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# The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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Examining a 16<sup>th</sup> century knitted cap (Accession No. NWHCM : 1961.74.2)  
at Norwich Museum.  
Photo by Challe Hudson

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## **Textiles at Home Conference & AGM – Postponed**

After much discussion over the last weeks and months, it is with regret that the MEDATS committee have come to the decision to postpone our 2020 Annual Conference, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Originally to have been held in London on 30 May 2020, this event is now planned for later in the year, and will take place on **17 October 2020**.

Our concerns are for the health and wellbeing of our members and speakers, as well as the potential restrictions over the gathering of large groups for non-essential purposes which may still be in effect throughout the UK in May and June.

The conference, which was to centre on the theme of Textiles in the Home, would have featured a series of interesting papers on this subject, (some tasters shared below), and we hope that many of these excellent presenters will be able to join us in October instead. We also hope to bring our attendees some exciting contributions from additional speakers in the fields of experimental archaeology and textile/clothing reconstruction, which we have enjoyed celebrating at our recent Learning Through Reconstruction events. In so doing it is our wish that we may make this, our one major conference event for 2020, an enjoyable combination of approaches to the study of medieval clothing and textile history, reflecting the themes of both events and the interests of all our members.

It is our plan that the Learning Through Reconstruction event will be back next Autumn 2021, as well as our Annual Conference in Spring 2021, and we are currently making arrangements and plans for both. We look forward to seeing all who are able to attend next year, and hope that 2021 will bring easier and happier times for us all.

Further details about the 17 October 2020 conference, including an updated speakers list, will be released as soon as possible. We are grateful for all our members' ongoing support and are looking forward to welcoming you all back in Autumn, and to an event which we hope will be just as rewarding and interesting as those we have enjoyed in previous years. We also encourage readers to visit our website and Facebook page to keep up to date with the latest developments, and with one-another, during this difficult and sometimes isolating time.

Our thoughts and best wishes go out to all members, and we look forward to seeing you soon.

NATALIE RACHEL WALKER, (PROGRAMME SECRETARY MEDATS)

A few tasters from the \*POSTPONED\* Annual Conference May 2020, 'Textiles in the Home'. This event would have featured presentations from the following speakers, who we hope to see joining us on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020 instead.

**Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies, The Tudor Tailor.**

**A cassock that is a spinning: Evidence for home produced textiles and clothes in wills, inventories and household accounts from 1485 to 1603**

The Typical Tudor was published this year as a study of clothing and textiles for the mean and middling sort from 1485 to 1603. A database of more than 55,000 garments and accessories from transcribed wills, accounts, inventories and court records reveals insights into the acquisition of clothing for ordinary men and women. This paper compares the evidence for the production of textiles and apparel in the home with that for professional workshops during the Tudor period. It illustrates the network of relationships – both commercial and personal - which were crucial for the maintenance of a comely appearance.

To find out more about the Tudor Tailor team, and their new book, The Typical Tudor, please visit:

[www.tudortailor.com](http://www.tudortailor.com)

**Prof. Catherine Richardson**, University of Kent, and **Dr. Hannah Lilley**, University of Birmingham, in association with Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project: 'The Cultural Lives of the Middling Sort'.

**English Middling Houses and their Textile Ownership in the 1590s and 1620s**

The port towns of Bristol, Ipswich and Faversham yield rich inventory evidence for English domestic spaces and their textiles. This paper draws upon samples



Above: Reconstructed dornix bed hangings and coverlet at the Strangers Hall, Norwich.  
Photo by Pat Poppy

of inventories for each of these locations from the 1590s and 1620s in order to explore the aesthetic culture of textiles in the homes of middling status individuals. We look at household textiles and clothing in order to ask: how were textiles used at various levels of wealth within these three places? What range of cloth was used in households of middling status? And how far was textile use gendered or entwined with social status?

