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The EU-funded Research Project DressID

Under the heading "Clothing and Identities – New Perspectives on Textiles in the Roman Empire (*DressID*)", institutions in seven European countries spent five years systematically investigating the question of what knowledge can be gained about the identities of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire – the first multi-ethnic state in Europe – based on their clothing. Hundreds of publications, detailed studies, conferences on specific aspects, papers and reports emerged from the project over the five years of its duration. The project was initiated by the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim; textile archaeology and dress studies formed the starting point for the investigation. The questions that guided the investigation were: Is it possible to find out which animal and plant fibres were used in the Roman period, where they came from, how they were prepared, which weaving techniques were used for what and which colours the garments were dyed? What does this tell us about the dress worn in different parts of the Roman Empire? What insights can be gained through dress into the relationship between Rome and the provinces, the differences between men and women, children and the elderly, clothing and religion, trade and production? Dress is an expression of both the collective and social identity of individuals. Even today, clothing provides insights into a person's status, religion, ethnicity, gender and background. This kind of self-expression requires far more commitment than, for example, oral statements, which are temporary and from which one can dissociate oneself more easily. The analysis of ancient clothing gives us an idea of which of these categories were rooted deeply in the minds of people in that time. There was lively interest in the project on the part of archaeologists and biologists, textile experts and prehistorians, epigraphers and zoologists, art historians and physicists, chemists and religious scholars in many countries in Europe and beyond. Organisations from six European nations took on the co-organisation of their country's activities and co-signed the project proposal that was prepared by the project coordinator, the Curt Engelhorn Foundation for the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums, and sent to the European Commission:

- DNRF Centre for Textile Research (CTR), University of Copenhagen, Denmark
- KIK-IRPA, Brussels, Belgium
- Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria
- University of Valencia, Spain
- University of Crete, Rethymnon, Greece
- University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

The project grew over the years: more than 90 scholars from 35 institutions were eventually involved. At several European universities, museums and research institutes, textile archaeology has established itself in the course of this project. To support this was one of its original aims.

The following is intended to summarise, with a view to the central question of the relationship between clothing and identity, the many observations and research results of the project partners. Such a summary is necessarily somewhat subjective and preliminary in nature; the research will continue!

Scientific Methods

The members of the project were clear that an interdisciplinary approach would be the most fruitful, particularly the involvement of scholars from the social and natural sciences. In fact, due to the development of new methods in textile archaeology in conjunction with the *DressID* project, a new, more extensive pool of sources has arisen.

Strontium isotope analysis – usually used as a method of investigating prehistoric migration behaviour – was used for the first time in our European project in analysing the origin of wool. Certain geological element combinations in pasture regions enter the bodies of animals through their food. Using mass spectrometry, one can see a specific combination of trace elements in the wool fibres and thereby gain information on its origin.

A key contribution of the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums and the Curt Engelhorn Centre for Archaeometry was the systematic study of animal and plant fibre structures by reflected light, transmitted light and scanning electron microscopy. A reference database has been put together to identify fibres such as donkey and camel hair, cashmere from the Hindu Kush and Iberian sheep and goats.

Another first in the *DressID* project was, in collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, an analysis of the suitability of spectrometry for the identification of ancient dyestuffs. It worked, even in cases in which the colour was no longer visible to the naked eye. In fact, it is even possible to clearly identify real mollusc purple by means of spectrometry, although purple fabric to the human eye is not one single colour, but varies from red to purple to blue. This non-destructive method is an alternative to onerous and costly analysis, which uses physical samples to identify substances and dye residues by breaking the samples down into their chemical constituents.

Due to conservation conditions, Egypt, Syria and northern Europe are major source of large, well preserved archaeological textiles. The aforementioned scientific and methodological advances, have shown the good results that can also be achieved with even small preserved fragments from other regions of the Roman Empire.

Textile Technology

The collaboration of textile specialists and archaeologists in the field of experimental archaeology enabled the evaluation of textile equipment such as loom weights and spindle whorls, finds that had accrued in numerous archaeological excavations, but for which there were few specific evaluation criteria. In particular, the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen successfully addressed questions on the relationship of equipment to products: What type of spindle whorls were used to manufacture which threads and yarns? Which loom weights were suitable for the production which cloths? How much time and effort went into different products? How much time did you need to spin a kilometre of yarn? How many kilometres of yarn were needed for which kinds of clothes? Where the production bottlenecks were: in the preparation of the yarn, spinning, dyeing or weaving?

