The Habit Does Make the Monk: Jesuit Dress in the Marianas Mission 1668–1700

Sandra Montón-Subías
ICREA and Department of Humanities, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain
sandra.monton@upf.edu

Received 8 August 2023 | Accepted 21 February 2024 | Published online 23 April 2024

Abstract

This article explores some of the body modifications that occurred in the Mariana Islands during the initial decades of the Jesuit mission. It focuses on Jesuit vestments and the use of Indigenous CHamoru palm-weaving in a cultural background where the CHamoru dress code clashed with Jesuit mindsets. The article also analyzes the imposition of clothing on the CHamorus by the Jesuits and the imposition of nakedness on the Jesuits by the CHamorus as punitive measures within a colonial environment where the Jesuits sought to dismantle traditional lifeways while the CHamorus endeavored to preserve them.

Keywords

Jesuit missionaries – Mariana Islands – CHamorus – body modification and identity – colonial dress codes – missionary clothing practices – cross-cultural dress practices

Introduction

He began his Mission by making an entrance into those villages, without any defense except that provided by God, without any food to sustain himself along the road except that provided by divine providence, with only his breviary, and instead of a cloak, some kind of reed robe (called
that he used as a raincoat. This is a scheme devised by the Fathers of those Missions, so that they would not have to wear any cloaks, not overcoats; in effect, because of the heat, or the bother, they usually walk without any overcoat, or cloak; the Mariano people judge them to be superfluous luxuries, and they beg to have them to wear themselves, and to refuse their request would be to displease them, because they are like children.¹

More than twenty thousand km separated the Jesuits boarding in Seville to the Marianas (via Acapulco) from their final destination. The Mariana Islands were indeed one of the most remote colonies of the Spanish empire in the seventeenth century (figure 1). This huge geographical distance mirrored also the significant cultural distance between the Jesuits and the CHamorus, the Indigenous inhabitants of this archipelago. While the Jesuits belonged to patriarchal societies where relationships among their members were mediatized by social inequality, the CHamorus configured oral societies, most probably of matrilineal kinship, with a strong communal ethos. Structural relations of subordination and dominance and unequal power—i.e., the

---

¹ Francisco de Florencia, Exemplar vida, y gloriosa muerte por Christo del fervoroso P. Luis de Medina de la Compañía de Iesus (Seville: Juan Francisco de Blas, 1673), fol. 23v. Translated in Rodrigue Lévesque, History of Micronesia. Volume 5: Focus on the Mariana Mission, 1670–1673 (Quebec: Lévesque Publications, 1995), 26, my emphasis.
possibility of imposing one person’s or group’s will over the behavior and
destiny of the others—were probably absent, despite the presence of
chiefs and ranked lineages. This cultural distance included totally different
corporeal habits. However, for the Jesuits and the CHamorus, these habits were
fundamental to their self-identity and sense of group belonging.

Unlike most of the other colonies of the Spanish modern empire, the
permanent colonization of the Marianas started as a Jesuit mission. It took
place in 1668 under the leadership of the forty-one-year-old Diego Luis de
Sanvitores (1627–72). Sanvitores had envisioned these islands as the most
suitable place to develop a mass evangelizing project. Moreover, they provided
the best possible scenario to practice the Jesuit vow of poverty, which was
under political scrutiny when the mission began. For this reason, Jesuit
literature endeavored to show the Marianas as penurious lands without any
of the riches coveted in Europe. It was emphasized that the sole purpose in
embarking for these islands was to spread the faith and thus bring “civilization”
to the “barbaric” CHamorus. Local lifeways were targeted from the outset in
order to align the Indigenous way of understanding the world as closely as
possible with that of the Jesuits. Body modification became a key factor, as the
CHamorus did not use clothes to cover their bodies. For the Jesuits, clothing
“naked” bodies with garments and “naked” souls with baptism were deemed
inseparable from membership in Christianity and “civilization.” The process
sparked significant CHamoru resistance, ultimately resulting in the loss of
lives for a significant number of Jesuits in the Marianas.

See Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1969]), 25; Max
Weber, Economía y sociedad (Mexico DF: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 2014 [1922]).

For a deeper discussion about CHamoru social organization, see Sandra Montón-Subías
and Almudena Hernando, “Modern Colonialism and Cultural Continuity through Material
Culture: An Example from Guam and CHamoru Plaiting,” International Journal of Historical
Chamorro Culture and History of the Northern Marianas Islands (Saipan: Division of Historic

E.g. Archivo Histórico Nacional [hereafter ahn], Diversos-Colecciones, Legajo 27, n. 35, fol.
1r–2v; Archivo de la Real Academia de la Historia [hereafter rah], 9/3593, n. 20, fol. A’.

