



Here we see the ideal Burgundian couple in their courtly garden from *Pavilion Books' A Medieval Flower Garden*, page 53. Their source: Giraudon/ Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris MS 5072 f. 71 v.

Burgundian Costume

Being a study of women's formal dress of Northern Europe, especially Burgundy and Flanders, in the later half of the 15th century.

By Lady Lyonnete Vibert (Marie Vibbert)

"When I first joined the SCA," my friend Li said to me recently, "one of the first things they told me was 'pointy princess caps didn't really exist.'" I can understand the motivation of her early, erroneous tutor. From *Star Trek* to *The Wizard of Id*, any time a "medieval" woman is portrayed without an effort for authenticity she wears the tall pointed cap, usually with a short veil pinned to the tip. Little girls don them at renaissance fairs, complete with pink stars and flowers flowing like a fountain from their tips and elastic chinstraps to hold them on. The fashionable dress of the later 15th Century has become iconographic with our modern idea of medievalism. Such popular portrayal, largely inauthentic, has linked it with the reenactor's idea of bad medievalism. It is easy to see why this style has maintained such a presence in public consciousness: it is an enigmatic, singular style that captures attention and was depicted in paintings and drawings past its time of popularity. Illustrations from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that hoped to recall the glory of the tournament age take their images not from the early sources, but their 15th century copies, and so the contemporary dress of the late middle ages becomes the iconographic dress of Arthurian legend and the chivalric epic. Thus a long tradition of tertiary depiction of Burgundian costume began, clouding and obfuscating the record to this day.¹

My desire to research this subject grew out of a desire to wear a big, pointy hat and my subsequent surprise that the documentation available for this garment was sparse. The 18th and 19th century books on costume, famous for their sometimes laughably inaccurate drawings, seemed to take their largest leaps of fancy in the depiction of Burgundy and France of the 15th Century, proposing bag-stuffed stomachs, iron counterweights hanging from the front of hats, and the now classic veil pinned only at the tip. At every turn of my early research, I found

more bad conjecture than actual evidence. This is not to say that good resources do not exist. This paper, if anything, is a condensation of the greater works of talented and dedicated costume and art historians, to whom I owe a huge debt.



A particularly awful example of what sloppy researchers have made of Burgundian costume. This is from *Fashion in History* by Marybelle Bigelow, c. 1970. The author professes with authority that not only did women stuff their stomachs with horsehair (an idea perhaps developed from a modern esthetic of slenderness that could not rationalize the somewhat prominent stomach of these dresses without exaggeration—after all, aren't we all really shaped like Barbie?—and a vague memory of references to men of the time period stuffing their doublets.) but also that the cone-shaped headdress developed before the end of the 14th Century—it did not—and "was often more than ten feet long," with ribbons and scraps of veiling, even flags, adorning the tip. Clearly, 20th century costume historians can be just as guilty of misinterpreting this style as their 18th and 19th century predecessors.

Development

In her work "Dress and Fashions c.1470", Anne Sutton quotes an unknown Burgundian chronicler who found the changes in fashion around him worthy of mention. He writes, "In this year [1467] ladies and young gentlewomen ... put aside the trains they wore on their gowns, and instead they wore ... borders on their gowns of grey, letice and marten, of velvet and other fabrics, as wide and as valuable as they could afford.... And they wore headdresses ... in the shape of a round bonnet which narrowed above, some to a height of half an ell

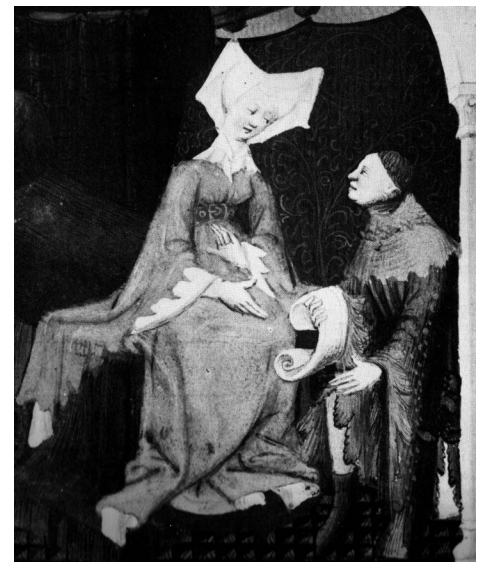
or three quarters and some lower....”² It could be easily to believe, as this chronicler did, that fashion suddenly and abruptly changed in the mid-15th Century. However, with the benefit of hindsight and pictorial evidence we can see that in fact the astounding styles of the late 1400’s were the direct, logical descendents of the clothes worn before them.

Let’s go back a bit. The 14th Century ended with the cotehardie, a tightly fitted gown, still prevalent but being augmented with a loose over-gown or robe, especially on older figures. (One can almost see the thought process: “Honey, I ain’t putting something that tight on at my age!”) These loose gowns became more and more ubiquitous and elaborate and thus the houppelande was born. These were sumptuous, heavy gowns, fur-lined and very warm, indicative perhaps of a shift in the climate. By 1420 these gowns had reached the height of their opulence with trailing sleeves and large, turned-back collars to show off their fur. Making trains and sleeves any longer than this extreme was impractical: already courtly ladies appear to be drowning in puddles of fabric in some depictions. It was time for fashion to move in a new direction. Whether consciously motivated by practicality, or a desire to not be doing the same old thing their parents had done, the fashionable ladies of the Fifteenth Century began to modify what they wore. The sleeve became enclosed into cuffs and the voluminous folds were cut down in

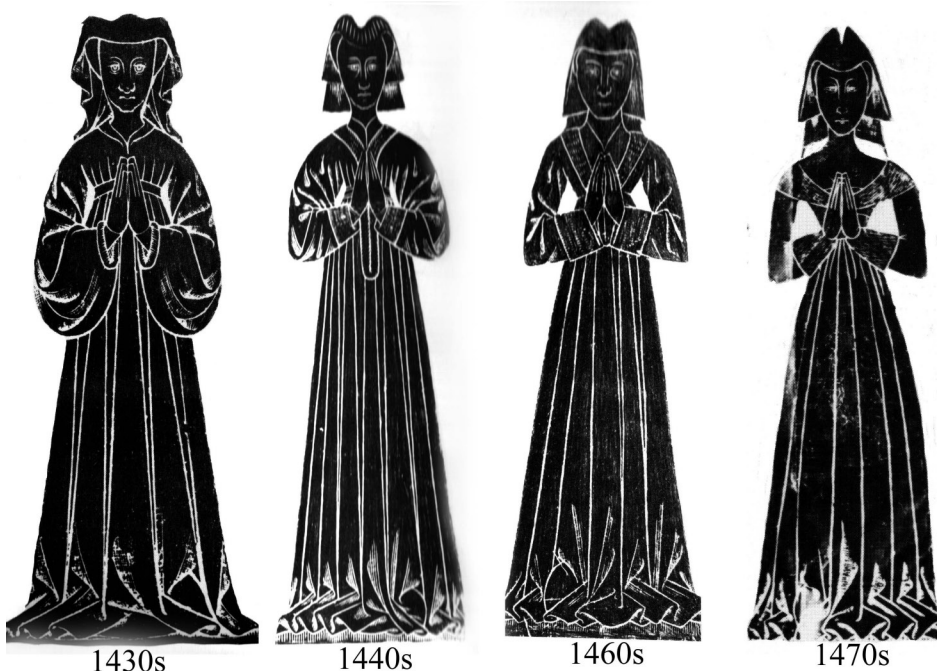
an effort to make a more fitted garment. Also, almost nonchalantly, the collar began to open up to show the lacings underneath.

Allow me to borrow a device used by Robin Netherton in her talks on the development of the V-necked

gown.³ To illustrate the gradual change in fashion, she provided a series of funerary brasses, placed side by side. Drawn in a similar style and sized to be the same, you can watch the slow progression of the collar as it opens wider and becomes more of a line of trim than a true lapel. The sleeves also tighten, and will get even tighter as the style reaches its ending years. The fur cuffs widen and then, in the last brass, are turned back. The belt has become wider and an emphasis on a slender waist has clearly been adopted. The first brass is clearly a houppelande, the last clearly Burgundian, and yet all four gowns are similar to those next to them and any one could not be picked out as representing a dramatic stylistic change.



A fashionable lady of around 1420. Note the cumbersome sumptuousness of her gown.



