

Attired

Perspectives on Historical Costume

Edited by

Dr Damayanthie Eluwawalage

Delaware State University

Series on the History of Art



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Introduction

This publication explores the integrative narratives of historical costume in the novel ecumenical perspective of literature, leisure, ornamentation, customs/traditions, and theoretical contexts. The adaptation, mutation, and transformation of attire are the result of complex interactions between many factors such as economic conditions, political conditions, social conditions, psychological conditions, and technology. The meanings encoded in the costume are one of the noticeable hallmarks of any society. This proposed book investigates multidisciplinary topics; for instance, “From Pattern to Pate: An Examination of Early Modern Embroidered English Head-Coverings and their Sources,” examines embellishments such as needlework and embroidery, which was regarded as a pervasive practice during the early modern era in England (and elsewhere). This skill was used to decorate a vast number of items of clothing and furnishings in all socio-economic levels, including the ubiquitous head coverings: the cap for men and the coif for women. These items were, at their most basic, constructed from rough homespun linen to the finest and sheerest batiste, and could be very plain or intricately decorated with silk, gold, lace, spangles, and pulled and drawn whitework. At the most extreme end, they were blatant status symbols of wealth and power, just as a Hermes scarf would be today. The patterns for these designs were an important part of the chain of production. In fact, a key source for many patterns included the manuscripts written by Thomas Trevelyan in the early seventeenth century. He was a draughtsman who created a number of patterns for decorative arts, including patterns specific to embroidery and, especially, embroidered caps. The study will examine these patterns, show how they were utilized in needlework, and discuss the importance of caps and coifs as an item of clothing at this time. In relation to sports and related-costumes, “It to Win It: The Evolution of Fightwear in Mixed Martial Arts Combat Sports,” focuses on the historical concept of fight, physical encounter, combat, or bout and its connection with related-attire. As the study explains, sanctioned, licensed mixed martial arts (MMA) combat sports are some of the most popular events taking place around the world today, with some organizations boasting their fight cards are available to view in over on hundred and fifty countries and which can be seen by up to 2.7 billion people, live, as the action happens. Although everyone in every location where the event is being telecast may not be watching the contest, it is true that MMA has gone from a relatively

unknown, untelevised, unsanctioned sport thirty years ago to a global phenomenon today. Similar to all sports, MMA has changed significantly since its inception as it has grown in popularity, specifically with regard to the fightwear, or costumes, that are worn by mixed martial artists, especially those worn by fighters in the Ultimate Fighting Championship promotion since its formation in 1993. It was in the first UFC fight card where combatants could wear anything they wanted, such as full keikogi, lycra, or spandex wrestling singlets or even wrestling briefs seen in the World Wrestling Federation, now known as World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. The choice of fightwear by the fighter could dramatically alter the way combatants engaged with each other. Today, fightwear is regulated by the promotion and the sanctioning body, whether it be an individual state commission or a nation's regulating body. In the case of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, both the promotion and the sanctioning body, which is the national Association of Boxing Commissions, regulate fightwear from the clothing the fighters put on to the gloves they wear, and their groin protection as well as their gum shields are also regulated. The evolution of fight costumes is interesting as it not only demonstrates the utility of the attire but also the changing rules due to a variety of influences external to the fighter's preference, not the least of which are the demands of the fight promoters of the MMA organization, the governing commission and the fans; In the context of clothing and literature, "Attire in Virgil's Aeneid," analyses the contribution of dress to the narrative process of Virgil's Aeneid, which in the West possesses a readership second only to the Bible. The epic commemorates Rome, destined to rule the world, when Octavian became the first emperor as Augustus Caesar. Hailed as canonical while still being written and celebrated by Emperor Augustus in 17 BCE as a masterpiece of poetry and patriotism, the Aeneid was swiftly adopted as both "school text and part of the furniture of the mind for educated Romans."¹ Seen as the external trappings of an internal quest, as allegorical poetry where the concrete stands in for ideas, the Aeneid inspires both sight and insight in large part by its use of material culture, often in the form of items of dress. Consequently, this chapter examines select narratives constructed around vestments, and discusses how Virgil directs micro-level, personal clothing items to probe and question macrolevel themes such as the cost of war and empire-building. Using modern western social theory, it tracks dress as it carries and transmits culturally ascribed messages

¹ Charles Martindale, *Introduction: The Classic of all Europe*, in "The Cambridge Companion to Virgil" ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge UP, 1997), 1s.

