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*The Salvation and the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for the Resurrection*

Carly Daniel-Hughes

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The way we present ourselves to the world communicates something about us: wealth, class, personality, interests, and style. From media coverage on Sarah Palin's outfits and Hilary Clinton's hair, it has become a topic of debate and public scrutiny. Political commentators and pundits dissect such "trivialities" in the public sphere, interpreting the dress of popular figures to represent status, competence, and ideals of virtue. This is not a purely modern preoccupation. As Dr. Daniel-Hughes shows in her astute and engaging new work, *The Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for the Resurrection*, early Christians were concerned with defining their identity as separate from the Roman citizenry through dress.

Tertullian (160-220 CE), a Late Antique theologian, wrote repeatedly on the dress of men and women. In this book, Daniel-Hughes challenges the view that his polemical discourse on dress was a secondary, and trivial, aspect of his writings by demonstrating that his concern with bodily appearance and dress was a product of his belief that the salvation of the flesh, the eventual resurrection of the Christian's body, would be affected by how that body was treated and represented in the earthly world. At first glance, concern for men's and women's fashion at a time when Christians were undergoing persecution may seem rather banal. Daniel-Hughes shows, however, that dress and ornamentation provided social cues about how that body could be read and understood.

As Daniel-Hughes shows, dress did not speak unilaterally; it could be manipulated to express a variety of meanings. Women and men affected the use of dress in their creation of a public persona. Likewise, Tertullian's concern with clothing the Christian body was a means of displaying a distinctly Christian identity, as opposed to Roman citizenry.

Chapter 1 covers the use of dress in the Roman world. The ways in which men and women were expected to dress was meant to convey social status and power. For example, the *matrona's* (matron's) conical hairstyle, bound with cords of knotted wool, was a symbolic fortress, an impregnable tower, that represented her own social position as a married woman. The standard dress of the Roman *matrona*, the *stole*, a gap-sleeved slip worn over a tunic, and the *palla*, a mantle that was wrapped around the body and drawn over the head and shoulders, denoted modesty, a virtue highly prized - or at least highly touted - by Roman men. This style of dress concealed the woman's body behind many layers of clothing, making her visually

unapproachable. Thus, along with her tall, girded hairstyle, the *matrona* was symbolically guarded, untouchable, in contrast to the naked and accessible slave.

Men, on the other hand, were expected to wear the toga, a fussy and elaborate garment that indicated its wearer's prestige and was worn and manipulated during public speaking; indeed students were coached on its use for rhetorical flourish. Tertullian responds to this Roman ideal of masculinity in his treatise, *On the Pallium*, where he exhorts Christian men to wear the *pallium*, a simple squared-off tunic instead. This is the focus of the second chapter, where Daniel-Hughes shows how Tertullian constructs a new image of Christian masculinity in contrast to the Roman *vir* (man). The values held by early Christian men (modesty, patience, sexual abstinence) were viewed as feminine as opposed to the dominant, aggressive, and sexually virile Roman male. In Tertullian's impassioned defense of the *pallium*, he re-imagines this garment as a symbol of masculinity by associating it with the tradition of Greek philosophy and therefore a representation of stoicism and wisdom. In contrast to the Roman man, whom he argues spent an inordinate amount of time and attention on dress, the Christian man was called on to dress simply, thereby expressing the masculine values of courage, self-control, and the avoidance of fussy, feminine, luxury.

The third and fourth chapters deal with women's dress. Here Daniel-Hughes covers *On the Apparel of Women 1 and 2*, and *On the Veiling of Virgins*. Tertullian's rhetoric on dress is informed by his theology, particularly his concern for the body and how it would appear after the resurrection. For Tertullian, as the author explains, the salvation of the Christian was the salvation of the flesh, and women's flesh was especially problematic. All women carried the taint of Eve's sin and so their bodies had to be carefully guarded. Although other Christian writers argued that by remaining a virgin a woman could make her body become symbolically impenetrable, thus symbolically male, Tertullian held that all women's bodies, virgin or not, provoked the male gaze.

However, fashion ideals did not often reflect the fashion of everyday life. Daniel-Hughes points to the fact that if Tertullian had to repeat his injunctions on women's dress, in particular the veiling of virgins, this indicates that virgins were not veiling. His repeated attempts to shame and cajole women into dressing modestly indicate the possibility that women were not, in fact, upholding his ideal of femininity. Indeed, his may have been the minority voice.

In examining dress in the Roman world, Daniel-Hughes draws on material culture in the form of statuary and paintings from the period. Her use of images adds dimension to the study, exemplifying the subtle cues clothing could be used to communicate. She raises the question of how these modes of dress were used by

women and men to shape their public image. The women of the imperial court utilized commissioned portrait statues to represent the values they wanted to uphold. For example, in a portrait of Faustina the Elder, she appears in the *palla* of a *matrona* but with the folds artfully draped to enhance her curves and form a suggestive 'v', thus presenting herself as both modest and fertile: the ideal wife.

Though targeted to a readership familiar already with early Christianity, the text provides enough introduction and background to make the material accessible to a reader not overly familiar with the context. Perhaps the only critique is that the book may fail to reach an audience wider than the academic community of early Christianity. As well as presenting a new and illuminating insight into the writings of Tertullian and the salvation of the flesh, this text has much to contribute to contemporary discussions of how dress speaks, for whom we dress, and why. Given the recent interest in studies of beauty, this work is topical, relevant, and provides a necessary compliment to current scholarship that focuses only on the modern world with often little more than a nod to the rich and complex history of beauty and fashion. This is an engaging and insightful book that has much to contribute not only to the study of gender in early Christianity but also to the study of beauty and gender in the contemporary world.

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