

# The Velvet Houppelande

## ACT I

### The Creation of the Houppelande.

A high status French Houppelande circa 1400-16.



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## Introduction



Ever have one of those projects that have been a life dream for a decade? Well an embroidered and fur lined velvet houpelande has been the ultimate fancy garment taking up space in my brain for a very long time. This silk lined houpelande project is the first phase of seeing that reality. My aim is to combine popular elements and construction techniques to create a garment that would be recognized as appropriate to the nobility of the time.

Left- An image from my favourite manuscript, *Les Tres Riche Heures du Duc de Berry*, Mai. by the Limbourg Brothers, 1413-16, ink on vellum (Musée Condé, Chantilly) Showing the variety of noble fashion in this period, including 2 women in green houpelandes.

As evidenced by the images and inventories most houpelandes of this status would have had a high quality

fur lining. While most fur linings were custom made for each garment,<sup>2</sup> there is heavy indication they would be removable for cleaning and versatility. As highlighted by the opening story in Veale about the maid who took her fur lining out to appear slimmer to a potential suitor.<sup>3</sup> While fur lining is outside the scope of this garment in its present state, there have been several choices made that were influenced by the fact it will be fur lined, and embroidered in the future.

In the book, *Tales of the Medieval Marriage Bed*, Framiglietti provides us with a contemporary tale of Duke Phillip Ordering 102 gowns (Houpelandes) in green velvet lined with white satin for his son's wedding guests to wear in 1401. The two gowns for the duke and his dutchess were matching, each with one sleeve encrusted with jewels, and the other sleeve had their initials embroidered in crimson and encircled by foliage of pearls.<sup>1</sup> This quote was an inspiration for this project, and some of the future embroidery will include some of these elements of design. This shows that velvet houpelande lined with silk satin was a



luxury item considered appropriate for a noble wedding, and in line with the noble ideal this garment is representing.

In this paper I will discuss the evidence for houppelandes, how I came about my pattern, the materials I chose, the construction methods I used, and how they related to period methods, and then the lessons learned along the way. This houppelande is not an exact replication of a manuscript image, an inventory note or even a copy of the extant garment, since none of these items can give us the full story.

**Note this is a work in progress due to unforeseen health issues and the velvet required more time to work with than anticipated.**

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## Scene I- Evidence within the period of Houppelandes



Fig. 1 - Master of the Cité des Dames. "Christine de Pizan presents a collection of her works to the Queen of France, Isabeau de Bavière," *The Book of the Queen* by Christine de Pizan, ca. 1410-1414. Parchment. London: British Library, Harley MS 4431. Source: [British Library](#).

As can be seen in the depiction of Queen Isabeau and her two ladies, they are wearing houppelandes at the height of houppelande popularity around 1410. Houppelandes were a very full garment constructed with heavy fabrics. The shape of the garment is not tailored close to the body, this is made clear by the pleats and the waist being brought in by a wide belt. The fabrics are either brocade or

have been decorated with gold work. The sleeves on the queen are wide trumpet shaped sleeves that have been lined in ermine. The collars are tight around the neck, but also lay open around the shoulders.



Left- Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Klaris of mulieribus*, Traduction Guest of En français *Livre Des fatal Noble and renommes*. 1403. Folio 78r

This depiction is a bit earlier, around 1403, the lady in the centre has a bit more modest headgear, but is wearing the exact style of gown as the woman in the crown that is being led away. Again we see the wide trumpet like sleeves, and we see grey squirrel fur peeping out at the sleeves and hem. Her collar is standing high and tight around the neck, and would require some button or other fastenings to close. I've included this image because of it's representation of the collar, and the fabric is not embellished, which is closer to the style I'm recreating.





Church of Santa Maria in Piano (Loreto Aprutino, PE, Abruzzo - Italy). St. Ursula, fresco, 1420 c.

This image, while in Northern Italy instead of France, and a few years later than my intention, shows a similar style collar and sleeves as Queen Isabeau, but also is visual evidence for a silk lined houppelande.

The thing is that artwork of this time period wasn't depicting reality. It was commissioned by the rich, to depict the noble ideal. And often the pigments used in manuscripts were a reflection of the cost of the pigments and a display of wealth. We can assume however that the drape, and shape of the garments are what the noble ideals were. Manuscripts and portraits are a good starting point to visualise what they aspired to wear, but not the whole story.

For representations of what was actually used, we need to consider written sources and extant textiles.

### So what written evidence is there for Velvet Houppelandes?

As mentioned in the introduction, we are introduced to Duke Phillip ordering 102 gowns (Houppelandes) in green velvet lined with white satin for his son's wedding guests to wear in 1401. The two gowns for the duke and his dutchess were matching, each with one sleeve encrusted with jewels, and the other sleeve had their initials embroidered in crimson and encircled by foliage of pearls.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1416 inventory of Chaillou Castle in Northern France, we see an entry for a velvet houppelande lined in Satin.

*"Une hopelande noyce fourrée de matres ; une houpelande de volloux fourrée de satin noir"*<sup>4</sup>  
One Houppelande black with martin fur, One houppelande of velvet lined with black satin.

In the Dijon Inventories, entry 31 in 1397 of Feue Perrenote, femme de Estiennot le Mortardier,<sup>5</sup> A widowed woman who was clearly well off to afford luxury goods, we see 2 velvet houppelandes mentioned.

- Item une longue oppellande de violot fourree de connis, II Francs -A long Houppelande of velvet furred with rabbit, 2 francs.<sup>6</sup>
- Item une oppellande longe de violet doubled de saye rouge, II florins- A long houppelande of velvet lined in red silk. 2 florins.<sup>7</sup>

Within this entry see a lot of other velvet and expensive fur lined garments mixed in with lesser valued items, so it would seem by 1397 even a well off widow of a merchant would be able to purchase luxury goods.

A later entry in the Dijon Inventories, No 62 in 1403 of Feue Julienne, femme Henry le Berruier, Chevalier, A widow of a knight also has a velvet houppelande,

- Item une aultre opelande a femme de vienote fouree de viez panne de gris, Il Francs demi- Another feminine houppelande of violet furred with old plates of gris (grey squirrel), 2 and a half francs.

There are also a few other houppelandes of luxury fabrics lined in both silks and various furs.<sup>8</sup>

Entry 63 in 1404 of Messire Jehan Pegu has an old velvet houppelande lined in serge and one lined in blue camelot.<sup>9</sup>

Entry 66, Feu Belot, femme Jehan de Beaulfort, of minor nobility, had 2 velvet houppelandes, one lined in gris, one lined in old black fur.<sup>10</sup>

Entry 84, Feue Jehannote, Femme de Girard Pourchassot, wife of the mayor, also had 2 velvet houppelandes, one unlined, one lined with a nicer unspecified squirrel.<sup>11</sup>

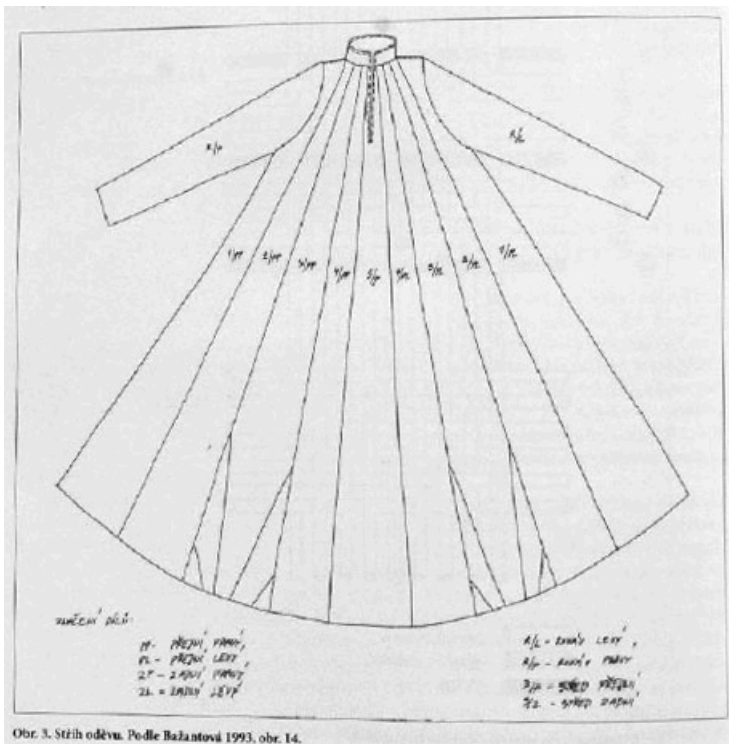
One pattern that I noticed in the Dijon Inventories was that starting 1397, the minor nobility or well off merchants would have at least one velvet garment. Before 1397 the entries of velvet are much rarer and are limited to garments that require a lot less fabric. I also see a lot of houppelandes in scarlet, a type of luxury wool dyed in kermes that gives it a distinctive red colour, that are lined with both expensive furs and silk linings.



