

## THE GOTHIC FITTED DRESS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Background handout for Robin Netherton's Fitted Dress Workshop*

**Author's note:** *I prepared this handout to accompany a workshop on the Gothic fitted dress. You will find here basic information on the style and likely construction methods. However, this handout is intended to serve only as an introduction to this topic, not as a how-to guide or a formal referenced paper. Therefore, it contains some generalizations and simplifications, many of which will be clarified at the workshop. For more detailed information, please see the "Useful Books" page as a start to doing your own research. If you have questions on specific points, please contact the author.*

### **Q. Where and when was this style worn?**

A. The Gothic fitted dress first shows up in artwork from the mid-1300s and seems to have been commonly worn as late as the mid-1400s. Various forms of the style appear in artwork from a vast area of Europe, including such countries as France, England, Flanders, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Northern Italy.

### **Q. Who wore it?**

A. A wide range of women, of all ages, and of stations ranging from royalty and nobility down through the various ranks of the middle class. (It is possible that even some lower-class women occasionally wore this style, but the visual evidence overwhelmingly suggests this would have been atypical.)

### **Q. How was it worn?**

A. The basic fitted dress seems to have been worn routinely as an everyday dress for informal situations. For more formal circumstances, it was apparently used as a supportive underlayer beneath overgowns such as houppelandes or sideless surcotes. In the same way, it was also apparently worn under various forms of overdress that had the same fitted body shape. (Despite their similarity in body cut, the fitted overdress and fitted underdress styles are distinct garments with different uses. This workshop, and this FAQ, focus primarily on the day-dress/underdress.)

### **Q. What was it called?**

A. Terms for the basic day-dress/underdress varied by place and time, and included "kirtle," "cotte," and "gonella," among others. Many people today refer to this and other styles of fitted dresses as "cotehardies," but that word does not seem to have been used so broadly in the Middle Ages. In documents, "cotehardie" generally refers to a specific male overgarment worn during the late 1300s in France and England, and may have occasionally been used for a particular style of female overdress — but not the basic day-dress/underdress. (See Newton for more on terminology.)

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**Q. What’s “Newton”?**

A. See the accompanying listing of “Useful Books.”

**Q. What were the distinguishing characteristics of this style?**

A. Tight fitting that stabilized, shaped, and even manipulated the female figure, with set-in sleeves that made possible a close fit in the shoulders and upper arms, and a long opening in the center front (or possibly the center back) that enabled tight fitting down the torso and past the waist. The skirt, which flared from a point near the hips, appears to have been cut in one piece with the body. The basic day-dress/underdress had long sleeves fitted tightly to the arm.

**Q. What elements of the style varied?**

A. Length — ankle-length dresses are particularly common in images of women doing active work, but many examples are longer.

Skirt width — the earliest versions were fairly narrow, and the later ones much fuller.

Body fastenings — lacing (either visible or hidden) seems to have been most common, but front buttons appear in certain images (particularly on overdresses from the 1370s and 1380s).

Sleeve style — closely set small buttons are visible on many examples from the 1300s, but are less common on later styles, which seem to have used hidden lacing or stitching to tighten the sleeves. Usually the sleeves end at the wrist; in some times and places, they extend partly over the hand. (On the fitted overdresses, sleeve style had many variations.)

Silhouette and posture followed a distinct path of changes over time. The earliest versions (1350-1370) show a fairly vertical posture and a contained, unified “monobosom.” As time passed, the bust inched upward and outward, and the spine curved into an increasingly pronounced S-shape. By the early 1400s, these changes culminated in a posture known to art historians as the “Gothic slouch” — marked by a very high bust, a swayed back, and a prominent “pregnant”-looking belly.

**Q. Yuck, why would I want to look pregnant?**

A. This style does not fit the image modern people are accustomed to thinking of as “attractive,” but it’s actually quite appealing in life. The “pregnant” silhouette emphasizes a woman’s natural curves. The style can be immensely flattering on both rail-thin women (creating cleavage out of practically nothing) and heavy women (accentuating shape rather than size). At its best, it raises the bosom to the top of the ribcage and pushes the belly below the ribcage, which creates a longer “waist” (somewhat higher than the natural waistline) and intensifies the in-and-out curvature of the female form.

