# Dress to Impress? how dress created diversity in Pompeii (Late Republic – Early Empire)

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# *Dress to Impress?*: how dress created diversity in Pompeii (Late Republic – Early Empire)

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## Introduction

Contrary to what has often been suggested, the emergence of the Roman Empire has not only led to more uniformity, this also created diversity – not just between diverse cultural groups, but also among the different social groups within Roman society itself.[1] Along with the growing differences among people, for example in status, gender and wealth, showing your place within the community became more important. One way to do this was by the way you dress. Visible appearance, consisting of the quality of garments, accessories, jewellery, but also hairstyles, were all part of one's identity and a way to confirm, showcase, perform and claim a place within society.[2] In this article the term 'dress' will be used to describe this totality of someone's visible appearance.[3]

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[1] I would like to use this first footnote to thank Leidschrift for giving me the opportunity to transform my Research Master paper into an article. Additionally, I want to thank the Leidschrift editors for their feedback. Lastly, I would like to thank dr. Miko Flohr under whose supervision I wrote this Research Master paper within the interesting and innovative research seminar 'Empire and Diversity in the Roman World' (Leiden University 2023).

[2] C. R. Potts, 'The Art of Piety and Profit at Pompeii: A New Interpretation of the Painted Shop Façade at IX.7.1-2', *Greece & Rome* 56.1 (2009) 55-70: 68-69; L. L. Lovén, 'Priests, priestesses, and clothing in Roman cult practices' in: C. Brøns and M. L. Nosch ed., *Textiles & Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford; Philadelphia, PA 2017) 135-141; M. J. Perry, 'Status' in: R. S. Bagnall, K. Brodersen, C. B. Champion, A. Erskine and S. R. Huebner ed., *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012).

[3] One of the important debates within this field of study focuses on which term should be used when analysing visible appearance in general. In the book *The World of the Roman Costume* (Madison 1994), edited by J. L. Sebesta and L. Bonfante, the term 'costume' is used, which consist of the entire visible appearance of a person. Batten and Olson suggest using the term 'dress'. According to them 'costume' is often associated with specific events, like holidays, or theatre. Moreover, 'fashion' implies a focus on the elite society. Therefore, Batten and Olson conclude that 'dress' is more neutral and best suitable to use in the research on this topic. In this article I will therefore use 'dress' to refer to one's visible appearance. See for the discussion by

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was one of the first to write about clothing history.[4] With the growing interest in social and cultural history in the second half of the twentieth century this topic became more meaningful and widely studied.[5] An important book within this field of interest with a specific focus on antiquity is *The World of the Roman Costume* (1994), which is edited by Sebesta and Bonfante. However, many twentieth century studies on the topic of dress, such as this book, are very descriptive instead of analytic. Meaning that most works describe, for example, what sort of dresses and jewellery were worn without a study of the reasons and meanings behind them. Since the 2000s, these perspectives have received increasing attention in the historical discipline. An example is the recent volume *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity* (2021), edited by Alicia J. Batten and Kelly Olson. Due to the broadness of the topic, diverse research relating to dressing has been conducted, from gender and identity to cultural exchange.[6] But what happens when we look at visible appearance through the lens of empire formation, leading to diversity?

Many different sources have been studied to understand the meaning of dress in antiquity: from ancient literature, votive reliefs and fragments of textiles to coins, accessories and statues. However, the Pompeian frescoes depicting scenes of daily life have not yet been used for this purpose. This, while the very frescoes often show multiple or groups of people who also vary in status, gender and wealth – something that is less often the case with most of the aforementioned primary sources. It is therefore interesting to

Batten and Olson: A. J. Batten and K. Olson ed., *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity* (2021) 1-2.

[4] J. Edmondson and A. Keith ed., *Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture* (Toronto 2008) 1-2. Thomas Carlyle wrote about clothing's history in his book *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4).

[5] Ibidem, 4.

[6] Batten et al. ed., *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity,* 1. All the different chapters discuss specific examples related to the general topic of dress in Mediterranean antiquity. Some examples of research about the relation between dress and gender are: K. Olson, *Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society* (London 2008); K. Olson, *Masculinity and dress in Roman antiquity* (New York, NY 2017); J. Radicke, *Roman Women's Dress: literary sources, terminology, and historical development* (Berlin; Boston 2022). Some examples of research about the relation between dress, intercultural contact and identities are: E. Swift, *Regionality in Dress Accessories in the late Roman West* (Montagnac 2000); U. Rothe, *Dress and Cultural Identity in the Rhine-Moselle Region of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 2009).

explore the Pompeian wall paintings, since they allow us to examine the differences between people living within this city. One of the few scholars who has analysed the frescoes from Pompeii to understand the lives of people in town is John R. Clarke. In his book *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans* (2003) Clarke discusses several frescoes and what they depict. Yet, his work is predominantly focussed on everyday life and events within the city instead of the visible appearances of its inhabitants. Additionally, when Clarke addresses this topic in his research, it is rather descriptive and does not thoroughly delve into the deeper meanings behind dress and how it led to diversity. Another interesting research is done by art historian Bente Kiilerich. In her article 'The Real and the Ideal in Pompeian Fashion' (2023) she discusses Roman wall paintings in which female clothing is depicted, with special attention to colour and fabric. Thus, Kiilerich solely focuses on women's clothing instead of visible appearance and the society in total.[7]

A study of the Pompeian frescoes through the lens of empire formation, leading to diversity in dress among people, is therefore an interesting lacune which can give fruitful insights into the everyday life of people in Pompeii. Important to keep in mind is that Pompeii was located in the wealthy Bay of Naples: a place where a lot of rich Roman elites had summer residences. Therefore, the so-called daily life scenes may also be extraordinary to some extent, and the conclusions are thus not automatically applicable to other Roman places. Additionally, it is worth to note that the paintings selected for this research depict idealised forms of real life. Yet, by using literature on dress in antiquity that is based on other primary sources as well, we can detect types of dress, their meanings and thus get an impression of how diversity was created by visual appearance in Pompeian society.

