

The Queen's Gazette

By Marielle Brie
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The Queen's Gazette is locked in a safe with Napoleon's will and the French constitutions:

Fashion, in France, is of the highest importance. In an iron-clad cabinet and under high protection at the National Archives in Paris, a green-cover register is preciously preserved. It is dated 1782 or possibly 1789, and entitled "Garde robe des atours de la Reine", wrote in large elegant letters, no doubt by its owner Madame la Comtesse d'Ossun. Inside, pieces of luxurious fabrics are waxed or glued on each page. They offer a superb palette of the fashionable colors of the time: faded pinks, lilacs, blues and turquoises, grays and browns. A few unusual names give a particular relish to an era when the whims of fashion found its glory. The triviality of ordinary society saw in colors only descriptive nuances absolutely lacking in fantasy. Fortunately, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie did not fail to raise the palette to be equal to their own refinement. Where the boring people keep on seeing this or that pink or orange, the elegant distinguishes an "Intimidated salmon" colored fabrics. Chic isn't it ? A banal dark red-brown becomes, thanks to fashionable aesthetes, the « flea » (puce) color and it has an extraordinary number of variations inversely proportional to the size of the insect. Thus, the flea color must be distinguished from the "old flea", the "young flea", the "flea back", the "flea thigh" or even the "flea belly" colors, thus revealing that the milliner knows at least as much as the entomologist and that her eyes are veritable microscopes. Declining cream and copper colors, the "chamois" fabrics are worn in « à l'anglaise » or « à la turque » dress, just like the blond with soft shades called "queen's hair", a color that does not hide its courtesan admiration for the royal coiffure!



Next to each piece of fabric, annotations attribute their use to clothes, from the court dress to the dress for walk or game. However, the descriptions do not always correspond to the fabrics. If one has long taken this historical document for the book in which Marie-Antoinette selected her outfits every morning, it is more certainly the accounting report of the dresses awaiting delivery or not yet paid. For they were many! Following the rule that each outfit be worn only once, orders were going well, making the fortune of fashion merchants. The most famous, nicknamed the "Fashion Minister" was undoubtedly Rose Bertin. With her - unless it was the other way around - Marie-Antoinette prescribes trends to the whole world. A very large part of the country's textile economy is thus based on the stylistic choices of the Queen. When French silk goes out of fashion in favor of cotton, the new fashion truly becomes a matter of state because it is an entire industry in Lyon that is endangered. Especially since elegance no longer depends on the fabric but on its shaping so that fashion is being renewed at a frantic pace, much faster than the time needed to loom fabrics!

Then, what happens to the clothes once worn by the Queen? Well, they are sold to be transformed into furnishing fabrics or into priestly ornaments and the entire profit from the sale goes to... the lady-in-waiting. This is one reason why the Gazette was scrupulously managed!

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Other stories by Marielle Brie

