

Reconstructing a Renaissance *Verdugado*

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Figure A

What Is It?

Spanish *verdugado* (farthingale) of the mid-16th century.

This *verdugado* is constructed following the pattern for a *verdugado de seda para muger* in Juan de Alcega's *Libro De Geometria, Practica, y Traca* published in 1589. Materials selected based on *verdugados* described in the *Inventario de joyas y otros objetos de la recamara [todo tipo de objetos]* completed in 1539-1542.

What is a *verdugado* made of?

What was used in Isabel of Portugal's time?

In Isabel of Portugal's time, a *verdugado* was most commonly made of silk, damask, taffeta, or velvet.¹ In particular, the pattern I used from Juan de Alcega's tailoring manual specifies the

¹ Los Inventarios de Carlos V y la Familia Imperial, Volumen III. Compiled by Fernando Checa Cremades. (Madrid, Fernando Villaverde Ediciones with the assistance of the Getty Foundation; 2010), 3235.

verdugado be of silk.² The casings for the actual *verdugos* (the hoops) would often contrast, and the colors were frequently very loud: "un *verdugado* de damasco carmesi...otro *verdugado* de tafetan Naranjo...vn *verdugado* de tafetan azul...vna *verdugada* de tafetan verde..."³ In this more mature era of the *verdugado*, the *verdugos* (the actual casings for the hoops – we'll get to that in the construction section) are almost universally "de lo mesmo", or of the same fabric as the *verdugado* itself.

The *verdugos* proper – the ossiers which fill the channels and give the *verdugado* its shape – are not as easily identified as the fabric content. They are not listed in the inventories, there is no record of anything having been purchased by Spanish tailors as there is in England. The sole reference we have comes from Talavera. As quoted in Anderson's *Hispanic Costume*: "Talavera in that same decade uses in relation to skirts the term *verdugos*, which signifies 'smooth twigs put out by a tree that has been cut or pruned'; the inference is that such twigs were used for hoops."⁴ **However, even that assertion of smooth, pliable twigs being used for hoops is somewhat problematic, as it may be in fact biased by Talavera's dislike of the *verdugado*.** Anderson, again: "An editor of his [Talavera's] text later says plainly, 'They were called *verdugos* in the beginning...because they were made of osiers (*varillas de mimbre*) with which formerly executioners scourged evildoers.' Here is a favorite device of disparagers, associating a disapproved fashion with an unsavory character."⁵ **Therefore, it is at least possible that even the association with ossiers per se is a device by which literate detractors sought to disparage the fashion. The bottom line is, there's no certainty as to what the hoops would have been in Spain in this time.**

What did I use?

Silk dupioni and silk thread. The *verdugado* – both its skirt portion and its *verdugas* or hoop casings – is made from the same fabric. Having real silk was very important to me, as I wanted the strength that silk conveys, and I wanted to honor Alcega's insistence on it, as mentioned above. Unfortunately, silk taffeta or silk damask (both of which would have been more documentable as taffeta and damask are cited in the Isabel of Portugal inventories) were both out of my price range.⁶

Due to it being fall, anything resembling "smooth twigs put out by a tree that has been cut or pruned" are out of the question. So instead, I've chosen to replicate the pliability that they would offer with braided ¼" wire wrapped in plastic. I intend to experiment further with possible *Verdugo* options as part of a future project.

*How is a *verdugado* assembled?*

How was it done in Isabel of Portugal's time?

Actually, that's not as easy an answer as you would think considering we've got a pattern and instructions from Alcega. The text of Alcega's instructions as translated by Jean Pain & Cecelia Bainton reads:

"To cut this farthingale of silk, fold the fabric in half lengthwise. Cut the front on the left and the back next to it, both from double thickness. Then unfold the remaining silk, fold

² Juan de Alcega, *Tailor's Pattern Book 1589*. Trans. Jean Pain & Cecelia Bainton with original text included, (New York: Costume and Fashion Press; 1999), p. 49.

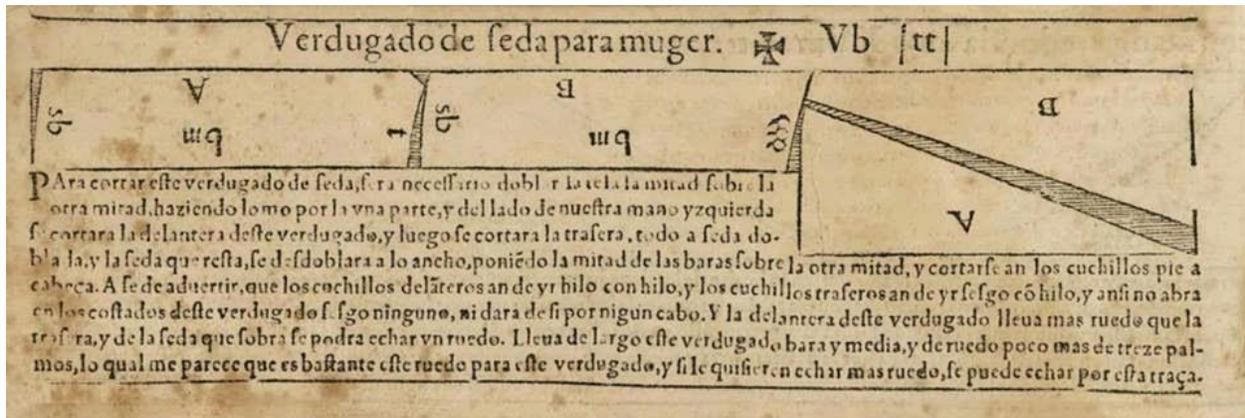
³ *Los Inventarios de Carlos V y la Familia Imperial, Volumen II*. Compiled by Fernando Checa Cremades. (Madrid, Fernando Villaverde Ediciones with the assistance of the Getty Foundation; 2010), 1694-1695.

