

The brief: a headpiece in red, burgundy and beige, inspired by Faust.

Faust is a very old legend that has remained popular across the centuries. The first known printed version appeared in 1587, but a couple of historical figures on which it is thought to have been based lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the story is preceded by a similar one, popular in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, about a 6<sup>th</sup> century figure. The most famous version is the play by Goethe published in 1832 (part one), and adaptations references and analyses continue to this day in a wide variety of media.

The story follows a scientist who wanted ‘to know too much’, amongst other things coded as bad, and makes a deal with a devil. What he does with his new power and a devil-assistant varies, as does the final outcome, although the two don’t appear to be connected in any modern sense, with Faust’s fate determined by further bargaining and intercession with the ‘good’ side rather than doing good things.

The early stories are clearly couched in christianity, with themes of innocence and indulgence, damnation and salvation, but from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, the tale is ripe for reinterpretation. I hope some of the new works have put a very different take on the struggle of knowledge vs. faith, because that could lead to some worthwhile interrogations of topics such as power, science, compromise, medical intervention, manipulation or aspirationalism. Without reading everything, I can only imagine such takes would also yeild rather more sympathetic characters, for those of us who are perfectly happy with ‘preferring human to divine knowledge’. It may, however, lose the murky and disturbing tone that makes it so interesting to costume!



In researching Faust and medieval Germany and the Netherlands, I explored the surprisingly consistent feathered caps of Mephistopheles; the fascinating transition from hoods with shoulder capes and liripipes to chaperons; and the bewildering array of women’s hats of around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, from the pairs of temples that resonate with recent obsessions making ourselves look like we have cat ears, through large, dramatic horns and a variety of other towering shapes, supplemented further by veils suspended on wires, and back down to fascinatingly rigid styles such as the gable hood.



Apart from fitting the brief, my criteria in choosing a design for this project involve:

- Something that has a chance of coming out regal and/or threatening, not tacky. From what I've seen, it's a challenge to do anything 15<sup>th</sup> century that looks serious, even if you're not prone like many to panne velvet!
- I'd love to do some experimental archaeology and get a feel for what it was like to live in this time and place where hats were so important and dramatic, so some degree of historical accuracy would be welcome, if possible.
- Since we know so little about original techniques and even materials, I'd like to make something that would really benefit from our modern ones. Something they would've done if they could. So something blocked, not a fabric piece that I could sew from a pattern, just like them but worse.
- I want to learn about creating complex shapes more than surface embellishment. Especially since contemporary embellishment was all about the gold, which doesn't fit the brief!

With those in mind, I've focused on the tall variety of 15<sup>th</sup> century escoffions, with wired veils.

Escoffions are striking and represent an interesting moment in dress history, where headgear completely outshone other garments, as beautiful as they were!

It's also a moment where headware appears to have been formalising from a collection of wraps, caul, bourrelets and veils supporting, shaping, obscuring and potentially supplementing the wearer's own artfully-piled hair, into a single garment. At least for the nobility.

With so few artifacts remaining from the middle ages, it is difficult to ascertain the true details, but the escoffion does have some advantages. Being so new and noteworthy at the time, derided and even decried, we can at least be confident that contemporary representations of tall escoffions aren't going to be affected by the problems of trying to find reality in religious art. They are also unentangled by the backward-looking traditionalism that occurs in places like royal funerary statuary – we can be confident that if it appeared at this time, something pretty similar was being worn at this time. Of course there are still veracity issues, as several interesting portraits of the era are known to not have been sat for by the person they purport to represent; even the artist isn't always clear as paintings were often produced by workshops. And, of course, the passage of time and continual reproduction by different people with different styles, assumptions and motives make working with history hazardous.



Painted in 1827, this portrait purports to be of Ermengarde d'Anjou, 1068-1147. However the costume is clearly from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, quite possibly 1450s Burgundy. The portrait claims to be done according to a painting from the Abbey of Redon, taken from Vannes, but I can't find any records of such. As an isolated and perhaps completely unrealistic representation, it's not easy to establish what might be under the veil.

So why this one? I'm intrigued by the audacity of the giant wired veil, and I still find it elegant. I'm pretty sure it's all in one piece and solid independent of the hair underneath, and I think the lack of a bourrelet dramatically reduces the risk of tackiness, as does the fact that it's not a hennin or evil stepmother horns!



A note on colours: they held specific meaning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A variety of sumptuary laws restricted what colours people could wear, as well as the richness and dimensions of garments. Red was one of the colours reserved for nobility in certain times and places, which makes it particularly interesting to see the series shown below of uniform-like red hoods on women who appear to be working. Of course this may be just a choice of the illuminator, but uniforms certainly did exist – courtesans would regularly give their staff fabric or garments. Livery was a gift, but it was definitely chosen by the boss. Wimples and other veils were mostly white, but I've seen a couple of examples of dark colours. A pale creamy beige would probably be suitably recognisable, if I don't want to go too drastic!



Here are some possible back views. The first doesn't address whether a separate construction would be plausible if the sides are higher than the front. The others suggest the option of being divided at the top but cut from a single piece.



