

## Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe

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In the past two decades, the multifaceted discipline of the history of medieval and early modern dress has benefited from reconceptualizations of the long, late Middle Ages and Renaissance as having undergone “a revolution of consciousness, belief, and thought with global implications” that we still recognize today.<sup>1</sup> A widening of the number and variety of crafts and industries, a proliferation and multiplication of skills and artisanal productivity that crossed regions, the ingenuity of pioneering ideas, and an unprecedented movement of goods, all had far-reaching influences on how merchants, diplomats, humanists, artists, mendicants, pilgrims, itinerant artisans, and laborers viewed their world and moved within it.<sup>2</sup>

Dramatic technical and intellectual innovations were not solely the product of small, closed, tightly knit elite societies of humanists and artists as these have traditionally been studied. Rather, since the eleventh century, the growth of towns and cities in Europe led to the formation of new and multiple centers of cultural forms and industrial practices and larger and more expansive social networks. Rural households were linked to urban markets, and more goods were owned by more people.<sup>3</sup> This paradigmatic shift of attention from social structure to both practice and agency links production and consumption when scholars now examine the significance of clothing and social systems of dress in these periods. Early modern retailers, for example, played a growing role as middlemen and women between producers and consumers.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the new technology of print in the late fifteenth century, ideas, information, and misinformation about clothing practices and goods circulated with extraordinary speed.<sup>5</sup> Already in the wake of the Black Death of 1348, trade in Italy had accelerated exponentially, and global networks involved newly widening commercial markets for individual consumption, from localized shops to international fairs and overseas depots.<sup>6</sup>

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Renaissance courts were in constant flux as nobles moved in and out of a ruler's household.<sup>7</sup>

These developments had an enormous impact on the material culture of the age, which witnessed an unrestrained accumulation of goods.<sup>8</sup> Luxury objects and fashionable garments were valuable assets that set elite families apart from the working poor.<sup>9</sup> Over two centuries of great economic and demographic expansion (ca. 1450–ca. 1650), new patterns of production, merchandizing, and consumption in the creation and dissemination of paintings, decorative ornaments, tapestries, and illuminated manuscripts, and the design and production of clothing significantly changed what clothing signified to individuals, within their respective communities and across the Continent.<sup>10</sup>

Clothing assumed a central position in this “world in motion” as it developed into complex social systems of dress: textiles and trims were acquired in local, urban, and international markets, and individual identities were formed no longer solely according to regional, economic, and political dictates but also in accordance with social, aesthetic, and industrialized processes that embraced both global techniques and individual preferences. Clothing for the upper echelons of society was made of intricate textile weaves and patterns.<sup>11</sup> Aristocrats sought social differentiation through dress codes and elaborate spending because social status depended not only on luxurious cloth but on how cloth was fashioned into garments that followed precise, often individual guidelines.<sup>12</sup>

Artifacts or worldly possessions and luxurious clothing, however, were separate and distinct from the household items that constituted instead an individual's patrimony and investment for one's heirs.<sup>13</sup> On account of fluctuations in the amount of textiles produced in the early modern period and “above all, because the values extolling the new, and the need for replacement to keep pace with fashion were late to gain precedence over those of conservation and tradition,” as Laurence Fontaine argues, clothing no longer served the purpose of “storing value,” given the growing popularity of cheap materials and secondhand markets where clothes could be bought.<sup>14</sup> Once clothing became integrated into a system of social codes, it was subject to ongoing political, economic, religious, and social change.

The expansion of Europe meant an unprecedented increase in two-way cultural exchanges of knowledge which Europeans carried into unknown areas around the globe—from West Africa to India, China, and Japan in the east, to the Americas in the west. New settlers brought with them the most recent technological inventions for producing cloth.<sup>15</sup> Euro-

peans were, therefore, at times in the uncomfortable position of redefining themselves according to infinitely expanding geographical boundaries rather than in relation to their own religious beliefs or social customs. Encounters with the New World forced them to come to terms with new peoples and new cultures. One result was that increased visual familiarity with other cultures' fashions meant that no culture was exempt from combining textiles from different locations, imitating cuts and designs across European countries, and embellishing fabrics with ornamental flourishes that richly joined threads, trims, and jewels from many places.

Such shifts in goods and *mentalities* also set into motion new ways of living. Imported products, for example, "found their way into the homes, the wardrobes, and the pharmacopoeia of the wealthy."<sup>16</sup> The wealthy and the poor enjoyed the consumption of new food stuffs and clothing, but exactly how and to what extent lower social echelons were connected to these new consumption practices is still an ongoing area of investigation. What is certain is that shelter and clothing, rather than worldly possessions, remained the basic necessities for the bulk of the population between 1300 and 1600. Even though "the culture of the Renaissance made very little difference in their lives," practical scientific advances spurred commerce into new arenas, and enabled transoceanic trade which in turn influenced how all socioeconomic groups, even the poor, could learn about the world from the visual arts.<sup>17</sup>

