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European Archaeologists Association: Golden Glittering Garments. Investigation – Systematic Study – Experimental Reconstruction – Handling

1-5 September 2010, The Hague,
The Netherlands

The 16th meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) in The Hague, The Netherlands from 1-5 September 2010 offered the opportunity to organise a session about “Golden Glittering Garments: Investigation – Systematic Study – Experimental Reconstruction – Handling”. In this session garments which were decorated with golden metal threads, mainly from the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Medieval periods were presented. The debate centred on different themes: How were the gold threads produced and applied to the cloth? Which parts of the garments were decorated? Are there chronological or spatial differences? Which gold textiles were gifts or imports for example from the Mediterranean area and which ones were produced locally? Are there uniform rules how to document and catalogue gold threads? Are there new methods to analyse gold threads? How can the gold decoration be reconstructed experimentally? How to handle these textiles from the excavation to their display or long-term storage? In particular how to keep the original arrangement of the gold threads as found in the grave and how to handle the decomposed organic components of the garments? The session was not only aiming at archaeologists, but also at restorers, experimental archaeologists or natural scientists.

Britt Nowak-Böck (Germany) set the theme in the

first paper and asked questions concerning handling, preservation, investigation and publication of gold textiles in general. Several aspects of technological analyses of gold threads were mentioned including first experiments with the technology of 3D tomography. The main focus was on the identification of patterns of gold bands and first results of precise reconstructions of Bavarian braids were discussed. Ina Meißner (Germany) presented the results of her diploma thesis (Technical University Munich). She focused on her investigations on 42 Merovingian gold textiles from Bavaria in Southern Germany, Hessen and from Northern Italy. For comparing the different types of gold threads an accurate and comprehensive documentation was necessary. With the help of a scanning electron microscope, and a confocal microscope as well as a light microscope the production methods and tool marks were analysed and could be compared to modern gold foil stripes. She performed structural examinations to determine whether annealed flexible or tensioned gold foils were converted to threads and whether the treatment of gold foil differs between spun and un-spun gold stripes. The X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and SEM equipped for energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy were used for the determination of the chemical composition of the gold. Inclusions observed in micrographs were



analysed in the hope of gaining important information on manufacturing technologies and the origin of the gold. With her paper "Gold thread from Near Eastern rulers to Roman Emperors: evidence and problems" Margarita Gleba (United Kingdom) gave an insight into her study about gold textiles. She presented a wide range of examples from different regions dating mainly to the Hellenistic and Roman period. It is still difficult to localise the production centres of these precious textiles exactly. This was followed by Carina Stiefel's (Germany) summary of her MA thesis (University Freiburg) about Merovingian gold textiles from South and Western Germany. She analysed burial sites, tomb types, dimensions of the grave, gender and age of the deceased and finally classified the grave goods according to the "Qualitätsstufen" by Rainer Christlein. Her results showed that garments decorated with gold threads were not limited to the highest social rank. Further it was not possible to detect any limitations concerning the age and gender for the use of gold textiles. Christoph Eger (Germany) gave an overview of the graves with golden decorated garments (with gold threads, appliqué plates and golden tubes) of the Late Roman and Vandal time from North Africa. Beside the well known two rich Vandal time graves near Carthage there are more references of gold textiles from Late Antiquity from early excavations in Tunisia and Algeria. Obviously, in Vandal times wearing gold decorated garments was often connected to the immigration of foreign people. Most likely the bearers of the clothes originated from South Eastern Europe. Niklot Krohn (Germany) spoke about two important graves

of the late Merovingian period, dated about AD 700 from South Western Germany Dürbheim, "Häuslerain" (Tuttlingen) and Lahr-Burgheim, St. Peter (Ortenaukreis). According to Krohn the gold threads from Dürbheim are the remains of a decoration braid from the cloak of the buried man. In the female grave from Lahr-Burgheim very unusual, square formed applications made of gold threads, most likely originating from a frontlet known as *vitta* were discovered. Though unfortunately some other speakers with interesting papers could not come to the meeting, it was an interesting session with vivid discussions. The main problem for the comprehensive studies about archaeological gold textiles is the insufficient state of publication. Only few graves with gold garments have been published yet. The gold threads are usually just briefly mentioned, the illustrations are mostly not very usefull and the technical descriptions are often confusing which is caused by using nonspecific terms. Furthermore, it appeared that different approaches of analysing this group of objects are necessary in order to gain more reliable results. In conclusion, the opportunities and the limits in the research of gold threads depend essentially on the international and interdisciplinary cooperation of archaeologists, restorers, site technicians, natural scientists and craftspeople. The summaries of the papers of the EAA session "Golden Glittering Garments" together with Ina Meißner's diploma thesis will be published soon in the "Berichte der Bayerischen Bodendenkmalpflege".

Dissertations

Sanna Lipkin, Oulu University, Finland, has been awarded a PhD for her thesis: *Textile-making in central Tyrrhenian Italy from the final Bronze Age to the Republican Period*.

Karin Margarita Frei, The Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, has been awarded a PhD for her thesis: *Provenance of Pre-Roman Iron Age textiles - methods development and application*.