

A Purple Passion? Queen's College Oxford and the Blood of the Lord

by Bruce Christianson

The Queen's College Oxford was founded in 1341 'under the name of the Hall of the Queen's scholars of Oxford'¹ by the endowment of Robert de Eglesfield. The queen² in question was Queen Philippa of Hainault, consort of King Edward III of England: Robert Eglesfield, who became Provost of the college, was her chaplain.

The college statutes contain one tantalising passage³ that might or might not refer to something that we would regard as academic dress:

Sedeantque de praedictis Sociis omnes Doctores in theologia et in decretis, tam in prandio quam in caena, singulus [>singulis] anni temporibus, in aula communi, propter status sui honestatem ac vestis et sanguinis Domini conformitatem, in palliis purpureis ad colla scissis, nigro fururatis bugeto. Caeteri vero in palliis ejusdem coloris simplicibus. Capellani tamen de capella sedeant in palliis albis simplicibus, loco et temporibus praetaxatis: ita quod omnia pallia singulorum in grado suo, juxta reputationem Praepositi, conformitatem habeant in colore.

With some hesitation, I offer the following translation:⁴

Out of the aforesaid Fellows, all the Doctors of theology and of canon law shall sit, the same way at lunch as at dinner, in every season of the year, in the communal hall, according to the honour of their standing, and in likeness of the robe and blood of the Lord wearing robes of purple (or dark red) split near the neck, and furred with black budge. However the others in plain (unlined) robes of the same colour. But the chaplains of the chapel shall sit in plain white (or undyed) robes, at the times and places established above: so that all the robes of those in each grade shall, in the judgement of the Provost, have conformity in outward appearance.

This passage raises a number of interesting issues, some of which are discussed further following these notes:

Status sui I take this to be the genitive singular, so literally '[each] according to the honour of his own standing'.

Honestatem Literally honour, but assumed to refer here to precedence.

1 Sub nomine aule scholarium Regine de Oxon.

2 Queens' College Cambridge was co-founded by (or at least in the names of) Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, whence the different position of their apostrophe.

3 *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 14; Magrath, Vol. I, p. 55.

4 My thanks to Mr Derek Cook, Dr Nicholas Groves, Dr Alex Kerr and Dr Genevieve Liveley for their assistance with this translation. I stress that the infelicities correspond to points at which I have not followed their advice.

Vestis et sanguinis Magrath⁵ paraphrases this passage slightly differently as ‘that their garments might conform to the colour of the robe and blood of the Lord’. The meaning of this is discussed further below.

Pallium Literally, a covering. In medieval Latin the word usually refers to the *cappa clausa* with two slits, but the statute refers to mealtime rather than to lectures. More on this below.

Purpureis This could be any shade between a red-purple and a dark red. More on this below.

Colla May mean neck or throat: it is thus unclear whether the split is at the front or the side.

Scissis Split or divided. *Scissori* can also mean tailored.⁶ ‘*Ad colla scissis*’ could mean ‘split as far as the neck’, i.e. all the way up the front or side.

Bugeto Budge, bogy, or bogey is white or black lambskin⁷ (black in this case), with the wool dressed outwards and used as a trimming. Interestingly, this could be read as providing an historical precedent for the much reviled proposal at the University of Cambridge⁸ to line the hood of the Bachelor of Theology with black fur.

Albis Usually white, but can also mean grey, or hoary (as with age). I am not convinced that white would survive well in a medieval dining hall, and the ‘white’ habits of Cistercians, Dominicans and others were effectively stone-coloured, being made of unbleached wool.⁹

Colore *Color* means shade or tint, but the word can also denote outward appearance, and I take the sense here to include identity of cut and trim.¹⁰

What sort of garment is intended by the pallium?

I have translated this term as ‘robe’, but with an unquiet mind. In classical Latin the word *pallium* often refers to a Greek cloak in the form of a rectangle, such as the *chlamys* (Figs. 1 and 2), or the larger *himation* that displaced the *toga* in second century Rome; in academic inventories the word usually refers to the two slit *cappa* (Fig. 5).¹¹

Whatever garment is intended by the statute, the choice of word gives an indication of the layer¹² to which the item belongs, which is therefore that immediately above the gown: the gown and dress robe being at the layer corresponding to the tunic. The academic gown is usually referred to in scholastic Latin¹³ as a ‘*toga*’, which logically belongs to the layer

5 Magrath, loc. cit.

6 Clark, p. 137/p. 33, perhaps rather enthusiastically translates *scissis* as ‘scalloped’.

7 This description is from Cunningham and Beard, p. 246. Clark’s suggestion [loc. cit.] of ‘badger’ for ‘*bugeto*’ is not tenable, but provokes a wonderful image.

