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# The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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A portion of the exhibition  
'Sword and Zlatnik: the 1150th anniversary of the Old Russian state'.  
Now on at the State Historical Museum, Moscow.

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## Editorial

Yet another great year for MeDaTS has drawn to an end, and another commences which promises much. The Society continues to progress. A couple of years ago the committee was somewhat concerned about its position. Finances were depleted, as, indeed, was committee itself. Both factors figured in the decision to reduce the number of meetings from three to two per year. Since then, a series of meetings which have been as financially beneficial as intellectually stimulating have returned the Society to a state of security. The condition of the committee has similarly improved, and those factors have allowed us to return this year to the previous practice of holding three meetings in a year. See page 10 for details

The gratifying gains in the committee's membership have not been unalloyed. Just after the middle of the year, at about the same time I resolved to move on, Hilary Davidson decided to return home to Australia, and realised her aim with more despatch than me. We are very sorry to have lost her, both for her company and for the fine work she did for the Society. Our best wishes went with her, and news since has indicated that she is doing well. Fortunately for us, her position as Publicity Secretary was not vacant for long, and Alice Gordon has proven to be a worthy successor. The remedies for the other lacunae in the committee have been very recent, and are still in the process of bedding down. But we do now have a Chairman, a Secretary, and a replacement for Jenny Tiramani as Treasurer. Once again, we owe Jenny a great debt of gratitude for many years service in the job, maintained despite increasing demands on her time from her own work. A warm welcome to Mary Frost as the new shepherd of our finances!

Succession to my position as Newsletter Editor remains open. It has been my intention that this should be my last edition, so if you know your way around a computer, and have a little time, please think about it. Not much is required, and there are perks – the pick of the review books, if nothing else!

To receive the newsletter as a colour PDF file electronically, e-mail me via [medatseditor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto: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](http://www.medats.org.uk)

**TIMOTHY DAWSON**

## EXHIBITION

### **Sword and Zlatnik: the 1150th anniversary of the Old Russian state**

State Historical Museum, Moscow

Until 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013

The sword and the *zlatnik* can be called symbols of the epoch of formation of the first East Slavic state. The sword, a sign of the military merit in the early middle Ages, was the main weapon of warriors who accompanied the princes during the military campaigns and taking tribute from conquered tribes. The *zlatnik* (the first gold coin minted in early Russian) was the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Russia that at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century had become a powerful Christian state.

The exhibition shows the process of the formation and flourishing of the Early Russian state in the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Early Russian state was born as a result of collisions and interactions between the "barbaric" pagan world of the northeastern

Europe and brilliance of the Byzantine Empire.

The exhibition presents rare and interesting exhibits: the treasures of silver jewellery and coins, weapons of ancient warriors, objects of pagan worship, copies of frescoes and mosaics of St. Sophia and St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery.

One of the most important exhibits is a unique Chinese silk dress that belonged to a noble lady of the tenth century. This dress is exhibited for the first time after the restoration. The garment was found in Gnezdovo near Smolensk.

**Editorial note:** the preceding text was from the SHM website. The visitor who took the photograph says that the description of the garment is misleading, as this is a hypothetical reconstruction utilising a few fragments. This type of coat is well attested from the Caucasus, but its relevance to Belarus, the western-most part of the Russian Federation, might well be open to debate.

## **CONFERENCES PAST**

### **MeDaTS Autumn Meeting: Annual General Meeting and *Well Worn Weeds: Plant fibres worn next to the skin***

Museum of London, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2012

#### **Annual General Meeting 2012**

The Meeting was opened by Dan Towse, Programme secretary.

#### **Election of the Chairman.**

James Robinson, Keeper Art & Design National Museum of Scotland. Accepted Unanimously.

Welcome from the Chairman.

The minutes of the previous AGM were read in by Dan Towse & Accepted by the meeting.

No Matters Arising

#### **Treasury Report, Jenny Tiramani.**

The Society is in good financial health, and Jenny again recommended that if we can, we should work towards charitable status in the not too distant future. Report Accepted

#### **Programme Secretary report, Dan Towse.**

Last year was a good year on the programme front, with the conferences being held in the BM and MoL at far less than commercial rates, this is hoped to continue. the programme themes are in place until 2014. (See page 10.)

Report accepted.

#### **Membership Secretary report, Carole Thompson**

134 renewing UK Members, 5 overseas, 3 institutions, 15 new members. 33 members were present at the AGM.

Report accepted

#### **Newsletter Report, Timothy Dawson.**

Timothy hopes that the newsletter continues to be of interest to the membership. He

thanks Stella Jundul for her continuing correspondence

Timothy is seeking a replacement, as he is only remaining in the post until January 2013.

