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## Readers' Guide

# Clothing and Adornment

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*Alicia J. Batten*

### Abstract

This guide introduces readers to some of the primary and secondary literature on clothing and adornment in antiquity, spanning ancient near eastern contexts to those of early Christianity. In particular, the discussion examines the social roles of these phenomena, including how they can function as symbols of power, status and honor. Gender issues also come to the fore, as women's dress faces increasing scrutiny by male writers.

*Key words:* Biblical clothing, Biblical adornment, Status attire, Greco-Roman fashions, Priestly attire, Gender clothing styles

Just as clothing and adornment can communicate significant messages in cultures throughout the world today, dress and decoration bore tremendous social significance in antiquity. Indeed, there is evidence that adornment extends as far back as our Neanderthal ancestors, and our friends and close relatives in the primate realm, at least those living in captivity, will adorn themselves with whatever is available and show it off (Schwarz: 24). In the ancient world, wealth, status, religion, culture and more could be imparted in the type of garments a woman, man or child displayed, or in the manner in which she or he wore them. Clothes and accessories were therefore not simply forms of decoration, or a means to protect oneself against harsh weather conditions, but social tools used to convey specific identities or aspirations to identities that individuals or groups wished to embody (Swift: 217–18). The meaning of particular items was also context-specific insofar as in one geographic region or historical moment a given piece could represent one thing

while it could signify something quite different elsewhere or at another time (Hodder: 217). But wherever and whenever people got dressed, it is clear that the way in which they clothed themselves was much more than a question of personal taste, but a “language” (Roach & Eicher 1979: 7) that humans used symbolically to reflect values, aspirations, style, and status.

Interestingly, anthropologists and sociologists have his-

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torically paid relatively little attention to clothing in comparison to the study of language and tool making as important characteristics of humans and their immediate ancestors (Schwarz: 23–45). Fortunately this situation has changed in the past 30 years (see, e.g., Schneider; Eicher 2000; for a thorough bibliography, see Tranberg Hansen), and the anthropology of dress is now flourishing. As one anthropologist has written, “An understanding of how and why a man [sic] gets dressed, as well as what happens once he [sic] does, is a move back towards the basics” (Schwarz: 40). Scholars examine the roles of clothes and personal decoration with regard to gender (Barnes & Eicher; Sciamia & Eicher), personal and group identity (Davis; Roach-Higgins, Eicher, & Johnson), ethnicity (Eicher 1995), power (Polhemus & Procter), sexuality (McDowell), social psychology (Kaiser), and how these phenomena can uphold and/or protest the social order in general (Roach & Eicher 1965). Dress and adornment are now established topics within the social sciences, and therefore those who study these issues in antiquity have a rich body of literature from which to draw.

As mentioned above, clothing and personal decorations are characteristic of all known societies, and we find numerous references to such items in the Bible and countless other texts of antiquity. One has only to think of Adam and Eve and their clothier, God. The reader is therefore requested to keep in mind that as there are extensive references to this topic throughout the primary evidence, this guide is introductory and simply highlights some key texts and ideas for consideration.

### **Clothing and Adornment in the Ancient Near East**

M. E. Vogelzang and W. J. van Bekkum (1986) provide a helpful analysis of clothing imagery in a variety of ancient near eastern texts. Descriptions of dress appear in all kinds of literature, including myths, hymns, letters and documents dealing with bureaucratic and legal matters (Vogelzang & van Bekkum: 266). Garments were expensive in ancient Mesopotamia, and it is quite likely that most people owned only a single item of clothing, a characteristic indicating poverty as illustrated by the Akkadian story of the “Poor Man of Nippur” who was “clad in a garment that had no change” (Vogelzang & van Bekkum: 267). Nudity typically meant that one was at the very bottom of the social scale, whether

because of indebtedness or because one’s provider neglected to provide this basic necessity against nature’s elements. Perhaps even worse, nudity subjected one to utter dishonor in the eyes of the community (Maier: 26–27; see also Neyrey: 121) and reducing a person to nakedness was viewed very negatively (Job 22:6; Maier: 26). The return of clothing was thus perceived as a restoration of dignity, as demonstrated by the boasting of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon who claims that in providing clothing to some freed prisoners he had also made them again into Babylonians, or civilized beings (Vogelzang & van Bekkum: 267).