Likewise, at the end of the 15th Century the transition from this “Burgundian” style to the “Tudor” style is also a slow, steady progression, so that we lose first the belt, then the v-neck, then the cap, and so by 1500 have a gown that would not be lumped together with the gowns of 1460 to 1490, though it is their direct descendent, just as they are descended from what came before them, and ultimately, your blue jeans and t-shirts have descended from all

All brasses, and the Houppelande at the top of the page, are from Margret Scott’s *A Visual History of Costume*. In order, from pages 67,77,84,101, and 105

that came since.

While a romantic notion, why does it matter that these dresses were the direct result of what came before them? Knowing where the style came from gives us clues as to its construction. The V-neck, filled in with a smooth piece of contrasting fabric, might be seen as an applique ornamentation, but is in fact the opening of the gown, having drawn out from the original slit opening in the front of the houppelande. Fashion moves toward extremes, and as the V-neck became wider and wider, discretion led to the insertion of a piece to cover the lacing of the underdress. But that is a story for later on.

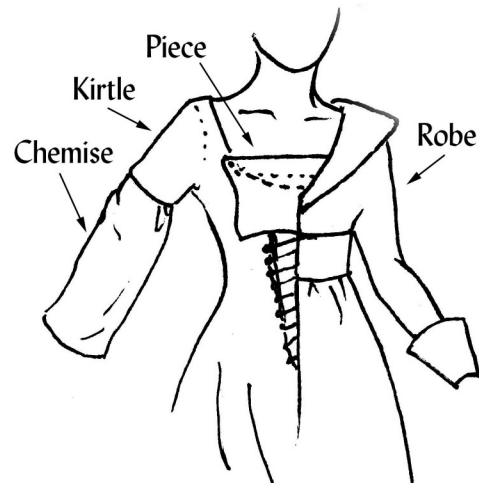
The Underclothes



Two details from *The Birth of the Virgin* <insert rest of info> showing glimpses of the chemise.

It is my opinion that the Burgundian Costume is a layered costume, and cannot be properly recreated without the proper under layers. The design is exacting. A tightly fitted bodice leaves little room for bulk underneath, and yet there must be two layers underneath of it, the chemise to protect the outer clothes from sweat and skin oils, and the under dress or kirtle, which provides the body shape.

Therefore let us start by getting down to the very bottom of the outfit: the underclothes. Written records speak of chemises or smocks and stockings, when they are so indelicate as to list these items. (Usually inventories or wills. Smocks and undershirts were given as gifts to the poor sometimes in wills.) But the pictorial evidence on underclothes is slim. Not surprising, after all, then as now people didn't show up to their formal portraits in their underwear. But there are a few wonderful images that give us a peek at what the ladies were



A cutaway of the Burgundian Costume, showing layers. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the under dress as the kirtle, the over dress as the robe, and the smock or undershirt as the chemise. Drawing by Milesent Vibert (Grace Vibbert).

wearing underneath it all.

One such glimpse can be found in birth scenes, such as *The Birth of the Virgin* <insert rest of info>. We are given an look into an intimate and wholly female event. One of the attendants has removed the over-sleeve of her kirtle to wash her hand, showing us the rumpled chemise sleeve. It's not much of a glimpse, but we can tell that the chemise sleeve is loose, and does not have a gathered cuff. The neckline and sleeves of St. Anne's chemise are exposed over her coverlet as well. Her neckline is scooped, and there is pleating in the center front. It looks like there is just enough shoulder on the chemise to hold it on, but the new mother is depicted with very narrow, sloping shoulders so it's hard to be sure. Her sleeves are long and tube-like, ending just shy of the wrist.

Another good pictorial source are illustrations from stories where a female character must disrobe as part of the plot. One such story is the legend of Patient Griselda, who at one point is kicked out of her home by her pig of a husband with nothing but her underclothes. In *The Story of Patient Griselda*, painted after 1451 by The Master of Mansel, we see a side view of a chemise with loose sleeves that reach to the wrist. The hem is at mid-calf. The folds in the gown are all at the front or back, leaving the side smooth and indicating that pleating takes place at the front and back of the neckline. The details so clearly shown in *The Birth*



Patient Griselda walks away in her chemise.

of the *Virgin*, the sleeve end and the neckline itself, are here obscured, but we have another piece of the puzzle shown.

This hemline and sleeve shape are echoed again and again in pictures of women in various states of undress, preparing for their bath, resting from field work, or in the case of this woodcut, printed by Heinrich Laufenberg, Augsburg, 1491, bathing a child. Her chemise sleeves have been rolled up for the task, evidence that they are loose, maybe even slightly flared. There is a fold at the armpit that may suggest a gusset or a T-shape for the sleeve. (Similar folds form at the armpits when you wear a T-tunic with the sleeve cut wide at its base.) Again, the gown is clearly pleated in the front center. Her dress does appear to be longer than calf-length, however, and her neckline has a distinct v-shape. Illustrations are only a secondary source, and so it is important to compare as many as possible to get a sense of what is common and what is merely



an addition of the artist's hand. In this case, the more fashionable neckline and longer length of skirt may have been 'beautifying' touches, or they may indeed represent an accurate depiction and therefore a reasonable alternative to a scoop neck and calf-length hem, or they may simply be distortions due to how the woman is kneeling.

Another source for a sense of what the chemise looked like are outlandish costumes worn by mythic or historical figures. Figures in some religious paintings are shown wearing long, loose gowns with loose sleeves and narrow pleats at the front and back of a large curving neckline that moves from nearly circular to almost square.⁴ While it is unlikely anyone ever wore these dresses, their construction might give some indication into the shape of the chemise, since the artist would draw on familiar costume to create his imaginative shapes. On their own, we couldn't be sure, but taken together with more direct

evidence of the chemise, they can add weight to earlier observations.

The figure to the right shows a lady from Pietrus Christus' *Lamentation*. Although her costume is clearly fantastic, note how the garment is similar to the chemises shown previously. The length (of the outer white portion) echoes chemise lengths we have seen: falling to mid-calf. The neckline is similar as well. We can then infer that the pleating method used in this imaginary costume might be the same as a chemise of the period. The sleeves are fuller than the others we have seen, so we can assume that this is a fantastic element. The fabric folds at the shoulder suggest to me that the sleeve is fitted in with a diagonal cut up to the neckline. Was Pietrus Christus just making it up? There's no way to be sure, but still, it is tempting to steal construction from this beautifully detailed painting when so many depictions of women in underclothes are not so finely wrought.



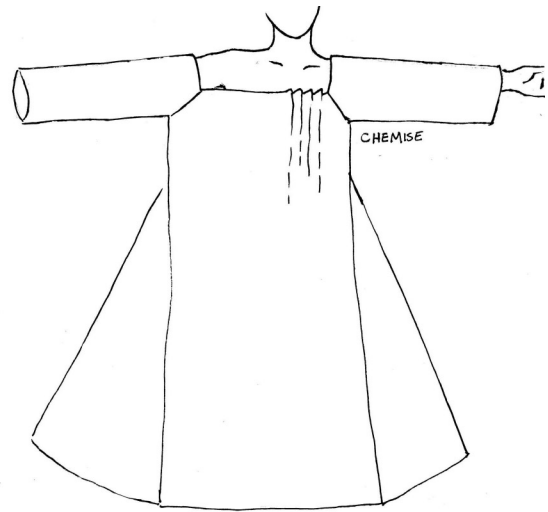
So what does all this pictorial evidence tell us? The chemise appears to have been a loose garment, falling straight, with narrow pleats gathering into a low neckline. It is a safe guess that a narrow strip of fabric was used to hold the pleats in at the neck and that the sleeves were fitted in loosely for comfort. In the color depictions that I have seen the chemise is always white. The materials that were prevalent and inexpensive at the time would have been wool or linen. Silk might have been used, but was so costly at this point, well, would you pay for underwear worth its weight in gold that no one is going to see? Wool can be surprisingly comfortable next to the skin, however given that linen tends to be a crisper, thinner fabric and very durable, I suspect most chemises in period would have been linen.

