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# Ancient Wardrobe Studies

## The Wardrobe of Kroniaina from Tebtynis (AD 54)

### **Abstract**

*Documentary sources like papyri provide information about all kinds of ancient social and economic processes, especially in the Roman world. They are a valuable and unique source on the basis of which not only aspects of legal history but also of social and economic history can be investigated. In this study the province of Egypt with its abundance of papyrological evidence is used as a case study to gain insight into the relevance of textiles in ancient marriage arrangements. Apart from jewelry and household items, textiles were the most important items of a woman's dowry and therefore often mentioned in detail in the contracts concluded between husband and wife. They are our only textual evidence of documentary nature showing textiles actually worn by women in everyday-life. Being a highly interesting type of sources in itself, the marriage and dowry contracts preserved will be used to shed light on the value, kind, number and colour of women's textiles in imperial Egypt. After a general introduction into the source material, we will demonstrate the potential insights dowry contracts can provide with regard to tracking everyday female clothing in Roman Imperial Egypt.*

**Keywords:** Roman Egypt, papyri, dowries, everyday dress

### **Introduction**

Sociologists, marketing experts and fashion designers alike recognise the potential of wardrobe studies (eg. Gwerner 2001; Salazar-Sutil 2009; Grimstad Klepp and Bjerck 2012).<sup>1</sup> Wardrobe studies encompass the investigation of the wardrobes of selected persons to find out about their personal style, shopping patterns, favourite colours etc. Wardrobe studies constitute a new type of user studies in the field of fashion research. When it comes to investigating ancient wardrobes, it is much more difficult to gain reliable information on the garments actually worn by people in everyday life. When looking at Roman wall paintings, funerary reliefs or statuary, we are constantly facing iconographic problems – these remains from Roman times demonstrate how people wanted to be seen, and how they wanted their fellow citizens, friends, or families to remember them. This does not necessarily reflect the dresses they actually wore. Another way of exploring ancient wardrobes is based on the archaeological remains of textiles or entire garments. It is not surprising that the last-mentioned are not very

numerous. To make matters even more complicated, most of these textiles originate from burial contexts (if we know their find sites at all). But how can we know that the garments worn by the dead were the same worn by these people during their lifetimes?

Other source material seems to be more helpful. If we consider source groups existing in a larger number, deriving from the actual everyday life of people, we can get a new insight into these 'wardrobes'. So it seems promising to deal – for example – with the papyrological evidence and the references to clothes it contains. Papyri, produced in Egypt, were a common writing material in ancient times. Most of them survived in Egypt but some texts were also found at several other locations (eg. Dura Europos, Palestine, Petra and Herculaneum, in latter case carbonized). The organic material needs dry conditions and a place above the groundwater level to be preserved (Rupprecht 2002, 65-66). These conditions were and are largely present in Egypt so that this area is highly appropriate to approach the clothing habits in Greco-Roman times. Skeptics like to claim that Egypt



is a special case in many ways and that therefore the information from the papyri cannot be transferred to the rest of the Roman Empire. Although Egypt certainly is special in terms of its geographical and climatic characteristics, this applies for almost all the other provinces, too. The Roman Empire was very heterogeneous; the conditions in Britain, for example, are not comparable to any other province. Thus, the history of the *Imperium Romanum* would be a history of special cases and not a history of an empire, which it is without any doubt.

Concerning the clothes, the papyri offer many ways to deal with this topic; apart from information on textile production (cf. Droß-Krüpe 2011), distribution and trade, there are also numerous texts that inform us about clothing colours, styles and materials. Especially marriage and dowry contracts contain many of such details, because it was common to list estimated

values as well as details like material for the included items (Yiftach-Firanko 2003). Thus, by looking at these contracts on papyrus, we can get a glimpse of ancient women's wardrobes. We can find out details about the terminology of female garments, about colours and sometimes even about the value of an actual garment. After a general introduction into this category of source material, we will demonstrate the potential insights dowry contracts can provide with regard to tracking everyday female attire in Roman Imperial Egypt. By analyzing women's dowries and the archaeological evidence of the garments they possessed and wore in everyday life we are able to explore the links between clothing and wealth, fashion and status – not just of upper class women but also of brides from very different social strata of the multicultural society in the Roman province of Egypt.

