100 Years of Venetian Patricians Women's Clothing

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Prior to diving in, there are some things that should be clarified regarding the information available. To complicate things from the beginning, there are no known extant Venetian gowns from this time period. Other city states in Italy have extant items to draw from. For example, there is the burial clothing of the Medici family, including Eleanor of Toledo. There are also restored gowns in Pisa that are believed to be owned by Eleanor, or her ladies, as well. Unfortunately, being Florentine, the finds, while perhaps informative of common construction methods of the time, tell us little if anything specific about Venetian clothing of the same time frame. This leaves us using visual sources, and the occasional rant by offended dignitaries to piece together what was worn, when.

Like today, there is no one specific "uniform". There was a range of styles and those were impacted by class, wealth, age, marriage status, and family political alignment. Much like now, fashions changed in a lurching, uneven, manner. New fashions were scorned by the older, embraced by the younger, and despaired of by the Church just as they always have been.

Another point to remember is that the concept of "Italy" as we think of it today did not exist until 1861 when the independent city states finally united. There are no "Italian" clothes, rather there are Mantuan, Florentine, Napolese and so on. To call the clothing of the Peninsula " Italian" erases the very real divisions between the courts that make up the history of this time frame.We moderns, especially Americans, have a tendency to look at a contiguous mass on the map and call it a country, assuming that all the subdivisions must be states like we have, allegedly working together for the common good.

To better understand the situation in "Italy" at our time of study, imagine that each state in the US is (in theory) completely independent of the other, yet tied together by marriage in a complicated web of truces, alliances and rather flexible treaties. War between them is far more common than cooperation, and alliances shifted constantly. In an era of slow and limited communication, clothing was (and remains) a way to communicate who you are to others. You are what you wear, and one does not wish to be labeled an enemy of the state because the cut of your sleeves is wrong.

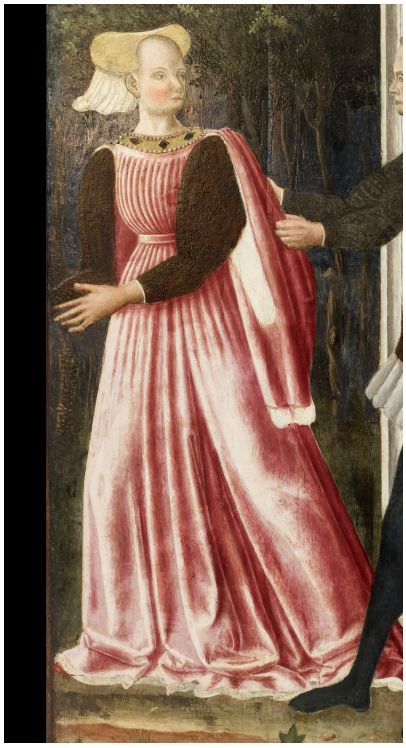
Please note, that in an effort to keep the class at an introductory level, very few specialized garment making or specifically Venetian words will be used. Also, please be aware that this is a work in progress. This class represents what I understand at this moment in time only, and represents my current best guesses as to what was worn in my beloved la Serenissima.

Pre 1490 Images

While the 1490s are commonly considered the beginning of the Renaissance in Venetian art and clothing, the fashions of that decade did not represent a striking new mode of dressing. Rather, the final decades of the 15th century represented the fading of the International Gothic style of the 14th and 15th centuries. The shapes of the 1490s are direct descendants of the fitted gothic dress and the houppelande.

Frescoes found in the inland north, made about 1450 in the Casino di Caccia Borromeo, on the edge of Venetian Terra Firma holdings, showcase ladies in a variety of styles. The most fashion forward of these shows a lady wearing an undergown of pale blue grey with a sleeve puffed and gathered just below the elbow, form fitting to the wrist. The forearm is snug enough that one assumes closures, though the fresco itself isn't quite detailed enough to clarify if it is buttons or lacing.

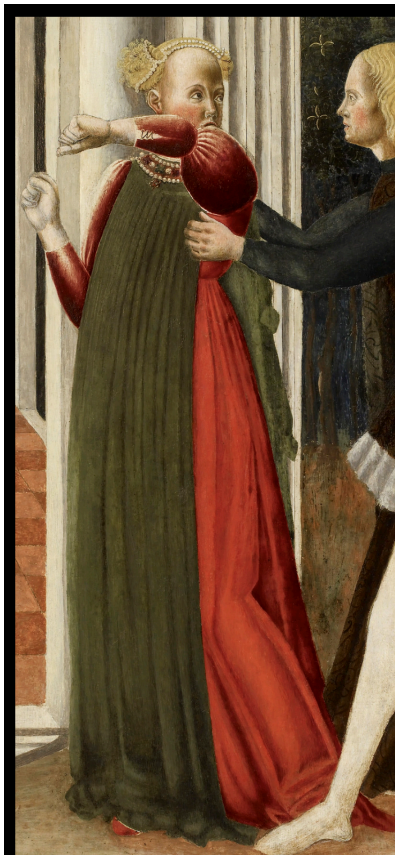
The overgown slips over the head with a simple round neckline. Without visible closures or tailoring, the volume of the fabric is gathered to a waistline just under the bosom with a simple belt. The massive hem pools on the ground, along with the hanging sleeves, falling in pleated folds from the shoulder. Note that the sleeves aren't just lined in another fabric. The lining also binds the front edge adding a bit of visual interest to an outfit that otherwise relies on mass and verticality for its effect.



About 20 years later, a 1468 painting cycle by Dario di Giovanni depicting the abduction of Helen of Troy, held by the Walters Museum, shows major shifts away from the International Gothic style.

The overgown has developed a boat shaped decorative facing at the neck, and the huge draping sleeves of 20 years ago have become hanging sleeves that the wearer could actually slip their arm through and wear. The overall shape of the overgown is no longer a sea of gored panels cinched by a belt, but shows clearly defined pleating at the front below the neck facing of gold. The fullness is still coming from the upper chest, but it is coming from plated rather than gored panels. There do not seem to be any side openings on this overgown skirt, indicating it might slip on over the head, or have a side neck opening.

Also of note is the hint of body linen showing at the rather exposed wrist. The undergown sleeve is slightly fuller, and the narrower section has retreated to just above the elbow rather than just below.



This detail from the same painting (Dario di Giovanni,1468, *Abduction of Helen*) gives us a wealth of information. Looking at the undergown first, we see a gown with the bodice and skirt cut separately. It sits at the natural waist to slightly above and it fits smoothly and supportively. The skirt appears to be pleated into the waist with a narrower column of fabric than the earlier styles, though it still trails on the ground, front and back. The sleeve still seems to be smoothly attached to the bodice in its entirety. There is no gap around the arm showing the body linen. If these sleeves are removable, they lace into the armhole completely.

We also finally get a view of the elbow itself. The foreshortened lower sleeve is laced closed, but leaves an intended gap showing the body linen almost up to the elbow. The body linen is clearly cut close to the body with very little extra fabric as it sits smoothly under the tight sleeve with no visible ruffling of the free edge.

Here we can see a different style of overgown. In contrast to the prior image, this gown is open all the way up the sides/ The boat neckline with heavy embellishment is the same as the closed version, as is the tidy pleating just below. This one also has dagging on the back side opening, but not the front.

1490-1500

Vittore Carpaccio, 1490-1495: *Two Venetian Ladies*

The most striking change from the prior era is the sudden arrival of copious amounts of visible body linen. These women are at home in a "private" setting, a rooftop terrace, so they are not wearing the additional outer gown that you see in public settings at this time. However, even with the addition of an overgarment, visible body linen still remains a distinct feature of the era. (As a *generalized* rule of thumb, women of the upper classes wear three layers. Body linen for god, private layer for solitude and family, and a public layer for out of the house or a formal visit.) Sleeves have become wardrobe extenders and accessories, in addition to merely covering the arm. The boat-shaped neck that appeared in the 1460s has now expanded outwards to the very point of the shoulder. The neckline has also lowered, but still does not expose much cleavage.

Their body linen is not extravagant, however, it is clear that the body linen is now using more fabric in both the sleeve and body, though the sleeve length seems to be about that of the earlier era. If the pleated frills along the

neckline edge are integral to the body panels rather than being attached separately to a flat body panel, then the body linen is now using a 3 to 1 ratio of fabric to neckline opening.

Both body linen layers also show organized pleats or ruffling at the wrist. Visible excess along the line of the arm shows that the sleeves are cut slightly longer than the sleeve itself, perhaps to the wrist. There is more excess width than length. There is no visible proof to claim that these are cuffed sleeves, but that would be a reasonable assumption for day to day wearability. An open ended sleeve would be impossible to keep that tidy for three minutes of wear, much less all day, unless you had a spare maid that needed a job. The pleated neckline frills show what is possibly a gold/ bronze embroidered edge or couched on cord on both gowns.

The sleeves are tied on both gowns in a decorative manner. They are very likely laced up into the shoulder strap of the bodices in addition to ties along the back as no actual ties show at the center top. The cut of the *these* sleeves itself do not appear to be of a two piece curved sleeve. It looks like the sleeve is cut with an s-shaped sleeve head, a seam down the back, and straight down, tapering to the wrist. (Look at the pattern on the red gown sleeve.) In practice, I have found that a straight sleeve cut to the wrist, pulls up to the lower forearm when worn. Sleeves are not always solidly connected at the shoulder strap like this. In this era, this is as connected as they get, in contrast to the past completely laced in sleeve. Also, note the definite contrast between gown body, trim, and sleeves. Unlike the prior period, the sleeves are often of a different fabric than the undergown fabric, but it all coordinates.

Both gowns appear to be velvet, with a silk sleeve. The waistline is back to just under the bosom, recalling the early 1400s. The lady in the rear is wearing a decorative cloth of gold apron, complete with early lace and beading on the bottom edge. The hem of her green gown has a stiffened hemline (likely very similar in construction to the Florentine *doppia* as demonstrated in the Elanora of Toledo finds - roughly translated as being “doubled”) on the bottom of the skirt. This is clearly shown by the contrast between the smoothly turning stiffened hem, and the fabric collapsing down behind it. A stiffened hem makes a big difference in moving safely. The extra rigidity keeps the skirts from tangling around your feet when standing and sitting.