For my reconstruction I cut two large rectangles of linen long enough to fall from my shoulders to mid-calf. The width I estimated by sight, but was roughly the measurement from shoulder to shoulder plus four inches. For the sleeves I cut simple rectangles the length from my shoulder to wrist and wide enough to hang loose around the arm. The neckline is formed on the sides by the sleeve material and on the front and back by the body

panels, which are gathered in narrow pleats to fit. I sewed the basic t-tunic shape and then held this on my body with hands on my shoulders while my sister folded and pinned the pleats, starting at the center front and back and working outward at half-inch increments until the chemise rested firmly on my shoulders and was no longer in danger of falling off. The sleeves were cut back in a manner to make the neckline curve (just a sliver to put stretch in the fabric of the edge), and a thin strip of fabric sewn down to cover the edge and hold the pleats in place. Bias tape might work as an option, but I just cut from the bias edge of my scrap linen. I also added gores at the sides of the chemise to add fullness, but these may be omitted if the body is cut in a fuller shape, rather than a straight rectangle.

I would encourage anyone to experiment to his or her own satisfaction to achieve the look of the chemise as shown in the pictorial evidence. This design worked for me. The important thing to note is that there is no gathered cuff on the sleeves and no draw-string gather at the neckline. These would add uncomfortable bulk underneath a tight kirtle and robe.

Now, about the stockings. As with the chemise, there are few pictures of women holding their skirts up high enough to give us a clear view of their stockings. At this date I have yet to see a source that shows the top of the hose on a woman's leg. However, I don't believe they wore hose as long as the men of the time period. Master Broom in his article "Chosen Hosen" holds that calf-length makes the most sense, and I'm inclined to agree with him. Why cover the whole leg when the skirts will be providing adequate protection both from the cold and prying eyes? The occasional lifted hem in an illumination leads me to believe however that the stockings must have been over ankle length- ie, over the length of ankle exposed in the pictorial evidence. Anne Sutton purports that hose were "always of black woolen cloth", though she does not list a source for this fact. Other evidence: I have seen two illuminations of tailor's shops showing hose of short length hanging - while they might have been an alternative for men wearing longer costume, chances are these are ladies' stockings. These short stockings also appear heraldically in the coat of arms of Maria Hoose (a pun, clearly.) Both the heraldic hose and the ones in the illuminations appear to be white, or at the least light-colored. They also appear



My hypothetical chemise construction. Not shown is the strip of bias-cut fabric at the neckline to secure the narrow pleats. Drawing by Grace Vibbert.

leg-shaped, which may be artistic license or may be evidence for the hosen being cut from cloth as opposed to knitted.

Although it is contested whether or not knitting existed in this time period (it may not have been developed until later, though there are some earlier illuminations of the Madonna where she appears to be knitting in the round) a pair of woolen knee-high socks make a good substitution for events lest you need to lift your hem to climb a stair.

The Kirtle



A kirtle from Davenport, page 339, from the Hours of Anne Beaujou, 1460-1522. I'd suspect this picture of belonging to the earlier part of the book, near to 1460, by the construction of the dress.

Throughout the 15th Century we see pictures of another kind of dress, less formal, with short sleeves and a spiral lacing up the front center. Depictions of the dress are so common it has achieved its own fame in the SCA, often called the "Flemish Dress." Van der Wyden's Mary Magdelene's are perhaps the most famous representations, meticulously showing every seam. Apart from being displayed alongside the Burgundian gown, how do we know this dress was worn underneath of it?

First off, we know something must have been worn underneath the Burgundian robe. Some depictions show cleavage, and the chest is certainly supported and held in by something to prevent it from just flopping over the belt. Many of the depictions show small wrinkles in the



The ladies here have removed their outer gowns, presumably because it is hot, or their travel by boat made them impractical. Note the lady in the foreground's pinned piece and the loosened lacing on her kirtle.

gown above and below the belt, showing that the belt has pulled in the body of the dress. These small pleats would have been distorted or flattened by the force of holding the bust up and in. The triangular piece revealed within the v-neck is usually depicted flat, wrinkle-free, or in some cases somewhat slack. This is not a supportive piece either. Therefore it cannot be attached to the rest of the robe directly. What is holding it in place? Something has to be going on underneath, were we cannot see. The early gowns show

lacings in their narrow V-necks, yet there is no tension nor distortion on the set-in pleats of the gown to show that any sort of lacing is attached to it, this must be a glimpse of an undergarment. Finally, we have scads of pictures of women walking in Burgundian Costume, or sitting, with their hem gathered up to show off both the rich fur lining of their skirt and the straighter skirt of the kirtle underneath.

Another source of evidence are pictures of women who have removed their outer robe sitting in the kirtle, or sequential pictures of women in stories wearing the v-necked robe in one scene and the kirtle in the next. One particularly nice pair of illuminations from King Rene's *Le Cueur d'Amours Espiris*⁵ shows two women in a boat, first during the day, wearing their v-necked robes, then at night, their robes cast aside, in kirtles. One lady is turned toward us and we can see a rectangle of black fabric pinned to the front of her kirtle, covering the lacing. There's our triangular piece!

The wearing of the kirtle underneath the gown is also supported by experimental evidence. When I made my first Burgundian costume, I felt that the under dress and chemise could wait- I'd just pin the piece to the outer gown and no one would be the wiser. The look simply wasn't right, and the dress flattened my bust while the V-neck kept trying to widen out and expose me. A week later I made the kirtle, and put it on, and it was a miraculous transformation. Not only did the dress look better and stay in place better, it went on easier as well. In my opinion, there simply is no getting away without the kirtle. The Burgundian costume is a layered costume at its heart. Besides, throw in a pair

of pin-on over-sleeves and you'll have a second outfit for before court. Noblewomen are shown in both the short-sleeved kirtle by itself and the full gown. Most likely they, as we, needed something more mobile for their day-to-day wear.

It has been suggested by some that the pinned-on sleeves of the Flemish dress are ostentation: they are there to provide the illusion that there is a dress underneath the short-sleeved one of costlier fabric. If that is the case, then why are they always so clearly pinned-on in depictions? And why not pin the sleeve underneath the hem of the shorter sleeve, rather than over it? Why then are the most ostentatious gowns of the period long-sleeved, offering no chance to view the sleeve of an under-gown? When poorer women are shown working it is the white, loose, rumpled chemise sleeve that is shown most often, so clearly if there was a style of short-sleeved dress overtop a long-sleeved dress, it was not so widespread as to be mimicked by the working classes. The humblest women are frequently depicted in long sleeve dresses, in fact, showing that they did not need short sleeves. Indeed, they wouldn't: the short sleeve serves a functional purpose.

In the era of wide, loose sleeves on gowns, a tight-fitting, long under-gown sleeve was often shown to protect milady's arm from being bared. As these sleeves closed into a bag-shape, and then became less full, the under-sleeve was hidden from view. As the over-sleeve got more and more form fitting, the under-sleeve must have posed a severe mobility problem. Have you ever worn a snug sweater over a snug shirt? Or a coat with narrow sleeves over a jacket with narrow sleeves? You develop a condition known as "Frankenstein Arms" – the inability to bend one's elbow. It is my belief the under-sleeve was cut shorter – always above the elbow, you'll notice – to allow the arm freedom of motion. The false sleeve then had to be adopted as a decency measure, to cover the chemise sleeve when the kirtle was worn on its own.

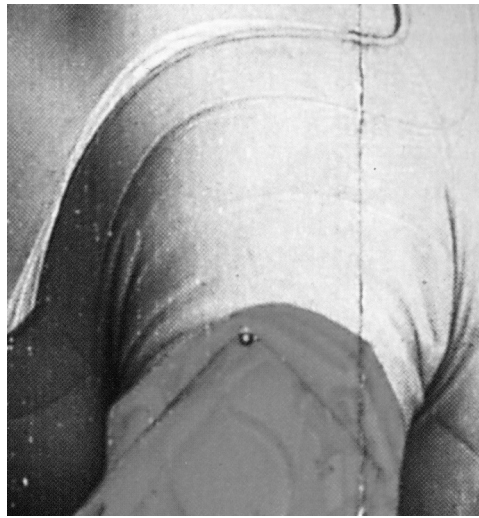
Thanks primarily to Van der Wyden and his contemporaries, we have strong evidence for the construction of these kirtles. Van der Wyden's Magdalene's have a front opening, clearly, and a seam underneath the arm. Two of his depictions show the back of the gown, with a seam straight down the center. From these pictures and many others from the time period, I deduced a four-panel pattern for the kirtle was probably used,

with seams at the sides and in the front and back center.⁶

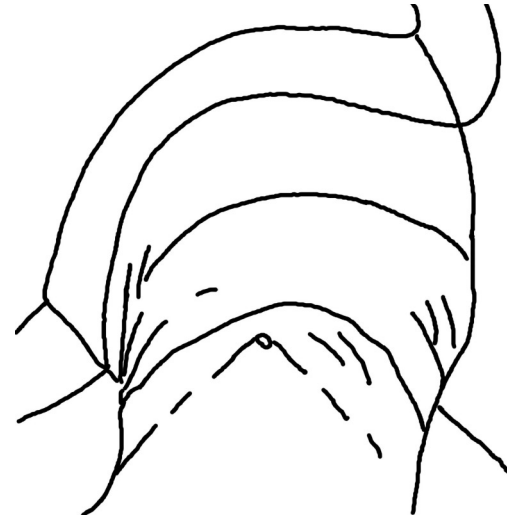
Something else exciting seems to be going on with these dresses in this time period. Both Van der Wyden and The Master of the Life of the Virgin show kirtles with and without a waistline seam. What is remarkable is that these seams are not shown all the time and that they fall at the natural waist, not just below the bust where the visual 'waist' of the Burgundian gown falls. The *houppelandes* of earlier in the century did not have waistline seams, and I do not believe the Burgundian gowns had them.

