

Changing dress codes in the Spanish Empire during the 18th century

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Introduction

When in 1713 the treaty of Utrecht ended the War of the Spanish Succession it was agreed that a Bourbon king should inherit the Spanish Empire except the Spanish Netherlands and the Italian territories. By this treaty of 1713, Britain obtained the monopoly of the slave trade to Spanish America and the right to send annually a ship of 500 tons loaded with merchandise to the Hispanoamerican realms. This annual ship and its goods, not the slave trade or territorial disputes, were the point of discussion that led to the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1739. Previously, during the War of the Spanish Succession the French had tried to enter the Spanish-American trade officially. Northern France and the Spanish Netherlands had already been important suppliers of manufactures, especially textiles, for Hispanoamerica since the 16th century.¹ The importance of French and Flemish textiles became even more relevant as the French king Louis XIV established his court as a fashion centre with special printed journals like the *Mercure Galant* announcing the latest trends twice a year.² Thus, the Spanish War of Succession ended with a commercial treaty on the import of British and Dutch linens produced in North-Western France and Flanders. At that point the export of European cotton textiles was not yet discussed.³

A century later the situation was quite different. In 1806-1807, British ships tried in vain to capture Montevideo and Buenos Aires. In Buenos Aires resistance was organized

¹ España y América. Un océano de negocios. Quinto centenario de la Casa de la Contratación, 1503–2003. Seville 2003; Ana Crespo Solana, *Legal Strategies and Smuggling Mechanisms in the Trade with the Hispanic Caribbean by Foreign Merchants in Cadiz: The Dutch and Flemish Case, 1680–1750*. In: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 47 (2010), 181–212.

² Joan DeJean, *The Essence of Style. How the French Invented Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour*, New York 2005; Veronika Hyden-Hansho, *Reisende, Migranten, Kulturmanager. Mittlerpersönlichkeiten zwischen Frankreich und dem Wiener Hof 1630-1730*, Stuttgart 2013.

³ For a history of cotton: Beverly Lemire, *Cotton*, Oxford -New York 2011.

by leading whole sale merchant houses. Their main objective was to prevent unconditional entrance of cheap, machine made British cotton manufactures. The opposition against British wares was rather short-lived. Only three years later, French troops had occupied Spain almost completely. On 25th of May 1810, at Buenos Aires a general city council met in order to decide the political future of the Río de la Plata. Now, conservative merchants were overruled by liberal ones who wished to change for an unrestricted commerce with British trading houses and their cheap cotton textiles. By 1815 opposition against the unlimited entrance of British textiles was led by conservatives in North-Western Argentina, on the route to the Bolivian border. On the slope of the Andes in Argentina manufacturers of coarse woollens feared the competition of British fabrics at the production centres of silver in the Bolivian highlands. Their resistance led to a civil war that finished only in the second half of the 19th century. In other parts of Spanish America the situation was similar, like in Mexico, where opposition to cheap machine made British cotton textiles was at least as strong as in the Río de la Plata., but change was inevitable.⁴

Changing cloth supply should have been accompanied by different consumer habits and dress codes in the Spanish Empire during the 18th century. At the same time the region experienced another fundamental transformation: The enormous expansion of the Mexican silver industry which tripled its output during that period providing increasing means of exchange for a thriving foreign trade. This must have affected textile consumption in Spanish America. Therefore a comparison of the dress codes from the first half of the 18th century with those from the end of the Spanish Empire in the Americas at the start of the 19th century will offer new insight into changing consumer habits. Especially the viceroyalty of New Spain and its central region of today Mexico will be considered, as this area traded directly with both Europe and Asia. The main export product of the Mexican economy was silver of which up to one third was sent via Manila to the Asian markets and around 60 % of the bullion was traded by the

⁴ Bernd Hausberger, Antonio Ibarra (ed.), Comercio y poder en América colonial. Los consulados de comerciantes, siglos XVII-XIX, Frankfurt a. M.-Mexico 2003.

European merchant community for their products. Approximately 10 % of the silver was paid as taxes to the Spanish crown. Thus cloth trade in Spanish America and especially in Mexico/New Spain must have been influenced from Europe and Asia alike and the impact of British industrial wares should have been perceived through crowding out Asian textiles as well as Southern and Continental European ones.