Francisco García, Vida y Martirio del Venerable Padre Diego Luis de Sanvitores (Madrid:
Imprenta de Juan García Infanzón, 1683), fol. 162; Rodrigue Lévesque, History of Micronesia.
Volume 6: Revolt in the Marianas, 1673–1678 (Quebec: Lévesque Publications), 248; Charles Le
Gobien, Histoire des Isles Marianes; Nouvellement converties à la Religion Christienne & de la
mort glorieuse des premieres Missionnaires qui y ont prêché la Foy (Paris: Chez Nicolas Pepie,
1700), fol. 85.
The impact that dress had on CHamoru lifeways, subjectivities and cosmovisions has already been discussed in previous articles. However, the impact that Marianas had on Jesuit body habits has not yet received the same consideration. This article addresses this gap by examining Jesuit vestments and their use of Indigenous palm-weaved textiles. Although the Jesuits strove to implement self-sufficiency in cotton cloth manufacture, from cotton growing to cotton weaving, they did not succeed, and they faced recurrent shortages of cotton cloth. This situation was sometimes “alleviated” with the use of Indigenous palm-weaving technology, both to clothe the CHamorus and the Jesuits themselves. The use of plaited textiles by some Jesuits could recall the strategy of accommodation that Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) crafted more than a century earlier for Japan and China. However, I argue that the Marianas case is not a proper example of it. Finally, to frame my discussion about Jesuit body habits in this archipelago, I will also discuss Jesuit perceptions of CHamoru body habits, with a focus on what they interpreted as nakedness and their strategies to eliminate it.

As the CHamorus were oral, the only written sources for the first decades of the mission were European (mostly Spanish). My critical research has mainly focused on eulogies and biographies made for those missionaries who died on duty and on annual letters. They contain the richest information for the purposes of this article. Jesuits typically wrote them during or after their service in the Marianas. Some eulogies and biographies, however, were written by Jesuits who never set foot on the islands. It is worth noting that, in using the ethnonym CHamoru to refer to the Indigenous inhabitants of Marianas, I am following the recommendation made by the Kumísión i Fino’ CHamoru in Guåhan. This term, as an ethnic name, is absent from the Jesuits’ documents.


7 Important insights are however found in Vicente A. Díaz, Repositioning the Missionary: Rewriting the Histories of Colonialism, Native Catholicism, and Indigeneity in Guam (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 165–66; Ulrike Strasser, Missionary Men in the Early Modern World: German Jesuits and Pacific Journeys (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 32–34.

8 See Montón-Subías, “Textile Technologies.”

9 Commission on CHamoru Language (https://kumisionchamoru.guam.gov/).
which refer to CHamorus in a variety of other ways, such as *indios* (Indians), *indizuelos* (little Indians), *marianos* (people from the Marianas), *naturales* (natives), and *ladrones* (thieves).

**“Nakedness”**

What is most surprising in them is their nakedness, even in their sexual parts, shamelessly on the part of the men; only the women, who are far worse than the men in this passion, hide their sex with tree leaves.

The Jesuits who arrived on the Marianas, as well as other European explorers and missionaries who had formerly visited this part of the world, viewed CHamoru body habits as nakedness. “Nakedness” was reported even in those narrations with a positive description of the CHamoru character. For instance, the previous sentences in the above quote from a 1668–69 annual letter emphasized that native morals were far better than those of many Christians and listed a series of “bad” habits that were not found in the Marianas. What some missionaries perceived as an incongruity between native morality and “nakedness” was even justified sometimes as inevitable because of the lack of clothing. However, most Jesuit accounts listed “nakedness” together with what they considered negative features such as a “lack of government” or “barbarity.” Whatever the reasons, “nakedness” was incompatible with the Jesuit mindset, which linked body image with moral behavior and associated dress with civilization. It is thus not strange that the Jesuits were determined to modify CHamoru body habits.

According to various written sources, textile manufacturing in the Marianas consisted of palm weaving made by women. This craft was integral to CHamoru
life; it was used to make mats (which served as mattresses, blankets, curtains, shrouds for the deceased, and as tomb covers), tables, hats, sandals, cradles, plates, baskets, boxes for the ancestors' skulls, sails for boats, street ornaments for the chiefs’ funerals, and a kind of “armor.”\textsuperscript{14} Even houses were partially plaited, as this is how their roofs and walls were made.\textsuperscript{15} Spanish sources frequently referred to plaiting as one of the finest industries in the archipelago. However, such praise did not include the few plaited artifacts used for clothing the body: sandals, hats, and, in the case of women, \textit{tifis}\textsuperscript{16} and skirts worn at female festivals. These skirts, for instance, were described in a pejorative way as “more like a cage than a clothing,”\textsuperscript{17} and plaited sandals were even used as a factor to express the Jesuits’ mortification (see below). In addition to plaited sandals, hats, \textit{tifis}, and the occasional skirt, CHamorus did not use fabrics to clothe their bodies. And this is what the Europeans interpreted as nakedness.

