

BOOK REVIEW

Textiles and Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean. Edited by CECILE BRØNS and MARIE-LOUISE NOSCH. Ancient Textile Series 31. Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2017. Pp. xiii + 320. Hardcover, \$80.00. ISBN 978-1-78570-672-1.

The twenty-one papers in this volume use epigraphy, iconography, literature and artefacts to investigate the economy and organization of textile manufacture by temples and sanctuaries and to examine the use of textiles in rituals, sacred dress and votive offerings. Through these methodologies, the authors extend our insight into the significant role textiles played in ancient religions.

Clothing gives clues as to the role, function and status of the wearer in religious ceremonies. Karine Rivière (“What does the clothing say about the killer?: some thoughts on textiles in depictions of sacrifice in archaic Athens”) shows that Greek participants in a sacrifice dressed simply without denoting social privilege or prestige, though distinctive dress denoted religious hierarchy. Liza Cleland (“Not nothing: conceptualising textile whiteness for cult practice”) argues that religious textile whiteness was an “active and intentional” color connoting “spotless(ness)” that “requires deliberate and extensive processes” (31). Signe Krag (“Women in Palmyrene rituals and religious practices”) demonstrates that Palmyrene women are heavily veiled and cloaked in processional reliefs, perhaps because there were restrictions on women’s portrayal in sanctuary reliefs.

Many cultures gifted fabrics to adorn temples and images of the divine. Tina Boloti (“Offering of cloth and/or clothing to the sanctuaries: a case of ritual continuity from the 2nd to the 1st millennium BCE in the Aegean?”) demonstrates that the Mycenaeans adopted and adapted the Minoan ritual of offering clothing to divinities, a ritual which continued into the Greek period. Jacquelyn H. Clements (“Weaving the Chalkeia: reconstruction and ritual of an Athenian festival”) investigates an example of such offerings, the weaving of the peplos gifted at the Panathenaia to Athena Ergane, patron deity of spinning and weaving. Sean V. Leatherbury (“Textiles as gifts to god in late antiquity: Christian altar cloths as cultic objects”) shows that, like the earlier civilizations, Late Antique Christianity also gifted textiles, especially altar cloths colored with expensive dyes and often

decorated with patterned images. Valuable for their spiritual meanings, such cloths often wrapped saints' relics.

Clothing can denote ethnography and politics. Maria Gerolemou ("Priestly dress in the ancient Mediterranean: Herodotus as a source-book") explicates how Herodotus uses clothing to mark ethnology, politics and cultural differences between nations and characters: he associates the colorful barbarian dress with monarchy and despotism. Maria Papadopoulou ("Headdress for success: cultic uses of the Hellenistic Mitra") examines the male headdress, the *mitra*, shown prominently in the iconography of Ptolemaic rulers and their depictions of Dionysos and Herakles. She explains how the Ptolemies used images and cults of these gods to support their ruler-cult and link the Ptolemies to the *mitra*-wearing Alexander the Great.

Measurements of loom weights reveal much about ancient fabrics. Signe Grove Saxkjær, Jan Kindberg Jacobsen and Gloria Paola Mittica ("Building V and ritual textile production at Timpone della Motta") describe the finds from Building V at Timpone della Motta (Italy): spindle whorls; loom weights; votive *kalathoi* holding wool for spinners; and *pxyides*, which likely held textile implements. They suggest that Building V was a site for textile production, influenced by direct cultural exchange between the Greeks and the native inhabitants. Hedvig Landenius Enegren ("The loom weights from the 'Scarico di Grotta Vanella': evidence for a sanctuary on the North Acropolis of Segesta?") reports on the six hundred loom weights found at Scarico di Grotta Vanella, Segesta. Calculations of three weight ranges indicate that they were used to produce very fine quality cloth. Bianca Ferrara and Francesco Meo ("Loom weights in sacred contexts: the square building of the Heraion near the mouth of the Sele River") analyze the measurements of votive loom weights found in the Sanctuary of Hera near the Sele River which indicate that some produced fabrics of different qualities. Deborah Cassuto ("Modes of textile production in cultic contexts in the Iron Age Southern Levant: the finds from Tell es-Sâfi/Gath") discusses loom weights from Tell es-Safi/Gaht, an Iron Age Philistine site, found in connection with temples, but also in the lower city in Area D. Determining whether this area was ordinary workshop or was connected with a temple would further our understanding of the role of textiles in this site's economy.

