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Fashion and Court-Building in the Sixteenth-Century Florentine Ducal Court: Politics, Agency, and Paleopathology in the Wardrobes of Eleonora di Toledo and Giovanna d'Austria

Leah Rachel Jeffers
Scripps College

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DUCAL COURT: POLITICS, AGENCY, AND PALEOPATHOLOGY IN THE
WARDROBES OF ELEONORA DI TOLEDO AND GIOVANNA D’AUSTRIA

by

Leah R. Jeffers

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PROFESSOR COREY TAZZARA
PROFESSOR SABRINA OVAN

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Fashion and Court-Building in the Sixteenth-Century Florentine Ducal Court:
The Role of Politics, Agency, and Paleopathology in the Wardrobes of Eleonora di Toledo and Giovanna d’Austria

Introduction

The history of fashion, too often, is viewed from a purely aesthetic angle of changing styles that are unrelated to political climate and personal agency. Equally as problematic are interpretations of certain fashions as instruments of oppression imposed upon women to limit their physical movements and personal expressions (most commonly, corsets and hoop skirts). It is true that, since the Middle Ages, many women’s fashions have been physically restrictive, and that has sculpted women into the ideal image of a demure, physically weak, slender creature. However, over-emphasizing this aspect of dress erases the agency that many women did exert over their clothing; women’s fashion cannot be viewed as purely something that was prescribed by men to control women. Furthermore, this form of analysis often ignores men’s fashion altogether. Beginning in the Renaissance, men also faced tremendous amounts of pressure to conform to an ideal body shape, although theirs was one based on strength and virility, rather than slimness and grace. Fashion in the Renaissance became intensely political, highly gendered, and anatomized (i.e. emphasizing human anatomy rather than masking it). Certainly, it is often difficult to argue questions of free will as opposed to societal pressures and norms, but to view fashion in either extreme - as an oppressive prescription or as a vehicle for free individual expression - is undeniably reductive.

Changes in Clothing from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance

In the Middle Ages, men and women wore relatively loose, very modest clothing; there was not much differentiation between ‘male’ and ‘female’ clothing, and the term ‘form-fitting’
was foreign to medieval European ears. Figure 1 provides an example of common depictions of clothing in late medieval art; this painting by Guido da Siena presents a religious scene (the Annunciation) with figures clad in large swathes of fabric. The fundamental difficulty in studying the history of dress is that clothing is hardly ever preserved well enough to last centuries; there are only a small handful of extant garments from before the past few centuries. Historians rely, therefore, on artwork for the bulk of information about how people dressed long ago. However, there are inherent problems with this mode of inquiry; artworks are under no responsibility to accurately depict reality, and even portraits that claim to portray an individual’s appearance are rarely representations of the subject’s everyday garb. More often than not, early modern and pre-modern portraits are rich with symbolic imagery and depict their subject (a ruler, usually) at their finest. Even once Renaissance humanism inspired artists to shift their focus to more secular subjects, and portraits proliferated of non-elite subjects, there still remained the fundamental disconnect between paintings and daily life.

One particular problem with scholarship of medieval dress is that very few artworks from that period depict secular scenes; even images depicting the lives of ‘everyday people’ were almost exclusively religious images, which brings into question how accurately they represented contemporary dress. The Renaissance, with the birth of classicism and humanism, saw a sudden appearance of art that was not religiously motivated, and was not representing only historical and/or religious figures. With the emergence of a newly wealthy merchant class, suddenly non-elites could afford luxuries (and status symbols), like portraits, previously reserved for the upper classes, which caused quite a bit of upset among nobles throughout Europe. Many sumptuary laws were born out of a desire to prevent wealthy non-elites from encroaching upon the realm of lavish clothing, which many elites believed should be reserved for those of noble birth. Portraits
were more difficult to regulate, though, so portraits of merchants proliferated, especially in the fifteenth century and onwards. Jan van Eyck painted several well-known examples, such as *The Arnolfini Wedding* (Figure 2) and *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini* (Figure 3). Furthermore, sumptuary laws did not prevent Renaissance merchants from owning beautiful, well-crafted garments made from expensive materials. The subject of Jan Gossaert’s sixteenth-century *Portrait of a Merchant* (Figure 4) sports a fine outfit including both patterned fabrics and red fabrics, both of which were very costly and fashionable at the time.

Images such as the ones mentioned above allow historians to trace a general progression of fashion from loose, flowing medieval robes to the more form-fitting, structured garments of the Renaissance and beyond. By the fourteenth century, images appear of women in tighter dresses; collarbones appear, and waists! Andrea di Bonaiuto’s frescoes in the Cappellone degli Spagnoli of the Basilicata di Santa Maria Novella in Florence provide instances of ‘modern’ fourteenth-century fashions (Figures 5, 6). In men’s fashion, the fourteenth century saw an increased emphasis placed on the legs, a trend which would characterize European men’s fashion for centuries later. (Figure 6). By the fifteenth century, in women’s fashion, one can see bared shoulders, skintight sleeves, slender bodices, and decolletage (Figure 7). Men’s fashion started to accentuate the waist and arms, as well as the legs (Figure 8). The sixteenth century saw the advent of the silhouettes and styles most commonly associated with ‘Renaissance fashion,’ such as noticeably corseted waists and puffed sleeves. (Figures 9, 10, 11).

