

HISTORICAL FASHION IN DETAIL

The 17th and 18th Centuries

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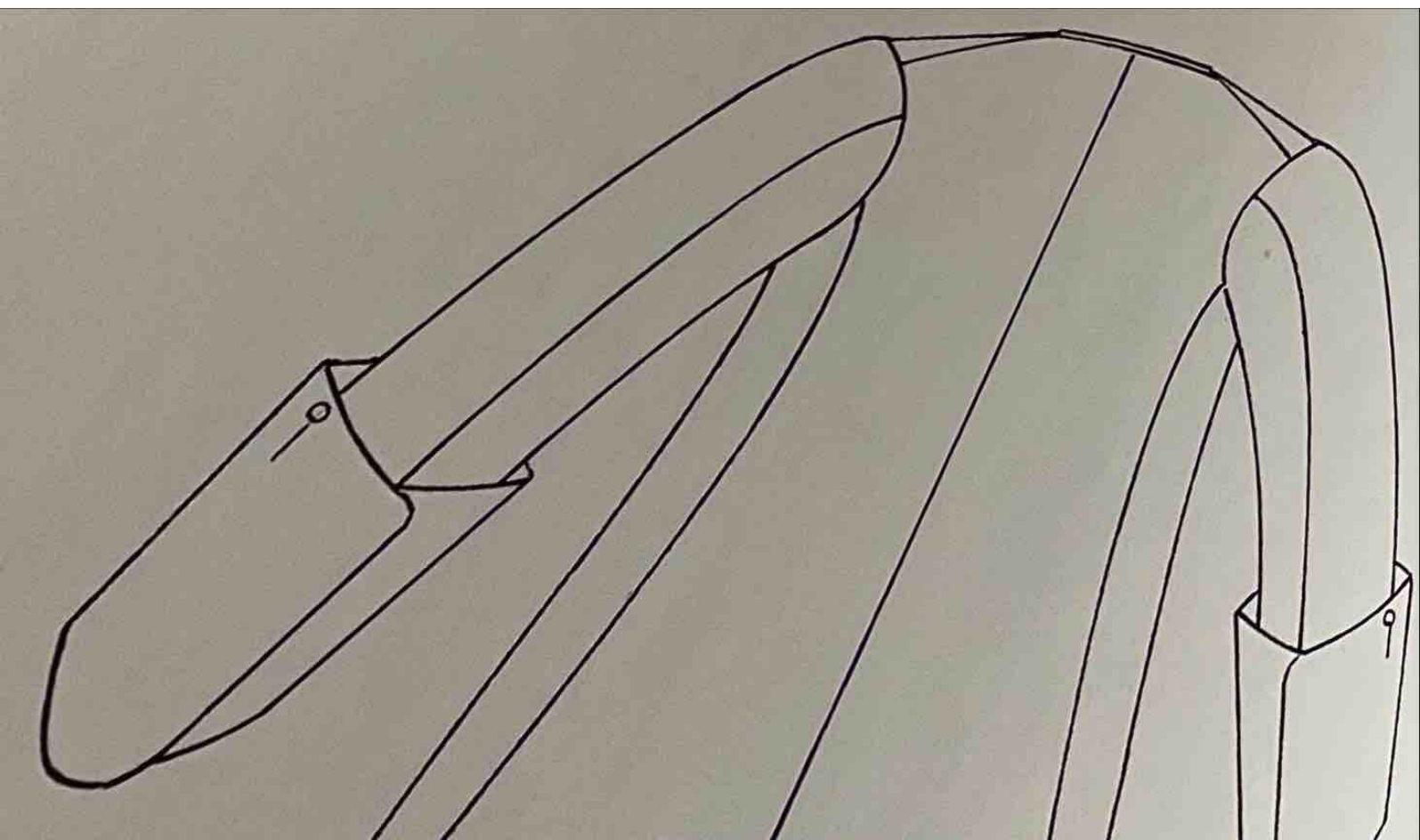
Illustrations

