

“...iij bourrelez de soye...pour ladite dame...”¹

Three women's padded roll headdresses of Western Europe c. 1400-1430

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Lady Ilaria of Delftwood

Alyson DeCosa



¹ *Argenterie* of Queen Isabeau of Bavaria; AN, KK 42, fol. 108v, quoted in *Illuminating Fashion*, 296-7.

I decided to explore the bourrelet headdress, often called a padded roll, as worn by noblewomen² in Western Europe, particularly France and Italy, in some form from about 1400 to the 1460s.³ Women's bourrelets undergo many stylistic changes over the decades: early bourrelets could be round like men's, but the women's innovation was to wear them bent at the temples into a horned or heart shape. In the first quarter of the 15th century, the bourrelet was typically worn over hair dressed toward the temples and covered with a hairnet/coif. In the 1420s, a new compound style developed, particularly in royal courts, of a structured stiffened horned coif with a v-shaped bourrelet on top. This style continued to appear through the 1440s, as the horns of the coif gradually approached the vertical. In the 1450s a turret or cone shape supplanted the vertical horns as foremost in fashion, however this latter style with a bourrelet on top still occasionally appeared on ladies-in-waiting, on younger daughters, and on wealthy conservatively-dressed women before disappearing sometime in the 1460s.



Detail images of early bourrelets from Thomas de Saluces, *Le Chevalier errant*. Paris, BnF, MS fr. 12559, fols. 5r (left) and 9v (below). 1403-1404.



² Dufresne, "A Woman of Excellent Character," 107, and van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion*, 97.

³The version of the bourrelet for males was a simple donut shape which appears mostly on young men through the 1410s, by which time it is incorporated into the brim of the bag hat and the chaperon.



Structured style of the 1420s: detail of Anne of Burgundy, Duchess of Bedford, from the *Hours of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford*, London, BL, Add. MS 18850, fol. 27v. c 1423-4.



c. 1460 bourrelet worn with a horned or steeple headdress, detail image from René d'Anjou's *Livre des tournois*, illuminated by Barthélémy d'Eyck, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 2685, fol. 100v.

For this project I started with a focus on the early types which might be seen from about 1400-1419. But I have a habit of working in threes, so when I saw a payment record for the order of three bourrelets for Queen Isabeau of Bavaria⁴, I decided to do three variations, with a third bourrelet of the 1420s. I am listing them in the order that I made them, and not in chronological order, for reasons of construction.

Possible Eastern Influences

Although the bourrelet is a Western European headdress, particularly worn in France and Italy, the inspiration for its silhouette may possibly have come from Eastern and North African sources. Charlotte Jirousek points out that prior to the Crusades, Christian Western European headdress was not remarkably large or structural, nor was it as clearly delineated according to status. Changes in the cut of Western European clothing from the 12th century on hint at continuing Ottoman Turkish and Mamluk influences.⁵

Tastes for voluminous, showy headgear particularly blossomed in Italy in the 14th century, often through travel and trade contacts⁶ and in France and Burgundy at the end of the 14th century, as they led a pan-European army against the westward-expanding Ottoman Turks, and encountered various types of Islamic official and military dress, most notably turbans. In the very early 15th century, the French court came into direct contact with Byzantine court fashion when the Emperor came for an extended diplomatic visit.⁷

Western Europeans did not adopt items of foreign dress exactly, but they did restyle some aspects of their own clothes after foreign silhouettes. As men began to wear their hoods like turbans, women padded their heads in rolls and horns.



A man in a turban-like chaperon and ladies decorating their bourrelets with garlands. Detail from the *Dunois Hours*, London, BL, Yates Thompson MS 3, fol. 4r. c 1439-1450.

⁴ *Argenterie* of Queen Isabeau, in *Illuminating Fashion*, 296-7.

⁵ Jirousek, "More than Oriental Splendor," 26.

⁶ Jirousek, "Ottoman Influences," 238-9.

⁷ Kubiski, "Orientalizing Costume," 162-9.

