

Herjolfsnes No. 61, a Gown for a Small Child

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Additional research on this item is available at:

<http://www.mathildegirlgenius.com/Documentation/KASF2006/InfantOutfit.pdf>

General thoughts on baby clothes

- Your number one concern is safety, not authenticity. We all know that babies put everything into their mouths. Consider this when choosing buttons, length of ties, bedding, etc.
- Kids grow fast, so you want their clothes to grow a little with them. You can add length in the sleeves and skirt. Depending on how much effort you want to put into modifications, you can leave a large seam allowance in your body to let out later. Keep in mind that the garment might need replacing before they grow too much, especially for a baby who is prone to reflux or other tummy troubles!
- Between certain ages, kids grow up more than they grow out. If you make a gown for a toddler boy that reaches the floor, it might be able to serve as a short gown on a somewhat older boy.

Measurements

This garment is not made to fit tightly on the child, so the measurements that you take are only a starting point. It's a gown, so if it's sized generously, that's ok. When in doubt, measure a little big. It's one thing to wiggle into tight clothing yourself, it's quite another to get a squirmy baby or toddler into it!

Seam Allowances

Don't forget to add seam allowances as appropriate. Add the seam allowances to the length and width of all body panels and sleeves. When cutting out the armholes and neck hole, make sure to cut the holes a bit smaller. When drafting patterns, I often draft each piece without the seam allowance, and add it on after determining the proper shape.

Layout

There are two main body panels that attach at the shoulders. The side panels attach between the front and the back, and form the lower part of the armhole. There is a triangular gore inset into the center of each main body panel.



The cutting diagram describes the length of the gore inset as $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length of the main body panel. The top point of the gore should be placed somewhere between the chest and the waist of the child. If the gore is lower, it will look more like a dress. If the gore is higher, the gown will be more like a smock.

Neck closure

The neckline on the G61 no longer exists, so you have a choice in the closure. A plain opening large enough for the head can tend to fall off of the shoulders. One possibility is to leave a slit open in the back, as far down as the top of the gore, if desired, and add ties. Alternatively, you could leave a slit open in the front, and close it with buttons, depending on the age of the baby, and how comfortable you feel sewing them on securely. On one version, I even added a small standing collar, similar to the G63 garment, with a button-down front opening.

Sleeve

The sleeves on the G61 are also non-existent, so we're just using a plain sleeve, as found on the G62. Cut the sleeves extra long, as lengthening them is an easy modification to make later. It's easier to hem a straight sleeve than a tapered one, so a little past the elbow, straighten out the lines of the sleeve.

I generally draft and cut my sleeves after I've sewn together the rest of the garment. The length of the curve at the sleeve head needs to measure the same as the sleeve opening. Make sure to take seam allowance into account. If you're not exact on this, that's ok. You can always change the angle on the sleeve slightly when you set it in, and trim off any extra. For more info on sleeves, see my sleeve class *Farmboy...Fetch Me That Pitcher*.

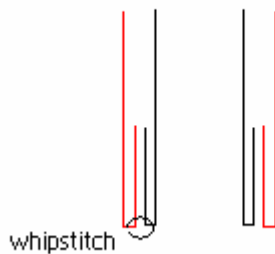
The width of the top of the sleeve should be somewhat larger than the bicep, but shorter than the sleeve opening. The key is to not have the curve be too deep.

When checking the length of the sleeves, double check that the distance from the center of the neck to the end of the sleeve is correct. The point of the shoulder may or may not be at the seam of the sleeve.

When you're hemming the sleeve, roll it up once or twice to the inside, depending on the thickness of the fabric. If you're using very heavy wool, you might only be able to fold the sleeve in once, for a double thickness of fabric, before it starts to get tight on the wrist.

If you're lining, you can tuck both the lining and the outer fabric up in between the layers, and then whipstitch it shut at the sleeves. That way, you can easily go back later and extend the sleeve without having to pick out stitches between the layers.

Cross-section of the sleeve opening



Hemming

You may wish to cut this several inches longer than necessary, so that you can let it out as your child grows. When hemming a flared skirt by more than just a half-inch or so, the hem isn't going to lay flat. You'll find it necessary to add a pleat in the hem every few inches. I suggest doing this every few inches, to achieve a smoother hem.

Setting in a gore

This garment requires a gore to be set into a flat piece of fabric, that is, set in where there is no seam. I've heard people say that this is impossible to do with a machine. Not so! With a few simple steps, this doesn't have to be the thing that you hate the most. In fact, you can feel slightly smug that everybody else hates it and you're good at it.

(From the book *Daily Life in Chaucer's England*, Singman and McLean, Greenwood Press, 1995, pp. 121-122)

A Note on Gussets

Since medieval tailoring often involved inserting a gusset into a slit, we have included the following set of instructions for dealing with them.

Assume you are using a 1/2" seam allowance, and want to insert a gusset in the front of a kirtle. The same technique was also used on hoods and sleeves (as in the cases of the side-gore hoods and the Charles of Blois doublet).

Find the spot near the tip of the gusset where it is 1" wide, and put a dot in the middle of that inch (i.e. 1/2" from either edge). Mark the wrong side at the corresponding point. Still on the wrong side, draw a chalk line on the gusset seamline (1/2" from the right edge). This line will pass through the point you just marked. Draw another chalk line on the fabric you want to set the gusset into, at the place you want the gusset to go. Don't cut yet.

Pin the gusset to the kirtle, right sides together. The bottom right corner of the gusset should line up with the bottom of the kirtle and the line you drew on it. The gusset itself will be off centre with respect to the line. Now sew along the line you drew on the gusset from the dot near the point to the bottom. Be sure to fasten your stitching with a knot or backstitch at the point. Cut along the line drawn on the kirtle until about 3" away from the point. Move the gusset seam allowance out of the way and carefully cut along the line right up to, but not through, the point where you started. Be careful not to cut the stitching at that point. You will see that while the seam allowance on the gusset is 1/2" throughout, on the kirtle it will taper towards the point.

Open out the gusset, flip over the kirtle, and match the unsewn side of the gusset to the other side of the cut line, right sides together. Line up the bottom corners as before, and you will see that once again the kirtle side of the seam allowance tapers towards the point, with the kirtle side on top. You want this seam to look like a mirror image of the last one. Pin in place, and stitch 1/2" from the side of the gusset, sewing from the dot to the bottom, again anchoring your stitching securely at the dot. Be careful not to stitch over the rest of the kirtle or gusset, or anything but the seam.