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Creating the image of a successful businessman
in the Crown of Aragon in the 15th century**

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The merchant wears Konstanz. Creating the image of a successful businessman in the Crown of Aragon in the 15th century*

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The aim of this paper is to provide an accurate analysis of the fashion consumption of the Barcelonense merchant Joan de Torralba, focusing on personal tastes and the perception of self-identity. First, I will take into special consideration the luxury markets of the Crown of Aragon and the role played by Torralba and his equals in fostering a refined demand that connected inland territories of the Crown with distant European markets. Secondly, I will concentrate on Torralba's fashion expenses and consumption patterns, compared to his family's and taking into account the international fashion context of the 15th century.

Middle Ages; 15th century; Crown of Aragon; economic history; merchants; fashion; consumption; identity.

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, consumption has again become a central topic of historical research. Reflections on inequality and its consequences lead, necessarily, to issues of consumption. The last decade has witnessed the development of a new line of research that has studied buying habits from markets to consumers in premodern times¹. Recent contributions based on assumptions of identity economics may lead to an approach from a wider perspective, as they take into account how the consumer's self-image shapes his or her economic decision making. This is particularly obvious when talking about fashion;

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¹ Petrowiste, Lafuente, *Faire son marché*; Laliena, Lafuente, *Consumo, comercio; Dynamiques du monde rural*; Hirbodan, Ogilvie, Regnath, *Revolution des Fleisses; Buyers and sellers*; Nigro, *Il commercio al minuto*; Sabaté, *El mercat*; Welch, *De compras en el Renacimiento*.

clothes and accessories are an identity issue today as they were in medieval times, when they were also a means of social distinction². This idea is key to understanding fashion³. Gilles Lipovetsky has already emphasized its individuality. He stated that fashion exists only as an expression of human particularity: without the individual and the personal autonomy to choose, to create a personal taste and to share it with society, even if it goes beyond convention, fashion wouldn't exist⁴. This is also stressed in Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli's works, where the author sees fashion as a reinforcement of personal identity⁵ and points at how clothing was regarded as proof of one's condition, while moralists considered it a way for individuals to assert their individuality⁶. Similarly Ulinka Rublack, reviewing Richard Goldthwaite's studies, concludes that the development of the individual during the Renaissance is key to understanding the importance given to the projection of one's image⁷.

Unfortunately, little has this individual perspective been applied to particular studies, which are more focused on the development of fashion or general dressing practices during the premodern period. On the other hand, identity in a traditional sense has long been taken into account⁸. For instance, for the Middle Ages, it is commonly accepted that it was especially important for merchants to publicly show their wealth and socioeconomic position. Merchants perceived themselves as self-made men who had to ensure their status and find their place in society in regard to the nobility, whose standards they tried to reach. The merchant's image has been proved to be consciously calculated, with a tendency to boost the sense of wealth⁹. But studies have often remained at a descriptive level and have considered mercantile and bourgeois culture and behaviour as a whole, not paying attention to individuals and their singularities. In this regard, David Igual points at a problem when trying to define the concept of elite in the Late Middle Ages. When it comes to

² Riello, *Breve historia de la moda*; Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*; Heller, *Fashion in medieval France*; Heller, *A cultural history*.

³ S.G. Heller points out to the "personal control of finances that empowers individuals to make distinctive personal choices" as a prerequisite for a fashion system: Heller, *Fashion in medieval France*.

⁴ Individuality is a recurrent topic in Lipovetsky's "empire of the ephemeral". He explicitly devotes a chapter to fashion as an individual expression, which he considers one of the most important factors to understanding the phenomenon of fashion: Lipovetsky, *El imperio de lo efímero*.

⁵ Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

⁷ Rublack, *Dressing up*, p. 3.

⁸ There is a large amount of literature that considers group characteristics depending, mostly, on social class, common origin (nationality) or religion. But the concept «identity economics», developed by economists, goes beyond them. It can integrate all of them, and it covers a more complex and multifaceted scope. For further reading on identity economics, see Akerlof, Kranton, *Identity economics*; Akerlof, Kranton, *Economics and identity*; Fine, *The economics of identity*; Garai, *Reconsidering identity economics*.

⁹ About this, it is interesting the work of Jan Dumolyn on elite dynamics in medieval Flanders. Dumolyn, *Nobles, Patricians and Officers*; Dumolyn, Clerq, Haemers, *Vivre noblement*.

merchants, he evinces the disparity of categorization depending on different criteria that go beyond economic activity or wealth. Individually, less tangible aspects such as entrepreneurial spirit, business mentality or the capacity for knowledge acquisition create a great heterogeneity that must be taken into account¹⁰.

Regarding the Crown of Aragon, some studies have pointed out the construction of a social identity and the establishment of common social patterns among the emerging bourgeoisie (as an homogeneous group) at the end of the Middle Ages, but little attention has been paid to the direct economic implications of this international phenomenon from the point of view of the market, apart from some considerations of luxury demand and luxury restrictions¹¹, and nothing at all with regard to individual behaviour. The abundant purchasing power of the new bourgeoisie in these territories contributed to the emergence of an intense luxury market on an international scale that resulted in the continuous importation and circulation of high quality fabrics and jewellery, all of which needs to get more attention.

