

**CLOTHING THE BODY OF CHRIST AT COLOSSAE:  
A Visual Construction of Identity**

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# Synopsis

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The metaphorical use of clothing and body in the Letter to the Colossians 3:1-17 draws upon and is connected to the social world of the author and the recipients of the letter in the first century CE. To understand how this text was heard I take a three dimensional approach engaging the visual representations of clothing and body prevalent in the cities where this letter was written, read and heard.

Roman emperors since Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) seized upon the potential of clothing and body to construct identity. The replication of images of the emperors throughout their regime was a strategic ploy to assert Roman values and identity across a diversity of conquered peoples. The plethora of representations created a new hierarchy of images which exploited the typical collective identity of Mediterranean culture. The emperor became the locus of the identity of a regime that promised and delivered *Pax Romana*.

It is against this backdrop that the Letter to the Colossians is read. The use of a socio-rhetorical approach to the text allows access to multiple textures of meaning. These are then placed in dialogue with the imagery of clothing and body defined and delineated in the cityscapes of the Lycus Valley and strategically connected cities.

The results of the dialogue yield significant correlation between the images and the text. These provide evidence of parallels of the elements of the visual construction of identity between the material culture and the literary text. The interdisciplinary engagement is essential to the interpretation of the text. The continued conversation between images and texts is vital for biblical interpretation. This work adds to the growing field of methods for making this conversation happen.

# Declaration

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I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rosemary Canavan', written in a cursive style.

Rosemary Canavan

Date: 6 June 2011

# Acknowledgements

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# Abbreviations

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- BMC* *Catalogue of Greek coins in the British Museum*, 29 vols., London 1873-1927 (repr.).
- IAPH2007* *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* (2007), available <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007>
- ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. Herman Dessau. 3 vols in 5 parts, Berlin, 1892-1916 (repr.).
- IvE* *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, ed. Hermann Wankel, Bonn, 1979-1984.
- JOAI* *Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts in Wien*. Wien, 1898-.
- MAMA* *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, ed. William M. Calder et al. 8 vols. Manchester, 1928-62.
- OGIS* *Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae*, ed. W. Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1903.
- SNG Cop* *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum: The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Danish National Museum* (in Copenhagen). 43 pts., Copenhagen 1942-77.

# Photographs

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