

An Assortment of Hats for Men

Spanish Headwear in the Reign of Isabella I



Doña Beatriz Aluares de la Oya

Barony of Ponte Alto

<http://www.spanishseamstress.org>

beatriz.aluares@gmail.com

Atlantia Kingdom A&S, 2012



Headgear is a commonly-overlooked but often necessary part of an historically authentic impression, and nowhere is this more true than in Spain during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. Very few men and virtually no women are represented in art without some sort of headcovering unless the lack of such a covering is intended to be symbolic; for example, saints, angels, and Mary Magdalene are usually represented *sans* headcovering as a reflection either of their other-worldliness or social disgrace.

Hats also played a significant role in rites of courtesy among men. The removal and flourishing of the hat was a way to honor ones betters or flatter those who were not equal in social stature. Indeed, hats could be seen as the very measure of respect for the social hierarchy, as evidenced by the following quote from Lazarillo de Tormes:

...I vow to God that if I meet the Count [his neighbor] in a street and he does not take off his bonnet to me, quite off, then the next time I come, I will enter a house pretending to have business there, or cross into another street if there is one, before he gets near me rather than take off my bonnet to him (quoted in Anderson 35).

I conducted an extensive survey of male headgear among the noble classes of Spain from about 1460-1530. While I would have liked to include examples from the middle and lower classes, the majority of existing artwork does not extensively portray characters that are not in some way upper class – this includes patrons, royalty, and religious figures.

A Note about Vocabulary

Ruth Anderson distinguishes between several broad types of hat; her vocabulary is based on earlier works by Carmen Bernis and C. Willis Cunningham. Although there are at least six distinct species of hat, I am most interested in the styles identified as *gorra* and *bonete*, or cap and bonnet, as these were heavily exported from Spain to places as far-flung as Belgium, England, and Santo Domingo (Anderson 35). That they are specifically mentioned in trade records and guild membership requirements indicates that they were probably a primary and well-known product, and that their names, unlike many other fashion history terms, may have been tied to those specific items.

A *media gorra* is a “half cap” with “ample crown and partial brim or flap” (Anderson 37), while a *gorra* has a fuller brim often divided into segments or sections. These sections appear in a variety of shapes from slitted to crenellated to a simple upturned flap. A *bonete* is a softer hat with a wider brim and a shaped crown; it may or may not have a chin strap or cord to secure the hat to the head.

Creating the Hats

For this experiment, both knitted and woven cloth was used to create an assortment of hat styles common from 1470-1530. Different materials were chosen to mimic the drape and apparent hand of the fabrics in the primary source images.

The predominant colors in both image and accounts are red and black, with some mentions of green, “wine dregs,” and tawny. Likewise, the favored fabric for headwear was wool, either woven or knitted, with velvet and silk making up the rest of the records. A noble inventory from Segovia lists “a black bonnet [and] one of red wool knitted (*hecho de aguja*).” Prince Juan’s wardrobe inventory of 1493 lists twenty bonnets in “black, crimson, or mulberry-colored” velvet, crimson silk, three tawny wool bonnets, and three wool bonnets of red, green, and black wools.

The cloth bag hat is made of a black worsted wool cloth. The fabric is a twill weave common to most areas of Europe during the 15th and 16th century (Johnson 14); it is made up of short-staple merino yarn that is fulling in hot water with lye soap. The resulting thickened fabric was cut to measure and sewn into form with black silk thread, using a running stitch for the seams. All seams were hand-finished by pressing the seams open with a wooden linen presser and whip-stitching the raw edges down. The hems were finished likewise; the fulling wool will not ravel and thus does not need to be fully encased.

The source image for the bag hat (figure 1) shows a full, tubular hat with a stiffer, upstanding brim. The hat appears to be unangled along the length, and the “bottom” end is gathered closed. However, the detail on the original image is not sufficient to show how or if the gathering stitches were finished or covered. For the finishing button detail, inspiration was taken from a secondary source that shows a woman wearing a similarly-gathered headdress in white linen (figure 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

The knitted and fulling hats were slightly more challenging due to the nature of the fulling process; because the knitted item shrinks and thickens under exposure to hot water, soap, and agitation, allowances must be made for size and shape in the initial knitting.

To determine the percentage of shrink, a swatch was made of each wool yarn to be used. The yarns were uniformly 100% merino wool commercially spun with an S-twist. The yarns for the two black *media gorras* and crenellated red *media gorra* were a lofty-finish yarn with a large amount of body, while the yarn for the red *bonete* was spun with a smooth, tight finish. Once the yarn was swatched, a scrap of

white thread was tied at each corner of an imaginary square 4x4 inches in the center of the swatch. The swatches were then fullled, and measured to work out the percentage of shrinkage.

The patterns for the three *media gorras* were self-created based on both modern and historical sources. The initial crown shaping began with a four-sided patch to form the top of the crown; the rest of the hat was worked downwards to the brim, increasing at intervals, in a smooth bell shape. The crenellated brims were formed by knitting a short rounded brim at 90 angles to the crown.



Figure 3



Figure 4

The curved brim *gorra* lacks any such brim shaping; the initial pattern for that hat was based on a 1920s knitted cloche. The shape was well-suited to the softly-curving and sloped crown shape in the two source images (figures 5 and 6), but more experimentation must be done to determine a better brim shape. The flared brim of the cloche did not lend itself well to the sharp upturn from crown to brim seen in the source images; nor did the cut shapes fit smoothly to the crown of the hat.



Figure 5



Figure 6

The lining of this hat is a heavy-weight drapery silk laid in with silk thread. This was a first attempt at lining and was not very successful from a practical standpoint; while the lining adds some support to the overall shape, it also makes the hat uncomfortably warm to wear. More experimentation is needed to perfect the lining in future attempts.

