

Domina Tullia Saturnina, JdL, updated 6/21/23

Sharon@rosecityacupuncture.com

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/rosecityacupunc/>

Website: <http://romanasum.com/>

All errors are mine. Research is a continuing process. Ask me questions! Please email me for updates, if you find an error, or if you have information to share! Feel free to share this entire document as long as you do not modify it in any way.

Intro to Roman Clothing

The Roman Monarchy (673-509BCE), Republic (until 43BCE), and Empire (to the third, sixth, or seventh century CE, depending how you count) stretched over a thousand years and multiple continents. As such, the styles vary quite a bit. **The focus of this paper is Late Republican (50BCE), in the city of Rome.** The goal of this paper is to provide an introduction to the garments and their social context. It's intended to be helpful for SCAdians who want to dress Roman with a modicum of accuracy. If you are Byzantine, Romano-Brit, etc., this may be helpful but you will need to continue your research. *Unattributed sketches are my own. Frescos are from Pompeii and other Vesuvian finds.*

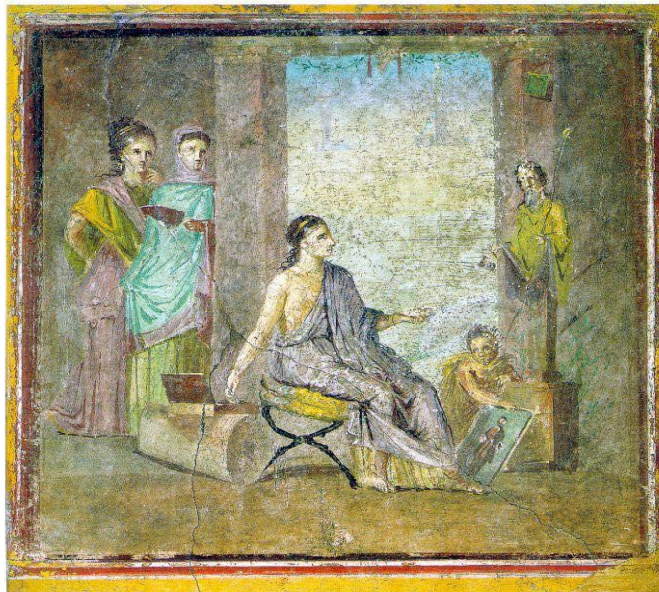


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A Note on Analyzing Artwork

Formal portraits of important, powerful women – empresses, goddesses, and wealthy ladies – were being presented as ideally modest and virtuous. As such, they are completely swathed in layers of fine cloth. However, when representing deities celebrating physical pleasure or love (or when symbolic art portrays a high status person as a deity), nudity is quite common. Understanding context is key!

Likewise, when looking at frescoes, it's important to segregate informal, private settings (inside the house, where showing skin is unimportant) from public appearances (dinner parties) depicted in the everyday life scenes, and separate those further from mythological stories with an abundance of bare breasts. The Vesuvian frescoes (found in the cities destroyed and preserved by Mt. Vesuvius in 79CE: Pompeii, Stabiae, Oplontis, and Herculaneum) often portray ancient Greek or Etruscan stories (Lessing, 137), and thus show anachronistic dress. This makes perfect sense – it's much more interesting to have your walls tell the story of Aphrodite or Hercules than the baker down the street – but it makes it harder to tease out what's actually contemporary Roman clothing vs. their idea of archaic style (Croom, 13). The epic tales, with their nudity, are more risqué than the normal dress of the times... perhaps an ancient version of the half-dressed hotties on our TV screens.

For the purposes of this paper, I have focused solely on portraits and scenes identified by experts in the field as everyday life. I've ignored anything with divine attributes, and those images labeled as representing history or mythology by professional archeologists and scholars. I also excluded the Villa of the Mysteries, since nobody seems to have a clue what's going on there. Hopefully, excluding anachronistic and metaphorical images will give us a more realistic idea of contemporary dress.

General notes

Romans generally wove a garment to size and used the rectangle right off the loom. Gores, curves, and other shaping concepts were not used. Sometimes T-tunics were woven as a single cross-shaped piece (used folded in half, with a cut head hole). Unless you are portraying a poor person who had to re-use fabric, the edges would have been selvedge. To duplicate this look, I hand sew hems using small, nearly invisible stitches. With heavy- and mid-weight linen and wool, I use threads from the fabric itself for a perfect color and texture match. Lightweight linen thread doesn't stand up as well to the sewing, so I use modern thread.

The body of the garment was a single solid color. Stripes (aside from the *clavii*, which we'll discuss later) generally only appear in this period on upholstery. Patterns appear in earlier cultures and later, in the Byzantine era, but not in Rome during the Republic or early Empire.

Pompeii frescos show white, natural, and pastel colors (soft yellow, sky blue, pale green, pink, etc.) for the layers that are linen. Aside from some blues, it's difficult to get linen to retain anything darker than a pastel. Wool takes dye beautifully and makes for a colorful *stola* or *palla* (see below), and in some cases *tunica*. The Romans loved color and, since dyes were expensive, it was another way to show off your wealth. For a really authentic look, avoid the super-saturated look of modern dyes. Black and other dark colors were usually reserved for mourning.

Although fancy trim is a handy way to lengthen a slightly-too-short *tunica*, and is very popular in the SCA, most images don't bear it out. Contrast edges were woven in and usually fairly simple - usually just a different solid color - although some were more complex (see the Hairdressing Fresco). If you use trim, stick to simple era-appropriate designs and avoid metallic thread unless your persona is extremely wealthy and/or high status.