Clothing was continually in motion from around 1300 to 1600.<sup>18</sup> It moved from body to body in the form of gifts and payments.<sup>19</sup> It separated into discrete parts that circulated and recirculated after the death of a person; clothing was altered and realtered for individual family members and for individuals in larger networks that extended beyond the family. Items of clothing helped to pay debts and assisted individuals who lacked cash yet needed to acquire essential resources. Probate inventories and household account books reveal that throughout most of Europe there was a massive growth in the variety and dissemination of new consumer products while consumer behavior often acted independently "from the economic performance of different countries or regions."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, since clothing increasingly did not maintain its initial value, and could not be easily collected, prized, or conserved, it needed to circulate and be exchanged in order to take on new value. In fact, since clothing had evolved into an elaborate assemblage of parts that mixed, matched, and constituted a whole, it was easier to take garments apart and sell them in portions if the occasion arose. Sleeves, bodice, doublet, partlet, shirt, cape, undergown, head covering,

and other clothing parts acted as material and symbolic currency whose circulation could make and unmake the clothed subject. These detachable parts could move from body to body; they served as gifts, donations and bequests; and they could be rented, if the necessity arose, from secondhand clothing dealers.

Fashion, clothing, dress, and costume, then, must be understood as elements of sign systems produced by historically specific material conditions. Each part of the system acted in different ways in negotiations between dominant groups and cultures and the lower echelons of society. It is the aim of this collection of essays, therefore, to explore the discipline's categories of fashion, clothing, dress, and costume in ways informed by recent changes in our understanding of the material cultures, international markets, formation of identities, and cultural and social codes of meaning in these periods. The study of fashion, clothing, dress, and costume, when aligned with these multiple social, cultural, political, and economic transformations during the long periods of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, reveals an intricate collage of distinct parts, each one raising multiple issues that open up substantial areas of investigation.

Much like a Renaissance garment made up of many distinct but interrelated parts that need to be assembled carefully and precisely in order to function as a whole, so our effort in this collection of essays is to offer historically specific studies emerging from the fields of economic, political, social, and literary history in order to piece together an understanding of how people over many centuries used textiles and designs to adorn their bodies, and how these dressings of the body were perceived and interpreted. This collection illustrates how scholars will continue to discover new sources and adopt new methods and perspectives for advancing the study of the history of dress.<sup>21</sup>

In this introductory essay, I intend to clarify the discipline of costume history by offering an overview and synthesis of the scholarship of the last two decades. Each subsection below represents a substantial topic in its own right and has produced extensive specialist literature. The discussion which follows is therefore necessarily a schematic synthesis of many scholars' findings.

## **Fashion**

*Fashion* in the premodern world refers to the act of transforming textiles into garments in new ways according to its cut and shape, and, moreover, mobi-

lizing its ability to introduce change.<sup>22</sup> With increasing subspecializations in the production of garments, the creation of new places to shop, and a rise in the number of patents that provided monopoly rights to manufacturing new goods, fashion could accommodate large sections of the population by imitating expensive fabrics in cheaper textiles that looked like luxurious silks and velvets.<sup>23</sup>

Novelty and innovation also involved increasing collaboration between the maker and the consumer in the process of creating a fashionable garment. Elizabeth Currie's essay, "Fashion Networks: Consumer Demand and the Clothing Trade in Florence from the Mid-Sixteenth to Early Seventeenth Centuries," closely analyzes the complex processes of dressmaking in Italy by delineating the interplay between Florentine consumers and producers in designing and producing new fashions. This interplay involved not only monetary transactions and credit but also relied on an expansive and varied social network. Currie demonstrates the active involvement of women in the trade, the artisans' role in designing the clothing, and the rise of the mercers as a powerful economic group.

Fashion in these long periods had the power to create aesthetic worlds that reflected and influenced social practices.<sup>24</sup> While the term has often been used to describe the garments worn exclusively by the higher echelons of society, in contrast to *clothing*, which denotes the attire of a more generalized population, recent scholarship argues that fashion as novelty and change was widely shared by large sections of the population.<sup>25</sup> It prefigured changes in manners and basic assumptions about society. And, most importantly, as a concept and a social practice, fashion did not apply only to the attire of elites.

*Fashion* is linked only in its broadest sense to *dress*, because fashion is simultaneously a public and private system, a social and an individual phenomenon. As a visual language, the performativity of fashion, unlike dress, is linked to the notion of personal identity as defined not only by what is new but by how garments adorn and cover the surface of the body while concealing or revealing what lies beneath.<sup>26</sup> Household account books reveal that in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, Italian tailors increasingly fitted garments to the body and were central to the process of dressing. They introduced new styles according to gender differences and helped to shape and influence personal aesthetic choices with new cuts, combinations of colors, fabrics, and ornamentation. Consumers played a more and more active, collaborative role with tailors in the shaping and producing of attire. Currie foregrounds the tailors' role in designing clothes for Florentine fami-

lies who bought their clothing from an extensive network of makers and suppliers, including mercers, tanners, and stocking-knitters, among others. Skilled and trusted tailors were at times employed from one generation to the next.

Recent scholars have also emphasized the speed with which the fashion trade was able to respond to highly discerning consumers' demands. The increased influence of luxury retailers and the emergence of professional designers gave consumers access to a wide range of products, and guilds acted as facilitators in this process. Many wealthy families typically employed one or more tailors, sometimes over a period of decades, to create new garments or refashion older ones according to quickly changing styles.

