A Woman’s Late 15th Century Italian Camicia

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*The Healing of the Madman.*
c 1496. Vittore Carpaccio. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
SUMMARY

The goal of this project was to research and create as documentable a 15\textsuperscript{th} C camicia as possible. This was a complex objective because not only would I be hand sewing the garment, there are no extant examples to copy. I had to create the pattern from an extensive and detailed survey of period artwork, family correspondence, and the closest extant examples available from 100 years later (which required it’s own survey and understanding of the differences between the two centuries in style and fit of under garments). It took over a year of research before I was ready to pattern, and 6 versions of the pattern to find the right fit. My finished product is a very well educated guess.

- Camicie were the washable under layer of clothing that is frequently seen peeking or puffing from the edges or joins of women’s and men’s clothes in 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} century Italy.
- Linen was a popular choice for camicie, as indicated in numerous contemporary inventories and personal letters (Frick, Birbari, Herald, etc.). Linen from Reims (rensa) had a fine weave, was light weight and is mentioned frequently in inventories and letters as used for camicie. Other noted materials, with less frequency, are silk and cotton.
- Period inventories indicate that the kind/quality of fabric for camicie was influenced by the financial means of the purchaser (Appendix A).
- It is exceedingly rare to find artwork with a woman in just her underclothes or laundry out to dry. I have only been able to find two examples that show a whole camicia (Image 1, 8). Both are mid 1490s, from Venice and Siena. 16\textsuperscript{th} C extant examples are only identified by country.
- Basic sewing tools of pins and needles (Images 19, 20) are similar to their modern equivalents. Artwork from late 1400s Italy suggests the use of spring shears instead of pivot point scissors (Images 21, 22).
- Seams and stitches are difficult to interpret from period artwork and period writings do not detail construction techniques. Contemporary extant examples from european countries (Crowfoot) indicate that the run and fell seams seen in the later 16\textsuperscript{th} C camicie are commonly used with linen and other woven materials that are prone to fraying, especially if washed.
A Late 15th Century Italian Camicia

OVERVIEW

What is a camicia?

Camicia is the Italian word for the washable garment worn under clothes to protect them from body oils and dirt. The term is used for both sexes. Men’s camicie appear to end around mid-thigh to knee and have a higher neckline that shows at the collar of the farsetto. Women’s garments have a lower neckline to match their gamurras and usually end mid-calf. Both sexes have sleeves with enough volume to puff slightly at strategically placed openings in the sleeves.

It can be made of “various soft washable fabrics such as cotton, linen (rensa), and occasionally thin silk or wool (saia) or cotton.” Camicie da verno (for winter) were made of a heavier fabric, possibly a light wool, for cold weather (Frick, 304). It was one of a group of washable personal items (biancheria) which also included “nightgowns, nightcaps, and headscarves” (Frick, 286).

The amount of fabric, type of fabric and cut of the camicia directly affected its cost. The coarser, less expensive fabrics were used for more simply cut camicias, while those who could afford them wore finely woven linens and silks with more volume. They could also afford to have multiple camicie (Appendix A) and women may have embroidery on their necklines.

Documenting the camicia

These private, and therefore nearly invisible, undergarments were primarily the work and responsibility of women, either family members, or those hired by family members (Appendix A). They are rarely mentioned in the appraised trousseaus or wardrobe inventories (Frick, 137) suggesting that they were not valued in the same way as the outer garments.

Extant garments from 15th C Italy do not appear to exist. Linen, popular for camicie, is known to degrade over time. But even outer garments such as the gamurra and farsetto, or the extravagantly embellished cioppas do not appear to have survived except for some silk and wool sample fabrics (i.e.- the V&A collection). The earliest known surviving Italian camicie and european smocks are
from the end of the 16th C and are documented in detail in Janet Arnold’s *Patterns of Fashion 4* (Appendix B).

There is one extant example that is claimed to be a fragment from Giuliano de’ Medici’s shirt (Image 2), saved as a relic after his death in 1478. The linen is of a medium fine weight, with a woven band for the neck facing, into which the body of the camicia is gathered in small pleats. A closer look at the neckline in comparison with portraits of Giuliano indicate that the neckline of the extant piece does not match the necklines seen on men in the 1470s (Image 3). It more closely resembles the male necklines of the early 16th C (Image 4).

