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The Typical Tudor: Reconstructing Everyday 16th Century Dress

Jane Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila

Lightwater, United Kingdom: Fat Goose Press, 2022

In their book, *The Typical Tudor: Reconstructing Everyday 16th Century Dress*, Jane Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila make an argument for how working- and middle-class people dressed during the Tudor Era in England. They support it with a variety of evidence: wills, legal documents, archeological finds, portraits, extant garments, and many other sources.

This book is a follow-up and elaboration upon *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Dress* (2006). It starts with an introduction that explains who the authors are including in the term “typical,” which defines the scope of the book. Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila offer visual and written evidence in support of their stance and using this as a starting point, begin the book by describing how ordinary people purchased or otherwise acquired yardage and clothing. The next chapters are a detailed exploration of fabrics and colors used by “the typical Tudor”.

Augmenting this chapter is a table with the names of colors and fabrics commonly used with supporting documentary evidence and descriptions of how each fabric was used in the construction of garments. It concludes with a page of pie charts detailing how color was used by the ordinary English person of the 16th century. The following chapter details construction techniques (hand stitches, fabric buttons, knitting and fulling instructions, methods for pleats, etc.) and includes detail photographs of extant tools and garments from the 16th century, diagrams, and color photographs.

Most of the rest of the book focuses on a variety of construction techniques for specific sixteenth-century garments and data about them. Possibly the most exciting of these sections

describes in detail the cut, composition, and construction of a previously undiscovered extant farthingale sleeve from the late 1500s. While there is sculptural and documentary evidence that this type of garment existed, this is the only example of this particular kind of sleeve support currently known.

The garment construction portion of the book consists of chapters organized by type of garment, beginning with underclothes for men and women, then moving on to chapters dedicated to specific types of clothing for men and women. These chapters include a men's section: "Men's Hose, Breeches and Netherhose," "Men's Doublets," "Men's Coats, Jackets and Cassocks," and "Men's Gowns". The women's section is equally comprehensive, with chapters on "Women's Kirtles and Petticoats," "Women's Coats and Waistcoats," "Women's Sleeves," and "Women's Cassocks, Frocks and Gowns." This part of the book concludes with chapters on "Hats and Caps," "Wearing Linen," and "Aprons".

Each of these garment chapters provides detailed pattern diagrams, construction instructions, interior and exterior photographs of extant garments or fragments of garments as well as process photographs of reconstructed garments made for modern models of a variety of body types. The authors supplement this material with evidence from a variety of sources, including written documents such as letters, song, and poetry from the period, as well as paintings and other visual evidence, extant garments, and data compiled from legal documents.

An example of the authors' thorough approach is the chapter titled "Aprons". Although it is one of the shortest sections, it is packed with information. It contains not only instructions for cutting and constructing an apron, but pie charts detailing the types of fabric and choices colors of aprons described in documents such as wills. A chart that clarifies which economic class might wear various types of apron appears alongside images of women wearing aprons in paintings,

quotes from sixteenth-century documents describing aprons, and photographs of modern people wearing reconstructed aprons in different ways. This information would be useful to someone with a casual interest in historical dress as well as costume historians, reenactors, theatrical and/or film designers, and technicians. Similarly effective use of data, photographic evidence, and line drawings is consistent throughout the book.

The impressive array of clothing patterns and instructions includes not just the expected kirtles, gowns, and shifts, doublets, and jerkins, but also accessories such as the farthingale sleeve, knitted sleeves and caps, men's hose and women's stockings, a woman's gorget, and other items worn by people of various professions and ranks in the sixteenth century. One additional aspect of *The Typical Tudor* that this reviewer particularly appreciates is the inclusion of diverse ethnicities and body types in the historical examples and modern models, a marked improvement on costume history books of the past.

The many illustrations in the book are of good quality and in most cases are in full color. They are augmented by detailed captions, and include clear diagrams and photos of extant garments, beautifully rendered line drawings (by Michael Perry), photographs of archeological finds, reconstructed and extant garments, paintings, patterns, maps, pie charts, and bar graphs. One table of note details the salaries, ranks and locations of different people during the late 1400s to late 1500s, which may be of particular use to those seeking to explore the socioeconomics of dress.

The visual information complements the well-written text and supplies evidence for the authors' claims, but most important for many readers, it vividly illuminates methods for constructing sixteenth-century garments for living history, reenactments, experimental archeology, theater, and film.

This reviewer has had the opportunity to utilize the book's instructions for the farthingale sleeve, a mockup of a kirtle, and the beginnings of a pair of knitted sleeves. The instructions were clear and supplemented by technical drawings, interior and exterior photos of completed garments, and pattern diagrams adaptable to many sizes that could be easily used by someone with basic pattern drafting skills.

In the negative column, the book contains occasional mentions of authors' online Tudor Tailor store, for example suggesting the purchase of such items such as a correct weight of knitting wool for the period. That is one minor issue in an otherwise astoundingly versatile and useful book.

In conclusion, the authors of *The Typical Tudor* make a strong argument for the sorts of clothing everyday people in sixteenth-century England wore based on current understandings of the era. They effectively draw connections between statistical analysis, academic scholarship, and the practical hands-on necessities of constructing historical garments, bridging a gap between academic studies, the School of Historical Dress editions of Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion*, and cutting manuals such as Sarah Thursfield's *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant*. This is a much-needed, comprehensive and practical guide to working- and middle-class clothing. The combination of data, well-written text and easy-to-understand diagrams, patterns and instructions should be a useful resource for costume professionals, reenactors, and hobbyists in building reconstructed garments. This reviewer, who also bridges the gap between academics and living history, found the combination to be refreshing and exciting.

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