The red *boneto* was modeled on one seen in many images throughout Spain in the 1490s-1510s. Possibly based on similar items from Germany and Belgium, the wide, flat *bonete* is mostly commonly found in bright red with a black tie that fastens the hat under the chin.



Figure 7

The pattern for this hat was based heavily on Sally Pointer's recently-released "Prince Arthur's hat" pattern, and similar hats mentioned in *The Tudor Tailor*. The base shape is a hexagonal crown with a segmented brim that can be turned up in sections. Although Pointer's pattern is intended to create a near-copy of an Henrician English accessory, the shape of the pattern proved to so closely match the Spanish equivalents that no modifications were needed. As this item is intended to be a gift to an individual with a non-Spanish persona, the black chinstrap was left off until the individual determines if they wish to have it.

Once all the items were knitted and fulled (due to time constraints, all items were fulled in a modern washing machine), they were blocked to shape and allowed to dry overnight.



Figure 8: Black curved-brim gorra blocking



Figure 9: Blocking form of plastic bowl, trash bag padding, and plastic bag cover

After the items were fully dry, they were gone over with a stiff wire slicker brush to raise the nap. The wire brush replaced the traditional fuller's teasel, and was critical for further blending the stitches and creating a soft nap. A small stiff-bristled brush was then applied to finish the teaseling step, and the nap was sheared to uniform length with a pair of shears and a modern sweater shaver. These finishing steps mimic the traditional process of fulling, napping and shearing, and created a finish more closely like that on extant artifacts such as the Mary Rose flat cap (Pointer 3).

Once the hats were completely blocked and shaped, they were trimmed with pearls, enamel pieces, and small silver *pailletes* in the shape of Laurel wreaths (this item was also a gift, for Master Miguel Estevan de Cabra). Spanish nobles frequently decorated their clothing and accessories with similar trinkets; for example, at a bullfight in honor of the royal family in Medina, Queen Isabella I appeared in a gown with trim consisting of "letters of beaten gold a quarter *vara* (about 7.5 inches) high, forming the motto TANTO MONTA...each letter was garnished with pearls" (Anderson 137). Pearls and silver or gold shaped *pailletes* are commonly mentioned in royal wardrobe inventories, alongside other trimmings such as gold lace and silver braid.

Historical Bonnet Production

Accounts of bonnet creation are not entirely clear on the method of production favored. While a wardrobe account from Segovia lists specific amounts of woven cloth to be made into bonnets, there are also many accounts of knitted and fulled caps. For example, the Sevillian trade ordinances concerning bonnet making note the steps over which potential bonnet-makers were to be examined in order to progress from apprentice to master. As Anderson notes, the makers were to be tested "from the beginning with a needle, to the end" (39) of 6 distinct types of caps.

The requirements to become a master *bonetero* in Toledo provide evidence for the popularity of knitted hats. Such a person must:

know the different kinds of wool and... be able to separate the four parts of a fleece, to know carding combs and the carding process, spinning, the proper shapes of bonnets when they are

knitted (*enagujados*), how to do fulling – cleaning, shrinking, and thickening wool – to block (*amoldar*) bonnets and make them even (*aparejar*), to dye in red and black... (Anderson 39).

In addition, a candidate for inclusion in the Toledo *bonetero* guild was required to submit “two perfect *gorras*, a blue and a white, and four *bonetes*, a blue, a white, a simple blue, and a simple white” (Anderson 35).

The entire process of becoming a *bonetero* took at least eight years, and the value of their products is readily discerned through the strict regulations surrounding the trade. All bonnets made by an individual must be marked with their own personal seal as well as with the device of the city in which the bonnet was made. Once produced and exported, a bonnet would undergo a rigorous system of inspection, approval, and labelling in order to be sold in any other city (Anderson 39).

Bibliography

- Anderson, Ruth M. *Hispanic Costume 1480-1530*. New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1979.
- Bernis, Carmen. *Idumentaria Medieval Española*. Madrid: Instituto Diego Velasquez, 1956.
- . *Trajes y Modas en la España de los reyes Católicos*. Madrid: Instituto Diego Velásquez, 1978.
- Ferrandis, Jose. *Datos Documentales para la Historica del Arte Español: Inventarios Reales (Juan II a Juana la Loca)*. Madrid: Instituto Diego Velásquez, 1943.
- Johnson, Caroline. *The Queen's Servants: Gentlewomen's Dress at the Accession of Henry VIII*. Lightwater [UK]: Fat Goose Press, 2011.
- Mikhailya, Ninya and Jane Malcolm-Davies. *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Dress*. London: Costume and Fashion Press, 2006.
- Phillips, Carla Rahn and William D. *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Pointer, Sally. *Prince Arthur's Hat*. Pattern. Self-published, 2011.

List of Images

- Figure 1: Flandes, Juan de. *Raising of Lazarus*. Detail. 1510.
- Figure 2: Flandes, Juan de. *Christ and the Canaanite Woman*. Detail. c. 1510/
- Figure 3: Gallego, Fernando. *Retablo virgen cacaes*. 1480.
- Figure 4: Master of the Retable of the Catholic Monarchs. *The Marriage at Cana*. 1496-97. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art.
- Figure 5: Master of the Retable of the Catholic Monarchs. *The Marriage at Cana*. 1496-97. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art.
- Figure 6: Figure of Sibilla Africanus. Detail. c. 1515. Relief sculpture.
- Figure 7: Borgona, Juan de. *St. Felix Preaching*. Detail. 1520.