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Action men: martial fashions in Florence, 1530-1630

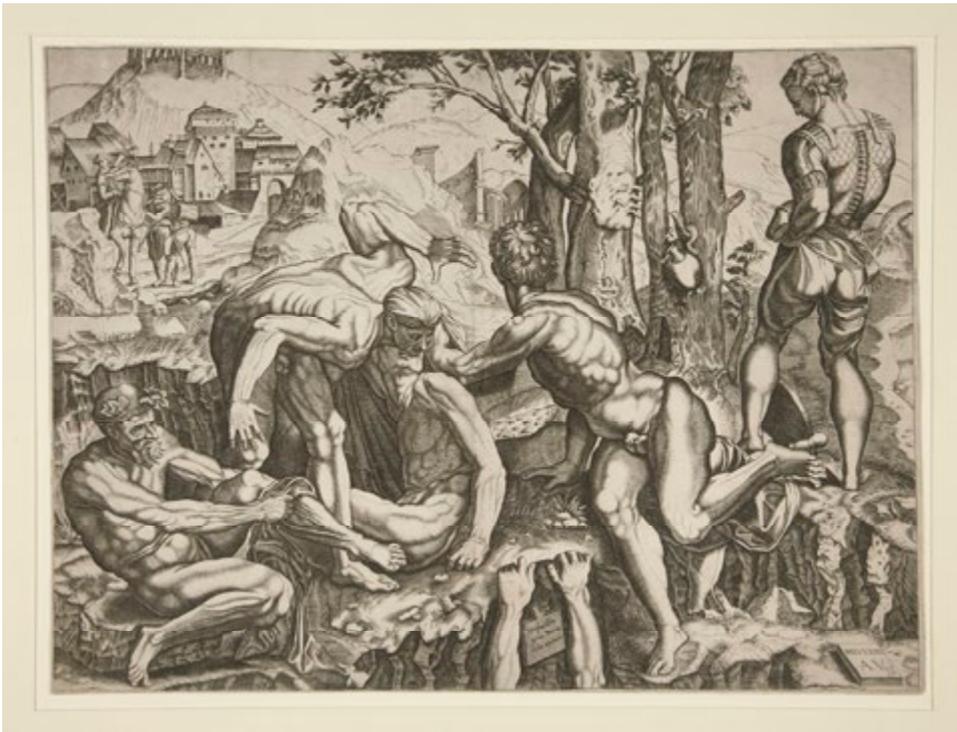
Men's fashion has a long tradition of drawing inspiration from the battlefield. One early example is the quilted pourpoint of the fourteenth century, which was first designed to be worn under chainmail. During the sixteenth century, military styles were reinterpreted for civilian purposes in new ways, part of a growing sense that clothing could convey strength and bravery. The correlations between inner virtues and outward appearances, and specifically the links between bravado and dress, were underlined in the expanding literature on etiquette and gender roles. Numerous cultural and artistic forms, from fresco cycles to festive performances, incorporated representations of warfare and glorified the male body in combat. Prolonged periods of warfare meant that soldiers on and off duty were increasingly prominent, gaining notoriety for their flamboyance and brightly-coloured clothing. Even the appearance of military adversaries offered source material for sartorial innovation. This chapter explores these eclectic influences, which emerged from city streets and taverns as much as from the art forms decorating public and private spaces. It shows how specific types of clothing enhanced male physical presence and power and considers how their appropriation within the fashion system affected their original associations with violence and disruption. These styles coexisted alongside more sober and decorous fashions, such as the predilection for black in male portraiture, receiving more emphasis according to factors such as the social context or age of the wearer.

1. The transformative powers of clothing

Early modern texts underline the analogies between bravery and ostentation. John Florio's Italian-English dictionary *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (1611) differentiates between bravery and courage, translating the word *bravura* as «bravery, swaggering» and *coraggioso* as 'courageous, hardy and stout» (Florio 1611, 67; 123). Although physical strength is implied in both, this suggests courage is a more silent, stoic quality while bravery is showier and performative, dependent to a degree on an audience. The *Vocabolario della Crusca* of 1612 defines the verb *bravare* as «un certo minacciare imperioso e altiero». In the first English translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, published in 1620, the word bravery is used to mean finery, with expressions such as, «imbroydered bodies, tricked and trimmed in such boasting bravery» or the adage that you can load an ass with «the richest braverie» but it will

not make him any wiser (Boccaccio, trans. Florio 1684, 31). This usage appears less frequently in Italian written sources, possibly because *bravo* referred to a particular social group by this period. It is significant, however, that descriptions of *bravi*, usually translated into English as foot soldiers or mercenaries, emphasised their appearance and aggression. The alignment between male heroism and clothing and strong colours is evident in other written sources. In an account of the Milanese celebrations in 1598 of the wedding of Margaret of Austria to Philip III of Spain, Guido Mazenta describes his admiration for the monarch and «*varii, e splendidi colori delle sue virtù heroiche*» (Mazenta 1598, 3). Touching on a similar theme, Gregorio Leti's *La lode della guerra e il biasimo della pace* (1664) observes that when the Amazons changed their style of clothing they became hardier and more warrior-like: «*per l'istinto della loro natura vestivano l'abito della lascivia e viltà femminile, fecero ferma risoluzione di cambiar moda e, non trovando il più abito nobile che quello del guerriero, lo presero e, vestitolo, fecero con questo maraviglie degne dell'eterna memoria*» (Garavaglia 2015, 42-3).

