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FLAX

24-26 November 2009,
Copenhagen, Denmark

In November this year a very interesting conference was organized by Dr. Sabine Karg from the National Museum of Denmark/University of Copenhagen. The conference was the first of two planned workshops within a research programme that is funded by the Danish Research Council: "FLAX – Interdisciplinary research on the evolution and cultural history of the useful plant flax (*Linum usitatissimum* L.) – a resource for food and textiles for 8000 years". The aim of the project is to give the possibility to communicate and exchange new knowledge on the flax plant. The conference started at the National Museum with a reception and a guided tour through the new exhibition "Danish Prehistory", followed by a dinner organised and sponsored by the Danish National

Research Foundation's Centre for Textile Research at University of Copenhagen.

The main conference was held in the Carlsberg Academy in Valby. During the first day interesting presentations on the archaeobotanical evidence of flax cultivation and textile production from Neolithic settlements at Lake Constance and in Upper Swabia, Germany was given by Christoph Herbig (University of Frankfurt) and Ursula Maier and Helmut Schlichterle (Cultural Heritage Baden-Württemberg, Germany). Urs Leuzinger (Archaeological Museum of the Canton of Thurgau, Switzerland) spoke about flax processing in Neolithic lake-dwelling sites of Eastern Switzerland, while Antoinette Rast-Eicher (Archeotex, Switzerland) presented a paper on flax

preparation and thread production at the Swiss lake-dwelling sites. In the afternoon of the same day the perspective changed to the North and Mogens Bo Henriksen (Odense Town Museum) spoke about archaeological evidence of flax production in 500 BC-AD 1000 on Funen, Denmark, while Peter Steen Henriksen (The National Museum of Denmark) presented an overview of the archaeobotanical evidence of flax in prehistoric Denmark. The day was rounded off with a quick review of the history of flax cultivation in Sweden by Karin Viklund (University of Umeå, Sweden) and a presentation on Neolithic flax from Okoliste in the Bosnian mountains by Helmut Kroll (University of Kiel, Germany).

The second day was devoted to the evolution of the flax plant and Sue Colledge (Institute of Archaeology, University of London, UK) gave a paper on the origin and spread of domestic flax while Robin Allaby (University of Warwick, UK) spoke about the archaeogenetics of flax. The day ended with exciting new information on the most recent molecular and nano-technological methods for identifying archaeological textile fibres, presented by Christian Bergfjord (University of Bergen, Norway) and on the use of

Micro-beam Synchrotron Radiation in the investigation of textile fibres from Dead Sea caves by Bridget Murphy (University of Kiel, Germany).

The conference provided an excellent overview of the most recent new discoveries concerning the cultivation and use of flax as a food and textile plant, which has had such an important impact on the development of human culture. Likewise the potential of cross-disciplinary collaborations between prehistoric and classical archaeologists, textile researchers and natural scientists such as botanists, molecular geneticists, geologists and physicists was well demonstrated.

A booklet with an presentation of the project and abstracts of all lectures is published in English: S. Karg (ed.) *Flax (Linum usitatissimum L.) – a natural resource for food and textiles for 8000 years*. Programme and abstracts of the first workshop 24-26 November 2009. *Communicating Culture. Workshop Info 1*. Copenhagen 2009. ISBN 978-87-993301-0-2. Peer-reviewed publications of the papers from both FLAX workshops are planned. More information on the FLAX project can be found at <http://cms.ku.dk/hum-sites/saxo-sites/projekter/flax>