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Fashioning Europe: Identity and Dress in Early Modern Costume Books

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Abstract

This article aims to demonstrate how early modern costume books attempted to define the identities of Europeans. They presented a system of social stratifications, describing the presumed differences between people of various origins, age, gender, and, above all, social position. The existence of these differences was presented as part of an order not only social and political but also moral and religious. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that these differences had as much to do with actual cultural disparities between people as with the different perspectives and attitudes of the authors of the individual books.

Résumé

Cet article vise à démontrer comment les recueils de costumes de la Renaissance ont tenté de définir les identités des Européens. Ils présentaient un système de stratifications sociales, décrivant les différences présumées entre des personnes d'origine, d'âge, de sexe et, surtout, de position sociale différents. Ces différences sont présentées comme faisant partie d'un ordre non seulement social et politique, mais aussi moral et religieux. En y regardant de plus près, on s'aperçoit toutefois que ces différences ont autant à voir les réelles disparités culturelles qu'avec les différentes perspectives des auteurs des différents livres.

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During the latter half of the 16th century in Europe, there was a broad range of printed media that played a significant role in establishing and disseminating an evolving worldview during “the early globalization”.¹ Among these media were illustrated costume books, which emerged as a new genre in the 1560s and gained substantial popularity for a time. By the mid-1600s, as many as 22 costume books had been published in different countries and languages. Similar to maps or illustrated travel accounts,² costume books aimed to collect and present knowledge about the world and its inhabitants. They consisted of depictions of men and women from different regions around the world. The bodies and clothing of these individuals were not only objects of curiosity but also subjects of knowledge that costume books attempted to systematise by organising figures according to alphabetical or geographic and social categories.³

If we assume that the purpose of these books is described by the declarations made in the titles or introductions, we would be dealing with an attempt to describe the world in its newly discovered diversity and complexity. Starting with the first costume book, *Recueil de la diversité des habits* by François Desprez, published in 1562, the thematic scope of the genre is defined by the adjectives “various” (Latin *varius*) and “all” (Latin *omnis*), recurring in the titles of almost all books.⁴ Therefore,

costume books are meant to present the different actors in the theatre of the world, to describe synchronic practices of clothing and, more broadly, of culture.⁵ The dress of people from different parts of the world is generally referred to by the Latin noun *habitus*, which directs the reader’s attention towards the social practices and customs associated with dress rather than the purely aesthetic aspect of clothing. This social dimension of attire is sometimes explicitly referred to by the authors; for example, François Modius and Jost Amman’s *Gynaeceum* already announces in its title that the reader will be presented with “Women’s Theatre, in which the costumes of all the most prominent nations, peoples, and populations throughout Europe, of every dignity, order, status, profession, age, are seen”.⁶ Within costume books, clothing is primarily used to define differences between people: dress, as we will see later in the text, was intended to serve as an emblem of social identification, allowing one to immediately recognise a person’s gender, nationality, social position, marital status or profession.⁷ Costume is thus a materialisation of status—or perhaps even *habitus*, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu.⁸ Costume books were addressed to those, “such as by their manner of ordinary life, of from other causes, are hindered from distant travel, but at the same time take pleasure at home in the costume of various people, which is a silent index of their character (*habitu qui est morum indicium tacitum*)”.⁹ Costume books were thus addressed to

¹ Susanna Burghartz, “The Fabric of Early Globalization: Skin, Fur and Cloth in the De Bry’s Travel Accounts, 1590–1630,” in *Dressing Global Bodies: The Political Power of Dress in World History*, ed. Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2020), 15.

² See Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2–8.

³ This subject is interestingly elaborated on by: Joanne Olian, “Sixteenth Century Costume Books,” *Costume* 3 (1977): 20–47; Daniel Defert, “Un genre ethnographique profane au XVI^e siècle: les livres d’habits (essai d’ethno-icographie),” in *Histoires de l’anthropologie (XVIe-XIXe siècles)*, ed. Britta Rupp-Eisenreich (Paris: Klincksieck, 1984), 25–39; Bronwen Wilson, “Reproducing the Contours of Venetian Identity in Sixteenth-Century Costume Books,” *Studies in Iconography* 25 (2004): 221–274; Bronwen Wilson, “Costume and the Boundaries of Bodies,” in *The World in Venice: Print, the City and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 70–132; Gabriele Mentges, “Pour une approche renouvelée des recueils de costumes de la Renaissance: Une cartographie vestimentaire de l’espace et du temps,” *Apparence(s)* 1 (2007); Giorgio Riello, “The World in a Book: The Creation of the Global in Sixteenth-Century European Costume Book,” *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14, (2019): 281–317.

⁴ See, for instance, Fernando Bertelli, *Omnium fere gentium nostrae aetatis habitus* (Venetis, 1563); Jacobus Sluperius, *Omnium fere gentium, nostraeque aetatis nationum, habitus et effigies* (Antverpiae, 1572); Jost Amman, Hans Weigel, *Habitus praecipuorum populorum, tam virorum quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti* (Nürnberg, 1577); Abraham de Bruyn, *Omnium pene Europae, Asiae, Africae atque Americae Gentium Habitus* (s.l., 1581); Jean Jacques Boissard, Abraham de Bruyn, *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* ([Mechelen], 1581); Bartolomeo Grassi, *Dei veri ritratti degli abiti di tutte le parti del mondo* (Roma, 1585); Pietro Bertelli, *Diversarum nationum habitus*, 3 vols. (Padua, 1589, 1594, 1596); Alexandro de Fabri, *Diversarum Nationum Ornatus* (Padua, 1593); Cesare Vecellio, *De gli Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venetia, 1598).

⁵ See Ulrike Illg, “The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe,” in *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson (Burlington: Aldershot, 2004), 29–47; Valerie Traub, *Mapping the global body*, in *Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 44–97.

⁶ “Theatrum Mulierum, in quo praecipuarum omnium per Europam in primis nationum, gentium, populorumque, cuiuscunque dignitatis, ordinis, status, conditionis, professionis, aetatis, foemineos habitus videre est.” English translation in *The Theatre of Women, Designed by Jobst Ammon*, ed. Alfred Aspland (Manchester: The Holbein Society, 1872), v.

⁷ See Defert, “Un genre ethnographique,” 32. Costume books are thus inherent in the effort to create “an everyday system of social recognisability,” cf. Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), 114.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–73.

⁹ English translation in *The Theatre of Women*, v. A similar promise is made by Nicolas de Nicolay, author of the book of Turkish costumes, which he offers to readers “so that those who do not have the opportunity for such voyages may derive pleasure from Nicolay’s efforts,” see Ulrike Illg, “Humanist Curiosity and Early Modern Thirst for Knowledge in the Illustrated Travelogue by the French Geographer Nicolas de Nicolay,” in *Nicolas De Nicolay: The Ottoman Empire*, ed. Maria Spitz (Mettingen: Draiflessen Collection, [2018]), 25.