The cotehardies of the previous century also appear to be devoid of a waistline seam. Could we be witnessing the development of what will become a standard tailoring practice in the next century, and indeed, a standard in clothing up until modern times? I believe we are, and my wild conjecture is that there is a reason they formed first on a garment worn underneath the most fashionable gowns. A waistline seam is a great cloth saver. By fitting the skirt in separate panels the dress is made of more, smaller, pieces. Less fabric is wasted than when larger pieces are cut out. Such a cost-cutting measure would be unsightly on a gown made for ostentation, but makes perfect sense on an under-gown. When in the next century Spanish styles caught on and everyone wanted a skirt that did not fall but was held out in a firm shape, the practice of separating the body from the skirt was already in place, ready to sweep across Europe.

My construction of the kirtle owes greatly to the previous work of Robin Netherton, who not only instructed me in the design but also helped create my first pattern. The pieces are fitted directly on the body, carefully matching the curve of the spine in the seam of the two back pieces and keeping the grain of the fabric horizontal to add strength. The dress is fitted very tightly to ensure proper support of the bust and to help with achieving a slender look. The pictorial evidence of ladies in these kirtles often show the lacing loosened to allow a strip of the chemise to be exposed,⁷ a natural result of having a closely-fitted garment: we rarely stay



A close-up of Van der Wyden's Mary Magdalen's sleeve from *The Descent from the Cross*, and a tracing of the seam lines for clarity. The pale seam line halfway up the sleeve could be a separation of the sleeve piece from the shoulder piece. I believe the curving seam line that follows the neckline is a sewing-down of an interior backing of the edge. Note the seam lines on either side of the shoulder, separating it from the body of the gown.



the same size throughout the life of a fashion, much less the month. I have seen one illumination from this time period that shows a tailor fitting a garment directly on his client. (It should be noted that this is a man's gown being fitted, and the tailor could be merely adjusting it, but I think it is likely that some fitting was done on the body during this time period.)⁸

The front opening seems to consistently extend below the waist, even when a waistline seam is employed, ending around the level of the navel, or the top of the hips. Experimentation shows that this leaves an opening easy to get in and out of without having to do more lacing than necessary.

The sleeves are cut short, between just a cap-sleeve and just above the elbow. The seam of this short sleeve seems in most depictions to be underneath the arm, as opposed to the back of the arm, which is where the seam line for long sleeves of the era are drawn. The false over-sleeves, when pinned on, have the back-of-the-arm seam, and so the seams of over and under sleeve do not lie atop one another. This might be a concession to simplicity on the construction of a very small sleeve. In some depictions, most notably Van der Wyden's, the sleeve appears to be set into the shoulder, much as my hypothesised chemise sleeve.

The length of the kirtle is also pretty consistent- long enough for the hem to brush the top of the foot, but allow for free motion. The skirt may be cut full for wearing on its own, but can be less full to save fabric.

My first kirtle I made with a strip of contrasting fabric at the hem. Many pictures of ladies in Burgundian costume show them holding up the front of their gown to expose the kirtle underneath, and frequently a line appears a foot or so above the hem. In some drawings there is an interruption in the pattern of wrinkles showing that this is a second piece of fabric. Others clearly show this to be a band of fur. While at first I thought that this might be some trope, to show off a more expensive fabric when the hem was lifted –as it must be from time to time. However, nearly every depiction shows this line, the division between fabrics. If it were a trope, wouldn't it be preferable not to reveal it? Also the fabric above and below the line is frequently the same color. In some images there is no apparent change in the fabric, only a line. It was suggested that this line in the fabric represents a repair, a replacement of a worn-out hem. But why replace so much fabric for a worn hem? And why record a repair detail into the dress of idealized, historical and allegorical women as well as the living? Surely queens and saints should be above wearing out their hems? Another theory is that the line is merely a line of stitches, representing the turning up of the hem underneath, reinforcing the bottom of the gown. While these are valid theories, my belief is that the addition of fur or patterned fabric was meant as a decoration of the kirtle itself. Burgundian gowns are always trimmed on the bottom, with fur or velvet matching the trim of the collar and cuffs. One theory states that it was the need to protect the fray-prone edge of the velvets so popular at the time that led to the use of trim on the hemline. There is one picture of a late houppelande/ early Burgundian that shows the collar edge-on, revealing that the fur edging wraps over it. My personal theory is that the fur edging grew out of the fur lining shown on houppelandes being turned out to show it off.

While men's houppelandes and cotehardies were frequently decorated on the bottom edge, women's were not, presumably because their edges dragged on the ground and it would be a waste of trim, or perhaps because trimming a lady's hem might –gasp– draw the eye to her ankle. Whatever the reason for it, hemline trim became a fashion in the later 15th Century and it is my belief that, at least in iconographic depiction, this fashion was carried on into the kirtle. However pictures of the kirtle worn by itself rarely show this. I suspect, therefore, that this detail is more wishful than actual: the ladies would have trimmed their kirtles if they had the

money, but probably did not, much as depictions of the Virgin Mary from this time period show her with jewels hemming her dress or cloak - a style the wealthiest of queens would find hard to maintain. A band of fur or velvet on an undergarment is not as expensive nor impractical as a band of jewels, so the style may have existed, among the wealthy, but was not as common as an untrimmed kirtle.

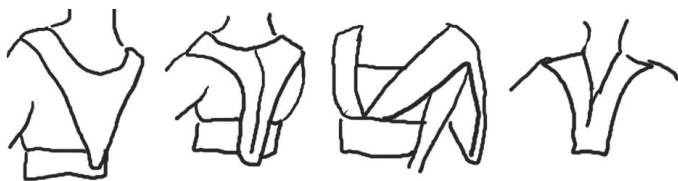
The most common colors used in pictures of the kirtle are red, green, and blue. Also common is cloth-of-gold, though this would probably have been less common in real life. If a trim band is shown, it is usually grey fur or cloth-of-gold brocade, unless the undergown is itself cloth-of-gold, in which case a bright velvet of green or red might be the trim. The fabric used was most likely wool, though linen or a wool/linen mix would have been available as well.

The Robe

Overtop it all, we have a V-necked robe lined in fur. It is my belief the robe opens in front, like the kirtle, and is pulled on and held shut with the belt- much like modern bathrobes. Many depictions of the Burgundian gown show evidence of a front opening, a line of fur or trim extending to the navel or merely a front seam-line. If this front opening is laced shut, it is done so in a way that is carefully concealed from the outside. “Invisible lacing” techniques from later finds might be in use here, where the lacing holes or eyelets are on a separate piece of fabric attached inside the opening. Early V-necked robes that are more houppelande-like appear to not have any sort of lacing holding them shut at all, the slit tapering closed naturally with the fullness of the body of the gown.

The collar is by far the most distinguishing characteristic of these gowns. The V-neck is always adorned with a trim of fur or velvet, forming a sort of lapel. This lapel usually extends out to the edge of the shoulder, obscuring the construction of the top of the gown. The fur (or velvet) continues on to the back of the gown.

