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Lyonnais silks «ad uttimo gusto»: the trade in fashionable waistcoats between France and Italy in the second half of the 18th century

1. Introduction

The European production of silk threads and fabrics has been an industry in constant evolution, following and adapting to the ever-changing landscape of European politics and economy. The first silk weaving looms were introduced in Europe between the 8th and 9th centuries by Arabic or Byzantine craftsmen, in Sicily, Calabria or Puglia (Crippa 2000, 8). Production progressively spread to the rest of the Italian peninsula and to other parts of Europe, such as England, France and Spain. Italian weaving centres, however, dominated this production, especially with their luxury fabrics such as figured velvets and damasks (Tognetti 2007, 143-4). Looms were active in Tours as early as the 15th century, but it was not until the second half of the 17th century that France experienced a significant development in its production of silk fabrics with the manufactures of Lyon. Looms had been established in the city of Lyon in the previous century. Francis I granted two merchants from Piedmont permission to set up looms in the city in 1536 (Godart 1899, 15-6; Barbier 2019, 252-54). In 1667, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's Minister of Finance and Trade, reformed the guild regulations on production, implementing a greater division of labour and higher standards of quality (Godart 1899, 83-5). In parallel, the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers (*marchands fabricants*) initiated a system of seasonal fashion changes: on a regular basis, new patterns were made available on the market for sartorial silks. These regular, quick innovations in fashion stimulated consumption while also making it more difficult for competitors to keep up with the pace of change (Poni 1997). Through these different strategies, Lyonnais manufacturing, called the *Grande Fabrique*, experienced a significant development, eventually taking the lead in the European production of luxury, fashionable silks.

The Lyonnais manufacture of silks took place within the framework of the guild of the *Maîtres marchands et maîtres ouvriers fabricants en étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soie* (Godart 1899). The merchant manufacturers managed the entire chain of production, from buying the silks threads, distributing them to master weavers (*maîtres ouvriers*), and selling the finished product. They also commissioned designs,

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put out dyeing and finishing processes, thus acting as the connection between the many different artisans in the industry. Because only master weaverscould become merchants, as per the guild's regulations, these tradesmen possessed the technical knowledge of weaving; some merchants were also designers (Miller 2014a, 34-6). The designers, who could also work as employees of a firm of as freelance artists, were in charge of creating the patterns for silks. Because of the Lyonnais strategy centred around the regular changes in patterns, their work was central to the *Grande Fabrique* (Miller 1988, 55; Poni 1997, 41).

Lyonnais merchant manufacturers sold their silks by various means. They could deal with consumers directly, selling their fabrics in their premises. They sold most of their production, however, through intermediaries. Indeed, most Lyonnais silks were sent beyond the city's walls. Lyonnais merchants supplied many French cities, Paris being most important (Miller 2014b, 88). They also sent fabrics abroad, and intermediaries were essential to conduct this long-distance trade. Lyonnais silks were sold to consumers through retailers, such as mercers or milliners. Finally, Lyon also had agents or commissionaires, who presented new production to clients (both consumers and retailers), conducted sales, gathered due payments, and in more general terms dealt with the long-distance businesses of the Lyonnais (Miller 2014b, 89-90; Peyrot 1973, 36-37).

During the 18th century, Lyonnais silks were indeed exported to many countries in Europe and beyond (Le Gouic, 276; Bogomonolova, 247). The different regions of the Italian peninsula were also avid clients.[2] Furthermore, many Italian weaving centres were still active manufacturers of silk fabrics, competing actively with the *Grande Fabrique*. Italy was also the main European producer of finished and semi-finished silk threads, and therefore one of the main suppliers of the Lyonnais manufactures, making their relationship all the more dynamic and symbiotic (Tolaini and Battistini 2010, 203-5). The Lyonnais merchant manufacturers distributed their silks through a large number of retailers scattered throughout the peninsula, being in contact with mercers based in Alessandria, Cagliari, Genoa, Livorno, Lucca, Mantua, Milan, Modena, Naples, Palermo, Rome, Turin and Venice, while the firm Sonnerat et cie traded with Alessandria, Cagliari, Genoa, Mantua, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Parma, Rome, Turin and Venice.[3] This network of intermediaries was essential to ensure the success of their business. To multiply connections was a way to reach a broader range of clients, as well as to spread risks, bankruptcies being common in this trade (Miller 1998, 150).

Lyon sent to Italy a wide range of silks: taffeta, satin, *lustrine*, watered silk, *droguet*, *gourgouran*, *cannelé*, *lamé*, striped, *chiné*, *gros de Tours*, *gros de Naples*, silks with gold and silver... in a myriad of colours. They were sent as lengths in varying

[2] In this paper, the term 'Italy' will be used to refer to the mosaic of independent city-states, duchies or regions under foreign rule that constituted the Italian peninsula in the 18th century.

[3] See for instance the papers of the Lyonnais merchant manufacturer François Fayet in Archives départementales du Rhône (ADR), 8B/871/3-32; or of the firm Sonnerat et cie in Archives départementales des Pyrénées-Orientales (ADPO), 1J/467/1-2, Journaux de ventes, 1755-1776.

numbers of ells, the unit to measure textiles' length in France.[4] The fabric was cut and transformed at a later stage according to its intended use by a specialised craftsman: a tailor or dressmaker made up clothes; an upholsterer made furnishings. Traditionally, members of the *Grande Fabrique* were not to make any garments from their silks, guild regulations keeping this prerogative for tailors (Roche 2007, 282).

Sources, however, reveal a peculiar tendency. In most account books, the textiles manufactured, sold or bought are recorded following a standard format: a short description of the fabric, the number of ells, the price per ell, and the overall price. There is usually no indication of the garment for which the silk was intended.[5] Yet, in some Lyonnais merchants' account books, one item stands out: the waistcoat. Entries are devoted to this garment and do not follow the usual format. Mentioned simply as «veste» or «gilet», sometimes described as brocaded or embroidered, the price is not given per ell, but for each single item.

The peculiarity of this phenomenon pushed us to investigate it and the Italian market, with its numerous mentions of «vestes», provides an interesting case study. Analysis of the Lyonnais trade in waistcoats with Italy reveals how both manufacturers and consumers constructed fashion and how merchants navigated its whims to keep their businesses running. This case study offers an excellent example of how fashion can shape a market. Furthermore, the transnational approach of this case study will illustrate the influence of the industrial, economic and social context on such a market. This analysis engages with a variety of archival and material sources. It is in large part based on the bankruptcy records of Lyonnais merchant manufacturers, which contain account books and correspondence with retailers in Italy. Further business papers were gathered in Florence, while archives of Italian consumers, whether from individuals or from courts' administration, added to this panorama. These documents prove much useful to discern tendencies and patterns in this business in waistcoats. However, their lack of descriptions makes it difficult to grasp this trade's nuances and raise several questions regarding the typology and terminology of this product. Which is why they are completed by further printed texts such as dictionaries. Finally, this study confronts these written sources with surviving garments from the Palais Galliera, musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, the Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice and the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa.

As peculiar as the mentions of waistcoats in account books appear, they strongly suggest the need for a definition of this item. An exploration of its terminology combined with surviving garments and sources will allow us to first outline a

[4] One ell, called *aune*, was of about 1,18m. In Italy, most cities had their own unit of measurement. In Florence, for instance, the *braccio* (about 0,58m) was used, while in Turin it was the *raso* (0,59m).

