

THE MYTH OF THE TOGA: UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF ROMAN DRESS*

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Addressing the problem: knowing what the toga looked like

'The toga was a garment worthy of the masters of the world, flowing, solemn, eloquent but with over-complication in its arrangement and a little too much emphatic affectation in the self-conscious tumult of its folds.'¹

'While the Romans probably wore the toga draped . . . without fastenings, it is hardly safe to depend upon the present day wearer to do so.'²

'**What did the Romans wear?**' The obvious answer to this question must be 'togas'. After all, most of their surviving images present them toga-clad, while Vergil himself defines them as 'the race that wears the toga'.³ Problems start, however, as soon as we attempt to move from these representations to the actual garments that Romans might have worn as they went about their daily lives. There are even more problems if we try to 'reconstruct' such a garment to wear today in the classroom, the museum, or the college play. This article will engage with these problems. It will take a fresh look at the **evidence** and at what it might mean to understand the history of Roman dress.

The study of classical dress has long been obsessed with reconstructing pieces of clothing as a means of making ourselves more familiar with ancient history, of actually touching the very fabric of ancient lives and draping ourselves in it. One of the classic studies of ancient costume, by L. Heuzey promised to 'revive the ancients, to show that still today they are not dead but live among us'.⁴ Likewise, L. Wilson⁵ provided detailed instructions for making our very own Roman clothes. By managing to fold 'the remaining portion of the toga from points H and G to the end of Bb',⁶ we can all solve this mathematical puzzle (can't we?). We can even have our very own tangible product (or at least could if we too had the superhuman ability to wear it without fastenings; if we too were as sophisticated as 'the masters of the world!'). (See fig. 1.) Sometimes this even touches the world of high art or high fashion. We need only flick through the eighteenth-century book of expensive plates by Dandre Bardon⁷ to see clothes become an art form in themselves, sharing the pages with drawings of griffins, chariots, and gods.

At the front of Heuzey's book is a photograph of the author himself adjusting the toga on a live model, like Yves St Laurent adding the final touches to one of his catwalk creations. His lectures on dress were apparently attended by some of the most influential people in Paris and from the theatre.



1. How to drape the toga the Wilson way: 'Draping the Imperial Toga'

More recently, in the most sophisticated and broadest work on Roman dress to date,⁸ we still find a section on 'reconstructions', complete with photographs of the book's contributors each clad in classical dress. Two so-called 'fashion shows' took place during the seminar series which lay behind the book. Much effort seems to have been put into producing accurate reconstructions and into demonstrating that the toga (and indeed the other reconstructed garments) were wearable, workable costumes. We cannot but suspect too much special pleading. The chances are that if **we**

cannot act Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* without our unpinned togas falling off, then the Romans themselves would have found such a toga hard work.

The effort poured into reconstruction tends to conceal the distinction between garments *per se* and their possible meaning(s) as cultural symbols in their own time. We must not assume a universal 'language' of clothing when