In the West as well as in the East there was a significant connection between female identity and cloth production. Work at the University of Crete has shown how spinning utensils such as spindles adorn female grave reliefs, while men are shown only engaging in specialised activities such as the manufacture of gold thread or purple dying. In Roman discourse on women the traditional description of female identity in the East highlighted a preoccupation with adornment and jewellery, perfume and the frequent change of hairstyle, which was contrasted with *modestia* in Rome, which demanded diligence, modesty, piety and silence, and was associated with *lanificium*, the production of woollen textiles. In contrast, as research at the University of Valencia has shown, the many female professionals, such as midwives, health care professionals, jewellers, innkeepers, beauticians, seamstresses, temple guards, secretaries, bankers, ship owners and wholesalers are known mainly from inscriptions and papyri, and so we have little idea how clothes expressed the professional identities of these Roman "businesswomen" and "entrepreneurs".

Only from the Egyptian papyri do we know about the conditions of textile production and details of textile trade organisation in the Roman Empire. According to the work of Droß-Krüpe, this involved standardised training contracts for male and female textile artisans, which established a clear training schedule, flexible pay scales, regulated accommodation, vacation time and apparently also a final exam. In Roman Egypt we encounter surprisingly modern forms of organisation that were largely separate from traditional apprenticeship and training within the family; these were forgotten when the Roman world came to an end. They did, however, form part of Roman identity.

An excellent example of the apparently typical planned and systematic approach of the Roman administration is reflected in the context of the identification of a previously unrecognised textile tool, the iron weft beater by Pasztokai-Szeőke (see *ATN* 52). As part of a re-planning of the entire landscape to the south of Lake Balaton, the weft beater was apparently systematically used to produce textile storage containers, which were needed in view of foreseeable agricultural surpluses.

Spain and its textile products were held in high regard in Rome. Alfaro at the University of Valencia has shown how this pertained not the only the raw materials, but also the end products. Numerous ancient written sources report on the extensive cultivation of flax and linen yarns and textiles. The exquisite quality of crisp Spanish white linen was especially popular with the consumers in Rome. Of importance were also the colours of the wool: black Iberian wool or reddish wool from Hispania Baetica, which saved expense on precious dyestuffs.

The Origins and Meaning of the Toga

How then was a Roman dressed and how different were his/her clothes from those of the Central European, the Oriental, the Egyptian or that of other

inhabitants of the empire? A person's origins were not necessarily visible in clothing, because apart from the typical Roman toga, there was no set Roman or Italian "costume", and any Roman citizen could wear, regardless of his ethnic background. Status and position were expressed in details such as the type of footwear and the colour of the garment: the purple border of the *toga praetexta* offered quasi magical protection for elite boys and girls, magistrates, senators, Vestal Virgins and the holders of religious offices in ceremonies. Certain leather caps, crowns, rings or white and red bows in the hair and on the clothes provided information about the specific identity of the toga-wearer, as did the way in which it was worn: worn covering the back of the head, it was a sign of the sacrificial priest; folded precisely, it identified the wearer as an official; draped loosely, it was appropriate for a wedding sacrifice.

The Roman encyclopaedian Pliny the Elder pointed out that the origin of the toga lay in the Etruscan *tebenna*. One of the most important aspects of the *DressID* project was the study at the University of Applied Sciences, Cologne of the grave finds from the necropolis of Verucchio near Rimini from the early Etruscan period (7th cent. BC). Already on the basis of the grave inventory – a figuratively decorated throne, gold brooches and a ceremonial club – the robe could be identified as that of a ruler. Only 400 years later on late Etruscan grave reliefs and sculptures do we find the more familiar shape of garment that we know as the toga, which was much larger and covered the whole body. In the following centuries, the toga gained in volume of fabric. As Goette's work has demonstarted, the toga was not 'put on', but rather draped around the body. A jerky movement could put it in disarray, so the *togatus* had to always move in a dignified and measured way; this was an essential part of Roman identity.