[5] Account books from the bankruptcy collection of ADR, fond 8B. It contrasts with other forms of account keeping, where, although the fabric is sold in length, the garment it is intended for is also indicated along with the right number of ells for its making. It is the case, for instance, in the bills of some Parisian silk mercers who supplied the Comtesse d'Artois (Paris, Archives nationales, Papiers Bourbon-Busset, T 265[1-8]) or the Comtesse du Barry (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, manuscrits français ms. 8157). It is likely this later form of recording was more usual for retailers in direct contact with consumers, such as mercers, who would sell fabrics being aware of their intended use by their clients.

typology of the waistcoat and understand its context of production in 18th-century France. We will then explore how from the 1770s the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers adapted to radical changes in fashion by introducing the manufacturing of embroidered waistcoats to their production.

2. A typology of the male waistcoat in the 18th century

The history of French terminology for waistcoat remains obscure. If manuscript sources, especially the ones of manufacturers, use most of the time the term «veste», writers of memoirs, such as the Baroness of Oberkirch, refer to this item as «gilet». Surviving examples in museums suggest that a distinction can be made upon the presence or absence of sleeves, a difference never clearly expressed in archival sources.[6] A look into dictionaries of the time helps narrow down this definition.

Antoine Furetière, in his *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690, describes the *veste* as: «Espèce de justaucorps qui va jusqu'aux genoux. En France on porte des vestes légères sous les justaucorps» (Furetière 1690). This definition classifies the waistcoat as a garment worn under the *justaucorps*, a sort of flare-shaped little coat reaching down to the knees at the end of the 17th century before shortening progressively in the following century. In his *Dictionnaire universel*, Jacques Savary des Bruslons solely uses the term *veste*, for instance under the entry «Cordonnet»: «Menu cordon d'argent, de soie ou de fil […] pour former des boutonnières de justaucorps, et de vestes» (Savary des Bruslons 1744, 1097). It is only later that we start seeing *veste* and *gilet* side by side: in his *Art du tailleur*, François Alexandre de Garsault distinguishes the *veste* from the *gilet*, indicating that the latter would come from the *camisole*, characterised as a «veste de dessous qu'on met souvent immédiatement sur la peau ; il s'en fait à manches et sans manches ; cette dernière se nomme un gilet» (Garsault 1769, 9; 14; 23). Similarly, in 1771, the fifth edition of Trévoux's dictionary makes the distinction between the *veste*, «espèce de longue camisole. *Vestis interior*. En France on porte les vestes légères sous le justaucorps, plus ou moins haut selon les modes», and the *gilet* «espèce de camisole sans manches, de laine ou de basin, que l'on met par dessus ou par-dessous la chemise pour se garantir du froid» (Anon 1771, t. 8, 373 and 509). These definitions therefore confirm that the *veste* is usually a garment with sleeves, while the *gilet* is without sleeves, depending on the consumer's preference. Thus, there was in the second half of the 18th century a shift of terminology and use from *veste* to *gilet*. The latter,

[6] These terminological questions are not proper to France. In Italian, the terminology is even less fixed than in French: the terms «sottoveste», «camisette», «vesti», «vestiti» were used depending on the place and person writing down the accounts. In English, Jenny Tiramani in her introduction to the book *Waistcoats* draws the attention to the double use of waistcoats mentioned by the Academy of Armory published in 1688. At that time waistcoats could be worn very close to the body «[…] under a Doublet, and within the Waist-band of the Breeches» or just under a coat, adorned so that they could be seen «rich» (Hopkins 2017, 5). These early definitions do not precise the presence of sleeves. It becomes clear that terminology was far from being fixed and depended largely on the place and context of use. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the English word waistcoat, used in this paper, does not make the distinction between the *veste* and the *gilet*.

at first worn as an undergarment under the shirt, seems to have substituted the *veste* put over the shirt and under the coat, following the trend for *négligé*. The appearance of the term *gilet*, however, does not put an end to the use of *veste*, especially in the manufacturers' accounts. Some Lyonnais merchant manufacturers mention indistinctly their waistcoat production as *vestes* throughout the 18th century,[7] while others make the distinction between *veste* and *gilet* in the last decades of the century.[8]

These considerations of terminology can be applied to surviving garments, samples and designs in museum collections to outline a typology of the male waistcoat in the 18th century. *Vestes* and *gilets* are certainly among the most ubiquitous surviving garments of the 18th century in museum collections. For instance, in the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, 399 *vestes* and *gilets* have been inventoried on a collection of 900 items of male costume, therefore a third (Fig. 1).[9] They show waistcoats made in silk, but also in other fabrics such as wool and cotton. In the first half of the 18th century, the waistcoat was worn long (the basques reaching to just above the knee) and often with sleeves. Through the decades, the garment became progressively shorter and more close-fitted to the body. From the 1780s, the basques disappeared while a collar emerged. Waistcoats could be plain or patterned, motifs being either woven or embroidered, with silk but also metallic threads. Only the front panels of the waistcoat were adorned, as it was always worn under the coat in polite society so that the back and sleeves were not visible. The back and sleeves were made of a different, simpler fabric. A standard way of distributing the patterns on the garment becomes apparent from the late 17th century: they are mostly gathered along the front edges, on and under the pocket flaps, while the rest of the fabric surface is either plain or with small repeating motifs.

To acquire a new waistcoat, consumers could buy from a silk merchant manufacturer or mercer a length of fabric, plain or with small patterns covering evenly the entire surface, which was then sent to the tailor to be cut. If clients wanted additional decoration on the edges of the fabric, as it was often the case, they could take their newly made waistcoat to the embroiderer to add embroideries or trimmings (Schoeser Boyce 1981, 39).

[7] This can also be explained by the fact that the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers could not know if their silks would be later on worn with or without sleeves, the word «veste» being therefore used as a generic term. ADR, 8B/876/1-41, Correspondance et livres de comptes de Marin Fiard.

[8] ADR, 8B/1089/1-14, Correspondance et livres de comptes de Pascal Vial et cie.

[9] Although, as most collections, these numbers are the result of accidents of survival, they are significant enough to show the importance of the waistcoat in the male apparel, suggesting a strong enthusiasm for this garment in the 18th century.

Fig. 1. **Waistcoat, c. 1770-1775. Silk tabby, chain stich embroidery, multicolour silk threads. Embroidered to shape pattern. Paris, Palais Galliera, Inv. 1962.108.376**

Waistcoats were also sold in shape. Consumers could buy a length of fabric which had patterns already arranged in the shape of the garment's front edges and pockets. In the case of woven patterns, they were made during the manufacturing of the fabric itself, the motif being woven in the shape of a waistcoat on the loom. In the case of embroidered patterns, the needlework was done once the fabric was woven and taken off the loom, also arranged according to the shape of the front edges. The shapes of the collar and button covers were embroidered on the same panel which could be between one and two ells (Fig. 2). The woven or embroidered

panels were then taken to the tailor to be cut and assembled, the fabric used for the back allowing the garment to be adjusted to the wearer's size. This particular type of production, rarely specified in written sources, can however be identified when a waistcoat is said «à bordures», which indicates it was sold with the edges already woven or embroidered.