The shape of the dress is especially effective at the back, where it shows off the dip in the spine and the outward curve at the sides of the hips, even on very heavy women. Many people assume that the visual attraction of the dress lies in the prominent bosom and cleavage. But I’ve watched men watching women in this dress, and then talked with them about what they notice, and almost universally their eye is drawn to the curves of the waist and hips, particularly the small of the back.

**Q. Would I really end up with that extreme S-curve shape?**

A. Some women can. The achievable degree of “slouch” depends on the woman’s figure. In artwork, the Gothic “supermodels” of the early 1400s display the most pronounced S-curve, but most other women show a more mild degree of sway.

Within the range of the woman’s physical bounds, an experienced seamstress can adjust the cut to modulate the degree of sway according to preference. This is consistent with variation in the sources, which show differences in silhouette not only by figure type, but also by social class and time period. What you end up with, then, will be a combination of what your figure allows and what variant you seek to reproduce.

**Q. Won’t I get backaches standing like that?**

A. I have not found that to be a problem. The curved posture comes naturally, without your conscious attempt or physical effort to create it. If you have a bad back normally, you will love this dress — it gives more support than a longline bra or “posture” bra, without shifting or digging.

**Q. Do I have to worry about “falling out” of that low neckline?**

A. No. The neckline looks low, but that is only because the breasts are raised high. They cannot move higher, so they will not “fall out,” even if you bend over. Bounce is not a problem either; the close fitting makes for a very stable bosom. It is comfortable to dance in this dress, regardless of your bust size.

**Q. How do you make this dress?**

A. My preferred construction has four body pieces, with center back and front seams on the vertical grain (with some curvature in the back to match the spine). Most of the fitting occurs on the side seams. I usually add gores starting somewhere between waist and hip level, at the sides and/or in back and front. Number and placement of gores depends on the individual’s shape and the fabric width.

**Q. Why don’t you use the 10-gore Greenland style?**

A. The so-called 10-gore style (which actually has 12 gores) is not a fitted dress. It is shaped, but it is not tight; it is loose enough to pull on over the head. Even if it were considered fitted, it is unlikely that the Greenlanders — who lived in an isolated subsistence-level colony with scarce resources and little contact with mainland society — were familiar with the relatively new methods used for European middle- and upper-class fashion. Moreover, even among the Greenland finds, the 12-gore version of the dress was atypical. It was apparently not a preferred or common construction there, and would be even less likely to be a preferred or common method on the mainland.

**Q. What about constructions that use princess seams, darts, waist seams, hip seams, pleats, and/or gathers?**

A. None of these techniques seems to have been in use at this time, and the visual evidence on fitted dresses in particular shows no sign of them. Of course, it’s always possible that one or more of these techniques were in use, and we simply don’t know about it. However, if you don’t

need a technique to accomplish a particular task, and there's no evidence it existed, there's usually no good reason to assume it was used.

**Q. What sort of stays or understructure do you use to hold the shape?**

A. None. There are no stays, boning, layered interlinings, etc.; they were not invented yet. While the fitted dress does manipulate the figure into a specific non-natural shape, it does not have a shape of its own. Without a body in it, it falls in a formless heap. Its action comes not from stiff components, but from the interaction of the fabric with the individual's body — you get support and strength along the grainlines, and flexibility along the angles, and these pressures push and pull the body into the desired shape.

**Q. How do you know they weren't wearing a foundation garment or body shaper?**

A. I've seen no illustrations suggesting a separate foundation garment or body shaper under a Gothic fitted dress. That's after examining many dozens of illustrations of women half-unlaced, or in the process of dressing or nursing. Over and over, you see the fitted gown unlaced to show a plain unfitted chemise underneath, and nothing else. Nor is there any evidence I know of in written records that names or suggests any sort of separate shaping layer. I can't of course say with certainty that nothing of the sort ever existed, but I feel pretty confident in saying it certainly was not in routine wear.

