



# Feather Your Hats

## Feathers as Decorative Elements on 16<sup>th</sup> C Hats

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# Hat History

- A coolie-style straw hat on a man's head is depicted in a tomb painting at Thebes
- the Petasos from ancient Greece is the first known hat with a brim.
- the Pileus, a simple skull cap
- The Phrygian cap



# 13<sup>th</sup> C

- In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, caps were fashionable: conical, squared and curled. Even pointy felt hats were popular.
- Some were decorated with ribbons and precious stones.



# 14<sup>th</sup> C

- The cap now has a secondary section for the brim.
  - The attached brim is the main element which differentiated a cap from a hat
- In felt, straw or cloth, the hat no longer simply covers and protects the head, but moves toward a more aesthetic role.





# Flanders, Bruges 14/15th Century



# Early 15<sup>th</sup> Century

- Many hat pins in the early 15<sup>th</sup> C derive from souvenirs of shrines visited by the medieval pilgrims.
- Other early hat pins seem to be tokens of office, such as Sir Henry Gilford's Order of the Garter.



Sir Henry Gillford wears a hat pin depicting the order of the garter



# Jewels as pins

- Henry the VIII – 1520
- metal aglets are also used.



# Feathers appear on hats

- Feathers worn as fashion accessories are seen in artwork from England and Germany beginning in the 1520s.



Heilung eines von einer Gesch-tzkugel getroffenen Mannes, 1518- 1522

# Multiple feathers are worn by Landsknechts by 1535



Captain, Erhard Schoen,  
1535



Profos, Lieutenant,  
Erhard Schoen, 1535



Landsknecht mit  
Schrammhans,  
Erhard Schoen,  
1535

# Feathers in England

The single sweeping feather became popular in the court of Henry VIII.



Henry the VIII 1536



# Not every hat had feathers



Portrait of a Young Man,  
Bronzino. 1530 *Italian*

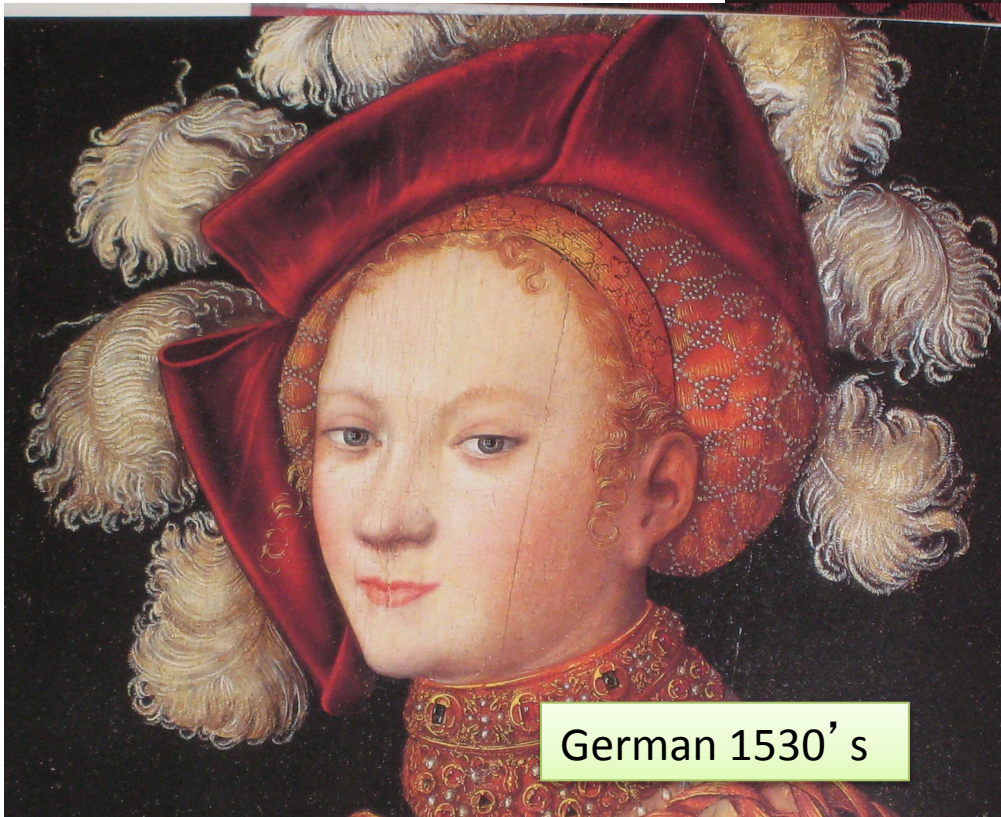


*German* 1534



Lucas The Younger  
Portrait of a Woman, 1539  
*Spanish*

# Feathers are trained.



German 1530' s



Dudley - 1575



# Feathers supplant hats in women's fashion

- By the end of the 1600s, women are using feathers as components of hair decorations.
- The name Aigrette has migrated in use to include hair decorations



# Some hat pins are feathers



James I in 1601 had the famous “feather” pin created.



# Types of feathers in use

- There are three basic types of feathers used on hats at this time
  - The Sweeping Aigrette
  - The Pon-pom
  - The Plume

# “Sweeping” Aigrette

- include upright plumage such as one sees in Victorian hats, or in a horizontal sweep of feather which one sees in the Henrician period.
- Only long, full, costly feathers were used for these.



# Pom-pons

- A pom-pon is a loose “ball” or curl of feather tips that create a fluffy ball. The ball can be large or small and worn singly or with several balls sewn together.





