

# Italian Gloves of the 16th century.

By THLady Katerina da Brescia

When looking at creating some Italian gloves, for my SCA persona, I found that there is a great deal less easily available written information about Italian gloves of the 16th century (let alone before that).

A lot has been written about Elizabethan gloves. They have a distinct look, are generally fitted with extended finger tips, longer fourchettes seams on the back of the hand and generously embroidered cuffs. Often these cuffs are separate to the main glove pattern, sewn to the trunk. (Figure 29)

This article is mainly concerned about the styles and patterns in recreating a more accurate copy of 16th century gloves from Italy. During my research, I discovered an glove pattern, differing from the modern one, and general styles for Italian gloves, differing from Elizabethan gloves.

## Customs and Laws

During history there have been varied sumptuary laws regarding the use of colours, materials and decorations of gloves.

Customs also controlled the use of gloves. One was to remove gloves when in the presence of Royalty and the Church. It was also considered polite to remove gloves when eating or when greeting people. This possibly led to a 15th century fashion of wearing only the left glove and wearing the right glove on the belt.

Apparently the giving of a poison glove as a gift to an enemy, was also common in the 15th century and beyond.

*(Gloves in Period and Free Masons website)*

## Portraits and Gloves.

Unfortunately, the custom for removing gloves in polite society, meant that many portraits do not have the gloves being worn, but held. This makes it much more difficult to define the seams and cut of gloves from visual references only. Luckily, there are a few portraits in which one glove is worn. This helps to see how the glove actually fitted and occasionally gives a glimpse into where the seams sit. This difficulty in getting a definitive look, at the glove in the portrait, necessitates some conjecture by having to piece together glimpses from differing paintings.

The first recorded (English) Glovers Guilds were in the 14th century. Into the 16th century, the number of Glovers Guilds increased. Though other guild documents exist, I have found no published contemporary patterns available prior to the 17thC. Descriptions are available on some occasions.

The best way to get a feel for the type of glove you want for your time period is to search out portraits, miniatures or extent examples of gloves.

For my research I was restricted to contemporary portraits. From the 15th Century, portraits are full of gloves.

In general, the 15th century saw a shortening of the glove length, from Medieval times. Colours became more varied and embroidered decoration appeared, mainly on the cuffs. During the 16th century, the cuffs slowly extended in length, yet again, with decorated cuffs

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being separate to the main pattern. Spangles, lace, embroidery, fringes and jewels were used. The Museum of Fine Arts has an extant (possibly Italian) glove showing metallic threads and lace trim.

The following 16th century Italian portraits show the gloves had a slightly different in appearance, though following the general rule.

Firstly the early 1500s



Figure 1. *Cesare Borgia* by Melone (Accademai Carrara Bergamo)



Figure 2. Moretto's *Count Sciarra Martinengo Cesaresco* 1516-18

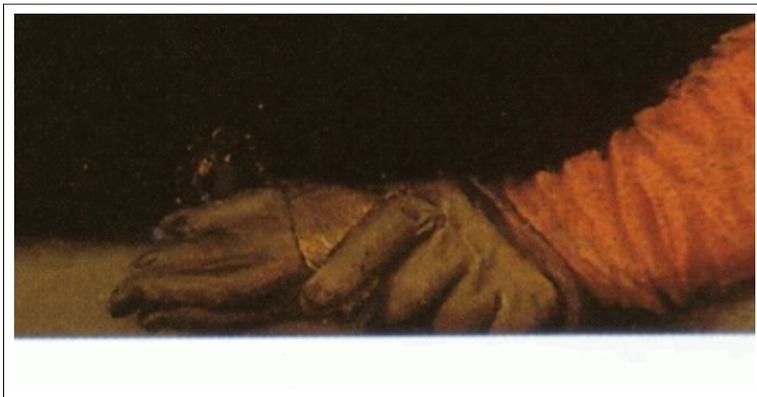


Figure 3. Titian's *Young man with cap and gloves* 1512-15



Figure 4. My version #1 of an early Italian glove

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Italian gloves of the 1520's:



Figure 5. Paris Bordone's *Venetian Lovers*, 1520's



Figure 6. Titian's *Man with a Glove*, 1520-22



Figure 7. Veneto's *Portrait of a Young Lady*, 1520-30



Figure 8. Paolo Cavazzola's *Portrait of a Lady*, Bergamo

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Italian Gloves of the 1530's:



Figure 9. *Lucrezia Sommaria* by Ridolfo, 1530-32



Figure 10. Parmigianino's *Roman Courtesan*, 1530-35

Italian gloves of the 1540's:



Figure 11. *Portrait of Febo da Brescia* by Lorenzo Lotto, 1544



Figure 12. *Portrait of Florentine Noblewoman*, Bronzino?, 1540's



Figure 13. Titian's *Portrait of Pietro Aretino*, 1545

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Italian Gloves of the late 16th Century:

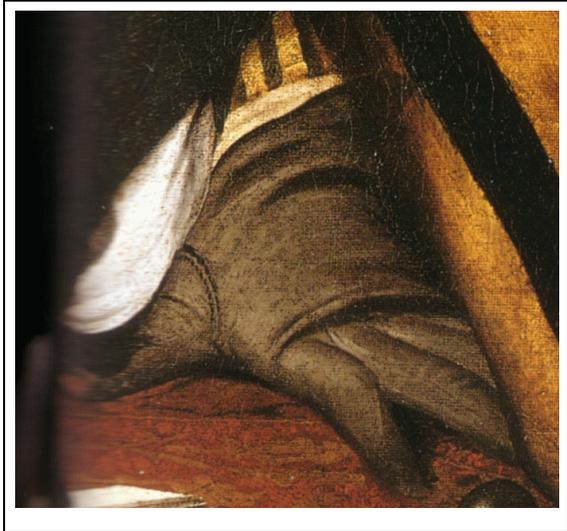


Figure 14. Caravaggio's *The Cardshaps*  
1595-1600



Figure 15. Caravaggio's *The Fortune Teller*

## The Italian Style

For the portraits, in the early part of the 16th century, we can see that it appears that gloves had short trunks, often with a cuff folded down to reach the ball of the thumb. Sometimes this could be slashed, as in Paolo Cavazzola's *Portrait of a Lady*, Bergamo (Figure 8), Titian's *Man with a Glove*, 1520-22 (Figure 6), his *Portrait of Pietro Aretino*, 1545 (Figure 13), and *Sacred and Profane Love*, 1514 (Figure 16). The same cuff treatment as Figure 16, can be seen in Melone's *Portrait of Cesare Borgia*. (Figure 1). In general, they appear to be of a much looser fit than later Elizabethan gloves



Figure 16. Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, 1514



Figure 17. Lotto's *Young man in Striped Coat*, 1526

Interestingly, there is definite visual evidence of the extended fingertips, seen in Elizabethan gloves, as early as the 1520's, in Titian's *Man with a Glove*, 1520-22 (Figure 6). The extended tips can also be seen, to varying degrees, Lotto's *Young Man in Striped Coat*, 1526 (Figure

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17), his *Portrait of Febo da Brescia*, 1544 (Figure 11) and possibly even in Titian's *Young Man with Cap and Glove*, 1512-15 (Figure 3)

There is also visual evidence of the fingertips having a more rounded shape, as seen in Moretto's *Count Sciarra Maringengo Cesaresco*, 1516-18 (Figure 2) and Veneto's *Portrait of a Young Lady*, 1520-30 (Figure 7). The rounded fingers still appear in Bronzino's *Portrait of a Florentine Woman* (Figure 12) in the 1540's. This seems to be more common, in the woman's glove.

Generally, the gloves do not appear to be very ornately decorated with embroidery in the first half of the 16th century. Colours seen are black, browns, yellows, white and possibly a reddish brown. The cuff could either be of the same material as the trunk or of a contrasting colour, most likely also made of leather, as seen in Alessandro Allori's *Portrait of Maria d' Cosimo*, 1555-57 (Figure 18).



Figure 18. *Portrait of Maria di Cosimo* 1555-57 by Alessandro Allori.

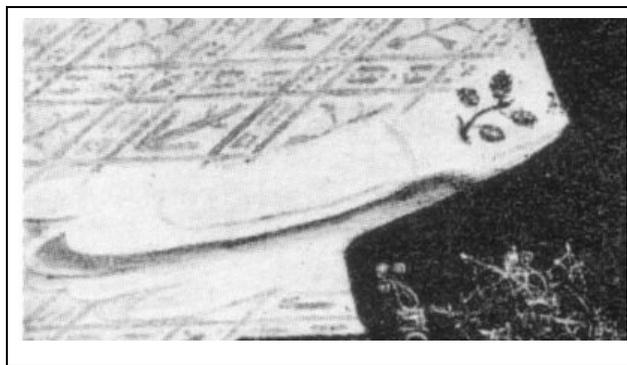


Figure 19. Frederigo Barocci's *Portrait of Duchess of Urbino*, Museo Filangeri (Naples)

Later, this century, Italian gloves appear to have embroidery, as seen in *The Portrait of Duchess Urbino* by Frederigo Barocci (Figure 19). Extended tips can again be seen in Carravaggio's *Fortune Teller* (Figure 15). This same portrait shows 'fancy stitching' or possibly slight embroidery around the thumb-trunk seam. I could find no evidence of this seam being heavily embroidered, as in Elizabethan examples, as seen here in Figure 20 for comparison.



