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Sumptuary Laws, Gender, and Public Dressing in Early Modern Genoa

Ana Howie 

History of Art and Visual Studies Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA
Email: ach278@cornell.edu

Abstract

This article explores sumptuary legislation and its enforcement in early modern Genoa. Whereas the sumptuary laws from other early modern Italian city-states partitioned society by social rank, profession, or citizenship, the laws in effect in late sixteenth-century Genoa divided the population only into men and women. Genoa therefore represents a key site for exploring gender difference through dress and adornment. Adopting a gendered, sociological, and material culture framework, this article demonstrates how sumptuary laws informed understandings of gender and gendered practices of dressing. It takes as its point of departure a ledger of sumptuary denouncements for the year 1594, and examines how Genoa's citizens adhered to, or transgressed the gendered expectations set out by the city's legislative structures. It argues that while prescriptions for idealized masculine and feminine comportment coloured the content and wording of the law, in daily life a spectrum of gendered identities could be enacted through clothing. This article thus advances discourse on the impact of sumptuary laws on understandings of gender in early modern Italy, and the ways in which masculine and feminine identifications were negotiated through and in dialogue with clothing.

I

29 July 1598 was a risky day to be out in the city of Genoa. Sumptuary laws were in full effect and officers of the city's *Magistrato delle Pompe*, the officials in charge of regulating fashion, were hard at work to keep citizens in check. That July, the *Magistrato* had made on average one to two sumptuary denouncements daily. On 29 July, however, eight men and women were spotted across the city in extravagant, forbidden garments. Among the infringing parties was the daughter of noblewoman Vittoria Spinola, who was stopped in Piazza San Lorenzo wearing a yellow and mulberry silk *ungaresca*, or sleeved jacket; Giovanni Battista Albenigo was spotted in Piazza di Ponticello dressed in a richly embroidered taffeta cassock and breeches; the wife of nobleman

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Luca Grillo was seen with a pair of garnet bracelets with gold closures; Lelio Pencho was stopped for his white doublet lined with coloured cloth with solid gold buttons; and Nicolo Bezagno Saverlo was spotted in a slashed, white taffeta jacket with red taffeta lining.¹

By the late sixteenth century, increased consumption of clothing across many social levels had instigated a wave of complex political, economic, and social arguments across Europe.² Many of these issues also converged with notions of gender, as clothing was a culturally constructed mechanism of early modern gender expression.³ Dress was one of a 'range of parts and features that might be used to help establish masculinity or femininity' at a time when boundaries between the sexes were thought to be porous and fluid.⁴ Clothing inscribed men's and women's bodies with cultural, religious, political, and aesthetic associations. In this way, the gendered body was rendered meaningful through its interactions with clothing, and clothing was rendered meaningful through its interactions with the gendered body. However, constant tensions existed at the intersection of gender ideologies and ideas of material excess. For the 'silent sex', dress could powerfully express identities within societies that afforded women little access to positions of power. However, the danger of over-dressing was constant due to women's perceived moral weakness and proneness to sin. For men, extravagant attire threatened their manhood and could render them effeminate. Thus, in the eyes of the state, ostentatious fashions threatened social order and cohesion; they disturbed order, dangerously blurred social boundaries, and compromised the morality of citizens.

Sumptuary legislation was one means through which governments attempted to control luxury clothing consumption and the social ills it could encourage. These laws sought to regulate and reinforce social difference by defining 'who could spend how much on what types' of material goods.⁵ The resulting stratification of consumption made it easier to determine social status and privileges, which reflected a well-balanced and orderly society. This objective was frequently veiled in moralistic messaging, suggesting that

¹ 'La M[agnifi]ca Vittoria Spinola...ritrovato sua figlia sopra la piazza di Sto Lorenzo con una ongaresca de seta di doi colori cioe giala e morella osia', 'Il M[agnifi]co Gio. B.ta Albenigo esser stato ritrovato...sopra la piazza di ponticello...con un vestito de taffetale cioe cazacca e calzoni lavorato tutto a recamo'; 'Il M[agnifi]co Luca Grillo aver ritrovato...Carignano...sua moglie con un paro di brazzali di granate con due mappe doro pognano di loro', 'Il M[agnifi]co Lelio Pencho Ritrovato alla mattina in campetto con giuppone di seta bianco fodrato de colore con bottoni doro massissi', 'Il Nob[ile]. Nicolo Bezagno Saverlo ritrovato...in piazza nova con un giupone de taffetale bianco a cordette taguicato, fodrato de taffetale rosso'. *Miscellanea del Senato 1598*, Senato (Sala Senarega), 1068–1, Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASG).

² Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing up: cultural identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010). The trajectory of clothing cultures in early modern Europe has been discussed from many viewpoints. See Evelyn Welch, ed., *Fashioning the early modern: dress, textiles, and innovation in Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 2017).

³ This thinking was heavily influenced by Galenic humoral theory. See Will Fisher, *Materializing gender in early modern English literature and culture* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵ Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, eds., *The right to dress: sumptuary laws in a global perspective, c. 1200–1800* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 1.

citizens' integrity was dependent upon their level of expenditure. Sumptuary laws were not solely concerned with dress, but also with spending for rituals and ceremonies including weddings, funerals, and baptisms. Nonetheless, the vast majority of legislation was dedicated to sartorial restrictions and allowances, indicating the centrality of clothing as a particularly significant form of material culture that was closely tied to the social and structural expectations placed upon men and women.

Sumptuary legislation was an important facet of early modern life in many parts of the world. These laws therefore represent a useful lens to assess the wide and varied experiences and implications of gender construction. In their essential volume on global sumptuary legislation, Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack assert that as clothing developed from tunic-shaped garments to fitted dresses for women and tight doublets and hose for men during the early modern period, 'the gendered body was "invented" and the visualisation of sexual difference through dress made normative'.⁶ Expressions, then, of masculine or feminine agency were significantly heightened through dressing practices. Legislation also intersected with religious sensibilities, maintaining 'religious norms in terms of the regulation of shame, gender, and respect for established social rules'.⁷ As I argue, laws therefore contributed to gender differentiation, attempting to curb men's decline into effeminacy and promote virtuous restraint among women.

The 'sumptuary phenomenon' was pronounced across Italy, thanks to the peninsula's increased production and appetite for luxury consumer goods, and has thus received significant scholarly attention.⁸ 'So marked was this luxury consumption', writes Catherine Kovesi Killerby in her survey of Italian sumptuary laws from 1200 to 1500, 'both in comparison to what had gone before and to levels elsewhere in Europe at the time, that it has been suggested that "modern consumer society,...had its first stirrings, if not its birth, in the habits of spending that possessed the Italians in the Renaissance"'.⁹ While the heterogeneity of Italian city-states means that circumstances cannot be mapped cleanly across regions, cities politically and economically similar to Genoa are useful points of comparison. Elizabeth Currie has demonstrated how sixteenth-century Florence was caught between courtly aspirations and republican ideals. Indeed, both Florence and Genoa were 'experiencing a

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ Luca Molà and Giorgio Riello, 'Against the law: sumptuary prosecutions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Padova', in *ibid.*, p. 211. For Italy, see Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy 1200–1500* (Oxford, 2002); Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Antonella Campanini, eds., *Disciplinare il lusso: la legislazione suntuaria in Italia e in Europa tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Rome, 2003); Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, 'Sumptuary laws in Italy: financial resources and instruments of rule', in Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, pp. 167–85; Michela Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie e moda a Genova fra Cinquecento e Settecento', in Anna Orlando and Agnese Marengo, eds., *Da Cambiaso a Magnasco: sguardi genovesi* (Genoa, 2020), pp. 204–33.

⁹ Richard Goldthwaite, 'The economy of Renaissance Italy: the preconditions for luxury consumption', *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, 2 (1987), pp. 15–39, at p. 16, cited in Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, pp. 111–32.

shift from a mercantile way of life focussed on generating money, to a courtly one that placed greater emphasis on spending it'.¹⁰ This article examines Genoa's sumptuary landscape at the apex of the 'Great Age of the Genoese': a period defined by the significant wealth accumulated by the Republic's merchant-banking elite.¹¹ As a pseudo-courtly Republic aligned with the Spanish Empire, Genoa's citizens enjoyed considerable access to and the funds to buy luxury goods, upon which practices of visibility and display were intrinsically reliant. However, these sensibilities were at odds with the pragmatic, mercantilist ideals upon which the Republic was founded. Crucially, sumptuary laws attempted to assuage this friction. The case of Genoa therefore represents a critical addition to existing literature and reveals the legal, material, and gendered dimensions of a city largely under-represented in anglophone studies.

Across Italy, sumptuary legislation actively distinguished between men and women, and thus represents an essential roadmap to explore gender performance through the fashioning of appearances. Early modern Italian sumptuary laws – including those from Genoa – were predominantly directed towards women, reflecting enduring notions about fashion as a firmly female prerogative. Diane Owen Hughes's seminal study of northern Italian sumptuary laws argues that the legal emphasis on women's fashions indicates that 'women were an object of fear'; male feelings of loss of control were central to misogynistic legislation.¹² Similarly, Kovesi Killerby's investigation of Italian laws explores why legislation became so fixated on women and their clothing, and the social and theoretical structures which undergirded legislation. While Kovesi Killerby finds that sartorial prescriptions paralleled wider intellectual debates concerning women's perceived vanity, lasciviousness, and weak natures, the periodization of this work excludes discussions of the later sixteenth century.¹³ The intertwining of gender, power, and politics is also read through sumptuary legislation in Currie's study of Florence. Throughout Italy, 'male honour [was identified] above all with political influence and wealth, and female honour with sexual restraint and belonging to a status-dominant male-headed household'.¹⁴ Clothing could render these intangible qualities tangible. In Florence, male dress may have 'received less attention in sumptuary legislation than female dress because it was self-monitored more effectively through codes of honour'; the 'public face of virtue'.¹⁵

¹⁰ Elizabeth Currie, *Fashion and masculinity in Renaissance Florence* (London, 2016), p. 75.