It is a common misconception that these gowns were cut with a deep V in the back to mirror the front. The subsequent result is a gown that won't stay put on your shoulders. Pictures of the backs of these gowns show otherwise. Sometimes a V-cut is employed, but it is always shallow, extending no further down than a curved neckline would in back.⁹ Rather, the back of the gowns are shown to either have a high neckline, as one would expect to support the plunging neckline in the front, or to have a V-shape of fur attached. These fur V's hang loose over the belt, like a small cape. Another variation is a Y of fur created by the two lapels coming together over the shoulders into



Four tracings of backs: The first three are from Margaret Scott's book, the last from a manuscript illustration reproduced in *The History of Dress*. The second shows what I mean by a “Y-shaped” back. The fourth also appears more Y-shaped in the original than my crude tracing. The first and third are examples of cape-backs. The third is a picture from the front, included here because of how clearly it shows the hanging nature of the fur. None of these are unique shapes, they are represented in other sources as well, though the fourth style is clearly paired with a narrow front more in keeping with the earlier houppelande style, it was worn with a tall, pointed hennin.

a shallow V or scoop, and then joining together to hang down as a double row of fur over the belt. The simple high-back without a fur V is shown on women wearing simple veils or hoods and could be seen as a lower-class alternative. None of the pictures of these gowns from the back show lacing or a hint of a back opening, reinforcing the theory that these robes open in the front only.



A shallow V-flap back and a non-V'ed back on two women in a romantic setting. Their headdresses are 'historical' elements. Image taken from the 2001 Medieval Women's Calendar.

At the outset of the style, when the gowns are more houppelande-like, the V-neck is narrow and deep, sometimes shown open under the belt. The top of the V does not expose much of the shoulder, if at all, and the gown is also fuller in the body and looser in the sleeves. With time the style progressed toward wider and wider necklines until it ends with a V so wide it is really no more than a curved neckline with a V of fur superimposed on top of it. The gown is also far tighter later in the 15th Century. By the dying days of the style, the gown is so tight the belt is no longer needed, and is abandoned.

To create the earlier style of gown, I cut a four-panel pattern that is somewhat fitted in the shoulders, but otherwise bells outward. My evidence for this is the lack of wrinkles at the shoulders in depictions of these gowns- the gathering wrinkles in the body seem deepest at the belt, narrowing out over the bust, indicating to me that the fullness of the gown is starting at the bust where the wrinkles start. No V-neck is cut, rather the dress is fitted with the front seam pulled outward into a V. These gowns invariably show deep folds in the front center, which do form when the top of the gown is distorted outward in this manner. Also, some depictions of patterned gowns from this time period clearly show the pattern to be off horizontal on the bodice, though little of the bodice is revealed, usually.

Some of the early gowns appear to have the sleeve head pleated in on top, which lends an almost shoulder-pad-like look.

For a Burgundian gown from the height of the style's popularity, I cut a little more fitting into the body of the gown, flaring outward from the level of the



These three gowns all show V-neclines that are trimmed, presumably with fur or velvet, a front opening that extends to about the navel, and a 'piece' that fills in the V-neck, yet they are clearly different from one another in more ways than the mode of their representation. These are in chronological order, and placed side-by-side, we can see how the style of the Burgundian gown changed with time. The first, a sculpture, is from 1452, the second, a portrait of Maria Hooze, is from 1473, and the third, a funerary brass, from 1479. Notice how the V neck becomes wider until, in the last gown, it is more of a scoop neck than a true V. The piece becomes little more than a sliver in the late dress as well. The belt in the early dress is narrower than the middle robe, and in the final robe, which is so tight-fitting it doesn't really need a belt, the belt is reduced to a loose chain hanging about the hips. The headdress changes with time as well, starting out vertical, it travels back on the head. All three of these images are scanned from Margaret Scott's *Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, pages 86, 106, and 110, respectively.

belt rather than the bust. Along the front seam line I cut a very narrow V, perhaps 15 degrees. The body of the dress is then pulled taut, using the stretch of the bias to form a 45-degree V-neck. The neckline is then left taut, in an unlikely-to-stretch state, which keeps it up and on your shoulders.

Evidence for pulling the upper part of the bodice like this is hard to find. Though patterned fabrics were used, the fur collar obscures the gown, leaving little chance of finding out if the pattern is off-grain. However there are some Italian illustrations from this time period which show a V neckline with no fur collar (after all, who would need such a thing in sunny Italy?). In these gowns the pattern of the bodice material can be seen to be pulled off the horizontal with regard to the rest of the gown, and a fold in the skirt at the center front attests to the extra fullness that would result from forcing a turn into the fabric. This same center front seam fold appears on the Burgundian gowns of the time period, evidence that the same technique is being used.

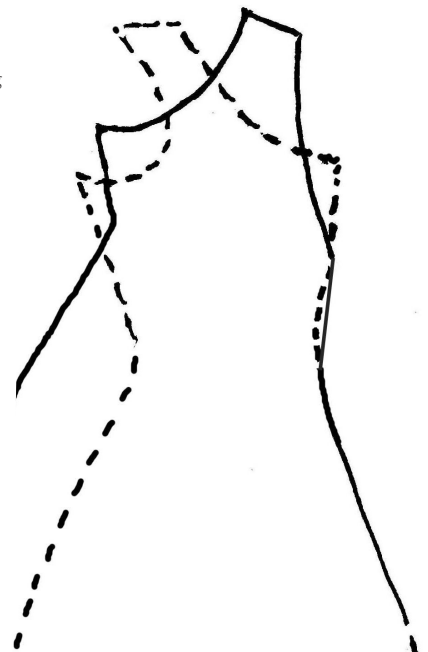
For the later gown, the only alteration is to cut the body fitted down to the hips. The neckline can be cut a shade wider, though be cautious- a sliver cut off the bias will transfer into more stretch than you might realize. As you stretch the neckline further, you will

notice it naturally tends to form a curve rather than a straight line. This is expected, and a part of the later look. The later gown needs invisible lacing up the front to stay closed all the way to the base of the V-neck.

As the style progressed to the end of its lifetime, the cut V is abandoned for a scoop-neck and the cotehardie pattern (shown in dashes below) is most likely

Here is a drawing of my dress pattern, showing the way it differs from its inspiration, a four-panel cotehardie pattern. The Cotehardie pattern is in dashed lines. See how the sleeve opening of the gown is distorted in response to the narrow-cut front that will become the wide V neck? Also, the front is kept straight as possible below this cut, rather than conforming to the body, and the sides are expanded outward to provide a full skirt immediately below the belt. Fullness on the front center seam will be added when the dress is deformed to shape. This stretching back of the shoulders produces a fold on the front center seam that points upward. This wrinkle is ubiquitous in drawings of this style of dress.

Later period gowns would be cut more conforming, more like the cotehardie pattern below, save for the distortion.



what was used: the practical introduction of the underdress style as an over dress in response to the change of fashion. (Some later gowns even show the fur V to be pinned on to a scoop neck, before the V was lost altogether. This development -the return of scoop-necks after nearly a century of V's- is dealt with thoroughly by Robin Netherton in her work.)

In all cases, the front opening of the gown opens to the navel. With the earlier, fuller gowns, there is no need for any sort of closure save the belt, though I find a hook and eye handy at the top of the opening/ the bottom of the V. We know that eyes such as are used with hooks and eyes existed at this time from the pictorial evidence, and we know that hooks and eyes were in use in Elizabethan times. I feel it is a reasonable conceit to use them in this case. An alternative that is perhaps more provable though not necessarily more likely is to use two eyes from two pairs of hook-and-eyes and tie a cord through them to draw the gown closed.

Prepubescent girls in this time period are depicted either in a miniature style of their mother's dress or in an altogether unique adaptation of the kirtle. This



Lady Donne and her daughter are very fashionably dressed in this portrait. Note how the young girl wears only a frontlet over her hair and a kirtle-style dress. This form of dress is echoed in other pictures of young girls from the time period.

girl's kirtle is very wide in the lacing at the neckline, resulting in a deep V all the way to the navel, behind which is either a very large piece pinned to the chemise, or perhaps a secondary underdress. This exposed fabric is surpassingly smooth, as is the line of the V. After this period women past puberty are depicted in similar dress and the 16th Century depictions of beautiful maidens in 15th Century costume nearly all copy this style of dress, albeit poorly. It is a lovely style, but I've yet to find depictions of it on full-grown women before 1500.