Materials, colors, embellishments

Colors: no bourrelets survive, and to my knowledge there is only one possible painted portrait, and that part of the painting has been heavily restored⁸, so I had to rely on pictorial evidence from illuminations, which show bourrelets in black, red, pink, blue, green, yellow, orange, purple, and white. Isabeau of Bavaria was Queen of France when the bourrelet first appeared. Her *Argenterie* of 1402 lists orders for bourrelets of crimson and of black silk, and also lists the colors white and green.⁹ The *Argenterie* of Marie of Anjou of 1455 records the order for a burlet of velvet.¹⁰ I used silk velvet for mine, one in green, one in red, and one in black.

Structural materials: Neither *Argenterie* seems to list the inner materials of the bourrelets ordered. But the 1459 *Argenterie* of Charles VII records an order for a chaperon requiring “ung bourrelet de jonc”, a bourrelet of straw, for its inner structure.¹¹

I translated a late 14th century poem by Eustache Deschamps, a ballad bemoaning excesses of female headdress. See page 24 for my translation. He describes bourrelets of wool and of *coton*, where cotton most likely means animal hair/roving or wadding. He criticizes the use of vines (which might be similar to the rushes above), and hairpieces of hemp fiber/tow. He describes the headdresses as giant baskets on the head (basket also being a derogatory term for a woman).¹²

Cheunsong Soon describes Deschamps as saying women used fishbone in their headdresses,¹³ and while it's possible, I have not been able to find that referenced in his poetry.

Since I had plenty of wool roving and batting on hand, I decided to use it. I needed something to help keep the shape of the bourrelet so I used millinery wire. Wire headdress frames, often covered with unspun silk in a similar manner to modern millinery wire, have been recovered from 14th and 15th century archaeological sites in London.¹⁴

Un bourrelet de soye vert...

The first bourrelet that I made was a round style after the c. 1406 effigy of Ilaria del Carretto in Lucca. One of the bourrelets in Isabeau's *Argenterie* is also described as *tout ront*.¹⁵

⁸ The c. 1410 *Profile Portrait of a Lady* by an unknown Franco-Flemish artist in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

⁹ *Argenterie* of Queen Isabeau, in *Illuminating Fashion*, 296-7.

¹⁰ *Argenterie* of Marie of Anjou; AN, KK 55, fol. 42v, in *Illuminating Fashion*, 297.

