Influences of Historic Costume in the Salem Witchcraft Trials

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RESEARCH TOPIC

My research topic discusses the historic costume of seventeenth century New England. It will be an analysis of the components of dress in relation to the events of the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692. Research will encompass the issues of historic costume, colonial history, religious implications, and their connections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

• Seventeenth Century history is most recognized by the religious turmoil of Western Europe as well as the founding of the colonies in New England and the issues that plagued the colonies during their genesis. Puritan New England was heavily structured in almost every aspect of social life, including fashion.

• Research in the area of historic costume and colonial dress has led to many conclusions about life in the 1600s as well as how history has dictated and influenced fashion. Events in the seventeenth century, such as the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692, could be connected to the fashion change of the century.

• Literature on colonial dress during the times of the Salem Witchcraft Trials is less than abundant. There has not been any conclusive research on the existence of a connection between colonial fashion and the Witchcraft Trials, or the absence of such a connection.

• McClellan (1937) and Sletcher (2004) both describe colonial costume in terms of the late 1600s and the change over time of the fashions through the early eighteenth century. McClellan’s work paints a better picture of colonial life and provides an in-depth analysis of the fashion of the times, whereas Sletcher focuses more on the social scene of New England. McClellan’s strength is in the vivid details of colonial clothing, from the commoners’ working clothes to the accessories of the bourgeoisie.

• Purvis (1999) provides the best information on the history of Witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. However, this article’s major weakness is the fact that it does not mention or acknowledge the influence of colonial dress and historic costume.

• McClellan (1937) and Sletcher (2004) both discuss the outrageous laws and regulations enforced by the micro-governments within the colonies, however neither of these articles describes the laws, regulations, and enforcements on the “witches” of the trials like Purvis (1999) does. Purvis details the actual number of executions and acquittals per colony, while also describing the events leading up to, during, and following the events of the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692.

REFERENCES


Images:
http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/salem/images/mattwitch1.jpg

History of American Costume
Survey of Historic Costume

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METHODS

1. Preserved garments from museum collections
2. Primary source documents such as journals
3. Paintings and drawings
4. Textbooks and other publications on Colonial America
5. Scholarly journals and articles on colonial costume