

Summary and Conclusions

This thesis used visual documentation from the fifteenth and early sixteenth-century to produce an aggregate description of the visual characteristics of Western European men's headdress from 1400 to 1519. 791 examples of men's headdress were selected for form analysis, and each example was subjected to classification in thirteen categories. Nine of the categories of physical characteristics were analyzed in terms of decade and place of origin. Each class in another category, headdress type, was further analyzed in terms of the remaining ten categories over time and by place of origin. Whenever possible and appropriate, statistical analysis techniques were applied to test if there were significant variations over time or by place of origin.

What follows are a summary of the overall trends in European society, aesthetics, and men's headdress from 1400

to 1519, and some comments on the methodology and its application.

Men's Headdress in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century

The greatest common bond among Europeans during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century was Christianity. Social hierarchy and social customs and symbols were rooted in and supported by the Christian faith and the institution of the Christian Church. During this period, the nature of spirituality was changing. These changes were based on a renewed emphasis on humanity and human achievement. This focus on humanity was not a rejection of the spiritual, but a transformation of the spiritual from the organized corporate religious practice into more

individual, personal practice. At the same time, increasing literacy among the lower orders allowed more of the lay population to participate directly in spirituality through the ability to read the scriptures and the meditation exercises for themselves. Expanding literacy and the transformation of the spiritual, among other factors, provided a ground for questioning the purposes and structure of the Church, and the nature of the social hierarchy, and an increased use of and appreciation for one's vernacular language and vernacular culture. Although these changes were to bring a divergence of cultural forms, national languages, and national institutions, most of the fifteenth-century culture was remarkably homogenous. The educational curriculum was similar throughout Western Europe. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, artisans travelled throughout Europe acquiring and disseminating techniques and aesthetic ideals over a broad geographic area.

Aesthetics, artistic practices, and the form of material objects used reflected these divergences, changes, and similarities in society. The two major artistic styles or aesthetics of this period were the "international" Gothic (sometimes called "Flamboyant" Gothic) and the Renaissance. These two styles are often contrasted with the Gothic characterized by complex outlines and curvilinear forms and shapes, a high degree of surface ornamentation, asymmetrical balance, and a strong

preference for soaring height; and the Renaissance being characterized by simple, easily-defined outlines, the use of angular forms, a low degree of surface ornamentation, symmetrical balance, and an emphasis on the horizontal.

The Renaissance aesthetic became dominant all over Europe by the end of the sixteenth century. During the fifteenth century, the Renaissance aesthetic was gradually adopted throughout northern Italy. Although some Italian artists remained essentially Gothic, these artists incorporated classical elements and concepts of mathematical perspective into their works. The Renaissance aesthetic had only started to influence the arts in Northern Europe by the end of the century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, but there is evidence that the Gothic style itself was evolving in a direction of simplicity of line and ornament and of a greater angularity of line, while retaining the ideals of height.

The overall homogeneity of European culture was supported by this study. There was little geographic diversity of headdress. Although each of the headdress types had geographic areas in which it was more likely to be found, there were examples of each headdress type in every place of origin. No area produced a headdress type that was exclusive, or nearly exclusive, to it. In most of the individual characteristics studied, usually only one or two geographic regions had statistically significant variations from the rest of the

geographic areas. Three areas diverged more often than others: Italy, the Holy Roman Empire, and the British Islands. The British Islands were physically isolated from the rest of Europe and did not have centers of major cultural influence. The Holy Roman Empire was also culturally isolated from the mainstream. Italy, as we have seen, was the home of the Renaissance aesthetic.

The characteristics of Italian men's headdress that did deviate did tend to follow general characteristics of the Renaissance aesthetic. Italian men's headdress had a lower percentage of decoration, less complex brim types, was less likely to be combined with other headdress, and tended to be somewhat shorter than other European headdress. By contrast, the Holy Roman Empire seemed to take Gothic ideals to the extreme, with the exception of height. Headdresses from the Holy Roman Empire tended to be shorter and wider than overall European headdress.

Given the association of ornateness and complex outlines with the Gothic and unadorned, simple lines with the Renaissance, it would be expected that European headdress would have more visual complexity through most of the fifteenth century, and that visual complexity would diminish with the spread of the Renaissance aesthetic from Italy into the north. Brim type, percentage of decoration, and the ratio of decoration type per decorated headdress were used to determine

the degree of visual complexity. In general, it was found that headdress tends to be more visually complex from the beginning of the study period, from 1400 to 1449 and during the last two decades, 1500 to 1519, while visual simplicity was preferred from 1450 to 1499. The high complexity found in the first half of the century was as expected, but the low complexity found in the middle of the century to the end was contrary to the Gothic preference for intricate shapes. Yet evidence of other artifacts from Northern Europe, and the fact that the preference for height remains in the headdress does not indicate that the Gothic style has been abandoned. Also there was increasing visual complexity at the time that Renaissance ideals were spreading throughout the north that was contrary to the Renaissance ideals as well. The reasons for these apparent contradictions provide a rich area for further research.

