

Vienna 25 April, 2016

WORKSHOP

**Textile Workers. Skills, labour and status of textile
craftspeople between prehistoric Aegean and Ancient Near East**



TEXTILE WORKERS. SKILLS, LABOUR AND STATUS OF TEXTILE CRAFTSPEOPLE BETWEEN PREHISTORIC AEGEAN AND ANCIENT NEAR EAST

This workshop aims at opening new perspectives in the archaeological textile research, focusing on a comparative analysis of textile workers in the Aegean and Near-Eastern world, from the Stone to the Iron Age. While archaeological remains such as textile tools, fibres and fabrics have been widely analysed for the technological information they contain, they have not been adequately studied for their potential to provide valuable data about the actors involved in textile production. So the main question is, what do archaeological remains, combined with the iconographical and textual data, can tell us about the prehistoric and early historic textile craftswomen and craftsmen.

Using all available sources, it is indeed possible to start a discussion and set various questions about the actors of textile production: what was their gender and social status? What type of labour did they perform: Domestic or professional? What was their concrete working space – a house or a workshop area? How were they organized: alone or in teams? Which were their body position and their gestures while working? Did they have free choices between different patterns, colours, materials or technics? Which were their specialized skills and their intellectual knowledge, applied at work?

It is possible to answer these questions by a combined study of artefacts, representations and textual data. The presence of textile tools in funerary contexts gives, for instance, information on the gender and social status of the workers; it may, as well, give clues about their working environment (outside/inside, at home/in the palaces or temples). The iconographical representations depict textile workers in action, showing their gestures, while they sometimes imply symbolic aspects of their work. Written sources record occasionally the names of the workers, their origin and their social status, and they provide insights into their verbatim conditions of work.

With this workshop, we wish to explore if, in all the fields and circumstances mentioned above, we can detect exact parallels, similar patterns, mutual influences or rather major differences between Near Eastern and Aegean worlds, from the Neolithic to the Iron Age.

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Abstracts (in alphabetic order):

Male labour in the Mycenaean textile industries

Marie-Louise NOSCH

The Linear B tablets give very much information about textile workers: their number, gender, place of work and ethnic origin, supervisor and 'collector', occupation, rations, level of training and age. In some records we come very close to the textile workers and from the tablets we know many hundreds of textile workers by name, and sometimes also their family ties.

Following up on John Chadwick's seminal work on "The Women of Pylos" from 1988, I will here discuss the gendered division of tasks in the textile production and especially highlight the role of male labour, both quantitatively and according to different sectors of the textile industry. Certain occupations such as fulling and shepherding are exclusively associated men. Men and boys also seem more frequently mentions in records concerning flax cultivation and flax fibre processing, perhaps due to the hard manual work.

Some of the bureaucratic parameters and categories for administering textile workers in a Mycenaean palace (age, place, gender, supervisor and 'collector') are also used for administering sheep and goats (young/yearlings/adults, place, gender, shepherd and 'collector') and this division and categorisation of resources will also be discussed in the presentation.

Tracing the Weavers in Early Mesopotamia, 5000–2000 BCE. Evidences from Iconography

Catherine BRENIQUET

It is well known that textiles badly preserved in Mesopotamian archaeological sites. However, other sources can be studied to understand the role of textiles in ancient societies: archaeology, texts and iconography. Within the frame of the Textile workers' workshop, we will take into account the early periods of Mesopotamia, ca. 5000–2000 bce. This wide time lapse gives the opportunity of see the evolution of societies, from the very late Neolithic communities to the first urban societies. During these three millennia, wool replaces the original vegetal fibres. This major change is linked with the emergence of a new social hierarchy, with the environment, with relations between groups, with the organization of labour and crafts, giving the opportunity to trace the weavers much more than the textiles themselves.

Archaeology (generally speaking) provides information about tools, raw materials but surprisingly, evidences of textiles, workshop or places for work are scarce or missing. Texts record very briefly the uses of textiles in the first urban societies. However, during the Ur III period, written cuneiform sources bring to light the organization of labour in the huge workshops. By contrast, iconography is abundant during the first half of the third millennium bce, especially on cylinder-seals, showing people at work, mainly women but also men, ungendered people and gods. From iconography, it is possible to reconstruct the entire "chaîne opératoire" of the textile work, to document the production tools and the many status of the weavers in early Mesopotamia

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Agencies of Textile Production in western Anatolian and Aegean Prehistory

Christopher BRITSCH

Findings of textile tools from the earliest settlements in western Anatolia show that the craft of creating textiles was implemented in societies starting at least from the Neolithic. While evidence for such early periods is very rare, recent and current studies could illustrate the importance of this craft for the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age. Moreover they demonstrate the potential insight in the social mechanics of prehistoric societies by analysing this craft and its tools.

It can be stated that the whole study of prehistoric textile production in Anatolia and the Aegean is a more or less neglected field. However about the social aspects – more precisely the people behind the textile production – even less is known.

