

Condition Report

Examiner: Sandra Vanderwarf

Date:

Object: Salmon chiffon and velvet beaded tunic

Accession No.: S.C. P84.21.33 FIT

Owner:

Origin: Europe (?)



Front, before treatment



Reverse, before treatment

Date: Circa 1915 (?) While an example of an extant dress similar in style and motif was not found, illustrations in a period fashion journal bear significant similarities (Fig. 1-2).



Fig.1 From *Vogue*, January 1, 1915, (16). Here, the garment is called a “tunic dripping with...beads.” Notice it is layered over an underskirt/dress. The sheerness of the dress at the focus of this report all but demands such an underlayer.



Fig.2 From *Vogue*, February 1915 (57). Note the distinct hemline.

Description

Bodice: Similar in style to that of a tank dress, the bodice is pale salmon chiffon with a scoop neck and curved V-backline. The straps of the bodice and the neck and backlines are edged with a ½-inch pre-made trim consisting of rhinestones and beads, which is used throughout the dress (Fig. 5).¹ Down the center front, beads and rhinestones form a continuous vine of seven floral (?) clusters, out of which a series of six large,

¹ Henceforth referred to simply as pre-made trim.

graduated, sinuous chevrons grows. The final two chevrons, whose points are rounded, are encapsulated in what appears to be a wide dropped waist, though structurally the dress has no true waistline.

The illusion of a dropped waist is created by two horizontal rows of pre-made trim. On the front, the top row forms a straight line at approximately the natural waist, while the lower row, about 20.5 centimeters below the top line at the center, curves upward. Both rows extend around the hips and continue to the reverse of the dress where they converge and curve away from each other. Three graduated beaded rhinestone chevrons embellish the reverse of the bodice, extending down the center to the top row of the beaded waistline.

Skirt: The skirt, flaring into a wide A-line, is made of salmon chiffon and a deeper hue of salmon velvet appliqué. A continuous vine of beaded fleur-de-lis embellishes the center front line of the skirt from the bottom beaded waistline to near the hemline, which takes the form of ten pointed scallops (five front, five reverse) edged with pre-made trim and looped beaded fringe.

In an effervescent, art nouveau style, curved tendrils and leaves of velvet appliqué appear to grow up the skirt from each scallop of the hem. Beads and rhinestones extend and outline the velvet appliqué and form roundels in the scallops.

On either side of the center beaded fleur-de-lis vine, there is a parallel row of rhinestones and beads extending from the bottom of the waistline to the top of the velvet appliqué, creating the illusion of vertically dividing the skirt's front into fourths. Except for these two vertical rows of beading running parallel to the central fleur-de-lis vine, the motif on the reverse of the skirt mirrors that on the front.

Capelet: A capelet or shawl-like collar matching the dress fabric follows and is attached to the neck and backline of the bodice. The capelet is beaded and appliquéd in the manner of the lower skirt and is also trimmed with looped bead fringe.

Dress Construction: The dress is constructed of two symmetrical pieces, front and reverse, seamed at the sides and tops of shoulder straps. The beads and some rhinestones are attached by a chain stitch (Fig. 4). In other areas, especially in the chevron motifs and adjoining floral sprays, pronged metal nailheads spots, which resemble jewel settings, have been clamped through the chiffon itself to encase a rhinestone on the front.

The matching capelet is constructed of four pieces: front left and right, seamed at the shoulders to reverse left and right pieces, which are seamed at the center back.

Approximate Dimensions (cm)

Shoulders (at straps): 34
Width of shoulder straps: 4
Bust (underarm to underarm): 46
“Waist” (taken from reverse): 49
Skirt at widest: 114
Center front to hem: 108

Analytical Testing

- The foundation of the dress is plain weave silk chiffon, confirmed by microscopy (Fig.3).
- The velvet appliqué is chiffon velvet,² composed of deep salmon silk substrate and clear, colorless, rayon cut pile, confirmed with a 70% sulfuric acid solubility test.³
- The beads and rhinestones are glass and are stitched on with cotton thread. Nine different beads and rhinestones embellish the dress (photo key, Fig.5-6):
 - 1-clear diagonally fluted bugle (tube shaped) bead with silver interior coating
 - 2-clear, flat rectangular beads with exterior iridescent coating
 - 3 and 4-square and round faceted, clear rhinestones in silver metal settings
 - 5-round pearllike beads
 - 6-translucent white seed beads
 - 7-clear seed beads with silver interior coating
 - 8-silver “ball bearing” beads
 - 9-small opaque white seed beads
- pH, tested on chiffon at lower left skirt front: between five and six, an acceptable range for protein fibers.
- Burning test for metallic weighting agent: A small chiffon fragment sample was used to determine if weighting agents were present in this dress. While unweighted burnt silk leaves an irregular, crispy, grey-black ash, burnt weighted silk retains a “skeleton” of the fabric weave structure or yarn (Fig. 7). When returned to the

² “Chiffon velvet is a soft light weight fabric made with a rayon pile and a silk back.” Norma Hollen, Jane Saddler, and Anna L. Langford, *Textiles*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), 313.