Europeans, and although their emergence is closely linked to world exploration, they are primarily intended as a mirror of European identities.¹⁰ Since traditional European self-identity as Christendom was increasingly problematic at the time of reformation and religious wars, the need for establishing a new self-image is apparent here, and it is defined in relation to an increasingly recognised rest of the world.¹¹ In his introduction to *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* (1581), the publisher Caspar Rutz notes the “many and diverse books” that “learn from a painted world in cards and maps” to be able to depict a human “in his own costume and habit . . . so that through costume the mental dispositions and local customs can be represented and easily recognized.”¹² European identity emerges as a sum of collective (national, regional, urban) identities which, although they can be compared and contrasted, are difficult to reconcile.¹³

The purpose of costume books thus seems to be defining the identities of Europeans in relation to the inhabitants of other, sometimes semi-mythical, realms.¹⁴ Costume books map an imagined social territory, projecting boundaries and divisions into a complex, heterogeneous area of the human universe by separating, distinguishing, and categorising.¹⁵ The identities they present are thus not monolithic—on the contrary, they are inherently divided by a dense network of social stratifications determined by

age, gender, and, above all, social position. Costume books present a system of strata, describing the differences—or presumed differences—between, say, a servant girl from Nuremberg, a wife of a London merchant and a favourite of a Turkish sultan. The existence of these differences appeared as part of an order not only social and political but also moral and religious. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent, as I will attempt to show in this article, that these differences are as much to do with the real cultural disparities between people as with the different perspectives and attitudes of the authors of the individual books. A closer look at the costume books reveals that many of these differences are conventional in nature and that the boundaries they draw turn out to be easily crossed.

Ulysses and Proteus

The authors' obsessive emphasis on the completeness of their project can be read as an expression of their anxiety about a rapidly changing world that can no longer be embraced as a whole. Here we touch upon the paradox inherent in costume books as a genre: they grow out of the dynamic cultural changes while remaining sceptical about those changes. The systematic discovery of new lands and their exploitation, as well as growing trade covering ever wider areas of the world, contributed to an accelerated exchange of goods and information.¹⁶ The need to describe this changing world is the immediate stimulus for the publication of costume books, so it should come as no surprise that a shared theme of costume books is a reflection on the mutability of the world. What may be surprising, however, is that from the 1562 *Recueil de la diversité des habits* onwards, these changes are perceived negatively.¹⁷ The introductions to several of the costume books reveal “an acute perception

¹⁰ Odile Blanc, “Images du monde et portraits d'habits: Les recueils de costumes à la Renaissance,” *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, no. 2 (1995): 242. See also Isabelle Paresys, “The Dressed Body: The Moulding of Identities in Sixteenth-Century France,” in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 4: *Forging European Identities, 1400–1700*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 227–257.

¹¹ Daniel Defert, “The Collection of the World: Accounts of Voyages from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1982): 12–13. For more on recognising and imagining otherness in this era, see Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 23–46.

¹² Caspar Rutz, “Dem Leser,” in Boissard, de Bruyn, *Habitus Variarum Orbis Gentium*, np. English translation in Bernhard Klein, “Oroonoko and the Mapping of Africa,” in *English Literature and the Disciplines of Knowledge, Early Modern to Eighteenth Century: A Trade for Light*, ed. Jorge Bastos da Silva and Miguel Ramalhe Gomes (Amsterdam: Brill, 2018), 37.

¹³ Michel de Certeau, “Writing vs. Time: History and Anthropology in the Works of Lafitau,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 59 (1980): 48.

¹⁴ Mary Baine Campbell, “The Nude Cyclops in the Costume Book,” in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and Davis A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2002), 285–301; Larissa Carvalho, “Contact, Perception and Representation of the ‘American Other’ in Sixteenth-Century Costume Books,” in *The Myth of the Enemy: Alterity, Identity, and their Representations*, ed. Irene Graziani and Maria Vittoria Spissu (Bologna: Minerva, 2019), 235–244; Isabelle Paresys, “Images de l'Autre vêtu à la Renaissance: Le recueil d'habits de François Desprez (1562–1567),” *Journal de la Renaissance* 4 (2006): 15–56.

¹⁵ Cf. Katherine Bond, “Costume Imagery and the Visualisation of Humanity in Early Modern Europe,” in *Writing Visual Histories*, ed. Florence Grant and Ludmilla Jordanova (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 46–75.

¹⁶ *Interwoven Globe: the Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013); Seboough David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); J. H. Parry, *The Age of Discovery, 1400–1600* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981); Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Ann Rosalind Jones, “Habits, Holdings, Heterologies: Populations in Print in a 1562 Costume Book,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 110 (2006): 92–121; Paresys, “Images de l'Autre vêtu,” 15–56.

of the acceleration of historical time”,¹⁸ whereby traditional customs and traditional social roles are threatened. This change, although not further defined or set in time, is seen as a disruptive element, destabilising human life on an individual and community level.¹⁹ The sense of living in an age of rapid change has disposed many of the costume book authors to quasi-religious reflections. The most incisive position on the matter is that of Jean de Glen, who sees his epoch as “iniquitous and turbulent times”.²⁰ He sees the reason for this in travel, the movement of people leading to a mixing of cultures:

How are all countries & nations today so forlorn of their original candour & sincerity, not only by a semblance far removed from their original simplicity, in which not only, like a Proteus, they change every day, adorning and transforming themselves in dress, customs, languages, manners; but also in their games, pleasures, indulgences, delights, vices, imitating the more dissolute nations?

He goes on to juxtapose two modes of human endeavour: the Christian pilgrimage, an earthly journey designed to bring man closer to paradise, and the journeys of the merchant, toiling “to acquire wealth, censes, or revenue”.²¹ He takes as his aim to persuade the reader towards the former type of activity, treating the latter as morally reprehensible.

In other costume books, too, the troubled present is contrasted with the past, always valorised positively. The vaguely defined “ancient times”, as well as clothing and traditions derived from them, are of the highest value, and their preservation is one of the fundamental duties assumed by the authors. This idealised past also proves to be closely tied to place and defining the identity of individual communities. Costume books, invented to describe the global, thus turn out to be an ardent defence of the

local.²² The introduction to *Habitus praecipuorum populorum* reads that: “In the past, almost every nation and people could be recognised and distinguished by their costume and clothes, both men and women”.²³ Such a situation appears to the authors as religiously sanctioned, and therefore the modern practice of imitating other people’s customs and clothing deserves condemnation on moral grounds. Indeed, what emerges from the costume books is a particular attitude to corporeality and dress, deeply rooted in religious categories. In his introduction to the 1586 *Gynaeceum, sive Theatrum mulierum*, publisher Sigismund Feyerabendt outlines the history of clothing as a kind of theology of dress.²⁴ Feyerabendt derives the history of clothing from the biblical parable of original sin and set clothing practices in the context of the writings of the early Christian thinker Tertullian. He is interested in the social functioning of women and the identities created for that purpose; in his view, modesty of dress and adornment define the moral condition of Christian women and “that accordingly in heathen women there is not true chastity”.²⁵ Similar arguments are found in the introduction to *Habitus praecipuorum populorum* of 1577, where clothing was also linked to original sin and the expulsion from paradise, as it was supposed to make it necessary for people to cover their bodies for protection from cold, rain, and wind. This original purpose of clothing has been abandoned over time, with clothing serving people “more for excess than for necessary use”.²⁶

Of particular concern to the authors of the costume books is the protean aspect of dress, the fact that “styles of dress are constantly changing, according to the whim and caprice of their wearers”.²⁷ These

¹⁸ Giulia Calvi, “Cultures of Space: Costume Books, Maps, and Clothing between Europe and Japan (Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries),” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (2017): 334.

¹⁹ Cf. Eugenia Paulicelli, “Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio’s Costume Books,” *The Italianist* 28, no. 1 (2008): 30.

²⁰ Jean de Glen, *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies, façons de faire anciennes et modernes du monde* (Liège, 1601), *iii r.

²¹ De Glen, “Preface,” np.

²² For more on the origins of fashion and its political connotations, see Odile Blanc, “From Battlefield to Court: The Invention of Fashion in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 157–172.

