

Cead míle fáilte! Today we're going to do a quick and general overview of early Irish garb as enshrined in law, images, and extant finds. These notes are limited due to available printing; if you have any further questions or are looking for sources, please email me!

Laws of Ireland:

Men and women wore basically the same garb at this early stage, with class playing more of a distinguishing factor. Upper classes wore longer versions of garb, more layers, and more embellishments. The laws of Early Ireland, called the Brehon Laws, dictated quite strictly what people of various classes were allowed to wear, in terms of garments, materials, and colours. While we no longer have the full text of the Brehon Laws, due to the ravages of time, we have facsimiles of the first, second, and part of the third volumes of the 8th century Senchus Mór, the main compilation of these laws in written form. From these and later written descriptions of the laws, we have been able to recreate some of the rules, at least in a general sense. Kings, both high and low, and the highest levels of bards, ollamh, were allowed the most complicated dress, including all six clothing colours, multiple layers, and metal embroidery. Lower nobles and trained professionals were allowed 3-5 colours based on their exact rank and/or grade in profession, with free peasants only being allowed 2 and serfs 1.

Terms and Items:

It is important to note that the Irish names for different pieces of clothing remain the same all through period, even as the pieces themselves change. In general, the earlier in period you are trying to portray, the less fitted the garb.

Leine – Tunic of linen. Goes to just below knees in middle classes, and all the way to the floor in the higher classes. Often embroidered around the hem.

Brat – Cloak of wool – Embroidered/decorated and dyed rectangle of wool, tied or held on with a broach at the shoulder. Could also be used as a hood – used by all.

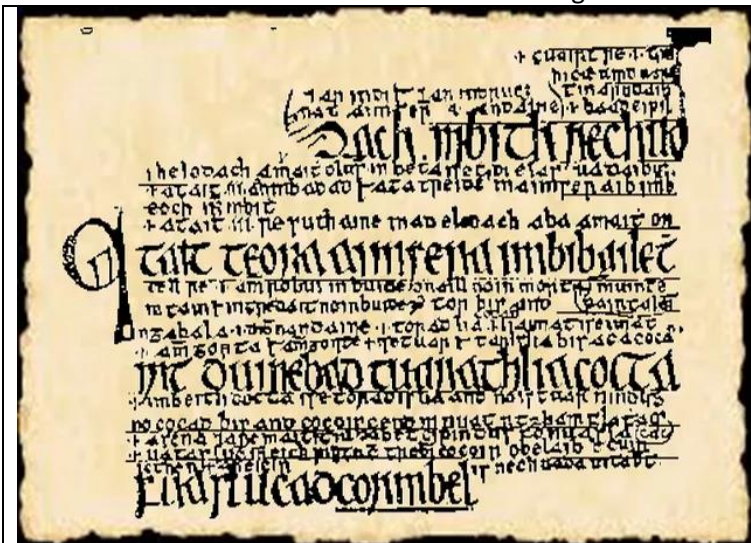
Ionar - Jacket/overtunic of linen. Term used both for the single tunic/jacket worn by soldiers and lower classes and the overtunic-outerwear worn by upper classes.

Broc/Trws – Short trousers or breeches, mostly seen in images with soldiers and lower classes. Not a required part of garb for the higher classes.

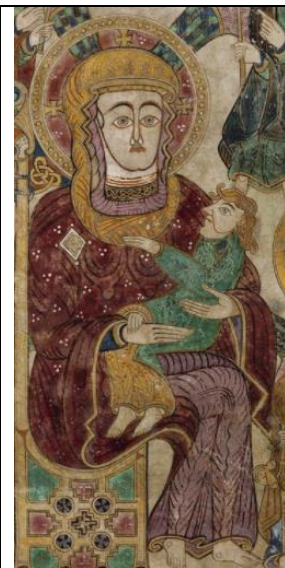
Crois – Belt. Made of leather, wide, with a wide buckle.

Ghillies – Shoes! Made of a single piece of leather, tied about the ankle. Often partnered with a woolen sock and/or straw or linen padding

Accessories – Cloak pins and broaches were the major ones, usually of metal (bronze or iron) or bone. The best known of these are the highly ornamented pins of the kings, encrusted with jewels. Necklaces and armbands were also depicted. Depending on the profession, you could carry a bag, particularly for books for the learned. Don't see much in the way of hats in the depictions given, although it is mentioned in some of the tales that unmarried women would keep their hair down and uncovered, probably as a way of showing wealth and health.



A Senchus Mór facsimile – Brehon Law Academy



2C Mary in lavender leine, maroon brat, and blue ionar - Book of the Kells page 7v

http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v

The leine is a lavender-purple, the brat is a rose red. There is no evidence that sleeves were made different colours than the body, so there's a good chance the blue sleeve peeking out from the brat is a different layer, a ionar.



John
Book of the Kells p 291v.
Similar to Mary, the leine is one colour, the brat a second, and the sleeves a third of a ionar.



Unnamed figure p 3v.

Here we clearly see two layers of garments at the neck – a leine of red-brown and an ionar of a lighter shade, the ionar neck bounded by embroidery. The grey-green brat covers both.



Unnamed figure p29r. This garment shows the two different layers of decorated ionar and leine, with the leine sleeves showing through the brown brat.



