

ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

Silk consumption and dressing practices in late-medieval Catalonia: the cases of Barcelona and Vic (1400–1460)

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Abstract

This article examines how consumer preferences towards silk fabrics changed in Catalonia over the course of the first sixty years of the 15th century. It argues that during the first half of the 15th century silk became a luxury fabric for the wealthiest households of Catalan urban society. This change was triggered by the crisis of Europe's most prestigious manufacturing centres of high-quality woolens. Moreover, this article also claims that the adoption of silk as Catalonia's newest luxury fabric entailed a transition from lighter and plain silks to more expensive and elaborate silk fabrics. Finally, it connects this sumptuary shift to the technological development of the Italian silk industry and its later diffusion in Europe.

Keywords: Catalonia; 15th century; silk consumption; luxury textiles; fashion

JEL Codes: D12; N33; O33; Z13

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la transformación en las preferencias de consumo de las familias catalanas respecto a los tejidos de lujo durante los primeros sesenta años del siglo XV. Se argumenta que, a lo largo de este periodo, la seda progresivamente se convirtió en un tejido de lujo para las familias más acaudaladas de la sociedad urbana catalana, impulsada por la crisis de los prestigiosos centros europeos de producción de lanas de alta calidad. Asimismo, este artículo sostiene que esta adopción marcó una transición hacia sedas más elaboradas y costosas, desplazando las variedades ligeras y sencillas. Por último, se relaciona este cambio suntuario con el desarrollo tecnológico de la industria de la seda italiana y su posterior difusión en la Europa mediterránea.

Palabras clave: Catalunya; siglo XV; consumo de seda; tejidos de lujo; moda

1. Introduction

For the past four decades, historians have demonstrated the growing importance that the European silk industry acquired over the course of the last three centuries of the Middle Ages. Until the 13th century, silk production was mostly concentrated in Asia. Europe only had a few manufacturing centres, mainly located in Islamic-ruled territories of the Iberian

Peninsula and in the Byzantium Empire¹. However, over the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, this situation started to change with the emergence of new manufacturing centres on the Italian Peninsula. Among them, it is worth noting Lucca, one of the pioneering Italian cities to specialise in the manufacturing of silk cloth. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Lucchese silk artisans learned how to produce a growing variety of silk fabrics inspired by Byzantine and Oriental models which resulted in an expansion of the offer of textile fabrics produced in this city. This process was the result of: (a) the growing exchanges of ideas, people and objects between Europe and Asia and (b) the ingenuity of the local communities of artisans². As a result, by the late 14th century, the Lucchese silk industry was capable of producing a rich repertoire of fabrics that ranged from lighter weight fabrics such as satins and different classes of *sendadi*, to figured textiles like the *baldacchini*, the *camucha*, the *diaspini* and the *diaspinecti*, as well as a variety of velvets of different complexity. The shiny and beautiful silk fabrics that the Lucchese weavers produced easily captured the interest of the European consumers. And, with the support of a powerful local mercantile community, Lucchese silks were commercialised all across Europe³.

During the 13th and early 14th centuries, other Italian towns also developed their own silk industries. This process was stimulated by the political turmoil that surrounded Lucca. In 1314, the fall of this city into the hands of the *Ghibellini* faction provoked a mass emigration of silk artisans and merchants belonging to the opposing political faction, the *Guelphs*, who sought refuge primarily in Bologna, Florence and Venice. The Lucchese emigrants took with them their financial capital and their former mercantile networks, stimulating the formation of new nucleus of highly skilled workers in their respective centres of migration⁴. Thus, as a consequence of the political turbulences of the early 14th century, the human and financial capital that the Lucchese had managed to accumulate during the previous centuries was transferred to other Italian towns, promoting the development of new silk manufacturing centres on the Italian Peninsula.

However, it was not until the end of the 14th century that the Italian silk industry became a leading exportation business. Sergio Tognetti has argued that this process was triggered by the growing demand for luxury goods that followed the Black Death. The rising standards of living of the European population stimulated social elites to search for new ways to articulate and display their power and status. The newer and more available Italian luxury silks suited this purpose⁵. Account books of royal and ducal households of Western Europe and Italian mercantile companies seem to confirm Sergio Tognetti's

¹ The first documented royal *tiraz* in the Iberian Peninsula can be traced back to the reign of the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Rahman II (822–852). A century later, in addition to this state factory, there were other *dar al-tiraz* in Seville, Almeria, Malaga, Pechina, Fiñana and Baza. By the 12th century, the geographer al-Idrisi stated that Almeria had 800 silk looms. The Christian conquest of the Iberian Peninsula reduced the once-thriving Muslim silk industry to the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, which increasingly became a major supply region of raw silk to the growing Italian and Valencian silk industries (Fábregas García, 2017, pp. 42–43; Rodríguez Peinado, 2017, pp. 29–30). In the case of the Byzantine Empire, its silk manufacture collapsed after the Christian conquest of Constantinople in 1204. From thereafter, Europe started to import silks from Asia (particularly, the Mongol-ruled territories) in larger quantities (Jacoby, 2011).

² On the development of the Lucchese silk industry during the 13th and 14th centuries, see the interdisciplinary work of del Punta and Rosati (2017, pp. 22–35, 117–146) and Rosati (2016). For written evidence on the incorporation of Oriental patterns to the European silk cloths, see: Molà (1994, p. 228). For a historical example of eastern technological transfer of knowledge to Europe, see: Molà (2000, p. 110). For the commercial and diplomatic exchanges between Italy and the Far East during the 13th and 14th centuries, see Molà (2012, pp. 123–166). For a recent and comprehensive state of the art on the late medieval Italian silk industry, see Franceschi (2020).

³ del Punta and Rosati (2017, pp. 33–35).

⁴ Livi (1881); Edler de Roover (1999, pp. 4–5); Molà (1994, pp. 21–72, 250); Tognetti (2014).

⁵ Tognetti (2007, p. 149).

claims. From the last decades of the 14th century onwards, the royal and princely courts of Europe increasingly purchased Italian silk fabrics⁶. Brocades, camacas, damasks, satins and velvets became the new markers of social distinction and status among the European elite. The Crown of Aragon was no exception. During the last decades of the 14th century, the Catalano-Aragonese court, like many other European courts at that time, bought large quantities of silk cloth, mainly produced in the Italian Peninsula⁷. Thus, by the 15th century, silk had become a luxury fabric for both the Catalan and the European nobility.

Additionally, the substantial profits derived from its trade also stimulated the expansion of the Italian silk industry. According to Sergio Tognetti, the cost structure of the silk industry was better suited to the economic context that followed the Black Death than that of other economic sectors. Despite the high salaries paid to the silk workers, the labour costs of this industry amounted to a relatively low share of the overall production costs. In fact, most of the capital was spent on the purchase of raw materials, which could absorb up to 70 per cent of the overall production costs. Consequently, in a context of rising wages such as that of the late 14th century, the silk industry offered more promising commercial prospects than other textile businesses, thereby attracting a higher proportion of the available capital⁸. Indeed, Florentine account books reveal that a successful silk business could annually report a profit of 20 per cent of the invested capital whereas a less lucrative silk company, like Andrea Banchi's, yielded him a return of 7.3 per cent of his initial investment⁹. Hence, it is unsurprising that some of the biggest Italian fortunes decided to invest into what was seen to be an expanding and profitable business¹⁰.

Over the course of the 15th century, the Iberian Peninsula also managed to develop their own silk industry in cities such as Toledo, Cordoba, Seville and Valencia¹¹. After the Christian conquest, silk production in this region was conducted by artisans of Jewish origin that, in some cases, had inherited the expertise of their Muslim predecessors. This silk production largely operated on a family basis through independent silk workshops. However, the massive arrival of foreign silk artisans in the Iberian Peninsula from the mid-15th century onwards transformed these initial nucleus of specialised labour into leading export businesses. In Valencia, German Navarro Espinach has identified a total of 560 Italian emigrants between 1450 and 1525¹². Similarly, foreign silk artisans have also been noted in other Iberian towns, such as Toledo¹³. However, Valencia was probably the home of the largest Italian community. These emigrants brought with them their advanced technological skills that fostered the technical development of the Valencian silk industry. As a result, this city became the most prominent silk manufacturing centre of the Iberian Peninsula in the late 15th century, exporting over 26,000 metres (29,617 *alnes*) of silk fabrics by 1475¹⁴. In the early 16th century, Valencia

⁶ For the royal and ducal consumption of silk fabrics in Europe during the late 14th century, see Berland (2009, pp. 227–242) and Lambert (2016, pp. 91–106). For the development of the silk fabrics in the 14th century, see del Punta and Rosati (2017, pp. 22–35).

⁷ In 1405, King Martin had an overall debt of f. 6,261, s. 8, d. 3 owed to Giovanni Bonini and Domenico Benedetti for previous silk cloth purchases, which included 63 metres of velvet, 218.1 metres of voided satin velvet, 12.4 metres of satin and 31.1 metres of damask and damascene (Soldani, 2010, pp. 504–514).

⁸ Tognetti (2002, pp. 19–21).

⁹ Caferro (1996, pp. 432–433); Edler de Roover (1966, p. 283).

¹⁰ In 1424, the Venetian Bartolomeo Troncon decided to open a silk workshop because “*pluxors fiade me fo ditto de' gran guadagni se sequia al mestier de la seda*” (Molà, 1994, p. 261). For a quantitative analysis of the capital invested in Florentine silk partnerships, see Tognetti (2014, pp. 78–79).

¹¹ Ladero Quesada (1993).

¹² Navarro Espinach (1999, pp. 33–45, 55, 255–263), Navarro Espinach (1994, pp. 209–210).

¹³ Ladero Quesada (1993, p. 127).

¹⁴ One *alna* was equivalent to 0.9 metres (Navarro Espinach (2017, p. 124).

had 1,200 silk looms and its annual silk exports nearly reached 38,000 metres (42,043 *alnes*)¹⁵.

Like other Iberian towns, the production of silk in Catalonia was mainly carried out on an artisanal basis by independent weavers and small-sized silk retailers of Jewish origin. The Barcelonese Jewish community was specialised in the production of lighter silk cloth, particularly veils, which were most likely intended to supply the local market¹⁶. After the attack of the Jewish quarters in 1391 and the subsequent forced conversions, the Catalan silk industry started to incorporate a growing number of Christian craftsmen. However, they did not change their earlier productive orientation. During the first half of the 15th century, veil-weaving remained the main profession of the Barcelonese silk artisans¹⁷.