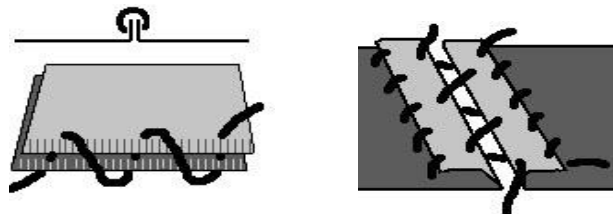
Materials

Linen (Fabrics-store.com, graylinelinen.com), and fine wool (sources listed in my *stola* article on wool at RomanaSum.com/papers) were most often used. Cotton was imported from Egypt and was pricier than linen, but by the 1st century CE it was considered a non-luxury good. Only very wealthy people, such as emperors and their families wore pure silk (1st century CE on) and gold thread. If using a re-purposed sari, choose one that's solid or just has edge trim. Beware the scattered "polka dot" patterns unless you are portraying a person from late antiquity. Wool-silk and wool-cotton blends are appropriate options for a wealthy persona. Don't neglect thrift stores: My favorite linen *tunica* used to be Ikea curtains!

Note: Wool has a sacred quality, because it's made from a live animal. All ritual clothing (priest robes, the *stola*, *vittae*, etc.) is made of wool. To represent her purity, a bride even wears woolen slippers! Part of a woman's duty is to make wool clothing for her family. Roman matrons were remembered as virtuous for their spinning and weaving; their industry with wool is often mentioned in epitaphs.

Seams

Without any extant garments from 50 BCE in Rome, we are left to make educated guesses on seaming techniques. The top and bottom edges would have been selvages. One advantage of the loose, unfitted garments is that the seams are not under stress. They are also not sites for decorative work, so a practical, simple solution seems appropriate. A simple "whip" or "overcast" stitch has worked well in my re-creations, and is borne out by other research (Jones, 2004). Left: Side and top view of overcast stitch. Right: My method of simulating selvages: Each edge is folded over and whipstitched, and then the two pieces of fabric are joined with another whipstitch. Images from *Archeological Sewing*.



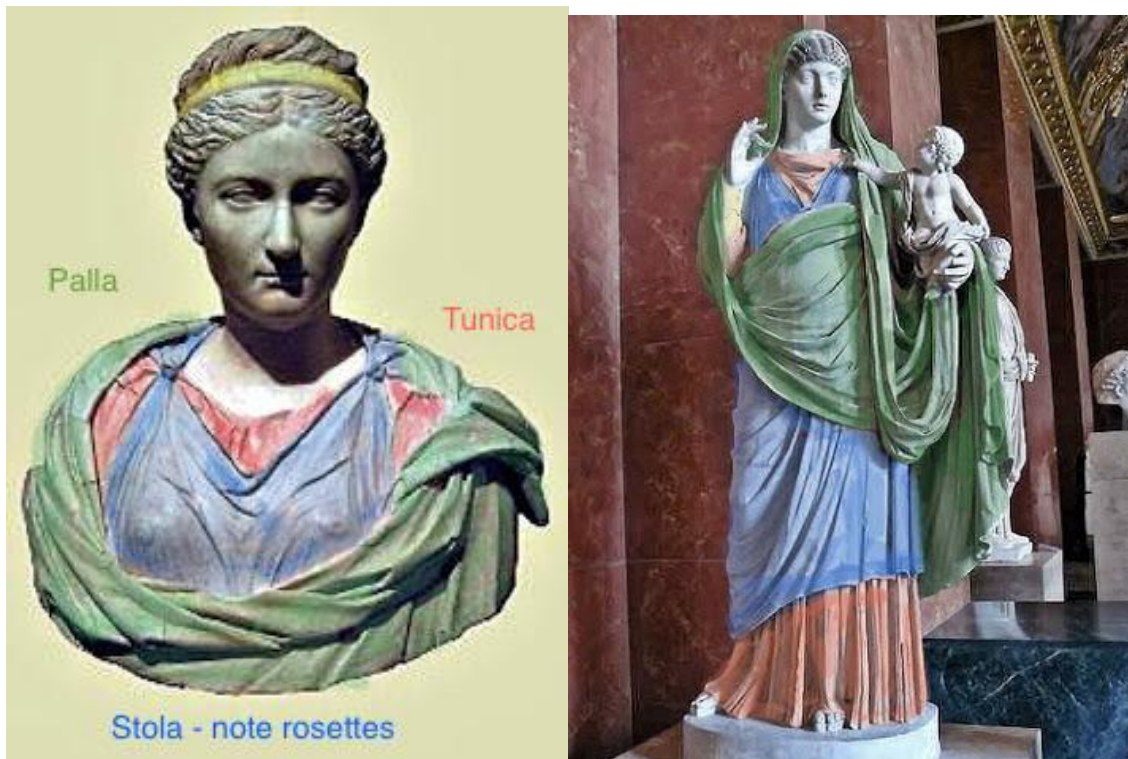
Thread was wool or linen, with bone or metal needles. Below: Roman bronze sewing needle. Metropolitan Museum of Art. 17.230.95



Female Clothing

- 1) ***Tunica* alone.** Appropriate for working women.
- 2) ***Tunica* and *palla*.** Appropriate for unmarried and lower status women in the Republican period, and all women later than that.
- 3) ***Tunica*, *stola*, and *palla*.** For matrons in the Republic and early Empire. Don't wear a tube *tunica* with a *stola*; you want a *tunica* type that has some "sleeve" to it.

It's difficult for the untrained eye (and even the trained one in some cases) to separate out the different layers of fabric. Dulcia MacPherson posted a collection of colorized statues that help differentiate between the garments. I've added some color-coded terms.