Historiography has analysed European trade with Hispanoamerica under a variety of items. The participation of British merchants has recently been summarised by Adrian Pearce, who stressed that the British used the official trading system as a backbone for their enterprise until its end during the Napoleonic Wars.⁵ Changes in the structure of English imports to Spanish America are not relevant in this context.⁶ Denis O'Flynn and Carlos Martínez Shaw are among the most outstanding scholars studying the connections between Spanish America and Asia via the Philippines.⁷ Their point of analysis is the export of silver to Asia and the import of precious Asian artefacts via Manila respectively. Changes in the supply of textiles are not the main focus of their investigation. Clothing patterns have been considered by art historians. They studied the representation of the inhabitants of New Spain with different ethnic background on folding screens.⁸ In this context Asian silks as part of the Mexican dress code are mentioned but cotton and printed cottons received less attention. Furthermore, drawings were not specific enough to reveal the origin of the fabrics.

⁵ Adrian Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America, 1763 to 1808*. Liverpool 2007. For trade in general: Antonio García-Baquero González, *Cádiz y el Atlántico (1717–1778)*. El comercio colonial español bajo el monopolio gaditano, 2 vols. Seville 1976; John R. Fisher, *Commercial Relations between Spain and Spanish America in the Era of Free Trade, 1778–1820*, Liverpool 1985.

⁶ Antonio Luis López Martínez, *Cádiz y el comercio entre Europa y América a finales del siglo XVIII. Una aproximación a partir de las pólizas de seguros marítimos*. In: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 47 (2010), 213–246.

⁷ Dennis O'Flynn, Arturo Giráldez, *Born Again: Globalization's Sixteenth Century Origins (Asian/Global versus European Dynamics)*, in: *Pacific Economic Review* 13: 3 (2008), pp. 359–387; Marina Alfonso Mola; Carlos Martínez-Shaw (ed.), *La ruta española a China*. Madrid 2007.

⁸ Ilona Katzew, *La pintura de castas: representaciones raciales en el México del siglo XVIII*, Madrid 2004; Banamex (ed.), *Pintura de los Reinos. Identidades compartidas*, Madrid 2010-Mexico 2011.

The study of the changes of consumer habits in Spanish America and especially in the Viceroyalty of New Spain during the 18th century thus requires a different approach. Inventories are a valuable source. Especially the series of inventories of persons deceased at sea on their voyage to or from Spanish America preserved by the Spanish trading office (Casa de la Contratación) offer interesting information. The number of inventories from the 18th century is rather moderate, but their great advantage is that both the description of the possessions and their prices are preserved. This is rare as usually Spanish and Spanish American inventories have separate registers for the goods and for their prices and the latter ones are often lost. According to the declarations in the inventories of the Casa, the values should have been near to market prices, especially when the personal belongings of the deceased were auctioned at sea, an indicator of a thriving market for second-hand textiles in the Spanish Empire. In addition, the inventories of persons who died at sea do not refer only to the elite or persons of middle income but include ordinary seamen as well. Unfortunately the small series covers only the period until the French-Indian War. Inventories from the very end of the 18th century, from prisoners brought from the Americas to Spain for trial can close the gap in part.

The information of the attire, the prices and the quantities possessed by individuals offers the possibility for a qualitative analysis which relates different belongings to each other at market values and studies personal choices. By close reading and a comparison of single documents consumer preferences and their changes will become obvious. In order to show the development between the first half of the 18th century, previous to the distribution of British machine made cloth, and the period around 1800 analysis will follow a chronological order.