Fig. 2. **Silk length for a waistcoat embroidered to shape, fronts, pockets, collar, buttons, c. 1785-1790. Silk tabby, satin stich embroidery, multi-coloured silk threads. Embroidered to shape pattern. Paris, Palais Galliera, musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Inv. 1985.31.1**

If the origin of the production of garments in shape remains unclear, some sources testify of its presence in the second half of the 17th century. Indeed, a trade card of the Parisian embroiderer Jean Magoulet, dated from around 1670-1690,

illustrates a scene of the craftsman showing to a client a coat embroidered to shape.[10] Some surviving garments confirm this production was already in use at that time, such as the pieces of a coat embroidered to shape preserved in Rosenborg Castle and said to have belonged to Charles XI of Sweden and dated around 1675-1679 (Rangström 2002, 159 and 355). At the same period, other garments such as petticoats, bodices or shirts were produced ready-made, although the ready-to-wear industry did not truly develop before the 1840s (Perrot 1984, 93-94; Lemire 1997, 43-74; Styles 2000, 158-62). Garments made to shape, however, need to be distinguished from the ready-made production. They still had to be taken to a tailor to be assembled. The production of waistcoat shapes therefore seems to have been an in-between stage from the traditional making of cloth and the ready-made.

The business of waistcoat shapes is difficult to uncover. They seem to have been sold by a wide variety of actors. Those woven to shape could be bought directly from silk merchant manufacturers or from intermediaries such as mercers. Some Lyonnais merchants sold waistcoats woven to shape already in the early 18th century, as demonstrated by a letter from the merchant Charles Lachasse in Cadix to the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers De Vitry et Gayet in 1724:

> Si vous voulez donner dans un article qui nous donne du profit considérablement, vous devriez monter des étoffes dans le goût des vestes faites, dont les devants et parements de poches étaient tissées en argent (cited in Le Gouic 2011, 287).

Waistcoats embroidered to shape could be sold by mercers and milliners, but also by the embroiderers themselves. In Paris, embroiderers had their own guild, the *corporation des brodeurs-découpeurs-égratigneurs-chasubliers*. Some dealt directly with consumers, as in the case of the embroiderer Balzac (Delpierre 1956, 10-1; Franklin 1906, 11), or the famous Davaux and Trumeau who worked for the court. Others were employed in workshops, fulfilling the commissions of mercers and *marchandes de modes*. In Lyon, in contrast, there was no embroidery guild. Embroiderers could work independently and sell their own production, but they often worked as employees of merchants specialised in embroideries (Baker 2019, 249). Embroidery work not being part of the silk weaving guild, Lyonnais merchant manufacturers only sporadically sold embroidered waistcoats. This distinction between weaving and embroidery became however a problem for the *Grande Fabrique* once the new fashion for embroideries took off in the second half of the 18th century.

3. The new embroidery-mania: Lyon facing the whims of fashion

For the first sixty years of the 18th century, woven patterns were the most fashionable: large and stylised in the 1700s-1720s, with a more naturalistic effect in the 1730-1740s, and on a smaller scale from the 1750s (Thornton 1965). As a result of the technique of *points rentrés*, developed by the Lyonnais merchant and designer

[10] *Trade Card of Jean Magoulet, Embroiderer-in-Ordinary*, c. 1690, etching and engraving on paper, Aylesbury, Waddesdon Manor Collection, 3686.1.6.8.

Jean Revel (1684-1751), the *Grande Fabrique* could manufacture woven vegetal motifs, but also architectural elements and human figures in a most naturalistic way (Miller 1995). However, in the last quarter of the century, fashion experienced a dramatic change. It shifted progressively away from richly brocaded fabrics towards simpler ones with lighter and more discrete patterns and to plain silks. The taste of consumers leaned towards patterns and adornment added in the form of embroideries, trimmings, ribbons, gauze attached in a fancy manner to plain or striped fabric (Gorguet-Ballesteros 2021). This change was fostered by the rise of new figures of the fashion trade, particularly the *marchandes de mode*, whose role and ascendency on the making of latest trends became increasingly important (Parmal 1997, 68-77; Jones 2004, 91-6).

The waistcoat was no exception, as is clear from those preserved in museum collections. While surviving waistcoats of the first half of the 18th century can be either woven or embroidered, garments from the second half of the century show an almost absolute predominance of patterns made of needlework. Museum collections also hold numerous designs for embroideries. The Palais Galliera holds a series of 179 watercolour and gouache designs which were models for waistcoats' embroideries (Fig. 3). These designs are also abundant in other public collections, such as in the Musée des Tissus de Lyon which holds 316 of them, in addition to numerous embroidery samples.

Contemporary texts confirm this taste for embroidered waistcoat, such as the baroness of Oberkirch who wrote in 1787:

> les belles étoffes et les diamants continuaient à primer, c'est-à-dire le luxe et la richesse; mais les hommes imaginaient des singularités. D'abord il fut du bel air absolument d'avoir des gilets à la douzaine, à la centaine même, si l'on tenait à donner le ton. On les brodait magnifiquement avec des sujets de chasse et des combats de cavalerie, même des combats sur mer. C'était extravagant de cherté (Bernard de Montbrison 1869, t. 2, 310).

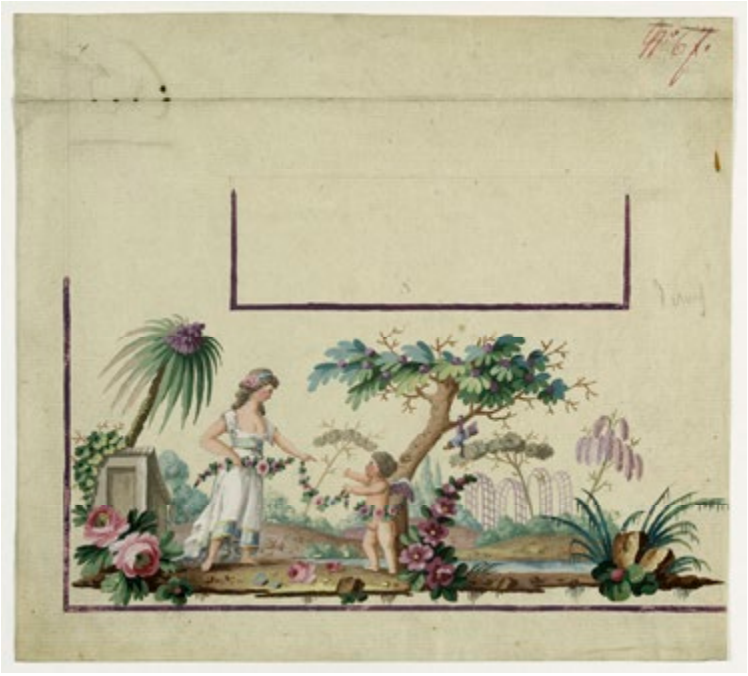
Needlework could add colourful motifs to garments, mostly floral ornaments but also architectural elements, animals, human figures, reflecting the political, literary and artistic events of the time (Piettre 2021, 125-26). Embroideries could be made of polychrome silk threads, but also silver or gilded silver threads combined with metallic spangles. Progressively, embroideries took over from woven motifs.

