



*The Well Dress'd
Peasant:
16th Century
Flemish
Workingwomen's
Clothing*

by Drea Leed

The Well-Dress'd Peasant:

16th Century

Flemish Workingwoman's Dress

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Costume & Dressmaker Press
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Cover

A Marketwoman and Vegetable Stand, by Pieter Aertsen

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Märkisches Ufer 16-18

D-10179 Berlin

Germany

Inside front cover

Harvest Time by Pieter Aertsen

and

Plates 1, 3

The Pancake Bakery by Pieter Aertsen

Harvest Time (A Vegetable and Fruit Stall) by Pieter Aertsen

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CX Rotterdam

The Netherlands

Plate 2 (Centerfold)

The Meal Scene (Allegorie van de onvoorzichtigheid)

by Joachim Beuckelaer

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Market Woman with a Vegetable Stall (detail)
by Pieter Aertsen

I NTRODUCTION

This book is a result of a simple question: what did a working woman wear during the latter half of the 16th century?

I began my research under the impression that I would quickly find an answer. After all, the dress of 16th century is a popular topic among costume historians. A number of exceptional works have been written on the topic, including such landmark publications as Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion: The Cut and Construction of Men & Women's Dress 1560-1620* and her renowned *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*. The century is recent enough archeologically that a substantial amount of material evidence still exists for first-hand perusal, and the rising popularity of portrait painting during the reigns of English monarchs King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I provided a wealth of detailed artistic evidence to use in my search.

I soon discovered, however, that my task would be more difficult than I'd imagined. Most books and articles on later 16th century dress focus primarily on the costume of the wealthy, for the simple reason that virtually all material and iconographic evidence from the time period relates to the clothing of the rich merchant class, minor nobility and royalty of the time. Few cooks or servants could afford to have their likeness painted. Pictures and paintings showing the dress of poorer folk are relatively rare in comparison to the plethora of upper-class portraits painted during the 1500s. The poor didn't wear valuable clothing to be preserved by future generations, and neither did they receive the careful burial that has helped to preserve bodies and burial clothes for later exhumation and examination.

As a result, information on the dress of the laboring class was scanty, general and relatively vague in nature. What I did find was composed mostly of secondary sources in conjunction with a great deal of speculation to make up for the scarcity of available material or pictorial evidence.

I eventually turned towards the art of the time in an attempt to see and hopefully work out for myself what I wanted to know. After searching through several books and museum catalogs, I discovered that resources were not as scarce as I'd expected. Although virtually no portraits of lower-class women were to be found, the genre paintings popular in 16th century Flanders provided an unexpected bounty of material: images of market women,

poultry vendors, kitchen maids, cooks and servants of the 1550s and 1560s, painted in delightfully realistic detail by artists such as Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer.

By using these paintings in conjunction with other 16th century written, pictorial and material resources, it is possible to create a reasonably accurate picture of what a kitchen maid or vegetable seller of the period would wear. The nationality of the paintings unfortunately narrowed the scope of my research to what was worn in Flanders (modern Belgium) at the time, though pictures I discovered later suggested this style was more widespread and could be found from Ireland to Italy.

As every costume historian knows, using contemporary art as a resource for reconstructing contemporary dress has its pitfalls. One must take into account the purpose of the painting, prevailing artistic styles of the time, the amount of realism or fantasy included in the painting, and any possible inaccuracies that both centuries of aging as well as painting restoration may have introduced.

Fortunately, the people of interest in Aertsen and Beuckelaer's paintings—namely, lower-class market women and servants—are not religious personages, and are therefore less likely to be portrayed in “symbolic” garments rather than everyday dress. Realism was in vogue in Flemish genre paintings of the time, which allows us to place more faith in the veracity of the costume depicted than in, say, pictures of biblical characters or classical allegories. In addition, comparison of several paintings by two artists of the same nationality, painted during the same time period and in the same general location, helps to eliminate other artistic variables which can result in inaccurate conclusions regarding the dress of the time.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that this Flemish style of dress is only one example of common clothing styles of the time. Pieter Breughel, who painted people of similar station in nearby areas of Europe, depicted clothing which was largely similar, but in some ways distinctly different from the ensembles worn by the market women of the Antwerp area painted by Pieter Aertsen. There were distinct shifts in style and fashion between one locale and the next.

It is often hard to relate artistic portrayals of dress to the concrete items worn, especially when none exist for comparison. In many paintings unseemly wrinkles and seams are discreetly omitted, which can make the task of reconstructing the actual fit and look of the garments that much harder. To this end, I supplemented my research with hands-on experimentation, attempting to physically reconstruct the garments depicted in the paintings. Not only did this point out several potential areas in which the artists may have

“flattered” their subjects, but it also brought up several construction-related questions: How were these garments finished and lined? How many layers or clothing were involved, and how did they interact? Why were these garments fastened and fitted as they were? How practical or impractical was this ensemble for the working women who wore it? Physically constructing and wearing these garments helped provide answers (or at the least reasonable guesses) to all of the above. Extrapolating from extant articles of clothing, available sculptures and paintings, and a certain amount of logical deduction, it is possible to come up with a relatively accurate re-creation of a mid-16th century workingwoman’s wardrobe.

In virtually all of the paintings examined, the dress worn by Flemish women from the 1550s to the 1570s is relatively homogenous. There are several layers involved in the basic ensemble: a linen smock, a sleeveless or cap-sleeved kirtle, a woolen gown laced up the front, and a partlet over the upper torso. Separate sleeves were pinned to the gown at the shoulder straps or the bottom of the cap sleeves. *Market Woman with Vegetable Stall* (cover), painted by Pieter Aertsen in 1567, gives a good depiction of all of these items mentioned. We will be examining these items of clothing piece by piece in upcoming chapters.

A WORKINGWOMAN'S SMOCK

The innermost layer worn by your average market woman was a linen smock. Linen smocks were worn by women in all classes of society. They were worn in part to protect the outer garments from sweat and body oils, as a linen shift was much easier to clean than the woolen gowns of the time. The smocks worn by Flemish workingwomen were made of white linen.

Though a variety of smocks were worn during the last half of the 16th century, the smocks worn by the servants and vegetable sellers in Flemish genre paintings were quite uniform. They all had a relatively low, square neckline with rounded corners, straight sleeves, and no visible gathers at the neck or cuffs.

Although blackwork decoration on smocks is commonly found in portraits and extant items, only one of the dozens of paintings I examined showed decoration on a smock: *Crepe-Making Scene*, by Pieter Aertsen. (Plate 1) The decoration is a narrow band around the square neckline.

To many, the 1560s and 1570s conjure up pictures of the underpinnings and underwear worn by Queen Elizabeth and her court: farthingales, corsets, bumrolls and all. The Spanish Farthingale (a hoop-shaped underskirt), boned corsets and boned bodices were indeed worn in Flanders during the 1560s and 1570s-but by well-to-do women, not by their servants, vegetable sellers and cooks. The women portrayed in Flemish genre paintings did not wear any corseting or boned bodice underneath their garments. Beuckelaer's painting *The Meal Scenes* (plate 2) illustrates this quite clearly. Nor did they wear a bumroll, or a stuffed crescent designed to enhance the swell of skirts around the hips as they fell to the ground. A smock was the extent of a market woman's underwear.

Petticoats, or underskirts, may have been worn over the smock. Usually made of wool, these petticoats were worn for warmth as well as fashion. They are mentioned in a large number of contemporary English and German inventories of middle class women, but there is no conclusive evidence, one way or the other, that they were worn with Flemish dress.

MAKING A WORKINGWOMAN'S SMOCK

When choosing fabric for a smock, linen is by far the best choice. Linen is cooler and wears better than cotton. It wicks sweat away from the body and is actually stronger when damp. Look for a medium-weight linen or cotton-linen blend or handkerchief linen.

If linen is unavailable, choose a white or cream cotton fabric that looks as much like linen as possible. In most cases, 3.5 yards of 45-inch-wide fabric will be enough for a modestly cut, calf-length smock with narrow side gores. 4 yards is a safe amount to buy. If you plan to wash the smock in the washing machine, buy a little extra fabric and wash your material in hot water and dry it in the dryer before cutting out your pieces.

You may wish to create a custom-fitted smock pattern with the Smock Pattern Generator, which can be found online at <http://www.dnaco.net/~aleed/corsets/smockpat/>

Make the body of the smock relatively close-fitting. If you want added bosom support, make the front and back sections of the smock very close-fitting (one inch larger around than your under-the-bust measurement) and make the underarm gussets just large enough to provide enough room for the bosom. Although a smock this fitted can take some wiggling to get into, once on it's very comfortable and provides as much support as a modern sports bra.

The length of the smock can be anywhere from knee length down to ankle-length, although a mid-calf length is the most convenient. The sleeves need not taper very much.

Before you begin, mark a line across the middle of the long body piece with tailor's chalk or another marking tool. This "shoulder line" will make it easier to place the sleeves and the neck opening.

CONSTRUCTING THE SMOCK

This smock construction method, while not true to construction methods used in the 16th century, goes together quickly. These instructions assume that you have the following smock pieces:

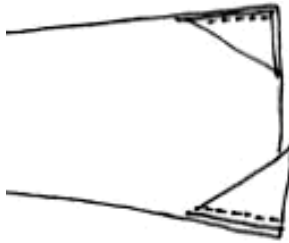
Two sleeve pieces

One main body piece (The back and front, which will have a hole cut in the middle for the head)

Four triangular underarm gussets (approximately 6 inches on the square sides)

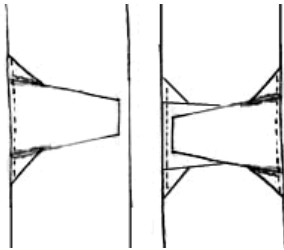
Four long side gores

A strip of fabric cut on the bias, 1.5 inches wide and a yard long, to finish the neckline



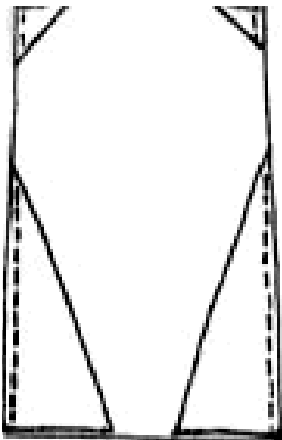
Step 1: Sew the underarm gussets to the sleeves

Take one of the triangular gusset pieces. Match up one of the straight edges with the top of the sleeve, as shown to the left. Sew the two pieces together 1/2 an inch away from the edge. Repeat this on the other side of the wide end of the sleeve. Do this to both sleeves. Iron the seams open.



Step 2: Sew the sleeves to the body

Lay the top end of the sleeve against the edge of the body piece right sides together, matching the center line of the sleeve with the center of the body piece. Sew the two together 1/2 an inch away from the edge of the fabric. Repeat the process on the other side of the body with the other sleeve. Iron the seams open.



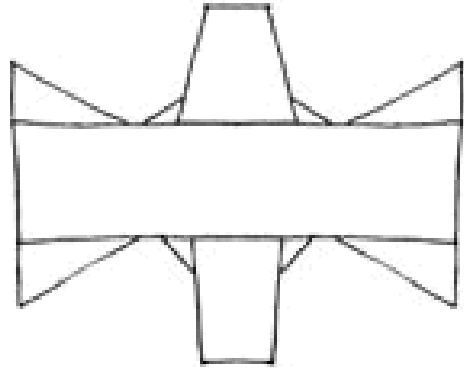
Step 3: Sew the gores onto the body

Starting at one end of the body, match up one of the long triangular gores with the edge of the body as shown. Sew the two together half an inch away from the edge. Repeat the process on the opposite side.

Then sew the other two gores at the opposite end of the long body piece. Iron all seams flat. You will end up with a shape like the one on the next page.

4. Make the square neck opening.

It is easier to finish the neck opening before the smock is sewn closed. Draw the square on the inside of the smock, locating the neckline square so that it is centered between the two sides and so that the shoulder line on the body comes to around 2 inches inside one edge. Make sure that the neckline is not too wide or long, or the shoulders of the smock may slip off your arms. 9 inches square is the largest neck opening for this type of smock.

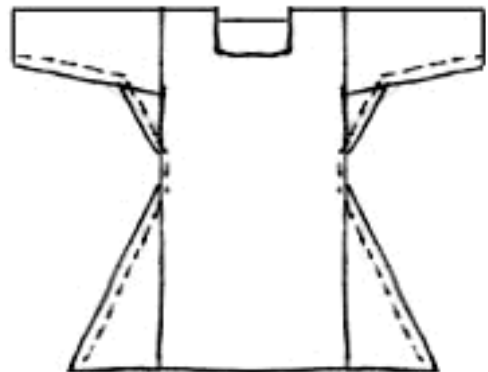


Cut out the neck opening, 1/2 an inch inside of the square drawn on the smock. Take the bias-cut strip of fabric and right sides together, match up the raw edges with the edges of the neck opening, and stitch along the traced neckline. Snip each of the corners of the neck opening to the seam line, and turn the strip of fabric to the inside of the smock. Iron the finished edge, tuck the raw edge of the strip in and iron that down as well. Hem-stitch the finished edge of the band down on the inside of the smock, and the neckline is finished.

5. Sew the Smock Together

Fold the smock in half lengthwise, inside out. Starting at the bottom of one triangular gusset, sew the gussets together, and then the bottom edge of the sleeve. Return to the bottom of the gusset and sew down the side and outside the triangular skirt gore. Repeat this process on the other side. Turn it right side out, and you have a smock.¹

Now all you need to do is hem the bottom and the edges of the sleeves. To prevent the linen ravelling, turn the raw seam allowances in towards each other and whipstitch them together. This method was used during the 16th century to finish linen garments. French seaming the smock is another alternative which resembles the whipstitching above, and keeps the raw edges from raveling.



You can also embroider around the neckline, if you wish. Blackwork, or Holbein stitch in red or blue, would be an authentic and appropriate form of decoration for a lower-class woman. *The New Carolingian Modelbook*, by Kim Salazar, contains several appropriate 16th century blackwork designs ranging from the simple to the complex.

FLEMISH KIRTLES IN THE 16TH CENTURY

Another item of women's dress in later 16th century Flanders was the undergown worn underneath the open-fronted Flemish gown. It is something more of a mystery—indeed, the undergown, referred to at the time as a “kirtle” or sometimes as a “petticoat bodies”, was a polymorphous item of clothing during the 16th century.

At the start of the 16th century, the kirtle referred to a closely-fitted gown, sometimes with close-fitting sleeves and sometimes without. In later decades, the term also came to denote a separate skirt worn under a gown. Tudor kirtles of the 1520s and 1530s fitted closely to the waist and flared out into a bell-shaped skirt. Loose kirtles of later decades hung from the shoulders to the floor, and references to “gathered kirtles” in the 1570s most likely referred to a skirt gathered to a bodice².

When visible, the skirt worn under an open-fronted Flemish gown is the same color as the fabric visible underneath the gown bodice. In one case, the fabric seen underneath the gown bodice and the short cap sleeves visible under the sleeveless over-gown are also the same color. This indicates that an entire undergarment is worn underneath the outer gown, rather than a stomacher under the bodice opening³. Kirtles were a common item of dress for most of the sixteenth century, and it is logical to assume this is the garment worn underneath the outer gown of these Flemish working women. For clarity's sake, I will refer to this undergown as a “kirtle” from here on out.

The kirtle was almost certainly wool, the primary fabric for clothing of the lower classes during the 16th century. The kirtle skirts shown in Flemish paintings are often brightly colored, an additional indication that they are wool rather than linen. Wool is much easier to dye bright hues than is linen, the other fabric available to these women. In middle class and bourgeoisie inventories, wills and wardrobe accounts, wool is by far the most common fabric mentioned, followed by silk-based fabrics. The only reference to linen used for kirtles in the 1550s and 60s appears in inventory listings for kirtles made of fustian, a linen-wool blend⁴.

