

Clothes Make the (Wo)man: Dress and Cultural Difference in Early Modern Europe

Veranstalter: Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz

Datum, Ort: 26.10.2017–28.10.2017, Mainz

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Dress is a key marker of difference. It is closely attached to the body, part of the daily routine, and an unavoidable means of communication. The clothes people wear tell stories about their allegiances and identities but also about their exclusion and stigmatization. They allow for the display of wealth and can mercilessly display poverty and indigence. Clothes also enable people to play with identities and affinities: for instance, individuals can claim higher social status via their clothes. In many ways, dress is thus open to manipulation by the wearer and misinterpretation by the observer.

Authorities—whether religious or secular, local or regional—have always aimed at imposing order on this potential muddle. This is particularly true for the early modern era, when the world became ever more complex. In Europe, the composition of societies diversified with the emergence of new social groups and increasing migration and travel. Thanks to intensified long-distance trade and technological developments, new fashionable clothes and accessories entered the market. With the emergence of a consumer culture, it was now the case that not only the extremely wealthy could afford at least the occasional indulgence in luxury items and accessories.

Over recent years, research has focused on a variety of areas related to dress and appearance in the context of early-modern political, socio-economic, and cultural transformations both within Europe and related to its entanglement with other parts of the world. Nevertheless, a significant compartmentalization in the research on dress and appearance remains: research is often organized around particular cities and territories, and much research is still framed by modern national boundaries. Thus, the conference on dress

and cultural difference in early modern Europe at the Leibniz Institute of European History aimed to cross some of these boundaries. It sought to look at dress and its perception in Europe from a transcultural perspective and to highlight the many differences that clothing can express.

In her keynote lecture „The Right to Dress,“ ULINKA RUBLACK (Cambridge) provided a broad overview of sumptuary laws, dress practices, and the related political changes in the early modern world. She emphasized that innovations in fashion, even before the eighteenth century, were not reserved to aristocratic elites. Small luxury items or imitations of precious fabrics allowed fashion to spread across different social groups. Rublack argued that sumptuary laws did not necessarily enshrine a new mode of ‘governmentality’ and mark a step towards modernity: instead, those protagonists interested in spreading new fashionable clothes and accessories – merchants, manufacturers, artisans, and their customers – fought for, and slowly won, their „right to dress.“

The first panel, on Thursday afternoon, examined the close entanglement between dress and social status based on two regional examples. First, BEATA BIEDRONSKA-SŁOTOWA (Cracow) spoke about „Polish National Dress as an Expression of Tradition and of Political and Cultural Independence.“ She showed how the Polish nobility made use of Ottoman and Persian models in order to develop its own sartorial identity since the sixteenth century. In the second paper, CORNELIA AUST (Mainz) took a comparative look at the development of so-called „Jewish attire“ in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Holy Roman Empire. In both cases, some pieces of cloth were regarded as typically Jewish by the eighteenth century, even though they had still been part of the general dress code only a hundred years earlier. Some of these pieces, like the Shabbos cloak in Frankfurt am Main and the ruff in Fürth, contributed to the emergence of a particular Jewish middle-class identity.

The second day of the conference began with a panel entitled „Signifiers and Symbols,“ which explored various symbolic elements of dress and their meaning. SUSANNA

BURGHARTZ (Basel) discussed the tension between stereotyping and the fashioning of women's veils in early-modern Europe and argued that the veil—situated at the intersection of fashion, habit, and tradition—could equally be a sign of identity or a fashionable accessory. In the following paper, FLORA CASSEN (Chapel Hill) examined the meaning of the round yellow badge and later on the yellow hat as stigmatizing markers of Jews. She showed the meaning these signifiers had for Italian Jews and Christians and explained how these signifiers influenced and altered the relationship between Christians and Jews.

The second morning session explored „Regional Dress and Identity“ in Ottoman Europe during the eighteenth century. CONSTANȚA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU (Bucharest) investigated how the local nobility of Wallachia and Moldavia, the boyars, adapted to the fashions and habits that were introduced by the Phanariot Greeks from Istanbul, who came to govern the region in the name of the sultan during the eighteenth century. She highlighted the tacit ways in which the boyars appropriated the Phanariots' Oriental clothes and costumes for their own self-fashioning and for creating a distinct boyar identity. DENISE KLEIN (Mainz) focused on the new significance that dress and lifestyle acquired in early eighteenth century Istanbul. She showed how, during that period of rapid social and cultural transformation, people's consumption and leisure choices became a key arena of debate about order, disorder, and the pace and form of socio-cultural change.

The panel on „Liturgical Dress,“ on Friday afternoon, shed new light on a highly symbolic and ritualized field of dressing. In his paper on Greek ecclesiastical costume, NIKOLAOS VRYZIDIS (Athens) highlighted the entanglement of Byzantine and Ottoman symbolism, noticeable in the textiles used by Christian preachers under Ottoman rule. Their costumes frequently showed an active reception rather than merely a passive borrowing of (or contamination with) Ottoman visual language.

