

Down to the Last Stitch:
Sumptuary Law and Conspicuous Consumption in
Renaissance Italy

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Laws and government are to the political bodies of civil societies what the vital spirits and life itself are to the natural bodies of animated creatures; and as those that study the anatomy of dead carcasses may see that the chief organs and nicest springs more immediately required to continue the motion of our machine are not hard bones, strong muscles and nerves, nor the smooth white skin that so beautifully covers them, but small trifling films and little pipes that are either overlooked or else seem inconsiderable to vulgar eyes. . . .”

-Bernard Mandeville¹

What Was Sumptuary Law in Renaissance Italy?

Fashion and luxury were very important in Italian Renaissance society.

One's appearance indicated more than whether one was simply attractive, it also indicated one's social standing. It was commonly believed that if one could acquire the wealth and means through which to buy beautiful clothing and host bountiful feasts, one could rise in status and prestige. Since most of the societies of Renaissance Italy were relatively fluid, at least compared to other societies of the time, the prospect of upward status mobility by the middle classes through luxurious clothing and opulent public behavior was troubling to the upper echelons of society. The more people infiltrated their ranks, the more their power would become diluted. They would not have this, if they could help it. How was this problem to be solved? The answer, in part, lay in the adoption of sumptuary laws. This did not mean, however, that the governments of Renaissance Italy did not target sumptuary regulations at aristocratic and elite groups as well, particularly if

¹ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. Irwin Primer (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 21.

merchants or the *popolo* dominated the governments. As early as the thirteenth century, for example, Siena passed a provision reducing trains on women's dresses, which was a direct effort to curb a purely aristocratic style.² We thus see the multifaceted nature of sumptuary laws and the motivations behind them. This thesis seeks to explore these various facets through the lenses of costume history, political context, gender, occupation and social class, and painting, so that we may establish the motivations for sumptuary legislation and examine its effectiveness across various cities of the Renaissance Italian peninsula.

As Alan Hunt contends in his comprehensive history of sumptuary law, an analysis of this type of legislation may be seen as an "exemplar of the sociology of governance,"³ by which we may understand more about the societies in which these laws were situated, providing, in our case, a more complete portrait of Renaissance Italian life. So as to not limit himself to certain aspects of sumptuary law, Hunt does not provide any one specific definition of the term.⁴ He argues that too often, literary definitions give primacy to the motives of sumptuary legislation, which then creates the problem of distinguishing between what he calls, 'real' and 'justificatory' motives.⁵

For the sake of comprehensiveness, however, I will venture to provide a definition, minding the fact that such an endeavor may, indeed, be imperfect. For the purposes of this thesis I will define sumptuary law as legislation that sought to temper personal expenditure on luxury items, as well as expenditure and

² Diane Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy," in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 74.

³ See Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

comportment related to ceremonies such as weddings and funerals that had public implications in Italian Renaissance society. We thus arrive at the idea that sumptuary law was not just a tool used in an attempt to regulate peoples' dress, it was a tool used more generally to regulate people in their relations to society. As to who these laws targeted specifically, we will see that this is a multi-layered question, for laws concentrated at times on elites, and at times on the working classes, and always seemed to target women, in particular.⁶

While sumptuary law might have been enacted to limit the amount of ermine on a woman's cloak or the size of a man's codpiece, it also sought to ensure proper social etiquette, i.e., to regulate extravagance in both consumption *and* conduct. In fact, when considering this legislation we see that the laws that regulated dress and ceremonies were considered under the umbrella term of "sumptuary law." This grouping of seemingly varied pieces of legislation provides an indication of what the laws actually aimed to do, which was to control society during a period of rapid economic change and social mobility. In other words, sumptuary laws sought to keep society stratified and to reduce its conspicuous consumption through different avenues (such as legislation pertaining to dress, as well as ceremonial gift-giving and conduct). Sumptuary legislation was, in essence, a governmental attempt to enforce social codes during a time of change, and it was a zealous one at that, judging by the more than 300 different forms of sumptuary legislation in Italy between 1200-1500.⁷

Sumptuary laws raise many questions for modern scholars. Were laws against excessive crying at funerals and limiting the number of guests at a wedding

⁶ This question regarding the subjects of sumptuary law will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁷ Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy: 1200-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 2.

celebration effective? How were they perceived by contemporary standards? And whom did these laws include or exclude? Were only the working classes targeted or were members of the elite and the nobility subject to the same limitations? Did the occupation of some people subject them to further scrutiny (as was the case for prostitutes), or render them exempt (as was the case in certain instances with civil servants)? By asking questions like these, I aim to discover whether or not the motivations behind sumptuary laws were inspired, at least in part, by the maintenance of a particular social structure. As an important side note, we must remember that sumptuary laws applied not only in the cities, “dove più facile è ‘peccare’” but also in the surrounding countryside or *contado*, as well as smaller subject cities.⁸

Historiography of Italian Renaissance Sumptuary Law

“Even the outward appearance of men and women and the habits of daily life were more perfect, more beautiful, and more polished than among the other nations of Europe.”

–Jacob Burckhardt⁹

In comparison to others areas of Renaissance history, the historiography on sumptuary legislation is not yet fully developed. In *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Burckhardt mentions sumptuary law only briefly, and does so without even using the term. Instead, he employs phrases like “rules and regulations” and “law,” in general.¹⁰ While it was widely accepted that Renaissance Italians were very invested in their physical appearance, perhaps more so than any other European

⁸ “Where it is easier to sin.” See Maria Giussepina Muzzarelli, “Perugia,” in *La Legislazione suntuaria: secoli XIII-XVI: Emilia Romagna*, ed. Maria Giussepina Muzzarelli (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2002), XIII.

⁹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy; An Essay*. (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 273.

¹⁰ Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, 274.

people, as Burckhardt notes when he states that “beyond a doubt . . . nowhere was so much importance attached to dress as in Italy. . . ,”¹¹ the critical role that sumptuary legislation played in perpetuating this phenomenon of opulent dress, by encouraging clever innovations in clothing, has yet to be firmly established in the canon of Italian Renaissance history.

Although there have been a few early and influential works that have blazed a trail for further study, such as Diane Owen Hughes’s articles analyzing sumptuary laws and society in Renaissance Italy, Catherine Kovesi Killerby’s book on Italian sumptuary law from 1200 to 1500, and Ronald Rainey’s extensive thesis on Renaissance Florence and its sumptuary legislation, there has yet to be a truly comprehensive overview of sumptuary legislation in Renaissance Italy.¹² Thus, as of now, there is as yet no one study that deals comprehensively with the different motivations for and impact of sumptuary law in relation to cultural values, gender, social class, economic interests, and political structures. The goal in this thesis is to understand better the complex spectrum of social values that characterized Italian Renaissance culture across occupational, political, and gender-based boundaries. That is to say that this thesis is based on the belief that sumptuary legislation serves as a unique illustration of the concerns of Italian Renaissance society spanning multiple cities as well as centuries.

To begin, it is important to establish Italy’s role in the history of sumptuary legislation because it was the most prominent source of these laws in Europe. Sumptuary laws were a recurrent theme in the works of many writers of the Italian Renaissance and it is partly for that reason that they are also considered

¹¹ Ibid., 273.

¹² See Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, and Ronald E Rainey, *Sumptuary Legislation in Renaissance Florence*, (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms International, 1985).

increasingly important today in Renaissance scholarship. In addition, the exploration of sumptuary legislation allows for the more complete exploration of Renaissance consumerism and the beginnings of conspicuous consumption in Italy. This thesis will argue that sumptuary laws actually shed light on economic, as well as moral, concerns during this period of Italian economic growth and expansion. What is more, I aim to discuss the ways in which governments sought to remedy these concerns, which ranged from the modesty of females in their cities to the success of their cities' trade and domestic manufacture. Thus, we see that there are twentieth- and twenty-first-century reasons as well as fourteenth- through sixteenth-century reasons why this subject is important in the scholarship.

From the fifteenth-century humanist, Leon Battista Alberti, to Giovanni della Casa, a century later, people paid great attention to an individual's dress and outward appearance and had strong opinions about what was considered proper and what was not. Perhaps the most resounding sentiment that we will see reflected in the sumptuary law codes themselves was Della Casa's argument that, "everyone must dress well according to his status. . . .[and] try to adapt himself as much as he can to the sartorial style of other citizens and *let custom guide him* [my emphasis], even though it may seem to him to be less comfortable and attractive than previous fashions."¹³

The origins of sumptuary laws go back much further than Renaissance Italy. The first, though scant, records of sumptuary laws can be found in ancient Sparta. In addition, a relatively detailed record exists of Athenian sumptuary laws. There are none, however, for medieval Europe from the end of the Carolingian empire until

¹³ Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1986), 12.

the appearance of the first sumptuary law in twelfth-century Genoa, prohibiting the trimming of hems with sable furs costing more than forty *soldi*.¹⁴ In fact, the discovery of this Genoese sumptuary provision, the *Breve della campagna*, by Franco Niccolai in the 1950s has changed historiography on the origins of Italian sumptuary legislation,¹⁵ which until recently was thought to have been modeled on laws adopted in thirteenth-century France under Louis VIII.¹⁶ Sara-Grace Heller acknowledges Killerby as a forerunner in the revision of Renaissance sumptuary law context, indicating that, now, Italy has been given the precedence that it deserves and that “the French laws appear less as the model for Europe,” as a result.¹⁷

The previous historiography focusing on France was flawed on two grounds. First, as Sarah-Grace Heller argues, French legislation came later than originally thought, and postdates the 1226 death of Louis VIII by three years, making it highly unlikely that these laws were the monarch’s idea.¹⁸ Second, even if the French sumptuary decree were a product of Louis VIII's reign, the Genoese law, issued in 1157, precedes the start of Louis's reign by 30 years and the issuance of any other European sumptuary law by over 70 years.¹⁹ Moreover, once such laws did get under way in Italy, they quickly flourished from the early thirteenth-century on and proved more “frequent, wide-ranging, and detailed than that of any other region in Europe.”²⁰

¹⁴ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 23–24.

¹⁵ Franco Niccolai, *Contribuito allo studio dei più antichi brevi della Compagna genovese* (Milan: A. Guiffré, 1939).

¹⁶ Sarah-Grace Heller, “Limiting Yardage and Changes of Clothes,” in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. Jane E. Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 122.

¹⁷ Heller, “Limiting Yardage,” 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

Writing in the nineteenth century, Jacob Burckhardt believed that sumptuary legislation was confined to the northern region of the peninsula,²¹ but more recent scholars have found late thirteenth-century records of early sumptuary law from the southern kingdoms of Sicily and Puglia.²² As we have just seen, the origins of Italian Renaissance sumptuary laws are indeed in the north, with Genoa's being the first, and other northern cities, such as Brescia, Bologna, Reggio, San Gimignano and Siena, following suit in the first half of the thirteenth century. Perhaps then this is not so much a "northern" phenomenon as an urban phenomenon. It just so happens that there was a larger concentration of cities in the northern half of the Italian peninsula than in the south. In fact, one of the most prevalent ideas examined by Killerby and Hughes is that sumptuary legislation was mostly an urban phenomenon.²³

One interesting feature of this phenomenon is that each city tailored the legislation to fit its needs. The current historiography is focused on the customized preambles included by each city when it passed a new code. Historians have looked to these preambles to determine the motivations behind the sumptuary laws themselves. Killerby has even created rubrics to compare these various preambles and what they reveal about governmental concerns.²⁴

This leads to another aspect of the historiography: to what extent did a city's form of government affect the establishment and nature of its sumptuary legislation? Perhaps the only polemical issue in the scholarship on sumptuary law

²¹ "Where the fashions were more free, as in Naples [the south], the moralists confess with regret that no difference can be observed between noble and burgher." Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, 274.

²² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 25.

²³ This is perhaps why sumptuary laws, at least the early ones, were originally concentrated in the north, since this was an area of greater urbanization than the south.

²⁴ See below for a more in-depth discussion of Killerby's consideration of preambles.

pertains to this question. Hughes argues that there was a strong link between republican governments and the institution of sumptuary legislation. She states that early clothing regulations have an “anti-aristocratic flavour,” and that “sumptuary law, seen in this way as a curb on aristocratic display, becomes a symbol of republican virtue.”²⁵ She also traces the connection back to the origins of sumptuary legislation, that is, sumptuary laws first appeared in governments that had allowed at least partial participation of the “popolo,” as seen in Siena, Bologna, and Florence.²⁶ In particular, Hughes identifies the Florentine republic at the time of Savonarola as the best example of the “fervent mating of sumptuary controls with republicanism...” for later, when the republic was re-established in 1527, a new sumptuary law code was published.²⁷ In general, Hughes considers sumptuary law to be linked with republican theory based on the fact that many such laws sought to temper aristocratic power, such as those restricting mourning practices and clothing styles pertaining to noble families.

Killerby, on the other hand, argues that “the laws appear in late medieval Europe across the board in monarchical, despotic, and republican states.”²⁸ She concedes, however, that perhaps monarchical regimes were not as consistent in the implementation of new laws and did not produce as many as contemporary republican governments.²⁹ Therefore, perhaps the safe generalization on this issue is to say that republican governments in Italy seemed to be more preoccupied with sumptuary legislation due to the greater involvement of the popolo in governance,

²⁵ Owen Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations,” 74.

²⁶ Ibid., 73.

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 33.

²⁹ Ibid.

but that this legislative phenomenon was by no means strictly republican.³⁰ Killerby reinforces this point and cites the thirteenth-century French law as a non-Italian example of monarchical sumptuary legislation, along with Italian examples of royal sumptuary laws as seen in Sicily and Puglia in 1290.

One other issue that comes up in the scholarly discussion of sumptuary laws is, as Heller points out, an often, problematic and diachronic focus on the “evolution of regulation in a specific region over several centuries,” instead of a focus on making valuable comparisons across various regions in the centuries of the Renaissance.³¹ Two cities, Florence and Venice, stand out in particular for the degree of scholarly attention they have received with respect to the number of sumptuary laws adopted in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Yet this does not necessarily mean that these two cities passed more such laws than others in the Italian peninsula. As Killerby asserts, it is important to keep in mind that historians’ awareness of the abundance of these laws in Florence and Venice probably just reflects the “current preoccupation with the history of these two cities.”³²

An example of the type of diachronic treatment of the subject that Heller points out is the work of Ronald Rainey, who has written an extensive work on the sumptuary legislation of Renaissance Florence, beginning with the city’s earliest sumptuary laws in the late Middle Ages. Rainey’s close study of Florentine sumptuary legislation is a good illustration of the importance of case studies in the history of Italian sumptuary law. Since this type of legislation was, indeed, extremely variable from city to city, it is necessary to see how each city in particular handled sumptuary laws so that we may arrive at more accurate conclusions about

³⁰ See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth analysis of sumptuary law in political context.

³¹ Heller “Limiting Yardage,” 122.

³² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 27.

the function of sumptuary laws as a form of social control and the general trends that existed across city boundaries, such as restrictions on clothing and ceremonies.

For example, Rainey points out that in the case of Florence, sumptuary legislation served as a tool to encourage marriage in a society in which the excessive extravagance of men in providing clothing for the trousseaus of the women in their families exacerbated the custom of very expensive dowries.³³ If the citizens of Florence were delaying marriage, it not only affected the birth rate of the city, it threatened the “honor of the city.”³⁴ Another aspect of Rainey’s case-study approach is that it provides a very useful methodology that can be applied to other Italian cities. In particular, his extensive description of the terminology of Florentine sumptuary law helps us to understand exactly how the people of Florence discussed matters of consumption and which elements of dress and personal expenditure were most targeted. For example, Rainey outlines the various types of headpieces that were forbidden by referencing the particular terms such as the horn-shaped hats, *corne*, or saddle-shaped headdresses called *selle*.³⁵ Without discovering and discussing this terminology, it may never have been apparent that Florence was concerned with matters surrounding headwear. Thus, we see how useful diachronic studies can be, but we must remember that it might be even more helpful to make comparisons between the city in question and nearby areas.

In fact, there are a few such studies. In the early twentieth century, in a study that we well ahead of its time, Antonio Bonardi examined the sumptuary legislation in the city of Padua, in the broader context of its surroundings, including

³³ Rainey, *Legislation in Renaissance Florence*, 432.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 450.

not just the rest of the Veneto, but Venice itself.³⁶ More recently, Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli's work on Emilia Romagna takes this concept to a new level as she makes an explicit attempt to identify the themes and connections between sumptuary laws within a particular region.³⁷ In fact, her work is a prime example of what I would like to call an "expanded diachronic study." As a result of her project, Muzzarelli has provided some of the most recent case-study work regarding Italian Renaissance sumptuary law and her compilation provides a helpful scheme for studying the evolution of these laws over multiple centuries in relatively large area of the Italian peninsula. In her work, the law codes she examines appear as they were originally written in Latin, and are subsequently analyzed in a comprehensive manner. A similar diachronic analysis for another region, Umbria, is the study by Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani.³⁸ It should be noted that all three of these scholars have looked, at least briefly, at the late medieval period, as Heller suggests they should, which creates a very useful context for the laws that appear during the Renaissance.

One might say that another problem with the current historiography is that historians have chosen to hone in on the issue of female clothing in sumptuary laws at the expense of other matters. To be sure, female clothing is particularly important in the legislation, but scholars have almost forgotten that sumptuary laws cover a large range of subjects, including men's clothing, as well as funeral, wedding, baptismal, and post-partum practices. One notable exception is the work of Diane

³⁶ Antonio Bonardi, *Il lusso di altri tempi in Padova studio storico con documenti inediti*. Miscellanea di storia veneta, t. 2 (Venezia: a spese della Società, 1910).

³⁷ See Muzzarelli, *La Legislazione suntuaria: Emilia Romagna*.

³⁸ Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani, *La legislazione suntuaria, secoli XIII-XVI: Umbria* (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Dipartimento per i beni archivistici e librari, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2005).

Owen Hughes, whose emphasis on the regulation of female clothing, especially in her article, "Regulating Woman's Fashion,"³⁹ reflects but does not go beyond the preoccupation of Italian Renaissance governments with women's clothing. Her work covers a variety of other topics, such as mourning rituals, in the sumptuary laws and more generally seeks to discern the multiple motivations behind sumptuary laws, ranging from economic protectionism to "public morality," in order to examine the connection of the laws to social relations in Renaissance Italy.⁴⁰ In this respect, her unique and inventive scholarship is an obvious influence on Killerby.

Perhaps the most glaring problem, and definitely the hardest one to solve, is that of the enforcement of sumptuary legislation. While there are ample examples of the laws themselves, there is virtually no record about their enforcement. Without evidence as to how exactly these laws were enforced, or even whether they were enforced at all, it remains extremely difficult to discuss their social impact. We also have very little idea of popular attitudes towards the legislation. Were people of certain social groups wary of the laws? Did they act accordingly so as not to face legal difficulties or the payment of fines? This paper will seek to answer these questions.

Killerby has pursued the topic of sumptuary law enforcement more so than other scholars. In her article, "Practical problems in the enforcement of Italian sumptuary law, 1200-1500," she makes an argument that in the absence of governmental records detailing when and how sumptuary laws were enforced, the written preambles to the laws themselves provide the most evidence about

³⁹ Diane Owen Hughes, "Regulating Women's Fashion," in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Pauline Schmitt Pantel (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁰ Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," 79.

enforcement.⁴¹ I conclude after reading Killerby that these preambles - with which every city explained the motivations for new laws and the revision of old ones - demonstrate the fact that enforcement was eagerly and sincerely sought and attempted, but that the sumptuary laws themselves were so shaped by ambiguity on the part of government officials so as to be defective, and thus, impossible to enforce. Thus, we may readily identify a conspicuous problem with Killerby's argument, which is that it does not account for how people reacted to sumptuary laws or the possibility that they had mixed feelings about them. In other words, her theory regarding the use of preambles as an explicit example for the analysis of motivations does not take into consideration the possibility that legislators were ambivalent in their attitudes. This is to say that the men who created these laws were not necessarily fully committed to the provisions they established and may have had different motives about the laws they passed depending on the subject of the legislation. For example, when Florentine sumptuary laws demanded fines for the infringement of clothing regulations, did legislators prefer that society conform to these restrictions on dress for modesty's sake, or did they hope that the law might be frequently breached in order to enhance the city's fiscal revenue from the fines collected? Furthermore, maybe legislators were torn about whether it was better to concern themselves with the general welfare of the city's population versus protecting certain groups in society, a dilemma that arises when one considers the laws that pertained to the regulation of prostitutes. Sometimes these laws protected the trade, giving it a specific zone within which it could be practiced, while at other times they tightly restricted what the *meretrici* could wear.

⁴¹ Interestingly enough, this absence of records might tell us something about the process of enforcement, specifically the true intentions of enforcers (like if they really wanted to punish people for infractions, or just dissuade citizens from wearing certain clothes or performing certain practices).

Regardless of sometimes-contradictory implications and ambiguous attitudes, it is undeniable that the publication of these preambles was considered very important. This is demonstrated by the fact that a majority of the laws themselves provided instructions for how exactly the public would be informed about them.⁴² Often times, there were details as to where and when government officials would publicly announce the new laws, so that the public might learn of them and hence, be held accountable for following them.⁴³

In addition, the denunciation boxes provided by city governments are additional examples of the concerted effort towards enforcement.⁴⁴ The cities of Florence, Perugia, Viterbo, and Venice all provided special boxes where secret denunciations could be left against individuals who allegedly broke the sumptuary laws.⁴⁵ The Venetian case, however, is particularly revealing of both, the enforcement efforts and the obstacles they encountered. In Venice two *bocche* (or mouths) were constructed in 1562 outside the office of the *Magistrato alle pompe* in the ducal palace. The first contained the inscription, “Denontie secrete in material d’ogni sorte di pompe contro cadauna persona con benefici de ducati 42 per cento giusto alle leggi.”⁴⁶ The second was inscribed with the statement, “Denontie secrete contro ministri dele pompe con l’impunità secreteza e benefitii giusto alle legi.”⁴⁷ The latter inscription suggests that the officials charged with the enforcement of the

⁴² Catherine Kovesi Killerby, “Practical problems in the enforcement of Italian sumptuary law, 1200-1500,” in *Crime, Society, and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 101.

⁴³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 136.

⁴⁴ Killerby, “Practical problems in enforcement,” 111.

⁴⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 129.

⁴⁶ “Secret denunciations concerning every sort of luxury against any person whatsoever with rewards of 42 ducats per 100 according to the laws.” Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 149.

⁴⁷ “Secret denunciations against ministers of luxury with impunity, secrecy and benefices according to the laws.” Ibid.

laws could themselves not be trusted to do so. It also raises the question of who, other than the officials of this magistracy, were to read the denunciations left in this second bocca.

Because enforcement is a crucial part of sumptuary legislation, to establish a better understanding of the topic, it is essential to study prosecution records. As previously mentioned, however, there are very few existing accounts of prosecution, and the job was often passed between many different governmental offices, indicating perhaps that no one really wanted these controversial cases on their docket.⁴⁸ The lack of prosecutions is a likely indication that enforcement was rather difficult to pursue, meaning that instead of actually enforcing a law through prosecution, the case was passed between different offices, with the result that prosecutions were rarely enacted. With the presence of secret denouncers (who received monetary rewards for their information,⁴⁹ as we have just seen), prosecution was less strictly systematized than the creation of the laws themselves. Many problems arose, indeed, due to the fact that these denunciations were often unfounded accusations. Why not accuse someone for wearing clothing in contravention of the law if it meant that you could prosper financially or politically by doing so? Despite the problematic nature of sumptuary enforcement, Killerby is still able to identify notable patterns in the prosecution of cases by using the records of at least eight Italian cities: Florence, Perugia, Siena, Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, Lucca, and Viterbo.⁵⁰

Prosecutions for breaches of ceremonial law are among the most common,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹ Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," 95.