There are, however, references to petticoat bodies made of linen during the 1550s⁵. A petticoat bodies is, simply, a petticoat with a sleeveless bodice attached that was worn under outer gowns. This item of clothing shows up in inventory records from the 1550s to the end of the century.⁶

Examining the many paintings by Aertsen, Breughel & Beuckelaer gave me clues to the shape of the kirtle in question. It had a low, squared neckline, which in some cases curved upwards in the middle. The kirtles were usually portrayed as sleeveless, although a few examples of kirtles with small cap sleeves reaching to the bicep can be seen in Flemish genre paintings of the time. One example of a long-sleeved kirtle shows up in Beuckelaer's *Market Scene with Ecce Homo*, dated 1561 and currently in the Swedish Nationalmuseum, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

In some pictures the kirtle appears loose and wrinkled in the front, while in others it appears quite smooth and tightly-fitted. In no pictures were laces apparent, indicating that this kirtle either slipped over the head or laced at the side or back.

This item of clothing is where the paintings of Aertsen and Beuckelaer and the peasant paintings of Breughel differ most dramatically: The first two painters, as well as their followers, portray every female subject that is wearing an open-fronted Flemish gown with a kirtle underneath, while Breughel, in cases where he paints women wearing this open-fronted Flemish gown, shows nothing underneath but the white of their smock.

Why the difference? It could be purely regional. It could be that because Breughel's open-fronted gowns are laced quite closely, the front edges only a few inches apart, a kirtle is not necessary. Other Flemish artists of the 1550s and 1560s depict gowns with a much wider gap between the front edges, one which could not be sufficiently concealed by the sheer shifts worn by Aertsen's market women and Beuckelaer's kitchen maid.

A closer look at the paintings of Breughel reveal another possible answer to the mystery. The most commonly seen gown in his paintings is one with a square necked bodice, fastened closed at the front or side, with relatively wide sleeves and a generous skirt pleated to the waistline. This type of gown is ubiquitous in depictions of dress in Germany and northern Europe from 1500 onwards. On occasions where the underskirt and under-sleeves are visible, they are of different colors, indicating sleeves pinned to a short-sleeved or sleeveless undergown/kirtle which is what he sometimes depicts as an outer garment. It is a difference in layering: smock, kirtle and open-fronted gown in the case of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, or smock, open-fronted Flemish gown (serving as a front-laced kirtle) and closed overgown in another.

It is possible to recreate a kirtle that achieves the look seen in contemporary paintings, but pinpointing the actual cut and construction of the kirtle worn under an open-fronted Flemish gowns is much more difficult. We have some extant gowns, a petticoat bodies and a kirtle to examine, but nothing from the same region or time period to help us gain insight into how a kirtle was put together.

There are two types of gown which could re-create the look of a Flemish workingwoman's kirtle, as it is seen in paintings. Both gown types existed during the 16th century, and each possible cut has arguments in its favor:

A kirtle cut in a similar fashion to the gown worn over it, i.e., a close fitting bodice with a full skirt gathered or pleated to the waist of the bodice.

A kirtle cut of gored sections, i.e., bodice and skirt sections cut in one to make a gown that fits close to the body with a flared skirt.

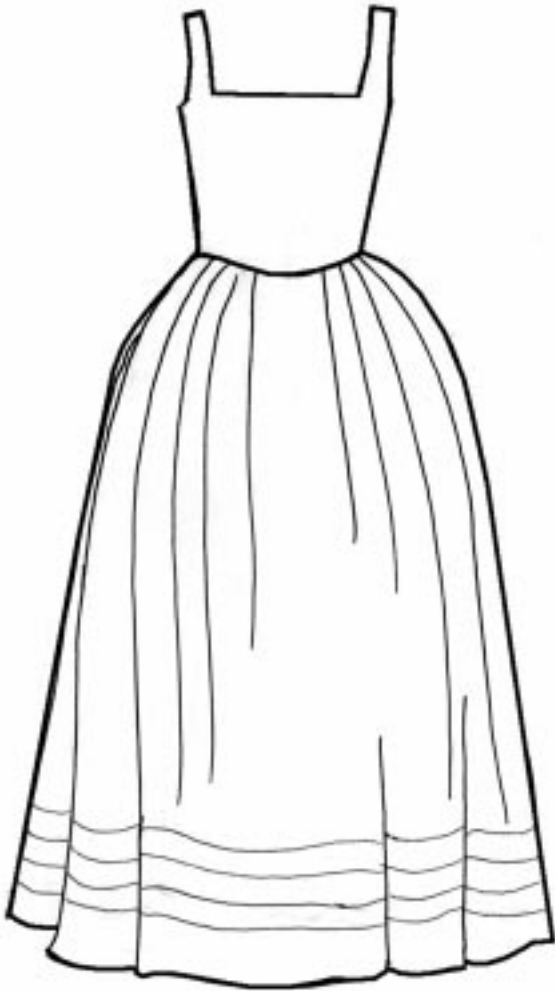
The first cut, which will be referred to from here on out as a "gathered kirtle". It has been depicted in several sources as a simple type of gown. Such a sleeveless gown is shown in Jost Amman's depiction of a Tailor's shop in his *Book of Trades*. Other German sculptures and paintings show this "unterrock", or undergown.⁷ A gathered kirtle is mentioned in Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe accounts, which could be something similar. This type of garment (a skirt gathered to a sleeveless bodice) is also referred to in the later 16th century as a "petticoat bodies", or a support bodice with a petticoat sewn to it. An existing petticoat bodies, belonging to Eleanora of Toledo, is a basic sleeveless bodice with a square neck and side-back seams. It fastens up the front.⁸ In addition, there are numerous depictions of outer gowns cut in a similar fashion that we can turn to for information on possible seam placement, cut and construction of a gathered kirtle.

The second cut, which I will refer to as a "gored kirtle", is an older cut more reminiscent of fashionable late 15th century and very early 16th century gowns.

The only extant kirtle from the time period which we can look to for comparison is a German dress dating to 1580, depicted in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 1560-1620*. This item was a loose dress, lined in heavy linen, fitted at the shoulders and falling unfitted to a gored skirt. It had eyelets at the shoulders for laced sleeves, and a back closure which semi-fitted it to the body.

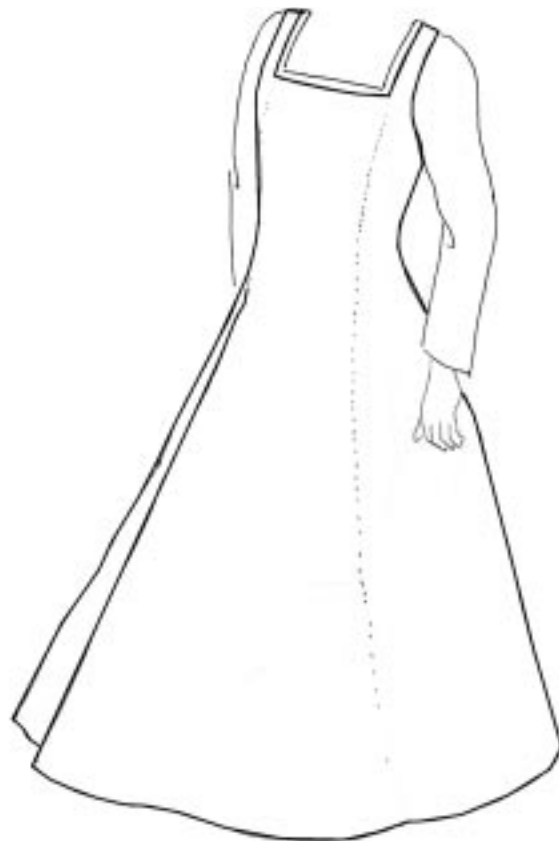
Although the neckline of the kirtle is substantially higher than those worn by Flemish workingwomen of the time, It is possible that this gored construction was used in their under gowns. Janet Arnold's research has led her to believe that kirtles of this time in England could also be close-fitted to the torso and flare out from waist to the ankle.⁹

There is no concrete evidence that one style of kirtle was favored the other. As with all studies of fashion, we must allow for the possibility that both were worn. Reconstruction has shown that both types of gown can reproduce the look found in Flemish genre paintings.



A gathered kirtle

A gored kirtle



MAKING A KIRTLE

Wearing a close-fitting, sturdy kirtle provides enough support that heavy boning in the bodice is not necessary to create the flat and slightly elevated bosom so often seen in pictures of the 1550s in Flanders.

Whether to make a gathered kirtle or gored kirtle is up to you. A gathered kirtle is the easiest to make, and can be worn over a bumroll if you want to re-use it for Elizabethan or other 16th century wear. It can double as a “petticoat bodies”, or a combination petticoat/support bodice, and be worn underneath Elizabethan gowns in lieu of a corset and petticoat. If you want a lot of support, you can sew boning into the bodice lining¹⁰.

The gored kirtle is slightly more comfortable, as it hugs the body down to the upper hip rather than stopping at the waist. It offers enough support for all but the largest bust sizes, though it doesn't flatten the bosom as rigorously as a gathered kirtle will. It is also a more complicated pattern to make, involving seven bodice-skirt pieces. This kirtle pattern can also be used to make a Tudor kirtle, which was worn under gowns and over farthingales with a decorated forepart & sleeves attached. It cannot, however, be worn over a bumroll unless extra space is allowed just below the waist.

Lower-class kirtles were made of linen, wool or linen-wool blends. Although wool was by far the most commonly mentioned material, for practical purposes I have found linen to be more useful: it's easier to wash, cooler, stretches less, and supports more than does wool. This last is a serious consideration for well-endowed women. If you use wool, choose a fabric with a firm hand which doesn't stretch. You can line the bodice of a woolen kirtle with a linen or canvas fabric for increased strength and support. Look for a white, cream or natural colored fabric for the kirtle bodice lining, as it won't stain your smock if you get wet and sweaty and happen to be wearing a fabric that bleeds dye color. A list of good sources for linen and wool are given in Appendix III.

MAKING A GATHERED KIRTLE

These instructions use the bodice pattern from Appendix II at the back of this book. The bodice pattern is a synthesis of two 16th century bodice patterns: the petticoat bodies worn by Eleanora of Toledo, and the gown worn over the petticoat bodies. Both gowns are in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 1560-1620*. You should have two pattern pieces made using these bodice pattern instructions: A front pattern piece and a back pattern piece.

A gathered kirtle will take approximately 4 to 4.5 yards of fabric to make (2/3 a yard for the bodice and 3 1/2 to 4 yards of fabric for the skirt). You will also need 1/2 a yard of lining fabric to line the bodice. If you are going to line the skirt, you will need as much fabric for the skirt lining as you have for the outer skirt fabric.

Part I: Making the Kirtle Bodice

1. Take the kirtle fabric of your choice. Fold it in half. Place the back pattern piece with the center back on the fold, and trace around it with tailor's chalk, pencil, or some other marking tool. Cut the fabric out 1/2 an inch outside of these tracing lines. Once you've unfolded the fabric, flip your pattern piece over and trace around it on the unmarked half of the fabric.
2. Now take the front piece. Place it on folded fabric, with the center front against the fold. Trace around the pattern, and cut it out 1/2 an inch away from the tracing lines. Unfold the fabric, flip your pattern over, and trace around it on the other unmarked half of the front.
3. Repeat the above two steps with your lining fabric.
4. Place the front piece and the front piece lining right sides together. Pin them together all the way around, making sure that the outer fabric and lining lie smooth, with no wrinkles. Fold the tips of the shoulder straps back on either side to the tracing line, and pin them down. (This basically finishes the edges of the shoulder straps, which will make them much easier to butt together and sew once the kirtle bodice is turned right side out.) If you pin perpendicularly to the edge, you can sew over the pins (carefully) which will help to keep the bodice pieces from slipping.

5. Starting at the bottom of the side back opening, sew along the tracing lines up the back side seam and around the armhole to the top of the strap. Leave the top of the strap unsewn. Continue sewing down the inside of this strap, across the front neckline and up to the top of the other front strap. Again, leave the top of the strap unsewn. Sew along the other armhole and down the edge of the other side back opening. Leave the bottom of the kirtle unsewn.

6. Repeat the above two steps with the back piece and the back lining piece, pinning them right sides together and sewing them on the tracing lines. Again, leave the tops of the shoulder straps and the bottom edge unsewn.

7. Now take the pins out and make snips every couple of inches along the armholes of the front and back, from the edge of the fabric to just outside the seam line, and also in the front corners of the square neckline. Make a few snips along the back neckline of the bodice as well, and any place where the seams are curved. This will keep the fabric from puckering when the kirtle bodice is turned right side out. Turn the front and back bodice pieces right side out. Iron them so that they lay flat and smooth. Sew the shoulder straps together.

The kirtle bodice is pretty much finished. Now, you need to make the skirt.

Part II: Making the Gathered Kirtle Skirt

These instructions can also be used to make a simple, period petticoat skirt—just sew the skirt to a waistband rather than to a bodice.

1. Calculate the skirt fabric yardage

The kirtle skirt is a very wide tube, gathered into the waist of the bodice. To calculate the yardage of fabric you'll need, do the following:

Measure around your waist.

Multiply this measurement by three.

Add 1 inch (for seam allowance) to this x3 measurement. Convert inches into yards; this is the amount of fabric you will need.

If you want to do double-box-pleating, or want a very full kirtle skirt, you can include more fabric in your skirt.

2. Calculate the skirt length

Once your kirtle bodice is laced on (or pinned on with safety pins, if you haven't put lacing holes in it yet), measure from the bottom edge of the kirtle to where you want the bottom of the skirt to be. Add 1 1/2 inches to this measurement; that is the length you will have to cut out for your skirt. If the length you need is 45 inches or less, or if you are using fabric 60 inches wide, you are in luck. Simply

measure across your skirt fabric to the width you will need for your skirt, mark, and trim off the excess band of fabric.

If not, or if you want to fancy up your gathered kirtle, you will need to add a band of fabric to the bottom edge of your skirt to lengthen it to the proper length. Bands of contrasting fabric at the bottom of kirtles and skirts were called “guards” if they were wide, “welts” if they were narrow, and were very common. Woodcuts and portraits show bands of fabric from 1 inch to 8 inches in width. For simple kirtles worn by servants and the not-so-wealthy, these strips of fabric were similar to the material of the kirtle—a linen kirtle would have linen bands, a woolen one woolen bands. If you are making a fancy kirtle, of course, you can make the bottom band of velvet, satin, taffeta, or whatsoever your heart desires. Adding guards to a skirt is a very simple process.

Cut a strip of out of a contrasting fabric. The width should be the finished width that you want the strip to be plus 1 inch. (For example, if you want a 2-inch wide band at the bottom of your skirt, cut out a 3-inch wide strip of fabric; if you want an 8-inch wide band, cut out a 9-inch wide strip. The strip of fabric should be the same length as your skirt fabric.

Place the strip of edging fabric and the skirt fabric right sides together, and sew the two pieces together half an inch away from the edge. Iron this seam flat..

3. Sew the skirt fabric into a tube

This step is pretty self-explanatory—match up the raw ends of the skirt fabric, right sides together, and sew them together 1/2 an inch away from the edge of the fabric. Start at the “bottom” of the skirt and stop sewing around 8 inches from the other end. If you have 3 yards of fabric, you should now have a tube a little over a yard in diameter.

If you have a contrasting band of fabric at the bottom of the skirt, you should pin the edges of the skirt fabric together before sewing them, making sure that the place where the bottom band meets the skirt fabric matches up on either side of the seam.

If you wish to line your kirtle skirt, repeat this step with the lining fabric. Be sure that the length and width of the lining fabric and the outer fabric are exactly the same, so they will match up without puckers, gathers or excess fabric when they’re sewn together.

4. Hem the Skirt

Modern skirt-making techniques involve finishing the waistline and then trimming and

hemming the skirt so that it is even all the way around. In Elizabethan times and for the next few centuries, the opposite method was used. The hem was finished first, and then the waistline was fitted so that the skirt hem was even all the way around.

If you are making an unlined skirt:

This step is easy. Simply turn the bottom edge of your kirtle skirt up on the inside, iron, fold the raw edge under, iron again, and either hand-hem or machine-hem the bottom of the skirt. Although machine-hemming takes much less time, hand-hemming a kirtle gives it a nicer look. Whichever option you choose, ironing the hem first is important. If you loathe hemming but want an authentic looking kirtle you might want to try lining it—no hand-hemming involved.

If you are making a lined skirt:

First, you must have the lining as well as the outside of the skirt sewn into tubes (see step 3 above). Match up the bottom edge of the outer skirt fabric and the lining, right sides together. Sew these two layers of fabric together along the bottom of the skirt, 1/2 an inch away from the edge. Turn the two layers of fabric right side out, and iron the hem seam where they're joined together. Voila! You now have a hemmed and lined skirt.