Whereas Munro defends a transition to the “dark side” at the end of the Middle Ages, meaning that dark colours were the rule in the Flemish industry of luxury woollen fabrics, Catalan, Aragonese and Valencian merchants in the 15th century show a clear preference for bright and striking colours, more representative of their economic power, due to the implicit use of expensive dyes¹². As Juan Vicente García Marsilla states quoting a 13th century saying, «good people dress in colourful fabrics»¹³. We can see some similarities with other Mediterranean areas, for instance Italy where, as Muzzarelli has shown, colours were key to the development of fashion from the 13th century onwards¹⁴. Nevertheless, some dark colours were also appreciated in the Crown, in cases when a mixture of different dyes was required to put up the final price and to become a mark of distinction¹⁵.

The documentary collection of the Barcelonese merchant Joan de Torralba leads us into the luxury market of the Crown of Aragon and opens a window to the performance of its mercantile agents regarding fashion. Firstly, his businesses in Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and Flanders provided him with a great part of the goods needed to meet the demands of the Crown economic elites. Secondly, he was a model consumer of these goods; being a merchant, Joan de Torralba projected his self-image and identity to society through a careful selection of clothes and accessories. The services of a tailor were frequently needed to make new clothing with the richest

¹⁰ Igual, *La formación de elites económicas*, pp. 137-160 (especialmente pp. 145-146, and 154).

¹¹ With the exception of J.V. García Marsilla's works on fashion, among the most representative see *La moda no es capricho* and *El lujo cambiante*.

¹² Igual, *La distribución de materias tintóreas*, pp. 105-108.

¹³ García, *La moda no es capricho*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴ Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, pp. 46-50.

¹⁵ García, *La moda no es capricho*, p. 81.

fabrics and flashy colours, as well as to refashion old pieces in order to meet new requirements¹⁶.

Furthermore, Torralba's ledgers and loose documents allow a comparative analysis of fashion consumption with his two sons-in-law, the Barcelonese citizen Pere de Sitges, involved in the city government, and a nobleman with economic and political aspirations, Joan de Sabastida, which reveals preferences and differences in tastes. In Joan de Torralba's documentary collection we can find a considerable amount of information related to the merchant's lifestyle during the first half of the 15th century. Accounts devoted to food, furniture, house expenses, and fashion in journals eleventh and twelfth (*Manual onzè* and *Manual dotzè*) are of great interest, as well as the loose documents kept with them and with the general ledgers third and fourth (*Llibre major terç* and *Llibre major quart*)¹⁷. Likewise, our merchant's personal *Llibre de comtans* (a sort of cash ledger) and a small ledger of debts between Torralba and one of his sons-in-law, Pere de Sitges, provide an excellent complement to a reasonably complete image of daily expenses, despite some data irregularity¹⁸.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to provide an accurate comparative analysis of fashion consumption by Joan de Torralba and his family to bring personal choices to light. As in the film *The Devil Wears Prada*, Konstanz was the "brand" chosen by our merchant, as we will show in detail in the following pages. This study will also take into special consideration the luxury markets of the Crown of Aragon and the role played by Torralba and his equals, which stimulated a refined demand that connected inland territories of the Crown with distant European and far away Mediterranean markets.

2. A luxury market in the Crown of Aragon

From the mid-13th century, deep transformations in the Crown of Aragon led to the creation of markets, the commercialization of society, and the regional integration of the territory in wider markets and networks. One of the consequences of these complex processes, which I cannot address comprehensively here, was that more social groups gained access to a wider set of

¹⁶ A first approach to this issue in Viu, *Una gran empresa*, pp. 353-363.

¹⁷ The journals cover the period 1434-1437 (*Manual onzè*) and 1437-1442 (*Manual dotzè*). The third general ledger is dated between 1437-1447 and the fourth between 1448-1458.

¹⁸ These sources are preserved in the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya in Barcelona [from now on ANC]. Some of the ledgers have recently undergone a critical edition. Amongst the ones used here, the *Llibre de comtans* (1434-1458) is about to be published in a joint volume with the booklet of debts (1432-1448): Viu, *La contabilidad privada*. Also the four *llibres de la companyia* from 1430 to 1437 (similar to the Italian *libri segreti*) will be available soon. On Torralba's documentary collection and sources see Viu, *Una gran empresa*.

resources¹⁹. Diffusion of credit allowed them to buy more and richer goods. Besides, the arrival and settlement of foreign agents introduced new technical knowledge, part of which was related to fashion (silk and wool production and transformation). The creation of mercantile fortunes encouraged the demand for new merchandises, and their connections to other European territories resulted in the spread of innovative tastes and cultural patterns.