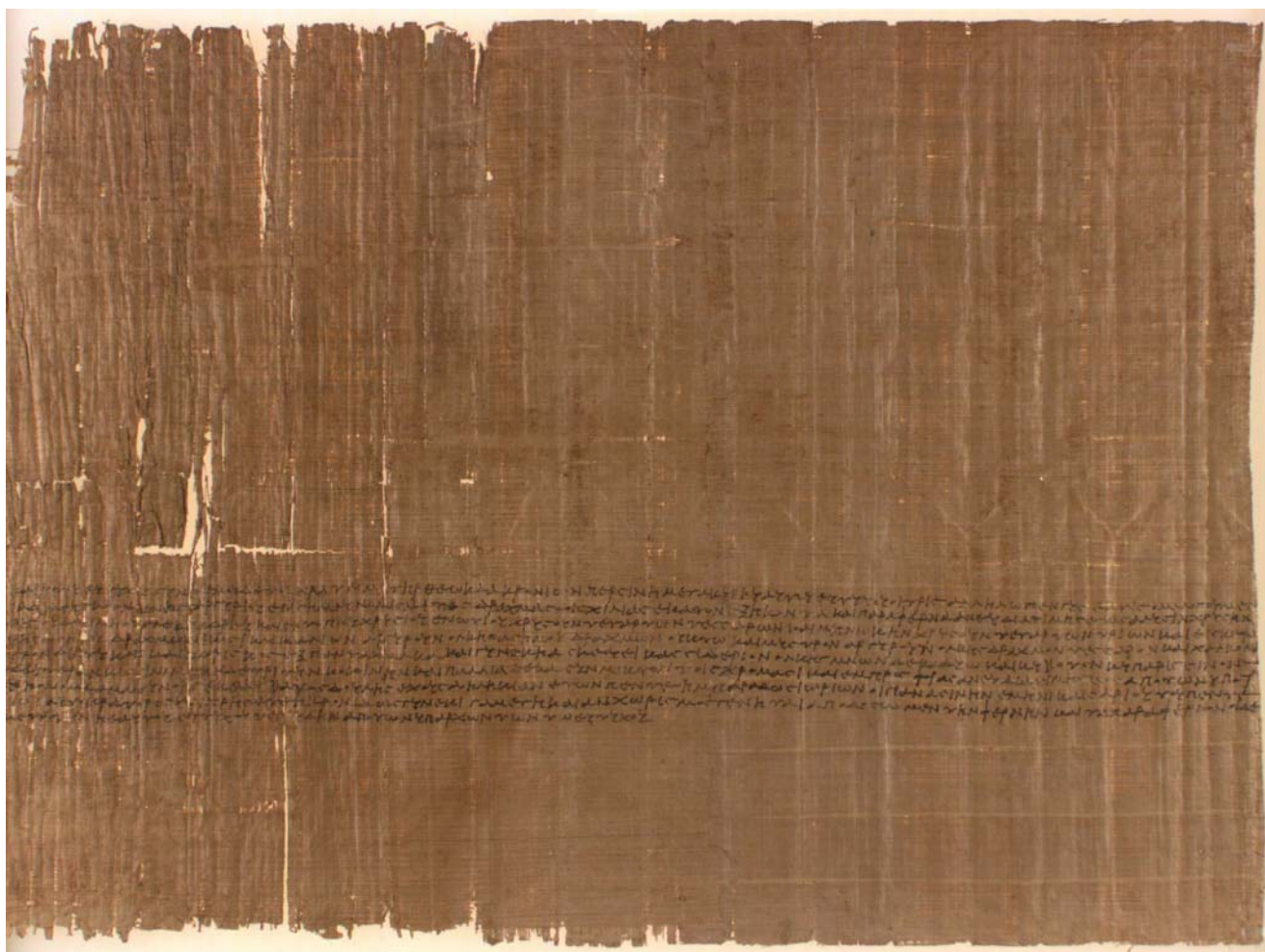


Fig. 1. P.Mich. 5/343 – Marriage between Chrates and Kroniaina; acknowledgment of the receipt of a dowry (P.Mich.inv. 719; University of Michigan Papyrology Collection).



### Marriage and dowry contracts in Greco-Roman Egypt

It is necessary to keep in mind that marriage was important and common in ancient times. Analyzing census declarations, Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier have even proven that in Roman Egypt at least 93% of the women aged between 26 and 35 years were married or already divorced or widowed at the time of declaration (Bagnall and Frier 1994, 117). So marriages were a very common phenomenon!