It was not until the mid-15th century that silk production in Barcelona underwent a significant transformation, as the municipal council and private entrepreneurs made several attempts to promote the production of heavy and elaborate silk fabrics. The local authorities of Barcelona drew up public contracts with foreign silk artisans, granting them semi-monopolistic rights and providing them with financial support in order to help them establish their own silk workshops in Barcelona¹⁸. The most ambitious project was that of Urbano Trinchero. In 1451, this Genovese entrepreneur requested 10,000 florins from the municipal authorities of Barcelona to establish himself with a group of silk artisans in the city for a period of 10 years. During that time, they would produce and teach the art of weaving gold-and-silk cloths (Table 1). The government accepted his petition and granted him preferential treatment, protecting him from internal and external competitors¹⁹. However, the project never prospered as Urbano was caught in Genoa while presumably attempting to supply Barcelona with the necessary work equipment²⁰.

In parallel, private entrepreneurs also started their own silk companies. One of the first to do so was Bartomeu Miró, a Barcelonese merchant who formed a partnership with the notary Nicolau de Mediona, to produce damascenes, satins and velvets. However, the most important initiative was the *Companyia de les Sedes*, an ambitious enterprise that aimed to organise its labour force in a single workshop, which functioned as a manufacturing centre for the last steps of the silk production process as well as the administrative headquarters of the company. In both cases, the firm of Bartomeu Miró and the *Companyia de les Sedes* relied heavily on the expertise of Italian silk craftsmen to promote their businesses²¹. Additionally, there were other attempts to promote the silk industry in Barcelona (Table 1)²². However, it is impossible to determine how successful these private

¹⁵ In 1532, it is possible to document a total of 1,200 looms in Valencia, although not all of them were probably active (Navarro Espinach, 1999, p. 55).

¹⁶ The veil weaving represented the main profession among the Jewish silk artisans. A small incursion in the notarial records of Barcelona reflects that out of thirty-seven identified Jews involved in the silk industry, there were nineteen that were veil weavers (Madurell Marimon, 1965, pp. 247–249).

¹⁷ From 225 silk artisans documented in Barcelona during the first half of the 15th century, 79 (35.1%) were veil weavers. The other notorious professions related to the silk industry in Barcelona were silk merchants (49), embroiderers (35) and mercers (26) (Stojak, 2013, p. 424).

¹⁸ Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona (AHCB), 1C. V-12/2. 1456; AHCB, IB. II-12, f. 51r-51v. 28 September 1458; and AHCB, IB. II-12, ff. 120r-120v. 4 May 1459.

¹⁹ The municipal government would not give any further loans to other brocade masters so as to not incentivise local competition, and women could only wear silk cloths made in Barcelona (except if they were able to find less expensive ones) (AHCB, 1C. V-12/6. 2 April 1451).

²⁰ Massa (1970, pp. 194–195).

²¹ Claude Carrère and Ivana Stojak have identified twenty Italian silk artisans in Barcelona between 1450 and 1460 (Carrère, 1967, pp. 908, 910–912; Stojak (2013, pp. 330–340, 341–347).

²² AHCB, IB. II-12, f. 51r-51v. 28 September 1458; AHCB, IB. II-12, ff. 120r-120v. 4 May 1459.

Table 1. List of municipal policies that the local government of Barcelona passed in order to promote the silk industry in the city during the middling decades of the 15th century

2 April 1451	Concession of 10,000 florins to the silk masters Urbano Trincherio, Niccolò di Pietrasancta, Baltasar Maiolino and Domenico da Lucca to establish themselves in Barcelona for 10 years and teach their craft.
19 April 1451	Deliberation in favour of the establishment of the art of brocades in Barcelona by the council member Ferrer Nicolau de Gualbes.
1456	Disposition of the Council of the Hundred in favour of offering a loan of 10,000 florins for any brocade weaver who established himself in the city of Barcelona and exercised his profession for 10 years.
30 September 1457	Petition of Bartomeu Miró and Nicolau de Mediona to free the two imprisoned Genovese silk masters that had been capture by the fleet of Barcelona while they were travelling to Valencia in order to work for them.
9 January 1458	Ratification of the concession of the two imprisoned Genovese silk masters to Bartomeu Miró after the reception of the petition from the <i>Jurats</i> of Valencia.
18 January 1458	Petition of the clothier Joan Serra to the Council of the Hundred to plant mulberry trees in Barcelona to help the development of the local silk industry.
28 September 1458	Petition of a silk master from a Valencian silk artisan to establish himself in Barcelona in exchange for £400 that would be repaid 4 years later.
4 May 1459	Approval of a loan of £200 to the above-mentioned silk master from Valencia in order to exercise his profession in Barcelona, together with three other artisans.

Source: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona (AHCB), IB. II-12, f. 51r-51v. 28 September 1458; AHCB, IB. II-12, ff. 120r-120v. 4 May 1459; AHCB, IC. V-12/2. 1456. Disposició dels brocaters; AHCB, IC. V-12/6. 2 April 1451. These sources have been previously published in Camós i Cabruja (1947, 1948); Carrere (1967, pp. 907–912); Stojak (2013, pp. 266–272, 330–340, 341–347).

and state-sponsored enterprises were²³. The start of the Catalan Civil War in 1462 put an end to any progress that these initiatives might have made. And, once the conflict was over, it is very likely that the Principality of Catalonia would have relied on foreign silk exports to meet its domestic demand for silk fabrics²⁴.

In fact, for most of the 15th century, Catalonia would complement its local silk production with foreign imports from Italy, the Near East and the neighbouring Iberian kingdoms. The passage tax (*lleuda*) of Collioure, a harbour town located in the northernmost part of medieval Catalonia, illustrates the economic relevance that the Italian silk industry had for the Principality during the early 15th century²⁵. Unfortunately, the description of the silk imports in terms of bales, boxes and bundles makes it impossible to determine the actual volume of the Italian silk trade.

²³ In the case of the *Companyia de les Sedes*, the private accounts of the notary Nicolau de Mediona, as one of its initial investors, attest that in 1457 the company did not report benefits to the scale that the notary had expected and so he decided to withdraw from it (Ferrer i Mallol, 1994–1995, p. 548).

²⁴ Between March 1488 and April 1489, a total of 2,475.56 metres (1,592 *canes*) of silk fabrics were traded in Barcelona, according to the *lleuda* of this city. They were all sold by two Genovese merchants, Ambrosio Fetinanti and Bernardo di San Narciso (Arxiu de la Catedral de Barcelona (ACB), Lleuda de Mediona, March 1487–May 1488 and ACB, Lleuda de Mediona, June 1488–May 1489). I am grateful to Lluís Sales for kindly providing me these figures. For the equivalence of *canes* and *palms* to present-day metres, see Teixidó i Puigdomènech (2008, pp. 70–80, 348).

²⁵ It is impossible to determine the final destination of the silk fabrics listed in the passage tax of Collioure. The most typical destinations of the ships that transported these silks were Barcelona and Valencia. However, some ships could travel much farther. For instance, the final destination of the Florentine State Galleys was Northern Europe. Thus, it is very likely that some silk fabrics were sold in Catalonia, but not all of them.

Table 2. Number of silk cloths imported from Western Italy listed in the passage tax (*lleuda*) of Collioure during the first half of the 15th century

	Taffetas and <i>terçanells</i>						Other silk cloths (<i>atzeitunis, brocats d'or, draps de seda</i> and <i>velluts</i>)					Silk work (<i>lavor</i> or <i>obra de seda</i>)			
	Costals	Boxes	Bales	Bundles		Cloths	Boxes	Bales	Bundles		Cloths	Boxes	Bales	Bundles	
				<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>				<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>				<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>
1406 ^a	–	–	1.5	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1407	–	–	–	5	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
1410	–	–	–	1	1	–	3	–	4	1	–	4	–	–	–
1411 ^b	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	–
1412 ^c	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1413 ^d	–	–	–	9	15	–	4	1	5	1	–	12	–	12	–
1414 ^d	–	2	1	12	11	26	1	0.5	1	–	1	12	4	6	1
1415 ^d	1	–	2	2	16	–	1	2	2	–	–	6	1	–	–
1418	–	–	1	11	10	–	2	–	2	5	–	1	–	2	–
1419 ^e	–	–	2	–	6	–	1	–	6	1	–	9	–	5	1
1422	–	1	–	4	–	–	4	–	1	1	–	13	–	1	–

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

	Taffetas and <i>terçanells</i>						Other silk cloths (<i>atzeitunis, brocats d'or, draps de seda and velluts</i>)					Silk work (<i>lavor or obra de seda</i>)			
	Bundles						Bundles					Bundles			
	<i>Costals</i>	Boxes	Bales	<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>	Cloths	Boxes	Bales	<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>	Cloths	Boxes	Bales	<i>Fardells</i>	<i>Fagots</i>
1423	–	–	–	4	1	–	4	–	2	–	–	11	–	1	–
1424	–	1	–	–	4	–	5	–	1	1	–	10	–	1	1
1427 ^f	–	9.5	–	5	2	1	24	–	1	–	–	12	–	1	1
1428	–	–	–	–	2	–	4	1	–	–	1	5	2	–	–
1431 ^g	–	–	–	–	12	–	1.5	–	1.5	1	4	3	0.5	–	–

^aThe year 1406 includes a value of 0.5 that refers to one bale which included several pieces of taffetas as well as mercery goods.

^bFor the year 1411, I have excluded from the statistics one velvet bale that was shipped to Pisa, one chest of furs and silk fabrics that were transported in the ship of Pere Salvador, that came from the Near East (*Romania*).

^cFor 1412, I have excluded two boxes and five bales of silk fabrics that were shipped from “Motzo” or “Morzo”, a location that I was unable to identify.

^dThe values for 1413, 1414 and 1415 have been taken from the volume 1309, because it apparently included more Italian silk exports than the figures given in volume 1308.

^eFor 1919, I have valued the two *fagots* of fur and *terçanells* as one.

^fThe year 1427 includes a value 0.5 that refers to one box of veils and taffeta.

^gFor 1431, I have valued the four bundles of *terçanells* and gold thread as two. I have also equally divided the three *caixes* and *fardells* of silk fabrics into boxes and bundles, and I have attributed the value 0.5 to one bale of woollens and silk work.