García Marsilla points to a shift in luxury tastes in the 15th century Crown of Aragon, in the vein of European changes, opening the door for fabrics that, until that moment, had occupied a secondary place²⁰. Among these, silk became the protagonist, with Florence as the reference centre of production²¹, followed by Valencia²². However, this last city falls out of the scope of our study as it was not a reference market for Torralba. Along with silk, velvets (which may be also made of silk²³) and eastern fabrics (such as *aceitunís* and Damask) were highly regarded²⁴. But all of this had to deal with moral restrictions and regulations on luxury and ostentation²⁵. In the Kingdom of Aragon, brocades with silver and golden threads suffered from some limitations, and so did the excessive use of silk; however, like in the rest of Europe, hardly ever were these regulations observed in practice²⁶. Within the described framework, my approach brings to light a luxury exchange circuit, little noticed in previous historiography. That is, an itinerary formed in the Crown of Aragon between the cities of Barcelona, Zaragoza and Tortosa, held up by a demand of a select clientele, further detailed below.

Little else can be said about Barcelona, as it was a consolidated medieval Mediterranean marketplace which is already covered by a vast literature. However, new discoveries about the markets in Valencia and Zaragoza have resized the importance of Barcelona in the commercial development of the Crown of Aragon during the 15th century, and Zaragoza, which had long been considered a marginal international market due to its inland situation, has finally been put in its correct place. We know now for certain that Zaragoza, the head of the Kingdom of Aragon, was a dynamic commercial city well connected to international networks, as well as a key marketplace for the eco-

¹⁹ A synthesis of these processes in the Crown of Aragon can be followed through the collective works of CEMA group, mainly: Sesma, Laliena, *Crecimiento económico*; Laliena, Lafuente, *Una economía integrada*; Laliena, Lafuente, *Consumo, comercio*. It is also interesting the «Aragones commercial revolution» raised by Ángel Sesma in 1982, more valid than ever, reedited in Sesma, *Revolución comercial*.

²⁰ García, *Vestir el poder*, pp. 358-359.

²¹ Tognetti, *I drappi di seta*; Tognetti, *The development of Florentine silk industry*.

²² Navarro, *El arte de la seda*.

²³ In our sources, velvets are mentioned without reference to the material used in its manufacture. Many of them may have been made of silk, but we cannot discount the presence of velvets made from other materials.

²⁴ García, *Vestir el poder*, p. 359.

²⁵ Muzzarelli, *Let the great evil*; Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*; García, *El lujo cambiante*, pp. 240-244.

²⁶ Villanueva, *Sobre el lujo femenino*, pp. 248-249.

nomic and financial growth of the Crown of Aragon. Recent works confirm its position in the triangle formed by Barcelona, Valencia and Majorca, thus turning the triangle into a rhombus²⁷.

There was another city essential for the functioning of the commercial circuits in the Crown: Tortosa, a port town at the mouth of the Ebro, the river which crosses Aragon and flows through Zaragoza. This river was a main channel for the Aragonese exports to the Mediterranean. Merchandises arrived in Tortosa and were loaded onto the big boats sailing to other Mediterranean ports or, along other routes, to the North Sea. This resulted in the settlement of an interesting and very active merchant community mainly made up of the agents of powerful European companies. Tortosa was, thus, a cornerstone of international commerce, yet few works have been directly devoted to it²⁸.

Research up to the date shows the commercial links among the three cities, but Joan de Torralba's companies are the most evident manifestation of the aforementioned itinerary. If we focus on the company that he shared with Juan de Manariello (1430-1437), which till now is the only one that has received attention in a specific study²⁹, it operated from two different headquarters: one located in Zaragoza, the other in Barcelona. From the very beginning, the articles of incorporation established an agent in Tortosa, as it was absolutely essential for their main commercial objective. Aragonese raw material exported to Italy needed the river Ebro and its port *par excellence* to reach the Mediterranean.

The Torralba-Manariello company took profit from its contacts with Italian cities. In order to import certain goods to the Crown of Aragon, it implemented a system of barter for some of its merchandises in Genoa, Pisa, Florence and Venice, although its agents could also purchase them if necessary. The company also put into practice short-term partnerships with other merchants in order to reach North-African, eastern Mediterranean and Flemish ports, by concluding *commenda* contracts, by which one of the partners supplied the funds and the workforce was provided by the other partner³⁰.

The goods coming from different European cities arrived in Barcelona and Tortosa and entered the company's redistribution circuit, moving from one city to another and also to Zaragoza. As I have already pointed out, this superregional circuit responded to a specific demand and involved certain agents and commercial networks. It was characterized by the participation

²⁷ Sesma, *Revolución comercial*; Laliena, *Saragossa, capital medieval*; de la Torre, *Grandes mercaderes*; Viu, *Crédit et transfert de capitaux*; Viu, *Una compañía mercantil-bancaria*.

