

12 *reticulum* – hairnet (pl. 19)

1. Introduction
2. Terminology and appearance
3. Social usage
4. History

12.1 Introduction

The present chapter concerns the *reticulum*.¹ It is the first on accessories, which are ordered from head to toe (B 12–30). Roman female accessories differed significantly from those we have today. Roman women had fewer options. They could use various pieces of headwear, scarves, belts, and shoes to individualize and colour their attire. Once in a while, they could take a fan or a sun shade. But there were no hats, no eye-glasses, no shawls, no furs, no gloves, and no handbags. In short, there were none of the things that make up much of the modern fashion accessories. In compensation, there was golden jewellery on the head, upper arms (*armillae*), and legs (*periscelides*) for the well-off.

In general, there are five types of female headwear: the *reticulum*, the *mitra*, the *anadema*, the *strophium*, and the *vitta*. The first four items are normal pieces of headwear, whereas the *vitta* was turned into an insigne by Augustus and thus gained importance in literature. The *reticulum* and the *vitta* are designated by Latin words which describe their structure. The other pieces of headwear are referred to by Greek loanwords and thus seem to have come to Rome through the influence of Greek culture. The linguistic and historical evolution is also mirrored by Varro's short history of female headwear:

Varro LL 5.130

quod capillum contineret, dictum a rete reticulum; rete ab raritudine; item texta fasciola, qua capillum in capite alligarent, dictum capital a capite, quod sacerdotulae in capite etiam nunc solent habere. sic rica ab ritu, quod Romano ritu sacrificium

¹ Becker/Göll III (1882) 274; Marquardt/Mau (1886) 702; Blümner (1911) 263; RE 1.1 A (1914) s.v. *reticulum*, col. 694–695 (A. Hug); L. Sensi, Ornatus e status sociale delle donne Romane, in: *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia* 18 (1980), 57–58; E. Mottahedeh, The Princeton Bronze Portrait of a Woman with Reticulum, in: A. Houghton (ed.), *Studies in honour of L. Mildenberg*, Wetteren 1984, 193–210; L. La Follette, The Costume of the Roman Bride, in: Sebesta/Bonfante (1994), 55; GRD (2007) 160; Olson (2008) 76; K. H. Hersch, *The Roman Wedding*, Cambridge 2010, 106–108.

feminae cum faciunt, capita velant. mitra et reliqua fere in capite postea addita cum vocabulis Graecis.

Because it held the hair, the *reticulum* was named after the net (*rete*). The term *rete* is derived from *raritudo* (looseness). Likewise, the small strip of cloth with which they tied the hair to the head (*caput*) was called **capital* after the word *caput*. Priestesses still usually wear it on their heads. Thus **rica* is derived from the word *ritus* because women veil their heads when they perform a sacrifice in the Roman manner (*Romano ritu*). The *mitra* and almost all other headdresses were added later along with their Greek names.

After the word *reticulum*, Varro offers two Latin glosses—**capital* (D 6) and **rica* (D 4)—which he relates to ritual dress. Both words do not belong to neutral language and probably do not designate headwear at all. They are part of Varro's pseudo-history of early Roman dress (C 1). The next neutral dress term in Varro's list is the Greek loanword *mitra*. Varro's explanation shows that Roman women had no regular headwear (as opposed to jewellery) except the *reticulum* before the arrival of Greek dress style in the third century BCE. Instead, they used a cloak (*pallium*) or a scarf (*palliolum*) to cover their heads when necessary (similar to how a South Asian *sari* can also be pulled over the head and face). It is also remarkable that the term *vitta* is missing from Varro's text. This is perhaps because the term does not exclusively apply to a female piece of headwear but to a plaited band.

The Imperial jurists Ulpianus (ca. 170–223/228 CE) and Paulus (2nd–3rd century CE) already debated about which dress items were a type of garment (*vestimentum*) and which were a type of ornament (*ornamentum*). As to the head, (rich) Roman women had many dress options that fall under the category of ornaments: the golden crown (*corona*), the diadem (στεφάνη),² the comb (*pecten*), the hair clasp (*fibula*), and the hair pin (*acus*). All these items are left out of this book because they were not made of textiles or leather (even though such items were not necessarily made of precious metals). The book makes an exception in the case of the hairnet (*reticulum*) because of its dual character and because Varro lists it among the pieces of headwear.

