The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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The Dunstan Chasuble at Stonyhurst College. Photo by Gale Owen-Crocker

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CALL FOR PAPERS:



British Library, Cotton MS Nero D VII f. 107r. The Benefactors' Book of St Albans Abbey, 1380-c 1540.

Topping it off: dress and textiles above the shoulder

On Sunday, 27th April the Medieval Dress and Textile Society will host its annual conference online via Zoom.

We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers concerning all aspects of European textiles, clothing, dress and fashion accessories from the end of the Roman Empire in western Europe until the Early Modern Period (approximately 400 to 1600 C.E.). Papers on this theme might address hats, head wraps, hair styling, eyeglasses, jewellery, cosmetics, or other related

topics. We encourage speakers of both academic and non-academic backgrounds to propose papers. Surprise us with the creativity and scope of your investigations.

Submission deadline: 15th January, 2025

Any questions, please contact events@medats.org.uk

RECENT EVENTS

Embroideries and Vestments at Stonyhurst College. An in-Person Study Day on Friday, 31st May, 2024 at Stonyhurst College, Clitheroe, Lancashire, report by Gale Owen-Crocker

On 31 May 2024, a rare beautiful day in this year's dismal summer, 17 of us converged on Stonyhurst College in the glorious Lancashire countryside. Now a co-educational boarding school, the college is a Jesuit institution founded in 1593 at Saint-Omer in what was then the Spanish Netherlands for the education of Catholic boys, largely English, at a time when Catholicism was illegal in England. Expelled from Saint-Omer, the school moved first to Bruges then to Liege. Forced to flee from the French Revolution in 1794, and following a change in English law, it moved into Stonyhurst Hall, the owner of which was a former pupil. From 1609 the college has been the recipient of treasures, a safe place for items in danger of destruction because of the Reformation, warfare and other dangers. It has also received many valuable gifts such as paintings. Its museum and three historic libraries contain valuable manuscripts, books and artefacts as well as the historic vestments and other embroideries that we had come to see.



Detail of the Dunstan Chasuble depicting the Martyrdom of St Thomas a Becket. Photo by Challe Hudson

After coffee and a brief history of the school, we were conducted round the museum and libraries by Dr Jan Graffius, the Curator, and shown a video about the life and work of Helena Wintour, a 16th - 17th century recusant who risked her life to embroider sumptuous vestments in gold and jewels, decorated with explicitly Jesuit motifs and signed with her own name or initials. Several pieces of

her work were rediscovered in the nineteenth century, repaired and conserved at Stonyhurst and displayed specially for us along with other historic vestments and other embroideries.

We were served a tasty lunch, when we were able to introduce ourselves to each other, welcome non-members and discuss our individual research and the work of MEDATS. We were then given free range to examine the textiles, some of which were mounted on dummies that could be rotated, some laid out, and to wander round the museum at our own pace. My own favourite exhibit was not among these; it is in a show case in the main school. One of the earliest acquisitions of the school, it is a magnificent cope in an Italian fabric: cloth of gold with integral red velvet panels depicting the red rose of Lancaster, the velvet powdered with tiny gold loops pulled through from below and with an exquisitely embroidered hood depicting the Annunciation. It was commissioned by King Henry VII of England as one of a set for Westminster Abbey, and taken by his son Henry VIII in 1520 for his historic meeting with François I of France where the two young kings tried to outdo one another in magnificence to the extent that the meeting was called the 'The Field of Cloth of Gold'. I imagine nothing the King of France wore could compete with this.

In the museum I was particularly intrigued by an early school uniform in nautical style, adopted by the school when they moved to England. The boys had previously worn cassocks, ecclesiastical style. The schoolboy who wore these leather breeches and short jacket must have been painfully thin! Dr Graffius also very kindly took out the school's copy of Shakespeare's first folio and allowed me to handle it, a special treat for me as a graduate of English Language and Literature, and nothing to do with textiles!

