

Garment collection at the Sabadell History Museum: an approach

by LAURA CASAL-VALLS, PhD in History of fashion, specialising in the history of clothing and ideology, director of the Museu Virtual de la Moda de Catalunya

¹ Museu Virtual de la Moda de Catalunya, www.museudelamoda.cat, won the Premi Lluís Carulla in 2016.

Local Catalan museum collections are home to a wide variety of heritage pieces that offer a snapshot of Catalan society at different points in time. One example is the textile collections, which include everything from samples catalogues from the textile industry to underwear, curtains and clothing from various eras. All of this gives us information on the technical specifications, designs, tastes or, simply, use that was given to these various elements.

They are often donations from individuals who, wanting to preserve private, historical memories, donate items that were used by their ancestors to the museums. In this regard, local museums overlap with the territory in a very interesting, enriching way.

The Sabadell History Museum is one such space, preserving and safeguarding numerous pieces associated with the world of textiles. Although the importance of the wool industry in Sabadell is well known and much defended (reflected in more than 4,000 documents that have been catalogued and preserved by the Sabadell History Museum, from over 30 Sabadell-based companies), it is important to remember that this centre's collection has many pieces of clothing, of great quality, which create a timeline of the history of clothing in Catalonia.

This article aims to provide a brief look at these pieces, sharing with the reader the importance of this collection and of preserving it.

The Sabadell History Museum clothing collection

The museum's storerooms are home to a significant number of garments, some of which are accessories, menswear, women's clothing, underwear, etc. Recently, one of the projects that has set its sights on this type of items is the Museu Virtual de la Moda de Catalunya¹, managed by Walden Gestió del Patrimoni Històric i Cultural, which has brought to light more than 600 garments preserved in 38 museums around Catalonia. The Sabadell History Museum has participated in this project, contributing 68 of the more than 400 items that have been preserved. Looking at this museum's archives, it is clear that they reflect the nature of the Catalan collections preserved: generally women's pieces, from the 19th and 20th centuries, although there are some from even earlier.



Velvet waistcoat with large lapels with marked edges, with back in mercerised cotton. The front pieces, quilted, have 2 pockets, 1 button on either side of the lapel and 2 lines of 4 buttons to close, many of which have been lost. The pattern had 5 pieces: in the centre of the back, a triangular piece pointing towards the neckline, two wide side pieces and two front pieces.
© Walden/Sabadell History Museum. [See more.](#)

It is worth noting that there is very little menswear, as these pieces were generally quite simple and subject to more wear and tear. In general, they haven't been appreciated by collectors, as they are known for being less precious. One of the pieces of men's clothing that has been preserved throughout the region is the waistcoat. These, in fact, were the most decorative item of menswear since, in the early 19th century, they became progressively simpler in shape and colours, standardising the three-piece suit: trousers, jacket and waistcoat. One example is waistcoat number 5710, dating from 1837-1842.



Outfit made up of a bodice and skirt in ochre brocade silk and an overskirt in silk tulle. All of the pieces have nude ribbonwork, black velvet and pleated tulle, in line with the structuralist decoration. The bodice opens completely in the front and is done up with covered buttons. It has a pointed neckline, with a strip of pleated tulle, and a skirt also in pleated tulle. The shoulders are low, the sleeves are long and end in a fold-over cuff with the aforementioned appliques. In the back, the bodice has a fitted waist with two side pieces without a

central seam; in front, two darts, one on either side. In back, it extends out with a tail that covers the waistline. The skirt is long, fitted with increasingly tight pieces, and a bit of a tail in back, with a ruffle of gathered fabric, with flat folds that gather with a drawstring. On the overskirt, the appliques with strips of nude ribbon and black velvet also gather in back, where the piece is done up in a bow to create an accumulation of cloth in back. © Walden/Sabadell History Museum. [See more.](#)



Outfit made up of a bodice and cotton skirt with diagonal stripes following a grid. The bodice has long, puffy sleeves, gathers at the shoulder and comes to a tight cuff of 20 cm. It opens completely in the front and is done up with 8 round bone buttons. Round neckline, with a rolled collar with pleated fabric edging, making a small ruffle. On the breast, there is a series of tuck pleats, long and half a centimetre wide, sewn up to 13 cm and then opening up to gather again at the waist, creating a small flap. The bodice goes down to the hips and has a tail in back, too.

