

# Legionary clothing

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*At least a soldier needs a tunic, belt, and shoes. Thus a reenactor may present a soldier who is not in combat duty. The soldier could always be recognized by his military belt which is decorated with metallic plates. Cold weather equipment includes scarf, cloak, leg wraps and woollen socks, but these are not needed in the summer. Getting authentic fabrics is the basis for credible reenactment.*

## Tunic – Tunica

Tunic is the most necessary Roman garment, but fortunately, it is also the easiest to manufacture by yourself. Only one rectangular piece of fabric is needed, the fabric is folded double, the sides are sewn together, openings are left for the arms and the neckline cut open.

The width of the tunic is from one elbow to another when the arms are spread straight to the sides. The tunic has to be very wide, and this width forms short "sleeves" when the tunic is worn, and thus there is no need for separate sleeves. The length of the tunic is from the shoulders to slightly below the knee, though the tunic is collected with a belt upwards so that the hem lays slightly above the knee. The tunic should fit a man like a tent, not like a T-shirt.

The fabric of the tunic should be wool. It can be thick and warm fabric, or thinner and cooler. The hems should be seamed as unnoticeably as possible, since the tunic fabrics were originally woven into final size, so there was no need for seaming. The woven fabric should show a weave pattern (ie weft and warp yarns). Modern wool is often felted so that no weave pattern can be seen anymore.

### **Allowed wool weaves:**

2/2 diamond twill (most common, e.g. 60 % of imperial period finds in Vindolanda)

2/2 chevron twill

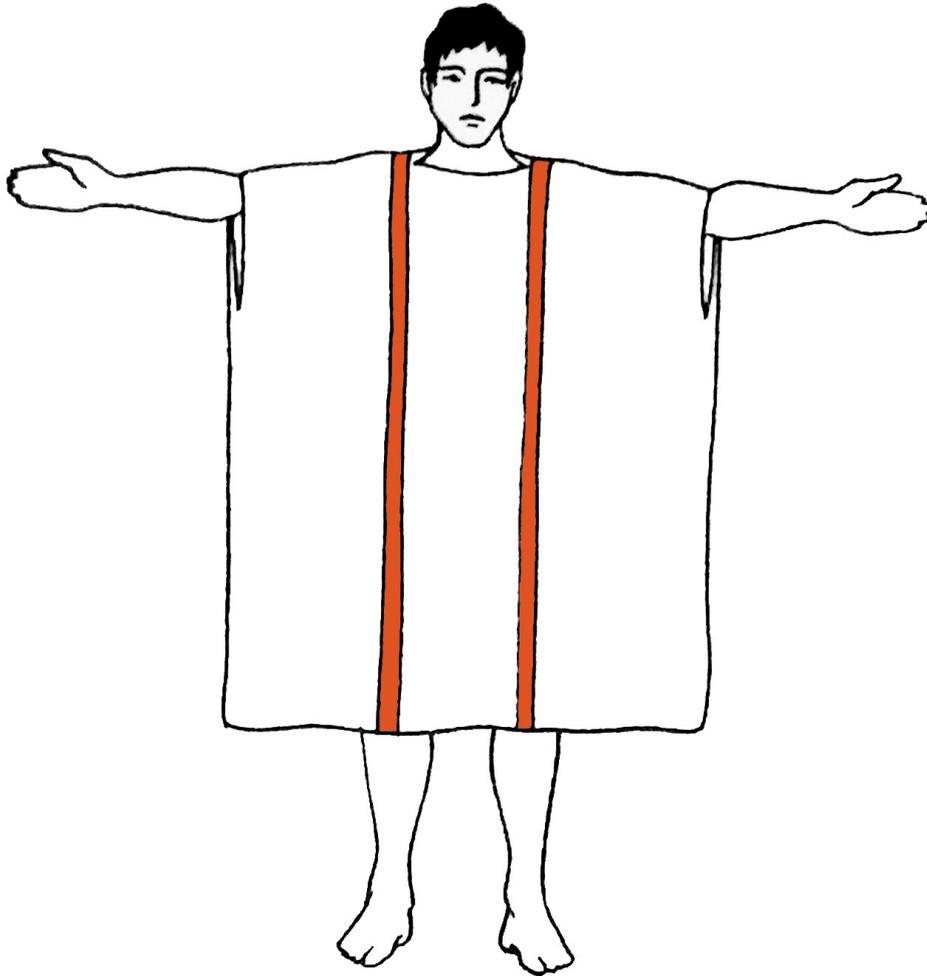
full basket weave

half basket weave

plain weave

The woollen tunic can be of many different colors. Color variations are all natural colors. In the forbidden list are only black, other very dark colors (dark colors were reserved for grief), and purple

(violet red), which was an extremely expensive luxury color that only the rich could afford. I do not wish that everyone wants a red tunic as it is a cliché and a misconception that all legionaries would have dressed in red tunics. It is also good if the legionaries have a lot of different colored tunics, because no source says that everyone should have clothes of the same color. The most common colours were off-white, and the natural colour of the wool.