²³ Hans Weigel, “Vorrede,” in *Habitus praecipuorum populorum*, Xii v.

²⁴ Sigismundus Feyerabend, “Epistola nuncupatoria,” in Jost Amman, François Modius, *Gynaeceum sive Theatrum Mulierum* (Francoforti 1586), A2r–A4r. For more on *Gynaeceum*, see Nikola Rossbach, “*Gynaeceum, sive theatrum mulierum*: Modellierung von Weiblichkeit in enzyklopädischen Wissenstheatern,” *metaphorik.de* 14 (2008): 151–177.

²⁵ Feyerabend, “Epistola nuncupatoria,” A3v. English translation in *The Theatre of Women*, xxxviii.

²⁶ Weigel, “Vorrede,” Xii v.

²⁷ Cesare Vecellio, “A i Lettori,” in *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo*, np. English translation in *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas: Cesare Vecellio’s Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, ed. Margaret F. Rosenthal and Ann Rosalind Jones (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 52.

changes raised a concern that was all the more profound because clothing seemed to be intrinsically linked to social identities so a change of dress must have entailed the risk of transgressing traditional social roles. Costume books address this concern with an attempt to stop these constant changes by creating a complete catalogue of prefabricated identities to be donned along with clothing. This project is inextricably linked to the conviction that identity needs to be realised in a performative mode: that one becomes someone in relation to others and that the human body must be constructed as an image.²⁸ Costume books assume that clothing encapsulates the status and identity of the wearer.²⁹ Like the sumptuary laws, they fulfilled the need to codify social differences and to make social affiliation instantly recognisable.³⁰ Hence, costume books do not document actual clothing practices but attempt to establish a register of attire attributed to particular genders, stages of life, social roles, etc. In the costume books, the very notion of Europe—its traditions, customs, and identity patterns—is thus founded on religious notions. Cesare Vecellio, in the *Discourse* preceding the second, expanded edition of his book, states:

Even though Europe is smaller than the other two [Asia and Africa] in area . . . , it is still far superior in dignity to those others because of its wealth in everything needed to feed and clothe human beings, owing to the kindly disposition of heaven”, through which Europe is “rich in every region and full of cities, farmlands, castles, and villas, whose inhabitants are both of livelier intellect and greater strength than the peoples of Asia and Africa.”³¹

At the same time, he attempts to define European-ness by combining geographical location with cultural affiliation when he adds, “It can also be said that the Europe of our days includes all parts of the world where the Christian faith is practised and

part of the territories of Turkey”.³² On the one hand, he refers to the traditional notion of Europe as Christendom, supposed to include non-European territories being incorporated into the Christian world; while on the other hand, he also includes “part of Turkey” in the European project, that is, a country with a different religious identity, even perceived as hostile in Europe at the time. He writes this without acknowledging the internal contradictions in his definition nor without clarifying which parts of Turkey he has in mind.

Many of Vecellio’s arguments are repeated by de Glen in the introduction to his *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies* published in 1601. He presents a reader with the biblical genesis of the continents, providing an interesting insight into the self-perception of Europeans. He mentions that after the Flood, there was to be a division of the earth by Noah’s sons: Ham was henceforth to reign in Africa, Shem in Asia, and Japheth in Europe, which “has this wonderful prerogative over the other parts of the world, that it is the only one that preserves and perpetuates the knowledge of the true God, the true faith and religion”.³³ Further on, de Glen warns his European contemporaries: “Let us not resemble the companions of Ulixes, who, enchanted by the sorceress Circe (i.e., by sensuality), refused to return to their homeland: but let us be like pilgrims and poor exiles, travelling towards heaven”.³⁴ Adopting foreign customs is compared to witchcraft, whereby man loses his identity, whereas European peoples should cherish their distinctiveness. A similar argument can be found in Johann Boemus’ book on costumes and customs. His descriptions of sartorial practices of various peoples were to be “mirrors” in which the readers could see themselves in order to “fashion their body and soul” and “organise their lives” in opposition to non-Europeans. For Boemus, the European resembled Ulysses, using the “wax of good judgment” to block his ears in order to protect himself from the siren song of the barbarian world.³⁵

²⁸ Isabelle Paresys, “The Body,” in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Renaissance*, vol. 3, ed. Elizabeth Currie (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 58.

²⁹ Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–31.

³⁰ Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*; Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, eds., *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c. 1200–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

³¹ Vecellio, “Discorso,” 2v. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 55.

³² Vecellio, “Discorso,” 3r. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 55.

³³ De Glen, *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies*, Ar.

³⁴ De Glen, “Preface,” np.

³⁵ Johann Boemus, *Omnium gentium mores leges et ritus* (Lyon, 1543), 5. Quoted in Giulia Calvi, “Gender and the Body,” in *Finding Europe: Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images*, ed. Anthony Molho and Diogo Ramada Curto (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 93.

The components of this “good judgment” and, thus, key elements of European identity were to be Christianity, national belonging, heterosexual and monogamous marriage, and patrilineal inheritance.

The authors of the costume books ostensibly absorb new knowledge about the world but at the same time seek grounding in past structures of thought. Paradoxically in an era associated with a time of religious crisis for Europe, their attempts at self-identification are still very much rooted in Christianity while at the same time attempting to embrace a changing worldview on the verge of colonial expansion. In doing so, they reveal a fundamental ambiguity within the notion of Europe, stretched between a sense of its own superiority and an uncertainty about what it is and where its borders lie.

“Moral geographies in print”³⁶

Conceptualising Europe based on a sense of entitlement is well illustrated by the title pages of several costume books, which feature personifications of the continents, which were, as Michael Wintle points out, a key device for transmitting the European self-image and growing Eurocentric message.³⁷ On the title pages of many of these books, Europe was personified and depicted surrounded by allegories of other continents. The relationship of these images to the iconographic tradition and cognitive situation of the time has recently been presented by Ann Rosalind Jones,³⁸ but it is perhaps worth adding two interpretative threads here related to the definition of European identity in the context of the cultural changes taking place at the time. The first is the anchoring of European identity in religion, which—along with the allegory and history mentioned by

³⁶ Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 146.

³⁷ Michael Wintle, “Renaissance Maps and the Construction of the Idea of Europe,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 2 (1999): 137–165; *The Image of Europe: Visualizing Europe in Cartography and Iconography throughout the Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); “The Early Modern Iconography of Europe: Visual Images and European Identity,” in *Contesting Europe: Comparative Perspectives on Early Modern Discourses on Europe, 1400–1800*, eds. Nicolas Detering, Clementina Marsico, and Isabella Walsler-Bürgler (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 54–76; Michael Wintle, “Gender and Race in the Personification of the Continents in the Early Modern Period: Building Eurocentrism,” in *Bodies and Maps: Personification of the Continents*, eds. Maryanne Cline Horowitz and Louise Arizzoli (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 39–66.

³⁸ Ann Rosalind Jones, “When Allegory Met History: Allegories of the Continents on Costume-Book Title Pages in the Late Sixteenth Century,” in *Bodies and Maps*, 253–271.

Jones—also comes into play here, primarily through its attitude to corporeality: both nudity and dress. The second theme, already indicated, which finds its visual representation here, is the fear of change resulting from intercultural exchanges.

