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New Textiles in a New World: 18th Century Textile Samples from the Viceregal Americas.

Elena Phipps

In 1783, on behalf of the King of Spain, Charles III, Jose de Galvez, Head of the Council of the Indias (the governing body for all of the Spanish colonies) requested a report on the state of the silk textile industry in Mexico. At that time, silk fabric, its use, production and trade was an important aspect of Colonial life in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, and in fact throughout the Spanish Americas¹. Silk—as the primary luxury fiber throughout the world-- penetrated all areas of Colonial society—both in the form of locally made fabrics as visible in the portrait painting of Sor Sebastiana Ines (Fig. 1) wearing an indigenous back-strap woven *huipil* whose patterning appears as silk, as well as high style fashion garments made of imported fabrics and ribbons worn by the *Peninsulares* and *Criollos* of the upper classes in the highly stratified caste system that composed Colonial New Spain in the 18th century.



Figure 1. Painting *Sor Sebastiana Inés Josefa de San Agustín*, Ávila. Oil on Canvas. 1757. Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico

Some, at the time, viewed its use as excessive. And the church being one of the greatest consumers of imported silks, damasks and velvets—used it to cover all surfaces of the altar, garments for the statues of the Virgin and various saints, as well as for ecclesiastical garments and furnishings for the clergy.

Almost from the beginning of the Spanish engagement with the Americas, there had been an interest in introducing the cultivation of silk, especially in Mexico, with a campaign in 1536 to plant over 100,000 mulberry trees in Huejotzingo, Cholula y Tlascala initiated by Antonio de

¹ Groundbreaking work on this subject is Borah, W. *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico*. [Ibero-Americana: 20.] Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1943.

Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain.² Mulberry leaves were essential as the main diet of the newly introduced crop of silkworm, sent as “seeds” – the eggs—that came from Spain and the plan for raising of the trees for this purpose was established over a fifteen -year program. (Fig.2) Following Spanish regulations, the silk yarn, then in its raw form, was to be sent back to Spain where it was woven, then re-imported as fabric back to the Americas.



Figure 2. Eggs from silkworm appear as ‘seeds’. Photo: Bryan Whitehead
http://japanesetextileworkshops.blogspot.com/2010_06_01_archive.html

In the early period of Colonial rule of the 16th and 17th centuries, luxury goods, such as silks and velvets highly regulated by Spanish law. It was prohibited, for example, to weave them in the Americas, as all such goods were to be imported from Spain. However, regulations were not always conformed to, and in fact silk fabrics of various types were produced on Spanish style looms, including, what must have been a rare occurrence, on the drawloom. (An 18th century painting in the Soumaya Museum by Carlos Lopez *St. Michael and the Drawloom* depicts a Mexican textile workshop with such a loom.³

While the finished textile was prohibited as such, much of the raw materials used to produce these luxury fabrics--notably the dyestuffs of cochineal, indigo, annatto and the wood-dyes, as well as the special fibers—as well as the fine cotton, and eventually silk yarns —originated from Mexico and Peru, and were sent in tremendous quantities, to Spain, fueling the Spanish textile industry. The advent of the Manila Galleons in the 1560s brought direct trade between Mexico and Asia (via the Philippines), laden with silk textiles from China.⁴ (Fig. 3) As part of an

² "Ordenanzas de Antonio de Mendoza sobre géneros de seda" Archivo General de Indias PATRONATO,181,R.3. This was in the form of “obligation of Martin Cortes to viceroy of new Spain, Antonio de Mendoza to plant in the province of Huejotcingo, Cholula y Tlascala 100,000 feet of mulberries, in 15 years for the raising of silkworms. It is said to be the first cultivation in this reign since the conquest. Tenochtitlan, Oct 6, 1536. “ Archive of Seville.

³ See Cárdenas Gutiérrez, S.. *El obraje de Mixcoac : En el siglo XVIII*. México: Universidad Panamericana. 2002.

