



The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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A happy sight! Karen Watts, our Honorary Secretary, back on her feet giving a lecture at the Royal Armouries Museum in March.

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EDITORIAL

First, the Good News:

As shown on the cover, Karen, who was rather ill for a considerable time, is much recovered. When I attended the lecture at RAM, she seemed much her bubbly old self.

Then, the Bad News:

Karen's improved condition does not presage a return to service on the MeDaTS committee. The committee has been working very hard for more than a few years to make up for often depleted numbers. Program Secretary was vacant from early 2008 until Dan came on board early last year. Bushy stepped up as Ticketing Secretary late in 2009 after that job had been vacant for much of that year. Shortly after Karen was taken ill in the third quarter of 2010, John moved from Chairman to take on the figurehead role as President following the death of Claude Blair. His replacement as Chairman, Geoff Egan, was taken from us untimely just before Christmas 2010. Thus, at this point there are two committee roles vacant – Chairman and Honourary Secretary – with their duties done as needed by various other members of the committee. Unfortunately this situation is about to become significantly worse, as two more committee members have signalled their departure. I plan to move to Europe, while Hilary intends to return to Australia.

The proverb tells us that "If you want something done, ask a busy person". The people on your committee *are* very busy people, and have done very well in making up the needed work, as the successes of the last several years worth of meetings testify. (Although I claim no credit in that myself) But there must come a limit, and the departures of Hilary and myself may well test that limit. Therefore, if you value what MeDaTS does, please give some consideration to putting something in to keeping it functioning.

I can certainly recommend the Newsletter Editor position. It takes very little time. In fact the amount needed is very much up to the Ed. All you really need is a reasonable grasp of some word processing program and a moderate attention to detail. You would have to ask Hilary about what her job entails, although I can tell you that the one thing that was giving her a bit of headache for a while, the Society web page, is now running smoothly, in no small measure due to the assistance of Dan.

So, please, give this matter some serious thought.

To receive the newsletter as a colour PDF file electronically, e-mail me via medatseditor@hotmail.co.uk.

Otherwise, information about MeDaTS, and membership forms, may be had from the Membership Secretary, Carole Thompson, 9 Fairthorn Road, Charlton, London SE7 7RL, or from the society website: www.medats.org.uk

Timothy

EXHIBITIONS

Stella Jundul has written regarding her recent excursion to Tunisia. She reports that there are quite a few small museums scattered about the country which often feature traditional textile crafts and clothing, much of which hark back to the middle ages. She particularly referred to the Sahara Heritage Museum in Douz, in the south of the country on the very edge of the desert. In Kairouan the rhythmical clacking drew her attention to the fact that that in the back rooms of shops there are still craftspersons busily hand weaving cloth for the clothes on sale in the front rooms. Picture from the Sahara Heritage Museum leaflet.



CONFERENCES PAST

MeDaTS Spring Meeting: *'Heavy Metal and Dirty Deeds: Buttons, Hooks & Other Dress Accessories'*

Museum of London
10th March 2012

Work commitments forced me to miss this one, but all accounts I heard were very enthusiastic. 80 attended, and the Finds Research Group has expressed an interest in further joint events in future. Alas, I have not been successful in getting abstracts that might allow others who missed out to gain some appreciation of the offering. Sorry! Perhaps they will eventually arrive, like the following.

MeDaTS Autumn Meeting 2010: *'Tapestries Study Day'*

Hampton Court Palace
9th October 2010

Paul Garside, 'The History and Construction of Metal Threads: A Brief Account'

Metal threads, of a variety of types, have been used to embellish fabrics for thousands of years. By incorporation into the weave of a textile or by embroidery onto the surface, the lustre of the metal - usually gold or silver - can be exploited to produce dramatic and luxurious fabrics. For the historian, these elements can provide important evidence about the status, function and value of artefacts, and may reveal something of individuals to whom they belonged. Contemporary records and surviving textiles allow the history of these materials to be explored, providing an insight not only into changing fashions and styles, but also into advances in metallurgical technology.

The simplest metal threads consist of filaments or wires interwoven in the fabric, a practice that may date back as far as the 3rd millennium BC; garments decorated in the manner are mentioned in the Bible (Exodus, 39:2-3). By the 5th century BC the

more sophisticated practice of winding a metal filament around a fibre core (silk or linen, usually dyed to complement the metal) was developed, producing a thread with greater flexibility and durability. Such wound threads were quickly adopted in Western Europe after their introduction by the Romans, and following the collapse of the Roman Empire they continued to be produced throughout Europe and the Middle East.