⁵⁰ These patterns will be explored in the enforcement section of Chapter 5. Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 153-154.

including the prosecution of women attending funerals with disheveled, unveiled hair and the prosecution of newlyweds for breaking betrothal and wedding laws by accepting excessive gifts. Fewer records, specifically only four Florentine prosecutions, feature children breaking clothing laws and fathers being fined as a result of it. The most telling pattern in the prosecutions of sumptuary legislation cases is that the majority refers to women who have broken clothing regulations. Undoubtedly, this is connected to the fact that most sumptuary laws were directed against women and extravagant clothing, but what remains very interesting is that “not a single prosecution has been found concerning men.”⁵¹ In 1994 Killerby entertained the idea that perhaps this is indicative of a certain degree of misogyny, but she was not prepared to accept what she considered such a simplistic conclusion and decided instead to reserve the topic for another future work. When she did so, in her 2002 monograph, she concluded that misogynist language found in the legislative preambles “proves to be exceptional rather than usual” She cites as evidence the fact that out of the three hundred or so laws she considered in her study, only “six overtly misogynistic preambles were found.”⁵²

Killerby also argues that historians tend to discount the validity of the preambles in expressing the real reasons behind a city’s sumptuary law. It is as if they cannot believe that legislators would truly express the real motivations behind their laws and consequently, they have not dedicated much time analyzing what Killerby deems to be a valuable source of information. She maintains, however, that these statements from the legislators themselves should be given fair shrift as explanatory documents. They are in essence, “rich sources for understanding the

⁵¹ Killerby, “Practical problems in enforcement,” 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 119.

motives of the legislators...”⁵³ For example, she cites the preamble of a 1334 sumptuary law from Imola as “simply” stating the purpose of the law, which was “to revoke the grave and onerous expenses which have uselessly been made by all the men of the city and district of Imola from their wages for clothing and other various ornaments for men and women.”⁵⁴ Killerby’s argument, whether one agrees with or not, is that there is no reason for not taking such a preamble at face value. The problem with her argument, however, is the same one that has been mentioned already in this chapter— she ignores the fact that there could be many levels to contemporary motivations for a law as well as for reactions to it. In other words, the preamble may list explicit motives, but the legislators behind it did not have to share these motives completely, or even at all.

This brings us to the point that many laws were economically motivated, but certainly not explicitly so. Therefore the governmental preoccupation of the city’s population with rich clothing and ornamentation did not preclude the strong presence of governmental economic concerns. Indeed some laws involve a certain level of protectionism to guard a city’s economic interests in relation to international markets. Not only did laws, such as the fourteenth-century Florentine legislation forbidding the importation of foreign cloth, seek to protect domestic goods, they also sought to “boost trade surpluses, and cut deficits.”⁵⁵ Perhaps the most obvious example of this wish to generate revenue are the Florentine “gabelles,” or indirect taxes, which formed one of the bases of Florentine fiscal policy. Some

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁵ Killerby also notes that to accentuate these economic benefits, cities might restrict the consumption of home-produced goods (in addition to imported luxuries), so that they might sell more abroad and earn foreign exchange. This was especially the case in trade centers, such as Genoa and Venice, as opposed to manufacturing centers like Florence. Ibid., 48-49.

gabelles were, in effect, used as a luxury tax, which enabled those who could afford to pay the tax to wear the items in question.⁵⁶ For example, a Florentine law of the late fourteenth century provided for a gabella that permitted the payer to exceed the maximum number of guests, two hundred, that one was allowed to host at a wedding banquet.⁵⁷ Numerous cities also imposed fines upon those who acted contrary to the established law. Often times, ladies would simply wear what they wanted and expect to pay the fines that they knew they could afford. This phenomenon was so prevalent that it was even given its own term by the Venetians, “pagare le pompe,” or “to pay the luxury fine.” This was such a common colloquialism in Venice that Killerby notes it can be found in Venetian dialectical dictionaries.⁵⁸

Another important aspect of the historiography of Italian Renaissance sumptuary legislation regards the quantity of the laws. What can the sheer number of laws tell us about their significance and their effectiveness in Italian society? That is to ask whether their prevalence may be attributed to the fact that it was a pressing matter for the city-state, or to the fact that people were finding ways around the rules. Killerby has determined that there were over three hundred different forms of sumptuary laws from the period between 1200 and 1500 in Italy, and she adds that in the sixteenth century there was a boom in sumptuary legislation.⁵⁹ As a result, this thesis will focus on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, choosing as its rough symbolic ending point the early 1630s, a period when the last massive epidemic of plague descended on the Italian peninsula and when the trial of Galileo stifled much

⁵⁶ Rainey, *Legislation in Florence*, 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁵⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 123.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

intellectual development in Italian cultural circles, effectively bringing to an end the leading role that Renaissance Italy had previously possessed in the European continent.

Since Renaissance Italy was a time of notable social change and class fluidity, sumptuary laws may be seen as an attempt to “reimpose order.”⁶⁰ New urban middle classes that began to emerge in response to new economic opportunities and that developed a taste for luxuries made existing aristocracies in the principalities feel threatened. They also raised concerns among republican governments, which wanted to preserve “republican virtues” among the members of their regimes.⁶¹ By tempering personal expressions of wealth by elite groups that had previously held power or by newly emerging groups that wished to emulate the behavior of old elites, the governments hoped to curb challenges to their supremacy.

In an era when the Catholic Church was so prominent and pervasive, one naturally wonders about the role of sumptuary laws emanating from ecclesiastical concerns. Both Hughes and Killerby note that on the whole there was a conspicuous absence of sumptuary laws or pronouncements emanating directly from the church. The church undoubtedly exercised some moral influence on these matters, as it had done for centuries, and the sermons of preachers sometimes preceded the issuance of sumptuary laws and influenced some of their content. For the most part, however, the laws were motivated by secular concerns and were adopted by secular governments.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁶¹ Ibid., 81.

The one area where the church did play a role in passing legislation was in regulating the “seductiveness in female dress.”⁶² In particular, scholars have seen ecclesiastical influence in the laws controlling the *décolletage* “beneath the collarbone.”⁶³ Many law codes specified that the appropriate dip in neckline should be that of a certain number of fingers placed sideways, usually one to two, below the collarbone. As a result, in the late fifteenth century the regulation gave rise to the new trend of wearing a chemise whose neckline came high above that of the dress to reach the base of the neck, thus allowing women to wear dresses that had necklines that were actually very low.⁶⁴ Hence, not only does this type of sumptuary law demonstrate the specific regulations women faced, it also shows how these women responded to such laws by inventing new styles and fashions. Perhaps an unintended consequence of sumptuary laws was the acceleration of fashion and of consumer culture in Renaissance Italy.

Given this background, I hope that the intricacies of the topic – which are as detailed as some of the regulated fashions and practices themselves – prove to be worthy of my further exploration and examination. Specifically, this thesis will be organized into five thematic chapters in an effort to address Italian Renaissance sumptuary law through the aforementioned categories of analysis. It is through this comprehensive, thematic approach that I endeavor to add to the somewhat skeletal scholarship that has been done on the topic.

⁶² Owen Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations,” 82.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting, 1460-1500*, (London: J. Murray, 1975), 56.

Chapter 2

Changing Fashion, Changing Practice, Changing Law

“Whereupon Gualtieri, having taken her by the hand, led her out of the house, and in the presence of his whole company and of all the other people there he caused her to be stripped naked. Then he called for the clothes and shoes which he had specially made, and quickly got her to put them on, after which he caused a crown to be placed on the disheveled hair of her head. And just as everyone was wondering what this might signify, he said: ‘Gentlemen, this is the woman I intend to marry, provided she will have me as her husband’. . . .To which she replied: ‘I will, my lord’. . . .and he married her then and there before all the people present. He then helped her mount a palfrey and led her back, honourably attended, to his house, where the nuptials were as splendid and as sumptuous, and the rejoining as unrestrained, as if he had married the King of France’s daughter.”

- Excerpt from the “Tale of patient Griselda,” Giovanni Boccaccio⁶⁵

The Fashion

By the fifteenth century, sumptuary laws had been established by virtually all of the city governments of Italy. These laws were put in place to monitor the fashion trends of the time, which were employed throughout the peninsula and deemed by many city governments to be outrageous and socially detrimental (for both moral and economic reasons), since they involved overly ornamented and complicated styles that required expensive and extensive use of fabric and ornamentation. In general, the daily outfit for both men and women consisted of three layers of garments. It was not the existence of fine garments themselves that attracted the attention of legislators, but the material these garments were made from, as well as their cut, their length, and their ornamentation. What would become problematic,

⁶⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Classics, 1972), 786-787.

however, would be the pace at which these fashions changed. Indeed, the evolution of fashion proved so quick, that once a law was established it might no longer be relevant, or might lack the proper terminology. A first-hand witness of this phenomenon, fashion writer Cesare Vecellio (c. 1530- c.1601) lamented that an accurate account of the current fashions was a grueling task to undertake given that, “they are highly susceptible to change and vary more than the shape of the moon.... So it is to be feared that, while I am writing about one fashion, they may change to another, making it impossible for me to cover everything.”⁶⁶

Despite the capriciousness of fashion trends in fifteenth-and sixteenth-century Italy, we may successfully catalogue much of the clothing that was worn by men, women, and children across the social spectrum. Contemporary writers, as well as family ricordanze, sumptuary laws, and a variety of paintings, supply the basis of information on popular styles and typical articles of Renaissance clothing. The only remnants of clothing that survive from the era are occasional pieces of ecclesiastical garb as well as fragments of fabric found preserved from fifteenth-century Florence.⁶⁷ Thus, most of our evidence exists in written form and requires careful study so that we might have an accurate idea of how these fashions actually appeared in real life. This is where paintings and prints become very useful tools for understanding Renaissance clothing styles, provided we make the assumption that despite artistic license, these images render faithfully the era’s prevailing fashions.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Owen Hughes, “Regulating Women’s Fashion,” 142.

⁶⁷ Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing*, The Johns Hopkins University studies in historical and political science, 120th ser., 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 148.

⁶⁸ For further information as to the accuracy of clothing in Renaissance painting see Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 2.

Indeed, it is through paintings that we can actually study Renaissance fashions, for the clothes themselves did not survive to the present.⁶⁹

Rosita Levi Pisetzky's volumes *Storia del Costume in Italia*, is a great collection of standard quattro- and cinquecento fashions ranging from headwear down to shoes.⁷⁰ It instantly becomes apparent that the vocabulary of clothing was quite extensive and that the terminology might include numerous names for the same or similar styles. To begin, a look at headpieces, from hats to hoods and veils, highlights the Renaissance concern with modesty, a value that influenced the styles of all types of clothing. Both men and women often covered their heads when out in public and they had a variety of options by which to do so. Men might sport small head coverings called *cuffie*, which were close-fitting bonnets, or the similar *foggette* of the *popolani* (those men of the lower, working classes), made of soft material that could be folded on top of the head.⁷¹ Seeing as *popolani* were the ones who usually wore *foggette*, it becomes apparent that status was often attached to style. That is to say that *foggette* were seen as cheap excuses for headdress and even generated an insulting term for a lower-class male, *foggettina*. Another option was the simple hood, or *cappuccio*, that could be worn by both sexes and people of all standing. It even existed in a children's counterpart as the smaller *cappuccino*.

As was the case with most fashions, the women's' range in headdress was much more extensive than that of males. Women might wear turban-like hats of Eastern influence called *balze* or circular crown-like pieces called *ghirlande*, or garlands. *Mazzochi* were hat forms made of cork and covered in fabric and other

⁶⁹ Please refer to Chapter 6 for an analysis of fashion, ceremony, and sumptuary laws as seen through Italian Renaissance art.

⁷⁰ Rosita Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del Costume in Italia*, (Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1964), II.

⁷¹ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 46, 149.

forms of embellishment.⁷² They illustrate the fact that Renaissance fashions often used every opportunity for ornamentation, as we will see throughout all categories of clothes. It is in the category of headgear that we also see the importance of foreign influences on Italian Renaissance fashion. The styles that came from other lands were referred to as *alla di là*, meaning “from beyond.”⁷³ For example, in the fifteenth century, Italian women could be seen wearing *acconciature a corna* (headdresses with horns) or *selle alla fiamminga e francese* (saddle-shaped Flemish and French headdresses). The adoption of these styles indicates the influx of the international gothic into Italy and its effect on fashion.⁷⁴ And yet, it was not only an international gothic style that was developing at this time, but as we see from the aforementioned terminology, fashion trends began to reflect a more regional and distinct cultural character by the fifteenth century. For example, styles began to be referred to as particularly French or Italian.

When it came to the clothing that covered the body, we see that the Renaissance standard of layering many garments and adding accessories was constant throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁷⁵ For men, outfits began with a *camicia*, or shirt, usually made of a soft, white cotton, that was then paired with stretchy, footed hose. Particularly important, a man’s hose, or *calze*, could be an important indication of his family lineage or status based on its pattern of colors (perhaps each leg was a different color, or perhaps boasted a sort of checkered pattern or one with zigzagged lines separating the various hues) (Appendix, Figure 1). As Stella Blum concisely puts it in her review of Jacqueline Herald’s *Renaissance*

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 180.

⁷⁴ Pisetzky, *Costume in Italia*, 222.

⁷⁵ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 147.

Dress in Italy 1400-1500, “young men. . . began to shorten their tunics [in the fifteenth century] to reveal well-shaped legs encased in striking parti-colored hose.”⁷⁶ In Venice there were fraternities of these young patrician men that arose around the year 1400 and “enlivened the city for two centuries with their costumes, their banquets and other entertainments, especially on the occasion of the presence of any distinguished foreigner.”⁷⁷ These clubs were known as *Compagnie delle Calze* for members of each *compagnia* were known for their particular, colorful calze.⁷⁸ Eventually the calze came to be decorated with gold, silver, and precious stones, and distinctive emblems.⁷⁹

Over the *camicia*, which was gathered at the neck and wrists, came the *farsetto*, or doublet, which was quilted for shape and chest definition.⁸⁰ The tunic followed on top of the *farsetto* and came in a variety of styles. The *giubba* and the *villano* were the shorter versions, while tunics also came in longer styles such as the *cioppa* and the *cotta*, as well as the Florentine *lucco* and the sleeveless *giornea* (which originated as a military garment).⁸¹ Magistrates, as well as men about town, might don an overgown, known by the generic term of *mantello* (Appendix, figure 3). Other forms of this outer layer were the old fashioned *cottardite*, the *robbe* and the *sacchi*. In fact, the terminology for this overgarment was so extensive that in Florentine communal statutes it appears as over twenty different types.⁸² An interesting development in men’s fashion by the end of the fifteenth century was that many

⁷⁶ Stella Blum, review of *Renaissance Dress in Italy, 1400-1500*, by Jacqueline Herald, *Renaissance Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 421.

⁷⁷ Mary Margaret Newett, “The Sumptuary Laws of Venice in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Historical Essays*, ed. T.F. Tout (Manchester: University Press, 1907), 272.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 272-73.

⁸⁰ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 160.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

were conducting their public affairs without an over-tunic, wearing just their doublet and hose. If the tunic was worn, it might be flung fashionably over the shoulder, or carefully buttoned down the front in the case of elderly gentlemen.⁸³ Might this represent a change from a more sober mercantile dress to a more courtly (and, hence, racy) style? In a city like Florence where a court culture was developing under Medici reign, this was a definite possibility, because Italian cities that had favored simple lines and restrained use of ornament during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, began to develop more “severe” public styles later on in the fifteenth.⁸⁴

Scholars such as Carole Frick have established that fashion was, relative to today’s standards, not as much of a gendered phenomenon, meaning that women’s ensembles closely resembled those of men.⁸⁵ There were strong similarities especially in the cut of the garments, the shape of the sleeves, and the lowering of the waistline (which occurred in the second half of the fifteenth century).⁸⁶ Women, too, began with a *camicia* (which might be exposed at the neckline and through outer layers by way of slashes, such as those at the elbows). On top of the *camicia* was the bodice that may or may not have included *lacci* and *maglie* (laces and eyelets).⁸⁷ Next came the gown, which came to be refined by many a name and style. In the fourteenth century, it was known as the *gonna*, *gonnella*, or the *sottana*. By the fifteenth century, gowns were referred to as *gamurre* or *cotte*. Unlike the case for

⁸³ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 17.

⁸⁴ Philip M. Soergel, “Fashion,” in *Arts & Humanities Through the Eras: Renaissance Europe (1300-1600)*, ed. P. Soergel (Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2005), 4: 104-05.

⁸⁵ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 162.

⁸⁶ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 22.

⁸⁷ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 162.

men, the fourth layer was usually compulsory for women, as it was uncommon that anyone outside of the immediate family would see a woman merely in her *gamurra*.⁸⁸

The overgown, or *mantello*, was certainly the most ornate layer of clothing for women, which is an interesting contrast to its purpose—to allow women modesty or the ability to hide, *nascondere*. Especially distinguished were those *mantelli* that had areas of plain, easily stained fabric alternating with richly decorated sections (perhaps by embroidery or brocade).⁸⁹ Though this fashion was meant to be a conservative covering, it only covered the other garments partially, allowing for a very visually layered affect. Indeed, in the summer, women wore the sleeveless *giornea*, only wearing the sleeved *cioppa* in the wintertime.

As for children, their fashions during the Italian Renaissance were essentially mini versions of adult clothes. One important addition was the *grembiale* or the *cioppa* which served as an apron or smock and protected expensive clothing from stains and spills.⁹⁰ An easy way to spot a style for children is by identifying those with diminutives in the names such as *mantellino*, *lucchetto*, *farsettino*, *gamurrina*, and the aforementioned *cappuccino*.⁹¹

Accessories were perhaps the most important components of the Renaissance outfit. It was not only jewelry that was used to ornament clothing, but belts and purses and shoes as well. In fact, Carole Collier Frick asserts that the belt was the most important accessory, especially for women.⁹² A fashion that has been used for centuries and centuries, the belt represented a simple, interchangeable ornament that could beautify even the most simple dress. Belt fashions became so elaborate

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 46.

that they even began to feature pendants of jewels and stones that would hang down the sides of a woman's skirt.⁹³

As for jewelry, not only were intricate and fanciful styles in vogue, most pieces recalled influences from classical antiquity, especially sculpture and architecture,⁹⁴ for these were the main forms of artwork that survived from the classical period and came to represent the paradigm of elegance and poise of classical Greece and Rome. In fact, jewelry was so connected to classical, and therefore contemporary, art that many of the great Renaissance sculptors we know today began as or studied with goldsmiths (such as the acclaimed Lorenzo Ghiberti and Benvenuto Cellini).⁹⁵ Not only did jewelry reflect the classical revival in art, it also appeared very accurately and intricately in paintings. For example, the details in Lorenzo Lotto's painted portrait of *Lucrezia* show an intimate knowledge of the type of pendant produced by a skilled goldsmith.⁹⁶

As fashion was becoming increasingly more reflective of a distinct cultural identity by the fifteenth-century, so was jewelry. Italy was known for its extremely elegant and elaborate jewelry (such as seen in Bernard Strigel's portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza), while other nations, as may be seen in Austrian portraits, took a more modest approach.⁹⁷ Italy's highly ornate jewelry was not, however, confined to women. The fashion of thick, heavy gold chains, seen in many Renaissance paintings (such as Titian's portrait of Pietro Aretino, found in the Frick Collection), was a male style that emanated from Italy and entered the fashions of many other foreign

⁹³ Wilmen Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne dalle leggi suntuarie a Venezia e in Romagna III sec. a.C.-XIX sec* (Cesena: Comitato Consorti del Rotary Club, 1994), 77-78.

⁹⁴ Joan Evans, *A History of Jewellery, 1100-1870* (Boston, Mass: Boston Book and Art, 1970), 81.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

countries. In fact, in 1511, Henry VIII bought a gold chain weighing ninety-eight ounces!⁹⁸

By the sixteenth-century, jewelry fashions began to reflect the mannerist trend in art.⁹⁹ Italian jewelry continued its tradition of “monumental elegance,” but lost the emphasis on architectural significance that had been so important in the early Renaissance.¹⁰⁰ Even in the seventeenth-century, Italian jewelry maintained its large-scale, visually impressive effect, as one can see in the Florentine portrait of Maria Capponi (1578-1656).¹⁰¹

The amount of clothing that upper class people had in their *guardaroba*, or wardrobe, was often quite large, considering documentary evidence that suggests the latter ordered a new set of garments each year.¹⁰² For an adult, a wardrobe usually consisted of about twenty to twenty-five pieces, while for children it was made up of about ten to twelve articles. When clothing was discarded from a household, it usually did not become garbage, but rather a valuable garment that could be sold on the second-hand market.¹⁰³ This market was so extensive that it came to be under the complete control of the *Arte dei Rigattieri*, which also dealt in new, ready-to-wear garments, perhaps the closest example we have to modern-day ready-to-wear shopping.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ This source does contain weight conversion tables, so it must be considered that ninety-eight ounces in sixteenth-century England might have been a different measurement than ninety-eight ounces by today's standards. Ibid., 98.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰² Birbary, *Dress in Painting*, 15.

¹⁰³ Because this clothing was so valuable, people did not buy a new outfit each year – not even for children, who wore loose clothing, a size too big one year, a size just right another, and a size too small the next! For information about Venice's well-established second-hand market, see Patricia Allerston, “Clothing and early modern Venetian society,” *Continuity and Change* 15, no. 3 (December, 2000): 376.

¹⁰⁴ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 21.

Though commercial transactions did not occur as they do today at stores with sales clerks and set prices, the importance of purchasing clothing was so great that Carole Frick estimates that it was not unheard of for families of the Florentine patriciate to spend as much as forty percent of their total wealth on clothes.¹⁰⁵ Patricia Allerston's analysis of the Venetian elite led her to the conclusion that in order to attain the proper appearance (especially in those cases in which one sought social mobility), it was necessary to commit to "considerable financial undertaking." As an example that gives us an idea of the kind of money spent on attire, the case of Venetian artist Lorenzo Lotto provides interesting insight. Upon moving in with his wealthier attorney cousin, Lotto borrowed one hundred and twenty ducats, over a third of which he spent on clothes.¹⁰⁶ He spent 8.5 ducats on a woolen cloak and 5.5 ducats on a lined woolen tunic which Allerston has translated to mean just under 43 days' labor for the cloak and 28.7 days' wages for the tunic, based on the average builders' wages in 1546.¹⁰⁷ It thus becomes apparent that clothing could be remarkably expensive and was nevertheless deemed necessary for one's success.

As we have seen, this standard of appearance applied to all members of the family as a reflection of status. A cohesive image was so crucial, in fact, that well-off families employed tailors attached to their households and embroiderers who often also served as household servants.¹⁰⁸ Having a family tailor and embroiderer is what ensured a customized look for the family, namely the use of the same colors, cuts, and patterns of clothing. As Frick has noted, the Parenti family of Florence was identified around the city in the gold and scarlet colors of the men's' attire and the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 180.

