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## EC69-450 Clothing and the Spirit of the times : Part I -- The Ancient World through the Renaissance

Jane Spence

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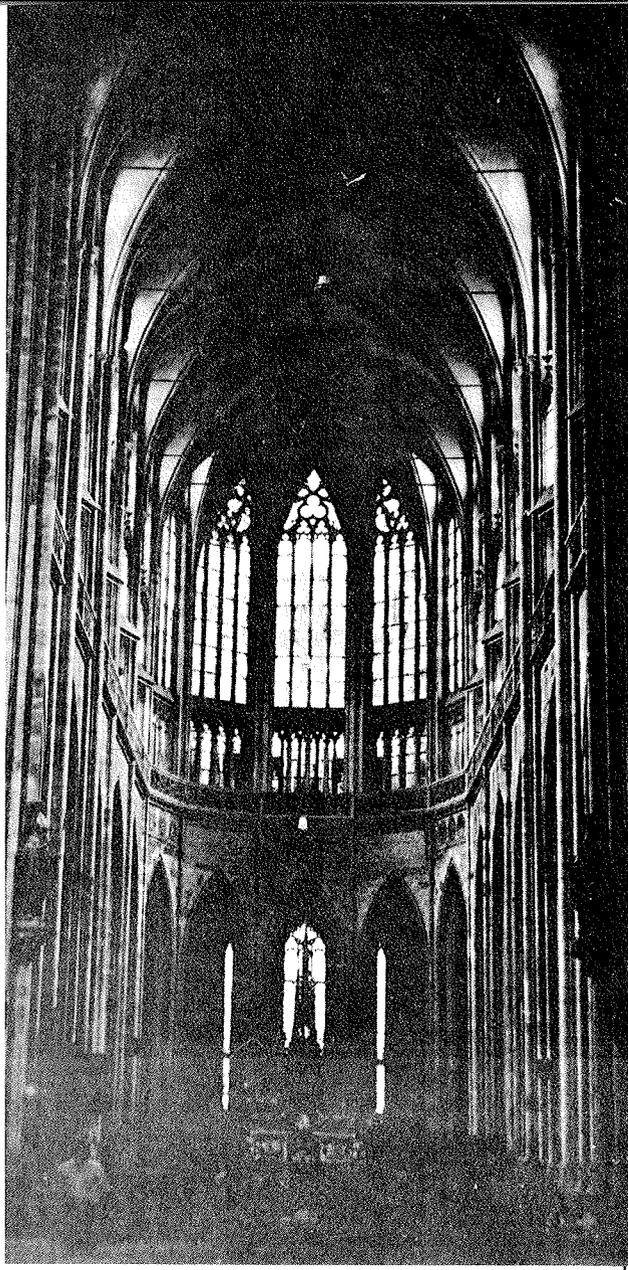
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# Clothing and the Spirit of the Times

PART 1 - THE ANCIENT WORLD  
THROUGH THE RENAISSANCE



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS,  
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING. E. F. FROLIK, DEAN; J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

