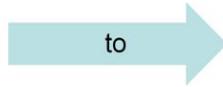


Martial Surcottes of the 14thc in England and France

Taught by Tasha Dandelion Kelly/Marcele de Montsegur



Before we start...

- This class has an Anglo-French focus.
- I consulted sculptural, incised, and painted imagery.
- Terminology: “surcotte” is the default, generic term I will be using.
 - Other terms like jupon and pourpoint will show up too.

This class focuses on English and French styles. Somewhat different styles were happening in other parts of Europe, but since I only have an hour, I’m keeping the focus on the Anglo-French cultures. I created this class using manuscript illuminations, sculptural imagery, and incised slabs/brass imagery, though I also consulted documentation on two extant surcottes, the Edward of Woodstock pourpoint and the Charles VI pourpoint. Terminology for martial surcottes is varied and controversial. For the most part, I’m going to use the generic term “surcotte” but will mention when other terms exist to describe a particular style.

What fabrics made up a martial surcotte in the 14th century?

- Likely the Big Three: Linen, Wool, and Silk, plus:
 - Cotton and linen tow for padded surcottes.
 - Velvet (made from silk or a mix of silk and linen), embroidery, metal thread couching, fringe .

Extant padded garments such as the Edward of Woodstock's pourpoint and the Charles VI pourpoint both have linen linings, as does the non-martial pourpoint attributed to Charles de Blois. All three have silk as their outer fabric and are stuffed with cotton tow. Wool was ubiquitous in the 14thc, and was probably the most common fabric used in clothing of all kinds. The less wealthy men of arms would probably have had wool surcottes to wear, not silk.

What was the average knight wearing under the surcotte around 1300?

- **Next to his skin:** shirt (optional), braies, hosen, aketon
- **Armour:** Helm, coat of plates, head-to-toe mail, padded cuisses (optional), plate knee cops, belt(s), shoes/boots, aillettes
- **Top layer:** Surcotte, belt for surcotte, belt for sword

To set the scene, let's review what a typical knight at the turn of the 14th century was probably wearing when fully dressed for a fight. The aketon was a padded, quilted garment worn under armour as another layer of protection. The term is presumed to descend from the Arabic term for cotton: al-qutun. Aillettes were stiff boards, usually in a rectangle shape, worn on the shoulders. Scholars believe they served the role of protecting the shoulders and neck from blows or perhaps as decorative elements or a form of heraldic identification.

With all that armour, why was a surcote worn too?

- Slight protection from attack – the long, full skirt could diminish force, tangle weapons, and obscure targeting.
- Identification – a great place for heraldry.
- Warmth – France and England weren't warm for most of the year.
- Protection of armour from elements – a little less rain on the body and leg armour, a little less dirt, mud... and blood.

Characteristics of the long, sleeveless surcote of the early 14thc :

- Simple curved neckline
- Large, sleeveless armholes
- Fullness of the torso and skirt
- Hem length – mid-to-upper calf
- Slits in skirt, front and back, for riding a horse, running, wide-legged stance



Roman de Thèbes, France, 1330

Examples of the long, sleeveless surcotte in the first quarter of the 14th century



Sir Richard
Whatton,
England, 1300



Roman de Tristan, France, 1300



Queen Mary Psalter,
England, 1315

Note the slits in the front of these garments. They don't always appear to go higher than mid-thigh. On the right, the slit looks to be on the side of the garment, but I wonder if this is actually an artistic tweak in order to show the back slit and the flow of the fabric on the far side of this figure.

Hem length variations in the first quarter of the century



Sir Edward
Estur,
England,
1303



Sir Richard
Haymon,
England, 1300



Liber Legum Antiquorum
Regum, England, 1321



Ormesby Psalter,
England, 1310

I organized these images by hem length to show a difference from long to shorter, though the dates are random within the first quarter of the century. The hem began to subtly rise during this time, though longer hems were still seen into the 1330s. As the hem rose, note that the slits in the front and back remained constant, with the occasional side slit variation seen as well. It's worth noting that the fullness of these surcottes was likely achieved through the addition of triangular gores, which was a common tailoring practice at this time. Precious fabric was best conserved by cutting rectangles and triangles for expanding garments, rather than cutting the full expansion in one piece of fabric. Gores set into the center front and back -- when cut open for the riding split -- would create an effect where the fabric folded outward when hanging naturally.

An English variation on the early surcotte: the inverted-V split

- Long surcottes with a diagonal split in the front
- Portrayal plainly indicates a diagonal hemline
- Appeared parallel to the straight-split calf-/knee-length surcottes

Examples of the inverted-V surcote



Sir R. de Bures,
England, 1302



Sir John de Goshall,
England, 1306



Robert de Steveton,
England, 1307



Unknown Poole, England,
mis-dated to 1335

A variation in the front slit appeared in the memorial brasses and effigies from England at the beginning of the 14thc. Instead of meeting the hem perpendicularly, the slit began to take on an inverted V-shaped appearance. The carvers took great care to show the voluminous folds of the fabric falling into what is unmistakably a diagonal hem.