**Allowed tunic colours:**

natural wool colour (changes from whitish to gray and brown)

off-white (bleached)

all the shades of brown

all the shades of red

many shades of yellow

many shades of green

light blue (woad)

dark blue (indigo)

## Decoration

The tunic may be monochrome and non-ornamented, or it may be adorned with two vertical lines which are called *clavi* (singular: *clavus*) in Latin. Vertical stripes extend from the sides of the neckhole to the lower hem, both sides of the tunic (distance between the stripes could be about a span of the hand). In reality *clavi* were woven directly into the fabric, but since finding such a fabric is impossible, and to have it done is very expensive and slow, it is also possible to sew strips of differently colored fabric on the tunic. In military garments the *clavi* were apparently most often red, but blue is another possible colour choice. *Clavi* are about as wide as two finger widths, but not more. *Clavi* with double that width were reserved to the use of the senatorial class. Purple coloured *clavi* were used only by senators and knights, so they are forbidden for ordinary soldiers.



## Belt – *Balteus*

Tunic was never used without a belt because it looks ridiculous. Sometimes soldiers were punished by making them stand in a tunic without a belt.

At a minimum, the tunic can be tied to the waist with a cord, a fabric strap or plain leather belt. The soldier, however, would have a military belt (*balteus*, later in the imperial times called *cingulum*), because of which he can be recognized as a soldier, even though he had nothing but a belt and a tunic on.

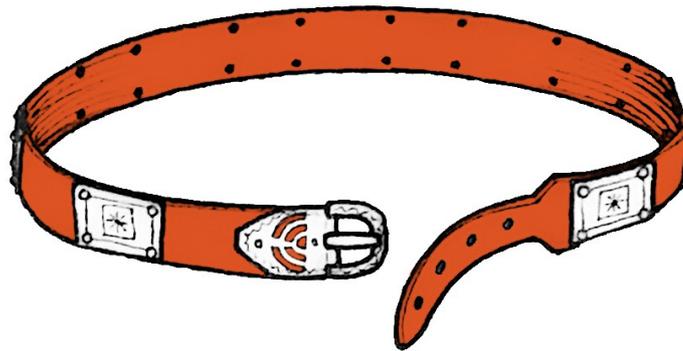
*Balteus* is leather, it can be dyed with any color (blue, red, green, etc.), its edges can be decorated with stitches, but the most important decoration are metal plates on the belt surface.

Since the belt was the symbol of the soldier's profession, the legionaries often used a lot of money to decorate their belts with different metal plates. The belt can never be too fine, it is the symbol of soldier's appreciation and the indicator of wealth. During the republican times, the belt plates are horizontally rectangular, flat, riveted to the belt at the corners, and decorated with a variety of carved patterns. The plates can be silver, bronze or brass. It is not necessary to cover the entire length of the belt, there may be gaps between the plates (perhaps as wide as the plates themselves, perhaps smaller, perhaps larger). It is also possible that decorative plates are not acquired all at one time, but in smaller amounts (speculated: maybe one after each battle?), so a belt with little or no decorative plates is also allowed.

The buckle of the belt is bronze or brass, and may even be silver-plated. The buckle is D-shaped and is often beautifully decorated. The belt is perhaps not wider than two finger widths and the tip portion going through the buckle is considerably narrower. The narrow section has no decorative plates, only the holes for the buckle tongue.

There are not yet any leather "Apron straps" decorated with studs and plates in the republican times, those which are perceived as belonging to the Roman military belt. They start to appear in the imperial times.

The sword and the possible dagger are also attached to the *balteus* belt, the sword baldric running over the shoulder is not yet in use.



## Sandals – *Caligae*

As well as a tunic and belt, a soldier needs proper footwear. Sometimes they are called sandals, sometimes boots, sometimes half-boots, but in any case they are the Roman military shoes, *caligae*.

Caligae are made of sturdy leather, they are tied with leather cords, and they have hobnails on the soles. The hobnails make them very well suited for walking on grass and sand, but on a stone floor they are dangerously slippery.



