

## TEXTILE CONSUMPTION IN LATE MEDIEVAL CASTILE: THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL MEANING OF CLOTHING<sup>1</sup>

El consumo textil en la Baja Edad Media Castellana: significados sociales, económicos y culturales del vestido, 1200-1350.

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**Abstract:** Focusing on the types of clothing imported into the realm, and using information from the royal accounts and tithes of a number of ports in the Bay of Biscay, I focus on issues of production and consumption in late medieval Castile and what this information tells us about the economic structures of the realm and on the exaggerated consumption of foreign cloth by certain groups within Castilian society.

**Key Words:** Bay of Biscay Ports. Castile. Consumption. Economic conditions in Late Medieval Castile. Prices of cloths. Types of cloth. Social meaning of clothing.

**Resumen:** El artículo examina la relación existente entre el consumo y la producción de telas y paños en la Castilla bajomedieval. Basado en fuentes cortesanas y en los diezmos de los puertos del Cantábrico, el estudio se centra en los textiles importados desde Flandes. El objetivo es conocer el consumo textil y lo que nos enseña acerca del consumo de telas en Castilla y la jerarquía social que éstas conllevan.

**Palabras clave:** Castilla. Economía castellana. Consumo textil. Significado social del consumo de telas. Precio de las telas. Precio y tipos de paños consumidos a finales del XIII y principios del XIV.

### \* INTRODUCTION

For a long time historians have known that the economic revival of the medieval West was fueled by the rise of manufacturing and long distance trade from the late tenth and early eleventh century onwards. In towns throughout Flanders, Hainault, Brabant, and northern France — Lille, Bruges, Ghent, Arras, and others — and in Florence and other Italian urban centers the making of wool cloth, and in the case of Florence silk as well, lay at the center of Europe’s first manufacturing revolution since the collapse of the Roman empire in the West.<sup>3</sup> Not unlike the first industrial revolution in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the production of cloth was at the vanguard of new forms of economic activity. Textiles dominated medieval European manufacturing as did its trade.

Production is of course the flip side of consumption. Production, whether in the Middle Ages or today, is inexorably linked to consumption: the former will cease or diminished without the latter. For the medieval world, we do not know as much as we may wish as to how much cloth was produced over time or how much was consumed. Knowing however how many pieces of fabric were imported into specific regions provides a rough approximation to levels of consumption; far more important, it gives us a window into the social and cultural aspects of consumption in general and, in this specific case, textile purchases.

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3 The literature on towns and early forms of industrial production in the medieval West is vast indeed and only the most perfunctory references are offered here. See, for example, POSTAN, M. M. and MILLER, E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, vol. II. Also the rightly famous and still useful book by LOPEZ, R. S., *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976 as well as CIPOLLA, C. (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, London: Collins/Fontana Books, 1972, vol. I.

In the pages below, I wish to revisit some topics that have been close to my research interests for many years.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, I would like to examine the role of textiles in Castilian markets, provide an implicit approximation to the level of consumption over time, and attempt to answer questions as to what the purchase, use, and symbolic value of certain types of cloth meant, and how cloth consumption helped shape social identity and social difference in medieval Castile. This study is limited to the late thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century, mostly because a series of unique sources provide us with an entry into textile consumption in the period under study.<sup>5</sup> The locus of this article is the kingdom of Castile, though some regions within the vast kingdom of Castile, such as Galicia and parts of Asturias, do not enter much into the story. Most of western Andalucía, conquered by Castilian armies in the mid-thirteenth century, present peculiar problems to be noted below. That region comes in and out of this study. The core of this inquiry therefore focuses on northern Castile, above all the great plain of Old Castile and the Cantabrian and Basque coastal towns.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. SOURCES

My findings in this article and what we know about consumption in late medieval Castile is shaped by the unusual sources — unusual in the context of Castilian archival material — extant for the period. First in order of significance are the royal accounts of 1293-94. These royal accounts, the only surviving royal accounts from the period before 1400, provide us with two crucial types of information. The first and most important data describes the importation of textiles, and implicitly its consumption. An extensive (but limited) record extant for that year details what was imported into the kingdom through a handful of ports in northern Castile. As formidable as this source is, one can immediately see how very limited our knowledge of these matters is in reality. We have information for just one year and nothing or little else is available for the years before or after. Were the accounts of 1293-94 representative of general import trends, or was that year unusual? How did the importation of textiles change over time? These are unanswerable questions since the evidence does not exist to answer them before the very late Middle Ages. What we have for 1293-94 however is quite detailed, providing us with a sharp and clear sense of what types of cloth were imported, their prices, and volume. As shall be seen below, the total amount of cloth coming into the realm (or probably coming since our conclusions are extrapolated from a limited data base) was simply staggering; this high volume

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4 One of my first published articles dealt with trade, mostly of textiles. I shall be drawing on some of that information but emphasizing consumption rather than mercantile exchanges. See RUIZ, T., *Crisis and Continuity: Land and Town in Late Medieval Castile*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, pp. 196-234, «Burgos y el comercio castellano en la Baja Edad Media», in VV. AA., *La ciudad de Burgos: actas del Congreso de historia de Burgos: MC aniversario de la fundación de la ciudad, 884-1984*, León: Santiago García, 1985, pp. 37-55 and «Mercaderes castellanos en Inglaterra, 1248-1350. Con un apéndice documental de mercaderes y marinos de los Cuatro Puertos», *Anuario de Estudios Marítimos "Juan de la Cosa"*, 1977, nº I, pp. 11-38.

