

10 Cicero – the travesty of P. Clodius Pulcher

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10.1 Women's Dress in Cicero

In contrast to Varro, Cicero talks about female clothing only a few times. His reticence has to do with the character of his literary oeuvre. Politics and philosophy have little room for female fashion. Cicero's lack of interest in the subject can even be seen in the few references he does make to the topic. He mentions female clothing in connection with 'real women' very rarely, once when criticizing the extravagant dress (*Melitensia*) of the wife of the corrupt provincial governor Verres,¹ and once when accusing him of depriving an innocent girl of her *toga praetexta* (= her civil rights).² The other examples from Cicero's writings include two mentions of statues of goddesses,³ and five instances where he inveighs against men purportedly wearing female clothes (using the trope of the *effeminatus*).⁴ The passages in question are mostly short and will be dealt with in part B under the heading of the individual garments. This chapter only discusses

1 Cic. Verr. 2.4.103: *insula est Melite ... in qua est eodem nomine oppidum... quod isti textrinum per triennium ad muliebre vestem conficiendam fuit* [There is an island called Malta ... on it there is a city with the same name ... Three years, it served as textile factory for this person (= Verres) to produce female clothing]; cf. also 2.2.176, 183. On the *Melitensia*, cf. B 9 pp. 384–385.

2 Cic. Verr. 2.1.113: *eripies igitur pupillae togam praetextam, detrahes ornamenta non solum fortunae sed etiam ingenuitatis?* [So, will you carry off the *toga praetexta* of the ward, will you strip her of the adornment not only of her wealth but also of her free birth (*ingenuitas*)?]; cf. C 5 p. 357.

3 Cic. Verr. 2.4.74 (Diana): *erat admodum amplum et excelsum signum cum stola; verum tamen inerat in illa magnitudine aetas atque habitus virginis* [It was a quite large and tall statue with a *stola*. Nevertheless, the age and the condition of a young girl (*virgo*) were shown in that size]; cf. on it B 4 p. 303; Cic. de nat. deor. 1.82 (Juno): *cum calceolis repandis* [with shoes curling up at the toes]. The Renaissance had a similar type of shoe variously called *poulaine* or *pike*, which had an elongated beak that was sometimes curled back. On the type of shoe (a *soccus*), see B 27 p. 537.

4 Apart from the passages discussed in this chapter, see Cic. Verr. 2.5.31: *cum iste (sc. Verres) cum pallio purpureo talarique tunica versaretur in convivii muliebribus* [when this person (sc. Verres) with a purple *pallium* and an ankle-length *tunica* spent time at feasts with women], cf. B 1 p. 256; Cic. Cat. 2.22: *manicatis et talaribus tunicis, velis amictos, non togis* [wearing ankle-length tunics with sleeves, wrapped in veils not in *togae*], cf. B 1 p. 260; Cic. Phil. 2.44: *sumpsisti virilem, quam statim muliebre togam reddidisti. Primo vulgare scortum, certa flagitii merces, nec ea parva; sed cito Curio intervenit, qui te a meretricio quaestu abduxit et, tamquam stolam dedisset, in matrimonio stabili et certo collocavit* [You (sc. Antony) put on the men's *toga*, which you immediately made into a woman's *toga*. At first, you were a public whore (a sure reward for fornication, and not a little), but Curio quickly intervened and

Cicero's oratorical attacks against P. Clodius Pulcher because they contain a long and coherent description of female clothing (albeit worn by a man).

