5. Dress in *Mona Lisa*

Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, or *La Gioconda*, is not only the most renowned Renaissance portrait, it is the most famous painting ever made (fig. 6). This last extant portrait by Leonardo resides in the Louvre. He portrayed the female sitter in a chair on a balcony with a panoramic view of a mountainous landscape and a river. The sitter has her hands on the armrest of the chair and her face shows the most familiar feature of the painting, her smile. The iconic status of this portrait has inspired a huge number of academic and non-academic publications. There are many controversies regarding the identity of the sitter and the interpretation of the painting as a whole. In fact, the scholarly attention that *Mona Lisa* has attracted over the centuries is too vast and varied to be summarized here.[1] Instead, this chapter focuses entirely on her dress, an aspect that has received relatively little attention.in comparison to the landscape in the background or the sitter's smile.

Over the course of more than a century several art historians and, surprisingly, archaeologists have suggested a number of highly diverging interpretations of Mona Lisa's attire. On the basis of her dress, the sitter has been said to be a mourning mother, a widow, a fashionable Florentine lady dressed 'alla Spagnola', a mother who has just given birth and is still wearing maternity dress, and even a prostitute. Remarkably, most of the scholars who have launched new hypotheses did not care to comment on the previous theories, let alone prove them wrong. Notwithstanding the continuously growing body of research on *Mona Lisa*, the fact remains that the garments worn by the sitter have never been studied by a dress historian.

In any discussion of the meaning of Mona Lisa's attire, the issue of the identity of the sitter looms large. The traditional identification as Lisa Gherardini, wife of the silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo, is based on Vasari's account. Other suggestions that have been put forward include Isabella d'Este, Costanza d'Avalos, a mistress of Giuliano de' Medici, and a generic type of a beautiful woman.[2] In 1981 Martin Kemp pointed out that if *Mona Lisa* was not so famous, 'we would have no difficulty in accepting it as yet another portrait from the Renaissance of a sitter unknown to us'.[3] By consistently using the title *Portrait of a Lady on a Balcony* instead of *Mona Lisa*, Kemp emphasized our ignorance of the sitter's identity. However, new evidence confirming the identification as Lisa Gherardini has recently come to light. This chapter therefore starts with a survey of the earliest sources on the historical Lisa Gherardini and her portrait by Leonardo, followed by a critical overview of all existing hypotheses on Mona Lisa's dress.

Since none of the prevailing interpretations is convincing, the second part of this chapter aims to establish a new reading of Lisa's dress. At first sight, Lisa seems to be wearing dark colours. Her head is covered with a veil and the absence of jewellery is striking, as it is in Leonardo's portraits of Ginevra de' Benci and Isabella d'Este (figs. 1, 5). Results from technical analysis of the paint layers are compared with contemporary Florentine written and visual sources to determine exactly what Lisa is wearing. Special attention is paid to the appearance of

[1] On the history of the painting and its iconic status, see: Sassoon 2001. For references to the most significant contributions on *Mona Lisa*, see: Marani 1999, p. 206, note 86.
[2] For an overview of different hypotheses on the sitter's identity, see: Shell and Sironi 1991, p. 98-99, with references to further literature.
[3] Kemp 1981, p. 268.

the dress during the consecutive stages of the painting process to provide further insight into Leonardo's working procedure and the tenets of art theory that may have guided him. The pictorial sources for Mona Lisa's dress are traced to determine whether Leonardo depicted actual contemporary fashion or took some poetic license. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Leonardo's view on the depiction of contemporary dress in painting.

1. The portrait of Lisa Gherardini

For a long time, Vasari's life of Leonardo da Vinci was the only source supporting the identification of the sitter of the *Mona Lisa* as Lisa Gherardini. Vasari wrote:

> Leonardo undertook to execute, for Francesco del Giocondo, the portrait of Mona Lisa, his wife; and after toiling over it for four years, he left it unfinished; and the work is now in the collection of King Frances of France, at Fontainebleau.[4]

Since several other early sources provide contradictory information, Vasari's testimony has often been called into question. Bernardo Vecchietti, author of the codex known as the Anonimo Magliabecchiano, does not mention a portrait of Lisa Gherardini in his life of Leonardo. Instead, he refers to a portrait of her son, stating that Leonardo 'portrayed Piero di Francesco del Giocondo from life'.[5] Doubt about Vasari's identification was further fostered by the travel account of Antonio de Beatis, secretary to cardinal Luigi of Aragon. On 10 October 1517 the cardinal paid a visit to Leonardo's workshop at Château de Clou near Amboise, where he was shown three paintings, including a portrait that is usually identified as the *Mona Lisa*. De Beatis described it as 'one [painting] of a certain Florentine woman, made on the instigation of the late Giuliano de' Medici'.[6] This led to a wide-ranging speculation on the identity of Leonardo's sitter. A poem by Enea Irpino, dedicated to a portrait of a women wearing a black veil painted by Leonardo da Vinci, also gave rise to alternative identifications.[7]

Recently, however, a much earlier source has come to light, confirming Vasari's account of the identity of Leonardo's sitter. In 2005 Armin Schlechter discovered a margin comment that mentions the portrait in an incunabula of Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares* that appeared in Bologna in 1470 and is now kept in the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.[8] Between 1493 and 1530 notes were added by different hands, most extensively by Agostino Vespucci, vice-chancellor of the Florentine Republic and assistant to Macchiavelli, in 1503. In one of the passages, Cicero describes a work by Apelles: 'Apelles perfected the head and bust of his Venus

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[4] 'Prese Lionardo a fare per Francesco del Giocondo il ritratto di Monna Lisa sua moglie, e quattro anni penatovi lo lasciò imperfetto, la quale opera oggi è appresso il re Francesco di Francia in Fontanableò', Vasari 1966-87, vol. 4, p. 30. Translation: Vasari 1996, vol. 1, p. 635.

[5] 'Ritrasse dal natural Piero Francesco del Giocondo', Fabriczy 1893, p. 89. For an extensive discussion of this source and the improbability of Leonardo having painted the portrait of Piero del Giocondo, see: Zöllner 1993, p. 116-118.

[6] 'uno di certa donna Firentina facta di naturale ad istantia del quondam mag.co Juliano de Medici', Itinerario di Monsignor R.mo et Ill.mo il Cardinale de Aragonia, per me dom. Antonio de Beatis, 10 October 1517. Beltrami 1919, p. 149, no. 238.

[7] The poem is published in: Vecce 1990, p. 62. For an overview of the different suggestions that have been put forward, see: Shell and Sironi 1991, p. 98-99.

[8] The discovery was first published in 2005, but only became widely known after a second publication that sparked substantial coverage in the popular press in 2007. Schlechter published his findings more extensively online in: Schlechter 2008, with references to the previous publications under no. 3.

with the most elaborate art, but left the rest of her body in the rough.'[9] Vespucci noted in the margin: 'Apelles the painter. Thus Leonardo da Vinci does in all his paintings, as is the head of Lisa del Giocondo and of Anne, mother of the Virgin. We will see what he will do in the Hall of the Great Council, he now made an agreement with the *gonfaloniere* [Piero Soderini]. 1503, October'.[10] This source is now generally regarded as the definitive confirmation of Vasari's statement.[11]

Archival research conducted by Frank Zöllner and more recently by Giuseppe Pallanti has established the basic facts of the lives of Lisa Gherardini and her husband, Francesco del Giocondo. Lisa Gherardini was born on 15 June 1479 as the first daughter of Antonmaria di Noldo Gherardini's third marriage. Antonmaria had previously married Lisa Carducci in 1465 and Caterina Rucellai in 1473, who both died in childbirth. In 1476 he remarried Lucrezia di Galeotto Spinello, Lisa's mother.[12] Given Antonmaria's tax declaration of 1480, the family was not very rich and had only a moderate income from farms and land near Florence.[13] Consequently, when Lisa married Francesco del Giocondo in March 1495, her dowry was modest, consisting of 170 gold florins cash and several parcels of land south of Florence, near the Gherardini country estate.[14] Unfortunately, no inventory of Lisa's trousseau listing her garments and accessories survived.

Francesco del Giocondo (1465-1538) owned a prosperous silk business, which he had inherited from his father. The Giocondo family belonged to the Florentine ruling class and Francesco held several political offices during his career. In 1491 he had married Camilla Rucellai, who gave birth to a son, named Bartolommeo, in February 1493. The next year, however, Camilla died in childbirth.[15] Francesco signed the wedding contract for his second marriage, to Lisa Gherardini, on 5 March 1495. Lisa bore her husband five children: Piero (b.

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[9] 'Nunc ut Appelles Veneris caput & summa pectoris politissima arte perfecit: reliquam partem corporis incohatam reliquit', Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares*, Heidelberg, University Library, inv. no. D 7620 qt. Inc. (GW 6821), fol. 11a. Cited from: Schlechter 2008, no. 102. Translation: Burke 2008, p. 4. Cicero refers to a passage from Pliny's *Historia naturalis* on the same subject.

[10] '[Apelles] pictor. Ita leonar/dus uincius facit in omnibus suis / picturis. ut est Caput lisę del giocondo. et annę matris uirginis / videbimus quid faciet de aula / magni consilii. de qua re conuenit / iam cum vexillario. 1503. 8bris', Cicero-Inkunabel D 7620 qt. Inc. (GW 6821), fol. 11a (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg). Cited from: Schlechter 2008, no. 104. Translation: Burke 2008, p. 4. See also: Paris 2012, p. 120-121, cat. 30 (with photo of the original document).

[11] See: Burke 2008, p. 4.

[12] Pallanti 2006, p. 37.

[13] Antonmaria owned a house in the city near Santa Trinita and a *casa signorile* in San Donato a Poggio, south of Florence. However, in 1480 the family lived in a rented house in the Santo Spirito quarter, because their own house was too severely damaged. Apparently, there were no means to restore it. See: Zöllner 1993, p. 118-119.

[14] The value of the land is not specified in the documents, but according to Zöllner it could not have been more than 400 florins. Antonmaria Gherardini had not invested a sum of money in the city's dowry fund, the *Monte delle doti*, for his daughter. The cash portion of Lisa's dowry was probably financed by selling some land. See: Zöllner 1993, p. 118-119, 132-133, notes 42-43 (with reference to the archival documents); Pallanti 2006, p. 41, 57-58.

[15] Pallanti 2006, p. 52-55. Older literature states that Francesco del Giocondo had been married twice before marrying Lisa Gherardini. First to Camilla Rucellai, followed by a marriage to Tommasa di Mariotto Villani in 1493, who then died in childbirth too within a year. First stated in the 1851 Le Monnier edition of Vasari's *Vite*, without further reference, cited in: Zöllner 1993, p. 117 and esp. p. 131 note 23. Archival documents mention the death of 'Francesco del Giocondo's wife' in 1494, without specifying her name. Pallanti found no reference to the supposed marriage of Francesco and Tommasa and, since it is unlikely that Francesco remarried so quickly, he believes that the 1494 document refers to his first wife, Camilla.

1496), Camilla (b. 1499), Andrea (b. 1502), Giocondo (b. 1507) and Marietta (year of birth unknown).

Francesco must have asked Leonardo to paint a portrait of his wife Lisa no later than the spring of 1503, given the fact that Agostino Vespucci mentioned the – still unfinished – portrait in October that same year. Leonardo had returned to Florence in late February or early March 1503, after having served as architect and engineer to Cesare Borgia from August 1502 onwards. The reason for the commission is not known, but Zöllner put forward two different suggestions. On 5 April 1503 Francesco bought a house of his own. Before that time, he, his wife and their children had been living in his parental home with the rest of the Giocondo family. This purchase may have provided the occasion to commission a portrait to decorate the new home. Otherwise, the portrait might have been meant to celebrate the birth of Andrea in 1502.[16]

For reasons unknown, though, the portrait was never delivered to Francesco del Giocondo. Maybe it was not ready in time or Leonardo did not want to part with it. As Vasari stated, even after four years the portrait was not finished and Leonardo took it with him when he moved to Milan in 1508 and to Rome in 1513. Joanna Woods-Marsden even suggested that Francesco might have declined the portrait because of the unusual way his wife was represented in it, wearing dark dress without jewellery.[17] In any case, after several years of travelling and returning to Florence every so often, Leonardo went to France in 1516, where he found employment as a court painter to Francis I.[18] There, in Leonardo's French workshop, the *Mona Lisa* was admired and described by Antonio de Beatis. Over the years Leonardo continued to work on the portrait, adjusting the dress and the background, a subject that is discussed below.