**Q. How can you be sure your method is right?**

A. I can't. We have no extant garments of this style to copy, and only the barest of clues from visual and documentary sources. However, given what we do know about medieval sewing methods, this approach is logical within its context. It does not assume any methods that are unlikely to have been used at that time, and it reliably produces the right look. Still, I want to make clear that this is the system that works *for me*, and that I consider most reasonable. Other people have other theories. There will probably never be definitive proof for any of them.

**Q. Do you have a pattern for this style?**

A. No. Patterns weren't period. I cut only rough shapes to start, then drape and fit on the body. I pin, stitch, cut, then fit again and repeat until I achieve the desired shape.

**Q. Well, for those of us who are used to sewing with patterns, can't you make a pattern based on the shapes of the pieces you finally come up with?**

A. Actually, no, I can't. I have never found a pattern successful for this, if by "pattern" you mean a piece of paper, a scaled diagram, or specific measurements that you use to guide your cutting of the shape of the fabric pieces. I can describe the number, position, and general shapes of the pieces, but the exact proportions and angles of the final pieces are too idiosyncratic and individualized to predict before the fitting. Measurements are of limited use, as the act of wearing the dress will change the body's angles (and some of the measured distances) substantially. Measurements also fail to account for variables such as muscle expansion and breast weight. On top of all this, there's a lot of variation in the behavior of different fabrics, so even two dresses for the same person can end up having different angles and proportions. The bottom line is that each dress must be made individually, and fitted directly on the wearer's body.

**Q. Isn't that a pretty bass-ackwards way of sewing?**

A. No, because it was the logical and sensible way of sewing before patterned approaches were invented. Working patternless is fundamentally different from working with a pattern, and the results are substantially different, too. I believe I'm getting closer results to what was done in period by using a technique that's more likely similar to theirs.

**Q. All this fitting sounds pretty complicated. Can I make this dress by myself?**

A. Most people need a knowledgeable assistant. When I was 19 and first working this construction out, I was able to fit myself — but I was slim, small-busted, and flexible. I still am not quite sure how I managed. Remember, though, that few medieval women lived alone; they lived in extended households or communities. Each household or community would have had members who specialized in sewing, and everyone who sewed would have had some understanding of the commonly used processes.

**Q. What fabrics were used?**

A. Wool, linen, and silk. The most common fabric was wool. Linen seems to have been used primarily for linings. Silk was mostly restricted to the wealthy. It's safe to assume that the fabric was always woven. As for color and pattern, most of the images show solid-color fabrics, but some sources show overall geometric or floral patterns (presumably woven-in).

**Q. What fabrics should I use?**

A. Wool, linen, and silk. Wool can be very bouncy, and is wonderful for this dress. Linen is difficult to cut and sew because it tends to crawl and mutate, but that same property enables it to mold to the figure, making it easy to fit. Silk is less flexible than wool or linen, and thus a more difficult to fit, but it is very strong, and good silk has shine and color that is unmatched.

The best combinations are probably wool or heavy silk on the outside, with linen or worsted wool for the lining. In any case, look for a weave with a tiny bit of “give” on the grain, a significant amount of stretch on the bias, and good strength, substance, and integrity overall. Do not settle for a fabric that is too weak or flimsy; it will not work well.

**Q. I've got a polyester blend that looks just like a period fabric. You'd never know the difference. Will that do?**

A. No. Synthetic fibers do not breathe the way natural fibers do, and they do not have the springy “give” on the grain that natural fibers do. They also do not expand and mold to the body with warmth and moisture, a necessary characteristic of the tightly fitted dress.

An exception is rayon, which is a natural fiber and makes a passable silk imitation, but it is not very strong, particularly when exposed to sweat, and will deteriorate with repeated wear.