¹⁰⁶ Allerston, "Clothing and Venetian society," 372.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Birbary, *Dress in Painting*, 10.

blue and white attire for the women.¹⁰⁹ It is important to acknowledge the fact that Marco Parenti's wife, Caterina, entered the marriage with a blue and white trousseau, which likely set the tone for the family's female color scheme.¹¹⁰ In addition, Caterina continued the tradition by creating blue and white trousseaus for her daughters as well.¹¹¹ Thus, we become aware of how closely clothing was tied to status, for the wearing of particular colors became a public portrayal of one's kinship in a powerful family. In essence, image was everything.

Just as for nobles the phenomenon of family coats of arms was a mark of status, so too was their use of family clothing, which they employed to an even more elaborate degree than people further down the social scale. One of the greatest examples comes from the Este sisters Isabella (wife of Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua), and Beatrice (wife of Lodovico Sforza, future Duke of Milan).¹¹² As seen in their letters to each other and to their husbands, both of the Este sisters used one of the Sforza personal devices, an embroidery pattern, which featured the twin towers of the lighthouse in Genoa.¹¹³ As has been true regarding fashion throughout the ages, however, a certain standard of uniqueness was always valued. Beatrice wrote Isabella, for example, to make sure she had not worn the intertwined trellis pattern that had been suggested by Niccolò da Corigi, because she wanted to wear it for the wedding of their niece, Bianca Maria Sforza.¹¹⁴ These two women were such innovators in fashion that they were responsible for creating popular trends throughout Italy. Specifically, Beatrice D'Este secured the Queen of France's

¹⁰⁹ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 175.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 176.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Birbary, *Dress in Painting*, 8.

¹¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

drawings to introduce a new headdress into Lombardy. Meanwhile Isabella wore *berettino* (a mourning gray color) year-round because she believed it suited her complexion.¹¹⁵ Their fashions also served as influences in neighboring countries. Francis I requested that a doll featuring Isabella's fashions be sent to the ladies in his court so that they might use it as a model for their clothing.¹¹⁶

The emulation of fashion, however, was not restricted to nobles and the wealthy. In fact, British historians of consumerism, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb assert that there existed (at least in eighteenth-century Britain), a "social emulation model" in which lower social classes would, if possible, mimic the buying behavior of the upper classes instead of creating their own patterns of consumption.¹¹⁷ Yet, while perhaps this model may be used as a tool to analyze those fashion phenomena that were worn by the *popolani* and the patriciate alike, Allerston argues that though a useful theory, it is not one that provides sufficient explanation for the case of Renaissance Italy.¹¹⁸ She believes that adopting a single theory behind the consumer behavior of Renaissance Venice would be "arbitrary and reductive."¹¹⁹ Instead, the fact that Venetian consumerism was influenced by many complicated systems (such as second-hand markets, clothing theft, payment in garments instead of wages), leads us to the realization that Renaissance consumption was an intricate institution. I believe that Allerston's conception of Venice might be an applicable pattern for other Italian states as the rise of consumerism in Renaissance Italy created a complex commercial system that

¹¹⁵ Owen Hughes, "Regulating Women's Fashion," 156-57.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁷ Allerston, "Clothing and Venetian society," 369.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 381-382.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 382.

promoted the purchase of clothing by a variety of means as it encouraged the importance of outward appearance.

The Laws on Fashion and Public Responses

City governments hoped that the profuse use of sumptuary legislation that would temper the luxury consumption and excessive ornamentation of their inhabitants. Due to the chameleon-like nature of the trends in style, this was not always an easy feat, but nevertheless concerted efforts were made to curb specific fashions and accessories. One area that was often targeted was the fabric used to make the garments. Quite commonly, this was a protectionist attempt to maintain the authenticity of a city's textiles. If foreign textiles were to imitate domestic ones successfully, they might be sold for a lower price on the market and therefore lead to a decreased demand for Venetian textiles. In fact, opportunistic Venetian merchants made a profit off of this strategy.¹²⁰ As a result, by 1442 the Senators banned the use of clothes made from gold and silver cloth, for Turkish weavers had already figured out how to fake the Venetian mark of authenticity (a pomegranate tree design made by metal sheets inserted into the textile's selvage).¹²¹ Exception was made for certain noble women, *le principesse* and the *Dogaressa*, and it was the nobles and the city elite as well, who were the only ones allowed to wear Venice's premier velvet: *il velluto allucciolato*. According to Wilmen Di Renzo Vianello, it was "the king of textiles," and was reserved for the mantles on the shoulders of only the highest magistrates.¹²² Similarly, the wearing of gold and silver cloth carried a great cache in the Romagna, causing legislators to ban this fabric in the early

¹²⁰ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 48.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

sixteenth century, so as to limit the use of extraordinary fabric by ordinary citizens. It was the prohibition of these types of fabric that encouraged the mania to possess it, as we will see in the clever responses to these laws that citizens created.

Color was a very important factor in fashion as well. Contrary to the popular opinion that red and purplish hues were reserved solely for city magistrates, in Florence it might also have been a symbol of usury, or of shedding blood, and became connected with Jews and prostitutes through various statutes. Frick speculates that perhaps the red used for Jews and prostitutes was a lighter red, and therefore required less of the expensive kermes dye that was most often used to make the crimson woolen gowns worn by those in public office.¹²³ Di Renzo Vianello notes that in Venetian sumptuary law, the color *rosso cupo* or *paonazzo*, was a luxury confined to magistrates on solemn occasions.¹²⁴ The color gold was also very precious and therefore, very desirable.

Members of lower social classes wore either undyed cloth or that which was dyed with the most economical colors. Such inexpensive hues included *rancio di bianco* (a warm white color), *cilestri di bianco* (a light blue), and *scarelattini* (a light red).¹²⁵ It is important to remember, however, that the clothes worn by these working women did not remain a uniform color for long. Upon their dresses becoming threadbare and torn, women patched them with whatever fabric they had on hand.¹²⁶ Strong visual evidence for this patching phenomenon can be seen in a

¹²³ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 174, 151.

¹²⁴ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 49.

¹²⁵ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 154.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

late fifteenth-century fresco from the Ghirlandaio school in which the working class female figures are depicted in patched gowns.¹²⁷

Initially, in the early Renaissance, the color black was not prestigious, or of any particular importance, except for its role as the proper color for mourning. Far from being considered an elegant shade, black provided the wardrobe for nuns and widows. Its lack of cache may be attributed, in part, to the fact that the dye used to make black garments was very inexpensive. Even the most costly black dye, *morello di grano*, was still relatively cheap in comparison to other hues.¹²⁸ It was when Leonora and Isabella of Aragon married in the late fifteenth century that “Italians connected the color black with wealth and refinement.”¹²⁹ In fact, when Lucrezia Borgia married into the house of Este in 1502 and brought some thirty black gowns with her, she inspired a new, must-have style for fashionable court elites.¹³⁰ In fact, as it made the transition from inconspicuous to chic, black was increasingly consigned to women, especially those of the nobility.¹³¹ Other colors that were complicated enough to produce, and therefore worthy of being restricted to the upper classes consisted of polychromes and in-between colors. Comprised of a variety of hues, there were speckled styles (*spolverezata*) as well as marble-type prints (*marmorini*).¹³² In addition, shades that depended on a mixture of hues, in order to demonstrate more subtlety of color, included the dark golden yellow

¹²⁷ Ibid., 156.

¹²⁸ Frick, 174–175.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Owen Hughes, “Regulating Women’s Fashion,” 151.

¹³² Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 176.

(*mostanolione*) and the rather elusive, aforementioned *pavonazzo*, which has been interpreted to be anywhere from peacock blue to red violet.¹³³

It was not only the color of the garment that sumptuary law regulated, but also the cut. In particular, the *décolletage*, or the neckline, was a prevalent theme in sumptuary legislation directed at women. In general necklines could be very high (*alleuto* or *accollato*) for mature, married, or cloistered women, and lower and rounder for younger girls.¹³⁴ Décolletage might also feature neckbands that created a pleated effect for those styles that covered the throat.¹³⁵ The shape of the neckline, however, is not what appears delineated by sumptuary law. Instead, legislation focused on the ornamentation that was sewn around the neckline. Early Florentine statutes dating from 1322-25 prohibited such ornaments completely, exacting a 200 lire fine against any goldsmith or tailor who sold them and 100 lire against the wearer.¹³⁶ So common was this type of decorated décolletage that there were as many as a dozen names used to describe it, which meant it was more difficult for enforcers to identify the exact type of ornament and prosecute its use.¹³⁷

Perhaps even more flamboyant than jewel-adorned necklines were the sleeves of Italian garments. In Florence by the end of the fifteenth century, at least fourteen different types of sleeve were documented, many being of foreign influence.¹³⁸ In fact, Di Renzo Vianello comments that these *maniche* were “il più bello e onorevole ornamento della persona[.]”¹³⁹ In Venice, indeed, sleeves were

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 158.

¹³⁵ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 55.

¹³⁶ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 189.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 190.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 191.

¹³⁹ “The most beautiful and honorable ornament of a person.” Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 63.

such a crucial legislative topic that they often dominated senatorial discourse as seen in early sixteenth-century meetings.¹⁴⁰ Although always full-length, to accentuate male movement and preserve female modesty, over time sleeves were transformed into a variety of shapes and cuts.¹⁴¹ Apart from the many variations in puffiness and pleats at the beginning of the fifteenth century, sleeves eventually became so tight that they were cut into two separate pieces and laces together at the elbow, allowing the undershirt, *camicia*, to show through.¹⁴² Sleeves could also be trumpet-shaped (*atrombe*), ornamented (*fiorite*), or slashed in a variety of patterns (*aburattegli*, *acotelacio*, or *affettate*).¹⁴³ These elaborate styles of sleeves were often prohibited by sumptuary legislation such as that of Emilia Romagna, which outlawed sleeves that were open, slashed, or even hanging.¹⁴⁴ Most likely, as a result of the spread of the International Gothic style, extravagant sleeves such as those *al ducale* (huge and open-mouthed) and *a gozzi* (bag-like and closed at the wrists) became extremely popular¹⁴⁵ (Appendix, figure 2). Another important innovation that became common after 1450, especially in Florence, was the Spanish-inspired detachable sleeve.¹⁴⁶ It is quite possible that people reserved their most elaborate fabrics and ornamentation for these detachable sleeves (as they would get the most use of their money being able to wear them with any tunic or gown) and thus, made them the most ornate clothing articles they owned.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹⁴¹ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 158. For more illustrated examples of the various sleeve styles see also Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 18-19.

¹⁴² Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 20.

¹⁴³ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 65.

¹⁴⁵ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 99.

Fifteenth-century laws therefore came to regulate the types of fabric used to construct sleeves, such as forbidding the use of velvet or silk.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, in January 1456, the commune of Florence restricted women to owning only one pair of brocaded sleeves (worth no more than ten florins).¹⁴⁸ But it was not just women who wore decorated sleeves. In the fifteenth century it was common for men to boast a decorated left sleeve for ceremonial occasions. Women also decorated the left shoulder with brooches and jeweled pins.¹⁴⁹ By the sixteenth century, sleeve embellishment was so advanced that laws began to take action against *maneghetti*, or a second pair of sleeves that was justified by wearers as more adequate protection from the elements, while in essence they were made of softer, finer material and fancier embroidery.¹⁵⁰

Extravagance even extended to footwear during the Italian Renaissance. Though one might wear something as simple as cloth slippers around the house and wooden clogs on the streets,¹⁵¹ upper class women often donned high platform shoes called chopines, or *zoccoli* (Appendix, figures 4, 5, & 6). Like many Renaissance fashions, these reached ridiculous heights both literally and figuratively. Especially popular with Venetian women, not only were they often covered in fancy cloth or embroidered, they could raise a woman as high as twenty-something inches off the ground!¹⁵² It is thought that the higher the chopines, the higher the status of the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 194.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 197. For an idea of how much money ten florins was for an average skilled worker in 1456, given that their daily wage was on average fifteen soldi di piccioli, it would be the equivalent of seventy-one and a third days' wages! Figures have been calculated using the Appendices One and Three from Richard Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 429-30, 435-42.

¹⁴⁹ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 197.

¹⁵⁰ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 65.

¹⁵¹ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 157.

¹⁵² Harold Koda, "The Chopine," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History- The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chop/hd_chop.htm.

woman wearing them, but at the same time it was often difficult to distinguish between noblewomen and successful courtesans in Renaissance Venice.¹⁵³ Though sumptuary laws sought to restrict platform height, such as the decree of March, 2 1430 that “aveva ordinato frattanto ai calzolari di non fabbricare ne` vendere calzature piu` alte di mezza quarta nella parte posteriore...,”¹⁵⁴ the mere use of platform shoes mocked other sumptuary laws, such as those that regulated train length.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, while chopines restricted the mobility of women, they also allowed for greater personal expression. For example, prostitutes might wear *zoccoli* to highlight their impurity¹⁵⁶ and propensity towards pleasure. Just as with the practice of foot binding in China, platform shoes were surrounded by an erotic aura in Renaissance Italy.

Sumptuary laws also covered smaller accessories such as belts, buttons, fastenings, and gloves. As has been noted, the belt was the most important accessory, so it follows that it was the target of many laws. In Venice, silver belts were regulated in 1334 to contain costliness. In 1495, the Venetian government banned the use of belt pendants or *ciondoli*, and prohibited pearl belts for the same reason in 1548.¹⁵⁷

When it came to the fastenings on a garment, single-chord lacing was the most common method;¹⁵⁸ however, buttons (*bottoni*) of precious metals, in use since the thirteenth century as closures set in rows, became another popular method and thus,

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Owen Hughes, “Regulating Women’s Fashion,” 148.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 74.

came to be greatly targeted by sumptuary legislation.¹⁵⁹ As Di Renzo Vianello points out, buttonholes (*asole*) were as stylistically important as the buttons themselves.¹⁶⁰ For example, the *asole* could be embroidered to create a more intricate and eye-catching effect.¹⁶¹

Even seemingly negligible elements of fashion, such as hand-held fans and gloves, became subjects of sumptuary laws. Due to their prevalence, perfumed pairs of gloves were allowed in Florence if they cost less than ten scudi.¹⁶² As for fans, they were the target of Venetian sumptuary laws since 1525. By the year 1535, fans were completely banned. In 1562, a law was passed that allowed fans, if they cost no more than four ducats.¹⁶³ These minor examples are important in that they demonstrate the truly vast range of articles that sumptuary laws aimed to control.

One other pattern that can be observed readily is that as fashions become overwhelmingly ornate, laws attempt restrictions, but ultimately more elaborate fashions prevail. This is no coincidence. One of the most fascinating phenomena surrounding Italian sumptuary legislation was its role in inspiring new fashions, especially in the area of women's clothing.¹⁶⁴ Though designed to curb excessive ornamentation and stylish dress, sumptuary laws actually spurred the birth of new trends and led to an even greater explosion of intricate accessories and sumptuous clothing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was as if sumptuary legislation encouraged women to be even more clever and detailed in their clothing,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁰ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 73.

¹⁶¹ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 78.

¹⁶² Carlo Carnesecchi, *Donne e lusso a Firenze nel secolo XVI: Cosimo I e la sua legge suntuaria del 1562* (Florence: Società Colombaria di Firenze, 1902), 37.

¹⁶³ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 75.

¹⁶⁴ Judith Brown, review of *Sumptuary Law in Italy: 1200-1500*, by Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 178.

in order to evade the legislation. While the Venetian government thought it had taken care of the belt problem by its legislation of 1495 banning belt pendants, women began wearing precious stone-encrusted belts, using crystal, agate, and lapis lazuli on the belts themselves. Legislation of May 1529 tried to address this new trend and one imagines that it probably had the same result as previous efforts. As Di Renzo Vianello noted, “la fantasia femminile ha mille risorse.”¹⁶⁵

If tweaking the fashion didn’t work as a means of evasion, there was another, rather physically taxing mode of evasion, and that was to run away (as quickly as one could while wearing platform shoes) from the officials who were supposed to enforce the laws, and that the laws themselves provided a loophole by designating churches as sanctuaries. Finding ways to circumvent those sumptuary laws regulating clothing could also become a very physical endeavor. Instead of using solely passive actions, such as wearing a banned material as a lining, women actually ran away from prosecution. In fact, when it came to law enforcement, churches served as sanctuary and offenders could not be prosecuted inside their walls.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, physically evading laws became a very useful technique of resistance. Another way in which women avoided sumptuary prosecution was to employ ambiguous terminology, such as calling their furs by another name and therefore not actually being in breach of the law by wearing a named animal pelt. This method and other tactics for dodging sumptuary prosecution will be analyzed and discussed in much greater depth in the section on enforcement, found in Chapter 3.

Even more cunning was the female response to those laws that restricted the use of furs and rich fabrics. As fur and expensive textiles, such as gold and silver

¹⁶⁵ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 80.

¹⁶⁶ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 183.

cloth, were seen as requiring excessive expense, sumptuary laws often added them to the list of banned materials. These items, however, did not remain absent from the wardrobe. Instead of foregoing their use, people began to use these fancy materials as linings, or *fodere*, to their garments, and especially, sleeves.¹⁶⁷ More than a method to brave the elements (silk was used as a lining in the summer, fur in the winter), linings provided an extra opportunity to showcase elaborate styles all in a very elusive manner. Elizabeth Birbari notes that the lining was often extended to the edge of the garment so that it not only rendered the clothing reversible and became easily visible, but also so that it might serve as a decorative trimming.¹⁶⁸

And yet, laws such as those just mentioned, which had as their motivation a form of social control through a moral and economic lens, did not stop here. The scope of sumptuary legislation was so extensive, indeed, that it fell well outside the boundaries of clothing and often concerned itself with ceremonial practices. Weddings and funerals were the events were a particular focus for legislation. The reasons behind such regulations lie in the fact that these ceremonies were very important in Renaissance culture, as in most cultures, and had developed very intricate and exact practices in Italy by this time period. In fact, marriages were made into multi-day affairs that included a number of rituals and ceremonies. To begin, once two families made marriage negotiations, there was a church ceremony attended by relatives and those intermediaries who had drawn up the contract. It was at this *impalmare* ceremony that both sides of the agreement shook hands for confirmation. The bride was conspicuously absent at this affair of “business.”¹⁶⁹ At

¹⁶⁷ Di Renzo Vianello, *Proibito alle donne*, 50.

¹⁶⁸ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 28.

¹⁶⁹ Charles L. Mee, Jr., *The Horizon Book of Daily Life in Renaissance Italy*, [Daily life in five great ages of history] (New York: American Heritage Pub. Co, 1975), 21.

the second event, however, the bride was present for the act of betrothal. A third event followed in which guests witnessed the exchange of rings and vows and got to enjoy the wedding feast.¹⁷⁰ A standard wedding feast might include a first course of herbed ravioli, chopped pork, and cream-cheese filled, sugared and fried pastries. The second course consisted of meat, most often veal, followed by a third course of an elaborate meat pie.¹⁷¹ Soon after, if not the same night, the wedding day was followed by the *nozze*, or the day the groom took his bride home.¹⁷² The most important marriage arrangement, the dowry (*dote*), was usually not paid at once, but rather was paid in numerous installments (and sometimes not paid in full by the time of the husband's death many years later). What did come in one package, however, was the wedding chest containing the trousseau, or *donora*, that a new bride brought to her husband's home. This trousseau was usually stocked with clothing and linens.¹⁷³ Just as wedding ceremonies and feasts could become extravagant, dowries and trousseaus too reached a level of ridiculous proportions.

As a result, sumptuary legislation targeted weddings at all levels. Not only was the number of guests and the food served tightly regulated, brides might be confined to accepting a maximum number of rings as well as foregoing elaborate presents. Also controlled was the entertainment provided at wedding ceremonies. Even relative to today's standards this regulation would appear reasonable, as Italian entertainment had a penchant for turning violent and bloody. For example, there existed a popular wedding exhibition known as *The Knight of the Cat* in which a

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Refer also to the excerpt of the Griselda story by Boccaccio (quoted on p.22, footnote 1) as an illustration, albeit fictional, of some of the sumptuous wedding procedures of Renaissance Italy.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 107.

shirtless, shaved-headed man must battle and kill an enraged cat with his teeth, making no use of his hands.¹⁷⁴

Obviously less violent, but still rather lively, wedding music was also targeted by sumptuary laws. Specifically, professional music was allowed to a limited degree in cities like Lucca in the late fourteenth century, but “spontaneous amateur celebratory noises” were explicitly forbidden.¹⁷⁵ The number of instrumentalists was also tightly regulated, a law in Siena restricting the numbers to no more than two trumpeters (*tubatores*) and one kettledrum (*naccherarium*), or one tambourine (*tamburellum*) and one shawm (*ciaramellam*)¹⁷⁶ or trumpet (*trombettam*).¹⁷⁷ In addition, when the bride made the transition to her new husband’s house, no one was (for up to three days) to make any noise or “play” any pots and pans or bells, or boards, or any type of metal.¹⁷⁸ In Milan in 1396, one statute instructed that for the feast of Saint John the Baptist, people must refrain from *fiant cantegore*, which is thought to have been celebratory singing that often degenerated into a discordant din.¹⁷⁹

On a more subdued note, as with all ceremonies, weddings also required very specific garb. Often times, great time and money were spent on the wedding gown, which could easily be seen by the public during the traditional *ductio*, or the bride’s ceremonial walk through the city to the groom’s house.¹⁸⁰ Guests, too, were expected to don their best, and this could mean a lot of pressure to wear

¹⁷⁴ Mee, *Daily Life in Renaissance Italy*, 103.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 68.

¹⁷⁶ A medieval/Renaissance instrument of the woodwind family made in Europe between the 13th and 17th centuries. It was a double-reeded predecessor of the modern oboe, it had a “piercing brilliance in tone.” See “shawm”, Michael Kennedy and Percy Alfred Scholes, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music: Based on the Original Publication by Percy Scholes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 669.

¹⁷⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 68.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 116.

extraordinary clothing. Sometimes the social importance of wedding celebrations was so demanding, that the impulsion to wear something beautiful led guests to forego the event completely.¹⁸¹ Naturally, sumptuary laws on clothing might get in the way of the outfits the newlyweds and the guests might wear. That is, normal sumptuary restrictions applied on these days of celebration.¹⁸²

Funeral ceremonies called for even more specific clothing. In fact, those sumptuary laws that pertained to funeral laws not only demanded a very strict adherence to appropriate *vestiti di lutto* (mourning attire); they also sought to temper the emotional outbursts and disheveled appearances of distraught widows. First of all, the corpse was to be properly dressed. For both men and women, "plain white wool lined in linen" was to be accompanied by a white cloth cap. Women in particular were to remain simply clothed, laws calling for no head covering over forty soldi, no garlands, no plaited hair, and no silver or gold adornments.¹⁸³ In Florence, fines for any breach of these restrictions (one-hundred lire) were four times what it was for men.¹⁸⁴ It is clear that a woman's modesty was just as important in her death as it was during her life. The only instance in which the deceased might be more ceremoniously decorated was during the public funerals of judges and knights (all of whom were obviously male).¹⁸⁵ This practice is extremely telling of gender views (to be discussed in Chapter 4), because as we know was custom for the time, only men held important public positions, and therefore only men had important funerals (with the assumed exceptions of powerful ruling class women, such as those of the Medici or D'Este families).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 88.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 88.

