

Sunna Regnbue, OL
On Facebook as Sunna Regnbue
MKA Rachel Case

One-Piece Bronze Age Shirt



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Bronze Age Timeline

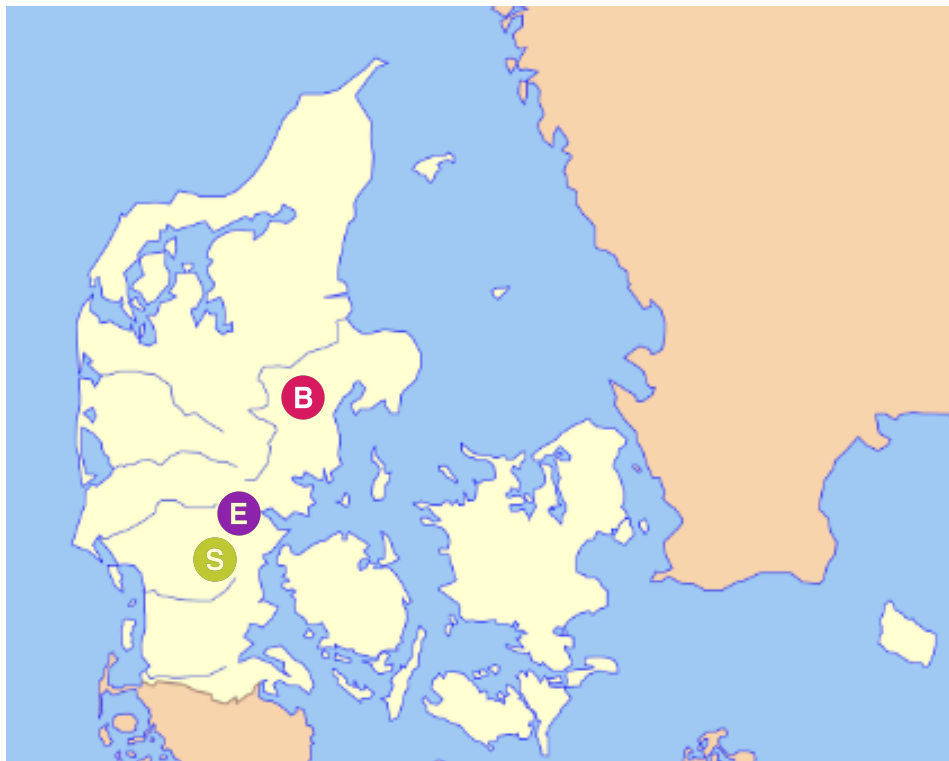
In general, the Bronze Age in Europe can be broken down into three time periods:
Early Bronze Age (3500-2000 B.C.E.)
Middle Bronze Age (2000-1600 B.C.E.)
Late Bronze Age (1600-1200 B.C.E.)

Extant Finds

There are three major Late Bronze Age finds of women with very similar “short tunics”. I will refer to them as shirts, as they resemble (in form but not construction) modern shirts. The construction of these shirts are charmingly simple and elegant, made from one piece of fabric.

All are finds from Denmark in the second millennium BCE (c 1370-1300), Late Bronze Age.

Geography of Finds in Denmark (for this class)