There are still questions about what exactly happened to the *Mona Lisa* after Leonardo's death on 2 May 1519. For a long time it was believed the portrait was directly incorporated into the collection of Francis I. However, Shell and Sironi's publication in 1991 of the posthumous inventory of the possessions of Leonardo's pupil and companion Salaì dated 21 April 1524 has cast doubt on this. Salaì had returned to Milan after Leonardo's death. The inventory lists several paintings that were among his possessions, including: 'a painting called la Joconda'.[19] Given its estimated value of 100 *scudi* and 505 *lire*, half the price of Salaì's house, Shell and Sironi believed this to be the original rather than a copy and on that basis claimed the portrait was in Milan in the 1520s.[20] In 1999 Bertrand Jestaz published yet another newly discovered document concerning the sale of a number of unspecified paintings to Francis I by Salaì in 1518.[21] Salaì received twice the amount mentioned in the inventory, which led Jestaz to conclude that the paintings listed in the inventory were all copies and that he had sold the originals to the king.[22] Although it seems likely that *Mona Lisa* stayed in France after Leonardo's death, this document does not provide absolute certainty as to its whereabouts, as Jestaz suggests. Since no specific

[16] Zöllner 1993, p. 122-123.
[17] Woods-Marsden 2001, p. 79-80.
[18] On *Mona Lisa*'s (and Leonardo's) whereabouts between 1506 and 1516, see: Cox-Rearick 1995, p. 152, cat. IV-5.
[19] 'Quadro [in margin with carat mark] dicto la Joconda [cancelled: dicto la honda]', Shell and Sironi 1991, p. 96.
[20] The amount of 100 *sudi* and 505 *lire* for a painting is exceptionally high in the early sixteenth century. By comparison, three panel paintings by Francesco Napolitano were sold for eighty *scudi* in 1502 and Bernardino de' Conti was only paid six *scudi* for two paintings in 1522. See: Shell and Sironi 1991, p. 96-103.
[21] The document reads: 'a messire Salay de Pietredorain, paintre, pour quelques tables de paintures qu'il a baillées au Roy, II^{M} VI^{C} IIII l.t. III s. IIII d.', cited from: Jestaz 1999, p. 69.
[22] Jestaz 1999, p. 70-71.

paintings are mentioned, it remains uncertain which or even how many paintings were sold to Francis I in 1518.

The *Mona Lisa* must have been acquired by Francis I at some point before the mid-1540s, either in 1518 or later. Vasari states that the portrait was at Fontainebleau in the first edition of his *Vite*, completed in 1547, which is confirmed by the painter and art theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1592), who wrote around 1563: 'The portrait of Mona Lisa, which he worked on for four years, [even if] as yet unfinished shows perfectly what nature and art together are capable of doing. The portrait is now in France at Fontainebleau.'[23] Even though Vasari had probably never seen the portrait, he must have heard about it. His well-known passage on the portrait, an elaboration of the topos of lifelikeness reflecting the Petrarchan idiom of female beauty rather than an accurate description of the painting itself, shows the fame that *Mona Lisa* had already acquired in the sixteenth century:[24]

In this head, whoever wished to see how closely art could imitate nature, was able to comprehend it with ease; for in it were counterfeited all the minutenesses that with subtlety are able to be painted, seeing that the eyes had that lustre and watery sheen which are always seen in life, and around them were all those rosy and pearly tints, as well as the lashes, which cannot be represented without the greatest subtlety. The eyebrows, through his having shown the manner in which the hairs spring from the flesh, here more close and here more scanty, and curve according to the pores of the skin, could not be more natural. The nose, with its beautiful nostrils, rosy and tender, appeared to be alive. The mouth, with its opening, and with its ends united by the red of the lips to the flesh-tints of the face, seemed, in truth, to be not colours but flesh. In the pit of the throat, if one gazed upon it intently, could be seen the beating of the pulse. And, indeed, it may be said that it was painted in such a manner as to make every valiant craftsman, be he who he may, tremble and lose heart.[25]

2.1. Mother in mourning dress

In 1864 the well-known art critic Théophile Gautier discussed *Mona Lisa* in his book *Les dieux et demi-dieux de la peinture*, adding the discerning remark that the colours had darkened over the

[23] 'Redussi sì a perfizione, non essendo ancora finito, il riratto di Mona Lisa, dretto al quale stei quattro anni; ma ciò che la natura e l'arte insieme si pol fare fei; et il qual ritratto ore è in Francia a Fontanableo.' Lomazzo 1973-75, vol. 1, p. 109. Translation cited from: Cox-Rearick 1995, p. 152. Greenstein regards Lomazzo's text as 'nothing other than a summary of Vasari's story', but at the same time he points out that the Milanese Lomazzo was very well informed about Leonardo and his oeuvre through Francesco Melzi, who was living in Milan at the time as well. See: Greenstein 2004, p. 22.

[24] Marani believes that Vasari could not have written such a detailed description without actually seeing the portrait. He suggests that if the *Mona Lisa* was indeed in Italy in the 1520s and 1530s because Salaì had brought it to Milan, it is possible that it was taken to Florence, where Leonardo enjoyed a great reputation as a portraitist. See: Marani 1999, p. 194-195. Given the Petrarchan commonplaces used by Vasari, it seems equally likely that he only knew *Mona Lisa* from hearsay. Vasari's indebtness to Petrarch was noted by: Rubin 1990, p. 42.

[25] 'nella qual testa chi voleva veder quanto l'arte potesse imitar la natura, agevolmente si poteva comprendere, perchè quivi erano contrafatte tutte le minuzie che si possono con sottigliezza dipignere. Avvenga che gli occhi avevano que' lustri e quelle acquitrine, che di continuo si veggono nel vivo; et intorno a essi erano tutti que' rossigni lividi et i peli, che non senza grandissima sottigliezza si possono fare. Le ciglia per avervi fatto il modo del nascere i peli nella carne, dove più folti e dove più radi, e girare secondo i pori della carne, non potevano essere più naturali. Il naso, con tutte quelle belle aperture rossette e tenere, si vedeva essere vivo. La bocca, con quella sua sfenditura con le sue fini unite dal rosso della bocca con l'incarnazione del viso, che non colori, ma carne pareva veramente. Nella fontanella della gola, chi intentissimamente la guardava, vedeva battere i polsi: e nel vero si può dire che questa fussi dipinta d'una maniera da far tremare e temere ogni gagliardo artefice e sia qual si vuole.' Vasari 1966-87, vol. 4, p. 30-31. Translation: Vasari 1996, vol. 1, p. 635-636.

ages, which had caused the sitter to look almost like a widow, dressed in mourning.[26] Modern technical research has confirmed Gautier's assessment of the painting's darkening. Some pigments of the dress have blackened through chemical reactions, while original colours that have remained unimpaired are hidden under a layer of discoloured varnish and surface dirt.[27] Nevertheless, the authors of most theories on Mona Lisa's attire took the colours as they appear now at face value, entirely ignoring the result of discolouration. While Gautier merely remarked that these darkened colours make Mona Lisa's dress look like mourning garb, subsequent scholars, even more recent ones, have suggested she actually was in mourning.

The first scholar to suggest that Lisa is depicted in mourning garb was the French archaeologist Salomon Reinach in 1909. He took his lead from Vasari, accepting the identification of the sitter as Lisa Gherardini, and supposed Leonardo started working on the portrait in 1501. He mentioned archival evidence suggesting that Lisa had lost a daughter in 1499. However, Lisa's first daughter Camilla, who was born in 1499, lived to adulthood, dying in 1518, whereas her second daughter was born after 1507.[28] Reinach found further circumstantial evidence for Lisa's mourning in Vasari's remark that Leonardo invited buffoons and musicians to his studio to cheer her up while she was posing for him: [29]

> He made use, also, of this device: Mona Lisa being very beautiful, he always employed, while he was painting her portrait, persons to play or sing, and jesters, who might make her remain merry, in order to take away that melancholy which painters are often wont to give to the portraits that they paint. And in this work of Leonardo's there was a smile so pleasing, that it was a thing more divine than human to behold; and it was held to be something marvellous, since the reality was not more alive.[30]

Furthermore, Reinach concluded that the dark olive green and brown colours of Lisa's dress, the transparent black veil worn over her head and the absence of jewellery were characteristics of mourning attire. He found support for this in some letters by Isabella d'Este. When Isabella's mother, Eleanor of Aragon, died in 1493, Isabella asked her sister Beatrice to send her veils to cover her head.[31] Isabella also requested an informant to report to her on her sister's dress. On 25 October 1493 she was informed that Beatrice's mourning attire consisted of 'a dress of brown cloth with rather long sleeves of brown cloth, and on her head a cap of brown silk with veils over it that are neither yellow nor grey, but pure white'.[32] For the jewellery, Reinach referred to Isabella's letter to her husband in which she tried to prevent him from

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[26] 'Le costume, par la carbonisation des couleurs, est devenu presque celui d'une veuve […]', Gautier, Houssaye and Saint-Victoir 1864, p. 24.
[27] For the results of technical research on the colours of *Mona Lisa*, see: Martin 2006, p. 60-64.
[28] Reinach refers to Müntz, who in turn referred to a certain Carli, who had told him that the *Libro dei Morti* in the ASF lists 'una fanciulla di Francesco del Giocondo, riposte in Santa Maria Novella', dated 1 June 1499 (no inv. no. given). See: Müntz 1899, p. 416. Lisa' daughter Camilla was born in 1499, and entered the convent of San Domenico di Cafaggio at the age of ten. She died young of an unknown illness in 1518 at the age of eighteen. See: Pallanti 2006, p. 61-62.
[29] Reinach 1909, p. 21.
[30] 'Usovvi ancora questa arte, che essendo mona Lisa bellissima, teneva mentre che la ritraeva chi sonasse o cantasse, e di continuo buffoni che la facessino stare allegra per levar via quel malinconico che suol dar spesso la pittura a' ritratti che si fanno: et in questo di Lionardo vi era un ghigno tanto piacevole che era cosa più divina che umana a vederlo, et era tenuta cosa maravigliosa per non essere il vivo altrimenti.' Vasari 1966-87, vol. 4, p. 31. Translation: Vasari 1996, p. 636.
[31] Luzio and Renier 1896, p. 459; Reinach 1909, p. 21.
[32] 'un vestito in corpo di panno bruno cum maniche de panno bruno assai longa, et in testa una scuffia di seta bruna cum li veleti di sopra non gialli nè greggi, ma pur bianchi', Leonardo Aristeo to Isabella d'Este, Milan, 25 October 1493. Luzio and Renier 1896, p. 460; Reinach 1909, p. 22.

pawning her last jewels, writing: 'I shall be left entirely without jewels and shall be obliged to wear black, because to appear in coloured silks and brocades without jewels would be ridiculous.'[33] This passage led Reinach to believe that the absence of jewellery was a characteristic of mourning garb, 'just as it is today'.[34]

First of all, Reinach's use of sources is problematic in that he applied evidence from a courtly context to the portrait of a Florentine citizen's wife. Moreover, his views on Renaissance mourning dress stem from practices of his own day. In the nineteenth and early-twentieth century an elaborate mourning etiquette was maintained, not only among the highest levels of society but also by the middle class. Mourning garb was obligatory for a prescribed period and consisted of black dress with a black veil without jewellery or, depending on the stage of mourning, special mourning jewellery.[35]

Late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento mourning practices, however, were less strict and did not require mourning garb after the death of a young child. The Florentine government occasionally even decided to limit the use of special mourning garments in an attempt to curb expenses. For this reason, a sumptuary law surrounding deaths and funerals was issued in 1473. Fathers were not allowed to wear *panni bruni* (mourning dress) after the death of a child under twenty-five, except for a black *cappuccio* (chaperon). The law was even stricter for women. There were only two occasions on which they were allowed to wear mourning garb, either after the death of their father or mother for no longer than six months or after being widowed for as long as they wanted. In any other case, including the death of a child, whether underage or adult, the law prescribed normal dress.[36] Given the high child mortality rates in this period, it seems likely parents did not wear mourning garb for every deceased child and certainly not for a period of more than two years.

Adolfo Venturi, the second adherent to the mourning garb theory, identified the sitter differently. He connected the portrait to four sonnets and two madrigals by Enea Irpino, dedicated to the portrait by Leonardo of a lady by many believed to be Costanza d'Avolos (c. 1460-c. 1541), widow of Federico del Balzo (d. 1483). In one of these poems, Irpino states that she is to be painted 'under her black veil'.[37] Venturi identified *Mona Lisa* as the portrait mentioned in the poems and interpreted the head covering of the sitter as Costanza's black widow's veil.[38]

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[33] Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga, Mantua, 27 August 1496. The letter is cited in greater part in chapter 4, p. 119.

[34] 'Ainsi, avec des vêtements de deuil, mais avec ceux-là seulement, il était d'usage, alors comme aujourd'hui, de ne pas porter de bijoux.' Reinach 1909, p. 21. Reinach's theory was followed by: Schiaparelli 1921, p. 172.

[35] On nineteenth-century mourning dress practices, see: Cunnington and Lucas 1972, p. 247-255; Taylor 1983, p. 120-163.

[36] The law was issued on 27 April 1473 and has been published by: Rainey 1985, app. 12, p. 773-781. For the regulations on 'panni bruni', see: p. 779, no. 11.

[37] 'Per finger lei sotto il negro velo'. For the complete poem, see: Vecce 1990, p. 62. On Irpino's *canzoniere*, to which this poem belongs, see: Bolzoni 2008, p. 183-185.

[38] Venturi 1925, vol. 1, p. 40-42. Robert Langton Douglas tried to disprove Venturi's theory, arguing that the sitter was Lisa Gherardini dressed in contemporary fashion with a hairstyle 'alla francese', i.e. her hair flowing loosely over her shoulders and gathered in a veil held in place by a ribbon. He argued, without backing his statements with sources, that Isabella and Beatrice d'Este wore this informal hairstyle at home, while they appear in their portraits coiffed in a formal style. See: Douglas 1944, p. 118. Although Douglas was right to reject Venturi's suggestion that the sitter is a widow, his arguments are not plausible. His description of the hairstyle 'alla francese' corresponds with Leonardo's portrait drawing of Isabella d'Este, in which her hair is covered with a light veil, secured by a *lenza* (fig. 5). Lisa Gherardini's hairdo, however, is different, with long locks of curly hair hanging loosely on either side of her face.

