

# Onstage and Beyond the Stage: Historical Theatre Costumes and Everyday Fashion in Early Nineteenth Century Vienna

Naya Tadavarthy, Fulbright Combined Grantee 2022-2023

## Introduction

The way people dress demonstrates their preferred mode of self-expression, as well as social, economic, political, and cultural status. Costumes employ this identity-shaping role of clothing to convey character onstage, as theaters offer a space for cultures to define themselves and experiment with their values. Moreover, a society's representation of history reflects how it reconciles its past with its present. Vienna's theatre tradition flourished and a fashion industry emerged after the Congress of 1814-1815. Yet previous research has not sufficiently investigated how these cultural forms influenced each other, as Vienna sought a post-Napoleonic identity. Using case studies of plays set in (1) antiquity and (2) the Middle Ages, I present how costume designers, critics, and consumers approached historical and historically inspired dress in the Biedermeier period (1815-1848).

## Methodology

I am comparing historical costume renderings and contemporary fashion illustrations from Viennese sources with each other, as well as with written descriptions, to discover the relationship between these two forms of dress during the early nineteenth century. The *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode (Wiener Zeitschrift)* (1816-1859) provides fashion illustrations for my analysis, as well as articles on the cultural sphere and theatre reviews. I also study the *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, in which Adolf Bäuerle printed reviews and commentary on theater and performance in general from 1806 to 1860. Then, I compare the visual and textual information from these Viennese publications with costume sketches in the collection of the Austrian Theatermuseum, when available. The archives at this museum and the Wienbibliothek offer further primary and secondary sources. Meanwhile, books in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek and the Universitätsbibliothek Wien provide essential context for theatrical and sartorial practices in Biedermeier Austria.

## Background Information

By the late eighteenth century, a reform movement in German-speaking theatre promoted costumes with greater historical accuracy. Yet motivations to appear aesthetically pleasing, plus the fact that most costumes were made of accumulated stock pieces worn in multiple productions rather than built from scratch, hindered faithfulness to past styles (Linhardt 156). Moreover, marked gender differences arose in the accuracy of Biedermeier stage costuming, with women's costumes demonstrating a greater dependence on contemporary silhouettes (fig. 1-4, 16-17). Notably, though, most of the prescriptive and descriptive source material on these costumes comes from male designers and critics.

As women's fashion permeated costumes on the Vienna stage, characters' and actresses' clothing often inspired similar styles in their audience. The city developed its own sartorial identity through local publications like the *Wiener Zeitschrift*, which often depicted popular stage protagonists (Buxbaum 302). Fashion writers even named trends after historical characters in theater productions, indicating a reciprocal relationship between stage costumes and everyday dress.



Fig. 1. Antonie Fournier as Johanna in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 4 October 1833

Fig. 2. Modebild XXII. *Wiener Zeitschrift*, May 30 1833

Fig. 3. Modebild XXIV, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 13 June 1833

Fig. 4. Flagbearer in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 4 October 1833

Buxbaum, Gerda. *Made aus Wien, 1815-1938* (Vienna: Residenz, 1986).

Linhardt, Marion. "Kleider der Illusion, Kleider der Distanz: Kostümkonventionen des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts und das Wiener Vorstadttheater." *Nestymana* 30 (2010).

Wagner, Gretel and Ekhart Berckenhagen. *Bretter, die die Welt bedeuten: Entwürfe zum Theaterdekor und zum Bühnenkostüm*. (Berlin: Kunstbibliothek Berlin, 1979).



Fig. 5. Modenbild I, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 1 January 1818

Fig. 6. Sophie Schröder as Sappho in *Sappho*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 21 April 1818.

Fig. 7. Mad. Grelinger and her two daughters Klara und Bertha Stich in *Sappho*, Matthäus Kern, Burgtheater, 23 July 1835.

Fig. 8. Modenbild XXVI, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 23 June 1835.

## Case Study I: Antiquity

### Reviews:

- A *Wiener Zeitschrift* critic likens the historical inaccuracies in "Wahnsinn" at Theater an der Wien in 1816 to the anachronism of depicting ancient Greek heroine Phraedra in a dress with a train, one of many recent costuming errors.

