

Suited and booted: costume and textiles in Europe from Neolithic to Roman times

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MARIE-LOUISE NOSCH (ed.). *Wearing the cloak: dressing the soldier in Roman times*. viii+144 pages, 60 colour & b&w illustrations, 1 table. 2012. Oxford & Oakville (CT): Oxbow; 978-1-84217-437-1 hardback £25.

SUSAN MÖLLER-WIERING. *War and worship: textiles from 3rd to 4th century AD weapon deposits in Denmark and Northern Germany* (Ancient Textiles Series 9). xvi+198 pages, 103 b&w & colour illustration, 8 tables. 2011. Oxford & Oakville (CT): Oxbow; 978-1-84217-428-9 hardback £30.

MARGARITA GLEBA & ULLA MANNERING (ed.). *Textiles and textile production in Europe: from prehistory to AD 400*. viii+470 pages, 343 b&w & colour illustrations. 2012. Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-84217-463-0 hardback £48.



Denmark has a particularly strong tradition of scholarly research into costume and textiles. Notable landmarks include Poul Nørlund's (1924) systematic study of the costumes from Norse Greenland, Margrethe Hald's two ground-break-

ing volumes, *Costumes of the Bronze Age in Denmark* (Broholm & Hald 1940) and *Olddanske tekstiler* (Hald 1950/1980), Lise Bender Jørgensen's monumental surveys of textiles, first in Scandinavia and then in northern Europe (Bender Jørgensen 1986, 1992), and Else Østergård's (2004) re-examination of the Greenland costumes and their context. Building on this inheritance, in 2005 the Centre for Textile Research (CTR) was established at the SAXO Institute in Copenhagen, under the directorship of Marie-Louise Nosch. Whereas the earlier studies had to be driven forward by

individuals, CTR was able to provide facilities which allowed collaborative work, cross-pollination of ideas and continuity of effort. The new organisation was committed to interdisciplinary research and the blending of historical and archaeological studies has proved to be one of its main strengths. From the start, it had an international focus, holding conferences that drew together scholars from all over Europe, and it quickly established an admirable record for publishing conference papers, thematic studies and individual theses. The three volumes to be reviewed here represent the latest in a fine series, published in English through Oxbow Books.

Roman military clothing

Wearing the cloak is an engrossing book, well-edited and well-illustrated. Taking its title from the Latin phrase, *sagum sumere*, which was a metaphor for waging war, the volume is a collection of essays on the theme of Roman military clothing. The authors come from different research backgrounds and draw on a wide range of archaeological, historical and art-historical sources. Michael Speidel sets the scene with a review of the different suites of clothing individual soldiers might possess and the context in which they would wear them. That is followed by two papers on the military supply network, by Kerstin Dross-Krüpe and Jinyu Liu, which demonstrate that the Roman army did not rely exclusively on local weavers, but could in certain circumstances draw on cloth from neighbouring provinces. Stefanie Hoss's examination of the changing appearance and significance of the military belt and baldric is enlightening for those of us who have to deal with the different types of belt fitting recovered from archaeological excavations. Margarita Gleba demonstrates that densely woven linen body armour was worn in Greece and Etruria from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods, while Hero Granger-Taylor argues that it is represented in derivative form by some of the twined-weave linens

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from Masada. A late Roman mummy painting of an army officer is the subject of a wide-ranging and exemplary study by Annette Paetz (formerly Schieck), which places the man, Tyranos, within the context of the army that policed the Egyptian trade routes in the third century AD. From Denmark itself comes a chapter by Susan Möller-Wiering on the textiles found with weapon deposits. The whole is rounded off by Graham Sumner whose superbly illustrated chapter illuminates the research behind his painted reconstructions of the clothing of soldiers in Egypt such as Tyranos.

Certain lacunae do need to be noted. The cloak which features in the title receives intermittent mention throughout, but it surely deserved a chapter of its own. Its different forms, the *paludamentum* worn by officers, the plain *sagum* and the hooded *paenula*, are touched on, but it would have been useful to see the context of their use accorded the same level of investigation as the belt and the body armour. A review of the archaeological evidence from the western empire might also have been expected: military sites, such as Vindolanda in Northumberland in Britain, the Roman forts in Germany and the coastal fortifications in Belgium and England, have all yielded collections of textiles, and in the case of Vindolanda they are supported by letters and notes recorded on wooden tablets recovered in excavation (the tablets receive mention in Jinyu Liu's paper). Nevertheless, given the alacrity with which CTR publishes its research, it will no doubt be possible to expand on these topics in later volumes. As it stands, it is already an important contribution to the study.

