



FASHIONING
THE EARLY MODERN
*Dress, Textiles
and Innovation in Europe
1500–1800*

EVELYN WELCH

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Dress, Textiles, and Innovation
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DRESS, DISSEMINATION, AND INNOVATION

*Artisan Fashions in Sixteenth- and
Early Seventeenth-Century Italy*

PAULA HOHTI

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries constitute an important period of change in Italian fashions. The rapid changes in tastes and the wide circulation of fashion innovations, popularized by Spanish and French courts and promoted by flourishing international textile and clothing trades, introduced new concepts into traditional, local ways of dressing.¹ Men and women from wealthy Italian families spent fortunes on their clothing, as they aspired to differentiate themselves socially through fashionable garments that were not only made from luxurious fabrics, but also fashioned according to precise dress codes.² But was ‘fashion’ connected only with the wealthy and powerful men and women who had acquired economic and social capital through aristocratic birth, marriage, or professional position, or could ordinary Italian men and women who had very few of these advantages be ‘fashionable’ in the early modern period?

Although they need to be used with care, late sixteenth-century Italian genre paintings offer a unique visual source for the study of working- and middle-class dress. A painting by Annibale Carracci, for example, shows a peasant man sitting down to a meal of beans and bread (Illustration 5.1). He is wearing a basic linen shirt, a coarse jacket and a rustic straw hat. A market scene from 1580 by Vincenzo Campi depicts a young woman selling fruit (Illustration 5.2). She is dressed in a front-opening yellow gown with a green apron and a high-necked

¹ For innovations and changes in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century fashions see Elizabeth Currie, ‘Fashion Networks: Consumer Demand and the Clothing Trade in Florence from the Mid-Sixteenth to Early Seventeenth Centuries’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 39/3 (2009), 483–509; Carlo Marco Belfanti and Fabio Giusberti, ‘Clothing and Social Inequality in Early Modern Europe: Introductory Remarks’, *Continuity and Change*, 15/3 (2000), 359–65.

² Margaret Rosenthal, ‘Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 39/3 (2009), 459–81 at 460.



Illustration 5.1. *The Eater of Beans*, by Annibale Carracci, c.1580. Oil on canvas. Galleria Colonna, Rome. Photograph © Photo Scala, Florence, 2013

linen shirt. The relatively basic clothes in both images are designed to provide maximum comfort and practicality during work. For example, although the upper part of the fruit-seller's dress seems to be tufted, the wrinkles across the bodice imply that there is no boning or corset. In addition, the upper part of the outfit includes large ribbons where the sleeves could be attached, but she is wearing the dress without sleeves. Emphasizing durability, comfort, and practicality rather than beauty, the clothing in the representations ties the wearers to their roles as manual labourers or vendors.

In this context the famous portrait painting of the tailor painted by Moroni around 1570 seems striking and highly unusual (Illustration 5.3). The tailor is depicted in a self-confident pose, wearing a fine-pinked cream doublet and red hose and looking straight out to the spectator. The significant difference is that, whereas the genre scenes afforded curious Renaissance gentlemen the possibility of observing how the lower orders lived, worked, and dressed, while still maintaining a distance from the subjects, Moroni's tailor confuses the social and cul-



Illustration 5.2. *The Fruit-Seller*, by Vincenzo Campi, 1580. Oil on canvas. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Photograph © Photo Scala, Florence, 2013; courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali

tural boundaries between the sitter and the viewer. Although the tailor is depicted with scissors—the sign of his craft—his dignified pose and relatively valuable clothing seem to make a self-confident visual statement: ‘I am one of you.’³

Historians have been fascinated by the tailor’s image because it seems to suggest that the Renaissance preoccupation with what Stephen Greenblatt has famously described as self-fashioning—the creation and representation of public social and cultural identities by means of clothing, appearance, and behaviour—extended all the way down to the lower classes.⁴ Yet, with the important exception of John Styles’s study of everyday fashion in the eighteenth century, there has been surprisingly little discussion of how non-élite members of society

³ See Jonathan Jones’s observations in his essay ‘Why Everyone Should See This Painting’, *The Guardian*, 1 May 2007.

⁴ For the introduction of the concept of *self-fashioning*, or the construction of one’s public identity by means of material items and behaviour according to a set of socially acceptable rules, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare* (1980; repr. Chicago, 2005). Portraits, including that of Moroni, have been an important source for studying dress in Renaissance Italy. See e.g. Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing* (Baltimore, 2002); Jacqueline Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy, 1400–1500* (London, 1981).



Illustration 5.3. *The Tailor*, by Giovan Battista Moroni,
c.1570. Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London.
Photograph © The National Gallery, London/Scala Florence

dressed in early modern Europe, especially when they took off their work clothes and changed into more elaborate or expensive items for public or festive occasions.⁵

While recent work on early modern Italian material culture suggests that the artisan and labouring classes had greater access to a wide range of luxury dress items, especially through the flourishing second-hand trade, than scholars have tended to assume, it is not clear how the tastes and dress styles at lower social levels were connected to the fashions of the period discussed in this work.⁶

The preceding chapters by Styles, Wunder, and Welch and Claxton have investigated how fashions were disseminated at a relatively élite level. This chapter explores how dress fashions circulated further down the social scale, among artisans and shopkeepers, such as barbers, bakers, shoemakers, and hatters. The discussion will centre on the urban, middle classes of artisans, shopkeepers, and traders living mainly in Siena and Florence in the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This group of consumers, modestly prosperous but not rich, was composed neither of peasants or labouring people who worked on the streets pulling carts or building walls, nor of top-level artisans who had close dealings with patricians, but of ordinary working citizens who ran small business enterprises on a local basis in the two cities.⁷

In looking at individual items of dress that were found in the wardrobes of these groups, and examining broad trends in Italian fashions

⁵ John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2007); see also Chapter 1 above. Some recent studies of early modern dress also deal with dress and appearance at the lower social levels. See Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 149–57; Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010).

