

***Recreating the Spanish Headdress known as  
La Cofia con Tranzado  
From the Iberian Peninsula  
late 1300s to mid 1500s***

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## ***A Brief History***

One of the earliest depictions of the cofia con tranzado is from *Massacre of the Innocents* on the retable from the Monastery of Suso ca. 1370-1390. One of the women depicted is wearing a cofia that comes down over her brow. Her tranzado is clearly seen flowing down her back with its familiar criss cross ties. We continue to see the cofia con tranzado up through 1529 when Christoph Weiditz made his Trachtenbuch (Anderson's fig. 319).

It is not possible, from examining the paintings to state a hard and fast rule that I can see. In general, I would say that the larger the cofia, the earlier it is. The 1500 painting of Salome (Anderson's fig. 316) shows a cofia that is just barely on the back of her head. This is held in place by her large head roll. Other such barely-there cofias have no visible means of support such as the 1510 painting of Salome (Anderson's fig. 321). However, in 1529, Christoph Weiditz's "Lady of High Rank" wears a very large and decorated cofia con tranzado.

The two pieces do exist on their own in the pictorial evidence. One portrait of the Royal Family around the altar shows Isabel I and Infanta Isabel wearing just the tranzado. (Anderson's fig. 311) Whereas, another of Weiditz's sketches of a Valencian Noblewoman (Anderson's fig. 322) seems to show just the cofia.

My favorite picture is Anderson's fig. 315 from *The Marriage at Cana*. The young girl pouring water into the large cistern has allowed the cofia to slip off the back of her head, which to me seems to confirm that there was no internal support for the cofia. It appears to only be held on by the tie of the tranzado at the base of her skull. The tie is most clearly seen in the 1500 painting of Salome.

Anderson discusses the cloths and ribbons used for this headdress. The cofia and tranzado can be made of almost any material from holland to cotton to silk. The ribbon ties were usually silk. Most of them were a single color, but the 1500 picture of Salome (she asserts) used ribbons with words woven into them. The Moors had a tradition of weaving letters into fabric so this is not surprising. I don't see that the lettering is on a separate ribbon, but then I'm looking at a picture in her book not the actual painting where I can see more details like this.

## ***What I Tried***

My first goal was to simply create a cofia that would fit my head in the same manner as the painting depicted in Anderson fig. 327, from *The Entombment* by Juan de Flandes ca. 1510, and fig. 348, which is the famous painting of Isabella by Bartolomé Bermejo ca. 1495. These show a cap that fits tightly to the head. One being a back view and one a

frontal, the only seams showing go straight down center of the skull.

Although it struck me as a waste of fabric, I tried several times to cut two, rounded half circles -rather like a very skewed oval- that that could be sewn together to get that appearance. (A much less wasteful method would have been to piece together triangles in the manner of making a circle cloak. However, the depictions just don't show this construction

*Illustration 2: Third & Fourth Pattern Attempts*


method. I would have seen several more seams.)

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*Illustration 1: First & Second Pattern Attempts*

When I was satisfied with the fit, I turned my attention to attaching the braid case. From all the pictures, it appeared that the tranzado was simply a rectangle of cloth wrapped around the braid. Considering this, there were three options open to me in my opinion.


The first was to sew the cap completely as though it was all I were making and then attach the braid case to the bottom edge. When I tried on my mock up, it hung surprisingly well. I had been afraid there would be a drag on my stitching. However, as I will tell anyone who asks, I have to think before practically every stitch. I had sewn the fabrics together incorrectly so had it been correct, I still feel there might have been undue strain on the seam. I also scrapped the idea because there was an abundance of material that would have to be accounted for when tying the ribbons around the casing.



*Illustration 3: First Option to attach directly to finished cap.*


At this point, I decided to modify my pattern to a little to fit farther back on the head similar to Anderson's fig. 321 from Presentation of the Head of St. John the Baptist by the Astorga Master ca. 1510-1530.

The second option that I felt might be a viable solution would be to cut the cofia so that instead of being two half circles, they would each be truncated by the amount of seam need to attach the tranzado. When I tried this, it did hang reasonably well. However, going back to fig. 327 in Anderson, I noted that the tranzado would have to start much lower on the base of the skull in order to wrap the braid around the head like that without there being a visible seam. I scrapped this idea, too.



