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# The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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Two – tone (green and white) braiding – Courtesy of Ruth Singer

The Committee would like to dedicate this issue of the Newsletter to Les Hulton.

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## Les Hulton.

We are saddened to report the death of Leslie 'Les' Hulton M.A., C.ENG, MIEE. in October 2005. The husband of Mary Hulton, our committee member, he was responsible for the creation and maintenance of the Medats website, and a great help to Mary in the preparation of the Medats Newsletter. He was a Principal Lecturer at Coventry University and a member of Downing College. Cambridge. He will be greatly missed by us all.

John Cherry

I will remember Les particularly for his generous and unfailing patience and understanding in facilitating my work as Membership Secretary by maintaining a computerised membership list and running off membership cards and address labels, as well as sharing with me his extensive experience in similar posts. This was, of course, on top of all the valuable help he gave the Committee generally on websites and other computer applications, and his genial participation in Committee meetings. He will be much missed.

Carol Chattaway

### Les Hulton, an Appreciation

It is no exaggeration to say that without Les and Mary's work Medats would probably not have had its own website quite so soon as it did, and the Newsletter would not have appeared quite so regularly.

Les Hulton was not 'just' the husband of Mary Hulton, our Medats' Newsletter editor. He had become a 'virtual' member of Medats through the enormous amount of voluntary help he contributed to the Society. For many years past he was the mainstay of the Medats website, having been responsible for its creation and upkeep. He helped Mary to create the Newsletter three times a year, creating the format and collating all the information required for sending copy to the obliging Coventry printer Mr Mutton (to whom the Society is also much indebted). I did not know Les very well, having met him only a few times, but I spoke to him quite a bit over the phone. He was an amiable and kind man, who always had time to talk, and was especially helpful with anything to do with computers (about which I knew even less a couple of years ago than I do now!) and faxes – our fax machine being especially pernickety- on occasions printing too dark – or missing out the edges of sentences.... Most especially I remember him asking after our daughter, 'How's that lass of yours?' – a lovely expression...and one very typical of Les.

Having felt rather unwell in early October he was found to have liver cancer. He died on October 18th 2005. There was an Obituary notice in The Times on 27th October. He will be much missed, but not forgotten, by everyone in Medats. Our condolences go to Mary, their two sons and two small grandchildren.

Jane Bridgeman

The next MEDATS newsletter is planned for May 2006. All copy to Andrea Kalvin before the first week of April 2006, please, e-mail: andrea\_kalvin @yahoo.co.uk or by post to address on page 11.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

### **A reminder from our Membership Secretary.**

Members who do not pay regularly by Standing Order, or whose subscription payments for 2006 membership year, which were due on January 1, 2006, have not already been received, have been sent individual subscription statements, indicating the sum owing. Outstanding payments should be sent, as soon as possible, to the Membership Secretary, c/o MEDATS, PO BOX 948, GUILDFORD, GU1 9AH, UNITED KINGDOM, in pound sterling, either in cash, or by cheque, payable through a British bank, and made out to MEDATS. Membership cards will be issued as soon as appropriate payment has been made or confirmed. Members requiring a separate receipt should enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with their payment.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

All meetings are at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London. (unless specified elsewhere) Meetings are usually held on Saturdays.

**May 20th Annual General Meeting and Liveries and Uniforms in |Europe before 1600**

**October 28th Aspects of European Embroidery in the Late Middle Ages**

Please note that the date of this meeting is now 28th October not October 14th.

Suggested/Proposed meetings for 2007. Dates and topics to be confirmed

March **Dress on English brasses & effigies**

May **AGM**

October **Scandinavian and northern European archaeological textiles and dress.**

A two-day conference

Suggestions and offers of papers for presentation at these forthcoming events are welcome as the meetings are still being organised.

