

Sumptuary Laws: 600 to 1650

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Conflict of Interest

- I have no conflict of interest to disclose in this presentation

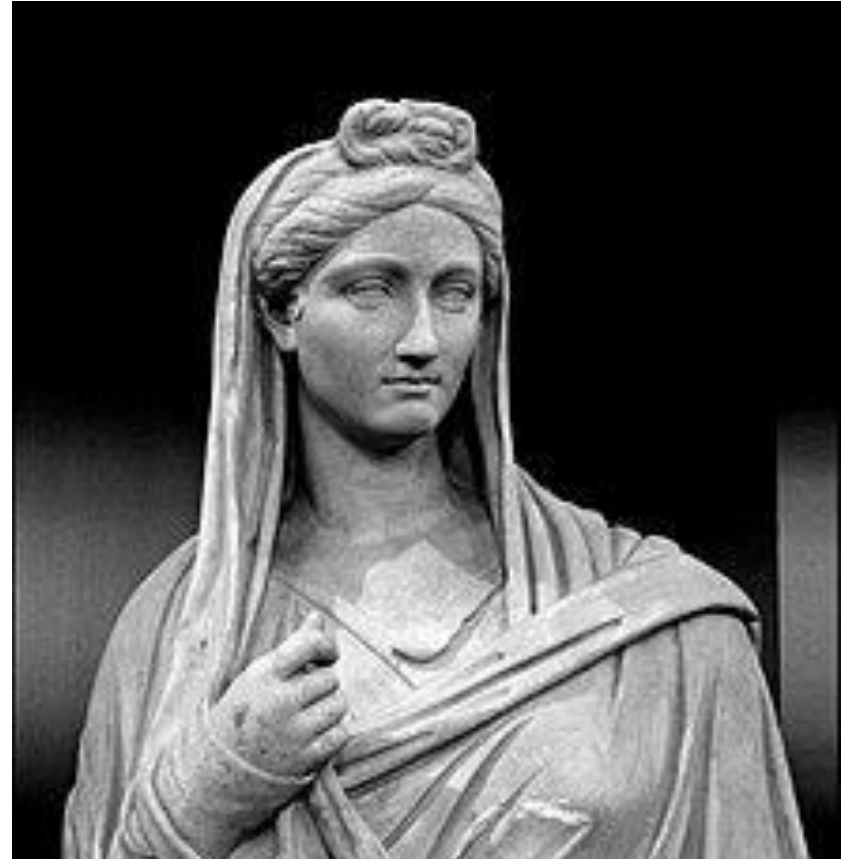


Sumptuary Laws- Defined

- 1) A law common in the 13th and 15th Centuries to prevent extravagance in private life by limiting expenditure for clothing, food, and furniture.
 - 2) A law designed to regulate habits primarily on moral or religious but regarded as justified by the police powers of the state.
- From Merriam-Webster Online dictionary

Latin origin

- Comes from the Latin *Sumptus* or *Sumpturius*
 - Expense or cost



Lex Oppia

- Thought of as the “original” sumptuary law
- Passed around 215 BC
- Romans were defeated against Hanibal
 - Created financial state hardship
- Designed to control spending of women
- Also Maintain Roman family values and female virtue
- Targeted controlling social classes





Lex Oppia the law

- Women restricted to wearing less than one ounce of gold
- No multi-colored garments
- Within one mile of the city, women would not ride carriages-except during religious festivals



Lex Oppia and other Roman laws

- The influence felt for generations
 - Medieval Europe and the Byzantine Empire, especially 12th Century

Sumptuary Laws

- There is no universal truth
- Laws vary between Kingdoms
 - Cross reference even between neighboring cities uncommon
- Targeted different populations
- Reasons for passing the laws differed
 - Reduced Crime
 - Clothing usually the largest expense in the household



Weddings

- Control number of guests-especially women
 - And/or the length of the celebration
- Time of the banquet
 - Some cities laws on the amount of wine served
- Value of the trousseau and wedding gifts
- Bride's dress
 - The value of the dress could be used as a measurement of the rest of the celebration



Funerals

- Could be very specific about the processional
 - Hearse, Bereaved family, the Crown/Royalty, aristocracy, clergy, military, merchant class
- Clothing differed among ranks
 - Black was reserved for the higher classes
 - Lower classes took a long time to adopt black, every after sumptuary laws mandated it
 - Royalty generally wore purple-mostly as a distinction of rank