¹¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Phillip II*, II (London, 1973), p. 500. On Genoese sumptuary laws, see Luigi Belgrano, *Della vita privata dei genovesi* (Genoa, 1875), pp. 191–6; Emilio Pandiani, *Vita privata genovese nel rinascimento*, XLVII, Atti Della Società Ligure di Storia Patria (Genoa, 1915); Marzia Cataldi Gallo, 'Storia del costume, storia dell'arte e norme suntuarie', in Muzzarelli and Campanini, eds., *Disciplinare il lusso*, pp. 183–202; and Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie'.

¹² Diane Owen Hughes, 'Sumptuary law and social relations in Renaissance Italy', in John Bossy, ed., *Disputes and settlements: law and human relations in the West* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 97.

¹³ Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, pp. 111–32.

¹⁴ Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Currie, *Fashion and masculinity*, p. 10.

Genoa was not left untouched by these debates. Significantly, unlike other Italian cities in which laws were dependent on citizenship, social rank, or profession, Genoese laws distinguish primarily between genders, drawing all attention to this division. This prioritization of gender can be considered alongside the city's reputation as *il paradiso delle donne*, where women were not as 'closely watched' as elsewhere and enjoyed 'muche libertee'.¹⁶ Characterized as such by Eneo Silvio Piccolomini in the 1430s and reiterated by subsequent writers, this appellation may have fuelled concerns about the place of women in Genoese society.¹⁷ Indeed, like elsewhere in Italy, Genoese laws were dominated by meticulous and moralistic restrictions on womenswear, perpetuating the belief that fashion and luxury consumption were particularly feminine issues. Contrastingly, the regulations for menswear reproduced ideals of male stability and sobriety. Although such prescriptions were issued across Italy, Genoese legislation also betrayed anxieties about the decline of mercantilism as the merchant-banking elite increasingly turned towards conspicuous consumption and 'effeminate' courtly lifestyles.¹⁸ Thus, for legislators, gendered material consumption was intrinsically linked to the health and longevity of the Republic – by enforcing proper gendered sartorial behaviour, the stability of the state was similarly secured.

Despite their richness, legal documents have significant constraints. As Luca Molà and Giorgio Riello assert, legislation 'can only capture the prescriptive nature of the law, rather than how sumptuary laws were experienced and negotiated on a daily basis'.¹⁹ Accordingly, this study broadens its scope beyond the word of the law itself. Molà and Riello investigate how the systems and structures that shaped fashion consumption were confronted in everyday life through sumptuary prosecutions in Padua from 1560 to 1620.²⁰ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli has analysed a 1335 Bolognese ledger of *veste bollete* (forbidden yet registered clothing) to demonstrate the implication of sumptuary laws on women's social and economic lives.²¹ Similarly, Giulia Calvi's study of the enforcement of Florentine sumptuary laws from 1546 to 1637 assesses how gender and citizenship intertwined through the language of fashion, and how legislation prescribed appearances that signalled social inclusion and exclusion.²² Calvi also investigates 255 trials that took place between

¹⁶ Giovanna Petti Balbi, *Genova Medievale vista dai contemporanei* (Genoa, 1978), p. 114. Filippo Casoni, quoted in Rodolfo Savelli, 'Genova nell'età di Van Dyck. Sette quadri con un epilogo', in Susan J. Barnes et al., eds., *Van Dyck a Genova: grande pittura e collezionismo* (Milan, 1997), pp. 25–6; William Thomas, *The historie of Italie* (London, 1549), p. 162.

¹⁷ See Savelli, 'Genova nell'età di Van Dyck', pp. 25–6.

¹⁸ Andrea Spinola, 'Dizionario' (Genoa, n.d.), 106-B12, Archivio Storico del Comune di Genova (ASCG).

¹⁹ Molà and Riello, 'Against the law', p. 212.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, "'Quilibet possit accusare': denunce e mezzi di controllo del rispetto della legislazione suntuaria. Il caso bolognese', in Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ed., *Riferire all'autorità denuncia e delazione tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Rome, 2020), pp. 97–112.

²² Giulia Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secc. XVI–XVII)', *Quaderni Storici*, 37 (2002), pp. 477–503.

1638 and 1640. Importantly, Calvi's study reveals that the presence of women in these charges significantly outweighs that of men, with 215 women charged to 40 men.

Like Padua and Florence, government-issued restrictions on citizens' dress were enforced through a system of denouncements in Genoa.²³ Everyday people as well as magistrates betrayed their fellow citizens' breaches of the law. Thus, to enrich the restricted view offered by legislation, this article presents a case-study of a register of sumptuary denouncements compiled for the year 1598. To date, the register has received little attention from Italian scholars, and no attention from anglophone scholars.²⁴ These documents, called *biglietti di calice*, could be written anonymously and left in special boxes set into the Ducal Palace walls; sartorial breaches could also be reported directly to officers of the *Magistrato delle Pompe*.²⁵ Incentives for reporting were varied; for citizens, such action may have been motivated by feelings of envy or spite towards one's peers, or a strong commitment to civic duty. The nuances of Genoese sartorial cultures become apparent when the structures upheld by sumptuary laws are brought into conversation with the consumption practices indicated in denouncements.

Moreover, evidence from outside the legislation problematizes assumptions about the connections between fashion and gendered consumption and display; indeed, men were just as if not more likely as women to enjoy striking attire. The case of Genoa is therefore a fascinating pendant to Calvi's study of Florence (as 103 Genoese men were charged for sumptuous dress in comparison to 98 women) and a crucial addition to understandings of gender and sumptuary laws more broadly. I examine the slippage between the female-centric laws and other records from Genoa that elucidate the complicated intertwining of gender, dressing, and the law. Although the actual impact of legislation on the experiences of the Genoese is difficult to quantify, a study of the laws and the ensuing denouncements sheds important light on the ways in which gendered ideals were prescribed by the state and performed and manipulated by early modern people.

The 1598 ledger of denouncements contains 286 records (Tables 1–4). This may seem like a small number considering that Genoa's population boasted approximately 62,000 inhabitants at the turn of the seventeenth century.²⁶ However, these records are unusual in their quantity in comparison to other Italian cities, and thus represent an extraordinarily rich source.²⁷ The ledger offers a crucial snapshot of the daily acts of identity confirmation through dress that occurred in Genoa's streets and piazzas. Reading these documents

²³ For denouncements and punishments in medieval Italy, see Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, *Le regole del lusso* (Bologna, 2020), pp. 49–73.

²⁴ Two ledgers of denouncements have been identified thus far, including the 1598 document. The other dates from 1596. See Cataldi Gallo, 'Storia del costume', pp. 183–202.

²⁵ Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie', p. 232 n. 55.

²⁶ Andrea Zanini, 'La superba: its institutions and fortunes', in Jonathan Bober, Piero Boccardo, and Franco Boggero, eds., *A superb baroque: art in Genoa, 1600–1750* (Washington, DC, 2020), p. 10.

²⁷ For documents attesting to breaches of sumptuary law, see Kovsi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, pp. 152–60.

Table 1. Sumptuary denouncements by gender

Men	138
Women	162
Total	300

Source: Senato (Sala Senarega), Miscellanea del Senato 1068, Archivio di Stato di Genova.

Table 2. Sumptuary denouncements by infringement type

	Men	Women
Clothing	109	64
Jewellery	16	38
Forbidden number of servants	0	57
Funeral processions	0	3
Artisans making illegal garments	10	0

Source: see [Table 1](#).

Table 3. Number of repeat offenders by gender

Men	18
Women	20
Total	38

Source: see [Table 1](#).

Table 4. Number of sumptuary denouncements by profession

Unspecified – noble	287
Lawyer	2
Doctor	1
Artisans (tailors, embroiderers, etc.)	10

Source: see [Table 1](#).

alongside further textual and visual evidence, this article reveals the values and social currencies of clothing for Genoese men and women, and the divergence between prescription and practice. An excursus of a year in the life of a cosmopolitan city and its sartorial concerns provides crucial insights into

broader questions of material consumption, gendered performance, and practices of display.

As this article thus demonstrates, sumptuary laws only evidence the prescriptive half of the story. In reality, the situation was considerably more complex, and gendered dressing was unique to a city and its cultural and political character. This article provides a critical analysis of the denouncements in tandem with the sumptuary laws in place in Genoa in 1598. In doing so, I assess the extent to which Genoa's citizens experienced concessions and constraints to sartorial displays of masculinities and femininities and assert that sumptuary denouncements reveal the system's only partial success in limiting modes of identity expression and its associated expenditure. By focusing on the city's sumptuary circumstances, I argue that Genoese men and women actively adhered to and transgressed sartorial codes to assist in the process of forging masculine and feminine identities.

This article is comprised of three parts. The first section begins with an overview of the cultural, economic, and political forces that shaped the development of sumptuary laws in Genoa. The second section undertakes an appraisal of Genoa's 1594 sumptuary legislation (which was still in effect in 1598) and the trends in material restrictions that responded to larger moral, ideological, and cultural fluctuations. The final section analyses denouncements from 1598 to explore the form and materiality of forbidden garments and accessories. In doing so, I demonstrate that sumptuary laws could profoundly impact conceptions of masculinity and femininity in relation to social position. With a reconsideration of Genoese sumptuary laws and their application in daily life through the lens of gendered, sociological, and material culture theory, this article seeks to recover the forces that shaped the lives of Genoa's citizens and their material worlds.