From the mid 15th C forward we see embroidery on some, but not all camicie, usually at the neckline only and almost always only for women. Camicie with embroidery tend to have a slightly wider band at the neck than those without embroidery. I chose a simple, thin unadorned neckband, which can be seen (or barely seen) in many contemporary portraits and frescoes just above the neckline of the gamurra (dress) (Appendix C).

Given the lack of surviving camicias from the 15th C and no contemporary documents or books on their design and construction, the logical next step is to examine existing later camicias, in conjunction with 15th C artwork, and contemporary writings that mention buying fabric or having them made.

Although there are many examples of artwork showing the camicia at necklines and sleeve cuffs, I could only find two which showed the full camicia in the 1400s. The *Griselda* painting (Image 1) is a narrative of the story of Griselda and is highly unusual in showing a woman in just her camicia (when her husband casts her out “naked”). She is the main character of the piece and her camicia is painted with detail, including some seams. The *Madman* painting (Image 8) shows a number of personal linens, including two camicie, hanging to dry on a pole, on top of a building, in the background. There is little detail, but some lines do suggest the presence of gussets and gores. A painting of note, which is over 20 years later than these two is *Girls bathing* (Image 5). The sleeves and neckline are much closer to the late 1400s style than the very wide
A Late 15th Century Italian Camicia

sleeves of the early 1500s. There are no distinguishable gussets, gores or seam lines. But it gives a general idea of the shape and volume of the camicia.

The wealth of other paintings that show neck or sleeves support what we see in these paintings and give examples of how the camicia works with the gamurra: a delicate neckline barely peaking over the dress (Images 34, 35) and moderate volume sleeves carefully folded and held in place by the dress sleeve (Images 7, 8, 31 - 33).

The artwork by itself only gives hints of the construction details. The 16th C camicias are a vital resource for the size of each pattern piece, the seam types used, and how the garment is assembled. But I had to develop an understanding of the 16th C style to make logical decisions on what aspects were shared with the 15th C. For example, many 16th C camicie and smock pieces have edges that are turned and then connected with colored silk floss in a decorative pattern. There is no visual evidence or contemporary writings that indicate this was used in the 15th C. Crowfoot’s review of medieval textiles gives examples of run and fell seams and turned hems that are also seen in the 16th C camicias. This gives me a level of confidence that the same seam techniques were used in the 15th C for similar uses (capturing raw edges that fray easily).

The difficulty of defining a specific geographic region

The two 1400s paintings come from Siena (Image 1) and Venice (Image 9), the 1500s painting (Image 5) is by a Milanese artist. Other artwork I reference that show sleeves and necklines come from Florence and Ferrara. Contemporary documents I found are from Florence and nearby areas. The extant camicie from the 16th century are not documented as to their region of Italy, some are described as smocks, suggesting a different country of origin. Because the conjecture of the pattern and construction must come from many sources, albeit mostly from middle to northern Italy, it is difficult to say with any confidence that the pattern I have created is the one specifically used in Florence, Siena, Venice or Milan. To add to the confusion there is a letter from mother to son that indicates there may be preferences for cut and construction between families (Frick, 41). The best I can do is generalize to late 15th century, middle to northern Italy.
CONSTRUCTION

Pattern

I started by defining the basic layout of a 16th C camicia which had a gathered neck. I surveyed the size of body panels, gussets, sleeves, etc (Appendix B) to develop an idea of the size of the extant camicias and the ratios I would need to use to develop one based on my own measurements. I also looked at the gores and gussets used and how this affected the finished look.

Drawing 1. Basic pattern of 16th c camicia, gathered neck examples (Arnold #3, #4, #71) with gore styles.

Arnold 75 & 77
Arnold 76
Arnold 78
Arnold 80

Drawing 2. Hypothesized 15th c camicia.
The weight of the fabric influenced the cut and volume of the camicia. The finer and lighter the fabric, the more volume could be added to the camicia without binding or lumping under the gamurra. _Greselda_ (Image 1) has a volumous camicia with a sheer luminescent quality that suggests silk. The _Madman_ (Image ##) camicias are not sheer and may be linen.

A man’s camicia mentioned in one period text was about about three and a half yards (Frick, 40). We know there were variations in construction, even between families. In a letter to her exiled adult son, a Florentine woman says that she is sending a camicia “in the family style” (Frick, 41). There are also hints of regional variations, including a letter from Alessandra Strozzi in 1450 referencing a man’s shirt “a modo di Firenze” (Frick, 182).

