

# **An exploration of 16th century French dress**

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A copy of this paper, more images and higher resolution images from this paper can be found on <http://frenchrenaissancecostume.com>

## **Aim of the paper:**

This paper was initially written for a collegium, to give an overview of French fashions in late period.

There is a disappointingly small amount of French costuming or research into French fashions in the SCA and I have not found any comprehensive fashion overviews in English at all. There is also an unfortunate belief that French fashion was the same as English. It was not. Although England adopted some of French fashions, French dress had its own unique look.

This is an attempt to fill some of the gap and to encourage people to do some French costuming. There should be more French frocks around!

## **What this paper covers:**

- This paper covers 16th century female fashions in France.
- It covers mostly upper class dress with some middle class. Lower class and peasant dress is occasionally mentioned, but I have not undertaken a detailed enough survey of the dress of lower-classes to provide comprehensive information.
- The paper focuses on the appearance of clothes and how the “look” changes throughout the century. It does not deal with patterns of clothes or how to construct them. For construction of late period clothes I recommend Janet Arnold’s books as providing the most authentic patterns.
- Knowledge of basic terms and clothing concepts is largely assumed, although I have attempted to explain some terms and use non-technical descriptions wherever possible. I have also assumed awareness of the most significant late-period costuming texts, such as Janet Arnold’s books.

## **Limitations of the paper:**

- This paper talks of “French” fashions. However, in 16<sup>th</sup> century France was not one homogenous country. It was a collection of regions, under feudal allegiance to the French crown
- Those regions had different cultures, wealth and even languages. There were regional dress variations, but they are beyond the scope of this paper.
- The coverage of the last quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century is not as comprehensive as I would have liked as I have collected a smaller number of images from that quarter-century than from others.

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# 1 First quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century

Early in the century the French fashions became strongly influenced by Italian fashion, due to Francis I's interest in renaissance arts coming from Italy and ongoing wars which led to increase in communication and exposure to Italian fashions.

So in this early period you see the heavier bulkier French fashions and the lighter, more elegant Italian fashions. A good illustration is in this early 1500s tapestry (in Cluny museum):



The lady on the left is dressed in the Italian style. The lady on the right is in the typical early 16th century French style.

## 1.1 Gown

The bodice of the gowns is mostly undecorated, with a square neckline. There is one image of a rounded neckline, on a picture of a pregnant lady (*Image 1-16*), but the shape is so uncommon that it may be artistic licence.

The neckline is quite high on the French-style gowns early in the century and gets lower and wider towards the later part of the first quarter of the century. The neckline on the Italian-influenced gowns is lower.

I have seen two instances of a decorated bodice – one on an Italian-style gown early in the century (*image 1-9*) and one on a painting of Claude of France in about 1520 (*image 1-12*)

The gowns could have front closures (eg. *image 1-2*), or back closures (eg. *image 1-13*). Because it is hard to see side closures in images, it is not clear whether side-closing gowns existed. There are few pictures showing external lacing being visible in front closures and those are all of peasant women (eg. *images 1-23 and 1-24*). Upper-class women may have had internal lacing or possibly hooks and eyes.

Some early French-style gowns do not have a waist seam - eg. *images 1-2 and 1-3*). However, with many other gowns it is difficult to tell because the ladies often wear a girdle on their waist (eg. *images 1-5, 1-6 and 1-13*). The Italian style gowns all have a waist seam (eg. *images 1-10, 1-11*)

## 1.2 Sleeves

The sleeves of French-style gowns early in the century are “bombard sleeves” - voluminous, loose sleeves very wide at the wrist and turned back at the cuff. They are often trimmed with rich fabric or fur.

They are otherwise undecorated, are not slashed and appear to be always set in and not removable. See *images 1-1 to 1-8*

Underneath these wide sleeves there is an under-sleeve, which can be decorated or slashed. See *images 1-5 to 1-8*

It is not clear whether these under-sleeves are permanently attached to an under-dress or are a separate accessory, but from the later fashion of detachable sleeves, I would guess the latter.

The turned back sleeves continue to be worn until almost mid-century, although the top of the sleeve becomes tighter and acquires decoration.

The Italian style gowns that are becoming more popular at this time have narrow fitted sleeves, often in two parts, and laced at the shoulder, with puffs of chemise showing through the gaps. See *images 1-9 to 1-11*

Peasant women can be seen wearing short fitted sleeves or sleeveless kirtles – see *images 1-23, 1-24* and woman on the right in *image 1-27*

## 1.3 Skirts

The skirts are very full, with most of the fullness gathered at the back. Some of them are split in front, revealing an underskirt (eg. *images 1-3, 1-9, 1-11, 1-14*), others are not (eg. *Images 1-1 to 1-3, 1-6, 1-10*).

