

# Medieval News

April 2016 No. 4



Textiles in Late Antiquity...



# Medieval Histories this week...



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## Medieval News

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## Photo (frontpage):

A decorative panel from a furnishing, representing Pan and Dionysus, ca. 4th-5th century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Photos are to the best of our ability either published by permission or under the CCA.



*A tapestry weave of dyed wools and undyed linen from Egypt, ca. 6th-8th century A.D.  
Sarah DeSantis/Brooklyn Museum. Currently exhibited at ISAW*

## Textiles in Late Antiquity

In Late Antiquity, textiles played a significant role in both public and private life – economically, politically and cultural.

Both from an economic and a cultural point of view textiles played a very important role. Narrative sources witness to the use of textiles and clothes as important sign of economic, cultural or religious power (or the lack thereof). But extant textiles also furnish a colourful glimpse of their importance as social and cultural markers.

Of overall importance are the many pieces of clothing and fragments of textiles, which archaeologists aka grave-robbers salvaged from the Egyptian sand. Early finds, reportedly from Saqqârah, ended up in Turin, Louvre and the British Museum. However, in 1883 digging began at

Akhmim and large collections of tunics, curtains and other textiles – whole or fragmentary - fragments began to fill the coffers of the large museums as well as the booming market for antiquities. Unfortunately mummies were more often than not unpacked in order to retrieve the colourful and patterned pieces, while the more humble undecorated linens and wools were discarded. Of special interest were the textiles embellished with applied silk and the occasional use of gold yarn to couch these.

Part of this interest was undoubtedly fuelled by the Arts & Crafts Movement, which led to the creation of large public collections intended to foster the fine arts and techniques of textile productions of the late 19th and early 20th century. Estimates vary, but it is generally believed





*Fragments of a hanging that represent a servant opening a curtain possibly from Egypt, 5th century A.D. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Currently exhibited at ISAW/NYU*

that 100.000 – 150.000 pieces may be found in collections in America, Europe, and Asia. As yet, international collaboration has not been able to secure funding for doing a full and proper registration of the diverse collections. In stead, beautiful collections help to focus the attention towards the artistic merits of the many beautiful patterns and decorations. However, the last 20 years have also witnessed an explosion in the scientific studies of the material.

Another significant branch of textile production was the manufacture of large wall

decorations. Such hangings as well as curtains played a very important role in the upper-class houses at that time. In Late Antiquity they seem to have superseded the colourful paintings of the Roman villas. But textiles were also widely used as cushions

Motives were, however, the same: gardens with fruit trees, seascapes with monsters and mythological themes. Later Sassanian motifs like winged animals, palmettes and hunting scenes became fashionable.

Some of these textiles were also used in a liturgical context as is witnessed by the inventory of the Ecclesia Cornutanensis, a house-church built at a villa near Tibur (today's Tivoli near Rome) around 471. The Charta (pp. 146 - 48) outlines the deed which consisted of a piece of land, silver utensils to the weight of 541 Roman pounds, bronze chandeliers and three sets of curtains – of silk, half silk and linen from Aquitaine. Listed were also covers to be used at the altar or to cover the graves of the saints as well as liturgical vestments with golden bands (clavi) to be used by the clergy. The document is interesting because it stipulates the colours in detail – purple could be had in a full version as well as in more pale greenish or whitish versions. To judge by the specifications, a liturgical service in the church must have been a dazzling and colourful experience.

Excavations around the Mediterranean have unfortunately not as yet led to a precise understanding of how these large textiles were produced and what particular kinds of looms were used. However evidence in the form of papyrus illustrations witness to the existence of professional workshops. Two distinctive types of tools used in these establishments have been identified: pattern-books present-

ing general iconographic repertoires and cartoons, and 1:1 scale guides for weaving tapestry textiles. Detailed analysis by Galliker has shown that a significant body of conventions existed and that these were perpetuated for centuries. In itself, this underlines the professional character of much of this textile production in Late Antiquity.

However, these finds from Egypt should not mislead us to believe that textile production and consumption were the prerogative of the Egyptians. Precious textiles were without a doubt produced as well and in abundance in Syria, Palestine, and Constantinople and further into Asia Minor. Early finds from Dura-Europos, Palmyra and Masadah have shed light on the importance of those regions for both textile imports and textile production on a larger scale.

From an imperial decree from c. AD 300 we also learn that textile workshops (gynaeceae/gynaieia) as well as dying work-

shops could be found in both Southern France and Tunisia. In medium-sized cities like Oxyrrhynchus, we know that about 60 % of the population was involved in the textile production, which produced the short tunics and cloaks used in the Roman Army.

## SOURCE:

### **The Cambridge History of Western Textiles**

By David Jenkins (ed)  
Cambridge University Press 2003

### **Middle Byzantine Silk in Context: Integrating the textural and Material Evidence.**

By Julia L. Galliker  
Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 2014

### **Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity**

By Thelma K. Thomas (Ed)  
Princeton University Press 2016

*A fragment of a tapestry representing two figures from Egypt, ca. 7th-9th century A.D. Byzantine Collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC*







*A child's tunic with hood tapestry weave of dyed wools from Egypt. ca. 5th century A.D.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY*

## Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity

Moving from white togas to glittering purple silks, powerful textiles became a singularly effective way of signalling wealth and influence in Late Antiquity (AD 200 – 600). This spring an exhibition in NY offers a unique view of some of the bits and pieces still in existence.

This spring, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at the New York University (NYU) has mounted an exhibition on how people in Late Antiquity used sumptuous and powerful textiles to design their identity.

Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity, offers intimate glimpses into the lives of those who commissioned and used textiles and more sweeping

views across Late Antique society (roughly third to seventh century CE). The exhibition brings together over fifty textiles of diverse materials, techniques, and motifs to explore how clothing and cloth furnishings expressed ideals of self, society, and culture.

By their valuable materials and virtuoso execution, the textiles displayed their owners' wealth and discernment. To modern

viewers, the materials and techniques also attest to developments around the Mediterranean world and farther east along the routes of the silk trade. The Late Antique owners, in choosing from a vast repertoire of motifs, represented (hopefully more than actually) the prosperity and well-being of their households. The owners represented themselves through the distinctively gendered imagery of manly and womanly virtues in mythological and Christian subjects so that in these textiles, we see distinctly personal manifestations of the religious transformation of the Roman Empire into a Christian Empire.

Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity has been curated by **Thelma K. Thomas, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts**, who is also the editor and a contributor to the show's accompanying catalogue. The exhibition

is open Wednesday to Sunday from 11 to 6 pm with a late closure at 8 pm on Fridays. A free guided tour is offered each Friday starting at 6 pm.

All objects on view in the exhibition were generously loaned by the following lenders: Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA

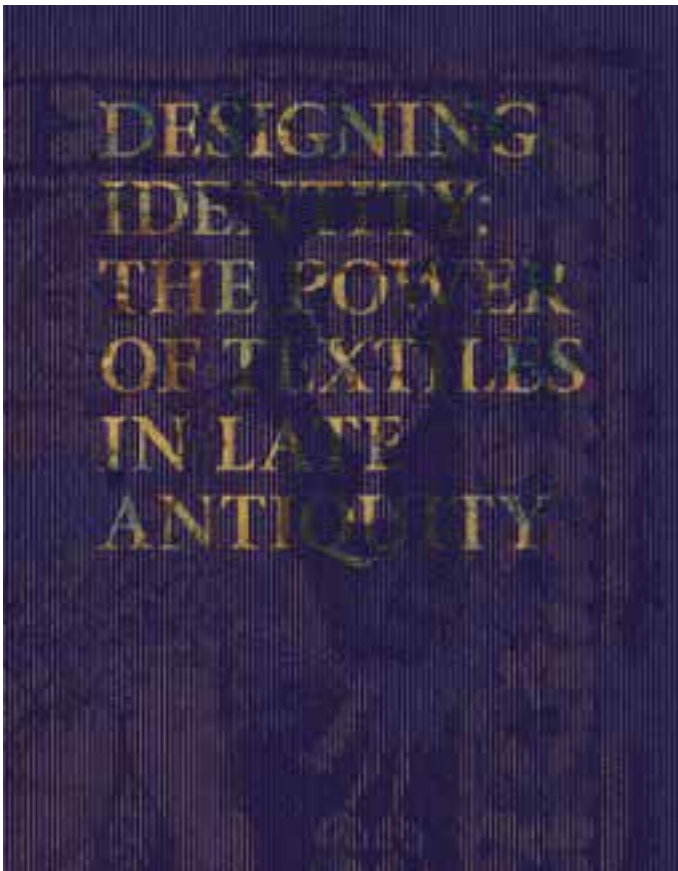
**Designing Identity:**  
**The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity**  
15 East 84th St. New York, NY 10028  
25.02.2016 - 22.05.2016

*Exhibition at NYU/ISAW © ISAW*



# Designing identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition on the Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity is both beautiful and informative



## **Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity**

Edited by Thelma K. Thomas  
Princeton University Press 2016  
ISBN: 9780691169422

The letters of Sidonius Apollinarius are known to be full of descriptions delineating the different cultural practices, which one might encounter in Late Antique Gaul – Late Roman life in the countryside, barbarians smelling of the rancid butter in their hair or – in this case – the plain lifestyle of a Roman, who turned ascetic priest. Through these and other similar vignettes we get precious insights into the role, which textiles might have played in this period signifying the person and its status through its accoutrement.

"On my arrival, [Maximus] came out himself to meet me. But how changed his walk from the old erect and rapid gait; how changed the old frank regard and hearty voice! His dress, his walk, his humility, his pallor, his mode of speech----all declared the churchman. And then his hair was short and his beard long; he had simple tripod seats; coarse Cilician hangings [sackcloth] covered his doors; the beds were featherless, the tables unadorned. His entertainment was as plain as it was kindly, with more vegetable than meat; if any richer dish appeared, it was brought not to him but to his guests."

