



**Editor's Note:** This issue is about a controversial fabric in Renaissance and Medieval costuming, corduroy. Many people are confused as to the historical accuracy of this fabric. I took it upon myself to find some answers, and present the results to you. I hope you enjoy reading this article as much as I enjoyed researching the information.

### ***Corduroy – True or False?***

Corduroy as a fabric had its beginnings in the Near East, made as a variation on velvet and other pile fabrics. To make a pile fabric, you need to weave an extra dimension into the fabric. Your basic fabric is woven in two dimensions, up-down, and side to side. These are called warp and woof. Velvet, corduroy and pile fabrics can be made in several ways by the addition of extra fibers that are cut to size.

One way is to weave a third dimension that is at a 90° angle to the warp and woof. This is easy to see if you look at carpet, but doesn't seem practical for fine fabrics. Another variation is to weave extra warps *or* wefts (depending on what the end result is supposed to be), and 'float' them over the cloth. Then the floats are cut to form a kind of 'shag'. This kind of weaving has been around for a long time, ever since weaving was invented, I am sure. If the extra dimension is not cut, you get terry cloth. Usually the extra fibers are cut, shaved, burned or sheared to create texture or design. This is how we get ribbed fabrics (corduroy), figured velvets and of course, shag carpet.

### ***Origins and History***

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, fustian is a fabric made by weaving two sets of cotton wefts on a linen warp creating a pile. The resulting fabric was popular during the European Middle Ages and includes among others moleskin, velveteen, and corduroy. It is believed that fustian originated in Al-Fustat, now part of Cairo around AD 200.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the production of this cloth had spread through Europe, as evidenced by guilds of fustian weavers in Spain and Italy. Later it spread to Germany and Switzerland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. French weavers made fringed and roughened fustians in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this fabric was called thickset.

According to an article titled *12th and 13th Century Velvet* by Lydie LaBarthe, "Corduroy, (Fr: Corde du Roi) was woven for minor nobility and the servants of kings in the Middle Ages. It has extra wefts that form lengthwise rows of floats that are cut to form a pile, resembling the corrugated effect of the corduroy we know today".

Herbert Norris, author of *Medieval Costuming and Fashion*, noted that "it was considered very seemly, without being costly", thus eminently suited to the Middle Classes.

### ***Notes:***

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