This new trend was certainly a problem for the Lyonnais manufacturers, who had based their entire strategies on the production of fashionable woven patterns. With this new trend, consumers were mostly interested in plain or simple-patterned fabrics, which were less profitable to sell (Arizzoli-Clémentel 1993, 7-8). The Parisian mercer Delpech, for instance, lamented to the Lyonnais merchant manufacturer Marin Fiard in 1781 that business was not going well since he had only been able to sell plain taffetas for the summer.[11] With this new fashion, the Lyonnais were also losing their supremacy on the market, as they could not rely any longer on the regular fashion changes of their woven patterns that had given them the edge over other manufactures. The *Grande Fabrique* strongly complained about

[11] ADR, 8B 876/1, Lettre Fiard/Delpech, 18/05/1781.

this new fashion, lamenting that «la broderie faisoit aujourd'hui la branche la plus essentielle du commerce de la fabrique» (cited in Miller 1988, 78).

Fig. 3. **Drawing for an embroidered design for the edge of a waistcoat's left front, c.1770-1790. Watercolour and gouache on beige cardboard. Paris, Palais Galliera, musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Inv. 1956.42.30**



CC0 Paris Musées / Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris

The issue was particularly important when it came to the Italian market. The peninsula had a number of very active weaving centres which produced a large variety of fabrics. Following the rise of the *Grande Fabrique* in the late 17th century, consumer preference had favoured fashionable Lyonnais silks. Italian manufactures had to adapt, and did so by focusing their production on types of fabrics which did not have to compete directly with the patterned silks of Lyon. They focused part of their production on the weaving of plain fabrics, such as taffetas or satin, but also on more traditional textiles such as velvets (especially those used for furnishing), and Italian figured velvets still enjoyed a good reputation among European consumers (Tolaini and Battistini 2010, 204-5). From the early 18th century, a new geography of silk production therefore came into being with Lyonnais silks having the upper hand on the market for fashionable, patterned silks, and Italy keeping a profitable trade in fabrics not subject to ephemeral fashion changes. However, with the new trend for plain or

small-patterned fabrics, Lyon lost its advantage over Italian production, as the latter suited the trend admirably, and could compete for clients. In particular, Italian consumers could enjoy plain taffetas or satins produced locally and therefore available at a lower price. There was no longer incentive for them to import expensive Lyonnais silks. It was thus all the more difficult for the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers to keep this market in the face of such strong local competition. This new fashion seemed to be out of the Lyonnais' control, stealing their profitable markets. Some Lyonnais merchants, however, turned this new fashion to their advantage by focusing on the production of and trade in waistcoats embroidered *à bordures*.

4. The Lyonnais production of waistcoat shapes

If the manufacturing of a waistcoat woven to shape did not differ much from the making of other types of silk fabrics, the patterned textile being entirely made on the loom by weavers, embroidered waistcoats entailed a different organisation of production. The making of a fabric whose patterns were woven took place entirely within the silk weaving guild. Only preliminary work, specific effects and extra finishing processes were undertaken by workers from a different guild. However, everything was still done under the management of the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers, these different processes being closely linked. Embroidery, on the other hand, was not systematically part of this overall process: while all merchant manufacturers employed silk spinners, dyers and weavers, not all employed embroiderers. This part of the work was before the 1770s mostly left to merchant embroiderers specialised in this trade (Baker 2019, 129-30).

With the new fashion for embroideries, some silk merchant manufacturers decided to also embrace this aspect of adorning silks in order to sell waistcoats embroidered to shape. Indeed, their accounts reveal that some employed directly embroiderers, providing them with lengths of fabrics to embroider in the shape of waistcoat's edges.[12] This part of production was easy to incorporate as there was no embroidery guild in Lyon (Baker 2019, 198). The Lyonnais merchants were not restricted in the number of embroiderers they could employ. Some even ran embroidery workshops rather than employing individual needleworkers (Baker 2019, 249). The firm of Joseph Pascal, Vial et cie, for instance, had an embroidery workshop in the city between 1767 and 1787 (Joly 1928, 391-5; 451-5; 510-4; Arizzoli-Clémentel 1993, 10-1).[13] By commissioning this further step, they had the almost entire making of a garment under their supervision.

[12] The merchant Fiard, for instance, had account books entirely devoted to the embroideresses he employed. ADR, 8B/876/33, Livres pour les broderies.

[13] ADR, 8B/1089/1-14, Correspondance et livres de comptes de Pascal, Vial et cie. Designs for waistcoats are present in this collection.

Tab. 1. **Sample of prices per typology of waistcoats commissioned from Italy, about 1750-1780**[14]

Type of pattern	Type of fabric	Price per ell or waistcoat	In shape	Period
Plain	Tissu argent	28 to 30 livres (l.)/ell		1770s
	Tissu or	30 to 32 l./ell		1770s
Unknown (woven or embroidered)	Fond lamé or	26 to 28 l./ell		1760s
	Damas	30 to 35 l./ell		1720s
	Gros de Tours or et argent nué	40 l./ell		1760s
	Gros de Tours lamé argent	18 l./ell		1760s
	Florentine	5 l. 7 deniers (d.)/ell		1750s
	Carrelé	6 l. 10 d./ell		1770s
Woven	Fond tissu lamé or et nuances	33 to 61 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu lamé or broché et nué	76 l./waistcoat	X	1760s
	Fond tissu lamé or liseré	76 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu lamé or broché argent nué	38 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu or relevé or	100 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu argent	74 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu argent broché et nué	68 l./ell		1750s
	Fond tissu argent relevé sans nuances	82 to 84 l./ell		1750s
	Gros de Tours broché or nué	35 l./ell		1750s
	Gros de Tours broché or sans nuances	44 l./ell		1750s
	Gros de Tours broché argent sans nuances	43 l./ell		1750s
	Gros de Tours broché or et argent nué	48 l./ell		1750s
	Gros de Tours broché or et argent sans nuances	57 l./ell		1750s
	Taffetas	17 l./ell		1760s
	Taffetas broché or et soie	30 l./ell	X	1770s
Embroidered	Taffetas, broderies de soie	18 to 30 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Taffetas, broderies de soie et argent en bordures	21 to 30 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Satin rayé, broderies de soie en bordures	18 to 34 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Satin, broderies de soie et or en bordures	34 to 60 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Satin rayé, broderies de soie et or en bordures	23 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Tissu or, broderies de soie en bordures	60 to 70 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Tissu or, broderies d'or et soie en bordures	70 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Tissu or, broderies d'or, argent et soie en bordures	50 to 70 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Fond lamé or, broderies de soie en bordures	40 l./waistcoat	X	1770s
	Fond lamé or nuancé très riche	60 l./ell		1770s

[14] These data are taken from a sample of 307 Italian commissions of waistcoats identified in the account books of the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers and their correspondence with Italy (ADR, fond 8B). The price is either per ell or per waistcoat (made with about 1 to 2 ells of fabric). Technical terminology is in French, as per the one found in the sources.

The production of embroidered waistcoats might have even been rather profitable for some Lyonnais merchant manufacturers. It allowed them to diversify and expand their range of products. Differences in price between garments and from one merchant to the other indicate that a wide variety of waistcoats was manufactured in Lyon. From embroidery to brocade, from silk threads to gold and silver decoration, from plain to patterned ground, from simple, repetitive motifs sitting discreetly on the garment's edges to sophisticated and colourful flower gardens splendidly spreading on the fabric, the Lyonnais merchant manufacturers could offer waistcoats at a wide range of quality and prices on the market (Tab. 1).

