

Bourgeois Luxury in Seventeenth Century Germany: A Costume Collection in the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

Johannes Pietsch, Costume Historian

When we think of luxury in seventeenth-century Western clothing, the splendour of precious fabrics and gold-embroidery, worn at the various courts in Europe, come to one's mind. Such garments can still be found in the collections in Dresden (Germany), Stockholm (Sweden) and Copenhagen (Denmark), which possess the largest collections of princely and royal attire of this period. However, we must not forget that in the big cities of Europe there had emerged a rich bourgeois ruling class who followed international fashion trends but had their own distinctive styles as well.

In the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt in Germany a rare treasure of historic costume has been preserved. It is a spectacular collection of upper garments dating from the seventeenth century, which were shown in the 2008 special exhibition at the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg / Switzerland.¹ The eighteen costumes for men and women were worn by wealthy citizens of Cologne in Germany between 1610 and 1675. So they all come from the same city and the same bourgeois class. From this social class generally only a few single pieces of garments have survived, which make the Cologne costumes by far the most significant collection of its kind.

We owe the survival of these costumes to a collector from Cologne, who called himself Baron von Hüpsch. This man ranged among the famous people of Cologne in the late eighteenth century. As a universal scholar according to Enlightenment ideals, he had assembled an encyclopaedically arranged collection of works of art, historic documents, objects of natural history and curiosities. To visit his house, which was full of these items, represented a tourists' attraction in Cologne in these days. One of the last visitors was Empress Joséphine, the wife of Napoléon, who was apparently quite pleased with the objects shown to her. Originally, it had been Baron von Hüpsch's intention to leave his possessions to the city of Cologne, but after some quarrels with his fellow citizens he decided to bequeath his whole collection to the Landgrave Ludwig X of Hessen-Darmstadt, who was himself a passionate art collector. So after the Baron's death in 1805, along with the greater part of the collection the bourgeois garments were transferred to the German city of Darmstadt. Since about 1844 the costumes were presented in the museum in Darmstadt.² Before, they all seem to have been stored in cardboard boxes. Throughout the nineteenth century the costumes were exhibited in the so-called "Old Museum" in the castle of Darmstadt. In the new building of the Großherzogliches Landesmuseum, opened to the public in 1906, the garments were on display until the Second World War. After the war they were kept in storage, so in 2008 the complete collection was newly presented after about 70 years.

Generally it is striking that this costume collection only consists of upper garments like doublets and bodices. This is not unusual, however. The assorted breeches or skirts made from large pieces of fabric could easily be reused for new clothes or would be given to the church for ecclesiastical textiles or garments.

The cut and the fashionable line of upper bourgeois clothes were largely the same as what was worn by nobility and monarchs. This can be seen in the earliest garment in the collection. It is a man's doublet dating from the second decade of the seventeenth century (fig. 1). In this time men in Western Europe began to abandon Spanish court fashions that had prevailed in whole Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century. International fashion trends were now set by France, England and the Netherlands. The red doublet shows the new fashion silhouette with a straight, oblique front line. It is provided with a stiff standing collar, shoulder wings and fourteen small tabs. With such a doublet, wide, loosely falling knee breeches would be worn, with matching knitted silk stockings and garters of silk taffeta with large bows. It is only in the choice of materials that citizens showed more modesty than aristocrats. This was not simply the expression of individual taste but also suggests that the bourgeois upper class of Cologne actually dressed according to dress regulations. These were laws that determined what materials the different social classes were allowed to use in their clothes. For example, metal thread in fabrics, embroideries, braid and laces were strictly reserved to nobility.

The fabric of the doublet is a dark-red silk satin. Plain, shiny satin is the outer fabric of thirteen out of eighteen Cologne garments and seems to have been enormously popular in those times. In dress regulations it features as the typical fabric for upper class bourgeois clothing. However, this plain fabric could be embellished by intricate decorations, such as slits and pinking, embroidery, braid trimmings or lace. In this case the decoration is formed by tablet-woven trimmings and diagonally cut slits that show a black silk fabric underneath. So the bourgeois ruling class found their own way to show luxurious styles, despite the plainness of the fabrics. And the Cologne costumes show a big variety of imaginative decorations.

Special fashion features of the seventeenth century are the luxurious ruffs, collars and cuffs that were worn with all the costumes. These accessories consisted of very fine linen that was called *cambric*.³ And they were very often bordered with intricate laces, the finest of which were produced in Flanders.

In the seventeenth-century costume collection of the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt especially the women's bodices are truly unique. While men wore international styles, Cologne women followed exactly the Netherlandish fashions. Cologne is not far away from the Netherlands. And in the seventeenth century the wealthy citizens of Cologne looked to the rich patricians in the Netherlands as examples for their own fashions, as in those days the Dutch were a leading nation in economy as well as culture. By dressing in this style Cologne women wanted to express their bourgeois pride.

It is always the same shape of bodice that can be found in this bourgeois clothing style. A very fine example is the pink bodice from about 1625 (fig. 2). This bodice reaches up to the neck and is provided

with two stiff basks that have decorative borders in the shape of little triangles. The decoration consists of little slits that show a white fabric underneath. On the top of all seams and around the edges the bodice is trimmed with small tablet-woven braid. Inside the front there is a stiffening of whalebones, while the round shapes at the breast and the shoulders are moulded by woollen interlinings. The bodice is laced in the back. Additionally, a corset, also stiffened with whalebone, would have been worn underneath the bodice. Over such a decorative bodice a lady would wear a floor-length, wide black over-garment, which was open in the front and thus revealed a silk petticoat worn over a hip roll. The costume was complemented by a big ruff, precious lace cuffs, a lace cap and a gold chain around the waist. We find this style depicted in all the portraits of the bourgeois class by Dutch and Flemish masters in museums all over the world. All in all, five bodices after the Dutch fashion have been preserved in the costume collection in Darmstadt. This is quite sensational because apparently there is no other of these worldwide although they were so widely worn.