12.2 Terminology and appearance

The term *reticulum* is a diminutive of *rete* (net).³ It is an old Latin word and designates a fine (and often elastic) web covering the hair. A normal *reticulum* consisted of textile threads and could have different colours (like nowadays). In Festus (Verrius), we hear of a special bridal hairnet that was yellow (*luteus*);⁴ Ulpianus mentions *reticula cro-*

² We do not have a Latin word for this type of crown or hair circlet, which is called στεφάνη or (in literary language) ἀμπύξ in Greek. Maybe, it was simply called *corona* in Latin.

³ See already Varro LL 5.130.

⁴ Festus p. 364.21–25 L.

cyphantia.⁵ The adjective *crocyphantia* is usually thought to be used as a noun and to designate a second piece of headwear (OLD),⁶ but it may well qualify the preceding *reticula*. The expression *reticula crocyphantia*, if we understand it in this way, may thus also refer to an orange-coloured (*croceus*) hairnet. However, the *reticulum* was not only made of textiles. It could also consist of golden (or silver) filaments. It was then produced by the *aurifex*.⁷

As archaeological evidence shows, the Roman *reticulum* was worn on the dome of the head (pl. 19).⁸ It is an alternative to a *mitra* (headscarf).⁹ Its usage thus differed from that of the similar hairnet called *κεκρύφαλος* (*kekryphalos*) in Greek Classical literature.¹⁰ This was a kind of hair bag that was worn on the back of the head.

12.3 Social usage

In general, we should distinguish two types of hairnets and their function. There was a normal hairnet to protect your hair and to possibly adorn you, and there was an expensive one *only* to adorn you and show your status. The normal *reticulum* belonged to the boudoir and average people. The other one (as golden jewellery) belonged in public and to the rich classes. The normal hairnet is a trivial accessory, and we therefore only hear about it incidentally. It is not as prominent as the *kekryphalos* in Attic comedy. Hence, we may conclude that it was more functional than fashionable. It was probably worn by all women alike. In Turpilius¹¹ and Novius,¹² young unmarried girls wear a *reticulum*. However, these comedies (a Palliata and an Atellan farce) might mirror Greek custom by translating the Greek word *κεκρύφαλος* (*kekryphalos*).¹³ A passage in Varro

5 Digest. 34.2.25.10: *ornamentorum haec: vittae mitrae semimitrae calautica acus cum margarita ... reticula crocyphantia*.

6 Cf. OLD s.v. *crocyphantia*.

7 Blümner (1911) 263.

8 Cf. p. 690; and M. Harlow, in: M. Carroll/J. P. Wild (eds.), *Dressing the Dead in Classical Antiquity*, Stroud 2012, 151–152, 155 colour ill. 24.

9 Varro Men. 433: *aliae [mitrant] reticulum aut mitram Melitensem* [other women ... a hairnet or Maltese mitra], cf. A 9 p. 192; D 4 pp. 637–638.

10 Homer. Il. 22.469; Aristoph. Thesm. 138 (with Austin/Olson ad loc.), 257; F 332.6 K.-A.; Eupolis F 170 K.-A.; Antiphanes F 115, 187 K.-A. Menander wrote a comedy intitled *κεκρύφαλος*, cf. Men. F 208–217 K.-A.; IG II² 1525.4: *κεκρύφαλον λευκὸν πεζίδα ἔχοντα* [a hairnet with a white border]; 1522.18 with Cleland (2005) 118. On the appearance of the *κεκρύφαλος* in general, see M. Bieber, *Griechische Kleidung*, Berlin 1928, 26; Stone (1981) 203.

11 Sextus Turpilius, Hetaera F 1: ... *interea aspexit virginem || iniectam in capite reticulum indutam ostrina* [while doing so, he saw a young girl who had put a hairnet on her head and was dressed in a crimson tunic]; on the text, see A 7 pp. 144–146.

12 Novius, Paedium F 4: *molliculam crocotam chiridotam reticulum* [a soft *crocota* with long sleeves, a hairnet]; on the text, see A 7 p. 169

13 On the character of Roman Palliata, see A 7 p. 134.

is more to the point. It presents a homely genre scene in which a girl is offering hair circlets (*strophia*) and *reticula* as modest gifts to the household gods (*lares*).¹⁴ In Festus (Verrius), a Roman bride is wearing a yellow *reticulum* the night before her wedding. The remarks also show that a *reticulum* was used for hair protection at night, (which was probably its main function). In Ulpianus, there is only general talk of *mulieres* (women) wearing *reticula* without specifying social status.¹⁵