Fig. 1. Agostino Musi, called Veneziano, *Les Grimpeurs (The Climbers)*, after Michelangelo, 1524, engraving, Yale University Art Library, 1969.98.1



It was widely believed that clothing could draw out or enhance latent forms of bravery. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, for example (published in Spain in 1605, first

translated into English by Thomas Shelton in 1612 and into Italian in 1622), alludes to the agency of clothing in the case of a woman who is «all clad in green, so brave and rich that bravery itself was transformed into her» (Cervantes, trans. Shelton, 1740, Vol. III, 209). Michelangelo's much-copied composition for the Battle of Cascina commission, abandoned when he was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II in 1505, brilliantly conveys the literal and metaphorical significance of dressing for battle. The group of soldiers are startled by their adversaries while bathing and reach for their clothing in haste. The figure on the right is seen from behind in the act of fastening his adherent hose to his upper body armour (Fig. 1). Clinging to his buttocks, the garment appears to grow out of his skin, creating a perfect fusion of inner and outer intent, throwing into relief a part of the anatomy that was also showcased by male fashionable dress.

Two sixteenth-century Florentine diaries recall how men consciously altered their clothing and hairstyles to demonstrate their readiness to take up arms and rise against the foe during the siege of 1529-30. This involved cutting their hair short, growing beards and swapping the *cappuccio* – traditionally worn by the Florentine patriciate and wrapped, turban-like around the head with one end hanging down over the shoulder – for hats and berets (Corrazzini 1900, 96). The anonymous addition to Luca Landucci's diary also associates this wartime sartorial turning point with the adoption of slashed breeches, a fashion derived from the clothing of soldiers (Landucci 1883, 371). These accounts suggest that Florentines were transformed into men of action when they were unhampered by long locks and fabric draperies.

As implied by the biblical expression «to gird one's loins», trailing, voluminous clothes were manifestly unsuitable for physical combat. The relationship between bravery and particular clothing colours is less immediately obvious. Discussing the symbolism and properties of the colour red in his *Del Significato de' Colori* (1535), Fulvio Pellegrino Morato explains that:

Aggiunger cosa artificiosa alla Natura è supplire alli difetti di quella, perciò gli timidi Soldati mancandogli il calor naturale, pigliano il color finto Rosso, perche le cose che concorreno à far il color Rosso, hanno forza incentiva & calorifica, piu che quelle che concorreno à far li altri colori, et così aiutano la loro pusillanimità naturale, con l'aiuto delle cose exteriori (Morato 1535, 26-7 and Currie 2019, 122).

The explanation for this was that red was a hot colour with a capacity to draw out inner fire and bring it up to the surface. Although Morato seems disdainful of soldiers who relied on this strategy, its efficacy is not questioned.

2. Flamboyance and Aggressive Masculinity

Whether or not they possessed inner fire, by Morato's time soldiers were well known for their distinctive appearances. While flamboyance was a prerequisite for the standard bearer on the battlefield, it was also a marker of the off-duty soldier carousing in a local hostelry. Soldiers had relative freedom in terms of their behaviour and clothing and came to represent the antithesis of the ideals of decorum and restraint that limited the choices of many Florentine men. Cesare

Vecellio's *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo* (1590 and 1598) includes detailed descriptions of the clothing of on- and off-duty soldiers of different social ranks. Even the foot soldier in combat depicted in a *corsaletto*, or half-armor, wears brightly coloured breeches. These, we are told, are «always rich and beautiful» and sometimes even made of patterned or brocaded silks (Vecellio 1590, 162v). The figure's clothing is designed to reveal his strength and vigour: «il quale Habito mostra dispostezza del corpo: oltre la gagliardia della vita, come si vede in molti Nobili d'Italia, i quali mostrarono tanto valore in quella guerra, che meritamente si deve tener conto d'ogni suo vestigio» (Vecellio 1590, 163r). The off-duty, high-ranking soldier is shown in even more expensive attire including a satin doublet and leather jerkin with gold buttons and velvet breeches. A similar combination of upper body armour, in this case embellished with the cross of the Medici Order of Saint Stephen, and patterned silk breeches mark out the senior members of the Medici troops at the Battle of Bona in Bernardino Poccetti's fresco in the Palazzo Pitti. The scene is one of several designed to commemorate Ferdinando de' Medici's military victories, reprising the themes of the *Salone dei 500* in the Palazzo Vecchio discussed below.

Vecellio's coverage of soldiers concludes with a depiction of a Venetian *bravo*, stating that in previous times these men were called gladiators. The fifteenth-century *bravo* who appears earlier in the volume is a neutral figure, associated with training and skill in swordplay and fighting (Rosenthal and Jones 2008, 120). In contrast, the sixteenth-century *bravo* is characterised as more brutish: «hoggidi bravi, overo sbricchi, i quali per danari servono hor questo, hor quello biastemando, & bravando senza proposito» (Vecellio 1590, 165r). However, according to Vecellio they dress very well, the key components of their clothing being a linen doublet, leather jerkin, short cloak decorated with gold braid, silk breeches and a high velvet hat. Military figures in the volume are often characterised by their panned and slashed breeches with stockings tied above the knee. The widespread fashion for slashing in civilian dress throughout the sixteenth century is thought have derived from the ripped and torn garments of Landsknechts. The arrival of Cosimo I's troop of Swiss Guards in Florence from 1541 onwards would have underlined the link between masculine strength and ostentatious apparel given that they were a highly visible presence in public life, dressed in their bright liveries with plumed hats and panned trunk hose (Arfaïoli, Focarile and Merlo, 2019).