The back also has some larger central pleats, sewn in. The bottom is covered in thick cotton taffeta and has a second opening, done up with 6 round mother-of-pearl buttons, each different. The sleeves have a significant interior structure to give them volume. The piece doesn't have any specific decoration and the pleats, neck and cuffs serve this purpose. In terms of the pattern, the back is fitted with a side piece on either side and a centre piece that is whole. In front there are two darts, one on either side of the opening. The pieces make a tail, without seams at the

waist. The pattern isn't visible from the outside. It is surely a summer garment. The long skirt is very flat in front and shaped in the back, where all the volume is, with significant gathering. It closes at the waist with two hooks. Partial side opening. Semi-hidden pocket on the other side. Simple pattern of rectangular pieces gathered at the waist and sewn into the waistband with 126 folds, 2 cm each. The hem, well finished, is reinforced with a 45-cm interlining. Inside, the folds aren't carefully finished. © Walden/Sabadell History Museum.

In terms of women's clothing, however, there is a much richer selection that has been preserved. Of the pieces from Sabadell, the number of whole dresses is noteworthy, as there are many with the bodice and skirt, which isn't common as the fabric from the skirts was often re-used for new pieces.

Dress number 10474 (c. 1874) and outfit number 4605 (c. 1895) are both good examples of this sort of item, giving us an overview of the outfits of that time.

No less interesting are the dress bodices, of which there are many. In fact, they are pieces that were worn with skirts that haven't been preserved. These pieces normally hold a lot of technical information, gleaned from inspecting the inside and, in some cases, even have the seamstress's name on a label.



Jacquard silk bodice with plant and flower patterns in aubergine. It opens completely in the front and is done up with 11 metal buttons, with the image of a lyre and a strip of paper that could be sheet music (it has lines on it) and some little flowers. In addition to the buttons, which have been painted or worn with black enamel, there are two hooks at the neck and one below the bottom button to keep the piece securely in place. Band collar lined with brownish satin and 1cm lace edging. Fitted sleeves with brownish silk satin ruffle cuffs edged with the same lace. The bodice is fitted at the waist, with a pronounced chest, typical of that time. It is shorter in front than in back, ending in a peak on either side of the central opening. There are two darts on either side of the opening and side seams. The pattern can be seen from the outside in back, as well, where the bodice is quite tight, and ends in two long, pronounced tails, each with a large, wide pleat held in with a piece of black ribbon to give the wearer mobility without them separating. These tails, edged with a small strip of

brown satin that sticks out like the one on the collar, were probably worn on top of the skirt with a bustle. In back, we can see a central seam on the back and two thin side pieces coming off the armhole and make the piece quite fitted at the waist. These side pieces, as well as the central pieces, extend down to form the tails. There is a seam above the armhole that divides the bodice in two parts. The bodice is lined with striped white cotton, including the sleeves. Inside there is a waistband to adjust the piece and hold it tight to the body, on top of the corset. The inner seams are well stitched with a black ribbon and show the cuts necessary to adjust it to the body. It has boning, 9 pieces, to give it structure (4 are still in place). It is interesting to note that two seams were corrected after the pieces were finished and that the seams have been gone over with a machine several times. Nevertheless, the craftsmanship of the sewing is good. © Walden/Sabadell History Museum. [See more.](#)



Striped bodice with velvet stripes. Fitted at the waist, with long sleeves and tight cuffs, loose armhole with gathering. It opens completely in the front and is done up with 17 hooks. Imitates a blouse with a collared jacket. The blouse part, which has a pointed neckline, is cream coloured satin, very simple, with a curved opening to pad out the piece in the chest. On top, imitating wide lapels with two points, it has two lapels that look like a striped jacket. The inner satin piece has a band collar, done up with two hooks, while the outer piece has a very spectacular neckline, high and pointed, held up by wires or thin boning inside. The bottom of the bodice is scalloped around the hem. The inside has boning, with 13 pieces to give it structure (two at the opening). As the inner lining is very torn, we can see the side seams that have been reinforced with a Petersham

ribbon and the scalloped hemline with a strip of interlining, as are the cuffs (the cuffs were very tight and probably covered the hands partially). There are two armholes at the armholes. Inside there is a silk waistband with the name of the dressmaker in red and the letters AZ. This is for the seamstress Augusta Zagri, who was influenced in this piece by Worth for the elaborate necklines and lapels, as well as the scalloped edging. In terms of the pattern, the back has a centre seam and two side pieces with the armholes. Side seams and two darts in front, with a central opening done up with hooks. The pattern is visible on the outside in the thin dart at chest level. The lapels are sewn to the bodice pieces, which are covered.
© Walden/Sabadell History Museum.

A representation of Catalan dressmaking

There are several pieces at Sabadell History Museum from some of the most important seamstresses of the time.