## Extent Houppelande of John of Görlitz



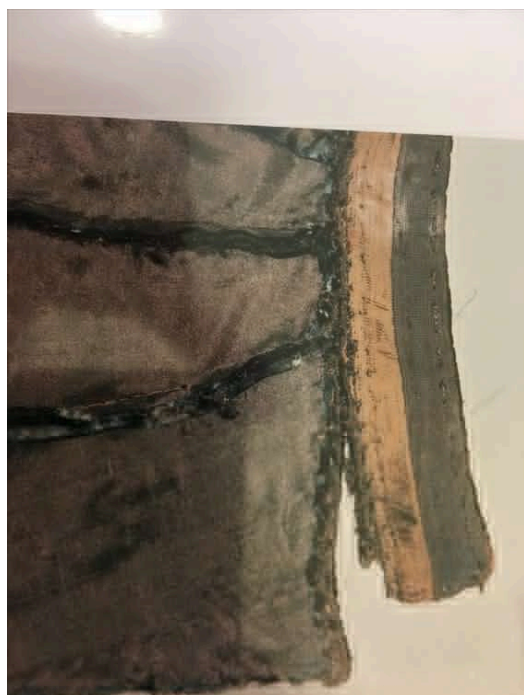
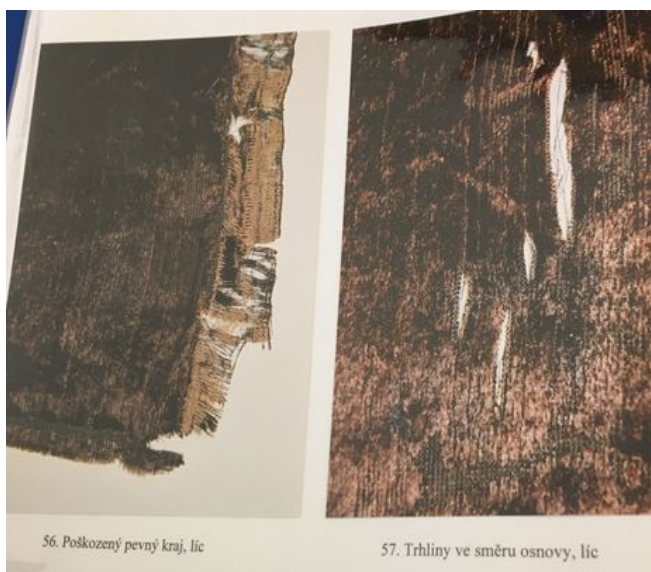
John of Gorlitz also known as Jan Zhorelecky was the last son of king Charles IV. In 1396 he died suddenly. Since he was not a royal heir he was buried in fashionable secular clothing. The garment was constructed in haste. It is created from a single layer of monochrome velvet.<sup>12</sup> It also is the only surviving houppelande we have, outside of a garment in Greenland that might be considered on, but is way outside the fashion centre.





Left and below- Panel fragments of the John of Gorlitz.

Whenever possible the selvage of the fabric was used. Each of the panels have been cut so that one long edge is along the straight grain, and the other is on a slightly bias cut. When sewn together the straight grain to bias caused the garment to form natural pleats.<sup>13</sup>



Left- A close up of the collar and some interior stitching.

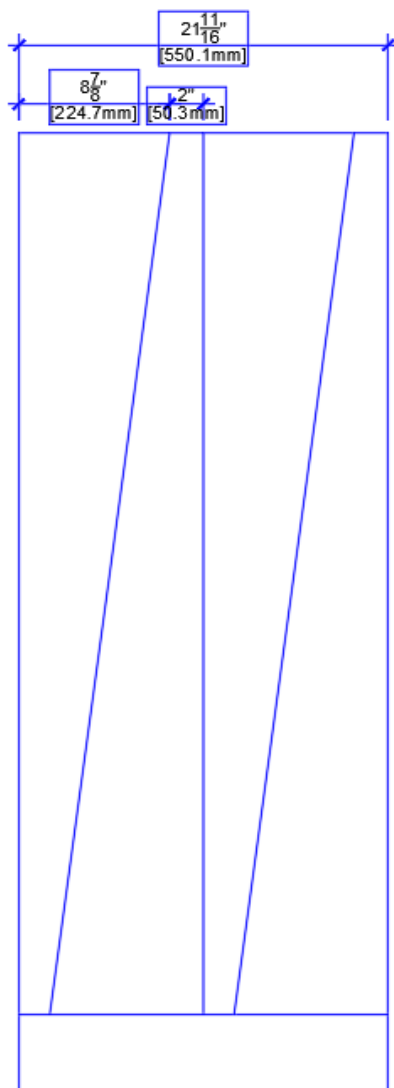
An interesting feature of the garment is that the only place that is lined is the collar. The collar is also the only place where original extent stitches remain intact. They were of silk, and the stitches here and impressions left elsewhere on the garment show very wide spacing, simple running stitches 3 stitches to the inch, which confirms that this garment was solely intended to cover a body, and not for wearing.

Because of the nature in which this garment was constructed, I will be using other sources in addition to this one for construction techniques.

The garment is currently brown, but recent analysis has confirmed that it was originally black.<sup>12</sup> Achieved with oak gaul and kermes.

## Scene II- Patterning

While one can not rely on the extant garment for construction techniques, we can assume they wouldn't create a new pattern for a funeral and would have used a known pattern. Period velvets were limited by loom widths, and were regulated by the guilds to be 55 to 60 cm wide.<sup>14</sup> It also appears that fur plates began to be standardised and regulated by the guilds in the 13th and 14th century. "Skins of pured minivair were about 5½ inches long and 1½ or 2 inches wide, and even to sew together the 120 skins usually put into a fur of minivair of eight tiers involved the sewing of over 400 seams."<sup>15</sup> So the standard width of a fur plate fell within the same 55cm to 60cm range as did the velvets.



The original extant John of Gorlizt Houppelande, has 19 trapezoid panels, all about 5cm wide at the top, 15 average 22.5 to 27cm wide and 4 are 33cm at the bottom.<sup>12</sup> Given the alternating nap direction, the bias to straight grain panels, when you lay them out on period fabric of 55 to 60 cm, you clearly see 4 panels would be cut out of the width of the fabric with zero waste. So given all that information, I feel confident using a pattern based on the extant garment.

My silk velvet, also happened to be 44" wide, double the width of period velvets. The minivair plates I also acquired are 55cm wide. So it makes complete sense to make my pattern also follow suit.

My pattern deviates from the extant garment. I chose to have 20 body panels all the same width of 22.5cm instead of 19 panels with 2 different widths. This is frankly for ease of construction and economic fabric use. It also means both the front and back will have the same number of panels. The fabric nap will follow a consistent pattern, and the centre front will have a seam, which makes creating an opening and placing a collar much easier.

After laying out this pattern I can surmise how the uneven panel layout and the four pieced panels on the extant were a necessity of needing enough fabric for the sleeves and collar, and I don't have that limitation.