Before the Renaissance, clothing was generally conceptualized as a fairly static characteristic of a culture. Costume books proliferated in the Renaissance, which aimed to document the costumes (customs) of different cultures around the world – dress, it was believed, could indicate much about the nature of a society. However, in the Renaissance, trade became
increasingly globalized, urban populations boomed, and material culture experienced a massive increase. In addition, the rise of the merchant class meant that more people than ever were participating in ‘fashion,’ and buying clothes and accessories that were considered highly desirable. These conditions set the stage for the emergence of the very concept of fashion as a changing concept of what was considered ‘in’ or ‘trendy,’ as opposed to costume, which was more static. The belief that dress was an important representation of culture, however, persisted throughout these changes, and often led to discourse on topics such as the allegedly corrupting influence of foreign fashions on European culture, and the moral dangers posed by the allure of lavish clothing and accessories.

Fashion and Court Culture

After the middle ages, as court culture developed, one’s ability to keep up with the latest fashions became intertwined with one’s political success; an inability to fit in sartorially in court could spell the end of an elite’s political career. In general, court culture emphasized dress as a demonstration of ‘taste,’ which was believed to be something innately bestowed upon worthy elites. Manners and social relations also became politicized - rules of etiquette, both official and tacit, began to govern interactions in court.¹ In Italian court culture, the term ‘sprezzatura’ appeared in common usage, and was used to describe the art of making one’s virtues, skills, and especially appearance, seem effortless.² Embodying the spirit of sprezzatura, a skill vital to social survival in the Renaissance, also required demonstrating ‘taste,’ and in particular, the

‘instinctual’ knowledge of how to dress appropriately and fashionably for any situation.

The body of the courtier was a particular point of focus. As Renaissance fashions became progressively more revealing, certain gendered body parts, like breasts or broad chests (or non-gendered body parts which came to become gendered, like calves) came to hold much more social importance. Consider the corset; the late Renaissance was rife with laced waist-reducers, and having a small waist began to be seen as a marker of femininity, grace, and womanly virtue. Physical grace was also emphasized in the arts in which a sixteenth-century courtier was expected to excel. While medieval nobles in feudal societies focused mainly on military skills, Renaissance courtiers had to be able to dance well, dress well, and potentially sing and play musical instruments as well. These skills, of course, had to be performed with sprezzatura; if they seemed practiced or challenging, the illusion of courtiers being naturally artistically and musically gifted would have been ruined. In his fantastically popular etiquette manual Il Cortegiano, Baldassare Castiglione advised against bright colors; one of the characters in his dialogue commented: “I am also always pleased when clothes tend to be sober and restrained rather than foppish; so it seems to me that the most agreeable color is black, and if not black, then at least something fairly dark.”3 Throughout Il Cortegiano, Castiglione proposed a model of sprezzatura as applied to fashion which prized modesty and sobriety, which stood in stark opposition to the increasingly eclectic tastes of sixteenth-century Italian clothing.4

greater extent than most other Italian courts. However, the Medici regime’s reserved sartorial choices were not motivated purely by a desire to honor more conservative Italian moralists and their rejection of ostentatious fashion trends. The Medici, attempting to install themselves as dukes over the deeply republican Florentine government, adopted modesty in clothing, behavior, and lifestyle as a vital pillar of their political agenda.

While the Medici family held significant amounts of de facto power in the republican Florentine government for generations, the mid-sixteenth century saw the Medici take the (irrevocable and unbelievably risky) step into the public spotlight as hereditary rulers of Florence. Alessandro de’ Medici was instated as the duke of the Florentine republic in 1532, under the auspices of Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, and with the cooperation of Pope Clement VII. In 1537, Cosimo I de’ Medici was elected as ‘capo e primario’ of the Florentine government by the still extant Senate. When the Senate attempted to bureaucratically tie Cosimo’s hands in an attempt to maintain a balance of power in the government, he disregarded the limitations placed upon him; exiled political opponents of the Medici attempted to intervene militarily, but were crushed rapidly and violently. Charles V, two months later, bestowed the title of ‘duke’ on Cosimo, partially in recognition of Cosimo’s swift quelling of his political opponents’ uprising. Cosimo ruled as duke until 1569, when Pope Pius V named him Grand Duke of Tuscany, a title which was then ratified by Emperor Maximilian II. The Medici dukes and grand dukes were backed by imperial power, and not opposed by the papacy - their most dangerous enemy, in addition to members of other noble families they had exiled, were the Florentine people themselves.

