

A web study of the Saint Louis shirt.

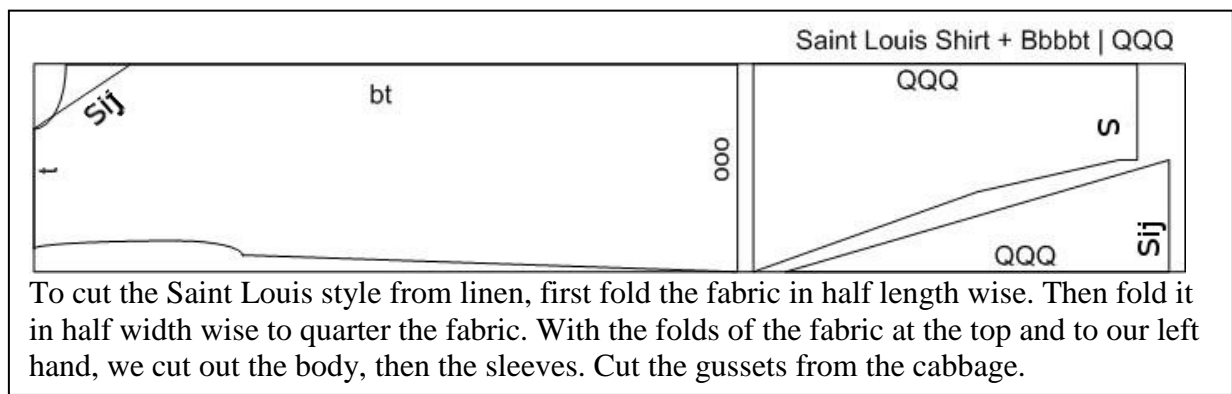
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(Bryan James)

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With Pennsic fast approaching, and always the need for new cloths, I decided to make a couple of linen under-cotes and picked the Saint Louis shirt to be my guide.

Finding information on the Saint Louis shirt on the web isn't too difficult; a Google search for "Saint Louis shirt 13th Century" will provide several sites. Among them is a Tournament Illuminated article called "Another Look at St. Louis' Shirt" by Heather Rose Jones, which has great information and a couple of detailed pictures. There's also I. Marc Carlson's website where you'll find pattern redrawing and basic info under his "Some Clothing of the Middle Ages" section. There is also www.kostym.cz website of synopsis about medieval clothing that contains a good construction pattern piece.

Though there is plenty of rough information available on this shirt, and it's been on display at the Notre Dame Cathedral, I have yet found a detailed published examination and measurements on the garment, like we see with the Greenland extant pieces. What has been written has been based on observations of the garment hanging on display. One thing that everyone seems to agree on is the length of the shirt at 43.8 inches. But there is disagreement and theories on just about everything else. As example with the width of the fabric, I've seen mention of a loom width of 22", 24" and 30 inches; of course all of these will affect the final hem width. Also it used to be thought that the body piece was a rectangle with an armscye cut in, now it is pretty much accepted that the body of the shirt is a trapezoid shape, with debate if there is a set in armscye.

Now my goal isn't to recreate the Saint Louis shirt exactly, but instead make a shirt that is in the style of the Louis but fits me, or who I'm making it for. This means I can take a slight different approach on making the garment then I would if it was a recreation. Also we are basing our numbers on the artistic skills of those that have either drawn the garment from observations or redrawing based off of those, like I did to avoid copy right issues.

Before patterning the shirt, I first want to get all the measurements I can off the Saint Louis shirt, so that I can understand the proportions and the shape of the pieces. This way when altering for me the proportions will be altered to keep the look the same. So the first step was to print out one of the line drawing diagrams of the shirt, and take a ruler and measure it out (Fig1).

The important measurement here is the length of the shirt. This is because; we are going to use it to set our ratio to convert the garment (Fig2). So other then the length of the garment, we need to know the width of the sleeve and the width of the body at the hem. Also we want the height of the gore and the width of it too.

