

**Dressed for War:
The Metamorphosis of the Military Skirt**

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Abstract

The skirt, a clothing item associated with hyper-masculinity from the early days of hunting to the late Middle Ages, was worn by fighters across cultures and periods, with a broad, short cut, allowing freedom of movement. It accentuated the masculine leg, highlighting the body's lower part and marking the warrior out as animalistic, natural, a "war material" in the service of his people. In late medieval period, skirts entered the female wardrobe, assuming a movement-restricting, passivity-defining shape, and the item gradually disappeared from male and military wardrobes. With the advent of modern armies, with women in their ranks, the skirt returned to the military uniforms repertoire, but veered from its historical role and came to denote incompetence for battle. The following article employs historical analysis to explore the gender-related reincarnations of the military skirt, while looking into its material metamorphosis from a male object, the ultimate combat wear, to a female item that highlights de-familiarisation and exclusion from combat settings.

Introduction

Scholars of various disciplines and diverse research perspectives have explored the military uniform.¹¹⁷ In relation to the uniforms' sartorial repertoire, the skirt has been neither researched in itself nor extensively discussed. This article seeks to dwell on the military skirt as a unique clothing item of the military wardrobe, while tracing the military skirt's evolution, from an ancient masculine combat garment, through its casting as an integral part of the warrior's closet through the middle medieval times, to its modern incarnation as a female military clothing item. The present article examines the contexts of the skirt's transformation from a "masculine" combat attire to a "feminine" one, which stands for unfitness for combat and de-familiarisation and exclusion from the combat setup. For this research, I employed a combination of historical and material studies, focusing on the social and cultural norms that attended the skirt's constitution as a "masculine" or "feminine" clothing item.

The analysis examines numerous contexts where the skirt figures as either a masculine or feminine item, a distinction that falls along technical qualities of form and material. The material issues raised by this gendered clothing item, such as pattern, length and size, offer the material basis for historical-cultural research of the relationship between material and form, on the one hand, and socio-cultural definitions on the other. The article charts the skirt's history from the ancient masculine skirt, a key item in a repertoire that allowed optimal combat conditions for the warrior, to the departure from it in favour of uniform trousers. I shall trace this ancient object's evolution to its modern version, a women-only uniform skirt, and discuss the gender issues thrown up by this specific clothing object.

Skirt = Masculinity: The History of the Skirt

The skirt is one of the oldest, most varied and consistent forms of clothing. This is largely down to the fact that it is easy to prepare, as an immediate, simple wear. The first skirts were the mantle skirts: rectangular pieces bound, tied, or tightened (with a belt) around the waist area or above the

¹¹⁷James Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1995; 2010, p. 15; Carrie Hertz, "The Uniform: As Material, as Symbol, as Negotiated Object," *Midwestern Folklore*, Volume 32, Issues 1-2, 2007, pp. 43-56; Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We Are What We Wear*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, United States, 2002; Jennifer Craik, *Uniform Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, Berg, Oxford, England, 2005; Jennifer Craik, "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform," *Fashion Theory*, 2003, Volume 7, Issue 2, pp. 127-147; Martin Windrow, *Warriors: Fighting Men and Their Uniforms*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford and New York, England and United States, 2015 and others.

loin, designed to hide and protect this part of the body (like the loincloth). Similarly, the sewn skirt is an accessible clothing item that does not require a complicated cut or many stitches. A simple thread of tendon, curled straw, wool, or a leather band between fibres or holes in either piece was enough to utilise it for wearing.



Figure 1: Panel fragment depicting hunting and battle scenes, circa 8th–7th century BC, Iran, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States, 51.131.9.

Throughout history, skirts were a clothing item associated with the male sphere, an object bound up with masculinity and its manifestation. They revealed the male leg, the body part that stood for male strength and audacity. Accordingly, in ancient Egypt (2130–500 BC), the military system was sophisticated and complex, while clothes in the kingdom, in contrast, were simple in shape.¹⁴⁸ Men would wear short skirts known as *Shendyt*, made of rectangular fabric and waistbands, sometimes folded or gathered at the front and cut above the knees.¹⁴⁹ The skirt was the most widespread exclusively masculine clothing item, represented as a garment worn by gods, pharaohs, warriors, commoners and workingmen alike, distinct by the fabric material (no evidence exists that women wore skirts in ancient Egypt). The attire comprised a long garment, usually hung or tied from the neck and shoulder area. Such a garment was also depicted in some of the frescoes on Pharaoh himself. Ancient Egyptian culture borrowed the skirt from the dress' repertoire of the ancient hunter. For him, it had become the ultimate clothing item for hunting, covering, and protecting the genitals, while ensuring maximum freedom of movement. Foot control was a central practice in the hunting process; the legs were a significant organ for the ancient hunter, a stable base for accomplishing his mission.

