



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

---

Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

Crusader Chic

ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

# Crusader Chic

---

First Edition  
2020  
Prepared by



Dr. Chev. Peter L. Heineman, GOTJ  
2020 Avenue B  
Council Bluffs, IA 51501  
Phone 712.323.3531 • [www.plheineman.net](http://www.plheineman.net)

---

# Table of Contents

Introduction ..... 1  
The Crusades ..... 2  
Fatimid Dynasty ..... 3  
Western Textiles ..... 7  
Relics ..... 10  
The New Fashions ..... 12

## INTRODUCTION



## Fashion

Roland Barthes draws a distinction between the universal practice of adornment and what we call fashion. Fashion is not only clothes and accessories, it is also a language that harmonizes with a time and place. Along with the obvious reasons clothing was invented—*“as protection against harsh weather, out of modesty for hiding nudity, and for ornamentation to get noticed”*—Barthes says that fashion serves another essential function: storytelling. Wearing a particular item of clothing, writes Barthes, is *“an act of signification and therefore a profoundly social act.”*

For the early medieval period, clothes were statements of function and position. Stability and outwardly legible rank were important above all else; one dressed according to one’s station. The rigidity of this system stands in contrast to modern notions of fashion, which emphasize aspiration and fluidity—whether this is a countess deciding to dress like a queen or a suburban American teenager like a sophisticated Parisian.

The following publication is based on an article from the Lapham’s Quarterly. Lapham's Quarterly is a literary magazine established in 2007 by former Harper's Magazine editor Lewis H. Lapham. Each issue examines a theme using primary source material from history.



In the 11th century, the countries of Europe had yet to emerge – the continent was a patchwork of smaller kingdoms, each with their own rulers. By 1095 Islam had spread to the Holy Land, encompassing two-thirds of the area. As a military campaign, the Crusades were generally a failure, however the stories brought back by the crusaders who had left their homes to fight a distant war encouraged their countrymen to look beyond their villages for the first time. Western Europeans became interested in other cultures, and opened their minds to other ideas. There was bringing back of spices, knowledge, ideas and treasures (i.e. windmills, carpets, compasses, fruit and spices). All of this led to advances in technology and the arts – what we now call the Renaissance period.

# The Crusades

The Crusades (1095–1291) were one of the earliest disruptions in the medieval world's codes of appearance. In 1091 Pope Urban II declared that it was urgent to restore Christian control of the Holy Land. Religious enthusiasts set off to conquer; when they arrived in the Levant, they encountered the refinement of the Islamic courts, a developed consumer society, and well-dressed Muslim armies. While we think of the medieval period as a time of violent conflict between Islam and Christianity, and assume this animosity left little room for cultural exchange, there is also a story of artistic dialogue across geographical, political, and cultural boundaries. Viewed through the lens of clothes, the history of this period is marked by concord and cooperation, and stands in contrast to the military clashes of the Crusades.

Travelers to the Holy Land encountered a new universe of fabrics and clothing—and returned home with powerful new desires. Exchange between the courts of the Latin West and Muslim caliphates eventually led to a revolution in aristocratic dress, with French courtly ladies deriving identity and recognition from the lavish silks of Baghdad, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Damascus.

It is hardly surprising that Europeans looked to the East for new fashions. Every scrap of silk in Christian Western Europe was imported from the East until the eleventh century. The vast majority of medieval Western art also points to other places and times: the Garden of Eden, the future resurrection, the court of Heaven, Jerusalem, and other sites of biblical history. To medieval Europeans, the East meant the holy places of Christianity, the Magi, and the early martyrs, and anything from the East had an aura of the sacred. The Crusades also opened the Holy Land to mass pilgrimage, a journey undertaken by a larger and more diverse group of pilgrims than ever before—thousands a year—who also observed the splendor of the Islamic world.

Knights and pilgrims, the majority of whom came from Capetian France, brought back souvenirs from their journeys, including textiles and other Muslim-made luxury objects. These were bought in the marketplaces of Frankish crusading states, were gifts from Islamic courts, or war booty. Many of these objects—bought, given, or taken—were in the supremely lightweight, flexible, foldable form of textiles: robes, pouches, turban wraps, veils. These textiles were like nothing most Europeans had ever seen.

