

Red Damask Gown (*robe à l'anglaise*)



Unknown maker and place of origin, likely English

Silk damask

Date of garment: damask dates from ca. 1740 with gown alterations ca. 1760

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Accession # 2014.1.2

2014 purchase from Cora Ginsburg LLC (Sharon, USA)

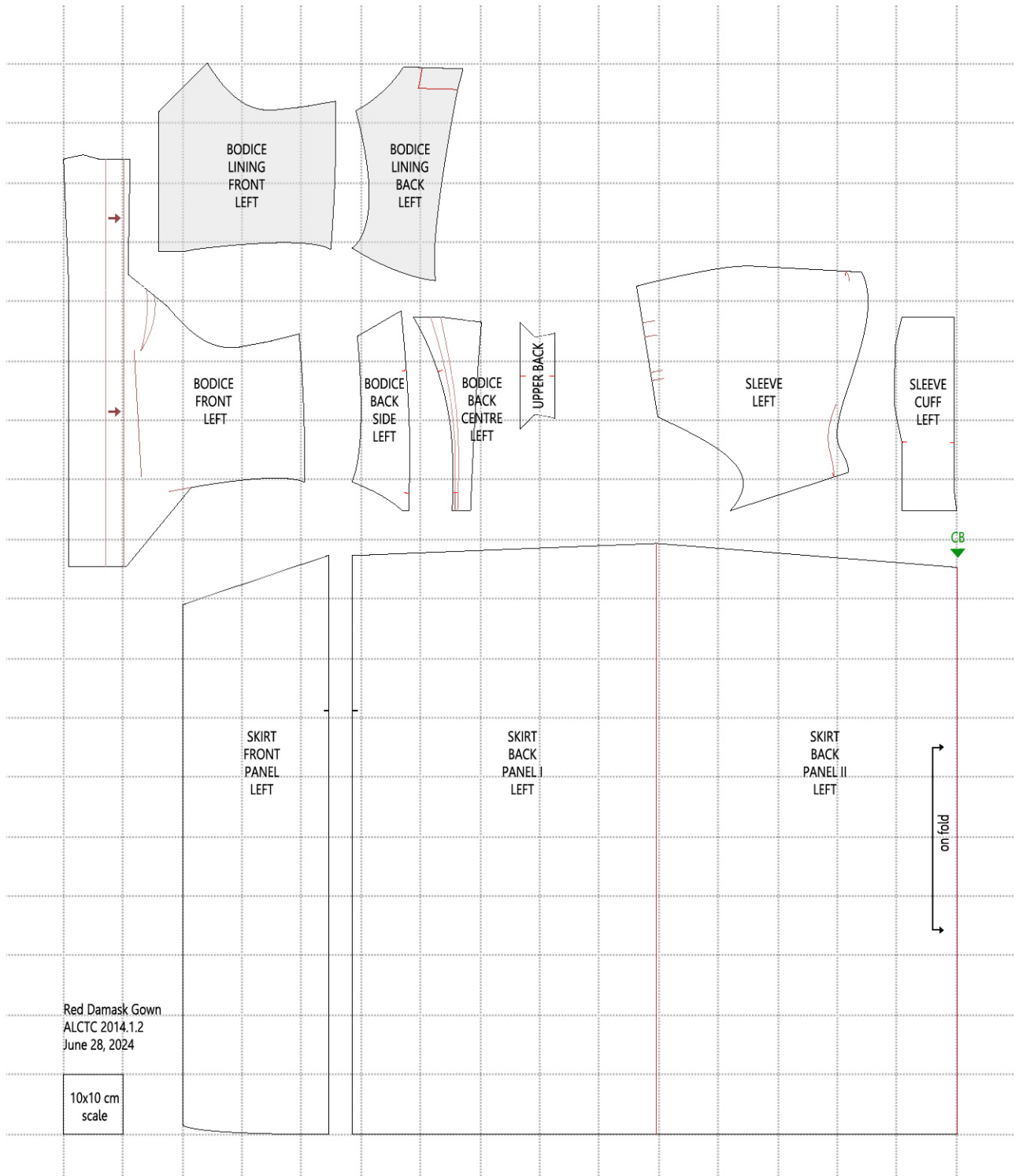


Figure 1
Pattern Diagram 2014.1.2



Figure 2

2014.1.2: Front View

Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.

Mount with reproduction kerchief, elbow ruffles and paper hair by Sarah Woodyard, graduate student.



Figure 3

2014.1.2: Three-quarter View

Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.

Mount with reproduction kerchief, elbow ruffles and paper hair by Sarah Woodyard, graduate student.



Figure 4

2014.1.2: Back View

Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.

