

Catalan Clothing of the 14th C
Translated by Callista Jerman

The Golden Shoes and the Hourglass

It's not surprising that the house of Barcelonan merchant Guillem Ferrer was full of textiles when he died in July of 1398. His mercantile activity had led him to follow the so-called Llevant route that led to Mallorca, Sardinia, Sicily, Alexandria, Beirut, and other eastern ports. It seems that death surprised him shortly after returning from a trip to Sicily, and he left four children (Guillermonet, Bernardo, Perico and Francisco) and his second wife, senora Isabel. The widely varied merchandise that their ships transported was stored in the family house on the street of La Volta del Lledó, near the area known as Viladecols. The house, or *hostel*, as it was called at the time, was on the corner of a dead-end street. Three or four stores or *botigues* formed part of the ground floor and were headed by large patio with a wall climbing to the first floor.

On the first floor or *sostre* were the main rooms used by the family, such as the bedroom of the deceased, the dining room, the kitchen, and another space for strictly professional use: the office. A second floor included some rooms, porches and roofs that were used as slave bedrooms. Six slave of 20 to 38 years had been bought in Sicily on Guillem Ferrer's last trip. Five small slaves ages 2-13 were also brought to Barcelona, many of them children of other Sicilian slaves.

Other merchandise was transferred to the stores on the ground floor without any particular organization. Among the four stores and wine cellars on the street were many items, including the following: red buckwheat boots, red and white vinegar, sugar carvings from Palermo, Alexandrian linen, Damascus cane strings, and Roman scales destined for the textile industry. However, to find the textiles themselves we have to go up to the main floor. Coffers, boxes and cabinets spread across the first floor contained a large variety of textiles, including home linens (sheets, pillows, tablecloths, napkins, towels, curtains, mattresses), lengths of fabric to make clothing or household linens, and small scraps for mending and making small purses and pouches. In the particular way that medieval objects were stored, the textiles were mixed in with all kinds of objects and utensils: jewelry, books, silver cups, saddles, ampoules, etc.

One of the rooms of the house that contained a great deal of textiles was the office. A great volume could have been kept in the seven coffers that furnished the room. In this case they held 176 textile items- divided between clothes and household linens of sheets, tablecloths, and napkins. Each trunk could hold from a couple of these pieces up to a dozen, along with other objects as diverse as a silver ring with turquoise or a painted box holding a white thread the exact length of the tomb of Jesus Christ. This intermixing between clothes and various other objects was present in all Catalan homes, although the exact manner depends

on the wealth of the household. Sometimes, as in the house of poet Pere de Queralt, there were pieces with an evocative presence, including “golden shoes” and a few hours of glass (sand clocks) that had a German coat of arms on the inside.

Merchants such as Guillem Ferrer bought and sold clothes to the markets, both new and secondhand. Dresses were pawned when someone in the family needed money, and rich dresses were given on the occasion of weddings and royal births. But almost no civilian clothing from medieval Catalonia has survived. The fragility of fabric, the constant reselling of clothes—even amongst the rich—and the sacking and destruction of many medieval tombs have all prevented the survival of medieval civilian clothing.

However, in July 1997, a tomb was opened in the church of Santa Maria d’Agramunt which brought to light a few pieces of clothing from the fourteenth century. Not fancy garments of gold, velvet or silk: cotton and linen. The simple clothes correspond to a boy and a girl buried in the same tomb but at different times. The best preserved items were the woman’s cut tunica, turban-like head wrap, and her *calces* (stockings) of the left leg with its corresponding *llogacama*. A part of the *cofia* (cap) worn by the man is the only garment undamaged by the lime that covered the body.

A large mantle complements this set of garments, which seem to be part of a daily wardrobe rather than funeral dress. These civil costumes from Agramunt (restored by the Terrassa Documentation and Museum Textile Center) are the only medieval garment heritage in Catalonia. The relative simplicity of the fabrics adds interest as these were likely clothes in common use throughout the population. Since December 2013 these pieces have been on display at the Agramunt Town Hall. They have not been included in the archaeological sources section of this book but in the near future [Montse Aymerich Bassols] will focus a monograph on the study of the grave finds from Agramunt.

The most splendid set of medieval costumes, both in terms of its state of conservation and the number and quality of the pieces, is located in the monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Huelgas de Burgos. Many members of the Castilian royal family were buried here forming a considerable textile heritage. The author selected four garments that covered the bodies of the infant Fernando de la Cerda (c. 1252-1275) and the queen Leonor de Castile (c. 1191-1244), who was the first wife of James the Conqueror. Outside the Iberian Peninsula there are additional museums that hold civilian costumes of medieval origin. One of these is the Musée Tessets de Lyon, home of an extant version of one of the emblematic masculine garments of the 14th century: the pourpoint, or *gipó*. The jacket kept at the Lyon museum is attributed to Charles de Blois, who died at the Battle of Auray in 1364, although not all scholars accept this attribution.

