

# WHAT DID JESUS WEAR?

A mosaic of Jesus Christ, likely from a Byzantine or Orthodox tradition. He has long, wavy brown hair and a full brown beard. His face is pale with some reddish tones. He is wearing a dark brown, textured robe. Behind his head is a large, circular halo made of gold mosaic tiles, with a red border. The background is also composed of gold mosaic tiles.

Joan E Taylor

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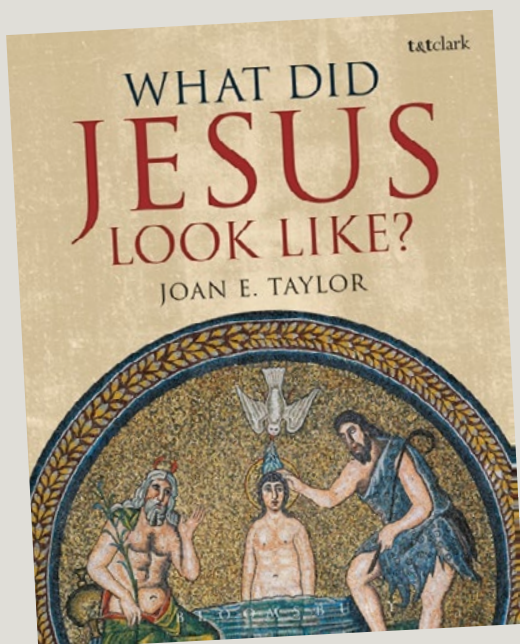
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Design: Simon Jenkins

Cover photograph of a 6th century mosaic of Christ in  
Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna

# What Did Jesus Look Like?

This booklet is an extract from the book  
*What Did Jesus Look Like?*  
by Joan E Taylor



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[\*\*What Did Jesus Look Like?\*\*](#)

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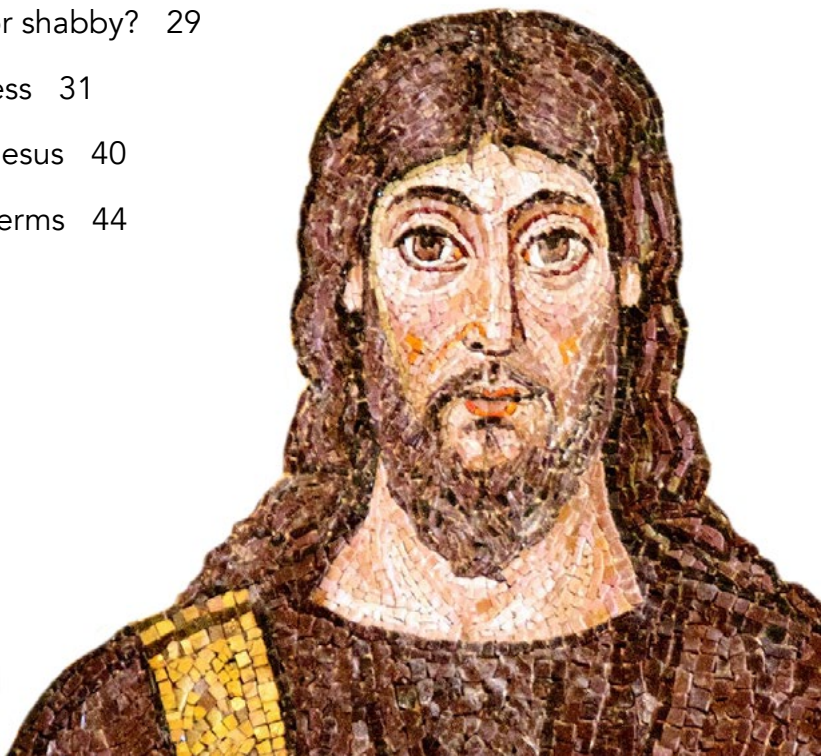
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# Introduction

When it was reported that the face of Jesus had been spotted on a three-cheese pizza fresh out of the oven at Posh Pizza in Brisbane, everyone who examined the fuzzy image knew what they were looking for: shoulder-length hair and a beard. Jesus has looked that way for centuries, whether it's in church paintings, Sunday school books, or plastic statues to stick on the dashboard of your car. He is instantly recognisable.

But is that how Jesus really looked when he was a carpenter in 1st century Galilee? The Professor of Christian Origins at King's College London, Joan Taylor, thinks it's unlikely that Jesus ever looked like this.

'Jesus, as a philosopher with the "natural" look, might well have had a short beard,' she says, 'but his hair was probably not very long.' Long hair, she believes, would have identified Jesus as a Nazirite, someone who had taken a vow not to drink or cut his hair. This doesn't match the Jesus depicted in the Gospels, who was accused of drinking too much.

This booklet presents a complete chapter from Joan Taylor's book, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, with some minor editing. The book explores all the historical evidence for the appearance of Jesus, looking at how Jesus has been portrayed in art and literature, moving back in time to the earliest wall paintings in the catacombs of Rome.

Joan Taylor writes in her introduction to the book, 'We will consider... what we can know about Jesus' height, skin, age and hair, among other things. We will then dress Jesus, using the evidence of Jesus' clothing in the Gospels, comparative paintings and textiles that have survived from Jesus' time in the dry environment close to the Dead Sea.'

The chapter chosen for this booklet is 'Top to Toe: Dressing Jesus', which focuses on the clothing of Jesus. The booklet explores the style, cut and colour of the robes Jesus wore, right down to the tassels on his cloak. It also opens up Jesus' teaching about clothing, and what it tells us about his message and mission to the people of his time, and ours.



# First century fashion

In the Cathedral of Trier, in Germany, there is a holy relic that attracts great crowds of pilgrims whenever it is on display. Like the Shroud of Turin, many people believe in its authenticity; unlike the Shroud, however, it does not elicit as much sensational international fame, belief and controversy.

The robe itself is recorded as being in existence in Trier from the 12th century onwards, since there is a document from this time stating that it was found among the reliquaries of the high altar. It first went on show in 1512, and over the centuries it has been repaired and restored, and even dipped in a rubber solution to ensure its preservation. In 2012 it was displayed

*Picture 1: The Holy Robe of Trier on display in April 2012, on the 500th anniversary of its first public appearance.*



*Picture 2: A marble statue of Serapis, the Graeco-Egyptian god, from the 4th century CE. He wears a long robe, associated in the ancient world with power and high social status.*

again (picture 1), to mark the 500th anniversary of its initial exhibition, and thousands of visitors came to see it.

Four years later, in France, another alleged tunic of Christ went on show, likewise drawing throngs of visitors. The holy tunic in the basilica of Saint-Denys d'Argenteuil, in the Val d'Oise, also has documentation from the 12th century attesting to its existence. Radiocarbon dating of the material, carried out in 2004, allegedly provided a date range for the cloth from 530 to 640 CE.