The many campaigns of the Italian Wars (1494-1559) and changing military practices swelled the numbers of foot soldiers and militia men, and among them unwilling conscripts, often poorly paid, and prone to high desertion rates (Mallett 2019, 153-59; 226-27). When their services were no longer needed some joined the retinues of feudal lords or members of the aristocracy, who depended on armed «heavy men» to protect their interests. These men would have been described by many contemporaries as *bravi* and had a reputation for being rough, tough and lawless. Some also embodied an element of glamour, in part due to the type of eye-catching dress outlined by Vecellio. Jonathan Walker has shown that in Venice the term was applied to a range of individuals, from rogue criminals to the employees of noblemen, and the boundaries between their roles were not always distinct (Walker 1998, 85). The growing presence of *bravi* in the second half of the sixteenth

century in public spaces and in representational forms, from *commedia dell'arte* performances to genre paintings, suggests they were a source of both desire and anxiety. In 1583 in Milan legislation was passed against *bravi*, vagabonds, rascals, and cheats «without a salary or profession, who idle about in squares, taverns, and brothels, sometimes asking for alms pretending to be poor soldiers returned from the war» (*Grude et Ordini* 1584, 17-18). The city's concerted efforts to curb the activities of *bravi* were viewed favourably in other parts of Italy. In 1612, for example, a notification from Rome to the Medici court reported that the Spanish Governor of the Duchy of Milan «si mostrava molto rigoroso nelle cose del governo et particolarmente circa l'estirpatione de'bravi, facendone ogni dì carcerare qualcuno, né voler che si porti da nessuno pistole».¹

Parallels can be drawn between the behaviour of *bravi* and their wealthier, titled, male counterparts given that masculine honour was often asserted and maintained through acts of aggression at all social levels. In 1579 in Milan, for example, Cardinal Carlo Borromeo tried to limit reckless, violent acts and flamboyance amongst courtiers during Carnival. The places and practices he urged them to relinquish included hostleries, cards, games, sword fights, brawls, masking, bacchanalian and lascivious activities: «sono introdotte risse, inimicitie, giuochi, balli, comedie, spettacoli conviti, crapule, et ogni sorte di dissolution et offese de Dio» (Annoni 1984, 926-27). For Florentine noblemen in their teens and twenties, disputes and clashes were quickly magnified by the fact that men often acted in groups and their sense of status was enhanced by belonging to different factions or coteries (Trexler 1980, 387-89). These characteristics, and the strong links between youth, visibility, violence and daring, are illustrated in a tragic episode from 1548 involving a group of young Florentine noblemen. A feud exacerbated by their opposing political affiliations came to a head during a game of football, a favourite sport of the Florentine male elite that tended to combine sartorial ostentation with brute force (Currie 2016, 131-35). An argument over a goal led to blows between Francesco Bucherelli, described in contemporary correspondence by Giovanni Maria Segni as a «giovanetto sbarbato e bello» and another youth, Gino Capponi, a favourite of Cosimo de' Medici (Mellini 1820, 109-11). Bucherelli's friends, including Paolo Buonagrazia, «un uomo che si piccava di bravo e di duellista», encouraged him to vindicate his honour but when they broke into Capponi's house at night they encountered more opponents than they had bargained for: ten men including two soldiers and a priest. Bucherelli and two of his supporters attempted to escape but were captured and later hanged, while the fourth, Niccolò degli Alessandri, died fighting off his opponents. Segni was more forgiving of Alessandri than the others, calling him «un uomo valoroso», implying that this act of bravery transformed him into a knightly, heroic figure (Mellini 1820, 110).²

On both sides, these men were armed with a mixture of improvised weapons and swords. Cosimo de' Medici's sumptuary laws of 1562 prohibited men who did not qualify for exemption from wearing knitted silk stockings and hat feathers yet

¹ State Archives of Florence (ASF), *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 4028, fol 380. Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 24448.

² For further details of this episode, see Babcock (1991).

allowed them to carry swords, daggers, spurs and gold, silver or silver-gilt knives (Cantini 1802, Vol. IV, 407).³ The growing prevalence of such weaponry can be traced through household account books, surviving objects, and commentaries on changing court etiquette (Bartels 2019, 188-223). By the early seventeenth century, observers such as Bartolomeo Cenami and Tommaso Rinuccini noted that courtiers were increasingly accustomed to carrying arms on their person (Pellegrini 1901, 123 and Aiazzi 1840, 276). The Venetian author, Lucrezia Marinella highlighted the importance of weaponry when she caricatured the appearance of male bravado in *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men* (1600), describing how «we always see men dressed up like soldiers with weapons at their belts, bearded and menacing, and walking in a way that they think will frighten everyone» (cited and translated by Paulicelli 2014, 143). This underscores the potential for weapons to be worn and displayed in different ways: darkly sheathed under a cloak when they needed to be concealed or clinking and glinting at every move for a public performance of assertiveness.