# CLOTHING AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

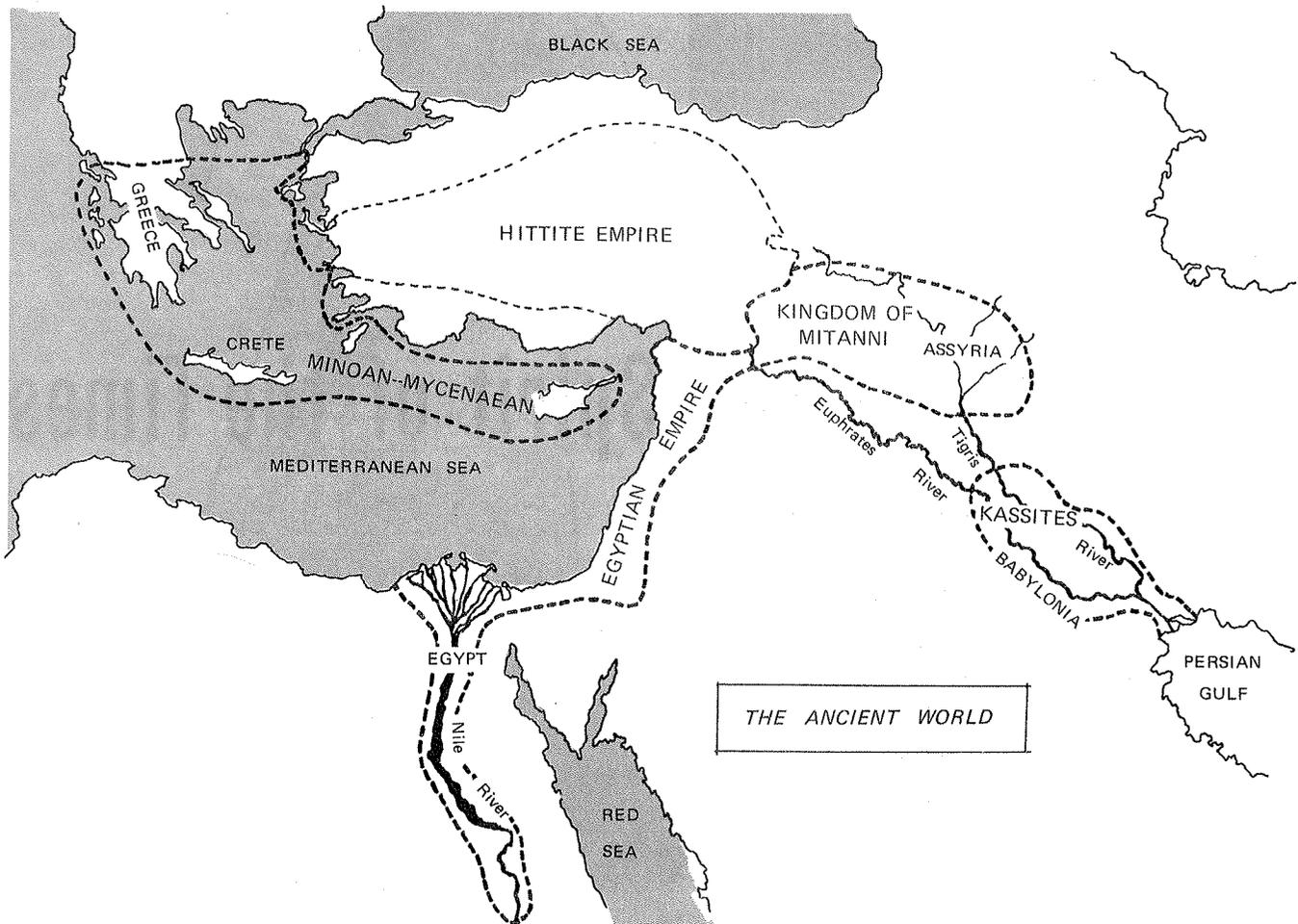
## PART I – The Ancient World Through the Renaissance

By Jane Speece  
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Fashion is not an arbitrary style based on the creative impulse of one designer's mind. Fashion is rooted in the hopes and fears of humanity. Political, social and economic conditions affect men's minds and emotions. In turn the minds of men interact with surrounding conditions to produce the trend of thought and feeling of a period. Thus, the spirit of the age – Zeitgeist (tsit ' gist) – evolves. Costume becomes the reflection of this spirit.

Behind all costume stands the spirit of the age. Any new fashion to be accepted must be in accord with the ideas current at that time. As people's views in art, politics, economics, religion or science vary, so does the length of hair, the size of hat, the style of suit. Zeitgeist is in operation.

Looking back through various periods of history, the spirit of the time can be sensed as reflected in the costume of the time.



## ANCIENT WORLD

### Early Civilization

Asian civilization, preceding that of Europe, arose in the fertile river valleys about 3000 B.C. (Figure 1). Egyptian culture was the first to evolve and clustered along the Nile River.

The Assyrians, later absorbed into the kingdom of Mitanni, and the Babylonians, later called the Kassite kingdom, developed civilizations surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the area called Mesopotamia.

Another culture soon began in the areas of Crete and Greece. These were the Minoans and their followers the Mycenaeans.

Each area had its own individual style of dress. The same basic style was retained for centuries.

**Egyptian:** Loin cloths secured by a belt were worn by the lower classes. Men and women of the upper classes wore triangular shaped skirts. Heads were shaved for hygienic and religious reasons and wigs were worn. Men's and women's clothes were similar.

**Babylonian and Assyrian:** Shirts were short and tight sleeves were worn by all classes. Slaves and the lower classes wore the shirt to the knee; royalty wore it to the ankle and

added a fringed cloak. Both men and women wore long hair. False beards and wigs were popular.