There are several that appear to have a split in the side (*Images 1-11 and 1-15*). Where a skirt is not split, a part of the hem is often tucked up to reveal the lining and the underskirt (eg. *images 1-1, 1-11 and 1-16*).

The skirts are soft and flowing, there is no farthingale or any apparent support undergarment worn at this time.

## 1.4 Under-dress

Under the top gown one can always see an under-gown, usually, but not always also square necked, cut slightly higher than the over-gown and almost always black (*images 1-1 to 1-3, 1-5 to 1-9, 1-14, 1-25 and 1-26*) In the *image 1-14* the last lady on the right is wearing a v-necked under-dress. The two ladies in the front row on the left in *Image 1-25* are wearing v-necked and a round-necked under-dresses.

It is not clear whether the entire under-gown is black or whether, black being an expensive colour to produce, only the neckline or upper body is trimmed with black so as to display the rich fabric where it is visible. Given the wide-spread practice of using rich fabrics in visible places only (for example, skirt foreparts), the latter seems to be the more probable option.

## **1.5 Partlets**

There do not appear to be any partlets worn under the gown earlier in the quarter century. The chemise is square-necked and occasionally peeks out of the square-cut neckline of the gown and under-gown.

There are however partlets worn over the gown, which start to emerge towards the end of the quarter and are worn over the gown (*Image 1-17*). They are always black (eg *Images 1-26 and 1-27*)

## **1.6 Accessories**

The ladies commonly wear girdles, often with beads or tassels at the end (*images 1-1, 1-11 and 1-16*), or sashes tied to form a loop (*images 1-5, 1-6*).

As jewellery, ladies also wear large pendants on a chain (*images 1-1, 1-5, 1-11, 1-14, 1-15*), or necklaces (*images 1-2, 1-3, 1-6, 1-7 and 1-9*). Sometimes two necklaces are worn, one sitting wide across the bust and one descending down into the dress (eg. *images 1-6 and 1-7*). The trend for wearing multiple necklaces continues into the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## **1.7 Headgear**

For most of this period the most common form of headdress for upper class ladies is an early version of the French hood.

It was made popular by Anne of Bretagne and is a layered head-dress, probably consisting of a coif, sometimes with a frilled edge, a cap, sometimes with a decorated edge and a hood/veil, often with a decorated front edge. There may be one or more other layers there.

During the earlier period, the hood/veil was long at the sides (see eg. *images 1-2 to 1-5, 1-14, 1-18 and 1-20*), sometimes with a slit on the side (eg. *image 1-22*). Later, the sides of the hood became shorter and the veil at the back narrower/more pleated (see eg. *images 1-7, 1-8, 1-17, 1-19, 1-21 and 1-22*).

Sometimes the veil was placed over the head to form a shadow or a bongrace. (eg. *images 1-5, 1-27*). A form of this head-dress became very popular with middle-class ladies in the second half of the century.

Lower-class ladies wear white linen coifs (*images 1-23, 1-24, 1-27*)

## 1500 to 1525 images

**Image 1-1**



c1500 - Tapestry of the scenes of Court: The bath.  
From the Cluny Musee National du Moyen Age

**Image 1-2**



1503 – Illumination from a Manuscript by Jean PICHORE

**Image 1-3**



Before 1514 - Anne of Brittany (1477-1514) with her ladies. Painting in Musée Dobrée, Nantes, France

**Image 1-4**



1506 (approx) - Hélène de Chambes-Montsoreau,

**Image 1-5**



Before 1514 – Anne of Bretagne in "Epistres Envoyées au Roi"

**Image 1-6**



Early 16th century - Tapestry of the scenes of Court: gentlewoman embroidering

**Image 1-7**



~1525 - Madame de Canaples by Jean Clouet

**Image 1-8**



Exact date unknown - French - Jeunes gens et jeunes femmes autour d'une table

**Image 1-9**



Early 16th century - Tapestry of the scenes of Court: gentlewoman embroidering – Cluny museum

**Image 1-10**



Album of Calendar Miniatures, France, ~ 1517–20 by the Master of Claude de France

**Image 1-11**



Early 16th century Tapestry at Cluny museum

**Image 1-12**



~1520 – Claude of France and her daughters

**Image 1-13**



1515 - David and Bathsheba, French Book of Hours

**Image 1-14**



Before 1514 - "Epistres Envoyées au Roi"

**Image 1-15**



C1500 Cluny tapestry

**Image 1-16**



1524 - Parisian Book of Hours by Jehan de Luc

**Image 1-17**



Approx 1525 sketch of an unknown woman by Jean Clouet.

