

ROMAN CLOTHING



citizen, matron, curule magistrate, emperor, general, workman, slave

“Dress for a Roman often, if not primarily, signified rank, status, office, or authority. . . . The dress worn by the participants in an official scene had legal connotations. . . . The hierarchic, symbolic use of dress as a uniform or costume is part of Rome's legacy to Western civilization.” (Larissa Bonfante. "Introduction." *The World of Roman Costume*. Ed. Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante. University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. Pp. 5-6)

I. Clothing and Status: Ancient Rome was very much a “face-to-face” society (actually more of an “in-your-face” society), and public display and recognition of status were an essential part of having status. Much of Roman clothing was designed to reveal the social status of its wearer, particularly for freeborn men. In typical Roman fashion, the more distinguished the wearer, the more his dress was distinctively marked, while the dress of the lowest classes was often not marked at all. In the above diagram, for example, we can deduce that the first man on the left is a Roman citizen (because he wears a toga) but is not an equestrian or senator (because he has no stripes on his tunic). We know that the woman is married because she wears a *stola*. Colored shoes and the broad stripes on his tunic identify the next man as a senator, while the border on his toga indicates that he has held at least one curule office. The laurel wreath on the head of the next man and his special robes indicate that he is an emperor, while the uniform and cloak of the following man identify him as a general. It is more difficult to determine the exact social status of the two men on the right; their hitched-up tunics indicate that they are lower-class working men, but the two lowest social classes in Rome (freedpeople and slaves) did not have distinctive clothing that clearly indicated their status. These men could both be freedpeople (or citizens at work, for that matter); however, the man in the brown tunic is carrying tools and the other man is lighting his way, so we can deduce that the man in the white tunic may be a slave of the other man.

Augustus and later emperors emphasized the interaction of dress, social status, and public display when they required official dress at public performances and regulated public seating in the theaters and amphitheaters of Rome. A prominent section was reserved for the male and female members of the imperial family and the 6 Vestal Virgins; the first rows were reserved for senators, the next for male equestrians, the next for male citizens (with women of all classes relegated to the top rows of this section), and the top "standing room only" tiers for the lowest classes. Performers and spectators at these events would thus see a striking visual display of the

different status groups in the form of blocks of color created by the different types of togas (the modern film *Gladiator* recreated this effect in the computer-assisted simulation of the Colosseum).

II. Production and Cleaning of Garments: Typically, Roman garments were made of wool. In the early Republic, women [spun the fleece into thread and wove the cloth](#) in the home, and doubtless many women of the less wealthy classes continued this practice throughout the history of Rome. By the late Republic, however, upper-class Roman women did not spin and weave themselves (unless, like Livia, they were trying to demonstrate how traditional and upright they were). Instead, slaves did the work within the household or cloth was purchased commercially, and well-to-do Romans could also buy cloth made of linen, cotton, or silk. There were many businesses associated with textiles besides spinning and weaving, including operations such as dyeing (fibers were usually dyed before being spun into thread), processing, and cleaning. Garments were cleaned by [fullers](#) (*fullones*) using chemicals such as sulfur and especially human urine.



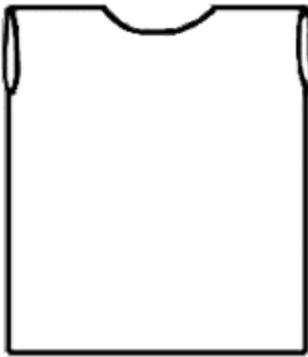
III. Undergarments: We do not know a great deal about Roman underclothes, but there is evidence that both men and women wore a simple, wrapped loincloth (*subligar* or *subligaculum*, meaning “little binding underneath”) at least some of the time; male laborers wore the *subligar* when working, but upper-class men may have worn it only when exercising. Women also sometimes wore a band of cloth or leather to support the breasts (*strophium* or *mamillare*). Both these undergarments can be seen on the woman athlete at the left, from a fourth-century CE mosaic; she holds a palm branch signifying that she has been victorious in a contest. (see [another scene from this mosaic](#) and [an ancient pair of leather “bikini” pants](#) found in Roman Britain.)

IV. Footwear: Sandals (*soleae*, *sandalia*) with open toes were the proper footwear for wearing indoors. There were many different designs, from the practical (as shown in this [model](#) or this [foot of a statue](#)) to elegant (as shown in this actual leather woman's [thong-style sandal](#) with a gold ornament).

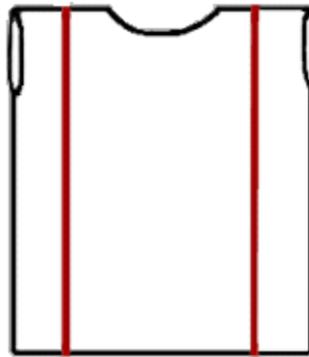
Shoes (*calcei*), which encased the foot and covered the toes, were considered appropriate for outdoors and were always worn with the toga; when visiting, upper-class Romans removed their shoes at the door and slipped on the sandals that had been carried by their slaves. There were many different styles of shoes, and some leather versions have survived, like [these shoes](#) (ancient leather shoes on top and modern reconstructions below) and this simple workman's [shoe](#). There were no dramatic gender differences in Roman footwear (unlike the high heels worn by women today), though upper-class males (equestrians, patricians, and senators) wore [distinctive shoes](#) that marked their status; the patrician shoes, for example, were red.

