

CHAPTER XII

THE DRESS OF ROMAN WOMEN

Archaeological sources of information, reliable, so far as they go, for the study of the characteristic costume of Roman men, have a singular deficiency in their evidence regarding the dress of Roman matrons. The Roman man, proud of his national costume, the toga, despite its inconvenience, generally appears in it in his portrait statues, and reconstruction of it proves that, in many cases, it was sculptured with surprising truthfulness. The same is true when he is represented in military or other activities requiring the use of some one of the Roman cloaks. But the portrait statues of Roman women—empresses and others of distinction—often consist of a portrait head placed upon a copy of a Greek statue.

This condition has given rise to two assumptions, one of which ignores this subterfuge and accepts these statues as actual, detailed representations of Roman costume. The second assumption carried its adherents to the opposite extreme. Not only do they refuse (and properly so) to consider these portrait statues as authority for Roman dress; but, going farther, they hold that all sculptured or painted figures of Roman women having the usual Greek conventions in pose and disposition and rendering of drapery, are copies or adaptations of Greek originals, and that the garments represented are Greek garments. An examination of any considerable number of Roman female figures other than the portrait statues already mentioned will prove that this assumption is also faulty.

THE TUNIC AND THE STOLA

What has been said with regard to the weaving and making of tunics for men applies equally to those for women, and therefore need not be repeated.

According to traditions already quoted, the same style of tunic was in very ancient times worn by both sexes. In the period covered by literature and the existing works of art, they differed in certain features. The woman's tunic had no stripes (*clavi*) over the shoulders; it was much longer than the man's tunic, reaching quite to the instep; the skirt was wider, and the sleeves were longer than those generally worn by men until about the beginning of the fourth century. Naturally, the length of sleeve was determined by the season for which the tunic was designed.

So far as form and model are concerned, fickleness was not a characteristic of the fashions of the Roman woman's dress. In this respect she was more conservative than her husband. In the course of seven centuries, the man made radical changes in the shape of his tunic and toga; while the woman's *palla* retained its original shape, and there was little change in her tunic. Her desire for variety was satisfied by differences in texture, color and decoration.

Fig. 96 is one of the best preserved reliefs of the Republican period, its date being about the second century B. C. It is a very high relief of the figures of a Roman woman with her two sons. Strong, dignified and sincere, with no shadow of affectation, she is every inch a Roman matron of the Republic, and the clothing which she wears is that of her own people and times, despite any convention of rendering on the part of the sculptor.

Later by two centuries, we find on the *Ara Pacis*, Fig. 85, Roman matrons wearing the same costume as that of Fig. 96, but the drapery is rendered with more emphasis on Greek conventions. And again, after a lapse of perhaps two and one-half centuries, we find Roman women dressed as in Fig. 97, a detail of a relief in the Vatican Museum. It belongs to the middle or latter part of the third century of our era. It

A reconstruction of a Roman matron's costume is shown in Figs. 101a and 101b. The basic process of draping the palla is the same in all representations of it. It is illustrated by Fig. 102. Naturally there were numerous minor variations. Every change in the position of either arm produced a corresponding change in the disposition of the drapery. For example, the edge of the drapery hanging from the left wrist might hang in front of the body as in Fig. 101a; or if the arm were dropped, it would fall at the side as on the woman at the extreme left in Fig. 85.

Because of the absence of evidence as to the width, color, and exact location of the instita, no authoritative reconstruction of it can be made, and I have attempted none. For those who insist upon this detail in their reconstructions, I suggest a purple band about two or two and one-half inches wide attached to the lower edge of the stola.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PALLA

Measurements: The palla, as previously stated, was of different sizes. The dimensions here given are for one of medium size. The unit is the height of the wearer from the floor to the base of the neck in front.

Length	2 $\frac{1}{8}$ units
Width	1 unit

Material: Same as for the pallium, q. v.

Draping: The palla is first placed on the left shoulder, so that one corner hangs down the front of the body; see Fig. 102. The edge of the adjacent end passes over the left wrist as in Fig. 102. The palla is then brought around the back of the neck (or over the head if the wearer so desires) and covers the right shoulder and arm. The remaining upper corner is then thrown over the left shoulder and hangs down in the back. The second end of the palla is then brought over the forearm placed on the left wrist exactly as was the first end, see Fig. 102.

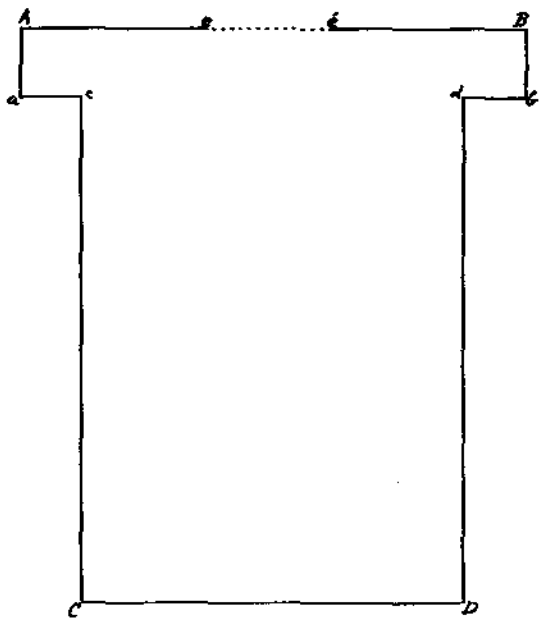


FIG. 103. The Stola.

RECONSTRUCTION

THE STOLA

Material: The same as for men's tunics.

Color: Any color desired; very brilliant and gaudy shades were considered immodest.

Measurements: (See Fig. 103.)

The dimensions of the stola of the simple tunic style are the same as those of the bride's tunic, except the length. It should be long enough to sweep the floor.

The stola of Fig. 99 is made of two pieces of cloth of the shape of Fig. 103, one piece being the front of the garment and the other the back.

Length: The same as the tunic style. (See above.)

Extreme width: (Line AB) With the wearer's arms extended laterally, measure from the base of the fingers on one hand, across the breast, to the same point on the other hand. This is the proper width of the front of the stola. The back should be about 5 inches narrower.

Length of sleeve: (Lines ac and bd) About 7 inches for a person of average size.

Making: It must be borne in mind that the number of inches specified at each point in the following instructions are only approximate. A successful reconstruction of the stola requires a certain amount of adjustment to each individual model.

1st: In the middle of the front section, measure off for the front of the neck opening 14 inches between points e and e', but do no cutting; leave the edge straight. At points e and e', gather into small overlapping plaits, about 8 inches of the cloth and sew the plaits firmly together. At each of the five points between Ae and Be', draw into a close gather, secured by stitches, about 1½ inches of the edge of the cloth.

2nd: Proceed in the same manner with the back section of the stola; but between points e and e', leave only 9 inches for the back of the neck opening.

3rd: Attach the front and back sections together by firm stitches through the gathers at the five points between Ae and Be'. A button may be sewed on at each of these points; or a stud button may be used if the gathered-up points are sewed together in such way that an opening is left to insert it. At points e and e', the back and front may also be sewed together and the joining covered by a brooch, which should be about 1¼ inches in diameter.

4th: Adjust the girdle well above the waist line and arrange the folds of the garment so that they will hang straight from the girdle down the skirt part of the stola, and produce a graceful blouse in the waist.

After the adjustment, it will be necessary to attach the girdle to the stola and the garment worn beneath it, particularly under the arms. For this purpose, the Roman woman doubtless found fibulae convenient; and we may use its modern descendant, the safety pin, but it must be completely concealed.