

Documentation: Men's Doublet

The doublet was a close-fitting garment worn over the shirt and under a gown, houppeland, or other outer layer of clothing. The doublet was usually padded, had a low collar, and usually had sleeves. It was worn in all parts of Western Europe, although details of sleeves, skirts, and collars may vary from region to region. Among its purposes were to give the body the fashionable shape of the time, provide extra warmth, and to support the hose.¹

Relevance to Theme:

Figure 1, an illumination from the *Livre des Tournois* of about 1450² shows similar doublets worn under sleeveless gowns by participants at a tourney. It is not unlikely that similar doublets were worn under the armor as well.

History:

Time Period: 1450-1460 (This style was worn through the 1470s among the fashionable, and even later by the lower and middle classes).

Place of Origin: Franco-Burgundian

Social Class of Wearer: upper-middle class or upper class (for everyday wear)

Materials:

The outer layer and the lining were made from 100% linen. The inner linings were 100% cotton duck and the padding was 100% cotton batting. The sewing thread was commercially-available mercerized cotton-covered polyester. The eyelets were sewn with commercially-available mercerized cotton-covered polyester buttonhole twist or DMC cotton floss. This doublet was made for summer wear and I wanted a fabric that was cool, would wick moisture away from the body, and was used in period. Linen met those qualifications. Cotton was also used, but was rare.

Jacqueline Herald cites that Italian doublets could be made from elegant fabrics such as silk brocades velvet or from simple linen.³ Information about the materials used to made doublets in Burgundy or France is sparse. Margaret Scott notes that many doublets worn by the nobility in the 1470s were made of silk or velvet, and there is also mention of fine worsted (wool) being used as well.⁴ Spanish doublets were made from

¹ Margaret Scott, *Late Gothic Europe, 1400-1500*, The History of Dress Series (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc., 1980), 80; Jacqueline Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400-1500*, History of Dress Series (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc., 1981), 53 and 216; Ruth M. Anderson, *Hispanic Costume: 1480-1530* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1979), 53-63; and François Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., n.d.), 196.

² The *Livre des Tournois* was produced for and, in part, by King René of Anjou. This particular scene shows the melee.

³ Herald, 53, 245 and 247. Page 245 cites an inventory of 1449 that lists six farsettos (doublets) made of linen and one of velvet. Page 247 cites a letter of 1475 that requests fabric for a zupone (a northern Italian name for a doublet) including velvet, brocade, and silk satin.

⁴ Scott, *Late Gothic Europe, 1400-1500*, 176 and Margaret Scott, *A Visual History of Costume: The*

silks, woolens or fustian (a linen-cotton blend).⁵ Although I could not find specific references to linen or linen-blend doublets in France or Burgundy, the presence of linen or linen-blend doublets in Spain and Italy, the close cultural ties that Spain had with Burgundy, and the ample availability of linen fabrics in France and Burgundy suggest that linen or linen-blend doublets were likely to have been made there.

Construction

The pattern, shown in **Figure 2**, was derived from the study of a number of doublets in mid-fifteenth century paintings (see note 8) and from a pattern depicted by Joan Evans in her *Dress in Medieval France*.⁶ This pattern consists of two fronts shaped to give the rounded, pigeon-breasted shape popular at this time, two backs, a four-part collar that is cut into the deep U-shape often found in the 15th-century, and four skirt sections. The sleeves consist of a tight-fitting full-length sleeve, open and laced at the elbow, with a heavily-padded upper-sleeve (puff) at the shoulder. This padded upper sleeve provided and supported the broad shoulders found in contemporary gowns. A doublet of similar construction can be found in an illumination from the *Histoire de Renaud de Montauban* of 1462 illuminated by Loyset Liédet (**Figure 3**). A gown following the same construction except that it has a pleated skirt and is worn over a doublet can be found in the same illumination. In fact, the doublet exhibited today was made to be worn with a gown similar to that worn by the central figure in this illustration.