**Q. What about cotton? It's a lot cheaper than linen, and easy to find.**

A. You will regret it. Yes, cotton is a natural fiber, and it was known in period, but it does not seem to have been commonly used for garments, and after years of struggling with it, I think I can see why. It resists molding and shaping; it tends to wrinkle and crease. A lot of my fitting problems disappeared when I stopped using cotton and moved strictly to wool, linen, or silk.

**Q. How much fabric do I need?**

A. This varies by body size, height, the desired skirt width, and the fabric width. In most cases, six yards is a safe minimum; eight is even better (and allows for the occasional botched sleeve). You need about as much for the lining.

**Q. Can't I just skip the lining?**

A. Lining is absolutely essential. I used to make these dresses out of just one layer. There was a lot of strain on the seams, and every wrinkle showed. Two substantial layers share the pressure and smooth out the fit. Lining also adds to the life of the garment, not just by reducing stress, but also by protecting seams and absorbing sweat. If need arises, the lining can be patched or replaced.

Lining makes the fitting process much easier, too. With a single layer, you must fit inside-out, and any asymmetry of the wearer causes problems. With a lining, you fit the lining first, with the wrong side and the seam allowances on the outside, which is how the fabric will be oriented in the final product. Serious errors can be corrected by piecing the lining; the piecing won't show. Then, after you are happy with the lining fit, you use the lining as a template to cut the main fabric. Assembly is then very quick, and final adjustments minor.

**Q. What other materials do I need?**

A. Use natural-fiber thread for seams; it has more stretch. Cotton works fine. Silk thread should be used only on silk cloth, as it can cut through other fabrics on stressed seams. (Medieval people would probably have used linen or wool thread, and these can be wonderful if you are sewing by hand, but I have not found any suitable for machine-sewing.)

If you use a laced front, you need a lacing cord. I like using 1/8-inch ribbon (it is very strong) but handmade cord or braid is a nice touch.

Some people use metal eyelets for the front laced opening, but I strongly recommend handmade eyelets — they are quicker and easier than you might expect, and they don't have the annoying tendency of falling out or developing rough edges that fray your lacing cord. Plus they look better — and they're historically accurate.

Buttons for the sleeves or the front opening are optional, depending on the time and place of the style you are reproducing. I have found machine-made buttonholes to be an acceptable substitute for handmade.

I use strips of fabric to bind certain inner seams, such as the neckline and armholes. Bias binding (store-bought or homemade) is easier to use than straight-grain strips, though the small amount of available evidence suggests that straight-grain binding was normally used in period. (For more details on seam finishing and other sewing techniques of this period, see the Museum of London's book on *Textiles and Clothing*, Crowfoot et al., reissued in 2001 by Boydell and Brewer.)

**Q. What headdress was worn with this style?**

A. Headdress varied dramatically depending on date and place, as well as the wearer's class, age, and circumstances. Sources show such options as cauls at the sides, cauls at the temples, wrapped veils, wimples with veils, layered frilled-edge veils, hoods, hats, braids arranged with circlets, braids arranged without circlets, and more. For ideas, take a good look at the sources

from the place and period you are seeking to reproduce. Pay particular attention to the class and circumstances of the women pictured, as these factors affect headdress choice.

**Q. What accessories were worn with this style?**

A. This, too varies with date, place, class, and situation. Jewelry, however, is often minimal. The most common addition seems to be a belt (often with a pouch), and there are several predominant types. Again, consult artwork from the place and period you are trying to reproduce.

**Q. What kind of undergarments were worn with this?**

A. The only undergarment is a shift (also called a chemise or smock). This needs to have a neckline lower than that of the dress. Illuminations from this period show shifts that are calf-length, scoop-necked, and fairly narrow (but not tight or restrictive) in both body and sleeves. Do not use a tent with raglan sleeves gathered into a huge lumpy drawstring at the neckline! Linen is far preferable to cotton for comfort, washability, and fit.

My favorite shift is linen, cut as a calf-length T-tunic with narrow side gores. It has a scooped neck that is lightly finger-pleated into tiny tucks an inch or so apart, so that it lies flat against my body. (Pin the pleats while you are wearing the shift, and it will become obvious how they should fall.) The neck and cuff edges are bound with strips of linen.