Newly made fashions of a very large range and variety were put quickly into circulation, and were distributed by a complex retail system that depended on the close interaction between fixed shops and markets, both formal and informal, first and secondhand. Textiles were at the heart of these trade circulations. Upon the death of a family member, clothing was put into recirculation because of the enormous difficulties of conserving textiles over an extended period of time; additionally, the alteration and refashioning of secondhand garments created new ones for all levels and members of society.

As Bruno Blondé and Natacha Coquery have observed, retailing moved in a parallel direction to changes in consumer behavior and the “economic performance of different countries or regions.”<sup>27</sup> There were many venues for acquiring goods—from the shop, to the street, and to public markets where itinerant traders, mercers, and merchants displayed and sold their wares. While many questions still persist about just how consumers influenced the daily work of retailers, and the extent to which retailers then integrated new products into their trades and actively shaped consumer demands, archival sources have already revealed that “goods decreasingly served the purpose of ‘storing value’ because of the growing popularity of buying cheap materials.”<sup>28</sup> In short, fashion relied heavily on interpersonal relationships between sellers and customers. Women in the textile market played a much more significant role than previously understood.

European economies fueled by cloth production like those of Venice, Bruges, Florence, and London were attentive to how fabrics created national identities so that social status did not depend on cloth alone. Fashions pieced together from the secondhand clothing trade were personalized according to individual, aesthetic preferences. In the past few years, scholarship on the secondhand industry across Europe has downplayed the theory

of social emulation according to which those of lesser means imitated leading citizens.<sup>29</sup> But scholars continue to ask the following question: If there was more access to goods both first and secondhand than ever before, how did this fact condition Europeans' understanding, as well as ours, of what constituted a luxury object?

So, too, how we understand the historical framing of a costume book is based on the premise that costume is stable enough to permit artists to record dress as being typical of contemporary regions and that it is a trustworthy guide to group identities. This stability, however, was challenged by political changes, the appropriation of elite styles by larger groups in spite of sumptuary laws, the transformation of clothing styles over time, and the importation of fabrics, cuts, and even people from foreign lands. All these inconsistencies are registered in the costume book as a genre, as Ann Rosalind Jones demonstrates in her essay, "'Worn in Venice and throughout Italy': The Impossible Present in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books." Jones argues that the genre of the costume book exemplified by the *Habiti antichi et moderni* is contradicted by Vecellio's choice of representations, his commentaries on particular forms of dress, and his acknowledgment of the passage of time and its dissolution of local cultures. Jones's essay traces the tensions between Vecellio's guide to styles and customs that characterized present-day cultures and his attempt to construct a history of dress based on images from the past.

Medieval and early modern social critics scorned novelty, rapid shifts in styles of clothing, and excessive visual display, because they believed that these social practices were to be blamed for a radical dissolution of the body politic in a world of nation-building. Fashion, from their perspective, equaled pretense, counterfeit, even perversion. Critics of fashion railed against its divisive force; they saw lavish spending on velvets, silks, and brocades as proof of a lack of social cohesion, because the new links between different clothed identities within the same society dissolved differences of rank. Moralists' discourses abounded on the confusion of social boundaries that the transferability of fashions created. The consumption of foreign products, critics argued, also signaled the loss of political and national hegemony. Both Andrea Denny-Brown's and Roze Hentschell's essays focus on religious discourse on dress in the medieval and early modern periods respectively. In "Old Habits Die Hard: Vestimentary Change in William Durandus's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*," Denny-Brown points to the persistent paradox in material clothing that was lavishly ornamented yet communicated a Stoic asceticism and "spiritual" meaning. She examines the work of a highly influ-

ential thirteenth-century canonist and liturgical writer, William Durandus, whose monumental eight-volume *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, written shortly after 1286, devotes one entire book to the changing “fashions” of garments worn by the clergy, who no longer followed traditional or biblical prescriptions on ecclesiastical vestments. Denny-Brown shows how these garments maintained specific traditional meanings but also opened up gaps and discrepancies that encouraged Durandus to defend changes in clerical dress that critics saw as lavish, conspicuous consumption. He defends specific, traditional meanings for individual ecclesiastical garments, and bolsters his argument with biblical allegory against those critics who might view changes in ecclesiastical dress as lavish and as signs of clerical excess. Denny-Brown also reveals the many discrepancies and contradictions in Durandus’s argument. In so doing, she uncovers a persistent paradox in clothing that was supposed to carry spiritual meaning in the late thirteenth century in England. Ultimately, she calls attention to the important philosophical and theological role that clothing occupied in discussions of the “ethics of materiality itself, and especially the ethics of using material things to depict spiritual truths.”