The doublet was constructed by first cutting the inner lining pieces and padding by hand the batting in such a manner as to create the pigeon-breasted shape seen in the illustrations and to correct some of the posture problems of the wearer (he is sway-backed, and extra padding was needed to fill in the upper chest and lower back). The collar pieces and collar linings were sewn to the corresponding body pieces. The inner-linings, the lining, and the outer sections of the body were sewn together as if they were separate garments and the inner lining attached to the lining. This grouping was then treated as one piece. The outer sections were then attached to the lining along the neck and front leaving the bottom and armholes unsewn.

The undersleeve and its lining were sewn together. The upper sleeve was pleated to the undersleeve and padding placed inside. The sleeves were then sewn to the bodice outer layer. On the inside, the lining is turned in over the seam allowances, and stitched down by hand concealing all raw edges. The outer layer, the lining, and the inner lining of the skirts were treated in the same manner as the bodice. Each layer was constructed

Fourteenth & Fifteenth Centuries, (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1986), 15.

⁵ Anderson, 55.

⁶ Joan Evans, *Dress in Medieval France*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1952), 30 and 48. On these two pages, she shows drawings of the cutting diagrams of two pourpoints. One of the drawings on page 30 is captioned as the pourpoint belonging to Charles of Blois. The cut of the pourpoint attributed as belonging to Charles of Blois, has been documented in many other sources and its cutting diagram is generally depicted as the one she shows on page 48. The doublet pattern on page 30 is typical of the doublets shown in illustrations from the mid-1400s. It is likely that the publisher inadvertently switched the drawings and the mistake was not caught before publication.

separately, then the lining and inner linings were attached as if one layer, then this group in turn was attached to the outer layer and turned.

The skirts were attached to the outer layer of the bodice, with the lining turned in over the seam allowances and stitched by hand to conceal all raw edges. The eyelets were sewn along the front for closing the garment and along the bottom edge to attach the hose. These were made by making a hole through all layers and satin-stitching around the hole opening. A survey of archaeological finds at the Museum of London had one example from this period with eyelet holes. These eyelet holes were buttonhole-stitched, but I have found through experience that buttonhole-stitched eyelets are not as durable as satin-stitched eyelets, so I used satin-stitched eyelets.⁷

Internal seams were machine stitched. All pad-stitching, eyelet stitching, and other exposed stitching were done by hand.

Design

The desired male silhouette of this period in Northern Europe included a rounded pigeon-breasted front, a flat back, broad shoulders, narrow waist and hips. From the front, the outline would be of an inverted triangle with the shoulders as the base and the apex at the feet topped by a smaller triangle formed by the head and headdress. The doublet at this time was padded to produce the basis for this shape by having heavily-padded upper sleeves to broaden the shoulder, padding to exaggerate the shoulder and chest area, little or no padding near the waist and hips (but heavy interlining and proper cut would compress this area). This doublet, when worn produces such a shape.

Details of collar and sleeve construction distinguish Northern European doublets from Italian doublets of the same time.⁸ These differences are illustrated in **Figure 4**. Northern European doublets have collars that are relatively high and curve away from the base of the throat. These collars rarely meet in front. Italian collars rise straight up in front and meet or overlap when the doublet is closed. The collar of this doublet follows the Northern European design, but is not as high as those seen in illuminations at the

⁷ Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing c. 1150-1450, Medieval Finds from Excavations in London: 4* (London: Her Majesty's Stationers Office, 1992), 164.

⁸ For examples of Italian doublets, see: Francesco del Cossa, *The Triumph of Venus*, fresco, ca. 1470, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, Italy; Master of the Barberini Panel, *The Birth of the Virgin*, fresco, mid-15th century, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; Benozzo Gozzoli, *Journey of the Magi*, fresco, ca. 1459, Palazzo Medici-Ricardi, Florence; Piero della Francesca, *The Victory of Heraclius*, ca. 1452-66, Church of San Francisco, Arezzo, Italy; Domenico Ghirlandaio, *A Study for David*, drawing, as reproduced in Herald, figure 24, p. 53. Any good art book on this period will render numerous examples.