3. Portraying heroism in court culture

Florentine men's personal experiences of physical aggressions were echoed in the many representations around them of male exemplars engaged in acts of strength and bravery. The aestheticization of combat permeated court life and the military conflicts that took place during the first decades of Medici rule, from the Battles of Montemurlo in 1537 to Lepanto in 1571, were commemorated or re-enacted in the form of propagandistic paintings and performances. Giorgio Vasari and Giovanni Stradano's frescoes for the Palazzo Vecchio celebrated Florentine military triumphs, including the depiction of the Battle of Marciano (1554) in the *Salone dei 500* portraying combatants in a mixture of antique-style armour and sixteenth-century clothing. The most striking elements of their armour include muscle cuirasses with lappets influenced by classical sculpture, while other figures wear garments typical of the clothing of Landsknechts, including codpieces and *pluderhosen*. Patricia Lee Rubin notes that Vasari was preoccupied with achieving accuracy in details of dress elsewhere in his history paintings in the Palazzo Vecchio (Rubin 1995, 205). However, in this scene dress is primarily a tool to show off the idealised, heroic body to best effect. The theme of warfare was also incorporated into the painted ephemera for court festivities as, for example, in the series of triumphal arches created to celebrate Ferdinando de' Medici's wedding to Christine of Lorraine in 1589. Although the arches do not survive, preparatory drawings and sketches show they included scenes elevating the military history of the House of Lorraine-Guise (Saslow 1996, 192-93).

In addition, court life regularly offered opportunities to perform feats of bravery in staged battles, such as jousts, usually featuring lavish costumes or liveries. The ideal of beautiful combat is highlighted in a description of a joust for Francesco de' Medici and Bianca Cappello's wedding celebrations in 1579:

³ «...spada pugnale, cintura di spada, sproni, & coltelli dorati, & d'oro, & d'argento, così ferri & finimenti di Carnieri o scarselle...»

Come ebbero fine le vaghe rappresentazioni, cominciarono le giostre a piedi, le lance erano verdi, e salde, gli stocchi molto pesanti, si che vi furono di molti incontri bellissimoi & di molti forti colpi, i quali di raccontar tralascio, perche tali cose ogni giorno possono esser vedute, se non facilmente almeno con minore difficoltà, che le inventioni, & le livree, che furono così nobili, e belle, che à giudizio di chiunque le vide mai ne tante, ne tali per bellezza, o per ricchezza erano state vedute (Gualterotti 1579, 80).

The protagonists gained prestige from their appearances as much as their actions. This is evident from the carefully annotated design by Baccio del Bianco for a festive court costume for Jacopo Giraldi (1576-1630), Knight of Malta and member of the *Accademia della Crusca* (Fig. 2). The sketch shows him wearing a fantastical warrior's outfit, including a gorget, sword and helmet, decorated with a range of costly materials from ermine and swan feathers to silver lace.

Fig. 2. Baccio del Bianco, Costume Design for Jacopo Giraldi, depicted on horseback, 1620-30, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1948, 48.122.2(11a)



Such staged battles were a key component of Medicean propaganda, building on traditions established by earlier generations of the family. The mock naval battle, or *Naumachia*, held at the Palazzo Pitti in 1589 for Ferdinando de' Medici's marriage to Christine of Lorraine is a notable example of this (Saslow 1996, 165). While courtiers and visiting dignitaries often took part in these court displays, particularly the popular football matches, the *Naumachia* was unusual in being performed by 150 soldiers and sailors from the Grand ducal galleys (Saslow 1996, 49; 163). The demanding nature of the event, heightened by a sudden, torrential downpour, presumably required special physical or technical skills.

The *Gioco del Ponte* was one of many festive team sports configured as a mock battle. Usually staged in Pisa, it was performed in Florence in 1608 as part of the programme of celebrations for the wedding of Cosimo II to Maria Maddalena of Austria.⁴ A souvenir book for the wedding underlines that clothing was a key element of the event, with one illustration showing the formation of the ten different teams on the bridge each composed of 30 men, who made «una bella mostra». The teams were dressed in the clothing of foreign nations: «con abiti stravaganti, capricciosi, e livree di colori apparenti, e ben concertati, per potersi riconoscere nella folta della mischia» (Rinuccini 1608, 63). There was presumably little concern for these brave liveries once the battle began and the teams fought to gain control of the bridge: Stefano della Bella's etching of the *Gioco del Ponte* in Pisa in 1634 shows that contestants sometimes ended up in the river Arno.⁵ Poet and composer Andrea Salvadori helped to devise the Battle of Love performed as part of Carnival festivities of 1616. In the accompanying souvenir book he extols the socio-political merits of mock combat:

Fu sempre nobilissima usanza di tutte le più civili Nazioni con pubblici spettacoli trattenere nell'ozio della pace la moltitudine....si devono lodare quei giuochi, che, havendo sembianza di Guerra, rallegrano infinitamente l'animo di chi gli vede, e rendono il corpo di chi gl'esercita piu vigoroso, & agile per le vere militari imprese (Salvadori 1615, 5).

He notes the crowd-pleasing potential of these spectacles and their ability to relay authority and power while enabling the noble participants to flamboyantly demonstrate their strength and bravery. He also praises the realism of this particular event, noting that the only thing missing to make it seem a real battle was «il veder' correre il sangue per il Teatro» (Salvadori 1615, 40).

4. Jerkins and cuirasses: the appeal of leather

Several key features of Florentine fashionable dress reflected these militaristic influences by magnifying the wearer's bravado and physical presence. The codpiece is the best-known example of this kind of cross-fertilisation. At first a simple flap intended to cover the gap between separate leg hose, the codpiece was initially

⁴ For further discussion of these festive battles see Laura Kramer (2014).

⁵ British Museum, London. Accession number: 1871,0513.665.

associated with soldiers on foot and horseback and subsequently developed into an ostentatious and decorative component of male fashionable dress. There is a considerable body of literature on the codpiece, which had similar characteristics in both its civilian and military guises (Fisher 2006; Frick 2011; Glover 2019). Yet there were several other types of clothing that were influenced by masculine ideals of combat and bravery and absorbed into fashionable dress via more circuitous routes, undergoing changes in appearance and function in the process. Reconstructing the initial context or model for these ubiquitous components of sixteenth-century fashion is key to uncovering their significance within the broader fashion system.

