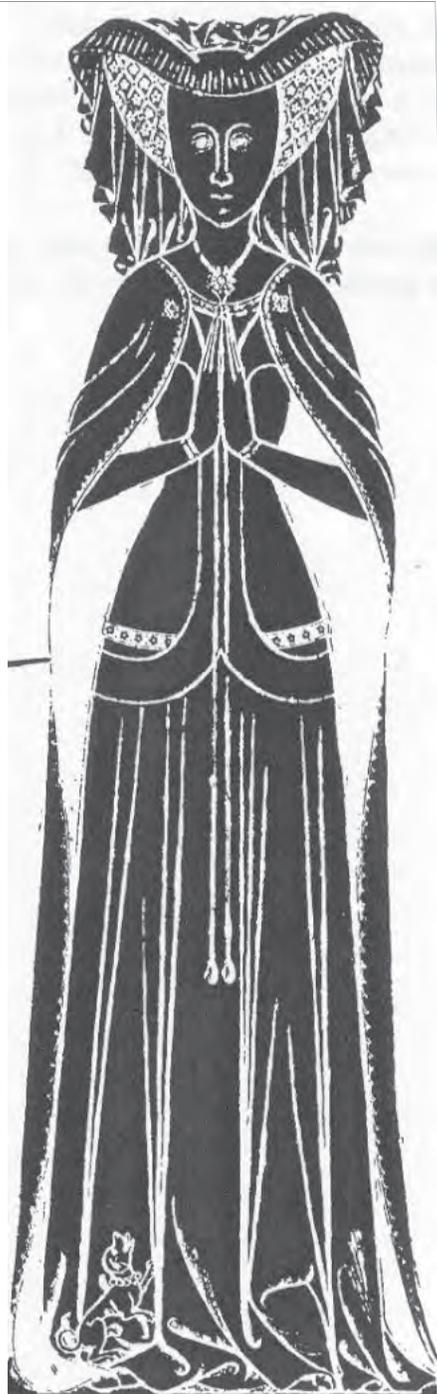
In these 15th C brasses, the front of the top remains narrow and almost becomes merely a holder for the skirting; frequently made of, edged, or lined in ermine. The skirt is very full and falls on the ground into a train. Boucher notes that for special occasions the skirt might be “parti” or decorated with heraldic motifs.(pg. 199)

In the first 3 brasses, you also see the fine girdle that was a status symbol. It is symbolic of virtue and innocence and protectively encircles it wearer. (Piponier, pg. 61)

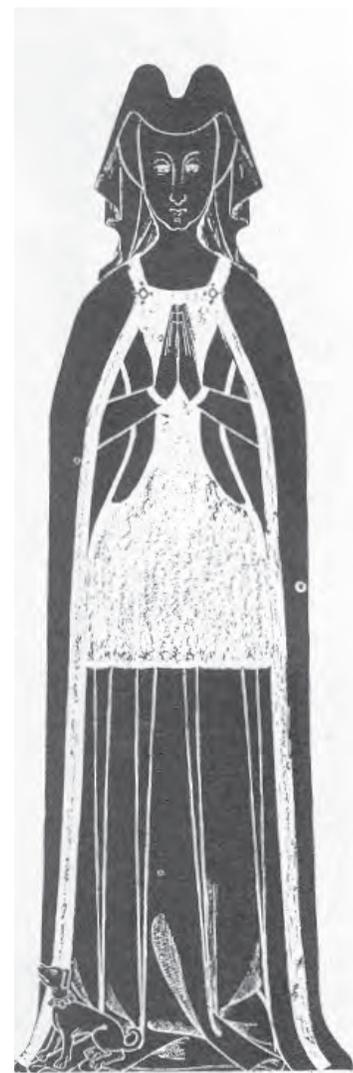
The open sides give way to calling this piece of clothing “Gates”. In Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s prologue, Alisoun describes a piece of her clothing as “scarlett gytes”. (Hodges, pg. 175).

At some point in time, tales would have us believe that women took to wearing the gates without the under dress and the Church denounced this practice calling the garment

“The Gates of Hell” — but I have been unable to find any primary or secondary source of this story.