10.2 The travesty of Clodius – introduction

The issue which led Cicero to ridicule Clodius was as follows: In the year 62 BCE, Clodius secretly joined a group of upper class *matronae* celebrating the rites of Bona Dea in the house of Caesar. Since this was a festival reserved for women, Clodius needed to dress up as a woman in order to attend. He was then caught in the act. His daring prank led to a social scandal, Caesar even divorcing his wife. For some unknown reason, Cicero destroyed Clodius' alibi, turning Clodius into a formidable enemy. This rivalry finally forced Cicero into exile in 58 BCE.⁵

Cicero later used Clodius' travesty to ridicule him.⁶ In two speeches, he gladly and extensively describes how Clodius dressed up as a woman: once in the pamphlet called *Against Clodius and Curio* published in 61 BCE (of which some fragments remain),⁷ and once in the fully preserved speech *De haruspicum responso* (About the response of the soothsayers), which Cicero held before the senate in 56 BCE after his return from exile.⁸ It is for this reason that we owe Cicero two of the most detailed descriptions of female dress in Latin literature. Nevertheless, we must add a caveat here: Cicero does not describe everyday female Roman clothing. As we will see, there is a considerable amount of 'literarization' in it. Cicero's account resembles a scene from a Greek comedy. It turns the social scandal, at which Cicero himself was not present, into a comic

took you away from the whore trade and, as if he had given you the *stola*, associated you with himself in a firm and lasting marriage (*matrimonium*)], cf. B 4 p. 331.

5 On the historical events, cf. J. Balsdon, *Fabula Clodiana*, *Historia* 15 (1966), 65–73; A. W. Lintott, *P. Clodius Pulcher – Felix Catilina?*, *G&R* 14 (1967), 157–169; D. F. Epstein, *Cicero's Testimony at the bona dea Trial*, *CP* 81 (1986), 229–235; H. Benner, *Die Politik des P. Clodius Pulcher. Untersuchungen zur Denaturierung des Klientelwesens in der ausgehenden römischen Republik*, Stuttgart 1987, especially 37ff; H. Brouwer, *Bona Dea. The Sources and a Description of the Cult*, Leiden 1989, 363ff; W. J. Tatum, *Cicero and the bona dea-Scandal*, *CP* 85 (1990), 202–208 and id., *The Patrician Tribune. Publius Clodius Pulcher*, Chapel Hill 1999, 62ff; A. Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea and the Cults of Roman Women*, Stuttgart 2014, 94ff; T. Boll, *Ciceros Rede 'cum senatui gratias egit'*, *GFA Beiheft* 10, Berlin 2019, 7–12.

6 On the *topoi* of the invectives concerning clothes, cf. *RAC* 4 (1950) s.v. *effeminatus*, col. 629–632 (H. Herter); most recently on Cicero's invectives in general and the passages discussed here, J. Heskell, *Cicero as Evidence for Attitudes to Dress in the Late Republic*, in: Sebesta/Bonfante (eds.) (1994), 139–140; A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter. Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic*, Princeton 1996, 159–173 and id., *Ciceronian Invective*, in J. M. May, (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Cicero. Oratory and Rhetoric*, Leiden 2002, 197–217; C. Craig, *Audience Expectations, Invective and Proof*, in: J. Powell et al. (eds.), *Cicero the Advocate*, Oxford 2004, especially 200–201; J. Booth (ed.), *Cicero on the Attack. Invective and subversion in the orations and beyond*, Llandysul 2007.

7 M. Schanz/C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur II* (= *HAW VIII.2*), Munich 1935, 445–446.

8 Schanz/Hosius (n. 7) 429.

scene. Clodius comes very close to the comic character Mnesilochos from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai* (Women celebrating the festival of the Thesmophoria), and Cicero's description of Clodius' travesty should be read against this literary background.

In Aristophanes' play, Mnesilochos also wants to sneak in among some women, specifically at the festival of *Thesmophoria*. He therefore puts on a female attire, which he gets from the 'effeminate' tragic poet Agathon. Aristophanes depicts the travesty in a funny scene (249–263).⁹ First, Mnesilochos puts on a *crocata* (= χροκωτός [sc. χιτῶν] 253), then a cord (στροφήιον 256). Then he asks for a 'hair bag' (κεκρύφαλον 256) and a headscarf (μίτρα 256), and receives a silly night cap (κεφαλή περίθετος 257) instead. Finally, he puts on a shawl (ἔγκυκλος 261) and sandals (ὑποδήματα 262). The humour of the scene is created by two interrelated factors: the female clothes do not suit a male, and the process of dressing in this ill-fitting clothing is nonetheless done with great ado.