⁴ Amelia Peck, ed. *The Interwoven Globe*. MMA and Yale University Press, 2013.

extended global trade route, they also brought goods from India—such as the painted cotton chintz so favored in Europe-- which then could come directly to the Americas.



[Figure 3 Map, Spanish trade routes (after *Interwoven Globe*, MMA 2013)]

The question of supply and demand, national and international industries and consumption, Spanish hegemony of trade and production, were complex issues, and of great concern both in Spain and in the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. This was especially true in the 18th century, as with the Bourbon reforms, the Spanish Empire was in a period of social and fiscal revision and restructuring of economic and commercial enterprise and there was much concern regarding the impact and efficacy of trade and industry to and from the Americas.

The report on silk weaving and cotton printing in Mexico: the Brooklyn manuscript

In this context, an assessment of the state of textile production in New Spain was undertaken over the course of approx. 10 years—and compiled into a report for the King of Spain. The report was specifically concerned with silkweaving and also of a specialized product of printed cotton fabrics called Indianillas. The report was prepared in triplicate as all business of the Council required. One set of documents for the King, one for the Viceroy of New Spain and one for the Fiscal of the Royal House. The documents composing this report gathered between the dates of Sept 2, 1783- March 2, 1793: one extant set is presently in the form of a manuscript entitled “About the Silk Looms that are in this Capitol” and is currently in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, acquired by the museum in the 1940s. (Fig. 4) The manuscript, never fully published, was included in the groundbreaking exhibition *Converging Cultures* that highlighted the extraordinary collection in the Brooklyn Museum of Colonial art from Mexico and Peru in 1996, curated by Diana Fane.⁵ In preparation for the exhibition, a then graduate student, Christopher Couch, prepared a description of the basic contents of the manuscript.⁶ The catalogue entry, co-authored by Couch and noted Spanish scholar Luisa Elena Acala, introduces

⁵ Fane, Diana, and Kevin Stayton, Editors *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Spanish America*. The Brooklyn Museum and Harry Abrams, Brooklyn, 1996.

⁶ Brooklyn Museum archive. Letter from Chris Couch to Ann Coleman 8/17/87 with a schematic description of the manuscript and its folios

the manuscript, though the work has never been thoroughly published or contextualized from its textile perspective.⁷

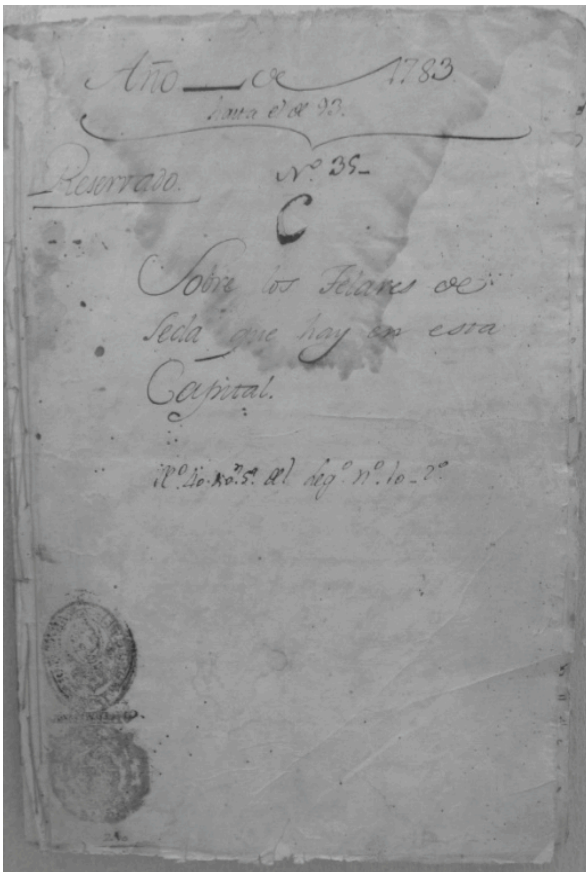


Figure 4. Frontispiece. *Sobre los telares de seda que hay en este capital* (About the Silk Looms that are in this Capital. 1783) paper, ink. Brooklyn Museum ms. 44.188

