

FASHIONING THE  
EARLY MODERN

Dress, Textiles, and Innovation  
in Europe, 1500–1800

EDITED BY  
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corrective to the impression given in these literary sources, permitting reflection on the likely role of innovation in these men's reputations.<sup>11</sup>

### SILK MANUFACTURING IN LYON

Between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries Lyon shifted from being predominantly a centre of commerce to being a centre of manufacturing, from being a city with a population of 36,000 to one of about 150,000.<sup>12</sup> Silk weaving provided employment from the fifteenth century onwards, but it was only in the last thirty years of the seventeenth century that the trade took off, stimulated by the state encouragement given by Louis XIV and his Contrôleur Général des Finances and Directeur des Manufactures et du Commerce, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83). By the early years of the eighteenth century, Lyon had gained a reputation for producing the most innovative silks in Europe whose patterns changed seasonally. The Lyonnais merchants also manufactured a far greater variety of silk fabrics than any other European centre.<sup>13</sup> By the eve of the French Revolution about a third of the population worked in some capacity or other in or for silk manufacturing. About 400 were merchant manufacturers and about 80 to 100 freelance designers. The silk products made were for consumption at home and abroad.<sup>14</sup>

The organization of silk manufacturing explains the 'brand' that was Lyon, within which individual manufacturers forged their own personal reputations. A guild, the Grande Fabrique, controlled workshop practice and product quality according to regulations instituted by the Crown, most significantly in 1667 and 1744. These statutes determined the nature of the products and policed the working practices of weavers who laboured in small urban workshops.<sup>15</sup> The guild was hierarchical

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent analysis of reputation in the fashion trades of eighteenth-century Paris and claims to creative genius and artistic status see Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Régime France* (Durham, NC, and London, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Françoise Bayard, *Vivre à Lyon sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1997), 105–15.

<sup>13</sup> As a number of economic and art historians have revealed through their analysis of the reception of Lyonnais silks and silk weavers in other European countries—notably Peter K. Thornton, *Baroque and Rococo Silks* (London, 1965); Carlo Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production: The Strategies of the Lyon Silk Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', in Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Cambridge, 1997), 37–74.

<sup>14</sup> Lesley Ellis Miller, 'Designers in the Lyon Silk Industry, 1712–1787' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Brighton Polytechnic, 1988), ch. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Justin Godart, *L'Ouvrier en soie: monographie du tisseur lyonnais* (1899; repr. Geneva, 1976).

in structure, with apprentices at the foot of the ladder and merchant manufacturers (*marchands fabricants*) at the top. Each master weaver had at least ten years' training before setting up a workshop containing up to four or five looms. The master, his family, journeyman, and apprentice worked on or with the looms, while other auxiliaries (*domestiques*) carried out tasks such as the filling of shuttles. These workshops usually received their commissions from the merchant manufacturers, who were creditworthy men with the capital to invest in raw materials, commission the making of designs and the weaving of silks, and organize sales at home and abroad. At any given time the wealthiest might occupy 60 to 100 workshops in the weaving of silks. The precarious nature of the business, sensitive to circumstances such as royal births, marriages, and deaths, wars, and failed harvests, led to the forming of short-term partnerships which might be renewed in propitious times. Few survived more than ten to twenty years, though the working life of a merchant might well extend over four or five decades and several dynasties were established over these centuries.<sup>16</sup>

In the public domain, Lyonnais goods were announced under this corporate identity, the *Almanachs de Lyon*, for example, providing details of the guild headquarters and the guild's office-bearers but not a list of merchants who could be approached for commissions. The guild, however, kept registers of the names and addresses of every merchant manufacturer, but did not apparently hold a similar directory for designers.<sup>17</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, the *Almanach général des marchands*, published in Brussels and then Paris, listed under Lyon between 80 and 150 manufacturers' names, albeit without their addresses. The number decreased towards the end of the century, at the same time as the specialism of each firm was more clearly indicated, the three categories being plain silks, brocaded and embroidered silks, plushes and velvets in 1788. Only in that same year did a directory of the city make easily available all names and addresses of merchants and designers who chose to be included.<sup>18</sup> Designers' names

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed overview see Lesley Ellis Miller, *Selling Silks: A Merchant's Sample Book of 1764* (London, 2014), 32–41.