**Minoans and Mycenaeans:** Men wore short sheaths called loin-skirts. Women wore long-flounced, bell-shaped skirts and a short-sleeved jacket with an open front. Slender waists were emphasized. Men's hair was often worn longer than women's.

Asia Minor played a significant part in history as its people became the channel through which the culture and civilization of Asia was transmitted to Greece and Europe. In the East Chinese and Indian civilizations had arisen. The Persians occupied areas surrounding the Persian Gulf. Other peoples scattered in Asia Minor between the Mediterranean Sea and the East were the Syrians, Medes, Amazons, Parthians and the Phrygians (fri-gians).

**Peoples of Asia Minor and the East:** There were some national differences, but costumes in all countries were similar. Both sexes wore almost the same costume. The Persian costume of shirt, underclothing and stockings worn under a knee-length or longer tunic and trousers was representative. Set-in sleeves were Oriental in origin and was their contribution to the world of dress.



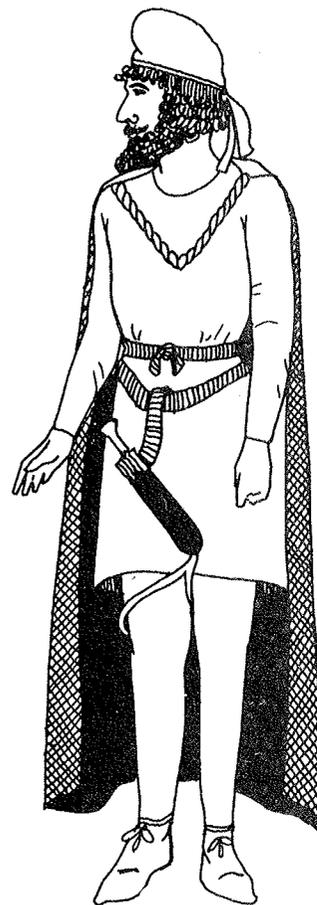
EGYPTIAN 3000 - 525 B.C.



BABYLONIAN and ASSYRIAN  
1500 B.C. - 550 B.C.



MYCENAEAN 1500 B.C.



ANCIENT PERSIAN  
About 550 B.C.

The Egyptians initiated trade which resulted in the spread of civilization to the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Great commercial cities were established and, as trade grew, dress began to reflect the increased prosperity.

Basic clothing styles remained about the same. These people were more concerned with developing the basic arts and extending the civilized portions of the world than in fashion as we know it.

Refinements showed in luxuries added to basic dress form. Brilliant dyes in reds, greens, blues and purples were used; perfumes and cosmetics were worn; intricate hair styles evolved; elaborate jewelry set with precious stones was adopted; silk from the East and finely woven linens were added to the coarse linens, cottons and wools in use.

About 1400 B.C. the then known civilized world had reached a peak of prosperity and peacefulness. Egypt was the dominant power.

Then came the deluge. The Hittites pushed back Egyptian boundaries to be overrun in turn by wild tribes invading Asia Minor. The Kassite and Mitanni kingdoms were broken by revolt and invasion. Greece was overrun by barbarians. The Persians began to expand their boundaries. Plague, invasion and earthquake caused cultural and commercial contacts to be broken off for centuries. Refinements to dress were at a standstill, and few variations were seen for several hundred years. A whole era of civilization had come to an end.

#### Advancing Civilization

About 750 B.C. trade and commerce once again began to link the countries. The next great civilization to dominate the world was that of the Greeks. The accumulation of wealth in Greek trade centers laid the basis of the Greek period known today as the Classic Age of Greece.

The Greeks gloried in bodily beauty and excelled in philosophy, science and creative art. Their clothing was entirely different from the preceding peoples of Greece. A reflection of the spirit of their age can be seen in their clothing with its simple, draped lines intended to glorify the human figure and to express the freedom of their minds. Coarsely woven wool was a common fabric but, as prosperity increased, fine linens and silk were used in its place.

**Greeks:** For six centuries (seventh to the first century B.C.) a rectangle of material was secured at the shoulder by a pin or brooch to form a tunic, usually confined at the waist by a cord. Men wore the tunic knee-length, women wore it ankle-length. Hair was first worn long, then bound up or cut short.