The Hats

Cheunsoon Song and Lucy Roy Sibley in their article, *The Vertical Headdress of Fifteenth Century Northern Europe*, express a common confusion. "While previously discussed headdresses do have a more or less logical explanation of evolving from the caul and bourrelet of the fourteenth century, it is not clear how the fashion of the cone-shaped headdress began."¹¹

From the beginning of the fourteenth century, the dominate headdress was a pair of cauls, or buns stuffed into cages at the side of the head, growing wider with time, and then starting to move upward into a horned look, with or without a bourrelet, or padded roll, on top. This became what is known as the 'butterfly' headdress. The fashion became taller and more elaborate for wealthy women, while women of more modest means wore their hair in two horn-shaped buns and pinned veils over top to compliment the horned shape, which fell gracefully into a butterfly drape at the sides of the head. How could a cone shaped headdress have developed from this steady progression of horns?

The illustration given with the above text of Song and Sibley's article shows the five types of headdresses evolved from the caul and bourelet, with the cone-shaped hats off alone together. The hennin and truncated hennin are *not drawn with veils*. This, in my opinion, is the source of most of the confusion on their development.

Look at the truncated hennin to the right. Like nearly all depictions of steeple-caps, a veil is draped over top, of some transparent material. Down the center of the hennin the veil is pinned into two thin ridges, and over the top of the point the veil is continued past the point in two small horns. The next figure shows a taller headdress, yet still a clear continuation of tiny horns over the top is clear. The cone is not the central shape that

The first headdress here is from *The Story of Patient Griselda*, reproduced by Scott on page 87 of her book. The second is from "Histoire de Charles Martel", dated 1470, in Piponnier & Mane's *Dress in the Middle Ages*. I blackened the background in the second picture in photoshop so that the floral motif would not distort the edges of the veil.





Because this hat is rendered in stone, we can clearly see the veil shape with its predominant V-formed horns. Still you can see the truncated cone shape to the center of the headdress and the orientation of these horns is clearly vertical, not outward like the earlier horned styles.

defines the development of the hennin- it is every bit a continuation of the 'butterfly' head-dresses more commonly associated with cauls. By ignoring the veil's shape, all we are seeing is the internal support structure. A cap such as the truncated hennin could well have existed

underneath the high butterfly headdresses of earlier in the century. A higher support structure would in fact be necessary, to keep the tall horns from falling to the side of the head. If we look at the butterfly head-dresses of the Fifteenth century we do see the valley between the horns rising off of the head as well as the horns themselves becoming more vertical. The introduction of sheer, transparent veiling exposed the support structure beneath.¹² From a modern perspective, this is a sudden appearance of cone-shapes, because we could not see the structure underneath heavier veiling. Soon after the transparent veils are introduced, this supporting structure, the cone, becomes a dominant feature of its own.

Once the tall cone was in place to create the tallest and mightiest 'butterfly' of them all the wire supports were soon shortened and the veil draped over the cone itself. The valley between the horns was then achieved by pinning the veil to the cone in a thin ridge. Later, the 'horns' are dropped themselves and the pinned ridge as well. Thus, the draped veil and cone can be seen to be the direct descendents of the horned headdress.

A word on a variation: the bourrelet did not wholly die out, but continued an upward progression as well, on top of a caul-like structure that slowly made its way into being more conical. This variation is not draped with sheer veils, but rather continues the scalloped veiling that was popular with the original bourrelet, hanging off the back of the hat between the two 'horns'. This mimics the veiling of the original bourrelets, which themselves evolved from the hood. The bourrelet always uses an opaque, usually dagged or segmented veil, like a cock's comb, a vestigial remnant

of the hood which was rolled up to form the first padded rolls, its collar and liripipe hanging off the back. My theory is a second wire would easily support the padded roll, being sewn through the fabric, or perhaps welded and sewn around to anchor it to the fillet.

The second conundrum, after 'where did they come from' is 'how did they get those things to stay on their heads?' If you roll up a cone of cardboard, for example, and place it back on your head like the cones in these illustrations, it will simply fall off. Modern attempts at this sort of hat nearly always include a chin strap, however no drawing of a hennin shows a functional chin strap.¹³

I have two theories why a strap under the chin would not have been used. First, there was no such thing as elastic yet. A tied strap would have been bulky and uncomfortable, and, as it is not elastic, prone to slipping out of place if not painfully tight. Second: in most cases, the hat itself is far back on the head, and a strap would have had to extend up and in front of the ear before attaching to the hat, making it highly visible. The drawing up of the hair, the hanging veil, the wide v-neck all suggest that a cleanly exposed throat was desired by this fashion. Why obscure the beauty of the neck?

Portraits of ladies in hennins nearly always show a tugging up of the corner of the eye, evidence that the hair has been pulled back very taut. This could be by a tight 'headband' or comb sewn into the hat, or by a bun formed more conventionally with hair and pins underneath the cap. Both could be support for the hat.

As I am fortunate enough to have period-length hair¹⁴, my first attempt at a hennin was merely a cone of fabric-covered buckram, with a velvet frontlet. The weight of the velvet frontlet combined with the support of my hair drawn up into a bun were enough to hold the hennin in place, even through dancing Salterelli La Regina! Even still, I was missing a design element: the forehead loop. And the hat was not as sturdy in place as I would have liked. It has been postulated by other researchers that the long hair of medieval women was the primary support of the cone shaped headdress. I find this doubtful for all but the shortest hats, for human hair is heavy in bulk and compresses easily.



If not buns nor chin straps, what is left to hold these hats on? There are two clearly shown support elements in the pictorial evidence: the forehead loop and the ear piece. I'll deal first with the ear piece.

The picture above is an early picture, if we are to guess by the narrow V of the gown and the still-present gathering of the bodice. Notice the apparently metal piece that extends down and under the ear. They seem to mimic what was once the edge of the caul, and this might be their source. It is possible that a truncated hennin with frontlet could be hiding these as well.

The forehead loop seems most likely to have developed from the cauls as well. Many pictures of women with horned buns or cauls show a metal band across the top of the head or forehead connecting them for support. A similar band of metal is included in the picture above, not yet a forehead loop itself, still it has detached itself from the base of the hat. As the horns moved higher and back further from the forehead, this band remained, sometimes shown cutting right across the hairline, as was necessary to keep the headdress

from toppling off the back of the head.

As the shift was made from double horns to a single cone, the hat also moved back on the head. The forehead loop became narrower and longer to compensate. What we are seeing is a simple exercise in physics- as the weight of the headdress shifted from being at the sides of the head to the back of the head, the anchoring point needed to shift to compensate.

It has been argued that the loop is a counter-weight. While it does serve that purpose, it is more of a counter-brace, not being very large. It is its pressure against the forehead than its weight that holds the hat in place, in my opinion, not its weight. Another explanation for the loop is that it was simply a hold to reach up and grab to pull your hat back down as it crept back, like the loops on boots to help pull them on. However, I find that such repositioning would result in loose and frayed hairs, as well as disturbance of the veil.

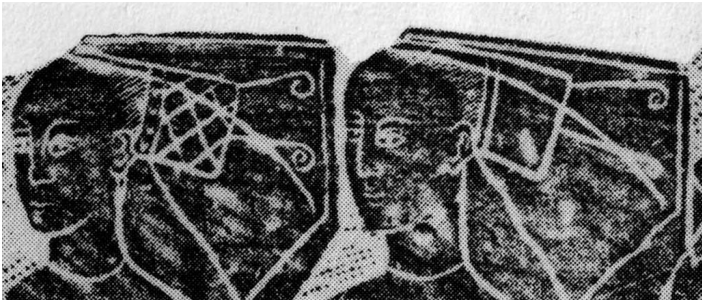
It is certainly likely that many of the loops are simply decorative, shown depending from crowns that would not need such support, or even lying on heads covered only by veils. But like many other features, I feel this decorative element arose from a practical application. The tall hats were nearly always tilted back somewhat, and indeed this tilt seems to progress, starting with the nearly vertical 'sail' headdresses, and moving eventually to a 45 degree angle that dominates the shorter, truncated hennins. By the end of the fashion the smaller caps appear almost to be upon the back of the head.

This small cap at the back of the head would continue onward with a velvet frontlet or ironed veil, slowly evolving into the 'French hood' of the Tudor era.

Finally, my experimentation with creating cone shaped headdresses with forehead loops has proved that a stiff wire loop adds an extraordinary amount of stability to the headdress absent without it.

Moving on from the 'how did they keep these on their heads' question we come across the next mystery. "What were these hats made of?" No extant hats remain from the era, and the written record seems scant on overt haberdashery.