⁴ Ruth Matilda Anderson, *Hispanic Costume 1480-1530*, (New York, Hispanic Society of America; 1979), 208.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Inventarios V. II*, 1694-1695.

it in half crosswise, and cut the godets (*cuchillos*) head to tail. Note that the front godets are to be joined straight edge with straight edge, whereas the back godets are to be joined bias edge with straight edge. Hence, there will be no bias edge on the sides of the farthingale, nor will it protrude on any side. The Front of this farthingale is wider than the Back, and from the remaining silk you can make a hem (*ruedo*). The farthingale is 1 ½ ells long and a little more than 13 hand-spans (*palmas*) wide, which seems to me to be sufficient for this farthingale, but if you wish to make it wider, this can be done from this pattern."⁷



So although we have the detailed cutting layout pictured above, and we know what pieces we have and how some of them are to go together, we don't actually have exact, detailed construction notes that specify. In particular, how do you tell whether the back godets should be at the back, or whether the Back should be at the back? This question is ultimately answered by the notation from Alcega that the Front of the farthingale is wider than the Back. If the Front and back pieces were to be in the actual front and back, that could not be true, as their hems are identical in width, and the waist of the Back is actually longer.⁸ Therefore, the only way to accomplish this difference in width is by using the differing widths provided by the godets. By placing the front godets – joined straight edge to straight edge – at the front of the *verdugado*, we accomplish additional width, which is lost in the back godets, which are placed straight edge to bias edge.

The other thing that Alcega's pattern appears to be missing is measurements for the godets proper. The measurements for the Front and Back are given via the labeled letters in Castilian ells, called *baras* (see Appendix 1 for reading *baras* notation) – 5/6 *baras* at the hem of both Front and Back, 1 and 1/2 *baras* along the length of each Back and Front side, 1/3 *bara* at the waist of the Front, ¾ *bara* at the waist of the Back. However, if you look at the cutting layout, it's not possible to actually obtain those measurements with the fabric in that layout (which is itself only 2/3 of a *bara* wide, and is here folded over). So, we are left to conclude that the measurements printed must be the measurements *including the godets*. In other words, the back total measurement of ¾ *bara* at the waist must be the 1/3 *bara* from the back plus an additional 1/12 of a *bara* – which gives us the dimension needed for the flat top of the back godet. We can obtain the diameter of the flat part of each godet in the same way: 5/6 *baras* at

⁷ Juan de Alcega, Tailor's Pattern Book 1589. Trans. Jean Pain & Cecelia Bainton with original text included, (New York: Costume and Fashion Press; 1999), p. 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the hem leaves us with 1/2 of a vara width for the godet hems. Translated into modern centimeters, the various dimensions are as follows:

Hem of each Front piece itself: 28 cm
Length of each Front piece: 126 cm
Waist of each Front piece: 28 cm
Hem of each Back piece itself: 28 cm
Length of each Back piece: 126 cm
Waist of each Back piece: 28 cm
Hem of front godet: 42 cm
Hem of back godet: 42 cm
Waist of back godet: 7 cm

I should note that I owe a great debt to Andrew Reid of *The Alcega Project* fame. After I ran these numbers for myself, I checked them against his, and was greatly relieved to be able to confirm I was on the right track.

I also owe a great debt to Matthew Gnagy, whose re-translation of this passage of *Alcega* done for the Elizabethan Costuming Facebook group provided interesting additional insights and confirmations.

After establishing dimensions for everything, there was still no guarantee on how the thing fits together. In particular, it quickly became apparent that the hem would need to be trimmed (the lengths were close, but it was absolutely not a smooth curve). Ultimately, I decided to follow the reasoning presented by Reid, which went very much along with my own thoughts, and place the two back godets directly at the back, and the two front directly at the front. Leaving the *verdugado* open at the back and laying it out right side up, it appears as such:

Back godet – Back – Front – front godet – front godet – Front – Back – back godet

But even from there, there's still question as to exactly how the *verdugos* would be attached to the *verdugado*. I do not believe that Janet Arnold's assertion that tucks would have been used is correct – the *verdugado* is not quite long enough for that, and the *Inventarios* inventories seem to indicate that separate *verdugos* (casing) is used regularly.⁹ Therefore, it is my belief that in period, separate casing was used. The inventories do not specify how many *verdugos* there would have been, and there is no visual evidence from this time, as the *verdugado* has become an undergarment.

