

# The Bonnet and the Beret in Medieval and German Renaissance Art

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**Abstract** This paper presents an art-historic contribution, examining the bonnet and the beret as characteristic forms of female and male headdresses and their manifold variations and oriental origins. Both types of head coverings are shaped by sociocultural attitudes and evolved in form. Embedded within the wider context of clothing they also, in turn, influence social norms and attitude. Examining their history and genesis also reveals and raises gender-specific perspectives and questions. The depiction and representation of the bonnet and beret during two defining periods in the visual arts, incorporating role-play and creativity, present a considerable knowledge transfer through media. First instances of gender-specific dress codes can be traced back to the *Bible* and therefore Paul's rules for head covering for women in 1 Cor 11,2-16 is intensively debated. The following chapter will trace and illustrate the history of female and male head coverings on the example of various works of art. The strict rules outlined in 1 Corinthian 11 prescribing appropriate head coverings in ceremonial settings, which had a significant and lasting impact, have in time been transformed through the creative freedom afforded by the mundanity of fashion.

**Keywords** Beret. Bonnet. Female Head Covering. Hennin. Veil.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 From Veil to Bonnet. – 3 The Beret and Dürer's Caps.

## 1 Introduction

In March 2020, the University of Graz hosted the interdisciplinary *Festival Alpe-Adria dell'Archeologia Pubblica senza Confini* on the topic of "Headscarves and veils from the ancient Near East to modern Islam". This paper presents



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an art-historic contribution, examining the bonnet<sup>1</sup> and the beret as characteristic forms of female and male headdresses and their manifold variations and oriental origins. Both types of head coverings are shaped by sociocultural attitudes and evolved in form. Embedded within the wider context of clothing they also, in turn, influence social norms and attitudes.

The correlation between people and clothing becomes particularly evident in relation to headwear. What is significant here is that the headwear reflects back on the physical as well as the mental stance of the wearer.<sup>2</sup>

Examining their history and genesis also reveals and raises gender-specific perspectives and questions. The depiction and representation of the bonnet and beret during two defining periods in the visual arts, incorporating role-play and creativity, present a considerable knowledge transfer through media that deserves closer investigation.

Images or visual-artistic mediation have a strong impact on how the depicted content is received. The hermeneutics of images<sup>3</sup> reconstructs the information flow of this century-old medium. Methods of iconography and iconology further examine the content of images and their genesis. Additionally, text/image studies provide a comparison between systems of textual and pictorial communication. Art is an important medium that carries information across temporal boundaries, it is characterised by specific communicative mechanisms and operates within specific sociological contexts. It is important to note that communication through words is distinctly different from communication through images. Susanne K. Langer concludes in her theory of art *Feeling and Form* that texts are discursive, whereas images are presentative.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely this presentative component that allows images to effectively communicate across language barriers. This also exposes worldviews and gender perceptions. The figures depicted in images, along with the clothes they wear, often reflect dominant notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity', social roles and expectations, and culture-specific stereotypes at a given point in time.

**1** Bonnet is a generic term in English for female headdress (particularly during the Middle Ages and Renaissance) and is used here in its broadest meaning, similar to and as a translation of the German term *Haube*, which also denotes various forms of head coverings.

**2** Loschek 1993, 108. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

**3** Bättschmann 2003, 199-228.

**4** "Formulation, representation, abstraction: these are the characteristic functions of symbols. As such they have been studied, however, mainly in connection with discursive symbols" (Langer 1973, 376-7).

First instances of gender-specific dress codes can be traced back to the *Bible*. Initially, there is no marked difference between male and female items of clothing as attributed to Adam and Eve. According to the *Bible*, God made them loincloths from fur (Gen 3,21), without any gender-relevant distinctions. Only 1 Corinthians 11 refers to differentiations between male and female clothing with regard to Christian ceremonies:<sup>5</sup>

#### Head Coverings

(2) Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. (3) But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (4) Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head, (5) but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. (6) For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. (7) For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. (8) For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. (9) Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (10) That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (11) Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; (12) for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. (13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? (14) Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (16) If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11,2-16)

This explanation by Paul in 1 Cor 11,2-16 is intensively debated in Bible Studies and extensively explored within the field of theology.<sup>6</sup> It is not for art history to comment on this; but it can reflect on it. The text establishes that women, same as men, can perform ceremonial acts in the Christian community. However, the requirement for women to cover their heads as opposed to men, who must keep their heads uncovered, explicitly marks them in their gendered difference. The

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<sup>5</sup> Dettinger 2017, 152-6; Gielen 1999; 2001; 2002; Gielen, Merklein 2005, 25-72. Jantsch 2015a; 2015b; Marshall 2017, 203-13; Schottroff 2013, 280-4; Zamfir 2013, 342-4.