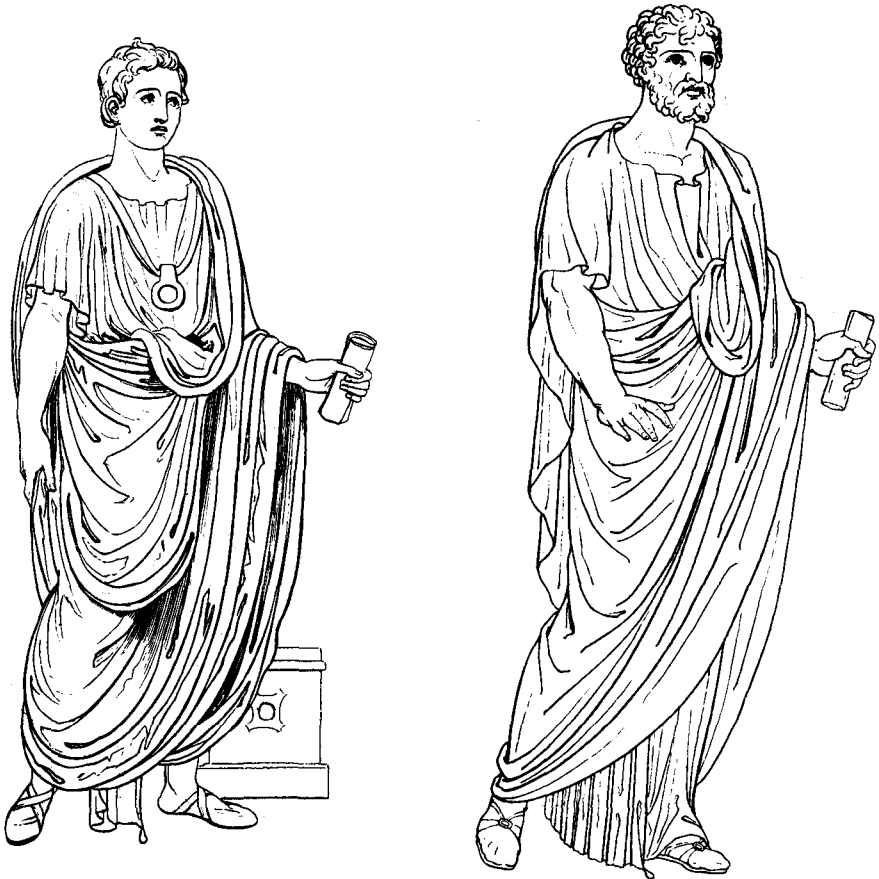
As with speech, the meaning of any costume depends on circumstances. It is not 'spoken' within a vacuum, but at a specific time and place, any change in which may alter its meaning.⁹

A study of Roman dress is, as I shall argue, not a study of the clothes themselves but of the images of clothes, not a study of how Roman people looked but on how they perceived or defined themselves as looking.

The toga is material stuff *prima facie*, so we can perhaps understand why Wilson, Heuzey, and Bieber¹⁰ chose to focus their attention on the visual evidence. Images, in a sense, offer a more direct picture of Roman clothing than any poetry or prose. We have numerous representations of the toga and various cloaks worn by the Romans, including statues, funerary reliefs, wall painting, mosaics, and ivories. Studies of ancient dress are full of these images. (See fig. 2.)

But are these images quite so direct a window onto Roman dress as they might seem? They can tell us much about the Romans' images of themselves. They can show us how a particular garment was perceived and how it was supposed to look. But even so, they are **representations** of garments and not the garments themselves. A 'straight reading' of the visual images would suggest that most of the characters from the Republic through to the Late Empire wore the toga. The images would suggest the toga as everyday wear. There is plenty of other evidence, however, that the dress of the Roman world, taking into account its widest geographical and social spread, was far more varied than the visual and textual evidence could lead us to believe. Shelley Stone must be right when in *The World of Roman Costume*, she writes 'The artistic record is misleading because of the public and status-oriented nature of Roman art.'¹¹ She argues correctly, as we shall see, for a toga of ceremonial rather than everyday significance yet still maintains that we can date the styles and stylistic changes of these formal garments on the basis of their representations in art.

The problem is multilayered. The artists will have made choices on which clothes to represent; the Roman people will have made choices on which clothes to wear. Even if they wore the toga at all, they will not have worn the same form at the same time. Clothes change; representations of



2. Two of Hope's sketches: 'Roman youth with the Bulla' and 'Roman orator'

clothes change. C. F. Ross, writing at the start of the century, began his discussion of the toga's history with the words, 'The development of the toga is continuously and consistently from the simple to the complex.'¹² Here again we find a direct dependence on the images – this time to construct a chronology and to determine changes in dress over time. The problem is that the number of datable changes identified depends upon which particular images are chosen. Many are dismissed, while select examples are removed from their ancient context and reproduced next to photographs of live models to become illustrations of the finished garments. (See fig. 3.)