The 1320s and 1330s: surcotte stability



England
1325



France
1325



England
1330



France
1330



England
1335



France
1335

Not much changed, fashion-wise, as political intrigue heightened leading up to the exhaustively long and bloody disagreement between the French and the English, known as the Hundred Years War. But once that War was kicked off in 1337 with Edward III's announcement to Philip VI that he was the rightful king of France, not Philip, the look of the surcotte began to change more rapidly.

Steel plate armour and its possible effect on the surcotte hem

- Thigh defenses were evolving effectively: more plate, less mail.
- Lots of fabric around the legs was no longer necessary for protection.
- One of a number of resulting styles: the “cyclas” surcotte – short in front, longer in back.

By the 1340s, there is some evidence that thigh armour was becoming more plate-centric. Some scholars posit that there was a brigandine-like thigh defense, where plates were riveted to the inside of a leather or textile-based cuisse. Full plate cuisses might have also already been in use by this time.

Evolution of the “cyclas” surcote



Front rolled up
and tucked in
belt: Français
122, Belgium,
1344



Pseudo-cyclas: Sir
William Crathorne,
England, 1346



William de
Hinton,
England,
1346



Peter de
Grandisson,
England, 1340s
(mis-dated to
1358?)



William Bruce,
England, 1346

This series of images shows how the style may have evolved. Most cyclas-style surcottes are seen in imagery dated solidly to the 1340s, but here and there are some outliers, date-wise. I've seen them dated as early as 1325, but I'm inclined to think those are mis-dated. This style undoubtedly was worn by the English chivalry on the field of Crecy in 1346, the first large battle of the Hundred Years War.

The cyclas in France: not so much



Henri de Meudon,
France, 1344



Henri Briart,
France, 1344



Far more common:
Jean de Drée, France,
1343

Note what's different about the armour of the figures wearing the cyclas and the figure wearing a regular split surcote: the cyclas figures have plate on their legs, while the other figure has mail. Plate greaves appear to have developed before plate cuisses, so if these images are showing mail below the knee, it is unlikely that the knight was wearing plate above his knees first. Of course another option is that the effigy on the right was commissioned long before the Sir Jean's death, and was therefore executed in an antiquated style. I can't be certain without further digging.

Lacing: a sign of the fashion times



William de
Kenes,
England, 1344



Nicholas de la
Beche, England,
1348



John Lyons,
England, 1350



John Leverick,
England, 1350

The cyclas and its contemporary surcote styles made a noticeable shift towards a tighter-fitting torso in the 1340s and 1350s. To assist this, the garment required an opening so the wearer could wedge himself inside. The solution was most often side-lacing. This appeared both in spiral-lacing form and in cross-lacing form.

Mid-century: lots of war, major fashion changes



Thomas de la
More, England,
1347



Henry
Plantagenet,
England, 1347



François 178, Le
Roman de la Rose,
France, 1353



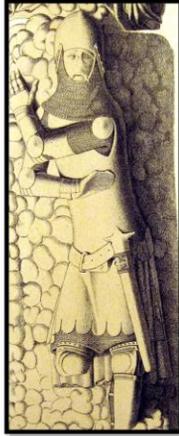
François 122,
Belgium, 1344

The 1340s and 50s show a lot of tight torso, short, full skirt surcottes. Lacing is not portrayed on the examples in this slide, but it was probably needed in actuality. The last image shows buttons on the surcotte. This was less practical for martial use, but the fashion for buttons was so strong by the 1340s, it's not surprising to see it make its way into military use as well.

The 1350s into the 1360s: the surcote turns into the “jupon”



Nicholas de
Cantelupe,
England, 1358



Oliver Ingham,
England, 1360



Robert Albyn,
England, 1360



John de Mereworth,
England, 1366

Another stylistic transition occurred at the end of the 1350s into the beginning of the 1360s. The longer-skirted surcote morphed into a very form-fitting, very short-skirted surcote frequently called a “jupon”.

Into the 1370s, the jupon reigned.



Thomas Cheyne,
England, 1368



Thomas
Beauchamp,
England, 1369



English Knight,
1370



St. George,
England, 1370

By the late 1360s and early 1370s, the sleeveless jupon had become the representative English surcotte style.

What about the French in 1370?



Français 10135, Les
Chroniques de France,
France, 1370



Latin 511, Speculum
Humanae Salvationis,
France, 1370-1380



Français, 1584, France, 1372

While comparing a few effigies on the English side to a few manuscript illuminations on the French side presents an apples and oranges problem, I think there are some recognizable differences in styles between England and France by 1370. While the image on the left is pretty close in keeping with the English imagery, the images on the right show two things: first, the chest curve is fuller in the French images. The French also appear to be partial to the short, scallop-dagged sleeves seen on the right. As the slides progress, pay attention to how the English imagery is sleeveless while the French imagery is almost entirely short-sleeved (and later, long-sleeved).

As the 1370s moved toward the 1380s...



Thomas Cawne,
English, 1374



Jack of
Badsaddle,
English, 1375



Richard
Pembridge,
English, 1375



Hugh de Audley,
English, 1375

The English style was strong and consistent. Note that the waist has become fully “wasped” by the mid 1370s, though the chest curve is not overly pronounced. Jack of Badsaddle appears to have either fringe or a long fur purfelle sticking out of the bottom of his jupon, for a twist on the dagging concept.