To make a lined skirt with a lot of body to it, lay a thin, folded strip of heavy canvas, duck or drill on top of the seam and sew it to the fabric when you are sewing the bottom of the lining and the skirt fabric together. When you turn the skirt right side out and iron it, this strip will make the hemline much stiffer and help it stand out.

One more step you have to take, if this skirt is lined. Lay the skirt flat, and match up the top edges of the lining and the outer skirt fabric so that both layers are the same length. You don't want the lining bagging or hanging down because it's longer than the outer fabric at some points. Baste the two layers together at the top.

5) Finish the skirt side openings

The kirtle we are making has two openings, one on either side of the back. This allows the kirtle to be more adjustable. For this kirtle, you will need to cut a second slit in the skirt. Measure around the tube of fabric, divide this measurement by three and cut a slit this distance away from the existing slit. Now, finish the raw edges of the side openings. If the skirt is unlined, turn the raw edges under and hem them down. If the skirt is lined, turn the edges of the outer fabric and the lining in towards each other and whipstitch the edges.

6) Gather the waistline

You can choose to either gather or pleat your kirtle skirt to the bodice. Gathering is the easier method, pleating was more common and creates less bulk at the waist seam. Knife pleating and box pleating were both used during the 16th century. If your skirt is lined, treat the lining and outer fabric as one layer of fabric. You will have two sections of skirt, divided by the two side back slits: one section is much shorter than the other. This shorter section will be attached to the back kirtle bodice piece. The longer section of the skirt will be attached to the front bodice piece.

To gather your skirt, start 2 inches from the edge of one skirt slit and run two basting stitches, one 1/4 an inch above the other, 1/4 an inch from the top of the skirt until you're two inches from the other slit. Gather these two rows of stitching together until the top of the skirt measures the same as the bottom of the kirtle piece it is to be attached to.

To pleat your skirt, you can either eyeball the pleats, or measure them off with a ruler. Once the pleats are pinned, measure them to make sure that the top of the skirt measures the same as the bottom of the kirtle bodice piece they're to be attached to. Run a basting stitch over the pleats, 1/3 an inch away from the top edge of the skirt fabric, to keep them in place. You can also iron the pleats at the top edge of the skirt once they're pinned or basted.

7). Sew the skirt and bodice together

Place the kirtle bodice piece and the skirt section which will be sewn to its right sides together, so that the bottom edge of the kirtle matches up with the top edge of the skirt. Pin the outer fabric of the kirtle bodice to the skirt, and sew skirt and outer fabric together half an inch from the edge, along the tracing line of the bodice. Sewing two seams, one 1/8 inch closer to the edge of the fabric, to reinforce the waist seam. Do this for the front and back kirtle sections.

Trim the excess seam allowance, and then tuck up the kirtle bodice lining so that it is even with the bodice/skirt seam. Hem stitch it down over the raw fabric. Do this for both the front and back pieces. You now have a completely finished, authentically cut gathered kirtle, or "petticoat bodies", whichever you prefer to call it. If the thought of making an entire Flemish or 16th century outfit is a bit overwhelming, this kirtle is a good first item to make.

Boning the Kirtle

If you want boning along the back side openings of the kirtle, sew a seam, either with a machine or by hand, 3/8 of an inch away from each edge of the back side opening from the armhole to the waist seam. Do this after the kirtle lining has been tucked up even with the waistline seam, but before the kirtle lining has been hem-stitched down. Take

poly boning, obtainable at the local fabric store, and remove it from its paper or fabric casing. Slip it into the channel between the seam and the edge of the fabric. If you want to use more authentic boning, use a bundle of broom straw or thin reeds in place of the plastic boning. You want about an inch of space between the end of the plastic bone and the bottom edge of your kirtle bodice.

Finishing Touches

All that's left is adding the grommets, or sewing the eyelets, on either side of the back side openings to lace it closed. Grommets were not used on the original garments, but they do the job if authenticity is not an issue. I use the 00 (double-ought) brass grommets from Greenberg & Hammer, which are much better quality and slightly smaller than the Dritz grommets at the local fabric store. They're also cheaper, at \$6.00 per 144 of them.

If you want to make period eyelets, make a hole in the fabric with an awl or similar tool, stretch it to the size you want, and do a buttonhole stitch or a plain whip-stitch around the hole. If you use quilting thread and go 3 times around the eyelet, you can get a very sturdy lacing hole indeed! These eyelets do not tear loose, as grommets can do when placed under strain.

Whichever you choose, place the eyelets 1.25 to 1.5 inches apart on either side of the kirtle opening. For convenience's sake, you may wish to permanently stitch closed one of the kirtle side back openings and use only one side back opening to get into and out of the kirtle.

These kirtles and all other gowns of the 16th century were laced up using one lace. Tie this lace around the top two holes in the kirtle, tying the two sides together. Then thread the lace alternately through the front and back eyelets, forming a zigzag. Lacing this way makes it possible to get into a back-laced kirtle by oneself; simply lace the kirtle loosely with a very long lace, slip it over your head, and pull the lace tight. Loop it around the bottommost lace hole and tie off with a half-hitch, weaver's knot, or whatever works for you.

You can further decorate the kirtle by appliquéing narrow bands of contrasting fabric, or guards, around the bottom of the skirt. Although not seen in Flanders per se, this was a common form of kirtle and gown decoration seen in other depictions of English and German dress.¹¹

MAKING A GORED KIRTLE PATTERN

The gored kirtle I wear beneath my open-fronted Flemish gown is based roughly on Arnold's loose kirtle in *Patterns of Fashion 1550 - 1650*. Rather than hanging loose from the shoulders, however, it is fitted to the waist and flares out from there. This A-line kirtle has seven pieces: a center front, two side fronts, two side backs, and two center back pieces. It laces up the back, has a square neckline, and is sleeveless.

The A-line kirtle should be cut with no curve at all to the front side seams. I made the pattern for mine while wearing a corset, fitting it as though it was going to be worn over a corset. When worn by itself, this does a marvelous job of flattening and supporting the bust, helping to achieve the look you want.

To make this kind of kirtle, you need to take the bodice pattern created in Appendix II and make some alterations to it.

First, take the bodice pattern you created. It should have two pieces, a front and back piece, and look similar to this picture.

Draw a line underneath the armhole down the side of the front piece of the pattern. Draw a slanting line down the front, following the line of the front strap. When you cut along these lines, you should have four pattern pieces resembling those shown here.

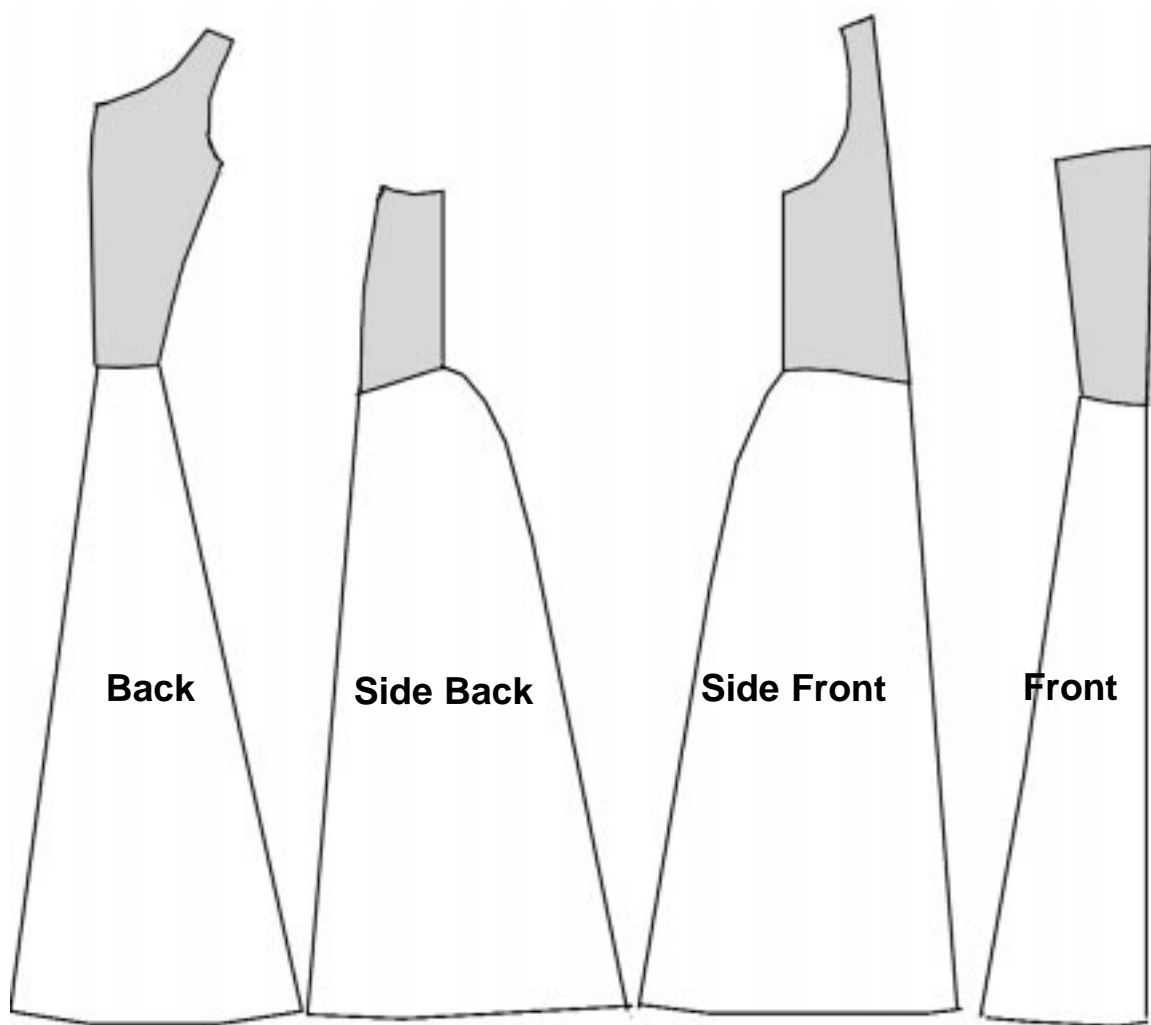
Measure from your waist to your ankle. Draw lines from the bottom edge of each kirtle pattern piece to this length. You should end up with pattern pieces resembling those below:

The grey areas represent the original bodice pattern pieces. The front piece of the kirtle will be cut with the center front on a fold; you will need two of each of the other three pattern pieces. The kirtle will lace up the center back. The pattern above is designed to be worn over a petticoat or boned corset as well as by itself, and therefore the side front and back skirt arches out at the waist to accommodate this. You can smooth this arch out if you wish.

For such large patterns, interfacing makes a good pattern material to draw out the pieces on.

I strongly recommend cutting out the above pieces out of a sturdy canvas or poplin, sewing them together, and trying on this kirtle toile before making the real thing to make sure that it fits. This will allow you to find the correct skirt length as well. Note any measurements that need changing on the toile (such as adding an inch to the waist, shortening the straps, shortening the skirt, etc.) and make those measurements on the paper pattern. Then cut the kirtle out of your good fabric. The instructions above will give you a kirtle which fits closely, but for an exact fit you should do this toile fitting.

This pattern is designed to lace up the center back. You can, if you wish, alter it so that it laces up the side back or side for ease of dressing.



THE OPEN-FRONTED GOWN

One of the signature aspects of mid 16th century lower-class Flemish dress is the open-fronted gown which laced closed over an under-gown or smock. The gowns worn by women of this class were made of wool. There is no evidence that these gowns were made of linen, although a wool-linen blend is a possibility; such fabrics did exist at that time, and were worn for outerwear. Silk-wool blends were also worn during this time, but were not available to market women, servants, cooks, and others of similar station who wore these gowns.

A number of variations on this gown are seen in the many pictures of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, but on the whole it, too, is a homogenous garment. It was either sleeveless, with wide-set straps hugging the outside of the shoulders, or had short capped sleeves reaching to the bicep. The armhole of the gown appears from the paintings to be curved in both back and front, although some paintings show gowns with wrinkles at the armhole which suggest less curve was used in the cut.

Eyes or metal rings were sewn to the front inner edges of this gown, through which a cord laced. In some paintings, as in Aertsen's *Poultry Vendors*, the lacing of the gown is quite high and reaches up to the neckline of the kirtle; in others, the lacing stops below the bust, leaving several inches of the kirtle uncovered. In all cases only one lace is used, zig-zagging from one side of the gown to the other. The gown neckline varied as well. In some cases there was no neckline at all, with the inner edge of the shoulder strap continuing straight down to the waist. Some gowns which laced more closely had a scooped neck, again at different heights.

The front sides of the gown could be as close as 3 inches apart, or leave most of the front of the body uncovered. In Breughel's paintings where this type of gown is seen, there are only a few inches between the front sides and the gown is worn directly over the smock. In the paintings of Aertsen & Beuckelaer, there are several inches exposed under the lacing, and a kirtle is invariably worn underneath. The width of the lacing wasn't dictated purely by regional styles, however; the same woman could wear a gown laced closed to different widths through pregnancies and other weight gain and losses.¹²

Whether or not the front edges of this gown were boned is open to debate. Aertsen's market woman clearly shows a bodice under some strain at the front edges, which remain straight despite the slight puckers in the fabric. Beuckelaer's vegetable seller, on the other hand, depicts a similar gown with heavy wrinkling along the front edges. Beuckelaer's gown is worn without sleeves or a black over-partlet; one historian of the time suggested that this, accompanied by the wrinkled gown, was meant to symbolize a "loose" woman, or a woman in "disarray". In any event, she is clearly unsupported by anything more than layers of fabric.

Bents were used for boning the lacing closures of more affluent women during this time¹³, but there is little information concerning the garments of this class to draw on. Therefore, I turned to my own devices and made two separate Flemish bodices, one with boning and one without, to see which best emulated the look seen in portraits. The bodice without boning along the front edge showed significantly greater wrinkling, especially when I was seated and didn't have the weight of the skirts to help keep the bodice smooth. The other bodice was stiffened by a bundle of small reeds (2mm diameter) sewn into the front edges. This gave a much neater and straighter appearance, like the bodice worn by Aertsen's *Vegetable Seller* (cover) and by the woman seated on the left in *The Meal Scene* (Plate 2).

Whether the bodice is lined is another mystery. The Shinrone gown, a gown of similar construction and shape to those depicted in the paintings of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, was half-lined. That is, the fabric of the bodice was folded up at the waistline to mid-rib and stitched down, finishing the waist edge and lining the bottom half of the bodice. The unlined edges of the armholes and neckline were turned under. Other extant bodices of the time are lined¹⁴, however, so either method is a valid option when recreating this type of gown.

In the pictures where the waistline of the open-fronted Flemish gown can be seen, the skirt attached to the gown by regular gathers, rather resembling large cartridge-pleats, rolled or stacked pleats, or perhaps stuffed box-pleats in the back¹⁵. In some cases, the skirt front is shown open; in Beuckelaer's *Market Scene with Ecce Homo* in the Uffizi gallery, a woman has the front edges of her skirt pinned back on either side. In other cases, the skirt has no center front opening and is presumably stitched to either side of the open-fronted bodice, with the center 6 to 10 inches of the skirt crossing between the two sides. This type of skirt is seen in Beuckelaer's *Meal Scene* (Plate 2), and is more commonly portrayed.

The skirt was either a rectangle of fabric or slightly gored sections sewn together. In my recreation of the Flemish gown, I have used rectangles of fabric attached to the waistline of the bodice with rolled pleats. I have been able to replicate all of the skirt treatments seen in the paintings with this cut and construction; the rolled pleats and rectangular cut achieve a look indistinguishable from the skirts in genre paintings of the time.

In the paintings of Beuckelaer and Aertsen, the outer fabric of the skirt invariably matches that of the attached bodice. The lining, however, is always depicted as a contrasting color: red, orange-gold, green, brown, or even, as is shown in some paintings, vertically striped in white and blue. These skirts range in length from the top of the foot to mid-calf. It's easy to understand why these working women, to whom fire could be an occupational hazard and muck an everyday occurrence, preferred shorter skirts.