Report accepted.

### **Election of Officers.**

Of the present committee members willing to continue:

Jane Bridgeman, Non Executive, Accepted Unanimously;

Philip Harris, Non Executive, Accepted Unanimously;

Marc Meltonville, Non Executive, Accepted Unanimously;

Carole Thompson, Membership Secretary, Accepted Unanimously;

Jenny Tiramani, Treasurer Pending Replacement, (Jenny indicated her willingness to continue in the role, but asked that someone step forward to replace her, as she does not have the time to give the post its due) Accepted Unanimously.

### **New Nominations**

Alice Gordon, Publicity Secretary. (Proposed Towse Sec. Westfallen) Accepted Unanimously

Bushy Westfallen, Secretary. (Prop Thompson Sec. H. Davidson) Accepted Unanimously

Timothy Dawson Newsletter editor, extension of term until Spring 2013, Accepted Unanimously

### **10) Any Other Business.**

Joy Godsell proposed that the meeting send its best wishes to Karen Watts, Passed Unanimously

The possibility of meetings outside of London was raised. Leeds, Edinburgh were suggested as possibilities.

Caroline Yeldham suggested we work with Distaff on a tie-in with the International Medieval Congress in Leeds.

Joy Godsell suggested streaming or web enabling the conference. Dan Towse agreed to look into that possibility, but warned of two potential problems – the technical costs, and the difficulty over image rights & content confidentiality.

Elizabeth Brown Asked what proportion of the membership received their newsletter electronically. – around 10%. Following that, a motion was proposed (Dan Towse, sec. E. Brown) that the default delivery method for new members should be electronic, with the option of paper. Passed: 27 in favour; 3 abstentions, 1 against.

The Next Annual General Meeting is to be held at the Autumn Meeting 2013.

The AGM Adjourned for Coffee,

**On Resumption**, Mary Frost Was Proposed as Treasurer by Dan Towse, Seconded Jane Bridgeman, Accepted Unanimously

Jenny Tiramani was confirmed as a non executive committee member

Annual General Meeting adjourned.

The public portion of the meeting was very well attended, benefitting from the wide advance publicity regarding the fifteenth-century “brasiers” from Lengberg Castle.

Beatrix Nutz’ paper on the Lengberg finds was certainly fascinating and very well presented, but she did point out that the excitement over the brasiers was not entirely justified – there had been references to “breast bags”, as the period term has it, known in the literature back into the fourteenth century. Neglected in the prior brouhaha, but every bit as important was the find of a man’s underpants. They are certainly going to make my excursions into the fifteenth century more functional, as well as more historically accurate! Beatrix had lamented that none of her male colleagues would model her reproduction. I was pleased to be able to remedy that lack of a model. And you can see that for yourself in the centrefold!



The underpants found in Lengberg Castle.



The other papers were of scarcely less interest, with much discussion ensuing, particularly around the presentations of Jane Bridgeman and Jenny Tiramani. Between sessions, Alice Gordon’s fine linen products got a good pawing!

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***The Inventory of King Henry VIII, ii textiles and dress***

Maria Hayward and Philip Ward, eds.

Harvey Miller and the Society of Antiquaries of London

£140.00 hardback, 367 pages

ISBN 978-1-905375-42-4

In the months following the death of Henry viii in 28<sup>th</sup> January 1547 an inventory was drawn up of his personal property, the most complete list of an English king’s possessions ever made. In 1981, on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year after his birth, the Henry viii Inventory Project was launched under the direction of the historian David Starkey.

This volume, (the first of 3) appeared in May 2012, and though the waiting was long, through all manner of causes, including the sad death of several of the participant authors, the result has been well worth it.

For this is an excellent, indeed a fabulous book, both beautiful - copiously illustrated, in full colour where appropriate, and useful - the analyses are always distinguished and sometimes highly original, by experts at the top of their game - a remarkably rare combination of beauty and brains.

The contents of the volume are :

Foreword by the series editor, David Starkey.

Introduction: ‘Textiles and dress at the court of Henry viii’;

Chapter 1, The Art and Splendour of Henry viii’s Tapestry Collection;

Chapter 2, Dressed to rule: Henry viii’s Wardrobe and his Equipment for Horse, Hawk and Hound;

Chapter 3, Temporary Magnificence: the Offices of the tents and revels in the 1547 inventory;  
Chapter 4, From the Exotic to the Mundane: carpets and coverings for tables, cupboards, window seats and floors;  
Chapter 5, The Art of the Broderers;  
Chapter 6, Napery for tables and linens for beds;  
Chapter 7, Henry VIII's valuable store of textiles;  
Chapter 8, The Splendour of Royal Worship;  
Chapter 9, From Sable to Mink.