V. Men's Clothing:

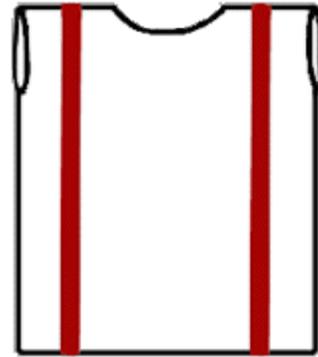
THE TUNIC



basic tunic
(*tunica*)



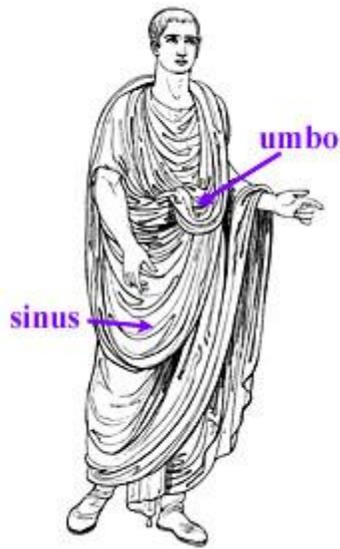
equestrian tunic
(*tunica angusticlavia*)



senatorial tunic
(*tunica laticlavia*)

The basic item of male dress was the tunic, made of two pieces of undyed wool sewn together at the sides and shoulders and belted in such a way that the garment just covered the knees. Openings for the arms were left at the top of the garment, creating an effect of short sleeves when the tunic was belted; since tunics were usually not cut in a T-shape, this left extra material to drape under the arm, as can be clearly seen in [this statue](#) of a first-century CE orator in tunic and toga. Men of the equestrian class were entitled to wear a tunic with narrow stripes, in the color the Romans called purple but was more like a deep crimson, extending from shoulder to hem, while broad stripes distinguished the tunics of men of the senatorial class. Most ancient statues do not show these stripes, but this [wall painting](#) from a lararium in Pompeii depicts both the *tunica laticlavia* and *toga praetexta*. As can be seen in the drawing at the top of this page, working men and slaves wore the same type of tunic, usually made of a coarser, darker wool, and they frequently hitched the tunic higher over their belts for freer movement. Sometimes their tunics also left one shoulder uncovered, as depicted in [this mosaic](#) of a man named Frucius (whose narrow stripes indicate equestrian rank) being attended by two slaves, Myro and Victor. Slaves were not inevitably dressed in poor clothing, however; Junius, the young kitchen slave depicted in [this mosaic](#), wears a more elegant tunic and a gold neckchain, and the skeleton of a woman was recently found in an area near Pompeii with a [quantity of gold jewelry](#), including a [serpent bracelet](#) engraved DOM[I]NUS ANCILLAE SUAE, “from the master to his slave girl.”

THE TOGA



The toga was the national garment of Rome; in the *Aeneid*, Virgil has the god Jupiter characterize the Romans as “masters of the earth, the race that wears the toga” (1.282). Only male citizens were allowed to wear the toga. It was made of a large woolen cloth cut with both straight and rounded edges; it was not sewn or pinned but rather draped carefully over the body on top of the tunic. Over time, the size and manner of draping the toga became more elaborate; compare [this bronze statue](#) from the beginning of the first century BCE with [this statue](#) of a Roman senator or [this statue](#) of the emperor Augustus, which clearly illustrate the toga as worn during the late Republic and first centuries of the Empire. As shown in the drawing at left, the cloth was folded lengthwise and partly pleated at the fold, which was then draped over the left side of the body, over the left shoulder, under the right arm, and back up over the left arm and shoulder. It was held in place partly by the weight of the material and partly by keeping the left arm pressed against the body. The large overfold in the front of the body was called a *sinus*, and part of the material under this was

pulled up and draped over the sinus to form the *umbo*. The back of the toga was pulled over the head for religious ceremonies, as in [this statue](#) of Augustus as chief priest (*pontifex maximus*). It was difficult to put the toga on properly by oneself, and prominent Romans had slaves who were specially trained to perform this function. Togas were costly, heavy, and cumbersome to wear; the wearer looked dignified and stately but would have found it difficult to do anything very active. Citizens were supposed to wear togas for all public occasions ([here](#), for example, is a man being married in a toga), but by the beginning of the Empire Augustus had to require citizens to wear the toga in the Forum. This fresco from a building outside Pompeii is a rare painted depiction of [Roman men wearing togae praetextae](#) participating in a religious ceremony, probably the *Compitalia*; the dark crimson (Roman purple) color of their toga borders can clearly be seen.

The color of the toga was significant, marking differences in age and status:

- *toga virilis* also called *toga pura*: unadorned toga in the off-white color of the undyed wool that was worn by adult male citizens
- *toga praetexta*: off-white toga with a broad purple border shown in the right-hand drawing. The only adults allowed to wear this toga were curule magistrates (curule aedile and above).
- *toga pulla*: toga made of dark-colored wool worn during periods of mourning
- *toga candida*: artificially whitened toga worn by candidates for political office
- *toga picta*: purple toga embroidered with gold thread worn by a victorious general during a triumphal parade and later



adopted by emperors for state occasions. A variant of this costume was the *toga purpura*, an all-purple toga worn by the early kings and possibly adopted by some emperors

Male children of the upper classes also had distinctive dress for formal occasions. All freeborn citizen boys were entitled to wear a *bullā* (see below). On formal occasions, boys also wore the *toga praetexta*, possibly over a striped tunic; in theory all freeborn citizen boys could wear this garment, but because of its expense it generally indicated that the wearer belonged to the upper class (see these [boys on the Ara Pacis](#) and this [statue of the future emperor Nero](#) wearing a *bullā* and an elaborately draped toga). At the age of 14-16, boys laid aside the bordered toga during their coming-of-age ceremony (usually celebrated on the feast of the Liberalia, March 17) and ceremonially donned the *toga virilis*.