In her article, "Dress and Fashions c. 1470", Anne Sutton informs us: "In 1466 the inventory of Lady



This tomb brass from c.1480 shows these ladies' hats with their transparent veils supported by two curled-end wires. The answer to those mysterious ephemeral horns that appear to be held up by hope alone! Also a continuation of the horned style well into the age of scooped-neck and pre-tudor style. (from Scott, p. 110)

Elizabeth Lewkenor included 'vij pecis of perle set on parchemyn and cold foile made yn levis and for fillettes' 'a pair of tiris of silver wire and over gilt with the fillet of the same...' ¹⁵

The OED defines a fillet as a head band of some sort. To me this inventory of separate decorative elements (a band of gilt parchment) and the fillet and tiris (defined by the OED as a 'tier' or perhaps a band of metal similar to the early use of the word 'tire' as a wheel banding) indicates to me that these hats were not considered items of their own accord. Rather, a lady could own wire frames and decorative elements, which she could combine as she saw fit as parts wore out and fashion changed. Ms. Sutton also quotes a will of 1493 in which a widow leaves her "bonett of velvet with all my frountelettys longing therto..." This sounds like a set of interchangeable frontlets to go with the shorter velvet bonnet popular at the end of the century – the one which I referred to earlier as being a precursor to the French hood. Again, we have interchangeable elements combined to form the final headdress.

My hypothesis is that the hats were made of stiffened fabrics or even, perhaps, fabrics backed by stiffer material such as parchment or even paperboard (there is an extant hat from the 16th century that appears to be backed with cardboard!) These materials would not hold up well against the weight of veils and padded rolls, and so a wire frame is introduced consisting of two 'tiris' extending upward and a metal 'fillet' acting as a headband. A metal headband would both help anchor the hat and keep the less sturdy material from collapsing at the base.

To create a wire-supported hennin, I started with a

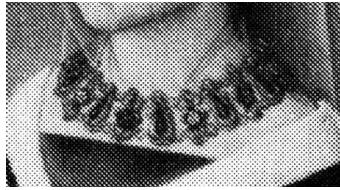
length of brass armature wire and bent it in half, forming a tight loop at one end. I then sewed this long U of wire down to a cone of stiff material. (For my test hat I used simple poster board. I suspect in period they would have used felt, canvas, or some other stiff fabric.) To my surprise and delight, this loop was enough to hold the cap firmly on my head without my hair drawn up into a bun. Any weight, such as veiling, added to the top of the cap is transferred down to the point of the loop, securing the hat rather than causing it to tip back. For a test, I put a scrap of wool over the paper cone to act as a veil and danced a galliard. The hat did shift during the dance, but *forward* on the head, rather than back as would be expected. The pressure of the loop on the forehead was not comfortable, but covering the wire with fabric alleviated much of this. However, I found with extended use that the poster board relaxed around my head, losing its ability to act as a support. This was after two separate events three months apart, however, so as a cheap-and-easy, poster board seems to work without a metal headband.

With the ability to solder wire together, an even sturdier cap could be constructed with a metal band around the bottom of the hennin, and perhaps small wires extending behind the ears to prevent the cap slipping forward or side-to-side.

A word on color: the predominant colors of gowns in depictions are red, blue, and black- not suprisingly corresponding to the most expensive dyes of the time period. The hats carry a similar color pallet, and the majority of hats depicted are covered in a similar fabric to the gown they are worn with, however very often the hat is not the same color as the gown. This seems to be most comon when the gown is not black, red, or gold- the most expensive colors. It makes sense to me that expensive fabrics were preferred over matching, since the hats used considerably less fabric than the gowns.



Other Accessories



The Jewelry

Wide collars dominate, hanging perfectly between the chin and the fur collar, often quite ornate. Rarely are these collars shown as touching the fabric of the dress, nor encircling the neck tightly. Rather, a placement evenly between the base of the neck and the edge of the clothing seems to have been preferred. Frequently, a transparent scarf is pinned in place over the necklace. This perhaps served two purposes: to show off the transparency of the silk and to protect the exposed flesh somewhat from cold. Black cords are shown in some portraits hanging beneath the silk scarf, terminating somewhere below the neckline. Perhaps these hold some personal or devotional object. One amusing theory is that this is the loose end of the lacing-cord on their under dress, looped over the neck before being tucked away.

Floral motifs are common, as are heraldic and devotional badges. Lady Donne's necklace, pictured above to the left, contains suns and roses with a heraldic lion pendant, identifying her as a Yorkist. She also wears a thin black cord at the base of her neck, evidence for another use of the black cord- to compliment the delicate shape of the neck.



Maria Hoose's collar, above and to the right, is made of several linked jewels, any one of which would serve as a brooch on its own. To

the left here is a collar worn by Salome in Hans Memling's *Triptych of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist*, c. 1479. In addition to finely rendered enameled flowerers and pendulant pearls, her necklace is decorated with twisted metal designs, twists and loops. Other shapes and uses of bent wire dominate necklaces of the period. Some necklaces appear to have been constructed entirely of floral-shaped loops of wire, bound together with small links and decorated

with enamels and jewels.

Also worn were broaches on the piece, shown centered, or perhaps these are sewn-on jewels as they appear in some illustrations to have disconnected pieces. A broach might also be pinned to a velvet frontlet, especially when worn without a bonnet, and the belts were frequently decorated with pinned-on jewels.

Rings were worn both above and below the knuckle, by both men and women, and appear to have been largely very simple, a gold or silver band with one small stone set into it seems most common.



A typical ring- from Quentin Massys' *The MoneyChanger and His Wife*, c. 1514. After our period of discussion, but the clearest picture I could scan and visually similar to the most prevalent finger-rings in other paintings.

The Belts



from Van der Wyden's *Portrait of a Young Lady*. Many portraits show similar D-shaped buckles, and the buckles worn in front seem to be dominated by the most ornate brasswork.

The houppelande had been belted high with a narrow belt just under the bust, buckled in back with the excess hanging down. As the robe made its way toward being the Burgundian gown, this waistline dropped somewhat to about mid-ribcage, and the belts got wider. Usually shown belted in back, it is sometimes shown with the buckle in front. The end of the belt, when visible, is always decorated, and frequently has beads hanging from it. The buckles themselves are usually D-shaped, with a single prong, however square buckles are shown in some images, particularly if the buckle is clasped in back rather than in front or at the side.. The loose end of the belt does not extend very far from the buckle, usually, however in some pictures they are shown hanging far down and away from the wearer. There is no evidence the tab-ends of the belts were secured to prevent them from hanging, and indeed it appears as though this hanging tab was considered attractive, another excuse to decorate something.



from Brouchere, page 208, Roman de la Violette, Dated only as mid-Fifteenth century. Note the D-shaped buckle, worn at the side in this case, and the decoration, perhaps of sewn jewels or embroidery.

I have seen pictures both of belts that shone like modern leather belts- and had indentations for stitching above and below- and belts on which a weaving pattern is clear. Most are of a similar color and sheen as the dress they are worn with, however. It is my belief that woven and leather belts were used because a belt of fabric and buckram would bend under the force of being

tied tightly, as these belts clearly were. The sturdy belt material was then covered in most cases with fabric similar to the dress it was to be worn with. Embroidery appears to have been used on some belts, and sewn beads, either all the way around, or just at the tab-end.

At first, the belts appear to have gotten steadily thicker with time. At their thickest, the belts appear to have been as wide as a lady's splayed hand, stretching from just under the bust to just above what we would see to be the 'natural' waist. Then, sometime around 1475, they are dropped altogether, replaced with a loose chain at the hips. At this time the robe has taken on more of the characteristics of the under dress, with no looseness at the waist, a tightly closed front seam, and a rounded appearance to the collar, the v having grown quite wide and shallow, and being joined closed rather than tapering into an opening slit. As the gown was slowly tightening in its fit, the belt served less of a useful purpose, and now, with no gathering to be done in the body and a high, sealed front, there is no reason for the belt at all, save decoration. This chain belt would continue into the early Tudor styles.