In contrast, the golden *reticulum* clearly belongs to the costume of rich Roman *matronae*. In Plautus, gold (*aurum*) is a privilege of this social group.¹⁶ In Cato, rich upper-class women wear expensive, maybe silver hairnets and other precious headwear (A 2).¹⁷ In Imperial times, Petronius depicts the rich up-start Fortunata in a golden *reticulum*. She moves about the dinner party and boasts that her hairnet was made of fine gold.¹⁸ In Juvenal, a passive homosexual upper-class man dresses up as a *matrona* with a golden hairnet.¹⁹ In contrast, we do not find a hairnet of any kind with the mistresses of Latin Love Elegy.²⁰ Like the *mitra*, the *reticulum* (of any kind) was probably not fashionable dress for these beautiful women (who impressed by their hair). The literary stereotypes mirror the social code as concerns luxury hairnets: They are items that show matronal wealth and status and not accessories to accentuate the beauty of a woman.

Both the everyday and the luxury *reticulum* are ‘regular’ items of dress. They are *not*—as has been claimed—specific pieces for the marriage ritual, i.e. for a rite of passage.²¹ According to Festus (Verrius), on whose remarks this hypothesis has been based, Roman brides put on a plain white tunic and a yellow *reticulum* in the night before the wedding ceremony.²² In the relevant passage, Festus (Verrius) is speculating about primeval Roman marriage customs. His guesses may originate in a marriage

14 Varro Men. 463: *suspendit Laribus manias mollis pilas || reticula ac strophia* [she hung up figurines, soft balls, hairnets, and hair circlets on the *lares*], cf. A 9 p. 193.

15 See above n. 5.

16 Cf. B 6.

17 Cato F 113 P.: *mulieres opertae auro purpuraque ... argentea reticula, diadema<ta>, coronas aureas* [women covered over and over with gold and purple ... hairnets of silver, diadems, wreaths of gold].

18 Petron. 67.6: *reticulum aureum, quem ex obrussa esse dicebat* [a golden *reticulum*, which, she said, was of fine gold].

19 Juvenal. 2.96: *reticulumque comis auratum ingentibus implet* [and he fills a gilded *reticulum* with his big mop of hairs], cf. also 6.022: *reticulatus adulter* [an adulterer with *reticulum*].

20 Cf. On hair in Latin Love Elegy in general, I. Hohenwallner, *Venit odoratos elegia nexa capillos. Haar und Frisur in der römischen Liebeselegie*, Möhnesee 2001.

21 Against Hug (n. 1) 695; Sensi (n. 1) 57–58; La Folette (n. 1) 55; GRD (2007) 160, Hersch (n. 1) 106–108.

22 Festus p. 364.21–25 L.: *regillis tunicis albis et reticulis luteis utrisque rectis, textis susum versum a stantibus, pridie nuptiarum diem virgines indutae cubitum ibant ominis causa, ut etiam in togis virilibus dandis observari solet* [The day before the wedding, the virgins went to bed dressed in white *tunicae regillae* and yellow hairnets, both *rectae*, i.e. woven from bottom to top in standing position, for the sake of a good omen. The same custom is also (still) observed when giving the *toga virilis*]; for further discussion, see D 3 pp. 602–604.

custom current at his own time, although this is far from certain. In any case, it is not the *reticulum* but its yellow colour that is important because yellow is the traditional wedding colour.²³ Yellow is consistently used in this rite of passage, and it is the colour of the bridal scarf (*flammeum*, B 18). Like the scarf, the hairnet is a common garment which is only adapted to the specific purpose through a specific colour. It is not bound to ritual usage.

12.4 History

According to Varro,²⁴ the hairnet was the oldest type of Roman headwear, predating Greek influence on Roman dress style and dress terms. The word *reticulum* is indeed not a Greek loanword, and Varro may thus be right. It is likely that a trivial normal hairnet was in use among women from the earliest times onward, although its history is beyond proof. It was demonstrably used in late Republican and in Imperial times. In contrast, golden hairnets and illustrations of them have been preserved in early archaeological evidence.²⁵ Etruscan-Roman upper-class women may have used them, since they used golden crowns. However, our literary evidence dates much later. In Cato's *Origines*, precious *reticula* are listed as articles of matronal luxury. After a long gap in time, we find them again in Petronius and Juvenal. Fortunata and Juvenal's homosexual imitate the dress customs of 'normal' rich *matrona*. We may therefore infer that this type of jewellery was still in use among upper-class *matronae* in the first century CE. It was maybe even regarded as an old 'traditional' Roman dress style by that time, and traditionalist women may have used it—much like the *stola*—as a deliberate fashion choice to underscore their political and social views.

²³ Cf. B 11 p. 427.

²⁴ See above p. 455.

²⁵ Cf. p. 690.