Fighting was the consequence of the hunting act, from which warfare techniques and loose physical conduct of full leg mobility ensued. According to Martin Windrow, fighters' clothing choice was generally a practical one, mainly for movement ability and optimal weapons use.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the primary use of the skirt, a masculine wear, has been documented as worn mainly by various

¹⁴⁸ Also according to paintings of the soldiers of Pharaoh Ramesses II (c. 1303 BC – 1213 BC). Windrow, op cit.

¹⁴⁹ It was not until 1420 BC that a long, sleeveless shirt appeared, worn over a pleated skirt that sometimes folded like a pantsuit. This tunic also appeared alongside the skirt as a prevailing male garment on the battlefield. Tom Tierney, *Ancient Egyptian Fashions*, Dover, Mineola, NY, United States, 1999, pp. 3–49.

¹⁵⁰ Windrow, op cit.

warriors.¹⁵¹ The Kingdom of Sumer in Mesopotamia registered two categories of clothing, the most important of them involving a male ceremonial outfit, with a fur skirt tied to a sheep wool belt.¹⁵² Skirts were also the ultimate male battle wear in ancient Greece and Rome, highlighting the concept of ideal masculinity. In these cultures, the skirt sealed the appearance of youth's ideal, as a form of hyper-masculinity, while showcasing manhood.

The skirt became the ultimate battle clothing item, being easy to put on and take off, thus allowing mobility and exposing the torso and legs. And so, throughout history, the skirt's role had been maintained as an item that validated a potent masculinity. In early medieval Europe, the skirt was an omnipresent, essential clothing item for soldiers of all combat units. Battle skirts made of



leather, iron, tin, cotton and linen, were also worn over trousers and tunics, while knights wore short trousers or long metal skirts that covered the straps connecting the iron legs to the chest area.¹⁵³

Figure 2: Limestone statue of a bearded warrior, Early Hellenistic, late 4th–3rd century BC, Cyprus, 27.3 x 15.2 x 8.3 cm, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States, 74.51.2600

Together with other traditional clothing pieces in this wardrobe, the skirt stood for status and standing in the masculine sartorial repertoire, alongside other daily clothing items. The trousers are one of them, which gradually became the most popular and widely-owned male clothing item in the West. To comprehend the skirt's evolution as an exclusively feminine clothing item, we must consider trousers'

development into a male clothing item and a mark of modern masculinity. The first documented trousers from sixth century BC were found on rock carvings in Persepolis.¹⁵⁴ Back then, Scythian, Sarmatian, Sogdian, Bactrian, Armenian men and women, as well as people of other Eastern cultures, wore trousers.¹⁵⁵ In ancient Greece, trousers were seen as a ridiculous, inferior clothing item, associated with those Eastern cultures and therefore shunned by the Greek. The Roman Republic similarly distinguished between East and West, perceiving Greek and Minoan wear as a representation of progress, with trousers consigned to the uncultured East.¹⁵⁶ Trousers, however, entered the Roman sartorial repertoire with the Roman Empire's expansion beyond the

¹⁵¹ In other cultures, than the Western one, the skirt was also worn by women, but usually as an undergarment, mainly for modesty and warming purposes.

¹⁵² This wool is called "Kaunakes", which became the name of the garment itself, the skirt with the belt. Francois Boucher, *20.000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1987.

¹⁵³ Phyllis G. Tortora and Sandra J. Keiser, *The Fairchild Books Dictionary of Fashion*, Fairchild Books, New York, United States, 2014, p.11.

¹⁵⁴ The oldest trouser-shaped garment was found on mummies in western China and dates from the 10th-13th century BC. Blanche Payne, *History of Costume*, Harper & Row, New York, United States, 1965, pp. 49-51.