**Image 1-18**



Early 16th century - Portrait of a woman by Jean Perreal

**Image 1-19**



Anne de Bretagne, prior to 1514.

**Image 1-20**



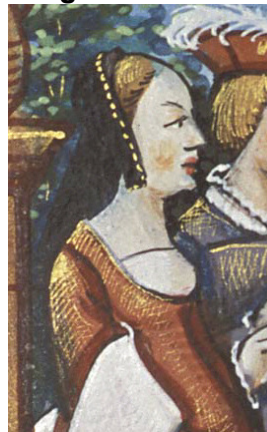
Anne de Bretagne from "Epistres Envoyées au Roi"

**Image 1-21**



1515 - David and Bathsheba, French Book of Hours

**Image 1-22**



1524 - Parisian Book of Hours by Jehan de Luc

**Image 1-23**



Approx 1500 – illumination by Jean Poyer

**Image 1-24**



Approx 1500 – illumination by Jean Poyer

**Image 1-25**



Before 1514 - Epistres Envoyées au Roi"

**Image 1-26**



1524? - from Memoirs of Philippe de Commines (his memoirs were completed between 1498 and 1501, but not published until about 1524s)

**Image 1-27**



1525 - Book of hours by Jean de Mauleon

## 2 Second quarter of 16th century

In the second quarter of the century, we see the development of the elegant French style that is no longer copying from Italian styles of earlier decades but comes into its own. The late 1530s to 1540s are a period of very rapid transformation of French fashion.

### 2.1 Gown

The gown bodice in the second quarter of the century has very wide necklines, sitting on the outer edge of the shoulders. The neckline also acquires more of an upward curve, which looks quite elegant.

There are still plenty of plain bodices, especially earlier in the quarter century (eg. *images 1-1 and 1-2*), but towards the late 1530s and 1540s the bodices are increasingly decorated in the style that becomes characteristic of French fashion later in the century. That is, they acquire a decorative band at the neckline and then two decorative bands (sometimes more) down the middle of the bodice. Those decorations often continue down to the skirt) and matching decorations sometimes appear on the sleeves (see *images 2-3 to 2-6*).

The bodice is more tightly fitted, but does not have as narrow a waist as one sees later in the century. There is a dearth of full-length images, but where visible, it appears that gowns now have a waist seam. The bodice begins developing a gentle downward curve at the waist, but does not have a pointed waist (unlike the incorrect portrayals often seen in movies). (Eg *images 2-3, 2-7, 2-8, 2-18*)

### 2.2 Sleeves

Throughout this quarter century we still see the style of sleeves of the sort seen in the first quarter - voluminous at the wrist with a turn back exposing fur or rich lining with under-sleeves, although they do become much more fitted at the upper arm than early in the century (eg. see *images 2-2, 2-8, 2-9*)

However, at the same time there is development of a variety of different sleeve styles that become increasingly decorative as the century nears its middle.

- There are bands of decorative trim - both horizontal and vertical (eg *images 2-3 to 2-6*),
- there are shorter, capped sleeves with under-sleeves (eg. *images 2-5 and 2-7*)
- there may be button-on tighter sleeves with a puff at the top (eg. *image 2-4*)<sup>2</sup>.
- Towards the end of the quarter we see sleeves with decorative puffs and beads (eg. *image 2-10*) and multiple layers of "scallop" decorated with beading (*images 2-11 and 2-16*)

By mid-century French fashion has a great variety of sleeve styles, most of which develop in the 1540 to 1550 decade.

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<sup>2</sup> The image is dated by the museum as 1536, however, I think the ladies dress style is more consistent with a later period - about 1550s. Hence the doubt about the existence of this sleeve style during this time.

## 2.3 Skirts

Unfortunately, there are few full-length portraits or drawings in this period and it is difficult to determine the shape of the skirts.

From the limited images available, it appears that the skirts are voluminous, but are not supported by large farthingales of the sort seen in English fashion of the period (where the farthingale is used to give the skirt a conical shape). If there is a farthingale under the French skirts, it is likely quite narrow at this time. (see *images 2-12 and 2-13*.<sup>3</sup>)

Even in the early 1550s, the skirt shape remains quite narrow compared to what is seen in England and bell-shaped, suggesting padding at the hips (see *image 2-14*).