South Petherton
- Joan Darcy 1445



Shernbourne - Margaret
of Anjou 1458



Trotton - wife of Thomas,
Lord Camoy 1421



Birth of Saint Louis.

(BNF, FR 2813)

fol. 265

Grandes Chroniques de France
France, Paris, 14th Century.

(75 x 65 mm)

http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/manuscrits/aman5/i2_0005a.htm



Emperor Charles IV visiting Queen Jeanne of Bourbon, wife of Charles V.
(BNF, FR 2813) fol. 477

Grandes Chroniques de France,
France, Paris, 14th Century (80 x 65 mm)

http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/manuscrits/aman5/i2_0077.htm



Birth of Saint John the Baptist.
(BNF, Lat 18104)

fol. 207

John of Berry's Petites Heures
France, Paris 14th Century.

(90 x 70 mm)

http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/manuscrits/aman9/i7_0003.htm

Left to Right: 2 ladies wear sideless surcoats trimmed with ermine on top. Lady on the left wears a sideless surcoat trimmed in white which may be ermine. The Queen may also be wearing a sideless surcoat, but it is unclear in the picture. The woman giving birth is wearing a cream colored sideless surcoat with white edging.



Jeanne de Bourbon and Jeanne d'Armagnac (or Isabeau of Bavaria) c. 1388

Boucher comments on the surcoat being a ceremonial garment trimmed in fur on the plastron and at the arm holes or fastened with buttons of precious metals. It reveals a fine gold girdle. Boucher further notes that the sideless surcoat was rarer in Italy than in France by the end of the century. (Boucher, pg. 199, 206-7)

Payne notes that the "buttons" may be bezants – "popular jewel-like ornaments stamped from gold". (pg. 203)

Note how low the sides are cut and how wide the trimming is on the statues; possibly a separate piece.

Herjolfsnes no.37

Pattern drawing based on [Nörlund](#)

This item was found interred with skeletal remains with a calculated height of 1.52 m (59.8”), and based on that is assumed to be those of a man. The material of the garment is a dark brown “four-shaft twill, well and regularly woven of firmly spun threads”. It appears to have been cut with front and rear pieces, neither having a center gore. The broad side gores are each divided by a false seam. There is no indication of what sleeves this garment might have had.

The side gores are much more narrow than in other outfits while the center pieces increase in width much faster, without the presence of a center gore. Enough of the right hand side gore

exists to indicate that there was a “pocket” slit.

Length from Shoulder to Hem: 115 cm (45.3”)

Waist Circumference: *156 cm (61.4”)

Hem Circumference: *310 cm (122”) of which the back piece is 98 cm (“38.6”)

Armhole Circumference: 66 cm (26”)

Neck Circumference: ??

Sleeve Length: ??

Shoulder width: 48 cm (18.9”) across the back.

*Waist and hem measurements are assumptions based the front piece (now missing) accurately reflecting the size of the rear piece.

Some Sources:

- Nörlund, Poul. “Buried Norsemen at Herjolfsnes: an archaeological and historical study.” Meddelelser om Gronland: Udgivne af Kommissionen for ledelsen af de geologiske og geografiske undersøgelser i Gronland. Bind LXVII. Kobenhavn: C.A. Reitzel, 1924.

Some Clothing of the Middle Ages -- Tunics -- Herjolfsnes 37, by I. Marc Carlson, Copyright 1996 This code is given for the free exchange of information, provided the Author’s Name is included in all future revisions, and no money change hands-

