13 Imperial literature on dress – an overview

In contrast to the authors dating to the time of the Roman Republic, especially the early ones, Imperial literature on dress is not problematic as concerns textual transmission. In most cases, the manuscript evidence is sufficient, and the text has been established in a satisfying manner. For this reason, the Imperial sources are only discussed in part B, and a short overview will suffice here.

In general, the mention of dress depends on the literary genre. For this reason, there are only few references to it in epic poetry and high flown history; we usually find it mentioned in literature that pertains to normal life. In Republican times, the genres referring to articles of everyday culture are political oratory and comedy. This changes in Imperial times. Now, Roman Love Elegy, satire, epigram, and the novel are our main sources. In addition, there are some 'technical' treatises that occasionally refer to garments.

The frequency of references follows the general transmission of Latin literature. There is much evidence in Augustan times (35 BCE–14 CE). In the time of the other Julio-Claudian emperors (14–68 CE), our sources become fewer. They increase again in the Flavian period (69–96 CE). Under Trajan and Hadrian (98–138 CE), there is still some primary historical evidence. In the second half of the second century CE, however, the character of our sources changes. They become largely antiquarian, and our authors often talk about dress they do not know anymore from practical experience. The last evidence dating to Antiquity are the excerpts from various jurists later collected in the Digests. After this, there is a gap of transmission. The next contemporary source about dress is the Edict of Diocletian (301 CE), which comes about eighty years later. This places it at the beginning of Late Antiquity.

In general, there are about twenty authors in Imperial times who refer to Roman garments. All of them have specific qualities and contribute specific bits and pieces of knowledge. The following provides a rough (albeit not complete) sketch of when and how a particular author or text comes into play. The most important single sources are Ovid and Martial. However, there are many other texts that offer interesting and unique information.

Horace is our first major source as to the traditional costume of the Roman *matrona* and the prostitute and its history in the latter part of the first century BCE.[1] In addition, Vitruvius' *De architectura* (ca. 30–20 BCE) helps us to track down the matronal *stola* on the monuments and provides the missing link that the matronal shoes were called *calcei*.[2] Vergil mentions female Roman garments very rarely since his epic poems and his choice of subject do not allow for this. However, he finds his place in the history of

1 Hor. sat. 1.2, 1.6 and c. 3.14; cf. B 3 pp. 287–288; B 4 pp. 306–308, 313–316, 326, 332–333; B 6 pp. 368–370; B 9 p. 387; B 16 p. 477.

2 Vitruv. 1.1.5, 4.1.6–7; cf. B 4 pp. 304–305; B 25 pp. 527–528.

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female Roman dress by some veiled allusions to it and a fine description of the *mitra*.[3] The Augustan Love poets Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid introduce us to the costume of the Roman *puella*. Ovid, in his *Amores* (15 BCE) and *Ars amatoria* (2 CE), gives us a comprehensive overview of the variety of young Roman women's attire and also a wonderful list of dress colours.[4] His *Metamorphoses* (8 CE) and *Fasti* (17 CE) are of less importance, though the latter provides a fine view of how the tunic could be draped.[5] Tibullus adds nothing to the picture we get out of Ovid, since he does not describe Delia's dress in detail.[6] There is more in Propertius, who focuses on Cynthia's elegant garb and her Coan garments. His mention of the *soccus* also proves that it was not a sock, but a type of shoe. In his funerary elegy on Cornelia, he also describes the attire of a matron belonging to the imperial court, hinting at the same time at Augustan dress legislation.[7] Valerius Maximus' rhetorical treatise *Facta et Dicta*, published under Tiberius (14–37 CE), also seems to mirror this legislation.[8] All these authors help us to get a good impression of what dress style, fashion, and imperial representation was like in Augustan and Tiberian times.

In Claudian and Neronian times, the treatment of dress gets more pointed. Seneca repeatedly complains about the degeneracy of dress style.[9] Petronius, in his *Satyrica*, shows us what such supposedly degenerate fashion looked like by giving us a full description of the attire of the freedwoman Fortunata and her husband Trimalchio.[10] His novel is the point where we get closest to individual dress style and fashion. Lucan's epic poem *Pharsalia* mentions clothing only once, since the work does not allow for a mundane subject matter. However, his description of Marcia's attire helps us to define matronal dress more precisely.[11]

In early Flavian times, Pliny's *Natural history* (ca 73 CE) is our most informative source. This encyclopaedia is very 'factual' in its subject matter and approach. Among other things, Pliny gives us a history of the production of purple and wool. He also talks about the upper-class fashion and luxury during his lifetime.[12] Under Domitian (81–96 CE), there are the epigrams of Martial. Martial comes close to Ovid as to his importance for our knowledge about female Roman dress. In his so-called *Apophoreta* (84 CE), he lists many dress terms and garments. He also introduces the *synthesis* to Roman

3 Verg. Aen. 1.648–652, 4.215–217, 9.616, cf. B 1 p. 259; B 3 pp. 294–295; B 13 pp. 462–463.

4 Ovid. am. 1.5.9–14, 1.7.47–48, 3.1.7–14, 3.3.25–36; ars 1.31–32, 2.297–302, 3.169–192, 3.273; cf. B 1 p. 267; B 2 pp. 281–282; B 3 pp. 296–297; B 4 pp. 308–309, 312; B 9 p. 390, 396; B 11 pp. 410–420; B 16 p. 480; B 20 p. 494; B 22 p. 508.

