

**INVISIBILITY CLOAKS AND MAGIC BELTS:  
GARMENTS AND FASHION ACCESSORIES  
IN THE MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN DIETRICH CYCLE**

**Chiara Benati**

“Laurin der kunheit vorgaz, / iz woste nicht, wo iz waz. / Ez greyf zcu den syten sin, /do iz weste eyn helkeppelin, / der vil kleyne recke, / daz her sich da myte bedecke, / daz sin der Berner nicht ensach” (*Laur.* 453-459). *Shortly before being overcome in the one-to-one fight against Dietrich, Laurin has recourse to a stratagem which can save his life: he produces from his pocket a small invisibility cloak and covers himself with it, so that neither Dietrich nor anyone else can see him. Passages as this mentioning or describing (magic) garments and fashion accessories are quite frequent in the Middle High German Dietrich cycle. In some cases, thanks to their magic powers, clothes and accessories even play an important role in the development of the narrative by helping or strengthening the hero or his enemies. In this paper these passages are analyzed and attention is given not only to garments and accessories and their function in the narrative, but also to their descriptions and to the terms used to identify them, so as to ascertain if these reflect the fashion of the period in which the texts were composed or written.*

### **1. The Dietrich Cycle**

Theodoric the Great (471-526), king of the Ostrogoths and conqueror of Italy, is one of the most important characters of the medieval heroic tradition. This Amal king serves as inspiration not only for the Middle High German hero Dietrich von Bern (Verona) and for the protagonist of the Old Norse *Piðreks saga* but also for a series of shorter texts belonging to the German, English and Scandinavian language areas, the largest part of which were composed in the 13th century.<sup>1</sup>

This narrative material is very likely to have been first developed by the Goths, but it reached its peak of popularity in Germany, where the majority of the preserved Dietrich epic comes from. Apart from a series of historical texts – both Latin and vernacular – narrating the

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<sup>1</sup> See also Heinzle 1999, 1.

life and deeds of Theodoric the Great, which often contaminate historical evidence with legendary elements, and can therefore be classified as pseudo-biographical,<sup>2</sup> three main narrative cores can be identified in the Dietrich cycle:

1. The so-called “historical Dietrich epic” (German *historische Dietrichepik*), constituted mainly by three Middle High German poems: *Dietrichs Flucht (DietrFl.)*, *Rabenschlacht (RaSchl.)* and *Alpharts Tod (AlpT.)*. Despite its name, this group of texts presents a strongly transformed version of the historical truth: here Dietrich is not the conqueror of Italy but the legitimate heir of a kingdom situated in the Northern part of the country, who has been usurped by his uncle Ermenrich. The name of one of Theodoric’s ancestors – traditionally hostile to his relatives – replaces here that of his historical opponent, Odoacer. Exiled from his kingdom, Dietrich takes refuge at the court of Attila (German: Etzel), king of the Huns, and repeatedly tries to win back his kingdom, until – after 30 or 32 years – he is finally able to defeat Ermenrich and return to his homeland.
2. The *aventiurehafte Dietrichepik* (“adventurous Dietrich epic”), a large group of texts which, lacking any historical basis, narrate Dietrich’s enterprises against fantastical opponents such as dwarfs, giants and dragons.<sup>3</sup> Seven texts are traditionally classified as belonging to the adventurous Dietrich epic: *Goldemâr*, *Eckenlied*, *Laurin (Laur.)*, *Rosengarten (Ros.)*, *Sigenot (Sig.)*, *Virginal (Virg.)* and *Wunderer (Wund.)*. In addition to these, Heinzle includes in this context one more poem, preserved fragmentarily and known as *Dietrich und Fasold*.<sup>4</sup>
3. The texts dealing with Dietrich’s end concern the *damnatio memoriae* suffered by Theodoric as a consequence of the tension with the Roman Catholic Church, which characterized the last years of his kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> The life of Theodoric is narrated in the Latin *Gesta Theoderici* and in the *Kaiserchronik* and the *Weltchronik* by Heinrich von München, both in Middle High German.

<sup>3</sup> The Middle High German term *aventiure*, from which the adjective *aventiurehaft* derives, is a loanword from Old French *aventure* and entered German at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a consequence of the strong influence of chivalric culture.

<sup>4</sup> Heinzle 1999, 99.

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Dietrich is, therefore, either sunk into the crater of a volcano (Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*), brought to Hell (*Piðreks saga*) or rescued by a trick (*Wartburgkrieg*).<sup>5</sup>

### **2. Garments and Fashion Accessories in the Corpus**

Quite frequently garments and fashion accessories are mentioned and described in the texts of the Middle High German Dietrich epic. The following study will identify the relevant passages, analyze the vocabulary of garments and discuss both their function in the narrative and the possibility that they reflect the fashion of the time the texts were composed or written.

#### *2.1 Which garments and which accessories?*

The typology of the garments and fashion accessories present in the analyzed corpus is necessarily strongly influenced by the very nature of the texts constituting it. In particular, two specificities of the Dietrich poems exert influence on the selection of the pieces of clothing: plot and gender of the characters.

The plot of the Middle High German Dietrich poems is centred on a series of fights, duels and tournaments. Given this importance of combats in the development of the plot, it is not surprising that particular attention is paid to armour and weapons. When a new opponent is introduced, his battle outfit is usually described in some detail. This is, for example, the case for the dwarf Laurin, come to avenge the destruction of his rose garden by Dietrich and his companions:

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<sup>5</sup> See also Cometta 1994.