# Optional garments

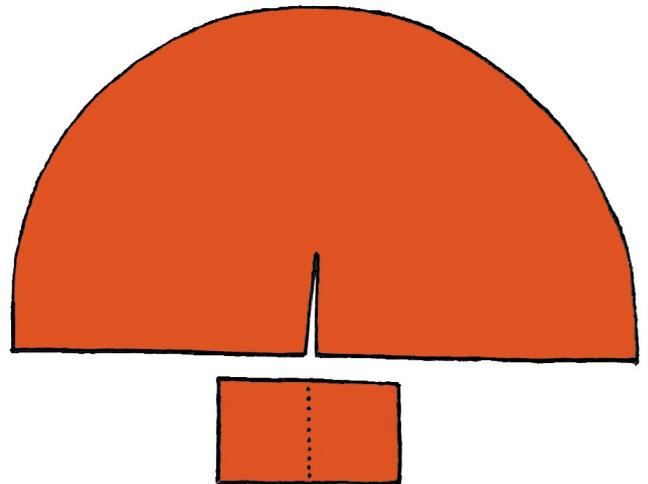
## Cloak – *Paenula*

The soldiers had a cloak for bad weather, which protected them from cold, wind and rain. The cloak was perhaps Italic or Greek in origin. It was semi-circular, and included a square hood to protect the head. The hem reaches at least under the buttocks, but can reach the mid calf.

The cloak is always made of wool. The wool fabric can be either thick or thin, depending on how thick and warm (and heavy) the user wants it. I recommend thick fabric. The woollen cloth originally had lanolin, a natural waterproof wax of sheep's wool, which has been removed nowadays. This is not necessary, but the cloak will get more weatherproof if treated by lanolin again. Lanolin can be purchased in a can, and it must be tediously smeared into the fabric. The cloak may be of any color (see allowed colours for tunics), and may be either felted or unfelted wool (where the yarns can be seen). In rare mural paintings depicting the cloak, its color is either dark greyish or in more examples a light brown (camel-coloured).

The hood is sewn either from one long rectangular going over the head or from two smaller square pieces. The hood must be large enough that it can fit a helmet underneath (at least five cm space on top of the head).

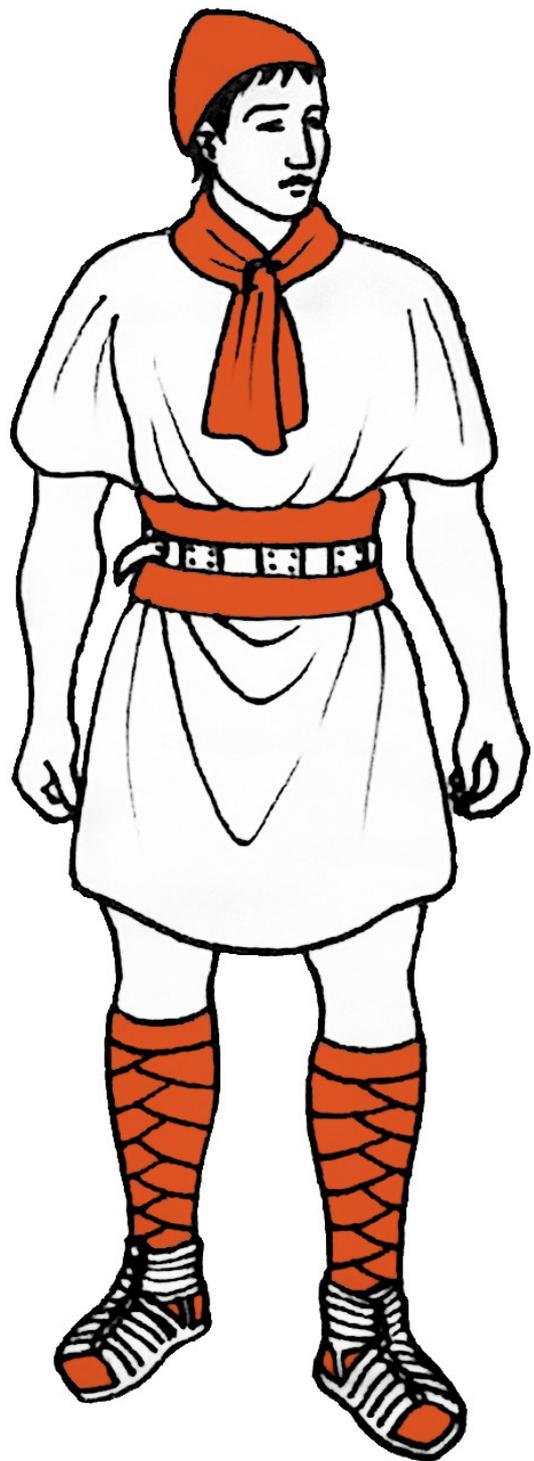
The cloak is closed at the front by one or more buttons (between two and four is a good number). The buttons are made of wood or bone, shaped like Duffle coat buttons, attached with cords, and on the other side there are cord loops for the buttons. The cloak may also be stitched closed at the front but not reaching the lower hem (down to the navel perhaps).



