

# Early Modern Dress – A Declaration of Political Allegiance? A Case Study on Dress *alla Romana*

Vestimenta moderna temprana.

¿Una declaración de lealtad política?

Un estudio de caso sobre el vestido *alla romana*

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**Abstract:** According to Janet Cox-Rearick, «At the courts of sixteenth-century Europe foreign styles of clothing –or even just a specific item of foreign clothing– were often worn to declare the wearer’s political allegiance, and the issue of foreign styles assumed a high profile on the broader political stage of Europe» (Cox-Rearick, 2009: 39). This article focuses on the concept of a national character in dress, and how important this was in forming nationality in early modern Italy. It highlights the Spanish influences on early modern Italian dress as a declaration of political allegiance, with particular focus on the clothes worn in Rome and on how they seem to have differed from those worn in other urban centres on the Italian peninsula.

**Keywords:** Early Modern, Court Fashion, National Character, Italian Dress, Spanish Influences.

**Resumen:** Según Janet Cox-Rearick, «En las cortes de la Europa del siglo XVI, los estilos de ropa extranjeros, o incluso una prenda específica de ropa extranjera, a menudo se usaban principalmente para declarar la lealtad política del usuario, y la cuestión de los estilos extranjeros asumió un alto perfil en el escenario político más amplio de Europa» (Cox-Rearick, 2009: 39). La discusión en este artículo se centra en el concepto de carácter nacional en la vestimenta y cuán importante fue para la formulación de la nacionalidad en la Italia moderna temprana. Destaca las influencias españolas en la vestimenta italiana de la Edad Moderna como una declaración de lealtad política con un enfoque particular en la vestimenta usada en Roma y cómo parece haber diferido de la de otros centros urbanos en la península italiana.

**Palabras claves:** Edad moderna, moda de corte, carácter nacional, vestido italiano, influencias españolas.

## Introduction

Around 1550 Spain had become the dominating nation in terms of the fashions favoured at the European courts (Guarino, 2014: 234). However, while previous studies on early modern dress have thoroughly investigated Spanish influences on the clothes worn in several cities throughout the Italian peninsula –such as Naples, Florence, Milan, Mantua and Venice<sup>1</sup>– Rome has been relatively overlooked. This oversight is striking, especially considering that by the 1590s the Spanish community was the most dominant foreign faction in Rome, comprising nearly a third of the city’s population (Dandeleit, 2001: 108). In general, surprisingly little has been published on dress worn in early modern Rome, despite the city’s centrality in European political affairs during the period.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: José Luis Colomer (2014): «Black and the Royal Image». Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; Janet Cox-Rearick (2009): «Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosimo de’ Medici and François I The *moda alla spagnola* of Spanish Consorts Eléonore d’Autriche and Eleonora di Toledo»; Gabriel Guarino (2014): «Spanish Fashions and Sumptuary Legislation in Habsburg Italy». Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; Stella Mary Newton ([1988] 2009): «Venice and the Dress of Foreigners». New York: Berg; Roberta Orsi Landini; Bruna Niccoli (2014): «The Image of a New Power. Fashion at the Florentine Court in the Mid-Sixteenth Century». Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; Aileen Ribeiro (2003): «Dress in the Early Modern Period, c. 1500-1780». Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paola Venturelli (2014): «Spanish Fashion among Women of Milan and Mantua (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)». Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica.

Rome was a contradictory and complex place, with a rich, animated culture. It was a city of immigrants and foreigners –people from all social spheres were drawn to Rome for various reasons, whether they were seeking preferment, salvation, employment or fame and fortune. Rome was also a place where social distinctions seem to have been more fluid than in other parts of the peninsula. Thus, in the study of dress as social identity markers, early modern Rome presents an interesting case. The city might even have been an exceptional case, since the situation in Rome seems to have differed rather markedly from that of other cities in Italy. The reason for this was most likely its very constitution– being a city of foreigners with much coming and going in all social classes, a constantly volatile environment due to the often rapid turnover of both popes and personnel at the centre, and ruling elite families, all with different political allegiances. This volatile environment also meant that the people of Rome could sometimes have chosen to deny and betray a former political allegiance by wearing clothing customary in other nations and regions in order to save face if the need arose. This article sets out to elucidate how early modern Rome differed from other urban centres on the Italian peninsula by discussing the concept of a national character in dress.