Over the course of the sixteenth-century, leather upper body garments, such as sleeveless jerkins (*colletti*) and doublets, became increasingly fashionable, as evidenced by portraits and wardrobe accounts. For centuries leading up to this, leather had been worn in combat, either as a single, outer layer or underneath plate armour, prized for its resilient qualities. Alongside its use in battle, leather was also worn for other physical pursuits, such as hunting. In 1572, news reached the Medici court of a hunting accident involving Charles IX de Valois when a member of his hunting party apparently accidentally wounded him with a large knife. The account suggests that the French king would have lost his arm if it had not been for his layers of clothing that included «...una bona veste di lupo, et un colletto di buffalo con le maniche et un grosso gippone con le maniche con molto bambagio dentro...».⁶ Leather clothing also offered protection in a brawl or street fight. Vecellio's *bravo* wears «un colletto di caprone, o cerviotti, o camozze...calzette di cuoio o stame di Fiandra» sometimes combined with leather breeches (Vecellio 1590, 165r). It is not surprising that it is one of the identifying characteristics of Giovanni, a Flemish man wanted in Florence in 1557 for unspecified crimes. In an account reminiscent of a baroque genre painting, a witness named Natale Borgognone reports spending an evening visiting hostelryes and a brothel with Giovanni who wore:

un paio di calze gialle scavezze con raso rosso drento. Un colletto di cuoio nero trinciato. Giubbone di tela bianca. Spada alla spagnuola con'ilzi gia' dorati. Coreggina di velluto morello che mi disse era ancora della livrea quando stava col Marchese di Pescara?⁷

Some forms of leather jerkin became so associated with aggressive behaviour they were banned in a 1585 Florentine law (Calvi 2002, 491; Currie 2016, 97). The same approach was taken in Elizabethan England, where «doublets of defence» were outlawed (Strype 1824, 296). The Florentine law prohibited padded or reinforced leather jerkins, called *colletti di Dante*, similar in function to modern stab vests, but allowed all ranks of *Signori* and courtiers to wear «ordinary» ones. As with many early modern clothing terms, the name reflected the shifting networks of trade, production, and consumption that drove fashionable change. Terms such as *ormesino*, *ciambellotto*, or *palandrana*, remained current even when the garment style or product had evolved to bear little resemblance to their original namesakes.

⁶ ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 4026, fol. 109r. The Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 28364.

⁷ ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 1864 fol. 203. The Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 8745.

Ciambellotto, for example, was originally an imported fabric made of camel hair and although there are later examples of silk camlets, by the mid-sixteenth century it was usually a medium-cost woollen cloth.

The *colletto di Dante* seems to have taken its name from the dant, lant, or danta, an animal described in writings by European travellers to Western and Central Africa, from Alvise da Mosto in the mid-fifteenth century onwards. Although the dant's tough hide was a source of curiosity and fascination there was little consensus around its appearance, which prompted comparisons with various animals in the bovid family, such as gazelles or cows. Travellers recorded that its skin was used for the production of clothing and armour in Africa as well as being exported to Spain and Portugal. In his description of the Jolof kingdom, the Venetian Livio Sanuto observed: «si prevagliano di targhe rotonde e larghe, fatte del cuoio d'un animale detto Danta, che è durissimo» (Sanuto 1588, 80). Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes' report of the kingdom of Kongo includes an animal called empachas in the neighbouring kingdom of Loango, stating that «it is smaller than the ox, with horns like a goat, and is still found in Germany, where it is called Dant. From these Parts and from Congo the skins are taken to Portugal, and from thence to Flanders, where they are dressed and made into jerkins, corselets, and cuirasses, to which they give the name Dant» (Hutchinson 1881, 25). Giovanni Botero's *Delle Relationi Universali* (1591) lists animals found in the Kongo, including «i bufali, e gli asini salvatichi, e Danti (la cui pelle e' durissima) vanno in frotte per li boschi» (Botero 1591, 152). John Florio's dictionary provides a further flourish with his translation of Dante as «a great wilde beast in Affrica with a very hard skin. Also used for the best perfumed Turkie or Spanish leather for gloves or ierkins» (Florio 1611, 136). During this period, Italian production centres came to rely increasingly on imported hides to satisfy the growing demand for leather for clothing, accessories, domestic furnishings, the upholstery of coaches, and so forth (Ventura 2003, 472). According to George E. Brooks, the trade in hides from West Africa to Europe expanded significantly in the latter part of the sixteenth century especially propelled by the activities of Dutch and French merchants (Brooks 2003, 31). The scale of the import market is hinted at in a 1624 bulletin to the Medici court reporting seven vessels arriving in Zeeland from Cape Verde with a cargo seized from the Spanish, comprising sugar, silver, and twenty thousand ox skins.⁸ Even when made from local leather, the notoriety of the *colletto di Dante* was presumably enhanced by the implied connection with the famed qualities of this distant beast.

Like their martial prototypes, fashionable jerkins were also thought to safeguard the wearer. Rodrigo Fonseca, the Portuguese physician and lecturer at the University of Pisa recommended in his *Del Conservare la Sanita* (1603) that those with weak chests «should arm themselves by covering the whole chest with a leather skin, like a corset, and wear leather clothing» (Cavallo and Storey 2013, 106). Leather was considered by some to be a sturdier, more masculine choice than softer fabrics, especially silks.⁹ Nevertheless, the jerkins worn by wealthy Florentine men tended to privilege decorative features over functional ones, often being made

⁸ ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 4258, fol. 301. The Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 23760.