<sup>6</sup> Jantsch 2015a.

rule is justified with the argument that women are subordinate to men as evidenced by the woman having been created after man (Gen 2,21 f.). She is denied direct connection to God through Christ and is not recognised as an image of God. This represents a multi-layered gendered subjugation of women. The subsequent mention that God intended men and women for each other does not retract from the above. Further, head coverings and women's hair are both defined as a form of covering, the lack or removal of which is a mark of shame. This also creates distinctly gendered rules for men and women with regard to hair. Men are allowed to cut their hair and must not cover it up. Women are not allowed to cut their hair as they must be and remain covered. The question whether this instruction for women to cover their head intends for women to wear their hair as a covering lies beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>7</sup>

Another relevant *Bible* text that is more women-friendly is *Proverbs* 31,10-31, setting out the characteristics of a good housewife.

#### The Woman Who Feared The Lord

(10) An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. (11) The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. (12) She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. (13) She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. (14) She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. (15) She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. (16) She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. (17) She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. (18) She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. (19) She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. (20) She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. (21) She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. (22) She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. (23) Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. (24) She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. (25) Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. (26) She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (27) She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. (28) Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: (29) "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all". (30) Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,

<sup>7</sup> Jantsch 2015b, 99 ff.

but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. (31) Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates. (*Proverbs* 31,10-31)

Irmtraud Fischer's inaugural speech at the University of Graz offers an invaluable and objective account exploring this *Bible* passage following different methodologies and yielding extensive insight for understanding the text in how it addresses women.<sup>8</sup> She concludes that the exegetical tradition postulated by Cardinal Michael Faulhaber in 1912, defining the text as in praise of the wife – a “classic M-voice”<sup>9</sup> with lasting impact – has undergone transformation through the progress of time and societal change. Irmtraud Fischer presents several arguments supporting the view that the above *Bible* acrostic is spoken by a theologian of high social standing addressing her children. One such argument that the notion of the model wife, a genius of productivity working around the clock without pause, goes far beyond household chores is supported by the description of her clothing as being precious.<sup>10</sup> It is dyed in expensive colours, such as purple (in blue and red) and possibly even carmine, which are produced from animals.<sup>11</sup> These so-called luxury fabrics not only demonstrate female financial power, but an intertextual reading of the *Bible* also reveals parallels with ceremonial fabrics reserved for sacred places and artefacts, and those worn by priests. The domain of the praised wife is not limited to the domestic sphere, it “rather demands that the wife has a right to what she has produced and that she is recognised in the public sphere, in the gates, for her own work”.<sup>12</sup> The text does not mention any head coverings to be worn by women, as such it does not establish a gender-specific dress code. However, female attractiveness is minified in verse 30: “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain”. This could suggest that the rule for women to cover their head, in whatever form, in ceremonial settings is intended as an instruction to hide their female attractiveness. An intertextual approach points to further passages in the *Bible* where women are advised to practice modesty in their appearance: “Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear” (1 Peter 3,3).

This original decree on female head coverings found in the *Bible* also forms the background and context within which to situate the bonnet. It consistently accompanies or is accompanied by the veil and

<sup>8</sup> Fischer 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Fischer 2005, 238.

<sup>10</sup> Brockmüller 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Fischer 2005, 248.

<sup>12</sup> Fischer 2005, 252.



**Figure 1** Heimsuchung Mariens von den so genannten Magdeburger Elfenbeintafeln, Inv.-Nr. 17/418, photo nr. D70051. © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München (photo Bastian Krack)

the two are permanently combined in the Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup> The bonnet thus undergoes creative evolution and transformation. It becomes imbued with meaning and acts as a social marker for women, as demonstrated for example in the well-known German proverb: *Unter die Haube kommen*, literally “to bring under the bonnet”, meaning to be married off.<sup>14</sup> The following chapter will trace and illustrate the history of female head coverings on the example of various works of art.