## National character in early modern dress

The formation of the concept of nationality throughout early modern Europe went hand in hand with the development of courts and large urban centres (Boucher, [1966] 1996: 194). Amedeo Quondam stresses: «Courtly society is a society of “nations” recognisable by identities [...]» (Quondam; Patrizi, 1998: 75). During the 14th and 15th centuries power across Europe became increasingly concentrated in the courts, which played an important role in the civilising process by engendering new codes of corporeality. New relationships between clothing, appearance and identity emerged, and fashion therefore came to play an increasingly significant role in life at court. Appearance was used as a classifying tool, a means of marking out class distinctions in which dress naturally played a crucial part, so that participants in any social interaction would be able to make immediate judgements on the other party according to the way they were dressed. Thus, throughout Europe, there existed a common concern to create a set of rules and canons according to which both the private and public self could be fashioned and moulded, and

it was founded on the notion of what was known in Italian as the *carattere nazionale* (national character). (Entwistle, 2000: 84-87; Vincent, 2003: 81; Paulicelli, 2008: 33-34).<sup>2</sup>

European court fashions were not strictly contained by national boundaries. Instead, courtly fashion was rather –to a limited degree– international (Veliz, 2004: 84). The trendsetters in the early modern period came from the royal families and aristocracy. For instance, women such as Eleonora of Toledo who married Cosimo I de' Medici, and Anne of Austria who married the French king Louis XIII, have often been pinpointed as leaders of changes in fashion. Their marriages required them to move countries, and when they did so they took with them their entourages as well as their native customs, which came to influence the fashion scene in their new countries (Orsi Landini; Niccoli, 2014: 37-40; 57-59). In the 1590s Cesare Vecellio commented on this phenomenon in his costume books *Degli abiti antichi e moderni di diversi parti del mondo* (1590, 1598). When describing the clothes worn widely by women in Florence and throughout Lombardy, he notes that their dress was: «... not exactly a Florentine style but it was introduced by the ladies-in-waiting attending the Grand Duchess of the city, or by the wives of the courtiers to the Grand Dukes» (Vecellio, [1590/1598] 2008: 285). The clothing that Vecellio is describing as «not exactly the Florentine style» was of Spanish origin, introduced in Florence, where the French style was otherwise more dominant, by Eleonora of Toledo.

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It is important to bear in mind that Italy at that time was not yet a political reality and the concept of a unified nation was still only an idea. The Italian peninsula was divided into a dozen independent city-states and principalities, and the fashions in Italian dress therefore also varied from one region to

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to stress that the early modern notion of national character was something quite different from national identity. Silvana Patriarca stresses: «National character is not the same as national identity even though the two notions are often confused in common parlance. While both notions are rather slippery and lend themselves to multiple definition and uses, national character tends to refer to the 'objective' settled dispositions (a set of distinctive moral and mental traits) of a people, while national identity, a term of more recent coinage, tends to indicate a more subjective dimension of perception and self-images which may include a sense of mission and self-projection in the world». Silvana Patriarca (2010): *Italian Vices. Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 2-3.

another. Furthermore, like the rest of Europe, Italy experienced political turmoil throughout the early modern period as the result of both numerous foreign invasions and the rivalry between the peninsula's own competing city-states and principalities. The turmoil was above all dominated by Spain and France, whose struggle for dominance in Europe forced other nations to pick a side by showing their diplomatic alignment. Since clothing represented a powerful and effective means of projecting and strengthening local identities, such alignment was often shown through dress by adopting foreign customs. Like a language, dress and style were considered a vernacular that could be identified with a particular place. Thus, when dress is considered in a text written in the early modern period, it is often discussed in connection with the concept of nation. Yet, since Italy did not possess a centre, each local entity also had its own culture, which by extension meant that each local entity often also had its own idea of what the Italian character was, could, or should be (Paulicelli, 2014: 77; Paulicelli, 2015: 1-9).