This should be no surprise. Both these artefacts are long, Gallic tunics with large, baggy sleeves, and they fit well with the image of Jesus' clothing we find in European art from the Byzantine period onwards. In the earliest depictions of Jesus, on the walls of the catacombs and on sarcophagi, he is presented in typical male attire of the time, in a shorter tunic, though sometimes also with long sleeves.

In this booklet, we will outline what we know about Judaeen clothing of the 1st century, and link this evidence with what we find in the Gospels, where what Jesus wore is sometimes mentioned.

## **Wearing long robes**

In the 1st century, there were long garments worn by men, but not by the kind of man Jesus was. Male Roman citizens, when they were at ceremonial events, or engaged in public speaking and official duties, wore the traditional Italian toga, which was not only long, but was also probably semi-circular, heavy, enormously voluminous and made of wool. It was a mark of distinctively Roman manhood, worn in a very special way, with different types of purple stripes signifying high rank. Emperors and other honoured Roman men are depicted in the toga in statues and reliefs, but it was not worn by ordinary non-Roman men such as Jesus.

In the eastern Mediterranean world, long robes were worn by royal rulers and the rich elite. Enthroned statues of the Graeco-Egyptian god Serapis (picture 2) are usually dressed in a long, short-sleeved tunic with a mantle (a cloak), visualised in the garments associated with the resplendent kings of ancient Alexandria, where the great cult statue of Serapis was made in



*Picture 3: In a scene from the Aeneid, a physician removes an arrowhead from the leg of Aeneas after a battle. The physician is wearing a long tunic which was worn by elite men in the time of Christ.*

the 4th century BCE. Not surprisingly, then, in the book of Revelation, the heavenly 'Son of Humanity' is imagined sitting on a throne 'clothed to the feet' (Revelation 1:13). A long robe correlated with power, affluence, leisure and status.

In Judaea, many wealthy and educated men also apparently donned long tunics, called *stolai*. Therefore, in one of Jesus' teachings, he says, 'Beware of the scribes who desire to walk in long *stolai*, and to have salutations in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets' (Mark 12:38). From this we can assume Jesus really did not wear such robes, since he pointed to these as being worn by others, who sought esteem.

Such long tunics have been found depicted in the frescoes of Pompeii, where there are depictions of a type of 'archaic Greek man' who is eminent or learned: invariably he is bearded, wears a long tunic with tight long sleeves, and a mantle. We see this type in a painting from the House of Siricus (picture 3), where a physician, Iacyx, is shown working on Aeneas' leg to remove an arrowhead (in an episode from Virgil's epic poem, the *Aeneid*). Iacyx is wearing a mustard-coloured tunic with tight long sleeves underneath, and a mustard-coloured outer tunic which appears to be long and gathered in at the waist. Around this he has a mantle draped over his left arm and around his right thigh.

Likewise, in another fresco, depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia, from the House of the Tragic Poet (picture 4), King Agamemnon, knife in hand, wears a long pink tunic with tight, long turquoise sleeves. A yellow, purple-bordered mantle is tied around his midriff with a gold band. The shiny highlights on the tunic indicate it is made of silk.

From the House of Jason comes a scene which shows King Pelias, a wreath on his head, and with a grey beard and curly hair around the nape of his neck, meeting a young Jason (picture 5). Pelias is dressed in the same long tunic down to his ankles, with long, narrow sleeves that are white with pale blue front and edges, wearing a pink mantle with purple trim, and laced boots. All his clothing appears to be made of silk.

These scenes show events from the mythological past; they represent a Roman idea of the Greek king or the elite expert of long ago. However, the type was informed by the actual garments of royal Hellenistic men, as we see in Serapis' clothing. In the book of Revelation, Christian martyrs in the world to come are each given a 'white *stole*', a bleached-white long robe, as a kind of honorific reward that grants them a place of highly esteemed rest



*Picture 4: King Agamemnon (right) pictured in a scene from Greek mythology on a wall painting from Pompeii. He wears a yellow mantle over a pink silk tunic.*

at the end of their trials (Revelation 6:11). The last have become first. It is an irony that the very clothing Jesus defines as self-aggrandising and different to his own is the clothing that artists have dressed him in for some 1,600 years.



*Picture 5: King Pelias (the central figure at the top of the steps) sees the warrior Jason, in a famous scene from Greek mythology, in a house wall painting from Pompeii. Pelias wears the long tunic known in the time of Christ.*

## **Wearing a tunic**

Much is now known about clothing in 1st and 2nd century Judaea, because many fragments of the tunics worn by people then have been found in caves and tombs bordering the Dead Sea, where the dry climate has allowed their preservation. For example, picture 6 shows a tunic recovered from the Cave of Letters, a burial site near the Dead Sea. From the archaeological remains, and from comparable art from Egyptian mummy portraits, Pompeii and



*Picture 6: A child's undertunic, a belt and sandals found in the Cave of Letters by the Dead Sea. The items were made and worn in the 2nd century CE. The child's tunic is mistakenly displayed here on an adult-size torso. It would have been made for a toddler and tied at the waist.*



Picture 7: Jesus (centre) delivers his teaching to Peter, in a sarcophagus of the 4th century. He is wearing a tunic popular at the time, with a longer hemline than the tunics of earlier centuries.

elsewhere, we can visualise what people wore. It is clear that Judaeans were part of the Mediterranean world and dressed much like everyone else.

An ordinary man in Jesus' world would wear a short tunic, called a *chiton*, in Greek (in Latin a *tunica*) and a woman would wear an ankle-length one. The long version, the *stole*, in Greek (or *stola* in Latin), was understood to be women's clothing, when not worn by high-status men. A higher hemline indicated masculine wear. Thus, in the Acts of Paul and Thecla, a 2nd century apocryphal story, Thecla, a female disciple of the apostle Paul, dons a short tunic to show her commitment to an ascetic Christian life, dressing like a man. As centuries passed, the hemline became longer.



*Picture 8: Jesus wearing a longer, Gallic tunic, on a sarcophagus from about CE 350. The soldier with him has a short tunic, still worn at the time by the military.*

The short tunic, usually finishing just below the knees or above the calf when belted, is rightly shown as Jesus' appropriate clothing in catacomb art, early sarcophagi (pictures 7 and 8), and in the Dura house church (picture 9). Here the artists of the 3rd and 4th centuries are accurately reflecting what continued to be normative dress for non-elite males. Men not in high status

positions were supposed to be ready for action. If they needed to be really active (by running, or physically labouring), they would ‘gird their loins’ by tucking the *chiton* up through their legs and tying it, as pictured in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: ‘Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist’ (Ephesians 6:14).