²⁸ Although Tortosa was an important economic center, it has been little studied from a commercial perspective: Vilella, *La lleuda de Tortosa*; Saucó, Lozano, *El puerto de Tortosa*.

²⁹ On this company see Viu, *Una gran empresa* and *Eadem, Una compañía mercantil-bancaria*.

³⁰ There were different types of *commenda*, all with a similar theoretical basis (Viu, *Crédit et transfert de capitaux*). On the commercial *commenda* see: Madurell, García, *Comandas comerciales barcelonesas*.

of a reduced number of sellers and consumers, which remained more or less stable throughout a great part of the 15th century. Nevertheless, the itinerary of luxury goods formed by these three cities was not the only one within the Crown.

Merchandises imported by Torralba's firms were all due to cover the particular requirements of the bourgeois elite. The most powerful merchants and bankers of the Catalan and Aragonese territories, leaders of the greatest firms and the most active in the political spheres, aimed at possessing the newest, richest and most expensive international and exotic products in order to show off their status and capacity. The Torralba-Manariello company imported several different fabrics, many of which were made of silk, from Genoa (fustians), Venice (velvets), Pisa (veils) and Florence (high quality cloths). Other merchandises, such as food (wine, spices, etc.), furniture, jewels, paper or slaves, also came from these and other places. Some of them were for the use of the partners, but others were sent, on order, to their colleagues in Barcelona, Tortosa and Zaragoza. Also valuable home-made goods from the three cities and their surrounding areas circulated along this itinerary. The great demand for this type of luxury goods led to a growing demand by the shops of the three cities, and the company itself became a main supplier of some of these stores, which the urban elites would frequently visit.

For example, according to the first ledger of the Torralba-Manariello company³¹, Juan de Manariello, a merchant from Zaragoza and Torralba's main partner from 1430 to 1448, received many pieces of *camelot*, a wool or silk fabric³², some in red and violet made of kermes, some in light blue, and others in an unidentified colour (this may refer to some dark tone, in connection with the aforementioned taste for expensive dark dyes). The price of each piece was of 50 Aragonese Florins (nearly 600 *sueldos* in Barcelona). Joan de Torralba also sent a furry hat (12 *sueldos*) for his colleague, the knight and merchant Juan de Mur³³, from Barcelona to Zaragoza; for Antoni López's wife, another Aragonese merchant, a silk and golden-silver belt (c. 75 *sueldos*). Pedro de Azuara, a member of the citizen elite of Zaragoza, bought a crimson chasuble for nearly 941 *sueldos* 10 *dineros* for his wife in Barcelona. A piece of sateen was also sent to the notary Aznar de Torralba for 22,5 *sueldos*. The fabrics bought in stores in Barcelona or imported by Torralba were sent to the shops of the aforementioned Juan de Mur in Zaragoza.

Undeniably, certain socioeconomic groups shared common fashion tastes. In this case, the privileged access to the luxuriously rich fabrics and objects that a company like Torralba's could import from distant places promoted their diffusion throughout the network. Even if we can see shared patterns, other commercial circuits operated in the three cities. This led to distinctive

³¹ That is, ANC, ANC1-960-T-703, *Llibre de la companyia*, 1430-1432.

³² See the details of the fabrics in the next section of this paper.

³³ ANC, ANC1-960-T-706, *Llibre de la companyia*, 1434-1436.

elements depending on the interaction of each merchant with the different markets where they operated. We have no means to determine these particularities, as a lot of work has yet to be done. Nevertheless, some authors have already pointed out that, despite large-scale fashion diffusion, homogeneity didn't exist. It was precisely diversity that explained the attraction to fashion and provoked the amazement of others in the presence of the unusual³⁴.

3. *Shaping identity through fashion*

Studies on Catalan-Aragonese merchant families have revealed that they shared a number of traits, including a relatively small family size. Unlike the situation in Italy, where families were large enough to manage big companies on their own, the smaller families in the Crown of Aragon needed to develop extensive connections based on identities, common origins and / or friendship ties³⁵. Joan de Torralba's family provides an example of this.

The merchant was married to Úrsula, a woman from a bourgeois family from Barcelona. The marriage possibly took place at the beginning of the 15th century, when Torralba arrived in the city from his town in Aragon. They had several children, but only two daughters survived. The first one, Agnès, married Pere de Sitges in 1432, who belonged to the Barcelonese oligarchy of *ciutadans honrats*³⁶. His father had previously occupied relevant positions in the city government. After the marriage, Sitges only participated indirectly in some of Torralba's activities, as he pursued political aspirations, and in 1444 reached a high position as a counsellor (*conseller*). The second daughter, Antonia, followed a different path. In 1435 she married Joan de Sabastida, a member of the Catalan low nobility. He didn't seem to be very wealthy, but he gave the Torralbas the greatly appreciated link to the privileged class. He rapidly became involved in Torralba's business, unlike Sitges. We still have little information about Sabastida's activity, but we know that he was in charge of a galley that participated in the conquest of Naples³⁷. Many years later, his career reached its peak when he entered the administration of the Aragonese King in Sicily. There, Sabastida continued his mercantile role, being senior partner of a new company with Torralba and his former employees³⁸.

