Overview
In this class, I want to give you enough information and resources to create German peasant clothes that look as if they came from the early 1500s. I will focus on the shape of clothing, the basic articles required for a complete-looking outfit, the materials that clothing is made from and the colors you can use. This class is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. I am focusing on getting "the look" rather than historic reproduction. Historic reproduction will be discussed in a paper I am working on for KASF 2015.

Sixteenth century peasant clothing, which is the most comfortable and utilitarian German clothing, didn’t survive. The largest amount of evidence we have for what peasant clothing looked like is contained in the German Single Leaf Woodcuts. Colors can be determined using paintings such as the Augsberg seasonal paintings.

Historical Context
What was going on during this time period? 80-90% of the population was peasantry.

- The Little Ice Age
- Protestant Reformation
- German Peasant Wars

Men’s Clothing
Key items of clothing for men: hat, hood (optional), shirt, jacket (optional), pants or hose, codpiece (most definitely optional), shoes or boots, belt, and pouch.
Men’s Outer Wear – Head to Toe

Hats & Hoods

Men wore a variety of hats as shown in the image below. I speculate that many were knitted in wool yarn and then felted into shape. I have contacted a professional hat-maker and her opinion is that some were constructed from fulled wool fabric (see images 2 & 5). Others are made from leather in either a wide-brimmed style (figures 1 & 3) or the “Robin Hood” variety, with a rooster tail feather as decoration (see images 4 & 6). There is a free “Robin Hood” hat pattern online at http://craftystaci.com/2010/04/17/robin-hood-hats/. I haven’t attempted the other hats thus far.

You will also notice men wearing hoods, though they are often shown as a scarf-looking thickness bunched around the neck (see images 1 & 3). As a period source, the Schnittbuch Tailor book shows a hood pattern. For other hood patterns, see the Medieval Tailor’s Assistant. I speculate that hoods were made from wool. I made the pattern from the Schnittbuch from flannel and the hood would not stretch enough to fit over my husband’s head.
Tunics

The Schnittbuch does not show patterns for peasant tunics but the book does show patterns for other garments that are essentially a body and sleeves all in one piece with a slit up the side from the bottom hem of the garment to the cuff of the sleeve.

To make your own pattern, take an old dress shirt that fits you, button the front, and cut that line up the side seam. Lay the garment on a single thickness of fabric (wool if you want to be accurate or linen for SCA field garb) and cut around the outside of the pattern, remembering to include a seam allowance.

Sew the garment up the sides. Hem the bottom of the shirt and the bottom of the sleeves. Face the neck opening with a strip of bias made from the same fabric. Et voila! You have a German peasant shirt.

Jackets

Jackets are made from a similar method as described above except more dismemberment of the old dress shirt is required. Again, I have seen similar patterns in German tailor books, so you are not off-base using this method.

1. Get an old dress shirt and cut off the sleeves along the shoulder seam.
2. Slit the sleeves up the back. German sleeves often had the sleeve seams along the back as opposed to under the arm like modern sleeves.
3. Cut the collar off the shirt body.
4. Press the remaining shirt body so that there are creases showing where the shoulder seam should be. I’m giving you this advice because many modern dress shirts have a yoke which means there is no shoulder seam.
5. Cut the shirt front from the shirt back by unbuttoning the shirt front and cut along the pressed shoulder seams and the side seams.
6. Fold the back in half and press along the center back.
7. Cut the back in half at the center back seam.
8. Now that you have all the shirt pieces, lay them on a doubled piece of fabric (remember, you’re cutting two pieces each) and cut around the pattern, remembering to include a seam allowance.
9. To construct the jacket, sew up the shirt sleeves.
10. Sew the center back seam.
11. Sew the shirt fronts to the back at the shoulder seams.
12. Sew the front fronts to the back at the side seams.
13. Reinforce the neck seam by running a straight stitch around the neck.
14. Attach the sleeves to the jacket.
15. If you want to hide your modern construction, hand-hem the jacket bottom and front. Also hand-hem the sleeves.
16. As with the tunic, take a piece of bias made from the same fabric and finish the neck.
17. Add a button at the neck and you have your German men’s peasant jacket.

**Hose & “Pants”**

Tight-fitting hose appear in many woodcuts. Sometimes it is impossible to tell if the artist meant to portray hose or bare legs. Hose can be made from wool, leather or linen. If you want to get the basic look of a German peasant, you can wear some loose-fitting linen pants and tuck them into your tall boots. Since the groin area is covered on many of the woodcut images, the cheat of wearing looser pants will not show.

To make loose pants, you can purchase a commercial pattern for hospital scrubs and use the pants pattern, Simplicity 4378.