In her essay “Moralizing Apparel in Early Modern London: Popular Literature, Sermons, and Sartorial Display,” Roze Hentschell maintains that sermons delivered at St. Paul’s Cathedral in early modern London were part of a larger social critique of fashion. The same sermonists who lambasted “pride in apparel” as a sin betrayed, she argues, an unusual fascination and in-depth knowledge of the fashions that they denounce in their audience: “they not only were attuned to the preoccupations of their audience, but were influenced by literature of a more meretricious variety.” By comparing the rhetorical positions of sermonists on extravagant apparel to formal verse satire, city drama, and popular ballads, Hentschell reveals the cross-pollination between diverse kinds of texts whose writers rail against “things foreign, the unnaturalness imbued in fantastical garments, the class disruptions that occur when they are worn, the lust incited by the women who wear them, and the financial wastefulness announced by their purchase.”

Fashion on a smaller, regional level not only concretized the material display of courtly power but extended way beyond into a much larger global context. In an increasingly decentered world where no one nation or city could maintain hegemony, fashion communicated concrete personal choices pieced together in styles that departed from predominant courtly aesthetics. Fashion registered in concrete terms “a Renaissance world in movement,” one which was connected to dramatic transformations in all



areas of life—economies, social organizations, politics, technologies, cultures, and religions.<sup>30</sup>

## Clothing

Expensive, embellished textiles as well as simpler, less expensive fabric weaves were not just formal signs of wealth and splendor or poverty and disenfranchisement, according to Ferraro; indeed, all fabrics registered the work that made them.<sup>31</sup> Spinning, needlework, and lacemaking, typically forms of women's production, constituted specialized skills, not merely a branch of the decorative arts used to adorn the human body. And textiles were intricately associated with the groups of people who produced them—guilds, courtly fashion designers, individual technicians, tailors, and seamstresses. But the quality of the fabric and the cut—the tangible properties of the garment—were the grounds for its meaning, not the fabric alone. Surplus wealth was in the hands of a very few, as Ferraro argues:

The vast majority of people in late medieval and early modern Europe lived at the subsistence level, subject to periodic famines, the disruption of war and disease, and the burden of consumption taxes, rents, debased coinage, and obligations to their landlords or employers. Their standard of living was precarious at best, hardly qualifying them as consumers. Most people had little purchasing power for handicrafts and perhaps none for luxuries. Moreover, they had little or no coin or currency, relying on their own raw materials at home and exchanging goods and services within local economies rather than the global networks of manufacture and trade.<sup>32</sup>

Medieval machines, fulling and paper mills, the loom and the anvil, and other handcraft technologies also limited the manufacture of goods, while difficulties in transportation limited their circulation. With the advancements in warfare and the firearms industry, and with new forms of artillery, fortifications, and the development of the bronze cannon, the poorer members of the population experienced a technological or economic “Renaissance.” Even so, agriculture remained the foundation of the Italian economy, and the incomes of the poor went largely to subsistence (food, low-grade textiles, and cooking utensils). Most people in the lower orders depended on used clothing, inexpensive weaves, and simple bed linens.

In times of economic depression, urban centers across Europe relied on the supply of products made in rural areas rather than on transoceanic trade. Markets for textiles dotted the entire Italian landscape, and vendors set up shop along roads connecting place to place, and along mountain passes linking Italy to the North, or in regional markets, fairs, auctions, and lotteries; they assisted in the circulation of goods by carrying their products to locales that could buy them.

After 1348, Italy cut back on manufacture and trade because of an overwhelming reduction in the population caused by the plague. However, the economy gradually gained back its prominence on the European stage because Italy diversified its production techniques and the distribution of its goods. All of its major cities (Milan, Cremona, Brescia, Pavia, Como, Venice, and Naples) offer instructive examples of how Italians responded to consumer demand. Venice, the most industrialized city in Europe, produced wool and silk, among the many other types of goods that filled its marketplaces, and were the staples of aristocratic clothing. The silk industry also flourished in other northern Italian cities (Milan specialized in silk thread) and in the south, while the Kingdom of Naples produced leather, wool, and all kinds of luxurious trims for personal wardrobes.<sup>33</sup> Cotton was the only industry that declined in this period because ordinary people preferred to purchase “low-cost German cloth rather than to weave it at home.”<sup>34</sup> Resilient northern Italian rural industries in the region of Lombardy produced low-quality woolens, cotton, and linen, while needlework thrived everywhere.<sup>35</sup> In smaller villages, where there were less restrictive guilds than in large cities, production increased from the making of leather goods, linen, wool, and silk to glassmaking and the cutting of diamonds. Rural and urban economies were united in their mutual dependencies for the manufacture of goods.