As the first Medici dukes were establishing power, the ghosts of failed leaders such as

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Girolamo Savonarola would have weighed heavily on their minds. Savonarola painted himself as a prophet, but he did not attempt to seize absolute political power; nevertheless, he met a decidedly grisly end when the pendulum of public opinion swung out of his favor. Savonarola was tortured and executed in 1498, only 34 years before Alessandro was named duke. With Savonarola’s fate in their minds, as well as Florence’s centuries-long history of violent political turmoil, the first Medici dukes were keenly aware that their political success and their very lives depended on the Florentine public’s acceptance of their rule, and that acceptance freely won would guarantee safety much more than acceptance forced upon them through imperial coercion. In a city whose republican heritage was woven into its cultural identity, the Medici faced the difficult task of suppressing republican ideas both in theory and in practice, and the cultural agenda of the Medici dynasty, including their fashion choices and how they regulated dress in Florence, was designed specifically to convince the Florentine elites to accept them as leaders.

In the Florentine Republic, members of the government wore black robes as an early modern equivalent to today’s three-piece business suit. All were wearing essentially the same outfit, except for differences in the quality of the fabric or the cut of the garment. The Medici dukes chose to establish a court culture much more representative of the current political climate in sixteenth century Europe, dressing themselves in distinctive clothes and implementing a number of sumptuary laws to institute a sartorial hierarchy within the government and within Florentine society in general. However, Cosimo in particular was exceedingly aware of the precarious nature of his political power, and this awareness manifested itself in nearly every aspect of his rule, including his fashion choices. He made an effort, especially in the early decades of his rule, not to dress too ostentatiously; while portraits of him depict clothes that seem

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lavish to the modern eye, they were relatively restrained in comparison to those of other contemporary rulers. One portrait of Cosimo I from 1537 depicts a young man, just on the cusp of dukedom, in a somber black outfit (Figure 13). Even later in life, Cosimo is portrayed repeatedly in simple, modest clothing (Figure 14). Sometimes Cosimo was depicted in more regal clothing, but even his most lavish outfits are not as ostentatiously decorated as those in portraits of other sixteenth-century rulers in more established positions, like Henry VIII of England (Figures 12, 15).

In Elizabeth Currie’s article “Prescribing Fashion: Dress, Politics, and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Italian Conduct Literature,” Currie argues that the Medici court as it developed over the course of the sixteenth century was “far removed” from Norbert Elias’s model of court culture based on the French court of Louis XIV, the Sun King. Visitors described Cosimo I’s court as surprisingly “modest and informal.” This assessment holds true with the idea of Cosimo as a cautious court-builder, wary of creating an image of imperial or monarchical pretensions or intentions that could turn the public’s opinion against him. However, while Cosimo’s court may be termed ‘relatively informal’ in comparison to other contemporary courts, this by no means indicates that social and sartorial guidelines and laws were less restrictive in Cosimo’s court. The level of ‘formality’ in question relates solely to the level of ostentation present in the court, and not how regulated behavior and dress were. In the latter sense, Cosimo’s court was just as formal as others of its time.

In another passage of Il Cortegiano, Castiglione speaks to one of the factors behind the high stakes of fashion in Cosimo’s court - the fear of foreign influence in fashion as a harbinger of foreign influence in politics, a fear that plagued Europe throughout the Renaissance, and

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8 Currie, “Prescribing Fashion,” 159.
became quite pointed in Medicean Florence. “I do not know,” a character complains, “by what fate it happens that Italy does not have, as it used to, a distinctively Italian costume: for although the new fashions in use may make earlier ways of dressing appear uncouth, still these were perhaps a sign of our freedom, as the former have proved to be an augury of servitude, in my opinion now clearly fulfilled.” In the immediate wake of the establishment of the Medici duchy in Florence, many Florentines saw Cosimo I as an imperial puppet. Castiglione’s passage here reflects that fear as applied to the realm of fashion.

It is recorded that when Darius, the year before he fought with Alexander, changed the style of the sword he wore at his side from Persian to Macedonian, the soothsayers interpreted this as meaning that those into whose style Darius had changed his Persian sword would become the rulers of Persia; and in the same way it seems to me that our having exchanged our Italian style of dress for that of foreigners means that all those whose fashions we have adopted in place of our own must come to subjugate us. And this has proved only too true...

These fears were very real for the Florentine public, and made the Medici’s task of establishing themselves as a genuinely Florentine regime crucial to their political viability. The first Grand Duchesses, who served to legitimize the Medici regime within an international political context, had to appear ‘Florentine enough’ not to arouse dangerous levels of antipathy from the Florentine public.

For this reason, the wives of Cosimo I and his successor, Francesco I, were tasked with inventing the image of the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, with the additional challenge of adapting to the (newly-formed) Florentine court, and ingratiating themselves with their staff and the people of Florence. Many royal women in the sixteenth century had to move to and adjust to a new country when they were married, but most were married into extant monarchies - very few had to perform that task as the first or second woman to hold their office! Alessandro de’

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9 Castiglione, Book of the Courtier, 134.
10 Ibid., 134.
Medici’s wife, Margaret of Austria, was the daughter of Emperor Charles V, and as such was essentially a representative of imperial power in the Florentine government.

_Eleonora: The First Grand Duchess_

Eleonora di Toledo was born in Spain in 1522 as the second daughter of Don Pedro Alvarez de Toledo. Her father had been appointed as the Viceroy of Naples by Emperor Charles V, and when Eleonora was ten years old, she moved to Naples with her father’s retinue. She lived there for the next ten years of her life, coming of age in an Italian city, but within a Spanish court. It was there that she learned to ride horses, hunt, and gamble; her father, in particular, passed on to Eleonora his love of gambling.