**Q. Can I wear a bra with this?**

A. No. A bra creates a very different shape from the one the dress is designed to create. These are two completely incompatible silhouettes.

**Q. How about if I wear a sports bra during the fitting, to hold the breasts up? A sports bra gives a “mounded” bosom something like what you see in some of the fitted dress pictures.**

A. No, really, you don't want to do this. You need to make the dress do the work of holding and shaping the bosom, and part of that task is determining where to introduce pressure. If anything is supporting the breasts, it's changing the effect — and you can't get a clear view of what will happen without the bra.

You also need to play with the degree of molding of the breast, particularly how much you let the dress “push” the internal mass up from the underside, and how much you let “drop.” If you're wearing a bra, the breasts aren't as malleable — the whole point of a bra is to keep the breasts from shifting.

There's also a question of the thickness of the extra layer. A difference of as little as one-eighth inch on a seam can affect the fit, so fitting over a bra and then removing the bra would certainly introduce a significant amount of space. The best way to keep the breasts properly positioned during fittings is to have the person lie down.

**Q. Did you say “lie down”?**

A. This is vital to the fitting method. Lying down redistributes the breast mass higher on the body, and flatter. Once I've fit the dress tightly to the ribcage below the bosom and to the very gentle swell of the lower half of the breasts while the woman is lying down, the breasts drop very little when she stands up. Then, to hold the upper part of the bosom in place, I pull the fabric up and out at the shoulders.

**Q. Will this dress work if I'm large-busted/small-busted/big in the stomach/big in the hips/long-waisted/short-waisted/etc.?**

A. I have fit all these figure types, and not yet found a figure that I could not fit. That doesn't mean they're all equally easy! Some types need a great deal of work, and some raise special difficulties. It seems that with each new body I discover yet another figure quirk, with yet another solution.

**Q. What if I'm asymmetrical?**

A. Just about everyone is uneven somewhere. If you don't already know where your personal asymmetry is, you will very likely find it in the process of fitting this dress.

The most common discrepancy seems to be in the bust. Often just making the dress symmetrical is enough; the larger breast will push slightly toward the smaller one in the center, which is not noticeable unless you are staring directly down the cleavage. When one breast is significantly larger, I've found it helps to tighten the fit a bit more on the *larger* breast. That may seem counterintuitive (most people would think you need more room on the larger side) but it actually helps even things out visually.

Another common imbalance is shoulder height. This is easily handled by adjusting the height of the shoulder straps. However, you need to be aware of it throughout the fitting process. If you do not compensate, the breast on the side of the lower shoulder will appear to sag.

If your spine is shifted significantly to the left or right, you will need to place the back seam visually instead of following the spinal indent.

The worst set of anomalies I ever dealt with was on a slim young woman of about age 20. She had a leg-length discrepancy that raised her left hip an inch higher than the right. Her body had compensated for the imbalance by shifting her torso in the opposite direction, making her right shoulder an inch higher than her left. In between, her squeezed left shoulder blade protruded significantly further from her back than her right shoulder blade. The differences were not obvious to the eye, and she was unaware of them until our fitting session. (The dress turned out fine, but it was a challenge!)

**Q. Is there anyone who *can't* wear this dress?**

A. I'm sure there is, but I haven't tried fitting her yet.

**Q. How do I keep the front laced opening from gapping open?**

A. There are several tricks to avoiding gaposis. The full lining is helpful here, as it means each front edge has a slim line of four layers of fabric (outer fabric, lining, and the turn-under from each). When you fit, allow enough room to overlap the edges, and put the lacing holes less than an inch apart vertically and no more than 5/8" from the edge of the fabric. Offset the lacing holes (after making a parallel pair at the top). Then overlap the edges and lace up with a single cord, tied off at the bottom and going up in a spiral — out on one side, in on the other. What you end up with is a cord wrapped around a skinny stack of eight layers of fabric. It's as strong as a bone, and it doesn't shift. Or gap.