⁶ Studies of the artisan class and the acquisition of clothing include Patricia Allerston, 'Clothing and Early Modern Venetian Society', *Continuity and Change*, 15/3 (2000), 367–90; Monica Cerri, 'Sarti toscani nel Seicento: attività e clientela', in Anna G. Cavagna and Grazietta Butazzi (eds.), *Le trame della moda* (Rome, 1995), 421–35; Elizabeth Currie, 'Diversity and Design in the Florentine Tailoring Trade, 1550–1620', in Michelle O'Malley and Evelyn Welch (eds.), *The Material Renaissance, 1450–1600* (Manchester, 2007), 154–73.

⁷ For the economic level of artisans, based on the Sieneese tax records known as the *Lira*, see Paula Hohti, 'The Inn-Keeper's Goods: The Use and Acquisition of Household Property in Sixteenth-Century Siena', in Michelle O'Malley and Evelyn Welch (eds.), *The Material Renaissance* (Manchester, 2007), 242–59; and ead., 'Artisans, Pawn-Broking, and the Circulation of Material Goods in Sixteenth-Century Siena', in M. Ascheri, G. Mazzoni, and F. Nevola (eds.), *Siena nel Rinascimento: l'ultimo secolo della repubblica*, ii. *Arte, architettura e cultura. Acts of the International Conference, Siena (28–30 Sept. 2003 and 16–18 Sept. 2004)* (Siena, 2009), 271–81.

of the period, the aim is not only to explore how the dress of ordinary Italians changed during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but also to evaluate whether dress fashions were driven at the lower social levels by the same concepts of novelty and innovation that characterized the élites.

The diffusion and consumption patterns of early modern fashion have long been described as a process of emulation. This is an entrenched idea in historical scholarship, based on the premiss that the élites (usually the court) were the first to offer and adopt a style that gradually became accepted by lower social ranks. This view assumes that as soon as new fashionable commodities became available and affordable, the lower classes would try to replicate the 'look' of their social superiors rather than establish dress styles, and habits and meanings of dress, of their own.⁸ We need to move away from a concept of dissemination as a form of direct imitation in a new consumer economy, noting that lower social groups were remarkably receptive to fashion change. By drawing on high fashion in multiple ways and by repurposing innovative goods, ordinary men and women were engaged with much more creative practices than traditional assumptions about fashion dissemination suggest to date.

THE DISSEMINATION OF FASHIONABLE DRESS

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Italian fashion was characterized by a desire for novelty. The emergence of new crafts and industries, the unprecedented speed and movement of goods, including a wide geographical circulation of international fashion manufactures and clothing designs, and the growing preference for cheaper materials not only changed the way clothing was made, decorated, and worn, but also established new values in the systems of dress. Expensive fabrics, used for the multiple layers of male and female clothing, were no longer the only powerful tools that made real or imaginary distinctions of rank visible in society. Instead, the display of new styles and novelties, such

⁸ The trickle-down theory was first offered by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York, 1899). For a systematic attempt to apply the 'trickle-down' concept as a general explanation for early modern consumer behaviour see in particular Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and John H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982). The concept is discussed in relation to early modern Italy in Allerston, 'Clothing and Early Modern Venetian Society', 367–70, and Paula Hohti, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Popular Consumers: Material Culture and Social Status in Sixteenth-Century Siena', *Renaissance Studies*, 24/5 (2010), 654–70.

as short cloaks, tight jackets, stiff bodices, hooped skirts, and loose overgowns that were decorated with slashes, embroidery, applied trims, and other forms of surface ornamentation and accessories, became an important part of the local dress cultures.⁹ Many of these new fashions imitated foreign designs. An account book of a Lucchese tailor, Pellegrino di Antonio, practising in Livorno in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for example, shows the increasing demand by his clients for garments that were made from foreign fabrics or fashioned to resemble foreign styles, such as doublets made from yellow cloth ‘alla francese’, garments lined with a cloth from Sangallo, or gowns that were decorated with ribboning in the Neapolitan style.¹⁰ Particularly important for the fashionable look were new accessories and light silk fabrics that were imported from diverse Italian towns such as Milan, Venice, Rome, Naples, and Lucca.¹¹

Court artists recorded these elaborate dress fashions in detail in portraits. Two portrait paintings shown overleaf (Illustrations 5.4 and 5.5) provide examples of fashionable dress around the 1560s–1570s. In the portrait of Francesco I de’ Medici the male sitter, represented standing next to his armour, is wearing a gold-embroidered black outfit, composed of a tight-fitting buttoned doublet, panned hose, and matching sleeves, worn over a high-neck shirt edged with a small ruff. The painting of Maria de’ Medici shows an elegant noblewoman’s dress. The figure is dressed in a close-fitting blue silk gown, worn over an underdress that matches her sleeves. An elaborate flared lace collar decorates her neck. The stiff bodice of the dress is fastened with small

⁹ Novelty was a key to distinction and not limited to Italian products. See Elizabeth Currie, ‘Clothing and a Florentine Style, 1550–1620’, *Renaissance Studies*, 23/1 (2009), 33–52. Foreign trade of material goods played an important role in fashion dissemination. For early modern trading networks see Marta Ajmar and Luca Molà, ‘The Global Renaissance: Cross-Cultural Objects in the Early Modern Period’, in Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley (eds.), *Global Design History* (London, 2011), 11–20; Rosenthal, ‘Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe’; Joanne Ferraro, ‘The Manufacture and Movement of Goods’, in J. Martin (ed.), *The Renaissance World* (New York, 2007), 87–100. For sixteenth-century clothing fashions in Tuscany see Roberta Orsi Landini and Bruna Niccoli, *Moda a Firenze 1540–1580: lo stile di Eleonora di Toledo e la sua influenza* (Florence, 2005).

¹⁰ Cerri, ‘Sarti toscani nel Seicento’, 428. The desire for foreign clothing was also seen in the increasing number of violations of the sumptuary regulations. See Luigi Fumi, ‘La moda del vestire in Lucca dal secolo XIV al XIX’, *Bollettino dell’Istituto Storico Artistico Orvietano*, 54/60 (2002), 519–86 at 546–7.

¹¹ Imports from those places included new garments, hats, trimmings, fabrics, and specialized types of haberdashery. See Currie, ‘Fashion Networks’, 488–501. For the importance of imported material goods see Rosenthal, ‘Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, 461–5.



