

lectures given by The Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for Textile Research to the students at the Design School in Kolding, Denmark, this provides an original angle on the subject as an interdisciplinary approach to how dress (or costume) can be thought about in various periods of the past. With contributors including skilled crafts people, historians, museum curators, media studies researchers, textile designers, conservators and archaeologists, this is a truly interdisciplinary approach and shows both how many disciplines are researching in this area and the diverse audiences interested in costumes from the past.

The book has eleven chapters by seventeen contributors and is arranged chronologically, spanning from Minoan dress in Bronze Age Crete, Renaissance and Baroque royal costume to female dress construction in the last 200 years. It is amply illustrated in colour throughout and certainly fulfils the editors' invitation 'to dive into the colourful world of dress'.

All of the authors deal with methods for understanding and interpreting dress in the past from a wide range of sources of evidence, albeit in very contrasting ways. The evidence for dress ranges from actual preserved garments, fragments of cloth, textile processing equipment, representations and written accounts. Most of the authors are dealing with a limited range of sources and have to make the most of their evidence. The range of approaches is therefore a significant aspect of this volume. Nosch (Ch. 1) uses levels of technology to show how the colour, shape and pattern on female dress in Bronze Age frescoes of the Cycladies in Greece match up to archaeological evidence of dyes, weaving technology and garment fit. In a complementary approach, Anderson investigates types of Viking Age cloth from the textile production tools alone (Ch. 6). Gleba compares literary, archaeological evidence and iconography of Scythian dress from Greek, Persian and Scythian sources (Ch. 2). From this she is sceptical of the non-Scythian sources, which emphasize feature such as the pointy hat, that rarely feature in the Scythian sources. Mannering (Ch. 5) uses a quantitative analysis of figures on tiny gold sheets from the Scandinavian Iron Age to understand garment type and combinations worn by men and women.

If it seems that poor evidence is the sole hindering factor in our understanding of dress in the past then Mathiassen and Lielund's chapter is an informative comparison (Ch. 9). They present some of the problems they faced when asked to provide costumes for the characters in a televised living history event. Despite ample sources of evidence (museum stores of clothing, drawings, painting and plates in fashion magazines), they found it challenging to put this information into a detailed social context. A request for a complete outfit for a shoemaker's wife in 1840 leads to further ques-

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*Dressing the Past*, edited by Margarita Gleba, Cherine Munkholt & Marie-Louise Nosch, 2008. (Ancient Textiles Series 3.) Oxford: Oxbow Books; ISBN-13 978-1-842-17269-8 paperback £25 & US\$50; 167 pp.

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As the title implies, *Dressing the Past* is about the process of understanding costumes in the past. It looks at many approaches to research and multiple ways to express the research results; as academic publication, conservation of original clothing, reconstructions of full costumes or impressions of these costumes expressed in the media. Originating from a series of

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tions; did she wear individual garments such as apron, headscarf and shawl differently inside or outside of the house? Which materials could she afford? What was her taste in colours? These questions of social context are addressed elsewhere, as are the practical problems faced with such gaps in research or 'black holes' as Vestergaard Pedersen calls them (Ch. 7).

Although the book is not solely about reconstructions, this is one of the major themes. The majority of authors show illustrations of costumes made in the style of their period, describe their experience of making such costumes or discuss their role in display. These issues are approached differently according to the authors' remit and skills. For example, as a professional weaver who has worked on a number of museum reconstructions Nøgaard (Ch. 4) describes how she reconstructed an Iron Age costume from Huldremose, Denmark using information from fibre, weave structure and dye analysis of the original excavated fragments. By contrast from a conservator's perspective, Aneer (Ch. 8) describes the treatments used to transform the ragged remains of a seventeenth-century Swedish king's battle costume into an impression of the splendid outfit it would once have been. Both work with the interpretation between ancient original and modern display object with skill, but approach it quite differently. In several of the chapters, the authors express a tension between the interpretation of the sources and their ability to provide enough information to make a full costume. For some, this problem is felt more intensely because of the contrast between the huge popularizing effect of reconstructions and the problematic nature of the source materials (Mannering Ch. 5).

Despite the issues that incomplete or biased sources may provide, there is a genuine demand to understand complete costumes for living history events, museum reconstructions and television dramas. Here there is a real sliding scale from those made using authentic techniques and materials to produce near copies, to the use of visual codes to indicate a period and place without any attempt at material authenticity. An interesting example is provided by the costumes reconstructed for the Hungarian National Museum, where they use archaeological artefacts (buckles and fibula) as part of costumes (Hendzsel *et al.* Ch. 3). This is a novel way of displaying original artefacts that could be applied elsewhere.

Where attention to detail is the key in some contexts, Borrell's account of dressing the past for costume dramas (Ch. 11) is in complete contrast. Not about objective truth, films convey something quite different. The costume designer creates an impression of the period where visual clichés are sufficient and the glamour of leading female characters is paramount. It

was enough for Elizabeth Taylor in the film 'Cleopatra' to wear Egyptian style headdress and make up, but the dress remains distinctly 1960s. While such an approach may cause contention with academics, the chapter is valuable in pointing out why this approach sells films and is therefore enough to satisfy the producers.

The book is intended to be a handbook by specialists for non-specialists. By non-specialists, they include costume designers, hobby enthusiasts, museum curators and historians (presumably specialist in areas other than textiles or costume). This is an interesting audience and I am sure they will find many useful ideas in this book. My only concern is that while the book provides an open forum for this discussion, it lacks some of the historical background to this subject and hence the context to which the book belongs. This is relevant as some of the debates have been quite fierce. For example, museum, or worse re-enactment, costume reconstructions have often been viewed with little respect by textile researchers, considered unscientific and relevant only for their popularizing effect (for a summary of this debate see Bender Jørgensen 1994, 109). There is also a call for clarity in the decision-making process behind textile reconstructions or replicas (for example Gilbert 2005, fig. 17). Similar debates exist in experimental archaeology, where there is conflict between the use of practical experiments, such as reconstructions, for research purposes and for recreational re-enactment or demonstration (Outram 2008, 3).

From my own perspective as an archaeologist researching textiles and leather, I think this volume should be commended for taking a brave step forward in dealing with the tricky relationship between the evidence for, and the interpretation of, the perishable remains of dress. In this way, some of the papers may also be relevant to researchers working with other organic materials. Overall, I think this volume is an excellent resource and would recommend it as an enjoyable and useful starting point to understanding dress in the past with sufficient scope to open up the subject in a broad and thoughtful manner. Equally because of the diversity of approaches, geographical areas, contributing disciplines and periods, I am sure specialist textile researchers will also find new ideas among those that are more familiar to them.

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