By the early medieval period, the majority of European metal threads came from Italy or the Middle East. In addition to solid metal filaments, 'membrane' or 'aurum Cyprese' threads (using narrow strips of gilded parchment or paper) came to be employed, with this technology possibly originating in the Orient where their use was already widespread; although they required less of the valuable metal to produce, this advantage was balanced by a loss of durability.

By the 12th or 13th century composite metal strips (silver gilt, gilded copper and silvered copper) became widely used, and these materials gradually replaced the pure metal threads. The gilding itself could be achieved by copper soldering, amalgam gilding, furnace welding, or hammering and burnishing. Advances in wire-drawing in the 14th and 15th centuries allowed filaments to be produced more easily and uniformly; wire wound metal threads became common, as were those using filaments created from wires flattened by rollers or hammering. These developments made the fragile membrane threads redundant, as they are seldom seen in European fabrics after the 16th century.

Despite their relatively simple construction, a variety of effects can be accomplished: The appearance of a metal thread will depend on the composition of the metal, the colour of the fibre core, the extent to which the core can be seen through the wound filament and the overall diameter of the thread. More complex forms are also seen, with multiple filaments (usually two, sometimes three) wound around a single core, with two or three similar metal threads plied together, or with a narrow metal thread (or a wire) twisted around a wider one.

Therefore by the middle ages, a wide range of metal thread types were available, and when combined with different weaving or embroidery techniques, intricate and sophisticated visual effects could be achieved. Couched metal threads were widely employed in Opus Anglicanum ('English work') or goldwork embroideries, particularly of the 13th and 14th centuries, created for both ecclesiastical and secular purposes. Cloth of gold (and cloth of silver) was created by weaving fabrics with metal thread wefts to achieve an even metallic surface, and could be embellished with weaving techniques such as damask. Medieval Italy was particularly well known for the production of these fabrics. Garments using metal threads were included in those restricted by the various sumptuary laws enacted from the 14th to 17th centuries; for example, the law of 1363 AD states cloth of gold should be limited to women of the royal family, whilst the law of 1574 AD condemns 'superfluities of ... cloths of gold [and] silver' as a cause of 'the manifest decay of the whole realm'.

CONFERENCES FORTHCOMING

Workshop: 'Dress, Textiles and Heritage'

University of Wolverhampton

13th June 2012

A workshop to explore the collection, display, conservation and all other uses of dress and textiles in heritage settings, including museums and historic houses, in Britain and beyond. Themes of interest include – but are not limited to:

- The uses of textiles in recreating and restoring historic interiors
- The collection and display of dress, from haute couture to everyday dress
- The historic development of dress and textiles collections
- The use of dress in re-enactment
- The role and development of ethnographic and specialist collections
- The conservation of historic dress and textiles
- Exhibitions and displays beyond heritage settings
- The 'consumption' of dress and textiles in heritage settings

Further information

Laura Ugolini at l.ugolini@wlv.ac.uk

International Medieval Congress

Leeds University, 9th – 12th July 2012

Textiles and dress are a little less prolific at the IMC this year. DISTAFF are sponsoring three sessions:

'Dress, Textile and Convention (or Not) I' of three papers, Valija Evalds, 'Out of date and overdressed: the horned headdress of Frideswinde's Cloister', Emily Hane Rozier, 'What not to wear: manipulated masculinity in the Galaunt tradition', Tasha Kelly, 'The pourpoint of Charles VI of France: structural details revealed';

'Dress, Textile and Convention (or Not) II' of four papers, Sue Powell, 'The evidence for textiles dress in the household accounts (1498–1509) of Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII', Maureen C. Miller, 'The liturgical vestements of Castel Sant'Elia: their historical significance and current condition', Tina Kane, 'The art of transating text into tapestry: Pierre Desrey and the *Troyes Mémioire*', Nahum Ben-Yehuda, 'Spanish medieval silk: the silk trade in 14th-century Spain – testimony from the rabbinical *Responsa*'.

'Unwritten Rules of Embroidery in the Early Medieval period' of three papers, Alexandra M. Lester-Makin, 'How to become a relic: an embroiderer's guide', Maggie Kneen, 'Early woollen castles' (sic), Anna C. Henderson, 'Reinventing the rules: slipping between the Bayeux Tapestry and its Victorian replica'.

There is a just a couple papers of dress and textiles interest in other sessions, including yours truly, 'Transgressions: Is it possible to rules, but no enforcement? The instance of sumptuary rules in Constantinople'.