## 2.4 Partlet

There are very few under the gown partlets to be seen prior to 1540. From 1540 onwards, rather suddenly, partlets become very popular and are seen in most portraits.

The partlets have a stand up collar which is often edged with a little frill and covering most of the neck. (*images 2-4, 2-6, 2-7, 2-9, 2-15, 2-16*)

Partlets tend to be decorated with vertical lines of cord, embroidery or possibly gathering/smocking (*images 2-6 and 2-9*), (its hard to tell which from the pictures) and, from about 1545, with a net pattern, which appears to be overlaid on the linen or silk partlet and has beads or similar decoration at the intersections between cords (*images 2-15 and 2-16*). These partlets become very popular (and increasingly more decorative) in the next quarter of the 16th century.

Over the gown partlets are also seen, often with a linen/silk partlet as well and so are presumably worn for warmth rather than modesty. (eg. *Images 2-21 and 2-22*)

## 2.5 Accessories

Because there are few full-length images, it is hard to tell whether ladies are wearing girdles, however, the images that do show the waist seam do not reveal a girdle (eg *images 2-3, 2-7, 2-8 and 2-13*), which was almost always present in the previous quarter-century. Its lack in the available images doesn't mean a girdle was not worn however, and its presence in the next quarter-century suggests that it may well have been.

The ladies all wear necklaces, often more than one. Most commonly these comprise of a necklace worn near the base of the neck and another going down into the bodice (eg. *images 2-1, 2-5 and 2-12*) or pinned to the bodice in the middle, (eg. *images 2-2, 2-4, 2-9 and 2-15*) or in several places (*images 2-10, 2-11*), forming decorative loops

## 2.6 Headwear

Almost all the headwear in this period is French hoods (see *all images*), although how it is worn varies – sometimes a shadow is added at the front, for a more modest

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<sup>3</sup> These are unfortunately the only images showing skirts in the period 1525 to 1550 that I have been able to locate to date.

look, particularly by older ladies (see eg. *Images 2-13 and 2-21*). The upper decorations are sometimes dispensed with and the fall/veil is flipped over the head to form a bongrace (for more details see below) – as in *images 2-12 and 2-13*. Children may be seen wearing a snood at the back, instead of the veil (eg. *Image 2-7*)

The French hoods have increasingly more prominent decorations - the cap and the billiament are often decorated with large pearls or gemstones, that sometimes, but not always, match the decorations on the gown or the lady's necklaces. (see eg *images 2-2, 2-3, 2-5, 2-9, 2-11*)

Although they are now shorter than the earlier hoods, the French hood is still a series of layered headdresses. The hood does not have a stand up crescent often portrayed in movies (or in the Tudor Tailor book).



Image from *The Other Boleyn Girl* - WRONG way to do a French hood!

All profile images of the French hood reveal that it is in fact flat and multi-layered (eg *images 2-17 to 2-20*), like the earlier versions, with more prominent and narrower billiaments. The veil/fall at the back is always black.

I will be doing a paper on French hoods shortly, but if making one, please bear in mind that the most popular reconstruction is incorrect.

French-style bongraces also appear occasionally (eg. *images 2-12 and 2-13*). I believe it is a billiament (headband) without decorations and with a long veil. The veil goes down to mid-back, then upwards and is pinned over the head, then turned back again (to form the square shape on top of the lady's head) and the remainder is allowed to fall hang back.



This image is from a 1568 book, but shows the details of the bongrace

**1525 to 1550**

**Image 2-1**



C 1530 - Portrait of a woman by Corneille de Lyon

**Image 2-2**



C1530 - Françoise de Longwy by de Lyon

**Image 2-3**



1533 – Anne de Pisseleu by Corneille de Lyon

**Image 2-4**



1536 (approx) – Portrait of unknown woman

**Image 2-5**



1543 (approx) – Françoise de Brézé by Clouet

**Image 2-6**



1545 – Portrait of Marguerite de Lustrac t

**Image 2-7**



1540s – Jeanne d'Albret (child)

**Image 2-8**



c1549 - unknown woman - school of Clouet

**Image 2-9**



1548 (approx) – Jeanne d'Albret - Clouet

**Image 2-10**



1545 – Isabeau d'Hauteville by François Clouet

**Image 2-11**



1550 (approx) - Charlotte Du Moulin

**Image 2-12**



1532 - from Illustrations de Flammette

**Image 2-13**



c 1540 - miniature of queen Marguerite de Navarre giving her book "Le débat d'amour", to Anne de Pisseleu

**Image 2-14**



1553 - Marriage of Diane de France to Duc de Castro

**Image 2-15**



1540s - Renée de Bonneval

**Image 2-16**



1545 - Marie de Montchenu

**Image 2-17**



**Image 2-18**



Date unknown - medallion of Losina de Manteca

**Image 2-20**



English funerary effigy of Sir Thomas Cave's wife, constructed in 1558.

