Epilogue

The painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich shows a wanderer standing on a mountain top and looking down on a large plain of white mist veiling the surrounding landscape. The image has always been near to my heart and in a way symbolizes my feelings at the time of writing my final chapter. In this book, I have climbed an intellectual mountain, and I now look back on my work with surprise. All results have been achieved by a chain of rational choices, and yet the ultimate form of the book now lies before my eyes like the result of a miracle. I can only hope that I have created an image of Roman dress culture that somehow mirrors reality. However, the lost Roman world will always remain a mystery for me, and this mystery will always fill me with awe. Ancient life is gone for good, and it has left only barren signs for us to decipher. My deciphering of the female Roman 'dress code' has come to an end now after over a decade.

The form in which this book has been written does not lend itself to a grand conclusion. The results have been presented within the single chapters and repeating them seems redundant and somehow inappropriate. My book is not a novel as to its form, and there has been no winding up of the plot for a dramatic finale. It is rather a collection of short stories intertwined by common leitmotifs. For this reason, the following section reflects on some of the implied premises of the previous analysis. It is an abstract musing about the philosophical books that have influenced me and about what kind of inspiration I have taken from them. Perhaps, readers now expect me to discuss the terms 'culture, Romanization, Hellenization, hybridity, ethnicity' and all other concepts that keep modern scholarship busy, but I felt that I could neither outdo Wallace-Hadrill (*Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 2008) in this nor that my subject would gain much from it. I will therefore look at things from an altogether different and more abstract point of view.

Composing scholarly books is about making choices. If you plan on starting a revolution, you may start it by shouting revolutionary slogans. This was not my way. In a certain sense, this book has aimed for a revolution in the field of Roman dress studies, but I have deliberately shunned from making too much noise at the beginning. In contravention of current trends in German Humanities, I chose to not present a flashy theoretical *Überbau* at the start of the book, but served a more traditional meal. All I wanted was to convince my readers by the wealth of new detailed results drawn from all extant sources. While it is possible to observe observing how to observe, there is the danger of ending up in an infinite regress and of losing sight of what you were going to observe in the first place. Confronting readers with a meta-theory from the start may impress them, but at the same time deter them from reading on or leave them disappointed when after much fussing about the correct theory no new concrete results are offered in the end, and to say it in Horace's words: *parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus*. For example, all debate about the above-mentioned terms has only led to one thing: You have to put them in quotation marks now (at least if you want to show your scholarly raffinesse), and you are often offered the most trite or even wrong results when it comes to analyzing the evidence. For this reason, the book avoided scholarly

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parlance as far as possible and focused on applied method. Theorizing was deliberately reduced to a minimum. Analysis kept close to the ground, using the microscope, so to say, and slowly ground away at the evidence. Emphasis was laid on new concrete results rather than on abstraction. There was, however, some method behind this madness, and I am going to explain it from the scratch now.

As should be evident, the book kept to the dichotomy *true–false* and adhered to the principle of falsification. It may seem unnecessary to state this at this point, but the reading of many 'scientific' books and articles has taught me that these basic rules are often lost sight of. Within this framework, I combined multiple strands of philosophical theory from various traditions: epistemology, theory of discourse, semiotics, and social theory. I did not start the project from the theoretical side, and it was rather that bits and pieces of these theories—that had been mostly slumbering in my mind for a long time—suddenly cropped up within me when it came to interpreting the data and to structuring the results. I then took them up as they best suited my purpose, sometimes with disregard for their greater subtleties.

The epistemic backbone of this study is formed by the principles of empiricism, as laid down in the various books by Willard Van Orman Quine. His studies on logic and language, especially his classic *Word and Object*, deeply impressed me as a student, and they still do so now. More than the details, it is the mode of Quine's thought that has left a mark on me. His sober and sobering reflections about words and their meanings, about how we designate objects, and about how we form statements often came to my mind while writing. The first main division as to subject matter, for example, was heavily influenced by Quines' remarks on extensions and intensions of statements.

