

“RECOGNIZABLE” TEXTILES IN DAILY PRACTICES OF THE 16TH-CENTURY FLORENCE**Kateryna Hotsalo****«Впізнавані» тканини в повсякденних практиках Флоренції XVI ст.****Катерина Гоцало**

Метою статті є формування семіотики текстилю в контексті його використання в повсякденних практиках міста Флоренція протягом XVI ст. Дослідження можливість різних представників міста сприймати тканини в якості символу та зміння ідентифікувати різні види текстилю «на око». Стаття складається з трьох тематичних частин. Перша присвячена вивченням тих характеристик тканин, які були визначальними у формуванні їх семіотики. Було з'ясовано, що матеріали та техніки виготовлення текстилю слугували такими характеристиками. Так як створення тканин було кропітким процесом, їх функція в якості символу статусу користувача була винятково важливою. Друга частина присвячена тим виробничим процесам в межах міст, які сприяли обміну технологіями та дизайном тканин, а як наслідок, сприйняттю користувачами текстилю такої його складової як орнамент. В третьій частині статті розглядаються конкретні приклади перцепції самими флорентійцями тих або інших тканин. Звертається увага на те, яким чином описувався текстиль в різних писемних джерелах. Різноманітні міські практики сприяли тому, що представники різних верств населення вміли розрізняти види текстилю. Тканини ставали допоміжним способом для ідентифікації статусу та походження їх носія. Орнаменти, залежно від матеріалів, використаних для їх виготовлення, також були символічними. З іншого боку, окремі елементи більшості поширених візерунків на тканинах не сприймалися в якості символів та не могли бути ідентифіковані міськими мешканцями.

Ключові слова: текстиль, Флоренція, XVI ст., символіка, орнамент.

Nowadays, it is almost impossible for a simple layman to determine the quality of textiles "by eye": modern technology makes it easy to imitate any fabric. During the previous centuries, when the manufacture of textiles was a laborious process, using expensive materials, fabric became a particular symbol because each person, depending on income and sumptuary law, used a different one and, therefore, could distinguish it.

Brilliant researches have studied the Florentine material culture, its clothing and textile production. Especially valuable for the context of current investigation are previous achievements in studies of the history of the Florentine costume of such researches as Bruna Niccoli and Roberta Orsi Landini (Landini, Nicoli 2019). An outstanding academic and historian Carole Collier Frick held the extensive investigation, concerning various aspects of the renaissance Florentine clothing (Frick 2002). One of the most influential researchers of the Florentine economic studies, who also paid attention to the issue of the development and functioning of textile production, is Richard Goldthwaite (Goldthwaite 2009). However, the biggest part of the previous investigations has dedicated to the symbolism of the ready-to-wear clothes or to the economic side of the textile

production system. Despite the big amount of the ancient fabrics preserved in different art collections, their semiotic tradition in the early modern times has not become a theme of the separate research.

“The clothing chosen by and for young women carried multiple meanings. The cut, color, and fabric signaled its economic value” – concluded the researcher Megan Moran (Moran 2018, p. 181). Well-known scientists, thus, underlined the symbolic function of textiles during the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

Nonetheless, the other side of this scientific problem is a goal of this study. To reach a conclusion on this topic, we would propose the following research questions:

- Was the fabric an understandable symbol for different representatives of 16th-century Florentine society?
- What particular characteristics of textiles were symbolic in context of city life?
- How one can use characteristics of preserved ancient fabrics in broader scientific research?

Some textiles, produced in Italy over the 15th-17th centuries, from the collection of the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts involves into this investigation. Almost all Italian fabrics of the museum's collection the collectors Bogdan and Varvara Khanenko bought



directly in Italy, while visiting famous auctions of the late 19th-early 20th centuries (K.M.A., aids 1 file 14, p. 73). The items they bought were often small pieces of fabrics. Obviously, the Khanenkos recognized the value of such textile samples for the visual culture of past centuries. They decorated the house's interiors used these textiles abundantly, imitating European dwellings of the 15th-18th centuries (K. M. A., aids 1, f. 2. 14, p. 14).