Fytt for thy degree: Clothing and arming the Typical Tudor man. Mendlesham Armoury Talk – 11th October 2024

In 1558 Mary I legislated that every man worth £5 or more was to provide arms and armour to help defend the country in times of need. In addition, cities, towns, boroughs and parishes were, at their own expense, to keep a quantity of equipment 'as shall be appointed by the commissioners' to arm their mustered men'.[1] And so it was that William Harrison, writing in 1587, just one year before the Spanish Armada, described how 'there is almost no village so poor in England… that hath not sufficient furniture in a readiness to set forth three or four soldiers, as one archer, one gunner, one pike, and a billman at the least'.[2] The church of St Mary the Virgin in Mendlesham, Suffolk still owns a rare, and probably unique, example of such a collection, containing examples of arms and armour dating between c1485 and c1620. In a presentation given online on Friday 11th October viewers were introduced to the church and its collection by Tobias Capwell, an independent scholar and leading authority on medieval and Renaissance arms and armour. Dr. Capwell explained the 'Mendlesham Armoury Facelift Project' was raising money to conserve the armour and improve the display to make it more accessible to the public. There followed a presentation by Ninya Mikhaila in which she discussed the clothing and armour worn by ordinary men in the Tudor period, and

compared the descriptions with the examples in the Mendlesham collection. The material was drawn from the extensive survey of 16th-century wills, inventories and household accounts carried out by herself and Jane Malcolm-Davies as part of the research for their book *The Typical Tudor* (2022). Over £1000 was raised through ticket sales and donations. A recording of the event can be accessed for a donation to the project until Sunday 8th December https://buytickets.at/medievaldressandtextilesociety/1479728 the video will remain online after ticket sales close. To read more about the project, and to donate, please visit: www.medats.org.uk/articles/mendlesham-armoury-facelift-project



The armoury at St. Mary's Church, Mendlesham, Suffolk. Photo: Tobias Capwell

References

1 Heath, I. *Armies of the Sixteenth century: The armies of England, Scotland, Ireland, the United Provinces, and the Spanish Netherlands 1487-1609.* Guernsey: Foundry Books, 1997. 32

2 Harrison, W. *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life.* ed. Georges Edelen, Folger Shakespeare Library, New York: Washington and Dover Publications, 1994. 234-235

Volga to Vinland: Early medieval dress & textiles. MEDATS autumn 2024 in-person conference, York. Abstracts of papers

SESSION ONE: Function and Beyond

Sarah Thursfield

Independent Researcher, author of *Medieval Tailor's Assistant*

'The Idea of Trousers: development and change in male clothing during the first millennium CE'

During late prehistory and the first millennium Common Era the basic forms of later medieval garments were emerging through the adaptation of flat pieces of woven cloth. The shape of

most body garments followed a fairly simple set of models, but there is rather more variety in the garments worn below the waist by men to cover the groin, legs and feet. Early evidence shows breech-cloths and short leggings on the straight grain. Trousers appear to have been in widespread use across northern Europe and Scandinavia by the late Roman period but surviving examples display a remarkable variety in their cut, suggesting that makers used various approaches to develop their patterns.

This paper presented these approaches and discussed how the idea of trousers is more difficult to visualise than the idea of upper body garments in general, and the garment is more difficult to create satisfactorily. What do the survivals tell us about their makers' perception of woven cloth and its use? And why, towards the end of the first millennium, did the men of northern Europe abandon trousers for linen breeches and bias-cut hose?



At the conference Sarah Thursfield explains her models of possible trouser patterns

Professor Heather A.D. Mbaye
University of West Georgia, USA
'10th Century Norse Dress: The Woman's Smokkr'

Much of what historical reenactors think they know about 10th-century Norse women's clothing is fairly conjectural. The fragments available are tiny – some as small as a thumbnail - and none very large: the biggest is a sort of rhomboid shape 30cm tall by 16cm at the top and 24cm at the bottom – that is 12 inches tall, about 6.3 inches wide at the top and about

9.5 inches wide at the bottom. That is why we see so many different styles of aprons on reenactors – they have very little archaeological textile evidence and what they do have does not tell us very much. The paper reviewed the information we have from the Hedeby textile findings on the smokkr, and reviewed what we can glean from them. It drew some conclusions, and stated carefully what we cannot know from these fragments. Then, it discussed several possible styles for these garments as represented by scale-sized dresses and a full sized speculative reproduction dress.

Ms. Lykania
Society for Creative Anachronism, Lykania's Endeavors
'Norse Glass Beads and Geography'

Glass beads were an important part of life for North Atlantic peoples, including the Norse. Beads are not static: their story is often complex. Geographic and chronological variations exist among the archaeological finds. These variations were influenced by changing cultural norms and regional references, but in addition, they were influenced by glass type and locality. The availability of Roman and other imported glass created the context of later beads, and a silver fever spawned bead distinctions as well.