You can also see a pair of platform shoes, now commonly called chopines. At this stage in Venetian fashion, chopines are about 4-8 inches tall, wide and boat like under the foot. Later years will see them rise to 18 inches in extreme cases, and become much less clunky under the foot (aka wobbly). They are not often shown in Venetian art, as they quickly came to be considered underwear. Originally meant to keep expensive skirts out of the muck of Venetian walkways, in time skirts were lengthened back to to the street level again, hiding the shoes completely. Their function went from being practical, to symbolic, indicative of status. The higher the shoe, the longer the skirt. The longer the skirt, the more money you spent. The higher the shoe, the more attendants you need to walk around with. Ergo, the taller you appear, the richer you must be.

Jacometto Veneziano, 1495-1497 ***Portrait of an Unknown Woman with a Lagoon Landscape and Hills Behind***

Here we have a gown with an off the shoulder pointed front neckline, embellished along the center front with pearls and gold. It is very likely that the pearls don't go any farther along the neck due to the possibility of damaging them with the repeated on and off motion of the overgown, and if you always have the overgown on in public, why pay to pearl what won't be shown?

The overgown neck dips all the way to the raised waistline, just barely leaving any room for fabric to embellish. The heavy gold band with applied pearls is not the over gown. If you look carefully you'll see that it doesn't follow the line of the overgown neckline exactly. That looks like a heavy necklace that is basted on at the shoulders and likely moved to different dresses as they are worn. The overdress neckline itself is embellished with a row of tiny figure 8 pleats behind the neckline, and a flat gold ribbon held down with x shaped stitches. Note that even with the overdress on, the body linen still poofs at the underarm.

You can just barely see the sleeves in the bottom corners of the painting, indicating how much lower the main body of the sleeves sit than before.

Lazzaro Bastiani, 1494: ***The Relic of the Holy Cross*** **(detail)**

Here we have a rare side back view. The bodice neckline is pointed in back, deep enough that it might expose a center back detail on the undergown. The trained skirt is pleated into the high waist. Most of its bulk is confined to the very center of the skirt panel. rather than make the entire back half longer, Venetians often opted to keep the side backs shorter, allowing the very center back to be much longer. The technique creates a "v" shape that is characteristic of venetian gowns. (V for Venetian.)

This particular outfit features hanging sleeves that trail along with the train, quite reminiscent of the trailing sleeves in the 1450s. These however fail to actually cover the arm. They exist for drama and an expression of wealth, The under sleeves here appear to be two part, with an exposed elbow.

Also - pink is period.

Gentile Bellini, 1496: *The Procession in Piazza S. Marco* (detail)

Here we have a rare image of several women in public. There is one lady with a trained overgown, the other two are ground length. This back view of the peach overgown reveals another back v bodice with a center bulk train.

It is interesting to note the variety of headwear present. The lady in peach, we assume unmarried, is wearing a small sheer veil over her head. The woman in blue grey and rust next to her is wearing a white shoulder length veil, and the woman in black has a mantle wrapped around her and held in front of her face. While the details are hard to see, the woman in blue grey is wearing an overgown that has half length blue sleeves that match the overgown. The gold of her undergown shows at the center front of her bodice and again at the lower sleeves.

Carpaccio, 1496-1499 *The Arrival of the English Ambassador*s (detail)

This is the soon to be martyred Ursula, making demands of her father with regard to her marriage. She is indoors and in her bedroom, so she doesn't seem to be wearing an overgown, even though she wears two sets of sleeves, her shirred upper sleeves match the gown. Note the decorative cut out shape of the upper arm attachments. There is a series of small black points along the outer edge of the shoulder strap that could be how the sleeves are being laced on. Black binding unifies the two different sleeves, and would allow both sets to be reversible. The gold sleeves are full length under the upper shirred grey.

She wears a red mantle all the way around her, seemingly held up by a strap that passes around her neck and attaches to her bodice or a thin belt. This image shows a partlet-like garment above the neckline of the gown. The ruffled and corded edge of the body linen shows above the material, indicating that this extra garment is worn beneath the body linen. I do not know what this is. My gut suspicion is this is some sort of " pilgrimage" or "extreme piety" garment shown to indicate what she is telling her father right now. " I'll marry him but he has to convert and I get to go on pilgrimage before I do." I haven't seen another garment like this in the art of this time and place.

It could literally just be a partlet, but this is 30 years before they become common. As it seems to be a one off occurrence, I lean towards it being a way for the artist to indicate piety.

Her body linen features prominently in her sleeves, and shows tidily at the sleeve attachment points. There is still far more horizontal excess than vertical in the shape of the body linen sleeve.

Vittore Carpaccio, 1495: *Meeting of the Betrothed Couple* (details)

This painting gives us a slew of information about variations possible amongst the basic garment types. Sleeves are mostly in one or two parts. The most common types are one part long sleeves, or a two part sleeve with the elbows exposed. However, they can be worn together. Sleeves often have cut outs in oval or linear "windows". In this era, "slashing" is a decorative technique used to allow the body linen to be seen on sleeves and occasionally the bodice. At this point in my research, I have not seen any fabric in this time and place that cut the outer fabric to reveal a contrasting lining, or inner garment rather than the body linen. The standard practice seems to involve cutting apart a standard sleeve pattern and making different openings for the *body linen* to show through. The cutouts do not seem to be raw edged. At this point, applied fabrics used as trim may have a raw edge, but the openings in sleeves and bodices do not. As they made the openings specifically to pull the body linen through, it makes sense that the edges would be finished off prevent undue wear and tear. So far, I have found no images showing a similar slash and puff effect on skirts.

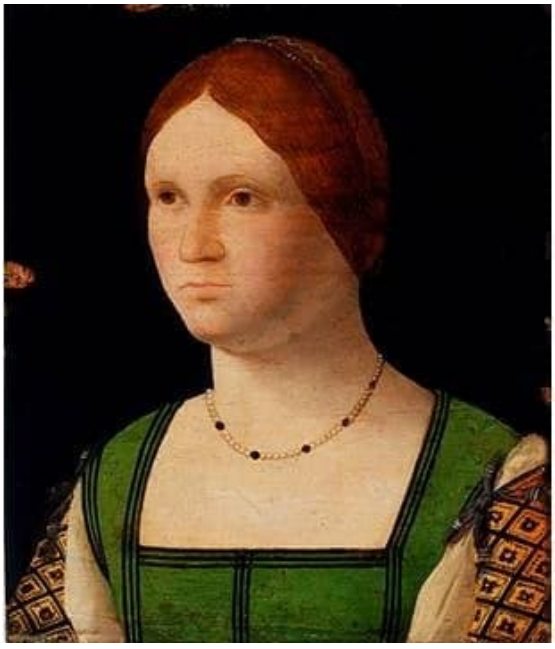
Note that since these are images of women outside for a formal occasion, they are wearing the additional layers required for public decency. However, it would appear that in Venice, a head covering that *hides the hair* outside the home is still not mandatory at this time. The outer mantle does not appear to be mandatory either. It can be worn as an all encompassing cloak, over the entire body and head, or worn diagonally on the body, wrapped or tied over one shoulder, flipped up over the head as needed. We see a plethora of different hairstyles and headwear, several different types of over gowns, and pearls, pearls and more pearls. (Likely glass, and made locally.) The detail on the upper left shows what looks to be beading in addition to a row of pearls on the bodice of the black undergown. It also has massive jeweled decoration on the upper sleeve, which also features a decoratively shaped sleeve head. The lower sleeves are

covered in oval slashing. Her overgown is a v-neck to the waist, and the hem of her train is bound in gold

1500-1510

Anonymous, approx 1500, *Portrait of a Lady*

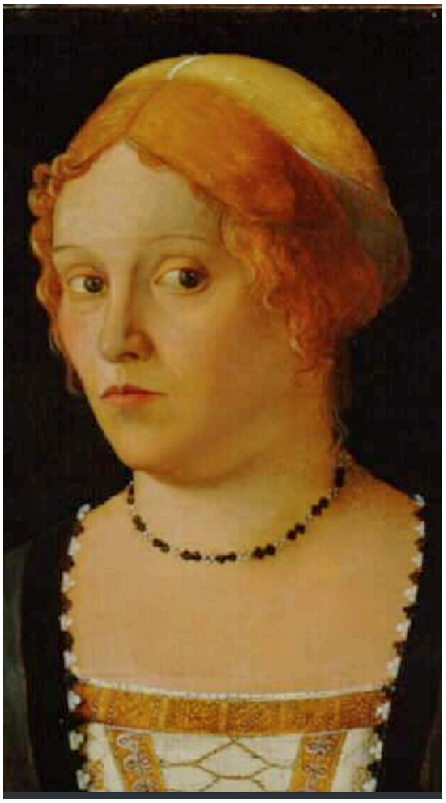
At the turn of the century, radical changers hit Venetian fashion. For the last 100 years, necklines on under gowns had been circular to boat shape. Suddenly, a squared off neck appeared. At the same time, pearls as trim on gowns themselves became something the Council frowned on. This is one of the latest dated gowns to have pearls on the neckline. This gown combines the pearls of the last period with the new emphasis on geometric trimming and squared off shapes. This gown carries pearls not only along the front of the neck, but down the center front of a built up section of trimming. The overgown sports the cap sleeve look, but interestingly enough, there's no sign of how the sleeves attach to either layer. This example may be from inland Venetian holdings as this ensemble shows off immense amounts of highly contrasting embroidery. Needle artists on the lagoon seemed to have heavily favored white on white work.



Francesco Pietro Bissolo, 1500, *Portrait of a Young Woman*

In a drastic change from just a few years earlier, this green gown has a high square neckline that cants *inward* to the neck slightly as it rises, the absolute opposite of the prior trend. The trim on the bodice extends down from the neckline in three lines, center front, and down the sides of the front, along the outer edge of the breasts. (This outside line will become important in the future.) The sleeves are of a black and gold fabric, cut smoothly at the shoulder. No evidence of pleating can be seen. The sleeves appear only to be tied in place in two spots, front and rear of the shoulder. Note the rather conspicuous lack of pearls on the gown. Black trim around the neckline becomes much more common, and matching trim often appears on the edges of sleeves.

The sleeves have simplified in shape. Slashing on them vanishes, giving way to paneing, catching finished panels together at intervals, rather than cutting into the panel itself. The effect is still to reveal body linen, it is merely approached from the other side of fabric manipulation. Note the necklace of black beads alternating with pearls.



Carpaccio, 1505, *Portrait of a Venetian Woman*

This gown showcases the fact that not all gowns are made identically. This neckline is almost straight across, but not quite. This one still fits closely to the new canon of a squared off neck, but do so in a slightly softer manner. A squared off opening will dominate the Venetian neckline for the rest of the century.