A note on Birbari’s pattern

Birbari’s camicia pattern has been popular with historical costumers. But her choice of artwork (a single painting) that she based her pattern on is very limiting. She chose an allegorical painting of an old woman in a ragged camicia of heavy, course material and simple cut. This is not representational of most women seen in paintings of the time period (ie – most women in portrait paintings are dress in expensive cloth and a fashionably tailored style). Birbari makes some unexplained guesses in the pattern, such as an inserted sleeve and pleats, that are not supported by period artwork and later extant pieces. She uses an inset raglan sleeve to attempt to replicate the angle of the seam that attaches the sleeve to the body. This indicates she doesn’t understand that when the neck line is gathered, the straight, non-inset seam (Drawing 2), becomes angled.

Sleeves

The style of sleeve is one of the features that helps to date a camicia to the 15th C. By the very early 16th C the sleeve cuffs become very big, some dropping to the floor, but in the 15th C they tend to not be bigger than about twice the diameter of the thickest part of the forearm, as can be seen in the _Griselda_ painting. This is one of the few paintings we see the sleeves of the camicia without the gamurra’s sleeves on top, which hold the camicia sleeves in delicate folds at the wrist and artistic puffs along the arm and at the arm/body junction.
Sleeve length in the camicia hanging on a pole in Madman (Image 9) is three-quarters to one body length. If the hem of the body comes to about midcalf, as seen in the Griselda painting, it’s possible that the sleeves in Madman are no longer than to the palms of the wearer. Extant 16th C smock sleeves are half the length of the body panel.
Gores and Gussets

The Griselda painting (Image 1 & 6) is unique in its clear indication of seam lines for a wide gore coming to a point just under the arm. Griselda is a major figure in the painting so there is a good amount of detail. In Madman (Image 9) there are biancheria (personal linens, including camicie) hanging out to dry from a building in the background. These camicie have less detail but there are still lines that suggest gores and gussets. The lines indicate a gusset in the left side camicia. The garment on the right shows the outline expected with gores starting under the arm, with faint hints of a gusset (see Image 27, Appendix C for a larger image). There are several examples of gores and gussets in the extant 16th C pieces (Appendix B, Images 10, 11, 36) that have a similar bell-like shape to the garments in the two 15th C paintings.

Arnold's *Patterns of fashion* 4 contains a wealth of late 16th C camicie and smocks and allows for
comparisons to develop some general style rules for camicie (Appendix B). The gusset widths average about one-third the length of the sleeve. The shape and volume of #78 looks similar to the hanging camicie in Madman, especially the lower 2/3rds of the garment, but the split top gore/gusset area doesn’t look like the camicie in Madman (Image 9) or Griselde (Image 1).

Some gores have the selvage at the bottom (#76, 78, 80). Arnold specifically notes that #80 does not hang well because the grain is horizontal, with selvage at the hem. I chose to keep the gores parallel with the grain to avoid this problem. It’s possible the extant gores that are perpendicular to


the grain were an attempt to use remaining fabric.

#75 and 77 (Drawing 1) have gores with a vertical grain and also a seam in the vertical center of the gore with two selvages joined together. This adds some stability to the gore and helps it to hang evenly by placing the slanted part of each side of the gore along the vertical grain of the body, compensation for the bias-pull of the bias cut side of the gore. I wasn’t always able to use the
selvage where I would like, but I did use two part gores for each side. This creates the need for a seam down the middle of the gore, but it appears to hang better and use fabric more judiciously, than cutting one large gore.

The following page describes my pattern creation process. I started with some guesses, based on artwork and extant camicia about how the garment should fit and the general size of the pieces.
Table 1. Pattern development for the camicia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>body (height x width)</th>
<th>sleeve (length x width)</th>
<th>gusset (height x width)</th>
<th>gore (height x width)</th>
<th>sleeve/body overlap at seam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 1.0</td>
<td>44” x 25”</td>
<td>30” x 19”</td>
<td>5” x 5”</td>
<td>34” x 15”</td>
<td>5”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>I was concerned that a voluminous camicia would bunch inside the tight fitting gamurra bodice. Starting with my bust measurements, I increased the diameter slightly. It was still too tight.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Based on the Griselda painting (Image 1) I used a sleeve diameter double the diameter of my forearm at the thickest point. This diameter was too tight to tuck the cuff into the gamurra arm hole when not wearing sleeves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>My previous camicia had a 10” gusset, which made the underarm area very big, so I reduce each side by half, which made the underarm area too tight.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>There are two gores per side, with right angle triangles with the grain on the long vertical side.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>I need to reduce the sleeve/body overlap at the neck to help reduce tightness under the arm, and a low and very square neckline.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pattern 1.1

