

The Italian Pleatwork Shirt

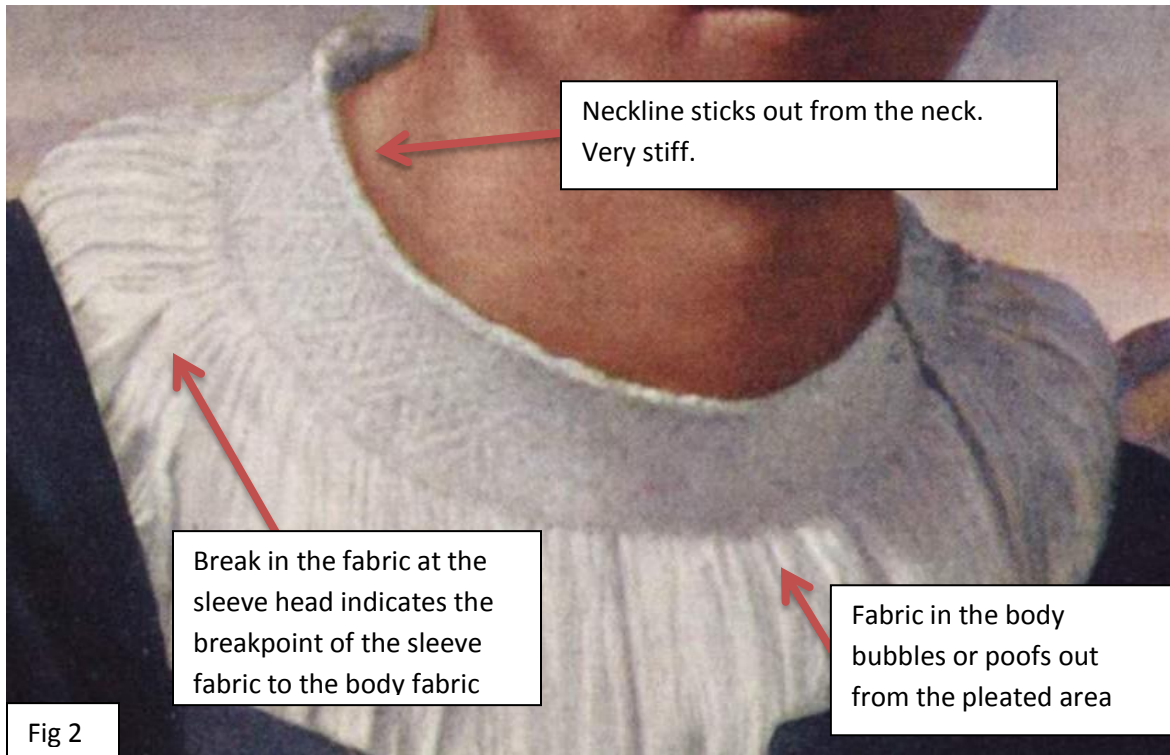
Inspiration

I wanted to do another pleatwork shirt. I have done a number of them in the past, but wanted to specifically test out a few theories on construction. I asked if I could make a shirt for someone, close to his persona but of my choosing. I fell in love with this image, painted by Franciabigo in 1522. It provided the right elements I wanted to work on: construction of the collar, side opening, but at the same time it fit within my patron's time frame.

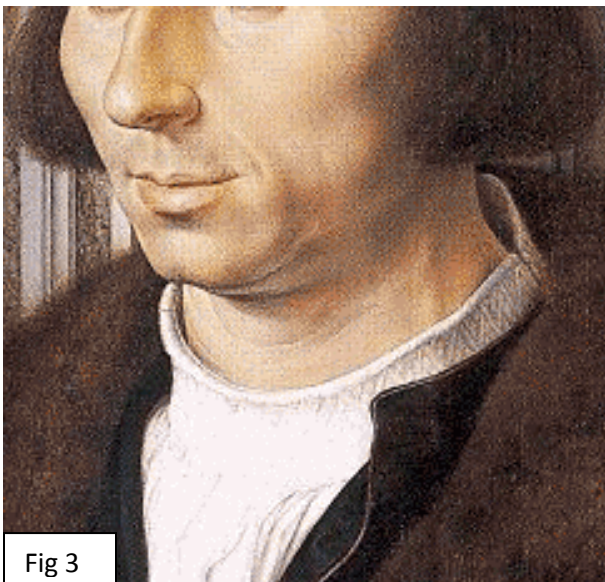


Fig 1

A close up of the image yielded a number of details that I wanted to test out.

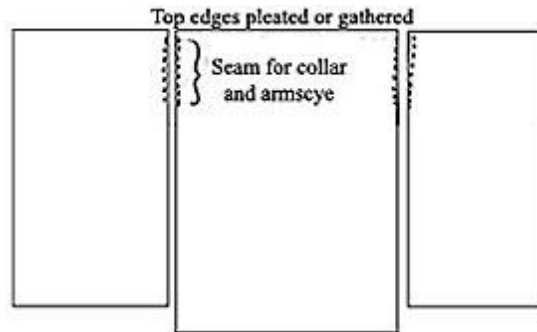


Below are examples of the same style of shirt, with similar details



Construction Theory

The construction of the shirt followed my prior research. It is constructed of four pieces of fabric, front back, and two sleeves; all pleated up to form the collar/neckline.