Breeches of silk and cloth – dress codes previous to the introduction of machinery

On 31st of July 1718, near the Azores the mariner Antonio de Artusa from the Spanish

province of San Sebastián, near the French border, made his testament.⁹ He had served on the ship *La Santa Trinidad* which was part of the fleet that returned from New Spain to the Iberian Peninsula. During his stay in Mexico he had obtained the considerable sum of 300 silver pesos. When he died shortly after having made his testament his belongings were auctioned at sea. Beside the silver coins the rest of his personal property was sold for only 25 pesos. With the exception of some tobacco and a few working tools like a saw his belongings consisted mainly of garments. Most of them had a value of one or two pesos except a pair of old shoes, several pairs of old stockings, a piece of linen and a piece of old satin. Only one item was quite expensive: a new justacorps of woollen cloth 5 pesos worth. Besides this attire Antonio de Artusa owned blue breeches, as well as other breeches and jackets of woollen cloth. Linen was used for a white lapel and two white light jackets. He owned various new and old stockings most of them were not characterized any further but a pair was described as white woollen stockings. Quite a number of items were new: the justacorps, the two white jackets of linen, a black pair of stockings and a pair of shoes with the white woollen stockings. The mariner Antonio de Artusa must have bought them in New Spain and they were sold for 9 pesos. The recently acquired clothing had a worth of more than a third of his personal apparel. These garments will have been the most fashionable attire he could afford. Neither items from China, nor European printed cottons or indigenous cotton garments were mentioned in the inventory.

During the next years preferences and possibilities of seamen did not change considerably. Francisco de Arteaga, native from Northern Spain as well, died at the coast of today Venezuela, at the harbour of Puerto Cabello, west of Caracas, in 1732.¹⁰ In his inventory there was no indication which of his dress was new, but prices are telling. The most expensive garment was a cape of cloth for 10 pesos. Second in value was a light jacket with its breeches of cloth, together they had a value of 8 pesos. The other items were far less expensive and even of less value than those of the above

⁹ Archivo General de Indias, Contratación, 580, N1, fol. 1r-7v.

¹⁰ Archivo General de Indias, Contratación 580, N9, fol. 1r-5r.

mentioned Antonio de Artusa. Whereas Artusa had made a little fortune in Mexico and was already returning to Spain, Francisco de Arteaga was less successful. Many of his belongings were auctioned only for a quarter of a peso or even less because they were worn. Instead, Arteaga owned several hats and a berretta. In those cases in which the inventory mentions the material of the garments they consisted of woollens. Only once a pair of worn silk stockings is listed for one peso, whereas woollen stockings had only half the price.

The similarities of both inventories are striking: The personal belongings for which the fabric was mentioned consisted mainly of woollens. Shirts usually received no further description. Absolute and relative prices were very much the same. The attire described by the inventories was completely European, and not the slightest reference to indigenous garments like cotton shirts appeared. The only hints that the seamen had been living for some time in the Americas were the first entrances in their inventories: bundles of tobacco leafs in the case of Artusa and the list of Arteaga mentions six boles of “chorote”, a product elaborated from cocoa.

In contrast to these inventories of rather humble European seamen from Northern Spain, there were inventories from persons with larger financial means. In 1710 in Cartagena, at the Atlantic coast of present day Colombia, died the priest and inquisitor Don Juan de Layseca.¹¹ His garments mentioned in the post mortem inventory differed considerably from those of the seamen and this was only in part due to his status as a clergyman but mainly to his wealth. He possessed new habits of taffeta which were quite expensive (55 pesos) and a new cassock of satin with a value of 26 pesos. The difference in prices between old and new habits and cassocks was as large as in the case of the worn and new garments possessed by the seamen. The old habits were fixed at 10 pesos and the cassock was not even rated. In addition, Juan de Layseca owned three pairs of silk stockings, valued at 3 and three quarters of a peso and an old short silk jacket. The rest of his attire like stockings, pants and shirts were not characterized even

¹¹ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición, 1614, Expediente 4, fol. 11r-14v

if each item had a value of approximately one peso. The prices established for these goods were similar to the prices obtained at the auction at sea. Thus in the case of this priest only items made of silk received a special attention. Nonetheless, there was one exception. His rather expensive dressing gown valued at 25 pesos was made of fine Flemish cloth with fine laces.