| 44” x 35” | 30” x 22” | 6” x 6” | 36” x 15” | 2” |
| ✓ | Added 10” width to front and back body panels. |
| ✓ | Added 3” width to both sleeves, it now looks more like the Griselda painting (Image 1). |
| X | Added 1” to both sides of gusset, still not enough space under arm. |
| ✓ | I waited to determine the final gore length until the rest of the pattern was finished. |
| ✓ | Reduced sleeve/body seam overlap by 3” to give more space in under the arm. This smoothed the neckline from too square to slightly rounded. |

Pattern 1.2

| 44” x 35” | 30” x 22” | 10” x 10” | x 15” | 2” |
| X | Added 4” to both sides of gusset. This made the underarm area too big. |

Pattern 1.3

| 44” x 35” | 30” x 22” | 8” x 8” | x 15” | 3” |
| X | Reduced both sides of gusset by 2” but there is still too much space under arm with the change in sleeve/body overlap. |
| ✓ | Increased sleeve/body seam overlap by 1” to raise the neckline. |

Pattern 1.4

| 44” x 35” | 30” x 22” | 5” x 5” | x 15” | 3” |
| X | Reduced both sides of gusset by 3”, the arm hole is now too small. |
| ✓ | My linen fabric is 55” wide. I realized a sleeve and a body panel next to each other would equal 55” if I took 1” of width from each. |

Pattern 1.5 FINAL PATTERN

| 44” x 34” | 30” x 21” | 6” x 6” | 35” x 15” | 3” |
| ✓ | Increased both sides of gusset by 1”. Solves the armhole tightness. |
Seams & Hems

Given the limited number of extant garments from the 15th century, some educated guesses need to be made about the seams and stitch work of 15th C camicias. The piece of a man’s camicia (said to be worn by Giuliano de’Medici when he died in 1478) includes a piece of neckline, but no visible side seams. The neckline style is also more similar to early 16th C men’s styles than the 1470s, giving rise to the possibility of a manufactured relic from 30 plus years later.

Examples from contemporary European countries, plus extant 16th C camicias, are the closest reasonable examples to help build an understanding of the seams and stitches used. Crowfoot says that by the middle ages the most usual method of joining two pieces of fabric is by a fairly fine running stitch parallel to the raw edges to be joined. A number of seams of this kind are in the London textiles. “The size of the stitch varies somewhat...but is usually related to the fineness and flexibility of the cloth; stitch lengths of 2-4mm have been recorded, 2-3mm, being usual” (155-6).

Image 12. Running seam.

The seams for a garment that was worn and washed regularly and made of fabric that easily unraveled, such as linen, silk and cotton, needed to ensure the fabric did not come undone by enclosing all the raw edges. A practical way of doing this is with a flat-felled (also called run and fell) seam (Drawing 3). There are lots of examples from contemporary 15th C garments from other European countries. Flat seams are also seen in hose where strength and flatness are desirable (Crowfoot, 153) and the

(Image 13. #76C. c.1560-80. Women’s linen smock. Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester City Galleries. (Arnold).)
two lines of stitches add to strength. There are also many examples in the extant 16th C camicias and smocks (Arnold) (Image 13).

First seam (running seam)
Lay right sides together, with one having a slightly wider seam allowance.

Open the seam
Ironing the seam open makes it easier to manage the fabric and get small tight seams.

Second seam (fell seam)
Fold the wider seam allowance around the narrower one, encasing it. Iron again. Sew the folded edge of the wider piece in place. This gives a strong, seam that does not unravel. It’s very useful for garments that are washed.

Raw edges on cuffs and hems also needed to be enclosed. There are several examples from London of silk edges being double turned (Crowfoot). Aronold notes two linen camicie with a double fold hem cuff (#77) and a skirt hem (#75) with a very fine double fold. She notes that #75 has a 1/16” wide hem sewn with very fine thread (Image 14).