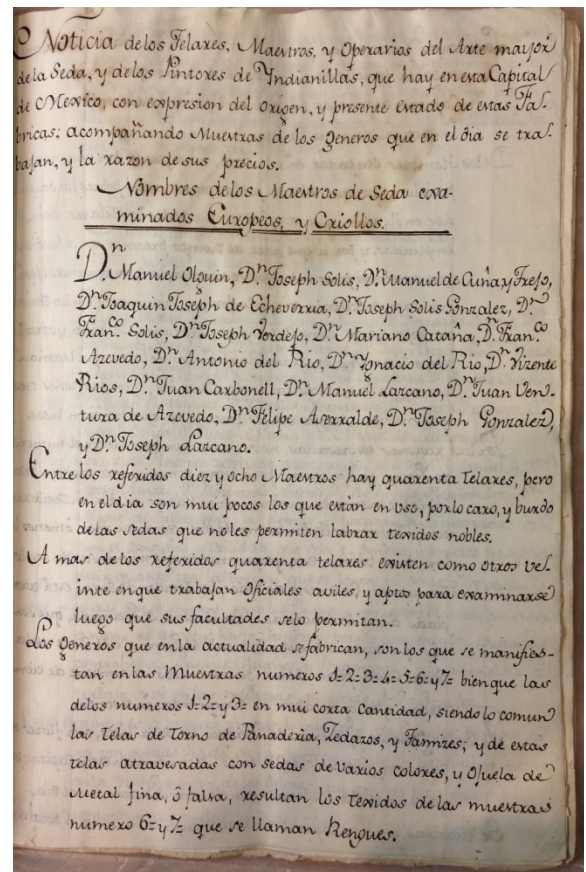


Figure 5. Report of the Looms, Maestros and Workers of the high Art of Silk and of the Painters of Indianillas that are in this Capital....

The manuscript is a composite of correspondence, various reports, and fabric samples. It is an unbound but stitched ms of 30 unnumbered folios composed of linen paper, many of which have watermarks. (Fig. 5) There is correspondence, in various hands, between various officials of the Viceroyalty of New Spain responding to the request from the King to document the silk weaving and cotton printing textile industries in Mexico. The players in this story include some of the most important political and economic personages of Viceregal New Spain in the 18th century-- José de Gálvez, the Minister of the Council of the Indies (1775–1787), the Fiscal de Real Hacienda- the royal accountant for New Spain Don Ramón de Posada y Soto, 1781-1793 and the Viceroy of New Spain Conde de Revillagigedo [1789-1794] (though his father, a former Viceroy may have been involved in the earlier part of the report.)

⁷ C. Couch and M.L. Acala Cat.no. 20(pp. 100-101) in Fane and Stayton, *Converging Cultures*. The manuscript was also included in an exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2006. J. Rischel *Arts of Latin America*.

