

## **Little luxury for women and men: embroidered or printed shawls and sashes from the collections of the National Museum in Krakow**

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### **Abstract**

The National Museum in Krakow has an excellent collection of printed and embroidered shawls, the purchase of which was within reach of middle-class burghers and less affluent noblewomen. Although the materials and techniques used in them were not those most valued at the time, we often deal with very original and beautiful objects. Attention is drawn primarily to embroidered shawls, often made at home, according to the own invention of ladies of the house, but we also mention the nicest examples of printed shawls. In men's fashion of the nineteenth century in Poland, the indispensable accessory of noblemen's traditional costume was a luxurious silk sash. It could cost a fortune if it came from one of the great Polish manufacturers. Poorer noblemen would have to wear an embroidered one, the cheaper substitute. It is worth examining fashion accessories that were only intended to match their costly counterparts, but which often exceeded them in terms of originality.

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### **Introduction**

In women's fashion of the nineteenth century, shawls played a significant role in creating a fashionable image. Every elegant woman's dream was a wonderful cashmere shawl, or one made of Brussels lace. Only the richest could afford such an expensive accessory. Ladies from less affluent homes had to restrict themselves to cheaper versions of luxury shawls. Printed or embroidered shawls could be purchased also by the middle-class burghers and less wealthy noblewomen. Although the materials and techniques used in them were not necessarily those most valued at the time, we often deal with very original and beautiful objects.

Poland in the nineteenth century was partitioned between Austria, Prussia and Russia, but the fashionable desires of Polish women were just the same as in the rest of Europe. Men were also fond of expensive fashion accessories. The male equivalent of the shawl in the world of the Polish nobility (and later on also amongst richer burghers) was the *kontusz* sash, the indispensable accessory of their national costume. Polish, Turkish, or Iranian sashes, often woven with gold and silver, were very expensive, so poorer noblemen had to obtain something nice but cheaper instead. In the collections of Polish Museums there are many examples of printed or embroidered shawls and sashes, intended for less wealthy representatives of Polish society. The National Museum in Krakow has one of the richest

collections; some of the most interesting objects among the collection are to be explored here.

### Printed shawls

In the nineteenth century, the barely affordable dream for every elegant woman was the Indian cashmere shawl. These shawls had extraordinary values of softness, precision of execution, beautifully composed colours, and a sophisticated pattern. What other shawl could substitute for them? Could that be the printed shawl with the ornamental *buteh* motif? The easiest way to produce a cheaper, but still desirable shawl, was to use the pattern characteristic of cashmere shawls and repeat it in an accessory made of less noble materials and using simpler and cheaper techniques.

The most recognisable element of Indian shawls' complex ornament was a motif known as *boteh* or paisley. Described as resembling an inverted six, a teardrop or a feather, it was easy for designers to interpret. Variations of *boteh* shape and overall appearance were invented both in the East and West. Since in Poland the taste for the Orient with all its beauty and refinement had a very long tradition, it is not surprising that Polish women were used to looking for fashionable accessories in the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Quite lovely, reasonably priced shawls could be brought from Iran. They were made of printed cotton fabrics and resembled the beauty of Indian-produced shawls in terms of shape, pattern, and colour, but not the quality and sophistication. The use of ornamental motifs was elaborate, but the colours obtained were visibly paler; their touch was coarser, and they were definitely not so warm as the original cashmere shawls (Fig.1).<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1. Shawl, Iran, first half of the nineteenth century, printed cotton fabric, inv. No. MNK XIX-2261. Given by Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński, 1929.

<sup>1</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. numbers: MNK XIX-2261 (129cm x 268cm), MNK XIX-2257 (135cm x 245cm)– both from the Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński collections, given to the Museum in 1929.