For examples of Franco-Burgundian doublets, see: Jean Fouquet, "Trial of the Duc d'Alençon," illumination from *Lit de justice de Vendôme*, ca. 1460, Cod. Gall 6, f. 2v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich; Loyset Liédet, "Bertha, Duchess of Burgundy Supervising the Building of the Church of the Magdalene, Vezelay," ca. 1465, illumination from *L'histoire de Charles Martel*, ms 6, f. 554v, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels; Anon., *Louis of Savoy*, drawing, c. 1470; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands; Maître François, "Circle of the Virtuous and the Vicious," illumination from *City of God*, ms. fr. 18, f. 3v; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; various paintings by Rogier van der Weyden, Hans Memlinc, and Petrus Christus; and the aforementioned sources.

request of the wearer. Northern European collar backs can have a U- or V-shape, although the V-shaped back seems more common. Italian collar backs are usually U-shaped.

Mid-fifteenth century upper-class doublet sleeves from Northern Europe have a short, heavily-padded upper sleeve. The Italian silhouette of this period does not exaggerate the shoulder area as much, so the upper sleeves of an Italian doublet has lighter padding or no padding. The upper sleeve of a Northern European doublet extends only to the mid-upper arm; the upper sleeve of an Italian doublet extends almost to, but not covering, the elbow. Both Northern European and Italian doublets typically have sleeves that open from wrist to over elbow and is fastened with laces or buttons. This doublet has sleeves open from the wrist to over the elbow and is fastened in three places with laces, allowing the sleeve to puff out between fastenings.

Function

The primary functions of the doublet are to:

- give a fashionable shape by padding and constriction of the body,
- provide warmth through the use of padding, inner linings, and warm fabrics,
- and
- support the hose by providing eyelets or ties to which the hose is tied.

To appear wearing only a doublet with shirt, hose, and drawers, connoted informal status or that that person was performing acts of physical exertion, whether heavy manual labor or sports. In the latter case, the informal status is assumed. A man was not considered formally or properly dressed unless he wore at least three body layers: 1) the shirt and drawers, 2) the doublet, and 3) the gown or its equivalent. These were usually the minimal requirements for a person's appearance in public -- unless that person was participating in sports or labor. A man may wear just the two inner layers in private, informal situations, such as being at home with family and friends.⁹ This basic principal held true throughout Western Europe.

A doublet may also connote social status through the type of material used. Some sumptuary laws tried to dictate what kinds of doublets persons of particular social standings may wear, but these were not often enforced and often transgressed.

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⁹ Herald, 53.