I was originally planning to roll the hem and sleeve cuffs, but the linen was too stiff to make this easy to do with a small finished seam. 15th C Italian artwork doesn’t show hem lines around the sleeves so I wanted them to be as fine and discrete as possible. Given the amount of sleeve cuff that needs to be folded into the gamurra sleeve, I was also looking for a low-bulk hem that would be comfortable pressed against my skin. I decided to use a simple double fold hem with a running stitch for both the sleeves and the bottom hem.
Neck

Arnold notes on several 16th C camicia/smocks that the neckline is gathered with 2 or 3 rows of parallel stitches. I used 3 parallel rows. With one row the fabric flares to either side, with each additional row the fabric flattens slightly as the gathered pleats are aligned with each other, making it easier to attach the neck facing. The pleats need to be relatively the same size.

Arnold suggests that the edge of the neck facing is attached at the bottom most line of gathering stitches because she can see some gathering stitches slightly below the neck facing. I used the same technique, attaching the facing first to the outside of the garment for a hidden seam, then to the inside, covering the raw edges of the body and sleeve panels.

I used the 100/3 linen thread for the three rows of gathering stitches, the same as I used for the run and fell seams. I also used the same small stitches that I used on the run and fell seams. This produces a lot of tiny gathers, similar to the 16th C camicia necklines. I wanted a low profile, flat neckline because the neckline in 15th C art work is usually very thin and barely visible above the neckline of the gamurra.
When I tried on the camicia to adjust the neckline, the thin linen threads broke several times and had to be replaced. After several attempts to adjust the neck while I wore it, I placed the camicia on my dressmaker’s dummy to finish the neckline. This allowed me to easily spread out the gathers along the entire neckline, pinning it in place, and attach the facing. Given that the 100/3 thread broke so many times under gentle use during fitting I was very concerned that two running seams attaching the neckfacing would be prone to breakage. For the neckfacing I used a thicker 80/3 in a backstitch. The backstitch also helped me to
capture all the small gathers with the seam. Back stitch was used in areas of stress, such as the seam of hose in medieval London finds (Crowfoot, 156).

The extant camicias all appear to have neck tape/facing that is not on the bias (Images 15, 16, 18), instead it is probably a strip running parallel to the grain of the fabric. I used a strip of the same fabric as the camicia, running in line with the grain of the fabric, for my neckfacing.
MATERIALS

Linen cloth

Unfortunately linen, being a plant material, is prone to decomposition and is not usually found in archeological textile finds (Crowfoot, Arnold). Proteins, such as wool and silk do better, but there do not appear to be examples of silk or wool extant camicie from the 15th or 16th C.

Frick notes that “women’s underblouses, whether of fine linen, inexpensive cotton, or a luxurious silk, were of natural unbleached color or pearly white” (162). The finest linen was imported from Cambria. It was well known for its tight weave, fine diameter thread, and high thread count. Rensa was another “type of fine linen used for personal linens and undergarments (biancheria) made in Rheims, in northeastern France” (Frick, 315). It occurs frequently in late 15th C Italian inventories for linen camicias (Birbari, 42).

Each fabric also came in a variety of weights, quality and refinement. Several types of linen are described in the wardrobes and letters of Italians, including Cambric, a fine white linen made in Cambray, Flanders, Holland, and Rensa, another fine linen, made in Rheims, France (Frick, 315). A heavier material may be chosen for warmth in the winter (camicia da verno for children), but the actual material is not specified (Frick, 164).

Fabric width and length

A braccio is the standard length of measurement for cloth in Italy. It is “about 23 inches...and was the retail measurement into which the longer fabric lengths of the canna (34 braccia) and the pezza (12 to 14 canna) were cut” (Frick, 267).

Although the width of some expensive fabrics, such as silk, can be determined from extant swatches, the width of linen is not mentioned in contemporary texts. Frick suggests that the width of the fabric was sometimes related to its expense. Silk to 1450 was about 46 inches wide, but reduced to about 25 inches later (267). Herald suggests that the reduction in width was to meet the increased demands of weaving more elaborate designs in the cloth (77). Birbari suggests the reduction in width was also because the type of loom changed (to a button drawloom) (77).

Arnold notes that while lengths of linen are listed in 16th C inventories, width rarely is, but seems to vary. Body panel widths from the extant linen camicias of the late 16th C indicate fabric widths up to at least 47 inches.