The Etruscans, thought to be from Asia Minor, had settled Northern Italy around 1000 B.C., bringing with them culture from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Crete. Eventually, these people handed on to the Romans a luxurious and sumptuous civilization closely allied to that of the Greek.

**Etruscans:** A shirt-like garment with a cloak was basic for both sexes. Women's dress was more Oriental in character with a long, tight-fitting robe with half-sleeves.

ANCIENT GREEK  
About 1500 B.C.



ETRUSCAN  
About 1000 B.C.



ANCIENT ROMAN  
First Century B.C.  
5th Century A.D.

Rome was founded in 753 B.C., and the Roman Empire dominated the known world for many centuries (Figure 2).

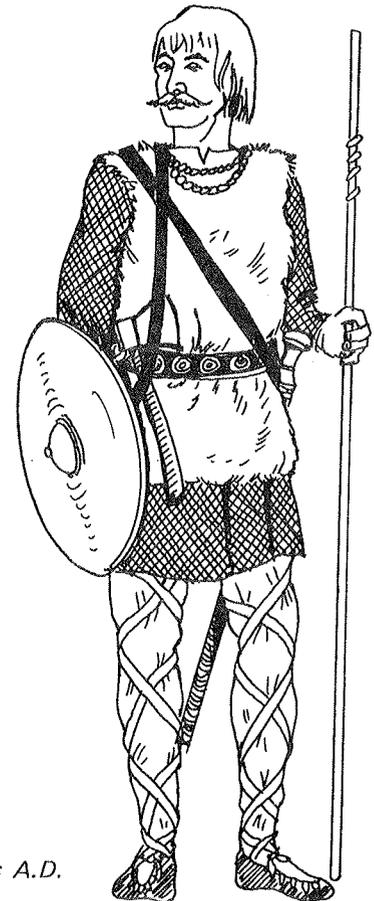
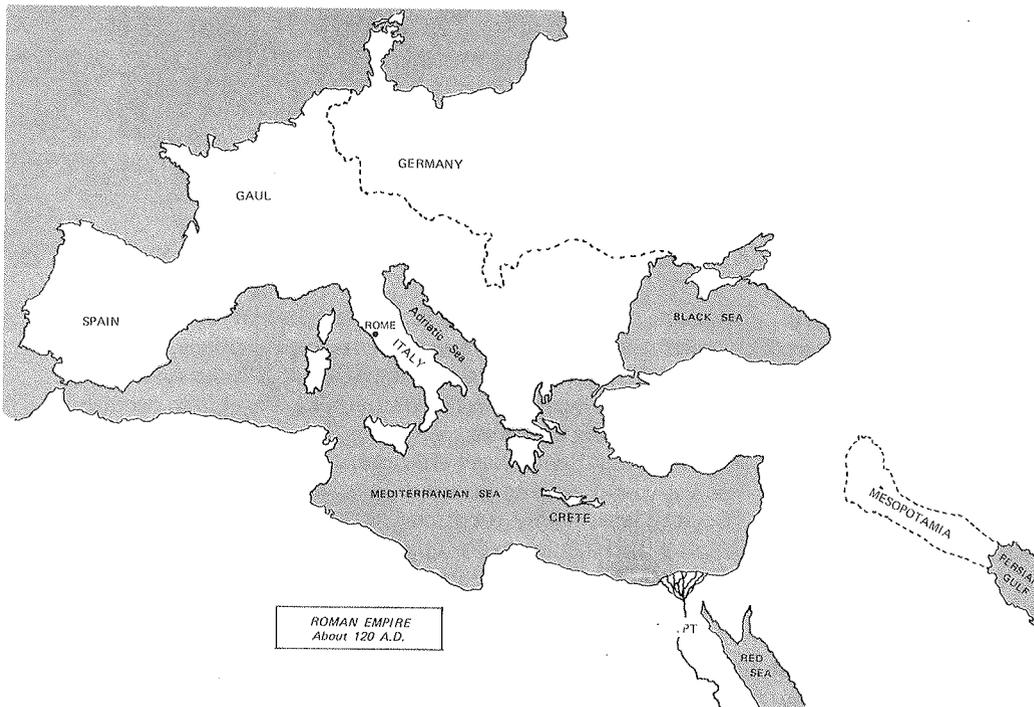
**Romans:** Early dress, worn by both sexes, was the shirt-like tunic reaching to the knees with a voluminous cloak called the *toga*. Women gradually adopted a long over-tunic with sleeves called the *stola*; their cloaks became the *palla*. Men adopted the sleeved over-tunic, often worn short, and retained the *toga*. Men's hair was worn short. Women's hair style became elaborate as the Empire grew.