# Fatimid Dynasty

European crusaders and pilgrims reached the Holy Land at the high point of an extraordinary textile culture. The Fatimid dynasty (909–1171) ruled an empire that stretched from North Africa to Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Accounts of visits to the Fatimid court in Cairo contain descriptions of magnificence, with textiles playing a large role in the visual luxury. Visitors were led through sumptuous courtyards, each courtyard draped in rich fabrics. One tent was decorated with images of every known animal, a fabric bestiary that took 150 workers nine years to complete. At the center of the court was a gold-curtained throne where the caliph sat in golden robes. The Fatimids were minority rulers, and intricate textiles were a way for the caliphs to legitimize their rule in the eyes of subjects and rivals.

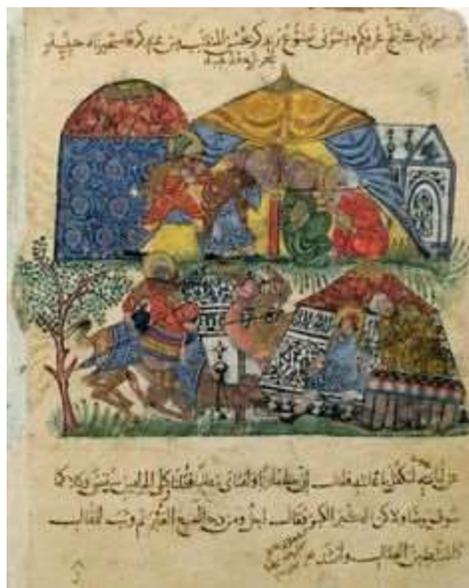


Figure 1 Fatimid tent

The crusaders arrived in the Holy Land at a high point in the production and styling of textiles in the Muslim world. The Fatimid Dynasty (ca. 909-1171), which represented a political challenge to the Sunni Abbasid caliphs based in Baghdad, was well known to travelers for its display of textiles at its court in Cairo. By the time of the First Crusade, the Fatimid court had made Cairo the most important and influential cultural center in the Muslim world. Fatimid government officials oversaw textile factories, especially those that produced the *tirāz* and silk was so widespread that it was carried by merchants as a form of currency.

It is not surprising that the crusaders were influenced by



**FATIMIDS** claimed descent from Fatimah, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad.

Islamic culture during their time in the East, lasting nearly two centuries. Indeed, the phenomenon of Latin Christians living in the crusader states “going native” is attested to by both the Latin Christian and Muslim contemporary sources. Both the French cleric Fulcher of Chartres and the Arab Syrian historian Usamah ibn Munqidh, for example, commented in detail about how people of European birth had, while remaining Christians, abandoned the customs of their native countries to embrace life in the East, including the adoption of Muslim dietary laws and native clothing styles. Some of the innovations were available to Europeans prior to the First Crusade, as merchants made such goods available in Mediterranean markets, but the crusades drove a much greater European interest in, and market for, such items. Indeed, many clothing innovations, such as embroidered fabrics, redesigned tunics, and the increased use of silk, made their way back to Europe and became popular during the crusading era.



## Fatimid Egypt

The first Fatimid invasion of Egypt occurred in 914–915, soon after the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate in Ifriqiya in 909. The Fatimids launched an expedition east, against the Abbasid Caliphate, under the Berber general Habasa ibn Yusuf. Habasa succeeded in subduing the cities on the Libyan coast between Ifriqiya and Egypt, and captured Alexandria. The Fatimid heir-apparent, al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah, then arrived to take over the campaign. Attempts to conquer the Egyptian capital, Fustat, were beaten back by the Abbasid troops in the province. A risky affair even at the outset, the arrival of Abbasid reinforcements from Syria and Iraq under Mu'nis al-Muzaffar doomed the invasion to failure, and al-Qa'im and the remnants of his army abandoned Alexandria and returned to Ifriqiya in May 915. The failure did not prevent the Fatimids from launching another unsuccessful attempt to capture Egypt four years later. It was not until 969 that the Fatimids conquered Egypt and made it the center of their empire.

The Costume Supply House was a major Fatimid government office, established by the first caliph in Egypt, with an initial budget of more than 600,000 dinars. It oversaw the production, storage, and distribution of official costumes for court functionaries, from the caliph to government clerks and their families and servants—a wardrobe from turban to underwear, with different outfits for summer and winter. To give a sense of the enterprise's scale, Abu al-Futuh Barjuwan, only an administrator in the court, died (d. 1000) with a wardrobe containing a hundred turban wraps, a thousand pairs of pants, and a thousand waistbands.