II

Anxieties about ostentatious dress were deep-rooted in Genoa; it was the first European city to issue sumptuary legislation in 1157 – seventy-two years before any other centre – forbidding the use of sable to trim garments.²⁸ Documentation for the years between 1157 and 1402 is undiscovered or lost, yet like many other Italian centres, Genoa witnessed a rapid firing of laws in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁹ It is no coincidence that the issuing of sumptuary legislation increased in frequency alongside the acceleration of international trade and production and the unprecedented expansion of European clothing cultures. Never before had such a large portion of the population had access to, and funds to spend on, a plethora of material goods from Europe and beyond.³⁰ With their new clothing forms and materials, early

²⁸ Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 8.

²⁹ Eighteen laws were published between 1402 and 1494 and twenty laws published between 1506 and 1594, without reprintings of previous issuances. See Belgrano, *Della vita privata*, p. 194 n. 3; Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, pp. 28–9.

³⁰ Rublack, *Dressing up*.

modern people, as Ulinka Rublack asserts, ‘performed ideas of elegance, civility, and ingenuity through a host of decorative, fashionable objects, often expressing them in embodied ways through new practices of adornment, comportment, and spectacle’.³¹

Such practices of adornment and spectacle were a frequent occurrence in Genoa. The affluent and cosmopolitan city had been built on the fortunes of noble merchant-bankers who financed the imperial machinations of Habsburg Spain and acted as key figures in Iberian-Atlantic trade.³² Commonly compared to a theatre in contemporary accounts, the city’s natural geography facilitated rituals of display, with ‘streets and buildings so ranged one above another, as our seats are in play-houses’.³³ Accordingly, the citizens inhabiting this city-theatre were intensely preoccupied with self-definition through material consumption and spectacle, much to the dismay of the *Magistrato delle Pompe*.³⁴ The Genoese were highly dress-literate and held sophisticated understandings of the cultural, ideological, political, and economic currency of clothes; they knew that ‘the putting on of clothes...[was] the means by which a person was given a form, a shape, a social function, a depth’.³⁵ Moreover, as the city’s nickname *La Superba* might suggest, the Genoese were proudly attired: English traveller Richard Lassels (1603–68) was amazed by Genoese sartorial splendour, writing in his travel diary of 1670 that ‘If ever I saw a Town with its Holy-day clothes always on, it was Genoa’.³⁶ This reputation took pictorial form in contemporaneous images of Genoese dress, where elegant jewellery and gloves, costly velvets, and brightly hued ensembles defined the Genoese style (Figure 1). Evidently there was a disconnect between the government’s desire for curbing luxury consumption, and the clothing practices of Genoa’s citizens.

From the beginning of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth, Genoa published thirty-eight sumptuary laws to reinforce the social norms that excessive consumption threatened by regulating ‘manufacturing systems and moral economies via the medium of expenditure and consumption’.³⁷ Yet,

³¹ Ulinka Rublack, ‘Befeathering the European: the matter of feathers in the material Renaissance’, *American Historical Review*, 126 (2021), pp. 19–53, at p. 19.

³² At the beginning of the seventeenth century, 800 nobles were listed in Genoa’s *Libro d’Oro*, a register of the aristocracy. Between 1593 and 1630, the wealth of Genoa’s nobility quadrupled, from roughly 40 million to 160 million lire. Edoardo Grendi, *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi: politica, carità e commercio fra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna, 1987), pp. 8–34.

³³ John Evelyn, *Diary and correspondence of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray (London, 1854), p. 172.

³⁴ The 1594 reform provides some detail on the organization and structure of the *Magistrato*. The office was comprised of five senior noble citizens over the age of forty who were elected by the government’s Most Serene College and Minor Council and who served for fifteen months. Their numbers were bolstered by six officers on horseback who circulated the city in pairs. Officers were obliged to stop citizens in breach of the law and report infringements. *Capitoli et Nuove Riforme Fatte circa le Pompe*, 1594, Miscellanea del Senato 1069, Senato (Sala Senarega), ASG (hereafter *Capitoli e Nuove Riforme*).

³⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance clothing and the materials of memory* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 2.

³⁶ Richard Lassels, *The voyage of Italy* (London, 1686), p. 83.

³⁷ Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 4.



Figure 1. Lucas de Heere (1534–84), Genoese nobleman and noblewoman, in *Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre...*, fo. 19r, watercolour illustration, sixteenth century, Ghent University Library. Image in the public domain.

lawmakers were engaged in a fruitless task. Legislation dictated that luxurious clothing was forbidden; yet clothing had become a ‘key aspirational good’;³⁸ the wide availability, diversity, and powerful symbolic meaning of clothing

³⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

secured its place as a crucial facet of early modern culture. Furthermore, the government's desire to curb spending disregarded the interests of local artisans fabricating and selling forbidden items and thus was, paradoxically, detrimental to the economy. Finally, luxury goods represented a double-edged sword requiring constant negotiation from governments and citizens alike. When exploited by the government, luxury materials embodied the wealth and magnificence of the state; yet when consumed by private individuals, it could be associated with inappropriate personal advancement and moral weakness.³⁹ As the Genoese state was managed by wealthy private citizens, luxury clothes posed a particular issue; the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate consumption was perpetually undermined. Consequently, sumptuary legislation was unable to function effectively in this ambiguous environment.

The issue of luxury was particularly troublesome throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At this time, an investment in expensive clothing was part of a wider uptrend of material consumption among Genoa's patricians, fuelled by the immense wealth amassed from extensive financial and mercantile activities throughout the century.⁴⁰ The expression of prosperity, status, and honour through rich dress was crucial to the elite, and they seemingly chose the path of ostentatious consumption over moderation as often as possible. However, for their detractors, such material goods were sterile investments that did not generate further capital.⁴¹ For a nation built on trade and reinvestment, this stagnation caused significant concern. Nobleman Andrea Spinola (1562–1631) lamented his countrymen's increasingly conspicuous consumption, which he considered an unfortunate consequence of Spain's influence over the Republic.⁴² A similar renouncement of luxury goods had long been mirrored in sumptuary laws. The preamble to the 1449 issuing bemoaned the fact that 'a great quantity of money which is being kept dead and wrapped up in clothing and jewels, converted to trade might bring great returns and profits'.⁴³ Sumptuary laws thus attempted to tackle a uniquely Genoese problem: what could be done if a nation of traders no longer wished to trade, and instead tied up capital in sumptuous clothing? Unsurprisingly, with the excess of the sixteenth century came the most dramatic uptick in sumptuary legislation. Twenty laws were published in Genoa from 1506 to 1594, ranging from two to twenty-seven pages in length, including a preamble outlining the public need for limitations on luxury (Figure 2).

Unlike other European centres, Genoese laws did not partition citizens by class; what was prohibited for nobles was equally prohibited for commoners

³⁹ Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, p. 8; Patricia Allerston, 'Wordly goods in Renaissance Venice', in Evelyn Welch and Michelle O'Malley, eds., *The material Renaissance* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 22–9.

⁴⁰ Alongside clothing, investments included large-scale building projects, art collections, and interior decoration. See Piero Boccardo et al., *L'età di Rubens: dimore, committenti e collezionisti genovesi* (Milan, 2004).

⁴¹ Zanini, 'La superba', p. 11.

⁴² Spinola, 'Dizionario', 106–B12, ASCG.

⁴³ Owen Hughes, 'Sumptuary law and social relations', p. 77.



Figure 2. *Capitoli et Nuove Riforme Fatte circa le Pompe 1594*, Miscellanea del Senato 1069, Senato (Sala Senarega). With permission, Archivio di Stato di Genova. Photo by the author.

as legislation addressed 'all citizens, of any status, rank, age and condition'.⁴⁴ Legislation instead emphasized gender difference. As will be discussed below, the laws expose concerns about the perceived deterioration of

⁴⁴ 'tutti li Cittadini di qual si voglia stato, grado, età, e conditione'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

masculinities through extravagant dress. It was women, however, who provoked considerable apprehension around female agency and its material expression. As was also seen across Italy, sixteenth-century legislation in the so-called *paradiso delle donne* demonstrated an increasingly fierce interest in the virtues of women, as they might be expressed through clothing. High-born women were expected to exhibit chastity, which ensured the purity of their husbands' lineage. Unlike their male counterparts, women's immodest clothing had 'practical implications for the honour of the household'.⁴⁵ In Christian thought, opulent dress was a contemporary manifestation of Eve's original sin and the resulting original clothing. Thus, sumptuary laws 'clearly argue that women's fallen nature disposed her towards unbridled excess in apparel'.⁴⁶ This thinking also brought gender into dialogue with the sin of *luxuria*. In Veblenian terms, women's clothing surpassed men's in its ability to exhibit the wearer's 'abstinence from productive employment'.⁴⁷ These ideas were expressed in Genoa, where female vanity jeopardized the stability of the Republic itself. In an oration delivered in 1536, Chancellor of the Republic Paolo Partenopeo (fl. 1536) lamented the richness of Genoese feminine dress:

What is the use of so many stage hats, so many nets, so many theatrical robes and long skirts? Why so many jewels and necklaces? Why so many grotesque fringes? What is the point of the indiscriminate squandering of so much gold and silver? And yet, now, so much luxury, so many delights, so much debauchery and excesses flourish in Genoa, that it seems as if pleasure has here...its kingdom. By now, if you do not repress women's pride, if you do not curb their recklessness, if you do not tame their brazenness and luxury, I foresee that our Republic will soon come to an end.⁴⁸

As such, sumptuary laws contributed to a larger discourse surrounding the worth of women and their consumption practices. The 1594 legislation was no exception, yet it was also considerably more lenient than previous laws, perhaps pre-empting the eventual abolishment of sumptuary legislation forty-one years later.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class: an economic study of institutions* (New York, NY, 1899), p. 171.