The mourning dress hypothesis suddenly reappeared in 1990, when Carlo Vecce reinstated Venturi's version of the theory, relating *Mona Lisa* to Irpino's poems. Vecce, however, pointed out that Irpino mentions the first name 'Isabella' in one of the sonnets and argued that Irpino's lady was not Costanza d'Avalos, but rather Isabella Gualandi, who was widowed at a young age.[39] By contrast, Janice Shell and Grazioso Sironi followed Reinach's suggestion. In their article on Salaì's posthumous inventory, in which they confirmed the identity of the sitter as Lisa Gherardini, they continued to promulgate the idea that she had lost a daughter in 1499. Leaving no doubt as to their interpretation of her dress, they wrote she 'is clearly dressed in mourning'.[40] However, as has become clear, the evidence in favour of the mourning garb theories is meagre at best and technical analysis has since effectively undermined this hypothesis. Pigment analysis has revealed that Mona Lisa's dress was probably brownish green rather than black and her sleeves bright yellow.[41] Before considering the results of technical examination in more detail, other theories on Mona Lisa's dress put forward after Reinach and Venturi will be considered first.

2.2. Fashionably virtuous Florentine wife

Frank Zöllner, who still believed Mona Lisa's veil to be black, proposed a different reading of the garment. In his view, a black veil was not necessarily indicative of mourning, but part of a married woman's attire. In Florence, he wrote, women were only allowed to forego a veil for a period of up to two or three years after getting married.[42] Moreover, an etiquette book for young girls, published in Venice, recommended black as an appropriate colour for the 'first nuptial dress'.[43] Zöllner therefore argued that Lisa's black veil conveyed her married status and the virtues associated with it, such as chastity and piety. At the same time, he acknowledged that black veils are a rarity in Florentine portraiture. He explained the predominance of black and other dark colours in Lisa's dress as influence from Spanish fashion. At the start of the sixteenth century Spanish black dress became popular in Northern Italy, to which the vogue for black during the wedding festivities of Lucrezia Borgia and Alfonso d'Este testifies. Zöllner assumed that Francesco del Giocondo, being a silk merchant, was aware of the latest trends and dressed his wife accordingly.[44] Lisa's dress therefore strikes a balance between 'a personal wish for expressing her virtue and her desire to be dressed fashionably', as Zöllner put it.[45]

As in the case of Reinach's mourning dress hypothesis, Zöllner's interpretation of the primary material is questionable. Oddly, he failed to provide the source for his statement that married women were obliged to cover their heads with a veil. As far as I know, such regulations do not appear in the Florentine sumptuary legislation of the fifteenth and early sixteenth

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[39] Vecce 1990, p. 61-72.
[40] Shell and Sironi 1991, p. 102. In a footnote they added the anachronistic nuance that Lisa's dress could be half-mourning as well, which is another nineteenth-century concept.
[41] Martin 2006, p. 64.
[42] Zöllner 1993, p. 126, 136-137, note 106.
[43] 'primo vestimento nvptiale', *Decor puellarum*, published in Venice in 1471 (although the title page erroneously states 1461, which is impossible because the publisher only started his business in Venice in 1470, see: Gerulaitis 1976, p. 23). Cited from: Zöllner 1993, p. 126.
[44] Daniel Arasse followed Zöllner's theory, but added that it may have been Leonardo himself rather than Francesco del Giocondo who suggested the black veil. See: Arasse 1997, p. 389.
[45] Zöllner 1993, p. 126-127. For the wedding festivities of Lucrezia Borgia, Zöllner refers to: Butazzi 1983, p. 58. For descriptions of the attire of the bride and the wedding guests in the letters of Isabella d'Este, see also: D'Arco 1845, p. 300-309. Lucrezia Borgia's trousseau, which contained many black garments, was published by: Beltrami 1903.

century.[46] Secondly, Jack Greenstein with good reason wondered how a Venetian manual, written several decades earlier, could be related to a Florentine portrait painted in 1503.[47] Moreover, the Spanish craze for black, which influenced court fashion in Northern Italy, had not yet reached Florence at that time. Florentine women still preferred the lighter and more cheerful colours that were already in use in the fifteenth century.[48]

Early sixteenth-century trousseaux convincingly demonstrate the Florentine preference for coloured dress. The trousseau of Cornelia di Bartolommeo Buondelmonti, who married Leonardo di Lorenzo Morelli in 1507, is a case in point. Cornelia received a white satin *veste* (overgown) lined with marten, a purple *veste* lined with fur, a *cotta* of white damask with red velvet sleeves, a green *gamurra* with deep blue (*alessandrino*) sleeves and a second pair of green sleeves, a pink *gamurra* with sleeves of grey damask, a short purple *gamurra* with a velvet border and a *cioppa* of auburn wool decorated with red velvet. The unappraised items further included a gamurra of blue *saia* and a short green gamurra.[49] Another example is the trousseau of Catherina di Filippo Strozzi (app. 3D). She married Gino di Neri Capponi in 1504, a year after Leonardo started working on the *Mona Lisa*. At that time, Catherina owned a *roba* of auburn velvet lined with marten and three *cotte*, one of gold coloured satin with deep blue velvet, one of white damask with red satin, and the third of pale blue camlet with auburn satin. She also had three *cioppe*, respectively made of red, grey and multi-coloured woollen cloth, a *gamurra* of purple wool decorated with silver and green satin and a second one of multi-coloured cloth with sleeves of deep-blue satin.[50] A third and somewhat later trousseau, made up for the marriage of Ghostanza Minerbetti in 1511, conveys the same image. Ghostanza received a pink overgown edged with grey velvet, a dress of blue moiré silk edged with red velvet, a lemon-coloured dress edged with black velvet, a dress of white silk with edging and sleeves of auburn silk damask and a dress of green cloth with sleeves, borders and trim of auburn damask. She also had two pairs of sleeves, one pair of purple silk and one of red velvet.[51]

The inventories of bridal trousseaux not only show a predilection for colour, but also reveal a partiality for combining contrasting bright colours, like red and white or yellow and blue. Raphael's Florentine portraits of women, such as *Maddalena Doni* and the *Lady with a Unicorn*, beautifully illustrate this fashion (figs. 108-109).[52] The portraits of Maddalena Strozzi and her husband Agnolo Doni were probably painted on the occasion of their marriage in 1504.[53] Maddelena wears a dress of red moiré silk, trimmed with black fabric, with sleeves of

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[46] Zöllner may have been thinking of the sumptuary law of 1464, which allowed women to wear certain pieces of jewellery for a period of three years after marriage. For this law, see: Mazzi 1908, p. 44, no. 3.
[47] Greenstein 2004, p. 30-31. Italian historian of dress Levi Pisetzky stated that black veils were worn in Venice, whereas Florentine women preferred white. Levi Pisetzky 1964-69, p. 89, 94. Although Zöllner refers to this study, he does not draw conclusions from it.
[48] Already stated by: Levi Pisetzky 1964-69, vol. 3, p. 57-59.
[49] Cornelia Buondelmonte's trousseau is published in: Morelli 1897, p. 14-16.
[50] The only trace of Spanish fashion present in this trousseau is a purple *bernia*, a cloak of Spanish origin (app. 3D, no. 12), but even this garment is not black.
[51] Ghostanza Minerbetti's trousseau is published in: Frick 2002, p. 233-237, for the appraised dresses, see p. 233.
[52] Raphael's two other female portraits painted in his Florentine period (1504-1508), *La Muta* (Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche) and *La Gravida* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 no. 229), are fine examples as well. On dress in Raphael's Florentine portraits, especially *La Muta*, see: Baldi 1983, p. 238-239. A further example of the same fashion depicted by another painter is the portrait of an unknown woman by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio (Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 no. 224).
[53] Both portraits are now in the Galleria Palatina in Florence. The attribution to Raphael is based on Vasari and has never been doubted. There is, however, some discussion on the date of the commission. Since the two portraits were originally joined, it seems likely they were painted for the couple's marriage,

bright blue damask. The white linen of her shirt is pulled through the apertures between the bodice and the sleeves. A transparent veil partially covers her otherwise bare shoulders. She also wears a conspicuous pendant attached to black cord and a gold chain around her waist.

Raphael's *Lady with a Unicorn* is dated slightly later, to c. 1505-1506. Even though the portrait has been repainted several times and was restored heavily in the early twentieth century, it still provides an accurate image of Florentine dress at the start of the sixteenth century.[54] The anonymous sitter wears a soft green dress edged with broad bands of auburn material. The dress has a low neckline that nearly plunges off the shoulder. Wide, red sleeves are loosely attached to the bodice with short ribbons, revealing the white linen of the *camicia* underneath. The lady wears a golden chain around her neck with a large pendant consisting of an emerald, a large square ruby and a pear-shaped pearl. The other jewellery consists of a golden ornament worn in her hair and a golden belt accentuating the waist. Both portraits reflect the use of contrasting colours that can be traced in inventories.

Roberta Orsi Landini, who did extensive research on the archive of the Medici wardrobe, has shown that the Florentine style, characterized by the use of bright colours, persisted well into the sixteenth century. When Eleanor of Toledo married the Florentine duke Cosimo I de' Medici in 1539, she adopted the Florentine custom of wearing coloured dress instead of black, the predominant colour in her native Naples. Similarly, her daughter-in-law Giovanna of Austria favoured bright colours only after her marriage to Francesco I in 1565. The colourful silk fabrics required for these garments were all produced in Florence. By wearing these locally produced fabrics, the court visually supported an industry that was vital to the Florentine economy.[55]

It is highly unlikely that Francesco del Giocondo would have chosen Spanish black dress for his wife, because it was not fashionable in Florence at that time. Moreover, as a Florentine silk merchant, he would most likely have favoured the local coloured silk fabrics. Instead of Spanish black fashion, Lisa Gherardini seems to be wearing colourful Florentine dress, which is confirmed by the results of the technical analysis of the pigments. This subject will be further elaborated on below.

2.3. New mother in maternity dress

In 2004 an international team of scholars and scientists conducted extensive technical research on *Mona Lisa*, the results of which were published two years later. For the first time, they drew attention to the ample, pleated overgown made of transparent material worn by Lisa Gherardini. Although discernible to the naked eye, the gauze dress is only fully visible in an infrared reflectogram. Imaging shows clearly that Lisa Gherardini is depicted wearing a tight-fitting bodice, decorated with the familiar motif of the *nodi vinciani* and edged with a braid border, to which a pleated gauze overgarment has been attached. Their main contribution to the debate on the sitter's attire, as formulated by Bruno Mottin, however, without proper evidence, is the suggestion that this is maternity dress.

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although some scholars have suggested they were meant to celebrate the birth of their first child, a daughter in 1507, or their second child, a son in 1508. See: Florence 2008, p. 192, cat 44.

[54] At an unknown date, maybe already in the sixteenth century, the portrait was changed into a Saint Catherine of the Wheel, wearing a cloak to conceal the original dress. This layer was removed at the start of the twentieth century. For a comprehensive overview of the painting's history, including multiple restorations and technical research, see Tullia Carratù in: Paris 2001, p. 114-121, cat. 9.

[55] The change from black and other dark colours to a brighter and more colourful palette can be traced in the *Guardaroba Medicea* and in portraiture. Orsi Landini 2010, p. 193-197.

Mottin compared the overgarment to the one shown in Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady known as Smeralda Bandinelli* (fig. 43). Over a deep pinkish red undergown Botticelli's sitter wears a similar gauze dress gathered at the neckline and decorated with gold braid at the neckline, sleeve edges and along the mid front opening of the garment. The upper part is worn closed, but from the waist down it is left open, just revealing the skirt of the underdress. According to Mottin, she is obviously pregnant and wearing a *guarnello*, a garment that he describes as indoor dress for young children and pregnant women. Although there are no indications that Lisa Gherardini was expecting when she was portrayed, Mottin pointed out she gave birth to Andrea in December 1502 and suggests she is wearing a *guarnello* to celebrate this occasion.[56]

Although Mottin should be given credit for being the first to include the sitter's transparent overgown in the analysis of her attire, his interpretation of the garment is inaccurate. He based it on dress historian Jacqueline Herald's description of the aforementioned portrait by Botticelli. Herald, however, only cautiously stated that 'Smeralda Bandinelli […] wears what may be termed a *guarnello*'. She tentatively suggested that it was 'possibly worn by pregnant women', but also mentioned that *guarnelli* are listed in inventories as male clothing as well, a fact that Mottin completely ignored.[57]

There are no sources to confirm that *guarnelli* were worn as maternity dress. However, *ricordanze* do list other types of dress typically worn by women just before or just after giving birth. Two garments appear regularly throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the *guardacuore da parto* (maternity shirt) and the *mantello da parto* (maternity mantle). *Guardacuori* were often colourful and fancifully decorated with buttons and linings. *Mantelli da parto*, meant to keep a new mother warm while she recovered from giving birth, were very diverse, ranging from rather basic examples to luxurious showpieces lined with fur and decorated with pearls. The Florentine painter Bartolomeo di Fruosino depicted the latter garment on a birth tray (fig. 110). A mother who has given birth receives her guests seated upright in bed, wearing a red *mantello da parto* closed with a pearl brooch at the chest.[58]

The dress shown in the portrait of Mona Lisa is clearly not maternity wear, a fact that Mottin himself now apparently acknowledges. In 2014 he republished the results of the examination carried out ten years earlier in summarized form. He repeated the suggestion that Lisa's dress is a *guarnello*, but no longer considered it to be maternity wear, citing Jacqueline Herald's description of the garment's use in full this time. He interpreted it as a simple gown, suitable for the domestic environment, which would then confirm Zöllner's hypothesis that Francesco del Giocondo commissioned the portrait to either celebrate the purchase of a new house or the birth of the couple's son Andrea.[59]

However, Lisa's dress cannot even be regarded as a *guarnello*. Herald described *guarnelli* as simple, loose dresses, made of linen or cotton.[60] The simplicity of the garment was also stressed by Polidori Calamandrei, who defined it as a very cheap and modest dress made of a

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[56] Mottin 2006, p. 70.
[57] Herald 1981, p. 220. Herald's book offers a general introduction to fifteenth-century dress in Italy as a whole. For the definition of a Florentine garment such as the *guarnello*, one is advised to turn to the standard work on Florentine women's dress in this period: Polidori Calamandrei 1924, p. 53. A more recent study that also provides an accurate definition of the *guarnello* is: Frick 2002, p. 310.
[58] For a more extensive discussion of maternity dress in *ricordanze*, see: Musacchio 1999, p. 38. On the guardacuoure, see also: Polidori Calamandrei 1924, p. 102. For the birth tray, see Jacqueline Musacchio in: New York 2008, p. 152-154, cat. 69.
[59] Mottin 2014, p. 208-210.
[60] Herald 1981, p. 220.

coarse linen and cotton mixture, often without sleeves, worn by country women and servants.[61] Mottin's own description of Lisa's garment as being made of raw silk provided by Francesco's own shop is obviously at odds with the appearance of a *guarnello*.[62] The dress depicted in Botticelli's portrait stands out for its delicate fabric, probably made of silk, and luxurious gold edging and is therefore certainly not a *guarnello*. Nor is Lisa Gherardini's fine gauze dress.