⁹ Views on this in an English context are raised in Erica Fudge (2002, 89).

of thinner skins, slashed, and decorated with braid and embroideries. The jerkin in the Stibbert Collection, Florence is stuffed with cotton or wool and quilted, making it stiff and resilient although it lacks other key defensive elements of a military garment. It has a high waist, finished with pickadils that barely overlap and the V-aperture at the neck creates another weak spot (Orsi Landini 1998, 74-5). Leather garments made for battle usually included design features such as overlapping areas at front openings or at the skirts, in the case of buff coats, to provide maximum resilience (Dowen 2015, 162-63). In 1546, Cosimo de' Medici ordered a new *colletto di corame* to replace one that he thought was too heavy.¹⁰ This suggests a more decorative garment than the jerkins he wore as a younger man keen to visually align himself with his father, the renowned military leader, Giovanni delle Bande Nere (Currie, 2016, 47-48), perhaps resembling the Stibbert jerkin thought to be made of fallow deerskin, or the fencing doublet in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, from c. 1580.¹¹ As a ruler, dressing too aggressively could lead to accusations of cowardice. This was the case for the Stuart King James I, of whom it was said «he was more corpulent in his clothes then through his body...his cloathes [were] ever being made large and easie, the Doublets quilted for stiletto proof, his breeches in great pleats and full stuffed» (Hayward 2020, 60). It was insinuated that the king depended upon dress to increase his bulk and appear physically stronger, although it could equally be argued that he was merely following the fashions of the time. In whatever form, ornamental or reinforced, leather jerkins were intended to show the wearer was no stranger to action and the layering of skin on skin harked back to the muscle cuirasses on the backs of the heroes who adorned the walls of Florentine *palazzini*.

5. Military conflict and the circulation of fashions

In 1624, one Alessandro Scavaruoti, the fiscal auditor for a member of the Gonzaga family, is described in Medici correspondence and identified by his clothing, which included «un colletto di dante con alamari d'oro».¹² It was typical to combine leather jerkins with this type of braided fastening, now known as frogging and usually described in contemporary sources as *alamari* or *bottoni all'ungheresca*. Both terms referred to the foreign origins of frogging, which reached Italy via different routes, another reminder of the richness of the vocabulary of sixteenth-century fashion. *Alamari* is derived from Arabic and Spanish while *all'ungheresca*, the term usually employed in Medici wardrobe accounts, nods to the style's connections with Hungary (Orsi Landini and Niccoli 2005, 58). Dress historians have linked frogging with the types of ornamentation utilised on metal breastplates, specifically those worn by the notorious Hungarian Hussar regiment. It has been

¹⁰ ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 1172 fol. 174r. Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 7811. «Il colletto di corame che lui ha e' troppo grave, et che non e' il proposito suo, et percio' che la [ne] faccia fare un'altro piu' leggier di quello».

¹¹ Museo Stibbert, Florence. Inv. no. 193. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession number: 29.158.175.

¹² ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 2952, unfoliated. The Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 5753.

suggested that «when seen from a distance their braid-trimmed breastplates were meant to look like deadly attackers' rib cages» (Johansen 2005, 17). Sixteenth-century Italians would also have associated frogging with the zupan, kaftan, or dolman-type gowns worn in North Africa and Turkey but it was the use of frogging in military contexts that accelerated its diffusion from one country to another.

Fig. 3. Giacomo Franco *Effigie naturali dei maggior prencipi et piu valorosi capitani di questa eta con l'arme loro* (Venice, 1596), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1957, 57.506(35)



Following the Ottoman-Hungarian wars, many elements of Turkish clothing were adopted in Hungary and spread to neighbouring countries such as Poland as well as to Italy, one of various examples in this period where fashion transcended geographical borders, as well as political and religious differences. This intermingling of styles was remarked upon by the Hungarian Martin Csombor

travelling through Poland in 1616: «Once, the Polish men's dress was different from the Hungarian but today there are only a few differences for both delight in Turkish dress» (Tazbir 1985, 173). The Battle of Lepanto gave further impetus to these sartorial transmissions in Italy in the last quarter of the century. Rick Scorza has described how Italian soldiers «cavorted in colourful 'Turkish battle dress' in victory processions (Scorza 2012, p. 178) while the sailors manning the Ottoman ships in the 1589 *Naumachia* wore Turkish dress (Poole 2011, 405). Turkish military figures were typically identifiable by their frogged upper garments, as exemplified by the portrait of Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha in Giacomo Franco's *Effigie naturali dei maggior prencipi et piu valorosi capitani di questa eta con l'arme loro* (1596) (Fig. 3). Turbaned Turkish riders wear similar gowns in Giovanni Stradano's engraving of the Siege of Vienna, designed for the 1589 Medici wedding celebrations (Gualterotti 1589, 132).¹³ Vecellio depicts frogging on Polish, Croatian and Hungarian male clothing and his description of Polish men's customs is prefaced with the assertion that «il Polacco è bellicoso, e valoroso a cavallo», underlining the extent to which Italians associated these figures and their clothing with martial skills (Vecellio 1590, 353v).