Thread

Linen was in general use as a sewing thread in the later middle ages. Traces of stitches survive in a few London medieval textiles of a fiber assumed to be linen. It was frequently found in seams and hems. Extant fabric with stitching holes are assumed to have linen thread in most cases rather than silk because the linen threads have decomposed. “The Great Wardrobe accounts of the 14th
century show that linen thread was used extensively in the various workshops supplying the court with clothing and other textile items...Naturally linen thread was used for sewing linen clothing and such other domestic items....” (Crowfoot, 151).

Arnold notes on a 1560s smock that “the linen thread used for sewing the seams is very slightly thicker than the threads in the weave, but it sinks in, and can hardly be seen” (115). The use of finer weight thread also allows for the smaller stitches and narrower seams.

The smallest diameter linen thread I could find was Londonderry 100/3. It closely matches the diameter of the fabric threads. Linen thread is very prone to fraying and breaking so I smoothed the fibers by running the thread over a piece of beeswax before sewing. I also used short strands, about 20” or less, reducing wear on any one piece of thread.

I used the slightly heavier 80/3 Londonderry for the neck facing seams because the 100/3 broke repeatedly as I gathered in the neckline during fitting.

Tools

Needles and pins

Needle finds from late 14th C England look like our modern ones and were made of iron (Crowfoot, 151). The pins at right from c1583 look very much like modern pins.

I used modern needle and pins for this project.

Scissors

Artwork from late 1400s Italy suggests the use of spring shears instead of pivot point scissors. I was not able to get easy access to a pair of spring shears and I am not practiced in their use. For this reason I decided to use modern pivot point shears for this project and revisit spring shears at a future time.
Assembly

Assembled in this order

1) Gussets to one side of each sleeve
2) Gusset/sleeve to body panels
3) Attach other two sides of gusset to sleeve/body
4) Close sleeves
5) Attach gore pairs to each other
6) Gore pairs to body panels
7) Gather neck and attach facing strip
8) Hem sleeve cuffs
9) Hem bottom

I ironed the fabric and laid it out ensuring that the warp and weft threads were perpendicular to each other. My linen fabric was 55" wide and probably wider than normal loom widths of the the 15th century, but it had the fine thread and higher thread count I would expect for a camicia of moderate to nice value. The fabric has a good drape and is thin enough to allow fine seams and needle work and to have some volume in the body with gores without being bulky under the gamurra.

I used run and fell for all the seams except the neckline (facing and backstitch), hem (double fold running stitch) and cuffs (double fold running stitch). All raw edges were encased to prevent fraying during wear and washing.
RESULTS & CONCLUSION

Lessons learned

When patterning the cut of the camicia, the joining around the arm (gussets and where the gores attach), is the most difficult area to get right. Small changes in pattern piece size make big differences in tightness under the arm and how low the neck sits. Most of my six pattern versions were attempts to get this ratio correct.

There was a lot of small, detail-oriented work in constructing this garment. Janet Arnold notes the seams in the camicie and smocks she examined were 2 to 4 cm wide (about 1/8”). Even with the finest linen I could find (about 3oz) the fabric was a little stiff to turn and unraveled easily making the seams challenging to do.

I have extensive hand finishing experience, but this was my first time doing run and fell seams. I had to learn through trial and error how much width to leave between the edges to successfully turn the fell fold and capture the raw ends. If I left too much the seam would be too wide, which I could sometimes hide by rolling under additional width. If the width was too narrow I may not be able to fully cover the raw edges in spots and have to use additional stitches to capture the edges. This also distorted the seam and was very time consuming.

Frick mentions a camicia would have taken about half a day to complete, but that was by someone who already had a pattern and was probably a professional or at least very experienced camicia seamstress. I averaged more than an hour a foot of completed run and fell seam.

I now believe that they ironed the seams as they worked on them. After I did the running stitch I ironed the seam open and then the larger seam allowance over the top of the smaller. This helped to manage the uncooperative linen.

The neckline gathering can be time consuming. I plan to use the heavier 80/3 for the gather seams in the future. Attempting to adjust the neckline while wearing it was impractical. A sewing dummy was a big help in keeping the neckline and all those tiny gathers pinned in place until I could get the neckfacing attached. I can’t say if they had a sewing dummy or had figured out another solution, but it’s a very fussy process.

I was very surprised at how easily I was able to make such tiny seams. There is a small margin of error on the run and fell seam for the wider seam allowance that wraps over the smaller one. One seam had a seam allowance that was too small and I had to do extra stitches to capture the raw edges when they’d slip out of the running stitch.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

Additional Historical Information: How Many Did a Person Own and Who Made Them
How many did a person own?