I am also making some changes to better match the aesthetic of a woman's garment around 1410. I am gradually increasing the length of the panels in the back, to create a train. I am also patterning 8 trapezoidal panels for each sleeve of increasing length to create the trailing trumpet style sleeves. I will also be creating a collar that can be buttoned, or hang open, that is more tailored to my body than the extant collar.



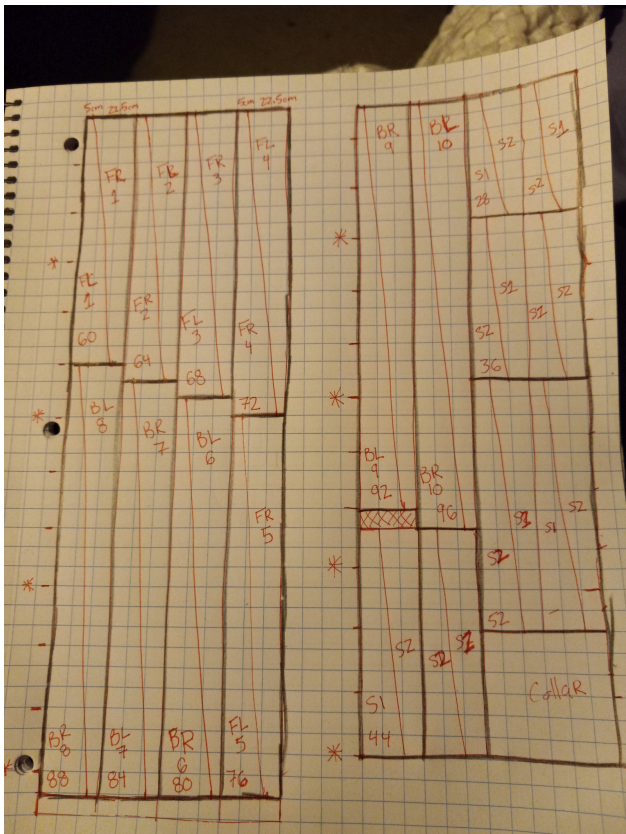


This is an old sketch I did for a wider width fabric using 16 panels, but the concept is the same. I'm alternating the nap, as indicated by the arrows, and making sure that the bias edges are being sewn to a straight grain edge. There are two reasons to make sure to maintain the bias to straight grain, one, the straight edge stabilises the bias edge, minimising the stretching that will occur. Two, the bias to straight orientation creates a natural pleating drape effect that is prevalent in the images.

Bonus effect of this is keeping the nap alternating in a consistent way that is pleasing to my modern eye, however it wouldn't necessarily be a concern in this period.



One of the things that is important in a houppe is to maintain the curve of the shoulder seam. The trapezoid panels will naturally form a convex curve, when the weight of the garment and sleeves pull this seam flush with the shoulders, the tension from the pull is a way to create natural sinuous drape. This is the same concept that makes a circle skirt naturally curve in and out along the hem.



On the left is the initial cutting pattern I derived from the known width of period velvets, and follows the widths of the extant houppe panels. With this layout I need 8 yards of velvet fabric, and 14 plates of fur.

I used this pattern to cut out the mockup.

There are small tailoring things that will be adjusted during the mock up phase, such as adding the neck and arm holes, smoothing out the hem, finessing the collar and the exact orientation of the sleeve head, so the longest back seam is at the back of the sleeves.

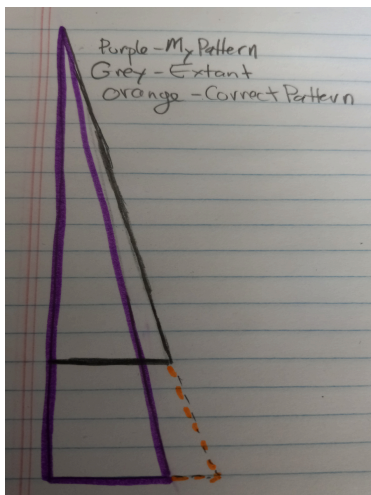
## The mock up process!



Here is how that initial mock up turned out. It clearly needed some help to achieve the right shape.

There are a few things obviously wrong, the train is way too long, plus it didn't lay right, and it created a tulip style silhouette instead of an a line with a lot of volume! It also isn't tight around the neck either.

There are a few things that were revealed to be erroneous in my pattern.



First off because I simply extended the panels 4" consecutively the widest part of the panels were now on the floor, whereas in the extant garment that volume would have stayed at the ankles. By extending the panels the circumference of the gown at my feet was significantly reduced. In my sketch on the left, the orange dotted line shows what my panels would need to be to maintain that circumference. A quick measure showed my ankle circumference was about 16" shorter. Because I wanted to maintain working within the limitation of period velvet width, my solution was to add two more panels to the back.

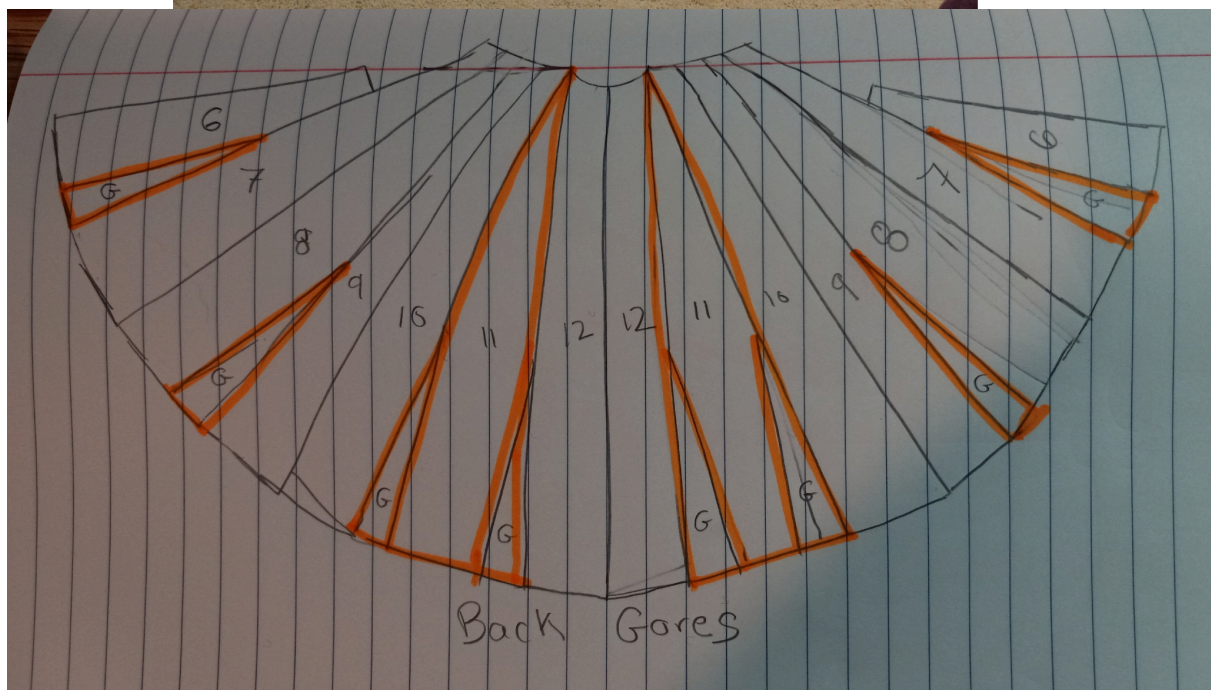
These extra panels in the centre back also helped solve the issue of pulling the two halves together, severely altered the drape, and created an open V that would have to be filled in. Adding the panels and making the top wider would allow for that gap to be filled, while maintaining the shoulder tension.

I also chose to make the front centre panels wider at the top to help solve the same issues of tension and having a fitted neckline that does not detract from the shoulder curvature.

To fix the train, I did two things, one, I shortened it to a more reasonable length, and two previous experiences showed me that a train needed extra volume as it spreads on the ground, so I slit the mockup to judge how much extra volume it would need.