Not surprisingly, hostility to foreign fashion grew alongside the formulation of the notion of a *carattere nazionale*. There existed a fear that traditional identities were being lost if different nationalities could not be distinguished from one another. Since clothing was considered one of the foremost means of both communicating and establishing social and cultural status, many 16<sup>th</sup> century writers were committing themselves to classifying the "hierarchy of appearances." Whether providing moral and behavioural guidance or dealing with political and social topics, the treatises on appearances published during the early modern period were dedicated to a careful reflection on clothing and its social function, generally stressing the strong connection between dress and social status. For instance, in his *Galateo* (1558), a treatise on good manners, Giovanni Della Casa exemplified this connection when writing: «The article of clothing, whatever it may be, should fit the person and suit him or her, so that it does not seem that you are wearing someone else's clothes, and especially should be suited to your social station, so that a priest is not dressed as a soldier, and a soldier as a juggler» (Belfanti, 2009: 263).<sup>3</sup>

For the European elite, the need to demonstrate international allegiances often took precedence over local and regional styles. Clothing was consciously

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<sup>3</sup> Cited and translated in Carlo Marco Belfanti (2009): «The Civilization of Fashion. At the Origins of a Western Social Institution», p. 263. For the original see: Giovanni della Casa ([1559] 2000): *Galateo*. Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, p. 128.

used to project different identities and, above all, to express various political allegiances. Clothes were understood to be something more than just an external shell to the body that could simply be put on and taken off. Instead, they were considered to mould a person and materialise identity (Rublack, 2010: 138). The writers' concerns about appearances may therefore be regarded as legitimate, since people throughout Europe could easily deny and betray both their national identity and/or former political allegiance by wearing clothing that derived from other nations and regions (Currie, 2008: 34-38; Jones, 2009: 517). Even though dress served to indicate geographical boundaries, Italian critics of foreign dress particularly anticipated the loss of the immediately identifiable citizen (Currie, 2000: 163-165). For example, in 1581, Francesco Sansovino expressed his disapproval on the matter when he commented on the Italians' sartorial mixture and their propensity to imitate the dress of foreigners:

«We [...] see that a majority of Italians, forgetting that they were born in Italy and following northern fashions [instead], have changed their habits of thought along with their dress, wanting to look now like the French, now like the Spanish. And certainly, to their damage and shame, they openly reveal their lack of stability and firmness, because such men never acknowledge that in other times they ruled the other nations of the world through the constancy and steadiness of their actions».<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the 16th century a similar concern had been raised in what came to be the most influential conduct book on courtly manners – namely, Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528). The character Giuliano il Magnifico commented on the variety of different styles amongst courtiers: «... some dressing after the French manner, some after the Spaniards, some wishing to appear German; nor are those lacking who dress in the style of Turks» (Castiglione, [1528] 2002: 88).

Archival documents from the period confirm these comments. For instance, inventory lists of both the elite and the middle classes in Italy often enumerate a great geographical mix of clothing; French, Hungarian, German, Genoese, Roman and Venetian fashions feature alongside Spanish-style garments, adornments, accessories and hairstyles. In juridical documents too, such as interrogations before civil and criminal courts, people were often identified by their clothing, especially if they were wearing foreign dress,

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<sup>4</sup> Cited and translated in Ann Rosalind Jones (2009): «Worn in Venice and throughout Italy. The Impossible Present in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books», p. 517.

since it was the clothes and their cut that marked the foreigner out as such (Fosi, 2008: 28). However, these sources seldom give any form of stylistic indications or details of the construction of the garments – perhaps because they were self-explanatory to a contemporary audience. Thus, attempting to reconstruct the appearance of clothing from any given geographical area solely from written testimonies might prove to be quite problematic. Especially since, Elizabeth Currie emphasises, the geographical labels attached to clothing in written documents seem to single out the country of origin rather than the style itself. It is generally difficult to tell if the national characterisations refer to a cut or a technique, or if they were just an association with a production centre (Currie, 2000: 163).

According to Eugenia Paulicelli, in terms of foreign hegemonies, Italian writers on appearances attempted to lay down the foundations for a more uniform Italian style of customs, dress and language. The local and regional customs were considered the only means of defining the identity of a society, a country or a region; that is, to convey the *carattere nazionale* (Paulicelli, 2014: 76). Since the volatile behaviour of constantly changing one's clothes according to new fashions was thought to create social disorder, the custom of adapting various foreign styles provoked mostly hostile reactions throughout the early modern period. It was thought that such adaptations would create a situation where neither the clothing nor the wearer could be accurately identified. For this very reason, in Milan the use of foreign styles came to be forbidden by a law in 1639. (Levi Pisetzky, 1966: 305).

