

16th c. German Goldwork Gown

by Genoveva von Lübeck

genoveva.von.lubeck@gmail.com

Division II: Costume Single Component or Costume: 1451-1600

Documentation Summary

A reproduction of Dorothea Kannengiesser Meyer's gown as painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in 1516¹. The gown is made of dark red wool and trimmed with black velvet guards with goldwork embroidery at the neckline. All materials are natural: black linen and red canvas lines the bodice, and silk thread was used for the stitching (machine stitched in non-visible places, hand-stitched everywhere else). While the lower front of the gown is not visible in the painting, I chose to run the black guards all the way down to the bottom hem based on other paintings in this time period and region². The goldwork was done with gilt passing thread and silk thread, and—while styled after the design shown on her gown as well as examples shown in *Ein Formbuchlein* of 1534 by Johan Schwartzenberger³—it is actually my own design of a morning glory vines. Dorothea Meyer was the second wife of Jacob Meyer, Burgomaster (mayor) of Basel elected on June 24, 1516⁴.



Sketch of Dorothea Meyer by Hans Holbein⁵



Painting of Dorothea Meyer by Hans Holbein

Materials

I used all natural and, as much as my budget allowed, period-appropriate materials in the creation of this gown. The dark red wool was slightly fulled because in the high-resolution image of the painting of Dorothea Meyer, you can see the tiny hairs of the wool (see photo to right).



The guards are of black velvet made of cotton rather than silk, because I feel that the cotton velvet mimicks the look and feel of the sort of velvet used during this period more than silk velvet available today does. I used heavy cotton canvas between the outer wool layer and inner linen layer to give the bodice body, rather than a linen canvas which would have been more period⁶,

because I could not find linen canvas readily. I used silk thread, rather than linen, because it is stronger and the wool is reasonably heavy (either may have been used during this period ⁶).

Materials Used in Making This Gown

What They Used	What I Used
Wool	Wool
Linen lining	Linen lining
Linen canvas	Cotton canvas
Linen thread	Silk thread
Silk velvet	Cotton velvet
Gilt smooth passing thread ⁶	Gilt smooth passing thread
Coiled Wire or Japaned Hooks and eyes ⁷	Black Enamel Nickel Hooks and eyes
Linen twill strip ⁷	Black cotton twill tape

Construction

I drafted the pattern based on a bodice design I'd already created for myself. I took this to the lovely and talented Mistress Melisant Saint-Clair who helped me fit the bodice and adjust the angle and width of the shoulder straps so the gown would appear to almost be off the shoulders, as seen in the painting. I chose to pleat the skirt with rolled pleats because my research² indicated this mimicked the appearance of gowns that appear in similar paintings in this time period/region, though there is no extant evidence that rolled pleats were used at this time in history. The black velvet guards to the hem were modelled after a painting of a young woman in Southern Germany by Nicolas de Neufchatel² (see image



on right). You can also see that her skirt appears to be unsewn (open) in the front (see detail), as evidenced by the tiny sliver of lighter-colored material which shows through, which I've chosen to duplicate as well.



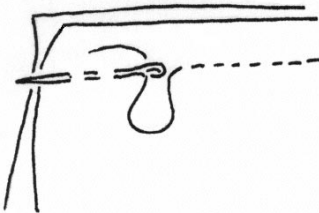
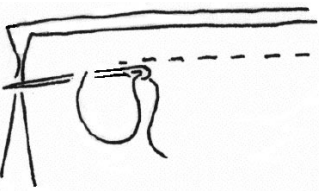
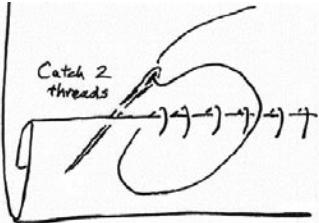
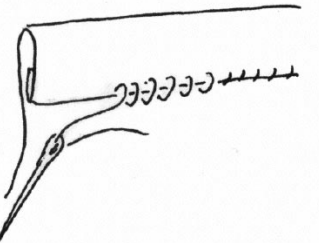
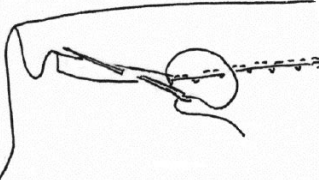
The velvet guard at the neckline of my dress was a shaped piece of velvet, rather than a rectangular strip, so that the nap of the velvet would appear correct. The skirt and bodice were constructed separately, then sewn together. The sleeves are set-in, not raglan, to provide better strength and structure to the gown. The bodice is lined with black linen (black was chosen to reinforce the smooth line of black at the neckline and torso) and the linen was sewn down last so that it could

cover the edges of the skirt and the armscye inside edges. Wishing to finish every last raw edge, I covered the hemmed edge at the bottom of the gown with black twill tape. The gown closes with simple hooks and eyes, which I found to be a period-appropriate closure⁷. To accompany the wool gown, I made an identical black linen kirtle that is worn beneath the gown. I cut the straps just a little longer so that it would not be as visible beneath the gown, as Dorothea Meyer's kirtle (if she is indeed wearing one) is not visible either. It is unclear to me if a kirtle would have been worn with this gown, but it seems likely. Women of this time period usually wore an underdress of some sort, as evidenced in woodcuts that show more than painted portraits⁸. I've chosen to design this gown to wear over a kirtle to give my body support.