In 1535 (two years before he became duke), Cosimo de’ Medici visited Naples, and when he met Eleonora, the pair allegedly fell in love at first sight. While this was undeniably a politically strategic marriage, there is much evidence that Eleonora and Cosimo had a strong, loving, and companionable relationship. Eleonora spent much of her time at her husband’s side, both on official occasions and in more informal settings such as hunting and fishing trips. The Florentine public, however, was not as immediately fond of Eleonora, whom they saw as a representation of foreign allegiances and alliances that had been solidified by Cosimo’s ascension to ducal power. While some sources painted a brighter picture of Eleonora’s

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11 Roberta Orsi Landini and Bruna Niccoli, _Moda a Firenze 1540-1580: Lo stile di Eleonora di Toledo e la sua influenza_ (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2005), 15.
12 Ibid., 15.
13 Ibid., 17.
14 Ibid., 15.
15 Ibid., 18, 36.
reception in Florence, she was described by other sources as haughty and proud, and thus had difficulty integrating herself socially into the Florentine nobility.\textsuperscript{17} Beyond appearing at Cosimo’s side, Eleonora occasionally demonstrated her capacity to rule in her own right; she essentially single-handedly managed the state during a war against Siena for some time while Cosimo was away dealing with other business.\textsuperscript{18}

Eleonora certainly represented an image of femininity which was rare in Renaissance Italy. In the Renaissance, many cities established separations between the public and private spheres. This shift effectively barred women from participating in politics or any other form of public life. In courts, women managed to maintain some measure of power, for they lived at court, which was also where politics were conducted, so even women who did not hold politically powerful roles could influence those who did.\textsuperscript{19} In republican cities, however, most women were confined to their homes, and even noblewomen who ran their own households would conduct their business with the outside world through a hired proxy.\textsuperscript{20} Eleonora’s bold presence in the Florentine government was undoubtedly fostered by her upbringing in the Spanish court at Naples, which would have been rich with powerful women to whom she could have looked up to as a teenager.\textsuperscript{21}

Eleonora’s personal style was governed by her passion for living an active life; she loved to ride horses, travel, and join hunting and fishing parties with her husband.\textsuperscript{22} The records of her wardrobe include mentions of a vast quantity of new garments created specifically for travel and

\textsuperscript{17} Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 16.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{19} Joan Kelly, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” 1977.
\textsuperscript{21} Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 18.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 17, 36.
other outdoor activities, such as hats, “jerkins, coats, travelling coats and capes for rain and sun, baviere and pappafichi.”\textsuperscript{23} See Figure 16 for an example of a sixteenth-century jerkin, which most likely belonged to a man; Eleonora’s jerkins were almost certainly quite similar to this, however, as she reportedly borrowed freely from the traditionally male wardrobe. The baviere was “a piece of cloth used to protect the face while travelling in the open air,” and was generally attached to the hat.\textsuperscript{24} The pappafico was “a type of hood or wimple which covers the head and shoulders, and can also be raised to protect the face.”\textsuperscript{25} Most notably, Eleonora’s wardrobe records show no indication that she ever wore or owned a farthingale.\textsuperscript{26} The farthingale, a structured garment similar to the later ‘hoop skirt’ to extend the fabric of a skirt or gown, originated in Spain and rapidly became fashionable throughout Europe. Eleonora did embrace the full-skirted silhouette, but the volume of her skirts was created by skillfully gathered fabric at the waist, rather than internal structures.\textsuperscript{27} While most of Eleonora’s gowns would be considered highly restrictive by modern standards, on the spectrum of sixteenth-century elite European fashions, her wardrobe allowed her to move much more freely than many of her peers.

Eleonora undoubtedly understood her precarious political position as Cosimo’s foreign bride, and while she still maintained a strong presence in court, she also made numerous efforts to endear herself to other Florentine elites and the rest of Tuscany’s population. For instance, her rejection of the farthingale may have also stemmed from a desire to distance herself from such a distinctly Spanish garment. Eleonora also made it a point to patronize many different Florentine

\textsuperscript{23} Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 36-37.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 251.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 34.
textile suppliers.\textsuperscript{28} In a city in which the textile industry had played such a central role in its history, the choices Eleonora made in regard to where she acquired her textiles and clothing were hugely significant. Eleonora also dressed her ladies-in-waiting primarily in wool, although their gowns were decorated with silk bands.\textsuperscript{29} This choice was certainly consistent with the general rule of Cosimo’s regime, which valued caution above all else, and emphasized humility so as to be less likely to be viewed as aspiring monarchs — wool was a fine but modest fabric. However, Eleonora may have also chosen wool as a nod to the centrality of the wool industry in Florentine history. These economic and symbolic nods to Florentine craftsmanship were part of an overall strategy to support Florentine interests and better her image in the eyes of the Florentine public; Eleonora also made gifts to convents and colleges, which helped paint her as a pious and generous patron of Florentine institutions and culture.\textsuperscript{30} She also supplied members of her entourage who wished to marry with dowries, which demonstrated largesse and a personal concern for the success of each member of her court.\textsuperscript{31}