5 Although I will use the Cortes' ordinances and other documentation, the most important source for our understanding of what textiles were purchased and used in the period come from an edition of the royal accounts and tithes of northern ports found in an appendix to GAIBROIS DE BALLESTEROS, M., *Historia del reinado de Sancho IV de Castilla*, Madrid: Tipografías de la Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos, 1922-1928, 3 vols. Hereafter referred as *Cuentas*.

6 Since I first formulated some of the ideas for this article, Jesús Solórzano Telechea and his students at the University of Cantabria have been undertaking a monumental work of recreating the life, political, social, and economic structures of towns on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula. These are singularly original contributions, now summing up several volumes and an important context for any study of trade and consumption in the north of Castile.

of imported cloth does also tell us a great deal about cloth consumption and the nature of local, or lack thereof, production in this period.

The second significant type of evidence provided by the royal accounts of the late thirteenth century concerns the court expenses and, for this particular inquiry, the royal court's preference for specific types of cloth. They reveal a clear social gradation among royal agents and servants, a hierarchy which, as shall be seen below, was articulated through the quality and color of vestments. In addition, the ordinances of the Cortes, wills, and other documents provide an entry into Castilian cloth consumption and into the social and symbolic meaning attached to certain types of consumption patterns.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. MANUFACTURING AND CONSUMPTION

We must begin by acknowledging the fact that most of the cloth bought and sold in late thirteenth Castile came from abroad. There are scattered references to weavers and local cloth production in the documentation and in the ordinances of the Cortes, but neither of these sources point to a robust cloth manufacturing tradition in this period. In many respects, Castile had to wait for the late fifteenth century for the rise — minor as it was — of full fledged cloth manufacturing enterprises in Cuenca and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, as Carlé and others have already pointed out, Castilian cloth production was mostly restricted to the manufacturing of inexpensive textiles, and most certainly not geared to the production of clothing that would serve as markers of social difference.

The ordinances of the *ayuntamiento* de Jerez de la Frontera, meeting in 1268 to address the rampant increase in prices and wages plaguing the realm, provide us with some indications as to the main centers for textile production in Castile and the relative price of each item in *sueldos per vara*.<sup>9</sup> In the ordinances of Jerez de la Frontera (1268), the merchants and urban procurators in attendance agreed to set a ceiling price for Castilian produced cloth as follow in Table I.

TABLE I: PRICE OF CLOTH PRODUCED IN CASTILE IN 1268 (in *sueldos per vara*)

TYPE OF CLOTH	PRICE
<i>cardenos</i>	2
<i>Viado</i>	2
<i>Llano blanco</i>	4
<i>Segoviano cardeno viado</i>	4
<i>Segoviano of Segovia</i>	18 <i>dineros (ds.)</i>

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 7 See note 3 and the excellent collection and study by HERNÁNDEZ, F. J., *Las rentas del rey. Sociedad y fisco en el reino castellano del siglo XIII*, Madrid: Fundación Ramón Areces, 1993, 2 vols.

8 Below I will discuss some of the local manufacturing areas in greater detail, but see ASENJO GONZÁLEZ, M., *Segovia: La ciudad y su tierra a fines del medioevo*, Segovia: Diputación Provincial de Segovia, 1986, pp. 197-208; LE FLEM, J. P., «Vrais et fausses splendeurs de l'industrie textile segovienne (vers 1460-vers 1650)», in SPALLANZANI, M. (ed.), *Produzione, commercio e consumo dei panni di lana (nei secoli XII-XVIII)*, Firenze: Olschki, 1976; IRADIEL MURUGARRÉN, P., *Evolución de la industria textil castellana en los siglos XII-XVII. Factores de desarrollo, organización y costes de la producción manufacturera en Cuenca*, Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1974, pp. 15-50 *et passim*. See Iradiel's bibliography for further reading.

9 Although the actual value of coins and the relation to one monetary unit to another fluctuated widely in this period a *sueldo* (from the Latin *solidus*) was equal to 12 *dineros*. The *vara* was a linear measure close to a yard.

<i>Marfaga</i>	5
<i>Blanqueta</i> of Avila	4
<i>Burel</i> of Avila	7
<i>Frisa</i>	4
<i>Pardo</i> (from 1293 source)	8

**Source:** COLMEIRO, M. (ed.), *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Castilla y León*, Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1861, vol. I, p. 66<sup>10</sup>.