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<p>Sich du qwam geriten eyn getwerg mit swinden siten, daz waz Laurin genant. Eyn sper vurt iz an siner hant, bewonden wol mit golde, also iz eyn konig furen solde. Vorne an dem spere sin do swebit eyn panir sidin, dar an zcwene winde. Sam sy liffen swinde in eynem witen walde noch eynem wilde balde. stunden sy, sam sy lebeten da sy an dem panier swebeten. Sin ros was zcu den siten wech unde in der grozze also eyn rech, dor uffe eyn decke guldin</p> <p>dy gap in dem walde lichten schin von deme gesteyne also der tag.</p> <p>Der zcaum, der an dem rosse lag, der waz rot guldin, alz in der cleyne Laurin hatte in der linken hant, do her dye zcwene forsten vant.[...]</p>	<p>See there came riding very quickly a dwarf named Laurin. He held in his hand a spear covered in gold, as adequate for a nobleman. At the top of his spear there waved a silk flag representing two hounds following quickly their prey into a wide forest. The flag moved so that they seemed to be alive. His horse was piebald and was about as big as a roe deer. On the back of the horse lay a golden cover shining in the forest as the bright day because of precious stones. The bridle on the horse was of red gold, the small Laurin held it in his left hand, when he found the two noble men.<sup>6</sup></p>
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More than 100 lines are dedicated to this detailed description of every single element of Laurin's military equipment: spear (*spere*), flag and coat of arms (*banier*), horse and harness (*zoum*, *satel*, *satelboge*, *stegereife*), greaves (*beingewant*), breastplate (*brünne*), belt (*gürtelin*), sword (*swert*), tabard (*wâpenrock*), helmet (*helm*) and shield (*schilt*). Each of these elements is depicted in its colour, ornament and, in some cases, value, origin and particular (strategic and magic) properties.

A similar – slightly shorter – description of a knight's equipment is to be found in *Virginal*. At the beginning of the poem, Hildebrand

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<sup>6</sup>Lienert *et al.*, 2011, 16. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Middle Low German are my own.

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and the young Dietrich, who still doesn't know what adventure is, move towards the forests of Tirol to fight against the pagan Orkise, who had brought death and devastation in the land of Queen Virginal. This pagan villain is extraordinarily strong and well equipped:

Der heiden was unmâzen starc.  
bezzet vil wan tûsent marc  
sô was sîn harnesch reine.  
sîn ros daz was unmâzen guot  
(ez lief reht als ein schibe tuot  
über stocke und über steine,  
sô er in die wilde reit),  
sîn harnesch licht und veste,  
mörderclîchen daz er streit.  
[...]

er hete ein swert unmâzen guot:  
der knopf und daz gehelze  
von alsô klârem golde was;  
lûter als ein spiegelglas  
glizzen ime in die velze.  
sîn helm von klârem golde schein,  
sô er reit in die wilde;  
dar an lac manec edel stein  
verwûrket in diu bilde.  
dâ zuo vuorte er einen schilt,  
dar an von rôtem golde was  
gestrichen manec edel wilt.  
Sîn brünje alsô herte was  
von klârem stahel, als ich las,  
sî eime keiser zæme

ze tragen wol in sînre nôt.  
er wær verdecket vür den tût,  
und obe ez alsô kæme  
daz er in strîte müeste sîn.  
die ringe wâren veste:  
reht als sî wæren rôtguldîn,  
gâben sî ir glest. [...]

The pagan was immensely strong.  
Much better than one thousand war-  
horses, so was his good armour.  
His horse was extraordinarily good  
(it ran just like a wheel,  
over bushes and rocks,  
when he rode it in wilderness),  
his armour shining and resistant:  
he fought to kill.

He had an extraordinarily good  
sword: the knob and the hilt  
were of shining gold;  
brighter than a mirror,  
they shone to him in the mountains.  
His helmet shone of clear gold,  
when he rode in wilderness;  
many precious stones lay there  
to form an image.  
In addition to that he had a shield  
on which many noble beasts  
were gilded in red gold.  
His breastplate of clear steel was so  
hard, as I have read,  
that it could have been worn by an  
emperor,  
if the situation had required.  
He was protected against death.  
And if this had come,  
it should have been in battle.  
The rings were strong  
and shone exactly  
as if they had been of red gold.

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er vuorte ein sper wîz unde rein, daz was lûter von helfenbein: drin in vil sûezer wîse ein nahtegal sô lûte sanc, swann erz vuort an der hende, dazz in dem walde suoze erklanc und in der steines wende. ir stimme diu gap sûezen dôn, wan sî mit grôzen listen was in daz sper verwûrket schôn.	He had a spear, white and good, as clear as ivory: inside it a nightingale sung aloud in such a sweet way, that it resonated sweetly in the forest and towards the mountains, whenever he took it in his hand. Its voice gave out a sweet sound, because it had been manufactured astutely in the spear. <sup>7</sup>
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The pagan's suit of armour is described in full detail and appears to be as effective and sumptuous as Laurin's: armour and weapons (sword, spear) are not only extremely strong and resistant but also very precious because of the materials employed (e.g. gold and gems) and the peculiarity of their manufacture. So, for example, the pagan's spear is not only good and solid, but it also produces a sweet sound, similar to a nightingale's song, which can resonate in the forest, whenever it is grasped at.