Egtved Shirt

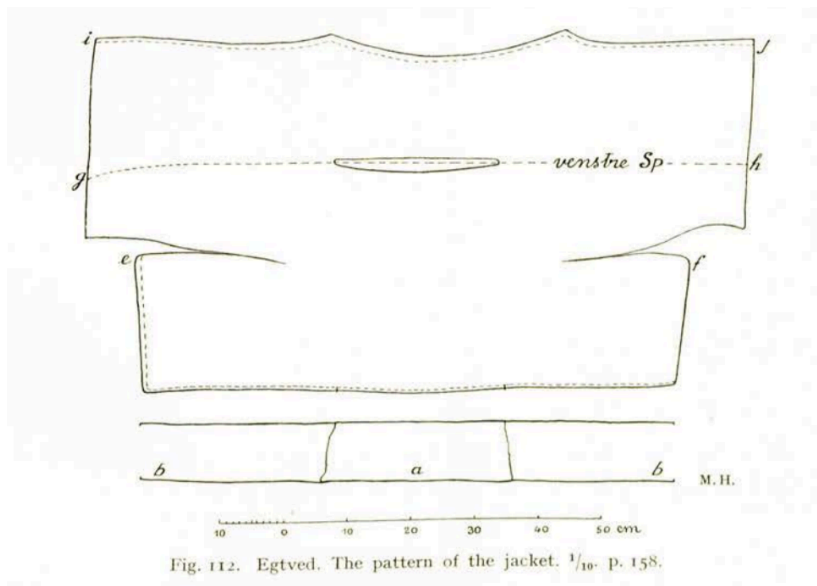


<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/af/DO-4368.jpg>

The Egtved Girl find was discovered in Denmark in 1921 and consists of several well-preserved items including a short woolen shirt and a corded woolen skirt. A woolen belt around her waist held a large bronze belt plate decorated with spirals, and a horn comb. Jewelry included two arm bands and a small earring. Near her head a vessel of birch bark held a bronze awl and a hairnet. Near her feet a bark bucket once held ale.

She was between 16-18 years old when she died, and was buried with a small child around the age of 6.

The find has been dated to approximately 1370 BCE.



Borum Eshoj Shirt

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/DO-4372.jpg>



The Borum Eshoj find was uncovered in East Jutland Denmark in 1875 and consists of burials of three individuals: an older woman and man, and a young man. The woman's grave included a short shirt with a long skirt held in place with two woven belts, all made of wool. On her waist was a decorated bronze belt plate. The neckline and sleeve ends were finished with a double row of right-to-left buttonhole stitching. The long vertical cut at the neckline may have been made in order to fit the shirt over the woman's head after her death. Narrow pieces of fabric were used to lengthen the shirt, as the wearer's abdomen would have shown without them.

Other grave items included several pieces of jewelry, a horn comb, a dagger, a pottery vessel, and a wooden box.

She was between 50 and 60 years old when she died.

The find has been dated to approximately 1351 BCE.

