

Ready-to-Wear Clothing in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: New Ready-Made Garments and Second-Hand Clothes Trade

Jutta Zander Seidel

To speak about ready-to-wear clothing until the 17th century has to include two different points of view: Firstly, the aspect of production, leading to the specific garments, which only were allowed to be fabricated ready-made. Secondly, the aspect of consumption, what means both the occasions that people have had to buy either new or used ready-made garments, and the social classification of the purchasers. The sources are tracing back to the 14th century, when tariffs of customs indicate various ready-mades as commodities, while at the same time other records already verify second-hand clothing markets in German towns. In the context of my own studies about textiles in private households of Nuremberg between 1500 and 1650, it has become evident that second-hand garments were of great importance for clothing not only the poor. ¹

1. New ready-made clothes

To a limited extent ready-made clothes were available long before industrial fabrication started in the 19th century. In 1767, a merchant's encyclopaedia enumerates stockings, hats, caps, gloves, all kinds of fashionable finery as well as military clothing as usual wares of a tradesman, and also a recent study on petty chapmen in the 17th century has come to the conclusion that «it seems that ready-made clothes industry was born in the seventeenth century, not in the nineteenth». ² But the traces lead back even to the late Middle Ages. More than fifty years ago, having investigated South-German men's clothing, Sigrid Flamand Christensen mentions tariffs of customs proving 14th century trade in caps and trousers between Strassburg and Lombardy. Leather trousers, what in this times means ankle-length stockings cut to the shape of the legs, were traded from Lübeck to Venice. ³ Once more trousers («hosen») and «hawben», probably woollen caps, are specified as commodities in the records of the Regensburg family of merchants Runtinger between 1387 and 1407. ⁴ These trousers, made

of woollen material of medium or low qualities, were acquired at the Frankfurt fair, normally by the dozen. Various colours as black, red, green, white, blue and brown were in stock, with prices from threequarters of a florin to one and a half florin the piece, or better, in the historical terminology, the «pair». Obviously first of all the trousers were sold in Regensburg, as consignments are lacking. On the other hand, some purchasers of trousers are noted: Runtinger himself, his son-in-law and a councillor of Regensburg - all three citizens of Regensburg, whose social ranks may demonstrate these ready-mades being in demand not only by the lower classes.

Coming now to the proper topic of my paper, the situation in Nuremberg since about 1500. This former imperial city in the 16th century, always a place of great interest in the history of costume and fashion, has been taken as an example that may find its parallels in other German towns too.

By law of the city government it was prohibited to the tailors of Nuremberg, to make new clothes «auf den Kauf», that is in stock for sale, without a direct order of a customer. Replacing the statutes of a guild, the tailor's order («Schneiderordnung») of 1535 established that no tailor was allowed to make any clothes from new or old fabrics on public sale. In 1629, a revised version provided exceptions only for some «foreign» clothes, as leather or woollen stockings from the Netherlands or from France, and «foreign» gloves or bags, which, according to the given argumentation, could no longer be prohibited anyhow. Moreover the purchase of new ready-made garments was allowed elsewhere, but only for one's own use.⁵

Similar restrictions are known from other German towns. By the end of the 15th century, also in Bamberg their oath prohibited the tailors from making garments in stock for sale,⁶ while the tailors of Münster had to take advice being called «clothes-makers» («Kleidermacher») and not «clothes-sellers» («Kleiderverkäufer»).⁷

Somewhat surprisingly, at the same time craftsmen outside the tailor's corporation were permitted to produce ready-made clothes for public sale. In Nuremberg, those exceptions were made for some garments of basic use, perhaps to promote a sufficient supply for everybody. For this purpose, mainly women are to recognize, whose competences were fixed by an annex to the tailor's order since 1535.⁸ More than hat- and cap-makers, shoemakers, bag-makers and so on, who traditionally worked in stock for sale, these women represent an early stage of production of ready-

to-wear clothing, as in fact they produced garments, and not accessories in a broader sense of the word.

In 1535, mainly two different garments for women are mentioned as ready-mades, namely «Goller» and «Brüstlein». The Goller was part of the contemporary dress, composed of skirt, bodice, shirt and Goller. Albrecht Dürer's portrait of a young girl of 1515, shows a version of the Goller, covering the low neck of the bodice as a large round collar (Fig. 1).⁹ The middle-class bride and her two bridesmaids from Hans Weigel's «Trachtenbuch» of 1577 wear an other type of it, now a short waistcoat without sleeves, ending just below the bust (Fig. 2). Another illustration from the same costume-book shows a back view of it, now worn by an elder woman.¹⁰ However, on both illustrations, the Goller is a fashionable, even festive, garment of velvet or another silk fabric, while the materials allowed for ready-mades were explicitly limited to linen or woollen fabrics («Haras, Zwilich, Schetter, Barchent und wullen Tuch»). A remarkable additional clause establishes the same women being allowed to use silk and other fabrics of high quality by a customer's order, so that by working on commission they obviously approached to tailor's competence.