An article in the Livrustkammaren, a Journal of the Royal Armory of Sweden, discussing the construction of the Sture shirts, and their evolution comments:

“the sleeves had been drawn up towards the low neck and the slit had been moved to the side of the neck along the seam between the front piece and the sleeve^(Nyeln 275)”

To form the rigid neckline, as well as to create the rounded top edge I theorized that the fabric was doubled over then pleated. This would provide a finished top edge and add additional stability to the neckline. I then made test samples to check the size of the pleats needed.



Once the gauge had been determined I pleated up the entire neckline. You can see that the bottom of the pleated area is already starting to “poof” out like the images. I actually did over 7 test samples to get the tension correct.

The neckline of the shirt was pleated three times because even though I tested and tested the tension, when I actually started the embroidery it was going to be far too big.

See Appendix for additional test pictures



Embroidery Design

I chose to use a design found in the *New Modelbuch of Nicolas Bassee c 1568*. I charted the design from the original (Appendix). The technique I used is a form of pattern darning. This is a counted form, that uses the pleats as the count, taking the embroidery thread over the pleats or through the pleats. The contrast between the thread and the pleats forms the geometric design.

The Embroidery

The pattern darning is a technique based on extant garments. The following is an image and information from a communication with a curator at the Museum of London to the author:

"A sleeve fragment found in Worship Street, circa 1501-1599, wool and silk, 200mm at widest. A fragment of garment probably part of a sleeve, with gathered cuff and embroidery (smocking). Dark brown weave wool, fragmentary, with fraying edges. One edge with fine pleats held in place with gathering stitches and smocked embroidery in a pale brown thread. Under a microscope, the thread looks like a floss silk. The gathered section measures 80 mm across and is 50mm deep. The embroidery forms a diamond pattern enclosing a pattern of four smaller diamond shapes, in what appears to be silver metal thread wrapped around a silk core, now very discolored and decomposed. The main diamond pattern is bordered with three lines of bold stitches on each side. Each of these bordering stitches is offset to form a decorative pattern"



Materials

The shirt was made in handkerchief weight pure linen, sewn with linen thread.

Embroidery done with an untwisted filament silk : Silk Ovale by Au Ver a Soie. I chose to use this silk as I felt that the filament silk, untwisted would create flatter embroidery and better replicate the period silk.

Construction

Once the embroidery was completed, I whip stitched the raw edge of the inside of the neckline to ensure that it would not fray. It was very possible that this could have been done with a selvage edge. Since there are no extant shirts in this style, it was a solution. The selvage edge on our modern fabrics is too stiff to work effectively. I also "tugged" the pleats away from the body of the shirt after it was done, and as soon as I did that the shirt "puffed" out along the neckline, just as in the portraits.

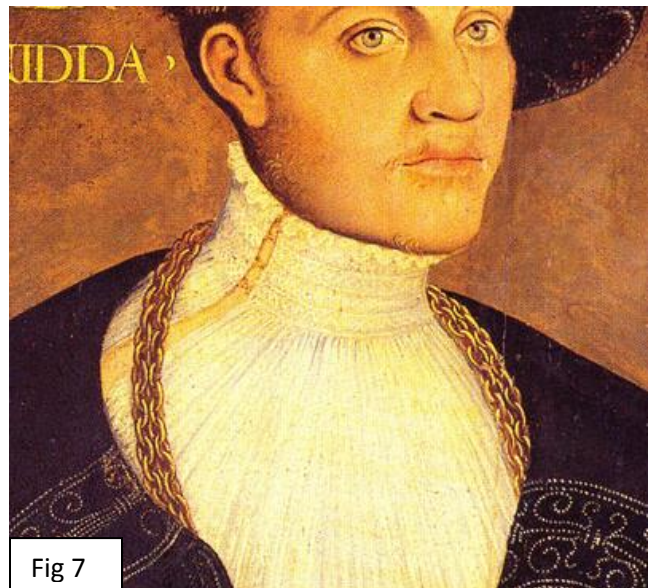
I fit the garment on my patron, and inserted the underarm gussets to fit. The seams were all done in backstitch with a modified flat felled edge, whip stitched for stability. There is documentation for various styles of seaming in garments. This technique is one of the accepted versions of seaming, especially in later period garments.



I chose to do a simple pleated sleeve cuff. In the images, most of the cuffs were either not pleated or very plain. It was not until a later date do you start to see ruffled cuffs.

The pleating is held in place by simple back stitches. This was another test, to replicate recently reported techniques on some 15th century pleated shirts. (See details in the Appendix)

The opening on the neck was bound, in part to be able to cover the ends of the silk, which was knotted at each end of the neck, and to provide a better foundation for the hooks. The shirt is closed with hooks and eyes made by the patron, Eric Scherck. In this image you can see the hooks and eyes, as well as the opening of the shirt all the way up the shoulder through the neckline.