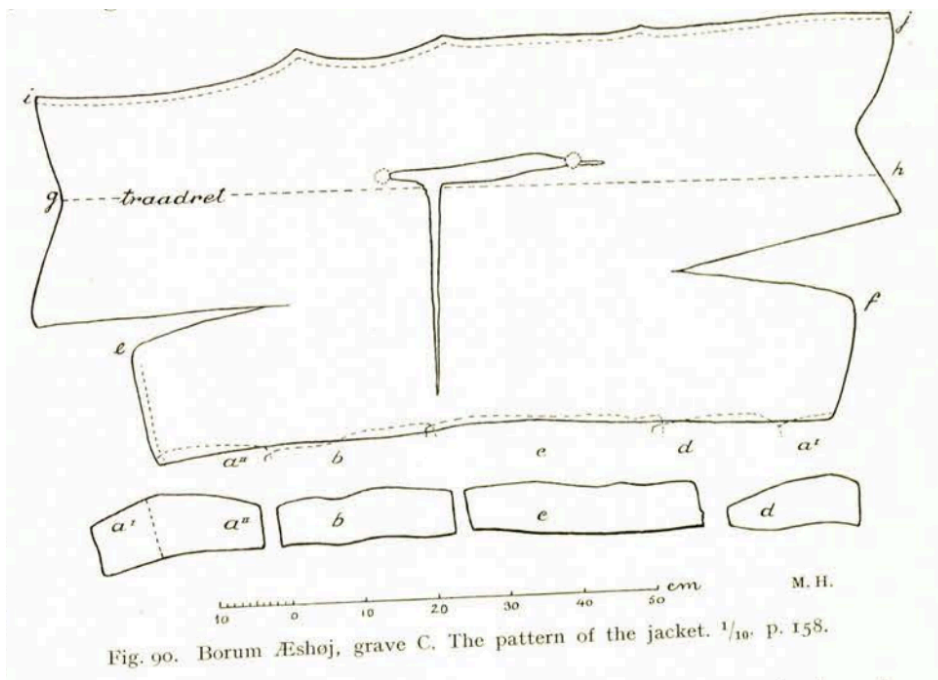


Fig. 90. Borum Eshøj, grave C. The pattern of the jacket. ¹/₁₀, p. 158.

Skrydstrup Shirt

<https://samlinger.natmus.dk/do/asset/4889>



The Skrydstrup find was discovered in a burial mound in Skrydstrup, Southern Jutland Denmark in 1935. The woman in the oak coffin was around 18 years old, and wore a short shirt with fairly elaborate embroidery around the neck and on the sleeves along with a long skirt held in place with a woven belt. A horn comb was found at her belt, and she wore an elaborate hairstyle held in place with a woven band. A horsehair cap was worn over her hair, and a woolen sprang cap was found near her body. She wore large spiral earrings. The find has been dated to approximately 1300 BCE.



The construction of this shirt is different than the other two we are looking at—the embroidered sleeve detail is complex, and it is unclear whether the sleeves have separate panels or if they are in one piece like the other two shirts. The neckline also featured elaborate stitching.

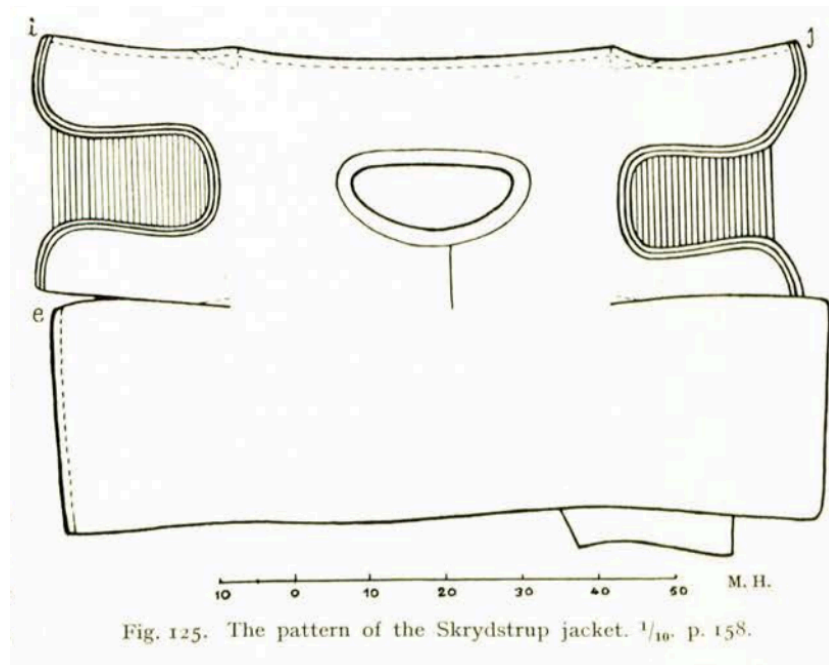




Fig. 126. Skrydstrup. Detail of the right sleeve, $\frac{1}{1}$.



Fig. 127. Skrydstrup. Diagram of the embroidery of the sleeve.

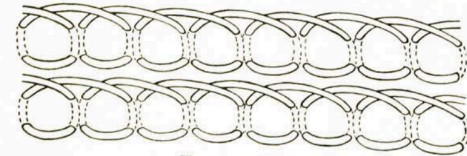


Fig. 128. Skrydstrup. M.H.
Diagram illustrating the sewing by which the ribs are made on the sleeve.



Fig. 129. Skrydstrup. The embroidery at the neck-opening, $\frac{2}{1}$.