With embroidery, they were indeed able to lower the costs of production and, as a result, offer fashionable and medium- to high-quality waistcoats at cheaper prices. A comparison of the wages of weavers and embroiderers reveals differences in production costs between an embroidered and a brocaded waistcoat. Weaving complex patterns was a long and costly process. First, the setting up of the loom, with the reading of the design, took longer to make for a patterned textile. The loom used for large and sophisticated motifs, called *métier à la grande tire*, was a complex mechanism which took several weeks to set up. The pattern had to be transferred on the loom through a process called *lisage*, or read in, an additional cost to the manufacturer. Marin Fiard, for instance, paid a weaver eight *livres* solely for «frais de lisage» in September 1775.[15] The weaving process was also long, especially for brocaded fabrics which required to use each weft colour one by one and the assistance of another worker. Weavers were paid per ell of fabric woven, the salary depending on the quality and the complexity of the fabric's motifs. Sophisticated and colourful patterns took longer to weave and the price of manufacturing per ell was therefore higher. The cost of weaving of a brocaded silk could go up to 16 *livres* per ell, and up to 36 *livres* with the use of metallic threads (Miller 2014a, 17). The use of material that was more delicate to handle, such as metallic stripes and threads, required more time and skill.

It was possible to lower production costs, but the design had to be simple and with a reduced number of colours. Fayet had brocaded taffetas woven for about 10 to 15 *sous* per ell, some going up to 36 *sous*. A sample book left among the firm's papers provides visual evidence of the type of fabrics the company manufactured.[16] The figured silks are indeed rather simple, the motifs being slightly abstract and with a limited number of colours (Fig. 4). It is possible to understand how their weaving required less time and effort than a complex brocaded fabric.[17] Furthermore, figured silks were only a small portion of the book's contents, and most samples are simply stripped or chequered. Around the same period, the merchant manufacturers Lassause et Regnier manufactured brocaded taffetas for which they paid their weavers between 4 and 7 *livres* per ell.[18] We can imagine these taffetas had a more complex design which required more time.

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[15] ADR, 8B/876/34, Livre d'ouvriers, 1775-1776.

[16] ADR, 8B/871/30, Livres d'échantillons 1746-1755.

[17] This point also raises the question of how fair the weavers' salary truly was. Justin Godart mentioned how some merchants paid their weavers lower than the actual worth of their work.

[18] ADR, 8B/995/1, Livre d'ouvriers, 1754-1761 (Godart 1899, 390).

The weaving of a waistcoat with brocaded motifs made to shape answered to the same parameters. Some weaving accounts have left an indication of the price of weaving a waistcoat *à bordures*. Fiard paid his weavers around 11 *livres* the waistcoat for the manufacturing of patterns to shape (therefore about 8 *livres* per ell).[19] If, once the loom was set up, several waistcoats could be woven on the same installation, only variations in colour were possible, the design remaining essentially the same.

Fig. 4. **Sample of figured taffeta from the sample book of the Lyonnais merchant manufacturer François Fayet, 1746. Lyon, Archives départementales du Rhône (photo by Moïra Dato)**

In comparison with the weaving of a figured silk, an embroidery was quicker and easier to make. It could be done on a plain fabric (monochrome, striped or checked) or on one with little designs, called *petits façonnés*. These types of silks required simpler looms, quicker to set up and easier to handle. Also quicker to weave, the wages of weavers were accordingly lower: plain silks were woven at a rate of 8 to 22 *sous* per ell (Godart 1899, 390). Furthermore, needlework required no sophisticated and expensive equipment, and embroideresses' wages were not high. A complex and sophisticated waistcoat embroidery could be done in a few days for a few livres, a Lyonnais embroideress being paid between 2 and 4 *livres* per waistcoat (Baker 2019, 289). Overall, the production of an embroidered waistcoat could be faster, but also cheaper for the merchant manufacturer supervising its manufacture. The *Grande Fabrique* could therefore produce fashionable waistcoats with sophisticated designs at cheaper costs, which allowed them to expand their range of prices to attract a wider spectrum of consumers.

[19] ADR, 8B/876/38-39, Livres d'ouvriers.

5. The rise of the Lyonnais waistcoat: example of the Italian market

In 1786, the fashion magazine *Le Cabinet des Modes* wrote that almost all *gilets* on the Parisian market came from Lyon (Baker 2019, 195). To stress the Lyonnais origin of waistcoats seems to even have become an advertising strategy: the Parisian milliner Madame Auboineau, for instance, advertised «all sorts of waistcoats from Lyon» in her shop at the Palais Royal (cited in Baker 2019, 195). Indeed, the embroidered waistcoat became not only a French success, but also a Lyonnais one. The trade in Lyonnais waistcoats made to shape was not only successful in Paris, but also abroad, as demonstrated by the case of Italy.

Fig. 5. **Waistcoat of Claude-Lamoral II (1685-1766), Prince of Ligne and of Holy Roman Empire, c. 1745-1750. Gros de Tours liseré broché (brocaded), multi-coloured silk threads, gilded silver threads. Woven to shape pattern. Paris, Palais Galliera, musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Inv. 2004.7.1**

Fig. 6. **Waistcoat, c. 1745-1750. Gros de Tours liseré broché (brocaded), multi-coloured silk threads, gilded silver threads. Woven to shape pattern. Venise, Palazzo Mocenigo, Inv. CL.XXIV n.251**

Waistcoat shapes were sold in Italy already in the first half of the century, as suggested by written archives,[20] but also by surviving examples. A remarkable group of garments illustrates the international success of Lyonnais waistcoats woven to shape. The Palais Galliera holds a sleeved waistcoat, known to have belonged to Claude Lamoral II, Prince of Ligne and of the Holy Roman Empire (Fig. 5). This garment, decorated with opulent floral patterns on a ground of golden-silver palm leaves, typical of the Jean Revel's style, is an illustration of the highly skilled Lyonnais production of the 1740s. This specific waistcoat of a peculiar blue could have enjoyed some success in Italy, as suggested by the presence at the Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice of an almost identical garment: if the shape slightly differs, the patterns and colours are exactly the same (Fig. 6).[21]

[20] The Milanese merchant Spreafigue, for instance, commissioned grey and silver brocaded waistcoats to the Lyonnais merchants Vitry et Gayet in 1725. ADR, 8B/1281/2, Lettre Vitry et Gayet/Spreafigue (Milan), 02/10/1725.

