

On Köhler's 14th century Chemise.

By ffride wllfsdotter / Rebecca Lucas

Carl Köhler's "*A History of Costume*" seems to be a staple of the costumer's library, and although the line drawings for some garment patterns may be outdated, and the black and white photos are passe compared to full-colour glossy books, it is still often a typical reference.

But looking beyond the front cover of our well-thumbed, 1963 Dover edition, the situation seems much more complex: Dover had reprinted a 1928 work (now in the public domain, incidentally including colour plates), which was apparently a compilation of Köhler's 1870s works "*Die Trachten der Völker im Bild und Schnitt*" [The costumes of the people, in image and cut] (1871) and "*Die Entwicklung der Tracht in Deutschland während des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*" [The development of the costume in Germany during the Middle Ages and Modern Times] (1877), with new photos and text included by Emma von Sichart. This was then published in 1926 as "*Praktische Kostümkunde*" [*Practical Costume Design*]. The entire work was then translated from the German by Alexander Dallas. So items mentioned in the 1928/1963 English editions may never have originated with Köhler at all!

One such item that is closely associated with Köhler, is a black and white photo captioned "Chemise of the Fourteenth Century" (Köhler, 1963; 177), with the additional cryptic subtitle "Heyne. Thuringia, Burg Rhanis" in the list of illustrations (Köhler, 1963; 23). (The photo, from the now Public Domain 1930 edition of "*A History of Costume*" can be seen at right.)

However, at the beginning of this list, it says (Köhler, 1963; 11):

"The names in italic indicate the source of the illustrations (fuller details of this are given in the Bibliography) or the owner of the originals. The illustrations for which no acknowledgment is made are taken from Carl Köhler's "Die Trachten der Völker im Bild und Schnitt."

This makes sense – Köhler was a professional illustrator, and his 1871 and 1877 works are full of clear line drawings, but no photographs. The mysterious source for the chemise is Moriz Heyne, who in 1903 published "*Körperpflege und Kleidung bei den Deutschen von den ältesten geschichtlichen Zeiten bis zum 16. Jahrhundert,*" [Personal hygiene and clothing of the Germans from the earliest historical times to the 16th Century] 27 years after



Fig. 209. CHEMISE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Köhler's death. "*Körperpflege und Kleidung*" is the third tome of a five-volume set collectively called "*Fünf Büchern Deutscher Hausaltertümer von den ältesten geschichtlichen Zeiten bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*" [Five Books of German Household Antiquities, from the Oldest Historical Time to the 16th Century]. There is no way we can blame the lack of information about this garment in "*A History of Costume*" on Carl.

Heyne (1903; 310) says that the woman's chemise was discovered in 1867, together with other items which were dated to the early 14th century, in a domicile within Burg *Rahn* (not *Rhanis* as in Köhler 1930, 1963. The modern name of the castle is *Ranis*.) in Düringen, Thuringia, Germany. It was made of linen, and was 70 cm long. (See Appendix 1.)

This appears to have been the earliest publication mentioning the find, as in 1907 a slightly more detailed description appeared in the journal "*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Thüringische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*" [Journal of the Association for Thuringian History and Archaeology] (See Appendix 2). Qaantz (1907; 187) begins by describing how a cache of objects were found when a wall was being demolished. Hidden in the patched-up crevice left behind by a window-shutter latch, approximately 3 metres high, was a pile of bird bones, an iron hammer, a now-lost (by 1907) item described as a skull, pieces of a plain wooden plate, and the chemise, which had apparently been found wrapped around the remains of a carved and painted wooden plate.

Qaantz (1907; 188) then goes on to describe the chemise, as being made from very coarse linen, hemmed by folding over the edge of the fabric twice, and sewn together with "thick" stitches. At the bottom of the shift, there is evidence for wedges being inserted on both sides – i.e. gores. He then goes on to give its measurements as 68 cm long, and 29 cm wide at the shoulders.

According to Heynes, the chemise was kept in a private collection, which Qaantz says he accessed with permission of the Lord District Administrator von Breitenbauch of Ranis Castle. This is likely to have been the then-owner of the castle, Arthur Constantin Wolf Ludwig von Breitenbauch (Wikipedia, 2012). In 1926 a museum was established by Dietrich von Breitenbuch (Burg Ranis, 2012) but according to Cainder nic Sheanlaoich, who had written to the modern-day museum, during World War II the castle was sacked and the contents of the museum taken (nic Sheanlaoich, 2002), apparently including the 14th century shift.