<sup>13</sup> Loschek 1993, 110.

<sup>14</sup> Loschek 1993, 106.

## 2 From Veil to Bonnet

Etymologically, the English term 'bonnet' is derived from the Old French *bonet* denoting material from which hats are made and the Latin *abonnis* referring to headdress. The German term *Haube* is derived from the Middle High German *hûbe*,<sup>15</sup> meaning 'round head covering'. Bonnets and their different shapes and designs have a long history. In the following, this section traces the evolution of the veil, which is closely interlinked with the evolution of the bonnet, in the transalpine context from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the Modern Era when the bonnet's popularity as a fashion accessory reached its peak. The 11th century saw a linen kerchief that was loosely draped over the head and fastened under the chin with an agraffe. In the 12th century, this evolved into a stiffer variation, and in the 13th century it took on a fixed shape. This formed the basis from which various distinct regional styles emerged in the High and Late Middle Ages, for example the *wimple*, the *Hulle*, and the *Rise*.<sup>16</sup>

The Romanesque ivory relief depicting a visitation, 962-73 [fig. 1], donated by Otto the Great to the Cathedral of Magdeburg, shows the two expecting mothers Mary and Elizabeth wearing traditional Frankish costumes consisting of a tunic, a short coat and a flat veil, which is already layered into folds (so-called *Vächern* in German) to lend it a more voluminous appearance.

This layering of the veil can take on significant dimensions with regard to sin and luxury, as illustrated by the clothing that characterises *Superbia* in Herrad of Landsberg's *Hortus Deliciarum*, 1175 [fig. 2].<sup>17</sup> The extravagant shape of the headdress is similar to that of a turban and is shown to consist of a very large brown cloth. The luxurious use of fabric is also reflected in the long flaring sleeves, which also served to puff up the wearer's appearance and were more decorative than useful in function. The dress is of a regal crimson purple, the cloak of an equally precious blue purple, both plain with no pattern. The pointed crakows are no less a fashion fad of the time.

Lady World is draped in expensive attire with similar flaring sleeves as she introduces poverty to a monk as illustrated in a book painting found in the Benedictine Abbey of Engelberg [fig. 3].

She wears a cap-like head covering on top of her veil, an addition that also appears in the Schöngrabern relief of *Luxuria*, further adorned with striking decorative elements [fig. 4].

<sup>15</sup> Mackensen 2013, 180-1.

<sup>16</sup> Loschek 1993, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Gillen 1979; Fingernagel 2007; description of female dress, closed at the side, with flaring sleeves and train, no reference to the headdress, pictured in black and white in Thiel 2004, 108.



**Figure 2**

*Superbia*, as in Herrad of Landsberg (1125-1195), *Hortus Deliciarum*. Ca. 1180. Written at the Hohenburg Abbey. Facsimile by Christian Moritz Engelhardt ca. 1818. Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, inv. no. ark:/12148/bpt6k9400936h. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Hortus\\_Deliciarum?](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Hortus_Deliciarum?)



**Figure 3**

*Frau Welt* stellt einem Mönch die Armut vor. 1197-98. Book painting. Engelberg (Switzerland), Stiftsbibliothek. © Thiel 2004, 108, fig. 191





**Figure 4** *Luxuria*. 1225-30. Schöngarbern, parish church, apsidal relief.  
© Bundesdenkmalamt (photo Bettina Neubauer 1997)

**Figure 5** *Lady World*. 1225-30. Schöngarbern, parish church, apsidal relief.  
© Bundesdenkmalamt (photo Bettina Neubauer 1997)