Illustration 5.4. *Portrait of Francesco I de' Medici (1541–87)*, unknown artist. Oil on canvas. Museo Bardini, Florence. Photograph © Photo Scala, Florence, 2013



Illustration 5.5. *Portrait of Maria de' Medici*, by Alessandro Allori, c.1555–60. Oil on poplarwood. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photograph © Photo Austrian Archives/Scala Florence

gold buttons and loops and is decorated with gold-embroidered trims that extend to the skirt. A double row of rolled loops decorates each shoulder.

It is usually assumed in historical scholarship that fashion in dress in this period was created for the privileged few.¹² However, sixteenth-century documentary sources from Siena and Florence suggest that the working population was much more receptive to innovation than we tend to assume. Inventories, account books, and sumptuary laws demonstrate that changes in tastes and dress styles profoundly influenced the ways in which the lower orders dressed, not only increasing a sense of luxury but also introducing new fashionable garments into the wardrobes of ordinary artisans.

One novelty seen in late sixteenth-century outfits was the *zimarra*, a Spanish tight-fitting sleeveless overgown sometimes worn with separate matching sleeves, especially preferred by mature women.¹³ This gown, represented in many Italian portraits throughout the sixteenth century, begins to appear more frequently in Sienese artisans' inventories in the 1590s. By the 1630s it had gradually become popular alongside the traditional long mantles (*mantelli*) and gowns known as *sbernie*, which were worn wrapped under one arm and tied at the opposite shoulder.¹⁴ Among the artisan population, at first the *zimarra* might have been a rather functional garment used either at home or outside for warmth. Lined with leather or linen in the winter, it was often made from black or brown woollen fabric that varied in quality between homespun cloth and fine-quality wool, such as *rascie*.¹⁵ By the 1630s, however, this overgown, even among artisans, became increasingly decorative. It was often made from green, red, or medium blue fabric and decorated with

¹² This is in part due to the fact that many of the arguments concerning lower-class dress are based on visual images of or the distribution of clothing among servants. See e.g. Margaret Scott, *A Visual History of Costume: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London, 1986), 14.

¹³ For *zimarre* see Currie, 'Diversity and Design in the Florentine Tailoring Trade, 1550–1620', 164, and Cerri, 'Sarti toscani nel Seicento', 427.

¹⁴ The *zimarra* appears only once among the 82 artisan inventories that were studied between 1500 and 1555, and it was a modest, functional garment. See Archivio di Stato di Siena [henceforth ASS], Curia del Placito [henceforth CDP] 725/142 (27 Apr. 1548): 'The inventory of the woodcutter Christofano di Bartolomeo', fol. 3^r. By the 1590s the *zimarra* had become a relatively common item in artisan inventories. At first it coexisted with other types of overgowns, such as the *turcha*, but by the 1630s the *turcha* seems largely to have disappeared from artisan wardrobes.

¹⁵ The majority of the *zimarre* listed in the sales records and inventories of the sixteenth-century Sienese Curia del Placito were made from dark-coloured woollen fabrics. These were probably intended for winter use. See e.g. ASS, CDP 279 (1636): 'Inventory of the barber Maestro Giovanni Rosi', fol. 25^{r-v}.

silk trim or embroidery. In 1636 the household inventory of Maestro Guasparre Radi, a furniture-maker at San Pietro alle Scale, listed two *zimarre*, one medium blue and the other black, decorated with bands of velvet. The tailor Oratio Rondini's clothing list included three *zimarre*, one of which was made from black velvet and decorated with embroidery.¹⁶ Some of these *zimarre* were described as 'new'.

Although men also wore *zimarre*, the gown was especially popular among women. It was nearly always listed in clothing inventories together with the *sottana* or the *vesta*, a gown worn by elite women, as seen in the portrait painting of Maria de' Medici (Illustration 5.5). Composed of a skirt and a bodice and sometimes supported by circles of linen or cotton (*faldiglia*) in the Spanish fashion, in order to give the dress a fuller shape, the *sottana* or *vesta* was usually designed to provide a sharp colour contrast with the *zimarra*.¹⁷ For example, the hatmaker's wife Verginia had a black gold-embroidered woollen *zimarra* and a velvet-trimmed black silk *zimarra* that she could combine with one of her three bright silk-trimmed or embroidered silk *sottane*, one of which was light blue, while the other two were pink.¹⁸ The tailor Oratio Rondini's wife also owned a black *zimarra* that she could wear over a yellow damask *sottana* or a multicoloured trimmed silk gown.¹⁹

Documentation suggests that fine *zimarre* such as these were worn by women at lower social levels for festive occasions. A Florentine document, for example, tells us that Antonia, wife of one Gabrielo, attended the *fiesta* of San Lorenzo on 12 August 1642 wearing a *zimarra* and two elaborate gold chains, one worn at the neck, the other at her shoulder.²⁰ Gradually, then, the *zimarra* seems also to have added a new decorative layer to public dress at lower social levels, increasing not just the sense of refinement but also the cost of the outfit. The account book of the workshop of a Florentine tailor producing clothing for an artisan clientele

¹⁶ ASS, CDP 279 (1636): 'Inventory of the furniture-maker Guasparre Radi', fol. 67^r. ASS, CDP 279/43 (1637): 'Inventory of tailor Oratio Rondini', fol. 184^r.

¹⁷ The underskirt reinforced with linen, cotton, or wooden circles, known as *faldia*, *faldiglia*, or *verduacto*, was a Spanish invention. It was adapted to Italian dress fashions at the end of the fifteenth century and appeared in the Sieneese artisan inventories definitely by the 1530s: ASS, CDP 687/20 (1531): 'Inventory of the innkeeper Marchione da Mulazzo', fol. 9^v; ASS, CDP 684/10 (1532): 'Inventory of a shopkeeper Benedetto di Bartolomeo', fol. 1^v.

¹⁸ ASS, CDP 279/42 (1637): 'Inventory of the hatmaker Ascanio Mancini', fol. 178^r.

¹⁹ ASS, CDP 279/43 (1637): 'Inventory of the tailor Oratio Rondini', fol. 184^r. For other examples see e.g. ASS, CDP 279/29 (1637): 'Inventory of the tailor Giovanni di Andrea', fol. 117^r.