The very idea of clothing, as we have seen, is, according to the authors of the costume books, related to original sin. This association is well illustrated by the title page of the 1577 *Habitus praecipuorum populorum*, which feature personifications of four continents: however, contrary to popular iconographic convention, all four are male figures. Asia and Africa wear turbans and orientalising costumes, while America only wears a feather headband and a loincloth. Europe is presented as a naked man with a bale of cloth under his arm and a pair of tailor shears in his hand. While representatives of other parts of the world present themselves in dignified *contraposto*, the European is shown striding forward. His nudity, as well as his movement, is figuratively linked to the original sin, as the scene of the expulsion from paradise is depicted in the cartouche at the top of the page. However, since the personifications of Asia and Africa are clothed, the moral condition of humanity cannot explain the nakedness of the European. In fact, the image of a naked man with scissors and a piece of cloth is an established moralistic trope of the time, recurring in many early modern visual sources. It embodied the anxiety associated with the disruption of traditional clothing codes.

Cultural exchange between countries, the introduction of new fashions, and new customs were perceived as an agent of confusion within the body politic since clothing failed to clearly assign a person to social status, marital status, nationality, etc. In Andrew Boorde’s *Book of Knowledge*, the nearly naked Englishman is presented as unable to dress himself because he cannot make a single outfit choice.³⁹ It is the multitude of garments and the desire for new ones that paradoxically deprive him of clothing and expose his naked body to the public gaze—and, in the author’s intention, to ridicule. The image of a naked Englishman in *Theatre*

³⁹ Andrew Boorde, *The Fyrst Booke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (London, 1562?), A3v.

de tous les peuples by Lucas de Heere has a similar meaning: here, too, nudity is supposed to stem from greed and fickleness, making it impossible to decide on just one outfit, constantly looking for new, unusual garments.⁴⁰ The image on the front page of the costume book introduces two new elements to this motive: firstly, the naked man represents the whole of Europe, not one of its nationalities; secondly, he is depicted among the personifications of other continents. The European is as naked as the Native American, but his nudity is sanctioned by tradition and, therefore, legitimate. Meanwhile, the European is depicted as someone who loses his identity: he not only doesn't know WHAT to wear, he doesn't know WHOM to dress FOR.⁴¹ The same image is evoked in Vecellio's *Discourse*, although this time, the ill-advised naked man is Italian. Vecellio recalls "an amusing anecdote about the topic of . . . diversity" about a man creating "a book of clothing" in which the Italian was depicted "naked but carrying a piece of cloth on his shoulder" because the author of this book "saw the Italians as so changeable, mutable and capricious in their dress that this one had decided to carry cloth on his shoulders so that he could have the tailor cut his according to his whim".⁴² And although the anecdote is clearly self-reflective, the Italians depicted by Vecellio in his book are presented completely clothed.⁴³

A unique interpretation of this trope can be found on the title page of another costume book, Bartolomeo Grassi's *Dei veri ritratti degl'habiti di tutte le parti del mondo*.⁴⁴ It depicts a man and a woman, both

naked, each with a piece of cloth under their arms and a pair of tailor's shears in their hands. Considering how expensive fabric was at the time, such an image must have conveyed wealth pushed to the limit of wastefulness. The couple is reminiscent of the first parents, Adam and Eve, once again proving the connection between nudity (but also clothing) and sin. It is not nakedness perceived as the natural state of the body, but the nakedness associated with a taste for luxury, the pursuit of fashion, and a detachment from traditional clothing styles that is something reprehensible. This is in line with the theology of clothing articulated by Feyerabendt, who argues that clothing inevitably gravitates towards excess and that the need to cover oneself cannot be separated from the fatal predilection for opulence. Although Jean De Glen perceived wealth as proof of European superiority, at the same time, Europeans saw themselves as victims of their own prosperity, people on the verge of moral decline.

In perhaps the most typical manner of its era, the continents were visualised on the title page of Jean-Jacques Boissard's book, where Europe is personified as a queen, with attributes of power, knowledge, and domination, Asia holds a censor, an allusion to the riches she shares with the world.⁴⁵ The two of them are tightly clothed, while Africa is depicted with bare breasts and a palm leaf, and America is completely naked except for a headdress of feathers. This image fits very well into the iconographic pattern prevalent in the second half of the sixteenth century and perpetuated by Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. Ripa asserts that Africa is naked because "this land does not abound in riches," while America is naked "because it is the custom of the people there to walk about naked."⁴⁶ Behind the nakedness lies a peculiar mixture of allegory and "realism": it symbolised both supposed material deprivation while also documenting the lifestyle of the inhabitants. In this juxtaposition, clothed means cultured and prosperous, naked—wild and destitute. This association can also be found in the increasingly

⁴⁰ Michael Gaudio, "Truth in Clothing: The Costume Studies of John White and Lucas de Heere," in *European Visions: American Voices*, ed. Kim Sloan (London: British Museum, 2009), 26. In a similar manner a German is represented on a decorative fabric from Leipzig's town hall, today in the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, see Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 144–145.

⁴¹ Isabel Paresys, "Paraitre et se vêtir au XVIe siècle: morales vestimentaires," in *Paraitre et se vêtir au XVIe siècle: Actes du XIIIe colloque du Puy-en-Velay*, ed. Marie Viallon (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), 11–36.

⁴² Vecellio, *Discorso*, 6v. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 59. For more on Vecellio's project, see Ann Rosalind Jones, "Sleeves, Purses, Spindles: Fashioning Women in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," in *Re-framing Representations of Women: Figuring, Fashioning, Portraiting and the Picturing Women Project*, ed. Susan Shifin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 99–114; Eugenia Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: The Political Geography," 24–53; Ann Rosalind Jones, "'Worn in Venice and throughout Italy': The Impossible Present in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39, no. 3 (2009): 511–544; Jane Bridgeman, "The Origins of Dress History and Cesare Vecellio's 'pourtraits of attire,'" *Costume* 44, no. 1 (2010): 37–45; Eugenia Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: Dress in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books (1590, 1598)," in *Writing Fashion in Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 89–125.

⁴³ Cf. Jones, "'Worn in Venice,'" 517–520.

⁴⁴ Bartolomeo Grassi, *Dei veri ritratti degl'habiti di tutte le parti del mondo* (Roma, 1585).

⁴⁵ Boissard, de Bruyn, *Habitus variarum orbis gentium*.

⁴⁶ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini cavate dall'antichità, et di propria inventione, trovate, et dichiarate* (Roma, 1603), 336, 339.

popular travelogues of the time. They described the newly discovered lands while culturally producing a “savagery” of the indigenous population that included nudity, unfettered expression of emotions, as well as violence and cannibalism.⁴⁷ In the eyes of the early colonisers, adopting European customs and dress was tantamount to being subjected to a civilising process.⁴⁸ And while costume books owe a great deal to these travel accounts, attitudes to corporeality and nudity, as well as perceptions of what is European and non-European, are much more problematic here. On the title pages of both editions of the Vecellio book, for instance, we see a naked Africa, but in the books themselves, the image of a naked female inhabitant of the continent is rare. It seems, then, that nudity belongs to the allegorical rather than the mimetic order. It is also noteworthy that authors in no way denigrate or sexualise the few depictions of nude or semi-nude figures in their books. The description of the image of *Donzella Africana nell’Indie* (curiously included in a book of Asian clothing) shown by Vecellio with naked breasts simply reads:

Not only men but also women of this region are seen walking around almost completely naked because of the harm caused by excessive heat. However, they adorn themselves with various ornaments according to their ability. These women are seen with their upper bodies exposed above the waist but covered with a cloth similar to a panty below. They decorate their neck and chest in different and elegant ways, and their bellies, arms, hands, and legs are adorned with gold plates, as well as feathers of various colors and jewels on their heads. They only wear these ornaments before getting married, but

⁴⁷ Contributors to these imaginations included John White watercolours from 1585–86 representing Native American peoples, illustrated travel collections published by Theodore de Bry and sons, among them Thomas Harriot’s account of the voyage, named *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, published in London, 1588, Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues’ account of a transatlantic voyage published in Frankfurt in 1591, as well as work by André Thevet, Hans Staden, Jean de Léry, etc. For more on the European production of ‘savagery’ see Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 23, 43; Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Ann Rosalind Jones, “American Beauties, or What’s Wrong with this Picture? Paintings and Prints of the Women of Virginia from John White to Joan Blaeu,” *Early Modern Women* 7 (2012): 215–229; Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Texts, Images and the Perception of ‘Savages’ in Early Modern Europe: What We Can Learn from White and Harriot,” in *European Visions: American Voices*, 120–30.

