



The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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Capering Compromises, Medieval Man!

The Arbeau Dancers (performing here at the Skipton Medieval Festival) feel it is necessary to perform in clothing of the style of the period of their dances, but they “are a dance group, not a re-enactment group” so it does not have to be that close, just a general impression.

To what degree is that a justifiable philosophy?

Could this be one of the questions debated in the MeDaTS Autumn Meeting?

Don't miss the next exciting episode at the British Museum on October 22nd!

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Editorial

2011 seems to have become the year in which Dress History really gets into its stride. Multiple conferences and seminars, often with more practical elements, and more and more new scholars submitting theses for advanced degrees. The bonus of the latter is that it is becoming more and more the norm for such theses to be made available on line as they are approved, rather than them having to go through the often lengthy and sometimes unsuccessful process of being turned into a paper publication. See below in the New Publications section.

An Appeal

Surely I am not the only person attending the odd conference or seminar. Please, if you have been to something relevant, do share an account of it with your colleagues.

Similarly, if you have encountered a good, or not so good, book, website or other thing of interest, pass it on.

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 Dawson

NEWS

University of Glasgow, MLitt Art History: Dress and Textile Histories

For more information: www.glasgow.ac.uk/pg/dresstextilehistories

University of Glasgow, MPhil Textile Conservation

For more information: www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/textileconservation

CONFERENCES PAST

International Medieval Congress

Leeds University,
11th – 14th July 2011

This was the first time on three years that I had had the luxury of attending the entirety of the IMC. Perhaps that fact had some influence in forming my conclusion that this was the most interesting, enjoyable and productive Congress that I had attended. Certainly, one can never get the greatest benefit out of this event without being present for a substantial portion of it. It is not simply the chance to attend plenty of papers, for the formal proceedings are not the heart of the matter. It is rather the people one is able to meet. Sometimes in context of a session or paper, but just as often serendipitous encounters in a wine reception, at the coffee machine, or even in the queue at the bar! For me this year was well supplied with both. In the two years I had not attended, my disappointment had been ameliorated by the observation that those programs did not seem to be that well supplied with papers that looked interesting. (It is a bit of a liability that the IMC does not publish abstracts in advance, so all there is to make a judgement on is the title.) This year, the more familiar situation prevailed of there being so many potentially interesting papers on, often against one another, that it was hard to make a choice. Unfortunately, countering that, there was the observation that another delegate confirmed that there seemed to be a larger than usual number of cancellations, which winnowed some of my choices. I was speaking myself in the cookery stream, which filled all of Tuesday, and felt obliged to attend some of that besides my own session, if only to ensure that any of my points were not going to be negated by prior speakers, so that kept me away from some of the dress papers I would otherwise have heard. With such an extensive and intensive stream of data, it is hard to retain many highlights. My few are mostly the shiny curiosities – a gold ring with a secret compartment in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the unique use of a lobster as a heraldic emblem on the fittings of a belt belonging to a fourteenth-century German Jewish merchant. There was some very interesting consideration of how differently medieval Europeans used furs, when they were less for conspicuous consumption than for actual warmth. For sheer breadth, the prize must go to Sarah Randles of Melbourne University who traced the practice of apotropaic clothing deposits from antiquity to the twentieth century. Amongst the clothing offerings, the one I most looked forward to was from our own Hilary Davidson 'Bliaut, Bliial, Brial: the Broader Chronology and Geography of a Twelfth-Century Prestige Garment', but it was, alas, forestalled by illness. A session on armouring, armour and its representation sponsored by the Royal Armouries was one not mentioned in the preview of last newsletter, but within MeDaTS' traditional scope. It provoked much animated discussion, yet its most memorable feature for me was once again confronting the gulf between academics and practical medievalists in Kelly DeVries' paper 'What armour was worn by the Second Crusaders: Evidence from the Baptismal Font of the Church of San Frediano, Lucca'. From someone who has been involved in re-enactment for a while the response is "And this tells us what that did not know before?", but then, Kelly's extensive work on the medieval military has been much more focussed on campaigns and so on, than on its material culture. Yet it is an area in which modern practical experience, for all its caveats, can make a significant contribution.

I can heartily recommend an intellectual holiday in Leeds in July!

Timothy Dawson

Conferences Forthcoming

Why Leather?

Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK
Thursday 8th September 2011, 10am -5pm

This conference brings together researchers to explore the science, craft and beliefs behind the use of leather, fur, parchment and rawhide.