Although women had apparently worn togas in the early years of Rome, by the middle of the Republican era the only women who wore togas were common prostitutes. Unlike men, therefore, women had an item of clothing that symbolized lack of (or loss of) respectability—the toga. While the toga was a mark of honor for a man, it was a mark of disgrace for a woman. Prostitutes of the lowest class, the street-walker variety, were compelled to wear a plain toga made of coarse wool to announce their profession, and there is some evidence that women convicted of adultery might have been forced to wear “the prostitute's toga” as a badge of shame.



Jewelry: Propriety demanded that adult male citizens wear only one item of jewelry, a personalized signet ring that was used to make an impression in sealing wax in order to authorize documents. Originally made of iron, these signet rings later came to be made of gold, like the ring at left, whose carnelian sealstone depicts a tragic actor holding a mask (see this [large bronze signet ring](#) from Herculaneum with the letters of the owner's name in reverse, for stamping on wax: M[arci] PILI PRIMIG[enii] GRANIANI.). The reverse lettering on this [gold signet ring](#) from the third century CE says CORINTHIA VIVAT, “may Corinthia live” or “long live Corinthia.” Other rings with a practical function were actually [keys](#) (see also [this bronze ring](#) with a more elaborate key), perhaps to the gentleman's strongbox. Literary evidence indicates that some Roman men ignored propriety and wore numerous rings as well as brooches to pin their Greek-style cloaks (like [this silver pin](#) with symbols of victory—a winged goddess with an eagle, laurel crown, and palm branch). Before the age of manhood, Roman boys wore a *bullā*, a [neckchain and round pouch](#) containing protective amulets (usually phallic symbols), and the *bullā* of an upper-class boy would be made of [gold](#). See this [terra-cotta statue of a baby](#) wrapped in swaddling clothes and wearing a *bullā*, and [this statue](#) of a proud mother pointing to her [son in](#)

[his toga and bulla](#) (the facial features and hairstyles indicate that this statue probably represents Agrippina the Younger and her son Nero). Boys sometimes wore [small gold rings](#) carved with a phallus for good luck

Hairstyles: During the middle and late Republic and into the early Empire, Roman men wore their hair short and were clean shaven, even though the process of shaving was uncomfortable and frequently resulted in cuts and scratches. Emperors, however, became style setters. The emperor Nero (54-68 CE) affected a [more elaborate hairstyle](#) with curls framing his face and later added [sideburns](#), which can also be seen on his [coins](#). [Hadrian](#) (117-138 CE) was the first emperor to adopt a short beard, and many men, no doubt grateful to escape the ordeal of shaving, followed his example. After his reign, in fact, beards became quite common among Roman men.

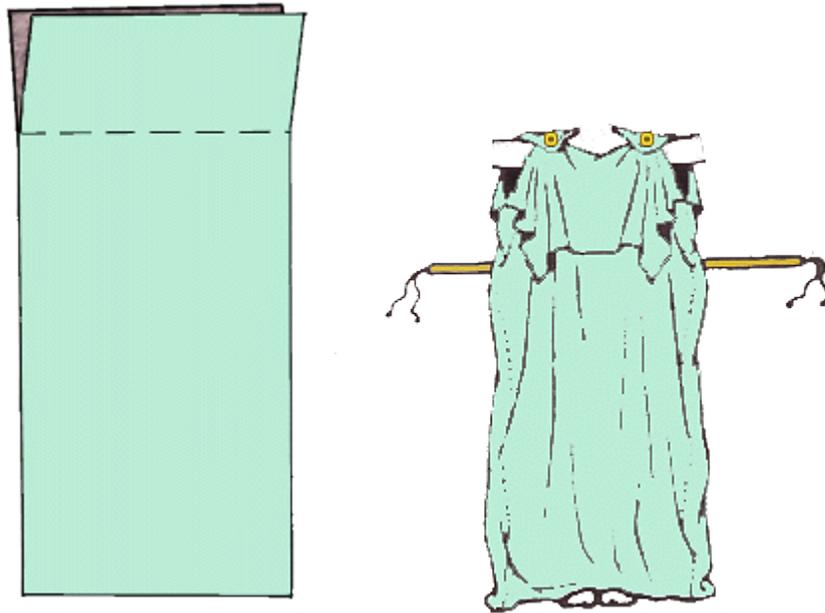
ROMAN CLOTHING: WOMEN

Women cannot partake of magistracies, priesthoods, triumphs, badges of office, gifts, or spoils of war; elegance, finery, and beautiful clothes are women's badges, in these they find joy and take pride, this our forebears called the women's world. (Livy, *History of Rome* 34.5)

In the above passage, Livy quotes a Roman tribune's argument for the repeal of the Oppian Law, a wartime measure which curtailed the finery that upper-class Roman women could display and which provoked the first recorded protest demonstration by women, as aristocratic Roman matrons took to the streets in 195 BCE to urge repeal of the law (click [here](#) for the context of this passage). As the tribune pointed out, high-class Roman women did not have the same distinctions of clothing that immediately marked out the status of their male counterparts; in fact the only certain distinction of dress allowed to women was the *stola*, which indicated a woman's marital status, not her social class or wealth. In addition, except for minor variations of color or fabric, women's clothing styles were relatively simple and unchanging, so they had to emphasize elaborate hairstyles and jewelry in order to stand out from other women.