In Fatimid Egypt, the Crusaders also encountered something entirely new to them: a complex system of investiture that was widespread in medieval Islam. Investiture is the ceremonial reclothing of a person in special garments to create a new status. A ruler would bestow a garment, called a *khil'a*, sometimes with a ceremonial sword, on a court official, who would then be known as one of the “men of robes of honor.” Almost all of these ceremonial garments were woven or embroidered with gold in the eleventh century, with different levels of grandeur signaling different ranks. The *khil'a* ceremony is the origin of our word *gala*.



Figure 2 Robe of honor

Originally the *khil'a* robes would have been ones a ruler had actually worn, containing a *baraka*, or “blessing.” The investiture ceremonies later became more symbolic; as honors were extended to thousands of followers, it was impossible for every garment to have been worn by an important ruler. (This led, of course, to requests by those set to have a *khil'a* ceremony for a robe that the caliph actually wore.) The core idea remained, however: the ruler was holy, with a radiant light that could be transferred by cloth.

**SILK SHIMMERS** due to the triangular prism-like structure of the silk fiber, which allows silk cloth to refract incoming light at different angles.

It is impossible to trace the origins of robing ceremonies, although the biblical story of Jacob giving his coat of many colors to his son Joseph, or the Prophet



## Cairo

The area around present-day Cairo, especially Memphis that was the old capital of Egypt, had long been a focal point of Ancient Egypt due to its strategic location just upstream from the Nile Delta. However, the origins of the modern city are generally traced back to a series of settlements in the first millennium. Around the turn of the 4th century, as Memphis was continuing to decline in importance, the Romans established a fortress town along the east bank of the Nile. This fortress, known as Babylon, was the nucleus of the Roman and then the Byzantine city and is the oldest structure in the city today. It is also situated at the nucleus of the Coptic Orthodox community, which separated from the Roman and Byzantine churches in the late 4th century. Many of Cairo's oldest Coptic churches, including the Hanging Church, are located along the fortress walls in a section of the city known as Coptic Cairo. Following the Muslim conquest in 640 AD, the conqueror Amr ibn As settled to the north of the Babylon in an area that became known as al-Fustat. In 969, the Fatimids conquered Egypt from their base in Ifriqiya and a new fortified city northeast of Fustat was established.

Muhammad giving his coat to the poet Ka'b bin Zuhayr, have been presented as possible origins for the tradition. Over two thousand years ago, silk robes were also given out by nomadic kings in Central Asia to solidify relations between them and their subjects. Investiture ceremonies became central in all the states that developed out of Islamic conquests and grew particularly important as Islam spread. After the Fatimid period the tradition took on a strictly metaphorical meaning: a chronicler might say someone was “invested with a robe of honor” to mean he was appointed to a high office, even if no garments were involved.

For the Fatimids, however, robing involved actual garments, and the highest-status textile was the *tirāz* (from the Persian word for embroidery), a cloth with an Arabic-inscribed border. The inscriptions, also known as *tirāz*, were formulaic, beginning with a blessing, followed by the name of the caliph, the vizier, the place of production, and the date. *Tirāz* were made between 700 and 1171 in Islamic lands from Persia to Sicily, and reached their artistic height in Fatimid Egypt. The Fatimid caliphate had official administrative departments for *tirāz* textiles, which were linked to the mints; both *tirāz* and coins were made with gold and silver. The written word was the highest achievement in Islamic societies, and the signature of the caliph on *tirāz* had meanings far beyond those of the designer names on our own clothes. In the Fatimid world, an inscription on a *tirāz* wasn't just a brand. It was magic.



Figure 3 *Tirāz*

Fatimid Cairo was also a place of relative cultural mobility, with something approaching a middle class—a world that surely surprised the Crusaders. The Fatimids were generally tolerant of Jews and Christians, and Cairo was a place of great religious intermixing. There were silks manufactured by royal *tirāz* workshops made for export to the West with invocations to the trinity applied on the silk. Makers of textiles, like mosaicists, worked for both Christians and Muslims. The Jewish upper class also imitated Fatimid court styles, copying textiles inscribed with Arabic script. A cache of 200,000 manuscripts and papyri found in the *genizah*, or storage room of a synagogue, in Cairo contains more than 750 trousseau lists appended to marriage contracts. They catalogue seventy different types of women's clothes (half of them headgear) in sixty different fabrics, including robes with printed designs, checked patterns (plaid and checkerboard), set with jewels or pearl sleeves, gilded or embroidered with gold, or striped like “the flowing of the pen” (probably a fine pinstripe). Almost every new bride had a *jūkāniyya*, not mentioned

in any Arab dictionary but probably a sleeved garment of linen, brocade, or silk. The word is perhaps derived from *javkân*, the game of polo, which would mean it resembled a polo jacket; a short coat with narrow sleeves. Islamic laws restricting the colors worn by non-Muslims were not enforced in Cairo.