⁴⁸ Burghartz, “The Fabric of Early Globalization,” 16–17, 31–32.

after that, they leave them aside and dress from top to bottom.⁴⁹

Exposed breasts are thus supposed to be appropriate to the maidenly state, but, despite the obvious difference in customs, Vecellio makes no judgements or comparisons here. Along similar lines, this author comments on the nudity of Native Americans, whose representations are relatively numerous in the book. They, too, are described in factual and non-judgmental terms, with no mention of cannibalism or savagery, instead focusing strictly on clothing habits. Nudity, then, has no theological explanation, nor does it result, as in Ripa’s work, from poverty or lack of civility, but simply from a different climate and custom. While describing the figure of the half-naked “queen” of Florida in the twelfth chapter, Vecellio does not see the tension between her nudity and her royal dignity, even though she is supposedly depicted at her nuptials. As in other costume books, unfamiliar American society is organised according to familiar concepts to be found in the social structure (nobleman, centurion, priest), as well as in the valued qualities of people (bravery and valour for men, modesty and maternal care for women). Vecellio matter-of-factly and without any sense of superiority, describes the custom of partially covering nudity, but he interprets it in familiar moral terms, using the Italian word *vergogne* and Latin *pudenda*, thus inextricably associating sex with shame:

The queen precedes them with her hair loose on her shoulders, wearing many necklaces on her neck, arms, and legs. They take great pleasure in painting their bodies: they cover their shoulders and private parts [literally: shameful parts] with tree leaves, and through their ears, they wear fish bones.⁵⁰

This acceptance of different dress customs does not necessarily indicate greater anthropological curiosity and openness. Such an attitude seems rather consistent with an apologetic attitude to

⁴⁹ Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni*, 486v–487r. This passage comes from the 1598 edition of Vecellio’s book and is not included in the edition compiled by Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret Rosenthal, which is based on the 1590 edition. I therefore give it in my own translation.

⁵⁰ Vecellio, 497v–498r. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 550.



Figure 1. Moorish women of Granada, from *Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz*, ca. 1529. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Hs. 2247, fols. 101–102.

tradition, which assumes that clothes—even if radically different from European clothes—should first and foremost be faithful to local customs and, consequently, allow for easy identification of the wearer.⁵¹

Circulation of Images

Costume books employ a rather rigid representational formula, within which a single human figure is an embodiment of a continent, a country, a city, or a social group.⁵² Human bodies have thus been identified by the caption and often further described or interpreted by the accompanying text. Within such a formula based on repetition, the exceptions are all the more interesting, especially when they reveal

how images are transmitted between one book and the next. Such an example is provided by the image of a woman that recurs in a few different costume books, each time accompanied by a different description demonstrating how fluid the interpretation of the depicted figures is. This image seems to be born as a pen and watercolour sketch made by a German goldsmith Christoph Weiditz during his travels in Europe in the late 1520s. Among his drawings are several sketches of Moorish women from Spanish Granada (Fig. 1) depicted while spinning, walking by the street, sweeping in front of the house, in domestic attire, with a child, and riding a horse.⁵³ Details of clothing (colours, jewellery), body types, and physiognomies suggest that we are dealing with images of different persons and that they are records of eyewitness observation—although, as Katherine

⁵¹ See Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 152; Eminegül Karababa, “Ethnicity,” in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Renaissance*, 142; Wilson, *The World in Venice*, 70, 292–293.

⁵² Isabelle Paresys, “Apparences vestimentaires et cartographie de l’espace en Europe occidentale aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles,” in : *Paraître et apparences en Europe occidentale du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2008), 259.

⁵³ *Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz*, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, Hs. 2247, 96–103, 105.

Bond recently noted, this was not always the case.⁵⁴ Weiditz registers not only the details of the garments, accessories, headgear, and footwear but also their respective gestures, ways of spending time and moving around, as well as their immediate surroundings. In this way, he manages to capture the diversity and complexity of the social fabric, represented here far more freely than in later costume books.⁵⁵ A similar image can reappear in the manuscript costume album commissioned by Christoph van Sternsse ca. 1548–1549.⁵⁶ One of its images represents a group of Morisco women of Granada, including a figure with a spindle reminiscent of the one in Weiditz's drawing. However, an important difference emerges here—the woman is naked under her jacket. Theodor Hampe, editor of Weiditz's manuscript, speculates that Weiditz's images of Moriscos were, in fact, copied from an unknown Spanish original.⁵⁷ Perhaps this difference in the depiction of the figure of the Morisco woman could be due to different interpretations of this unknown source, but there is no evidence to support this hypothesis.

Some fifty years later, Weiditz's image of a Morisco woman from Granada was transposed in print, appearing on the pages of *Habitus praecipuorum populorum* (Fig. 2). Several elements from Weiditz's drawings have been compiled into one: the woman is dressed in a distinctive attire, she holds a spindle in her hand, while a child looks out from behind her back. The caption identifies the engraving as a likeness of a Moorish woman from Granada in domestic dress, while the succinct description identifies the woman with the community from which she



Figure 2. Moorish woman in domestic dress, *Habitus praecipuorum populorum tam virorum quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti* (Nürnberg 1577), fol. CLXIV, PAN Library, Gdansk.

originates (“In the kingdom of Granada / There are many Moorish women”) and further explains that this is how “they” dress around their house and that weaving is one of “their” traditional activities.⁵⁸ The image closely replicates the details of Weiditz's drawings, such as the headdress, short wide jacket, loose trousers pulled down at the calves, and the bare feet, but—as in the van Sternsse manuscript—introduces nudity with the open jacket revealing the woman's bare breast. None of Weiditz's Morisco women were depicted in this way, although nudity does appear in his depictions of Native Americans.⁵⁹ Jost Amman's woodcut undoubtedly employs an iconographic pattern known from Weiditz's *Trachtenbuch*, but it

⁵⁴ Katherine Bond mentions Weiditz's “willingness to copy or adapt existing imagery” and points out that “a number of the costume figures in the *Trachtenbuch*” are subjects of lands Weiditz is not believed to have travelled to, combining existing visual tropes with first-hand observation,” Bond, “Costume Imagery,” 53.

⁵⁵ An alternative representational pattern of the Moorish woman of Granada has its origin in drawings by Enea Vico made around 1560. Here we find Mora de Granata, shown backwards, wearing a coat and distinctive trousers, see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 30, Enea Vico: *Italian masters of the sixteenth century* (New York: Abaris Books, 1985), no. 158-II (326). In a similar manner, a Moorish woman is depicted by Pierto Bertelli in the third volume of his *Diversarum nationum habitus* of 1596. The motif of nudity, on the other hand, is introduced by a drawing by Vico signed as Povera de lo Grogno, of a woman with a child at her exposed breast, holding a spindle, wearing a pointed headdress, see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, no. 163-II (326). It finds its transposition in *Anciens costumes coloriés*, 1572, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, RESERVE OB-11-PET FOL, fol. 42.