Turning to the marriage and dowry contracts in particular, there are about 145 of these documents edited, dating between the 4th century BC and the 4th century AD. This type of legal agreement was quite common, though marriages without any written record were fully valid (Palme 2009, 366). Our study focuses on Roman imperial times (1st–3rd centuries AD), as conditions in the Ptolemaic period were notably different, and Late Antiquity experienced a dramatic change in social, economic and political terms alike. Marriage and dowry contracts – like most of the papyrological material – are mostly drafted formulaically, a fact which facilitates the reconstruction of damaged or incomplete texts. They generally consist of the date and name of the contractual partners, acknowledgement of receipt of the dowry, a set phrase of the shared life of the spouses, arrangements in case of divorce (such as the redemption of the dowry and a deadline thereof) and – sometimes – phrases in case of death or a partial divorce.

The most interesting elements of these documents are the dowries which were mostly given by the bride's parents or some relatives to the groom (Kutzner 1989, 43). The content of the dowries is miscellaneous; they include for example jewellery, money, slaves, real estates and – particularly important at this point – various textiles and garments. Of the dowries dating back to Roman Imperial Times (1st–3rd centuries AD), 46 mention textiles (Droß-Krüpe and Wagner, forthcoming) – this is about half of all dowries of that time. This stresses the importance of textiles as part of women's belongings and also highlights the importance of garments and the connection of gender, everyday dress and social status. The overall value of the dowries varies a lot, but this results from the fact that the contracts come from varied socio-economic backgrounds, which is not surprising considering the high percentage of married women. However, based on the items listed and their quantity, one can often make tentative conclusions about the socioeconomic status of the bride's family.

### Types of dowries

There are three types of dowries in the Roman period, which do not necessarily appear in all contracts. The *pherne* is usually listed as the first of them and includes movable goods brought into the marriage by the wife, such as money, clothes, jewelry and household items. Ownership and use of the *pherne* lay with the husband during the marriage. In case of divorce he had to pay back the entire *pherne* within regulated limits. The value of *pherne* is always estimated and included in the contract (Häge 1968, 141-142).

*Parapherna* and *prosphora* probably became usual during the Roman Empire, while the *pherne* was the regular and single form of dowry in papyrological marriage and dowry contracts already in the Ptolemaic period (Kutzner 1989, 44). The items of the *parapherna*, which were usually listed after the *pherne*, are everyday objects, which came directly to the wife for good and were primarily used by her (Kutzner 1989, 48). Erich Gerner therefore came to the conclusion that the *parapherna* is a continuation of "women-things" (*Frauensachen*) known from demotic texts (Gerner 1954, 37). Nevertheless, in terms of the occurrence of textiles it can be stated that clothes are also common items for the *parapherna*. The owner of the whole *parapherna* is the woman, and her husband is not allowed to sell the listed items.

The third form of dowry, the *prosphora* consists mostly of real estates, slaves and money. Although textiles are therefore not listed therein, the presence of a *prosphora* also facilitates the possible conclusions about the socio-economic background of the bride's family, provided that they are also the donor of the *prosphora*, which usually is the case (Kutzner 1989, 49).

### Kroniaina's wardrobe

As we have seen, garments were part of the *pherne* and the *parapherna* and were included in the contracts from the Ptolemaic period (306-30 BC) as well as in those of late antiquity. The phenomenon of providing textiles of various kinds as a dowry was obviously not time-limited. Textiles were very commonly included in dowries. Using one particular dowry contract (or more precisely an acknowledgment of the receipt of a dowry), we demonstrate the value of this source material in investigating everyday female garments during the Roman Empire in the province of Egypt.

The bride, Kroniaina, was given several different garments as a dowry (Table 1). The dowry is paid for by the bride's brother, Horion, and is received by Chrates, the groom, and his parents. The contracting parties were situated in the village of Tebtynis, in the Arsinoite nome. The settlement of this marriage contract consists of all three dowry categories



mentioned above, *pherne*, *parapherna* and *prosphora*. It also includes provision for the return of *pherne* and *parapherna* in case of divorce.

