

A Study on Plastron Basque —Centering around Rehabilitation of 1887~9's Day Dress—

Moon-Sook Kim, Hyun-Ju Kim, Sung-Ji Han, Hyun-A Kim, Jin-Kyung Ryou,
Jung-A Cho, Eun-Jung Choi, Shin-Ae Moon, In-Suk Hong,
Wan-Ju Kim, Su-Young Lee and Yu-Jin Chun
Department of Clothing Science, Seoul Women's University

Abstract

In recognition of the necessity to research on dresses of the past to lead future fashion, this study is focused on plastron basque that has constructed or decorated upper garments in various forms from the ancient times to modern times. Especially through reproduction and restoration of Victorian dress with plastron basque, the study approaches the problem in positive manner. As a result, studied 1887~9 day dress is a plastron of pouched style with pleats panel in front center connected to jacket style bodice by buttons; and it shows changes into modern day dress form by constructing fitted line with decorative effects. By actually making the plastron that was only seen in picture, we expect this study will be a valuable resource for developing patterns, sewing and decoration techniques.

Key words: plastron, rehabilitation, pleats panel, pouched style.

I. Introduction

In the history of fashion, fashion trends of the past are revived and repeated as frequently as the new trends and trials. In the flow of modern fashion, we can find many contemporary examples expressed through researches, imitation and reinterpretation of the past and in the *fin de Siecle* of today, we find many parodies of the past design becoming popular.

Under such condition, we have recognized the necessity of studying about past dresses to lead future fashion and therefore focused attention on plastron basque that constructed and decorated upper garment in various forms from the ancient

times. Especially by restoring and reproducing those dresses showing plastron basque of 19 century Victorian Period which are the basis of modern dress. Not only historically examining the plastron basque through indirect literature studies but also further positive research was performed.

In cuirass, the fitted bodice that appeared in bustle style period of Victorian dress. Here, the length of the bodice extended to hip line so princess and darts began to appear in various forms then before, and this forms the basic part of modern dress and its design is used frequently in dress design¹⁾.

The purpose of this study is to display materials that can help create original and creative

E-mail : mskim@swif2.swu.ac.kr

¹⁾ Moon-Sook Kim et al., "A Study on Cuirass Bodice", *The Costume Culture Association*, Vol. 6, No. 2, second issue, 1998, p.154.

design by investigating plastron basque of Victorian period.

As methods of the study, we examined theoretical background of plastron and its structural changes through historical research and by selecting 1887-9 day dress that displays the forms of plastron basque and rehabilitating the dress, the structural composition and characteristics of plastron is positively examined. The patterns and sewing methods of restored dress were based on Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 2*.

II. Theoretical Background of Plastron Basque

1. Historical Investigation of Plastron

The lexical meaning of plastron is breast decoration of woman's clothes; (starched) breast part of shirt for man's use, the breast supporter of steel (armor): the breast supporter of skin (of fencing)², and according to fashion dictionary, plastron is "a kind of breast decoration devised for the variation of breast supporter of suit or dress. Some of it are decorated with lace, frill, embroidery and so on and some are of hard starched picquet cotton or linen"³.

The dress named plastron can be found from ancient times. According to historical records, Sumerian Queen Shub-ad wore plastron with suspending tubular beads and long gold pins. And in Crete, plastron made of hard structure material emphasizing a supple waist much more than a belt was worn with polonaise-style skirt (Fig. 1).

In early 16 century, short outer garment of ceremonial dress was decorated with plastron that had fur decorations and expensive metal buttons. This also indicates that European



<Fig. 1> Cretan Plastron
(20,000 Years of Fashion, p.80)

women wore gold girdles. In addition, colorfully embroidered plastron is seen and in the case of men's clothes, doublet where front body was reinforced with padded plastron known as 'peacock belly' was worn with tight hose made of wool and silk. In women's clothes of 17century France, hard starched plastron pointed onto the skirt and was the characteristic of boned bodice⁴(Fig. 2).