Even before the colony, clothing versus “nakedness” was a key missional concern. Not only had Sanvitores read descriptions of CHamory body habits,\textsuperscript{18} but he had been in the Marianas in 1665 and knew CHamoru customs firsthand. A document from this same year, allegedly written by him, remarked that no silver would be needed to help people and missionaries in the Marianas, only some seeds and clothes.\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, an inventory most likely made in Acapulco in 1668 recorded clothing items to be loaded onto the Manila galleon where Jesuits would travel some months later to establish the first mission in Guam. Items listed as essential included Indian blankets (\textit{mantas de indios}), hats, generic cloth to be converted into soutanes, and poor people’s dresses (\textit{vestidos}...
de pobres), cordovan leather and soles for shoes.20 And Luis de Pimentel (1612–89), writing from Seville in 1667, thought that cotton and hemp could be sown in the Marianas due to the similar climate to the Philippines, where natives already used these materials for clothing.21

It is also significant that one of the first commands that Sanvitores gave upon arriving on the Marianas, even before disembarking from the galleon San Diego, was to dress a two-year-old native girl in white for baptism.22 Baptism symbolized entry into civilization, and civilization was inseparable from clothing. Similarly, the case of Choco (dates unknown), a Chinese man living in Guam prior to the Jesuits’ arrival, is noteworthy. Initially opposing the mission, Choco eventually embraced Christianity. When this happened, different documents emphasize Choco requested new clothes to replace his old ones.23 For him, Christian conversion also implied the incorporation of new clothing.24

During the first years of the mission, clothing the CHamorus remained a significant concern, with part of the Spanish budget allocated to address this issue.25 Requests for clothing were frequently made to the Spanish regent queen Doña Mariana de Austria (1634–96). Sanvitores himself petitioned for cloth in 1669 “to cover our Lord Jesus Christ who is extremely naked in these poor people” and for cotton and abaca weavers.26 Suitable lands to grow cotton were also sought and found in the different Mariana islands.27 The Jesuits were determined to develop self-sufficiency regarding cotton cloth, although without much long-lasting success.28 In fact, cotton cloth seems to
have been a recurrent shortage. In this situation, the Jesuits made new use of native technologies—palm-weaving in this case—to cover the body, both the CHamorus’ and their own.29 I will return to this point later.

Dress and Punishment

I found this year that a college for youths was opened at great expense at the first Residence, and in it were admitted about 20 of the ablest [children]. This institution was then spread to the other Residences with great fruit. Those admitted in it were first clothed, and a punishment was threatened, if they were seen and caught without these clothes.30

That dress was core to the Jesuit mission is illustrated by the previous quote from a joint relation that summarizes the mission’s first years (until 1673). The quote refers to the establishment of schools, an institution that was alien to the CHamoru tradition.31 The first thing done at this school, these Jesuits remarked, was to clothe children, and they were then threatened with punishment if they were “seen and caught” without their clothes. Within this same logic, clothing was also used as a reward for the best pupils.32

Written sources frequently mention petitions of cloth for schoolchildren, which were often insufficient.33 In 1689, more than twenty years after the arrival of Sanvitores, Lorenzo Bustillo (1642–1716) noted that neither the Jesuits nor the soldiers could completely “cover” Indigenous “nakedness,” with much of the Jesuits’ sparse socorro directed toward schools. Specifically, funds were allocated for two outfits per child—one for holidays and one for work—and sometimes included clothes for parents upon their children’s marriage.34 Similarly, in a 1682 relation from Rota, Teofilo de Angelis (1652–84) mentioned

29 E.g. García, Vida y Martirio, fol. 222; Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 6493; Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 7543, 558.
30 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 6413, my emphasis.
31 Schools were perhaps the most instrumental means to colonize CHamoru subjectivities and change the way of life since they were aimed at the children and therefore at the future (see Montón-Subías, “Gender, Missions,” 416).
32 E.g. “Relación de las empresas y sucesos espirituales y temporales de las Islas Marianas, que antes se llamaban Ladrones, desde que el año de sesenta y ocho se introdujo en ellas el Santo Evangelio por los religiosos de la Compañía,” RAH 10 g/2676, n. 8, fol. 48v.
33 RAH 9/2677, n. 55; Rodrigue Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:412.
34 RAH 9/2677, n. 55.
that when boys from schools got married, they were given "clothing for themselves and their wives."  

Schools not only made clothing compulsory but also served as workshops for teaching practical skills related to sewing, spinning, and weaving cotton and making and maintaining clothes. While missionaries occasionally engaged in sewing tasks, various documents recounted the petition and/or arrival of artisans like boot-makers, shoe-makers, and cotton weavers to train children in these new skills. Cotton weaving, sewing, and cloth maintenance fell mainly into girls’ hands. Jesuit Bustillo, for instance, reported that school girls sewed to cover the needs of both the Jesuits and the schoolboys at Hagatña, the main town of the colonial administration. They also crafted their own clothing. For religious festivities, it included ungarina dresses and shirts and petticoats made of colorful cambaya.

The introduction of clothing to cover the body was not a smooth process; had different speeds and provoked a range of diverse attitudes and reactions. Reinterpretations through use were common during the first years, as we can learn from a letter that Captain Joseph de Quiroga (1636–1720) wrote in May 1680. The letter says that the CHamorus of Hagatña asked for clothes because they were already familiar with the new custom but shortly after he arrived, they made him laugh with their “barbarities” because “they did not know what to make with them.” He continues to provide some examples: “One would wear pants around his neck like a tie, and the rest of the body naked; another would wear a hat, but the rest naked, yet another with only one stocking, or only one shoe.” And especially referring to women, he adds that “when they wear a skirt, it is almost the same as when they do not, because in church, when they kneel down, they usually place the skirt under their belt to avoid getting it dirty.”