Avila and Segovia are prominently mentioned as places where local textiles were produced. Other types of cloth, not identified by location, are instead designated by color or type of dye (*cardenos* or red) or design (*viado* or striped). The most expensive item, and the language of the ordinances insist that this is the price for the best quality in these categories of cloth, is the *burel* of Avila (the price for the *pardo* dates from 1293 when inflation had taken its toll on the cost of cloth) at 7 *sueldos* (*ss.*) per *vara*, but the price of most of Castile's produced clothing was far below that imported from Flanders and elsewhere. We can render this information best in the following table (Table II).

**TABLE II<sup>11</sup>: IMPORTED CLOTH 1268 (PARTIAL LIST)**

TYPE OF CLOTH (best of each type)	PRICE PER VARA (in <i>mrs.</i> or <i>ss.</i> )
scarlet (Montpellier)	6 <i>mrs.</i>
scarlet (Yncola?)	5 <i>mrs.</i>
scarlet (Ghent)	4 <i>mrs.</i>
red cloth (Cambrai)	3 ½ <i>mrs.</i>
red cloth (Ghent)	3 <i>mrs.</i>
red cloth (Douai and Ypres)	2 ½ <i>mrs.</i>
but dark brown and orange (Douai and Ypres)	3 <i>mrs.</i>
red cloth (Rouen)	2 1/3 <i>mrs.</i>
camelina (Ghent and Lille)	1 ½ <i>mrs.</i>
blanqueta (Ypres and Commines)	1 ½ <i>mrs.</i>
dark cloth (England)	10 <i>ss.</i>
cloth (Aboxiula?)	10 <i>ss.</i>
cloth (Saint-Omer)	10 <i>ss.</i>
serge (used by poor people)	8 <i>ss.</i>
cloth (Bruges)	7 <i>ss.</i>
cloth (Valenciennes)	5 <i>ss.</i>

**Source:** COLMEIRO, M. (ed.), *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Castilla y León... op.cit.*, vol.1, pp. 66-67.

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 10 I have also used this table in RUIZ, T., *Crisis and Continuity... op.cit.*, p. 211, table 7.7. These information has already been examined in detail by Iradiel and others, and the data from the *Ayuntamiento* (Cortes) of Jerez de la Frontera has been widely used and interpreted since it is one of the few instances of such information available for late medieval Castile.

11 In theory 1 *maravedí* (*mr.*) equaled 12 *sueldos*, though the *maravedí* was essentially a counting money that did not circulate, except in some very limited circumstances. .

The list continues in descending order of quality and price. The most expensive local cloth — red and *viado*, as well as *llano blanco* and *burel* (Avila) ranged in price from 7 to 2 *ss.*, and far below the high end of the imported textiles.

In 1268 the price of imported cloth, and even the highest priced Castilian-produced cloth, remained fairly inaccessible to the immense majority of the population which was overwhelmingly rural and poor. Fortunately, the *ayuntamiento* of Jerez de la Frontera also provides us with information about wages and prices for other commodities, and we can estimate how very difficult it would have been for those employed in agricultural labor or menial urban work to purchase more than one or two pieces a year of the lowest priced cloth. For those working the land or employed as manual labor in the construction trade salaries ranged between as little as 4 *mrs.* a year (although those working the land often received daily food when working during harvest time or tilling the soil) for a *mancebo* (a young and inexperienced rural labor working in northern Castile,<sup>12</sup> to one *sueldo* a day for a carpenter. Or to put the relative cost of cloth in relation to other goods, in the area of Burgos a piece of land was sold for 16 *mrs.* in 1268; while the following year another piece of arable land (cereal-growing land) brought 4 *mrs.* That is, a substantial property could cost less than one *vara* of expensive cloth, or at the most two *varas*.<sup>13</sup>

It may be useful to re-emphasize this point since it goes to the heart of the social and cultural meaning of cloth consumption. Clearly, few in late medieval Castile could afford, considering their salaries, to purchase more than one or two pieces of cloth a year. How then are we to account for the veritable deluge of textiles imported into the kingdom in the late thirteenth century? Although I will return to this question later, it is clear that in 1268 and later years the consumption of foreign textiles was widespread not just among the powerful but throughout certain segments of the general population (the middling sorts) as impossible that may seem considering salaries and average income of those involved in rural labor. As has been seen already, the ordinances of 1268 provide a clear indication of what types of cloth were consumed in Castile during the mid-thirteenth century, their provenance, as well as regional fluctuations in price, accounting for the greater difficulties in, and cost of, transporting goods from the northern ports, the entry point for imported textiles into Castile, and Andalucía. The ordinances of 1268 also provide an important clue as to the dramatic shift in cloth consumption and the sources of new textile preference. We know that at the beginning of the thirteenth century most of the cloth bought in Castile, certainly in the central and southern areas of the realm, came from al-Andalus or was produced locally. After 1212 and the Christian victory over the Almohads at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, the conquest of most of western Andalucía followed from 1236 onwards, leading to the expulsion of the Mudejars from the region in the mid-1260s. This opened the door to enterprising northern Castilian merchants and connected northern and southern markets, reorienting and integrating the Castilian economy.<sup>14</sup>

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 12 Salaries in the south, as was the case sometimes with prices, were always higher than in other parts of the realm.