The Good Shepherd portrayal of Jesus found in the catacombs and elsewhere (picture 10), shows the shepherd wearing a ‘one sleeve’ type of tunic called an *exomis*, worn by shepherds and labourers, which could be particularly short.



Picture 9: Jesus (right) wearing a tunic, in a wall painting of his healing of the paralysed man, who is carrying his bed on his back. The painting is from a 3rd century CE house church in Dura Europos, a border town in Syria.



*Picture 10: Jesus is pictured here as the Good Shepherd, in a Roman catacomb painting from the 3rd century. He is dressed in an exomis, a short tunic worn by shepherds, which allowed them freedom of movement for manual labour.*

Generally, tunics were made of wool, but linen could be worn in hot weather. The Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, who lived in the 1st century, says that the people of Jericho wore linen all year, because of the mild climate, since it was a lighter fabric. Linen and woollen tunics would be easily distinguished not only in terms of lightness; while woollen tunics could have thin coloured stripes (called *clavi*) from shoulder to hem, the stripes on linen tunics were made by a different kind of weave alone (called ‘self-bands’) and not dyed. In Hebrew, the word for tunic, *haluq*, means ‘divided’, which makes sense for a garment conceptually divided into two, front and back.

The ‘sleeves’ of the tunic are not separate, or long, but simply the width of the material used, since the tunic was gathered in at the waist with a belt or tie. A long sleeve results from a wide tunic, since the ‘sleeves’ of an ordinary tunic are actually shoulders that drop down over the arms, their length dependent on the width of the tunic. Long sleeves for men are not common in warm climates, though sleeves do appear increasingly on women’s wear, as women covered their arms more than men, as well as having longer tunics.

For example, the dimensions of a well-preserved adult’s tunic from a 1st century cemetery at Khirbet Qazone, near the Dead Sea, are about 117 cm long and 142 cm wide (3ft 10ins by 4ft 8ins), which would probably indicate a women’s tunic with ‘sleeves’ down to the wrist, and a baggy shape.

A belt was tied around the waist, and could be made of leather or cord. John the Baptist’s belt was considered unusual in being made simply of ‘skin’, not proper leather. John also wore unusual clothing made of camel hair (not camel skin), the kind of cloth otherwise used for sacking material. But, unlike John, Jesus is not distinguished as looking very different from anyone else.

## **Wearing a cloak**

On top of the tunic people could wear a mantle, called a *himation* in Greek, or a *pallium* in Latin (see Mark 10:50). This was a large piece of material, usually woollen. Known in classical Greece as a *chlaina*, a *himation* was sometimes



*Picture 11: A statue of the philosopher Demosthenes wearing a diploida, a double mantle.*

called a *chlani*s or (as diminutives) *chlainion* or *chlanidion*, indicating one of finer wool, especially one worn by women, while a man's short cloak for military use was a *chlamus*. All these words relate to the Greek verb 'warm', *chliaino*, and thus mean 'warmer' in one way or another.

The long, rough mantle of some philosophers (worn without a tunic underneath) could be called a *tribon* – literally a 'worn thing', or even a 'rag' – or a *peribolaion*, a 'wrap'. Their garment, if a long *diploida*, a 'double' piece of cloth, was distinguished by quality from the expensive type of wrap the gods would wear. These were generally worn wrapped around the middle of the body under the armpits and then slung over the left shoulder, as we see in the sculpture of Demosthenes (see picture 11).

A *himation* would also be used as a sheet or blanket by the poor, and when Jesus comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, people spread out their *himatia* in front of him along with vegetation cut from the field (which they would use for bedding), as a way of laying out the 'red carpet'. Matthew's Gospel describes the scene: 'A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road' (Matthew 21:8).

In terms of dimensions, one of the mantles found in the Cave of Letters by the Dead Sea measured 140 x 270 cm (4ft 7in by 8ft 10in). This is thought to have been a woman's mantle. The average height of a woman of the time is estimated at 147 cm (4ft 10in), and so the mantle would cover a woman from neck to toe.

There were many ways of wearing a mantle. In catacomb paintings of Jesus (picture 12) the mantle is often wrapped around the front of the body and the material is bunched up at the front left side of the waist. This would correspond to wearing the mantle with a *fibula* (or brooch) at the left shoulder; one of the ends would be gathered up under the armpit to the back of the shoulder. The mantle would be wrapped round the front and back, and then clipped to catch the piece from the front, then the end would hang down over the left shoulder and arm. This kind of mantle could be comfortably some 2 metres long.

A mantle worn in the style of Demosthenes (picture 11) would need to be 265 cm long at the least, and ideally much longer if it was worn as a 'double',



*Picture 12: Jesus heals the woman with an issue of blood, in this Roman catacomb wall painting from the 3rd-4th century CE.*

a *diploida*. The widths are variable, but the mantle worn by Demosthenes is very wide because it is his only garment.

### **Colourful clothes**

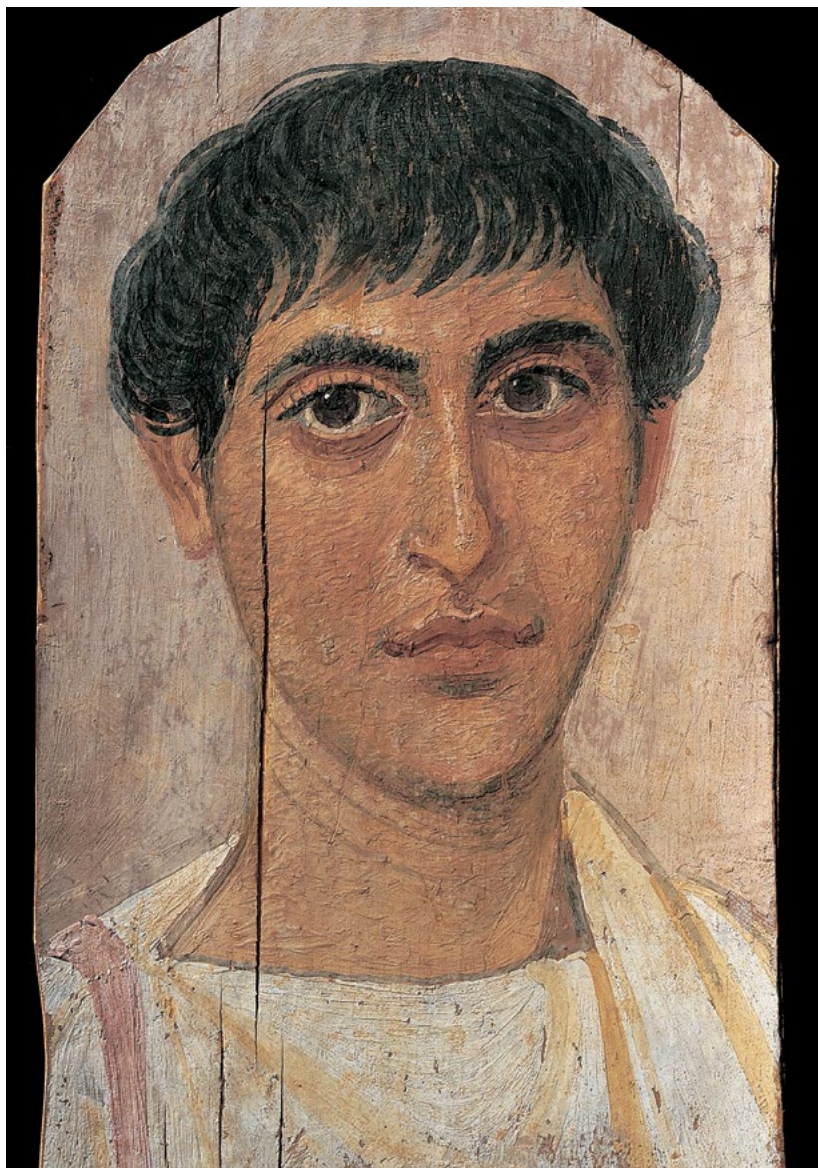
In a trading post at Mo'a, just south of the Dead Sea, 310 textiles were found, and 169 of them were dyed wool or linen, most of them in green