Topics include the physical properties of skins according to species and tanning process, medieval armour, South American codices, furs in Bronze Age Europe, scented gloves in Renaissance Italy, nineteenth century industrial machinery, wineskins, bespoke contemporary interiors and more.

£10 students, £20 members, £25 non-members. Tea and cakes provided.

For details of the programme: www.archleathgrp.org.uk

To register contact Jackie Keily on 0207 814 5734 or jkeily@museumoflondon.org.uk

Dyes in History and Archaeology DHA30

University of Derby Enterprise Centre, 37 Bridge Street, Derby DE1 3LA
12th - 15th October 2011

A joint meeting with the Royal Society of Chemistry Historical Group.

Wednesday 12th: reception 18:30 - 21:00 at the conference centre.

Thursday 13th: presentations & posters 09:30 – 17:30, Conference Banquet.

Friday 14th: presentations & posters 09:30 – 17:30.

Saturday 15th: excursion - coach departs 09:30 from the conference centre.

<http://www.chriscooksey.demon.co.uk/dha/dha30.html>

Presentations at past meetings:

<http://www.chriscooksey.demon.co.uk/dha/mtitles.html>

New Research Day: Association of Dress Historians

The Art Workers' Guild, London
Saturday 5th November 2011

Formerly CHODA, The Association of Dress Historians has been established to provide a meeting place for those involved in the professional practice of dress and textile history. This includes, but is not limited to, students, museum curators, designers, journalists, and academics in a number of fields, as well as independent researchers. Our main focus is the organisation of symposia and conferences, so we have decided to launch the Association with a New Research Forum, to take place on 5th November 2011 at the Art Worker's Guild.

The aim of this event, which we hope will become an annual fixture in the calendar, is to create a space for those actively engaged in research into dress and textile history to present new work, and to promote awareness of the diversity and vitality of the field.

Presently, ADH does not have a website. **Further information** may be had from Helen Margaret Walter, History of Design Department, V&A/RCA, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL. helen.walter@network.rca.ac.uk

Developments in Dress History

Grand Parade Campus, University of Brighton, UK

8th – 10th December 2011

Over the last twenty years, dress history has moved from the margins of academic debate to the centre of interdisciplinary analysis in the arts and humanities. Dress and its meanings are matters of significance for social and cultural historians; the circuits of clothing across the globe are used to explain patterns of globalisation; its exchange between people is essential to understandings of consumer culture; everything we wear is understood as a crucial component identities and rituals. Once denigrated by design reformers, fashionable dress is integrated into histories of design and western clothing is considered alongside traditional textiles within studies of material culture.

Developments in Dress History reflects upon the current place of the discipline of dress history in academic field of arts and humanities. The conference will explore the meanings of dress in the widest range of cultural and historical contexts, exploring the following or other themes:

- Dress History and Design History;
- Ethnography and dress;
- The material culture of dress;
- Dress and museums;
- Collecting dress;
- Consumption and dress;
- Dress and Identity;
- Dress as an object of study;
- Teaching Dress History.

Further information: <http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/research/centre/design-history-and-material-culture-research-group/events/>

Textiles and Economy: Production of and Trade in Textiles.

SAXO Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

19th – 22th April 2012

Production and trade of textiles form the core of the economic history of Flanders and England in the Middle Ages. As the key medieval industry, textile production not only emerged in, but is well known as the monopoly of Northern Western Europe. But during the last years single case studies offered a quite different view on this phenomenon. Given a multitude of evidence, production and trade of textiles were not at all concentrated on Flemish and English cloth.

Material from archives as from excavations show, that cloth was produced and traded all over Europe - from all places to all places. A region especially underestimated in its function within the European economic system is central and northern Europe's main trade route along the Northern and Baltic Sea. This area and its supplying Hinterland is often characterized as the "Northern Mediterranean", although this concept does not do justice to its unique economic patterns which are quite different to its southern counterpart.

For more information: <http://ctr.hum.ku.dk/conferences/2012/textiles/>

International Congress on Medieval Studies

Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA

10th – 13th May 2012

Some of the sessions of interest:

DISTAFF (Discussion, Interpretation, and Study of Textile Arts, Fabrics, and Fashion)

(4): Dress and Textiles I–IV:

- I. Sheep to Shawl, Field to Fabric;
- II. What Not to Wear;
- III. Studies in Memory of Verna Rutz;
- IV. Dress and Textile Vocabulary Revealed [co-sponsored with Medieval Dress and Textile Vocabulary in Unpublished Sources Project]

Episcopos: Society for the Study of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Middle Ages:

- I. Men of the Cloth: Vestments and the Performance of Episcopal Power [co-sponsored with DISTAFF]

Special Sessions, Costume in Medieval Texts: Sessions in Honor of Laura Hodges I–II (2 sessions)

Others may also be relevant. Paper proposals are still being taken.

