

To Make a Cote

by Dame Katyrina von Katzenelbogen (aka Tricia Whealan)

Cote Hardies were fitted garments worn by both men and women from about the mid 1200s to the late 1300s. By the mid 14th century the gores had moved south to hip level, elongating the appearance of the torso. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the cote was still being worn as under clothes. The women's dress looks remarkably like the modern "princess style" dress with long sleeves and a floor length skirt. In its first incarnation, the cote is fairly fitted and the gores are set in just below the waist. The sleeves are extremely fitted from shoulder to wrist; many were buttoned from elbow to wrist. A distinctive feature of the sleeve was the seam, which ran down the back of the arm, across the elbow.

A cote hardie is simple to make, the trickiest part is the sleeve. Before we begin, there are a few things to be considered. Where do you want to lace your cote? You could lace it in the front, which implies less money so you would not have servant to lace you. Then there is the side, (I have never been successful in getting in and out of this version). The most common (in Markland) placement is down the back, from the neck to the top of the pelvic bone.

Next you need to decide where to place the gores. If you are slender through the hips I recommend hip level. If you are anything else, belly button level. A friend of mine made one for during her pregnancy and put the gore at bust level. It still fit a week before she gave birth.

As for the method of closure; hand sewn eyelets, machined button holes, hooks and eyes, sewing it closed, and lacing through a series of eyes or metal rings are all acceptable methods to use. Eyelets whether hand or machine sewn should be done in a **MATCHING** color to the fabric. Contrasting colored eyelets is neither attractive nor period. They should not be obvious for any reason. The eyelets should be about 3/8" in diameter so that they will not show skin (this would not have been a problem in the middle ages as underclothing was worn). If you use chain mail rings, solder or weld the rings closed so that they do not work there way out at the most inopportune moment.

I have some requests that I make whenever I teach someone how to make garb. I ask that you do not use, grommets, zippers, Velcro, or snaps. Use period fabrics, linens, wools, silks, and fustian (50 % cotton/ 50 % linen). "Linen Look" does not look like linen. 100% cotton is planning wrong and polyester makes my skin crawl. I highly recommend JoMar in Landsdale, and Philadelphia, PA. I can provide directions.

Measurements. Make the following measurements:

Bust, Waist, Hips, Shoulder to floor, Waist to floor, Length of arm with arm bent, Around Shoulder, Wrist.

Once you have taken and recorded these measurements, you will begin to work on cutting out your dress pieces. You will need between 5 and 6 yards of 45" wide fabric. Your dress will consist of four rectangular body pieces that are identical; four gores (triangles) which are identical, and two sleeves.

To cut the body. Take the larger of the two, bust and waist measurement, add 8 to it, round that number up to the nearest multiple of 4. (i.e. a 41 would round to 44; a 49 would round to 52 etc.) then divide it by four. This will be the width of the body pieces that you cut out, including a 1" seam allowance. Add four to your shoulder to floor measurement, this will be the length of your body pieces.

To cut the gores. Decide if you want a full (x1), medium full (x1.5), or completely swirl skirt (x2). Then take your hip measurement, round it up to the nearest multiple of four, divide it by four and multiply it by

the kind of skirt you want. For example, with a hip measurement of 41, round to 44, divide by 4 = 11 and for a very full skirt multiply by 2 = 22. I will cut triangles that are 22" wide at the bottom and are the waist to floor measurement plus four.

To cut the sleeves. The top of the sleeve is difficult because of the curve. I recommend putting on an old tee shirt and getting a friend to masking tape your shoulder and upper torso in the shirt for a snug fit. Then with your elbow bent at a 90 degree angle and your arm straight out from your side, have your friend draw a line from the back bottom of the arm, down toward the elbow. Then draw a line around the shoulder following the joint. Have your friend cut you out of the shirt. This exercise does not work with duct tape or any other tape that has the capacity to stretch.

When you use this piece for a pattern, use it to cut the curve at the top of the sleeve and sketch in the remainder of the arm. Draw a straight line down from the high side of the curve the mark out your wrist measurement + 2" for seam allowance. Connect the end of the wrist to the low side of the curve. If you have trouble, email me or call, I'm in the Plague.

Layout Time. Below are some recommended layouts for cutting your pieces. Remember that the sleeves should be mirror images of each other. Cut one out, flip it over and use it to cut out the mirror image of it.

Adjustments to the Body Pieces. To accommodate the shoulder, lay all our body pieces down in tow pairs, inside out. Mark a spot 2" down from the top of the panels. Mark a spot 5" across the top of the panels Draw a line connecting these two points. Mark another spot that is ½ the around the shoulder measurement down on the panel. Connect this to a point that is 2" across the top. Now, cut this excess off, start with the bottom line, cut until it intersects then switch to the other line.