Figure 20 Museum of Fine Art, Boston. 1580, English

From the two extant examples, late in the 16th century, the Venetian glove from the *Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur* website (Figure 21) and the leather glove from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (Figure 22), classified as possibly Italian, the cuff appears to be simply an extension of the trunk pattern. Both or these are dated at 1600 and both show patterned embroidery on the cuff. The Venetian glove also has embroidery on the back of the hand. This is very similar in style to a pair of embroidered leather gloves (non-Italian) in the Manchester Gallery.

The Museum of Fine Arts Boston glove, shows longer fourchettes, extended on the back of the hand. This is similar to Elizabethan gloves. This is not seen in the Venetian glove which

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seems to be more consistent in shape to the earlier gloves, seen in portraits - with a less fitted, more loosely fitting glove.

The thumb in all examples appear to be similar in shape. The thumb-trunk seam appears to be stitched on the outside in Figure 23. The fingers are sewn and turned in the Venetian example. The Museum of Fine Arts glove appears to have fine outside stitching for the fingers and side seam also. (Figure 24)

## The Real Thing



Figure 21. Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur  
Glove, Venice 1600



Figure 22. Italian 1600 Leather  
Museum of Fine Arts Boston



Figure 23. Italian 1600  
MFA Stitches



Figure 24. Museum of Fine  
Arts, Boston. Italian 1600  
Stitches on fingers and side.

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Here are some 16th century gloves for comparison. These are *not* classified as Italian: The first is from the Manchester Galleries (Figure 25). The fingers, thumb and trunk and decoration placement are similar to that from the Museum of Fine Arts Italian example (Figure 22).

Figure 26 is also from the Manchester Gallery. It is an English glove dated 1580. Here the cuff is a separate embroidered piece, sewn to the trunk.

Figure 27 is from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. These gloves are of unknown origin, dated 1575-1625. Again the silk cuff is heavily embroidered and sewn to the trunk. This is a looser fitting glove and is similar in appearance (without embroidery) to the earlier Italian gloves found in portraits.

Finally, I have chosen a pair of gloves classified as from 'Europe' 1600 (Figure 28). These again are highly decorated on a cuff that appears to be originally separate to the trunk of the glove. This could be made of differing materials, as seen here and in Figure 27.

This shows that the Elizabethan style of separate cuffs was on the continent Europe if not specifically in Italy.



Figure 25. Manchester Galleries.



Figure 26. Manchester Galleries 1580  
-1600 England



Figure 27. Museum of Fine Arts - Leather  
Unknown Origin 1575-1625



Figure 28. Manchester Galleries, Europe  
1600

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## A Map of Parts

The main parts of a glove are the body (trank), thumb, cuff and fouchettes (Figure 29).