Textiles played a central role at the court of Henry enveloping every aspect of life. The peripatetic nature of the monarchy required an immense number of premises and even mobile conveyances to furnish and decorate, and even streets to be lined with banners and tapestries when foreign royalty like the holy Roman emperor visited England, and temporary tents like those at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In dress Henry was not only extravagant but fashionable. He loved clothes.

Although the *Inventory* contains a great deal of information, it has limitations, and the authors have extended their articles to include a great deal of supplementary information not contained in or arising directly from the original documents. They shed a new flood of light on the historical reality of this period by imparting solid information about the material culture of that time.

The articles vary in their stress. For example, the article on napery, as well as dealing with the iconography of the subject, goes into tremendous detail on weaving techniques, of especial interest to the weaver to the specialist linen spinner and weaver.

There is lovely information throughout the volume. For instance the fineness of white linen was defined in 12 steps from 1,100 to 40,000 threads per ell. Serviettes were 1.4 metres long 79 centimetres wide and worn over the shoulders of servants with the imperial arms the right way up (so never again call a table napkin a serviette!!) It is interesting to note that although fur was far less fashionable than it had been in the past for linings and trimmings, Henry was lavish in his use of it employing the most expensive sables from Russia and thereabouts on a lavish scale, keeping a permanent store of raw skins, and having first refusal on luxury skins coming into the country. Often the considerably less expensive mink skins were used, as well as native rabbit, squirrel and so on.

The notes and bibliography are exemplary.

The inevitably high price of such a beautiful book limits its ownership mostly to libraries, but for this there is no remedy. A demerit of the volume is that there is no glossary. This would have required a degree of co-operation between the authors, and getting them together would be difficult perhaps, but its absence is a blemish.

Yet my criticisms are very few relative to the overall excellence of the book.

**Philip Harris**

## ***The Troyes Memoire: The Making of a Medieval Tapestry***

Tina Kane

Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge 2010

£50.00 Hardback

196 pages, 8 colour and 8 b/w illustrations.

ISBN 978-1-84383-570-7

The Troyes Memoir is the only known surviving full set of directives for tapestry or any other comparable work of art from the fifteenth century. The Memoire sets out detailed instructions for the artists who would paint the cartoons from which a series of six tapestry panels were to be woven. In 1851 Phillipe Guignard published an annotated transcription, but this is the first time the Memoire has appeared in English.

Tina Kane also makes great use of an account book from a church in Troyes listing payments to a group of artisans working together to produce a tapestry for the church.

The tapestries were never made but the eight colour plates give examples of tapestries that illustrate forms and conventions that are described in the Memoire. There are also eight black and white illustrations.

Tina Kane's book consists of a 60 page introduction in which she discusses the authorship of the Memoire, narrative strategy, Phillipe Guignard, the copy notebooks, the Latin texts, St. Cecilia and her sacred company, the account book of the church of saint Madeleine, making a choir tapestry in Troyes, painter, illuminator, seamstress, cartoons, weaving a tapestry, materials, costs, and a brief history of Troyes and its churches.

Her translation has taken into account Guignard's transcription of the original codex, together with his additions from the five notebooks that copied portions of the first codex. Each scene in the Memoir derives from an authoritative latin source, and the author of the Memoire had identified these texts. The seven pages of Translator's notes clarify exactly what has been translated and stylistic considerations. It concludes with a concise guide to the panels and their subjects. The Memoir follows with French on the left and the translation on the right.

The book is well annotated with footnotes, and concludes with a Glossary, comprehensive bibliography and index.

This book is very approachable and satisfies on many levels. Perhaps not a must for the costume historian, art and textile historians will find it of great interest. What came to the fore most for me was the dramatic history involved, and I am sure theatre historians will find it a valuable research tool. Giving, as it does, a direct connection to the people of the fourteenth century, I am sure that social historians, and medievalists will also find a great deal of interest in this volume.

**Nila Monckton**

## ***Medieval Clothing and Textiles, volume 8***

Robin Netherton & Gale Owen-Crocker (eds.)

Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge 2012

£30.00 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-84383-736-7

Volume eight of the *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* series is primarily a discussion of gold. The thread running through all essays is the emphasis on fine fabrics and/or threads, and how they are used, primarily by royalty and the nobility. Overall, the

book is very well laid out; each chapter is divided into smaller sections, which are clearly labelled and neatly develop the discussions. There were various thematic links between chapters, as in the first and last chapter looking at the material culture of graves and tombs. It is perhaps a small point, but I liked the inclusion of calls for papers and for book proposals at the front. I am so used to seeing them at the end of a book, but this way, a potential author is immediately aware of the possibility that they too could appear in a follow-up volume to that which they are reading.