Depending on their financial means, many people mentioned in contemporary writings had five to ten camicie (Frick, 286). Levi- Pistzky estimates they could have an average of 12 at the end of the 15th century (285). Estimated annual earnings in 15th c Florence for a successful lawyer was 200-500 florins, a bank manager 100-200 florins, a university professor 74.5 florins, and a carpenter 36 florins (Frick, 97). Duke Lorenzo de’ Medici of Florence had 13 shirts made at a very pricy 5 ¾ florins each for just the cloth (construction price was not mentioned) (Frick, 40).

Levi- Pistzky notes that clothing inventories of 15th century Italy do not always include personal linens, such as camicie, because they are not considered of enough value to be noteworthy. The exception are “day shirts” (camicie da giorno) which are recorded as “few in number” at the beginning of the 15th century (two or three in a wardrobe), becoming more numerous per owner as the century progresses. They are made of rensa (a fine quality linen from Reims) of Holland or Cambrai and may have some ornamentation. In Florence there is an 1410 inventory that lists four camicia. In 1433 Teresa Guicciardini, wife of Francesco de'Medici, had 17. In 1455 Nannina de' Medici, married to Rucellai, had a camicia “una di rensa lavotata” (worked linen?). Drusiana Sforza in 1463 had 40 camisse “de tella de reno “. Bianca Maria in 1493 had eight from Cambric cloth (linen), twenty-five adorned with black silk embroidery, and fifteen with wire lace. In Naples the shirts are not only important because of the fineness of the fabric but also for the elegance of the cut (Levi- Pistzky, 285).

Who made them?

The making of personal clothes items appears to be the work primarily of women. This work was not limited to hired labor, women, especially mothers, of wealthy families include every day descriptions of personal garments in their letters, either sending garments to a son or requesting fabric from a husband.

Women could also be hired to create personal items, the patron frequently providing the fabric that the garments would be made from. These hired women fell into one of two categories: professional, unguilded craftswomen, and nuns. The camiciai were the unguilded craftswomen and which were generally outside of guild regulation. It appears that guilds were uninterested in regulating this type of work (Frick, 39). She usually worked out of her home. “In the wardrobe accounts of Duke Lorenzo de’ Medici, one such craftswoman appears, with the curious appellation of “Signora di Madonna,” to whom are consigned “ four pieces of unbleached linen...to make camicie for Il Signore.” (Frick, 40).

Several letters from women to family members discuss personal linens. “[Alessandra Strozzi] Writing to her [adult] sons in exile....In 1450, she says, ‘First, I am sending you four undershirts, six handkerchiefs...the shirts styled and cut in our family manner [a modo nostro]....’ ” Clarice Orsini
(Lorenzo de’ Medici’s wife) writes to her mother-in-law Lucrezia Tornabuoni asking her to send “twenty braccia of linen cloth so that I can make camicia for these children.” Margherita Datini “sees to the undergarments of her husband...and also those of the servants, retainers, and staff....” She mentions in a letter that she had eight undershirts made for herself and twelve for her husband by “Fensi’s wife” who was so slow that she gave the remainder of the work to “Mona Chita” at the monastery of Santo Nicholaio. (Frick, 41).
APPENDIX B