Frogging had several practical advantages, being preferable to buttons for fastening thick fabrics while the loops could be adjusted depending on the size of the wearer and the number of layers worn underneath. As with leather jerkins, these functional aspects tended to become redundant when frogging was utilised on fashionable, bespoke garments. Indeed, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, frogging was employed for decorative purposes as much as for fastenings. In 1562, Don Garzia de' Medici was buried in a cloak decorated with frogging, described by the team who conserved it as «silk braid fastenings after the Polish fashion», along the side seams, hanging sleeves and collar (Arnold and Orsi Landini 1993, 52 and 64). Similarly, sketches for Medici liveries from 1593 incorporate frogging as ornamental detail, such as around the hem of a cloak (Currie 2007, 164-6). It is employed in the same way upon the robes of high-ranking Janissary captains in an engraving from Nicolas de Nicolay's *Discours et histoire veritable des navigations, peregrinations, et voyages, faits en la Turquie* (Antwerp, 1586). Here, in addition to the rows of front-fastening frogging, the braiding also appears on the cuffs of hanging sleeves and splits at the side of full-length robes (Jirousek 2019, 86). The link between frogging and bravery was so deeply embedded that it survived its appropriation across different countries on male and female clothing. The frogging on Elizabeth I's bodice in the so-called 'Darnley' portrait (c. 1575) by an unidentified continental artist should surely be seen in this light: as a conscious evocation of masculine authority and strength, in the same way the queen harnessed male-gendered terminology.¹⁴ Elizabeth's wardrobe also featured two leather doublets (Arnold 1988 142-44), a material more frequently associated with menswear. Charlotte A. Jirousek suggests that the Darnley portrait was painted

¹³ <https://www.bl.uk/treasures/festivalbooks/pageview.aspx?strFest=0204&strPage=132> (17 February 2021).

¹⁴ National Portrait Gallery, London. Accession number: 2082.

during secret Ottoman negotiations and that the inclusion of the braided fastenings was a conscious reference to links between the two courts (Jirousek 2019, 100).

6. Fashioning the muscular male body

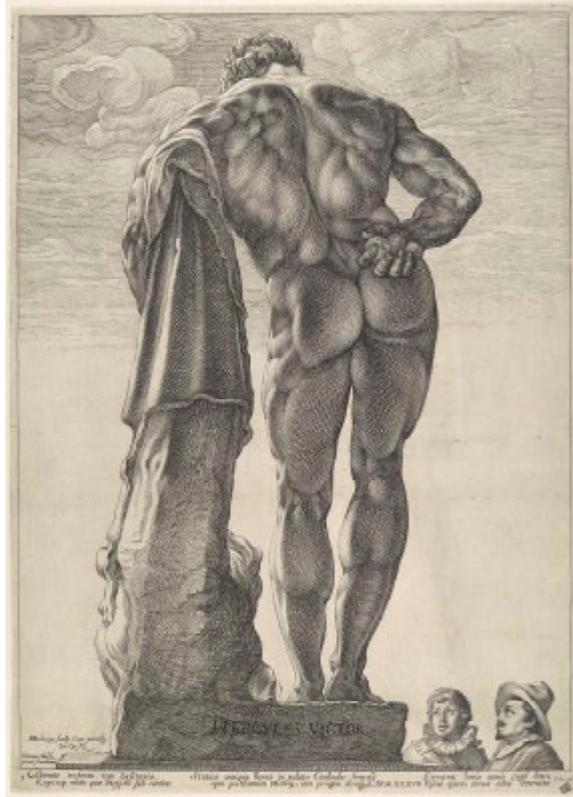
Turning to the lower half of the body, the new style of short, bulbous trunk hose that exaggerated the buttocks and highlighted the male thigh also encapsulated virility. Leg padding had been used earlier on by soldiers to provide extra protection and cushioning under leg armours and the practice became increasingly prevalent in civilian fashions from the first decades of the sixteenth century. Padded breeches developed as the result of other changes in male dress: the gradual separation of upper hose (or breeches) and lower hose combined with the popularity of short, high-waisted doublets. Prior to this, men wore full-length hose, usually made of woven fabric, often with integrated leather soles (Muzzarelli, 206-9, 212-15). When the lower half of the body was encased in a single garment, the male silhouette appeared lithe and elongated, an impression further enhanced by the use of parti-coloured hose. In contrast, padded upper breeches created a burlier look, mimicking the shape of muscled buttocks and thighs, or compensating for less developed ones. Tailors soon created breeches in an array of different styles and decorative effects, often taking inspiration from the leg coverings of soldiers, who were known for their paned, slashed breeches, codpieces, exposed buttocks and other eye-catching styles. Some of these features, including clearly delineated buttocks, were incorporated into costume armour thought to have been made for Polish nobleman Jerzy 'Herkules' Radziwill in c. 1525, evidence of the reciprocal influences between fashion and armour (Patterson 2009).¹⁵

Sixteenth-century art idealised the monumental male form, often modelled on classical prototypes. The combative bodies in representations of warfare tended to be endowed with Herculean thighs, such as the pair in the foreground of Giorgio Vasari's fresco of *Maximilian Lifting the Siege of Livorno* (1568-71) in the Palazzo Vecchio. The rediscovery of sculpture and other artefacts from classical antiquity fuelled these tastes and Renaissance artists were spurred on to produce their own, occasionally even more awe-inspiring bodies, as exemplified by the reconstruction of the Farnese Hercules (Haskell and Penny 1981, 103 and 229-30). When the statue was recovered from the Baths of Caracalla in 1546 without its legs, sculptor Guglielmo della Porta was commissioned to create a new pair. Shortly afterwards, the originals were recovered but contemporaries including Michelangelo argued that della Porta's limbs were preferable. While his opinion was shaped by a desire to demonstrate the superiority of Renaissance artists over those of classical antiquity, it probably also reflected his appreciation of the more imposing proportions of the new additions, which can be seen in Hendrick Goltzius's engraving of the statue from c. 1592 (Fig. 4). The original legs were reunited with the rest of the sculpture in 1787. When Goethe saw them shortly afterwards he commented «it is now incomprehensible how the first legs by Porta could so long have passed for good»,

¹⁵ Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession number: 24.179; 26.188.1, .2; 29.158.363a, b.

a reaction that possibly reflected shifting views of the ideal male body (Goethe 1883, 365).