The Meaning of Dress in Roman Culture

Clothing was of central significance in ancient Rome. The pictorial evidence alone is proof of this. Unlike in ancient Greece, where the representation of the human body was the most important consideration, the main attraction in the Roman tradition was the representation of the garment. Goette has shown that this can be seen in the fact that Roman statues frequently lack some depth, and this also applies to famous sculptures such as the statue of Augustus as *togatus* from the via Labicana.

While Rome's citizens were represented veiled and draped in robes, the image of the emperor was not limited to the simple *togatus* scheme. Research undertaken at the University of Crete has shown how in his state robes, in which the hem was also drawn veil-like over the back of the head, the emperor is occasionally portrayed as a pious Pontifex Maximus. When armoured, on horseback or standing, we see him depicted in the tradition of Hellenistic rulers going back to Alexander the Great. Reliefs on his cuirass portrayed his heroic deeds and political programme. A third variant is that of the deified ruler, indicated by the nakedness of his body, such as when he is represented enthroned like Zeus on the frieze of the Acropolis. The works of art that depict the emperor are naturally more diverse than those representing Roman citizens because he was not only revered in representational metaphors, but was also himself the object of sacrifice.

Larsson Lovén's work concentrated on Roman women's dress. The *stola* – an ankle-length pinafore-like garment worn over the *tunica* with a purple bordered hem at the bottom – was the symbol of a newly-married woman's new identity as *matrona*, a married, free and respectable Roman woman, and was in many ways the female equivalent of the toga. In public she also wore a cloak called a *palla* or *pallium* (which corresponded to the Greek *himation*) with which she could also cover the head. Apart from the purely Roman *stola* type, however, which in any case appears to have been out of vogue by the end of the 1st century AD, the sculptural evidence shows no significant differences between Greek and Roman women's clothing. Only the fact that Greek women customarily covered the head while Roman women, especially in the high Empire, rarely did is a major difference. Greek dress obviously influenced the clothing of Roman woman and our investigations have shown that there are Greek models for almost all female depiction types in the statuary art of Rome. A good example is the classic "Herculaneum woman" image type of which there are hundreds of copies in the form of sculptures and funerary reliefs in the Roman Empire.

Luxury Textiles

In the early civilisations of East Asia, America and the Middle East, the purple secretions of sea molluscs were used to dye royal robes and establish elite identity. The work of the scholars at the University of Valencia and at KIK-IRPA in Brussels has shown that this was an extremely difficult procedure because the shellfish contained only very small amounts of dye, and we must assume that it was not stored or transported. In Rome there were even specialised jobs for dyeing different shades of purple. By the end of Roman Empire, the red, purple or bluish purple colour was produced in fourteen large imperial workshops called *baphia* under

the strict control of the imperial court. Naturally, there were many attempts to imitate the precious dye or even to fake it, though this was severely punished. Plant sources such as seaweed, madder, blueberry, etc. were used for these cheap imitations. They did not, however, achieve a comparable durability of colour.

The work of Hildebrandt, Reifarth and Wild has shown that a contradiction between a fascination for oriental luxury and a traditional ideal of simplicity was a central characteristic of Roman identity. Both had a profound impact on clothing habits. Already in the days of the Republic, important figures railed against luxury, which was seen to be evidence of moral softness. The Roman ideal of a simple life stands in contrast to an apparently increasing tendency of the Romans to dress sumptuously. This was no doubt influenced by the splendour and refinement of the newly-conquered Eastern territories. If one looks at evidence for gift-giving practices even in rather poor provinces such as Britain and the grave goods at archaeological sites such as Trier, they suggest a far greater distribution of high-quality clothing than one would think in view of the property structure of the Roman Empire. Purple silk fabric with woven gold threads was the epitome of luxury. Contrary to popular assumptions about the effectiveness of the legal restrictions, this luxurious clothing was apparently widely used in Rome. In the 5th century AD the production and possession of purple silk clothing were identified as imperial privilege and accepted in Rome.

