

What Lies Beneath : Faldia

(Florence Underthings of the first half of the 16th century Part 5.)

by La Signora Onorata Katerina da Brescia.

The best place to start with any outfit is underwear. This forms the foundation on which any look is created. The correct underpinnings can change the shape and look of an outfit, making a significant difference. My area of interest is the early to mid-16th century, Medici Florence. Some recently published research, on the Gardaroba (wardrobe) of Eleanora di Toledo (1539-1562) has answered a few theories and questions I had on Florentine underwear of this time.

Faldia, Faldiglia and Sottana

While England, Spain and parts of Italy embraced the *faldiglia* (in Spanish called the *verduago*; in English it was the *farthingale*), Florence was reluctant to adopt this fashion. It was not until the mid 1500's that the upperclass Florentine women took to it. Even then, it was of a less exaggerated version. They preferred the softer look to their *faldia* (skirts). (*La Mode a Firenze* p77). A 1562 Florentine sumptuary law referred to the *faldaglia* but did not impose any of restrictions that were found in other European countries at the time. This seems to imply it was not in common use as yet, as there needed to be no restrictions enforced.

The Gardaroba of Eleanora records no *faldiglia*. The only mention of such an item are in 1544, for the dwarf Piera, then again in 1550 where 'bents' (stiffening for *faldiglia*) are recorded for Eleanora's daughter Lucrezia. It was not until 1565 that they were mentioned regularly in the Gardaroba and then not for Eleanora's use. (*La Mode a Firenze* p 78).

Sottana were used to fill out the shape in the form of underskirts. Before the 1540's, the *sottana* was a separate item to the stays which were not always worn anyway. From this time, until the mid 1550's, the records of the Gardaroba suggest that Eleanora's *faldia* were attached to the stays (*La Mode a Firenze* p 80). This formed the *sottana* with a low neckline below the cleavage (*La Mode a Firenze* p 83).

In *Patterns of Fashion*, Janet Arnold surmises that the possible stitch holes, on the waist of burial stays of Eleanora, suggests that there may have been an underskirt which was removed, (hence a petticoat). However, *La Mode a Firenze* states that there is no record, in Eleanora's Gardaroba, of the stays being attached to skirts, as they were named as a separate item of clothing to the petticoat and faldia.

During the middle two decades of the 16th century, the petticoat took over from the gown. It was then often worn on its own, particularly in summer and for domestic use. Eleanora had several sleeveless 'petticoats' in her Gardaroba. These are recorded as *sottana*, in the Gardaroba. The word *gamurra* for this type of dress was also still used in Florence in the first half of the 16th century.

Without a *faldiglia*, stiffening of the skirt was achieved by dense gathering of the waist and by a strip of felt at the hem. This was hidden under a guard of satin called a *copertura della doppia*. This type of hem stiffening was found on both Florentine extant gowns.

Right: one of my faldagia (skirts) worn under my gowns.



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