In order to gain a nuanced understanding of diversity and dress within the city, three spheres will be central, namely the religious, public and (more private) domestic one.[8] For every sphere a wall painting or set of wall paintings will be analysed which depict that particular sphere. Even though it is complex to make a clear distinction between these spheres as they can sometimes overlap, this framework allows us to better analyse the meanings and reasons of certain dress within a specific context. This is interesting

[7] B. Kiilerich, 'Pompeii from the Real to the Ideal in Pompeian Fashion', *CLARA* 10 (2023) 1-25.

[8] Public and private can be complicated terms to use. In this article, private will point to the idea that a space was 'domestic' (like houses) and not freely accessible to everyone.

because on the one hand, certain settings sometimes expect a particular way of dressing, while on the other hand, some ways of dressing only have meaning within a specific context. The distinction in spheres thus enables the study of diversity on multiple levels: not only in status, wealth and gender, but also the differences between the various settings. Therewith, this article aims to explore the extent to which frescoes can provide an interesting source that can help in gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of daily life in Pompeian society. The scope of this research is between the Late Republic and the Early Empire (until 79 CE, when the Vesuvius erupted), since the frescoes date from this period.

## Religious sphere

For the religious sphere this article will take a closer look at the wall painting depicting a procession of the goddess Cybele (figure 1). This fresco was painted on the outside wall of what was probably a shop and dates from the first century CE.[9] *The Procession of Cybele* could be found on the right of the entrance.[10] It remains unclear what sort of shop this must have been, but the fact that the owners commissioned a wall painting showing this religious procession suggests that they might have had a connection to Cybele's cult.[11]

[9] Besides the fresco of the procession of Cybele, some of the other exterior walls of this shop were decorated as well. On the left wall next to the entrance the goddess Venus Pompeiana is depicted. Above the entrance there are four portraits of different gods visible, namely Apollo, Jupiter, Mercury and Diana. The Procession of Cybele could be found on the right of the entrance. The specific location of the shop is Region IX.7.1. J. R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans. Visual Representations and Non-elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 315* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London 2003) 87-94.

[10] These paintings were discovered by Vittoria Spinazzola in 1912. Back then, the paintings were quite well preserved, but over time the quality has decreased. However, since many pictures have been taken of these frescoes, it is still possible to analyse them. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans,* 87-88; Potts, 'The Art of Piety and Profit at Pompeii', 55-70; S. R. Joshel and L. Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge 2014) 90-91.

[11] Nearby the shop's wall painting depicting Venus Pompeiana, *graffito* has been found. The graffito encourages people to vote for someone called Helvius to become an *aedile* (an elected office). This encouragement is supported by felt-workers, *coactiliari*, which led to the interpretation by some scholars that this shop might have been a

Perhaps they were devotees or held a formal position, for example as a priest or priestess. Another interesting thing to note is that this shop was located along an important and busy street within Pompeii: the *Via dell' Abbondanza* (Region IX.7.1). Because this fresco was situated on the outside wall of the shop, it was visible for everyone in the street, making this religious fresco part of the public area.[12]

The subject of this wall painting is the procession of the goddess Cybele, who was also known as Magna Mater. The cult of this goddess of Phrygian origin was brought to Rome around 204 BCE in light of the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE). The Roman state made this decision on the basis of the consultation of the oracular Sibylline books and the oracle of Delphi. It was believed that Cybele would protect the Romans in this war. After her arrival in the city of Rome, Cybele's cult spread throughout Italy over time. However, some of its practices and customs were criticized by the Roman state. Devotees, for example, made a lot of noise with musical instruments and wild dancing during processions. But probably most shocking to the Romans was a practice performed by Cybele's male priests, the *galli*, namely the ritual act of self-castration.[13] Moreover, their clothing also differentiated them from others – at least during the rituals – and was visible to the eye: the male *galli* wore female garments. Therewith, the *galli* were distinguished from the other (uncastrated) men in public as well as male priests of other cults who often wore typical male clothing, like the *toga*. This separation is something that seems similar to female sex workers wearing the male *toga* in public to distinguish them from chaste women in Roman times.[14]

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felter's shop. This is for instance suggested by: Potts, 'The Art of Piety and Profit at Pompeii', 58. In her article, Potts further analyses the connection between the religious frescoes on this shop in relation to daily life and *collegia* in Pompeii.

[12] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 90; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 94.

[13] M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis. The Myth and the Cult* (London 1977) 38-43, 110; H. W. Obbink, *Cybele, Isis, Mithras. Oosterse godsdiensten in het Romeinse rijk* (Haarlem 1965) 6-7, 21-22; L. E. Roller, 'Cybele', *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012); Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 92; D. Montserrat, 'Reading gender in the Roman world' in: J. Huskinson ed., *Experiencing Rome. Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (London 2000) 153-182; C. Daniel-Hughes, 'Belief' in: M. Harlow ed., *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in Antiquity* (London; New York; Dublin 2021) 71-78, 85; Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 90.