¹⁵⁵ Sarah M Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology: Analyzing Power and Prestige*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, United States, 2004, p. 85.

¹⁵⁶ Laver, op cit, p. 15.

Mediterranean Basin, and became a commonly-worn, trendy item, typically under a skirt or tunic, as a legitimate form of male exterior.¹⁵⁷ Their acceptance had to do with the fact that as modernity evolved, towards the late Middle Ages and early into Modern History, animalism as cultural attribute that signalled power and status disappeared from western culture. The earth's cooling, starting in the fourteenth century and culminating in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, as part of the Little Ice Age, further established trousers as an essential clothing item for men and warriors.¹⁵⁸ Despite them wearing different forms of trousers as protection from the cold, the skirt nevertheless remained an overwear, mainly designed to signal gender and position. This form of use set off a process of rendering the item redundant, and by the late Middle Ages, warriors in skirts grew less common, only to become a rarity.

Even after trousers were adopted as men's gender-establishing item, the masculine leg remained key to strutting male prowess. Thanks to the skirt, the leg was exposed and prominent, tightly associated with significant concepts in the shaping of masculinity, like strength, power and athleticism. The skirt as formulating the masculine physique and leg as a focus of reference was also cemented in the new attire mode, which lacked the skirt. Accordingly, it has been found that in the fourteenth century, men would wear very short tunics.¹⁵⁹ As tailoring methods became elaborated in the fourteenth century, close-fitting, precisely-trimmed came to the fore, thus covering the male leg, to be covered with a tight-fitting wear. Men in Europe would wear very short tunics, while super-tight (mostly light-coloured) trousers covered their lower body, highlighting the legs in all their glory.¹⁶⁰

These two facts were crucial in entrenching the difference between the male and female attires. This distinction grew starker over the following centuries, evident in the fact that men would wear separate clothing items, allowing their legs to stand out, while women wore one-piece items, which covered their lower body.

Skirt ≠ Fighting: Between Soldierly and Feminine

Until middle medieval times, the skirt supported men in battle, with technical features for optimal combat support. The skirt's revealing features proved advantageous, as a garment that facilitated freedom of movement, indicating physical strength and capacity, allowing the full action of the lower body. And so, via the skirt, male exposure was associated with fighting, loading it with increased strength and military notions.

The skirt gradually found its way into women's wardrobes in the late medieval period, becoming a popular, key item with the advancement of in the weaving technology. Simultaneously, trousers became the clothing item associated with progressive masculinity (and later modern masculinity), gradually established as the warrior's underlying clothing item. At the same period, the skirt was transitioning from an ultimate, distinctively masculine combat item that allowed unlimited movement, to an item generally considered across cultural wardrobe systems as movement-restricting. The skirt's gendering as a feminine object resulted in a completely different type of bodily disciplining to the one that marked its masculine instance, with long, fabric-laden, heavy feminine skirts, complete with multiple folds and undercut structures. The newly-emerged

¹⁵⁷ Gradually becoming acceptable, trousers were usually worn as an undergarment under a skirt or tunic. Two types of trousers became common in Rome: *feminalia*, which closes in the mid-calve, and the *braccae*, loose trousers that closing at the ankles.

¹⁵⁸ Rose-Shoshana Marzel, "On the Invention of Fashion in the Fourteenth Century in Italy and the South of France," *Znanium*, Volume 136, 2016, pp. 94-103; Mann, Michael E., Zhang, Zhihua, Rutherford, Scott, Bradley, Raymond S., Hughes, Malcolm K., Shinell, Drew, Ammann, Caspar, Faluvergi, Greg and Ni, Fenbiao (2009), "Global Signatures and Dynamical Origins of the Little Ice Age and Medieval Climate Anomaly," *Science*, Volume 326, Issue 27, 2009, pp. 1256-1260.

