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Paintings of upper-class men and women tell an important part of the history of costumes, but surviving garments themselves reveal even more. Every crease, stitch, and stain in a piece of clothing supplies information about its wearer and its era. This stunning book features 18th- and early-19th-century garments from the premiere collection of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Illustrated with more than 300 colour photographs, including many details and back views, the book treats not only elegant, high-style clothing in colonial America but also garments for everyday and work, the clothing of slaves, and maternity and nursing apparel. Drawing on contemporary written descriptions and on actual costumes of the period, the book analyzes what Americans in the 18th century considered fashionable and attractive and how they used clothing to assert status or to identify occupations. The book also examines the myths and meanings of clothing in British and American society, clothing for the entire lifecycle, and a history of clothing alteration. Informative sidebars on a variety of fascinating topics complete the volume.