or shades of red. Colourful clothes, like long garments, were associated with women's attire. The historian Josephus notes how insurgents in the Jewish revolt against Rome in the 60s of the 1st century, who were intent on killing collaborators, managed to conceal their daggers by dressing as women. They supplemented their hair, wore women's clothing and applied perfume. Josephus notes that 'while appearing womanly, their right hands were murderous, and while walking with little-bitty steps they would suddenly become warriors, and, bringing out their swords from underneath their fine dyed mantles (*chlanidia*), they'd stab whoever they could.'

In most of the Egyptian mummy portraits (dating from the 1st to 3rd centuries CE), men wear undyed or white garments made of linen or wool (picture 13), and we see this coloration for Jesus' clothing in the art of the catacombs (picture 12) and in Dura Europos (picture 9). This is because there was a strong association between the enjoyment of colour and the lure of the passions; women were associated with a weaker and more passionate nature, and were expected therefore to delight in colour, while for men, eschewing coloured clothing was simply part of being really manly. That is why the tough Essenes (a legal school of Judaism which followed a strict interpretation of the law and a life of community) were noted as not using perfumed oil and for always wearing 'white'.

However, one cannot be too absolute in an association between colour and women's wear. In Pompeian frescoes, both men and women are shown with coloured tunics and mantles, even though the men are also dressed in white or undyed tunics. Tough guys might choose to eschew colour, but it was always a choice, and not a rule. One factor that could easily offset a manly preference for undyed or white clothing was the concern to show riches and status.

Clothing found in Masada and the caves by the Dead Sea is often highly coloured: bright shades of red, yellow, orange, blue, green, and types of purple, including bold, striped cloth for blankets and rugs. In visualising clothes in Jesus' time, these remains ask us to imagine people wearing a kaleidoscope of hues. The question then is whether dyed clothes mainly belonged to women? Or did these clothes sometimes belong to wealthy men who wished to show they could afford expensive dyes, or men who



*Picture 13: An Egyptian mummy portrait from the 2nd century CE, showing a young man wearing white or undyed robes.*

just did not care that much about looking manly and liked a bit of orange? While Josephus states that ‘dyed *chlanidia*’ were women’s apparel, that is not to say it was invariably the case, but rather Josephus is setting up a contrast between hues preferred by women and masculine aggression.

## **Jesus and expensive clothes**

The Gospels show us that a kingly mantle was expected to be red or purple, and Jesus did not ordinarily wear this colour. In Mark and Matthew, when Jesus is ridiculed by Pontius Pilate’s troop of Roman soldiers, prior to his execution, they dress him up in mock gorgeous clothing, with a crown of thorns rather than a crown of laurel (or another honourable plant) twined around his head. Mark’s Gospel says this garment is ‘porphyry’, or purple: ‘And they clothed him in *porphuran*; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him’ (Mark 15:17). Known also as Tyrian purple, this was much admired in the Graeco-Roman world, obtained only from *Murex* shellfish. The classic hue is a reddish kind of purple, or a purplish kind of red, found also in a type of marble called porphyry.

Matthew’s Gospel states that the garment in question is a *chlamuda*. This word is distinctive to this Gospel, and relates to the short military cloak called a *chlamus*. Matthew also says that its colour was *kokkinen*: cochineal, or scarlet – ‘They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head’ (Matthew 27:28).

Curiously, a shortish red military cloak was distinctively Roman wear: the Latin *sagum*. In the book of Revelation, the two colours porphyry and cochineal are listed as being among the luxurious items traded by rich merchants in the Roman empire, along with gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, high-quality linen and silk, precious woods, metals, ivory and marble (Revelation 18:12). They are associated with the ‘whore of Babylon’, who is dressed opulently as an earthly queen.

Nothing suggests that Jesus was concerned to wear expensively dyed cloth made of very fine weaves; the opposite was the case. The taunting soldiers provide him with an expensively-coloured mantle, which was nothing like what he was wearing. Very fine clothing is associated with palaces (such as

the palace of the regional ruler Herod Antipas and his family). Jesus asks his followers about why they went to see John the Baptist by the Jordan River: 'What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? Look, those in glorious clothing and those living in luxury are in palaces' (Luke 7:25). He therefore specifically undermines not only the long tunics worn by elite men, but also very fine, soft, and expensively dyed garments, such as silks and high grade linens. He wore neither. Jesus makes a deliberate point of rejecting any form of dress associated with status and wealth.

However, this is not to say that he wore sackcloth material like John the Baptist. Cloth at the time of Jesus was in general well spun and well made; people took pride in their craft. We should not image textiles as being roughly woven. Even if they wore undyed tunics, men could add status by the width and colour of their *clavi* (vertical stripes): purple, blue and red were popular.

## **Did Jesus wear white?**

Jesus did not wear white. Even though men would mainly have worn undyed clothing, proper white was distinctive, requiring bleaching, and Josephus associated this with the Essenes (some of whom lived in community by the Dead Sea) and also with purity and festivity. Bright white is also associated with the shining dress of angels – as in the book of Revelation: 'And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses' (Revelation 19:14).