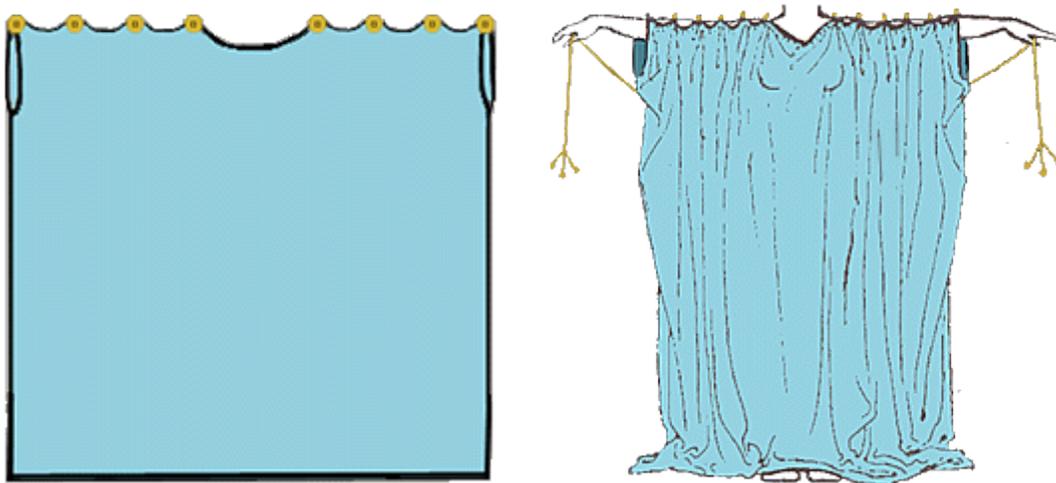
Similar to Roman men, the basic item of clothing was the tunic (*tunica*), though women's tunics were fuller and longer, usually extending to the feet. There were two basic styles of tunic, both similar to tunics worn by Greek women.

THE PEPLOS



The peplos was made from two rectangular pieces of cloth partially sewn together on both sides; the open sections at the top were then folded down in the front and back. The woman pulled this garment over her head and [fastened it at her shoulders](#) with two large pins, forming a sleeveless dress; she then tied a belt over or under the folds. [This statue](#) shows a Roman woman wearing a peplos and holding a glass vial for perfume.

THE CHITON



The more common sleeved tunic worn by women was similar to the Greek *chiton*. Two wide pieces of cloth were sewn together almost to the top, leaving just enough room for armholes. The woman pulled this garment over her head and used several pins or buttons to fasten it at intervals over her shoulders and arms, forming a dress with sleeves which could be belted under the

breasts, at the waist, or at the hips. The length of the sleeves was determined by the width of the cloth. Statues clearly show the manner of [fastening the sleeves](#) as well as various modes of [draping](#) and [belting](#) the tunic. Tunics could be brightly colored or made of lightweight fabrics such as linen or silk, as in [this wall painting](#) of a fashionable young woman pouring perfume into a tiny container.

At the time of her [marriage](#), the Roman woman donned the *stola*, a long, sleeveless tunic, frequently if not always suspended at the shoulders from short straps, which was worn on top of another tunic. It is probable that the stola was typically made of undyed wool. The stola was a symbol of marriage, and by the late Republic all women married according to Roman law were entitled to wear it. Not all did, of course, since it was not a particularly fashionable or flattering garment, but wearing the stola was a way for a woman to publicly proclaim her respectability and adherence to tradition. Statues of the [first empress Livia](#), for example, prominently display her stola, even [this one](#) whose head has been lost (a [close-up](#) clearly shows the strap of her stola).

As the drawing at left shows, respectable women also wore a long cloak, called a *palla*, over their tunic and stola when they went outside. This was rectangular in shape and was typically draped over the left shoulder, under the right arm and back across the body, carried by the left arm or thrown back again over the left shoulder. The palla could also be pulled up to cover the head, as shown in the above statue of Livia or in [this depiction](#) of a matron whose [elegantly draped palla](#) has a [fringe](#).

THE STOLA



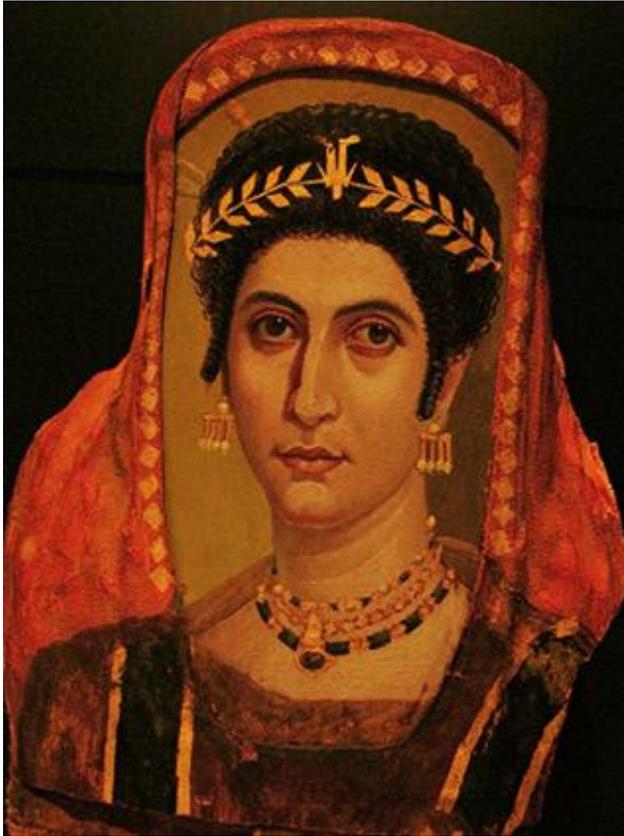
HAIRSTYLES:

Women relied mostly on elaborate hairstyles and jewelry rather than clothing to vary their appearance (see [hairstyle 1](#), [hairstyle 2](#), [hairstyle 3](#), and [hairstyle 4](#)). In fact, an elaborate hairstyle is the only thing worn by [this woman](#), who had herself sculpted as the goddess Venus (I like to imagine that this sculptor had an ironic sense of humor, since the contrast between her [realistic portrait head](#) and the prefab Venus-like body is so striking). Some of these styles were influenced by coiffures adopted by empresses, as for example the unusual hairstyle worn by Julia Domna during the latter half of the second century CE:, shown in [this coin](#) and in the two views of her sculpted head below. In fact, some lucky Roman girl of that period had a beautiful [jointed ivory doll](#) wearing a gold necklace, bracelets, and anklets, with a [hairdo](#) imitating that of the empress. This doll also proves that Barbie was not the first anatomically correct “fashion doll”! No doubt this doll's owner dressed her in elegant clothes mimicking those worn by aristocratic women.



One of the [most famous styles](#) was worn by women during the period of the Flavian emperors (Vespasian to Hadrian, 69-138 CE); this is the style that Juvenal mocks when he describes the woman who appears tall from the front but quite the opposite from the back (on [this sarcophagus](#) a woman with a Flavian hairstyle proudly displays the bust of an important male in her family; note her *stola* as well). [Numerous slaves](#) skilled in the arts of [hairdressing](#) and cosmetics were needed for these elaborate hairdos, as were [hairpins](#) (shown here with a beautifully carved [ivory box](#) in which to store them), wigs, and hair swatches. This [hairpin made of bone](#) is topped by the carved head of a woman with an elaborate hairstyle, while [this one](#) bears an inscription and originally showed the heads of a couple (the woman's head has broken off). Women also wore [hairnets](#) made of finely woven gold wires; this [gold hairnet from Rome](#) mirrors the hairnet shown on this [Pompeian fresco portrait of a girl](#) (often mistakenly labelled “Sappho”). Women also had many creams, cosmetics, and perfumes; this [cosmetic box](#) belonging to a woman in Pompeii was made of bronze and beautifully carved bone (wood portions have been restored). Cosmetics and hairstyling required mirrors, which were made of highly polished bronze or silver in rectangular or round shapes. The most elaborate had handles and relief carvings on the back, like this [silver mirror](#) depicting the myth of Phrixus riding the ram with the golden fleece.

JEWELRY:



Fashionable upper-class women wore considerable amounts of jewelry. One design that persisted from a very early period to late antiquity was the *fibula*, a pin whose basic design resembled our safety pin. It was a useful clothing fastener and was often beautifully decorated, as is the case with this [Etruscan gold fibula](#) depicting a cat stalking two unsuspecting birds. Since Roman clothing was frequently pinned rather than sewn, many fasteners were beautifully decorated; this gold pin has an [amethyst cameo](#) with a female bust, and the [large garnet](#) in this pin has an winged Victory intaglio carving. A [representative collection of jewelry](#) from the first to the third centuries CE includes earrings, necklaces, pendants, bracelets and rings of gold, gems (garnets were especially popular), and cameos (here is [another collection of Roman jewelry](#)). Gold bracelets were often fashioned in the [form of snakes](#) (see [another snake bracelet](#) with carved scales), and rings often had relief

carvings, like this [gold betrothal ring](#) with a couple clasping right hands, or intaglios, like this [camel](#). A popular style of jewelry apparently invented by the Romans was made of [hollow, polished gold hemispheres](#) fashioned into necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. Pearls were particularly prized and costly; this [impressive gold necklace](#), found in Pompeii, is set with emeralds and large pearls. Silver was used less frequently, as in this [medallion with chain](#), this [bracelet](#) with a portrait of a child, or this [ring](#) showing two snakes holding in their mouths a *patra* (a dish used in religious ceremonies). This [silver ring](#) has an inscription (with letters in reverse for stamping) that reads LIBERA VIVAS, “may you live free.” Cameo portraits were also worn, as in [this pendant](#) depicting a married couple or in this [striking gold pendant](#) with glass beads and plasma cameos of the faces of children. Gold coins (*aurei*) were often made into jewelry: a [gold ring](#) with a coin of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, a [pendant](#) with garnets and a coin of the emperor Caracalla, an [armband](#) with coins of Caracalla and his wife Plautilla, and a [belt](#) made with coins of fourth-century CE emperors [Constans to Theodosius](#). The portrait of the woman at left is one of many so-called “[mummy portraits](#)” dating from Egypt after it became a Roman province; these portraits, usually depicting only the face and shoulders, present us with strikingly individualized faces of varying ethnicities, Greco-Roman clothing, adornment, and hairstyles, combined with the quintessentially Egyptian custom of mummification. We know that this woman was named Isidora, since her name is painted in Greek on the

wooden sarcophagus, and her hairstyle dates to the period of the emperor Trajan, the beginning of the second century CE. [Sources](#)

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<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing.html>

Roman Dress

Dress of Rome



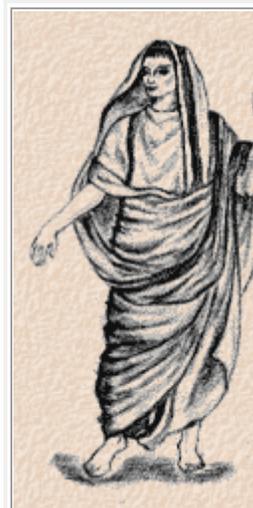
Toga



Stola and Palla



Stola and Palla



Priest's Toga



The Pallium
Cloak

Roman clothing owed much to that of ancient Greece, but it had distinct forms of its own.

