

Everyday Life for the Women of Ancient Rome

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Names and Terms:

- ◆ Atrium– Central courtyard found in a typical Roman house. Surrounded by a flat roof.
- ◆ Insula– A city block of apartments.
- ◆ Peristylum–Second courtyard, usually a garden, surrounded by a sloped roof.
- ◆ Fibulae– A pin very similar to our safety pin, used for fastening clothes.
- ◆ Lararium– Household shrine to the spirits that protected the home.
- ◆ Stolae–Floor-length tunic, often pleated, worn by women. It could be sleeved or sleeveless, and could be somewhat colorful.
- ◆ Palla– rectangular fabric that was draped around a woman's upper body, worn over her stola. Similar in purpose to a toga, it was almost always white.
- ◆ Terms are continued on next page.

Book

Life in Ancient Rome – F.R. Cowell

While this book focuses on all aspects of life in ancient Rome, there are some chapters that are specific to the lives of women. In the chapter “Women at Home” the marriage is described in detail. However, not much information on Roman women is available. There is quite a lot of emphasis put on beauty regimens of the time. This book, like many others, focuses mainly on the material culture and laws of the Romans and very little on women, as there are very few primary sources available to help scholars truly understand women in the Roman Empire.¹

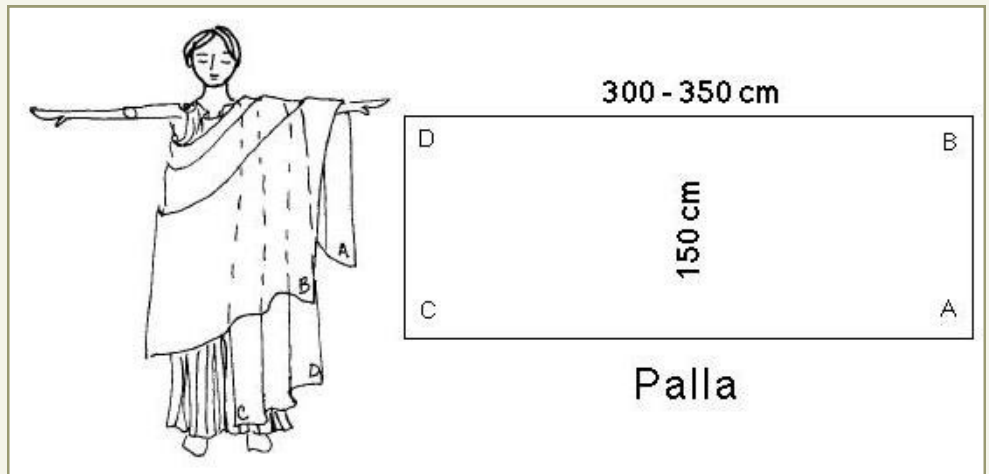
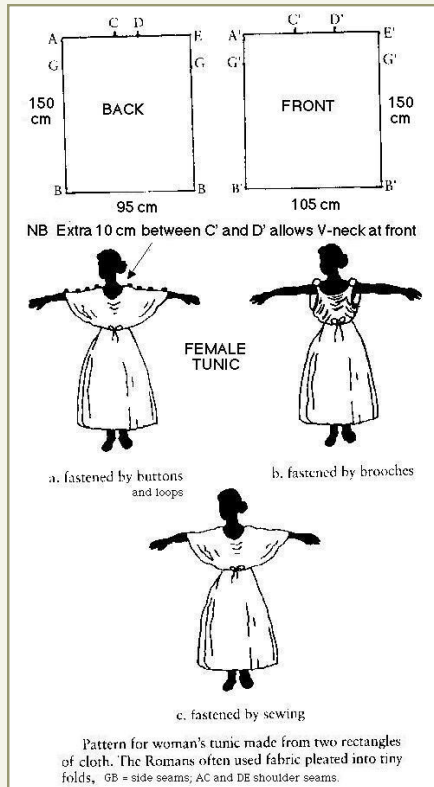
Website 1:

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/family.html>

This website gives very good insight into the life of a woman in the Roman Empire. Although it specifically focuses on the first century of the Roman Empire, this is still a valuable resource which allows the reader to understand the roles of women, which presumably did not change much from the first to second century, in the empire. Probably the most helpful part of this website are its explanations of women's rights during the time (i.e. women were able to manage their own property and affairs, while they had been unable to before the first century).²

¹F. R. Cowell, *Life in Ancient Rome* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1961).

²“The Roman Empire in the First Century,” PBS.org, February 1, 2014, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/women.html>.



Typical Women's Dress.² Although the pattern remained the same, the quality of materials varied greatly, from coarse to very fine wool, as well as flax. Cotton was mostly used for sails; while silk was incredibly expensive and was associated with women of ill repute. (Cowell, 70-71)

Website 2

<http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/staff/resources/background/bg18/>

This website explains the role of women in ancient Athens. While Regilla lived in Greece while it was part of the Roman Empire, Greece still would have held onto many of its traditions, especially during the Second Sophistic movement when a rebirth of the ideals of classical Greece. After reviewing this website, it is interesting to note that most Greek women would have had fewer rights than those that Regilla experience. For instance, a Greek woman was not entitled to inherit property, Regilla owned her own property.¹

Questions for Discussion, or 'Quaestiones Americanae'

- How would Regilla's life been different if she had married a Roman and stayed in Rome?
- Does it seem that there was any way Regilla could have or would have asked for a divorce?
- Would Regilla have been prepared to fulfill the duties of a Grecian wife?
- After comparing the life of a Greek and Roman woman, what are the differences? Similarities?
- What advantages did Regilla have by being from a wealthy Roman family?

- ◆ *In Manu* – A term referring to the control given to the husband of a Roman women which gave him and his family all rights over the bride and her property, not all women married in this way.
- ◆ *Sine Manu* – This term refers to a woman who marries, but is still under the control of her pater familias, allowing her to have rights to her own property.
- ◆ *Sui Iuris* – A woman with at least three children who was able to become legally independent.

¹"Women, Children, and Slaves," AncientGreece.co.uk, February 1, 2014, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/staff/resources/background/bg18/>.

²"Roman Female Costume," Women's Costume Patterns, February 1, 2014, accessed February 1, 2014, http://members.ozemail.com.au/~chrisandpeter/radical_romans/female/female.htm.