Further information: <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/sessions.html>

International Medieval Congress

Leeds University, UK

9th – 12th July 2012

The theme for 2012 is “Rules”, and since there is still plenty of work to be done on sumptuary laws, and even more on less formal ways in which dress and accessories determine a person’s place in society, there ought to be scope for some fine offerings. The deadline for individual papers (August 31st) will have passed by the time this newsletter gets to you, but there would still be time to submit a session proposal, the closing date for which is September 30th.

Further information: www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc/

New and Forthcoming Publications

Sjoukje Colenbrander, ‘When weaving flourishes: Silk weaving in Amsterdam 1585-1750’

Thesis download (8MB) from the University of Amsterdam

<http://dare.uva.nl/document/168554>

Extracts from the English summary:

Dutch silk weaving originated in the Southern Netherlands, in Antwerp, where a fully developed silk industry existed at the time when its silk weavers left for Amsterdam and Haarlem in the Dutch Republic. The Antwerp silk industry comprised silk throwing, silk dyeing and silk weaving and all three trades were controlled by a guild. There was a regular supply of raw silk and the fabrics were sold on the local and international markets. By the time the silk workers left Antwerp as a result of the political and religious upheavals around 1585, fabrics such as silk grograin, bourat, armosin, satin, damask and velvet, as well as kaffa and silk ‘smallen’ had already been woven there for many years.

The fact that representatives of all three trades settled in Amsterdam and Haarlem during the late sixteenth century contributed to the success of the establishment of the silk industry in both cities, as well as financial and commercial factors, craftsmanship and the quality of the designs. As a result Huguenots arriving in the Dutch Republic around 1680 found a well-established industry which they could enrich with new fabrics and techniques, but where there was no room for them to take up leading positions within the industrial organization.

Piotr Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261)*

Brill, Leiden 2010

Hb, 483pp, 75 b/w and 33 colour plates

ISBN 9789004185487

€191 / £170

Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints is the latest contribution to a sea-change sweeping Byzantine Studies. That tide is washing away the old paradigm of Byzantine Art History which was expressed by Cyril Mango thus: “Nearly all Byzantine painting that has come down to us is religious in content and is based on the faithful reproduction of iconographic formulas that can be traced back to the early Christian period. It is worthy of note that in depicting such stereotyped compositions Byzantine artists carefully avoided any intrusion of contemporary costumes or settings: Christ, the Apostles, the prophets appear in antique garb...” (‘Discontinuity in Byzantium’, in C. Mango, *Byzantium and Its Image*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1984, p.51) In one sense, Mango’s comment has some truth. Those very few classes of people are indeed usually depicted *just so*. Yet there are many other people and situations depicted in Byzantine religious art, and Byzantium produced far more secular art than Art Historians of the Old School were willing to acknowledge. The new wave is breaking down this idea by increasingly correlating the details of Byzantine religious art with evidence for material culture from other angles.

The title of this book does not fully represent its contents, although it does illustrate the primary interests of the author, and the current balance of the scholarship. The study of military equipment in the enduring Roman Empire is somewhat established, with one major monograph and an array of articles, including some from the present commentator. The study of clothing in that culture is nowhere near as advanced. Yet the saints are, of course, depicted clothed, and while all are armed, some are depicted without armour. Hence, the author had, perforce, to consider how the dress, as well as the military equipment of the saints might relate to reality.