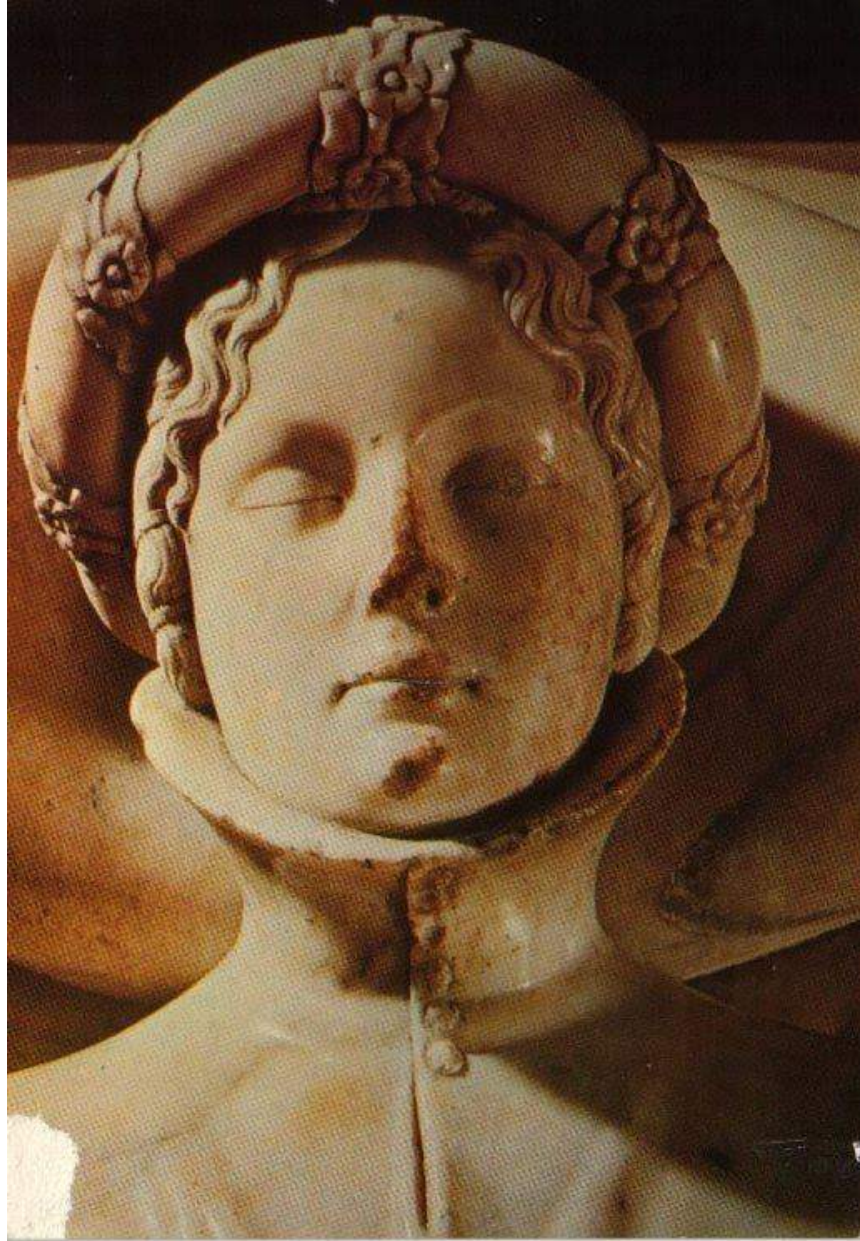
¹¹ *Argenterie* of Charles VII; AN, KK 51, fol. 38, in *Illuminating Fashion*, 297.

¹² For this double meaning, see “Cabas.” In *DMF*, <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/cabas1>

¹³ Soon, “The Vertical Headdress,” 6.

¹⁴ Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, 293-6.

¹⁵ *Argenterie* of Queen Isabeau of Bavaria; AN, KK 42, fol. 108v, quoted in *Illuminating Fashion*, 296-7.



Effigy of Ilaria del Carretto, c.1406, attributed to Jacopa della Quercia

Photo by Xenxax - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29299638>

I made a simple tube of green silk velvet, stuffed with wool roving, then a wire inserted down the middle. I curved the wire into a circle, joined it, topped up the roving and slipstitched the tube closed at center back. I embellished it by handsewing gold braid wrapped around like a garland, bezants, and pearls.



I made a large brooch for the center front. Many images show women in bourrelets with gold or jeweled brooches at center front, and while this may just be a natural place for ornament, there is also a precedent in Islamic headgear: The Abbasid jeweled turban adopted by the Mamluks¹⁶ and eventually the Ottomans¹⁷. Both the jeweled turban and the jeweled bourrelet appear in illuminations made by contemporary Parisian artists with ties to the French court: the Master of the Cité des Dames who illuminated the *Chevalier errant* c. 1403-1404, and the Limbourg Brothers famous for the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, 1410-1416. The fact that later in the century a large bourrelet/turban with a center jewel becomes a standard type of headwear for allegorical subjects¹⁸ is further evidence that this manner of embellishment had origins in Islamic styles.



Left and center: details from “The Princes of the East,” *Le Chevalier errant*. Paris, BnF, MS fr. 12559, fol.162r.

Right: detail from “The Month of April,” *Très Riches Heures*. Chantilly, Mus. Condé, MS 65, fol. 4v.

Un bourrelet de fine soye noire...

This second bourrelet is also made of a straight tube of velvet, stuffed, and with wire inserted down the center. I wanted to see if the same construction, but with a thinner tube, could be bent into horns.

In the end it worked, but it put up a fight, and I would hesitate to do it this way again. Due to its springiness, wire needs to be bent just past its final shape. It is difficult to do this in a straight stuffed tube. It was also very difficult to get the wire into the stuffed tube. It kept getting stuck. I tried putting the wire in first and stuffing around it, but it was too narrow to reach. Eventually I got it into a good shape and closed the wire with tie wire and the velvet with slipstitching. I embellished the bourrelet with gold braid wound around it and stitched in place.