The twelve-part sculptural work on the Eastern facade of the apse at the parish church in Schöngrabern (Lower Austria), 1225-30, is a dramatic depiction of the eschatological path from Original Sin to Last Judgement. The high reliefs are likely the work of four or five sculptors, as evidenced by slight stylistic differences, and have not yet been conclusively classified in terms of style or fully analysed in their iconography. This so-called stone *Bible* from Schöngrabern contains within it a wealth of information about the early 13th century, which was first heretically interpreted and later understood from a Christian perspective.<sup>18</sup> Both the sequence of individual scenes and the individual elements create an unusual iconography, which Martina Pippal examined in constant reference to patristic literature.<sup>19</sup> Seen from bottom/south to top/north, the reliefs depict scenes from the OT and NT, including illustrations of battles against wild animals (*psychomachia*) as part of the eschatological narrative. The story concludes with *Luxuria* being condemned to hell in the upper tier of the south bay. She is shown as wearing an elaborate fascinator around her veil, ornaments around her chest and wide flaring sleeves, with a little demon sitting on her train. In the upper tier of the north bay, a woman similar in appearance and a man are depicted in the foreground of the scene. The female figure is particularly interesting and presents a yet unsolved mystery as to who she is and what she symbolises. She wears a long dress with a train and in her right hand she holds an object consisting of a round disk attached to a handle [fig. 5].

With her left hand she holds a small flowering tree. The male figure to the left of her crosses his arms tightly in front of his body. This posture could signify that the woman is to be interpreted with a negative connotation. A possible positive interpretation, however, is that the woman represents summer while the man represents winter, or they symbolise *Scientia*. The clothing of the second female figure in the Schöngrabern relief is simpler than that of *Luxuria*, she does not wear any intricate ornaments or wide flaring sleeves. In comparison, the rose window at Notre-Dame in Paris, the Cathedral windows in Auxerre and Lyon, as well as the illustration in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 6329, fol. 167v show *Luxuria* as an elegant woman looking into a mirror. In this context, the Schöngrabern relief could be interpreted in the sense that the flowers in the woman's left hand are violets and rose petals that *Luxuria* throws at Virtue in an act of distraction, as described in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* (vv. 326-327).<sup>20</sup> Only *Sobrietas* succeeds in defeating her with the standard of the cross. Fol. 106r of cod. 1898 at the Austrian National Library in Vienna from

18 For an overview of the research history of this work see Fillitz 1998, 386 ff.

19 Pippal 1991, 31, 35-6, 41.

20 Prudentius 1962, 300 ff.

the second half of the 13th century shows an initial adorned with figures as an illustration for Psalm 68 in which God is depicted as a young Christ, along with David and an elegantly dressed woman with a mirror, who Andreas Fingernagel was not able to identify.<sup>21</sup> Based on the fact that the female figure is depicted with red cheeks, looking at the mirror held above and facing away from God, it is likely that this is a representation of *Luxuria* fleeing from God (*Psalm* 68,2-3). Further, looking at the difference in clothing as worn by *Luxuria* condemned to hell, the woman depicted in less extravagant clothes at Schöngrabern is likely Lady World, as already encountered in the book paintings from Engelberg. It is also not flowers that she holds in her left hand but a flowering twig, the Medieval symbol for the granting of fiefs.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Lady World wants to grant the man in the Schöngrabern relief the world as a fiefdom by giving him the little flowering tree. He, in turn, rejects her offer, God-fearing, with his arms crossed around his body.

Soon, female head coverings became fashion objects that experimented with the possibilities of form and shape. One such example is the *kruseler*, a veil with ruffled ends. The origin of this variation, the loose kerchief, is thus still clearly recognisable. The *kruseler* is also depicted as a head covering in images of saints and the Madonna, as exemplified in the limestone effigy of Saint Elizabeth, 1380-90 [fig. 6]<sup>23</sup> and the Madonna effigy carved from poplar wood found at Sonntagberg, 1420 [fig. 7].<sup>24</sup>

Different headdresses also incorporated hairstyles such as plaits and buns. Closed head coverings worn over combed back and tied hair became a symbolic marker for married women. Often, any hair that was still visible under or despite the cap was shaved off. Only unmarried women were allowed to wear their hair loose and the *schapel* was exclusively reserved for them.