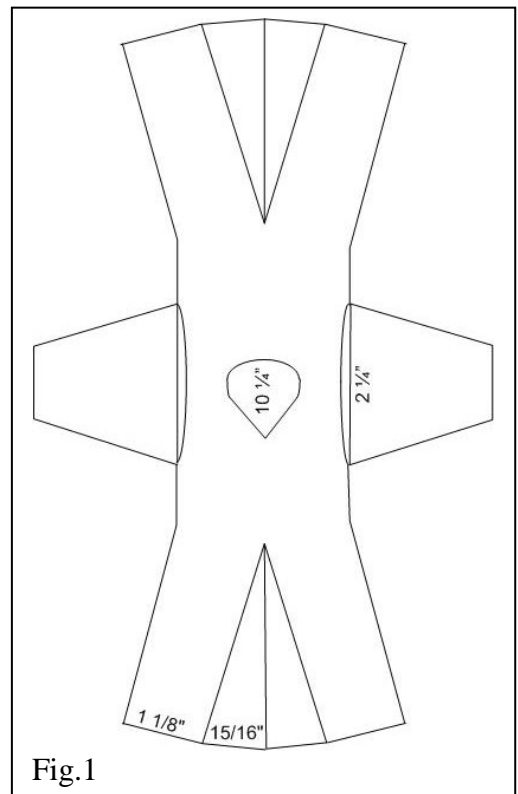


Fig.1

Overall Length = 10 1/4 inches

Sleeve width = 2 1/4 inches

Half width of body (edge to the gore) = 1 1/8 inches

Height of the gore = 2 7/8 inches

Width of the gore = 15/16 inches

So if we decided to take the length of the shirt at 43.8 inches. Then our scale is .117:1 inch.

