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Period Costume & Style course final essay

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## The Decadent Lechuguilla

—The rise and fall of the ruff collar in Spain and Europe



Rijksmuseum ca. 1615 - ca. 1635

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ruffs#/media/File:Plooiakraag,\\_fraise\\_à\\_la\\_confusion.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ruffs#/media/File:Plooiakraag,_fraise_à_la_confusion.jpg))

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## 1. Introduction



1. Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn  
The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, 1632  
Mauritshuis, The Hague

In the sixteenth century Europe was living the period of the renaissance of literature and visual arts that started in the preceding centuries in Italy. The human body was idealized and decorated for maximum results during the 16th century. Boucher writes in her book *a History of Costume in the West* (1987, 219), that there was no other period that "was to give men more precious adornments to attain the perfection of human beauty". The Italian book *Il Cortegiano* (1528) by Baldassare Castiglione presented a new concept and social phenomenon of 'gentleman'. (Boucher 1987, 222)



2. Diego Velázquez - Philip III  
on Horseback (detail)

The nobility gathered to fewer courts than in preceding centuries, and the luxurious materials were present all over Europe in the costume of courtiers and bourgeoisie: "rich, heavy stuffs, thick embroideries, sumptuous jewels and fragile lace." (Boucher 1987, 219, 222)

There were also obstacles like the financial crisis 1557-9, general rise in prices and religious wars. The lower classes had extremely poor clothing. Workers, craftsmen and peasants had to lower the standard of living. In the same time painters were working in the courts and depicting the life of the most privileged and highest rank of taste. (Boucher 1987, 222)

16th century was a time for great discoveries: Europeans found America and familiarized with Asia and Africa. The discoveries, political changes, precious metals from overseas, industrial and commercial development brought unseen wealth. (Boucher 1987, 219,222) This is a period of golden age for Spain, and its fashions spread all over Europe. The golden age in Holland started in the last quarter of the

sixteenth century and ended about 100 years after. Queen Elisabeth I, last Tudor governing, forms also part of this period, maintaining her power from 1558 until her death in 1603.

The fashion for ruff collar was born in to this era of extreme contrasts. It is remembered iconic symbol in the portraits of the Elisabeth I, the portraits of the Philip III of Spain and not to mention innumerable paintings and portraits depicting the social elite of this period especially in Holland and also all over Europe.

The power of ruff lasted some seventy years, starting from Spain in the court of Philip III, and dealt a death blow from 1923 sumptuary law by Philip IV banning the extravagances of the ruff. The ruff had become in this point the symbol of decadence in Spain, and in contrast it started to present a conservatism and tradition in Holland and for example in Finland, where it was last seen in the necks of clergy men until about 1660. (Pylkkänen 1970, 287) In the Church of Denmark it is still maintained in the formal attire of bishops and ministers. Anglican Church choirs use ruff as an optional choice for boy sopranos. ([https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ruff\\_\(clothing\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ruff_(clothing)))

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## 2. Origins

Pleating was present in European costumes early on. In medieval times, in fourteen and fifteen centuries Germany the headgear called Kruseler was used. (Picture 4) Unlike the later ruff which was horizontal, this ruffled head covering surrounded the face vertically like a halo. The use of Kruseler spread to England. In fifteen century France pleated headgears were used. The costume book (Trachtenbuch) of Christopher Weiditz, presents travel drawings from the 1530's women from Navarra and Bretagne wearing pleated neckwear. (Picture 3) Cranach painted about 1510 Saint Elisabeth with pleated neckwear, that is also present in the portrait of Margaret of Austria. (Pylkkänen 1956, 216)

The development of the ruff collar started from the linen under shirt which had high collar decorated with little narrow ruffs. This little white ruff peeked over the bodice. Towards the end of the century it separated from the shirt and had grown to large proportions, reaching the maximum possible effect. Ruff increasing in size, rises the need to invent support systems like Rebato. (Boucher 1987, 227)

The fashion for ruffed collar started firstly spreading from Spain from the court of Philip II. The Spaniard had gained prestige from the discoveries of Christopher Columbus. The Spanish costume influences started to spread all over Europe. In addition in Spain the Moors were expelled from Andalusia, Portuguese crown went to Spain and general unification of the Iberian Peninsula effected together to create the golden age for Spain. (Boucher 1987, 225)