Early modern clothing was the product, then, of diverse spinners, weavers, and embroiderers. Women also were responsible for the preliminary processes of silkmaking, “such as reeling, winding, throwing, and boiling silk filament.” Ferraro maintains that in the region surrounding Brescia, “women were intrinsically involved in costume and dress, activities that touch on raw materials, production, culture.”<sup>36</sup> Women found ways to make use of their household skills in the production of articles of clothing from the development of raw materials into finished ones. Their involvement forces us to take another look at the history of clothing from a gendered perspective by reexamining the paradigms that have shaped histories of dress. Such a perspective would complicate, Ferraro suggests, dichotomies including

“global versus local, urban versus rural, incorporated versus unincorporated labor, shop versus home production, paid versus unpaid work, agricultural versus nonagricultural labor, and production versus reproduction.”<sup>37</sup>

Current rethinking of the “trickle-down” theories that Goldthwaite and other economic historians claimed gave birth to an unprecedented “consumer society” in early Renaissance Italy has led scholars to argue that Renaissance consumer trends were fuelled less by elite values and spending patterns and more by an overall improved standard of living. The entrepreneurial spirit of Renaissance Italians gave rise to the desire to own and collect worldly objects, a thesis advanced by Lisa Jardine in her book *Worldly Goods*, but this shift reflects the desires of only a very small group of collectors and consumers. Beyond Florence, spending patterns varied from city to city and town to town. Textile production and the spinning and washing of wool were in the hands of workers unprotected by the guilds and therefore did not receive their just due. During the Genoese silk boom of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, spinners had to pay out so much in rent for tools that they suffered reduced profits. And artisans never controlled the raw materials on which textile production depended or the prices of finished textiles once they appeared in the marketplace.

Recent scholarly findings attest to the negative impact that inflation together with stagnant wages and repeated epidemics of plague and famine had on the consumption of luxury goods. Most people were burdened by increasing taxes, the cost of making war and maintaining armies, grain prices, and rural catastrophes. International trade and manufactured goods were only a small part of the overall accumulation of wealth in this period. Political power, social prestige, and office-holding meant that ruling elites extracted resources from ordinary people, for example, when they bought up tax gabelles, engaged in widespread lending, and debased coinage.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, luxurious clothing occupied a significant part of a world of expensive commodities that belonged to a few elite dynasts and families, and to ecclesiastical leaders; it was visible in public spectacles in major cities throughout Europe. While one can argue that all people needed to be clothed, it also must be remembered that only very few men and women had the ability to acquire great lengths of fabric, adorn their garments with gold and silver thread, with laces and ribbons, or to line their cloaks, doublets, and capes with silk or fur. The very rich who sat for portraits wore sleeves or trains created with billows of silks and satins. Fans were inlaid with gold, silver, and ivory; decorative jewels were abundant, either sewn onto the fabric in clusters of pearls or draped over the bodice or doublet to enhance the

colors of the fabric underneath, as Roberta Orsi Landini demonstrates.<sup>39</sup> Aileen Ribeiro argues in *Fashion and Fiction* that elite clothing in the time of James I acted as a kind of “theatrical diplomacy” indicating the moral qualities of its wearer; fabrics ornamented with lilies, for example, were intended to reveal certain qualities of its sitter such as modesty and decorum.<sup>40</sup>

## Dress

Despite its transferability and exchangeability, *clothing* becomes *dress* when it endures as expressing a collection of manners and customs and in marking regional and social differences. Groups of people with shared identities used dress to forge collective identities even though social, economic, and political inequalities worked to divide them. From this perspective, dress refers to a communal, collective fashioning of the self whereby one’s identity is shaped by both prescribed codes of civility and social dictates as well as by family lineage, regional specificity, and gender. For both the wearer and the viewer, dress does not necessarily relate to any specific historical period or any specific gender. This performativity of dress had previously found visual expression in the “talking garments” fashioned for medieval court performances, tournaments, and festivals, in illuminated manuscripts, and in lyric poetry. Susan Crane argues that

court clothing was . . . a symbolic medium in the later Middle Ages, both within and beyond ritual. Expansively and expensively marked with mottos, heraldic signs, occulted signatures, symbolic colors, and allegorical messages, the courtier’s dress was a visual manifesto for its wearer. The strongly rhetorical quality of court clothing helps explain its prominence in ritual articulations of identity.<sup>41</sup>

By the sixteenth century, however, dress became increasingly aligned with an individual’s need for personal expression and the desire to assume different roles in different contexts. Sixteenth-century portraits, illustrated *alba amicorum* and tailors’ model books, poetry, drama, and the *novelle* relied increasingly on the belief that humans had the capacity to transform themselves and their world rather than merely imitate what had come before them. As humans endowed with a generative force and a desire to understand the self, Renaissance individuals embraced dress as a way to construct their identity materially. Even so, identities were also “created by

larger external forces and by internal anxieties and even haunting memories of unspeakable loss—the self always negotiated as a relation between internal experience and the external world.”<sup>42</sup>

As state formations and nation-building during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries emphasized regional differences rather than similarities between people, a system for monitoring the movement of individuals necessitated “new forms of documentation,” as Bronwen Wilson explains:

Badges and documents carried the signs, seals, insignias and marks of authorities as efforts were made to identify pilgrims, students, journeymen, beggars, merchants, soldiers, and diplomats. Diverse forms of passports emerged in Italy and northern Europe as a means to identify that a person was in fact who she or he claimed to be.<sup>43</sup>

Another form of identification system, a sort of Renaissance ethnography, emerged in the numerous costume books printed in Europe from the early sixteenth through to the seventeenth century. Movable type placed clothing in a “world in motion” whereby costume book writers like the Venetian Cesare Vecellio, travel authors, mapmakers, and tailors’ books recognized the “other” or the “exotic” by deciphering the language of clothing as the making of the human subject in relation to his or her geographical place and time.

