

Marie Antoinette Paper Dolls

Tom Tierney



(continued from inside front cover)

Paris, still respected and apparently forgiven for her role at court. She died in 1812. In many ways, Rose Bertin was the precursor of both French couture and international fashion.

With Rose Bertin as her confidante and advisor, Marie Antoinette became the most elegant woman of the eighteenth century. Her influence on fashion began as soon as she became queen: she brought the farthingale, a centuries-old hooped underskirt supported by iron rods, back to the court, a style that lasted until the French Revolution. Marie's costumes blended the Rococo—a highly ornate, decorative style—with the new English simplicity, resulting in a fresh, romantic way of dressing that had the grace of an English garden rather than the elegant but cold symmetry of formal French design.

Marie Antoinette loved to escape the formality of the court at Versailles by retreating to the specially constructed rustic village—the *Hameau*—at the Petit Trianon. There she dressed in the new “natural” style, donning the simple costumes of shepherdesses and milkmaids, although in much grander fabrics and accessories. Marie hated wearing corsets, even though her mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, forbade her to abandon them, lest she ruin her figure. She preferred wearing “considerations,” two half circles of stiffened fabric attached at the waist to widen the skirt in a simpler and more practical manner than the usual panier, hoops used to expand a woman's skirts, thereby extending her hips. (In Plate 2, the Marie Antoinette paper doll wears a panier constructed of a whalebone or wire framework and covered with gauze or sheer linen.) A panier might extend the width of a gown's hem up to four yards. A less cumbersome panier was adopted in the late 1770s; in the 1780s its size continued to decrease, and finally it was abandoned.

In 1775, Marie Antoinette began a fashion revolution by giving orders that the princesses and other court ladies should no longer wear “Pierrots, cloaks, chemises, polonaises, long-coats, Turkish and Circassian-style dresses” for ceremonial visits. By the 1780s, the queen's personal taste for simpler styles was beginning to change the look of things, although she was criticized for “dressing like a chambermaid.” Of course, the years 1790 and 1791 also saw a rejection of ornamentation by anyone who could possibly be suspected of belonging to the aristocracy. Hoops were abandoned and skirts fell in soft pleats, held at the waist by a wide belt tied at the back. The monumental “pouf” hairstyle, which frequently housed fleas or even mice under its flour coatings, was abandoned in favor of soft curls falling back on the shoulders. The hip-line was amplified by a saddle-shaped cushion—the “cul de Paris”—attached to the underskirt below the waist.

Plate 1. Left. Rose Bertin in a polonaise [a coat/gown with skirts pulled back over an underskirt] caught up to form poufs at the back, worn over a flounced gown and apron. The short skirt worn over a panier created a problem: when a woman bent over, she revealed a considerable stretch of leg. In addition, underpants and drawers were considered the garments of the streetwalker; hence, considerable maneuvering was necessary to preserve modesty. Here, Rose Bertin carries the symbol of her trade, a hatbox. Right. Court robe (*robe de cour*) in the Turkish mode. It is worn over an extremely wide panier. The skirt displays “plastic decoration,” trimmings of ribbons, ruffles, and bows (also seen on Plates 3 and 7). The hat is the French version of an oriental turban.

Plate 2. Marie Antoinette. The doll is wearing a front-laced corset of silk damask with bottom tabs to cover the top of the panier. The panier is constructed of canes of whalebone covered in satin, filled in with sheer silk. The panier is worn over white linen petticoats; a low-cut sleeved chemise is worn under the corset and petticoats.

Plate 3. Court robe worn over a panier. The fanciful decoration on the robe includes silk flowers, leaves, and tassels. The headdress includes ostrich plumes, *aigrette* (ornamental plumes, often the tail feathers of an egret), and silk flowers to match those on the dress. The tall, elaborate hairdo (seen also in Plates 7, 8, and 10) was commonly achieved by combing the hair over

a pad or wire support and adding false curls. Embellishments might include a basket of flowers or a miniature scene. These headdresses were abandoned by the late 1770s.

Plate 4. Morning gown of brocaded satin. The train is lined in deep blue silk; it is constructed with Watteau-style box pleats (many details of Rococo costume can be seen in the paintings of Antoine Watteau). The low-cut, square neckline was typical of the late 1770s. The sleeves show a typical style of a lower sleeve of flaring lace ruffles topped by a bow.