The research that went into *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints* is certainly admirably compendious. (I am inclined to envy the author in harking from the necessarily polyglot region of central Europe.) In that fact perhaps lies its greatest recommendation. Unfortunately, however, the presentation of the book embodies a style of scholarship which is no longer very fashionable in the Western world, and somewhat justly so. A major part of the reason why it is such a large volume is that its footnoting is utterly bloated. Footnotes are a vital component of good scholarship, allowing a reader to verify or further explore an assertion or reference that seems questionable or interesting. Unfortunately the author has often adopted the practice of not merely referring to a source, but including substantial quotations from it. This is useful if one has an idle desire to have a quick look at the source in brief, yet will rarely forestall the need to look it up if more incisive investigation is needed. Furthermore, the footnotes also sometimes incorporate substantial segments of

discussion. Surely if such discussion is truly relevant it ought to be in the main text? If it is not relevant, does it need to be in the volume at all? The result of these two practices is that the footnotes can often be as great or greater than the text. The most extreme case is found on facing pages 58–59 on each of which a single line of main text is accompanied by a page of footnote text. It would not have been so bad if they had been endnotes, then at least one could read on in the main line of argument with ease. As it is, in addition to inflating the size (and therefore presumably the cost) of the book, they also make it harder to read.

In terms of the substance of the topic, the major problem is that in one area, at least, the author had insufficient foundations upon which to build a stable edifice. The Art History components (chapter 1 on sources, and chapter 2 on the origins of the imagery) are quite brief, but that is probably quite appropriate in view of the deficiencies of past work indicated above.

The topic of Byzantine arms and armour has seen a reasonable quantity of past work. Grotowski surveys this well, and the main observation that may be made of his treatment of this topic is that he could have been much more definite about his own conclusions. In part there is again the old-fashioned style of scholarly prevarication. “λωρίκιον ἀλυσιδωτόν –literally chain armour (probably a mail-shirt)” (128) Probably? If there really was another viable interpretation, surely it ought to have been explored in detail.

The weakness of the volume lies in its treatment of clothing. Piotr Grotowski, is not, it need hardly be said, a dress historian. Hence, he cannot be expected to have a grounding in the methodologies for analysing clothing. (It must be admitted that this is a field in which such things are in a state of flux, as well) He is, alas, also working in a near vacuum, as he implicitly recognises in the Introduction. Under ‘State of Research’ it contains sections on iconography and military equipment, but nothing at all on clothing. Yet the twentieth century did see some forays into the field – notably Nikolai Kondakov’s attempt in 1924 to identify the *skaramangion*, a garment that features frequently in the *Book of Ceremonies*, a tenth century manual largely devoted to court regalia, a scattering of articles by other authors, and several more extensive publications by Elizabeth Piltz. Most of those authors were unfortunately no better equipped to elucidate the subject, nor were useful methodological tools clearly defined. Much of the twentieth-century literature embodied the premise that in the absence of incisive parameters for analysing garments and accessories and their terminology, items could be plucked from art and literature and equated in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner. One example of such a problematical lack of analytical discrimination is the way the Grotowski conflates trousers and leggings. Both legwear, certainly, but so different in form, usage and, in Byzantium, cultural baggage. Going beyond perpetuating the confusions propagated about the *skaramangion* and other garments by previous writers, Grotowski strikes off in his own direction, focussing on another important garment mentioned in the *Book of Ceremonies*, the *spekion*. This tunic was the regalia of just one rank, that of *Prôtospatharios*, although some higher ranks might occasionally “dress down” in it. To give the author his due, he does draw upon that book to present what he takes to be the defining characteristic of the *spekion*, that it had golden *klavoi*, keyhole-shaped decorative panels projecting up from the hem. (302) The problem with this keyhole view is that it is insufficient. Had it been so, it would imply that almost every man of status shown in Byzantine art from the sixth to the eleventh century was a *Prôtospatharios*, including a goodly number of Emperors! Yet, even the terms of the passage he draws upon show that more is required, for it says that the *spekion* was “true purple”, the only tincture it has besides gold. This, inescapably, negates

Grotowski's attempt to see *white spekia* in various sources across the period. His discussion of the *kavadion* (coat) and *epilôrikion* (surcoat), both important military garments, unfortunately show the same lack of technical rigour.

A widespread problem undermines this book. Once again, it is one that has bedeviled historical dress studies, and, indeed, arms and armour studies, since the inception of those fields. It is that the author is evidently working, not only without practical experience of these quintessentially practical topics, but even without a practical mindset. This abstraction has allowed many authors to make suggestions which in some cases simply could not be realised in physical form, or, even if they are physically possible, would not serve any sensible function in that form. I concede that the lack of sensible function is not necessarily a liability when it comes to dress fashion, but the imperatives of military effectiveness and mortality are overwhelmingly cogent in the case of arms and armour. In view of this, any author must be able to envisage, and convincingly argue for, the functionality of his theories. I could not see that in this volume.