Bodices are still ornamented but the ornament is no longer confined to the neck and the center "v". Geometric arrangements down the entire front to the waistline dominate. This gown even hints at a front lacing.

Body linen is almost absent at the wrist or neck, but still shows at the underarm, unless the " coat style" overgown is worn. This portrait shows no less than three types of detailing on the front of the bodice, and none of them are pearls. The new over gowns are cut much closer to the neck, so far less of the undergown shows. Accordingly, what does show is trimmed to oblivion. This overgown of deep green has a black edge, what looks to be black and white needle lace or passemeterie along the front edge.

She too wears a necklace of alternating black and white.

And some epic side eye.

Durer, 1505, *Portrait of a Venetian Woman*

The neckline of her gown is softly square, canting neckwards a small amount. The line of her hair arrangements echoes the softly squared off lines of the gown neckline. The bodice is decorated with crossing strips of what looks like cloth of gold ribbon. (possibly selvage strips, or raw edge bias.) Crossing "x" style trim will become very important in the coming decade.

Note the construction of the bodice where the strap meets the body. The strap is a separate piece, not cut in one with the lower bodice.

The sleeve shows minimal ties, again at the front of the shoulder, and presumably the rear as well. Compared to a few years ago, these sleeves are positively huge in diameter. The

body linen, which does not show at the neck at all, is gathered up at the shoulder, yet remains unpuffed. The sleeves here might be the same fabric as the bodice, merely left plain. The shoulder ties are black. (The one on the left side of the work is unfinished.)
And yet another black and white necklace.

Carpaccio, 1507, *St. Tryphon Exorcising the Daughter of the Emperor Gordian*

This work is one of the few of this era that show many women in the same painting. Most of them are merely heads in windows, but we at least get to see several signs of the changes that have occurred.
Sleeves have clearly simplified in shape. They may still be in two parts, but the near frantic slashing has faded. The focus is shifting to the body linen, which is becoming more obvious, even with less slashing. It is beginning to be cut even longer, as it needs to be pulled out at multiple points along the arm, and each pull adds 4-8 inches to the length of the sleeve. They are still rather narrow, likely less than 24 inches around in general.
The new over gowns are more uniform in their cut, resembling a modern coat more so than before. Some are still cut with a cap sleeve allowing the body linen to show through both layers of clothing. The ends of the body linen sleeves no longer have to be controlled under the edge of the sleeve, allowing them to drape below the hand in a fetching way.

This group of ladies from the same painting (Carpaccio, 1507, *St. Tryphon Exorcising the Daughter Emperor Gordian*) are in the far distance of the painting, so their clothing is merely sketched.. But the purpose of sketching is to convey maximum meaning as little effort as possible.
And Carpaccio does just that.

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The consensus style is a higher necked undergown, almost always cut very close to straight across. Sleeves begin to match the undergown again, in compensation, the bodice front is more decorated before, giving the effect of a different fabric, especially when worn under a contrasting overgown. gowns have codified into a kaftan like garment that closer to the neck and meets at the center front waist. The other important detail this image shows us at a glance is that the waistline has slid back down to a "natural" position, allowing for more decoration on bodice. This makes up for the amount of decoration from mostly hidden necklines.

There is as of yet no sign that these gowns are anything but side laced. Even when the lines on the bodice might indicate lacing, that does not seem to have been the case. However, the amount of attention paid to the center front is certainly prophetic, as center front opening gowns will be all the rage in just a few years.

1510-1520

Titian, 1511, *Miracle of the Newborn Child*, detail

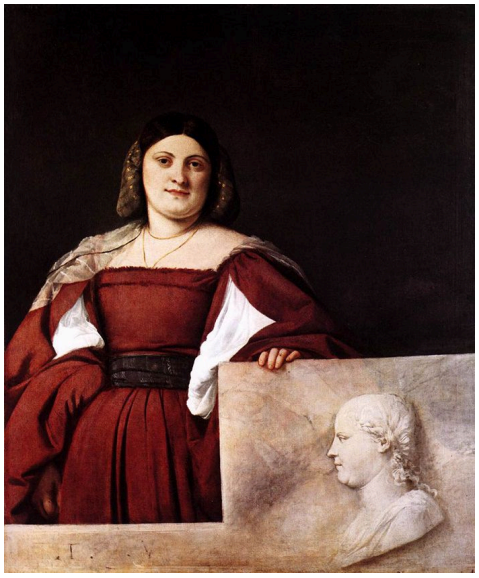
The detail of this image gives us an invaluable side view to help us better understand this entire silhouette from head to toe. This angle shows us that the back of the bodice is trimmed, which looks to be the same fabric as the gown itself, combined with thin lines of green. The waistline in back is at the natural waist to slightly higher. She has pulled her overgown train around to the front to hold it up. The hem is heavily embellished for this time frame. Note the lack of hem ornament on the ladies behind her. The x shaped, quatrefoil trim at the hemline seems to be appliqued silk in a beige or gold. In addition to the quatrefoils and bands of green trim, this hem appears to have The Tuck. The tuck takes a skirt that is ground level or longer in back and shortens up the front for safer walking. This is an extreme example, appearing to go around to the back side of the skirt. The Tuck can help stiffen a hemline, so this may have been done deliberately all the way around to help display the heavily trimmed hem.

Under the lifted hem of the gown, another skirt can clearly be seen. This is several inches above the ground. This could be for one of two reasons. One, it was cut that length because it was meant to be a underlayer. The other reason could be that she is wearing her chopines, and we simply cannot see them. Note that you don't see the fabric of either layer puddling on the ground anywhere, other than the train.

Within moments of introducing these massive sleeves, it seems Venetians added an optional cuff. Here is the genesis of every Venetian sleeve from now on. There is a larger mass of fabric at the upper arm that has openings, which is then connected to a smaller piece of fabric closer fitted to the arm. Every sleeve from now on is a variation on this theme. If the sleeve itself is just long and open, within a few years, another set of sleeves that follow the poofy upper thinner lower pattern will be added under them. This particular sleeve is open along the front, trimmed in green , including matching green tassels. The pleats at the shoulder are far less extensive than will support the mass of the sleeve seen implying that the sleeve is a gored shape, perhaps pieced.

The body linen hanging out the sleeve is loose, likely not cuffed at the wrist. It is hard to tell if the body linen is actually longer than the sleeve, is pulled through a slit in the cuff, or is merely pulled out the bottom of the sleeve cuff, and secured to a body linen cuff too. It shows in rumpled masses in the openings of the sleeve along the front of the arm. This indicates a large volume pleated down to fit inside the gown sleeve at the shoulder.

Titian, 1510-1512, *Portrait of a Woman, "la schianova"*



In this portrait, we see sleeves much like those from 1450, very long, very full.Here is where the trend of exposed body linen reaches its full expression. The sleeves are hugely voluminous, and open at the front to show the white body linen which is correspondingly massive. The sleeves are lightly pleated into the sleeve head of the bodice, and very likely detachable. The pleating is not robust enough to have the full width you see below, so this would have had to have been pieced, or at least cut in a triangular shape, much like a skirt gore.

The contrasting geometric trims of a few years ago are completely missing on the bodice. Not a pearl to be seen either, not even in the necklaces. The only trim we can see is a frayed self fabric band at the neck.

While she does not have a formalized partlet, she does have a cloth of gold scarf tucked into her neckline. The "bling" to be found is in her accessories; partlet, caul and waist sash. The gown itself remains simple, relying on mass for effect, again recalling the 1450s.

Titian, 1512-1514, *Sacred and Profane Love*

Titian here shows us another variation on the theme. Huge oversleeves, attached *over* the top of the bodice strap, and body linen containing undersleeves attached *under* the shoulder strap. These sleeves are clearly gored based on the way they flare from the pleating at the sleeve head. This bodice is low in front, exposing a large amount of body linen. She does not appear to be wearing another gown under this one, but she might be. It is tempting to assume that the mid bust gowns are only inner layer gowns, but that is a big assumption based on modern ideas of modesty. The body linen here has a center front opening and a tightly pleated and controlled neckline, with a touch of gold. A similar bit of gold appears on the bodice neckline in two thin lines. A fitted belt finishes off the waistline that looks to be roughly natural, possibly a bit higher. The undersleeve, while unornamented, carries a great deal of detail due to pleating and

seaming. Like la schianova, the skirt is casually pleated. While there is plenty of volume, there is no effort to pad out or stiffen the gown skirt at the waistline. This gown is likely side laced.

Palma Vecchio, 1514-1515, *Woman in a Blue Dress*

While gold and pearls are still absent from the vast majority of images, fabric manipulation such as pleating, fraying, fringing, shirring, pintucking and smocking have exploded in popularity to make "simple" gowns anything but simple. Here we see a blue oversleeve ornamented with a ribbon, hanging open from the top over a large green puff of an upper sleeve, and a caramel brown lower sleeve, pleated and banded with a pinked and frayed cuff. A new type of bodice has arrived, the front tied gown. This style is the direct ancestor of the Venetian V front ladder laced gown of the future. Her body linen shows at the front, thickly gathered. The ruffle at the top is attached as it is far too thin to represent the mass of fabric below it. The ruffle edge is not only unhemmed, it is deliberately frayed out like the bodice trim for a soft and textured finish. She has an almost invisible shawl or scarf tucked into her neckline.

Titian, 1515, *La Violante*

Five years into the decade, and we see the large oversleeves left off, with elaborate particolor sleeves embellished with applied bands of pintucking exposed. Pintucking can be done on the straight of grain, then cut into strips, turned sideways then mounted to a skirt or sleeve. Both lower sleeves are bronze, while the uppers are color changed front to back. Her upper sleeves appear to be wadded full of linen. In an interesting detail, you can see inside the bronze section of the sleeve. It is lined in dark green and bound in black, and is cut away from the shoulder to expose more of the linen and the linings. There are no visible ties. The sleeves and body linen are full enough that they obscure the bodice straps. She has no visible partlet.

Body linen has reached massive proportions and importance in the look. This set has a very full edge drawn up into a ruffle, which is then edged in gold.

The low bodice has wrinkles in it, indicating that while it might be stiffened, it is not rigid. The skirt shows fine scale and slightly uneven pleating or gathering. I lean towards gathering as the scale is so fine.