The gender of the characters portrayed constitutes the second specificity of the Dietrich epic with regard to the selection of garments mentioned and described in the poems. As stressed by Brüggén in respect of German courtly literature of the 12th and 13th century, Middle High German poets paid particular attention to women's fashion, while only rarely the same space is dedicated to men's clothing.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to courtly literature, in the poems of the Middle High German Dietrich epic female characters play, on the whole, a quite marginal role. Women are hardly mentioned in the text belonging to the pseudo-historical branch of the Dietrich tradition, whose plot is centred on Dietrich's exile and attempt to win back his kingdom, without any concession to romance. Somehow women are more present in Dietrich's adventures, since some of them are determined by the protagonist's wish to help a woman in need (*Virginal*, *Wunderer*), by the glove of defiance thrown by a lady (Kriemhild in *Rosengarten*) or are in some way connected to the

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<sup>7</sup> Zupitza 1968, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Brüggén 1989, 100.

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narrative scheme of a maiden in danger (*Laurin*). Some of these “active” women are described by their physical appearance and, consequently, by their clothing as well. This is, for example, the case of Kriemhild’s companion, the future duchess of Brabant, in *Rosengarten A*:

<p>Kriemhilt diu küneginne dô niht langer beit, mit ir juncvrouwen si sich dô bereit Diu junge herzoginne gienc ir an der hant, die wollte si ze wîbe geben deme von Brâbant. [diu selbe juncvrouwe truoc ein kleit an, dadurch dâ schein ir lîp, der was sô wolgetân. Ir arme wâren wîz, blanc als ein hermelfîn. under den juncvrouwen mohte si diu schênste sîn.]</p>	<p>Kriemhild, the queen, didn’t wait any longer then: she prepared herself together with her maidens. The young duchess walked at her side: she wanted to give her in marriage to the duke of Brabant. (This very maiden wore a dress  which gave a glimpse of her well- built figure. Her arms were white, as clear as an ermine. She could be the most beautiful among the maidens.)<sup>9</sup></p>
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The focus of this description is the maiden’s beauty, rather than her outfit, which is only hinted at. The only relevant feature of the dress (*kleit*) mentioned in this passage is that it lent a glimpse of her beautiful and shapely figure, while all other details such as colour, fabric, length and shape are considered unimportant and, therefore, not included in the text.

Some more details can be found in a passage of *Laurin* describing a group of women. The dwarf-maidens living in Laurin’s hollow mountain are portrayed in these terms:

<p>Do quam Kunhilt dy kunegin mit mancher kurzzer</p>	<p>Künhild, the queen, came then  with many small dwarf-maidens,</p>
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<sup>9</sup> Holz 1982, 18.

getwergin. Dy waren schone und wol getan, dy trugen riche cleyder an von phellel und von syden. Do waz daz beste gesmide, daz man von golde addir von gesteyne tragen solde.	who were beautiful and well-shaped.  They wore rich clothes of purple and silk and, on these, jewels of silver, gold and precious stone, the best one could have. <sup>10</sup>
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Not only do we get to know here that these dwarf-maidens were beautiful and well-shaped but also that they wore rich and sumptuous clothes made of precious fabrics, such as silk (*syden*) and purple (*phellel*), which were traditionally used for people of imperial, royal or other high rank. The opulence suggested by this detail is further reinforced by another element of the girls' outfits: their jewels (*gesmide*), which were the best one could have.

Taking into consideration the specificities of the Dietrich epic as far as both plot and gender of the characters are concerned, we expect to find references to men's garments, in particular those which were worn with the armour, and only occasionally to women's items of clothing and accessories.

## 2.2 *The function of garments and accessories in the Dietrich cycle*

The garments and accessories mentioned seem to have three major functions in the corpus. The first of these functions is clearly exemplified by the passages quoted above: the description of rich and sumptuous pieces of clothing and/or military equipment contributes to the general atmosphere of the poems by giving dignity and importance to the characters owning them. This is extremely significant in those texts of the adventurous Dietrich epic where the protagonist is confronted with fantastic, non-human creatures. If, in fact, the praise and exaltation of the opponent's value constitute a stereotype of heroic literature, aimed at highlighting the hero's own strength, they are far

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<sup>10</sup> Lienert *et al.*, 2011, 102.

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more important when the enterprise's difficulty is not immediately evident, as, for example, in case of a fight against a dwarf. Duelling with a dwarf could have appeared quite an easy task and, as such, not worth being told, if this small opponent had not had some peculiarity or magical power compensating his size and making him worthy to be one of Dietrich's opponents.<sup>11</sup> The above-mentioned description of Laurin's military equipment and the emphasis given to its preciousness and refinement is not only a narrative device employed to praise Dietrich's small opponent and, through him, the Veronese himself. In addition to that, one particular accessory – Laurin's magic belt – plays a fundamental role in this process of underlining the difficulty of Dietrich's enterprise: far from being simply a "knight in miniature", Laurin represents a real danger for the hero and his companions, because he wears a magic belt conferring on him a strength equal to that of twelve men (*da von iz hatte zwelf manne craft*) which has always allowed him to be victorious in battle. If this were not enough, Laurin can take recourse to another magical garment of great strategic value:

Ez greyf zcu den syten sin, do iz weste eyn helkeppelin,  der vil kleyne recke, daz er sich da myte bedecke daz sin der Berner nicht ensach.	He caught on his side where he had a small invisibility cloak, the very small warrior, in order to cover himself with it, so that the Veronese did not see him. <sup>12</sup>
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During the fight with Dietrich he wears a small cloak (*helkeppelin*) rendering him invisible to his opponent,<sup>13</sup> who, in the version of the story preserved in the Danish ballad *Dværgekongen Lavrin*, will be

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<sup>11</sup> See also Wessels 1966, 350.

