CHAPTER V.

ROMAN

"To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome."—Poe.

From the Greek age, when art was perfect in its many forms, when costumes were extremely refined in color and arrangement, when jewels were worn only to make the color of the eyes, hair or flesh tints more attractive, when art was created and studied for beauty's sake, we come to the more gorgeous period, that of the Roman, which is distinguished for its profusion of wealth and jewels, richness of color and of material. As a magnet draws to it all the small pieces of iron within reach, so Rome conquered the countries about her and drew their wealth to Italy.

The Roman rule continued over two periods of art, Roman and Byzantine, these divisions being named for the cities which were the home of the Emperors. The Roman marks the age of the pagan religion, the Byzantine, the beginning of the Christian Era, the capital being changed from Rome in 330 A. D. to Byzantium or what is now known as Constantinople. Though the art of Byzantium may truly be called Roman, since many of the people were of Roman birth and all were of the Roman Empire, the character of the costumes and designs differ sufficiently to warrant a distinctive name. To avoid confusion we leave the Byzantine art for another chapter.

The wealth of all the known world was poured into these two capitals of the great empire, and when we remember the vast extent of the Roman power, extending from the middle of England to the southern part of Egypt and from the Rhine to the Desert of Sahara, we may begin to imagine what treasures might be collected. Besides all the wealth that could be obtained from the provinces, precious metals, jewels, ivory, perfumes and rich fabrics were brought from
Arabia, Ethiopia and India by a host of traders. With this endless store of material, there was no reason why the Roman people should not have whatever they desired for their personal decoration. It was not a time when the public could use only that which their own country provided, as with the Egyptians, nor did they have to depend on their own or upon their countrymen’s skill for their designs, ornaments or embroideries as did the Greeks. Instead of this, the minds and hands of the whole world were working for them, and selecting for them the best from each section of each country.

The Romans were, as a rule, tall and well built, with features showing a decided character. They had straight eye brows, prominent noses and square jaws; the whole figure had the appearance of physical as well as mental power. Due to this, the Roman costumes, though very similar to those of the Greeks, appeared to be very different, the manner of displaying the costume making the difference. The graceful, swinging movement of the Greeks gave way to a dignified, almost pompous stride, and as the delicate curves of the body became straightened, the figure gave a decidedly Roman air to the costume.

Toga. The true Roman garb and the part of the dress which distinguished it most decidedly was the toga. It appears to have been worn by both men and women; by the poorer as well as the wealthier, at home and abroad; both in country and in town. The Roman toga, to a certain degree, resembled the Greek himation but it had no points. It was in the form of a semi-circle, eighteen feet from tip to tip or about three times the height of the wearer. It was made of soft wool, silk or fine linen, and had a plain or an elaborate border. One end was thrown over the left shoulder to touch the ground while the other end was draped about the body either over or under the right arm and allowed to fall to the rear over the left shoulder. If the ends swept the ground, so much the better as this was a sign of dignity and high rank. If the ends seemed to be in the way, the toga could be kept from dragging on the floor by tying knots in the cloth near
NO. 15. ROMAN TOGA AND ORNAMENT

1. Roman Rosette
2. Toga—18 feet from edge
3. Scroll
the ends. It is not known whether the toga derived its form on the body from the mere spontaneous throw of the whole garment, or after the folds having been arranged or draped, were fastened in some permanent way. No fastenings of any sort are visible, but their existence may be inferred from the great formality and little variation displayed in its division and folds. A bag or loop of folds was made to hang over the drapery in front, and the folds were loose enough and ample enough in the back to admit of their being drawn over the head in bad weather, and also to cover the head during religious ceremonies as was the custom of the time. Great rivalry existed among the Romans as to the arrangement of their togas. The most skillful were not at all modest about their accomplishments. The Roman people, as a rule, were rather aggressive in all things, ever eager to impress their associates with their importance. This self-reliance was, no doubt, partly due to the wonderful success they had in conquering the nations about them, thus giving them great confidence in their own ability. (Illustration 15—No. 2.)

No doubt you have often noticed in the plays of Shakespeare, how the Romans step aside from their comrades in order to display the beauty of the toga as they swing it about the body with the right hand and throw it over the left shoulder. They desired to be noticed and receive admiration from those around. Horace, in his fourth epode thus satirizes an upstart:

“Mark, as along the Sacred Way thou flauntest,
Puffing thy toga, twice three cubits wide.”

Priests and magistrates wore the toga pretexta, or toga edged with a purple border. The toga, without rim or border, was called a toga pura. The knights wore the trabea or toga striped throughout with purple, and the generals, during a triumphant entry, wore an entire purple toga to which was gradually added a rich embroidery of gold.