²⁰ Archivio di Stato, Florence (henceforth ASF), Pratica Segreta 176 (1642), ch. 482.

shows that the *zimarra* was a relatively expensive item to make. For example, in 1614 the Florentine Francesco di Nicholo paid the tailor ten *lire* for making up the *zimarra* that he had ordered for his daughter.²¹ After adding the cost of the fabric and decorations, a tailor-made *zimarra* probably amounted to a considerable investment for the average artisan, whose earnings usually varied between one and a half and two *lire* a day.²² A finished linen-lined taffeta *zimarra* was valued at twenty *lire* in the tailor's account book, making it one of the most expensive items in his stock.²³ *Zimarre* were, of course, also purchased by artisans at a cheaper price in the second-hand market. The sums paid for plain *zimarre* at the Sienese auction organized by the local Office of the Wards in 1591 varied between three and eighteen *lire*.²⁴

The new tastes and dress fashions of the period also influenced the colour scheme of the artisans' outfits. While the domestic gowns and work clothes of artisans were usually plain grey or brown, clothing reserved for festive occasions was often made from fine fabrics in fashionable colours.²⁵ One of the refined colours of the mid-sixteenth century was *pavonazzo*, an expensive purple-red colour historically based on valuable red dyestuffs, the *chermisi* and the *grana*.²⁶ Just like intense black, this precious colour was associated with wealth and prestige, not only because of its high value, but also because of the status of *pavonazzo* as a symbol of authority and power. For example, the regulations concerning *abiti civili* state that the highest state officials, including the Capitano di Popolo, were required to wear mantles of this colour.²⁷ The colour also enjoyed great popularity among the élite of the mid-sixteenth century. The famous portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi, painted by Agnolo di Cosimo around 1540 (Galleria Uffizi in Florence),

²¹ ASF, Libro di Commercio 3430 (1601–18), fol. 113^v.

²² For the level of artisans' income see Paula Hohti, 'Material Culture, Shopkeepers and Artisans in Sixteenth-Century Siena' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 2006), 50–8.

²³ For commissions by artisan clientele of *zimarre* and the prices paid for the tailor see also Cerri, 'Sarti toscani nel Seicento'.

²⁴ See the various prices paid at auction in ASS, CDP 1382 (1591).

²⁵ In the late fifteenth century women's clothing of the *popolo minuto* was often made from natural cloth, uncoloured or in inexpensive hues such as shades of white or light blue. In the sixteenth century the colour range seems to be more varied. The ordinary clothing worn by Sienese artisans was usually green, red, grey, black, brown, or yellow.

²⁶ There has been some debate over the precise meaning of *pavonazzo*. For a discussion of the origins and character of the colour see Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings, 1300–1550* (New Haven and London, 2008), 315.

²⁷ ASS, Balìa 840 (1577), fol. 282^r.

represents the sitter wearing *pavonazzo* sleeves. By the 1550s the colour had acquired popularity among Sieneese artisans, especially for women's *gamurre*.²⁸

The use of *pavonazzo* by the lower social orders must have caused some tension, because in 1588 the Sieneese government announced a new sumptuary law forbidding all people outside the ruling classes to wear the colour.²⁹ The prohibition seems to have been effective: *pavonazzo* gradually disappears from the Sieneese artisans' wardrobes and by the 1630s is almost entirely replaced by other colours, particularly shades of pink, light blue, white, and black. None of these colours was necessarily cheap, however. The pink-coloured cloak (*turcha*) once worn by the Sieneese baker Bartolomeo di Andrea, decorated with white and crimson silk fringes, was sold at auction in 1591 for the considerable sum of seventy-one *lire*—almost two full months' salary for an average artisan.³⁰

In addition to new clothing types and colour schemes, new fabrics were introduced in artisan dress in this period. One of the notable developments was the spread of silks in the wardrobes of the artisan classes. In his work on the Venetian silk trade Luca Molà cites the case of a Venetian woollen-cloth weaver, whose inventory of 1565 contained a wide range of silk items, such as sleeves, doublets, and trousers made from red and black satin, sarcenet, and samite.³¹ Light silk fabrics also begin to appear in the clothing of Sieneese artisans around the same time. By the third quarter of the sixteenth century, both artisan household inventories and clothing registers kept by government officials responsible for sumptuary legislation included entries listing undergarments, sleeves, and aprons belonging to artisans that were made from a wide

²⁸ e.g. ASS, CDP 725, 142 (25 Apr. 1548): 'Inventory of the shoemaker Christofano di Bartolomeo', fols. 2^v–3^r; CDP 722, no. 4 (5 May 1546): 'Inventory of the fife-player Paulo', fol. 2^v; CDP 684, 10 (1532), 'Inventory of the shopkeeper Benedetto di Bartolomeo', fol. 2^r.

²⁹ The other colour absolutely forbidden at this time to those below the ruling élites (*non riseduti*) was intense black. See Giulia Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', *Quaderni Storici*, 110 (2002), 477–503 at 501 n. 28. The law was repeated in the Sieneese *statuti* of 1599: 'Il color nero o almeno il pavonazzo pareva da proibirsi in tutto alle donne non riseduti o non maritate a riseduti' (ASS, Balia 830 (1599), fol. 342^r).

³⁰ ASS, CDP 1328 (1591), fol. 12^v. According to Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 101–3, the most expensive colours included crimson, scarlet, red violets, blue violets, purples, and black (*morello di grana*), which was still only half the price of crimson. Blue-greens such as *oricello* (blue-orchill) and *verzino* (vermilion), and pale shades of black, were among the less costly colours.

