

A photograph of the ruins of Pompeii, showing several classical Roman buildings with columns and arches, set against a clear sky. The ruins are made of stone and brick, with some walls still standing and others reduced to rubble. The scene is captured from a low angle, emphasizing the scale of the ancient structures.

From The Ruins of Pompeii... AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

by Arlene Converse

Who would have thought that 22 years in the dry cleaning industry, a store named Toudanines and a long awaited cruise to the Mediterranean would result in an amazing discovery of chance and coincidence! No one would ever dream of any connection between all these events. The cruise was a dream trip with friends to travel to Spain and Italy, to visit the Vatican, Coliseum, and Pisa. Pompeii was not on the itinerary, per se; rather it was an excursion option onboard the cruise ship. We opted for Pompeii out of pure curiosity with only limited information. During this excursion I felt a surprisingly emotional connection to Pompeii as the story was so tragic and the ruins that remained told the story of regular people, families and friends living their lives as we all do, working and enjoying their life. Our tour guide was magnificent and as she spoke, we could literally envision people walking around, in and out of their homes, going to work in their individual small shops, shopping and we saw the children playing in the streets. It was as real as it could be during the time we were there! What I learned at Pompeii was amazing! So you ask, what has this got to do with dry cleaning?

THE FULLERS OF POMPEII

Dry cleaning dates back to Roman times, probably beginning with the advent of textile clothing itself. The process which the Romans used in ancient times is definitely a milestone in the history of dry cleaning. The ruins of Pompeii provides a record of a highly developed trade of “fullers” (or fullones) who were professional clothes cleaners and clothes dyers. Lye and ammonia were used in early laundering, and a type of clay known as “fuller’s earth” was used to absorb soils and grease from clothing thought to be too delicate for laundering. They were called “fullers” because of their use of fuller’s earth. The Romans used a lot of natural fibers in their clothing; wool in particular was very popular, which would have been used for making tunics and toga’s. However, cleaning wool in water would result in shrinkage. The Fullers were the expert

cleaners of ancient Roman times, and they were very resourceful in the methods they used to meet their customers’ cleaning requirements. They often cleaned woolen clothing using urine (the ammonia in urine is good at dealing with minor stains). Urine was the most used resource in the process! The fullers would collect it from farm animals as well as public toilets. The savvy fullers would avoid collecting from the taverns though, as the nitrogen content would likely be too low (nitrogen is an important in the cleaning process and it is reduced after drinking lots of alcohol).

To dye garments, the fullers used pigments that were made from different plants and some types of shellfish. After washing and dyeing, the garments were rinsed in large tubs of water, and then moved to the drying stage. Clothing was either hung on lines to dry, or placed on racks on the roof of the fullonicae (fuller’s shops) to dry in the sun. In more crowded Roman towns, the fullers had permission to dry some clothing on the street sides.

The fullers’ shops had large overhead, having to employ a large staff, take up a large space, and keep and maintain large equipment. However, many fullonicae seemed to have been very profitable, and were able to use their funds to fulfill civic duties. As laborers, they were respectable, and were often known to support high-ranking Romans in politics through financial donations and patronage. In Pompeii it was the fullers who supported Eumachia, even dedicating a statue to her in honor of her support of them.

The fullers were skilled and important tradesmen. Arguably the most important job in the Roman clothing industry was that of the cleaners, or the fullers. The fullers’ shops serviced an entire town, where they dyed, washed, and dried garments of all types. The fullers’ shops (fullonicae), as seen at the ruins of Pompeii, were often larger than other types of businesses, in order to accommodate the large equipment needed, as well as to oblige the large number of daily customers. This also required a rather large workforce, and was probably one of the biggest employers in a city.

The Romans were all about appearances, which was obvious by the array of clothing that they wore. Their garments were billboards that advertised their status and wealth to all other Romans and anyone they came into contact with. As such, the clothing industry was a highly important part of Roman commerce. Not only was the sale of clothing a profitable business in Rome, but the care and maintenance of garments also became a highly important trade.

“DRESSED TO THE NINES”

The name Toudanines is derived from the term “dressed to the nines.” The term “dressed to the nines” has been a long playing topic of discussion as to its origin dating back as far as the 14th century. The term “to the nines” had been in existence for at least 150 years before “dressed to” was add to the term. Despite this, various attempts have been made to guess at the origin and meaning. One has it that tailors used nine

yards of material to make a suit (or according to some authors a shirt). The more material you had the more status, which bring us back to Pompeii, the Romans and a possible theory.

From around the second century BC, Roman men wore the toga on top of a tunic, and from then onwards it became a tradition of the Roman Empire. The color, style and bordering on the toga indicated official status, social class and education levels. The toga was worn exclusively by prominent Roman men through the period of the Republic and the early Empire, though not always happily. The large white woolen piece of fabric was carefully folded and draped on the body, in order to produce a garment that represented a specific type of Roman. The toga was a large cumbersome robe like garment of white wool and used up to 9 yards of material. Hence the reference to the number "9" and its link to status.



Supposedly because "9" is the highest ordinal number, equating to "the best" This expression, meaning "very fashionably and elaborately dressed", is recorded from the 18th century. "The nine" or "the nines" were used to signify "superlative" in numerous other contexts. Theories include: 9, being the highest single-digit number, symbolized the best; a metanalysis of Old English to then eyne "to the eyes"; and a reference to the 9 muses.

SUMMARY

And so, the amazing and surprising connection between "Toudanines", 22 years in dry cleaning and an excursion to Pompeii was discovered. I have always been someone to notice connections, timing and coincidences when others failed to connect the dots for one reason or another. But this one I missed! And so, everyday in dry cleaning, as we wash and prepare garments for our customers, I remember the fuller's from Pompeii and their talents and the lessons they taught us, being thankful we no longer have to wear 9 yards of fabric daily, particularly in Texas!

Toudanines Cleaners considers it a privilege to be of service to you for all your dry cleaning needs and we look forward to continuing to service these needs in the future. Thank you for your continued patronage and loyalty. ☺

Arlene Converse is President of Toudanines Cleaners in Boerne, San Antonio and Schertz, Texas. They currently own and operate 3 locations in Boerne and throughout the San Antonio area. In 19 years they have owned and operated 17 stores in 11 cities throughout the state of Texas. For more information visit our website at www.ToudaninesCleaners.com, Facebook and Twitter. If you have a question for The Dry Cleaning Lady, please submit it to info@ToudaninesCleaners.com.



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