In a 1668 letter sent to Jesuit Guillén (1627–75), Jesuit Pedro de Casanova (1641–94) mentioned that shirts were gifted to CHamoru chiefs, but they could not wear

---

36 E.g. “Relación de las Islas Marianas desde Junio de 75 hasta Mayo de 76,” RAH 9/2677, n. 2.
37 E.g. Gabriel de Aranda, Vida, y gloriosa muerte del V. Padre Sebastián de Monroy (Seville: Thomas Lopez de Haro, 1693), fol. 313, mentions that Sebastian de Monroy mended children's dresses, and that the same children—especially girls—asked the Jesuits to be taught how to sew (see also Montón-Subías and Moral, “Body Is Worth,” 278).
39 “Relación de El Estado, y Progressos de la Misión de las Islas Marianas desde Junio pasado de 81, hasta el de 82,” RAH, 9/3593, n. 23, fol. A2v.
42 RAH 9/2677, n. 24, my translation.
them for more than 2 hours. More open resistance can be understood by the fact that punitive measures were needed for school children who refused to wear colonial dress. And some CHamorus, even after baptism, resisted wearing clothes, as noted by Manuel de Solorzano (1649–84) in 1677, lamenting the limited success in encouraging converts to clothe themselves.

Other passages, conversely, highlight the acceptance of dress and/or suggest that clothes have become valuable and even precious commodities, possibly because they began to be used in transactions. In relation to the years 1676–77, Gerardo Bouwens (1633–1712) described significant processions where CHamoru chiefs were portrayed as well-dressed. We are left wondering if these were the same chiefs who could not tolerate shirts for over two hours nearly a decade ago. In any case, adequate attire for attending offices and processions is frequently mentioned. And not only during religious events: “Generally speaking, all persons of either sex try and walk about decently dressed, in line with their poverty, even when they are working or in their plantations,” wrote Lorenzo Bustillo in 1669. In this same annual letter, he explained that Nicolás Chuchan (dates unknown), a CHamoru chief whom the colonial administration had awarded a political office, risked his life to retrieve his clothing when his house caught fire. The fact that clothes were used as money or exchange currency is seen by the fact that soldiers were said to give Indigenous women their own clothes as payment for sexual intercourse.

43 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 4:469; Lorenzo Bustillo also reported that the first 1668 interaction with the CHamorus on dry land included hats and clothes given as gifts (Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 4:498).
44 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 6:652; see also García, Vida y Martirio, fol. 222; Montón-Subías and Moral, “Body Is Worth,” 278.
45 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 6:604.
48 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 9:479.
49 RAH 9/2677, n. 53, fol. 1r.
Likewise, a Jesuit annual report for 1673–74 mentions Pedro de Alexo (dates unknown) sometimes gave his clothes to the CHamorus in exchange for food for the Jesuits and companions.\(^{50}\) The CHamorus also exchanged food for shirts and dresses of bad quality, according to Archbishop Diego Camacho (1652–1712), with Manila galleons.\(^{51}\)

Jesuit biases likely exaggerated both resistance and acceptance to dress in Marianas. Their texts were aimed at securing support (and thus funds and provisions) for the continuity of this mission. Consequently, they needed to convey the idea that there was still much to be done and, at the same time, to highlight significant achievements. This was especially important as detractors of the Marianas endeavor, even within the Society of Jesus, were arguing that no progress was being made and that it was better to terminate the mission. Despite these biases, it seems plausible that both resistance and acceptance co-existed and that, in the most colonized areas, Jesuit policies eradicated or severely damaged CHamoru traditional body appearance.

Missionary body policies profoundly impacted Indigenous CHamorus. As previously noted, dressing the body meant much more than covering “nakedness” with offshore garments. For the CHamorus, these measures directly attacked their way of constructing and expressing their own personal and cultural identity. Jesuit-introduced foreign robes were tools to dis-robing the CHamoru traditional way of being. They became a disciplinary apparatus to disincarnate traditional selves through embodying new emotions, feelings, values, and senses of the body. More than the clothes themselves, what must have been groundbreaking was the incorporation of the sense of nakedness and the associated feelings of shame.\(^{52}\) Although always written with a Jesuit pen, some passages refer to this new emotion of shame towards the, now yes, naked body, as well as to the “appropriate” sense of modesty, embarrassment, recollection, virtue, decency, and chastity, that especially targeted women.\(^{53}\)

**Jesuit Vestments Away from Home**

We go as Our Lord knows in terms of clothing and without shoes, which often results in being hindered by the wounds we get on our feet due to wearing certain soles that the Indians make from the leaves of a tree called

---

\(^{50}\) Lévesque, *History of Micronesia*, 6:211.


\(^{52}\) Montón-Subías “Gender, Missions,” 419; Montón-Subías and Moral “Body Is Worth,” 280.