<sup>12</sup> Lienert - Kerth, 2011, 50.

<sup>13</sup> In one particular version of the poem, the so-called *jüngere Vulgat-Version*, characterized by the addition of a prior event to the main plot, this invisibility cloak has already been mentioned in this first part of the narration, where Laurin, invisible by means of it, is able to approach and kidnap Lady Künhild, the sister of Dietleib, one of Dietrich's companions.

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able to guess his position only by looking at the movement of the grass.<sup>14</sup>

The motif of invisibility is also present in another passage of the *Laurin*: after Dietrich has defeated the dwarf and agreed to spare his life, he and his companions are – according to the narrative scheme of the treacherous invitation – attracted and locked into the dwarf’s underground palace, the hollow mountain (*hohle berg*). Once they are there, thousands of dwarfs attack them taking advantage of the darkness. The Veronese warriors are able to escape this trap only thanks to a magic belt which Master Hildebrand gives Dietrich:

Nim hin daz gurtelin, daz saltu gurten um dynen lib, so seyst du an der selben zcít dy getwerge in deme berge wol. Vor war ich daz sprechen sol.	Take this small belt and wear it around your waist. In this way you will immediately see the dwarfs in the mountain. I can say this in truth. <sup>15</sup>
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This magic belt belongs to a category of accessories which play a role in the development of the narrative, since their acquisition represents an important turning point in the plot. The insertion of this belt into the narration constitutes, here, the physical and tangible representation of a supernatural force – such as magic or witchcraft – necessary to turn the tide and solve an apparently desperate situation. In this case, the reference to a specific piece of clothing has a particular function in the narration, since this garment becomes the visual expression of an external help given to one or other character and sets, therefore, the basis for the future development of the narration.

The third function of the items of clothing in the Dietrich epic could be defined as “symbolic”.<sup>16</sup> Some passages of the poems analyzed mention garments or accessories hinting at one particular

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<sup>14</sup> Benati 2003, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Lienert *et al.*, 2011, 136.

<sup>16</sup> The symbolic value of clothing in literature has been extensively studied in Raudszus, 1985 where a wide spectrum of different symbolic functions of clothing is described. When referring to garments which have a “symbolic” value within the Dietrich epic, I refer to what he calls “*Signalfunktion*” (191-194).

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situation or condition which could be visually represented by a particular outfit. So, for example, the army of 1,100 men moving towards Verona in *Alpharts Tod* is characterized by the black cassock (*swartz kotten*) they wear over their shining armour (*liechte ringe*):

<p>Da hyeß der monch Ylsam uff blasen sin her horn. Da hette er der synen da keyn verlorrn. Da samelt er der synen da eyloff hondert man, dye aber den liechten ringen drungen swartz kotten an.</p>	<p>Then Ilsan the monk let blow the horn. He had not lost any of his men.  There he gathers eleven hundred men of his who, over the shining rings, wore black cassocks.<sup>17</sup></p>
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The very name of this garment is sufficient to suggest to the audience that this rank of men was actually composed of monks, the brethren of Ilsan, Hildebrand's brother, since the Middle High German term *kotte* is always – apart from a few dialectal exceptions – used to refer to an ecclesiastical garment.<sup>18</sup> Also the chromatically contrasting reference to the black cassock and the clear and shining armour suggests the peculiarity and unconventionality of this character who is monk and warrior at the same time.

Ilsan's monastic condition is symbolically indicated by garments in one passage of *Rosengarten D* as well:

<p>Dô trat vür die porten der münech Ilsân. dô truoc er ob den ringen eine grâwe kuttan an. dô truoc er ob den beinen zwô dicke grâwe hosen. [...] Nu wil ich iuc]h gerne helfen', sprach der münech Ilsân, 'nu luo]get mich, her Dietrich, waz</p>	<p>Then Ilsan the monk arrived at the gates. Over the rings he wore a grey cassock. On his the legs he wore a pair of heavy grey trousers. [...] "Now I would like to help", said Ilsan the monk, "Have a look now, Lord Dietrich,</p>
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<sup>17</sup> Lienert –Meyer 2007, 75.

<sup>18</sup> See also Grimm, 11, coll. 2891-2898.