Printed shawls with Paisley motifs used in Poland also came from Western Europe. As early as 1892, the former Museum of Industry and Technology obtained a shawl, which in the shape and arrangement of motifs resembles shawls from the Napoleon era.<sup>2</sup> It is made from very fine wool and the pattern is complex, constructed of multi-coloured details. Paisley motifs intertwine in floral twig entwining typical European elements of the trellis (**Fig. 2**).<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 2. Shawl, Europe, first half of the nineteenth century, printed cotton fabric, inv. No. MNK XIX-2215. Obtained by former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow from Józefa Grakocka, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> The Technical and Industrial Museum was dissolved by the decision of the communist authorities in 1950 and its collection was included into the collections of the National Museum in Krakow.

<sup>3</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-2215 (242cm x 67cm), from the collections of the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow, obtained in 1892.

Another printed shawl referring to classical cashmere shawls from the Napoleonic era was given to the National Museum in Krakow by Maria Czerkawska–Mauthnerowa (1881–1973), Polish poet, novelist and author of children books. She came from noble, but impoverished family, so a printed shawl was probably the only affordable choice for her female ancestors. The yellow shawl is ornamented with rows of “Indian” motifs, primarily using the Paisley pattern. Especially in the border we can notice ornaments visibly inspired by Turkish textiles, such as palmettes and flowers.<sup>4</sup>This is a rare example where we can prove that a certain printed shawl was an accessory for a noble woman of good taste, but with limited financial resources. Another beautiful example is a brown shawl with ornament printed in six different colours in shades of pale red, yellow and cream. Paisley motifs correspond with typical European garlands and multi-shaped medallions. The lightness of the striped fabric is particularly important because the shawl is huge.<sup>5</sup>

All of the shawls with Paisley motifs described above refer to shawls from the Napoleonic era; all are designed to leave a large portion of the central part ‘empty’. But the style of original cashmere shawls changed with the passing decades of the nineteenth century. When crinolines came into fashion, the preferred shawls were overflowing with ornament, and only a very small part of the background was visible. Shawl designs from that period could be described as designed out of *horror vacui*. Another fashionable design was the square shawl, dating probably from the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The elaborate ornament decorates its whole surface (Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 3. Square shawl, Europe, the third quarter of the nineteenth century, printed woollen fabric, inv. No. MNK XIX-4458. Obtained in 1964.

<sup>4</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-3324 (250cm x 62,8cm), given by Maria Czerkawska–Mauthnerowa in 1961.

<sup>5</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-8644 (177,5cm x 356cm), given by Anna Chrzanowska, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-4458 (169cm x 163cm).

Its eastern character is emphasized by *boteh* motifs, but in between it features flowers in bloom with a typical European styling. This compilation of eastern and western ornament is illustrated in this printed square shawl of the mid-nineteenth century. It is made from very fine wool and silk checkered gauze. The ornament of the frame is Indian inspired, obviously with Paisley motifs, while the central part is decorated with Western net ornamented with flowers.<sup>7</sup>



A beautiful, European creation is this white shawl decorated with very simple black ornament of rosettes and leaves. A single tassel accentuates the central axis (**Fig. 4**). This shawl reflects Napoleonic era accessories in terms of its shape, size, and colour. Its simplicity would have made it very much in fashion in the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes even quite plain, one colour shawls could be much desired. Their beauty lay in the quality and unusual choice of materials, like in an example in the collection of a shawl made of pink cashmere wool, trimmed with golden galloon and fringed with llama hair.<sup>9</sup>

Fig. 4. Shawl, Europe, early nineteenth century, printed woollen fabric, inv. No. MNK XIX-3214. Given by Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński, 1929.

## Embroidered shawls

Another way to lower the price was to exchange woven techniques with embroidery, which was quicker and cheaper. As demand for cashmere shawls was growing in Europe, weaving techniques were very often substituted with embroidery even in places where this valuable accessory originated. In Europe, embroidery techniques were part of the education of every well-bred woman, and thus embroidery was the simplest and the most obvious way to obtain something beautiful to wear.

<sup>7</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-3327 (281cm x 285cm), Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński collections, given to the Museum in 1929).

<sup>8</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-3214 (258cm x 70cm), Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński collections, given to the Museum in 1929.