To find out more about The Cultural Lives of the Middling Sort, please visit: [www.middlingculture.com](http://www.middlingculture.com)

**Dr. Anne Kirkham**, University of Manchester

### **Textiles and End-of-Life Rituals in a Book of Hours (Rylands Latin MS 164)**

Rylands Latin MS 164 (mid-fifteenth century) is a book of hours associated with French royal patronage and the celebrated Bedford-Master workshop. Twenty-seven of this luxury prayer book's seventy-four image pages feature furnishing textiles. In those accompanying the Offices of the Dead, we see scenes of the hoped-for 'good death' at home in bed surrounded by loved ones and clerics, of the draped coffin during the funeral, and the body borne to the graveside on a rich canvas stretcher. This paper examines how convincingly the textiles in the death-centred images suggest the material experience of end-of-life rituals, and considers how consciously the painted textiles' alignment of patterns and isolation of significant decorative motifs augment symbolically the passing from the bodily to spiritual realms.

**Jorge Kelman**, an independent practical researcher and designer of medieval painted cloth.

### **Painted cloth in late medieval English homes: written sources and reconstructions**

Although extremely rare in the archaeology, painted cloths were a common feature of the medieval domestic environment across a range of social classes. Medieval recipes and guides for painting cloth offer a wide spectrum of complexity in style and technique; from the simple 'waters' or stains to block printing, emulating more expensive woven textiles. This presentation will show how painted cloths took their place alongside the more familiar and more expensive embroideries and tapestries in the medieval domestic space.

**Sarah Thursfield**, seamstress and independent researcher

### **Linen Clothing in the Howard Household Accounts, 1464-1484**

The four surviving account books of John Howard, first Duke of Norfolk contain details of his domestic and business expenditure, from building ships and equipping armies to buying new shoes for his children. This paper will consider the provision of linen clothing for the family and household. The author will refer to other sources for comparison to suggest what we can



deduce about the provision of shirts and shifts; to consider the role of the 'chamberer' in the household; and ask whether the Duke wore underpants - and, if so, where they are hidden?

To find out more about Sarah's work, please see: [www.sarahthursfield.com](http://www.sarahthursfield.com)



Above: Table setting at Strangers Hall, Norwich. Photo by Pat Poppy

**Pat Poppy** – retired academic librarian

### **Textiles in the Shop Inventories of a Group of Late Elizabethan Exeter Merchants**

The recent transcription of inventories from the Exeter Orphan Court includes the stock of Exeter merchants, covering the period 1591 to 1601. Between them they have over 80 different named types of textile in stock. This talk will examine what textiles were stocked, where they come from, and the uses these textiles might have been put to in the home. It will also examine household inventories from 1590 to 1603, looking at the extent to which descriptions of furnishings include textile terminology, and how closely they match with the textiles that the merchants have in stock, from hempen sheets to needle wrought cushions.

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### **Open Access article on the finds at the Lendbreen Pass, Norway**

Pilø, L., Finstad, E., & Barrett, J. (2020). Crossing the ice: An Iron Age to medieval mountain pass at Lendbreen, Norway. *Antiquity*, 94(374), 437-454. doi:10.15184/aqy.2020.2

# MEDATS STUDY DAY

## Report on 16th century knitted and other textiles at Norwich Museums, Friday 28th February 2020

Study day 16th century knitting at Shire Hall Study Centre, Norwich (Norwich Castle Museum)

The participants were split into two groups, I was in group one, which started at the Study Centre, examining items from box 1961.74 with curator Ruth Battersby-Tooke

Box 1961.74 contains items from the Leonard Bolingbroke collection, which was handed to the museum in 1922. He had collected anything that might have been in use in Stranger's Hall throughout the house's history, so mainly middle class or lower class items.

The original excavation finds had been split between Northampton Museum, the Museum of London, and Norwich.

The pieces are chiefly Tudor, and had not relevance to Norwich itself except that he thought they might be what could have been found in Stranger's Hall in the period.

The items were stored as was, most likely not washed or undergone any other conservation treatment, at least none are recorded.



Above: Examining surviving 16<sup>th</sup> century knitted caps with museum curator Ruth Battersby Took (far left) and Ninya Mikhaila (Manning the microscope camera far left). Photo by Challe Hudson

We did have a look with the Dino-Lite microscope but struggled to get a good image, so our observations were based mainly on examination by eye. It did show how dense the fibres were, and how short and broken, in comparison to a modern fabric in cashmere, and how dense the loops/stitches are in the knitted items.