**Tunic.** The tunic of the Romans was almost the same as the chiton of the Greeks but the love of splendor was too strong to allow the
ROMAN TOGA AND DRESS

NO. 16. ROMAN COSTUMES
Romans to be content with a single garment of delicate coloring and several garments of the same or similar shape and of different colors were therefore worn one over the other. They were often looped up the waist, so as to show the different colors at the bottom and the sleeves were made of varying lengths, thus giving the same color effects over the arm. The bottom of the shortest garment was often finished with a fringe or heavy embroidery, and for the ladies who were wives of Senators, this shorter garment showed a broad stripe worked in purple and gold. The desired rich appearance was given the garments of the wealthier class by the great variety of oriental silks with their brilliant colors. (Illustration 16.)

**Colors.** As the colors became more numerous certain colors were reserved for the sole use of certain classes of the people. For instance, the costume of the soothsayer was white with no ornament; that of the lowest class, a sombre color such as tan or gray; the peasantry were ordered to wear a garment of one color only; officers, garments of two colors; commanders of clans, garments of three colors, and so on until those of the royal family were allowed seven colors. The hue denominated purple by the ancients and running through all the various shades of color intervening between scarlet, crimson and the deep reddish blue called purple at the present day, was the sign of royalty and the well-known saying of a child being “born to the purple” when born of rich or distinguished parents comes from the Romans. Garments of academic colors were very popular and later had their place in the college and professional world.

Among other influences, religion had a decided influence on the colors of the costumes of this period. The Roman nation was cosmopolitan in its character, being made up from the subjects of the conquered nations from all parts of the known world. These peoples coming to Rome brought with them various styles and ideas new to the Romans, and were not required to change their habits or even their religion as long as they did not conflict with any of the laws of the state. The people holding public offices were required to attend certain services and festivals given at stated times during
the year. These festivals were given to please the Gods and a few superstitious customs were regarded with respect whether with belief or not. It is said that the state religion was of four types, for the poet, the philosopher, the statesman, and the common people, with a distinctive color and way of wearing it for each. There were also different colors for the professions; blue for philosophy, black for theology and green for medicine. The colors most characteristic of the period irrespective of religion, were royal purple, gold, dark red and a creamy white.

Veil. The Romans continued to use the wreath or the band for the decoration of the hair, and for the women, a veil of exquisite quality was used for a head-dress.

Sandals. Many of the sandals of this period were made of beautiful leather handsomely decorated and colored. Pieces of leather were used for bands of trimmings as well as for foot coverings. Some of the best examples of the decoration of this time are to be found on these leather ornaments and pieces of armour, shields and breast plates.

The men of this period dressed according to their standing in the affairs of the state and the women followed the people of culture and wealth and dressed according to their husband’s standing rather than original ideas. The wife, being to some extent independent, selected her garments according to her own liking or, as has been said, “consulting her mirror.” Her place in the house was somewhat different from that of the woman in the Greek household. She married at a younger age than the Greek girl, marrying at twelve or thirteen, or at the latest, at nineteen years of age, while the Greek girl married usually between the ages of twelve and twenty-five years. Though the Roman men were usually older than the women at the time of marriage, yet they were sometimes only sixteen.

The Roman women were not shielded as were the Greek women but were permitted to go when and where they pleased and they were not kept in a secluded part of the house but were provided with
apartments in the center of the dwelling where all of them, matrons and maids, congregated, did their spinning, embroidery or like work, entertained their friends, and enjoyed the companionship of the men of the family; and in turn were consulted on all matters relating to the home. The wife was the ruler of both the male and female servants, and was her husband’s counselor. In fact, she was not her lord’s subject, but was his companion. Shakespeare shows the relation between husband and wife in Julius Caesar:

“Portia kneels when she desires Brutus to tell her what troubles his mind,
Brutus says ‘Kneel not my gentle Portia,
You are my true and honorable wife,
As dear to me as the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.’”

And again:

“O Ye Gods! Render me worthy of this noble wife.”

No expense was spared in purchasing the apparel for the Roman women as the men enjoyed seeing the women beautifully gowned and to further this idea the men would, on every possible occasion, present handsome jewels to their favorites. It is from the Romans that we get the custom of giving the ring to the betrothed one; also the wearing of the elaborate gowns at the wedding ceremony and the custom of the wedding trip. With the Romans, the parents of the young people of marriageable age had no active part in the making of the match, this being done by some outsider, an older person. The weddings and the feasts accompanying them, became so costly and the festivals such times of great excitement that some of the young people would become worn out, and would have to go to the country to rest from the social strain. This gradually became a popular custom which has continued to the present time.

Roman Designs. The Romans derived the style of their ornaments directly from the Greeks, and showed individuality only in adaptation
NO. 17. ROMAN DESIGNS

1. Scroll
2. Remulus and Remus
3. Fasces
4. Chariot
5. Horse-head
6. Shoes
7. Rosettes
and more excessive elaboration. Many of the artists of this time being Greek, it was no uncommon thing to find pure Greek patterns on Roman costumes. This is why many are confused when studying the Greek and Roman styles. One should remember that, during the Greek period, the Greeks made designs which satisfied the simple, aesthetic taste of their countrymen; while during the Roman period, the Greeks who were employed by the Romans as teachers or designers, endeavored to please the pompous, wealth-loving Romans with more elaborate ornament.