⁵⁶ Museo Stibbert, MS Cat. 2025, 32. Cf. Katherine Bond, “Mapping Culture in the Habsburg Empire: Fashioning a Costume Book in the Court of Charles V,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 71 (2018): 530–579.

⁵⁷ Theodor Hampe, *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien (1529) und den Niederlanden (1531/32)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 18–19.

⁵⁸ *Habitus praecipuorum populorum tam virorum quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti* (Nürnberg, 1577), CLXIV.

⁵⁹ It is worth mentioning here that—as Katherine Bond notes—the so-called Waldburg-Wolfegg copy of Weiditz's *Trachtenbuch* preserves an image absent from the original manuscript (perhaps removed from it), namely the blunt image of the Morisco woman almost completely naked, if one does not count the headdress and open shirt. See Katherine Bond, *Costume Albums in Charles V's Habsburg Empire (1528–1549)* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2017), 299–301.



Figure 3. Abraham De Bruyn, *Omnium pene Europae, Asiae, Africae atque Americae gentium habitus* (s.l. 1581), fol. 58, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

remains unclear whether it derives directly from this or from another reworking of the motif.⁶⁰ Whatever the case, it is possible that the figure of the Moorish woman has been partially exposed in order to increase her appeal to the exotica-hungry readers of the book. Should this interpretation be assumed, we would be dealing with the exoticisation of an inhabitant of Spain, a process opposite to that described by travellers who saw the adoption of European fashion habits as a sign of becoming “civilised”.⁶¹ Perhaps, the woman’s nudity reflects the conviction that nudity belongs to peoples of non-European origin, even if they had lived in Europe for many centuries. In such a case, nakedness would be a sign identifying everything that does not fit into the established

sartorial system of controlling appearances. Such an interpretation would be reinforced by Abraham de Bruyn’s *Omnium pene* of 1581, where the figure of *Maura Granatiensis* with a spindle and naked chest was included among the inhabitants of America and Africa (Fig. 3).⁶² As the figures in this book were not provided with a textual commentary, however, the intention behind this composition cannot be clearly verified.

A few years later, the same image of a woman appeared again, this time in a book by Jost Amman, or more precisely in two editions of the same book published simultaneously in Latin as *Gynaecium* and in German as *Frauenzimmer*. The text in the two language versions is quite different; both the introductions and descriptions of the images vary, as does the arrangement of the images, although the figures themselves are the same. In both

⁶⁰ For example by the author of another costume album, Sigmund Heldt, who worked closely with the publisher Sigmund Feyerabend. Sigmund Heldt, *Abconterfäitung allerlei Ordenspersonen in iren klaidungen*... Nuremberg, 1560–1580. Lipp Aa 3, Lipperheidesche Kostümbibliothek, Kunstbibliothek Berlin. Cf. Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 200–206.

⁶¹ We would be dealing here with the origins of the construct defined by Said as orientalism, cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978)

⁶² De Bruyn, *Omnium pene*, 58.



Figure 4. Peruvian woman, *Gynaecium sive Theatrum Mulierum* (Francoforti 1586), fol. e4. Jagiellonian Library, Krakow.

variants, the woman is depicted in the same way as in the *Habitus praecipuorum populorum*: with her head covered, wearing a jacket revealing her bare breasts and stomach, in loose trousers, with a child by her side and a spindle in her hand. The caption, however, is quite different: in both books, the woman is identified as a Peruvian. In both versions, the engravings are accompanied by relatively long, eight-verse comments providing further details of the depicted figure. Both the German verse by Conrad Lautenbach and the Latin by François Modius emphasise the foreignness of the woman. The distance is also established by her place in the book: she is one of the last figures closing the female universe (followed only by nine nuns, even more clearly distinct within the female society). The Latin version (Fig. 4) emphasises, in particular, the wealth that the newly discovered lands open up to the world (*tantas orbi apiret opes*). Among the new European discoveries are also the sumptuous garments worn by their inhabitants, including precious metals, jewels, and all kinds of commodities (*aurum gemmarum & vulgo quae genus omne ferunt*), that are available for all people, including

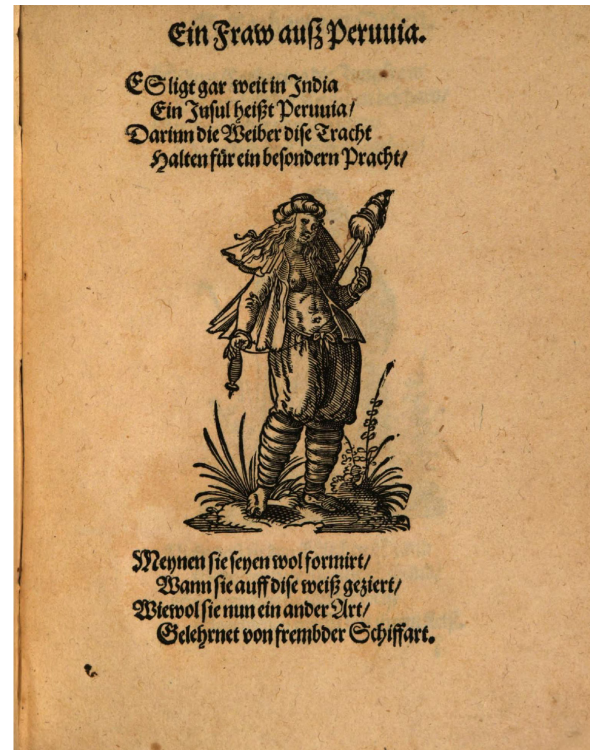


Figure 5. Peruvian woman, *Im Frauenzimmer* (Frankfurt am Main 1586), fol. e4. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

those of lower social status. Modius does also mention, however, *vestis sexu in deteriore modo*, which could refer to clothing that is considered inferior and which goes against traditional gender norms or social expectations, that is, “dressing in a manner that disregards gender.”⁶³ What in the *Habitus praecipuorum populorum* was domestic attire here becomes evidence of fabulous overseas wealth and an example of transgression of gendered social norms. In the German version (Fig. 5), the distance separating supposedly Peruvian and European dress customs is even more pronounced. The author marks both spatial distance (“It lies far away in India / An island called Peru”) and aesthetic difference (“Where women wear this attire, / Considering it a special adornment. / They believe themselves well-formed”). Besides the emerging recognition that cultural patterns and customs are relative, this can also be seen as a testament to the change in customs as a result of cultural exchange. The author explicitly points out that women’s dress has already changed because foreign European dress customs

⁶³ Amman, Modius, *Gynaecium sive Theatrum Mulierum*, e4.

have been assimilated: “Though now they have adopted / The customs from the foreign ship”.⁶⁴ In neither of the descriptions was the woman’s nudity addressed in any way, apparently treated as self-explanatory in the case of a resident of the New World. A woman’s nakedness and the difference of her dress from familiar patterns are justified by geographical and cultural distance. Such marginal female identities are contrasted in this book with the legitimate modes of women’s social functioning and the social roles created for it, which are inextricably linked to dress.⁶⁵ In the introduction to the Latin edition, Feyerabend makes a general remark in doing so that sums up the relationship between “legitimate” and “marginal” identities quite well:

It is established that different nations will have different customs . . . and it is the will of God, the ruler of all things, that each nation has its own characteristics—it must be stated that in terms of moderation and self-restraint, German women are most worthy of praise, which will hopefully be partially demonstrated in this book.⁶⁶

This remark provides a good introduction to the “ethnographic” consciousness expressed in costume books, within which different by no means implies equal.

