

## The Novel Pourpoint

Anne Bissonnette, Ph.D., University of Alberta, Canada

Keywords: Quilted Jacket, Sleeve Construction, Range of Motion, Sustainability

**Purpose:** A 2019 encounter with a fourteenth-century pourpoint (924.XVI.2, 2020) from the Musée des Tissus in Lyon, France, that is said to have been worn by Charles de Blois (1319-1364) renewed my interest in quilted clothes for active lifestyles. Vaguely reminiscent of today's puffer jacket worn by men and women, this pourpoint was worn even closer to the body to emphasize an athletic build. Its tailored sleeves are curved at the elbow and reach high under the arms. Their extension into the bodice section may be quite unique and done with range of motion in mind. While few medieval pourpoints have survived, the aforementioned piece led me to investigate body-delineating, quilted garments and alternative ways of designing patterns for increased range of motion and fabric use. *The Novel Pourpoint* is a woman's garment designed with function, aesthetics, and environmental considerations in mind.

Garments meant for strenuous activities, such as sports and combat, have been adopted and worn more broadly for centuries and often appropriated by women. Soon after 1340, new fashions fitted at the torso impacted the wardrobes of European men and women (Newton, 1980, p. 2-3). Dress historian Stella Mary Newton attributes this change to the introduction of the set-in sleeve and explains how "once the sleeves have been set high, to coincide with the articulation of the whole arm, both they and the body covering can be fitted as tightly as desired without unduly restraining the movements of the wearer" (Newton, 1980, p. 3). Historian H. M. Zijlstra-Zweens suggests that the tight fit also led to the shortening of men's hemlines to a point where garments barely covered the hips (Zijlstra-Zweens, 1988, p. 27). The pourpoint came to life under these circumstances and has been defined as a "quilted doublet worn by men in the 14th and 15th centuries as part of civil costume and of armour" ("Pourpoint," 2020). The etymology of the word tells of a garment meant (i.e. *pour*) to accommodate laces tipped with metal tags (i.e. *points*) as they are inserted on one's hose, which are then secured to the laces of a short jacket (Houston, 1996, pp. 142 and 181). The resulting garment fits tightly at the torso and may cover the groin and buttocks closely, which was likely the case for de Blois. As today's population prizes athleticism, bodily perfection and tight-fitting garments, the affordance provided by a fitted pourpoint and its engineered-sleeves was ripe for inspiration for a woman's coat.

**Process:** *The Novel Pourpoint* is a quilted silk and cotton coat draped on a woman's body with the arms raised high. With efficient use of the fabric in mind, the pattern is designed in terms of "zero-waste and less-waste" of fabric, as championed by sustainability advocates Rissanen and McQuillan (2013, 2016). A shabby, secondhand cotton quilted

blanket was cut as padding for a sewing table and the remnants were used to create the jacket. All pattern pieces fit on a surface 45" by 80". The main part that covers the body was draped on the grain starting at the center front and ending on the bias at the center back. This main pattern piece has very little removed from its surface: instead of extracting a portion to create the high armhole, most of this area extends into the sleeve. This is antithetical to de Blois' pourpoint where the sleeves extend into the body of the coat. The cross grain of the blanket extends diagonally to a point below the wearer's buttocks to reduce fabric waste. Darts were cut out of the blanket to increase the fit at the waist but small remnants were pieced together to extend the main pattern piece at the shoulder in back. The remaining two pattern pieces are for the sleeves (draped on a bent arm) and narrow collar (taken from the back pointed hem). As for de Blois' textile covered in birds and lions, a prized fabric covers the common base materials. A silk charmeuse with flamboyant peacock feather motifs was chosen as a pun to the fashionability of the ca. 1340 medieval man.<sup>11</sup> The silk was quilted over the blanket following the same quilting lines. The edges of the darts were first zig-zagged, the uncut silk pushed in the dart openings, and the sides of the darts were brought together and closed using a modified zig-zag stitch. This eliminated raw edges for all darts. All other seams were butted and zig-zagged but were also covered with a narrow self-fabric band to cover raw edges. Cotton fabric was used to create cuffs and a removable collar to ease cleaning and/or reduce dry-cleaning, which is more environmental and user friendly.

The resulting design is both chic and practical. The high armhole allows a good range of motion and body delineation at the upper torso. The highly efficient use of fabric where the main pattern extends into the sleeve blurs the typical anatomical covering of pattern pieces and is reminiscent of both de Blois's pourpoint but also of the distinctive work of Madeleine Vionnet (Kirke, 1998, p. 63). Worn with tight pants or leggings, the up-to-date narrow silhouette of this distinctive tailored coat is not far removed from the hose and pourpoint of late fourteenth-century courtiers.<sup>2</sup>

Techniques: Draping as well as machine and hand quilting.

Materials: Silk charmeuse, cotton plain weave, cotton batting, buttons, snaps.

Date completed & measurements: May 1, 2020, size 10 to 12.

References:

924.XVI.2 (numéro d'inventaire). (2020). Joconde, Portail des collections des musées de France, recherche avancée, [http://www2.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/joconde\\_fr?ACTION=CHERCHER&FIELD\\_98=TECH&VALUE\\_98=baudruche%20&DOM=All&REL\\_SPECIFIC=3](http://www2.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/joconde_fr?ACTION=CHERCHER&FIELD_98=TECH&VALUE_98=baudruche%20&DOM=All&REL_SPECIFIC=3).

- Houston, Mary Galway. (1996). *Medieval Costume in England and France: The 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries*. Adam & Charles Black, London, 1939, reprinted by Dover, Mineola.
- Kirke, Betty. (1998). *Madeleine Vionnet*, Kyuryudo Art Publishing Co. Ltd., Tokyo, 1991 (in Japanese), reprint in English by Chronicle Books, San Francisco.
- Newton, Stella Mary. (2002). *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340-1365*. The Boydell Press, Rochester, 1980, reprint.
- Pourpoint. (2020). *Oxford English Dictionary* (Online). Retrieved from <https://www-oedcom.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/149083?rskey=r98KEr&result=1>.
- Rissanen, T. I. (2013). *Zero-waste Fashion Design: A Study at the Intersection of Cloth, Fashion Design and Pattern Cutting* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Technology, Sydney).
- Rissanen, T. I., & McQuillan, H. (2016). *Zero Waste Fashion Design* (Vol. 57). Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- V&A Museum, "The peacock revolution: 1960s menswear," <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/thepeacock-revolution-1960s-menswear>.
- Zijlstra-Zweens, H. M. (1988). *Of His Array Telle I No Lenger Tale: Aspects of Costume, Arms and Armour in Western Europe, 1200-1400*. Brill Rodopi, Amsterdam.

---

<sup>1</sup> While the "peacock revolution" is mostly applied to 1960s menswear, the bravado of the ca. 1360 doublet wearers is by no means less bold. See "The peacock revolution: 1960s menswear," V&A Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-peacock-revolution-1960s-menswear>.

<sup>2</sup> See kneeling courtier in the ca. 1372 illumination from the Musée Meermannno (Ms.10 B 23) at [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_historiale\\_de\\_Jean\\_de\\_Vaudetar#/media/Fichier:MMW\\_10B\\_23\\_002R\\_MINMJean\\_de\\_Vaudetar.jpg](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_historiale_de_Jean_de_Vaudetar#/media/Fichier:MMW_10B_23_002R_MINMJean_de_Vaudetar.jpg).