In general, texts are the main evidence for Roman dress available to us, followed by works of visual art. As banal as it may sound, words are symbols that serve to communicate with others, and they have a 'meaning.' Some of them, like *stone*, designate material objects that exist in the outer world and that can be discerned by sense perception. Such symbols refer to a set of real, tangible things. You may kick a stone and dress your body in a tunic. In contrast, some words, like *centaur*, do not relate to any material object, or it is unclear which object they refer to. Logicians would say that these words have no extension or at least not a clear one. Semiotics would say that the sign has no referent. No matter the preferred theoretical frame, no one has ever seen a real, living centaur because it is just a fictional object of literature and of material art. A centaur can be said to exist in some sense, but not in the same way as a stone. In accordance with this, one of the main contentions of this book is that we find both types of words in the discourse on Roman fashion.[1] I have called the stone-type of word 'neutral' or 'literary' terms, and the centaur-type I have called glosses, thereby following ancient

1 The word *tunica*, for example (B 1), refers to a real historical dress item (B 1). In contrast, the term **ricinium* (D 1) does not designate any garment any of our sources saw in real life, and it very likely originated by textual corruption through a misspelling of *triclinium*.

and modern scholarly tradition. The glosses were marked by an asterisk (*) in order to denote their different 'ontological status.'[2] In contrast to my predecessors, I have strictly kept to this ontological distinction, and my study is shaped by it in a fundamental way. Parts A/B concern the common dress terms and real garments, while the parts C/D deal with the glosses and the dress chimaeras.

In a second step, I proceeded to combine and to diversify this down-to-earth logical concept with a rather primitive theory of discourse that fit the evidence. Hardly any scholar living in 20th-century Europe could avoid being influenced by the thoughts of Michel Foucault. His insistence on discourses and their mechanisms in his theoretical chef d'oeuvre *L' Archéologie du savoir* (The archaeology of knowledge) is such that no one can ever forget that communication is a social art and that different groups of people communicate in a different way. Abstracting from Foucault and focusing on words, we might divide language users into four main groups: technical experts (non-linguists), 'normal' individuals, poets and authors of 'high' literature, and linguists.[3] Members of the first group (or at least individuals acting in that capacity) use everyday *and* technical language when talking among themselves. As regards clothing, for example, tailors talk about things like hemlines, rounded borders, dropped shoulders, and other things in a language that non-specialists will not easily understand. Normal people use neutral (= common) terms. Poets use poetic language (including some everyday words). And finally, linguists (that is, word specialists) use linguistic and neutral terms. In the different fields, language has a different purpose, and individuals can shift between group discourses depending on whether they are at work or in the pub with friends. Technical experts use technical words as a shortcut for saying technical things. Normal people want to communicate in a general and commonly understandable non-specialist way. Poets use poetical expressions to embellish their poems and to entertain. Linguists ponder about terms, if they are difficult, and try to find out their origin and their meaning. In contrast to the other groups, they often do not use the respective words in a primary way in order to designate things, but only speak *about* them. Words become thus part of a meta-language.

In our Latin texts on dress, technical and colloquial language are largely lacking. With a few exceptions, the texts belong either to the literary or the scholarly (linguistic) discourse.[4] Accordingly, parts A/B were about 'high' (= non-scholarly) literature, and parts C/D about scholarly literature on dress. The distinction between different discourses complements the ontological division mentioned above. The first type of literature is primary evidence because it is about garments authors and readers could

2 We also find a similar distinction in art. There are real and fictional garbs.

3 We should perhaps not so much talk about groups but rather about roles. Individuals usually combine several roles. Technical experts, poets, and scholars are normal persons using neutral language most of the time. However, for the purposes of defining the nature of our sources, it seems best to stick to groups or—in a more abstract manner—to discourses.

4 Sometimes, like in the case of Varro, a text contains elements of both.

see and touch in their world. The scholarly literature is secondary evidence because it is about garments authors and readers did not see, but only *thought* to have existed and that thus took on a life of their own in discourse.