Fig. 4 Hendrick Goltzius, *Farnese Hercules*, c. 1592 dated 1617, engraving. Gift of Henry Walters, 1917, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 17.37.59



Tailors had various means at their disposal to make breeches that would endow the upper thigh with larger-than-life dimensions, applying skills and techniques already in their repertoire. Surviving garments and archival records point to the use of padding, wadding, quilting and under layers, often made using excess fabric to plump up outer layers. Florentine sumptuary laws acknowledged such styles required more material. In 1562, two *braccia* were allowed to make *braconi* but this had doubled by 1568 (Cantini 1800-1806, Vol. III, 406 and Vol. VII, 38). A missive from Rome in June 1567 describes a similar trend: «la Pragmatica del vestire si è rinnovata adesso allo improvviso con molto furure [furore], et sono stati presi molti giovani per amore de braconi, et così gli sbirri fanno ogni dì buonissime prede».¹⁶

¹⁶ ASF, *Mediceo del Principato*, Vol. 3080 fol. 96. Medici Archive Project, Doc ID 21625.

Eugenia Paulicelli has identified various texts that refer to the use of props or prosthetics to make legs appear more muscular, from Ariosto's comments in his play *Cassaria* (1508) that men «support their hips with props, they enlarge their shoulders with felt and cardboard and the legs take on Herculean size with the help of babbage and rags» to Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti's critique of the same fashion (cited and translated by Paulicelli 2014, 100-104 and 192). The latter's comments formed part of a series of polemical exchanges by different authors on the subject of male and female followers of fashion. Lodovico Sesti's contribution to this dialogue expressed his support of padding: «Abominate che essi consumino una poco di bambagia per supplire ai mancamenti di natura, e dar compita perfezzione ad una gamba» (Sesti, 1656, 153). However, physician Frediano Elici's *Arca novella di sanita* (1656) suggests by this point the style was on the wane, as men no longer wore doublets and breeches with so much cotton stuffing they looked like mattresses or cushions (Cavallo and Storey 2013, 106).

Vecellio spoke in similarly disparaging tones of the spectacle of men's upper thighs, squeezed into such tight breeches you could see the veins in their legs (Jones 2017, 101-2). The increasing use of knitted stockings made of wool or even silk, which had greater adherence and elasticity than woven ones, inevitably focused attention on the musculature of the male leg. Banned in Florentine sumptuary law in 1562, as noted above, silk stockings were a luxury product. The account books of wealthy courtiers Francesco and Riccardo Riccardi show even they usually opted for woollen knitted stockings in the late sixteenth century.¹⁷ This tendency is confirmed by the inventories of merchants trading in knitted goods in Mantua and other Italian cities including Florence on the cusp of the seventeenth century, 90% of whose stockings were woollen (Belfanti 2003, 587-9). The propagandistic potential of the male thigh can be glimpsed in representations of Cosimo and Ferdinando de' Medici in active roles with their legs decorously sheathed in knitted stockings yet very much on display. Benedetto Velli's 1589 engraving of Cosimo overseeing the fortifications of Tuscan cities (Gualterotti 1589, 145) shows him in mid-thigh-length breeches that reveal well-defined, poised legs.¹⁸ Jacques Callot's depiction of Ferdinando, presiding over the fortifications at Livorno, emphasizes his stockinged knees protruding from panned breeches, a muscular contrast to the rest of his body, which is swaddled in silks and furs despite the apparent heat of the day (Fig. 5).

¹⁷ ASF, Riccardi 55, 41v, 42r, Riccardi 56, 73r: various payments to Agostino Agucchiatore including for *calze di stame* and *calze intere*.

¹⁸ <https://www.bl.uk/treasures/festivalbooks/pageview.aspx?strFest=0204&strPage=145> (17 February 2021)

Fig. 5. Jacques Callot, after Matteo Rosselli, *Fortification of the Gate of Livorno by Order of the Grand Duke*, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of William Gray from the collection of Francis Calley Gray, by exchange, Photo ©President and Fellows of Harvard College, S3.91.2



As the Italian elites became more removed from actual warfare, they embraced ways of incorporating a martial aesthetic within their clothing. The popularity of the codpiece was an early manifestation of this phenomenon and a striking conjunction of the martial and hypermasculine. It has been noted that its prominence was relatively short-lived but its heyday in male fashion coincided with other celebrations of warfare and male muscularity in the visual arts and festive life. By the mid-seventeenth century, however, the Medici court seemed less focused on projecting its bellicose nature, perhaps a sign of the confidence of the Grand ducal regime. Equally, the courtly taste for festive war games that glorified noble participants began to dwindle and these events were increasingly replaced by more controlled military displays (Pollak 2010, 280-6). Indeed, in 1688 a publication dedicated to the Medici was deemed necessary to drum up support for the once-popular sport of Florentine football (Bini 1688). The rise of military uniforms across Europe in the seventeenth century marked a clearer distinction between the appearances of soldiers and civilians, putting a stop to the more ad-hoc assemblage of styles that could be appropriated to express the combative powers of elite men. Fashion during the century leading up to this point is therefore noteworthy for its public promotion of the idealised masculine attributes of strength and bravery.

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