

Authenticity in Historical Clothing: Renaissance Europe Class I: Research

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One of the first steps to creating more authentic clothing is to start doing research. You do not have to become completely authentic in your costume all at once. Think of authenticity as a journey—your clothing becomes more authentic one step at a time. Perhaps you start with upgrading to linen rather than cotton shirts and chemises, or you use historical techniques to create a garment—handmade eyelets instead of grommets. The more research you do, the more you will know about creating authentic clothing. Researching Renaissance European clothing is significantly easier than researching earlier periods. There are many extant garments from this period housed in museums, and the artwork during this period focused on the extravagant costumes of the subjects.

Finding Sources:

You're ready to begin your research, but where do you even begin? Although research can be intimidating at first, with a little practice and patience, you will soon be zooming through the internet, the library or dashing about a museum. The best sources are actual extant garments—actual clothing that was made and worn during the Renaissance. The next best sources are analyses of extant garments by subject matter experts followed by contemporary art.

Web:

The World Wide Web is a great resource. Museum catalogs, library catalogs and art catalogs are online and searchable. There are many European reenactment groups and other SCA members that have great websites. Use these websites for background information and as jumping off points. If the websites list bibliographies or references, scan the lists to see if there are sources that are new to you. Try to read those books and come up with your own opinions. People interpret information differently—do not be afraid to think of your own theories or conclusions.

Keywords:

One of the easiest ways to search the web is using a keyword search. Keyword searches for Renaissance clothing can include the specific type of clothing, for example: corset, jerkin, doublet, 16th century gown, farthingale, kirtle, pair of bodies, chemise, smock, blackwork, Venetians. You can also use contemporary artists like the following: Hans Holbein, Joos van Cleve, Lucas Cranach, Jean Clouet, Michelangelo, Leonardo de Vinci and Albrecht Dürer. You can also search by famous people in the period: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Mary of Guise, Eleanor of France, Eleanor di Toledo, Charles V,

Robert Dudley, Diane Poitiers, Jane Seymore, Henry VIII, James V, Medici, Mary Tudor, Phillip I, Anne of Cleves, Eric of Sweden, etc.

If your search is for non-English clothing or subjects, try searching in that foreign language. For example, Mary of Guise was a French woman, and to get French resources try searching her name in French, “Marie de Guise”. This is also a way to separate your research from research that has not looked into other foreign language resources.

For a specific search, use quotation marks around your text phrase. For example, “effigy corset” or “Hans Holbein” would only return searches on effigy corsets and Hans Holbein. You can also use a combination search like: 16th century “effigy corset”. This would those specific pages

Museums:

Many of us do not have the means to fly off to Paris or London for a research project. Fortunately, many museums work to create traveling exhibitions. Keep tabs on local museums to see if any traveling exhibitions excite you. Others museums have digitized their collections, so you search and view artifacts online. Some museums with online catalogs/exhibitions are the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Louvre, the Hermitage, the Smithsonian, and there are many others. Also, museum exhibitions often print books or allow others to write books about their collections, artifacts or are associated with an exhibit, which are usually very good and reputable resources.

Libraries:

Most of us have access to a public library and many have access to a college or university library. These are institutions that are supported by your taxes, so use them! The days of card catalogs are long gone, and you search for books using an online catalog. The catalog screens are usually very intuitive. If you cannot find what you are looking for or are not sure where to begin, librarians are very helpful. Libraries also have computers where you search the web.

Even with keyword searches, sometimes it is hard to tell exactly what book you are searching for. Fortunately, similar books are grouped together. So, I use the catalog as a guideline, if I do not know exactly what I am looking for. Find a promising book through the catalog and look through the books surrounding it on the shelves. I have found some of my best resources this way.

One of the joys of our society is that so many of our populace are really interested in research and learning. Many members have highly specialized personal libraries and are more than happy to share that information. Ask around and see if anyone might have the book you are looking for. If you do find someone who has the book, bring your note-taking gear, because some (understandably) are reluctant to let a \$100+ or rare book out of their home.

Art:

Researching costume through art can be a bit tricky and requires a costume historian to understand some art history of the period. Sixteenth century portraiture was revolutionary, because painters began to paint realistic portraits and paid excruciating detail to their sitter's costume. Court painters flourished and there are many surviving secular portraits. Mythological and religious paintings of the Renaissance are similar to earlier periods that they are implying fantastical, idealized and heavenly images of gods, goddesses, saints and the Holy Family. Usually the central figures are not the best examples of contemporary clothing, but often the sponsors and donors of the work are also pictured, off to the sides of the central figures. The depictions of the sponsors/donors are typically good examples of contemporary costume.

Books:

There are many books available on Renaissance clothing. It is very important to be able to discern well-researched and qualified sources vs. those that make interesting suppositions and leaps. Victorian authors are notorious for trying to make the Renaissance fit *their* ideas and values. More recent books tend to be better, but you also need to be aware that some books are written for the Renaissance Faire crowd. The more you read, the better you will be at discerning well laid out research to mere supposition.

Tracking Your Resources:

Now that you have started your research, how are you going to keep track of all the great new information? There are several tricks that make note-taking—and reading your notes months later—easier.

Note Taking:

When you start finding your nuggets of information: write them down! At a minimum, paraphrase the information (or if you can't think of a better wording, jot your notes as a quotation), note the author, title, copyright date and page number. If you find something interesting—but it is not related to your current research, make a note of it. You would be surprised how quickly information can hide when you are desperately looking for that one thing you “think you remember seeing”.