2. Plastron Basque Displayed in Victorian Dress

The characteristic of Victorian bodice under the reign of Queen Victoria of England (1837-1901) is divided largely into 3 groups. The first period is crinoline period bodice of 1837 to 1870. The bodice is tightly fitting pattern and of

² YBM Sisa English Co. Dictionary Compilation Dept., *Sisa Elite English-Korean Dictionary*, YBM Sisa English Co., 1996, p.1662.

³ Fashion Professional Material Dictionary Compilation Committee, *Fashion Professional Material Dictionary*, KDR Korean Dictionary Research Institution, 1997, p.1441.

⁴ Francois Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion*, Harry N. Abrams Inc.: New York, 1987, p.40, 81, 207, 255.



<Fig. 2> Stiff Plastron in 17C
(20,000 Years of Fashion, p.258)

waist length. The second period bodice of 1870 to 1890 is mainly of bustle style and shows tightly fitted patterns like the crinoline style, but the length was extended to hip line or hem line. The third period from 1890 to 1910 is of hourglass style bodice with tightly fitted under bodice made of lining material and over bodice of pouched style using pocket-shape pleats made of outer garment material to give projected look.

Among these, the fitted bodice expressed in bustle style is named as 'cuirass'⁵⁾ and it has fitted look like the crinoline style of 1870s, but the bodice at this time was called cuirass bodice specifically and dart and princess line were used mixed to form fitted torso bodice pattern⁶⁾.

The cuirass bodice can be divided into 3 periods; in the early period (1870~76), the bodice is fitted under the waist-line and for this purpose several darts such as waist dart and

fish-eye dart, and princess line were used. And to emphasize its natural form, which is the characteristic of this period, the bones are attached to each side of the seam.

The second period (1876~80) cuirass bodice was an advanced form from the early period and was developed into a dress form where a hem line touching the ground. In another words, bodice and skirt connected in one piece appeared.

The later period (1880~90) cuirass bodice brought about dual changes in plastron basque; not like the bodice of the earlier period, the composition of front panel and decoration are not much seen, but the pouched form still exaggerated front neck center as same as forming the collar of a jacket⁷⁾.

Especially, the pointed plastron basque



<Fig. 3> Pointed Plastron Basque in Victorian Dress
(Harper's Bazar (1867~1898), p.166)

⁵⁾ Moon-Sook Kim et al., *op. cit.*, p.154.

⁶⁾ Quoted from the Introduction of Past and Present "Victorian Dress Research Exhibition" Catalog, 1997.

⁷⁾ Moon-Sook Kim et al., *op. cit.*, p.309.

exaggerated the pattern of the later period cuirass bodice. Plastron appeared in Victorian dress at this time is defined as V-shaped front resembling the breast supporter of armor⁸⁾, and we can find this pointed plastron basque in *Harper's Bazar*(Fig. 3).

III. A Study through Rehabilitation

1. A Making of 1887~9 Day Dress

1887~9 day dress is terra-cotta ottoman silk dress made by Mrs. White. The bodice was decorated of tan terra-cotta velvet with fleur-de-lis pattern and pouched panel of gray twilled silk; and the pleats became visible in the shoulders of sleeves. Casing tape and bustle pad that supported the under-skirt maximized the shape of the skirt. There was a bone in the bodice and it seems that it was worn over a long corset made of colored brocaded silk or satin⁹⁾(Fig. 4).

The pattern structures of bodice are as follow. (See Table 1) It is composed of 2 front and back pieces and a separate pattern for pleats panel. Also it is composed of front center band and petershame band. Sleeve is composed of top sleeve, under sleeve and cuffs.

The outer clothes of bodice is terra-cotta ottoman silk and the lining is of white-yellow stripe and solid white cotton. The sewing starts from darts, but lining and outer clothes are sewn together by method of 'together sewing'; and leave opening at the side line. Bones are attached to dart and side-seams, and hem is bonded with bias tape and pleats panel is attached to back center. To the waist-line, petershame band with a buckle is attached to give natural curve of a body(Fig. 5).

The outer clothes of pleats panel is gray twilled silk. Lining is of white-yellow striped cotton. Sewing starts from pleating the pleats. At this time, pleats are not sewn yet and the



<Fig. 4> The full scale of 1887~9 Day Dress.

completed line is only fixed and front center of lining is sewn(Fig. 6).