The notion that clothing is an indicator of civilization is perhaps most famously demonstrated in the Mesopotamian myth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when the wild and hairy figure Enkidu rubs the shaggy growth on his body, anoints himself with oil, puts on clothing and becomes like a man (ANE 77). Likewise throughout this narrative, exchanging dirty clothes for clean ones and adorning oneself has a positive effect on other people, although when the hero of the epic, Gilgamesh, did this after a battle, it caused the goddess Ishtar to fall in love with him, eventually leading to disaster (ANE 83). But the effect of his elegant attire was clearly quite powerful. Unsoiled, undamaged clothes and stylish appearance are thus generally associated with positive characteristics and circumstances, whereas wearing dirty garments connotes humility, degradation and death. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the dead are dressed in dirty clothes (ANE 97–98), whereas the brave and strong are clean and oiled.

The value of clothing and adornment in the ancient near east is further demonstrated by the fact that kings would send garments and other textiles as gifts, as evident in the El-Amarna archives (Vogelzang & van Bekkum: 271). The possession of these fine items was a sign of status and elevation within the group, although it was also true that ostentatious or inappropriate dress was not appreciated. Wearing royal colors such as red or purple would look ridiculous on someone who was not of imperial status, and thus one finds proverbs such as the following Mesopotamian example:

The wise man is girt with a loin cloth,  
the fool is clad in a scarlet cloak [see Lambert: 228].

Clearly clothing could be not only an indicator of riches and status, but also a sign of character. It was not enough to be wealthy to be credited with elegant appearance; one

also had to possess an honorable status that had been either inherited or earned.

As clothing was often little more than a piece of linen in Egypt (although they did have a variety of garments, including sleeved clothing; see Marcar: 34), hairstyles and make-up also served as important communication tools in this context (see Vogelsang-Eastwood). Both men and women took hair-dressing and make-up very seriously, not only for the sake of physical beauty, but for ritual concerns, and as protection from nature as dark kohl around the eyes could reduce the glare of the sun and provided antiseptic benefits from bothersome flies and blowing sand (Fletcher: 9). Moisturizing oils were used regularly, as were perfumes. Unlike many ancient cultures, the Egyptians did not differentiate gender through hairstyle, at least not greatly. Men often had long hair as it was associated with strength and virility (as it was in a variety of cultural settings), and wigs and hair extensions were used by men and women given the evidence for these things found in the tombs of both sexes (Fletcher: 7–8).

### Clothing and Adornment in the First Testament

Given the widespread attention to clothing and adornment throughout the cultures of the ancient near east, it should not be surprising that these topics garner attention throughout the literature of the First Testament. The most frequent word used for clothing, both men's (Gen 39:12) and women's (Gen 38:14), is *beged*, which appears some 200 times and applies equally to the rags of a leper (Lev 13:45) as to the robes of the high priest (Lev 8:30) (Edwards: 232). We find both complicated instructions for dress, especially priestly dress, throughout this literature, and symbolic references to garments within various narratives.

Probably the most important item of dress for men was the mantle, or large piece of fabric that was draped about the body and fastened with a belt or pins. This piece of clothing is not identified with a single term. Sometimes it is called a *šimlâ* (Exod 12:34) which could be used to assist in carrying things over the shoulders, or a *kěšût*, an outer garment that Exodus 22:26–27 insists must be returned to its original owner before sundown if taken as a pawn, for it was used to cover up while sleeping.

The hem was a crucial element of this *kěšût* or cloak. The hem, as an extension of the wearer's power and char-

acter, could be employed as a signature when pressed upon a document (Horn Prouser: 27). Tassels or fringes on the hem had a long tradition in the ancient Near East, for there is visual evidence that people wore garments with fringed edges in ancient Egypt, at least from the time of Thutmose II (ca. 1490–1436 BCE) and definitely among the Assyrians from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Bertman: 121–22). Usually these tassels symbolized a special status as they appear on depictions of gods, kings and great warriors (Bertman: 128). S. Bertman suggests that this special status is one reason why the biblical texts decree that tassels must be worn as a sign of God's covenant with Israel (Num 15:37–41), for the people are "God's own treasure" (Bertman: 128). Regardless, among the ancient Israelites the more ornate and complicated the hem of this garment, the more social status and power the wearer possessed (Milgrom: 61–65).

Archaeological evidence indicates that ancient near eastern males wore undergarments, somewhat similar to a tunic—a predecessor to the Greek *chitōn* and Roman tunic (Edwards: 233). They had various types of headgear, including turbans and helmets for war (as depicted on the Sennacherib stele). While priests had turbans of fine linen, the high priest wore a crown from which a gold plate engraved with the words "Holy to the Lord" hung by a blue thread (Exod 39:30–31). Footwear primarily took the form of sandals, the absence of which indicated poverty or mourning, as when Isaiah removed his sandals as a symbolic portrayal of the humiliation and defeat of the Egyptians and Ethiopians who would be invaded by Assyria and forced to walk barefoot and naked into exile (Isa 20:1–6). Some men also wore jewelry such as signet rings (Esth 3:10) which would again indicate rank and status within the community (Edwards: 234).

