# 11 *colores* – colour, dress style, and fashion



## 11.1 Introduction

The following chapter covers artificial dress colours (as opposed to colours in general).[1] It was the last to be conceived, and it turned out to be the most interesting to write. More so than all other chapters in this book, the chapter on colours touches on questions of social code and behaviour. Dress colour takes us closest to fashion and social trends in the Roman world. In contrast, we know next to nothing about the specific versions of garments, nor do we have much on ornaments beyond the basic defining criteria that often make the fashionable difference (as, for example, the shoulder strap of the Augustan *stola*).

**1** On colour and Latin colour terms in general, cf. H. Blümner, Philologus 47 (1889), 142–167, 706–722 and id., Die Farbbezeichnungen bei den römischen Dichtern (Berliner Studien 13), Leipzig 1892; André (1949) and, more recently, M. Bradley, Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome, Cambridge 2009; R. B. Goldman, Color-terms in Social and Cultural Context in Ancient Rome, Piscataway, NJ 2013.


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Work on this chapter showed that there is much work to be done on the subject, which was very surprising. There are no detailed studies on social preferences concerning dress colour for either the Roman or the Greek world. In some cases, even the basic definition of certain colours seems to lack the necessary precision. Readers might feel that there is some similarity between ancient and modern European social colour norms. However, the results of this chapter are not won by cultural inference, but by studying patterns in the ancient evidence. The lack of precision comes from the usual problem of textual access. The historical pegs we can drive into the material world to fasten our theory on are few; as usual, the sources are presented in full. In a way, this chapter serves as a summary of the social history of dress sketched throughout part B.

To set the scene, let us turn to German '*Sturm und Drang*'-literature. Young Werther was impressively dressed when he was on his way to shoot himself. His fancy dress consisted of a blue tailcoat, a yellow waistcoat, yellow breeches, and brown cuffed boots. The behaviour of Goethe's hero and his fashion choices were not lost on the reading public. Many young men deliberately dressed like Werther; some of them also shot themselves. Goethe's emphasis on the colours of Werther's (dyed) clothing carried great literary and social significance. The ability to choose the colour of dress should not be underestimated. Colour choices usually carry meaning in real life. They can serve as personal and social distinction; they can be used to impress others.

In literature, the colour of clothing is always significant. In contrast to fashion magazines, like those analyzed by Roland Barthes,[2] fictional literature does not aim to ignite personal wishes in order to transform technical objects into desirable merchandise. Literature wants to tell readers something about the characters being described: Colour can make them appear young or old, trendy or old-fashioned, rich or poor, elegant or boorish, beautiful or filthy, attractive or repellent. It also tells the reader what impression the characters want to make or how they want to act in their environment. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, garments by themselves define individuals and groups, as do the garments' other traits (for example, holes indicate poverty). In Latin literature, colour is the attribute most connected with dress. It is a primary trait of garments. If it is mentioned in literature, it always contains the primary information. Sometimes our Latin texts even mention the garment's colour only and leave the cut to the imagination of the readers. Above all, colour is important when it comes to social codes and behaviour. In this respect, ancient and modern literature function alike. The only difference is that, in the case of our own times, we understand implicit hints because it is our own culture, whereas times not our own cause us to often miss such clues since we lack direct cultural knowledge.

In the case of Roman culture, the blank spaces are more aggravating than we usually like to admit. As to colours, we sometimes have to find out what a Latin colour term even denotes. Which colour, for example, does *croceus* (saffron-coloured) refer to?

**2** On his study, cf. the epilogue p. 706

Does it refer to the yellow colour added to food (as our dictionaries seem to suggest), or does the adjective refer to the red of the threads? And which colour is called *galbinus*? Is it green or yellow? And which colour does 'purple' refer to? Is it violet, or is it red? The translation into modern languages also faces problems if an ancient colour term is ambiguous, or our own word does not exactly apply to the same range as the Latin one. Things get even worse when it comes to social colour perception and behaviour. We have no way of directly knowing what Romans thought when seeing a certain dress colour, much less what a given individual associated with it. All we have is Latin literature and its stereotypes.

In the light of these difficulties, the following chapter has the following aims: It lists all artificial (as opposed to natural) dress colours used by Roman women along with their respective colour terms in neutral language, excluding poetical language and glosses.[3] It defines all shades as precisely as possible with reference to natural objects such as animals or plants.[4] Apart from this, the chapter also describes social colour codes and social behaviour.

Its order is as follows: The narrative starts with a general overview (1) and then offers two case studies: Ovid's colour catalogue in the *Ars amatoria* (2.1) and the letter of a wealthy Egyptian woman named Herais (2.2). They are meant to introduce the following section on the social perception of colours (3). This in turn suggests several categories that may be useful for future analysis. The respective categories are each illustrated by examples of single colours. Discussion of social codes leads to the last section on social behaviour and fashion (4).[5]

As all other chapters, this one needed a drastic reduction of contingencies and relies on generalization. It may therefore be expedient to know what the following is *not* about. It is neither about the physical production of (artificially) coloured dress nor about the physical perception of colours. It is not concerned with individual preferences, but rather with general preferences of individuals appertaining to certain social classes. Since much talk will be about social code, we should also keep in mind that all Latin literature used in this chapter is written by male members of the educated elite and that we are viewing colour preferences from their perspective. In the face of the lack of other sources, this method is in place as long as we remain aware of this fact. In the view of Petronius and his readers, for example, Fortunata's dress, which combines striking colours, is perfectly tasteless (and unprejudiced modern readers may legitimately share

**3** These are discussed elsewhere, cf. **caesicius*: A 4 p. 76; **cumatile*: A 4 p. 80; **caltula*: A 4 p. 78; **molochinus*: A 7 p. 139; **rusceus*: A 2 p. 430. The lack of linguistic discrimination mars many of the older studies.

**4** If a colour definition diverges from the traditional one, the evidence is assembled in full in order to prove the diverging assumption.

**5** The final discussion is the most hypothetical, as to be expected from our lack of sources on everyday life. However, the evolution of colour preferences and their corresponding behaviour is congruent with what we learn elsewhere about Roman dress and the social evolution of Roman society in general.

this Roman upper-class amusement). From a neutral sociological standpoint, however, Fortunata's dress rather shows (a) that members of the Roman upper-class preferred clothing with less vibrant and less contrasting colours and (b) that freed persons and lower classes preferred stronger and more contrasting ones. A further difficulty for the following discussion is also that the term 'class' is somewhat imprecise (the composition of the 'classes' changed significantly in the late Republic). The chapter therefore sometimes uses the more abstract expressions 'low-status' and 'high-status' for a more accurate definition.

## 11.2 Colours of female dress – an overview

The following 'artificial' shades of colour are attested with female garments in Latin literature.[6] In general, the range of female dress colours comprises the entire electromagnetic spectrum:

| | |
|---|---|
| azure[7] | *caeruleus* [*venetus*] |
| turquoise[8] | *color aquae marinae* [*callainus*] |
| leek-green[9] | *prasinus* |
| myrtle-green[10] | *myrteus* |
| 'lime'-green[11] | *galbinus* |
| green (unspecified)[12] | *viridis* |
| yellow[13] | *luteus* |

**6** In addition to the works mentioned in n. 1, see Blümner (1912) 257–259; Wilson (1938) 6–13; Sebesta (1994) 65–76; Olson (2008) 11–14; Croom (2010) 24–28. – The term 'artificial' requires definition. I do not use it in the modern sense of a synthetic dye or a colour that does not exist in nature or cannot be produced using natural components or processes. In ancient times, colouring treatments were inevitably 'natural' in the strict sense of 'derived from nature.' The predicate 'artificial' is used here in the sense of 'as the product of artifice.' It refers to dyes and other treatments used to modify the neutral, pre-existing colour of cloth, leather, or other materials used in making clothing. The term 'dyed' is insufficient since the colour of a material can be changed with processes other than only adding pigments (such as bleaching with sunlight).

**7** Ovid. ars 3.173 (see below p. 414).

**8** Ovid. ars 3.176 (see below p. 416); *callainus* Mart.14.140.

**9** On the shade, see below p. 430; Petron. 27.2, 28.8, 64.4; Mart. 3.82.11, 10.29.4.

**10** On the shade, see below p. 430; Ovid. ars 3.179, Petron. 21.2.

**11** On the shade *galbinus*, see below pp. 430–433; Cato F 113 P. (A 2 p. 51); Petron. 67.4; Mart. 1.96.10, 3.82.5–7; Iuven. 2.97.

**12** Iuven. 5.14, 9.50.

**13** On female garments this colour is attested only with the bridal scarf (*flammeum*), see below p. 427 and B 18; Plin. NH 21.46: *lutei video honorem antiquissimum, in nuptialibus flammeis totum feminis concessum* [I see that the honour of the colour *luteum* is most ancient, which in bridal scarfs is perfectly permitted to women]; Lucan. 2.361 (B 1 p. 272); on the meaning of *luteus*, in general cf. Blümner (1892)

| | |
|---|---|
| 'orange'[14] | *croceus* |
| plain red (general)[15] | *russus*, *russeus* (artificial); *rufus*, *ruber* (natural) |
| crimson[16] | *coccineus* |
| dried wine-leaf red[17] | (*xer*)*ampelinus* |
| cherry red[18] (dark) | *cerasinus* |
| purple[19] | *purpureus* |
| purple red[20] | *puniceus, Tyrius, ostrinus* |
| violet[21] | *amethystinus, ianthinus, violaceus* |
| rose[22] | *roseus* |
| wax-coloured, yellow-brown[23] | *cereus* |
| almond brown[24] | *amygdalinus* |
| chestnut brown[25] | *caryinus* |
| white[26] | *albus, candidus* |
| snow-white | *niveus* |
| black[27] | *niger, ater* |
| coal-black | *anthracinus* |

In addition to these terms referring to artificial colours, there are the terms *fuscus* and *pullus*, which denote a natural (i.e. non-manipulated) dark grey or dark brown hue. There are also adjectives derived from the words for gold and silver that refer to the

(n. 1) 125–129; André (1949) 151–153. As to male garments, the colour is only attested with Dionysus; cf. Tib. 1.7.46; Sen. Oed. 427; Varro Men. 314.

**14** Ovid. ars 3.179; on the shade, see below p. 416.

**15** On the shade, see below pp. 440–443.

**16** On the shade *coccineus*, see below p. 440.

**17** Iuven. 6.519; PHamb 33.8, see below p. 439.

**18** Petron. 28.8, 67.4, see below p. 439.

**19** On purple, see below pp. 445–447.

**20** On the shade of Tyrian purple, see below p. 440

**21** On the shade violet, see below pp. 418, 448; Plaut. Aul. 510 (A 5 p. 110); Ovid. ars 3.181; Mart. 2.39 (B 6 p. 371); Suet. Nero 32.2 (p. 452); PHamb. 33; of men's garments: Mart. 2.57.2, 14.154; Iuven. 7.137; Plin. NH 21.45: *amethystinum* (sc. *colorem*) … *quem ianthinum appellavimus* [The colour of the amethyst…, which we have called *ianthinus* (violet)].

**22** On the shade *roseus*, see below p. 418; Cat. 64.47–49,309 (cf. n. 153); Ovid. ars 3.182; Apul. Met. 11.3; PHamb. 33.9; for further evidence, cf. I. Bogensperger, Purple and its Various Kinds in Documentary Papyri, in: S. Gaspa/C. Michel/M.-L. Nosch, Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD, Lincoln, NE 2017, 240–242.

**23** On the shade *cerinus*, see below p. 420; Plaut. Epid. 233 (A 4 p. 83); Ovid. ars 3.184.

**24** Ovid. ars 3.183.

**25** On chestnut brown, see below p. 419; Plaut. Epid. 233 (A 4 p. 82); Ovid. ars 3.183.

**26** On white, see below pp. 434–436.

**27** On black, see below p. 426; ThLL II s. v. *ater* col. 1019.58–64; OLD s. v. *niger* 7b; Varro De vita populi Romani F 412 Salvadore (see below p. 426 and C 1 p. 567).

colours of the metals. Some colours are also designated by denoting the origin or the natural colour of the wool.[28] Turning to the level of linguistics, there is a wide range of word formations among the various colour adjectives. The elementary unspecified colours white (*albus*), black (*niger*), red (*russeus*), green (*viridis*), and blue (*caeruleus*) are all designated by Latin words that exist in the general sphere of Indo-European language. The majority of the other adjectives refers to natural objects of reference, mainly plants. Many of them are Greek loanwords. The adjectives *coccineus* and *purpureus* are derived from their dye, the kermes (*coccum*), which was believed to be a plant, and various sorts of purple snails (*purpura*). The adjectives *Puniceus, Tyrius*, and *Venetus* refer to the places of production. The etymology of the adjective *galbinus* is uncertain.[29]

## 11.3 Case studies

The following two social case studies may help to differentiate the general picture. They have in common that they represent the cultural preferences of the educated elite in Imperial times. They differ from each other in that they date to different epochs (to the time of Augustus and the Antonine emperors) and that one of them concerns urban Roman, the other Roman-Egyptian fashion. Moreover, one is about the dress of an ideal young *puella*, the other about the dress of a real rich *matrona* living in the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, there is a general convergence in social preferences (upper-class taste), although we can also discern individual differences in selection. The range of clothing in a given woman's possession will be referred to as her 'wardrobe' for the sake of brevity. In the wardrobe of the *puella*, we find far more shades than in that of the *matrona*, who mainly keeps to shades of purple.

### 11.3.1 Roman maidens' colourful dress – Ovidius Ars amatoria 3.169–192

Ovid's *Ars amatoria* was published in about 2 CE. In his didactic poem, Ovid takes on the ironic stance of an experienced love teacher counselling young lovers. In the third book (169–192), he advises young fashionable women on what colours to choose for their garments. The work is written in a youthful spirit, although the narrator is looking backward rather than forward to new adventures. Its contents were judged as 'politically incorrect' by Augustus, who did not draw the subtle distinction between real author and textual narrator, and indeed, the narrator certainly mirrors Ovid's own experiences and preferences. What we get is the opinion of a middle-aged man on fashion (Ovid himself is about 45 years old at the time of writing the *Ars*). However,

**28** Cf., for example, *leucophaeus*, *baeticatus*, *spanus*.

**29** Cf. below p. 430

his views will not have been too far off from those of his readers and the *puellae* he purports to council.

In addition, there are some social restrictions on the intended and actual readership. The (Graeco-Roman) *puellae* whose culture Ovid is celebrating in his poems all belong to the class of freedmen; Ovid himself was a member of the Roman upper classes with close contacts to the imperial court; his readers were all at least part of the urban elite, ranging from the old aristocracy to social upstarts and new money. Although the composition of this group is to some extent heterogenous, the social and cultural mores Ovid describes nevertheless derive from what we might call 'new' upper classes. We may generalize Ovid's cultural preferences, but we should not forget that these are only the preferences of a restricted, albeit very influential number of people. All colours mentioned by Ovid are those worn by well-off young women in the capital (the leisure class). A commoner will have rarely dressed in artificially coloured clothing, and if so, her preferences may have been different (see below). Ovid's production and reception context can then be summed up as high-status social discourse.

Ovid's catalogue of dress colours is a *locus classicus*. No other passage in Latin literature assembles such a variety of shades. It has recently been commented on by Gibson (2003).[30] The present analysis mainly focuses on colour terms. Readers are referred to Gibson's commentary for further information. The following section disagrees with Gibson and the traditional interpretation on Ovid's catalogue in several points.

In general, the *Ars amatoria* is concerned with physical beauty (*forma*), and this also pertains to the use of colour. At first glance, the catalogue of dress colours looks like a digression inserted between remarks on hairstyle and facial care. And yet, artificial colours play a role in those sections as well, since they enhance attractiveness and hide 'physical defects.' Hair dye or a wig hide grey hairs; brushing teeth makes them shine brightly; and white or red make-up models the face as needed. In this respect, the catalogue of coloured dresses comes in quite smoothly. Like cosmetics, coloured dress is not an end in itself, but serves to underline or heighten *forma*. The cut and the colour of the garments must be in keeping with the woman's physique. Not every dress colour suits every complexion (188). The woman has to make the right choice and avoid offensive taste. In the framing sections, Ovid emphasizes that individual *forma* is the objective by renouncing expensive clothing (169–170) and by stressing that colour should always suit complexion as well as situation (189–192). The criterion of the *aptum* (appropriateness), a rhetorical category, plays an important role in the catalogue as well, in which most colours are assigned to a female goddess or heroine for whom they are most appropriate.

As to formal poetic art, the catalogue of colours forms a self-contained unit and can be read on its own. The catalogue of colours proper (173–184) is framed by two

**30** See also Sebesta (1994) 68–69; Olson (2008) 11–12; Bradley (n. 1) 181–187; Goldman (n. 1) 25–26.

sections (169–172, 185–192) serving as introduction and conclusion. Ovid also aims at internal proportion, but he does not meticulously maintain formal exactness by counting verses (as minor poets might have done). The core of the catalogue—a hidden allusion to the love goddess Venus—is found near the middle (181).