In addition, women of nobility wore a *Gebende* covering the bottom half of their face. Etymologically, the term is derived from the Old High German *bant* (meaning 'ribbon'; or 'binding' in English). The *Gebende* is a white ribbon that is tightly wound around the top of the head, ears, and chin. It can be worn in combination with a *schapel* or a headband made of stiffened linen. During the later period of the Middle Ages, between 1385 and 1480, female head coverings took on extraordinary shapes and dimensions, such as the *hennin* or horned headdress, often up to 60 cm high.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that

21 Fingernagel, Roland 1997, 60, fig. 79.

22 This valuable information was provided by the legal historian Gernot Kocher in conversation.

23 Brucher 2000, 368; Schweigert 2019, 641.

24 Brucher 2000, 90-1.

25 von Boehn 1925, 218-19.



**Figure 6** *Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia*. 1380-90. Fine limestone. Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, inv. no. 4897. © Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere



**Figure 7** *Sonntagberger Madonna*. 1420. Poplar wood, Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, inv. no. 4831. © Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere

this conical shape with a flowing veil attached at the tips, often long enough to reach the floor, was adopted from oriental styles as trade relationships increased. The *tantour* is a historic headdress made from silver or silver-plated copper worn by women in Lebanon and Syria. Its name translates as horn according to its cone-like shape<sup>26</sup> or as soft chime.<sup>27</sup> A thin veil consisting of large quantities of fabric attached at the top and cascading down to the hips was used to cover women's faces. What is interesting is that this horn-shaped headdress was initially referred to in the *Bible* (Job 16,15; *Jeremiah* 48,25;

<sup>26</sup> Ritter 1850, 189.

<sup>27</sup> Loschek 1993, 114.

*Psalms* 112,9; 132,17 and 148,14)<sup>28</sup> as a status symbol worn by men, that was then adopted by their wives as a marital symbol, thus taking on significant symbolism. It was worn differently than the *hennin*, either attached to a cushion, or tilted forward from the forehead, or to the side.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the *hennin*'s origin can be traced back to the Orient, as is the case with the turban, which became popular with women and men in the Middle Ages. In Italy, the *gugel* took on a turban-like shape in the 14th century and became known under the French name *chaperon*.<sup>30</sup> The first person to wear a *hennin*, in silver, is thought to be Isabeau of Bavaria, at her wedding to Charles VI of France.<sup>31</sup> The *hennin* is a very elaborate headdress that had to be pinned to a hairnet worn underneath, often still visible on the forehead. It was positioned such that it was slightly tilted backwards for a more attractive look,<sup>32</sup> as seen in a portrait of Mary of Burgundy by Niklas Reisers, c. 1500 [fig. 8].

The extravagance was immediately met with criticism. Jan Hus' *De sacerdotum et Monachorum carnalium abominatione* heavily criticised this escalation of fashion:

[Women] wanted to be horned in their own appearance by wearing a fantastical adornment to also publicly demonstrate their nature as animals; on their heads they arrange their veils with a certain art and much effort so that at least three horns, one above the forehead, the others on the crown, protrude from their heads.<sup>33</sup>

In the Renaissance, it was common for women to wear caps and for long periods, particularly in transalpine regions due to climate conditions and based on local traditions. They became an integral element of different regional traditional costumes, such as found in Nuremberg or Augsburg. Head coverings also functioned as markers of religious affiliation. Catholics wore the Augsburg *Riegelhaube* or *Ringelhaube*, Protestants wore the *Bockelhaube*. Veils gradually disappear towards the end of the Middle Ages in the transalpine context with only few variations that combine bonnets and veils remaining in fashion.

<sup>28</sup> Ritter 1850, 189.

<sup>29</sup> Sommer 1840, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Loschek 1993, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Loschek 1993, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Sommer 1840, 76.

<sup>33</sup> Cited according to Thiel 2004, 147 ("wollten durch eine wunderbare Anordnung selbst gehört sein in ihrer äußeren Erscheinung, damit sie gleichfalls öffentlich zeugten, daß sie dem Tiere zugehören; denn auf ihren Köpfen gestalten sie die Schleier mit einer gewissen Kunst und nicht ohne große Mühe so, daß mindestens drei Hörner, eines über der Stirn, die anderen auf dem Scheitel des Hauptes hervorragen").