Sumptuary laws also held mourners to very specific standards of dress during funeral ceremonies. In general, funeral attendees (*vestiti a lutto*) wore garments made of a drab material called *panno monachino* that was purchased by the deceased's family and distributed to relatives and household servants.¹⁸⁶ Sometimes, however, the number of people allowed to wear official mourning garb was limited by the law as seen in the Paduan statute of 1398 which stated that only the wife and children of the deceased were allowed to do so.¹⁸⁷ The color-scheme of this funeral garb ranged from brown to black and was meant to symbolize the somber event. For example, when Beatrice D'Este's mother died, she wore a dark brown gown with dark brown sleeves (foregoing the trend of extravagance) and a dark brown cap.¹⁸⁸ As for black, widows wore it daily from the moment their husbands passed.

Laws on Ceremonial Occasions and Public Responses

Sharon Strocchia argues that it was more than just the clothing of funerals that came to be extravagant, for she finds that by about 1370, "funerals for those above the level of artisan or shopkeeper regularly became occasions for a new flamboyance aimed at asserting personal and family status."¹⁸⁹ In fact, Killerby finds that funeral legislation was most abundant in the regulation of physical and vocal grieving. In an effort to maintain social decorum, laws banned the excessive "wailing, weeping, tearing of hair, and beating of palms, particularly by women."¹⁹⁰ Specifically, a law compiled in Siena between 1277 and 1282 ordered that "no one

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁸⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 71.

¹⁸⁸ Birbari, *Dress in Painting*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ Sharon T. Strocchia, "Funerals and the Politics of Gender in Early Renaissance Florence," in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: 1991), 155.

¹⁹⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 72.

was to cry, plaint, or lament with a high voice.”¹⁹¹ In Renaissance Italy, women were considered the vessels of public expression of grief. Their propensity towards what contemporaries perceived as immodesty during the grieving process was so great, however, that they actually were eventually excluded from funeral processions.¹⁹² In fact, Sharon Strocchia found that the sex-segregation of funerals was a new practice that dated from the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries.¹⁹³ Rituals of death and mourning were part of an attempt to redefine the civic community, which often translated into the exclusion of women; however, this is not to suggest that it was ever “entirely successful in erecting a clear binary division in practice”.¹⁹⁴ Thus, Siena passed a law in 1343 that no woman could follow a body in its procession to the grave or through the public streets, unless it was a female (or a male child aged ten years or younger), in which case a maximum of six women could accompany.¹⁹⁵

Just as it was for weddings, the number of funeral guests of both sexes was held to a maximum by law. In Milan, for example, a 1396 statute held that “no more than ten men from the surrounding countryside were to attend any funeral rites and, if any did so, then a fine of 100 *soldi* was to be paid by whoever had invited them.”¹⁹⁶ Perhaps the city wanted to prevent any large gathering of peasants and farmers that could agitate and rebel. It was at ceremonies, in general, that governments feared the fomenting of political upheaval. As a result, many laws stemming from many cities were crafted in an attempt to prevent gatherings after the funeral service. For

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁹² Ibid., 74.

¹⁹³ Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*. The Johns Hopkins University studies in historical and political science, 110th ser., 1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Strocchia, “Funerals and Gender in Early Renaissance Florence,” ??.

¹⁹⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 74.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 74-75.

example, in Modena from 1327 to 1336, on the day of a burial and for eight days after, no man outside of the immediate family was to go to the deceased's house or stay with the mourning family.¹⁹⁷ Later, in Siena, a law was passed in 1411 banning all funeral feasts, but it was modified in 1473 as long as only close relatives were dining and that the meat selection was restricted to lamb or cow.¹⁹⁸ A look at Tuscan grain prices for the first decades of the fifteenth century provides a possible reason for this legislation. Experiencing great political and social upheaval in the late fourteenth century, Siena came into the fifteenth in a much-impooverished state. It was thus very concerned with the conservation of social stability, meaning no fancy funeral banquets because they could potentially become the site of public unrest. Thus beginning in the decade from 1390-1400 all the way up until the 1470's, grain prices were relatively high (in 1411 grain cost 53.30 silver grams per one hundred kilograms).¹⁹⁹ By the revision of the law, that came in 1473 and permitted more leniency, standard of living stabilized as there was a smaller population, meaning all people, in general, were slightly better off (more resources per person).

Funeral-themed sumptuary laws also restricted what could be said at the ceremony. As we just saw in the above Sienese example, the primary concern was that an public unrest could foment at such a ceremony, that is: an "impassioned oration" could inspire mourners to excessive actions of public display or even allow the opportunity to forge political alliances.²⁰⁰ This concern regarding political relationships was so prominent that it even carried over into laws concerning

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ As cited in Leticia Arroyo Abad, *Notes on Italy - north 1285-1850*, http://gpih.ucdavis.edu/files/Italy_north_1285-1850.xls

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 76.

baptism. For example, in Pisa in 1350, a law was passed declaring that “the citizens of Pisa may only choose poor people to stand in as godparents for their sons and daughters.”²⁰¹ Seemingly ridiculous, at least by today’s standards, sumptuary laws went to great lengths to control social order and maintain a very careful balance of power.

With these pressing concerns in mind, it makes sense that sumptuary laws also regulated feasts and even gift giving. Not only were wedding banquets targeted, but also feasts in general were subject to strict legislative control. A look at the 1366 feasting law in Perugia demonstrates the variety of concerns surrounding this type of event. First of all, feasts that included non-relatives, or those who were not wedding-related, could not be held at night. It was thought that nocturnal events led to evildoing and improper behavior. This law also held that no more than six non-relatives could be present at a feast unless formally approved by a sumptuary official or notary to make sure that all was in accordance with the regulations concerning food type and quantity. Any host who did not comply was held to the payment of a fine of *25 lire di denarii*.²⁰² It is true that the food at such events could be ostentatious. For example, at Eleanor of Aragon’s banquet in Rome in the beginning of the sixteenth century boasted gilded oranges not only for their sumptuousness, but also because gold and silver gilt were considered contributors to a healthy heart.²⁰³ Even more elaborate and showy was the banquet of Agostino Chigi, a Roman banker, in which the silver plates were tossed out the window after every course in order to show the guests that they were, indeed, being served clean

²⁰¹ Ibid., 77.

²⁰² Ibid., 66-67.

²⁰³ Mee, *Daily Life in Renaissance Italy*, 97.

silver for each course.²⁰⁴ More commonly, feasts were held in open-air loggias and might be observed by hungry peasants who scrambled to collect the leftovers the rich tossed from their banquet table.²⁰⁵

When it came to the exchange of gifts, sumptuary legislation sought to temper the extravagance of the expenditure that was often involved. It also sought to control the use of gifts as a social tool for the creation of alliances and powerful relationships. As a result, fourteenth-century Perugian law prohibited gift giving between *affigliati*, or associates.²⁰⁶ The most targeted form of gift giving, however, was that which surrounded weddings. Laws restricted both gifts exchanged between the conjugal pair, as well as those given by the guests.²⁰⁷ In addition, as was previously mentioned, christenings were targeted by such legislation and it followed, for example, that in Florence in 1377, no one was to give a gift worth more than 1 gold florin to anyone participating in the ceremony, including the godparents.²⁰⁸ The extension of sumptuary laws to an institution as personal and private as the exchange of gifts demonstrates the truly invasive and comprehensive nature of Renaissance Italian sumptuary laws.

Ceremonial and funeral legislation was the most common subject of the earliest sumptuary laws dating from the later medieval period, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These laws were not revised to grant greater leniency until the late fifteenth century.²⁰⁹ In the case of Florence, detailed *Trecento* funeral laws were simply incorporated into fifteenth century statutes and it was not until the end of

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 98.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 78.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 79.

²⁰⁹ Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," 69.

this century that funeral laws began to be more display-tolerant regarding the corpse and the procession.²¹⁰ Mourners were still strictly targeted, however, for as the centuries progressed in Renaissance Italy, sumptuary laws seemed to be more concerned with morals, which in turn led to their focus on modesty and subtlety of action and dress.

It seems that in general, over the centuries sumptuary laws became more accommodating of ornate fashions and sumptuous ceremonies in an effort to be more effective by somewhat appeasing the public. For example, in Cosimo I's sumptuary law revisions of 1562, after Florence had become a duchy with a court, he explicitly states in one of his letters that he does not want to prohibit common fashions:

“In prima vorremo non proibir le perle, cioè
un vizzo solo di valor al più di scudi 500. Questo
lo facciamo, perchè tutte le gentildonne l'anno.”²¹¹

It becomes apparent that with this new courtly culture in Florence, Cosimo wanted to maintain an air of elegance and extravagance, and therefore more legal concessions were made for ornate fashions even for the well to do of society. This law reminds us that class interests might often influence motivations behind legislation. Just as we see in this provision on pearls, the only women truly affected were those who had enough disposable wealth to spend up to 500 scudi on pearls in the first place. A gentildonna was a lady, not an ordinary woman, and 500 sc. was a rather sizeable amount, more than the annual income of a baker or master carpenter or an innkeeper, perhaps. In other words, a pearl necklace worth close to but

²¹⁰ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 89.

²¹¹ “First of all, we will not prohibit pearls, which is a habit that costs no more than 500 scudi. We do this because all gentlewomen have them.” Carlo Carnesecchi, *Donne e lusso a Firenze nel secolo XVI: Cosimo I e la sua legge suntuaria del 1562*. (Florence: Società Colombaria di Firenze, 1902), 37.

probably not over 500 scudi represented a nice chunk of change – more than an overwhelming majority of the population could afford.

Perhaps this method was not the most effective means of regulating society, but it certainly was the course of action most Italian cities seemed to adopt by the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Indeed, marriage laws in Florence from the fourteenth century regulated all aspects of the ceremony, except the bride's dress. By the fifteenth century, brides were even less regulated as they were allowed to accept multiple rings at the actual ceremony and for the next fifteen days following.²¹² While laws might demonstrate periods of alternating stringency and lenience, it seems that over time, as we will see, sumptuary laws caved in the face of a materially preoccupied society.

²¹² Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 188.

Chapter 3

Sumptuary Case Studies: **A Comparison in Political Context across the Peninsula**

“The Commercial Revolution that began in Europe around 1000 C.E. rested on a firm foundation of cloth and clothing production. . . .and by the early Renaissance Italy was Europe’s preeminent center of cloth production, exporting fine silks and woolens throughout the continent. The production of cloth – an item for which there was universal need – was the foundation upon which great Renaissance economies relied, and the spinning of fabric produced much of the enormous wealth that allowed the era’s elites to indulge in their tastes for art, fine buildings, and sumptuous fashions.”

-Philip M. Soergel²¹³

Spanning the “Boot”: from North to South, from Heel to Toe

It is undeniable that governments in Renaissance Italy promulgated more sumptuary legislation than any other contemporary governments, but as to which cities found these laws most instrumental remains to be explored. As an entity that was not yet unified politically, the Italian peninsula boasted multiple forms of government from north to south, creating an intricate web of political relationships in and between each town and city, as well as between larger states. Sumptuary law was not more secure in any one form of government, but there were definite changes in sumptuary legislation depending on the particular governmental structure.²¹⁴ As a broader generalization, Christine Shaw argues that most civic governments in Renaissance Italy were a syncretic blend of popular government and oligarchy.²¹⁵ In fact, using popular government to be a loose term describing those systems in which a “significant proportion of adult male citizens from various social groups could

²¹³ Soergel, “Fashion,” 90.

²¹⁴ This point has also been discussed in Chapter 1.

²¹⁵ Christine Shaw. *Popular Government and Oligarchy in Renaissance Italy* (Brill: Leiden, 2006), ix.

participate in governing councils,” Shaw indicates that this form of rule was more common in fifteenth-century Italy than has been supposed.²¹⁶ According to Shaw, in the long-standing political historiography of Renaissance Italy, scholars have focused so much on the oligarchic governments of the fifteenth century and have seen them so often as the standard form of government, that they have assumed that oligarchies existed for much longer than was actually the case and have neglected the fifteenth-century popular governments that actually existed.²¹⁷ Although, as Alison Brown comments, perhaps Shaw’s rather broad and sometimes vague concept of the term “popular” makes matters even more complicated when trying to categorize a government.²¹⁸ It remains essential for this study, however, to explore some of the differences in governmental forms among particular Italian cities in across the peninsula in order to analyze the possible effect of political context on the dissemination and enforcement of sumptuary law.

As a point of departure, we will begin in Tuscany, starting with the most powerful and influential of the Tuscan cities, Florence. To provide a brief historiopolitical context, concise summaries in Gene Brucker’s essays in *Renaissance Florence: Society, Culture, and Religion* help to elucidate the evolving Florentine governmental structure that existed in the early Renaissance. In the thirteenth century, popular regimes dominated by the guilds were established with much

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid, x.

²¹⁸ By “popular government” Shaw means more than just guild government. Among other criteria, she also uses the term to refer also to the exclusion of nobles, to a meaningful role for the *popolo minuto*, and to the make-up and role of legislative and deliberative assemblies. See Alison Brown, review of *Popular Government and Oligarchy in Renaissance Italy*, by Christine Shaw, *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2007): 1296.

“strife and bloodshed.”²¹⁹ Both the practices of exclusion of particular individuals from political office and assassination had their place.²²⁰ In general, therefore, the study of various forms of political associations, whether they be family *consorterie*, political factions, or guilds, has been the focus of many Italian Renaissance scholars, for through brute force these groups could be “strong enough to win a share (and sometimes a monopoly) of political power.”²²¹

As was the case for Florence, by early fifteenth century, the government gained “through war or purchase” the ports of Pisa and Livorno, and the inland cities of Cortona and Arezzo. This meant that Florence essentially controlled all of Tuscany with the large exceptions of Lucca and Siena.²²² Its constitution was designed so that the dominion of Florence would distribute power among a “large group of responsible citizens.”²²³ And yet, as Hale argues (according to Brucker’s model of power concentration described immediately above)²²⁴, the Medici were able to gain de facto, though not de jure control in 1434, which has come to be seen as the founding date of their dynasty. Indeed, a historically unexpected occurrence, one that happened against many odds, was that the Medici threw up a leader (Cosimo de’ Medici) that would eventually commence a long line of “hereditary and eventually near-absolutist rule.”²²⁵ Specifically, it was Giovanni di Bicci de’ Medici who possessed an “undercover role” in the construction of a political party that would

²¹⁹ Gene A. Brucker, “The Medici in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Renaissance Florence: Society, Culture, and Religion*, Bibliotheca eruditorum, 10 (Goldbach: Keip, 1994), 29.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Brucker, “The Florentine *Popolo Minuto* And Its Political Role, 1340-1450,” in *Renaissance Florence*, 81.

²²² John R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: the Pattern of Control*, 9.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Hale uses Brucker’s model of the concentration of power as the foundation for his argument. See footnote 7 for citation.

²²⁵ Ibid., 10.

allow for the protection of his financial interests and permit the Medici to enter the main stage of civic politics.²²⁶ Giovanni di Bicci's financial success was acquired at the papal curia and was the foundation that paved the way for his son, Cosimo de' Medici, to become the respected *pater patriae* of Florence.

But what of the *popolo minuto* of Florence, that vast array of people that formed the lowest rank of Florentine urban society (e.g. artisans, apprentices, cloth workers, journeymen, carpenters, servants, fishermen)? First, they certainly did not hold any political power, notwithstanding the fact that they were citizens in a popular government. What is more, Brucker argues that particularly after 1380, the Florentine social structure had become much more inflexible, making opportunities for upward mobility much more unattainable.²²⁷ Thus, the power of the city remained in concentrated hands during the days of republican government, a setting amenable to the passage of socially stratifying sumptuary law.

When power shifted to the clutches of a succession of de facto Medici leaders during the fifteenth century, it was not until the exile of Piero de' Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, that Florence would once-again exist most of the time as a Medici-free republic. After almost forty years of this, however, Florence would become a principality under the hereditary rule of the Medici in 1532, when Alessandro de' Medici was given the title of Duke by emperor Charles V. Yet as we will see, sumptuary laws were promulgated throughout these many years regardless of the political structure of Florence. This was a phenomenon that existed truly independently from governmental structure. In fact, sumptuary law promulgation

²²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²²⁷ Brucker, "The Florentine *Popolo Minuto*," *Renaissance Florence*, 85.

was so persistent in Florence that at least one new law was passed every decade between, 1281 and 1497, for a total of sixty-one such edicts.²²⁸

It seems that the late fourteenth-century was a major turning point for those Florentine sumptuary laws that originated in the late thirteenth century, in that the laws from that moment on began to include concerns regarding fashion and public appearance and these were repeated and elaborated throughout the fifteenth century. Most representative in Florence, in terms of that legislation that would be revamped or reformed, were those laws pertaining to modesty, ranging from gift-giving, to dining, and especially to male and female dress: laws that seem to abound no matter what the century. Examples are the law of 1330, which restricted the number of courses during a feast to three (so as to ‘restrain riots and ambitions of the throat.’²²⁹), as well as the law of 1345, which forbade the giving of any gifts at baptisms.²³⁰ In terms of clothing laws, an example can be seen from 1325, when Florentine men and women were forbidden to wear clothing of the opposite sex.²³¹ The concern here certainly had to do with modesty and propriety, but perhaps even more it had to do with accepted social roles that imposed a strong gender divide that was not to be transgressed. Even though women’s immodesty was usually targeted,²³² there is an interesting decree found on a 1373 list of *gabelle*, that any man over ten years (excluding farmers) may wear *pannos curtos* if he paid ten gold

²²⁸ All of my information - from this point forward in Chapter 3 - regarding the quantity and chronology of Italian sumptuary laws from 1200-1500 comes from Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, Table 2.1 “Distribution and Chronology of Italian sumptuary laws, 28-29.

²²⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 67.

²³⁰ Ibid., 79.

²³¹ Ibid., 64.

²³² Ibid., 112.

florins.²³³ Not only does this law demonstrate that Florence was certainly preoccupied with the modesty of male appearance, it also indicated that the city was not “unwilling on occasion to make money out of such immodest clothing;”²³⁴ signifying that economic motivation was a factor even in early legislation. It also seems that, in addition to a concern with raising funds, there was a concern with the transgression of class boundaries and the solidification of a social hierarchy in a time of rapid social mobility after the depopulations caused by the Black Death. Ten gold florins was a good sum of money. The poor would be unable to pay it, so the poor would not be able to wear that style of clothing. In other words, it was an easy way for the government of Florence to restrict the number of people, who wore a particular fashion or pursued a particular practice, to those who were amongst the upper tier of society.

It was during the years of the Medicean duchy, however, that we have some of the most telling documentation of Florentine sumptuary law. In particular, the legislative reforms of Cosimo I, which were declared first in 1546 (and subsequently in 1563 and 1568), reveal how sumptuary legislation was used as a governmental tool. In the introduction to *Donne e lusso a Firenze nel secolo XVI: Cosimo I e la sua legge suntuaria del 1562*, Carlo Carnesecchi provides his own interpretation of why Cosimo passed such legislation for Florence and its surrounding countryside; it was to prevent domination by luxury items (such as clothing and ornaments, and the associated purchasing of such pieces). Although he is writing in the early twentieth century, Carnesecchi’s opinion reflected the way that Renaissance writers spoke about the function of sumptuary legislation. That is to say that literary figures of the

²³³ *Pannos curtos* were defined as any garment that did not cover at least half of the thigh when the wearer was standing upright. Ibid., 62.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Italian Renaissance wrote about sumptuary laws as if they were a tool by which governments could preserve the moral purity of their cities.²³⁵ Moreover, Carnesecchi's opinion seems to reflect accurately the thoughts expressed by Cosimo in his letters explaining the reasons behind his desire for legislative reform.²³⁶

Specifically, as Cosimo I made perfectly evident in his letter to his team of legislators, the aim of the sumptuary law reforms was to generate legislation that would “venisse fuori chiara, giusta e saviamente disposta.”²³⁷ The process was to be carried out by a council of four prominent men (Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi, Alamanno de' Pazzi, Donato Tornabouni, e Giovanni Dini), in secrecy and haste, with the understanding that they “fare e non dire.”²³⁸ It becomes immediately salient in their 1546 *Riforma sopra il vestire*, that the maintenance of modesty was one of the principal stimuli behind Florentine sumptuary legislation. In fact, the *Riforma* itself begins:

“Le altre cose, che ricerca la vita civile e il buon' reggimento di qual si voglia Principe, o Republica è molto conveniente, e necessaria la modestia, la quale tempera le attioni humane, e mette regola, 'et misura alle cose tanto publiche, e universali, quanto domestiche, e private.”²³⁹

As to why modesty would figure so prominently as a precursor for a successful government, it is necessary to remember that although the

²³⁵ Refer to Chapter 4 for examples of Renaissance literary consideration of contemporary Italian Sumptuary laws, such as the works of Lodovico Dolce, which show a view of this legislation through a moral lens.

²³⁶ To be discussed directly below.

²³⁷ “would come out clear, just, and wisely organized.” Ibid, 7.

²³⁸ “do and don't talk.” Ibid, 10.

²³⁹ “The other things that civic life and the good dominion of any Prince or Republic seek, is the very convenient and necessary modesty, which tempers human action, and places order and measure, as much on those things that are public and universal, as on those that are domestic and private.” *Riforma sopra il vestire: Nuouamente ricorretta, & ristampata*, (Florence: I Giunti), 1562.

Catholic church was not itself a source of sumptuary legislation, the values it instilled in social and governmental consciousness (no matter how secular that government may have been), had a great impact. That is to say that the supremacy the Church placed on human modesty carried over into the values of citizens and civic government alike. As an example, the widespread Renaissance belief that a city's government was a reflection of the kingdom of God caused leaders to establish moral precedents of modesty. Taken a step further, it was also believed that the women of the city were a reflection of the nature of the city itself, meaning that honorable, modest women were critical components of an honorable city.²⁴⁰

As for other motivating factors behind sumptuary legislation, we see that in the case of Florence, a bustling center of textile production and artisanal crafts, protectionism figured prominently. A succession of political regimes, whether republican or ducal, believed that just as the city's spiritual well being depended on the modest spending habits of the population, its financial well being depended partly on tariffs and the regulation of foreign goods. As a result, Cosimo I prohibited the purchase of cloth and drapery made by foreigners with the natural benefit being the increased profit-making potential of Florentine textile factories. To help bolster his legislation, he argued that foreign goods should be less desirable because they were considerably more expensive and of a much inferior quality than those of the Florentines.²⁴¹ This seems more like a justification of the law (as if Cosimo was trying to make it seem like he has his people's best interest in mind), while the true

²⁴⁰ For more information about the connection between women and the honor of a city, see Rainey, *Sumptuary Legislation in Renaissance Florence*, 432.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

motivation may have been more along the lines of promoting the growth and prosperity of his domestic economy.