Augusta Treverorum (modern Trier in Germany) became the residence of Roman emperors in the 4th century AD, and as such an economic, political and cultural centre of the empire. The analysis of the partially preserved, luxury textile inventories of 22 never-opened sarcophagi by Reifarth as her Phd, supported by the *DressID* project revealed a (not always complete) quartet of luxury goods: silk, purple, gold and resin impregnation of grave clothes. The latter observation is new. The other features of the grave goods – purple silk with gold thread pattern – characterise a find horizon of corresponding grave goods in a large part of the Roman Empire in the early 4th century AD. Perhaps this was owing to a domestic situation in the empire in which the enforcement of sumptuary laws was no longer an urgent priority. Another discovery in this context is the presence of characteristic gold strips, apparently part of linen fabrics that have not survived due to the high acid levels in the graves.

Military Textiles

Thanks to the analysis of archaeological finds from waterlogged contexts in the fort of Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall by Wild, we now have exceptional insights into the clothes of Roman soldiers. The finds consist of hundreds of textile fragments and wooden writing tablets – some with textile-related texts – from the turn of the 1st/2nd century AD. They have been studied in the context of the *DressID* project in view of their technological, economic and sociological information. The textile terms recorded in the texts could be categorised under headings such as 'clothing' (for example, outer garments), 'accessories' and 'household textiles,' and some can be linked with fragments of tunics and coats. The formal wear and lavish lifestyle of the camp commander and his family are revealed in the tablet texts which mention invitations to parties and lists of evening wear. All this transmits the idea of a distinctive class difference between the life of the commander and that of ordinary soldiers in their cramped accommodation in the camp. The study of the archaeological textile finds, however, seems to contradict this generalisation. High-quality, well-made clothing seems to have been a general feature of even the simplest Roman soldiers' kit. If this is the case, then it has implications for our understanding of the relationship of the Roman military to Roman society, i.e. their self-image and identity.

Careful investigation By Mitschke at the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim of the extensive textile finds that have been recovered in the past two centuries at the military camp in Mogontiacum (modern Mainz in Germany) – the largest corpus of its kind in Central Europe – have shown that a significant number of the textiles were of practical use as, for example, ropes, and bands. Fabrics were also used as padding for armour and helmets, packaging etc. Based on quality and decoration many of the Mainz textile fragments can be identified as the remains of clothing. Special technical features such as the spin direction of the threads indicate a local source of clothing for the troops in the Rhine provinces. The different types of textiles could be linked with the respective different images of soldier's clothes, enabling the incorporation of sculptures in the investigation of the textiles. The textile analysis also yielded valuable information on quality standards in the clothing of the Roman army. This is all the more remarkable as uniforms in our sense were unknown and each soldier had to buy his own clothes.

Provincial Dress Styles

The region in which the Mediterranean overlapped with the Oriental world of the Parthians was the oasis of Palmyra (modern Syria). It lay at the western end of the Silk Road from South and East Asia and grew rich

from trade between Asia and the Mediterranean. We know a lot about the private appearance of the leading families in Palmyra because apart from paintings and finds from grave towers of the 2nd century AD, we have tombs that show the deceased surrounded by their families in hypogea of the 3rd century AD, which have been studied by Stauffer. The garment types depicted can even be compared with the Palmyrene textile finds, showing that the individuals were shown dressed in different ways in different functions, from loosely draped robes of Mediterranean style in white and red for sacrifices, to tailored, brightly coloured clothing, such as that worn by the mounted Parthian nomads, at banquets. The research has now made great progress in exploring the meaning of decorative textile elements (*clavi* etc.) at Palmyra. It is increasingly clear that there were not only local and Mediterranean clothing styles that can be related to private and public contexts, but also that social identities as well as special identities such as family rank, clan associations and professions were expressed in decorative elements, draping styles and garment types. The enormous wealth of the trading hub at Palmyra is shown not only in the glorious buildings and grave monuments, but also in the trade goods themselves, first and foremost Chinese silks, Indian cottons, Central Asian cashmere and diverse dyeing substances from India, eastern Anatolia and probably also from the Persian Gulf. The analyses prove that silks with embroidered and woven decoration and even silk fabric came from the Chinese imperial court to Palmyra. It was not only a commercial centre; exotic materials were also processed there, combined with wool, woven with purple decorations etc.

