
The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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Beatrice d'Aragon of Naples and King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary.
(See Rosalia Bonito Fanelli's exhibition report on page 3)

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Editorial

I am very pleased to be able to tell you that my quest for a successor as editor is at an end. At the Annual General Meeting, **Ninya Mikhaila**, of the Tudor tailoring books fame, volunteered to take over. I trust that the six years I have been in the post has served the Society well. I hand over to Ninya with my best wishes and gratitude.

One of the recent reasons I wanted to pass on the job is that the difficulty I have had in finding gainful employment has led me to embark upon a business producing historical and alternative dress accessories. It will primarily be footwear, which I have been making for thirty years beginning with dance boots. So I will leave with a parting exploitation of my position in the shameless plug below

Subscriptions: Please note that if your subscription for 2014 is not up to date, this will be the last newsletter you will receive until it is renewed.

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Exhibition

Antinoë, Life and Fashion: Visions of elegance in solitude

Museum of Textiles and Decorative Arts

Lyon, France

Until 28th february 2014.

Hero Granger-Taylor has recommended this to me as an outstanding exhibition.

The museum says:

This exhibition presents an exceptional collection of clothing and fragments from archaeological excavations in the nineteenth century in the city of Antinoë in Egypt. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Lyon regularly funded excavations until 1908. The Textile Museum has benefited from a significant quantity of that archaeological material.

The exhibition reveals the entire excavation campaign of 1898, complete garments (coats, jackets, shirts, veils, accessories, belts) as well as fragments of clothing. These pieces show an elegant taste for luxury fabrics, silk or wool, in the fashions of Late Antiquity, influences, too, from a mythical East, Persia, and the types of clothes or ornamental repertoire that were then adopted in the Middle Ages.

The exhibition reveals the population that Albert Gayet unearthed at Antinoë, the living throng who inhabited the city, their tastes, aspirations and customs, through the clothes they wore. The fabrics also show that Antinoë was a centre of textile production of primary importance.

Exhibition Report

Mattias Corvinus and Florence: Art and Humanism at the Court of the King of Hungary
San Marco Dominican Convent Museum
Closed 6th January 2014

The exhibition ended significantly on the feast of "The Three Kings bearing Gifts to the Christ child" and also concludes the "Year of Hungarian Culture in Italy".

Matthias Hunyadi "Corvinus" (reigned 1458-90) and Lorenzo the Magnificent had many similar ambitions. Art and humanistic learning were prime vehicles for pursuing those ambitions.

Foremost amongst the extiles in the exhibition was the well-known royal throne hanging of costly gold-brocaded velvet (right), designed by Antonio del Pollaiuolo, loaned from the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

An exhaustive catalogue contains both a highly scientific essay on the restoration as well as a study of new Florentine archival documents tracing the Francesco Malocchi weaving workshop accounts and payments.

My hyper-text view:

This wall hanging represents a tale of international power politics, ecclesiastical affairs, military expeditions, financial transactions, prestigious matrimonial contracts and the exchange of costly gifts. And the world has not changed since then.

Classical humanistic attributes and motifs imbue the throne hanging with an eloquent magnificence which glorify the Magyar King. And with Corvinus' marriage to Beatrice d'Aragona, the daughter of King Ferdinand of Naples, was sanctioned his entry into European power politics.

Further information: www.polo.museale.fiorentino.



Corvinus depicted in ms. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana Ve

Rosalia Bonito Fanelli

PAST CONFERENCES

MeDaTS Autumn Meeting and Annual General meeting

British Museum,
23rd November 2013

The deviation from the custom of opening the day with the Annual General Meeting was caused by the fact that Jenny had another commitment in the afternoon. Hence, we had three papers before lunch, which your editor had the misfortune of missing while doing duty on reception. A true misfortune, as I was not able to see the one practical demonstration in Jenny Tiramani's presentation. In Jenny's own words, it went like this:

Jenny Tiramani, 'Dressed (to please King Ferdinand) at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg 1530'.

An illustrated talk and practical demonstration of dressing in the early sixteenth century, using garments reconstructed with a grant from Cambridge University and commissioned by Dr Ulinka Rublack. The outfit consists of a fine linen shirt, a panned doublet in red silk satin and yellow damask, a pair of alum-tawed deerskin hose dyed yellow with Persian berries, a knitted woollen cap, a pair of straight horn-toed shoes and silk velvet purse and belt. There was some discussion on precise the nature of the fastenings used to attach the 142 aiglets to the doublet, on how much help was needed to get the wearer laced into his doublet and hose, and on how the silk taffeta 'pullings through' on the hose and the linen folds of the shirt needed to be arranged well by the dresser.