In contrast to the personal attire the textiles used for other purposes were described with more detail. He owned silk sheets, silk covered his bed and pillowcases of linen had a taffeta cover. Other pillowcases were made with linen from Brittany. His linen tablecloth had been made according to German style. He owned silverware, paintings and a musket with Chinese adornment, as well as a bowl and its grinder to prepare his chocolate drink. Thus, there were two main differences between the belongings of the seamen and those of the well to do clergyman. The outstanding personal garments of the latter were of silk, whereas those of the seamen were of cloth. The dressing gown was a very expensive exception. Furthermore the inquisitor owned extensive textile household goods in part of linen with laces and other goods with Chinese decoration. In contrast to the seamen the clergyman possessed underwear worth to be mentioned in the inventory.

To evaluate the effect that had the condition of the clergy on the attire, the garments of another well to do person deceased will be studied. His belongings were very numerous even in comparison to the clergyman. The lay-man, Antonio González de Barrera was on his way from Mexico to Manila.¹² He was born in Spain, in Santillana, but actually he had become a Mexican citizen. In the former city of the Aztecs he made his testament on 4th of March 1741, and six weeks later he was already dead. On 20th of April 1741, on the ship Nuestra Señora de Covadonga, the executor of his last will, Don Miguel de San Román, asked the notary of the ship to list an inventory. He started with the entrance of an expensive cape of red cloth for 25 pesos and a red coat lined with blue “Pequin”, i.e. Asian silk, with its breeches and 39 silver buttons with a weight of 3 ounces (almost 100

¹² Archivo General de Indias, Contratación 581 B, N5, 9r-17r

grams of silver) for 30 pesos. A jacket of camlet with its two pairs of breeches was valued at 10 pesos, whereas a green flowered coat lined with red "Pequin" was estimated at 8 pesos. For only 4 pesos each were listed worn cloth coats, one of them lined with woollen serge and both adorned with 26 or 44 silver buttons, the latter ones weighted around 3 ounces. The comparison with the aforementioned new coat adorned with silver buttons shows that this coat and its breeches would have had a worth of almost 27 pesos without the silver buttons. This estimate is corroborated by the indication that two worn flowered coats had lost their worth almost completely and were listed at half a peso each. Whereas another worn woollen jacket lined with serge had still the double value of one peso. Another old woollen black coat must have been heavily worn as it was worth only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a peso. The comparison between flowered coats and those made of cloth gives the impression that the latter were slightly more expensive than the flowered ones. Antonio González de Barreda owned several castor hats, a white one, worn, worth 4 pesos and a second black one, which had been used a lot, therefore it was valued only at $1\frac{1}{2}$ pesos. His five pairs of shoes were valued at $2\frac{1}{2}$ pesos, whereas a pair of breeches with silver buttons was estimated at two pesos. In contrast to the other inventories the one of Antonio Gonzalez listed quite a number of linen garments. , 19 shirts and 11 pants. The shirts were somewhat more expensive as they cost 10 pesos and the pants only 4 pesos. Even three new pants made of linen from Brittany had a value of only $1\frac{1}{2}$ peso. In addition, three old shirt and two pants made of Brittany linen cost $2\frac{1}{6}$ pesos, and his five old handkerchiefs were made of linen from Cambay for $\frac{5}{8}$ pesos. His stockings were either of cotton, six pairs for $2\frac{1}{6}$ pesos or of wool. The well-equipped Antonio González owned also a number of household items, like for example two used sheets of linen from Flanders listed for 2 pesos. In addition two pairs of glasses should be mentioned as well as a dressing gown which was more modest than that of the South-American priest as the gown of Don Antonio was valued only at 2 Pesos. The value of all his personal belongings left at the ship was fixed at 222 pesos, ten times the value of the inventories of the seamen deceased on the Atlantic. In contrast to all the other inventories no hint to specific American items was given in the register of this rather wealthy citizen of Mexico. The absence of Mexican material culture might be due

to the aim of the voyage, i.e. the necessity to adapt to the habits of Manila. Neither tobacco nor chocolate might have seemed useful for him on the Philippines.