Similar vocabulary is used for men's and women's clothes throughout the First Testament, although it is stipulated in Deuteronomy that there should be no cross dressing (Deut 22:5). Women wore more jewelry than men, including earrings, nose rings, bracelets and necklaces (Ezek 16: 10–14), and sometimes this adornment was associated with adultery which in a few famous passages became a metaphor for Israel's worship of foreign gods (Ezek 16:17–18; Hos 2:13). There is plenty of archaeological evidence for women's ornaments, as well as for perfume—perfume-making being a trade practiced generally by females (1 Sam 8:13) (see also Edwards: 235). Women sometimes wore veils on special oc-

casions or apparently if they were prostitutes as in the story of Tamar and Judah (Gen 38:14–19). They could also use their mantle as a veil if in mourning (Edwards: 235). A woman's hair was an aspect of her loveliness, repeatedly expressed, for instance, in the Song of Songs (4:3; 6:5). The only mention of the cutting of a woman's hair in the First Testament is Deuteronomy 21:12 in reference to a captive woman, whose nails will also be pared and captive's garb removed. This shaving of the head, which was done at the beginning of a 30-day period after which her captor could decide whether or not to take her as a wife, may have been an indicator of her mourning for being held captive, or her subjugation. However, medieval rabbinic interpreters suggested that the fact that the cutting was done at the beginning of the month long captivity may have made the woman unattractive to her captor, thus cooling his ardor (Bronner: 466). If this is the case, it underlines to what extent hair was perceived as an important dimension of a woman's beauty.

Leviticus provides information about hairstyle and personal grooming, primarily by describing what is unclean. Thus yellowed and thinning hair was highly suspect and usually declared unclean, whether it appeared on a man or a woman (Lev 13:29–37), and the leper was consigned to wearing torn clothes, letting his hair become dishevelled and living alone outside the camp (Lev 13:45–46). If and when the leper was healed, he was to wash all his clothes, shave off all his hair (including the beard and eyebrows), bathe, and resume living in the camp (Lev 14:1–9). If any signs of a leprosy disease appeared and remained in an item of clothing, the priest was eventually to burn the garment (Lev 13:47–59).

Priestly figures wore distinctive outerwear indicating their prestige and special status as intercessors to God on behalf of Israel. If their garments were made according to the biblical instructions, they must have been spectacular. Their ephod or long vest was created from fine linen, gold leaf and threads of multiple colors of gold, blue, purple, and crimson. The ephod had straps, each of which bore an onyx stone inset in gold filigree and inscribed with six names of the tribes of Israel respectively (Exod 28:6–12). Over the ephod they wore a breastplate which was again crafted from threads of many colors and flashed four rows of different colored gem stones which would again be set in gold filigree. Under the ephod the priest apparently donned a blue robe hemmed with colorful pomegranates and golden bells. These bells served as protection when the priest entered the

holy place, for they would courteously announce his entrance before God (Exod 28:31–35). S. Kim suggests that this elaborate and beautiful priestly clothing “divinized its wearer” (Kim: 21); whether or not this is the case, he is surely correct that this clothing and other various accoutrements such as a special turban and embroidered sash signify “that the priest becomes a representative figure of God's sacred people” (Kim: 21).

Numerous stories throughout the First Testament use the giving, taking and tearing of clothing in highly symbolic ways. The most famous example is Genesis 3:21, in which God clothed Adam and Eve after they became aware of their nakedness. Although they had attempted to dress themselves with leaves (Gen 3:7), the garments provided by God were presumably much more durable and more technologically sophisticated, thereby possibly indicating cultural progress (Vogelzang & van Bekkum: 273). Kim interprets Genesis 3:21 as ultimately a signal of the “restoration from death and shame to life and glory” (Kim: 17) and it is interesting to note Vogelzang's and van Bekkum's point that at the moment when the humans are being sent out of the garden and losing the nearness that they once had to the deity, God offered protection through the means of clothing (273). Whatever the final interpretation, at the very least one can say that the narrative's detail regarding dress conveys cultural and theological messages (see Neufeld 2005b).