We examined 2 knitted caps, a smaller one with what looked like a slightly scalloped edge, and earflaps (only one still exists), label 74. 961.2, and a bigger hat, 74. 961.1

Like one of the V&A caps, the bigger hat has several layers of brim, and the most likely explanation is that the top layer is a lining, that should be pushed into the crown to stiffen it! This would leave the full brim, and the half-circle longer brim that could be pulled up by a strap, or left hanging down over the neck, possibly. A reconstruction would help in deciding what this might look like.

Other items we examined were item 1961.75.11 "belt"

The shape and look reminded me immediately of a part of a liripipe or tail for a hood; the original description listed it as a fabric belt. I'm very much looking forward to finding out more about that at another visit!

1961.79 Slashed leather "waistcoat" (official museum description for any upper body garments)

Looking from the either side of the box (top and bottom) several of our group members immediately thought "hose/stocking pattern" so we suggested this might be a boot, possibly something like seen on the painting of the embarkation at Dover.

1961.74.5 Dark knitted stocking, too dark for my camera to pick up much detail, but long stocking with what looked like an interesting heel solution

Sleeve 1961.75.7, a knitted sleeve with a small flap at the top and a beautifully executed flared cuff, no dating so far.

1961.74 (the board had one number for several items)

Cloth stocking, one of the most exciting items for me, since I specialise in hose, and it is so exciting to see originals with the gores still attached! The side normally on display shows different stitches around the gore than the side that is normally facing downwards, which might suggest some conservation work. The way the slits for inserting the gores for the ankle part are cut are very similar to the stocking on show at the moment in the Museum of London.

Next to the cloth stocking was another knitted stocking, knitted from what looked like two different yarns, there was a clear difference in colour and texture, with a toe section that looks pulled together, and a ribbed heel.

The top has a row of purl stitches under the chain pattern of the cast off (or on, we did not establish the direction the stocking had been knitted)

The same board also displayed a child's mitten, and a small stocking, made from rather thicker yarn, similar to the child's mitten, and knitted similar in style to the two-tone stocking



Item 1961.77, labelled “Leather Purse” was a bit of a puzzle, and we had several guesses at what the shape and material originally might have been, and what it might have been used for

The box also contained several smaller pieces of fabric, of different quality, and shapes.

We swapped with the other group, and after a very nice lunch in Stranger’s Hall we discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the different sources (written, pictorial, extant), adding another aspect, the input of a skilled maker today, what they can tell us and what they can’t tell us, and how they all work together to give us a better picture.

Example was the Erasmus cap, which has been interpreted as being felted, but an experienced hat maker said it would be quite difficult to make that shape, and testing showed that is quite easy to knit that shape, then full and block it.

We got to handle the different stages of the experiment of creating different hats and sleeves, standing in for examining extant examples.

We also had a guided tour of Stranger’s Hall, well worth a visit on its own, followed by a plenary discussion with all members of the study day.

I’m looking forward to returning to Norwich for closer study of some of the items we saw, and to the next MEDATS study day!

CHRISSI CARNIE



Above: Examining samples of reconstructed knitting with Jane Malcolm-Davies (far right) in the undercroft of Strangers Hall. Photo by Challe Hudson



## BOOK REVIEW

**Sarah Brazil, *The Corporeality of Clothing in Medieval Literature: Cognition, Kinesis, and the Sacred*, Early Drama, Art, and Music (Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University Medieval Institute Publications, 2018). ISBN 9781580443579. Pp. 174. 7 Illustrations of which 4 in colour.**

This book is about the relationship between clothes and the body – specifically the holy /biblical body – in the medieval imagination. It draws on some little-known texts as well as Middle English drama and provides some original insights, like the garments sewn by Adam and Eve being the first artefacts mentioned in the bible, and the difficulties of acting on stage the rising of a body tightly wrapped in grave-clothes.