## **Precious Thread:**

**The Manufacture, Trade and Usage of Gold and Silver Yarn in Medieval Society**  
Meeting held at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Strand, London WC2 0RN in the Kenneth  
Clark Lecture Theatre on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2005

**John Cherry.** *Gold thread and wire in Medieval Jewellery.*

This lecture explored thread and wire in gold and silver jewellery. The mid fifteenth-century Middleham jewel (Yorkshire Museum) originally it had a surround of wire with jewels. The reverse has a back plate which shows the Nativity surrounded by 15 saints. Inside the jewel, three and a half embroidered gold roundels were found inside it. They were made of couched gold thread, silk textile, a stouter textile probably linen, which served as the support cloth of the embroidery, and a sewing thread probably of linen used at the back of the embroidery to secure loops of the gold thread. The gold thread consisted of cut silver strips of silver-gilt foil which was S wound around an S twist silk core, probably originally yellow in colour. Thread from Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire, may date from the thirteenth century. This had brass wire at the centre, surrounded by silk thread which itself had silver wire wrapped about it, perhaps for a saddle.

One of the main impressions of high status medieval dress must have been the combination of cloth of gold with gold jewellery, producing a glittering effect. Gold wire can be used to attach the jewellery to the body or dress, or within the jewellery itself. Theophilus described wire drawing in chapters VIII, VIII, and X of Book 3. The use of wire was usual on twelfth-century Mosan shrines, produced in the area of the river Meuse. The thirteenth-century goldsmith Hugo D'Oignies produced work that survives in Namur. This use of wire in Mosan metalwork inspired its use in medieval ring brooches, particularly in France. The talk concluded by indicating the difference between the effect of light on jewellery and on gold thread. The way that light reflected on spangles was another way in which gold was used as a dress accessory to disperse light. Jewellery with wire had that added sparkle, while embroidered gold thread had the quality of covering much larger areas.

John Cherry, The Middleham Jewel, 1994.

Niamh Whitfield, 'Round Wire in the Early Middle Ages', Jewellery Studies, 4 (1990), 13-29.

T. B. James and A. M. Robinson, Clarendon Palace, 1988.

Erhard Brepohl, Theophilus Presbyter und das Mittelalterliche Kunsthandwerk, Köln 1999.

Autour de Hugo d'Oignies, exhibition catalogue, ed. R. Didier, Namur 2003.

**Ruth Singer.** *Gold thread in narrowwares*

This paper considered surviving examples of narrowwares from the later middle ages incorporating gold thread. Additional contextual information was also noted, mainly from Royal Wardrobe accounts which list items such as gold fringe, silk and gold button and silk and gold ribbons. Surviving items discussed included a simple silver cord attached to a 14<sup>th</sup> century hat, preserved in Saffron Walden Museum, made very simply from two strands of thread. Similar cords are used as purse strings on a 1540 purse in the V&A. Other items are far more complex; three early 16<sup>th</sup> century Royal books in the National Archives have braids, fastenings, tassels and other trimmings incorporating gold thread, created using a variety of methods such as fingerloop braiding, tablet weaving, needle weaving and tabby weaving. Fringe and ribbons are found attached to ecclesiastical vestments, with fringe commonly used to decorate the ends of mitre lappets, and tabby woven ribbons of varying complexity used as edgings.

Many of the surviving items date from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, though there are items from earlier periods. Gold thread appears to have been used more extensively in trimmings in the later period. This is an ongoing study so I am always pleased to hear about other examples. [www.ruthsinger.com](http://www.ruthsinger.com)

**Márta Járó.** *The manufacturing technique of gold threads in the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian coronation mantle and some 12- 14th century coronations vestments of the Holy Roman Empire*

The contribution exposed some problems which arose during the evaluation of the scientific investigation results of metal threads in the Hungarian coronation mantle and in the robes which were used at the coronation of the kings and emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, now in Vienna.