Within this main distinction, I further individuated the literary discourse. Part A explored its nature in its entirety and sifted through its ingredients. However, Roman literature has a double nature. It combines literary (in the stricter sense of the word) and everyday aspects and uses both literary and everyday terms. Part A interpreted single texts by means of traditional hermeneutics, but did not focus on one particular side. In contrast, part B directed its attention exclusively on the common discourse on dress. It cut off poetical words and focused on neutral dress terms and on real female Roman garments.

In a third step, I turned to another French philosopher for intellectual help: Roland Barthes and his semiotic study *Système de la mode* (The language of fashion). In contrast to the other philosophical works mentioned in this section, Barthes' book was completely new to me. I hit on it while reading several studies on modern fashion and found it to be most impressive. It obviously differs much in scope and content from my own study. It deals with the language of fashion magazines and 20th-century fashion and reconstructs the nature of the discourse on fashion, whereas my aim was to get through to real objects and social 'data.' Barthes' semiotic enquiry nevertheless sharpened my understanding about how the same statement, even the same word, can express different things according to the different perspectives and contexts in which it is used. The criteria 'appearance' and 'social usage' structuring the narrative of most chapters in part B mirror Barthes' influence to some extent, and they are based on the different functions of neutral language in life. Basically, I posited that every dress term is involved in a technical and in a social discourse. The technical discourse teaches us something about the material and form of a garment, and the social one teaches something about the garment's social usage and about the society which employs it. Via social usage, materiality transforms into mentality.

In Latin literature, we are missing, as I said above, most of the technical discourse. There are no sewing patterns nor technical descriptions of how to produce a certain garment. However, there are some residues of it when technical and neutral language are using the same words. The main points of intersection are the general neutral terms which Latin has for specific garments and which mostly refer to a particular form or fabric. We might call them linguistic shortcuts that function as technical definitions. In contrast to Barthes, who knew the objects his texts referred to and only reconstructed the discourse, my scope was different. The symbolic character of language that suits oral communication was a disadvantage for the enquiry into past things because we do not have the respective sense perception of the material object. We have just the Latin word, but we do not have the object it refers to. We must learn what type of garments the Romans would have called, for example, a *pallium* by inferring it from texts and from depictions. Our written sources are often very few, and it requires detective work to discover the correct solution. Depictions are important since they fill the visual gap

left by our texts. Without them, our texts (and by extension, we as scholars) would be blind. For this reason, I started by defining the technical meaning of terms and identifying the archaeological objects they refer to.

After this, my analysis turned to the social aspect of dress terms. The social implication of a word does not depend so much on the term itself, but more often on the context in which it is used. Words are part of statements, and most of them are more complex than mere occasion sentences like 'this is a tunic' or 'there is a tunic.' Many statements express a belief or an attitude. In literature, they convey what authors want to tell their readers. In Latin fictional texts, dress terms are usually part of descriptions of characters. At a most basic level, they imply social expectations as concerns the use of the respective garments. Picking two examples of obvious rules: A *tunica* is not worn on your feet, and a *calceus* (shoe) does not belong on your head. But social usage is not restricted to elementary functions like these. A garment also characterizes the person wearing it. It is his or her second skin, and this is even more important in literature since the authors have full control over how to depict their characters. Moreover, in Roman literature in particular, a garment marks age or social status. For example, a *stola* indicates that the woman wearing it is a Roman *matrona*, whereas a *toga* characterizes a woman as a lowly prostitute. Beyond social classes, descriptions of dress also often imply an authorial judgement on the behaviour of the character being described. Here, authors rely on shared norms among their readership. At this point, Pierre Bourdieu's book *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste) came to mind. His study on French culture does all we would like to do with Roman culture, but we lack the necessary evidence. In contrast to Bourdieu, we have no experience and no statistics; we have only a few stray remarks in texts. And again, we have to first find out the social matrix, whereas Bourdieu could take it for granted and focus on it. Some Latin authors, like Pliny, express explicit judgements, but most do not. The social code appears only by comparison, and it is only by parallels that we can find out what was considered normal or abnormal. With much caution, I thus tried to derive social norms from several parallel descriptions. The colour red, for example, was often worn by young women and hetaeras. In contrast, an old woman (*anus*) in red clothing was exceptional and in some way transgressive. Hence the conclusion that the (satirical) author wanted to express that the *anus* was a strange person by dressing her in a garb only *meretrices* would wear. Due to the nature of our available texts and their authors, the rules of behaviour we can somewhat confidently posit were those of the upper classes since all Roman literature was either written by members of the elite or their clientele. This is how it is for most of human history.[5]