Cover, front: Back of a pair of pink watered-silk stays, 1660
to 1670. T.14-1951

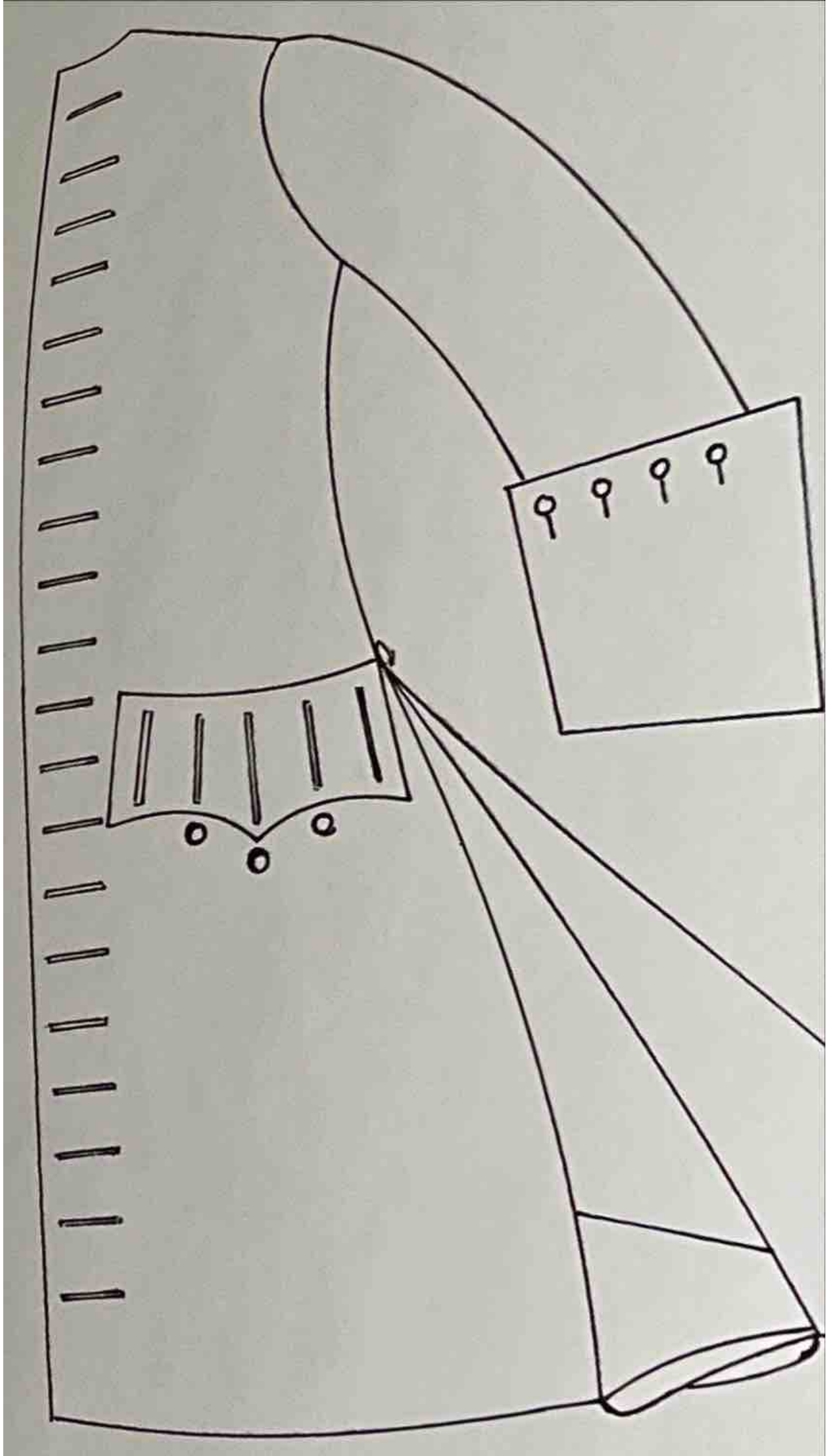
Cover, back: Cuff of a man's coat of ribbed shot silk, 1780s.
Circ.455-1962

Frontispiece: Back of a polanaise gown of Chinese painted
silk, late 1770s. T.30-1910