Edward of Woodstock's pourpoint



The extant padded garment, back-view



Manuscript image from 1370s showing the Prince with his father, Edward III



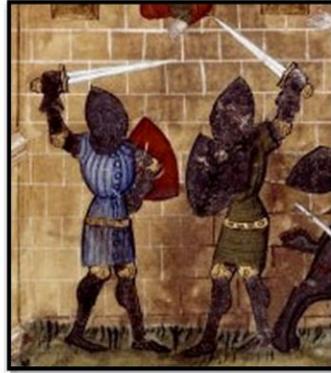
The Prince's effigy at Canterbury Cathedral

With the sleeveless versus short-sleeve question in mind, let's review what we know of the Black Prince's jupon, or pourpoint, which is dated to the year of the Prince's death, 1376. Janet Arnold, in her article on this topic, speculates that the sleeves could have once been long, but shortened over time. In my opinion, given the strength of interest in short sleeves in France at this time and the lack of sleeves in the English style, Edward's jupon was more influenced by the French fashion than the English and therefore, the sleeve length on the funerary achievement is accurate. Indeed, he spent more of his life in France than in England. Also, the long sleeved style hadn't yet taken hold in the 1370s, if we're to believe the figural art.

The globose chest: big in France



Français 2813, Grandes Chroniques de France, France, 1375-1380



Français 12399, Book of Modus and Ratio, France, 1379

These two illuminations show the intensity of the curve over the chest in the 1370s in France. Note also, the padded, quilted garments on the right have short sleeves like the Black Prince's jupon.

The globose chest: a little of both in England



Hugh Courtenay,
English, 1377



Henry de Cobham,
English, 1380



John D'Argentine,
English, 1382

The two on the left have noticeable bulges. Note the lines cutting into the waist of the man in the middle – those are intended to signify a significant bulge. The man on the right, however, still has the sleek lines of those who wore this style in the 1360s, before the globose chest became so popular.

The 1380s: the height of French martial fashion



St. George statuette,
French, 1380



François 338, Guiron le
Courtois, France, 1380-1390



Royal 19 B XVII, Lendenda
aurea, French, 1382

Something coalesced in the French art right around 1380. The French had enjoyed consistent victories in skirmishes against the English throughout the 1370s, under the strong leadership of Charles V and his very competent commander, Bertrand du Guesclin. Not only did Edward III of England die, but his heir, Edward of Woodstock, died too. The late 70s and early 80s were dark days for the English and as a result, brighter days for the French. On the artistic side of things, Charles V encouraged artistic efforts during his reign. The journeyman artists of the 1370s were masters by the 80s, when Charles' son took the throne. Could it be that a flourishing artistic world in France merged with military victories to express the martial material culture with a heightened aesthetic? Perhaps.

The rise of the padded, quilted surcotte, or “pourpoint”, or “jupon”



The Charles VI
pourpoint, French,
1380



François 338, Guiron le
Courtois, France, 1380-1390



PA 30, Cy
commencent les
grans croniques
de la genealogie
des roys de
France, French,
1380



Francois de la Sarraz,
French, 1390

It's hard to know for sure what this garment was called in its time. There is evidence for use of the word “pourpoint”, which is the French term for a padded, quilted garment. “Jupon” or “gippon” appears to also have had merit as a term for a padded, quilted garment. In France, this garment was likely worn over the chest armour, which could have been plain plate, a coat of plates, or mail. I haven't found English imagery with this style yet, but my search has not been exhaustive. The extant Charles VI pourpoint, or jupon, is on view at the Musée des Beaux Arts in Chartres. It's a beautiful example of the way clothing was tailored to create a wasp-waist effect with a globose chest and A-line hips.

The un-quilted jupon continued to appear,
all the way through the end of the century.



Robert de Grey,
English, 1387



John of Artois,
French, 1387



Guy de Brien, English,
1390



Jean Sevestre,
French, 1390

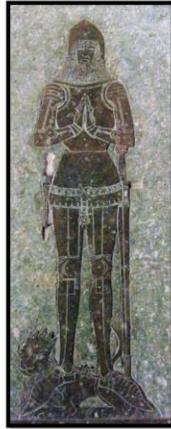
The last decade...



John
Thornbury,
English, 1396



Jehan le
Mercier,
French, 1397



John
Bettesthorpe,
England, 1398



Geoffroi de
Charny II, French,
1398

I think it is fitting to end this survey with the son of Geoffroi de Charny, who was one of the last great French knights of the 14th century. Charny (the father) wrote “The Book of Chivalry”, a text still studied today by historians and re-creators alike. Note that Charny’s image has the typical short sleeves seen in French portrayals of armoured men.

Just one more!



St. George statuette, French, 1399

As you can see, the 14th century provided a plethora of martial fashion changes while centuries previous had remained relatively constant in the style of surcote worn with armour. For questions or commentary, please write me: tasha@cottesimple.com.