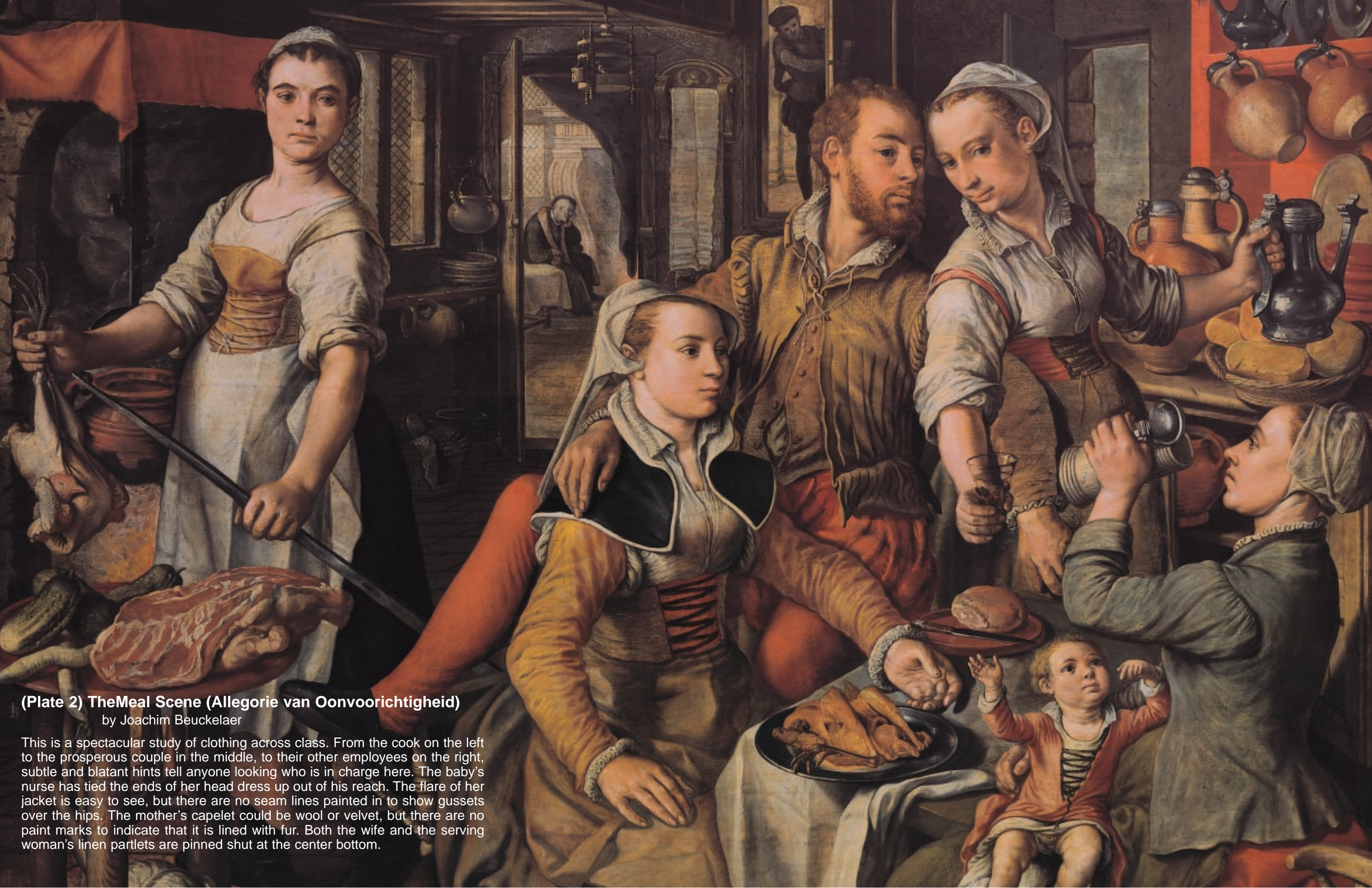
Breughel's depictions of the open-fronted laced gown have one striking contrast to those of Aertsen, Beuckelaer and their followers: in numerous cases, the bodice fabric and skirt fabric are two different colors. This depiction is unique to Breughel, but common enough within his works that it cannot be discounted as a fluke. Unfortunately, all depictions of this two-colored gown are from the back or side back and it is therefore impossible to determine whether they are one garment, or a separate, decorative bodice worn over the gown¹⁶.

The skirt of the outer gown is subject to a number of treatments which keep it out of the dirt as well as show off the skirt lining and the kirtle. Most common was the fashion of drawing the front edges of the skirt to the back of the gown and pinning them together, either at the bottom corners or at some point along their length.. The front and center back of a skirt could also be pinned together at either side, or the back of the skirt could be lifted and the bottom pinned to the back waist. Skirts that aren't split at the front can be hitched up and tucked through the bottom lace of the bodice

Some aspects of the cut of the Flemish gown bodice remain a puzzle. Aertsen's *The Pancake Bakery* (Plate 3), shows a squared armescye which indicates a side back seam. The Shinrone Gown, a contemporary Irish dress discovered in a bog and currently on display at the Museum of Ireland¹⁷, also has a slanted side back seam, as do several other noblewomen's gowns of the late 16th century¹⁸. Aertsen shows the backs of several gowns, but no back side seam, back center seam, or for that matter any bodice construction seams at all aside from the seam connecting the gown straps at the top of the shoulder is visible. Whether this is a true reflection of life or the whim of the artist, however, cannot be determined.

Breughel gives a clear picture of the back of one of his front-laced gowns which shows a back center seam and two back side seams, slanting from the back neckline towards the back center waistline. This seam placement is congruent with all other pictures by Breughel where a gown back is shown, and echoes the bodice seam placement of women in later 15th century and early 16th century illuminations.

The most likely answer is that there were several different cuts used, depending on the region, the person making the garment, and the amount of fabric available.



(Plate 2) The Meal Scene (Allegorie van Oonvoortigheid)
by Joachim Beuckelaer

This is a spectacular study of clothing across class. From the cook on the left to the prosperous couple in the middle, to their other employees on the right, subtle and blatant hints tell anyone looking who is in charge here. The baby's nurse has tied the ends of her head dress up out of his reach. The flare of her jacket is easy to see, but there are no seam lines painted in to show gussets over the hips. The mother's capelet could be wool or velvet, but there are no paint marks to indicate that it is lined with fur. Both the wife and the serving woman's linen partlets are pinned shut at the center bottom.



(Plate 3) The Pancake Bakery
by Pieter Aertsen

This part of the painting clearly shows the square armhole of the kirtle. The old woman's linen headpiece seems to be pinned to her cap about an inch back from the cap edge, along the center fold.

(Plate 1) The Pancake Bakery
by Pieter Aertsen

This part of the painting clearly shows the black embroidery on the woman's smock and the man's shirt. The edge of her sheer partlet seems to be black. The painter did this with a solid line, so it impossible to tell if a whip stitch or other stitch was used on the original.

C

ONSTRUCTING AN OPEN-FRONTED GOWN

These patterns and instructions are for a sleeveless gown with no discernable neckline in the front. Cap sleeves can easily be added, as can alterations to the front neckline, for women wanting an alternative look.

Wool is by far the best choice for a Flemish gown, if you want it to look, feel and move correctly. For people allergic to wool, a new polyester fabric, “Worsterlon” is the most wool-like man made fabric I’ve seen. For summer wear in hot areas, an open-fronted Flemish gown made of a fine, light wool is surprisingly cool. If you need something even cooler, linen is also a possibility.

Pattern

This gown can be made from the bodice pattern in Appendix II. Once you have this bodice pattern and have fitted it, lay the front piece of the pattern on a piece of paper, trace around it, and lift the original pattern piece away. Line up the back pattern piece with the front along the side back seam, trace around it, and lift it away.

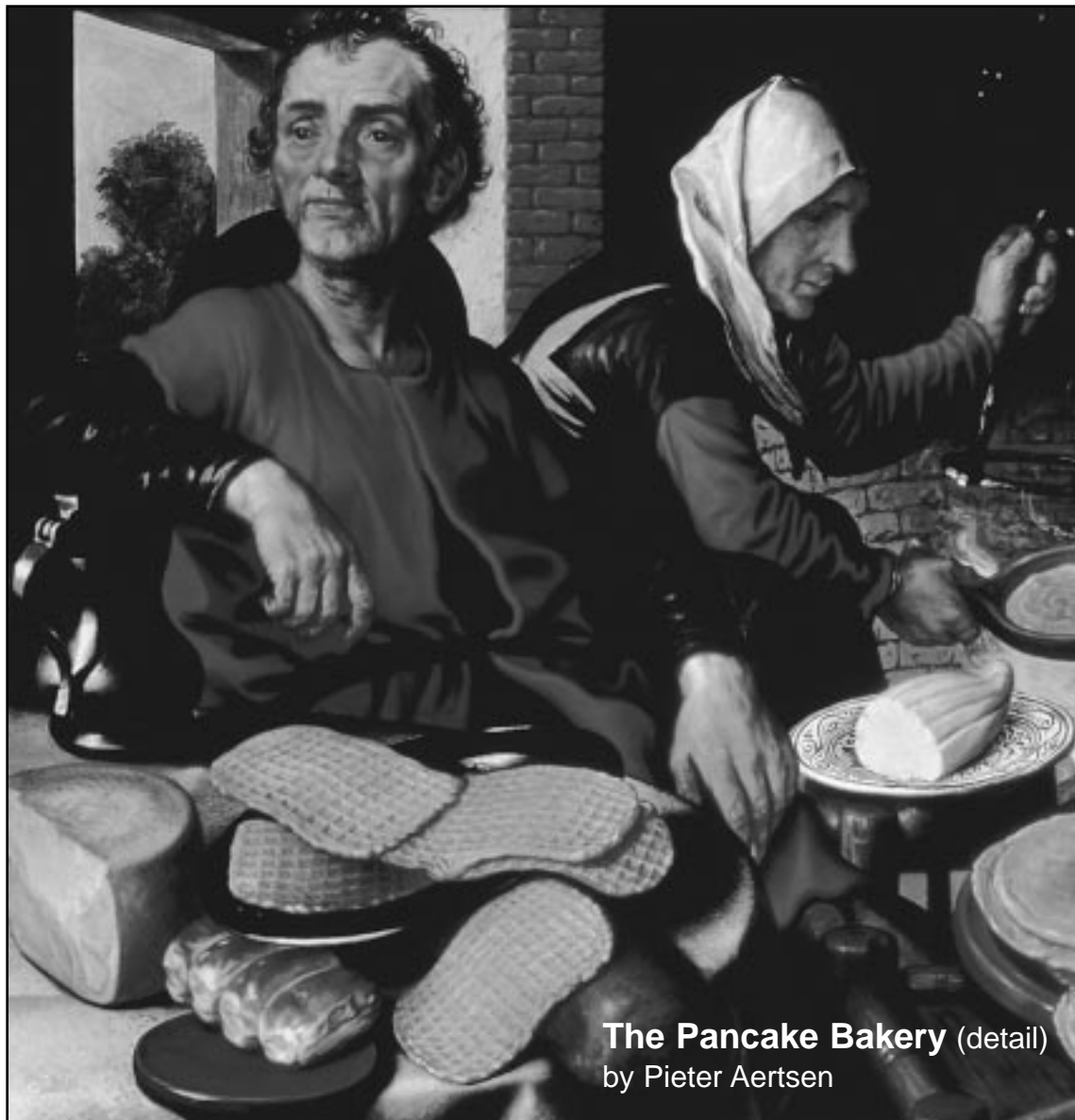
You should have a tracing that looks approximately like this. On this new pattern piece, start at the inner corner of the front square neckline, and draw a line that follows the line of the shoulder strap all the way down to the waist. It should follow the dotted line down the front, as pictured here.

Now draw a line at the level of the bottom of the armhole back towards the side back seam, and draw a line down from the back armhole down to the side back seam. This creates a “squared” armhole at the back. Cut this new pattern out, cutting along the back side seam to create two pattern pieces, and you’re ready to go. You now have your Open-fronted Flemish gown bodice pattern.

Making the Flemish Gown: Bodice

This gown bodice will have three pieces: one back piece, and two front pieces. Lining is optional. These instructions are for a fully lined bodice, made in the same way that the gathered kirtle bodice was lined.

1. Fold your outer fabric, and place the back center of the back piece on the fold. Trace around the pattern piece. Cut out the fabric 1/2 an inch outside the tracing lines, unfold



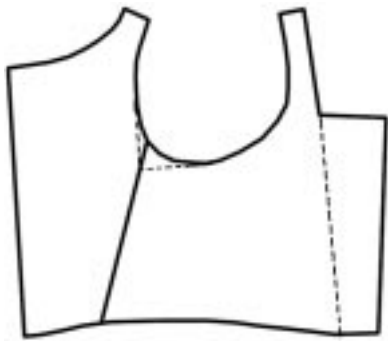
The Pancake Bakery (detail)
by Pieter Aertsen

the fabric, and draw the pattern lines in on the unmarked half of the back.

2. Place the front section of the pattern on a piece of your fabric. Trace around it, and cut out the fabric 1/2 an inch outside the tracing lines. Flip the pattern over, place it on another piece of fabric, and repeat. When you finish, you should have two front pieces and one back piece.

3. Repeat the above steps with your lining fabric. You can use wool or linen, whichever you choose; a woolen lining will stretch more. This isn't a problem unless you want a lot of support; as your kirtle is doing most of the supporting, the gown bodice does not need to be exceptionally stiff. A medium weight linen or wool, or cotton if authenticity is not an issue, is acceptable as a lining. Undyed linen or wool is a good idea, as you won't run the risk of staining your kirtle or smock when you sweat.

4. Match a front piece of the gown with one of the back seams of the back seams, right sides together. Starting at the waist, sew the two pieces together along the tracing lines until the front piece ends. Do the same with the other front piece. Now repeat this process with the lining. Iron the seams flat.



5. Place the lining and outer fabric right sides together. Pin them all the way around, making sure that the fabric and lining lie smooth, with no wrinkles. Fold the tips of the shoulder straps back on either side to the tracing line, and pin them down. If you pin perpendicularly to the edge, you can sew over the pins (carefully) which will make it easier to sew.

6. Sew around the edges of the bodice as you did the kirtle, sewing along the tracing lines, leaving the tops of all four straps unsewn (but sewing all the way to the edge, over the folded-back edges of the straps.) Sew the bottom of the bodice as well. Only leave the bottom seven inches of each front side unsewn.

7. Make snips in towards the seam every couple of inches along the curved armholes, to keep the fabric from puckering when it's turned right-side out. Make a few snips along the back neckline of the bodice, as well.

8. Take the pins out and turn the bodice right side out. Iron it so that it lays flat and smooth. Turn in the raw edges of the outer fabric and the lining on either side of the front opening, and iron it so that there is a smooth line from the top of the shoulder strap down to the waist. Hand-stitch the straps together, stitching the outer fabric together and the lining as well.

9. Take a 7 inch piece of boning. Poly boning is adequate, as is 1/4 inch spring steel. If you want to be exceptionally authentic, use a small bundle of broom straw with string wrapped around it to keep it together. Tuck this boning inside the ironed fold of the lining along the opening along the front edge, and stitch the raw edge of the lining down over with a running stitch. Whipstitch the outer fabric and the lining fabric together along the front edge. You now have an invisibly boned front edge. Repeat this process on the other side of the front opening. This boning is optional, but I've found that it improves the look of the bodice significantly and reduces wrinkles and gapping along the front edge. Some of the bodices in Flemish genre paintings were obviously stiffened along the front edge; others were just as obviously not. If you don't want to bone your gown, simply stitch the lining and outer fabric together without inserting the bone into the lining first.

You can use metal rings or normal, small eyelets for lacing the gown closed. A far better choice are the flat topped hooks and eyes available from Greenberg & Hammer. The flat top lets a wider lace through the eye without it gathering or twisting, and lets the eye be placed closer to the edge of the fabric. They are also considerably larger, stronger and more substantial than the eyes commonly found at most fabric stores. Contact information for Greenberg & Hammer is in Appendix III.