8 Cambridge University Reporter, Vol. cxxvi (1995): No. 6 (8 Nov.) p. 137; No. 9 (29 Nov.) p. 233; No. 11 (13 Dec.) p. 260. While withdrawing the proposal, council nevertheless noted that they saw ‘no objection in principle to such an innovation.’ Perhaps it wasn’t.

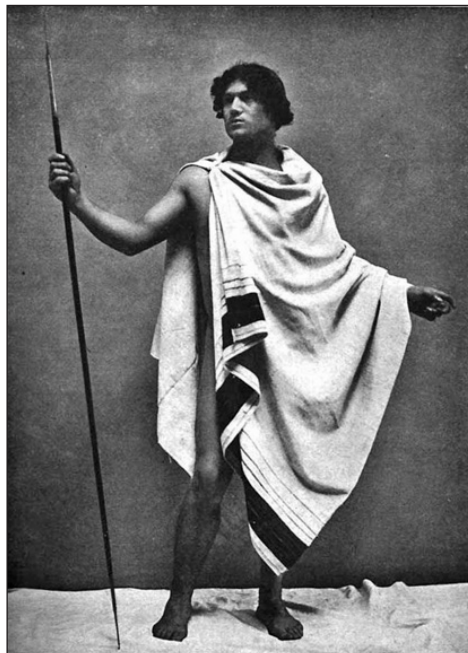
9 I am indebted to Dr Nicholas Groves for this observation, and for access to a great deal of information on medieval colour words.

10 Academic dress seems to have functioned as a sort of founder’s livery in the early stages of a number of Cambridge colleges, particularly the 1546 statutes for Trinity, and Caius’ 1558 re-founding of Gonville Hall: see Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *Academical Dress*, p. 132 and below nn. 33 and 37.

11 Unlike the one slit *cappa*, the two-slit *cappa* has no integral cowl.

12 See Kerr, ‘Layer upon Layer’.

13 For example, see Magrath, p. 322. Whenever the term ‘*toga*’ is used to refer to an item of academic dress, it is inevitably a garment at the tunic (*supertunica*) layer.



FIGS 1, 2. Two pictures of a *chlamys*, showing movement of the clasp.

below the *pallium*. If the higher layer is preferred for the *pallium*, then a better translation might be 'cloak' or 'mantle'.

Clark surmises¹⁴ that the term may refer to an outer habit worn at meals instead of a gown or tunic:

In the Statutes of Queen's College, Oxford, [the *pallium*] seems to be a sort of cloak, taking the place of the ordinary Gown in Hall, worn plain by the Fellows and Scholars, but scalloped at the neck and edged with black badger's fur for Doctors in Theology and Canon Law. When used, in the same Statutes, of the garments distributed by the Scholars to the poor, *pallium* seems to mean merely a common cloak. I incline, on the whole, to regard the academical *pallium* as one name for the Tippet.

I have already commented upon Clark's scallops and badgers, but his reference to the role of the Scholars¹⁵ in the later statute is interesting. The relevant passage refers to the arrangements to feed in the hall each day thirteen poor persons:¹⁶

ex quorum compassione, cum palliorum purpureorum conformitate, scolares ipsi possint passionis Christi, caritatis, paupertatis et humilitatis ejusdem, indicio ostenso pre oculis, intimius memorari

¹⁴ loc. cit.

¹⁵ The term Scholar seems to be used interchangeably with Fellow in the statutes, the King's charter of 1341 having been given to found '*aulam collegialem de scholaribus capellanis et aliis*' (a collegiate hall of scholars, chaplains and others).

¹⁶ Magrath, op. cit. p. 58. The number thirteen is in remembrance of the Last Supper.



FIGS 3, 4. Oxford Proctors wearing the tippet in 1675.

from which compassion, in accord with [their] purple robes, the scholars themselves shall be able to be reminded inwardly of the passion of Christ, by the evidence of the same love, poverty and humility, having been shown to the view of the eye.

It is not clear from this whether the purple garment is being given to the poor, as Clark believes, or worn by the scholars ministering to them.