*From letter by Sidonius Apollinarius to his friend Turnus c. 461 -7 Translation from Sidonius Apollinarius, Letters. Tr. O.M. Dalton (1915) vol. 2. pp. 3-47 ; Book IV*





*Coptic. Child's Tunic, 5th-6th century C.E. Flax, wool, 18 x 32 in. (45.7 x 81.3 cm) © Brooklyn Museum*

However, knowledge about the the diverse ways in which all this might have played out, comes from the 100.000 – 150.000 precious pieces of textiles, which were excavated – robbed – from graves in Egypt in the course of the 19th and early 20th century, and which were later sold or donated to the large museums in Europe and USA.



It stands to reason that the main collections will be found in the large museums in Europe – Berlin, Mainz, Louvre, British Museum and V&A keep vast numbers of pieces wrapped in acid-free paper and stored under rigid climatic control. However, the collections in USA are not insignificant and should be kept in mind by any serious textile historian or archaeologist working on the material.

Currently (2016) an exhibition in NY is exhibiting some of these American held pieces of textiles and fragments thereof. In connection with this, the curator of the exhibition, Thelma K. Thomas, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, has edited a very fine catalogue presenting and explaining the use and look of some of these treasures.

This is a very nice book, which anyone with a serious intention of experiencing and understanding the luxurious lifestyle of people in Late Antiquity will enjoy. The reason is, that textiles in numerous forms and qualities obviously played such an important role as literally couching the refined lives of the last Romans. The layout and the quality of the book obviously respects this.

Here we find cloaks and tunics presented – some embellished by appliques of silk or



*Tunic, 6th - 7th century, Egypt, Akhmim (former Panopolis) © The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

tapestry woven bands; but we also discover fragments of the ubiquitous hangings and curtains, which were later reused as shrouds or simply displayed in the tombs as wall-coverings. As any fine catalogue, the book holds a full inventory of what might be seen, complete with thorough descriptions and explanations of materials, dates and production methods. But we also find very valuable chapters on the collections in the museums, which have contributed so generously to the exhibition.

Of superb value, though, are the introductory chapters, which outline the material meaning of textiles in Late Antiquity, the use of charms of all sorts on garments and the continuity of Late Antique patterns and motifs, witnessing to the continued cultural importance of wearing, inhabiting and demonstrating “Romanitas” to one’s social peers in a world, which Sidonius and others thought was going awry. Here we encounter hangings and curtains depict-

ing not only Pan, but also the ubiquitous Dionysian figures accompanied by nymphs and set in mythological scenes filled with birds, putti and the lush vegetation of the Nile River; but we also meet the people themselves flitting in and out of colonnaded porticos wearing their tunics (short for men and long for women and embellished with the *clavis* and the applied roundels functioning as important charms and spells.

One such example – not shown at the exhibition but found in the catalogue (p. 57) – is a child’s tunic from Brooklyn dated to the 5th – 6th century. Here “shield-carrying putti hunt rabbits scurrying up and down the front of the child, who wore the tunic”. The hare was associated with the cult of Osiris and a significant part of the funeral rites [1] Thus, the tunic is a very fine specimen witnessing to the syncretism of the newly Christianised Egyptians steeped in a world filled with ancient rem-



iniscences.

Thus, the catalogue renders a service in between the traditional art-historical approach, where comparisons of motifs and form are ubiquitous, and the German pre-occupation with the archaeological details of spinning, weaving, texture and dyes etc. Here we find at least the beginning of a social-historical exploration of the way in which textiles were used to design one's identity in Late Antiquity.

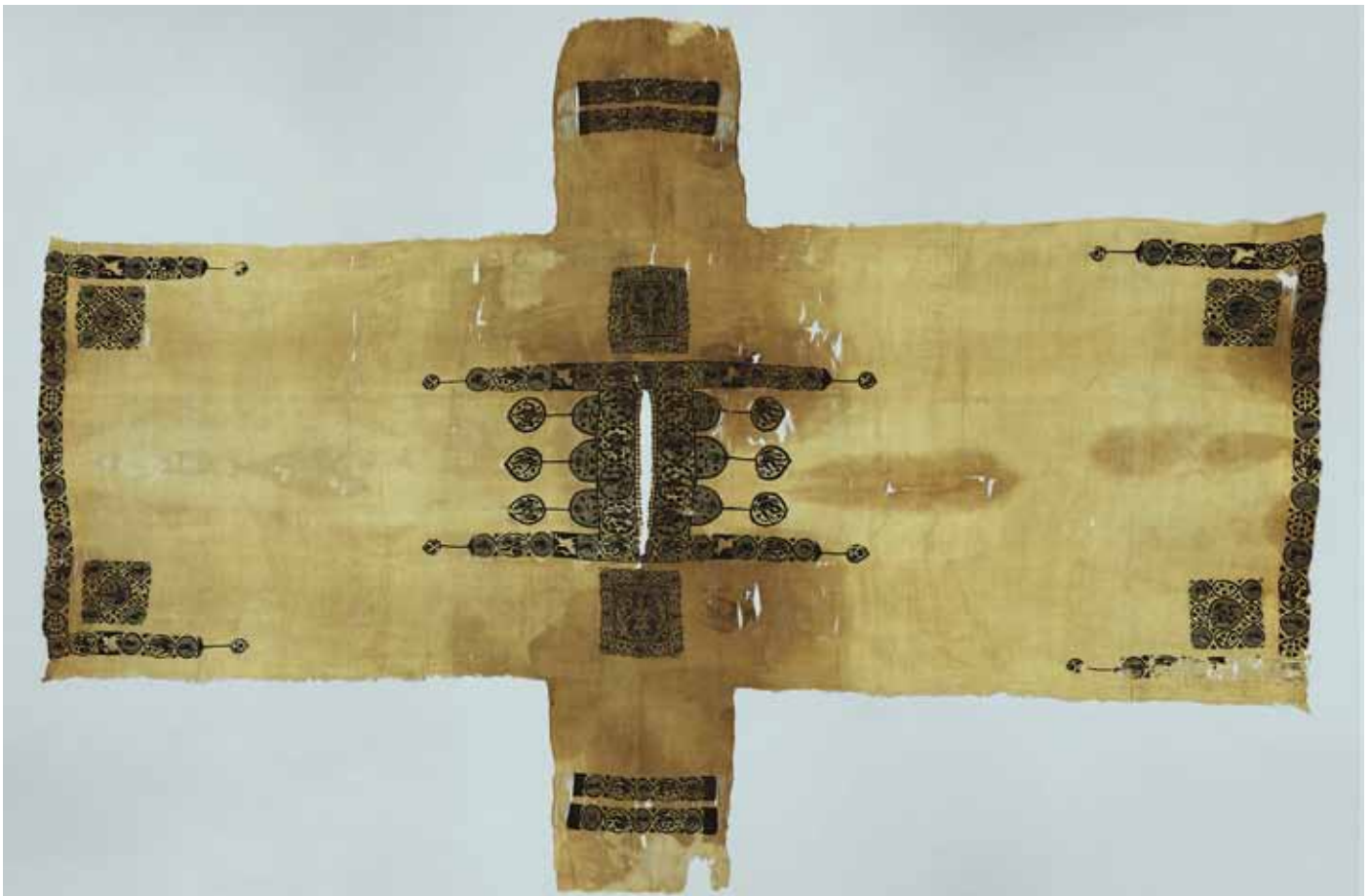
It is a fact that the so-called excavations of the graves in the 19th and 20th centuries were often no more than plain grave-robberies: the aim was to find and present as many fabulous patterns as possible to the people involved in the Arts & Crafts Movement as well as making a business out of selling the pieces to museums and collectors in order "to make an honest buck". The frustration is of course that the people in charge of the excavations unceremo-

niously disregarded information about where and under what circumstances the fabrics were found. Also, they threw most away, which did not appear spectacular. Today, we know that fragments belonging to the same ensemble can be found in different collections all over the world. The challenge is that the circumstances of the find may no longer be reconstructed.

Nevertheless, it is obviously possible to get a glimpse of this context by once again mulling over the scraps, which we are left with. Congratulations are certainly due to the curator cum editor/author. Hopefully, though, research will continue down this road in years to come, while the international community get busy organising web-based catalogues spanning all the large collections making comparative cultural history really prominent.

*Karen Schousboe*

*A tunic with Dionysian motifs from Egypt, Early 6th century A.D. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art*





*Large portion of a decorated hanging © RGZM*

## Byzantine Textiles in German Collections

More than 100.000 late Antique and early Byzantine textiles may be found in collections throughout Europe. Byzantine Textiles in German Collections Detailed studies of the collections in Germany continue to be published, while more detailed studies are carried out

In 19th and beginning of the 20th century, archaeologists working in Egypt discovered the many textiles, which had survived in the dry and hot climate of Egypt. But not only the linen in the Egyptian graves caught their interest. Significant collections of Byzantine textiles from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages were created by enthusiasts and collectors working their way through the desert. Today, thousands of fragments and even whole pieces

of clothing is kept in museums in Europe and the USA. The last ten to twenty years have seen an upsurge in the scientific studies of these invaluable pieces. Now publications lift the veil on the colours, the designs and the many uses of the sumptuous textiles, which came to characterise our understanding of the Byzantine Empire and the material culture, which came to dominate Eastern Mediterranean in this period.