[14] C. Mowat, 'Don't be a Drag just be a Priest: The Clothing and Identity of the Galli of Cybele in the Roman Republic and Empire', *Gender & History* 33.2 (2021) 296-313:

Fig. 1: Procession of Cybele, On the outside wall of a shop, Region IX.7.1, Pompeii. Source: https://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=9291

In this wall painting (figure 1) the goddess Cybele is visualised by a wooden statue, at the front of the procession, visible on the right. This effigy was dressed and decorated by the devotees and then paraded throughout the city during the procession. Cybele is seated and wears a white tunic. On top of that she wears a long purple garment, which is draped in a Greek style. Hereby, she is distinguished from others in the scene and the style of her dress might have referred to her oriental origin. Furthermore, she has a crown on her head which depicts the city walls, reflecting her role as protectress.[15]

Besides the wooden statue of Cybele, sixteen people are depicted in this fresco. One of the most important figures is the priest. He stands in the middle, to the left of the man who is wearing red and white garments and has

296; A. K. Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World* (Cambridge 2016) 21-22; A. Duncan, 'Infamous Performers: Comic Actors and Female Prostitutes in Rome' in: C. A. Faraone and L. K. McClure eds., *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (Madison, WI 2006) 252-273: 269-270. In this chapter Duncan also discusses male actors who wore female clothes when playing roles of women in theatre.

[15] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 89.

the task of carrying Cybele's statue. The priest has his arms open and holds cult objects in both hands.[16] He is most recognizable by the long white garment he is wearing: a *toga*. This is a male clothing item which could only be worn by Roman citizens and was regarded as a status symbol. Additionally, the white colour of the priest's outfit points to his religious importance, since this colour symbolised ritual purity.[17]

Yet, like mentioned previously, the priests of Cybele were known for wearing female clothes. The question then arises why he is dressed in the male *toga*. There are multiple plausible explanations. Firstly, the white *toga* of the priest indicates not only his ritual purity, but also that he is a Roman citizen. Roman citizens could become priests of Cybele's cult since 50 CE, something which was forbidden before that time.[18] If that is the case, this painting dates between 50-79 CE. It is possible that, since Roman citizens became appointed as Cybele's priests, more obscure rituals and customs were changed or 'Romanised' to fit the Roman religious status quo. Then, what is shown here is a form of intercultural contact whereby some cult practices remain intact, and others are changed. Another explanation could be that the person in the white *toga* is in fact not a priest, but a Roman magistrate. When Cybele was ritually brought to Rome around 204 BCE, Phrygian priests accompanied her so her cult would be practiced in the right and original way. This was necessary, since the Roman state aimed to gain Cybele's protection in the Second Punic War.[19] Therefore, probably two ways of worshipping this goddess coexisted before Roman citizens could become her priest in 50 CE. The main cult was led by the Phrygian *galli*. Cybele's feast was an event to venerate her in a Roman way, when not only a procession and games were organised, but also offers were brought to the goddess by a Roman magistrate.[20] When attending a religious event, magistrates often wore a white

[16] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 91.

[17] K. Olson, 'Dress and Religious Ritual in Roman Antiquity' in: Batten et al. eds., *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity,* 201-213: 203-204.

[18] In 50 CE, under the reign of emperor Claudius (r. 41-54 CE), Roman citizens were eventually allowed to become a priest of Cybele's cult. H. W. Obbink, *Cybele, Isis, Mithras. Oosterse godsdiensten in het Romeinse rijk* (Haarlem 1965) 26; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans,* 92.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Obbink, *Cybele, Isis, Mithras,* 26. The feast days with Roman games were called the *ludi Megalenses.*

*toga*. Thus, it is possible that the man identified as the main priest in this fresco is in fact a Roman magistrate.

But then, what about the *gallus*? Two figures standing behind the man in the white *toga* are identified as priestesses, based on their hair, clothing and the objects they are holding.[21] Since the *gallus* was a man with the appearance of a woman, one of them could be a *gallus*. Perhaps it is the person on the right, behind the man in the white *toga*. This figure is dressed in brightly coloured garments with a red-purple robe in the same colour as Cybele's dress. Furthermore, this figure wears a vegetal crown and is holding a *patera* and a branch.[22] This corresponds with other visual representations we have of *galli*.[23] If the person who is often identified as a priestess is indeed a *gallus*, it is interesting that he is not depicted in the centre, but rather tucked away – the emphasis thus laying on the Roman way of honouring the goddess Cybele.

The two assistants of the man in a white *toga* are both wearing the same outfit. They are depicted on his left and both are dressed in a tunic which ends around their knees. The tunic is white and has two small vertical red-purple stripes on each shoulder which run down to the bottom of the garment. The white tunic with red-purple stripes – also known as *tunica lato clavo* – was an indication of status and associated with the Roman elite.[24] This garment was probably chosen not only because it indicated importance, but the white, as previously mentioned, also referred to ritual purity. It was thus a visible marker of their status and tasks within this procession.

