

FASHION IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

THE COURT

Power Dressing



LES ENLUMINURES

Color, material, and style each played a role in signaling the place of persons in medieval society. During the reign of Charles VII in France (1422-61) his councilors urged him to regulate both color and fabric of the dress of his subjects "according to his estate, otherwise, there would be confusion, and nothing would be sure." This applied to garments of gold and silver, silk and wool, patterned and plain. Velvet, silk, damask, and satin were typically reserved for the upper classes, whereas the middle classes wore grey or black wool, broadcloth or fustian, a mixture of linen and cotton. The peasants wore linen and cotton. Color symbolism dictated that purple was for bishops and royalty, as was crimson or red, worn also by gentlemen and cardinals. White was for children, monks, nuns, and the insane; blue for maidens and villagers; grey for merchants and laborers. Accessories also varied from class to class. Sumptuary laws dictated the amount and type of jewelry, but they vary so widely from country to country, and their interpretation can be tricky, because it's not clear to what extent they were followed. Style too broadcast status: the upper and middle classes wore long garments, while shorter ones were reserved for peasants who worked in the fields and thus required greater mobility. Dress was generally fitted, since the revolution of set-in sleeves, allowing for greater tailoring, took place already in the mid-fourteenth century.

Over four weeks, every Wednesday, this four-part exhibition looks at fashion first at the court, and in successive weeks in town, in the convent or monastery, and in the countryside. The origin of the works chosen varies widely, both in country – from France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy – and date – from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. We are only able to skim the surface of this fascinating subject, and many of our observations will of necessity be quite general. Nevertheless, we hope this overview will provide viewers with an additional perspective in their appreciation of art of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

Further reading is given here for those who wish to delve deeper into the subject:

Anne H. van Buren with the assistance of Roger S. Wieck, *Illuminating Fashion, Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands 1325-1515* (exhibition catalogue), New York, The Morgan Library and Museum 2011.

Margaret Scott, *Fashion in the Middle Ages*, Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011.

Beatriz Chadour-Sampson and Sandra Hindman, *"Living nobly": Jewelry of the Renaissance Courts*, Paris, Chicago, New York, Les Enluminures, 2020.

Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, Oxford, 2010.

Ulinka Rublack and Maria Hayward, eds., *The First Book of Fashion, The Books of Clothes of Matthäus & Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg*, London, 2015.



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1.

Velvet Textile with Gold Disks in Offset Rows

Eastern Islamic, Mongol period, 14th century

Lampas/ velvet, with pile in plain weave of the foundation and pairs of gold wefts
in the supplementary twill

21 x 17.5 cm. (31 x 30 cm. framed)



Gold, red, and velvet ranked at the top of the hierarchy of color and material. Here in a substantial surviving fragment of velvet with golden threads woven into the plush red pile. We know quite a lot about this fabric from paintings of the period; it was worn by highly placed ecclesiastics, such as bishop Louis of Toulouse in a Simone Martini painting. Positioned side-by-side royalty, Louis was later canonized, and his garb fashioned out of this textile demonstrates that he outclassed even the nobility. Documents from Popes Clement V and Boniface VIII describe these textiles as "Tartar," and they made their way to western Europe via the Silk Road.

[Click here to watch the video](#)

\$8,000



2.

Saint Jerome, *Letter LIV to Furia*
[*To Furia, On the Duty of Remaining a Widow*],
in the translation by Charles Bonin

France, likely Bourges, c. 1500-1510

In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

1 full-page miniature by the Master of Spencer 6 (active c. 1490 to 1510)



As a distinguished ecclesiastic, a cardinal, Jerome wore brilliant red robes, marking his elevated status. The subject of the present manuscript and its full-page frontispiece is Jerome's friendship with women, especially with the late Roman aristocratic widow, Furia. After the death of her husband, Furia thought of marrying again, but eventually remained a widow, caring for her young children and aged father. Jerome's letter counseled her against remarriage with guidance on rules of conduct that should be followed. Accompanied by two ladies in waiting, Furia in the center wears a dark velvet robe with a squared neck over a gorget of white linen. A rounded head cloth and frontlet encircles her face down to the jaw. Strokes of liquid gold highlighting convey the shimmer of the rich velvet fabric, worn in the same style but with different coloring by the ladies in waiting. This is an aristocratic woman of the contemporary court. We are probably meant to understand her as the patron of the manuscript, Louise of Savoy, married to Charles of Orleans, the Count of Angouleme, in 1488, who died in 1496, Louise gave birth to her second child, Francis I, the future King of France. (TM 935)



3.

Prayer Book (fragmentary)

Southern Germany (Augsburg?), c. 1490-1500,
and Western German (diocese of Cologne?), c. 1500-1510
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment
4 historiated initials, 18 illuminated borders



Full of ostentatious borders of unicorns, jugglers, and all sorts of flora and fauna, this manuscript includes an image of a contemporary upper-class woman (the patron?) seated on the ground. In the south-German style of the time, she wears a golden gown with narrow sleeves and a tight-fitting waist, color and style both signaling her elevated position in society. She is married, as indicated by her white linen wulsthaube (literally "bulge hat"), which derived from a bonnet with its padded cushions. The bright parti-colored outfits of the jugglers who animate the border are in marked contrast to the opulent gold gown worn by the courtly lady. Although sometimes the nobility dressed in parti-color to signal the combination of two different colors from the husband's and wife's family heraldry, more often musicians, jesters, fools, and other court performers were so outfitted. (TM 1206)

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\$30,000



4.

Cameo with Double Portrait of Cosimo I de Medici and Camilla Martelli

Cameo, Northern Italy, late 16th century; mount with pin 18th century and later

Gold, onyx

Weight 3.7 gr.; 14.88 mm.



Nero and Agrippina, Ptolomy II and Arsinoe II, Trajan and Plotina ... jugate portraits of Roman rulers were a well-established genre in Antiquity. The present cameo echoes this genre in its depiction juxtaposed in profile of **Cosimo I de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany (1519-1574), and his lover and later second wife, Camilla Martelli (m. 1570; d. 1590).** Cosimo wears a toga, an allusion to his association with rulers of ancient Rome. His portrait with a full beard and mustache is fully in keeping with Renaissance style from the mid-sixteenth century onward and most resemble sculptures of him from the end of his reign, such as the equestrian monument in Florence by Giambologna. Their double portrait asserts their fictional lineage from celebrated rulers of antiquity.

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\$9,000

The Court



5.

Pendant with Cameo of King Henry IV of France

France, late 16th century; mount: probably 18th century

Mother of pearl, tortoise shell, silver gilt

Weight 9.5 gr.; Dimensions 56 x 38,5 mm; Length (with loop) 62.9 mm.

Cameo: 37.9 x 28.4 mm.



No figure ranks higher in France than the King. Here capital letters around the rim of this shimmering mother of pearl pendant identify King Henry IV of France (1553-1610; r. from 1589) HENRICVS IIII. DEI. GRATIA FRANCORVM. ET. NAVARRAE. REX. He is portrayed half-length in three quarter profile view. Wearing a fashionable ruff around his neck, armor, and a sash with a necklace draped over his shoulder, he is crowned with a laurel wreath, a symbolism from Greek mythology attesting to his victorious achievements.

[Click here to watch the video](#)

\$45,000