The second intriguing paper I missed was:

Kathleen O'Neill, 'Nicolette : action transvestite, or, who and what is the heroine of Aucassin et Nicolette?'

The opening lines of the story of Aucassin and Nicolette suggest that it is a typical courtly romance, but as the story unfolds, we discover that it is not so simple. The ambiguity rests primarily in the person of Nicolette. Although she has a French name, she is a Saracen, bought as a slave, baptised and raised as god-daughter by the Viscount of Beaucaire. She is viewed with great suspicion by the parents of her love Aucassin, and his father threatens her with death if she is not removed from the situation. Subsequently imprisoned, Nicolette does not wait for Aucassin to rescue her, but climbs down from her tower prison and goes in search of him. When he disappoints her, she leaves of her own accord, escaping into the forest, where she sets in motion her plan to be reunited with Aucassin. Her subsequent adventures and choices see her identity and gender shift as required to fit the situation in which she finds herself, and in the end she and Aucassin, their fathers having died and themselves having respectively been discovered as Saracen princess and elevated to the rank of Count, marry.

You may ask yourselves, what is an action transvestite?



Jenny's son Jack modelling the outfit as he did on the day.

“It's running, jumping, climbing trees, putting on makeup when you're up there”.

Eddie Izzard, *Dress to Kill*, 1998

This paper, aims to show how Nicolette is constantly, deliberately, changing, in appearance and identity, from the beginning of the story, and how she is thus Izzard's “action transvestite”. She is neither Christian nor Saracen, neither female nor male, neither blonde nor brunette, neither white-skinned nor dark-skinned, neither human nor animal, neither mortal nor supernatural, adopting or being assigned by others all these identities only transiently until she achieves her ultimate goal of being reunited in love with Aucassin, once he has proved himself worthy of her. Only then does she choose a fixed identity, again expressed in her – last – change of appearance, irrevocably recreating herself as Christian, wife, and woman. I study the story of Aucassin and Nicolette as it is told through her changes in dress and identity, drawing comparisons between Nicolette and Eve, Nicolette and the Virgin Mary, Nicolette and medieval saints, and Nicolette and other women in medieval literature. I thus look at the various ways in which Nicolette is undressed and dressed, by herself and by others (characters and narrator), arguing that she is more than a character in the story, she is the story, moving forward through her changes in dress and identity, by focusing on key episodes in the story, moments of acting, speaking and/or undressing, dressing, and redressing.

The last of the morning was:

Sarah Thursfield, 'Lacing in Fact and Fiction'

This was a look at the evidence for laced clothing in England and northern Europe up to the middle of the fifteenth century, and an attempt to separate it from the modern cultural baggage which surrounds it.

Lacing is very commonly used as a decorative feature to invoke the spirit of 'Merrie England' on dressing-up clothes which reflect the modern assumption that lacing is exclusively feminine, fashionable and sexy. The assumption can be traced back to nineteenth-century historians, but for much of the medieval period there is actually little evidence for laced clothing.

Apart from a period in the twelfth century, early and high medieval dress was not sufficiently fitted to require any fastening round the body: its first appearance was in mixed armour of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, first for mail components and later for fitted surcoats, which were laced at the sides.

The twelfth century saw complaints about men as well as women wearing tight clothing which might be stitched closed, though apparently only women were laced: most of the evidence for this comes from romances although the well-known 'demon of fashion' (Psalter of Henry of Blois, Winchester BL Cotton Nero Ms.C IV, f.11r), which Margaret Scott suggests shows both male and female dress, has a body that is clearly laced (or sewn) at the side, as would be logical on garments which were cut without centre front or back seams.

Developments in tailoring from about 1340 produced truly fitted clothing for both men and women, four-panel garments with centre front and centre back seams.

The fitted look suggests a laced inner garment to take the strain under a buttoned outer garment and the common use of short outer sleeves indicates a second, inner garment. But proof is elusive.

For men this inner garment was the doublet, which derived from military dress where lacing was already in use, and there is abundant evidence for front-laced doublets in the fifteenth century, but a noticeable absence from the 14th.