Margarita Teresa of Spain in mourning attire circa 1666

Food

- Sauces were restricted to elite social classes
 - King Edward III restricted use of sauce to have taxable monies available for war on France
 - Sauces could be served if they were not expensive

Hunting

- Certain game was restricted to certain classes
 - Ex: England venison was restricted to the crown
- China, France, England
 - Falconry 'hierarchy' never detailed laws





Fashion

- Most laws focused on clothing
 - Other areas of focus fell away over time
- Laws prohibited what people could wear, not what they could own
- Clothing served as an indicator of wealth and social status
- Clothing contributed to one of the largest household expenses

Populations

Peasants

- “by law what a peasant wears must be black or gray, nothing else is permitted. A coarse linen smock is appropriate, wooden clogs, and one pair of leather boots. That is enough.”

Peasants

- Very restricted to colors and fabrics
 - Natural colors
- Holy Roman Empire
 - More relaxed



Prostitutes

- Different approaches
 - Restrictive approach preventing wearing luxurious items
 - Then allowing to wear luxury items when the first didn't work
- Gave a “uniform”
- Most countries took a restrictive approach
 - Attempting to moralize



Enforcement

Enforcement

- Challenging at best
- Compliance
 - High versus low
- Lack of evidence
- Varies from country to country



Punishment

- Garment/items confiscated
- Fines
 - “Finder’s fee”
- Imprisonment/pillory
- Loss of title (rare)
- Death

Special Circumstances

Crown Jewels

- Great debate over personal versus what belongs to the crown
- Used for many things
 - Barter
 - Paying debts
 - Loans
- Most monarchies developed laws against leaving the country with the crown jewels



Specific Countries



England

- Frequent and common with the Tudors
- Color frequently mentioned
- Furs
- Women not mentioned specifically until Elizabeth I
- James VI/I abolished all previous laws in 1604
 - In ENGLAND



Robert Dudley, Dressed Head to Toe in Silk

Ireland



- Little record exist
- Traditional Irish hair/dress prohibited in England (repeatedly)

Scotland

- Laws remained separate from England
- James VI/I continued Scottish laws after abolishing English laws
 - Continued with heirs
- National laws vs City laws

Spain

- Meticulous laws on what was banned
- Described social rank in detail
- Violators punished
 - So could their descendants
- Scarlet reserved for royalty



France

- About 100 laws passed still in early modern time
- Complex hierarchical state
 - More than other states
- Turn of the 12th century
 - Legislation on color, fabric,
 - Scarlet (color) reserved for royalty
- Laws sustained much longer than other countries-until the revolution



Italy

- Each City state was known to make its own laws
- Over 300 laws passed between 1200-1500
 - Enormous increase during 1100's
- Focused on details of prohibited items

Holy Roman Empire

- Est 3,000 to 5,000 laws passed between 1200 to 1500
- Class distinction highly emphasized
 - Religion was also very prominent
 - Everything to better the common
- Laws were passed said to be “God’s will”



Flanders

- *Vivre noblement* – living nobly
 - Working class
- *Vivre noblement et desat* – most socially elite and wealthiest social class
- Lack of consequences from lower class to dress higher
- Hunting strongly regulated
 - Large game, swans, herons restricted to the Prince (Charles V)
- Heraldic devices



A Flemish lady and gentleman in the year 1400, illustrated in the manuscript "Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits et ornemens divers, tant anciens que modernes, diligemment depeints au naturel".

China

- Each dynasty had different focuses
 - Some tried to “stamp out” influences of other cultures such as the Mongols
- Emperors would develop extensive documents
- Had some of the harshest punishments



Japan

- Dating from 682
- Focused on all aspects of life
 - Size of houses, feasts, even the doll a child could play with or the hair pins a woman could wear
- Also some of the harshest seen punishments



Ottoman Empire

- Two classes: Ruling class and the ruled class
 - Focus on the separation of classes
- Punishment included execution
- Targeted Minority groups
 - Christians, Jewish
 - Prescribed garments to distinguish based on status
- Last Ottoman Sumptuary Law Abolished in 1829!



Suleiman the Magnificent and his wife Hürrem Sultan.

Sumptuary in the SCA

- Coronets and crowns
- Use of titles
- Devices and armory

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