Source: Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), Reial Patrimoni, BGC, vols. 1305 (1406–1407), 1308 (1410–1415), 1309 (1412–1415), 1310 (1418–1419), 1313 (1423–1424), 1314 (1427–1428) and 1318 (1431–1432).

Nevertheless, it demonstrates that a significant large number of silk fabrics were imported from Tuscany and Liguria, via the commercial route that followed the coastline of the Western Mediterranean basin. Moreover, the *lleuda* of Collioure also seem to suggest that, in the early 15th century, Italian silk exports mainly consisted of lighter and plain silk fabrics, namely taffetas and *terçanells*. Although other silk cloth, often described with the general term of “*draps de seda*”, and silk work (*lavor de seda*) were also imported in considerable quantities (Table 2).

Yet not all silk in Catalonia was imported from Tuscany and Liguria. Late 14th-century Catalan *comanda* contracts suggest that luxury silk fabrics were also imported from Beirut and Alexandria²⁶. Moreover, the shop inventories of two mercers from Barcelona and Vic demonstrate that Valencian silk goods were also commercialised all throughout the Principality of Catalonia. Among their products, there were small pouches, hair laces and veils produced in Valencia (*obra de València*)²⁷. At last, some Catalan after-death inventories also list silk goods made of Venetian silk²⁸. Unfortunately, it is impossible to quantify the silk imports of these regions beyond these few impressions due to the lack of adequate sources.

After having reviewed the existing literature on the late-medieval silk industry in the European Mediterranean, and particularly, in Catalonia, it is clear that scholars have studied its development from the perspective of its production and commercialisation. When demand has been addressed, it has mainly concerned that of the aristocratic elites and the high-ranking members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy²⁹. However, their consumption alone cannot fully explain the late-medieval expansion of the European silk industry. For this reason, this article aims to analyse the changes in the consumption of luxury textiles of the urban population during the first sixty years of the 15th century through the case study of Catalonia. In doing so, it seeks to emphasise the role played by the upper and middling social groups in the development of the late-medieval silk industry. Following the argument of Patrick Chorley, Franco Franceschi and Richard Goldthwaite, this article claims that silk fabrics came to replace the traditional high-quality woollens, which had dominated the high-end sector of the textile markets since at least the 13th century³⁰. Moreover, it links this substitution process to economic and technological factors.

2. Sources

Like most consumption studies, the primary source material of this article consists of after-death inventories. These documents meticulously describe nearly all moveable and immovable assets that an individual or a family had at the time of the death of the head of the household. In Catalonia, it became customary to compile an after-death

²⁶ Coulon (2004, pp. 479–482). It should be noted that Oriental silk exports to the European continent gradually declined from the late 14th century onwards (Jacoby, 2011).

²⁷ “una bossa maytada d’or e de seda verda e vermella, d’obra de València”; “sis cordes de València abtes a fer coes de dones brodades de fil d’or [...] és, duas de seda verda e una de seda negra e una de seda [...]mella de grana e una de seda foguina e l’altra d’obra d’Avinyó, cascuna ab botons de fil d’or en los caps”; “tres trescolls de seda blanca de València, la un dels quals era brodat de fil d’aur e los dos ab randa del [...]de seda negra” (AHCB, Arxiu notarial, Inventaris, I-3. 1401); “X bosses de seda d’obra de València estimades entre totes s. XIII d. IIII” (Arxiu i Biblioteca Episcopal de Vic (ABEV), Arxiu de la Cúria Fumada (ACF), vol. 3753, ff. 381r-402v. 7 October 1402).

²⁸ “una bossa d’or e seda veneciana e de obra de Massina” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-9, August 1450) and “un carner de fil venecià ab sa correge blanca” (ABEV, ACF-3779, f. 108r-135v. 3 October 1457).

²⁹ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Françoise Piponnier are among the few historians who have analysed silk consumption in late medieval Italy and France, see Muzzarelli (2000) and Piponnier (1993).

³⁰ Chorley (1993, p. 163); Franceschi (1993, p. 29); Goldthwaite (2009, p. 291).

inventory after the approval of the assizes of the Parliament of Perpignan (1350). The statutes of this Parliament made inventories mandatory to the guardians of minor for the purpose of safeguarding the family inheritance of their pupils and to widows who sought to protect their dowry and other nuptial rights³¹. However, beyond these legal parameters, any individual involved in an inheritance process could request the elaboration of an after-death inventory. In fact, many heirs and testamentary administrators requested such inventories to prevent potential legal disputes concerning a deceased's estate.

Unfortunately, not many towns have preserved a sufficiently large number of after-death inventories to draw conclusions of statistical significance. Barcelona and Vic have preserved two of the largest collections of notarial records in the region of Catalonia. For this reason, the probate inventories examined in this article stem from the archives of these two towns. By combining the after-death inventories of these two urban centres of different sizes and socioeconomic structures, this article aims to offer a comprehensive view of the consumption patterns of the Catalan urban population. In the 15th century, Barcelona was the largest city of this region, with a population of approximately 33,000 citizens³². As the main harbour of this region, it had an important mercantile elite that played a crucial role in the export of Catalan products overseas, while ensuring the arrival of foreign commodities. In contrast, Vic was a small inland town with a population ranging from 2,700 to 3,500 inhabitants. It was specialised in the manufacture of leather and metal goods, particularly knives³³. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the significance of the textile industry would have grown in both urban centres over the course of the first half of the 15th century due to the expansion of the Catalan woollen industry³⁴.

A database of randomly selected inventories for 1400–1460 will serve to illustrate the changes in the consumer preferences for luxury textiles of the Catalan urban population. Despite the extraordinary richness of after-death inventories, clothes are not consistently recorded³⁵. For this reason, the sample has only included those inventories with three or more garments in order to ensure the representation of a minimum wardrobe. However, it is important to note that this method may not encompass the clothing of all family members, offering only an approximation of the actual ownership. For analytical purposes, the sample has been divided into three periods of 11 years each. The 148 after-death inventories written down between 1400 and 1410 will serve to illustrate the pre-existing consumption patterns. The remaining 264 inventories collected for the years 1425–1435 and 1450–1460 will show the changes in the consumption of luxury textiles during the first half of the 15th century (Table 3).

Considering that most studies have linked consumer differences to market accessibility and wealth, this article will take into account both variables when analysing the consumer

³¹ 1906, pp. 375–376, 394.

³² The demographic data of Barcelona are based on the hearth tax of 1378 which stated that this city had a total of 7,295–7,301 households. This figure has been multiplied by 4.5 in order to estimate the total population (Redondo García, 2002).

³³ The wealth tax of Vic for the year 1427 provides the highest number of tax contributors. According to this document, this town had 773 fiscal units. On the other end, the wealth tax of 1452 contains the lowest demographic figure, listing only 605 fiscal units (Arxiu Municipal de Vic. Caixa 30.19). The productive structure of this town is also based on the wealth taxes of this town.

³⁴ Carrère (1967, pp. 818–837).

³⁵ Clothing was one of the most common testamentary bequests. As such, it would not have been uncommon for men and women to take their new belongings before the inventory of the deceased was made (Palarea Marimón, 2024). More obscure reasons could have also led to their omission (*“hun cofre de fust de poy pintat en què stava la roba del dit defunct la qual la dita dona ne lo hereu per certa causa no volgueren ses inventeriàs”*) (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-10. 15 October 1455).

Table 3. Sample of after-death inventories classified according to place and number of inventoried rooms listed

No. of rooms	Barcelona						Vic					
	1400–1410		1425–1435		1450–1460		1400–1410		1425–1435		1450–1460	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Category I (rooms 0–1)	4	9.8	10	21.3	5	11.4	17	15.9	9	8.3	5	7.8
Category II (rooms 2–3)	6	14.6	9	19.1	8	18.2	10	9.3	13	11.9	12	18.8
Category III (rooms 4–6)	15	36.6	13	27.7	12	27.3	37	34.6	35	32.1	23	35.9
Category IV (rooms 7–9)	8	19.5	7	14.9	11	25	24	22.4	30	27.5	16	25
Category V (rooms 10+)	7	17.1	7	14.9	7	15.9	19	17.8	22	20.2	8	12.5
Undetermined	1	2.4	1	2.1	1	2.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	41	100	47	100	44	100	107	100	109	100	64	100

Source: AHPB, vols. 69/27 (1404–1429), 74/8 (1434), 88/18 (1410), 88/19 (1434), 88/22 (s. xv), 88/23 (s. xv), 104/19 (1417–1451), 107/110 (1409–1430), 112/24 (1415–1429), 112/25 (1430–1438), 113/105 (1432–1441), 113/106 (1432–1449), 143/18 (1450), 161/10 (1439–1468), 175/90 (1441–1451) and 175/91 (1455–1464); AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, 1.1 (1348–1514), 1.2 (s. xv), 1.3 (1403–1414), 1.5 (1420–1427), 1.6 (1427–1433), 1.7 (1434–1441), 1.9 (1448–1451) and 1.10 (1451–1461); ACB, Gabriel Canyelles, vols. 341 (1400–1409), 342 (1400–1409), 343, (1400–1409), 346 (1420–1429) and 348 (1430–1443); ACB, Julià Roure, vols. 513 (1432–1457) and 520 (1401–1419); ABEV, ACF, vols. 3705 (1397–1403), 3706 (1404), 3707 (1405–1409), 3708 (1406–1418), 3709 (1411–1414), 3712 (1421–1430), 3713 (1431–1433), 3714 (1434–1438), 3717 (1448–1467), 3731 (1400–1500), 3732 (1400–1500), 3733 (1400–1500), 3752 (1400), 3753 (1396–1405), 3754 (1398–1401), 3755 (1403–1408), 3756 (1409–1410), 3757 (1411–1413), 3759 (1422–1427), 3760 (1428–1436), 3763 (1403–1427), 3764 (1405–1429), 3765 (1409–1433), 3766 (1410–1436), 3767 (1410–1420), 3768 (1410–1425), 3770 (1423–1431), 3771 (1432–1440), 3773 (1416–1443), 3774 (1424–1443), 3776 (1450–1452), 3777 (1453–1454), 3778 (1455–1456), 3779 (1457), 3780 (1457–1459), 3781 (1460–1463), 3786 (1457–1474), 3793 (1460–1514), vols. 3876 (1403), 3883 (1402), 3884 (1405–1418), 3888 (1430–1431) and 3889 (1432–1435).

behaviour of Catalan urban population³⁶. Unfortunately, *post-mortem* inventories in Catalonia do not include monetary valuations. Hence, this article has used the number of inventoried rooms as an alternative proxy for wealth to socially classify the sample of after-death inventories³⁷. Table 3 shows the social distribution of each set of after-death inventories. It demonstrates that both samples of after-death inventories are distributed quite evenly among the five social categories created on the basis of the number of rooms. Households belonging to the middling rank constitute the most well represented categories of the sample. Conversely, the bottom groups of the urban population are slightly under-represented, likely due to the considerable cost associated with the elaboration of after-death inventories and the relatively straightforward nature of their inheritance processes. Despite this bias, the sample covers all social groups, even those who were often excluded from fiscal sources because they were deemed too poor to contribute (category I). While it is true that the sample of after-death inventories provides a comprehensive picture of the consumption patterns across different social groups of the Catalan urban society, it has a slight bias towards those households residing in smaller urban centres, such as Vic. In contrast, those individuals living in large cities, which were otherwise a minority of the total population of Catalonia, are under-represented.