The emphasis on height or width in headdress did generally agree with expectations based on Gothic or Renaissance aesthetics. At the beginning of the fifteenth century headdresses were both tall and wide. About 1450, the width of headdress was abruptly reduced producing a headdress that was not only tall, but also very slender, which served to emphasize the tallness. After 1490, both height declined and the width increased. Headdresses were relatively short and wide. The ratio of height to width at the

beginning of the fifteenth century and at the end of the study period were roughly the same, but headdresses from 1490 to 1519 were much reduced in size relative to the size of the head.

Although asymmetrical balance was associated of the Gothic and symmetrical balance was associated with the Renaissance, the opposite trend appears in headdress. Although symmetrically-positioned headdress was preferred throughout the study period, there was an increasing trend to asymmetrical positions on the head during the last twenty years of the study period just as a trend toward greater symmetry as the Renaissance aesthetic spread would be expected.

Over time, the characteristics of headdress seemed to change two times, creating three periods. In the first period, 1400 to about 1449, there was an established feature or set of features. About 1450, this feature or set was replaced with another, often contrasting, feature or set. Again, about 1490, the first feature reasserts itself, or yet a third features replaces the second. In addition to brim type complexity, percentage of decoration, and aspect ratio, this temporal trend was also found for coverage of the hair-growing area, coverage of the ears, and the height and width of headdress. More of the head was covered from 1400 to 1469 and after 1510, but in that middle period, less of the head was covered. Again coverage of ears showed a similar progression. The tendency for headdress

to cover the ears was greatest from 1400 to 1449 and then decreased. About 1510, there were signs that coverage of the ears was increasing again. Three general periods of changes in physical characteristics emerge: 1400 to about 1449, 1450 to about 1489, and 1490 to 1519.

The study of headdress worn or carried off of the head may lead to an exploration of role of headdress in the forms of courtesy and the ideas of status and deference found in a place or time. Most headdresses were worn on the head rather than carried. After 1490, it was more likely that headdress would be depicted on the head. Headdresses from Holy Roman Empire were somewhat more likely to be worn off of the head than headdress from other locations.

Attributes of Headdress Types

Headdress types used in this study could be grouped into three general varieties, headdress types that appeared sporadically throughout the study period, headdress types that have a continual, if sometimes small, existence throughout the period, and those that appear to have a more limited temporal existence with a fairly definite rise, peak, and fall in frequency of appearance. Chaplets, rondelles, and draped headdress were examples of the first variety. Their small numbers and their spread over time made their temporal and geographic characteristics difficult to delineate.

Hoods, coifs, and stiffened hats constituted the second variety of headdress type. Coifs and hoods were remnants of headdresses popular in the previous century. Coifs persisted as headdresses frequently worn by members of the courtier/professional/official class as symbols of their positions. Hoods and stiffened hats had functional qualities as protection from the elements which would explain their longevity and their popularity with the lower orders. Hoods were also a customary part of a clergyman's attire.

The third variety of headdress types included chaperones, sack hats, acorn hats, and bonnets. If the study period had been extended, flat hats and cauls would have likely fitted into this variety as well. Chaperones and sack hats were dominant headdresses until 1450. The peak popularity for these two headdresses was in the 1420s. There appeared to have been a recurrence of popularity for chaperones, but the sample size for the places of origin that had many chaperones for the decade for which there was a fall in usage was small, and it may well be that if the sample had been more complete, this decline may proved to have been more apparent than real. Chaperones were especially frequently worn in the British Islands and in Burgundy/Flanders/Netherlands. Sack hats were also popular in the British Islands and in Italy.

Acorn hats predominated from 1450 to 1499 providing almost one-half of all headdresses worn from 1450 to 1489. The peak popularity for acorn hats were the 1460s and 1470s. Acorn hats were particularly popular in Spain/Portugal and with the courtier/professional/official class. Bonnets were a dominant headdress type from 1490 to the end of the study period. The bonnet's apparent peak of popularity was in the 1510s, but the study period ends as this peak was reached. Bonnets were unusually popular in Spain/Portugal and with the gentry class.