**Figure 8**

Niklas Reiser, *Mary of Burgundy*.  
Ca. 1500. Oil on canvass,  
79,5 × 56,3 cm. Vienna,  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv.  
no. 4400, currently displayed at  
Ambras Castle (Tyrol). © Vienna,  
Kunsthistorisches Museum

### 3 The Beret and Dürer's Caps

The beret was a head covering initially exclusively worn by men. Etymologically, the name traces back to the Medieval Latin terms *barete*, *biret(e)* or *barretum*, which in turn originate from the Latin *birrus* or *birrum*, meaning hooded cape.<sup>34</sup> It presents an early version of head coverings, which were simply part of the outer garment and were pulled up over the head.<sup>35</sup> The Gallic *cucullus*, a hood with a collar, formed the basis for the *gugel*, a variation of a hood with a collar that was fashionable in the Middle Ages.<sup>36</sup> Another historically important head covering is the *pileus*,<sup>37</sup> a cap of semi-spherical shape that was the mark of freed Roman slaves and thus constitutes an early symbol of social status in Roman antiquity. The Medieval beret has

<sup>34</sup> Mackensen 2013, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Jantsch 2015b, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Loschek 1993, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Loschek 1993, 109.

a certain similarity with Fez-like caps in that it maintains its shape and can include a brim. It may be this consistency in shape that allowed the beret to become the first head covering to be worn in various styles, whether square on top of the head for official purposes or pushed to the side as in the landsknecht uniform, which required an undercap underneath.<sup>38</sup> This male head covering can also take on additional meaning, considering the German proverb *etwas auf seine Kappe nehmen*, literally ‘to take on one’s cap’, meaning taking on responsibility.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the bonnet, which assigned women societal and marital status, the beret symbolises responsibility, taking charge, thus representing masculine characteristics. The feminine bonnet hides, whereas the beret signals potential.

As illustrated by Anton Pilgram’s sculpture, *The Falconer*, c. 1495 [fig. 9], the beret also had a practical function, as seen in this hunting costume.

In Lucas Cranach’s painting, John Cuspinian and his wife Anna, née Putsch, 1502-03 [fig. 10]<sup>40</sup> wear their festive costumes with beret and *Kugelhaube* respectively. The double portrait thus shows the two gender-specific head coverings next to each other. The woman and the man in the painting both crown their festive dress with a headdress. The beret of the scholar is of a bright, deep red. Anna’s headdress is a light colour and embroidered with golden patterns matching the gold necklace and rings. Yet, there is a difference between man and woman and their head coverings on a symbolic level: while the woman’s headdress and the white carnation in her right hand signify her marital status and symbolise the promise of her wedding vows, the man’s head covering is also part of his professional attire as a physician and scholar.

Albrecht Dürer demonstrates variation and creativity in drawing and painting himself with long hair and wearing caps of different shapes and forms. His *Self-Portrait at the Age of 13*, 1484,<sup>41</sup> already illustrates an example of these unusual headdresses. He wears a similar cap-like head covering with tassels in his *Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle*, 1493.<sup>42</sup> Dürer is depicted as holding the eryngo plant, known to him as *aster atticus*, with both hands, the flower corresponding to the meaning of the inscription at the top edge of the painting: *My sach die gat | als es oben schtat* (loosely translated as “My affairs follow the course allotted to them on high”).

<sup>38</sup> Loschek 1993, 116.

<sup>39</sup> Loschek 1993, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Stadlober 2006, 180 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait at the Age of 13*, 1484, Vienna, Albertina, inv. no. 1484.

<sup>42</sup> Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle* (Sternkraut, *Aster Atticus*), 1493, oil on canvass, originally parchment, 57 × 45 cm, Paris, Louvre, no. RF 2382. An inscription at the top edge of the painting reads: *My sach die gat | als es oben schtat*.



Figure 9

Anton Pilgram, *Der Falkner*. Ca. 1495.  
 Pear wood, height 26,5 cm. Vienna,  
 Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 3968.  
 © Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