\(^{53}\) Lévesque, *History of Micronesia*, 8:114; See also Strasser, *Missionary Men*, 164.
Aga, wrapped with some straps made from coconut shells, uncomfortable footwear because it’s heavy and doesn’t last long; therefore we prefer to walk barefoot, and we suffer because of this, though with much joy, for the sake of Our Lord.  

Jesuits missionaries also modified their bodily habits in the Marianas, but for reasons drastically different to those of the CHamorus. Despite the Jesuit contempt for bodily needs, their bodies were crucial in shaping their identity as Jesuits. Their corporate identity, as relational identity, was literally constructed, expressed, and re-enacted in a corporeal way through their bodies. The Jesuit wardrobe was thus fundamental to the fostering of a sense of community belonging, both differentiating the missionaries from others while simultaneously connecting them to their Jesuit peers. The Jesuit outfit also permitted the CHamorus to identify them as a specific faction within the colonial party.

In a 1670 royal decree by Regent Queen Doña Mariana de Austria, attire for missionaries bound for the Philippines and Marianas was recorded: “to each one of the said Religious you are to give one set of vestments, according to the usual manner, and one mattress, one blanket, and one pillow for the sea voyage.” The same provision was made in later documents by her son Carlos II (1661–1700). However, it seems this was insufficient, as the Jesuits repeatedly emphasized the lack or scarcity of clothing in their written accounts. It is said, for instance, that Sanvitores’s soutane had completely faded, and that

---

54 Aranda, Vida, y gloriosa, fol. 256, my translation, my emphasis.
57 E.g. Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:633.
58 Strobach’s eulogy, however, noted that his soutane remained in use long after he arrived in Marianas because of his exceptional cleanliness (Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:457). Referring to Sebastian de Monroy, Gerardo Bouwens also emphasized his cleanliness (see Rah 9/2677, n. 13, fol. 2’).
he often arrived at villages wet without spare clothes. This clothing poverty is often listed together with other hardships endured by missionaries in the Marianas, such as meager sleep or food scarcity.

A shortage in cotton cloth supplies was sometimes managed by resorting to traditional CHamoru palm weaving, which seems to have provided clothing for both the CHamorus and the Jesuits within social circumstances driven by both necessity and proselytism. In an account for June 1668 to May 1669, Andrés de Ledesma (1610–84) noted that “for the Jesuits’ vestments, in the event of a shortage of other fabric, palm leaves dyed black shall suffice, to imitate the two Pauls, the hermit in attire, and the Apostle in zeal, and preaching.” An eulogy for Sanvitores in 1672 justified this use as “the Society does not have distinctive clothing, wearing only the robes of modest clerics, or what is demanded by the glory of God.” This scarcity of cloth became an opportunity for body mistreatment and mortification in line with the Jesuit vow of poverty. Mortification, occasionally referred to as the sister of the Jesuits, was envisioned as a pathway to purity and lauded as a means to extoll their excellence. A clear example is the use of palm-sandals (figure 2).

Palm sandals became a corollary to suffering and distress when worn by the Jesuits. As we can see in the quote that opens this section, they were sometimes considered even worse than walking barefoot, which is how they decided to walk sometimes. In a 1676 letter, Manuel de Solórzano pointed out that “ordinarily we make the journey barelegged to the knees (many streams compel us to do this), not without many and serious injuries to the feet from brambles and thorns and the burning heat of the sand.”

---

60 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:627. Different documents also touch on the fact that even before going to the Marianas his soutane was torn and disdainful (e.g. “Vida del invicto soldado de Cristo V.P. Diego Luis de San Vitores martirizado en las Islas Marianas,” RAH 10 9/2676, n. 24, fol. 36; Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:323). The Jesuits’ scarcity of dress is also recorded in Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:561, 663.

61 E.g. Aranda, Vida, y gloriosa, fol. 256; “Noticia de los progresos,” fol. 7v; RAH 9/2676, n. 16, fol. 26v; Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:328. For other contexts, see Zampol d’Ortia, “Dress of Evangelization,” [7].


63 “Vida del Invicto,” fol. 36, my translation.

64 E.g. Florencia, Exemplar vida, fol. 23v.

65 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:457.

66 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 6:649.
slashed" after walking barefoot on reefs. Apparently, however, as noted by the nineteenth-century Freycinet expedition, these palm sandals were particularly appropriate for walking on reefs.