Back views are hard to come by for anything, but these variations appear to suggest that once escoffions became this tall and narrow, they became a solid shape with the bourrelet no longer a padded roll sitting atop the hair and coverings, but a partly-padded nod to the old style, and an excuse for drapery. The circle is broken, and there's no reason to think there is any division in the structure for it to edge.

The dresses in the first two images reflect Hermengarde's, the V-necked gown that replaced the houppelande, so if one is to assume that both are faithful representations of reality, this is the closest example. Of course, that is a big assumption! The second appears to be just a later redrawing of the first, but at least that artist also thought the roll was no longer structural! Of course replacing the bourrelet with another piece on the front doesn't give us any clues as to Hermengarde's lines and finish, where the front piece appears to sit underneath the side.

The third example appears to show the front piece as a mere triangle with the back piece presumably continuous, which is an option, but the hat is also more triangular to suit, and tilted, which minimises the back. The fourth, also tilted, offers a continuous structure with the sections as mere surface design.



Here are some of the other rare images of escoffions with clearly wired veils – heart shapes that are bulbous even without a bourrelet, a simple coif and a pair of biscuits on either a skullcap or a band. Not convincing.

Here are some designs mocked up. Please ignore the roughness, the lack of burgundy, the white bits and the unintentional nose that wouldn't go away!



Thinking of veils, here is some information on the standard shape for a short hennin. I'll have to try it out to see whether it's the same shape I'll need for such a vertical orientation or not.

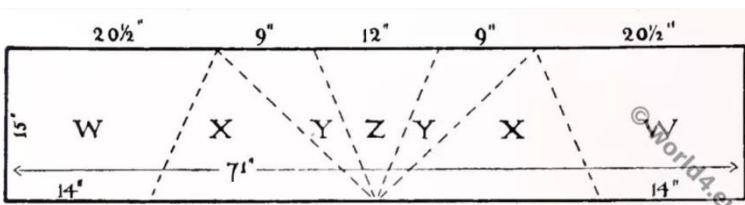


Fig. 623. Diagram of Veil



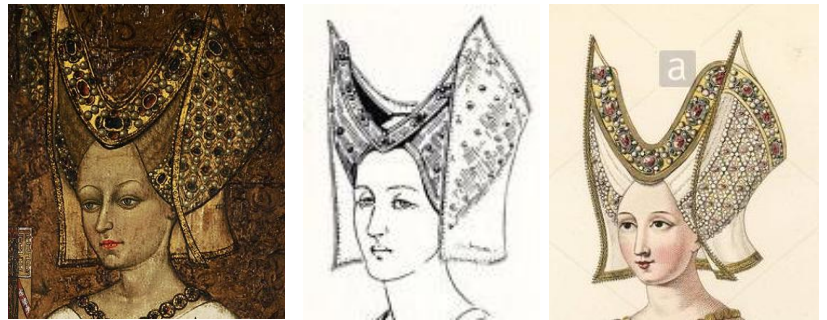
Fig. 619. DEVELOPMENT OF THE HENNIN

Apart from modesty and denoting married status, covering the hair with white wimples appears to have been all about highlighting the paleness of your skin. I'm not really comfortable with any of those concepts, so as interesting as it is when entire horns appear to be made of white sheets, I'm much happier when they migrated up away from the face, seeming to float above the head on wires. This is mostly seen on hennins, but there are a handful of images available of wired escoffions.

Some other miscellaneous interesting shapes, in case Ermengarde isn't working out for some reason:



This dramatic headpiece also appears to have its veil wired, just a little, as well as a similar hairline, but not in such a way as to shed light on the questions at hand. It also doesn't look like it'd win the plausibility/tackiness stakes.



They're all made of hair and metal, but a nice shape. Interpretable.

A nice, interesting shape. The one on the right is an interpretation for a masquerade in 1860. Is it less tacky because of the shape, or something else they've done, or just because it's not the kind of tack we're used to these days?



So, actual horn shapes. They're fantastic and could be spectacular supporting a wired veil, but I'm just not sure if anything like this is actually real, or just a caricature of the other pointy and/or divided styles of the time. I also have no idea how they'd be made, with such variable curves exposed from all directions in one continuous piece.



And for something different and curious – open hoods, with cat ears! I doubt they'd make a good project for this class, since they all look sewn, except maybe the two back views, which I can't figure out... but how fun! Was this standard attire for working women in some place or time, considering all those similar red hoods?



## Glossary

- Bourrelet – padded roll, possibly the result of further abstraction of the chaperon, it would sit atop your horns until the shapes no longer supported it and it became vestigial
  - Burgundy – All sorts of different things over time, from 1441 its court was in Brussels. Apparently the leader of fashion in the region.
  - Chaperon – what happens when you keep rolling up the face hole on your caped hood and stick the resultant doughnut on the top of your head, with the liripipe and possibly-dagged cape hanging out
  - Crespine or caul – hairnet, snood
  - Escoffion – anything big with horns or curves, not a hennin
  - Hennin – a cone or truncated cone, with or without hoods, crowns or veils
  - Liripipe – the long thin bit that dangles from the back of your hood
  - Wimble – veil, particularly the white ones that were wrapped everywhere
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