V. Matthews (1995) has demonstrated how clothing has particular relevance to the Joseph narratives throughout Genesis 37–45. He argues that the motif of giving and receiving a garment throughout the stories serves as a signal of a status change (29). In Genesis 37: 3 Jacob gave Joseph “a long robe with sleeves” (NRSV—Matthews [30] notes that the traditional “coat of many colors” is a mistranslation in the LXX that was perpetuated in the Vulgate and the KJV) which identifies this son as possessing a special status; in this case, Joseph is Jacob's favorite. When Joseph's brothers betrayed him, they took his garment and thus reversed this special status. Here Matthews notes a compelling comparison with the story of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, who, as she makes her way through the underworld, gradually lost her life-force as she was systematically stripped of her clothing, leaving her a corpse, hung from a meat hook (Matthews: 31; see ANE 52–57). In the Joseph story, the robe becomes evidence used to convince Jacob of Joseph's death (Gen 37:32–33) reinforcing the notion that Joseph lost his

special role. Then, when Joseph became part of Potiphar's household, he undoubtedly wore a garment signifying his status as a slave overseer (Gen 39:5). Potiphar's wife then used Joseph's abandoned livery as evidence for his supposed sexual advances, and Joseph again lost his status, this time his status in an Egyptian household, and the garment "now becomes the basis for his shame" (Matthews: 32). But it does not stop here. In Genesis 41:42, Pharaoh arrayed Joseph in fine linens, gave him a signet ring, and placed a gold chain around his neck in gratitude for Joseph's wise interpretation of dreams. Joseph was reinstated. He had a new identity as a courtier in the Egyptian imperial household; he was so Egyptian that even his famished brothers did not recognize him (Gen 42:8) until he eventually convinced them of who he was in Genesis 45. Once they understood, Joseph sent them back to Canaan with sets of garments although he singled out Benjamin by giving him more (Gen 45:22). According to Matthews, this brings the cycle of stories full circle, with the brothers' acceptance of the clothing indicating that they were now Joseph's clients and subject to the rule of Pharaoh for whom Joseph worked (36).

J. R. Huddleston (2002) builds upon Matthews' work, arguing that the episode involving Judah and Tamar in Gen 38, which was perhaps a later addition, is nonetheless an important marker. The story appears just before the episode between Joseph and Potiphar's wife. As we have seen, garments figure importantly in Tamar's deception of Judah (Gen 38:13–19) yet Judah's "*divestiture* foreshadows Joseph's imminent *investiture* in Gen 41:42" (Huddleston: 61; italics original) for Judah had to pledge his signet ring among other things to Tamar until she received his promised kid from the flock. The juxtaposition between Judah's bad behavior (not giving Tamar to his son Shelah) and Joseph's good behaviour (refusing to sleep with Potiphar's wife) is highlighted by the garment motif and leads the reader to contrast the characters of Judah and Joseph.

One last study worth noting is the work of O. Horn Prouser (1996), who examines the role of clothing in the narratives of Saul and David throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. As David rises to power, he receives clothing from a variety of sources (1 Sam 17:38–39; 18:4) while Saul gives away or loses his clothing (1 Sam 17:38–39; 24:4; 31:9) and at one point strips off all of his attire (1 Sam 19:24). Keeping in mind that the reception of clothing is generally a positive sign in the First Testament while the loss of garments is negative,

with nakedness indicating poverty and ultimate humiliation, Horn Prouser shows how as David gradually gained status and honor, he received clothing, including armor, while Saul lost such items and experienced a decline. This culminates, for Saul, at his death, where he was stripped of his armor by the Philistines (1 Sam 31:9), the armor then being placed in the temple of Astarte. In the second account of Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1, Saul's crown and armlet were brought by the Amalekite to David. Interestingly, David remarks in 2 Samuel 1:24 that Saul was famous for giving luxurious clothing and ornaments to women, yet as Horn Prouser points out, within the context of the story, it is this penchant for giving away clothing, a sign of strength, that signifies Saul's weakness in other parts of the story (Horn Prouser: 34). Although David participated in mourning rituals that involved the renting of clothing and wearing the garments of grief (see 2 Sam 1: 11; 3:31)—actions that were most appropriate—he reacted negatively when the Ammonite king shaved off half the beards of David's messengers and cut their outfits in two (2 Sam 10:4) and subsequently sent his soldiers to fight the Ammonites. David thus reacted swiftly and effectively when someone took garments from him whereas Saul did not react. As the stories proceed, however, David's eventual decline is symbolically emphasized through clothing imagery. Perhaps the most dramatic instance appears in 1 Kings 1:1 when he is lying upon his deathbed. At this moment, the old king is covered in clothes and yet he is cold; he cannot get warm. As Horn Prouser puts it, the "clothing that had been his friend and support all his life is no longer useful to him" (36).