Three general ideas may help to find the way through this piece of complex poetry. (1) Ovid is creating a cosmology of colours. The entire world offers a variety of colours that young women can wear: the sky (*aer*), the sea (*undae*), the land (*terra*), animate and inanimate nature, the animals (*grus*), the plants (bushes, fruits, flowers), and stones. The natural world is governed by cyclical movement: weather (rain and sunshine), the time of day (day and night), and the seasons (spring, summer, autumn, winter). (2) The cosmos is almost exclusively populated by female beings: (a) goddesses, such as Venus, Nephele, Eos, and the nymphs, (b) heroines, such as Ino, Helle, Briseis, and Andromeda, and (c) Amaryllis, the shepherd's mistress. All these are implicitly compared to Ovid's mortal female readers. (3) Numerous poetic models are evoked or quoted by Ovid, such as Homer, Catullus, Vergil, and Propertius. Some myths offered in unusual versions suggest that Ovid also used Hellenistic authors (Antimachos and Kallimachos) and pieces of art that are no longer recognizable to us. The whole catalogue, including its framing sections, runs as follows:

*quid de veste loquar? Nec vos, segmenta, requiro*
*nec te, quae Tyrio murice, lana, rubes.*
*cum tot prodierint pretio leviore colores,*
*quis furor est census corpore ferre suos!*
*aeris, ecce, color, tum cum sine nubibus aer,*
*nec tepidus pluvias concitat auster aquas,*
*ecce, tibi similis, quae quondam Phrixon et Hellen*
*diceris Inois eripuisse dolis.*
*hic undas imitatur, habet quoque nomen ab undis:*
*crediderim nymphas hac ego veste tegi.*
*ille crocum simulat: croceo velatur amictu,*
*roscida luciferos cum dea iungit equos.*
*hic Paphias myrtos, hic purpureas amethystos,*
*albentesve rosas, Threiciamve gruem;*
*nec glandes, Amarylli, tuae, nec amygdala desunt;*
*et sua velleribus nomina cera dedit.*
*quot nova terra parit flores, cum vere tepenti*
*vitis agit gemmas pigraque fugit hiemps,*
*lana tot aut plures sucos bibit; elige certos:*
*nam non conveniens omnibus omnis erit.*
*pulla decent niveas: Briseida pulla decebant:*
*cum rapta est, pulla tum quoque veste fuit.*
*alba decent fuscas: albis, Cephei, placebas:*

*sic tibi vestitae pressa Seriphos erat.*

What shall I say about clothing? I do not need metal ornaments nor wool dyed with Tyrian purple. Since so many colours are on the market for less money, it is madness to wear your fortune on your body. [azure] Behold the colour of the sky when it is without clouds, and no warm south wind is stirring up rain. Behold the colour, which resembles you (= *Nephele*), who once, as the story goes, saved Phrixus and Helle from the malice of Ino. [turquoise] This colour imitates the waves and also takes its name from them. The nymphs, I think, wear such a garment. [saffron red] This colour imitates saffron. Aurora, wet with dew, dresses herself in saffron-coloured cloak when she harnesses the light-bringing horses. [dark green] This colour imitates the myrtle of Venus; [violet/rose] this one imitates the purple amethysts or the whitish rose-coloured roses or the Thracian *grus* (flamingo). [brown] Neither thy chestnut, Amaryllis, nor the almond are lacking, and even beeswax has given its name to the fleece. How many flowers the earth brings forth anew when, in the balmy spring, the vine buds and the sluggish winter flees. So many and more dyes the wool drinks. Choose certain colours because not every colour suits every woman. Dark clothes adorn women with a white complexion. Dark clothes adorned Briseis. When she was being abducted, she was also wearing a dark robe. White clothes adorn women with a dark complexion. Thou, Andromeda, didst please in a white dress. That is how you were dressed when you stayed on Seriphos.

The first framing section (169–172) alludes to a diatribe of Propertius (3.13) on female luxury. In his poem, Propertius mentions imported luxury goods, such as gold and Tyrian purple, and complains that many Roman wives carry the fortune of their grandchildren on their body.[31] Ovid similarly renounces *segmenta* (ornaments) and wool dyed with Tyrian purple.[32] *Segmenta* and purple are often associated with the costume of the rich *matrona*,[33] but Ovid shows that dresses with gold and purple cloaks also belonged to the wardrobe of young hetaerae.[34] Ovid's advice may thus be hiding some self-interest of the male lover, who—in the poetic stereotype—is always made to pay for female dress luxury.[35] However, it is also a common trope in Latin Literature that young

**31** Prop. 3.13.1–12.

**32** The form and the material of a *segmentum* is not described explicitly in any Classical text. It is some kind of valuable trimming very likely made of metal (gold or silver). Sidonius Apollinaris, epithal. Polemii 158; epist. 8.8.6 (5th century CE) uses the word to denote the square or rectangular ornaments on the garments of consuls, which we can identify from consular diptychs; cf. Marquardt/Mau (1886) 548; Blümner (1911) 255; Blümner I (1912) 212; Gibson (2003) ad loc.

**33** Val. Max. 5.2.1: *permisit quoque his purpurea veste et aureis uti segmentis* [he allowed them (i.e. the *matronae*) to use a purple robe and *segmenta*]; CIL 14.2215: *zona I cum segmentis argenteis* [one belt with silver *segmenta*] (cf. also B 4 p. 340). Iuven. 2.124 (mocking a passive homosexual): *segmenta et longos habitus et flammea sumit* [he puts on *segmenta*, a long robe, and a bridal scarf]; 6.89 (of the *matrona* Eppia): *quamquam segmentatis dormisset parvula cunis* [although she has slept already as a little girl in a cradle with *segmenta*].

**34** Ovid. ars 2.297–299; cf. B 9 p. 373.

**35** Cf., for example, A 5 p. 89; A 11 p. 213.

women do not need expensive clothing to appear beautiful. Tasteful dress suffices. Although the focus is on value in this section, dress colour comes in with Tyrian purple. This type of purple was still very expensive in Ovid's times (it lost value later).[36] It had a reddish purple colour (*rubet*). Tyrian red (alongside gold) thus forms an implicit supplement to the catalogue of colours that follows, which lists several violet shades, but omits dark red.

The catalogue of colours proper comprises the verses 173–184. The identification of the various hues and their designations present several difficulties. These arise from the fact that Ovid does not use the regular word for the colours in question, but only ever gives the natural object it 'imitates.' Some designations are easy to determine because the regular colour adjective is derived from the natural object (for example: *myrtus* = *myrteus*). Others are more opaque. The enigmatic nature of the terms contributes to the charm of the passage, but it has led scholars astray in some points. In total, the catalogue enumerates ten (and not eleven) shades.[37] The suggested identifications differ in several points from the traditional interpretation as represented by the commentary of Gibson. The left-hand column lists the Latin natural object from which the shade is derived. The central column lists modern English equivalents. The right-hand column then gives the designation in neutral language.

| **Natural object** | **Colour** | **Designation** |
|---|---|---|
| *aer= caelum* | sky blue, azure | *caeruleus* |
| *undae = mare* | aquamarine, turquoise | *color aquae marinae* |
| *crocum* | saffron red, orange red | *croceus* |
| *myrtus* | myrtle green, dark green | *myrteus* |
| *amethystus* | amethyst-coloured, violet | *amethystinus* |
| *rosa* | rose-coloured | *roseus* |
| *grus* | rose-white | – |
| *nux castanea* | chestnut brown | *caryinus* |
| *amygdalum* | almond brown | *amygdalinus* |
| *cera* | wax-coloured, yellow-brown | *cereus* |

### 173–176: *caeruleus* (azure)

The first colour is presented in the form of a riddle: "The colour of the sky when it is without clouds, and no warm south wind is stirring up rain." The obvious answer is 'blue.' However, it is not the pale sky blue known to the inhabitants of northern Europe,

**36** See below p. 449.

**37** Against Gibson (2003).

but a darker, more intense shade called azure.[38] Following Servius,[39] modern scholars usually associate Ovid's statement with the adjectives *aerius* or *aerinus* (ἀέρινος),[40] but both words are attested as colour designations only in Tertullian and then in Late Antiquity.[41] It is therefore advisable to solve Ovid's riddle in a different way and to replace the Greek loanword *aer* with the Latin noun *caelum* (sky). The adjective form *caerulus*/*caeruleus*, which is derived from *caelum* by dissimilation, is a perfect fit. From Ennius onwards, it often denotes the colour of the sky.[42] The sky also gave its name to the azurite (*caeruleum*).[43] The adjective *caeruleus* is also used by Juvenal to designate a female dress colour.[44]

The subject paraphrased in the relative clause of the riddle (175) is the sky goddess Nephele. Usually vv. 175–176 are thought to refer to a second colour (white or even grey), which contrasts to the before-mentioned colour of the sky.[45] There are, however, some difficulties with this view: All other colours in the catalogue are defined with reference to an object of nature and are identified as artificial colours. In addition, grey-white (white is mentioned below) or grey do not suit a beautiful girl. The traditional view is also not compelling as to grammar. The sentence structure can be interpreted in another way. The explanation runs as follows: The vv. 173–174 and 175–176 should not to be kept apart. They instead form a single unit. The word *ecce* (behold) in verse 175 does not introduce a new item but simply repeats the preceding *ecce* (173) in a kind of rhetorical repetition (*geminatio*). This creates the same structure found in vv. 177–178 and vv. 179–180, where a colour is first introduced by reference to a natural object and then assigned to a goddess. The doubling of *ecce* then means that we no longer need to look for an additional colour for Nephele's dress. Her robe is azure, symbolizing the sky. Perhaps Ovid even had a specific depiction in mind. The blue colour is appropriate for a beautiful goddess living in the sky. It also suits a Roman *puella*. Blue is further related to the colour of the sea described in the next distich.

**38** Against Sebesta (1994) 68.

**39** Serv. ad Verg. Ecl. 3.69 p. 28.19 Thilo: *aeriae* (sc. *palumbes*): *aerii coloris*. Servius' comment on Vergil is mistaken. The doves are said to be *aeriae* because they fly in the air (*aer*), not because of their colour.

**40** Blümner (1912) 258; André (1947) 182; Gibson (2003) 165 ad loc.

**41** Tertull. cult. fem. 1.8: *non potuit* (sc. *deus*) *purpureas nasci iubere neque aerinas oves* [god could not let grow purple or blue sheep]; de anim. 9: (sc. *anima*) *tenera et lucida et aerii coloris* [the soul is tender and bright and has a blue colour]; ThLL I s. v. *aerinus* col. 1061.67–70; s. v. *aerius* col. 1062.75–81.

**42** ThLL III s. v. *caeruleus* col. 104.18–23; s. v. *caerula* col.107.24–27; OLD s. v. *caerula* 1.

**43** André (1947) 164–166.

**44** Iuven. 2.97, who mocks a homosexual for wearing a feminine blue-checked dress (*caerulea scutulata*).

**45** T. Leary, The Sky is overcast. Ovid, ars 3.173–6, AC 34 (1991), 151–152; Gibson (2003) ad loc.; Bradley (n. 1) 183.

**177–178: *color aquae marinae* (turquoise)**

The colour of the sea lies between blue and green. We call it blue-green, sea-green, turquoise, or aquamarine. Because of the ambiguous position in the colour spectrum, Latin literature elsewhere denotes sea water through the adjectives *caeruleus* (dark blue) or *viridis* (green). Ovid, however, does not allude to either of these adjectives. His statement that the colour received its name from the waves (*ab undis*) has led scholars to think that Ovid is referring to the Greek loanword **cumatilis* (κύμα = *unda*).[46] However, this hypothesis is not viable. The adjective **cumatilis* is only attested in this form in the catalogue of garments in Plautus' *Epidicus*. It is not a regular word, but a hapax (maybe coined by Plautus ad hoc). It is a gloss that does not denote a colour.[47] A wave (*unda*, κύμα) is not a colour, but a form, and **cumatilis*, like its Latin counterpart **undulatus*, must refer to an ornament with a wave pattern (as there are in archaeological evidence). For these reasons, the explanation of Ovid's description must take another starting point. The noun *undae* (waves, plural) is simply a metonymy for the sea, which is called *mare* in Latin. The adjective *marinus* is not attested as a colour term in Classical literature,[48] but *color aquae marinae* is mentioned by Celsus in his treatise on medicine.[49] In the respective passage, Celsus is describing the blue colour of various eye injuries, distinguishing—like Ovid—this type of blue from the dark blue called *caeruleus*. On the basis of this close parallel, it seems very likely that Ovid is also referring to *color aquae marinae* (aquamarine) in his catalogue. In later times, this colour is denoted by the Greek loanword *callainus* (καλλάινος) after the stone turquoise (*callais*).[50] The inadequacy felt in the short designation of shades of blue may have led to the adoption of the Greek adjective, as well as to the adoption of the adjective *Venetus* (= azure). Both azure and turquoise were presumably regarded as more 'neutral' female artificial dress colours. For this reason, there are only few references to it in Roman literature, which mostly notes the devious and hence focuses on the more striking colours.

**vv. 179–180: *croceus* ('orange')**

The third colour contrasts strongly with turquoise. It is usually identified as yellow (OLD s. v. *croceus*: saffron-coloured, yellow),[51] but we should instead opt for another colour. Yellow (*luteus*) is the wedding colour (see below), and it does not fit this passage.

**46** Blümner (1912) 258; André (1949) 193–194, 234; Sebesta (1994) 68; Gibson (2003) 166; GRD (2007) 45; Olson (2008) 11; Bradley (n. 1) 183.

**47** Cf. A 4 p. 80.

**48** It is first attested in Nonius p. 879.10 L.: *cumatilis aut marinus aut caeruleus*.

**49** Celsus 7.7.14: *si exigua suffusio est, si … colorem … habet marinae aquae …, spes superest* [there is hope if the cataract in the eye is only small and has the colour *aquae marinae*].

**50** Mart. 14.140.

**51** Blümner (1892) (n. 1) 130–132; Sebesta (1994) 68; Gibson (2003) 167 ad loc.; Bradley (n. 1) 184; Goldman (n. 1) 26.

Ovid will hardly have suggested that the *puellae* seeking to impress a lover wear the colour of a wedding dress. Like its counterpart from the yellow to green side (*galbinus*), the term *croceus* is difficult to define. Its semantic place in the line of Latin colour terms is between *luteus* (yellow) and *russeus* (plain red). In modern terms, it can denote shades ranging from scarlet to bright orange. If we aim for the medium, we may thus simply call it 'orange.' Since the denoted shades rarely occur in natural objects (the word mostly refers to the rising of the sun), there is some ambiguity in usage. Some authors interpret *croceus* as a kind of yellow,[52] other authors (the majority) as a kind of red. The difficulty of the ancient authors may be felt when trying to describe the colour of a sunrise without reference to the fruit orange. Is orange a yellowish red or a reddish yellow?[53] In modern scholarship, the word *croceus* is often thought to refer to the yellow colour produced by saffron. Gibson, for example, interprets Ovid's expression *crocum simulat* to mean that the colour imitates the yellow hue obtained from saffron dying.[54] However, the phrase *crocum simulat* rather refers to threads of the crocus—the saffron (*crocum*)— which have exactly this colour. Ovid says that saffron has a red shade,[55] and *croceus* is predominantly regarded as a sort of radiant red.[56] The goddess of dawn is thus dressed in the colour of dawn, whose colour is orange tending towards red.[57] The colour *croceus* also gave rise to the dress name *crocota*.[58]

**181a: *myrteus* – dark green**

The fourth colour again forms a contrast to the preceding colour. It is the green of the evergreen myrtle (*myrtus communis*).[59] The point of reference is clearly the green of the leaves and not the brown of the bark.[60] It was evidently perceived as a dark green, since Ovid calls the myrtle black (*nigra*).[61] It is the darkest of the three green shades[62] and is the least attested, presumably because, being the darkest one, it is the least 'controversial' and therefore the least worthy of mention in a scandalizing text.

**52** Mart. 15.40.1: *croceos vitellos* [yellow yolks]; Iuven. 7.23 (of pergament).

**53** On the same ambiguity in case of hair colours of women in Classical Greece, cf. S. Grundmann, Haut und Haar. Politische und soziale Bedeutungen des Körpers im klassischen Griechenland, Wiesbaden 2019 (Philippika 133), 375–377, 442–451.

