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Round Table comment.

Fashion as an economic engine: continuity and change

When Marco Belfanti and I proposed the *Settimana* theme of «Fashion as an economic engine» three years ago, our main aim was to highlight how fashion by itself could stimulate economic transformations, not only indirectly through changes in, for example, textile manufactures. I am pleased to see that our expectations have been more than met in the array of excellent papers that have been presented. My remarks, organized according to the three major points in the Call for Papers, focus especially on continuity and change between the medieval and early modern periods and pose further questions that we should consider. As a medievalist, I am especially struck by how often developments characterized as new in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can also be identified in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, even though these developments may have been more intense and rapid in the later centuries. Here I am also picking up on Professor Muzzarelli's arguments (this volume) that medieval developments in fashion represented the beginning of the road to modernity.

Innovations in products and processes

Similarities more than differences characterized medieval and early modern innovations in the production of textiles, which all required capital investment and yielded cost reductions and improvements in quantity and quality. In both periods, knowledge transfer from immigrants – who were sometimes deliberately recruited for their technical skills – could play a crucial role. Most technological innovations, whether the horizontal loom, new tailoring techniques, lacemaking, or the use of New World dyestuffs, are imprecisely dated developments that took some time to realize fully. Other changes singled out in the early modern period, such as the shift to lighter, cheaper, and less durable textiles; to mixed-fibre fabrics; and to linen underwear, all originated in the late Middle Ages. But a break in the traditional process of technological innovation did occur in the second half of the eighteenth century when complementary 'inventions' such as the spinning genny, water frame, and spinning mule can be attributed to named inventors at specific times and locations. These and other inventions such as the mechanized looms radically improved the production and quality of textiles in laying the foundation for the industrial revolution.

There are interesting questions to ask about the motivating factors behind these innovations across time. Convincing arguments have been made for how changing

patterns of consumption stimulated technical innovation in the eighteenth century, but were the general contours of innovation all that different in the earlier and later centuries? There are medieval parallels to the quickening pace of adaptation and invention; to the power of choice among consumers as the variety of fabrics, colors, and shapes proliferated; and to the impact of multiple, global forces shaping both supply and demand. Are the differences mainly those of degree? Perhaps this is a question that can be revisited at the 2022 *Settimana* on «The knowledge economy: innovation, productivity and economic growth».

Product innovation has been a major theme in the conference papers, with in-depth analysis of changes in weaving, cut, shape, color, fibre content, and fabrics, although the focus has been more on demand than on supply, and rather less has been said about economic stimulants such as state fiscal policies and rising standards of living, although these factors have received considerable attention in the past. If we stand back and assess what prompted innovations in the types of garments being produced, however, what role should economic historians assign consumer demand compared to supply, and how much weight should we assign to larger political, financial, and demographic trends? Did the balance of these factors differ in the medieval and early modern periods? Did all technical innovations in the production of cloth and clothing lead to fashion innovations?

Commercial strategies

Although the proliferation of prints, costume books, and magazines depicting fashionable dress offered more targeted marketing strategies in early modern than medieval Europe, the retailing venues of markets and shops were largely the same across this entire period. The papers say little about the the role of fairs in fashion, but early modern fairs performed essentially the same functions as the medieval fairs when it came to marketing the cloth that was employed in crafting fashionable garments and accessories. There also seems to be little new evidence about shops or other locations where cloth and clothing were offered for sale. Indeed, I am struck by the similarities in the images that speakers have used to illustrate shops, especially in terms of the overhead or bird's eye views of open marketplaces used in several powerpoints – in fact, these images are very close to what we see even today in the Sunday market in Prato's Piazza del Duomo.

There is, however, perhaps more to say about changes in the experience of shopping over time, whether done by drapers, mercers, and intermediaries seeking textiles and mercery from local, regional, and international suppliers, or by consumers themselves. Scholars have been exploring the contours of pre-modern shopping (for example, Blondé et al. ed. 2006; Welch 2005), but I would like to know more. Did the greater variety of textile and fashion choices in the early modern period fundamentally change how consumers approached shopping for garments and dress accessories? When exactly could a fashion-forward aristocratic lady, or a middling urban guildsman, or a well-off peasant walk into a shop and find ready-made wear? Was that entirely outside our period? Did this type of consumer behavior occur first in big cities or in certain regions?