The wooden statue of Cybele stands upon a *ferculum* (visible on the right). A *ferculum* was used to carry, for instance, statues of gods throughout the city during a procession.[25] In the case of Cybele this act was performed

[21] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 91. When Clark describes these two figures, he follows Spinazzola's interpretation that they are priestesses of Cybele.

[22] A *patera* is a bowl used for libations (liquid sacrifices) within religious contexts.

[23] Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis,* 97; Obbink, *Cybele, Isis, Mithras,* 26, 42. An interesting example is a funerary relief of a *gallu*s, found in Lavinium (second century CE), which is now part of the collection of the Capitoline Museums in Rome.

[24] B. Kellum, 'The Spectacle of the Street' in: B. A. Bergmann and C. Kondoleon ed., *The Art of Ancient Spectacle* (Washington D.C. 1999) 283-292, 289; E. D'Ambra, 'Real Estate for Profit. Julia Felix's Property and the Forum Frieze' in: B. Longfellow and M. Swetnam-Burland ed., *Women's Lives, Women's Voices. Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples* (Austin, TX 2021) 85-105: 99.

[25] Another interesting fresco which depicts a procession and a *ferculum*, is the wall painting of the Procession of the Carpenters, which was also found in Pompeii (Region VI.7.8 and VI.7.9, the fresco was found on a pilaster between two entrances).

by the four men standing around the statue. All of them wear a white tunic and a dark, red-coloured robe draped from one shoulder to the other.[26] These men had an important task within this festivity whereby they were probably expected to be dressed in a specific way. This is also suggested by the fact that the four men are all wearing the same garments in the same colours. Moreover, not only the white of the tunics points to a religious connection, the red robe on top of them, does this as well. Such double garments were in all probability meaningful within religious rituals.[27]

Cybele's devotees can be found in the middle and at the end to the left of the procession. They are wearing long, brightly coloured garments and make music with instruments, which was an important ritual within her cult.[28] Although most of the male members hold the more formal positions in the Cybele cult, all devotees are women. That quite a lot of women are depicted makes this fresco meaningful, since many of the other wall paintings depicting everyday life are dominated by men. The women wear garments in bright colours, such as yellow-orange, green and deep red-purple. Their clothing is quite long, possibly *stolae*, which might indicate their higher status.[29] However, it is also possible that these were special garments which were only worn during religious events.[30]

On the far left, beside the notch in the wall with a sculpture of the god Dionysus, we see two smaller figures. According to the excavator of the shop, Vittorio Spinazzola (1863-1943), these two were musicians. One is playing the cymbals and the other panpipes, something which is no longer visible due to the state of this fresco. Clarke suggests these two figures could be children, which would explain why they are depicted smaller than the

On this wall painting one can see a procession in action, whereby the ferculum is carried by four people as well.

[26] Olson, 'Dress and Religious Ritual in Roman Antiquity', 203-204; Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 90.

[27] Ibidem, 208-209. The red robe the carriers are wearing might be a *laena*, which also had a religious meaning.

[28] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 90; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans* 91-92; J. Hartnett, 'The Power of Nuisances on the Roman Street' in: R. Laurence and D. J. Newsome ed., *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii. Movement and Space* (Oxford 2011) 135-159: 140.

[29] A *stola* is a female garment. It is a longer second tunic which is worn over the first, shorter tunic. The *stola* was worn by *matrons*, wives of Roman citizens.

[30] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves*, 91.

others in the painting.[31] However, another explanation might be that the two are in fact enslaved people. Enslaved people were often depicted smaller than freeborn and citizens, a visible way of showing their lower status.[32] Furthermore, their dress could also point to their enslavement. Even though enslaved people did not have a uniform, the length of clothing is connected to status – longer garments were often worn by the elite. Moreover, when one looks up closely, the right person of the two appears to have a beard. This would at least rule out the possibility that he was a child, whereby the interpretation of him being enslaved seems to be more plausible.

All in all, diversity in dress is shown on multiple levels in the religious fresco depicting the procession of Cybele. Dress is a way to distinguish people: for this particular fresco it signified the distinctions between a variety of roles within the procession. However, the diversity we can study is also limited in this case. Religious processions namely took place through the streets. Even though it was an open and public event, this fresco only shows those who took part in Cybele's cult. Therefore, only the diversity among the cult's participants can be researched and not how the group as a whole differed from other people walking the same streets.[33]

## Public sphere

In the large *Praedia* of Julia Felix (Region II.4) an interesting wall painting depicting the public sphere was located. This *praedia* consisted of multiple sections with different purposes, such as shops, baths, rental apartments and a private house.[34] The building was already excavated in the eighteenth century by Roque Joaquín de Alcubierre (1702-1780) and Karl Jakob Weber (1712-1764), whose intentions were to find treasures for the Bourbon royal family. They found some in the room, probably an *atrium* or inner courtyard,

[31] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 92.
[32] B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford 2004) 334; C. Cobb, *Slavery, Gender, Truth, and Power in Luke-Acts and Other Ancient Narratives* (Wingate 2019) 19-20, 97.
[33] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves*, 91; Potts, 'The Art of Piety and Profit at Pompeii', 59.
[34] A *praedia* is a Latin word meaning 'land' or 'estate'. The *Praedia* of Julia Felix is sometimes referred to as 'House of Julia Felix'. However, since this estate was multifunctional and contained more than just a house, the term '*praedia*' is preferred.

which was decorated with a long fresco that continued on the various walls. This wall painting from 62-79 CE shows (idealised) daily life events taking place on the Forum in Pompeii.[35] Some fragments of this fresco were removed from the wall. The ones which were left behind are badly preserved due to the excavation methods of that time. The pieces which were taken from the house are very faded. Fortunately, there are engravings of the fragments of the Forum fresco from the eighteenth century, which enables us to study them.[36] Due to the existence of many fragments, once forming a large fresco, only a selection that most clearly deals with this article's subject matter will be discussed.[37]

Fig. 2: Fragment depicting buyers and sellers. Source: Tomo Terzo, Le Pitture Antiche D'Ercolano Vol. 3 (Naples 1755-92).