13 See COLMEIRO, M. (ed.), *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Castilla y León... op.cit.*, vol. I, pp. 77-8; CARLÉ, M. M., «El precio de la vida en Castilla del rey Sabio al Emplazado», *Cuadernos de historia de España*, 1951, n° XV, pp. 32-156 and «Mercaderes en Castilla «1252-1512»», *Cuadernos de historia de España*, 1954, n° XXI-XXII, pp. 146-328; for prices in Burgos see PEREDA LLARENA, F. J., *Documentación de la catedral de Burgos (1254-1293)*, *Fuentes medievales castellano-leonesas* [hereafter *FMCL*], Burgos: Ediciones J. M. Garrido Garrido, 1984, pp. 138-139.

14 See CONSTABLE, O. R., *Trade & Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula 900-1500*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 209-258; HERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ, F. J., «Las Cortes de Toledo de 1207», en VV.AA. *Las cortes de Castilla y León en la Edad Media*, Valladolid: Cortes de Castilla y León, 1988, pp. 221-263.

Although trade with northern manufacturing centers (beyond the Pyrenees) dated from the heyday of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the eleventh and twelfth centuries — merchants were often pilgrims and vice versa — Castilian maritime connections with Gascony, England, Flanders, Hainault, Brabant and other great textile centers had to wait until the resettlement of the Bay of Biscay coastal towns (in Cantabria and the Basque coast) created the conditions for dramatic increase in the importation of textiles and other goods. This shift in the provenance of clothes bought and worn in Castile signaled also changes in taste and fashion which were very much in tune with other changes taking place in Castilian society and culture during the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Once again, two points need to be made here. First, the price of imported and local cloth, as well as the limit on wages set by the ordinances of 1268 and later attempts to control price and wages, represented the Crown's ideal highest price for vital commodities and labor — the ordinances of 1268 as you may remember set regional limits on prices on a large variety of products not just textiles. It does not mean that this was the actual price of textiles. In the real world prices must have fluctuated according to the demands of the market and must have often been substantially higher. Following along this line, the movement of prices over the next century or so shows dramatic increases in the price of clothing. In some respects, these increases reflect the inflationary pressures experienced by the Castilian economy in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Since we know fairly well that prices increased most rapidly after 1250, the ordinances of 1268 reflected already the changes brought about by inflation, and the later increases, though still affected by inflationary factors, revealed the pressure on certain types of fabric and higher demand. Scarlet cloth from Douai, which was listed as costing 6 mrs. per vara in 1268, fetched 150 mrs. later in the century, while other less fashionable fabrics also commanded very high prices.<sup>16</sup> Second, while in 1268 imported cloth played an important part of Castile's foreign trade and sartorial display, their prominence then does not prepare us for the enhanced role of foreign textile in the 1293-1294 royal accounts. If the partial evidence of the tithe of a limited number of ports in the Bay of Biscay tells us anything, it is that the demand for imported textiles and other goods had increased dramatically.

As indicated earlier, the records provided by the collection of the tithe on imports in the 1293-94 royal accounts present very specific problems. Not only are they unusual, and no such record exist for the previous or following decade, but the information is limited to a handful of locations in northern Castile. We know that some of the most active ports on the Cantabrian coast — Santander, San Vicente de la Barquera, Castro Urdiales, Laredo among them — or on the Asturian coast — Llanes and Gijón — are not included in the 1293-94 accounts. As we know from other sources, many of the above mentioned coastal towns had long been engaged in active commercial exchanges with southern France, England, and Flanders, as well as in far-flung trade between England, northern Castilian ports, Seville and, through Genoese intermediaries settled in Seville, with Italy.<sup>17</sup> If we accept that the 1293-94 royal accounts provide only a partial view, probably less than half of the actual annual imports, then

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15 See RUIZ, T., *From Heaven to Earth. The Reordering of Castilian Society, 1150-1350*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 12-36.

16 See RUIZ, T., *Crisis and Continuity...* *op.cit.*, p. 210, table 7.6.

17 See RUIZ, T., «Mercaderes castellanos en Inglaterra»... *op.cit.*, pp. 11-38 and CHILDS, W. R., *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978, pp. 11-39.

our estimate of textile imports and therefore consumption is quite remarkable indeed. A sense of what the annual volume may have been is provided by a table on textile imports through the port of San Sebastián during a few months in 1293-94. Although not of all the cloth entering through San Sebastián ended up in Castile (Aragonese and Navarrese markets also received supplies through the Bay of Biscay), the presence of numerous Castilian merchants in Biscay points to the commercial links between this particular port and northern Castile.

