



Image with me that you're walking proudly  
through the Roman forum,  
— a citizen of ancient Rome,

and, though you have a very typical Roman stature,  
even strangers know exactly who you are.

Citizens are staring at you and calling out,  
"Hail Triumphator!"

This is your day and everyone knows it.

It's your toga, of course,

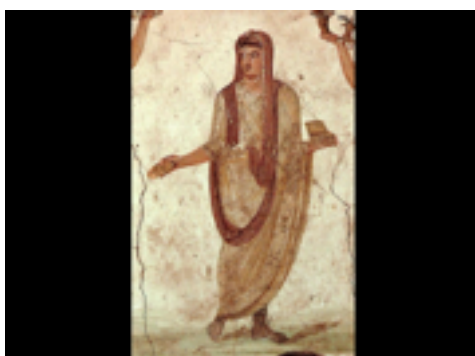
that makes you so easily recognizable.



Only Generals celebrating triumphs at war  
get to wear this "**toga picta**"  
(bright purple with gold embroidery

— it's the embroidery that makes it "picta").

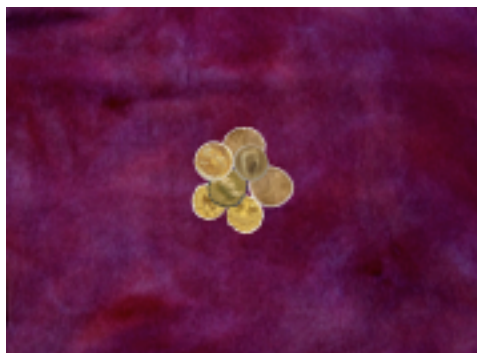
Senators, government officials, and priests mob  
around you, and they, too, have purple in their  
garments, but only stripes.



Senators and some officials have a single hand-  
width purple band on one edge of their togas.

Lesser magistrates get only a finger-width  
and the priests have yellow or red  
stripes along with purple.

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Purple was a symbol of power  
in the Roman Empire in Jesus' day,  
and, above all, a symbol of wealth.

An **ounce** of good purple dye  
would cost many times more  
than a **pound** of gold.

The Phoenicians had long ago given up their secret of how to make  
"Tyrian Purple", later to be known as "Royal Purple,"  
but that didn't lower the cost:

it still took more than 10,000 Murex saltwater, sea snails  
to dye enough raw wool to make a purple "toga picta".



In order for that toga to be made,  
someone had to know where the right  
varieties of Murex snails  
were found in the Mediterranean,  
and had to dredge the spiny shellfish from the sea,

(I don't have a murex shell to show you  
but they are about the size of my thumb)

and then someone had to one by one  
break their tiny shells at the right spot

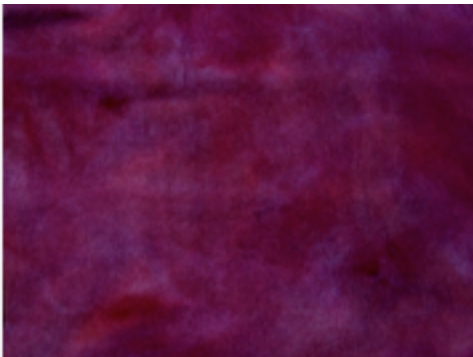
and remove a tiny gland

that held the seemingly magic fluid  
that would become the dye.

(remember, 10,000 for one purple robe)

The tiny sack was the size of a pea and if it broke in handling it,  
the fluid would be lost and the work thus far — useless.

The whole process created a stinking mess.



When enough hypobranchial glands were collected  
and dried they would be spread out on cloths and  
laid out in the sun.

Then someone would watch as they turned  
from a milky color,  
to light green, then deep green,  
then a light blue  
— the blue of lightly worn denim,

then, finally a reddish purple, then a deep purple.



Pliny the Elder, the great Roman historian, who wrote his book titled, *Natural History*, at almost the same time as Luke is writing the New Testament book we call, *The Acts of the Apostles*,

includes a lengthy section on the dye-making process, including the following description of the final outcome:

*... the Tyrian hue ... is considered of the best quality  
when it has exactly the color of clotted blood,*

But if the potential dye stayed out in the sun **too long**  
it would turn black and would be totally worthless.