**The Roman Scroll.** With the scroll designs the same lines of construction and the same motifs, the acanthus, anthemion, laurel and olive are used as before. The main spiral lines of the scroll are made more elaborate by a greater amount of foliage and the acanthus leaves are slightly changed because they have round edges in place of pointed ones. (Illustrations 15 and 17.)

The rolls of parchment, called “volumina” or manuscripts, fastened on rods, were often spoken of as the Roman scrolls. These are found in the designs, either tightly rolled or left open ready for the reader.

**The Roman Rosette.** The beautiful rosettes or designs made after the form of a rose, are found on the Roman jewelry, in the borders for costumes, in many scroll patterns, and all kinds of decorations especially characteristic of this period. (Illustrations 15 and 17.)

**Horse and Chariot.** Many of the scrolls and rosette patterns are found as decorations of the chariots and the trappings for the horses. The spokes, hub and rim of the wheels were often so elaborately decorated that they formed artistic circular designs. These were spoken of as “wheels of triumph.”

Which with their laurelled train
Move slowly up the shouting streets
To Jove’s eternal fane.”
When the general was victorious he entered Rome in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was preceded by the captives and spoils taken in war, and was followed by his troop. Naturally, the most elaborate costumes were worn by the Romans who participated in, or attended these triumphal entries and the chariots and harness were most elegant. The great chariot races were also festivals of pomp and show. (Illustration 17.)

**The Fasces.** The fasces was composed of a bundle of rods from which an axe projected. This was borne by the “Victors” whose duty it was to walk before the chief Roman magistrates; to call to the people to make way and to serve as a body-guard. They also executed judicial sentences. The fasces became a symbol of authority. (Illustration 17.)

Though the abstract ornament was most commonly used, symbolism was again beginning to creep into decorative units as, for example, the lamb skin as an emblem of Jason and the Order of the Golden Fleece; the swan, emblem of Venus, goddess of beauty; and the figures of a female wolf under which crouched two children, the symbol of the founding of Rome.

**Romulus and Remus.** This sketch of the wolf and children had no special artistic value as to the arrangement and design, but it made an attractive spot in ornament of which the Romans were very proud, as they desired to have everyone know about Rome and the legend of its origin. (Illustration 17—No. 2.)

This is the story so often told by the Romans. Numitor, King of Alba, was dethroned by his brother Amulius who made himself king. Numitor and his daughter were put to death and the two sons of Rhea Silvia, Numitor’s daughter, were given to the soldiers with instructions to drown the babes in the river Tiber. The soldiers found the river swollen beyond its banks and being unable to put the children in the deep water, placed the cradle holding the sleeping babes in a shallow part of the stream and left them there. The water sinking rapidly,
the cradle soon grounded and the children were found by Faustalus who lived near the river, and who chanced to be walking along the bank. When discovered by him a great female wolf stood beside the cradle and he found that the wolf had been caring for the babes as though they had been her own offspring. Faustalus, taking the children home, reared them as his own, calling them Romulus and Remus. These boys on growing to manhood became great warriors and finally founded a new city upon the banks of the river where they were found. The two brothers started the great walls of the city, but could not agree upon a construction and Remus, chided his brother upon such a poor construction. Romulus in a rage struck and killed Remus and afterward finished the city and named it after himself, Rome.

The Romans often speak of their own people as the “Wolf’s litter.” In “Horatius” we read, —

He smiles on those bold Romans
A smile serene and high;
He eyed the flinching Tuscans,
And scorn was in his eye.
Quote he, “The she-wolf’s litter
Stand savagely at bay:
But will ye dare to follow
If Astur clears the way?”

As the center of the world’s civilization moved gradually toward Constantinople, the costumes and art in general began to show the influence of the Orient. A still greater influence, that of Christianity, also, was to make a decided change in art. This development of thought was destined to change the government as well as the art of the succeeding years; for soon the most powerful nation was to be ruled by a Christian Emperor, Constantine. The costumes and decorations took on a new form, the classic costumes, composed mostly of drapery were combined with the slightly fitted garments of
the East, and the new style became known as the "Byzantine;" the period known as the "Ancient" ended and the Middle Ages and Christian Era began.

LESSON V.

Make a sheet of sketches showing a Roman toga and two or more Roman designs. Color at least one design. Notice divisions of the circular forms and the effect of spiral lines. Make an original design for an evening cape or wrap using the draped effect suggested by the toga. Use the rich Roman coloring.

Make a small bag out of stained leather or embroidered cloth showing Roman design. (A)

Make a Roman toga out of paper or cloth. (C)

Arrange on a sheet bits of modern trimmings, cloth or prints of costumes which resemble the Roman.