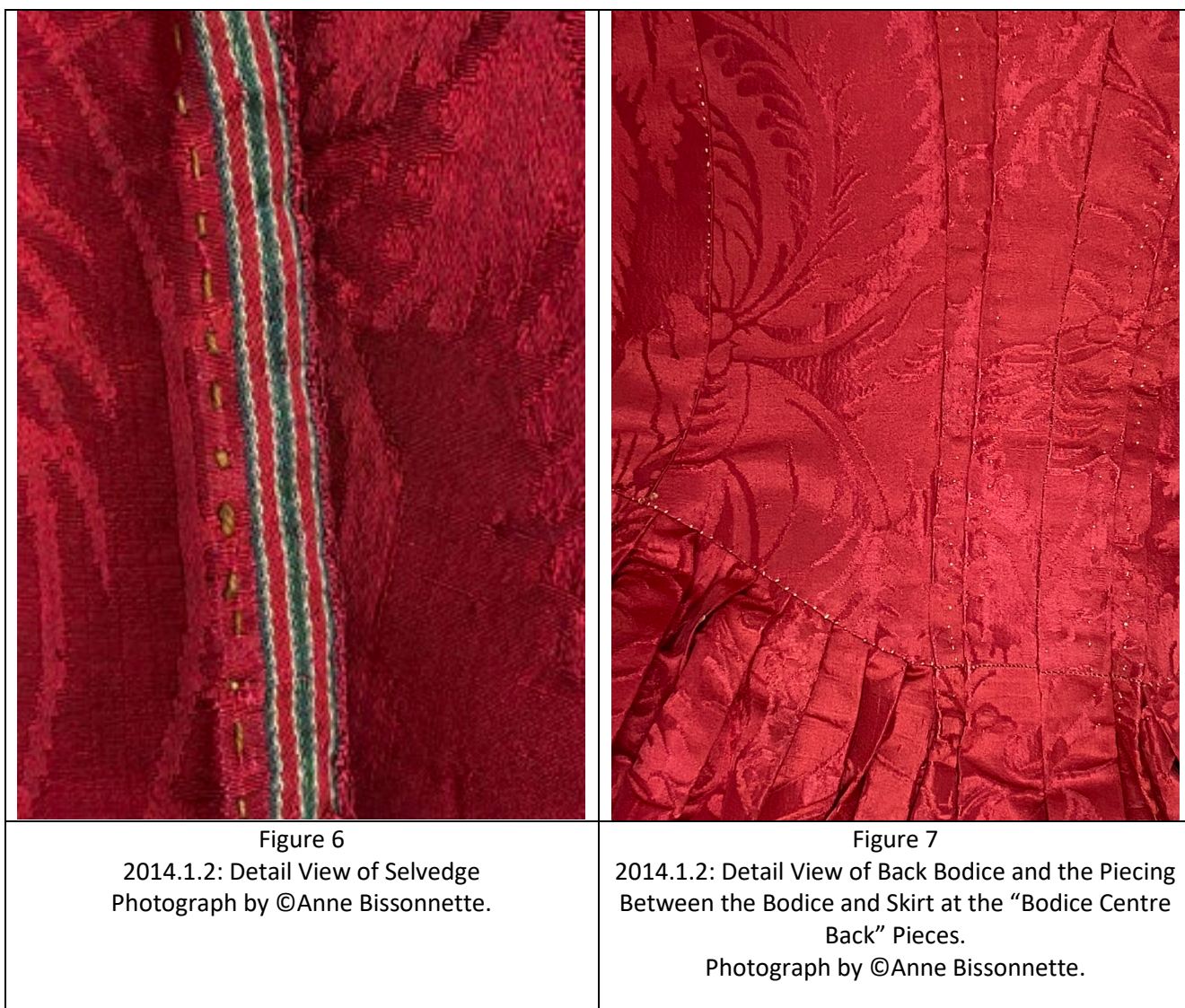
Mount with reproduction kerchief, elbow ruffles and paper hair by Sarah Woodyard, graduate student.



Figure 5

2014.1.2: View of Bodice Lining with the "Upper Back" Pattern Piece Folded Over at the Neckline

Photograph by ©Anne Bissonnette.



Observations

This ca. 1760 red silk damask gown is open at the front (254.5 cm hem circumference), has a fitted bodice, below-the-elbow sleeves with “winged” cuffs, and a full, pleated skirt. The bodice and sleeves are constructed over an unbleached linen lining. The outer bodice and its lining differ in cut and are sewn together in multiple places.

The gown fits a short and corpulent woman. Its outer bodice has pleated robings (a folded band along the front bodice opening) that are part of the “bodice front” pattern piece. They extend over the shoulder to cover the sleeve head and attach to the “bodice back side” pattern piece. The “bodice front” piece has a curved bust dart at the armhole. The “bodice back centre” piece has a centre back (CB) seam and is composed of what appears to be a series of gently curving vertical pleats. The two “skirt back” panels are sewn together and provide much fullness in back. These two panels are pleated at the waistline (10 pleats along the “skirt back panel I” pattern piece and 7 pleats and a box pleat at CB on the “skirt back panel II” pattern piece). The skirt dips at the centre front waistline and again at CB. The upper portion of the vertical seam joining the “skirt front panel” and the “skirt back panel I” is unstitched until the notch to create a pocket slit. Though it appears that the “bodice back centre” piece is cut in one with the skirt by the CB, there is a small horizontal piecing seam in this area separating bodice and skirt pattern pieces (Figure 7). The fully-lined sleeves appear to be rather fitted and are pleated into the armhole. They have pleated “winged” cuffs constructed separately from the sleeve and sewn onto the sleeve opening.