The similar composition, fineness of the gold embroidery threads of the Hungarian coronation mantle, originally a bell-shaped chasuble from 1031 AD. and of those used to embroider, around 100 years later, the mantle of Roger II of Sicily, the later coronation mantle of the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire poses an analytical and historical problem at the same time. Can the similarity of the gold alloys and their slight difference from those used in the given period of the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries in other embroideries from which analysis data are on disposal be the prove for a common source of these metal threads? Could that source be identical with that of the base silk fabrics, that means Byzantium or the Byzantine territory? If yes, can be supposed that in the Byzantine workshops gold refined in the same way was applied to the manufacture of metal threads for as long as a century or longer?

The metal thread, made from single-sided gilt silver strips, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century woven stola of the Vienna coronation vestments poses a problem in connection with the manufacturing technique, that of the joining method of the silver and gold.

Gold wires were used to embroider the different parts of the alba belonging to the Vienna coronation vestments. The morphology of these wires differs from that of the drawn ones. Were these wires hammered (rolled) from cast rods or thinned from thicker, drawn wires? The cuff of the blue tunicella of the Vienna coronation vestments is embroidered with small gold tubes. The base material of the tubes is practically pure gold. Small tubes made from gold foil had already been employed in textile decoration in the Roman

Empire, and in the early Middle Ages. Did the “tube-makers” in Sicily or elsewhere continue an old tradition of making these decorations?

The morphological and material analysis of the metal threads help in reconstructing their manufacturing technique, but at the same time more and more questions arise. Only an interdisciplinary approach can be successful in this territory as well. The historical data as well as the practical experience of goldsmiths can contribute to the clarification of the technical data, of the results of the scientific investigations.

**Philippe Trelat.** *‘Ad opuscyprense’, The production and trade of Cypriot textiles with gold.*

During the Lusignan domination (1192- 1474) Cyprus became a significant staging post for east-west trade in the Mediterranean. If colonial products such as sugar, cotton or salt are well documented and studied, costly textiles and particularly gold wire, one of the specialties of the island, have until now attracted little attention from historians. Written sources, however, enable us to appreciate the importance and diversity of gold working, especially Nicosia, the capital of the Cypriot kingdom. Notarial acts and commercial manuals report that textiles with gold were exported from Famagusta to the main ports of the Mediterranean by Italian merchants. Inventories of cathedral treasuries in Western Europe often refer to sumptuous and costly textiles from Cyprus. Gold yarn and costly textiles were often appreciated by travellers and pilgrims who landed at the island like Nompars de Caumont in 1418. Finally, a few pieces preserved in different museums, such as the altar hanging of Otto de Grandison, or the liturgical vestments of Boniface VII must be examined as invaluable examples of the high quality work produced by medieval Cypriot craftsmen.

**Professor Wendy Childs.** *The London customs accounts and trade in Cyprus gold*

Gold thread and cloth had long been available to the English royal court. In the later fourteenth century they also became more available on the open market. This increase matches the rise in purchases for the royal wardrobe, increasing references in noble inventories, and the perceived rise in luxury industries in the period after the Black Death. In this period imports were exclusively to London and Cyprus gold was predominant. The London customs account for 1390 (TNA:PRO E122/71/13) illustrates the trade. This year 111 lb of Cyprus gold thread (in lb. and ozs.) were valued at £194 and Lucchese gold and silver thread (in grosses and dozens) at a mere £17. Almost all the gold cloth was worked with Cyprus thread. 260 pieces of brocade with Cyprus gold and 5 with Cyprus silver, 55 pieces of baudekin and 2 pieces of velvet powdered with Cyprus gold, and a small number of orfreys and some Arras powdered with Cyprus gold were valued altogether at £1439; 90 rakkemas and imperial cloths, almost certainly also gold cloths but not specified as worked with Cyprus thread, were valued at £186; 2,141 pieces of silks, brocades and velvets not specified as with gold were valued at £3872. Cyprus gold cloth therefore made up around 13% of imported fine cloths by volume and 26% by value. Imports came entirely from the Low Countries, having been brought by the safe but expensive overland route from Italy. The importers were two-thirds Italian merchants (of Lucca, Florence, Milan, and Bologna) and one third English (mainly mercers). This

pattern continued into the early fifteenth century, but then Cyprus gold was joined by Venice, Genoa and other gold threads and gradually some gold thread and cloth appeared on ships directly from the Mediterranean at Southampton as well as at London.

