

Women's 1490's Italian Renaissance Ensemble Part 2: The Gamurra

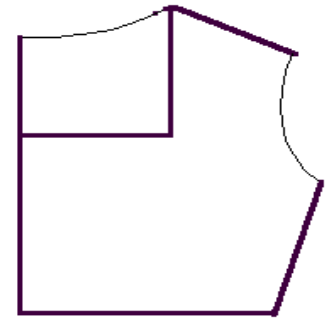
By *Baroness Briana Etain MacKorkhill*

Toward the end of the 15th Century, the fashion in Italy changed once again. Gone are the houppelandes with long flowing sleeves. A new style emerged with a more fitted bodice and pleated skirt of the now typical Italian Renaissance *gamurra*, *camora* or *zamurra*.

. This was the layer worn directly over the *camicia* (chemise).

The square-neckline was the most common neckline but there were a few rounded-neck dresses but they were phased by around 1500. The square-neck version started up higher earlier and lowered to show some cleavage by the end of our discussion and was popular for the better part of the entire 1500s.

This tight-fitting bodice with what we would think of as “empire waist” or slightly lower at the beginning was at the advent of this period. With the start of the 1500s, the waistline would begin to drop down to near waistline by the 1540s. When constructing the bodice, it is often helpful if you use an inner lining of lightweight canvas to give it a little extra body. The front and the back sections can be assembled and lined separately leaving the shoulders and the bottom of the bodice open so they can be turned and then join the front and back at the shoulders. That way, each piece can be turned and all the inner seams are protected. Once sewn, the shoulder seams are pressed opened and whipped down to finish them. L



The closings of the bodice are at the sides or sometimes the bodice is split down the front and laced. There is even some evidence that although there is a split down the front, it was a false front with the true closing being on the sides. After 1510, often the bodice was open at the front and did not quite meet, displaying the *camicia* through the ties or lacings. Lacing holes are finished by embroidering over lacing rings (closed brass rings). I tend to cover mine with three-ply embroidery floss as there are a wide variety of colors and the strands are made to work together and cover more evenly than conventional thread. You may use whatever cording you wish, however, I would strongly suggest that you do not try and use the “satiny” cording that you can purchase at a fabric store. The cording that I find works best has been either cord produced by a lucet or by a kumihimo disk. I have also read recently that there have been disks discovered in Europe that have been theorized as being used for making cording. Because Venice was one of the premiere trading centers of the world at that time, it is certainly possible that this kind of cording was available to purchase in period.

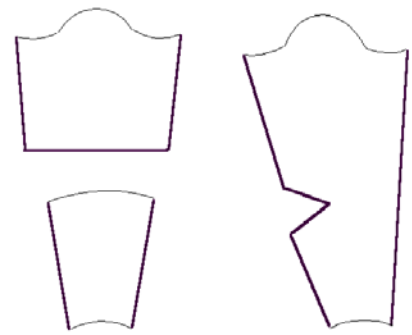


Fabric is elaborate and rich in both content and pattern. Brocades of silk, linen, and wool are common. Cotton also takes its place as a commonly utilized material. Wool and linen were often used for the northern areas more frequently, southern city-states preferred to use silk, cotton and linen for their clothing.

Embellishment consists of braids, gimps, embroidery, couching, pearls and beading. But the embellishment usually is employed to highlight the richness of the fabric. The neckline was a popular placement for any kind of embellishment.

At this time, the skirt employed pleats of box, stacked box, knife or cartridge and they were distributed evenly around the bottom of the bodice. Many of each pleating style can easily be found so there really is no one favorite.

Sleeves are elaborate and usually displayed the *camicia* between lacings at some point. Many different styles were employed. They often were removable and interchangeable. Regional differences can be seen as the closer to the Alps and colder climate, many chose to have very voluminous sleeves, while the warmer climates would have the smaller sleeves. Also popular were intricately cut-out sleeves and strip sleeves. Here are two common examples. All offer yet another opportunity to display wealth and prosperity. Ties were most popular and usually finished with points (metal aiglets or with beads).



One completed the gamurra and *camicia* may be worn for informal occasions and take on different looks when you remove the sleeves or have other pairs of sleeves. Once you add the third layer – the *giornea*, it will change the look even more. We will discuss the *giornea* in the next part of our discussion.

Bibliography

Abbigliamento e Costume nella Pittura Italiana nel Rinascimento. Bentivenga, Ferruccio Cappelletti. Roma: Carlo Bestetti Edizioni d'Arte, 1962.

At Home in Renaissance Italy, Marta Ajmar, Flora Dennis. Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006

The Book of the Courtier, Castiglione, Baldesar, translated by George Bull, Penguin Classics, Reprint edition, 1976

Dress in Italian Painting 1460-1500. Elizabeth Birbari,. London: John Murray, 1975

Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing, Carole Collier Frick, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 2002.

Dress of the Venetians. Stella Mary Newton. Scholar Press, 1988.

Inside the Renaissance House, Elizabeth Curie, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006

Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family, Patricia Fortini Brown, Yale University Press, 2004

Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400-1500. eds. Jacqueline Herald, Aileen Ribeiro. London: Bell and Hyman, 1981.

Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries. Campbell, Lorne, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990.

Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy, 1400-1600, Evelyn S. Welch, Yale University Press, 2005

Virgins of Venice : Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent. Mary Laven, Penguin (Non-Classics); Reprint edition (June 29, 2004).

Women In Italy, 1350-1650 Ideals and Realities, A Sourcebook. Mary Rogers, Paola Tinagli, Manchester University Press, 2005.