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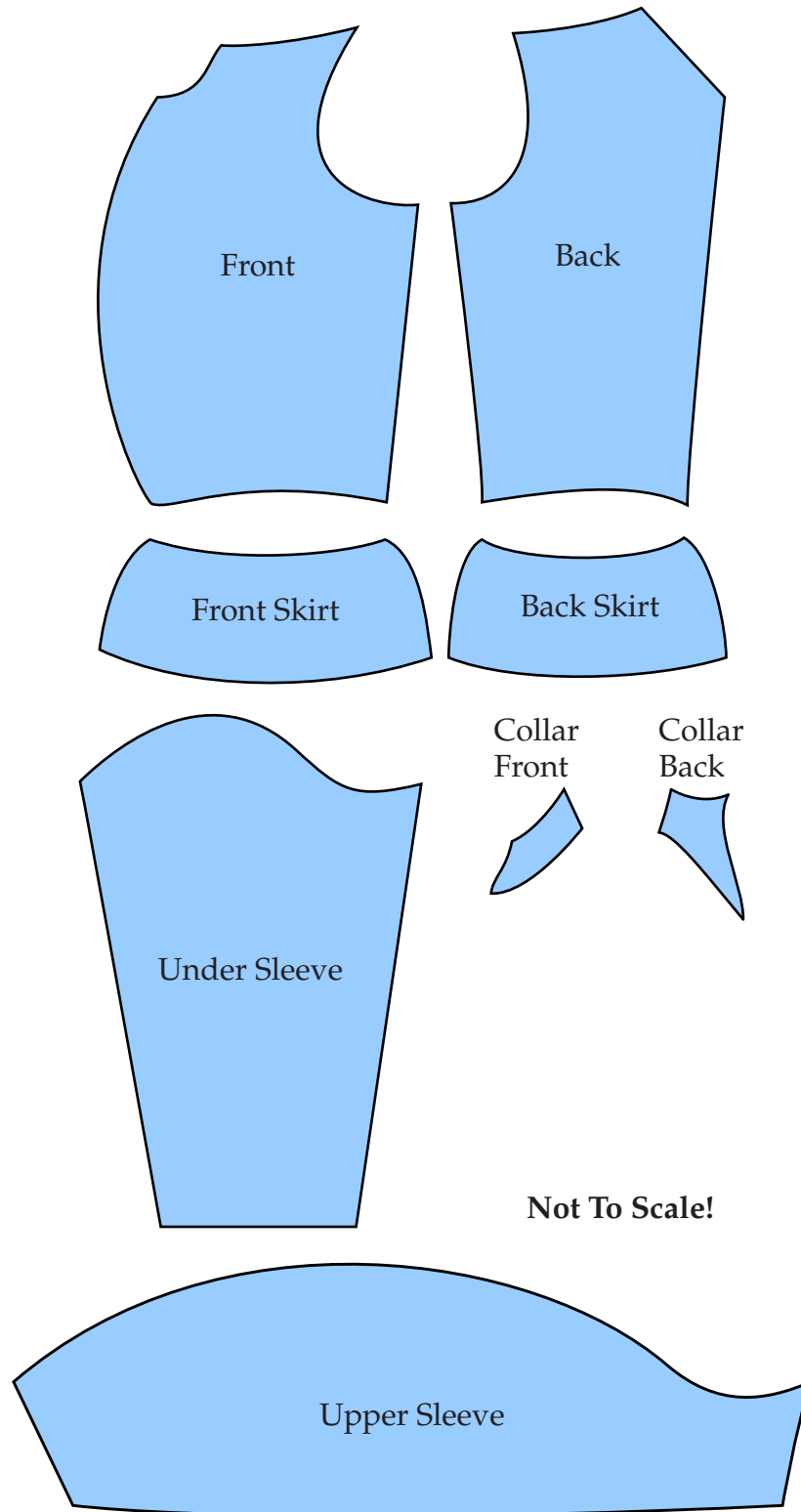
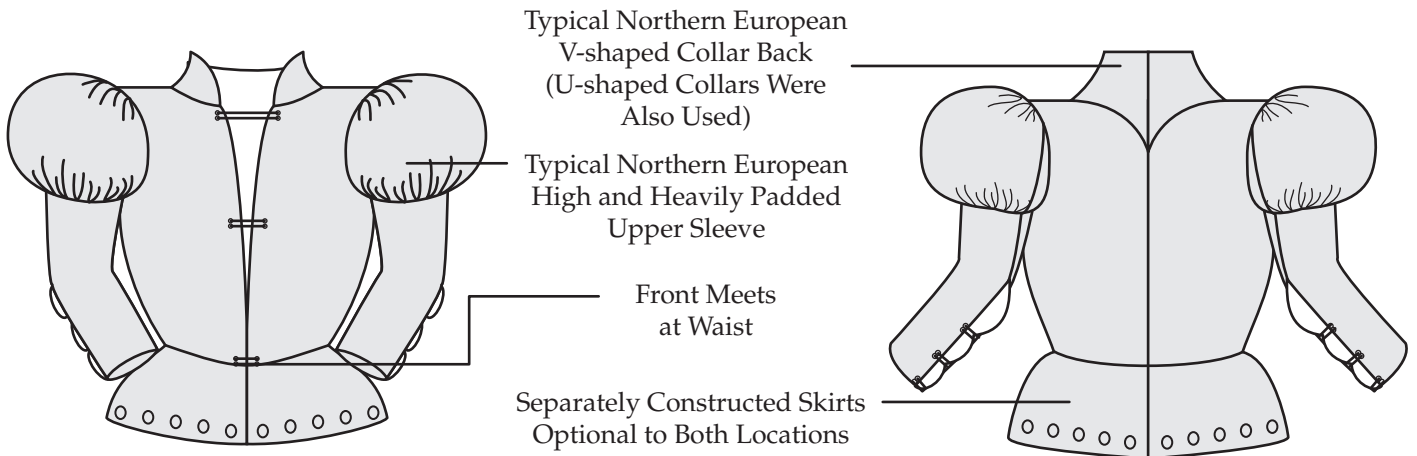
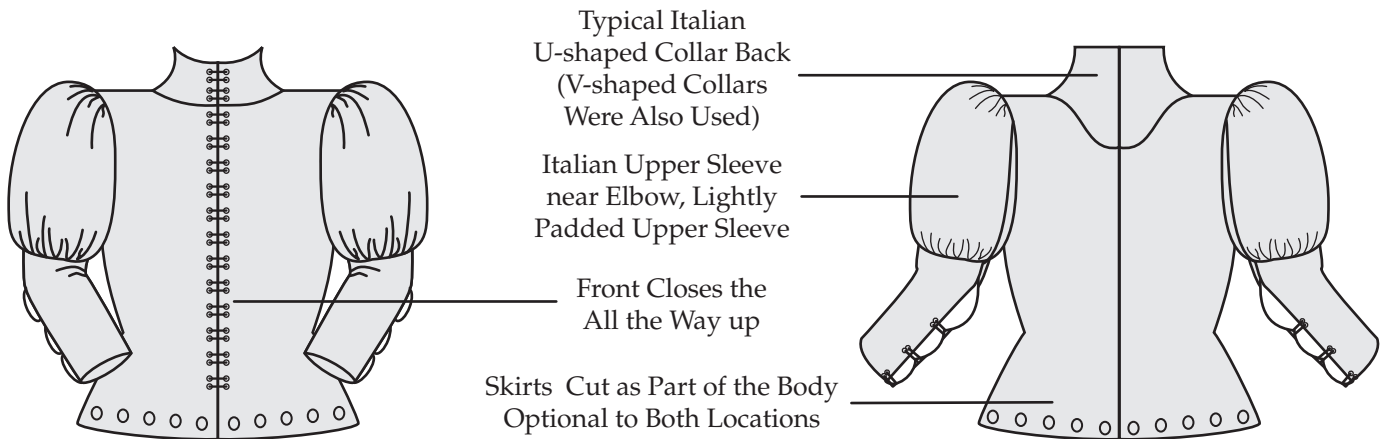