**54** Gibson (2003) ad loc. 167; Bradley (n. 1) 184.

**55** Ovid. ars 1.104, am. 2.6.22, fast. 1.342.

**56** André (1949) 154.

**57** Blümner (1892) (n. 1) 130–132; André (1949) 153–155.

**58** Cf., for example, p. A 3 58; A 10 pp. 205–206; B 1 p. 259.

**59** André (1949) 190; Sebesta (1994) 68.

**60** Against OLD s. v. *myrteus*.

**61** Ovid. ars 3.690.

**62** See below p. 430.

**181b–182: *amethystinus* and *roseus* (violet, rose)**

The grammatical form of the enumeration changes in v. 181b. Instead of a strict equivalence, the subject (*hic*) now refers not only to one (x = a), but alternatively (*ve*) to three accusatives (x = a or b or c). The questions arise: (A) Do the three natural things expressed by the object all have the same colour? Are the amethyst, the roses, and the bird called *grus* all violet? (B) Or do they have slightly different shades? Are amethysts violet, the roses rose-coloured, and the *grus* white rose? (C) Or (assuming a grammatical ellipsis) do they have three different colours? Are amethysts violet, roses white, and the *grus* grey?[63] The grammar seems most natural if we opt for solution A (same colour) or B (similar shades). The hypothesis is also supported by the subsequent distich (183–184), which gives us three different shades of one colour—the colour brown. However, there is the word *grus*, which usually refers to the grey crane. This would favour solution C. In the end, we have to make a choice. In contrast to Gibson, the following argues that we should opt for solution B (three similar shades) and explain the word *grus* as a reference to a flamingo.

The colour of the first two natural objects is clear. The gemstone called *amethystus* is violet. Ovid says that it is *purpureus*. In addition, Pliny the Elder defines the colour *amethystinus* as *ianthinus* (violet).[64] The *albentes rosae* have a similar hue, though not exactly the same. The term rose (*rosa*, ῥόδον) in Antiquity, if not further defined, referred to a pale, rose-coloured flower (not a deep red one we commonly associate with roses today).[65] The appearance of the wild dog rose (*rosa canina*), the most common species of the genus growing wild in Europe, shows what kind of roses Ovid and his readers had in mind. Its petals are rose-coloured and grow a bit whiter (*albentes*) towards the middle. The colour adjective *roseus* hence describes a range of rose or pink shades.[66] In the list of Herais,[67] the shade ῥόδινος (*roseus*) figures besides *ianthinus*. After the darker violet of the amethyst, we thus have a second, very similar shade.

For these reasons, it seems likely that the third item in line—the *grus*—would have a similar shade. But what kind of bird is Ovid referring to? First of all, his *grues Thraciae* recall the mythical *grues* of Virgil (and Homer), which settled in the estuary of the Thracian river Strymon. In a strictly neutral sense, the Latin term *grus* (= γέρανος) designates a crane. However, this bird is dark grey and does not match the catalogue at all.[68] Its colour is neither attractive nor is it artificial for clothing. It would have been called *pullus* in Latin. On the other hand, the delicate rose-white plumage of the flamingo (*phoenicopterus*) perfectly fits into the line of violet colours. The flamingo lived in the coastal area of the Mediterranean and was well known in Rome. In numerous

**63** Sebesta (1994) 68; Gibson (2003) 168 ad loc.; Goldman (n. 1) 26; Bradley (n. 1) 185.

**64** Plin. NH 21.45 (see n. 21).

**65** D. W. Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Birds, Oxford 1936, 69–75.

**66** André (1949) 111–113; Bogensperger (n. 22) 240–242.

**67** See below p. 423.

**68** For the aporia, cf. Gibson (2003) ad loc. and Bradley (n. 1) 185.

texts of the later Imperial period, it appears among other pet birds.[69] Ovid might have called the flamingo a *grus* in poetic language. After all, his poem is not a scientific treatise. In the next verse, for example, chestnuts are mixed up with acorns (*glandes*). It was also metrically difficult and inelegant to include the unwieldy neutral term *phoenicopterus* in the verse. In a similar manner, Martial circumscribes the word as a bird with reddish plumage. Juvenal uses *phoenicopterus* in an artistic manner (to designate an overloaded dinner table).[70] However, these were not viable solutions for Ovid here. For this reason, the simple term *grus* may have served as a metonymy for a bird that was similar to the flamingo in its over-all physique.[71] If the poetical expression *Thracian grues* thus conceals the rose-coloured flamingo, Ovid is referring to a third, similar shade of violet. It seems a better solution than to force grammar or to include a grey shade in the line of bright colours.

**183–184: *caryinus*, **amygdalinus*, *cereus* — three shades of brown**

The last distich offers three different shades of brown. The first is chestnut brown. Ovid is clearly alluding to Vergil's second *Eclogue*, in which the shepherd Corydon regales his pastoral mistress Amaryllis with chestnuts (*castaneae nuces*) and wax coloured plums (*cerea pruna*).[72] The Latin term denoting this sort of brown is difficult to determine. The adjective **castaneus* is not attested in Latin.[73] We might hence look for a Greek loanword hiding behind the Latin word *nux*. In Greek, the chestnut (κάρυον καστανεϊκόν) was counted among the nuts (κάρυα). Ovid may be alluding to the adjective *caryinus* (καρύϊνος). The dress catalogue in Plautus' *Epidicus* shows that the adjective also referred to a dress colour.[74] The second brown—the brown of the almond (*amygdala*)—is slightly lighter than the brown of the chestnut. The respective adjective is *amygdalinus* (ἀμυγδάλινος). In analogy to *caryinus*, it may have served as a colour indication, although we do not find it used in this way anywhere else. The final shade of brown is wax brown, which is slightly yellowish. Ovid's imitation again takes its starting point from the above-mentioned passage from Vergil's *Eclogue*. The term that

**69** Sen. epist. 110.12; Plin. NH 10.133; Suet. Cal. 22, Vit. 13.2.

**70** Mart. 3.58.13–14: *pauones* || *nomenque debet quae rubentibus pinnis* [peacocks and the bird which owes its name to its reddish plumage]; 13.71: [*phoenicopterus*]: *dat mihi pinna rubens nomen* [flamingo (= 'bird with red wing'): my reddish plumage gives the name to me]; Iuven. 11.139: *et Scythicae uolucres et phoenicopterus ingens* (Scythian birds and a flamingo hue).

**71** It is interesting to note that the constellation *grus* was called *phoenicopterus* in Early Modern times.

**72** Verg. ecl. 2.51–53a: *ipse ego cana legam tenera lanugine mala* || *castaneasque nuces, mea quas Amaryllis amabat*; || *addam cerea pruna* [I myself will gather grey quinces with tender down and chestnuts, which my Amaryllis loved. I will add wax-coloured plums.].

**73** Vergil and the ps.-Vergilian *Copa* 19, which seems to imitate him, speak of the *nux castanea*, but use the noun *castanea* as an adjective.

**74** Cf. A 4 p. 82.

covers the particular brown is *cereus* or *cerinus* (κήρινος). In the *Epidicus*, this adjective also denotes a dress colour.[75]

The strict enumeration begins to fade in the last four distichs, which serve as the second frame part and form a kind general conclusion (185–192). According to Ovid, there are infinitely many colours. Referring to flowers and wine, Ovid may have had further colours in mind, which would all derive their names from these natural objects. His advice to his female readership: You must choose from among the colours and shades that suit you. Having dealt with the costs (*pretium*) at the beginning, Ovid now mentions two further factors that should determine the woman's choice: complexion and (indirectly) the particular occasion. In vv. 189–192, he illustrates this with the extreme 'colours' white (*albus*) and black (*pullus*).[76] The Homeric heroine Briseis, when abducted from her father, is shown in a dark mourning robe that goes well with her white complexion; Andromeda, when rescued by Perseus from the sea monster—she celebrates her rescue as a kind of birthday—, is wearing a white festive robe that makes her dark skin stand out advantageously. It also signals that she is still a virgin.[77]

Comparing Ovid's list to the general overview of colours, it appears that it contains the most important shades. However, there are some notable gaps. Yellow (*luteus*), the wedding colour, is missing, and apart from *croceus*, Ovid only refers to the less striking shades, focusing on blue, violet, and brown. In the case of green, he mentions dark green, but neither medium green (*prasinus*) nor 'lime'-green (*galbinus*). In the case of red, we only find purple Tyrian red, but not plain red (*russeus*). We should also note that Ovid converges with what we find in Herais' catalogue in his preference for violet (purple-related shades) and that the colours missing in Ovid are exactly those which appear on the clothing of the freed slaves Trimalchio and Fortunata. As we will see later on,[78] this omission may not be pure coincidence. It may point to the restriction that these colours were not fit for the educated upper classes. We should keep in mind that despite the irreverent tone there is a social bias in the *Ars amatoria*. It is poetry for and about the urban Roman jeunesse dorée. As much as Ovid is seemingly giving 'new' advice, he derives his suggestions from the established codes of his clientele. His advice cannot stray too far from the fashionable norm.

### 11.3.2 The colours of an Egyptian *matrona* – PHamb. 33

The second case study shows the diversity Graeco-Roman dress culture had achieved by the second century CE so that it comprised Greek, Roman, and even Celtic dress terms (*lodix*). The text we are going to analyse now is of an unique cultural importance.

**75** Cf. A p. 83.

**76** Against Gibson (2003) 170 ad loc.; on *pullus* (~ *niger*), cf. André (1949) 71–72.

**77** Cf. below p. 434.

**78** Cf. below pp. 438–443.

It is not a literary Latin text, but a Greek everyday text, a letter written on papyrus. It does not pertain to Italy, but to Egypt, which was part of the southern border of the Roman world, and unlike most of the texts examined in this book, it does not date to the beginning of the Imperial period, but to the latter half of the second century CE. Finally, the text is not written by a man, but by a mature woman, an Egyptian *matrona*.[79] That makes it one of only two texts in this book not written by men!

The woman refers to herself as Herais, and she lived in a village in the Fayum Oasis. In her letter she reports a burglary of her estate to the local magistrate (δεκαδάρχης). After briefly describing the crime (which includes a murder), she enumerates the stolen objects, first and foremost the clothing.[80]

[1] ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐβάσταξάν μου συνθέσεις τελείας λευκὰς δεκατρεῖς,
ἐν αἷς πλατύσημοι γυναικεῖαι δέκα, καὶ παιδικὰς δύο, καὶ ἑτέρας χρωματίνας· λευκόσπανον ᾱ καὶ σπανὴν ἑτέραν ᾱ, ῥοδίνην ᾱ καὶ γαλακτίνην ᾱ·
καὶ φαινόλην λευκόσπανον τέλειον λακωνόσημον ᾱ·
[5] καὶ γυναικείας συνθέσεις· πορφυρῶν μὲν β̄, ἐν αἷς ᾱ <μετὰ> ὑποζώνης καὶ παλλίου, καὶ τυριαντίνην ᾱ καὶ κροκωτίνην ᾱ καὶ κοκκίνην ᾱ·
[7] καὶ σμαραγδίνον ὑπόζωνον καὶ πάλλιον·
καὶ ἱμάτιον μόναχον ἀμπέλινον·
καὶ ἕτερον ἱμάτιον ῥόδινον·
καὶ πάλλια μὲν ἄλλα δ̄ λευκὰ μὲν β̄, κροκώτινον ᾱ, τυριάντινον ᾱ καὶ <…> μόναχον πορφυροῦν·
καὶ ἀβόλλας τελείους β̄, ἐν οἷς ἄγναφος ᾱ·
καὶ λωδίκους λευκὰς β̄.

They also stole from me 13 first-class *syntheseis* in white colour, 10 of which are for women and have broad stripes, and 2 more for children; and other coloured ones, 1 'white Spanish' and 1 'Spanish,' 1 rose-coloured and 1 milk white; and 1 first-class *paenula* in 'white Spanish' with Spartan stripes; and female *syntheseis*, 2 purple, including 1 <with> belt and *pallium*, 1 purple, 1 saffron, 1 crimson; and 1 emerald belt with *pallium*; and 1 wineleaf-coloured *himation*, a single piece; and 1 other rose-coloured *himation*; and 4 more *pallia*, 2 white, 1 saffron-red, 1 violet; <…> a single purple; and 2 first-class *abollae*, 1 of which is not fulled; and 2 white *lodices*.

**79** Cf. the first edition of Meyer (1924); C. Römer, Was so in einem reichen Haus zu finden war, in: M. Tellenbach et al. (eds.), Die Macht der Toga. Dresscode im Römischen Weltreich, Hildesheim 2013, 161–163; for photography, see https://digitalisate.sub.uni-hamburg.de. The text is so far omitted in all dress histories.

**80** The condition of the papyrus offers no difficulties. For this reason, a diplomatic transcription has been omitted here, for which Meyer (1924) may be consulted. However, the writer himself seems to have made some mistakes. In contrast to former editions, μετὰ is added in line 5 in front of ὑποζώνης (= belt, cf. LSJ s.v. and l. 7 ὑπόζωνον). In line 6, πάλλιον is emended to παλλίου and included into the relative clause. In this way, the enumeration of the *syntheseis* runs without interruption.

The catalogue is not completely systematic. It can be roughly divided into two large sections. First, several white and coloured *syntheseis* are listed. The ten striped white *syntheseis* for women with broad stripes are especially noteworthy. The usual number of participants of a *triclinium* was about nine to twelve,[81] and the *syntheseis* perhaps formed a set. After the reference to an exquisite *paenula* in line 4, the list seems to reach a first stop. In line 5, there is a new start, which lists further female *syntheseis*. Then come further individual pieces. The coats again stand at the end of the enumeration. If Herais' extensive list was based on the contents of her wardrobes and chests, at least two storage containers were involved in the burglary. Herais' robes were precious (that is why they were stolen). They obviously derived their value partly from the fabric, partly from its colour and ornaments.

All of the Greek garment terms used by Herais are attested elsewhere in Latin literature in the Imperial period. Particularly prominent in her letter is the *synthesis*. It is noticable that there is no mention of single valuable tunics (*chitones*), perhaps because all of them formed part of Herais' *syntheseis*. For a *synthesis* (B 10) usually consisted in one tunic (specifically an undertunic) and a scarf (*palliolum*). Furthermore, the enumeration mentions several other types of coats or cloth: the Greek ἱμάτιον, the *paenula* (B 7), the *abolla* (B 8), the *lodix* (a loden cloth), and the πάλλιον. The Latin loanword πάλλιον,which is formally equivalent to Latin *pallium*, causes some difficulties. It occurs alongside the term ἱμάτιον and indicates that Herais uses the two Greek terms to refer to two distinct garments. However, this stands in contrast to normal usage because Latin literature always translates the Greek term ἱμάτιον with the Latin word *pallium*. There are two different ways of solving this question: We could either equate the Greek word πάλλιον to the Latin word *palliolum* (scarf),[82] or we could assume that the Roman *pallium* could be distinguished in Greek (as opposed to in Latin). Perhaps a Roman *pallium* differed slightly from a Greek ἱμάτιον, but the Romans, in contrast to the Greeks, did not differentiate between both garments linguistically, as was the case with the Roman tunic and Greek *chiton* (both being called *tunica* by the Romans).

Now to the colours, first to the natural ones. The word λευκός (white) is sometimes used to specifically denote the natural white of wool or linen. Since other whites are mentioned in the text, it might do so here. The adjectives λευκόσπανος, σπανός, and γαλάκτινος mark a deviation from the normal and refer to other, more notable shades of white of fine wool (the quality and cost of the garment is implied by the special colour). The word γαλάκτινος (= *lacteus*) is self-explanatory. It denotes the radiant white of milk (τὸ γάλα), which was artificially achieved in clothing by bleaching. Distinction between the terms 'Spanish' (σπανός) and 'white Spanish' (λευκόσπανος)

**81** Cf. A 1 p. 40.
**82** Meyer (1924) 40.

is difficult since the colour *spanus* is otherwise only mentioned in Late Antiquity.[83] The term is probably derived from the fact that the Iberian Peninsula, especially the province Baetica, produced wool with a very typical colour.[84] Martial associates it several times with the colour of gold.[85] We might thus infer that this special Spanish wool had a golden or golden-brown tinge.[86] The adjective λευκόσπανος, attested only in Greek, is sometimes associated with the adjective λευκόφαιος (*leucophaeus*) and is thought to denote a natural grey colour.[87] The connection of both terms also goes back to Martial, who refers to a man who liked to appear *baeticatus* (= *spanus*) *atque leucophaeatus*.[88] However, this assumption is not necessary. The designation 'white-Spanish' (λευκόσπανος) could just as well point to a light golden colour (σπανός).