<sup>9</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-3328 (137cm x 138cm), Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński collections, given to the Museum in 1929.

Embroidered shawls could be made at home and the finish appeared of higher value than it was. Idleness was seen as one of the worst female vices in nineteenth-century Europe, so even wealthy woman could spend their time practising embroidery. If she was very talented, a woman's needle could produce top-class embroidery, especially if she could afford expensive embroidery materials. Extraordinary examples of such high-quality embroidered accessories are two narrow but long shawls from the beginning of the nineteenth century, given to the Museum collections by Zofia Tarnowska from Chorzelow (1866–1956). Tarnowska was the daughter of a rich, aristocrat family and shawls inherited by her could hardly be considered cheap. Nevertheless, thanks to them we can observe how spectacular artistic effect could be obtained by replacing weaving techniques with embroidery (**Fig. 5**). Both shawls are made of batiste. They are decorated with motifs and even figural scenes inspired by antique art, popular at the turn of the nineteenth century. The materials used for the embroidery are of high quality, both the metal elements and the silk yarn.<sup>10</sup>The precision of execution and the quality of the design are amazing. Such an embroidery likely demanded the skills of qualified craftsman, but we cannot know for certain.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 5. Shawl, Europe, batiste embroidered with metal and silk threads, No. MNK XIX-3209, given by Zofia Tarnowska from Chorzelow, 1960

Another good example was given by Wanda Homolacs to the collection of the Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow. She was the wife of Karol Homolacs (1874 –1965), artist, professor of art, theorist of ornament and the curator of the aforementioned Museum. Wanda Homolacs visibly appreciated the artistic value of the piece, the delicate ornament of the floral twig, baskets and buckets of flowers executed in gold thread on fine muslin.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. numbers: MNK XIX-3210 (166cm x 29,5cm), MNK XIX-3209 (159cm x 29,5cm), both given by Zofia Tarnowska z Chorzelowa, date unknown.

<sup>11</sup> A professional embroiderer probably also made two square shawls embroidered with gold, ornamented with floral motifs, in the collection of the National Museum in Krakow, inv. numbers: MNK XIX-9921 (91cm x 95cm), MNK XIX-9922 (87cm x 91cm), given by Stanisław Ursyn Rusiecki, before 1939.

<sup>12</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-5954 (from the collections of the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow).

Instead of a wildly fashionable cashmere square shawl folded in half, a nineteenth century woman could wear an equally beautiful looking triangular embroidered shawl. Each of the original cashmere shawls is unique, but it is only among the European shawls worn for balls and for walking that you can find objects that draw attention with their originality. Especially beautiful is an example made of stripes of delicate, probably cashmere wool in red, white and black and decorated with bouquets of flowers, executed with tambour stitch and shaded embroidery with silk yarn (**Fig. 6**). It has a silk lining and two-button fastening with a loop of multi-coloured cord. It has been in the Museum collections since 1899.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to say whether it is still a shawl or a cape. Additionally, a triangular shawl made of ivory and pink silk taffeta has exceptional artistic qualities (**Fig. 7**).



Fig. 6. Left: Shawl or cape, Europe, wool fabric embroidered with silk, No. MNK XIX-10037. Obtained for the collections of the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow before 1899.

Fig. 7 Above right: Square shawl, Europe, silk taffeta decorated with applique on tulle, No. MNK XIX-10036. Given by Lucjan Portruski to the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow before 1882.

Fig. 8. Below Right: Square shawl, Europe, tulle embroidered with silk yarn, with applique of silk gauze, No. MNK XIX-8266. Obtained in 1976.

<sup>13</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-10037 (120cm x 230cm), from the collections of the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow, obtained before 1899; M. Gutkowska-Rychlewska, *Historia ubiorów*, Wrocław : Zakł. Nar. im. Ossolińskich-Wydawnictwo, 1968, s. 782.