### Clothing and Adornment in other Ancient Judean Contexts

Clothing continues to play symbolic roles in literature that emerged in the Second Temple period. In *1 Enoch*, we find several intriguing references to garments and adornment. Perhaps the most famous, in part because it was later used by Tertullian (see his *Cult. fem.* 1.2), is the story of the angels' rebellion in the *Book of the Watchers* when the leader, *Aša'el*, reveals the mysteries of metallurgy which are used to make instruments of warfare and items of jewelry and adornment used by women to seduce people (*1 En.* 6–11). Thus we find a clear instance of a negative view of jewelry as a tool used in the arts of seduction. This brings to mind the *Wiles of the Wicked Woman* text from Qumran (4Q184),

in which the woman's clothes are "shades of twilight and her ornaments plagues of corruption" (Vermes: 417—cf. the "strange woman" of Proverbs 7 [Maier: 28–29], who seduces, traps and destroys a young man).

Kim (36–37) points to other sections of *1 Enoch* that refer to clothing symbolically and positively such as God's bright gown "which was shining more brightly than the sun" thereby underlining God's glory (*1 En.* 14:20; Charlesworth: 21) and the wonderful garb that the righteous will wear (*1 En.* 62:16). These garments accentuate the heavenly and holy nature of salvation in this apocalyptic text, as we will also see in the Book of Revelation.

The biblical commentator and philosopher Philo reflects upon clothing in a variety of texts. His interpretation of priestly garb takes on Platonic and Stoic dimensions (Maier: 29). Various aspects of the priestly robe symbolize different elements: the robe itself represents the air; the pomegranates, water; the ephod, heaven; etc. (*Mos.* 2. 133; see Kim: 50). Philo says that when the high priest enters the most holy place he must leave behind his robes and enter naked, with no distracting colors or bells and offer the entire mind to God the Savior and Benefactor (*Leg.* 2.56). Kim (51) interprets these instructions as referring not to physical nudity but to "purity of the soul," since obviously the high priest never officiated in the nude.

Judeans living in Palestine during the Roman period generally wore the Greek *himation* or outer garment that was draped around the body. Evidence for it has been discovered outside of the Cave of Letters near the Dead Sea. These garments had stripes running along the portion of the cloth that went around the neck. Similar types of clothing have been found at En-Gedi and at Masada (Edwards: 236). Some of the Judea Capta coins depict Judean soldiers with beards and longer hair, but undoubtedly, as Edwards indicates, first-century Judeans imitated the Roman practices of closely shaved faces and clipped hair (236).

Judean women were clearly interested in the arts of adornment, as is evident from the cosmetic equipment, including combs and ring keys, found at Masada. Hair found at the same site indicates that women wore their hair long, perhaps in a single braid, but no doubt wealthier women were influenced by the fashions of the day, arranging their hair in more ornate ways (Edwards: 237). It is only later in the rabbinic writings that women are exhorted to cover their heads (*Ketub.* 72a) out of general concerns for modesty and to indicate a

transition from girlhood to womanhood (Bronner: 466). The Talmud claims that a woman going out with her head uncovered is in violation of biblical law. This is because of Numbers 5:18, which describes a ritual stipulated for a suspected adulteress. The priest must either unbind or uncover her hair. The Talmudic authors argue that he was uncovering it, therefore presuming that married women normally went about with their head covered. However, other interpreters debated whether or not the specific word in question, *parah*, meant to loosen or to uncover. Regardless, hair covering for married women eventually became a widespread practice in various forms of Judaism. Midrash adds the *attractiveness* of Eve to the reasons why she ate the fruit and apparently seduced the man (*Gen. Rab.* 17:8; see Bronner: 470–71), which provides further justification for women to cover their heads so that they will not tempt men who cannot resist them.

### Clothing and Adornment in Greco-Roman Contexts

References to clothing and forms of adornment abound in Greek and Roman contexts, within literary sources but also in inscriptions, papyri, art and archaeological remains (see Cleland, Harlow, & Llewellyn-Jones; Colburn & Heyn). Since the evidence is plentiful, this survey will simply touch upon examples from a range of sources, with particular emphasis on Roman contexts.