**TABLE III: CLOTH IMPORTED THROUGH SAN SEBASTIÁN (1293)**

ORIGIN AND TYPE EXPENSIVE CLOTH (more than 300 <i>mrs.</i> )	QUANTITY (in pieces)	PRICE PER PIECE ( <i>mrs.</i> )	TOTAL (in <i>mrs.</i> )
<i>Pannos tintos</i> (red cloth)	155	550	85,250
	6	530	3,180
<i>Camelins</i> (Lille)	2	450	900
(Ypres)	2	400	800
(Lille)	19	350	6,650
<i>Blaos</i> (mostly from Ypres)	76	350	26,600
	7	330	2,310
	13	300	3,900
<i>Blanquetas</i> (Commines)	11	300	3,300
<i>Viado</i> (Ghent)	1	350	350
(Ypres)	2	300	600
<i>Viadillo</i>	2	300	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>		<b>134,440</b>

**TABLE III (continued): CLOTH IMPORTED THROUGH SAN SEBASTIÁN (1293)**

INEXPENSIVE TO INTERMEDIATE CLOTH (less than 300 <i>mrs.</i> per piece)	QUANTITY (in pieces)	PRICE PER PIECE ( <i>mrs.</i> )	TOTAL (in <i>mrs.</i> )
<i>Pannos tintos</i> (Imitation)			
Carcassonne	10	150	1,500
Narbonne	24	150	3,600
<i>Camelins pardos</i> (Ghent)	2	270	540
small	4	180	720
	4	160	640
<i>Blaos</i>	2	150	300

<i>Blanquetas</i> (imitation from Narbonne)	190	90	17,100
	22	80	1,760
	25	70	1,750
<i>Tintas</i>	40	150	6,000
<i>Grolos?</i>	8	50	400
<i>Raz</i> (Arras)	88	270	23,760
	5	260	1,300
	5	250	1,250
	1	240	240
	3	230	690
	19	220	4,180
From Tournai	7	240	1,680
	79	220	17,380
	40	200	8,000
<i>Viado</i> (Ghent)	1	160	160
(Ypres)	10	140	1,400
<i>Viadillos</i> (Ypres)	4	140	560
(Valenciennes)	4	130	412
	60	200	12,000
	825	180	148,500
	244	170	41,480
	202	160	32,320
	30	150	4,500
	30	140	4,200
Valenciennes ( <i>cuerda</i> )	211	150	31,650
	156	140	21,840
<i>Valencinas</i> (Maubeurge)	52	150	7,800
Saint Omer	516	150	77,400
	120	140	16,800
<i>Baradetes</i> (Ypres)	4	165	660
	33	160	5,280
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,080</b>		<b>499,752</b>

**Source:** *Cuentas*, pp. iii-xiii, RUIZ, T., *Crisis and Continuity... op.cit.*, pp. 207-298 and GUAL CAMARENA, M., «El comercio de telas en el siglo XIII hispano», *Anuario de Historia Social y Económica*, 1968, nº 1, pp. 83-106, specifically pp. 104-05.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Imports did not arrive throughout the entire year but were concentrated on a few days in February.

At first glance, one can see that the price of cloth varied greatly. As I have shown elsewhere, although the bulk of the imports came in the form of medium and low priced textiles, the profit one could garner from the high end expensive cloth was substantial indeed. Table III shows that most of the cloth purchased in late thirteenth century Castile was the type broadly known as *valencina*, that is cloth supposedly manufactured in Valenciennes but which by the late thirteenth century was produced in other towns as well. This was followed by Saint Omer clothing which, together with Valenciennes' style textiles, were among the lowest priced textile imports in the ordinances of 1268. In the latter ordinances the best cloth from Saint Omer was priced at 10 *ss.*, while the best *valencina* only commanded 5 *ss.* In 1293-94, the import of just these two types of clothing surpassed 500,000 *mrs.* and over 2,500 pieces altogether, and it is easy to see their popularity throughout Castile.<sup>19</sup> As seen in table III (which provides just a sample of the port of San Sebastián), the import, and thus consumption, of these two styles of cloth accounted for almost half of the entire import through that port. This data reinforces a general impression in the pattern of textile consumption throughout the realm: fairly inexpensive cloth manufactured abroad overwhelmed local production, and very expensive textile, consumed by the ruling groups, served as markers of social distinction.

### 3. THE SOCIAL MEANING OF TEXTILE CONSUMPTION

Gual Camarena has correctly suggested that low-end fabrics were reserved for servants and poor people. This must have been the case. Even the royal court, which was probably the largest consumer of imported cloth, favored higher price cloth (the *pannos tintos* or red cloth). One is left therefore with evidence that point out to the extraordinary conclusion that in most probability even some peasants and members of the urban poor may have worn, not unlike the US today but at a higher price, imported cloth. The royal court, as already mentioned, was a big player in the market for cloth. The king and queen made gifts of clothing to their servants and agents at least once a year. The 1293-94 royal accounts show the manner in which specific types of fabrics — always carefully identified in the accounts — were allotted to important royal agents. They, in turn, distributed some of the cloth among their respective staffs. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate patterns of consumption and distribution among members of the royal household. This circulation of cloth served, at the same time, to reinforce ties of patronage, gift-giving, and obligations between great lords (in this case the royal family) and their subjects and were part of traditional forms of gift-exchange and dependance.<sup>20</sup>

In the accounts of 1293-94, one finds numerous examples of this circulation of goods. That, in turn, provides a glimpse at the large consumption of textiles undertaken by the royal court on an annual basis. The bishop of Tuy reported to the Crown on the expenses undertaken to dress some of the king's servants. Ten men who took care of animals in the king's retinue received 19 *varas* of *viado* each for their capes and covers, plus 3 *varas* of the more expensive *pannos tintos* (red cloth) for their pants (*calzas*) and shirts. Another ten footmen received 10 *varas* of *viado* and 2 *varas* of *pannos tintos* each. The list, which included messengers and

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 19 This is the amount from all the ports reporting in that year. See RUIZ, T., *Crisis and Continuity... op.cit.*, pp. 201-202.