<http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/herjol37.html>

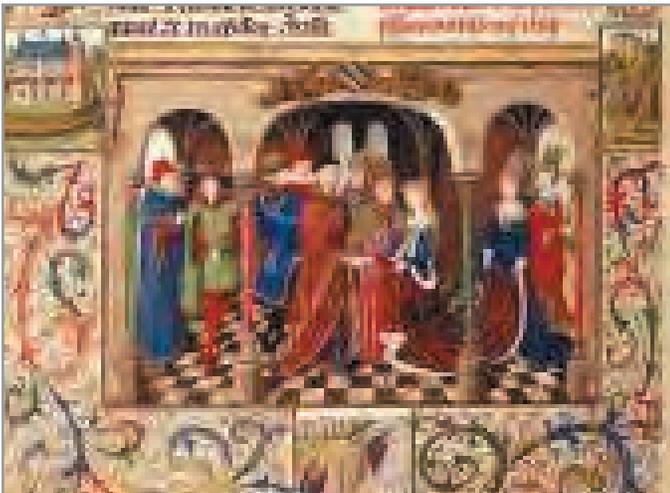
Probable dates — late 14th and early 15th Century.

Used, in full, with notice given to author.

Altar piece of St John the Baptist, Catalan, 14th C. - mid. Salome wears a sideless surcoat. The style and trimmings echo the Byzantine and may well have been a pearled band.

Source: Black Prince pg 89-90.





Girart de Roussillon c. 1450
 Opaque paint, gold, and pen and ink on parchment,
 395 x 300 mm
http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/zgothic/miniatur/1402-450/02n_1403.html
 Lady wears a red sideless trimmed in ermine.



Evening Feast
History of Renaud de Montauban, Bruges 1468-1470
 Paris, BnF, Arsenal, manuscript 5073 folio 148
 Source: Time-Life pg. 64 & <http://expositions.bnf.fr/gastro/grands/121.htm>
 Central figure wears a ermine trimmed sideless surcoat.



Scarlet was both a color and a term to mean an expensive piece of finely finished wool. In addition, dyeing fabric red with kermes dyes was very costly and usually reserved for very fine fabrics, like scarlet. Wool, satin silk, and silk velvet were all easily available to the upper classes throughout Europe and England for clothing. Blue and white as a combination, especially during the 14th C, evokes the symbolism of the Order of the Garter and all the chivalry and honor that the Order represents. Ermine is frequently one of the items restricted by the sumptuary laws. One example is the Royal Ordinance of 1294. (Boucher pg. 180).



Original Source not cited - Florence is overprinted on the piece. Source: Time Life pg. 141.
 Left figure with loose sideless tunic. Center figure with loose sideless tunic edged with a small band of what may be ermine.

From the Roman de la Rose - an illuminated manuscript in the British Museum c. 1485 Source: *Costume - Tudor*
 Figure wears a tight fitting sideless surcoat with the top being of white fabric or fur. This 2 fabric form also appears in the Memling St. John alterpiece.



*Cluny Unicorn Tapestries -
The Sense of Hearing
Loire Region about 1500,
Musee de Cluny, Paris.*

Her sideless is cut very low on the sides and is slit in front. Done of what appears to be a lampas silk, it is trimmed on all edges with a band of woven trim and possibly jeweled.



*The Paintings of Hans Memling:
Left - detail from St John Altarpiece 1474-9
Right - St Ursula Shrine, Bruges 1498
Detail from Scene 6 - The Martyrdom
Upper Right - St Ursula & Holy Virgin*

Similar images appear in The Donne Triptych 1475 and other of the St. Ursula Scenes.

<http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/m/memling/>



In the St. Ursula and St John, the sideless are made with a cape attached. The top portion of the sideless is white and is loose fitting. The Martyrdom has a separate half circle cape. The St John has deeper side openings and is clearly a brocaded fabric skirt.

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Codex Manesse: Copyright Universitats Bibliothek Heidelberg, Plock 107-108, D-69117, Heidelberg

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Manuscripts from The Age of Charles V

Bibliotque Nationale de France - copyright BnF

<http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/aaccueil.htm>.

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Herjolfsnes 37

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Web Page of Robin Netherton

and pdf of *Gothic Fitted Garment*, by Robin Netherton

<http://www.netherton.net/robin/>

Pewter devotional badge in the late 14th /early 15th C.

English — honoring St. Sithe, found at Dowgate, Upper Thames Street, City of London (accession no. 8738) - Museum of London.

Source: Hodges pg. 174.