Brigitte Haas-Gebhard and Britt Nowak-Böck opening chapter on 'The Unterhaching Grave Finds: richly-dressed burials from sixth-century Bavaria' is part of a greater discussion of the Unterhaching Cemetery, which includes an exhibition and other publications. I had some concerns about the use of the technical language of archaeology, but all such terms, for example in the discussion of dating methodologies on pp.1 and 2, were explained in the vernacular. The paper is a very interesting introduction to the graveyard, and its burial traditions, situating it and the grave goods found therein within a larger tradition in that area, before moving on to focus on the more exceptional items discovered at the site. The gold examined here is presented both as jewellery and as textiles, the latter being very rare in their own time and even more so in ours as organic threads decay.

Chapter two is an excellent example of academic research and publishing as an act of advocacy of one's collections, in this case 'Old Finds Rediscovered: two early medieval headdresses from the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, the Netherlands'. Chrystal Brandenburgh makes a case against restoration of such artefacts in her introduction by pointing out that a proper examination of the headdresses was only possible because they have not been restored. She ends this introduction with the questions that that lack of restoration will allow her to answer. As I am no expert in Dutch history, I enjoyed the summary of the headdresses' original location and people, and found the brief look at archaeological research in the area similarly accessible. Each hat was analysed in careful detail, looking in particular at their construction, which was very interesting. My only criticism at this stage is that not all technical terms are explained. The study of the use of colour and decorative stitches in hats as a sign of wealth links Chapters One and Two, although the latter doesn't focus on gold in any part of her article.

Recycling and reusing clothes has seen a revival recently in more difficult financial times. Maren Clegg Hyer shows a similar mindset at work in the early Middle Ages in 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Imagined and Reimagined Textiles in Anglo-Saxon England'. She begins with an account of King Athelstan's visit to the shrine of St Cuthbert near Durham, and the King's gifts of stoles covered in gold, and maniples embroidered with gold thread. The paper uses original Anglo-Saxon written sources as well as the extant textiles, and the argument is stronger for Hyer's discussion of primary sources throughout, such as wills, inventories, and tombs.

The fourth chapter is 'Investigating a Semantic Classification in the Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project'. The author, Louise Sylvester, is a co-investigator on the project, and she demonstrates how the lexis can be used to study gold as it is mentioned in relation to clothes and textiles drawn from material and literary sources including *Beowulf* and the *lais* of Marie de France. The lexis is impressively detailed, using primarily historical dictionaries in all languages for which textual evidence could be found, as well as critical literature as required to add depth to the definitions. The discussion and examples of the methodology behind, and the information stored in, the database are useful for others working on similar projects, to give them a glimpse into the intricacies involved. I am looking forward to using it in more detail, and if you



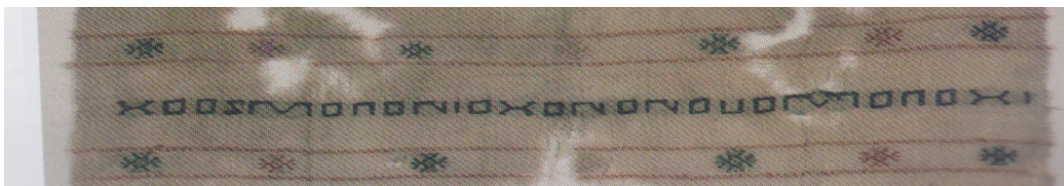
would like to do so too, it is available here: <http://lexisproject.arts.manchester.ac.uk/>.

If you have never read the *Mabinogion*, Patricia Williams's 'Dress and Dignity in the *Mabinogion*' opens with a very accessible introduction to the stories contained therein, as part of which she clarifies her premise of looking at the language of clothes, and the relationship between clothes and their mostly aristocratic wearers. I liked the way in which Williams looked at individual types of clothing or cloth according to the frequency with which they occurred in the texts, thus beginning with the most popular items. She addresses issues of textile terminology and translation, using a similar methodology to that of the Lexis in the preceding chapter. The final paragraphs demonstrate the difficulty of studying clothes in literature – it is difficult to know what is historically accurate and what came from the storyteller's imagination. I saw in Williams' conclusion the same issues that I recognise from my research into clothing in Old French literature, and she neatly demonstrates that links between the two literary cultures are possible, given Wales' international trade in fabrics and fashions.