In all the ancient world, first and foremost clothes needed to be simple. As for possible materials there was only really one. Wool, although to some extent linen was also available.

The needles of the day were coarse and unwieldy by modern standards. Hence any stitching or sewing was kept to a minimum.

This of course also ruled out button holes, and meant that any kind of clothing was held together either with fastenings such as broaches or clasps.

Underwear

As undergarments Romans would wear a simply loin cloth knotted on each side. This garment appeared to have several names. The most probable explanation for this is that they varied in shape.

They were the *subligar*, *subligaculum*, *campestre*, *licium* and *cinctus*.

Women would also wear a simple brassière in the form of a band, tightly tied around the body, either across the bust and under clothing (*fascia*), or under the bust and over clothing (*strophium*, *mammillare*, *cingulum*).

Undergarments are believed to generally have been of linen. Spanish, Syrian and Egyptian linen was deemed of the finest quality.

The Tunic

The most basic garment in Roman clothing was the tunic (*tunica*). It was the standard dress of Rome. For most Romans and slaves the tunic would be the entire clothing they dressed in before setting foot outdoors.

The male tunic would generally reach roughly to the knees, whereas women's tunics would generally be longer, some reaching to the ground. Female tunics often also had long sleeves. However, it took until the second or third century AD for long sleeves to become acceptable for men. Until then it was perceived as highly effeminate to be wearing one.

Cold weather would likely see Romans wear two or three tunics to keep warm. In that case the tunics nearest the body, functioning as a vest, would be the *subucula*. The next layer would be the *intusium* or *supparus*. Emperor Augustus, who was of a rather frail constitution, was known to wear as many as four tunics in winter.

There was some formal differences in tunics which denoted social rank.

A purple stripe worn on the tunic was called a *clavus* and indicated membership to a particular order:

- the *latus clavus* (or *laticlavium*) denoted senators.
- the *angustus clavus* was the mark of the equestrian order.

So a senator could wear a tunic featuring a vertical broad purple stripe down the centre. An equestrian could wear a tunic featuring two vertical narrow purple stripes on either side of the tunic.

It is worth mentioning the *tunica palmata* which was a brightly coloured tunic embroidered with palm leaves and was worn by the *triumphator* during his triumph, or possibly by other dignitaries at other, very exceptional occasions.



Dalmatica Tunic
For larger picture click
on image above

The richest form of the long-sleeved tunic, the *dalmatica*, in many cases replaced the toga altogether in the later years of empire. In the very same age, due to the influence of Germanic soldiers dominating the ranks of the army, long, close-fitting trousers were widely worn.

The Toga

The toga was allowed to be worn only by free Roman citizens. Foreigners, or even exiled citizens, could not appear in public wearing a toga.



Toga Praetexta
For larger picture click
on image above

If in the early days the *toga* was worn directly on the naked body, then later a simple tunic was added, tied at the waist with a belt. There were some old families with ancient ancestry who insisted on continuing the tradition of dressing without a tunic, but their fellow Romans understood them somewhat eccentric.

Basically the toga was a large blanket, draped over the body, leaving one arm free.

Through experiments historians have concluded that the vast blanket took the form of a semi circle. It was along the straight edge the purple stripe of a senator's *toga praetexta* ran.

Usually the toga spanned between 2 ½ and 3 meters long (though apparently up to 5 ½ metres long in some cases) and at its widest point it will have been up to 2 metres wide.

No doubt keeping such a cumbersome item of clothing on one's body, and looking elegant, will have been fraught with practical problems as one moved about, sat down and got up again.

In some cases lead weights were sewn into the hem to help keep the garment in place. In order to help the toga drape more gracefully, slaves were known to place pieces of wood in the folds the previous evening.

The toga was made of wool. The rich had the luxury of choice of what kind of wool they sought to wear. Of Italian wares, the wool of Apulia and Tarentum were deemed the best. Meanwhile wool from Attica, Laconica, Miletus, Laodicea and Baetica were deemed of the finest quality of all.

Boys of reasonably wealthy families already would be expected to wear the toga. In their case, the garment oddly shared its name with that of the senators, the *toga praetexta*. On formally becoming a man, usually around his 16th birthday, the young Roman would then dispense with the *toga praetexta* and instead wear the simple, white toga of the Roman citizen, known as the *toga virilis*, *toga pura* or *toga libera*. It is worth mentioning that the white colour of the toga was prescribed by law.

There may be an explanation why a boy's toga was deemed a *toga praetexta*. It may have traditionally borne a purple hem. So too may the stola of girl until marriage. This obviously would have been cheap imitation purple and not the real Tyrian purple dye.



How to dress in a toga

In times of the republic, it was simply deemed improper for a Roman citizen of note to be seen in public without his toga.

After all, anyone who didn't want to be seen as a slave or a workman in Rome had to be seen in a *toga*. The only exception for this was the festival of the *saturnalia* when everyone, including the magistrates, left their *toga* at home.

Some early emperors were very keen to maintain the republican traditions of a toga-wearing public, but gradually it began to fade from use, being worn only as formal dress at the law courts, the theatre, the circus or at the imperial court.

It is also known that many politicians campaigning for public office would go as far as whitening their *toga* with chalk in order to stand out more from the crowd. In fact this is the very reason for the name. In Latin *candida* stands for *white*. So the *candidates* were 'the white ones'. The use of the word has survived unto this day in the English language.