10.3 Cic. In Cur. et Clod. [14] 22, 23, 25

Returning to Cicero, the relevant passages in his speech *Against Curio and Clodius* are as follows:

Cic. in Cur. et Clod. [14] 22, 23, 25

(22) *nam rusticos nos ei videri minus est mirandum, qui manicatam tunicam et mitram et purpureas fascias habere non possumus. Tu vero festivus, tu elegans, tu solus urbanus, quem decet muliebris ornatus, quem incessus psaltriae, qui effeminare vultum, attenuare vocem, levare corpus potes.*

(23) *tunne, cum vincirentur pedes fasciis, cum calvatica capiti accommodaretur, cum vix manicatam tunicam in lacertos induceres, cum strophio accurate praecingerere, in tam longo spatio numquam te Appi Claudii nepotem esse recordatus es?*

(25) *sed, credo, postquam speculum tibi adlatum est, longe te a puchris abesse sensisti.*

(22) for it is not surprising that we are peasants to him, who cannot have a tunic with sleeves, a headscarf and purple sandal straps. You, however, are pretty; you are elegant; you alone are chic, adorned by a woman's garment and by walking like a female lyre player, a man who knows to make his face appear feminine, to soften his voice and to smooth his body.

(23) When your feet were wrapped with straps, when your headscarf was fitted to your head, when you pulled your tunic with sleeves over your upper arms with difficulty, when you carefully girded yourself with a cord, have you never remembered in such a long time that you are the grandson of Appius Claudius?

⁹ For a detailed interpretation of Aristophanes, cf. B 21 pp. 502–504.

(25) Yes, I think that after a mirror was brought to you, you realized that you were far from being a beautiful one (a pulcher).

In F 23, Cicero imagines a veritable dressing scene. First, Clodius puts on his sandals with straps (*fasciae*) and a headscarf (*mitra*)—as in Lucretius, feet and head stand together.¹⁰ Then he puts on a tunic and cord or braided belt (*strophium*). In F 22, in contrast, the tunic is mentioned first as the most important garment, followed by the other garments—the headscarf and the foot straps. Again, head and feet are grouped together.

Let us now turn to the single garments. Like Mnesilochos (257), Clodius wears a *mitra* on his head. This is a typical female headgear that is also mentioned in other invectives against men and travesties. Cicero calls it alternatively a *mitra* and a *calvatica* (sc. *mitra*).¹¹ Something akin to the *calvatica* also appears in English in the form of the skullcap (*calva* referring to the scalp). Cicero may have used the word *calvatica* for rhetorical effect, thus producing an alliteration and assonance (*capiti calvatica accomodaretur*). On the other hand, the technical term gives the scene a touch of everyday life. In contrast to Mnesilochos, Clodius has no κεκρύφαλος. This is not surprising. A hairnet (or rather ‘hair bag’) is a headgear typical for the fashion of Greek Classical times and would be completely out of place in this Roman context.¹²

Cicero also claims that Clodius wore a *tunica* with attached long sleeves (*tunica manicata*). The sleeves indicate that it is a long female *tunica*, since Roman men were usually dressed in sleeveless tunics.¹³ The *tunica manicata* is also found in other invectives and travesties.¹⁴ The long sleeves may have led readers to imagine a Greek or even Oriental version of the tunic, a type that would fit a female freed-woman dancing and playing the lyre (*psaltria*). Cicero also uses the tight sleeves for a joke, describing how Clodius has to squeeze his arms in.¹⁵ Like Mnesilochos, Cicero’s Clodius girds his dress with a cord (*strophium*). The *strophium* is also a typical female accessory and serves as a belt to fix the garment to the body (B 21).¹⁶ Cicero makes fun of Clodius by describing how he puts it on with all diligence (*accurate praecingere*). This is very pertinent if we imagine Clodius wearing a wide Greek *chiton* that needed exact girding. In any case, Clodius dresses carefully and neatly, as a woman would have done. This also begs the

¹⁰ Cf. A 11 p. 211.