Along the edges and in the central corner there is inserted tulle with silk appliqué. A dense, very precise floral ornament, with roses in full bloom and leaves taking the shape of a rocaille motif, clearly references the Rococo. The contours and the internal drawing of the pattern are made with tambour stitches. It was given to the former Technical-Industrial Museum in Krakow before 1882.<sup>14</sup>The material which had exclusively decorative properties was tulle. Numerous embroidered tulle shawls are preserved in Museum collections. Embroidery on tulle quite accurately imitated expensive lace, so the most popular were white embroidered tulle accessories. More interesting are those shawls which are embroidered with colourful yarn, mostly on a black tulle ground, where their ornament does not imitate anything. The most beautiful one in the collection is a square shawl from the Biedermeier period, featuring a long fringe, with three-dimensional decoration of bouquets of gauze roses and violets, with leaves and stems executed in silk yarn embroidery (**Fig. 8**). Such decoration can also be found on other accessories from this period.<sup>15</sup>

### Men's sashes

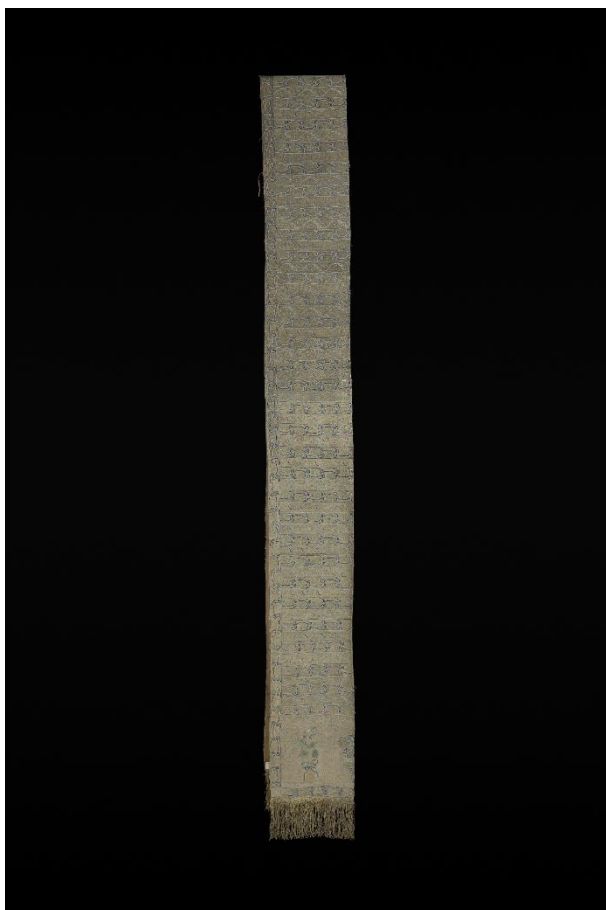


Fig. 9. Men's sash, Poland, end of the 18<sup>th</sup> cent., tambour stitch embroidery with metal thread and silk yarn, No. MNK XIX-2476, given by Society of Friends of the National Museum in Krakow, 1936

In nineteenth-century Poland, national *kontush* costume, used by the nobility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was still present in men's fashion. Its indispensable accessory was a luxurious silk sash. It could cost a fortune if it came from one of the great Polish manufacturers and was woven using expensive metal threads. However, sometimes even cheaper silk woven sashes could be too expensive for a poorer nobleman. If he did not inherit a valuable sash from his ancestors, he would have to wear an embroidered one. But first we must recall the exquisite quality sashes made in Poland in the eighteenth century.

In the 1780s and 1790s, the demand for good quality silk sashes was so high that they were produced even in Lyon, where sometimes they were obtaining fake signatures of Polish sashes. Much cheaper printed, cotton sashes were produced in Mulhouse (Taszycka 1984, 110-111).<sup>16</sup>At the turn of the century, poorer nobility (it must be noted that nobility made up 10 % of Polish society—a percentage unparalleled in Western Europe) wanted to maintain the tradition of wearing the Polish national costume, but

<sup>14</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-10036 (144cm x 314cm), given by Lucjan Portruski, before 1882, from the collections of the former Technical and Industrial Museum in Krakow, lata 60.

