

Athens vs. Rome

Seminar 4: Fashion and Dressing

Look at the different types and uses of clothes in ancient Greece

Peplos or peplum was a shawl commonly used as part of the dress of females. Women of high rank wore their shawls so long as to trail upon the ground. It was often fastened by means of a brooch.), and was thus displayed upon the statues of female divinities. The shawl was often worn so as to cover the head while it enveloped the body, and more especially on the occasion of a funeral or of a marriage, when a very splendid shawl was worn by the bride. It often constituted a very important part of the treasures of a temple. The peplos was a large rectangular piece of cloth, it was formed into a cylinder and then folded along the topline into a deep cuff, creating an apoxygma, or capelet-like overfold. The neckline and armholes of the peplos were formed by fibulae,



The **chiton** was worn by both sexes and consisted of two rectangular pieces put together along a sideseam from top to bottom. The top edges were sewn or buttoned together with openings for head and arms.



The **Himation** was a large cloak, always orthogonal. It was usually worn over a chiton. It could also be worn alone. It could be worn by both women and men. Generally, when worn by women, it was a garment of decorous modesty, but it has been shown on hetaerae as a device for provocation.

Chlamys: This is a term used for a smaller woolen garment that was sometimes



bordered and pinned at the right shoulder or the front. Younger, active men mostly wore it with a short chiton or alone



Think about the different uses of dressing and their meaning in the following sources.

1. Homer, *Odyssey* IV, 305

Penelope finds out that her son Telemachus has left her and sailed off to find out about his father

"Then the dear old nurse Euryclea said, "You may kill me, Madam, or let me live on in your house, whichever you please, but I will tell you the real truth. I knew all about it, and gave him everything he wanted in the way of bread and wine, but he made me take my solemn oath that I would not tell you anything for some ten or twelve days, unless you asked or happened to hear of his having gone, for he did not want you to spoil your beauty by crying. And now, Madam, wash your face, change your dress (peplos), and go upstairs with your maids to offer prayers to Minerva, daughter of Aegis-bearing Jove, for she can save him even though he be in the jaws of death. Do not trouble Laertes: he has trouble enough already. Besides, I cannot think that the gods hate the race of the race of the son of Arceisius so much, but there will be a son left to come up after him, and inherit both the house and the fair fields that lie far all round it."



With these words she made her mistress leave off crying, and dried the tears from her eyes.

Penelope washed her face, changed her dress (peplos), and went upstairs with her maids. She then put some bruised barley into a basket and began praying to Minerva."

2. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 41-53

Women dress as identifiers and weapons

CALONICE

How could we do

Such a big wise deed? We women who dwell

Quietly adorning ourselves in a back-room

With gowns of lucid gold and gawdy toilets

Of stately silk and dainty little slippers....

LYSISTRATA

These are the very armaments of the rescue.

These crocus-gowns, this outlay of the best myrrh,

Slippers, cosmetics dusting beauty, and robes

With rippling creases of light.

CALONICE

Yes, but how?



LYSISTRATA

No man will lift a lance against another--

CALONICE

I'll run to have my tunic dyed crocus.

LYSISTRATA

Or take a shield—

Roman dressing: cultural trends and morals

Among the social reforms undertaken by Augustus was the obligation for magistrates to dress properly.

3. Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 40, 5

"He desired also to revive the ancient fashion of dress, and once when he saw in an assembly a throng of men in dark cloaks, he cried out indignantly, "Behold them Romans, lords of the world, the nation clad in the toga", and he and he directed the aediles never again to allow anyone to appear in the Forum or its neighbourhood except in the toga and without a cloak."

In De Pallio (On the Mantle) the early Christian author Tertullian criticises the changing customs of the inhabitants of Carthage, once the capital of the Punic civilization, now citizens of a flourishing Roman colony in the Severan period. With this humorous speech written at the beginning of the third century, Tertullian tries to explain why he has stopped wearing the Roman toga and started instead to wear the pallium, the cloak associated with philosophers. The speech is adorned with an intelligent rhetoric in which dressing represents something else than just a way of wearing clothes. What can we learn here about clothes, morals and identity?

4. Tertullian, On the Mantle (1.1) **1** You, who are have always been leaders of Africa, men of Carthage, noble of old and blessed today, I am glad that you live in such happy times that you can find both the time and the pleasure of censuring clothing! **2** This is the sort of pursuit of peace and plenty. All is well on the part of the empire and on the part of the sky. **3** However, in the past you too wore your clothing, tunics, differently: they were even famous for their skilful weave, harmonious colouring, and proper size. For they did not fall extravagantly over the legs or shamelessly above the knees, they did not fit shortly at the arms nor tightly at the hands. No, in a fourfold suitable form it fitted men (it was not considered easy to divide its folds with a belt). **4** The outer garment, the *pallium*, itself also quadrangular, was thrown back from both sides and knit around the neck in the bit of a buckle, and so rested on the shoulders. **(1.3)** **1** From then on, your tunic is longer and you use a dividing belt to let it hang down. Likewise, you support the abundant flow of your now smooth gown, by gathering it in folds. And if any circumstance of class or dignity or time makes you wear other garments, you forget and even criticize the *pallium*, that used to be yours in all circumstances! **(3.7)** **3** The very man who sentenced the Greeks to be removed from town, but who as an old man had become instructed in their letters and language, this same Cato used to bare his shoulder at the time of his administration of justice, and so favoured the Greeks no less by wearing his *pallium*. **(4.8)** **3** But now that the eyebrow of censorial watchfulness has disappeared, how much ground for criticism does the lack of distinction provide? **4** <You may see> freedmen in the attire of knights, slaves loaded with floggings in that of nobility, captives in that of freeborn, bumpkins in that of city dwellers, buffoons in that of men of the forum, citizens in that of soldiers. The corpse-bearer, the pimp, and the trainer of gladiators: they dress like you. **(5.1)** **1** 'But,' you will say, 'thus <we> move from the toga to the *pallium*?' Why not, if we also moved from diadem and sceptre? Did Anacharsis [Scythian philosopher who lived in Athens] change