If you want to make hose in the period style, I recommend the **Tudor Tailor**, page 60. This book is a standard reference for early 16th century clothing of the middle and upper class. We are not covering landsknecht clothing in this class, but the Tudor Tailor also has patterns that can be used for landsknecht soldiers on pages 87-95.

If you want to make your own hose without buying a book, cut apart a pair of old long-underwear and use them as a pattern. They will not be historically accurate in construction but it will give you the look of period hose.

A word about codpieces – more than a few of the woodcuts show peasants wearing codpieces. Not everyone is comfortable with codpieces since to our modern eyes they seem obscene. Given the fact that the groin area is covered by long tunics and coats, I don’t think it is necessary to wear a codpiece. However, if you want to make and wear a codpiece, there is a pattern for a codpiece in the Tudor Tailor. There are also patterns online, for example [http://scagermanrenaissance.blogspot.com/2007/10/codpieces.html](http://scagermanrenaissance.blogspot.com/2007/10/codpieces.html).

The last thing I want to talk about is modesty. The SCA is a family organization. If you want to wear tight hose but you don’t want to wear a codpiece to cover your groin, please consider purchasing a dance belt. This is a supportive garment worn by male ballet dancers that keeps all their man-bits in place and presents a smooth view to the audience. It eliminates the clinical view of your groin anatomy if you wear tight hose. And no, a jock strap does not work in the same way as a dance belt.

**Boots & Shoes**

As you can see from the woodcut images, knee high boots with a turned-down top were very popular in the 1520s. Men are also shown wearing ankle boots and low shoes. Boots and shoes are one of the most difficult items to acquire for an historic outfit, yet along with the proper headwear, they make all the difference.

The only vendor that I have found who sells boots that look like German tall boots is SCAboots.com. A pair for my husband ran about $190. I haven’t found a good source from which to acquire low boots or shoes.

If you are a good leatherworker and you want to make your own, Master James who has a laurel in leatherwork, recommends the book *Leather and Leatherworking in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval York* by Quinta Mould, et. Al. It
is a 388 page book on leather finds, including 16\textsuperscript{th} century shoes. This book is downloadable as a free PDF. http://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/resources/AY17-16-Leather\%20and\%20leatherworking.pdf

James also has a handout on cordwaining at www.historiclife.com/pdf/Shoemaking.pdf.

If you can’t make your own shoes, you can find shoes which will give you the look of German peasant shoes. Black Crocs will work as well as any type of dark clog. Google “black crocs” to see a list of current vendors.

**Pouches (for men and women)**

Both men and women wore pouches at the waist. The standard reference book used for the German pouch is *Purses in Pieces: Archaeological Finds of Late Medieval and 16th Century Leather Purses, Pouches, Bags and Cases in the Netherlands* by Olaf Goubitz. - You can find this for about $40. Look on Amazon.com. This book is the main book that people use for Germanic purse patterns.

**Women’s Dress**

While there is a wide range of accessories available for women of every class, the types of dresses worn by peasant women are very basic. They are made from wool or fustian, which is a mix of cotton and linen. Undergarments were made from linen. The images of women on the next page are from woodcuts showing country fairs. These dresses are representative of the basic dresses worn by peasant women.

![Image 8: The dress on the left simplest peasant dress to make. It is a loose fitting dress with an apron to make the waist.](image8.jpg)

![Image 9: This woman wears a capelet over her dress. Capelets were used as a colorful accessory...and also to keep warm.](image9.jpg)

The woman on the right wears a belt pouch which was very common for men and women. Women often wore keys and a knife as well.
Peasant dresses were often shorter than town dresses. All these dresses stop about mid-calf. Very handy for SCA field garb. This woman is wearing a short jacket, as well.

Double aprons were popular as shown in the image above. She is also wearing a dress that would have been more popular in the late 1490s. Fashion did not change quickly among the poor.

Unmarried girls wore velvet bands around their hair.

Key items of dress for women: dress, apron, headwear, shoes, belt, waist pouch, keys, and a knife. The images above are from summer. Optional items for colder-weather dress are jackets and capelets. These were often lined with fur. Germans loved squirrel fur.

Women’s Outer Wear – Head to Toe

Hats, Veils, and Headbands

Women wore as many different types of headwear as men. The easiest hat to acquire is a wide-brimmed straw hat. Straw hats can be purchased at Michael’s Arts & Crafts. See the figures below.
Notice that the women have their hair down under the straw hat.

Another type of headwear is a wulst and wulsthaub. A wulst is a round form worn on the head and covered by a veil. It's the notorious "donut" headdress. A wulsthaub is the covering you wear over the wulst. You can make your own very easily. I have a photo essay on my blog on how to do this: https://amiesparrow.wordpress.com/dress-diaries/wulst-wulsthaube/. In addition, Marion McNealy has a youtube video on how to wrap the linen veil.