The Shoes

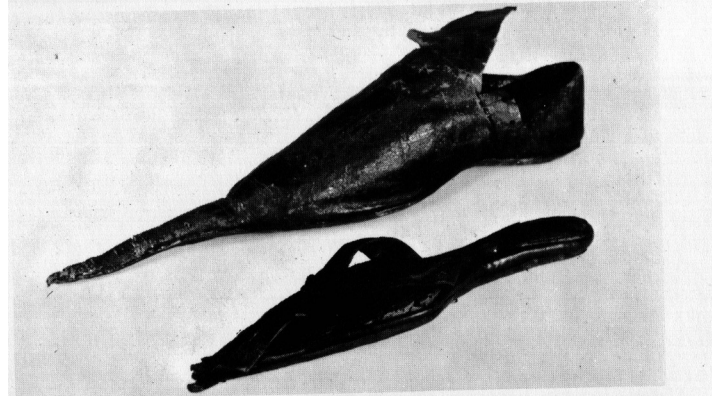
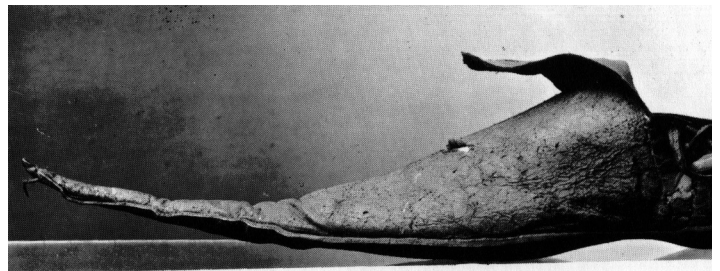
Pointed toes are ubiquitous, on both the elegant ladies and their lords. Several pictures show pattens, wooden sandals for wearing along with the pointed shoes. Men and women who are laboring are shown wearing rounded-toed shoes of similar construction, no doubt practicality winning over fashion. Below is a small segment of the *Birth of the Virgin* picture showing a lady's food peeking out from her robes, and a pair of wooden pattens lying on the floor beside her. To the right are two photographs of surviving shoes with

excessive points. I have yet to find evidence for points much longer than these, and there is absolutely no evidence that, as has been suggested in re-drawings and early costume histories, the points were tied back to the calf to keep them out of the way. This idea is most likely a fabrication of those histories, fueled by their authors' inability to comprehend the fashion.



A glimpse of the pointed shoe of a seated woman in *The Birth of The Virgin* painting by The Master of The Life of The Virgin. Nearby are wooden pattens to be worn outdoors to protect both shoe and foot.

Below are two extant shoes and an extant patten photographed in Brouchere's, page 203. Upper shoe from Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the lower from Deutsches Leder Museum, Offenbach-am-Main.



Notes

1. There is even an extant gown from the 16th Century “in the Burgundian style” which was made for Mary of Hapsburg and is in the possession of the Hungarian National Museum. Like the pictorial depictions of 15th Century costume in the 16th Century, it adds a waistline seam and exaggerates or distorts most of the gown’s elements. Don’t get me started on the neckline or the cuffs! A word on my use of the term ‘Burgundian’ while we’re at it: this style of dress was not limited to Burgundy, and in fact the pictorial evidence of the style is heavily Flemish. The term is convenient and widely used, and so I use it as well. This style of dress could as easily be called “Flemish Costume”, “Transitional Costume” or “V-necked gowns of the Fifteenth Century.”
2. Sutton, Anne. “Dress and Fashions c. 1470.” *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*. Ed. Richard Britnell. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998. p.11. ‘lettice’ is a type of fur used as a cheaper alternative to ermine, and an ‘ell’ is translated by my copy of Juan de Alcega’s *Tailor’s Pattern Book of 1589* to be 84 cm. That’s in Spain, and over a century later, but puts three quarters of an ell at just over two feet and this measurement corresponds with the apparent height of some of the tall headdresses of this time period.
3. The brasses here are my own selection, not those distributed by Ms. Netherton, though the idea is all hers. For more information on the development of the V-necked gown see: Netherton, Robin. “The Fifteenth Century V-necked Gown.” *Proceedings of the First Known World Costuming Symposium*. Ed. Mary Peralta Railing. Bedford, Indiana: KWCS, 2000. pp 57-62.
4. To be specific, Mary in Robert Campin’s *The Nativity*, 1420, the figure on the far right in Petrus Christus’ *The Lamentation* (No date given for the painting, but he was active from 1444 until his death in 1475.) and Hugo Van der Goes’ *Calvary Triptych*, in which a wide variety of ‘historical’ costumes appear. All three paintings are in *Early Flemish Painting* by Jean-Claude Frere.
5. These images first shown to me by Robin Netherton, from her private collection of slides, later I found them (or ones very similar- the book is in French, alas, and I could not decipher where or if he cites his pictorial sources) in Francoise Piponnier’s *Costume et Vie Sociale*.
6. I have also seen one or two pictures that appear to have an eight panel design, or perhaps six, seeing as the back is not shown and there is no evidence that the front seams are repeated in the back. While this might look like evidence for in-period use of the modern “princess” seam, I would argue against this. The modern seam assumes a static breast, held in place by that ingenious invention, the brassiere. The seam in the medieval picture follows with the curve of the body, yes, but this curve is subdued, not curving around the breast but with it, still drawing it in and clearly giving support. (One of these pictures is Mary nursing, and she literally pops out of the top where she has loosened her lacing to nurse. The curving nature of a princess seam would introduce stretch into the body and alter the shape of the breasts, allowing them to bulge beneath the neckline. I have also tried constructing cotehardies with a princess seam and it is very hard to get it to not look like a modern party dress with a wide neckline.
7. Many of the pictures of women with loosened lacing show it unraveling from the bottom, leaving the stomach area open wide and showing the metal tip of the lacing string as it hangs free. Unraveling from the bottom may have been considered more seemly than from the top, or it may be an indication that the lacing was not secured as strongly at the bottom as the top, though certainly the nursing Madonna’s do unravel from the top, and lacing from bottom to top is easier to do than the reverse. I have seen one illumination of a woman in the act of undressing, and she is unlacing from the top. Pictures that show unlacing from the top also show the lacing string to have a metal tip. I would speculate that the lacing string was secured both at the top and the bottom with a knot onto itself that was likely to come undone with use, and that the string was crimped with metal or somehow woven onto a metal

needle of sorts on both ends, to prevent fraying. The holes are close together, I'd say just under an inch apart at the most. Some depictions show metal eyes sewn onto the kirtle, such as you see today paired with hooks for fastening your brassiere. The lace is threaded through these eyes, and so no holes are made into the kirtle at all.

8. This very useful illumination is from *Livre du Roi Florimont*. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Fr. 12566, f.139 and f.92v. Viewed by me in Piponnier's *Dress in the Middle Ages*, p. 30. The illustration also shows the tailor and his assistant calling on their client, the assistant carrying a bolt of cloth, a measuring rod, and scissors. A dressmaker's dummy appears in the background as well, half-dressed.
9. I'd go even farther against this: the depictions of V-backs are nearly always women in "foreign" costume and aren't to be trusted.
10. Actually, some of the 11,000 virgins in the Polyptych of St. Ursula, believed to have been painted around 1475, show these types of gowns. But this might be because of their status as virgins that they are dressed in a 'young' style. Whatever the reason, this type of gown became very popular for post-period representations of the Burgundian style and should not be confused as being prevalent among mature Burgundian noblewomen.
11. Dress, volume 16, 1990, a publication of the Costume Society of America, page 11. Throughout this section I refer to these cone-shaped hats as "hennins". This is a common costumer's term for them, derived from a source that was most likely an insulting term for a different hat! The hats appear to have been called "atours" or "tyres" in period, or whatever term for hat and headdress was prevalent in a region. However hennin is an easily recognized term and shorter and easier on the tongue than 'cone-shaped headdress', so I continue to use it.
12. More evidence for the 'hennin-as-support-structure' theory: women depicted bathing during this time period nearly always have a truncated hennin as their only clothing. To me, this links this cap with 'intimate apparel', besides underlining the headdresses importance as a social signifier.
13. Petrus Christus' *Portrait of a Young Girl* is often cited as a 'chin strap' source, but look closely- the loose, flowing scarf that loops down from the top of her truncated hennin could not be a functional strap. The hennin is tipped backward, and support from under the chin would not hold it on, but encourage it to tip backward. Further, there is no strain on the fabric, it appears to be lying loose.
14. Depictions of women with their hair loose from the 14th and 15th centuries nearly always show the hair ending shortly after the hips. My hair extends to my knees, and thus can assumed to be as long as some of the longer hair lengths available at the time. Different hair types can grow longer than this by far, however the medieval women did not have the benefit of conditioners, purified water, and tangle-loosening solutions. It's my personal opinion that medieval women did not have extremely long hair with much frequency, though it is clear that long hair was desired.
15. Out of *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, Edited by Richard Britnell, page 10.

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