Because of the peculiarities of textiles' production and using, it is often hard to establish the provenance of the concrete fabrics as well as the geography of their utilization. On the other hand, written and visual sources can support the popularity of different types of textiles within defined territories. To research semiosis of fabrics in 16th-century Florence, the investigation complements with the study of specific cases of textiles' using, known from visual and written sources.

*Fig. 1. Interior of the Khanenkos house
Beginning of the 20th century*

with the study of specific cases of textiles' using, known from visual and written sources.

Recognizable characteristics of valuable fabrics

According to Michael Baxandall's research, it is very important to catch the difference between the renaissance term “ornate” and the modern perception of its sense. If the renaissance meaning of “ornate” is closer to such qualities as richness, liveliness and charm, the old term “ornamenti” has more in common with the modern understanding of the word “ornaments” – decorative embroidery and embellishments (Baxandall 1988, p. 131). In this context Baxandall paid attention to the Leonardo da Vinci's warning of the use of ornaments on paintings: “In narrative

paintings never put so many ornamenti on your figures and other objects that they obscure the form and attitude of the figures or the essence of the objects." (Baxandall 1988, p. 133). Therefore, it is evident that textiles used on paintings could help to interpret their senses. Let us regard the particular example.

From the age of 30 the famous Florentine master Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572) was the court painter of Cosimo I de Medici (1519-1574), duke of Florence. Even though Bronzino was a talented painter while reproducing particular textiles, it is still hard to distinguish their types because of the smoothing surface of the biggest part of paintings. The fabric appeared on the most famous portrait of Eleonora Toledo, the duchess of Florence (1522-1562), also raises a big discussion among scientists. The problem of textiles' recognition is complicated due to the various names of their producing techniques, which written sources often have not concretized.



Fig. 2. Bronzino. *Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo and her son*. Circa 1545. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

type of textile (qualche altro drappo ornato) (ASF MP, f. 374, v. 1175, Doc ID 523). The term "ornato" perceives in this situation, according to Baxandall's notice, as "richness" even more than as "ornament".

This case may be indicative for the current research from different points of view. First of all, the sender of the letter was able to distinguish the particular technique of textile production, even though he did not have a close relation to the manufacture of fabrics. However, the most important are the other aspects of this issue.

Comparing types of the textiles Lorenzo di Pagni underlined that the depicted fabric should be no less beautiful or at least approximately equal to that, which had been planned to be painted (che facci bella mostra). There is only one such a portrait of 1549, that is suitable to the researched document.



Fig. 3. Bronzino. *Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo and her son*. 1545. Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Reale, Pisa, Italy

thread. It is most likely that the Florentines could use one and the same embroidery several times, transferring it from one textile item to another (Landini, Nicolli 2018, p. 7). The importance of materials, used for producing textiles or their embellishments, proves through the existence of a big amount of pattern books, edited throughout the 16th century. The printed ornaments contain the elements common for the high-quality expensive textiles, used by the rich. For instance, patterns for embroidery in the form of heraldic lilies as well as ornaments with Christian emblems and symbols were presented in Italian books of patterns abundantly (Pagano 1554, p. 36). The city dwellers could use them for homemade embroidery and textiles' embellishing freely.

Obviously, these ornaments could appear on various textile items among different representatives of society. However, only the use of expensive materials for reproduction of patterns could make them the symbols of wealth and status.



Fig. 4. Embroidery with gold threads 16th century Italy or Spain Silk, gold thread; velvet, embroidery The Khanenko Museum, Kyiv, Ukraine. 46 TK

According to the picture, the artist substituted the so-called "broccato riccio" textile with another richness — embroidered golden ornament on the red clothes. The abundance of expensive red fabric fills the picture's space.

This example leads to a broadened designation of the textile's semiotic, which has not concretized before. It is obvious that materials of fabric and technique of its production were the main characteristics which underlined person's status. Although the garment of Eleonora Toledo depicted in 1549 has only a bit of ornamentation, compared to the fabric that had been planned to be pictured, it was embroidered with very expensive materials. This type of clothing, therefore, could replace the ornamented one that the artist did not have time to display.

