Introduction

“Money … lies dead, converted into vanities,” states a late 14th-century Venetian law\(^1\), and gives us the basis of many, although not all of the Sumptuary laws from the city states of the Italian peninsula. A common theme in sumptuary laws is preventing excess spending, but in many of the Italian laws they go a step further and state that the excessive spending means that there is less currency in circulation and that must be addressed. Some historians, such as Killerby, feel that there is a possible connection between the Florentine banking failures of the 1340’s and some of their laws showing a preoccupation with the “conservation of capital”. Additionally, most historians that study Sumptuary Law agree that the existence of the laws means that there is an economy for luxury goods.\(^2\)

Other concerns expressed in the sumptuary laws include increased spending on dowries, trousseaus, and wedding celebrations. These expenditures were considered both necessary and excessive, with “legislators… striving for an elusive ‘golden mean’.\(^3\)

Sumptuary laws could also be used to enforce ideals of behavior and morals. Laws spoke against everything from public nudity to prohibitions on the wearing of hoods by married or unmarried women. Restrictions on behavior often related to weddings, notably, a law from Aquila in 1375 prohibited the impeding of the bride during her procession.

Some considered the sumptuary law fines as a tax to continue wearing the banned and restricted items, “pagar le pompe” (to pay the luxury fine).\(^4\)

But as with all laws there are always issues with enforcement, especially when the laws are used to ascribe collective moral values by defining the perceived immoral behaviour as a crime.\(^5\)

Early 14th-century

- Useless and harmful expenses, that “impoverished” one class to help another class.\(^6\)
  - Deficit-financing due to expansion, plague, famine, etc. leaving the cities in need of large sums of coin.
    - Perugia, 1342\(^7\)
    - 1301 July 8, Bologna - Forbidding of wearing crowns ornamented with pearls or circlets of beaten gold and silver.
      - Previously allowed if taxes were paid.

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\(^2\) Killerby, Catherine K., Sumptuary law in Italy, 1200-1500, Clarendon (Oxford, 2002). pg. 41
\(^3\) Killerby, pg. 60.
\(^4\) Killerby, pg. 123.
\(^5\) Killerby, pg. 133.
\(^6\) Killerby, pg. 43.
- Luxury Taxes
  o Bologna
- Public Disorder
  o Venice – (weddings)
- Clothing Restrictions
  o Lucca, 1337 - Forbidden that women except lay sisters and nuns to go about the city with the hoods of their cloaks over their heads. Exemptions were if it was raining or at the funeral of their husband.  
    For servants, no false hair, cloth worth more than 4 lire of Lucchese denarii/length, dresses of more than 1 color, gold or silver, or silk.
  o Lucca, 1342 - Disallowing nudity in the streets. No definition of nudity, although later laws describe nudity as doublets being excessively short, or garments not covering the thigh.
  o Perugia, 1342 - no necklines that come below the “fork of the throat”.
  o Florence, 1318 - restrictions on serving women’s clothing. Gowns could not go to the floor and they could not wear hoods on their heads.

Mid 14th-century

- “Dead money” - A lack of circulating gold and silver to make money with created a need on the part of the cities to encourage the use of coins.
  o Venice, 1360 - “Our state has become less strong because money that should navigate and multiply … lies dead, converted into vanities”
- Public Disorder
  o Perugia - (weddings)
  o Lucca, 1362 - prohibition on punching or hitting the groom.
- Clothing Restrictions
  o Bologna - Women under 40 not allowed to adorn their braids with gold thread
  o Siena, 1348 - Limitations on how much money could be spent on mourning clothes.

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10 Fabretti, A. ser 2b, pg. 166, 203, 205, & 209 (1888). Translation from Killerby.
12 Rainey, R.E. pg.
Late 14th-century

- Luxury Taxes - more common as in the 15th-century.
  o Florence, 1364 & 1373 - luxury taxes, known as *gabelle* were implemented to help bring money into the city’s coffers and to promote the purchase of locally produced goods.¹⁶
  o Milan, 1396¹⁷
  o Siena & Bergamo – economic considerations
    ▪ City Officials didn’t see the economy to be particularly stable.
    ▪ Need of gold and silver to make money with on the part of the cities.
- Public Disorder
  o Milan, 1396 - wedding feast could not last more than 1 day.¹⁸
  o Aquila, 1375 - could not impede the bride’s progression for any reason.¹⁹
- Clothing Restrictions
  o Aquila, 1375 - doublets that show the genitals²⁰
  o Florence, 1373 - a *gabelle* of 10 florins if the garments did not cover at least half the thigh.²¹
    ▪ Exemption for farm workers.
  o Perugia, 1416 - prohibitions on mantels that were below the knee or covered the head.²²
    ▪ Exemptions for widows and religious women, later modified to include mourners, women over 40, and during inclement weather.

¹⁶ Rainey, R.E. pg. 206-207
¹⁸ Verga, Ettore. Translation from Killerby
²⁰ Rainey, R.E. pg. 204
²¹ Rainey, R.E. pg. 204
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