¹⁶ Kubiski, “Orientalizing Costume,” 165.

¹⁷ Friedman, “The Art of the Exotic,” 188.

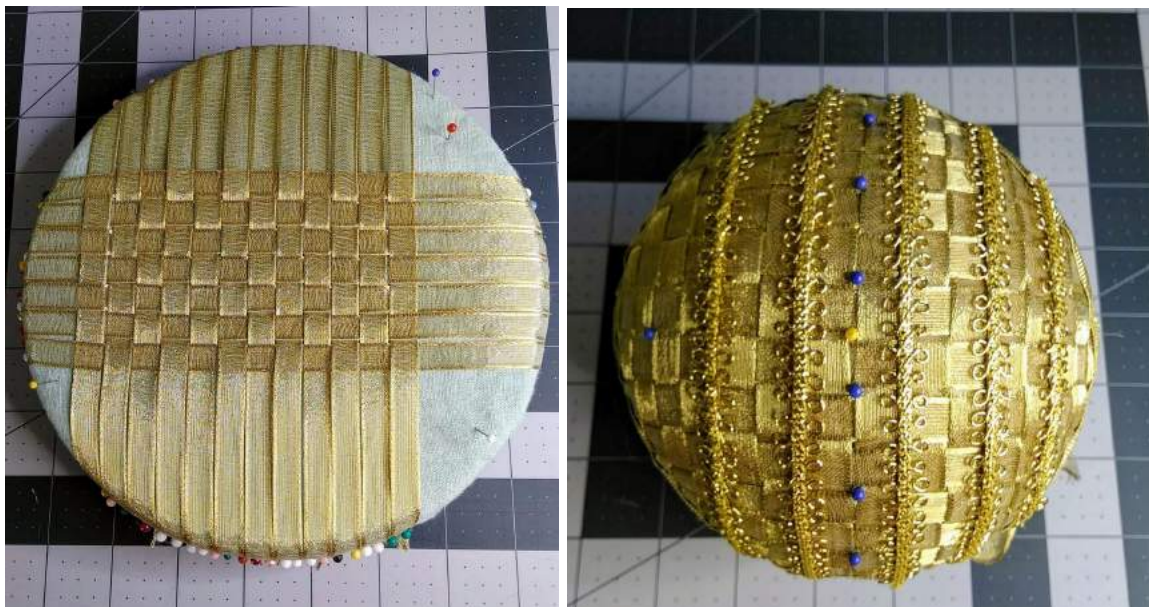
¹⁸ Ibid.

I decided to experiment with adding a reticulated coif under the bourrelet, to create volume at the temples. I wanted something with more structure than a hairnet, and lighter in weight than stuffing or false hair. I also wanted to be able to embellish it. Most horned coifs in illumination are yellow or gold in color; suggesting either blond hair or golden material. They also typically have a diamond hashmark pattern on them, suggestive of a hairnet, or at the very least surface decoration reminiscent of a hairnet. *Illuminating Fashion* lists at least two references to coifs containing gold and/or jewels.¹⁹



Detail from "Virtues of Nobility," *Bréviaire des Nobles*. London, BL, Royal MS 15 E vi, fol. 403.

Since I couldn't use gold, I used gold metallic wired ribbon, woven like a basketweave on a flat form, and then blocked on a round form. I did this twice and then further stiffened the shapes with wired gold braid and gold tape.



¹⁹ van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion*, 300.

I layered more braid and tape on top of each other and sewed them together in a long strip to make a *frontel*, the circlet-like front edge of a coif.²⁰ I sewed the pieces of the coif to the frontel so that they would sit at my temples. Then I sewed the frontel to the bourrelet, using strong thread.



²⁰ Ibid.

Then I sewed pearls on the coif and bezants, jewels, and pearls on the bourrelet.