Reproduction beads from Lykania's Endeavors

In the context of glass science and technology and the industrial trade system spanning three continents, the paper endeavoured to understand the material culture of glass beads by exploring their variety through reproduction. The presenter covered experiments with charcoal fuel, clay furnaces, and period tools. The materials and technology used by these Norse flame workers is a part of a larger and older glass industry, and, with the rise of the silk road, the north Atlantic glass industry adapted to the flood of silver and imported glass. The presenter's collection of reproduction beads, tools, and materials told the multifaceted story of North Atlantic glass: from the fall of Rome through the Viking age – from Norse religion to Christianity – from Denmark to Iceland.

Rebecca Wendelken
Retired Professor of History, Methodist University, USA

'"So I see you are from Gotland!": Regional Variation in Viking Women's Dress'



Necklaces from Gotland. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence.

There is a tendency to assume that all Viking women dressed alike. Admitting that some basic garments like the shift and overdress were similar, the speaker argued that decoration, ornamentation, and ways of wearing them were often quite different, with specific examples of clothing and jewellery from the island of Gotland, and relating the use of foreign materials to the spread of Viking travel and trade.

In the Viking period, 7th to the 10th centuries, it is important to remember that while some women travelled to foreign realms along with the Viking ships or emigrated for new lands, most remained at home to run farms and businesses. This helps explain the conservative nature of some women's dress but also the use of foreign materials. Materials used for dress included wool, linen and hemp and increasingly throughout the period silks from China, Central Asia, Spain and Byzantium.

Determining what garments were worn and in what order is difficult. Burials in this region are badly degraded and even partial garments are rare. Jewellery and decoration often shifted as the body decayed. New discoveries are adding to our knowledge daily, but the picture is still a bit cloudy. There is also a wide difference in the interpretations of various finds. This paper attempted to bring a little light into the picture through comparison of various regions and by examining some of the major interpretations.

SESSION TWO: Materials Here and There

Samantha Rose
Independent Researcher

'Shears and Frontiers: wool shears in Viking-Age graves and their implications'

The establishment of Norse economic urban centres in Scandinavia produced concentrations of skilled artisans to support the expanding trade and settler networks emerging in the Viking Age. It was, however, the Scandinavian hinterlands which kept the requisite raw materials flowing into these centres, such as the vast amounts of wool needed for textile production. Textiles, including sailcloth, facilitated the economic and cultural boom of the Viking Age and their importance has only recently been emphasized, though the academic focus has been centred on the production aspects of spinning and weaving.

Through examination of previously overlooked grave goods such as wool shears in the Central regions of Sweden and at Birka, this research aimed to explore the complex relationship between hinterland and urban areas. Of particular interest are the cultural and economic implications of these shears and other pastoral equipment placed into graves in Dalarna and Jämtland, an area previously associated most strongly with iron ore.



Iron shears excavated from Icklingham, West Suffolk, England. In the background, a hone stone or whetstone excavated from West Stow. West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village Museum, photo ©Challe Hudson

Kat Stasinska

AOC Archaeology

'A Second Look at Early-Medieval Scandinavian Checked Linen'

The fragment of linen band from grave 182–185:12 in Hedeby (10th-century Denmark) was first published in 1991 by Inge Hägg in her book *Textilfunde aus der Siedlung und aus den Gräbern von Haithabu*. Despite its humble size (7 mm in width), it is an intriguing piece of textile. It was made of linen fibres dyed blue, with single red threads in warp and weft forming a check pattern. The sole fact that this fragment has been dyed makes this band interesting, as during the Early Medieval period in northern Europe plant fibres were often left undyed. Dyeing them was a laborious process requiring specialist knowledge (unlike dyeing animal fibres, which was relatively simple).

The weaving pattern is another interesting feature of the band. It combines a blue background with single red threads. This kind of pattern is not unique, as checked patterns of similar type (single lines on a background of different colours) appear in other settlements and cemeteries in Scandinavia of this time – e.g. Birka and Vaernes. The combination of blue and red is not unusual among these finds. It appears in other textiles from Hedeby, and from Birka, and the usual combination is single red threads in warp and weft separated by much thicker blue stripes. The mixing of blue and red thread has a long tradition in European culture, starting from antiquity. The main purpose was the imitation of extremely expensive Tyrian purple. The reason for mixing blue and red fibres instead of, for example, overdyeing, is probably the ease of achieving a purple shade, with control over the process (whilst double dyeing in red and blue dyestuffs can result quite often in undesired brownish shades).