The papyrus is 49.2 x 28.8 cm wide, its verso is blank (Fig. 1). It is broken off on the left-hand side; about 20 to 25 letters from the beginning of each line are lost. There is no exact date for the contract given, the only date mentioned in this document is referring to a time in the future, at which a slave will be given to the newly married couple, and this will take place

in the month Kaisareios (July 25 - August 23) in the fifteenth regnal year of the current Roman Emperor. The remaining parts of the Emperor's name given read Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator, the first part of the name is missing. It might be Nero or Claudius. As the document is part of the archive of Kronion, son of Apion, who was head of the record and writing office (*grapheion*) at Tebtynis AD 26 to 56, this document is most certainly referring to the fifteenth year of Emperor Claudius. This Emperor died

**Table 1. P. Mich. 5/343. Text and translation.**

[Χράτης Εὐτύχου καὶ Εὐτυχοῦς Χράτου οἱ δύο Περσῆς τῆς ἐπιγονῆς καὶ ἡ τοῦ Εὐτύχου γυνὴ ἐμοῦ δὲ τοῦ Χράτου μήτηρ Θεωκλᾶ Κρονίων Περσίνη μετὰ κυρίου αὐτοῦ Εὐτύχου οἱ τρεῖς ἀλλήλων ἐγγυς <εἰς> ἐκτὸς ὁμολογοῦμεν | [ἔχειν παρὰ Ὠρίωνος . . . .] παραχρημα φερνὴν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡε[υ]τοῦ ἀδελφῆς Κρονιένιας ἀργυρίου ἐπισήμου νομίματος δραχμᾶς δισχιλίας ἑκατὸν ἑξήκοντα καὶ παράφερνα ἄνευ διατιμήσεως ἄλυσιν χρυσῆν | [-20-25-] ἵν τετάρτων τεσσάρων ἄμφω τ[ο]ῦ χρυσίου δοκιμίου Ἀλεξανδρίου καὶ ἐντοπίου χρυσίου ἐνωπίου χρυσοῦν τετάρτων τεσσάρων καὶ μηνισκην χρυσοῦν τετάρτων τριῶν καὶ εἰσκεφα- | [-20-25-] ἕξ καὶ ψεελίων ἀργυρίων ζεῦκος [ὄλ]κῆς ἀσήμου δραχμῶν ἴκοσι καὶ κλάλιων ἀργυροῦν ὀλκῆς ἀσήμου δραχμῶν οὐκτὼ καὶ μύστρον ἀργυροῦν ὀλκῆς δραχμῶν τεσσάρων καὶ χαλκῶμα- | [τα -18-23-] ἓξ καὶ ζῆρον καὶ ζμημοδοκίτον καὶ κά[τ]οπτρον δίπτικον καὶ ὑδρίσκος ἕξ πάντα χαλκᾶ καὶ γυνεκῆα σκευεῖ κασσιδερίον ὀλκῆς μινῶν δέκα δυὼ καὶ κυβοτὸν κυπαρίσσινον | [-10-15-] καὶ στολὰς γυνεκίας τρεῖς μίαν μὲν λευκὴν τὴν δὲ δευτέραν κισσίνην τὴν δὲ τρίτην κοκκίνην καὶ πάλλια δέκα σύνμικτον τοῖς χρομασι-καὶ ἐμ προσφορας ἄνευ διατιμήσεως ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπαρ- | [χόντων αὐτῶ] δουλικῶν [σω]μάτων οἰκογενὴν πεδίσκην δούλην ἣ ὄνομα Ἀμμουνούς ἐκ Θαυβάτος δούλης ἔχουσιν ἡλικίαν ἐτῶν πέντε ἡμ παραδώσι Ὠρίων οἴγιαν ἀσινην ἐ μὲν Καισαρίου τοῦ πεντε- | [καιδεκάτου] ἔτους Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ Γερμανικοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος. καὶ χρήσετε ἡ Κρονία ὡς γυνεκὶ γαμετῆ καὶ ἂν χωρισμὸς γένηται ἀποδόσωμεν τὴν φερνὴν καὶ τὰ παραφερνον. οἱ δὲ | [δύο Εὐτυχός τε καὶ Θεωκλᾶ] [σ]υνχοροῦσι ἀπομερίτεν ἑαυτῶ Χράτη μετὰ τὴν ἡεαυτοῦ Εὐτύχου τελευτὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων τῶ Εὐτύχου.

