

**Excerpt**

Orphanages came from the tradition of catholic or Christian charity which was rooted in cities all over Europe in the Middle Ages. The care for the needy and sick was largely in the hands of the Roman Catholic clergy. Monks, but more often nuns were kept busy with, among other duties, nursing the sick, both inside and outside their nunneries.

In Dutch cities foundlings and orphans were also the focus of concern and care. However, in early medieval times special orphanages were rare. Orphans were usually sent to private individuals to be taken care of. During the 16th century the Dutch authorities, the nobles and local elite turned their attention to groups of orphans who were staying in the cities. Holland was at war with Spain, The Eighty Years War (or *Dutch War for Independence* 1568-1648) was wreaking havoc in the country, and more children than ever were orphaned.

A great need grew to establish specialised homes for the orphans where they could be educated towards becoming good citizens with an honourable occupation. After all, when the war was over, the country needed to be rebuilt.

In the days when reading and writing were not every day skills for most medieval citizens, there was a need to distinguish orphans from 'regular' children: their garments were made in different colours, better known as 'mi-parti'. The colours were not picked randomly, the city's coat of arms provided the colours most often; or the coat of arms of a wealthy sponsor.

Rich citizens, who donated funds to the orphanages, made sure the best fabric for clothing was used. Not only did those wealthy citizens believe it would get them a place in heaven, they also made sure the whole town knew who paid for the fabric and garments. It was excellent marketing, resulting often in other wealthy citizens to pay for (extra) education, special festive food on Christian holidays or jobs for the older orphans.

The different coloured clothing made it easy to recognize orphans in case of mischief, but it was also a means to make sure they stayed on their best behaviour. The mentor or regent of the orphanage would of course get all the credit for such exemplary behaviour!

My persona's name is *Van Allecmere*, meaning "from Alkmaar" (40km north of Amsterdam). The original Arts & Sciences paper on the subject of clothing for medieval Dutch orphans was



accompanied by a doll dressed in Alkmaar orphanage clothing. I am sharing the picture with you here.

### Doll

Breeches/undies: This is the subject of historical debate for as long as I have been a re-enactor, but I chose to include a bit of underwear. I just don't like dolls without undies... Made out of raw silk, handsewn. Drawstring handmade with lucet, wool.

Undershirt: Made of white linen of fine quality. Handstitched!

Shoes & stockings: Were already on the doll when I bought her at the flea market. I decided to leave them as they are, the doll was in bad shape when I bought her and I didn't want to make things worse.

Skirt: Made of red wool of fine quality. Closes with one hook. Handstitched!

Jacket: Made of red & black wool of fine quality. Handstitched! Closes with five hooks



*undies*



*undershirt*





*the finished doll in Alkmaar clothing*



Sources:

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M. van der Laan : "*De Alkmaarders en hun armenzorg*" paper 1989

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