The contrast between Jesus' ordinary clothing and gleaming, white clothing, is described specifically during the transfiguration scene in the Gospels. In this sequence, we are told that Jesus' clothes (*himatia*) were changed to become 'glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them' (Mark 9:3). He is thus transformed into wearing heavenly attire. Jesus – prior to being transfigured – must have been imagined as wearing ordinary clothes, in this case wool (the material you would send to a fuller, a bleacher of wool) that was undyed, and not bright white. It was the kind of clothing that could be bleached white, but was not.

## Teaching on clothing

Both Jesus and John the Baptist taught their followers to share any surplus clothing with those who needed it. Clothing is given considerable emphasis because dress signalled identity and social status and was therefore an important cipher in Jesus' teaching. Textiles were expensive to produce, and highly valued personal items, vulnerable to theft. The expensiveness of clothing is indicated by how it features in charity laws in both Christian and Jewish contexts.

The teaching on clothing also reflects back on what John and Jesus themselves would have worn. In Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist says, 'Let the one who has two *chitons* share with the one who has none' (Luke 3:11). Having two tunics seems to be associated with a degree of prosperity and normal social status (see below), and probably was also about decency and warmth in cold weather. All this was irrelevant, John seems to be saying, if there was an opportunity for compassion.



Picture 14: An engraving from the catacombs of Rome, 4th century CE, showing Christ raising Lazarus using a staff.

As Jesus travelled around the villages of Galilee preaching, 'he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two' (Mark 6:7). Jesus instructs his envoys ('apostles' means envoys or messengers) to take no second *chiton* on their journey, presumably trusting instead that people would provide for their needs when required. He ordered them to take nothing except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics (Mark 6:8-9).

Since Jesus appointed the disciples not only to be with him, but also to act for him in his stead in spreading the message and healing, they were presumably being asked to wear what Jesus himself wore when he arrived in villages. This tells us that Jesus himself did not wear two tunics (an undertunic and an outer one). He wore one tunic, with a belt in which he carried no money, and he wore sandals on his feet. According to Mark, he carried a staff with him, as depicted in early Christian art (picture 14), and he asked the twelve to do likewise.

## **Wearing sandals**

Jesus would have worn the standard type of *soleae* sandals. As with the textiles, we now have excellent examples of these. Sandals from Masada have been preserved in an area of the bath-house, where the skeletons of a man, woman and child were discovered, with a woollen mantle, the woman's sandals and braided hair, and broken pottery used for writing. Both whole and fragmentary sandals have also been found in the caves of the Judean desert (picture 15).

The soles are made up from layers of thick leather, sewn together by leather binding. Near the heel, two tabs were passed through the sole on either side, and one more went through between the big and second toe. The main strap was threaded through these tabs and the strap ends were tied together at the toe with a sliding leather band. This could be pulled up to tighten the strap against the foot. The appearance of the sandal is much like a leather thong type, but with a strap around the back of the heel.

The job of adjusting a sandal strap seems to have been the task of a menial slave, which is why John the Baptist says, 'After me comes the one more



*Picture 15: A pair of 1st or 2nd century sandals found at Masada.*

powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and loosen' (Mark 1:7).

The dimensions of the sandals give us some indication of the size of feet of the wearers. Two sandals found in the caves of Qumran measure 20-21 cm in length, which is about 2-3 UK shoe size (or 34-36 EU size and 2.5 to 3.5 US size). Similar sizes have been found elsewhere in Palestine. The average height of men in the time of Jesus is estimated at 166 cm (5ft 5in), and the average woman 147 cm (4ft 10in), and so the small shoe sizes match what we would expect.

### **Smart or shabby?**

Jesus's clothing might not have been in good condition. He seems to demonstrate a good knowledge of how to repair old, worn or torn garments, and speaks to people who expected to make such repairs. He states, 'No one

sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on to an old *himation*, or else the patch tears away from it [when it is washed and shrunk], the new from the old, and a worse tear happens' (Mark 2:21). While mending was traditionally women's work, Jesus has correctly observed the process. New woollen cloth, freshly spun and woven, needs to be washed and dried before being sewn onto an old mantle as a patch. Otherwise, when the mantle is washed, the patch will shrink and tear away from the fabric around it. Woollen fibres matt together and shrink in the wash.

The situation Jesus describes, of repairing an old mantle, shows his concern with the life of the poor. They would seek to keep a mantle in use as long as possible (since clothing was extremely expensive), which would require hours of household labour and the purchase of wool. Charity involving the provision of clothing to the needy is key in the work of the early church. The book of Acts tells us about a disciple of Jesus named Tabitha, saying she is highly valued because of her wonderful charitable actions, including making 'tunics (*chitons*) and other clothing (*himatia*)' (Acts 9:39).

The letter of James says you should not act with any special respect towards someone coming into your meeting wearing gorgeous clothes (James 2:2). This implies that someone wearing fine clothes would indeed expect special treatment, and that they were unusual in a Christian setting.

Jesus specifically addresses his followers' concern with not having enough clothing (along with not having enough food), by saying they should not be worried about what they will wear, because God will provide for them: 'Why are you anxious about clothing? Look at the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil or spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was decked out like one of them' (Matthew 6:28-29).

When the injustice of any theft of clothing happens to anyone, he advises the same detached attitude, involving no retaliation or resistance: 'If anyone takes your *himation*, do not withhold your *chiton* also' (Luke 6:29). Or alternatively, and more radically, 'If anyone would take your *chiton*, give up your *himation* to him also' (Matthew 5:40). This would leave the robbed person completely naked, or clad only in a loincloth or other undergarment. Indeed, this is what is said to happen to the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan: the robbers who attack and beat him also 'strip him' (Luke 10:31).



## Jewish dress

In addition to the *chiton*, we are told Jesus wore a mantle, a *himation*, which is touched by a woman who sought to be healed of a chronic bleeding problem (Mark 5:25-34). In Mark's version of the story, the woman has bled for 12 years and spent all her money on useless physicians. She comes up behind Jesus in a crowded place, and touches his *himation*, thinking all she needed to do was to touch his clothes to be healed. But Jesus asks, 'Who touched my *himatia*?' The woman falls down to the ground in front of him and confesses, at which point Jesus tells her that her faith has healed her.

In the parallel stories told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, however, the woman touches 'the edge of his *himation*' (Matthew 9:20 and Luke 8:44).

*Picture 16: Moses, shown twice in this wall painting from the 2nd century CE synagogue in Dura Europos, is wearing a Jewish tallith (or cloak) with tassels at the corners. One of the tassels is visible at the bottom of the tallith on the left.*

Elsewhere in Mark, touching the edge of Jesus' *himation* was indeed a way of getting cured: 'And wherever he went into villages or cities or fields, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him to touch the edge of his *himation*, and all who touched it were healed' (Mark 6:56). This may be why the woman does this.