Jesuits in the Marianas also wore traditional CHamoru palm hats instead of birettas, which were descriptively mentioned in the sources. However, the use of palm-weaved textiles as substitutes for black soutanes and capes is quite a different matter. Some passages refer to this practice as a type of example, as seems to have been the case with Sanvitores. It is said that he dressed himself with palm mats (*petate* and *estera*) to “make these nude people weave their clothing with the very land fruits to serve decency.” What happened before is narrated in a eulogy penned in 1672. It appears that Sanvitores had previously fashioned a series of hoses (*toneletes*) with fabrics brought from Mexico, which


71 “Vida del Invicto,” fol. 36.
were well received by the CHamorus. However, the availability of these fabrics quickly ran out. Sanvitores then looked for the most skilled palm-weavers to craft a large quantity of shirts. However, those who had previously appreciated the toneletes now scorned these plaited shirts, and no one was willing to accept, let alone wear, them. With no funds to bring additional fabrics, the eulogy further narrates that resorting to creativity became imperative, highlighting Sanvitores as the visionary who first conceived this solution (beginning to use plaited clothes). This remedy also proved advantageous for the Jesuits, who faced difficulties in replacing or mending their cassocks. Francisco García (1641–85) emphasized in 1683 that the new costume initially elicited laughter from the CHamorus but later moved them to tears in seeing an Apostle Paul dressed as the first hermit Paul and that this strategy was used in all the missions.72 Another document described these plaited outfits as long tunics (sayo largo), hats, and sandals. The Jesuits also carried a cross-shaped staff while entering the CHamoru villages, singing prayers, and ringing a bell.73 Other passages suggest that plaited fabrics were primarily used as replacements for capes. In a eulogy for Luis de Medina (1637–70), the first Jesuit murdered during CHamoru-Spanish conflicts, we read that “his soutane was extremely modest, and instead of a cape, he wore an overcoat made of plaited mats. He used to say with humor that it was better than the cape from Spain, as it served a myriad of purposes: as a dressing gown, a cape, a soutane in case of necessity, a sheet for sleeping, a blanket, a pillow, and so on.”74

The use of palm mats by missionaries was also gathered by Francisco de Florencia (1619–95) in 1673 in the excerpt that opens this article. It belongs, precisely, to the biography that he wrote for Luis de Medina. Florencia also noted the employment of plaited mats as substitutes for capes for rain protection and that this scheme was invented in the Marianas to avoid wearing capes or overcoats. He outlined three reasons for this choice: heat, the perception of capes as superfluous luxuries by “Marianos,” and to prevent giving them away to CHamorus upon request.

The quote is a good example of cultural bias. While the CHamorus might have viewed capes as exchangeable items, they did not share the missionaries’ moral judgment on luxury as the concept was foreign to their cultural tradition. Despite this bias, the quote clearly expresses the idea that capes were

72 García, Vida y Martirio, fol. 222, my translation. On this same episode, see also Vicente M. Díaz, Repositioning the Missionary, 165–66; Strasser, Missionary Men, 34; Montón-Subías and Moral, “Body Is Worth,” 278.
73 RAH 9/2676, n. 1.
not possessions Jesuits would share or exchange with the CHamorus, unlike other possessions like shoes. In fact, some eulogies expressed concern over CHamorus taking the Jesuits’ clothing and sacred ornaments. Therefore, choosing not to wear capes was deemed preferable to risking displeasing the CHamorus because they were childlike, Florencia noted in an infantilizing manner, which is a typical discursive colonial strategy often found in Jesuit accounts. Jesuit soutanes and capes likely belonged to the category of inalienable possessions and may have had a metonymic relation with holiness. Within the religious community, they were not just representations of holiness but considered sacred in their own right. Military expeditions were undertaken to recover Jesuits’ vestments from the CHamorus when Jesuits were killed during the Spanish–CHamoru wars, and, in some cases, these vestments were believed to have miraculous powers. Francisco Ezquerra’s (1644–74) soutane is one example. After its recovery, documents claim it was used to heal the only horse in the Marianas at the time.

Returning to Florencia’s quote, it ends with a sentence that may have two interpretations in Spanish, not captured in the English translation. After stating that not giving the CHamorus their vestments would displease them due to their childlike nature, the original Spanish adds, “Y va mucho en su disgusto.” This could be interpreted as redundant information that reiterates that denying the Jesuit clothes greatly displeases the CHamorus, something like “and it greatly contributes to their displeasure.” But it could also be translated as “there is much to lose if they are displeased,” implying that it was important not to offend them for the sake of the mission as a strategy to avoid hindering evangelization. This may recall the contentious strategy of Jesuit accommodation, previously discussed for the Marianas regarding foodways. As for dress, Jesuit accommodation has been analyzed for other socio-political

---

75 For instance, this same biography reports that he would give the CHamorus his shoes and use palm sandals instead (Florencia, Exemplar vida, fol. 35v).
76 E.g. Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:626. The eulogy also mentions that this gave him an opportunity to exercise patience.
77 See also Diaz, “Repositioning,” 148. The desire for Jesuit frocks is also found in Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:625.
78 “Relación de las empresas,” fols. 48r–v. This passage also recounts that on the same day, Sanvitores’s crucifix was also recovered.
79 Florencia, Exemplar vida, fol. 23r.
contexts, mainly for the Asian missions.\textsuperscript{81} It appears that \textit{The Constitutions}, by advocating the adaptation of clothing to local customs, offered dress guidance for those Jesuits who pioneered this practice.\textsuperscript{82} However, the situation in the Marianas differs significantly from Asian missions for various reasons.