Only by using expensive materials and techniques, ornaments on textiles could gain special meanings. For such orders like Eleanora Toledo's dress, depicted on the researched portrait of 1549, a professional embroiderer made the embellishment. An official delivered the materials for such cases and weighed a finished embroidery to make sure that there was a full amount of gold

The cost of fabrics for wedding dresses was also incredibly high, according to the order made for the clothes of Lucrezia de Medici (1545-1561) and Alfonso II (1559-1597). The big amount of gold-woven textile, which should have been made for the wedding, surprised even weavers. They asked for pre-payment, in connection with cost of the materials, needed to be spent in the process of weaving. Such orders were not common



Fig. 5. Examples of patterns for embroidery from the 16th-century books

ducal palace (La France 2013, p. 68). It is not necessary that Bronzino also was the creator of particular designs of textiles. However, according to the paintings, Bronzino's knowledge of textile types and designs is noticeable.

The portrait of a young woman, painted by Bronzino circa 1540, reflects a very characteristic textile pattern of the 16th century. Making the reference to the Portrait of Lavinia Vecellio by Titian, created circa 1545, one can notice a similar ornament on Lavinia's dress. The very close analogy to the indicated fabrics preserves in the Khanenko Museum. It includes the visible remains of the image of a crown as well as distinct ornament of big stylized leaves with branched pillars and rounded bends. Many similar Italian textiles that nowadays stores in various art collections

still have some insignificant differences both in technological aspects and nuances of designs. Even though they have much in common, apparently, these fabrics were often made in different workshops.

According to the attribution of several researchers, similar items to the textile from the Khanenko Museum collection, were most likely produced in Venice or Florence. The ornament on such fabrics was formed by combining several heights of pile which often calls as alto e basso technique. (Lewandowski 2011, p. 11). Notwithstanding, there is some difference between the structure of such textiles on different paintings; fabrics designs could transfer from one workshop to another even through different cities, excluding only a few cases when particular specific designs were made only in distinctive regions for a long time.

However, during the researched period the textile production of Florence was so noticeable that there was no need to use imported fabrics, with the exception of especially unique ones. This could apply to goods created in Venice, the main Florentine competitor. "I wanted to have the cloth for them from Florence rather than those brought from outside [the city]", — wrote a noble Florentine woman Cassandra Ricasoli, having made an order for cloth



*Fig. 6. Bronzino.
Lady in a dress with a fair-haired
little boy.
Circa 1540 reworked 1545-46.
The National Gallery of Art,
Washington, USA*

practice even among the richest customers (ASF MP, f. 116, v. 470, Doc ID 9560).

This part of the article concludes by arguing that the structure of a fabric as well as materials used for its manufacturing were the most expressive semiotic characteristics of textiles.

Migration of Technologies and Designs

The other textiles on the paintings by Agnolo Bronzino could be also noticeable in the context of the research. Being a designer of tapestries, Bronzino often visited the workshop of such weavers as Jan Rost and Nicolas Karcher, with whom he had been working on the projects for the



Fig. 7. Titian. Circa 1545. Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy

workshop. For instance, the tapestry weaver Bernardo Saliti asked for protection against a partner who was about to open his own manufactory, having desired to establish a new private contract (ASF MP, f. 713, v. 1175, Doc ID 13382).