## Mainz

The RGZM – the Römisch- Germanisches Zentralmuseum - has an extensive collection of 220 early Byzantine textiles, which are currently being evaluated in terms of the production techniques involved, the function of the textiles and the chronology. Basis of the research is a textile-technological examination of each piece. The textile-technical data and the decorative scheme will often allow to determine the original appearance and thus the original look and use of objects, which only exist as highly fragmented pieces. The textiles in this collection have been divided into two functional groups: clothing and textiles serving as furnishing, equipment and

functional textiles. Among the garments in the collection of RGZM are four full tunics and three full headcoverings. Textile technology studies have further identified 18 fragments of a front and/or back part of tunics, 15 tunic sleeves and three more head-coverings. Among Furnishing fabrics were identified 12 fragments of large-sized blankets that were often fitted to upholstery with ribbons. Six fragments derived from larger hangings, including a fragment, which must have belonged to curtain plus two other wall hangings. In the collection of RGZM are also two examples of functional textiles rarely encountered: A larger fragment of a hunting or fishing net from Karara and a thick covering or matting from the Egyptian city

*Fragment of Tunic with imitation of silk applique © RGZM*



of Crocodilopolis. Here too, the manufacturing technique of the objects are closely related to their function. Both the clothing and the use of equipment and textiles show that the textile trade in the early Byzantium was highly developed and specialized. This collection has recently been published by Petra Linscheid.

## Karlsruhe

The textile collection of BLM Karlsruhe contains 238 textiles from the early Byzantine period. Most stem from the collections amassed by the collections of Reinhard and Bock. These two well-known collectors of "Coptic" textiles sold parts of their collections of numerous major German and European museums and fragments and related pieces can be found in other collections. The fabrics are from early Byzantine graves in Egypt, more precise location information is not recorded. The fragments belong to the period between Late Antiquity and Early Islam (3 – 7th centuries). The remarkable thing about the collection in Karlsruhe, is the large number of those pieces that are of a relatively large size and with original edges. This is important, when trying to determine the former appearance and function of the pieces.

The collection holds two complete tunics and nine larger fragments. Especially important are thirteen fragments of early Byzantine silks that have been used as applied decoration on various garments. While some of these trimmings were probably cut from larger silk pieces, which were being recycled, other pieces of silk ornament have been woven to form. In the collection one may also find four full hairnets made in sprang technique. A total of fifteen larger fragments of curtains, draperies, rugs and upholstery fabrics il-



*Fragment from a cover of a chair? © Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe*

lustrate the upscale home decor early Byzantine period. Two larger fragments with diffuse pattern can probably be identified as curtains. Other fragments demonstrate the use of decorating with loops made of bright bright linen threads.

Exceptional are two-colored embroidered stripes. Embroideries are rare in the early Byzantine period, as decorative pieces were usually worked as woven bands. Iconographic significance has a Clavus – a vertical band used on Roman tunics - with several New Testament representations, including Mary with the Christ child. This Clavus belongs technically and stylistically to a small but homogeneous group of tunics with biblical representations dated rather late in to the 7th-9th centuries. (This collection has not been published yet.)

An inkling of the abundance of material kept in these collections come from the study of hairnets, which was undertaken by Petra Linscheid as part of her PhD. This study was published in 2011. In connection with her doctorate she catalogued 600 original head-covers, preserved either whole or as fragments. Most of these pieces had until then not been published. The



typology counted hairnets, scarves, hoods, caps and hats of diverse forms. Geographical and chronological mapping demonstrates that these types were used all over Byzantium in the whole period.

Most of these were worn by woman. However, different types were obviously worn by different social groups and served to differentiate people. Hoods were primarily worn by children and indifferent of their gender. The catalogue, which accompanies the text, presents 610 different headcovers, of which 20 are presented in full colour.

## Papyrus Patterns

It is well-known that the Egyptian sand has not only preserved large collections of textiles and fragments thereof. Hoards of

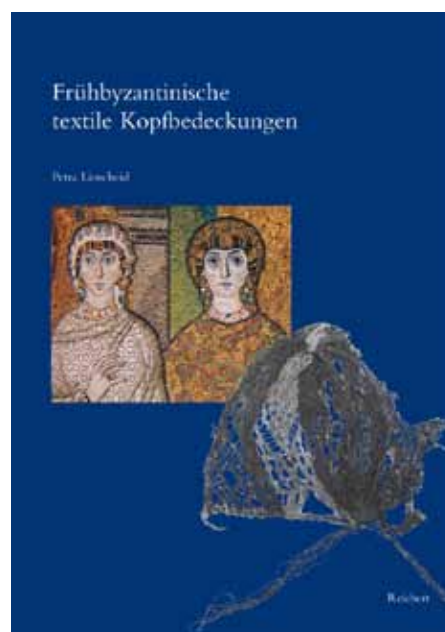
millions of papyri fragments have helped to make Byzantine Egypt one of the most well-known Mediterranean regions.

Part of these fragments have been studied by Annemarie Stauffer, who some years ago discovered papyri, which had obviously been used as patterns for weavers and textile workers in Egypt. This led to a systematic worldwide search through collections in order to discover more about this phenomena. She succeeded in finding more than a hundred such patterns. This allowed her to explore the ways in which such patterns were produced and how they were transformed into the medium of textiles. In a recent book (from 2008) she published a catalog of the papyri with corresponding items of preserved textiles, thus demonstrating the correspondence between the two media.



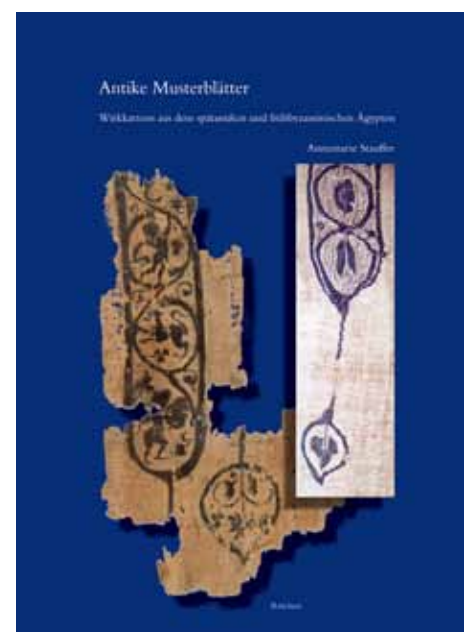
### Die frühbyzantinischen Textilien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums

By Petra Linscheid with a foreword by Ina Vandenberghe  
Schnell & Steiner 2016  
ISBN: 978-3-7954-3037-5



### Frühbyzantinische textile Kopfbedeckungen. Typologie, Verbreitung, Chronologie und soziologischer Kontext nach Originalfunden

By Petra Linscheid  
Verlag Reichert 2011  
ISBN: 9783895007217



### Antike Musterblätter. Wirkkartons aus dem spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Ägypten

By Annemarie Stauffer  
Verlag Reichert 2008  
ISBN: 9783895005848



COMING SOON:

# Atlas of Garments from Late Antiquity

## **Bildatlas zur spätantiken Kleidung**

By Achim Arbeiter and Sabine Schrenk

Schnell & Steiner, June 2016

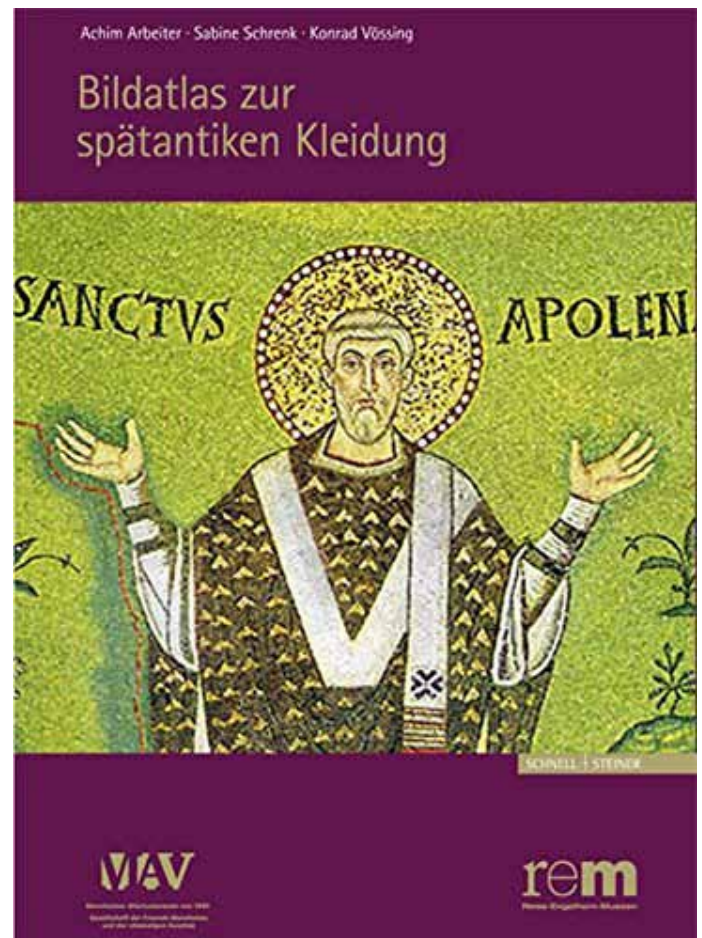
ISBN-10: 3795425913

ISBN-13: 978-3795425913

The book is accompanied with a CD

This atlas aims to present a lexicographic presentation of all types of garments, dresses and liturgical vestments, which can be identified in pictorial art or as preserved pieces in archaeological collections. Via a glossary it is possible to reach to the different concepts and words designating different types of garments. The book includes a compendium of texts from the Antiquity where garments are mentioned. Drawings of all the textiles accompanied by explanations of ways of wearing and draping the textiles makes it possible to recreate the garments.

Special notice is made of the shifts in looks, meanings and uses of the different garments over time. The atlas presents photos, drawings and quotations shedding



light on more than 65 different types of garments from every day wear to liturgical vestments.





There Be Bogs...



# New Viking Site in Newfoundland?

Guided by ancient Norse sagas and modern satellite images, searchers claim to have discovered what may be North America's second Viking site.

Archaeologists have found a stone hearth used for iron-working hundreds of miles from L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland. It may rewrite the history of the Vikings. Or that of the Basques?