Sew these eyes or rings to either side of the front of the gown, placing them so that the edge of the eye or ring is even with the front edge of the bodice. If you used broom straw for stiffening, you can sew through it. I use quilting thread to sew the eyes on, and stitch them down very firmly so that they will take the strain of lacing. Sew one eye to the very bottom of the front opening, and every other eye an inch above the last; on the other side, sew the first eye 1/2 an inch from the bottom, and every eye an inch above the other. This staggers the hooks so that, when a lace is laced through them, it will zigzag up from one side to the other.

You can have the gown lace up as high as you wish. It can have as little as 6 inches of lacing, or alternately, lace all the way to the top of the kirtle. Both are equally common in paintings. Although the bodice front edges may be straight from shoulder to waist, lacing them to just beneath the bust creates an illusion of a curved neckline.



The Meal Scene (detail)
by Joachim Beuckelaer

Making the Flemish Gown: Skirt

The skirts in 16th century genre paintings were lined—all those where the lining could be seen, that is. The lining was often a contrasting fabric, and was very likely wool rather than linen. Whether or not you want to line your skirt is up to you. It does make the skirt heavier and bulkier at the waist, but gives it a more substantial hang and lets you pin it up in one of the many fashionable ways that Flemish women used. If you do line it, choose a color which contrasts with your gown fabric for some extra flash. I've used both linen and wool for lining, and both work equally well.

The directions for making this skirt are almost identical to those for making the gathered kirtle skirt. Measure the waist edge of the bodice; this will be the finished length of your pleated skirt. If you want to use knife or box pleats, you will need three times this measurement to get enough fabric. If you want to use rolled pleats, however, you will need 5 times the measurement for enough fabric. Although they take more fabric than other types of pleating, I highly recommend rolled pleats; they are the only type of pleating I've found which accurately imitates the look of the pleats found in the portraits. Other pleats aren't bulky or deep enough, although they were used in period. (An overview of pleat types is in Appendix IV.)

1. Measure the waist-to-ground measurement for your gown skirt just as you did for your kirtle skirt, with one inch added to the original measurement. This is the height of the fabric you will need. Do the same for the lining. Lay the skirt fabric and lining right sides together, and sew the long bottom and the two shorter sides together 1/2 an inch away from the edge. Turn it right side out, and iron flat. Turn the edges of the open side in 1/2 an inch, and iron. From this point on, regard the lining and outer fabric as one layer.

2. Pleat the skirt using the pleating method of your choice. Rolled pleats, as they are too thick to pin, may be basted with a running stitch. Place the right side of the bodice and the outside of the skirt's top edge together, and, using a strong thread (silk buttonhole twist or quilting thread is good) stitch the top of the skirt and the bottom of the bodice together. As the skirt is basically finished on top and the bodice is finished on the waistline as well, this will make the join even stronger.

Here's a tip: when lacing the gown closed, tie one end of the lace around the top ring/eye and sew or pin it to the lining. Lace the lace in a zig-zag fashion until you reach the last ring at the waistline. Tie a half-hitch around the eye, and then wind the lace (if you have enough left) once around your waist and tie another half-hitch around the lace right in front of the last ring. This gives you something to hang your pouch, keys or other accessories from underneath your skirt.

Wooded Hamlet Designs (<http://www.woodedhamlet.com>) sells waxed linen cord and a wide variety of linen, worsted and silk ribbons which can be used to lace your Flemish gown.



The Meal Scene (detail)
by Joachim Beuckelaer

PARTLETS

The topmost item worn is the partlet. It was an item of clothing worn over the upper torso in conjunction with low, square-necked kirtles and gowns. Although there is some variation in the neckline—some partlets are v-necked, others have a jewel neckline and still others have flared collars—it is invariably sleeveless, opens in front, and attaches under the arms. *Crepe-making Scene* by Pieter Aertsen shows two women in the same scene wearing differently designed v-necked partlets. Although there are several types of white partlets depicted partlets with flared collars are more commonly seen.

The clothing worn under this item necessitated such protection: gown, kirtle and smock all had low, often squared necklines. In Pieter Aertsen's *The Pancake Bakery* (Plate 1), you can actually see the neckline of kirtle and smock where they are revealed underneath the bottom edge of the young woman's partlet.

The partlet is not a uniquely Flemish item of dress, although it is in Flemish paintings that it most often appears. This item had been in existence for several decades before Aertsen and Beuckelaer began painting—indeed, Hans Holbein the Younger depicted it repeatedly in sketches of court ladies drawn during the 1520s. It was worn in England from the 1530s on, though the partlet worn over a gown fell out of favor with fashionable nobility over the next few decades and, by 1560, is rarely seen in upper-class portraits.

The partlets shown in the dozens of paintings of Aertsen and Beuckelaer are quite homogenous. They are always depicted as either of black fabric—presumably wool—with a high, fall-back collar, or of a sheerer white fabric, most likely linen. In many cases a black woolen partlet was worn in conjunction with a white under-partlet, cut in the same way and often with a small ruffle at the top. This combination can be seen in several of Aertsen and Beuckelaer's paintings.

Some partlets appear to have fastened, either by hooks and eyes or pins, beneath the arms. A white linen partlet in Beuckelaer's *The Cook* has long strings tied to either side of the back and front which tie around the body. The partlet itself is tucked under these strings to keep it in place.

Pieter Breughel showed an interesting partlet variation from a different area of Flanders, possibly from the Brabant region where he grew up: The v-backed partlet. This partlet is

always depicted by Breughel as black. Like several of the partlets described above, it had either a v-necked or jewel-necked opening in the front. Rather than fastening beneath the arms, however, the front sections of Breughel's partlets are pinned to the gown itself. The back of the partlet narrows into a long V, which was held in place by a hook sewn to the tip of the V and hooked into the center back of the gown slightly above waist level.

In the later 1560s and early 1570s, a new type of partlet appears in Flemish genre paintings: the "ruffed partlet". Rather than having a flared, v-necked or fall-back collar, this partlet has a neckband to which a modest ruff is attached. This ruffed partlet remains part of the servant's wardrobe to the end of the century.¹⁹



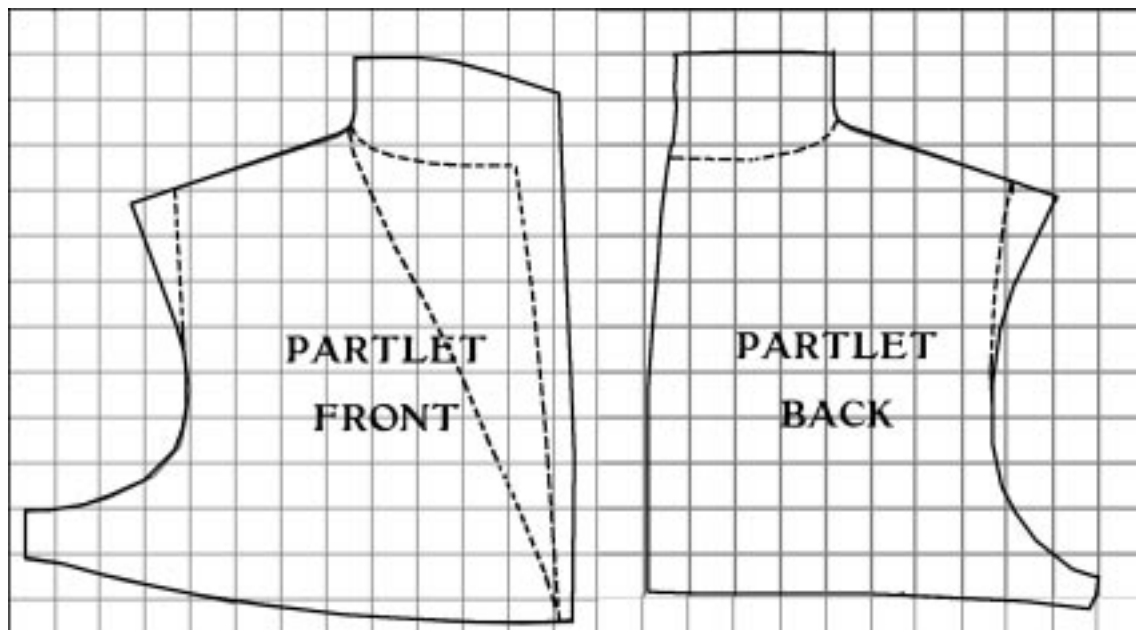
A Marketwoman and Vegetable Stand (detail)
by Pieter Aertsen

MAKING A PARTLET

It looks, from current evidence, as if partlets were worn by all Flemish working women. There are very few pictures showing a peasant, serving maid or market woman without one during the 1550s to 1570s. They are easy to make, versatile, and invaluable in protecting the chest and shoulders from sunburn when spending long periods of time outdoors.

Partlet Patterns

This partlet pattern is the one I use. It makes a partlet with a flared collar, but cutting along the dotted lines can produce a v-necked or jewel-necked partlet. This same pattern can be used to make a ruffed partlet, which became popular with lower-class women in the 1570s and continued in use until the end of the 16th century. Jean Hunnisett also has patterns for partlets in her book *Period Costume for Stage and Screen 1500-1800*.

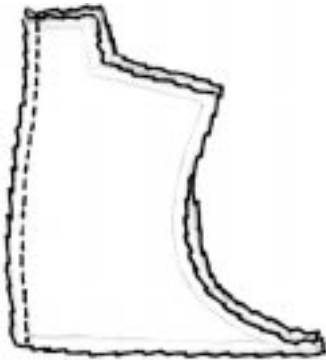


Scale: 1 square=1 inch

Making a Flared-Collar Partlet

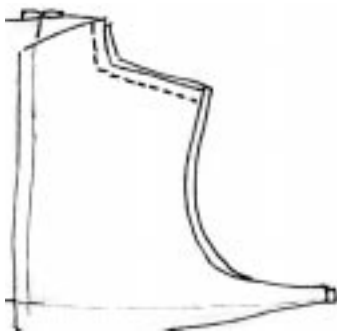


To make a partlet with a flared collar as pictured here, use the above pattern and cut along the solid lines. This type of partlet was most common among Flemish working women in the 1550s and 1560s. It was made out of both white linen, for summer wear and protection from the sun, and black wool, for warmth. Sometimes both were worn in conjunction, the black wool partlet over the white linen partlet. The instructions below are for a linen partlet, but work just as well for a partlet of wool.



1. Once you have a pattern that fits, trace around the pattern pieces you have and cut them out 1/2 an inch outside the traced lines. You will need four front partlet pieces and four back pieces. These will make up both the outer layer and the lining, which are identical.

2. First, sew the back pieces together along the traced line as shown here. Iron the center back seam. Do this again for the two back pieces of the lining.



3. Now sew the two front pieces to the back piece along the traced shoulder seams. Do this to the lining as well.

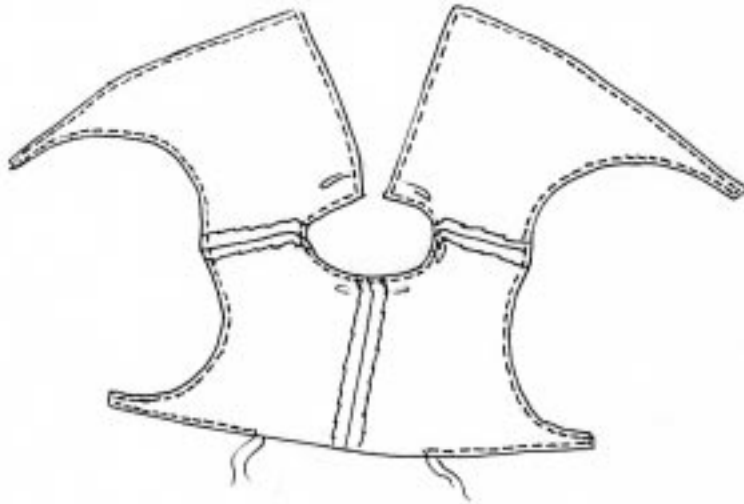
4. Place the outer fabric and lining together, pin, and sew around the traced lines along the edges all the way around save for the center back bottom, as shown on the next page. Stitching heavy fishing line or horsehair braid into the front center seam will help the linen partlet to curve back without wilting down (though, as period pictures testify, wilting often occurred.) If you want a narrow ruffle around the neck of your partlet, take a 1 in. strip of linen selvedge three times the measurement of the neckline and pleat or gather it finely. Place the strip

between the two layers of fabric to be sewn, matching up the edge of the strip with the raw edges to the partlet pieces, and sew all three together. This will produce a ruffle along the neckline edge.

5. On all curves, clip the seam allowance carefully to just outside the seam line. It is important to do this, as otherwise the partlet won't lay flat. Once the seams are clipped, turn the partlet right side out and iron it flat. The partlet is now almost finished.

6. Pin the underarm pieces together and try the partlet on. Try it on over the kirtle, so your bosom is in the proper place. Once you know where the underarm pieces should meet, mark this point, cut off the excess half an inch beyond this point, turn the raw edges inside and finish. Sew a button and loop, or a hook and eye, to either side of the underarm pieces to fasten them together. I sew one underarm side together and use a hook and eye on the other; if you sew both underarm seams, you will be able to get the partlet on but will have a *very* hard time getting it off.

You can fasten the front together at the bottom with a pin, a simple brooch, two ties, a button & loop, or with hooks and eyes. If this is a linen partlet, use spray starch while ironing to make the collar slightly stiff.



MAKING A RUFF'D PARTLET

Ruffed partlets, or partlets with a neckband and small ruff at the top, begin to appear among Flemish workingwomen in the 1570s and continue to show up in portraits and inventories of serving-womens' clothing into the 1590s. The ruffed partlets worn by servants and market women were made of white linen and sported a modest ruff at the top. Ruffed partlets were also worn by the middle classes in the 1570s and 1580s.

Materials:

1 yard of white linen (or other white fabric) for the partlet. 2.5 yards of 2-inch wide white grosgrain ribbon (or a 2-inch wide strip of linen with the selvedge along one edge) for the ruffle.



The Meal Scene (detail)
by Joachim Beuckelaer

Making the Partlet

Use the partlet pattern, cutting along the dotted lines that follow the base of the neck.

1. Once you have a pattern that fits, trace around the pattern pieces you have and cut them out 1/2 an inch outside the traced lines. You will need four front partlet pieces and four back pieces. These will make up both the outer layer and the lining, which are identical.

2. First, sew the back pieces together along the traced lines as shown in the section on making a flared-collar partlet. Iron the center back seam. Do this again for the two back pieces of the lining.

3. Now sew the two front pieces to the back piece along the traced shoulder seams, again as shown in the above section on making a flared collar partlet. Do this to the lining pieces as well. Iron all seams.

4. Place the outer fabric and lining together, pin, and sew around the edges all the way around except around the neck. Trim the seams, clip the curves, turn the partlet right side out and iron.

The partlet itself is done—now you need to make the ruffle and the neckband to attach to it.



Making the Ruffle

This is a small ruff-band, which requires no special materials, equipment or skill to make. It ends up making a ruff about 1.5 inches in depth with ruffles about 1 inch high. It hugs the neck and flares out around the face. With practice, you can make one in a couple of hours.

For a sturdy ruffle that you can throw into the washing machine without fear, use grosgrain ribbon. For a more authentic ruffle, use a two-inch wide strip of linen with one edge on the selvedge edge of the fabric. Iron and spray-starch the linen before beginning, to make the gathering process easier.

1. Measure around your neck. Multiply it by five, and cut a length of ribbon this length + 2 inches. (for example: 11-inch neck measurement x 5=55 inches, plus 2 inches=57 inches.)

2. Using a pencil and a ruler, make marks 1/2 an inch away from one edge of the ribbon or strip of fabric every 3/4".

3. Thread a needle with a long length of thread. Bring the needle up through the first mark, catch a few threads at each of the next four marks, and draw the thread tight as shown to the right. You will have 5 bits of fabric on the needle, with four little gathers between them. Sew a couple of stitches through the gathering point of all 5 bits of fabric that you gathered together, locking them firmly in place.

4. Do a running stitch (in-out-in-out) to the next mark on the ruff. The needle should come out of the mark on the top. Catch a few threads at each of the next four marks, gather them together, and stitch the five through a couple of times to lock them down, as shown here. Then do a running stitch to the next mark. Repeat ad nauseum until the entire length of ribbon has been gathered in this manner.

