

**King's College London, Centre for Hellenic Studies, Special Events**

*28 January 2012*

**Anatomy Lecture Theatre, Strand Campus, King's College London, Strand, WC2R 2LS**

***The State of the Arts - Early Applied Arts* “**Early Textiles and their Study**”**

**ABSTRACTS**

***Introduction: Early Textiles and What We Learn from Them***

**Margarita Gleba**, Senior Research Associate, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

Since early prehistory, textiles have had more than simply a utilitarian function and in many societies they were among the most important objects of applied arts. A textile is the result of complex interactions between resources, technology, and society and as such, it is a repository for (prized) fibres, dyes, dedicated human labour, skill and art, as well as social meaning. Textiles thus have an enormous potential in archaeological and historical research to inform us of social, chronological and cultural aspects of ancient societies. This introductory paper will provide an overview on early textile preservation, analytical techniques and examples which illustrate the enormous variety of information which can be obtained through study of this fascinating material.

***The Study of Textiles and the Understanding of Texts: Extant Silks and English Medieval Documents***

**Lisa Monnas**, independent researcher, London

awaiting abstract

***Teaching the History of Early Textiles in UK Institutions***

**Jane Bridgeman**, Associate Lecturer, Central Saint Martin's School of Art, London

awaiting abstract

***Textile Conservation and the Study of Early Textiles: knowledge, treatment and intervention.***

**Elena Phipps**, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This paper will discuss the role of conservation, its contributions and impact on the study of early textiles. It will include a discussion of documentation, analytical processes, treatment, as well as storage and access, utilizing the author's experience as a textile conservator for over 30 years at the Metropolitan Museum, and in the design and planning of the Antonio Ratti Textile Center in 1988-1995, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of over 32,000 world textiles from antiquity to contemporary times.

### ***Research into Early Textiles in the UK and its Current Reflection in our Institutions***

**Hero Granger-Taylor**, independent researcher, London

The first part of the talk will illustrate the expanding interest in early textiles which took place across the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reaching what was perhaps a high point in the 1960s. Over this 150-year period, collections of textiles grew, the designs of early textiles influenced contemporary design and research into the history of textiles increased in quantity and quality.

The middle part of the talk will deal with the last fifty years, a period of diversification and the involvement of a greater range of professionals. Archaeological textiles came to the fore during this time. Perhaps against expectations, the research into early textiles largely moved out of our own institutions, with individual researchers increasingly reaching out to international networks.

The last part will look in more detail at our two largest museums, the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum, and the current status of early textiles within them. University museums will be briefly considered as an important potential link between new research and established collections.

The talk will conclude with some thoughts on possible reasons for the apparent decline in the status of our subject, ranging from the decrease of involvement of men in textile research, perhaps as a result of the decline in the textile industry, to the current comparative absence of patterning and detail in contemporary applied arts, particularly architecture.

### ***Flying carpets? India in Egypt***

**John Peter Wild**, Honorary Research Fellow in Archaeology, University of Manchester

The Ptolemaic and Roman port of Berenike on the Red Sea coast of Egypt was host to a significant number of resident Indians engaged in the lucrative, if risky, trade across the Indian Ocean. Some of their worn-out cotton clothing was dumped in Berenike's middens, including a number of heavy pile fabrics, which are discussed in this paper.

### ***France - the very long tradition of 'textile analysis' inherited by the Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens in Lyon***

**Sophie Desrosiers**, Maître de Conférences, Histoire des Techniques, École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris

The talk will show how the structural analysis of textiles as taught at CIETA from the 1950s was developed by two teachers, Félix Guicherd and Gabriel Vial, and grew out of their experience as professors at the Textile Industry School in Lyon.

The duties of Guicherd and Vial when at the Textile Industry School had included, in age-old tradition, teaching student textile engineers how to analyse the structure of any given textile sample. This knowledge was necessary because, in their future work, these engineers would be expected to be able to copy, within the firm that employed them, a range of silk textiles of varied origins according to the demands of fashion. When working in parallel for CIETA, Felix Guicherd and Gabriel Vial adapted this way of teaching to the needs of textile historians. They also added to their previous repertoire structures such as samite, the typical weave of Byzantine silks, which had fallen out of use. Guicherd and Vial showed textile historians how, by looking at specific features in any given historic example, it should be possible to deduce the setting (*montage*) of the loom in question and from this also to go on to recognise the design constraints the loom itself would have imposed.

Using the methods developed by Guicherd and Vial, over the last sixty years textile historians have been able to reconstruct important details of many weaving traditions. These have helped us to identify the origins of individual surviving textiles and to date them, to recognise the process of technology transfer and to differentiate textiles of different qualities, this last an important consideration for social history.

Preserved early silks as well as written documents show that the practice of analysing the structure of woven fabrics for the purposes of copying them has existed for at least two millennia.

### ***Scandinavia – From Household Practice to Archaeological Insight***

**Lise Bender Jørgensen, Professor**, Department of Archaeology & Religious Studies, Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Trondheim

Textiles are usually considered as belonging to the sphere of women, currently as well as in the past. This certainly applies to Archaeology, where the study of ancient textiles to a great extent has been carried out by women scholars. The paper explores the history of textile studies in Scandinavian archaeology, where the first to perceive textiles as an interesting field of study were prominent male scholars. Female scholars of ancient textiles were considered assistants and technicians, although some took the doctoral degree and became academics. As rather strong-minded ladies, they became marginalised in male-dominated Scandinavian archaeology and were regarded as specialists on the periphery. It is only recently that textile studies have become fully acknowledged as an integrated part of archaeology, and indeed as fully-fledged academic scholarship. The paper discusses how modern gender issues have structured perceptions of an ancient craft, as well as presenting an outline of the potential for insights offered by textile studies into the lives of women in Prehistoric and Early Historic Scandinavia.