### Theoretical Texts:

- Antiquarian Böttiger publishes an 1820 article entitled "Über das antike Kostüm in Grillparzers Sappho" in the *Wiener Zeitschrift*, in which he argues that historical costumes should not depart from scientific correctness in every detail. He recommends using statues and sarcophagi in museums collections as examples of proper sleeves, belts, and other garments based on the characters' roles in ancient Greek society and educating women on how to wear them properly.
- Berlin theater director Carl Graf von Brühl argues that female actors preferred ancient-style garments, because they allowed them to show off more of their bodies. Yet von Brühl reveals bias in his criticism that women in general were less willing to depart from current fashion trends for the sake of historical accuracy, due to their lack of education and artistic knowledge (qtd. in Wagner 150).

### Stage Costumes:

- Philipp von Stubenrauch's sketches from the 1818 premier of *Sappho* display the high-waisted style and sweeping trains of the Empire Period (fig. 5-6).
- Illustrations from an 1835 Burgtheater production include the belted waists, triangular bodices, wide necks, enormous puffed sleeves, and hair curled to the side of the face in the style of the Romantic Period (fig. 7-8).

### Fashion Trends:

- The "coiffure a la Sappho" becomes popular after the 1818 premiere of Franz Seraphim Grillparzer's play at the Burgtheater (Buxbaum 305).

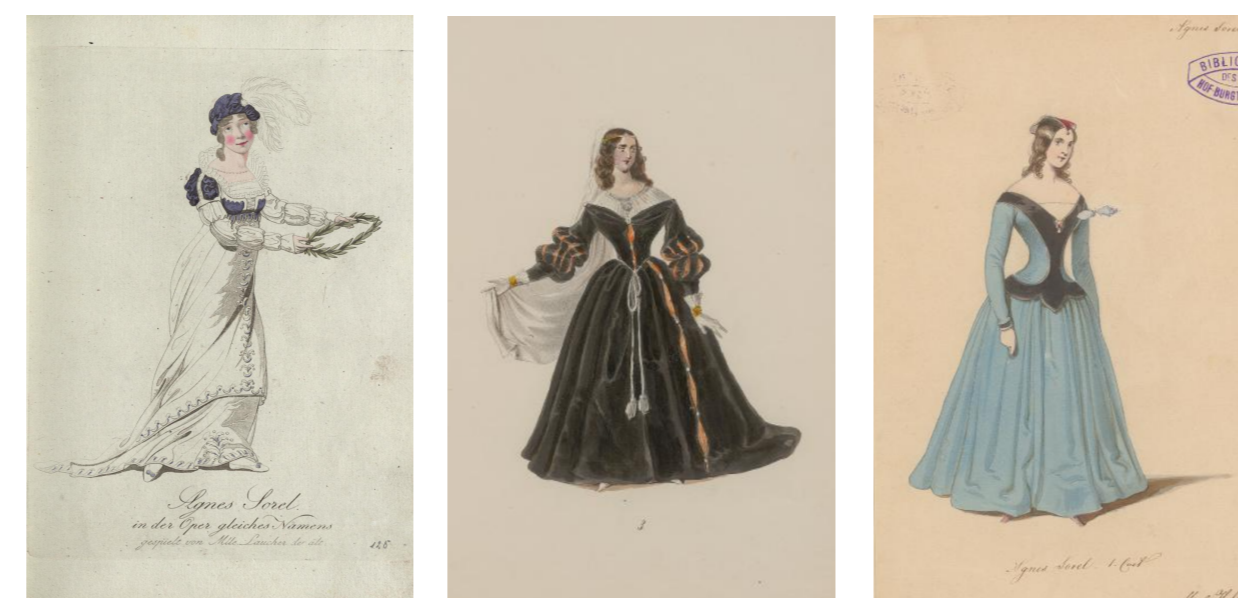


Fig. 9. Antonie Laucher as Agnes Sorel in *Agnes Sorel*. Performed on 12 December 1806, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Kärntnertheater. *Auswahl schöner Costumes für Theater- und Ball-Anzüge gezeichnet von Ph. Von Stubenrauch*, ca. 1813