Clark's last sentence identifying the *pallium* with a tippet may appear at first sight to replace one ambiguous term with another,¹⁷ but bears further analysis.

Certainly the tippet may refer to a round cloak or to a shoulderpiece, and the word is still used at Cambridge in the latter sense. At Oxford however, the word refers to the small piece of cloth now sewn to the left shoulder of a proctor's gown.¹⁸ The modern Oxford tippet is a vestige of the much fuller version worn by Loggan's proctor (Figs 3 and 4):¹⁹ the latter has a similar appearance to the round cape of a hood, but detached and turned sideways.²⁰

One possibility is that this form of the tippet was itself a degenerate form of a *mantellum* (mantle), worn across the left shoulder (Fig. 6): Clark²¹ mentions the ancient Cam-

17 The word 'tippet' has variously been held to refer to a hood, a cape, a liripipe, or a scarf.

18 A similar abbreviated tippet was also attached to the undress gown of a nobleman at Oxford in 1770, Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *Academical Dress*, p. 95 n. 1.

19 Loggan, *Oxonia*, Plate 10, Fig. 17.

20 The proctor's miniver hood worn over the top of the tippet [loc. cit. Fig. 18] is of simple shape, without the cape, and worn inside out, as it still is. See my 'Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape'.

21 op. cit. pp. 29–30.



FIG. 5



FIG. 6



FIG. 7

FIG. 5 John Bloxham BD (died 1387) wearing the two-slit *cappa clausa* in 1420.

FIG. 6 Sir Hugh de Holes wearing the mantle of a Judge in St Mary's church, Watford, in 1415.

FIG. 7 Thomas Baker SCL wearing a mantle in All Souls chapel in 1510.

bridge statute 133 as using the term *mantellum* where the corresponding Oxford statute uses the term *pallium*; Baker²² argues that the ruff worn by the proctors in Cambridge evolved from a *mantellum* (mantle) that had in turn either evolved from, or else replaced, the *cappa*; and Fortescue,²³ writing in the 1460s, refers to the legal mantle as the *chlamys*. This form of mantle was also worn more generally as a garment of dignity.²⁴

However, Clark²⁵ continues:

22 'Dress of the Cambridge Proctors', pp. 86–97.

23 Fortescue cap 51, quoted by Clark, op. cit. p 89/p 17. In Amos' translation, Fortescue states that the mantle (*clamide*) of the judge replaces the hood (*collobi*) of the serjeant, but that the cape (*capicio*) is common to both, albeit lined with a finer fur for judges. I would be inclined to interchange the hood and cape in the translation, as Magrath does: op. cit. p. 35 n. 5. See also Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *Legal Dress*, p. 49 n. 2 ff.

24 I incline, contra Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *Academical Dress*, p. 91, to the view that this, rather than the fact that he was a student of civil law, explains the mantle in the 1510 brass of Thomas Baker in All Souls College (Fig. 7). This more general use of the mantle may also explain the nobleman's tip-pet referred to in n. 18. My thanks to Dr Alex Kerr for advice on interpreting the brasses in Figs 5–7 and many others.

25 loc. cit.

The name *mantellum* is given by the Abbe Paries to a Hood or Scarf, whichever we choose to call it, fastened on the left shoulder, which was worn, apparently at rather a late period of the University of Paris, by Doctors Regent, to distinguish them from Doctors Non-Regent. There is something very similar in the dress of the later Bologna Professors.

The proctors at Oxford and Cambridge represent the regents in the Faculty of Arts; however, the late and degenerate form of the *mantellum* here being described by Clark appears to have evolved from a hood with a cowl, in a manner similar to the *epitoge* or the judicial casting hood, and so would logically seem to be a garment of a different type to that of the proctor's mantle already considered.²⁶

The idea of a continuous link between the ancient Greek garment and the medieval *pallium* is of course outrageous. Nevertheless, if we look at the picture of the *chlamys* and imagine progressively shrinking the rectangle along the short side, we pass through something very like a fuller form of the Oxford proctor's tippet²⁷ seen in Loggan, before reaching the version of the *pallium* traditionally worn²⁸ by metropolitans in the Roman church.

What colour was the pallium?

The Latin word *purpureus* can classically refer to any colour between red-purple and dark red. The word purple originates from Tyrian or imperial purple, made from the murex snail, and which to the modern eye looks like dark red.²⁹ (See Fig. 9, on back cover.)