Most telling of Cosimo I's motivations for legislative reform is his letter to Francesco Vinta pertaining to the legislation of female dress.²⁴² It may be safely said that this writing demonstrates the fact that the reason behind his legislation was, indeed, a mixture of the city's modesty and its fiscal well being. For example, he initially states that pearls may be permitted -as long as they were valued at 500 scudi or less, seeing that all of the noblewomen have them ("tutte le gentildonne l'anno").²⁴³ This implies, however, that if pearls were to cost more, they would need to be banned. In a similar vein, he permits perfumed gloves up to the value of ten scudi, because seeing that they only cost this small amount, they are not a threat to the city's modesty or financial well-being.²⁴⁴

As we have ventured into the realm of the motivations of sumptuary law, it is very important to remember the difference between governmental motivation and governmental justification, as has been discussed in the introduction of this study.²⁴⁵ There is, indeed, a fine line between what was an actual motivating factor for legislation and what was really just a justification for the law written under the guise of a good intentions. Often times it is impossible to distinguish between the two, therefore, caution must be exercised when considering motivation versus justification.

²⁴² See Carlo Carnesecchi, *Cosimo I e la sua legge suntuaria del 1562* (Firenze: Chocchi & Chiti, 1902), 37.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁴⁵ For more detail on the interplay between motivation and justification for sumptuary law, see Chapter 1, footnotes 4 and 5.

Closely connected to the reasoning behind sumptuary laws were the criteria for establishing those who were to be excepted. Specifically, the exceptions recognized by Cosimo I's reforms included, unsurprisingly, counts, marquis, and other titled gentlemen. This is most likely due to the presence of a lavish court culture in Medicean Florence in which the duke wanted to make sure that the aristocratic class was a proper reflection of his ornate and sumptuous style. An interesting inclusion in the category of those excepted people, however, were foreigners, as well as their wives and families.²⁴⁶ This is most likely because Florence wanted to encourage the movement of foreigners in to the city so as to reverse the devastating effects the plagues had on Florentine population. It was only when the sons and daughters of the aforementioned peoples married a Florentine noble that they were subject to sumptuary law.²⁴⁷ Florentine workers, or more generally, workers residing in the Italian cities in which the legislation was passed, were usually subject to sumptuary legislation as well, and in fact, they often received harsher punishment for breach of the law than other citizens. But as an exception, workers such as tailors, embroiderers, hosiers, and jewelers, were permitted to disregard the law when producing an object to be sent outside of Florence or to be made in the service of one of the city's exempt citizens, presumably because these were not objects for their own use or consumption, but rather because they were temporarily in their possession while working on them until they were sold.²⁴⁸

To look further into the Florentine dominion, Siena serves as another good case study, especially using the model for analyzing popular government that Christine Shaw proposes in the first chapter of her monograph. As an exemplary

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 22.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Carnesecchi, *Cosimo I e la sua legge suntuaria del 1562*, 23.

model of popular government, Siena was still technically a republic during most of the fifteenth century (before the takeover by Pandolfo Petrucci in 1487)²⁴⁹, and yet, as early as 1403 it may be considered to have experienced a “*reggimento popolare*, since nobles were excluded not only from the chief executive committee, the Concistoro, but also from the council of the People”.²⁵⁰ As to how eligible men were placed into political office, appointments were made through the process of sortition, “the drawing of name-slips from electoral purses.”²⁵¹

How did this form of popular government affect the sumptuary legislation passed in Siena? As previously mentioned, despite theories proposed by J.A. Brundage and Diane Owen Hughes in which republican governments show an affinity for sumptuary law, Catherine Kovesi Killerby demonstrates with numerous archival examples the fact that these laws figured prominently in all forms of Italian government.²⁵² As for Siena in the sixteenth century, we see that some sumptuary laws, as well as other legislation in general, were disseminated, in part, by its imposing neighbor, Florence (which had conquered them in mid-sixteenth century). Indeed, a glance at Lorenzo Cantini’s multi-volume work *Legislazione Toscana*, we see that a few Florentine provisions from the were passed in conjunction with the Sienese government as indicated by the introductions stating that the laws stem from the “illustrious duke of Florence *and* [my emphasis] Siena.”²⁵³ This does tell us, however, whether or not Siena wanted these laws passed. Even though it had become a Florentine subject city, it was probable that Siena itself pressed to pass

²⁴⁹ Shaw, *Popular Government and Oligarchy*, 38.

²⁵⁰ Brown A. Review of *Popular Government and Oligarchy*, 1296.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 5-6. As Shaw states, this form of government was typical of popular government.

²⁵² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 33.

²⁵³ Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana*, 1802. See page 328 for an example of this type of introduction.

these laws, because from 1249 to 1532 (when the Florentine duchy was declared and Siena became a subject), Siena had independently passed twenty-one laws in the three hundred year period.²⁵⁴

An illustrative example of Siena's early commitment to sumptuary regulation can be seen in its role of introducing to the peninsula the 'bonfires of the vanities' under San Bernardino in the year 1400.²⁵⁵ Much earlier, however, the maintenance of modesty was enforced under the Sienese funeral law of 1277-82, which forbid anyone to "cry, plaint, or lament with a high [or perhaps, loud] voice".²⁵⁶ We thus see modesty of behavior as a motivating force behind sumptuary legislation, as well as the importance of maintaining public order. In other words, If you have extremely vocal expressions of grief might it be difficult to tell that apart from factional violence about the erupt?, as has been discussed above in reference to Florence. Although, as we have also seen in the case of Florence, motivation behind sumptuary law had a strong economic component as well. In fact, in a law from 1348, the Sienese government "referred to the 'useless and harmful expenses' incurred for costly mourning clothes" as an impetus for legislation.²⁵⁷ In fact, through her extensive analysis regarding the preambles of sumptuary law codes, Killerby found a preamble from a Sienese statute of 1412 that highlights economic considerations:

"It is necessary to make provisions to restrain superfluous expenditure from our citizens' purses, both rich and poor, for

²⁵⁴ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, Table 2.1, 28-29.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 109.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 72-3.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

their own preservation and for the utility and honour of the
commune.”²⁵⁸

Thus it seems safe to ascertain that Siena’s sumptuary laws were the result of its own governmental desires and not just because the city fell within the wide-ranging influence of Florence. As Carlo Carnesecchi notes in his book on Cosimo I’s sumptuary law reforms of the 1540’s and 60’s, Siena also felt an even more dire need to moderate its population’s luxury.²⁵⁹ In fact, in a letter by secretary of the Balìa, Antonio Maria Petrucci, to Prince Francesco de’ Medici on November 9th, 1568, the Sienese politician humbly suggests that Florence approve the Sienese plan for stricter laws, omitting exceptions for any inhabitants of Siena or its territory. In other words, if you were a foreigner living in Siena you were also subject to the law, which was not limited to citizens:

“...Porgerà questo fatto, tuttora che si metta in esecuzione et che da ciascuno indifferrentemente sia osservato, senza havere riguardo in ciò a huomini di lettere, d’armi o d’altra prerogativa, preghiamo Vostra Eccellentia Illustrissima che si compiaccia farne grazia et concederne l’osservanza conforme al desiderio nostro, il quale ha riguardo solamente al ben comune.”²⁶⁰

Could this effort to include foreigners in the sumptuary laws, in fact, be a dig at their new Florentine masters and their Spanish allies, who moved to Siena to enforce Florentine hegemony?

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.

²⁵⁹ Carnesecchi, *Cosimo I E La Sua Legge Suntuaria Del 1562*, 27.

²⁶⁰ “...It will be put forth, this fact, that still now one instates [these laws] to be observed by everyone, without regard for those such as men of letters, those in the military, or of any other privilege, we pray that your Illustrious Excellency will agree to make and concede them [the laws] as to the standards of observance according to our desire, that which regards only the well-being of the commune.” Petrucci’s letter is in the R. Archivo di Stato di Firenzem filza medicea 539 a c. 97.

Similarly in Pisa in 1330, despite the fact that the Florentines were in a position as “overlords,”²⁶¹ it was the Pisans themselves who petitioned for a sumptuary law to be approved for them.²⁶² What is more, in 1463, the citizens of Pisa, still a Florentine subject city, begged for the passage of a sumptuary law due to the fact that their poor city had:

“about 900 nubile girls, more than 300 of whom are twenty four years of age and older, and many youths and men who might take these girls as wives instead remain without wives, as much as they wish to marry, on account of the great expenses that they would be required to make for the apparel and ornaments of married women, and especially because the dowries of these girls are so small, none of them having a dowry of more than 200 florins.”²⁶³

Yet again in Pisa, this time as late as February 1569 in the *Statuti, et Ordinazione Sopra il Vestire della Città di Pisa, & suo Contado*, the supremacy of the “Illustrissimo, & Eccellentissimo Signor Duca di Fiorenza, & Siena” is immediately recognized.²⁶⁴ It is most probable that the leaders of Pisa sought to pass this law based on their own desires, wanting, however, to show their respect for the ultimate authority of Florence before they promulgated the statutes themselves.

And yet, sumptuary legislation reform was not *necessarily* a self-directed endeavor in all of the subject towns. As Carnesecchi demonstrates in his work, Cosimo I sought to order all of the surrounding cities and territories to stop the excesses of luxury in

²⁶¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 31.

²⁶² Rainey, *Legislation in Florence*, 466-467.

²⁶³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 51

²⁶⁴ *Statuti, et Ordinazione Sopra il Vestire della Città di Pisa, & suo Contado*, Florence: Giunti, 1569.

clothing and ornaments in a manner “imitando Firenze.”²⁶⁵ Cities such as Pistoia, Livorno, and Arezzo did quickly follow suit, often times revamping pre-existing laws as in the case of Pistoia in 1558 and Arezzo in 1563. In both instances, it was clear that the reforms were to affect the surrounding contado as well.²⁶⁶ What is not clear, however, is whether Cosimo’s desire that they pass reforms was truly the inspiration to do so. Most law codes of subject towns and territories, indeed, had to be approved centrally meaning that they often carried a standard acknowledgment of ducal supremacy.²⁶⁷

Moving slightly northeast, coming upon the region of Emilia-Romagna, one encounters rich archival evidence of sumptuary legislation, especially in the city of Bologna. As perhaps the most influential city of Emilia Romagna, Bologna’s legal standards often became those of the surrounding cities. As we see in Killerby’s categorization of laws from 1200-1500, Bologna was the first city of the region to pass sumptuary legislation, and did so as early as 1233.²⁶⁸ Even more influential however, was the law code of Cardinal Bessarion in 1453, which classified six groups of people to be considered under sumptuary legislation, a delineation that became universal not just for Bolognese law, but for the whole region.²⁶⁹ Killerby describes this piece of legislation as influential, not because it was especially effective, for it was relatively lenient in comparison to other laws, but because it uniquely sought to

²⁶⁵ “imitating Florence.” Carnesecchi, *Cosimo I E La Sua Legge Suntuaria Del 1562*, 26-27.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁶⁷ Judith Brown, *In the Shadow of Florence: Provincial Society in Renaissance Pescia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 16-19.

²⁶⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 28.

²⁶⁹ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, “Una Società nello Specchio della Legislazione Suntuaria,” in *Disciplinare il lusso: la legislazione suntuaria in Italia e in Europa tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Muzzarelli and Antonella Campanini. Studi storici Carocci, 40. (Roma: Carocci, 2003), 17.

maintain “class structures by means of clothing.”²⁷⁰ For example, law did not always expressly state that they were to apply solely to the lower classes, but it is clear that they aimed to hinder particular groups through their provisions for punishment, such as the fines that discouraged most lower class people from wearing certain items or engaging in particular behaviors as it might be difficult to find the money to pay. Broadly speaking, Bologna passed twenty-one different sumptuary laws in the years from 1233 through 1476. No other city passed as many and Ferrara, which is second in the list of cities with the most sumptuary legislation passed only nine in the years of and between 1287 and 1460.²⁷¹ Sumptuary laws were also passed in Parma, Piacenza, Modena, and Ravenna, but not with the frequency of the two aforementioned places.²⁷²

In terms of the motivation behind the sumptuary laws of Emilia Romagna and especially Bologna, the reasons do not seem to differ from those of the Tuscan cities. Perhaps these laws were more open and specific about social stratification, but they were certainly no unique in wanting to use sumptuary laws to indicate and reinforce social stratification. Bolognese sumptuary law was also particularly concerned with women, and just as we have seen in the aforementioned Pisan law of 1463, Bologna recognized a major problem in that “young women....needed to look attractive in order to find a husband, and married women needed to look attractive in order to keep their husbands faithful.”²⁷³ Specifically, in 1289, a Bolognese law noted that all married women were prohibited from wearing ornamentations known as *frixis* or *gramitas*, while unmarried women were limited to ornamentation using

²⁷⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 124.

²⁷¹ Ibid., Table 2.1, 28-29.

²⁷² Refer to figures in Table 2.1, Ibid.

²⁷³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 59.

four *frixis* as well as one *brachia* of *frixos* up to the value of two Bolognese *soldi*.²⁷⁴

Due to the delicate balance between unmarried status, ostentation, and the maintenance of honor, however, a century later the Bolognese government switched directions and forbid women under forty to “ornament their plaits with gold threads, while women over forty were given complete freedom in the matter.”²⁷⁵

What was it about Bologna’s political structure created the frequent passage presence of sumptuary law? Perhaps they needed to issue so many because what they had was not enforced or easily evaded. Although it was an oligarchy with the permanent presence of a papal legate or governor, it was still a form of communal government,²⁷⁶ and as Shaw writes, one may call it an *institutionalized oligarchy*.²⁷⁷ Specifically, there was a body known as the Sixteen, which served as the *reggimento* for the city,²⁷⁸ that was in charge of choosing its own successors, thereby allowing members of the body a *de facto* permanence in office.²⁷⁹ The Sixteen was not devoid of individual alliances between members and other factions, such as that of the Bentivoglio, the most powerful, and politically influential Bolognese “ruling” family of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁸⁰ In fact, unlike Perugia where political factionism led to domination by papal rule, the papacy had a hard time taming the influence of the Bentivoglio family through the efforts of its legate stationed in Bologna.²⁸¹

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Shaw, *Popular Government and Oligarchy*, 186.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 188.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 186.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 188.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 237.

It was only with the arrival of Cardinal Bessarion in March 1540²⁸² that the Bentivoglio faction was able to establish a productive relationship with the papal legate, and it is under this ecclesiastical ruler, as we have seen, that a new sumptuary law code was promulgated in the city of Bologna. It seems as though no change in the promulgation of sumptuary law occurred as a result of increased cooperation between the papal legate and the other members of the ruling groups of Bologna. That is to say that sumptuary laws continued to flourish in the city of Bologna and surrounding towns, almost irrespective of its political climate. With a glance at the chronological list found in the *La Legislazione suntuaria: secoli XIII-XVI: Emilia Romagna*,²⁸³ one finds that there was consistency in the sumptuary laws of Bologna from the late thirteenth through the late sixteenth century (when the study stops). The consistency is found in the fact that the majority of the laws passed were concerned with clothing ornamentation, most often pertaining to women. As was mentioned earlier, this seems to be a trend true of Italian Renaissance sumptuary legislation, in general, for the whole peninsula. Emilia Romagna was no exception, for those towns and cities surrounding Bologna seemed to focus on female ornamentation as well. For nearby cities such as Ferrara²⁸⁴ and Forlì, indeed, a reading of the catalogue of statutes reveals the repeated appearance of the word *mulierum*, referring, of course, to women and quite often their *ornamentis*. Again, the same can be said for Parma and Piacenza.²⁸⁵ The information on Modena yields a common phrase found in the various sumptuary statutes that were passed in the

²⁸² Ibid., 188.

²⁸³ See list of statutes for Bologna in Muzzarelli, *La Legislazione suntuaria: Emilia Romagna*, 19.

²⁸⁴ For the sections on Ferrara and Forlì see Muzzarelli, *Legislazione Suntuaria: Emilia Romagna*, 287-338.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 435.

fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, which is the “moderatione delle pompe.”²⁸⁶

In the case of Ravenna, Enrico Angiolini argues that the laws tend to pay “un’attenzione....legata più in generale alla dignità formale o all’eccesso di spesa in manifestazioni pubbliche in cui acquisiscono visibilità il rango, il potere e l’influenza delle famiglie.”²⁸⁷ In comparison to other cities of Emilia Romagna, Ravenna passed fewer laws, and they seemed not to focus as much on women. Instead, the city dedicated itself to general moderating laws (“leggi moderative”), and created a committee as late as 1547 to formulate them.²⁸⁸ These examples lead us to recognize that while influential cities such as Bologna may have inspired nearby towns to disseminate sumptuary legislation, the content of such laws and the structure for formulating and implementing them still varied greatly from place to place. In other words, there was always an individuality of sumptuary law for each city.

As we turn to the region of the Veneto, we are reminded once more that sumptuary legislation prevailed in cities independent of their form of government. The region’s leading city of Venice is a good example. As an aristocratic republic, Venice passed a total of forty-two different pieces of sumptuary legislation between the years 1299 and 1499.²⁸⁹ A port city with great influential regional and international standing, it served as a model of sumptuary propriety, especially within its highly recognized aristocratic class. The Venetian aristocracy, indeed, came to be listed in the *Libro d’Oro* (Golden Book) beginning in 1506 under the

²⁸⁶ For an example, see the provision from 5 October entitled, “Provvigioni: Per la moderatione delle pompe da pubblicarsi.” Ibid., 407

²⁸⁷ “An attention, linked more generally to formal dignity or to excess expenditure during public events in which the rank, power and influence of families acquired visibility.” Enrico Angiolini, “Ravenna,” in *Legislazione Suntuaria: Emilia Romagna*, 495.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, Table 2.1, 28-29.

legislation passed by the Council of Ten.²⁹⁰ Specifically, the *Libro* enumerated all male noble (those who were part of the hereditary aristocracy), births and was an attempt to prevent newcomers from garnering political power in the city. Ostensibly this closing of the rank was made in order to preserve peace and unity as well as to maintain Venice's "glorious reputation."²⁹¹

Sumptuary laws, therefore, served as a governmental tool through which the doge and members of the aristocracy could maintain the city's careful balance of power that they feared might be threatened by the success of eager, upstart merchants. In her article, *The Sumptuary Laws of Venice in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Mary Margaret Newett analyzes legislation from the first statute of 1299 to the downfall of the Republic.²⁹² Even though the laws were being enacted since the end of the thirteenth century, there was no special group of magistrates in charge of sumptuary legislation in Venice until the second half of the fifteenth century when the "ever-rising tide of extravagance and luxury [in the city]" necessitated the creation of the 'Provveditori sopra le Pompe.'²⁹³

In her article, Newett recognizes the trend of female-targeted sumptuary legislation and quotes a very typical opening to a statute (this one from 1500) which read:

"Some women of this city have begun lately to adopt certain new fashions which are uglier and more dishonest than any fashions ever used in this city, that is to say, certain robes and sleeves, cut

²⁹⁰ Stanley Chojnacki, "Marriage Regulation in Venice, 1420-1535," in *Women and men in Renaissance Venice: twelve essays on patrician society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 63.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Newett, "Sumptuary Laws of Venice," 246.

²⁹³ Ibid.

in several pieces, and of divers colours....”²⁹⁴

Venice, indeed, adopted a very interesting example of this type of gender specific legislation when it came to regulating an original, truly Venetian fashion, the chopine. Newett argues that this high platform shoe was born of necessity, due to the fact that narrow Venetian streets “were not paved, and in consequence were thick with dust and mud, especially in wet weather.”²⁹⁵ As had happened with other fashions, such as ornate sleeves, these *zoccoli* reached ridiculous , and particularly in this case, dangerous heights. Thus sumptuary legislation interfered to reduce the chopines to more “reasonable proportions.”²⁹⁶

As a powerful, and far-reaching Republic, Venice undoubtedly created a sphere of influence over neighboring cities. And yet, as we have seen before, although the sumptuary laws of “satellite” cities might have been inspired by bigger neighbors, they maintained a very customized and individual profile, depending on the needs and wants of that particular city. For example, although Padua was officially under Venetian control since 1405, it chose to pass a sumptuary law in 1440 based on its own accord, not under the pressure of Venice.²⁹⁷ In addition, Padua already had a significant history of sumptuary legislation before it fell under Venetian jurisdiction with its first sumptuary law having been passed in 1277, giving the city a total of five sumptuary laws from this year through 1460.²⁹⁸ Verona was another city of the Veneto with a rich history of sumptuary legislation, passing nine laws from 1295 to 1499.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 248.

²⁹⁵ Newett, “Sumptuary Laws of Venice,” 273.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 274.

²⁹⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 31.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 28.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

And what of a city like Milan? Given its reputation as a powerful and important Italian city during the Renaissance, perhaps quite surprisingly Milan had very few extant sumptuary laws³⁰⁰ and rare references regarding sumptuary legislation in contemporary sources. Why might this be? What was it about the Milanese government and society that created less of an impetus for sumptuary laws as compared to other northern cities during the Renaissance? Interestingly enough, this scanty amount of sumptuary legislation was not characteristic of other cities in the region of Lombardy. For example, the city of Brescia had a sizable number of laws, eleven, in the years from 1200 through 1499.³⁰¹ The laws Milan did pass, however, dealt largely with ceremonial and ritual practices, such as childbirth and funerals. For example, a strict rubric of 1396 instructed that “no one was to conduct funeral rites for any deceased person whose body was not present under pain of a ferocious fine of 200 lire [,,]”³⁰² nor were they to carry the banners or flags of the deceased man’s family (or put insigniaed drapery on horses) during funeral processions.³⁰³ Perhaps this law was passed to prevent the opportunity for political unrest to foment, especially if the deceased was an important public or political figure. A little over one hundred years later, in 1498, a Milanese law stated that no one was to use any sort of silk bedcovers (whether they were plain, or worked/embroidered in gold, silver, or silk), during the birth of a child.³⁰⁴ Perhaps the city saw this practice as extremely wasteful and unnecessary considering the way in which the sheets would become soiled quite irrevocably throughout such an event.

³⁰⁰ See Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, Table 2.1, 28-29.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 28.

³⁰² Ibid., 72.

³⁰³ Ibid., 80.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 39.

Moving towards the south, the regions of Umbria and Lazio contained cities with notable sumptuary legislation during the Renaissance. Perugia passed fifteen different forms of sumptuary legislation between 1266 and 1485.³⁰⁵ In fact, Perugia's legislative reforms nicely illustrate an important generalization made earlier about the history of Italian sumptuary law, which is that early laws from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries tended to focus on ceremonial events as well as clothing, while those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries focused more closely on clothing restrictions. Specifically, the Perugian government initiated a reform of the old statutes from 1366 at the beginning of the fifteenth century.³⁰⁶ This revision of the laws, added restrictions on women's ornaments in precious stone, as well as prohibitions of certain types of velvet, silk, and other rich fabrics, in favor of plain wool cloth.³⁰⁷ In 1402, Perugia also saw the dissemination of legislation from the imposing power of Milan – again demonstrating the influence that large cities had over the surrounding towns and smaller cities – which aimed to moderate the length and size of sleeves, as well as their linings and trim.³⁰⁸ By 1432, after laws had already begun to target women and prostitutes more frequently, legislation was also being drawn up against the Jewish population of Perugia.³⁰⁹ Assisi, a nearby city in Umbria, also passed its fair share of sumptuary legislation, and similarly, its quattro- and cinquecento laws were almost always directed against one group: women.³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 28

³⁰⁶ Paola Monacchia, "Perugia: Introduzione," in *Legislazione Suntuaria d' Umbria*, ed. Maria Grazia Nico Ottaviani (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Dipartimento per i beni archivistici e librari, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2005.), 9.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Monacchia, "Perugia: Indice delle Fonti," 29-31.

