

# The Emperor's Humbler Clothes: Textures of Courtly Dress in Seventeenth-Century South Asia.

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### The Emperor's Humbler Clothes: Textures of Courtly Dress in Seventeenth-Century South Asia

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#### Abstract

This study reconstructs the humbler components of South Asian courtly ensembles worn by the greatest Mughal emperors, which included relatively inexpensive tie-dyed cloths made in Rajasthan and finely spun cotton muslins from Bengal. Court biographies, popular lexicons, and the letters sent from the Mughal court to its Rajput

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allies reveal that the fabrics used for dress in early modern South Asia were valued for sensory qualities, such as softness, saturation of color, and coolness on the skin, that went beyond the cost of the materials or the sophistication of the technology used to produce them. This project transports the study of dress in early modern South Asia beyond its current focus on the material wealth of imperial costumes to recover the sensory experience of wearing airy cotton and velvety wool, as well as the sophisticated intellectual, poetic, and political messages that could be carried in the fabric of a courtly coat.

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