5 On social bias, cf. also Carlo Ginzburg's historical study *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (The cheese and the worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller). His work shows how

It was at this point that I urgently felt the need to emancipate myself from epistemology and semiotics in order to get on. Words are not all; society (as objects) does not consist of only words (symbols), but there is something factual the words refer to, even if they can also help establish non-tangible societal structures. We can definitively say that Roman society *was* differentiated by gender (male vs. female), age (young vs. old), and various social strata. There *were* slaves, freedmen, freeborn Roman citizens, knights, and senators. In addition, social classes and codes change over time, as does clothing in particular. From what I could tell from the sources, Roman dress changed in the first century BCE when the composition of the social classes drastically altered, the allegiance to social classes lost overall importance, and new functional elites came to the forefront. For these reasons, it seemed that I needed a more elaborated social theory that gave me the possibility to describe the process.

The sketch of dress culture given in this book had to be a drastic reduction of contingencies in order to make it a tractable subject matter. This occasionally makes it seem like Roman culture was on some form of trajectory. Unlike Aristotle and Hegel, I do not see such large-scale changes as a linear movement to a preordained single end and consummation (*telos* or *agathon*). There is nothing, in my view, like a *Weltgeist* that comes to its fulfillment. Societal *kinesis* is a complex and unpredictable process. Social and cultural evolution is neither a clear-cut nor a uniform movement, even though it may appear so to those watching from a long distance in the future. To the contrary, evolution proceeds per *vestigia cancri*: It can slow down or accelerate; it will usually involve only some parts of society, but leave others untouched; and the changes mostly concern select items of the material culture, but not all. Thus, any apparent grand narratives were an incidental result of analysis and the presentation of results in a finite book.

In a last step, I hence tried to graft a social theory onto semiotics. The theory that came closest to my wishes was that of Niklas Luhmann. He is the most 'Aristotelean' thinker I know of when it comes to categorizing social phenomena, although he challenges many hidden 'Aristotelean' premises. He developed his theory over the course of thirty years. The first coherent draft of it in *Die Systemtheorie der Gesellschaft*, published posthumously in 2017, dates to 1975 and shows a strong anti-Marxist streak. The last version of it, called *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Theory of society), was published in 1997, shortly before Luhmann's death. In this, anti-Marxism has faded because Marxism had lost its lustre among German academics, and there were no more sit-ins or teach-ins at German universities.[6] The work also has a striking difference in language. In the final draft, most of the over-abstract expressions have ceded to 'normal' language

difficult and rare it is to get a hold of statements by people that lived beyond the limited confines of the elite.

6 The Cold War being over, criticizing them has given room to satirizing German academic life, a satire that is funny to read and that one might spin out even more nowadays. There is no one who can describe the system of the university, its media, and its academic limits like Luhmann.

so that it is much easier to read. Even so, Luhmann's theory is highly abstract and complex. In simple terms, it distinguishes between three levels of human interaction: the private level, called 'personal interaction,' the organizational level (like the state), and the entire society. He also distinguishes between 'system' and 'environment.' A 'system' (or part of it) reacts to its 'environment' and vice versa. Such reactions are part of its *autopoiesis* (self-contained reproduction). This is admittedly a very reductive version of Luhmann's thought, but it may suffice for the present purpose.[7]