The 'edge' (*kraspedon*) of the mantle here is a technical term. It relates to a distinctively Jewish (and Samaritan) piece of clothing. In Hebrew, a man's mantle is called a *tallith*, and it had special features. It is supposed to have *tsitsith*, 'fringes' or 'tassels', placed at the four corners, with the colour blue used in the thread. This came from a command of Moses: 'Tell the Israelites to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner' (Numbers 15:38).

In the Greek Septuagint, these *tsitsith* are called *kraspeda*, 'edges'. A depiction may be seen in the portrayal of Moses in the Dura Europos synagogue scene of crossing the Red Sea (picture 16). Two small tassels are shown at the end of the mantle slung over the left shoulder to hang down behind the arm at the front. In the Gospels, just one 'edge' is mentioned, when a *tallith* mantle would have had four. Why is this?

If a mantle is wrapped around the body starting with one end behind the back, then wrapped around the front and the back again, and then finally draped over the left arm to fall at the front, this leaves only one tassel hanging down. It would be at the back, towards one side, dangling near the feet. One tassel would be tucked into the body and the two hanging from the cloth over the left shoulder and arm would be higher, unless the *himation* were particularly long. Mention of only one 'edge' available for touching provides a clue as to how Jesus wore his mantle.

If he had worn it as Moses does in the Dura Europos synagogue images, there would have been two tassels hanging down at the front. But in the Gospel story the woman is behind Jesus. Thus when people begged Jesus if they could merely touch the 'edge' of his mantle, they were suggesting they put themselves in a menial position behind or at the side of him, kneeling at his feet as he passed by, believing that touching this lowest part of his clothing would heal them.

That tassels were thought to have some heavenly connection is found in a story in a 3rd century rabbinic text, *Sifre Numbers*. In this story, a Jewish student goes off to see a prostitute in one of the coastal cities, but he is warned off her when his *tsitsith* fly up and hit him in the face as ‘four witnesses against him’. But in the story told by Mark, it is all of Jesus’ clothing that becomes a channel for his cleansing or healing power, and the woman knows this.

The *tallith* is specifically referred to by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, when he identifies features of clothing worn to impress others. He points to the Pharisees who ‘make their phylacteries broad and their “edges” (*kraspeda*) long’ (Matthew 23:5). The Pharisees used phylacteries (see page 34) for prayer, and Jesus’ comment suggests that this is prayerful piety gone wrong. Nothing about prayer should be for show. Instead, he advises his disciples, ‘But when you pray, go into your back room, shut your door and pray to your Father, who is in secret, and your Father, the one who sees in secret, will repay you’ (Matthew 6:6).

When archaeologists excavated the Cave of Letters by the Dead Sea, they did not discover any tasselled mantles among the textiles found with the buried bodies, but they did find blue wool. In another cave, 20 km north of the Cave of Letters, textile dye experts identified the kind of blue used in a fragment of cloth, and it is the *tekhelet* blue recommended for *tsitsith*. This blue is derived from the *Hexaplex trunculus* sea mollusc.

We do not know if Jewish men such as Jesus considered it essential to wear a *himation* with tassels all the time, or only for prayer. In the mantle fragments surviving in the caves of the Dead Sea and Masada it is clear that men could wear a *himation* quite apart from the tasselled *tallith*, either instead or additionally. Indeed, for warmth, a man might seek a thick mantle as well as the *tallith*. The lack of *tsitsith* discovered in the caves may mean that the tassels were removed before burial, not only for ritual considerations, but also for their value, as blue thread was precious. In Masada, such tassels could have been cut off as booty by the Romans.

There are some ramifications from these observations. Jesus wore a *tallith*, distinctive of Jewish men, as he travelled. This shows us that Jesus followed Jewish custom. He not only was a Jew, but he looked like a Jew.



*Picture 17: Jewish men wearing the modern form of phylacteries, which are worn on the arm and the head.*

## **Phylacteries**

Phylacteries (or in Hebrew, *tefillin*) were worn by Jewish men during prayers. As with sandals, the Dead Sea caves, particularly near Qumran, have provided a number of examples of these leather amulets.

For the head, there was one with four small pockets, and for the arm, there was one with a single pocket. In the pockets were pieces of scripture written in tiny handwriting. Such *tefillin* are much smaller and slimmer than contemporary types (picture 17) and are like little seed-pods, lying quite flat, such as the example from Qumran (picture 18), by the Dead Sea. These



Picture 18: The ancient form of phylacteries, found in the caves of Qumran by the Dead Sea, and dating from 200 BCE to 50 CE. The leather capsules contain tiny scrolls with excerpts of biblical texts.

would be tied around the forehead and the arm with thin leather strips when a man was ready to pray.

There is also another type where each pocket is separated, which would make the *tefillin* broader, and there are also cases that are either squarer or more oblong. From Jesus' comment he seems to prefer small *tefillin*, and thus this type presumably is the kind he wore, with short *tsitsith* on his *tallith*. It seems there was nothing even remotely 'showy' regarding the piety of Jesus.

## **Jesus' execution**

During Jesus' execution, we are told something more about Jesus' clothing, when his garments are divided among the soldiers. The Gospel of John provides some details of this: 'When then the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his *himatia* and made four parts, a part for each soldier, and the *chiton*.

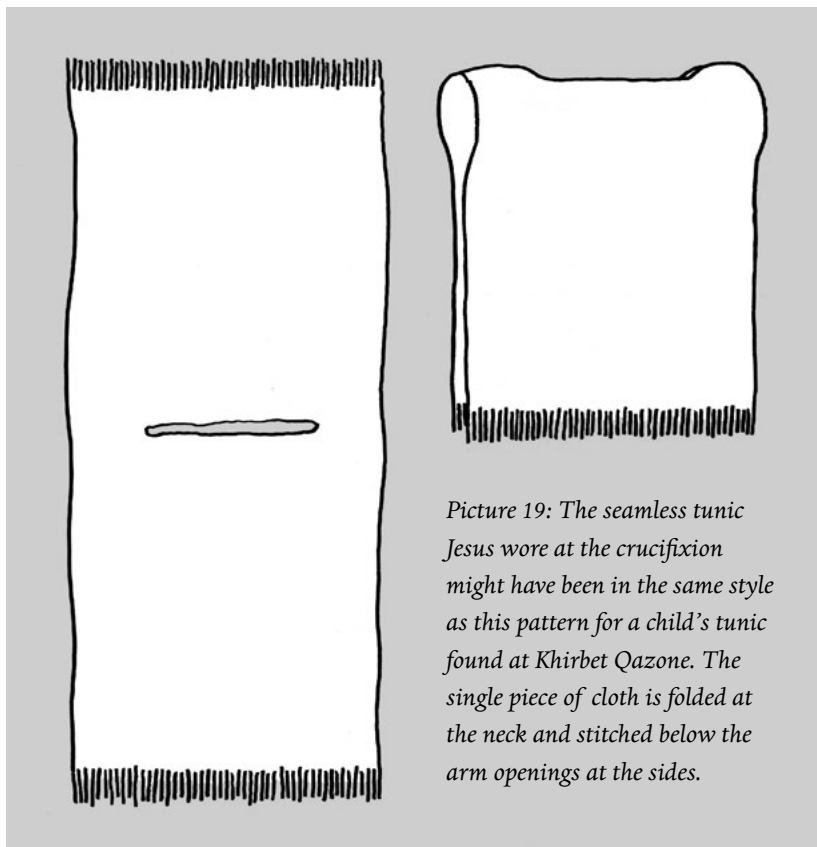
But the *chiton* was seamless, woven from the top parts through the whole thing. So then they said to each other, “Let’s not rip it, but rather cast lots for it to see whose it will be” (John 19:23-4).