Assembly. At this point we are doing everything inside out. Begin by pinning the shoulders together. Then pin the front seam together, start from about three inches below the top. Next borrow that friend and pin the sides together. Then attach the gores and pin up the back of the dress. This would be a good time to look in the mirror and make and necessary adjustments to the pins to perfect your fit. Baste this version, or sew it, but not more than 12 stitches per inch (you never know when you may have to rip it out). Remember that you are going to lace into this dress so if you want to lace the back, don't sew it shut.

Next sew the sleeves together, starting from the wide end and working towards the narrow. It is OK if your ends do not match up, it happens. Now get into the dress still inside out, pin up the back. Find your friend. Have your friend gently pin your sleeves on. Start by pulling the sleeves on, lining up the sleeve seam with the back of your arm and your elbow. Make any adjustments necessary to the sleeve. Pin the sleeve to the top of the shoulder first, then pin the front, underarm, and then the back.

At this point, you should sew your eyelets, buttonholes etc. for lacing up the back. Then finish the cuffs, pin the hem and roll and sew the neck. Necklines of this time were modest. The necklines were either wide on the shoulder but very shallow, or close to the sides and back of the neck but moderately deep in front.

Accessories. I have not seen trim on cote hardie illustrations other than at the cuffs. Metal hip belts were frequently worn low on the hip. Some of the belts were a simple circle while others extended down in the front with an additional piece of chain in a line or v in front.

For further illustrations including primary sources please see my web site <http://loki.stockton.edu/~stk17808/index.php> (there is no WWW on this address). Please feel free to contact me regarding this article at whealan@yahoo.com Please reference this article in the subject line.

To Make a Cote Measurement Guide

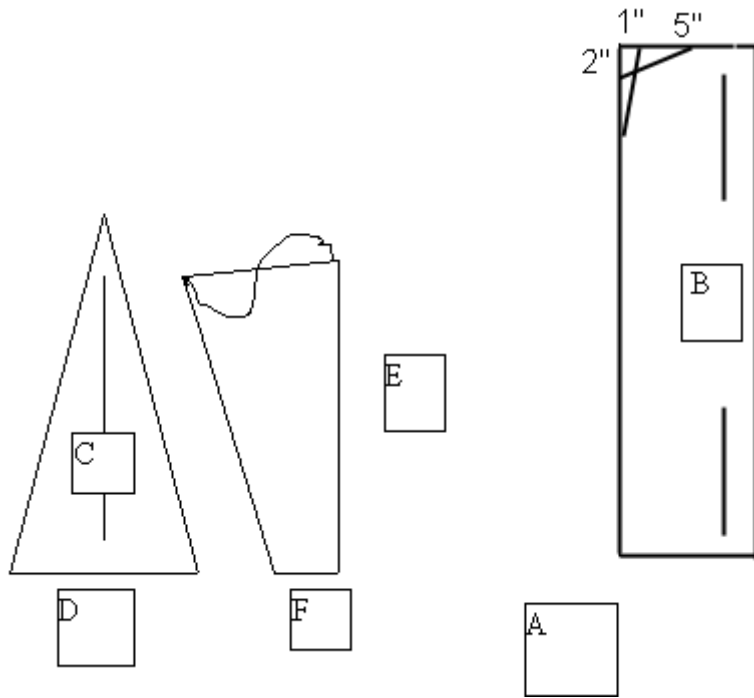
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Cote Worksheet

Use this worksheet to simplify your measurement information

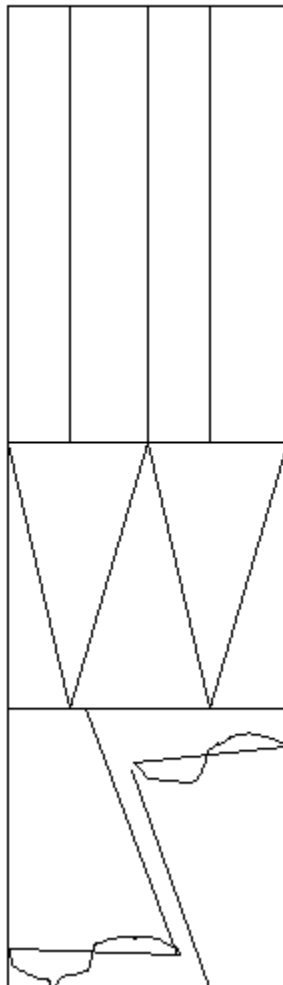
Measurements:

1. Bust _____	A. Body Width _____ (Torso + 8 round to multiple of 4 then divide by 4)
2. Waist _____	
3. Hip _____	B. Body Length _____ (shoulder to floor + 4")
4. Waist to floor _____	C. Gore Length _____ (waist to floor + 4")
5. Around Shoulder _____ (divide by 2)	D. Gore Width _____ (Hip round to nearest multiple of 4, divide by 4 times skirt regular *1, medium * 1.5, full *2)
6. Wrist _____	E. Arm length _____ (Bent Arm + 4)
7. Bent Arm _____	F. Wrist _____ (wrist + 2)
8. Shoulder to Floor _____	



Additional Images

Cutting Layouts



Dress

