

Defensive Design Elements in Doublets of the Late 16th Century

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Costuming plays a central role in the recreation of any activity in the Society for Creative Anachronism. When we put on the clothes, we are better able to become the character that we are attempting to portray. Recreating those clothes is a vital key to the successful completion of our personas. The Society provides us with an interesting perspective from which to view our success. Our clothing not only impacts how we and the people surrounding us feel, but if made properly, will impact how we carry ourselves and consider how varying activities would have been accomplished wearing those clothes.



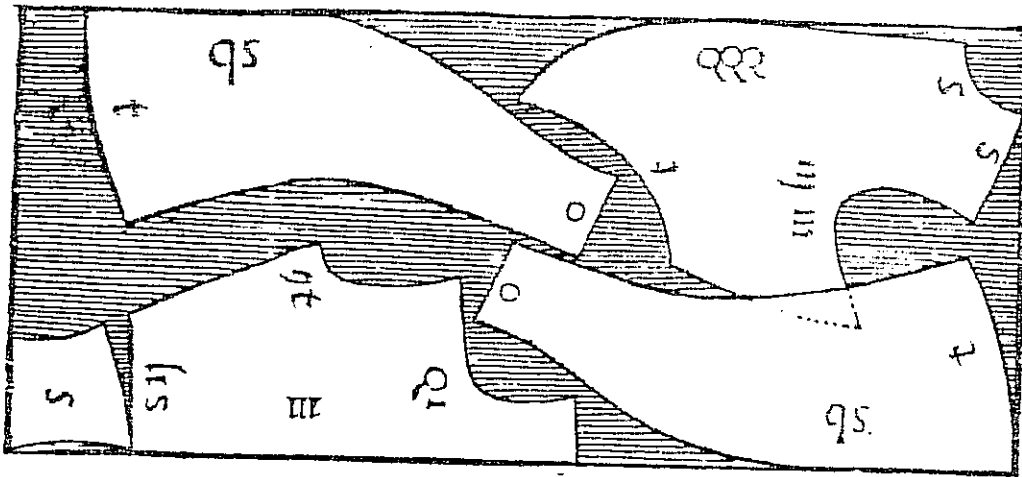
This impact on how we think and feel dictates that some should look at exactly how these clothes were put together. Seams, layering, drape, and the weight of fabric will impact range of motion, stance, and the walk of the person wearing them. The impact of the external environment will be altered by fabric choices and construction. A cotton cloak would not do the wearer much good compared to a nice wool cloak. This simple principle can be applied to doublet construction. A period looking doublet can be made from a single layer of wool. Constructing a garment from single layers often looks fine until the garment is broken in. Folds and wrinkles will develop in permanent locations that will alter the look of the garment. In the late 16th Century, Europeans were constructing their clothes from multiple layers. These additional layers served the function of allowing a stiffer look to expensive lightweight fabrics, lengthening the life of the garment, and possibly protecting the wearer not only from the elements, but from attack on the street.

The doublet began to take a definite shape in the early 1500's. The Italian renaissance had shortened and tailored men's garments to the waist, exposing hosen clad legs. This form fitting garment allowed for easy mobility. The outer "doublet" covers a voluminous undershirt. The undershirt is tucked into the hose, and the hose are tied to the "doublet". The lay of the seams and drape of the fabric allows for ease of mobility while still conforming to the shape of the body.

As the century progressed, garments gradually altered. Hose and doublets were cut to reveal under layers. The under layers peeking through led to false panels being worked into garments. This design concept reached it's peak during the Landsquinet era. These famous mercenary soldiers wore clothing with a plethora of detailing. These men were generally not of the nobility and did not own suits of armor. They made up for the lack of steel by layering fabric on their bodies. The layers of fabric not only absorbed blows, but helped prevent a blade from penetrating to the skin. These layers of fabric served a third function of providing protection from the cold, and wicking moisture from the skin. A microclimate was created around the individual, helping regulate body temperature.



By the end of the 16th Century, the nobility had incorporated many of these advantages into the construction of their doublets. Padding, as found in gambisons, or boning, like in women's corsets, were used in vulnerable areas. Fabric was backed for durability, and an inner layer completely lined the garments. These garments protected the wearer from the elements by creating a microclimate inside the garment. They were thick enough to keep the wearer warm and in the summer, the natural fibers wicked away moisture from the skin to cool the wearer. Extra layers were added over vulnerable areas that helped prevent the wearer from serious wounds.



The abdominal area of a doublet developed two distinct treatments by the end of the 16th Century. The first was a pad stitched lining that produces a protruding look to the belly. This was accomplished by stitching wads of wool to the inside of the garment. At the stomach, this layering thickened and provided the desired profile. Not only did the layering provide aesthetic appeal, but it also was used for self-defense. This is the method used to line gambisons throughout the period. The layers of fabric cushioned the blow and provided to be resistant to thrusts. By adding extra layers at the abdomen, the sensitive abdominal cavity was afforded extra protection.



As the century came to a close, however, thrusting was becoming more and more common in sword play. Swords were becoming lighter, and it was not feasible to wear a padded doublet at all times for protection. It is at this time that much of the padding diminishes, and many doublets have boning or selected areas with extra layers. As you can see in the diagram, these extra layers coincide to easy kill areas. Around the armscye the layering is pronounced and would provide protection to the major arteries running unprotected through that area. At the abdomen, the area not protected by the ribs is given a boned lining to provide the extra needed protection. The collar is reinforced and a ruff is worn on top. This gives the neck extra padding

and protects the major veins there as well.

Much of the aesthetic quality of these elements were dictated by fashion, however, I believe these elements cannot be ignored as elements of vanity. They provided much needed protection and developed as thrusting styles of sword play became more and more predominant.

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