<sup>17</sup> Those set up after the guild regulations of 1744 are particularly useful: Archives municipales de Lyon (hereafter AML) HH620, 621, 622. Joubert's search for models for his own career, and Dutillieu's haphazard way of finding a route in designing tend to confirm this lack. See Joubert, *Le Dessinateur*, xiii; Jacques-Charles Dutillieu, *Le Livre de raison*, ed. François Bregnot de Lut (Lyon, 1886), 30–1.

<sup>18</sup> *Almanach des négocians: contenant le tableau par ordre alphabétique des bonnes maisons de commerce des principales places de l'Europe, avec le tableau raisonné des manufactures de l'Europe les plus intéressantes, pour servir de supplément au Journal de commerce*

were therefore not immediately accessible in the public domain for most of the century.

The guild's deliberations—minuted discussions of masters and merchants' meetings—and commercial correspondence between merchants, their employees, and their clients are the best guide to how reputation was defined in silk manufacturing circles. They echo the more theoretical content of commercial manuals of their time, such as Jacques Savary's *Le Parfait Négociant*, first published in 1675. Reputation derived from the product being made but also from communications between supplier and customer. For the guild, it was linked to quality as defined through the guild regulations and controlled by use of an official seal affixed to the end of each piece of fabric, which approved its nomenclature, width, and composition. A second seal might reveal the identity of the manufacturer. The guild was not averse, however, to moving with the times. By 1779, new fabrics were licensed as long as they carried a seal which showed that they did not conform to guild regulations. Their cachet was still presumably that they were made in Lyon.<sup>19</sup> This shift in regulations is not surprising, given that merchants also believed that value for money was crucial, and that variety in merchandise, good taste, and novelty built trust and custom.<sup>20</sup> They were clear that new ranges of 'Paris fashions made in Lyon' needed to be supplied at least four times per year to clients, and that in between times a steady flow of information was indispensable—often in the form of small samples of fabric attached to letters containing news of different types. Guild and merchant reputation was also evidently enhanced by capturing court markets and the attention of the major retailers in Paris (and other major cities). These criteria fit within a broader framework in which reliability, whether in delivery of orders on time or delivery of goods of the type and quality promised, or punctual payment of workers, was significant. So too was consistent and conscientious commercial correspondence. The plaintive voice of manufacturers who were not experiencing quite the level of correspondence they expected from their travelling sales

(Brussels, 1762); *Almanach du commerce* (Paris, 1772, 1774, 1778, 1786, 1789); *Indicateur alphabétique de la ville de Lyon pour l'année 1788* (Lyon, 1788).

<sup>19</sup> *Lettres patentes du roi concernant les manufactures*, Marly, 5 May 1779, Article VII, 6. The seal either had *réglée* or *R* on it, if following *règlements*, or nothing, if outside *règlements*.

<sup>20</sup> On the tensions between regulation of textile products and free trade, the quality versus price debate, see Philippe Minard, 'Réputation, normes et qualité dans l'industrie textile', in Alessandro Stanziani (ed.), *La Qualité des produits en France (XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris: Belin, 2003), 69–89.

representatives or agents suggests that in the eighteenth century, as now, business reputation was established 'by gaining and retaining the confidence and trust of the stakeholders in the business: customers, suppliers and employees' and that trust and confidence needed to be maintained over time 'through benign and adverse economic cycles'.<sup>21</sup> Presumably this was why by 1779, manufacturers whose families had been in the same business for over sixty years, through different generations, were allowed to mark up their own fabrics rather than go to guild headquarters to do so.<sup>22</sup>

Demand for new ranges of silks was indicative of the success of the fashion system that developed in Lyon at a time when textiles, rather than the cut of dress, indicated changes in taste from one season to the next. This system was in place by around 1672—in other words only five years after Louis XIV bestowed upon Lyon certain privileges in order to encourage silk manufacturing and around the time that the first fashion plates and news began to be published on a regular basis in *Le Mercure Galant*.<sup>23</sup> By the 1720s merchant manufacturers were promoting sales through the creation of previews of seasonal collections sent out quarterly in advance of full production.<sup>24</sup> Innovation and creativity were not restricted to fashionable patterns, local and national institutions recognizing these qualities in several related areas of manufacturing: in improvements in throwing, weaving, and finishing technologies, in the extension of the repertoire of fabric types, in the promotion of well-executed seasonal designs and the skills attached thereto. Liliane Hilaire-Pérez has devoted considerable attention to the technological

<sup>21</sup> Bob McDowell, 'Reputational Risk: Without Reputation You Have No Business', posted 22 May 2006 on <www.theregister.co.uk> [accessed 1 April 2013]. Jacques Savary gave advice on this subject in *Le Parfait Négociant; ou, Instruction générale pour ce qui regarde le commerce des marchandises de France et des pays étrangers*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1675), and the correspondence between Bonaventure Carret and François Grogard and their respective partners demonstrates this point. See Lesley Ellis Miller, 'Material Marketing: How Lyonnais Silk Manufacturers Sold Silks, 1660–1789', in Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart (eds.), *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century: Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe* (London, 2014), 85–98.