There are certain types of toga which are of note.

The *toga picta* was a brightly coloured and richly embroidered garment and was chiefly worn by victorious military commanders on their triumph through the streets of Rome. The *toga palmata*, alike the *tunica palmata* richly embroidered and decorated with a palm leaf pattern, was a type of *toga picta*.

The *toga trabea* was ceremonial toga of various colours. It was either wholly purple (if meant to decorate the statues of deities) or featuring purple stripes for kings, augurs and some priests.



Toga Trabea
For larger picture
click on image above

Finally, the *toga pulla* or *toga sordida* was of dark colour and was worn when in mourning.

At dinner parties and in private the *toga* was simply deemed too impractical and so on such occasions it was often replaced by the *synthesis*, a sort of dressing gown. Else one simply wore a tunic.

Textiles and Dyes

Status was evidently all-important in Rome. Given that clothes were a simple way of expression such status, it is little surprise that rich families had slaves trained as tailors (*vestiarii*, *paenularii*).

Trade guilds existed for the professional tailors, dyers and fullers, indicating that there existed a substantial industry.

The fullers of course are famed for their large earthenware bowls which they kept at their gates into which citizens caught short could relieve themselves. The gesture was of course not entirely selfless. Fullers were dependant on the ammonia they gathered from urine as a natural detergent.

Of the greatest importance when considering the dying of textiles was of course Tyrian purple. Tyrian purple dye was one of the most costly commodities available in the ancient world.

The dye was gained from the glandular fluids of certain types of sea snails in the eastern Mediterranean, known collectively as murex snails.

Women's Dress

Fewer restrictions by laws, customs and traditions existed on the dress of women. If initially is believed to have been largely white, like the dress of men, then didn't appear to stay so for long. Female clothes instead being of almost any colour.

The basic female garment was the *stola*. It was essentially a long tunic reaching to the ground. It could have long or short sleeves, or be entirely sleeveless.

The *stola* was generally worn over another long tunic, the *tunica interior*.

It was often the case that the *stola* therefore was shorter than the under tunic in order to show the layers of garment (which invariably was a display of wealth and status).

Another display of wealth could be a wide ornamental border (*instita*) on the lower hem of either the under tunic or the *stola*.

As an over garment women in the early days of the republic wore the *ricinium*, a simple square cloak,



Stola and Palla
For larger picture click
on image above



Stola
For larger picture click
on image above

covering the shoulders. But later the *ricinium* was replaced by the *palla*.

It is perhaps easiest to describe the *palla* as a draped cloak similar to the *toga*, albeit smaller and much less unwieldy.

There seems to have been no specific size or shape that specified a *palla*. So it could range from a large garment which draped around the body to something no more significant than a scarf.

Silk clothing was available to the rich, but was solely used for female vestments, as for men it was deemed utterly effeminate until the late empire, when the courtiers of the 4th century dressed in elaborately embroidered silk robes.



Child with *bulla*
For larger picture
click on image above

Children

It is fair to assume that children, especially those not borne to rich families spent their time in simple, belted tunics.

Children wore an amulet called the *bulla*. Boys would wear it until reaching their manhood, usually around the age of sixteen. Girls would wear it until they married.

Cloaks

Cloaks and other over garments were used to protect against bad weather. A variety are known, at times worn over the *toga* itself, but more often replacing it.

If various kinds of cloaks are known by name, it is today quite hard to discern where the precise differences between these garments are to be found as little more than their name is known.

The *pallium* was worn over the tunic or the *toga*. This seems possibly to have been quite a colourful decorated item, hence possibly an outdoor vestment of the wealthy.

The *lacerna* was originally a military cloak, but during the empire it began to be extensively worn by the middle class. The wealthier people tended to wear brightly coloured *lacerna*, whereas the poor wore cheaper dull, dark ones.

The *paenula* was a very simple type of cloak, used especially as protection against bad weather. It was a cloak the Romans probably adapted from their Gallic neighbours early on.

It was put on by simply pulling one's head through the central hole and was normally fitted with a hood. They could be made of either leather (*paenula scortae*), or very heavy felt (*paenula gausapina*).

The *paenula* was worn by both men and women.

The *laena* (also called *duplex*) was thick, round cloak which was folded double at the shoulders and was generally of heavy material, much like the military cloak, the *sagum*.

The *sagum* appears to have been worn by soldiers and officers alike. The *sagulum* most likely being a shorter version of the full *sagum*, reaching to the hips, rather than to the knees.

The *paludamentum* was a particular red cloak which in republican times was worn solely by the commander in chief (ergo, it would be available only to a consul or dictator). He was handed the cloak as part of the ceremony of inauguration as military commander on the Capitoline Hill. Once the emperors ruled, the *paludamentum* became a symbol of imperial power and was worn, highly ornamented, only by the emperor.

The poor wore short and dark *laena*, whereas the wealthy would wear brightly coloured one to cover their shoulders at banquets during the cold season.

In many cases a hood, the *cucullus*, would be sewn to a cloak. In fact there may have been a hooded cloak called *cucullus*.

Other such hooded cloaks were the *bardocullus*, *birrus*, and the *caracalla*, a heavy hooded cloak.

Footwear

Roman footwear showed little distinction between male and female. One usually wore sandals tied round the ankle with thin strips of leather.



The common Roman footwear, the *calceus*. (Plural: *calcei*)

There were three main types of footwear:

The *calcei* were the standard outdoor footwear for a Roman and formed part of the national dress with the *toga*. It was a soft leather shoe, generally speaking a cross between a shoe and a sandal.