## Spanish influences on dress as political statements of allegiance

During the early modern period, Italian literary and artistic production had a great influence on the culture of the powerful courts of Europe, while, on the contrary, Italy's political power was in decline as it became overshadowed by the conflicts between the continent's Imperialist nations (Spain, France and England). Even Italy's influence on European fashion gradually became weaker after the mid-15th century. The soft lines of Italian dress had been one of the dominating styles in Europe since the end of the 13th century, but at the end of the 15th century the tables turned. By the 1520s the Spanish court had imposed its codes and customs on the whole of Europe and triumphed

everywhere –above all reflecting the wealth and status of Charles V’s world-wide empire– and around 1550 Spain had replaced Italy as the dominating nation in terms of the fashions favoured at the European courts. (Boucher, [1966] 1996: 222; Guarino, 2014: 234; Paulicelli, 2008: 33-34).

Indeed, at the courts of 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, foreign styles of clothing –or even just a specific item of foreign clothing– were often worn mainly to declare the wearer’s political allegiance. On the Italian peninsula the two dominant influences in dress and customs were the Spanish and the French, who both made political statements of allegiance. As for the characteristics, clothing influenced by the Spanish style was

generally more severe and modest than clothing influenced by the French style, which instead was more refined and mundane (Levi Pisetzky, 1966: 304–305; Veliz, 2004: 81). The Spanish style was more prevalent in some parts of Italy, while the French style was more prevalent in others, but in the course of the 16th century, following the political

«On the Italian peninsula the two dominant influences in dress and customs were the Spanish and the French...»

and military dominance of Charles V, the Spanish style became even more widespread.<sup>5</sup> Initially, Spanish power grew particularly strong in Naples –where the nobility adopted Spanish dress to such an extent that it more or less obliterated the styles that had once defined the costume of the region– and at the courts of Ferrara and Milan because of their ties to the Aragonese line of the Kingdom of Naples (Cox-Rearick, 2009: 39; 51; Jones, 2009: 526-528; Ribeiro, 2003: 662-665).

In his travel account *Voyage of Italy* (1670), the English Catholic priest Richard Lassels confirms the custom of dressing according to one’s allegiance, whether it was to the French or the Spanish faction. He explains that the «... Apparel or Dress of Italians is [...] commonly Black and Modest. They follow the French Fashion, but not too hastily, except in those places that are of the Spanish Faction, or under that Government, for then one shall see them dress as well as walk all Spanish» (Lassels, [1670] 1698: 10).

As previously mentioned, the custom of expressing one’s political allegiance through adopting foreign styles in dress could sometimes stir

<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, the French style became the dominant influence at the northern Italian courts and at the courts of Florence and Genoa.



up emotions. A good example of this can be found in the diary of another Englishman, the gentleman John Evelyn, who in one of his observations on the Neapolitans remarked: «They have a deadly hatred to the French, so that some of our company were flouted at for wearing red cloaks, as the mode then was» (Evelyn, [1818] 1901: 160).

Much has already been written on the influences of Spanish fashion on dress in early modern Italy. For instance, the colour black has often been identified as one of main components of the Spanish style that was adapted at various Italian courts (Colomer, 2014: 77-112; Levi Pisetzky, 1966: 217-223; Pastoureau, 2008: 103-104; Quondam, 2007: 119-134).<sup>6</sup> Italian men's adaption of over garments of Spanish origin, such as the *ferraiuolo* and the *cappa*, is generally highlighted, while in terms of specific female garments, the focus has generally been laid on Italian women's adaption of the Spanish farthingales with hoops made of wood or iron rims (later of wire or whalebone), worn to increase the volume of a gown's skirt; of various over garments of Spanish origin, such as the *robone*, the *sottana*, the *tavardetta* or *tavarolo alla spagnola*, as well as the *zimarra*; and how the neckline of female bodices came to change according to the fashion in the parts of Italy where the Spanish style set the tone (Cohen; Cohen, 2001: 232-233; Cox-Rearick, 2009: 40; Currie, 2008: 41; 46; Guarino, 2014: 235-236; Hohti, 2017: 152-153; Hughes, 1992: 149-151; Lassels, [1670] 1698: 67-68; Levi Pisetzky, 1966: 71-73; 149-151; 357-359; 390; 395-396; Massariello Merzagora; Buttazzi, 1995; 68-71; Orsi Landini; Niccoli, 2014: 40-51; 54-56; Ribeiro, 2003: 667; 669; Venturelli, 2014: 87-108). However, in terms of the clothing worn in Rome and whether it was influenced by Spanish fashion, a more detailed study on the topic remains to be written, particularly considering how strongly Spain was represented in Rome at the time.

