

## 19 *focale* – neckerchief

The *focale* is attested only four times in Latin literature, and always with men.<sup>1</sup> Because of its function, it seems likely that it was also worn by women. For this reason, it is included in this book. The etymology of the word *focale* indicates how the garment was used. It was a (woollen) textile that was wrapped around the neck to protect the throat (*faux*) from cold. We do not have a description of its exact form. Since it is twice listed in our sources alongside the *palliolum*, it may have looked different. It was smaller and perhaps similar in form to a neckerchief or a modern stole (not to be confused with the Roman *stola*). In contrast to the *palliolum*, the *focale* is only said to be for the sick (*insigne morbi*).<sup>2</sup> We learn that it was wrapped around the throat and perhaps ears for helping with an earache.<sup>3</sup> In concordance with the misogynous trope of sick being equated with effeminate, we may assume that Roman women wore *focalia* as well.

A sore throat affects both genders and wrapping it is useful no matter the time period or the culture. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that the neckerchief only crops up in Imperial literature. How did the *focale* become so remarkable that Quintilian saw the need to say that orators should not use it except in the case of illness?<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the reason for this was that the *focale* had become more refined and widely used in the first century CE,<sup>5</sup> and types of neckerchief might have been on the way to fashion in a rich Roman society that was more individualistic than ever. Two literary figures often adduced in this book may also point to this: In Petronius, Trimalchio is wearing an elaborate purple-striped *mappa* with fringes around his neck;<sup>6</sup> Fortunata features a *sudarium* in the same position.<sup>7</sup> Their garments are not called *focalia*, but they function much like neckerchiefs. Since both Trimalchio and Fortunata are examples for what a refined Roman should not do (but people nevertheless liked to do), they might express a trend in fashion that more serious men like Seneca<sup>8</sup> and Quintilian criticized. If this hypothesis is correct, in Imperial times, Roman men and women started to wear textiles

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1 ThLL VI s.v. *focale* col. 986.14–20; Hor. sat. 2.3.254–255; Sen. NQ 4b.13.10; Mart. 14.137.2; Quint. inst. or. 11.3.144.

2 Hor. sat. 2.3.254–255: *insignia morbi*, || *fasciolas*, *cubital*, *focalia* [emblems of sickness: straps, elbow-cushions, neckerchiefs]

3 Mart. 14.137: *si recitaturus dederō tibi forte libellum*, || *hoc focale tuas adserat auriculas* [if I should perchance recite and send you an invitation, this *focale* shall set your ears at liberty]. As a sign of illness, the *focale* served as an excuse for not attending a recitation.

4 Quint. inst. or. 11.3.144: *palliolum sicut fascias*, *quibus crura vestiuntur*, *et focalia et aurium ligamenta*, *sola excusare potest valetudo* [only illness can excuse a *palliolum*, wraps around the legs, *focalia*, and ear bandages].

5 In Martial, a *focale* can already serve as a (albeit trivial) dress gift.

6 Petron. 32.2.

7 Petron. 67.5; cf. B 1 p. 269.

8 Sen. NQ 4b.13.10: *videbis ... palliolo focalique circumdatos* [you will see men ... wrapped in a *palliolum* and a *focale*].

around their necks like many of us do today—and not only for medicinal purposes. The ascots worn by men and the French scarves worn by women are not that different from the Roman *focale*. It seems that people of all ages find ways to turn even the simplest garment (a small piece of fabric) into a fashion statement.