As to artificial colours, the legal complaint mentions six shades of red and purple that are likewise hard to distinguish: rose-coloured (ῥόδινος = *roseus*),[89] purple red (πορφυροῦς = *pupureus*), Tyrian-violet (τυριάνθινος = *tyrianthinus*),[90] crimson (κόκκινος = *coccineus*), orange red (κροκώτινος = *croceus*), and wineleaf-red (ἀμπέλινος = *ampelinus*).[91] In Imperial times, the term *purpureus* refers to a reddish purple (often called Tyrian red), as opposed to more violet shades of purple. The term *tyrianthinus*[92] either designates a special kind of violet called after its production site (Tyre), or it is simply synonymous with *ianthinus* (violet). The adjective *ianthinus* is found elsewhere and may be an abridged version of the longer word *Tyrianthinus*. A similar explanation is plausible for the term ἀμπέλινος, which is attested with a colour only in Herais' letter.[93] It is very likely a shortening of the adjective ξηραμπέλινος (*xerampelinus*), which we find first in Juvenal and subsequently in Late Antique Greek authors.[94] According to its name, it denotes the colour of dry (ξηρός) wine leaves. We might call it 'Bordeaux red' today. In addition, we find two dark green garments: a belt (ὑπόζωνον) and a scarf (πάλλιον) in emerald (σμαράγδινος) green. The word σμαράγδινος as an adjective describing the colour of a garment is found only once more in an Egyptian papyrus from the same period.[95] It does not occur with dress in

**83** Nonius p. 882.30–31 L.: *pullus color est, quem nunc Spanum vel nativum dicimus* [*pullus* is the colour we now call Spanish or natural].
**84** Marquardt/Mau (1886) 478.
**85** Mart. 9.61.3, 5.37.2, 12.98.2.
**86** Marquardt/Mau (1886) 478; Meyer (1924) 39; against LSJ s. v. σπανός 2: 'grey.'
**87** Marquardt/Mau (1886) 478–479; Meyer (1924) 39; LSJ s. v. λευκόσπανος: 'pale-grey.'
**88** Mart. 1.96; cf. below p. 428.
**89** See above p. 418.
**90** On the different shades of purple, see below pp. 445–447.
**91** On the different shades of red, see below pp. 439–443.
**92** Mart. 1.53.3.
**93** On Caecilius Pausimachus F 3, where is has been restored mistakenly, cf. A 7 p. 140.
**94** Iuven. 6.519 and LSJ s.v. ξηραμπέλινος.
**95** CPR I 27.8: χιτὼν σμαράγδινος (an emerald *chiton*).

Latin.[96] This may be incidental, but local conditions should be kept in mind when considering colour terms. Emeralds were mined in Egypt, and their green was a ready reference point, especially for a wealthy woman living in the region. The same applies to milk white, which was more common in Egypt than the snow white found in the north of the empire.

In general, there are twelve dark red or violet garments on Herais' list. All of them have a shade that is related to purple and may be produced by purple dye. The selection shows the unique social prestige attached to purple in Roman dress culture.[97] This prestige led to the invention of ever-more colour terms denoting special dark-red or violet shades, whereas other colours, like green, saw far less technical and linguistic innovation. In Herais' list, there is no yellow (the wedding colour), but there is also no true red and no blue. Green is only found twice and only with accessories. Beyond the purple and crimson shades, there are thus none of the striking colours (*russeus*, *galbinus*) worn by Trimalchio and Fortunata. However, many of the colours recommended by Ovid are also missing. This discrepancy could be caused by the fact that Ovid is listing ideal options, whereas Herais' list describes the contents of a real wardrobe and her own preferences. It may also mirror a general difference between the garb of young *puellae* (Ovid's target audience) and that of *matronae*. The latter social group probably preferred a reduced colour palette and focused on (expensive) shades of purple. At least, Herais' preferences fit in with tendencies we find in other literary sources.

## 11.4 Social codes of dress colour

An old German proverb says that 'the wife of punch (*Kasper*) wears green and blue, punch himself a yellow hue.' It shows that in Germany social colour codes once even pertained as far as punches' clothing,[98] but there are still some colour codes left in modern European societies (such as wearing black at funerals or a bride wearing white). The ancient Romans likewise had many more or less strict codes for which colours were worn on which occasions and by which social class, and this section develops a brief sociology of Roman dress colour.[99]

In Antiquity, informal social rules structured society by distinction and restraint far beyond written law. The chapters on the *stola* (B 4) and the *praetexta* (B 5) have already touched on social norms and privileges that were converted into legal ones in Augustan times. The informal social norms, as it seems, usually take their origin

**96** It is used by Celsus 5.19.4 to denote a plaster.

**97** See below pp. 447–449.

**98** German: Grün und blau geht Kaspers Frau, noch ein bisschen gelber geht der Kasper selber.

**99** For the categories, cf. M. E. Roach/J. B. Eicher, Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order, Madison 1965.

with the (rich) ruling classes and then diffuse into all social groups. For order and hierarchy are always in the interest of those who stand at the top. Distinction shows that you are in a place in the sun, and restraint keeps others' hands off your legal and financial privileges. Roman (mostly unwritten) social rules are as well hidden as modern ones. They only become noticeable to us in ancient sources when they clashed with transgressive behaviour, but we might assume that the rules pervaded life to the highest degree.

In Rome, artificial dress colour and garments served to fix an individual's place in society, at least to some degree. There was no permanent (as opposed to temporary) legal prohibition of anyone wearing any dress colour of his or her own choice. There was also no regular item of female clothing that had a fixed colour (the yellow wedding dress was an exceptional garment). However, dress colour showed who you were. This is most obvious in the colours of the insignia—purple, crimson, and white—which distinguished the upper classes, but the same distinguishing function pertains more or less to all artificial colours. An individual living in Roman society had to know how to use colours in an appropriate and advantageous manner. There was, of course, always the (legal) freedom to *not* use colours in a socially approved manner, but this only indicated a lack of education (or simply lunacy). Wearing black, for example, except as a sign of grief, would have been seen as incongruous by Romans. In this sense, the history of artificial colour is not only one of distinction, but also one of restraint.

The following describes the general categories that gave specific social functions to certain colours. They are similar to those whose residues we still find in the modern European world: situation, gender, age, and social class. The criteria often overlap, and there is often more than one in use at a time. Since social norms are mainly implicit, explicit evidence on the social perception of dress colour is slim. Colour codes are rarely expressed directly in the texts available to us, and they have to mostly be inferred from the type of individuals described. For this reason, literary stereotypes help us to infer some notions about social codes in general and colour codes in particular.

Before starting, however, it is best to once again delineate what the following section and its sub-sections are about and what they are *not* about. (1) The section focuses primarily on social norms and not on actual social behaviour and fashion. This is examined more closely in the last of the chapter's section. In contrast, the present section is about what dress colour certain people *should* have worn (if following social rules), and not about the inappropriate colour they were actually wearing. In fact, many of our texts explicitly mention that someone did not conform to the social guidelines established by the educated upper class. (2) The following discussion is about literary stereotypes and their abstract implications, and not about actual *individual* choices. It is about the social notions conveyed by a certain dress colour, and not about the personal reasons a woman might have had for choosing it. To give an example: The colour red is generally associated with eroticism, but this does not imply that an individual woman chose a given dress for that reason. Her personal interest and motivation might well have been different. Instead of thinking 'I will take my red dress because red is the

colour of love,' the reasons may have been: 'My red dress is the best I have; it makes me appear beautiful (*formosa*) and suits the occasion; and it has just come back from the laundry.' Reducing contingencies, the following is thus only about the main, normative, abstract notions that could connect a person wearing a certain colour and his or her social environment.

### 11.4.1 Social context

In general, any 'normal' Roman women (as opposed to priestesses) could use any artificial colour on more or less any garment. However, there are some situations that required certain colours (while forbidding others) and at the same time restricted their use in daily life. Above all, this concerns the colours black, yellow, and (though less strictly) pure white. To illustrate this, the colours black and yellow may serve as case studies. There was only one occasion for each of the colours that was acceptable: funerals (and grief in general) and weddings.

#### 11.4.1.1 Black

Women wearing black or dark garments at funerals are well attested in Latin literature.[100] We even have one example showing that there was also a gradation in black dress colours and that the type of the garment and the material also mattered in combination with colour.[101] The relevant passage is found in Varro's cultural history *De vita populi Romani*. Varro is speculating about primeval Roman dress customs:[102]

> Varro VPR F 411 Salvadore (= 105 Riposati) + F 412 S. (106 R.)
> *ut, dum supra terram esset, riciniis lugerent funere ipso ut pullis pall<i>is amictae, || propinquae adulescentulae etiam anthracinis, proxumae amiculo nigello, capillo demisso sequerentur luctum.*
>
> so that, while it (sc. the dead person) was still above the earth, the women mourned at the burial dressed in **ricinia* like in dark *pallia*, || the young female relatives followed the funeral procession dressed even in coal-black, the nearest female relatives dressed in a black cloak and with hanging hair.

Varro's remarks, though purportedly referring to ancient dress culture, very likely mirror an upper-class funeral of his own time. His description is a valuable source in two respects. On the one hand, it shows us that black was presumably restricted to the outer garment (there was probably nothing like an artificially black tunic). On the other hand,

**100** For references, see n. 27.
**101** The complexity and meaning of the permutations are not considered in this chapter.
**102** Cf. also C 1 p. 567

it gives us three strictly neutral colour terms relating to dark shades of dress: *pullus* (dark), *nigellus* (black, blackish), and *anthracinus* (coal-black). In addition, there are also the words *niger* and *ater* (dark and black), which often denote not only the colour, but also imply a symbolic sense of evil and doom (perhaps strongest in *ater*). The colour black is an exception among artificial colours in so far as it is usually not thought to enhance women's beauty (*forma*) (although Ovid suggests it for fair-skinned women[103]). Black and dark shades were generally seen as diminishing beauty in conjunction with other funeral rites, like scraping the cheeks and destroying the coiffure.

#### 11.4.1.2 Yellow (*luteus*)

The colour called *luteus* is even more restricted in use than the colour black.[104] The adjective *luteus* is derived from *lutum* (weld, *Reseda luetola*), which has a yellow flower and also yields a yellow dye. In the list of Latin colour terms, *luteus* stands between *galbinus* ('lime'-green) and *croceus* (orange). It can occasionally verge slightly towards orange. In Antiquity, for example, *luteus* denotes the colour of the bird called golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), the colour of a yolk, and the yellow eyes of a person suffering from jaundice; in modern terms, it is the colour of American yellow school busses and German post boxes.

In Roman dress custom, yellow is only used with a single specific garment. As in Northern India, it is used with the bride's dress:[105] The scarf worn by the bride during the wedding ceremony had this colour, which is why it was called *flammeum* (B 18). The use of yellow can thus be counted among the ritualistic patterns.[106] The colour *luteus* is not found in the *puella*'s nor in Herais' wardrobe (see above), nor is it attested with any other type of normal female garment. The silence of our sources mirrors reality in this respect since no reasonable Roman woman would have worn a wedding colour in daily life. It is difficult to see why the Romans chose yellow in particular to symbolize wedding (in India, it is used to keep evil ghosts away). On a practical basis, they might have done so because yellow was the only signal colour not used with other dresses. It was thus normatively 'free.' Since even funeral garments had a range of appropriate colours, the brilliantly yellow *flammeum* is the only item of female Roman clothing that had a single normative colour.

**103** See above p. 420.

**104** ThLL VII s.v. *luteus* col. 1896.70–1897.15.

**105** E. Crawley, Wedding Garments, in: Roach/Eicher (n. 99), 53.

**106** In this ritualistic sense, yellow is also found with the dress of Osiris/Dionysus, cf. Tib. 1.7.46 (Osiris/Dionysus): *fusa sed ad teneros lutea palla pedes* [but a long yellow *peplos* reaching down to the tender feet]; on the poetical meaning of *palla* (= *peplos*), cf. B 3 pp. 292–297; Sen. Oed. 427 (Dionysus): *lutea vestem retinente zona* [a yellow girdle fastening the garment]; Varro Men. 314: *Cynicis involucrum et pallium luteum non est* [Cynic philosophers do not have a cover or a yellow cloak].

### 11.4.2 Gender

In the Republican Period, all artificial dress colours (apart from purple, crimson, white, and black) were a social privilege of women. Section 4 examines how male attitude towards colour gradually changed in the Imperial period. This section only focuses on how this gender difference was perceived by the Romans themselves and which colours were regarded as especially feminine. The two most important general testimonies to gender differences in colour are found in Seneca and Martial.[107] In his *Quaestiones Naturales*, Seneca complains that in his time (in contrast to the glorious past) men were dressed in colours that would befit prostitutes (*meretricii colores*):

> Sen. NQ 7.3.2
> *levitate et politura corporum muliebres munditias antecessimus, colores meretricios matronis quidem non induendos uiri sumimus, tenero et molli ingressu suspendimus gradum* (*non ambulamus sed incedimus*), *exornamus anulis digitos, in omni articulo gemma disponitur.*
>
> By smoothing and cleansing the body, we have surpassed female body care. We dress in colours of prostitutes, which matrons in fact are not allowed to wear. We delay the step in a delicate and soft style of walking (we do not walk, but we strut along); we adorn our fingers with rings; on each limb there is a pearl.

In his *Naturales quaestiones*, Seneca wastes a significant amount of time on castigating Roman depravity, and he relishes parading all sorts of sexual perversions. This time he focuses on dress and physical appearance. It is not a new topic. Effeminate male dress forms part of the discourse on Roman decadence that we find in Roman literature from Cicero onwards. The question arises of which colours were considered *meretricii colores* by Seneca. He is using a double gradation to make the common topic even more pointed. Men are not only wearing female dress colours, but also those of the lowest type of women possible: unfree prostitutes (*meretrices*). But which are their colours? We come closer to the answer by looking at an epigram of Martial, who uses a similar two-step gradation of colours implying the same contrast between *matrona* and *meretrix*. Mocking a hidden passive homosexual who wants to appear particularly masculine, Martial describes him as wearing expensive clothes in natural shades of wool (*nativus color*) and as censuring other men's coloured dress as effeminate:

> Mart. 1.96.4–9
> *amator ille tristium lacernarum*
> *et baeticatus atque leucophaeatus,*
> *qui coccinatos non putat uiros esse*
> *amethystinasque mulierum uocat uestes,*

**107** Cf. also Mart. 11.39.11–12.

*natiua laudet, habeat et licet semper*
*fuscos colores, galbinos habet mores.*

May that lover of dark coats be dressed in the wool of Baetica and in grey robes; may he judge men in crimson robes as unmanly and call violet dress female dress; may he praise natural-wool clothes and always wear dark colours. Nevertheless, he has light-green manners.

In a first step, Martial contrasts the natural shades of wool—white-yellow (*baeticatus* = *flavus*), white-grey (*leucophaeatus*),[108] and dark (*fuscus*)—with the artificial colours crimson (*coccinus*), violet (*amethystinus*), and green (*galbinus*). The natural shades are identified as masculine colours (which is why the hidden homosexual is wearing them). The artificial colours are considered feminine ones. In a second step, there is also a social hierarchy between the three artificial colours:[109] Crimson and violet are elegant high-status colours (the colours of the *matronae* also found in Herais' wardrobe);[110] in contrast, 'lime'-green was probably perceived as a low-status colour worn by *meretrices*. Martial's joke thus culminates in the insinuation that the unnamed fan of dark clothing is inferior to the men whose conspicuous dress he criticizes. In fact, his *mores* are those of a prostitute.

Seneca and Martial show that not all artificially coloured garments were considered suited to men. However, some colours befit them even less than others because they are judged to be especially feminine and therefore effeminate when worn by a man. We have only a few explicit remarks on individual colours, but the social significance of colours can be inferred from two broad sources: (1) from texts like Martial's epigram, which disparage passive homosexuals and (2) from the frequency with which artificial colours are mentioned on women's but not on men' clothing. As to be expected, most evidence concerns the colours red and green, which can be worn by 'normal' men only in special functions or as a fan jersey (there was a red and later on also a green circus faction). The same holds true to a lesser degree for blue. The next sub-section focuses on the example of green, especially on the green shade called *galbinus* in our sources.

#### 11.4.2.1 Green

Green is not attested with ordinary adult men, but only with other males deviating from the ideal, either by age or behaviour. In Petronius, a *cinaedus* (a passive homosexual) is wearing a green woollen dress (*myrtea gausapa*);[111] Trimalchio has a green ball (*pila prasina*),[112] and his porter is dressed in a green uniform (*ostiarius prasinatus*);[113] Juvenal

**108** On the shades, see above p. 423.
**109** See below section 3.4.
**110** See above p. 424.
**111** Petron. 21.1.
**112** Petron. 27.7.
**113** Petron. 28.8.

tells us of a boy in a green fan jersey (*viridis thorax*);[114] and finally, green is the signal colour of a circus faction,[115] of which the boy was perhaps a supporter (*prasinianus*).[116] Since the *cinaedus* is already shown in the darkest shade of green (*myteus*), we may conclude that the brighter shades were also regarded as feminine colours, which an adult man would only wear in exceptional circumstances (as a servant in uniform or as a fan). We should also note that Trimalchio, who is prone to social mistakes, does not wear green on his body (although the ball is a kind of accessory).

Altogether, there are four words denoting green dress colour. The most general is the old Latin word *viridis*, which can denote any (mostly natural) green colour in literature. There are then three Greek loanwords which refer to artificial dress colour: *myrteus*, *prasinus*, and *galbinus*. Moreover, we find the Greek word σμαράγδινος (*smaragdinus*), which is not attested in Latin with garments.[117] The colour *myrteus* (myrtle-green) is the darkest shade. Ovid recommends it to his elegant *puella* readership,[118] which means that *myrteus* should be considered a normal and elegant female colour. Next in shade comes *prasinus* (πράσινος), which is first attested in Petronius and may hence be a more 'modern' shade. The term derives from the plant called *prason* (πράσον; *Allium porrum*).[119] A precious stone bore the same name. The plant indicates that *prasinus* denoted a leek-green, which is a slightly bluish green close to the colour of an emerald. The green of *prasinus* is more striking than that of *myrteus*. As to women, it is first attested in Martial on the dinner dress (*synthesis*) of a *puella*[120] and on the fan of a *concubina*.[121] The two examples show that *prasinus* was not beyond the wardrobe of the elegant mistresses in Flavian times, though perhaps a serious *matrona* would not have dressed in it. However, Herais employs emerald green with her accessories.