Detail of Woodcut of Lan-squenet and Wife, 1568.

Stitch List

Stitch Used	Diagram
Straight (running) stitch	
Back stitch	
Hem stitch	
Whipstitch	
Slipstitch	
<p>Machine stitching was used in some non-visible locations, mostly long seams, to save considerable time. I am a practical woman, just as my German ancestors were—but unlike German upper class women, I have no seamstresses or servants to help me with sewing.</p>	

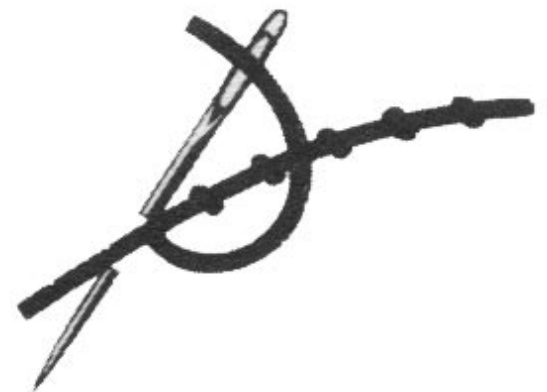
*Note: Credit to Master Henry Kersey for teaching hand sewing techniques and tips.
Stitch Images Credit: <http://www.ia470.com/wardrobe/stitches.html>*

Goldwork

The six goldworked circles on the velvet guard at the neckline are based on those seen in the painting, though not exact because the details were not clear enough. I was able to find similar patterns to the goldwork seen here in *Ein Formbuchlein*³, a 1534 German pattern book which is first known to have been cataloged in 1524. I used gilt smooth passing thread, which is a very thin filament of metal (with about 2% gold) wrapped around a silk core—research shows this is the type of metal thread used at this time and place¹⁰. The gold thread was surface couched down with gold silk thread with techniques learned from the Royal School of Needlework Embroidery Techniques¹¹. The goldwork on my gown is not meant to match the exact style of goldwork on Dorothea's gown, as I just didn't have enough information. Instead, I styled my circles to mimic the vines of a morning glory (*Convolvulaceae*), which is a period flowering plant with heart-shaped leaves (in the 16th century this plant was known as the snakeplant, according to Bernardino De Sahagun, who lived from 1547-1569).



My goldwork was started by anchoring gilt passing thread in the back of the fabric, pulling it through to the front, laid down, couched down, pushed back through the fabric, and anchored to the back at the end. Gilt passing thread is couched down because it is fragile and would be damaged if it is passed through the fabric many times. To couch the passing thread down, thread a needle with matching silk gold thread and bring this thread up to the right side next to the other gilt passing thread. Take the needle back to the wrong side by making a tiny stitch over the first thread and then bring the needle back up a little further along the edge of the surface thread. Continue along the length of the first thread, making tiny stitches across it, until the entire length has been secured. The stitches that hold the surface thread in position should not pierce it, but simply sit around it holding it in place and can be worked as close or as far apart as needed. For example, a row of couching done on a tight curve will require stitches closer together than a row done on a straight line. In my goldwork, I chose to couch down two strands of the gilt passing thread together, to give a more unified appearance.



Persona

This gown was constructed for a burgomaster's wife or daughter in early 16th century Germany. This would be a wealthy woman who could and would display her status and wealth on her person through the extensive use of gold. This matches the persona of my Genoveva von Lübeck personality in the SCA.



References

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4. Buck, Stephanie. Hans Holbein, 1497/98-1543. (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), pages 13-17.
5. Holbein, Hans. Sketch of Dorothea Meyer. 1516. Kunstmuseum, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basle, Germany
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8. Giraud, Wolff. Lansquenet and Wife. 1568. Present location unknown.
9. Christian Müller; Stephan Kemperdick; Maryan Ainsworth; et al, Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years, 1515–1532, Munich: Prestel, 2006, ISBN 9783791335803.
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Images



Cutting out my wool from my paper pattern



My sketch of what the goldwork embroidery might have looked like on the original gown



Smoothing and fitting the bodice as precisely as possible