This paper therefore focuses on the agencies in prehistoric textile production. To approach this elementary but difficult question, recent as well as former studies of settlements and burial sites will be taken into comparison. The aim is to show which people were accustomed with this task and what social and cultural impact they had within the societies of western Anatolia and the Aegean.

Textile Workers in the Royal Archives of Mari (Syria)

Cécile MICHEL

The archives excavated in the royal palace of Mari which document textiles workers are of various types. Administrative lists record the distribution of rations to the personnel: beside the weavers, other specialists are mentioned, male or female, producing specific types of textiles or using special technics. Letters dealing with the fabrication of luxurious garments for the king or the queen might refer to skilled textile professionals. Deliveries or receipts of raw materials or finished products may as well cite various textile workers. Looking at all these occurrences, we wish to give a tentative reconstitution of the organization of textile production linked to the palace of Mari by answering to the following questions: Is there a link between the gender of the workers and the tasks to be performed? Are these professionals working in or outside the palace? How are they organized? What can their rations tell us about their social status?

A Textile Workshop from the Acropolis of Tell Mishrifeh. New Light on Weaving and Dyeing in Iron Age Syria

Daniele MORANDI BONACOSSO

The paper will present the archaeological evidence on craft activities performed on the acropolis of Mishrifeh during the Iron Age II. The excavation of a large craft area yielded facilities and tools mainly pertaining to textile production. This activity was carried out in a complex located in the northern part of a craft quarter where numerous tools associated with textile production and processing have been found. Significant evidence of textile industry has been identified also in other parts of the acropolis and in the city's lower town. Weaving and textile production seem to have been an important economic activity and were performed on a large scale.

Evidence of textile dyeing was also brought to light in the workshop. Other activities, such as washing, fulling and mordanting, may have been performed in the same space.

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The evidence excavated in the craft area on the acropolis and in the lower city emphasizes the important role played by Mishrifeh as a textile production centre and offer new important evidence on the textile production technologies employed in the Iron Age Northern Levant.

Social Status and Organization of the Textile Workers of Uruk During the Neo-Babylonian Period

Elizabeth E. PAYNE

This talk will provide an overview of the social status and organization of the textile workers of Uruk based on the documentation preserved in the Eanna archive (ca. 630–520 BCE). These craftsmen were organized into three professions (washermen, launderers and weavers), who together manufactured and maintained the sacred garments worn by the deities residing in the Eanna temple. Each profession will be characterized by its responsibilities and the type of work done, followed by a discussion of how the workers' social status affected their organization and role within the temple. While all of the temple's textile workers were male, this talk will also present such evidence as there is for female textile workers in Uruk.

Mediterranean interconnections: Weaving technologies during the Middle Bronze Age

Luca PEYRONEL

The use of the warp-weighted loom in Anatolia, the Aegeum and Cyprus since the Early Bronze Age is well testified by archaeological evidences indicating that it was the main weaving technology in the area. On the contrary, the situation of the Levant during the Bronze Age was completely different: interactions between different weaving methods are attested at least since the Middle Bronze Age, when loom-weights testify for the introduction of the warp-weighted loom side by side the traditional Syro-Mesopotamian horizontal ground-loom and probably the new technique of the two-beam vertical loom was also elaborated, later on well documented through iconographic representations in Egypt. The distribution and the typology of the textile materials collected in the Syro-Palestinian regions also suggest that the evolution of the new loom types probably happened in specific interaction zones, along the southern coast, in the 'Amuq valley and in the Nile delta, where the cultural and commercial relations between the Aegeum, Cyprus and the Anatolian plateau have been more consistent. On the socio-economic ground the presence of the warp-weighted loom in the Levant during the MBA seems to be a phenomenon mainly related to a restrict group of craftsmen linked to the palatial organization, possibly reflecting specific textile products and/or a distinct sector of the local textile industry.

Insights into the Professional Life of a Weaver's Family from Sippar Across the 6th Century BCE

Louise QUILLIEN

This talk aims to reconstruct the professional life of a weaver's family during three generations from the reign of Nabopolassar (627–605) to the one of Cambyses (530–522). Šamaš-aḫ-iddin, father of Šāpik-zeri and grandfather of Gimillu, was working for the temple of Sippar. His main task was to manufacture the garments offered to the gods during religious ceremonies. He has the speciality of colour wool weaver and dyer. His son has taken following the work, and became the head of a team of weavers, as the grandson some years after. More than sixty cuneiform texts from the temple archive document the professional activities of the family. The study of this family across the time allows us

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to understand what were the specific tasks of the coloured wool weaver: what garments they had in charge, what material they used. We can also try to deduce what technics they employed even if they are not described in the texts. We can evaluate the degree of specialization of craftsmen in the temple and see how the workers were organized in teams, with a strict hierarchy. At least, this family is a good example of how the workers passed down their knowledge and social position from one generation to the next.