The linen bodice lining has a simplified cut in comparison with the silk outer bodice. Composed of two pattern pieces, the “bodice lining front” pattern piece extends over the wearer’s side to join the curved “bodice lining back” pattern piece. This back piece has a seam at the CB that adds shaping to the gown. The silk outer bodice appears to have a long diagonal tuck below the dart on the “bodice front” pattern piece but this tuck is shallow and does not provide shaping. The tuck’s function is to secure the linen lining to the silk outer bodice. The back bodice pieces of silk damask are sewn to the linen lining with large running stitches, which could likely be removed to allow for alterations to the fit of the gown. Pattern pieces for the silk bodice and its linen lining differ significantly in cut and one finds more piecing (not represented in the diagram) in the more expensive silk fabric.

The silk damask fabric is 51 cm wide from selvedge to selvedge. It displays large-scale motifs of pomegranates with leaves on branches. The selvedge is visible on the skirt and displays three colours (blue, white, red) in nine bands of colours (see Figure 6). The threads used to stitch the damask fabric are tan and medium brown. The gown is in good condition for its age, with some abrasions and areas of discolouration throughout, particularly at the underarms on the silk bodice.

Of importance:

- The nature of the bodice's stitched-down back pleats posed problems to the pattern-measuring process. Because the silk "bodice back centre" piece is covered with the lining, it is impossible to verify if the back pleats hide seam lines or if a single piece of fabric is pleated down to shape the curve of the back.
- As the linen "bodice lining back" piece also has a centre back seam and is a single pattern piece, we can assume that the corresponding silk "bodice back centre" piece may be a single piece as well and not one cut on a fold.
- The stitched-down pleats on the silk "bodice back centre" piece are not required for fitting purposes as it is clear from the corresponding lining piece that it is possible to fit this area with one smaller pattern piece. Their function may be aesthetic. On the other hand, the silk "bodice back centre" could be un-pleated and re-pleated to adjust to bodily changes. If such alterations occurred, the much cheaper linen lining would need to be replaced or altered.
- There are no "bodice shoulder lining" in this pattern: the pleated robings function as both the visible shoulder portion and its lining.

Pattern Notes:

Pattern diagram:

- All descriptions use proper left and right, unless otherwise specified.
- All patterns are placed on the grid, which corresponds to the grain line.
- Seam allowances are not included.
- All pattern pieces are presented for one side of the body, except for the "upper back" pattern piece.
- The "upper back" and "sleeve cuff" pattern pieces must be rotated at a 90° angle to be sewn in place.
- To obtain a full pattern, individual pattern pieces can be flipped along the horizontal axis to obtain the right side equivalent.

Garment materials:

- Silk damask is 51 cm wide from selvedge to selvedge.
- Unbleached linen lining fabrics are used.
- The gown is completely hand-sewn and has no closures (such as buttons, hooks and eyes, or laces).
- It is predominantly sewn using a rather coarse, 2-ply sewing thread. This thread appears tan from the exterior but retains some pink colour in the lining, suggesting fading of the dye. Additionally, a medium brown thread is also used and is visible in the lining.

Assembly of pieces:

- The front robings (a folded band at each side of the bodice's front opening), which are part of the "bodice front" pattern pieces, were created by pleating excess silk damask fabric and stitching them down into place.
- The silk outer bodice is top stitched to the linen bodice lining along the short side of the "bodice back side" pattern piece, along the back pleats, and in a diagonal tuck in front.
- The silk "bodice back centre" piece may be cut in one piece, pleated, and stitched down to the dimensions captured in the back pattern lining. This silk pattern piece could not be measured with certainty because the lining hides the reverse of the fabric and the top stitching of the pleats make it impossible to measure their depth.
- The "upper back" pattern piece creates the back horizontal neckline. Once rotated at a 90° angle, the red notches correspond to the CB line and the longest segment is over the visible silk bodice while the corresponding shorter segment covers the linen lining (Figure 5). This piece is presented in full rather than a half piece folded at CB. The narrower section of this band is folded over the back neckline and stitched on the linen lining (Figure 5). The "bodice lining back" piece has a red outline of where the "upper back" pattern piece covers the linen lining.
- The sleeve is cut on the cross grain and is lined with the same unbleached linen fabric as the "bodice lining back" piece.
- The sleeve cuff is a component that was likely attached to the gown *in situ*. While it is close to the lining at the elbow crease, it diverges in placement elsewhere.
- The armscye seam allowance is left raw.
- The left portion of the skirt is comprised of three assembled panels. The one at centre back and its neighbor are full selvedge-to-selvedge widths of fabric. The panel in front is a half-width but is horizontally pieced – a feature not indicated on the pattern.
- The skirt hem is self-faced with a 1.8 cm deep rectangular strip of fabric. Its circumference measures 254.5 cm but the front skirt panels do not touch at the centre front as this is an open gown worn with a visible petticoat.

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This garment has also been part of the exhibition [Stitched Narratives](#) (2015)

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