Dress, or “habit,” is therefore the opposite of fashion. Dress works to affirm the persistence of social patterns and to consolidate cultural ways of life, despite the ways clothing can be transferred from subject to subject. In addition, costume books encouraged viewers to focus on faraway places and regional dress for its novelty and strangeness, yet this appeal to ethnographic curiosity was not merely linked to a desire to change one’s personal style by adopting international fashion. From the mid-sixteenth through to the seventeenth century, costume books articulated a language of national and regional identity formation, even though fixed notions of place were being called into question. Social distinctions, regionalized textiles, and accessories no longer could define a single national identity. A person’s garment was a complex patchwork of dress derived from multiple nations. Yet the rapid print circulation of images of dress often served to reinforce rather than to break open strict codes. And itinerant artists literally carried with them new artistic conventions that circulated in manuscript form or as albums of drawings available to the public.

The unprecedented speed whereby information was disseminated and ideas and practices spread slowly began to erode sharp social and national distinctions between countries and social groups. Nonetheless, individuals were not always free to dress as they pleased. Sumptuary laws controlled the use of fabrics, their colors, their weaves and cuts, not only in order to enforce equality among citizens, affirm gender prescriptions, and curtail excessive spending, but also to protect precarious economies. As Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli claims in her essay, "Reconciling the Privilege of a Few with the Common Good: Sumptuary Laws in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," this legislation was an instrument used to maintain and reinforce social barriers and, therefore, provides an important source for understanding the complex hierarchical structures of past societies. Legislators and preachers supported these regulatory practices, and their moral rationale stressed the need for some of the resources of the rich to be spent on behalf of the common good. This combined action promoted a "significant consciousness about consumption that offers one possible approach to the topic." Further, the political nature of the laws used clothing, fabric, colors, jewelry, and fashions to impose and maintain "political order on the local level." One of the interesting outcomes of this mechanism of political, economic, and social sumptuary legislation is the advertisement of the great variety of materials and goods, and in some cases, the "approximate moment when new forms of ornamentation appeared," such as buttons, hairstyles, shoes, and more. While in the Middle Ages the notion and practice of luxury was to reward and distinguish social groups, in the early modern period luxury was an important factor in economic growth and as a "motor of human progress." Paradoxically, moralist and ecclesiastical criticisms of the uses of luxury sustained fashion rather than curtailing it. Their criticism "had the paradoxical effect of instigating a renewed obsession with ostentation and luxury goods." So, too, novelty no longer could be easily absorbed into traditions of dress. With the advent of fashion as a system of appearances, and with the parallel recognition that this phenomenon was "escaping the control of those who wanted to conform external appearance to a form of distinct, politically governed social signage," sumptuary legislation ended up not only curbing luxury consumption but "diffusing a consciousness about new fashions, even ways to overcome the confines of class through dress." The fines (a kind of luxury tax) exacted throughout European cities upon the transgressors indicate a desire to redistribute the city's resources while the perpetrators actually participated in an economic system designed to recycle their wealth into "the good of the city" and in

order to render “the coexistence among unequals less extreme and more acceptable.”

In a largely preliterate society, people were read by, and learned to “read,” the value of textiles and cut of clothing as fixed signs of profession, wealth, social status, and geographical provenance. Legislation against luxury expenditures did not mean that governments were against luxurious objects in and of themselves. Rather they were opposed to “useless expenditures,” those that might ruin well-to-do families or reduce marriage and reproduction rates because families could not amass sufficiently large dowries to find acceptable husbands for their daughters. According to this perspective, Muzzarelli argues that sumptuary legislation was concerned with social stability, hierarchical classification systems that distinguished the rich from the newly rich. Most importantly, it protected aristocratic displays of luxury.

Even increased social mobility did not necessarily translate into the invention of new styles. Merchants, university students, soldiers, courtiers, and ambassadors continued, for the most part, to wear their cities’ and regions’ styles. While there was great variation in fashions from place to place, dress signified shared cultural belonging and collective identity rather than the whims of personal taste. Its production revealed collective choices. Changes in social rank and position still required a style of clothing declaring one’s regional origin and profession. As Vecellio recognized, political changes affecting the elite—the takeover of the court of Naples by the Spanish, for example—did lead to the adoption of new styles. But for most classes the difficulty and expense of traveling gave traditional regional dress, as presented in printed costume books, a startling novelty rather than inspiring a desire to imitate them.

While printed costume books sought to normalize and categorize regional dress according to strictly defined social, political, and gendered classifications, a portable, do-it-yourself collection of clothing types—the illustrated, colored *album amicorum*—allowed the manuscript owner to assemble a highly individualized selection that ultimately spoke more about the owner than the dress he collected, as I demonstrate in my essay, “Fashions of Friendship in an Early Modern Illustrated *Album Amicorum*: British Library, MS Egerton 1191.” These manuscript albums were most often assembled by university students from Germany and the northern countries. In cities such as Padua and Venice where they had traveled to study, these foreign students selected particular drawings and watercolors of local costume from the range available in printers’ and stationers’ shops and directly

from artists' studios and had them inserted into their friends' album books to commemorate specific occasions such as the beginning or end of their studies. They kept these albums as souvenirs of their youthful travels and of student life.