As the Romans began to move northward in conquest, they caused an evolution in dress as well as in the social and political condition of the people. Gallic women became Gallo-Roman and desired to follow the fashion of prominent Roman matrons by adopting the *palla* and the *stola*.

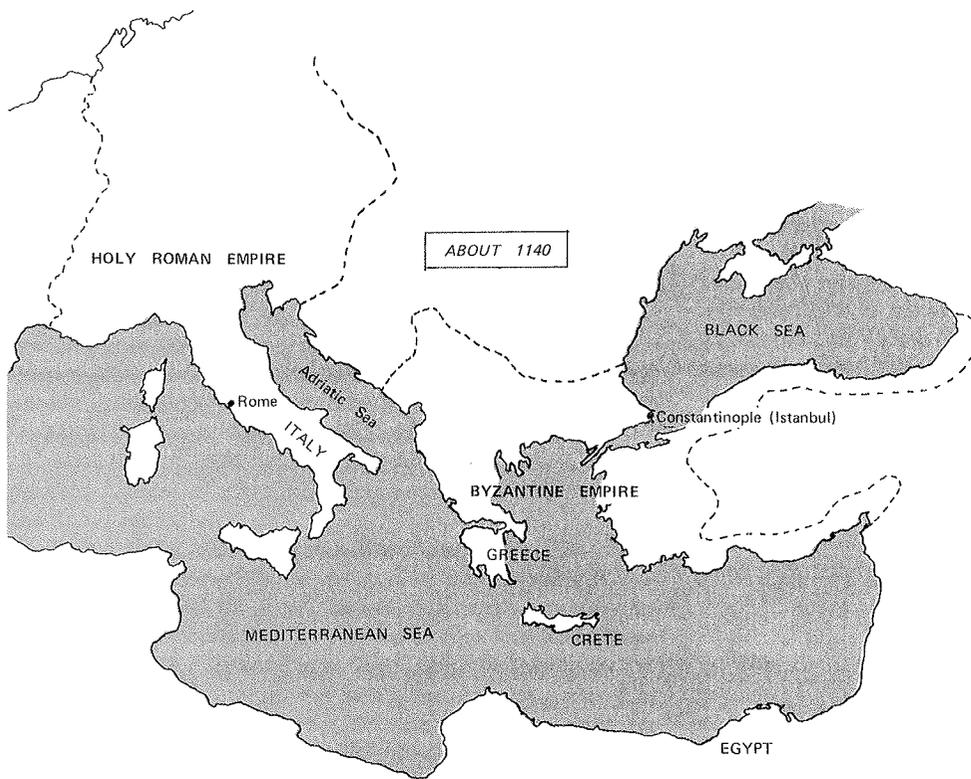
In turn the skirted Romans found it necessary to adopt the costume of the "trousered barbarian" as they moved into colder climates.

The Romans expended their energy as empire builders, administrators and engineers. The tunic and the cloak remained their basic clothing style over the 800 years they remained in power.

**Barbarians:** Skins were originally worn around the legs, held by cross garters. Gradually the skins became trousers or breeches shaped and sewn of fabric. Close-fitting tunics to preserve body heat were worn by both sexes. Men and women wore their hair long. The long, flowing blond hair of barbarian women became so popular in Rome that wealthy matrons resorted to hair dyes and wigs to achieve it.



BARBARIAN (Northern Europe) First Centuries A.D.



BYZANTINE 5th - 6th Century A.D.

The Roman Empire was reorganized in the fourth century A.D. with a western capitol at Rome and an eastern capitol at Byzantium, renamed Constantinople (Figure 3).

Though the Roman Empire fell in the fifth century A.D., the Byzantine Empire was a world influence in culture and dress until it fell to the Turks in 1453.

**Byzantine:** Costume consisted of a tunic with wrist-length sleeves, a belt, and a cloak. Hose and shoes were worn. Male and female costume was almost indistinguishable. This Eastern Empire was placed where the East and the West met. The luxurious silks, damasks, jeweled and embroidered robes and rich colors of the Orient were to supplant Roman simplicity in dress. Royalty over all Europe copied its magnificence. Religious garments worn even today are based on Byzantine forms.