Talarico's description of Renart's *Roman de la Rose* as a "crazy-quilt text" in her paper, 'Dressing for Success: How the Heroine's Clothing (Un)Makes the Man in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*', looks forward to the final chapter, Lisa Evans' 'Anomaly or Sole Survivor? The Impruneta Cushion and Early Italian "Patchwork"'. This was a particularly excellent chapter, in that Talarico uses the language of textiles to discuss Renart's use of the same language of textiles, and Lienor's use of textiles, to develop their stories. I was surprised that there was no comparison made with the titular heroine of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. While I was initially unsure of her use of the headings 'Linings of Character', 'Linings and Performances', and 'Linings and Songs', the concluding paragraph makes it delightfully clear that Lienor is the lining that gives this tale its weight, and that she so reminds us "that the lining is far more interesting and complex than romance or lyric could ever have either contained or imagined".

Lisa Evans ends the volume with 'Anomaly or Sole Survivor? The Impruneta Cushion and Early Italian "Patchwork"'. The initial brief biography of the cushion's owner and the short description of the cushion itself introduce the chapter's focus upon its material culture, the intention being to find out if it is a unique artefact. The emphasis upon the rise of Bishop Agli through religious and social circles suggests that he could easily have owned something so rare. I would have liked to know more about his niece Deianara, very possible the most likely person to have made the cushion. The breakdown of the cushion's construction is impressively detailed, but the real strength of the article is in the provenance discussion, particularly when the 15<sup>th</sup> century origin of the cushion is questioned through a comparison with 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century silk coverlets, and particularly as regards the history of the embroidery patterns, front and back. As in the other chapters, the patterns' sources could have been international as well as Italian, through trade. The conclusive scientific tests having been rejected by conservators because of the damage they would cause, Evans ends with a convincing summary of the reasons why we should accept that the Impruneta cushion is exactly what it purports to be.

**Kathleen O'Neill**



A textile with a Coptic inscription in the Austrian National Library. (See below)

## ***Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Egypt***

Cäcilia Fluck and Gisela Helmecke (eds.)

Studies in Textile and Costume History, Volume 4

Brill, Leiden 2006 €166.00 / US\$231.00 / £130.00 Hardback

**ISBN:** 978 900414 95 64

To get the most from this fascinating and important volume a reader needs to be polyglot, but it is very rewarding for those who are. The great majority of the papers (10 of the 15) are in German, and two in French, with the remainder, along with two prefaces and introduction, in English.

It is a common impression that textiles with text on them are predominantly from an Islamic cultural context. The monograms and ligatures identifying saints and other figures on many medieval textiles do not come so readily to mind. It is true that inscriptions without religious references do occur more commonly in Islamic cultural contexts, but an important contribution of this volume is to broaden that impression, showing that the practice predated the creation of Islam and was a widespread custom across the broader cultural milieu of the Near East transcending religious allegiances. The purposes inscriptions on textiles were correspondingly diverse. The quite well-known Islamic *tiraz* normally recorded practical information such as where the textile was made, by whom or for whom. Yet inscriptions in Greek, Coptic and Hebrew might serve that same purpose. Some texts were clearly added much later to identify a proud, or pretentious, owner. There is much fascinating discussion of the various motives for inscribing textiles. Besides information, the text could be a claim for social status, and, as one contributor pointed out, the mere presence of an inscription could make that claim even to viewers not well enough educated to be able to actually *read* the text. Blessings and appeals for protection are, unsurprisingly, themes which also transcend religious affiliation. In view of the cultural convergences, it should not be a surprise to find that a single inscription might be composed of more than one language, and could occasionally combine distinct elements from the different faiths.

One of the English language papers discusses material in the Katoen Natie Collection in Antwerp to show that scribal analysis of texts on fabric can be as effective in dating the cloth as radiocarbon analysis, even when there is no date recorded within the inscription. (It is not unusual for *tiraz* inscriptions to include a date.)

This volume is a very important contribution to the social history of this area of material culture in the Near East, and should be required reading for anyone working in the field.

**Timothy Dawson**

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## **MEDATS Future MEETINGS**

**Spring 2013** *Below the Knee: Patens, Shoes, Hose, Socks, and Garters.*

**Summer 2013** *Getting Dressed: The practicalities of putting on clothes.*

**Autumn 2013** *Furs: Comfort and Luxury.*

**Spring 2014** *The Fabric of Pageantry: Tents, Banners, Standards & Canopies.*

**Summer 2014** *Working Textiles: Rope, Cordage, Packing Cloths & Industrial Fibres.*

**Autumn 2014** *Interior Textiles: Drapes, Floor Coverings, Bedding & Upholstery.*