

A *Giornea*, or 15th C. Italian Overgown

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WHAT, WHERE and WHEN:

- ◆ A *giornea*, a tabard-like garment worn over a *gamurra*, or fitted dress
- ◆ Worn in many parts of what is present-day Italy. The examples this gown was based on are from Florence.
- ◆ Examples are found through the second half of the Quattrocento, or 15th century

MATERIALS:

- ◆ Cotton/poly damask fabric
- ◆ Procion dye
- ◆ Linen lining fabric
- ◆ Thread
- ◆ Metal clasp

PROCESS:

- ◆ Dye fabric an appropriate color
- ◆ Draft pattern for *giornea*
- ◆ Cut front and back pieces, fabric and lining
- ◆ Sew back pieces together down center back
- ◆ Sew front pieces to back at shoulders
- ◆ Repeat both steps for lining
- ◆ Sew lining to fabric at hem and sides
- ◆ Stitch lining to fabric at neckline
- ◆ Attach clasp to front pieces, right at bust level

SOURCES:

- ◆ Birbari, Elizabeth. *Dress in Italian Painting, 1460 - 1500*. London: John Murray, 1975.
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- ◆ Crowfoot, Elizabeth, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland. *Textiles and Clothing: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London, c. 1150 - c. 1450*. London: HMSO, 1992.
- ◆ Herald, Jacqueline. *Dress in Renaissance Italy 1400 - 1500*. London: Bell & Hyman, Ltd., 1981.
- ◆ Quermann, Andreas. *Domenico di Tommaso di Currado Bigordi Ghirlandaio, 1449 - 1494. (Masters of Italian Art Series)*. Germany: Konemann, 1998.
- ◆ Roettgen, Steffi et al. *Italian Frescoes: The Early Renaissance 1400 - 1470*. New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996.
- ◆ _____ . *Italian Frescoes: The Flowering of the Renaissance 1470 - 1510*. New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996.

Wealthy women in Renaissance Florence generally wore three layers of clothing when out in public or receiving formal visitors (though not while at home in an informal setting). During the latter part of the Quattrocento, the outer most garment was usually a *cioppa* or a *giornea*, which was a tabard-like overdress with an open front and sides. It is thought that the *giornea* developed from a military garment, while the *cioppa* was closed up the front and sides and resembled the houppelande of northern Europe. The *cioppa* was more of a winter garment, often lined with fur, while the *giornea* was lighter in weight and in style.

The cut of the *giornea* was very simple, draping over the shoulders and hanging to the ground. It did not fit closely to the body, though sometimes a belt was worn around the waist and over the front panels of the dress. A clasp was another form of closure for this dress. The hem fell just at the top of the foot in front, sometimes longer in the back, forming a small train. Some early *giornee* were relatively plain, but later they became more opulent through use of rich fabrics and detailed embroidery. There are a number of examples of *giornee* in contemporary art, including sculpture.



Adoration of the Holy Wood, Piero della Francesca, ca. 1452.



Bust of a Young Girl, Andrea del Verrocchio, ca. 1470.



Giovanna Tornabuoni, Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1488.

I decided that a brocade was the most suitable fabric for my *giornea*, especially since the *gamurra* I made to wear under it was of a solid colored velvet. I found a cotton/poly brocade online that had a woven pattern similar to those of the Renaissance, seen both in contemporary art and in photographs of existing fragments of fabric in Jacqueline Herald's *Dress in Renaissance Italy 1400 - 1500*. The brocade I found is a stylized floral design, with a regular repeating ogee shape (like a teardrop but pointed at both ends). Period brocades were often silk, and while I have found sources for ordering these fabrics, I cannot afford them, as they are exorbitantly priced. The only problem (aside from its modern content) that I had with the brocade was that it was an inappropriate (read: ugly) color. The background was a medium brown color and the pattern was a light beige. However, this problem was easily solved by dyeing the fabric. It turned out that only the pattern would take the dye, as this was the cotton part. I used Procion dye as I do not know much about period dyestuffs and techniques, and I wasn't sure that period dyes would be fast on this particular fabric. I mixed a wine color with some blue and came up with a respectable purple. The brown background softened with the washing and turned out with a nice sheen. Overall, I was very pleased with the results.

Once I had my fabric prepared, I drafted a pattern for the *giornea*. I measured my shoulder width, measured from my shoulder to the top of my foot for the front hem, and added six or so inches to that for the back hem. I cut the front neckline in a V shape, with the panels meeting at about the mid-bust point. Then I cut the back neckline in a shallow curve and I had a workable pattern. I cut out the front and back panels from my brocade, then did the same for the linen lining.

I had intended to hand sew the *giornea* as I had done with the *gamurra*, but I came down with the flu two weeks before the Persona Pentathlon and I did not have enough time. I had planned to use a sturdy back stitch for all the main construction seams, and I already had the linen thread I was planning to use. However, in light of the fact that I lost a good deal of time while I was sick, I decided I would rather sew the *giornea* on my sewing machine and actually get it finished in time.

I started by sewing the two back panels down the center back, and then doing the same for the lining. Then I stitched the front panels to the back at the shoulders (and again for the lining) and then sewed the lining to the outer fabric all the way around, leaving the neckline open for turning the garment right side out. Then I blind-stitched the lining to the fabric at the neckline. The last touch was to sew on a small gold-tone metal clasp, to hold the front of the *giornea* closed.

The sewing of the *giornea* itself was not especially difficult; the challenge was in drafting the pattern so that the proportions were right, and in choosing the fabric and details carefully. My only disappointment with the project is that the modern brocade I was able to obtain is stiffer and somewhat heavier than an equivalent period fabric would have been. The garment doesn't hang in folds in quite the way I had envisioned, but the result is fairly close. Another fabric would probably have draped better, but I wouldn't be able to afford a patterned brocade with that quality, so that effect would be lost. I'm satisfied with the choice I made from what was available to me.