## The Spanish community in Rome

As the seat of the papacy, Rome became the central axis of international Catholic diplomacy during the early modern period as the importance,

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<sup>6</sup> Yet, as some scholars have pointed out, the sobriety and preference for dark (mainly black) colours that is regarded as characteristic of the Spanish style was in fact a Habsburg inheritance, imported from Burgundy. See for instance *Id.* (2003): «Dress in the Early Modern Period, c. 1500-1780». Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 665. According to Belfanti, Venice had in fact adopted black clothes as the 'uniform' of its patricians before those of Burgundy and Spain. *Id.* (2009): p. 265.

influence and wealth of the papal court gradually made the city the capital of Europe. From the late 15th century to the late 17th century, Rome was in fact the main centre for European political affairs (Storey, 2008: 57). Professional life in Rome was articulated through elaborate political performances, since foreign governments kept an eye on what went on at the papal court while at the same time working strenuously to keep their own interests alive in the city, which also turned Rome into a battleground for distant political conflicts (Nussdorfer, 1999: 168-169). The city drew diplomatic representatives from all over the Italian peninsula and the rest of Catholic Europe, making it home to a great number of foreign cardinals, ambassadors and their entourages from both the different Italian principalities and the other great Catholic nation states, such as Spain. Rome therefore came to be known as *il teatro del mondo* –the world’s theatre– where it was necessary to play one’s social role with style to create, maintain and, if necessary, save one’s face (Burke, 1987: 9-10).

«The city combined many theatres into one great stage»

The city combined many theatres into one great stage. In fact, perhaps paradoxically, Rome’s success in establishing itself as a European power was mirrored by the effort of great European nations to gain a foothold in the city’s public arena. Mario Rosa argues that the success of Rome as a European power occurred at the end of the Religious Wars in France (1562-1598) and coincided with the renewed importance of the Counter-Reformation church on the international scene. Since religion and politics were closely intertwined, Rome was a “theatre”, above all in a political sense, where it was possible to publicly mediate and form alliances based on the tensions and conflicts that were afflicting Europe (Rosa, 2002: 78-81).

By 1580 Rome had also become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, in which the Florentines, French, Germans, Spaniards, and Venetians –to name but a few– were organised in separate national communities, all with different preferred political alliances (Burke, 2002: 254; Feigenbaum, 2014: 1). In the *Discourse for the Ambassador Conde de Castro on How the Roman Embassy Ought to be Governed*, published in 1609, the unknown author described how the different nationalities at the Roman court were characterised by a particular temperament as well as by their preferred political factions. For instance, among the Italian nationalities, the Lombards were described as docile and Spanish-loving; the Neapolitans as arrogant

and ceremonious, pretending to love the Spaniards; some of the mercantile Genoese had a penchant for the French, others for the Spaniards; and the Florentines and Venetians both sided with the French (Visceglia, 2002: 112). On this topic, in his *Relazione della città e corte di Roma* (1641), Teodoro Ameyden, a Flemish lawyer at the Roman court, tartly remarked on the situation in the city by stating that: «[one] cannot really trust the Roman people any more than a myriad of [other] nations, nor the nobility [which is] distracted by the many factions. The people of Rome are constantly divided into Spanish and French factions. Shopkeepers and lowly people belong to the French, gentlemen and citizens to the Spanish».<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the various national communities in Rome were often resident in different administrative regions, so-called *rioni*, whose boundaries were determined by the population and usually concentrated around a specific church or a religious confraternity. For example, throughout the early modern period the French presence in the city was particularly significant and centred on its national church of San Luigi dei Francesi in *rione* Sant'Eustachio. The zone between their church and the Pantheon was traditionally dominated by the Florentine Medici-family, who were allies of the French. In the 16th and 17th centuries the Florentines were one of the most important foreign communities in Rome, mainly active as bankers and merchants. The Florentine district of Rome was centred around the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini in *rione* Ponte, where all the palaces of the Roman branches of the Florentine families also stood (Robertson, 2016: 10).