³ This solvent dissolves rayon and other cellulose, while silk, a protein fiber, remains virtually unaffected (Hollen, et al, 17).

flame, the “skeleton” of weighted silk fibers burns orange-red, like metals. My fabric sample met both of these criteria.⁴

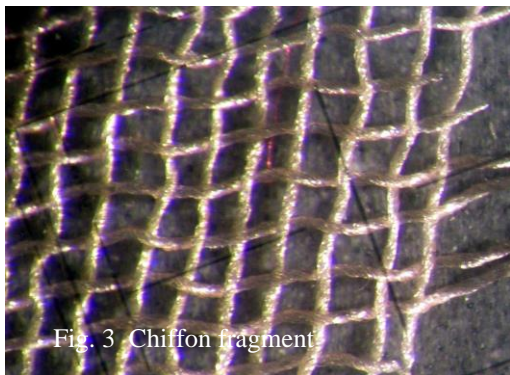


Fig. 3 Chiffon fragment



Fig. 4 Center front hem



Fig. 5 Center front hem

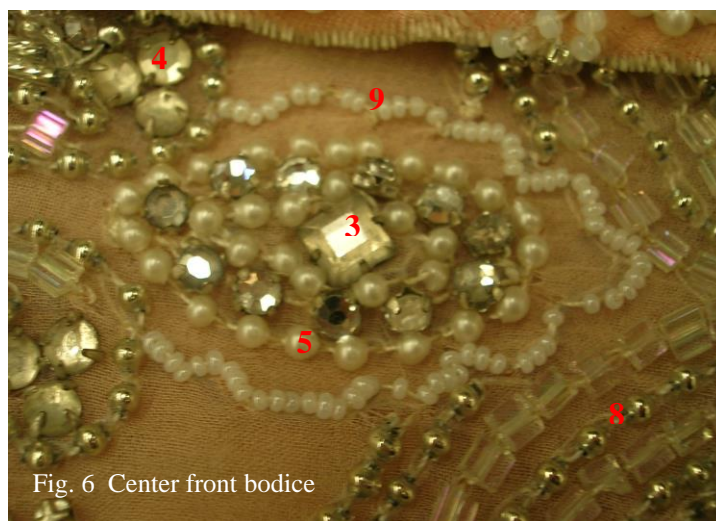


Fig. 6 Center front bodice

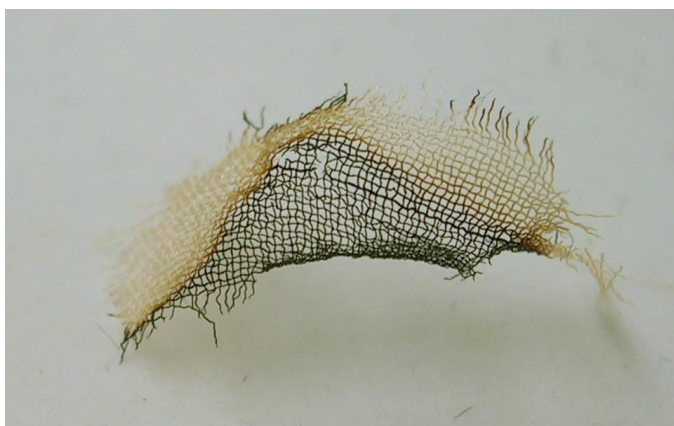


Fig. 7 Burnt chiffon sample retaining skeleton of weave structure indicates the presence of weighting agents.

⁴ Shawna Lemiski, “Summary of Thesis Research on Weighted Silk,” *Textile Conservation Newsletter* (Fall 1996): 5-9.

Condition

General rating: On a scale of one to five with five being the poorest, this dress is rated 4.5 due to its extreme fragility, extensive previous conservation, fiber damage, and rhinestone loss. The dress cannot be hung at all. It could only be laid out flat for examination, having done so with much difficulty, because even ginger handling results in further tears in the chiffon and a fresh sprinkling of rhinestones.

