14th-Century Northern Italian Women’s Clothing
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Silhouettes & Design Aesthetics

Early to Mid 14th-century clothing
- Straight loose body shape more similar to Byzantine styles and aesthetics at the beginning of the century.
- Transitioning to a tighter body shape similar to what is seen in Western Europe during the middle of the century, although still very straight through the body.
- Wide bands of trim around the neckline, biceps, and center front of garments.

Late 14th-century clothing
- Styles become more similar to Western Europe in silhouette while retaining a distinctly Italian aesthetic.
- Wide and low necklines, often, but not always edged with contrasting fabric in imagery.
- Loose over sleeves, deviation from previously seen styles.
Fabrics

Silk, wool, and linen, would have been the most common fabrics available, with wool and linen being the most used. There is evidence for coarse cotton fabrics, specifically for cheap underclothes.\(^1\) The *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, a popular medical text from late 14th century in northern Italy, recommends linen cloth next to the skin and wool fabric to keep one warm and dry.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Mazzaoui, Maureen Fennell. 1981. The Italian cotton industry in the later Middle Ages, 1100-1600. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\(^2\) The *Tacuinum Sanitatis* refers to several heavily illustrated 14th century texts that were translated from a 12th century Arabic text on health. See Bibliography for more information.
Linen Clothing (Vestis Linea)
Usefulness: It moderates the heat the body. | Dangers: It presses down on the skin and blocks transpiration.
Neutralization of the Dangers: By mixing it with silk. | Effects: It dries up ulcerations. It is primarily good for hot temperaments, for the young, in Summer, and in the Southern regions.
Translation provided by: [http://www.godecookery.com/tacuin/tacuin47.htm](http://www.godecookery.com/tacuin/tacuin47.htm)
Main Garment Layers

Camicia - The camicia is typically made of thin linen fitted to the body, but not skin tight. As mentioned above, coarse cotton and cotton/linen blended fabrics were used by the lower classes for their body linens, but the upper classes much preferred their fine smooth linens.³

Cipriana and Vestito - The over and under gowns would have most commonly been made from wool, although some imagery indicates that damask silks were used for clothing and the silk trade was large enough that silk for over gowns was probably common.⁴ I prefer thin fine wools for my own use because they breath better than silk and are often less expensive.

The vestito was most likely a front laced supportive gown layer that could fit narrow to the arms with little embellishment, have buttons, or have a “bag” sleeve. Mitten cuffs are commonly seen on sleeves in late 14th century imagery. I am a fan of mitten sleeves because they can be folded down to keep your hands warm or folded back to stay out of the way. Some images suggest that the sleeve cuffs could have been lined as well, based on the contrasting fabric seen when the cuffs are folded back.

The cipriana most likely refers to the wide sleeved and wide neckline over gown, but I have not been able to solidly identify the Italian for the other styles of over gown seen in the imagery.⁵ Over gowns are seen with a variety of different sleeve and neckline styles, but the cipriana, is mentioned in the writings of J. De Mussis as being “inhonest” because it shows too much of the breast.⁶

“However, these garments are honest, because with these garments [women] don't show off their breast. But they also have inhonest garments, that are called Cipriane, that are wide towards the feet and tight fitting in the upper part, with long and wide sleeves like the aforementioned garments, of similar value, with similar jewels and precious decorations. And they are buttoned in the front from the neckline to the hem. And these Cipriane have such a big neckline that they show off the breast and it looks like the breast wants to come out from the dress. And this dress would be beautiful, if it didn't show off the breast, and if the neckline was moderate enough so that the breast wouldn't be visible to other people.”⁷

Other clothing items

Calze - in modern Italian calze translates as both socks and hose, and images of calze are seen in both the silk and woolen merchant images. For women the calze would most likely only cover the lower leg coming to the bottom of the knee and held in place with a garter, but very little imagery exists of even working women showing their lower leg so it is a best guess as to whether they would have worn them short or long. Wearing the longer calze for warmth in winter is likely.

Scarpe (Shoes) - often shown with a very long pointed toe, but shorter toes are seen in images of working class people. Written references for shoes in the 14th century indicate that they were made of very thin leather and that people expected to replace them a couple of times a year.⁸ The most common colors in both the

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⁵ Guarnacca is the word provided by Anna Attiliani for a common style over gown, but she does not provide any additional information. [http://tacuinummedievale.blogspot.mx/2016/08/qualche-chiarimento-sulla-cipriana-few.html](http://tacuinummedievale.blogspot.mx/2016/08/qualche-chiarimento-sulla-cipriana-few.html)
**Tacuinum Sanitatis** images and the household accounts from Lucca are black and red.\(^9\) Leather finds dating to the 14th century from the British Museum and Museum of London also suggest that shoes were made from very thin leathers.\(^{10}\)

Pattens - the most common Italian word related to pattens is *chopine*, but most references to this word indicate a usage starting in the mid-15th century. So while it could have been in use as early as the 1380’s I have not been able to confirm that.\(^{11}\) Christine Meek uses the Italian word *pianelle* for pattens in her article on shoes in Lucca, but in modern Italian *pianelle* translates to “tile”.\(^{12}\) Since Meek does not provide an explanation for this my personal thought on it is that the original pattens must have looked like walking on a wood tile. Meek does say that many of the purchases of pattens that she reviewed seem to be purchased in conjunction with a matching pair of shoes.\(^{13}\)

### Accessories

Hair Styling - the most commonly seen hairstyle for women in the mid to late 14th century is taped hair or ribbon wrapped hair. This is done by wrapping the length of hair with a piece of ribbon and then wrapping the wrapped hair over the top of the head and using the end of the ribbon to secure the hair. Other hairstyles include braids wrapped over the head and hair wrapped in pearls. Veils are less common in Italian images than in English and French images mostly showing up on working class women and women in religious settings. Even in outdoor images upper class women are typically not shown wearing a veil.

Jewelry - simple bead necklaces of either coral or pearls appear to be be most common jewelry seen in images, and the occasional belt can be seen in some images. There are two rather famous belts dated to late 14th century Italy, one at the Cleveland Museum of art and the other at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but they are both very expensive examples of belts available.\(^{14}\) Both belts are silk snartemo weaving with gilded and enameled plaques, buckles, and strap ends. The belt that I wear for everyday use is plain silk tablet woven belt with a simple silver buckle and strap end, and pewter eyelets, better matching my persona’s social class than a snartemo belt with gilded fixtures would.

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\(^9\) Ibid.
[https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections)  
[http://www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)


\(^{12}\) Meek, Christine. 2017. "*Calciamentum*". 83-105.

\(^{13}\) Meek, Christine. 2017. "*Calciamentum*". 83-105.

\(^{14}\) Belt for a Lady's Dress. c. 1375-1400. Italy, Siena?. 14th century. Cleveland Museum of Art. 1930.742  
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