In Roman Egypt, Mediterranean clothing in the Hellenistic tradition was apparently widespread. Due to special burial customs and ideal preservation conditions we have a large number of textile finds in the land on the Nile that have received detailed attention in the course of the *DressID* project, especially by Fluck and Paetz gen. Schieck. They convey a vivid picture of the appearance and texture of Roman garments of linen and wool, which we elsewhere know only from small textile fragments, paintings and sculptures. In addition, the considerable corpus of the so-called Fayyum mummy portraits give excellent, detailed information on clothes, jewellery, hairstyles and make-up. As it dyes better, one must assume from the colourfulness of the garments that most of the textiles were made of wool. The sheer mass of original clothing and high-quality colour painting open up a wide field of possibilities and invites comparison between textile decorative elements in Palmyra and Egypt. Schieck has shown how geometric elements of decor from the Parthian decorative clothing of Palmyra reveal their presence in Egypt and other parts of Syria. In one case, they could even be linked to Roman Palmyrene troops thanks to the identification of the officer's insignia. Also to be found amongst the Egyptian fabrics are some knitted wares with woollen threads in tendril designs also known from Palmyra. Apparently the exchange of motifs between Syrian and Egyptian textile workshops happened on the basis of pattern sheets or the textiles themselves.

Egypt has rich evidence on Roman clothing, since it houses an excellent range of sources. It is due to the abundant written sources from Egypt that we have, for example, many papyri mentioning garments and details from the textile industry. One example that gives us an idea of the nature and extent of female garments in private households is a papyrus documenting a theft reported by a lady from a wealthy village in the Fayyum oasis, studied by Römer. It mentions the robbery of nineteen sets of dresses, about a third of them in colour, and ten mostly coloured coats and throws, as well as towels and sheets. An indication of the value of the textiles is the fact that the loss of home appliances, jewellery and cash stocks is only mentioned after them.

The work of scholars at the University of Valencia has shown how, although the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula was the result of a bitter war that lasted for over two centuries, it is the only region of the empire in which there are no depictions of the residents in local costume in the Roman period. Our hypothesis – that clothing expresses identity – is further explored here. The preponderance of Roman clothes in Iberia is an expression of a strong identification with Rome. One of the factors affecting the adoption of Roman identity in Spain is the fact that the Iberian Peninsula was already part of Mediterranean culture for centuries before Roman rule, in contrast to Central and Eastern Europe. There are a number of sculptures from the 4th and 3rd centuries BC in Spain representing the human form. They give us a vivid image of the clothes and self-presentation of the people here in the pre-Roman period. The most important find is the so-called Dama de Baza, the most detailed of a group of sculptures depicting women enthroned wearing rich clothes and jewellery the clothing of which was reconstructed on technical grounds by Demant under the archaeological and historical guidance of Carmen Alfaro in the context of the *DressID* project (see *ATN* 52). The Dama de Baza wears a tunic with long sleeves and several layers of tunics or skirts. The reconstruction of the clothing of the Dama de Baza revealed that the woollen cloak, similarly to that of Verucchio, was made from a segment form; but this cloak was worn with the

round edge upwards. The chequerboard pattern at the borders of the tunics and the cloak must have been created using tablet weaving.

In contrast to the Iberian region, the pre-Roman dress, especially of women, in Central Europe, i.e. in Eastern Alpine Noricum and the Pannonian Danube region, is reproduced in great detail on the Roman grave stone markers, as investigated by Rothe and Carroll. They show elaborate headdresses and layered tunics held by brooches at the shoulders. The women appear to have played the key role as guardians of local clothing traditions. Thanks to the inscriptions it is possible to correlate dress styles with individual people and ethnic groups and it is surprising that even the female relatives of former insurgent and forcibly resettled tribes are represented in full local dress and jewellery, while their husbands are usually dressed as Roman citizens and soldiers. It appears that foreign ethnicity did not have negative connotations, and that the depiction of the clothing and identity of local tribes only became possible with the advent of the Roman custom of erecting grave stone markers with the image of the deceased.