*Illustration 4: Modified Cofia, truncated, with tranzado attached to base*

The third option still didn't meet all the criteria set out in the pictorial evidence, but it came the closest of the three. In this mock up, I actually set the tranzado into the center back seam of the cofia as though it were merely a gore. It hung well. I could start the casing much farther back on the skull. It didn't have much undue strain when the braid was placed inside. The extra fabric from attaching a rectangle to my half circles was absorbed into the seam itself. This is how I decided to make my final project.



*Illustration 5: Third option with tranzado set into the center back seam.*

## ***The Final Project***

Material Specifications:

A linen rayon blend cloth (55 % linen / 45% rayon)

Cotton Thread

For my final project, I went back to my original pattern for the cofia. I also chose to try my hand at hand sewing. The interior seams are done in a running stitch that I then double back on itself for a bit more stability as my stitches are not as small and close as I would have hoped. I whipstitched on the trim that I am using to tie the casing. (Please see Appendix A for a discussion of how I made the trim and designed the pattern.)

My chosen trim is meant to evoke the feel of my coat of arms. It is not a period pattern nor do I have a period reference for making such trim. I'm using it because the idea of having words on my ribbon ties was intriguing and that led me to want to use my heraldry instead.

## ***What I Learned***

I am still not convinced that I've used the right type of pattern for this piece even though I like the fit and hang of the cofia. As an ongoing project, I would like to explore whether the appearance of some of the later cofias could be achieved by wrapping a large rectangle of fabric starting at the back of the skull. However, I am confident that I have at least approximated the look of Anderson's fig. 327.

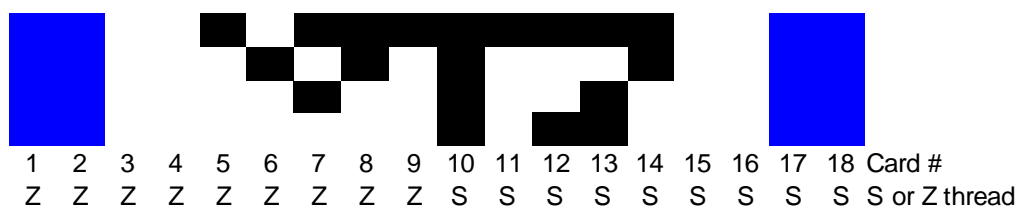
## ***Bibliography***

Anderson, Ruth M. Hispanic Costume 1480 – 1530. New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1979. ISBN: 87535-126-3.

## *Appendix A: "Documentation" for the Anchor Trim used on the cofia and to tie the tranzado*

The cofia con tranzado could often be quite decorated or rather plain depending on station. The painting of Salome presenting the head of John the Baptist shows her tranzado tied with ribbons that have been woven with words. Other paintings show a simple solid color ribbon tied around the tranzado. My goal, which admittedly fell short, was to create a pattern that would evoke a feeling of my device which is Azure, two pallets argent each charged with three anchors sable.

I designed the following pattern. The online pattern generator that I tested it against assured me that this would look like an anchor.



However, upon trying to actually warp the loom and weave the pattern it did not work as intended. It looked more like a smiley face and a solid bar when using the traditional  $4\frac{1}{4}$  turns forward and  $4\frac{1}{4}$  turns backward. I eventually stumbled upon the fact that by using  $5\frac{1}{4}$  turns in each direction it would produce something resembling the anchor I was looking for. It still requires some imagination to see it in the trim.

Overall, I was quite pleased with the tightness of the weave and the final outcome. I will continue to try to perfect this pattern because I just think it would be cool to have my own device as part of my trim.

As to the periodness of this pattern, most people will tell you that patterns woven directly into the trim are not period. Most patterns we see are actually the result of rather more complex card manipulation which may involve only one or two cards being turned at a time, such as weaving letters. On the positive side, tablet weaving or card weaving was known in Spain as it was part of the Islamic culture! (According to Mistress Violante, anyway.)

### Materials:

Cotton Crochet Thread in blue, white, and black

18-4 holed cards

Floor loom and wooden shuttle