The same limitations for materials were in force concerning other ready-made garments, especially the «Brüstlein». «Brüstlein» has been the idiomatic term for the bodice of a woman's kirtle, normally sewn together with the skirt, the so-called «Unterrock». This garment was the leading everyday dress during the 16th century, certainly taking the first place before festive or ceremonial one-piece-gowns, which hardly were worn by women of the lower classes.

The spinning young woman painted on a wooden box in a Nurembergian doll-house is wearing such an everyday dress, composed of a white shirt, a red «Brüstlein», a blue «Unterrock» and a white apron (Fig. 3).¹¹ According to the craft-order, only the bodices were provided as ready-mades, while the skirts came into tailor's competence. Therefore the name «Brüstmacherin», approximately «bodice-maker» in English, given to the women tailoring the ready-made bodices, corresponds exactly to their work, while «skirt-maker» («Unterrockmacherin»), as they were called too, uncorrectly refers to the forbidden skirts. The suffix «maker», however, is well known from other historical crafts, completed by various adjuncts according to the produced goods, as shoemaker, bag-maker, hat-maker and so on.

Of course, such an amalgamation of tailor's and ready-to-wear-maker's

competences resulted in frequent quarrels. At first, the tailors felt always at a disadvantage by the ban on making ready-made clothes. Furthermore, they complained of those women, they suspected of passing over their marks. Already in 1521, the town-council refused a complaint made about women selling new ready-made bodices and Goller on the market. On June 1535, the councillors had to decide upon the tailor's protest against ready-made silk bodices, now coming to a ban, which was also given to a woman's application for making and selling trousers and coats too.¹² Today these quarrels are of great interest for the history of ready-made clothing, recording not only the norm of a law, but also its application in every-day life.

Later in the 16th century, a renewed order refers to an increasing supply with ready-to-wear clothes. In addition we find men's garments as linen breeches («pluderhosen»), short coats or smocks («hartzkitl») and stockings («strümpf»).¹³ Besides, of course, silk stockings and other fancy goods were available, still mainly imported from Italy.

A further aspect of ready-made clothing, as far as I see not yet taken into account, seems to be provided by historical gifts of clothes, especially by their sources of supply. Since the Middle Ages, these gifts were established to help a certain number of poor people to new clothes, which, both possibilities being recorded, were given either as fabrics or as ready-made garments. A drawing about 1580, from a chronicle of Würzburg (Tav. D),¹⁴ shows the distribution of clothes, shoes and bread on the occasion of a medieval donation. It may give us a visual idea of other 16th century gifts of clothes, as for example the donation of the wealthy citizen Wolfgang Münzer, died in 1577 in Nuremberg. In our context it is first of all interesting by its records about the tailoring of the garments, already showing the beginnings of mass-produced clothing.¹⁵

The donation had to be executed every year on October 31 by providing a hundred of poor men with a long black woollen coat («Rock»), a black woollen waistcoat («Leibrock oder Mutzen»), a pair of stockings («Strümpf/Hosenstrümpf»), again meaning trousers, of black woollen cloth, a black hat, a white linen shirt and a pair of shoes. An engraving shows the 100 old men with their new clothes, on the way to church.¹⁶ There is striking the difference between the fashionable suit of the two men conducting the procession and the traditional outfit of the 100 men new-dressed by the donation, which, by the way, was not changed until 1809.

The order of the donation prescribed names and qualities of every

material to be used for the clothes, even of lining and where it has to be purchased. Of every garment a pattern and a calculation were asked, before two tailors and a shirt-maker («Hemdenmacherin») were commissioned to make coats, waistcoats, trousers and shirts. Hats and shoes were ordered from hat- and shoemakers. Then the tailors and their journeymen had to cut out the clothes under the supervision of a sworn «measuring-master», a work to take several days, considering the quantity of 100 coats, 100 waistcoats and 100 pairs of trousers. 500 ells of linen were taken by the shirt-maker for 100 shirts. A bill of the costs for hospitality during cutting out the clothes, dated from September 3, 1765, demonstrates that from this day on only two months remained for tailoring, as the distribution had to take place punctually on October 31.

The big number of garments, to get ready until a fixed day, demanded for a kind of mass-produced tailoring. Indeed, the cooperation of only two masters, tailoring to a granted pattern and mass-cutting from normal measures can be taken for standardizations in this sense. And finally the distribution among the poor fits into the picture, as once more ready-made clothing were at the consumer's disposal.