## Felt hat – *Pileus*

In Ancient Rome, most people were bareheaded, but hats were also used. One form of brimless hat was called *pileus* or *pilleus* and was copied from a Greek hat called πῖλος, *pilos*, used by sailors, miners, freedmen, and light infantrymen. In Greece, the name of this headgear means felt, and it was usually made of felted wool. Another material alternative is leather. The woollen *pileus* was most often white. These hats were quite thick, some were hemispherical, some almost conical. Relatively low *pileus* can also act as a helmet liner.

*Pileus* was associated with liberty because freed slaves cut off their hair and got an undyed (white) *pileus* hat to use instead of hair. Also the lower social classes used *pileus* sometimes, mainly in connection with the *Saturnalia* celebration.



## Neck scarf – *Focale*

A neck scarf (*focale*) is part of the military clothing, a very early predecessor of the modern tie, and its main purpose is to protect the neck from the chafing of the armour. It does not have to be used if one is not dressed in armour, but it gives a nice addition to the tunic and the belt.

The scarf is always wool, as long rectangular strip that it goes well round the neck, and the ends hang at the height of the chest. The scarf can be made in many colours (see allowed colours for tunics), and it may be a good idea to make a colourful scarf to stand out in contrast to a pale tunic. *Focale* can be tied to itself, or then attached with a small bronze or brass brooch (*fibula*), which can be either a traditional Roman bow brooch, or less often an omega-brooch.

When using armour, the ends of the *focale* can go under the armour, but it is not necessary with a mail shirt.

## Waist cloth – *Fascia ventralis*

*Fascia ventralis* was a long rectangular strip of wool fabric wrapped around the waist that protected the tunic from chafing of the belt and possible weapons attached to it. It also improves posture, is good on the lower back, makes the tunic look better than with just the belt, and emphasizes the athletic shape of the soldier's body. The military belt is always worn over the *fascia ventralis*. This garment is not used with armour, only in duties when a soldier only wears his tunic.

## Loincloth / underwear – *Subligaculum*

Loincloth or underwear were known by the name *subligaculum*. It was a certain shaped piece of cloth, which were fastened with a particular way around the loins. This garment is not necessary if a reenactor intends to keep his tunic on in front of audience. However, gladiators and some slaves might need a loincloth.

*Subligaculum* was probably made of wool, although linen is another choice. It might have been naturally coloured or then dyed.

Proper trousers (*braccae*) were not yet in use at the republican times, and Romans considered pants altogether barbaric and feminine.

## Leg wraps – *Fasciae crurales*

Leg wraps (*fasciae crurales*) were used at cold weather, or to protect the legs while marching for example in thick underbrush of a forest. In Roman times they were made in two fashions: either a tubular piece of cloth wrapped around the lower leg, and which was tied with two cords from top and lower end, or then a long strip of cloth, which was wrapped many times around the leg. For the latter, viking age leg wraps are more than fine, since the model was the same from Roman times to the middle ages. Leg wraps are always wool, and they can be colourful. If the wool shows the yards, the more better. I certainly won't demand leg wraps that are particularly woven into that shape, instead strips cut from woollen fabric are fine.

In any case the leg wraps are not necessary part of soldier's garments, and they were mainly used in special occasions, like in cold weather (and the wars were usually waged only at summers).

## Socks – *Udones*

Socks (*udones*) are not essential, but they make the sandals more comfortable to wear, and protect the feet from branches somewhat, and of course from cold. *Udones* are woollen socks, and they are made with the naalbinding technique. They only reach a bit over the *caligae*.

The socks can be of one-colour woollen thread, or they can have stripes in many colours. All natural colours are allowed.

## What to do by yourself and what to buy?

I recommend doing the following garments by yourself: *Tunica*, *balteus*, *focale*, *paenula*. Belt buckle is worth buying, but the belt can easily be made from some leather or an old leather belt by swapping the buckle and making minor changes. Decorative belt plates can be bought later, they are not immediately needed. You should buy a brooch for the neck scarf.

Sandals should be ordered if you have never before made shoes yourself. Loincloths, socks and leg wraps are optional parts of the clothing, and the cloak is not compulsory at the beginning, even though it is easy to made by yourself.

Authentic woven fabrics are available from many online stores, eg Wooltrade.

Sewing should be done manually if patience suffices. However, you can cheat a little and make the process faster by sewing all the invisible inside seams with a sewing machine. The outside seams and hems should be sewn by hand if possible. Either woollen or linen thread can be used in sewing. The color of the thread may be the same as in the fabric itself or it may be something else to create some contrast.