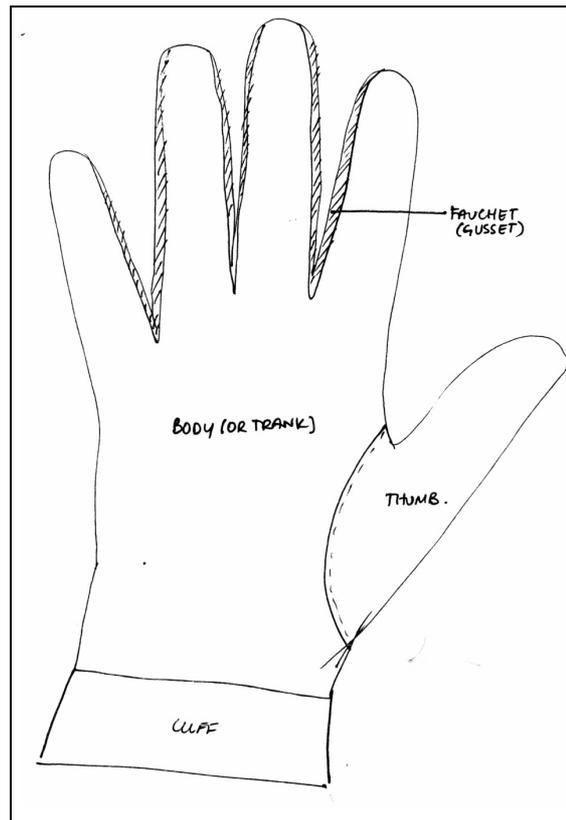


Figure 29. Parts of the glove

## Patterns

Before the 17th century, (English) Glovers Guilds did not tend to document patterns etc. and it appears that there are no written diagrams or patterns available for this period. (Apparently there are some Italian, German and French documents around, but I have not got access to them.)

My first attempt at Italian gloves, uses the modern day thumb. (Figure 4) Since then I have managed to get access to two patterns, more closely aligned with the 16th century. The first is from *Le Gant*. I tried to find a copy of this book but failed. Thanks to *The Glove Website*, I also have a copy. This pattern is from King James I, being a little outside the era being considered. However this is the closest published pattern we possibly have. The pattern has been linked to gloves from Henry VIII.

Thanks to Gina, from the Society of St Anne glovers email list (who provided a scan), I now have a copy of the glove pattern from Diderot's pattern also (Figure 32). This is from the mid 1700's and, while well outside the area preferred, it is very similar in style to that of *Le Gant*. This can also be found on *The Costumer's Manifesto* website.

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Figure 30. English 1600 (Emlyn-Jones)

The main difference between modern patterns and these two, very similar patterns, is the thumb. Modern patterns have a squarish shaped 'flap' that fits into the thumb piece. The *Le Gant* and *Diderot* patterns do not. I have supplied a copy of both these patterns, at the end of this article.

Though an English example, the closest I have found to showing the actual thumb piece, at the webbing, is from *Glove Making* by Gwen Emlyn Jones. (Figure 30). This is dated around 1600 and shows a thumb that appears to be consistent with both *Le Gant* and *Diderot*.

When looking at our visual evidence for 16th century Italian gloves, the cuff appears to be separate to the trunk. This is seen in *Le Gant's* pattern.

For the glovers amongst us, it seems that quirks (see Glossary) were not used for Italian 16th century gloves. This is an assumption, as it is a possibility that the painters missed this detail. This is often the case with secondary sources. However, both of our Italian extant examples seem to back this up (Figures 21 and 22). The quirk is usually on the back of the hand. This example shows extended fourchettes but there does not seem to be a quirk (Figure 24).

And finally, we see another English glove. (Figure 31) from the Manchester Gallery, dated 1640. I have chosen this, as it is very similar to the Italian extant glove from the Museum of Fine Arts (Figure 22). As *Le Gant* is a 'King James' pattern I thought it would be helpful to show extant gloves from that time made from the contemporary pattern, so this can be compared to our Italian extant examples.

## Perfuming?:

During the 16th century, scented gloves were in fashion. This is documented in *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* for Elizabethan and Spanish gloves. Apparently Oxford gave Queen Elizabeth a pair of Italian scented gloves. Beyond this, I have yet to find documentation on perfuming of Italian gloves.



Figure 31. Manchester gallery 1640

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*The Glove Website* states that perfumers were bound by Guild laws and had to be 'licensed' as poisons could be also be applied to the hand via mthe glove. It is well-rumoured that this was used by Catherine d'Medici.

*Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* gives documentation for a panne of stele for perfuming in 1563 (p217), and of fine carving tools to cut gloves, and descriptions on types of scents and how they were applied.

Many of Queen Elizabeth's gloves were scented. They could be perfumed with” of jessamine, ambergris, washed with malmsely wine and coated with a odiferous grease. powder of cypress, pomade, oil f cedar, oil of benzoin, grains of musk , cinnamon, closes storax, nutmeg, oil o flemon, civet, water of orange flowers, musk rose, goat tallow mixed with oil of jessamine, martells, lemon camphore, white lead, oil of sweet almonds, roots of white lily, rose water, oil of musk oil of fruit stone, white ambergris, oil of storax.” (p 217)

## Materials.

Leather, linen, silk, wool, velvet are some of the more common materials used in renaissance and medieval times. Gloves made of linen has been recorded as early as King Tut (*Renaissance Tailor*), and as late as Queen Elizabeth (*Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*). Silk was another popular choice. Emperor Frederick II's gloves were made of red silk. Leather such as calf skin or kid (*History of Costume, Gloves in Period*) have been recorded from Henry II, Richard I, King John (*Gloves in Period*). Other leathers possible were deer, rabbit and sheep. There is evidence of fur-lined gloves in both portraits, extant examples and the 3-fingered sculpture from St John the Baptists' Cathedral. Velvet gloves appear in the 13th century. (*Gloves in Period*)