³¹⁰ Ottaviani, "Assisi: Indice delle Fonti," in *Legislazione Suntuaria d' Umbria*, ed. Maria Grazia

As for Lazio, the region around Rome, sumptuary laws did not flourish as they did in the North. In fact, even though Rome was under the governance of papal authority, and therefore a very conservative Catholic city, it did not implement much sumptuary legislation. Even though one might consider the Papal government a secular government at times, the relative lack of sumptuary laws in Rome the aforementioned generalization that sumptuary laws of the Italian Renaissance were not religiously motivated, but rather secularly so, (even though, at times, one might consider the Papal government as a secular government as well). Rome, indeed, only passed four sumptuary law codes in the fifteenth century, while other, fellow powerful cities, such as Venice and Florence passed thirty-three and twenty-five laws in the fifteenth century, respectively.³¹¹ Rome was mostly a parasitical city, (it had no economy in the Renaissance other than being the head of the church, which brought great wealth to certain people and families who had clerical titles and benefices). It is also a more male city than others. Thus, perhaps Rome was less socially diverse than other cities. For example, it did not have textile industry for example, and without weaving work, women did not have as much of a presence in the public, urban sphere. This might have led to less of an impetus to regulate female dress and therefore, less of a push for sumptuary legislation, in general.

Even further south, in the city of Naples, located in the region now known as Campania, but which during the Renaissance was part of the Kingdom of Naples, sumptuary legislation was passed as early as the late thirteenth century. In fact, one of the most complete records of sumptuary legislation from this city dates back to the year 1290, when a group of “reggenti del Reame” (made up of prelates, counts,

Nico Ottaviani (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Dipartimento per i beni archivistici e librari, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2005), 255-260.

³¹¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, Table 2.1, 28-29.

barons), published a collection of sumptuary legislation in the absence of King Charles II.³¹² The purpose of this law code was “da aver rigore durante la guerra cogli Aragonesi di Sicilia[,]” or have control during the war with the Aragonese in Sicily.³¹³ As Giuseppe de Giudice notes, the long *proemio*, or preamble, discusses the beneficial effects of moderation and temperance to combat the “inutile superfluità delle spese.”³¹⁴

This law code specifically came right after King Charles, Count of Anjou, took control of the kingdom of Sicily and Puglia,³¹⁵ and was therefore motivated by very particular reasons, primarily economic. Naples was in dire need of monetary resources as well as military reinforcements.³¹⁶ By 1308, Frederick III of Sicily was also passing sumptuary legislation, or *ordinations generales* on women’s clothing and accessories, nuptials, funerals, and military conduct.³¹⁷ In 1340, the city of Palermo appealed to Peter II of Sicily to approve its sumptuary statute “sopra il vestito delle donne, gli sensali, la milizia, ed i convivi.”³¹⁸ Later, in 1383, Messina applied to Queen Maria of Sicily for approval of its sumptuary law code. Basically, since Naples’s sumptuary law code of the last decade of thirteenth century, sumptuary legislation continued to spread slowly through the Southern Kingdoms of Italy, but not to the degree or with frequency of legislative dissemination characteristic of the North.

We have just seen that in general, laws were concentrated in the north, and that there were both moral and economic motivations behind the legislation. It

³¹² Giuseppe de Giudice, *Una legge suntuaria inedita del 1290: commento storico-critico*, (Naples: 1887), 2.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ “useless superfluity of purchases.” Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 165.

³¹⁸ “over women’s dress, brokers, the militia, and cohabitators.” Ibid., 177.

seems that there is no real connection between form of government and the presence of sumptuary laws, but that the content of these laws were apt to change based on governmental structure. In the case of Florence, for example, we have seen that a change to a ducal government (with a strong court culture), had an effect on the content of Florentine sumptuary laws beginning in the fifteenth century. Lastly, we are reminded that sumptuary law was very much a secular phenomenon, the Church's presence being limited to a supporting role in sumptuary enforcement, as we will see in the section that follows.

“Skirting” the Law: Problems of Legislative Enforcement

As the subtitle indicates, the enforcement of sumptuary legislation was a very problematic endeavor. Because sumptuary laws were so unpopular, the actual task of prosecuting people in the street was such a difficult undertaking, that it may have been comparable to the job of the tax collector.³¹⁹ Indeed, a few contemporary Renaissance accounts mention the degree to which people despised legislative enforcers and the lengths to which they ventured to shirk, or rather “skirt,” sumptuary law.

It is important to begin by mentioning the presence of moral authorities who made the enforcement of sumptuary laws a pressing issue. For instance, San Bernardino of Siena “linked trains with bestiality, saying that they made a woman look as though she were dragging a tail.”³²⁰ The Ferrarese friar, Girolamo

³¹⁹ In fact, the position of patrol officer in charge of sumptuary denunciations was so undesirable that in 1333, the Florentine Commune decided to have the Bishop of Siena appoint this official, who was to be foreign anyway, in order to distance further Florentine males from this unattractive job of policing their fellow citizens. Frick. *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 183.

³²⁰ Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 190.

Savonarola, a champion of spiritual parity between the sexes,³²¹ was a staunch proponent of, and policy maker for, dowry reform. In fact, during his time in Florence, Savonarola worked diligently to impose a limit on the standard marital dowry requirement, as well as assisted in the founding of the *Monte delle doti*, an institution that helped impoverished families secure reputable dowries for their daughters.³²² More importantly, Savonarola's bonfires of the vanities, ignited in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, made an impression (albeit momentarily), on "Italy's ordinary citizenry . . . [and] even on the members of its glittering courts."³²³

For the most part, sumptuary legislation was enforced through the exacting of fines from those who breached the law. Fines, however, were usually a nominal amount for those people who were capable of breaking the law. That is to say, only the financially well-to-do actually had the means to dress and celebrate in ways that might contradict existing sumptuary legislation. The relatively benign cost of wearing an outlawed item often led the wealthy to treat fines as something of a luxury tax.³²⁴ As mentioned before, there was a specific term for this concept, "pagare le pompe," which became part of contemporary colloquial speech.³²⁵

³²¹ "Before God there is no difference between man and woman. God does not consider the body nor the intelligence, but only the souls and the purity of life and He does not care whether it is [that of] a man or a woman; whence the Apostle Paul says: *apud Deum non est masculus neque femina*, that is, that God does not find man more agreeable than woman, but cares only about the soul that lives well and looks for the sanctity of life." See Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

³²² *Ibid.*, 104.

³²³ Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past and Present* 112 (August, 1986), 50.

³²⁴ Hughes, Diane Owen. "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," 97.

³²⁵ Bridgeman, Jane. " 'Pagare le Pompe': why Quattrocento sumptuary laws did not work. *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizzi (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 221.

As an example, a Florentine statute of 1459 prohibited any *new* garment of cloth-of-gold or silver, or silk embroidered with gold or silver, and it also prohibited decorative cutting or slashes. Women were allowed to wear their pre-existing garments that fell under this category for up to one month following the provision's publication in July, and then they were to stop wearing such fashions for fear of a fine. Specifically, a woman's husband or closest male relation had to pay a 50-florin fine any contravention of the law.³²⁶ Thus, it is clear that if the offending item cost as much as a minimum of 400 florins, as Bridgeman estimates a dress of this nature would cost, a measly 50-florin fine would be an ineffective disincentive.³²⁷ One might consider the system to be like bribery, in which the offender need only pay a small sum (small according to his own standards) to do as he pleases.

Although, interestingly enough, the tailors or embroiderers responsible for producing clothing that contradicted the above provision were to be fined twenty-five florins.³²⁸ This brings us, therefore, to the one glaring exception to this generalization regarding the negligible nature of fines. A fine of such a sum could be a considerable amount for an artisanal professional. What is more, tailors could even be subject to monetary penalties as much as twice the amount of those (penalties) exacted on the people who actually wore the prohibited fashions.³²⁹ We thus see here, yet again, that social standing mattered greatly; the government was willing to impose large fines on artisans who broke the sumptuary laws, but they were reluctant to do so when it came to the wealthy and powerful. It is to be kept in mind,

³²⁶ Ibid., 219

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Please refer to Chapter 2, in which there is mentioned early the Florentine statutes dating from 1322-25 exacted a 200 lire fine against any goldsmith or tailor who sold decorated *decolletage* and 100 lire against those who wore such ornamentation.

however (as we know from earlier), that these professionals could produce such products and escape the fine if they were for export or for the social classifications exempted from the general rubric.³³⁰ And yet, it is not possible for us to know how often tailors and embroiderers were working under such excepted conditions. One would assume that if the tailor decided to produce a garment that did not fall into the excepted category, he would be making enough money off of the commission so as to consider the fine a most minor consequence.

What were the offices in charge of the enforcement of sumptuary legislation, and who did the legwork? It is safe to say that there were many different types of offices that worked in sumptuary prosecution in the various Italian cities. Sometimes these offices were formed for this express purpose, other times they were amalgamations of a variety of law enforcement offices. Killerby argues, indeed, that a majority of Italian cities used many different officials in sumptuary legislative enforcement, but rarely did they create permanent sumptuary magistracies.³³¹ Very commonly, one particular city might shift the responsibility of legislative enforcement of sumptuary laws between multiple offices, due to the unfavorable nature of this task.

As an exception, the first sumptuary office in Florence, known as the *Ufficiali delle donne*, was created in 1330 to enforce all of the sumptuary bans adopted that year.³³² By the fifteenth century, secret denunciations made by Florentine citizens and placed in boxes known as *tamburi*, were a commonplace. In addition, in 1403, the

³³⁰ Please refer to beginning of this chapter.

³³¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Legislation*, 143.

³³² Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 182-83.

Ufficiali dell'Onestà was created to regulate the prostitute population, which meant the strict regulation of these women's sumptuous dress and ornamentation.³³³

Later, in early seventeenth-century Venice, as Patricia Allerston mentions in her discussion of a sumptuary prosecution during the birth of a merchant's child, there were small groups of petty officials, known as *fanti*, that came from the lower class and served the Venetian sumptuary magistracies as field workers and denouncers.³³⁴ Perhaps the Venetian government was able to count on the resentment of the *fanti* against wealthier citizens or nobles to overcome the distaste for enforcing unpopular laws.

In this particular instance, the merchant Zuccato was rumored to have hosted female guests in his house to celebrate his child's birth,³³⁵ thus the most fascinating question becomes, how did the authorities hear about this seemingly minor gathering? Allerston informs us that restrictions on childbirth receptions were such that the midwives who assisted on successful births were obligated to inform the Venetian sumptuary officials when a successful delivery had occurred. The magistrate's men were then to report to the house in question and prevent the family from receiving visitors, returning with regularity to make sure their orders were obeyed.³³⁶ Obviously, this above process was carried out the day Zuccato's child was born, bringing the merchant to court where he eloquently and systematically refuted the denunciation testimony of the *fante* captain, Zuane.³³⁷

³³³ Ibid., 185.

³³⁴ Patricia Allerston, " 'Contrary to the truth and also to the semblance of reality'? Entering a Venetian 'lying-in' chamber (1605)." *Renaissance Studies* 20, no.5, (2006): 629-639. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118572077/PDFSTART>, 631.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid., 634.

³³⁷ Allerston, "Entering a Venetian 'lying-in' chamber," 636.

Zuccato's impressive self-defense demonstrates that he took the charges very seriously,³³⁸ but that, with oratory skills much superior to Zuane's, it was difficult to slam him with a conviction. In essence, those who were prosecuted had more in common with the magistrates hearing their cases, than the magistrates had in common with their lower class *fanti* workers.³³⁹ This most likely led to favorable outcomes for those being charged, proving that ultimately, the laws existed without consequence.

Thus, in general, sumptuary law enforcement can be described as ineffective, or inconsistent at best. There *were* times that punishment could be extremely severe (as in the Bolognese case of Sante Bentivoglio and his bride Ginevra Sforza, who were excommunicated for their overly ornate wedding garments),³⁴⁰ but usually fines were insignificant, and therefore did not prevent the continued observance of practices in dress and celebration that contravened the sumptuary laws. This does not reflect, however, on the commitment of governments to these laws. Instead, it demonstrates a need for more archival research to be done (in order to supplement our existing knowledge of sumptuary prosecution records), so as to ascertain whether or not the failure of these laws was rooted in "what they sought to contain [rather] than in any deficiency of commitment."³⁴¹ However, I would like to argue that if governments were really, really committed to curbing certain practices, they would have imposed larger fines, would have prosecuted the laws more frequently, and would have found culprits guilty more often. I wonder whether we are seeing mixed feelings about this on the part of rulers and other officials. They were

³³⁸ Ibid., 637.

³³⁹ Ibid., 639.

³⁴⁰ Bridgeman, " 'Pagare le Pompe', " 210.

³⁴¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 134.

conflicted regarding allegiance to older Christian views about poverty (as expressed by Bernardino and Savonarola), for example; conflicted about their views on social hierarchy on the one hand and not stirring up social resentments, on the other; conflicted between social versus economic or fiscal views. Some of these sentiments are revealed in Cosimo's note to his officials about imposing a law that makes allowance for existing practices in the usage of pearls.³⁴²

Killerby argues that there is convincing evidence to suggest that legislators were, indeed, committed to the laws they promulgated, yet at the same time, the content of the laws were sometimes tailored to deal with conflicting claims. To begin, a crucial step in the proper passing of a sumptuary law was to make the population aware of the new legislation. This meant that laws often included instructions as to how they should be published, which could translate into regular vocal announcements of the various provisions (as was the case for a the Venetian sumptuary law of 1344 that was to be shouted every six months by criers on the Rialto Bridge and in Piazza San Marco). As this was the practice for all types of laws, we see that governments were committed to the idea that if you pass a law it should be announced, otherwise the population would correctly complain that they could not be held accountable to a law they never heard about.³⁴³ Interestingly enough, a couple of laws enlisted the help of the clergy in their dissemination, calling for regular church announcements of the laws, as well as clerical cooperation in the denouncement of those parishioners in contravention.³⁴⁴ In addition, all of the Italian sumptuary laws of the thirteenth century include detailed provisions for a

³⁴² See Chapter 2, 31-32.

³⁴³ Ibid., 136.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

variety of methods of enforcement.³⁴⁵ In 1290 in Florence, a significant means of enforcement was proposed, requiring all women to register their garments with the commune and have them marked with a special seal.³⁴⁶ This is the earliest reference to marked or stamped clothing, known as *vesti bollate*.³⁴⁷ Provided the clothing was actually stamped, which would make sense to presume it was, this still does not tell us if it really had any practical effect. Did sumptuary laws enforcers really demand to see such seals? Could people forge them? Thus we see that there are often many unanswered questions that arise when discussing legislative enforcement.

As to which transgressions were most commonly denounced, we see a great favoring of female prosecution for sumptuous dress. In fact, as of now there has been no discovery of prosecution records in which men are breaking the clothing laws.³⁴⁸ In a sort of exception to this generalization, there are records of four instances in Florence of children who are too sumptuously dressed and so their fathers are charged for having allowed this.³⁴⁹

It naturally follows, that people, especially women, would act in breach of sumptuary legislation, due to the materialistic preoccupation of Italian Renaissance society. As Diane Owen Hughes acknowledges, it is truly paradoxical that in a society where the dowry arguably functioned as the “single most important transfer of personal assets[,]” there was an overwhelming amount of legislation in place to prevent women from “wearing their wealth.”³⁵⁰ This again raises the question of whether this is aimed at men or women? To the extent that women are being given

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 135.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 136.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 154.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Owen Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy,” 97.

a trousseau by their fathers and women are in a sense a vehicle for representing the honor and standing of the paterfamilias, whose rights are being limited?

As a result, women invented many astute ways in which they could outsmart the authorities and get away with wearing prohibited fashions.³⁵¹ Carole Collier Frick notes this phenomenon with discussion of an “avoidance” language that developed in response to harassment by sumptuary officials in the city of Florence.³⁵² As Frick observes, there was a “virtual explosion” of new terms used to refer to articles of clothing and ornaments, which led to great difficulty for sumptuary street patrollers who could not denounce a fashion that was not actually listed by name in a sumptuary statute. As Frick comments, these “neologisms tested the patience of the most determined communal officials,”³⁵³ as they protected both women and men from prosecution concerning the breaking of laws regulating women’s dress and accessories. In fact, in one of his short stories, *Novella CXXXVII*, Renaissance writer Franco Sacchetti (ca. 1330–ca. 1400) describes a comical confrontation between a sumptuary official and a woman walking down the street. When the official tries to pin the woman with a citation for wearing a pelt that looks like ermine, she cleverly responds that it is rather “lattizi,” adding coyly, “È una bestia.”³⁵⁴ To this day it is hard to deduce exactly the type of fur the term “lattizi”

³⁵¹ It is important to realize that this does not necessarily contradict the idea that both men and women were the targets of legislation having to do with women’s clothing and jewelry, for when a woman dodged sumptuary enforcement she was saving her closest male relative the burden of paying the monetary fine or showing up to court on her behalf.

³⁵² Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 188.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ The women thus describes the pelt as “milky,” adding, “it’s an animal.” Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 189.

described, because during the Renaissance the word became a pretty common descriptor for a variety of animal furs.³⁵⁵

And as for punishment? As was previously discussed, monetary fines were the most common form of punishment for the disobedience of sumptuary law. If this was not deemed sufficient, excommunication was a frequently added penalty.³⁵⁶ Imprisonment was an extremely uncommon punitive measure (it was only used as a method for sumptuary enforcement in Venice).³⁵⁷ Corporal punishment was also a very rare punitive practice and it only applied to people without much status (e.g. prostitutes and male/female servants).³⁵⁸ This brings us to the next point, that it is crucial to remember the class-based nature of successful sumptuary law punishment. As Hughes writes, “where prosecutions were undertaken, appeal and influence often let the guilty escape,”³⁵⁹ bolstering the idea that even if a law did not explicitly target a social group, its consequences were felt much differently depending on one’s status.

It thus becomes necessary, as Diane Owen Hughes argues, to distinguish between “*enforcement*, which failed, and *legislating*, which achieved objects of its own.”³⁶⁰ In fact, Hughes goes as far as to say that enforcement was always seemingly less important than the actual creation of the law.³⁶¹ It was as though publishing sumptuary legislation was a sufficient means by which the government could express its fears for society,³⁶² whereas tangible enforcement of these laws was

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 138.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 140.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 139.

³⁵⁹ Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations,” 97.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 96.

³⁶² Ibid.

too difficult to pursue with any great effort or success. While Hughes raises some great points we must be careful not to speak in absolutes when considering enforcement. For example, the issue is not as cut and dry as Thomas Izbicki sees it when he concludes that “laws were enacted to curb excess, but they regularly fell by the wayside or were laxly enforced after a first burst of enthusiasm.”³⁶³ When it comes to sumptuary legislative enforcement for the Italic peninsula during the Renaissance, we see that from the laws conception through its publication and dissemination, all the way to its enforcement, there is an array of mixed and conflicting attitudes.

³⁶³ Thomas Izbicki, “The Origins of the *De ornatu mulierum* of Antoninus of Florence,” *MLN* 119, Supplement (2004): S147.

Chapter 4

Sexual Expression: Gender, Literature, and Sumptuary Law

“Che dirai tu delle donne di Siena?
Ce ne dirò? che le fur fatte in cielo.
Acconce, sconce, in cuffia, in treccia, in velo,
Formose sono, e la città n'è piena.”
Antonio Cammelli³⁶⁴

When discussing gender, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of equating the term with women and their condition. As Kim Phillips has reminded us, ‘women’ and ‘gender’ have not quite ceased to be synonymous in academic discourse,”³⁶⁵ and we must therefore be sure to include the effects of sumptuary laws on men as well. This is not to say, however, that we can overlook the overwhelming concentration of Italian Renaissance sumptuary legislation on female subjects. There is no denying that these laws often targeted women specifically, and at times even failed to bother mentioning men. As will be discussed, the English Medieval and Renaissance examples of sumptuary law, in contrast, tended to focus on men, at times disregarding women altogether. What does this comparison between two important Western European regions tell us about the motivations of Italian sumptuary laws and the impact they had on society? Were they tools to subordinate women as well as all members of the lower classes? In addition, were women more involved in clothing and fashion in Italy than the men?

³⁶⁴ “What would you say about the women of Siena? What shall I say of them? That they were made in heaven. Proper, obscene, capped, plaited, veiled. They are quite shapely and the city is full of them.” Cited in Iris Origo. *The World of San Bernardino*. 43.

³⁶⁵ Kim M. Phillips. *Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws*. Gender & History, Vol. 19 No. 1 April 2007, 22.

The Renaissance notion of women was based in large part on views about their virtuousness and, as Ian Maclean discusses, notions about feminine virtue rooted virtue in those characteristics that were passive. While men were to be eloquent, women were to be silent.³⁶⁶ While men were to be commanding, women were to be obedient.³⁶⁷ Maclean also points out the importance of the idea of female moral weakness – based on her inability to control her emotions and act rationally – especially in sexual encounters.³⁶⁸ Paradoxically, however, women were prized most for their pure and modest nature, as well as their maternal side – perhaps because Renaissance moralists thought that this was so difficult for women to attain. So while women could be seen as sexually hungry and inappropriate, they were also simultaneously praised for their Mary-like modesty and chastity when they could achieve it. A woman's character was, indeed, so important, that female honor was considered the prerequisite for a city's honor.³⁶⁹ That is to say that a city's female citizens were a reflection of the city itself; if the women were honorable, the city might be considered honorable.

A great proponent of such theories from the later fourteenth- and early fifteenth century city of Siena is the well-known clergyman and orator, San Bernardino. Born Bernardino degli Albizzeschi (1380-1444), San Bernardino often preached that as the guardians of religious and moral propriety, women were

³⁶⁶ Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women*, Cambridge monographs on the history of medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 54.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 27.

³⁶⁹ Poala Tinagli, "Womanly Virtues in Marriage Furnishings," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2000), 279.

advised to be well versed in household management and religion.³⁷⁰ His words could be harsh and demanding as seen in his rant against the woman who does not maintain her appearance at home:

When she goes to church, she is all adorned, painted,
garlanded, so that she seems *Madonna Smeraldina*, and at
home she is a slut.... Shame upon you, for you should look
finer and more seemly in your own room with your
husband than among so many folk in the Bishop's palace!"³⁷¹

This was not to say that women should not always be presentable, however. In fact San Bernardino believed that ornamentation in moderation was ideal, "...I would have you be adorned and delicate, but with discretion in all things, and modestly."³⁷² Styles that required a lot of excess fabric, such as winged sleeves and trains, were disdainful because they were simply wasteful.³⁷³ Most maddening to San Bernardino, however, was the process of makeup and hair dying that the Sienese women called *delicatura*.³⁷⁴ These women bleached their hair, painted their faces, and even lightened their skin, which according to San Bernardino, was wrongly masking God's intended creation.³⁷⁵

A secular example of similar theories comes from the work of Leon Battista Alberti. In his *Libri della Famiglia*, Alberti clearly delineates a (well-off) woman's roles as both wife and mother. As a wife, she is to be faithful, modest, responsible,

³⁷⁰ Judith C. Brown. "A Woman's Place Was in the Home: Women's Work in Renaissance Tuscany," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 215.