<sup>22</sup> *Lettre patentes*, 1779, Article XIII, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Règlements et Statuts, Concernans le Commerce, Art & Fabrique des draps, or, argent & soye, & autres Etoffes mélangées, qui se font dans la Ville de Lyon . . .* (Lyon, 1667); Jennifer Michelle Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford, 2004), 15–70; Joan DeJean, *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* (New York, 2005), 35–82; Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset (ed.), *L'Esprit des modes au Grand Siècle* (Paris, 2010); Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex*, 151–63; John Styles in this volume.

<sup>24</sup> Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Lyon, *Délibérations*, 10 Jan. 1761, fol. 11<sup>v</sup>.

developments, noting how prolific the Lyonnais were and how well rewarded for their experimentation. She also reveals how collective the nurturing of invention was. Reward—usually financial, but sometimes reputational—was not easily won, every technological invention having to pass through a rigorous testing process before being accepted. The silk weaving guild had its say as to the accuracy of the inventor's claims as well as to the public benefit of the invention. The Lyonnais Chamber of Commerce commented before the invention passed to the authorities in Paris, where it was investigated by the Académie des Sciences.<sup>25</sup> The granting of a premium or pension often had strings attached, usually relating to the dissemination of the technique to other French craftsmen.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the creation of new patterns on fabrics, three identifiable forms of support were evident in the eighteenth century: first, the protection of designs; second, tacit agreements in working practices within the guild; and third, the establishment of education in drawing. Designs (works on paper) constituted part of any partnership's capital because the manufacturers who had paid for them might use them again at some later date. They always belonged to the manufacturers who had commissioned them, rather than the designer who had drawn them.<sup>27</sup> An *ordonnance consulaire* of 1711, converted into Letters Patent the following year, treated designs in the same way as other materials used in making silks (raw silk, metal threads, etc.) and the penalty for stealing designs and materials was the same: corporal punishment and a 500 *livres* fine.<sup>28</sup> In 1737 loss of master's status (*maîtrise*) was added to the penalties for non-observance,<sup>29</sup> and in 1744 designers were named in a clause forbidding the direct or indirect copying of designs.<sup>30</sup> The first national legislation on the subject in 1787 introduced a time limit on

<sup>25</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, *L'Invention technique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 2000); ead., 'Inventing in a World of Guilds'.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the perfecting of watered silks in the 1750s. See Daisy Bonnard, 'Des histoires des calandres', in Maria-Anne Privat-Savigny (ed.), *Lyon innove: inventions et brevets dans la soierie lyonnaise aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Lyon, 2009), 110–21.

<sup>27</sup> Lesley Ellis Miller, 'Mysterious Manufacturers: Situating L. Galy, Gallien et Cie. in the 18th Century Lyon Silk Industry', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 9/2 (2002), 87–131.

<sup>28</sup> BML Imprimé 113884. 500 *livres* was equivalent to about two years' wages for a drawgirl in silk manufacturing at this time. It should be noted that the stealing of designs had caused complaint well before this date, as a case involving Claude Joannon and François Sauge, both merchant manufacturers, proves. Their dispute arose as early as 1672: AML HH139, 8 Feb. 1672.

<sup>29</sup> Édouard Paul Lucien Philippon, *Notice historique sur la propriété des dessins de fabrique: d'après des documents inédits conservés aux Archives de la ville de Lyon* (Paris, 1888), 60–1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 65–6. The difference between the designs on *petits façonnés* and *grosses*

the rights of manufacturers with regard to their designs, ownership of a design for furnishing or church silks being limited to fifteen years, that for dress silk to six years. To prevent copying, manufacturers could register their designs or a sample of their choice at guild headquarters. Their names, a description of the design, the date, and the ownership were taken and a number ascribed to the entry. This was concrete evidence of ownership.