I believe it is fair to say that even though the chemise seems lost to us today, there is more information available than one is usually led to believe. Köhler should not be blamed for the lack of information in 'his' book, as it seems the first published mention of the garment occurred long after his death. Why Emma von Sichart did not provide more information about the find is unclear. However we now have a better idea of the find circumstances; it was a hidden cache of objects, not a grave, and is described as being made of a coarse linen, with gores. It sadly seems, however, that the precise method of construction, and details such as if it was cut on-grain or bias, and details of strap attachment, which fuels speculative costuming, remain unsolved.

Appendix 1: Heyne's description of the chemise.

Heyne, M. 1903. *“Körperpflege und Kleidung bei den Deutschen von den ältesten geschichtlichen Zeiten bis zum 16. Jahrhundert”* (Leipzig : S. Hirzel); 310.

“Wie früh das leinene Hemd in unserem Sinne sich bei der Frau einbürgert, darüber fehlen Zeugnisse; aber es wird sich damit nicht anders verhalten haben, als mit dem gleichen Kleidungsstücke beim Mann. Und wenn an Frauenbildnissen jede Andeutung davon fehlt, so erklärt dies die Form, wie sie aus einem erhaltenen späteren Stücke erhellt: in einem Hause der Burg Rahnis in Düringen fand man um 1867 zusammen mit Sachen aus dem frühen 14. Jahrhundert ein leinenes Frauenhemd, das nicht nur für den Schnitt dieser Zeit, sondern wohl auch der früheren zeugt: die Länge (70 cm) reicht nicht über das Knie, der tiefe Ausschnitt fällt bis zur Brust hinunter, statt der Ärmel sind nur Tragbänder angebracht. Bei dieser Form ist natürlich Sichtbarkeit auf Bildern unmöglich.”

[Please note: For readability in English, I have added extra punctuation not used in the original German.]

“How early the linen chemise, in our modern sense, was a natural part of the female wardrobe, is unknown due to a lack of evidence; but it does not have to be treated differently, than the same item of clothing worn by men. And, if in portraits of women they lack any hint of a chemise, this is so explained by the form that is preserved by a later piece: In a domicile of Castle Rahnis in Düringen, in 1867 one found, together with items from the early 14th century, a linen women's chemise. This is not only evidence for the cut of shifts at this time, but also for earlier periods: the length (70 cm) does not reach below the knee, the deep neckline drops down to the breast and instead of sleeves, only narrow straps are attached. This style of clothing is, of course, impossible to verify from examining images.”

[Please see the comments of: <http://research.fibergeek.com/2012/05/23/do-you-see-what-i-see/> for my first attempt at translating this passage.]

Appendix 2: Qaantz's description of the chemise

Hermanii Qaantz 1907. "Ein spätmittelalterlicher Fund von Burg Ranis." *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Thüringische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*; 188.

"Von dem Frauen hemd hat der unlängst verstorbene Geheimrat Moriz Heyne in seinen „Fünf Büchern Deutscher Hausaltertümer von den ältesten geschichtlichen Zeiten bis zum 16. Jahrhundert“ (Leipzig, Hirzel) eine getreue Abbildung nach einer Photographie veröffentlicht. Es ist aus ziemlich grobem Leinen gefertigt und trägt dick umgenähte, doppelte Säume. Es weist unten beiderseits Einsatzkeile, sogenannte Spiele, auf, ist 68 cm lang und zwischen den Achseln 29 cm breit. Von Interesse sind an ihm die schmalen Tragbänder."

"On the women's chemise, the recently deceased Privy Councilor Moriz Heyne, in his "Fünf Büchern Deutscher Hausaltertümer von den ältesten geschichtlichen Zeiten bis zum 16. Jahrhundert," has faithfully reproduced its appearance by a photograph. It was made from very coarse linen and the doubled-seams are sewn together with thick stitches. There is evidence the bottom of the shirt of inserted wedges on both sides – so-called 'Spiele'[lit. games?]. It is 68 cm long and, between the shoulders, 29 cm wide. Of interest are the narrow shoulder-straps."

[Please see the comments of: <http://research.fibergeek.com/2012/05/23/do-you-see-what-i-see/> for my first attempt at translating this passage.]

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