This paper aimed to investigate if this weaving pattern could be a Scandinavian approach to the imitation of purple, taking the Hedeby textile as an example. For research, a close copy of the Hedeby textile was prepared, starting from spinning linen threads, through dyeing them and weaving. Then tests were conducted, visual (with the naked eye) and with a colorimeter. The purpose was to answer the question of how the colour is perceived. Does the naked eye see the colour from the distance as purple? What about the different intensities of lights and candlelight/flame? The speaker considerd that experimental archaeology helps to answer these questions.

Georgia Gould

PhD student, University College London

'Across the North Sea: a comparison of garments from female burials between England and Norway in the 5th – 6th centuries CE'

As the name suggests, the so-called 'Migration Period' was a time of great change as people migrated, fighting and settling in different regions. One can see this in the formation of Early Anglo-Saxon England, where styles of dress and dress accessories began to change, bringing

with it a 'Germanic' influence. Authors such as Gale Owen-Crocker and the late Penelope Walton Rogers have examined the clothing and accessories of Anglo-Saxon Britain, comparing fashions between England and Northern Europe. This paper sought to build upon their excellent work, using methods of textile analyses, anthropology and art history. The presenter has studied the impact of trade and migration on motif and weaving techniques of early medieval Northern European textiles, and also sews and weaves her own garments and tablet-woven trims. The paper sought to bring academic analyses of early medieval textiles alongside reconstructions of Norwegian Migration Period and Early Anglo-Saxon dress to provide a close examination of the links between what is now modern-day Norway and England.

The paper analysed the dress accessories used in certain regions and their parallels. To complement this the presenter analysed types of tablet-woven bands used in both places, particularly bands woven with horsehair soumak and broken twill bands. It considered the sensory experience of using and wearing these bands and how the bands compare across regions. In addition, by looking at the archaeological evidence, it included a summary of types of twill used in the garments, demonstrating both the comparisons and contrasts. In summary, this paper sought to demonstrate how experimental archaeology and anthropology can reinforce textile analyses. This way of examining textiles can provide an insight into the networks of trade and migration within a historic period.

SESSION 3: The Desire for Adornment

Olga Magoula-Bamford

Research Associate, Department of Archaeology, University of York

'Local Varieties of Gold Foil Threads and Gold Braids in the Context of Accompanying Textiles in Early Medieval Burial Contexts'

Gold foil threads and braids have been found in early medieval archaeological contexts with a wide geographical distribution and various foci such as Northern Gaul and the Netherlands, the lower and middle Rhine Valley and Northern Italy.



Gold threads, image from speaker Olga Magoula-Bamford

The paper reported the results of a survey based on the factual evidence of a database on gold-

foil headwear and accompanying textiles in contemporary contexts. A new typology growing out of varieties of gold foil, braids and threads can now be identified. The purpose of the paper was to describe and demonstrate these local and distinct types of gold braids and foil and bring them together with the types of preserved and analysed archaeological textiles which accompanied them, where this was possible.

The comparative analysis of the remains of gold-foil headwear and gold thread decoration on the related remains has shown very interesting local distributions. In some localities it is possible to define local tastes and perhaps costume. On the basis of the technical analysis of these artefacts it has been possible to identify local differences in the manufacture and aesthetics across localities. These differences may be identified as diverse but identifiable local stages in the development of textile and jewellery manufacture traditions.

As will be demonstrated Anglo-Saxon braids are of the flat strip type while more than half of the gold-foil braids and threads in the Merovingian realm are of the spun gold variety. The Germanic surviving examples also seem to be of great interest, especially around the Trier region, but the most interesting case can be found in the most varied artistic interpretations of these artefacts by the Longobards as found in various Longobardic burial contexts. The presentation and discussion touched upon issues such as the complex processes of cultural interaction and trade, the particular history of these interactions in each locality and discussed these in the light of contemporary artefactual and textile analysis.

Ingela Wahlberg
Textile Studies Uppsala University, Sweden

'From Central Asia to Valsgärde Sweden'

The paper examined some textile fragments in which the embroidery technique of underside couching was worked on samite.

Some of the earliest finds of samite and underside couching in Sweden are three fragments from the Valsgärde burial mound circa three kilometres north of Uppsala. The burials are dated to the Vendel period and the beginning of the Viking age. Since the textile is preserved only where it has been in contact with metal, we can only guess its original appearance. One thing is certain, they were not made in the area where they were found.

Another set of fragments in the combination of samite and underside couching is from Biskoppskulla, in the same area, 24 roundels dated to the second half of the twelfth century, from about the same time as the first archbishop of Uppsala. They were probably made in northern France.