The speakers have been especially effective in telling us about the sellers and makers of cloth and clothing and how changes in their tasks, guilds, profits, and influence can reflect changes in the production of cloth and clothing, and therefore fashion. Indeed, the history of urban guilds often serves as a lens to track product innovations and consumer behavior in the manufacture and sale of textiles and dress. But can we step back and look at the *longue durée* in a European perspective? Drapers and tailors in thirteenth-century Catalonia sound a lot like their counterparts in England at this time, but by the early sixteenth century the London tailors had become the liveried company of Merchant Taylors, with significant investments in and control of the domestic cloth trade (Davies and Sanders 2004, 55-67; 73-87). The tailors in the provincial English city of Exeter also became wealthy enough to challenge the local mercantile elite in the mid-fifteenth century, although only the minority engaged in overseas trade ever came close to the status and power exercised by the merchant class (Williams 2020). Did the tailors of Vic experience a similar rise and if they did, what might that tell us about fashion and the economy? Did tailors' growing access to imported luxury cloths help prompt new types of clothing and accessories? In the discussion, Peter Stabel notes that second-hand clothes dealers in medieval Bruges were really a manufacturing trade, which was not entirely the case for their counterparts in London and Paris at the time (Staples 2011; 2015). Parisian embroiderers were organized into guilds during the Middle Ages (Depping 1837, 379-82), but even in the eighteenth century the Lyons embroiders worked as independent contractors. What are we to make of these similarities and differences? Or should we simply throw up our hands and concentrate on understanding this organization of labor in our own research bailiwicks?

Changes in consumer behavior

Consumer behavior has rightly received the bulk of attention in the *Settimana* papers, with convincing evidence across all periods that clothing was a crucial part of the material culture of middling and poorer people, representing a significant expense in their budgets and an opportunity for them to communicate both individual and collective identities. Also welcome is the attention now being paid to how gender (and among women, how marital status) influenced patterns of dress consumption. Social emulation is everywhere perceived as a potent force in consumer choice, although we have also been given some examples of bubble-up phenomena in medieval Valencia, renaissance Florence, and eighteenth-century Vienna. But I want to know more about why noble or urban elites would adopt dress practices from lower social groups. Were the reasons gendered in any way? I'm thinking here of how easily the street fashions of soldiers were adopted and wonder if masculine street fashion can be more easily adapted to elite fashion tastes when it reinforces aspirational male virtues like strength, bravery, and a certain youthful insouciance. Even today, new styles of male street fashion such as sagging jeans that display a guy's underwear can have an easier time making it to fashion runways than many female street fashions, which have a tendency to put an inexpensive twist on magazine high fashion.

As several speakers have noted, when it came to shopping for ready-made clothing, consumers often looked to second-hand dealers. Early modernists have begun to rethink second-hand clothing (for example, Fontaine, ed. 2008; Lemire 2012), which medievalists until recently have tended to view as reflecting the poverty of its buyers, whereas now the emphasis is placed on the large consumer market that second-hand dealers served (for example, García Marsilla 2013; Staples 2015). In the Middle Ages, second-hand dealers were probably the main providers of ready-made garments. Non-elite customers could acquire colors, fur trimmings, and expertly cut garments that they would not be able to afford when new by participating in the second-hand market, or via gifts or bequests of used clothing. This is a topic that deserves more attention, not only because it is likely that second-hand dealers served an even larger market in the medieval than early modern period, but because these dealers could also fashion new clothing out of old garments and because used clothing helped to blur the boundaries of social distinctions that we see as such an essential function of dress. It was also a clothing trade that appears to have employed many women (Staples 2015, 300-1). The resale value of clothing and accessories, moreover, also points to their use as capital to secure loans and pay debts, as both medievalists and early modern scholars have pointed out (for example, Smail 2016).