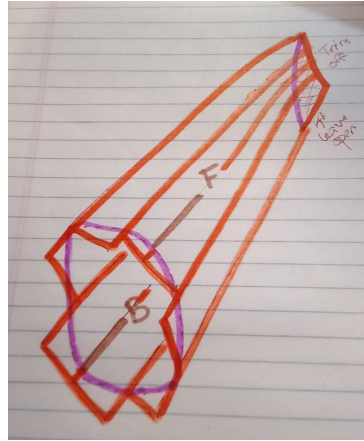
Here is my adjusted mock up, and the resulting back pattern. You can see the silhouette is much closer to the shape of the extant garment







up

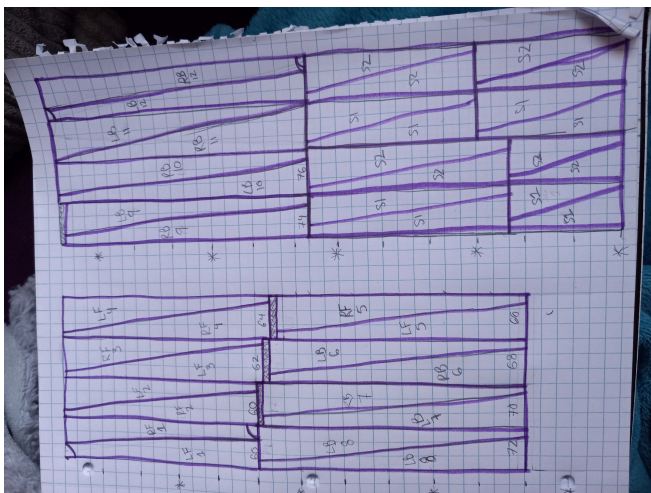


My sleeves, like the body of the houppelande, are trapezoid panels, each 11.25" wide. They start at 24" long at the front of the sleeve, and 42" at the back. For this mockup I wasn't sure of the curve needed for the sleeve head, so I ended leaving 12" of the seam closest to the body open and pinned it to the

houppelande. I ended up with a trim line shown in purple.

And here is the sleeve on the mockup. Once the sleeve was added, the wings of the shoulders were pulled down and the drape was lovely.

Below are two photos of the collar, showing that the same collar can be used for the high and tight style of 1405 and the turned down style of 1416. It also shows the extra width I added to the front panels.



To the left is the adjusted cutting layout. There are now 22 panels, 2 full length gores, and 8 shorter gores. The centre front and back panels are 1.5" wider at the top than the rest. Because I added the extra panels to the back, the rest of the back panels were reduced by 1 cm to help maintain the length of the shoulder seams. Reducing the length of the train made it possible to still fit everything except the short gores and collar on 8 yards of fabric.

### Scene III - The Materials



Shown- Future embroidery notions, mock up fabric & thread, leather for fur trimming, silk velvet, silk lining Fabric, Silk thread, 2.8 oz linen, 3.5 oz linen. Not shown- extra threads and fabric for the guard, the minivair plates, or tools used. Note some of these items are for future additions to this gown.

#### Silk Velvet-

At the end of the fourteenth century velvet and silk production in general expanded to several factors. The increasing contact with the Arabic world had grown, bringing new trade, ideas, people and skills to Europe. Italian merchants had established trade relations with the Mongol empire in the thirteenth century and then settled into major cities throughout western Europe. The black plague significantly shifted the dynamic of industry, allowing people to have more disposable income and creating a high demand for luxuries and exotic products. High Fashion became a mind set for the nobility and growing merchant class, and so was very lucrative.<sup>17</sup>

In Lucca, Italy silk artisans relocated after the black plague. Many new regions encouraged emigration of these highly skilled weavers, offering incentives so they too could be able to profit from the demand for silk. The raw silk was being grown, traded and spun more as it had become more lucrative, increasing its availability.

Velvet production was a highly specialised and time consuming process, raw silk was imported, then spun. To weave velvet one needed a highly skilled workers on narrow looms, and a lot of tiny rods to create loops in the fabric, which then would be cut.<sup>18</sup> A skilled worker could produce around 25cm of 60cm wide plain velvet fabric a day, and often it would take an entire year to produce 60 metres of velvet cloth of gold.<sup>19</sup>

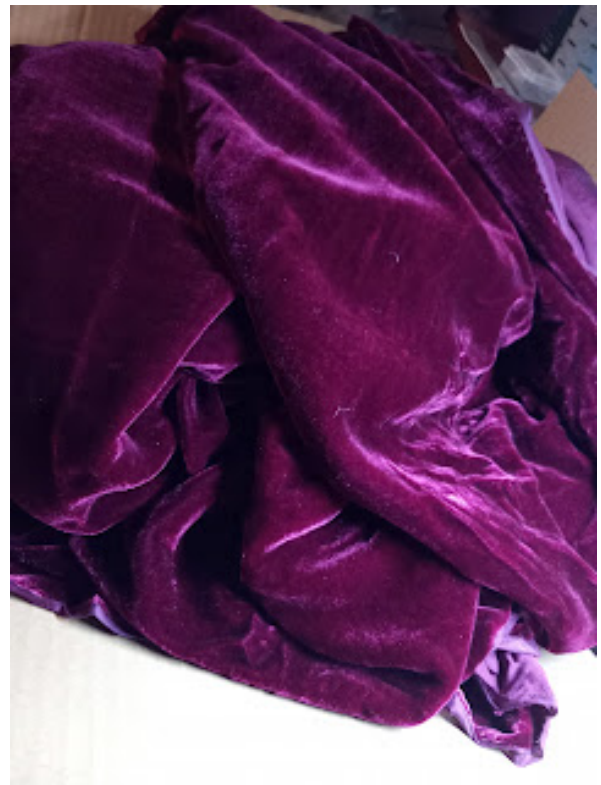
Velvet was then often dyed in expensive dyes, creating many vibrant or deeply saturated hues. Kermes dye was created from the blood of female scale insects that fed only upon a certain evergreen found in the mediterranean. This process took thousands of insects, and many messy and foul steps before becoming capable of producing the most vivid reds and purples. A skilled dyer could formulate many colours, even green from mixing the Kermes dye. It was the most expensive dye and its use was reserved for only the best fabrics.<sup>20</sup>

Then velvet was then exported throughout Europe via the Italian trade merchants who were already established in the major cities, especially my focus, Paris.<sup>21</sup>



Velvet also needs special skills to handle it. It's delicate, has a strong bias stretch and frays easily, has a nap that is easily crushed or creased by ironing, or improper storage. Mistakes in seams easily damage the fabric, and it also doesn't handle pressure well, and needs careful consideration for the lining. So is a more time consuming fabric to work with.

As evidenced by the velvet references previously indicated and many more contemporary accounts, velvet became the in vogue high status fabric for those who could afford it at the end of the fourteenth century. Until velvet became more accessible it was used for furnishing, belts, pouches. This is also the time of mediaeval history when the mini ice age starts to occur, so the demand for heavier fabrics increases. So velvet became the material used for travellers' robes and the fanciest houppelandes.

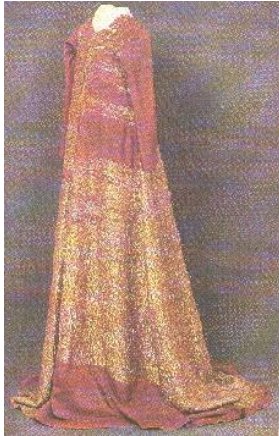


Above on the left is a kermes dyed velvet fragment from Milan Italy dated to 1385-1402.<sup>16</sup> It was my inspiration fabric for this project, both for its colour and the French inscription, A Bon Droit meaning a good right. It's also fascinating for its clever use of piecing before it was embroidered. On the right is a photo I took of the silk velvet I purchased for this project, a burn test confirmed it was silk.

However the velvet I chose does have a key difference from period velvet. Period velvet would have been woven with a denser ground fabric, closer to taffeta or twill. Modern silk velvets are woven with a chiffon ground. Chiffon is lightweight and has a lot of drape to it. They simply do not make velvet that matches unless you have the funds to shell out thousands of dollars per yard for one of the very few reproduction producers still in existence. To help solve this issue, I have chosen to interline the velvet.



