DRESS
DEFINING PERSONAL SPACE: DRESS AND ACCESSORIES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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Abstract

Late antique dress in its diversity offers a mirror to the heterogeneity and complexities of late antique society. This paper presents a brief overview of the attire of various social groups in Late Antiquity—beginning from the imperial court and reaching down to the professionals of the world of public-spectacle—as this may be reconstructed from the archaeological, the written, and the artistic records. Its purpose is to highlight the importance of clothing and accompanying accessories as eloquent signs in an intricate communication system that enabled individuals and groups to articulate their identity and express it outwards in different physical settings and in a variety of social contexts.

Introduction

In the 7th c. collection of the Miracles of St. Artemios we hear of a man who, while spending the night in the church of that martyr at Constantinople hoping to be healed by the saint’s grace, encountered the saint in a vision dressed in a tunic (στυχάριν) fastened at the waist with a belt (βαλτίδων) with a deacon’s narrow stole, an orarion, around his neck. There was no church-service going on at the time. The sick man was initially puzzled because the saint did not wear a mantle (χαλινί). He assumed, however, that he must have felt comfortable (τε βρηκακός) moving around in such a guise because the church was his home. Following the ardent prayers of the saint, the sick man was miraculously healed.¹

¹ Crisafulli and Nesbitt (1997) 166–70, 276. I thank Ms Andria Andreou for sharing her insights on this passage with me.