The treasure found is a stone hearth used for working iron. However, the site – Point Rosee – lies very near the Channel-Port aux Basques, and may perhaps as well be the result of iron-forging carried out by fishermen, who famously fished the Grand Banks in the 15th century before Columbus set sails. Fishing cod is a business, which needs near-by ports, where fish can

*Photo from preceeding page: L'ance aux Meadows  
© advjoe.ca*

be dried. Presumably the fishermen had landing-places on the shore.

It is also known that the Christian I, king of Denmark sent an expedition West in 1472 to explore the fishing waters and perhaps proceed to further west. The expedition was financed by the Danish King and manned by a couple of German admirals (Pining and Ponthorst)

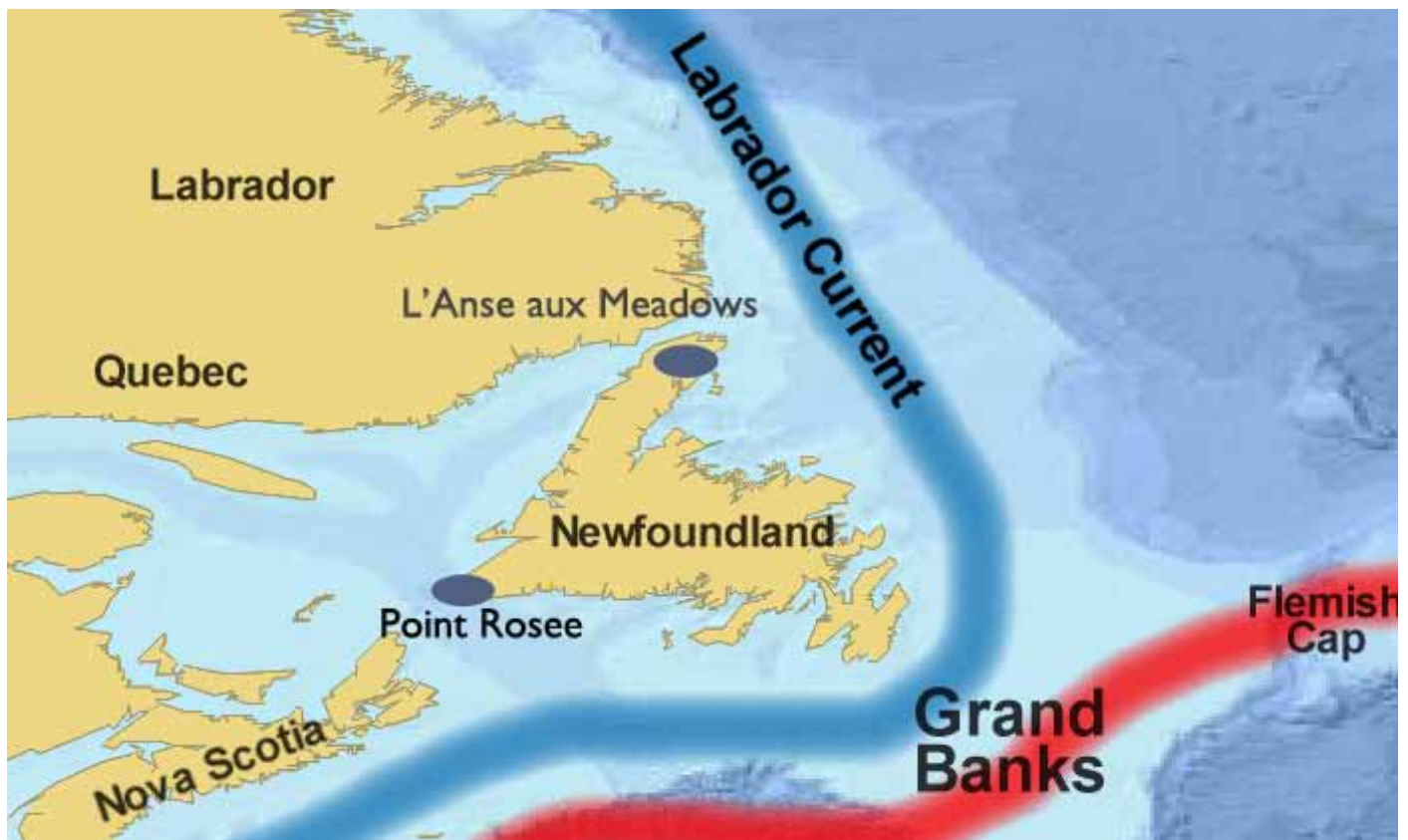
However, archaeologists, who have examined the stone hearth claims that the technology seems to be decidedly "Viking".

"The sagas suggest a short period of activity and a very brief and failed colonization

*The team from Point Rosee © BBC*







attempt,” says Douglas Bolender to National Geography, an archaeologist specializing in Norse settlements. “L’Anse aux Meadows fits well with that story but is only one site. Point Rosee could reinforce that story or completely change it if the dating is different from L’Anse aux Meadows. We could end up with a much longer period of Norse activity in the New World.”

According to him, the evidence is promising. The turf structure that partially surrounds the hearth is nothing like the shelters built by indigenous peoples who lived in Newfoundland at the time, nor by Basque fishermen and whalers who arrived in the 16th century. And, while iron slag may be fairly generic, “there aren’t any known cultures—prehistoric or modern—that would have been mining and roasting bog iron ore in Newfoundland other than the Norse,” says Bolender to National Geographic. Although Norse people knew of mining and mined some iron ore in a variety of locations throughout Scandinavia, most Viking era iron was smelted from

bog iron. However, the knowledge of how to extract bog-iron was not “lost” in later Scandinavia. The technology continued to be used into the later Middle Ages and must have been known by seamen, used to repair their ships in far-away corners of the world.

The jury is still out! It awaits C14 and if lucky - dendrochronological - dating of the find.

The site of the discovery, hundreds of miles south of L’Anse aux Meadows, was located by archaeologist Sarah Parcak, a National Geographic Fellow and “space archaeologist” who has used satellite imagery to locate lost Egyptian cities, temples, and tombs.

## SOURCE:

**Discovery Could Rewrite History of Vikings in New World.**

**By Mark Strauss**

**National Geographic, 31. March 2016**

# Expedition to Newfoundland 1472

In 1472 an expedition was mounted by the Danish king, Christian I, in order to explore the riches of Iceland and Greenland. Some believe they reached Newfoundland

Although notorious pirates, two German brethren in arms, Didrik Pining and Hans Pothorst, were sent out by a royal Danish order in 1473 on an expedition to find out which of several possible policies concerning trade in Iceland might be developed, and which settlements and harbours should be preferred. At this point in time, England and the Hanseatic League had a de facto monopoly on the arctic trade in stockfish from Iceland.

However, Pining's orders also included investigating what formerly, in the 11th century, had been called the regiones finitimae (i.e. "the coasts opposite those still-remembered but obsolete settlements in Greenland"). Probably around 1476 they sailed, to Greenland, where they were reported to have encountered hostile Inuit. Nothing specific suggests the expedition went further west. Nevertheless, in 1925 a Danish historian,

*Hans Pothorst in the murals in St. Mary in Elsinore © Medieval Histories*





Sofus Larsen published a theory that the expedition had indeed reached Newfoundland, an idea, which was fostered by a letter set to a later Danish king in 1551, describing the expedition as a Portuguese-Danish venture, fostered by the common interest in the cod-fishing on the Great Banks. This hypothesis was later hijacked by German historians, who found that Pining and probably also Pothorst came from Hildesheim. Hence, the discovery of America was German and streets in both Bremen and Hildesheim were named after the two buccaneers. Later, Portuguese historians prompted by the Salazar-regime expanded the story by linking it to the well-known expeditions to Newfoundland in the 16th century.

Today, the jury is still out. Maybe Pining and Pothorst did reach Newfoundland, maybe not. What is known is, that Pining later (in 1478) became governor (höfuðsmaðr) of Iceland. From this base, he proceeded to make his mark on politics in Iceland and Norway (where he was knighted). He was present at the funeral of Christian I in 148, continued to be a politically controversial person.

Pining and Pothorst are believed to have died around the same time. As a later chronicle had it, they “met with a miserable death, being either slain by their friends or hanged on the gallows or drowned in the waves of the sea”.

Not much more is known about the career of Pothorst. But he must have lived in Elsinore, where he was painted with his coat of arms in the late 1480s in the church of St. Mary. In the inscription he is named as donor of the murals in the aisle.

Recent discovery on Newfoundland of a stone hearth used for working iron has

preliminary been dated to the Viking Age. However, it might be the remains of another early expedition like the one, which perhaps were undertaken by Pining and Pothorst. C14 and other dating will decide the question.

## SOURCE:

### **The Discovery of North America twenty years before Columbus**

By Sofus Larsen

Levin & Munksgaard 1925

### **The German Discovery of America: A review of the Controversy over Didrik Pining's Voyage of Exploration in 1473 in the North Atlantic.**

By Thomas Hughes

In: GHI Bulletin (2003), No. 33, pp. 79 – 82.

*Aisle in St. Mary in Elsinore © Medieval Histories*







*Beating the bloom @ Ribe Viking Centre*

## Smelting Iron the Viking Way

Smelting Iron the Viking way is a remarkable simple process. It only takes some charcoal, some bog iron ore, roasted and crushed, plus a simple clay oven.

Bog ore may be found where streams flow from mountains and into peaty land. The streams carry the iron, which is then acidified because of the low level of oxygen in the bog. Bog ore is typically identified through the presence of an iridescent oily film floating in the bog. The bog ore may then be harvested in the form of pea sized nodules of bog iron, the raw material which may then be melted down.

Extracting iron from bog ore is a traditional summer activity, which may be experienced at any decent Viking museum in Scandinavia.

By experimenting, they have found that they are able inside six to eight hours to extract 4.5 – 5.5 kg bog iron from app. 35 kg roasted and crushed bog ore. The bog

*Tending the furnace @ Ribe Viking Centre*







*Detecting bog iron: film on the stream in Iceland*

iron might then be forged. In practice you need a furnace, which may be constructed of clay or stones, lined with a mixture made of sand, fiber (horse manure) clay, and water.