Fig.2

Overall Length = 87.6 inches

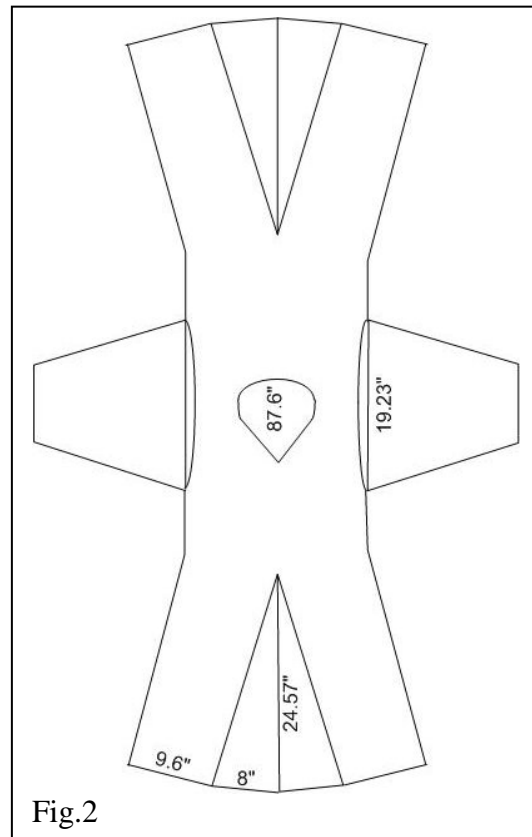
Sleeve width = 19.23 inches

Half width of body (edge to the gore) = 9.6 inches

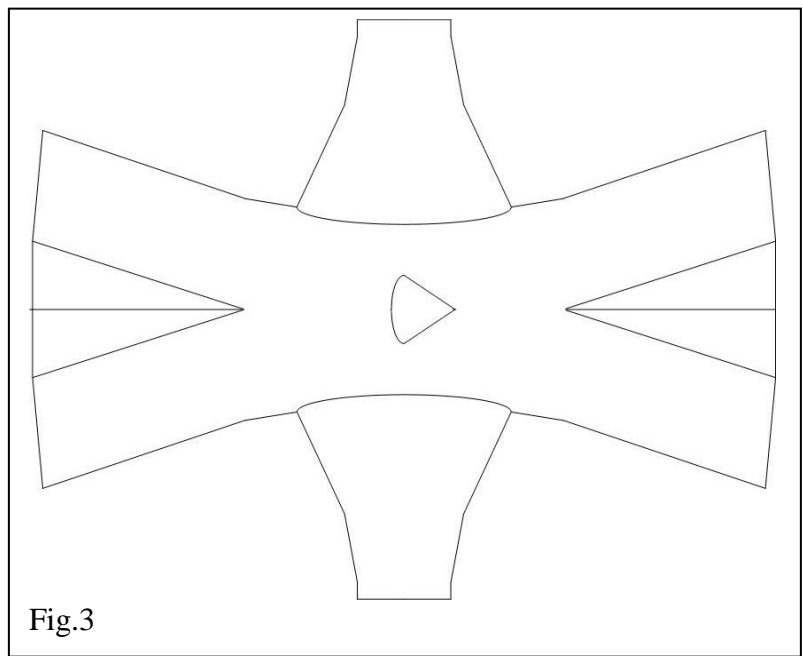
Height of the gore = 24.57 inches

Width of the gore = 8 inches

We know from reading Heather's article and from other observations of the garment, that the body panel is trapezoidal in shape and not rectangle as first purposed. It is thought that the garment tapers in 3 to 6 inches. It is hard to say how much to taper in for sure, some people say 3 to 4 and others say 4 to 6. I figure I'd let my body and width of fabric decide the exact amount.



Why did I ignore the sleeve except for the width? As stated earlier, this garment is for me, So the length of the sleeve doesn't really matter or the width of the wrist, since I am not recreating the original shirt (but if you really must know was probably around 17 inches on the drawing), nor am I the same size that King Louis IX was. The shoulder width is important since everyone says that the width of the sleeve is the same as the width of the fabric and body panel. This is at least proven on our drawing, were you can see our two half measurements of the body piece (excluding the gore), equals the width of the sleeve.



I started with 4 yards of 52 inch wide fabric, but I wanted to make the shirt out of fabric the same width as available in period. The measurements support 20" wide fabric, but to be more comfortable for me, and to make things easy, I decided to go with 26 inches wide. The reason for this is because that was the width of my modern linen folded in half. Now this amount of linen will produce two shirts. You could of course do the same with 2 yards of linen, using 1 half for the body and the other half for the sleeves. This will limit your over all length of the Garment to at least 36 inches, which will be fine for a shorter length version of the shirt.

Now for me, to pattern the garment, I am using just the chest measurement (Or, if this is for someone that is bigger then the normal person, use the largest measurement around the torso), the length I want the garment, sleeve length, and the measurement around my wrist to be able to pull the sleeve over my hand. You well want to add in ease to your chest measurement, since this is an under garment I usually add in about 2 inches. Since I'm only laying out a quarter of the panel because of the way the fabric is folded, the ease is added to the chest measurement divided by 4 gives you the width from the center to the point of the shoulder. For the bottom hem add at least 3 inches to that number, more if your fabric allows it. The side seam is made by connecting the shoulder point to the hem line.

I decided to make it 44 inches long since that was about knee length for me (It is ok to vary the length for your personal taste). To quarter the fabric, I folded the fabric length wise to about 46 inches was showing on the top piece and cut it off the 4yds giving me a piece of fabric 92inches x 26 inches.

The reason I cut the body panel larger was to compensate for the fact linen likes to shift and since my table isn't big enough to hold 4yds and the weight pulling as I cut the linen, it was easier to cut longer and then re-cut again while cutting the trapezoid on the body panel.

Leaving the body panel folded in half length wise, I next folded it in half width wise, effectively quartering the fabric. At the upper corner I first measured down 44 inches and squared off my fabric,

next from back up at the upper corner, I marked out my line to my shoulder point. There is some debate whether the garment had an armscye cut in or not. I decided to put a very shallow one in. measuring 13 inches down from the shoulder point and drew a very small armscye curve.