In any case, the *gipó* of the Museum of Lyon gives us an idea of the complexity of design, cut, and construction of the garments of the era. But the exceptional nature of the preservation of these garments does not prevent the phenomena of “the intractable object,” per French author Odile Blanc. Due to the loss of the material object we wish to study, here the medieval Catalan costume, we must approach it through indirect paths: the various written sources and iconographic sources from painting and miniatures to sculpture and embroidery. [The author] has detailed in the first part of this book the utility but also the limits that these indirect methods impose on the study of medieval Catalan clothing.

In the general history of costume the 14th century often is disregarded between the extensive display of clothing common in the 13th Century and the structured and sumptuous refinements of Renaissance dress. But the speed at which silhouettes and cuts begin to change in the first half of the fourteenth century implies that this is the first appearance of “fashion” in Europe. Fashion will begin to differentiate between the clothing of men and women (although they will share garments in many cases) and break the uniformity of clothing in Christian nations. Francesc Eiximenis, a keen observer of the changing clothing of his time, praises Muslim attire for keeping its simple form, while Christian fashions are “continuously pushed by the wheel of vanity.” He also bemoans that the Aragonese and Castilians have abandoned their traditional clothes for pieces in the new style.

Car sarrahins, homens e fembresm jamés no mudaren tayll de lurs habits, ne•n fan exces ne vanitats; e crestians, tots anys... homes e fembres, muden tal e estill novell en lurs vestits e ornaments.

...solien ésser loats aragoneses qui tostempts han portades les vestidures.... Sens pompa e erguyll.... Mas ara los convertexen a novell estil. Guarden-se de Déu!

Castellans, axí meteix, de Juli Cesar, anaven amb les gramalles largues fins en terra, e ab lurs antipares.... Mas ara muden l'estil e•s giren al francés.

The sarahins, male and female, never change their garments, never have an excess of vanities, yet Christians, every year.... Men and women, all change to the new styles in garments and ornaments.

....it used to be that the Aragonese always kept the style of their clothes... with pomp and pride... but now they turn them into a new style! Keeping them from God!

Castellans, from the time of Julius Caesar, went with long gramalles down to the ground, and with antipares¹ but now they change to the style of the French.

In the first few decades of the fourteen century Europe had already been shaken by new clothing silhouettes for both men and women. The clothing began to

¹ A piece of fabric or leather that covers the leg to the knee and buttons on the outside (essentially, spats)

adopt draping, pleats, and gores that mold clothes to the body and require a much more complicated construction. In particular masculine dress began to shorten and no longer tended to hide and homogenize the body. Openings and cuts show both the male and female form, and in the case of some men's clothes, they even accentuate them. At the same time garments adopted a growing luxury that crossed the limit of noble and aristocratic circles to encompass new social groups such as the bourgeoisie. They were enriched by commerce or business and could afford to allocate a high price for their wardrobe. However these changes in the style of clothing primarily focused on those of the upper classes, including new fabric motifs and more complex construction requiring professional tailors. The evolving silhouette was also more obvious in male fashion than female, and the gipó is a good example of this trend, as it is tightly fitted to the body and leaves the legs and thighs visible. Meanwhile women's skirts remained long enough to cover both the legs and feet.

The changing fashions of the 14th Century occurred throughout a large part of what we today know as Europe. France, Italy and Flanders were the major leaders and influencers in terms of style. Many of the changes we observe in Catalan clothing of the 14th C are part of the profound changes occurring throughout the west. Cultural similarities, commercial trade, royal matrimony and geographic proximity explain the variety of influences seen in Catalunya, not only in costume but in all aspects of life. Eiximenis attributes the new forms of clothing to influence from the French:

E cons alguns hòmens de paratge napoletans apreessen de anar a la manera d'aquells francesos ço es, curts e strets e fort dissolutament.....

And some men of Neopolitan parentage are beginning to dress in the manner of the French, that is, short and tight and very dissolute.....

The second part of this book deals with the study of Catalan clothing through the 1380s. The period of greatest interest in terms of changes in clothing starts in the 1340s and ends in the late 1380s, with most of the evolution in fashion occurring in the decade between 1340 and 1350. However, garments from outside of this time range have been included when needed for context.

Clothing began to be dyed in new vibrant colors that can express the taste, wealth, and personal taste of the wearer--along with golden "freturas" that border the neck, cuffs, and skirt hems, delicate embroidered patterns sewn onto the dress, complex elements of construction, and novel patterning and extravagance in the cut of sleeves and skirts.

Generally 14th C Catalan clothing can be grouped into three categories, excluding footwear and headwear: the underwear, the dresses, and an overlayer or wrap. The shirt layer (*camisa*) in contact with the skin could be made of wool, linen, or silk and was worn by both men and women. The length of men's shirts

varied depending on the structure of the clothing worn over it. There was also a separate variety of shirt known as the *alcandora*, which was sumptuously decorated, particularly on the cuffs. This level of ornamentation meant that it was worn so that the decoration was visible despite the overlayers.

