

# QUOTES CONCERNING SCOTTISH CLOTHING

## CONTEMPORARY QUOTES ABOUT SCOTTISH MEN'S CLOTHING

### MEN'S HIGHLAND DRESS:

“From the middle of the thigh to the foot they have no covering for the leg, clothing themselves with a mantle instead of an upper garment and a shirt dyed with saffron. . . . In time of war they cover their whole body with a shirt of mail of iron rings, and fight in that. The common people of Highland (*lit.* ‘wild’) Scots rush into battle having their body clothed with a linen garment manifoldly sewed and painted or daubed with pitch, with a covering of deerskin.” --1521, John Major, as quoted in McClintock.

“. . . and they were naked except their stained shirts, and a certain light covering made of wool of various colours . . . .” --1556, Jean de Beaugué, *L’histoire de la Guerre d’Ecosse*, as quoted in Kelly.

“All, both nobles and common people, wore mantles of one sort (except that the nobles preferred those of several colors). These were long and flowing, but capable of being neatly gathered up at pleasure into folds. I am inclined to believe that they were the same as those to which the ancients gave the name of *brachæ*. . . . The rest of their garments consisted of a short woolen jacket, with the sleeves open below for the convenience of throwing their darts [javelins], and a covering for the thighs of the simplest kind, more for decency than for show or defense against the cold. They made also of linen very large shirts, with numerous folds and wide sleeves, which flowed abroad loosely to the knees.” --1578, Bishop Lesley, *De Origine, Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*, as quoted in McClintock.

“They delight in variegated garments, especially stripes, and their favorite colors are purple and blue. Their ancestors wore *plaids* of many colors, and numbers still retain this custom but the majority now in their dress prefer a dark brown, imitating nearly the leaves of the heather, that when lying upon the heath in the day, they may not be discovered by the appearance of their clothes; in these wrapped rather than covered, they brave the severest storms in the open air, and sometimes lay themselves down to sleep even in the midst of snow.” --1581, George Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, as quoted in McClintock.

“Their exterior dress was mottled cloaks of many colors with a fringe to their shins and calves; their belts were over their loins outside their cloaks.” --1594, Lughaidh O’Clerigh, *The Life of Hugh Roe O’Donnell*, as quoted in Thompson. [This description is generally recognized as the first verifiable mention of the féileadh mór or great kilt.]

“They are clothed after the Irish fashion, in striped mantles, with their hair thick and long.” --1607, Camden, *Britannia*, as quoted in Kelly.

“At the end of the 16th century, Lady Montgomery, wife of Sir Hugh Montgomery, 'set up and encouraged linen and woolen manufactory (in Ulster), which soon brought down the prices of the breakens (tartans) and narrow cloths of both sorts.” --1613, unattributed quote in Grange.

It appears that the desire for uniformity in the colours of tartan used by a clan was beginning in the early 1600's: "remove the red and white lines from the *plaides* of his men so as to bring their dress into harmony with that of other septs." --1618, Letter from Sir Rbt. Gordon of Gordonstoun to Murray of Pulrossie, as quoted in Grange.

"Many Highlanders we observed in this town (Edinburgh), in their plaids, many without doublets, and those who have doublets have a kind of loose flap garment hanging loose about their breech, their knees bare; they inure themselves to cold, hardship, and will not diswont themselves; proper, personable well-complexioned men, and of able men; the very gentlemen in their blue caps and plaids.” --1636, Sir William Brereton, as quoted in Grange.

## **MEN'S LOWLAND DRESS:**

The husbandmen in Scotland, the servants, and almost all in the country did wear coarse cloth made at home, of grey or sky-color, and flat blue caps, very broad. The merchants in cities were attired in English or French cloth, of pale color, or mingled black and blue. The gentlemen did wear English cloth, or silk, or light stuffs, little or nothing adorned with silk lace, much less with lace of silver or gold, and all followed at this time the French fashion, especially at court. –1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, v. 4.

“Myself was at a knight’s house, who had many servants to attend him, that brought in his meat their heads covered with blue caps. . . .” –1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, quoted in Rae.

## **CONTEMPORARY QUOTES ABOUT SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CLOTHING**

### **WOMEN'S HIGHLAND DRESS:**

"Their women's attire is most becoming. Over a gown reaching to the ankles, and generally embroidered, they wore large mantles . . . woven of different colours. Their chief ornaments were the bracelets, and neck laces with which they decorate their arms and necks. –1570, Bishop John Lesley, as quoted in Kelly. [The description seems to describe the ersaid, a women’s version of the great kilt.]

### **WOMEN'S FASHIONS, EDINBURGH:**

"Many [women] wear (especially the meaner sort) plaids, which is a garment of the same woolen stuff whereof saddle cloths in England are made, which is cast over their heads and covers their faces on both sides, and would reach almost to the ground, but that they pluck them up and wear them cast under their arms." --1636, Sir William Brereton, quoted in Grange.

Some ancient women and citizens wear satin straight-bodied gowns, short little cloaks with great capes, and a broad bonegrace coming over their brows and going out with a corner behind their heads: and this bonegrace is as it were lined with a white starched cambric suitable thereto." --1636, Sir William Brereton, as quoted in Dunbar.

"Young maids not married all are bare-headed, some with broad thin shag ruffs, which lie flat to their shoulders, and others with half bands with wide necks, either much stiffened or set with wire, which come only behind; and these shag ruffs, some are more broad and thick than others." --1636, Sir William Brereton, as quoted in Dunbar.

"The ancient dress wore by the women, and which is yet wore by some of the vulgar, called arisad, is a white plaid, having a few small stripes of black, blue and red; it reached from the neck to the heels, and was tied before on the breast with a buckle of silver or brass, according to the quality of the person. . . . The plaid being pleated all round, was tied with a belt below the breast; the belt was of leather, and several pieces of silver intermixed with the leather like a chain. . . . The head dress was a fine kerchief of linen (tight) about the head, hanging down the back taper-wise; a large lock of hair hangs down their cheeks above their breast, the lower end tied with a knot of ribbands." – Martin Martin, *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, (1703), as quoted by Sharon Krosa.

## WOMEN'S LOWLAND DRESS:

Gentlewomen married, did wear close upper bodies, after the German manner, with large whalebone sleeves, after the French manner, short cloaks like the Germans, French hoods, and large soft falling bands about their necks. The unmarried of all sorts did go bareheaded and wear short cloaks with most close linen sleeves upon their arms, like the virgins of Germany. -- 1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, v.4. [Whalebone sleeves: sleeves stretched on whalebone hoops; falling bands: a deep linen collar, turned down.]

The inferior sort of citizen's wives and the women of the country did wear cloaks made of coarse stuff, of two or three colors of checker-work, vulgarly called *ploddan*. – 1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, v. 4.

To conclude, in general they would not at this time be attired after the English fashion in any sort, but the men, especially at court, followed the French fashion, and the women, both in court and city, as well as in cloaks as naked heads and close sleeves on the arms and all other garments follow the fashion of the women of Germany. – 1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, v. 4.

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