Titian, Woman at Her Mirror, 1515

In this decade, the question of What Lies Beneath gets fuzzy around the edges. To look at the first two gowns, one might think the bodices to be supportive on their own. The easily discernible layers of body linen, inner and outer begin to shift. In contrast to earlier, and later decades, the layers of inner and outer become interchangeable, mix and match, modular, in a sense. A lady might be wearing a full gown under the gown you see, and good luck proving it The gown style shown here, a deep midbust scoop neck could be just for private wear. Or it could be a petticoat layer, helping support the bosom and providing body and volume to the skirts. Or it could be both, depending on the day and the weather. This gown might have large sleeves to it that she just isn't wearing yet. This body linen is made to display, made up in a fine fabric, finely pleated, either finely smocked, knife or needle pleated. It is massive in volume, delicate in material. The neckline itself may be ornamented with pleatwork. It should be noted that body linen in the actual city of Venice, in contrast to the provinces on the mainland, is almost always a white on white embellishment situation in body linen.

Note the center front opening of the bodice. It has body, but it is not rigidly boned, and appears to be closed by hook and eye. There is no modesty placket under the lacing, and the body linen can be seen underneath. The opening continues down into the skirt, at least a minimum of 4 inches but likely at least 8.

Palma Vecchio, 1518, *La Bella*

So much for simplicity.

Venetians have managed to make garments that dazzle the eye without a pearl in sight. This is a center front tied bodice that is currently being worn "en deshabille". It appears that she has the dress pulled on over her shoulders, but left completely unfastened. Her body linen seems to be finely gathered, then roughly pleated. This is another example of when more than one set of sleeves is worn at the same time. Note that in this case, all of the sleeves are attached below the shoulder strap, as the strap is just visible at the top of the pile of sleeves.

From the outside in, there is a pair of red silk "angel wings", the relative smallness of the pleats combined with the fullness of the sleeves indicates another gored sleeve. The next layer down is a very large royal blue upper puffed sleeve. It appears to not be attached to either the red angel wings, or the red and white inner sleeves. It is gathered down to and lined with a shorter length of fabric to give the outer fabric the desired puff. Then we get to the confusing part. Is her body so massive she can line the inside of her lower sleeves AND still pull that much out for display? Or is she wearing another body linen layer cut much slimmer and simpler under all of this so the big poofy one can be displayed?

Then we finally have the inner/ fore sleeves, which are pieced together out of red and white. The forearm of the sleeves was pintucked on the straight of the grain, then turned 45 degrees, in order to make diamond shapes without having to pintuck on the bias. I have tried pitucking both on the straight of grain and the bias, and the bias is a certifiable nightmare. The process of turning the fabric does waste some, but that does not seem to be a concern here. The stiff edges on those tucks brings to mind a whip stitch method of making the pleats, rather than a running stitch. At the end, the wrist section shows fabric cut into strips and floated over a gathered or otherwise padded base. The very end of the cuff is pieced, banded, then frayed.

A Note Particular to the Fashions of 1519-1529

What Lies Beneath?

All or nothing and everything in between.

As the Teens turned into the 20s the sheer variety of garments worn, and the combinations thereof, get a little dizzying. In the past, a clear three layer (body linen, gown, overgown) system usually prevailed. In the late teens, that system broke down as more and more and more was added. Women who look to be wearing two garments can be wearing 5 at once.

There are two possible viewpoints to look at this problem from. One, it is possible that under layers such as the body linen and first layer gown suddenly became so plain and small that no one would wear them by themselves, requiring an outer garment to have any kind of fashion at all, much like the beige and boring underwear we have today. We don't want anyone to see our cotton undies, right?

The other solution is that they just wore complete public ready gowns over the top of each other anyway, and just switched things around as it worked out for what they needed.

A third option is that not only did some garments become undergarments only, but outer layers were worn as inner layers at the same time.

Venetians have a long running tradition of enjoying the results of " sprezzatura". In 1528, in *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione, published in Venice, defined sprezzatura as " a certain nonchalance, so as to c conceal all art,and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought". This skill was considered vital for the member of any of the courts on the peninsula. As this translates to clothing, the concept is translated into making the impossible work via whatever method of hidden ropes and pulleys you need to pull it off.

We modern courtiers would be well advised to apply the same attitude to our work. To be right, it needs to look natural and effortless upon the body.

Take what you see in any Venetian painting from the 1520s with a grain of salt. In practice, think very carefully about what would need to happen on *your body* to get the final silhouette right. Make the layers you need for your own goals. Do not think that if you can't make an outfit with all the layers that you " should " have, you shouldn't bother. We don't actually know What Lies Beneath, because they only showed us what they *wanted* us to see.

1520-1530

Palma Vecchio, 1520

Three Sisters,

This image is remarkable because it shows you several different variations and styles in the same portrait.

Starting from right to left, you see the sister in a rust colored gown from the side, and that view allows you to see how high the back of the bodice is. It is in line with the bodice strap as it comes over the shoulder, rather high. The next thing to note about this gown is the giant pumpkin sleeves, a new shape, which are tied in several places with a black cord and come down below the elbow. There isn't enough pleating in the tops of those sleeves to be a flat panel. The panels must get thinner at the top then open out. The cuff is fitted softly fitted and seems to be made of a densely pleated or gathered length of fabric. It isn't visible at this angle, but it certainly appears that the upper and lower sleeves are joined, rather than the upper floating loose.

Moving to the middle sister, we see big differences. The neckline of her gown has always been an enigma. Other than this image, I cannot find another neckline with a notch in it. However, in the process of preparing these class materials, I noticed what appears to be a front opening on this center gown that continues down the bodice, disappearing under the sash, exactly like the 1515 Titian With a Mirror. The trim continues across the opening, and up the bodice strap.

The sleeve heads are deeply pleated on this gown, perhaps indicating a flat panel sleeve, merely pleated to fit, top and bottom. These pleats seem to spring upwards from the shoulder, but the sleeve volume is flatter in shape. There is no hint of body linen at the neck or the wrist, so perhaps her sleeves are self supporting, no longer requiring massive amounts

of linen stuffing to hold their shape. This would allow for a much smaller and easier to manage body linen construction. Note that the pleats are narrower at the forearm than shoulder. The forearm section is built out of strapwork, and in the , which are laid out with gaps in between them. Those are then stayed to a network of straps underneath them, which in turn have gaps in between them, allowing tiny amounts of body linen to show. At a glance, the effect is one of pearls on strapwork. It's a lovely way to fake the glimmer of pearls without using any. The wrist section is made of panes of fabric, laid over more of the same fabric, gathered, the ends of which have been fringed or possibly cut on the bias and thickly frayed. It's also important to note that while she does have a gold golor trim on her gown neckline, the rest of her outfit is all one color.

In the third gown, the outer sleeves are pleated over top of the bodice straps. This does not mean they are permanently attached. Presumably, the inner sleeves are attached on the underside. The outer angel wing sleeves are lined in green, and it appears that the inner sleeves are at least partly blue. The oversleeves are much smaller in scale than seen prior, both in length and width. Her high cut bodice has quatrefoil embellishment that looks to be reversed applique, but may also be a slashed overgarment over a solid undergown of a matching neckline. It could also be one gown, merely with a contrasting lining under it, rather than another garment entirely. Here is one of the first instances of making openings in one layer of fabric to deliberately expose a lining layer beneath it, rather than making a hole to pull body linen though.

Licinio, 1524 ***Portrait of a Family Group***

“ The Venetian Sears Family Portrait Studio”

I had to include the whole image because this family could live down the street from any of us. No idealized expressions here. Bored teenagers who just want this to be OVER WITH , bratty little brothers, offended little sisters, a dad who isn't helping and a mom who is considering ending them all.

They are glorious in their humanity.

Beginning with the mother of this sadly unknown family-

Here is evidence of ladder lacing one gown over another garment, likely at least a supportive bodice with an attached petticoat skirt, if not a complete gown all on its own.

The undergarment is of ivory and gold with goldwork embroidery on the front. The neckline is a rounded square and shows all the way around the neck. Her body linen ruffle shows as well, also delicately worked in gold. Her overgown of wine velvet has no front to the bodice. The shoulder straps dead end at the waist. The skirt pleats do rise from the waistline, indicating that they are stayed somehow from behind, possibly using an underskirt for additional support. The sleeves are simple, a large panel about the length of the arm then pleated up to the forearm and shoulder, then squished vertically to occupy half the space and create those lovely folds. They are likely tacked to a supportive lining to keep the folds of the velvet just so. Importantly, the sleeves match the overgown.

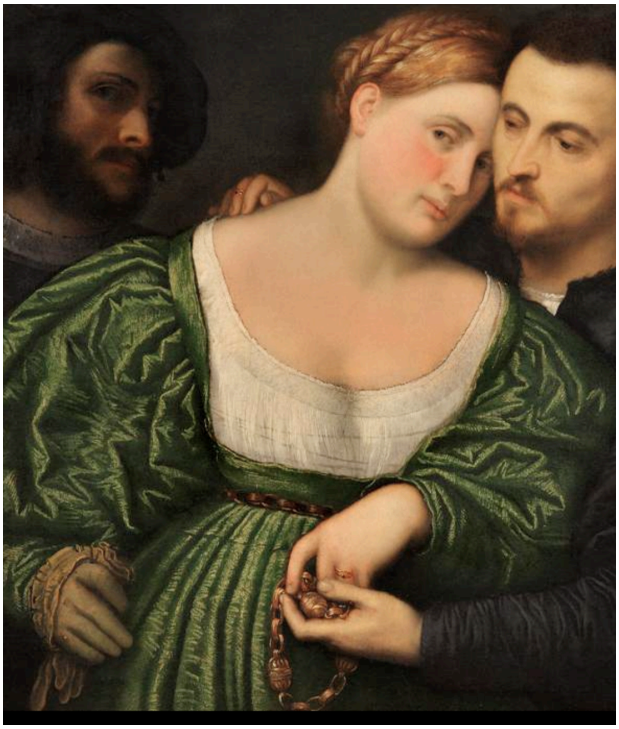
The daughter behind her wears a high necked gown of black with gold. Her neckline is squared off, and her body linen follows the neckline exactly. And look! The return of the pearl necklace!

The daughter standing in front of the carpet covered table almost looks like she is wearing an ivory gown like her mother, but with a vest of embroidered and patchwork fabric with only upper sleeves attached to it. This raises the question of the manner of construction for adults too. Her over bodice is ladder laced with beads threaded along each rung of the ladder. Almost unnoticeable at a glance, she has a strand of pearls sewn to the neckline of her bodice exactly following the curve of the neckline. It may be a necklace sewn to the gown temporarily, or actual pearl decoration on the dress. She also has a gold chain wrapped around her diagonally and around the waist. She also has a pearl necklace like her sister.