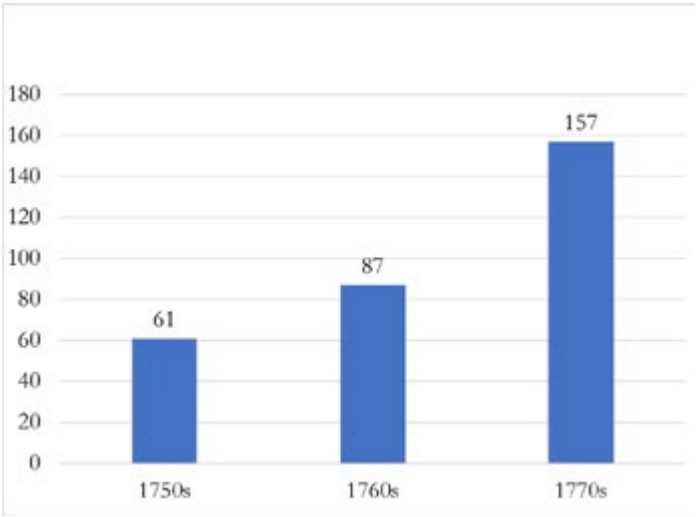
[21] Palais Galliera, musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, inv. 2004.7.1. ; Venise, Palazzo Mocenigo, INV.CLXXIV n.251. In addition, a 1747 drawing by the English designer Anna Maria

Fig. 7a and b. **Silk length for a waistcoat embroidered to shape, c. 1770-1780, full length and detail. Silk satin, tambour embroidery, multi-coloured silk threads. Pattern embroidered to shape. Genoa, Palazzo Bianco, T.114**

Gartwaite (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv.5985.13) and a third similar waistcoat in the United States (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Costume Institute, inv.CI. 66.14.2) are further evidence to the circulation of this Lyonnais design, and by extension to the European success of the Lyonnais artistic and technical creativity.

Numbers are however much higher in the second part of the century. From a sample of 639 Italian commissions (all types of products included) on the period 1750-1780, 307 of these commissions were for waistcoats, therefore almost half (48%) of the overall orders. Furthermore, the number of waistcoat shapes sent to Italy grew significantly from 1770 (Graph 1). Such increase was most certainly related to the fashion for embroideries, which was the privileged method of decoration for this garment by that date. This tendency is suggested by written sources, where most identified waistcoats shapes sent to Italy are embroidered (see Tab. 1), but also by Italian museums: some of them, such as the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa, hold surviving examples of waistcoats embroidered to shape likely to have been sent from France (Fig. 7).[22]

Graph 1. **Number of waistcoat commissions per decade, 1750-1779**



Slowly but surely, many Lyonnais merchants started incorporating waistcoats and coats embroidered *à bordures* in their production. Pierre César Sonnerat, for instance, active since at least 1755 in the silk trade, sent 20 embroidered waistcoats to Turin in 1775 instead of the usual lengths of fabric.[23] Similarly, the firm Gaudin et cie had embroidered waistcoats and coats alongside other silk fabrics in their workshop in 1776.[24] It is a trend that not only silk merchant manufacturers, but also other tradesmen opted into once the fashion for embroideries took over. The merchant Joseph Pascal, for instance, was primarily specialised in the sale of *dorures*, gold and silver threads and trimmings in various forms, including spangles or strips. He sporadically commissioned embroideries to sell, but it is only from the mid-1770s that

[22] The waistcoat of the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa has an attached original label that reads in French «297. Veste sattin brodée» (sic.), which would suggest that the garment was sent from France

[23] ADPO, 1J/467/2, Journal d'achats, 22/02/1775.

[24] ADR, 8B/912, Inventaire des marchandises sur le métier et en magasin, 1776.

his firm, newly constituted with the embroiderer Vial, started commissioning and selling embroidered waistcoats. This branch of Pascal's commerce, however, remained secondary to the sale of metal threads and trimmings. It is not until the 1780s that embroidered waistcoats took over and became the main focus of the firm's activity.[25] This shift testifies to the success of this business and how some Lyonnais merchants seized the opportunity to diversify by manufacturing embroidered waistcoats.

Entering a new trade, however, was not always easy. If Pascal, Vial et cie managed to expand their business in embroidered waistcoats to sell them all over France (they had clients in Avignon, Montpellier, Bordeaux, and of course Paris), they sent only a few of them abroad. Already from the 1740s, Italy was their main foreign market (along with Switzerland), and they had among their regular clients several merchants based in Turin, Milan, Palermo, Augusta, Parma and Rome. However, only a few embroidered waistcoats and coats were sent to the peninsula, and not all met with success. In a letter of 1786, the Milanese merchants Canna and Varese complained to Pascal that the waistcoats they had received were of poor quality, «très ingrates, très indignes», and did not manage to sell them. Their disappointment at the quality and problems with paying their bills encouraged them to end all exchanges with Pascal.[26] Until the end of the century, Italian merchants commissioned Pascal mostly gold threads and trimmings, a trade in which they already had a reputation built on decades of experience. In the 1780s, several merchants from Turin were still referring to Pascal, Vial et cie as «marchands de dorures», unlike French merchants who often referred to them as «marchands brodeurs».[27] They therefore did not seem to have convinced their foreign customers of the quality of their waistcoat production enough to expand their new business abroad.

This was not the case for the Lyonnais merchant manufacturer Marin Fiard, who from the late 1760s made this garment the main object of his trade. Already active in the 1750s, he was mainly sending lengths of fabric. The number of ells of most of his commissions, however, already points towards production specialising in waistcoats: many of them were of one or two ells, the length needed to make a waistcoat of this period. Already from 1760, Fiard started sending what can be identified as waistcoat shapes - unfortunately, it is not possible to say if the motifs were woven or embroidered.[28] Yet, by 1768, he was sending to Italy waistcoats identified as embroidered to shape by the dozen.[29] The accounts of his master weavers reveal that they manufactured mostly fabrics for waistcoats from about 1767, this type of production taking over the usual longer lengths which became in the 1770s rather sporadic and limited to a small number of weavers.[30] To grasp the scope of his production, we can use the account book in which all the metallic

[25] ADR, 8B/1089/1-14, correspondance et livres de comptes de Pascal Vial et cie.

[26] ADR, 8B/1089/4, lettre Pascal Vial et cie/Canna et Varese (Milan), 13/06/1786.

[27] ADR, 8B/1089/4, Correspondance de Pascal Vial et cie.

[28] ADR, 8B/876/32, Livre de vente au comptant.

[29] ADR, 8B/876/30, Marchandises vendues comptant et Mains courantes.

[30] ADR, 8B/876/38-39, Livres des maîtres ouvriers.

material used for his silk fabrics and waistcoats was listed, with more or less consistency. In 1766, he counted 180 waistcoats made with «lames or et argent», «fils or et argent», «frisé», «sorbec» and other metallic threads. In 1767, the number skyrocketed to 751 waistcoats, and slightly declined to 593 the next year.[31] These numbers are all the more significant as they solely refer to the gold and silver waistcoats, therefore only one part of his production. Eventually, Fiard ended up selling almost exclusively waistcoats embroidered to shape, accounts specifically dedicated to the work of embroideresses being drawn up from 1773 onwards.[32] Unlike Pascal Vial et cie, Marin Fiard became extremely successful with his embroidered waistcoats, to the extent that he specialised in the production of this specific garment. By the 1780s, he was sending waistcoats to Italy, but also to England, Germany, the Low Countries, Poland, Spain and Switzerland.[33] His products were also in great demand in many French cities.[34] Fiard's success, however, ended when he died and his papers were seized as the firm was considered bankrupt, a situation which should be attributed to mismanagement rather than lack of demand for his products. As his account books and correspondence reveal, commissions were flooding in.[35]

6. Promoting fashionable embroideries in Italy: Lyon and French fashion

Although garments made to shape or ready-made were not new, they were not the most common way of buying clothes at the latest fashion (Lemire 1991, 178). To develop this market, the Lyonnais merchants therefore had to secure the consumers' interest by making these items, along with their specific mode of acquisition, attractive. Why would Italian consumers want to purchase waistcoat shapes? If the tailoring of the garment was quicker than that for a normal waistcoat cut from a length of silk, the time difference was probably not great: the tailor still had to make measurements and sew the garment together. The first advantage offered by garments made to shape was that the added decoration, the embroidered motif, was already on the fabric, and therefore no further trip to the embroiderer was needed. However, such ready-made embroideries could also be produced in Italy by local embroiderers. This is when fashion becomes, once more, a selling argument around which the Lyonnais merchants centered their business. In order to make their embroidered waistcoats attractive, the Lyonnais merchants relied on what had made their silks desirable in Italy for decades: the constant renewal of designs. If Italian consumers decided to buy and import these foreign fabrics instead of having them manufactured locally, it was due to their perception of Lyonnais silks, which they considered the most fashionable (Poni 1997, 43).