### The Linen Interlining-



The extant houppelande was a funeral garment and was not well constructed. However if we look at the Golden Golden Gown of Queen Margarete from the first decade of the 15th century we see the garment is interlined in blue linen through the bodice area.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately I don't have a picture of this, just a description. The linen interlining in this case will provide structure to the velvet and provide a backing for the future embroidery.

We also see in the royal English accounts that linen was often purchased locally in bulk,<sup>23</sup> often alongside entries for fashion fabrics. The Dijon inventories also show us that at a glance, there were many different types of linen available with many different weaves and weights at a given time within a well off household. It was a very

common fabric from homespun and woven to professional centres in places such as Paris, Rouen, and Reims.<sup>5</sup> So it's safe to assume that linen was frequently used in the construction of garments.

I chose a 2.8oz linen from a well known online store primarily because of the weight factor. With the eventual fur lining and gold work, I had to consider the weight of all the materials due to my personal weight restrictions. I do want this to be a wearable, if not quite functional\*, garment for myself.

This linen also has a shorter staple that period linen would have, often made in the same looms that modern short staple cotton is made, so this linen would not have the same structure as period linen, it has more slubs and a softer drape. After receiving this linen, I was a bit disappointed that the threads were not as fine as I wanted, having a bit more open weave to achieve the weight, however this point of the project didn't have the funding or time to wait for a return to process, and then purchase a higher quality long staple linen. It had enough structure to hold up to embroidery in my test sample. It would also make sense to use a lesser quality linen in a hidden element to the gown.

I would later revise my opinion of this decision. While linen was used in the period as interlining, It didn't have enough structure to back the modern velvet.

\*It will be a heavy velvet and fur garment with dozens of yards of fabric and big trailing sleeves, "functional" in this context is limited to standing around and looking pretty as a courtier would have done in such a gown.

### The White Silk Lining-

This silk lining is based on multiple inventories, contemporary references, and artwork depicting silk linings, more often in Southern France, and Italy, but not uncommon in Paris and Northern France. Again I'll reference the inspiration reference for this project-

In the book, *Tales of the Medieval Marriage Bed*, Framiglietti provides us with a contemporary tale of Duke Phillip Ordering 102 gowns (Houpelandes) in green velvet lined with white satin for his son's wedding guests to wear in 1401. The two gowns for the duke

and his dutchess were matching, each with one sleeve encrusted with jewels, and the other sleeve had their initials embroidered in crimson and encircled by foliage of pearls.<sup>1</sup>

I chose a white because it was a popular colour for lining. While we do see a lot of white linings in manuscripts, they are not always a reliable source of colour, given paint pigments had different value and often meanings than fabric dyes. We also see a lot of inventories call out linings in Blanc, which could have been a type of purred minivair, consisting of only the white bellies of squirrels,<sup>24</sup> or blanc could be a used to denote a particular type of silk fabric, such as cendal,<sup>25</sup> in the same way that the inventories use violet and scarlet to call out velvet and fine wool.

White fabric was often said to draw impurities from the body,<sup>26</sup> thus it became a symbol of godliness and purity.<sup>27</sup> Achieving Pure White and the ability to keep it cleaned were also status symbols. Leading me to believe that white fabrics were considered to be an ideal choice for women of status.



I chose a 12mm habotai silk for the lining. Although not the heavier satin fabric that would be considered luxurious in period, I choose this silk due to its ability to preserve the drape of the velvet and to minimise weight, and is thick enough to hide the bulk of the interior construction. It also makes this gown more versatile, usable even in our midwest summers.

The weave is still a satin weave, this silk would be very similar to Cendal. Cendal was a silk in which the fabric would be woven with unwashed silk threads, when the fabric would be washed, therefore removing approximately 25% of the weight, making it a lightweight breathable fabric,<sup>28</sup> in which was a very popular choice for linings and veils in this period.

This fabric will also be used to reinforce future button holes on the front opening.

### The Threads-



The threads I am using are a 50# purple Silk thread and a 100# white silk thread. A 50# thread is stronger, and is being used on the structural seams on heavier velvet and any finishing details I want to blend into the garment. The lighter white silk thread is being used for the silk lining and seam allowances. I did end up purchasing more thread.

I chose silk threads because past experience has shown me having a thread in similar fibre to the garment you are working with makes for a stronger garment. We do see that the silk industry in Paris was thriving in small silk goods, and so obtaining various weight sewing threads in matching colours wouldn't be unfeasible in Paris at this time. Silk thread was also found on the collar of the extant houppelande.<sup>12</sup>



## The Collar interlining-



During the process of construction, I realised I would need a more substantial interlining for the collar. I chose this black 100% wool from my stash. It's a nice felted and smoothed light coating weight wool, Melton, that provides the right amount of structure. A felted wool like this would often be used as the base fabric for scarlet.<sup>20</sup> On the right is an image taken from Textiles and Clothing of a similar felted wool.<sup>29</sup>



**Fig 50** Offcuts of wool felt, No 133, from a deposit dating to the second quarter of the 14th century.

## Guard Material and Evidence-

This gown is an expensive labour of love, and to protect the hem I'm adding a dress guard. It is usually a durable fabric used to protect expensive fabric hems from dirt and snags. They are extremely popular in later periods, While it is hard to find visual evidence of a dress guard in use on houppelandes, especially the interior of a silk lined one, most images show a fur trimming instead, which would also protect the gown from damage.



Roman de la Rose (1400-1402)

In this period you often see manuscripts showing a hem of a different colour, this could be a fancy decorative element, a guard or a repair. An example of this is on the fitted cotte in the French manuscript Roman de la Rose left, from slightly before this time period, and in the image right, although later, from the French Manuscript, La Fleur des

Histoires, MANSEL, Jean (1400-1473), Also shows an example of a non fur guard on a fashion garment.

However, we do need to keep in mind that Manuscripts were created to show the noble ideal, and not exactly reality. The English Queen Isabella (1320) was known to replace hems to preserve the longevity of gowns,<sup>30</sup> and there are a handful of extant textiles from the fourteenth century that show silk reinforcement was used in edges, openings, and button holes,<sup>31</sup> and given the amount of



narrow silks found in the London evacuations,<sup>32</sup> inventories and guild records of Paris during this time,<sup>33</sup> the use of silk reinforcement appears to have been common practice. Also, if one is going to spend a fortune on one gown, it would seem like a common sense practice to protect the hem of the gown from dirt and stone surfaces. While a houppelande is an item of copious consumption, it is not a period of fast fashion, and a gown would need to last.



Despite the tenuous evidence for the early fifteenth century, I'm adding a lightweight satin to the inside bottom of the gown from the hem to the knees. Previous experience has shown that hems on the ground quickly degrade, even when wearing it indoors, and if it's below the knee, I tend to step on it and rip out stitches. I chose this fabric because it is lightweight, so won't affect the drape, and is tightly woven, so less likely to snag. It's also less expensive and time heavy than having to replace or redo the bottom of the silk lining. In the future, when I will need to replace the guard, I will replace it with real silk, but this development came at a time when my budget didn't allow for more real silk, and frankly I know this part of the gown will be quickly ruined, that is its entire purpose.

Now If there was a period solution to preventing OTHER people from stepping on my dress! I actually thought about putting reflective tape on the hem in hopes that it would warn others, but hopefully the reflective nature of the velvet itself will have to suffice!

### **Construction Tools-**

I am using modern tools such as needles, bee's wax, thimbles, snips, pins, tape measures, awls, iron and ironing board. Medieval versions of the tools do exist,<sup>34</sup> however the documentation of all these items is outside the scope of this project.

## Scene IV- Construction

### Cutting the Fabrics-

One of the most nerve racking things is cutting into expensive fabrics! That's 4 layers 8+m of fabric laid flat! 100% silk velvet, 12mm silk for lining, 2.8oz linen for interlining, 3.5oz linen for fur backing. I also was still recovering from covid at this point in the process.