Pliny states³⁰ that 'The Tyrian colour ... is most appreciated when it is the colour of congealed blood, dark by reflected and brilliant by transmitted light.'

Changes in dyeing technology have often led to the same colour name being subsequently extended to cloth with a very different visual aspect. For example the robes of Roman cardinals are still officially referred to as purple, even though they have been bright red ever since the fall of the Eastern Empire removed access to murex and forced a switch to kermes:³¹ and Doctors' scarlet robes are referred to as *murice* (purple, from the same root as murex) in the Cambridge statutes³² still carried by the proctors (Fig. 8, on back cover). In the nineteenth century, the synthesis of mineral dyes such as aniline purple (mauve) permanently moved the centre of gravity of the English word purple firmly towards the red-blue border on the colour chart.

26 It may thus correspond to the squared hood sometimes worn by the Cambridge proctors as a less formal alternative to the ruff and flourished hood: see Baker, *op. cit.*

27 And before that passing through a form similar to the present Cambridge proctor's ruff, and before that something rather like Thomas Baker's mantle.

28 This traditional form is still worn (as the omophorion) by Orthodox bishops. The loose ends are flung forwards and backwards across the *left* shoulder rather than the right. The even narrower Roman *pallium* has evolved further: first the ends were sewn down, forming a Y at front and back, and then the double thickness over the left shoulder was omitted.

29 For example <http://www.99colors.net/name/tyrian-purple> gives the RGB for Tyrian purple as 102,2,60.

30 IX xxxviii 135: *laus ei summa colore sanguinis concreti, nigricans adspectu, idemque suspectu refulgens.*

31 See Frick, p. 102 n. 28.

32 For more on this, see my 'Doctor's Greens', especially p. 45 n. 25; and Baker, 'Doctors wear Scarlet' p. 33 n. 2.

I incline to doubt that the medieval use of *purpureus* stretched very far towards what we would today call blue-purple: for example, *purpureus* was not used to describe the violet prescribed in Cambridge for undergraduates (and bachelors) at Trinity.³³

The Queen's College statutes refer to the purple *pallium* as conforming the Fellows to the robe and blood of the Lord. There is a long tradition of referring to the 'purple blood of Christ' in devotional literature, a famous example being Gregory of Nyssa's funeral oration for the Empress Flacilla, delivered in the year 385:

[She] takes off her purple dress but puts on Christ. Truly this is the garment which befits royal dignity! I know about the purple robe stained with the blood of sea shells, however the purple blood of Christ radiates with what is above.

It is not clear that purple is being used here as a straightforward colour word, and I am in any case cautious about concluding that a garment intended in the 14th century to evoke the blood of the Lord must therefore itself have been the colour of blood;³⁴ such literal-mindedness is arguably a by-product of the enlightenment, which the statutes predate.

The robe of the Lord mentioned in the statute is almost certainly intended to be the robe in which Christ was dressed while being mocked: Matthew describes this garment as red (*kokkinen*), Mark and John as purple³⁵ (*porphyroyn*). Luke describes the robe simply as 'splendid' (*lampran*).

This robe is often assumed by commentators to have become stained with Christ's blood, and the difference in reported colour is sometimes reconciled via an appeal to the difference between oxygenated and de-oxygenated blood: on exposure to air blood will oxygenate to a brighter red than it ever has in the body, whereas de-oxygenated blood is a dark red-purple.³⁶

The blood appears to have dried by 1416, when the undergraduate Thomas Eglesfield (kin to the founder, and later himself tenth Provost) is recorded as having paid 5s for two

33 Even Loggan's *Cantabrigia* plate 7 still uses the word '*violacei*' in the caption to Fig. 3, whereas the colour is described (in English) as purple by Woodforde [Diary, 2 May 1776]: 'The members of Trinity Coll: undergraduates all wear Purple Gowns—gentlemen Commoners wear purple Gowns trimmed with silver'.

The Trinity gown had mutated to dark blue by 1805: see the text for a Trinity Pensioner in Harraden. Caius undergraduate dress, violet in 1558, was black again by 1805 [op. cit.] until 1837 when Trinity blue was substituted, Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *Academical Dress*, p. 132 nn. 5, 6.