³¹ Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore, 2000), 90–1.

range of coloured silks, particularly red, white, green, or yellow taffeta, sarcenet, or satin.³² Since some of these fabrics, such as taffeta, were relatively cheap silks, applied ornaments or embroidery were included in the garments to emphasize the shiny effect. A number of Sienese lower-class women, such as the wives of the carpenter Guasparre Radi, the tailor Giovanni di Andrea, and the innkeeper Basilio di Domenico, had clothing made from taffeta and finished with trims of gold embroidery.³³

Contemporaries also often remarked on the increasing dissemination of silks across social classes. Giovan Andrea Corsuccio, author of *Il vermicello dalla seta* [*The Little Silkworm*] (1581), claims that in Venice ‘anyone, vile as he may be, is dressed in silk, . . . so that even the charlatans, if they have no velvet cap or doublet, are not able to draw a crowd of listeners’.³⁴ The wider social dissemination of silks was connected to more general shifts in demand in northern Italy in the late sixteenth century, as identified by some historians of early modern dress and textile, from heavy brocaded velvets and damasks to cheaper light silks, satin, taffeta, sarcenet, and grosgrain.³⁵ Such silks cost much less than the heavy brocaded silks and velvets because they weighed less and were woven using smaller amounts of silk, which was of inferior quality. The lower price of the fabric fitted well with the requirement of élite con-

³² The increasing number of light silk fabrics in artisan dress in the sixteenth century can be seen both in inventories and in documentation relating to sumptuary laws. While satin already appears relatively frequently in artisan inventories around the 1550s, taffeta used for lining sleeves and modest silk dresses became increasingly popular in the second half of the sixteenth century. The clothing registers of 1562, for example, listing the licences that were sold allowing artisans to wear prohibited silk garments, show that articles made from taffeta were particularly popular. See ASS, Biccherna 1084 (1562).

³³ CDP 279 (1636): ‘Inventory of the carpenter Guasparre’, fol. 66^v; CDP 279, 29 (1637): ‘Inventory of the tailor Giovanni di Andrea’ fol. 116^v; CDP 279, 47 (1637): ‘Inventory of the innkeeper Basilio di Domenico’, fol. 198^r.

³⁴ Cited in Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice*, 90–1. For the original see Corsuccio da Sascorbaro, *Il vermicello dalla Seta del Corsuccio da Sascorbaro, nuovamente venuto in luce* (Rimini, 1581), 11–12: ‘E perche hoggi chiunque per vile che sia veste di seta; fa di mistiero trovar modo, come se ne possi haver assai, che fino I Ceretani, se non hanno la beretta, o saio di Veluto non sono atti à far un circolo, & essere intesi.’

³⁵ Currie, ‘Clothing and a Florentine Style, 1550–1620’, 51; Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 6. The development can also be seen within the artisan classes. Compare, for example, the painter Sano di Nero’s heavy velvet clothes in the previous century, as listed in the *Marcatura di vesti*: Mario Ciatti, ‘I tessuti d’arte a Siena’, in M. Seidel and Francesco Caglioti (eds.), *Le arti a Siena nel primo Rinascimento: da Jacopo della Quercia a Donatello*, catalogue of the exhibition held in Siena 26 Mar.–11 July 2010, Santa Maria della Scala, Opera della Metropolitana, Pinacoteca Nazionale (Milan, 2010), 588–93 at 590.

sumers for rapid changes in dress styles, and these changes in turn made fashionable clothing more accessible to less privileged families.

As fashionable clothing seemed to spread through the ranks with increasing speed, states throughout the Grand Duchy of Tuscany tried to exercise tighter control over dress. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, for example, state officials in Florence took increasing measures against those who broke the sumptuary laws, monitoring individuals' clothing at taverns, marketplaces, *piazze*, and the entrance of churches such as the Duomo and Sant'Annunciata, literally removing excess jewellery and ruffs from people's neck and arms.³⁶ These actions seem to have especially targeted the dress of the non-élite classes. Giulia Calvi has calculated from the surviving records of the Florentine *Pratica Segreta* of 1638–40 that 80 per cent of the prosecutions concerned members of the lower social orders.³⁷ Several of these cases involved a measure of aggression. For example, on the morning of 25 September 1638 officials caught Costanza, a gardener's wife, in the street wearing a trimmed veil of black velvet, a pearl necklace with a small gold cross, and three gold rings that were prohibited for women of her social status. The officials demanded these items from her, and when Costanza refused to hand over the necklace the police threatened to use force and put her in prison.³⁸ Sometimes events could even turn violent. In February 1638 two wives of ordinary workers, in the company of a gentlewoman and the wives of a doctor and a pharmacist, were caught wearing heavy gold chains, prohibited pearl necklaces, and rings set with precious stones and diamonds. When officials demanded the excessive jewellery, all five women reacted violently. They first tried to hide the objects and then fled screaming and shouting, threatening to provoke a fight with stones, beating and banging on the entrance doors of the street.³⁹

As these cases demonstrate, the level of feeling associated with the use and display of fashion accessories, connected with the increasing social diffusion of fashionable fabrics, colours, dress types, and accessories,

³⁶ See e.g. a case of 1638–9 in Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', 494–5.

³⁷ The Florentine officials of *Cinque Centori* began to identify offenders in 1638. The records of 1638–40 contain 255 lawsuits together with successive revisions of the penalties. Of these, according to Calvi, 80.5% belonged to the popular classes, including wool and silk weavers, street vendors, smiths, hatmakers, shoemakers, butchers, second-hand dealers at the *Mercato Vecchio*, barbers, and peasants. See Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', 492.

³⁸ Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', 495; the original is at ASF, *Pratica Segreta* (26 Sept. 1639), ch. 230.

³⁹ Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', 494; the original is at ASF, *Pratica Segreta* (1638–9), chs. 140, 173, 186, 194.

suggests that artisans in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Italy had both the desire and the financial capacity to adopt some of the essential elements of fashions associated with the nobility. This extended to the presentation of the self through portraiture (Illustration 5.3). While Moroni's painting may be a rare surviving example of an artisan portrait, portraits did begin to appear in artisan inventories at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For example, the Sienese shoemaker Giovanni di Pavolo had a painted portrait of himself in the bedroom of his home.⁴⁰ The presence of portraiture among artisan classes met with a great deal of disapproval because earlier, when only the upper classes had their images painted, the mere existence of a portrait had been a sign of high status. The Venetian Pietro Aretino, disregarding his own humble origins, expressed it thus: 'It is a disgrace of our age that it tolerates the painted portraits even of tailors and butchers.'⁴¹

The growing popularity of portraits among the classes of artisans and traders and the wide social diffusion of fashionable clothing demonstrate that these classes were remarkably receptive to fashion change. This challenges the common assumption that clothing owned and worn by ordinary Italians showed little change in comparison with the dynamic culture of elite fashion. However, in order to evaluate the cultural experiences associated with clothing and appearance at lower social levels, it is important to consider dress and fashion in the context of their own specific material and social conditions, especially the rules and constraints that regulated dress.