Luckily I had access to a large enough space and an extra set of hands to help me lay this all out. I started off using bottles as weights and then used pins to align all 4 layers of fabric along one selvage. Note that the bottles left round circles in the delicate silk velvet. They seemed to have steamed out, but still was not the best choice. Next time I'll try hockey pucks, since the curved edges are less likely to cause that issue. Glass fabric smoothers would have been a common item in a tailor's shop that might have worked as a period weight in this application.<sup>37</sup>

The fabric was divided into 4 equal widths, each representing half the width of silk velvet in period. Each width was then split on a diagonal, the short width on the front panels measuring 5cm, as was the dimension on the Prague Houppelande. Refer to my cutting layout in the patterning section.



Because I added 2 panels in the back, I reduced the top of the back panels to 4 cm to maintain the shoulder length. Even still the shoulders seams stretch wider with the velvet than the mockup, so I ended up adding a few pleats and using a line of stay stitching to hold them in place.

I used 2 metre sticks taped together to get a long edge long enough to mark out the pattern with tailors chalk.

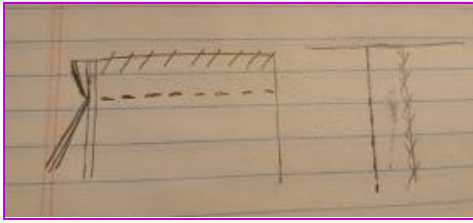
As I was cutting I made sure to pin a post-it note to each section with its name and the nap direction. And then put them in individual freezer bags to protect them.

While pinning my panels together I'm making sure to alternate the nap pattern, and to make sure I'm matching a bias edge to a straight edge. There are a few pen marks on the seam allowances to help keep that sorted out. Unfortunately I discover later that I messed this up with my covid brain fog.



### The Velvet Shell-

I am sewing the 2.8oz linen interlining as a flat lining, since its purpose is to add strength and structure to the silk velvet to closer resemble period velvets. It will also provide a backing for future embroidery.



To sew the velvet and interlining, I used a simple running back stitch with 5-6 stitches per inch which seems to be a common stitch length in extant garments. I then did a simple overcast stitch on the seam allowances. With all of these seams I made sure to start sewing at the top of the garment and work my way down, so that any uneven stretching would be at the hem. These



stitches seem to be quite common and universal throughout history. And can find several examples on Archaeological sewing website.<sup>35</sup>

Right- Finished seam from the right side. Look at that colour in natural light!!



Left-Finished seam on the interior.



After a month of devoting every free moment I had to hand sewing, I did resort to using the machine to replace the running stitches on the back half of the gown, and rework, however I did continue to hand finish all other elements.

Left-Hand sewn front half hanging out.

Because the velvet can be easily crushed I'm trying to roll it up as much as possible as I'm working with it. As I got more of it put together I began to pin the panels to my mannequin so they could hang and to not be folded or rolled. Added bonus of providing a cosy sleeping cave for my cat.



An In progress picture of the centre back panels. Before I ripped out the centre back due to my labelling mess-up.

Also starting to sew this project while I was still in recovery from a nasty bout of long covid and still suffering from major brain fog wasn't the best idea. AFTER I had hand sewn the entire front of the houppelande, I realised that I didn't mirror the pieces when I started, and thus had 2 of the same front half instead of mirrored. Luckily, I had enough length, and the nap of the fabric is almost indistinguishable, so I could make do with only ripping out one centre front panel and moving it to the other side, and adjusting the hem a bit shorter along the sides to make it work, instead of having to re-sew 2 weeks of hand work.

I also made the mistake of labelling and cutting my back panels wrong. Which I did discover quicker, but had a few panels already sewn. So I ended up ripping out a total of 6 panels, the wider centre back panels ended up being used elsewhere, combined with the stretch of the fabrics I ended up putting in several pleats at the shoulder anyways, and my hem needed adjustments, a couple panels pieced at the hem.



Here is a picture of the shoulder seams. It has pleats in it. The fabrics simply stretched enough that the shoulder seam ended up quite a few inches longer than my shoulders, so I ended up adding pleats which will add to the drapery effect iconic in houppelande imagery.

I'm kind of irritated at myself, all my carefully planned tailoring of the panels at the shoulders and hem was thrown off. Plus my near zero waste cutting pattern now generated more waste and some piecing when I had plenty of fabric to make it unnecessary. I know that I can do better. But c'est la vie, and I made it work.

Because of the stretching I did add stay stitching to the shoulders, collar, and armscote to prevent further disfiguration during construction.





Here is an in progress photo of the garment. The uneven nature of the hem is quite obvious. But look at the drape and the way it catches the light! Note that the belt is just a place holder.

I also needed a last minute purchase of more thread because I didn't plan for this much rework, nor the amount of thread needed for pad stitching and the dress guard.

Interesting tidbit from my research- The parisienne guilds statues of the time stated that fibre arts must be done during daylight hours. Work done after dark was considered inferior and could result in fines.<sup>36</sup>

Technically most of my sewing would be illegal. Thank goodness for modern lighting!

Two useful things I've found when hand sewing is to keep a fuzzy blanket on my lap, that way a needle won't get caught up in any other fabric, and the fabric doesn't slide around. Most fabrics need a bit of tension while hand sewing, and silk velvet such as this can very easily be distorted and pucker if the right tension isn't maintained. I try to tuck one end under



my body, between my knees, or pinned to my pants, as I sew, so I can pull gently with one hand, and allows me to keep tension and allows me to pull my thread tightly without any fabric bunching. Once sewn to the interlining, the velvet holds the shape of the linen. An after observation was that a silk organza might have been a better option for structure since it tends to hold its shape better.

An example of using tension and a fuzzy fabric to aid hand sewing.

I need to talk about pressing seams... because period seam smoothers were round glass objects that used their weight to press seams, or flat irons could be heated in the fire and used in a similar fashion as modern irons<sup>37</sup>. But they would completely crush silk velvet. The needle boards traditionally used to iron velvet were first used in 1870,<sup>38</sup> and the modern hack of fluffy towels doesn't translate into a period method because towels were simple woven linens in period. While a shorn lamb fur could be a common item in a medieval household that might work for pressing velvet seams, I have no evidence.

So I simply dampened my fingers and used them to gently press the seam and tacked down the seam allowances as I went to keep them neat. It also has the bonus of a second line of stitches to strengthen the seam, to both add strength to the seam, and to prevent any fraying. Even still I wasn't happy with how the seams fell, and so I did resort to using a modern iron with a fuzzy towel to press the seams.





Once allowed to hang, I noticed a rippling effect that told me the velvet was stretching at a different rate than the underlining. So I added a few lines of pad stitching down the centre of each panel and gore. The pad stitching adds structure to help keep the fabrics from stretching further, and helps maintain the natural curves in areas such as the collar. Pad stitching was often used in gambesons of the time period. I chose a simple running pad stitch on the body of the garment since it doesn't need to shape the garment. I did the pad stitching on a flat surface, so I could spread each panel to get the velvet to align and lay flat as much as possible.



Note because at the time of writing the garment is still a work in progress. In lower areas of the gown, where the pad stitching has not yet been done you can see the obvious stretching of the velvet.

Left an interior pic showing the finished seams, curved shoulder and the simple pad stitching.

Pourpoint attributed to Charles VI of France



Photo © Musee des Beaux-Arts of Chartres

The Pourpoint of Charles V de France, a garment from the late 1370's shown on the left, uses straight running pad stitches to quilt this garment, evident by the fact the stitches are almost invisible on the surface of the garment, but also clearly see the quilting lines.<sup>39</sup> This demonstrates the use of pad stitching decades prior to the houppelande's popularity.

**The sleeves** are sewn with the same techniques as the body of the shell. They do have a curved sleeve head, and the shortest panels are oriented towards the front of the Houppelande. They are sewn into the openings formed on the body, because of the weight pulling on the seam at the head, I went around twice with lines of machine stitches, and made sure my hand felled seam allowances were stitched down with closer stitches.