Earlier, it was stated that change occurred slowly in this time period, but that the pace of change was beginning to accelerate. The popularity peaks of each of these headdresses (sack hats being grouped with chaperones) were about forty to fifty years apart. The time span of this study was too short to determine if there was any acceleration in the rate of adoption of new headdress types. However, the earlier popular styles had a slower decline than later styles, and there was more than one dominant headdress style at the same time. Later, there was only one truly dominant style at a time and each of these was adopted rapidly and intensely. This suggests that the expansion of study period both into the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries might be fruitful in detecting an acceleration in the rates of adoption of new styles.

Methodology

Every attempt was made to have an adequate sample for every place of origin for every decade in the study period. However, it was not possible to find enough visual sources to complete the desired sample. Some times and places produced sources that were valued enough to be collected and saved and ultimately reproduced; others did not. Lines of artistic development that were not part of the mainstream were not often reproduced, and it was difficult to find examples for this study. A more complete sample might change some of the generalizations from this study.

Another significant problem encountered in creating a sample for this study was the lack of precision in the dating of visual sources. It was important to have sources that were dated independently of costume historians and important to have sources dated to within a ten-year period. Unfortunately, many clear examples of men's headdress had to be rejected as they were not dated more definitively than "first quarter of the fifteenth century," or even "fifteenth century." Had these been more precisely dated, some of the gaps in the sample could have been filled.

Thirteen characteristics of men's headdress were defined for use in a form analysis study. Each characteristic contained two or more

mutually-exclusive classifications to which each headdress could be assigned. Because the study period was lengthy, and the focus of study, men's headdress, was broad, these classifications had to also be broad enough to be applicable to the whole period and to the diversity of headdress. On the whole, these classifications were adequate to define the general parameters of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century headdress and give a good foundation from which to pursue other lines of inquiry. However, some of the classifications may be too general to capture the subtle differences within any one of the headdress types. One of the refinement of this classification system would be to use the general classifications developed as a basis to define more headdress-type-specific classifications which can be used to find these subtle geographic or temporal characteristics that cannot be established with the current system.

Another problem with such general categories were that some headdresses fit the established definition of a headdress type, but did not conform to the holistic concept of that type. The few instances of acorn hats prior to 1450 and the one specimen of a bonnet before 1480 were examples of this phenomena. They fitted the categories, but did not "feel" like that headdress type. Again, headdress-type-specific classifications could be useful in this situation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

For the most part, this quantitative method of study provided a detailed outline of the characteristics of men's headdress from 1400 to 1519. The results from the study of each characteristic over time and geography can provide the basis for more detailed study of that characteristic in order to better fill in the outline. This method of study can be extended and modified in several ways to give a more complete picture. These were completion of the sample, extension in time to the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and extension of the method to other items of clothing and then correlating the items with each other.

Earlier, it was also noted that larger samples for each of the place of origin and decade combinations could give more accurate information about the characteristics of headdress. Also developing headdress-specific categories may also uncover more subtle patterns missed by the broad classifications used in this study. This method may be extended to other items of clothing for the same period, giving an idea of the kinds of clothing items that were associated with each other and to discern other social, religious, or aesthetic patterns that may not be apparent in headdress alone.

Over the study period, variations in the characteristics of men's headdress

tended to fall into three chronological periods: 1400 to 1449, 1450 to 1489, and 1490 to 1519. These periods did appear to match periods of change in aesthetic thought, but the actual characteristics of the headdresses found in these periods often contrasted with expectations derived from contemporary aesthetic trends. Changes in vertical and horizontal emphasis in headdress did accord well with the expectations but that visual complexity often did not. Generally the characteristics of headdress did not vary much by place of origin, but headdresses from three places of origin, Italy, the Holy Roman Empire, and the British Islands stood out being as relatively distinctive for some characteristics.

Although one hundred and twenty years may seem like a more-than-ample amount of time for patterns to emerge, the pace of change during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance was slow enough that the study period from 1400 to 1519 was too short for more than a glimmer of a pattern to appear. However, based on the study of Gothic and Renaissance art and artifacts, there seems to be two currents. The Gothic aesthetic appeared to be evolving from an ornamented, rounded style to a simpler, more linear style, but retaining the penchant for verticality. This appears about the middle of the fifteenth century. The other current was the evolution of Renaissance aesthetics and its expansion into Northern Europe

around 1490 to 1500. The exact nature and mechanisms of the manifestation of aesthetic ideals into material objects are beyond the scope of this study, but the results from this study can be combined with other types of

documentation such as household accounts, trade records, studies of other types of decorative arts, literature and chronicles to more firmly place head-dress in its aesthetic, as well as social and cultural, contexts.