Taking the entire 'Roman society' as the starting point (system), this study of Roman female dress considered the extension of various classes of people (= subsystems), the interactions between them, and their results on the entire society. Applied to clothing, this meant that a specific garment or attire was not always worn by the same social group. For example, the group of female citizens wearing the *palla* and the *stola* varied widely in composition in Roman history since new groups acquired the social status and the right to wear these garments over time. On the other hand, looking from the outside, Roman society as a whole (system) and its clothing stands in contrast to other cultures (environments). For the sake of a heuristic division, I took the notion of a 'traditional' Roman dress as a starting point, defining it as the clothing that Romans wore at the beginning of the second century BCE and that they themselves considered 'traditional' in the first century BCE.[8] I then opposed this traditional Roman dress (system) to 'Greek' dress (environment 1) and 'Celtic' dress (environment 2). The resulting narrative was that Roman dress culture did not only influence other dress cultures, but other dress cultures also influenced Roman dress culture in a kind of give-and-take. The expansion of the Roman Empire first combined with a diffusion of 'foreign' cultural mores within Roman society that in the second century CE led to a homogenous 'international' dress culture in a Roman Empire that had lost nearly all original Roman traces. In other words, 'Roman dress' in the second century CE had acquired a new definition, and it was this new Roman dress that the Romans gave back to their provinces.

Within this general evolution, the organizational level (state) also came into view, the imperial politics and policies of Augustus. In the first century BCE, so my narrative went, Roman society and Roman dress culture had already changed to a great degree. Cultural change made itself felt, and Augustus tried to counteract this process by propagating traditional Roman dress. There were probably many reasons for the change in Roman culture, but three may be the most important: the influence of foreign cultures, the evolvement of a new wealthy leisure class, and the dissolving of old social elites (on

7 Luhmann himself never wrote about dress and fashion. Doris Schmidt, Die Mode der Gesellschaft. Eine systemtheoretische Analyse, Hohengehren 2007 describes fashion as a system in Luhmann's sense. However, this type of close proselytism was alien to me.

8 Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Roman costume was heterogenous from its start.

the vertical level) in favour of new functional elites based on competence.[9] The decline of social cohesion and its reasons have already been considered by the Roman historian Sallustius, and it is a common topic of the modern handbooks on Roman history. From the Gracchi onwards, political antagonism within the upper echelons of society had increased to an extent that it led to civil war. This happened exactly at a time when functional competence in administrating a wide and complex empire was lacking. The incompetence of the old elite also spurred *homines novi* like Marius (and Cicero) to come to the foreground. At the same time, the freedmen class gained wealth and social clout. As regards Roman dress, all this resulted in the gradual disappearance of the traditional garments that belonged to the old elite culture, which had been annihilated by wars and ousted by newcomers. Augustus saw this upheaval and tried to stabilize Roman society in general and his rule in particular by redefining social privilege as a functional privilege, thereby transforming social dress customs into emblems. Traditional garments were even defined as privileges by law. The *stola*, *vitta*, and *praetexta*, as well as the male *toga*, became legally bound to Roman citizenship and Roman marriage (*matrimonium*), whereas they had previously only been social custom. However, in contrast to the male *toga*, the female 'traditional' garments had no civil function because women had fewer official roles than men and no political role at all. Roman women thus had no occasion to wear an odd 'traditional' garb that was not even functional and instead impeded movement. In any case, Augustus' political measures could not stop the 'internationalizing' cultural trend but only slowed it. In the first century CE, traditional Roman dress was still worn by the elite (senators, knights) when performing social and political roles. Upper class women were the last to wear a *stola*, in analogy to their husbands wearing the *toga*. However, the cultural trends begun decades earlier prevailed over social policy, and a new supranational Roman dress culture and a new imperial self-representation was formed under Hadrian. In private, an individualistic dress culture prevailed that could rely on multi-ethnic ingredients from Gaul to Greece to China.

