

# A dressing gown made of a parachute in 1946: Which one is the Real Thing?

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Fig.3: The dressing gown on a mannequin



Fig.1-2: The buttons used on the cuffs and the waist area.

## The paper presents the case study of a dressing gown which was constructed in 1946.

In 1946, a seamstress was paid from a client for her services with a piece of textile cut from a red parachute. It was after WWII when in Greece there was still shortage of new textiles and women still made-do and mended clothing. The seamstress, the same year got married and made from this piece of parachute a dress, and a dressing gown using the original red colour of the parachute. She kept the dressing gown in a chest until 2009 and she revealed it during an interview given to the author. Although she had kept it for all these years, she did not believe it was an important object. However, after the interview the 90 year old seamstress, offered the author the dressing gown to keep it, as she thought that her family would rather not keep it after her death.

The object had the rare opportunity to be thoroughly documented both historically and technically.

## Information extracted from the object before the interview:

Before the interview, only a dressing gown constructed with a 1940's pattern could be recognised (fig.1,2,3).

## Information offered by the informant

During the interview the informant indicated with confidence that it was constructed by a piece of silk-parachute and the exact year of its construction, 1946.

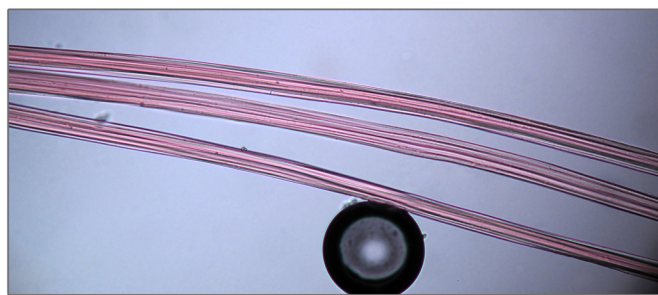


Fig.4: Viscose fibre from the dressing gown (magnification x400)

## Information revealed after research and examination by a textile conservator

The fibre analysis revealed that the textile material was viscose (rayon) and not silk (fig.4), as its owner believed. Although it was a common practice in Greece to use parachutes for the construction of clothing during WWII, their users were not aware of the new materials (fig.7). In contrast, the Britons were not only encouraged with official leaflets (fig.5-6) to reuse materials, but were also given instructions on how to look after the new man-made materials<sup>1,2</sup>.



Fig.5-6: "Make-do and Mend" leaflets giving instructions on "How to look after parachute nylon" and "How to look after rayon"<sup>1</sup>

## Which one is "The Real Thing": the parachute or the dressing gown?

The dressing-gown is a typical, authentic object of a period. It was not altered or changed but was constructed of re-used material. It is authentic because it is accurately reflecting an era, which was characterized by the re-use of materials, as the bibliographical research and fieldwork showed.

It is a rather rare case that both "lives" of the textile, as parachute and as clothing, are equally important because only both combined create its special character. The textile in its current form as a dressing gown is narrating a personal history. In its former use as parachute is hidden an important part of the recent history of Greece and Europe.



Fig.7: Young woman wearing white dress made of nylon parachute (Athens 1943)

The work presented on the poster is part of the author's research for a PhD thesis titled: "The utilitarian life of the textiles in the Greek (traditional) society: practices of reuse and techniques of alteration."