¹⁵⁹ In the 15th century too, the masculine legs is key to demonstrating and asserting masculinity. Andrew Bolton, *Bravehearts: Men in Skirts*, V&A Publications, London, England, 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Contemporary writers went as far as blaming France's 1346 defeat as divine punishment for the too skimpy attire. Tunic became so short that Pope Urban V, tried, in vain, to prohibit it altogether.

feminine incarnation was not just unsuitable for the fight, it also jarred with this type of activity. The skirt, associated with femininity, asserted the gendered association with passivity, embellishment and movement restriction.¹⁶¹ Its re-gendering as an exclusively-feminine clothing item transformed it from a sartorial masculine tool of war, into an object removed from the battle mode, associated with passivity and femininity. Wearing it marked one as unfit for the combat system. This drew on the notion that the female skirt, in all of its forms, played a cultural role that suppressed a feminine comportment in space, and as Pierre Bourdieu writes: "... the skirt which forbids or suppresses all sorts of activities (running, different types of seating, etc.)"¹⁶²

Women have served in Western countries' armies since 1700, but were only formally recognised as a part of the military in 1940.¹⁶³ The vast majority were engaged in female-assigned roles, while only a handful were involved in active battle. Female military personnel (cooks, nurses, sewers, photographers, etc.) were issued female uniforms (including dresses, jumpers, aprons and particularly skirts). At the same time, women who served in combat roles wore male uniforms. Naomi Wolf poses an inherent tension between "professionalism" and "femininity" in society and culture.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, the more feminine a subject's appearance is, the more its level of professionalism is questionable, as a source of doubt and suspicion. Female soldiers' uniforms are governed by the principle that assigns a female combat soldier or "professional" military role holder uniforms with trousers. Female soldiers in the other military professions, on the other hand, will be issued skirts as part of their uniforms, signalling their particular professionalism as an element of their responsibilities.

"Discussing the uniform's design allows to comprehend the structuring of the female body in the military setting," writes Chava Bronfeld-Stein, while posing that the uniform skirt is the most typical indicator of the visual distinction between male and female soldiers.¹⁶⁵ The female uniform skirt, which in all its design variants stretches across the pelvis and narrows the waist, is one way to define a body with contours identified as feminine. Even today, in many armies, the uniform skirt is part of the repertoire provided to female soldiers, including those assigned to battle and officer positions. In most cases, the skirt features in a set of symbolic uniforms worn by female soldiers during ceremonies and various events, when the military ventures to the civic arena.¹⁶⁶ This sartorial repertoire, with the mandatory skirt, fleshes out the conflict at play between the soldierly and the feminine, so that the combat soldier is often forced/required to externalise her gender and be "feminine". Military and security activity is traditionally masculine. The woman's presence in these arenas entails engagement in a traditionally inappropriate pursuit, a fraught action in a public or male arena. Heavily gendered as it is, the skirt is ruled out for combat roles. A female combatant must wear trousers.

Uniforms affect both the behaviour of those who wear them and their viewers' behaviour.¹⁶⁷ Uniform homogeneity reduces visual differences (unifying process) and constructs practices of physical unity. According to Jennifer Craik, uniforms are closely associated with male ideals and

¹⁶¹ According to Zakim, this division still stands today. Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760–1860*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, United States, 2005, pp. 200–203.

¹⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, SEUIL, Paris, France, 1998, p. 56.

¹⁶³ Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*, Routledge, New York, United States, 2006, p. 42.

¹⁶⁴ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, NY, United States, 1992, pp. 131, 179.

¹⁶⁵ Chava Brownfield-Stein, *Photographs of IDF Female Soldiers and the Eroticization of Civil Militarism in Israel*, Resling, Tel-Aviv, Israel, 2012, p. 60.

¹⁶⁶ In most armies, the trend for comparing women's and men's uniforms is widespread today. This trend gradually leads to the tearing of the military skirt from the uniform repertoire, defining it as a rare-looking festive item, and in part even its extinction.

¹⁶⁷ Rebecca H. Holman, "Apparel as Communication," in Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Morris B. Holbrook, Editors, *SV - Symbolic Consumer Behavior*, Association for Consumer Research, New York, NY, United States, 1991, pp. 7–15.

norms, which means that women in uniform present enigmatic and ambiguous sexuality.¹⁶⁸ This is due to the soldier's body, constituted around the masculinity ideal, while its presence indicates physical, emotional, and cognitive makings, emotion exclusion, impulses, self-control, and sexual restraint. Bronfeld-Stein also states that uniforms employ differentiable techniques that cement the male soldier as a man and the female soldier as a woman.¹⁶⁹ Wearing a skirt is perceived as the polar opposite of this physical ideal. Therefore, female combatants wear a variant of men's uniforms, while accepting the rules of the war setup, a field that excluded them throughout history. Although women have become more integrated into combat zones in recent decades, these arenas remain overwhelmingly masculine, complete with masculine characteristics. It is a clear example of how gender laws follow the male norm. To be perceived and behave as a soldier, a woman must ditch feminine protocols and adopt a masculine appearance, starting with the uniform.