Left- in progress sleeve. Notice the felled seam allowances and pad stitching. The shortest panels are oriented towards the front. One sleeve was cut while still sick, and was cut cross grain instead of with the grain. It needed some piecing on the longest panels, and the velvet stretched a lot more in comparison to the linen. It will require additional pad stitching.



The shoulder seam also was reinforced by a second line of machine stitches and then received the same felling treatment as the sleeve heads. I may add twill tape in this area to take the pressure off the velvet, a practice done in later eras, but not sure if done in this period.

Above- close up of the reinforcement at the shoulders and collar. Pad stitching to follow.

### The Collar-



As I worked through the garment it was obvious that the collar was going to need a bit more structure. So I chose a felted wool that had enough structure, cut a bit smaller than my pattern was, and pad stitched that to the velvet. Which was then covered by the linen

interlining, this it had switched to the front top of the velvet with a running back stitch along the top curve of the wool, then flipped it around and pressed to have a crisp edge for the silk lining to attach to later.

I then carefully back stitched the collar to the neck opening and felled the seam allowances with another line of back stitches. I used back stitches in this area because it is a stronger stitch and this area will have a lot of pull on it from the weight of the garment, and possibly people stepping on the hem. Again, I may add twill tape in this area to take the pressure off the seam.



An in progress photo of the initial shaping of the hem. The centre front is purposely a bit higher to make it easier to walk in. When finished it should just brush the ground.





A closer view of the back of the garment with the collar attached.

The buttons on the front are part of the future phase of this garment. For the moment, we are using a previous brooch I had modified.



I chose to do a simple double turned hem on this shell, since there will be a lining and a guard. It is sewn with a running stitch. There are 5 to 6 stitches per inch.



## The Lining-



For the 12mm silk lining, I am bag lining it, so I can unpick it as needed for future embroidery. I sewed most of the lining in tandem with the shell so that I could make sure I was making the same adjustments (and mistakes!) to the lining.



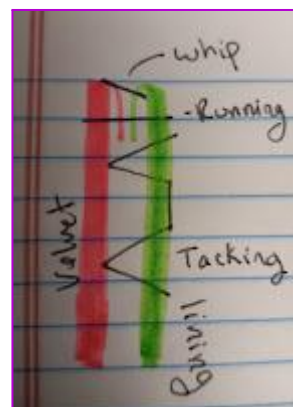
I used the same running back stitch, but because it is a finer material the stitches are finer, closer to 8-10 stitches per inch. The allowances are treated with a simple overcast stitch that rolls the cut edge under. It's not as finely rolled treatment as I would do for a veil, This is simply because I was worried that the seam allowances would fray apart, and seam allowances would lay nicer. None of it will be seen once it is sewn in. Afterwards I pressed the seams with a modern electric iron. Like the outer shell, I did resort to using the machine to replace the running stitching on the back half of the lining, continuing my pattern of hand finishing the seam allowances and any visible stitching.

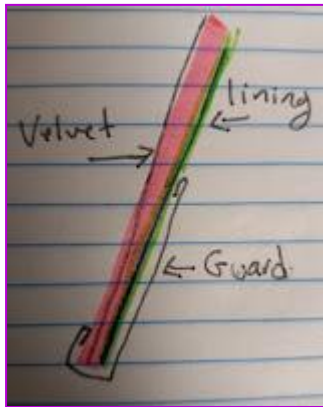
## Attaching the Lining-

After the shell has been completed, hung out, ironed, and then pad stitched, it will be ready tack in the satin bag lining. For this I'll fold 1/2" of the raw edges of both to the interior, using



a whip stitch at the edge, iron the edge, and then use a running stitch 1/4" away to keep the edges crisp and to prevent any stretching. I will also have tacking stitches at intervals along the seam lines. Keeping the stitches on the exterior will ensure I'll be able to remove the lining for cleaning or future embroidery without damage to the fabrics.



**Dress Guard-**

The satin was cut on the striate grain, and I used a running back stitch to make one long strip. The cut edges tucked and pressed under and then I whip stitched one edge to the front edge of the finished hem, wrapped around to the interior, and simply tucked and folded to match the circumference of the gown, this technique being called a nun's tuck in later periods, and then also whip stitched at the upper edge.



**Scene V- Conclusion-**

This project unfortunately isn't complete. There is still a lot of pad stitching and hemming to be done.

I started this project before I caught a nasty bout of Covid, which landed me in the hospital and a long slow recovery.

The mockup took quite a bit of extra time to adjust the pattern, and added a lot more hand sewing to the project than originally estimated.

The velvet turned out to be a more time consuming material than I had estimated. Both with the care needed to handle it, and with the choice of linen for interlining, which may have been a period method, but wasn't the greatest choice for this modern velvet. I compromised with using a machine on the running stitches, but even still the nature of the velvet made it a more delicate process. I combated the structure issues with hand sewn pad stitching, but it also added a lot more time, and the pad stitching would have been better to do before the pieces were sewn to prevent slipping and stretching. A silk taffeta, however, which was also a period fabric, would have had more structure and more appropriate for this task.

The collar also needed more specialised detail work than I anticipated, and the guard was truly an afterthought that occurred while having to repair another hem, so came at a time when my budget was very limited, and I resorted to faux silk in my stash that will be replaced.

Adding in the Covid Brain fog, there was extra time added to the project to fix my mistakes.

Otherwise, overall I'm extremely happy with the project to date. It was challenging, but I did learn a lot, and I felt it wasn't beyond my skill level. I easily translated the widths of the extant garment panels to the widths of velvet and inferred the cutting pattern. The mockup process was essential, and really showcased my skill in being able to develop and modify a draped pattern. I'm proud of the research that went into this project, and that touches on a lot of the subjects of my knowledge, and employed a wide range of construction techniques despite it being deceptively simple.

YIS Isabelle Montfort de Bretagne



## Notes-

1-R.C. Famiglietti, *Tales of the Marriage Bed from Medieval France 1300-1500*, Picardy Press 1992. Page 65. Note- Gown was often the term used in English for the houppelande, and while the original inventory was in French, this author chose to use the English term gown.

2- As evidenced by Veale, furs in this period were typically sold as standardised plates with a set number of tiers. These plates then would be made into linings separately by the furrier after the tailor had made the gown. Because these linings were so tailored, it was illegal in some places to resell fur linings by themselves. "Ordinances of skinnners' guilds in the fourteenth century state the numbers of squirrel skins to be used in the manufacture of a fur: London: Lambert, p. 27; Arras: Fagniez, Documents, ii, n. 120; Lübeck: Wehrman, Die älteren lübeckischen Zunftrollen. These furs seem to have been of standard size all over Europe, varying only according to the number of tiers of which they were made. (fn. 24 Veale)

3- Veale, Elspeth M. *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages*. London: London Record Society, 2003

4- *Inventaire du Mobilier du Château Chaillou de l'Année 1416*, By De Beaurepaire, Charles de Robillard. 1866.

5- *Les inventaires après décès de la ville de Dijon a la fin du Moyen Age (1390-1459) tome I : 1390-1408*, Guilhem Ferrand, Presses universitaires du Midi, page 268

6- This book is a transcription from old written documents of non-standard French. In my study of this book I've come to the realisation that Velvet was often written as Violot, Velvet, Vienot, Vienote, etc.. Depending on the scribe and probably the origin of the fabric since some of the entries look like a combination of velvet and Venice where the fabric could have originated. This pattern is also found in other inventories where high end textiles are just called out by their colour.

7-The Florin was used to account for items that were generally of Italian origin, suggesting that the fabric or this garment has been imported.

8- *Les inventaires après décès de la ville de Dijon...* page 439

9- *Les inventaires après décès de la ville de Dijon...* page 447-8

10- *Les inventaires après décès de la ville de Dijon...* page 472, The inventories have switched over to the term robe for women instead of houppelande.

11- *Les inventaires après décès de la ville de Dijon...* page 548

12- *John of Görlitz's Funerary Clothing from the Royal Tomb of the Saint Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle*, Dr. Milena Bravermanová 2005, Translated to English by Master Charles de Bourbon.