Eleonora’s style has been described as “a meeting point between the novelties of fashion, which are by this stage dictated by the Habsburg court and to a lesser extent by the French, and Florentine taste, characterised by an equilibrium of form and a harmony of colour.”\textsuperscript{32} As much as she did attempt to adapt her fashion choices to the Florentine aesthetic, Eleonora’s fashion and lifestyle choices were often viewed as inadequately Italian.\textsuperscript{33} Many conservative moralists were disturbed by the aspects of Eleonora’s lifestyle and wardrobe which failed to conform to the

\textsuperscript{29} Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 27; Bercusson, “Giovanna d’Austria,” 686.
\textsuperscript{30} Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 18.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 37-38.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 37.
traditionally feminine concepts of grace and modesty that were prevalent in Florence at the time. Throughout Europe, a general trend of masculinization of female clothing can be observed in the second half of the sixteenth century, but beyond that, many of Eleonora’s traveling clothes and outfits for outdoor pastimes were “borrowed directly from the male wardrobe, such as jerkins, capes, and waterproof felt cloaks.” More traditional Italians also vocally resisted the advent of trends such as earrings and plumed hats among the elite, which had previously been considered accessories for only the most immodest of women. While Eleonora did manage her household and bore Cosimo many children, and thus fulfilled some of the most fundamental aspects of Renaissance womanhood expected by the Florentines, she was too adventurous and active to gain widespread approval.

It has even been speculated that Eleonora’s arrival in Florence sparked a return among certain Florentine intellectuals to fashions that were distinctly outdated, but which appeared to be distinctly Italian, if not specifically Florentine. Figure 17, a portrait of Florentine poet and intellectual Laura Battiferri, exemplifies this counter-trend. Although painted in the 1550’s, Battiferri’s clothes are more in line with the styles of roughly 1540. She is depicted in “a pronounced mazzocchio, a low-necked gown with gathered puffed sleeves, baragoni, with sleeves of a different colour beneath. Even the smock is of an antiquated form: by the 1550s the model closed around the neck was considered inelegant.” The very fact that Laura Battiferri chose to wear such outdated fashions in a portrait - a time-consuming and costly acquisition - should serve as a testament to the strength of her antipathy towards the evolution of Florentine trends to include non-Italian aesthetics or garments. Whether or not that resistance was directed

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34 Orsi Landini, Moda a Firenze: Eleonora, 37.
36 Ibid., 37.
37 Ibid., 35.
in particular at Eleonora’s influence is unclear, but Eleonora was certainly part of the wider trend to which Battiferri was so vehemently opposed.

_Giovanna: The Second Grand Duchess_

Francesco I’s first wife, Giovanna d’Austria, was also the daughter of a Holy Roman Emperor (Ferdinand I). Throughout their marriage, Francesco showed a marked (and quite public) preference for the (Venetian-born) Florentine noblewoman Bianca Cappello, his mistress, even letting her live in a palace near his own. After Giovanna’s early death, Francesco married Bianca and named their (previously illegitimate son) his heir. While Bianca’s beauty was famed, and Giovanna’s unfortunate lineage burdened her with several physical deformities, one cannot help but wonder if Francesco’s choice of an Italian woman as his second wife was a deliberate play to distance himself, at least symbolically, from imperial power.

Trapped in an unhappy marriage, Giovanna was given nearly no personal freedom; one of the only aspects of her life that she did have free reign over was her own wardrobe and those of her ladies-in-waiting. Historical records of her fashion decisions and transactions reveal her keen awareness of the power of fashion as a political tool. Giovanna dressed her ladies-in-waiting well, in fine fabrics such as velvet, silk, and satin, which were often decorated with fine ornaments such as gold embroidery and gold or silk buttons. Giovanna’s ladies’ appearance would have been understood publicly as a demonstration of Giovanna’s good taste in fashion and her generosity in caring for her attendants. Giovanna also gave gifts of exquisite clothing to her ladies-in-waiting on special occasions; in 1575, Giovanna commissioned a gown for Camilla Arrighi, one of her ladies, who was getting married. The gown was constructed of “gold tabby,

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39 Ibid., 687.
that is, taffeta with an extra weft thread of gold running through it, with a leaf pattern in red silk, and decorated with 49 ¾ braccia (about 29 metres) of embroidery on pinkish-red satin, which weighed 39 ounces, and was made using gold and silver in various forms, including the expensive canottiglio [coiled gold or silver wire].”

Giovanna, like Eleonora, used her limited financial freedom to spread largesse throughout the city by patronizing many different Florentine textile suppliers. In comparison, Giovanna d’Austria’s sister, Eleonora, ruled in Mantua, and whose clothing was supplied by contract with a single source.