The furnaces might be built into the earth. The construction of such furnaces have been based on finds from archaeological excavations from the Iron Age. They usually measure app. 20 – 30 cm in diameter and a height of 80 – 90 cm. They are dug 40 – 50 cm into the ground.

One of the challenges is of course to get the 1200 – 1300o celcius, needed to smelt the iron from the bog ore. This is done by continually feeding the oven from the top with charcoal. This implies a process whereby any Vikings would need to first

burn a cartload of charcoal, which takes about five days.

When completed, the oven is turned over and the bloom is extracted. This consist of a mixture of low-carbon iron, slag and charcoal. This bloom has to be processed afterwards in order to cleanse it for residue. This is done by hammering at it for a while until the dross and slags falls away.

## SOURCE:

**Jernudvinding på Ribe Viking Center**

**Udvinding af myremalm på vikingeskibsmuseet i Roskilde**

**Jernudvinding på Moesgaard**

*A bloom @ Moesgaard*







*Experimenting with Bog Butter at the Nordic Food Lab. The butter is now 1 year, 6 months, 3 weeks old, and counting. Dug up at Floda by © Ben Reade. © Ben Reade*

# Medieval Bog Butter

**RECIPE: Make your own medieval butter and preserve it in an Irish Bog.**  
**Brian Kaller tells us how**

Like most people these days, we have a refrigerator to keep food fresh, and it runs on electricity – and here in Ireland, we get that from burning peat, or “turf.” A short walk from our house in the Bog of Allen, the land has been strip-mined to remove, press and dry the turf, in order to burn it in furnaces to boil water to run turbines to spin magnets to generate electricity to run refrigerators to keep food fresh.

Or you could do what Irish people used to do for thousands of years, and just bury food in the bog without all the steps in between. And when I say “food,” I really mean butter. It sounds bizarre, but there

were good reasons for it, and we’re experimenting with preserving food the same way ourselves.

Irish bogs are often misty and mysterious places, where local people would secretly speak their own forbidden language, teach children their faith, poach meat – and occasionally hide things. When farmers later drained areas of bog-land, they revealed the reddish ground under the water – thousands of years of compacted sphagnum peat moss, pressed into a solid mass. The farmers then scooped out the turf with special shovels, dried them at home, and burned them in the fireplace – and



today, machines do the same thing on a vaster scale.

Occasionally they find more than turf. Archaeologists have found ancient necklaces, coins, tools, swords, 1,200-year-old prayer-books, the remains of Viking settlements, and apparent human sacrifices. Not much decomposes in the acidic, oxygen-free bog-water, so tough organic material simply cures in it like leather. Shops around us sell “bog-oak,” wood from ancient trees that fell in the bog long ago, cured and darkened but still solid, and some writers believe that the Irish used to bury wood there intentionally to make musical instruments with the right tone.

And sometimes turf-diggers unearth packages of butter – small as fists or big as barrels, wrapped in bark, wood or baskets. One recent discovery, a barrel of butter

*Ancient Bog Butter © Armagh County Museum*



*Burying the Bog Butter at Mayberry © Brian Kaller*

weighing more than 35 kilos, dated from 3,000 years ago – and many such discoveries have been eaten, and were reported to be delicious.

More than 430 such finds have been recorded, and that does not count all the buried gastronomic treasure still waiting out there. Since we can suppose that people buried their butter to unearth and eat it later, and usually did so, these hundreds of finds must represent the small proportion of times that their owners died or the locations forgotten. This must have been a rather commonplace activity.

All the same, why butter, you ask? Probably because decomposers are slow to take apart fats anyway, and meat or vegetables would be more readily consumed. A surprising number of foods around the world are preserved by being buried in the ground, but they are usually dried foods in arid climates (cheese in Italy), or sub-Arctic countries where the ground is freezing (salmon in Sweden), or where the food is meant to ferment in some way (eggs in China).

Also, butter makes a valuable and high-calorie food for poor agrarian people; with it you can fry food or preserve things like potted meats. It was also taxed in medieval times, so burying it could have been a kind of tax evasion.

As with the other organic matter, butter did not go rancid in the waterlogged soil, and could be perfectly preserved after thousands of years. Archaeologist Daniel C. Fisher buried various meats in a frozen pond and a peat bog for comparison, and found that after a year, the meat buried in the bog had no more bacteria than the frozen meat – and remember, some of that fast-food meat might be more than a year in the freezer.

Finally, some authors have pointed out that preserving it this way would give the butter an earthy taste that some might have liked; recently unearthed butter, taste-tested by Irish schoolchildren, was reported to taste like well-aged cheese.

My daughter and I decided to do the same thing, making some butter at home and burying some in the bog-lands behind our house. In the old days this might have been done with a butter churn, but we were only doing small amounts, so we poured milk into a jar until it was half full and shook it – music is good for this part. At some point the sound of the sloshing changes, and you have a solid clump of butter in the middle of the liquid. In olden days many people would pat the butter dry of any milk-liquids, but we heated the solids off, not-quite

clarifying it. Then we solidified it, wrapped it in cloth, and set off from our house.

From our house it's a short walk to the Bog of Allen, where we dug a hole half a metre deep. We tied a rope around the cloth wrapping, and tied the other end of the rope to a nearby tree, and counted the steps in each direction to the neighbouring field. In six months or so we'll come back, and see how edible the results are. Such experiments combine home-schooling, home-cooking, and empirical science all in one, and help us re-discover the methods our forebears used to survive for generations.

*Brian Kaller*

*Brian Kaller blogs on restoring “Mayberry” and learning to be self-sufficient in rural Ireland. He lives near the Bog of Allen*

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**Bog Butter: a Gastronomic Perspective**  
By Ben Reade.  
In: Wrapped and Stuffed: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2012.







*Medieval Food from Lödöse Museum in Sweden © Lödöse Museum*

## Churning Butter with the Devil

Milking and churning butter was a competence belonging to the female sphere in Northwestern Europe. However, in the later Middle Ages, butter became a very important export article. This led to the development of a special motif: the devil's milkmaid.

The story about Egil and Bård begins with Aulvir asking to be treated as a guest to Bard, who is manager of a farm, which belongs to king Eric. But Bard is a skimpy man and offers his guests a most basic fare (and no ale). As it happens, the king arrives the same evening to Atla-isle and Bard is obliged to serve the beer, which he has kept from his wayfaring guests – Aulvir, Egil and their men. “Sumptuous was the banquet, and great the drinking within the hall”. Hereafter the story turns into a mighty drinking brawl, which naturally

Tables were brought forth and they were given food: bread and butter. Large bowls with curd (skyr) were also placed on the table. Bard said: “I regret much that I have no ale to offer you, though I would have liked to”

(From: Egil's Saga. Ed. By Bjarni Einarsson. Viking Society of Northern Research. University College 2003, p. 57)



*Castello del Buonconsiglio. Scene from June showing milking, collecting churning and packing. Source: Pinterest*

ends with Egil killing Bard. However, for our purpose here, we only have to note the two offerings: on one hand a plain meal consisting of bread, butter and sour milk and on the other a banquet with lots of ale.

Originally – in the Viking Age - butter was thus a plain, everyday product produced by women or children shaking pots of sour cream up and down and around until it cluttered. Another method was probably to fill a calf’s skin with the soured cream and hanging it from a wooden tripod or tree. The skin could then be swung back and forth until the cream split.

Soured, salted and kept in wooden caskets or alternatively buried in bogs – butter might be preserved for a long time. Another option was of course to serve it directly

on bread or as a condiment to fish. The latter option is even today very common in a Scandinavian context where “skinny” marine fish – typically cod or plaice – might

*Churn Lid from Scotland c. 585 – 630 © National Museums of Scotland*





be boiled and served in a very simple way with butter plus some pickled vegetables.

It has been estimated that 25 lbs of milk is required to make one pound of butter, the equivalent of the average daily yield of a cow belonging to the ancient Irish breed of the Kerry. Even if only produced in the summer, any decent farm with a herd of 8 – 10 cows would be able to churn out more than might be eaten on a good day. Easily preserved, stored and transported, butter was early on a valuable commodity, which might be taken to market or used directly to pay taxes, tithes and rents to the king, the church and the local magnates. Such “butter taxes” were then transformed into export articles, shipped from Scandinavia to the growing towns and cities of the Middle Ages.

An important precondition for this development may have been the more widespread adoption of the wooden churns, which made large-scale production more viable. “The archaeological material provides a picture of an emerging new technological complex surrounding butter between 1000 -1300, which involved high quality production for long-distance trading and tax paying”, writes Janken Myrdal. It is worth noting, though, that the growth in export and the rise in prices of butter in the later middle ages cannot be seen as the result of a technological innovation. Rather, the churn was adopted as part of the development of the new agricultural production system. Plunge churns are known from Roman Britain and the earliest extant churn lid can be found in the National Museum of Scotland and has been dated

*Västra Vemmerlöv church, Trelleborg Sweden Source: wikipedia*







*Butter presented to a banquet by a woman ridden by a devil. From a church in Dannemora in Sweden. Source: Wikipedia*

to AD 585 – 630. Nevertheless, the churn probably did not become widespread until the 12th or 13th centuries, when it created the opportunities for a more developed agrarian butter economy.

## Trade in Butter

Thus, the point is that at some time in the 12th – 13th centuries, butter gradually became a valuable trade commodity in Northern Europe. In the 13th century, Germans and Danes traded butter in Brügge and Damme, while butter was listed in lists of customs paid in Lübeck from the 14th century. Butter exports were huge and ships carrying cargoes of butter measured in læster are commonly mentioned

in the sources. One læst butter was the equivalent of 12 tonnes, in principle the equivalent of 1344 kg. In 1411 Margaret I, Queen of Denmark delivered 24.5 læster of butter to a merchant from Lübeck or the equivalent of more than 130.000 “modern” half-a-pound packages of butter. Butter was definitely big business. At the same time, butter became an important dish, which formed as chalices were served at medieval banquets. Long gone, were the days when butter was a plain daily fare on an old Icelandic farm.