Danish ritual deposits

War and worship represents the extended study on which the single chapter by Möller-Wiering in *Wearing the cloak* was based. The weapon deposits found in eastern Jutland, Fyn and the islands of the Baltic, dating from the first to the fifth centuries AD, have been interpreted as 'sacrificed' booty, placed in lakes and bogs by the local population after a successful battle. As such, the changing character of the metalwork has been taken to reflect the shifting pattern of hostilities of the period. Few textiles have been preserved in the earliest sites, but four collections dated to the third and fourth centuries have been selected here for analysis (or in some instances re-analysis). Each of the four—Illerup Ådal, Vimose, Thorsberg and Nydam—has been given its own

chapter, in which the archaeological background and the textiles are described, after which the comparative material is reviewed and conclusions presented. There is also a useful appendix from Lise Ræder Knudsen on the tablet weaves. A few quibbles should be mentioned here. The English has not been edited to the same standard as in the other two volumes and there are times when ambiguously-worded sentences leave the meaning unclear. It is also disappointing to find that no fibre identification has been attempted. Although the author may well be right in stating that the textiles are likely to have been made of wool, it would not have been difficult to check this by microscopy. In addition, the very thorough chapter on comparative material would have benefited from some diagrams to illustrate the construction of the garments described in the text.

However, it seems churlish to raise these concerns, since this is undoubtedly an important work, which presents some significant conclusions. First of all, good quality textiles were found at all four sites: they lack the character of discarded textiles from middens and they accord with the interpretation of these sites as ritual deposits. Some of the textiles had been used to wrap weapons, but garments, possibly officers' clothes, were also recovered, rolled-up and whole. The textiles and costume styles fit most naturally in the Germanic world and support the conclusions drawn by others that the finds reflect the structure of Germanic armies. There are also hints that the regional sources of the textiles may have shifted with time, in the same way that the sources of the weaponry did. Finally, and most importantly, at all four sites cut seams and slash marks indicate that the textiles have been 'sacrificed' or 'killed' in the same manner as the weapons. The project has therefore validated and expanded the earlier studies of these sites and amply demonstrates the value of studying textiles alongside other artefacts.

European overview

Textiles and textile production in Europe from prehistory to AD 400 is clearly intended as a work of reference, rather than a book to be read from cover to cover. There is an introductory chapter on general principles, but the main body of the text has been divided into 14 sections, each devoted to a separate European country, and each containing chapters contributed by authors who write within their own area of expertise. For the most part, all sections

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follow the same format and incorporate the same general themes, although the individual authors have been given licence to emphasise particular local issues and, where warranted, there are expanded pieces on significant sites such as Hallstatt, Hochdorf and Verucchio. There are, however, some omissions, notably France and the Low Countries. As the editors say in the preface, surveys of textiles from The Netherlands and Roman France have recently been published, but that does not really explain why no summary was included here. Prehistoric Britain also seems to have been left behind: for some reason, little evidence published later than 1993 has been incorporated. On the other hand, it is encouraging to see countries such as Greece, Latvia and the Slovak and Czech Republics being brought in, while Ukraine proves to have produced some stunning remains, including colourful resist-dyed textiles, embroidery, beadwork and garments with sequin-like gold attachments. The standard of illustration is particularly high and the numerous close-up photographs, charts and coloured line-drawings make it an enjoyable book to browse through.

This volume has been produced under tight editorial control and much thought has been given to making it accessible for the general archaeological reader. A table of local chronologies with real dates appears at the start of each section, and within the text subjects which may cause confusion (such as the distinction between the phases of the Hallstatt site and the dating of the Hallstatt period) are clarified as the need arises. The countries have been arranged alphabetically, which means that Austria and Switzerland are at opposite ends of the book and the Scandinavian countries have been dislocated. Although this seems at first odd, in fact it facilitates navigation through the volume. Careful cross-referencing between sections ensures that an entry on the same subject in an adjacent country will not be missed. Another benefit of this approach is that periods and zones which are at present poorly covered can be isolated within each country as subjects for future research.

In some ways this is a successor to Bender Jørgensen's 1992 volume, expanded to include material from

southern Europe. The amount of detail contained in this book could not have been encompassed by one person and the multi-author approach is its great strength. On the other hand, a final chapter summarising the main trends—perhaps by Bender Jørgensen herself—would have been welcome. Anyone wishing to find Europe-wide evidence for the spread of spinning practices, or changes in weave structure in parallel with loom type, will find it all here, but it would have been useful to see it brought together in a final summary. Even so, this is a magnificent work of reference, which deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in European prehistory and the Roman period.

Each of these volumes is immensely satisfying in its own way. Each makes a contribution to archaeological research and is a tribute to the high standard being maintained in Copenhagen. Of course, in an ideal world, each country would establish its own centre for textile research. In the absence of Utopia, however, it is heartening to find textile studies in such good hands.

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