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VII.5 In which cases sumptuary laws are useful in a monarchy

- The Spirit of Law - Book VII. Consequences of the different principles of the three governments with respect to sumptuary laws, to luxury, and to the condition of women -

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VII.5 In which cases sumptuary laws are useful in a monarchy

It was in the spirit of the republic, or in some particular instances, that sumptuary laws were passed in Aragon in the mid-thirteenth century. James I decreed that neither the king nor any of his subjects could eat more than two kinds of meat at each meal, and that each would be prepared in one manner only, unless it was game they had killed themselves. [1]

Sumptuary laws have also been created in our time in Sweden, but they have a different purpose from those of Aragon.

A state can make sumptuary laws with the purpose of absolute frugality : such is the spirit of the sumptuary laws of republics, and the nature of the thing makes it clear that such was the purpose of those in Aragon.

Sumptuary laws may also have a relative frugality as their purpose when a state, realizing that excessively costly foreign merchandise would require so much exportation of its own products that it would be depriving itself more of its needs by that exportation than it would be satisfying them by the importations, entirely forbids their entrance : and this is the spirit of the laws that have been created in recent times in Sweden. [2] These are the only sumptuary laws that befit monarchies.

In general, the poorer a state, the more it is ruined by its relative luxury, and consequently the greater need it has of relative sumptuary laws. The richer a state, the more its relative luxury enriches it, and relative sumptuary laws must surely be avoided. We shall explain this better in the book on commerce. [3] Absolute luxury is the only question here.

[1] Constitution of James I in the year 1234, art. 6, in *Marca hispanica*, p. 1429. [Reference is to Pierre de Marca, *Marca hispanica* sive limes hispanicus, hoc est, geographica & historica descriptio Cataloniae, Ruscinonis, & circumjacentium populorum ('Marca hispanica, or the Spanish perimeter, in other words a geographical and historical description of Catalonia, Ruscino, and the neighboring peoples', Paris, 1688.)

[2] Banned there were rare wines and other precious merchandise.

[3] See vol. II, book XX, ch. xx.