

= Metal corset =

Metal corsets ( also known as iron corsets ) are a type of historical corset or bodice made entirely out of metal , usually iron or steel . The metal corset was popularly claimed to have been introduced to France by Catherine de ' Medici in the 16th century , although this is now considered a myth . The idea that such garments were worn for fashionable purposes is debatable , with fashion historians now regarding such claims sceptically . Many of the original metal bodices that have survived are now believed to have been intended for medical purposes as orthopaedic support garments and back braces . Such garments were described by the French army surgeon Ambroise Paré in the sixteenth century as a remedy for the " crookednesse of the Bodie . "

Some of the more extreme examples of metal corsets that have survived are now generally thought to be later reproductions designed to appeal to fetishists , rather than garments intended for fashionable wear .

Metal medical corsets were still being made in the twentieth century , whilst , since the late 20th century , fashion designers such as Alexander McQueen and Issey Miyake have made contemporary metal bodices and corsets from wire and aluminium coils .

= = Origins = =

Early fashion historians and writers have often attributed the introduction of fashionable corset @-@ wearing to Catherine de ' Medici , who is said to have brought metal corsets to France from Italy in the 16th century . The fashion historian Valerie Steele noted that after 19th @-@ century writers catering to audiences for tightlacing and sexual fetishism played up the sadomasochistic idea of a " cruel , tortuous fashion " enforced by a dominant queen who demanded unrealistically small waists from her subjects , this mythical royal connection captured public imagination and became part of fashion mythology .

It is now widely believed that authentic metal corsets were intended as a form of orthopaedic brace to address spinal issues such as scoliosis . The 16th @-@ century French army surgeon Ambroise Paré described metal corsets as intended " to amend the crookednesse of the Bodie , " recommending that the iron should be perforated in order to make the garments lighter , and that they be made to fit and padded for comfort . Paré criticised the concept of corsetry as a waist @-@ training device , warning that such a practice risked deforming the figure .

= = 16th and 17th centuries = =

A steel corset in the Stibbert Museum , Florence , Italy , is dated to the mid @-@ 16th century , and thought to be similar to the metal stays recorded as having been made by a corazzaio mastro ( master armour @-@ maker ) for Eleanor of Toledo and delivered to her on 28 February 1549 . However , as Eleanor 's wardrobe records do not list any boned or stiffened corsets , it is thought that her steel bodice was designed for medical or therapeutic reasons rather than worn as a fashionable garment .

Although surviving metal bodices are usually dated to the late 16th and early 17th century , Steele has stated that some of the more extreme and elaborate examples are fakes created from the 19th century onwards to cater to fetishistic " fantasies about women imprisoned in metal corsets . " For example , Herbert Norris claimed in *Tudor Costume and Fashion* ( 1938 ) that a misbehaving wife would be locked into a metal corset by her husband until she promised to behave . One such iron corset , with a 14 @-@ inch waist , was acquired by the FIT Museum as dating from 1580 ? 1600 , but is now considered to be a forgery from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries . Steele noted suspicious similarities between this corset and an illustration first published in 1868 in *The Corset and the Crinoline* , a " fetishistic " book claiming to offer a historical overview of fashion , and draws parallels between such corsets and fake medieval chastity belts . Harold Koda , curator of the Costume Institute , states that the excessive , mechanically @-@ produced regularity of the garment 's structure is evidence for its being a 19th @-@ century fabrication . Koda 's take on the significant

percentage of extant nineteenth century metal corsets made in emulation of purported sixteenth @-@ century models is that they were created to cater to a specialist market , perhaps for inclusion in collector 's cabinets .

The fashion historians C. Willett Cunnington and his wife Phillis also stated firmly that surviving " iron bodies , " when not medical garments , were usually " fanciful ' reproductions ' " with no proof of their having genuinely been worn . Despite the explicit scepticism of fashion historians such as Steele and the Cunningtons , scholars outside the field of dress history sometimes treat these corsets as legitimate fashion garments . The anthropologist Marianne Thesander concluded that because such bodices fit the fashionable silhouette of their alleged period , they were probably authentic , and served the same purpose as other corsets .