The social history of Roman dress proffered in various chapters of part B (especially 4 and 11) formed the climax and the turning point of the book. The dynamism of the description stands in marked contrast to the static picture of Roman dress that has prevailed in scholarship up to now, and that is suddenly exchanged for Late Antiquity like a colour slide. However, the narrative offered in this book is only one possible hypothesis. Writing about a long bygone dress culture is, as I said at the beginning, a daring enterprise, and it inspires skepticism as to what we can truly know about it. All theory rests on sense data that connect us to the exterior world. Theory gets farther away from such data when it advances, or, to change the perspective, the sense data

9 On a small scale, this process prefigures what we see at the beginning of the Early Modern Period. Luhmann's description of this inspired me to transfer it to Antiquity, though the remodeling of Roman society stopped before the process had been completed.

remain the same in number but become fewer in relation to the scale of theory. In astrophysics, we first describe cosmic background radiation, then define from it the extension of the universe, and finally form a theory about the big bang that occurred billions of years ago (all based on the original measurements). I proceeded in much the same way for this book. I first interpreted single statements concerning dress; then I defined the meaning of neutral dress terms as to the material and the social usage of the objects designated by them; and I finally formed a theory about Roman dress culture and its evolution.[10] In the end, however, we have to admit that all we know about Roman female dress is fastened on the few pegs that we are able to drive into the outer world (far fewer pegs than non-specialists usually believe), and it is important to get at least these pegs right. Since we have no direct sense data (no garments are left from the respective period), but only words and pictures, we must treat them with all care, and I have tried to do so.

In dialectics, it is usual to also give heed to alternatives, and this has been done in parts C/D, which are a collection of cautionary tales. In Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the travelers read at the entrance to hell "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate!" and then encounter various ghosts consisting of souls without a body. In the same way, the world of the ancient scholars we entered was a quite hopeless affair. Many of the hypotheses proposed by them are still influential in modern research, but they are nevertheless mistaken. Nearly all of the words I discussed in those parts had either no or no clear stone-type object of reference. They were chimaeras and did not lead to real Roman dress culture, but only to the world of scholars' books. It was a world for linguists indeed, but a world for linguists only. The final chapter (D 7) left our ancient predecessors for good and turned to modern scholarship. This was done to remind us that we should not look on the Roman *grammatici* with scorn. They did what they were able to, and if they failed, it was because they had no rigorous methodology to build on and because they desired to know more than the evidence allowed them. In the end, their vain efforts show us how difficult it is to win reliable historical knowledge, even when it is 'only' two or three centuries removed.

Writing this book proved a veritable challenge for me because it needed all of the scholarly skills I had at my command, spanning from textual criticism to social theory. I often felt gratitude for the various outstanding scholars who had instructed me over the years. Sometimes, it was a short lesson that nonetheless accompanied me in my academic career.[11] And finally, the book would not have been written in this form without the help of my friend and colleague Joachim Raeder, who contributed the archaeological skill that I lacked.

10 On the similarity of method, see also P. Hoyningen-Huene, Systematicity. The Nature of Science, Oxford 2013, 107–108.

11 The distinction between primary and secondary evidence, for example, was first introduced to me by Edward Hussey, an Oxford scholar, who severely criticized an undergraduate essay written by me on the Pre-Socratics for mixing up and using incorrect sources.

On the most abstract level, my study was about words and objects, although the objects only came into play indirectly. Implicitly, it was also about method and about the question of whether a serious general cultural history can be written anymore. As the preceding pages show, my answer to this question is in the affirmative. Yes, we can still write cultural history if we keep to certain methodological standards concerning source analysis, and above all, if we clearly mark the limits of our knowledge and justify our hypotheses. That is all we can do. The readers may then decide whether they follow our arguments or, in the words of Ottavio Ferrari,[12] they can decide to contribute something that is better. This will progress knowledge and that is, I think, what science and scholarship are really about.

12 Cf. p. 15.