[We, Chrates, son of Eutychos, and Eutychos], son of Chrates, both Persians of the epigone, and the wife of Eutychos, who is also the mother of Chrates, Theokla, daughter of Kronion, a Persian, with her guardian, the same Eutychos, all three being mutual security for the payment, acknowledge [that we have received from Horion, son of . . .], at once, the dowry on behalf of his sister Kroniaina, consisting of two thousand one hundred and sixty silver drachmai in coin; and as parapherna without valuation a gold necklace [- - -], and [- - -] of four quarters, both of Alexandrian current gold coin, and a gold earring of native current gold coin of four quarters, and a gold lunette of three quarters and a [- - -] and a pair of silver armlets of a weight of twenty drachmai of uncoined metal, and a silver bracelet of a weight of eight drachmai of uncoined metal, and a silver spoon of a weight of four drachmai, and bronze utensils [- - -] and a box for ointment and a folding mirror and six water jars all of bronze, and women's utensils of tin of a weight of twelve minas, and a cypress chest, [- - - and] three women's [dresses], one white, the second ivy-colored, and the third scarlet, and ten cloaks of various colors; and as a gift, without valuation, from the slaves that belong [to him], a female child slave, born in the house, whose name is Ammounous and who was born of the slave Thaubas and is five years of age, whom Horion shall give over in good health and unharmed in the month Kaisareios of the fifteenth [year of Tiberius Cl]audius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator. And he (i.e. Chrates) will treat Kroniaina as his wedded wife and, if a separation shall occur, we shall return the dowry and parapherna. And [Eutychos and Theokla] agree to bequeath to Chrates after the death of Eutychos from the property of Eutychos.

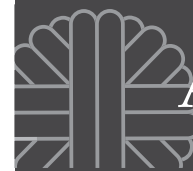


Fig. 2. Common Ivy (*Hedera helix*) growing on a red brick wall (Photo: Derek Ramsey).

13 October AD 54, a fact that was known in Middle Egypt at the latest since mid-November (cf. P.Oxy. 7/1021). Thus November AD 54 would be the *terminus ante quem* (date before which) for this contract. It is likely that the document was written between January and November AD 54.<sup>2</sup>

It is beyond doubt, that the dowry provided for Kroniaina is a large and precious one (Table 1). Among various items (mostly jewelry), her *parapherna* includes thirteen garments – the largest known number of garments in a dowry. The type of the first group of garments is lost, but the editor of this document suggested reconstructing the phrase as women's *stolai*. The *stola* was the typical garment worn in public by Roman matrons, i.e. free-born married women (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 33,40). It was a long, pleated dress, entirely covering the body (Horace, *Satires* 1,2,99). The *stola* reached to the ankles and was typically girt with two belts at bust and waist level (Martial 3,93,4). Though this type of garment was a typical female one and is often attested in dowries, the lacuna in the text could also be reconstructed differently: Other dowries contain the more general term *ἱμάτια γυναικεῖα*, women's garments (BGU 4/1050, BGU 4/1101 or BGU 3/729). Thus we cannot be sure if Kroniaina's wardrobe contained *stolai* at the day of her marriage. What we can be sure of is that her dowry contained three garments of the same kind, but in different colours.

The colours given for the garments are noteworthy. The first garment is said to be *λευκήν* – white. This might include a hint towards the raw material used. Though linen could be dyed (eg. Goyon 1996; Kourkoumelis et al. 2012), scholars mostly assume that white linen was preferred (Germer 1992, 95-96; Mossakowska 2000, 290-291) and more precious (Ezzeldeen Ahmed 2009, 28). The white garment could thus be made of undyed wool or bleached linen. Usually all items in

a dowry are given in decreasing order of value – and Kroniaina's dowry follows the same pattern: The commodities of her *parapherna* are arranged according to categories – first the most precious, her jewelry and other prestigious items made of precious metal and expensive wood, followed by her garments. The metal and wooden objects are arranged according to the value of the material used: In first place, the golden jewelry, in descending order by weight; in second place, the silver items, arranged in the same way, followed by those of bronze, tin and cypress wood. We may conclude that the following garments are arranged similarly. This would make the *stolai* (or *himatia*) more precious than the *pallia* and the white garment the most precious of all. The colours given for the remaining two garments are *κισσίνοσ*, meaning ivy-coloured, and *κοκίνοσ* (= *κοκκίνοσ*), scarlet. While scarlet garments appear quite frequently (e.g. P.Hamb. 1/10; P.Hamb 3/220; P.Tebt. 2/405), *κισσίνοσ* is hardly ever attested. As far as we know, this document is (up to now) unique in using this term to describe a colour. Ivy was very common in the ancient world (Fig. 2): Pliny the Elder describes the plant in his famous *Naturalis Historia* (16,145). The wreaths made from its foliage were dedicated to Dionysos, to a lesser extent to Apollo and Aphrodite, Artemis and Athene (Hünemörder 1997). However, an ivy-coloured garment appears in this particular dowry alone. Generally speaking green female garments seem to have been more of an exception than a rule in dowries from Roman Egypt. Preliminary analyses have shown that only 6% of all garments in the dowry contracts specified according to colour (of a total of about 50 coloured garments in 46 dowry arrangements from imperial times) are different shades of green. It is often stated that dying threads, yarns or entire textiles green became popular only in Late Antiquity and even more