Young women wore black velvet headbands over loose hair. I don't know if this was for everyday use in peasant society, but it can certainly be seen on faire days.

**Dresses**

I have an extensively documented process on how to make a standard dress with a square-necked front. I learned this method from Marion McNealy. [https://amiesparrow.wordpress.com/dress-diaries/1512-blue-german-dress/](https://amiesparrow.wordpress.com/dress-diaries/1512-blue-german-dress/). The dress diary shows a round-necked dress but that's something easily changed.
The easiest German dress to make is what I call the angel dress (see below). It looks just like a standard angel dress used in Christmas pageants except that the wide, billowy sleeves are gathered up at the wrist. A good pattern for an angel dress is Simplicity 2777. This has a gathered neckline and large sleeves. The actual Angel pattern (Simplicity 4795) has the wrong neckline. There is no waist to this garment. The waist is created by wearing an apron over the dress.
The third type of dress is a v-necked dress which is clearly very snug on the woman in the woodcut. I have not experimented with how to construct this dress but I suspect that back is cut in such a way to keep the dress snugly on the shoulders. As far as I know, there is no commercial pattern for this dress.

The Hausbook dress is another type of dress seen on peasant women in woodcuts. This is a great example of how fashions changed very slowly among peasants. Hausbook dresses were typically worn in the 1490s. The fashion lived on in the peasant population until the 1520s. I have never made a Hausbook dress but there are dress diaries that outline the process, for example http://www.bettinas-pages.de/clothing/c_duerer.php.

**Aprons**

The apron shown on the Hausbook dress is a double apron. This is a popular type of German apron that is essentially the same in the front as it is in the back. Note that if you make a double apron, make it out of heavy weight linen. A double apron made out of handkerchief weight linen will billow out like a tutu. Images of my double apron are found here: http://amiesparrow.wordpress.com/dress-diaries/1523-berlin-green-dress-double-apron/.

The second type of apron is what I think of as a standard apron with linen pleated into a plain waist band with ties. Upper class German women wore narrow aprons. Peasants wore aprons that covered the entire front of their dress and often covered their entire dress from waist to mid-calf.

Make your apron out of white or off-white linen.

**Jackets**

There are at least 3 different types of jackets worn by German peasant women. I’m currently writing a paper on the construction of women’s jackets. You can easily modify a modern pattern to get the look of a German woman’s jacket. Remember, German sleeves have their seams up the back of the sleeve.


**Hose & Socks**

There are no patterns specifically marketed for German women’s hose. There is a general women’s hose pattern in the Medieval Tailor’s Assistant if you want to make linen or wool hose. If you want to buy hose, your best bet is to buy knee-high socks sold at Pennsic or the Fort Frederick Market Fair. Since you are a peasant, you won’t be wearing stripped socks, such as a female landsknecht would wear. Pick a plain color.

There is also visual evidence that women wore white ankle socks with their shoes. This may be a desirable solution for you on a hot summer day.

**Boots & Shoes**

German woodcuts show women wearing low shoes and low ankle boots. As with almost all historic outfits, the proper shoes are the hardest piece to acquire. Ironically, landsknecht shoes, which were worn far less than peasant shoes, are available. Peasant shoes are not available.
I started taking a leatherwork class from Master James in order to make my own shoes. The same book recommended in the men’s section above applies here. If you can’t make your own shoes, you can find shoes which will give you the look of German peasant shoes. Black Crocs will work as well as any type of dark clog.

**Fabrics**

The fabrics used in period:

- linen for undergarments and possibly summer outer garments
- fustian and wool for outer garments (dresses, jackets, hose, hoods)
- leather for hose, jackets, hats, and purses

Wool is made from animal fibers, mostly sheep but camel hair was also used for imported fabrics.

Linen is made from flax, which is a plant. Linen does not take dye well.

Fustian is a mixed weave of cotton and linen, though some fustian is listed as having been made from cotton and some “local fibers.” What those local fibers are is not explained any further. The fustian that I have found modernly is almost denim-like in weight and toughness, which would explain why that type of fabric would have been great for 16th century farmers.

Cotton is period back to a coat belonging to Charles de Valois (circa 1364), however pure cotton might have been a high-status cloth. I suspect it must have been very high status or else more would have been written about it. There is a description of a doublet made of white velvet with its slashes being tacked to an under-layer of white cotton. This is for an upper middle class man who was a social climber. My advice to you is to avoid cotton and velvet entirely.