Portrait of a woman, date unknown

**Image 2-21**



1545 – Anne de Montejean

**Image 2-22**



Approx 1530 – Unknown woman, Jean Clouet

### 3 Third quarter of 16th century

In the third quarter of the 16th century French fashions become increasingly decorative and extravagant.

Decoration on gowns, sleeves and partlets increases. The styles are elegant, but become more rigid, shaped by the underpinnings. Skirts of the upper classes are supported by farthingales and probably bumrolls.

The French fashion is strongly influenced by Spanish styles at the time, but is more "immodest", with open décolleté collars, not seen in Spain, becoming more common towards the end of the quarter century. Head covering becomes increasingly sparse, with a lot of hair showing

#### 3.1 Gown

The bodice of the gown is now most commonly decorated with rows of trim along the top and parallel rows down the centre of the gown (*images 3-1 to 3-3, 3-17, 3-18*). Sometimes several rows are used for a more unique look (*image 3-4*). These were sometimes combined with additional decoration and trimming (see eg *images 3-5 and 3-15*)

After the late 1560s this style of decoration starts disappearing from high-class gowns and is adopted by the middle-class (see eg *images 3-6, 3-13 and 3-14*). Towards the end of the quarter-century the upper-class gowns use rich embroidered or damask fabrics, jewels, fanciful puffs and slashes to distinguish themselves (eg *images 3-7 to 3-9*), although more modest styles are still seen among nobility away from the royal court (eg. *image 3-10*)

The bodice now has a distinct V-shape, which becomes sharper towards the end of the quarter. (eg. *images 3-3, 3-6, 3-9 and 3-18*). The waist is narrow, probably shaped by corsetry.

Quite a few gowns with high-necks are seen, possibly as a result of strong Spanish influence in fashions of this period (eg *images 3-5 and 3-8*)

#### 3.2 Sleeves

There are several sleeves styles common in this period.

There are short sleeves, with an under-sleeve. Sometimes they are plain (eg. *images 3-1 and 3-6*) but are often decorated, have slashes and puffs, are ornamented with beads or have fancy edges and construction (see eg *images 3-3, 3-4, 3-5 and 3-11*).

The under-sleeves are embroidered (eg. *image 3-3*), slashed (*images 3-5, 3-11*) or otherwise decorated (*image 3-6*)

There are removable long sleeves, most usually buttoned on (eg. *images 3-2, 3-8, 3-12 see also 2-4 above*). This style appears to be influenced by Spanish fashions which also have buttoned sleeves in this period. Here too, the sleeves are trimmed or otherwise decorated.

Then there are set-in long sleeves. Again, slashing, puffs and decoration with beads are common. (eg. *images 3-7, 3-10, see also 2-14 and 2-18 above*)

Note the shape of the sleeves - they are quite fitted in the arm and towards the 1560s and 70s there is an increasing puffiness in the shoulder (see eg. *images 3-3, 3-7, 3-10, 3-11 and 3-13*) These sleeves are often called "mutton leg" and have a large head that needs to be gathered into the shoulder to give that effect.

### **3.3 Skirts**

Skirts of the upper classes are usually supported by a farthingale. Note the shape of the skirts - they have a bell shape rather than a cone shape often seen in English styles and are not very wide. (eg. *images 3-6, 3-9, 3-13, 3-14, see also 2-14*)

Note also the curve at the waist - this is most likely achieved with a small bum roll worn with a Spanish farthingale (having tested this theory I can confirm that the combination of the two gives the right profile).

Later in the century the proportions of the bum roll increase and it evolves into the French or wheel farthingale. In upper-class gowns, the skirts are often split to reveal rich petticoats below (eg *image 3-9, see also 2-14*).

### **3.4 Partlets**

Partlets are almost always worn in this period. They have high-necked collars, with a small ruff (*images 3-1, 3-5*), which gets bigger towards the 1570s (*images 3-7, 3-8, 3-13*). The collar of the partlet is sometimes worn open (*images 3-3, 3-4, 3-6 and 3-12*) - a precursor to the décolleté necklines that become popular shortly afterwards.