**Dott. Ssa Isabella Campagnol Fabretti.** *Ganzi, Restagni and Laces: the Use of Gold and Silver Threads in Venetian Textiles*

A crossroad in the merchant routes from East to West, Venice always had huge amounts of gold.

It was also widely used: *cuori d'oro* (gilt leather upholstery) covered the walls of the palaces of the aristocracy, in Palazzo Ducale the gold foil covered stuccoes of the Scala d' Oro had been made with the explicit purpose to impress foreign dignitaries and on the Grand Canal shone the Ca' d' Oro, the palace that Marino Contarini in 1431 wanted decorated with gold leaf.

It is then easy to understand why gold did find its way into the Venetian textiles.

Venetian weavers found, at the very beginning, inspiration for their most luxurious works from the court of Byzantium and their precious *panni de oro*, were widely used by Venetian ladies, despite the prohibition by the sumptuary laws.

If there was somebody that could, in his own right, use cloths of gold, this was the doge and his family; these luxury textiles were also used as diplomatic gift, and to oversee the production of the restagni, the Venetian name for the gold cloth, were appointed the *Officiali a i panni de oro* charged with the responsibility to check the good quality of the materials and of the manufacture, and to avoid any fraud.

Another legendarily precious and typically Venetian fabric was the *Ganzo*, a lampas in which were present both gold and silver threads; the name is a misspelling of the name of the Indian river Gange, maybe a remembrance of the generic Indian origin of the materials or of the original patterns, exotic motives outlined in pastel-coloured silks.

If golden threads were valuable by themselves, this was even more true when they were worked as needle or bobbin laces. If lace trimmings, since their appearance, have always been considered a status symbol, metallic laces were akin to real jewels, precious for the materials and craftsmanship that was put into them.

Unfortunately, the use of economically valuable materials caused the disappearance of the majority of golden laces; melted in order to recover the metal, it is now not so easy to find some examples in the collections.

A peculiar Venetian custom in the use of gold threads is mentioned Cesare Vecellio writes in his *Habiti antichi*: brides on their wedding day were in fact introduced to relatives and guests dressed in white and gold fabrics with long, blonde hair in which golden threads were mixed to enhance the shine of their locks.

## **VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM**

### **INTRODUCTORY TOURS & GALLERY TALKS AT THE VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON SW7 2RL**

If you have any questions about any of the events listed below, please call 020-7942-2211

#### **Daily Introductory Tours**

Visitors who want a general introduction to the Museum can join one of our guided tours, which last approximately one hour. The tours introduce a selection of treasures from the Museum's outstanding collections.

Sound enhancement equipment is available for visitors with hearing impairments. Tours at 12.30 and 14.30 introduce the British Galleries.

10.30, 11.30, 13.30 and 15.30 Introductory tour

12.30 and 14.30 British Galleries tour

Wednesdays only

16.30 Introductory tour

19.30 Thirty-minute tour of an area of the collection

Daily Gallery Talks. Starting at 13.00

Meet at the rear of the Cromwell Road entrance unless instructed otherwise.

These talks in the galleries last 45 minutes to an hour. They explore the wider context and history of the objects on display. The talks are led by V&A staff or guest speakers. Sound enhancement is available for visitors with hearing impairment.

Please visit the Victoria & Albert Museum website at [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk) and search for 'Gallery Talk'

## **CONFERENCE**

Leeds. International Medieval Congress. The conference for 2006 will be held from July 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. The main theme is Emotion and Gesture. Sessions on Talking about Textiles and Transforming Textiles have been organised by Dr Gale Owen Crocker. Details can be obtained on [www.leeds.ac.uk/imi/imc.htm](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/imi/imc.htm), or by post from IMC, Parkinson 1.03, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT.

The Congress in 2007 will be on the theme of The City. The deadline for the submission of papers on this theme or indeed any other topic is 31<sup>st</sup> August 2006. Details as above.