otherwise, when he preferred philosophy to the kingship of Scythia? **2** Even if there are no signs of a change for the better, the dress has something that it brings about. **(5.2) 1** Now I will interrogate your conscience: how do you feel in a toga: dressed or oppressed? Is it like wearing clothes or bearing them? **2** If you deny, I will follow you home, and I will see what you hasten to do right after the threshold. No other garment is taken off with such relief as the toga!

On the conduct, dressing and moral depiction of Emperor Elagabalus. The literary characterizations of this emperor links his corrupted and depraved mind with the degenerated way he lived and looked like.

5. Cassius Dio 80

11 Closely related to these irregularities was his conduct in the matter of Elagabalus....**2** Furthermore, he was frequently seen even in public clad in the barbaric dress which the Syrian priests use, and this had as much to do as anything with his receiving the nickname of "The Assyrian."

6. Historia Augusta, Elagabalus 23

He would wear a tunic made wholly of cloth of gold, or one made of purple, or a Persian one studded with jewels, and at such times he would say that he felt oppressed by the weight of his pleasures. **4** He even wore jewels on his shoes, sometimes engraved ones — a practice which aroused the derision of all, as if, forsooth, the engraving of famous artists could be seen on jewels attached to his feet. **5** He wished to wear also a jewelled diadem in order that his beauty might be increased and his face look more like a woman's; and in his own house he did wear one.

On the importance of fashion in the Roman society: the women of the imperial court as aesthetic and moral models. The hair styles of Roman women were, for the most part fairly plain during the Republic and the early empire. From the Flavian Dynasty (A. D. 69 - 96) on, they became more and more elaborate, continuing to do so until well into Byzantine times.

7. Ref Faustina Sr Aureus, RIC 349a, Cohen 3, BMC 268.



Diva Faustina Sr AV Aureus. DIVA AVG FAVSTINA, draped bust right / AETERNITAS, Fortuna standing left, holding patera in right hand, rudder on globe in left. Cohen 4. Faustina the Elder is here portrayed with a very elaborate hairstyle: the wavy tied locks and 'bun' on top of her head became the fashion of the period. This hairstyle, with a double tiara of pearls, hair entwined with more pearls, distinguishes Faustina from all other empresses.

8. Ref Julia Domna, Caracalla & Geta AV Aureus, RIC 540, Cohen 1, BMC 3



Julia Domna, Caracalla & Geta AV Aureus. 201 AD. IVLIA AVGVSTA, draped bust right / AETERNIT IMPERI, laureate, draped & cuirassed bust of Caracalla right vis à vis bare headed & draped bust of Geta left. Calico 2653, Cohen 1. Julia Domna was the Syrian wife of Septimius Severus. Her hairstyle set a new fashion trend of wavy locks rolling down both sides of her head, curling under at the ends. Here her hair is drawn straight down away from her face, brought back to the nape of the neck and braided upward in a criss-cross double plait.

Roman men and women used various mixtures to dye their hair. Henna, for example, was quite popular. One of Ovid's girlfriends, however, had an unfortunate experience with one dye. The following inscription shows the existence in Rome of professional hairdressers.

9. Ovid, Love Affairs 1, 14, 1-18, 27, 28, 43-46.

"Didn't I tell you to stop messing around with the colour of your hair? Now you have no hair left to dye! If you had left it alone, who had thicker hair than you? And when you let it down, it used to hang to your waist. It was very fine – so fine that you hesitated to curl it with curling irons – like the silk fibers the Chinese produce, or the threads which the spider spins with her slender legs when she weaves a delicate web under a deserted beam. But it was neither raven black nor golden blond; it was a mixture of the two, the colour of cedar wood when the bark has been stripped away. And it was easy to manage, naturally curly, and didn't cause you any trouble. You didn't have to worry about hair pins or combs being caught in tangles and hurting you when they were pulled out. Your hairdresser was never bruised or scratched. I used to watch her combing and arranging your hair, and you never had to grab a hair pin and stab her in the arm... I used to cry out to you, "it's a crime, a real crime, to burn such naturally lovely hair with dyes. You cruel woman, have pity on your head." ... Now your hair has fallen out, and you alone are responsible. You yourself mixed the poison and put it on your head. Now Germany will send you her captured locks of hair, and a conquered race will save you from the embarrassment of baldness¹."

10. CIL VI, 9980. Inscription from Rome:

"To Italia, dressmaker of Cocceia Phyllis. She lived twenty years. Acastus, her fellow slave, paid for this tombstone because she was poor."

¹ She will buy a wig. Wigs made from the hair of Germans captured in battle were very popular because the hair was naturally blond.