[35] M. Beard, *Pompeii. The Life of a Roman Town* (London 2008) 72-73; D'Ambra, 'Real Estate for Profit. Julia Felix's Property and the Forum Frieze', 85-105; P. Wilkinson, *Pompeii. An Archaeological Guide* (London; New York 2017) 204-207; R. Laurence, *Roman Pompeii. Space and Society* (London; New York, NY 2007) 37; Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves*, 92; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 96-98; D'Ambra, 'Women on the Bay of Naples' in: S. L. James and S. Dillon eds. *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (Hoboken, NJ 2012) 400-413: 407.

[36] For this research, in addition to the engravings depicted in this article, the original, coloured (but also very faded) fragments were studied. Due to the lack of good, sharp photographs of the original frescoes and the length of this article, only the engravings are shown, as they are more detailed and therefore make the scenes easier to understand.

[37] The fragments that will be discussed are the ones which depict diversity best: people with different status, gender and wealth within one fragment. These are the most interesting for this research, since it enables the study of differences among groups of people within one place: the Forum.

In figure 2 we see an event that nowadays is still common to the public marketplace: the selling and buying of all sorts of goods. Thus, the different roles people had can be distinguished.[38] In antiquity selling goods on the market was considered a non-elite activity.[39] Some of the sellers might even have been enslaved people, who were appointed by their boss as *institor* to sell products on the market.[40] Most of the sellers in this painting, who are often men, wear shorter clothes – tunics – which end around or above the knees. In contrast, the buyers often wear longer garments, possibly *toga*s, indicating their status and wealth: they had the financial means to buy things. Therefore, the length of clothing is also seen as an indication of status. Right of the centre, for example, we see a man wearing a red-purple *toga* who is buying a pan. Some have suggested the small person standing right next to him is his son.[41]

Another interpretation could be that this person is in fact a servant accompanying his master and is, again, depicted smaller in shorter clothes to indicate his lower status. Besides bringing your servant(s) with you, the *toga* was also a way to show off your status as a Roman citizen in public. It was a formal way of dressing and due to the large amount of fabrics not very practical, because the *toga* consisted of a tunic with a second and long fabric wrapped around the body. Therefore, it was mostly worn in more public and formal settings, like political meetings, (religious) ceremonies and business affairs.[42]

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[38] Laurence, *Roman Pompeii,* 37; Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves*, 93.

[39] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 97.

[40] S. R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge 2010) 206. According to Joshel the term *institor* meant a variety of things, among others someone who sells things. An institor could almost be anyone. In legal sources we see traces of free and enslaved persons of all ages and gender who could hold this position. However, Joshel states that it was often enslaved people who were labelled like this in literary sources and law.

[41] Beard, *Pompeii*, 74.

[42] Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, 22; P. Watson, 'Slavery, Rome', *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012); L. Cleland, 'Toga', *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012). On other fragments we also see men wearing *toga*s – for instance one wherein all the men are wearing *toga*s and reading texts (probably notices) on the forum. Another one depicts men in *togas* sitting and discussing something (legal business) with a person and a(n) (enslaved) girl. See for this: Laurence, *Roman Pompeii,* 37; Beard, *Pompeii,* 75.

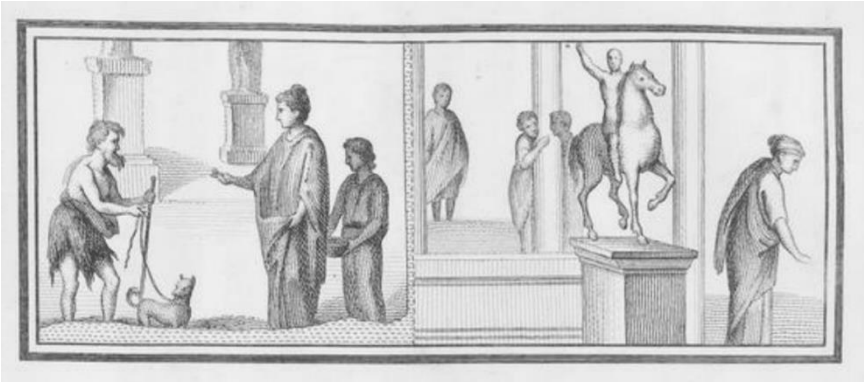

Fig. 3: Fragment depicting a lady and a beggar. Source: Tomo Terzo, Le Pitture Antiche D'Ercolano Vol. 3 (Naples 1755-92).