⁴⁸ Quorsum enim spectant tot scaenicae mitrae, tot reticulae, tot histrionicae vestes, tam longa syrmatæ? Quorsum tot monilia, tot torques? Quorsum tot mimicae lacinae? Quid sibi vult tanti auri et argenti indiscriminata profusio. At nunc tantus luxus, tantæ delitiæ, tot mollicies et intemperantiæ Genuæ vigent, ut hic sedes, hic domicilium, hic regnum voluptatum esse videatur. Iam, nisi mulierem superbiam retunderitis, temeritatem compresseritis, imprudentiam atque luxus coercueritis, fore video ut brevi Respublica nostra sit peritura. Quoted in Belgrano, *Della vita privata*, p. 197.

⁴⁹ For a survey of the laws from 1506 to 1715, see Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie'.

III

Like other Italian cities, Genoa's *Magistrato delle Pompe* was continually pre-occupied with the material quality of clothes; the fibres used, the weave chosen, and the adornment applied were subject to restriction.⁵⁰ Building upon the 1582 laws, the reformed, eight-page *Capitoli* prohibited women from wearing silk clothes unless made from 'black cloth, flat satin in black, white, yellow, green, dark blue, red, purple, or tawny (*leonate*) in solid colours, and not mixed'.⁵¹ To clarify the specifications, 'damask and taffeta of the same colours' appear at the end the list. *Ungaresche*, or jackets, could be made of black, printed, or pleated *burato*, a matte silk and wool mixed cloth.⁵² All velvet garments were strictly forbidden; a figured velvet cloth that that pictured in [Figure 3](#) thus would have been a double contravention. Wool clothing could be any colour, and cotton or glazed linen garments could – along with the colours allowed for silk – be white, fawn, rose, and porcelain.⁵³ While these concessions provided women with a solid spectrum of hues to choose from, the laws also dictated that from 15 October to 15 May married women were to wear black outward unless attending a wedding. Although this dictate may evidence legislators' interest in functional seasonal dressing, prescribing warmer colours for colder months, the sombreness of black also befitted wives' honourable status in society. Further, this rule was likely not heavily criticized, as black was fashionable and highlighted pale, bright skin, a crucial marker of feminine beauty.⁵⁴ On the other hand, new brides enjoyed significant concessions, reflecting the gravity of this shift in social status. For the month of their wedding, brides could wear jewelled hair ornaments and damask, satin, or white taffeta clothing. For three months after the wedding, they were permitted to wear any of the colours granted in the reform ([Figure 4](#)).⁵⁵ An illustration of a Genoese bride in the album amicorum of Dutch collector Bernardus Paludanus (1550–1633) pictures the splendour of bridal fashions. The bride wears a heavily pleated

⁵⁰ A similar phenomenon occurred in Padua. See Molà and Riello, 'Against the law', p. 222.

⁵¹ 'teletta nera, raso piano di color nero, bianco, giallo, verde, turchino, carmesile, morello, o leonato, semplice però, e non misti, damasco e taffetale degli istessi colori'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁵² 'Che si consenta il potersi portare le vesti, ò sia, ungresche, che sono di velo, ò sia burato negro stampate, ò sij piegate.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁵³ Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie', p. 214.

⁵⁴ On black clothing in early modern Europe, see John Harvey, *Men in black* (London, 1995); José Luis Colomer, 'Black and the royal image', in José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo, eds., trans. Jenny Dodman, *Spanish fashion at the courts of early modern Europe* (2 vols., Madrid, 2014), I, pp. 77–112; For feminine beauty ideals and clothing, see Erin Griffey, "'The rose and lily queen': Henrietta Maria's fair face and the power of beauty at the Stuart court', *Renaissance Studies*, 35 (2021), pp. 811–36.

⁵⁵ 'che per un mese dal giorno, che vanno a marito, ò che escono fuori in abito di spose possono portare le solite brille in capo, e vestire di sopra una veste di damasco, raso, ò taffetale di color bianco, con la guarnitione però regolata come sopra; e per altri tre mesi susseguenti possono vestire delli colori nella presente riforma concessi'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.



Figure 3. Crimson silk ciselé velvet, 1550–75, silk, inv. 592–1884. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

gown with embellished sleeves while a dark-skinned liveried page carries her train behind her.⁵⁶

The 1594 laws indicate a growing trend for mixing colours in garments and the increasing use of half-tint dyes to create novel, lighter hues. As Chiara Buss has shown, the chromatic possibilities of dyed cloth widened significantly during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁵⁷ Cheaper and less-saturated fabrics represented not only lower costs and faster production times for manufacturers, but also spurred wearers to update their wardrobes more frequently. While rapid consumption was not desired by the *Magistrato*, half-tints used considerably less dye than fully saturated cloths and thus could also offer more modest options in the face of excessive spending. Some colour combinations within one garment were also now permitted,

⁵⁶ On race, femininity, and servitude in Genoa, see Ana Howie, 'Materializing the global: textiles, color, and race in a Genoese portrait by Anthony van Dyck', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 76 (2023), pp. 589–644.

⁵⁷ Chiara Buss, 'Half-tints in Italy in 1628: an unusual book of samples from the Milan State Archives', in Thomas Ertl and Barbara Karl, eds., *Inventories of textiles: textiles in inventories* (Vienna, 2017), p. 173.



Figure 4. Bernardus Paludanus (1550–1633), *Sposa di Genoa* in his *Album amicorum*, fo. 285r, National Library of the Netherlands. Image in the public domain.

including white with rose, yellow, red, or wine-colour (*avinato*). Mixes without white were forbidden, however; these were likely considered immodest and unsuitable for honourable women. Clothing could also be decorated with up to three centimetres of silk lace trim.⁵⁸ In a final concession, slashed garments

⁵⁸ 'si consenta...alle guarnitioni de vesti, oltre le pimpinelle l'esser accompagnate da trenini, ò pizzetti di seta, come più tornerà commodo, e che la detta guartione possano essere di larghezza un'ottauo di palmo'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

were permitted.⁵⁹ There was no limit to the number of garments one could own, nor the number of metres of fabric used to make a dress.⁶⁰ The 1594 laws also allowed for significant concessions in line with new fashions. By the late sixteenth century, lettuce ruffs made of several yards of expensive lace or net had become popular among both men and women, yet Genoa's magistrates did not restrict their size or material; they simply were not to have any silverwork or goldwork.⁶¹

The provisions for menswear were less articulated than those for women and were lifted directly from the legislation published twelve years prior, thus reproducing ideas about the stability of men's fashions.⁶² Inside the city walls, men aged fifteen and over were required to wear black, knee-length outer garments. These could be made of wool, *filozella* (a lower-quality silk waste cloth), taffeta (a lighter and cheaper silk weave), or silk and wool mixes, and were to have no embellishments.⁶³ Decorative borders were to be of the same fabric as the garment, and only black wool or taffeta could be used for lining. Floor-length surcoats, also called *ungaresche*, could be any colour if made of wool, and could be woven with velvet stripes that measured less than $\frac{1}{4}$ *palm* (6cm) in width.⁶⁴ Other garments, including long and short jackets, jerkins, hose, and breeches could be made of black wool, silk, or leather without ornament. When outside the city walls, however, coloured garments could be worn.⁶⁵ All other new fashions were strictly prohibited.

These prescriptions did much to set expectations for masculine identities, and not only in Genoa: across Europe, men's sombre garments symbolized stability and gravitas befitting their rational minds and civic duties.⁶⁶ As Gerry Milligan has argued, an extensive literary tradition defined the parameters of sartorial masculinity. Eschewing these prescriptions could lead to the failure

⁵⁹ 'che le vesti possano esser piccate, ò taiucate'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶⁰ In 1512, only three silk outfits, and four silk sleeves had been permitted. See Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie', p. 207.

⁶¹ 'Collaretti e sciorette non habbino altra limitatione di misura, e lavoro, consentendo, che possono portarsi di quella qualità, e foggia, che più a loro piacerà, pur che non vi sie ne oro, ne argento in qual si vogli modo'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶² *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶³ 'E tutti I Cittadini...che havranno l'eta di anni quindeci siano obligati portrare sempre, che faranno fuori delle loro habitationi...la veste di sopra di color nero, lunga almeno fino alla metà del ginocchio; la quale possa esser di ogni sorte di lana, filozella, talletta, ò taffeta, ò sia lana, e filozella miche, ouero seta, e lana mischie...senza alcuno ornamento intorno.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶⁴ 'per le robe, ò siano ongaresche lunghe fino a piedi...che faranno di lana ogni colore, e poterli mettere ornamento sopra una lista di veluto, che no passi la larghezza di un quarto di palmo'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶⁵ 'Che si consenta à gli huomini il potersi vestire nelle ville fuori della Città robe longhe...e cosi ogni sorte di calzette, ligami, calzoni, e giupponi di seta...qual si voglia altra cosa di ogni colore.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁶⁶ On black clothing and early modern European masculinities, see Harvey, *Men in black*; Colomer, 'Black and the royal image'; Amalia Descalzo, 'Spanish male costume in the Habsburg period', in Colomer and Descalzo, eds., trans. Dodman *Spanish fashion*, I, pp. 15–38; Currie, *Fashion and masculinity*, pp. 93–108.

of manhood into effeminacy, and, in turn, could provoke civic instability and military loss.⁶⁷ In particular, colour (or lack thereof) was an essential marker of dutiful, stable masculinity. Famously expressed in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528) by Genoese nobleman Ferdinando Fregoso, black was 'more suitable for garments than any other colour. [Black outfits] display that sobriety which the Spanish nation greatly affect, for things external often bear witness to the things within.'⁶⁸ Indeed, the links between Spain and black clothing were pronounced. In Spanish writer Juan Rufo's *Las seiscientas apotegmas* (1596), black was deemed 'the most honest colour'; in 1627, Gonzalo Correas noted that 'in dress [it is] an honourable colour in Spain'.⁶⁹ Under Charles V, who was particularly fond of the hue, black cloth represented 'imperial power [and] a sober gravity consonant with the virtues of temperance and moderation'.⁷⁰ It follows that Spain's associates (including the Genoese) would adopt the fashion for black, marking their allegiance through sartorial signifiers.