Many of these garments and textiles made their way back to the Latin West after the beginning of the Crusades, starting especially after the late 1060s, when unpaid Fatimid troops raided the royal treasury and plundered unimaginable quantities of luxurious goods to sell. Merchants, whose trade had been established under the Romans and had continued more or less uninterrupted, made many of these goods available in Mediterranean markets, including those sold to the Frankish armies. The scope of the liquidation was vast, and we now assume that most of the Islamic luxury objects found in Europe today were in the possession of the Fatimids until 1061.



Figure 4 Fatimid rock crystal ewer

The rock crystal ewers in the treasury of San Marco and in the Louvre, for instance, probably came to the West at this time. The San Marco ewer was most likely sold in Tripoli, after which it ended up in the Byzantine court in Constantinople. The Venetians acquired it in another pillaging—the second great event in the movement of Islamic luxury goods to the West—the 1204 Sack of Constantinople. The Paris ewer most likely took a different route to Europe. It was first given by King Roger II of Sicily to Count Thibaut of Blois, who donated it to the treasury of St. Denis, where it remained until it was moved to the Louvre in the eighteenth century.

Textiles also entered Europe as booty from the wars against Byzantine- and Muslim-controlled Sicily and southern Italy. Pope Benedict VIII sent Henry II a gold and jeweled crown that belonged to the wife of the Muslim emir of Sardinia. The crown must have been taken as booty when the island was recaptured. William of Tyre said the plunder after the fall of Antioch was so big “*it was impossible to count or measure the gold and silver, the gems, silks, and valuable garments.*” Geoffrey de Vinsauf described King Richard the Lionhearted’s army raiding a Turkish caravan in 1192 near Galatia and finding “*gold and silver, cloaks of silk, purple and scarlet robes and variously ornamented apparel.*”



## Old French Crusade Cycle

is a medieval narrative, a type of epic poem, concerning the First Crusade and its aftermath. The manuscripts were all written between approximately 1350 and 1425, in northeastern France. The original poem in the cycle was the *Chanson d'Antioche*, which is the basis for the "historical" section of the cycle. The original *Chanson d'Antioche* is lost, but it was edited in the 12th century by Graindor de Douai, who also edited the *Chanson de Jérusalem*, and possibly wrote the *Chanson des Chétifs* himself. These three *chansons* form the basis for the rest of the cycle, and are more historically oriented than the Romances that grew up around them. The protagonist of these three *chansons* is Godfrey of Bouillon, around whom the rest of the cycle is based, in a much more romanticized form. These connect Godfrey with the legend of the Swan Knight. The subject of the *Chanson d'Antioche* is the preaching of the First Crusade, the preparations for departure, the tearful goodbyes, the arrival at Constantinople and the siege and taking of Antioch, where King Corbaran is defeated by Godfrey and the Crusaders. The lost original poem was said to have been composed by Richard le Pèlerin, who was present during the siege.

# Western Textiles

The desire for these textiles in the West is well documented. When the Crusaders, men from relatively diverse backgrounds, saw the abundance of the Islamic courts, they wanted to possess such new and exotic finery. Knights coming from the lower nobility could fulfill these desires; they returned with a longing for uniqueness and originality after sharing in a knightly culture in which all knights emulated the highest noble ranks.

The adventure stories now known as the Old French Crusade Cycle, read and told to nostalgic French audiences from around 1190 into the fifteenth century, contain lush descriptions of Eastern textiles. In “Les Chétifs” (c. 1190–1200) Frankish knights encounter one Muslim leader with a tent that was

very rich, draped with brilliant silk,  
and patterned green silk was thrown over  
the grass,  
with lengths of cut fabric worked with  
birds and beasts.  
The cords with which it was tied are of silk,  
and the quilt was sewn with another  
shining, delicate silk.