The other major powers on the Italian peninsula were, above all, Genoa, Spanish-controlled Naples, and Venice, which all maintained substantial representation in the city. As for other European nation states, Spain –the traditional enemy of France– was strongly represented in Rome at the time. The Spanish community was mainly centred around their national church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, which faced onto Piazza Navona in *rione* Parione. The Spaniards also owned the church of Santa Maria di Monserrato in *rione* Regola, which was primarily the national church for the Aragonese community in Rome and located close to the palace of the then Spanish-allied Farnese family.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cited and translated in Maria Antonietta Visceglia (2002): «Factions in the Sacred College in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries». Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, however, the Palazzo Farnese serves today as the French embassy in Italy.

In his study on the role that the Spanish Empire played in shaping the politics, culture and society of Papal Rome in the early modern period, Thomas Dandeleet argues that a combination of necessity and desire drew the two empires together in the 1520s. In 1529, two years after the Sack of Rome (1527), Pope Clement VII (1523-1534) compromised the Church's and Italy's independence by allying with the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, after almost 40 years of wars. Spain thereafter defended the Papal State against the French, Ottomans and Protestants outside Italy, while at the same time pouring a large amount of money into the city of Rome with the expectation that the papacy would support their ecclesiastical agenda throughout the empire in return. Rome therefore became the centre of Spanish imperial religion, and the centre for Spain's Italian diplomacy and international politics. In the 1550s Spain had established complete hegemony over all the Italian states (except Venice), whereas some states (Naples, Sicily, Sardinia and Milan) were ruled directly by the Spaniards (Dandeleet, 2001: 1-16).

As the diplomatic centre of Europe and the seat of Roman Catholicism, Rome became even more crucial to the Spanish monarchy, for its international reputation, expansionist agenda, internal authority, and financial control of the Church. In return came the popes, Roman cardinals, clerics and laity, all to benefit from Spanish pensions, gifts and religious charity on a large scale. Furthermore, within Roman society Spanish cardinals and churchmen were given greater prominence as they intermarried with the Italian nobility, built and maintained palaces, became leading Jesuits in the city and held high offices in the papal Curia. Spaniards from every section of society therefore moved to Rome for the opportunities the city offered ambassadors, soldiers, courtiers, priests, painters, merchants, bankers, blacksmiths, educated laymen who worked as notaries and lawyers, even working-class Spaniards (who served in households, drove coaches, and provided a variety of other services) were all drawn to Rome. Thus, according to Dandeleet, by the 1590s the Spanish community comprised nearly a third of the city's population, which made the Spanish faction the most dominant foreign faction in Rome, as well as the most powerful foreign community in the city (Dandeleet, 2001: 1-16).

However, like all the different national communities in Rome at the time, the Spanish faction was not limited to the Spaniards. It also comprised the many Italians living in Rome who were allied with the Spanish monarchy by some means or other. Dandeleet stresses that the Spanish faction on the Roman scene was: «... composed of a fluid, constantly changing group

of cardinals, soldiers, lawyers, noblemen, courtiers, artists and working-class Spaniards and Italians who were all involved in some direct or indirect exchange of goods and services with the Catholic King, although seldom on a contractual basis» (Dandele, 2001: 124). From 1608 on, however, although the Spanish faction still exerted considerable influence in the papal court, their support became gradually weaker at the same time as the French faction grew, actively capitalising on the Spanish weakness (Dandele, 2001: 140).

## Dress alla Romana – a mere ideological carattere nazionale?

Although fairly rare, an interesting feature in archival documents such as the inventories of early modern Romans, are the various toponymic terms for both different fabrics and specific dress items. Several items have been catalogued under the name of a city or place within the Italian peninsula, while other items have been catalogued indicating their national origin, such as *alla Francese* (French way), *all'Ungaria* (Hungarian way), *Scotta* (Scottish), and *alla Spagna* (Spanish way) or *di Spagna* (from Spain).<sup>9</sup> In Roman documents items are commonly described as being the so-called *colore di Spagna* –colour of Spain– or more specific hues, such as *lionato di Spagna*.<sup>10</sup> The general term *colore di Spagna* might have been another expression for Spanish *lionato*. Or, since Spaniards were known for wearing black, perhaps it was another term for indicating that the item in question was black. There are also catalogued textiles specified as Spanish, such as *perpignano di Spagna* and *saia di Spagna* as well as, of course, garments such as *giuppone* (doublets), *veste* (dresses), and *ferraiuoli* (cloaks).<sup>11</sup>

Although these toponymic definitions do occur, they are seldom particularly helpful in terms of clarifying how one regional or national style differed from another. Instead, such references can be quite misleading. Janet Cox-Rearick emphasises: “To call a garment *alla francese* (or *alla tedesca*,

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<sup>9</sup> These are drawn from inventories preserved in the archives of the nineteenth office of the Trenta Notai Capitolini in Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR).