## Choosing Materials:

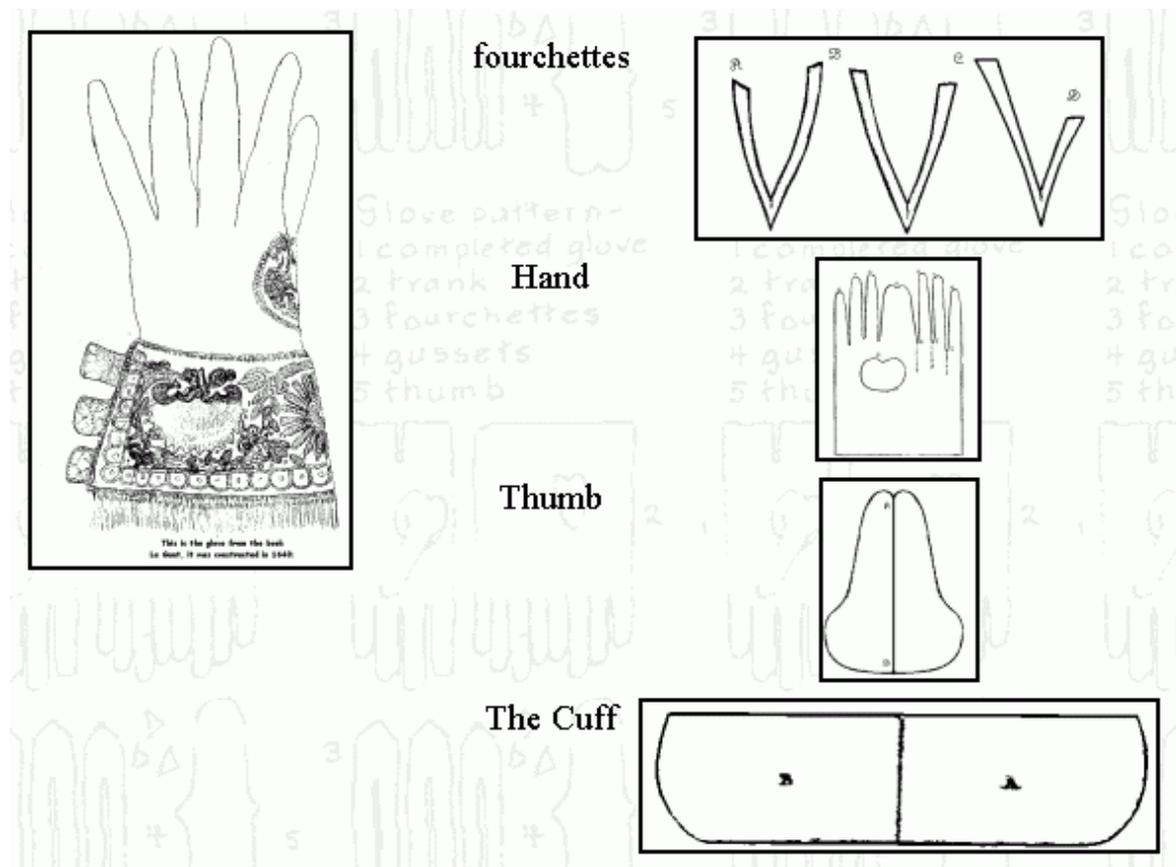
From the visual evidence and extant examples seen here, it appears that leather was the material of choice in Italy. However, as far as extant examples go, the leather would have lasted much longer than either silk, linen or wool. So this is, by no means, definitive.

When cutting leather, the grain runs parallel with fingers as stretch most across grain (over hand). If the leather is very stretchy, first stretch before hand or will become baggy prewash materials for gloves or it will shrink!

Instructions for this can be found at the *Vintage Sewing* website and *You Can Sew Your Own Gloves*.

