



Winter 2008

# Book Review of "Clothing the Spanish Empire" by Marta Vicente

Miranda Howard

Western Michigan University, [miranda.howard@wmich.edu](mailto:miranda.howard@wmich.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library\\_pubs](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library_pubs)

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

## WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Howard, Miranda, "Book Review of "Clothing the Spanish Empire" by Marta Vicente" (2008). *University Libraries Faculty & Staff Publications*. 4.

[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library\\_pubs/4](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library_pubs/4)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Faculty & Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



readers alike to engage with this collection in a more extended way. Sometimes the sheer volume of details, whose significance is not immediately appreciated, can be trying, but more often readers will gain a new, fruitful sense of the rich era in which Marlowe lived and wrote. Hopkins' chronology is eventful and full of activity, marked by many friendships, formal relationships, and enmities. Students of Elizabethan history will find her careful plotting of tense political events such as the Babington Plot to be clearly rendered and illuminating in its own right, Marlowe aside. Elsewhere unknown connections emerge; I had not known that William Corkine, who set Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" in 1612, was probably the son of the tailor with whom Marlowe fought in Canterbury in 1592. Time, and people, come 'round again.

Of course every compiler must determine where to draw the *supra qua non* line of inclusion. You may or may not agree that such a volume should include the 1545 publication of *Dialectica*, a text Marlowe likely encountered at Cambridge, or Edward Alleyne's christening in 1566 at St. Bodolph Bishopsgate, London, or when this or that alleged spy matriculates at Oxford or Cambridge. Similarly, most readers will not find compelling any news of Margery, the daughter of Peter Frizer, who may or may not be the brother of the Ingram Frizer familiar to readers of Marlowe. Yet it is enlightening to see, in such short order, the activities a year or so later of the three men present at Marlowe's death: Ingram Frizer is leasing a house in Southwark, Robert Poley is being paid for delivering letters, and Nicholas Skeres, no stranger to suspicious circumstances, is arrested for doing business with a suspected recusant. In March 1596, when we hear of the death of Eleanor Bull, in whose house Marlowe had died, the volume begins to feel, despite the obvious limitations of its format, like an early modern version of Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, or a staging of *Our Town* set in Renaissance England. In addition to his plays and poems, Marlowe's life—and his world—remain as fascinating as ever, and Hopkins makes that fact abundantly clear.



**Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic.** Marta V. Vicente. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 198 pp. \$65.00. ISBN 978-1-4039-7226-2.

REVIEWED BY: Miranda Howard, Western Michigan University

Marta Vicente guides her reader through the financing, manufacture, and distribution of Catalan calico during the last half of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century. Vicente, an assistant professor of History and Women's Studies at the University of Kansas, introduces the reader to the world of the calico trade through the fabric needs of the Spanish Empire in the New World. Her goal for this book is to explain to the reader the importance of the extended family in the study of economic history.

Central to this work are the economics of the Spanish calico trade and the role families played in the managerial, structural, and financial success of the calico exchange. Vicente hones in on the importance of women in the family business. She is quick to point out that a male merchant would include his wife in short- and long-term decision making in the trade. Most often it was the men of the family who were sent with the shipments to the other side of the Atlantic to oversee distribution and the sales end of the enterprise while the women remained in Spain to perpetuate and maintain the manufacturing operation. Throughout the text, the historian reader is reminded of the Roman *gynaeceum* where the women of a family unit carry out much of the textile manufacture. The author points out in the second chapter entitled "The Personal Is Commercial" that the structure of the family-

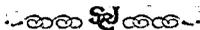
owned calico business “was reminiscent of the Roman law where the household becomes the measure of all units...” (26).

In the third chapter, “A Microcosm of Families,” the author discusses development of *Junta de Comerç*, an official supervisory committee that promoted the quality of the fabric printing technique that developed in Barcelona during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. It was often the responsibility of the wife in the family to ensure the standards of the committee were adhered to in manufacturing. The *Junta* oversaw twenty-six stringent ordinances governing the calico industry that were later approved by Charles III to pertain to the silk industry as well.

In later chapters, Dr. Vicente directs the reader to explicit families’ experiences in the overseas shipping and distribution of calicoes to the New World. She selects chronicles that reveal the political and military barriers to safe trade which led to the depression of calico production in Barcelona. British blockades of Cadiz and other important ports prevented the successful exporting of calicoes to Puerto Rico and Veracruz. One account tells of the ship, *El Rosario*, which is able to successfully export and deliver fabrics to the colonies on one trip only to be later captured in the Caribbean on its second voyage. Vicente also delves more deeply into the function of family in commercial alliances by drawing on Juan Carlos Sola-Corbacho’s research on merchants in Mexico marrying *paisanaje* and the study of Spanish merchants in Mexico. She includes examples of how intermarriage between merchant families in Spain and the New World cemented and furthered business ties between the two continents. A specific account is that of the Basque merchant Gaspar Santa Coloma who married into a merchant family of Buenos Aires and then arranged marriages for his new sisters-in-law with other reputable Argentine merchants in order to further his own career. Other examples provide insight into how widows of merchants and manufacturers were able to take over and serve as chief officers in a family cloth business where women in other circumstances were unable to attain this status.

This publication includes maps and contemporary illustrations to demonstrate various aspects of her writing. However, more illustrations of fashion and more robust discussion on men’s and women’s fashion on both sides of the Atlantic at this time would have further enhanced the subject of the chapter entitled “The Craze for Calicoes.” Marta Vicente’s research is an excellent complement to that undertaken by James K. J. Thomson in *A Distinctive Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) on the topic of the industrialization of the cotton printing trade in Catalan and its place in the economic history and expansion in Spain during the eighteenth and first third of the nineteenth century.

*Clothing the Spanish Empire* belongs in academic and research libraries serving the subject areas of history of the Spanish Empire and Spanish diaspora; development of trade in the new world; women’s studies; fashion history; and studies in material culture. It is a fine piece of scholarly research, rich in its use of primary sources and scholarly apparatus such as notes, bibliography, and index. Dr. Vicente has laid the ground-work for scholars of visual and material culture with her detailed discussions of cotton cloth distribution in the Americas and Caribbean. A fashion history or material culture researcher could readily use Vicente’s research as the foundation of the study of clothing styles, trends, manufacture, and distribution in Caribbean countries, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, and Guatemala. For the academic researching the far corners of the Spanish Empire, this work serves as a bridge to three continents—southeast Asia, where calico was first manufactured; the trend to manufacture Spanish calicoes of American cotton for the American colonial trade; and the distribution of this fabric in the Americas to meet fashion needs.





## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: [Clothing the Spanish Empire]  
SOURCE: Sixteenth Cent J 39 no4 Wint 2008

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:  
<http://www2.truman.edu/escj/>