Conversely, excessive ornamentation was considered effeminate and a threat to manhood. While Castiglione conceded that 'bright and cheerful colours' and clothing that was 'fringed, showy, and magnificent' was more appropriate for armour and ensembles for 'festivals, games, and masquerades', by 1609 satirist Francisco de Quevedo wrote that, 'some men appear through their finery to be sorry to have been born male. The end result is that their gender is uncertain.'⁷¹ Dressing in sober clothing was therefore vital to expressions of masculine selfhood and honour. Moreover, this mode of dressing was befitting to *negotium* and government duties undertaken in the city. Conversely, extramural villas offered indulgence in the beauty of nature and in time spent in *otium*, away from the demands of urban life. Because of this, villas were considered more feminine in character.⁷² Accordingly, a certain level of sartorial exuberance, which legislation primarily only afforded women, was legally permitted for men when outside the city walls. Genoa's sumptuary laws thus reinforced the standards expected of Genoa's men and bound them tightly to the urban – and suburban – spaces in which they operated.

Much like its predecessors, the 1594 *Capitoli* were heavily preoccupied with the restriction of precious metals and gems for clothing decoration and jewellery for both men and women.⁷³ Throughout the sixteenth century, sumptuary

⁶⁷ Gerry Milligan, 'Aesthetics, dress, and militant masculinity in Castiglione's courtier', in Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *Sex, gender and sexuality in Renaissance Italy* (London, 2019), pp. 141–6.

⁶⁸ Baldassare Castiglione, *The book of the courtier*, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York, NY, 1901), p. 103.

⁶⁹ Colomer, 'Black and the royal image', p. 89.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷¹ Castiglione, *The book of the courtier*, p. 103; Amanda Wunder, 'Spanish fashion and sumptuary legislation from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century', in Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 260.

⁷² Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, trans. and comps., *Women and the visual arts in Italy, c. 1400–1650* (Manchester, 2012), p. 123.

⁷³ For restrictions on jewellery during the sixteenth century, see Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie', pp. 204–18.

laws had grappled with the ever-growing influx of metals and gems into the Republic from the Spanish Americas, Africa, and Asia, at times forbidding all jewellery except for rings.⁷⁴ The 1594 laws echoed previous legislation: most jewellery was forbidden, except for one ring with a stone, plain rings, a gold *dentarolo* (toothpick), simple hoop earrings, and devotional necklaces like crosses or *Agnus dei* without a gold chain.⁷⁵ All kinds of gold or silver buttons, rosettes, and medals were prohibited, as were all gold chains, cords, pendants, bracelets, and 'any other piece of gold or silver...worked with enamel, or *bonino*'.⁷⁶ In an addition to these restrictions, and likely in response to changing fashions, jewellery made with carnelian, lapis lazuli, and agate (both real and imitation) was now forbidden, as were heron feathers, and items perfumed with musk or amber. In an unusual concession, women could wear silver or gold bracelets with a gold clasp or a cameo, if desired.⁷⁷

The 1594 laws also reassert the belief that womenswear was renewed more frequently than menswear. Men's dress reflected a stable masculine internal life. Women's clothing, in contrast, was changeable and subject to the whims of fashion, indicating the instability of the feminine mind; as Cesare Vecellio (c. 1521 – c. 1601) wrote in his widely read costume book *Degli habiti* (1590), women's fashions were 'quick to change, and are more variable than the forms of the moon'.⁷⁸ Sumptuary laws helped to form these assumptions. In legislation, the brief outline of styles, colours, and fabrics permitted for men pales in comparison to the verbose articulation of styles of garments, accessories, and materials for women. The sartorial literacy of Genoese women was therefore crucial, as they needed to understand exactly which garments were forbidden. Indeed, this was partly a response to the issue that women posed for legislators, namely that they actively and regularly updated fashions in order to circumvent the law. With one of the more paradoxical characteristics of sumptuary legislation, the highly specific sartorial vocabulary used to pinpoint prohibited fashions had the reverse effect of creating fashion loopholes.⁷⁹ Indeed, this phenomenon did little to further the government's cause; instead, sumptuary laws unintentionally fuelled fashion innovation as makers and wearers of garments sought new forms and materials undefined by the law; and often these rulebreakers were women.⁸⁰ This represented 'female

⁷⁴ A complete ban on jewellery occurred in 1531 and 1582. See *ibid.*, pp. 209, 217.

⁷⁵ 'Si proibisce à tutti li Cittadini di qal si voglia stato, grado, età, e conditione siano il portare al collo [missing] ornamento, ne sopra le vesti alcuna qualità di oro, ne di argento in bottoni, rosette, medaglie, ne in qual si voglia modo gioie, perle, pietre pretiose, ò margarati, risaluati però gli anelli da portar in dito, ouero al collo le Croci & Agnusdei, che si portano per habito di religione, ò per diuotione; le quali però non possino essere attaccate con catene, ò altra cosa d'oro.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁷⁶ 'Si proibisca tutte le cadene d'oro, cordoni, pendini, brazzali, et ogn'altra cosa d'oro, ò d'argento, che sia lavorato con smalto, ò bonino, consentendo però alli brazzali una sola mappa con una figura d'oro, ò di cameo, con lavoro di smalto, ò bonino.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁷⁷ 'si consentano alle donne i brazzali di granate con una mappa d'oro per brazzale solamente ornata, ò di cameo, ò di lavoro di smalto, e bonino'. *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁷⁸ Cesare Vecellio, *Degli habiti antichi e moderni di diverse parti del mondo* (Venice, 1590), p. 140.

⁷⁹ Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 20.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

ingenuity', as women invented new ways to express their agency and taste through sartorial means.⁸¹ As such, sumptuary laws were necessarily mutable structures that responded to the citizens they sought to manage. This article thus turns to the clashes between individual, gendered agency, and the law as evidenced by the ledger of denouncements.

IV

It has long been argued that sumptuary laws remained unenforced, yet surviving sources indicate that enforcement did indeed occur, though not necessarily in a systematic manner.⁸² The ledger of sumptuary denouncements for the penultimate year of the sixteenth century is a well-preserved document held in Genoa's State Archive (Figure 5). It demonstrates that the law was implemented once it was brought to action. A detailed reading of the ledger uncovers the application and negotiations of the 1594 laws described above, as well as the ways in which gender ideals could materialize both through the wearing of specific garments and the consequences individuals faced for these clothing acts. It contains 286 denouncements, organized alphabetically, which provide detailed insights into the specificities of illegal clothing. Each denouncement records the name and profession of the lawbreaker, if male; women are frequently unnamed and are defined through their relationship with either their husbands or fathers. The records also identify features of the infringing garments, where the wearer was spotted, and how frequently such breaches occurred. Multiple infringements often appear in one denouncement, conveying how the layering of markers of wealth compounded the resulting magnificence of the wearer. Moreover, unlike the Florentine and Paduan prosecutions investigated by Calvi, and Molà and Riello respectively, most offenders in Genoa belonged to noble clans, suggesting that this group was either particularly targeted, or especially prone to breaking the law. Only three entries note a profession; however, in the records the honorific *il Magnifico* is used, suggesting that these individuals may have been newly created, or lesser nobles.

An investigation of the consumption habits and clothing practices recorded in the 1598 ledger demonstrates the importance of luxury spending to the construction and performance of gendered, familial, and social identities within Genoa's urban fabric. Clothing and adornment functioned as a social skin that conveyed a wealth of information about the wearer through a complex material vocabulary. Sumptuary legislation further complicated this phenomenon. Once items or materials were banned by the *Magistrato*, the wearing of illegal garments conveyed that the wearer had prioritized clothing's original material messaging over the dictates of the authorities – and that they could afford to do so. Once an officer had, along with three witnesses, reported an illegal clothing act, the offending citizen would be summoned to court. If the *Magistrato* concluded that the law had indeed been broken, the offending

⁸¹ Cucicea, 'Leggi suntuarie', p. 210.

⁸² Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary law in Italy*, pp. 113–64.