Secondly, such a valuable customer as the ducal court could give instructions for the creation of specific types of fabrics to several Florentine workshops at once, because of the previous poor-quality creation of tissues by other manufacturers (ASF MP, f. 177, v. 659a, Doc ID 20195). It is obvious that the customer's instructions were fairly accurate which could lead to the



Fig. 8. Textile fragment. 16th century. Italy, Venice or Florence. Silk; velvet. The Khanenko Museum, Kyiv, Ukraine. 33 TK

structures. Famous weavers from Flanders, the center of the tapestry production in Europe, were invited to work in Florence: their skills intertwined with local traditions. Recently, a lot of quality research has been done about these ducal workshops (La France 2013, p. 68). In the context of this study, it is important to mention that three years after arriving in Florence, the Flemish weaver Nicholas Karcher announced that he would like to live and die there (ASF MP, f. 720, v. 1170a, Doc

(Moran 2018, p. 190-191). Since many wealthy families were directly interested in the development of the Florentine economy, they were especially concerned about using local luxurious products (Currie 2008, p. 52).

Wherever the fabric from The Khanenko Museum collection was produced, in Florence or Venice, it is obvious, according to its shape, that it was remade from one object to another several times. However, the green shade of this expensive fabric still impresses which may indicate its careful use.

Similar textiles were also produced in different workshops within the same city, in the current case in Florence, which likely promoted by a number of obvious reasons. Firstly, due to disagreements with partners, prosperous weavers were free to leave workshops to create their own. Sometimes they even poached customers and were more likely to borrow some types of designs, using in a new

In 16th-century Florence there was also a tapestry production, about which we have mentioned before. Although it worked directly for the ducal court, the workshop was located outside their palace. In November 1545 Pagni Lorenzo di Andrea, a diplomat and politician, asked Pierre Francesco Riccio, an official, to find a new location for the court workshop, so as not to disturb the monks of the monastery of Santo Spirito (ASF MP, f. 489, v. 1170, Doc ID 673). It assumes that this tapestry manufactory could be located within the walls of the monastery for some time. Even the workshop of the dukes was located in the open space of the city — it was permanently in its

ID 23901). The fate of the weaver is unknown but it is clear that he spent at least 10 years, working in Florence.

Another practice could also contribute to some exchanges in the field of textile production. For instance, different weaving manufactures sometimes could help each other in the execution of orders. In 1582 the weaver Ligozzi asked the maestro Benedetto, the head of the tapestry-weaving workshop, for help with the execution of an order, so not to be obliged to sell goods, in order to get money for weavers' salaries (ASF MP, f. 199, v. 5928, Doc ID 21645).

The current research strives to highlight the one more aspect of textile production — ornament. It was the patterns that became the component of fabrics, especially migrated from one production to another (Facelle 2009, p. 58). It is obvious that it was textile ornaments that became an important symbol for Italian spectators of the late Middle Ages and the early modern times. However, could the Florentines interpret ornaments on fabrics or perceive them as a whole?

The assumption that ornaments were deeply symbolic has repeatedly stated in the context of many studies. This applies to the "pomegranate" pattern — one of the most popular ornaments of the 15th-16th centuries Italian textiles as well. Scientists of the 19th century gave a conditional name, garnet ornament, for a group of similar patterns. However, various plants are in the basis of such ornaments (Joe 1994, p. 263).

If some fabric designs of the 15th-16th centuries are highly stylized, some still allow to find out exactly, which plants were shown.

According to given examples Italian artists used shapes of such plants as pomegranate, artichoke and thistle so as to create patterns. Some lucky employees of the industry probably had the opportunity to observe rare plants in order to borrow their forms. For instance, artichokes were very popular among the dukes, as their form considered especially exotic. This plant occupied a central place among green vegetables and herbs in the Medici garden, according to the plan of the territory (Pini 2016, p. 11).

Such plants as pomegranate and melon even in the ducal courtyard of the 16th century considered unusual fruits: they were specially delivered for the famous Medici garden (ASF MP, f. 395, v. 1172, Doc ID 20385).

On the contrary, the appearance of the thistle was more widely known: its form was used in the manufacture of jewelry as well (ASF MP, f. 24, v. 643, Doc ID 25338).