Readers enjoyed these specific, lush details. The colors and types of textiles even change in different manuscripts of the same story, as storytellers rushed to keep up with the latest styles: here the tent is draped in imperial Byzantine silk, but has purple stripes in another version, striped white silk in yet another.

A number of scenes show Crusaders dreaming of *khil'a* ceremonies or

receiving honorific robes as gifts. In “Les Chétifs” one Crusader is given robes of honor by a sympathetic Muslim and then shares the robes with his companions in the mode of Christian humility and comradeship. In these tales common knights, not only the great heroes, imagine receiving fine robes.

In the Crusader epics, Islamic textiles also become an opportunity for social mobility, as anyone given such an outfit could wear it and undermine the hierarchies of appearance. As new textiles became available to more people, they became a sign not just of wealth but also of honor.

It is worth emphasizing that the new desires for exotic clothing started with men, not women. In fact, the Crusader epics are more likely to focus on the textiles worn by horses. In one tale a sultan, wanting to tempt the hero Godfrey of Bouillon with his wealth, is advised to bring out his white Arabian charger. While Godfrey resists, the poet and his audience succumb—not to the horse’s size and strength, but to its dazzling accessories.



**TEXTILE** is Latin, from the adjective *textilis*, meaning 'woven', from *textus*, the past participle of the verb *texere*, 'to weave'.



*Figure 5 Tapestry of Godfrey of Bouillon*

The horse was covered...

with a rich silk of Carthaginian make; the governor had a saddle of gold covered with many images—

birds and maritime fish are worked on it in enamel.

The saddle is very rich and of very fine foreign manufacture...

There was never either reins or a saddle made of better gold, it was all done in scales of gold hung all over the outside, there were many emeralds and many shining topazes.

The horse's chest harness was extremely admirable; there was not a man in France rich enough to have bought it, for venom cannot poison the one who uses it.

The horse was whiter than snow that you see falling and its head was red as coals in a furnace.

With a checkered vermillion siglaton silk the horse was covered, they had cut it very well: you could see the white shining out between the red.

The bridle it had on its head was worth the honor of Pithiviers: Few men in the world would not covet it.

The manufacture, materials, their places of origin (Carthage), design, visual effect, aspirational quality (not a man in France rich enough to buy it), and novelty add up to desire: all, or nearly all, men would covet it. Historians tend to talk of Crusaders' wives back home launching the craze for Eastern textiles that swept across Europe, but this description is probably anachronistic, privileging the agency of women in a fashion universe that did not yet exist. Still, women were at least part of the craze for Eastern textiles: one observer described the Christian women of late twelfth-century Sicily who followed Islamic fashions: *"For the feast of Christmas [in 1184] they go out clad in gold-colored silk gowns, wrapped in elegant mantles, covered with colored veils, with gilded brodequins on their feet; they flaunt themselves in church in perfectly Muslim toilettes."* Such a person would have been introduced to the glamorous variety of Eastern textiles (as well as spices and other imports) thanks to the Crusades, creating the desires an expanded commercial trade system would soon move to satisfy.

A new era of economic prosperity opened with the Crusades. Posts were established in Crusader states like Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem; Acre, in what is now northern Israel, was the central marketplace and major port of the Franks in the Holy Land. The symbolic meaning of the Crusaders' newly discovered textiles wouldn't have gone far without a flood of actual clothes and garments to buy, sell, and wear in Europe.

The encounter with Islam also created the idea that textiles could have another type of value: they could contain honor. This made the textiles a site of fantasy: they were no longer simply about monetary value or luxury but honor or status as well—something they were already infused with in the Islamic context that now entered the West. It is also likely that the Eastern origin of these textiles helped give them a sacred aura that worked against the Christian tradition of rejecting worldly luxury. As early as the second century, Christian leaders such as Clement of Alexandria were thundering that the truly holy would be clothed in *"the pure vestment, woven of faith, of those who have been shown mercy"*; they would metaphorically wear Christ, not luxurious robes.



Figure 6 Patterned bilaut

The new fabrics and costumes the Crusaders brought home inspired others to want rich and detailed clothes, with complex tailoring and fine workmanship. Patterns on textiles were introduced. Stockings were replaced with tailored leggings, draped garments with the cut-and-sewn. Skirts became long and flowing, with trains sweeping the ground, and silhouettes became fuller. One new type of full-skirted tunic, the *bilaut*, sometimes with kimono sleeves, became popular with both sexes. Women's bilauts had a close-fitting tunic top that sometimes laced at the sides, and a skirt worn with two belts, one at the natural waist and one at the hip, where the skirt and top joined. Seams were concealed with decorative tape. This is recognizable as the fairy-tale Middle Ages presented by the Victorians and so well known today. The world of basic, functional European garments would never be the same.