The brightest green shade is without doubt *galbinus*. The word itself and the colour it denotes need a more detailed discussion. The origin of the word has not yet been fully explained. It is likely a Greek loanword, and perhaps it has something to do with *galbanum* (χαλβάνη), the plant with the botanical name *Ferula gummosa*.[122] This natural object roughly squares with what else we know about the colour *galbinus*. To define the shade more precisely: *galbinus* stands between *prasinus* (medium green) and *luteus* (yellow). As to its definition, it presents similar difficulties as *croceus* (orange),

**114** Iuven. 5.143.

**115** OLD s.v. *prasinus* 2b; LSJ s.v. πράσινος 2.

**116** Petron. 70.10.

**117** Cf. above p. 423.

**118** Cf. above p. 417.

**119** LSJ s.v. πράσον.

**120** Mart. 10.29.4.

**121** Mart. 3.82.11; for a parasol (*umbrella*), see Iuven. 9.50.

**122** The term *galbanum* usually designates the gum resin, but cf. Plin. NH 12.126: *dat et galbanum Syria … e ferula, quae eiusdem nominis* [Syria gives us also *galbanum* from a giant fennel which has the same name].

which is also defined as existing somewhere between two colours. The colour *galbinus* is often thought to be a type of greenish yellow in modern scholarship.[123] In contrast, the following argues that it was regarded as a shade of green in Antiquity. Admittedly, the distance between a greenish yellow (the common interpretation) and a yellowish green (my proposal) is not very far, but there is at least some. In modern terms, we may think of the colour of a lime or the snake called green mamba. Altogether, there are four arguments for the assumption that *galbinus* was regarded as a shade of green: (1) The natural object which is said to have this colour is unambiguously green. (2) The word *galbinus* is listed next to *prasinus* in a papyrus which gives a recipe for producing greens. (3) It is consistently contrasted with red. It is very likely that *galbinus* and plain red (*russeus*) were considered complementary colours. (4) The colour *galbinus* is found in Trimalchio's household, which is otherwise dressed in red and green.[124]

There is only one natural object that is expressly said to have the colour *galbinus*. It is the bird called *gal**b**ulus* (with a B) or, in assimilation, *gal**g**ulus* (with a G), which Martial says to be *galbinus*.[125] The bird is usually identified in modern research (albeit with slight reservation) with the golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), which is yellow.[126] However, the following remarks argue that this hypothesis is clearly wrong. The starting point of the entire discussion is a remark in Pliny. In an offhand remark in a section on jaundice, Pliny identifies the *galgulus* with a bird called *icterus* in Greek:

> Plin. NH 30.94
> *avis icterus vocatur a colore; quae si spectetur, sanari id malum tradunt et avem mori. hanc puto Latine vocari galgulum.*
>
> The bird is called *icterus* after its colour. If the patient (sc. who suffers from jaundice) sees it, he is, as they say, cured of this disease, and the bird dies. I think this is the bird we call *galgulus* in Latin.

The issue with Pliny's explanation is that the *icterus* is not the golden oriole. The oriole is named χλωρίων in Greek,[127] and it is also called that elsewhere by Pliny. According to him, the colour of the golden oriole is *luteus* (yellow) and not *galbinus*.[128] For this reason, the golden oriole cannot be the natural reference hiding behind the *galgulus*. We must therefore look for another bird that has a colour similar to that of jaundice. It must be a small bird since, according to Martial, it is caught with nets and limed canes. This also speaks against the larger golden oriole. A bird that fits both criteria is

**123** OLD s.v. *galbinus*.

**124** See section 4.4.

**125** Mart. 13.68: *galbuli: galbina decipitur calamis et retibus ales* [the *galbulus*: the green bird is deceived by limed canes and nets].

**126** OLD s.v. *galgulus*: perh. golden oriole; Georges s.v. *galbulus*; Thompson (n. 65) 150; André (1949) 148–150; Sebesta (1994) 70; Goldman (n. 1) 70.

**127** LSJ s.v. χλωρίων.

**128** Plin. NH 10.87: *chlorion … totus est luteus* [the chlorion is completely yellow].

the greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*). It has the correct colour (its plumes have a yellowish green),[129] and it is the correct size (similar to that of a sparrow). The word *galbinus* hence denotes a very bright green. In addition, an alchemical papyrus tells us that the shade *galbinus* is produced when cooking the plant *euphorbia* (spurge in English). The alchemist explains that adding a shot of verdigris (the green patina of oxidized copper) turns the whole mixture *prasinus*.[130] The alchemy itself borders on nonsense. The mixture has the desired colour, but it is of no practical use, especially not as a dye. However, the colour of the ingredients (similar to that of the results) and the listing of another green shade suggest that *galbinus* was considered a bright green shade.

When referring to dress, *galbinus* is (with one exception) contrasted with shades of red. This suggests that it was seen as complementary. The evidence is as follows: Based on my emendation, Cato the Elder criticizes Roman *matronae* for wearing improper red *fasciae* and green *pallae*);[131] Petronius' vulgar upstart Fortunata parades a red undertunic and a green belt;[132] Martial contrasts red and violet clothes with the green *mores* of a passive homosexual[133] and shows an effeminate debauchee dressed in green lying on a crimson couch;[134] Juvenal, in describing a male transvestite orgy (*orgia*), has the participants wear blue-black chequered or thin green robes.[135]

All of these texts show that *galbinus* was felt to be a feminine colour. Moreover, all of the texts are exclusively negative in tone (hence it is used to disparage passive homosexuals as effeminate). Not one person wearing *galbinus*, not even a woman, is portrayed in a positive light in the texts. This may indicate that *galbinus* was a shade of green that the cultured classes regarded as particularly vulgar when used for clothing.[136] It is a colour that a decent and educated Roman *matrona* should not wear, let alone combine with red. It is a colour of social newcomers and probably belongs to what Seneca calls *meretricii colores*. Restrictions and preferences due to class are more closely examined below[137] when analyzing the different shades of red. However, the

**129** The tale that the *galgulus* sleeps upside down hanging with its feet from the tree told by Plin. NH 10.96 also fits this bird.

**130** PHolmiensis (ca. 300 CE), κε (25) p. 38.1–3 Lagercrantz: καὶ ὁ τιθύμαλλος ξηραθεὶς καὶ ζεσθεὶς γάλβινα ποιεῖ, ὀλίγου δὲ εἰοῦ δὲ μιγέντος πράσινα ποιεῖ.

**131** Cato Origines F 113 P., cf. A 2 p. 51.

**132** Petron. 67.4: *venit ergo* (sc. Fortunata) *galbino succincta cingillo, ita ut infra cerasina appareret tunica* [so there came Fortunata, who had gathered up her garment with a light green belt, so that underneath appeared a cherry-red tunic]; cf. B 1 p. 269.

**133** Mart. 1.96.10, cf. above p. 428.

**134** Mart. 3.82.5–7: *iacit occupato galbinatus in lecto … effultus ostro Sericisque pulvillis* [clothed in green, he lies on the couch and fills it up … propped up on crimson and silk cushions]. His *concubina* has a green (*prasinus*) fan.

**135** Iuven. 2.97*: caerulea indutus scutulata aut galbina rasa*.

**136** Sebesta (1994) 70; Goldman (n. 1) 77.

**137** Cf. pp. 439–443

observations made in the case of plain red (*russeus*) apply to the different shades of green as well.

### 11.4.3 Age and gender roles

The third category used by the Romans to judge dress colour was a combination of age and gender roles. Chapters B 1–5 demonstrated that these criteria also applied to garments.[138] As regards colours, social codes were similar to those prevalent in 20th-century Europe for a long time. In Rome, old people and young people were expected to wear different colours. Old people had to show restraint: Wearing 'young' colours was a social faux pas. Younger Romans could use more colours than were socially acceptable for the older generation. Children were allowed every colour.[139] Although these rules are often implied, Latin texts explicitly stating them are rare. A single instance concerning the colour plain red (*rufus*) is found in Martial. He remarks that cloaks in this colour are something that boys and soldiers like. Soldiers presumably wished to accentuate the aggressive masculinity of their uniform and gear, and boys presumably sought to imitate the soldiers.[140]

The 'anthropological' reason behind all of this probably lies in pure bodily physique. Signal colours distinguish the wearer and attract the eyes. The Romans deemed it unsuitable for the elderly to direct attention to their 'unattractive' body. In general, physical love was something for the young women, although extra-marital *castitas* was required of women of all ages. Via sexuality, artificial colours are then related to the three roles Roman women could have in relation to a man (other than being a member of the family): *virgo* (unmarried woman), *matrona* (married woman), and *meretrix* (prostitute). The social code in connection with these roles more or less includes all artificial colours, but it is most evident with the signal colours red and white, which acquired a symbolic value. They are firmly bound to sexual activity and non-activity and express normative sexual notions in a symbolic manner.[141] The colour white symbolizes virginity, and the colour red symbolizes love and sexual intercourse.

**138** E. Crawley, The Sexual Background of Dress, in: Roach/Eicher (n. 99), 72–81.

**139** On neutral child-fashion, cf. Crawley (n. 138) 72.

**140** Mart. 13.129: *placet hic pueris militibusque color* [boys and soldiers are fond of this colour].

**141** Red also keeps its erotic significance with male clothing, as the invectives against homosexuals show (see above).

#### 11.4.3.1 White (*albus*, *candidus*, *niveus*)

There are three common terms denoting white dress colour: *albus*, *candidus*, and *niveus* (snow white). [142] As to *albus*, it is not always clear whether it denotes an artificial white resulting from bleaching or the natural white of wool. In most cases, however, it seems to refer to clothes distinguished by their artificial 'whiteness.' In Rome, artificially white wool also played a prominent role as a male signal colour, distinguishing citizens from non-citizens (i.e. the higher social strata from the lower ones). The use of bleached white was restricted to the male citizens' dress insigne: the *toga*.[143] In Imperial times, rich Romans wore the *toga* when receiving their *clientes*, who in turn had to dress in it (at least when visiting their *patroni*).[144] Political candidates were clad in a special garment called *toga candida*, perhaps because its cloth was bleached. The white *toga* as a political insigne probably symbolized 'purity.' Citizens are purer than non-citizens, and candidates are (or at least should be) uncorrupted.[145] The same notion is prevalent with female dress. In contrast to male dress, however, the idea of purity unfolds itself on the 'private' side of morality and sexuality.

White female dress symbolized moral integrity. The allegorical state goddesses Fides, Pietas, and Virtus are depicted in white clothes by Roman poets.[146] In the case of Roman women, moral integrity and virtue also implied sexual integrity (i.e. marital fidelity or even abstinence). In this sense, white clothing could be worn by all sorts of women. However, there is almost no evidence on mature women explicitly wearing white. Our sources show Roman *matronae* only dressed in some form of white clothing when taking off their usual darker garb while celebrating the festival of Ceres (which included sexual abstinence).[147] In contrast, white dress is consistently shown with virgins and young women. More so than with marital chastity, white is the colour of virgins.[148] According to Festus, Roman brides dressed in a white *tunica* in the night

**142** Cf. in general Blümner (n. 1) (1889) 144–167, 706–712 (~ [1892] 3–41); André (1949) 25–40; on white colour used in ritual, see G. Radke, Die Bedeutung der weißen und der schwarzen Farbe in Kult und Brauch der Griechen und Römer, Jena 1936.

**143** Two examples show that white could cause offence when used elsewhere or mistakenly on male dress. That Pompeius wore white *fasciae* on his shoes aroused Cicero's displeasure, cf. Cic. ad Att. 2.3.1 with B 29 p. 546. The flute player Princeps was laughed at for being dressed in white, cf. Phaedrus 5.7.36–39.

**144** Mart. 4.34.2, 9.49.8; Iuven. 10.36–46.

**145** Radke (n. 142) 57–67.

**146** Hor. c. 1.35.21–22 (Fides); Stat. Silv. 3.3.3 (Pietas); Sil. It. 15.31 (Virtus).

**147** Ovid. Fasti 4.619–620: *alba decent Cererem: vestes Cerialibus albas || sumite; nunc pulli velleris usus abest* [White things suit Ceres. Put on white clothes at the festival of Ceres! Do not use a dark-coloured wool dress!]; 5.355–356; Met. 10.432 (of married women): *festa piae Cereris celebrabant annua matres || illa, quibus nivea velatae corpora veste* [the matrons were piously celebrating the annual festival of Ceres, during which they wear snow-white dresses]; epist. 4.71.

**148** As seen in chapter B 4 p. 315, even the expression *cunnus albus* denotes virginity.

before their deflowering.[149] Young *virgines* are shown in white robes at a festival of Juno in Falerii.[150] The Vestal Virgins wore a white costume;[151] Isis' priestesses also dressed in white;[152] in mythology, the Parcae and the Muses, who also have no husband, are clad in white attire;[153] the huntress Atalante has a white hairband;[154] and finally, Andromeda wears a white dress in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* after her rescue from the sea-monster, which symbolizes that she is still a virgin.[155] Literary symbolism was probably still felt in everyday life, as Ovid and other examples show. The notion of purity and the colour white could also be exploited in an erotic sense. However, literary usage suggests that artificial white was regarded as something very special and that it was reserved for special occasions. Ovid implicitly recommends its use for birthday celebrations (the rescue of Andromeda symbolized a new birth). Herais' wardrobe contains several white (though natural white) *syntheseis* with purple stripes reserved for dinner parties and similar occasions.[156]

In its symbolic function (non-sexuality), white is opposed to red, the sexual colour par excellence. In an abstract form, the two-sided symbolism appears in Silius Italicus, who presents the allegorical female figures of Virtue (*virtus*) and Pleasure (*voluptas*) dressed in white and crimson robes respectively.[157] In its fashionable function, we find the opposite in an elegy of Pseudo-Tibullus describing the various robes and attraction of his mistress Sulpicia. Both red and white are arousing in different ways:

**149** Festus p. 364.21 L.

**150** Ovid. Am. 3.13.27.

**151** Prop. 4.11.54: *exhibuit vivos carbasus alba focos* [the white robe showed that the fire was still alive]; Ovid. Am. 3.6.56 (Rhea Silvia): *vitta nec evinctas impedit alba comas* [she did not have a white *vitta* in her hairs]; Festus p. 474.3 L: *suffibulum est vestimentum album …, quod in capite Vestales virgines sacrificantes habebant* [the *suffibulum* is a white piece of clothing that the Vestals wear on their heads in sacrifice], cf. also B 4 p. 327.

**152** Cf., for example, Plutarch. De Is. et Os. 4 p. 352 D with the commentary of Hopfner pp. 5f, 60f; R. Reitzenstein, Die Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen, Leipzig 1927, 263f; R. Merkelbach, Isis Regina – Zeus Sarapis, Stuttgart/Leipzig 1995, 162.

**153** Cat. 64.307–309 (Parcae): *his corpus tremulum complectens undique vestis* || *candida purpurea talos incinxerat ora,* || *at roseae niveo residebant vertice vittae* [White dress covered their trembling body and surrounded their ankles with a crimson border. On their snow-white heads rested rose-coloured (purple) bands]; Stat. Silv. 2.7.9–11 (Muses): *laetae purpureas novate vittas,* || *crinem comite, candidamque vestem* || *perfundant hederae recentiores* [Be happy and renew the purple headbands. Do your hair! Fresh ivy shall spread over your white robes].

**154** Ovid. Met. 2.413.

**155** See above p. 420.

**156** See above p. 422.

**157** Sil. It. 15.23–25,31.

Ps.-Tib. 3.8.11–12
*urit, seu Tyria voluit procedere palla,*
*urit, seu nivea candida veste venit.*
She inflames me with desire if she appears in a crimson *palla*. She inflames me if she comes in a snow-white tunic.

The verses of this minor poet are clearly inspired by Propertius and Ovid.[158] The narrator-lover expresses his ardent desire for Sulpicia in whatever colour she might be dressed. In order to visualize the general thought, he uses a bipolar expression, a rhetorical device splitting an entity into opposite parts (for example: the entire world = land and sea). In this case, the pair of opposites is formed by two extreme dress options—crimson and white clothing—which explore the range of notions connected with both colours. As to sexuality, the implicit sense of the passage is: 'I like Sulpicia whether she be dressed like an innocent girl (white) or like a vamp (red).'[159] However, there is also a second, maybe even prevalent sense in this passage. Crimson (as opposed to plain red) is a precious red shade (see below). It is expensive and hence symbolizes luxury (Silius' goddess *Voluptas* is also dressed in a robe of this shade). The *Tyria palla* (be it a *pallium* or a '*peplos*') is thus a luxurious dress, whereas the white *vestis* (very likely a white *tunica*) is very plain apparel. The second sense implied is therefore: 'I like Sulpicia whether she be dressed in a simple or in a luxurious dress.'