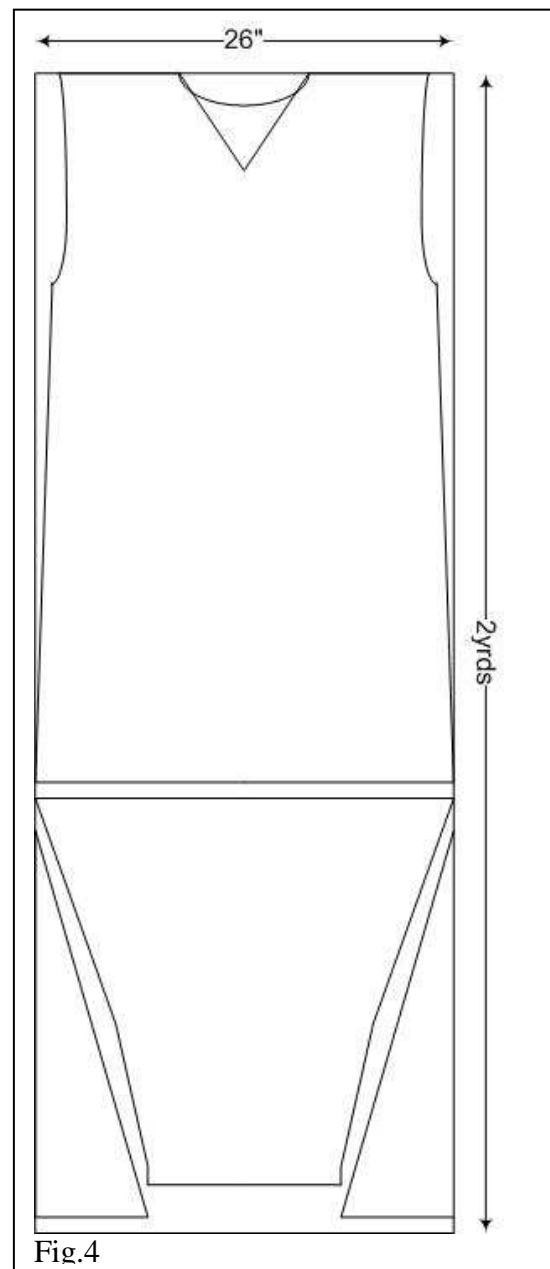


Fig.4

The neck on this shirt is a V shape front and a curved back. I feel that this is up to you again on what you like for a neck line. Personally I kept the style the same as on the shirt. While the body panel was still folded I laid out the neck opening. I started by marking the width at four inches from the center, I got this number since it is half my Front width measurement from the Sator drafting system. The curve for the back of the neck drops down by 1 ½ to 2 inches depending on your taste. The Front V I found looks pleasing on the shirt when dropped down by 6 inches from the center point. This is very similar to the calculated measurements taken from the drawing, with the drop in the back being 2 inches, the V drop being about 7" and the width being 4 ½ inches.

Now that the body has been cut out, there is one thing I'd like to point mention. A lot of the drawings, that show the pattern pieces onto fabric for a cut diagram. Like to show the gores being made in the cabbage cut out from the body panel trapezoid. Don't count on this. In fact in my case this wasn't possible, there was only 3 inches width left on the cutout piece. I was, though able to get the pieces from the cabbage from the sleeves.

To cut out the sleeves I took the remaining fabric and quartered it like I did the body panel. Along the length of the fabric I marked my sleeve length. At the end of the sleeve length I drew a perpendicular line for the wrist. The wrist line should be enough to slide over your hand. Next on the sleeve length I marked the elbow, which should be have the sleeve length +2 inches (towards the wrist end of the sleeve. again I marked a perpendicular line that was equal to half the measurement around your elbow bent. I then connected this line to the wrist line (usually have a straight line at the wrist for 2 inches then angle it to the elbow line). Then connect the elbow line to the end of the sleeve which in the width of the fabric in this case. The gores I was able to get from the cabbage of the sleeves.

On the original they talk about a fabric casing that covers the seam, though I could have done this, to save time, I decided to just flat fell the seams. Any period seam finish could be used. For the neckline though, I decided to use a facing like was done on the original. The facing isn't cut on the true bias but was made out of what was left from the fabric. You can do a double folded hem on the neckline, but this will not give you your nice pointed V in the front, but a curve at the point. So if you do want the V style neckline you should face the neckline.

There is no right or wrong way to assemble the garment. But personally, I find it easier to first put on the open sleeves into the body, and then set in the gores. And once all that is done, to sew up the sides and sleeve in one stitch.

Bibliography

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