**Q. Never mind gapping — I can't get the dress closed! What happened?**

A. As you go through each fitting stage, you will find it gets harder and harder to close up the



front. But if you keep the dress on for a few minutes, the heat and moisture of your body relaxes the fabric, and the dress loosens up a bit. This happens with the finished dress too. Each time you put it on, it will seem as though it can't possibly lace closed. Don't panic. Just lace it up with a gap, wear it that way for 5 to 10 minutes, and then pull the lacings tight. This isn't as time-consuming as it sounds — I usually get into the dress, do up my hair, then tighten the dress.

**Q. How do I get rid of that wrinkle across the small of my back?**

A. First, if you're wearing panties with an elastic band at that point, get rid of them. That often takes care of the problem. Next, make sure the back seam exactly matches the curve of your spine; sometimes taking it in a pinch at the point of the wrinkle helps. Third, accept the fact that some wrinkles are normal, and some medieval images of this style show some wrinkling at the small of the back.

**Q. How do I get rid of the crease under the bust?**

A. You probably need to pull the shoulders up and out further, and you may need to fit tighter under the bust. A deep fold is undesirable. However, large-busted women may always have some creasing there. It's period; you can see it in some of the sources.

**Q. How do I get rid of that horizontal pulling across my breast, at the level of the underarm?**

A. That's a common problem — a tightness or indentation slicing directly across the breast to the underarm. It usually aligns with the top end of the side seam; above that, the armhole provides some release from the crosswise tension. I've found it occurs most often when I'm using a fabric that is not very flexible, such as a cotton or a tight-woven silk. Beyond that, there are several possible causes, with different solutions.

Most likely, the fitting is too loose in the ribcage, allowing the bust to drop. If so, you need more pressure on the bottom of the bust to push the interior breast mass up. Make sure the dress becomes narrower as you move down the side seam, like a funnel. Ideally (if anatomy allows), you can move most of the breast mass higher than this problem area, so you can use the pressure to good advantage in pressing on the underside of the breast rather than slicing into the front of it.

Horizontal pulling sometimes comes from tension focused on a grain line going across the bust. Pulling the front pieces out on a slant at the side seam, under the arm, can minimize this. This side-seam shifting involves re-sewing the side seam to remove a vertical wedge of fabric from the front pieces, usually an inch or two wide at the armhole edge and three or four inches in depth along the side seam. That changes the angle of the grain slightly and adds a little flexibility. It also helps solve another common problem — a ripple in the front armhole edge. This situation commonly occurs in large-busted women, because you can't raise as much of the breast mass above the level of the bottom of the armhole.

The worst possibility is that you cut the armhole too deep in front. It should be right against the body, all the way around the arm, at the point at which your arm bends. The only fix is to re-do. Aren't you glad you discovered this on the lining fabric?

**Q. What about the little creases just under the arm, in front?**

A. You see them in artwork too. Don't worry about them.

**Q. What other tips and tricks should I remember while I sew?**

A. The construction relies on the natural stretch of the fabric — so do your best not to inhibit that. Machine-sew seams with a very slight zigzag, so the seam can stretch as the fabric does. Don't stay-stitch anything.

Keep left and right sides very carefully symmetrical until you reach a point at which you need to compensate for body anomalies (fairly late in the fitting). Until then, if you make an adjustment to one side, make the exact same adjustment on the other. After you pin both side seams during a fitting, mark and average the new seam lines before you sew them in place. If your dress isn't precisely even, you won't know if any imbalance you see later is from the woman's body or an artifact of sloppy sewing.

Begin fittings from the waist (which is relatively unchangeable), going both up and down from there. Cut your seam allowances huge at shoulders and armholes, because everything will change in those areas after you start pulling on the fabric. Fit in increments, a little tighter each time, so you can get a sense of the new body shape before you commit to the angles of the pieces.