As in all cultures, dress and adornment (or lack of adornment) identified all sorts of things about a person in Greek settings, whether it was in daily life or religious environments, such as the mysteries. A fascinating and lengthy inscription detailing the activities of the Andanian mystery cult in Messenia, Greece provides detailed instructions for how the members of the cult are to dress, including men and women, children and slaves. Regarding women, it stipulates that no women can wear transparent clothing, the uninstructed cannot wear a border on their linen *chitōn* or tunic (on borders and trim, see Sebesta: 108) and it decrees the maximum worth of the garments which each category of women ("sacred women" vs. uninstructed vs. slave women) can wear. None of the women, moreover, can wear gold, rouge, white make-up (lead), a hair band or braided hair, nor shoes unless they are made of sacrificial leather (see Meyer: 51–59). Gawlinski is surely correct in saying that "no one single purpose lies behind all the rules" (159) but

the hierarchy created by the different forms of clothing for the women indicate that again, garments were symbols of status within the group. The ban on make-up and jewelry may be connected to the notion that these items were often associated with *hetairai*, who would use them as tools for sexual manipulation and thus the formulators of the cult's regulations wanted to restrict such items as inappropriate to the ritual. The prohibition against hair bands and braids may also be connected to ritual life here, as generally women let their hair hang free during festivals while they bound it up during their daily lives (Gawlinksi: 159). The fact that binding and knotting were associated with magical spells may also be a central reason why such things were forbidden (Gawlinksi: 159; see Luck: 91–92).

The inscription's references to the cost of the women's garments points to another reason why clothes and other items of dress and adornment were mentioned so often: these things could be very expensive, and were important forms of wealth for both sexes. Papyri indicate that in addition to property and money, jewels, and other objects could be forms of payment provided to a woman in case her husband wanted to divorce her (P.Mich.2.121) and bracelets, earrings, dresses and robes were not unusual elements within a woman's dowry (P.Mich.5.343; P.Tebt.2.405). R. Berg's work on women and jewelry further emphasizes that women often owned their own bracelets, pendants, earrings, etc., especially if these things had been gifts, and they could use them as forms of money or as collateral for loans (Berg: 57–58). There were many wealthy women in antiquity, and indeed J. Pölonen thinks that between 50 BCE and 250 CE women received 40–50 percent of the inheritances that were passed on (Pölonen: 179). This means that women were key economic agents throughout the Roman Empire and their jewels and clothes were a significant portion of their financial assets.

Writers such as Pliny the Elder criticize women for their love of gems, accusing them of *luxuria*, an extremely negative concept in ancient Rome (see Weeber), which was perceived as a type of madness (see Pliny, *Nat.* 33.95; Berg: 25–26). Yet clearly the abundance of items that have been discovered and preserved by archaeologists, whether they be jewels, hairpieces, or money fashioned into bracelets and necklaces (see Giroire & Roger: 97; 128–33), attests to their popularity as does, precisely, the criticism male writers launched against women who wore such finery. Unlike men's jewelry, such as signet rings, which served to indicate rank, women's orna-

ments were viewed as frivolous and wasteful, and some items (such as pearl earrings) were understood to be unnatural because they required removing the pearl from its native home at the bottom of the sea (Pliny, *Nat.* 9. 105). Yet pearls were one of the most sought after commodities, probably because they were very difficult to procure and because the Romans seemed to prefer color over glitter (Croom: 115).

Many male writers disparage and satirize women for their adornment. Juvenal makes fun of women's hairstyles (*Sat.* 6.501–03), and some authors quite viciously attack women for their artificiality. In one poem Martial describes an old woman, Galla, whose hair, teeth, clothes and face are put away at night in boxes (9.37; see also Wyke: 147). Although Ovid provides a guide for how women should prepare themselves in order to attract a lover in his *Ars Amatoria*, and does so approvingly, it is important to take note that the description of female *cultus* is being used in order to advocate and justify male *cultus* including the cultivation of the rural to the urban, of the wine from the grapes. As M. Wyke puts it, Ovid is simply appropriating women's arts of make-up "to describe male creativity" and "the adorned woman takes on a positive value and her body becomes a surface on which the male artist displays his literary skills" (146). Besides, the use of cosmetics is later undermined by Ovid in his *Remedia Amoris* in which he advises lovers how to fall out of love. Here he counsels his male reader to arrive at the girlfriend's house early, before she has adorned herself with poisonous slop and all sorts of other vile things that stink and make the author want to throw up (351–56). Ovid's poetry further illustrates the Roman ideology that "the female body is something that needs to be fixed" (Richlin: 205) while the male body is neutral. Women had to use their bodies, "gaining a limited and lower social status through physical self-cultivation" (Wyke: 140). They had to be elegant, but also modest and not gauche. A careful balancing act was required for each woman, depending upon her social level.

