

7 *paenula* – ‘poncho’

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7.1 Introduction

This chapter concerns the *paenula*,¹ a coat that was a dress alternative to the *pallium*.² In its origin, the *paenula* is not an elegant luxury garment. The jurist Ulpianus (ca. 170 – 223/228 CE) lists it among the *vestis familiarica*, the clothing worn by the entire *familia* (= slaves).³ The *paenula* is functional and robust and became a fashionable garment in Imperial times when it was worn in all parts of the Roman Empire. The perspective of this chapter is bottom up.⁴ It first describes the use by ordinary people before making its way up to the wealthy classes.

The *paenula* has been discussed in detail in a magisterial article by Kolb (1973). The following remarks are based on his results and restrict themselves to the essentials. The *paenula* is well attested in archaeological evidence as part of male Roman dress culture.⁵ We do not have a depiction of a woman wearing it, although together with the *pallium* and the *tunica*, it was probably the most popular female garment in the period covered by this book. The *paenula* seems to have made its way from Italy to Rome, following the gradual expansion of the Roman Empire. We thus see with it the beginnings of the evolution of Roman dress. Although it can still not be discerned in detail at this stage, this evolution finally led to a complete change in Roman dress culture. The *paenula*, for example, replaced the *toga* as the usual male outer garment during the Imperial period at the latest.⁶ We will follow this process more closely in

1 F. Kolb, *Römische Mäntel. Paenula, Lacerna, Mandye*, MDAI 80 (1973), 69–167; Potthoff (1994) 141–145; Croom (2000) 59 (without reference to Kolb); GRD (2007) 135–136.

2 The *lacerna* and the *laena* have been excluded in this book. A joke in Iuven. 1.60–61 shows that the *lacerna* was regarded as male dress, cf. Kolb (n. 1) 125 n. 442; Courtney (1980) in his commentary ad loc. The *laena*, referred to in Mart. 14.138, is a historical double *toga*. Both garments were thick cloaks that could be used as overcoats in addition to the *toga* and the *pallium* in Imperial times.

3 Digest. 34.2.23.2: *familiarica sunt, quae ad familiam vestiendam parata sunt, sicuti saga tunicae paenulae lintea vestimenta stragula et consimilia* [‘family’ clothing is clothing bought for the use of the *familia*, like *saga*, tunics, *paenulae*, linen coverings, blankets and similar things].

4 For a similar approach concerning the *lacerna*, see V. J. Willi, *Kulturgeschichte der Mode*, pp. 9–102 in R. König/P. W. Schuppisser (eds.), *Die Mode in der menschlichen Gesellschaft*, Zurich 1958, 23.

5 See Kolb (n. 1).

6 Kolb (n. 1) 93–94.

chapter B 9, where acculturation will come into view more clearly. This section may be read in part as a prelude.

7.2 Terminology and appearance

The Latin word *paenula* (= φαινόλης) may be a Greek loanword.⁷ It first appears in a Greek text. The *paenula* was a closed cloak without sleeves,⁸ which was worn over the *tunica*. It had a neck hole in the middle through which the head was inserted, and it came close in appearance to a modern poncho. Vitruvius compares its shape to that of an inverted funnel, when describing the famous water machine of the Greek inventor Ctesibius (3rd century BCE):⁹ *supra catinum paenula ut infundibulum inversum est attemperata* (above the kettle, a *paenula* like an inverted funnel is fitted). This allows us to identify the *paenula* without doubt on archaeological sources.

The *paenula* was usually made of wool and was of somewhat thicker fabric. Pliny tells us that Apulian wool was used for it.¹⁰ We also hear of *paenulae* made of *gausapum*¹¹ and of leather.¹² Its usual function was to protect against cold and especially rain, which is mentioned several times in literary sources.¹³ It is possible that the plain garment was somewhat ‘upgraded’ in Imperial times. There were also finer and more luxurious versions (see below).¹⁴

7.3 Social usage

In principle, the *paenula* was a rather rustic garment used by all social classes and by both genders. It is well attested with men. In contrast, there are only few texts concerning women wearing a *paenula*.¹⁵ This paucity of information on the female *paenula* is due to the limited perspective of the texts. The *paenula* was a plain everyday garment, and it belonged to normal life and did not fit into the literary stereotype (*matrona* or *meretrix*) to which the representation of women is usually subject in Latin

⁷ Potthoff (1992) 143–145.

⁸ Kolb (n. 1) 76–77.

⁹ Vitruv. 10.7.2–3.

¹⁰ Plin. NH 8.190: *Apulae breves villo nec nisi paenulis celebres* [Apulian fleeces are short in the hair and not of great repute except for *paenulae*].