## Hard Work

However, milking cows by hand is not an easy task. It is hard on the hands and any one old enough to suffer from arthritis has no role to play. Secondly, the production takes a lot of lifting, carrying and sifting. After having milked the cow, the milk has to be poured into shallow vessels in order to let the cream float to the surface, where it might be skimmed off. Finally, the churning itself is hard on the back. This is especially the case when using one of the “new” upstanding churns of the 13th and 14th centuries. More butter might be churned in one session, but more might also go wrong.

The cream was collected over a week and had to be slightly sour and slightly warm, 15 – 20° celcius. When churning, the woman had to lift the plunger to just above the surface in order to gather air and whisp the cream until the fat modules gathered. After the cream was churned, the butter and the buttermilk would be separated through a straining cloth and the butter would be paddled and pressed in order to remove the residue of milk. Finally, according to Janken Myrdal, it had to be washed in cold water and salted. Af-



terwards the churn had to be cleaned with hot water and sometimes scrubbed.

In the sagas we hear that milking and churning were the jobs of female slaves. Men might be mocked for milking cows or in general work with the herds. Janken Myrdal, who has written extensively on the medieval butter business and examined medieval wills from Sweden, tells us that cows would in general be bequeathed to women, while men would get the work-horses and the oxen.

## Butter Luck

There is no doubt that there was a special connection between woman and dairy cattle on the medieval farm. This was developed through experience, but also fostered by skills handed down from mother to daughter (together with the cows). Such

skills would imply knowledge of how to feed the cows properly. But you also need to have a good eye for cows and be able to read them. Cows may withhold their milk if they do not trust the milkmaid. Secondly, you also need to have some basic luck. More than anything this was documented in the many proverbs, which floated around – “better one cow, than two unwilling”, “the milk rarely sours for the woman, who looks for sweetness” or “better good butter-luck than a sour heering”, quotes Janken Myrdal. From a later time, countless folkloristic tales are provided on how to secure your butter-luck by dropping all sorts of talisman into the churn, churn on Thursday (Thors-day), make the milk-utensils out of wood from the Rowan etc.

Thus men depended on women for procuring one of the important “cash cows” in the medieval agrarian economy. At the

*Woman working the churn with devil. Vejlbj Church, Randers Denmark. Source: Pinterest*





*Butter churning in Tuse Church in Denmark.  
Source: Wikipedia*

same time the success of these women depended on a “lore” basically unknown to the – in this matter – inexperienced men. Finally a successful peasant with a competent milkmaid in the family might also be the object of the envy and mistrust in a peasant society, which was basically built around “the image of the limited good”. [2] Such a situation was perhaps ripe for drama.

## The Devil’s Milkmaids

It is probably in this context we should understand the widespread motif of the “Devil’s Milkmaid”, which can be found in penitentiary texts from the 11th century, literary texts from the 14th century and murals in late medieval churches from the 15th century.

According to these folkloristic tales devils might be at play both when maids milked the cows or did the churning. A lucky milkmaid might just as well be someone who had been spared the onerous task of milking the cows. In stead the milking had been done by a devil or herself masked as

a suckling animal thieving from someone else’s cow. This milk would be spewed into the churn, which the devil would proceed to help the woman work. Finally, the devil would shape the butter into a cone. In the end the woman would receive a harsh punishment from the devil for stealing her “milk fortune” from her less clever neighbours.

The oldest sources stems from German penitentiary manuals and are more concerned with the sorcery involved than the fable itself. However, in 1180 Gerald of Wales writes about complaints that women in both Wales, Ireland, and Scotland “sub specie ubera sugendo” (shifts into the form of a hare) in order to “milk” their neighbour’s cows unseen. This motif is later found in a somewhat different form in a poem by Robert of Brunne in *Manel de Péches*, dated to around the beginning of the 14th century. Somewhat later (1330 – 50) the motif is worked over by Magister Mathias in his handbook of sermons, *Homo Conditus*. Mathias was friend and confessor of St. Bridgit of Vadstena and widely copied and read in both Sweden and Denmark. It is thought that the motif was transferred from here to the many iconographic renderings, which we find in late medieval church murals.

All-in-all more than 63 murals preserved in Danish, Swedish and Finnish churches render the moral fable, ready to be perused by anyone planning to steal the milk (wealth) of her neighbours or just more generally their “milk-luck”. The oldest of these is from c. 1420, while the youngest is dated c. 1520. The motif may also be found in a few churches in Northern Germany. Really interesting is the concentration of the motif around large export-centre of butter – Mälarn (Stockholm), Gotland (Visby) and Seeland (Copenhagen). Pre-



sumably nobles and church authorities in these regions were more than heavily involved in butter export. It is likely, this caused a gradual development of more specialised agrarian production profiles among some medieval peasants, which may have caused social stress. Other sources (tax lists) point to the existence of important economic disparity in the late medieval peasant societies around Copenhagen, an important export centre. In turn, all this may have contributed to the development of local animosity between different types of peasants. Vitriol might then have been sprayed on this fire by the general misogyny expressed by prelates plus the general feeling of powerlessness among the men in the village, excluded as they were from the lore of their milkmaids and housewives.

No wonder the motif later turned up in the 16th and 17th centuries manuals used in the persecution of witches.

[1] Egil's Saga. Ed. By Bjarni Einarsson. Viking Society of Northern Research. University College 2003, p. 57)

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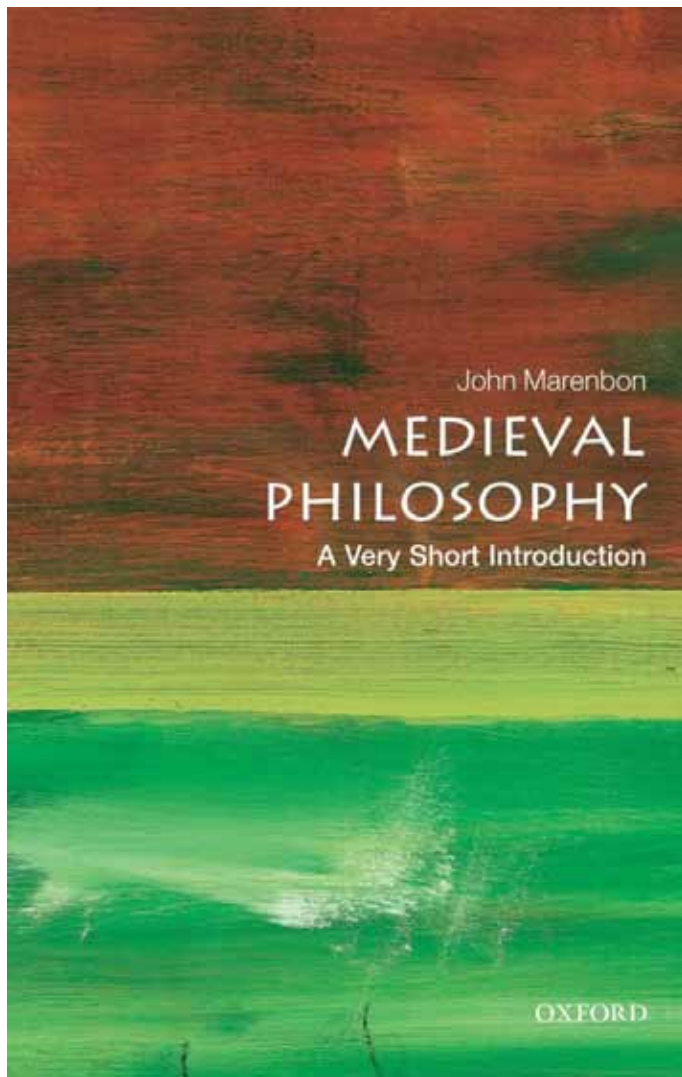


### **Boskapsskötseln under Medeltiden. En källpluralistisk studie.**

By Janken Myrdal  
Nordiska Museets Förlag 2012

This book - alas only in Swedish - tells the fascinating story of medieval animal husbandry in Sweden and further afield. However, a main quality is its use of wide variety of sources: iconographic, literary, economic and archaeological evidence is used intermittently in order to tease out daily life in the early middle ages and how it was organised between men and women. It deserves to be translated!

# NEW BOOKS....



## Medieval Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction

By John Marenbon

Oxford University Press 2016

ISBN-10: 019966322X

ISBN-13: 978-0199663224

The concept of Medieval philosophy conjures up a subject too difficult to tackle for any student, who does not suffer from masochistic tendencies. A new tiny book carefully written by **Jon Marenbon** lifts the onerous burden from our shoulders. In 160 pages he succeeds in presenting an overview, which will be of immense value to any medievalist, who does not really wish to delve into the intricacies of how to count the number of angels, who can

dance on the head of a pin, but in stead wish to work with more mundane matters. Here – in a mere 160 pages – we are offered a succinct and readable account of the coexisting strands of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish philosophy.