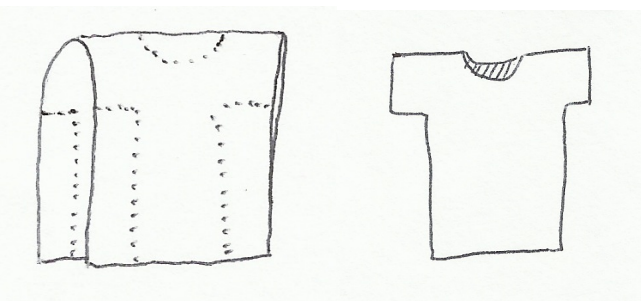
Women's Tunica

The *tunica* is the building block of the outfit. It can be worn alone, or with an unseen linen undertunic, called a *subucula*, *tunica interior*, or *camisa*. If you are portraying a working woman, stop the hem just below the knees or at mid-calf and you are done – you can use a *palla* (shawl) if you like but it's not required. Poorer people wore skimpier clothes for ease of movement, and because fabric was vastly expensive and time-consuming to make. The *toga* and *palla* were a way to show off that you can afford extra fabric and can swath yourself in extra layers because you aren't doing any physical work. In frescos, if the *tunica* is being worn as an underlayer, the fabric is translucent, and based on the tiny draped folds must be very, very thin.

For wealthier ladies, the *tunica* should cover the feet so just the toes are showing. Remember to belt your fabric and consider hems before cutting!

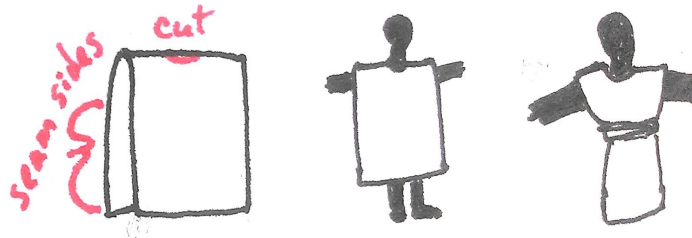
Four types of tunicas:

1) T-Tunic: Not commonly pictured, but seen in some sculptures of working women such as midwives and those selling bread in a bakery stall. These have a scoop neck, and the sleeves go almost to the elbow. They are occasionally seen long-sleeved in frescos (see the hairdresser). This relief of a birthing scene was found in Ostia.



To make a T-tunic, use fabric twice as long as your shoulders to the ankle, plus extra for belting (and hems if needed). Cut out the neck and extra width under the arms along dotted lines. Leave enough room for ease of movement. Seam under the arms and along the body. Hem the neck. Done! For long sleeves, you can make them separately and join them. Wear it belted under the breasts (optional for slaves). In the Imperial period, women started wearing *clavi* (see men's section). Bonus: the cut-out pieces work well as a headscarf!

2) Straight *Tunica (Tunica Recta)*: This is a simple rectangle, folded in half with a head hole cut, OR two identical squares, front and back, seamed on the top and sides. It's identical in construction to the male tunic, with the option of making the front longer to create a neck drape. "Sleeves" are created by the excess fabric (wider than shoulders) simply draping down the arm.



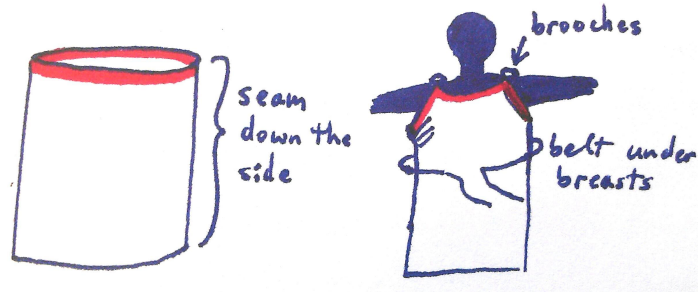
You can also make a *tunica recta* with two pieces of fabric (front and back) or by wrapping fabric around the side, with an arm slit cut out. Also see the left arm on the Peplos sketch below for another armhole option. Symmetry wasn't essential.

3) Tube *Tunica*: AKA Doric chiton when worn by Greeks. This is the simplest. You literally step into a wide tube and fasten it at the shoulders, back over the front. The top edge becomes both the neckline and the underarm. Leave the front longer than the back to create the V drape. You can also pin one shoulder and wear it Greek-style (see hairdressing & dinner scene frescoes).

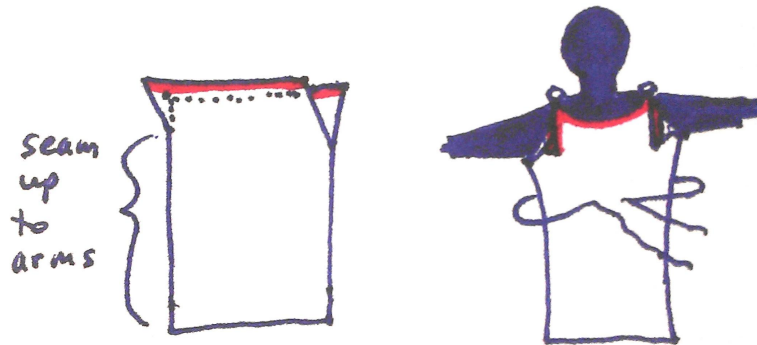


This lightweight linen is flattering even on bigger girls, and wow, is it ever comfortable! I've been known to wear it out in the modern world on super-hot days.

The tube size: Measure from the center of an armpit, up to the shoulder where it will be pinned, across the back of the neck to the other shoulder, and down to the other armpit. Multiply that by two and add about 5 inches so you get a nice drape in the front. That's the circumference of the tube.



This second method is similar but requires less yardage.