These include Augusta Zagri, creator of the Augusta Zagri dress from the 1890s. It is a bodice from the last decade of the 19th century, with the sombre but structured lines of the pattern used and the ornamental resources, which suggest this seamstress's creativity and skill. The tag reads "ROBES & MANTEAUX AUGUSTA BARCELONE" and also has the anagram "AZ".

2 *La Publicidad*, 21 February 1855.

3 Anuario del comercio, de la industria, de la magistratura y de la administración. Madrid: Carlos Bailly-Baillère, 1885, p. 764.

4 ACA, Hisenda, Matricules industrials, 1896-1897, inv. 1, n. 448. Appeared as a dressmaker.

5 The newspapers from the Balearic Islands: *Diario de avisos y noticias*, n. 1052 (1894), p. 2 and *El isleño: periódico científico, industrial, comercial y literario*, n. 12286 (1894), p. 2 and *Gaceta de Mallorca: diario de la tarde*, n. 717 (1909), p. 3.

By looking at sales catalogues from the time, it was possible to determine that the dress was made by Augusta Zagri and the anagram is her initials.

The first news we have of Augusta Zagri is in the newspaper *La Publicidad* from 1885, where she noted “On display today in the windows of the dressmaking shop at Calle Fernando VII 27 there will be a rich toilette on display, made for Ms Borghi-Mamo by renowned seamstress Madame Augusta Zagri.”² Her client was Erminia Borghi-Mamo (Paris, 1855 - Bologna, 1941), an Italian soprano, daughter of singer Adelaida Borghi-Mamo, who that year starred in one of the most noteworthy shows at the famous Liceu theatre. This would indicate, then, that Augusta Zagri was already a renowned seamstress in 1885. The first location associated with her, therefore, was Calle Fernando VII 27 (Carrer de Ferran). Taking into account that the space had display windows, it must have been a ground-floor shop of some importance. That same year, she is mentioned in conjunction with other addresses, Carrer Ferran 32 and Avinyó 7³, which could mean her workshop was expanding, and these would still exist two years later. Between 1896 and 1898, Augusta Zagri’s workshop was located at Plaça Santa Anna 8, bis, listed as a “dressmaking shop for dresses, coats, hats and other garments for women and children”.⁴ In 1899, she moved to Portal de l’Àngel 12, 1-2. And, in 1908, to Carrer Casp 15. This path clearly illustrates the growth the city of Barcelona experienced in those years and how its shopping centre moved. It is also known that she travelled to the Balearic Islands (1894 and 1909) to take the patterns for the dresses, coats and other garments for the new seasons.⁵

The Sabadell History Museum also has a piece from another dressmaker, Madame Berbegier, who was originally from France but set up shop in Barcelona in 1902. This piece is a winter dress from between 1902 and 1904, so it was made during her first years in the city. It shows great skill in pattern-making and meticulous finishes. The lines of the piece clearly reflect the fashion of the time, leading us to believe it was probably a seasonal dress. Plus, the tag stamped on a ribbon inside the waist is still there and reads: “MARIE-ANTOINETTE BERBEGIER FERNANDO VII N. 34 ENTRESUELO BARCELONA”.

Berbegier published a sales brochure, with a drawing of two seamstresses by Xavier Gosé (quite modern in comparison to the unoriginal style often seen among local dressmakers). In the brochure, the dressmaker announced that she had opened a “Fashion house for ladies” and ensured that ladies would find patterns created in Paris by the most important fashion houses. She also offered to design totally new pieces, as she had been working at Redfern for more than fifteen years and for the magazine *L’Art et la Mode* (under the pseudonym



Silk corduroy bodice, fitted at the waist with a band and puffy front. The neckline is a strip with a bib, to look like a blouse underneath the corduroy fabric. This neck has very small machine-sewn pleats and bobbin lace with floral motifs (passion flowers) sewn on by hand. The front is longer than the back, accentuating the "S" shape that was typical of Modernisme dresses. Winter dress, pagoda sleeves, with the drape at the end of the sleeve and a slightly drop armhole. Around the thick corduroy piece there is faux-brocade strip with little green dots. This strip, which runs along the whole front opening and neckline, is also on the cuffs, which are bias-cut fabric. The bodice has a very fitted cotton lining with striped print, which has darts in front and seams. One dart in front and seam, and in back, two side pieces. Silk ribbon inside, with a hook close (in two positions),

stamped with the name and address of the dressmaker (Marie-Antoinette Berbegier Fernando VII n° 34 entresuelo BARCELONA). Done up in front with 16 hooks and on top with 4 metal hooks and a thread clasp. The neck is done up with 4 hooks in back, and has lost its inner lining. It has 4 pieces of boning (3 at the back and 1 at the front opening). It is a quality piece, sewn mainly by hand although the main seams were done on a machine. In terms of the pattern, the bodice is shorter in back, where it is cut from a central seam and two side pieces from the armholes. No side seams. The front has two darts that open up to let the weight of the piece drape over the belly. © Walden/Sabadell History Museum.