Women's dress on effigies shows close-fitted dresses, usually worn under an open surcote or a front-buttoned dress with short sleeves; in 1370 Queen Philippa of Hainault was shown on her tomb wearing a plain, long-sleeved fitted dress with close lacing down the front, as were a few other ladies whose willingness to be shown in such a simple dress suggests that it was a striking novelty. The lacing was shown as a discreet line of single-end bars through a large number of eyelets, quite unlike the modern row of giant XXXs; one brass from 1405 does show two-end crossed lacing but this is unlikely to reflect the modern fiction of 'moral' straight and 'loose' crossed lacing.

Fourteenth-century writers and chroniclers were silent about lacing. Chaucer's prologue to the Parson's tale, for example, mentions many iniquities of dress but in contrast to the twelfth century it seems that fourteenth century society accepted close-fitting laced clothing as functional and unremarkable.

In the fifteenth century, front-lacing is in plain sight as a near-universal fastening for a fitted 'base layer' – the kirtle for women and the doublet for men.

The fitted outer dress seen on working women rarely shows any fastening though side lacing may have been common, being both discreet and practical compared to back lacing. Back-lacing is not illustrated though it might have been used for the fashionable tight dresses which supported the bust.

After the middle fifteenth century, the laced garments begin to appear from under the gown and even to show a bit of style, but the picturesque front lacing of popular imagination is still a very long way off. Up to the middle fifteenth century, the impression is of lacing used by both men and women as a fastening as discreet, functional and unremarked as the modern zip-fastener, serviceable and practical but not regarded as a fashion detail, or as a tool of seduction.

Abstracts for the afternoon papers were not available at going to press. Christine Carnie's presentation was a display and discourse on the outfit worn by Ruth Goodman in the television series *Tudor Monastery Farm*. It was not entirely clear how 'Shaping a Fashionable Silhouette' by Johannes Pietsch related to the theme, but the paper was well worthwhile simply for introducing me to the delightful fifteenth-century "Moorish dancer" figurines of the Munich Municipal Museum.

The major business of the **Annual General Meeting** was the resignation of James Robinson as Chairman. He acknowledged that taking on the post just at the time he was moving from London to Edinburgh had been a mistake and apologised for the fact that the demands of his new post had forestalled his involvement in the Society. Hence we are once again in need of a principal committee member. On the positive side, however, as noted in the editorial, Ninya Mikhaila has very very kindly responded to my request for a successor as editor. Carole Thompson reported out membership lies in vicinity of 150, and Mary Frost assured us that our finances are very sound.

CONFERENCES FORTHCOMING

North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles XII

Hallstatt, Austria

21st – 24th May 2014

Preliminary program is available at http://www.nesat.org/hallstatt_xii/program_en.html

Recent Publications

Setting the Scene: European Painted Cloths: 1400-2000.

Nicola Costaras & Christina Young (eds).

Archetype Publications, London 2013.

ISBN: 9781904982906

£39.50 / US\$85.00 Paperback 196p, 297 x 210 mm.

The conference papers in this volume explore the use of painted cloths in religious ceremony, pageantry, domestic interiors and scenic art, focusing on their change of context and significance from the fourteenth to the twenty-first centuries and examining their different function, materials, and method of creation.

The potential for large sizes, portability, and versatility for religious objects including banners, hangings, altarpieces, and palls was the impetus for the emergence of fabrics as a painting support in Western art in the Middle Ages. The functionality of the works explains the survival of relatively few examples. One of the most common forms of interior decoration for centuries, painted cloths have received less attention from art historians and historians than they deserve in part due to their poor survival. Scenic backcloths were once commissioned for court functions, part of an elaborate display of royal power and magnificence. The same methods and materials continued to be used for theatrical cloths.