The often forgotten fact is that these ancient images are not mannequins from a leading Roman fashion house but are portrait statues, funerary

reliefs, components of large official monuments, **works of art**. In order to interpret them properly, we need to think about the aesthetic and technical considerations of the artists, about the wishes of the patron, about the responses of the viewer. We should not, that is, remove ‘reconstructed’ clothes from the image(s), nor the image(s) from the social, moral, and political context of the ancient world in which they are made. We need to consider why a particular figure is shown clothed in such a way and what the choice of dress might be able to tell us. As Sir Joshua Reynolds said,

He, therefore, who in his practice of portrait painting wishes to dignify his subject . . . will not paint her in modern dress, the familiarity of which is sufficient to destroy all dignity. He, therefore, dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity.¹³



3. ‘Reconstructions of the toga of the Consular Diptychs’

More often than not, the statues and relief sculpture from the Roman world show us individuals sufficiently influential in public life to be portrayed. The famous Ara Pacis provides a clear and simple example. With its procession of togate priests and members of the imperial family, it has proved highly attractive to historians of Roman dress. Wilson¹⁴ uses these figures as examples of what she calls 'the third form of toga' which she then dates to the early empire when the monument was erected. The Ara Pacis is, therefore, made an illustration for the kind of dress favoured at this time. But in Rome, the portrait was part of civic ideology;¹⁵ a means of display and honour for individual and state. It was about status. With the Ara Pacis, it is the dignity of the figures in their national costume, the dignity of the imperial family, the dignity of Rome which is stressed. As Suetonius puts it (more generally),

He [Augustus] was also keen to bring back the style and dress of yesteryear. He once saw a crowd of men at a meeting clad in dirty cloaks. Filled with indignation he cried, 'Look at the Romans, the masters of the world, the race that wears the toga'.¹⁶

It is a rhetorical statement in marble about the imperial family. It is not about what 'your average man in the street' was wearing. Nor can it be said to be a reliable illustration of the style of toga preferred by even the priests or the emperor. Reynolds' remarks have already highlighted the folly of dating clothes from their representations.

This article aims to deconstruct the picture of the homogeneous, ubiquitous white toga to stress variety above and below it on the social scale. We cannot allow our familiarity with the now white Roman sculpture to seduce us into seeing Roman costume as being of 'immaculate whiteness'¹⁷ as opposed to Egyptian clothing, for example, which appears still in glorious colour¹⁸ in the tomb paintings of the Valley of the Kings. We must for example, think about what was worn by poorer Romans and slaves, who according to Cato had a 'dress allowance' of only one tunic and cloak per year.¹⁹ We need to think about what else the Romans might have worn and to try, if possible, to look behind the myth.

Behind the myth of the toga: a world of tunics, trousers and cloaks?

Cadmean Tyre dresses you; oily Gaul dresses me. Do you want me in my common cloak (*sagum*) to adhere myself to you in your purple (*purpureum*)?²⁰

If we were to travel back in time and programme the Roman world as our destination, we would not emerge surrounded by a citizen band clad in tell-tale white togas. Whether we landed in 700 B.C. or A.D. 200, in the town or

in the country, in Rome or in the provinces, there would probably not have been togas as far as the eye could see – that, at least, is my claim. And the question that follows: if we clear our minds of togas, is it possible to determine what else they might have worn? There are still problems of representation. For any garment we might find lurking behind the myth of the toga might be as ideologically loaded as the toga itself. A Roman male in a portrait statue celebrated his status by being portrayed in national costume; it was Medes, Persians, Parthians, Dacians, and Gauls who were supposed to be the long-haired, wildly cloaked and trouser-clad ones . . . was it not? In rhetoric, yes but in reality, the answer has to be no. As I shall argue, the reality cannot but have been **diversity**; diversity of colour, diversity of style.