The decoration effect is similar to the Duchess of Bedford above. The shape is rather similar to these below:

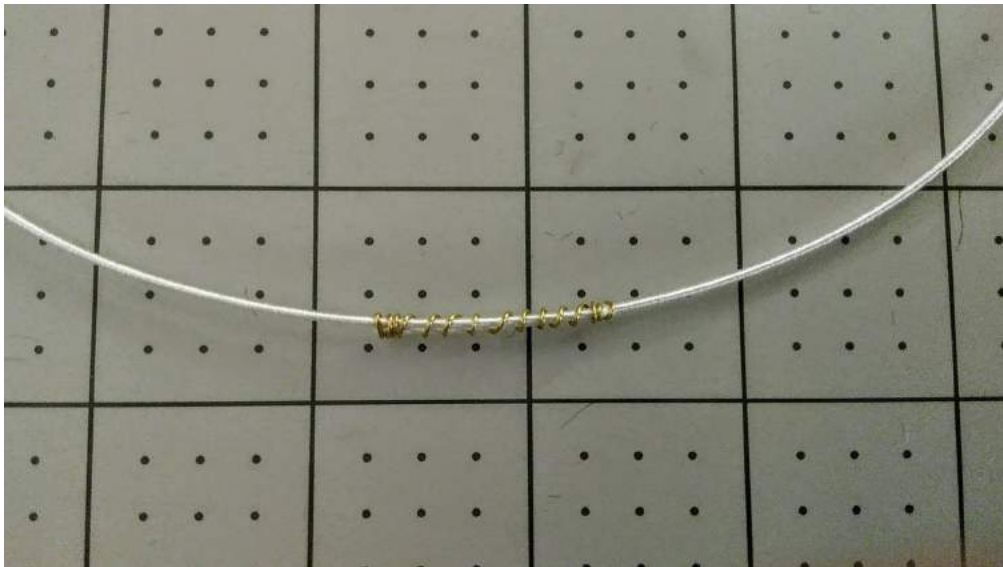
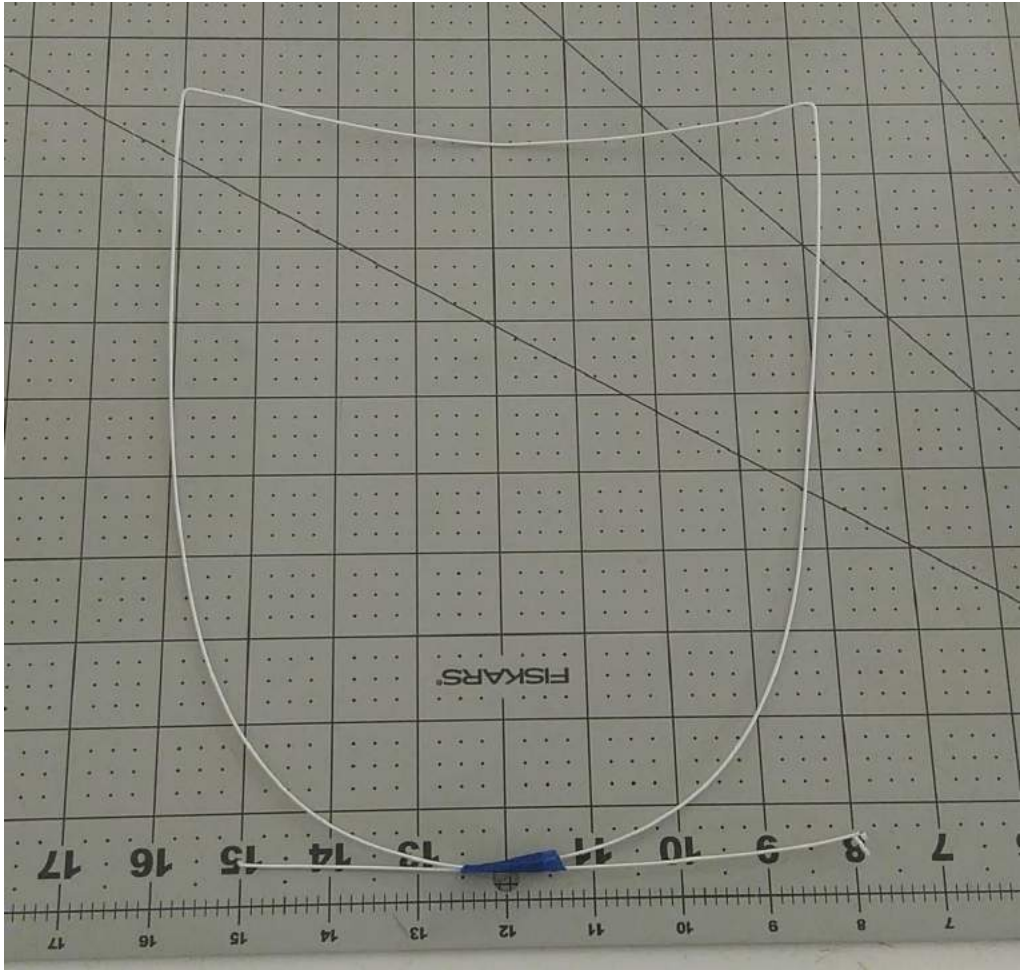