¹¹ Cf. B 13 p. 462 and RAC 4 (1950) s.v. effeminatus, col. 631 (H. Herter).

¹² Cf. B 12 p. 457.

¹³ On tunics with sleeves, cf. B 1 p. 257 and RAC 4 (1950) s.v. effeminatus, col. 630 (H. Herter).

¹⁴ Cf. p. 201 n. 4 above.

¹⁵ A similar joke is made by Ovid about Hercules, who squeezes himself into the robe of the Lydian queen Omphale; Ovid. fasti 2.321–322: *ventre minor zona est; tunicarum vincla relaxat, || ut posset magnas exseruisse manus* [The belt is smaller than his belly. He widens the bands of the tunics, || so that he can stick out his big arms]. Unlike Clodius, Hercules wears a sleeveless chiton. His muscular body does not fit into his female tunic and ends up tearing seams trying to force it on.

¹⁶ It should not be confused with the *fascia pectoralis* (B 22) that is wrapped around the breast.

question of where Clodius learned how to tie his garment is such a precise manner. The scene culminates in Clodius vainly checking the fit of his dress in a mirror. A pun based on Clodius' cognomen Pulcher (*pulcher* meaning beautiful) completes the scene.¹⁷ It turns out that despite his best efforts Clodius is neither beautiful nor does he behave like a worthy member of his aristocratic family.

Now we come to the feet. Clodius' footwear is difficult to explain and is the most confusing aspect of the passage. Cicero talks of purple *fasciae* with which Clodius wrapped his feet. But what are those *fasciae*? They have no parallel in Aristophanes, since they are no Greek custom. The term *fascia* is often thought to designate puttees (leg wraps) that have the function of modern stockings. However, I argue that the term refers to straps (μάντρες) fastening various types of Roman shoes. In contrast to laces, they are not permanently attached to the shoe or threaded through the material.¹⁸ There are only a few examples for this meaning, but there is at least one good parallel in Cicero's own writings. In a private letter to his friend Atticus, Cicero (again) mocks Pompey for wearing white *fasciae* with his *caligae* (a type of sandal).¹⁹ Similarly, Clodius wears purple straps with his sandals. Clodius' blunder (like that of Pompey) is not so much the wearing of straps, but rather their colour. Our lack of knowledge makes a more precise assessment impossible at this point. It is clear by Cicero's remarks that purple *fasciae* were out of place for a person like Clodius. But why? Was it thought preposterous or ridiculous because the purple was considered typically female on shoes? Or does Cicero insinuate that Clodius is imitating official dress (*praetexta*)? Is the purple strap to be interpreted as a social insigne of a Roman patrician, which Clodius perverts in wearing it on his sandals? Unfortunately, all these intriguing questions must remain open. The fact that Cicero points to the *fasciae* in particular suggests that these straps were a unique feature and something that could be exchanged at will. He does not mock new shoes which happen to have purple laces, but instead mocks the straps themselves, suggesting that Clodius, like Pompey, could also wear his shoes with some other type of strap or with a strap of another colour. In any case, the coloured straps are considered unbecoming of a Roman nobleman.

10.4 Cic. De harusp. resp. 44

In his speech *De haruspicum responso*, Cicero essentially follows the description he uses in *Against Clodius and Curio*, although he places a somewhat different emphasis.

¹⁷ See on it most recently Corbeill (n. 6) 79–80.

