SCA Rapier Garb:

From Fighting to Feasting

Scope of this discussion paper

According to the Lochac Rapier Combat Rules, rapier combat in Lochac “is intended to re-create the styles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.” This is a very long period of time to try to cover in any discussion of rapier garb, so in this presentation I will be concentrating on the period in which the rapier was having what has been called its “Golden Age”- the sixteenth century, and only such clothing that is adaptable for SCA rapier fighting. I will look firstly at what was being worn then by both men and women, and then at ways in which the Society's safety requirements can be easily, practically and accurately implemented. I will also suggest commercial patterns for your clothes.
When I first began researching this topic in both period manuals and modern sources I thought I would perhaps find a few references to what was being worn in the sixteenth century during rapier play, whether serious or not so serious. I was wrong. There is very little attention paid to clothing in any of the period sources that I looked at, and almost none in the modern sources. What I was able to glean came from passing reference, and diagrams in the period manuals.

Overwhelmingly, what is mentioned in texts or displayed in art is the wearing of a full suit of contemporary clothing. There is little mention of combatants fighting in just their shirts. I found only one reference to it, and that not even sourced, so I could not judge how accurate it was. The author said only “they no longer fought in armour, but in their shirts.” This was said in the context of relating a story about an illegal duel in the woods. (Hutton, p70) I have learned during my costume studies that the shirt was considered a item of underwear, and so it is not likely that men would have worn just a shirt outside the confines of their private home, and then only in the presence of only the closest of family members.

Clothing For Men

“…..the very butcher of a silk button...” In describing Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare gives as a very clear mental picture of the atrocities committed upon silk-covered buttons, and in Shakespeare's own time, it was Rocco, an Italian fencing master who said he could “hit any English man with a thrust, just upon any button in his doublet”. Let's take a look at the clothing worn by men in the sixteenth century.(Lane, p67) (Image on the right: Antonio Moroni, Bergamo: Portrait of Gian Gerolamo Grumelli, 1560)

1. Shirt

Considered an under garment, in art the shirt is not usually seen worn alone, except in depictions of peasants in the fields. All the extant shirts I've looked at were made of linen, some embroidered, some not.

2. Doublet

The doublet varied only a little during the course of the sixteenth century. It was usually a close-fitting garment, buttoned in front, with long or short skirt or short tabs usually, but sometimes without. Earlier in the century doublets with looser sleeves and longer skirts are seen, as in the “Italian gentleman” on the previous page. All of the doublets I have seen have a neck band, or collar. They were made from fashionable fabrics - brocade, velvet, plain silks - and also leather. In the case of the upper middle class, wool was also used. Most doublets were comprised of two or three layers of fabric.
3. Trunk-hose

There were paned or unpaned “slops”, which came in lengths that varied from just covering the backside, mid thigh or just above the knee, or “venetians”: or even pluderhosen. Unpaned ”slops” were usually padded and stood away from the body, but paned could be closer fitting. Venetians were just below knee length, very loose fitting breeches. Waist to ankle length pants were not worn in Western Europe in the sixteenth century.

4. Hose or Nether-stocks

The covering for the lower half of the leg, these were usually fastened by means of garters (ribbons) tied around the leg below the knee, occasionally both above and below the knee. Sometimes no method of fastening can be seen, and the hose disappears beneath the hem of the Venetians. In some cases full-length hose were worn beneath slops.

5. Jerkin

Sometimes to the doublet was added another doublet-like garment, usually sleeveless. It was worn over the doublet.

6. Finishing off and Accessories

Shoes, not boots, are most often seen in period portraits. These could be made from very elaborate materials such as velvet, but were also made of leather. Boots are known of, but seemed to have been confined to those who spent time on a horse. Of course no gentleman would be completely outfitted without his rapier. But next to that the most important accessories were a suitable cloak, or cape, and a flat-cap or bonnet. Of course you do not need to wear these when fighting, but they do make for a spiffy outfit.

Clothing For Women

I have not found anything specifically regarding female rapier fighters in period, nor anything about what kinds of clothes they wore. But we shall look at women's clothing of the sixteenth century, and see what styles can be best adapted for rapier fighting garb. The typical outfit for the sixteenth century generally consisted of a shift, gown and sometimes over-gown worn outdoors. There is no definitive proof of when separate skirt and bodice combination was first introduced. (Image at left: Antonio Moroni, Bergamo: Portrait of Angelica Agliardi di Nicolinis, 1565)

1. Shift or smock (also known as chemise)

This, like the shirt for a man, was seen as underwear, and all extant garments I have looked at were made from linen. It is not as uncommon as it is for men, for ladies to be portrayed in period art with their gown sleeves removed, revealing the shift sleeves beneath, although it is much more common in the art of Italy. One thing I have noticed is that shift sleeves are allowed to show only in portraits of of ladies depicted in an informal situation - at home with family and friends usually. Sometimes lady musicians tie their shift sleeves to their arms with ribbons to be better able to play their instruments. Often courtesans are depicted not only in their shift sleeves, but with those sleeves rolled up to reveal bare forearms - very risque!
2. “Pair of Bodies” or corset

There are few extant examples, but pairs of bodies, or corsets, are known to have been worn in the sixteenth century, and there is an extant example in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.