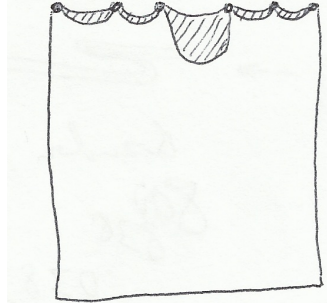
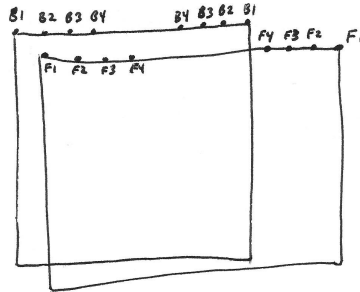


For this to work in a properly flattering manner, **you must use very fine cloth with a good drape.** If you are using a modern bra, I recommend pinning the shoulders to the bra straps to hide them. Secure at the shoulders with fabric rosettes or brooches. Arrange the tube seam to be under an arm to hide it.

A variation, called the **Peplos**, has an extra flap made by folding the top over before pinning. It was worn by lots of women in Greece, but may have been limited to girls and virgins in Roman culture. My research continues! Sketch, right, by Angelo Todaro, <http://www.angelotodaro.it/>



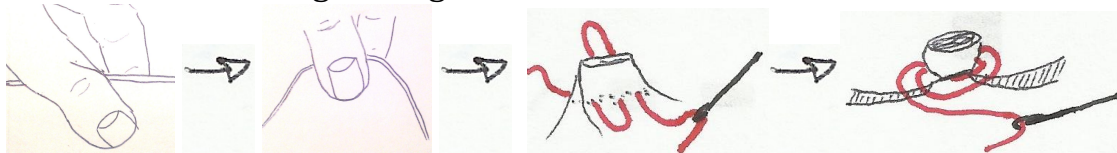
4) Gap-sleeve: AKA ionic chiton when used by Greeks. This is made from 2 rectangles, with the front wider than the back. 4-8 small buttons or fabric rosettes hold the front and back together. About 5” of extra cloth in the front creates a draped “V neck” look. Elbow-to-elbow is a good width.



See the rosettes along the top of my arms? Join F1 to B1, F2 to B2, etc., with a rosette or button. The number of gathers is variable. I usually do the ends of the “sleeves” first, then the neck, then figure out how many to add in between depending on the width of the fabric. Note that there is more space in the center front than the back. This is what creates the V fold. Of course you would belt this, and possibly cover it with a *stola* depending on your era and status.

Wrinkles are period!

Rosettes are made by holding both layers of fabric, then pulling it up a little, sewing through the base, wrapping additional thread around the base of the rosette, and stitching through to secure it.





You can also use plain metallic or enamel buttons, 0.25-0.5" ([see my paper on gap-sleeve fasteners](#)). If you go the button route, gather the fabric a little for good draping in the gaps. These are sewn in place, not meant to unfasten in the sense of modern buttons.



These buttons from Pompeii with round and triangular loops are interesting. I'm just guessing here (I can't find any artistic representations of them in use), but they may have been used to create a wider gap in the sleeve, or to connect layers of tunicas.



The Greeks would simply belt the front and back of the ionic tunica and allow breezes to enter the sides of the garment. Romans, being more modest, seamed the sides, just leaving the top 6-8" open as armholes.

Note that sizing is based on height and arm length – you can gain or lose weight and still wear the same clothes. This also makes for easy loaner garb.

Stola

This garment had four major identifying features:

- 1) Worn as an overdress
- 2) Made of extremely lightweight wool
- 3) Constructed as a simple tube, with straps, round pins, or fabric knots at the shoulders
- 4) Worn double belted, to create an extra folded layer at the hips

While the *tunica* appeared alone, the *stola* was only ever worn over a *tunica*. This was the overgarment that declared “I am a respectable Roman matron,” starting in the 3rd century BCE. Unmarried girls, slaves, and “immoral” women (adulteresses, etc.) were forbidden to wear it. Note that the *stola* went out of fashion in the early Empire, which infuriated uptight Roman men. Under Emperor Tiberius (d. 37 CE), a law was proposed to make the *stola* a requirement for *matronae*, but failed. From then onwards, to wear one might be dreadfully out of fashion, but a would be a powerful statement of your *pudicitia* (modesty, moral fiber) as a good Roman matron. Portraits of empresses, goddesses, and powerful women were often dressed in *stola* to emphasize the laudable nature of their subject long after women stopped wearing it. By the Flavian period (69-96 CE), the *stola* no longer represented all decent women married to Roman citizens: It had become solely the garb of the 600 senatorial wives. Nobody wore the *stola* past the mid-2nd century CE.

FYI: Sebesta’s book reports that “*institia*” means “strap,” but this is incorrect. It refers to a contrasting colored band at the foot of the *stola*, an optional but popular embellishment. I’m guessing that it was meant to be removed and cleaned, or replaced, as it got soiled in the streets.



Hera Campana. Marble, 2nd century AD. Musée du Louvre, # 21523
Cameo showing a stola with braided straps. 90-100 CE, British Museum.

Use extremely lightweight wool, as fine as you can find to get a nice drape. It may be tempting to use a sari for one, but keep in mind that the *stola* should be wool, and that the patterns on the silk saris are more appropriate for the Byzantine period, long after the *stola* died. They were made in solid colors or with a contrasting border (*institia*). Length varies from a few inches above the ankle to floor-length. Construction is exactly like the tube *tunica* above, with straps, rosettes, or pins at the shoulders. The major difference is that the *stola* was longer, and worn with a second belt around the hips. The fabric was folded over the belt, hiding it. This increases the visual size of the hips (the better to make more sons for Rome!) with the extra layers. Usually worn with a gap-sleeve *tunica*. The seam is on the left, so it's mostly hidden by the *palla*.