#### 11.4.3.2 Red (1) – eroticism

Red is as an erotic colour and a colour for young women.[160] This applies to all shades of red, although these bear different associations, being either low-status or high-status.[161] Women in red garments are very common in Latin literature. Second to purple, it is the dress colour most frequently mentioned. In Titinius, a *puella* is wearing a purple-red **supparus*;[162] in Turpilius, a *puella* clad in purple red inflames an *adulescens*;[163] Cynthia, Propertius' mistress, is dressed in rose-coloured Coan garments and in a

**158** Cf. Prop. 2.1.5–6 (B 9 p. 388), 2.25.45 (n. 164); Ovid. ars 2.297–302 (B 9 p. 396). The language of this undated author (maybe he belongs to Late Antiquity) is difficult to interpret. His Classical models suggest that the term *palla* designates a *pallium*.

**159** Sometimes attire, combining red, seems to play with both notions at the same time. For example, Photis, the *ancilla* seducing the *adulescens* in Apuleius, is wearing a linen (= white) *tunica*, but shows parts of her red 'brassiere.'

**160** On red, cf. Blümner (1892) (n. 1) 159–183; André (1949) 80–85; Bradley (n. 1) 150–159; Goldman (n. 1) 11–13, 111–115.

**161** On low-status red, cf. below pp. 439–443.

**162** Titinius, Fullonia F 14: <*sup*>*parum puni*<*ceum*> [a **supparus* in crimson]; cf. A 7 p. 148.

**163** Sextus Turpilius, Hetaera F 1*: iniectam in capite reticulum indutam ostrina* [a girl who had put a hairnet on her head and was dressed in a crimson *tunica*]; cf. A 7 144.

purple-red *tunica*;[164] in Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, the *puellae* also wear purple red cloaks,[165] as does Sulpicia in Pseudo-Tibullus (see above); in the epyllion *Ciris*, the heroine Ciris has crimson shoes;[166] in Martial, a lover gives violet and purple red cloaks to this mistress;[167] in Apuleius, Photis features a red 'brassiere.'[168] There are even more examples if *croceus* ('orange'), the colour of the *crocota*, is considered a shade of red. All of these women share one characteristic: They are young and physically beautiful; they are viewed with great sympathy, and all but Photis are clad in an expensive shade of red. Nevertheless, with the exception of the mythological Ciris, all of the women come close to what Roman moralists would have called *puellae* or *meretrices*.

A notable shift occurs when mature married women are portrayed in red garments. In Cato, *matronae* wear red 'brassieres';[169] Fortunata openly shows her cherry-red undertunic;[170] the libidinous old woman (*anus*) in *Carmen Priapeum* 12 (CP) is clad in a plain red *stola*.[171] Besides all being *matronae*, all of these women are viewed negatively. Cato criticizes the Roman matrons for wearing *fasciae* in such a lascivious colour. Fortunata and the *anus* are characterized as elderly, ugly, and vulgar. Twice, in Cato and in the CP, the women are shown as wearing a cheap and 'vulgar' type of red.[172]

The stereotypes are striking, and they convey a clear social code. *Puellae* (of course not the daughters of the Roman educated classes) may wear red garments, whereas serious *matronae* may not. The same even holds true for men wearing entirely red garments (crimson and purple red are only allowed on the insigne). Both the men and women and girls who are not *puellae* might also incur overt criticism. In contrast to white, which pertains to the sexually inexperienced *virgo*, red is the colour of the sexually open-minded woman (something a 'good' Roman girl and woman should not be). Martial perfectly sums up the Roman notion associated with red: It suits only mistresses (*nec nisi deliciis convenit iste color*).[173]

**164** Prop. 2.1.5; 2.25.45 (*sandycis amictus*); 2.29.26 (*ostrina tunica*).

**165** Ovid. ars 3.170 (above p. 412), 2.297 (B 9 p. 396).

**166** [Verg.] Ciris 169: *coccina non teneris pedibus Sicyonia servans* [she has lost her crimson Sikyonian shoes from her tender feet]. On the entire passage, cf. also A 11 p. 211 and B 30 p. 551.

**167** Mart. 2.39.1: *coccina famosae donas et ianthina moechae* [you give purple and violet robes as presents to a notorious adulteress]; cf. B 6 p. 371; and Mart. 9.62.

**168** Apul. Met. 2.7; cf. B 1 p. 274.

**169** Cato F 113 P.; cf. A 2 p. 50.

**170** Petron. 67.4 (n. 131).

**171** CP 12.11 (see below p. 442); in general, cf. B 4 pp. 316–318.

**172** See below pp. 439–443.

**173** Mart. 8.48.6; cf. Goldman (n. 1) 47–48.

### 11.4.4 Class

In addition to the restrictions of gender, age, and civil status, the Romans had clothing codes based on social classes.[174] This also holds true for (artificial) dress colour. The general contrast between social groups is well-attested.[175] The colours of the common (working) people were dark (*pullus*), meaning they wore the natural brown or grey colours of wool and linen.[176] In contrast, at least the male members of the Roman upper class and their *clientes* wore a white or off-white *toga* when they appeared in public.[177] The upper classes (*equites*) distinguished themselves further by wearing purple insignia on their tunics. For parades they sometimes went as far as wearing a uniform (*trabea*) in crimson and purple. There is substantial evidence relating to the general dichotomy of colour vs. non-colour used to distinguish between social groups. In Imperial times, the colour distinction was deliberately used by Augustus in order to visually underline social distinction. In the theatre and in assemblies, those dressed in dark garments were banned to the margin,[178] an effect not lost on Latin authors. Evidence becomes less when it comes to examples of individuals. Cicero says that Piso's dark purple insigne looked 'plebeian.'[179] Propertius informs us that Cynthia occasionally wore a 'plebeian' robe (*plebeius amictus*), contrasting it with her expensive purple dress.[180] But what about specific colours? Were there differences in attitude towards specific colours between social classes? Were there 'low-status' colours? As already suggested above, there were indeed distinctions and some individual colours, and especially mixtures, were regarded as 'vulgar' by the cultured elite.

**174** On this category, cf. the various sections in Roach/Eicher (n. 99), especially J. Gillin, Clothing and Ornament, 174–184.

**175** For this well-known fact, cf. Blümner (1911) 248.

**176** Cf. also section 4; Mart. 10.76.8–9 (underlining the social contrast): *pullo Mevius alget in cucullo,* || *cocco mulio fulget Incitatus* [Mevius is shivering in his dark *cucullus*. Incitatus, the muleteer, is wearing a conspicuous crimson cloak]; Quint. inst. or. 2.12.10: … *mire ad pullatum circulum facit* [it (sc. gesticulating) makes an extraordinary impression on the dark-dressed part of the audience]; 6.4.6; Plin. epist. 7.7.9: *nam illos quoque sordidos pullatosque reveremur* [for we also feel uneasy in the presence of the people in mean and dark clothes]; Suet. Aug. 40.5 (cf. B 4 p. 353).

**177** See above p. 434.

**178** Suet. Aug. 40.5, 44: *sanxitque ne quis pullatorum media cavea sederet* [and he legislated that no one of the dark dressed crowd should sit in the middle tiers; Calpurn. Sic. 6.26–29: *uenimus ad sedes, ubi pulla sordida ueste* || *inter femineas spectabat turba cathedras.* || *nam quaecumque patent sub aperto libera caelo,* || *aut eques aut niuei loca densauere tribuni* [We came to our seats where the mean and dark dressed crowd and the women used to sit. For the free space under the open sky was all occupied by knights or tribunes in snow-white garments (i.e. the *toga*).]; 7.81; On the organization of the theatre in Augustan times and the *lex Iulia theatrali*s, cf. E. Rawson, Roman Culture and Society, Collected Papers, Oxford 1991 [1987], 508–545.

**179** Cic. Sest. 19; cf. also below p. 447.

**180** Prop. 2.25.45.

As regards low-status artificial colours, the most explicit Latin evidence is found in Seneca, who complains about degenerate Roman men wearing *meretricii colores*[181] and *colores improbi*.[182] In a sociological sense, Seneca's statement is not only about sexual norms, but also about social status. Unfree *meretrices* belonged to the lower classes of Roman society and wore clothes in signal colours which Seneca's wife, Paulina, would have never touched. Beyond Seneca, we have only Lucianus (see below). Otherwise, explicit evidence on differences in social colour preferences is rare. As to green, we have already seen that dark green (*myrteus*) may have been preferred by the elite, whereas the brighter shades—*prasinus* and especially lime-green (*galbinus*)—were rather considered low-status colours. As to red, the social distribution of shades (high status vs. low status) is even more pointed.

#### 11.4.4.1 Red (2) – high-status and low-status shades

In general, red is mentioned far more often in Latin literature than is green. There are also more shades of red, which has to do with fashion. New dark red shades were always in high demand because they were close to purple. The many shades of red were not only defined by their chromatic colour, but by their cost. Some reds were produced with purple dye and were much more expensive than others. Thus it was not only the issue of whether a colour (in a strict chromatic sense) was appropriate. Its cost was also a factor in determining suitability.

But let us first review the individual terms for red. Starting on the dark side, we find six terms denoting about four dark shades of red: cherry-red (*cerasinus*), wine-leaf red (*xerampelinus*), purple red (*puniceus*, *Tyrius*, *ostrinus*), and crimson (*coccin*(*e*)*us*). The adjective *cerasinus* (κεράσινος) derives from the noun *cerasus* (cherry) and is only attested in Latin in Petronius' *Satyrica*. Trimalchio's doorkeeper and his wife Fortunata are shown as wearing a belt (*cingillum*) and undertunic (*tunica*) in that colour.[183] We also find the Greek word in an alchemical Greek papyrus dating to the late Imperial period.[184] The evidence may suggest that *cerasinus* first came up in the Imperial period because the upstart Trimalchio always kept up with the latest fashion. The term very likely denotes the colour of the wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), a dark red bordering on dark violet. Since Trimalchio and Fortunata both try to imitate the purple insignia of the upper classes, it must belong to this part of the purple colour spectrum. The same holds true for the term *xerampelinus* (wine-leaf red), which we only find in Juvenal[185]

**181** Sen. NQ 7.3.2, cf. below p. 428.

**182** Sen. epist. 114.21 (of men): *qui lacernas coloris improbi sumunt, qui perlucentem togam* [who dress in cloaks of an immoral colour, who dress in a translucent *toga*]; on a transparent *toga*, cf. also Iuven. 2.65b–70 (B 6 p. 372).

**183** Petron. 28.8, 67.4.

**184** PHolmiensis (ca. 300 CE), κα (25) p. 33.31 Lagercrantz, cf. also above p. 432.

**185** Iuven. 6.519.

and in papyri from Egypt and was probably a fashionable shade as well. *puniceus* (φοινίκεος, Phoenician) and *Tyrius* (of Tyre) are common words. They apply to a reddish purple called Phoenician red or Tyrian purple that received its name from the original production site in Tyre (Lebanon) with a pigment won from various sea snails.[186] The adjective *ostrinus* is again much rarer. It is only found in Latin poets (the Greek term is used in papyri),[187] and it is only used with cloth. The evidence shows that it must refer to the same reddish purple shade.[188] Finally, the adjective *coccin*(*e*)*us* (κόκκινος) derives from the *coccum* (*Coccus ilicis*) and is also quite common. It denotes a crimson red that is produced by the pigment won from the insect called kermes.

In general, all these dark shades of red bear a positive connotation. From the beginning, they were associated with the dress of the upper class, which wore red as dress insigne. The high estimation of these shades clearly came from their price and rarity (the production of purple and crimson was laborious and costly). Being shades of red, they nonetheless also retained an erotic connotation. Garments in reddish purple and crimson were worn by beautiful young *puellae* without causing offence,[189] but men had to be careful when using shades of any red beyond the insigne. Entire garments in that colour could provoke criticism from moralists and satirists, though they became fashionable among men in Imperial Rome and the Roman world in general.

The nature of our evidence changes completely when it comes to clothing in the brighter shades of red. The term *croceus* (orange) has been discussed above.[190] The bright *crocota* is an exceptional festive Greek-inspired garment reserved for young women at banquets. Next to *croceus* comes a colour that we might call medium red. In general, there are four words denoting this shade. It seems expedient to shortly review them, although not all apply to dress colour, since the dictionaries do not distinguish sufficiently between their usage. The terms in question are: *russus* and *russeus* (the artificial dress colour), *rufus* (the natural colour), and *ruber*. The broadest spectrum is covered by *ruber*. The adjective can refer both to the entire genus and to the species of an average bright red, but is (in contrast to the verb) never used in connection with

**186** See below p. 446.

**187** Turp. Hetaera F 1 (A 7 p. 144); Varro Men. F 121 (A 8 p. 185); Prop. 1.14.20, 2.29.26, 3.13.7.

**188** On the colour, see André (1949) 102–103; Bogensperger (n. 22) 246. The adjective is derived from the Latin noun *ostrum*, which denotes the purple pigment or a purple robe, cf. ThLL IX s.v. *ostrum* col. 1161.27–1163.16; OLD s.v. *ostrum*. It was thus called after the sea snails which produced the pigment, cf. Vitruv. 7.5.8: *quod ex concharum marinarum testis eximitur, ideo ostrum est vocitatum* [because it is extracted from the shells of sea shells, it is commonly called *ostrum*]; on the terminology, cf. also Blümner I (1912) 233–248. The sea snail itself is called *ostrea* or *ostreum* (ὄστρεον), cf. ThLL IX s.v. *ostrea* col. 1159.2–1160.45. The word *ostrum* clearly designates a red purple, since our sources connect it with the adjectives denoting dark red shades, like *rubens* (reddish), *sanguineus* (blood-red) and *coccineus* (crimson), and with Tyrian (= reddish) purple. Gellius NA 2.26.2 also reckons *ostrinus* among the red shades.

**189** See above p. 436.

**190** See p. 416.

dress colour. The word *rufus* is an Oscan loanword.[191] It doubles Latin *ruber* to some extent, but is only used for the natural red colour of objects.[192] Pliny, for example, tells us that the flower of the common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) is *rufus*.[193] It also denotes the natural red colour of certain Italian types of wool, and this is how it applies to dress. We will also leave it aside in this chapter, which is only concerned with artificial colours. In contrast to *ruber* and *rufus*, the adjectives *russus* and *russeus* only pertain to cloth and only to artificial colour, mirroring the adjective *rufus* on the artificial side. As to the form *russ**e**us* (with an E), its meaning has always been clear since all instances concern dress. As to the variant *russus* (without an E), the restriction to artificial dress colour has been blurred because there appear to be two exceptions. However, both texts in which the exceptions are found suffer from corruption and are not reliable evidence.[194]

Unlike many of shades of red, plain red is actually a very old dress colour.[195] It was produced by a red pigment won from a plant called rose madder (*Rubia tinctorum*). The Italian and Roman varieties of the pigment were particularly prized.[196] The production of plain red was comparatively cheap, and it is not associated with any notion of value

**191** J. Untermann, Wörterbuch des Oskisch-Umbrischen, Heidelberg 2000, 637–638.

**192** Cf. Plin. NH 31.86 (on different red colours of salt): *sal rubet Memphi*, *rufus est circa Oxum*, *Centuripis purpureus* [In Memphis, the salt is red. Around the Oxus river, it is bright red. In Centuripae, it is purple red.]. In Pliny's coordinate system, *ruber* denotes the middle, while *rufus* slightly diverges to orange, *purpureus* to the violet side. The adjective *rufus* is also used to describe the red shade of hairs (distinguished from a darker red shade called *rutilus*), cf. Varro LL 7.83. Some type of cattle in Asia Minor is said to have had this colour, see Vitruv. 8.3.14.

**193** Pliny NH 19.169.

**194** The first is a poem of Catullus (39) in which Catullus mocks his peer Egnatius for his excessive tooth care (including the use of urine). According to the editions, Catullus says that the gums (*gingiva*) resulting from this care are *russa* (19). However, *ru**ss**a* (with double S) is only a modern emendation. The transmission has the form *ru**s**a* (with a single S), which leads to the form *rufa*. In the Carolingian minuscule and related scripts, the letters S and F are similar and often cause this type of error in our manuscripts (see also below). Restoring *rufa* (in accordance with what we else know about the use of this word) is the best solution. Problems also exist in the second testimony in Ennius scaen. 219 (Cic. Div. 2.54) concerning a rooster's throat. The statement that a rooster sings with his red throat (*faucibus russis*) is somewhat odd. The colour red is more readily associated with the bird's comb). When it comes to crowing, the rooster can do so with a hoarse throat (*faucibus r**au**c**i**s*), as was suggested by Hottinger (1793) in his edition of Cicero. Referring to a rooster's signature cry makes perfect sense. At the same time, it has many parallels, cf. OLD s.v. *raucus*. If we solve both problems in the suggested way, both purported exceptions disappear. The adjective *russus* is then used exactly like its variant *russeus*, equally pertaining only to cloth and artificial red colour.