3. Luxury and silk in early 15th-century Catalonia

The statistical analysis of the after-death inventories from Barcelona and Vic suggests that, in the early 15th century, luxury garments were rarely made of silk. Better-quality clothes were made of high-quality wool, usually English wool, whose fineness was unrivalled by any other wool variety of that time. Moreover, they were dyed in beautiful and bright colours that could vary from sky blue (*celestí*) to black (*negre*)³⁸. Above all, the most prized woollens were dyed with kermes (*grana*), the most expensive dyestuff available at that time³⁹. Additionally, most of these high-quality woollens were produced in prestigious manufacturing centres outside the Crown of Aragon. However, it is noteworthy that Catalonia and Mallorca also had some renowned cloth manufacturing centres. In the former region, these centres were mainly located in the Pyrenees and the Roussillon (Tables 4 and 5).

Beyond the Crown of Aragon, the early 15th-century Catalan urban markets offered a wide variety of luxury textiles that ranged from medium-quality fabrics produced in Courtrai and Verviers, to high-end cloths produced in Brussels or Florence⁴⁰. The most consumed textiles in Catalonia were those produced in Verviers (*vervins*). Although, better-quality cloth imported from Malines were also quite popular. Woollens produced in Florence and Brussels were very expensive products that could only be afforded by an exclusive clientele with high purchasing power (Tables 5 and 6). These consumers

³⁶ On key determinants of consumption, see Weatherill (1988, pp. 75–90, 105–109, 185–189); Dyer (1989) and Shammass (1990, pp. 103–111, 173–180).

³⁷ The combined analysis of wealth taxes (*talles*) and after-death inventories of 15th-century Vic has revealed that there is a 0.6 correlation between the number of inventoried rooms and the economic position of these households in the wealth taxes of Vic. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the number of rooms listed in the after-death inventories is an accurate wealth proxy to socially classify after-death inventories with no monetary valuations, such as the Catalan ones (Palarea Marimón, 2024). On the use of rooms as an indicator of wealth, see Blondé and de Laet (2006, p. 71) and Blondé and van Damme (2010, pp. 661–663).

³⁸ See, for instance, “Iª aljuba de drap de lana blau celestí de florentí, ab pell blanca d’e-yines, ab mànegues sens folredura” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-2. 25 August 1400); “I mantó de home de drap de florentí negre, folrat de drap vermell de la terra migencer” (ACB, Julià Roure, vol. 520, Plec 2. 18 July 1410).

³⁹ Franceschi (2015, p. 184).

⁴⁰ For the market prices of luxury woollens, see Melis (1962, pp. 229–231) and Diago Hernando (1997, p. 177).

Table 4. Luxury garments listed in the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic during the first half of the 15th century

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
BARCELONA															
Foreign wool garments	32	78	3.6	19	4.4	30	63.8	2.9	25	4.3	16	36.4	1.1	9	2.1
Catalan and Majorcan wool garments	9	22	0.3	2	0.6	12	25.5	0.3	2	0.6	3	6.8	0.1	4	0.6
Scarlet garments or clothes dyed with <i>grana</i>	14	34.1	0.6	4	1	13	27.7	0.4	3	0.7	11	25	0.6	7	1.3
Silk garments	4	9.8	0.2	3	0.6	5	10.6	0.2	4	0.7	10	22.7	0.8	16	2.6
Camlet garments	5	12.2	0.1	1	0.3	2	4.3	0	1	0.2	4	9.1	0.2	3	0.6
Total luxury garments	35	85.4	4.6	22	5	35	74.5	3.7	28	5	19	43.2	2.8	30	5.7
Total garments	41	100	27	78.5	16.1	47	100	24.6	79	18.3	44	100	27.2	112.75	25.1
VIC															
Foreign wool garments	36	33.6	1.4	16	2.7	37	33.9	0.7	5	1.2	16	25	0.4	3	0.7
Catalan and Majorcan wool garments	4	3.7	0	1	0.2	6	5.5	0.1	2	0.3	0	0	0	0	0
Scarlet garments or clothes dyed with <i>grana</i>	18	16.8	0.3	3	0.8	10	9.2	0.1	2	0.5	4	6.3	0.1	3	0.5
Silk garments	3	2.8	0.1	3.5	0.4	2	1.8	0	0.5	0.1	7	10.9	0.1	3	0.5
Camlet garments	2	1.9	0	2	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	1	0.1
Total luxury garments	42	39.3	1.6	20	3.2	43	39.4	0.9	6	1.4	21	32.8	0.6	6.3	1.2
Total garments	107	100	14.9	53	10.7	109	100	16.5	59	11.4	64	100	17	69	12.6

Note : (1) The statistical analysis of this table and the following ones has attributed to those goods referred in the plural form a minimum value of 2, goods qualified as several (*alguns*), have been given a value of 5 and every piece (*tros*) of silk ware has been accounted as 0.5.

(2) The category of garments includes gowns, coats, surcoats, bodices, doublets, mantles, jackets, shirts, breeches and hoses.

(3) Catalan after-death inventories only included the place of origin of a textile when it came from a prestigious cloth manufacturing centre. On the asymmetrical description of goods in Mediterranean inventories and its relation to prestige, see Lord Smal (2016, pp. 45–59).

Table 5. Place of origin of all textiles (including garments, accessories and linings) listed in the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic during the first half of the 15th century

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
BARCELONA															
Catalan cloths	10	24.4	0.3	2	0.7	13	27.7	0.4	3	0.7	3	6.8	0.2	5	0.8
Ceret	0	0	0	0	0	5	10.6	0.1	2	0.4	1	2.3	0	1	0.2
Mallorca	4	9.8	0.1	2	0.4	5	10.6	0.1	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	0
Perpinyà	6	14.6	0.2	2	0.6	3	6.4	0.1	3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
Sant Joan de les Abadesses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.8	0.2	4	0.7
English cloths	2	4.9	0	1	0.2	10	21.3	0.4	4	0.9	14	31.8	0.7	5	1.3
Bristol (<i>bristons</i>)	0	0	0	0	0	10	21.3	0.4	4	0.8	13	29.5	0.6	4	1.2
London	2	4.9	0	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern European cloths	32	78	3.4	15.5	3.8	29	61.7	2.1	24	4	3	6.8	0.1	4	0.6
Courtrai and Verviers (or Wervik)	21	51.2	1.5	7	2	28	59.6	1.7	21	3.3	2	4.5	0.1	4	0.6
Malines (or Mechelen)	17	41.5	1.3	11	2.4	3	6.4	0.1	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
Montivilliers	8	19.5	0.3	3	0.7	4	8.5	0.1	3	0.5	1	2.3	0	1	0.2
Brussels, Douai and Ypres	6	14.6	0.2	3	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lières	0	0	0	0	0	4	8.5	0.2	4	0.7	0	0	0	0	0
Verneuil	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	0.1	3	0.4	0	0	0	0	0
Italian cloths	16	39	1.3	10.5	2.3	15	31.9	0.7	5	1.3	7	15.9	0.3	3	0.7
Florence (<i>florentins</i>)	16	39	1.3	10.5	2.3	15	31.9	0.7	5	1.3	7	15.9	0.3	3	0.7
Lighter-weight cloths	1	2.4	0	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.3	0	1	0.2
friezes from Marseille	1	2.4	0	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
osettes from Cyprus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.3	0	1	0.2

(Continued)

Table 5. (Continued.)

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
Total	33	80.5	5.1	28	5.8	34	72.3	3.6	27	4.9	16	36.4	1.3	10	2.5
VIC															
Catalan cloths	4	3.7	0	1	0.2	6	5.5	0.1	4	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
Ceret	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	1	0.9	0	2	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
Mallorca	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	5	4.6	0.1	4	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
Perpinyà	2	1.9	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English cloths	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	15.6	0.2	2	0.6
Bristol (<i>bristons</i>)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	14.1	0.2	2	0.5
Northern European cloths	39	36.4	1.6	20	3.3	36	33	0.6	5	1.1	4	6.3	0.1	3	0.5
Verviers (or Wervik)	32	29.9	0.7	6	1.3	29	26.6	0.4	4	0.8	2	3.1	0.1	3	0.4
Malines (or Mechelen)	28	26.2	0.8	11	1.8	13	11.9	0.2	3	0.6	0	0	0	0	0
Montvilliers	5	4.7	0.1	3	0.5	4	3.7	0.1	2	0.3	0	0	0	0	0
Brussels	2	1.9	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lières	1	0.9	0	2	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Verneuil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3.1	0	1	0.2
Italian cloths	9	8.4	0.2	7	0.8	11	10.1	0.1	3	0.5	4	6.3	0.1	1	0.2
Florence (<i>florentins</i>)	9	8.4	0.2	7	0.8	11	10.1	0.1	3	0.5	4	6.3	0.1	1	0.2
Lighter-weight cloths	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	1	0.9
Saies from Ireland	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Osettes from Cyprus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	1	0.1
Total	41	38.3	1.9	20.5	3.8	44	40.4	0.9	5	1.3	17	26.6	0.4	3	0.8

Note: The woollens from “Lera” or “Leyra” have been identified as cloths made in Lières. However, it is also possible that they were produced in Lleida, an important Catalan cloth manufacturing centre.