31 ADR, 8B/876/32, "Ce que mes dessins reviennent en dorure".

32 ADR, 8B/876/33, Livres pour les broderies.

33 ADR, 8B/876/10, Correspondance reçue de l'étranger.

34 ADR, 8B/876/1-9, Correspondance reçue de France.

35 ADR, 8B/876/1-10 and 30-32, Correspondance and livres de comptes de Marin Fiard.

The idea that Lyonnais silks were at the peak of fashion came from two factors. First, the prestige of French culture and 'taste', with notably the influence of the royal court in Versailles, led French fashion to the forefront of European trends, followed by other courts and countries (Ribeiro 2002, 6; 56; Sargentson 1996, 104). Some Italian consumers wanted to wear French fashion, and above all what was worn in Paris. As the milliner Forot, based in Naples, put it in 1753:

> C'est assez que je sois française pour me mettre plus au fait des modes […] toutes les Françaises font fortune ici si elles savent travailler à ces colifichets. Il n'y a pas de meilleur commerce que celui-là. L'on tire tout de France quoique l'on fabrique de tout à Naples.[36]

Forot's letter suggests that Neapolitans preferred the imported French silks over the locally manufactured fabrics for the very reason that they were French.[37] Simultaneously, Lyonnais merchant manufacturers stimulated this perception by accelerating the pace of fashion changes, launching new motifs for their brocaded silks on the market on a regular basis. For decades, Lyonnais silks were sought after for their newest designs, to the extent that other manufactures attempted to copy them (Miller 1999, 281). We can see from their correspondence with Italian retailers that novelty was, along with fair prices, the main requirement. Fabrics sent to Italy had to be «alla derniere mode».[38] In the last quarter of the century, the same expectation was applied to embroidered waistcoats. When commissioning these garments, Italian merchants invariably asked the Lyonnais to send their newest production, as the merchant Bernascone, based in Alessandria near Turin, expressed by asking for «disegni delli più moderni ad uttimo gusto».[39] In order to introduce their embroidered waistcoats in Italy, the Lyonnais merchants could therefore rely on their already-acquired reputation and on the everlasting success of French fashion. Consumers were aware that Lyonnais silks were in the latest fashion and mirrored what was worn in Paris.

Not only did the *Grande Fabrique* mirror Parisian fashion, it was the place of creation of silk fashion. Historiography has demonstrated the close collaboration between Lyon and Paris in the making of new fashionable designs (Miller 1998; Miller and Sargentson 1996). New patterns were created on a regular basis by Lyonnais designers, who went regularly to Paris to visit the art collections, gardens and silk shops of the capital and discuss with the mercers the new trends of the time. This trip allowed them to find inspiration and get information on the new styles favoured by consumers. Back in Lyon, they discussed their ideas with merchant manufacturers, taking into consideration the technical and economic issues underlying the transformation of their designs into fabric (such as weaving techniques, the use of metallic threads, the translation of the design to a loom, etc.) (Poni 1997, 64-6). Prototypes were made in the form of small samples that were sent to Paris. The capital's mercers would then approve the design or request

[36] ADR, 8B/871/3, Lettre Fayet/Forot, 14/07/1753.

[37] An idea promoted by the Bourbon dynasty in Naples (Clemente 2017).

[38] ADR, 8B/876/10, Lettre Fiard/Gambara (Parma), 28/02/1758.

[39] ADR, 8B/876/10, Lettre Fiard/Bernascone, 14/02/1778.

modifications (Miller 1998). Their opinion was taken into consideration by the Lyonnais manufacturers, aware that the most famous mercers carried weight in the consumption of their Parisian clients, who trusted their judgment and followed their advice. It was therefore to the advantage of the Lyonnais to gain the approval and custom of these influent merchants.

However, the actual impact of the Parisian mercers in the decision-making process needs to be nuanced. If there are cases of mercers requesting specific modifications, they remain rare. Complaints from Parisian mercers over the quality of a design or a fabric are common, but they are rarely accompanied by suggestions for improvement. Indeed, correspondence between Lyonnais merchants and Parisian mercers reveals that such complaints were often used by the latter as an excuse to request a discount.[40] Of course, many of the exchanges between the Parisian mercers and their Lyonnais counterparts must have taken place orally, especially during the Lyonnais designers' visits to the capital, and therefore left very few written traces to allow assessment of their impact. However, it is important to stress that most of the creative process took place in Lyon. Lyonnais designers found inspiration from their trip to Paris, but also from previous designs that were kept in the Lyonnais firms' design studios and from their exchanges with fellow designers. The technical skills of weavers, and the economic knowledge of merchant manufacturers – who also were, along with most designers, in possession of technical know-how – was central in determining what could and could not be done, or which design would have a good visual effect or sufficient quality once manufactured (Miller 2002).[41] Being in Lyon offered a unique environment where designers, merchants and skilled artisans - weavers, dyers, embroiderers - collaborated closely. The Venetian ambassador in France, Marco Zen, wrote himself in 1777 that the situation in Lyon was ideal for silk designers, because of

> la residenza di Lione, la gara di tanta fabbriche, l'esercizio incessante, la vista degli altrui ritrovati, la necessità d'inventare altrimenti non si smaltisce, tutto concorre in quel luogo a spronare e sforzare gli ingegni e la volontà in modo particolare e forse unico, talmente che, quello stesso disegnatore non suol più fare una eguale riuscita […] trasportato dovunque (cited in Della Valentina 2003, 172).

The patterns, the colours, the material, were conceived, selected and decided in Lyon with some input from Parisian mercers. The fashion for silks was therefore just as much 'made in Lyon' than 'made in Paris'.

The crucial role of Lyon in the making of French silk fashion was essential for their reputation abroad. It became all the more important when embroideries became the preferred decoration. Originally, embroidery was not a Lyonnais specialty. The Lyonnais could however use their reputation as fashion-maker, along

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[40] The Parisian mercers Leroux et Delasalle, for instance, wrote to Marin Fiard that they were unhappy with a sample of blue and black silk they received, asking for its price to be reduced by 10 *sous* per ell. ADR, 8B/876/4, Lettre Fiard/Leroux et Delasalle, 30/05/1783.

[41] On the importance of techniques and economic factors in the making of a design, see the work of Lesley Miller on the training of designers (Miller 2002).

with their long-time close collaboration with Paris, to underline the fashionable nature of their embroideries in the mind of consumers. With their waistcoats, the Lyonnais offered embroideries 'made in France', produced in one of the two centres of French fashion in order to catch the interest of Italian consumers who would prefer them over Italian embroideries.