How did I assemble the *verdugado*?

I followed the process laid out above exactly. I cut my fabric and sewed it together as described in the process, although I did use a sewing machine. The seams are not overly complicated, and hand sewing would have added little. I used flat-felled seams as are common on undergarments from elsewhere in the world at this time.¹⁰ **To attach the casing, I cut strips of the same silk fabric, and first sewed down one side, and then the other, creating a casing that lost minimal length on the *verdugado* itself.**

⁹ *Inventarios* V. II, 1694-1695.

¹⁰ Arnold, *Patterns* 4, 54-64

Additional Notes, or, why Janet Arnold is actually probably wrong (at least, for Spain):

As you may be aware, Janet Arnold has turned her considerable costuming brainpower onto the subject of the *verdugado* in the past. However, she has certainly not created one that matches the Spanish model. It is very clear from the inventories that Spain favored separate, distinct *verdugos* to hold the actual ossiers. Arnold's method involves creating tucks in the (admittedly very ample) amount of fabric given in the pattern.¹¹ This may have been done elsewhere, but certainly not in Spain.

More Additional Notes, or why the extant at the top of this document doesn't count:

At first blush, the extant *verdugado* shown in the museum photo at the top of this document would seem like a wonderful resource. Unfortunately, when you see it in person (which I have not, but I've spoken with many who did), it quickly becomes clear that it has been extensively altered in order to fit an effigy in a church. That explains some of the oddities (the many, many *verdugos* and the generally odd, slouchy fit). It's still helpful from the perspective of seeing the basic shape, but it's not helpful for serious reconstruction work.

For Next Time

- Experiment with different options for the stiffened *verdugas*. This could be an excellent spring project, when trees have more pliable branches and stems.
- Create two additional *verdugados* from silk brocade and silk taffeta, to see what the difference is in the silk weaves.
- Hand sew, in particular the *verdugas* to ensure they lay flatter.
- Experiment more with different closures for the waist.

What I Learned from This Project

This project was definitely an exercise in applied patterning from Alcega. He didn't write a tailoring manual so much as he did a guide to practices for tracing and marking out, and his goal is definitely to show fabric conservation, rather than provide a step by step guide for how to make the various items he includes. It's a great introduction that will help me as I consider other more complex patterns of his.

References:

- Los Inventarios de Carlos V y la Familia Imperial*, Volumen II. Compiled by Fernando Checa Cremades. (Madrid, Fernando Villaverde Ediciones with the assistance of the Getty Foundation; 2010).
- Carmen Bernis, *Indumentaria Espanola en Tiempos de Carlos V*. (Madrid, Instituto Diego Velazquez, 1962)
- Juan de Alcega, *Tailor's Pattern Book 1589*. Trans. Jean Pain & Cecelia Bainton with original text included, (New York: Costume and Fashion Press; 1999)
- Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 3*, (Hollywood, Quite Specific Media Group; 1985)
- Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 4*, (London, Pan Macmillan; 2008)
- Ruth Matilda Anderson, *Hispanic Costume 1480-1530*, (New York, Hispanic Society of America; 1979)
- La Moda Espanola En El Siglo De Oro. N.d. Museum exhibit at the Museo de Toledo. Spain, Toledo. Accessed via the highly detailed online gallery provided by FiberFerret on Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fiberferret/albums/72157656258313642>

¹¹ Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*, (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 1988), p. 196.

Appendix A: Understanding *baras*

The decoding that follows is for the sizing given in Alcega’s pattern manual, which focuses extensively on the Castilian *bara* (sometimes spelled *vara*). I haven’t tested it with any of the other Spanish ones, although I have a theory it would quite resemble accuracy. The trouble is, the units of measurement can absolutely change over time and from place to place, making it very hard to use this system from within Alcega anywhere else. I’m going to cover the Alcega “key” here—you’ll need to track down the keys for any other fabric pieces on your own! Great credit is due here to researchers who have done this work before me, most particularly The Honorable Lord Jack Bandyard, whose calculations in this matter helped me confirm my own. His article on the subject is well worth the read:

<http://www.chesholme.com/~jack/handouts/ells.pdf>

Name	Symbol	Amount	In Inches	In Yards
Bara	b	1	33	.916
Medio	m	1/2	16.5	.458
Tercio	t	1/3	11	.305
Quarto	Q	1/4	8.25	.229
Sesto	S	1/6	5.5	.153
Octavo	o	1/8	4.125	.114
Douazo	d	1/12	2.75	.076

Making Sense of The Letters as Marked

Now that you know what marking means what, you can start to understand what Alcega means when he puts them together—because rather than using his numbers, he had to squish os and ds and all other manner of things together and make you figure it out. And just for good measure, he threw in some marking letters to indicate which side connects where.

When a bigger letter is followed by a smaller letter, add. tS = 1/3 *bara* plus 1/6 *bara*.

When a smaller letter is followed by a bigger letter, subtract. St = 1/3 *bara* minus 1/6 *bara*.

When two of the same letter are written together, add. bb = 1 *bara* plus 1 *bara*

V means 5 *baras*. X means 10 *baras*. Thanks, tailoring conventions of the 16th century.