Table 6. Number of after-death inventories (%) that listed foreign woollen textiles during the first half of the 15th century according to the socioeconomic position

	Catalan cloths			Florentine cloths			Northern European cloths			British cloths		
	1400 (%)	1425 (%)	1450 (%)	1400 (%)	1425 (%)	1450 (%)	1400 (%)	1425 (%)	1450 (%)	1400 (%)	1425 (%)	1450 (%)
Category I	4.8	10.5	0	4.8	5.3	10	28.6	15.8	0	0	0	0
Category II	12.5	18.2	0	12.5	9.1	5	18.8	18.2	5	6.3	4.5	10
Category III	7.7	10.4	0	9.6	10.4	0	44.2	37.5	0	0	6.3	25.7
Category IV	9.4	8.1	3.7	15.6	32.4	14.8	53.1	54.1	11.1	0	2.7	11.1
Category V	15.4	17.2	13.3	30.8	20.7	33.3	80.8	69	20	3.8	17.2	60

were mainly found in Barcelona, which concentrated a wealthy elite of nobles, merchants, municipal and royal officers whose incomes, expenses and rents far exceeded those of the rest of the population. Thus, at the beginning of the 15th century, social differentiation in Catalonia was expressed through the quality of the woollen garments and their dyes. Clothes made of other expensive fabrics such as silk or camlet were extremely rare (Table 4).

In fact, in the early 15th century, silk was almost exclusively used for the elaboration of interior linings and head accessories (Table 7). Linings were made of lighter and cheaper silk fabrics, such as cendals, taffetas and *terçanells*. Their smooth surface made them ideal for protecting the skin from the rougher touch of the outer woollen garments. Moreover, by turning the cuffs inside out, by folding back the sleeves or by slashing or slitting the outer garment, the invisible silk linings could be displayed⁴¹. In this way, silk linings complemented luxury woollen garments as additional markers of social distinction and status. Despite being made of costly materials, Catalan after-death inventories suggest that silk linings were socially widespread items⁴². Between one-third and one-fifth of the middle and lower echelons of the urban society in Catalonia were able to afford these products (Figure 1). The popularity of silk linings can probably be attributed to the fact that linings rarely require large quantities of fabric. Interior linings seldom overlaid the whole garment. In most cases, they simply covered the sleeves of the dress, part of the mantle or only the hood (Table 7)⁴³.

It is hard to estimate the actual demand of silk cloth that was needed to make them. However, the debt accounts of Jaume Mateu, a cloth merchant of Vic, seems to suggest that a pair of taffeta sleeves linings required 1.46 metres (7.5 *palms*) of silk fabric⁴⁴. Thus, if we consider the length of sleeve linings as a standard size for all linings, it is possible to argue that, on average, nearly half of the Catalan urban households owned a little bit less than 1.5 metres of silk cloths (Table 7)⁴⁵. It was a small amount of fabric that allowed a significant share of the Catalan urban society to own silk.

In the early 15th century, silk was also used for the elaboration of head accessories, especially for women and children (Table 7). Catalan after-death inventories describe a wide variety of female veils. These sources seem to suggest that it was a common practice for women to cover their heads with several veils. This ensemble was called a "*ligar*", and it consisted of at least a head and a neck veil, though some included

⁴¹ For examples on slashed garments lined with silk, see "*una manteta del dit drap de Mellines, trepada, folrada de tafatà vert*" and "*una manteta petita del dit drap folrada de tafatà vert, trepada*" (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3753, ff. 419r-435v. 29 July 1402); and "*I cot de oliveta verda ab roda squequade de oliveta e vermell ab mànegues forrades de teffetà vert ab trepes per les mànegues ab XX brots de perles en cascuna mànegue e ab anelletes dobles de perles per los pits del dit cot lo qual és de la infanta, fila del dit deffunt*" (Arxiu de la Catedral de Barcelona (ACB), Gabriel Canyelles, vol. 341, plec 5. 5 January 1406).

⁴² On average, a *cana* (1.555 metres) of taffeta was sold for s. 26 d. 3 in the market of Vic (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3884, ff. 15r-46r. 22 March 1409).

⁴³ See, for instance, "*I mantell blau de palmela, folrat en part de tersanell vermel, ab arminis*" (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3771, ff. 49r-60v. 8 March 1434); "*I mantell de drap de bristó, mig forrat de terçanell negra*" (Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona (AHPB), 112/25, ff. 47r-53v. 15 January 1431); "*I mantell de verví scur folrat la meyta de terçanell bo*" (AHPB, 112/25, ff. 235r-239r. 8 November 1434).

⁴⁴ Antoni Vinyes, bailiff of Torrelló, a small urban centre in the surrounding area of Vic, bought 7.5 palms of red taffeta "*per folradures de les mànegues*" for s. 24 per *cana* to the cloth merchant Jaume Mateu (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3884, f. 37v. 22 March 1409).

⁴⁵ Sleeves' linings only represented 26 per cent of all silk linings listed in the *post-mortem* inventories of Barcelona and 20 per cent in the case of Vic. Therefore, this estimation probably downplays the actual consumption of silk cloth as, in fact, most silk linings were larger pieces used to cover mantles (Table 4).

Table 7. Silk garments and accessories listed in the post-mortem inventories of Barcelona and Vic during the first half of the 15th century

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
BARCELONA															
Garments	4	9.8	0.2	3	0.6	5	10.6	0.2	4	0.7	10	22.7	0.8	16	2.6
Pieces of clothing	3	7.3	0.2	4	0.7	5	10.6	0.3	5	0.9	12	27.3	0.9	13	2.5
Head accessories	9	22	0.4	3.5	0.8	10	21.3	1	17	2.9	12	27.3	1.4	11	2.9
Belts	10	24.4	0.4	3.5	0.7	10	21.3	0.5	8	1.4	13	29.5	0.3	2	0.6
Pouches	11	26.8	0.5	4	0.9	9	19.1	0.4	5	1	12	27.3	0.5	5	1
Linings	21	51.2	1.1	4	1.4	20	42.6	1	5	1.4	8	19	0.3	4	0.7
<i>Lining of mantles</i>	14	34.1	0.5	3	0.9	16	34	0.5	3	0.9	4	9.1	0.1	4	0.6
<i>Lining of hoods</i>	2	4.9	0.1	2	0.4	1	2.1	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Lining for sleeves (in pairs)</i>	8	19.5	0.2	2	0.5	15	31.9	0.4	2	0.6	1	2.3	0	1	0.2
Bands, guards and trimmings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	13.6	0.3	4	0.8
Raw textiles	11	26.8	0.4	4.5	0.9	12	25.5	0.4	4.5	1	3	6.8	0.1	3	0.6
Total	28	68.3	3	12.5	3.4	25	53.2	3.7	26.5	6.4	26	59.1	4.5	48	9.4
VIC															
Garments	3	2.8	0.1	3.5	0.4	2	1.8	0	0.5	0.1	7	10.9	0.1	3	0.5
Pieces of clothing	2	1.9	0	3	0.3	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	8	12.5	0.2	5	0.8
Head accessories	14	13.1	0.7	15	2.4	20	18.3	0.5	12	1.6	14	21.9	0.7	9	1.7
Belts	13	12.1	0.2	3	0.6	3	2.8	0	1	0.2	6	9.4	0.1	2	0.4

(Continued)

Table 7. (Continued.)

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
Pouches	23	21.5	0.3	3	0.6	16	14.7	0.2	4	0.5	8	12.5	0.2	4	0.7
Linings	47	43.9	1	11	1.7	39	35.8	0.6	4	0.9	12	18.8	0.4	4	0.8
<i>Lining of mantles</i>	27	25.2	0.4	4	0.8	26	23.9	0.3	3	0.6	7	10.9	0.1	2	0.5
<i>Lining of hoods</i>	7	6.5	0.1	5	0.7	4	3.7	0	2	0.3	3	4.7	0.1	3	0.4
<i>Lining for sleeves (in pairs)</i>	19	17.8	0.2	2	0.5	12	11	0.1	2	0.4	6	9.4	0.1	1	0.3
Bands, guards and trimmings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	9.4	0.2	3	0.6
Raw textiles	4	3.7	0.1	2.5	0.3	11	10.1	0.1	2.5	0.5	12	18.8	0.6	10.5	1.9
Total	59	55.1	2.3	32.5	4.7	61	56	1.5	12.5	2.3	29	45.3	2.5	21.75	4.7

Note: (1) The category of Garments includes all bodices (*cossets*), doublets (*gipons*), gowns and overcoats (*aljubes*, *almeixies*, *brials*, *clotxes* and *sacs de vestir*), mantles (*mantes*) and shirts (*alcandores*) made of silk. The category of Pieces of Clothing includes collars (*collars* and *cabessos*), cuffs (*punys*) and sleeves (*mànigues*) made of silk. The category of Head Accessories includes all veils and neckcloths (*alfardes*, *cabets*, *draps de coll*, *rapassells*, *trescolls*, *vels* and *volandes*), hair nets (*gandalles*), hair laces (*cordes de cúa*) and hats and hoods (*capells* and *caperons*) made of silk. The category of belts includes all *cinnyells*, *corretges*, *esquerpes* made of silk and *savastres* and the category of pouches includes *bosses*, *carners*, *clauers* and *marçapans* made of silk. At last, the category of Bands, Guards and Trimmings includes all *cerques*, *cortapises*, *mostres* and *perfills* made of silk. Additionally, this last category also includes all those sleeves “*ab vellut*”. I have assumed that they were sleeves decorated with velvet strips.

(2) The statistical analysis of this table and the following ones do not take into account ecclesiastic garments and accessories made of silk.

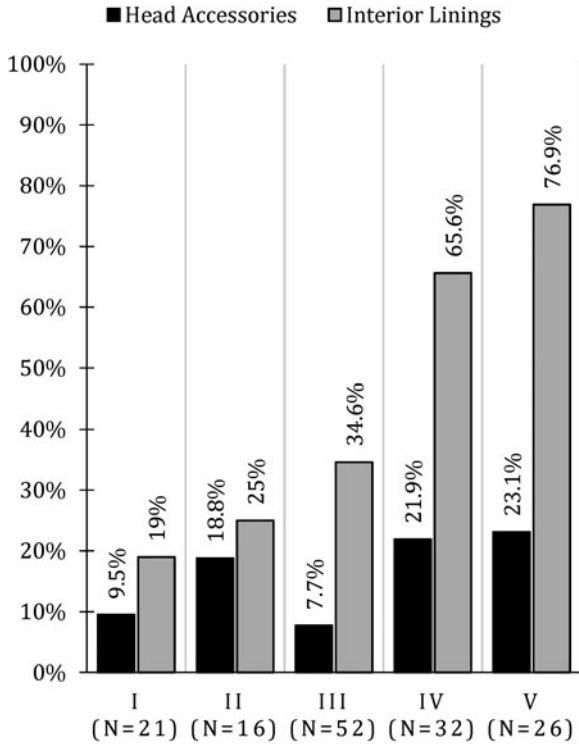


Figure 1. Number of after-death inventories (%) listing silk linings and head accessories during the first decade of the 15th century.

three or even four veils⁴⁶. Alongside these veils, Catalan consumers also adorned themselves with silk hair nets (*gandalles*), hair laces (*cordes de cúa*) and to a lesser extent, hats and hoods (*capells* and *caperons*). Head accessories fashioned from silk were quite uncommon. They were found in less than 25 per cent of the Catalan urban households, regardless of their social position (Figure 1).