Most women likely did not share male negative views of adornment but valued their jewels, clothes, hairstyles and make-up as status markers, symbols of honor, and forms of self-expression (Bartman; Olson: 111; Shumka: 173; Stout: 77). Livy acknowledges that such is the case when he depicts Valerius claiming that "elegance of appearance, adornment, apparel—these are the woman's badges of honor; in these they rejoice and take delight; these our ancestors called the woman's world" (34.7). Although women could inherit



and own considerable amounts of property, and exercise a good deal of social power, they generally could not achieve the honors gained by their male counterparts through politics or military valor. Thus beauty, elegance, good taste and graceful manner were significant means for women to assert and express their status within society. Nor was this limited to wealthy women, for poor women would imitate their more affluent neighbors with costume jewelry and cheaper fabrics (Olson: 45–47).

Men were not immune from invective and ridicule for their personal appearance. If a man wore make-up or dressed in an effeminate manner he could be mercilessly ridiculed (see Juvenal *Sat.* 2.95). There are examples of ritual settings in Greece in which males went through an “initiatory transvestism” that symbolized the transition from a boy to a man through the donning and discarding of female clothing but such cross-dressing was limited to the initiation rite (Leitao). In Rome, however, according to Cicero, males dressing as women were deemed to be immoral (*Cat.* 2.22) although it is interesting that Cicero himself receives criticism for wearing his tunic too long “even if it was to cover up his varicose veins” (Edmondson: 35). A loose tunic, such as the one Julius Caesar wore, was equated with loose morals. Ovid provides guidelines for the well but not overly groomed male: he should be fit, clean, in properly fitting clothing and shoes, and not smelly of breath or body, but attending any more assiduously to his looks would raise questions about his manliness (*Ars. Am.* 1.509–22). Although women received more criticism for their dress than men because they were often perceived to be indulging in *luxuria*, clothing and overall appearance were important for males. Men and women were subject to dress as a form of social control, and any “deviation in terms of dress was seen as a threat to the social order and was very closely associated in Roman mentality with moral deviance” (Edmondson: 32).

### Clothing and Adornment in the Second Testament and Ancient Christian Writings

The texts of the Second Testament and early Christianity emerge in an environment in which these social and symbolic meanings of dress were deeply embedded. We also find recollections of the use of clothing in the First Testament, with stories such as the parable in Luke 15:11–32, in which the use of a robe to symbolize the investiture of the wayward

son (Luke 15:22) recalls, in some ways, the Joseph cycle in Genesis. Strength and power can be associated with garments, as the story of the woman with the flow of blood states (Mark 5: 28–30). Scribes wear long robes (*stole*), symbols of wealth and honor (Luke 20:46), and Matthew’s mention that scribes and Pharisees wear their fringes long (Matt 23:5) is a stinging remark intended to underline their thirst for social recognition. The juxtaposition of stripping Jesus then placing a scarlet cloak (*chlamys*), a vestment of Roman authority, on him by the soldiers accentuates their efforts to humiliate and dishonor him (Matt 27:28), for the notion that a Roman officer would walk around naked underneath his cloak is ridiculous.

By the first century women throughout the Roman Empire would pull their *himation* up over their heads in certain settings, especially ritual settings, but they were not required to wear a separate veil nor go about in public with their heads covered (Edwards: 237). Much energy has gone into attempting to understand the instructions about head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, and there is not enough space here to fully discuss the issue, which is complex and requires attention to the role of women’s heads in general (see, for example, D’Angelo) and a variety of other issues brought up by the passage. What we can say is that Paul echoes the importance of keeping the genders distinct through manner of dress and hair arrangement. He may also be concerned about women of some means who could display their wealth and honor by exposing their elegantly coiffed and adorned heads. Perhaps he did not want them exerting their authority or attracting undue attention due to their appearance and affluence? Even if the latter is not the case for Paul, it is quite possible that later writers such as the authors of 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3 sought to curb women’s adornment as a means of limiting their power or aspirations to power within the church (Batten: 498–501). And, as a woman’s appearance was understood in part to be a reflection of her husband, father or male guardian (D’Ambra: 110), placing restrictions on her adornment was a strategy for preserving or maintaining the honor of her male family members in the public eye.