The analysis of the male dress codes of persons travelling through the realms of the Spanish Empire during the first half of the 18th century showed that the attire of seamen and well to do persons followed continental European patterns. Linens were provided from Flanders, Brabant and Northern France, they were used for household and underwear especially by the higher income strata. Furthermore, the difference of clothing between income groups consisted in the different quality of their woollen cloth and in the use of silk by the higher income strata, which the lower income groups could not afford. Both dressed their jackets, coats, breeches and stockings according to European and especially French style. Even after a longer stay on the American continent no indigenous influences in their attire could be perceived. This overwhelming presence of French and Flemish style and clothing in the Spanish Empire might have been one of the reasons why Britain did not insist on the annual ship and the export of British manufactures after the end of the Seven Years War.

Cord instead of cloth: the transformation of dress codes in Spanish America

Within half a century the situation changed completely. This is reflected by the inventory of Mariano Molas, a Spanish captain whose ship was captured at the coast of New Spain.¹³ He was sent back to Northern Spain where he died in prison. After his death the authorities established an inventory of his belongings on 22nd of September of 1798. In this case his goods were not evaluated. Nonetheless the differences between the inventories from the first half of the century to the one from the end of the 18th century are significant. Captain Molas owned 80 pesos of gold in specie and 80 pesos of silver coins. Furthermore he possessed some jewelry of silver and gold with ordinary stones. Thus, even if he was not a very wealthy man he had more financial means than

¹³ Archivo General de Indias, Estado 39, N2-A(1), fol. 5r-6v.

a simple seaman. His personal belongings consisted of trousers, coats, jackets, even a frack, vests, shirts, pants, stockings, and household items including a cup to prepare hot chocolate. The names describing his personal attire differed only in part from those used during the mid-18th century. The Spanish term for breeches and trousers remained the same, as did the word for jackets. But this did not apply to the vests, which changed their names, and even an English expression was adopted: the frack. This latter one was described as very old and useless. Thus, the captain had employed the frack for a long time. He might have bought him second hand but this seems less consistent with his other belongings. Mariano Molas owned five trousers some of them made of cord or Nanquin cotton. His jackets and vests matched the trousers. His belongings were mostly worn but some of them quite new. One of his shirts was of muslin, others of different sorts of linen. His stockings were either of cotton or of silk. His household items were of linen and cotton.

Considering the changes that occurred between the inventories, they apply to several levels. Even before the turn of the century, breeches had been transformed to trousers everywhere. Coats had been replaced by vests and jackets had been accompanied by fracks. These European developments had been adopted in the Americas immediately. With the change of the attire a change of textiles employed went hand in hand. Instead of woollens and different sorts of silk now cotton were used predominately.

Conclusion

During the first half of the 18th century, textiles and dresses used in the Spanish Empire adopted French fashion, its style and its fibres. By the end of the 18th century the situation had changed radically. Albeit France and Spain still were not at war, the dress codes that had changed since the French Revolution completely were echoed in Spain and Spanish America. This implied a growing presence of cotton textiles replacing mainly woollen cloth and to a certain extent even silk attires. Breeches were replaced by

trousers, coats by vests, and flowered silks by Nanquin cotton. This favoured the presence of British machine made cotton textiles which replaced Asian silks and woollens from North-Western Europe. Thus even before Britain send its fleet to Buenos Aires in 1806, British taste and costumes had replaced French fashion already. It was only during the 19th century that the struggle for the inner Hispano-American markets shifted from the consumers of the well to do to the less affluent.

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Abstract

British imports to Spanish America received broad attention from contemporaries and historians alike since the late 16th century. After the War of Spanish Succession, interest even increased. Nonetheless, in 1806/07 resistance to the import of British manufactures and especially textiles was such that the invasion of British troops was rejected in Buenos Aires by the urban militia under the command of the most important merchants from the city fearing the competition of British wares. Historiography echoes the fears and expectancies of contemporaries, but Adrien Pearce has stressed the importance of the formal institutions of the Spanish trade with Hispanoamerica even for British merchants until the last decade of the 18th century. Nor should the importance of French dress codes in the Spanish Empire be overlooked. The analysis of post mortem inventories from passengers and seamen travelling between Spain, Spanish America and the Philippines during the mid-18th century shows that the influence of British textiles on Spanish clothing was still rather moderate. Only by the end of the period habits seemed to change.