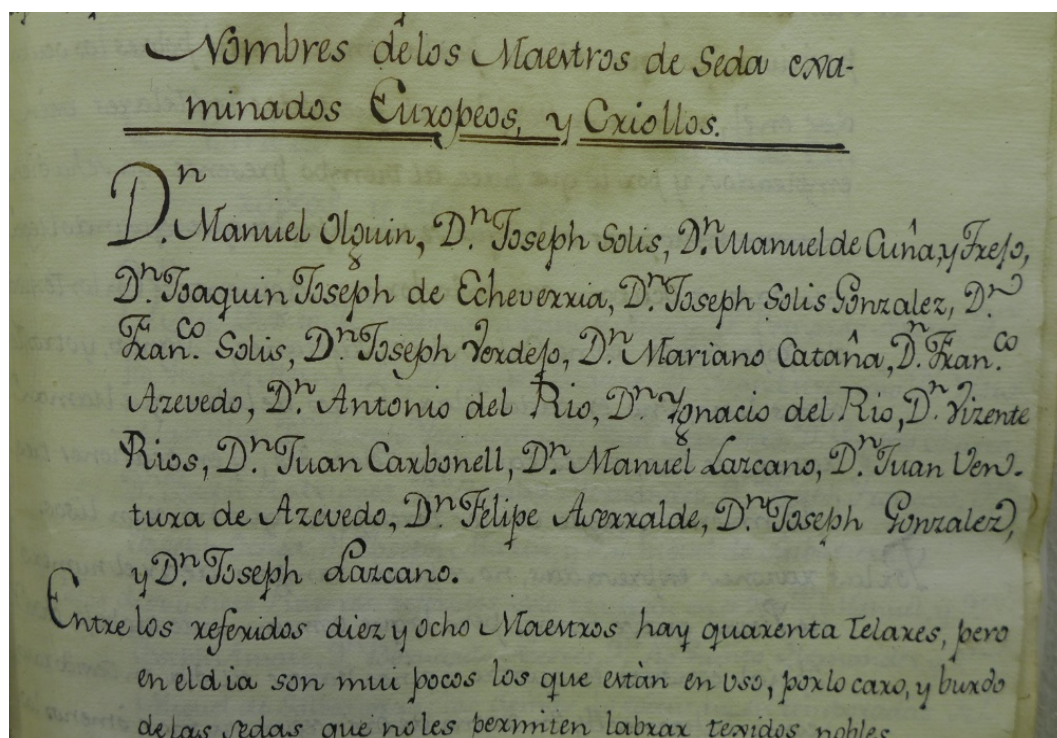


Figure 6. Names of the masters of silkweaving European and Criolle. (detail of folio from Brooklyn Museum ms.) “ among the 18 referred-to Maestros, there are forty looms.....”

There are various reports and updates on silkweaving and cotton printing including lists of names of all of the weavers and printers in Mexico City, their origins and domiciles. (Fig. 6) There are also some commentaries on the manufacturing, the state of the art and business. From the text we can study the names of the master silkweavers, their origins and specialties. These seem to range from velvet, damask, and *capichola*- or warp-faced plainwoven silks, among others.

Among the list of the “painters” of Indianillas, we can see that many are criollo—Spaniards born in the Americas-- while others are Catalan, French and “Jacupin” (though it is not certain if this phrase refers to English supporters of the French revolution, or the French themselves) Another document includes where these weavers live, which barrio and what they produce. In the economics of the Mexican silk industry, the prices of each of the different types of fabrics are listed, and compared to same or similar fabrics produced in Spain. An example: Blue Capichola woven in Mexico sells for 3 peso per vara (yard) while the same from Sevilla sells for 9 ½ varas. There is so much information within this manuscript, that includes a number of different reports and compilation of census and other data—and so much to assimilate-- that it is not possible in this short paper to present the full scope. I would like, rather, to focus on the samples themselves.

The Silks

The fabric samples accompanying the documents come after a page indicating “triplicate.” The set of samples that follow containing one page of of Mexican silk fabrics are stitched onto a sheet of paper, and include paper labels with the names of the different fabrics and their price per

yard (vara). (Fig. 7) The samples are numbered 1-7 and include a red velvet, a blue and a purple plain cloth, two sheer pieces and two small narrow ribbon-like pieces.



Figure 7 Page of Brooklyn Museum manuscript with fabric samples. {Photo: author}

The following table (Table 1) is a brief transcription of the information on the labels, and general description. The names include *Terciopelo de Popotillo*, *Capichola*, *Anafalla*, *Liston* and *Rengue*. The fact that they are identified by name as associated with an actual textile sample is very important—as we so often find names of fabrics listed in archival documents such as wills, shipping records, etc, but it is difficult to know exactly what type of fabric they are actually referring to.