= = 18th and 19th century = =

In Fashion and Fetishism , David Kunzle noted that in Peter Rondeau 's 1739 French @-@ German dictionary , the French term corps de fer is explained in German as " Schnürburst , mit kleinen eisernen blechen , für übel gewachsenes Frauenzimmer " ( A bodice , with small iron plates , for badly @-@ grown ( i.e. , deformed ) girls ) . He reads this as implying that the iron plates would have been part of a fabric corset , rather than an all @-@ metal garment .

Kunzle has noted the absence of literary evidence for showing that metal corsets were also worn for fashion purposes . He has suggested that surviving metal garments , if not specifically medical in purpose , might have served the same masochistically gratifying purpose as the deliberately uncomfortable , tortuous hair shirt , combining a fashionable silhouette with penance , and as such , might have been worn in convents . To support his " pure speculation " , Kunzle cites a 1871 newspaper report from The Times reporting that during the Paris Commune , the National Guard found two iron corsets , a rack , and other instruments in the Convent of the White Nuns in Picpus . The claim by the Mother Superior that the instruments were for orthopaedic purposes was dismissed at the time as " a superficial falsehood . "

Metal corsets for medical purposes continued to be used in the 18th and early 19th century , although equivalent garments made from canvas were increasingly used in their place . In 1894 , A.M. Phelps of the American Orthopaedic Association recommended an aluminium corset coated with waterproof enamel for sufferers of Pott disease or curvature of the spine . Made from a cast of the patient 's body , the advantages of such a garment were that aluminium was lightweight , durable , thin enough to be worn beneath clothing , and could be worn while bathing . Such corsets were still being recommended in the early 20th century as cheaper and more durable in the longer run than plaster moulds , although their initial expense was greater .

= = 20th and 21st centuries = =

Since the 20th century , actual metal corsets have occasionally been made for contemporary wear , although such instances are rare . Steele notes that alongside a 1930s metal corset made for and worn by a fetish corsetiere called Cayne , the late 20th- and early 21st @-@ century tight @-@ lacer Cathie Jung had a silver corset @-@ cover made to wear over her actual laced corset . Between 1933 and 1940 Mrs. Cayne advertised a booklet describing her 14 @-@ inch waistline and offered other services in the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News .

As a medical garment , metal corsets endured well into the 20th century . The Mexican painter Frida Kahlo was a notable wearer of such medical corsets , following ongoing problems as a result of a serious road crash she experienced as a teenager . By 1944 , Kahlo 's doctors had recommended that she wear a steel corset instead of the plaster ones she had mainly worn since the accident ; and Kahlo , whose paintings were heavily autobiographical , used the new corset as the basis for one of her best known self @-@ portraits , The Broken Column . In the painting , Kahlo portrays herself weeping with agony , her torso split open revealing that her spine is a crumbling Ionic column , and her damaged body held together by the steel corset . A form of metal corset or orthopaedic brace used in the second half of the 20th century is called a Harris brace after its

inventor , R.I. Harris . Harris braces are designed to immobilise the waist whilst healing , and are made with two bendable metal bands worn above and below the waist , and connected with rigid metal supports .

20th and 21st century designers have sometimes offered metal corsets and bodices as part of their presentations , including Alexander McQueen , Issey Miyake , and Thierry Mugler . One of McQueen 's most famous pieces was a 1999 aluminium corset , called the Coiled Corset , created in collaboration with the jeweller Shaun Leane and the artist Kees van der Graaf . Built around a cast of the model Laura Morgan 's torso , the garment had a 15 @-@ inch waist and was composed of 97 stacked coils , which had to be screwed together onto Morgan 's body . The Coiled Corset was inspired by the neck rings worn by Ndebele women , extended to encase the wearer 's torso . In 2001 , the corset formed part of a live presentation at the Victoria and Albert Museum showcasing McQueen and Leane 's collaborations . Corsets and bustiers can also be made using wire , such as a 1983 aluminium wire bustier by Miyake which was cuffed around the torso over a feathered garment , offering a pun on the theme of birdcages .

= = In museums = =

Metal corsets are found in a number of museum collections around the world . Some museums , including the Museo Stibbert , and the Kyoto Costume Institute in Japan , present their metal bodices as fashionable late 16th @-@ century garments . The Victoria and Albert Museum in London describes their iron corset ( formerly owned by the painter Talbot Hughes ) as dating from the 18th century and likely intended for orthopaedic purposes . Others , such as the iron corset in the Fashion Institute of Technology , are presented as fakes .