# The Plume

- A plume is a spray of feathers.
- Usually 2-3 feathers sewn together and attached to a hat



# What feathers to use?

- According to the *Right and Worshipful Order of Hatters of Dover*, the table to the right indicates which types of feathers were available, and most likely used in the 16<sup>th</sup> C.

	Plumes	Sweeping Aigrette	Pompon
Ostrich	X	X	X
Vulture	X		
Peacock	X		
Pheasant			X
Pigeon			X
Goose	X		X
Coq	X		X

# How were feathers prepared for use on hats?

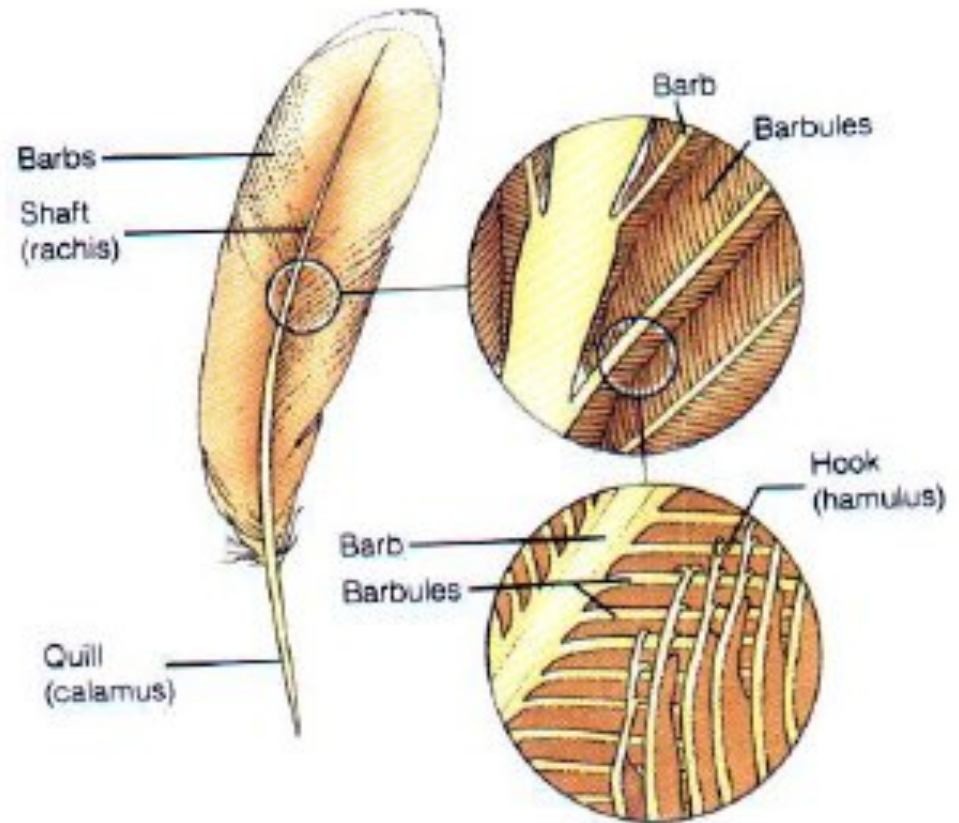
## Step 1: Cleaning and Bleaching

- Feathers are a keratin material similar to natural hair.
- They can be washed, combed, curled, powdered and starched without hurting the feather.
- They can be washed repeatedly throughout their lives and may last many years.



# Step 2: Re-fluffing feathers

Stroking feathers from the base up, prompting the hooks on their barbs and barbules to make the barbs realign, can often repair feathers.



# Step 3: Combing

- Wooden combs were very popular and relatively accessible.
- The comb is smooth to not damage or break the barbs and hooks.



# Step 4 Trimming

- One would even out the flues of a feather by trimming the edges as one would trim hair. Scissors or a sharp knife would be used. This allowed one to make the blade any diameter that was appropriate for the feathers' use.



# Step 5: Wiring or bending the feather

- Lightly steam the spine and wrap the feather around a small piece of wood while it cooled.
  - This piece of wood would be about 6” in diameter, but could be smaller.
- Wiring feathers
  - A narrow piece of wire is covered with thread, usually white or black to match the feather. It is then sewn along the spine with thread. One does not pierce the spine when this is done, merely wrapped around the spine and very carefully though the frons
- Another approach was to hold the spine directly over a dull knife and press the blade into the spine with our thumb.
  - The indentation made by the knife on the back of the spine permits one to bend the feather backwards. Likewise, this can be done on the side or front.

# Step 6: Curling

- This was done using either a dull knife called a curling knife or a hot iron as one would have used for setting ruffs.

Grasp a small section of flues, about 1" wide, and place them between thumb and the curling knife. Pressing the flues very gently against the knife, one would drag the flues between thumb and knife. This can be done several times in each section until the desired curl is achieved



# Creating a Sweeping Aigrette

- The feather may be attached at the brim as well along the crown for added support usually allowing the tip to float at will.
- The feather may run along the back of the hat or along the front.





# Creating a Pom-pon

- Several feather tips are curled tightly and sew to the brim of a hat.
- Pom-pons may be one color or several used together.



# Making a Plume

- Connect 2, 3 or sometime 4 or more feathers together to make various plumes.
- Attach feathers to hat using thread around the spines – never through the spine as that weakened the feather.





# Let' s try it...

- You will need
  - A feather
  - A curling knife
  - Dry, clean hands