<sup>10</sup> The Italian term *lionato* indicated a brown hue, which resembled the colour of a lion's mane – that is, a reddish brown or tawny colour (or simply fawn – between red, yellow and brown).

<sup>11</sup> *Perpignano* was a fine quality woollen cloth with a French weave, while *saia* was a thin twill which usually had a diagonal weave. However, *saia* could also denote a thin silk fabric, or be the term for a shift or a dress made from the fabric.

*alla spagnola*, etc.) apparently did not require explanation, for the expression could refer to a style current in France, for example, or could simply be a label attached permanently to a type of French garment. Furthermore, there was rampant imitation of the styles of many countries - sometimes all at once” (Cox-Rearick, 2009: 51). An explanation for this may be that the descriptions and definitions were generally the work of a notary rather than a professional craftsman. The inventories were written by professionals whose main task was not to categorise the garments in question, but to record them. Written in as much detail as possible, these inventories were a kind of security paper that could demonstrate the legitimate ownership of the objects listed, but one should not expect that the notaries had the same specialised knowledge about clothing and fabrics as the professional craftsmen (tailors, textile weavers or cloth merchants) or second-hand dealers did.

«Communities that had their own local styles certainly adopted foreign fashions deliberately»

Communities that had their own local styles certainly adopted foreign fashions deliberately.

However, in the case of early modern Rome, it is important to bear in mind that it might be difficult to determine if a local style survived alongside the apparent obsession for looking foreign. In her study on Venetian dress 1495-1525, Stella Mary Newton stresses that «... most Italians who adopted foreign dress did so only for single occasions or at the most for short periods» (Newton, [1988] 2009: 222). According to Newton, it seems the geographical labels were attached to certain types of clothing mainly because it was considered unfamiliar and therefore difficult to describe otherwise. Furthermore, these labels were far from precise, since they did not take into consideration how dress within various countries differed in style from one region or province to another. (Newton, [1988] 2009: 222-223).

Despite the preserved descriptions of different garments worn in Rome, it has proven hard to distinguish what characterised the clothing of the early modern Roman *carattere nazionale*. Perhaps *l'essere romano* –being Roman– was merely an ideological national identity, which did not manifest itself as much in clothing as it did in other aspects of identity.<sup>12</sup>

On this topic, as Thomas Dandeleit points out in his study on the Spanish community in early modern Rome, it is important to bear in mind the many

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss this matter in more depth in my doctoral thesis. See Camilla Annerfeldt (2021): *A Paradise for Impostors? Clothing as Social Markers in Early Modern Rome*. Florence: European University Institute.

intermarriages between different national communities that occurred in Rome. Dandeleet speculates that the significant number of intermarriages between Spaniards and Romans must have made an impact on the Romanisation of the Spanish population, and may also have diluted loyalties to the Spanish community, especially among the working-class Spaniards in the city, whose children most certainly grew up speaking Italian and thinking of themselves as Romans. Hence, Dandeleet suggests, many Spaniards probably became native (Dandeleet, 2000: 159). This observation raises the question: if the next generation of the foreign communities living in Rome gradually became native, did they then also dismiss their cultural and national markers in dress? Certainly, if foreigners' loyalties to their countries of origin were diluted over time, so too must the characteristic features of their national dress have become blended with the dress styles of other nations. Indeed, when discussing the clothing worn in 16<sup>th</sup> century Milan, Paola Venturelli stresses that «... while adopting Spanish fashions, 16<sup>th</sup> century Milan also incorporated elements of its own...» (Venturelli, 2014: 94). This must have been the case in Rome as well. Similarly, some Spanish fashions adopted by the Romans might, over time, have also been integrated to such an extent that their origins fell into oblivion.