Differences and continuities can be observed using the textile fragments from pre-Roman times that have been preserved in the salt mines of Hallstatt, including coloured borders and patterned and embellished fabrics. The work of Grömer has shown how the Hallstatt period was a period of great achievement in textile art, characterised by richly decorated tablet weaving, various other weaving techniques, fabric patterns, plaids and colour variations. In marked contrast, the following centuries are characterised by increasing standardisation apparently emanating from Rome, firstly coming over from the Celtic neighbouring cultures, and later directly from Rome.

The analysis of the Roman textile finds from Pannonia show many references to Romanisation in production and quality. The investigation of textiles from the Migration-Period royal grave of Poprad on the northern edge of the Carpathian Basin by Štolcová and Lau in the context of *DressID* has shown that outside the Roman Empire and then again after the end of Roman rule the pre-Roman textile technology re-emerged: the textile analysis here revealed, for example, considerable variation in the weaves, colours, patterns, especially tablet weaving. In addition, there was gold embroidery imported from the East.

Also in Western European regions of the Roman Empire, in Gaul, Britain and the Rhine provinces, the population commissioned Roman-style grave monuments with representations of the deceased. The women in particular were shown in the native dress of the respective regions, at least until the Flavian dynasty. The Mediterranean custom of erecting votive stones to the gods was transferred to the local gods, in this case the Ubian mother goddesses – *matronae* – and as in Italy or Greece mortal worshippers were also depicted. Rothe's work has shown how small-scale, local dress disappears in the funerary art of much of the north-west in the 2nd century AD in favour of a more widespread style, the "Gallic ensemble", showing that this region developed its own collective identity, but not as opposition to Rome: rather it was a consequence of integration into the Roman Empire.

Roman Influence beyond the Frontiers

The Roman Empire was heavily involved in trade with regions outside the borders of the empire. In terms of clothing the relationship between Rome and the 'barbarians' can best be examined in northern Europe, where moors and wet soils provide excellent conditions for the preservation of animal fibre textiles. Systematic studies of the rich clothing finds from pre-Roman Scandinavia by scholars at the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen have showed that only half of the clothing – that of fur and leather – was cut and sewn, but not the other half, i.e. the textile clothing. In Scandinavia and in the Mediterranean garments were woven whole on the loom. Patterns were achieved using vegetable dyes and the natural colours of wool. Sprang hats and fur hats were apparently the only difference between male and female dress; scarves, coats, large, blanket-like cloaks and tube-shaped dresses were held in place using shoulder brooches. Over this, one wore fur capes. Not even men and women's shoes were different. From the time of Christ onward the north imported precious Roman goods and adapted to more gender-specific clothing. Amazingly, it is only in this period that trousers appear in northern Germany.

The influence from the south by no means led to crass copying and imitation. This has been shown in new investigations of the textiles from Thorsberg and three other major northern European localities by Möller-Wiering. Over a thousand precious weapons and tools were found in these locations, which are believed to have been sacrificed as war booty. Often they display a mixture of Roman and Germanic elements in manufacture and decoration. The most famous are the Thorsberg clothing finds: two pairs of trousers with attached foot pieces, a long-sleeved tunic and large cloaks with wide tablet-woven borders. Comparative analysis of the technical characteristics (yarns, construction, borders) revealed that these textiles were manufactured locally. The first strontium isotope analysis confirms this result. We know that there were also people in the north who were wearing

Mediterranean dress thanks to the careful analysis of the clothing of a man found at Obenaltendorf in 1895. For reconstruction purposes garment fragments from this bog body were reassembled because the significance of some garments had been unknown. Analysis of yarn twist, weave, fabric borders and *clavus* decoration proved that these clothes were of Mediterranean origin. Only the huge figure of the blond man, his decidedly Germanic shoes, his two capsule-like lockets and the absence of any evidence of a belt suggest that he was not a Roman and not a soldier.

The great wealth of results of the *DressID* project are only partially represented here. Thanks to the collaboration of researchers from the many European countries we have gained some initial, more than impressive insights into the relationship between clothing and identity in the Roman Empire. The *DressID* Project "Clothing and Identities – New Perspectives on Textiles in the Roman Empire" culminated in the exhibition *Die Macht der Toga – The Power of the Toga* in Hildesheim, Germany (20th April to 8th September 2013), but the research will continue for many years to come.

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