Then you had to mix it with right chemical and water solution

and heat it with the woolen fibers in it—  
— **but being careful not to boil it!!!** —

It took several days  
of heating and stirring and checking  
and heating and stirring and checking  
as the wool yarn sat in the solution  
before the fibers would be just the right color.



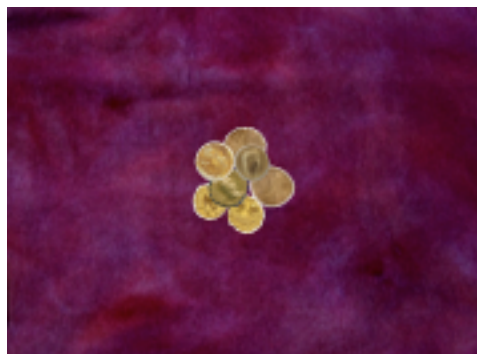
Slaves, of course, did most of the hard and stinking work, but trained and trusted supervisors had to be on hand 24 hours a day giving orders to

"add more wood," "let it cool,"  
"stir," "test,"  
"remove," "add the next batch."

And then there was an expensive real-estate investment that had to be factored into the cost of the dye.

Sections of shoreline along the sea were "reserved" for its extraction  
just as sections of towns were "reserved" for tanneries and other  
dyeing industries.

Of course, "reserved" simply meant that nobody in his or her right mind would buy property anywhere near these stinking places.



So great diplomatic skills as well as well placed bribes to the right officials might be necessary to maintain a choice sea-front location also close to a good source of fresh water.

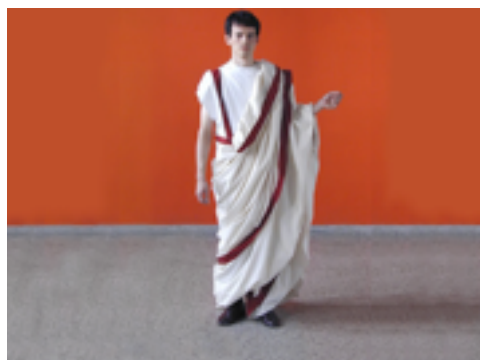
The Romans of course knew of other ways to make purple colors — mostly from plants — but they correctly judged that the vegetable dyes were not as brilliant as the Murex purple nor were they as durable. They faded much too quickly.

Besides, the whole "purple" thing was about **EXTRAVAGANCE** —

— you wore purple because you wanted everyone to **know**  
**you** could afford **real** Tyrian Purple,

not some cheap substitute made from roots or moss.

portions above adapted from <http://www.mmdtkw.org/VPurple.html>

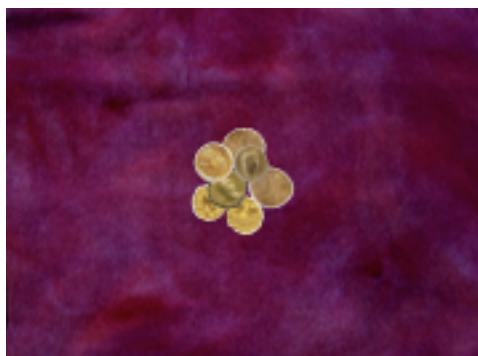


By the time Luke wrote his "Acts of the Apostles," the wearing of purple was one of the most highly regulated industries in the Roman Empire.

It reached its climax with infamous Emperor Nero who ruled the Empire from year 54 – 68.

Nero had people arrested, executed, and all their possessions confiscated if they wore purple beyond their rank.

And for most people that meant none at all.



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The story of Lydia has been largely undervalued in the history of the church.

She was a dealer in purple.

To have secured the position of trading purple at the strategically important Roman colony at Philippi  
meant that she was highly regarded,  
both in the tightly controlled monopoly  
of the Thyatirian Purple Dye Guild —  
as well as in circles of authority in the Roman Empire  
who would have granted her license to sell there.