For a long time, researchers also attributed the shape of pineapple to many similar textile ornaments. However, until the end of the 16th century, it was most likely unfamiliar to designers and weavers of Tuscany. Even in the middle of the 16th century pineapple remained unknown to the general public of Florence. In the letter of 1584 to Francesco I de Medici, the famous Florentine traveler Filippo Sassetti, visiting India, in surprise describes a

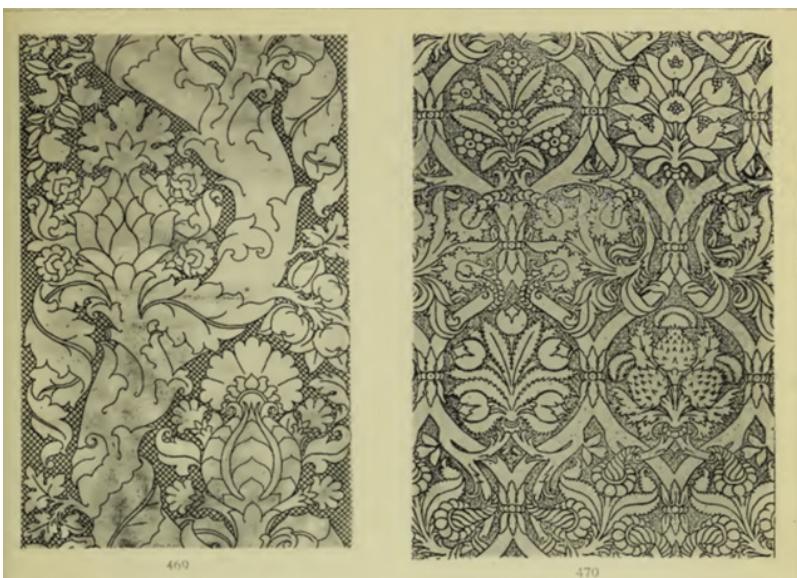


Fig. 9. Examples of the 16th-century textiles' designs
(Von Falke 1922, p. 255)

delicious fruit: pineapple. He compares its shape to the artichoke and pine cones (ASF MP, f. 508, v. 5037, Doc ID 22796).

Even though many exotic plants were available in the Florentine area of the 16th century, the large number of inhabitants poorly knew them. Archaeological research has shown that plants, such as pomegranate, grew and used in the territories of rich palaces exclusively. As a result, they were not familiar to a wide range of consumers (Mazzanti et al. 2005, p. 449).

If we are to believe in evidence of art, the shape of the garnet ornament inherited the image of the lotus flower on the Chinese silks, which appeared in Europe from the 14th century onwards actively (Von Falke 1922, p. 34). Nonetheless, the direct mentions of this flower are very rare in archival documents (ASF MP, f. 58, v. 613, Doc ID 18075). Compared to other plants, even exotic ones, attention to the lotus was negligible. The presence of this flower at the base of many ornaments was not obvious to the Florentines.

In inventories and other types of documents the educated Florentines gave no special attention to ornaments of fabrics, despite a detailed description of their other characteristics. Creators of documents almost always recalled the presence of patterns on textiles. However, the meaning of ornament as such, obviously, did not interest descriptors.



Fig. 10. Textile fragment with the "Garnet ornament" with different shapes.

Second half of the 15th century.

Venice, Italy.

Silk, gold thread; velvet

The Khanenko Museum, Kyiv, Ukraine.

32 TK

According to Carole Collier Frick's research, Florentine civil servants, responsible for the enforcement of the sumptuary laws, did not know how to distinguish between different patterns. Likewise, employees could call all of them with the general terms such as "floral" (Frick 2002, p. 181).

According to the facts we mentioned above, the presence of ornament on the fabrics was symbolic in the context of Florentine everyday life. In most happenings, the woven pattern indicated the high price of textile, especially in cases of using expensive materials such as gold and silver thread. However, various representatives of the Florentine society clearly could not identify the elements of ornaments. The big number of city dwellers could never even see those plants that were the basis of many textile designs.

Recognition of textiles by the people of Florence: everyday practice

How in fact the identification of fabrics in practices of the city was occurring? What examples demonstrate the semiotic of textiles that we have outlined before?