Textile production played a major role in temples and sanctuaries. Salvatore Gaspa ("Textiles in Assyrian and Babylonian temples of the 1st millennium BCE") details uses of textiles in Assyrian and Babylonian temple cults and presents a collation of all the textual terms describing these textiles. Elizabeth E.

Payne (“Textile production in the Neo-Babylonian Eanna archive”) describes the contents of some 250 texts found in the archive of the Neo-Babylonian temple of Eanna, which give information about the textile workers and their salaries in kind; the transfer of raw materials from the temple storehouse to and from the workers; the divisions of textile workers (e.g. weavers, launderers); dyes; and production of items adorning the textiles (jewels, gold sequins).

Textiles can give clues to religious beliefs. Karen Kristensen and Jens A. Krasnilnikoff (“Dress, code and identity-of-place in Greek religion: some cases from classical and Hellenistic Athens”) use cultural geography (“identity-of-place”) to determine how sacred buildings, religious instruments and actions (e.g. purification, banquet) impress mental and emotional meanings of the place upon participants (50). Lena Larssen Lovén (“On priests, priestesses, and clothing in Roman cult practices”) shows how the quotidian clothing of Roman men and women was modified and combined to become religious dress. She finds that religious dress is generally marked by its whiteness, connoting purity and divinity, and its simplicity, which connoted piety. Rubena Raja (“Between fashion phenomena and status symbols: contextualizing the wardrobe of the so-called ‘former priests’ of Palmyra”) analyzes one group of male Palmyrene funerary portraits termed by scholars as “former priests.” Having previously argued that these are indeed priests, Raja posits that being depicted in everyday dress with the priestly *modius* set aside gave them an opportunity to display their social rank and wealth through their luxurious dress and still underscore their priestly rank. The Zoroastrian text, Yašt 5, describes Anahita, the Goddess of the Waters, wearing clothes made of beaver fur. Miguel Angel Andrés-Toledo (“The description of Anahita’s attire in the Yast 5”) ascertains where this text was created by examining proscriptions against the killing of beavers in other Zoroastrian texts. He hypothesizes different communities varied in their interpretation of these texts. Orit Shamir (“The high priest’s garments of mixed wool and linen (sha’atnez) compared to textiles found in the land of Israel”) explains the concept of *sha’atnez* (the religious proscription of mixing of wool and linen in the same garment). He suggests reasons why textile fragments dating to the Roman occupation of Judaea do not adhere to the proscription.

Lastly, textile artifacts can present intriguing mysteries. Unusually shaped objects from Greek and indigenous sanctuaries in southern Italy have been interpreted as “temple keys” or as distaffs. Examining illustrations of distaffs on Greek pottery, Alessandro Quercia (“‘Temple key’ or distaff?: an ambiguous artefact

from the Greek and indigenous sanctuaries of Southern Italy”⁶) concludes there is not sufficient data to corroborate either hypothesis or even whether the “keys” have any connection at all with textile production. Zosia Halina Archibald (“Astral symbols on a loom weight from Adjyska Vodenitsa (ancient Pistiros), Thrace: measurement, astronomy, and cult”) discusses a unique, pyramidal artifact from ancient Pistiros. Initially thought to be a loom weight decorated with astral symbols, she concludes that it more likely functioned as an astral sighting device and suggests that it was shaped like a loom weight because weaving, like astral orientation, were “the readiest models of mathematical regularities” (85).

In this collection of papers, these authors have demonstrated that, despite the rare survival of ancient Mediterranean textiles (save for those in Egypt), we can glean from texts, artifacts and linguistics substantial information on the kinds of textiles produced, insights into religious values and practices and the significance of textiles in the economy and structuring of ancient societies.

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