For women, the innermost layers consisted of *el drap de pits* (breast band), *les calces* (hose), and *les bragues* or *panyos* (braies). Next came the shirt, and then whatever dresses were worn on top. Usually this consisted of two different pieces, the underdress (*gonella*, *gonella encordada*, *samarra*, *brial*) worn directly over the shirt layer, and a highly visible and ornamented overdress (*cota*, *aljuba*, *curtapeo*, *pellot*, *gipó*). According to Eiximenis, a honest and respectable woman must wear two dresses upon leaving the house:

...la dona atendre què ha mester la casa quant a draps, a vestir dessús e dejús....

....the woman when leaving the house must wear a dress above and below.....

The prohibitions of various materials (cloth of gold, cloth of silver, various silks, etc) in contemporaneous sumptuary laws clearly state that these restrictions are extended to *robes subiranes ne jusanés*.² Many layers of outer/"exterior" wear³ existed and were frequently worn for ornamentation, not just practical use. There are two general categories of outerwear: unshaped rectangular or circular pieces of fabric wrapped around the body and attached on the shoulders or chest (*manto*, *mantell*, *mantellina*, *redondell*....) or garments with a structure and specifically, armholes (*gramalla*). The second part of this book covers the underwear, the interior overlayers, and then outerwear.

Sometimes by examining the clothing of a time and place, we are able to learn about the social and cultural situations of the people who wore said clothes. Ramon Muntaner writes about when an infant King Jaume III of Mallorca was presented to his grandmother at the gates of Perpinya, he wore a golden set of gowns and a tiny pellot. Desclot describes how his grandfather, Jaume II was able to escape Perpinya during siege by wearing a good quality but unremarkable *gramalla* made of fabric from Narbona. Another blue *gramalla*, well-made but unornamented, let King Peter the Great cross France incognito. During an attack on the city of Perelada by French forces a strong and grounded woman (wearing a *gonella*) captured an unarmed Frenchman while on her way to pick a cabbage from her garden. This particular story corroborates that the *gonella* was worn by women when they were at home or otherwise doing work.

² underwear or undergarments

³ The exact usage of the terms *vestidures* or *robes subiranes* are unclear. In some cases they seem to mean only the very outer layer of dress, in others any layer worn over the *camisa*

[There's a paragraph here about another literary episode, I have left it out since I think we have enough of those and also the translation was a mess. It seems to be about an Archbishop paying someone to lure his crush in for tea by giving them a pelot, and then diverges into talking about the church trying to ban the gonella encordada.]

The clothes worn by a person in the fourteenth century would provide a bystander with a great deal of information about their social status, age, marital status, and gender. Wearing expensive silver, gold and silk or certain garments traditionally associated with power— a *dalmatica* or a *gramalla*— was an indication of wealth or status. A short skirt or a longer one that drapes on the ground, a veil of silk or a cotton or linen cap, bright red dye or a cheaper yellow all formed a language that would have been clearly understood to other members of society at the time.

The third part of this book discusses various attempts by civil and religious powers to control this “dress language” and keep people visibly within their social rank. As more people are willing to spend large quantities of money on ornate and elaborate clothes, it becomes more difficult to tell a rich merchant from a Duke or Earl. The municipal authorities of several Catalan cities tried to implement sumptuary laws to limit luxury materials to higher classes, but the number of times these laws were passed implies that they were not successful. We cover sumptuary laws from Barcelona, Cervera, Mallorca, Berga, and Solsona, demonstrating exactly how common these laws were.

Approach to medieval dress research: Written, iconographic and archeological sources

The written documentation of the time about clothing is very diverse— inventories, wills, married chapters, royal books, payment records— but the inventory gives the most thorough and complete information of the medieval wardrobe. These inventories were formal documents written and notarized at the time of someone's death so that their belongings could be properly divided among any heirs.

These inventories have a part designated for clothing, although textiles of domestic use are often not listed, ie mattresses, pillows, blankets, curtains, towels, smaller towels⁴, napkins, and rugs. The size of the inventory varies great depending on the wealth and status of the person in question. Unsurprisingly the inventories of people of high rank and status contain a greater variety and quantity of clothing, especially for honorable citizens of Barcelona and wealthier merchant families. Royal inventories in particular demonstrate the richness and intricacy of ornamentation that was applied to clothing, while craftspeople only

⁴ yes there is apparently a difference and they have to be listed separately

mention a single outfit. Keep in mind, however, that it is not always clear which clothing belonged to the deceased or other members of the family.

The inventory is an essential documentary source for the study of Catalan clothing of the 14th C, since it systematically provides basic information that might otherwise be difficult to determine: the name of the garment, the fabric with which it was made, and its color. Over and over again the names of common garments that made up the wardrobes of people of the 14th C are listed, from general terms like the gonella, the cota or the gipó to very short-lived and avant garden fashions. Medieval houses (such as those discussed in the introduction) had garments and textiles kept in locked casks spread throughout different rooms and often are included with various domestic objects. Inventories list underwear, interior and exterior garments, cloaks and mantles, headwear, and various kinds of shoes. The amount of detail, precise descriptions and variety and quantity of textiles make inventories a resource significantly more valuable than any other period writings.