## **TEXTILE FAIR**

The textile society's annual **Antique Textile Fair** held on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2006, 10am-5.00pm at Armitage Centre, Moseley Rd, Fallowfield, Manchester M14 6HE. For further information visit [www.textilesociety.org.uk](http://www.textilesociety.org.uk).



## **BOOK REVIEW**

**Mary Schoeser**, *World Textiles: A concise history* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 224 pages, £7.95.

This volume is part of Thames & Hudson's world of art series and, with its slim A5 format, is indeed concise. Within this scope Schoeser - known to many readers through her extensive previous publications - neatly rethinks the categorisation of textiles to present a densely useful work. She takes her lead from the artefacts themselves, organising her chapters around similarities of theme rather than geography. The global textile interconnections caused by religion, politics, trade and other cultural movements form the basis for a broad perspective.

Medieval textiles are discussed through five of the ten chapters, locating them within greater artistic and technical developments. Schoeser traces how the influences of non-European groups affected textile creation in the period. This is a refreshing change from discrete Western-based presentations. Highlighting, for example, that by the 1450s Mongolian rulers held territory from Vietnam to Poland instantly changes the idea of an East/West divide. She is looking at history through textiles, emphasising that no culture creates in isolation.

The images are as large and clear as the page size permits, more in colour than black and white. Lovely close-up shots allow the reader to absorb the details. With a wealth of content at modest cost, *World Textiles* is justly described as 'an invaluable introduction' to the subject. For anyone interested in textiles, novice or experienced, it forms an inspiring reference for further explorations.

Hilary Davidson

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Our chairman recommends:

*Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork and other Cultural Imaginings* ed. **E. Jane Burns**. This series of essays is published by Palgrave Macmillan in the New Middle Ages Series in 2004. It costs £50.

The book published by **E. Jane Burns**, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2002 is now available in paperback at £16.50.

The catalogue of the exhibition at Mechelen from September to December 2005 entitled ***Women of Distinction: Margaret of York Margaret of Austria*** is available in an English version and is well worth acquiring. The ISBN is 000-5826-374-6. It contains an article by Paul Matthews on 'Apparel Status Fashion: Woman's Clothing and Jewellery.'

Our Programme Secretary recommends:

**Anne F. Sutton**, *The Mercery of London*. Trade, Goods, People 1130-1578

Ashgate, Aldershot 2005 £75.00

A comprehensive and detailed account of the Mercer's Company, which will become a classic. Well worth reading.

**David Jacoby**, *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean*. Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy

Ashgate 2005, £60.00

**Judith H. Hofenk de Graaff** with contributions from **Wilma G. Th. Roelofs & Maarten van Bommel**, *The Colourful past: Origins, Chemistry and Identification of Natural Dyestuffs*, Abegg Stiftung, Berne & Archetype, London 2004 ISBN 3-905014-25-4 (cloth bound) 120 Swiss Francs.

## **GRANTS**

**Grants** for research are available from the Society of Antiquaries who administers the Janet Arnold Fund. Application details can be obtained from the Society of Antiquaries website. Applications have to in by Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006 and Friday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

## **COLLECTION**

The new medieval **Gallery** at the Museum of London opened in late November 2005. The knitted caps are back on display.

## **COURSES**

### **Natural Dye Workshop**

Run by Penny Walsh

Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th March 2006

Concentrating on experimenting with historic natural dyestuffs, Penny Walsh will focus on exploring the process from mordanting (ie pre-dyeing), using mineral salts and mordants such as rhubarb leaves and wood ash. Using dyes from madder, safflower and logwood you will learn how to make vivid and subtle shades of reds, pinks and purples. Or try over-dyeing on indigo blue for a range of greens, and saffron, weld and goldenrod for mellow yellows and deep golden hues. Venue: Greenwich Craft Foundation, Royal Hill, Greenwich, London SE10 8PY Booking: 020 8858 2211 or e-mail: [craftinfo@gcc.ac.uk](mailto:craftinfo@gcc.ac.uk)

Time: 10am – 4pm daily

### **Practical Courses on Dress With Sarah Thursfield**

Author of *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant*

At the Castle Court Quilter, Whittington, near Oswestry.