The soldiers do not want to rip Jesus’ tunic, since it was made out of one piece of cloth. The reference to it being ‘seamless’ really means there are no shoulder seams, though there were seams at the sides. The tunic could not be unpicked at the seams and separated out into two pieces (front and back) as was usually the case. Josephus states that the high priest wore a seamless garment, and much has been made of this in commentaries, but to find an allusion to High Priestly vestments here assumes a knowledge of Temple practices on the part of the readers of John far beyond what is found in scripture, with no clue at all given in the text.

From a textile history point of view, the passage seems to describe an Egyptian-style ‘bag tunic’, made of one piece, folded at the shoulders and sewn up at the sides, though this type of tunic is usually glimpsed in the wealthy clothing of Roman-period mummy portraits only as an undergarment. Fortunately, tunics of this type of design have now been found in 1st to 3rd century graves in Khirbet Qazone, a cemetery on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, and published by textile expert Hero Granger-Taylor. An example of a one-piece child’s tunic from Qazone is shown in picture 19.

We can imagine Jesus’ tunic as being of this type, possibly one with vertical stripes (*clavi*). It would not have been particularly wide or long. It seems unlikely that Jesus wore a tunic with expensively dyed stripes. Simple, cheaper colours could be created out of dyes such as field madder (reds) or onion skins (greens, oranges), but no stripes were necessary.

While the word *himatia*, used in John’s description of Jesus’ execution, can mean ‘clothes’ in general, it can also mean two or more mantles. So, when the Roman soldiers are said to have divided Jesus’ *himatia* into four shares, it is not clear what is being referred to. The plural must relate to more clothing than a single mantle. Given they did not want to cut Jesus’ tunic, perhaps they would not have wanted to cut his other garments either, as cut cloth would lose its value.



Handmade textiles, particularly if made of wool, easily fray. Cut cloth needed careful sewing with a view to using it for particular purposes, as we see in some of the linen wrappers, jar covers and padding used for depositing the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves. It would be better to have four pieces of whole cloth without any cuts, with only the seams unpicked. However, the wording does seem to suggest the soldiers were indeed prepared to cut the large mantles, but resisted doing the same with the tunic. Halved mantles would still have had a use as saddles, small blankets, or for shrouding.

We noted earlier how the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke indicate that Jesus' usual mantle was a *tallith*, a distinctive *himation* for Jewish men

with tassels (*tsitsith*) at the corners, which could be worn either singly or with another mantle for warmth. In the Gospel of John, there is an indication that Jesus was wearing both a 'warmer' mantle as well as the *tallith* mantle while he was in Jerusalem. It is possibly implied earlier on in the story, when John says that the night of Passover eve, when Jesus was arrested, was cold: 'Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves' (John 18:18).

It is also said that Jesus puts aside his *himatia* before he washes the feet of his disciples: 'He took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel (*lention*) around his waist' (John 13:4). The word *lention* is a little-known Greek word, from the Latin *linteum*, which is specifically a linen cloth, of no fixed size. Is Jesus only clad in this, which he also uses as a towel, or does he still have on his tunic? Afterwards, it is said he takes his *himatia* and reclines at the table again. The ambiguity allows us to imagine either a completely naked Jesus with a linen cloth wrapped around his waist, using his only clothing to wash his disciples' feet; or a Jesus more decently clad with a linen cloth wrapped around him instead of two mantles, keeping his tunic on. Overall, since there is no explicit mention of Jesus stripping naked, the latter seems preferable.

Was Jesus imagined in the Gospel of John as wearing an undertunic? In Roman contexts, mentioned in writings by the authors Varro, Horace and Seutonius, this undertunic is called a *subucula*. In rabbinic literature mention is made of a garment called an *epikarsin*, a loan word from the Greek *epikarsion* – a 'striped garment', literally a 'stripey' – which actually seems to be a colloquial way of referring to any tunic with *clavi* (stripes).

At the end of John's Gospel, Peter is described as naked while fishing, and he puts on an *ependutes*, another rare word, meaning a garment worn over another one, which is therefore often translated as 'outer garment'. The reason this is mentioned is to indicate haste. In his excitement, the naked Peter quickly donned his topmost tunic and jumped into the water to swim to shore, as he could not have swum in a mantle. From this, Peter is assumed to have usually worn an undergarment. However, as we have seen, in the other Gospels when Jesus asks the twelve to go out in his name around Galilee, he specifically says, 'Don't put on two tunics' (for example, in Luke

9:3). This would imply that the disciples would normally want to do so, but in this case they should not, as Jesus' representatives. In other words, Jesus did not wear a second tunic.

Therefore, it is likely that the four soldiers were indeed prepared to halve two woollen mantles equally (despite their loss of value), but not to tear the tunic. If this Gospel also imagines Jesus wearing a Jewish *tallith*, the soldiers might have received a cut-off *tsitsith* each. But Jesus' tunic itself was really already the kind of garment worn as an undergarment by (elite) adults in Egyptian mummy portraits, evidenced as children's clothes in Khirbet Qazone, and probably only worth something whole.

The memory of Jesus looking dishonourable or shameful would then cohere with his clothing, quite specifically. This is not at all to say Jesus went around in what we would consider as underwear (our concepts do not map onto ancient ones), but that the Gospel of John presents Jesus as wearing very simple, basic clothing that readers would have recognised as being usually covered up with something better. It should be remembered that some philosophers would wear nothing under their *himatia*.

There was another type of fine mantle or wrap that could be worn, often made of linen, called a *sinдон*. Jesus himself is said to have been wrapped in such a cloth after he died, but not while he was alive: 'So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock' (Mark 15:46).