To make one with braided straps: Start with a tube. Braid two straps and sew them in place. Attach them at the back first. I went about 6" apart to help avoiding them sliding off my shoulders. A wider length between the front straps will give you that sexy drape.



Thin plain single and double straps are options, too. Check out Empress Livia's bangs (58BCE-29CE)!

A few years ago, a re-enactor wrote a blog post about an "experimental" stola she created by turning the garment sideways, so there was a seam down the chest to create a deep V neck. *In that article*, she declared it non-historic: Some people have taken it as research and run with it. In the SCA you can wear whatever you want, but please don't mistake that variation for accurate.

For a comprehensive analysis of the construction and social context of the *stola*, please see my expanded article at RomanaSum.com/papers.

Palla



A wool *palla* layered over a wool *stola* (tube style) and a linen gap-sleeved *tunica*.

The *palla* was a long rectangle of cloth, usually wool. It ranged from 3.5-5 yards long, and was wide enough to act as a headcover (again, protecting the *pudicita*) out in public. It crosses the torso horizontally in some statues, although it's only held in place by arm position. Pins weren't used with the *palla* - at least none are visible in any of the art. Some had contrasting trim either along one or both long sides, or both short sides. Fringe is also seen, infrequently. I am a rotund 4'10", and most comfortable with a 3.6-4yd *palla*. Longer drags on the ground, and shorter won't stay in place. A grabby light wool is less hassle than a slippery fabric like silk.

To put one on, start with an end at your left waist and toss most of it over the left shoulder. It goes around the back to the right side, across the chest, and back over the left shoulder. If you have extra length, leave more draped over in front when you begin. Note: If you are left-handed, you might want to reverse sides.



The *palla* is sometimes seen wrapped around the waist in domestic scenes. Remember it's hot and humid inside, so a thin transparent layer of linen is all most women seemed to wear inside with only slaves and family looking on.

Brooches

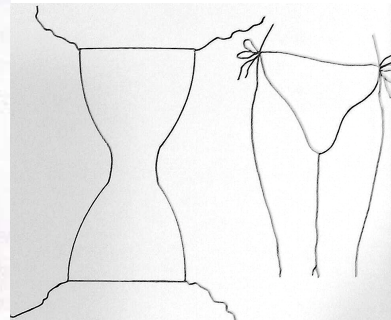
Round ones (about 1.5" diameter) appeared at the shoulders, joining the halves (back over front) of a tunic or stola. Fibulas, ancient safety pins, are also used to join shoulders or hold your cloak in place. Google "make wire fibula" for easy tutorials. Romano-Brits have fantastic, colorful enameled brooches, both round and in animal shapes. Bronze or gold, usually.



Belts

Thin rope or tablet woven belts were worn just under the breasts. They were tied in the front, (overhand or bow knot) with symmetrical loops hanging down and the ends tucked along the belt, or hanging loose. In the case of the *stola*, there was a second belt low on the hips, hidden by a flap of draping cloth. Images of goddesses usually wear both belts. This helps visually enlarge the hips. The standard of beauty in that time was smaller breasts (the wraps help with that) and wider, childbearing hips. Greek women (and sometimes men) would criss-cross a belt across their busts in a harness-type configuration. So far I've only seen this in images of Greeks, not Romans

Undergarments



Strophium (breast wrap): A long strip of linen that can go around you 6-7 times, about 5 inches wide, or wider if needed. There is some conflicting evidence as to whether it was used as a flattener or a pushup bra – possibly depending on the circumstance. Tie a knot in front and tuck the ends under.

Subligaculum (underwear): These were bikini-style, usually linen. There's an extant red leather one, probably for an athlete or circus performer. To

make one, cut out an hourglass shape and attach strings at the four corners. Sketch from Sebesta. See also “sublingar” in men’s section.

Shoes

Use sandals (flip-flop or T-strap style) or thin leather slippers (rounded, natural toe). Laces are legit, although they are rudimentary. Note visible shoes in other illustrations in this document. Shoes are a massive topic too big for this paper!



1st century, Jerusalem

Jewelry

Bangle bracelets, rings, drop earrings, necklaces... there’s too much to discuss here. Snakes, phalli, (ask me about Roman sexual imagery) and orbs were common themes. Pearls, emeralds, and carnelian were favorites, along with other stones, amber, and glass. Lots of gold! Silver was less common. In the Empirical period, wealthy women sometimes wore gem headbands.

See my papers and guide to making your own Roman jewelry at RomanaSum.com/papers.

See my Pinterest collections. <http://www.pinterest.com/rosecityacupunc/>

If you want to buy or commission some period adornment, see TulliasJewels.com

Hair

If you want to get fancy, you’ll appreciate the towering Flavian curls and other craziness of the Empire period. The upper class ladies sported very elaborate structures of braids and twists. Wealthy women had ornatrixes to do their hair and makeup. They also had both the time to sit still for it, and the need to present themselves as fashionable. Janet Stephens has recreated a number of styles in easy-to-follow [YouTube videos](#).