3. "Kruseler Püppchen" (14./15. Jhdt.)  
[Archäologie in Deutschland, Heft 1, 2004, S. 31]  
[http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/Bilder/Kruseler-Puppen\\_AiD-2.jpg](http://www.landschaftsmuseum.de/Bilder/Kruseler-Puppen_AiD-2.jpg)



4. 1530's, "Costume book" (Trachtenbuch) of Christopher Weiditz, German National Museum in Nuremberg, Pp. 135-136 Women's costume in Brittany.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weiditz\\_Trachtenbuch\\_135-136.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weiditz_Trachtenbuch_135-136.jpg)



5. Portrait of Archduchess Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy (1480–1530), in widow's dress, by Bernard van Orley.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_of\\_Austria,\\_Duchess\\_of\\_Savoy#/media/File:Portrait\\_of\\_Archduchess\\_Margaret\\_of\\_Austria,\\_Duchess\\_of\\_Savoy\\_\(1480-1530\),\\_in\\_widow's\\_dress,\\_by\\_Bernard\\_van\\_Orley.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_of_Austria,_Duchess_of_Savoy#/media/File:Portrait_of_Archduchess_Margaret_of_Austria,_Duchess_of_Savoy_(1480-1530),_in_widow's_dress,_by_Bernard_van_Orley.jpg)

In the beginning from the 16th century, Spain started to discard former Italian fashion influences (low-cut gown, wide sleeves) and developed the style of their very own, severe and solemn. (Boucher 1987, 220)

Anne Hollander in *Seeing Through Clothes*, (1993, 367) states that the Spanish and Dutch were first ones to adapt "the use of chic black". Hollander continues (1993, 367) how these both countries were "very receptive to the morbid beauty of black, but they stuck to black relieved by a little white around the neck". This preference to rich, dark tones was apt for use of white collar and cuffs concluding the look.

Boucher states (1987, 227), that "The dominant feature of Spanish Costume was its sobriety and austere elegance." Spain was going through the moral preoccupations of the Counter-Reformation and the ideology of the Spanish clergy was ascetic. Spanish attire created a hard geometrical

outline, formed from the bodice and *farthingale*."The farthingale was a stiff, bell-shaped underskirt to which were sewn hoops made of supple switches of wood (vertigo) to hold out the skirt, which wasn't not gathered at the waist, thus accentuating the sliminess of the body." (Boucher, 1987, 227) The bodice was stiff and high with a point at the waist. The ruff came well to complete this outline toward 1555. (Boucher, 1987, 227) Boucher (1987, 227) writes about the "concordance between the exaggerations of the ruff and farthingale". The influences of Spanish fashion declined in the seventeenth century, when Dutch and French costume came dominant. (Boucher 1987, 229-230)

In Spain the the ruff was called a lechuguilla, 'little lettuce'. This definition is found in the Castilian dictionary from 1611 by lexicographer Sebastian de Cobarrubias Tesoro de a lengua castellana o española, 705): "Lechuguillas. Los cuellos o cabezons, que de mucho anchos de Holanda, o otro lienzo, recogidos quedan haciendo ondas semejando a las hojas de las lechugas encarrujadas." Cobarrubias explains here how the ruffles resembled likeness to the lettuce leaves. He continues the explication saying, that in the first phase these collars were small, but started to grow and be more similar to burdock plant leaves than ones of lettuce. (Pictures 6 and 7) (Reference to the Covarrubias from Welch 2017, 113)

The ruff separated itself from the linen under shirt only after 1575. (Boucher 1987, 240) This development of the ruff is linked to the time when Europeans returned from the expeditions to India and Ceylon. It is speculated that the Europeans were fascinated by the effect of the wide collars starched with rice water used in these countries. These collars protected the clothing from long, oiled hair. The starching spread from Low Countries to French, England and to Spain. The starch made possible the larger ruff form that spread firmly over the shoulder framing the head and gained own life separated. The use of starch was in use in England already 1564. (Boucher 1987, 240)



6. The man holding the burdock leaf is 180 cm tall.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctium#/media/File:BurdockLeafInHand.gif>)