so in (Early) Islamic times (e.g. Paetz 2003, 99, no. 206; Colburn 2012, 169, no. 111). But the archaeological record from Imperial Egypt, for example from Mons Claudianus, quite often provides us with green fabrics, which forms a remarkable contrast to the dowry contracts. For now it must remain an open question whether this contrast may be the result of differing tastes of men and women (as dowries only contain female garments whereas Mons Claudianus is clearly a male dominated settlement; cf. Bülow-Jacobsen 1988; Mannering 2000) or if different colours were used for different types of textiles (e.g. green might have been a fashionable colour for household textiles but not for garments). Comparing the overall record of the dowry arrangements, we are faced with a clear preponderance of different shades of white (31%), red (33%) and yellow (12%). Interestingly, the value attested for a certain garment does not necessarily correspond to the fact that it was dyed.

Looking at the values of the individual textiles one can detect an astonishing range: The cheapest garment in a dowry is a milk-white tunic worth 12 *drachmai*, the most precious one is a combination of a silver *dalmatike* and *maphorion* worth 260 *drachmai*. This very expensive garment is often translated as hooded mantle but most likely consisted of two different garments worn together to form an entire outfit. A white *pallion* can be worth 125 *denarii* (~ 125 *drachmai*), a white tunic 160 *drachmai*. The most common garment, the tunic, appears in various value gradations – 12, 20, and 160 *drachmai*; and various colours – purple, mulberry red, sandalwood red, chrysanthemum yellow, sulphur yellow, safflower yellow, milk white and white (Droß-Krüpe and Wagner, forthcoming).

In addition to the three garments discussed in detail above, Kroniaina was also given ten *pallia* of various colours. This type of garment is a traditional Roman mantle worn by women of all ages, often fastened by brooches (Apuleius 11,3). Two facts are remarkable: ten mantles form the largest group of garments in a dowry known up to now. Thus, no other woman of Greco-Roman Egypt we have evidence for owned more garments than Kroniaina. However, the *pallia* seem to be less precious than the garments mentioned before. This is not only indicated by the position in the text but also by their less detailed description. No individual colours are listed, but a broader term “of various colours” is used. Obviously these garments were of lesser importance and probably of lesser value (be it the value attributed to them by the bride or their material value).

As Kroniaina was presented a huge amount of money in her *pherne* (2,160 *drachmai*): a lot of precious metal, wooden items in her *parapherna*, and unusually a

female child slave as *prospora*, we can clearly detect a very well-off family. The value of her *pherne* alone would be sufficient to feed, dress and shelter a family of six people for almost three years (cf. Drexhage 1991, 453)!

### Conclusion

The Roman dowry contracts provide a unique possibility to detect the social realities of clothes as actually used and worn. They can be used to detect textile tastes and to make the wardrobes of women visible. They provide unique insights in everyday life of women, the dresses they possessed and their colours. Combined with the value of textiles often provided in these documents, we can get a good glimpse of the taste of Roman women – at least in the parts of the Roman Empire that provide us with papyrological evidence. This case study is the starting point for a more thorough analysis of this material – and a unique chance to take a look into ancient wardrobes.

### Notes

1. One could also mention the “Wardrobe studies” network between fashion and dress scholars from Holland, Iceland, England, Sweden, Norway and Denmark: <http://www.re-ad.dk/en/activities/garderob-eundersoegelser%20e137f10-1d42-11df-a5a5-000ea68e967b%29.html> (last retrieved on 15 May 2013).
2. Cf. Mitthoff 2007, who gives an even narrower time frame from the end of August to the end of November.

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