These early samite/underside couching embroideries have intrigued the presenter for some time. Her first conclusion is that the underside couching technique was developed in

symbiosis with samite weave. Her second conclusion is that, when the samite was replaced by other fabrics during the fourteenth century, underside couching vanished and was not rediscovered until the late nineteenth century. Her third hypothesis is that underside couching was only used in workshops by trained embroiderers. Combining her technical analyses of the embroideries with the broader story of plain and patterned samite, she proposed that the desire for luxury textiles imported via the silk roads and the development of Church textiles during the early years, both in Byzantium and the western part of the Church, can be seen in the samite/underside couching embroideries. She questioned whether the embroidery technique be traced back to Central Asia or was developed along the road to the Mediterranean area. The technique can be called archaic; it does not change except for the short period of time when it was embroidered on linen, the presenter believes mostly in England. She questioned if this archaic approach to the technique was established solely on samite, or whether it was Byzantium and the Orthodox workshops which set the standard.

CONCLUSION: Urbanization and Industrialization

Laurel Ann Wilson
Medieval Institute at Fordham University, USA

'"The Loom Used by Women": gender, looms and the cloth industry in early medieval Europe'



So-called Reiner Musterbuch, made between 1208 and 1213. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ÖNB Cod. 507 f. 2r

The advent of the horizontal loom in Europe, which dates to the early eleventh century, led to the development of a different kind of cloth industry, one so extensive that it became known as the *grande industrie*. This industry, and the fine woollen broadcloth which was its main product, were among the primary catalysts for the enormous social and economic changes which are often referred to as the Commercial Revolution. The development of a wealthy merchant class, of organized networks of long-distance trade, of different forms of credit and bookkeeping, possibly even of the Western fashion system, can be traced in large part to the development of the *grande industrie*. It also had an enormous and ongoing impact on class structure and gender relations.

The importance of this later industry, however, has often led historians to overlook the existence of the European cloth industry which flourished in earlier centuries. The early medieval cloth industry was on a smaller scale than the *grande industrie*, depending more on individual artisans, primarily women, using warp-weighted looms. When the horizontal loom began to take hold, the warp-weighted loom did not disappear. Instead, it continued to be used by, and identified with, women. The paper looked at both the early medieval cloth industry, and the cottage industry which later developed from it. It aimed to shed some light on an entire under-the-radar women's industry, which continued long after the development of the *grande industrie*.

BOOK REVIEW

Making Late Medieval Menswear by Meridith Towne. Crowood Press. 2004. 192p. ISBN: 9780719842993, Review by Challe Hudson



Having spent years dressing the men in my life in late medieval clothing, the moment I saw the title I nodded to myself and agreed, this book needed to be written. After reading it, my conclusion is that the book delivers far more than promised, and if it can be transmitted into the hands of reenactors, book illustrators, museum exhibit designers, theatre wardrobe departments and (dare I even be so optimistic) costume designers for film and television, the quality of their historical interpretations of English men's dress might all be improved.

Meredith Towne is well qualified to author a book of this scope. She combines her background in archaeology, history, and costume with her experience making clothing for the Royal Armouries, English Heritage, National Trust, Historic Scotland and others. She offers both a solid explanation of the factors influencing English dress between 1300-1485 and includes patterns with construction instructions for the key garments.