2.4. Venetian courtesan with a yellow shawl

The most recent hypothesis on Mona Lisa's dress was put forward in 2009 by the late Elfriede Knauer, an archaeologist and ancient historian, whose special interest in costume history did not compensate for her lack of knowledge of the field.[63] Notwithstanding the discovery of the Heidelberg codex with the reference to Leonardo's portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, Knauer refused to go along with this identification of the sitter and dated the portrait earlier than most art historians did, to the months Leonardo spent in Venice in 1500. Comparing *Mona Lisa* with other Florentine portraits of women, especially Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Woman* in the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and Leonardo's own *Ginevra de' Benci* (figs. 49, 1), she argued that the sitter's attire does not correspond to Florentine customs. Mona Lisa's long, free-flowing hair and the absence of a kerchief covering the neck and shoulders would have been regarded as offensive in Florence. She believed that the sitter is dressed as a Venetian prostitute, an interpretation that she based on her new reading of the title *Gioconda* as 'girl of pleasure' or prostitute, and on the colours of the sitter's dress, in particular her alleged yellow shawl.[64]

The result of the technical research published in 2006 was Knauer's point of departure for the description of the sitter's dress, although she must have misread at least some of the conclusions. According to Knauer, the dress shown in *Mona Lisa* was originally red. The scientists never mentioned that possibility, but instead literally stated that 'greenish-brown seems more probable'.[65] Knauer furthermore disagrees with Mottin's conclusion that the sitter is depicted wearing a transparent overgown. She believes he mistook the white highlights on the gathered 'red' velvet at the neckline for a gauze *guarnello*, and a yellow shawl, draped across the left shoulder, for its rolled up sleeve.[66]

Knauer devoted a large part of her article to the connotations of yellow and the yellow shawl in particular. In Venice, prostitutes were obliged to wear a yellow shawl and Knauer tried hard to trace a pictorial tradition of portraits of courtesans wearing such a shawl, one of her ill-chosen examples being the *Portrait of a Lady* by Jacometto Veneziano in the Philadelphia

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[61] Unlike *gamurre* and *cotte, guarnelli* are sometimes not even listed individually in inventories but are grouped together and listed under the linens along with shirts and aprons. An example is the 1417 inventory of Lorenzo di Giovanni di Duccio, which registers nine *guarnelli* without further specification. See: Polidori Calamandrei 1924, p. 53.

[62] Mottin 2006, p. 68. Although is it seems likely that Leonardo depicted a sheer silk fabric, it is probably not raw silk, which has a more irregular appearance because the gummy substance that covers the natural fibre has not been removed.

[63] On Knauer's interest in the history of dress, which arose after she had briefly worked at a tailor's shop in Paris early in her career, see: Ridgway 2011, p. 330. Ridgway suggested that Knauer's experience in dressmaking provided her with 'an acute understanding […] of the history of costume'. However, technical ability alone does not lead to historical and theoretical understanding. This pursuit fell outside Knauer's expertise, which did not include knowledge of dress history literature and methodology.

[64] Knauer 2009, p. 36-38, 46-55.

[65] For the technical research on the original colour of Mona Lisa's dress, see: Martin 2006, p. 64. X-ray fluorescence has revealed the presence of iron and copper, probably copper-acetate, as the main pigments for the dress. See: Laval, Pagès-Camagna and Walter 2006, p. 89.

[66] Knauer 2009, p. 44-45, 55

Museum (fig. 111).[67] Incidentally, she cites many more examples, interpreting a wide range of portraits of women as depictions of courtesans or mistresses, including examples that are not Venetian, such as Raphael's *Donna Velata* (fig. 112).[68] It is striking to see how Knauer interprets every shawl or veil that is yellow or even off-white, whatever its origin and appearance, as the sign of a courtesan. Even the veil worn by Cecilia Gallerani in her portrait by Leonardo is regarded as such (fig. 3).[69] Finally, she concludes that the sitter of *Mona Lisa*, wearing the yellow shawl on her left shoulder and dressed in red as a sign of lust, 'was meant to be seen as the supreme and therefore nameless member of that age-old sisterhood'.[70]

Besides the fact that Knauer too readily pronounces yellow shawls to be the insignia of a courtesan in a multitude of portraits of women, she obviously made a number of unjustified assumptions regarding the colour of Mona Lisa's dress and the absence of the gauze overdress. Moreover, Knauer's comparison of the portrait to Leonardo's *Ginevra* and Ghirlandaio's likeness of an anonymous woman is misleading, since both were painted decades before Leonardo started working on *Mona Lisa*. Fashion had, of course, changed during those years. Closer examination of the infrared reflectogram and the X-ray image shows that the first outline of Mona Lisa's dress has more in common with Florentine fashion than can be made out by simply looking at the painting with the naked eye.

3.1. A reconstruction of the painting process of Mona Lisa's dress

In 1973 Kenneth Clark was the first and remains the only art historian to suggest that Mona Lisa's dress as it appears in the final painting was not planned as such from the start on. He suggested that Leonardo first drew a now lost cartoon, which was copied by Raphael. This drawing, now in the Louvre, shows a woman on a balcony in the same pose as Lisa Gherardini, flanked by two columns (fig. 113). She is not dressed in a transparent draped overgown, like Lisa, but is depicted wearing contemporary Florentine fashion, consisting of a dress with a fitted bodice, ample sleeves and a low neckline, revealing a large part of her pleated chemise. Clark considered this attire to be a faithful copy of the first stage of the dress as it appeared in the cartoon of *Mona Lisa*. He thus hypothesized that Leonardo had portrayed his sitter in early sixteenth-century Florentine fashion and only added the transparent drapery and what he considered to be a widow's veil after leaving Florence to give the portrait a more timeless appeal.[71]

Clark's suggestion found no following and today Raphael's drawing is generally regarded as a free interpretation rather than a truthful copy of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.[72] But even

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[67] David Alan Brown noted earlier that Veneziano had portrayed another sitter with the same coif, in white instead of yellow (*Portrait of Lady*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 1975.1.85). See: Washington 2001, p. 154-157, cat 19 and p. 160-161, cat. 21. In 1543, this woman was identified by Marcantonio Michiel as a nun of the monastery of San Secondo, quite the opposite of a courtesan. For this identification, see Andrea Bayer in: Berlin / New York 2011, p. 346-348, cat. 152b.

[68] According to Knauer, there is no evidence that the veil worn by *La Velata* is typical of Rome. However, the veil can be identified as a *lenzuolo*, a type of mantle worn only in Rome and its immediate environs. In fact, fifteenth-century Roman sumptuary laws forbade courtesans to wear a *lenzuolo*. See: Van Dijk 2008, p. 5-11.

[69] Knauer 2009, p. 7-28, 35.

[70] Knauer 2009, p. 59.

[71] Clark 1973, p. 146-147.

[72] Clark's view was strongly opposed by David Alan Brown, who rejected the idea that the portrait evolved gradually. Brown 1983, p. 103-104. For Raphael's drawing, see especially Françoise Viatte in: Paris 2003, p. 190-192, cat. 62. Lucco connected the Louvre drawing to a newly discovered portrait of Costanza Fregosa – a lady from Genoa who stayed at the court of Urbino – that he attributed to Raphael.

if there is no direct relationship between this drawing and *Mona Lisa*, Clark's hypothesis in fact stands up to scrutiny. All previously discussed scholars supposed a direct relationship between the sitter's actual garments worn at the time of painting and the attire in the final portrait. Ever since Pope-Hennessy's seminal study on Renaissance portraiture art historians have been well aware of the constructed nature of a portrait. Pope-Hennessy described *Mona Lisa* as 'a highly artificial structure', a composition that has been well thought out and carefully planned.[73] Yet when it comes to dress, most scholars tend to think that Leonardo simply depicted what he saw in front of him: a mourning woman, a Florentine matron wearing Spanish fashion, a mother in maternity dress or even a Venetian prostitute. We may assume, however, that Lisa's dress as it appears in the finished portrait is just as carefully staged as all other elements of the composition. Since Leonardo never parted with the portrait, reworking it over time, it appears there was a long process of alteration.

Modern technology and the recent discovery of a workshop copy of *Mona Lisa* in Madrid now enable us to confirm the two main points of Clark's hypothesis: Lisa Gherardini was originally wearing Florentine fashion and the overgarment was added at a later stage. To understand the layers of Mona Lisa's dress it is crucial to study the infrared reflectograms made first in 2004 and then with a better camera in 2008 (fig. 114).[74] These images not only give a much clearer picture of the sitter's transparent overgown, especially on the right of the sitter's left arm, but also of the dress worn beneath, including some lines of the underdrawing. Further helpful information is provided by the workshop copy of *Mona Lisa*, now in the Prado in Madrid, which was cleaned and restored in 2011 (fig. 115). For a long time this version was regarded as one of the many later copies of the *Mona Lisa*. However, recent technical examination and the subsequent restoration have convincingly proven that this portrait was produced in Leonardo's workshop by an assistant working alongside the master during the period when the latter made significant alterations, only visible in the underdrawing.[75]

Ana Gonzáles Mozo, who conducted the technical examination, assumed the workshop copy was begun very shortly after Leonardo started working on the original, because the infrared reflectogram of the copy shows largely the same underdrawing as the original (figs. 114, 116). Details that are clearly visible in the underdrawing but have disappeared in the final version, such as the clearly defined waistline, show that the copyist must have seen the original *Mona Lisa* at an early stage and closely followed Leonardo's working process.[76] Bruno Mottin, on the other hand, proposed a later date for the copy, since the copyist left out some of the

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Although this portrait differs from the drawing in composition, Lucco judged the dress of the sitter to be similar. He stated that the *lenza* worn around the head was an accessory unknown in Florence, thereby ruling out that the sitter of the drawing is Florentine. See: Lucco 2000, p. 57-58, 69. However, by the early sixteenth-century the *lenza* appears in other Florentine female portraits, for instance in Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Lady* (Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 no. 224).

[73] To exemplify his statement, Pope-Hennessy mentions the placement of the sitter between the parallel lines of the armchair and the parapet, the different light source in the area of the sitter and background and the use of a mountain landscape as background. See: Pope-Hennessy 1966, p. 106-108.

[74] For technical details on the infrared reflectogram, see: Lambert 2006, p. 78. After the first reflectogram, a second one was made in 2008 with a better camera. Published for the first time in: Mottin 2014, p. 207.

[75] Both Francesco Melzi and Salaì have been mentioned as the possible copyist, but the style and working method led Mottin to tentatively attribute the copy to Salaì, ruling out an attribution to Melzi. He suggested this workshop copy could then be the painting mentioned in Salaì's inventory (see note 19 above). Mottin 2014, p. 215-220.

[76] Anna Gonzáles Mozo in: Paris 2012, p. 234-235; González Mozo 2014, p. 197-201. González Mozo also suggested that, since the figures have the same size, the copyist may have used the same cartoon, although there are also lines that were clearly drawn freehand. However, as indicated by Mottin, there are many slight differences between the underdrawings that rule out this possibility. Mottin 2014, p. 214.

important pentimenti that are visible in the infrared reflectogram of the original, notably an alteration in the positioning of the left hand.[77] Both agree that the copy reflects an earlier stage of the Louvre *Mona Lisa*, before the latter's completion. This becomes apparent in the mountain landscape. A detail in the workshop copy on the right of the sitter's neck shows a distinct mountain group with two rocks leaning to the right, which is related to one of Leonardo's studies of mountains made between 1508 and 1511 (fig. 117).[78] This rock formation is not visible in the Louvre *Mona Lisa* with the naked eye, but according to Gonzáles Mozo it is recognizable in the infrared reflectogram of the panel, though difficult to make out. Mottin refers to an x-ray emissiography image of Mona Lisa, revealing the same rocks more clearly.[79] It is clear that, although of far lesser quality than the original *Mona Lisa*, the workshop copy is a highly valuable source for Leonardo's workshop practice, not least because of its excellent state of conservation.

