Medieval Clothing

In Medieval Europe, as in the Roman period, most people wore loose linen or wool tunics like big baggy t-shirts. But clothing did become more complicated in the Middle Ages, and more used to distinguish men and women of different professions from each other. Men mostly wore tunics down to their knees, though old men and monks wore their tunics down to the ground, and so did kings and noblemen for parties and ceremonies. Men sometimes also wore wool pants under their tunics. Wearing pants was originally a Germanic idea, and the Romans disapproved of it. But it gradually caught on anyway, especially among men who rode horses and in colder areas. Other men, especially noblemen, wore tights under their tunics. Knitting had not yet been invented, so they had to wear woven tights which did not fit very tightly. Outside, if it was cold, men wore wool cloaks.
On their feet, men wore leather shoes if they could afford them. You can tell if a medieval painting or tapestry was made before or after about 1300 AD by looking at the mens' shoes. In the earlier paintings men wear shoes with square toes, but later the shoes have pointy toes and even curve up at the toes in a kind of hook, just to be extra fancy.

Women also wore different kinds of clothes depending on who they were. All women wore at least one tunic down to their ankles. Many women, if they could afford it, wore a linen under-tunic and a woolen over-tunic, and often a wool cloak over that if they were going outside. On their legs women sometimes wore woven tights or socks, but women never wore pants. Nuns wore tunics like other women, but generally in black or white rather than colors. Noblewomen often wore fancy tall hats, sometimes with streamers coming off them. They sometimes plucked the hair from their foreheads to give themselves very high foreheads which people thought were beautiful.

Not much medieval clothing survives today, because clothing tends to rot when it is buried under the ground, and even in the air it tears and gets threadbare and then people use it for rags. Most of what we know about medieval clothing comes from medieval pictures and sculptures, which have lasted better.
Information About Medieval Dress

The Middle Ages or medieval period stretched from the 11th to the 14th century. During the medieval period, clothing laws were assigned to the citizenry to signify social divisions, according the sumptuary laws of the country. Medieval societies were organized by a definite feudal or class system. Each class had limits as to the type of clothing that members could wear. Penalties and fines were given for wearing clothing considered too nice or inappropriate for any specific class.

Peasant Men

Clothing for medieval peasants plain and simple. Men's apparel was made to be practical for their everyday work. Peasant men were the lowest ranked in society. The peasant or common worker wore a tight tunic that was short and belted with rope or leather. The belt would sometimes hold the tools the peasant would work with. He might also wear short pants or trousers made of wool. Medieval peasants were allowed to wear a felt hat.

Peasant Women

Peasant women wore either a single long tunic with sleeves, or two tunics. The two tunic combination consisted of a long tunic that went to the heels, with sleeves that were tied at the wrists, and a short tunic.
The short tunic was usually sleeveless or had short sleeves. It was tight and made of simple, unadorned material. A peasant woman could wear a belt, but those were also to be kept simple. She was allowed to wear a veil that covered the back of her hair and hung down past her shoulders. If she did kitchen work, she was also allowed to wear an apron. She wore lace up shoes and woolen stockings during cold weather.

Knights

When wearing a suit of armor, a knight needed to protect his skin with underclothing. These underclothes began with a basic linen shirt and trousers. That was topped with a padded coat that protected the knight's skin from the weight of his armor. Knights wore woolen stockings and a surcoat or robe. The surcoat was sewn with the knight's coat of arms that identified him on the battle field. His armor was made of metal and most often had a headpiece, a torso piece and arm and leg greaves. Some knights also wore chainmail under their armor to give them further protection from the blows of swords.
Lords and Ladies

Medieval lords could wear velvet hats, befitting their rank. A lord wore a fancy robe and, later in the period, a surcoat that was cinched with a bejeweled belt. He wore his hair short and kept his beard, if he chose to wear one, neatly trimmed. He wore colored hose and pointed, closed-toe shoes. In later medieval times puffed sleeves and fur trim on robes became popular. Ladies wore tight, form-fitting dresses, rich with embellishments. Jewels were sewn onto the bodice, which was laced tight. The dress could have a high collar or show the lady's decolletage. She could wear a train, the length of which was determined by her rank. She would wear a mantle or surcoat when outdoors. She wore hose and long, pointy shoes.
Royalty

The kings of medieval Europe wore clothing that was luxurious and beautiful. A king of the Middle Ages would generally wear a thigh-length tunic. This tunic was long sleeved, with padded shoulders that gave the king a more robust appearance. In later years, puffed sleeves replaced shoulder pads. It was not uncommon for kings to wear bold colors, like bright reds and blues. It was the singular privilege of royalty to wear purple and gold. Anyone else appearing in these colors broke the sumptuary laws. The king also wore a surcoat, which besides showing his royal crest, would have jewels and precious stones sewn onto the front. He also might line the ends of his robe and tunic with fur. He wore hose in colors that matched his attire and wore the latest shoe styles, which were usually long and pointy. The king only wore his crown during formal occasions, but at
other times wore fancy velvet and jeweled hats.

Middle Ages

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Under and Outer Garments

The Roman attire during the medieval period consisted of two garments. The under garment was referred to as a tunic and the outer garment, was known as the cloak.

The Tunic

Today’s blouse was derived from the tunic. The silhouette had sleeves and was also called by various names according to the difference in sleeve and shape. A tunic with long and wide sleeves was called a chiridota. The manuleata had long and tight sleeves to the wrist. The talaris silhouette had an extended length. The palmata was the state tunic and was embroidered with palms and other ornamentation throughout the tunic.

The Cloaks

Outer garments such as mantles and cloaks were made with and without hoods. Lacroix and Naunton also write, “The cloak...was known under various names of chlamys, toga and pallium.” These different names referred to altered shapes which were derived from the cloak.

Upper Garments
Garments worn over the tunic were referred to as upper garments as well as the lacerna, loena, cucullus, sagum and paludamentum. The upper garments were generally short in length. The silhouette was made in two different ways. Draped fabric added fullness to the silhouette and less fabric was used for a slightly contoured shape.

**T-Shirt**

Today's t-shirt industry is traced back to the 7th century. According to Blanche Payne in "History of Costume," "On a bronze bowl of the early 7th century B.C., figures representing...a hunter and a warrior...show...the short loin skirt...also a short t-shirt."

**Medieval Pants**

The braies, which is the term for medieval pants, were part of men's fashion. The garment was generally worn with chausses which today are referred to as leggings. The two garments were usually tied at the waistband, producing natural fabric folds which today are referred to as shirring or gathers.

**The Clavi**

As the Etruscans migrated from Asia Minor to the Italian peninsula towards the end of the ninth century, the fashion influences from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Crete continued to blend. The clavi, which are vertical borders, were originally worn by the Etruscans on long
tunics. The Romans adopted this detail which became a status symbol and then decoration. The trimming market today produces wide embroidered taping borders to embellish apparel as well as accessories.

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