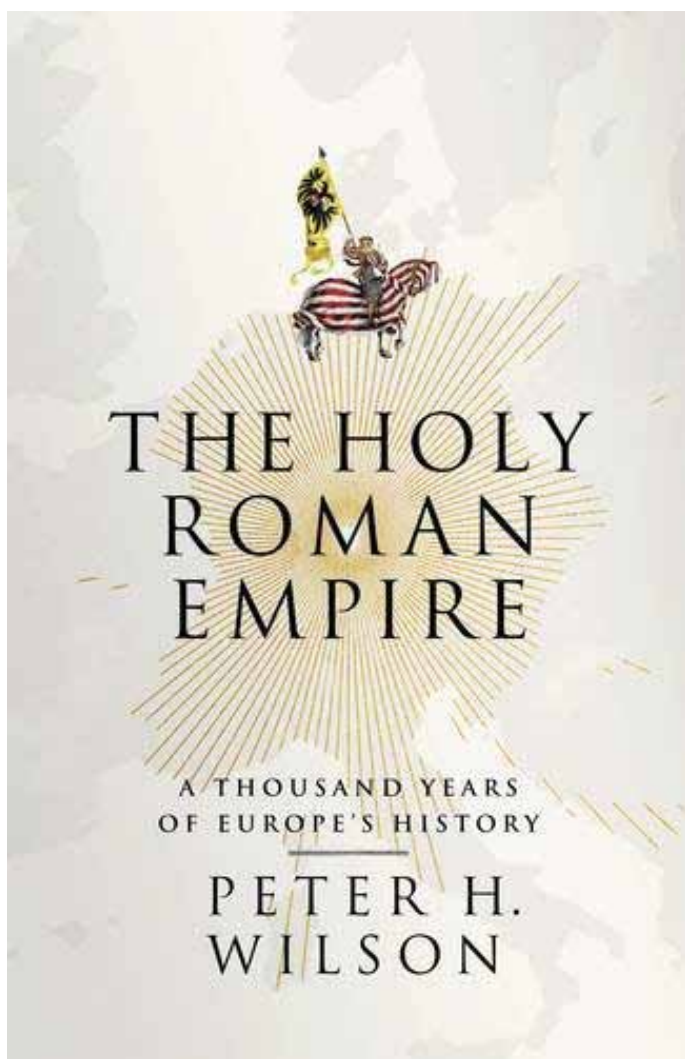
Marenbon shows how these traditions all go back to the Platonic schools of late antiquity and explains the complex ways in which they are interlinked. Providing an overview of some of the main thinkers, such as Boethius, Abelard, al-Fârâbî, Avicenna, Maimonides, and Gersonides, and the topics, institutions and literary forms of medieval philosophy, he discusses in detail some of the key issues in medieval thought: universals; mind, body and mortality; foreknowledge and freedom; society and the best life.

The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

John Marenbon is a Fellow of the British Academy, Senior Research Fellow of Trinity College, and Honorary Professor of Medieval Philosophy, as well as Visiting Professor at the Philosophy Department of Peking University. His interests cover the whole breadth of philosophy in the Long Middle Ages (c. 200 – c. 1700), in the Latin and Greek Christian, Islamic and Jewish traditions as well as more specialized studies of Boethius and Abelard. His most recent book is *Pagans and Philosophers. The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (2015).





### **The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History**

By Peter H. Wilson

Allen Lane 2016

ISBN-10: 1846143187

ISBN-13: 978-1846143182

A great, sprawling, ancient and unique entity, the Holy Roman Empire, from its founding by Charlemagne to its destruction by Napoleon a millennium later, formed the heart of Europe.

Sometimes it functioned as a great engine for inventions and ideas; sometimes its importance waned. However, it never seemed to totally unimportant who was elected as emperor and on what grounds (the conditions shifted through times).

It was the origin of many modern European states, from Germany to the Czech Republic and its relations with Italy, France and Poland dictated the course of countless wars - indeed European history as a whole makes no sense without it.

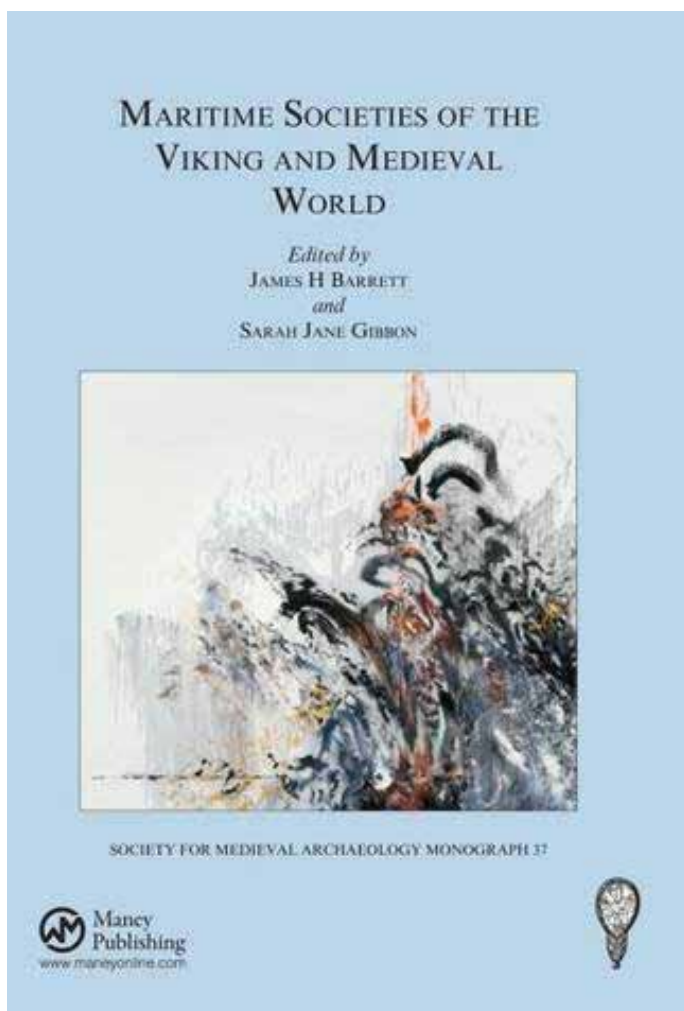
In this strikingly ambitious book, Peter H. Wilson explains how the Empire worked. It is not a chronological history, but an attempt to convey to readers why it was so important and how it changed over its existence. The result is a tour de force - a book that raises countless questions about the nature of political and military power, about diplomacy and the nature of European civilization and about the legacy of the Empire, which has continued to haunt its offspring, from Imperial and Nazi Germany to the European Union.

This is also an important book for an English speaking audience. Living in continental Europe, the Empire have often seemed to play a greater role than Britain would allow it to play in its broader conceptualisation of European History.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Peter H. Wilson is the author of the highly acclaimed *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (2009). He is especially interested in the history of war in wider European and world development from the seventeenth century to around 1900 and Early modern German history, particularly the political, military, social, and cultural history of the Holy Roman Empire between 1495 and 1806.

He is the Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford.



Individual chapters introduce maritime worlds ranging from the Isle of Man to Gotland – while also touching on the relationships between estate centres, towns, landing places and the sea in the more terrestrially oriented societies that surrounded northern Europe's main spheres of maritime interaction.

It is predominately an archaeological project, but draws no arbitrary lines between the fields of historical archaeology, history and literature. The volume explores the complex relationships between long-range interconnections and distinctive regional identities that are characteristic of maritime societies

The new book should be read as a companion guide to the books and research agendas currently evolving around the concept of the Viking Diaspora

## Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World

By James H. Barrett (Editor), Sarah Jane Gibbon (Editor)

Series: Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs

Routledge 2016

ISBN-10: 1909662798

ISBN-13: 978-1909662797

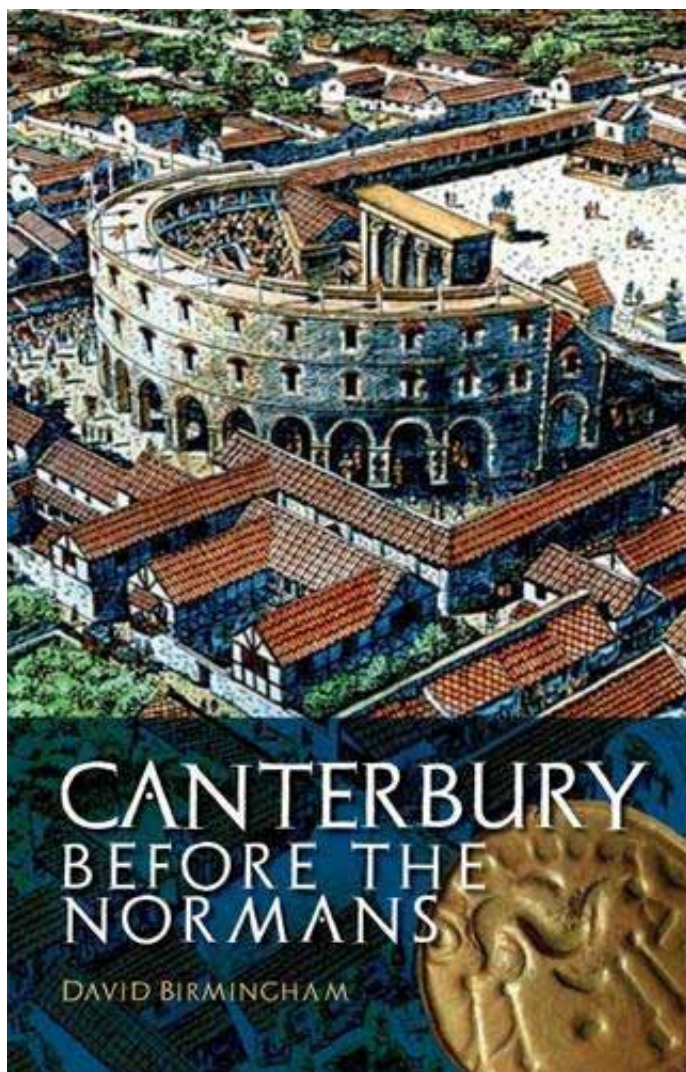
This book is a study of communities that drew their identity and livelihood from their relationships with water during a pivotal time in the creation of the social, economic and political landscapes of northern Europe.

It focuses on the Baltic, North and Irish Seas in the Viking Age (AD 1050–1200), with a few later examples (such as the Scottish Lordship of the Isles) included to help illuminate less well-documented earlier centuries.

