



Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert

## RECONTEXT: Reconstructing the history of Egyptian textiles from the first millennium CE at the National Museum of Denmark

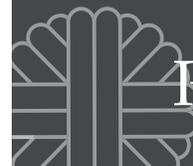
The aim of the project is to establish a history of the Egyptian textiles collection at the National Museum of Denmark (NMD) by investigating how the objects were acquired, their provenance, as well as their original appearance and shape. NMD holds 114 fragments of textiles from Roman, Byzantine, and Early Medieval Arab Egypt. It is the richest ensemble of Egyptian textiles in Danish collections. The

highlights of the collection are fragments identified as parts of tunics of various kinds. The collection has not been systematically studied, and since it has not been published, it remains inaccessible to the academic world as well as the general public.

This one-year project is funded by two Danish foundations: Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond and Beckett-Fonden (dates of the project: 1/5/2021



Fig 1: A textile purchased by the National Museum of Denmark from Robert Forrer in 1891 (Image: Søren Greve © National Museum of Denmark)



– 30/4/2022). RECONTEXT is hosted by the Centre for Textile Research (CTR), Saxo Institute, at the University of Copenhagen and is conducted in close collaboration with NMD.

NMD acquired the first Egyptian textiles from the art market of the late 19th century. Most of the European museums and collections acquired their Egyptian textiles in the same way. Many textiles were divided and sent to different museums either by the collectors themselves or by the museum staff. Frequently, the most legible, visually appealing part of an ornament has been cut, leaving behind a puzzle with few clues as to the cloth's original overall appearance.

The first items (six fragments in the current collection) were purchased by NMD from 1886 to 1887 from an Austrian antique dealer, Theodor Graf. The most important group (48 fragments) was acquired from a Swiss collector, Robert Forrer. Eventually, in 1936, 16 textile items were transferred as study material from University College London (UCL) to Copenhagen by Margrethe Hald. The London fabrics most likely belong to the collection of Egyptian antiquities sold to UCL by Flinders Petrie. Several textiles were also acquired from the 1930s to 1960s from antiquarians and collectors in Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Copenhagen, Paris, and Stockholm. Some were donated to the NMD by Danish Egyptologists and archaeologists (Erik Iversen, Hans Ostenfeld Lange, Werner Jacobsen). Finally, the provenance of 15 fabric items has not yet been established.

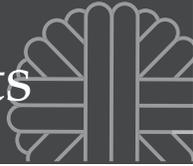
RECONTEXT makes a crucial contribution to the research field by tracing the history of Danish and European collections of Egyptian textiles. The research results and digital reconstructions of the scattered fabric fragments will be presented on the NMD website as an online exhibition. The project study outcomes will also be presented to an international academic audience.

The team includes project leader Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen, Anne Haslund Hansen, curator and senior researcher at the NMD in the Department of Ancient Denmark and the Mediterranean, Morten Valner S Grymer-Hansen, Tekstilpioneren Margrethe Halds liv og virke Project Coordinator and Anne Kwaspen, textiles conservator and textile analysis and reconstruction expert, a Marie Skłodowska Curie research fellow at CTR.

Collaborators include: Cécilia Fluck, curator and senior researcher at Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany; Anna Głowa, senior lecturer at the Institute of Art History, at the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland; Barbara Thomas, PhD student at Bonn – Cologne University; Stine Schierup, senior researcher in the Collections Department at NMD; and Søren Greve, photographer.

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Susanna Harris & Martin Goldberg

# Unwrapping the Galloway Hoard

*Unwrapping the Galloway Hoard* is a three-year UK Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project (2021-2024) which aims to challenge current understanding of the process of hoarding through an interdisciplinary study of one of the best-preserved hoards found in Britain to date.