The infrared reflectogram of *Mona Lisa* beautifully shows the outlines of the dress worn under the layers of transparent material (figs. 114). Lisa is depicted wearing a dress with a fitted bodice and a clearly defined waistline. From the waist up to the breast, several parallel, horizontal lines can be seen, which Mottin interpreted as a broad belt.[80] However, belts of this size are never encountered in portraits of this time. Moreover, it raises the question why Leonardo would have used multiple lines to indicate one accessory. I interpret these lines as indications of folds. The fabric of a tightly fitted bodice will wrinkle at the slightest movement of the wearer. Leonardo, a keen observer of both movement and folds, would certainly have noted them. Raphael depicted similar horizontal folds at waist level on his portrait of Maddalena Doni and the *Lady with a Unicorn* (figs. 108-109).

Lisa's first layer of clothing is also partly visible in the infrared reflectogram (fig. 114). At the left shoulder a light area stands out. This is a white *camicia* that has been pulled out between bodice and sleeve. This detail can still be observed with the naked eye, although the shirt now appears yellow rather than white (fig. 6). The workshop copy, however, gives an impression of the original effect (fig. 115). In the infrared reflectograpm of the Louvre *Mona Lisa* a darker, narrow band along the neckline of the dress is visible (fig. 114). This appears to be the *camicia* as well, appearing at the cleavage.[81] It is not visible in the original *Mona Lisa* (fig. 6), but the workshop copy shows the scalloped edge of a shirt peeking out of the dress at the cleavage (fig. 115).

The infrared reflectogram of the original *Mona Lisa* further shows two curved lines of the underdrawing painted with a thick brush on the front of the bodice running from cleavage to waistline (fig. 114). Mottin interpreted these lines as bust darts, shaping the bodice. He also noticed a slight irregularity in the embroidery pattern along the neckline. The pattern, Leonardo's well-known *nodi vinciani*, consists of a regular alternating pattern of two loops and a larger cross. However, at the centre front of the dress, in between the two lines of the underdrawing, there are three loops instead of two (fig. 118). Mottin explains this by suggesting the bodice was made of pre-embroidered fabric, the pattern of which was interrupted by the

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[77] Mottin interpreted the grey area at the neckline as a line of the underdrawing indicating the edge of the *camicia*, that was wiped out at a later stage. Mottin 2014, p. 214-215. It is difficult to make out whether this is indeed a blurred part of the underdrawing or a pentimento in oil paint.
[78] On the date of the drawing, that is usually connected to Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* in the Louvre (fig. 14), see Vincent Delieuvin in: Paris 2012, p. 160-161, cat 49.
[79] González Mozo 2014, p. 200; Mottin 2014, p. 214 and p. 215, fig. 13 (X-ray emissiograph).
[80] Mottin 2006, p. 70. I thank Vincent Delieuvin (Musée du Louvre, Paris) and Margreet Wolters (RKD, The Hague) for discussing the infrared reflectogram of *Mona Lisa* with me.
[81] Mottin 2014, p. 214.

two bust darts.[82] The use of ready embroidered fabrics, however, is improbable and the addition of the *nodi vinciani* motif is more likely to have been an invention of Leonardo's rather than a pattern actually worn by Lisa Gherardini. As Mottin noted himself, it is a recurring motif in his work.[83] Moreover, the location of the two drawn lines is illogical for bust darts, which are normally positioned more to the sides. What, then, is the purpose of these two lines? Because of their position at the centre front, I would suggest that they indicate the two pieces of the bodice that were laced up, similar to the way Ginevra de' Benci's bodice is fastened (fig. 1).

Comparing Lisa's dress as revealed in the infrared reflectogram to contemporary portraits, it becomes clear that she was indeed originally wearing the local fashion of her day. Maddalena Doni was portrayed by Raphael wearing a strikingly similar dress with a fitted bodice and detachable sleeves (fig. 108). Her *camicia* too pops out at the shoulder and appears at the neckline of her dress in the same way as Lisa's. The front of her bodice is also laced up and the dark edging of the two bodice pieces corresponds exactly with the lines of the underdrawing seen in Lisa's bodice. As discussed above, the bright colours of Mona Lisa's attire, a green dress with vivid yellow sleeves, are also hallmarks of Florentine fashion. The workshop copy in the Prado gives an idea of the original green colour of the dress, albeit with red sleeves. Red was also a fashionable colour at the time. In his first outline of the portrait, Leonardo clearly depicted contemporary Florentine fashion as probably worn by his sitter, Lisa Gherardini.

A comparison of Raphael's drawing in the Louvre to the first phase of the depiction of dress in *Mona Lisa* shows some similarities (figs. 113-114). The cut of the two dresses is the same and Raphael has indicated the same vertical lines on the bodice as Leonardo did. However, these parallels stem from the similar Florentine fashion worn by two different sitters; Raphael certainly did not copy Lisa Gherardini's dress faithfully. The sleeves of his sitter are much larger and her chemise rises up to her collarbone, whereas Lisa's cleavage is uncovered. Although Clark was right to suppose Leonardo first portrayed Lisa Gherardini in contemporary dress, his suggestion that Raphael's drawing is a copy of the original cartoon is implausible.

Two clues suggest that dress was not Leonardo's primary concern when he began working on a new painting. As discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the cartoon for a portrait of Isabella d'Este, when preparing a drawing for transfer Leonardo would prick the outlines of a figure's face and hands very carefully. He was less concerned with dress and drapery, which were pricked roughly.[84] In the case of *Mona Lisa* this is confirmed by Agostino Vespucci's margin note, commenting on Cicero's statement that Apelles finished the head and hands of his Venus most beautifully. Vespucci informs us that Leonardo worked in the same manner, as for instance in 'the head of Lisa del Giocondo and of Anne, mother of the Virgin'.[85] Probably, the dress in the underdrawing was casually sketched based on drawings from life, which faithfully recorded the features of Florentine fashion. Only at a later stage would Leonardo devote more attention to the depiction of dress and drapery in *Mona Lisa*.

Clark's suggestion that the transparent overdress was added in a later phase is confirmed by the infrared reflectogram. The band of embroidery running along the neckline of Lisa's dress continues even in those parts where it is covered by the drapery worn on top (fig.

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[82] Mottin 2006, p. 70.

[83] The *nodi vinciani* motif appears in a similar way as a decorative border along the neckline of a garment in the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani (fig. 3) and the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* in Mary's cloak (fig. 13). On the motif, see: chapter 3, p. 81-83.

[84] Bambach 1999, p. 111-112. See also chapter 4, p. 112.

[85] See notes 9-10 above.

114).[86] The conclusion that the addition of the overgarment was not planned from the start has never been drawn before. As discussed in chapter 3, Leonardo worked in a similar way on the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani. He first painted the entire decorative border of Cecilia's neckline, only to cover it with a blue *sbernia* in a later phase (fig. 3).[87] In the case of *Mona Lisa* too, Leonardo added the draperies at a later stage, at which point he probably also decided to remove the lace fastening at the centre front of the bodice, causing the irregularity of the embroidered *nodi vinciani* pattern. Significantly, the infrared reflectogram of the workshop copy does not show this discontinuity, nor does the pattern continue under the draperies at the left shoulder (fig. 116).[88] Although Leonardo's assistant did add the vertical lines of the bodice fastening, he only drew the *nodi vinciani* pattern when the decision was already made to remove the fastening and to add the draperies. It also explains the fact that the embroidery appears to be underneath the transparent overgown in the original *Mona Lisa*, whereas it lies clearly on top of it in the workshop copy.

When did Leonardo decide to add the draped overgarment? Clark assumed it was done in Milan, where Leonardo settled in 1508 after travelling back and forth from Florence between 1506 and 1508. He suggested that the absence of the sitter would have inspired Leonardo to start idealizing both the facial features and the dress.[89] This date for the addition of the overgarment is in fact confirmed by the date that Mottin proposed for the workshop copy. As noted above, he pointed out that the absence of the pentimento in the position of the left hand indicates that work had already been underway for some time when the copyist started. Mottin argued the copy must date to Leonardo's second Milanese sojourn, because its walnut support is typically Milanese. The original version of *Mona Lisa* is painted on poplar panel, whereas Leonardo used walnut support for all his Milanese portraits: the *Portrait of a Musician*, *The Lady with an Ermine* and *La Belle Ferronnière* (figs. 7, 3-4). In Florence, however, walnut was hardly used, either by Leonardo or his contemporaries. It was a common support in Milan, often used by Leonardo and his circle for paintings of smaller dimensions.[90] Mottin thus dates the workshop copy to c. 1506-1512, i.e. from the moment Leonardo began travelling to Milan on a regular basis until the end of his second Milanese sojourn.

There is one more painting that may provide further insight into Leonardo's thought process with regard to dress in *Mona Lisa*. Shortly before he received the latter portrait commission, he started work on *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, now in the Louvre (fig. 14). The detail of interest here is the sleeve of the Virgin, which is transparent. The recent restoration of the painting in 2012 yielded new insights that allowed Vincent Delieuvin to present a detailed analysis of the various stages of the genesis of the painting. He used elaborate and varied evidence, such as a surviving cartoon, preparatory drawings, the underdrawing as revealed by infrared reflectography and a large number of workshop copies after different stages

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[86] As noted by: Mottin 2006, p. 66, figs. 108-109.
[87] See chapter 3, p. 91.
[88] Mottin argued that the different appearance of the embroidery pattern in the workshop copy is an indication that the copyist set out to work independently of Leonardo. See: Mottin 2014, p. 214. However, Mottin ignored the fact that the pattern does not continue under the drapery of the shoulder, which shows that the copyist was anticipating Leonardo's changes rather than working independently.
[89] Clark 1973, p. 146-147. Clark believed that Leonardo only transferred his cartoon to panel in Milan. However, if Leonardo used a cartoon, it seems more likely that he had already transferred the design to panel in Florence. The underdrawing clearly reveals the typical features of Florentine fashion, including details such as the fastening of the bodice that were painted freehand.
[90] While in Milan, Leonardo executed only very large paintings on poplar panel, like the *Virgin of the Rocks*. Mottin 2014, p. 213-214.

of the composition. This allowed him to distinguish three major phases, each with a different cartoon.[91] None of the copies after the first and second stage of the composition shows Mary's transparent sleeve. Only in the latest phase, after his move to Milan in the summer of 1508, did Leonardo start (as Delieuvin put it) updating different elements, notably the drapery and coiffures of the figures. These changes were preceded by a number of detailed drawings, dated between 1507 and 1510, in which the new forms took shape. A study for Mary's right arm, now in the Royal Collection, shows the meticulous attention Leonardo devoted to the circular pleats of the light, transparent fabric of her sleeve (fig. 119).[92]

Could it be that Leonardo, who was working simultaneously on *Mona Lisa* and *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, developed similar ideas on the depiction of transparent drapery for both paintings at the same time?[93] Taking a closer look at his writings on drapery from the *Treatise on Painting* that Pedretti dated to this period confirms Leonardo's preoccupation with the depiction of various sorts of textiles and pleats. As discussed in chapter 3, this was already apparent in his writings dated to the 1490s, but he elaborated further on the subject between 1505 and 1515. In the 1490s Leonardo pointed out that the painter should draw fabrics from nature and be aware of the different folds of each type of textile caused by the movement of a body underneath. In the early sixteenth century he expanded on his advice and started to encourage the depiction of a greater diversity of draperies, stating for instance (app. 1, no. 18):

> Above all, diversify the draperies in narrative paintings; in some make the folds with smooth breaks, and do this with thick fabrics, and some should have soft folds with sides that are not angular but curved. This happens in the case of silk and satin and other thin fabrics, such as linen, veiling and the like. Also, make draperies with few but large folds in thick fabrics, such as are seen in felt, when used in capes and bed coverings.

In another passage he wrote (app. 1, no. 9):

> The draperies with which figures are clothed are of three sorts, that is, thin, thick and medium. Thin ones are lightest and liveliest in motion. […] Medium draperies show less motion and thick ones almost none, unless a wind contrary to the motion of the figure aids them to move. The upper or lower ends of draperies follow the bending of the figure; toward the feet they are disposed according to whether the leg is straight, bending, twisting or striking against them. They must approach or withdraw from the joints, in accordance with whether the figure is walking, running or jumping, or move without other motion of the figure when the wind itself strikes them. And the folds should be modified in accordance with the kinds of draperies, and whether these are transparent or opaque.

The contrast between transparent and opaque as well as the variation of thin, medium and thick drapery are new themes in Leonardo's writings in this period.

It is significant that Leonardo distinguishes between transparent and opaque draperies at the end of this passage. As Pedretti has pointed out, Melzi may have based this part of the

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[91] On the different phases of execution, see the chapter 'L'exploration du sujet, du carton de Londres au tableau du Louvre' in: Paris 2012, p. 46-116.

[92] Paris 2012, p. 131-143. For the study of the Virgin's arm, see in particular: p. 142, cat. 42. Compare also Carmen Bambach, who dates the drawing slightly later, to c. 1508-1512, in: New York 2003, p. 561-562, cat. 106.

