



## V&A Visit notes

Textiles Storage Appointment, 19-dec-2002

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One thing that had struck me was how ungarish the colors in fact were. The picture I have of it in color from a 1985 German exhibition catalog (<http://www.medievalbeads.com/docs/items/12th-germie-parchement.html>) are much more vibrant than it was in real life - where it appeared almost pastel minus the bold cobalt beads. Certainly not the blinding orange the picture showed.

Overall, The beads are about a modern size 10/11/12, the gold crimp beads being larger more or less, but in no way uniform (as they each appear to be hand rolled and seamed - the open cracks of the rolling can be seen clearly), as are beads used to designate eye centers being larger cobalt beads (0/8 size or so). Foil bezants were probably twisted or clipped off as you can see the stitches used to hold them on are still in place.

The glass beads: Cobalt transparent (looking just as the ones I have in my collection now) and greasy (semitransparent and fairly variegated) teal. The teal remind me of transparent teal matte finish AB beads I have seen actually, but with out the matte finish. They don't capture well in the pics.

The red beads are coral, as we knew, and some of them are a bit less than opaque as some shots show, some more peach than red.

What you can see pretty well in some shots is the under drawing they did on parchment to flesh out the design, the shapes are very smooth, showing, to my eye distinct tracing (of the metal plates that are missing in the halo for instance) and smooth arcs, pointing to a protractor. What they drew it with, I dunno, but I think ink of course.

Observation I had: I don't think the two squares and the the long pointed piece were made at the same time for the same garment. The beads one one are much thinner and finer than the other (just thinner, not smaller like height-wise), telling me they are at least a different batch/supply. Also the difference in design. The squares are very cleanly geometric and long piece is very scripty and floral. The only real similarity I see is the colors used.

Being that on most of the pieces I find pearls, gold, cobalt/blue glass and coral beads are present on most all of them, I think that this may be simply what the church/convent had handy, or had easy access to purchasing all the time. So the three pieces being of the same beads does little more than say they were made probably in at least the same location to me.

Even the way the edges are finished varies from the long piece to the squares. The squares are edged in a few rows of gold, the long piece is edged with a line of alternating beads in sets of three. The saintly subject on the long piece and the squares face in opposite direction from the squares.

I think the pointy long piece was made at another time for a mitre (whatever those flaps down the back are called) that was possibly worn with stole that I think the squares were on. Just a theory.

*The curator I talked with said that the two parts (squares and long piece) weren't acquired in the same year so that could well be the case, and they themselves wondered if it might be from another piece of the ensemble.*

*On the long piece, one thing you notice is the crown has been broken away (minus only the points that secured it on) being on all the pieces the pearls have been mostly been ravaged off, I wonder if it's silver and had been thieved as well, the dark color is hard to tell.*

*Also on on the long piece along the outside of the main almond shaped flora/fauna frame, is that the running thread and the couching thread are different colors, the couching being a sage green. I find no green in the interior, which makes me think they worked from the center out, which is what I do to make the beads behave better.*

*They used parchment (what type/weight they don't know, I asked) and you can clearly see the couching stitches that still stand after the running stitch was plucked out to snatch off the pearls. Large unpierced voids show where the gilt plaques were laid. (These plaques were common german decorative element in these kind of embroideries with beads)*

*The thread overall was double ply, and had a very slight sheen. I think it was linen. Someone here may be a better guess, the twist you can see in some shots may help. I don't think it was silk. It looked to weedy/coarse for silk. Some of the plaques/metal baubles such as flower centers are attached in coral or red thread.*



Here you can see the space left by the gilt foil plaques, or bezants, that were removed as well as the clear underdrawing lines used by the nuns to design the piece. Since pieces were done on parchment, and the drawings are so clear and well done I think they were drawn by monks and filled in by the nuns with beads. Monks were often more used to drawing and a the lines show a certain level of expertise of drawing with shapes sometimes having center lines drawn and bezants carefully spaced and traced out. Also notice how some of the gold beads are thinner than others - not smaller, just thinner.