Figure 2. Early to Mid-15th Century Doublet with V-neck Collar, Short Upper Sleeve and Skirts Cut Separate from Body.

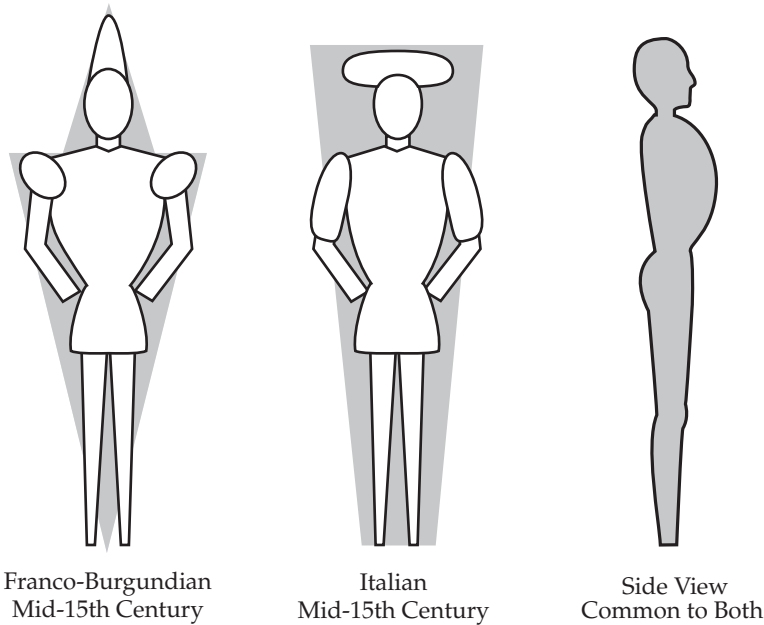
Frequently-found Features of Northern European and Italian Doublets



Typical Northern European Doublet



Typical Italian Doublet



Men's Silhouettes