The same figure returns again in both editions of Vecellio’s *Habiti antichi et moderni*—this time again among the European garments as *Donzella di Granata* (Fig. 6). She is depicted in a familiar convention: in an open jacket, with her head covered, holding a spindle in her hand, and with a child by her side. In fact, she is even more scantily dressed here: instead of a jacket, she wears only a short cape running down her shoulders while revealing her naked torso. Her sexual allure is also suggested by a subtle change in status: she is a maiden, not a married woman as before. The image is accompanied by a matter-of-fact description, explaining that “There

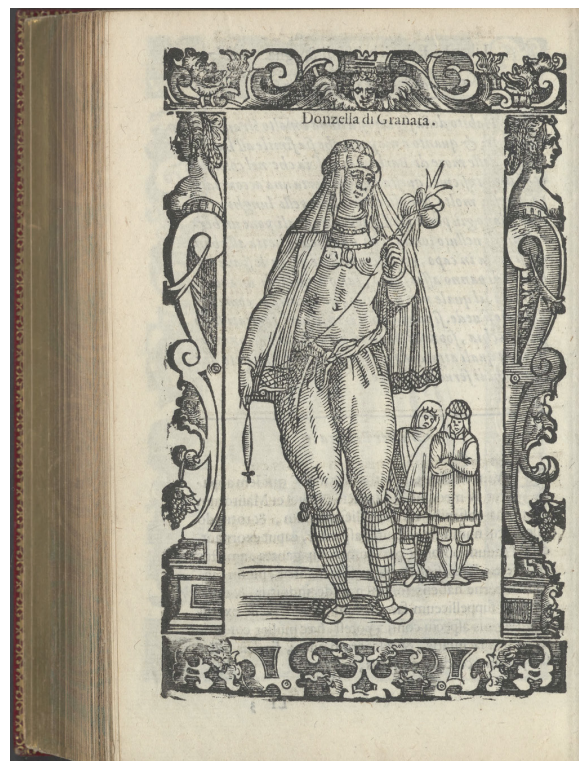


Figure 6. Maiden of Granada, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venetia 1598), fol. 268. Czartoryski Library.

are certain maidens in the Kingdom of Granada, who go naked from the middle of their bodies to the top,” to go into further details about her clothing, colours, and types of fabric, and to explain the spindle in her hand by saying “because of their poverty, they always go about like that, spinning.”⁶⁷ Although the woman’s attire differs quite radically from other European clothing, as she is the only woman in trousers and partially naked, her appearance—apart from this mention of poverty—is not commented on in any way. The author merely reinforced the veracity of her image by repeating in words what the reader sees in the picture.

The same engraving, also as an inhabitant of Granada (Fig. 7), reappears a few years later in Jean de Glen’s book, without any iconographic changes but with a truly surprising commentary. The image is accompanied by an extensive three-page argument on the practice of cross-dressing, which the author laments:

⁶⁴ Jost Amman, Conrad Lautenbach, *Im Frauenzimmer Wirt vermeldt von allerley schönen Kleidungen vnnnd Trachten der Weiber* (Frankfurt am Main, 1586), e4.

⁶⁵ Sigismundus Feyerabend, “Widmung und Vorrede,” in *Im Frauenzimmer*, np. For more on female dress codes in costume books, particularly the practice of veiling, see Susanna Burghartz, “Covered Women? Veiling in Early Modern Europe,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 80 (2015): 1–32.

⁶⁶ Feyerabend, “Epistola nuncupatoria,” A3.

⁶⁷ Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni*, 267v–268r.



Figure 7. Woman of Granada, Jean de Glen, *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies, façons de faire anciennes et modernes du monde* (Liège 1601), fol. 189r; Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris.

The fashion and manner of dressing in a foreign way is condemnable, as we have just mentioned. But for a woman to wear a man's garment or for a man to wear a woman's garment is improper and worthy of serious regret. . . . In fact, nature forbids it, for she has created such a difference between the sexes, in bodily appearance, disposition, organs, and the principal instruments of nature in man and woman, that it is necessary that there should be differences in form and dress. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the enormous abuses that would be committed if a woman or a girl could lawfully assume the appearance of a man, and a man the form of a woman.⁶⁸

The author makes a whole series of associations here, which are worth briefly examining. Firstly, he bluntly refers to all forms of foreign dress as “condemnable”. Secondly, he draws on Modius's remark

⁶⁸ De Glen, *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies*, 189r–190v.

about dressing in defiance of gender norms, associating bare breasts and trousers with masculine modes of dress. Thirdly, he stigmatises this kind of practice of dressing up as the opposite sex as an example of disgraceful and scandalous behaviour. De Glen's argument is thus the inverse of what Vecellio proposes: he completely abstracts from the details of a character's appearance, from tradition and cultural context, to plunge instead into a theology of dress, within which certain forms of dress are laudable and others reprehensible. Perhaps De Glen's indignation, however, stems from the fact that the boundaries between the genders cannot be rigidly defined as opposites. One of the reasons for the insistence on a clearly gender-marked dress in this period was that the bodies were perceived as sexually unstable.⁶⁹ Clothing was thus meant to rigidify fluid gender boundaries, enclose bodies within safe conventions, and stabilise sexual differences as visible identities.

The difference between the latter two examples is all the more striking in that we are dealing with radically different interpretations of the same image by two authors living at almost the same time in neighbouring countries. The attitudes of these authors mark the opposite poles between which the thinking about dress and the custom behind it, as revealed in the costume books, is organised. Within this spectrum of attitudes, Cesare Vecellio occupies the position of the observer and de Glen of the stern moralist. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the authorship of *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies*, hitherto attributed to the graphic artist and printer Jean de Glen. It may be, however, that the book is the joint work of him and his brother, the Christian theologian and clergyman Jean-Baptiste de Glen.⁷⁰ Indeed, the two brothers had previously published a book together, which may shed more light on the difference in seeing similar issues shown above, namely a lace pattern book entitled *Du Devoir des Filles traitte brief, effort utile*.⁷¹ It, too, contains

⁶⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Renaissance*, 99–103.

⁷⁰ See *Le bulletin de bibliophile belge*, vol. 2 (Bruxelles, 1845), 303; Marie-Elisabeth Henneau and Olivier Donneau, “Le livre religieux,” in *Florilège du livre en principauté de Liège, du IXe au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Paul Bruyère and Alain Marchandisse (Liège: Société des Bibliophiles Liégeois, 2009), 275.