The origins of the three individuals analysed here are, therefore, very different. The humble family of Joan de Torralba, in the distant Aragonese hinterland, had little to do with the Barcelonese governing elite or with a noble lineage. Their life expectations were also different. As a great merchant, Joan de Torralba was sure about his convictions and his necessities that resulted

³⁴ García, *La moda no es capricho*, pp. 87-88.

³⁵ Viu, *Una gran empresa*.

³⁶ Doufourq, *Honrats, mercaders et autres*; Fernández, *De prohoms a ciudadanos honrados*.

³⁷ Viu, *Una gran empresa*, pp. 334-337.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 70-72.

in particular behavioural patterns, to a large extent common to the *nouveau riche* economic elite. On the other hand, Pere de Sitges was a proud member of the ruling class, which was reflected in a political confrontation with his father-in-law, as he sided with the *Biga* party (formed by Barcelonese oligarchy) while Torralba was an active *Busca* supporter (the party that represented the merchants' interests). In the meanwhile, Sabastida, a knight who had to earn his living, played a complex role between commerce and high politics.

Their self-identity was hence different, and so were the ways of presenting themselves to society. Joan de Torralba, Pere de Sitges and Joan de Sabastida shared common elements, as a result of being at the pinnacle of the society of the time and of having amassed great economic and political power. But personal expectations introduced significant variations. Ulinka Rublack shows the magnificent example of the painter Albrecht Dürer and the clothing chosen for two of his self-portraits: first when he was an extravagant would-be artist; some years later, as a candidate to the City Council³⁹. If one person could make such great changes in fashion selection in only a few years, one can expect variances regarding their consumption of fashion between our three individuals, something indeed revealed in many details.

3.1. Fashion expenses and textile characteristics

To begin with, I have carried out a quantitative analysis of the sources presented in the introduction. Torralba's ledgers and documents provide interesting data about fashion consumption and expenses⁴⁰.

As stated before, during his life Joan de Torralba employed several tailors who obtained textile supplies directly from the merchant, as he imported luxurious fabrics from different European centres, although a great deal was also bought in shops in Barcelona. We know the names of some of the tailors working for the merchant. Joan Sabadell (documented in the period 1430-1432) and Pere Armengou (c. 1436) themselves used to buy the fabrics needed for their work in the shops of the drapers Francesc Moragues, Bernat Roca and Joan Tomas⁴¹. Sabadell also went to some workshops in the city to buy, for example, Barcelonese dyed fabrics (*brunetas*) or blue Konstanz⁴².

Since 1434, it was the tailor Antoni Guitart who was entrusted with most of our merchant's fashion requirements; he remained at his service until the 1450's, that is, nearly until Torralba's death in 1458. There are many detailed

³⁹ Rublack, *Dressing up*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ For fabric and clothes identification, I have used the following vocabularies and dictionaries: Alcover, Moll, *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*; Sesma, Libano, *Léxico del comercio medieval*. Not all entries have a corresponding translation in English, for example *cota* and *jubón* were similar but not the same, and both are translated as doublets, with a note to which one we are referring in each case.

⁴¹ Documented along the *Llibre de comtans* (ANC, ANC1-960-T-700).

⁴² ANC, ANC1-960-T-700, *Llibre de comtans*, f. 7v.

accounts of Guitart's assignments for the merchant and his family in the *Manual onzè*. He also had a favourite supplier, Francesc Rajola, from whose shop he bought several colourful fabrics, including, again, blue Konstanz in November 1434 and December 1435⁴³, many of which were for Antonia de Torralba. His father used to pay in advance for some of his daughters' and sons-in-law's expenses, which he claimed and recouped afterwards, with the exception of the occasional gifts. Thanks to this, we can have an insight not only into Torralba's fashion expenses, but also into his daughters' households through the abovementioned journals *Onzè* and *Dotzè*, the third *Llibre major* and the *Llibre de comtans*. The latter introduces a new textile supplier, Francesc Pla.

Data shows a clear preference for Konstanz fabrics, coming from the German city of the same name (*Costança*), in different colours: black, dark (*burella*), blue, and white. There were also many pieces of embroidery, a variety of woollen clothes (*saya*, *frisó*), linen fabrics, and others of non-specified material and quality. Pine marten fur was also frequent and was used to line the pieces of clothing. If we take a look at the manufactured clothes recorded in our sources, the most frequently used were velvet, rough woollen fabrics (*frisó*), and pieces of cloth coming from Bristol, Florence or Damask. Fabrics coming from the Lys woollen centres, mainly Kortrijk but also Mechelen and Wervicq⁴⁴, are also documented⁴⁵. Furthermore, the accounts show a great dynamism of textile markets. Apart from the above mentioned, there are a lot of different types of fabrics which can give us a complete view of the fashion tastes of the merchant and his family. Perpignan was also a fabric supplier, as was Montivilliers in Normandy. Nevertheless, Catalan fabrics from Barcelona and Sant Joan are unusual, as are the ones from Majorca. Silk fabrics also seem to be rare, apart from *camelot*, the unusual *camocan* (silk brocade) or some *terçanell* (similar but not as thick as taffeta). *Camelot* could be made of wool or silk, but the difference depended on the dresses and the items of clothing for which they were intended.