5. Thread your needle with a new length of thread. At every gathering point, divide the four gathers so that two lay to the right and two lay to the left. Make sure that the edges of all of them are even—this is important to making an even, neat looking ruff—and stitch them down 1/2 an inch away from the edge (where the first running stitch can be seen.) as shown here. When finished, the open, unstitched edge of your ruff should resemble a neat series of figure-eights when you lay it on a flat surface.

6. Wrap the ruffle around your neck. The edges should overlap by half an inch. If there's too much ruffle, cut off the excess so that the ends overlap by this much. Turn the raw edges of the ribbon in and hem them with white thread. Once hemmed, the ruffle should just match the measurement of your neck. (Check this before sewing the raw edges down).

7. Cut two rectangles of the white fabric to make the neckband. Each rectangle should be 3 inches wide and the length of your neck measurement + 1 inch.

8. Match up the sewn-flat edge of the ruffle with the edge of one of the rectangles of fabric. The rectangles should be 1/2 inch longer on either end than the ruffle. With the ruffle on top, sew the fabric and ruffle together 1/2 an inch away from the edge, following the line of stitching that holds the ruffle down. Now place the other rectangle on the other side of the ruffle, so that the ruffle is sandwiched between two layers of fabric. match up the edges. With the already-sewn piece of fabric on top, stitch all three layers together, following the stitching line already in place.

9. Stitch the short edges of the fabric rectangles together 1/2 an inch away from the edge, being careful not to catch any ruffle material between them. Turn the ruffle right side out. You may if you wish iron the band to flatten it; be careful not to iron your ruffle, however.

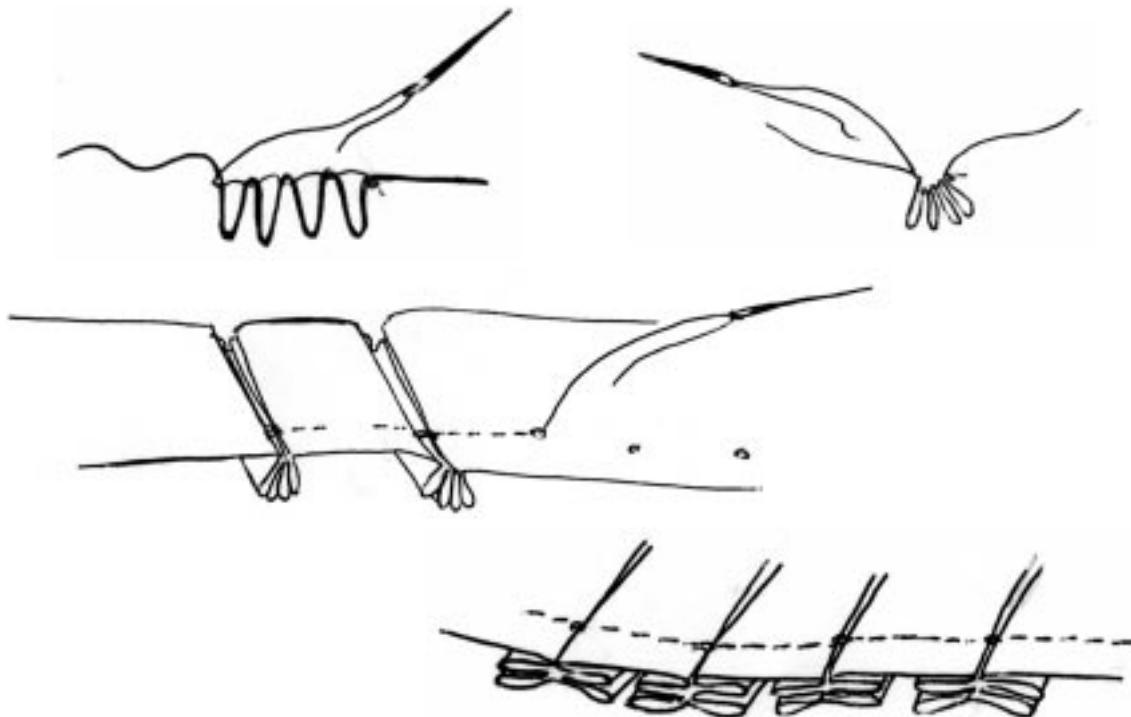
Sewing the ruff band to the partlet

Match up the raw edge of the bottom of the neck band (the outside layer) with the raw edge of the partlet neck edge (both outer layer and lining). Pin these together, and sew them half an inch away from the edge. Clip the curved neckline and trim the excess fabric down to 1/4 inch.

Tuck the inside layer of the neckband up until the finished edge meets the neck seam you just sewed, and hem-stitch the neckband in place.

As with the flared-collar partlet, pin the underarm pieces together and try the partlet on over the kirtle & gown, so the bosom is in the proper place. Once you know where the underarm pieces should meet, mark this point, cut off the excess half an inch beyond this point, turn the raw edges inside and finish. Sew a button and loop, or a hook and eye, to either side of the underarm pieces to fasten them together. I sew one underarm side together and use a hook and eye on the other; if you sew both underarm seams, you will be able to get the partlet on but will have a *very* hard time getting it off.

You can fasten the front edges of the ruffed partlet with a pin, a simple brooch, two ties, a button & loop, or with hooks and eyes. Alternately, you can fasten the partlet at the bottom front and let the ruffed collar lie open.



SLEEVES FOR A FLEMISH GOWN

The sleeves attached to the gown with a pin at the shoulder strap or, when worn with a cap-sleeved Flemish gown, to the base of the sleeve at the bicep. In some paintings, a kirtle with cap sleeves is worn with a sleeveless gown and the sleeves are pinned to the kirtle instead. In some cases they were pinned to the gown shoulder strap at the back as well. Some paintings show these flaring at the wrists and turned back to show a contrasting lining. The sleeves, like the gowns they were attached to, were made of wool.

These sleeves were very simply shaped. They were tapered tubes with a slanted cut at the top, and are therefore quite easy to make. They should be made of wool, although linen would be an option for hot weather. I have found that the wool sleeve, when closely fitted and worn over a straight linen sleeve, stays in place quite handily and puts little strain on the pin that connects it to the gown.

You can line the sleeves in a contrasting fabric, as is seen in some portraits. This has the added advantage of making the sleeves reversible. Leave the bottom few inches of the sleeve seam unsewn at the wrist so that you can turn it back to display the contrasting lining as a cuff. One yard of fabric is more than sufficient to make a pair of pinned sleeves.

Sleeve Pattern

1. Measure from your underarm to wrist. Add one inch to this measurement. We'll call this measurement A. Draw a horizontal line of this length across a piece of paper.
2. Measure around the widest part of your arm. Divide this measurement in half, and add 1 inch to the resulting number. This will be measurement B. Draw a line the length of measurement B down from the right end of the horizontal line.
3. Measure around the widest part of your hand. Divide this measurement by two and add 1 inch to the resulting number. This will be measurement C. Draw a line the length of measurement C down from the left end of the horizontal line.
4. Measure from your shoulder to your wrist. Add 1 inch to this measurement. This is measurement D. Take a yardstick and place one end at the bottom of the vertical "Measurement C" line. Angle it so that it hits the bottom of the "Measurement B" line. Draw a line the length of measurement D, starting at the bottom of the measurement C line.

5. Connect the right end of the horizontal Measurement A line with the right end of the measurement D line. You should have something that resembles the picture.

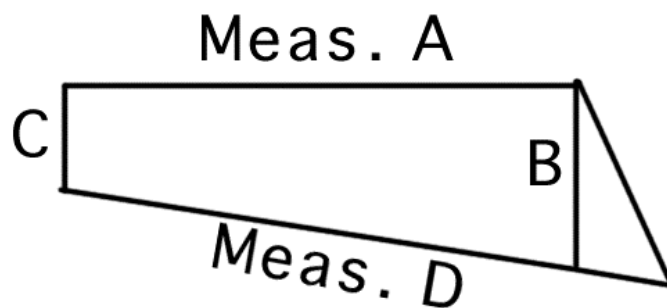
Making the Sleeves

Cut out this pattern. Fold your fabric in half, and lay the pattern piece on top, with the measurement D line along the fold. Trace around the pattern, and cut the fabric on the tracing lines.

Leaving the sleeve folded, sew the sleeve together half an inch from the edge of the measurement A side of the sleeve. Turn it right side out, hem the raw shoulder and cuff edges, and you have a finished sleeve that you can pin to your Flemish gown.

Although we have fallen out of the habit of using pins to keep our garments together, I've found through experimentation that pins are actually the sturdiest and most practical method of attaching sleeves to the gown. Hooks and eyes invariably come loose, ties are hard to put on by oneself (and aren't appropriate for this type of outfit), and tacking the sleeve to the bodice with stitches prevents me from removing the sleeves when they get too hot. It also makes getting into a gown much more difficult. A pair of pins used together as one keeps the sleeve in place through a day's activity.

We must keep in mind that pins in the 16th century came in a number of sizes and weights, from small pins to "farthingale pins", ostensibly used to pin a skirt flounce to the french farthingale beneath. If you find that common dress pins aren't sturdy enough to keep your sleeves on without bending, experiment with larger pins, such as corsage pins, to see whether these work for you.



WORKINGWOMAN'S JACKETS

In isolated paintings of the 1550s and more frequently in the later 1560s and 1570s, one other item of women's clothing made its appearance: a jacket, worn over the ensemble. It fastened down the front, with lacing through rings or eyes or hooks and eyes, and could be worn open or shut. In some cases it had a flared collar. The sleeves were gathered at the top and sewn to the bodice of the jacket, which was fitted to the waist and flared out to the upper hip.

This jacket appears to be a feminization of an item of clothing shown in many depictions of male peasants in Aertsen's and Beuckelaer's paintings of the 1550s and 1560s. It was worn in conjunction with the common kirtle-and-laced-gown combination; the two variations are shown in several paintings from 1564 to 1569.

It is hard to deduce the cut of these jackets; depictions of them give little to no information on cut and seam placement, and so one must turn to contemporary sources for men's and upper-class noblewomen's dress of the time. The flare from waist to hip would necessitate a side seam or near side seam, which is found in some men's riding coats of the time, rather than the side-back seam commonly found in women's bodice construction. A side-back seam would not allow enough flare at the hip without a gusset added, and seam lines indicating gussets aren't seen in the paintings. A four-piece construction, with two front pieces shaped at the side and the front and two back pieces shaped at the side and center back, would create a jacket similar to those seen in Flemish genre paintings. Contemporary sleeve construction would place the sleeve seam at the back of the arm.



The Meal Scene (detail)
by Joachim Beuckelaer

A WORKING-WOMAN'S APRON

In almost all paintings, the front of the skirt was covered by a rectangular apron. Three distinct styles of apron are seen in the paintings of Aertsen, Beuckelaer and Breughel. One type is a simple rectangle of fabric, reaching to below the knee, with strings attached to the top corners which tie at the back. The other is a wider rectangle, the corners of which meet at the center back, and the third is the same white rectangle which reaches to the center back, but which is pinned to either side of the side back, leaving the corners free. In one picture, the strings attach several inches in from either top corner of the apron, achieving a similar effect. The apron is most commonly white, but in Flemish paintings it is also depicted as olive, pink or light blue. There are some pictures which show women tucking up the back of their skirt under the apron strings to keep it out of the way.

It is likely to have been made of linen, as linen is a more washable fabric than wool and better suited to the job. Contemporary inventories mention linen aprons and apron skirts as well²⁰.

To make the first type of apron, take a rectangle of fabric about 2/3 of your waist measurement wide and long enough to reach to mid-calf, sew some strings onto the ends, (twill tape works well for this purpose) and tie it over your skirts. It will flatten the skirts at the front and hips and help to keep them in place.

WOMEN'S HOSE

It is virtually difficult, if not impossible, to know precisely what Flemish workingwomen of the time wore for hose. We know that women wore short hose to the knee during the 15th and 16th centuries, and that, for all but the wealthy, these hose were made of sewn cloth²¹. Although there are no surviving womens' hose to use as a model, it is possible to extrapolate something of hose construction from men's hose of the same time period.

The Flemish genre painting by Joachim Beuckelaer *The Meal Scene* shows what could a triangular seam on the side of a man's hose. This triangular gusset is also seen in a pair of 16th century men's hose dug up in London, shown in the Museum of London's *Clothing and Textiles*. Additional 16th century hose remnants of similar construction are pictured in the book *Material Culture in England 1450-1600*.

WORKING WOMENS' HEADWEAR

The hairstyles, coifs, cauls and hats of these laboring women are one of the most varied aspect of their ensemble. Straw hats are worn in a number of paintings, a sensible form of headwear for market women, vegetable sellers, and others who spent their days out of doors. The hats shown in Beuckelaer and Aertsen's paintings were a variety of shapes: shallow-crowned and wide-brimmed, high crowned, and bowl-shaped. The first of these is similar in many respects to the basic shape of straw hats worn by women during the late 18th and early 19th century. Unlike the decorated bourgeoisie straw bonnets of Regency times, however, these straw hats appear to have been strictly lower class, they do not show up in pictures or inventories of more affluent folk.

Another basic headdress, however, was worn by the entire spectrum of women, noblewomen as well as market vendors and serving maids: the caul, which was a circle of fabric gathered to a band. Beuckelaer's market woman shows this item in good detail. It is made of fine linen, although similar cauls depicted in middle class portraits show cauls of an identical cut composed of black velvet, silk, needle lace and embroidery²². An interesting offshoot of the widely popular caul is shown in Beuckelaer's *The Meal Scene*: a caul with a wired front edge and a strap holding it on under the chin.

Another, much more popular wired headdress was the "Flemish hood", a fine linen veil with a wired front, which came to a point in the middle front and arched out on either side to meet just before the ear. The Flemish hood was worn as far back as the 1520s in Flanders and evolved from a white linen veil, starched and creased down the middle, that pinned at the front corners to a coif or caul worn underneath. By the 1560s it had evolved into the more delicate and decorative item. This wired hood was also worn by several classes; they are shown worn by fishwives with their Sunday best, as well as by urban gentlewomen.

In several of Aertsen's genre paintings of the 1560s, women do not cover their hair at all. Instead, it is wound with a ribbon and coiled around the back of the head. Aertsen's *Harvest Time* shows a girl wearing this hairstyle, with the addition of a cloth band wound around her head just in front of her coiled hair. Most interesting is the cotter-type pin shown, which slips through the band and through one twisted length of hair to fix it in place. This hairstyle seems quite wide-spread, as it is shown in the majority of the genre paintings of

the time. Contemporary references to “hair-tapes” used by more well-to-do English women²³ indicate that this style was widely worn and not limited to either Flanders or lower-class women.



Harvest Time (detail)
by Pieter Aertsen

C

ONSTRUCTING A FLEMISH CAUL

The construction of a caul is exceedingly simple—it is basically a circle of fabric gathered to a band and fixed to the back of the head. This type of headwear is shown worn by Flemish market women, such as that painted by Beuckelaer shown to the right, during the last half of the 16th century.

Materials

Servants, peasants and other working women would have worn a simple linen caul. If linen is not available, any white, linen-like fabric will suffice. 1/2 a yard of fabric is required to make a caul like the one shown to the right.

Pattern

A caul doesn't really have a pattern; it is simply a circle of fabric 10 to 12 inches in diameter gathered a strip of linen around 19-21 inches long and 3 inches wide (The length of the strip length depends on your head size; you want a strip long enough to go around your head plus an inch extra.) If you have enough fabric, cut the strip on the bias. This will allow the outer edge of the band to stretch and fit your head better.

An 8-inch circle produces a caul with virtually no gathers, which sits to the back of the head. If you want a "puffier" caul, use a larger circle, 12 to 14 inches in diameter.

Sewing the Caul Together

First sew a basting stitch (either by machine or hand) around the outside of the cloth circle, 1/2 an inch away from the edge, and gather it until it measures 20 inches in circumference. (This is if you are using a 21 inch band of fabric; if you are using a longer or shorter band, gather the circle until it measures 1 inch less than the band. 18 inch band=17 inch circumference, 23 inch band=22 inch circumference, etc.

Take your band, fold it in half, and iron it flat. Fold the raw edges in 1/2 an inch, and iron the band again. It should now be one inch wide.

Take the ironed band, and place one of the outside creases against the outside of the gathered caul. Sew the two together along the crease as shown to the left. Fold the band over, and match the other edge fold of the band up with the inside stitching on the edge of the gathered circle; whipstitch it into place. You now have a finished caul!