Fabrics

All three of the extant shirts are coarsely woven wool (in tabby or plain weave), with thread counts typically between 3.5 to 5 threads per centimeter. Wool was originally the natural color of the sheep's wool, but have since turned deep brown. Any natural plain woven wool would be appropriate if you are going for a completely period impression. If you want to have fun with colors, or if you want to use linen or another fabric, do so with your comfort and happiness in mind!

Sewing Thread and Needles

Both woolen and linen/bast fiber plied threads were used to sew garments in the Bronze Age.

It would be appropriate to use either type of thread for your own shirt if you are portraying a period impression. In general, the threads would have matched the fiber content of the shirt.

In the Bronze Age, bone needles were used to sew clothing. I was gifted mine, but I have seen them for sale on Etsy. Bone needles are fairly specialized tools these days, so use needles you have access to.

Methods

Measure yourself

Bust measurement

Waist measurement

Shoulder to waist or hip

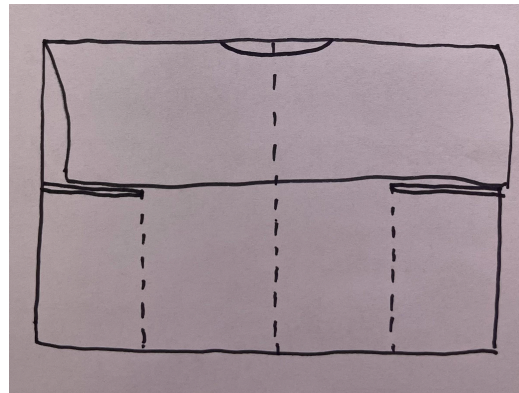
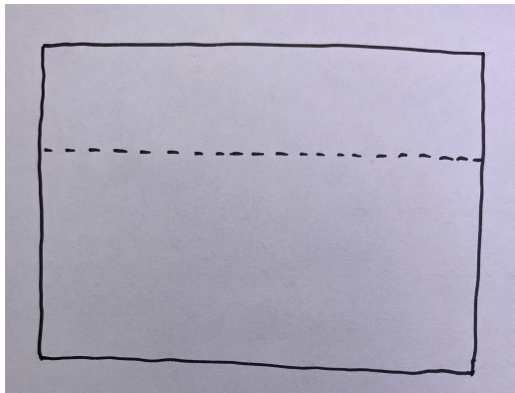
Shoulder to armpit + 2 inches

Apply measurements

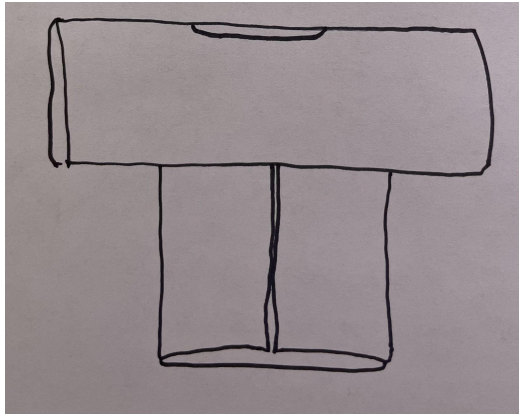
Find your largest measurement (bust OR waist). Add 3-4 inches for "ease". This is the length of fabric you need for your shirt. Add your shoulder to waist or hip measurement to your shoulder to armpit +2 inches measurement. This is the width of fabric you will need. Using a modern t-shirt for sizing is an easy "hack"--just remember to add ease!

Using the shoulder to armpit +2 inches measurement, fold the top of your fabric down.