<sup>15</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-8266 (187cm x 190cm)

<sup>16</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-2477 (383cm x 40cm).



for many of them a sash from the professional workshop was too expensive. So, they substituted them with sashes decorated with tambour stitch embroidery. The Museum has a beautiful half-sash (cut lengthwise, like many sashes of eastern origin, which were too wide to wear comfortably) in the collection. It features a traditional composition with decorative endings and striped main part (**Fig. 9**). Such beautifully embroidered sashes are preserved in many Polish collections (Chruszczyńska 1995; Wróblewska–Markiewicz 2009, 31). A very unusual sash was made from a striped silk fabric. The stripes on the fabric are arranged in groups: a dozen or so narrow stripes alternate with the area with almost no decorations, with only single stripes (**Fig. 10**). To achieve the effect of a traditional sash composition, blank areas were filled with embroidered stripes, repeating the pattern of woven stripes, which gave the effect of "*pólka*"—the stripes characteristic of Polish sashes. It was a simple and cheap version of a traditional sash.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 10. Men's sash, France and Poland (?), early 19<sup>th</sup> cent., patterned silk fabric embroidered with silk yarn, inv. No. MNK XIX-2478. Given by Feliks "Manggha".

### Shawl or sash?

We cannot say if the modest but lovely accessory made of half-silk fabric and decorated with tambour stitch embroidery with metal thread is a shawl or a sash (**Fig. 11**). Its background with a dot pattern and ends decorated with buckets of flowers with a bow determine it could be worn as sash or a shawl. Its dimensions (284 cm x 50cm) let it be worn over the shoulders as well as around the waist (if folded widthwise, as sashes used to be worn). We likely will never know. Nevertheless, it is a good example of something made at home, at low cost, especially because it bears many traces of being repaired and remade. Certainly, it would have been used by a male or female member of a Polish noble, but not overtly wealthy family.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-2478 (286cm x 30cm), Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński Collections, given to the Museum in 1929.

<sup>18</sup> The National Museum in Krakow, inv. number: MNK XIX-3240 (Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński Collections, given to the Museum in 1929).



Fig. 11. Shawl or sash, half-silk fabric with tambour stitch embroidery with metal thread, inv. No. MNK XIX-2478. Given by Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński, 1929.

### Patchwork shawl

Sometimes the story behind the object is as interesting as the object itself. There is, for example, a strange, green shawl, stitched together out of paisley-patterned cashmere wool pieces: big and small, put together to create a rectangular shawl with decorative ends. Strangely, pieces of patterned fabric are sometimes sewed together upside down, with the reverse side up. It is hard to imagine how folded the shawl had to be to look nice; perhaps the shawl's owner had her way. The shawl was given by Teresa Nieszczyńska (1870–1956), to the National Museum of Krakow just after the Second World War in 1949. Knowledge about the donor has faded with time, and she was put amongst the many benefactors we know nothing about. She was not famous enough to be found in the Polish Biographical Dictionary and not noble enough to be put in any genealogy. But recently I found by accident T. Nieszczyńska street in Sucha Beskidzka, a small town in the Beskidy Mountains. It turned out that Teresa Nieszczyńska was a highly respected teacher in this town (1898–1928).<sup>19</sup>As a teacher devoted to her work, she did not make a big fortune, and her shawl turned out to be another example of an accessory used by a not-so-wealthy family. Now we know who the donor was, we hope to find a photo of her wearing the shawl to answer the question of how it was worn. Sometimes it is worthy to turn our attention to goods which are often underestimated. They have the potential to be an interesting field of research, especially when we know their provenance, and their artistic quality makes the research a real pleasure.

<sup>19</sup> I owe all the information about Teresa Nieszczyńska to Anna Spyrzyńska from the Sucha Beskidzka Museum.



Fig. 12 Shawl, pieces of woollen shawls sewn together, No. MNK XIX-3299. Given by Teresa Nieszczyńska, 1949.

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