In a field with little published material to date, anyone researching within it must consult this volume as an indispensable resource, and will be likely to find it helpful in clarifying their own thought processes.

Timothy Dawson

Lilli Fransen, Anna Nørgård and Else Østergård, *Medieval Garments Reconstructed: Norse Clothing Patterns*

Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2011

Hb, 143pp, black and white and col. ills.; no index

ISBN: 978 87 7934 2989

This is not a true review, but a passing observation. I had the chance to look over this book on one of the stalls at the International Medieval Congress book fair. I did so with the predisposition *towards* buying it, despite the fact it was not particularly near the centre of my interests, nor something of which I was likely to make much use. In the event, the act of looking it over persuaded me not to part with money I could spend less whimsically. Not that I decided it was a bad book, by any means. I am sure I will sell very well to less confident tailors and those who want a short cut, just as it should. It was just that I happen to own a copy of Østergård's previous book analysing the Greenland finds, *Woven into the Earth: textiles from Norse Greenland*, and found that this volume appeared to add very little to that admirably detailed and well illustrated work, and what I could infer from a close study of its fine pictures. Of course, this reaction may well say more about my self-confidence as someone who has spent decades replicating medievaesque and medieval clothing. I would say that if you have a similar confidence, then get the archaeological book. If you do want a short cut, this is accessible, and affordable at £25.

Timothy

Available for review: *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 7*.

Contents: 'A *rotulus pannorum* of Isabella, sister of King Henry III'; 'A Case Study of frilled veils in the Low Countries (1200–1500)'; 'What is the Pearl-Maiden wearing, and Why?'; 'The "Open Surcoat" in Late Medieval British Texts'; 'London Merchants' Cloth Exports, 1350–1500'; 'Design and Production of Lucchese Silks in the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries'.

Contact the editor if you are interested in reviewing this volume.

MEDATS Future MEETINGS

2012

Spring Meeting: *Buttons, Buckles and Brooches: In Memory of Geoff Egan.*

Date: March 10th (TBC)

Venue: Weston Theatre, Museum of London

Autumn Meeting (with AGM): *Bast Fibres- Flax, Hemp, Nettle, broom.*

Date: October

Venue: TBC

Future topics

Underwear: linens against the skin / Coronations and Investitures / Dyes.

MEDATS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Information about MEDATS and application forms may be had from the Membership Secretary, Carole Thompson, or from the society website: www.medats.org.uk.
Correspondence address for the Membership Secretary: 9 Fairthorn Road, Charlton, London SE7 7RL

Annual subscriptions (payable in pounds sterling only) run from 1st January – 31st December.

Rates:

£15 Individuals in Britain and Europe;

£20 Households in Britain and Europe (2 members);

£10 Students in Britain and Europe (with proof of status);

£30 Individuals outside Europe and Institutions irrespective of location.

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MeDaTS Autumn Meeting, Saturday 22nd October 2011

Stevenson Theatre, British Museum

A.G.M. and meeting: 'Reconstruction, Living History, Re-enactment'

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|---------------|--|
| 09.00 | Doors open |
| 10.00 – 11.00 | Annual General Meeting (Members of MeDaTS only) |
| 11.00 – 11.30 | Morning tea (not provided). Great Court cafés. |
| 11.30 – 12.00 | 1: Christopher Gidlow (Head of Live interpretation Historic Royal Palaces), 'The HRP's philosophy and methodology in reconstruction' |
| 12.00 – 12.30 | 2: Sarah Thursfield and Ruth Gilbert (M.phil), 'Clothing for King Offa: the challenges and compromises of a commercial reconstruction' |
| 12.30 – 12.45 | Discussion. |
| 12.45 – 13.30 | Lunch (not provided). |
| 13.30 – 14.30 | 3: Combined presentation by interpretation staff of Weald and Downland Open Air Museum on their reconstruction projects. |
| 14.30 – 14.45 | Discussion. |
| 14.45 – 15.15 | Afternoon Tea (not provided). Great Court cafés. |
| 15.15 – 15.45 | 4: Dr. Katrin Kania (Freelance Historical Costumer), Title tbc. |
| 15.45 – 16.15 | 5: Christina Petty (PhD candidate, University of Manchester), 'Historical Recreation: An (Almost) Untapped Contributor to Scholarship'. |
| 16.15 – 17.00 | Discussion. |
| 17.00 | End of meeting. |

Booking Form: MEDATS Autumn Meeting

This Section Redacted