3. Petticoat Bodies or Kirtle

This was a simple bodice with attached skirt, usually worn as an under-gown. It was also known as a kirtle. Kirtles could be fitted at the waist with a seam, or A-line (hanging from the shoulders).

3. Gown

This varied so greatly from country to country, and even city to city, that it would be outside the scope of this class to deal with them all. Instead I will concentrate on the style that perhaps is more suited to our society's safety requirements - the most important in this context being the covering of the chest up to and including the neck. The square-neckline style of gown offers no protection in this area, but the doublet or doublet gown does. (Image at left: Ludovico Carraci: Portrait of Contessa Bentivoglio, 1589)

Phillip Stubbes in his book “The Anatomic of Abuses”, 1583, said “the Women also there have dublets & Jerkins, as men have heer, buttoned up the brest, and made with wings, welts, and pinions on the shoulder points, as mans apparel is for all the world, and though this be a kinde of attire appropriate onely to man, yet they blush not to wear it...”

The doublet-style bodice is also seen in the art of Spain and Italy. In some cases it appears that a separate doublet was worn over a kirtle or petticoat bodies (as seen in the picture on the left) but in others a skirt was attached to a doublet-style bodice to create a doublet gown - this appears most often to have been an over gown, worn over another, simpler gown.

4. Over-Gown

The loose gown, or Ropa, was a Spanish garment that became popular in England and Italy. Some are loose from shoulders to floor, others have a false back that creates a semi-fitted garment. It was usually worn over a gown, kirtle or petticoat-bodies, but can be worn alone over the shift if you so wish.

5. Finishing off and Accessories

Shoes are not usually visible in period portraiture, but in many cases they were similar in style to those of the men. Simple canvas Mary-Jane style shoes can be effective. A flat-cap can be a spiffy addition for wearing when you're not fighting.
**Making Combat Armour of Clothing:**

**Lochac Safety Requirements for Rapier**

The safety requirements place specific demands upon our choice of clothing. In terms of layers of fabric, you must have **abrasion** resistant material (such as one layer of heavy poplin cloth, for example) covering your legs and the lower two-thirds to three-quarters of your arms, and **puncture** resistant material (such as four layers of abrasion resistant fabric, or one of 2mm leather) on your torso (including groin, upper arms and armpits). This layering can be hot, but needn't be too much so, and with appropriate choices of fabric can also be practical and attractive to wear. It is worth mentioning that on the occasion of rapier combat in cold or wet weather, extra layers help to keep the muscles warm and flexible. This is just as important as keeping cool in warm weather. The most important thing in reducing the heat factor, is to use 100% natural fibre fabric wherever possible. Polyester retains heat close to the body, especially if there are several layers of it. Natural fibres - linen, wool, cotton and silk - breathe. Rayon is also a good fibre - while it is artificial in its manufacture, it is made from natural polymers - usually wood pulp - and it breathes well.

**Some Possible Combat-Legal Clothing Layers for a Man:**

**A - TORSO:**

1. A Shirt of heavy poplin cloth, or similar, plus a long-sleeved doublet made from two layers of heavy poplin cloth or similar, plus a short-sleeved jerkin made from one or two layers of heavy poplin cloth or similar.

   Shirt= 1 layer, doublet= 2 layers, jerkin= 1 or 2 layers, for a total of the minimum of four layers, or five.

2. A Shirt of heavy poplin cloth, or similar, plus a doublet made from either three layers of heavy poplin cloth or similar, or 2mm leather. It is not necessary for the doublet sleeves to be completely made of three layers of fabric, but the top third of the arm MUST have a total coverage of four layers of heavy poplin fabric or similar, so two of the three sleeve layers could cover just the top third of the arm.

   Shirt=1 layer, doublet= 3 layers, for a total of the minimum of four layers.

3. A Shirt of heavy poplin cloth, or similar, plus a short-sleeved jerkin made from three layers of heavy poplin fabric or similar, or one of 2mm leather.