34 The robes washed in the blood of the Lamb in Revelation 7.14 come out white.

35 *Kokkinen* comes from the same root as kermes. Interestingly, *kokkinen* and *porphyroyn* are the same two colour words used in Revelation to describe the Imperial clothing of the Scarlet woman. Luke, who places the mockery in Herod's palace, may be describing the robe in High-Priestly, rather than Imperial, terms.

36 Although veins appear blue beneath very fair skin (whence the origin of the term 'blueblood' for the aristocracy) in reality this is an optical scattering effect: objects seen through translucent flesh appear blue for the same reason that the sky does. (The reader may examine a red object through a mixture of milk and water to demonstrate the same effect without surgery.)

Mollusc blood indeed turns blue as it oxygenates on exposure to air, because it uses hemocyanin in place of hemoglobin: however, Gregory's antithesis is slightly misleading, as the classical Tyrian dye came not from blood, but from an organobromine in the mucus produced by the murex snail's unique hypobranchial gland. See Cooksey for more detail of the chemical processes involved.

yards of russet (*russeto*) for a gown.³⁷ However very shortly afterwards Eglesfield pays 6d ‘*pro factura viridis toge*’ (for the making of a green gown).³⁸

Of course, *viridis* here could mean simply ‘fresh’, but the settled use in these accounts of the word ‘*toga*’ to mean ‘gown’ seems to indicate that the items refer to garments of a different type³⁹ to the purple *pallium* of the statutes.

I am inclined to believe that the *pallium* worn by the original Fellows of Queen’s College was what we would regard as a red-purple: definitely purple rather than crimson, and bluer than actual blood.⁴⁰

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37 Magrath, p. 321. The account continues ‘10d for an ancient gown to line his gown of russet, and 12d for making a gown, hood, and sleeves (*manicae*) for him.’ Cooper, ‘The Scarlet Gown’, p. 12, mentions both this gown of russet and the ‘blood red or purple robes’ worn by the fellows in his list of red gowns; however, (like scarlet) the word *russeto* at that time denoted the weave of cloth rather than just the colour: russet cloth also came in grey.

The passage from Magrath cited earlier (see n. 23 above) p. 35 n. 5, speaks of the scholars being provided with ‘*palliis, supelliciiis* (sic) *et amuciis ... et similiter quod inde in conformi habitu robarum annis singulis vestiantur*’. While it is tempting to see *robarum* as the gen pl f of red (*robus*), specifying the colour of the garments, both gender and number are wrong for this to agree with *habitu*. The root is more likely to be robe (*roba*), literally ‘dressed in like character of robes’. Livery was often referred to as ‘*liberatio robarum*’ in medieval accounts; see Lachaud for details.

38 op. cit. p. 322.

39 Indeed, at a different layer. The *pallium* may have already fallen out of use before 1416, according to Salter and Lobel: ‘Many clauses, such as those about the daily giving of alms, the speaking of French at meals, and the colour of the fellows’ robes, were soon forgotten.’ By 1361, as a result of the Black Death, the college had been reduced to three fellows, all of whom were to die over the next twelve months, see Magrath [op. cit.] pp 103–104.

40 The purple used at Queen’s was most unlikely to be murex. The *pallia* had most probably been double dyed: first with woad, in the fleece, and then with madder, in the cloth: see Kerridge, pp. 166–67.

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Figure Sources

- Figs 1, 2. *Chlamys*. Taken from Heuzey, Figs 63 (picture from a vase) and 64 (live model), pp. 124–25. Many more pictures are available at thecostumersmanifesto.com
- Figs 3, 4. Oxford Proctors. Taken from Loggan, *Oxonia*, Plate 10, Figs 17 and 18.
- Fig. 5. John Bloxham. Taken from Beaumont, p 109.
- Fig. 6. Sir Hugh de Holes. Picture courtesy of Hamline University's Brass Rubbing Collection, to whom my thanks:
<http://www.hamline.edu/offices/archives/brass-rubbings/collection.html>
The same brass also appears on page xc of Haines, Vol. 1.
- Fig. 7. Thomas Baker. Picture courtesy of Dr Alex Kerr, to whom I am also grateful for supplying the images for Figs 3, 4, 5 and 8.
- Fig. 8. Cambridge Proctor. Plate by John Samuel Agar after Thomas Uwins, taken from Vol. 11 of Combe.
- Fig. 9. Tyrian Purple. Printed here in CMYK as 44.100.43.27. A swatch of similar colour is at pieced-work.com under 'murex'.