The styles of the partlets are often extremely decorative. They are sometimes made of transparent fabrics (*images 3-2, 3-4 and 3-12*), are decorated with embroidery (eg. *images 3-1 and 3-13*) or gathered into the neckline to create textured effects (eg. *images 3-10 and 3-14*).

A very popular style of partlet is one that has a net-like pattern on it. Some seem to be a net, sometimes with decorations at the intersections, overlaid on a cloth partlet (eg *image 3-16*).

Some of the partlets have decorations in the middle of each net square (eg. *image 3-3*). They tend to be the ones where I have the most trouble deciphering whether the net pattern is made up by gathering fabric of the partlet itself or by couching/laying cord on top.

Then there are some where the net overlaying the fabric is made entirely of beads/pearls. (eg. *images 3-7, 3-12 and 3-15*) Because the beading continues up to the collar, I think the bead partlet is sewn onto/couched onto the fabric partlet underneath and is not a separate item. In some of the portraits you can see the light (presumably silk) fabric puffing up inside the net squares – giving a rather lovely effect (eg. *image 3-7, 3-18*). The intersections of the net are often adorned with contrasting jewels.

Not surprisingly, such partlets are seen exclusively in the portraits of very great ladies. Their cost must have been enormous.

*Image 3-4* shows a partlet where the net itself is dispensed with and pearls are sewn onto the fabric in a regular square/diamond pattern as though they were decorating the intersections of the net.

And *image 3-17* is a portrait showing a partlet where the fabric itself is dispensed with and the partlet is composed entirely of the net, made of pearls and jewels.

### **3.5 Accessories**

Ladies wear necklaces in much the same style as in the earlier quarter century. The ladies also quite frequently wear earrings which comprise of a round hook with a single pearl or bead on it. (see *images 3-4, 3-8, 3-16 and 3-17*)

Girdles can be seen in some images (eg. *images 3-1, 3-3, 3-13, 3-14, 3-18*) , sometimes these are long and some a short, stopping at the waist, but very decorative (see *image 3-18* for a particularly decorative short girdle). Middle class ladies often have pouches hanging off the end of a long girdle (as in *image 3-13*)

### **3.6 Headgear**

The 1560s see the abandonment of the French hood among nobility in France. Although it is frequently worn in the 1550s (eg *images 3-2, 3-3, 3-5, 3-15 and 3-17*) and occasionally, often in a modified, modest form with a shadow in the 1560s (see *images 3-4 and 3-16*), it is very rare to see it in the 1570s in the upper class portraits (*image 3-11* is one of the rare examples) or beyond.

The ladies now wear their hair dressed with ribbons, pearls or other gems and otherwise uncovered (eg. *images 3-7 and 3-10*) or wear small jewelled caps (eg. *images 3-8 and 3-18*) or beaded cloth caps or snoods (eg. *images 3-1 and 3-12*)

The hair is worn parted in the middle and slightly raised at the front. That raise of the hair becomes more prominent towards the end of the century.

Some ladies wear flat caps, often decorated with jewels and feathers (*images 3-20 and 3-21*) and some are seen wearing taller hats. (eg *images 3-13 and 3-22*)

Middle class ladies often wear bongraces - it seems to be the most popular headwear seen in illustrations of middle class (eg. *images 3-6, 3-13*)

The headwear of lower-class women is hardly changed. They are still wearing linen head-dresses – coifs (*image 3-23*) and headwraps, tied to leave a tail hanging at the back (eg. *Image 3-24*)