In the mind of early weavers: perceptions of geometry, metrology and value in the Neolithic Aegean

Kalliope SARRI

The Neolithic period in the Aegean has not yielded any textile remains. So we know very little about textile production and even less about the identities of the earliest Aegean weavers. Some related information comes from the contemporary toolkit and from textile imprints on wet clay. To this indirect evidence pottery decoration can be added. This often shows symmetrical painted or relief systems, which have been interpreted as textile patterns from their strong similarity with patterns that are timelessly present on textile products. Such ornaments can be seen as representations of coloured textiles while they sometimes allow a recognition of specific textile techniques.

Apart from this, the textile patterns reveal the abilities of the weavers in calculating, in conceptualizing and representing geometrical shapes, in creating hierarchies and in estimating sizes, volumes and values. This observation is the key for the connection of the Neolithic textile art with measuring systems, which are still not known from this cultural stage of the Aegean area.

The communication approaches the tracing of early metric systems in the Aegean Neolithic through the analysis of textile patterns and comments on the calculating abilities of textile workers in a culture whose calculating and metric systems are not yet known.

Social dimensions of textile use in Middle and Late Chalcolithic Anatolia

Ulf-Dietrich SCHOOP

Anatolia saw a dramatic increase of interest in textile production beginning in the last centuries of the 5th millennium BC and lasting throughout the fourth and third millennia BC. It is argued that the exchange and the consumption of textiles assumed a key position in the definition of social relations during this time. This contribution aims to investigate the social and economic context in which this development took place, the identity of the producers and their motivation to invest a considerable amount of labour into the manufacture of cloth. I will also offer some thoughts on the question why this development coincided with the widespread adoption of the vertical loom and how the transition from plant to animal fibres fits into the picture. The social role of textiles during the Late Chalcolithic appears to differ in some important respects from that of later times.

Craftspeople, craftsmanship and textile production in the Early Bronze Age Greece

Małgorzata SIENNICKA-RAHMSTORF

Prehistoric textile production continues to attract the interest of scholars studying the remains of textiles, as well as textile tools made of various materials, particularly clay, stone and bone. From Early

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Bronze Age Greece (the 3rd millennium BC) no actual fabrics have, however, been preserved, thus textile research can only investigate the numerous implements used in their production, primarily found in the settlements. The aim of this paper is to discuss craftsmanship in Early Bronze Greece (particularly the Peloponnese). New insights regarding the use of fibres, textile tools, changes and innovations of techniques and implements, and the organisation of manufacture will be presented. The textile tools commonly preserved at many sites display various qualities and methods of production, from 'home-made' to standardised, and it seems that in some cases (especially in EBA II) they may have been made by professional craftsmen and widely distributed. In other cases they were rather made for private use. By analysing the archaeological contexts of such finds (especially spindle whorls, loom weights, bone and metal objects) it is to a certain extent possible to reconstruct patterns in their use, for example regarding the working areas and the organisation of textile manufacture. There is no secure evidence for textile workshops in this period, but domestic manufacture seems to be more probable than professional or attached production. On account of the wide range of spindle whorls and loom weights attested, it is probable, as far as the types and dimensions are concerned, that textile craftspeople developed specialised skills in the manufacturing of yarns of various thickness and quality, and textiles of diverse quality, patterns and weaves, according to their needs or the requirements of the market, whether it was local or part of wider trade routes.

Textiles tools, significant markers of gender?

The case of the cremation cemetery Tell Shiukh Fawqâni (Syria)

Aline TENU

For a long time sexual identification of the dead was based on the material associated to them. Spindle whorls for instance were systematically considered as belonging to female graves because the link between textile work and women seemed obvious. The aim of this communication is to address this issue with data provided by the cremation burials excavated at Tell Shiukh Fawqâni (Syria). After a presentation of the material proper and the difficulties of identification it raises, I will discuss its association with female graves (established on the basis of bone analysis) and finally review its possible meanings. Are textiles tools markers of gender, or do they reflect the main occupation of the deceased during his/her life or do they have a symbolic significance?

Contemporary Actors and Bronze Age Textile Techniques from Greece. Experience Approach to Textile Work, its Specialisation and Apprenticeship

Agata ULANOWSKA

Textile production with its extensive *chaîne opératoire*, high labour inputs and the highest economic importance has undoubtedly been one of the key crafts in Bronze Age Greece. Its comprehensive understanding requires adopting different methodological approaches, such as studies of textile tools, workshops and dye-works and textual and iconographic investigations. More insights into textile work, the skill of textile workers and their specialisation may presently be grasped thanks to experimental approach to textile manufacturing.

In my paper I will argue that deliberately designed and controlled hands-on experience of modern actors in textile craft may also generate some analogies of how the textile work was organized, performed and apprenticed in the Prehistory, specifically in the Bronze Age Greece. I will draw on my five years' experience in teaching about textile production in Bronze Age Greece at the Institute of

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Archaeology, University of Warsaw and I will refer to my research project in which I document, assess and monitor the progress of students of archaeology in gaining an initial 'body knowledge' of textile craft over a longer period of time. In these experiments copies of Aegean textile tools are applied and questions about ergonomics and difficulty of various operational sequences of textile work, especially weaving, are asked.