A telling example of this can be found in Roman inventory lists from the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. As we have seen, the *zimarra* was an over garment of Spanish origin commonly adapted by Italian women. It was a long, tight-fitting, usually sleeveless over-gown that by the 1630s had become one of the most popular over garments amongst Italian women of various social classes. This was also the case amongst Roman women. For my doctoral thesis –*A Paradise for Impostors? Clothing as Social Markers in Early Modern Rome* (2021)– I studied a selection of 133 inventory lists in which items of clothing are mentioned, to be able to grasp which colours, textiles and garments seem to have been favoured in Rome between the years 1590 and 1644. In these lists, one of the garments which features most is the *zimarra*, listed 218 times. However, only one out of the 133 inventory lists emphasises that the *zimarra* catalogued was *a la Spagnola*.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the conclusion to be drawn from these documents is the fact that the *zimarra*, despite its traditional Spanish origins, seems to have been fully adapted as an integral part of Roman dress by the time these inventory lists were compiled.

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<sup>13</sup> ASR, TNC, UFF. 19, Vol. 131, [1624], p. 638.

Another telling example of how Rome differed from other cities on the Italian peninsula is the Roman sumptuary legislation, or rather the lack of more detailed and specific laws on the matter. In contrast to the sumptuary legislation in many other Italian cities, Rome seems to have issued very few sumptuary laws, and those that were issued do not seem to have been very restrictive (Ago, 1997: 672-673; Ago, 2013: 109-110; Cohen, 2008: 301-302). In the 16th century only two Dress Reforms were published in Rome, in 1563 and in 1586.<sup>14</sup> However, these do not distinguish between different types of people, such as gentlemen, burghers or peasants, nor do they make a distinction between Romans and foreigners. Instead, they bunched them all together. In terms of foreign dress styles, in the Bull of 1563 there is a paragraph on the clothing of *le altre donne honeste, che non usano habito Romano* (foreign women, from another nation or city abroad), whether French, Florentine, Genovese, Neapolitan, Spanish or Venetian, who did not dress *alla Romana*. The paragraph stresses that foreign women in Rome should observe the same restrictions in terms of dress as the *Romane*, stating that *le altre donne honeste* were allowed to wear neither gowns in gold or silver cloth, nor gowns decorated in any way with gold or silver thread, slashed, cut or trimmed with braid, lace, embroidery or piping. In the Dress Reform of 1586, however, there are no instructions directed at foreign women (or men), although it contains a concession to foreigners who had recently arrived in Rome –*per divozione, ò per altri negozi*– which granted them an extra month from the publication of the Bull to adjust and alter their clothing according to the rules stipulated by the Dress Reform.

## Concluding remarks

Since Rome was the main centre for European political affairs from the late 15th century to the late 17th century, there is no doubt that the city held an important position in the early modern period and that its population ascribed themselves to different political factions. Yet, for reasons such as its very constitution and cosmopolitan nature, it has proven difficult to fully render what

<sup>14</sup> Biblioteca Casanatense, Editti e Bandi, Vol. I, *Bando e riforma sopra l'immoderate spese & pompa del vestire delli huomini & donne di quest' Alma Città, & degli Conviti*, 10 December 1563, p. 168; *Reformatio circa immoderatos sumptus, qui in Alma Urbe fieri consueverunt, circa vestes, dotes, ornamenta, indumenta, & conviva*, 23 December 1586, in *Bullarum, Privilegiorum ac Diplomatum Romanorum Pontificum Amplissima Collectio. Cui accessere Pontificum omnium Vitae, Notae, & Indices opportuni. Opera et Studio Caroli Cocquelines. Tomus Quartus Pars Quarta. Ab Anno X. Gregorii XIII. usque ad Annum III. Sixti V. Scilicet ab Anno 1581 ad 1588, 1747*, pp. 288–292.



was characteristic of the Roman *carattere nazionale* in terms of dress. It might have been merely ideological, and did not manifest itself as much in clothing as it did in other aspects of identity, simply because it was a city of foreigners, which made the very population of Rome more socially and politically fluid than those of other urban centres on the Italian peninsula. It could therefore be argued that in terms of dress, Rome may have offered a kind of middle ground, which was more forgiving and adaptable to avoid causing unnecessary scandals and conflicts. Furthermore, although Rome was a highly hierarchical society, even the notion that one ought to dress according to one's social station must have been rather difficult to comply with in a social environment which was as fluid as the *patria commune* –common homeland– probably was.

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