Cut your neckline in a U-shape or a gentle scoop and pull it open into a wider scoop, and pull the excess fabric diagonally across the bust. The exact steepness of the U and the form of the curve you cut varies immensely depending on fullness and location of the bust, and also on the inherent stretch of the fabric; I'm afraid only experience will help you on judging that. (That's another reason is why I CANNOT give anyone a pattern.)

**Q. What if I really screw up?**

A. I've been known to hack the shoulder or armhole or bust section off a lining piece and replace it with fresh fabric so I could re-cut the problem part. Just be sure to make your cut on the grain, and match the grain angle of the replacement piece exactly to the grain of the original piece. Instead of a regular seam, overlap the new piece about 1/4 to 1/2 inch and sew both raw edges perfectly flat with zigzag. This method won't interfere with stretch. The piecing won't show when you're done, as long as you avoid placing the piecing line over the larger part of the bust.

**Q. Why don't you write this all up in a how-to article?**

A. Some people have been able to make this dress based on my descriptions; these are typically people who are already familiar with the look of the style, who have experimented with various approaches to reproducing it, and who have some understanding of the difference between medieval and modern sewing techniques.

However, I don't think I could describe this process in a definitive sequential set of directions that would be suitable for someone without such background and experience. A comprehensive write-up would have to explain many details of technique, such as how to insert a gore and how to allow for overlap on a laced or buttoned opening. These are things that are more easily learned with experience and personal instruction, and are beyond the scope of an article.

More important, I don't think I can adequately capture all the nuances of the fitting process in writing. The specific fitting problems change with each woman, as do the solutions.

There are just so many factors and possibilities involved that any description will be incomplete — meaning some readers, expecting a full set of instructions, would understandably become frustrated and angry when they encounter some specific problem I did not anticipate or address in my description.

Just as this dress must be fit to the individual, it must be taught to the individual. Overall, that's really a very medieval approach.

### **THE GOTHIC FITTED DRESS: USEFUL BOOKS**

Costume books often show only a few “typical” examples of any one style. Fortunately, fitted dresses are easy to find in European art of 1350-1450. To get a sense of the range of variation, page through the following:

- art books focusing on medieval art of this era in Europe generally (the “International Gothic” style) or in a specific country
- art books focusing on medieval art by medium; particularly useful in this period are manuscript illuminations, monumental brasses, and sculpture
- illustrated “coffee-table” books on historical figures or events of this period or on various aspects of medieval culture or life
- art calendars, date books, etc. with medieval themes, particularly the “Medieval Woman” series

Following is a list of just a few of the books I have found helpful for this period. I could easily add at least 50 others of equal merit. Consider these a starting point to lead you to the useful parts of the library shelves ... and then browse from there. Be sure to look in the oversize sections of each call number to find the best art books and picture-books.

#### **COSTUME BOOKS**

*The Visual History of Costume, 14th & 15th Centuries*, Margaret Scott (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986).

*Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, Stella Mary Newton (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1980; recently re-issued).

#### **MANUSCRIPT FACSIMILES**

*The Tres Riches Heures of Jean, Duc du Berry* (several available editions).

*The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, Millard Meiss and Elizabeth Beatson (New York: Braziller, 1974).

*The Rohan Book of Hours*, Millard Meiss and Marcel Thomas (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973).

*The Four Seasons of the House of Cerruti*, Judith Spencer (New York: Facts on File, 1983).

*The Decameron*, Edmond Pognon (Spain: Productions Liber, 1978).

**BOOKS ON SPECIFIC TYPES OF ART**

*Monumental Brasses: The Portfolio Plates of the Monumental Brass Society*, Malcolm Norris (Suffolk: Boydell, 1988).

*Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, Muriel Clayton (London: HMSO) (sometimes indexed under its cover title, *Brass Rubbings*, or under “Victoria & Albert Museum” as the author or publisher)

*Manuscript Painting at the Court of France*, Francois Avril (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1978)

*The Golden Age: Manuscript painting at the time of Jean, Duke of Berry*, Marcel Thomas (New York: Braziller, 1979).

**HISTORY, CULTURE, ETC.**

*A Mirror of Chaucer’s World*, Roger Loomis (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).

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