Each weekend offers a relaxed but stimulating mix of presentation, practical work, books and garments to study, and the exchange of ideas with other enthusiasts. The fee covers tuition, handouts and coffee. Lunch and accommodation available nearby (ask for details). To book please send a cheque for £30 per person payable to Sarah Thursfield, together with a SAE, to the address below. Full refund if course does not run for any reason. Ashgrove Overton Road St Martins OSWESTRY Shropshire SY11 3DG Phone 01691 778019, email milseam@btinternet.co.uk

### **All about hose**

Choosing cloth, cutting, fitting and making up separate and joined hose; fancy Tudor upperstocks. 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some sewing experience useful. Weekend 11-12 February 2006.

### **Women's Medieval Headgear**

Kerchiefs, wimples, nets, barbettes, bourrelets and tires...from 1100 to 1500, what English women really wore and how to make it. Some sewing experience useful. Weekend 1-2 April 2006

### **Tudor Improvers At a venue near Cambridge**

Bring your own project for a working session with support and advice. Primarily for Kentwell participants but open to all. Further details available early 2006. Weekend 22-23 April 2006

**Status & Style: Dress & Armour of the 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries.** This course is taught by Chrys Plumly at Morley College, starting on Tuesday 21st February 2006, 14.00-16.00, lasting six weeks. For more information please visit [www.morleycollege.ac.uk](http://www.morleycollege.ac.uk), the course code is 608V.

### **MEDATS COMMITTEE ADDRESSES**

**This section redacted**

## **Looping the Loops: Knitting before 1600**

**In memoriam Montse Stanley**

Saturday 11th March 2006, Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre Courtauld Institute of Art,  
Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

Tickets:

	Booking in advance	At the door
MEDATS members	£10	£12
Non-members	£12	£15
Non-members joining at the door		£10+Membership fee
Students (proof of status required)		£5

Household and Institutional Members: Maximum two persons each.  
(N.B. Lunch is not included)

9.15	Doors open
9.45	Introduction
10.00	<b>Edwina Ehrman</b> , (Curator of Dress and Decorative Art, Museum of London) <i>Knitted garments in the collection of the Museum of London: an overview</i>
10.30	<b>Linda Newington</b> , (Head Librarian Winchester School of Art, Southampton University) <i>Knitted together: An introduction to the knitting collections held by the University of Southampton libraries with special reference to Montse Stanley &amp; Richard Rutt.</i>
11.00	Coffee/tea in seminar room 1.
11.30	<b>Jennifer Scarce</b> , (Honorary Lecturer, Middle Eastern Cultures Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, Dundee) <i>Medieval Middle Eastern Knitting</i>
12.00	<b>Ruth Gilbert</b> , (Ph.D candidate Southampton University, Winchester campus, supervisor Dr Maria Hayward) <i>The Virgin Mary's knitting: pictures as technical evidence.</i>
12.30	Discussion
13.00	Lunch
14.15	<b>Julie Botticello</b> , (Ph.D candidate University College, London, supervisor Dr Michael Rowlands) <i>The conservation of Tudor caps in the Cuming Museum, Southwark</i>
14.45	<b>Lesley O'Connell Edwards</b> , (Independent scholar) <i>A survey of Elizabethan handknitting</i>
15.00	Discussion
15.15	Tea/coffee seminar room 1
16.15	Seminar Room 1 <b>Catherine Stallybrass &amp; Dagmar Pickles</b> of 'Curious Workes', York will give a short talk and demonstrate the making of sprang, naalbinding (needlebinding) and alternative 'knitting' techniques

\*\*A supplement to The Bibliography of the History of Knitting (published in CIETA Bulletin 2000) by Lesley O'Connell Edwards will be available at the meeting.