1550 - 1575

Image 3-1



1550 - Portrait of a Woman – by de Lyon

Image 3-2



1550s– Anne d'Este-Ferrare

Image 3-3



1555 (approx) – Louise de Halluin by Corneille de Lyon

Image 3-4



1565 – Claude de Beaune by Clouet

**Image 3-5**



1550s – JEANNE DE HALLUIN, DAME D'ALLUYE

**Image 3-6**



1575 – Orléans – Civitates Orbis Terrarum

**Image 3-7**



1571 – Elisabeth of Austria, Queen of France by  
François Clouet

**Image 3-8**



1570 – Madeleine le Clerc du Tremblay By  
François Clouet

**Image 3-9**



1573 – part of Valois Tapestry – Ball at Tuileries

**Image 3-10**



1570 – Jeanne d'Albret

**Image 3-11**



1574 – Gabrielle de Rochechouart by de Lyon

**Image 3-12**



1570 – CATHERINE-MARIE de LORRAINE

**Image 3-13**



1575 – Bourges – Civitates Orbis Terrarum

**Image 3-14**



1567 – Lyonnoise woman

**Image 3-15**



1555 – Miniature of Catherine de Medici

**Image 3-16**



1562 - CLAUDE DE BEAUNE

**Image 3-17**



Approx 1556 - Catherine de Médicis

**Image 3-18**



1560 (approx) – Isabel Valois

**Image 3-20**



Queen Margot – precise date unknown

**Image 3-21**



Mme de Rochefoucault

**Image 3-22**



Marguerite Valois - 1572

**Image 3-23**



Engraving of French peasant - 1567

**Image 3-24**



Danse des Catherinettes – precise date unknown

## 4 Fourth quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century

The last quarter of 16th century is a time of extremes in French fashions. Clothes become bulkier, more ridged, with almost every aspect of attire exaggerated and taken to extreme.

### 4.1 Gown

The bodice of the gown acquires an exaggerated sharp point at the waist, giving it an inverted triangle appearance (*images 4-1 and 4-2*). The triangular effect is often supplemented by a V-shaped opening of the front gown, revealing the under-gown or (more likely) the stomacher underneath (*images 4-3 to 4-5 and 4-15*).

However, closed, high-necked bodices are also often worn (eg *images 4-2, 4-6 to 4-8*), as are the low-cut, wide-necked bodices seen earlier in the century (eg *images 4-8, 4-9 and 4-13*).

### 4.2 Sleeves

As with other aspects of French clothing, sleeves acquire oversized proportions. The sleeve head is large, exaggerating the shape of the shoulders (see *images 4-9, 4-10 and 4-12*) and is sometimes adorned with ribbons, bows or other decorations (eg. *Images 4-4, 4-7, 4-10 and 4-12*).

The sleeve itself is wide at the arm, but fitted at the wrist (eg. *Image 4-11*). The sleeves are often decoratively slashed or pinked (eg. *Images 4-5, 4-7 and 4-11*), left partially open to reveal an under-sleeve or sleeve of an under-gown (eg *images 4-1, 4-3 and 4-8*) or otherwise decorated (eg *images 4-8, 4-12 and 4-13*). There are examples of short sleeves or shoulder rolls, with an under-sleeve worn (eg *images 4-8 and 4-13*).

Lace trim at the wrist is not uncommon (eg *images 4-3, 4-5 and 4-14*)

### 4.3 Skirts

By the 1580s the skirts become extremely wide at the hips, with metres of fabric gathered by cartridge pleating. This width is achieved with the aid of a large bumroll and, later, a French farthingale (also known as a drum farthingale). See *images 4-1, 4-3, 4-5 and 4-11*). Some more modest shapes are still seen, (eg *images 4-8 and 4-16*) however, the wearing of the drum farthingale is not confined to court occasions, nor is it confined to adults – children are also dressed in this fashion (see *image 4-15*).

Under the gown skirt, petticoats are worn, often in contrasting colours. There are many images of ladies raising their skirts to show off the rich petticoats underneath. (eg *images 4-3, 4-5, 4-8 and 4-11*)

### 4.4 Partlets and collars

In the last quarter of the 16th century collars grow to almost ludicrous proportions. Some of the smaller collars appear to still form part of a partlet - eg *images 4-8 (lady on the far right), 4-9 and 4-10 (where the collar is part of a partlet worn outside the gown) and possibly 4-13*)

However, the extremely large collars and ruffs, often supported by a wire structure (supportase), are almost certainly attached to the gown and do not form part of a partlet or chemise (eg *images 4-1 to 4-7, 4-11, 4-12, 4-15*). For construction of such collars, see Janet Arnold 4. See also Janet Arnold 3, where she documents pairs of eyelets worked at the collar of women's gowns, to attach a supportase for a ruff or a standing collar.

Some of the ruffs are made of or edged in lace and would have been extremely expensive items (eg. *Images 4-3, 4-5, 4-7, 4-11 and 4-12*). Although some ruffs cover the neck completely, reflecting a strong Spanish influence in fashions of the time (eg. *images 4-7, 4-12 and 4-13*), French women often wear their collars open at the neck in a décolleté style, their chests immodestly open, a style not worn in Spain (eg *images 4-4, 4-5 and 4-15*)

## 4.5 Accessories

It appears that the ladies have, for most part, abandoned the wearing of jeweled girdles that were so common in the first three quarters of the century, at least I have not been able to find any in images of upper-class ladies.