³⁷¹ Origo, *San Bernardino*, 46.

³⁷² Ibid., 47.

³⁷³ Ibid., 48.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 49.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 50.

and obedient, respecting the ultimate authority of the family patriarch.³⁷⁶ The means by which she becomes the perfect wife and mother, however, is through the lessons she is taught by her male relatives, particularly her father and then her husband. As we are told by the character Gianozzo:

“My wife certainly did turn into a perfect mother for my household. Partly this was the result of her particular nature and temperament, but mainly it was due to my instruction.”³⁷⁷

This comment by Gianozzo alerts us to another important aspect of the female position in Italian Renaissance society, which is that she is to serve as the honorable manager of the household, especially in her husband’s absence (for he was in charge of affairs conducted in public seeing as “...it would hardly win us respect if our wife busied herself among the men in the marketplace, out in the public eye”).³⁷⁸ To run a household successfully, a wife need be in charge of the servants (as instructed by her husband), in order to make sure that “no one is ever idle.”³⁷⁹ Another important responsibility for the Italian Renaissance wife was to provide her children’s early education.

In the first half of the sixteenth century writer Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568) served as an important secular moral authority. Dolce’s early works carry a rather typical misogynistic tone, one that seems to be lost by the time of his later works. In his relatively later work, *Dialogo della institution delle donne, secondo li tre stati che cadono nella vita humana*, published in 1545, Dolce praises the virtuousness of women

³⁷⁶ Leon Battista Alberti., and Renee Neu Watkins. *The Family in Renaissance Florence*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), Book 3, 81.

³⁷⁷ Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, 78.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

and also provides advice for the proper behavior of nubile girls, wives, and widows.³⁸⁰ Through the character of Marcello, Dolce is sure to comment on the stereotypical spendthrift character of contemporary Italian women and the extensive list of their common purchases: “veste, cinte, ornamenti, gioie, anella, catene, maniglie, ventagli, vasi, unguenti, odori, belletti, gibellini, schiavi, nani, cavalli, carrette, cocchi, gondole, et istrumenti da pelarsi, da far ricci i capelli, e d’altri simili infiniti.”³⁸¹

Despite all of the negative examples, there existed in contemporary times acceptable models of “exemplary women” that were employed as social symbols of the desirable attributes for every woman.³⁸² In fact, there existed a strong literary tradition of creating collections or catalogues of illustrious, virtuous women. Influenced by Plutarch’s *Mulierum virtutes*, Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris* was a popular fourteenth-century example of such literature that highlighted women especially for their fame.³⁸³ Most interesting is the fact that Boccaccio chose to omit female saints, and instead included only laywomen whose virtuosness stemmed from their inherent goodness and not their religion. In this way we see how social models did not depend solely on religious figures, but on those women who were successful wives and mothers. These figures were meant to “inspire imitation,” especially in the case of sixteenth-century pedagogy.³⁸⁴ For example, the Dominican Giovanni Dominici is known for his use of these models of behavior to counsel the women of his parish in his letters. Perhaps sumptuary laws were seen as a tool to generate the

³⁸⁰ Ronnie H. Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce, Renaissance Man of Letters*. 135-36.

³⁸¹ Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce*, 139.

³⁸² See article by Marta Ajmar, “Exemplary women in Renaissance Italy: ambivalent models of behaviour?” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000).

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

existence of similarly perfect women. In fact, as Catherine Kovesi Killerby has argued, often times the preambles of the laws themselves indicated such a purpose.

Specifically when clothing was involved, those reasons outlined in the preambles tended to focus on female modesty. For example, though unusually harsh, the September 1433 law code of Florence outlined the motivation for sumptuary control:

“to restrain the barbarous and irrepressible bestiality of women who, not mindful of the weakness of their nature, forgetting that they are subject to their husbands, and transforming their perverse sense into a reprobate and diabolical nature, force their husbands with their honeyed poison to submit to them.”³⁸⁵

Therefore, we must look at sumptuary legislation not only as a reactionary device, but also as a means to craft a desired end, which was, often times, to create the proper and humble woman. Perhaps if women were given guidelines as to the proper procedures of daily comportment and dress, they would be less likely to stray from the path of modesty into the realm of concupiscence and ostentation.

By the seventeenth century, the close of the Renaissance, these ideas and theories as to women’s status and societal role continued to be perpetuated in literature written by males. Perhaps the most well known work on the subject of female luxury from this period is Francesco Buoninsegni’s *Satira Menippea Contro ‘L Lusso Donnesco* (1638). Buoninsegni used his writing to deride women and what men considered to be their flippant preoccupation with luxury. His tone is both condescending and he spares no harsh words to poke fun at female interests in

³⁸⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law*, 118.

fashion. A telling example of his satirical but belittling tone is found in a line that reads, “Il capo delle donne con tante belle figure mi sembra appunto un mazzo di carte da giuocare.”³⁸⁶

Printed a mere two years after Buoninsegni’s *Satira*, Neopolitan Andrea Genuzio’s work entitled *Satira ed Antisatira*, treated both female *and male* weaknesses for conspicuous consumption. Beginning with women in the first section of the book, *Mondo Femminile: Satira contro gli abbigliamenti donneschi*,³⁸⁷ Genuzio describes the ways in which women’s fashion habits are often excessive and nonsensical. Genuzio is sure to employ the usual arguments against women’s conspicuous consumption such as the argument that they ruin their husband’s financial status: “...essendo tanti mastini, che lacerano i patromonii de’ poveri mariti.”³⁸⁸ He specifically speaks of their extravagantly ample skirts,³⁸⁹ their clothing’s artifices of gold and silver,³⁹⁰ and the makeup they paint on their faces³⁹¹: all of which leads to visual deception and a perversion of honor and humility. Even though Genuzio is quick to criticize women for these practices, he also admits that such actions are so indelibly etched into social custom that it is pointless to linger on them. He writes that it is better simply to laugh off these ridiculous ways in which females dress by reading his comedy, instead of getting bogged down in ineffective efforts to prevent such practices:

“ Gli altri modi industriosi con cui i proprii mancamenti le donne

³⁸⁶ “The head of women with all of its beautiful adornments seems to me to be a deck of playing cards.” Francesco Buoninsegni, Arcangela Tarabotti, and Elissa Weaver, *Satira e antisatira*. Omikron, 60 (Roma: Salerno, 1998), 50.

³⁸⁷ Andrea Genuzio, and Girolamo De Miranda. *Satira ed antisatira*. Minima, 58 (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1997), 54.

³⁸⁸ “...being all of them mastiffs, that destroy the patrimonies of their poor husbands.” Ibid., 61.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 58.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 60.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 67.

ricuoprano, sara` meglio che voi gli leggiate presso questo comico,
che io per modestia gli rilascio, sapendo che alla giornata
continuamente si praticano.”³⁹²

In the second section of his work, Genuzio, in a very uncharacteristic move for Italian Renaissance literature, addresses the dress of men. In *Mondo Maschile: Antisatira contro gli abbigliamenti degli uomini*,³⁹³ Genuzio freely admits that men can be equally guilty in their pursuit of extravagant fashion. He even goes as far as to say that men are capable of forgetting their virile role in society with such behavior:

“ Tutti vezzi, tutti fregi a pena par che d’uomo il nome ritengano;
anzi...si son quasi dimenticati del proprio sesso.”³⁹⁴

This comment calls to mind the aforementioned, earlier work of Giovanni Della Casa, the *Galateo*, in which the author describes the ways in which men decorate themselves as if they were women.³⁹⁵ Thus, some men do not seem to be reluctant to ornament their clothing at this time, yet they often escaped the social commentary that usually targeted women as the spendthrift consumers. Again we encounter the issue of who is targeted and why? Women always seem to be the named target in sumptuary legislation, for the laws are often expressly directed towards them. We see however, that men were the ones responsible for the payment of fines, which might make us question if women were always the true targets, or if they were the only targets. When we consider that sumptuary legislation was very motivated by

³⁹² “[As for] The other industrious ways in which women make up for those things they lack, it will be better that you immediately read this work to them, for it is to them that I modestly dedicate my work, knowing that they will continue these practices daily.” Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid, 74.

³⁹⁴ “For all [of their] habits, all [of their] decorations, they barely retain the name of men; indeed....they have almost forgotten their own sex.” Ibid., 77.

³⁹⁵ “Onde non si dee l’uomo ornare a guisa di femmina [...]” Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo*, XXVII http://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Galateo_overo_de'_costumi/XXVIII.

economic reasons, we see that it is possible that men were really the intended targets, but that it was more socially acceptable to legislate openly against women because they are supposed to be the weaker sex.

Men were not the only ones to write on a woman's nature and behavior. There were a few female writers of the Italian Renaissance who published their thoughts on such issues as well, especially towards the end of the Renaissance when such publications by female authors became more acceptable. Modesta Pozzo (1555-1592), who used the penname Moderata Fonte, was a well-educated woman who had the somewhat unique freedom of being able to publish in addition to tending to her marital and maternal duties because she was born to a Venetian family of writers and professionals who were sympathetic to her literary interests. In her famous dialogue, *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, Fonte employs the use of several female speakers who debate the proper etiquette, actions, and appearance of a lady. Exploring the topic through characters that voice very different opinions on subjects such as the value of marriage, Moderata Fonte goes as far, as to argue for the superiority of the female sex. Her character Corinna is sure to provide a basic example as to why this is so: "Men *were* created before women But that doesn't prove their superiority—rather, it proves ours, for they were born out of the lifeless earth in order that we could then be born out of living flesh."³⁹⁶ Despite her forward-thinking and female-empowering ideals, Moderata Fonte's work does not lack some of the traditional support for the ideal virtues of woman, such as "chastity."³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Moderata Fonte, and Virginia Cox. *The worth of women: wherein is clearly revealed their nobility and their superiority to men*. The other voice in early modern Europe. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 60.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 54.

Even more direct and scathing in tone, Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–1652) is another example of a female Renaissance writer who treats topics regarding a woman's nature and the expectations that that society has of her. Embittered by her forced monachization she wrote her first manuscript, *La Tirannia Paterna*, to demonstrate the ways in which women are subjugated by men and resigned to live their entire lives as second-class people. Apart from providing a vast array of reasons why it is detrimental to religion and wrong to place a woman in a convent against her will, she blatantly expresses her opinions as indicated by her strong titles such as, "Liberty Is Of Greater Value Than Life Itself"³⁹⁸ and "Women Are No Threat To A Father's Power And Wealth, Evils Of The Dowry."³⁹⁹

One of the most colorful and impassioned examples of Arcangela Tarabotti's writing is her *Antisatira* (1644), a response to the aforementioned *Satira* of Francesco Buoninsegni.⁴⁰⁰ Tarabotti uses her work to craft a "vindication of women"⁴⁰¹ so that she may argue against that idea that sumptuary legislation is a phenomenon concerned with moral issues, and for the idea that it is a phenomenon driven by male greed.⁴⁰² She proposes that female clothing and embellishment is the manifestation of a "silent rebellion" or a "consolation" for a woman's stifled status.⁴⁰³ This idea becomes especially poignant when Tarabotti contrasts lay female dress to her drab and dull monastic attire.⁴⁰⁴ Life spent in a convent left no room for personal

³⁹⁸ Arcangela Tarabotti and Letizia Panizza. "Paternal Tyranny," in *The other voice in early modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 79.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., *Book Two*, 94

⁴⁰⁰ De Bellis, "Attacking sumptuary laws in Seicento Venice: Arcangela Tarabotti," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 227.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 228.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 232.

expression through dress, which could prove really difficult for those women forced into the nunnery, as they had learned to appreciate clothing in the urban world as a way of confirming one's identity. When reading Tarabotti, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the forced monachization of women was a phenomenon limited to the middle and upper classes. This makes it clearer that these women were used to wearing nice clothing and were used to certain freedoms that were abruptly taken away.

Tarabotti produces a response to Buoninsegni's work that is more than double its length. More importantly, she copies his structure (as is obvious by the repetition of the verse featured in the first pages of the *Satira*):

“Donne, e voi che le donne avete in pregio,

Per Dio, non date a questa istoria orecchia.”⁴⁰⁵

Dispersing other bits of verse throughout her treatise is also a reflection of Buoninsegni's work. Her tone, however, is much more aggressive. Tarabotti is just as quick to accuse men of conspicuous extravagance as is Buoninsegni; perhaps even quicker:

“Oh quanti, oh quanti giovani di questo secolo vanno

eccessivamente lisciati, attilati, profumati e lascivi”⁴⁰⁶

In her article, Daniela DeBellis effectively demonstrates the aforementioned point, which is that Tarabotti represents a particularly extreme viewpoint on the subject. For instance, a fellow female Venetian writer, Lucrezia Marinella, wrote to

⁴⁰⁵ “Women, and those of you that these women hold in prayer, For God's sake, do not lend an ear to this history.” Tarabotti, *Satira e antisatira*, 38, 59.

⁴⁰⁶ “Oh how many, many young men of our century walk around excessively groomed, perfumed, and washed.... Tarabotti, *Satira e antisatira*, 69.

encourage women, above all, towards decorum and modesty.⁴⁰⁷ Another, even earlier example, is seen in the works of fifteenth-century scholar, Laura Cereta. Instead of praising women for concentrating on material personal expression, she felt that this preoccupation with attire was the result of women “set[ting] their sights too low.”⁴⁰⁸ Instead, women should focus on their studies and the attainment of knowledge.

Arcangela Tarabotti’s fiery tone should not be dismissed as brash or contrived. As a woman, she showed remarkable influence even during her lifetime. For example, her works were not published posthumously, but rather while she was living, a true testament to her bravery and determination. Even more impressive is the fact that she was sufficiently influential or well-connected that she had the power to prevent a man’s written response to her *Antisatira*. Specifically, Angelico Aprosio wrote a critique entitled *La maschera scoperta*, and Tarabotti was able to prevent its publication,⁴⁰⁹ effectively silencing a male voice, which was most certainly an unusual flex of female power.

Although less flashy and controversial, the stories of the Sienese and Bolognese noblewomen Battista Petrucci and Nicolosa Sanuti, respectively, are equally interesting. It was because of an impressive oration that she read for Emperor Frederick III (1415-1493) and his fiancée, Leonora of Portugal, that Petrucci was asked to select a reward, for which she chose “release from all sumptuary regulations,” a request reluctantly granted by city officials.⁴¹⁰ Due to her scholarly intelligence and oratorical skills, attributes usually attributed to men,

⁴⁰⁷ De Bellis, *Attacking sumptuary laws*, 236.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 238.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 237.

⁴¹⁰ Owen Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations,” 87.

Battista Petrucci was able to distance herself from her feminine restrictions and become exempted from the sumptuary laws.

More aggressively, Nicolosa Sanuti, learned lover of Sante Bentivoglio, formulated a protest against the new 1453 sumptuary law imposed by Cardinal Bessarion, which tightly regulated women's dress.⁴¹¹ In a cleverly crafted oration, Sanuti reminded the cardinal that the women of Bologna, dressed in their fineries, could serve as heroines of the city, and as Hughes describes, Sanuti is calls to mind their classical predecessors, and just like the Sabine women, could "save a civilization from demographic ruin."⁴¹²

The general ideas behind sumptuary laws affecting women's dress and behavior were based on age-old stereotypes that continued to be prevalent in Renaissance society. As described by Diane Owen Hughes, there existed a very popular theory that argued the presence of a strong connection between women and concupiscence.⁴¹³ Especially linked to this idea were the prostitutes that found work in all Italian Renaissance cities. As a result, numerous sumptuary laws were devised to mark these women and indicate their unwholesome status to the rest of society. For example, prostitutes were required to wear "cheap fustian mantles" in fifteenth-century Milan, while their counterparts in Brescia were to don a yellow stripe on the shoulder.⁴¹⁴

As was previously mentioned, sumptuary legislation in England was focused on men. It seems that as a result of the strong, male homosociality of British culture, clothing and conspicuous consumption was a problem involving more men than

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 87-89

⁴¹² Ibid., 139.

⁴¹³ Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past and Present*, No. 112 (Aug., 1986), 25.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 25, 29.

women.⁴¹⁵ Italy was also a very homosocial culture, in comparison to England, this had a very different effect on sumptuary legislation. In Italy this meant that women became the main targets for sumptuary statutes, in England, it meant that women were ignored and treated as unimportant. In fact, Kim M. Phillips goes as far as to argue that women in English society were essentially the “third term in this relation: the apex of the triangulated structure which links one man to another...”⁴¹⁶ As we see in the sumptuary laws targeting both males and females in different Renaissance societies, it is important to also remember the theory of Harry Brod, which recognizes the strong presence of hierarchy *within* a gender and not merely *between* genders.⁴¹⁷

In general, throughout Europe, sumptuary laws took varying approaches based on the specific structures and concerns of the culture that created them. For example, as we have seen in Italy, sumptuary legislation went from a concentration on weddings, funerals, and feasts in the thirteenth century to a zealous control of women’s fashion by the fifteenth.⁴¹⁸ In Scottish and Occitanian laws, women also were also the primary concern. In French, Swiss, and German legislation, however, the sexes were targeted more evenly.⁴¹⁹ By considering sumptuary laws through the scope of gender and the gender divide, we are able to better deduce the condition of women in Italian Renaissance society and what it was about this society that made these conditions acceptable. Though it may be hard today to believe that a woman is headed for moral ruin if she wear shirt with a plunging décolletage, it is not hard –

⁴¹⁵ Kim M. Phillips. “Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws,” *Gender & History* 19, no.1 (2007): 23, 32.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

even in our “age of chemical dyes, synthetic fibers and mass-produced garments
—”⁴²⁰ to understand the ways in which one judged and regarded based on his or her
clothing.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 32.

Chapter 5:

Professional Courtesy?

Sumptuary Law According to Social Class and Occupation

A Stratified Society: Class Structure in Renaissance Italy

We have already discussed the gender divide as it applies to sumptuary legislation, and brief mention has been made as to how laws interacted with various occupations and social classes. In this chapter, through an analysis of how sumptuary laws singled out and affected particular groups, specifically magistrates, artisans and workers, prostitutes, Jews, and *contadini* (peasants), the aim is to elucidate how exactly these laws were intended to control different social groups.

To begin, we look at those who occupied the highest rung in society, the magistrates and any hereditary nobility. As these people were often, though not always, notably affluent, they had ‘purchasing power’ and disposable wealth. It goes without saying that the successful merchant middle class also possessed a sizable amount of disposable wealth, but even so, only the *very* wealthy could afford truly ostentatious and elaborate fabrics such as embroidered silk weaves for clothing, polychrome velvets, or pile-on-pile velvets brocaded with gold and silver thread.⁴²¹

The ways in which sumptuary laws usually applied to this upper echelon of Italian society, was through provisions that exempted them. That is to say that most sumptuary laws had clauses that exempted professionals (doctors, lawyers and their wives), certain political officeholders, and...from their observance.

⁴²¹ Jane Bridgeman, “Pagare le pompe’: why Quattrocento sumptuary laws did not work,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 217.

At times, laws became quite detailed in the categories they exempted. For example, when it came to clothing legislation it was especially important to distinguish between women who came from noble families, or families that were eligible for political office (such as the civil service), versus those women that were born into lesser ranks. Specifically, the latter were resigned to wear garlands and belts of silver, leaving the gold accessories to their more eminent peers.⁴²² Thus we see that one's permission to wear certain fashions was predicated by his or her social status, as well as gender.

It seems that in a general sense, when sumptuary laws were not explicitly directed against a certain social group (such as prostitutes), they were meant to curb the conspicuous consumption of the successful members of this professional group; a group that sparked the growth of a new, middle class. It was this middle class of wealthy, yet untitled, people that made the government, and especially those who comprised the hereditary aristocracy, feel very threatened and vulnerable to a loss of power.

As for the working classes, sumptuary laws did not always appear very relevant because such people did not have the financial means with which to break them. Where sumptuary laws did occupy an important position, however, was in the minds of tailors and embroiderers, who were often the temporary holders of cloths or other objects that were the subject of sumptuary legislation as they worked on them for clients and were held accountable for obeying the laws through the enforcement of considerable fines.⁴²³

⁴²² Ibid, 15-16.

⁴²³ For more information, please refer to the enforcement section of Chapter 3.

Considered less important than their employers, domestic servants (an important subdivision of the urban laboring classes) were sometimes treated separately in sumptuary legislation. In addition to outlawing certain types of dress for servants, servant-specific sumptuary legislation also created separate rubric for their punishment. Some statutes, for example, had provisions for enforcement and penalty that were to apply solely to those in domestic service.

People living outside of the cities and in the surrounding countryside were often subject to sumptuary statutes that were crafted specifically against them. These laws, which obviously originated in an urban setting, sometimes sought to thwart the sumptuary display of only the rural population. It must be assumed that for the most part, these peasants could not afford most of the prohibited articles or celebratory practices, but this did not prevent city authorities from trying to regulate the *contadini* strictly anyway.

Catholicism and Commercialism: How sumptuary laws targeted the Jews

The Jewish population of the Italian Renaissance, comprises the last group of second-class citizens to be discussed in this chapter as a special target of sumptuary laws. In fact, by the late thirteenth century, laws were in place to protect a city's bankers and moneylenders from Jewish competition.⁴²⁴ Specifically in Perugia, the *podestà's* annual oath included the explicit provision that he was to expel any Jew from the city.⁴²⁵ The reason that Italian governments allowed Jewish bankers and moneylenders to settle in their towns and to bring other Jews in with them is that the governments needed the money that the Jewish bankers and moneylenders were

⁴²⁴ Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs," 14.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

willing to lend. In other words, they didn't admit Jews because they were successful, they admitted them because they had the capital that the governments needed to fund various projects, mostly military, and permission was given to Jews to settle in various towns in exchange for forcing big loans from them. In particular, it was the failure of Italian banks in the middle decades of the fourteenth century, as well as the shrinking tax base that resulted from the recurrent plagues after 1347, that pushed Italian governments to grant privileges (*condotte*) to these Jewish financiers.⁴²⁶

Later, in the fifteenth century, Jews increasingly sought courtly patronage for protection from the growing animosity that confronted them in the cities.⁴²⁷ In many urban centers in fifteenth-century Italy, Jews were assimilated to society to a larger extent than in most other European cities and were in many ways virtually indistinguishable from Christians.⁴²⁸ They spoke the same language, lived in the same neighborhoods, and wore the same fashions. Although their assimilation was by no means full or complete, and they remained vulnerable to changing popular attitudes and government policies, their German co-religionists were shocked by the close way they interacted with gentiles.⁴²⁹

As to how sumptuary laws came into play in Jewish quotidian practices, it was through the process of marking- a technique employed by Italian governments to separate Jews distinctly and visually from Christian habitants.⁴³⁰ Inspired directly by the sermons of San Bernardino of Siena (a religious and moral authority whom

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ As Hughes adds, the German Jews could not believe that their Italian counterparts bought wine from "the uncircumcised". Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 17.

we have already encountered in Chapter 3), marking was manifest on the clothing of Jews, usually as a yellow symbol. For example, in 1430, Venice prescribed a yellow “O” made of finger-thick chord to be pinned to the chest.⁴³¹ In fact, legislation requiring that Jews wear these “distinguishing signs” was adopted more frequently in cities like Venice and Padua, cities that were free from the domination of a lord.⁴³² This meant that Jews were visibly marked in cities such as Venice and Padua. Yellow, however, was not always the go-to color for marking Jews. As was mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the color red (albeit, most likely a lighter shade than the rich, regal color), was also used to set Jews apart. For example, a Roman statute of 1360 required that all Jewish men wear a red tabard, and all Jewish females wear a red overskirt.⁴³³ Even though the law existed, however, it was not well observed, for “their [the Jews’] initiative was exceptional, and most Italian Jews if occasionally harassed went unmarked.”⁴³⁴ This brings us to a very important generalization, which is that it was not until the fifteenth century that laws requiring the marking of Jews were implemented with much success. As Diane Owen Hughes argues, the efforts of Franciscan preachers, such “accomplished in a few decades what church councils and inquisitors had tried to effect for centuries by legal means.”⁴³⁵ She identifies the preaching of San Bernardino of Siena (and his Observant followers throughout Italy), which spoke in favor of placing identifying signs on the clothing of Jews, to be the direct inspiration behind the employment of

⁴³¹ Owen Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs,” 17.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid., 18.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 17.