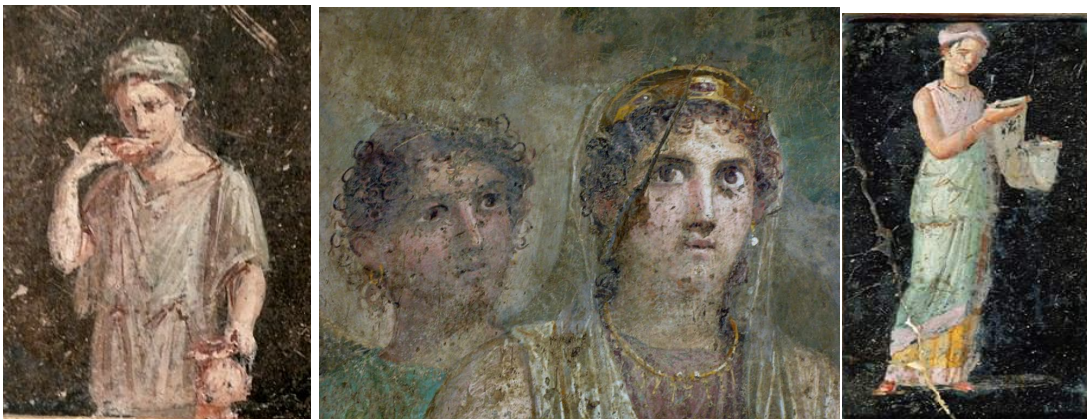


Note: Married women are often portrayed with thin strips of woolen cloth, called vittae, wrapped around their head. Imperial period women used diadems - a great way to use your SCA circlet.

Julia Caesaris filia was Augustus' daughter, 39 BCE – 14 C

Fortunately, there is a hairstyle that is documentable and simple enough to handle by yourself. Simply gather the hair at the nape of the neck. Some images have the front combed into small wing-like sections, while others come smoothly back. Make a single braid and coil it into a bun. Use a bone bodkin (hair stick) to secure it, or sew it into place with a bone needle and wool yarn. Even the great Cleopatra used this style.

If your hair is short, duplicate this look by making a ponytail. Buy some fake hair to match and braid it, then sew it into a cup shape. Using a bodkin, pin it in place over the ponytail. Wigs are period! Heawraps are also an option. See my Pinterest for more styles.



Other periods

The Late Roman Empire aesthetic was very different. They went heavy on the bling and patterns. Check out this post:

<https://romanasum.com/2016/04/06/byzantine-babe-attire/> and this site:

<http://www.comitatus.net/gallerydresscivlady.html>

<http://www.comitatus.net/gallerydresscivlady.html>

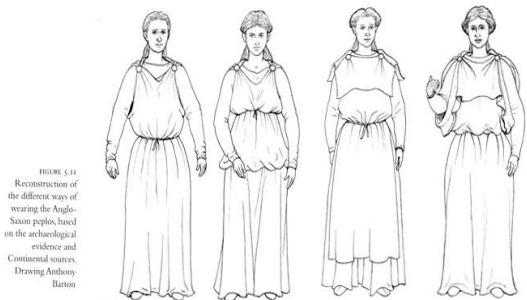
<http://www.comitatus.net/gallerydresscivlady.html>

Romano-British: For colder weather, wear a long-sleeved *T-tunica* with a wool tube dress over it. You can add a rectangular plaid wrap, pinned with a *fibula* or penannular brooch. See sketches below. I often wear this at outdoor events when it cools off, and refer to it as Romano-An Tirian.



Left: Penannular Brooch. Shrewsbury Museums Service

Below: Romano-British recreations by Penelope Rogers.



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Mid Empire:

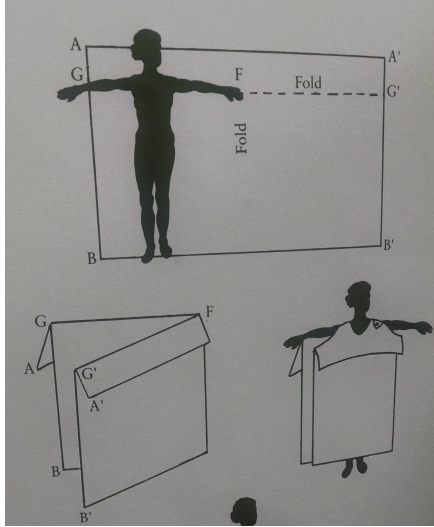


Here's an interesting sarcophagus from Rome, 150-160 CE. Note the wide waistband and thick platform shoes (left), and the cape (!) on the right. These are musicians, so this style may be performer-specific. This period is not my area of expertise or primary interest, so I leave it to the reader to do some more research. Louvre, Ma 475; MR 880; N 1035.

Girls

Girls dressed like their mothers, in that richer ones had more layers and jewelry, while poorer (i.e. more active) girls were seen in tunics only. The *palla* is not worn by girls, but they did use fillets (*vittae*) in their hair. They also wore peplos-type tunics.

There is an article of clothing, the *supparus*, specific to girls. We know it is made of linen, covers the thighs and has short sleeves, and is "narrow," so I imagine it was a close-fitting T-Tunic. This explains a statue I saw in the MFA of a pre-teen girl wearing a T-tunic under a tube *tunica*.



Peplos sketch from Sebesta.

Some girls are portrayed wearing a *peplos*, which was originally a Greek garment. This is known to have been worn by the Vestal Virgins, and seems to be suitable for virgins of all ages, but my research is incomplete.

Girls often wear a *lunula* (crescent moon shape) amulet. Some adult women wear them, too.



Southern Italy 200-100BCE, gold pendant with inlaid garnet, British Museum

Celtic bronze lunula 1st c. -2nd c. CE

Citizen children of both genders wore the *toga praetexta* (*toga* with a red-purple striped border). Both the wool and the stripe had apotropaic (protective) properties. In addition to warding off evil, the garment warned people to use proper language in their presence, and not to take sexual advantage of the children.

Outfits in Artwork

At the end of a dinner party, below, there's a drunk lady with her pale blue *palla* on – she's headed home with the aid of her (no doubt long-suffering) slave. Her friends are waving farewell. Note the one-shouldered tube *tunica* on the lady still seated. I also like the striped upholstery, cups, and furniture visible here. Fresco from the Triclinium, House of the Chaste Lovers.