In this fragment (figure 3) we see a completely different scene. On the left, a lady, next to a child or servant, seems to give something to the man who has a dog along his side. He is standing a bit bent forward, supporting himself with a stick.[43] Furthermore, he wears a rag, leaving one arm and his legs mostly exposed. In contrast to the other men on the fresco fragments, the beggar is the only one with a beard and wilder, uncut hair. All this points to the fact that he is poor and probably a beggar. In contrast to the man, the woman on his right is almost fully dressed in a *stola,* which is a longer second tunic worn over the first, shorter tunic. This garment is very long – it reaches the floor – which suggests the lady was of a higher status. Moreover, *stolae* were worn by *matrons*, wives of Roman citizens.[44] The *stola* symbolised a woman's status of chastity and morality and is often interpreted as the female equivalent of the male *toga*. This visible contrast in appearance between the two thus helps to tell a story, possibly a moral one: one of beneficence. A value closely connected to, and to some extent even expected of, the elite.

[43] Beard, *Pompeii*, 74.

[44] Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World,* 21; Cleland, 'Stola', *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012).

Fig. 4: Fragment depicting pupils and punishment. Source: Tomo Terzo, Le Pitture Antiche D'Ercolano Vol. 3 (Naples 1755-92).

In figure 4 there are three people seated on the left who are holding tablets in their hands. This indicates that they are pupils, and that the Forum might have been the place where education took place in Pompeii. On the right we see someone who is punished in public.[45] Some historians have suggested that this person was a pupil as well. He misbehaved and was therefore punished in front of the other pupils as a deterrent.[46] However, there is no direct connection visible between the two groups. Thus, another way of interpreting this fragment could be that there is in fact no relation between the two, but that it merely shows what could take place on the Forum. This seems more plausible, since the different fragments were in fact once one painting covering the walls of a room in the *Praedia* of Julia Felix. Thus, this particular fragment, and therewith the scene it depicts, is actually created by the excavators.

[45] Laurence, *Roman Pompeii,* 37.
[46] Beard, *Pompeii*, 76-77; Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 97.

Most striking about this particular event is that the one who is punished is almost fully undressed. This was probably a way to make the beating more painful. Additionally, it is a way to distinguish the one who is punished from the others who behaved well, and therewith also to deter others. Since dress, identity and morality were all connected with one another, (temporarily) undressing someone in a public place where everyone wore clothes was also a way to publicly humiliate one and showed one's immorality by taken away the visible embodiment of morality.

**Domestic sphere**

Frescoes depicting the domestic sphere are often situated within this context as well. A popular theme of these wall paintings are the dinners that took place here. They are mostly located in the luxurious houses of wealthy citizens who had the financial means to commission these paintings and organise such events. Therefore, what is depicted specifically reflects the elite, their wealth, status and the lavish dining parties that were held in these large houses, giving us insight into the life and perspective of the upper class. The first-century CE frescoes found in the large *House of the Triclinium* (Region V.2.4) seem to demonstrate a strong contrast. It depicts the lowest status – the (often enslaved) servants – as well as the highest status: the elite. Herein, the enslaved people are part of showing off the elite's wealth. The servants are namely not tucked away in these frescoes, but rather they are shown in the foreground and in action. Therefore, these wall paintings are very interesting to analyse, since they enable us to examine the various roles of the ones depicted and their difference in status.[47] The three paintings that will be discussed were all found in the dining room, the *triclinium*, wherein every painting decorated a different wall. Together they give an idealised or maybe extravagant insight into what really happened there. It seems to be the case that we are presented with several ways in which a dinner party could proceed, or even different fragments of the same evening.[48]

[47] Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans*, 239; Beard, *Pompeii*, 218; Watson, 'Slavery, Rome', *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2012).

[48] For the ease of understanding, I have numbered the three frescoes, each of which decorated a different wall of the triclinium.