No.	Name	Description	Material	Price per yard
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1	Terciopelo de Popotillo	Red Velvet (pile in bands alternating with no pile)	Silk	7 ps, 4 r
2	Capichola	Blue warp-faced plain weave (rep)	Silk	3 p
3	Anafalla	Purple plain weave	Silk	3 p 6 r
4	Liston	Pile stripes (blue) with white	Silk	6 r
5	Liston	Orange and white striped ribbon.(narrow)	Silk	2 r
6	Rengue	White silk with thin metal stripes	Silk with metal weft	6 r
7	Rengue	White silk with blue stripes	Silk	6 r

Table 1. Summary of prices of silk samples.

Looking closely at the actual fabrics, the following are the technical descriptions.

No.2 *Capichola*. (Fig. 8) The blue *Capichola* is a tightly woven warp-faced plainweave ‘rep’ fabric—with its weft-ridges visible from the thicker weft. It is somewhat dull in appearance, lacking the sheen of reeled silk, though the warp yarns do not have strong twist. It seems to be a strong, durable fabric.

No. 3 *Anafalla*. (Fig. 9) This fabric is a monochrome purplish warp-faced plain weave, with a striped selvage. *Anafaya* is a term used for silk fabric made from spun silk. It has a slightly dull appearance, as it likely was spun from the broken cocoons. From the commercial literature, *Anafaya* sometimes is combined with cotton- I have not had the opportunity to conduct the fiber analysis, but this sample does not appear to have cotton.⁸

⁸ From the Dictionary of the **Real Academia Española**. <http://buscon.rae.es/drae/srv/search?val=anafaya>
anafalla o anafaya.

(Del ár. hisp. *annafáya*, y este del ár. clás. *nufāyah* 'residuo'; cf. port. *anafaia* 'hilo de seda más basto hilado al principio'). 1. f. Tela que se hacía de algodón o de seda.

Translation: anafalla or anafaya.

(Del ár. hisp. *annafáya*, and this of the ar. clás. *nufayah*, residue; cf. port. (*anafaia*, more coarse silk yarn spun at the beginning). 1. f. cloth made of cotton or silk.

This may imply that the *Anafalla* is made with the leftover silk (*residuo*) also called *shapp* in French, which is spun, and therefore lacks the luster of higher quality silk.

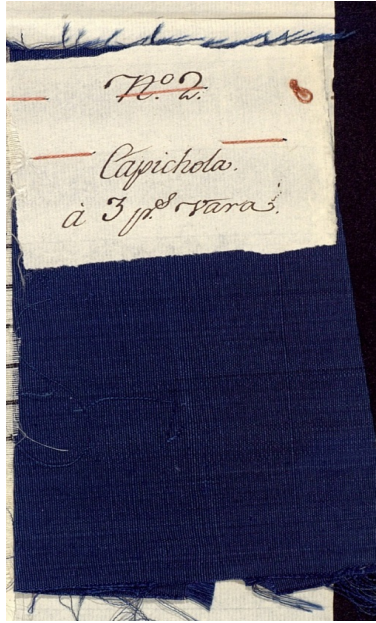


Figure 8 Capichola No. 2 and Figure 9 Anafalla No. 3 Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 10. No. 1 Velvet of Popotillo. Sample, Brooklyn Museum.

Figure 11. Popotillo plant: Ephedra

No. 1 Terciopelo de Popotillo. (Fig 10) Red velvet—no doubt silk dyed with cochineal—is labeled as *Terciopelo de Popotillo*, translated as Velvet of Popotillo. The silk velvet is a warp pile, and is woven with rows of cut pile alternating with non-pile areas. The term Popotillo is obviously a local Mexican name, though what it refers to is not certain. Originally I considered

it may be the name of the place where it was produced, however, the term Popotillo refers to a shrub—ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*) (Fig. 11) also called *popotl* in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of the Aztec (and Nahua people). The plant is used, among other things as a medicinal tea, and also its' stems are used to make brooms. The shrub's stems have regular, pronounced joints, and it may be that the name for the velvet with the regular ridges derives from the similarly regularly 'jointed' look of the plant, itself.