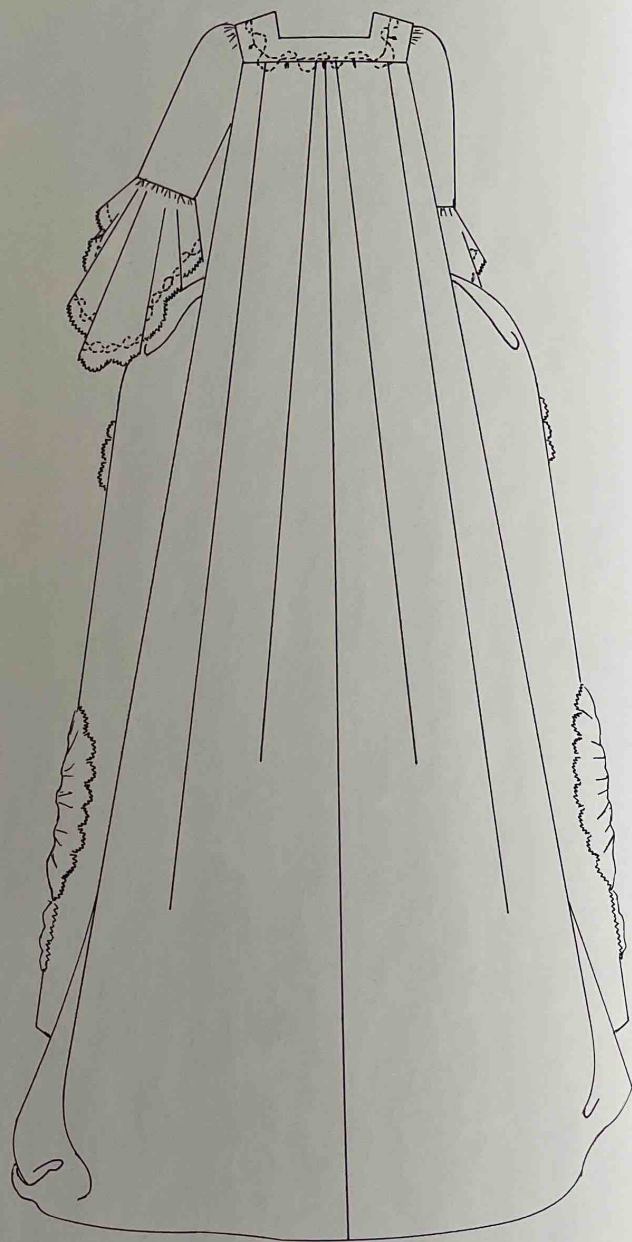
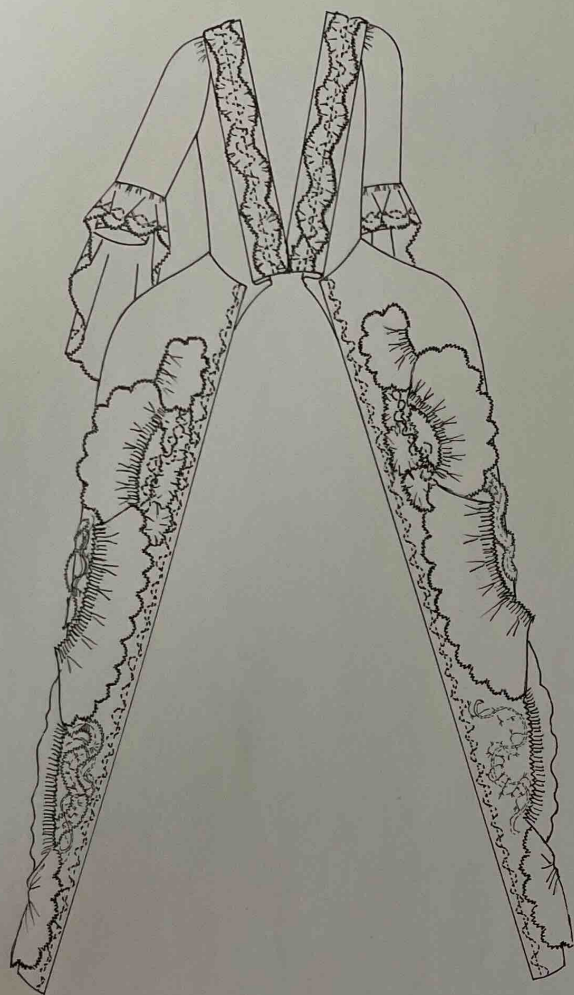
Acknowledgements, facing page: Gauntlet of a leather glove
1600-25. T.42-1954











THE DOUBLE BOX arrangement of the pleats at the back of this 1760s sack-back gown is typical of the construction of such garments in the mid-18th century. Almost all gowns of this style were made of four widths of silk at the back and two at the front. The lengths of silk were cut to accommodate the height of the wearer. By adjusting the depth and placement of the pleats at the waist and shoulder, the gown would be made to conform to the shape and exact measurements of the woman for whom it was made. Examination of many of these sack-backs reveals that this was the case, as each is slightly different in the width and arrangement of the back pleats. The fact that the back of the gown was meant to fall loose and unstructured from the pleats also made fitting a standard circumference of fabric to an individual much easier.

Typical of 1760s style are the single ruffles on the sleeves and the waist seam at the front of the gown. The rococo influence is evident in the curvilinear arrangements of the wide and narrow ruffles on the skirt, intertwined with white silk fly fringe. The narrowness of the front panels (less than one width of silk) and the slight awkwardness of their join with the bodice may indicate that the seamstress was inexperienced in accommodating recent alterations in the style of the sack-back: adapting to a narrower hoop and the newly introduced waist seam.

The brilliant yellow and white silk, made at Spitalfields between 1755 and 1760, is woven in a pattern of flowers and leaves.

For more details about this gown, see p.34.

A woman's sack-back gown
of yellow and white woven silk.
English, 1760-1765
T.426-1990