The Romans present themselves as toga-clad from day one: their founder, Romulus, was said to favour the toga himself as he wandered around the then primitive settlement of eighth-century Rome. What we must understand, however, is that the toga is not primitive clothing. We cannot know for sure what the Romans wore when ploughing, but it is hard to imagine that manual tasks were ever done by *togati*. Whilst other primitive societies were wearing tunics of some sort, it is extremely unlikely that Romulus and followers favoured a cumbersome blanket *à la* Cato. Besides, the Roman empire was not a homogeneous unit. Within any period there are always variables such as country²¹ and status which need to be taken into account. Logic dictates that not all Roman citizens can have worn the same styles at the same time. So what did the *gens togata* look like? Can the archaeological or literary evidence help?

A few surviving garments have been found in Egypt, France, and Britain. But it is difficult to know, with such isolated finds, whether these are at all representative of those worn throughout the empire, whether they are restricted to any particular period or any particular class. That said, do they reinforce the image of a toga-clad empire or conjure up a world of tunics, trousers, and cloaks? Do any togas survive?

Wild's²² study, for example, at Vindolanda on Hadrian's wall has revealed only fragments of a brown stained wool from the Flavian or Trajanic period. Of course any such fragment of wool, linen, or silk could once have been part of a toga but how can we be sure? We do not have any surviving garments which we could call 'togas' and compare to the kinds of 'reconstructions' done by Heuzey or Wilson. There are all sorts of reasons why this might be so. Most of our material remains are from such areas as Egypt where the toga was perhaps never as popular as in Rome itself; most date from the fifth century onwards when perhaps the toga's popularity

had weakened anyway; perhaps the surviving garments were largely precious ones. . . The fact remains, however, that we have found an exotic mix of cloaks and tunics but **no togas**. In the textiles collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum,²³ there is, for example, a fourth-century Egyptian tunic of red striped wool with a fringe, several fragments of red, purple, and green cloth, and embroidered panels from linen tunics showing such mythological scenes as an amazonomachy and Vulcan forging Achilles' armour. All this is surely indicative of diversity of colour and diversity of style. Let us now turn to the literary evidence. Do we find anything to support/obscure our view?

At first it seems difficult to get very much further. Roman authors do mention a whole array of cloaks from the *cenatoria* and *lacerna* to the *sagum* and *synthesis*²⁴ but within a rhetoric that does little to highlight their actual use or appearance. We might imagine that these garments were more practical than the toga but find that in Roman rhetoric they are more often associated with war,²⁵ wildness, poverty, *rusticitas*. With this in mind, however, there are hints to be found, about both the poorer and wealthier ends of the social spectrum. As Martial's poetic plea of poverty which I quoted at the beginning of the section suggests, not all could afford to wear the finest clothes even within the city of Rome. Juvenal writes,

And what if this same poor man supplies everyone with material and reasons for jokes, if his cloak is filthy and ripped, if his toga is somewhat dirty and one of his shoes is worn through and the leather is torn; if a hole has been darned and his many patches show rough and ready sewing?²⁶

To the satirist, Roman dress was yet another sign of *omnia Romae cum pretio*,²⁷ an increasing luxury which exaggerated social distinctions and announced *mollitia* rather than *gravitas*. Where might the toga fit into this? Is there any way of knowing how much particular items of clothing cost? The cost alone of certain clothes must have limited their popularity.

Our only clear evidence for the prices of garments is Diocletian's edict on maximum prices²⁸ from A.D. 301, which lists a variety of goods and services including food and textiles. While we must remember that the edict gives us notional, universal prices and not market prices, we should still be able to gain a better idea about the relative costs of different garments particularly by thinking about how these compare with the cost of subsistence (measured in terms of wheat) attested by the edict. The edict tells us that the maximum notional price for wheat was one hundred denarii for one *castrensis modius* or ten kilograms. An unmarked Laodicean twilled