RULES AND REGULATIONS OF DRESS

The many documents recording the clothing practices of ordinary Italians demonstrate that there were a number of occasions on which the lower classes were required to dress well before their peers. In addition to important family occasions, such as marriages, funerals, and childbirth, where individuals dressed in their best to show off family wealth and status, the early modern Italian calendar included numerous public festive days during which all inhabitants, both rich and poor, were expected to wear respectable clothing in honour of the city. The barbers' guild statutes of 1593, for example, listed thirty-four public holidays in

⁴⁰ CDP 279 (1637), 'Inventory of the shoemaker Giovanni di Pavolo', fol. 109^v. The practice also extended beyond Europe. For an accountant who commissioned water-colour images of himself dressed in order to project the desired image of himself see Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 33

⁴¹ Cited in Patricia Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1997), 149.

addition to Sundays that were devoted to commemorating saints, military achievements, or important diplomatic and royal visits in the city.⁴² All these events entailed the application of a set of informal rules and expectations about appropriate appearance.

Dress and fashion in early modern Italy were regulated by various formal and informal rules that limited the choice of apparel, especially at lower social levels. Outward appearance was systematically controlled, particularly through sumptuary laws designed to ensure that the social rank of each person would be immediately recognizable. Although sumptuary laws were not primarily concerned with 'fashion' in the stylistic sense, expectations of hierarchy and appropriate behaviour placed heavy restrictions on the dress of ordinary Italians. The Sieneese laws from the second half of the sixteenth century, for example, allowed women outside the ruling élites to have just one silk dress, provided it was not crimson red, and a limited number of dress accessories.⁴³ The regulations focused especially on the use of silks and velvets, such as brocaded silks, cut-and-figured velvet, grosgrain, and sarcenet, because all over Europe silk had traditionally been a badge of status for the wealthiest members of society.⁴⁴ A letter of 1546, for example, sent by Cosimo I to the secretary Francesco Vinta, demonstrates a strong desire to restrict the use of silks to the privileged classes: 'we want to distinguish those who are not *gentildonne* from the rest in this way: that they cannot wear velvets, satin, damask, sarcenet, or brocaded silk of any kind, but only wool and linen'.⁴⁵

In order to enforce the laws, Italian states often required householders to obtain a permit to wear luxury clothing. In the 1570s the Sieneese Balia specified that each garment regulated by sumptuary legislation had to be brought into the office for inspection within thirty days of the publication of the law. Once the notary had recorded the article, specifying the name of the owner and the colour and quality of the fabric, the owner was required to make a payment of 3 *quattrini*. The dress was then marked with a lead seal as a sign that the licence had been granted.⁴⁶ The laws also covered second-hand garments for, as the

⁴² ASS, Arti 37, Statuto de' Barbieri (1593).

⁴³ ASS, Quattro Censori 1 (1548). For prohibitions in Siena see Clara Bonelli Gandolfo, 'Leggi suntuarie senesi dei secoli xv e xvi', *La Diana*, 2/4 (1927), 274–94 at 281; and for Lucca see Fumi, 'La moda del vestire in Lucca dal secolo xiv al xix', 546.

⁴⁴ For silk as an indisputable sign of wealth and status see Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 1.

⁴⁵ Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli xvi–xvii)', 489.

⁴⁶ See e.g. the regulations in ASS, Balia 830, Libro dei bandi (1576), fol. 252^v. For the lead seal attached to the dress see e.g. ASS, Quattro Censori 1 (1548). For *vesti*

Sieneſe statutes ſtated, prohibited garments were not to be acquired or ſold even if they were made before publication of the law.⁴⁷

Although hiſtorians of dreſs generally agree that ſumptuary laws were not always effective, houſehold inventories and private accounts belonging to artiſan families ſhow that, while it was not uncommon for the wealthy Italian élites to acquire a new wardrobe for each family member every year, even individuals from the artiſan claſſes usually poſſeſſed one or two ſets of valuable attire. The inability of artiſans to change their wardrobe regularly according to changing fashi- ons was, of course, not only linked to the ſocial regulation of dreſs but was also connected to the high coſt of clothes, eſpecially thoſe made from fine fabrics, including ſilks, velvets, and fine, light woollen fabrics.⁴⁸

In order to follow changing fashi- ons, moſt artiſans therefore re- used and remodelled their old garments as occasions and preferences changed. The practice of reſhaſioning old garments ſeems to have been common. The account book of the Florentine tailor Antonio di Dome- nico da Stia, who produced garments for ordinary Italians, ſhows that many of his clients came to him with a requeſt ‘to modify the garments in the current ſtyle’.⁴⁹ Many of theſe garments may originally have been wedding dreſſes. Thus, on 3 July 1638, when a poor gardener’s wife in Florence was apprehended by officials upholding the ſumptuary laws for wearing forbidden items ſuch as a ruff and ſilk trimmed ſleeves made from a fabric that imitated the effect of cloth of gold, a wi- tneſs told the court that the accessories were part of the woman’s wedding gown, which had been made by nuns at the Florentine convent of Annalena.⁵⁰ Benedetta, the wife of a barber, was arreſted in Florence on 3 May 1638 for wearing a ſilk lace veil, which ſhe claimed to have received twelve years earlier on the occasion of her marriage.⁵¹

The high coſt of clothes and the ſtrict ſtate-regulated ſocial and *marcati* in the ſtate archives of Siena ſee Biccherna 1081 (marcatura delle veſti, 1544), *Quattro Cenſori* 3, 4 (marcatura delle veſti 1548), Biccherna 1082–4 (marcature delle veſti, 1561–3).