[93] Leonardo had already experimented with the depiction of a transparent garment somewhat earlier, in his first Milanese period. In the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* the angel wears a semi-transparent gauze dress (fig. 13). The rendering of the fabric is, however, less refined than in his later paintings.

treatise on a sheet containing anatomical studies and several notes on painting that were all crossed through (fig. 120). Dated to c. 1510, this is the only surviving original text on drapery by Leonardo written after 1500 and therefore a source of major interest.[94] The notes in the right column read from the top (app. 1, no. 14):

Variety in the histories. Thin cloths, thick, new and old ones, with broken or solid plaits; soft accents[?], dark areas[?] obscure and less obscure; with or without reflections; defined or confused, according to the distances and the various colours; and garments, according to the rank of those who are wearing them; long and short, fluttering or stiff, conforming to the movements, such as encircle the figures; such as twist and flutter with ends streaming upwards or downwards according to the folds; and such as cling close about the feet or separate from them, according as the legs are shown at rest or bending or turning or pressing together within; either fitting closely or separating from the joints, according to the step or movements, or the wind which is feigned; and that the plaits be accommodated to the quality of the cloths, whether transparent or opaque.

Leonardo's description comes close to the depiction of drapery in *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (fig. 14). The sleeves of Mary and Anne encircle their arms, the wind pushes Mary's fluttering dress upwards at the back whereas her heavier mantle reveals the movements of her legs and clings close to her feet. Leonardo indeed put into practice the contrasts he described between light and heavy, transparent and opaque.

Though the composition is static, similar contrasts can be seen in *Mona Lisa* too, and even better in the recently cleaned workshop copy than in the original (figs. 6, 115). Leonardo alternated the crisp pleats of the sleeves covering the right underarm with the soft and wavy folds of the gauze overgarment piling over, and the fine wrinkles at the neckline with the bold zigzag creases of sheer fabric falling over the left upper arm. He alternated thick and thin material, and played with opaqueness and transparency, leaving some areas in the dark and brightly illuminating others. In the original these effects are less obvious because of the layers of dirt and darkened varnish, but Leonardo's intention is still clear.

To summarize, in the first stage of *Mona Lisa*, painted in Florence, Leonardo represented Lisa Gherardini wearing the fashion that was popular in Florence at the time. As Agostino Vespucci's note to Cicero shows, the depiction of the garments was probably no more than a mere sketch at this stage. Leonardo, famous for being slow to finish a painting, seems to have abandoned the portrait at this stage only to return to it during his second stay in Milan, between 1508 and 1513. In this period, Leonardo developed a special interest in the depiction of transparent drapery (to which his writings and the changes in the *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* attest), resulting in the addition of a sheer, draped overgarment. At the same time, one of his workshop members started working on the copy. This assistant copied the underdrawing, but took into account the major change of the additional garment and did not draw the part of the embroidery pattern that would remain hidden under the draperies. As González Mozo has shown, the workshop copy was finished by 1512, after which Leonardo continued working on the mountain landscape in the background of the original *Mona Lisa*. Her draped overgarment, however, remained as it appears now in the workshop version. This sets a clear date of c. 1508-1512 for the addition of Mona Lisa's overdress.

[94] Pedretti 1977, vol. 1, p. 287.

3.2 Pictorial sources for dress in *Mona Lisa*

As discussed above, Mona Lisa's dress conforms to Leonardo's advice on the depiction of drapery. In fact, the transparent overgarment has more in common with this views on ideal drapery than with contemporary fashion. It is impossible to relate it to any known early sixteenth-century garment. Therefore, it stands to reason, as I will argue here, that Leonardo invented this garment himself, drawing upon a range of motifs with which he had become familiar in his early Florentine years and at Verrocchio's workshop in particular.

Verrocchio's *Bust of a Lady with Flowers* has often been compared to Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* (figs. 39, 1). Both sitters are plainly dressed and wear similar neckerchiefs.[95] The comparison is, however, never extended to *Mona Lisa*, even though the latter's overdress corresponds more closely to the garment of Verrocchio's bust than to Ginevra's *gamurra*. Verrocchio's lady wears a fluttering dress with a gathered neckline that closely resembles that of *Mona Lisa*. The cut of the garment is very loose and the lady's waistline is only defined by the sash tied around it. Although the tight cut of the sleeves is different from the ample sleeves of *Mona Lisa*, they have in common that they seem to have been cut in one piece with the rest of the garment, since no seam is visible at the shoulder. This simple rectangular cut was common for shirts, or *camicie*.[96]

In her study on Renaissance theatre costume, Stella Mary Newton showed that *camicie* were regularly used on stage to clothe mythological figures such as nymphs and other characters from antiquity. The *camicia*, which could be draped and pleated, was reminiscent of classical dress. This practice was adopted in painting as well. For instance, Botticelli dressed his three Graces in *Primavera* in transparent garments that are clearly derived from contemporary *camicie* (fig. 121).[97] Verrocchio and Leonardo made use of a similar garments for their depiction of a sleeping Venus or nymph on a design for a tournament banner (fig. 122).[98] The recumbent female figure wears a chemise of rippling fabric with the characteristic gathered neckline. In the last three decades of the fifteenth century, this type of neckline with masses of wrinkled fabric dispersing into the dress is an often-seen feature in the dress of nymphs, Venus and other goddesses in painting. It does not appear in fashionable overgarments of the time, with perhaps the exception of Botticelli's portrait of a woman now in the Victoria & Albert Museum (fig. 43).[99]

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[95] See for instance Eleonora Luciano in: Washington 2001, p. 162.

[96] On the cut of the *camicia*, see: Birbari 1975, p. 37-40.

[97] Newton 1975, p. 120-121. For the Botticelli example, see one of Newton's earlier articles, published under her maiden's name: Pearce 1959, p. 131. An interesting comparison is Emma Mellencamp's contribution on the shirt of Titian's *Flora* (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 1890 no. 1492), which she also links to theatre practice. See: Mellencamp 1969, p. 174-177.

[98] It is not known for sure which tournament the design was made for, but the sketch is usually associated with the *giostra* of 1475 in honour of Simonetta Vespucci. The drawing is firmly attributed to Verrocchio and Leonardo on the grounds of style and technique. See: Brown 1994, p. 99-109.

[99] It is not known for sure exactly what type of garment Botticelli represented, although it is certainly not a *guarnello*. It has been suggested that the gown is similar to the 'cioppa di mostavoliere' in the trousseau of Nannina de' Medici, which was interpreted as a dress made of a 'very light veil' (app. 3C, no. 5). See: Orsi Landini and Westerman Bulgarella 2001, p. 91. However, *mostavoliere* was a grey woollen cloth named after the town in which it was produced, Montvilliers in France. See: Schweickard 2009, p. 342. It has not been noted before that the garment in the Victoria & Albert portrait shows a remarkable similarity to the dress in a group of idealized female portraits by Botticelli and his workshop, of which the portrait in Frankfurt is best known (Städel Museum, inv. no. 936). These sitters are dressed in a way that is usually described as 'all' antica'. See: Frankurt am Main 2009, p. 152-155, cat. 1. More work is still to be done on this subject and dress in Botticelli's portraits is a subject for further research in its own right.

The use of a transparent garment for Mona Lisa similar to the one worn by nymphs and goddesses on stage and in painting, calls to mind a remark made by Gian Paolo Lomazzo. He described *Mona Lisa* as 'in the guise of spring', a detail that is usually dismissed as a mistake because obvious allusions to spring, such as flowers, are lacking.[100] However, it is plausible that Lomazzo, or possibly his informant Melzi, was familiar with the origins of the garment, which was indeed used for personifications of Spring and Flora.

In his *Annunciation*, dateable between 1470 and 1478, Leonardo used a similar garment for the Virgin Mary (fig. 9).[101] She is dressed in a pinkish red gown with a gold neckband, to which the rich folds of her bodice are attached. Like the lady of Verrocchio's Bargello bust, she has a sash around her waist. As Anne Hollander noted, this is the first time that the Virgin is clothed this way in Florentine art. She described how the drapery accentuates Mary's bosom underneath, recalling classical Greek dress. Moreover, she noted the resemblance to Mona Lisa's dress, suggesting that 'Leonardo wished to clothe her smile with both ancient suggestions and an ambiguously virginal ambience'.[102] Before elaborating on the possible connotations of this dress in the final section of this chapter, other elements of Mona Lisa's attire will be analysed first.

On Mona Lisa's left shoulder lies a roll of fabric that has been variously interpreted as a rolled up sleeve or a scarf.[103] It is difficult to determine what it is precisely, although it is not likely to be a sleeve because the left arm is covered by the true sleeve. It is important to observe that the motif of a roll of twisted material on a figure's shoulder appeared earlier in both versions of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*. In the first version, now in the Louvre, the angel in the right foreground wears a red mantle across his back, along the wing (fig. 12). One edge has been rolled up, revealing the green lining of the mantle, and draped over the left shoulder and underneath the left arm, creating a roll of fabric with a similar appearance as the one in *Mona Lisa*. In the second version of the altarpiece, now in the National Gallery in London, the angel's mantle has dropped and is draped along the bottom of the wings (fig. 13). The material on the angel's shoulder has not disappeared, however, but has been transformed into what seems to be a giant armhole of an overgown. This again shows Leonardo exploring the artistic potential of garments and drapery, creating visually appealing effects of wrinkled fabric in the process. The roll of fabric in Mona Lisa probably originated in the same way. Whether it is a scarf or something else is impossible to determine, but in fact this question is not of great interest since it is a drapery motif that Leonardo had employed more often in different ways rather than an actual garment or accessory.

A second motif that can be traced is the twisted point of the veil falling over the right shoulder. This detail is now hardly discernible in the original *Mona Lisa*, but can be studied very well in the workshop copy (fig. 115). The exact same twisted veil, falling across the right

[100] 'a guisa di primavera', Lomazzo 1973-75, vol. 2, p. 378. Regarded as a mistake for instance by: Greenstein 2004, p. 22.
[101] Opinions on the precise dating of the *Annunciation* vary. For an overview, see: Zöllner 2003, p. 216, no. V.
[102] Anne Hollander in: London 2002a, p. 24.
[103] Both Woods-Marsden and Mottin noted the difficulty of properly identifying this piece of fabric, because it is impossible to find comparable examples in portraiture. Woods-Marsden 2001, p. 87, note 10; Mottin 2006, p. 68.

shoulder of a female figure, appears in a drawing by Verrocchio of an idealized woman (fig. 123).[104] In his life of Verrocchio, Vasari related how Leonardo used to imitate these drawings:

> There are some drawings by his [Verrocchio's] hand in our book, made with much patience and very great judgment, among which are certain heads of women, beautiful in expression and in the adornment of the hair, which Leonardo da Vinci was ever imitating for their beauty.[105]

Notwithstanding Leonardo's own statement that 'it is an extreme defect when painters repeat the movements and the same faces and manners of drapery [as their master]', he quoted a specific drapery motif for *Mona Lisa* that was invented by Verrocchio.[106]

With regard to the depiction of the human body Michael Kwakkelstein has pointed out that Leonardo never emancipated himself from the pictorial language he became acquainted with in Verrocchio's workshop, adhering to the latter's forms and types, despite his own advice to work from nature instead of other masters.[107] To this can now be added that in the case of *Mona Lisa* the same applies to his treatment of drapery. Although Leonardo started out portraying garments that Lisa Gherardini could have worn, she never posed for him wearing a transparent gown as depicted in her portrait. Rather, the overgown and veil are composed of a mixture of pictorial sources, motifs that were partly derived from Verrocchio and partly from Leonardo's own earlier work.

3.3. Flowing tresses

A less conspicuous detail of her appearance, Mona Lisa's hairstyle has been studied less than her attire. Layers of darkened varnish and dirt have long discouraged and hampered a careful analysis. Several art historians have nevertheless devoted attention to it, one of them being Joanna Woods-Marsden, who thought the sitter was portrayed wearing her hair loose. This would have been highly unusual for the wife of a Florentine merchant. According to Woods-Marsden, loose hair was regarded as a sign of loose morals, even if covered with a veil. She argued that Leonardo put his own artistic and aesthetic considerations before the patron's demands, speculating this may have been a reason for Francesco del Giocondo to reject the portrait.[108] In the first infrared reflectogram of Mona Lisa made in 2004, however, Bruno Mottin noticed, for the first time, the presence of a small bonnet at the back of the sitter's head. He ascertained that the hair is gathered into a bun covered by the bonnet with some loose tresses on either side of the head. Comparing this hairstyle with fifteenth-century portraits, he concluded that it was rather common in Florence.[109]

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[104] Particia Lee Rubin suggested Leonardo had probably used this drawing already as an example for his study of an idealized female head, now in the Uffizi, dated to c. 1468-1475 (fig. 125). London 1999, p. 194-197, cat. 31.

[105] 'Sono alcuni disegni di sua mano nel nostro libro fatti con molta pacienza e grandissimo giudizio; in fra i quali sono alcune teste di femina con bell'arie et acconciature di capegli, quali per la sua bellezza Lionardo da Vinci sempre imitò', Vasari 1966-87, vol. 3, p. 538. Translation: Vasari 1996, vol. 1, p. 552.

[106] 'Sommo difetto è de' pittori replicare li medesimi moti e medesimi maniere di panni […]', CU fol. 44r. Translation: McMahon 1956, p. 55, no. 86. Compare also: Kwakkelstein 2011a, p. 108-111.

[107] Kwakkelstein 2011a, p. 134.

[108] Woods-Marsden compared the hairstyle of *Mona Lisa* to that of Isabella d'Este in Leonardo's cartoon, which she also described as loose. Isabella, however, wears her hair gathered in a light veil that is hardly visible any more, but can still be seen in the various copies made of the original cartoon. Besides the loose hair, Woods-Marsden also qualified the absence of jewellery and the colour scheme as unusual. Woods-Marsden 2001, p. 77-79.