**195** In Europe, the first mention is in a text written in Linear-B, cf. M.-L. Nosch, Red Coloured Textiles in the Linear B Inscriptions, in: L. Cleland/K. Stears (eds.), Colour in the Ancient Mediterranean World, Oxford 2004, 32–40, but use of the colour goes back much earlier.

**196** Plin. NH 19.47: *rubia tinguendis lanis et coriis necessaria. laudatissima Italica et maxime suburbana, et omnes paene provinciae scatent ea* [Madder is necessary for dying wool and leather. The most appreciated is the Italian and especially the local Roman one, and nearly all provinces abound of it]; 24.94.

(unlike crimson and the darker shades of red). The same picture emerges when we look at red-coloured garments and cloth. Although plain red is a signal colour, it is never found with clothing or insignia of the upper classes. On the contrary, red-coloured textiles are mostly inexpensive articles of everyday use. We find, for example, theatrical awnings and wound dressings in red.[197] It is the colour of one of the circus factions,[198] and it is also used by soldiers and by boys for cloaks.[199] There is only one man who is shown wearing it. It is Trimalchio doing some exercises before dinner in a plain red tunic as a sports dress. As to women, the colour plain red also appears very rarely. A garment in this colour is neither found in Herais' wardrobe nor in that of Ovid's *puella*. We only find it twice with accessories. Cato the Elder criticizes upper-class *matronae* for wearing plain red *fasciae*;[200] in Apuleius, the *ancilla* Photis uses a plain red *fascia* to attract a man's gaze.[201]

The only female (young or old) to be wholly dressed in plain red is the old woman mocked in the Carmen Priapeum (CP 12), who we have already encountered in the chapter on the *stola*.[202] The poem, probably dating to the second half of the first century CE, is as stereotypical as Latin poetry can be. Like Photis, the caricatured woman is of a low status. But to make matters worse, she is unlike the young and sexually attractive Photis: The woman is old, ugly, poor, and vulgar, and she is trying to commit an obscene act with the phallic god Priapus. In full tune with her overall appearance and behaviour, the author shows her wearing a *tunica scissa* (a tattered tunic) and a *stola russa*.[203] The poem is completely unrealistic, but it mirrors the social code in a pointed form. Using the red *stola* as a symbol, the author wants to convey the message that the old woman does not dress as she should. She commits two intertwined social mistakes: She is wearing a colour that suits only young mistresses; in addition, the red is only a cheap *russus*. We find an exact parallel when looking at the upstart Trimalchio, the only man in Latin literature wearing a *tunica russea*. He is also old (*senex*) and ugly, and he is a lower-status individual (a former slave) who has managed to acquire incredible wealth. Although he only dresses in plain red as a sports jersey,[204] the social mistakes he commits are even worse than those of the *anus*. His 'social crimes' are three in one: A plain red garment does not suit a man; it does not suit a *senex*; and, above all, it does not suit an educated person (like Petronius and his readers). Both the *anus* and

**197** Lucr. 4.75: *lutea russaque vela* [yellow and red awnings]; Plin. NH 21.166, 28.261, 29.64.
**198** Plin. NH 7.186; and OLD s.v. *russatus*.
**199** See above and Mart. 14.129, 121; Varro Men. 170.
**200** Cf. A 2 p. 430.
**201** Cf. B 1 p. 275.
**202** Cf. B 4 pp. 316–318.
**203** CP 12.11. The manuscripts offer the orthographical variants *ru**ss**a* and *ru**ff**a* (evidencing the common confusion between the letters S and F).
**204** Petron. 27.1.

Trimalchio thus implicitly mirror the same social code: Plain red (*russus*, *russeus*) is a low-status colour.

#### 11.4.4.2 Mixing signal colours

Social faux pas are not limited to wearing inappropriate or overly striking colours. Different colours can also be combined in socially inappropriate ways. The most important text, which may serve as a starting point, is written in Greek and dates to the second century CE. Lucianus, in his *Wisdom of Nigrinos*, tells us how an upstart millionaire wearing colourful clothes and committing other faux pas was 'educated' by the urban Athenians:

> Lucian. Nigr. [8] 13
> A millionaire … came to Athens, a very conspicuous and vulgar person with his crowd of attendants and his clothes in various colours and jewellery, and expected to be envied by all the Athenians and to be looked up to as a happy man. But they thought the creature unfortunate, and undertook to educate him, not in a harsh way, however, nor yet by directly forbidding him to live as he would in a free city. … His gay clothes and his purple tunics they stripped from him very neatly by making fun of his flowery colours, saying, "Spring already?" "How did that peacock get here?" "Perhaps it's his mother's robe" and the like. His other vulgarities they turned into jest in the same way—the number of his rings, the over-niceness of his hair, the extravagance of his life. So, he was disciplined little by little, and went away much improved by the public education he had received. [Loeb transl. with slight modification].

It must be noted that the story is situated in Athens and not in Rome. However, the attitude towards colour of the educated urban elite seems to have been similar in the entire Roman Empire during this time. Lucianus' millionaire, recently arrived in Athens, dresses himself in colourful clothes in a show of ostentatious wealth. He is wearing purple tunics and coloured cloaks. He also mixes different contrasting shades so that he is compared to a peacock. We have already seen that coloured dress was seen as unbecoming of a man, more so than of a woman. The same thought also appears here: The millionaire's critics compare his attire to that of his mother. The main point is that the attitude of the nouveau riche concerning colours is implicitly contrasted with that of the old urban Athenian elite. The upstart likes striking colours, whereas the Athenians do not. He likes mixing colours, whereas the Athenians prefer harmonious and matching ones.

Turning from Greek to Latin, there is no Latin text concerning 'class' attitude towards colours as explicit as Lucianus' description of the young millionaire. The tendency of the educated to wear matching colours is indirectly shown by the Graeco-Roman fashion of wearing *syntheseis* (dress combinations) in a single or at least in matching shades (B 10). Trimalchio and his wife Fortunata are again the Latin source most similar to the millionaire in their behaviour. They both wear red and green items

of clothing, golden jewellery, and golden rings, and they look a bit like peacocks. In the *cena Trimalchionis*, Petronius simply describes them and relies on his readers to recognize the 'horrible social mistakes' (*vitia*) committed by the upstart couple. The *vitia* are the basis for the author's humour, which will have appealed to his readers' sense of propriety. As to social codes, Petronius' subtle narrative conveys the same information as Lucianus' much blunter anecdote.

Fortunata's and Trimalchio's attire has been described in detail in chapters B 1 and B 4. The motto of their household seems to be: 'A bit too much of everything.' It not only applies to food and music, but also to colour. Both Trimalchio and Fortunata prefer striking reds and greens (the colours of the circus factions), and they like to combine them. We have already seen Trimalchio earlier in this chapter, in the public bath wearing a red (*russeus*) sport tunic and playing with a green (*prasinus*) ball.[205] Afterwards, he is carried away in his litter wrapped in a crimson (*coccinus*) blanket.[206] A well-clad doorkeeper receives Trimalchio's guests. He is sporting a green tunic (*prasinatus*) with a cherry-red (*cerasinus*) belt.[207] At dinner, Trimalchio is wearing a crimson (*coccineus*) coat and a purple-striped (*laticlavius*) napkin;[208] Fortunata is dressed in a red undertunic (*cerasinus*) and a 'lime'-green (*galbinus*) belt, in addition to a lot of gold jewellery and maybe white shoes.[209] The faux pas of the freed couple Petronius wants his readers to laugh at are the following: (1) They use too much colour; (2) they fail to distinguish between low-status and high-status colours; (3) they mix striking complementary colours; and (4) they wear the same colours as their servants. Petronius' descriptions are always based on realistic details (most of them have parallels in archaeological material). It is therefore very likely that he portrays Trimalchio and Fortunata in a stereotyped manner that he and his readers considered very typical for the social class of the freedmen.

If we believe Petronius, the new leisure class (in contrast to the 'old' Roman elite) liked dress colour, imitating (as with other luxury articles) the social elite and being proud that they could now afford expensive clothing. However, they often lacked cultural education and therefore blundered. They often used too much dress colour in order to distinguish themselves, and they used it indiscriminately, mixing contrasting colours and using vulgar ones. At the same time, the nouveau riche were fond of new fashionable shades which the cultured elite would not have worn. The *arbiter elegantiarum* Petronius and his male readers in the first century CE dressed much differently (see below). In the new Roman world of first century CE, now full of colours, the true distinction was to use dress colour with restraint. Properly cultured Romans

**205** Petron. 27.1–2.
**206** Petron. 28.4.
**207** Petron. 28.8.
**208** Petron. 32.2.
**209** Petron. 67.4.

avoided shades worn by the *vulgus* and only used those signal colours that underlined their upper-class status.

## 11.5 History

The preceding discussion focused on social codes and to some extent on social behaviour without regard for historical changes. The following section describes the evolution which social behaviour underwent concerning dress colour. Men and women are bunched at the beginning; gender differences are only explored in more detail towards the end. In general, social code and behaviour regarding colour differed considerably between genders. As a general rule, social restrictions for men were more pronounced than those for women. Roman men used fewer shades and less colour overall compared to Roman women. We should also keep in mind that the history of artificial colours is, like that of garments, in large parts a history of the upper and the leisure classes. In consequence, this section starts top down with first reviewing the preferences of high-status individuals and then switching to a bottom-up perspective. In contrast to natural colour (i.e. the colour of the untreated material), any artificial dress colour is a luxury product, even though some colours lost their social prestige over time (see below). A natural colour can, in turn, take on social value when it derives from a limited source, such as an exotic breed of sheep. Even though there was no Roman fashion industry in the modern sense, there are some similarities to ours in the sense of the *longue durée*. Change became faster in Imperial times when consumer demand for new clothing and new colours grew in conjunction with the production capacity of such luxury products.

### 11.5.1 Purple

The late Karl Lagerfeld, the German fashion designer based in Paris, once said that you can sell any dress colour to the inhabitants of Hamburg, provided this colour was dark blue. Transferring this witticism to the Romans, one might say you could sell any colour to the ancient Romans provided that it was purple (or crimson). The Roman (Etruscan) purple-craze, or rather that of the Roman elite, is well known. The technical purple production in particular has attracted a considerable amount of scholarship.[210] It will therefore suffice to stress only a few main points.

**210** Blümner (1912) 233–248; M. Reinhold, History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity, Brussels 1970 with the review of F. Kolb, Gnomon 45 (1973), 50–58; G. Steigerwald, Die Purpursorten im Preisedikt Dioketians vom Jahre 301, ByzF 15 (1990), 219—276; Bradley (n. 1) 189–211; Goldman (n. 1) 28–31, 40–52; M. Guckelsberger, Purple Dye in Antiquity, Diss. Univ. of Island 2013; Bogensperger (n. 22) 235–249.

Purple on dress is already referred to in the first 'longer' Latin text we know of: the Law of the Twelve Tables (450 BCE). In the tenth table, containing a burial law, purple stripes (*clavi*) are mentioned on the tunics of upper-class men (A 1).[211] Upper-class wives very likely equaled their husbands as to luxury dress at that time, but we have to wait for more than two centuries before we are told explicitly that the women wore purple or purple-bordered garments. The female *purpura* is mentioned as a perfectly natural dress by both Plautus[212] and Cato Censorius (A 2). Cato rejects the abolition of a luxury law concerning female gold jewellery and purple dress. We may hence assert with confidence that purple was a popular dress colour among Roman upper-class *matronae* in the third century BCE.

But what shade does the term *purpura* refer to? What colour is in turn called *purpureus*? The word *purpura* and *purpureus* are used ambiguously and can denote both a colour or a pigment. When referring to colour, they can refer to different shades from violet to reddish purple.[213] The violet hue was the older one (see below), and it was manufactured in Italy. In contrast, reddish purple was a later invention. In Latin, this type of purple was called Tyrian (*Tyrius*) or Phoenician (*puniceus*) because it was produced by the Phoenicians and not in Italy. It became most popular in about the second half of the first century BCE (see below). We must bear this colour shift in mind when reading our available texts. As a general rule, texts from the Republican Period use the word *purpureus* to refer to a violet purple shade (at least when it comes to ornaments). Texts of the Imperial period use *purpureus* to denote a reddish purple shade. Imperial authors seem to have felt this ambiguity. Hence, they use *violaceus*,[214] *Tyrius*, *puniceus*, or (somewhat later) the words *ianthinus* (viola-coloured),[215] *amethystinus* (amethyst-coloured),[216] or even *tyrianthinus* (Tyrian viola-coloured)[217] when they wanted to denote a precise shade. Beyond this general division, there were even more gradations of 'purple.' As Ovid's enumeration of violet natural objects shows, there

**211** Cf. especially p. 34.

**212** Plaut. Poen: 304*: meretricem pudorem gerere magis decet quam purpuram* [a prostitute should rather have good character than a purple dress]; cf. A 7 p. 137; Aul. 168: *eburata vehicula, pallas, purpuram* [carts adorned with ivory, *pallae*, a purple dress]; 500: *enim mihi quidem aequomst purpuram atque aurum dari* [I should be given purple and gold]; cf. A 5 p. 88; Plaut. Stich. 376: *lanam purpuramque multam* [much wool and purple]; Men. 121: *lanam, aurum, vestem, purpuram* [wool, gold, dress, purple]; Most. 286–290; cf. also Afranius, Fratriae (Fratres?) F 13: *mea nutrix, surge si vis, profer purpuram* [my nurse, please get up, bring me the *tunica* with purple ornaments]; cf. A 7 p. 157.

**213** For further information, cf. the books and articles referred to in n. 210.

**214** Plin. NH 9.137 (see below); Plaut. Aul. 510 (*violarii*) cf. A 5 p. 110.

**215** Mart. 2.39 (B 6 p. 371); Plin. NH 21.45 (see n. 21).

**216** Ovid. ars 3.181; Mart. 1.96.7 (above p. 428), 14.154: *lanae amethystinae*: *ebria Sidoniae cum sim de sanguine conchae,* || *non video quare sobria lana vocer* [amethystine wool: since I am drunk with the blood of a Sidonian murex, I do not see a reason why I am called sober wool]. Plin. NH 21.45 (see n. 21).

**217** Mart. 1.53.3; PHamb. 33 (above p. 421).

were various shades of violet and rose (see above). A full variety of them is also found in the edict of Diocletian (301 CE).

### 11.5.2 Colour and fashion

In the case of purple, we have something that we lack with all other colours. There are several statements on how the different shades of purple were socially perceived and used. For this reason, we can prove something with purple that we can only infer for other colours: There were fashion changes when it came to dress colour in Rome. Our first three Latin texts concern upper-class men—Roman senators and knights. The texts are all from court speeches given by Cicero and date to the fifties of the first century BCE. They all form part of invectives or rejecting reproaches of opponents, in which Cicero uses common tropes. It should be noted that when Cicero mentions colours in connection with clothing he is not referring to completely dyed garments, but only to the colour of ornaments. In one passage, Cicero mocks his archenemy Piso as posing as a populist by dressing in a common Italian and very dark purple (*vestitus aspere hac nostra purpura plebeia ac paene fusca*).[218] The word *plebeius* also implies that this type of purple was rather cheap. Cicero's slander may well be based on a real fact. It seems that some senators wanted to make a political statement by wearing traditional dark Italian purple. In a similar manner, Cato the Younger is said to have worn dark purple insignia.[219] Piso (like Cato) wanted to appear, to use Cicero's words, as an example of the old Roman rule (*exemplum imperi veteris*) and as a picture of 'the good old times' (*imago antiquitatis*). However, as Cicero goes on, Piso only does this for show. In reality, he is a wealthy passive homosexual debauchee. Cicero's political heckling of his opponent is not to be taken too seriously when it comes to an individual's actual behaviour. Cicero is having rhetorical fun with slanderous *ad hominem* attacks of his political or legal opponents. The heckling was mostly meant to entertain the audience. This is shown by the next example. Here, Cicero says that no one should begrudge Caelius his fashionable *purpurae genus* (again used on an insigne) and his somewhat flamboyant lifestyle, both being signs of youth and refinement.[220] In contrast, an opponent of Cicero wearing the same clothing and insignia as Caelius supposedly shows a lack of character and decadence. The *eques* Decianus, in his expensive and trendy *Tyria purpura*, is not a serious plaintiff.[221] The basis for these attacks is always that there were old and new shades of purple, each with different social connotations.

The slow changing of purple fashion, expressing itself in the opposition of 'traditional/old-fashioned' and 'new/extravagant,' is also mentioned by Pliny the Elder

**218** Cic. Sest. 19.
**219** Plutarch. Cato Min. 6.3.
**220** Cic. Cael. 77.
**221** Cic. Flacc. 70.

in his long chapter on purple. Pliny's testimony is most important for cultural history, since it explicitly refers to the behaviour of social groups (in contrast to individual behaviour). Pliny's account broadens our perspective by describing the evolution of purple and its production for more than a century. As so often in Pliny, we have a two-layered text. In the relevant section, Pliny first quotes the *Chronica* of Cornelius Nepos (ca. 100–28 BCE) as a source. In contrast to historical annals, this work contained remarks on social history. Pliny then proceeds to comment on the *Chronica* and to add something of his own.