20 See the paradigmatic work by MAUSS, M., *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, New York: Norton, 2000 [W. D. Halls translator] and DAVIS, N. Z., *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

other even lesser servants, continues in a hierarchical descending order of quality and quantity of the cloth given. The names of each of these servants is given, providing a clear portrait of most of the royal bureaucracy, and a sense of what they may have looked like when dressed in the imported cloth that had been distributed to them by order of either the king or queen.<sup>21</sup> Altogether Don Bartolomé — and he was only one of the many royal officials settling accounts for the distribution of clothing — gave the following amounts of cloth to a large number of royal servants.

TABLE IV: TYPES AND AMOUNT OF CLOTH GIVEN TO ROYAL SERVANTS IN 1293-1294 (partial)

TYPE OF CLOTH	AMOUNT (in <i>varas</i> )	TOTAL PRICE (in <i>mrs.</i> )
<i>blao</i>	24	All three at the same price.
<i>amelin</i>	232	
<i>viado</i>	307	
Total	663	9,940 <i>mrs.</i>
<b>Cloth given by Don Yhuda</b>		
<i>viado</i>	674	1,110 <i>mrs.</i>
<i>valencina</i>	148	1,184 <i>mrs.</i>
<i>santomer</i> and <i>valencina</i>	190	1,548 <i>mrs.</i>
<i>pannos tintos</i>	321 ½	7,073 <i>mrs.</i>
scarlet cloth	4	200 <i>mrs.</i>
		Total Expense: 30,060 <i>mrs.</i>

**Source:** *Cuentas*, p. lxxv. Sums do not always compute correctly in the accounts.

Since this is only a partial rendering of other lists of cloth distribution, one can easily see how the royal court served as the locomotive for textile consumption in late medieval Castile. 30,000 *mrs.* is a significant sum and the annual expense for clothing most have been probably many times larger than that, and altogether a significant part of the royal budget. Moreover, clothes served to provide a visible ranking — depending on the style, color, and value of the fabrics — of royal agents at court and throughout the realm.

Although we do not have similar accounts for the nobility or for the urban elites extant for this period, one can easily extrapolate from the royal examples. It is perhaps not incorrect to posit a society in which nobles, great and small, engaged in annual distribution of clothing to their retainers and close servants. Similar forms of commodities circulation by merchants, landholders, and ecclesiastics reinforce the vision of a society where consumption was an important aspect of social differentiation. We also know that from the 1220s onwards, the wills of the middling sorts often included provisions for the feeding and clothing of the poor. The evidence is overwhelming as to this type of activity. Although the fabrics prescribed for the

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<sup>21</sup> *Cuentas*, pp. lxxiii-lxxv.

poor were often the most humble types of fabrics, either sackcloth or burlap — clearly marking the distinction between donor and recipient — from time to time some donors requested wool clothing for their charitable donations.<sup>22</sup>

Although I have examined this topic from the perspective of charity and changes in mentality, it may be worthwhile to revisit some of these examples for what they tell us about consumption and the deployment of clothing — in this case clothing given as a form of charity — for social purposes. Ferrand Pérez de Frías, a scribe in Frías, a small town in northern Castile wrote two wills in the 1330s and 1340s. The first one, written with his wife Catalina and dated in 1334, provided for donations to monasteries and the usual requests for masses, candles, and other pious requests aimed at memorializing the donors and supporting their bid for eternal salvation. It also requested from the will's executors that fifteen poor women and men be provided with clothing, half sayal (sackcloth), half estopazo (burlap).<sup>23</sup> While we know that some sackcloth was imported, chances are that most of the clothing was produced locally and that, in the context of the will and funeral arrangements, they provided a ritual reassurance of humility at the moment of death or at the anniversary of the donor's death. Since the clothes (and food) were to be distributed initially at the funeral and, in most cases, the poor men and women were to march behind the funeral cortege, they also served as a vivid remainder of the social standing of the deceased. Ten years later, Catalina already dead, Ferrand Pérez had a second will drawn. A far more detailed will, it reflects Ferrand's increased wealth and far-flung business arrangements. In it he left funds for the clothing and feeding of 300 poor men and women in the region of Frías. He mandated that the clothes were to be half wool and half burlap (a substantial improvement on his legacy ten years earlier). I have calculated that the cost of these testamentary provision should have been around 2,100 mrs. Clearly, in 1344 the concerns were more charitable and less social, though the argument could be made that feeding and clothing 300 poor men and women was a very clear social statement about Ferrand's position in Frías society.<sup>24</sup> In any case, in this and numerous other examples, one can observe the symbolic value of different types of clothing at all levels of society. In the same manner in which varieties of fabrics, colors, and designs served to establish clearly delineated hierarchies of nobles, middling sorts, and royal agents, difference in clothing also marked the social divide between those who had and those who did not. And these boundaries, as mentioned above, were clearly patrolled by the authorities and codified in the sumptuary legislation that proliferated in the late thirteenth and fourteenth century (see below).<sup>25</sup>