Beyond silk linings and head accessories, in the early 15th century, Catalan consumers also decorated their garments with a variety of silk accessories. Better-off women stylised their gowns with silk and gold laces while others opted for the elegance of silk fringes to adorn their cuffs⁴⁷. Alongside these accessories, some Catalan households also owned luxurious belts made of silver and silk which were not only fashionable accessories but also valuable goods that could be pawned in times of economic difficulties⁴⁸. At last, a small

⁴⁶ “un ligar de vells de seda stufats, çó és, dos colls e un cabet” and “un ligar de vels de li, çó és, dos colls e un cabet” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3779, ff. 140r-163v. 15 November, 1457), “II ligars de vels stuffats de drap de li, en cascun dels quals ligars havie III pessés, ja usats” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-9. 5 November, 1450) and “dos vels, çó és, un cap e un coll de sede stufats” and “dos altres vels, çó és, cap e coll de cotó ab cresp larch” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3779, ff. 172r-173v. 3 October, 1457). For the statistical analysis, I have considered that all *ligars* consisted of three veils, when not specified.

⁴⁷ “una altre aljuba de dona de Mellines vermelles folrades en lo cors d’anynes blanques, ab les mànagues folrades de panxes de vays ab cordadura de cordons de seda vermella a cascun costat” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3753, ff. 419r-435v. 29 July 1402); “I^a gonella de verví vermell de la dita Johaneta ab puyets vermells de grana ab flocadura de seda verda” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3763, ff. 101r-113r. 24 September 1410); “una aljuba de dona de Mallines de grana, folrada de pell blanca, forrada de vays en les mànagues e ab vays per peus ab cordonetes de seda” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3884, ff. 1r-46v. 22 March 1409).

⁴⁸ “una corega de argent ab parxa de seda ab XXXIII platons de argent daurats ab cap e sivella la qual és de la filla d’en mosen Luis de Mur stà payora per IX florins e per forat una civella de pell blanca” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-3. 6 May 1408).

Table 8. Material composition of all the silk clothing items listed in the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic

	Atzeituní		Brocade		Camacas		Cendal		Damascene		Gold-and-silk		Satin		Silk		Taffeta		Terçanell		Velvet	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full silk garments	3	27.3	0	0	2	66.7	0	0	5	16.4	0	0	3.5	25.9	33.5	7.1	0	0	0.5	0.4	19	14
Silk pieces of clothing	0	0	1	15.4	0	0	0	0	8	26.2	9	24	5	37	11	2.3	0	0	0	0	45	33.1
Silk head accessories	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.5	6.4	1	3.3	0	0	0	0	282.5	60	2	1.2	0	0	5	3.7
Silk pouches	4	36.4	2	30.8	0	0	2	2.8	10	32.8	21	56	1	7.4	58	12.3	0	0	0	0	26	19.1
Silk belts	1	9.1	2	30.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.7	0	0	77.5	16.5	0	0	0	0	3	2.2
Silk linings	2	18.2	0	0	1	33.3	44	62.4	1	3.3	0	0	3.5	25.9	1	0.2	139	85.5	97.5	78.6	2	1.5
Silk bands and guards	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	22	16.2
Silk raw textiles	0.5	4.5	1.5	23.1	0	0	20	28.4	5.5	18	6.5	17.3	0.5	3.7	6.5	1.4	21.5	13.2	26	21	14	10.3
Total	11	100	6.5	100	3	100	70.5	100	30.5	100	37.5	100	13.5	100	471	100	162.5	100	124	100	136	100

number of Catalan families also owned silk pouches (Table 7). These small clothing accessories constituted one of the most lavishing forms of silk consumption of the early 15th century. They were often made of the most expensive fabrics of that time, such as velvet, gold-and-silk cloth and *atzeituní* and they were richly decorated with gold embroidery, gold buttons and pearls (Table 8)⁴⁹. Thus, Catalan after-death inventories demonstrate that late-medieval consumers employed small quantities of silk to improve their outer appearance through the use of veils, ribbons, laces, belts and pouches.

The dressing practices of the early 15th century largely revolved around the type of silk fabric that was most consumed. Because interior linings were typically made of lighter and cheaper silk fabrics, taffetas, cendals, *terçanells* and *atzeitunis* were the most socially widespread fabrics among the Catalan urban population (Table 9). In contrast, the consumption of more elaborate and costly silks such as damascenes, gold-and-silk cloth or velvets was very low. Most of these luxurious fabrics were used to make small clothing items, predominantly pouches, no bigger than one's hand (Table 8)⁵⁰. Less than one-third of the Catalan urban population owned articles of clothing fashioned from these expensive silks (Table 9). Moreover, the majority of these items were found among the wealthiest members of Catalan urban society. The lower social groups rarely participated in the consumption of elaborate silks (Figure 3)⁵¹.

To summarise, Catalan after-death inventories have demonstrated that, in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, silk consumption was not confined to a small aristocratic and patrician elite. A significant number of households belonging to all social groups of Catalan urban society owned silk items, albeit in small quantities. The most predominant form of silk consumption was interior linings made of lighter and cheaper silk. Moreover, many households also owned a variety of silk accessories, including veils, neckcloths, hair laces, hair nets, hats, belts and pouches. This consumer behaviour remained largely unchanged until the second quarter of the 15th century. Until 1435, the predominant form of silk consumption continued to be silk linings, although in the later period, there was a noticeable shift towards the use of *terçanell* instead of taffeta or cendal (Tables 7 and 9).

4. Silk, Catalonia's newest luxury fabric

Over the course of the first half of the 15th century, the consumption of high-quality woolen garments, particularly those from Northern Europe, experienced a substantial decline (Tables 4 and 5). This downturn was the result of a supply crisis. English wool exports to the European continent dramatically decreased from the third decade of the 15th century onwards, severely damaging the luxury cloth industries of Northern Europe that were largely dependent on high-quality English wool for the production of luxury woollens⁵².

⁴⁹ “una bossa d'e-zaytoní blava ab botons d'aur de Lucha” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, 1-3. Inventory of Eulàlia Quirze); “una bossa d'atzaytoni ab perles al miq qui ret letres” (ACB, Gabriel Canyelles, vol. 342, plec 33, ff. 1r-12v. 4 July 1405); “I carner de vellut vermell ab obres d'or” (ACB, Gabriel Canyelles, vol. 343, plec 14. 8 June 1406); “una bossa d'atzeituní blau, brodada d'aur ab senyal de font” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3753, ff. 419r-435v. 29 July 1402); “una boça d'or ab botons d'or e flochs de sede blava” (ABEV, ACF-3752. 1 March 1400).

⁵⁰ “dos trossos de drap d'or en camp vermell qui són cascu axí com la mà en què pot haver una bossa” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3759, ff. 80r-84v. 25 May 1425).

⁵¹ The only after-death inventory listing elaborated and costly silks among those individuals with zero or one room was the one belonging to Miquel Francolí. As a trumpet player of Barcelona, he owned two *atzeituní* doublets, which likely served as part of their professional attire (ACB, Gabriel Canyelles, vol. 341, plec 14. 15 July 1405).

⁵² Historians disagree about the causes that led to the decline of the English wool trade. For some, it was the result of the increasing tax burden on English wool exports (Lloyd, 1977). Others have claimed that this decline was caused by the high livestock mortality of the 1430s, that resulted from a disease outbreak and bad weather

Table 9. Material composition of all silk fabrics listed in the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic during the first half of the 15th century

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
BARCELONA															
<i>Atzeituní</i>	4	9.8	0.1	2	0.5	3	6.4	0.1	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
Cendal	11	26.8	0.3	2	0.5	5	10.6	0.2	3.5	0.7	0	0	0	0	0
Satin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	15.9	0.2	1.5	0.4
Taffeta	16	39	1	4	1.5	3	6.4	0.1	3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Terçanell</i>	2	4.9	0	1	0.2	20	42.6	0.9	4	1.3	2	4.5	0.1	4	0.6
Plain silks	22	53.7	1.5	6.5	1.9	23	48.9	1.2	6	1.7	8	18.2	0.3	4	0.7
Brocade	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	0	1.5	0.2	3	6.8	0.1	1	0.3
Camacas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.8	0.1	1	0.3
Damascene	3	7.3	0.2	2.5	0.6	2	4.3	0.1	2	0.3	10	22.7	0.4	4	0.9
Gold-and-silk cloth	5	12.2	0.1	1	0.3	5	10.6	0.2	4.5	0.8	5	11.4	0.3	7	1.1
Velvet and <i>vellutat</i>	7	17.1	0.4	8	1.4	7	14.9	0.4	6	1.2	12	27.3	1.4	23	4
Elaborated silks	12	29.3	0.7	8	1.5	11	23.4	0.8	7.5	1.6	18	40.9	2.2	34	5.7
Other silk items	16	39	0.8	4	1.2	18	38.3	1.9	23	4.4	19	43.2	2	17.5	4
Total	28	68.3	3	12.5	3.4	25	53.2	3.7	26.5	6.4	26	59.1	4.5	48	9.4
VIC															
<i>Atzeituní</i>	2	1.9	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cendal	10	9.3	0.1	2	0.4	16	14.7	0.2	4	0.6	7	10.9	0.2	4	0.6

Satin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	10.9	0.1	1.3	0.3
Taffeta	41	38.3	0.9	13	1.8	14	12.8	0.2	3	0.5	2	3.1	0.1	4	0.5
<i>Terçanell</i>	5	4.7	0.1	2	0.3	21	19.3	0.3	5.5	0.8	15	23.4	0.6	8	1.5
Plain silks	47	43.9	1.1	13	2	44	40.4	0.7	5.5	1.1	19	29.7	0.9	13.8	2.5
Brocade	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	2	0.3
Damascene	2	1.9	0	3	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gold-and-silk cloth	0	0	0	0	0	5	4.6	0.1	2	0.3	2	3.1	0	1	0.2
Velvet and <i>vellutat</i>	8	7.5	0.1	2	0.3	7	6.4	0.1	1	0.2	11	17.2	0.4	6	1.1
Elaborated silks	9	8.4	0.1	4	0.5	11	10.1	0.1	3	0.4	12	18.8	0.5	6	1.2
Other silk items	30	28	1.1	19	3	27	24.8	0.7	12	1.7	17	26.6	1.1	11	2.4
Total	59	55.1	2.3	32.5	4.7	61	56	1.5	12.5	2.3	29	45.3	2.5	21.8	4.7

Note: (1) I have assumed that the word *atzeituni* was the Catalan equivalent of the Italian *zetano*. As such, I have considered that it was a plain silk that could serve as a ground weave for velvet (*zetano vellutato*). The substitution of *atzeituni* for *setí* in the mid-15th century could probably indicate the success of the Italian silk production over their Oriental and Muslim competitors. When *atzeitunis* appeared associated with pouches, it is very likely that they were voided satin velvets. When they were used as linings it is very likely that they were plain satins (see also [Table 8](#)).