The barbarians had threatened the edges of the Western Empire for centuries and finally broke through in the fourth century A.D. The fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. marked the end of the Ancient World.

### MIDDLE AGES

The span of time from roughly the fifth through the fifteenth centuries is usually designated as the Middle or Medieval ages. Thoughts and ideas of early Medieval years were formed within a framework in which the then known truths were considered absolute.

The church constituted the foundation of existence. Society was graded from peasant to mighty prince, and few Medieval men were likely to question this caste system. A man did not move up in the world unless the church decreed it. Women had no rights.

Although these years are often remembered as a time of chivalry and knights in armor, the world was a poor one. Society was mainly rural, commerce was slow moving, and plague and famine were commonplace. Clothing reflected this stratified, almost non-changing society, which revolved around the church. The ideal female was the Madonna, and women dressed modestly with covered heads in an effort to reach this ideal. Clothing was almost uniform in style with no great change over several centuries.

**Early Medieval:** Tunics were worn by all classes of people. Women's tunics extended to the floor. Men's tunics were shorter and worn over trousers or breeches. Hose were worn. Both sexes wore a shirt-like undergarment and a super-tunic over all. Women's hair was concealed by a veil or kerchief. Only the ruling classes could afford or were allowed to wear the finer fabrics, furs and jewels.

The Moslems had begun to threaten the eastern edge of the Christian world but in the eleventh century the Christians were strong enough to send the first crusade against them. The Crusaders brought back a taste for Byzantine and Moslem art and for the magnificent jewels and fabrics of the East (Figure 3).



MEDIEVAL 9th Century

During the period of the crusades, luxuries from the East poured into Europe through Italian ports. Gothic architecture was an adaptation of Moslem mosques admired by the Crusaders. Man seemed to be reaching out to the heavens. Clothing followed suit. Men's dress accentuated the vertical by means of a shorter tunic, long hose, full, pointed sleeves, tall hats and shoes exaggerated in width or length. Women's styles became ornate. Dresses developed a train. The veiled headdress became a towering construction. Some were heart shaped, others cone shaped or two-horned. Elaborate patterns and bright colors became important. Fashion, as we moderns think of it, had begun.

The world had begun to move again. By the fourteenth century a stable network of trade routes had developed over Europe. A merchant class began to emerge in trade centers. Man began to release himself from the religious sanctions which had governed his behavior, economic practices and political actions.

Change had become the order of the day. The European states were unstable, the common man was beginning to struggle for a better position in the world and economic conditions had improved. Clothing styles began to change as they followed the changing spirit of the time. Fashion became so important that furriers, glove makers and ribbon makers became a part of the new order of society.

The courts and royalty originated the constant change of style, but the increasing wealth of the merchant class and skillful fingers of the craftsmen enabled them to follow suit.



GOTHIC HENNIN 15th Century



GOTHIC 15th Century

## RENAISSANCE

The stirrings of the late Medieval period began to bear fruit, and human energy was released. The Renaissance movement was one of the most vital periods of European history. It was a time of great geographical discoveries, state building, and large growth of the middle class. Poets, artists and philosophers flourished. Clothing showed this release of the human spirit.

**Renaissance:** Men's sleeves became puffed, with slashings to reveal other colors or elaborate designs. Short breeches were puffed between knee and waist in elaborate materials or slashings. Brimmed hats with sweeping feathers were popular. Short ornate capes or coats were worn.

Women's headdress became a flat cap or hood, and the hair was worn high. A huge collar called the ruff spread from shoulder to shoulder and required support. The farthingale hoop construction became so broad it was difficult for women to go through a door. Huge sleeves with elaborate puffs were common.

Both sexes wore chains and jewels at the neck, waist, wrist, on hats or in hair. Furs, lace, embroideries, and jeweled fabrics are characteristic of the period. Costumes became bizarre, sometimes ridiculous. Men were often more richly attired than their ladies. At the peak of the Renaissance in the 16th century, costume was flamboyant and dazzling.

The questioning spirit of the Renaissance man brought about great strides in his knowledge of the world and of himself. Every discovery or idea was followed by a new idea for fashion. The spirit of the time was one of movement and change. Clothing but followed suit.



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RENAISSANCE 16th Century