One further point should be made. The import of textiles and the high level of cloth consumption in late medieval Castile brought immense profits to certain Castilian merchants who served as intermediaries for foreign trade. It also brought great profit to the Crown which collected a substantial tithe from textile imports. In 1293-94 alone, and from just a handful of northern ports, the Castilian Crown collected enormous sums of tribute from the tithe on all imported goods at their entry point into the realm; yet, internal custom stations (the so-called

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22 I have already discussed this topic in RUIZ, T., *From Heaven to Earth... op.cit.*, pp. 120-131.

23 *Ibidem*, p. 125. Archivo Histórico Nacional [AHN], Clero, Carpetas [Carp.] 226, nº 17, (20 August 1334) and AHN, Clero, Carp. 227, nº 2 (20 October 1334).

24 RUIZ, T., *From Heaven to Earth... op.cit.*, p. 126; AHN, Clero, Carp. 227, nº 7 (13 April 1344).

25 For sumptuary legislation see COLMEIRO, M. (ed.), *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Castilla y León... op.cit.*, vol. I & II. See below.

dry ports or puertos secos) also added substantial funds to Castile's fiscal resources. These internal toll stations regulated the movement of goods between regions and should have, in theory, served as a deterrent to vigorous trade. That they were not, in spite of merchants and municipal elites frequent demands for exemption from royal and local tolls, is a testimony to the very high demand for foreign commodities and, most of all, the demand for imported cloth.

While the tables and information presented above help provide a partial understanding of the volume of textile imports and cloth consumption in late medieval Castile, perhaps the most significant data is that which provides a glance at social practices at the individual level and at the role of cloth within Castile's social structures. Although after 1350, chroniclers provided elaborate descriptions of the types of fabrics and color of vestments of the protagonist of their accounts, this was not always the case in an earlier period. In later chronicles, however, most notably the private chronicle of Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo, these elaborate descriptions were deployed for obvious hegemonic purpose, that is, specific colors and types of fabrics told salutary lessons about hierarchies of power. In many respects, the same patterns of fabric color and quality we have seen in the royal accounts of 1293-94 became prominently displayed in the narrative of late fifteenth century chronicles, serving as a coda for social distinctions.<sup>26</sup> Fashionable clothing and specific colors (scarlet cloth, red fabric, etc.) articulated social prestige and created a clear barrier between different social levels of Castilian society. This was not of course restricted to the Iberian peninsula but played out to the fullest throughout the medieval West.

Although, as indicated, Castilian chronicles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did not pay as careful attention to the types of fabrics and colors worn by the mighty as later chronicles would do, this did not mean at all that such preoccupations did not exist. We must return here to an examination of sumptuary laws and what they tell us about textile consumption. As mentioned above, sumptuary laws, inscribed and formalized in the ordinances of the Cortes from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, tell us vividly of the importance of keeping magnates and middling sorts from imitating the king and his immediate family. While these attempts to regulate consumption of textiles, as well as of certain foods and activities, focused mostly on the growing independent and rebellious magnate groups, they also addressed bourgeois desire for their own distinctiveness in urban settings and the sartorial codes of religious minorities.

In 1258 at the Cortes of Valladolid, Alfonso X, already troubled by noble opposition, obtained from the representatives to the Cortes a series of ordinances that restricted the use of silk, certain furs (ermine, nutria), silver-decorated cloth, scarlet capes, and other luxury garments to the king and his family. Similarly, the ordinances of the Cortes forbade the use of gold and silver to decorate saddles. Moving from the upper level of the aristocracy, the Cortes' ordinances ordered that esquires, Jews, and Muslims do not wear a long list of imported cloth and specific colors (scarlet, green, silver, and gold).<sup>27</sup> Although the Cortes' ordinances also paid equal attention to eating, the elaborate list of types of imported cloth reflect the Crown's sensitivity to noble display and the challenge which such displays presented to royal authority

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 26 I have already examined this topic in great detail. See DE MATA CARRIAZO, J. (ed.), *Hechos del condestable Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo. Crónica del siglo XV*, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1940 and RUIZ, T., «Elite and Popular Culture in Late Fifteenth-Century Castilian Festivals», in HANAWALT, B. A. and REYERSON, K. L. (eds.), *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 296-318.