⁷¹ Jean-Baptiste de Glen, Jean de Glen, *Du Devoir des Filles: traitte brief et fort utile, divisé en deux parties: la première est de la dignité de la femme, la premièreest de la*

patterns copied from Cesare Vecellio's work, published a few years earlier and highly successful *Corona delle nobili et virtuose donne*.⁷² In the introduction, Vecellio assumes that the main readers of the book will be women, which corresponds to the social practice associated with handicrafts being treated as a means of preventing idleness and, for this reason, recommended for women of all social classes. He thus explicitly writes of his pedagogical intention to cultivate female diligence and virtue, hoping that the patterns in his book will be used "applying them as virtuous works, to their [readers] great delight and praise."⁷³ However, if in Vecellio's book, the text is limited to concise praise and exhortation, De Glens' *Du Devoir des Filles* contains an over a hundred-page treatise on women's and girls' moral duties by Jean-Baptiste de Glen. Its first part discusses marriage, the second part virginity, and only the third and shortest part of the book contains lace patterns. The book was dedicated to Anne de Croy, Marquise de Renty, and the dedication already reveals the author's position towards women. De Glen praises Madame de Croy for her modesty in both dress and manners. He admiringly observes that this high-born lady keeps herself "aloof from all splendour, luxury, and ostentation" to the extent that one looking at her "might sometimes be misled and not take her for a lady of such rank as she possesses in this country". The author staunchly defends such modesty against imaginary critics who might accuse her manner of being "unworthy of the rank she occupies and of her great nobility" and argues that he is not alone in this since "so many wise men" regard Madame de Croy as "an exceptional ornament to the country, an honour to your sex and a true model for ladies". Given the costume book authors' keen emphasis on the need for social identification through dress and custom, de Glen's praise sounds rather unusual. What may be even more surprising to today's reader is the

advice Jean-Batiste de Glen gives to the parents and caregivers of girls. Well, in order to preserve their modesty and virtue, he recommends "depriving them of all . . . trinkets, jewels, and other excesses in dress" and dressing them as modestly and simply as possible, for "nothing provokes them more to go out of the house, and fancy themselves here and there, than rich garments". He does not stop there, however. Referring to the authority of Plutarch, he states that "Egyptian women . . . did not wear shoes on their feet, and were therefore in the habit of staying at home."⁷⁴ De Glen wants to protect young girls at all costs from the promiscuity he believes lurks at every turn—even extending to house arrest in this. A similar desire to perpetuate a moral "Christian economy" (*l'oeconomie chrétienne*)⁷⁵ is revealed in *Habits, moeurs, cérémonies*, where the—somewhat oppressive—pedagogy of female modesty is more important than the established cultural code of social hierarchies. In this De Glen is an outlier. However, his catechetical fervour can be seen as taking other authors' conservatism to the extreme.

Vecellio, on the other hand, certainly seems to have fewer religious inclinations, not only when compared with de Glen but also with the other authors mentioned here. The introductions to *Habitus prae-cipuorum populorum* or *Gynaecium* presented the theological origins of dress, whereas in *Habiti antichi*, there is a historical lecture oriented towards ancient Rome, "the Ruler of the World",⁷⁶ its political system, customs, and dress. Vecellio recognises the mutability of human customs, but it does not fill him with horror. He simply notes: "Human undertakings flow onward and have no permanence or stability."⁷⁷ He also explicitly notes the cognitive limitations he faces:

many regions of the world are too far away for us to have news of them, although they are nonetheless being discovered; we hardly know the names of

dignité de la femme, de ses bons déportemens et devoirs, l'autre traicte de la virginité (Liege, 1597).

⁷² Four such books, which have been reprinted many times, have been published, namely Cesare Vecellio, *Corona delle nobili et virtuose donne, libro primo* (Venetia, 1591); *Corona delle nobili et virtuose donne, libro secundo* (Venetia, 1591); *Corona delle nobili et virtuose donne, libro terzo* (Venetia, 1591); *Gioello della corona per le nobili et virtuose donne, libro quarto* (Venetia, 1593).

⁷³ Vecellio, *Corona delle nobili et virtuose donne, libro primo*, A2v.

⁷⁴ De Glen, *Devoir des filles*, 47, quoted in *Archives historiques et littéraires du Nord de la France et du Midi de la Belgique*, vol. 4, ed. Aimé Leroy (Valenciennes, 1854), 155–156.

⁷⁵ This is the title of another book by Jean-Baptiste de Glen, on the principles of proper upbringing and conduct, see Jean-Baptiste de Glen, *Oeconomie chrestienne contenant les regles de bien vivre, tant pour les gens mariés qu'à marier, pour nourrir et eslever les enfans, fils, filles en la vraye pieté; ses serviteurs aussi et servantes: compris en huit livres* (Liège, 1608).

⁷⁶ Vecellio, "Discorso," 7r. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 59.

⁷⁷ Vecellio, "Discorso," 1r. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 53.

many places discovered within our and our fathers' memories, let alone their costumes and customs; and dress shares the changeability to which all worldly things are and always have been subject.⁷⁸

In the face of this uncertainty and volatility, he sees the meaning of his work in perpetuating the multiplicity of customs, past and present. His work is, therefore, first and foremost an effort to establish knowledge since the aim of his book is that “we can understand the origin of the great variations and diversity of dress that has come into being and still exists, highly susceptible to change. Of this fact, we have reliable information from literature, history, paintings, carvings . . . and sculpture”.⁷⁹ He thus operates within a system of knowledge establishment that makes no distinction between fact and its artistic transposition, between perception and representation, treating them equally as a source of visual and textual information.⁸⁰ It thus opens itself up to a multiplicity of, sometimes contradictory, individual interpretations. In essence, then, the attempt to describe, and thus apprehend, the world in a process of constant change reveals what Surekha Davies describes as “the protean nature of knowledge-making” of the era, or its “multi-think”.⁸¹ This declaration by Vecellio sheds new light on the figure of the Moorish woman from Granada, who, in a short time, takes on so many different meanings. We see that although many costume books have similar goals, the discourses they engage in are far from unambiguous, thus showing the fragility of the belief system to which they refer: Meanings attributed to a human figure constantly shifted to the point that the same visual representation could be textually described and interpreted in a completely different manner.

The figure of the Moorish woman from Granada reveals both the contradictions inherent in the concept of costume books as a genre and the ambiguity of the notion of Europe. The costume books aimed to create a system of ready-made social roles that fixed legitimate patterns of identities while

inscribing the individuals into the grand design of imagined communities.⁸² This was supposed to be a system of social identifications that was to be projected onto Europe as well as the rest of the world.

With their authors insisting on the truthfulness of images drawn up from life, costume books are to be regarded as a medium for the transmission of empirical knowledge. A closer look reveals, however, that, in fact, they were the opposite. Under the guise of anthropological curiosity, there are repeatedly reproduced images, which can acquire completely different meanings in the process. The arbitrariness of their assignment, like the extent to which the text changes the meaning of the image, attests to the fact that costume books fail as a project of identity regulation. Over the course of several years, the same figure, in unchanged costume, can be seen as a European or as a Peruvian woman, a representative of the “inferior sex” in domestic dress, or a person indulging in the degrading practice of transvestism, conveying poverty or splendour. The attempt to systematically define the corporeal identities of the individuals through their garment cannot succeed, then, not only because dress has as much capacity to reflect the existing social order as it does to transgress it, but also because it is impossible to create a system for classifying people without understanding who they are and what constitutes the differences or similarities between them. Similarly doomed to fail was the attempt to fix human identities and social roles based on patterns from a more or less fictional past. Still, the more costume books fail in the objectives they set for themselves, the more interesting research material they represent, proving the contrary of what they were aiming for: how conventional the national, class and gender boundaries were, and thereby accounting for the impossibility of stabilising the meanings behind the clothes and the bodies that wear them. Ultimately, the longer we look at the people represented in the costume books, the less we know about who the Europeans are and what makes them different from others.

⁷⁸ Vecellio, “A i Lettori,” np. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 50.

⁷⁹ Vecellio, “Discorso,” 2r. English translation in *Clothing of the Renaissance World*, 54.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bond, *Costume imagery*, 46ff.

⁸¹ Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 46.

⁸² See Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 4.