Further information

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc>

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NEW AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Dress and Identity

Mary Harlow (ed.) University of Birmingham

Archeopress, Oxford 2011

ISBN 9781407309422.

£40.00 . iii+146 pages;

illustrated throughout in colour and black and white .

This collection of papers arose from a seminar series held by the Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham in 2005. The volume covers a wide chronological and geographical span: from archaic Greece to medieval Scotland by way of the Roman Empire and Anglo-Saxon England. The contributors come from a number of different academic disciplines: history, archaeology and classics.

Contents:

'Dress and Identity: an Introduction', Mary Harlow;

'Costume as Text', Zvezdana Dode;

'Veiling the Spartan Woman', Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones;

'Dressing to Please Themselves: Clothing Choices for Roman Women', Mary Harlow;

'The Archaeology of Adornment & the Toilet in Roman Britain & Gaul', Ellen Swift;

'Dress and Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire', Ursula Rothe;

'Investigating the Emperor's Toga: Privileging Images on Roman Coins', Ray Laurence;

'Anglo-Saxon Woman: Fame, Anonymity, Identity and Clothing', Gale R. Owen-Crocker;

'Representing Hierarchy and Homosociality: Vestments and Gender in Medieval Scotland', Penelope Dransart;

'Cosmetics and Perfumes in the Roman World: A Glossary', Susan Stewart;

'The Social Life of Museum Textiles: Some Comments on the Late Antique and Early Medieval Collection in the Ure Museum at the University of Reading', Anthea Harris.

For more information:

<http://www.archaeopress.com/ArcheopressShop/Public/defaultAll.asp?QuickSearch=9781407309422>

Intercultural Transmission in the Medieval Mediterranean

Stephanie L. Hathaway and David W. Kim (eds.)

Continuum International Publishing

Projected release: 16th August 2012

ISBN 9781441139085

Hb £65.00

Includes the following article –Timothy Dawson, 'There and back again: cross-cultural transmission of clothing and clothing terminology'.

Further information

www.continuumbooks.com

MeDATS FUTURE MEETINGS

Autumn Meeting (& AGM): *Well Worn Weeds: linen and other vegetable fibres.*

Date: 27th October 2012

Venue: Stevenson Theatre, British Museum

This time we have the luxury of some abstracts in advance!

Susan North, 'Linen and the Plague'

"I have observed that the inhabitants of Suk and Halk in Almería, where the clothing and bed linen of the sick were sold, died almost without exception."

Ibn Khātimah, 1348

This paper will examine the medical beliefs surrounding linen in the period prior to 1600, in particular the popular and professional association of linen with 'contagion'. In the wake of the arrival of the Black Death in Europe in 1348, many physicians thought infected clothing and bed linen responsible for its spread. This idea was endorsed by royal and local authorities, and plague proclamations often contained advice and regulations about 'disinfecting' these carriers of infection. A survey of plague literature of this period will examine the 'myths' and 'science' behind these ideas and explore how the association of clean linen with concepts of purity, upheld in the conduct literature of the medieval period, was further reinforced by this connection of dirty linen with disease.

Jenny Tiramani, 'The evolution of smock & shirt patterns in late fifteenth & early sixteenth century Europe'

As the open sleeves, changing necklines and the panning and slashing of tailored garments revealed more and more of the linen smocks and shirts worn beneath them, the shape of the linens was developed to suit their new roles. Although very few examples of these linen items survive, many clues as to their cut and construction may be found, often in surprising places. This presentation will explore the subject using surviving garments, portraits and experimental reconstructions.



Fine detail of those linens not so often seen, Gulbenkian Apocalypse, England c. 1270.

Beatrix Nutz, 'All indecent! 15th century linen underwear from Lengberg Castle, East-Tyrol, Austria'

In the course of extensive reconstruction of Lengberg Castle (municipality of Nikolsdorf, East Tyrol, Austria), starting in July 2008, archaeological investigations of several parts of the building were carried out under the direction of Harald Stadler (Institute of Archaeology, University of Innsbruck). During the research a filled vault spandrel was detected in the south wing of the castle between the 1st and 2nd floor. The fill consisted of dry material in different layers, among it organic material such as twigs and straw, but also worked wood, leather - mainly shoes - and textiles. The building history, as well as investigations on construction techniques and the archaeological features heavily suggested a dating of the finds to the 15th century, when another level was added to the castle by order of Virgil von Graben. The vault spandrel was most likely filled with waste during the addition of the 2nd storey as isolation or to level the floor. The reconstruction is mentioned by Paolo Santonino († 1507 CE) in his itinerary, who also gives us a short description of the castle and tells about the consecration of the castle chapel by Pietro Carlo, Bishop of Caorle, on October 13th 1485 CE. Assuming the reconstruction was finished by the time the chapel was consecrated the finds from the vault predate the year 1485 CE.