[109] Mottin 2006, p. 68.

Although similar coiffures are indeed often found in Florentine portraits, two aspects of Mona Lisa's hairstyle are unusual. Firstly, the loose curly locks are much longer than in other portraits, such as Davide Ghirlandaio's two portraits now in Williamstown and New York, and Leonardo's own *Ginevra de' Benci* (figs. 49-50, 1). Secondly, by the time Lisa Gherardini was portrayed, in 1503, this hairstyle had already been abandoned in favour of one in which the hair was loosely gathered over the ears in a transparent veil, as can be seen in Raphael's portrait of Maddalena Doni and his *Lady with a Unicorn* (figs. 108-109). Woods-Marsden's suggestion that Leonardo preferred aesthetics over reality may not be far off the mark after all.

In his life of Leonardo, Vasari recalled that Leonardo was particularly fond of his pupil Salaì's curls: 'In Milan he took for his assistant the Milanese Salaì, who was most comely in grace and beauty, having fine locks, curling in ringlets, in which Leonardo greatly delighted.'[110] This interest in curling hair is reflected in many of Leonardo's notes and drawings. Martin Kemp connected a note on the similar movements of hair and water to Mona Lisa's cascades of curls. Next to a drawing of water streams resembling braids, Leonardo wrote (fig. 124):

> Observe the motion of the surface of the water which resembles that of hair, which has two motions, of which one depends on the weight of the hair, the other on the direction of the curls; thus the water forms eddying whirlpools, one part of which is due to the impetus of the principal current and the other to the incidental motion and return flow.[111]

Kemp noted how the effect of the swirling and spiralling folds of the drapery underline this analogy.[112] Leonardo's fascination for the movement of hair is expressed even more so in a passage of the *Treatise on Painting*, mentioned earlier in chapter 2 (app. 1, no. 1):

> Depict hair which an imaginary wind causes to play about youthful faces, and adorn heads you paint with curling locks of various kinds. Do not do like those who plaster hair with glue, making faces appear as if turned to glass, another increased madness for those for whom it is not enough that mariners coming from eastern parts should bring gum arabic to prevent the wind from changing the order of their ringlets, so that they must still keep seeking a remedy.

It has not been noted before that parallels for Mona Lisa's hairstyle can be found in Leonardo's earlier work, as is the case for drapery motifs. A drawing of an idealised female head, now in the Uffizi, is revealing in this respect (fig. 125). Leonardo lavished meticulous care on the intricate coiffure of the young woman, depicting tresses flowing freely over her shoulder and braids intertwined with veils and ribbons, decorated with a large jewel on the forehead. More curling locks hang loose at her cheeks. On the right side of her face, the lower part of these locks was, at an unknown point in time, covered with white paint to shorten them. Originally,

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[110] 'Prese in Milano Salaì milanese per suo creato, il qual era vaghissimo di grazia e di bellezza, avendo begli capegli, ricci et inanellati, de' quali Lionardo si dilettò molto', Vasari 1966-87, vol. 4, p. 28. Translation: Vasari 1996, vol. 1, p. 634-635.

[111] 'Nota il moto del liuello del acqua, il quale fa vso de' capell, che ànno due moti, de' quali l'uno attēde al peso del uello, l'altro al liniamento delle volte; così l'acqua à le sue volte revertiginose, delle quali vna parte attende al inpeto del corso principale, l'altro attēde al moto incidēte e reflesso.' Transcription and translation: Richter, no. 389, with minor corrections by: Clark and Pedretti 1968-69, vol. 1, p. 113, no. 12579.

[112] Kemp 1981, p. 265. For a similar drawing of water resembling plaited hair, see: Clark and Pedretti 1968-69, vol. 1, p. 150-151, no. 12659.

they reached down to her chest as Lisa's locks do.[113] Notably, her dress is similar to the one Leonardo chose for Mary in his *Annunciation* and *Mona Lisa* (figs. 9, 6), although this is difficult to see well as the garment is only cursorily indicated. In all three cases, the neckline consists of a border to which the gathered material of the bodice is attached. Leonardo's idealized female head also recalls similar drawings by Verrocchio, aptly characterized by Vasari in the passage cited above as 'beautiful in expression and in the adornment of the hair'. A drawing now in the British Museum is an outstanding example of Verrocchio's delicate treatment of flowing tresses (fig. 126).[114] Braids are intricately bound up and abundant curls frame the head.

Like various elements of the drapery, Mona Lisa's hairstyle derives from Leonardo's early Florentine years. He inherited his fascination for elegant tresses blown up by the wind from Verrocchio. The motif of long, curly locks hanging loose on either side of the head regularly appears in Leonardo's work. For instance, in both versions of the *Virgin of the Rocks* Mary wears her hair exactly this way (figs. 12-13).[115] It is an elegant hairstyle which Leonardo clearly thought fitting for an idealized head, whether it was the Virgin Mary or an idealized portrait like *Mona Lisa*.

4.1. Timeless beauty

The analysis of the origins of the different motifs used for the dress of *Mona Lisa* shows that the transparent overgown is an artistic invention that literally veils the contemporary dress. Long ago, Kenneth Clark hypothesized that Leonardo added the garment to give the portrait a timeless appearance. Did Leonardo indeed consciously set out to cover up the original Florentine fashion of his sitter or was it an unintentional by-product of his interest in drapery?

In the fifteenth century, there was some debate on the subject of appropriate dress in art. When discussing decorum, Alberti stressed that figures should be clothed according to their dignity and action. For instance, Venus and Minerva should not be portrayed in military garb, nor Mars and Jupiter in women's dress.[116] The first to extend the discussion to the realm of portraiture was the Florentine architect and sculptor Filarete in 1464. In his treatise on architecture, written while in the service of the Sforza in Milan, he reacted fiercely against the practice of portraying contemporaries in ancient costume, condemning in particular Donatello's equestrian monument of Gattamelata, erected a decade or so earlier, in 1453.[117] Like Alberti, he made these remarks in the context of decorum. Filarete first discussed how the limbs of a figure's body should conform to his or her age and how the expression of a saint should conform to his or her character. He then continued:

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[113] For the attribution of the drawing to Leonardo, see: Florence 1992, p. 114-115, cat. 4.15. There is no consensus on the time of alteration of the length of the locks of hair. Most scholars regard it as a later addition, while others believe it was done at an early stage, since the use of white paint for corrections is seen more often in the Verrocchio workshop. See Hugo Chapman in: London / Florence 2010, p. 200, cat. 48. I am grateful to Giorgio Marini for discussing this drawing with me during firsthand examination of the original in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi on 13 November 2012.

[114] Patricia Lee Rubin connected this drawing to Giulano's joust for Simonetta Vespucci, in particular to the drawing of the sleeping nymph (fig. 122). See: London 1999, p. 184-187, cat. 29.

[115] Another example is a study for the head of *Mary in the Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 1951 51.90), a design that ultimately was never carried out. See Vincent Delieuvin in: Paris 2012, p. 133, cat. 35.

[116] The relevant passage from Alberti is quoted in chapter 3, p. 106.

[117] For a more elaborate analysis of Filarete's comment in relation to Gattamelata's antique cuirass, which is in fact combined with contemporary armour, saddle and stirrups, thus creating a rather hybrid attire, see: Zitzlsperger 2012, p. 118-119.

The same should be done with pose and clothing. Do not as the aforementioned [Donatello] who made a horse in bronze to the memory of Gattamelata. It is so deformed that it has been rarely praised. When you make a figure of a man who has lived in our own times, he should not be dressed in the antique fashion but as he was. What would it look like if you wanted to portray the Duke of Milan and dressed him in clothes that he did not wear? It would not look well and it would not look like him. It would be the same to make the figure of Caesar or Hannibal and make them timid and dress them in the clothes that we wear today. Even though the figures appeared bold and brave, they would not seem to be themselves if they were dressed in modern clothing. For this reason they should be done according to their quality and to their nature.[118]

It is no coincidence that Filarete mentioned the Duke of Milan becoming unrecognizable without his usual garb to illustrate his point. Although he does not differentiate as strictly as subsequent art theoreticians and modern art historians do between what would later evolve into the separate genres of portraiture and history painting, Filarete actually defended the standard practice of Sforza court portraiture. As described in chapter 3, lavish attire was indispensable at the Milanese court and was therefore painstakingly recorded in portraiture. Chapter 4 cites the example of Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who in 1471 prescribed that he and his wife should be portrayed in gold brocade, which was the contemporary fabric befitting his status. In the case of a female sitter, Filarete's argument of recognizability was even weightier. In portraiture it was standard practice to idealize women nearly beyond recognition, thus increasing the importance of their dress and hairstyle as identifying marks. The analysis of the portraits of Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan, in chapter 3 shows that she is consistently depicted with the exact same hairstyle in order to guarantee her recognizability.[119] Apparently the matter was important to Filarete, since he returned to the subject elsewhere in his treatise, elaborating on the same arguments:

Also suit the dress to the quality of those you represent. If you have to do a thing that represents the present time, do not dress your figures in the antique fashion. In the same way, if you have to represent antiquity, do not represent them in modern dress. Do not do as many I have already seen who alter the suitability of clothing. Frequently they have given modern dress to the ancients. Masolino sins in this, for many times he has made saints and dressed them in the modern fashion. This should not be done at all. There are masters who are good in other things but who have armed men of today in the antique fashion. What sort of respect is this? What sort of consideration? If I had been doing it for one of my things, I would not have done it. I would have dressed him in the clothes that he wore. The aforementioned horse [Donatello's equestrian statue of Gattamelata] is to be criticized for this. Take care to avoid these errors.[120]

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[118] 'così e ancora gli abiti & loro stare & non come elsopradetto che fece uno cavallo di bronzo a memoria di ghatta melata & e tanto sconsome chene stato lodato perche quando fa una figura duno che sia de nostri tempi non si vuol fare collabito antico ma come lui husa cosi fare: che cosa parebbe che tu volessi fare il ducha di Milano & farlo con uno habito che lui non husasse non starebbe bene & non parebbe detto. Cosi ancora affare la fighura di Cexare o dAnnibale & fargli timidi & colli habiti susano oggi & benche ardite & pronte parrebbono dette. Il perche si vogliono fare secondo loro qualita & loro essere.' Filarete 1965, vol. 1, p. 306 (translation) and vol. 2, Book XXIII, f. 179r-v (facsimile).

[119] For dress in court portraiture, see: chapter 3, 'The portrayal of splendour', p. 86-89. For Galeazzo Maria's portrait commission, see: chapter 4, p. 131. For hairstyle in Beatrice's portraits, see: chapter 3, 'Conveying coiffures', p. 94-97.

[120] '& cosi adattare gli abiti secondo loro qualita di quegli tu rapresenti che se tu avessi affare una cosa che rapresentasse il tempo doggi: non vestido alanticha & cosi ancora se ai arapresentare lantico nollo vestire a lusanza doggi & non fare come molto o gia veduti che anno tramutato questo atto degli habiti che molte volte anno alle' fighure antiche fatto habiti moderni & in questo pecchо Masolino che motle volte faceva santi & vestivagli alla moderna non si vuol fare per niente & anche di quegli che son bene per altro buoni

In short, according to Filarete people should be depicted wearing the dress of their day. Otherwise they would look ridiculous and their recognizability would be compromised.
A lengthy passage in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* can be read as a reaction against Filarete's point of view.[121] Leonardo advises painters to avoid contemporary attire in painting at all times (app. 1, no. 8):

The garments of figures should be in keeping with age and decorum; that is an old man should wear a long robe, and a young man should be adorned with a garment which does not extend above the shoulders, except for those who have professed religion. As far as possible avoid the costumes of your own day, unless they belong to the religious group just mentioned. Costumes of our own period should not be depicted unless it be on tombstones in churches, so that we may be spared being laughed at by our successors for the mad fashions of men and leave behind only things that may be admired for their dignity and beauty.

Based on the same principles of decorum, Leonardo adopts the opposite position, arguing that contemporary fashions will be perceived as ridiculous in the future.
Leonardo reinforced his point with an elaborate description of the fashions he remembered from his childhood:

I remember, in my childhood, having seen with my own eyes, men both great and small, with all the edges of their garments scalloped at all points, head, foot, and side, and it even seemed such a fine idea at that time that they pinked the scallops. They wore hoods of the same fashion, as well as shoes, and scalloped cock's combs of various colours, which came out of the main seams of their garments. Furthermore, I saw the shoes, caps, purses, weapons, the collars of their garments, the edges of jackets reaching to the feet, the trains of their cloaks, and indeed everybody who would look well was covered up to the mouth with points of long, sharp scallops.

The scalloped or dagged hems of garments and accessories that Leonardo describes were indeed fashionable in his youth. In fact, the Florentine sumptuary laws prohibited them throughout the 1440s and 1450s.[122] A garment with dagged edges can be observed in Lo Scheggia's depiction of the Adimari wedding (fig. 29). The dancing women on the far left wears a *giornea* that is decoratively cut at the edges. Another example, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is the *Portrait of a Woman*, attributed to the circle of Paolo Uccello (fig. 17). This sitter wears a black *giornea* with scalloped edges, cut in leaf-like shapes.