Jewish-specific legislation across the peninsula, such as the aforementioned provision passed in fifteenth-century Venice.⁴³⁶

The Christian rhetoric of some of the Observant friars got so intense and accusatory that it began to conflate stereotypes, grouping Christian women in with the Jews when they hurled their insults during their self-righteous speeches. As an example, we may look Viterbo in 1449 when Observant friar Battista da Genova preached against women's vanities, insisting with other friars that "women's endless appetite for finery made them partners of the Jew."⁴³⁷ That is, in their conspicuous consumption, women made it necessary for their Christian husbands to (in the words of Giacomo della Marca):

"pawn to the Jews for ten [soldi] a garment that he will resell for thirty. And so it is never redeemed, and the garment is lost.

Whence Jews became rich and Christians paupers."⁴³⁸

By the late sixteenth century in Florence, 1571, Cosimo de' Medici I created a ghetto for Jews in Florence, built in the same district of the prostitute's quarters, the area north of the Mercato Vecchio.⁴³⁹ Stefanie Siegmund argues that a cultural association of Jews and prostitutes may help us understand literary references to this "ghetto as built on the site of public brothels," but that the reason why this place was chosen was for non other than its low property value as an ill-reputed area.⁴⁴⁰ The cultural association made between these two minority groups remains quite

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Stefanie B. Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 207.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

interesting, however, because it highlights the fact that legislatively, Jews and prostitutes were single-out very similarly, (which is what we see in sumptuary laws). Should the laws therefore be seen as an earnest effort to keep society strictly stratified, precluding upstart merchants and minority populations from gaining any powerful ground in the city landscape? The answer is undoubtedly yes.

Chapter 6

Living Legacy: Representations of Sumptuary Practice in Renaissance Art

In this study of a time four and five hundreds of years removed from our own, it is difficult to grasp the fashions and practices that sumptuary laws regulated during the Italian Renaissance without much tangible evidence. Indeed, virtually no clothing has survived from the period with the exception of a few ecclesiastical garments and some well-preserved remnants of fabric dating from fifteenth-century Florence.⁴⁴¹ As we have seen, our information as to what exactly Italian Renaissance fashions looked like depended on accounts in logs in family *ricordanze* descriptions made by contemporary writers, and details discussed in sumptuary statutes. The notable thing about all of these sources is that they are written and therefore devoid of any visual explanation. We thus turn to the rich font of visual evidence that is Italian Renaissance painting in an effort to experience, and hopefully appreciate, those phenomena described and controlled by sumptuary legislation.

It is with this intent that this chapter adopts as its foundation the point of view of Elizabeth Birbari in her book, *Dress in Italian Painting: 1460-1500*, which asserts that Italian Renaissance painting can be seen as a reliable source of accurate depictions of contemporary dress. In support of her theory, Birbari argues that since fifteenth-century Italian artists were dedicated to the detailed depiction of their surroundings, “it is reasonable to suppose that they made no exception with the clothes worn by the characters who were delineated in their panels and

⁴⁴¹ As also mentioned in Chapter 2, 2. See also Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 148.

frescoes....”⁴⁴² Yet, as we know, Italian artists did not depict faces, or for that matter, the bodies of their subjects accurately. Isabella d’Este, for example, was painted as a lovely young woman when she was, in fact, rather well on in years and would have looked much older. Therefore we can say that the clothing and the setting were depicted accurately, but the figures depicted were certainly not.

A Fresh Glance at a Famous Painting

An interesting way to begin exploring Renaissance clothing in Renaissance painting is to study those works that are already extremely well known, but this time with a particular consideration for the clothing worn by the figures. As a result, the first painting this chapter will examine is an extremely renowned piece by the Dutch artist, Jan Van Eyck, known commonly in English as the *Arnolfini Portrait* (Appendix, figure 7). Even as this Northern Renaissance artist presents us with a telling and accurate depiction of this “great merchant capitalist,” Giovanni di Arrigo Arnolfini, and his wife, Giovanna Cenami through his famous, high-grade realism and attention to detail, we are still left unsure of the paintings explicit meaning.⁴⁴³ When it comes to the Arnolfini double portrait, however, exactly what this panel painting is intended to mean has “proved elusive” despite much analysis by prominent art historians.⁴⁴⁴ This is to say that Panofsky’s well-known reading of the work as a “clandestine marriage” (though supported largely by historians), has been increasingly called into question by art historians today.⁴⁴⁵

Both the Arnolfini and the Cenami were Lucchese families that had been

⁴⁴² Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting*, 3-4.

⁴⁴³ Hall, Edwin. *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Dyck’s Double Portrait*...4.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

active in northern commerce and financial ventures since the mid-fourteenth century.⁴⁴⁶ It makes sense, therefore, that the couple is depicted in their home located in Bruges, what Hall calls a center for this activity of “purveying luxury goods,” Arnolfini had close commercial ties to the Burgundian Court for close to fifty years and was eventually to become naturalized as a Frenchman by Louis XI.⁴⁴⁷ With this background, we can start to analyze why this translocated Italian couple is depicted in such an intriguing and mysterious manner. In fact, as his central thesis Hall argues that the portrait is not a portrayal of a clandestine marriage, but rather a “solemn *sponsalia* or betrothal, sworn by the groom in the presence of two witnesses[,]”⁴⁴⁸ (who can be seen in the mirror on the wall). The touching of the couples’ hand was a typical betrothal gesture used to represent their mutual consent to the promise of marriage.⁴⁴⁹ That is to say that while this painting cannot be seen as a substitution for a “marriage certificate,” it can be seen as a physical record of the consent of the bride and groom.⁴⁵⁰

Given this background, there is one particular aspect of the painting that attracts our attention, and that is Lady Arnolfini and the clothes that she is wearing. While Arnolfini’s hat and wooden clogs⁴⁵¹ definitely bespeak northern Renaissance fashions (for these were not characteristic of contemporary Italian style), Giovanna’s dress, belt, and headwear are all great examples of popular fifteenth-century fashions that were popular in Italy. Specifically, Lady Arnolfini is wearing a veil over her *acconciature a corna*, or horn-shaped headdress, a decorative belt cinched below the

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ For more on clogs see Hall, 110–12.

bust, and sleeveless *giornea* that allowed for the layered effect that was a customary and favored fashion during the Italian Renaissance.⁴⁵²

The most fascinating discussion lies, however, in the reference to Giovanna's supposedly pregnant state. For a considerable amount of time, Arnolfini's wife was assumed to be pregnant, an observation documented as early as a description found in the Spanish royal inventory of 1700. This hypothesis was also seen in the opinions of reputable, nineteenth-century critics such as Louis Viardot, (who specifically went as far to suggest chiromancy as the theme of the portrait, meaning that the man was reading the future of the unborn child from the woman's hand).⁴⁵³ Through a more thorough analysis and a greater understanding of the history of dress during the Renaissance, scholars today have rejected the pregnancy hypothesis almost outright, though Edwin Hall notes that the modern-day observer still makes this mistaken inference when seeing the painting for the first time.⁴⁵⁴

Instead of pregnancy, Lady Arnolfini's dress displays an upper middle class expression of rising social status. In other words, "the gown's excessive fabric in particular conveyed a message of status."⁴⁵⁵ With its ample folds, the dress had to be gathered and held in the hand, which would hinder greatly the wearer's movement and physical activity, thus signifying the fact that she need not perform any sort of work.⁴⁵⁶ It is also important to remember that the sheer amount of fabric needed to create such a voluminous garment required a considerable amount of money. This practice of using a large amount of material often came under attack by sumptuary

⁴⁵² Please refer to Chapter 2, as all of these garments and accessories have therein been previously examined.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

laws such as those that limited train length, or the amount of cloth one could use to make a garment.

The Eye of A Female Artist

In this section, I will argue that Italian women artists of the Renaissance, although less well known than male Renaissance masters, provide some of the best visual evidence of contemporary fashions with their eyes attuned especially well to all of the elaborate details of a lavish Renaissance costume (in addition to their keen sense of emotional depiction, a quality for which female artists are more typically recognized). I will use the work of artist Sofonisba Anguissola as my evidence.

This section will be a discussion of two works by Sofonisba Anguissola (c.1535-1632), “the first great woman artist of the Renaissance.”⁴⁵⁷ As this quotation indicates, Anguissola has begun to gain posthumous fame in the art world after falling quite far from the international fame that she enjoyed during her lifetime. Born a female to a family of the minor nobility in Cremona,⁴⁵⁸ Sofonisba undoubtedly faced difficulty pursuing her artistic training. It was, as were most professional endeavors, considered an inappropriate undertaking for a woman, especially a woman of the nobility.⁴⁵⁹ In fact, it was not just Sofonisba, but all six Anguissola sisters were very committed to both artistic and academic study during childhood.⁴⁶⁰ Their parents undoubtedly saw the advantages that an education could bring: perhaps a favorable marriage or maybe even independently achieved financial success.

⁴⁵⁷ Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, *Sofonisba Anguissola: The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance*, 22.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.

Growing up female, Sofonisba and her sisters would have worn the typical outfits of Renaissance women as has been described, at length, in Chapter 2. Thus, not only was Sofonisba surrounded by such costumes, she actually wore them. This means that the artist was able to pay special attention to clothing detail, for if they were to be attractive to male counterparts, she and her sisters would be adorned in all the latest fashions (including jeweled hairpieces and elaborately embroidered gowns). Consider first Anguissola's painting entitled, *The Chess Game* (Appendix, figure 8). In this portrait of three of her sisters, namely Lucia (the third-born), Minerva (the fourth-born), and Europa (the fifth-born), known as Sofonisba's undisputed masterpiece, the artist's extraordinary execution of the extravagant detail in the girls' clothing is impossible to ignore. Leaving aside any implications of the actual event the painting captures (the playing of a game of chess), we must focus on the minute details of dress that Sofonisba has managed to capture as an illustration of the Italian Renaissance fashions sumptuary laws often targeted.

To begin, we immediately notice the embroidered velvet and lavish brocade seen on the overgowns and *giorneas* worn by the three sisters. In addition, we can see the illustration of the concept of layering in that the chemise peaks from their collars as the sleeves are of contrasting pattern and color to the mantles they are wearing. In terms of accessories, each of the three sisters is wearing a unique necklace, Lucia's of gold chain, Europa's of coral-colored beads, and Minerva's of pearls. Also important are the stone and pearl encrusted hairpieces that each of the girls is wearing with her plaited hairstyle. In essence, however, there is no knowing whether or not Sofonisba might have embellished/ altered the outfits she depicts for the purposes of this portrait, but this possibility is not significant for our purposes.

What is significant is that the outfits in the painting are realistic examples of what girls of their social rank and historical time period would have worn.

In a different vein, Sofonisba Anguissola's *Portrait of Amilcare, Minerva, and Asdrubale Anguissola* (c.1577-58, Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Niva, Denmark) speaks volumes about familial values and the status of females during the Italian Renaissance (Appendix, Figure 9). As patriarch Amilcare Anguissola proudly holds his adoring son between his welcoming arms, daughter Minerva silently, but sadly, watches from behind a father that is disinterested in her. Hand clenched close to her heart, Minerva has accepted her duty as a daughter in the Anguissola household, second in importance to the son through the eyes of her father and the patriarchal system of society.⁴⁶¹ While Sofonisba's work undoubtedly acknowledges the ideal familial piety, it is not without a hint as to its hurtful affects on female members. Notice how the horizon is vast and open to the young Asdrubale, while the window of opportunity is virtually closed to the poor Minerva. In this portrait, just as it was for *The Chess Game*, it is important to note the sumptuous garments worn by Minerva. In stark contrast to the simple and streamlined outfits of her father and younger brother, Minerva's clothes are very ornate and punctuated by flashes of gold thread, a gold belt, and a gold headdress with a pearl pendant. Thus we are reminded that women were always to dress to impress.

⁴⁶¹ Fortunati, Vera. Unpublished lecture. Bologna: Fall, 2007.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The Last Stitch: Patterns in Italian Renaissance Sumptuary Legislation

It is impossible to ignore the veritable boom in sumptuary legislation that began during the fourteenth century in Italy. With the depopulation that took place after the plague of 1348-50, the decline in the price of food, and the rise in wages and inheritance by a lot of people, one might expect much of the population would now be able to afford clothing, food, etc. and would begin to flaunt it, with the result that government might start passing laws more frequently already in the 1360s through 1390s. Laws were being disseminated at a more frequent and fast pace, perpetuating self-generated problems of complexity; once one law was published, a new, revised law soon took its place. One may postulate why this trend in the proliferation of sumptuary laws was particularly strong on the Italian peninsula. What were the characteristics of Italian Renaissance society that encouraged the passage of the laws?

As discussed, Renaissance Italy was the home of a very materialistic, appearance-obsessed culture. It was a society that was married to the commonplace saying, “the clothes make the man,” or as Cosimo de’ Medici was widely reported to have said, “a gentleman can be made with two yards of red cloth.”⁴⁶² In effect, a person’s image indicated their social status, financial situation, and overall reputation in the general public. As a result, governments found themselves quite preoccupied by the possibility, which they eventually considered a necessity, of

⁴⁶² John R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 26.

regulating the appearances and practices that fell under the public eye. The legislation that controlled men and women's fashions, weddings, funerals, gift-giving, and post-partum practices was thus considered as a bundle, and considered under the blanket term of "sumptuary laws": laws that regulated a consumption that was becoming increasingly conspicuous.

This thesis explores the multi-faceted nature of Renaissance sumptuary laws – the historical highpoint of such legislation – but it does so with an understanding that this phenomenon has to be placed in medieval context. We have to consider those legislative developments that began in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and eventually became European-wide, (though they remained particularly prevalent in the cities and towns of Italy).

In terms of trends in sumptuary legislation, we find that some generalizations apply. The late medieval precedents usually concentrated on funeral legislation; however, as we have seen, the first sumptuary law code of the late middle ages (passed in Genoa in 1157), concerned itself with clothing regulations.⁴⁶³ It was not until the late fifteenth century that the funerary laws were revised to permit more flexibility in practice.⁴⁶⁴ By the beginning of the period that for Italy is traditionally considered the Renaissance, that is from mid-fourteenth to the late sixteenth century, sumptuary laws seemed to focus more on moderation and modesty in men's, and especially women's, dress. With the rise of a court culture in the fifteenth century, even in previously republican states, such as Florence, there were great implications for sumptuary laws.⁴⁶⁵ As for legislation in the sixteenth century, it continued to focus on clothing regulations, yet the styles it regulated

⁴⁶³ Heller, "Limiting Yardage,"

⁴⁶⁴ Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," 70.

⁴⁶⁵ For a discussion of the implications of court culture on sumptuary law, see Chapter 2, 6.

were increasingly “international in appearance.”⁴⁶⁶ The internationalization of style only applied to court and upper class urban societies, for peasant dress (as well as proletariat and artisan clothing styles), still varied greatly from region to region.⁴⁶⁷

We now arrive at the crux of this study: to analyze the possible motivations behind Italian Renaissance sumptuary legislation and to compare them with the outcome of these laws. It has been my main argument that sumptuary laws were both morally and economically motivated. When considering the moral climate of Italian Renaissance society, it is important to recognize the influence of the church, which helped develop a set of social values and moral codes, despite the fact that it did not really have a hand in the actual creation of legislation. Where the church did have a role was in indirect inspiration of clothing regulations. Ecclesiastical dress pronouncements started to become more precise in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries more consumption opportunities opened up to clergymen.⁴⁶⁸ In fact, religious figures such as San Bernardino and Savonarola served as very vocal proponents of material modesty and ceremonial moderation. In terms of economic motivations behind sumptuary laws, it seems that legislative decisions were, indeed, influenced by the fiscal concerns of governments. As Edward Miller points out in his argument that fiscal policy has a continuous presence in the history of government, “every medieval government had to grapple with one basic economic problem; that of its own maintenance.”⁴⁶⁹ As to whether or not sumptuary laws were more often the result of moral versus economic reasons, I conclude that such a determination is

⁴⁶⁶ Soergel, “Fashion,” 107.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Heller, “Limiting Yardage,” 123.

⁴⁶⁹ Edward Miller, Introduction to C. M. Cipolla, “The Italian and Iberian Peninsulas,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. Vol. 3, Economic Organization and Policies in the Middle Ages*, ed. E. Rich, Edward Miller, and M. M. Postan (Cambridge: U.P., 1963), 282.

impossible to make, for motivations behind such legislation were always more complex and multi-dimensional than an either/or categorization. My own observation, however, is that economic motivations tend to be more salient – when reading through various sumptuary laws and their provisions for punishment – because morally questionable actions did not seem have the same type of tangible consequences that imprudent economic endeavors might entail. For example, it would be a much more pressing issue if a father spent his entire savings on his daughter’s wedding trousseau ,and all the garments that went into it, than if his daughter walked around wearing a dress with immodest décolletage.

As asked in the introduction: “Were people wary of the laws? Did they act accordingly so as not to face legal trouble or payment of a fine?” It would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide definitive answers to these questions, but based on available, albeit limited, prosecution records and anecdotal evidence from the Renaissance, we can conclude that people were indeed wary of the laws and their consequences. To say that people certainly thought about sumptuary legislation is evident in the fact that they often developed clever methods for “skirting” the laws, particularly women. As to who was more concerned about the payment of a fine or serving a sentence after conviction, we see the importance of social class and occupation in relation to sumptuary legislation. Specifically, it seems that the wealthy and well to do of the upper classes were content to pay fines as a sort of luxury tax, and therefore receive license to wear prohibited fashions whenever they wanted. Professional artisans (such as tailors and embroiderers) and marginal social

groups, such as prostitutes, were perhaps more sensitive to sumptuary fines, considering their more vulnerable social, as well as, financial position.⁴⁷⁰

This thesis would not be complete if I did not mention new areas of research that pertain to the field of Italian Renaissance sumptuary legislation. To begin, Carole Collier Frick – whose 2002 book, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing*, has been a truly important influence on my thesis – is in the midst of writing a new paper entitled, “New Horizons: The Language of Color in Sixteenth-Century European Silks.”⁴⁷¹ In this paper Frick examines “the linguistic explosion of silk color names in sixteenth-century Europe, based upon the sixteenth-century treatise *L’Arte della Seta in Firenze*.”⁴⁷² She seeks to determine the significance of this expansion of color names and nomenclature and how it was understood by contemporaries. Her paper argues that the availability of new dye materials from Asia, Africa, and the New World allowed people to doctor colors, creating vibrant mixtures of hues. This invention of new colors purposefully undermined the purity of pre-existing colors, and therefore, undermined the purity of one’s appearance.⁴⁷³ I wonder to what extent Frick will find sumptuary laws to be relevant in the motivation behind the development of new color names, for as we have already seen, she discussed in her book contemporary Florentine use of a general “avoidance” language in an effort to evade sumptuary prosecution.⁴⁷⁴ Two other scholars, Valeria Finucci and Margaret F. Rosenthal, are currently writing

⁴⁷¹ Carole Collier Frick, “New Horizons: The Language of Color in Sixteenth-Century European Silks,” *The Languages of Fashion in Early Modern Italy Program and Abstract Book*, March 2009, http://www.rsa.org/pdfs/2009/reno173725v1x_text.pdf, 294.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ For a discussion of mixed colors, see Chapter 2, 15.

⁴⁷⁴ See chapter 3, p.39

papers that examine *alba amicorum*, or early modern travelers' albums.⁴⁷⁵ The travel logs "put together by French and German aristocratic visitors, most probably university students, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century," and the ways in which these journals catalogue and discuss contemporary clothing descriptions and opinions about fashions. I find Finucci's paper particularly applicable to my thesis, for it expressly seeks to "examine how these early modern tourists viewed and internalized the social reality and the identity of the 'Italian,' as they describe what was 'typically' Italian (especially Venetian) or 'strangely' foreign to them: the tattered clothes of the flagellants, the brunch al fresco of the merchants, the umbrella of the knight, the mules of the clergy, the white dress of the bride, and the jewels of the Dogaresa."⁴⁷⁶

Tying the Knot: A Closing Statement

Where has my research brought me? It has raised more questions than it has answered. The topic is worthy of further exploration and that was the aim of my thesis, to provoke discussion and inspire further research in this underdeveloped field. In conclusion, sumptuary laws were an application of governmental power that inspired new fashions and social ingenuity more readily than it maintained a strict moral and financial standard in Renaissance. This phenomenon of sumptuary legislation provides us with a unique insight into social structure, politics, fashion, ceremonial celebration, and art as they apply throughout the Italic peninsula.

Modern ceremonial attire, wedding gowns, for example; the "power-suit;" expensive

⁴⁷⁵ Finucci, "Clothes, Cosmopolitan Polish, and Excess: Italy Through Illustrated Albums of Foreign Students," and Margaret F. Rosenthal, "Word and Image in Illustrated *Alba amicorum*," in *The Languages of Fashion in Early Modern Italy Program and Abstract Book*, March 2009, http://www.rsa.org/pdfs/2009/reno173725v1x_text.pdf, 294-95.

⁴⁷⁶ Finucci, "Italy Through Illustrated Albums of Foreign Students," 294.

accessories, like handbags and shoes; and haute couture are today's descendants of sumptuary laws. Fashions come and go, but people remain the same.

Appendix



Fig 1. “The Adimari Cassone,” Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi, called Lo Scheggia,(c. 1443–50).
Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence

Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/special/art_love/view_1.asp?item=28



Detail: women's wedding *cioppa* and men's patterned *calze*.



Fig. 2 Sleeve *a gozzi*. Detail from Fra Filippo Lippi, "Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement," (ca. 1440). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Source: ARTstor



Fig. 3 Male *mantelli*. Detail of Masaccio, "Adoration of the Magi," predella panel of the *Pisa Altarpiece* (1426). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz
Source: ARTStor



Fig. 4 Twenty-four inch chopines



Fig. 5 Double- heel chopines



Fig. 6 Embroidered chopines



Fig. 7 "The Arnolfini Portrait," Jan Van Eyck, 1434.
Source: ARTstor



Fig. 8 "The Chess Game," Sofonisba Anguissola, 1555.



Fig. 9 "The Family Anguissola," Sofonisba Anguissola, 1557.

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