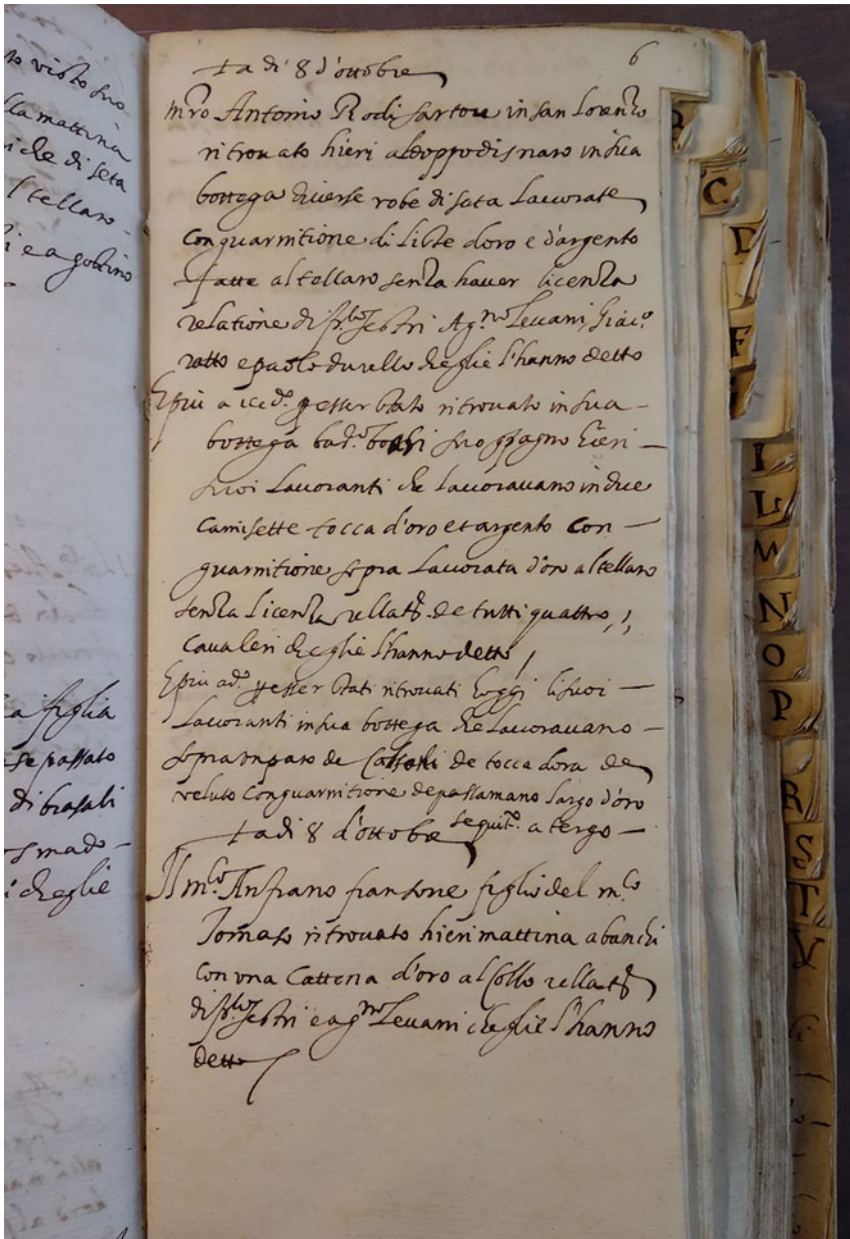


Figure 5. Page from the 1598 ledger of denunciations, Miscellanea del Senato 1068, Senato (Sala Senarega). With permission, Archivio di Stato di Genova. Photo by the author.

garment could be confiscated, and a fine of 5 *scudi* (= 20 *lire*) per garment would be charged, though in actual fact, a much steeper fine of 30 *scudi* could be demanded.⁸³ If a fine was to be paid, one third went straight to the reporting officer's pocket – an incentive for a job well done – and another portion to the *Magistrato delle Poveri*, which looked after the city's poor. In this way, sumptuary legislation directly supplemented the income of the state. The laws thus represented a form of luxury tax, which conceded that the legislation itself was ineffectual.⁸⁴ However, as Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli argues, through this method of taxation, which relied upon the citizenry's unflinching interest in fashionable dress, 'at least a portion of the wealth of the proud, vain, and well-to-do could...be used to pursue the public good'.⁸⁵ An in-depth consideration, then, of exactly which garments were spotted and likely fined reveals much about the attire that Genoese men and women held dear.

The most expensive and ostentatious fabrics and dyes represent the most frequently reported items. Of these, silk clothes stand above the rest. While the 1594 laws conceded that some silk garments could be worn, it was the combination of silk in a forbidden colour, or with a forbidden embellishment that caught the magistrate's eye. In 1598, fifty-seven women were denounced for wearing luxurious garments that combined costly cloth, colour, and decoration. The most visible garments were outerwear like the *ungaresca* and the *camisciotta*, a fitted, full-length gown. The authorities approved of the form of these two garments when made of sanctioned fabrics and colours. Yet, Genoa's women did not adhere to these prescriptions: on 20 June the wife of Bernabe Centurione was spotted near the Strada Nuova, the parade of magnificent palazzi built by the city's nobles, wearing a black and purple silk *ungaresca*; that same day, Gerlamo Scorza's daughter was seen in Piazza Nova in a yellow and porcelain silk *ungaresca*; on 6 August Battista Viale's daughter was stopped for wearing her yellow and wine-coloured *ungaresca*; and on 15 November Giovanni Carrega's daughter was denounced for wearing a silk *ungaresca* in green and yellow in the Ponticello district.⁸⁶ The *camisciotta* was also worn in combined colours on a silk weave. On 31 August, the wife of Fabrizio Pallavicino was spotted in a multi-coloured *camisciotta*, as was the daughter of Paolo Spinola Mongiardino, who was seen on 22 September in the Santa Catalina district in a two-toned silk *camisciotta*.⁸⁷

⁸³ 'Si contrafacienti cadono per ogni volta, che contrafaranno, e per orgni cosa, in che contrafaranno inremissibilmente in pena de scudi cinque d'oro.' *Capitoli e Nuove Reforme*, ASG.

⁸⁴ Riello and Rublack, eds., *The right to dress*, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Muzzarelli, 'Sumptuary laws in Italy', p. 185.

⁸⁶ 'Il M.co Batta Viale esser stata ritrovata sua figlia...con una ongaresca de doi colori cioe giallo e morello ossia avinato'; 'M. Gio Carrega sua figlia vista questa mattina in ponticello con una ungarasca di seta de doi collori cioe verde e gialda.' *Miscellanea del Senato 1598, Sala B Senarega 1068*, ASG (hereafter *Miscellanea del Senato*).

⁸⁷ 'Il M.co Fabritio Pallavicino esser stata vista sua moglie alla mattina a Sto Bart.o delle armenii...con una camiseta de doi colori contro cap.li'; 'Il M.co Paolo Spinola Mongiardino esser stata ritrovata sua figlia ieri mattina in Sta Cattalina con una camiseta de setta de doi colori.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

While the law allowed for colour combinations with white, these women chose much more flamboyant colour mixes. In particular, yellow and wine-colour (a new half-tint) was an incredibly popular pairing among Genoa's younger women. These hues had likely been made from both local and foreign dyestuffs like yellow weld or fustic, and reddish madder or cochineal.⁸⁸ Of the fifty-seven women denounced for illegal clothing, fourteen were stopped for garments in *gialdo e avinato*; of these fourteen, ten were described as the daughters of the person responsible for them, indicating their unmarried and/or minor status. Perhaps, as Evelyn Welch has argued for other sixteenth-century Italian women, through their wearing of certain colours, Genoese women were 'creating very public social identities that both emphasized their status and displayed their connections to other women'.⁸⁹ Their individual and collective identities could thus be forged in relation to advancements in dye technologies and the constant renewal of fashion, which allowed for striking public displays regardless of sumptuary laws.

The wearing of extravagant clothing was not only an act of individual or group expression, however. As the denouncements show, women were frequently identified not by name, but through their relationship with the male relatives whose protection they were under. Any fine accrued was expected to be paid by these men. As such, it is arguable that the burden of representing the family in public was of great significance for women, as their identities were subsumed into those of their husbands and fathers. Women's wearing of exuberant garb in public served to augment the prestige of their families. As this suggests, if caught, the men of the family could probably afford their wives' and daughters' fines.

The three professionals that appear in the register are two lawyers and a doctor. In all three cases, these men's wives were denounced for their apparel. This indicates a desire for upward social mobility among the city's female *popolari*, or middle class, which, much to the magistrates' vexation, could be facilitated through luxury clothing. The wife of doctor Giulio Guastavino was seen on the morning of 4 February in an embroidered silk veil with fringing.⁹⁰ On 12 August, the wife of lawyer Francesco Malfante was seen in Xilia wearing a worked gold chain and diamonds on two fingers. Some time later, she was spotted again in a portico meeting G. Cristoforo Centurione, dressed in a yellow and green silk ensemble.⁹¹ A few weeks later, on 27 August, the wife of lawyer Vincenzo Ligaluppo was seen in Piazza San Lorenzo in a litter (which was also

⁸⁸ Both fustic and American cochineal were imported to Italy from the Americas. Weld and madder could be sourced from Europe. For early modern dyestuffs, see Judith Hofenk de Graaff, *The colourful past: origins, chemistry and identification of natural dyestuffs* (London, 2004).

⁸⁹ Evelyn Welch, 'Art on the edge: hair and hands in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 23 (2009), pp. 241–68, at p. 245.