7. Romaine lettuce (*Lactuca sativa* var. *longifolia*).

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettuce#/media/File:Romaine\\_lettuce.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettuce#/media/File:Romaine_lettuce.jpg))

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### 3. Development

European countries developed own typical forms of ruffs. French ruff was usually plain, "with single row of pleats and sometimes open in front". French preferred to increase the width rather than to height. The metamorphosis led at the end of the century to the so called falling ruff, *fraise à la confusion*, which included several layers of unstarched material. *Collet monté* was the name for lace edged standing collar. (Boucher 1987, 242)

The ruff was seen in the neck of fashionable Henry III of France. When he appeared in 1578 "in a starched ruff made of fifteen ells of muslin half a foot wide", the reception from the Parisians was not flattering one. They compared it to a "platter bearing the head of John the Baptist". Parisians also shouted: "You can tell the clan's head by the ruff". (Boucher 1987, 240)

Coming to the seventeenth century ruffs were round as before, or soft and falling. These fashions continued to the first part of the seventeenth century. Collar was also worn supported by a frame. (Boucher 1987, 252) After 1635, Spanish fashions were wiped away in France. Only literature influences stayed. (Boucher 1987, 254)

In Flanders the tall and closed ruff was the main trend. (Boucher 1987, 242) In Flanders was worn the collars most thick and they could also be worn with lace. (Boucher 1987, 265) In the portrait of Aletta Hangman's from 1625 the Spanish fashions are clearly still present. (Image 8.) The ruff in the painting needs a very large amount of fabric.



8. Portrait of Aletta Hanemans by Frans Hals, 1625, collection Mauritshuis



9. Queen Elisabeth I,  
'Darnley Portrait'

In England ruff was closed in the front and trimmed with lace. It is also typical in England to have the ruff higher in the back than in front. (Image 9) (Boucher 1987, 240) The width of the ruff was limited 1562 to four inches on either side of the face. Nevertheless the ruff expanded in size, and reached its maximum size towards 1585. A Dutchman had introduced a starch paste 1564, and to prepare her ruffs, queen Elisabeth hired a Fleming. (Boucher 1987, 244)

England had the most variation of types of ruff compared to other countries. "English ruffs often had several tiers, often of different types of fold". English had also taste for ruff of very fine lace more frequently than in France. (Boucher 1987, 244)

When ruff fell out of fashion in England in elegant circles, the ruff was replaced with "a wide falling collar decorated with the rich lace, often dyed saffron yellow". (Boucher 1987, 244)



10. Queen Elizabeth I  
('The Ditchley portrait')  
by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger  
oil on canvas, circa 1592



11. Portrait from 1586 to 1587, by Nicholas Hilliard, around the time of the voyages of Sir Francis Drake



12. Dirck Jacobsz. Bas (1569-1637) and his family 1635  
 painting by Dirck Dircksz. van Santvoort (Museum: Amsterdam Museum)

(<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q17320362#/media/>)

File:Het\_gezin\_van\_Dirck\_Bas\_Jacobsz.,\_burgemeester\_van\_Amsterdam\_Rijksmuseum\_SK-A-365.jpeg)



13. Cornelis de Vos, Portrait of the Artist  
 with his Family (1621)

In the seventeenth century Holland, 1625-35, the last influences of the Spanish costume were discarded: the ruff, the straight stiff bodice, the farthingale and bell skirt. (Boucher 1987, 271)  
 In the painting Burgomeister Dirk Bas Jacobs and his family by Dirck Dircksz from 1635 the change of fashion is clearly visible in the first half of the seventeenth century. The old people wear now conservative ruff and young children prefer the French falling lace trimmed and soft collar. (Boucher 1987, 271)

The painting Portrait of the Artist with his Family by Cornelis de Vos from 1621 shows the very influence of Spanish fashion in Spanish Netherlands. The ruff is the flemish version, tense, tall and closed.





14. Peter Paul Rubens - The Artist and His First Wife, Isabella Brant, in the Honeysuckle Bower, 1610



15. Christian Bruce, Countess of Devonshire, and her children, c. 1629

In comparison, in the painting Rubens and his wife Isabella Brandt by Rubens, from 1610, we can see the more sensual Spanish ruff with lace and less thick construction.