¹¹ Mart. 14.145: *paenula gausapina* [a *paenula* made of *gausapum*]; on the material, cf. B 9 pp. 394–395.

¹² Mart. 14.130: *paenula scortea* [a *paenula* made of hide], but cf. Sen. NQ 4.6.2, who distinguishes both garments: *ut homines ad paenulas discurrerent aut ad scortear* [in consequence, all persons ran off to their *paenulae* or *scortear*].

¹³ Mart. 14.130; Sen. 4.6.2; Iuven. 5.79.

¹⁴ Kolb (n. 1) 77–78.

¹⁵ Kolb (n. 1) 107–109.

texts. For this reason, authors rarely found occasion to mention it. The first text we have is from the Greek comic playwright Rhinton (see below). In Latin literature, we find the woman's *paenula* only in the jurist Ulpianus (2nd century CE), who is concerned with daily life. In the relevant passage, Ulpianus is dealing with testaments and their wording. The *paenula* is mentioned among several other female garments.

Digest. 34.2.23.2 (Ulpianus)

muliebria (sc. vestimenta) sunt, quae matris familiae causa sunt comparata, quibus vir non facile uti potest sine vituperatione, veluti ... paenulae.

Female garments are the garments which are provided for the *mater familiae* and which an adult male person cannot use without being criticized, like ... *paenulae*.

Ulpianus is carefully defining the garments included in the expression 'female garments.' He first defines them by their purpose, and then negatively by gender. Female garments are the garments a man cannot wear (in a socially acceptable manner). However, we should not misunderstand his definition. Ulpianus is not saying that the *paenula* is *exclusively* a woman's garment, but only that it is a garment worn by women. His remarks thus only show that male and female *paenulae* could differ in appearance, although they were called by the same name. In addition, other authors and Ulpianus himself clearly demonstrate elsewhere that *paenulae* were likewise worn by men.¹⁶ We should keep this in mind for other garments as well. An item of clothing is not unisex in appearance just because it is designated by the same term. As we have seen in the chapter on the *tunica*, the male *tunica* differed significantly from the female one.

The third female *paenula* is also found in a text relating to daily life. In an Egyptian papyrus dating to second century BCE, we hear about a white *paenula* of the finest quality with a 'Laconic stripe.'¹⁷ This interesting text is examined more closely in chapter B 11.¹⁸ The papyrus contains a list of garments that were stolen from a woman's house. For this reason, it is very likely that the *paenula* that is mentioned in it was a female garment as well. The text also shows that we should not imagine every *paenula* to be rustic and plain.

7.4 History

The *paenula* (φαινόλας) is first mentioned in Greek literature by the Sicilian comic playwright Rhinton (320 BCE):¹⁹ ἔχουσα καὶνὰν φαινόλαν ἡκαρπατίω (a woman with

¹⁶ Digest. 34.2.23.2 with Kolb (n. 1) 108.

¹⁷ PHamb. I 10.19–20: φαινόλην λευκοσπανὸν τέλειον λακωνόσημον α' [and one first-class *paenula* in white-grey with Spartan stripes].

¹⁸ Cf. pp. 420–424.

¹⁹ Rhinton F 6 K.-A.

a new *paenula* made of leather/cotton?). The fragment, which is quoted by Pollux, does not give us much information. Unfortunately, the last word is corrupt. It may hide one of two forms: The form καρπάτινος/καρβάτινος (made of leather) fits well with what else we know about the material of the *paenula*; a form of καρπάσινος (made of cotton/linen) would come close to the comic stereotype of a young, beautiful *puella* alluring an *adulescens* with her outfit. Whatever we make of it, Rhinton of Syracuse shows that the *paenula* was well known in southern Italy (i.e. in the region of the Magna Graecia) and may have originated there.²⁰ Pollux’s quotation of Rhinton and not of Attic comedy (which Pollux usually quotes) might also point *e silentio* to the fact that the *paenula* was not worn in central Greece, but only in southern Italy. It may also be no coincidence that Apulian wool in particular was thought to be best with it.

In Rome, it perhaps came into use during or after the first Punic War in the third century BCE,²¹ following Roman expansion to the south. In Roman literature, it is first found in Plautus.²² It is then well attested in authors both of the Republican and Imperial periods. As the papyrus referred to above shows, it was a common garment not only in Rome, but also in the entire Mediterranean world.

²⁰ Kolb (n. 1) 73–75.

²¹ Kolb (n. 1) 90, 93.

²² Plaut. Most. 991: *libertas paenulast tergo tuo* [freedom is a *paenula* for your back].