The babe in arms wears an outfit of gold and white striped trim on peach fabric over a curved neck first layer of green and ivory. The baby wears a long gold necklace with her outfit rather than pearls. It is entirely possible that her outfit is like her sisters in that the over layer is actually just a vest. I lean towards two complete layers because there is no sign of lacing which a vest would need unless you were to use pins on an infant to keep it in place. Two layers plus a shift seems like much less drama when dressing a toddler. That being said, what makes sense to us may not have meant anything to them.

Licinio, 1525, *Portrait of a Woman With a Book*

The underlayer on this gown marches straight across without a hint of continuing over the shoulders like a bodice. This could be a stomacher, or it could be merely the middle of a complete underlayer with a wider neckline. It could be a stomacher pinned to a complete underlayer. The skirts are massive, springing quickly from the hips, which likely indicate an underskirt of some type. The bodice straps set firmly on the shoulders, though clearly as far out as they can be and still be secure. This gown does have a waistband of about 1-2 inches. It is small enough it hides behind the massive chain girdle. The lower sleeves are completely unornamented. The upper sleeves are massive, but shorter, fullness confined to above the elbow, These are almost certainly tacked to a inner lining to maintain the folds precisely. The sleeves now match the overgown in almost all instances. There are exceptions, but an single color is now the default for Venetian gowns.



Bordone, 1525-30, *Venetian Lovers*

What Lies Beneath? Clearly, all of it.

In the early teens the extremely low cut gowns were cut body and shoulder strap in one, whereas this one clearly is not. Under her right arm, at the bosom you can see that the strap goes under the corner of the bodice front. This makes sense as it would be an utter waste of fabric to attempt to cut a neckline that big all in one. These straps are teetering on the edge of the shoulder, clearly in danger of falling off. The old venetian urge to display shoulders seems to be resurgent in the late 20s. The upper sleeves appear to be very full and still appear to come down past the elbow before the lower fitted sleeve, which now matches the upper sleeve rather than being a contrast.

This is another critical change in the evolution of Venetian fashion- the lower fitted portion of sleeves are slowly extending, and becoming less elaborate, including being the same fabric as the more voluminous upper section. As we saw in the earlier example in Three Sisters, the pleats rise from the shoulder band and appear supported. But the overall sleeve looks light, hollow. The skirt features a detail found only from about 1523 to 1533, a folded and doubled top edge. This has the effect of helping the skirt stand out more while also adding a much needed detail in a solid gown.

The neckline of the incredibly sheer body linen is highly embellished with either white work or elaborate smocking. This image gives us the first hint of corseting or an under bodice of some sort, as evidenced by the visible black lacing that is clearly over something solid white. While earlier gowns may have had this type of support, this is the first unquestionably apparent supportive underbodice. It certainly looks like there is a flat under dress or body linen worn, which then has Something laced over it. To complicate matters even further, the lady in question is wearing another gown with the same neckline as the one we see over the sheer partlet\body linen. If you look carefully, on the painting's right shoulder strap, you will see a thin gleaming, uneven strip of pale gold silk, or even cloth of gold. There isn't one on the other side to match, so we know it isn't trim. It's yet another garment OVER the sheer partlet or body linen.

My current understanding of what I am seeing here, skin out is: t tunic style body linen, a black laced Something over that, a sheer and highly needle worked partlet or body linen, a gold trimmed gown of the same neckline, then the green gown over it all. My best guess is that the incredibly low necklines required tummy and bosom support for some women, so they added it as needed. The interesting part is the choice of black lacing. Had they chosen white, we never would have seen it. But the black shines through making it clear that there is more than meets the eye.

1530-1540

Lotto, 1530, *Portrait of a Woman Holding a Drawing of Lucretia*

Here is an eye searing outlier from the " all one color" trend. While it is clearly pieced, the piecing is the same throughout the garment. Sleeves, bodice and skirt all have the same treatment. So, technically, it's all the same fabric. Note how much smaller the upper sleeve puffs are. The bodice is of the new shape. The bodice now assumes a decidedly cone like shape, much tighter and involving much more structure. We do not know whether the structure is built into the

gown itself, or comes from a separate bodice or "pair of bodies". There are images in Florentine paintings of the 1530s that show empty gowns holding their shape in the bodice and upper sleeve area. Venetian styles may be the same, even though we know that supportive underbodices exist by this time.

The shoulder straps have moved back, now rising directly in front of the arm. These are done in counterchange piecing, so they meet at the center top of the shoulder. The skirt has an amazing example of the double fold top edge. It adds a great deal of richness to an already visually complex garment. The lower sleeves, now rising to mid upper arm have elbow vents and appear to be lined in fur. The body linen has collapsed, becoming the bare minimum to protect the dress from the wearer. The upper sleeves are no longer massive panels of fabric, but gently pleated, inner supported puffs.

Licinio, 1530*, Portrait of a Gentlewoman*

In the finest tradition of Venetian Side Eye, we see a lady wearing a fine example of the new style. The bodice is front laced, clearly stiff but not completely rigid, with a neckline cut to just about the underarm, and sits at or slightly below the natural waist. The angle and origination of the shoulder straps has shifted to very close to the arm, but still cut so that the entire strap is visible as it rises with the body, indicating that it is still in front of the arm. Her fur lined upper sleeves are paned and caught with toggles. No elbow vents are apparent in the image, but they might exist out of frame. Her body linen is heavily embroidered in gold. I believe she has a matching goldworked narrow partlet that is laid over the body linen but under the gown. It has a matching ruffle lining it, so it looks just like the body linen in front. It is important to note that at this time, partlets normally did NOT come up all the way to the neck, nor did they have a collar. They become much more common, but are heavy in structure, bold in pattern.

Licinio, 1532, *Portrait of a Lady*

Note the similar angle of the shoulder straps on this gown with the one just featured. These rise from the front of the arm and continue the angle of the bodice below it, forming a rounded cone shape. Her partlet is of heavy gold work needlelace, likely “punto in aria” literally stitches in air. It follows the line of the straps and shape of the bodice to reinforce the cone idea. Her lower sleeves are beautifully cutworked, and her upper sleeves are not only luxuriously pleated and fluffed, they are embellished with small sheer gold bows. The bows are also on the body and skirt. The skirt is pleated but not precisely. The body linen does show at the neck and wrist, but it is clearly not an extravagant amount. With bodices now this tight, extra bulk in the torso isn't needed or wanted. She wears a waist length strand of pearls and a thin gold girdle belt.

Licinio, 1533, *Portrait of a Woman*

Her partlet is of a solid fabric, heavily embroidered in gold. Look closely at her left shoulder. (Image right) See the angled wrinkle? There's the shoulder strap. It wasn't enough to just push the straps out as far on the shoulders as they could. They began wearing partlets over the straps to hide them to a much greater extent. I am experimenting with how they did this and I’ve come up with one of two ways. One, they could have cut a dog leg in the outer edge of the partlet so it laid on the outside, jumped over past the strap and then dove beneath the bodice. The second is simply sewing the edge of the partlet to the edge of the neckline all the way around. For an ease of use, the sewing method works quite well. You literally just drop the gown over your head and tighten it up. Doing a dogleg method means you've got to get the partlet on and keep it in place while you get the gown on, then fish it out from under the straps, pull it down into place from the

front and back, then pin it. It would be far easier to have a maid baste it in place around the neck and take it off when it needed laundering. It would take less than a half an hour to baste it in place, and simplifies the process immensely, all while giving you the absolute precision of fit Venetians prided themselves on. Again, what makes sense to a modern person might have been unfathomable to one of this timeframe.

Moretto de Brescia, 1535, *Portrait of a Lady*

The new structure that is going into gown bodices is quite apparent here. It looks thick, physically reinforced. It is now quite clear that by the mid 1530s, Venetian gowns were actively shaping the body, and sometimes using the gown itself to do it. The guards around the neck and front opening are of a greenish black velvet, while the sleeves are an olive green.

This gown is one of the absolute earliest to sport the new narrow v front opening bodice, and yet it lacks other more up to date details. This was likely either ladder laced or point to point laced. At some point, the lacing was overpainted, though to what purpose I could not say.

The sleeve head is also very fashion forward, in that it is the smallest we have seen so far, just the bodice strap, and then a small sleeve head consisting of small poofs of fabric that is banded in the same fabric as the bodice. The former sleeve head has moved over to the bodice , and serves to blur any sleeve attachment points, and further extend the line off the shoulders. The lower sleeves are very fitted, a different fabric and are paned, and are a little longer than the arm, which creates wrinkles, and open up the panes, allowing the body linen to show. It is quite interesting how the newest upper sleeve treatment is paired with an older method of slashing and puffing.

The lack of a partlet and clearly visible straps is also earlier in expression, yet the bodice shape is almost ahead of its time. This body shirt has to be cuffed, based on the fit of the sleeves of the gown, and the amount that shows through at the shoulder, versus the wrist. It has a center front opening, which rather than being designed for sex appeal, allows the body linen to be worn with more than one gown.

1540-1550

Licinio, 1540, *Portrait of a Lady*

Illustrated here is the type of gown in the 40s that retained a straight waistline. Those gowns almost universally have looser sleeves, even while the sleeve head follows fashion and continues to shrink to vestigial size. This particular gown has a twisted roll at the shoulder, a quirk common to the 1540s. Body linen begins to increase in size slightly, at least in the sleeves. The bodice remains very tight and unless the linen is very fine, full ruffles may be attached to a slimmer body linen. The wearing of partlets over shoulder straps (even if the partlet is sheer) has become a habit. This trick lets Venetian ladies fake an off the shoulder look, while keeping the actual strap up on the actual shoulder, where it is much easier to wear and move in.

Partlets are now a required garment, but their material and decoration is quite experimental at this stage. This one is exquisitely embroidered in gold. It has a raised collar and small lappets, another quirk of the 40s. The girdle for this gown is small and delicate.

Lorenzo Lotto 1544, *Portrait of Laura de Pola*

Speaking of experimental partlets, this one seems to be bullion work on top of a cloth of gold base. If that partlet is actually gold work, it would explain why she seems to have a second fabric partlet or men's style shirt underneath it, which is unusual. That shirt is also embellished at the neck with either silver lace or silver embroidery. Between possible scratchiness, and the need to protect the gold from skin oils, a layer of linen in between makes perfect sense.