Final Thoughts

This shirt accomplished what I wanted it to do. It confirmed my theory on possible construction techniques as well as added to my examples of pleatwork. I was fascinated during the construction, but how easily the neckline curved while I was pleating it. I also loved the patterning the embroidery formed.

The project was somewhat frustrating, because I actually ripped the embroidery out twice. As with anything that you are trying to test, it is trial and error. If I did it again, I would make some modification to the inside edge, most likely trying to find a way to either have it hidden in the pleats or use a selvage. The tension on the pattern darning is VERY hard to get correct. It is also not as flexible as I would have anticipated. But that is seen in the images, so I conclude that my thought process here is correct.

The best part of the project was having the recipient / patron, try it on, and start strutting around in it. He loves it!! If I was an embroiderer in period, this would be how I would build up my patronage!

Citations

Bassée, Nicolas. *German Renaissance Patterns for Embroidery: A Facsimile Copy of Nicolas Bassée's New Modelbuch of 1568, with an introduction by Kathleen Epstein*. Austin: Curious Works Press. ISBN 0-9633331-4-3.

Nutz, Beatrix, How to pleat a shirt in the 15th century. In: *Archaeological Textiles Review* 54, 2012, 79-91.

Nylen, Anna-Maria. "Stureskjortorna", *Lovrustkammaren, Journal of the Royal Armoury, Stockholm*, Vol iv 8- 9, Kungl, Livrustkammaren, Stockholm, 1948.

Image Citations

1. Franciabigo, c 1522, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, [image online] Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Franciabigo_001.jpg [accessed Feb 2014]
2. Franciabigo, c 1522, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, [image online] Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Franciabigo_001.jpg [accessed Feb 2014] Detail
3. Mabuse, c 1525-1530, Man with a Rosary [image online] available at <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-gossaert-man-with-a-rosary> [accessed Feb 2014]
4. Cleve, Joos van, c 1520, Portrait of a Man and Woman, [image online] available at http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/cleve/joos/double.html [accessed Feb 2014]
5. Photograph of Extant Fragment from Museum of London - Photograph by Amy Wojciechowski, used with permission of photographer.
6. Franciabigo, c 1522, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, [image online] Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Franciabigo_001.jpg [accessed Feb 2014] Sleeve detail
7. *Krell, Hans, 1534-1539, Portrait of Philip I, Landgrave of Hesse [image online] available at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wartburg-Philipp.von.Hessen.JPG> [accessed Feb 2014]*

The author of these works retains full copyright for all material. Permission is granted to make and distribute verbatim copies of documents for non-commercial private research purposes provided the author's name, the copyright notice, and this permission notice are preserved on all copies. The information found within these pages site can be used for reference provided credit is using the above citations.

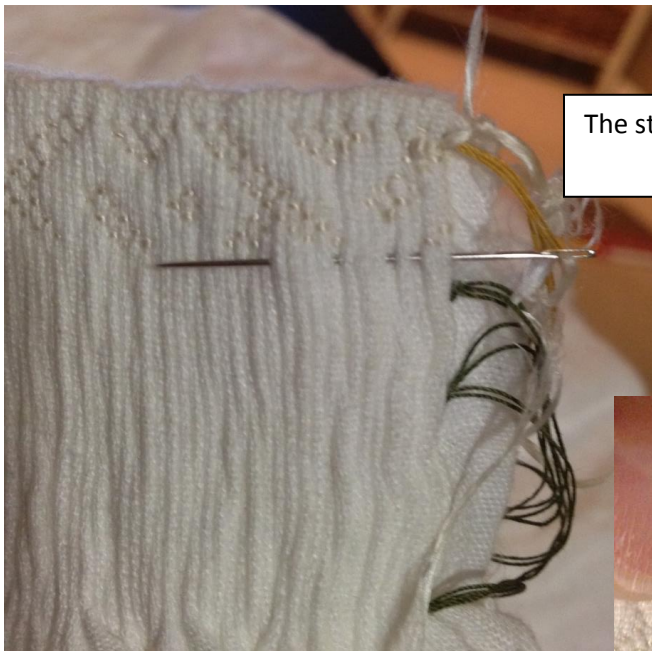
Appendix



The curving neckline though pleating



Checking the gusset area.



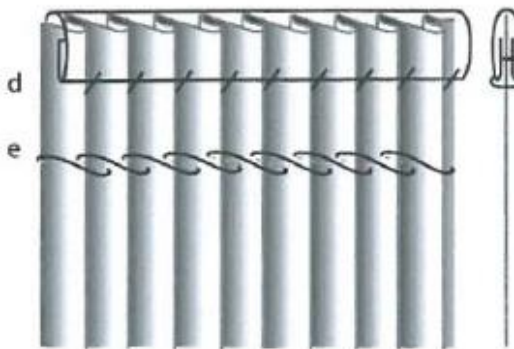
The stitching process.



The emerging pattern.



Type A



Trimming strip and additional pleat fixation
Cuffs and collar - inside

Fig. 15. Find No. 803.02.