Each type of fabric was used for a specific purpose. For instance, velvet was only used for linings or accessories. Damask fabrics, which could also be made of wool or silk (it is not specified in our sources), were used for linings and sleeves, the latter possibly in silk. English Bristol, in crimson or tawny colours⁴⁶, was reserved for doublets (*cota*). Also Florentine fabrics, most of them in dark green, were used for doublets but also for tunics (*gonella*). This gives us a valuable clue for establishing which fabrics Torralba imported for his own use, as his accounting books register the purchase of a piece of high

⁴³ ANC, ANC1-960-T-721, *Manual onzè*, f. 202r.

⁴⁴ A problem arises from the word *verví* (from Wervicq or imitation), which can be also read as *verní*, the name of a common fabric documented in Catalan sources. Nevertheless, given the context, I would opt for the first option.

⁴⁵ On these textiles see Melis, *La diffusione dei panni di Wervicq*.

⁴⁶ There is one mixed Bristol (*mesclat*) that can refer to a piece of several colours, or to a fabric imitating Bristol. In Florence the term *mescolati* was used for Florentine textiles which imitated Flemish or Brabantine ones: Franceschi, *Woollen Luxury Cloth*.

quality dark green fabric from the Ugucconi's in Florence. In the letters preserved from the company's agent in Tuscany, we can read about the splendour of this piece⁴⁷. Afterwards it was used for different dress pieces, very likely a doublet (*cota*), which is said to have been made of dark green *florenti* in 1435, and which was refashioned in 1437, according to the *Manual onzè* registers.

Verví or *Wervicq* was used for some doublets, coats and *pordemases*⁴⁸. Some doublets were also made of wool (*frisó*) mostly used for cloaks (*clotxa*). The *camelot* was mostly used for a type of women's skirt or dress (*brial*), which was usually made of silk, so we assume that in this case it refers to silk and not to wool, which was dyed in purple and crimson. As already stated, velvet (*vellut*) is hardly found in whole pieces, but there are, of course, some *pordemases* made of it, while we can find some others in Kortrijk and Bristol fabrics. Some pieces were also made of cotton (fustian), such as a type of doublet (*jubón*) and a corset. As a matter of fact, the *jubón* was key to fashion evolution. García identifies it as a very expensive piece of dress because of the difficulties that its manufacturing entailed⁴⁹, although at this stage one may be able to find pieces of different qualities and prices.

It may seem strange that Konstanz, despite being extensively bought, rarely appears in manufactured pieces. Unfortunately, many such pieces are described only by their colours while no reference is made to the material used. These items of clothing in unidentified material can be better known from descriptions and we can suppose that they were similar to others which used specific fabrics like Konstanz. Torralba may not have felt the need to specify this fabric as it was so common in his attire. Alternatively, as certain fabrics were particularly used for certain purposes, our merchant and his tailor might have considered it unnecessary to specify the kind of material they were discussing. In any case, as said before, our sources are not accurate records and, regarding Konstanz, there are obvious limitations.

Apart from the origins and qualities of the textiles, colour was a significant feature in Torralba's clothes, as it has already been stated, and this importance was linked to the "colour explosion" of the 13th-15th centuries⁵⁰. It was necessary to use dyes, such as pastel for blue tones, saffron for yellows, and kermes for red, or a combination of different dyes for green and other colours. As Hidetoshi Hoshino demonstrated for the kermes, the expensive price of some of these dyes, could raise the final price of fabric more than any other manufacturing cost⁵¹.

⁴⁷ In a letter sent to Joan de Torralba from Florence the 8th June 1432, Juan Esparter, agent of the company, said that everyone who had seen the green fabric had been amazed. ANC, ANC1-960-T-703, *Llibre de la companyia*, 1430-1432, loose papers.

⁴⁸ *Pordemás* was a complementary piece for women's dresses.

⁴⁹ García, *La moda no es capricho*, pp. 82-83.

⁵⁰ Muzzarelli, *Gli inganni delle apparenze*, pp. 46-48.

⁵¹ Hoshino, *Industria tessile*, pp. 23-39. See also the recent work Harsch, *La teinture*, especially pp. 87-94 on price formation. I would like to thank Mathieu Harsch for allowing me to access his research.

Clothes were ornated with a combination of different fabrics in collars, cuffs or linings, especially with colourful velvets (black, green, purple or violet, yellow, etc.). Metal pieces (rings and studs) as well as buttons were also sewn on to make them more attractive. One of the ledgers studied registers a green skirt garnished with yellow velvet borders, metal studs and a lining of another non specified fabric.