dalmatica (long-sleeved tunic) is two thousand denarii and the cheapest hooded cloak (*birrus*) one thousand five hundred denarii. If we consider that the minimum subsistence level is roughly two hundred and fifty kilograms of wheat per person per year, we find that even the **cheapest** hooded cloak would have cost **3/5** of a person's **minimum** subsistence. The toga is not mentioned in what survives of the edict. It may have needed less stitching than a tunic or a cloak but must have required a costlier quality and quantity of material. Few could have afforded, let alone wanted to wear a toga all the time; many might have found even the simplest of hooded cloaks above their means. Guilds of *centonarii* or patch-workers were frequent in Northern Italy and could be found in Rome from the Republic onwards. Their work was to make such things as quilts, cloaks, and saddle cloths from patches taken from worn garments. Many Romans must have worn patched, aging, ragged clothes²⁹ rather than those items which we seek to identify and 'reconstruct'.

We must not limit ourselves by thinking only about poverty. We need also to consider **wealth**, variety, display, and rivalry; the influence of the East as well as that of the North; of Cadmean Tyre (to use Martial's words) as opposed to Gaul. As Lurie says,

The wearing of a single foreign garment, like the dropping of a foreign word or phrase in conversation is meant . . . to indicate sophistication. It can also be a means of advertising wealth.³⁰

The victorious Romans could not live in less luxury than the nations they had conquered. We can scarcely imagine that they would have been content to wear a heavy, white toga which had changed little over the centuries, when there were embroidered silks on offer. Later art such as the famous Ravenna mosaics of the sixth century suggests that as Roman tradition met Eastern opulence at Byzantium, the variety of style, colour, and material became even broader. The fourth-century historian, Ammianus Marcellinus wrote,

They perspire under the weight of their cloaks (*lacernae*), which they tie at the neck and fasten around their very throats . . . They gather these up in both hands and often shake them to and fro to show off the excessive fringes and their tunics which are bright with different shaped animals embroidered in a variety of threads.³¹

It is a description which fits with the surviving examples now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is a description which again suggests variety. For the Roman male, the *pallium* and the *paenula* were to replace the toga even in official ceremony, as we can see if we refer to the Lex

Vestiaria of the Theodosian Code in A.D. 382 and its prescribed use of the *paenula* for senators.³² In A.D. 397 the emperor Honorius had to go as far as recalling the traditional toga by law while prescribing severe penalties for all those who dared to appear in the city of Rome in trousers. Once again, we find diversity.

Nowhere do we have a direct description of either the toga or any other items of dress just mentioned. By deciding to write about dress, such authors as Quintilian³³ and Tertullian³⁴ have made the toga and the *pallium* respectively into literary subjects. They cannot fail to flavour everything they say with their moral and social values and to frame their descriptions with such contrasts as simplicity against extravagance, self-control against rashness, Roman against barbarian and, in the case of Tertullian, pagan against Christian. It is these relationships among others that were used by Roman authors to articulate what it meant to be Roman. There is more to Honorius' decree than a simple change for change's sake. By declaring his preference for the toga, he actively promotes and displays true Roman-ness. It is a discourse which pervades almost all that the Romans wrote about their clothing, as we shall see in the next section.

The rhetoric of the toga: national identity and individual protection

*Romanos, rerum dominos gentemque togatam*³⁵

Let us think about the toga not as a **garment** but as a **cultural symbol**. As Vergil suggests to us, balancing the two words *Romanos* and *togatam*, to be one demanded being the other: the term *togati* was synonymous with *Romani*, it defined them as a nation separate from the Greeks or *palliati*, from the trousered Gauls³⁶ and the rest of the world. Like the Scottish kilt today, the toga celebrated national identity.

Today whenever Scotchmen gather together to celebrate their national identity, they assert it openly by certain distinctive national apparatus. They wear the kilt, woven in a tartan whose colour and pattern indicates their 'clan'.³⁷

If we asked, 'what do the Scottish wear?', the answer would be 'the kilt'. But we would not expect to go to Edinburgh and find all but foreign tourists clad in plaid. At the same time, we would expect to see kilts being worn by the Scots Guards or dancers in a Highland fling. Both display nationhood.