   Shirt= 1 layer, doublet or jerkin= 3 layers, for the minimum of four layers.

4. A modern close-fitting T-shirt made from one layer of abrasion-resistant fabric (avoid polyester if possible), plus a shirt of heavy poplin cloth, or similar, plus a short-sleeved doublet made from two layers of heavy poplin fabric or similar, or one of 2mm leather. This combination may be cooler in the torso and may be the best choice for warm weather.

   T-shirt= 1 layer, Shirt= 1 layer, doublet= 2 layers, for the minimum of four layers.

**NOTE:** Suitable fabrics for the doublet include 2mm leather, cotton velveteen (very spiffy and relatively inexpensive!), tightly-woven wool, or (less accurate for period outer wear) linen or cotton drill. It is important that the groin be covered by puncture resistant material (ie, four layers of abrasion resistant material) and this could be incorporated into the doublet skirts, which would need to be fastened together in front.

**B - LEGS:**

Venetians or slops made from at least one layer of heavy poplin cloth or similar, boots or hose to cover the lower legs. If groin-covering doublet skirt are not used it is important to ensure that the groin is protected by the required puncture resistant material. This can be achieved by wearing two pairs of close-fitting underwear as well as the
venetians/slops of the required thickness (in the groin area only).

**Some Possible Combat-Legal Clothing Layers for a Woman:**

Wearing male clothing is a valid option, and no woman should feel she should not or could not wear male attire to fence in.

1. **Modern closely-fitting T-shirt, plus high-necked shift of heavy poplin cloth or similar, plus a sleeveless “petticoat bodies” or kirtle made of one layer of heavy poplin cloth or similar, plus a doublet-style over gown made of two layers of abrasion resistant fabric in the bodice and sleeves.**

   T-shirt= 1 layer, Shift= 1 layer, kirtle= 1 layer, doublet= 2 layers, for five layers in chest, back and upper arms, but four layers elsewhere on the torso. This outfit has three layers in the skirts, so would be best suited for cold/wet weather. The outer layer of skirts could be hitched up out of the way, if need be, and should not be so long as to cause a tripping hazard.

2. **Shift of heavy poplin cloth or similar, plus a doublet made of three layers of heavy poplin fabric or similar. It is not necessary for the doublet sleeves to be completely made of three layers of fabric, but the top third of the arm MUST have a total coverage of four layers of heavy poplin fabric or similar, or one of 2mm leather, so two of the three sleeve layers could cover just the top third of the arm. Worn with separate skirt which has the top front (groin covering) section lined with one layer of abrasion resistant material, plus wear an extra layer of underwear of ample coverage.**

   Shift= 1 layer, doublet= 3 layers, for the minimum of four layers on torso, skirt= 2 layers, 2 pairs of undies= 2 layers, for the minimum of four covering the groin.

3. **Modern close-fitting short-sleeved T-shirt, plus long-sleeved shift, plus short-sleeved doublet made from two layers of fabric. Worn with separate skirt, lined in the front section with one layer of abrasion-resistant fabric and worn with an extra pair of undies.**

   T-shirt= 1 layer, Shift= 1 layer, doublet= 2 layers, for the minimum of four layers.

**NOTE:** Suitable fabrics for the doublet bodice include 2mm leather, cotton velveteen (very spiffy and relatively inexpensive!), tightly-woven wool, or (less accurate for period outer wear) linen or cotton drill. It is important that the groin be covered by puncture resistant material (ie, four layers of abrasion resistant material) and this could be incorporated into the doublet skirts, or skirt.

**NOTE:** In both men's and women's clothing the required layers can be achieved by means of flat-lining, or flat-lining and bag-lining your garment. (For definitions see Appendix B.)
**What The Clothing Looked Like - Gentlemen:**

**Shirt:**

This style of shirt is not only accurate for most of the sixteenth century, it's also fairly easy to make and doesn't require much fabric. It consists of a large rectangle, folded lengthwise at the middle. There are under arm gussets, for ease of movement. A T-shaped cut is made along the centre line, and the resulting opening is gathered to a neck-band or collar. The sleeves are also made from large rectangles of fabric gathered into wrist bands. Alternatively, there is an extant shirt in the People's Museum of Zadar in the former Yugoslavia, which is thought to be of Italian origin and from the late sixteenth century. It was made by without gussets or wrist bands, and instead has gores inserted into the top of the sleeves for shaping.

Image copyright and thanks, to Maga Anderson.