# Relics

At the distance of nearly a millennium, it is all but impossible to give a reliable history of any particular object that came back from the Crusades. Anyone studying the history of Islamic textiles will find the best-preserved objects in French churches. In addition to the innumerable textiles imported from the Holy Land for domestic use, extravagant textiles were presented in Europe as biblical relics. Muslim-made textiles came to fill church treasuries, as cloth that lined reliquary caskets, shrouds of saints, and relic wrappings covering the hair and bone fragments of the holy.

The Chemise of the Virgin, said be worn when Mary gave birth to Christ, is one of the rare Islamic objects transported to Europe before the Crusades. It is reputed to have been donated by Charles the Bald in 876 and is historically a ninth-century silk wrap, possibly a turban wrap. The Chemise was so sacred that the cathedral at Chartres was built to house it.



*Figure 7 Chemise of the Virgin*

Only two fully intact Fatimid textiles exist: one is in Apt, in the Vaucluse in southern France. It is said to be the veil of St. Anne, the Virgin Mary's mother. The other, the Holy Shroud, is in Cadouin and is said to be the cloth that wrapped Jesus



## Shroud of Cadouin

This cloth, held in the Abbey of Cadouin, in Dordogne, was long considered as the Holy Shroud, the cloth believed to have covered the face of Jesus—or enveloped his body—when he was placed in the tomb. This is the head-cloth that the Apostle Peter saw upon entering the sepulchre on the morning of the Resurrection; he observed ‘that the handkerchief that had been on Jesus' head was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up in a separate place’ (John 20:7). According to the traditions of the monks of Cadouin and the *Chronica* of Albéric of Trois-Fontaines, written around the mid thirteenth century, the relic came into the possession of the Bishop of Puy, Adhémar de Monteil, who is believed to have obtained it after the capture of Antioch, during the first Crusade (1095–1099). It was first mentioned in 1214. The cloth, used for healing, was highly venerated in the Middle Ages. Protected by a reliquary, sometimes hidden and displaced to avoid covetous attention, it attracted to the abbey the thousands of pilgrims on The Way of St James.

when he was placed in the tomb. The Holy Shroud of Cadouin was a destination for thousands of pilgrims.

These robes quickly traded their identities as Islamic objects for Christian meanings. They can be regarded as a kind of *spolia*—like the ancient Roman columns incorporated in medieval and late antique churches—that used symbols and materials of a powerful empire to celebrate victory over a great rival.

Textiles that came back to Europe passed effortlessly and uncontroversially into liturgical use. Inscriptions with Allah’s blessing abound in Christian churches, transformed into orphreys, elaborately embroidered ornamental stripes or bands on ecclesiastical vestments. A textile with embroidered and woven Arabic inscriptions, quoting the Qur’an at length, might proclaim Muhammad the messenger of God and announce the name of the reigning caliph and royal manufacture in which the textile was produced, all while serving as a burial shroud for a Christian saint.

These objects would likely have been consecrated in a religious ceremony before entering the service of the church, in a sort of material baptism that erased any previous history. When these objects entered church treasuries through donations after many years of secular use as clothes and furnishings, their origins would by then have been obscured.

Tirāz textiles with Arabic inscriptions started to be used creatively in Western art as well. There are some eight hundred known cases of late-medieval Italian painters putting their subjects—biblical characters, the Holy Family—in robes with Arabic script or tirāz armbands. Sculptors, too, gave the saints and holy figures crowding around the portals and cloisters of French cathedrals the same tirāz bands from the 1140s to 1160s. Arabic or Arabic-style inscriptions, the motifs most characteristic of Islam, became popular in the Latin West, with Western artists recreating Islamic motifs in paintings and sculptures.

The Holy Family, of course, could not have worn tenth- or eleventh-century Fatimid robes. Artists and church leaders simply got it wrong, taking what were really Islamic textiles woven for Muslim rulers and giving them Christian meanings. But the practice makes some sense if you reflect on the fact that these Islamic textiles were already hybrid objects. A tirāz might have Egyptian-style animals and a Byzantine neo-Persian pattern made by Coptic Christians for Muslim rulers, even before Crusaders brought it back to Christian Europe. And the church had tremendous confidence in its authority to reinterpret Islamic objects as Christian. They felt they could repurpose the spoils of conquest for their own ends.