Bercusson also argues that specific choices Giovanna made about her wardrobe can be read as part of Giovanna’s long struggle to assert her authority over and moral superiority over Bianca Cappello. Eleonora di Toledo’s wardrobe consisted of primarily red garments; red was an indication of prestige and financial power. Aside from this, the next most common colors (which most likely represent more of Eleonora’s everyday wardrobe than the red) are grey and brown. These colors, even in the sixteenth century, were viewed as modest and sober colors; they were also significantly less expensive than other colors, especially red. The use of grey and brown in her wardrobe would have been a clear indicator to the Florentine public that Eleonora had restrained and economical, rather than lavish or extravagant tastes. In Spain, black was the color of choice to demonstrate sobriety, but black was significantly less popular in Florence. Historical evidence indicates that Eleonora phased black garments out of her own

40 Bercusson, “Giovanna d’Austria,” 688.
41 Ibid., 689.
42 Ibid., 689
43 Ibid., 691
44 Ibid., 691
45 Ibid., 691
46 Cox-Rearick, “Power-Dressing,” 52.
wardrobe in correspondence with Florentine tastes.47

Giovanna, on the other hand, owned only a small handful of garments in grey, and nothing in brown. The majority of her wardrobe was either white or black.48 “By wearing white,” Bercusson argues, “she could highlight her own purity and innocence in the face of the duke’s philandering with Bianca, while also protecting herself from the accusations of lack of chastity that were often levied against recalcitrant wives.”49 The color white represented purity (both in general, and sexually), and was also costly to achieve and maintain in a garment.50 Much of Giovanna’s black clothing could have served as mourning clothing; Bercusson proposes that Giovanna observed Florence’s sumptuary rules about mourning (which was restricted to the aristocracy) more strictly and more often than she may have been expected to, perhaps in order to emphasize her Christian piety in contrast to her husband’s adultery.51 Black was also associated with the Spanish court, as discussed previously, and was associated with the Habsburgs in both Spain and Austria.52

In all of her portraits, Giovanna is wearing high collars - a definitively German style that contrasts starkly with Eleonora’s (almost exclusively) wide necklines, which were more fitted to the Florentine styles of the time. Eleonora certainly owned high-necked dresses, but she was never portrayed with a high collar in any official image, perhaps because of the association of high collars with foreign fashions.53 (Figures 18, 19). Italian collars were usually lavishly

47 Bercusson, “Giovanna d’Austria,” 691.
48 Ibid., 691.
49 Ibid., 692.
50 Ibid., 692.
51 Ibid., 692-693.
52 Ibid., 693.
53 Orsi Landini, Moda a Firenze: Eleonora, 34.
ornamented, as in Figure 20; Giovanna rejected that in favor of a more modest partlet.\textsuperscript{54} Portraits of Bianca Cappello indicate that she preferred the Italian style of ruffled, open collar which showed the throat and part of the chest.\textsuperscript{55}

The Renaissance saw a rise in discourse over the double standards of sexuality that were applied to men and women - the *querelle des femmes* was host to countless arguments against men being allowed to express their sexuality within and outside the boundaries of marriage without repercussions, while women were required to avoid even the suspicions of adultery. In sixteenth-century Italy, husbands could be quite easily rid of unwanted wives if they accused their wives of adultery. Ironically, many of these unwanted wives were thrown over in favor of a mistress. Giovanna was very aware of this reality, as reported by one of her confidantes (Ercole Cortile, Ferrarese ambassador); she reportedly did fear being accused of adultery and left powerless and alone.\textsuperscript{56} Choosing to dress in a manner that emphasized her chastity and Christian piety would have been a prudent insurance against the easily-turned tide of public opinion.

*Paleopathology and Fashion*

Health is undeniably a factor which influences an individual’s decisions. Some historians fall into a trap of attempting to explain the behavior of individuals in the past through a diagnosis - perhaps the most famous of these theories is the ergotism theory of witchcraft. Several intellectuals have proposed that individuals accused of witchcraft, especially in Salem, may have, in fact, suffered from ergot poisoning. Ergotism can often cause convulsive and psychological symptoms, which could conceivably have been understood as signs of possession.

\textsuperscript{54} Bercusson, “Giovanna d’Austria,” 694.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 694.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 694.
However, holding up a single medical explanation for such a complex and intense cultural phenomenon is certainly an oversimplification.

Even when analyzing the behavior of specific individuals, it is impossible to point to any one explanation for the choices they make. The following analysis is by no means an attempt to simplify the complex process of decision-making that the Grand Duchesses of Tuscany went through as they assembled their wardrobes. However, there is at least one relatively clearly documented instance in which Eleonora di Toledo commissioned garments for medical reasons, and it can be argued that Giovanna’s personal style choices were influenced by the congenital defects with which she was saddled.

In February of 1550, a cuirassier created two metal bodices for Eleonora. Figures 21 and 22 exemplify the sort of metal bodice Eleonora would most likely have owned, although they date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. Metal bodices were not regulated in Florence, but they were banned in Venice in 1547, as they were believed to cause miscarriages. In most other instances, metal bodices were used to correct spinal defects. In Eleonora’s case, the motivation behind commissioning these metal corsets is fairly clear; in December 1549, doctors had noted that Eleonora had been looking unwell, and had lost weight, and advised her to avoid overexertion and discontinue her habit of horseback riding. These corsets seem to be a direct manifestation of Eleonora’s will to continue her active lifestyle, with her only concession to her doctor’s advice being to acquire a more supportive bodice.