Wearing the Caul

As 16th century working women almost always had long hair, they wrapped it into a bun or coil at the back of their head and placed the caul over it; the hair helped to keep the caul in place, aided with pins and perhaps combs.

For those with short or wayward hair, a good cheat is to stitch a stretchy plastic comb into the band of the caul. This will help to pull short hair back, as well as keep the caul in place. If even this method doesn't keep the caul from slipping, spraying your hair with hair spray or finishing spritz and letting it dry before putting the comb and caul on your head will keep this caul on through high winds and somersaults.

COLOR IN WORKING WOMENS' DRESS

A wide variety of color was found in the clothing of the lower-classes. Gowns, kirtles and sleeves were shown in several shades and hues of pink, fawn, russet, peach, gold, orange, blue, sage green, tawny, red and brown. Sadder colors such as browns and duller greens predominated, as would be expected in a peasant's wardrobe, but as the color plates in this book show, brighter color were not unusual. All of the colors found in these genre paintings can be created with dyes which were cheap and available at the time. Woad (blues), dyer's weld(yellows) and madder(reds) were the traditional dye plants of the 16th century rural classes, to whom these naturally-occurring weeds and plants were freely available. These three dyes had been in use throughout Europe for centuries and were supplemented by dozens of other natural dyestuffs. When combined with each other and with a variety of mordants, these dye plants alone could create a rainbow of different colors. logwood, indigo, madder, weld, etc.

Near the end of the 16th century, new and more exotic dye plants entered circulation in the northern European textile markets. Indigo, because of its stronger blue hue and relatively cheap cost, began to replace woad as the most common blue dye. Cutch, logwood and brasilwood were other dyes of foreign origin quickly becoming popular in Europe. Though fabric colors were not as bright as those in modern times, and on the whole faded more rapidly, the genre paintings of Aertsen, Beuckelaer and Breughel dispel the common modern myth that peasants and lower classes were strangers to bright colors and hues.

One of the more eye-catching aspects of lower-class Flemish dress is the use of color to be found in them. Gown, kirtle and sleeves are always of contrasting or different colors. Some combinations seen in paintings are an olive gown, red kirtle, black partlet and pink sleeves; a fawn-colored gown with a dark brown lining, bright red kirtle and golden-orange sleeves; a buff-colored gown with a red skirt lining, dark yellow sleeves and a blue apron; a red gown with dark brown sleeves; a blue gown with pink sleeves and apron; and a golden-orange gown with red sleeves, white apron and black partlet. This lends a festive aspect to even the plainest of gowns, and makes up, in part, for the lack of applied decoration (save for embroidery along the smock neckline) found in Flemish and German lower-class dress.

The widespread use of bright red in the clothing of kitchen servants and market vendors was something I had not expected to see. Many people believe that bright reds were worn exclusively by the upper classes in the mid-16th century, as such a brilliant red could only be obtained by using kermes, a very expensive foreign dyestuff unavailable to the lower classes and peasants. Yet this color is frequently shown in the paintings of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, and to a lesser extent in the peasant paintings of Breughel. Sleeves are often red, as are kirtles; red hose, red jackets and doublets, and red hats are worn by men. Further research and personal experience has proven that a red quite as bright as that seen in the paintings is attainable through the use of madder, an affordable dyestuff commonly available to the working classes, when the madder is used in sufficient quantities. This bright color can even be obtained on linen, when the appropriate mordanting techniques are used²⁴.

WORKING WOMENS' DRESS ABROAD

There is evident proof that the clothing described was widely worn by Flemish workingwomen, but what about the rest of Europe? There is little data from France, Italy or England that can compare with the treasure trove of pictorial evidence left by Aertsen and Beuckelaer, but careful examination produces a few useful pictures.

There is a sketch of London Gentlewomen, drawn by Flemish expatriate Lucas de Heere in 1570, which shows a countrywoman wearing a gown strikingly similar to those depicted in Flemish paintings: the bodice laces closed across an underdress, the sleeves are narrow and quite fitted, and a partlet with a ruff gathered to a collar is worn under a shoulder cape virtually identical to one shown in Beuckelaer's "Return from the Procession". The same

picture depicts women of a higher station wearing clothing quite different from that of the countrywoman, another confirmation that this type of dress was specific to the lower classes.

Jost Amman, in his *Frauentrachtenbuch*, depicts a French country maid of 1570 wearing a similar open-fronted gown. Her bodice has a squarer neck than those shown by Aertsen and Beuckelaer, but the outfit shares several points of similarity: The gown is sleeveless, laces in the front over a smock or undergown, and has a close-fitting bodice with a full skirt pleated to it. She is wearing a straw hat.

Two maps from the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, written circa 1570, shows a group of people from Cologne : one woman and a man dressed in typical upper class dress of the 1570s, and two women wearing open front-laced gowns.

An even more tantalizing link can be found in an even more unlikely place: Ireland. The late 16th century Irish “Shinrone Gown”, discovered in a bog and now kept at the Museum of Ireland is inexactlly dated, and was discovered more than a thousand miles from Flanders. In many ways, however, it resembles greatly the gowns worn during the same time period on the continent.

The Shinrone gown has an open-fronted bodice that meets at the front bottom, strikingly similar to the bodice worn by the woman to the right in Aertsen’s *Crepe-making Scene* (Plate 8) and a pleated skirt, with no open seams or edges, sewn all the way around the bottom of the bodice. This bodice design may have been used for the Flemish gowns mentioned above, the ones with open-fronted bodices but no corresponding front opening in the skirt.

The bodice is partially lined, but in a curious fashion: the fabric of the bodice is quite a bit longer than the waist, and is doubled up to the inside to the level of the bust and tacked down. The center front openings are turned towards the inside and whipstitched, and the bottom edge is already finished—and strengthened as well. With the heavy skirts attached to it, a finished edge that wouldn’t unravel or pull out of the seam would be a great help.

The front of the Shinrone bodice curves down to just under the bust, as several of the Flemish gowns portrayed do. In addition it has a flat-bottomed armscye, with back and front pieces forming an “arch” over the shoulder. In the only Flemish painting to clearly show the back armhole of a gown, it too has an arched shape—a flat bottom piece going around the side, sewn to a taller back piece which arches over the shoulder to meet the front. (It must be noted, however, that in Flemish paintings the front of the armscye appears to be curved in a more modern fashion.)

A contemporary traveler described Irish dress thusly:

“They have straight bodyes [bodices], and long waists, but theyre bodyes come no closer but to the middle of the ribbe, the rest is supplied with lacing, from the topp of their breasts, to the bottome of theyre plackett, the ordinary sort have only theyr smockes between, but the better sort have a silke scarfe about theyre neck, which they spread and pinne over theyre breasts. On the forepart of those bodyes they have a sett of broad silver buttons of goldsmiths worke sett round about.”²⁶

This description, aside from the mention of decorative buttons, very closely matches that of lower class Flemish gowns of the 1550s to 1570s. In some of Beuckelaer’s market scenes, a scarf is worn over the partlet and pinned together at the middle of the kirtle neckline.

If we broaden our timeframe and scope, several additional examples of front-lacing gowns can be found. The rich gowns of Saxony, painted by Lucas Cranach at the beginning of the 16th century, are one of the more well-known examples; the wedding gown of Maria of Hungary, dated to circa 1540 and currently in the Budapest National Museum, laces up the front as well. Another Hungarian festival dress of the early 17th century laces closed over a smock. A mid-15th century sketch of a woman shows her wearing a gown which comes to mid-rib, with lacing across the front.

Additional German and English portraits of the 1530s show the occasional bodice which does not close entirely but shows a placket or kirtle underneath.

A case can be made, therefore, that this fashion was not exclusive to Flanders during this time period but could be found, with regional variations, through most of Europe. More research into the origin and development of this style will help to shed more light on the subject. Fashions for lower-class women during the 16th century were often years out of date; when talking about rural peasant fashions, sometimes decades. Some of Holbein’s sketches of noblewomen, drawn during the 1530s show women wearing gowns which lace closed across kirtles in a fashion reminiscent of the later Flemish style; though these sketches are not conclusive proof of the gowns’ ancestry by any means, it is an area worth of further exploration.

WEARING A FLEMISH WORKINGWOMAN'S OUTFIT: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the conveniences of this style of 16th century dress is its modularity. With a pair of reversible sleeves, 2 kirtles, an open-fronted Flemish gown and two styles of partlet, you can have over a dozen different wardrobe combinations in a rainbow of colors.

It is also a good style for someone who doesn't have the time or expertise to create the entire ensemble from scratch, or for someone who isn't sure this style is for them. A lady can make a smock and gathered kirtle to start out with, and wear that as a summertime or casual dress on its own. Sleeves, partlet and gown can be added to this basic undergown at any time and in any order, until you have the full ensemble.

For re-enactors portraying several time periods, these garments have the added advantage of being useful in multiple eras and countries. The clothing worn by the lower classes was often years, sometimes decades behind the fashion. Often styles and garments survived in the peasantry long after they'd been discarded by fashionable courtiers and nobility.

The gathered kirtle, for example, is a generic garment which can be worn as a combination support bodice and petticoat, or "petticoat bodies", underneath most later 16th century middle-class clothing. In some cases it can replace a corset for a gentlewoman's or noblewomen's dress as well. If you cut it with a wide neck that curves slightly upward in the middle, wear it over a smock and pin sleeves to it, it can also serve as a simple early 16th century countrywoman's gown.

A gored kirtle with cap sleeves bears a striking resemblance to later 15th century and very early 16th century gowns. Pin your sleeves to the gored kirtle cap sleeves and wear the appropriate head veil, and you're wearing a creditably authentic late 15^h century kirtle.

If you list the layers of clothing worn by lower-class working women—smock, kirtle, gown and sleeves, partlet(s) and apron, much of it made of wool—one might think it would be bulky, confining and hot. Surprisingly enough, I found this to be false. The ensemble is in fact, relatively cool. I have worn smock, kirtle, gown and linen partlet during a 80°F summer's day and been warm, but not sweltering. The linen smock and kirtle wick away sweat and breathe wonderfully, and the open underarms and bodice front help to dissipate heat.

If it gets too hot, one can put the layered nature of the dress to good use: simply removing the woolen over-partlet can cool you down significantly. If you're still too hot, removing the woolen or linen sleeves can help even more and takes less than a minute to accomplish. Rolling up smock sleeves, pinning back or tucking up the skirts of your gown, and tucking the front of the kirtle into the bottom-most lace of your gown are all treatments seen in paintings of the time and can make the hottest day quite bearable. In fact, the linen partlet is a wonderful form of protection for "bodice burn", or that unpleasant sunburn which can occur when wearing low-necked gowns on a hot summer's day for long periods of time.

If the weather cools, the woolen gown and a woolen kirtle worn underneath, with woolen sleeves and a woolen partlet, can keep you comfortably snug during chilly fall afternoons. Stockings sewn of fulled wool help to keep the legs toasty, and the jacket sometimes worn over the gown can keep one warm in even lower temperatures. Flannel or woolen petticoats, a winter mainstay for women of the time, are an additional item which can be added in cold weather.

This outfit is also ideal for the "hard use" that working women put it to during the 16th century. The relatively short length of the smock, kirtle and skirt, combined with the decorative tucks and back-pinning of the outer skirt used by Flemish women, greatly reduce the possibility of tripping or tangling legs and other items in skirts. The rectangular apron, when tied firmly on, keeps the skirts from swinging about in front as well as protecting them from everyday grease and grime. The mobility of pinned-on sleeves and the lack of stiffened undergarments makes it possible to bend, stoop, twist, lift and reach without putting serious strain on any major part of the garment. For well-endowed women, the cut and fit of kirtle & gown provide comfortable and secure support without being constrictive.

This dress is also an ideal one for pregnant women or women experiencing any significant weight gain or loss. The gown open front can be laced tighter or looser as the body demands. The kirtle underneath can be laced more loosely in the back as well, where the lacings won't be seen.

The coiled hair and coif seen in many paintings is exceedingly practical as well as decorative. A caul keeps the hair neatly out of the way. I have worn a Flemish caul from sun-up to sun-down and not once had my hair or the headwear come loose.

NOTES

- ¹ The instructions for this smock were given with beginning to intermediate sewers in mind. Almost all extant smocks of the time have underarm gussets which are square rather than composed of two triangles sewn together diagonally, which complicates the sewing process considerably. Arnold, Janet. "Elizabethan and Jacobean smocks and shirts", *Waffen-und Kostumkunde*.
- ² Arnold, Janet. *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*
- ³ A stomacher is a piece of fabric worn under or over the front of a bodice to cover lacings, or to fill in the gap between the front edges. Existing references to stomachers in the 16th century indicate that they were pinned or fastened over the front of a bodice, rather than tucked under bodice lacings. Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*.
- ⁴ Fustian came to denote a cotton-linen blend, rather than linen-worsted, later in the 16th century. Linthicum, M.C., *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*
- ⁵ Anne Buck, "The Clothes of Thomasine Petre 1555-1559," *Costume* 24; Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*.
- ⁶ *ibid*;
- ⁷ Zander-Seidel, Jutta. *Textiler Hausrat* & Romme, Barbara. *Gegen den Strom*
- ⁸ The bodice of a petticoat bodies belonging to Eleanora de Toledo is shown in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion*.
- ⁹ Arnold, Janet. *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*.
- ¹⁰ I've found this to be much more comfortable than a boned corset worn underneath, although it can increase the wear and strain on the kirtle bodice, particularly if you are well-endowed.
- ¹¹ Amman, Jost. *Frauentrachtenbuch* and Ashelford, Jane. *A Visual History of Costume: The 16th Century*
- ¹² Zander-Seidel, Jutta. *Textiler Hausrat*.
- ¹³ Stern, Elizabeth. "Peckover and Gallyard, Two Sixteenth Century Norfolk Tailors", *Costume* 15
- ¹⁴ Arnold, Janet. *The Cut and Construction of Men and Women's Clothing, 1560-1620*.
- ¹⁵ Descriptions and illustrations of these pleats are given in Appendix IV.
- ¹⁶ This bodice, known as a *Brüstlein*, is referenced in inventories and depicted in some mid-16th century German pictures. Jutta Zander-Seidel, *Textiler Hausrat*.
- ¹⁷ The Shinrone gown and its similarities to the open-fronted Flemish gown are described in the section on "Working womens dress abroad".
- ¹⁸ Arnold, Janet. *The Cut and Construction of Men and Women's Clothing, 1560-1620*.
- ¹⁹ Ruffed partlets dated to circa 1600 are mentioned in "Clothing given to a Servant in Late 16th century Wales" by Anthony Ilid.
- ²⁰ Zander-Seidel, Jutta. *Textiler Hausrat*.
- ²¹ Entries for cloth hose are found in the Inventory of Henry VIII and other middle class inventories of the mid-16th century, such as that of Thomasine Petre and German inventories of the time.
- ²² Ashelford, Jane. *A Visual History of Costume: The 16th Century*.
- ²³ Anne Buck, "The Clothes of Thomasine Petre 1555-1559," *Costume* 24
- ²⁴ I was able to examine samples of bright red linen obtained with a triple alum-tannin-alum mordanting techniques, and triple the usual amount of madder.
- ²⁵ Dunleavy, Mairead. *Dress in Ireland*

A PPENDIX I:

Sources, Pictography and Bibliography

Pictography:

Most of these pictures can be found in the Keith Moxey's *Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer and Secular Painting during the Reformation*, and Elizabeth Pied's *Painting and the Marketplace in Early Modern Antwerp*. (both listed in the Bibliography).

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A PPENDIX II: MAKING A BODICE PATTERN

I based this pattern on the pattern of the petticoat bodies of Eleanora of Toledo and the gown worn over them, shown in Janet Arnold's book *Patterns of Fashion: The Cut and Construction of Men and Womens dress 1560-1620*.

Although commercial Elizabethan patterns are available an Elizabethan bodice is simple enough to make that creating a custom pattern is cheaper and less of a hassle. I came up with the pattern on Page 59, and have used it to make an Elizabethan corset, a Tudor kirtle, or an Elizabethan gown.

Take your measurements.

- Waist measurement
- Bust measurement
- Waist-to-underarm measurement
- The front length of the intended bodice, from the top center front to the bottom point (A good average front length is 12-14 inches.)