In the Service of Gender: The Skirt and the Body

The skirt, like many attires, defines the body, shaping and marking it out. It involves dividing, cropping, separating and reuniting corporal categories. The skirt splits the body in half, from the lower part of the body from the waist down, while blurring and standardising the legs. According to Tim Ingold, the man in western culture is a divided creature with a civilised, evolved upper body and a lower body that is corporal, raw and primitive.¹⁷⁰ The evolutionary step towards the upright poise marks the waist as an area separating the body into upper and lower parts. The torso carries the human abilities that distinguish man from other creatures in nature. On the other hand, the lower body is synonymous with bestial sides, impulses/instincts and dirt, its genitals, secretions and legs all raw and primordial. This determination essentially refers to the skirt as an object that establishes, defines and secures physical boundaries.

The skirt's top line (belt) is perceived as a separator in its masculine instance, on the warrior's body. It draws the line between the rational and natural, the bestial aspect of the body. The warrior male body is traditionally designed with high endurance, built to withstand hazards and harsh natural environments and prevail over the fear of death.¹⁷¹

The warrior skirt was traditionally marked by a relatively broad, short cut (varying in length from the knee line to the loin area line).¹⁷² Thus, the skirt's body division separated the upper parting from the body line, highlighting the lower area. This shows the skirt as an object of both concealment and revelation. It validates, with its technical properties, a potential penetration and high physical availability. The accessibility of the loin area imparts the man in the warrior's skirt with animalism, naturalism and intuition. Hence, the skirt marks the upper part of the leg, the buttocks and the male genitals as available.

Since the eighteenth century, when trousers had already become the sole lower body wear for men, soldiers' uniforms were designed to highlight the top of the male torso in the soldier's body. The upper part was also employed for conveying one's rank, class and power. It was also the visible part of the mounted warrior; riding became a leading, essential combat practice and a status symbol. The transition to highlighting the upper body indicates a shift from the warrior soldier, figured as a natural, feral creature, to a logical, cohesive, organised being. It conveys self-control and endurance, accentuating these values as the soldier's formative characteristics. According to

¹⁶⁸ Jennifer Craik, *Uniform Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, Berg, Oxford, England, 2005, p. 97.

¹⁶⁹ Her book *Fantasy of the State: Photographs of IDF Female Soldiers and the Eroticization of Civil Militarism in Israel* examines the dressed female military body representations in the Israeli military sphere. This is part of the differentiating process, in which the uniforms, details, detachments and units are differentiated, while the uniform becomes a mechanism of sorting and scaling. The body of the "military woman" is positioned hierarchically, through this mechanism, as much lower than the military male body.

¹⁷⁰ Tim Ingold, "Culture On The Ground - The World Perceived Through the Feet," *Journal of Material Culture*, Volume 9, Issue 3, 2004, pp. 315-340.

¹⁷¹ Colonel Ardant Du Picq, *Battle Studies*, John Greely and Robert C. Cotton, Translators, Macmillan, New York, United States, 2005 [1920].

¹⁷² Saladin and Saracens' warriors were found dressed in narrow buttoned skirts.

George Mosse, in the nineteenth century, the male body image began to draw on the national movement iconography, which relied on a Victorian ideal of bodily concealment, willpower, firmness, self-control and respect.¹⁷³ These qualities were nurtured as components of the male individual's self-determination and came to define the combative heterosexual masculinity ideal. According to this image, the fighting male body developed into a depiction of an impenetrable figure that projected human defence. In order to celebrate the top part further, the bottom was also highlighted. During this period, the uniform trousers became vertical and tight, emphasising the loin area. This emphasis, impossible with a skirt, arranges the sexual and animalistic into a precise shape, thus marking the soldier as the superior master of nature

Trousers are formulated around the Homo Erectus logic, organising the binary and hierarchical division between rational and animalistic, nature and nurture.¹⁷⁴ Unlike the skirt, they cannot swing and shake, stretch or swing, reveal flesh or cause physical vibrations. Pants are a simple, closed and formal item, therefore synonymous with rationality, stability, and efficiency. In his 2002 article "Men in Skirts", Steven Connor argues that from the mid nineteenth century, men's and women's garments became utterly polarised. Trousers came to be a symbol and metonymy of masculinity during that period, as an object that stimulates masculinity in the gender sphere, while sustaining male gender identity with its strength and status.¹⁷⁵ Connor also argues that the historical stage that saw men move to trousers is typical of the cultural scene where clothing defines identity. As a result, women in trousers are seen to gain strength with male characteristics or to as crossing the gender lines.