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ich ze strîte hân', dô zôch er] abe die kutten und warf sie in daz gras: hei, ] wie wünnelîche der mûnech gewâfent was! 'Was traget ir under den hosen?' sprach meister Hildebrand.  'daz tuoni ich, lieber brode, mîn alt sturmgewant.' dô schouwete der von Berne des mûneches Ilsân swert: 'eines vrischen predegerstabes sît ir wol gewert.	what I have to fight!" Then he took the cassock off and threw it in the grass: oh, how extraordinarily equipped was the monk! "What do you wear under the trousers?", asked master Hildebrand. "I do that, dear brother, my old equipment." Then the Veronese looked at the sword of Ilsan the monk: "You are well worth a new preacher's rod." <sup>19</sup>
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The grey robe worn over the armour constitutes the visual representation of the religious role Ilsan is ready to put aside in order to fight on Dietrich's side. The scene of the undressing with the monk's cassock thrown in the grass clearly symbolizes this (temporary?) abandonment of the monastic condition to join the Veronese and his companions. However, if behaviour of this kind appears fully legitimate in a situation such as the one described in *Alpharts Tod*, where Dietrich was fighting against the usurper Ermenrich trying to win back his reign, in a context like this – a tournament organized as a series of duels between the heroes of two different factions aimed at winning a rose garland and the kiss of a beautiful girl – it acquires a farcical, if not obscene, connotation.

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<sup>19</sup> Holz 1982, 85-86.

### 3. The Terminology of Garments and Accessories in the Dietrich Cycle

An investigation of the Middle High German terminology employed to indicate garments and accessories can be helpful in ascertaining if they, in some way, reflect contemporary fashion. The analysis of both the historical and adventurous Dietrich poems has allowed an identification of a rather small corpus of terms belonging to the semantic field of fashion and clothing. These can be further divided into two groups: terms indicating garments and accessories themselves and terms referring to the textiles and materials these items of clothing are made of. Another clothing-related semantic subfield is represented by adjectives denoting colour, which deserves special attention and will not be treated in this study. Moreover, since the focus of this research is clothing and fashion in the Middle High German Dietrich epic, none of the terms referring exclusively to the heroes' weapons and military equipment will be included in this corpus.

#### Garments and accessories

Thirteen terms referring to garments and accessories could be identified in the Middle High German Dietrich poems. They will, here, be listed alphabetically and analyzed taking into consideration their meaning(s), connotations and, when semantically relevant, their etymology. All occurrences of each term will, moreover, be presented together with an indication of the poem and line (or stanza and line) where they can be found.

**gewant:** not only does this neuter (nt.) noun (n.) indicate generically any kind of garment or fabric used to produce clothing, but it can also be employed in the meaning of "armour, military equipment".<sup>20</sup> In a context such as that of the Dietrich epic, where clothing and military equipment are often mentioned together, it is not always possible to understand the exact meaning of each occurrence.

Clearly referring to clothing:

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<sup>20</sup> See also Lexer 1, col. 975 and Grimm 6, coll. 5236-5287.

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*Virg.* 1029, 4: *von sîde ein kostberlîch gewant* (“of silk a precious *gewant*”).

*Laur.* 1051: *sy taten ane phellel gewant* (“they wore purple *gewant*”);

Of uncertain interpretation:

*AlpT.* 405: *Er hyeß im balde brengen raß, harnesch und gewant* (“he ordered that horse, armour and *gewant* be brought to him soon”);

*Virg.* 577, 9: *welhz dunket iuch ein rîch gewant?* (“which one seems to you a rich *gewant*?”);

*Virg.* 579, 2: *ich wil ouch kleiden in mîn gwant* (“I want to put on my *gwant* as well”);

*Virg.* 580, 11: *daz dunket mich ein rîch gewant* (“this seems to me a rich *gewant*”).

**gürtel, gurtel:** feminine (f.) n., (diminutive *gürtelin*, nt. n.) “belt” worn around the waist by both men and women.<sup>21</sup> As pointed out by Brügger on the evidence of German courtly literature of the 12th and 13th century, belts had a particular decorative value and were often extremely valuable with gemmed buckles and bands made of silk, gold and silver threads or of precious metal components.<sup>22</sup> A small belt with sapphires and rubies is described in *Virg.* 578, 7 and following: *dar ûf ir kleinen gurtel small / sapphire und rubbîne, / dâ von erliuhte berc unt tal / von ir glanzen schîne.* (“There, on their small, thin belt, sapphires and rubies, because of them both mountains and valleys shone, because of their bright splendor.”)<sup>23</sup>

*Laur.* 187: *dar umbe lag ein gurtelin;* (“there lay a *gurtelin*”);

*Laur.* 1327: *Nim hin daz gurtelin;* (“take the *gürtelin*”);

*DietrFl.* 669: *zu den claidern edl gurtl guot,* (“in addition to the clothes a good noble *gurtel*”);

*Wund.* 19, 2: *mit einem gürtel kleyn.* (“with a small *gürtel*”).

**handschouh:** masculine (m.) n., compound of *hant* “hand” and *schouch* “shoe”, meaning “gloves”, covering hand, wrist and forearm. This particular garment is usually not mentioned in large

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<sup>21</sup> See also *Lexer*, 1, col. 1125.

<sup>22</sup> Brügger 1989, 90-94.

<sup>23</sup> Zupitza 1968, 107.

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literary descriptions of medieval clothing. They are, on the other hand, quite frequently present in lists of female accessories together with mirrors, rings, brooches and hair slides. In men's clothing they were part of hunting equipment and distinguished messengers and ambassadors.<sup>24</sup> The term occurs only once in the corpus analyzed, in *Virg.* 450, 8: *zwên handschouhe in der hende* ("two *handschouhe* in the hand"), and the context suggests it could refer to hunting gloves.

**helkeppelin:** nt. n., diminutive form of *helkappe* "invisibility cloak".<sup>25</sup> *Laur.* 456: *do iz weste eyn helkeppelin* ("where he knew there was a *helkeppelin*").