5 Ovid. fasti 1.405–410, 2.319–324; cf. B 1 pp. 248–250.

6 Tib. 1.6.67–68, 1.10.61; cf. B 1 p. 266; B 4 p. 318.

7 Prop. 2.1.15, 4.11.60–61, 4.7.40–41; cf. B 4 pp. 337–339; B 5 p. 358; B 9 pp. 388, 392; B 25 pp. 535–536.

8 Val. Max. 2.1.4, 5.2.1; cf. B 4 pp. 339–340; B 15 pp. 481–482.

9 Sen. de ben. 7.9.5, NQ 7.3.2, epist. 114.21; cf. B 9 p. 389; B 11 pp. 428, 439.

10 Petron. 67; cf. B 1 pp. 268–272; B 4 pp. 310–311; B 11 passim; B 30 p. 553.

11 Lucan. 2.360–364; cf. B 1 pp. 272–273; B 4 p. 319; D 5 pp. 651–653.

12 Plin. NH 9.137, 11.77, 30.94, 33.41; cf. B 4 pp. 350–351; B 9 pp. 389, 394–395; B 11 pp. 431, 447–449.

literature and, being fond of salacious jokes, informs us about all kinds of female bodywear.[13] Martial makes us see Flavian Roman society and its tastes in fashion more clearly, although his epigrams are full of stereotypes. Stereotype is also what we get in the *Carmina Priapea*, which show an old woman in *tunica* and *stola*.[14] In contrast to these authors, the epic poet Statius does not refer to Roman dress anywhere, not even in his occasional poems called *Silvae*. His only material contribution to the history of dress is a blatant omission. Statius does not mention the *flammeum* (bridal scarf) in a long wedding poem so that we may conclude that it was out of fashion at his time.[15] The orator Quintilian also offers no more than a casual comment on the nature of female dress.[16]

Under Trajan, the evidence begins to fade out altogether. However, there are still some interesting sources. Pliny the Younger gives us the important information that the Vestals were dressed in a *stola*.[17] Tacitus, in his ethnographic treatise *Germania* (98 CE), teaches us implicitly how rich Germanic women imitated Roman upper-class dress. In his *Annals*, he describes how Greek fashion came up briefly under Nero and then disappeared and also tells us a fine story about a heroic freedwoman hanging herself on a *fascia pectoralis* as a form of resistance against Nero's political purges.[18] In contrast to him, Suetonius is very disappointing. He wrote, as we know, an entire treatise about dress, but no trace is left of it. Instead, all we get from him is gossip about the Roman Emperors' quirks and their strange attire. He introduces us to Augustus' propensity for lots of bodywear and to Caligula's extravagant feminine shoes.[19] That is all. Juvenal's *Satires* read like a short appendix to Martial, focusing on cross dressing and deviations from the normal.[20] However, he tells us what official Roman dress style looked like in Italy at this point.

In the time of the Antonine Emperors, we first have Apuleius and Gellius. Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses* is very artificial as to its language and shows us that the stereotypes about social roles and female dress we found in old Roman comedy were still prevalent in the second century CE.[21] The grammarian Gellius in his learned or rather pseudo-learned *Noctes Atticae* is most concerned with the usage of old dress terms. Two interesting chapters inform us about the extent to which Roman dress style had

13 Apart from the *Apophoreta* see, for example, Mart. 2.39, 10.52; 11.99.1–6; cf. B 6 pp. 371–372; B 7 p. 376; B 8 p. 381; B 9 p. 395; B 10 pp. 401–404; B 11 pp. 428–429 and passim; B 20 p. 494; B 22 pp. 509–510; B 23 pp. 513–514; B 24 pp. 516, 518.

14 Carmen 12, cf. B 4 pp. 316–318; B 11 p. 442.

15 B 18 p. 490.

16 Quintilian. 11.3.138; cf. B 1 p. 251.

17 Plin. epist. 4.11; cf. B pp. 327–328.

18 Tac. Germ. 17.2; Tac. ann. 14.21; cf. B 4 pp. 350, 351–352; B 22 pp. 505–506.

19 Suet. Aug. 82.1, 94.10, Cal. 52; Cf. B 1 pp. 247, 254; B 25 p. 521; B 27 p. 531.

20 Iuven. 2.65–70, 3.171–172, 6.444–446; cf. B 1 p. 251; B 4 p. 354; B 5 pp. 372–373.

21 Apul. Met. 2.2,7, 11.3; cf. B 1 pp. 273–276; B 3 pp. 288; B 22 pp. 508, 510.

already changed by that time.[22] Then comes Tertullian (ca. 155–220 CE). He is the only Christian Latin author included in this book. Like Gellius, Tertullian already looks back on Classical Roman dress and writes in an antiquarian mood. His remarks have caused much misunderstanding, but they can be put to good use if interpreted correcty.[23]

Our last sources from Antiquity are again closer to life. They are Ulpianus (ca. 170–223/8 CE) and his fellow jurists, whose remarks are preserved in the Digests. They consist in legal definitions of dress terms used in last wills and demonstrate that many garments were still in use in their time, although we did not hear about them for a long time. The jurists are also important because they attribute garments to different genders and social classes without bias. The overview given by them is like a cross-section and feels a bit like a farewell to antique dress.[24]

All in all, the Imperial sources on female Roman dress are not as many as we would like them to be. Their narratives and those of the Republican sources are woven together by modern scholars into what we perceive as historical Roman dress culture.

22 Gell. NA 6.12, 13.22; cf. B 1 p. 260; B 28 p. 539; B 29 p. 547; B 30 pp. 554–555.

23 Tert. De cultu fem. 2.12, pall. 4.9; cf. B 4 pp. 337, 344–349.

24 Digest. 34.2.23,26,28; cf. B 3 pp. 290–292; B 7 pp. 375, 377; B 10 p. 401; B 13 pp. 462, 464; B 14 p. 468; B 17 p. 486; B 25 p. 523.