**The Rest of the Outfit:**

Illustrations above from Achille Morrozo “Opera Nova”, 1535
Images from Douglas Gorsline's “What People Wore: 1,800 Illustrations from Ancient Times to the Early Twentieth
What The Clothing Looked Like - Ladies:

Shift:

There existed square-neckline shifts, of course, but for rapier these would not help to cover your upper chest. The image at left shows another style, much like the man's shirt, worn in England, Spain and Italy. This affords the wearer more protection in the chest - the neck opening can be accurately made with ties to ensure the shift opening does not reveal any skin.
The Rest Of The Outfit:


Images above are from “Vecellio's Renaissance Costume Book: All 500 Woocut Illustrations from the Famous Sixteenth-Century Compendium of World Costume by Cesare Vecellio”. Dover Publications, 1977
Appendix A: Lochac Rapier Combat Rules Pertaining to Clothing:

4.2.2. General Defensive Equipment Requirements

4.2.2.1 No skin shall be barred. There shall be sufficient overlap between separate pieces of protective clothing, regardless of the combatant's stance or movements, that the minimum protection for that body area be preserved.

4.2.5. Torso and Other Incapacitating Zones

4.2.5.1 The entire torso (the chest, back, abdomen, groin and sides up to and including the armpits) must be covered with puncture-resistant material.

4.2.5.2 Acceptable minimum armpit coverage is provided by a triangle of puncture-resistant material extending from the armpit seam, covering the lower half of the sleeve at the seam, and extending down the inner/under arm, one-third the distance to the combatant's elbow.

4.2.6 Arms and Legs

4.2.6.1 Gloves made of abrasion resistant material shall protect hands and overlap any sleeve openings. Boots, shoes, or sandals, comprised of at least abrasion resistant material shall protect the feet.

4.2.6.2 Abrasion resistant material is required on arms (save as noted for armpits), legs, and any area not otherwise mentioned in these rules.

Appendix B: Lining Terms:

Flat-lining:
“Flat lining is also called underlining. Flat lining allows you to mark the inside of the garment without its showing, to attach bone casings and other notions, and strengthens the garment. It is useful for changing an insubstantial fabric of the right colour and pattern into one with the right drape and heaviness.”
<http://www.directcon.net/wander/tech.htm>

“Flat lining is sewing with the lining flat against the inside of the outer fabric, at the same time. The seams show inside this way. Victorian bodices are often flat lined, and the raw edges are neatly finished on the inside.”
<http://www.alleycatscratch.com/lotr/makingem/Defintions.htm>

Bag-lining:

“Sew around a hem (and possibly the sides), right sides together, one of the fashion fabric and one of the lining. Turn inside out. Press carefully. The remaining seam can be treated as one, or the outside can be machine stitched and the lining side tucked under and closed.”
<http://www.alleycatscratch.com/lotr/makingem/Defintions.htm>
Appendix C: Some Internet Sewing Resources:

The Elizabethan Costuming Page: <http://costume.dm.net/>

Period Pleats: <http://costume.dm.net/pleats/>

The Renaissance Tailor: <http://www.vertetsable.com/>

Sempstress’ Articles Page: <http://westwood.fortunecity.com/lingerie/779/frames.html>

The Auld Garb Monger's Costumes for Mnly Men: <http://www.garbmonger.com/>

HANDSEWING by Magistra Rosemounde of Mercia: <http://www.meridies.org/as/dmir/Costume&Fashion/0910.html>


Appendix D: Costume Patterns For Possible Rapier Garb:

“Margo Anderson's Historic Costume Patterns”: The Elizabethan Lady's Wardrobe
“Margo Anderson's Historic Costume Patterns”: The Elizabethan Lady's Underpinnings
“Margo Anderson's Historic Costume Patterns”: The Elizabethan Lady's Accessories
“Margo Anderson's Historic Costume Patterns”: The Elizabethan Gentleman's Wardrobe
“Period Patterns”, No 56: Late Tudor and Elizabethan Gowns
“Period Patterns”, No 58: Men's Late Tudor and Elizabethan Garments
“The Mantua-Maker”: Spanish Loose Gown
“The Mantua-Maker”: Round Kirtle
“Fantasy Fashions”: 003: Dashing Doublets
“Fantasy Fashions”: 004: Paned slops and Breeches
“Costume Connection”: Elizabethan Man
Appendix E: Rapiers

Image from George Cameron Stone's Arms and Armor (A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of in All Countries and All Times); Dover Publications New York, 1999

Bibliography and Internet Resources

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Elizabethan Costuming Page, Pictures of 16th Century Costume: 24 May, http://costume.dm.net/content.html#pictures

Illustrations of Marrozo, May 24: http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/marozzo/marozzo_illus.html