Tabulation of example shirts and smocks in Janet Arnold’s *Patterns of Fashion 4*
### Tabulation of example shirts and smocks in Janet Arnold’s *Patterns of Fashion 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shirts</th>
<th>Body panel width</th>
<th>Body panel length</th>
<th>Sleeve width</th>
<th>Sleeve length</th>
<th>Sleeve overlay at body</th>
<th>Gore</th>
<th>Gusset</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2. c.1550-60. Boy’s linen shirt. <em>Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.</em> p.65.</td>
<td>21.5” selvage to cut</td>
<td>64” (front and back are one piece)</td>
<td>16”</td>
<td>19”</td>
<td>Full width of sleeve. Neck opening does not touch sleeve.</td>
<td>No gore</td>
<td>4.75” x 4.75”</td>
<td>72 weft / 92 warp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smocks</th>
<th>Body panel width</th>
<th>Body panel length</th>
<th>Sleeve width</th>
<th>Sleeve length</th>
<th>Sleeve overlay at body</th>
<th>Gore</th>
<th>Gusset</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#71. c.1575-1600. Women’s linen smock. Italian. <em>Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.</em> p.111.</td>
<td>25” (3 panels) Selvage to selvage</td>
<td>46.5”</td>
<td>22”</td>
<td>27.5”</td>
<td>10”</td>
<td>No gore</td>
<td>9” x 8.5”</td>
<td>Straight grain finished neck strip width 1/8”. Neck is gathered with two rows of seams, possibly a third. Facing is a straight grain strip of linen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#72. c.1575-1600. Women’s linen smock. Italian. <em>The Metropolitan Museum of the Arts, New York.</em> p.112.</td>
<td>47”</td>
<td>44.5”</td>
<td>28”</td>
<td>26”</td>
<td>15.5”</td>
<td>No gore</td>
<td>7.5” x 7.5”</td>
<td>Straight grain finished neck strip width 3/16”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#78. c.1620-30 Women’s linen smock. <em>Victoria and Albert Museum, London.</em> P.116.</td>
<td>18”</td>
<td>44.5”</td>
<td>17”</td>
<td>17.5”</td>
<td>Full width of sleeve</td>
<td>34”h x 22” w</td>
<td>5” x 5”</td>
<td>Gore is split at top around the gusset. Selvage is at hem which JA notes make it not hang well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#80. C1625-30. Women’s linen smock. <em>Victoria and Albert Museum, London.</em> P.117.</td>
<td>36.5”</td>
<td>51”</td>
<td>16”</td>
<td>21”</td>
<td>Full width of sleeve</td>
<td>37”h x 8”w</td>
<td>3” x 3”</td>
<td>Fine white linen with 1/16” run &amp; fell seams and hem. Gore starts at gusset point.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Images
Biancheria hanging on a pole from a building, to dry after laundering. The camicia’s cone shape is from gathering the volume of fabric from the body into the neckline and adding gores to the sides under the arm. There is the suggestion of a gusset under the arm as well.

The left camicia may be for a man or possibly a narrower style of women’s camicia? There is a gusset, but harder to tell if there are gores.

A Late 15th Century Italian Camicia

Image 25 (left) and 26 (below). Girls Bathing. 1520-23. Bernardo Luini. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

These camicie don’t have the voluminous sleeves popular in the early 1500s and may be similar to what was worn at the end of the 15th century.
Depictions of women in only their camicia are rare. A full length view is even more rare.

This one is probably made of a very light weight silk given the sheerness, shine and volume of the fabric.

The sleeves are about twice the diameter of the wearer’s forearm. The volume of the body is gathered into an almost square, but with rounded corners, neckline. There is a hint of a seam joining the body to the sleeve. This is not a raglan sleeve, but a result of gathering a large diameter neckline where the sleeve to body seam is vertical.

The hem is just below calf length and slightly scalloped or ruffled.

The underarm gore seams are clearly visible on her right side. If there is a gusset it is very small and close fitting. If there is not a gusset the width of the body panels and sleeves may be wide enough not to need it (or the artist just didn’t include the gusset).
Because this painting tells the story of Griselda in a series of scenes, we are also able to see her in her gamurra with the camicia showing at the neck and sleeves, then her undressing and finally just in her camicia (previous page).

It is very rare to have all this (and in such detail) in the same painting.
The sleeves of the camicia are carefully folded and held in place by the sleeve of the gamurra.
More examples of careful folding of the camicia sleeves, held in place by the sleeve of the gamurra. Although there is some volume to the sleeves, they do not appear to be bigger than those seen on Griselda, about twice the diameter of the forearm.
Image 34. *Portrait of a Young Woman.*

c1475.

Sandro Botticelli.

Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence.

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Image 35. *Allegory of March Triumph of Minerva.*

1476-84.

Francesco del Cossa.

Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara.
The overall bell shape, gathering into the neck, sleeve gussets and body volume are similar to what we see in late 15th C Italian artwork of camicie. Pronounced differences in this 100 years later example is gathered cuffs, a neckline made more square by adding a strip of material to both sides of the neck and an increasing amount of embroidery and ornament. 15th c artwork does not indicate the use of multiple rectangular panels for the body. Most 16th c extant examples don’t use this design either.
The neck is gathered using 2-3 rows of stitches, then covered in a strip of the same fabric as the body to keep it in place.

This is not bias tape, the grain of the neck edging is not diagonal to the grain of the body, but in line with it.