



Frances Pritchard and John Peter Wild

# Obituary, Thea Gabra Sanders (1933-2011)

ATR has the sad task of bringing readers the news of the death after a long period of illness of Thea Gabra Sanders (Edinburgh) on 13th June 2011. She was well known to those who attended meetings of the North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles and the Early Textiles Study Group in the nineties, and she took on – with notable enthusiasm, energy and success – most of the organisation of the seventh symposium of NESAT in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, in May 1999. The lecture programme was full of interest and, thanks to Thea, the out-of-hours programme of activities was equally memorable: participants were each presented with a typical Scottish wool scarf on one fascinating visit to Burberrys, a leading woollen goods supplier on Princes Street! Her skill at winning financial support and help in kind from multiple donors was very evident.

Born and educated in The Netherlands, Thea settled in Scotland in 1962. She had already developed an active interest in craft weaving through the Edinburgh

Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers when she came into contact with Michael Ryder in the early eighties. She worked in the Teaching and Research Centre of the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh where she had access to, and expertise in, the application of the Scanning Electron Microscope to fibre examination. Her micrographs underpinned Ryder's publication of the wools from the Mary Rose shipwreck (*Journal of Archaeological Science* 11, 1984, 337-343) and in the following year they published together in *Textile History* 16, 123-140 an article on the application of SEM microscopy to textile history. As had Brenda Lomas in Manchester and Rob Janaway in Bradford, they recognised and began to exploit the value of the Scanning Electron Microscope, a technique originating in the fifties, for textile fibre analysis – since when it has become a sine qua non in archaeological textile research.

For many years Thea ensured that textiles from archaeological sites in Scotland were recorded and when her illness struck she had just embarked on a re-examination of Viking-Age textiles from the region as a research associate at the National Museums of Scotland. It is sad that, despite the devotion of her husband Victor, she was not able to enjoy fully the fruits of her work in Edinburgh and her considerable contributions to textile archaeology.