3.2. *Personal choices and the adaptation of fashion*

On the whole, merchants of the Crown of Aragon favoured more intense colours, while the dark, northern trend also had its influence. As we have seen, dark green was very appreciated by our merchant, black was also fairly frequent and we find some “dark clothes” of non-specified colours that connect with the Flemish fashion, even if many of these fabrics were produced by Mediterranean manufactures. Anyway, the combination of vivid and striking colours was intended to show off economic power.

Not only were colours carefully selected to transmit a proper image of the wearer, but also fabrics and accessories. Personal choices and preferences can be inferred from the sources. Konstanz and velvet were the most frequent fabrics in Torralba’s accounting but the latter, which was very appreciated by his sons-in-law, was seldom used by Torralba. While Sabastida, a nobleman-merchant, used Damask more often, and Sitges, a citizen-politician, preferred woollen clothes, Joan de Torralba, a proud merchant, favoured international material coming from England, Flanders or Italy. Our merchant bought some fabrics exclusively for his personal use, such as woollen *frisó*, fustian (cotton), and silken *terçanells*. Fabrics coming from Wervicq, Mechelen and Perpignan were only used by Torralba. He only used velvet (partly violet) for a pair of doublets (*jubón*) and some sleeves. Conversely, Pere de Sitges barely used foreign clothes, but preferred *burriel*, a black or dark rough woollen fabric. The knight Joan de Sabastida preferred Damask, which accounts for a great part of his fabric consumption, and he was the only one who used Montivillier.

Joan de Torralba was also the only one who purchased richly decorated hats made of the best fabrics. Hats and jewels were the perfect finishing touch to a striking image, not within everyone’s reach. Hats were preferably made of Bristol and Kortrijk, but for some headwear tailors used Sant Joan, Mechelen, Florence and Majorca cloth. The descriptions depict upturned brim hats and ornaments made of fabric, including silk. All this completed the image of the powerful international merchant, in contact with distant and exotic markets. The merchant himself became a walking catalogue or mannequin to display the luxurious textiles he could provide for others.

Women of the family were also part of the show. Muzzarelli explains in one of her studies that, in Late Medieval Florence, a man could well spend up to half of the dowry on his wife’s dresses and accessories. This practice was widespread in all layers of society and entailed using women’s bodies as

a shopwindow for the family's wealth and status⁵². A lot of cities tried to limit this practice⁵³ because it led to huge expenses, especially in the first years of marriage⁵⁴. But as the same author points out, women's initiative was also important. In Torralba's accounting a lot of purchases were specifically intended for the three women of the family, Úrsula, Antonia and Agnès, regardless of who paid for them⁵⁵.

Our merchant's wife, Úrsula, wore silk (*camelot*) dresses, a coat of Wervicq and one of Barcelonese *bruneta* with silk and metal ornaments, a skirt of dark Bristol with metal ornaments, a black *pordemàs*, some skirts (dyed in dark green or in a deep violet called *violat de grana*) with metal ornaments, and some cuffs of different fabrics and colours. In 1445, she even imported and paid out of pocket some fabrics from Cyprus, including a piece of *camelot*⁵⁶. As for their daughters, they got two silk dresses (*camocan*), one each, maybe for a special occasion, with green velvet lining, silk decoration and metal ornaments. Sabastida's accounts⁵⁷ record a Bristol *pordemas* with satin lining, green Damask sleeves, a blue skirt, and violet cuffs for Antonia's wardrobe. On the other hand, her sister Agnès had a *camelot* silk dress, a cloak of black Wervicq, another blue skirt, and a red doublet⁵⁸. A Bristol fabric was bought to tailor a *pordemas* and a hood for her⁵⁹. The sisters seemed to dress in a very similar way, with few variations, maybe because they had been brought up together or because of their father's choice of fabrics and clothes, such as the two *camocan* dresses.

Women's appearance was completed with jewellery, as a sign of fashion, wealth and power⁶⁰. Devotional jewellery was also frequent in the society of this time⁶¹, especially rosaries, for which the purchasing power determined material and quality. Accordingly, Úrsula de Torralba ordered the import of a coral rosary in 1445⁶². Although, as in other places, different legislations in the Crown of Aragon tried to limit luxury expenses, especially in weddings⁶³, the reality was another story. Pere de Sitges, like in the case described by

⁵² Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, pp. 89-91.

⁵³ Specifically, Stuard argues that the state intervened on dowry to avoid women's "immoral" overspending: Stuard, *Gilding the market*, pp. 84-121.

⁵⁴ See the case of a Florentine silk artisan who spent great amounts on his wife, even if he was of a lower status and the dowry was insufficient for maintaining her lifestyle: Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, p. 99.

⁵⁵ On the agency of the women in Torralba's family see Viu, *Una gran empresa*, pp. 327-337.