The first section on Saturday examined the relation between „Dress and Foreignness.“ In his paper on „Female Education, Dress and Body Image in the Early Modern

Spanish Court,“ GABRIEL GUARINO (Coleraine) drew a nuanced image of how the queens of Spain (who originally came from France, Portugal, and Austria) coped with the pressures exerted by Spanish court society. Although some of them preferred dark and self-effacing clothes conforming to the Habsburg ideal, others adopted more daring and frivolous fashions. Paying attention to the strong presence of foreign merchants in the Spanish Empire, THOMAS WELLER (Mainz) discussed the extent to which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century contemporaries were able to recognize „others“ (or members of their own peer group) by the way they dressed. As Weller pointed out, dress served as an important marker of ethnic and religious difference, but it always was an ambiguous signifier.

The last panel on Saturday was dedicated to the field of „Fashion and cultural transfer.“ In her paper on „Difference, Similarity and the Value of Transculturalism in the Clothing Choices of the 17th Century Scottish Male Elite,“ MARIA HAYWARD (Southampton) explored how elite Scottish men used clothing to make and assert their identity. Far from being isolated from other European regions, journeys and trade connections gave them a transcultural world to draw upon as they developed their own style, whether it was decidedly individualist or expressed a wider national identity. GUILIA CALVI (Siena) examined the spreading of „Cashmere shawls between Istanbul, Paris and Milan“ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Focusing on the works of Mouradgea d'Ohsson, the Armenian dragoman of the Swedish ambassador in Istanbul, and Giulio Ferrario, the director of a leading journal for women, she analyzed the circulation of textual and visual information on fashion, luxury consumerism and social practices across imperial boundaries.

In addition to debating the latest historical research on dress and cultural difference in early modern Europe, the conference featured a round table on „Historic Dress and Costume in Film and Theater.“ It acknowledged the fact that historical dramas have been enjoying great popularity in recent years and that dress and costume in such

film and TV productions play a significant role in shaping the way people today understand past societies. CONSTANȚA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU (Bucharest) shared her experiences as historical consultant for the film *Aferim!*, a 2015 award-winning Western by Radu Jude, set in nineteenth-century Romania. MARIA MOLENDĂ (Nowy Sącz) presented examples of her work as designer of historical costumes and as a director of historical plays, explicating the opportunities and challenges of creating a certain image of the past through authentic or creative use of special clothes and materials. ANN-CHRISTIN EIKENBUSCH (Mainz) contributed her expertise as a film specialist, highlighting the interplay of costumes and textiles with color, light, and camera angle in order to locate a story in time and space as well as to give it a certain tone.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Introduction

Johannes Paulmann (Mainz) / Cornelia Aust (Mainz)

Keynote lecture

Chair: Thomas Weller (Mainz)

ULINKA RUBLACK (Cambridge): The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws, Dress Practices and Political Change in the Early Modern World

Dress and Social Status

Chair: Jan Kusber (Mainz)

BEATA BIEDROŃSKA-SŁOTOWA (Cracow): Polish National Dress as an Expression of Tradition and of Political and Cultural Independence

CORNELIA AUST (Mainz): From Noble Dress to Jewish Attire: Jewish Appearances in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Holy Roman Empire

Signifiers and Symbols

Chair: Sebastian Becker (Mainz)

SUSANNA BURGHARTZ (Basel): Transparent or Opaque? The Veil, a Major Signifier of Difference

FLORA CASSEN (Chapel Hill): Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy: Politics, Religion, and the Power of Symbols

Regional Identities

Chair: Henning P. Jürgens (Mainz)

CONSTANȚA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU (Bucharest): Shawls and Sables:

How to Be a Boyar under the Phanariot Regime (1710-1821)

DENISE KLEIN (Mainz): Becoming an Istanbulite: Immigrant Clothing, Lifestyle, and Identity

Liturgical Dress

Chair: Christopher Voigt-Goy (Mainz)

NIKOLAOS VRYZIDIS (Athens): Communicating Multiplicities: The Compositeness of Greek Ecclesiastical Dress Code during the Ottoman Period

Historic Dress and Costume in Film and Theater

Moderation: Denise Klein (Mainz)

MARIA MOLENDĂ (Nowy Sącz)

CONSTANȚA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU (Bucharest)

ANN-CHRISTIN EIKENBUSCH (Mainz)

Dress and Foreignness

Chair: Róisín Watson (London / Mainz)

GABRIEL GUARINO (Coleraine): Fit for a Queen: Female Education, Dress and Body Image in the Early Modern Spanish Court

THOMAS WELLER (Mainz): „He knows them by their dress.“ Dress and Otherness in Early Modern Spain

Fashion and Cultural Transfer

Chair: Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge)

MARIA HAYWARD (Southampton): ‘a suttie of black which will always be of use to you’: Difference, Similarity and the Value of Transculturalism in the Clothing Choices of the 17th Century Scottish Male Elite

GIULIA CALVI (Siena): Imperial Fashions. Cashmere Shawls between Istanbul, Paris and Milan (XVIII-XIX centuries)

Tagungsbericht *Clothes Make the (Wo)man: Dress and Cultural Difference in Early Modern Europe*. 26.10.2017–28.10.2017, Mainz, in: H-Soz-Kult 31.01.2018.