Giovanna suffered from a plethora of congenital abnormalities and acquired chronic ailments. As a Habsburg, she was heir to a host of inherited skeletal defects. The most famous of

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these is undoubtedly the ‘Habsburg jaw,’ which is generally represented in portraits and
descriptions as an abnormally protrusive lower jaw.\(^6\) (Figure 23). Furthermore, this particular
skeletofacial abnormality causes an elongation of the entire face, and may well be responsible for
the strikingly long, narrow facial shape which characterizes the Habsburgs from the fifteenth to
the seventeenth centuries.\(^6\) Returning again to Giovanna’s high collars, it is worthwhile to
reconsider her choice to be depicted in all her official portraits in the (traditionally northern
European) high collared gowns. Records of Giovanna’s wardrobe do not specify whether any of
the petticoats she owned had a lower collar, so it is possible that she did not adhere as strictly to
her preference for high collars in her everyday life.\(^6\) It seems possible, if not probable, that
Giovanna’s skeletofacial abnormalities played at least some role in influencing her attachment to
the higher collars of her Northern European upbringing.

Giovanna’s necklines were not the only aspect of her clothing that differed from
Eleonora’s. In her portraits, Giovanna’s overgowns fit quite snugly, and they have “narrower
shoulders, a waist and a restrained shape,” giving her clothes a more structured appearance.\(^6\) In
addition, Giovanna is almost always portrayed in a farthingale, which Eleonora seemed to have
shunned.\(^6\) Wardrobe records show that she owned a number of farthingales, which do not lend
themselves well to physical activity, and none of the clothes specifically designed for a

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\(^6\) Recent scholarship reports that cephalometric analysis of Giovanna’s skull indicates that, at
least in her case, the Habsburg jaw abnormality was caused by maxillary retrognathism (an
abnormally ‘far back’ placement of the upper jaw), rather than maxillary prognathism (an
abnormally ‘far forward’ placement of the lower jaw), which had previously been believed to be
the cause of the Habsburg jaw. No other remains of an individual known to have the Habsburg
jaw have been identified or studied. Donatella Lippi, Felicita Pierleoni, and Lorenzo Franchi,
“Retrognathic maxilla in ‘Habsburg jaw’: Skeletofacial analysis of Joanna of Austria (1547-
1578),” \textit{Angle Orthodontist} 82, no. 3 (2012).


\(^6\) Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 40.

\(^6\) Ibid., 40-42.

\(^6\) Ibid., 42.
physically active lifestyle with which Eleonora had populated her own wardrobe.\footnote{Orsi Landini, \textit{Moda a Firenze: Eleonora}, 42.} Giovanna led a very physically inactive lifestyle, and that choice may well have been influenced by some of her other chronic afflictions. Giovanna undoubtedly suffered from a great deal of pain in her back and pelvis, probably for most of her life.

Paleopathological analysis of Giovanna’s remains revealed that she suffered from severe scoliosis in her lower spine, and significant deformation of the pelvis.\footnote{Gino Fornaciari, Angelica Vitiello, Sara Giusiani, Valentina Giuffra, Antonio Fornaciari, and Natale Villari, “The Medici Project: First Anthropological and Paleopathological Results of the Exploration of the Medici Tombs in Florence,” \textit{Medicina nei Secoli: Arte e Scienza} 19, no. 2 (2007): 528.} (Figure 24). She also presented with a congenital incomplete dislocation of the hip.\footnote{Ibid., 528.} In other words, she had developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH), albeit a relatively mild case.\footnote{Valentina Giuffra and Gino Fornaciari, “Developmental hip dysplasia in the Medici family: Giovanna from Austria (1548-1578) and her daughter Anna (1569-1584),” \textit{Hip International} 23, no. 1 (2013): 108.} Figure 25 illustrates the abnormal edges of Giovanna’s hip joints. Hip dysplasia is a term used to describe a mismatch between the femur and the hip joint. Essentially, the top of Giovanna’s femur rested slightly too high in the joint.\footnote{Gino Fornaciari, Presentation at the Fieldschool Pozzeveri in Medieval Archaeology and Bioarchaeology, Altopascio, Italy, 2017.} She may have had some problems walking, but she died before she developed the severe arthritis that her hip dysplasia would have caused later in life.\footnote{Ibid.}

The more dangerous problem Giovanna faced was the malformation of her pelvis. She survived six deliveries during her lifetime, but they were difficult deliveries each time, as evidenced by deep scoring of her pelvis.\footnote{Fornaciari, et al., “Medici Project: Anthropological Results,” 528.} The shape of her pelvis made each pregnancy and birth extremely dangerous for Giovanna, and at age 30, after her eighth pregnancy and during her
seventh labor, she died in childbirth, as a result of uterine rupture caused by the malformation of her pelvis and her severe scoliosis.\textsuperscript{72}