⁹⁰ 'Il M.co Giulio Guastavino medico aver ritrovato oggi alla mattina da Sto Dom.co Sua moglie con un manto di seta lavorato e fraponente.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

⁹¹ 'Il M.co Francesco Malfante dottor di leggi per esser stata ritrovata Sua moglie...in Xilia con una catena d'oro lavorato e doi diamanti in due ditte...E poi esser stata visto...in uno portico al incontro del G. Cristofforo Centurione con una roba di seta de doi colori cioe giallo et verde.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

forbidden) wearing a two-toned silk outfit. She too was a repeat offender, and also spotted near Piazza San Donato in a two-toned *ungaresca*.⁹² In this instance, Genoa's political structure is significant to interpretations of the denouncements. Genoa's nobility was open; each year a certain number of high-ranking members of the *popolari* could be admitted, if they met the established prerequisites.⁹³ Although difficult to confirm, Lugaluppo, Malfante, and Guastavino may have been recent inductees to the patriciate as they are mentioned with the honorific *il Magnifico*. Given this, their wives may have been actively and repeatedly asserting their new social positions through their dress. Similarly, the flagrant disregard of sumptuary legislation furthered this cause, as it suggested the wearer both did not mind, and could afford to break the law.

Unlike other Italian cities, the denouncements of 1598 demonstrate that it was actually Genoa's men more so than Genoese women who were more likely to wear – or at least to be caught wearing – forbidden clothes. And indeed, Genoese men earned a reputation for extravagant dressing. As is visible in a fresco in Genoa's Museo di Sant'Agostino, a crowd of noblemen richly attired in sky blue, crimson, purple, and white surrounds the figures of Cardinal Pacheco and Doge Giacomo Durazzo (Figure 6). While the fresco commemorates an important political event at which splendid attire would have been expected, the musings of local writer Ansaldo Cebà (1563–1623) evidence that male sartorial display extended into everyday life. As Cebà noted in 1620, the men of Genoa would, when wearing 'breeches *alla Spagnola*, or an embroidered doublet, circulate around the city so sedulously that you can't help bumping into [them] in church, in the square, or on the corner...You needn't think of leaving until you have admired [them] from head to toe.'⁹⁴ Evidently, the men of Cebà's day had inherited a culture of masculine visibility and display, built upon practices of wearing and being seen in specific, meaningful garments that, significantly, did not comply with the legislative prescriptions or conduct literature, but were considerably more flamboyant. On the morning of 11 May, the son of Gio. Pietro Riccardi was seen in Piazza San Lorenzo wearing black satin breeches *alla vallona* and a cassock, covered all over with embroidery;⁹⁵ on 3 October, a nobleman named Giacomo was spotted in San Siro with a black taffeta outfit trimmed with costly lace, embellished with

⁹² 'Il M.co Vincenzo Lugaluppo dottor di leggi p. esser stata ritrovata Sua moglie...sopra la piazza di San Lorenzo in bussola con una roba di seta de doi colori. Item a primo sett.e esser stata ritrovata sua moglie...in bussola presso la piazza de Sto Donato con una ongaresca de doi colori contro cap.li.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

⁹³ Zanini, 'La superba', p. 7. While in theory the nobility was open, the number of new members admitted annually remained low.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Belgrano, *Della vita privata*, p. 174.

⁹⁵ 'Il M.co Gio Pietro Riccardi haver ritrovato oggi alla mattina suo figlio nominato Riccardo in Piazza di S. Lorenzo con un vestito di raso negro cioe calzoni alla valona e cazacha tutti rapontati e ricami.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.



Figure 6. Bernardo Castello (1557–1629), *Doge Giacomo Durazzo Grimaldi leads Cardinal Pacheco to the Doge's Palace*, fresco. Courtesy Museo di Sant'Agostino, Genoa.

gazette, or small decorative coins. A purple cap finished the look.⁹⁶ Clothing and jewellery were also denounced together. Giacomo de Franchi was wearing a black, striped taffeta jerkin trimmed with double-height woven embroidery and a gold chain when he was stopped by officials on 30 June.⁹⁷ Some denouncements in the ledger also provide insights into the social lives of Genoa's citizens. On 28 January, nobleman Angelo Lomellino was spotted on the Strada Nuova. Heading to the residence of Marchese Spinola, he wore long hose and a shirt decorated with bobbin lace braids.⁹⁸ Presumably, Angelo had chosen to wear a sumptuous outfit for an audience with the marquis, as both a mark of respect and of honour. He was one of 103 men denounced that year for excessive apparel.

Denouncements also illustrate that numerous meanings, associations, and social relations could materialize through masculine clothing. On 30 April, Cesaro Semino Seatero was seen in the Focello with a black taffeta cassock and matching breeches, embroidered all over with peacock feathers. The same day, nobleman Lazaro Semino Seatero, presumably related to, and accompanying Cesaro, was also spotted in the Focello wearing a black taffeta cassock and breeches, embroidered with peacock feathers.⁹⁹ With such a recognizable motif embroidered covering their outfits, Lazaro and Cesaro surely were a sight to behold.

⁹⁶ 'Il M.co Giac.o ritrovato...in Sto Siro con un vestitio de taffetale nero tutto guarnito de trenino a schenna presso e lavorato de gazzette in mezzo de detti trenino contra cap.li con cappa de colore morello.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

⁹⁷ 'Il M.co Giacomo de Franchi del M.co Stefano ritrovato...presso banchi...con un coletto de tafetale nero fatto a liste guarnito tutto de trenino doppio e una catena doro al collo.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

⁹⁸ 'Il M.co Ang.lo Lomellino ritrovato hoggi alla mattina presso strada nuova de andava al banelletto del Marchese Spinola con calze insieme camisa di cadeniglia coppa curta.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

⁹⁹ 'Il M.co Cesaro Semino Leatero quale sta dalla porte delli vaccha ritrovato hoggi alla mattina in lo forcello con casacha e calzoni di tafetale negro tutti rapontati e ricamati a occhi di pavone'; 'Il M.co Lazaro Semino Seatero vista dalle porte delle vacche ritrovato oggi alla matina in Lo focello con cazacca e calzoni di taffeta nero tutti rapontati e recamati a occhio de pavone.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

Feathers of all types were prized for their luminosity, vibrant colours, weightlessness, and rarity. They became luxurious and precious fixtures in the fashionable European wardrobe following increased material exchanges with the Americas, Asia, and North and West Africa.¹⁰⁰ Specifically, peacock feathers held dense significations. The plumage embodied royalty and authority in both Christian and Muslim settings, and as a common symbol of eternal life, peacock feathers became highly desirable in late medieval Europe as one of the 'most marvellous and mysterious products of the natural world'.¹⁰¹ Feathers could also signal the masculine virtues of the wearer. As Rublack has shown, in early modern Germany feathered adornments and accessories functioned as makers and markers of male identities, carrying connotations of military prowess, gallantry, masculine daring, and sexual energy.¹⁰² Coincidentally, Cesaro and Lazaro may have had first-hand knowledge of German soldiers, as an army of *Tedeschi* was employed by the Genoese government to provide security and pomp at official ceremonies.¹⁰³ Perhaps inspired by these men, Cesaro and Lazaro sought to emulate their extravagant and symbolically potent fashions.

Interestingly, as Stephan Hanß has noted, in Spain 'featherworkers cited socially restricted material practices [like metal thread embroidery in their work] and, thus, turned...featherwork into precious luxury'.¹⁰⁴ As the laws in place in 1598 prohibited the wearing of feathers, this citation was amplified in Genoa. Lazaro and Cesaro arguably sought to simultaneously harness the agency of feathers while also sidestepping the restrictive sumptuary laws by translating the gendered, social, and material meanings of real peacock feathers into their embroidered outfits. Moreover, the repetition of embroideries suggests that both men likely patronized the same artisan, and that the motif on their clothing may have been particularly associated with their family. This highly intricate design also showcased the material knowledge and technical skill of the artisan, and the splendour of the materials used to mimic the magnificent chromatic effects of the peacock's plumage. As such, at the risk of being fined, these men favoured the display of wealth, masculinity, authority, and familial honour through the particular means of dress. It is also amusingly fitting that Lazaro and Cesaro were denounced wearing a symbol that also was associated with excessive pride and vanity.

Along with opulent clothing, jewellery made from precious metals and gems was highly significant to the Genoese as direct materializations of wealth. It thus follows that jewels, which had been persistently policed since the medieval period, appear frequently in the denouncements of 1598. While men were more likely to be stopped for excessive dress, women were frequently

¹⁰⁰ Rublack, 'Befeathering the European', p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Nile Green, 'Ostrich eggs and peacock feathers: sacred objects as cultural exchange between Christianity and Islam', *Al-Masaq*, 18 (2006), pp. 27–78, at p. 29.

¹⁰² Rublack, 'Befeathering the European', p. 24.

¹⁰³ The *Tedeschi* are commonly mentioned in the *Libro Cerimoniale Primo*, 1588–1613, Archivio Segreto 474, ASG.