Dürer's self-portrait, 1498 [fig. 11], at the Prado museum in Madrid marks the height of his extravagant dress style. His attire perfectly matches and forms a harmonious whole, from the cap-like headdress complete with tassel to the elegant leather gloves in a black and white pattern with a graphic aesthetic. The clothes he painted himself in also corresponds to his remark: *Ich pynn ein zentilam zw Fenedig worden* (Here I am a gentleman, at home only a parasite).<sup>43</sup> Dürer's long hair becomes progressively longer and curlier as he gets older. In this painting, he also sports a fine moustache and chin beard, which contravened fashionable taste at the time and were frowned upon.<sup>44</sup> Dürer's flamboyant and unique look also transgresses the rules on hairstyles and head coverings laid out in the *Bible*, as described above, and increasingly resembles the traditional image of Christ with curly shoulder-length hair parted in the middle after Nazarene fashion and a short beard. A fictitious report printed in Venice in 1494 also purported as much. Thus, Dürer demonstrably did not adhere to the gender-specific rules as prescribed by the *Bible*, as

<sup>43</sup> Rupprich 1956, 52.

<sup>44</sup> Rupprich 1956, 253.





**Figure 10** Lucas Cranach, *The Wedding Portrait of Dr. Johannes Cuspinian and Anna Cuspinian-Putsch*. 1502-03. Oil on wood. Winterthur, Collection Oskar Reinhart, inv. no. 1925.I. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas\\_Cranach\\_d.%C3%84.\\_-\\_Johannes\\_und\\_Anna\\_Cuspinian\\_\(Sammlung\\_Oskar\\_Reinhart\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_Cranach_d.%C3%84._-_Johannes_und_Anna_Cuspinian_(Sammlung_Oskar_Reinhart).jpg)

did many young men in the transalpine regions. Wilhelm Wätzold's comments on Dürer's *Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle* already saw him as clad in "a dandy costume of a squire, the many details of which almost appear feminine".<sup>45</sup>

The same era sees the beret transcend gender divisions, making it an early transgender accessory. Emperors, noblemen and peasants all wore it in a democratic sense, although it retained stylistic differences according to status. However, now women wore the beret too. Lucas Cranach's *Venus* [fig. 12] appears in her naked beauty, only wearing a dark red velvet beret, next to Cupid stealing honey. She wears the strikingly chic headdress, also worn by men in this form, to the side, attached to an ornate undercap (calotte) underneath.

The transformation of the beret from a once exclusively male headdress to an all-gender accessory was also documented by contemporaries such as Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg: "Now women behave like men and wear a beret with a cock's feather".<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Wätzold 1935, 34: "junckerlich stutzenhafter Tracht, deren zahlreiche Kleinformen fast etwas Weibliches an sich haben".

<sup>46</sup> Cited according to Thiel 2004, 174: "Es gon jetzt Frauen wie die Man und hond Bar-  
retlin mit Hahnenfederlin uff".



Figure 11 Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait*. 1498. Oil on wood, 52 x 40 cm. Madrid, Prado, inv. no. P002179. © Madrid, Prado

This transgendered transformation of the beret also concludes the observations made here. The strict rules outlined in 1 Corinthians 11 prescribing appropriate head coverings in ceremonial settings, which had a significant and lasting impact, have now been transformed through the creative freedom afforded by the mundanity of fashion. In wearing the beret, women no longer hide themselves behind a veil. Instead, they wear the beret as an accessory and playfully subvert and transfer dominant characteristics previously only reserved for men. With the beret, women rid themselves of the sym-



**Figure 12** Lucas Cranach, *Cupid Complaining to Venus*. Ca. 1530. Oil on wood. 81,3 x 54,6 cm. London, National Gallery, inv. no. NG6344. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus\\_mit\\_Amor\\_als\\_Honigdieb\\_\(London\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_mit_Amor_als_Honigdieb_(London))

bolism attached to headdresses that defined them as belonging to or subordinate to men. The sumptuous elegance of the beret as in the example above underlines the overt eroticism,<sup>47</sup> thus standing in stark contrast to the modesty of the veil towards the end of the Mid-

<sup>47</sup> Loschek 1993, 116.

dle Ages and prompting the accompanying inscription<sup>48</sup> that clearly serves as moral admonishment.

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**48** As Cupid was stealing honey from the hive a bee stung the thief on the finger. And so do we seek transitory and dangerous pleasures that are mixed with sadness and bring us pain (Als der Knabe Cupido [...] Honig stahl, stach die Biene dem Dieb in den Finger. So schadet auch uns die kurze, vergängliche Wollust, die wir begehren: Mit traurigem Schmerz ist sie vermischt).

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