Hoarding – the deliberate collection and burial of objects often made from precious metal – is a well-known phenomenon, primarily studied as buried wealth and popularly conceived as treasure. Associated with periods of social unease, such as the end of the Roman empire and the Viking raids of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland, hoards are often understood as valuable resources buried for security, although this position has been challenged recently (Bland 2015). Usually only inorganic artefacts survive. Buried around AD 900, and discovered in 2014 near Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland, the Galloway hoard is the richest, most varied, and well-preserved collection of precious and exotic objects hoarded together in Viking-age Britain and Ireland (Goldberg and Davis 2021). Unusually, the Galloway hoard contains both organic and inorganic artefacts, and evidence of accumulation with separate bundles and caches. In addition to containing silver and gold, the Galloway hoard is unique in Britain due to the preservation of textiles and leather that wrap the objects, creating multiple caches and bundles within the hoard. The textiles include wool, linen, silk, braids, and embroidery. The technical mastery of the silk items matches the splendour of the other striking objects in the hoard.

The durability of metal objects in hoards as treasure, scrap, bullion, or currency is largely dictated by taphonomy (the effects of burial through both human and natural actions). These processes of decay and

differential preservation play a crucial role in hoard interpretation because perishable material rarely survives. Hoarding has the potential to reveal much about the process of collecting and assembling objects, but even well-considered hoards, such as the Staffordshire Anglo-Saxon hoard (seventh century CE), are limited by the survival only of metal and other non-perishable materials (Fern et al. 2019). Intricate wrappings of textiles, leather and braids, and the remains of a wooden box are objects in the Galloway hoard that do not normally survive.



Fig 1: Lid of textile-wrapped silver-gilt vessel from the Galloway hoard (© National Museums Scotland)



Fig 2: Silver bullion of the Galloway hoard (© National Museums Scotland)

The Galloway hoard was buried in four distinct caches: a textile-wrapped lidded vessel (fig. 1) containing multiple textile-wrapped objects; silver bullion within a leather wrapping; three gold objects in a small wooden box tucked in a cluster of silver arm-rings; and a stratigraphically separate, upper cache of silver arm-rings and ingots accompanied by a Christian pectoral cross (fig. 2). This accumulation of artefacts is rare evidence for objects being placed in multiple distinct bundles and caches before they were assembled into the hoard deposit. This remarkable

preservation provides a wealth of information about internal structure and accumulation. The containers and wrappings create distinct bundles whereby objects are placed in marked relationships to one another. By connecting certain objects and separating others, bundles have an integrity which establishes relationships within and between object groups in this hoard that would otherwise be lost through taphonomic processes. The parcels, bundles and perishable materials in this hoard allow us to explore much more than the final deposit and to look in detail



at the biography and accumulation of this assemblage (Joy 2016; Zedeño 2008).

The composition and cumulative potency of bringing the Galloway hoard together provides an exciting opportunity to re-examine why, and how, people amassed, curated, and buried objects. Accumulated over many years, with objects originating from near and far, connecting Europe and Asia, and exceptionally preserved with its original textile and leather wrappings, the Galloway hoard provides a unique source of evidence to ask: How, and why, did people assemble and collect objects before burying them, and how does the Galloway hoard, with its unique combination of organic and inorganic materials, change our understanding of hoarding during the Viking Age? By focusing on the process of assembling and collecting this *Unwrapping the Galloway Hoard* project will provide numerous gateways into the wider Viking Age world.

The project is hosted by National Museums Scotland in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and scientific investigators. It builds on the foundation work of conservation and recording already carried out by the National Museum of Scotland and many individuals and organisations involved in securing the find for the nation through the Treasure Trove legislative process.

The AHRC project is led by principal investigator, Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator of Medieval Archaeology and History at National Museums Scotland. The textile and leather research is led by co-investigator, Susanna Harris, Lecturer in Archaeology, with Postdoctoral Researcher Alexandra Makin, at the University of Glasgow. The scientific collaborators include: Caroline R. Cartwright, The British Museum, for the identification of wood and textile fibres using high-powered microscopy; Derek Hamilton, Scottish Universities Environmental

Research Centre (SUERC, Glasgow), for the radiocarbon dating programme and Bayesian analysis; Ina Vanden Berghe, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels (KIK-IRPA), for the analysis of textile dyes using high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC); University of Glasgow Polyomics for the identification of leather species using proteomics; and Alice Macente, x-ray computed tomography at the Universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow.

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