¹⁰⁴ Stephan Hanß, 'Feathers and the making of luxury experiences at the sixteenth-century Spanish court', *Renaissance Studies*, 37 (2023), pp. 399–438, at p. 419.

reported for luxurious jewellery, which was a vital component of meaningful fashion. For women in particular, the symbolic valences of certain stones and gems were essential to the expression of gendered virtues. In a tradition dating back to Pliny's *Natural history*, pearls, for example, were seen as feminine in character and could connote purity, and inner and outer beauty; their translucent, luminous textures complimented the healthy, glowing skin of their wearers.¹⁰⁵ Pearls thus befitted the fairer sex; indeed, ten of the forty-one women stopped for illegal jewellery were sporting pearls. Moreover, the flat expanses of fabric that comprised women's Spanish-style clothing was ideal for displaying ornate jewels. This was likely the rationalization of the wife of Bernardo Cornero, who stepped out on 2 June wearing a pair of gold bracelets with cameos, a diamond on her right hand and two rings on her left, and a gold chain at her neck from which hung a cross with a figure of Christ.¹⁰⁶ Not all women who were denounced were dressed quite this extravagantly, however; the daughter of nobles Antonio and Faustina Vivaldi was seen on 26 August at San Lazzaro wearing a pair of pearl earrings, as was the daughter of noblewoman Marietta Ravana the following week.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Genoese women compounded the material and social value of their dress by layering luxurious items. The daughter of nobleman Gio. Battista Carbonara, Marietta, was found in the Maddalena district on 30 April in a litter, wearing a satin *ungaresca* trimmed with a gold fringe and a gold woven necklace.¹⁰⁸ Women could be denounced for new and fashionable jewellery items. The *randiglia*, or metal support that propped up stylishly large ruffs, became an item of jewellery itself and was often decorated with precious metals and charms. This excessive decoration was prohibited. Thus, on 28 April and a few weeks later on 17 May, nobleman Fabrizio Spinola found his two daughters at the Ponte de l'Aqua. Both times, each daughter was wearing a *randiglia* with gold charms supporting lace ruffs, likely similar to that seen in the portrait of Genoese noblewoman Veronica Spinola Serra (Figure 7).¹⁰⁹ As is visible in the portrait, such accessories encircled the head with delicate points of lace and quivering golden spangles, creating an affective, sensorially engaging appearance.

¹⁰⁵ Paradoxically, pearls were also associated with feminine vice, moral decay, and rash behaviour. For pearls in the early modern imagination, see Molly A. Warsh, *American baroque: pearls and the nature of empire, 1492–1700* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018), pp. 12–30.

¹⁰⁶ 'M. Bernardo Cornero...haver ritrovata questa mattina Sua moglie in piazza nova con un paro de brazzali d'oro doppi con due teste per brazzali e un diamante dalla mano desra e due anelle dalla mano sinistra con cordone d'oro al colo grosso con una croce pur d'oro con un cristo sopra di relevo.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

¹⁰⁷ 'La M.ca Faustina moglie delle Antonio Vivaldo aver ritrovato sua figlia...da Sto Lazzaro in leticcha...con un paro de pendini de perle all'orecchie'; 'La M.ca Marietta Ravana esser stata ritrovata sua figlia...dal ospitale al doppio disnaro con uno paro di pendini doro con perle all'orecchie.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

¹⁰⁸ 'Il M.co Gio.batta Carbonara haver ritrovato questa mattina sua figlia n.ta marieta dalla madalena in carrega con una ongaresca di raso tutta guarnita di frenne d'oro e sotto colano d'oro, colano de cadeniglia.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.

¹⁰⁹ 'Il M.co Fabrizio Spinola haver ritrovato oggi...sue due figlie dal ponte de l'acqua...con un regicollare d'oro con ciambrette doro per ognuna di loro et un colaro di cadeniglia picetti longhi ognuna di loro.' *Miscellanea del Senato*, ASG.



Figure 7. Guiliam van Deynum (c. 1575 – c. 1624), *Veronica Spinola Serra*, 1610, oil on canvas, 105 x 85cm. Courtesy Galleria Nazionale della Liguria a Palazzo Spinola, Genoa.

Wearing their glittering gems and jewels at the city's bustling port provided the Spinola daughters a prime opportunity to flaunt their personal tastes, as well as the wealth of their family.

According to the ledger, jewellery represented an important gendered divide; it was firmly in women's domain as only eight men were denounced for wearing jewels. Most commonly, the infringing item was a gold chain; Cesare Balbi, Filippo Saluzzo, and Gio. Giacomo Spinola were all reported in August 1598 for wearing such an item.¹¹⁰ Genoese men also had a predilection for solid gold buttons: Stefano Spinola was spotted on 12 August near the

¹¹⁰ 'La M.ca Battina Balbi esser stato ritrovato Suo figlio n.to Cesare...in lo forcello alla mattina con una catena d'oro al collo'; 'Il M.co Gio Filippo Saluzzo esser stato ritrovato ieri presso il palazzo

cathedral of San Lorenzo sporting a striped silk doublet with solid gold buttons.¹¹¹ Six days later, Filippo Merello was also reported for wearing solid gold buttons, this time sewn to a striped, coloured silk jacket.¹¹² The relative modesty of men's jewellery might reflect ideals of masculine sobriety and moderation in dress. Yet, when detail is given in the denouncements about the rest of the men's garb, it is apparent that simple – though costly – jewellery was frequently worn with colourful, luxury clothing. Genoa's men consciously ignored the warnings of writers like Sabba da Castiglione (1480–1554), who implored men to 'Shun all signs of excess and showy ostentation in your dress and hosiery...and other conceits and frivolities of this corrupt and foolish world, as they are not fitting to your situation or condition.'¹¹³ Evidently, contemporary fears about the effeminacy of luxury dress were not great enough for Genoa's men to abandon their extravagant attire. Giving weight to Currie's assertion that 'male sartorial ideals were often fugitive and contradictory', Genoa's men thus used clothing as a powerful means of materializing various forms of masculinity that existed alongside and apart from cultural and legal prescriptions.¹¹⁴

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In 'Commodities and the politics of value', anthropologist Arjun Appadurai conceptualizes a 'fashion system' as an 'ever-changing universe of commodities' that exists in opposition to a 'license system', in which permission is required for the use of certain goods.¹¹⁵ Expanding upon this, Beverly Lemire has shown that contests between the two systems were a defining feature of the early modern fashion landscape, as governments attempted (and mostly failed) to maintain control over citizens' clothing consumption.¹¹⁶ Genoa's sumptuary laws and denouncements bring to life the clashing of these two oppositional forces. An investigation of these forces reveals that it was not simply the wearing of fashionable clothing that represented a higher need for the Genoese. Rather, it was imperative to be seen by others and wearing particular garments, despite – or because of – the risk of prosecution. In Genoa, public dressing was intrinsic to rituals of self-expression and sociability. The Genoese had a sophisticated approach to the social usage of clothing, and

del criminale con una catena d'oro al collo; 'Il M.co Gio. Giac.o Spinola ritrovato presso Sto Luca alla mattina...con una catena d'oro al collo.' *Miscellanea del Senato, ASG.*

¹¹¹ 'Il M.co Steffano Spinola ritrovato...sopra la piazza di Sto Lorenzo con un giuppone de tela di seta rigato guarnito con bottoni doro massissi.' *Miscellanea del Senato, ASG.*

¹¹² 'Il M.co Filippo Merello...ritrovato...dalla piazza de Sta Maria Incoronata alla mattina con un giuppone di seta rigato de piu colori guarnito de bottoni doro massissi.' *Miscellanea del Senato, ASG.*

¹¹³ Quoted in Currie, *Fashion and masculinity*, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', p. 25, quoted in Beverly Lemire, *Global trade and the transformation of consumer cultures: the material world remade, c. 1500–1820* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 91.

¹¹⁶ Lemire, *Global trade*, p. 91.

they harnessed the agency of their dress in daily life. Moreover, they managed to do so despite hundreds of years of restrictive sumptuary laws. The influence of these laws on practices of dressing should not be overlooked, however. This legislation directly impacted the sartorial, financial, and social lives of Genoa's citizens.

Examining the sumptuary developments in Genoa alongside those in Padua and Florence brings into focus detailed legislative and enforcement initiatives that evidence a wider preoccupation with clothing, social order, and morality across Italy. In Calvi's words, these initiatives were 'caught between local particularities and general circumstances'.¹¹⁷ Each city experienced a unique trajectory, yet was located on or connected to a major port that enjoyed an influx of material goods, and the wealth these goods generated. It follows that these places moulded societies that were particularly invested in conspicuous consumption. Officials in Genoa, Padua, and Florence therefore employed similar means of social control to mitigate tensions that arose from broader economic and cultural shifts. Thinking critically about sumptuary legislation, its enforcement, and daily experiences of enforcement thus allows us to further unpick the complex intertwining of material culture, social classification, and economies of appearances in early modern Italy.

Sumptuary laws aimed to solidify gendered notions of consumption, display, and propriety. By policing garment forms, materials, colours, and accessories, legislators sought to alleviate the state's anxieties around gender and social duty by defining how men and women presented in public. The denouncement system then enforced the word of the law, though with limited success. A close reading of the 1598 ledger of denouncements exposes the distance between legislation and practice, and enriches understandings of the social, economic, and gendered aspects of material consumption and display. While women faced the most articulated sumptuary restriction, contrary to traditional scholarship on sumptuary laws, it was indeed Genoese men who were more likely to face punishment. Proudly attired in their finery, Genoese men used the city's streets and piazzas as their runways. Women, too, were luxuriously dressed. Often clothed in bright colours and glittering jewellery, Genoese women, though they held less freedom to operate in public, displayed their wealth and their families' honour through their dressed bodies when negotiating the city's public spaces. The differences in infringements between men and women reveal important insights into prescribed gender dynamics of early modern Italy. In their flashy clothing and ostentatious jewellery, women risked being overly visible in the public realm and immodest in appearance. On the other hand, men seemingly favoured surface embellishments including embroidery, braiding, and spangles, and thus veered dangerously close to effeminacy through their ornamentation. Nonetheless, as this article has demonstrated, Genoa's men and women forged their masculine and feminine selfhoods both in relation to and despite the city's sumptuary legislation. Their sartorial choices signalled their social standing, social groups, and familial identities in ways that were easily legible to observant onlookers.

¹¹⁷ Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza', p. 479.

Through a gendered and sociological reading of sumptuary legislation along with the remnants of its system of enforcement, this article has therefore shed important light upon on the sensibilities and preoccupations of Genoese society, and the contours of the material world they inhabited.

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