Not counting yarns, cords and ropes the assemblage consists of more than 2.700 individual textile fragments. The find provides a wealth of different textiles, including a number of almost completely preserved pieces of clothing as well as fragments of linen lining of women's garments with remnants of the former colourful woollen outer layer. In addition there were also some fragments of children's clothes in the vault.

Fragments of several linen shirts show pleats on collar and sleeves. Some of the sleeves with preserved textile buttons and corresponding button holes with small cuff circumference suggest that they were also constituents of female clothing, or worn by children. One pair of completely preserved linen underpants, the fragment of a second one and a textile fragment of red and blue wool, being the codpiece of trousers, belong to male clothing.

World's oldest bras?

Up to now only a few written sources of the 14th and 15th century indicated that medieval women may have worn some sort of breast support, but the sources are rather vague on the topic sometimes mentioning "bags for the breasts" or "shirts with bags". Other sources only mention breast-bands to bind down oversized breasts. Konrad Stolle writes in his chronicle of Thuringia and Erfurt on the fashion follies of the year 1480 CE amongst other things: "...und ore hemde hatten secke do sy dy broste jn stackten" = ...and their shirts had bags in which they put their breasts. Konrad Stolle then came to the conclusion that these dresses in the latest style are "...alles vnzuchtigk" = ...all indecent.

The actual existence of these "shirts with bags" is now proved by four fragmented linen textiles from Lengberg that resemble modern time bras. The criterion for them being classified as "bras" is the presence of distinctly cut cups. The two more fragmented specimens appear to be a combination of a bra and a short shirt or blouse. They end right below the breasts, but have a small piece of fabric that is indicated by partially torn edges of the cups onto which it was attached. This "bra" is the most elaborately decorated with needle-lace on the shoulder straps and sprang-work between the two cups. All three "bras" have decorated lower ends. Finger-loop-

braided laces are sewn onto the hem with lace-stitches resulting in simple needle-lace. The fourth "bra" resembles a modern bra the most. It can best be described with the term "longline bra". The cups are each made from two pieces of linen sewn together vertically. The surrounding fabric of somewhat coarser linen extends down to the bottom of the ribcage with a row of six eyelets on the left side of the body for fastening with a lace. The narrow shoulder straps are made of the same textile quality. Needle-lace is sewn onto the cups and the fabric above thus decorating the cleavage. In the triangular area between the two cups there might have been additional decoration, maybe another sprang-work.

Are the bras indeed from the 15th century?

There are considerable differences of opinion as to who 'invented' the brassiere or bra. Among those named is the French corset-maker Herminie Cadolle in the late 18th century and Mary Phelps Jacob who was awarded an US patent in 1914. As there have been no preserved textiles to prove the existence of bras with clearly visible cups up to date - and written medieval sources are rare, vague and far between - it was assumed that bras did not come into existence before the 19th century. All the evidence, the itinerary of Paolo Santonino, the building phases, the observed layers, the accompanying finds and the textile techniques used pointed to an age of 500 to 550 years for the finds, including the "bras", from Lengberg. Yet, as no comparable archaeological textiles of medieval "bras" were to be found, they were initially believed to have been dumped in the vault at a later age. Therefore fibre samples of two bras were Carbon-14 dated by the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule = Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in order to obtain the actual age of the "bras". To everyone's surprise (and the delight of the involved archaeologists) the results confirmed the dating of the "bras" to the 15th century. Three more radiocarbon dates carried out on other textile fragments support that dating.

Jane Bridgeman and Frieda Sorber will also speak.



An example of the sort of pattern worked into bed linens in eleventh-century Constantinople. Generally two such bands at each end of the sheet. For those looking at a printed copy, the central figures and outer stripes are kirmiz red, while the inner stripes are indigo blue.

(A souvenir of your editor's recent excursion into the Vatican Library.)

Future topics

Spring 2013: Footwear and Hosiery (Below The Knee)

Summer 2013: Getting dressed

Autumn 2013: Fur

Other suggested topics are: 'Working Textiles', 'Coronations', and 'Headwear, Hair and Make-up'.