To wear the toga enunciated all those Roman *mores* which Roman citizenship demanded. To have outraged this moral code and have been forced into exile meant being denied the protection which only a nation as

powerful as the Romans (*rerum dominos*) could provide as well as the 'privilege of the Roman gown (the toga)'.³⁸ So strong was the link between the toga and the concept of Roman citizenship that the Roman inhabitants of Asia are described as concealing their identity from Mithridates by putting aside their togas for square cloaks (*himatia*).³⁹ They have made themselves subordinate and have cut their link with mighty Rome by refusing one of the rights which was accorded to a Roman city. To wear the toga was to shout **I am Roman**; to be a true, gritty Roman of the Republic, like Cato, meant wearing the toga without tunic or shoes. Gellius wrote,

Initially at least, Roman men wore the toga alone without tunics. Afterwards, they had close-fitting, short tunics with short sleeves. Among the many other criticisms that Publius Africanus brought against Publius Sulpicius Gallus, an effeminate man, was this, that he had a penchant for tunics that covered the whole of his arms.⁴⁰

How are we to interpret this? We can joke about the Scots wearing nothing beneath their kilts but have been quite happy to imagine Cato and friends facing the cold and damp in little more than a blanket! It is one thing to construct 'proper Romans' as being this hardy but another thing to say that they **actually were**.

The toga defined the wearer as peaceful, civilized, male, **Roman**. If we look at what Livy tells us about that champion of the Republic, Cincinnatus, we can see some of these ideological links more clearly. He writes,

He (Cincinnatus) was asked – and may it turn out well for him and for the Republic – to put on his toga and listen to the mandates of the senate . . . He asked Racilla, his wife, to bring his toga quickly from the hut. Once he had wiped away the dust and the sweat, wrapped himself in his toga and set out, the envoys cheered. They hailed him as dictator and summoned him to the city.⁴¹

Here the toga is associated with political and civic duty. It is put on as Cincinnatus leaves the hut, the dust and sweat, signs of rusticity and moves towards the centre of Rome. To be *togatus* was to be actively involved in the workings of the state, whether a priest, an orator, a magistrate, a client or the emperor himself: all these as opposed to the rest of the population, whom Tacitus calls 'the tunic-clad populace'.⁴² The toga and tunic ensemble defined and displayed rank by means of the presence and subsequent width of the *clavus* or purple stripe, with the phrase 'to obtain a broad stripe from Caesar'⁴³ being used by Pliny to mean becoming a senator. The toga's colour and material were also indicative of status and wealth. It was the privilege of the emperor to wear an all-purple toga and to grant this privilege to others. The Theodosian Code⁴⁴ contains numerous edicts limiting the use of murex dyes as well as the wearing of silk. Purple

and silk were synonymous with immodesty, immorality, and foreign extravagance. They were also desirable, expensive, and high-class. They could enhance status and social mobility and had, therefore, to be controlled by sumptuary laws in a vain attempt to confine those who wore them to their rightful place. In one of Seneca's letters, written early in the first century A.D., he criticizes

those who prefer cloaks (*lacernae*) of a bold colour, who wear a see-through toga and won't do anything which escapes the attention of other people.⁴⁵

The word **toga** is probably derived from the verb 'to cover', *tegere*. As a garment, it was meant to cover and protect; to display status but no further than that status demanded. Suetonius⁴⁶ suggests that to wear clothes which were considered too high for your position in society was to put yourself in danger. We see Caligula ordering Ptolemy to be executed for wearing a fine, purple cloak which attracted too much admiration in the amphitheatre and then the emperor himself tripping over the fringe of his robe. Over-extravagance in dress is made signifier for monstrous emperor heading for a fall, just as Cato's scanty *toga exigua*⁴⁷ fits his strict Roman *gravitas*.