Fig. 10. Agnes Sorel in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Girolamo Franceschini, *Neue Costume-Sammlung verschiedener Zeiten und Nationen*, No. 4, Blatt 3., 1841-1846

Fig. 11. Christine Hebbel as Agnes in *Agnes Sorel*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 25 February 1848

Fig. 12. Modenbild VI. *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 8 February 1816

Fig. 13. Modebild XXVIII. *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 15 July 1841

Fig. 14. Modenbild Nr. 43. "Toilette von J. F. Bohlinger Nr. 1150." *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 21 February 1848



## Case Study 2: The Middle Ages

### Reviews:

- Adolf Bäuerle remarks in his 1820 review of Friedrich Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* that the costumes were historically accurate, rich, and gorgeous without superficiality.

### Theoretical Texts:

- In 1826, Bäuerle defends the well-researched, historically accurate work of designers like von Stubenrauch against Ludwig Tieck's "poetic costume" and criticism of Vienna's theater costumes as outmoded. However, the publisher argues that costumes can sacrifice accuracy to create the proper impression for the audience, exemplified by the modern gemstones worn by the character Agnes Sorel in a Burgtheater production rather than the large, uncut diamonds the actual historical figure would have worn.

### Stage Costumes:

- Costumes for Johanne (Joan of Arc) and Agnes Sorel in the 1810s depict the white muslin material, high-waisted bodices, and "Marie" multi-puffed sleeves of the Empire period (fig. 9, 12, 15). An 1840s rendering of Agnes Sorel also wears Marie sleeves, but an 1841 fashion illustration indicates that these sleeve styles have returned for everyday use (fig. 10, 13).
- Johanne's costume, designed by von Stubenrauch for an 1833 Burgtheater production of *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, includes a wide collar tucked into a belted waistband and enormous leg-of-mutton sleeves resembling Romantic fashion illustrations (fig. 1-2, 8). The bell-shaped skirt, wide triangular bodice, and dramatic puffed sleeves also resemble sketches for other 1830s productions set in different historical periods, such as *Sappho* at the Burgtheater in 1835 (fig 7).
- Common elements in Joan of Arc and Agnes Sorel costumes such as an armored breastplate indicate the reuse of medieval style tropes (fig. 15-16, 18).

### Fashion Trends

- The coiffure "a la Agnes Sorel" becomes popular in 1832, as well as the ferroniere, another medieval-style hair accessory. In 1843, the Agnes Sorel turban came into fashion. The Agnes cloak appeared in 1845, described in the *Wiener Zeitschrift* as straight in the back with a type of bodice in the front (Buxbaum 59, 63-64). It is unclear whether either of the two garments depicted in the accompanying illustration are an Agnes Mantel or why this style bore Sorel's name. (fig. 19).



Fig. 15. Anna Altmutter as Johanna and Carl Carl as Lionel in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Johann Nepomuk Musel, *Münchener Theater Journal*, 1815

Fig. 16. Karoline Wilhelmine Lemberg as Königin Isabeau in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 4 October 1833

Fig. 17. Carl von LaRoche as Philipp der Gute in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Philipp von Stubenrauch, Burgtheater, 4 October 1833

Fig. 18. Jeanne D'Arc in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Girolamo Franceschini, *Neue Costume-Sammlung verschiedener Zeiten und Nationen*, 1841-46

Fig. 19. Modenbild XXXV. *Wiener Zeitschrift*, 6 November 1845

## Conclusions

- Women's stage costumes followed contemporary modes faithfully throughout the Biedermeier era. Costumes from two different productions performed within a few years of one another share a more marked resemblance in silhouette than costumes from the same production decades apart.
- Despite this inextricable connection to current styles, critics expressed concern over the historical accuracy of costumes, in both specific reviews and more general, theoretical texts. Some authors stressed a strict adherence to historical sources, while others allowed for some artistic license to suit the tastes of the audience.
- Textual sources reveal an influence of theatre costumes on everyday fashion in the naming of certain trends. However, images of these stage-based styles were often not published, unclearly labeled, or did not survive. Thus, further research might reveal if these trends directly referenced specific costumes and productions or if they accurately reflected historical styles.