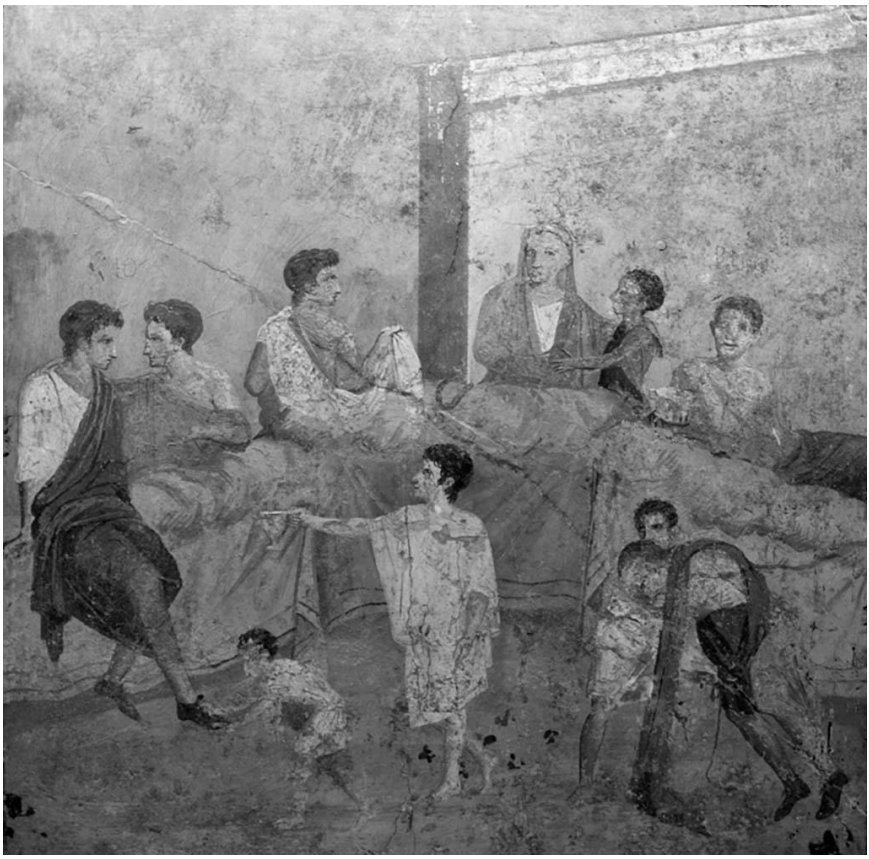

Fig. 5: First fresco, east wall of the triclinium. Frescoes depicting a dining scene. House of the Triclinium, Room 15, Region V.2.4, Pompeii. Source: photo courtesy of Johannes Eber. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/

In the first wall painting (figure 5) one guest just arrives while others are already lying on the couches. The servants are busy with taking care of the guests. All figures on this wall painting are men, which is not the case for the other two frescoes. In this first fresco four male servants, probably enslaved people, are depicted. Three of them are standing in front of the couches, all wearing short white tunics with vertical red-purple stripes. The one on the left is taking off the shoes of a guest, while the one in the middle offers him a drink. The servant on the right is helping a (drunk) guest who is about to

fall over or vomit.[49] The fourth servant can be found on the couches, on the right side, next to the man with a greenish cloak and a white tunic on.[50] This servant is the only one who wears a red-purple tunic. This might indicate that he has a different task than the ones in front of the couches.[51] The three of them are dressed in white tunics with red-purple stripes, just like the guest from whom the shoes are taken off, even though he still wears another red-purple garment on top of it.

This *tunica lato clavo* indicated status and was associated with the elite, a type of garment which was also worn by the assistants in the fresco depicting Cybele's procession. Eve D'Ambra has suggested that people who lacked status or prestige purposely wore this specific garment. Since the red-purple stripes indicated status, people who lacked this would wear this tunic in order to overdress and appear better than their actual status.[52] However, it is more likely that these servants were in fact enslaved. Enslaved people had no specific garment. According to the ancient writer Seneca, the senate once discussed a proposal that enslaved people should wear a uniform to distinguish them from others in society. However, this proposal was rejected: it was feared that such a visible marker would show the numerical strength of the enslaved and could lead to revolts.[53] Because the *paterfamilias* had to provide shelter, food and clothing for his slaves, he was also the one who decided what to wear.[54] The *tunica lato clavo* was thus in all probability chosen by the male head of the household himself. Since this specific garment was associated with the elite, it was possibly expensive as well. Perhaps the *paterfamilias* wanted his servants, who had an important role in receiving and serving the guests, to look well-groomed. But only to a certain extent, since – in contrast to the guests – they only wore a single garment. And if it was

[49] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 28-29; Beard, *Pompeii*, 218-219.
[50] This particular servant looks like the one walking in front of the couches depicted in figure 6.
[51] Joshel et al., *The Material Lives of Roman Slaves,* 28-29. Some historians, like Joshel, have suggested he had sexual duties. The other enslaved servants are active, while he is passive and this could point to the idea of him being marginalized and fulfilling a passive (sexual) role.
[52] D'Ambra, 'Real Estate for Profit. Julia Felix's Property and the Forum Frieze', 99.
[53] Seneca, *De Clementia* 1.24.1, transl. J. W. Basore, *Seneca. Moral Essays, Volume I: De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia.* (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge 1928); M. George, 'Slave Disguise in Ancient Rome' in: J. Gardner and T. Wiedemann ed., *Representing the Body of the Slave* (New York; London 2002) 41-54: 44.
[54] K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge 1994) 81.

not clear on the basis of clothing, than their lower status was at least emphasized in these wall paintings by depicting them smaller than the ones dining. Another interesting element in this fresco is that the two guests in the front are wearing shoes, while the servants are walking barefoot. Besides the possibility that this was an indication of lower status, it might also refer to the fact that these servants are part of this household, while the ones wearing shoes are guests from outside. Thus, it also shows a difference in dress in the public and domestic sphere.

Fig. 6: Second fresco, north wall of the triclinium. Frescoes depicting a dining scene. House of the Triclinium, Room 15, Region V.2.4, Pompeii. Source: photo courtesy of Johannes Eber. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/

In this second fresco (figure 6) we see the banqueters reclining on the couches in the dining room, two of them are women. Furthermore, two servants are shown.[55] A male servant stands in front of the couches and is, just like the ones in the first fresco, depicted smaller which points to his lower status. Other comparisons to be made are his short red-purple tunic and the fact that he has bare feet. The other female servant is less visible. She stands on the far left, next to one of the guests, with food or drinks in her hands. Interestingly, we can clearly see the difference between the servants and the ones dining. While the banqueters all have bare chests, the two servants are both dressed. This indicates different roles as well, distinguishing between the people who are enjoying their dinner and the ones who work, providing the food and drinks.[56] While some guests in the first fresco are wearing double garments, in this scene a lot of it has been taken off. Interestingly, this does not appear in frescoes depicting public and religious spheres. In those paintings people are wearing at least some clothes, with the exception for the one who is punished in the Forum scene. This indicates a difference between the public and the, more private, domestic sphere. Nakedness was not, socially or morally, tolerated or acceptable in public. Where less clothes on the streets implicated one's lower status, poverty or immorality, in this scene nudity is an indication of wealth: being part of the elite banqueters. In contrast, having your clothes on is an indication of your lower status and not being part of the ones enjoying the dinner party.