The belief that Lyonnais embroideries were the most fashionable is illustrated by the trust Italians put in the garments sent from Lyon: some Italian merchants commissioned waistcoats without prior selection of design. Fiard received several commissions of waistcoats which bore no reference numbers or samples which would point towards a selection from designs previously circulated. The Italian merchants asked for a certain number of waistcoats, only detailing the type and colour of fabric, if metallic threads were desired and if edges should be embroidered. They did not specify what kind of motif was expected, only that they had to be of fine taste. The Piedmontese merchant Tommaso Nava, for instance, only specified in a commission of 1774 that he wanted embroidered waistcoats «de très bon goût».[42] The underlying meaning behind these 'blind' orders of embroidered waistcoats is that some Italian merchants trusted the Lyonnais to send them designs of excellent taste and at the latest fashion, and that they were ready to accept whatever they sent. They trusted the knowledge and taste of the Lyonnais merchants to have the legitimate authority on what was fashionable. Such trust is expressed in their correspondence: in another commission, Bernascone asked Fiard for waistcoats «de bon gout, nous en rapportant entierement a vous».[43]

Italian retailers commissioned brocaded silks without a prior selection already in the early 18th century, as illustrated by the Milanese merchant Spreafigue commissioning brocaded silver waistcoats with «des desseins bien particuliers, me rapportant en cela a votre gout» from the Lyonnais merchants Vitry et Gayet in 1725.[44] Blind commissions, however, seem to have been a much rarer practice prior to the 1770s.[45] We can see in the correspondence of the Lyonnais merchant Fayet from the years 1740s-1750s that the reference number of a design was systematically attached to the lengths of silk commissioned from Paris and Italy.[46] Merchants always asked Fayet to send samples before making any commission:

> si vous faites pour l'été prochain quelque chose de joli et nouveau en fait que de taffetas façonnés et même quelques magnifiques dessins de Chine, pour lors nous pourrions satisfaire avec un vrai plaisir réciproque

[42] ADR, 8B/876/10, Lettre Fiard/Nava, 17/04/1774.

[43] ADR, 8B/876/10, Lettre Fiard/Bernascone, 06/02/1779. A similar trust is visible in the Lyonnais correspondence with Spain (Miller 2014b, 92-93).

[44] ADR, 8B/1281/2, Lettre Vitry et Gayet/Spreafigue (Milan), 02/10/1725.

[45] Only two examples prior to 1770 were found in the Lyonnais correspondence: the three silver waistcoats commissioned to Vitry et Gayet by Spreafigue in 1725 (cf. previous note) and a coat with embroidered edges commissioned to François Fayet by the merchant Mathieu Chambeyron, based in Naples, in 1748 (ADR, 8B/871/3, 29/08/1748).

[46] ADR, 8B/871/1-3, Correspondance de Paris et de l'étranger.

> l'empressement que vous nous témoignez, mais il est nécessaire de nous faire avoir de bonne heure vos échantillons.[47]

Furthermore, almost all of these blind commissions from the 1770s were for embroidered shapes. It is therefore apparent that this practice was often attached to the business in and consumption of waistcoats embroidered to shape. Selling them in shape certainly presented a number of advantages for both parties. First, it allowed the Lyonnais to skip the stage of circulating samples, which was not only costly in time and money, but also a risk as their designs for the new season might be copied by rival manufactures (Miller 1999). Furthermore, waistcoat shapes seem to have been particularly convenient for bulk orders, a large number of them often being commissioned at once. In 1777 for instance, Bernascone asked Fiard to send 39 waistcoats through a single order.[48]

With embroidered waistcoats, the Lyonnais merchants therefore managed not only to keep their Italian market despite the downfall of brocaded silks, but also to seize a niche they did not control before. Garments made to shape were not new at that time nor were they a Lyonnais invention. Lyon's waistcoats embroidered to shape, however, were the first garments of this type that became so popular and sold at an international level, to the extent that they became a Lyonnais 'brand'.

To better understand the consumption of Lyonnais waistcoats in Italy, it would be most informative to compare it with the local production of waistcoats. It is an aspect of the trade that still needs to be uncovered, along with the role of the different Italian actors (mercers, *setaioli*, embroiderers, etc) in their production and consumption. The only trace of waistcoats locally embroidered to shape found so far is in Florence where a Lyonnais merchant, Pierre Chauvet, established himself in the 1770s and started manufacturing and selling *gilets* all over Italy.[49] Other traces of embroidered waistcoats were found in the first years of the 1780s in the account book of Françoise Belsent, a French milliner previously based in Turin who came to Florence in the 1750s.[50] Consulted account books of Italian merchants do not mention any waistcoats, all fabrics being sold in length.[51] It is therefore difficult to say if the manufacturing of waistcoat shapes was common in Italy. Further research in business archives of other Italian cities is surely necessary to delve deeper into this matter and determine the competition for Lyonnais waistcoats.

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[47] ADR, 8B/871/3, Lettre Fayet/Chambeyron (Naples), 14/08/1756.

[48] ADR, 8B/876/10, Lettre Fiard/Bernascone, 21/06/1777.

[49] Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), N/422/1376-1391, Libri di commercio e di famiglia, Pietro Chauvet.

[50] ASF, Archivio Antinori, Busta 136, Debitori e creditori di Francesca Belsent, modista, 1779-1784.

[51] For instance, ASF, N/422/5012, Giornale di bottega di Vincenzo Turchi, setaiolo, 1783-1792; ASF, N/422/5017, Registro dei drappi riconsegnati dalle tessitrici al negozio di Vincenzo Turchi e compagni, 1783-1792; ASF, Archivio Venturi Ginori Lisci, 498, Giornali d'Antonio Cenni e figli, setaioli in Por Santa Maria, 1771-1774.

7. Conclusion

The increasing number of embroidered waistcoats, especially those in shape, in the Lyonnais merchants' papers from the 1770s is indicative of a significant change in production and business practices that took place in this period. This new tendency originated in and was shaped by fashion. The trend for embroidery taking over Europe, the *Grande Fabrique* had to adapt. Some Lyonnais merchants did so by transposing their trademark of seasonal fashion changes onto embroidery and by focusing their strategies on the garment the most likely to make this medium flourish. The waistcoat was not only a garment particularly popular embroidered, but also the central part of the male attire. By capitalizing on it, following sartorial trends and with a quick production process, Lyon maintained its hold on the market for fashionable silks. Exploring their trade with Italian cities, we saw that a number of Lyonnais merchants successfully incorporated the production of waistcoats embroidered to shape to their manufacture. Turning this trend to their advantage, they were able to stimulate consumption by offering a wider range of goods at different price levels. These observations nuance the usual narrative about the Lyonnais industry suffering at the end of the century because of the decline in demand for fashionable brocaded silks, a story often exaggerated by the manufacture itself. Some Lyonnais merchants were not only able to adapt to this change, but actually used it to their advantage in order to develop a successful product and expand their production. Furthermore, the case of the male waistcoat woven or embroidered to shape is also an excellent example of how different items and processes of trading and consumption could spread as a response to the emulation of fashion. Through their modes of production and acquisition, waistcoats woven and embroidered to shape were among the first steps that led towards the ready-made clothing industry of the following century.

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