Plate 5. Winter polonaise and gown. The polonaise is trimmed with mink and lined with white satin. The gown is decorated with satin ribbon as well as embroidery enhanced with pearls. Marie Antoinette carries a satin fur-trimmed muff and wears a fur hat.

Plate 6. Morning dress or negligee comprised of a polonaise-style robe worn over a silk gown. Marie wears a small lace cap and carries a striped satin scarf.

Plate 7. Satin court robe with gold tassels and fringe. The train is lined with pale green silk velvet. The headdress consists of satin ribbon and ostrich and heron feathers held by a diamond clip. This costume can be seen in a portrait of Marie Antoinette painted by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Here, the queen is shown wearing the famous jewels that were involved in the Affair of the Diamond Necklace (1785). It is doubtful that the queen actually ever possessed the necklace; it is shown here as an accessory to her opulent costume.

Plate 8. A grand court robe of cerise satin trimmed with flounces of white lace. The sleeves and bodice feature tiers of the same lace. The train is of green satin. The headdress incorporates cerise ribbon, a diamond pin, and ostrich plumes.

Plate 9. Costume for a tableau. Marie Antoinette was probably portraying Hera, queen of the gods (Hera was the Greek name for the mythological goddess, Juno the Roman). Excavations in Greece in the mid-eighteenth century briefly stimulated interest in classical dress styles.

Plate 10. Court robe trimmed with gold lace and golden medallions. The headdress is decorated with gold lace, ostrich plumes, pearls, and jet.

Plate 11. A blue satin polonaise worn with a *bask* [a stay that stiffened the point of the bodice] and satin petticoats. Lace flounces and satin ribbon trim the gown. Marie's plume-topped turban repeats the satin ribbon.

Plate 12. Velvet day ensemble with lace flounces and mink trim. The hat is of red velvet, white sheet, and ostrich plumes. Madame Vigée-Lebrun painted this costume in a portrait of the queen.

Plate 13. Walking costume of “flea” (a shade of brown that Louis XVI said reminded him of a flea) and gunmetal satin. The polonaise appears to be a “pocket polonaise,” with pocket slashes in the side; the train of the robe could be caught up in the slits, making it shorter and creating poufs at the back and sides. Marie's gunmetal satin hat is trimmed with a satin bow and an ostrich plume. She carries a muff of red fox.

Plate 14. Day ensemble similar to that in Plate 12, but in blue and white. The velvet robe is tied at the front with satin bows. The satin petticoat and velvet robe are trimmed with fur. The *shawl* [triangular shawl or scarf in a fine, soft fabric] is of linen with a lace flounce that matches the flounce at the cuff. The hat is of ruched velvet, ribbon, lace, and pearls. Marie Antoinette wore this costume for a portrait painted by Madame Vigée-Lebrun.

Plate 15. Simple satin day dress in the mode of a milkmaid (Marie played at being a milkmaid, although the chore was actually performed by others). The robe is caught with ropes of pearls and is trimmed with flounces of lace and satin ribbon. The headdress consists of a coronet of silk roses.

Plate 16. A chemise of white lawn, called the *chemise à la Reine* in the queen's honor, as it was a favorite style of hers. It is in the shepherdess mode and is trimmed with a satin sash at the waist. The chemise with waist sash was one of the “natural” styles favored in England in the 1780s. Marie wears a Leghorn straw hat with satin ribbons and an ostrich plume, and carries a decorative glass walking stick.





Rose Bertin



Do not cut out spaces between arms and bodies.

PLATE 1



Do not cut out
space between
arm and body.