Since styles of dress were assumed to persist as a form of custom, the traveling student represented each city visited and its people with brightly colored, conventionalized images of the clothing worn by its officials and citizens. Like prints or small quartos, such books were highly transportable, and they were organized according to a scheme shared by costume books: images were arranged along a hierarchical grid beginning with monarchs and nobles and descending to laborers and paupers. Sometimes the images preserved in the albums included interleaved, individual prints from well-known costume books already published. Unlike costume books, however, these collections were personalized, assembled according to the preferences of the individual collector and of the friend leaving his "signature" in the owner's album. The signatures of particular friends met during one's travels took the form of autographs of distinguished scholars and noblemen with paintings of their coats of arms accompanied by sententious mottos; they thus constitute the album owner's social circles, which are mobile, created and expanded across time. The signatures of friends inserted into an *album amicorum*, therefore, represent a particular, ongoing history, while the clothes depicted within their pages were thought to be relatively unchanging, and the friendships recorded were considered everlasting. In this sense, illustrated albums created and represented a social self that was individualized by the owner's particular bonds and experiences; they also formed a collective group portrait of oneself and one's friends, whose experiences of the places visited and people seen are recorded in the album. These albums then eventually became part of the private holdings of the elite families to which the students returned.

## Costume

The term *costume book* is a misnomer. *Costume*, as derived from the Latin word *consuetude*, implies the customary function or use of dress in multiple cultural contexts that precede the making of specific items of clothing. As adornment rather than simple bodily covering, costume, unlike clothing, assumes symbolic, ritualistic, and even superstitious valences. It can mask identity or highlight aspects of the body and ritualize social etiquette. Marieke de Winkel in her recent study of Rembrandt's portraits defines cos-



tume as “dress for special occasions like a masquerade, theater, or for a deliberate reconstruction of a particular period.”<sup>44</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have demonstrated that the performances of theatrical companies at the time of Shakespeare were shaped by the costumes they owned: “the guilds paid for costumes to be made; . . . accounts suggest the ability of the clothes to absorb the very identity of the actors.” In this sense, “clothes retain their value better than plays.”<sup>45</sup>

Costume books sought to regularize native and regional dress according to fixed classification systems that emphasized a specific culture’s style of life and manners. They functioned like contemporary encyclopedias that organized knowledge into distinct and comprehensive categories; like atlases that charted Renaissance cartography’s efforts to map the entire world. Costume books mapped the social arrangements of people according to rank, ethnicity, and gender, according to prescriptive codes of conduct that regulate human behavior. Within these systems, *costume* signifies manners and behaviors or customs and styles of life in much the same way that *habit* or *abito* characterizes the “habit” or “dress” of a specific group of people. As Ann Rosalind Jones maintains in “Worn in Venice and throughout Italy,” sixteenth-century costume books sought to maintain a rigid classificatory taxonomy of appearance that was superimposed on dress throughout Europe and beyond according to divisions of rank, gender, and occupation. Yet, while writers of costume books interpreted clothing as a way of life, or as a traditional set of attitudes and practices that connect to custom and habit, they also embarked on an epistemologically impossible project of representation. Jones maintains that the costume book writer/historian could never keep up with the changes in fashion in the early modern period because of increased “geographic mobility, the diffusion of local styles of dress into wider spheres, deliberate infringements of sumptuary codes, and larger changes and complexities in political and social formations” that “always exceeded the speed with which their effects in the world of dress could be captured and represented.”

As I hope to have demonstrated, the study of cultures of clothing in later medieval and early modern Europe has become a rich, complex field of inquiry that bridges a wide range of scholarly disciplines and methodologies. The following essays are both attentive to the conceptual shifts in thinking about the late Middle Ages and Renaissance periods and to the need to use the discipline’s theoretical categories in ways informed by recent decades of pioneering research into the production, retailing, distribution, and consumption of clothing as well as to the social, cultural, and aesthetic meanings

embedded in systems of dress. The last several years have witnessed a virtual explosion of interest in material culture and, specifically, in clothing and the histories of dress. We hope the studies collected in this volume will stimulate still further cross-cultural, interdisciplinary studies. No single scholar has all the practical skills or access to primary sources that the history of dress, as we envision it, will require in order to answer still many unanswered questions. These questions call for collaborative research into national, international, and global changes in the clothing made, bought and sold, valued and criticized, fixed and transformed as a centrally meaningful element in medieval and early modern cultures.