A decorated metal cloak pin called a pennanular brooch common through the 10th century. This one from the 7th century is bronze with and would have had red enamel. Walter's Museum



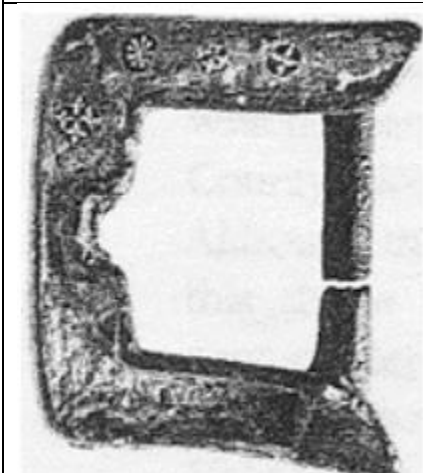
Cross of Murdach – the cross depicts a series of biblical stories in what is believed to be then-present dress. A variety of class levels and professions are shown, with the corresponding layers of dress.



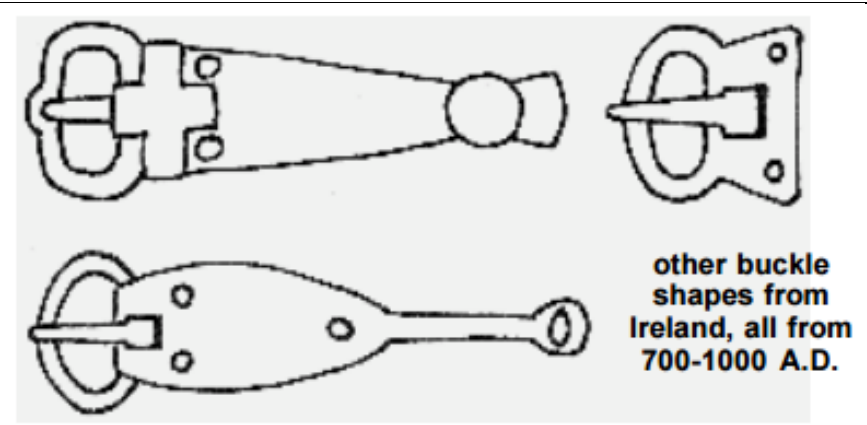
Lucas type shoe worn by the upper classes. Made from a single piece of leather, but stitched around the top and back. Often decorated or embellished.



Lower class bag shoe. An oval of leather is pierced around the edges and gathered with a leather thong to cover the feet. Simple but effective!



Buckle styles in-period. Many were found with scraps of leather or woven belt still attached, but no full belts have been found at this time.
Right: Youngs, Susan 1997
Left: County Derry buckle



other buckle shapes from Ireland, all from 700-1000 A.D.

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As a filidh bard, my persona's clothes would be regulated by the laws of those in trained professions, considered quite high in status. My persona would be allowed full freedom of dress – a leine to ankle length, ionar jacket, woolen brat – all were legal for a bard of my station. However, a filidh bard is limited to five colours, instead of the six of higher ranking bards. Ollamh bards, the highest rank, were so greatly valued that they were allowed the same colours and accoutrements as kings! Different sources cite different colours as indicative of high rank and nobility, and there is no real consensus amongst the academics at this time. However all agree that brightly dyed or gel garments were worn by those of rank and status, which I emulate here. My 5 garb colours are blue (several shades), yellow (several shades), green, purple, and red.


The bottom layer is an Irish leine, the main garment worn by both upperclass men and women throughout the early period, from around 600-1200 CE. A ubiquitous linen garment worn with a belt about the waist and frequently covered with a pinned cloak, or brat, subtle differences in the style, decoration, and construction of the leine can be used to distinguish the evolution of the garment through the ages and the status of the wearer. Leines became more fitted over time, with deeper gores aiding in shaping. Longer leines, down to floor length, indicated higher rank, as did finer linen and more elaborate embroidery. “This basic mode of dress can be attested to by the stone carvings found on the Cross of Muiredach. In this carving of three men, the léine can be seen as a long tunic with a narrow skirt, and a band of what appears to be embroidery or embroidered trim around the bottom. The central figure appears to be a man of some importance, and is wearing his léine full length to his ankles. McClintock notes that men in action are often shown with the léine pulled up around their thighs. In another carving on the cross, a priest is shown in a long léine with a decorated hem, and a warrior with a belt worn outside his léine, which is drawn up to his knees.

Similar to the leine in construction but shorter in length, the ionar served as a jacket or overtunic of linen or wool. (3A) For the lower classes, the ionar was the only garment allowed them by law, but for higher classes, this could be layered on top of the leine. For a long time, academics thought that higher classes wouldn't wear the ionar, but this has since been disputed. Indeed even in the Book of the Kells itself we see examples of ionar worn on top of leines, as in the case of the images of Mary, John, and others (3C-3F). For each of these examples, the person is wearing a leine of one colour, a brat of a second, but has a third layer showing as well, from the different coloured sleeves of Mary and John to the second necklines of the two unnamed figures.

No proper Irish noble would be seen without her cloak, or brat, usually pinned at the shoulder with a metal, wood, or bone pennanular broach. (4A, 4B) The brat is made from a single piece of wool, rectangular in length, and frequently fringed or embroidered at the hem.

Shoes: (5A) Contrary to popular belief, shoes were worn by most for at least some occasions in this time period. They were still made of a single piece of leather at this time, with varying levels of complexity depending on rank. While the peasantry would wear shoes made from essentially a gathered oval of leather, those of higher class, such as my portrayed persona, would wear slightly fitted garments. (5B)

Called the Lucas Type 1 shoe, after the person who first described the shoe and the pattern, these shoes are made from a leather 2-3mm in thickness out of a single piece, sewn at the toe and the heel. (5C) While the pattern may look odd, it fits together nicely. The shoe would be stuffed with straw or hay for support and warmth, and frequently was tooled or decorated.

	
<p>6D Breac Modac budget - Aidan, 2006</p>	<p>Loch Glashan Crannog satchel - Broderick, 2014</p>
	