Whereas the toga was believed to have been worn originally by both men and women,⁴⁸ it was to become a mark of a Roman *vir*, of a citizen who had the opportunity to participate fully in the political life of Rome. Quintilian advises orators that

their style of dress (*cultus*) should be distinguished and masculine (*virilis*), as it should be with all respectable gentleman.⁴⁹

To be a Roman **woman** was to be *stolata*, but only if she had those virtues demanded of a Roman matron such as *pudicitia* and *fides*. If found to be a *meretrix* or an adulteress, she was forced instead to wear the toga:

You give scarlet and purple presents to an infamous adulteress. Do you want to give her the rewards she deserves? Send her a toga!⁵⁰

Whether this was the same worn by men, we do not know, but what we can say is that it openly denied her the status of Roman matron. It was to deny her her femininity by denying her the dress which in Roman rhetoric defined her as female. It is this very rhetoric that Cicero employs in his prosecution of Antony:

You assumed the toga of manhood but immediately made it the toga of a tart. No boy ever bought for sexual services was as controlled by his master as you were by Curio.⁵¹

The relationship which he opens up to invective is that of patronage. It is a patron/client relationship in which Antony is over-exploited and feminized rather than empowered and protected. The toga articulates this subversion.

Visiting a patron was one of the occasions strongly associated with the wearing of a toga. Martial complains,

You exact from me *operam sine fine togatam*.⁵²

Not only did patronage afford individual protection but played 'a leading role in the creation, retention and expansion of the empire'.⁵³ Martial suggests that the wearing of the toga was an exertion (*opera*) in itself. The toga was heavy and impractical but it was perhaps 'these practical drawbacks that were the toga's *raison d'être*'.⁵⁴ Martial's words *operam sine fine* remind us of Jupiter's promise in the *Aeneid*, to give the Romans *imperium sine fine*,⁵⁵ but an imperium which the poet stresses is built upon much effort (*tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*⁵⁶). To wear the toga in the 'right way' must have been and indeed had to be difficult; to put it on in the 'right way' often needed the help of a trained slave or *vestispica*.

As both Cicero and Dio Cassius tell us, the toga was to become a symbol of peace:⁵⁷ perhaps also a mark of civilization and of a nation who claimed to have had the time and dignity to dress in such a way. It was a garment worthy of Aeneas and his descendants. Tertullian, writing in the third century A.D., was all too aware of this. By reworking the myth and turning the spotlight onto the humble *pallium* instead, he subverts the rhetoric to redefine what it meant to be Roman.

The decline of the toga: the ideology of change

I'm pleased that you are so fortunate to live at a time when you can spend time and find pleasure taking note of dress.

These are not words directed at the modern historian of dress but are taken from the opening section of Tertullian's *De Pallio*, written at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century.⁵⁸ In it the Christian author apologizes for having discarded the toga for the *pallium* in the Roman colony of Carthage under the rule of Septimus Severus. He presents us with a time and a place and parades and discusses a specific change of dress. But how might we use as evidence what at first sight appears to be a clearly documented change? What is Tertullian telling us?

It is hard to imagine that discarding the toga for the *pallium* in second/third-century Carthage could have generated such a scandal that Tertullian had to write this apology. As Charles-Picard says,

With their tight-fitted, braided tunics and their cloaks of every shape and every shade, the Africans at the time of Severus would seem to evoke very little of the majesty of the classical Romans.⁵⁹

As we have already seen, the Roman world was one of tunics, trousers, and cloaks. Even though Tertullian writes,

'But', you say, 'must we really change from the toga to the *pallium*?'⁶⁰

we cannot assume that most Romans were still toga-clad. In practice, to have worn the *pallium* instead of the toga cannot have been an overtly anti-Roman statement. Yet **to say** that you did might have been. The *De Pallio* ostensibly apologizes for a change in dress, yet at the same time celebrates this change. It is not a work specifically about dress and must not be treated as such. How does Tertullian's *pallium* signify as a visible expression of the Christian philosophy which he parades throughout his work? We have to read 'carefully': a change in dress must be about more than a simple change in dress.