⁴⁷ Bonelli Gandolfo, ‘Leggi ſuntuarie ſeneſi dei ſecoli xv e xvi’, 277.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Currie’s work on ſixteenth- and ſeventeenth-century tailoring practice indicates that garments made for an artiſan clientele differed from the clothing of the nobility more in the fabric than in the cut of the garment: ſee Currie, ‘Diversity and Design in the Florentine Tailoring Trade, 1550–1620’, 155 and 169 n. 9. For the account book of the tailor Antonio di Domenico da Stia, continued by his ſon Domenico, ſee Cerri, ‘Sarti toſcani nel Seicento’ (for the original ſee ASF, ‘Libro di commercio e di famiglia’ 3430 (1601–18)).

⁴⁹ Cerri, ‘Sarti toſcani nel Seicento’, 424: ‘far ridurre gli abiti all’uſanza’.

⁵⁰ Calvi, ‘Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toſcana moderna (ſecoli xvi–xvii)’, 494.

⁵¹ ASF, Pratica Segreta, 176 (1638) chs. 45 and 556. For a diſcuſſion of the practice of

cultural rules regarding self-presentation highlight not just the complexities associated with dress and dressing at the lower levels of society, but also the problems arising from imitation of the élites. In what follows it will be argued that in order to create a fashionable look within this hierarchical society, which classified people by rank and limited dress choice in both cultural and economic terms, the lower classes had to modify and manipulate current fashions to suit their own needs.

THE CREATIVE PRACTICE OF FASHION

In order to examine some of the specific features of working-class dress, we return to Vincenzo Campi's image of the fruit-seller (Illustration 5.2) and investigate characteristics of her dress. A closer look at the young woman's dress reveals that although the garment is relatively basic, it includes a number of details that respond to contemporary taste. For example, detailed examination not only shows that her linen shirt is decorated with a lacy edging that matches both her ruff and sleeve cuffs according to the taste of the period, but also reveals that her green apron includes a yellow embroidered pattern, perhaps made in imitation of gold embroidery.

Although the details of the dress may be idealized in the painting, archival evidence shows that artisans and shopkeepers often used a wide range of methods to update ordinary dress to conform to current fashions. One of the important ways in which a fashionable look was created was to trim the outfit using elegant materials. As we have already seen, although garments of the finest fabrics were reserved for the ruling élites—such as most silks, crimson red, black velvet, and cloth of gold—the lower social classes used the same fabrics to decorate their clothing. In this way they created bright colour contrasts by, for example, edging orchill and pink overgarments with crimson silk or velvet, by matching purple, brown, and red *gamurre* with black velvet borders, or by applying ribbons, braid, and gold and silver ornaments to various clothing parts. The materials and techniques used for decoration shifted according to the tastes and fashions of the time. In the 1550s, when brocaded silks and velvets were in high demand, artisans often finished their garments with heavy velvets.⁵² Once the general preference changed from

Pratica Segreta in Florence, including this case, see Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)', 494 n. 52.

⁵² See e.g. the clothing made from common materials, such as monachino wool, decorated with silk and velvet trims, at CDP 712, 211 (1544), fol. 2^v.

velvets to lighter silk fabrics, black velvet finishings were complemented with borders and ribbons made from taffeta or other light silks.

Both household inventories and state registers listing clothing licences show that men and women from artisan classes could also experiment with fashionable fabrics or elaborate decorations on certain clothing parts, such as sleeves, stockings, and collars, because sumptuary laws were relatively flexible regarding those parts that did not require much cloth. The clothing cupboards of Sieneese artisans included a wide range of elaborate sleeves and stockings, from pink and blue slashed silk sleeves to white breeches that were slashed and decorated with silk trims and ribbons and lined with taffeta. Although the general visual effect was not necessarily elaborate, such methods did nevertheless allow men and women from the lower social classes to put together the same materials and colour combinations that were used by their social superiors. Such detachable parts, as Margaret Rosenthal has noted, provided them with the possibility of creating elaborate assemblages of parts that could be mixed and matched to construct a new ensemble.⁵³

Another way to increase a sense of luxury in dress was to wear a decorated and colourful apron, as seen in the painting of the fruit-seller (Illustration 5.2). The wives of artisans usually owned at least one fine apron, often made from silk in a bright colour such as green, crimson, *pavonazzo*, or medium blue.⁵⁴ The inventory of the innkeeper Basilio di Domenico, for example, includes a list of women's clothing with a green and gold-trimmed apron that might be similar to the one worn by Campi's fruit-seller.⁵⁵ The ornamental apron may sometimes have been the most elaborate article of clothing in a woman's outfit, and it may have been used simply as a way to convert an ordinary domestic gown into a festive dress. The clothing of the barber Giovanni's wife, for example, included a yellow gold-embellished apron made from taffeta, which she could tie on in front of her basic red dress.⁵⁶ However, for festive attire the apron, made of a colour contrasting with the dress beneath, could also have been used to replace the forepart, a decorated panel sewn or pinned to the front of the dress, or to create the effect of

⁵³ Rosenthal, 'Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe', 461.

⁵⁴ CDP 279 (1636): 'Inventory of the barber Giovanni Rosi', fol. 25^v; CDP 264 (1590): 'Inventory of the potter Thomaso', fol. 36^v.

⁵⁵ CDP 279, 47 (1637): '10 spararembi da donna diversi uno di taffeta verde con oro', fol. 198^r. We also find aprons decorated with crimson and white silk (CDP 264 (1590): 'Inventory of the potter Thomaso', fol. 36^v).

⁵⁶ CDP 279 (1636): 'Inventory of the barber Giovanni Rosi', fol. 25^v.

a layered dress, typical of noble outfits of the period, as in the portrait painting of Maria de' Medici (Illustration 5.5).