In short, the clues we have concerning Jesus in the Gospel of John show him to have worn clothing that would not be esteemed: a one-piece, undyed woollen tunic that some others might wear underneath their better tunics made of two pieces. In the ancient world it was simply expected that people would adopt behaviours that led to honour, and avoid behaviours that led to shame, unless they were certain philosophers. To maintain a certain decent standard of dress led to honour not only for you but your family; the greater the magnificence of your dress, the more honour you and your family obtained. Wearing the right clothing at the right time was honourable, and transgressing the dress code was shameful, even if you were an emperor. Wearing the kind of clothing associated with a child, or an undergarment of the wealthy, was to show oneself as absolutely careless about social status.

# Dressing Jesus

As an idea of how Jesus dressed, there is an image of Moses standing by the burning bush in the 3rd century synagogue of Dura Europos (picture 20). Moses is shown with the same kind of undyed mantle and short tunic we have already found on Jesus in catacomb art and in the house church of Dura Europos, though here the distinctive *tallith* is not as clearly defined as in other Moses scenes there. In picturing Moses, the artist imagined a man people would consider authoritative, charismatic, knowledgeable and philosophically adept. Moses has a slight beard. He has taken off his boot-sandals. If we think of a model for this kind of representation, it seems to be the Jewish sages and Graeco-Roman philosophers of the world in which these paintings were done.

It is reasonable to assume that Jesus could be placed in the same category, wearing similar clothing. As we've seen, the transfiguration scene assumes that Jesus' clothing could be bleached white and was probably then remembered as undyed wool. The only qualification here is that Jesus may have worn a coloured mantle for warmth, especially in Jerusalem at Passover, but it was not the lush red or purple mantle the soldiers used to dress him in as a contrast to his normal wear.

Moses here also wears his mantle in an unusual way, dropped down and wrapped up around his left lower arm. In other paintings in the Dura Europos synagogue, the two *tsitsith* that are at times visible are hanging at the end of the piece of cloth slung over the left shoulder, at the front. To have just one *tsitsith* hanging down, as we have seen, Jesus would have worn his mantle more in the manner of Demosthenes (see picture 11).

It seems that Jesus was remembered in the mid 2nd century as being a man without honour and a bit of a vagabond, and this correlates with the kind of picture we can gain from the Gospels themselves. That Jesus was considered dishonourable in terms of his appearance relates to concepts in antiquity of shame and honour, which fed into the social template that



*Picture 20: Moses and the burning bush, in a wall painting from the synagogue of Dura Europos, 2nd century CE.*

governed patterns of behaviour. Clothing formed an integral part of this: a ragged or badly dressed appearance was shameful, even if you were not wealthy. Jesus apparently did not care about this, and asked his disciples not to care either.

We have seen from archaeology and art how Jesus wore a tunic that advertised no concern with social status. This coheres perfectly with his message. In Jesus' teaching about the reversals of the coming kingdom of God, many of those now top in society would be bottom, and those who were bottom would be top: 'But many who are first will be last, and the last first' (Mark 10:31).

We need to imagine Jesus in clothing appropriate for his time, but also as a man who appeared unconcerned about what he looked like, as he walked the roads of Galilee, sleeping wherever he was welcomed into a home. As he said, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but this son of humanity has no place to lay his head' (Matthew 8:20).



*Picture 21: The clothing worn by Jesus: leather sandals, a simple, knee-length tunic with vertical stripes (clavi), an average sized mantle (tallith) with fringes (tsitsith). Drawing by Joan E Taylor.*

# Clothing terms

**Chiton** – Short Greek tunic, known as a *tunica* in Latin, *haluq* in Hebrew

**Chlamus** – Short Greek military cloak, known in Latin as a *sagum*

**Chlanis** – Alternative Greek term for a *himation*. The diminutive terms, *chlainion* or *chlanidion*, indicate a *chlanis* made of finer wool, worn by women

**Clavi** – Vertical coloured stripes on a tunic

**Diploida** – Double piece of cloth (Greek), used as a mantle, and common in portrayals of philosophers or deities

**Ependutes** – Garment worn over another one, and therefore often translated as ‘outer garment’ (Greek)

**Epikarsin** – Striped Greek garment, possibly used as an undertunic, mentioned in rabbinic literature

**Exomis** – Extra short tunic worn by shepherds and labourers

**Fibula** – Brooch used to secure the end of a mantle at the shoulder

**Fuller** – Worker who washes or bleaches woollen cloth

**Haluq** – Hebrew term for tunic, known as a *chiton* in Greek, *tunica* in Latin

**Himation** – Greek mantle or cloak, often worn over a tunic. In classical Greece, it was known as a *chlaina*, and in Latin as a *pallium*

**Lention** – Linen cloth Jesus used as a towel when he washed his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper

**Mantle** – Cloak, usually a rectangle of cloth

**Peribolaion** – Greek alternative name for a *tribon*, the long, rough cloak of philosophers

**Robe** – Loose-fitting outer garment

**Sindon** – Fine linen mantle or wrap, used to wrap Jesus’ body after he died

**Soleae** – Type of sandals

**Stole** – Long tunic worn in Judaea, known as a *stola* in Latin

**Subucula** – Roman undertunic

**Tallith** – Hebrew mantle or cloak, with four *tsitsith*, or tassels, at the corners

**Toga** – Long, heavy, enormously voluminous robe made of wool, a mark of distinctively Roman manhood

**Tribon** – Long, rough cloak of Greek philosophers

**Tsitsith** – Fringes or tassels placed at the four corners of a Jewish cloak (*tallith*), using blue thread

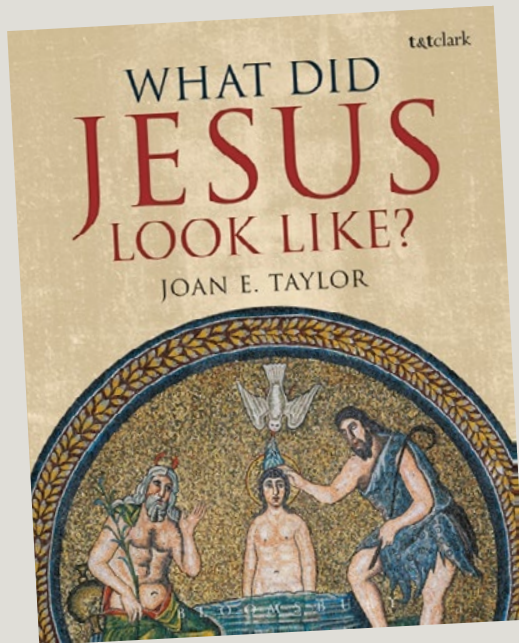
**Tunica** – Simple garment for the upper body, reaching from the shoulders to somewhere between the hips and the calves, either with or without sleeves. *Tunica* is the Latin name for this garment known as *chiton* in Greek, and *haluq* in Hebrew)

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