Relevant highlights:

Religious and secular

'Cloths in and on paintings: from curtain to shutter and back again.' Roland Krischel

'The use of painted cloths in London civic pageantry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.' Nicola Coldstream

'The ownership of painted cloths in late medieval England.' Nicola Costaras

Domestic interior

'The painted cloths at Owlpen Manor, Gloucestershire.' Nicholas Mander

'Painted cloths in late medieval London houses.' Katherine L. French

'"Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe": Shakespeare's narrative textiles.' Rebecca Olson

Pageantry and ceremony

'The trade and import of painted cloths in fifteenth- to sixteenth-century London.' Jo Kirby

'A technical study of a late fourteenth-century double-sided processional banner by Spinello Aretino.' Sarah Kleiner

'The Legend of St Bruno and painting cycles on canvas in late fifteenth-century Cologne.' Katja von Baum

Scenic art

'The changing practice of scenic painters in England.' Hilary Vernon-Smith

'The changing role of English scenic artists.' Christina Young

'Normansfield Theatre scenery: materials and construction revealed through conservation.' Karen Thompson and Frances Lennard

More information and orders:

<http://www.archetype.co.uk/publication-details.php?id=187>

Schätze des Mittelalters: Schmuck aus dem Staatlichen Archäologischen Museum, Warschau. (Treasures of the Middle Ages: Jewellery from the State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw)

Bönen, 2011.

162 pages, 390 illus, paperback, 21 x 26 cm. German.
ISBN: 978-3862060719

Published to accompany an exhibition (2012) at Brandenburg an der Havel. Museum of the Imperial Palace Paderborn and presents over 400 pieces of jewelry from Slavic cemeteries, ramparts and medieval discoveries. The magnificent earrings, bracelets and pearl necklaces are made of silver, bronze and gold, glass, semi precious stones and amber. They represent jewellery styles of Western and Eastern Slavs and show the Slavic culture in the Middle Ages in all their splendour and wealth.

The catalog includes contributions by outstanding specialists and provides all the exhibits in a richly illustrated directory with detailed information on location and previous publication.

More information

[http://www.landmuseum-](http://www.landmuseum-brandenburg.de/de/dasmuseum/sonderausstellungen/archiv/schaetze-des-mittelalters/)

[brandenburg.de/de/dasmuseum/sonderausstellungen/archiv/schaetze-des-mittelalters/](http://www.landmuseum-brandenburg.de/de/dasmuseum/sonderausstellungen/archiv/schaetze-des-mittelalters/)

<http://www.regensburg.de/kultur/museen-in-regensburg/aktuelles/schaetze-des-mittelalters/75860>

<http://www.archaeologie-online.de/magazin/nachrichten/slawische-schaetze-des-mittelalters-14638/>



A beadwork pendant from the exhibition.



An arm ring from the Warsaw exhibition.

Forthcoming Publication

Clothing the Clergy: Virtue and Power in Medieval Europe, c. 800–1200.

Maureen C. Miller,

Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2014 (due May)

304pp., 119 illus., 40 color, 79 b&w. 27cm.,

ISBN: 9780801449826 (hardcover) ISBN: 9780801479434 (paperback)

After initial ambivalence about distinctive garb for its ministers, early Christianity developed both liturgical garments and visible markers of clerical status outside church. From the ninth century, moreover, new converts to the faith beyond the Alps developed a highly ornate style of liturgical attire; church vestments were made of precious silks and decorated with embroidered and woven ornament, often incorporating gold and jewels. Making use of surviving medieval textiles and garments; mosaics, frescoes, and manuscript illuminations; canon law; liturgical sources; literary works; hagiography; theological tracts; chronicles, letters, inventories of ecclesiastical treasuries, and wills, the author traces the ways in which clerical garb changed over the Middle Ages.

Miller's in-depth study of the material culture of church vestments not only goes into detail about craft, artistry, and textiles but also contributes in groundbreaking ways to our understanding of the religious, social, and political meanings of clothing, past and present. As a language of power, clerical clothing was used extensively by eleventh-century reformers to mark hierarchies, to cultivate female patrons, and to make radical new claims for the status of the clergy. The medieval clerical culture of clothing had enduring significance: its cultivation continued within Catholicism and even some Protestant denominations and it influenced the visual communication of respectability and power in the modern Western world. *Clothing the Clergy* features seventy-nine illustrations and forty colour photographs that put the rich variety of church vestments on display.

Contents:

Introduction

Chapter 1. Let Them Exhibit Holiness

Chapter 2. A Clerical Spirituality

Chapter 3. Resplendent in Gold

Chapter 4. Women and Men

Chapter 5. Reform

Chapter 6. Good Lordship

Conclusion

Further information:

<http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100599700>

MEDATS Future MEETINGS

Spring 2014 *Furs and Feathers: Comfort and Luxury.*

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

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

Spring 2015 *Interior Textiles: Drapes, Floor Coverings, Bedding & Upholstery.*

To Be Announced *Occupational Dress*