[55] S. Mols and E. Moormann, 'Luxe en decadentie' in: V. Hunink et al. ed., *Luxe & Decadentie. Leven aan de Romeinse goudkust* (Nijmegen 2008) 36-72: 64.

[56] Ibidem. A text has been inscribed on the wall (within this fresco). It states *facitis vobis suaviter - ego canto - est ita valeas*: "Make yourselves comfortable; I am singing; go for it".

Fig. 7: Third fresco, west wall of the triclinium. Frescoes depicting a dining scene. House of the Triclinium, Room 15, Region V.2.4, Pompeii. Source: photo courtesy of Johannes Eber. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/

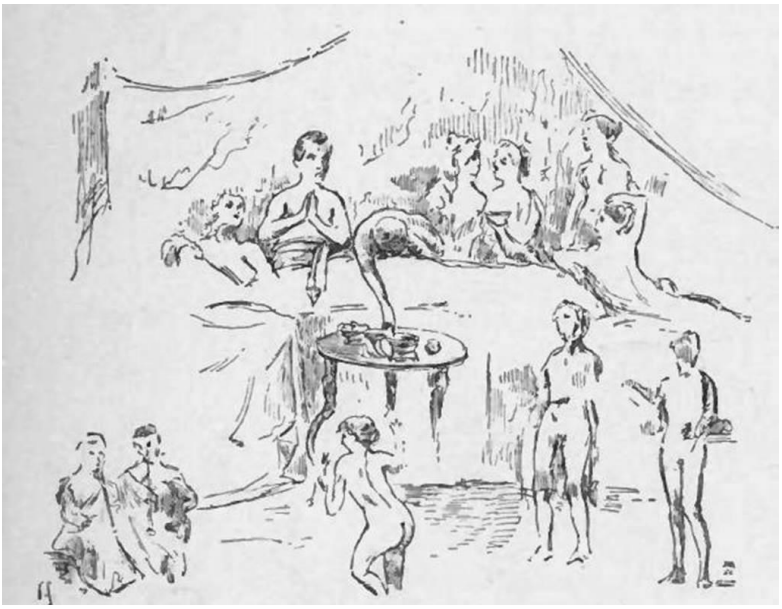

Fig. 8: Drawing of the third fresco. Source:
https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/

The third fresco (figure 7) depicts entertainment during dinner, probably a fragment depicting the dinner later in the evening. Where all banqueters were awake in the first and second fresco, here one of them has fallen asleep or passed out. Although this fresco is badly damaged, it is with the help of a drawing showing the outlines of the figures still possible to identify some figures. Just like the second fresco, the banqueters have bare chests. A naked female dancer, who might have been an enslaved sex worker, is performing for them. Whereas nudity in the public sphere was seen as immoral, here, in a private sphere, it was tolerated and even seen as entertaining. On her right, we see the fragments of a servant, recognisable by his bare feet and his white and short tunic, probably a *tunica lato clavo*, leaving his legs visible. Right next to him stands a bronze statue which represents a young man with a plate for refreshments.[57] On the left side of the dancer, two small figures are depicted. Just like the other servant, they are wearing short tunics and are depicted small – thus indicating they were servants too.

[57] Beard, *Pompeii*, 218-219.

**Conclusion**

The frescoes found in Pompeii had not previously been used to analyse dress and diversity in different spheres of urban daily life. Yet, it seems to be an interesting source which leads to meaningful insights in the importance of visible appearance in showing, performing and claiming your role, status, wealth and gender within Roman society. Even though the frescoes might provide an idealised image of everyday life, what was depicted must have corresponded with reality to some extent. All the frescoes tell a story without the use of text. So, the people who saw these wall paintings depicting different spheres had to be able to interpret the scenes on the basis of their own lived experiences. Therefore, these images must have been recognisable, reflecting what people encountered in daily life.

In the wall painting depicting the procession of Cybele, the importance of religious dress in society is demonstrated, which helps to identify the different religious roles of the people within the procession. It shows that certain formal roles required specific garments. Visible appearance in the Forum fragments in the *Praedia* of Julia Felix is important in understanding the differences in status, wealth, gender, beneficence and morality in the public sphere. Lastly, the domestic scenes in the House of the Triclinium give an interesting insight into private elite events, wherein people of the lowest and highest status meet, and aspects which are important and valued in the public sphere, for example to be dressed properly, can differ from the domestic, more private one.

All in all, dress created diversity in all the different spheres and on multiple levels in Roman Pompeii in the Late Republic and Early Empire. Not only could it show someone's gender, wealth or status, but also someone's role or function within a particular sphere. Thus, this suggests a discourse – the idea that there was in fact a conversation going on in Pompeii about differences within the city. Therefore, the wall paintings showing idealised real life scenes can be very interesting, meaningful and fruitful in expanding our knowledge and understanding of dress and diversity on multiple levels in Pompeian society. Pompeian frescoes show, to some extent, a way to 'dress to impress'. But not only status and wealth mattered, other aspects such as your role, morality and gender also had deeper meanings behind one's dress. So, Dress to Impress? Yes, but also, or maybe even more so: Dress to Express!