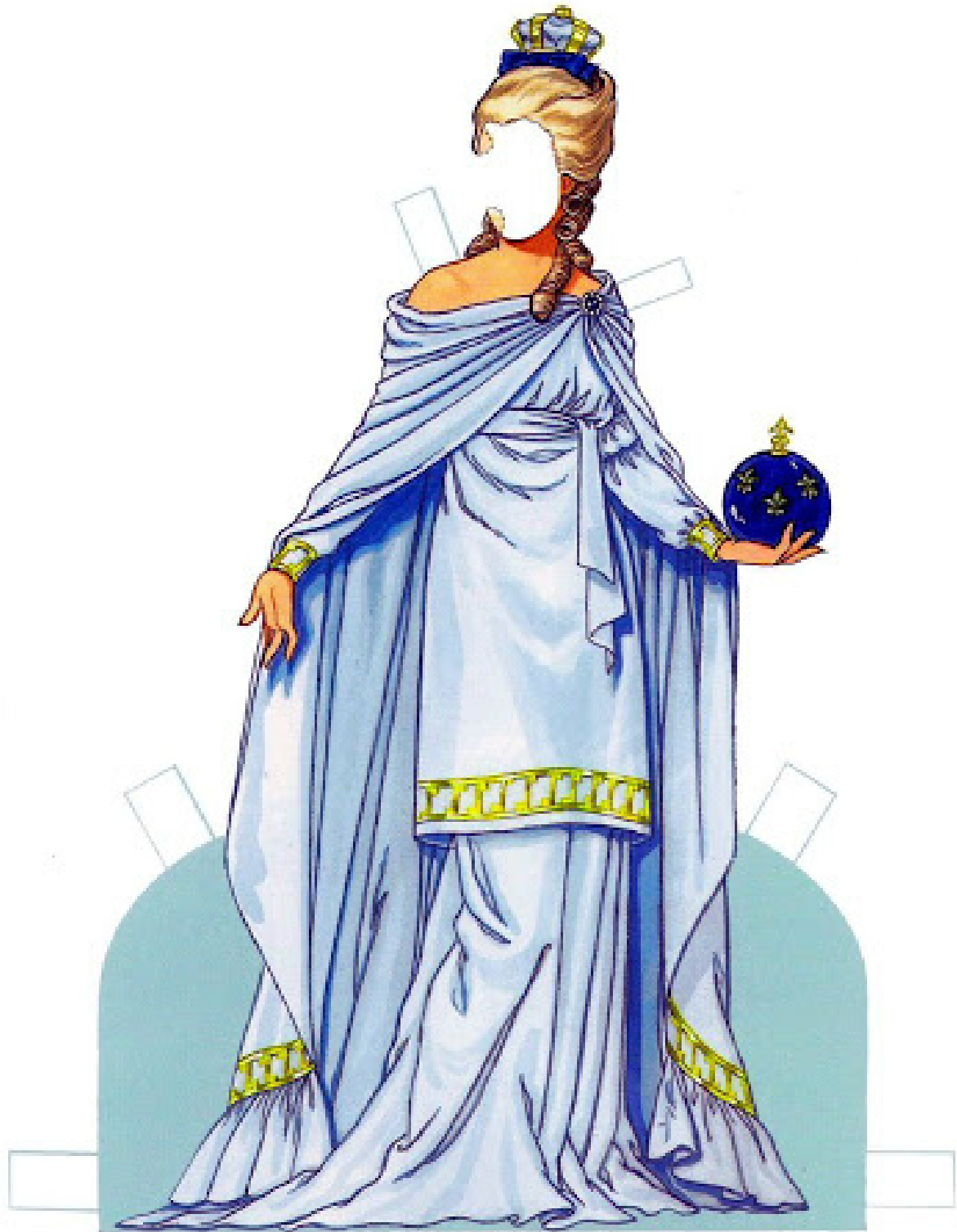
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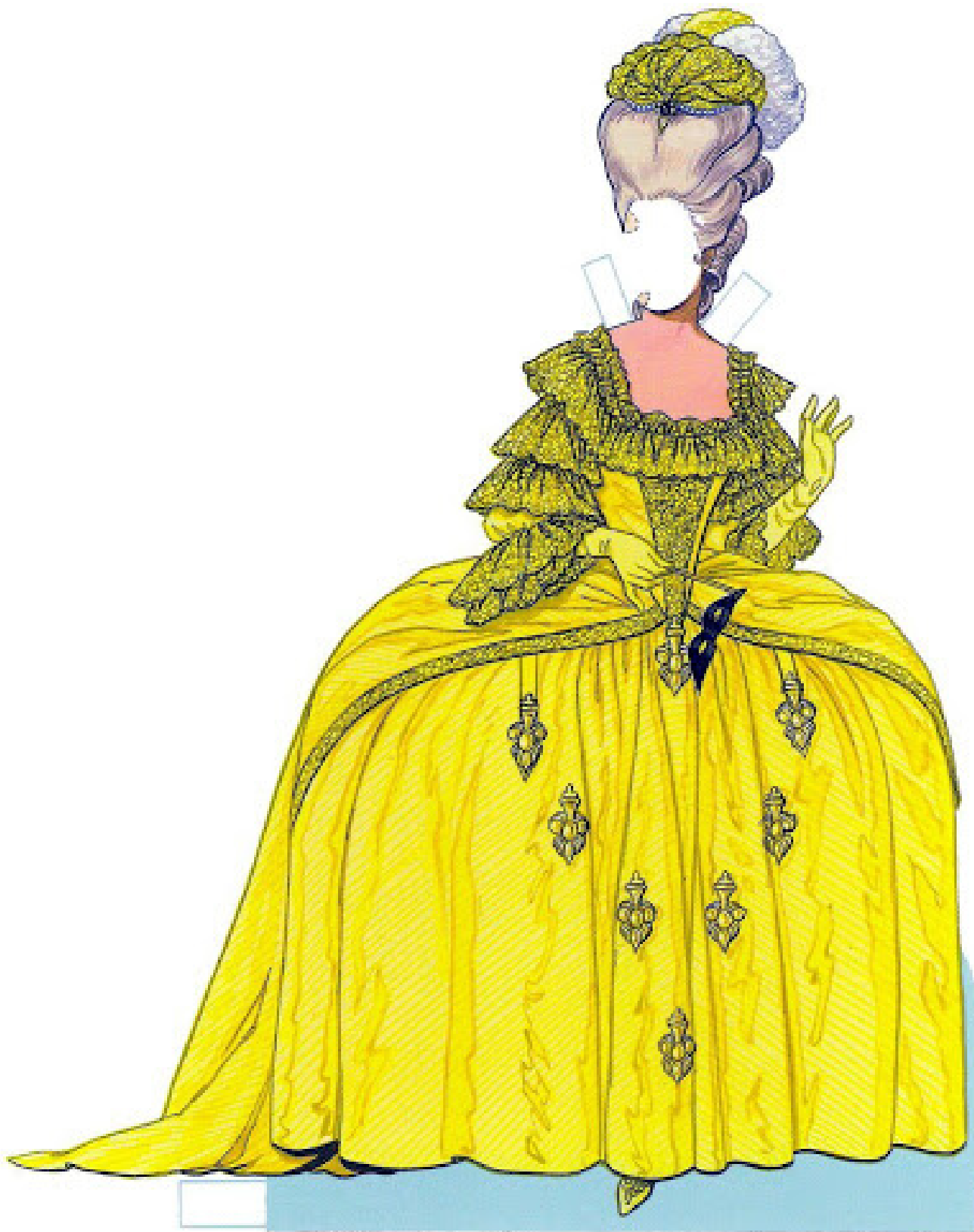




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In addition to her role as queen of France, Marie Antoinette (1755–1793) could justly claim to rule the 18th-century fashion world. Directly behind her throne stood a savvy dressmaker, Rose Bertin, who helped transform the young Antoinette from a foreign princess into the epitome of French fashion and the most glamorous woman of her era.

Two figures portraying the queen and her dressmaker appear in this lavish paper doll collection, along with 15 extraordinary costumes. These elegant ensembles attest to Rose Bertin's skills as a designer and her place as an innovator in fashion history. Her shop served as a center for the beau monde, and its displays of garments for an international clientele mark the first recorded showings of a couture collection. No one acted as a more conspicuous model than the ill-fated queen, who abandoned hoop skirts and monumental hairstyles in favor of her trademark style, magnificent renditions of the simple garb worn by shepherdesses and milkmaids.

These dazzling costumes, scrupulously researched and meticulously rendered, come with detailed descriptive notes, providing a treasury of historic fashions for paper doll fans and costume enthusiasts.

Original Dover (2001) publication. 2 dolls and 15 costumes on 16 full-color plates. Introduction. 9½ x 12½. Paperbound.

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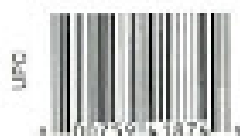
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