The issue with saying definitively what fabrics were worn by what social classes is that the second-hand clothing market was very active. Cloth and clothing was very expensive in period and people would often sell old clothing to try to recoup their investment. Therefore it was possible to see a lower-class individual wearing an upper class outfit that was just a little shabby. A traveler at the time commented that it was always possible to tell by the cut and color of someone’s garments what social class that person belonged to, rather, you could conclude from the condition of the garment. The lower classes might be wearing the second-hand clothing of the upper class.

**Colors**

There were a wide variety of colors used in the 16th century. Think of just about any modern color (except for the neons): red, orange, yellow, blue, pink, brown, green, violet, black. What colors were popular? From visual evidence, in the early 16th century, red seems to have been popular. Remember that reds fade to pink or brown so don’t let anyone tell you that pink isn’t period. In the later 16th century, softer colors such as lemon or peach were popular.

Sixteenth century people did not have the same aesthetic sense of “matching” colors that we do today. There were a wider variety of different colors in combination. Don’t think of peasant clothing as the generic brown or gray colors seen in any village scene from Xena: Warrior Princess or Stargate or any of the pseudo-historical fantasy shows on TV. Costumers dressed villagers in drab colors to make them part of the scenery. As a
costumer, you don't want random background characters to be wearing red if your principal actors are wearing red. That's too distracting for the audience so don't take any of those shows as inspiration for what to wear.

In real life, peasants were dressed much more brightly than the general public thinks. To bust the #1 color myth, purple was indeed worn by peasants. The Augsberg Seasonal paintings capture a female field worker and a hunter both wearing purple. There is documentation that Vikings were wearing purple. Chris Laning wrote a Tournaments Illuminated article about the testing she did making purple from lichens. You can also get pink and fuchsia from the same formula. All the color images below are from the Augsburg season paintings circa 1520s.

![Image 19](image19.png)

Image 19: Note the different head coverings. White linen head wraps, uncovered hair under a straw hat, a young woman with her hair down wearing a black headband, and a wool hat on the man.

![Image 20](image20.png)

Image 20: The butcher is wearing pink or salmon-colored hose.
Image 21: This scene highlights peasants wearing both black and white clothing while taking in the harvest. Again, we see straw hats, lots of red clothing and even men wearing a flower garland on his head. An upper class man watches while he carries his hunting hawk and has ostrich plums in his jaunty hat. Note the yellow hose. His companion has slashed clothing.

Image 22: This scene shows both lower class, town class and lower class people. The lady on the far left wears chains and well fitted clothes. her husband wears fancy hose and socks with a gold haube. A hunter in the background wears a gray coat, green hood and woolen hat. Note his two-fingered gloves. A town-girl wears her black velvet headband and green wool dress. Some lower class farmer worker carries her produce on her head.

For people who love green, you will be happy to know that one traveler mentioned that the best way to blend in to a village of lower-class folks was to dress in green. This type of random statement highlights the fact that parts of everyday life are totally missing from the visual record. As far as I know, we have no village scenes in period art that are overpopulated with the color green. Green appears in scenes, but only as one of many other colors.

Note: Sumptuary laws determined that trims could only be black and brown for lower-class women.

**Avoid These German Costume Clichés**
Jewelry, smocking, embroidery, square-toed Landsknechte shoes, wide Landsknechte hats, ostrich plumes (though rooster feathers are allowed in men’s hats), and slashed clothing.

**Fabric Resources**
- http://www.graylinelinen.com for linen. Note that Grayline has higher quality linen but you will pay a buck or two more per yard.
• Hancock Fabrics – Your mileage may vary. My local Hancock has horrible selection. The Hancock in Manassas caters to the Civil War Re-enactors so they carry a much wider variety of wool to choose from.

Patterns for Clothing
The truth about German patterns is that you have to make your own. For online resources see below.

• Marion McNealy (Dame Sophia Kress) - Sophia is a German laurel. She has great handouts for pattern drafting. http://www.curiousfrau.com/patterns/pattern-drafting. I use her method for drafting sleeves. Marion and Katrine De Saint Briec have a book coming out later this year on a German Master Tailor's book. Marion also has a youtube video on how to wrap a German veil.
• Drea Leed - 16th century German pattern book at http://www.elizabethancostume.net/schnittbuch/index.html
• Genoveva von Lubek - Genoveva has some kick-butt tutorials on her website. One of them is: http://germanrenaissance.net/free-patterns-for-16th-century-german-renaissance-clothing-and-accessories/

Color References
Ausberg Panels showing the four seasons. Many styles of garb shown, including many styles of women's cold weather outer garments in the appropriate seasons, also many different styles head covering. Click on each season to find close ups of many figures. http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/kurzweil/season.htm


Bibliography