27 COLMEIRO, M. (ed.), *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Castilla y León... op.cit.*, vol. I, pp. 57, 59 *et passim*.

and dignity in a society in which the most expensive and fashionable cloths (and food) could be available even to lowly esquires and religious minorities. Erosion of social difference was a great incentive for consumption of imported cloth, but it also toll warning bells for an embattled monarchy.

Ten years afterwards, at the Ayuntamiento of Jerez de la Frontera, heavy penalties (confiscation of lands and/or exile from Castile) were threatened against those disobeying royal, and the Cortes', sumptuary dispositions.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the legislation did not work and the litany of similar ordinances over the next century only remind us how futile these royal efforts were. By 1338, the Cortes' legislation, while still concerned with magnate display, focused now on the sartorial excesses of the urban elites. Rather than seeking to restrict bourgeois displays, the new ordinances aimed at providing a clear difference between social groups within Castilian cities, drawing contrasts between non-noble urban knights and *ome de pie*, that is, footmen and those underneath the non-noble urban knights in the social, political, and economic hierarchy.<sup>29</sup>

Reading this, one is impressed by the wealth of the upper nobility and urban oligarchs, and the ordinances of the Cortes only reinforce a perception of a society where textile consumption was all important. While the Crown sought to limit certain types of fabrics and colors (and restrict them only for the king and his family), it also sought to limit the amount of vestments a high noble could purchase in a year (no more than four). Clearly, the society was one where conspicuous consumption was the order of the day, and conspicuous consumption of textiles served as a locomotive for social claims. That these social claims were translated in the late thirteenth and throughout most of the next two centuries into violence and civil strife only reaffirm the conflation of consumption patterns and political realities. It was not just about purchasing cloth; it was about power.

These references to the ordinances of the Cortes provide a window into social aspects of textile consumption, but it does not bring to us the immediacy of individual examples. How did this desire for certain types of cloth work out at the local level? Earlier we have seen how this gradation of styles, colors, and quality worked in the uneven workings of charity. How did it work among social equals? One example will suffice before concluding. Throughout the Middle Ages well-to-do members of the nobility entered into careful agreements with monasteries. In return for donation of their property, the monasteries guaranteed room and board for the rest of the donor's life. Beyond providing the equivalent of a retirement income or annuity — similar agreements are quite common now-a-days — burial in the monastery also provided a significant religious benefit for ageing or ailing donors. Many of these agreements provided a plethora of details as to what types of food the monastery was to provide, number of servants, and types and quantity of cloth.<sup>30</sup>

In 1293, Doña María de Sagentes, already a widow and member of the power local nobility, gave all her property to the monastery of Santa María de Aguilar de Campoo. The donation agreement list the types of food the monastery would provide for Doña María (wine of the quality the abbot drank, meat three times a week, fish, and other victuals), a servant to help her, and clothes. Of the latter, the agreement spelled out what kind of clothes she was to receive.

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28 *Ibidem*, p. 69.

29 *Ibidem*, pp. 454-455.

30 RUIZ, T., *From Heaven to Earth... op.cit.*, pp. 56-58.

Every three years, the monastery gave her a cloak and a long robe of valencina, as well as another long robe and a cloak made from another Flemish imported cloth, camelin, every five years, Shoes, some furs, and other items were included in the donation which required return of the used cloth upon receipt of new cloaks and robes.<sup>31</sup> Donors, close to the end of their lives, nonetheless insisted on imported cloth as part of what were, on the surface, pious donations.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the previous pages, I have sought to make a few points which are worth perhaps reiterating here. First, textile consumption was quite high in thirteenth and fourteenth century Castile. Although this pattern of consumption was most certainly not restricted to Castile, in the peninsular kingdom the privileging of imported textiles to the almost universal neglect of locally produced cloth gives us a clear sense of the realm's specific economic patterns of trade and production. Two, imported cloth followed a well defined hierarchy of price and style. Costly cloth, though not imported at all in the same quantity as medium range or inexpensive cloth, played a significant role in the overall import and consumption pictures and brought considerable profit to merchants and middlemen. Three, this hierarchy of clothing had a signal place in social transactions and display. From the royal court — the most important purchaser of cloth in the kingdom — to the nobility, the middling sorts, and even to the poor, consumption of imported cloth and the wearing of certain types of fabrics and colors made a powerful visual statement as to one's wealth, position, and rank within Castile's highly hierarchical society. Finally, specific patterns of cloth consumption favored imported cloth. This raises all kind of questions as to the long-held idea that those in the lower ranks of society wore monochrome clothes, and vivid colors were reserved for the middling sorts and upper levels of society. The amount of imported cloth coming through northern ports and the scattered evidence of royal accounts, wills, and sumptuary laws belie these sharp chromatic distinctions. Almost everyone wore imported cloth; almost everyone wore some colorful garments. The charitable dispositions in wills requesting sackcloth or burlap are clear reminders that one had to request the poor to dress *qua* poor, and that such clear social markers were not always present in the fluid social and economic climate of late medieval Castile.

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 31 *Ibidem*, p. 57. AHN, Clero, Carp. 1662, n° 121 (9 July 1293).