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The Journal of Dress History is the academic publication of The Association of Dress Historians (ADH) through which scholars can articulate original research in a constructive, interdisciplinary, and peer reviewed environment. The ADH supports and promotes the study and professional practice of the history of dress, textiles, and accessories of all cultures and regions of the world, from before classical antiquity to the present day. The ADH is Registered Charity #1014876 of The Charity Commission for England and Wales.

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The Editorial Board of The Journal of Dress History encourages the unsolicited submission for publication consideration of academic articles on any topic of the history of dress, textiles, and accessories of all cultures and regions of the world, from before classical antiquity to the present day. Articles and book reviews are welcomed from students, early career researchers, independent scholars, and established professionals. If you would like to discuss an idea for an article or book review, please contact Jennifer Daley, Editor-in-Chief of The Journal of Dress History, at email journal@dresshistorians.org. For updated submission guidelines for articles and book reviews, please consult www.dresshistorians.org/journal.

The Journal of Dress History is designed on European standard A4 size paper (8.27 x 11.69 inches) and is intended to be read electronically, in consideration of the environment. The graphic design utilises the font, Baskerville, a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706–1775) in Birmingham, England. The logo of The Association of Dress Historians is a monogram of three letters, ADH, interwoven to represent the interdisciplinarity of our membership, committed to scholarship in dress history. The logo was designed in 2017 by Janet Mayo, longstanding ADH member.
With their ability to embody multiple aspects of the human experience, sartorial objects can be instrumental in uncovering wider social and cultural practices and addressing more complex personal histories. One such substantial, although often invisible and overlooked, element of dress finds its place at the centre of *The Pocket: A Hidden History of Women’s Lives, 1660–1900*, in which Barbara Burman and Ariane Fennetaux set out to explore women’s detachable pockets and the position they occupied within female clothing practices between the mid seventeenth and late nineteenth century. By investigating the pocket’s appearance within various discourses across the areas of production, distribution, and consumption, the authors make invaluable observations regarding its practicality and adaptability, and, perhaps more importantly, look at the subject of their research as one that could provide a multi-layered perspective of women’s lives during the period.

The research carried out to reveal the story of this unique object is equally guided by the expertise of Burman and Fennetaux and indeed represents, as the authors themselves declare, “a work of two minds” (p. 8). Central to the study is the adoption of an object-based approach supported by a range of surviving artefacts located in museum collections across the United Kingdom. Such an impressive scope of material evidence represents one of the main strengths of this book and enables the authors to present a distinct body of information derived from personal traces and associations preserved within the objects’ physical and symbolic structure. Rich in complex meanings and socially eloquent, the biographies of extant pockets are further complemented by an examination of textual and visual sources. Valuable references to court proceedings, newspaper advertisements, novels, inventories, letters, and diaries together with the depiction of pockets in graphic satire and paintings offer a nuanced look at the way in which these objects managed to encapsulate women’s domestic and labour practices, as well as issues of identity, communality, privacy, and secrecy.
At a time when integrated pockets were mainly reserved for men’s clothing, women’s detachable pockets acted as indispensable carriers that allowed their owners to transport and protect various contents essential to their everyday activities. Commonly worn tied around the waist and concealed under layers of clothing, pockets were accessed through openings in dresses and enabled efficient navigation through diverse public and private terrains. The variety of sources covered is especially relevant when it comes to the object’s use across different social classes and professional environments. The book discusses the pockets as tools that supported a range of economic activities and mentions occasions in which they emerged closer to the surface. This liminal status leads the authors to categorise pockets neither strictly as underwear nor outerwear, but as highly adaptable and practical textiles that facilitated various aspects of female mobility by fluidly taking on roles of both garments and containers (pp. 40–41).

Numerous case studies encountered throughout the book cover the processes of manufacture and maintenance intrinsic to the material life of the pocket. While being informed about the choice of fabrics, diversity in personal markings and needlework, construction and sewing methods, the reader is simultaneously exposed to intricate relationships developed throughout the female social network (pp. 68–72). In this respect, Burman and Fennetaux skilfully link the pocket’s existence within domestic and institutional economies to the exchange of ideas, skills and techniques transferred between women of different households and across generations. Through the discussion of specific activities related to the circulation of the pocket, the analysis looks at the dynamics of labour and considers interconnections between elite and non–elite women. Furthermore, the research addresses the scope in which modernisation and change in technologies such as the introduction of the sewing machine and the dissemination of commercial patterns may have influenced the evolution of this sartorial element.

The book also demonstrates how tie-on pockets acted not only as carriers, but as personal spaces reserved for temporary or permanent storage of valuable items and other delicate objects infused with sentimental meanings whose safety imposed challenges to women’s privacy within the domestic terrain. This leads the authors to contextualise this particular aspect of use as one that facilitated sanctuary for material possessions imbued with a high level of mnemonic potential and identify a number of objects upon which special values and promises were often conferred by women of the period, such as coins, papers, letters, and talismans used for personal protection (pp. 133–134). In addition, the study articulates the way in which small belongings located within women’s pockets appeared as evidence of their literacy, fashionable sociability and a growing interest in travel and the outdoors.
As the research covers a long period in history, the reader is reminded of changes in women’s political and social status as well as in sartorial appearances. However, the book also demonstrates how detachable pockets remained in regular use and persisted as an element of dress more or less unaffected by fashionable trends and their susceptibility towards perpetual innovation. On several occasions, Burman and Fennetaux reiterate their view of the pocket as a highly adaptable commonplace item that managed to withstand variations in eighteenth and nineteenth century dress styles and survive along the adoption of other containers that appeared in form of bags and integrated pockets. Within the dichotomy of fashion and anti-fashion, the analysis clearly positions the pocket as an “unfashionable” item (p. 38), primarily marked by its practical and functional aspects and resilient to changes imposed by mainstream fashions. These arguments offer a fresh look at some of the established narratives adopted within the field of dress history concerning the nature and the demise of the pocket and have a significant potential to encourage further discussions of chronologies commonly assumed within the fashion system.

The Pocket represents a coherently structured and important addition to material culture scholarship. As a thorough study of a high academic standard, the publication is especially valuable to dress historians specialising in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, this unique analysis may provide important references to scholars of social and cultural history as well as to those interested in historical dress reconstruction. From its very beginning, the book invites the readers to immerse themselves into the fascinating world of the pocket and cleverly presents stories of objects that illuminate a range of practices related to the daily life, whether in material, textual, or visual form. Many of the objects discussed throughout the text are complemented by an impressive selection of high-resolution photographs. Carefully selected and positioned, these images highlight the biographies of the pockets and include clear views of personalisation, marking, and preservation techniques that indicate the pockets’ significance to their wearers. This special relationship between humans and objects will strongly captivate the attention of anyone interested in exploring women’s economic and social activities through the lens of an incredibly rich and a distinctly female object.
Alicia Mihalič holds an MA in Theory and Culture of Fashion from The University of Zagreb, Croatia. For the past four years, she has been employed at the same graduate study programme as an Assistant Lecturer responsible for courses related to history and ethnology of dress and textiles. Her research explores the intersection of costume history, fashion theory, and material culture studies, and establishes connections between clothing and its socio-cultural representation in visual media. She is mainly interested in the phenomenon of nostalgia, trend mechanisms, and the revival of former dress styles throughout the nineteenth century as well as the development of marginal clothing discourses during the second half of the same period. Her most recent research focuses on principles and practical implications of historical dress reconstruction within the museum environment.