Usually gap-sleeve metal buttons were not worn with shoulder brooches. At least one (either shoulders or arms) was knotted, or the *stola* had straps.

Marble Erato, muse of lyric poetry; Roman, 2nd century CE. Found near Tivoli. Vatican Museum (Hall of the Muses).



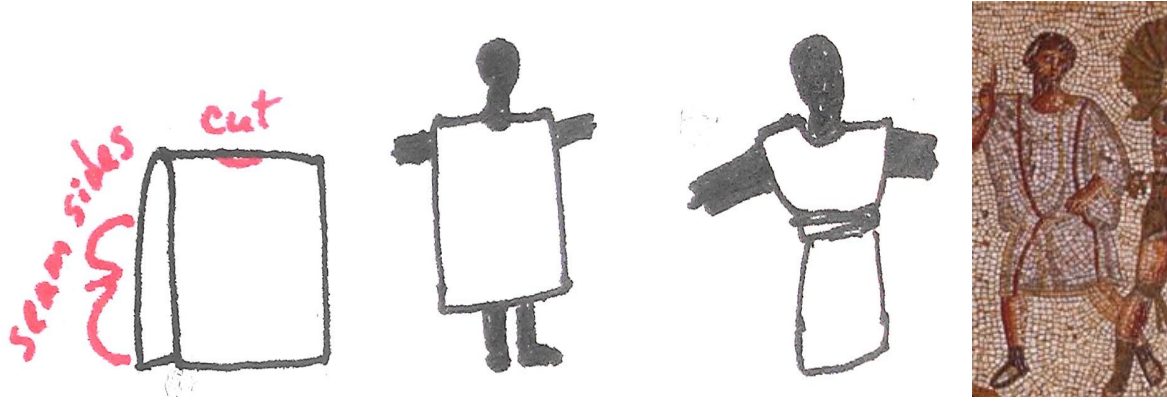
1st-2nd century CE. *Tunica recta*, tube *stola*, *palla* around the waist. “Flip-flop” style sandals, roses in her hair.

Pompeiiian Hairdressing fresco: On the far left, we have a woman wearing a long-sleeved (? Is that fabric at her elbow? Or is the “hem” at her wrist a bracelet?), natural-colored *tunica*, with a saffron and white *palla*. Next to her a lady has a white *palla* with blue trim over a natural tube *tunica*. Second from the right, she’s wearing a gap-sleeve *tunica* with gold fasteners. Note that her gap-sleeve *tunica* has a deep, ornate border, which would have been tablet woven. She’s also wearing tan leather shoes. The hairdresser on the far right is wearing a long-sleeved white *tunica* under a blue *palla*. Notice the *stola* has passed out of fashion for this everyday scene.



Men's clothing

Tunic



Mosaic from Leptus Magna, in modern Libya.

Tunica recta: “Sleeves” were created by the excess fabric (wider than shoulders) simply draping down the arm.



Note the thin *clavi* on the far left gentleman in this fresco of a Pompeii dinner scene. The darker *toga* probably represents mourning, since it's unlikely to be the reddish-purple of an extremely high status man (emperor) given the setting and the thin *clavi*. The man next to him, standing behind the bench in a simple tunic, is probably his slave. The center man with a white *toga* / tan *tunica* is chatting with a woman wearing a green *palla* pulled up on her head as if she just arrived or is just leaving. Between that and the changing of shoes (indoor slippers vs. dirty outdoor gear), this party is either breaking up or just getting started. Oh wait... the inebriated gent in the lower right corner gives it away.

The linen or woollen tunic was the basic garment for all men, no matter what their status. Slaves had rough-woven, shorter tunics (just above the knee), sometimes lacking a belt. Wealthy men would have finer fabric, often in white to show a lack of physical labor, and the ability to pay for the fuller to re-bleach them. But, again, Romans loved their colors, and white was by no means the only option! Tunics would hit below just the knee or longer for older or high status men. The *tunica talerus* (ankle-length) was acceptable for the elderly and frail, but mocked as effeminate for younger men. Linen undertunics (*subucula*) were optional.

Tunic construction is very simple: just a rectangle of linen or wool (shoulder-to-shoulder for workers or elbow-to-elbow for higher status), and twice as long as you need. Remember to include hems and belting in your length calculations. Fold it in half and cut a head hole. Seam up the sides, leaving room for an armhole. Wear with a belt, unless you are portraying a slave. Military men would wear leather belts, with the end hanging down in front. There are no pants, unless you are late Roman, or from the northern conquered lands.

Clavii, twinned reddish-purple vertical stripes, ran from the edge of the neck hole down. During the Republic, the stripes were used for class identification. Tunics were plain for most men. Thin stripes were for equestrians, and broad stripes were reserved for high status men like senators. During the Empire period, *clavii* became a general fashion choice, in varied colors, for men of all statuses, and then gradually for both genders.

Fancy dining calls for a matching long tunic and mantle (rectangular cloak). This outfit is called a *synthesis* ("set"), and is also worn to celebrate Saturnalia (more info at RomanaSum.com/papers).

Toga

A word on the *toga*: It evolved from an earlier Etruscan garment, the *tebenna*. In the early Republic (500s BCE), it was worn by both genders. By the 2nd century BCE, there were specific types with very rigid social rules. Slaves were forbidden to wear the *toga*.

toga praetexta – white with a red-purple stripe. Protective, for children, and for the ruling class

toga virilis / toga alba / toga pura - man's formal attire, usually plain white

toga candida – bleached to dazzling white, to represent purity, worn by men running for office

toga pulla – a dark toga for mourning men

toga picta / toga purpurea – dyed and embroidered, for special events like a Triumph (men only)

toga muliebris – Darker colored, for prostitutes. Expensive courtesans wore translucent silk or silk-blend.