2. *Second-hand clothing markets*

Finally we have to look at the second-hand markets, in those days certainly the most important source of supply with ready-made clothing. Already in 1361, six second-hand dealers could be verified in the city of Frankfurt.¹⁷ A Nuremberg city chronicle of 1488 is quoting second-hand dealers selling clothes on the «market», which, as a specific used-clothing-market has become a permanent institution since the first decade of the 16th century at the latest.¹⁸ Then the city government started to centre all second-hand dealers at an area near the Pegnitz-river, called «Säumarkt», - *verbatim* swine-market - formerly a quarter of poor and ill people.

Here the clothes were sold either in rented stalls or on the pavement (Fig. 4). This woodcut of 1490, printed in Nuremberg, shows such a stall, set up with a table and some wooden sticks. The woman in front of it, with coif and apron, is the second-hand dealer, just grasping at a coat, brought for sale by a well dressed man.¹⁹ Those dealers, called «käufflin», in their great majority were women, only being admitted to sell second-hand wares of low values. Their number was regulated by the municipal

authority. In 1557, the government conceded 32 dealers to sell second-hand clothes on the «Säumarkt». Until 1597 their number had grown up to 54.

The clothes reached the market mainly from the estates of deceased people, where they were sold with order and at a profit of the dependants. By the proceeds, poor families were enabled to pay their living for some time, so that in this respect too the second-hand clothes-trade was of great social importance. «All the clothes of my husband were sold after his death to liquidate our debts» and similar remarks can be found in a lot of probate inventories. More rarely, the sales are recorded by precise tabulations of the sold garments and their prices. After the death of a family member even the dependants could ask for permission to sell the clothes of the deceased person, but only this very clothes and only for a short period. These private sales of used clothes normally didn't take place at the market, but in or in front of the family's lodgings.

To avoid the risks of infection, special regulations were in force during epidemics. Then the second-hand markets rested closed, if necessary for months and years, as it had happened for instance from 1543 to 1546. Precautionary measures were issued by short intervals, always including the strict prohibition from selling clothes, linen and bedding of infected people or from those who had died of the plague. Exceptions for private sales were only granted for the poorest and only, if the textiles confidently didn't come from a ill person.

As probate inventories of all social ranks establish used garments for sale, we may assume that old and cheap rags reached the market as well as clothes in good condition. Even patrician families had been among the purchasers,²⁰ although above all the poor were left to second-hand markets for clothing. Calculations basing on the household accounts of the patrician Anton Tucher could establish that in 1509 a new coat at the price of three and a half florin came to 56% of the yearly income of a girl-servant. Only the fabric for a servant's coat and trousers could amount to 148% of his yearly wages.²¹ So it is quite obvious that the lower classes couldn't manage without buying second-hand clothes at prices from a few pennies upward, as they become evident by the following examples from probate inventories.

In 1547, one and a half florin were realized by selling a damask woman's Goller, seven coifs and an old everyday man's coat after the death

of a craftsman. Some years before, a girl-servant had to spend one florin to buy a second-hand coat for herself, while a man's coat, lined with fur, was bought for threequarters of a florin.²²

This enumeration of cheap second-hand clothes could be continued furthermore, but also at higher prices they found their purchasers. In 1509, the patrician Michael Behaim bought a black second-hand coat («Schaube»), lined with fur, for the price of 28 florin.²³ In 1577, a black velvet cap, decorated with gold and black feathers, was sold for 15 florins, which also could be paid only by a wealthy customer.²⁴

This few examples may be enough to show the flourishing state of the second-hand clothes-trade during the 16th century. While the production of new ready-made garments was still limited to a few everyday clothes without any appeal of luxury, here also fashionable garments of a certain value were on sale, and we have seen that in fact purchasers of every social rank made use of it.

¹ J. ZANDER-SEIDEL, *Textiler Hausrat. Kleidung und Haustextilien in Nürnberg von 1500-1650*, München 1990.

² B. DENEKE, *Bemerkungen zur Geschichte vorgefertigter Kleidung*, in «Waffen- und Kostümkunde» 29, 1987, S. 68-73. G. Krause, *Altpreußische Militärkleidungswirtschaft. Materialien und Formen, Planung und Fertigung, Wirtschaft und Verwaltung. Das Altpreußische Heer* 7, Osnabrück 1983. M. Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England. Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1984, p. 196.

³ S. FLAMAND CHRISTENSEN, *Die männliche Kleidung in der süddeutschen Renaissance*, Berlin 1934, p. 11.

⁴ F. BASTIAN, *Das Runtingerbuch 1383-1407*, 3 Bde, *Deutsche Handelsakten des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, 6-8, Regensburg 1935-44. V. EIKENBERG, *Das Handelshaus der Runtinger zu Regensburg. Ein Spiegel süddeutschen Rechts-Handels- und Wirtschaftslebens im ausgehenden 14. Jahrhundert*, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 43, Göttingen 1976, p. 142.