*Laur.* 713: *uf saczte ich ir eyn helkeppelin* ("I put my *keppelin* onto her").

**hemd:** nt. n. indicating the underwear – usually of silk – worn by women and knights directly against the skin.<sup>26</sup> In this corpus of texts, the term occurs only once and it refers to a man's garment worn under the hauberk (*halsperge*).

*RaSchl.* 650, 5: *Daz tet ein hemde sidine* ("a silk *hemd* did this").

**hose:** f. n. always used in plural (*hosen*) to indicate a stocking-like garment, usually of refined wool cloth, covering men's legs from the thigh or knee down to and including the foot. These *hosen* were often attached to a pair of short pants called *bruoch*,<sup>27</sup> which are, however, never mentioned in the Dietrich epic.

*RosD.* 97, 3: *dô truoc er ob den beinen zwô dicke grâwe hosen* ("he wore a pair of heavy grey *hosen* on the legs");

*RosD.* 105, 1: *Was traget ir under den hosen?* sprach meister Hildebrant ("What do you wear under the *hosen*? said Master Hildebrant").

**huot:** m. n. "hood", a head covering worn by men and women. In contrast to the *hûbe*, this head covering did not adapt to the form of the head, but had a tip pointing upwards. Hoods were usually made

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<sup>24</sup> Brüggem 1989, 222.

<sup>25</sup> See also Benecke *et al.*, 1, col. 787.

<sup>26</sup> See also Brüggem 1989, 71, 100, 223 and Grimm 10, coll. 980 and following.

<sup>27</sup> See also Lexer 1, coll. 368 and 1344 and Brüggem 1989, 103-104.

of silk and decorated with gold, pearls and precious stones.<sup>28</sup> A silk hood is mentioned in the only occurrence of this term in the corpus.

*Virg.* 837, 10: *vor der sidin huote* (“in front of the silk *houte*”).

**kleit**: nt. n. generically indicating any piece of clothing, both men’s and women’s. In the Middle High German Dietrich epic, the term often appears in the plural (*kleider*) and in connection with adjectives expressing a positive, but extremely general, positive opinion, like *rich* “rich” or *best* “the best”.

*Laur.* 991: *dy trugen riche cleyder an* (“and wore rich *kleider*”);

*DietrFl.* 669: *zu den claidern edl gurtl guot* (“in addition to the *kleidern* a good noble belt”);

*Virg.* 134, 3: *legt an iur besten kleider* (“put on your best *kleider*”);

*Virg.* 196, 5: *daz nie soum gewan ir kleit* (“that her *kleit* never had a hem”);

*Virg.* 681, 5: *sî truogen diu aller besten kleit* (“they wore all the best *kleit*”);

*Virg.* 1051, 3: *er gap in ros und kleider* (“he gave them horse and *kleider*”);

*Wund.* 142, 4: *hiengen jnn ir cleidt* (“they tore her *cleidt*”).

**kotte, kutte**: f. n. indicating originally a cheap and not particularly refined fabric, which was used, among other things, for cassocks worn by monks and nuns. Already in the Middle High German period, this had become the main meaning of the term. The f. n. *kappe* also occurs as synonym of *kotte*.<sup>29</sup>

*AlpT.* 1839: *dye aber den liechten ringen drungen swartz kotten an* (“who, over the shining rings, wore black *kotten*”);

*RosD* 97, 2: *dô truoc er ob den ringen eine grâwe kutten an* (“over the rings he wore a grey *kutten*”);

*RosD* 104, 3: *dô zoch er] abe die kutten und warf sie in daz gras* (“then he took the *kutten* off and threw it in the grass”).

**rock**: m. n. of uncertain origin appearing in Old High German from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards (*roch*, *rocch*, *rogh*, *rokk* and *hroch*). The term can be used to indicate the main piece of clothing of both men and women without distinction: the man’s is a sleeved, tight

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<sup>28</sup> See also Brüggem 1989, 227.

<sup>29</sup> See also Grimm 11, coll. 2891-2898.

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garment covering the upper part of the body, while the woman's is an outer garment covering the body from the shoulders to the feet.<sup>30</sup> In the corpus analyzed the term occurs only once, in *Wunderer*, where it refers to the white garment, embellished with pearls, worn by *fraw Seld* on her arrival at Etzel's court.

*Wund.* 16, 1: *Den rock den sie an hette* ("the rock which she was wearing").

**tesche, tasche:** f. n. "bag", diminutive: *teschelîn*, nt. n. The single occurrence in the corpus, in *DietFl.* 662, suggests bags could be precious fashion accessories: the one mentioned here is made of gold (*guldein*) and decorated with precious stones; not too big and not too small, it is worn with a belt (hanging from it?), according to the courtly fashion, as the poem says (*alz man ze hofe gern tuot*).

*DietFl.* 666: *die guoten tarschal guldeinn* ("the good golden tarschal").

**wâpenroch, wâfenroc, wapen rack:** m. n. referring to the cloak – usually of silk and with precious decoration – worn by knights over their armour.<sup>31</sup>

*AlpT.* 418: *Sye gap im eyn wapen rack, der was gut gnug* ("she gave him a *wapen rack*, which was adequately good");

*AlpT.* 487: *sin wapen rack myt dyren, myt golde wol dorchleyt* ("his *wapen rack* finely embroidered in gold with animal ornaments");

*Laur.* 201: *Sin woppin rog way siden* ("his *woppin rog* was of silk");

*Sig.* 61, 2: *Gar rûhe was sîn wâfenroc* ("his *wâfenroc* was quite unrefined");

*Walb.* 2590: *recht alz der waffen roch* ("as the *waffen roch*").