There are four chapters. The first, 'Clothing and the Fallen Body', treats the clothing of Adam and Eve and how it was used to discuss the implications of the Fall. Three sections discuss the Fall in terms of the loss of a garment – the clothing of righteousness; the subsequent clothing of Adam and Eve in animal skins (rarely depicted in art but the subject of much exegesis and attested in dramatic texts); and the tradition of continued nakedness and Eve's role as cloth maker.

'Graveclothes and the Resurrection: From Gospel to Stage' points out that Christ's resurrection had no witnesses and was attested by the grave clothes put aside, the face cloth folded (by hands). Not a central doctrine of Christianity until the fourth century, the event was largely depicted from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries through the Visit to the Tomb, though textile features in both art and dramatic representations from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century art depicts a bloodied body rising from the tomb. Bloodstained cloth invites meditation on Christ's suffering.

'Coming Forth still Bound: Raising Lazarus in Theology and Performance' demonstrates that St Augustine equated the removal of Lazarus's binding to absolution from sin. Where Lazarus's rising was included in drama, evidently the bound actor could only sit up, not walk out of his tomb.

'Metaphorical Shoes and the Body' is somewhat different from the rest of the book. It begins by showing how putting on of shoes (made of animal skin) was used as a metaphor for God taking on a human body, but moves into foot metaphors, as the foot became emblematic of the movement of the soul.

The book neatly opens and ends with anecdotes about attempts to steal holy relics from the grave clothes of St Edith and the reaction of the saint's dead body to the assault: bleeding, and raising its head, respectively. Drawing as it does on diverse disciplines, including neuroscience, philosophy and anthropology as well as Latin and Middle English texts, the book often uses challenging language. A favourite expression is that clothes act as 'cognitive affordances'; we are told at p. 47 that '... writers exploit these connections by means of specific corporeal information (sensorimotor, introspective, kinesis) ...'. Despite such linguistic hurdles, however, the book is full of new, stimulating material, and well worth reading.

GALE R. OWEN-CROCKER

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

### Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium

I was lucky enough to get to this exhibition before the world closed down. However, because it had to shut before its end date of the 30<sup>th</sup> April, the museum has created a 26 minute long virtual tour, and the information from the audio guide is also available, the English versions of both are at <https://vaneyck2020.be/en/van-eyck-from-home/>

Of the twenty two known surviving examples of Van Eyck's work, thirteen were gathered in Ghent for this exhibition. Some parts of the wonderful, recently conserved Ghent altarpiece, The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, were divided and made available at eye level so one could see both back and front of Adam and Eve from the foldable wings. The copies made a hundred years later are on the opposite wall, so you can see the difference.

The exhibition begins with a huge tapestry, and a variety of documents that put Van Eyck in the context of his age. Jan van Eyck (c.1390-1441) was court painter to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1396-1467), and there is much in the exhibition about his relationship with Philip, and well as portraits of both Philip and Philip's wife Isabella, and some paintings by Van Eyck's contemporaries, including some copies of his lost works, and those painters in other countries influenced by his work.

The clothing detail on some of Van Eyck's paintings is superb. Many will know the Marriage of Arnolfini, not least because Ninya Mikhaila's reconstruction of her dress was on the front cover of the last newsletter, but the Portrait of a Man with a Blue Chaperon, c. 1428-30 on loan to the exhibition from the Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu, Romania, (right) is less well known.

A well-illustrated English language version of the book that accompanies the exhibition is available : Maximiliaan Martens, et al, *Van Eyck*. Thames & Hudson, Feb 2020, 490p. £60, ISBN: 978-0500023457



**Two Exhibitions** took place in Washington DC at the end of last year

**Woven Interiors: Furnishing Early Medieval Egypt**, August 31, 2019–January 5, 2020 at the Textile Museum, George Washington University

The exhibition contained about sixty examples of hangings, curtains, bedcovers, pillows, and other fabrics intended for use in a range of sacred and secular spaces. It was based on masterpieces from the Textile Museum and the Dumbarton Oaks collections, supplemented with loans from other American institutions. The catalogue of the exhibition is available in a digital format at <https://museum.gwu.edu/woven-interiors-catalogue> and as a hard copy direct from the museum shop.