¹⁸ Cf. also B 29 p. 546; and Blümner (1911) 220 n. 15; against Corbeill (n. 6) 162: “purple garlands”; Croom (2000) 113: “purple puttees”; Stafford (2005) 104: “purple leggings.”

¹⁹ Cic. ad Att. 2.3.1: *Iphicratem suspicor, ut scribis, lascivum fuisse. etenim mihi caligae eius et fasciae cretatae non placebant* [I suspect that Iphicrates, as you write, has behaved a bit extravagantly. At least, his boots (*caligae*) and snow-white *fasciae* did not please me].

It must be noted that the speech is not a pamphlet but a speech in the senate. It is dated five years later (56 BCE). The relatively short list of garments can therefore be read as an allusion to the earlier invective and as a kind of quotation:

Cic. De harusp. resp. 44

P. Clodius a crocota, a mitra, a muliebribus soleis pupureisque fasceolis, a strophio, a psalterio, a flagitio, a stupro est factus repente popularis.

P. Clodius is suddenly made a *popularis* (member of the ‘popular’ party) by the *crocota*, by the bonnet, by the women’s sandals and the little purple *fasciae*, by the cord, by the lyre, by his outrageous conduct, by the fornication.

Cicero is now speaking of a *crocota* instead of a tunic with sleeves. The *crocota* is a typical female garment in the form of a Greek *tunica* (i.e. *chiton*), which is used not only in (Greek) everyday life, but also in the cult of Dionysus—the god himself wears one.²⁰ Cicero’s audience and subsequent readers might have immediately thought of a wide, flowing, and more than knee-length tunic of the Greek type. Nevertheless, the cut of the garment is less important here. The term *crocota* refers to its colour in particular, which was a bright red or orange (*croceus*).²¹ Clodius thus wears the same robe as Mnesilochos in the *Thesmophoriazusai* of Aristophanes (253). The *crocota* is an excellent symbol for the comic Dionysian costume as a whole. In Cicero, its use indicates a further ‘literarization’ of the description. The short passage might have been relished by Cicero’s readers as exactly what it is: a comical scene. Whatever the real core of the scandal, Cicero is mocking his rival less with further details than with a winking nod back to those real events. This later description need not be accurate for it to fulfil its rhetorical function of ridicule.

Another difference from the pamphlet is the explicit mention of *muliebres soleae* (women’s sandals) and the shrinking of the *fasciae* to *fasciolae*. Women’s footwear, especially sandals, is often involved in travesty and invective. The idea of Clodius wearing female footwear is the same in the senate speech and in the pamphlet (although it is not explicitly mentioned there). Here, however, the footwear is explicitly stressed. Clodius wears *women’s* sandals with *small* straps (*fasciolae*) as befit women’s shoes. Sandals—though always designated by the same word—were generally not unisex, there being clearly identifiable male and female variants. This reinforces the argument that the *fasciolae* are not leg wraps but something involving the shoes themselves. These diminutive straps appear to be the more delicate or filigree female variant for the specifically female variant of the sandal. By referring to Clodius’ sandals, Cicero

²⁰ Cf. A 3 p. 58.

²¹ Cf. B 11 p. 416.

brings his description further into line with that of Aristophanes, where Mnesilochos received ὑποδήματα.

Thus, Mnesilochos' garb differs from Clodius' only by a shawl (ἐγχυκλον 261). The other parallels are so close that one may assume that Cicero intentionally imitated Aristophanes. By referring to the lyre and the singing, Cicero rounds out the picture. Clodius looks like one of the Greek hetaeras we see on numerous depictions. The implicit references to Mnesilochos and Clodius cast as a female lyre player suggest that Cicero's picture of Clodius is a fantasy that is primarily fed by Greek literature and probably has only little to do with everyday Roman life. Cicero himself never saw Clodius dressed up as a woman, and therefore it is safe to assume that the detailed description is expanded on, if not intentionally exaggerated. That being said, it supports the basic contours we see of Roman female clothing in connection with other garments and in smaller textual fragments.