Within the guild system, the regulations regarding membership and training might be interpreted liberally in the case of designers. Sometimes apprenticeship contracts were accompanied by an additional document (*contrelettre*) releasing the apprentice from constant attendance in the workshop so that he could pursue an education in design or commerce concurrently.<sup>31</sup> The guild was also prepared to waive conditions of entry to apprenticeship or even to the *maîtrise* in order to incorporate promising, talented men into their business. About twenty-six designers, for example, were accepted in this way between 1743 and 1790, despite the fact that they had been born outside the correct geographical catchment area, or had not completed a ten-year apprenticeship.<sup>32</sup> They became merchant manufacturers and formed partnerships or set up on their own commissioning fabrics. Moreover, if they lacked the funds to invest in a partnership, they could substitute their talent for capital in the first partnership, and save enough from this first venture to be able to invest in their next one. In addition, the guild might back petitions that requested financial recognition for services rendered either through prolonged involvement in manufacturing or in the teaching of the next generation. Often such requests were an indication that the petitioner was not a good businessman and so needed financial assistance. While the role of novelty in design was recognized through guild rules, the skills required to pursue it successfully were promoted outside the guild. A group of *amateurs des arts*, among them several men who had been designer merchant manufacturers, founded a school of drawing in Lyon in 1756.<sup>33</sup> By 1780, they had Letters Patent from the king supporting the school and ensuring its future. The main objective was to provide training locally

*étouffes* was described in the case between Ribier and Bertrand in 1740: AML HH139, fols. 2<sup>v</sup>-3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, 'Designers in the Lyon Silk Industry', ch. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 67-8. The registers of *ordonnances consulaires* for the period before 1743 apparently do not survive.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. Pierre Monlong (1712-89), who was the son of one of Joubert's pioneers, Jean Monlong (1670-1752).



for talented youngsters who did not have the means to pay for private classes in Lyon or Paris, and whose skills might then be applied to silk design. The school was based on a well-worn academic model.<sup>34</sup>

In brief, this was the local commercial and manufacturing framework in which the subjects of this analysis built their reputations. The state, through the guild and municipality, encouraged innovation in design, while regulating quality of products. Merchants sought to communicate the novelty of their goods, their quality and their reliability in their dealings with suppliers and clients. These were not necessarily, however, the qualities praised in the literary sources that spread word of the importance of designers. The difference between their commercial experience and their representation in print is explored next.

### PROMOTING REPUTATIONS

Three contemporary authors afford access to local reputations in their publications: the abbé Jacques Perneti in 1757, Antoine-Nicolas Joubert de l'Hiberderie in 1765, and the abbé Pierre-Nicolas Bertholon in 1787.<sup>35</sup> Their texts were the most publicly disseminated sources through which the canon of silk manufacture and design was conveyed for and during the eighteenth century, and on which all subsequent accounts have been based. Each man wrote to a different brief and had different qualifications for the task in hand, facts that are important when considering whom they were promoting as significant models for their readers, and why. Their bias can be assessed to some extent against surviving archival evidence—to which they often did not have access. They were all, on one level or another, insiders who had lived in Lyon for some of their lives and had contacts in the trade. Significantly, they were all very much interested in perpetuating and creating institutions that stimulated innovation and skills in art and design. We know little of the impact of their publications, though Joubert's book was reviewed in local and national papers, reprinted with no changes nine

<sup>34</sup> Reed Benhamou, *Public and Private Art Education in France, 1648–1793*, Offprint Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 308 (Oxford, 1993). On the Lyonnais school see Marie-Félicie Pérez, 'Soufflot et la création de l'école de dessin de Lyon, 1751–1780', in *Soufflot et l'architecture des Lumières*, Les Cahiers de la Recherche Architecturale, 6–7 (Paris, 1980), 108–13; Lesley E. Miller, 'Education and the Silk Designer: A Model for Success?', in Christine Boydell and Mary Schoeser (eds.), *Disentangling Textiles: Techniques for the Study of Designed Objects* (London, 2002), 185–94.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Perneti, *Recherches pour servir à l'histoire de Lyon, ou Lyon et les Lyonnais dignes de mémoire*, 2 vols. (Lyon, 1757); Joubert de l'Hiberderie, *Le Dessinateur pour les étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soye*; Bertholon, *Du commerce et des manufactures distinctives de la ville de Lyon*.

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