Digitally restored Emperor Caligula, Blackbird Archives. Tunic and matching *toga* with wide (high-status) stripes.

For a formal or business occasion (like SCA court), you'll want a *toga virilis*, the Roman business suit. They are a serious hassle and require constant fussing to stay on since they aren't pinned (retinue helps). White, with the same stripe rules as tunics.

The wrap and drape of the toga created a sort of front pocket, called the *sinus*, that was used with varying degrees of success by men who didn't want to entrust their burdens to their slaves. There's a story about a senator who was embarrassed by his lover's shoe falling from his *sinus* during a public oration.



Republican *togae* are smaller and simpler than the later Imperial version, which may help explain why men finally got fed up and quit wearing the cumbersome things. See my *stola* paper for more information on that social shift. A future version of this paper will explore the evolution of the *toga* in more detail.

Armbands

Nope. Those leather wrist cuffs are a Hollywood invention.

Subligar (underwear)

A linen loincloth, worn by men and women. Gladiators performed wearing these with wide leather belts.



Image from "Cómo se cubrió un cuerpo."

Shoes

Use either sandals or plain thin leather shoes or ankle boots with natural toes. They get more complicated but that's a good start. Note: Men, do not wear sandals with a toga! That's like wearing Nikes with a tuxedo.

Hair

If your hair is short, brush it forward. If it's curly, use olive oil as a taming product. Facial hair trends changed to match the current ruler. Most civilians were clean-shaven until Hadrian, who adopted the soldier's beard. No goatees or moustaches – it's all or nothing.

Jewelry

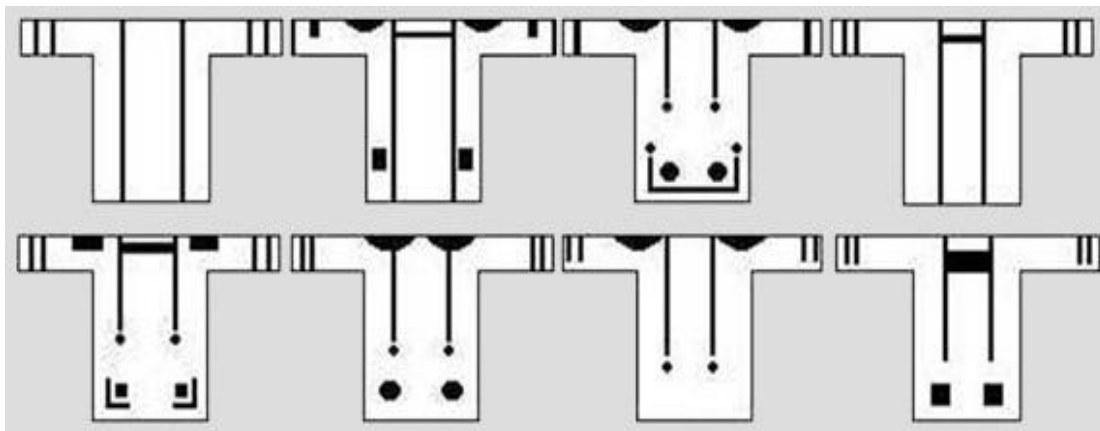
A nice signet ring is always in good taste. That and cloak pins are pretty much it, unless you are celebrating / super high status and wearing a gold laurel wreath.

Cold weather

Rectangular wool cloak pinned at one shoulder with a 2-3" round brooch. In northern conquered lands, adopt the local customs such as leg wraps, pants, etc.

Other Periods

Google "Coptic tunic" if you like weaving!





Hunting mosaic from the Esquiline Hill in Rome, 300-350 CE. Note leg wraps, short cloaks.

Boys

Boys wore tunics. Even the poor kids could have *clavi* (stripes), which serve a protective function. See the *toga praetexta* note in the girl's section. Also for protection, freeborn boys wear a *bulla* (amulet pouch). This would be a small leather bag on a string necklace, unless he was wealthy enough to have a bronze or even gold one. At about 15, a boy was considered a man. He traded his *bulla* for a *toga virilis* in a ceremony.



Social Context

Scraps of fabric, especially when rectangular and simply decorated, are not the most fascinating objects in history. What's captivating about Roman clothing to me is what it reveals about their culture.

Roman history is full of sumptuary laws regulating jewelry, the use of purple dyes, and other conspicuous consumption. These were a people very concerned with morality and righteous living. Likewise, the obsession of each life-stage and status having its own uniform helped people know their roles and the roles of others they encountered.

There is an interesting passage in Cicero's Second Philippic (43BCE) where he criticizes Marcus Antonius - known to the modern world as Mark Antony - for his youthful indiscretions. It seems as soon as he had attained the status of manhood, donning the *toga virilis*, M. Antonius drew scorn by being a passive sexual partner to Scribonius Curio. He began wearing the *toga muliebris*! "Curio then took him off the street, as it were, and set him up 'in a stable and fixed wedlock.'" It was, claims Cicero, as if he had given Antonius a *stola*. (Edmunson, 36).

This anecdote reveals the social significance of clothing for the Romans. Each stage of life has its own garments, and people literally wrapped themselves in their identities. In this case, Marcus' feminine (receptive) actions put him into women's wardrobe.¹

Imagine a family swelling with pride the first time a boy dressed as a man, or when a young bride donned her first *stola*. In Roman life, linen and wool hold the weight of cultural mores. Getting it right - or as right as possible - means understanding the context, and respecting the traditions of a culture that still shapes how we see the world.

¹ The Romans didn't have a concept of homosexuality in the modern sense. This was more misogyny than homophobia, but that's a subject for another paper....

Resources

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