

## Pearl Embroidery: A Survey of Pearls on Smaller Motifs

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*Spence Collection of Gloves - Worshipful Guild of Glovers  
No. 23338 + A*

*An important pair of gloves circa 1625 – 35, of white kid suede side uppermost, with separately worked large stepped gauntlets, the ivory satin ground adorned with raised pearl wire, sequins, couched gold threads and seed pearls, with a pelican in its piety, lilies, a lion with blue silk feet and black silk eyes, edged in gold and silver scalloped bobbin lace threaded with sequins, three salmon lace trimmed gussets, the elongated finger and thumb seams outlined with double rows of silver chain stitch with couched whorls to the knuckles, 37cm long.*

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Decorating clothing with pearls is a centuries old technique that was in heavy use from the 12th through the 16th C. In Europe, the pearls were primarily from the rivers and produced by various bivalves. They came in all sizes and shapes. Some of the most frequently seen in embroideries are what we refer to as “seed pearls”; small pearls of 1-2 mm in size. Christie comments on the lavish use of thousands of both large and seed pearls on orphreys, borders, and hoods of vestments. (pg 21 [English Medieval Embroidery](#) by AGI Christie 1938) Larger pearls were used in embroidery, but they were rarer and so less used. There is also evidence that pearls were removed from pieces and presumably reused as demand grew.

In 16th C Germany, secular embroiderers who worked with pearls were a separate profession and referred to as “stringers of pearls”. In addition, pearls were so important that for over 40 years the German court had a court embroiderer who was mainly engaged in pearl embroidery. (pg. 291 [Needlework: An Illustrated History](#) by Harriet Bridgeman and Elizabeth Drury. ISBN 0448220660). By the 16th C the rivers in Germany and Russia were so devoid of pearls that they were being imported via caravan routes from India and Persia. (ibid pg 302-2).

Pearls were either strung together and then couched down or applied singly. Rarely are they back stitched on to the fabric. Frequently they are placed on some form of padding, usually some wool felt.

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A ladies single glove of cream leather, circa 1600 – 1620, with long extended fingers, the gauntlet with eight deep round tabs of dark blue satin embroidered in coloured silks, gold thread and seed pearls, edged with metallic lace, the design incorporating bunches of grapes, blue cornflowers and other floral motifs alternating with the pelican in its piety, wrist trimmed with ruched pink silk ribbon edged with metallic lace and spangles and pink silk lining.



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A single gauntlet glove in white leather stained buff, flesh side outwards, circa 1610 – 1630, the separately worked ivory satin gauntlet worked with six tabs, superbly embroidered with seed pearls, raised gold purl wire, salmon pink floss silks, tiny sequins, couched gold thread with central pelican in its piety with padded, raised wings, carnations and roses, the wrist seam concealed below a ruffle of pink silk and gold lace, the lining and three gusset ribbons also of salmon pink silk, the now buff/grey leather with minutely worked with stab-stitched seams, 32 cm long.





Neckline (above) and sleeve (below) from Anonymous by Master Active at Ansbach c. 1490. Thyssen Bornemisza Collection Note different size and shape of pearls to give effect. Below see the acanthus leaf and pomegranate designs.



Suggested Books:

[Beadwork](#) by Pamela Clabburn - Shire 57 ISBN 085263529X.

[The History of Beads: from 30,000 BC to the Present](#) by Lois Sherr Dubin ISBN 0810907364.

[Bead Embroidery](#) by Joan Edwards, BT Batsford 1966.



The Lamb of God. Southern Germany 1450-70. Munich Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (NN 1100) Diameter 8 cm. Red velvet with gold sequins. Relief embroidery. Linen ground with pearls. Halo and banner in gold and silk embroidery couched work, satin and chain stitch. -- Schuette [Art of Embroidery](#) 1964 (above)

Detail of the medallion of the virgins and widows from the Cope of the Virgin, Order of the Golden Fleece. 15th C Burgundy. (below)





Detail from hat of Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg by Hans Suss von Kulmbach 1511. - Web Gallery of Art <http://www.ega.hu/>



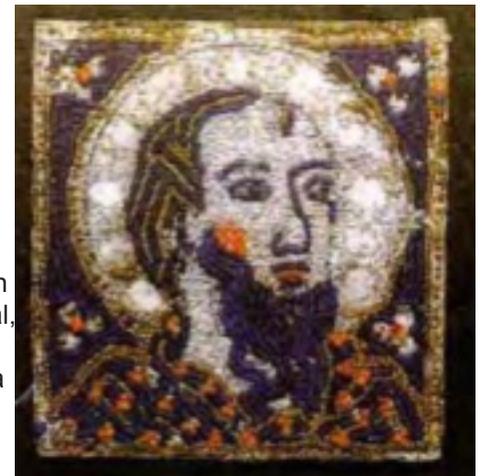
(above right) Plaque from girdle of Fernando de la Cerda. c.1225-1275. Spain. Girdle 192 cm x 42 cm. (pg 34 Museo De Telas Medievales Monasterio De Santa Maria La Real De Huelgas Burgos by Concha Herrero Carretero. 1988 ISBN 8471201275)

Detail from Merienwerder Cope. Germany 13th C. (left)



Detail from Jane Bostocke Sampler 1598  
Victoria & Albert 0789-055 (right)

Panel from a clerical stole. Late 12th C. Embroidery on parchment. Germany. Coral, pearls, blue glass, amber and seeded beads. Victoria & Albert Museum



Additional Information:

The Spence Collection - Worshipful Company of Glovers <http://www.glovecollectioncatalogue.org/Spence-Collection-at-Bath-23337-to-23361> and 23362-23389

<http://medievalbeads.com/> -- by Jen Segrest/Mistress Elspeth Grizel -- including "A Pictorial Overview: Bead Embroidery in the Late Medieval Period 1000-1600 AD

Order of the Golden Fleece [http://rubens.anu.edu.au/raider4/austria/vienna/museums/schatzkammer/order\\_of\\_the\\_golden\\_fleece/](http://rubens.anu.edu.au/raider4/austria/vienna/museums/schatzkammer/order_of_the_golden_fleece/)

Coronation Mantle, Robe, Gloves, etc of the HRE [http://rubens.anu.edu.au/raider4/austria/vienna/museums/schatzkammer/palermo\\_robos\\_12thc/](http://rubens.anu.edu.au/raider4/austria/vienna/museums/schatzkammer/palermo_robos_12thc/)