The black embellishment on the entire gown is appliqued by hand. The giveaway is that it changes based on the gown portion it is on. The

sleeves, bodice and skirt all have different patterns that follow the style lines of the gown. The bodice is not front opening, and no hint of side or side back lacing is given. The waistline of this gown has come up slightly on the sides, allowing the center front to drop lower. The more fashion forward pointed waist is almost always seen with slimmer, tighter sleeves that need closures.

Titian, 1545, *Portrait of Lavinia*

But not always! Here we have a beautifully illustrated shoulder seam on the partlet. It is unclear what the fabric of the partlet is. It may be a woven in pattern or embroidery. What is clear is that it is substantial and has developed a lovely standing collar with a small ruffle. Her gown presents a mix of the prevalent styles of the time. While her bodice is pointed, her sleeves keep the looser size of the older gowns. Note that her partlet comes exactly to the points where the front opening of her bodice lands. This becomes almost the rule in the coming decades.

The center front point is down to about 4 inches from the natural waist. This gown may have a center back point as well.

It is ladder laced with a tone on tone cord, and clearly has some kind of structure to keep the whole affair from wrinkling, and to give it that structured cone shaped silhouette.Likely, the body linen has a wrist cuff, as the ruffle is tight, small, and regimented.

Bordone, 1545-1550, *Portrait of a Lady, traditionally of the Fugger Family*

The partlet seems to be made nearly entirely of reticella lace, which would have made it exorbitantly expensive. Also of note, the partlet completely closes in front like a shirt, completely covering the chest. Look closely and you will see the red of the straps showing through the delicate lace. The white showing under her ladder lacing is likely not her body linen. It is perfectly flat and precise.

While the bodice retains the very structured cone look, it looks casual due the extreme sheen of the fabric, which gives the appearance of wrinkles. This is clearly a fashion fabric over something more structural. The Fuggers were German, and the shape of her partlet more closely echos German lines, though in the 40s not much was off limits for a partlet.

The sleeve heads/shoulder rolls are unusual, as the material looks either knotted, braided, or otherwise compacted, and

there are two layers of fabric manipulation, of differing types. There is still plenty of looseness around the elbow, enough for fully flexing the elbow without constriction. The ends of her sleeves actually have a pleated in ruffle. It is common for the 40s to have a small pleated end to the sleeve, which often spreads out over the ruffle of the body linen.
The center front opening clearly extends down the front of the skirt, which falls in luscious and slightly irregular folds from the waist. She is wearing a girdle belt, and it hangs down, but the tail is worn off to the side, not down the center.

Bordone, 1545-1550, *Portrait of Balinda de Medici*

This gown races forward to the 1550s, even though it was painted in 1545.
The waist is lightly pointed and is ornamented by a light girdle, one obviously not gold. The lacing gap in front appears to show her body linen, or perhaps a faked cover for a set of stays. It has very narrow pleats or gathers running vertically behind the lacing. The skirt flows in those slightly irregular pleats that help balance out the extreme precision of the bodice and partlet. The all lace partlet is neatly worn up against very small, very delicate shoulder twists. The sleeves, much slimmer than the opposing style, have been ornamented with a reverse cuff of lace at the wrist, another trait that will become characteristically Venetian. The sleeves have absolutely no sleeve head and they are very closely attached to the bodice straps.

1550-1560

Veronese, 1551, *Portrait of Countess Olivia Porto*

Her partlet appears to be sheer, and ornamented with what look like gold bows. The bodice shape shows the development of the center front point, but remains in the 3-4 inch range, and is closed in front, contrary to trend. (The fact that her hair shows no signs of bleaching implies that this lady may not have cared about what was trendy.) The bodice shows the faintest hint of a bosom, and a touch of wrinkling on the body left, which would be in keeping with a softly boned, or quilted underbodice, rather than a reeded or “cardboard” style of corset. Due to the presence of the over layer, the interaction of the sleeves, bodice straps and partlet cannot really be determined, other than to say that they must be slim, and any embellishment at the shoulder small in scale. The gown skirt has a casual gathered to the bodice look. The fabric itself might be shot red and gold. There are spots of shimmer all over the garment. The skirt hits exactly at the floor.

Her overcoat is a study in magnificence, with couched and embroidered gold decorations on the exterior of the silk, all the way around and lined in fur. There do not appear to be any closures on the coat. It has the spreading collar commonly seen in men's clothing of the era. Note the very full cut of the coat. It expands rapidly into a wide triangle, calling to mind Turkish caftans. There is an interesting bit at the body outermost shoulder point. On both sides, there appears to be a pleat at the shoulder seam in the sleeve, but it is not clear if this is a pleat adding fullness to the sleeve, or if it is adding width to the back of the coat. The sleeve head returns in the tops, so it would be logical to assign the pleating to be necessary to get the sleeve of the coat over a puffed sleeve head.

Her daughter wears accessories almost exactly like her mother - a gold caul, gold chain necklaces, and a girdle. Of interest is the gold trim on her dress. The position at the hem of the dress is " standard", but look at the matching stripe of gold on her sleeve. It continues all the way down to the wrist, encircles the wrist, and comes back up her arm on the underside. That, not being a typical trim placement in Venice, suggests that the gown may have been recut and altered to fit her. The trim would be applied over the seams of a two part sleeve, and elongated by the gold at the cuff. Also, note the deep vertical seams under her arm. This looks like a gusset, added for fit.

Her body linen shows only in a thin white line at the wrist, and a few points of needle lace at the neck. The bodice strap is ornamented with pearls and gold, which continue across the front of the bodice.

Her cuff even has a small line of lace at the cuff.

Licinio, 1550-1555, *Portrait of a Woman*

The most striking thing about this gown is the deep narrow v front, and the posture the gown creates. This is a very upright, yet natural body position. The girdle reveals the waistline, which shows no sign of being lifted on the side to make the point longer. Of note is the slight concavity to the front line. The bottom point of the bodice flares outward over the abdomen, making it easier to wear. The point is not that extreme at all. The narrowness of the opening provides all the drama it needs. This gown is stunning in its simplicity. The shoulder straps are visible, very thin, unornamented and hug the arm. Her partlet is quite sheer and utterly simple. The sleeves have slashed heads, with small amounts of white showing both through those slashes and the boundary between the sleeve and strap. Those are likely at least partly faked. Her body linen shows delicate points of lace at the

neckline, yet does not show at all at the wrist. A cuff of needlelace has been applied to the wrist, without any backing fabric, letting the lace shine against the black.

Titian, 1557, *Girl with a Basket of Fruit*

In this gown, the linen showing at the shoulder may be real, as the wrist shows a full and organized cuff trimmed in lace. Notably linen shows at the slashed upper sleeve, but not between the shoulder strap and the sleeve head. This has implications for gowns with the tiny poof of linen between the shoulder strap and the sleeve. If the sleeves are sewn directly onto the strap, then any linen that DID show there would be faked. It is an educated guess to say that if the body linen is being used here, the sleeves taper in a way that may be much fuller at the top, but considerably slimmer by the time it gets to the wrist. The cuffs are definitely an added ruffle. There may be hook and eye closures at the wrist on the body linen, or the gown sleeves themselves may hold it in place. Of special note, we have a partlet missing or worn en dishabille. This one has a very "crunchy" texture, equivalent to an organza in modern weaves. The back view allows us to see a Very Venetian Thing; The center back bodice point. It does not show up 100% of the time in the few rear views we have of this time frame. However it may be safely assumed that a "normal" Venetian gown of this decade, all the way out to the end of the period of study , has a back point and center front point. The sleeve heads appear to be slashed and self-bound. There is a very fine line of slightly lighter color around each slash. The sleeves are otherwise undecorated. This may be to allow the fabric itself to do the talking. Of note is how short the sleeves look overall. This is likely due to the raised arm posing, but the shoulder strap is falling off the shoulder in this decade, which physically shortens the sleeve, making the arm look shorter. The skirt itself is very unusual, with gored panels falling in elegant, wide, padded box pleats.

Vecellio, 1590, *Dress of Venetian women 1550*

This drawing is part of the collection of woodcuts made at the end of the century and is dated by the author to be "dress at 1550"The biggest evidence that the drawing in question represents a 1550s gown of some type is the upright and slightly concave front. The bodice straps are an unknown in this image. Posing my hide them, or perhaps they are hidden by the partlet as in the 40s. The partlet has the right shape for the 50s, with a small collar at the back of the neck. The necklace worn outside that collar also helps prop up the neck ruffle. Popping your collar, 1550s style. Also important to

note: Venetian partlets almost never actually cover the entire bosom. They usually leave the strip from the chin down to the gown bodice uncovered. There does not appear to be a stand for the collar. The ruffles seem to be bound directly to the neckline as is common in Venetian partlets of the time. It is decorated with flowers that may be anything from appliques of cloth of gold, embroidery, beading, or even woven in pattern. Of special interest are the white triangles on the bodice neckline. That could be appliqued lace. It could be fabric tabs. Her skirt is clearly longer than a natural body, revealing the presence of chopines under a skirt that doesn't quite hit the ground. Note that the gown hemline is shown as being dagged or pinked, though perhaps a shaped facing is what is shown. The sleeves are simple, a band of piping or cord at the seam, with panes curving over fluffed line to the shoulder. They do flaunt a flipped back cuff of needle or bobbin lace at the wrist. It has been depicted as solid, which may be to indicate that there is a solid linen under the lace, or it could just be artistic convention for contrast. The gown skirt is attached to a very deep v in small gathers. This gown does have the lifted hip line for extra drama.

1560-1570

Veronese, 1559-1560, Portrait of a Woman Holding Gloves

There is a time and a place for simplicity, and then there are days you need everything. This gown was made for such a day.

The bodice is strapped down over what looks to be a set of gold brocade stays. The even line above the outer bodice all the way across plus the apparent thinness of the bodice itself indicates strongly that we are looking at a corset worn under this gown, rather than a stomacher pinned behind the laces. Along the upper edge, a tiny row of needle lace peeks out. A very similar pattern edges the sleeve end at the wrist. Note the additional layer of points in the wrist ruffle there at the wrist that are gold, rather than white. This gown has a deep point, with a tabbed waistline, shoulder straps and wrist edges. The wrists have tiny tabs set with a pearl in addition to the lace ruffles. The shoulders and waistline have embroidered shell shapes attached. Her skirt is lightly pleated as the skirt panels are gored to fit almost smoothly over an underskirt. The hip is raised and padding might be present under the lifted area to help the

silhouette.After a decade with larger and softer sleeve heads, we see another sleeve without a separate top section. In its place on the now off the shoulder strap are knots of gold cord, shell tabs and small faked puffs of white. The partlet has it all. Embroidery, 3D elements, lace. Truly the embodiment of "If some is good, more is better." At this point, I believe the shoulder straps are laced or pinned to the partlet to keep them up, and the partlet sewn to the body linen to keep it in place.