Leonardo's description of the fashion he remembered from his childhood is followed by more examples of ridiculous extravagances from a different, but unspecified period:

At another time the sleeves began to grow in size and they became so large that each one by itself was larger than the gown alone. Later, gowns began to rise above the neck, so much that they finally covered the whole head. Then, they began to take them away so that the clothes could not be held up by the

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maestri che anno armato huomini di questa eta almodo antico che rispetto e stato questo che consideratione che se fusse stato mio affare: per una mia cosa non larei voluto anzi larei fatto rifare nel modo che lui portava & diquesto e dabiasimare el cavallo, & la figura che apadova dibronzo la quale rapresenta ghatta melata. Siche dacquesti errori fa chevi guardi.' Filarete 1965, vol. 1, p. 314-315 (translation) and vol. 2, Book XXIV, fol. 184r (facsimile).

[121] Leonardo was certainly familiar with Filarete's treatise. Filarete was one of his predecessors in Milan and Leonardo's own architectural endeavours during his first Milanese sojourn were closely related to Filarete's work. See: Pedretti 1962, p. 15.

[122] See chapter 1, p. 37, note 135.

shoulders because they did not hang from them. Afterward, garments began to lengthen, so that men always had their arms full of their own clothes, in order not to tread on them with their feet. Later they reached such an extreme that men were clothed only as far as the flanks and the elbows, and were so tight that they suffered great torture, and many burst inside. The shoes were so tight that the toes were pushed over one another and became covered with corns.

According to Pedretti, Leonardo referred to dress that was fashionable in his early manhood years.[123] It is however impossible to relate this account to the changes of dress styles that actually took place in Tuscany or elsewhere in Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century. Moreover, Leonardo's phrasing makes a somewhat cryptic and improbable impression. What to make of garments that do not rest on the shoulder or that are so tight that they torment the wearer? On closer scrutiny, however, this description beautifully matches fourteenth-century fashion comments. Of course Leonardo had not witnessed these styles with his own eyes, but he certainly would have had access to descriptions of the time.

The comments of the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani (c. 1280-1348) on several sudden changes of dress as they occurred in 1342 are remarkably close to Leonardo's description.[124] Prompted by economic welfare and technological developments in dressmaking, dress styles changed rapidly all over Europe early in the 1340s. Clothes became more tightly fitting and shorter, exposing larger parts of the body. These changes did not go unnoticed and aroused a great deal of comment at the time.[125] In his history of Florence, Villani lamented the loss of the ancient and, according to him, far nobler Florentine dress, describing the new style as follows:

Young people dressed themselves in a *cotta* or *gonnella*, so short and tight that one could not get dressed without the help of others, and a girdle like the girth of a horse with showy buckles and points, and with big pouches in the German style on their broad chests, and they wore their *cappuccio* [chaperon] like jugglers, reaching down to the waist and beyond, so that it was both *cappuccio* and mantle at the same time, with many decorations and scallops; the *becchetto* [pointed tail at the back] of the *cappuccio* reached down to the ground to be wrapped around the head for warmth, and they had long beards to look fiercer in battle. The knights wore a tight and belted overtunic or *guarnacca* [overgown] with hanging sleeve pieces lined with vair and ermine reaching to the ground.[126]

The *cappuccio*, known as chaperon in English, was a popular headgear consisting of a hood with a short cape covering the shoulders and a decorative tail at the back of the hood, called the

[123] Based on Leonardo's style of writing, Pedretti dated this passage to the early 1490s. He reasoned that Leonardo, who was almost forty years old at that time, thus referred to the changes of dress styles he witnessed in his twenties and thirties. Pedretti 1964, p. 114.
[124] Leonardo was certainly familiar with Villani's work. On one of the pages of the Codex Leicester, now in the possession of Bill and Melinda Gates, Leonardo discusses various geological issues, quoting some of Villani's ideas on the formation of a gap at Mount Gonfalina. See Claire Farago in: New York 2003, p. 623.
[125] For a discussion of fourteenth-century comments on dress, see: Newton 1980, p. 6-13, for Villani in particular see p. 6-7. On the new fashion in the 1340s, compare also: Mosher Stuard 2006, p. 24-26.
[126] 'sì si vestieno i giovani una cotta overo gonnella, corta e stretta, che non si potea vestire sanza aiuto d'altri, e una coreggia come cinghia di cavallo con isfoggiate fibbie e puntale, e con grande iscarsella alla tedesca sopra il pettignone, e il capuccio vestito a modo di sconcobrini col batolo fino alla cintola e più, ch'era capuccio e mantello, con molti fregi e intagli; il becchetto del capuccio lungo fino a terra per avolgere al capo per lo freddo, e colle barbe lunghe per mostrarsi più fieri innarme. I cavalieri vestivano uno sorcotto, overo guarnacca stretta, ivi su cinti, e lle punte de' manicottoli lunghi infino in terra foderati di vaio e ermellini.' Villani 1979, p. 231, Book 12, no. IV.

becchetto.[127] A profile portrait drawing of Petrarch shows the poet wearing a *cappuccio* with a long *becchetto* at the back (fig. 127).[128] Villani's account of chaperons with a cape so long that it became a mantle may well have been the inspiration for Leonardo's description of gowns that do not hang from the shoulder. Similarly, the long sleeve pieces described by Villani may explain Leonardo's reference to lengthening garments that have to be held in order not to stumble on them. Villani's comments have a moralist tone of voice and he probably gave a somewhat exaggerated account of the typical features of the new dress style. Leonardo, in turn, carries it even further, probably both out of ignorance of the true appearance of these garments and to emphasize his point on the foolishness of bygone fashions.

This does not mean Leonardo never depicted the fashion he grew up with. As Gombrich has pointed out, Leonardo deliberately clothed his grotesque figures in old-fashioned garments and headdresses to make them look even more ridiculous, thereby illustrating the very point he made in the passage quoted above.[129] Two examples are now in the Royal Collection, both representing an elderly couple. The first shows a woman in profile facing a man (fig. 128). She wears a high *sella*, one of the headdresses of Flemish origin popular in Leonardo's youth. The second drawing, a satire on aged lovers, shows a woman dressed in the fashion of the 1440s and 1450s, consisting of a belted *cioppa* with wide sleeves and extremely high headgear (fig. 129).[130] An early example of this type of high headdress, dating from c. 1440-1444, and very similar dress can be observed in Lippi's double portrait, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 15).[131] As an associate of Leonardo noted on a sheet in the Codex Atlanticus (app. 1, no. 13): 'Monstrous is that which has a huge head and short legs; and monstrous is that which with rich clothes is of great poverty; and thus we say that well-proportioned is that in which the parts are in correspondence with the whole.'[132]

Both Leonardo's examples of previous fashions and his grotesque drawings illustrate his point that what may seem beautiful and elegant at a time when everyone is wearing it, becomes hilarious when it has gone out of fashion. To be sure, he does not criticize those who are fashionable, but merely warns the artist not to depict these fashions, for in time they would make the painting look ridiculous. The painter should only depict 'things that may be admired for their dignity and beauty'. How this should be achieved can be read in a passage of the *Trattato della pittura* entitled 'Of the way to clothe figures' (app. 1, no. 19):

Observe decorum in clothing your figures according to their station and their age. And above all, see that draperies do not conceal movement; and that the limbs are not cut off by folds nor by the shadows of folds. As much as you can imitate the Greeks and the Latins in the manner of revealing limbs when the

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[127] In the fifteenth century the *cappuccio* was still worn in Florence, but the shape was different. The edge of the face opening was stuffed to form a brim (*mazzocchio*) that was put on the head. The shoulder cape was draped around the head and the *becchetto* was either draped as well or was left hanging loose over the left shoulder. On the *cappuccio* in Florentine dress, see: Bridgeman 1986, p. 95-104.

[128] For this drawing, see: Richards 2000, p. 244, cat. 7 and plate 35.

[129] Gombrich 1954, p. 200. For a discussion of the entire group of comic heads, see: Kwakkelstein 1994, p. 107-112.

[130] The first drawing (RL 12453) is a fragment from the Codex Atlanticus, f. 31r-a. See: London 2002b, p. 84, cat. 36. On the second drawing (RL 12449), see: London 2002b, p. 94, cat. 40.

[131] On the *sella* and Lippi's portrait, see: chapter 1, p. 22.

[132] The text was written in a different hand than Leonardo's and was most likely dictated by him to one of his workshop members. As Carlo Vecce has shown, Leonardo, like Cellini, did this more than once. See: Vecce 2003, p. 62. Leonardo's associates Salaì, Tomaso Masini, known as Zoroastro, and Lorenzo have been proposed as possible authors. See: Pedretti 1964, p. 65, note 74 (Salaì); Clark and Pedretti 1968-69, vol. 3, p. 35, no. 19089 (Zoroastro or Lorenzo).

wind presses draperies against them, and make few folds; make many folds only for old men in positions of authority who are heavily clothed.

Contrary to Filarete, Leonardo advises against the use of contemporary dress, turning instead to drapery as rendered by the ancient Greeks and Romans. It can therefore be concluded that Leonardo deliberately covered up Mona Lisa's original fashionable attire.

4.2. Idealized dress

The two major stages in the process of executing Mona Lisa's dress have been reconstructed here for the first time, disproving the common assumption that the finished portrait shows the dress the sitter was wearing when posing for Leonardo. Analysis of the infrared reflectogram has revealed that although Leonardo started portraying the local Florentine fashion of the day, later on he added the partially translucent overgarment that hides the contemporary dress. The comparison of *Mona Lisa* and the infrared reflectogram with the workshop copy, Leonardo's notes on drapery and Delieuvin's reconstruction of the genesis of Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* enabled me to date this addition to his second Milanese period (1508-1513).

In previous attempts to make sense of Mona Lisa's overgarment, scholars have limited their efforts to comparing the painting with other portraits. However, by extending the comparison to images of women in painting and drawing of religious and mythological subject matter, I have demonstrated that Leonardo did not depict contemporary fashion, as hitherto presumed. Instead, he drew upon the pictorial tradition with which he became familiar in his early Florentine years in Verrocchio's workshop, borrowing elements from the latter's work and elaborating on motifs previously explored in his own work. Leonardo clothed his sitter in a garment used for nymphs, goddesses and the Virgin Mary, complemented with motifs derived from the dress and hairstyle of angels and Verrocchio's famous idealized heads.

The extensive discussion in chapter 2 of the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci addresses the humanist notion that outer beauty represents inner virtue. I have pointed out that Leonardo used plain dress to underline Ginevra's beauty and thus her virtue.[133] Lisa Gherardini is also depicted in plain dress, but it is not just the lack of ornament that alludes to her character. Her idealized dress does so too. Leonardo avoided conspicuous fashions, making use instead of an aesthetic ideal of thin, elegantly draped, partly opaque fabrics, previously only deployed in painting to clad nymphs, goddesses and biblical figures. *Mona Lisa* may not bear an inscription on the back like the *Ginevra de' Benci*, but the painting conveys a similar message (fig. 2). Lisa also adorns her virtue with her beauty and this is emphasized by her dress. The idealization of the female figure in portraiture has thus reached a peak in *Mona Lisa*. Not only are her features beautiful, but she is also clad in timeless, worthy garments, all fashioned to highlight her chaste and noble nature.

Joanna Woods-Marsden proposed that Lisa's peculiar attire, lack of ornaments and unusual hairstyle could have been the reason that the portrait was never delivered to Francesco del Giocondo, who may have rejected it on these grounds.[134] However, the new date for the translucent overgarment, added in Milan, suggests otherwise. While he was in Florence, near his patron, Leonardo did not change Lisa's original attire. He started reworking her dress only after he left the city in 1508, five years after receiving the commission. It remains uncertain why Francesco never received the commissioned portrait, but whatever the case, Leonardo seems to have seized the opportunity to pursue his own artistic ideals.

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[133] See chapter 2, sections 'Ginevra's portrait and the *paragone*' and 'The poetics of plain dress', p. 56-65.
[134] See p. 142 and 160 of this chapter.

Although art historians have always grasped Leonardo's intention to idealize the sitter, they have focused their attention exclusively on her physiognomy. My research has demonstrated that the depiction of the dress was an integral part of that process of idealization. What started out as a portrait of a wealthy Florentine merchant's wife, dressed in fashionable attire, over time became the embodiment of Leonardo's ideals of beauty. It is impossible to say, at least on sartorial grounds, whether *Mona Lisa* should be considered a portrait of Lisa Gherardini or, as Jack Greenstein and Michael Kwakkelstein have argued, a showpiece that illustrates what art should be. Both scholars regarded the lack of ornaments indicating personal status as an argument to support the theory that the portrait does not represent Lisa Gherardini, or at any rate no longer represents her.[135] The omission of jewellery, however, is not unusual for Leonardo's portraits and the absence of contemporary fashion does not necessarily mean that the subject of the painting was not an existing woman. Regardless of the identity of the sitter, it is clear that Leonardo put his theory into practice and successfully so: *Mona Lisa* does not show 'the mad fashions' of the day and, more than any other work of art, has become a painting that is 'admired for its dignity and beauty' (app. 1, no. 8).

[135] Greenstein believes the subject of the painting is a fictive, smiling woman and that the portrait was never commissioned, but painted as a display piece. This would account for the unusual clothing, amongst other things. Greenstein 2004, p. 32. However, the discovery of Agostino Vespucci's margin note on *Mona Lisa* is convincing evidence that it was, at least in conception, a portrait of Lisa Gherardini. The underdrawing, revealing characteristics of Florentine fashion, points to an existing Florentine sitter as well. Kwakkelstein suggested that Leonardo started working on a portrait commissioned by Lisa's husband, but changed his mind when he realized he would not be able to publish his planned treatise on painting before his death. He then may have decided to keep the portrait with him and use it as an epitome of his ideas. Kwakkelstein 2011b, p. 21-23.