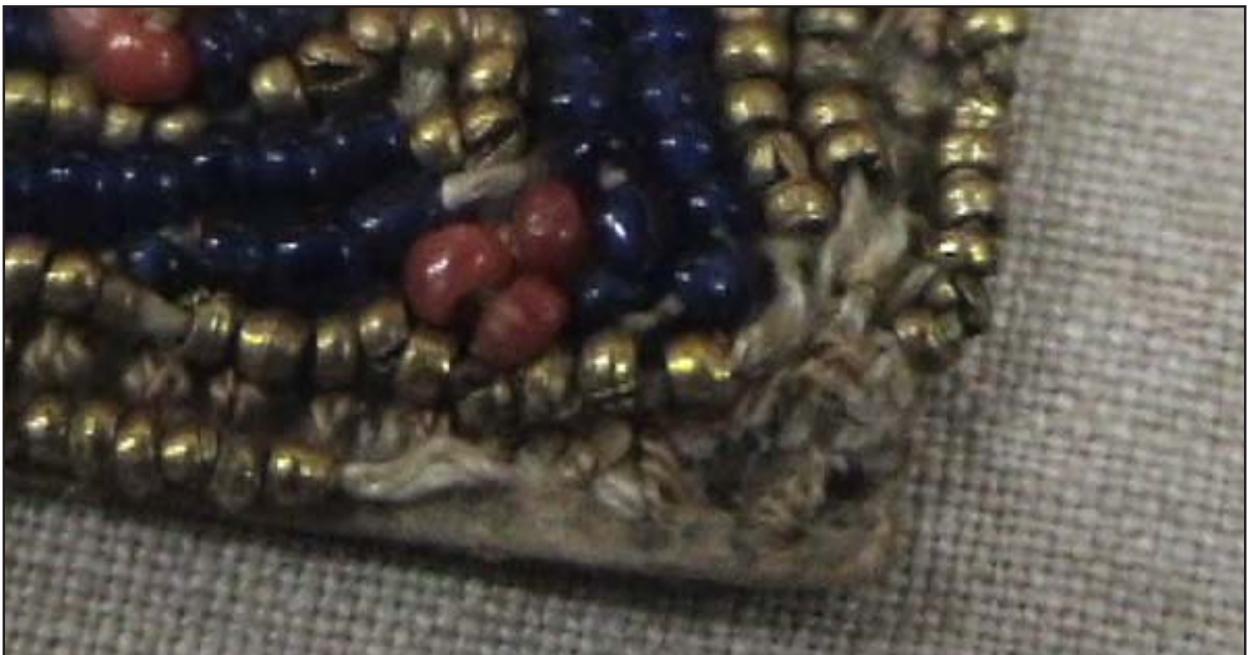
Couching loops are all that remain of the pearls that once filled in these areas.



Thread color changes in outer areas from white (natural) to green, even red in select places.



Dark ink underdrawing showing where the bezants (that were removed) were placed.



Gold beads were formed of wire and crimped shut, probably with some sort of shaping plier as they are all pretty consistent in shape. Cut seams from the wire coiling it was prob. cut from are clear here.



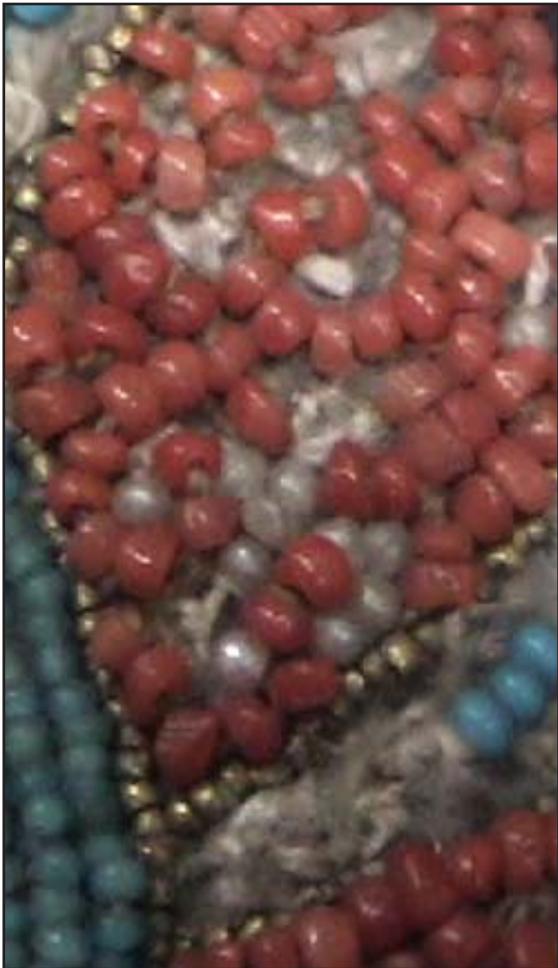
I do not believe this long pointed piece and the two squares were done by the same person, or for the same garment. The styles of beading and design are totally different, this one is more complex with a coral cope with pearl fleurs des lys, vine work, larger size, saint on the pined piece facing other direction, more difficult edging pattern, and expertly contoured lines of cobalt blue filling in the areas.

They were in fact obtained by the V&A in two different years, but due to similarity of condition, colors and types of beads, age and construction they have been lumped together. I think they were done for the same outfit perhaps.





Neck has been stripped clean, showing only its bare parchment ground. Needle holes are elongated, not round. Could this be from fine flattened steel needles? As today they would need something flexible.



The only place red thread appeared on this piece was to attach these silver ornaments.



Look how completely this coral field was stripped of its white fleur de lys with a few thread snips to the running stitches that run through the pearls.



Dark underdrawing in ink, metal traced in. Notice center guideline. Silver (pewter?) crown removed, only small sewn bits remain. was traced on parchment, beads applied around lines and crown sewn over top.



Thread color changes in outer areas from white (natural) to green, even red in places.



Gold beads were left while pearls were looted.



Running stitches holding the beads were removed to scavenge pearls, leaving the couching stitches.



Gold beads were left while pearls were looted.