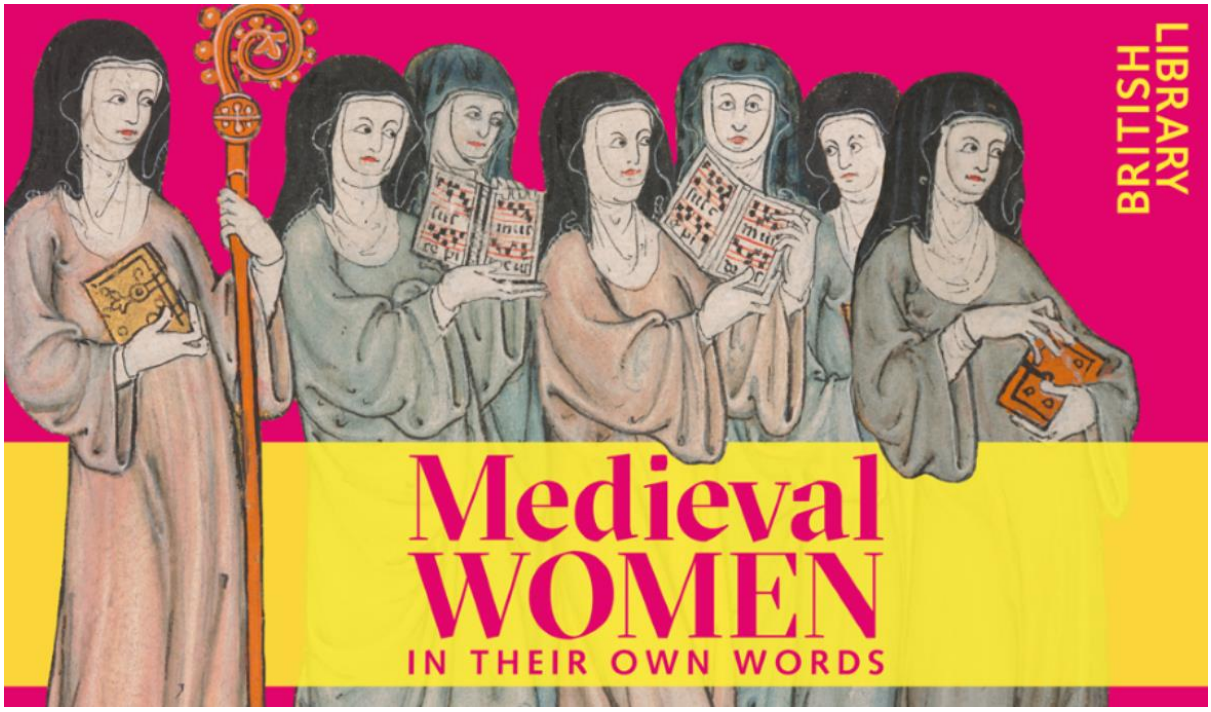
The opening chapters cover not only what tools and materials would have been available to medieval makers, but also how international trade, industry, guilds, and sumptuary laws influenced the clothing that people of varying social classes wore. She includes basic instructions on how to measure the body, scale patterns, cut and assemble garments, and make a range of hand-sewn stitches. In addition to explaining techniques for finishing

garments such as making buttons, braids, and embroidery stitches, she addresses methods with which garments might be theatrically aged or damaged. The middle chapters cover the essential items of menswear: underwear, hose, cote, doublet, cotehardie and gown. In each, she presents possible variations in the garment shapes and illustrates construction, fitting and wearing methods with a thoroughness that makes clear her familiarity with these clothes and techniques. The final chapters address quilted garments, clothing for religious orders, and headgear. Throughout the book she has placed useful advice, such as techniques for working with fur, velvet, and linen, or how to turn a small rolled tube of fabric, that would be useful for a beginner or intermediate sewist.

The entire book is richly illustrated with large, colourful photos of original sources such as illuminated manuscripts and church monuments as well as reconstructed garments, close-up details of the techniques described, and gridded line drawings of patterns. The writing is clear and readable, and the information had admirable breadth without becoming excessively mired in deep discussion of any one issue or time period. Although the book lacks the citations and footnotes one might expect of an academic treatise, the glossary, further reading, and list of suppliers will help many on their path to making better, more historically appropriate late medieval menswear.

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Medieval Women: In Their Own Words. The British Library, London, 25 October 2024 – 2 March 2025. Review by Pat Poppy



The exhibition at the British Library is excellent. From the point of view of dress and textiles there are not only numerous seminal illustrations, there are also a few textiles, and the

informative captions also pick out dress and textile references. The lighting of the illustrations shows the way in which gold and lapis lazuli catch the light, something photographs do not show. There are many woodcut illustrations, for example the first image of a woman ice skating, in the 1498 edition of Brugman's *Life of Lidwina*. The copy of Anne of France (1461-1522)'s *Lessons for my Daughter* is open at the page where she suggests her daughter dress modestly and warmly. The Edward IV Wardrobe accounts are open at a page where seven of the nine payments are to Alice Claver (d. 1489) his silkwoman. There are some of the Paston letters and Margaret Paston's 1482 will wherein she leaves several gowns including, to her servant Agnes Swan, her 'musterdevelys gown furred with blak'. The silk lampas woven in southern Spain, which was used for the cover of issue 78 of this newsletter, has been borrowed from the Whitworth, and an early 14th-century embroidered altar band has been borrowed from the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Seligenthal Gradual has been left open at a page where its 'silk curtain', to protect the illuminated initial, has been rolled up. This just scrapes the surface of the exhibition, allow at least two hours to go round it.

A book is available to accompany the exhibition. *Medieval Women: Voices & Visions: The Book of the British Library Exhibition*, edited by Eleanor Jackson and Julian Harrison. British Library Publishing. ISBN 978-0712355902. 256 pages

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