Some letters refer explicitly to clothing in order to make moral and theological arguments. James 2:2 deliberately contrasts the treatment of a rich man who flashes gold rings and wears fine clothing with that of a poor man in shabby clothing. The rich man is offered a fine seat in the assembly, while the pauper is ordered to sit on the floor. The letter

sharply rebukes such treatment of the two figures, arguing that the poor man has been dishonored by the people in the assembly but that in reality, God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom (Jas 2:5). Later on it is the rich, moreover, with their rotting clothes and gold and silver, the rust of which will eat their flesh, who will receive eschatological judgment (Jas 5:1–6). Kim has argued for the theological significance of clothing imagery in the Pauline tradition. He points to the notion of “putting on” a person, namely Christ (see, e.g., Gal 3:26–29; Rom 13:14), which he interprets to be describing a baptismal change through unification with Christ in his death and resurrection, and also a “parousia change in the mode of Christian existence” in which the present body will transform into a heavenly one at the *eschaton* (1 Cor 15:49, 50–54; 2 Cor 5:1–4) (Kim 232).

In the Apocalypse of John, garments can manifest theological and soteriological meanings reminiscent of Judean apocalyptic texts. Here we encounter the Son of Man, clothed in a long robe with a sash (Rev 1:13) and many figures in pure white robes, indicating their heavenly and righteous status (Rev 7:13–17; 15:5). The washing of robes (Rev 22:14) recalls the emphasis upon *tohorot* at Qumran (4Q276; 4Q277). In contrast, the woman clothed in the royal colors of purple and scarlet and festooned with gold, jewels, and pearls appears in chapter 17 (17:4), bringing to mind the stereotypical critique of *luxuria*, especially in its female forms. As Neufeld observes, the Apocalypse uses apparel and decoration to delineate boundaries of “who is in/out, pure/impure, and honorable/dishonorable” (2002: 686). Clothing imagery operates as an effective means of conveying social, moral and theological values to the readers and hearers of this text (Neufeld 2005a: 75).

Dress continues to function importantly within the rhetoric and hagiography of early Christianity, both for males and for females (Coon). Clement of Alexandria provides detailed instruction about clothing, hair, jewels and make-up for both men and women in his *Paedagogus*. Tertullian insists that virgins should be veiled. Here it is not so much the young women’s exposed heads that offend him as the honor that they are seeking (*Virg.* 9; see Torgeson: 166), thus underscoring the connection between women’s status and an elegant head. Tertullian also provides some brief counsel to men reminiscent of Ovid’s instructions (*Cult. fem.* 2.8) but spends the bulk of *De cultu feminarum* exhorting women to

modest dress. A few decades later Cyprian firmly counsels some presumably wealthy virgins against adorning themselves (*Hab. Virg.*) because their appearance forms part of the symbolic status of the church itself (see Dunn).

Later on we see examples of fabulously wealthy women such as Olympias who was admired for apparently forsaking her silks for “contemptible clothing” and who even avoided bathing unless illness required it (Cox Miller: 235). Although we must remember that the literary “lives” of these saintly figures do not necessarily reflect reality (E. A. Clark 1998), in practice many ascetic Christians gave up their fine garments in exchange for the clothing of the poor, including black clothing, because it “connoted dirt and deprivation; it was the color of mourning, and poor people wore dark clothes” (G. Clark: 114). Yet it seems that such women were admired only if they were not causing problems for men. When a married woman named Ecdicia adopted simple widow’s dress as part of her commitment to continence in marriage, Augustine exhorted her *not to do so*, for her husband had not been able to uphold continence and had fallen into adultery. Augustine tells Ecdicia that even if her spouse demanded that she wear excessive jewelry, she should obey (*Ep.* 262.9, 10). As a comparison, the bishop holds up Queen Esther “as an example of a woman who knew how to influence a husband in religious directions by her appearance and by submissiveness” (E. A. Clark 1989: 45). In contrast to women such as Olympias and Ecdicia, Christian rulers did not embrace the raiment of poverty but continued to attire themselves in resplendent costume, engaging in “power dressing” to use G. Clark’s description of Theodora’s attire as depicted in the famous mosaic of the church of San Vitale, Ravenna (109). But in general, dress remained a topic of interest among learned Christians, including the 7<sup>th</sup>-century bishop, Isidore of Hispalis, who devoted over 4000 words to the subject, including a full section on underwear (Edmondson & Keith: 13).

## Conclusion

This discussion has merely scratched the surface of all the sources for and significance of clothing and adornment in antiquity. The intent of the piece is to provide resources, to prompt further study, and to encourage readers to pause and think about the social and symbolic significance of dress and decoration the next time they encounter references to such

issues. Ancient texts, being “high context” documents, demand that one dig deeper in order to understand their aims. Just as “looks matter” today in all sorts of environments, they mattered tremendously in antiquity. By examining the social and symbolic roles of clothing and other sorts of personal *accoutrements* within these many and diverse contexts we can gain insights into the purposes of this literature, their authors, and the people for whom they were produced.

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