**Ornament: Fragments of Byzantine Fashion**, September 10, 2019–January 5, 2020, at Dumbarton Oaks

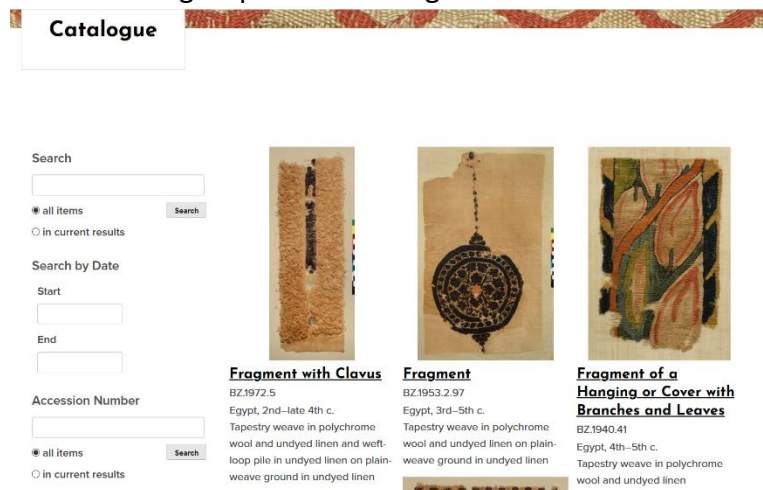
The exhibition brought together complete tunics, parts of garments, and contemporary replicas of ancient dress to evoke the fashions of this now lost world. The textiles represented a small part of the holdings in the Byzantine collection of Dumbarton Oaks.

### Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection

The Dumbarton Oaks textile collection is being entered into a free digital catalogue:

Gudrun Bühl and Elizabeth Dospel Williams, eds., *Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection* (Washington, DC, 2019), <https://www.doaks.org/resources/textiles>.

This catalogue went online in May last year. To quote from the site: “Our catalogue will feature all our textiles, starting with our collection of late antique Egyptian textiles. Each entry features high-resolution photography, archival photography where applicable, art-historical analyses, and full exhibition history, bibliography, and provenance information. The most important pieces also feature technical analyses to give a grounding in the material aspects of the textiles. We will add our smaller collection of post-Byzantine, *ṭirāz*, and Islamic textiles to this initial group in the coming months.”



**Catalogue**

Search

all items

in current results

Search by Date

Start

End

Accession Number

all items

in current results

**Fragment with Clavus**  
BZ.1972.5  
Egypt, 2nd–late 4th c.  
Tapestry weave in polychrome wool and undyed linen and weft-loop pile in undyed linen on plain-weave ground in undyed linen

**Fragment**  
BZ.1953.2.97  
Egypt, 3rd–5th c.  
Tapestry weave in polychrome wool and undyed linen on plain-weave ground in undyed linen

**Fragment of a Hanging or Cover with Branches and Leaves**  
BZ.1940.41  
Egypt, 4th–5th c.  
Tapestry weave in polychrome wool and undyed linen

The catalogue comes in three parts: the searchable catalogue itself (shown left), essays many of which were presentations at the 2015 conference “Liminal Fabric: Furnishing Textiles in Byzantium and Early Islam,” and a bibliography.

## MEDATS COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS

**President** - John Cherry, email - [president@medats.org.uk](mailto:president@medats.org.uk)  
**Chairman** –Ninya Mikhaila, email - [chair@medats.org.uk](mailto:chair@medats.org.uk)  
**Honorary Secretary** - Christine Carnie,  
**Treasurer** – Challe Hudson, email - [treasurer@medats.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@medats.org.uk)  
**Membership Secretary** – Linde Merrick,  
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**Programme Secretary** – Natalie Rachel Walker,  
**Newsletter Editor** – Pat Poppy, email [newsletter@medats.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@medats.org.uk)  
**Publicity Secretary** - Heather A. D. Mbaye  
**Web master** - Saragrace Knauf

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2: One copy of the newsletter will be sent whichever mode is employed, but both named members enjoy the full range of rights and privileges.

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Refunds for cancellations made at shorter notice will be given on a discretionary basis dependant on whether the ticket can be resold or not. The final decision will be made by the treasurer.