Detail from "Finding of Moses," *Historiebijbel*, The Hague, KB, MS 78 D 38, vol. I, fol. 47. c 1427.

Un bourrelet de fine soye vermeille cramoisie...

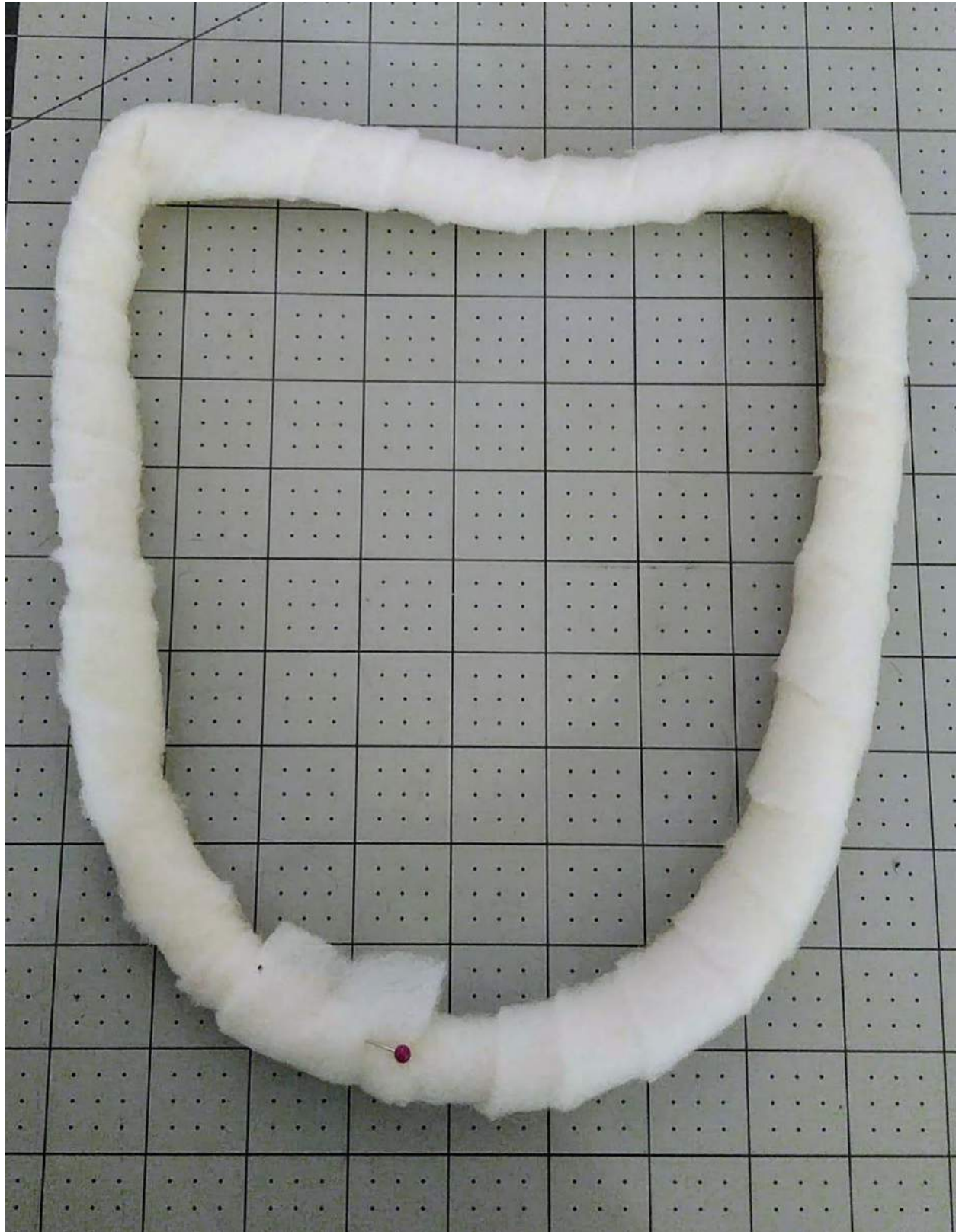
My third bourrelet is another early style from about 1400-1415. I wanted it to have horn-like bends at each temple and a slight dip over the forehead, and to be smooth and relatively thin.