In the past, the apparent decline of the toga has been linked to a decline in Roman *mores* and to the instability of the later empire. If we follow Wilson, we see in the later empire 'the contracted and changing forms which clothed Roman authority in all its decadence'.⁶¹ Tertullian, however, subverts the rhetoric by backing the *pallium* as national garment rather than the toga. He recognizes the toga's ideological significance and subverts it. It is the toga itself which now signifies moral decline. It is a burden to wear, a waste of time to arrange and despite being introduced into Carthage only during the rule of Augustus, demands the recognition of ancestral garment. It can no longer articulate the simplicity, freedom, protection and unity of the Roman world. The *pallium*, meanwhile, has no such pretensions; it can express the above qualities as virtues of the Roman but also Christian empire of the future. As Tertullian writes,

May there be no (wondrous) signs of your change for the better (i.e. your conversion to Christianity); it is your style of dress which can show it.⁶²

The term *palliati* had long been a pseudonym for 'philosophers' but is now a symbol of Christian status and Christian philosophical values. Christ himself is commonly portrayed as *palliatu*s, as on the fourth-century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and in the first catacomb paintings, which like the *De Pallio* are roughly contemporary with Severus.

Tertullian constructs the *pallium* as a simple garment which displays social unity through its simplicity rather than class distinction through its extravagance. Unlike the silks and purples which he criticizes in chapter

four, the *pallium* is seen to be acceptable attire for the men of Carthage. Unlike Martial's toga which outshines nature itself,⁶³ Tertullian's *pallium* is a perfect fit. Tertullian links what he has to say about the change from the toga to the *pallium* to a discussion on cosmological change. When changes occur, they must fit and not subvert nature. Just as the earth changes its mantle and the serpent sheds its skin, so too must a change in Roman dress fit the world's natural order. In Tertullian's eyes, the *pallium* was the natural choice to express the Christian/Roman order of Carthage. So much the natural choice, that another Christian writer, Celestine, pope from September 422 to July 432, can ridicule the *pallium*'s paraded adoption as a substitute for spirituality:

By dressing in a *pallium* and by girding themselves with a girdle, they think to fulfil the truth of the scripture. . . . We should be distinguished from the common people, or from all others, by our learning, not by our clothing, by the purity of our minds not by the cut of our garments.⁶⁴

Here we are faced with a problem. 'We are what we wear' –or so the cliché tells us – but at the same time, we can wear clothes which makes us seem something we are not. In the rhetoric of both Tertullian and Celestine, to exchange the toga for the *pallium* was to assume the clothing of a Christian and therefore, the way of life that being a Christian demanded.

The toga was part of the rhetoric which defined the Roman people and presented them to the rest of the world. Museums like the Capitoline are filled with togate statues; the Latin we read is littered with references. In 1786, Tischbein's painting of Goethe in the Roman campagna portrays him in a coat folded to resemble the folds of a togate figure; at a student classical fancy-dress party, what's the betting that the majority would turn up in white sheets? **This is the myth of the toga.** We have discussed its impracticality, its expense, its restricted use. We can see that it was not worn all the time and that the Roman world was one of tunics, trousers, and cloaks. We can see the problems of trying to document changes in dress and of wanting to 'reconstruct' our own Roman garment. It is the strength of the toga as ideological symbol that makes any understanding of these problems so hard to reach. This is what Wilson and Heuzey failed to take into account as they carefully sought to recreate tangible evidence for a world otherwise too distant to comprehend. And it is with this in mind that we must (re)examine such visual images as the Ara Pacis and such texts as Tertullian's *De Pallio*. Understanding ancient dress is to attempt to understand ancient rhetoric and ancient perceptions.

The way clothes look depends not on how they are designed or made but on how they are perceived.⁶⁵

NOTES

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** Unless otherwise stated in the notes, the passages of Latin and French cited were translated by the author.

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