Roman Clothes and Fashion

Men and women’s clothing is very similar, and fashions have changed very little over the centuries. Children tend to wear smaller versions of adult clothing.

Men’s clothes

The toga is a heavy, awkward item of men’s clothing, but the toga distinguishes a Roman citizen and so emperors insist on their being worn. They are of fine white wool, and require frequent cleaning by a fuller.

The toga virilis is a plain white and worn by all ordinary men. The toga praetexta (bordered toga) has a purple stripe and is worn by magistrates. Until the age of about 15 or 16, boys also wear the toga praetexta. A senator’s toga has a broad purple stripe (latus clavus), while an equestrian’s has a narrow purple stripe (clavus angustus). An emperor’s toga is entirely purple. A toga made of pure black wool, called a toga pulla, is worn at funerals and by those in mourning.

In the country, men usually wear a more practical cloak over a tunic, and for formal evening meals a smart, loose gown called a synthesis is popular.

Women’s clothes

Women also wear loincloths (and sometimes breast bands) and tunics. Two-piece garments resembling a bikini are popular when taking exercise at the baths. Married women (matrios) wear a stola over the tunic, a long, full dress gathered up by a girdle, usually with a colored border around the neck. The palla is a large rectangle of cloth that can be draped around the stola in many ways. Out of doors, women also wear a cloak.

Footwear

Romans wear a wide variety of shoes—hobnailed boots, slippers, and sandals made from leather. Cobbler make ready-to-wear and made-to-measure shoes ranging from the plain calo (heavy boot) to elegantly designed, open-weave ladies’ sandals.

Makeup

Women use various perfumes and facial cosmetics. A pale skin is always fashionable, and the face is whitened with powdered chalk or white lead. Eyelids are darkened with ash or antimony (a dark-colored metal). Cheeks and lips are blushed and painted red by using the sediment of red wine, or a plant dye called fucis.

Hairstyles

Men favor both the severity of the Republican no-nonsense short hair cut, with closely shaved face, and the slightly longer dressed locks and full beard of imperial times. In any case, most mornings start with a visit to the tosor (barber) for a shave and trim, or a tidy-up. Women have their hair done at home by slaves who style elaborate creations from their mistresses’ hair, or by the addition of hairpieces and wigs. Wigs made from the blond hair of Germans captured in battle are very popular. The whole edifice is held in place by a veritable scaffold of pins, combs, and braided harnets.