**zendelkleit:** nt. n., compound of *zendel*, *zindel* and *kleit*. The m. n. *zendel* indicates a light silk fabric, similar to taffeta. A *zendelkleit* is, therefore, a woman's dress made of this particular fabric.<sup>32</sup>

*Virg.* 578, 4: *diu ziehens über diu zendelkleit* ("they put on the *zendelkleit*").

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<sup>30</sup> See also Grimm 14, coll. 1092-1095.

<sup>31</sup> See also Lexer 3, col. 632.

<sup>32</sup> See also Lexer 3, col. 1122 and Grimm 31, col. 1387.

Textiles and materials

As far as the semantic subfield of textiles and materials is concerned, the following eight lexemes (nouns and adjectives) have been identified in the corpus:

**baldekîn, beldekîn**: m. n. indicating a precious type of moire cloth of silk and gold thread. The term comes from *Baldac* (Baghdad), from where this material originally came, even though it was, later, used to indicate less valuable fabric employed to produce both clothes and blankets.<sup>33</sup>

*DietrFl.* 656: *phelle unde paldegîn* (“purple and *paldegîn*”);

*Virg.* 579, 4: *in vrische niuwe beldekîn* (“in fresh new *beldekîn*”).

**hermelîn, harmlin**: nt. n., diminutive form of *harme* “ermine”. In the corpus analyzed this noun can refer to both the living animal and its fur, one of the most common symbols of royal dignity, as witnessed by *Virg.* 1029, 2: *Der vürste und ouch diu künegin / kleiten sich von hermelîn / nâch küneclîchen êren*.<sup>34</sup>

*RosA* 171, 3: *in pfeller und in hermelîn, vil rîchheit lac daran* (“in purple and in *hermelîn*, a great abundance was there”);

*Virg.* 654, 3: *von wîzem hermîne* (“of white *hermîne*”).

Referring to the living animal:

*Virg.* 352, 7: *diu dâ hât daz hermelîn / daz spilt in ir schôze?* (“who has the *hermelîn* playing on her lap”).

*DietrFl.* 655: *zobl und harmlin* (“sable and *harmlin*”).

**pfellel, pfeller, phelle**: m. n. referring to a refined silk (but probably also wool) cloth. The etymology of the term, a loanword from Middle Latin *palliolum* (diminutive from *pallium*, -i), suggests this fabric was originally used for both liturgical and secular official garments.<sup>35</sup> This noun was at first only indicating this particular type of textile, without any reference to a specific colour, with time it was more and more often combined with colour adjectives

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<sup>33</sup> See also *Lexer* 1, col. 114.

<sup>34</sup> *Zupitza* 1968, 188: “The princes and the queen put on ermine furs in conformity to their royal dignity.”

<sup>35</sup> See also *Grimm* 13, col. 1665.

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meaning “red, purple-red, crimson” and became a synonym for “purple”, as witnessed by the adjective *phellôlin*, “crimson”.<sup>36</sup>

*DietrFl.* 656: *phelle unde paldegîn* (“*phelle* and moire silk cloth”);

*Laur.* 1051: *sy taten ane phellel gewant* (“they wore *phellel* clothing”);

*RosA* 171, 3: *in pfeller und in hermelîn, vil rîchheit lac daran* (“in *pfeller* and in ermine, a great abundance was there”);

*RosD* 31, 3: *diu linde ist unbehangen mit pfeller alsô rôt*, (“the linden tree is decorated with red *pfeller*”);

*RosD* 32, 4: *darûf lît pfeller und sîde, daz besserz nie enwas* (“there lay *pfeller* and silk the best that ever existed”).

**scharlach**: nt. or m. n. “scarlet”.<sup>37</sup> The origin and exact nature of the textile defined by this term have been investigated by generations of scholars. In the 20th century, this extended scholarly interest resulted in two contrasting theories. According to the first and oldest theory, the term derives from Persian *sakçirlât* (or from one of its diachronic and/or diatopic variants), which various Persian dictionaries define as “warm woollen broadcloth” or “scarlet-coloured cloth”.<sup>38</sup> Accepting this theory, we should assume European scarlet was the imitation of a luxurious textile from the Islamic East, probably Persia. More recently a different etymology of the term was proposed. According to this second theory, scarlet was of Flemish origin. If it were so, the term would derive from the Flemish compound *scarlaken*, *schaerlaken*, *scaerlaken* (< *schaer* “shear” and *laken* “cloth”), meaning “a cloth to be shorn, or re-shorn”.<sup>39</sup> As convincingly demonstrated by Munro, none of these explanations is fully satisfying since, independently from the etymological origin of the term, scarlet was mainly characterized by its being dyed with a colour obtained from the desiccated eggs of various insects of the Coccidae family.<sup>40</sup> The high cost of scarlet and, consequently, its function as a status symbol were, therefore,

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<sup>36</sup> See also *Lexer* 2, col. 235.

<sup>37</sup> See also *Lexer* 2, col. 663 and *Grimm* 14, col. 2200.