(2) All clothing items described as “*de drap d’or*” or simply “*d’or*” have been considered to be made of gold-and-silk cloth. However, it is possible that some might have been embroidered with gold.

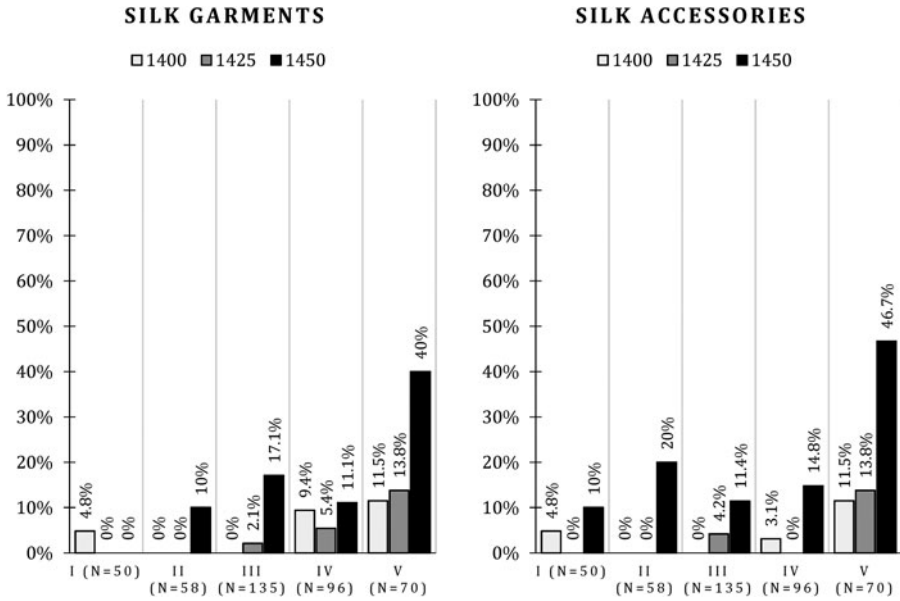


Figure 2. Number of after-death inventories (%) listing silk garments and accessories during the first 60 years of the 15th century, according to the economic position of the household.

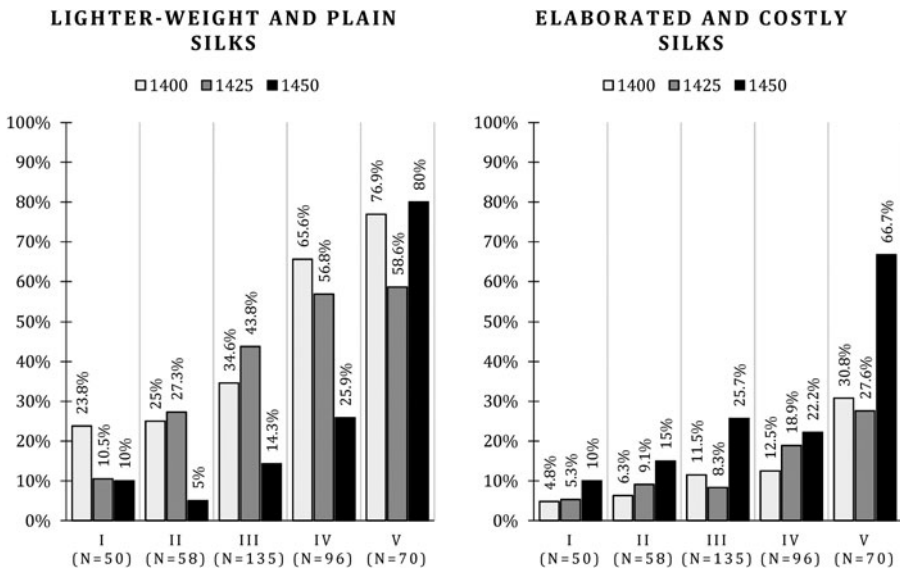


Figure 3. Number of after-death inventories (%) that listed lighter and cheaper silk fabrics and elaborate and costly silks during the first half of the 15th century.

conditions (Hatcher, 1996, pp. 241–243, 246). At last, some historians have argued that the fall of English wool exports was caused by the bullion laws established in the Low Countries (Munro, 1999, pp. 37–40; 2003, pp. 278–283).

The repercussions of this crisis were felt across all social groups of Catalan society. By the mid-15th century, Northern European cloths had almost completely disappeared from all Catalan households (Table 6). Additionally, scarlet woollens or cloths dyed with kermes also experienced a significant decline, as most woollens dyed with this expensive colorant substance were made in these same cloth manufacturing centres (Table 4)⁵³. In contrast, Florentine luxury cloths, which were also made from English wool, managed to hold their ground much better (Table 6).

To confront this situation, Catalan consumers sought new ways to demonstrate their status and social aspirations. The more available English cloths and silk fabrics seem to have suited the taste of the Catalan population. In the early 15th century, Catalan after-death inventories had rarely listed garments made of English cloth. Northern European and Florentine high-quality woollens had dominated the luxury sectors of the Catalan textile markets. However, over the course of the first half of the 15th century, Bristol cloths (*bristons*) progressively gained prominence, especially among the upper and middle groups of Catalan urban society (Tables 5 and 6). The expansion of these textiles in Catalonia was not an isolated occurrence but rather an illustrative case of a broader European trend, in which English woollens were gradually capturing all European cloth markets. This process was fostered by the technological development of the English cloth industry and the relatively low tax burden on English cloth exports⁵⁴. Thus, it is in this context that British cloths would have replaced Northern European high-quality woollens in Catalonia.

The crisis of the Northern European luxury cloth industries would have also stimulated the emergence of silk as Catalonia's newest luxury fabric. Throughout the 15th century, the number of Catalan urban households that owned silk garments increased by 12 per cent in Barcelona, and 9 per cent in Vic (Tables 4 and 7). Although its consumption was primarily confined to the wealthiest members of Catalan urban society, a minority of individuals from the middling layers of the Catalan urban population also partook in its consumption (Figure 2). Interestingly, the expansion of silk during this period did not always entail the consumption of garments entirely made out of silk. In some cases, silk was incorporated as clothing accessories, for instance collars, sleeves or cuffs (Table 7). Despite their relatively small size, these accessories were predominantly favoured by the wealthiest members of Catalan society. Only 10–20 per cent of the households belonging to the lower and middling groups owned silk collars, sleeves or cuffs, whereas nearly 47 per cent of the richest households embraced these accessories (Figure 2).

In parallel to the increasing popularity of silk garments and accessories, interior linings made of costly materials such as silk were gradually replaced by more visible silk bands, guards or trimmings that were worn along the necklines and the edges of the garments (Table 7). These bands and trimmings were simple strips of cloth that could easily be made from leftover cuttings. In fact, some mid-15th-century after-death inventories described some garments that were embellished with samples (*mostres*) of silk cloth⁵⁵. Therefore, this practice ensure that not even an inch of this precious material was wasted.

⁵³ Thirty-one per cent of all scarlet garments or woollens dyed with kermes listed in the Catalan after-death inventories were produced in foreign cloth manufacturing centres. However, the majority belonged to the first decade of the 15th century (54 per cent of all scarlet garments for that period were of foreign origin). Thus, on the evidence of the Catalan after-death inventories, it seems that the Principality of Catalonia managed to develop a luxury dyeing industry during the first half of the 15th century, without completely substituting the early fifteenth demand for scarlet cloths.

⁵⁴ Munro (1999, pp. 37–40; 2003, pp. 278–283).