She certainly knew Senators, Generals, and other highly placed Romans of the area and those who traveled there. And a lot of Roman officials traveled through Philippi.

Had she **not** known these persons well,  
she would **not** have stayed in business.

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So Lydia was wealthy, well-connected, respected, and well known throughout the community of Philippi.

But she was also, according to Luke's account,  
spiritually hungry.

Her prestige, wealth, elaborate home, and envied profession  
were apparently not enough.

She had most everything Roman, and for that matter, American households dream of,  
but it was not enough.

Though her name, profession, and city of origin almost certainly indicate that she was a Gentile of pagan background,



Paul and company, nevertheless, find her gathered  
by the river outside the city on the Jewish Sabbath,

joining with a small group of Jewish women,  
gathered for prayer.

Luke says there was no synagogue in this large Roman colony.



The general rule was that it took 10 Jewish males  
to establish a synagogue.

The travelers had been in the city for several days  
when the Sabbath came, and

they somehow had been led to believe  
that some people would be gathered by the river.

"Lydia," Luke says, "was a God-seeker."

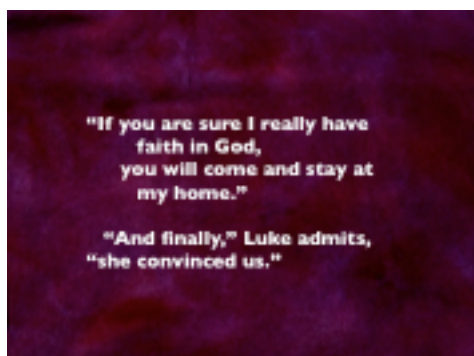
She was hungry for more than wealth, reputation, and success.

Paul's message about Jesus, filled her emptiness.

She responded by being baptized,  
"she and her whole household," as Luke describes it.

That would mean children, husband?? (one is not actually  
mentioned), other relatives, employees, slave and servants  
—anyone she supported with her trade.

And then she offers Paul a challenge  
(we can only imagine the challenge he offered her).



She says almost bluntly,  
"If you are sure I really have faith in God,  
you will come and stay at my home."

"And finally," Luke admits,  
"she convinced us."

A few verses later we learn how Paul and company are put in jail because of a  
healing they perform,  
and when they are finally released,

they go straight to Lydia's house.

"where," Luke says, "we met with the Lord's followers  
and encouraged them."

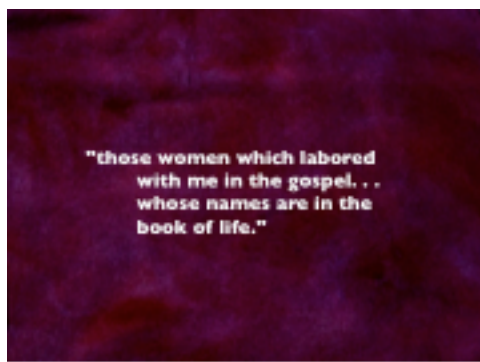
Lydia's home has become the gathering place  
for the first church established on the continent of Europe.

Paul has often gotten a lot of press through the centuries because he supposedly  
discourages the church from allowing women to take leadership.

Though there are a couple of verses that go that way, his actions prove  
otherwise.

Lydia is clearly credited by Luke with leading the birth of the church in Europe and  
the church at Philippi that starts from her home becomes Paul's  
clear favorite.

Years later, in his Epistle to the Philippians, written from Rome,  
Paul specially recommends to this church he loved the most,



*"those women which labored with me in the gospel.  
. . whose names are in the book of life."*

His phrase, "labored with me" is exactly  
a job description of a church elder.

The church at Philippi is the only church  
that Paul ever lifts up in a major way  
as a model for other churches to follow.

In this unusual year, when Pentecost Sunday and Mother's Day  
fall on the same day,

it is especially fitting to celebrate the faith of Lydia,  
the Mother of the Church in Europe.

And all our Mother's of the Faith through the centuries,  
who no matter what their stations in life,

found their spiritual hunger satisfied  
in the story of Jesus.