Fibers and accessory elements: Main areas of fiber loss are in the chiffon, especially at midsection between the beaded waistlines (Fig. 9), center front bodice extending laterally to underarms, proper right bodice side seam and lower proper right skirt front. The main source of damage to these areas is heavy, all-over beadwork. While much of the beading remains remarkably intact, there is extensive loss of rhinestones, used especially in the chevron motifs, because it has been clamped through the chiffon, an application method unsuitable for such a sheer, delicate fabric. The rhinestone loss, in turn, leaves additional small voids in the chiffon. Generally, there are small losses in the chiffon throughout the skirt front.

On the reverse, the major problem areas are: the chiffon at the beaded waist/hip area, a large loss near the side seam of the proper left skirt (an extension of the same area of loss on the front), as well as smaller losses throughout.

The outside surface of the matching capelet is mostly covered with velvet appliqué, rhinestones, and beadwork, with comparably small areas of just the chiffon foundation fabric. Many of these chiffon-only areas appear to have completely deteriorated and, on the front, have been conserved with patches of nude chiffon stitched to the underside of the capelet (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 Deteriorated chiffon region, capelet reverse, right.

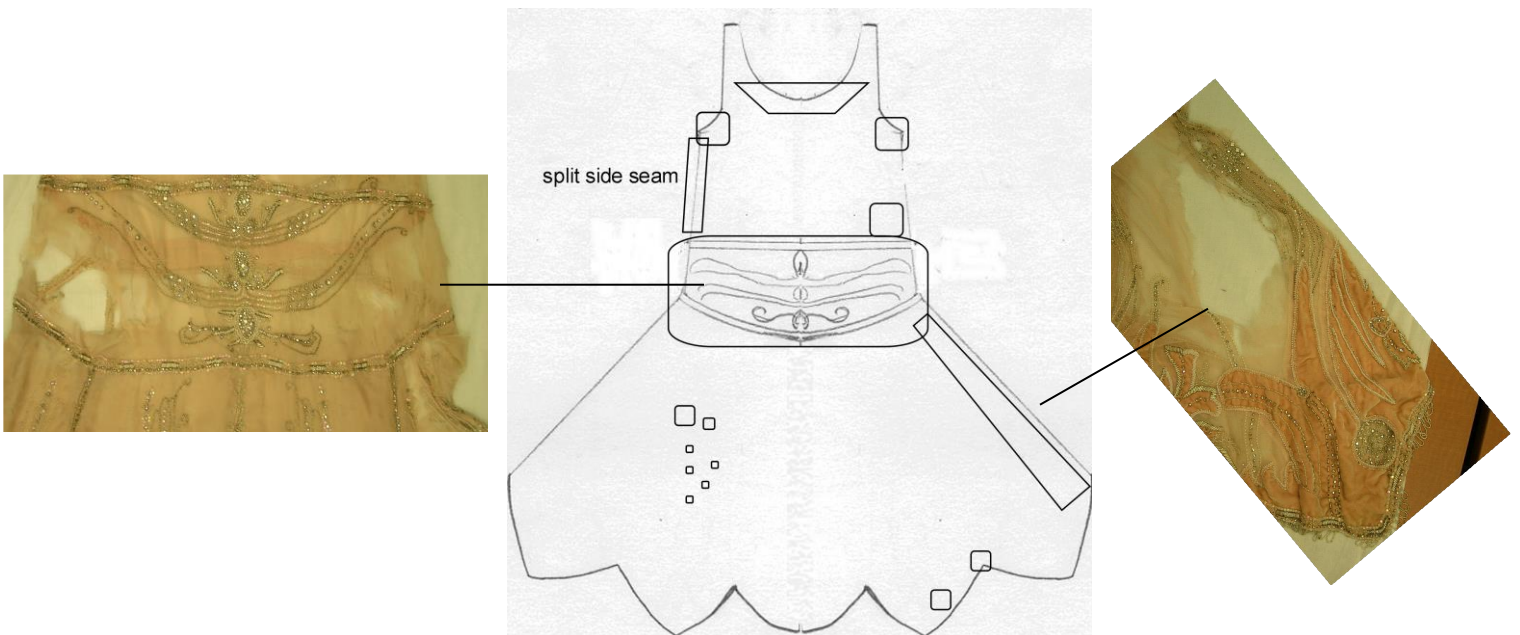
(Condition...)