I didn't want to work from straight tubes anymore, so this time I worked from the inside out. I shaped the wire first, estimating how much space I would need to leave around it. I joined the wire at the center back with tie wire.



I wrapped a long strip of wool batting around the wire like a spiral. I did four layers like this, whipstitching each one in place, then I added an extra layer of padding at the horns. Then I wrapped one long strip lengthwise around the entire bourrelet to smooth it out, and stitched it in place along the inner circumference.

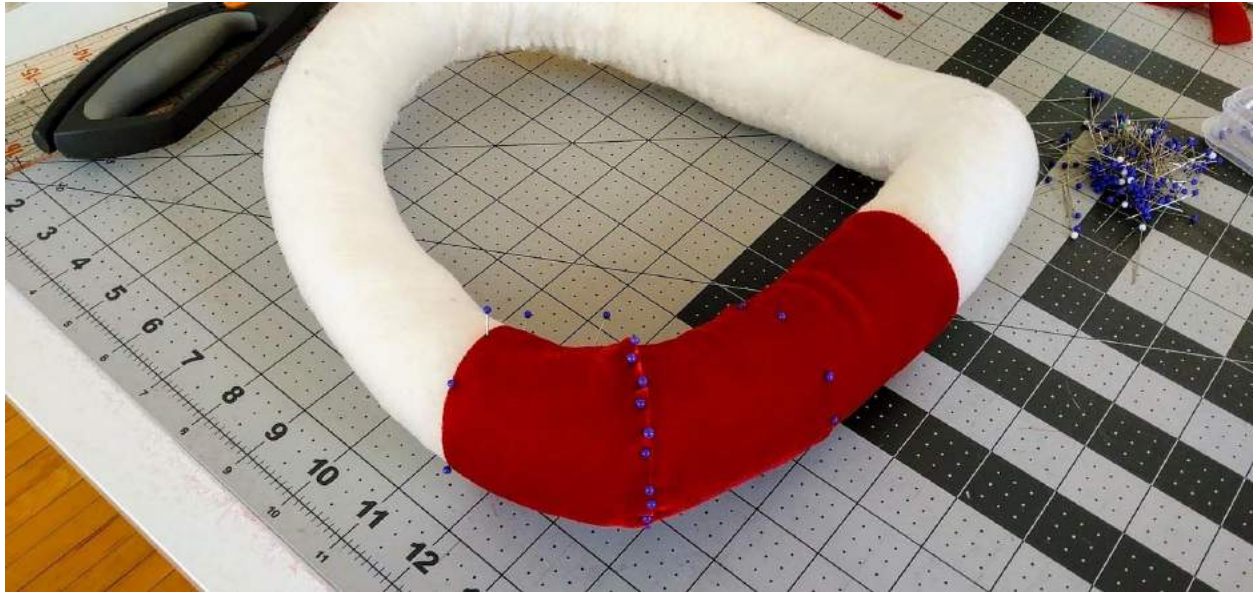








Now I had a lovely shape, but no easy way to cover it smoothly with my fabric in one piece. I tried draping the fabric, but it wrinkled and bagged. So I cut it into 2" strips (the biggest I could cut and get it to still lie flat) and wrapped each strip vertically around the tube. I did it vertically to keep the velvet nap laying smoothly. I pinned each one in place as I went and trimmed each strip at the inside circumference. Then I whipstitched all the strips in place along the raw edges.