*Gamleborg at Bornholm. Old Viking fortification from AD 750. Bornholm is one of the localities treated in the book. Source: Wikipedia*







## **Canterbury Before the Normans**

By Professor David Birmingham

Palatine Books 2016

ISBN-10: 1910837016

ISBN-13: 978-1910837016

When David Birmingham, a professor of history, retired from the University of Kent, he thought it would be fun to train as a Canterbury city guide. He soon became fascinated by the city's past and, after a lifetime of studying Africa - from the Iron Age onwards - he developed a particular interest in the prehistory of the Canterbury area.

This early history is barely mentioned in guidebooks which tend to start in 43 AD with the coming of the Romans, or even in 597 when Pope Gregory's missionaries arrived to revive Christianity. David delved

into archaeological reports and synthesised their findings into a readable narrative, designed to appeal to a wide readership.

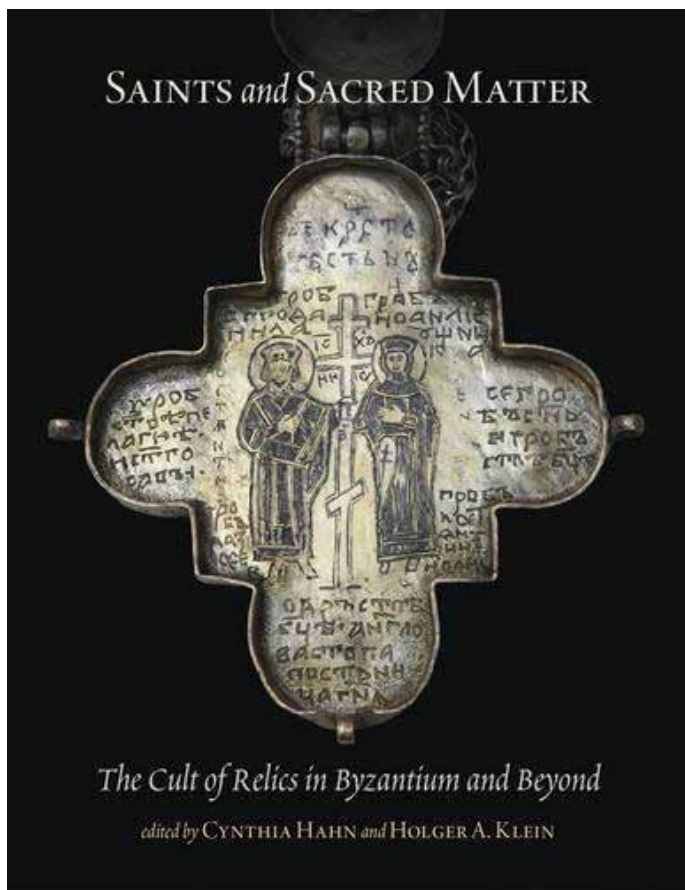
His book tells of ancient 'Celtic' peoples who traded far and wide in great oak Bronze Age boats, such as the one unearthed in Dover. It paints a picture of hill-fort inhabitants, whose lifestyle can be reconstructed from the chariot wheel-hubs, horse bridals, and tools they left behind when the Romans invaded. It shows how Canterbury with its great classical theatre and a prestigious city wall became a major Roman settlement.

The city declined after the legions withdrew around 410 A.D. but Romanised Britons remained in countryside villas with decorated mosaic floors.

The Jutes and other Saxon peoples who sought a new Kentish homeland produced magnificent jewellery which belies suggestions that theirs was a primitive 'dark age'. In a lively and accessible way, this book tells the story of the diverse and colourful people who occupied Canterbury before the Normans.

*St. Augustine in Canterbury. Founded in the 7th century and destroyed by the Normans*  
Source: Clerk of Oxford





tors explore how those remains, or relics, linked the past and present with an imagined future. Many of the chapters focus on the Christian context, both East and West, where relics testified to Christ's presence and ministry on earth and established a powerful connection between God and humans after his resurrection. Other religious traditions from the ancient world such as Judaism and Islam are frequently thought to have had no relics, but contributions to this volume show that Muslims and Jews too had a veneration for the corporeal that is comparable to that of their Christian counterparts.

Cynthia Hahn is Professor at City University of New York.

Holger A. Klein is Professor at Columbia University.

*Reliquary Cross from the 13th century. Byzantine or Russian. From the Dom-Museum Hildesheim. Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art*



## **Saints and Sacred Matter the Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond**

By Cynthia Hahn and Holger A. Klein  
Series: Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia

Harvard University Press 2016

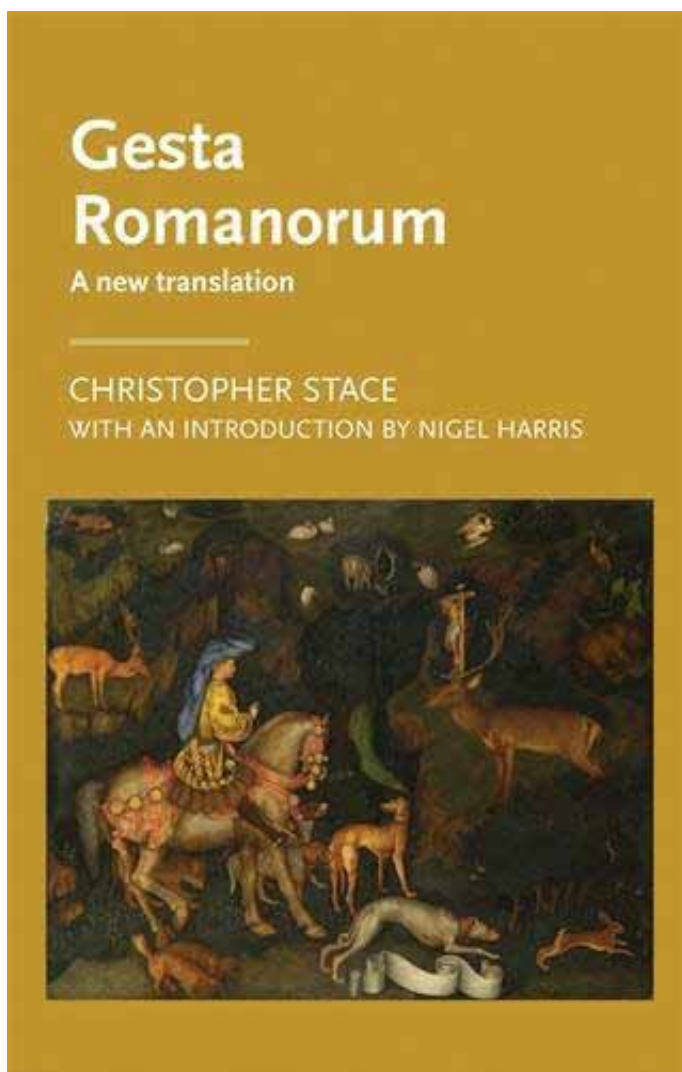
ISBN-10: 0884024067

ISBN-13: 978-0884024064

Enshrined in sumptuous metal, ivory, or stone containers, relics formed an important physical and spiritual bond between heaven and earth, linking humankind to their saintly advocates in heaven. As they were carried in liturgical processions, used in imperial ceremonies, and called upon in legal disputes and crises, relics and, by extension, their precious containers and built shrines provided a visible link between the living and the venerated dead.

"Saints and Sacred Matter" explores the embodied aspects of the divine physical remains of holy men and women and objects associated with them. Contribu-





possesses a two-fold literary interest, first as one of the most popular books of the time, and secondly as the source, directly or indirectly, of later literature, in Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, Giovanni Boccaccio, Thomas Hoccleve, William Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, Thomas Mann and others.

The Gesta is therefore a foundational work of western European literature - as well as one whose lively, well-crafted and often entertaining narratives hold a continuing appeal for contemporary readers.

Of its authorship nothing certain is known. It is conjecture to associate it either with the name of Helinandus or with that of Petrus Berchorius (Pierre Bercheure). It is debated whether it took its rise in England, Germany or France.

### **Gesta Romanorum: A New Translation**

By Nigel Harris, Anke Bernau and Christopher Stace

Series: Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture

Manchester University Press 2016

ISBN-10: 0719097150

ISBN-13: 978-0719097157

This volume contains an entirely new and accessible translation into modern English of the medieval Latin Gesta Romanorum. Based on the standard Gesta edition by Hermann Osterley, it is the first such translation to appear since 1824, and the first to take appropriate account of modern scholarly priorities.

Gesta Romanorum is a Latin collection of anecdotes and tales that was probably compiled about the end of the 13th century or the beginning of the 14th. It still

*Chaucer reading Gesta Romanorum?*

*Geoffrey Chaucer, detail of an initial from a manuscript of The Canterbury Tales (Lansdowne 851, folio 2), c. 1413–22; in the British Library.*



# FRENCH VISUAL CULTURE AND THE MAKING OF MEDIEVAL THEATER

LAURA WEIGERT



a new way of thinking about late medieval representation and spectatorship. She shows how images that ostensibly document medieval performance instead revise its characteristic features to conform to a playgoing experience that was associated with classical antiquity.

This retrospective vision of the late medieval performance tradition contributed to its demise in sixteenth-century France and promoted assumptions about medieval theater that continue to inform the contemporary disciplines of art and theater history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Laura Weigert is Associate Professor of Art History at Rutgers University, New Jersey.

*Stage used in the Valenciennes  
Passion Play, 1547. BNF, Paris.*



## French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater

By Laura Weigert

Cambridge University Press 2015

ISBN-10: 1107040477

ISBN-13: 978-1107040472

This book revives what was unique, strange and exciting about the variety of performances that took place in the realms of the French kings and Burgundian dukes.

Laura Weigert brings together a wealth of visual artifacts and practices to explore this tradition of late medieval performance located not in 'theaters' but in churches, courts, and city streets and squares.

By stressing the theatricality rather than the realism of fifteenth-century visual culture and the spectacular rather than the devotional nature of its effects, she offers