Finally, artisans could manipulate a number of new accessories, such as gold- and lace-decorated ruffs, scarves, hats, fans, and hair accessories, in order to enhance their fashionable appearance.⁵⁷ Although some accessories, such as silk and lace-trimmed ruffs, gold frontals, perfumed gloves, and elaborate headwear, were regulated by sumptuary laws, most of the new commodities were reasonably affordable.⁵⁸ Male artisans, in particular, had a taste for ruffs that grew from a narrow frill at the neck and wrists to a broad 'cartwheel' style that required a wire support by the 1580s.⁵⁹ Florentine records show that men of the labouring class often broke the sumptuary laws by wearing excessive ruffs in public.⁶⁰ Both men and women also had a number of head ornaments such as badges of gold that were attached to hats, or gold frontals and rosettes, silver and gold nets, and silk veils.⁶¹ Even the most modest items could be updated by using ornaments or accessories. The Sieneze baker Bartolomeo, for example, attached a gilded medallion to his basic straw hat.⁶² Such accessories were perhaps one of the most important ways to signal an awareness of fashionable novelties in the period.⁶³

In addition to signalling taste, these small areas of decoration at the neckline, waist, or shoulders were also important because they helped to

⁵⁷ Almost all of Campi's images show partlets being worn with the 'middle-class' outfit. Some women of the lower classes wore scarves instead of partlets. Another common feature of artisan dress is a pouch worn on the side, such as, for example, 'una borsetta di taffeta verde' in CDP 279, 29 (1637): 'Inventory of the tailor Giovanni di Andrea', fol. 118^r. The upper classes wore pouches too, but usually inside the dress.

⁵⁸ Evelyn Welch, 'Art on the Edge: Hair and Hands in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 23/3 (2008), 241–68 at 243.

⁵⁹ Bonelli Gandolfo, 'Leggi suntuarie senesi dei secoli xv e xvi', 282.

⁶⁰ See cases in Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli xvi–xvii)'. Lace ruffs (*colari di rete*) were in high fashion in the period. The Lucchese sumptuary legislation of 25 February 1597 states: 'Non e molto che si fece prohibitone di certi collari lavorati, per la molta spesa che erano; hora si fanno collari di rete con punte e altri lavori sopra dette punte, che per quanto intendiamo, sono venuti a un prezzo intollerabile.' See Fumi, 'La moda del vestire in Lucca dal secolo xiv al xix', 554.

⁶¹ Fumi, 'La moda del vestire in Lucca dal secolo xiv al xix', 533. Hats with badges, frontals, and rosettes are found in a number of inventories, e.g. gold hat ornaments at ASS, CDP 279, 42 (1637), 'Inventory of the tailor Oratio Rondini', fol. 184^v. See also the example of a court case involving a frontal, brought against the wife of the slipper-maker Biagio, Quattro Censori 2 (1548).

⁶² ASS, CDP 266 (1591): 'Inventory of the baker Bartolomeo di Andrea', fol. 111^r. Hats with gold badges were popular, e.g. ASS, CDP 279 (1636): 'inventory of the carpenter Matteo di Guasparre', fol. 66^r.

⁶³ For the importance and popularity of accessories see Jane Ashelford, *A Visual History of Costume: The Sixteenth Century* (London, 1983), 27.

personalize the outfit and transform an ordinary gown into a fashionable dress that created a visual hierarchical distinction between the wearer and others in the wearer's immediate social group.

The visual messages of the detail, including colours and materials, were well understood by contemporaries. Sumptuary laws reveal the precision with which people monitored each other's appearance in public. For example, in a note dropped into the wooden box on Piazza del Campo in Siena, the anonymous informer reports that:

On the Easter Sunday a bride in San Francisco was wearing a golden rosary chain with a gold pendant which had an emerald attached in the middle. Likewise, she was wearing a belt with various ambers attached.⁶⁴

The social importance of minor details was also recognized in the sumptuary regulations. The new laws issued in Florence in 1562, for example, defined with precision the occupational ranks that were allowed to wear gold buckles in their belts, and those who had to settle for silver.⁶⁵ The Lucchese and Sienese laws also placed increasing limitations on the number and kind of dress decorations, requiring that all modifications of dress had to be reported.⁶⁶ In this way decorative details, such as a more elaborate trim or a wider ribbon, beautiful matching trimmings at the wrists and neck, an embroidery trim on the apron, or elaborate ribboning where sleeves would be attached, allowed the onlooker to measure precisely the status of the wearer. This would have given even minor details of expensive materials or fashionable colours high significance as social markers. These were perhaps the most important ways in which members of the lower classes could distinguish themselves from the rest of their social peers.

In this way novelty and fashion in dress were keys to distinction, both for the nobility and at lower social levels; but for the latter the effect was realized in more subtle ways, involving a process of selection, interpretation, and modification of broad fashionable trends. A new look might be the result of the innovative and creative ways in which clothing, accessories, and decorations were put together, rather than arising from direct imitation of particular dress styles, garments, or fabric types.

These findings suggest that elite fashion did not necessarily 'trickle'

⁶⁴ ASS, Quattro Censori 6, Denunzie (1548): 'domenica di pasqua fu una sposa in San francisco con un vezo di padernostri d'oro con un pendente d'oro dove era in mezo un smiraldo e similmente portava un centolo di diverse amber'.

⁶⁵ Belt buckles were an important detail. Master artisans were allowed to wear gold while those below them were restricted to silver. See Calvi, 'Abito, genere, cittadinanza nella Toscana moderna (secoli XVI-XVII)', 485.

⁶⁶ Fumi, 'La moda del vestire in Lucca dal secolo XIV al XIX', 549.

down through the social layers. Fashion leaders provided a pool of ideas which ordinary Italians could draw on, sometimes borrowing from the wealthy, at other times drawing on and reworking broader trends, and occasionally creating fashions that challenged their social superiors. In this process, even adaptation and imitation could be seen as a creative act. The point, however, is that whatever they opted for, ordinary Italians may well have ended up with a version of fashion that was all their own.

CONCLUSION

When we speak about the practice of fashion in connection with the dress of lower social groups, the most relevant question to ask is not how they imitated fashion leaders, but how they created meanings, rules, and practices of their own. The meanings and uses attached to new commodities were not fixed, but varied from one social situation to another. To fully understand fashion and its meaning within artisan populations, we should not think of fashion as simply a process of direct imitation of the practices established by the élites, but as a creative reformulation that included a wide range of options. By recombining and referencing fashionable materials, colours, accessories, and decorations, artisans created a sense of their own fashion. They created a visual hierarchy whose rules and cultural meanings were ultimately measured, negotiated, and defined within their own local social groups—the guild, the family, the neighbourhood, and close peers.