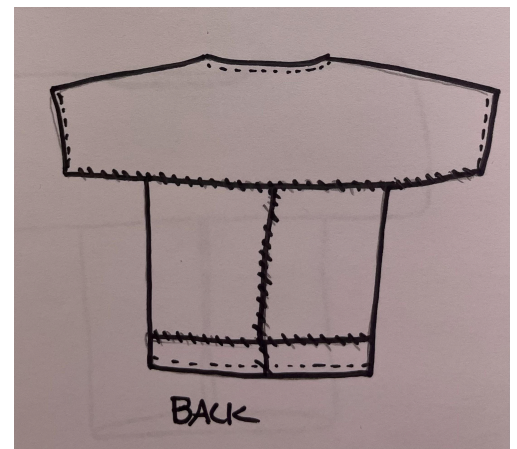
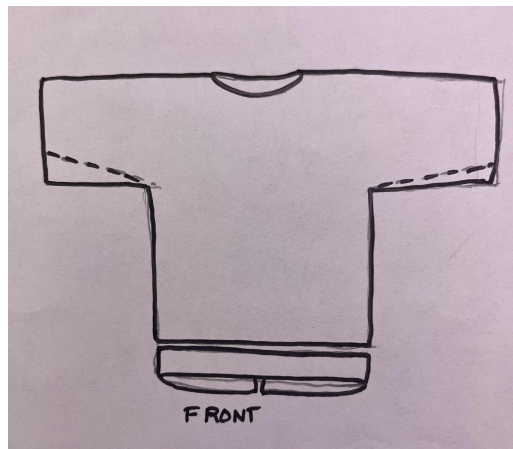
Next, find the center of your piece, crease carefully or mark with chalk. Take $\frac{1}{4}$ of your largest +3" measurement and draw a horizontal line along the bottom edge of the folded down section from the outer edges (use chalk or a frixion pen). Cut on the lines (NOT THE CENTER LINE!).



Fold the outer edges inward to meet in the center:



You may want to taper the sleeves. You can either cut them to taper, or fold the edges up to taper and sew in place. You can also optionally add a narrow strip of fabric at the bottom edge to add length.



The extant shirts were made by overlapping raw edges, then whip stitching raw edges down on BOTH sides of the fabric. This works really well with fulled/tight woven wool, less so for linens or other fabrics that may fray. For linen, finish raw edges with a hem stitch (whip stitch) and sew seams with a whip stitch.

Alternatively, you can machine sew your shirt and finish seams in the method you prefer.

Notes:

This shirt is so simple and sweet, and would fit into a modern wardrobe wonderfully. Try making it in your favorite linen or flowy cotton, in your favorite colors or patterns!

Neckline: try different necklines that work best for you. The extant shirts feature different styles, with variations in finishes and front openings (if any).

Create a long tubular skirt, held up with a woven belt, and you are ready to portray Bronze Age! If you're very daring, create a cord skirt like the Egtved Girl!

Further Reading

Barber, E. J. W. (1990). *Prehistoric textiles: The development of cloth in the Neolithic and bronze ages*. Princeton University Press.

Broholm, H. C., Hald, M., & Aagesen, E. (1940). *Costumes of the bronze age in Denmark; contributions to the Archæology and textile-history of the bronze age by H.C. Brohom and Margrethe Hald, with a pref. by J. Brondsted, tr. from the Danish ms. by Elisabeth Aagesen*. Nyt nordisk Forlag.

Grömer, Karina. Textiles from Hallstatt, Oxbow Books, 2013. <https://tinyurl.com/yc3tkmzy>

Grömer, Karina, Helga Rösel-Mautendorfer, and Lise Bender Jørgensen. "Visions of Dress, Recreating Bronze Age Clothing from the Danubian Region", *Textile Volume* 11/3, 2013. https://www.academia.edu/10762573/Visions_of_Dress_Recreating_Bronze_Age_Clothing_from_the_Danube_Region

Jenn Culler's excellent blog:

<http://awanderingelf.weebly.com/blog-my-journey/category/bronze-age>

Also from Jenn Culler's blog, a great Bronze Age bibliography:

<http://awanderingelf.weebly.com/iron-age-celtic-studies/egtved-bibliography>



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