Sandals (*soleae*, *crepidae* or *sandalia*) were generally regarded as indoor footwear. It was as improper to be seen in public wearing sandals outdoors as it was to visit your host's banquet in anything other. Hence a wealthy Roman would have a slave accompany him to a banquet, to carry his sandals, where he would change into them.



The Roman soldier's military sandal, the *caliga*. (Plural: *caligae*)

The third general type of footwear was a pair of slippers (*socci*), which



The Sagum Cloak
For larger picture click on image above

were also meant for indoor use.

There were of course other types of footwear. The *pero* was a simple piece of leather wrapped around the foot, the *caliga* was the hob-nailed military boot/sandal and the *sculponea* was a wooden clog, worn only by poor peasants and slaves.

Beards and Hairstyles

The tradition of intricately groomed beards was quite common among the Greeks and Etruscans (the principle cultural influences on the Romans). The Romans though until 300 BC remained pretty much ungroomed.

It was only with the introduction of the fashion of shaving during the age of Alexander that the Greeks began to shave. This of course also happened in the so-called area of Magna Graecia in southern Italy which was controlled by Greek colonies. From there the fashion was introduced to the Romans.

It finally took a firm hold in Rome in about the third century BC. The great general Scipio Africanus is believed to have been the first to have begun the fashion of shaving daily. During the third century BC many barbers from the Greek parts of Sicily moved to Rome and opened shops.

Indeed a skilled *tonsor* (barber) could make good money in Rome. For shaving was neither a pleasant nor a simple matter. The Romans lacked the high quality steel of today, so a razor (*novacula*) will have blunted very quickly. A visit to the *tonsor* may therefore have involved shaving, waxing and the use of tweezers to remove the various facial hairs.

Of course Rome was not completely immune to the whims of fashion. Especially in the late republic it was seen as very fashionable for young men to keep a small, well-groomed beard (*barbula*).

The late republic was indeed a time in which young rakes seemed to take to grooming in a big way. Cicero describes some of the followers of the Catalina as 'shining with ointments'.

The general tradition of clean shaven Romans remained, however, fairly unbroken until the reign of emperor Hadrian.

There are two schools of thought regarding Hadrian. Either he was so taken by Greek culture that he adopted the Greek tradition of wearing a beard. Or his face was slightly disfigured, possibly by a scar, and he sought to hide it from view. Whatever, the reason, nothing quite set the fashion like the imperial court.

Once Hadrian introduced it, the beard was set to stay for some time, until the reign of Constantine the Great who reversed the trend. Thus the men of the empire returned to being mostly clean-shaven.

As for Roman men's hairstyles, they tended all to keep their hair cut short. Some very vain ones might have had their hair curled with curling irons, whilst being pampered for hours at the barbers', but they were a small minority. Romans tended to see such affectations as effeminate.

Under Marcus Aurelius the fashion for shaving one's head clean was introduced, whilst early Christians tended to have their hair and beards cut short.

Women, in Rome, just as in any other civilization to this day, wore far more elaborate hairstyles than their men folk.

Young women simply gathered their hair into a bun at the back of the neck, or coiled it into a knot at the top of the head.

Married women's hairstyles were more complicated. At first, the women of early Rome wore their hair in Etruscan fashion, keeping all of it tied up tightly with ribbons on the very crown of the head (*tutulus*). Though this strange arrangement disappeared very soon, though some priestesses still retained its use.

Already as early as the second century BC caustic soap made of tallow and ashes was imported from Gaul to dye ladies hair a reddish-yellow colour.

The age of the Flavian emperors (Vespasian, Titus and Domitian) is largely seen as the age of the most flamboyant fashion in woman's hairstyles.

One of the styles used largely at court had the hair arranged in several layers, falling to the face in an abundance of ringlets.

Such fashion in hairstyle required the services of an expert female hairdresser who also doubled as make up artist (*ornatrix*), as well as additional hair pieces to be added to create such a mass of hair.

Hair pieces, wigs, hair lotions and dyes were all known to the Romans.

In fact blonde hair was a sought after commodity, traded with the Germanic tribes beyond the Rhine and Danube.

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<http://www.roman-empire.net/society/soc-dress.html>

Latin Words for Clothing With English Translation

List of the words for clothing in Latin and their English translations

By [N.S. Gill](#), About.com Guide



Vestal Virgin Costume

[Clipart.com](#)

- amictus, -us m. *mantle, cloak*
- anulus, -i m. *a finger-ring*
- armilla, -ae f. *a bracelet*
- balteus, -i m. *belt*
- bracae, -arum f. pl. *breeches*
- calceus, -i m. *a shoe*
- caliga, -ae f. *a boot for a soldier*
- cingulus, -i m. *a belt*
- crepida, -ae f. *a sandal*
- lana, -ae f. *wool*
- linteum, -i n. *linen (it also means napkin)*
- ornamentum, -i n. *an ornament*
- paenula, -ae f. *traveling cloak, rain cloak*
- palla, -ae f. *robe*
- pallium, -i n. *cloak*
- pannus, -i m. *a cloth*
- pileus/pilleus, -i m. *a hat*
- stola, -ae f. *a stole*
- toga, -ae f. *toga*
- torques, -is f. *a neck chain*
- trabea, -ae f. *a robe of state*
- tunica, -ae f. *tunic*
- velum, -i n. *a veil*
- vestimentum, -i n. *a garment*
- vestis, -is f. *a dress*
- vestitus, -us m. *clothing*
- vitta, -ae f. *a headband*