Accommodation was devised to introduce evangelization to societies like Japan and China, characterized by cultural features and socio-political organizations that, generally speaking, were not perceived by the Jesuits as deeply “barbaric” but rather closer to European societies.\textsuperscript{83} This was not the case for CHamoru societies, which were even compared to the Japanese to highlight their lack of “civilization.”\textsuperscript{84} The Jesuits viewed the CHamorus as “barbarians” in need of “civilization” through mass conversion to Christianity, which in this case meant a comprehensive program to modify CHamoru traditional lifeways. The Jesuits first tried with honey, but they did not hesitate to turn to vinegar when honey proved insufficient. They employed violence to eradicate what they considered “idolatrous” practices and superstitions, such as the veneration of ancestors’ skulls kept in homes,\textsuperscript{85} and the figure of the \textit{makana} (likely an equivalent to shamans,\textsuperscript{86} whom they labeled as minions of the devil); or the CHamoru sacred places.\textsuperscript{87} This contrasts with the \textit{modo soave}


\textsuperscript{82} Muller, “Jesuit Strategy,” 467; Strasser, \textit{Missionary Men}, 25, 33; Zampol d’Ortia, “Dress of Evangelization,” [33].


\textsuperscript{84} Florencia, \textit{Exemplar vida}, fol. 22v.

\textsuperscript{85} E.g. “Relación de las empresas,” fol. 4r; RAH 9/2677, n. 21; RAH 9/2677, n. 61.

\textsuperscript{86} Montón-Subías, “Gender, Missions,” 411.

\textsuperscript{87} E.g. Lévesque, \textit{History of Micronesia}, 529.
advocated by Jesuits as Valignano for Japan and China. In the Marianas, the Jesuits were unwilling to embrace local customs, let alone incorporate them into Christian rituals. Aside from the use of hats and criticized sandals, the adoption of palm-weaved attire was not an attempt to align with local practices. This, too, was foreign to CHamoru tradition. CHamorus, as observed, did not cover their bodies with clothes—a practice the Jesuits viewed as barbarity requiring immediate modification. Hence, palm-weaved clothes did not originate from a willingness to comply with the CHamoru tradition but from a determination to change it in the context of cotton cloth poverty.

**Nakedness and Punishment**

While the Father was bleeding to death, the barbarians despoiled him of his clothes. He begged them to give him back his underwear. From his neck still hung the image of the Virgin Mary.

In stark contrast to CHamoru “nakedness,” it appears that some Jesuits opted to sleep in the same clothing they wore during the day. Francisco de Florencia, referring to Luis de Medina, recounted that “his nightly rest, after he had walked many leagues and spent the whole day catechizing, preaching and baptizing, was very little sleep upon some palm mat, with his clothes on; this was a custom he began, and kept observing from the time he entered those islands.” This appears to have been the case with Sebastian the Monroy (1649–76) as well. A letter written by Gerardo Bouwens about his death and virtues also highlights that “he would not undress at night throughout the entire year, unless the need of cleanliness compelled him to perhaps change his shirt. And in spite of the significant perspiration in that land and being completely soaked, he saw no reason to change into a dry shirt. He allowed his clothes to dry on his body.” Despite what one might assume, Ezquerra’s clothes were also described as “clean with religious decorum.” In these and other instances, wearing clothes

---


91 RAH 9/2677, n.13, fol. 2r–v, my translation. See also García, *Vida y Martirio*, fol. 546.

92 García, *Vida y martirio*, fol. 547, my translation.
served as a form of mortification, complementing other bodily disciplines such as the use of cilices, fasting, and additional penances that Superiors sometimes had to moderate to prevent jeopardizing their lives and the success of the mission.

On the flip side, other sources mentioned that the Jesuits did indeed undress to sleep, yet even this practice was considered a mortification exercise. For instance, a document presented during the Toledo process noted that Sanvitores “slept very little and most of the time with his clothes on, but sometimes for greater mortification he undressed to sleep on a mat or board.”

It is noteworthy that Jesuit nudity was portrayed as a higher level of mortification and self-penance. In these cases, sleeping undressed was a voluntary penance. However, there are instances where Jesuit nudity may have served an entirely distinct purpose: as a punitive measure imposed by the CHamorus during episodes of conflict and native resistance.

Certainly, Jesuit soutanes vividly illustrate CHamoru resistance. In a eulogy for Pedro Pavón (dates unknown), Gerardo Bouwens praised his patience, writing that “one example among many was when an Indian, after he had dirtied his [bare] foot on some human excrement, went up to the place where the Brother was and, as a joke and scoffing, used his cassock to clean his foot.” In another eulogy, this time for Felipe Sonson (1611–84), it is reported that CHamorus stole and burned the Jesuit’s vestments. However, the most dramatic moments involve CHamorus stripping the Jesuits naked during fatal encounters. In 1674, Francisco Ezquerra experienced this fate. According to different sources, including the quote that introduces this section, he endured multiple machete blows and began to be undressed as the CHamorus believed him to be dead. Astonishingly, the narrative continues, “animated by his virginal shame, he called upon all his feelings […], begging to be left with a handkerchief they were taking away […]. It seems that the angelic

---

93 Florencia, Exemplar vida, fols. 23r–v. Most of the texts do not give much information about cilices. An exception is found in the eulogy to Teofilo de Angelis, revealing that the cilices were made of hair and sometimes of scraper-like iron (Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 7:328).