⁵⁶ ANC, ANC1-960-T-695, *Llibre major quart*, loose papers, 1445, Úrsula de Torralba's debts.

⁵⁷ ANC, ANC1-960-T-691, *Manual dotzè*, ff. 152v-155r and 236r.

⁵⁸ ANC, ANC1-960-T-721, *Manual onzè*, ff. 65v-66v and 236v; ANC, ANC1-960-T-694, *Llibre major terç*, loose papers.

⁵⁹ ANC, ANC1-960-T-721, *Manual onzè*, f. 59r (17th January 1435).

⁶⁰ Villanueva Morte, *Sobre el lujo femenino*, p. 251.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 264-265.

⁶² ANC, ANC1-960-T-695, *Llibre major quart*, loose papers, 1445, Úrsula de Torralba's debts.

⁶³ Villanueva, *Sobre el lujo femenino*, p. 254; García, *Las mujeres en Zaragoza*, vol. 2, p. 142 (doc. 39).

Muzzarelli for the city of Florence⁶⁴, spent great amounts of money in the first years after his marriage to Agnès. We do not have a full list of all the items he purchased, but only what Torralba paid for in advance. He bought a silver chain, a silver belt, a necklace and a diamond for his new wife. There are other pieces of jewellery registered such as bracelets, a golden necklace from Valencia and some rosaries, but the documents don't specify whether they were for Agnès or not. We do not have the same accounts for Sabastida, but we know that he paid quite a hefty sum to a female dressmaker for a piece of Cambrai and that he bought Holland cloth for his wedding⁶⁵.

Understandably, clothes ordered by Joan de Torralba for his domestic staff, slaves and servants, were of lower quality. Housemaids didn't dress very differently from women of the family. Here are a few examples of the garments ordered for them: a doublet (*cota*) in green Florentine fabric, and another one with silk sleeves, a dress (*brial*) made of *camelot*, probably silk, with metal ornaments. For young servant boys, such as Ramon, Jaume or Joanico, our merchant purchased a doublet of Barcelonese cloth, another one of fustian and one of wool, and a cloak of Catalan *beguinat*, all of them common fabrics. *Frisó* (rough wool) was frequently used for their clothes, too. Some of them were also made from old clothes.

Reusing and recycling old things was frequent in medieval society⁶⁶, up to the point of creating important second-hand markets⁶⁷. The Torralbas as well often reworked or refashioned clothes, not only to give a second life to old garments that could be used by servants, but also to update items to following new fashions and tastes. The sources use the term «fix» for some of them. But it is more frequent to see words that point at the reworking of some pieces, probably still in good condition, which needed modernizing. Adapting clothes to the new coming fashions meant having the economic means to do so, and not everyone could afford it. That is what makes fashion an “ever-changing luxury” which, more than any other element, can display the true economic power of individuals⁶⁸.

4. *To conclude: a successful businessman of the Crown of Aragon*

The economic and political power achieved by the merchants of the Crown of Aragon during the last century of the Medieval Age involved the creation and development of an accurate, external and idealised image that involved all the members of the family. Joan de Torralba, like many of his merchant colleagues, dressed in striking and fashionable garments that surely attracted

⁶⁴ Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, p. 91.

⁶⁵ ANC, ANC1-960-T-721, *Manual onzè*, f. 155v (1st March 1436).

⁶⁶ Pignonier, Mane, *Se vêtir au Moyen Âge*, pp. 44-48.

⁶⁷ García, *Expertos de lo usado*.

⁶⁸ García, *El lujo cambiante*, pp. 239-240.

the attention of others. The importation and redistribution of certain merchandises in the luxury circuit Barcelona-Tortosa-Zaragoza reveal that the tastes were, up to a certain point, shared by the business elite of the Crown of Aragon. But, as we have shown, Torralba's tastes differed from his sons-in-law, even taking into account that one of them was involved in commerce during the years documented. Likewise, other personal circumstances imply different personal choices that would be visible if we could cross these data with those referring to his merchant colleagues in Barcelona, Zaragoza and Tortosa. For instance, the attire of his partners in Zaragoza would surely show more differences than similarities because of the social and commercial context of the city. The coexistence of other luxury circuits complementary to the one presented here probably gave his colleagues access to other fabrics from Castile or Valencia, and Aragonese cloths would replace the Catalan ones found in Torralba's accounts.

Nevertheless, Torralba's image, which was certainly not eccentric in Barcelona, might have been as commonplace in Tortosa or Zaragoza, where other rich merchants would have followed a very similar fashion. Yet one cannot help imagining the impact of Joan de Torralba's looks in other places. As stated, he was the best "influencer" for selling his own imported merchandises, a walking showcase of the luxuries that common people could only dream of and only a few could afford. During his journeys to Aragon, on his way to the main fairs or when visiting his relatives in the little and remote village of Torralba, a man dressed in flashy, striking clothes of different attractive colours, richly bejewelled and crowned with colourful hats must surely have caught people's eyes.

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