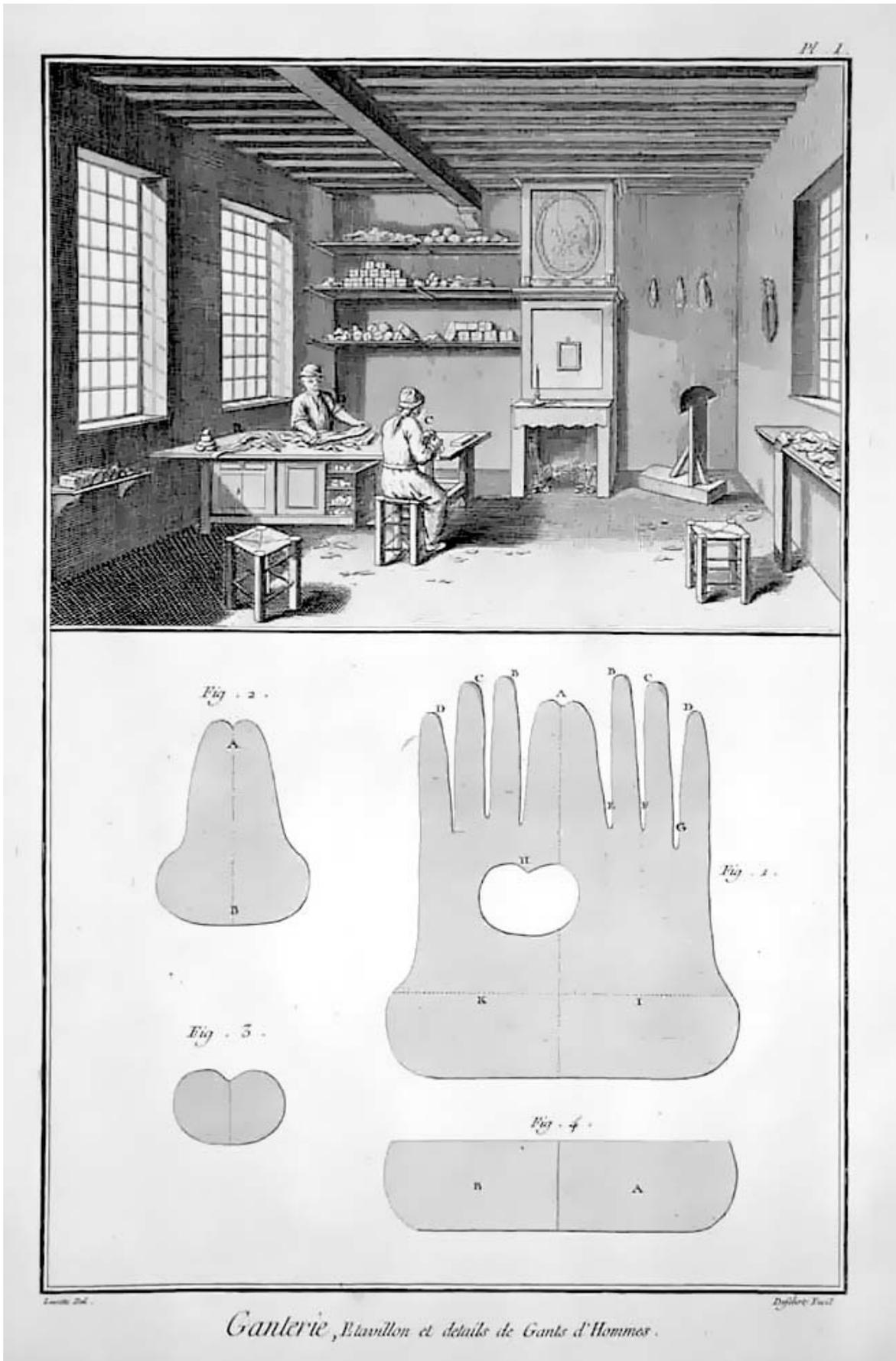
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Figure 32: Le Gant pattern from *The Glove Website*. (17thC)



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Figure 33: *Diderot's* Pattern 18th C



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## Glossary

(see Map of Parts for more details).

Trank: body of the glove, covering the palm area to the wrist (see figure 29)

Fourchettes: the long gussets between the fingers. They could be made from long rectangular pieces of material, or This could be made of differing materials, particularly for Elizabethan gloves. V-shaped, as in Le Gant's pattern. Fourchettes could be extended to lengthen the fingers. Some fashions were pointed at the tips.

Quirk: this is a small triangular gusset, sewn in at the base of the fourchettes, between the fingers. More commonly used in modern gloves. There is some evidence they were used in 17thC.

Cuff: the part of the glove extending up the arm, to lengthen the glove. This could be made separately, in some cases from differing materials. It can be very ornately decorated. It varied in length depending on the fashion.

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