The bright red bodice that is trimmed with black bobbin lace shows the shape at the beginning of the 1630s (fig. 3). Bodices became shorter while their basks became larger. And they had a square neckline. The fine, black silk bobbin lace has been preserved here in large quantities, which is rather unique. Even in internationally renowned textile collections there are often only small fragments of black silk lace of this period. Beautiful details are also the dainty passementerie buttons, which can be found on most of the Cologne costumes.

A black over-gown worn with these two bodices has been preserved as well. This is a rare piece of luck for the history of costume. Unfortunately the sewn-on, floor-length pleated skirt is missing. Besides a plain satin the over-gown consists of a silk damask with a pattern of two alternating flower motifs. Such damasks are of Italian origin and were produced in Lucca, Genova and in the Liguria region. These fabrics were exported and could be bought in Germany at the big fairs, for example in Frankfurt or Cologne.

Netherlandish fashions reigned in Cologne until about 1650, especially in women's garments. In the second half of the seventeenth century, however, it was definitely France that had taken over the lead in fashion in whole Europe. This fact is also reflected in the costume collection of Darmstadt. A yellow bodice shows the new women's fashion around 1660 (fig. 4). It reminds us of so many paintings of this era, especially the ones by Terborch or Vermeer. This bodice with its novel cut, its wide neckline and its short puffed sleeves is richly trimmed with gold and silver lace and black silk ribbons. The curvaceous seams, which had not existed before, enhance the baroque shape. With such a bodice a lady would wear a skirt equally made of silk satin and falling to the ground in soft pleats. Thus a harmonic, becoming silhouette was created. However pretty, this fashion was anything but comfortable. The inside of the bodice reveals its construction with whalebones sewn into the linen lining, so that it has a three-dimensional shape, almost like a sculpture, which forced the body into shape.

For the fashionable men's line around 1660 there is also a masterly example in the costume collection (fig. 5). It is a richly decorated short doublet made from a beautifully patterned silk fabric. It has got a high

standing collar and slashed sleeves. The special feature of the finely balanced materials is the delicate silk lace, in which strips of parchment have been worked in. This garment was surely worn in the highest bourgeois class. All comparable extant doublets are to be found in British collections. That is why this particular doublet could have been produced in England or even in France but it was worn in Cologne. This is not astonishing because the Cologne merchants had far reaching trade relations. Such a doublet was originally complemented by short, very wide petticoat breeches, the so-called *rhinegraves*.

In contrast to all this luxury a short black doublet of about 1665–1670 shows the typically bourgeois version of this fashion, much more modest, sober and also conservative (fig. 6). However the citizen did not want to dispose of the fashionable loops placed on the large double cuffs of the doublet, with always a plain and a patterned loop alternating. The weaving of bands and ribbons was rather important in seventeenth-century Cologne and an indispensable fashion feature on a man's suit in these years. So a large quantity of bands was produced in Cologne for export.

The contrast between the black doublet and petticoat breeches and the white linen shirt worn under the doublet would produce a very appealing effect, which mixed bourgeois modesty with the expressive gesture of obvious nonchalance.

To sum up the collection of seventeenth-century costumes in the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, it can be said that all garments are marked by a high art of tailoring, which by smart cutting produced clothes with balanced proportions. With a masterly craftsmanship the tailor created three-dimensional shapes with means of interlinings, padding and sophisticated sewing techniques to give the garments a perfect, creaseless fit. The art of tailoring had already reached a high standard in the seventeenth century, and it was capable of matching the desired silhouette to the individual body. And beautiful and precious materials were used to produce these garments. So all the costumes tell us about the luxurious life of the rich burghers in a German city in the seventeenth century.

Notes:

1. Johannes Pietsch / Karen Stolleis, Kölner Patrizier- und Bürgerkleidung des 17. Jahrhunderts. Die Kostümsammlung Hüpsch im Hessischen Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberger Berichte 15, Riggisberg 2008.
2. Philipp A.F. Walther, Die Sammlungen von Gegenständen des Alterthums, der Kunst, der Völkerkunde und von Waffen im Großherzoglichen Museum zu Darmstadt, Darmstadt 1844, p. 128–129.
3. Bianca M. du Mortier, Costume in Frans Hals, in: Seymour Slive, Frans Hals, exhibition catalogue, Washington, National Gallery of Art, London 1989, p. 46.

Illustrations:

Fig. 1: Dark red doublet, about 1610–1620, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. no. Kg 93:19.

Fig. 2: Pink bodice with pinking, about 1625, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. no. Kg. 52:13/1.

Fig. 3: Bright red bodice with black lace and upper part of a black over-gown, about 1630–1635, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. nos. Kg 52:12 and Kg 52:13/2.

Fig. 4: Yellow bodice, around 1660, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. no. Kg 52:10.

Fig. 5: Doublet with parchment lace, about 1660, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. no. Kg 52:4.

Fig. 6: Black doublet with ribbon loops on the double cuffs, about 1665–1670, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. no. Kg 78:6.

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