Titian, 1561, *Portrait of a Lady in White*

At this point, it would seem that venetians are looking to reduce bulk in all layers, including body linen. It would make sense that for ease of wearing alone, the less you are strapping down again the skin, the more comfortable it will be. It is not clear from this painting, but the fabric showing in the center opening could be her body linen. It could also be a stomacher. It could even be a corset. This lady is slightly built, quite dainty. However, in wearing, lacing directly over a pleated linen shift does not give you that flat and perfectly smooth look. There is obviously some form of boning on either side of the opening. However, that does not preclude the presence of a "hold it all together" underbodice. Note that the point now extends down to the pubic area,at least 6-8 inches. This alone would necessitate some reinforcement of the bodice opening to avoid shifting and gapping.

Of interest is the waistline, and center front of her gown. Rather than a standard girdle, her waistline is decorated by what look like all gold buttons or studs. They continue down the front of the skirt, holding two finished edges together. This is one of the few gowns we see in Venice with a center front opening. Note as well the random attachment of the skirts to the bodice. The skirt looks to be heavily gored, rather than a flat panel gather or pleat. There isn't that much fabric at the waist, and what is there isn't attached evenly.

The shoulder strap has been embellished with a row of tiny puffs.

At the top of the sleeve, there is a small paned upper sleeve section that looks to be pleated in to fit, rather than cut in a smooth curve. Beneath that, there is a twisted cord laid down, held at intervals by the same gold flower heads as decorate the skirt and waistline. Under that is a band of needle or bobbin lace. This particular pattern of lace looks very modern, a boon for anyone wanting to make a replica of this gown. The end of the sleeve is covered by the bracelet, so any closures there are hidden. A tiny and even row of ruffles finishes off the wrist. Those could be attached to the body linen but also might be separate ruffs removed when they need laundering as well.

Parrasio Michelin, Portrait of a Woman, 1565

This image is included for its look at the Venetian overgarment in vogue at this time. The coat she wears is cut in a triangular fashion from the shoulder . Note the full in the body cut, the flare of which begins at the top of the shoulder. However, the overall coat is not very wide at the bottom, indicating a narrower skirt. The coat appears to have large buttons all the way down the front, recalling Turkish kaftans. The closures line up on the other side of the opening. The sleeves of the coat fit snugly, but not tightly over the gown sleeves. It carries a puffed and paned upper sleeve that is ornamented with pearls. The sleeves are then banded directly below the paned areas, leaving most of the underlying gown sleeve exposed.

The coat collar is high, reaching to the ears in back. The sleeves of her gown fit tightly, indicating that the body linen underneath is slim. This means that the neat and tidy ruffle at her wrist is attached, rather than integral.

She does not wear a partlet with a high collar on it. It is unclear just what kind of a partlet she is wearing, if any at all.

Titian, 1565, Portrait of Lavinia

This gown is of green velvet, shallowly box pleated from an extremely deep v waistline, the effect of which is helped by a lift at the hip. The skirt remains slim at the waistline. What looks like wrinkling of a flat white piece of fabric filling the gap in front may be shadows of a boned undergarment telegraphing through the fabric itself. Her sleeves are tight, possibly cut in two pieces, trimmed heavily in gold along seam lines. The deep v is trimmed in doubled lines of gold as well. Note that the bottom of the v is actually finished off by the skirt panels, not the bodice. This becomes very common in the 1570s as the laced opening expands in width. The back of the sleeve shows a line of gold round buttons next to a line of gold trim on the backside of the arm, possibly covering a seam. Her body linen is extremely tight to the body, implying that the neat wrist ruffles are attached to a cuff. She wears matching gold bracelets. Her partlet hardly shows, but it has a standing collar trimmed in lace.

Fasolo, The Banquet, 1565

This lady wears more pearls in her har than she does around her neck! Apart from that extravagance, this is a delicate and reserved gown. Her partlet is sheer, very plain, with a short standing collar in the back. In an unusual case, her body linen is embroidered in diagonal lines of black embroidery that show across the narrow laced opening. The neckline and cuffs of her body linen flaunt black and white bobbin lace. This is an important development, as the city of Venice has resisted polychrome and non white embroidery, preferring white in embroidery and lacemaking. Color seems to have crept into lace first in Venice proper, while the provinces enjoyed contrasting color thread embroidery on body linen since approximately 1500. It is never " common", but it seems to have at least become acceptable

The bodice opening is a narrow v, ladder laced, and shows obviously reinforced edges along the opening. The gown of grey is simple, with little visible trim, other than the laces and a thin line of gold along the lacing edges. There is no sleeve head to this gown at all, merely a row of exceedingly small white puffs on the shoulder strap.

1570-1580

Fasolo, 1570, *Portrait of a Woman*

And now, for something different. The wide open front of this gown is laced over a flat expanse of white. The small ruffle of the body linen can clearly be seen behind this flat fabric, behind the partlet that is worn in front of the body linen. This implies a corset under the gown, as the gown bodice itself does not seem to be reinforced. The bodice is of the new shape, a wider and shorter opening with a slight slant outwards to the body as it reaches the waist. Note the line of embroidery under the arm. It does not fall straight towards the waist but veers forward slightly, creating another triangle on the side fronts of the bodice. This smaller triangle remains important to the end of the century.

This is a rare example of a later decade open skirted gown. This feature, in combination with the extremely wide bodice opening makes it highly unusual in Venetian gown images. There are plenty of gowns with VERY wide openings where the skirt finishes the bottom side of the opening. That was a relatively common feature in the 20s. But the same with a split skirt? Rare.

The bottom of the open front is completely finished off by skirt panels, but those panels do meet in the center. They could be hook and eyed or tied together that point. Cleverly, the embroidery panels are the same width as the skirt opening is, making the flat front edges make sense and hang beautifully. The actual join is hidden by the gold girdle. The open edges of the skirt have large toggles at intervals so the skirt could be closed if desired. Once past the flat joining sections, the skirt attaches to the waistline in soft pleats. The deeper bronze underskirt is unornamented other than a ribbed texture.

The shoulder strap is paned and puffed, in addition to the sleeve head, though they are both very small and tidy. The sleeves are otherwise super snug, clearly of a curved cut, allowing for no room for puffy body linen. This strongly implies that the puffs at the sleeve head, in addition to the strap, are faked.

Her partlet is very sheer, unornamented other than by rows of metallic gold tissue, caught by very large pearls at intervals. Note the collar on the partlet. It now rises in an arc behind her neck. The

collar may be pieced, or have wire supports, or both. The entire neckline opening of the partlet looks to be edged with a very small ruffle.

Note the partlet has crept inwards from the open edges of the bodice. It makes more sense that the partlet is attached to the body linen below the ruffles, which would then be worn under the corset.

Veronese, 1570, *Portrait of Gentlewoman and Gentleman*

This gown has bodice straps set so wide and narrow that the sleeve heads begin below the ball joint of the shoulder. The sleeve head has strapwork that is stuffed with crimped white linen. With how tight the sleeves are, the body linen couldn't be full enough to create puffs that full without binding uncomfortably. Those are certainly faked. Again, the fronts of the partlet are creeping inward from the bodice opening edges, even though the opening on this gown is not that wide. The sleeves are very snug, but notably are not visibly cut in a curved manner. Notice that the point at the front of the waist is very clear and not hidden by a girdle belt. The fabric at the front V of the gown seems to be of a different fabric, but isn't the white of an undergown. It may be a heavily embroidered stomacher, or, even the front of an embellished corset. I haven't been able to find a copy of this portrait that is clear enough to tell if this is pinned or stitched into place over the laces or not.

Veronese, 1571, *Madonna with the Family Coccina*

Her partlet is mostly sheer,with a small standing collar. The most obvious decoration is a row of pearls set in gold embroidery along the neckline edges, inside of the collar, and down the shoulder seam. It is important to note that her partlet edges are creeping inward towards the center of her chest, rather than sitting exactly in line with the bodice opening. This may have begun to counter the loss of coverage as the openings grew wider and wider, but eventually becomes a stylistic feature. The bodice shows

stitching that may indicate stiffening channels along the front and diagonally along the side. Even if no stiffening is encased in them, the stitching itself will add rigidity, much like quilting. Note the slight downward slant in the neckline from the arm towards the bust. The slant combined with the shorter point length begin to produce a characteristic parallelogram shape to the side front of the bodice.

The red velvet shows the piecing of the sleeves beautifully. The sleeves are at least in 4 pieces. This may be for additional seams to add rigidity and help keep the sleeve heads up high on the arm. in this case, the sleeve head is well developed, and paned rather than slashed. From this angle, the shoulder strap on the bodice is set so far back you cannot see it at all in front of her arm. It appears a few inches up in the form of a small twisted and paned roll. Her gown has a much fuller skirt than those seen in the 1560s and it carries a graceful train. The
skirt springs from the waistline, possibly with padded pleats or with the help of an underskirt with padding at the hips.

Studio of Jacopo Tintoretto, 1570s, *Portrait of a Young Lady in a Green Dress*

Here we have a gown that is a mix of newer and older elements. The partlet is heavily embroidered, giving it a 3 dimensional effect, is edged in gold needle lace, has no collar, and joins at the bodice edges, an earlier style. This gown has a higher shoulder arrangement than many other gowns, leaving room for a lovely sleeve head. Yet the shoulder straps are hidden. The sleeve head has slashed panes that are finished with gold threads, possibly beading or passementrie. The bottom of the sleeve head is further embellished with a row of tabs of the same fabric that edges the neckline of the bodice., and are also edged in gold stitching.

The embellishment and flat line of the white seems to be either an extremely robust stomacher or an embellished corset of swirling green fabric. The gown itself is embellished at the neck with lace, and carries the newer, wider front ladder laced style. There is a slight rise at the waist on the sides. This allows the front bodice point to look longer and more dramatic than it is as it physically shortens me While this gown shares the parallelogram side front and slanted posture, it does not have the lines of stitching or trim that the other gowns with that bodice shape due. My conjecture is that the higher strap provides a larger surface to attach the sleeve to, whereas the gowns that are completely off the shoulder may need a deliberate structure under the arm. The lines of trim and stitching may be there to support that point under the arm, which helps keep the sleeve in place.