Throughout the dress, the chiffon velvet appliqué is in surprisingly good condition, with no damage found upon examination.

The silk chiffon fibers themselves are brittle, powdering, and crack or shatter easily; this suggests the presence of weighting agents. Weighting is the addition of metallic salts or other agents to silk fabric to make up for the loss of weight during the degumming process. This results in a heavier fabric (thus greater sales profits because it is sold by weight), but may cause the silk to deteriorate much more quickly than unweighted silk.⁵ While no longer a common practice, prior to World War II, silks were weighted from thirty to fifty percent of their original weight.⁶ While brittleness, shattering, and powdering are characteristics commonly observed in historic weighted silks, visual analysis with the naked eye alone cannot confirm the presence of weighting agents; studies show that there are historic weighted silks in good condition and historic unweighted silks in highly deteriorated states.⁷

Problems in dress construction: Both side seams of the bodice have split, from the beaded trim under the arm to the top of the beaded waistline.

Staining: There are a few tiny areas of yellowish-brown staining on the proper left shoulder of the capelet front, also visible on the interior.



⁵ Janet Miller and Barbara Reagan, “Degradation in Weighted and Unweighted Historic Silks,” *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, (Fall 1989): 97-115. Interestingly, the authors also suggest that further elemental analysis of the weighting recipe used in historic silks of known age may be a potential method for dating silk fabrics.

⁶ Isabel Wingate, *Textile Fabrics and their Selection*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), 287.

⁷ Lemiski; Miller and Reagan.



Fig.9 (beginning on previous page) Main area of damage on at midsection, front and reverse, and lower front skirt, proper right, which continues to the reverse.

Previous Conservation

Bodice: At the neckline, shoulder straps, and underarms, the jagged edges of shattered chiffon have been stitched to a cotton tulle-like textile (Fig. 10a). The tulle was used both as a support and to fill in areas of complete loss. The split side seam of the proper right bodice was treated in the same manner.

Skirt: As a support, vertical panels of nude chiffon have been stitched to the inside of the skirt front, from the bottom beaded waistline to the hem. The proper right segment of the skirt front and the entire skirt back remain unsupported. Nude chiffon pattern pieces corresponding to the rest of the skirt and pattern templates corresponding to the bodice were found, indicating the intention to completely line the dress with a support fabric.

Capelet: As stated previously, some of the chiffon-only sections of the capelet have been replaced with nude chiffon patches stitched the to underside (Fig. 11) or with Stabiltex.



Fig. 10(a) Shattered chiffon stitched to tulle support fabric, center front bodice.

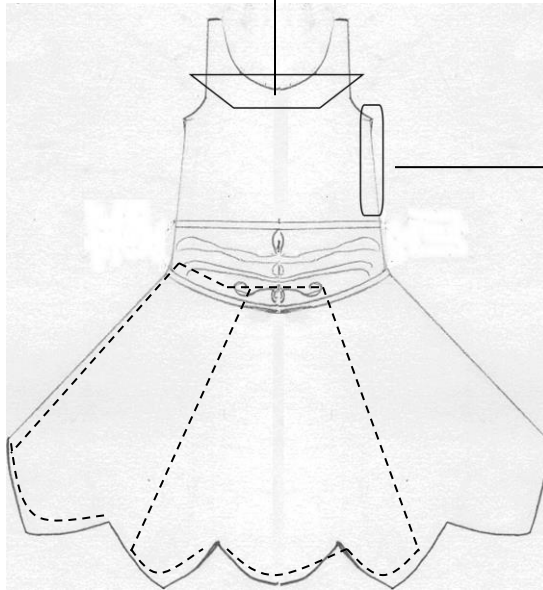


Fig.10(b) Previous conservation, front. Dotted lines indicate support fabric panels stitched on the inside.



Fig. 10(c) Side seam, proper right front; conserved with tulle-like support fabric.



Fig.11 Top: Bracketed area illustrates area where chiffon was completely replaced with new fabric. Bottom: detail of bracketed area above from underside showing nude chiffon replacement patch, front proper left.

Reference List

- Hollen, Norma , Jane Saddler, and Anna L. Langford. 1979. *Textiles*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Lemiski, Shawna. 1996. Summary of Thesis Research on Weighted Silk. *Textile Conservation Newsletter* (Fall): 5-9.
- Miller, Janet and Barbara Reagan. 1989. Degradation in Weighted and Unweighted Historic Silks. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* (Fall): 97-115.
- Wingate, Isabel. 1955. *Textile Fabrics and their Selection*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.