Plin. NH 9.137

*Nepos Cornelius, qui Divi Augusti principatu obiit: "me," inquit, "iuvene violacea purpura vigebat, cuius libra denariis centum venibat, nec multo post rubra Tarentina. huic successit dibapha Tyria, quae in libras denariis mille non poterat emi. hac P. Lentulus Spinther aedilis curulis primus in praetexta usus inprobabatur. qua purpura quis non iam," inquit, "tricliniaria facit?" Spinther aedilis fuit urbis conditae anno DCXCI Cicerone consule. dibapha tunc dicebatur quae bis tincta esset, veluti magnifico inpendio, qualiter nunc omnes paene commodiores purpurae tinguuntur.*

Cornelius Nepos, who died in the reign of the divine Augustus, says: "When I was young, the violet purple dye was in vogue, a pound of which sold at 100 denarii; and not much later, the red purple dye of Tarentum. This was replaced by the double-dyed (*dibapha*) Tyrian purple, which cost more than a 1000 denarii per pound. Publius Lentulus Spinther, as curule aedile, was the first to use this on his *toga praetexta*, and he was criticized for it. However, who does not use this kind of purple for covers of dining-couches now-a-days?" Spinther was aedile in the year 631 a.u.c. when Cicero was consul (63 BCE). At that time, the word *dibapha* referred to a purple cloth said to have been dyed twice, as if it were a great extravagance. Now, however, almost all standard (less expensive) purple cloth is dyed in this way.

Nepos is referring to the same fashion trend as Cicero. In his youth, 'cheap' violet purple was 'normal,' and then a red southern Italian shade came into use.[222] Finally, there was the expensive reddish Tyrian *dibapha*. Nepos marks the difference between violet and Tyrian purple by the cost. He says that the violet purple was selling at a hundred, while the Tyrian one at a thousand denarii per pound.[223] He then turns to the *primus inventor* of Tyrian purple in Rome. Since it is difficult to date the exact start of a trend, Nepos ties it to the person who first used a Tyrian purple insigne in a political office. This was supposedly the curule aedile Lentulus Spinther, whose office dates to Cicero's

**222** F. Meiers, Historical outline and chromatic properties of purpura rubra Tarentina and its potential identification with purple dye extracted from Bolinus brandaris, in: H. L. Enegren/F. Meo (eds.), Treasures from the sea. Sea silk and shellfish purple dye in Antiquity, Oxford 2017, 138–144.

**223** Since inflation was high in the first century BCE, price differences were perhaps not so as great as Nepos makes them appear.

consulate in the year 63 BCE.[224] The biographical details of Spinther do not need to interest us here; his office suggests that he was relatively young and belonged to the most upper-class stratum of Roman society. The office of the curule aedile was reserved for patrician, as opposed to plebeian, aristocrats. Spinther thus falls into a similar category as Caelius, who also wore Tyrian purple (see above). Nepos will have learned about Spinther from an unknown political or court speech. Criticizing the opponent for wearing extravagant purple was a common trope at that time, as Cicero's invectives show. An adversary will have turned on Spinther in a similar way.

After quoting Nepos, Pliny pursues the history of Tyrian purple up to his own time. The word *commodiores* also refers to the price. Something is called *commodior* when you do not have to pay too much for it, if it is convenient. We have thus the same antithesis between 'cheap' and 'expensive' purple as before. According to Pliny, Tyrian purple was once very expensive, which restricted its use to insignia. By the time of Pliny (ca. 70 CE), however, about a hundred years after Nepos, Tyrian purple was already considered cheap and was used for 'normal' bed and couch covers. In conclusion, Pliny's social history shows us two important things: (1) What was once a luxury fashion became a common affordable good and was used in an inflationary manner, and (2) the different shades of purple underwent a slight devaluation as time went on. In modern terms, we might say that a 'democratization' of the colour purple occurred.

Postponing the end of the purple story for a while, let us now consider whether something similar happened with other artificial colours. Of particular interest are those colours standing at the opposite end of the social spectrum: the 'low-status' colours plain red (*russeus*) and bright green (*galbinus*, *prasinus*). There is no written evidence on historical changes of these two 'low' colours so that their original status is beyond certain proof. However, taking the history of purple as an example, we may assume that a similar devaluation of these colours took place over the long course of Roman history and that colour production and social views on colour changed over the course of multiple centuries. Our argument might be as follows: A society's general view on colours can be summed up as 'any artificial colour is preferable to using none.' Red (as opposed to purple) is a very old European colour,[225] and its dye was produced near Rome. Hence it seems quite natural that it was (together with natural white) among the first positive signal colours known to the Romans.[226] In the beginning, red (like white) would have been the colour of wealth (requiring the purchase of dye). After some time, however, red lost its lustre. The invention of purple dye may have been a subsequent effort of the members of the elite to emancipate themselves from a signal colour that had become all too common. Red then remained a colour of the *plebs* (those who could

**224** RE 4.1 (1900) s.v. Cornelius (238), col. 1392–1398 (F. Münzer).

**225** Cf. the various articles in H. Meller/C.-H. Wunderlich/F. Knoll (eds.), Rot – Die Archäologie bekennt Farbe, Halle 2013.

**226** Crimson, a dark shade of it, still remains at the cloak (*trabea*) of the *equites* in historical times.

not afford the more expensive purple). The elementary nature of red and white is still mirrored in historical times by the fact that they are used by the first circus factions.[227]

However, this is merely a hypothesis based on analogy. It is only at about the turn from the third to the second century BCE that an evidence-based social history of red and other artificial colours can be undertaken. It is then that we find Plautus joking about various new colour terms (A 4). Although the basis of his jokes is partly Greek, the puns must have appealed to his audience. A little later, Cato the Elder complains about rich *matronae* wearing striking red *fasciae* and 'lime'-green cloaks (A 2). He obviously deemed these colours unfit for upper-class women, but his criticism shows that these colours were fashionable and were worn by the elite. After this, plain red (*russeus*) and bright green (*galbinus*) eventually made their way further down the social strata. In contrast to other shades, they do not appear in the wardrobes of the educated population. They are missing in Ovid and in Herais' police report. Instead, they figure in the wardrobe of people like Trimalchio and his wife Fortunata, the old woman prostituting herself to Priapus, and other debauched social upstarts. In addition, they appear on various trivial items and are used by the circus factions. In conclusion, the evolution seen in the case of purple probably also involved other signal colours (though to a lesser degree), while the social prestige of less striking colours (for example, blue and dark green) seems to have been relatively stable. At least, these colours are never connotated in a negative way.

### 11.5.3 Colour and society

In general, a change of dress style and colour preferences is connected to and caused by social change. Up to now, our view on dress colours has been largely top down. Now we will broaden the perspective and look from the bottom up. In the period considered in this book, Roman society underwent dramatic political and social changes. As already seen in preceding chapters (especially in connection with the *stola*), the composition of Rome's ruling class changed significantly during the Republic. This disrupted the traditional cohesion of status and code that held together the old ruling class. Ancient Roman historians like Sallust and Livy (mirroring the ideology of the upper classes) thought that the fall of Carthage (146 BCE) triggered a negative social process that finally led to the dissolution of the old Roman society, the dwindling of unity among the members of the upper class, and (most dangerously) the creeping in of *luxuria* (decadence) into hitherto simple Roman hearts. Inverting the historians' assessment, we might describe the same epoch as a time of great upward mobility and new social chances (something frowned upon by any ruling class). Upward mobility had already been strong after the Social Wars (87 BCE). After the end of the civil wars (30 BCE),

**227** On the *russati* (the red faction), cf. above p. 442.

however, social progress and life in the capital accelerated. The new rule of law and order (albeit a tyrannical one) and high government spending created a market boom. Luxury goods were imported. Emperor Augustus (exploiting the provinces) built a marble city (including the Campus Martius), and large sums of money were turned over in the capital. The upper classes had been always rich in Rome, but now wealth trickled down to the other strata of society. Producers and merchants, in large part belonging to the freedmen-class, acquired wealth, and they (like Trimalchio) aspired to new status, eventually rivalling the old elites. In a sense, dishwashers could become millionaires, or (in ancient terms) a muleteer could aspire to a crimson dress.[228] Roman society as a whole became richer; a new broad leisure class came to the fore and enjoyed the advantages of urban life. The satirists (Horace, Martial, and Juvenal) viewed the pastimes of this sort of people with some amount of skepticism, although they very likely profited from them.

Turning back to dress and dress colours, the immense social change had the same consequences as for other luxury merchandise: More people and more diverse people could afford them. It is during this time that the old Roman elite began to lose control on dress and on fashion. Despite the laws of Augustus, which declared some 'traditional' garments to be privileges, the maelstrom engulfing all Roman garments (at least in the eyes of traditionalists) went on. Roman elite culture was still shown on the official monuments in Imperial times. However, as to social reality, the cultured freed Greek hetaera (like Cynthia, Delia, and Corinna) and the young Roman dandy set the agenda of urban fashion. It is not without reason that most of the literary evidence we have in this time concerns the dress of such liberal individuals.

The preceding chapters also showed what this social (r)evolution meant for dress forms. 'Traditional' Roman garment forms like the *stola* (B 4) and *praetexta* (B 5) gradually disappeared; others, like the *tunica*, acquired ever more variety (B 1); and altogether new dress options like the *synthesis* emerged (B 10). Rome experienced veritable fashion trends—the Coan dress (B 9), and low-status clothing like the *abolla* and the *paenula* (B 7–8)—received a social upgrade. As to material, the options gradually increased: from wool, to linen, to cotton, and finally to silk.

As regards dress colours and their use, Roman dress in general became more coloured in Imperial times. Traditional colours lost attraction and value, and new ones came up. Under the influence of Greek culture, every perceivable shade was probably more or less available in Rome already by about 200 BCE. In Imperial times, however, previously unheard of colour terms crop up—like 'cherry-red' (*cerasinus*), 'wine-leaf red' (*xerampelinus*), and Tyrian violet (*Tyrianthinus*). Rather than truly new colours, these terms most likely denote new fashionable shades of existing ones. The spectrum of dress colours seems to have been quite stable in this period. There is only one exception,

**228** Mart. 10.76.8–9 (see above).

and this is 'purple' and its shades. All new designations refer to either dark red or violet.

But why did only purple see new shades and terms, even after the other colours had more or less stabilized? The change of purple shades probably has to do with a loss of distinction and the increasing numbers of people wearing purple. Since Roman society was growing richer and production became cheaper in the first century BCE, ever more people could afford to buy purple garments. The new leisure class, which could now afford something previously restricted to knights and senators, turned to purple for its social prestige.[229] Purple thus became part of a mass market. It probably did not matter too much whether the shade was achieved by real purple dye or by imitation. To use a modern example, real Gucci handbags can only be discerned by a specialist. Ovid and Pliny indicate what this wider access to violet purple had already occurred by the first century BCE (see above). Ovid lists several violet shades among the not-overly-expensive dress colours a *puella* could wear; Pliny (Nepos) says that purple was cheap. The result was that, by about 60 BCE, the bottom-up influence in fashion led the urban elite (now a mixture of new and old wealth) to invent new (foreign) purple colours for themselves, for example Tyrian red. High costs first helped to make this shade rare and distinctive. Tyrian purple was therefore still something extravagant fifty years later. But the same misfortune of democratization happened again. The value of reddish purple also quickly degraded through bottom-up influence. By the time of Nero (54–68 CE), a garment in Tyrian purple or crimson was losing its social distinction and, in order to stop this, Nero took a drastic measure. He simply forbade the colours violet and Tyrian purple. As Suetonius tells us:

> Suet. Nero 32.3
> *et cum interdixisset usum amethystini ac Tyrii coloris summisissetque qui nundinarum die pauculas uncias venderet, praeclusit cunctos negotiatores. quin etiam inter canendum animadversam matronam in spectaculis vetita purpura cultam demonstrasse procuratoribus suis dicitur detractamque ilico non veste modo sed et bonis exuit.*
>
> Having forbidden the use of amethyst-coloured or Tyrian purple dyes, he secretly sent a man to sell a few ounces on a market day and then closed the shops of all the dealers. It is even said that when he saw a matron in the audience at one of his recitals clad in the forbidden colour he pointed her out to his agents, who dragged her out and stripped her on the spot, not only of her garment, but also of her property. [Loeb transl.]

In contrast to the Twelve Tables, Nero's luxury law aimed less at keeping up morality and the unity of the Roman elite than at manipulating markets (and prices) in order

**229** On leisure class comportment, cf. the classic study of Th. Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions, New York/London 1899.

to reserve these (expensive) colours for imperial distinction. However, arresting bold *matronae* was finally to no avail, and violet and crimson garments remained popular. In Petronius, Trimalchio and his wife Fortunata do not only wear crimson and purple garments themselves, but they even dress their slaves in them; in Martial and Juvenal, crimson and purple are common dress colours for the dandy and his mistress alike;[230] Herais' luxurious wardrobe contains major garments (tunics, coats) in six different shades of violet, dark red, and purple, but it only contains two pieces in green, both of which are accessories.

The final question is: What did the 'old' elite do when large parts of society could afford anything and when taking refuge in special natural colours and special material (silk) was of no avail either? The answer is simple. The elite instead turned to 'simplicity' and to 'taste.' In Imperial times, the 'true' elite evinced itself by judging and reducing colours in a colourful word. Elite fashion moved from ostentatious wealth to subdued dignity. The credo became: 'You do not have to be rich like a Trimalchio, but you should at least have taste.' The right 'attitude' counted, and it could not be bought with all the money in the world. The view of the elite is mirrored by Ovid, who rejects wealth as a criterion for distinction and instead stresses knowledge and individual choice. Instead of purchasing advice, he offers an explicit style guide for *puellae*. About fifty years later, Petronius, as *arbiter elegantiarum*, implicitly tells us what a cultured member of the leisure class should *not* do by mocking the (uncultured) nouveau rich. A person of culture should *not* combine tasteless colours and should *not* exaggerate using colours. In the Flavian period, Martial and Juvenal follow up in this vein, ridiculing the uneducated members of the Roman leisure class. Their criticism of extravagant behaviour implicitly shows what was 'normal' behaviour.[231] And finally, we also have Herais' wardrobe to give us an example of cultured taste.

### 11.5.4 Colour and gender

Having examined the influence of class from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, a final factor needs to be brought back into focus when it comes to Roman colour fashion: gender. In Roman literature on women, the male moralists prevail. It is therefore difficult to judge real female behaviour based on the texts. As Cato's invective shows, women were very likely dressed in all sorts of colours during his lifetime, and similar attitudes likely remained in Imperial times. Although they were subject to the same general historical trends and social codes as men, women had complete freedom to choose the dress colours they liked and (as the example of Fortunata shows) seem to have made good use of this prerogative. Looking at the centuries of Roman history, the

**230** Mart. 1.96.6–7 (above p. 428), 2.39 (B 6 p. 371), 8.48.1; Iuven. 7.136.

**231** Satire needs an accepted social code as a backdrop against which deviation can be highlighted. There is no deviance without a thing to deviate from!

use of colour by Roman women did not significantly change in terms of the existence of dyed female clothing (dyed clothing had been used by women for as long as the technology existed). In contrast, the (acceptable) use of dress colour by Roman men changed and expanded considerably over time.

Until the end of the Roman Republic, men only used artificial colours sparingly. Signal colours appear to have been limited to the natural white *toga* and to the crimson and purple of upper-class insignia. We do not hear of any man wearing any other colour on any other part of dress. In Cicero, colour on men's clothing only exists in the form of insignia. There is no literary invective concerning an inappropriate colour of an *entire* male garment (only an insigne's colour is criticized). Assuming that the invectives mirror real behaviour, male dress in artificial colours was highly unusual, if not completely unheard of, during the Republic (otherwise there would be a rhetorical trope concerning it). This all changes in Imperial times. Now, several men are attested as wearing coloured garments in literature: Petronius' Trimalchio, Martial's dandies wearing violet and crimson cloaks, Seneca's men wearing prostitutes' colours, Juvenal's transvestites in blue and 'lime'-green, and Lucianus' nouveau rich in coloured dress. When we reduce hyperbole, these Imperial texts show that fashionable men could (and did) wear complete garments in artificial colours from at least the first century CE onwards.

Our evidence thus shows that gender norms concerning dyed clothing became more egalitarian, at least up to a point. The ruling elite probably kept to 'traditional,' relatively colourless dress. A member of the jeunesse dorée was still restricted to dark purple shades in public (if he did not wish to incur reproach). If he was wearing a green or blue garment, he still crossed the gender boundaries and was defined as effeminate (= passive male homosexual). Nevertheless, gender roles got closer in Imperial times, at least in the field of dress style and fashion.