13- *Conservation Photos and Documents-Prague Houppelande: John of Görlitz Funerary robe 1396*, From the personal collection of Master Charles De Bourbon, personal communications, Dec 2017.

14- *Medieval textiles*, Cloth of Gold, p 9. Also see *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, Sharon Farmer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p 67

15- *English Fur Trade*, Veale

16- Velvet Fragment c. 1385–1402 Italy, Milan ?, late 14th-early 15th Century Velvet (cut and brocaded); silk and metal Overall: 26.7 x 21 cm (10 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.)  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1918.36

17- *Velvet and Patronage: The Origin and Historical Background of Ottoman and Italian Velvets*. Sumiyo Okumura, Digital Commons of University of Nebraska, 2016. Section 5 Velvets in Medieval Europe

18- *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, Sharon Farmer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p 68

19- *The Last Velvet Merchant of Venice*, Eliot Stein, BBC, 14 November 2018

20- *The Medieval Scarlett and the Economics of Sartorial Splendor*, John H. Munro in *Cloth and clothing in medieval Europe*, 1893. P 15

21- *The development of the Florentine silk industry: a positive response to the crisis of the fourteenth century*, Sergio Tognetti 2005, *Journal of Medieval History*

22- *The Golden Gown of Margrete*, Webpage Forest.gen.nz. This particular article is undated and no author is given, but the host website is from a well researched SCA costumer in New Zealand. Marienna Jensdatter of House Marsvin. Though the website lacks attribution, the information aligns with other known information about the gown, but it's the one extant reference I can find on linen interlining.

23- *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, Stella Mary Newton

24- *Le Commerçancement des Fourrures en Occident, vers 1300 - vers 1450*, Robert Delort Ecole Française de Rome, 1978, *Les problèmes de vocabulary*, p21

25- Many English inventories purchase raw or white cendal, *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, p 54, Blanc is also the french term for blank, so Blanc in the Dijon inventories could easily refer to this raw fabric that would have been near white when undyed. I have come to the conclusion that it is a question of nuance and price that would determine if a lining was of white squirrel or cendal in the Dijon inventories. Une oppelende de gris doublé de blanc = white Cendal lining (Dijon entry 31, p 274) Whereas the term Fouree de blanc and its variations refer to the squirrel fur.

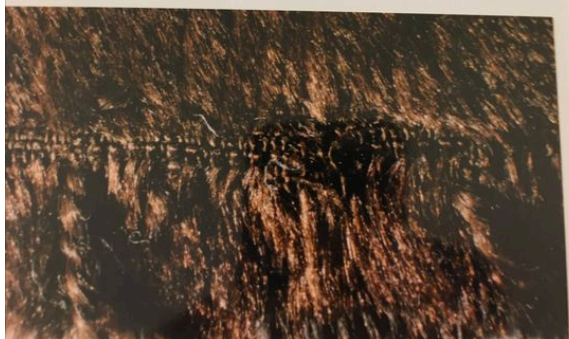
- 26- *The Color White Has a Dark Past*, Danny Lewis, The Smithsonian August 2015
- 27- *The Meaning of Renaissance and Medieval Clothing Colors*, Laura Mongiovi, 3D Materials and Concepts, Dec 2016
- 28- *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, Sharon Farmer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p 54
- 29- *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450, Medieval Finds From Excavations In London*, Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard, Kay Staniland, Boydell Press/Museum of London, 2001. Wool textiles, p76
- 30- *Medieval Clothing Care*, Rosali Gilbert, Rosalie's Medieval Woman
- 31- *Medieval Sewing Techniques: Stitches, Seams & Sewing*, Rosali Gilbert, Rosalie's Medieval Woman
- 31- *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450*, Elisabeth Crowfoot, et al, Bindings and Facings p158-164
- 32- *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450*, Elisabeth Crowfoot, et al, Narrow wares p130-142
- 33- *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, Sharon Farmer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p 48
- 34- *Medieval Sewing tools*, Rosali Gilbert, Rosalie's Medieval Woman
- 35- *Archaeological Sewing*, Heather Rose Jones, 2003
- 36- *The Silk Industries of Mediaeval Paris*, Sharon Farmer, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, chapter 4
- 37- *Did Shakespeare use an Iron*, Cash, Casidy That Shakespear Life, Aug 2020
- 38- Oxford Dictionary's first known use of the word needle board is 1879. I do not find a french equivalent for the term, nor any other documentation at this time for how velvet would be ironed without being crushed in period.
- 39- *Martial Beauty: Padding and Quilting one's way to a masculine ideal in 14th century France*, Tasha Kelly, Cotte simple, May 2013



## Appendix A- Additional Conservation Photos of Prague Houppelande



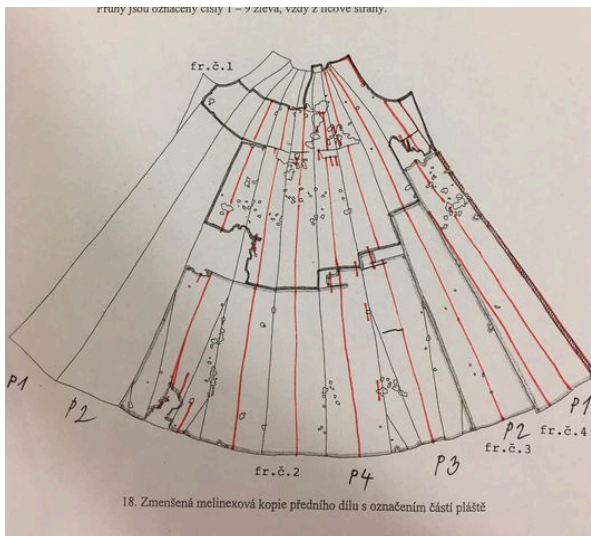
62. Tmavé nánosy na rubu tkaniny, zvětšeno 55 x



60. Pevný kraj, líc, zvětšeno 7 x



61. Tmavé nánosy na pevném kraji, líc, zvětšeno 30 x



Above- conservation diagram-front

Above Left- close up of the black silk velvet

Below Left- close up of the selvage edge

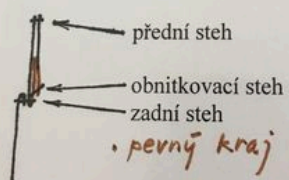
Below right- Panel fragments



Fragment č. 3, 89 x 26 cm a fragment č. 4, 106,5 x 27 cm. rub



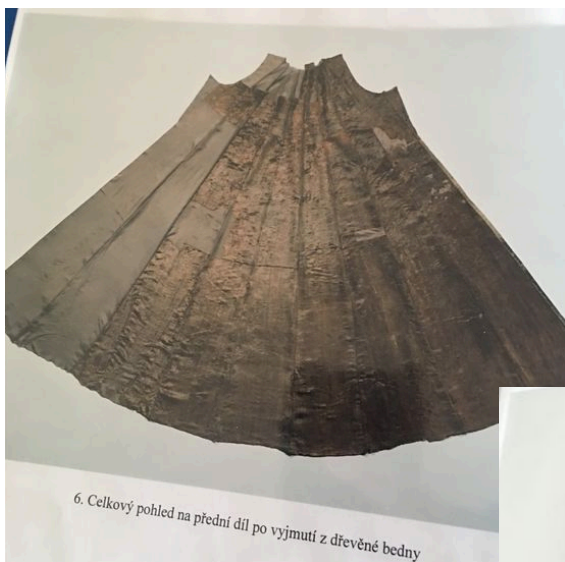
27. Stojáček z rubové strany  
(detail)



28. Kresba přišití stojáčku



Above left- collar and stitch diagram.  
Above Right- close up of only extent stitches.  
Silk thread.



6. Celkový pohled na přední díl po vyjmutí z dřevěné bedny

Left- Back of the Houppelande laid out  
Below- Front of the Houppelande laid out



7. Celkový pohled na zadní díl po vyjmutí z dřevěné bedny



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*Velvet Fragment* c. 1385–1402 Italy, Milan ?, late 14th-early 15th Century Velvet (cut and brocaded); silk and metal Overall: 26.7 x 21 cm (10 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.)  
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