⁵ Nürnberg, Staatsarchiv, Rep. 52 b, Amts- und Standbücher, Handwerksordnungen, No. 259, p. 272-281; No. 261, p. 394a-395a. To the following also ZANDER-SEIDEL, 1990.

⁶ Bamberg, Stadtarchiv, B4, No. 34, Schneiderordnung, p. 78a.

⁷ R. KRUMBHOLTZ, *Die Gewerbe der Stadt Münster bis zum Jahre 1661*, *Publicationen aus den K. Preußischen Staatsarchiven* 70, Osnabrück 1965 (1898¹), p. 401.

⁸ Nürnberg, Staatsarchiv, Rep. 52b, Amts- und Standbücher, Handwerksordnungen, No. 259, p. 277b-278a.

⁹ A. DÜRER, *Portrait of a young girl*, 1515. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.

¹⁰ H. WEIGEL, J. AMMAN, *Trachtenbuch: Darin fast allerley und der fürnembsten Nationen die heutigs tags bekandt sein Kleidungen ... abgerissen sein*, Nürnberg 1577.

¹¹ From a doll-house of 1639: Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, HG 4063.

¹² See Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Ratsverlässe 1521, No. 668, p. 3a; 1535, No. 851, p. 17b; 1537, No. 884, p. 3b.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Ratsverlässe 1556, No. 1132, p. 18a/b.

¹⁴ Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. M. ch. f. 760, fol. 97 b. G. MÄLZER, E. PLETICHA-GEUDER, *Die Fries-Chronik des Fürstbischofs Julius Echter von Mespelbrunn*, Würzburg 1989, Abb. 1.

¹⁵ H. RASCHER, *Die Kleiderstiftung des Wolfgang Münzer von 1577*, in «Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg» 57, 1970, p. 1-123.

¹⁶ Engraving from «Stiftungsordnung» (Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, WSt, Ält. Spez. Reg. M XII, No. 42). RASCHER, 1970. Abb. 7.

¹⁷ K. BÜCHER, *Die Bevölkerung von Frankfurt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*, Socialstatistische Studien 1, Tübingen 1886, p. 18, 23. U. DIRLMEIER, *Untersuchungen zu Einkommensverhältnissen und Lebenshaltungskosten in oberdeutschen Städten des Spätmittelalters*, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften 1, 1978, p. 261. See also H. KÜHNEL (Ed.), *Alltag im Spätmittelalter*, Graz-Wien-Köln 1984, p. 252.

¹⁸ Chronicle of Sigmund Meisterlin, 1488, in *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte. Nürnberg 3*, Leipzig 1864, p. 134.

¹⁹ From *Historie von den vier Kaufleuten*, printed by Hans Hofmann, Nuremberg, about 1490. A. SCHRAMM, *Der Bilderschmuck der Frühdrucke*, T. 18, Leipzig 1935, pl. 95, No. 647, p. 10/11.

²⁰ Purchasers from the upper classes are to find during the 16th century, while later on they shifted to the lower classes and the town mob. See M. GINSBURG, *Rags to Riches: The Second-Hand Clothes Trade 1700-1978*, in «Costume» 14, 1980, p. 121-135.

²¹ DIRLMEIER, 1978, p. 288/89.

²² Nürnberg, Stadtarchiv, Libri Inventariorum 3, fol. 155b-158r (Sebald Buchfelder, 1547); L.I. 2, fol. 82b-83a (Katharina Deum, 1537); L.I. 4, fol. 6a-8a (Barbara Hurlmeß, 1543).

²³ J. KAMANN, *Aus Nürnberger Haushaltungs- und Rechnungsbüchern des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, in «Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg» 6, 1866, p. 57-122, bes. 100.

²⁴ Probate Inventory of Wolfgang Münzer, 1577. Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, WSt. Ält. Spez. Reg. M XII, 33.



Fig. 1 - Albrecht Dürer, Portrait of a young girl, 1515. Stockholm, National Museum

MEDIOCRIS CONDITIONIS SPONSA
cum duabus virginibus, ipsam comitantibus in templum.



XXII.

Ein gemeine Braut/ sambt iren Tisch-
Jungfrauen.

D Nürnberg die Hochzeit Braut/
Gehen zu Kirch in solchem Kleidt.
Was nicht ist gar von hohem Stam/
Auffrichtig/ Erbar/ Tugendfam.

3 11

Fig. 2 - Jost Amman, A Nuremberg middle-class bride and her bridesmaids, 1577



Fig. 3 - Spinning young woman, from a Nuremberg doll-house, c. 1639. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum



Fig. 4 - A Nuremberg «Käufflin» selling second-hand clothes at the market, c. 1490