Draw the Bodice Body Pattern.

On a piece of large paper—newsprint, a cut-open grocery bag, etc.—take a ruler and pen, and mark out the following:

1. Take the front length measurement, and draw a vertical line of that length down the right

side of the piece of paper.

2. Take your bust measurement. Subtract two inches from it, and divide the resulting measurement in half. Draw a horizontal line of this length from the top of the front measurement out to the left.

3. Locate the midpoint of this horizontal line. Measure two inches to the left, and measure down from there:

- 1 inch if you are a size A cup
- 1.5 inches if you are a size B cup
- 2 inches if you are a size C cup
- 2.5 inches if you are a size D cup
- 3 inches if you are DD or larger

4. Mark this point A. Take that same measurement of one, two or three inches, and measure down that far from the left end of the horizontal line. Label this point B. Then measure from the front center out leftwards to $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of the horizontal line, and mark this point C.

5. Draw a gently curving line to connect points C, A, and B. This is the top of your corset.

6. Measure down from point A the length of the underarm to waist measurement. Mark this point, and draw a horizontal line all the way across the paper.

7. Take your waist measurement, subtract two inches, and divide the resulting measurement in half. Measure out this far to the left along the waistline, mark, and measure down one inch. Label this point D. Connect D and B to form the back center of your corset.

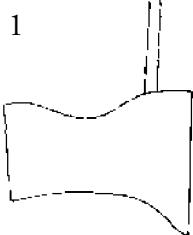
8. Divide the waist line in half, and mark it point E. Divide each half of the line in half again, and mark these points F (to the left of E) and G (to the right of E).

9. Draw a curving line from the bottom front center of the corset to point G. Make sure the curve at the bottom is wide enough to fit the point of the busk.

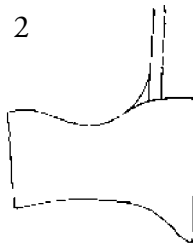
10. Measure up from point E one inch, and mark it. Draw a gentle curve from Points G, to this mark, back down to point F, and then from F to D. This finishes the body pattern.

If you stop at this point you have—surprise—a pattern for an Elizabethan corset! Once you have this corset pattern, you can easily alter it to make a bodice suitable for most of the 16th century. This bodice can be worn over your corset, or it can be worn without a corset underneath to create an “Elizabethan” silhouette appropriate to middle or lower class women.

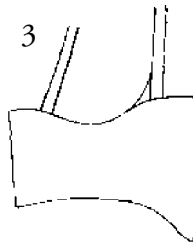
Making a Bodice pattern from this corset pattern



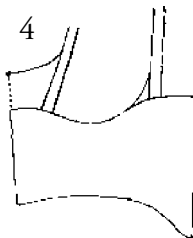
To begin with, take this corset pattern you have created. If you have already made a corset from this pattern and altered it so that it fits you precisely, so much the better.



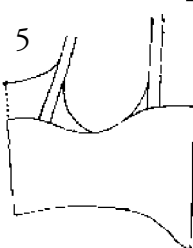
1. Measure out four inches from the center front, and draw a vertical line up several inches (8 or so.) If you have already made a corset from this pattern, put it on and measure the distance between the front top of the corset and the top of your shoulder and make the strap this long. Draw another vertical line 1.5 inches to the left of this line; this will be the front “strap” of your bodice.



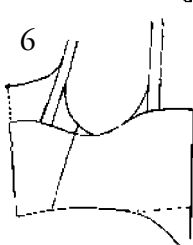
2. Draw a curving line connecting the side edge of the strap to the top of your bodice pattern.



3. Now, starting about three inches to the right of the center back of the pattern, draw a line slanting up and to the right about 10 inches long. If you have already made a corset from this pattern, put it on and measure the distance between the top back of the corset and the top of your shoulder and make the strap this long. Draw another one 1.5 inches to the right of the first line; this is your back shoulder strap.



4. Extend the center back line of the pattern up four inches. Connect this extended back line with the top of your back strap, as the diagram to the left illustrates.

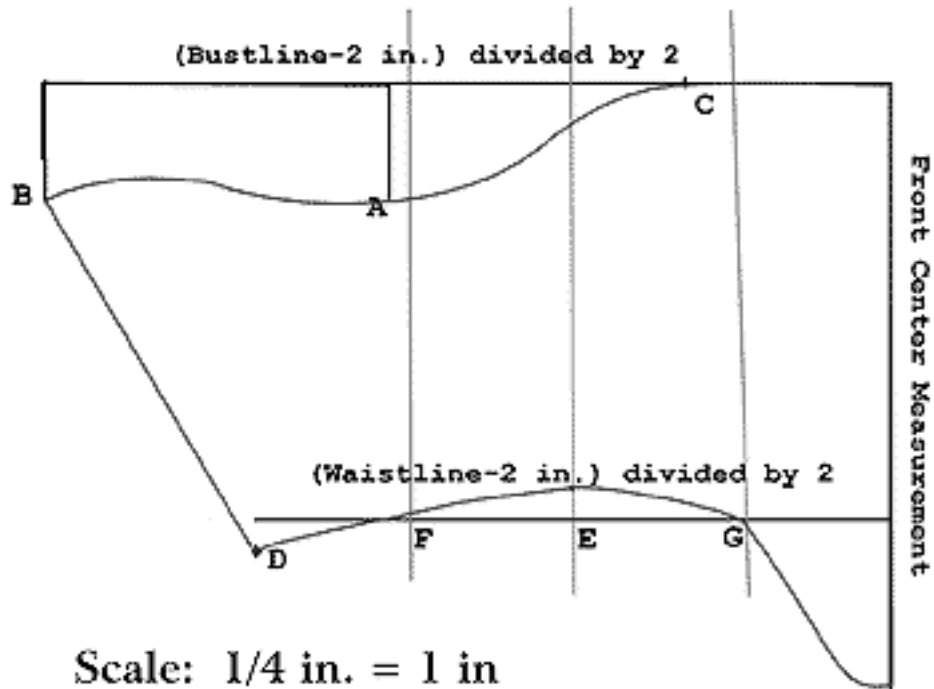


5. As you did for the front strap, draw a curving line connecting the side edge of the back strap to the top of your pattern. This will create the armhole of your bodice.

6. Draw a diagonal line from the center of the back side of your armhole to the bottom of the pattern, about 4 inches away from the center back. If you want the front to go straight across rather than dipping down to a point (For earlier Tudor and lower class bodices, draw the waistline you want in at this point.

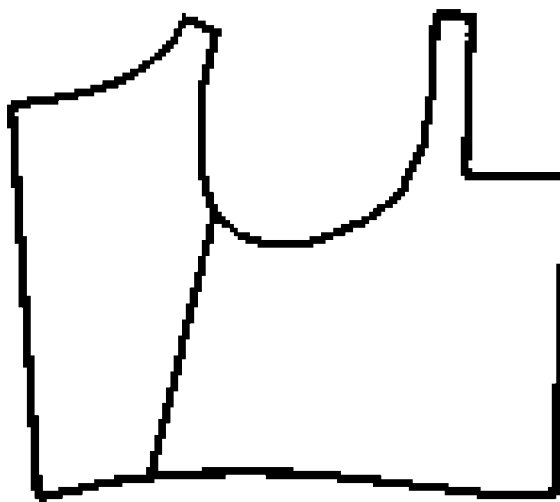
Once you’ve cleaned up all the drafting lines, your bodice pattern will look somewhat like the picture to the right. Cut along the diagonal line to make this a two-piece bodice pattern. And that’s it! You now have your own period Elizabethan bodice pattern.

Corset pattern



Scale: $1/4 \text{ in.} = 1 \text{ in}$

Finished bodice pattern



Fitting the Bodice Pattern

Of course, once you have a pattern you need to fit it to yourself. The bodice pattern instructions above aren't exceedingly precise; you may need to alter the armhole, shorten or lengthen the sides, and you will also need to find out how long the straps should be and whether the neckline of this bodice is too wide or narrow for your taste.

Fitting can be quite complicated, but this pattern is very simple and even if you've never fit a bodice or any other garment before, you can get a quite respectably fitting bodice. To do this, take a heavy fabric—canvas, poplin, drill or something similar. Place the front piece of your bodice fabric on the fold, trace around the pattern, and cut out the fabric 1/2 an inch away from the traced edge of the pattern. Then place the back piece of your pattern on another piece of folded fabric, trace around it, and cut it out half an inch outside the traced lines.

Sew the pieces together along one side back seam, and pin the shoulder straps together. Then try it on. If you have an elizabethan corset, put the corset on first and try the bodice on over it. Have a friend safety-pin the other diagonal side back seam closed. Pull the shoulder straps tight, and safety-pin them together at the top of your shoulders. (You may have to perform the “elizabethan lift” during this pinning procedure, to elevate the bosom and achieve a correct 16th century silhouette.)

Now check the following:

- Is the bodice too loose? It should fit quite snugly, not allowing any shifting beneath it. If it is too loose, pinch the excess in equally on both side back seams and pin it until it fits. Use a pen to draw a line along these pins.
- Does the armhole dig into your arm? If so, take scissors and carefully snip cuts from the edge of the fabric in until it feels right. Draw the new armhole line with your pen.
- Is the length of the bodice correct? If it is too long, draw a line on the sloper to the place where you want the waistline to be. If it is too short, measure from the edge of the drawn pattern line down to where you want the waistline to be, and write this measurement with a pen on the bottom edge of your bodice.
- Does the center top back gap? Pinch the fabric at the top and pin it together, working your way down until the back piece conforms smoothly to your body. Draw a line with a pen along this new pinned line.
- Are the straps too far apart or too close together? If you don't like the placement of the straps, mark on the bodice where you would like the straps to be.
- Is the front neckline too low or too high? Again, either mark where you would like the neckline to be, or write the measurement on the top front of the kirtle.

This may sound like a lot of work, but with the help of a good friend it will only take 10 to 15 minutes. All the work you do now guarantees that the final result will fit like a second skin.

Now take the bodice off. Rip the back side seams apart, trim the shoulder straps to the point you marked with a pen. Cut along the pattern lines of the pattern, making all alterations specified the pen marks on the bodice—cut out the armhole a little wider, cut along the curved top back seam, trim the front neckline down a little, etc.

Lay your bodice pattern pieces on top of the original paper pattern pieces, and transfer all alterations to the paper. Here is where you would cut shoulder straps (on the paper pattern) and move them toward or away from the center front; here also is where you would add paper to the bottom of the pattern to lengthen the waistline.

Once you have this bodice pattern, you can use it to make an Elizabethan or tudor gown . You can also place it on top of commercial Elizabethan bodice patterns, to make sure that they will fit you like they should.

A PPENDIX III: SOURCES FOR FABRIC

Here is a listing of good sources for period and period-looking fabric at good prices. The URLs and email addresses listed for some sources are current as of 8/1/2000.

Burnley & Trowbridge

108 Druid Drive, Williamsburg, VA 23185

phone: 757-253-1644 fax: 757-253-9120

email: jasburn@aol.com

CATALOG AND SWATCHES: \$4.00

This company caters to the re-enactment market: they have dozens of wools of all weights and colors, linens, linen-wool and linen-cotton blends, and several hard-to-find period fabrics such as period fustian. They also sell patterns and books related to costuming and textiles. This is my favorite source for good-quality wools.

Dharma Trading Co.

PO Box 150916, San Rafael, CA 94915

Phone: 1-800-542-5227 or (415) 456-7657

Email: catalog@dharmatrading.com

http://www.dharmatrading.com/indexpage_table.html

White & natural colored silk & cotton, all weights, at very low prices. Discounts for bolt & bulk purchases.

The Fabric Store

<http://www.fabrics-store.com/>

An online web site which sells a wide range of fabrics at very good prices. They have a limited range of wool, and sell very good quality, medium-to-heavy weight 100% linen in a wide variety of colors and at a very good price. This is my favorite source for medium to heavyweight linen.

G Street Fabrics

11854 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland 20852

Phone: 301-231-8998

5077 Westfields Blvd., Centreville, Virginia 20120

Phone: 703-818-8090

6250 Seven Corners Center, Falls Church, Virginia 22044

Phone: 703-241-1700

Email: customerservice@gstreetfabrics.com

<http://www.gstreetfabrics.com/>

G Street Fabrics is well known as a purveyor of a huge assortment of rare, hard-to-find and specialty fabrics. They are now accessible through their web site listed above. The prices are on the whole slightly above average, but they have a very large selection of wools available on their web site: wool tweeds, flannels, gabardines, plaids and herringbones. They often have some wools available inexpensively.

Linen Web

<http://www.linenweb.com>

Another online fabric site devoted to linen. They don't have as wide a variety of colors as the Fabric Club, but have the cheapest prices for linen. My favorite source for white linen & lightweight linen.

Phoenix Textiles

814-E Livingston Ct.

Marietta, GA 30067

1-888-455-2940

<http://www.phoenixtextiles.com/>

An online site, devoted to more modern fabrics but occasionally with some very good deals. If you're looking for \$3 a yard velveteen, \$2-a-yard wool and \$5-a-yard linen, this is the place to visit. Their velveteen is a very nice quality.

Rupert, Gibbon and Spider

PO Box 425, Healdsburg, CA 95448

1-800-442-0455

nature@microweb.com

<http://www.jacquardproducts.com/>

They manufacture over 85 kinds of silk and are, hands down, the cheapest source for silk fabrics. They only sell black and white silks, however.)

Shama Imports, Inc.

P.O. Box 2900, Farmington Hills, MI 48333

(248)478-7740

shama@mich.com

<http://www.mich.com/~mmanas/index.htm>

This company sells hand-embroidered crewel fabrics straight from India, in a number of period Elizabethan & Jacobean patterns. The fabrics are rather expensive, but worth every penny.

Silk Road Fabrics

3910 N. Lamar Blvd., Austin, TX 78756
(512) 302-0844
Webmistress@srfabrics.com
<http://www.srfabrics.com>

They have a very broad selection of wools and linen as well as silk fabrics. Their prices are average.

Textile Reproductions

Box 48, West Chesterfield, MA 01084
(413) 296-4437

Though they specialize in 18th and 19th century fabrics, they do have unusual and hard to find silk and linen fabrics. They also have linen, worsted and specialty ribbons & tapes.

Thai Silks

242 State Street, Los Altos, CA 94022
1-800-722-SILK
<http://www.thaisilks.com/>

This is THE source for silk fabrics of any kind. For a deposit you can get samples of every kind of silk they have (@400 types). If you order within a certain time, you'll get the deposit back. This is my best mailorder source for rare silk fabrics, including silk-wool and silk-linen blends, silk satins and taffetas in a rainbow of colors, and metallic cloth of gold & silver.

Timeless Textiles

110 Mill St. Suite #9, Middletown, PA 17057
Phone: (717)-930-0928
Email: info@timelesstextiles.com
<http://www.timelesstextiles.com>

Specializes in natural fabrics and historical cloth and patterns for re-creationists. Their wool & linen selection is slightly less broad than Burnley & Trowbridge and costs slightly more, but they have a large selection of exquisite brocades. My favorite source for brocade fabrics.

Vintage Textiles

P.O. Box 1504, Soquel, CA 95073
Phone: 831-476-9007 / 831-476-1102
<http://www.vintagetextiles.com/>

Direct importers of antique fabrics from around the world, including silk damasks, brocades and velvets from Italy, France, Belgium, Germany. Wholesale and Retail. Posh, pricey, high-end and beautiful.



HARVEST TIME (DETAIL)
BY PIETER AERTSEN



The Well Dress'd Peasant: 16th Century Flemish Workingwomen's Clothing

by Drea Leed

An in depth study of 16th Century Flemish working women's garments as depicted in the genre paintings of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer gave author and award winning costumer Drea Leed plenty to go on for her recreations of the kirtles, petticoat bodies and partlets described in this book.

Drawing on her years of experience, and the research of other costume historians, including the eminent Janet Arnold, Drea describes the painted garments as she sees them, and provides patterns and guidance for their reconstruction.

Novice costumers will appreciate the simplified smock constriction techniques and the helpful comments offered throughout the book.

Experienced costumers will recognize some of the references quoted, but will quickly add the log list of new sources to their own research efforts.

The Well Dress'd Peasant is sure quickly to get dog eared with use and is an excellent addition to any costumer's bookshelf.