<sup>38</sup> See for example *Vullers* 2, 303-304; *Johnson* 1852, 705; *Wollaston* 1889, 1131.

<sup>39</sup> See also *Weckerlin*, 1905, 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> *Munro* 1983, 13-17 and *Munro* 1994.

mainly due to the costs of this particular dyestuff and only secondarily to those of the precious English wools used in weaving it. Consistently with this, Munro also puts forward a hypothesis to explain the etymology of the word: in Medieval Latin, in Romance languages and in English the term for “scarlet” derived from the Arabic name for an ancient Islamic textile dyed in kermes, *sikḫlat* or *sikḫlātūn*. Even though it was made of silk and not of wool, this had taken its name from that of a late Roman or Byzantine woollen textile decorated with seals and rings, the *sigillatus* (Greek σιγίλλατον). Later, this very kermes-dyed silk was also – probably under the influence of Italian *scarlatto* – called *sakirlat*. Apart from English, all Germanic languages (German *Scharlach*, Dutch *scharlaken*, Swedish *scharlakan*) seem to have contaminated Arabic *sikḫlātūn* with Old High German *scharlachen*, a term appearing for the first time in the *Summarium Heinrici* (between 1007 and 1032) as a vernacular rendering of Latin *rasilis* “shorn, shaved cloth”.<sup>41</sup>

*DietrFl.* 657: *und manigen guoten scharlach*, (“and much good *scharlach*”).

**sîde**: f. n. “silk”, loanword from Latin *seta* (probably already deriving from Oriental languages).<sup>42</sup>

*RosD* 32, 4: *darûf lît pfeller und sîde*, *daz besserz nie enwas* (“there lay purple and *side*, the best that ever existed”);

*Virg.* 1029, 4: *von sîde ein kostberlich gewant* (“a precious cloth of *side*”);

**sîdîn**: adj. from *sîde* “of silk, made of silk”.

*Laur.* 201: *Sin woppin roch was sidin* (“his cloak was *sidin*”);

*RaSchl.* 650, 5: *Daz tet ein hemde sidine* (“a *sidine* shirt did this”);

*Virg.* 678, 11: *daz aller schænste sîdîn werc* (“the most beautiful *sîdîn* work”);

*Virg.* 679, 11: *daz aller schænest sîdîn werc* (“the most beautiful *sîdîn* work”);

*Virg.* 837, 10: *vor der sîdîn huote* (“in front of the *sîdîn* hood”).

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<sup>41</sup> Munro 2007, 63-66.

<sup>42</sup> See also Grimm 16, col. 174.

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**zobel:** m. n. “sable”. In the Middle High German Dietrich epic this term is always used to indicate sable fur, rather than the living animal.

*DietrFl.* 655: *zobl unde harmlin* (“zobel and ermine”).

### **4. Conclusion**

With this study I have tried to give an account of the role played in the Middle High German Dietrich epic by garments and fashion accessories. Even though a group of poems mainly centred on duels and military enterprises could appear unlikely to contain references to fashion, an accurate analysis of textual evidence has allowed me to demonstrate that clothing is not only frequently mentioned in the texts of the Dietrich cycle, but, in some cases, it is even functional to the narrative development of the plot.

This analysis of textual evidence has been conducted on different levels. Firstly, the relationship between the Dietrich epic and clothing has been investigated from a macroscopic point of view, taking into consideration the contexts in which garments and fashion accessories appear both in the historical and the adventurous Dietrich epic. This has allowed the observation that long and detailed descriptions of military equipment and clothing tend to be more frequent in the poems narrating Dietrich’s adventures against fantastic opponents, such as giants, dwarfs and dragons. In this respect they contribute to create a rich and fantastic atmosphere, to give dignity to Dietrich’s opponents, and thus to stress his military value. This is in fact one of the main functions of the insertion of garments and accessories in the Dietrich poems. Some items of clothing have magic powers, and therefore do not simply represent a knightly status symbol, but also play a role in the narrative, since their possession can overturn a fight, and thus constitute a turning point in the narration.

On the microscopic level, the Middle High German terminology for garments and fashion accessories employed in the poems of the Dietrich cycle has been analyzed in detail. A corpus of twenty-two terms – mainly nouns – referring to clothing has been identified in the texts under consideration. This corpus could be divided in two semantic subfields: nouns indicating types of garments and accessories and nouns and adjectives for materials and textiles.

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The present lexical investigation has pinpointed that the Middle High German Dietrich epic clearly reflects (at least to some extent) some trends of medieval fashion (e.g., the use of decorative accessories such as belts and bags). In one passage the medieval poet himself comments on the custom – which he calls “courtly fashion” – of wearing belts and bags on clothes. On the other hand, no detailed description of single garments is given: none of the texts analyzed contains information on hems, cuts or sleeve forms. Beauty and luxury are the only features considered relevant in the Dietrich epic. For this reason, the variety of terms referring to different fabrics should not, in my opinion, be considered representative of a real fashion habit: the presence of *scharlach* rather than *phelle* in a certain passage is not necessarily significant of the use of one particular fabric for one specific garment. All materials mentioned have a high symbolic value and a luxury connotation (ermine furs, and precious, sometimes exotic, textiles). Bearing this in mind, the selection of this or that term can be ascribed to stylistic (poetic variation) and metrical reasons, as witnessed by the fact that many terms appear at line end, in rhyming position.

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