Note Compilation:

After you have taken your notes, compile them by subject or category. This can involve retyping your notes loosely into a document, or writing them into a loose structure onto a piece of paper. As you are compiling your notes, this is a good time to double check them to make sure they are legible and descriptive enough to be usable. Verify you have reference information for your notes.

References or Giving Credit Where Credit is Due:

General information that everyone knows does not have to be referenced, but specific information should be referenced. For example, the fact the Henry VIII was the King of England in the 16th century is common knowledge, that he hypothetically had eighty pairs of shoes, including football shoes, should be referenced. The formats are different, but

the information is essentially the same: author, title, copyright date, publisher and publisher location. When you are writing your notes, record the author, title and copyright date as a minimum. You can use these to look up the publisher and other information later if you are in a time crunch.

Documentation:

Now that you have spent so much time researching your clothing, documenting your research can have surprising benefits. If you document your project, you can look back a year or more later and remember some of the finer points of the project. Plus, it is amazing how quickly documentation can turn into a class handout—so you can teach your findings to others!

Creating a cohesive document:

Headings/Subheadings:

Headings and subheadings organize your work. You can create a living outline which will become the structure of your document. Think of the major topics you would like to discuss. If you researching a garment, topics could include textiles, design, construction techniques and decoration.

Filling in the Details:

After you have set up your headings, start filling in the details. As you start writing you can edit your heading/subheadings or come up with new ones. Add pictures, tables or other media that can help explain your findings.

Bibliographies/References:

Reference pages and bibliographies both keep track of what sources you used in compiling your research. There are several different formats for making bibliographies and references like MLA and APA. A bibliography is a list of every source you read during your research for that project. A reference list contains the sources that you directly quoted or cited during the text of your document.

MLA Style: <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/CWP/library/workshop/citmla.htm>

APA Style: <http://www.apastyle.org/>

Citations:

Some methods use footnotes and other use a reference like (de Brétigny, 2006) to directly mark quotes or paragraphs. When you paraphrase a paragraph, you can use one footnote or citation for the whole paragraph. If you quote text, each quote should be cited, and the citation should include a page number.¹

¹ de Brétigny, *Authenticity in Historical Clothing: Renaissance Europe. Class I: Research*, p. 4.

Recommended Reading:

General:

Arnold, J. (1988). *Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe unlock'd*. Leeds, Great Britain: W. S. Maney & Son Ltd..

Arnold, J. (1985). *Patterns of fashion: The cut and construction of men and women's clothes 1560-1620*. Hollywood, CA: Quite Specific Media Group, Ltd..

Boucher, Francois. (1987). *20,000 Years of Fashion*. New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Burnham, D. K. (1997). *Cut my cote*. Toronto, Ontario: Royal Ontario Museum.

Crowfoot, Elisabeth et al. (2001). *Textiles and Clothing : Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, c.1150-c.1450*. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc.

Egan, Geoff et al. (2004). *Dress Accessories C.1150-C.1450: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London 3 (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London)*. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc.

Scott, P. (1993). *The book of silk*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Wescher, H. (February 1948). "Cotton and cotton trade in the Middle Ages." *Ciba Review*, No.6, Feb 1948, pp 2321-2360 (Now known as Ciba-Geigy) Basle, Switzerland. CIBA Limited.

Tudor:

Norris, Herbert. (1997). *Tudor Costume and Fashion*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.

Elizabethan:

Arnold, J. (1988). *Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe unlock'd*. Leeds, Great Britain: W. S. Maney & Son Ltd..

Arnold, J. (1985). *Patterns of fashion: The cut and construction of men and women's clothes 1560-1620*. Hollywood, CA: Quite Specific Media Group, Ltd..

French:

French:

Cloulas, I. (1998). *Treasures of the French Renaissance*. New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Italian:

Frick, C. C. (2002). *Dressing Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mola, L. (2000). *The silk industry of Renaissance Venice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mazzaoui, M. F. (1981). *The Italian cotton industry in the later Middle Ages 1100-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weiditz, Christopher. *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the "Trachtenbuch"*

Web Resources:

General:

Archeological Sewing--<http://heatherrosejones.com/archaeologicalsewing/index.html>

The Web Gallery of Art--<http://www.wga.hu/>

Festive Attire-- http://homepage.mac.com/festive_attire/

Museums:

The Victoria and Albert Museum--<http://www.vam.ac.uk/>

The Louvre--http://www.louvre.fr/llv/commun/home_flash.jsp?bmLocale=en

Musée national du Moyen Âge (The Cluny)--<http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/ang/>

The Museum of London--<http://www.molg.org.uk/english/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art--<http://www.metmuseum.org/>

Tudor:

The Tudor Costume Page-- <http://freespace.virgin.net/f.lea/index.htm>

Tudor and Elizabethan Portraits—<http://www.tudor-portraits.com/>

Elizabethan:

The Elizabethan Costuming Page—<http://costume.dm.net>

The Renaissance Tailor—<http://www.vertetsable.com>

German:

The Frazzled Frau—<http://frazzledfrau.glittersweet.com/>

Italian:

Italian Renaissance Gown Construction--

<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~rowen/renbk/rendressbook.html>

Kat's Purple Files--<http://katerina.purplefiles.net/>