that expand metaphysical and historical meaning in this early canon of literature where clothing items act as devices to shape and construct the narrative, mold character, and advance the plot. This study considers how clothing images embedded within this ancient volume function to convey the cultural convictions of the civilizations from which the text arises. As “Historical Costume: Acknowledging the Distinctiveness Between the Centuries and Epochs” examines, in any historical study, literary texts should be interpreted within the appropriate historical context, especially when analyzing costumes. For example, in *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*,² Jerome Carcopino states, “If Roman life is not to become lost in anachronisms or petrified in abstraction, we must study it within a strictly defined period.” The differences between centuries are significantly varied in the context of human deportment, customs, traditions, and attitudes.³ In fact, the pursuit of etiquette has been a societal concern for centuries.⁴ Manners and deportment are constantly transformed with changing society; therefore, these social behaviors should not be regarded merely as details of little consequence; they are an expression of a particular era as much as any other outward manifestation. Thus, according to Roland Barthes, “When we examine how clothes define an individual, we must also set the man or woman within the context of their place and time,” as the differences in clothing styles between the centuries are significant.⁵ Cutting and construction techniques also varied considerably from century to century as each era produced its own unique decorations and silhouettes.⁶ Clothes represent an art form ascending out of a particular period and environment. According to Francois Boucher, costume and its application and meaning have varied with each period.⁷ Differences in fashion theories also reflect different eras, and the chapter will explore those pertinent fashion theories between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, nineteenth-century theorists, such as Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel,

² Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (London: Penguin Books, 1941), 9.

³ Joan Wildeblood, *The Polite World: A Guide to English Manners and Deportment* (London: Davis Poynter Ltd, 1965).

⁴ Joseph Dent, *Australian Etiquette: Rules and Usage of the Best Society* (London: D. E. McConnell, 1980).

⁵ Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1995).

⁶ Gordon Willis & David Midgley, *Fashion Marketing: An Anthology of View Points and Perspectives* (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1973), 12.

⁷ Francois Boucher, *A History of Costume in the West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 5-6.

regarded differentiation and stratification as essential pre-conditions of fashion. Twentieth-century theorist Herbert Blumer, on the other hand, regards fashion as an expression of collective behavior; that is, the fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need for class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion. Also, the psychological, sociological, and gender aspects of costume will be discussed in theoretical contexts.

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PAGES MISSING
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List of Contributors

Damayanthie Eluwawalage, PhD, MPHA - Professional Historian, Assistant Professor, Private Pilot, Aerospace Education Officer (Civil Air Patrol, United States Air Force Auxiliary), NASA Research Scientist, and Industrial, Product and Fashion Designer. She earned her doctorate in design/history from Edith Cowan University, Australia. She also holds a BA (Honours First-class) in Design from Curtin University of Technology, Australia. She is an Assistant Professor at Delaware State University and a Professional Historian who specializes in costume history. Her multidisciplinary research interests include interdisciplinary design, industrial/product design, design theory, aviation/space history, space/aviation (she holds a Private Pilot License), costume history, fashion/aesthetic theory, space suit design concepts/applications, lunar dust mitigation technologies, oxygen/gas mask design/technologies, and general aviation.

Linda Matheson, PhD, holds an interdisciplinary doctorate from the University of California at Davis, where until 2022 she lectured in the Department of Comparative Literature. She also taught in the Departments of Textiles and Clothing, Gender Studies and Women's Studies. Her dissertation, *Divinely Attired*, examines the contribution of dress to the narrative process of Ancient Epics and Sacred Texts such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the book of "Genesis," the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Aeneid*. Using modern western social theory, it explores the interweaving of written dress, and image as vehicle of character and cultural development. She publishes both nationally and internationally and is currently working on the *Rhetoric of the Images from the Cantigas of Santa Maria* (12th century Spain).

Jeremiah Snyder completed his Master's in History at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs in 2014. Having studied Greek and Roman history by reading primary source material while also focusing his efforts on the history of the United States from its entry in World War I onward, Jeremiah has an extensive background in the Humanities with interests that concentrate on the intersections of Western arts, religion and politics. After some years of teaching humanities courses at the collegiate level, Jeremiah now works conducting research for a law firm in the Denver, Colorado, area. In his free

time, he loves to be outdoors in the beautiful Rocky Mountains with his wife, two children, and other family members, and writing when he can.

Christy Gordon Baty is an Eleanor M. Garvey Fellow in Printing and Graphic Arts at the Houghton Rare Books Library at Harvard University. Christy graduated with a Master's in History from the University of Nebraska at Kearney; her thesis focused on the needlework of English women in the early modern era. She earned her undergraduate degree in English Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. Christy is a member of the American Historical Association, Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Alpha Theta, and the Embroiderers' Guild of America.

Erin Harvey Moody is a certified Collections Manager of Costume and Textiles. She has taught aspects of historical fashion for many years and is a member of the Costume Society, UK. Erin studied historical embroidery technique at The Royal School of Needlework, and holds a PgCert in Museum Education from the University of Glasgow. Erin's primary work has been the cultural influence of needlework and fashion in early modern England. She is a member of the Royal Historical Society, and an Eleanor M. Garvey Fellow in Printing and Graphic Arts at the Houghton Rare Books Library at Harvard University.

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