Figure 12. Liston orange and yellow

Figure 13. Liston blue and white

No. 4 and 5 Liston. (Figs. 12 and 13) The two small samples are each labeled LISTON—meaning striped. The orange and yellow is a narrow-ribbon, warp-faced plainweave. The weft at the selvage edges has loops. It costs 2 *ruanes per vara*. The blue and white example is an unusual weave—with blue pile in-between the white areas. The price per vara of the blue and white, at 6 *ruanes per vara*, is double the plainweave striped orange and yellow.



Figure 14. Sample No. 7 Blue and white Rengue Brooklyn Museum.

Figure 15. Sample No. 6 White and gilt metal Rengue Brooklyn Museum.

No. 6 and 7. Rengue. (Figs. 14 and 15) The last two are labeled as “Rengue” -- and are both very interesting.

No. 7 is a sheer, thin, plain weave with supplementary blue and white stripes. No. 6 is Plain weave—a very sheer, open weave, with strips of solid metal—likely gilt silver—woven in weft bands. The cloth appears at times to be a gauzeweave, as the warps slip their position and appear diagonally: but in fact there is no crossing—it is a plainweave.

Rengue is a term that can refer to fabrics from the Philippines, made of piña—from the pineapple plant-- or wild banana fiber. We find this term in archival documents, and especially in relation to fabrics brought to the Americas via the Manila Galleons. Piña was and still is part of the Philippine specialty textile industry—and as a fiber can have a certain stiffness, but it can have a high luster, like silk, as well.

Microscopic examination of these fabrics has not been undertaken (though planned for the future) but my assumption is that these textiles do appear to contain silk, but may also have fibers of the traditional Philippine plant sources. The term Rengue may at this time period also refer simply to sheer cloth—perhaps reminiscent of an original piña or banana cloth model-- and perhaps that is the sense of the name in these cases. It is quite interesting from an historical perspective and in particular, the link through the Philippine-origin of the terms for its name-- that warrants further study.⁹

The Printed Cotton Indianillas



Figure 16. Page with Indianilla samples. Brooklyn Museum

⁹ Fiber samples from warp and weft examined under the microscope in longitudinal and cross section were identified as silk. January 2015. Phipps and MSH.

Another whole set of samples is a page with the Indianilla fabrics, with examples in two different colors, with four different patterns, also with their prices.(Fig. 16) What are these indianillas and how is it that they are part of this focus on luxury textiles?

The Indian chintz—fine cotton fabric that was patterned by dying, painting, printing and with mordant resist was exported throughout the world during the 16th-18th centuries especially, fueling the global trade networks. These fabrics were used for household furnishings and garments, as we see in one example here, of Indian cloth made up into a European garment.

Particularly popular in Europe, these Indian fabrics, and their European derivatives arrived in Mexico with great reception, brought by Spanish traders via Atlantic routes from Europe as well as the Pacific routes from the East, with the Manila Galleons. The impact of Indian chintz on the European textile industry cannot be underscored. The driving factor was, because of their popularity and to the efforts on behalf of merchants to capture the market, European textile manufacturers and especially printers, wanted to be able to reproduce what the master dyers of India had been able to create—especially a bright red printed color on the surface of fine cotton fabric.¹⁰ Many decades—if not centuries-- of experimentation by printers in England, France, the Netherlands, among others, resulted in successfully managing the technological achievement. In France, and other parts of Europe, these European-made printed cotton fabrics were referred to as *Indiennes*. In Mexico, they were called Indianillas.¹¹