94 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:681, my emphasis. Furthermore, it mentioned his use of severe cilices and disciplines to self-mistreat to such an extent that it was often necessary to have him cured (Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:666). Other sources specified that underneath his soutane he wore three painful iron cilices tightly compressing his flesh (“Vida del invicto,” fol. 49; “Compendio de la vida,” fol. 24r–v; Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 5:408; Le Gobien, Histoire, fol. 168).

95 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:581.

96 Lévesque, History of Micronesia, 8:559.
Father Francisco did revive, or resuscitate, recovering his last and lost breaths, stimulated by his virginal purity in obtaining something to recover the decency of his already naked body and in keeping a good grasp on a holy Crucifix and an image of Our Lady which the barbarians could not pry from his hands, no matter how they tried.97 Sometimes, these religious body ornaments were also destroyed, as reported in the case of Sanvitores’s death.98 The practice of undressing dead bodies extended to laymen accompanying the Jesuits, as was the case with Filipino Francisco González (dates unknown) during the same revolt that ended Ezquerre’s life.99

Undressing the Jesuits may have served as a form of punishment and rejection, having at least the same force as the murder itself.100 It is interesting that the CHamorus punished the Jesuits in the reverse manner that the Jesuits had previously punished them. However, forced dress and forced nakedness represented opposite ends of the same spectrum: both attacked body appearance and, thus, one of the most embedded ways in which cultural identity was (and is) constructed and expressed.

**Conclusion**

Contrary to Diego Luis de Sanvitores’s initial hopes, missionizing the Marianas proved to be challenging. Many CHamorus actively resisted, striving to preserve their traditional ways of life, under serious threat from the mission’s policies. Concerning attire, while the Marianas offered an ideal scenario to practice the Jesuit vow of poverty, the CHamoru dress code was diametrically opposed to what the Jesuits could accept. It encompassed bodily practices that the missionaries viewed as nakedness, thereby conflicting with their Christian moral standards.

The Jesuits gave their life (literally) and energy to modify CHamoru bodily customs. In the process, they also modified their own. They adjusted their

---

99 Lévesque, *History of Micronesia*, 6:199. The annua further recounts that Francisco González managed to reach a village where the chief cured him and facilitated his safe passage to the intended destination. This is also an example of diversity in CHamoru attitudes to the mission, which oscillated between open resistance and collaboration.
clothing in response to various challenges, including climate constraints and
the scarcity of cotton cloth. For instance, they incorporated CHamoru plaited
hats and sandals, but the most fascinating example was the manufacture of
plaited soutanes and capes during the early decades in the archipelago. It is
essential to recognize that these body modifications for both CHamorus and
Jesuits transpired within a colonial context and not in a cultural encounter
where both parties enjoyed equal footing.

In contrast to the CHamorus, the Jesuits were distinctly shaped by various
axes of social inequality and ranked among the most individualized members
of the seventeenth century. They actively sought to impose their own desires
(encapsulated in their worldviews) upon the CHamorus, thereby changing the
course of their destinies. Within this context, the CHamorus were inferiorized
and objectified in an unequal social relationship where the Jesuits held the
dominant position.

While the CHamorus had previously integrated European castaways into
their bodily habits, the Jesuits did not seek to incorporate CHamorus into
their own habits, which were part of their identity as Jesuits. Instead, the
CHamorus were to be attired in the garment befitting the less affluent,
thereby expressing and constructing their new place in the unequal social
structure of the emerging colonial society. Consequently, despite both Jesuits
and CHamorus undergoing alterations to their bodily practices, they did so
under markedly different circumstances. The imperative primarily drove the
Jesuits' bodily modifications to adapt to local conditions, devoid of colonial
imposition and the coloniality of being that characterized the experience of
the CHamorus.

This perception of the other as radically inferior is, in my understanding,
inconsistent with the practice of accommodation, which was initially
formulated for advancing Christian missions in societies perceived as culturally
closer to the European ones. In the case of the Marianas, spreading the Gospel
was synonymous with dismantling traditional rituals and nearly all aspects of
traditional life. Regardless of the degree of success, that was the intention of
the Jesuits. And when words fell short, they did not hesitate to seek military
support to quell resistance from those sectors of the CHamoru population that
fought against the mission.

\[101\] See also Michelle Molina, *To Overcome Oneself: The Jesuit Ethic and Spirit of Global

\[102\] *Vestidos de pobre* (poor people's clothes) is the term used to refer to clothing that needs
to be brought for the CHamorus (“Las cosas que son menester,” fols. 1r–v).
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sandra Lozano Rubio and Linda Zampol d’Ortia for their comments on an earlier version of this article. I would also like to thank the National Museum of Anthropology in Madrid, and most specifically Fernando Sáez Lara, Patricia Alonso Pajuelo, and Mar González Monseñy, for their information about the pandanus sandals used in the caption for Figure 2. The Spanish Ministry of Science has supported this work under PID2019-105431GB-I00/MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033.