The idea was that the Holy Family should be dressed in the best and most glorious possible clothes, and this is what glorious clothes looked like. Islamic script had the aura of the Holy Land. Artists didn’t try to replicate biblical styles; instead they used the tirāz as a marker of beauty or exoticism, giving fashionable details to European costumes. It is possible that Arabic script was occasionally thought to be Hebrew or another early Christian script, and if so it would have intuitively bestowed honor and authenticity on an object or painting.

Interestingly, a *tirāz* of the highest quality, made as a robe of honor for an investiture ceremony—an object that had been blessed and was inscribed with the caliph’s blessing—retained its power to convey the sacred even after it was transported to Europe. Across very different cultures, the power of the garment remained strangely the same.

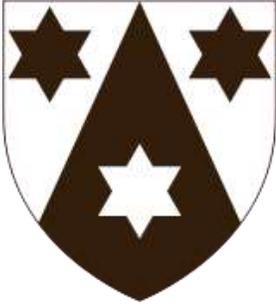
## The New Fashions

—and the taste for them—spread wildly. For a culture like medieval Europe’s, which placed such importance on external marks of inner rank, this created a kind of class panic. A sense of order had been lost. Orderic Vitalis, a monk writing an ecclesiastical history in the early twelfth century, describes the French count Fulk le Rechin’s lamentable taste for pointy-toed shoes, which “encouraged a new fashion in the Western regions, delighting frivolous men in search of novelties. To meet it, cobblers fashioned shoes like scorpions’ tails...and almost all, rich and poor alike, now demand shoes of this kind. Before then shoes always used to be made round, fitting the foot, and these were adequate to the needs of high and low, both clergy and laity. But now laymen in their pride seize upon a fashion typical of their corrupt morals.” It only got worse, the fashions more outrageous, from big sleeves to mullets to goatees.

Carmelite monks who returned from the Holy Land in the summer of 1254 wearing striped robes launched a controversy that lasted more than thirty years, with ten successive popes wanting the Carmelites to give up the stripes for plain cloaks. The medieval eye found any surface in which a background could not be distinguished from a foreground disturbing. Thus, striped clothing was relegated to those on the margins or outside the social order—jugglers and prostitutes, for example—and in medieval paintings the devil himself is often depicted wearing stripes. The West has long continued to dress its slaves and servants, its crewmen and convicts in stripes.



*Figure 8 Carmelite monks wearing striped robes*



## Carmelites

The Carmelites, formally known as the Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel or sometimes simply as Carmel by synecdoche, is a Roman Catholic mendicant religious order for men founded, probably in the 12th century, on Mount Carmel in Palestine in the Crusader States, hence the name Carmelites. However, historical records about its origin remain very uncertain. Berthold of Calabria has traditionally been associated with the founding of the order, but few clear records of early Carmelite history have survived. Berthold went to the Holy Land as part of the Crusades and was in Antioch when it was besieged by the Saracens. During this time he had a vision of Christ denouncing the soldiers' evil ways. At the time, hermits from the West were scattered throughout Palestine. Some accounts hold that in 1185 he came to Mount Carmel, built a small chapel there and gathered a community of hermits who would live at his side in imitation of the prophet Elijah. Berthold lived out his days on Mount Carmel, ruling the community he had founded for forty-five years until his death in 1195. In 1452 a parallel order was founded for women.

The Carmelites continually refused. Carmelites were, at worst, stoned and, at best, met with whistles and all sorts of intimidation. The conflict came to the attention of Pope Alexander IV, who forbade wearing of striped robes by the Supreme Decree. The stubborn Carmelites did not abide by the papal prohibition. The Vatican persisted and the final bull of Pope Boniface VIII forbade wearing strips by all Catholic monastic orders in the world, without exception.

Sumptuary laws in Western Europe sprung up in the late thirteenth century, particularly from the Council of Montauban (1274–1291), prohibiting wearing the color purple in the street and certain furs, silks, and luxury ornaments. These laws restricted the wearing of noble clothes among commoners, and occasionally limited the number of gowns dukes and barons could buy per year, to reduce bankruptcies among the aristocracy. The timing of these new laws is not surprising, given the influx of new fashions occasioned by the Crusades.