The symbolism of fabrics likely formed in accordance with the cost of dyes and materials used for their production. Obviously, for the average Florentine the perception of textiles came from daily practices, even in the space of other visual arts such as pictures. Criticizing the color theory of Bartolo da Sassoferato (1313-1357), Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) argues on the example of fabrics "Do we prefer ... white cotton to red or purple silk?" (Osborne 2019, p. 91).

The ability to recognize the types of textiles by Florentine residents (in times of difficult production of textiles) is obvious since the market of finished textile items and already-used fabrics functioned in the city well effectively during the early modern times (Moran 2018, 183).

By the end of the 15th century, textile dealers became very

professional: they owned shops and sold goods of various values. Researchers associate this process with the increasing consumer ability of the Florentines and their desire to assert themselves using expensive fabrics (Meneghin 2015, p. 336). Such processes are not the subject of this study. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the widest range of the Florentines was aware of various textiles through this practice as well, in addition to all other activities of the city in which fabrics involved constantly.

As we mentioned earlier, textile has been used for a long time: it could be altered to create new items. This practice was not alien to people of different statuses.

The correspondence of Cassandra Ricasoli, the Florentine noblewoman, mentioned the dealer Grezia who proposed old cloth for making bed sheets (Moran 2018, p. 190-191).

In 1536 the tailor master Agustino da Gubbio also received two damask dresses similar to those used by nuns. He had to alter them to cover Allessandro de' Medici's (1510-1537) carriage (ASF MP, f. 8, v. 630, Doc ID 24940).

It was not shameful to use fabrics' structures again and again as long as something could be cut off while the best part, on the contrary, could still be reused. As a result, textiles were in constant motion during the early modern times (Rosenthal 2009, p. 461). They lived several lives in various objects — all this imprinted in the appearance of those samples that have survived to this day.

But have textiles received much attention as important objects of material culture among the Florentines?

The inventory document of 16th-century Florentine mansion describes a lot of material objects. Despite the fact that the name of addressee is lost, he or she mentions the presence of Pier Francesco Riccio's room in the house. Along with other valuables, fabrics are described. Among them are a new colored carpet, a damask bedspread, a green damask robe embroidered

with silk, a Turkish taffeta. There are specific characteristics of textiles that are indicated. Firstly, the author draws attention to the types of fabrics — their materials and techniques of producing. Secondly, the writer notes whether textile is new or old. It is important that the characteristic "old" not relates to the state of item. In this way, the author simply indicates the age of the fabric. In addition, the word "Turkish" in relation to taffeta textile presents in the inventory (ASF MP, f. 464, v. 616, Doc ID 28221).

Most likely, urban citizens could see the difference between oriental fabrics and those that local manufacturers made in the eastern style: the both terms — "Turkish" and "ala Turkish" present in inventories. However, this ability could have more likely related to the wealthy urban population for whom expensive fabrics, including imported, were valuable parts of the material environment.

A similar description — "alla turchesa" was also used in documents when authors were clearly not sure about concrete origin of an oriental object. Describing the appearance of the middle eastern army members, under the command of Grand Marshal Meszkowski (1562-1615), the state personal Sernigi Giovanfrancesco appeals with such expressions as "in Turkish fashion" (ASF MP, f. 116, v. 4294, Doc ID 24540).

The list of provisions created for the voyage of the ducal court also indicates the presence of accessories and velvet



Fig. 11. Piece of reused red velvet.
16th-17th century.
Italy.
Silk; velvet
The Khanenko Museum, Kyiv,
Ukraine.
17 TK

textiles "in Turkish style" (not actually of Turkish production but "alla turchesa") (ASF MP, f. 18, v. 613, Doc ID 18159). Even a military engineer, whose profession was far from textile excesses, described the preparation of the city of Milan for the arrival of Emperor Charles V (1500-1558), giving a detailed description of the clothes of various representatives: senators and doctors were dressed in crimson, the chancellor and the president were in brocade. The clothes of the Turk Rusten Bass, the hat of whom was embellished with the feathers, made a lot of noise (ASF MP, f. 90, v. 2964, Doc ID 22700).