Fixing outer clothes and lining together and after turning it over from inside out by sewing outer clothes and lining at the side, the neckline is fixed by folding over outer clothes and it is hand-sewn. Then, the waist is fixed after folding over outer clothes towards lining. Bone is attached to front center band after being fixed by hand. Lastly, the wrapped button made of brown silk is attached(Fig. 7).

Next, gather is pleated on top sleeve, and the sleeve of terra-cotta velvet cuffs decorated with lace frill is attached. Everything is completed when bias-cut velvet collar is fixed.

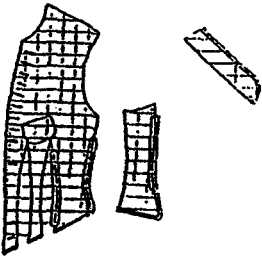
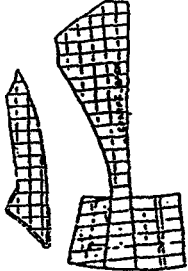
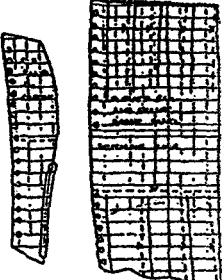
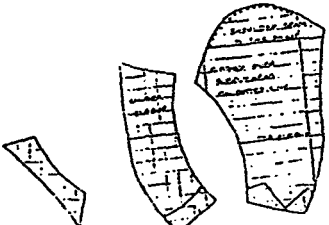
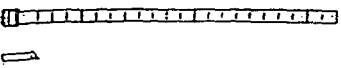
2. An Analysis of 1887~9 Day Dress

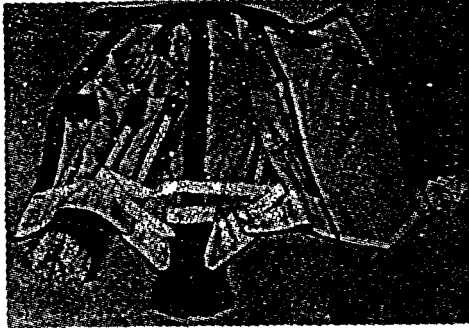
Each piece of bodice is lined with brown, yellow and white striped twilled cotton and sewn together in one piece. Bone wrapped in

⁸ Stella, Blum *Victorian Fashion & Costumers, Harper's Bazar(1867~1898)*, Dover. Publications, Inc.: New York, 1974, p.294.

⁹ Janet, *Arnold Patterns of Fashion 2*, New York: Drama Books Specialists, 1980, p.38.

<Table 1> The comparison chart of bodice

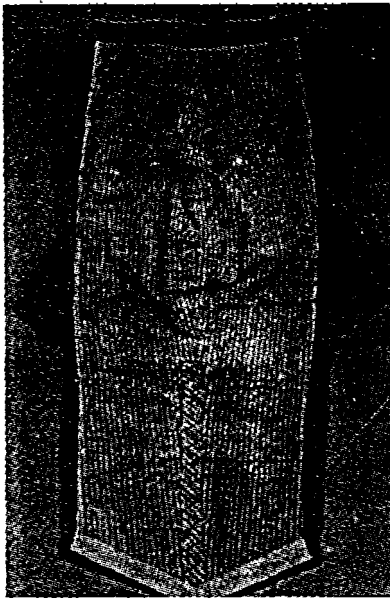
		Pattern	Color	Material
B O D I C E	Front		Tan	Terra-cotta ottoman silk
	Back		Tan	Terra-cotta ottoman silk
	Pleats panel		Grey	Twilled silk
	Sleeve		Tan	Terra-cotta ottoman silk, velvet
	Others		White	Cotton



<Fig. 5> Inside Bodice



<Fig. 7> Outside Pleats Panel



<Fig. 6> Inside Pleats Panel



<Fig. 8> Back Bodice

cotton casing is sewn onto it and pocket-shaped front can be separated apart. The length of bodice is extended below the waist and vertical dart and princess line are used for fitted bodice form. In front side panel, there are two waist darts respectively, and in back panel, there are center incising line and two princess lines. In back center, there are pleats (Fig. 8) and petershame band with a buckle is attached to the waist.