A final word on sources and methodologies

The Call for Papers concluded with this question: How can economic historians draw on new methodologies and different types of sources for understanding the relationship between fashion and the economy? The papers have indeed presented a wealth of methodological approaches and examples of clever exploitation of often recalcitrant sources to find useful data to underpin interpretations about this relationship. Archaeological evidence is now playing a more important role in understanding fashion, especially in the Middle Ages, when documentary sources are more scarce. For example, a close examination of hundreds of excavated leather shoes embroidered with red and yellow silk in twelfth-century Norway established not only that the silk likely came from Central Asia and Byzantium, but also that this fashion trend, which lasted into the first two decades of the thirteenth century, went far down into the social hierarchy, suggesting that the silk yarn needed for the embroidery was affordable across a wide social spectrum (Hansen 2015). And as we have seen in several of the papers, historians are also now benefiting from scientific analysis of the fibre content, processing, colors, and designs of fabrics across the medieval and early modern periods to augment our understanding of changes in production techniques and consumer preferences.

We have also heard how many museums are now making their textile and dress collections more easily available for consultation by scholars in person and online. The website of the Museum of London's «Dress and textiles» collection, for example, illustrates the types of available resources. The Museum's Archaeological Archive is the largest in the world, and most items are discoverable via an online searchable catalog (Museum of London, «Advanced search»). The medieval collec-

tion of the Museum of London contains over 12,000 artifacts; a search for the keyword 'cap' for the period 1100-1500 yields 129 results. Clicking on an image brings users to the catalog entry with further descriptions of the item. A similar search on 'cap' for the years 1500 to 1750 in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London produces 1172 examples, most with a high-quality image of the object and useful metadata on its date, origin, decoration, and materials, as well as links to similar items in the collection. These types of digital resources, which have only become accessible in the last few years, provide a valuable source for fashion historians.

Because consumer behavior was central to so many of the conference papers, probate inventories and to some extent bankruptcy and shop inventories have become a particularly important source. Some regions, such as Valencia, seem to be blessed with especially early and full inventories, but scholars everywhere are spending more time locating and transcribing these documents because of the information they contain about material culture, including data about the value, characteristics, and owners of textiles, clothing, and dress accessories. Here too new digital resources are proving especially helpful. Some members of this audience will know about the new «Documentary Archaeology of Late Medieval Europe» (DALME) project at Harvard University (Smail, Pizzorno, and Morreale, «Overview»), which is making medieval inventories and other lists of objects accessible as open, structured datasets that can be searched and subjected to computational analysis. They include inventories from all corners of western Europe, including significant sets from Gascony, Geneva, Marseille, and Valencia. Clicking on one of the inventories opens up two facing windows: one with the original document and the other with a transcription. In addition to providing new data to dress historians, projects like this have pedagogical value in being well-suited for student research projects while, in the case of DALME, also providing interdisciplinary perspective in drawing on archaeological ontologies for its 'documentary archaeology.'

Another project that combines archaeological and documentary research is «Living Standards And Material Culture in English Rural Households», which examines objects recovered from hundreds of archaeological excavations along with lists of goods forfeited to the crown by criminals and suicides in order to investigate the extent to which a consumer revolution occurred in the period from 1300 to 1600. This project is producing a monograph and essay collection, as well as transcripts of selected lists of forfeited goods from people very far down the social ladder.

There are also now online resources that offer help navigating the pitfalls of textile terminology, a problem that has been mentioned several times in the last few days. For example, «The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project» (Crocker-Owen et al.) offers a searchable glossary of types of cloth (such as 'holland cloth'), ornamentation (like 'dagginge'), garments (such as 'skirt'), or occupations (such as 'calendar'), which are defined and contextualized by identifying the earliest references for each term. The Lexis focuses on the British Isles and Ireland and encompasses more than fifteen of the languages spoken there, from Old English and Old Irish to Latin and Anglo-Norman French, but I suspect that there are similar digital resources becoming available elsewhere for other regions, other languages, and for

both the medieval and early modern periods. It would be a good idea to follow up on John Styles' suggestion that we create a shared dictionary of cloth types and their measurements since there is an increasing need to bring this material together in one place for those examining the international trade in textiles. I would like to close, therefore, by suggesting that we gather a list of these digital resources in the history of textiles and dress in an appendix for the *Settimana* volume that will be produced from this conference or, better yet, that we compile a curated list on the Datini Institute website, which is becoming an increasingly valuable scholarly resource for historical images, open access papers and ebooks, and the Datini archive itself.

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