Bodice in black silk satin (ribbed). Long sleeves, puffy at the shoulder and tight at the wrist, with fold-over cuffs and lace covering. Short bodice, with a pointed front. Crossed in front with full opening done up inside at the centre but on the outside it is hidden at the shoulder, armhole and sides, under the sleeve. Chest and back in embroidered lace with floral motifs in the Modernisme style. High, round neckline with a light coloured ribbon at the top. Triple bow in black satin, attached in front with a safety pin. Inner lining in cotton fabric with a print that appears to be a double horseshoe. Interlining to reinforce some sections, like the closing and the flap. Interior with 14 pieces of boning covered in fabric and stamped with the number 20. This boning is at the darts, seams and closing for reinforcement. In

front, it has 5 darts, which puff out the chest of the bodice; the flap, which crosses the chest, has 2 more and, in back, 5, plus 2 more on the sides. The bodice closes with 18 hooks at the centre and 19 on the side, armhole and shoulders. The inner seams are not finished, but they are cut with pinking shears so that they won't unravel. Made with great care. Inner waist band that holds the bodice to the waist, which has the dressmakers' signature. Neck lined with brocade fabric with geometric motifs. It has a centre seam in the back, with two side pieces coming off the armhole, side seams and four darts in front that come together at the centre. © Walden/Sabadell History Museum.



Vellay label.
© Laura Casal-Valls.

6 Madame Berbegier's brochure. BNC caixa V (7) C.

7 The most recent reference found was from the 1897 Anuario Riera (yearbook).

8 Anuario del comercio, de la industria, de la magistratura y de la administración. Madrid: Carlos Bailly-Baillère, 1881, p. 693.

9 Anuario del comercio, de la industria, de la magistratura y de la administración. Madrid: Carlos Bailly-Baillère, 1881 and 1883 p. 700.

10 Anuario Riera, Guia General de Cataluña. Barcelona: Centro de propaganda mercantil, 1896.

11 Anuario del comercio, de la industria, de la magistratura y de la administración. Madrid: Carlos Bailly-Baillère, 1884, p. 804.

12 *La Vanguardia*, 1 March 1881.

Although this article only refers to a few pieces, there are many that have been preserved in Sabadell thanks to individual donations, comprising a collection of great historical interest.

Solar, which was probably her husband's surname, as she signed this brochure "Berebegier [de Solar]"). Furthermore, in Paris she had a sponsor who could provide her with all sorts of patterns and materials at any time.⁶

Another name from this time is Teresa Solà, a Sabadell-based dressmaker. Two of her dresses have been identified, dating from between 1895 and 1899. Both of them, in the style of that time, are well made, with complex, meticulous patterning that is hidden by the structure of the piece itself. The interior of the bodices, which are well preserved, is carefully finished, with a ribbon at the waist bearing the stamped tag: "TERESA SOLÀ MODISTA SABADELL". These two pieces, which show great skill in pattern-making, are lined with a very similar patterned cotton. From this dressmaker, however, no records have yet been found.

Finally, it is interesting to highlight that Sabadell has the dress with the oldest label documented in Catalonia, which belongs to Virginia Vellay. It is piece number 13325. It is a two-piece dress in striped silk with black silk velvet appliqués. The tag is on the silk ribbon at the waist, with the name of the dressmaker and her location stamped in gold lettering: ANTIGUA CASA LLABOUR SUCCESORA VIRGINIA VELLAY RAMBLA DEL CENTRO 15 ENTRESUELO BARCELONA. The inside of this dress, which is still in quite good condition today despite having lost some of the splendour it surely had originally, is well finished. Although the inner seams are whip-stitched by hand, the piece isn't at all slapdash.

Virginia Vellay was a dressmaker who worked in Barcelona between 1880 and 1897.⁷ In 1881, she was at Carrer Fontanella 4,⁸ as she was in 1882,⁹ probably on the second floor,¹⁰ where she was also located in 1884.¹¹ From the inscription on the tag, however, it is clear that Vellay worked in a shop on Rambla del Centre before that. In 1881, a "good dressmaker" was advertised at Rambla del Centre 15: "Good dressmaker, confident in cutting and creating all sorts of dresses and coats for ladies, girls and boys, with fittings in their homes. Ask at Rambla del Centro 15."¹² Although it is not completely certain that this was Vellay, the dates and location fit. ●