Veronese, 1575, *Portrait of a Venetian Woman*

This gown has a very wide opening that is filled in with the skirt at the bottom. While it slants forward strongly, the upper edge of the bodice is not cut at a downward angle. Here there is a hint of the peascod body shape creeping in from menswear.

It does not have the side reinforcement, even though the sleeve head begins so far down the arm the actual sleeve looks short and not quite attached to her shoulder. Rather than a girdle, her gown waistline is embellished with a row of bows that float above the very thickly gathered skirt.

Her partlet is plain, and lacks a standing collar. There are bows along the shoulder strap, but they are of a different material than that of the waistline bows. Along with a tidy wrist ruffle, her sleeve ends have a simple set of tabs at the wrist. Notably, in addition to lacking a girdle, she wears no jewelry of any kind. There is a chance this could be a widow.

1580-1590

Workshop of Tintoretto, 1580, *Portrait of Morosina Morosini*

For the first time, the partlet closes at the center front neckline as a stylistic effect. The v it forms echoes the v of the waistline. The closed v partlet is far more common in closed front gowns than open from now on. In open fronted gowns, the partlet almost always follows in line from the point of the waist all the way up to the partlet collar.

This lady, soon to become the Dogaressa is dressed simply in burgundy velvet. There is a small paned decoration on the edge of the shoulder strap, with loops too loosely painted to identify immediately below it on the sleeve. The most striking feature is the shape of the bodice. The body assumes a leaning posture, possibly helped by padding, but possibly merely as is. If you were to draw a front opening on this gown, It would look exactly like an open fronted gown, other than the partlet. Adding to the leaning look is a downward curve to the neckline.

There is a small row of pleats touching the wrist frills, adding a small and precise detail.

Montemezzano, 1580, *Portrait of a Lady, Rita Bellesi*

In this image we see a new development, shoulder ruffs. Often made of figure 8 pleated lace, these embellishments often took the place of a sleeve head. Due to the upright nature, and the placement at the juncture of the shoulder strap and the top of the sleeve, they tend to widen the shoulder line to fall along the same diagonal as the waist. They add more height (effective length) to the v shape set up by the bodice. The bodice on this gown has a definite hip lift in the back, and moderate peascodding in the front. There is a line of trim from the center front point that draws the eye up from the abdomen all the way to the outer edge of the shoulder. The peascod abdomen only adds to the backward leaning stance that began to develop in the 1570s. The arm looks a little disconnected and quite short as is often the case with sleeves with this set up. If you were to draw a line from wrist to shoulder to bodice point to shoulder to wrist again, you'd have an "m". The shape of the hair frame on her head actively echoes this M shape.

The fabric of her gown is painted quite loosely, more suggested than depicted. The trim looks like a metallic silver tape that overlaps itself at the junction of the diagonal line and neckline edge. Her wrists are ornamented with pointed needle lace. Her partlet appears to be made completely of the same. The neck ruff is a little different. It combines two different trends, one, high curved and wired, the other softer and pleated with lace edging. All of the lace on her partlet and ruff is incredibly fine, which suggests bobbin lace rather than punto in aria.

Pozzoserrato, 1580, A Musical Evening

Here, the neckline edge of the partlet draws a straight line all the way from a super low bodice point all the way to the edge of her ruff. She also has large but looseand organic rather than organized or pleated shoulder ruffs that are lace of some sort, potentially needle lace. (I call them explosion ruffs as they look like fireworks to me.)

The point of her V front gown is so very deep that it looks like she wouldn't be able to close her legs fully while seated. That diagonal line is further clarified with a line of trim along the bodice lacing edge. She has spirals of trim running down her sleeves and a lace cuff applied to the wrist of the sleeve. The sleeve matches the trim on the bodice, and the ladder lacing seems to be white, which keeps the eye from being distracted from the diagonal. There is a definite hip lift to the back of this gown, and the painter has kindly shown her dancing, so that we may see the presence of an underskirt.

Robusti, 1583, Portrait of a Woman in White

Here we see yet a different arrangement of shoulder ruffs and standing ruff. This one surrounds her head and arches slightly rather than being a flat plane behind the head The shoulder ruff is in the figure 8 style on wide needle lace. The arch of the ruff combined with the wide line of the shoulder ruff give the impression that her entire upper body is encased in an arch of lace. There is a definite downward curve to the neckline edge that is softening up the hard line " v" . The peascod bodice point is beginning to shorten and soften up again, and its shape is echoed in the necklaces she is wearing and the front embellished edge of her partlet. The partlet is not only embellished in gold and pearls, but is further ornamented by needle lace points along the neckline edges. The sleeves are loose enough for movement,and oddly enough, while this gown looks absolutely frenetic in design, it gives a definite impression of wearability.

1590-1600

Veronese, 1590s, *Portrait of a Venetian Lady*

In a radical departure from several decades of long and strongly geometric bodice points, this gown clearly shows the triumph of the curved line over straight. The bodice, while still slightly peascod in shape, has shortened and rounded its point considerably, and the neckline continues to curve and lower. The v shape partlet remains, but rather than shoulder ruffs and wiring, this gown sports a small crescent shaped collar at the back of the neckover which has been added a veil. It appears to have been sewn or pinned to the collar, forming a small lace hood. This partlet does not appear to be lined and clearly extends into the hollow of the front of the arm. The sleeves are full enough that there is evidence of easing of the sleeve into the shoulder strap. The sleeves are of a two part curved seam make. Note that there is no sleeve head of any kind and no other detail is added to the connection. The shoulder

straps are very thin and ornamented with a thin twist of the fabric. That twist is the entirety of the ornament to this gown we can see. The very simplicity finally reveals why there is often a line of trim from bodice point to underarm. There is a diagonal seam line right across the front. This gown kept the geometric construction, but played up the curvilinear aspects of the bodice. The skirt is not immensely full at the waist, but springs from the moderate hip lift quite strongly, suggesting some sort of understructure. The gold chain girdle she wears is almost buried in the casual gathers of the skirt.

Anonymous, 1900, *Venetian Noblewomen*, held by the Duchess Anna Amalia Library

How do you keep sleeves on and body linen up on ones body if the neckline of your gown is completely off the shoulder and cut below the bust?

You sew your very fitted partlet to your body linen. This will keep everything in place. Note how tight the body linen neckline is. To get into the, there must either be a slit in one place that can then be hooked shut, or you do have to do the hokey pokey to wiggle ones ladies into the partlet area. Both options may be historical. Note that the sleeve of the body linen appears to completely separate, and looks attached only to the partlet, not the body panels. This makes sense from a mobility point of view. A sleeve connected to the bodice that far down and that tightly would remove all movement above the forearm. While beauty is pain, it is worth exploring the detached sleeve panel idea for the sake of modern recreations. The sleeve proportion looks very short, because the convention of decorating the top of the sleeve before the arm itself remains, even if that spot is now located 4 inches down the arm.

The gown shown to the right is labeled as being from Verona, which was a Venetian holding, and shares some similarities. It does show the "sleeves just sewn directly to the partlet, with a strapless bodice" look. It has a significant hip lift, and an underskirt with significant bulk to the back of the hips.

Giacomo Franco, 1609, *Dress of Married Women at Home*, From Habiti d'huomeni et donne venetiane, held at Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Library

And here we have the confirmation. This is from just after the turn of the century, but the line of the bodice, cut below the bust, with a short rounded waistline with a partlet supporting the bust remains the same. In this image, it is clear that the sleeves aren't attached at all, but are being sewn directly to the partlet. There may be a hook of some sort at the underarm to protect the underarm of the partlet from undue stress and make sure the design lines stay exactly where they should be. But that rise under the arm may be there to keep the back of the bodice higher and have nothing to do with sleeves.

This editing out of the shoulder straps makes the venetian fantasy of the bare shoulder look a complete reality. Sleeves attached this way would lend amazing amounts of movement to the wearer. The dress shown does not have the padded out rear end, though it does have a significant hip rise in back. The lacing is shown across the body linen, but there may be stays under that, as the line, even with wrinkles from the body linen, is impeccable.

Tintoretto, 1595, *Madonna delle Rose*

Here we see a beautifully proportioned standing collar partlet ornamented only along the neckline with applied lace and pearls. The partlet seems lined and yet is sheer. This likely means it is made of something along the lines of a silk gazar, sheer but very tough. The partlet is attached over the lace and ruffles of the body linen and any stays present. The back of the collar must be wired in some way for support. The edge of the standing collar is edged in the same gold as the partlet neckline.
The top of the sleeve is ornamented with a very small edge of tightly pleated fabric, and the sleeve itself is beaded in flower shapes just below the pleats. There is a clear seam on the front of the sleeve, and the wrist is finished with a slim cuff turned back and held up by matching bracelets. The girdle belt has no trailing center addition. It merely follows the line of the bodice. This gown still carries the diagonal front seam that leads directly back to the center of the underarm.The peascod form is gone, and the front of the bodice from underbust to center point is straight up and down. The diagonal seam is picked out in beading, likely glass pearls. The skirt is deeply pleated and flows over a serious under support of some kind. Following the break line between the horizontal and vertical lines in the skirt, it would appear the under support is at least 6 inches out from the body and continues all the way around, though it does become flatter in the front. Underskirts are assumed, but this may be a hip crescent of some sort added to move the skirts away from the body, where they then drop.

Tintoretto, 1597, *Portrait of a young Venetian Woman*

Here we see a gown in a beautiful modern looking green damask very similar in style to Madonna delle Rose, but without the high standing ruff. Rather than beading, the important seams down the arms and across the bodice are highlighted in silver tape trim. Her partlet has no neckline trim which at first glance gives the impression of toplessness. Her sleeves are ornaments only with two rows of tiny sawtooth cut fabric, edged in more silver. It is easy to see the effect the hip padding has on the gown when seated. The skirt fills the chair she sits in completely. It is not clear if the diagonal line of the front bodice shape is due to her posture in the chair, or if the

bodice itself is cut with more room at the abdomen. Amazingly enough, these shorter waisted gowns, despite the complexity, look much more comfortable than those of the decades immediately prior.

It is my sincere hope that this small introduction will give the reader the encouragement to try making a Venetian gown of their own, or for a friend. Please remember that all learning is a journey, and it is ok to be where you are right now. If in your journeys you find information I clearly do not have, please share with me!

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