Describing important city events — rituals and festivals, specific types of textiles were often indicated: authors of letters could distinguish them. In addition, it is also a signal that recipient of letters, reading about fabrics, would be able to understand the implication of their use.

Staying at the city festival in Madrid in the 20s of the 17th century, Castellina de Medici (?-1629) was surprised by the modesty of urban residents' clothes. He noted that the rulers of the city looked too luxurious, against the background of city dwellers. Such strict sumptuary laws of Madrid were unusual for Castellina (ASF MP, f., v. 4952, Doc ID 8839). Obviously, he belonged to a slightly different culture and models of social behavior, compared to traditions of the Spanish city. In fact, even the average Florentines used different types of expensive fabrics in small amount, above all velvet. For instance, the cloth for civil servants often was made from it. In 1536 the master Agostino received four pieces of red velvet to make clothes for servants. (ASF MP, f. 33, v. 630, Doc ID 26152). Moreover, they were often provided with a new set of clothes for work. Old items in such cases servants could exchange for other goods or sale them on the market of used things, as the property (Meneghin 2015, p. 61).

Examining specific samples of the Khanenko Museum textile collection, one can notice that by the end of the 16th century the number of expensive Florentine fabrics reduced. Researchers associate this fact with changes in the traditions of the republican era. Therefore, the visual difference between various representatives of society has become less noticeable (Currie 2008, p. 52).

However, in 1618 various contests and entertainments took place in Florence, during a city festival. According to eyewitnesses, the holiday was even more fun, despite the lower costs, than magnificent weddings often organized for the whole city (ASF MP, f. 787, v. 6108, Doc ID 6386). Accordingly, even in the 17th century, the demonstration of luxurious fabrics at expensive celebrations still remained an important symbol in the context of urban life.

Conclusion

Various Florentine city dwellers of the 16th century were able to identify textiles around them. They knew what the price of this or that fabric was and what was the status of its user. What characteristics of a textile did they identify especially? First of all — materials and techniques used for the production of fabrics. Since it was impossible to fake expensive textiles, these features were particularly important.

On the other hand, despite the symbolism of ornaments as such being recognized (as their creation also required skill, labor and material resources), ordinary Florentine citizens remained ignorant regarding the specific origin of the patterns. In archival documents any ornament could be explained by general phrases, such as "floral" or "in Turkish style".

Quite valuable fabrics, such as velvets, were presented in a relatively small amount in the possession of middle-class. Reuse of fabrics was common practice among various citizens, even the most affluent.

The current research outlined only the basic of textile semiotic. The following studies can consider one or more specific examples of textiles carefully, using them as a method of studying

some other aspects of city life. Understanding the specifics of fabrics' symbolism, it also seems possible to try to use it for interpretation of other visual arts.

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"Recognizable" textiles in daily practices of the 16th-century Florence

The aim of the article is to shape the semiotic of textiles in the context of their use in various daily practices of the city of Florence during the 16th century. The article investigates the possibility of different representatives of the city to perceive fabrics as a symbol and the ability to identify different types of textiles "by eye". It consists of three thematic sections. The first one dedicates to the study of those characteristics of textiles that were decisive in the formation of their semiotics. We have found that fabric materials and techniques were such characteristics. Since the creation of textiles was a complicated process, their function as a symbol of user's status was extremely important. The second part devotes to those manufacturing processes within cities that facilitated exchange of technology and design of fabrics and, as a consequence, perception by users such a textile component as an ornament. The third part of the article deals with specific examples of the Florentine comprehension of certain fabrics. It draws attention to the way textiles are described in written sources. The various urban practices have made it possible for representatives of different segments of the population to be able to distinguish different types of textiles. Fabrics have become an additional way of identifying the status and origin of their user. The ornaments were also symbolic, depending on the materials used to make them. On the other hand, many city dwellers could not identify elements of most common fabric patterns and, therefore, could not perceive them as symbols.

Keywords: textiles, Florence, 16th c., symbolism, ornament.

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