Cotton does not bond easily with organic red colorants, such as madder or cochineal, and requires considerable pre and post treatment to be effective, as well as special components to both the dye and its medium for printing. The complex chemistry required to do this took many decades to master by European printers in the mid-18th century. At the same time, a method of block printing these colors onto cotton was developed in Mexico. In Europe, the printing method generally involved the use of madder dye—the root of the *rubia tinctoria* plant native to the region. In Mexico, the achievement was the ability to print on cotton cloth, using local, native dyes, and specifically cochineal, *Dactylopius coccus*, the insect that thrived on the cactus and had been an important dyestuff since pre-Columbian times.¹²

¹⁰ See, for example, Georgio Riello and Beverly Lemire East and west: textiles and fashion in Eurasia in the early modern period. *Journal of Social History*, 2008, pp. 888-916.<http://chnm.gmu.edu/jsh/index.html>

¹¹ For further on the manufacturing of indianillas, see Grijalva, Manuel Miño, El camino hacia la fábrica en Nueva España: el caso de la “Fabrica de Indianillas” de Francisco de Iglesias, 1801-1810. *Historia Mexicana* Vol 34, no. 1 (Jul-Sept, 1984), pp. 135-148. [[jstor.org/stable/25135876](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25135876)]

¹² On the experimentation in Europe of red dyes for printing, see E. Phipps. Global Colors in A. Peck, ed. *The Interwoven Globe*. MMA and Yale Univ. Press 2013, pp. 120-135. See also Phipps. *Cochineal Red: the art history of a color*. MMA and Yale Univ Press, 2010.



Figure 17. Detail Glazed Indianilla sample, printed with cochineal dye. Brooklyn Museum.

A sample from the Brooklyn Indianilla textile was tested, and found to be indeed dyed with cochineal.¹³ (Fig. 17) In one of the reports in the Brooklyn ms, there is an interesting note about whether to try to bring the production of Indianillas to Spain—to capture the Spanish market with Spanish-made goods. The author concludes that since the materials—both the cotton and the dyes-- come from Mexico, it was more profitable to continue to allow their production there. When you look closely at this sample, you can see that it still has its glazed surface—likely produced from being rolled or beaten under pressure—calendared--rather than the application of a natural substance, such as was the practice in India.¹⁴

These samples in this Brooklyn manuscript are very rare—as very few textiles from the period have been preserved from Mexico. However, in the Archive of the Indes, in Seville—which is the place for all of the legal documents relating to the governance of the colonial enterprise-- there are additional parts of this story. The 35 or so entries in the archive with fabric samples included a variety of materials collected under this 18th century Royal mandate to demonstrate the type of textiles—national and imported-- that were available in the markets of Mexico, Peru, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Argentina. They include for example, beautiful samples of

¹³ Marco Leone, from the MMA scientific department analyzed a sample as was able to confirm the use of cochineal for the colorant . 2014. Personal Communication. Thanks also to Brooklyn Museum for allowing sampling.

¹⁴ See Miño Grijalva's description of tools- "apelear " -- rods to beat -- and a room for beating... "El camino hacia la fábrica en Nueva España: el caso de la "Fábrica de Indianillas" de Francisco de Iglesias, 1801-1810." *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jul. - Sep., 1984), pp. 135-148.

Spanish and English felted woolen fabrics dyed astonishing colors, that were available in Quito Ecuador in 1780. (Fig. 18)



Figure 18. *Pano de Castilla* 8 pesos of silver per vara , 1780. Archivo de Indias, Seville. MP-TEJIDOS 14

Belgian linens available in 1787 in Venezuela (Fig. 19) and European cotton velvets confiscated in the port of Lima in 1786, including the lead seal marking that the tax had not been paid on them for their import into Peru. (Fig. 20)

