

## **Tudor is the new black, Part One**

By Sarah Lorraine

If you're picking up the Tudor vibe for the first time, or you're returning the 16<sup>th</sup> century after a long stay somewhere else ("been there, done that, bought the overpriced t-shirt at the corporate sponsored Renaissance Faire"), you are in for a treat. Tudor is everywhere these days, and no longer are we bound by the dictates of the theatrical. Not only are there many extremely well-researched websites for you to peruse, showcasing 16<sup>th</sup> clothing and lifestyle, there are plenty of good books to choose from now, and even more commercially available patterns, if scaling up patterns gives you hives (see the resources list at the end of this article). This article is intended to help guide you in the right direction for all your Tudor clothing needs.

There is an important distinction to be made here, between "Tudor" and "Elizabethan" when it comes to clothing. Sometimes the two terms are used as if they are interchangeable, when in fact, they are not (and let's not get started on "Tudorbethan"); Elizabethan is a later stylistic development that happens from the years 1560 onward, whereas Tudor is usually reserved for the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For the classic Tudor look, we typically are referring to the years between 1520 and 1540, the height of Henry VIII's power and despotism. For men, the silhouette was broad shouldered and square, layer upon layer of heavy velvets and brocades meant to bulk up the body in an impressive show of masculinity. For women, the silhouette ranges from graceful at the start of the period to severe by the end of it; trained gowns in voluptuous velvets and dazzling brocaded foreparts and under sleeves create an elegant and

restrained appearance. Men wear jewel-encrusted caps and women alternate between the homeland fashion of the English Hood (often referred to as a “gable hood”) or the flattering imported French Hood. Blackwork can be seen on both genders, in their cuffs and bordering the necklines of their smocks. It is a time of great prosperity and personal wealth was displayed against the sober backdrop of rich silks and velvets. Pearls, goldwork, enameled jewels, diamonds, rubies, and anything that glittered were used to ornament necklines, headgear, adorn fingers and dangle from waists. It can be an intimidating era to delve into when taken in all at once, so where does one start?

Starting with an idea of what you want to wear is the obvious place to begin, and there are numerous books on the subject of Mannerist artists such as the English court painter Hans Holbein the Younger and his French contemporary, Jean Clouet. I always encourage people to go down to their local library and find hardcopy books to thumb through because images can be distorted online (plus nothing beats the sense of satisfaction that comes with utilizing your tax dollars). But if the internet is your thing, and you’re in search of Tudor eye candy, your first stop should be Edward Buehler’s excellent 16<sup>th</sup> century art resource, “Tudor & Elizabethan Portraits”, <http://www.elizabethan-portraits.com>. His collection of primarily Tudor family portraits spans the whole of the Tudor dynasty, beginning with Henry VII and ending with Elizabeth I’s death in 1603. He also includes a hefty helping of contemporary portraits of people within the Tudor courts. Another indispensable online clearinghouse of all things Sixteenth Century is The Elizabethan Costuming Page, (<http://www.elizabethancostume.net>), maintained by Drea Leed. The focus of the

website ranges over all major Western societies during the entire scope of the century, but there are links to many excellent Tudor-specific websites within it.

Now that you've got your inspiration, you're going to need to know how to go about constructing these garments. Let's start with the most recent and wildly popular book on Tudor clothing currently in print, [The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16<sup>th</sup> Century Dress](#) by Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies. This book gives a concise, research-founded introduction and overview of English garments from 1500-1599. All the basics are covered, from smocks, to stays, to ruffs, headgear, menswear and womenswear of the middle and upper classes. Pattern diagrams are given for each garment and accessory, and they are simple to scale up and fit. I highly encourage anyone who is nervous about trying 16<sup>th</sup> century clothing to purchase this book; you will not find a better resource on the shelves at this time. It is, in fact, one of the only books currently in print that deals with early 16<sup>th</sup> century clothing. Purchase it alone, or combine it with Jean Hunnisett's theatrically-themed [Period Costume for Stage & Screen: Patterns for Women's Dress 1500-1800](#) and you will find the 16<sup>th</sup> century much easier to decipher.

If you're more inclined towards using a commercial pattern, you're in luck: Ninya and Jane now offer a line of patterns based on the book, and you can order them at their website, <http://www.tudortailor.com>. The exchange rate has not been kind to us over here in the states, but the Tudor Tailor patterns are well worth the investment. Kass McGann, a state-side costume historian, also offers a range of 16<sup>th</sup> century patterns through her web business, Reconstructing History (<http://www.reconstructinghistory.com>), which is a little kinder to the budget. Stay away

from the Big Three pattern companies, for none of them currently carry anything remotely Tudor!

Stay tuned for the next article in the series, where we will examine the quirks of Tudor womenswear... Did they or didn't they wear stays, and just what were those weird white shoulder straps about, anyway?

### **Useful Books:**

Dress At The Court of King Henry VIII, Maria Hayward

Holbein Portrait Drawings (Dover Art Library), Hans Holbein

Period Costume for Stage & Screen: Patterns for Women's Dress 1500-1800, Jean Hunnisett

The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16<sup>th</sup> Century Dress by Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies

Holbein The Younger, Jeanette Zwingenberger

### **Useful Websites:**

*Costume Specific:*

The Tudor Tailor Website: <http://www.tudortailor.com>

Reconstructing History: <http://www.reconstructinghistory.com>

Pewter Replicas: <http://www.pewterreplicas.com/>

*Research:*

The Elizabethan Costuming Page: <http://www.elizabethancostume.net>

Tudor & Elizabethan Portraits: <http://www.elizabethan-portraits.com>

Tudor Dress, A Portfolio of Images: <http://www.uvm.edu/~hag/sca/tudor/>