An intaglio engraving from the second century AD depicts the Roman Diana (Greek Artemis), the hunting and wild animal goddess, in a short skirt and hunter shoes, equipped with a bow, arrows, and pouch, alongside a greyhound or deer.¹⁷⁶ This depiction is a perfect example of a gendered warfare employing the combat attire. At that time, fighters wore skirts; as a fighting woman, it was befitting she should be portrayed in a combat attire, a skirt. As the skirt transitioned to under-trousers in the combatant's wardrobe, images and representations were found of women within the combat system wearing trousers. Nowadays, representations of women wearing skirts are not shown as an obvious part of the fighting, indicating that they are by no means part of the combat units, which validates their fitness for specific and "feminine" roles in the military system.

Therefore, to this day, women combatants shun the skirt, which stands for passivity. The upright man is the master of movement, and the coupling of fighting and skirt is oxymoronic, as also evident in contemporary and popular cultural representations and descriptions of warrior women. Wonder Woman, Cat Woman, Scarlet Witch, Black Widow, Elektra, Jessica Jones and Captain Marvel, to cite but some, all feature combatant females in trousers or underwear, but never in skirts. Their femininity is present, but their identity as warriors is validated through masculine signifiers and they must therefore emphasise their physical capacities and prove their bodies to be equal tools of warfare in the male sphere, where no skirts are allowed.

Conclusion

The skirt was the ancient hunter's garment, the most appropriate clothing item for his pursuit. Following the hunting activity, the skirt was adopted as the go-to, ultimate combat attire. Until the middle medieval period, soldiers would wear different types of trousers underneath skirts of varying widths and lengths. As of the middle medieval period, with the introduction of the skirt into the female wardrobe, the item gradually dropped out of the male closet, until its final disappearance from men's wardrobes in the late Middle Ages. Since then, no descriptions can be found of soldiers

¹⁷³ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, United States, 1988.

¹⁷⁴ According to MacQueen Douglas, the English attributed cultural backwardness to the Scots due to the Kilt. Loudon MacQueen Douglas, *The Kilt: A Manual of Scottish National Dress*, Andrew Elliot, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1914.

¹⁷⁵ The question "Who wears the trousers?" for example, is a common phrase that expresses this metonymy. Steven Connor, "Men in Skirts," *Women: A Cultural Review*, Volume 13, Issue 3, 2002, pp. 257-271.

¹⁷⁶ The daughter of Zeus and Leto and Apollo's twin sister.

and fighters in skirts. Trousers, a vertical, straightforward clothing item, became identified with efficiency and activism and took over the male and military wardrobe. With the establishment of modern armies and the late integration of women into them, the skirt returned as part of the military uniform set. This turn did not echo the item's historical role in warfare, but rather enforced women's incompetence for battle.

Examining the skirt's symbolic significances as a masculine or feminine clothing item reveals the military skirt's case as a clear illustration of the skirt as part of a cultural sign system that structures and produces the body. Furthermore, it is a discourse tool within the social gender system: as a military masculine clothing item, the skirt never restricted movement, like running or other physical activities. On the contrary: it enhanced them. Its material properties were the ultimate blueprint for action: the riding, running and physical exertion required in warfare. Wide, short and simple to put on and take off, it was the ultimate warrior garment and a mark of active and combative masculinity. It is only in its reincarnation as a feminine clothing item that the skirt was transformed into a movement-restrictive object, prohibiting various activities. Its materiality was cumbersome and movement-limiting, with an unstable, amorphous exterior. Thus, this specific garment structures the specific body that dons it; its material properties steer the body and assimilate cultural rules. Its movement restriction and contradicting denotations associate the female body that wears it with incapacity, exclusion and prohibition, as a static object.

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