## Notes

- 1 On conceptualizing these periods as “long” rather than with the terms “low” or “high Renaissance,” see Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle*, 3 vols. (Paris: A. Colin, 1979); Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynold, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2:893–95; Richard MacKenney, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c. 1250–c. 1650* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), 78–79.
- 2 For the conception of the unprecedented speed and movement of goods in this period, see John Jeffries Martin, ed. *The Renaissance World* (London: Routledge, 2007). Much of my thinking on this subject has been shaped by the essays in this volume to which I am indebted. On the widening of crafts and industrial skills and artisanal production, see Hidetoshi Hoshino, “The Rise of the Florentine Woollen Industry in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson*, ed. N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 184–204; *Craft and Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation*, ed. Maarten Prak (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006); *Guilds, Markets, and Work Regulations in Italy, 16th–19th Centuries*, ed. Alberto Guenzi, Paola Massa, and Fausto Piola Caselli (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998); *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500–1900*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (Aldershot, Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1997); James R. Farr, “On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350–1750,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1 (1997): 24–54; John Styles, “Product Innovation in Early Modern London,” *Past & Present* 168 (2000): 124–69; James C. Riley, “A Widening Market in Consumer Goods,” in *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*, ed. E. Cameron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233–64; Jari Ojala, “Approaching Europe: The Merchant Networks between Finland and Europe,” *European Review of Economic History* 1 (1997): 323–52; Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett, “Crafts,

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- 3 On the consumption of goods across the social spectrum and throughout Europe, see Eileen Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941); Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*; Sara Pennell, “Consumption and Consumerism in Early Modern England,” *The Historical Journal* 42 (1999): 549–64; Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500–1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); *Material Culture: Consumption, Life-Style, Standard of Living, 1500–1900*, ed. Anton Schuurman and Lorena S. Walsh (Milano: Università Bocconi, 1994); *Private Domain, Public Inquiry: Families and Life-Styles in the Netherlands and Europe, 1550 to the Present*, ed. Anton Schuurman and Pieter Spierenburg (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren, 1996).
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  - 12 On the point that economies were fueled by cloth and society was distinguished by costume but social status depended on clothing not on just cloth itself, see Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*.
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  - 14 On the notion of clothing as no longer storing value because of the availability of cheaper textiles, see *Alternative Exchanges: Second-Hand Circulations from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Laurence Fontaine (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), and for the quotation, see Fontaine’s introduction, 2–3.
  - 15 Jardine, *Worldly Goods*; Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).
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  - 17 *Ibid.*, 98.
  - 18 On the uses and circulation of garments in the medieval period “as a mark of visible wealth, social position or class status,” see *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1–2; E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Susan Crane, “Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (1996): 207–320; Margaret Scott, *Late Gothic Europe, 1400–1500*, in *The History of Dress Series* (London: Mills and Boon, 1980); Margaret Scott, *A Visual History of Costume: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Batsford, 1986); Dyan Elliott, “Dress as Mediator between Inner and Outer Self: The Pious Matron of the High and Later Middle Ages,” *Medieval Studies* 53 (1991): 279–308; Françoise Piponnier, *Costume et vie sociale: La cour d’Anjou, XIV–XV siècle* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970); Joan Evans, *Dress in Mediaeval France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); Veronika Gervers, “Medieval Garments in the Mediterranean World,” in *Cloth and Clothing*, ed. Harte and Punting, 297–315; Nancy A. Jones, “The Uses of Embroidery in the Romances of Jean Renart: Gender, History, Textuality,” in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 13–44; Kathy Krause, “The Material Erotic: The Clothed and Unclothed Female Body in the *Roman de la violette*,” in *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Curtis Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 17–40; Gert Kreytenberg, “Nou-

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  - 20 See Blondé and Coquery's introduction to *Retailers and Consumer Changes*, 5.
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  - 24 See Aileen Ribiero, *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).
  - 25 Evelyn Welch, "Lotteries in Early Modern Italy," *Past & Present* 199 (2008): 1–11; Welch, "The Fairs of Early Modern Italy," in *Buyers and Sellers*, ed. Blondé et al., 31–48.
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  - 27 See Blondé and Coquery's introduction to *Retailers and Consumer Changes*, 5.
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  - 29 Patricia Allerston, "The Market in Second-Hand Clothes and Furnishings in Venice, c. 1500–c. 1650" (Ph.D. diss., European University Institute, Florence, 1996); Allerston, "L'abito usato," in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 19: La moda*, ed. Carlo Marco Belfanti and Fabio Giusberti (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 561–81; and Allerston, "Reconstructing the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Costume* 33 (1996): 46–56.

- 30 The quotation is from John Jeffries Martin, "The Renaissance: A World in Motion," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. Martin, 6.
- 31 This observation and others on textile production that follow in the next paragraphs are borrowed from Ferraro, "Manufacture and Movement of Goods," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. Martin, 87–100.
- 32 Ibid., 89.
- 33 Ibid., 92; Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). See also, Elizabeth Currie on the uses of cheaper silks as a "response to a broader taste for more fitted, lighter clothing," in "Diversity and Design in the Florentine Tailoring Trade, 1550–1620," in *The Material Renaissance*, ed. O'Malley and Welch, 154–73, at 167.
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- 35 See Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- 36 Ferraro, "The Manufacture and Movement of Goods," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. Martin, 94.
- 37 Ibid., 94–95.
- 38 Ibid., 96.
- 39 Landini, *Moda a Firenze*.
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- 42 Martin, *The World of the Renaissance*, 20.
- 43 Bronwen Wilson, "The Renaissance Portrait," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. Martin, 452–80, and for the specific notion of "sincerity" as connected to the portrayal of the self, see 455.
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- 45 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 176–77.