Giovanna’s preference for farthingales may have thus been more than purely a stylistic choice, as the structure a farthingale provided would have masked the shape of the lower half of her body, which may have been slightly abnormal. It is impossible to know how visible Giovanna’s skeletal defects were in life, as official portraits often gloss over physical flaws, and sixteenth-century elite fashions were hardly form-fitting. It is reported that, after Giovanna died in childbirth, the surgeons who performed the autopsy were “shocked” to discover the curvature of her spine.\textsuperscript{73} However, this does not necessarily indicate that Giovanna’s outward appearance was normal, for the reasons mentioned above. In contemporary sources, however, Giovanna is described as generally unattractive, and even ‘hunchbacked.’\textsuperscript{74} Some sources also report that she limped.\textsuperscript{75}

The concept of ‘dressing to hide one’s physical flaws,’ however, may be a relatively modern idea which should not necessarily be projected onto Giovanna. If, indeed, she made sartorial choices based on the desire to hide abnormal or unattractive features, they were most likely made from a political perspective rather than an aesthetic one. The concept of ‘sprezzatura’ would have been considerably difficult for her to embody, as her body itself was an obstacle to appearing physically graceful and dignified. Activities such as riding a horse or dancing may well have been excruciatingly painful, if not impossible, for Giovanna. By the time she died at 40, Eleonora, too, would have experienced some pain during physically demanding activities, and perhaps constantly, as she suffered from “slight arthritis in her lower spine and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[72]{Ibid., 528.}
\footnotetext[73]{Lippi, et al., “Retrognathic maxilla,” 388.}
\footnotetext[74]{Gino Fornaciari, Presentation.}
\footnotetext[75]{Lippi, et al., “Retrognathic maxilla,” 388.}
\end{footnotes}
shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, and ankles.” On top of the multiple pulmonary infections from which she suffered during the last years of her life (and which killed her), even slight arthritis in that many of her joints would likely have made her favorite pastime, horseback riding, quite difficult. While in some instances, paleopathological evidence can answer questions that written sources cannot, in Giovanna’s and Eleonora’s cases it seems to simply multiply the considerations which must be taken into account as historians attempt to understand how they built their wardrobes.

Conclusions

This evidence should not be read as a clear-cut argument that Eleonora and Giovanna exhibited high levels of individual agency by choosing garments that somehow combatted the ways in which their bodies failed them. Eleonora and Giovanna both made innumerable choices throughout their lives as Grand Duchesses regarding their personal appearance and the appearance of other members of their court; it is impossible to deny that they each had at least some individual power over their fashion choices, regardless of social and political pressures. However, even a topic as ostensibly personal as using fashion to mask or ameliorate one’s health issues cannot be disentangled from the complex sociopolitical pressures and relationships in which Eleonora and Giovanna were placed upon their accession to the role of Grand Duchesses of Tuscany. This discussion should rather serve as an argument for the inclusion of more in-depth studies of the individual, and all the aspects of individual life that may have affected their lifestyle and decision-making, in theories of court culture and agency in the Renaissance.

77 Ibid., 526.
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Figure 2: Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Wedding*, 1434, oil on panel, 82.2 cm. x 60 cm, National Gallery, London.
Figure 3: Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini*, 1435, oil on panel, 29 cm. x 20 cm., Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
Figure 4: Jan Gossaert, *Portrait of a Merchant*, ca. 1530, oil on panel, 63.6 cm. x 47.5 cm., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Figure 5: Andrea di Bonaiuto, Fresco detail, 1365-1367, Cappellone degli Spagnoli, Basilica di Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Figure 6: Andrea di Bonaiuto, Fresco detail, 1365-1367, Cappellone degli Spagnoli, Basilica di Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Figure 7: Master of the Cité des Dames, Illustration from Christine de Pisan’s *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, ca. 1405, illumination on parchment.
Figure 8: Sandro Botticelli, *The Adoration of the Magi* (detail), ca. 1475, tempera on panel, 111 cm. x 134 cm., Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
Figure 9: William Scrots, *Elizabeth I when a Princess*, ca. 1546, oil on panel, 108.5 cm. x 81.8 cm., Windsor Castle, Windsor, UK.
Figure 10: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Portrait of Princess Sibylle of Cleve*, 1526, mixed technique on beech wood, 57 cm. x 39 cm., Weimarer Stadtschloss, Weimar.
Figure 11: Francois Clouet, *Portrait of Charles IX of France*, 1570’s, oil on panel, private collection.
Figure 12: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Henry VIII* (copy), ca. 1537, oil on panel, 239 cm. x 134.5 cm., Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.
Figure 13: Bronzino, *Portrait of Cosimo I de’ Medici*, 1537, oil on canvas (transferred from panel), 117.5 cm. x 87.5 cm., Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.
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Figure 18: Francesco Terzio, *Giovanna d’Austria*, ca. 1564, oil on canvas, 201 cm. x 106 cm., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
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Figure 21: iron corset, France, ca. 1640, Wallace Collection, London.
Figure 22: iron corset, France or Italy, 18th century, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 23: Skull of Giovanna d’Austria, http://www.paleopatologia.it/immagini/IMMAGINI2007_2008/Fig.-13-Cranio-di-Giovanna.jpg.
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