⁵⁵ See, for instance, “una cota de dona de mesclat largue e senar. Los punys e mostres de velutat negre” (AHPB, 175/91, ff. 265r–265v. 22 August 1459); “1 roba de drap de lana leonat, ab les mostres e cerques de vallut vert, folrada de tela verda, qui-s diu ésser de na Johan Antigua, filla del dit deffunt” (AHCB, Arxiu Notarial, Inventaris, I-9. 7 September

Table 10. Material composition of the linings listed in the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic during the first half of the 15th century

	1400–1410					1425–1435					1450–1460				
	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.	Inv.	%	Mean	Max.	St. Dev.
BARCELONA															
Wool and <i>Mescla</i>	24	58.5	1.3	4.5	1.4	16	34	0.7	7	1.3	24	54.5	1.9	14.5	3.3
Undyed White Wool	6	14.6	0.2	2	0.6	4	8.5	0.1	3	0.5	7	15.9	0.4	8.5	1.4
Lighter-Weight Wools	8	19.5	0.3	4	0.9	2	4.3	0	1	0.2	12	27.3	0.6	4	1.1
Linen and Hemp	14	34.1	0.5	5	1	17	36.2	0.9	7	1.6	23	52.3	1.4	14	2.6
Cotton and Fustian	10	24.4	0.5	6	1.2	7	14.9	0.2	2	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
Silks	21	51.2	1.1	4	1.4	20	42.6	1	5	1.4	8	18.2	0.2	4	0.7
Fur	34	82.9	3.4	13	3.3	32	68.1	3	16	4	15	34.1	0.6	7.5	1.3
Camlet	2	4.9	0.1	2	0.3	1	2.1	0	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0
Other or unknown materials	9	22	0.3	3	0.6	9	19.1	0.2	2	0.5	11	25	0.3	3	0.6
Total	38	92.7	7.1	26	6.2	35	74.5	6	32	7.5	36	81.8	4.5	37	6.7
VIC															
Wool and <i>Mescla</i>	33	30.8	0.5	10	1.3	47	43.1	0.7	4	1	42	65.6	1.2	7.5	1.4
Undyed white wool	8	7.5	0.1	2	0.4	5	4.6	0.1	2	0.3	17	26.6	0.4	6.5	1
Lighter-weight wools	11	10.3	0.1	1	0.3	1	0.9	0	1	0.1	8	12.5	0.1	2	0.4
Linen and Hemp	19	17.8	0.2	4	0.5	25	22.9	0.4	5	0.9	26	40.6	0.6	4	1
Cotton and Fustian	7	6.5	0.1	1	0.2	7	6.4	0.1	3	0.4	1	1.6	0	1	0.1
Silks	47	43.9	1	11	1.7	39	35.8	0.6	4	0.9	12	18.8	0.4	4	0.8
Fur	58	54.2	1.8	18	2.9	49	45	1.2	10	1.7	20	31.3	0.7	7	1.3
Camlet	2	1.9	0	1	0.1	2	1.8	0	1.5	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
Other or unknown materials	26	24.3	0.4	4	0.8	33	30.3	0.4	4	0.7	26	40.6	0.5	3	0.8
Total	77	72	4	31	5.6	80	73.4	3.3	16	3.5	52	81.3	3.4	13	3.1

The substitution of silk linings with silk bands and guards decreased the use of interior linings, but it did not imply their complete disappearance. Catalan after-death inventories indicate that silk linings were partially replaced with linings made of linen and wool, especially white woollens (*blanquet*) and lighter-weight wool fabrics, such as friezes (*frieçons*), osettes (*ostedes*) and says (*saies*), as the mean figures in Table 10 seem to suggest. This change would have emphasised the role of interior linings as discreet layers of cloth designed to provide both comfort and warmth.

5. Evolving silk fabrics: the rise of elaborate and costly silk fabrics

The adoption of new dressing practices during the middling decades of the 15th century took place at the same time that lighter and cheaper silks were substituted for more expensive and elaborate silk fabrics. During the first half of the 15th century, the ownership of brocades, damascenes, camacas and, above all, velvets, witnessed a significant rise, reaching nearly 43 per cent of the Barcelonese households, and 20 per cent of the households in Vic. The success of luxury silks can be primarily attributed to the rising popularity of velvet, which, by the mid-15th century, had become the most widespread silk fabric in Barcelona, and secured the second-highest position in Vic. Nevertheless, the consumption of other elaborate fabrics such as brocades, damascenes and camacas also underwent a significant expansion during the second quarter of the 15th century, especially in Barcelona (Table 9). The inherent beauty of these silk fabrics, characterised by their intricate motives skilfully woven in various piles and depicting diverse themes in their surface, would have contributed to transform silk garments and accessories into instruments of social affirmation that expressed elegance, refinement and distinction⁵⁶.

These costly silk fabrics replaced cheaper and lighter silks, such as cendals, taffetas and *terçanells*. Only satins (*seti*) gained new consumers. In contrast, taffeta, which had been the most widespread silk fabric in the early 15th century, had completely disappeared from all the Barcelonese households by the mid-15th century. In Vic, this fabric was only documented in 3 per cent of all the after-death inventories. Moreover, the consumption of *terçanells*, which had become the most popular silk fabric during 1425–1435, rapidly fell in disuse. In the mid-15th century, only the inhabitants of small urban centres owned *terçanells* in significant quantities (Table 9).

The shift towards more elaborate and costly silks becomes more evident when examining the consumer behaviour of the different social groups within the Catalan urban population. Regardless of their economic position, all layers of Catalan society show a growing preference for elaborate and expensive silk fabrics. Interestingly, the wealthiest consumers witnessed the most substantial increase in the consumption of elaborate silks, despite being the largest consumers in the earlier 15th century. At the same time, nearly all social groups showed a decreasing preference for lighter-weight silks. Only the most affluent households continued to opt for plain silks in the mid-15th century (Figure 3). Thus, this social analysis not only reveals the widespread involvement of society in this material transition, but it also stresses the leading role played by socioeconomic elites in shaping new consumer practices.

This material shift in the consumption of silk fabrics was intrinsically linked to adoption of new dressing practices. Table 8 shows that luxury silks were worn in a completely different way in comparison to the early 15th-century lighter-weight and cheaper silk fabrics. While cendals, taffetas and *terçanells* were almost exclusively used as interior linings,

1450); “un cosset de drap de li ab mostres de seda blanca ab brots de ffill d’or e fulletes d’argent sobredeurades, tot levadis” (ABEV, ACF, vol. 3779, ff. 140r–163v. 15 November 1457).

⁵⁶ Franceschi (2020, p. 96).

brocades, damascenes, gold-and-silk cloths and velvets were predominantly turned into pouches (in the early 15th century), and into collars, cuffs, sleeves, bands, guards and trimmings (in the mid-15th century). The only exception to this classification were *atzeitunis* and *setins*. These textiles were employed in the elaboration of garments, pieces of clothing, pouches, linings and even belts. Therefore, Table 8 indicates that the adoption of silk as a luxury fabric in the mid-15th century did not only imply the consumption of silk garments and accessories, but also the consumption of more expensive and elaborate silks.

If the diffusion of silk garments and accessories occurred at the same time as luxury silks became more popular, it seems plausible to argue that silk was only adopted as a luxury fabric by Catalan society once Italian silk artisans had perfected the manufacture of elaborated silk fabrics. Indeed, from my perspective, the integration of silk in the dressing practices of the Catalan consumers was not only the result of a substitution process in which high-quality woollens were gradually replaced with silk fabrics, but it was also the result of the technological advancements of the European silk industry⁵⁷. Until the late 14th century, Catalan consumers who wished to buy luxury silks had had to rely on Oriental silk imports. The dependence on long-distant trading networks for the supply of luxury silk fabrics would have hindered their consumption, stimulating the use of high-quality woollens as luxury fabrics⁵⁸. Consequently, from the 13th century onwards, luxury wool clothes had become markers of social distinction and status⁵⁹. Once silk artisans in Italy and in the Iberian Peninsula made silk fabrics widely available to Catalan consumers, they made possible the adoption of silk as a luxury fabric. In doing so, they contributed to changing the pre-existing conception of luxury and reshaped the material culture of clothing.

6. Final remarks

To conclude, the analysis of the after-death inventories of Barcelona and Vic has provided a detailed picture of how consumer preferences towards silk fabrics changed during the first half of the 15th century. Catalan *post-mortem* inventories have demonstrated that, in the early 15th century, silk garments were extremely rare. Luxury clothes were predominantly made of the finest English wool varieties, they were dyed with the most expensive dyestuffs of that time, and they were made in the most prestigious manufacturing centres of Europe. In contrast, silk was mainly used for interior linings, head accessories, belts and pouches. Moreover, the majority of silk items in the early 15th century were made of lighter and cheaper silk fabrics, such as cendals, taffetas and *terçanells*. The consumption of more expensive and elaborate silks such as damascenes, gold-and-silk cloths and velvets was quite rare.

However, the consumption of luxury textiles started to change during the second quarter of the 15th century, probably due to a wool supply crisis that severely damaged the European production of luxury cloths. Consequently, Catalan consumers sought new products to substitute these high-quality woollens. After-death inventories seem to suggest that the newer and more available silks and English woollens would have suited this purpose. During the middling decades of the 15th century, a growing number of Catalan consumers started to wear garments made entirely out of silk. Yet, the adoption of silk as a luxury fabric did not always entail the consumption of silk garments. It often implied the consumption of small clothing accessories worn in a more visible and conspicuous

⁵⁷ This argument draws from the work of Giorgio Riello who linked the 18th-century rise of cotton textiles to Europe's technological development (Riello, 2009).

⁵⁸ Mainoni (2017, pp. 226–232).

⁵⁹ To Figueras (2016, p. 523).

manner. Thus, in Catalonia, the substitution of high-quality woollens with silk fabrics was a gradual process. In its initial stages, it involved the consumption of silk garments and silk accessories, and it was largely confined to the wealthiest groups of Catalan urban society.

The adoption of silk as a luxury fabric also implied a material turn in the consumption of silk fabrics. Lighter and cheaper silks were replaced by more expensive and elaborate silk fabrics, such as brocades, damascenes, camacas, gold-and-silk cloths and, above all, velvets. The transition from lighter and plain silk fabrics to more elaborated and costly ones was only possible once the Italian silk artisans had perfected the elaboration of luxury silks. The 14th-century technological innovations of the Italian silk industry and their diffusion in the Iberian Peninsula broadened the offer of silk cloths and made silk fabrics more easily available to the European society as a whole. Thus, both economic and technological factors played a crucial role in the adoption of silk as Catalonia's newest luxury fabric.

Ultimately, this article has aimed to link the changes in the demand for luxury textiles among the Catalan urban population to the developments that the late-medieval silk industry experienced at that time. It has successfully demonstrated that there was a notable rise in the consumption of silk fabrics among the Catalan urban population in line with the expansion of the Italian and Iberian silk industries. However, it is important to acknowledge that until the mid-15th century, silk consumption remained largely confined to the wealthiest urban households. Although the ownership of silk garments and accessories did increase among the rest of Catalan urban society, it stayed comparatively low. Considering that economic theory states that changes in demand must involve a substantial portion of society to have meaningful economic consequences, it might be worth exploring the consumption trends of other European regions. Catalonia may not fully represent the consumer behaviour of the broader European population due to local factors that might have limited the expansion of silk across broader layers of Catalan society. Hence, studying silk consumption in regions with different economic, social and cultural characteristics than Catalonia could provide a valuable insight into this matter as their aggregate demand might have played a more important role in the expansion of the late-medieval silk industry than that of Catalonia. Additionally, it may also prove useful to study the consumer demand of other Catalan actors, such as institutions. Their demand could have significantly contributed to the expansion of the late-medieval silk industry. Finally, extending the analysis to later periods may also be interesting to determine when silk garments became accessible to broader layers of Catalan society.

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