In England women keep wearing ruffs in the first half of the seventeenth century, but the elliptically shaped form is presented, like in the painting Countess of Devonshire and her children from 1629. (Boucher 1987, 272)

The ruff could be also colored. In Spain dyed ruffs were reserved for princesses. (Boucher 1987, 274)

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#### 4. The Fall of Spanish Ruff

The ruff collar presented wealth and prestige. It required dozens of yard of fine linen and lace. The extent ruff of six layers in Basel required 38 m 40, 5 cm long strip of fine linen hat is 11,4 cm wide. (Pietsch and Jolly, 97) "Lace making industry, derived from cut-stitch work whose artistic qualities were to make it one of the most highly prized elements of dress". (Boucher 1987, 221) To make them and maintain them was extremely expensive. It required work force to frequent specialized laundering and starching it to the form. (Welch 2017, 115) Also the imported tints were costly.



16. Portrait of infante Felipe (future Phillip IV) with dwarf Soplillo by Villandrando. 1620



17. Diego Velazquez, King Philip IV of Spain, 1628-1629

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century Spain the ruff became as a symbol of the degradation of the masculine ideal and the decline of Spain itself. It was exaggerated, effeminate garment. Wearing it was not possible to perform any productive labour. It started to present the "waste and excess of Philip III regime". The tough masculinity of armored Spanish who conquered an empire one hundred years yearlier was missed. (Welch 2017, 115) Philip IV made reforms attacking to the ruff and implemented reforms in the early years of his reign. (Welch 2017, 117)

In the portrait of Rodrigo Villandrando the infante Felipe, the future Philip IV is seen in the plain splendor of Spanish court before the reforms. He wears tall ruff with lace. Surprisingly not even ten years after, the King Philip IV is painted in very different manners and costumes. Sumptuary law banned the enormous ruffs 1623. King Philip is wearing the new spanish invention, *golilla*. Golilla

became as a cornerstone of general reform programme. (Welch 2017, 115) Philip IV is like grandfather Philip II in his monochrome black and white costume. (Welch 2017, 116)

1623 Reform Acts banned clothes decorated with silver or gold. No more ruffs exceeding seven centimeters. Also no collars with tints, lace or "any other kind of ornament". The punishment was public shaming and exile. Women were allowed ruffed collars and cuffs, but no extra decoration included. (Welch 2017, 117)

After banning the ruff, the Spanish men were not applauding. They were accustomed to hiding the Adam's apples. The small flat soft collars without starch, *valonas*, were too exposing for them. It became a sense of shame for Spanish men. (Welch 2017, 118)

Playwright Juan Ruiz de Alarcón went to praise the ruff as an "invention that covered a man's defects." (The inventor of this Dutch foliage did well! With a honeycombed collar what ugliness is not corrected?" (Citation by Welch 2017, 118)

What did not make the situation of the bared neck better, was the fact that the valona was French or Flemish origin. Men felt "vulnerable, ugly and angry". It was not an option to go back to the small, discreet ruff collar of the sixteenth century. (Welch 2017, 118)

The new invention of Golilla came to rescue the ruff situation. It was "stiffened paper covered with fabric." (Welch 2017, 119) This flat base could hold the valona high and present coverage and decoration Spanish men were accustomed. (Welch 2017, 122) The new golilla was to present austerity, economy and dignity.



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## 5. Conclusion



19. The Somerset House Conference 19 August 1604

usually plain. But the tense Flanders ruff was prestigious by the pure amount of fine linen needed for the effect, like the 38m strip for Basel ruff.

The last decades of ruff were contradicted in the first half of the seventeenth century. In Spain the ruff became the symbol of decadence that must be wiped out of the way. In the Holland and North Europe it presented, after the fashionable years were gone, the conservatism and office, staying lastly in the costume of the clergymen.

The ruff was born in the turbulent times of early modern Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century and disappearing almost completely after the first half of the seventeenth century. Its excess presented extreme wealth and power, the leaders of the most powerful nations of the time in Spain, France and England were showing themselves in the different versions of this collar.

In Spain and England the ruff was more loose, bordered with the luxurious expensive lace. In France, Holland and Flanders the ruff was

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