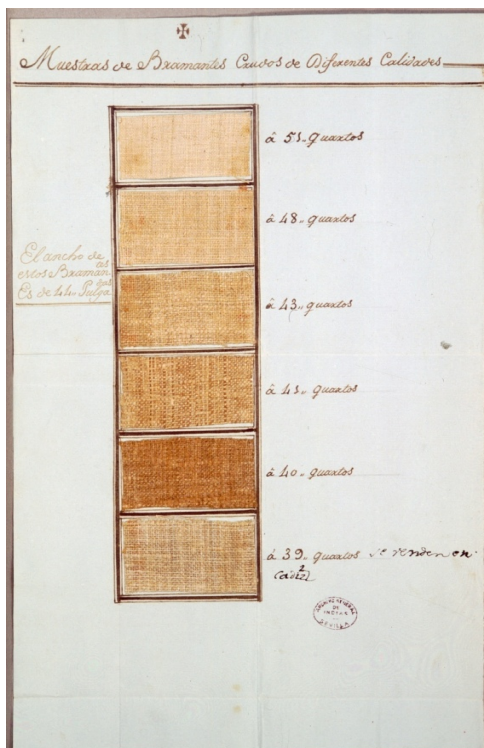


Figure 19. Raw *bramantes* of different qualities from Gante [Belgian heavy linen?] 1787
Archivo de Indias, Seville. MP-TEJIDOS 12

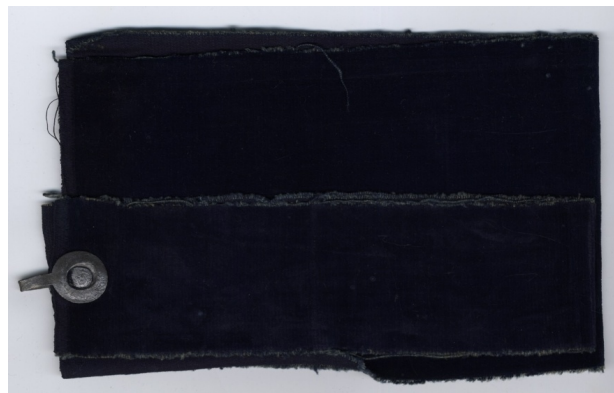


Figure 20. “Samples of fabrics coming from Cadiz, retained in the custom house of Lima under suspicion” May 20, 1786. Archivo de Indias, Sevilla. MP-Tejidos 6. Photo: Courtesy Archivo de Indias.

Among other treasures, surprisingly, were not one but two other sets of identical textiles that were part of the Brooklyn Museum manuscript. These must have been part of the original ‘triplicate’ sets of the Mexican Silk report, as indicated by the single page that had been marked as such!¹⁵ There were two sets of the silk pages that had included the velvet, capichola and renque samples, (Fig. 20) and two sets of the Indianillas (Fig. 21)



Figure 20. One of two identical pages to the Brooklyn manuscript “With letter original and duplicate no. 627 from the Viceroy of New Spain Conde de Revilla Gipedo” (Mexico, Aug 30, 1793). Archivo de Indias, Sevilla. MP-TEJIDOS 15. Photo: Courtesy Archivo de Seville

¹⁵ While in the Archivo, I did not see the written documents that would have accompanied these textile sample pages. They are noted as being part of number 627 Legajo.



Figure 21. One of two identical pages to the Brooklyn manuscript “With letter original and duplicate no. 627 from the Viceroy of New Spain Conde de Revilla Gipedo” (Mexico, Aug 30, 1793). Archivo de Indias, Sevilla. MP-TEJIDOS 15.1. Photo: Courtesy Archivo de Sevilla

Conclusions

This brief review does not summarize the contents and context of all of these documents, however we can see that the importance of the knowledge and production of the two textile artforms presented in them—the weaving of silk, and the printing of cotton-- took on a special role in Viceregal New Spain.

Expertise and tradition, technological advancement, economic incentives, political imperatives, social identities across cultures, among other factors, all contributed to the growth and development of these textile enterprises, within the specific context of a transforming Colonial society. There is still much research to conduct in order to develop a greater context of this story: knowing the names of the makers helps to put a human face on the subject, and seeing the actual examples concretizes their achievements from a history that is so little understood.

Acknowledgements:

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