However, multiple necklaces, often with prominent pendants, continue to be worn (eg *images 4-2, 4-6 to 4-10, 4-12 and 4-13*), as are brooches (eg *image 4-13*). Jewels are worn in hair (see below), and ladies often wear earrings, generally consisting of a single pearl drop (*images 4-4, 4-7, 4-9 and 4-12*).

Ladies are often seen carrying folding fans or gloves or sometimes rosary beads. (eg *images 4-3, 4-5, 4-8, 4-15 and 4-16*)

## 4.6 Headgear

A variety of headwear is seen in this period, most of which exposes a significant amount of hair.

Women's hair is worn parted in the middle and gathered with the front portion elevated, creating a heart-shape around the face (see all images). Having thus dressed their hair, some women wear no further hair-covering, save for some pearls or gems to decorate their hair (eg *images 4-4, 4-11 (view from the back), 4-12*). The lack of hair covering is not surprising in view of the trend which developed in the previous quarter century - see discussion and *Images 3-7 and 3-10* above.

A popular item of headwear is a jeweled cap, usually designed with a peak to sit in the middle of the part of the hair and often adorned with a larger jewel at the front which falls to the forehead (see eg. *Images 4-6, 4-13 and 4-16*). The cap is sometimes combined with a veil, such as in *image 4-13*.

Heart-shaped caps or hoods, designed to fit at the back of the head with the point protruding in the hair part are also worn. These are usually black and are worn with a black veil/fall at the back, in a style reminiscent of the French hood. (eg *images 4-9 and 4-17*. See also 4-8, where this headdress is shown as white in colour<sup>4</sup>). Even

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<sup>4</sup> In portraits I have only seen such head-dresses in black, which to my mind casts doubt on the authenticity of colours in this sketch.

these more modest caps are sometimes worn with a jewel at the point sitting in the hair part (eg. *Image 4-17*). A more modest version of this headdress is sometimes worn (generally by older ladies and widows), extending to the front, to cover all hair (eg. *Images 4-10 and 4-15*). This headdress is always black with a white under-cap or coif.

Round-shaped jeweled caps and flat caps adorned with feathers and similar ornaments are also worn (eg. *Images 4-7 and 4-8*)

Lower-class and peasant headwear remains unchanged. Peasants still wear linen coifs or veils (*image 4-18*). There are illustrations suggesting that, at least in Paris, well-to-do servants may have adopted the bongrace, previously worn by middle-classes (*image 4-19*). However, I do not presently have enough images of lower classes to analyse the development (if any) in their fashions.

1575 – 1600

Image 4-1



From 1581 – Le bal de nocce du duc de Joyeuse

Image 4-2



1595 – Funerary monument of the Villeroy family

Image 4-3



Late 16th century – Val at the Court of Valois

Image 4-4



Louise de Lorraine (wife of Henry III)

Image 4-5



Late 16th century – Val at the Court of Valois

Image 4-6



Late 16th century – unknown French noblewoman

Image 4-7



1600 - Portrait of Henriette de Balzac d'Entraigues

Image 4-8



1581 – plate by Boissard – French ladies

**Image 4-9**



Late 16th century – presumed to be portrait of Marguerite Valois

**Image 4-10**



1577 - Wife of Senateur Millet

**Image 4-11**



1582 – Ball at the Court of Valois

**Image 4-12**



Late 16th century – Christine of Lorraine

**Image 4-13**



Late 16th century – unknown noblewoman

**Image 4-14**



1591 – presumed to be Duchess of Montpensier

**Image 4-15**



1590s – from Procession of the Catholic League

**Image 4-16**



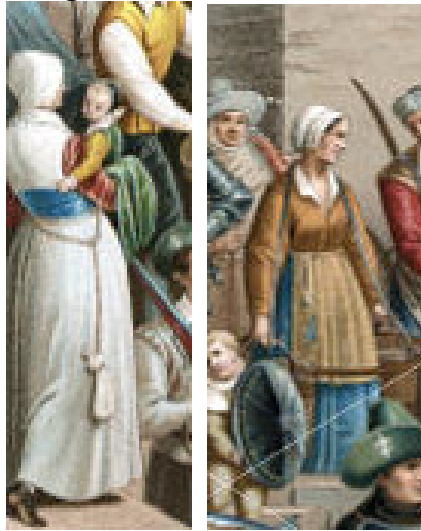
1600 – Dame de Noixces

**Image 4-17**



1575 - Louise de Lorraine

**Image 4-18**



1590s – from Procession of the Catholic League –  
two lower-class women

**Image 4-19**



1586 – servant going for a walk in Paris