Bone attached to front dart is extended below

waist and one bone is attached to waist at side seam, and a bone is attached on front center line of pouched front panel lining to keep a



<Fig. 9> Plastron Bodice

pointed shape of pouched front panel. (Fig. 7) Many bones seem to be used to express a fitted bodice form..

A completed bodice of 1887~9 day dress like above looks like the <Fig. 9>: a pleats panel of blouse-typed pleats in front center is connected to jacket-typed bodice with buttons. This, a basque with emphasized plastron in pouched pattern, can be regarded as plastron that appeared between cuirass bodice of the later bustle style and the pouched form of hourglass style.

IV. Conclusion

The result concerning the plastron basque through theoretical research of historical background and the rehabilitation of Victorian day dress are as follow:

Plastron-type dress has composed or decorat-

ed upper garments with various forms from ancient times.

In 4 century BC, plastron of decorative pattern together with hair ornament was worn in Sumer and Cretan women wore plastron of very tight and hard structure to emphasize the supple waist. During the Middle Ages, Europeans wore pointed-shaped plastron starched and decorated with fur and beautiful embroidery over the skirt.

Especially, plastron that appeared together with cuirass bodice in Victorian age to make bodice look fitted extended below waist-line as the silhouette changed to natural form. Also modern pattern techniques can be seen in the use of darts and princess line.

Plastron basque of rehabilitated 1887~9 day dress shows much more tender and light silhouette after 1890s together with these characteristics¹⁰⁾. It shows a transitional form of S-shape with projected upper body by using blousing bodice with pleats panel of pocket shape in front center; and projected lower body at the back using small bustle at the hip¹¹⁾.

Bodice length was extended below the waistline and two pieces of waist darts were in front side panel respectively and center incising line in back panel of princess line can be seen. In addition, bones were attached dart and side seams.

Especially front center of this dress is decorated with pleats panel of pouched style and the shape is kept in place by attaching bones in front center of the panel.

In conclusion, 1887~9 day dress is a plastron basque of pouched style with pleated panel in front connected to jacket-form bodice with buttons. This bodice shows the change into contemporary dress form by forming fitted line together with decorative effect. Therefore, by actual construction of plastron basque, we expect it would be a valuable material in several aspects, such pattern, sewing and decoration.

¹⁰ Boucher, Francois, *A History of Costume in the West*, Thomas and Hudson Ltd., 1987, p.389.

¹¹ Kim, Moon-sook and others, "The Study on Dress through Rehabilitation-The design and design analysis of 1902-3 day dress", *The Journal of the Korean Society of Costume*, 29 issue, 1996, p.119.

In performing rehabilitation research, there was a limit as there were lack of reference materials owing to arbitrary period limitation and an unprecedented research theme.

References

1. YBM Sisa English Co. 1996. Dictionary Compilation Dept., Sisa Elite English-Korean Dictionary, YBM Sisa English Co.
2. Fashion Professional Material Dictionary Compilation Committee. 1997. *Fashion Professional Material Dictionary*, KDR Korean Dictionary Research Institution.
3. Kim, Moon-Sook and others. 1996. "The Study on Dress through Rehabilitation-The design and design analysis of 1902-3 day dress", *The Journal of the Korean Society of Costume*, issue 29.
4. Kim, Moon-Sook and others. 1998. "A Study on Cuirass Bodice", *The Journal of Costume Culture Association*, vol. 6, second issue.
5. *Past and present: Victorian Dress Research Exhibition* catalog, Fashion Institute of Seoul Women's University, 1997.
6. Boucher, Francois. 1987. *20,000 Years of Fashion*, Harry N. Abrams Inc.: New York.
7. Arnold, Janet. 1980. *Patterns of Fashion 2*, Drama Books Specialists: New York.
8. Blum, Stella. 1974. *Victorian Fashion & Costumers from Harper's Bazar (1867~1898)*, Dover Publications Inc.: New York.