I covered the raw edges with gold ribbon, which I chose for its light weight and its resemblance to plain woven metal braid. I stitched the ribbon in place with tiny invisible stitches.







I put some square jewels and pearls in settings for embellishments, but I will probably leave them off because I like the way it looks as is.







Robert Campin. *Marriage of the Virgin*. C.1420-1430, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Balade sur l'estrangeté de l'atour et du chief que pluseurs dames font a present.

*Atournez vous, mes dames, autrement,
Sanz emprunter tant de haribourras,
Ne de querir cheveulx estrangement
Que mainte fois rungent souris et ras;*

*Vostre afubler est comme un grant cabas,
Bourriaux y a de coton et de laine,
Autres choses plus d'une quarentaine,
Frontiaux, filez, soye, espingles, et neux;
De les trousser est a vous tresgrant paine:
Rendez l'emprunt des estranges cheveux.*

*Faictes vo chief des vostres proprement,
Sanz faire ainsi la torche de pesas,
Sanz adjouster estrange habillement
Que destrousser fault, com jument a bas,
Chascune nuit, et getter en un tas,
Puis au matin fault retrousser s'ensaigne,
Et aide avoir; l'œuvre d'une sepmaine
Y convient bien, et qu'om soit deux et deux
A ce trousser: pour tel chose villaine,
Rendez l'emprunt des estranges cheveux.*

*Onques ne fut si lourde afublement
Ne si cornu; visaiges fait de chas,
Et si desplaist a tous communement
Tel chief fourré d'estrange chanvenas;
Cornes portez come font les lymas.
Atournez vous d'une atournure plaine,
De vostre poil, d'autre ne vous souviengne;
Ostez du tout ces grans hures de leux
Qui vous deffont; nulle plus ne les praingne:
Rendez l'emprunt des estranges cheveux.*

L'ENVOY

*Jeusnes dames, tele triquedondaine
Ne portez plus; aux vielles en conviengne.
Soit voz atours humbles et gracieux,
Plaisans a touz; Dieu en bien vous maintiengne,
Car raison dit, qui veult que tout le craigne:
Rendez l'emprunt des estranges cheveux.*

Ballad on the strangeness of coiffure and headdress that many women wear at present.

Arrange your coiffures, my ladies, in a different way,
Without making use of so many false hairpieces,
Do not seek strange hair,
That many times has been gnawed by mice and rats;

Your headdress is like a giant basket (You look like a whore).

Bourrelets there are, of wadding and of wool,
Other things by the dozens,
Frontlets, hair threads, silk, pins, and nets;
To truss yourself up is a lot of work:
Return your borrowed hair.

Dress your head with your own hair,
Without making garlands of pea vines,
Without adding on strange headdresses,
Which you must unravel, like a mare's tail,
Each night, in a heap,
Then in the morning must be tied back up, like a banner,
And, you need help: it could easily take both of us a week to do your hair:
For such an evil purpose,
Return your borrowed hair.

Never was there such a heavy headdress
As the horns: a coiffure made of animal hair,
And if that displeases everyone,
Then a wig of hemp/tow on your head;
You wear horns like a snail.
Dress yourself in a plain coiffure,
Of your own hair, don't think of any other,
Put aside these huge wolf's snouts
That disfigure you; do not use them anymore:
Return your borrowed hair.

Moral:

Young ladies, such fripperies,
Wear them no longer; suit yourselves as older women do.
Let your coiffures be humble and elegant,
Pleasing to all; God will keep you well,
As reason says, if you are god-fearing;
Return your borrowed hair.

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