

Book review :

The Hammerum Burial Site – Customs and Clothing in the Roman Iron Age ,
Eds. Tinna Møbjerg, Ulla Mannering, Hans Rostholm and Lise Ræder Knudsen
Museum Midtjylland og Jutland Archeological Society 2019
ISBN : 978-87-93423-23-7 Price 300 DKK

Verbal and nonverbal representation of archeological concepts – the terminology
work at the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen
www.ctr.hum.ku.dk

The realm of textiles provides fascinating possibilities of storytelling through a
framework of interwoven disciplines. As textile objects are crafted, travel, and
interact with people, they establish narratives and a life of their own .
As manufacture of textiles is an ancient occupation – indeed some people claim
that it was not until clothing making that civilization really commenced.
Denmark is particularly fortunate to have one of the biggest collections in the
world of archeological textiles because of good climate and soil conditions in
order to preserve so many fine fabrics and ancient history of weaving and
clothing/garments.

When people began to settle, cultivate the land and keep herds of animals,
weaving developed in direct relation to sheep and flax production. Wool was
carded by hand and spun and the yarn was then either used in its natural shades
or dyed with plant coloring.

The National Museum of Copenhagen houses samples of skirts, blouses, capes,
shawls, coats, bonnets etc. from the Danish Bronze and Iron Ages witnessing not
only changing fashion in these days but also increasing knowledge of different
forms and techniques of for instance weaving.

Recently a new book / and glossary of Roman Iron Age fashion and techniques
was published by the Jutland Archeological Society /Museum Midjylland .
The authors are from different departments and museums such as the
National Museum Ulla Mannering, one of the co-founders of CTR and she has
wide experience in pre-historic Northern European Textile production and
clothing , including the use and production of pre-historic plant fibre materials,
using experimental archeology ; the study of costumes from iconographic
sources and Roman textiles.

The main co-author Lise Ræder Knudsen who provided a rich iconographic
material about the techniques in the book has also wide experience in analysis of
archeological textiles and is director at Conservation Center Vejle.

From the preface, I would like to quote Constanze Rasmussen and Laura Liv
Weikop :

« Some objects attain an important status in archeology and in the public eye
because of their tangibility ; one of these is the ‘Hammerum Girl’ who, with her
dress, scarf and intricately braided coiffure, brings pre-history to life for us.

She was named after the small modern-day town of Hammerum where her grave was found in 1993. All that remained of her was her hair and dress, showing that she was buried on her back with her knees bent to her right. The grave is sensational since it contained the best preserved Danish Iron Age textile ever found and therefore offers a unique opportunity to analyse material which, in most cases, has disappeared. »

The Hammerum Girl's dress – with its red and white stripes challenges the concept of (bedraggled) prehistoric people of the North wearing rags. Here we discover a rather well-dressed Iron Age Girl, and we can by scientific-archeological analyses extract information from her clothes and hair. The analysis tells us a nuanced story of daily life and the pan-European 'slow fashion' : a dress used in everyday life, produced by carefully choosing fine fibres refers to a style.

The interdisciplinary analyses had multiple aims and one of the goals was to achieve a better understanding of the surrounding landscape at the time when the burial site was established. The analyses were non-destructive and the clothing and coiffure were kept in their original position. The analyses of the preserved clothing and coiffure have provided unique evidence about life and death some 2000 years ago.

In this work, we have also included knowledge about the craftsmanship and manufacture of textiles, as it provides an opportunity to view and compare the finds in a broader cultural historical context.

The glossary of the book – the last chapter encompasses textile-related terms used in the book – and partly after Susan Möller-Wiering 2011 .
War and worship. Textiles from 3rd to 4th century AD ... Ancient Textile Series volume 9)

The basic concepts of the textile field are defined and represented in a Non-verbal way for instance by diagrams.

Fibre : The smallest unit in a thread and thus in a textile of vegetal or animal origin, often a single hair.

Thread : Linear structure made from spun/twisted fibres/yarns

Textile : Flexible structure based on fibres.

Can be linear=thread or two-or three-dimensional = fabric

Spinning /twist directions :

Fibres are spun into a thread by twisting them either clockwise or anti-clockwise.

In S-spinning/twist the fibres run in a thread from top left to bottom right, like the middle part of the letter S. In Z-spinning/twist the fibres run into a thread from top right to bottom left, like the middle part of the letter Z.

Tabby :

A basis weaving type where each weft thread passes over and under each subsequent warp thread and vice versa.

Twill :

A basis weaving type where thread floats create diagonal lines that can be used

for making different surface patterns. In a 2/2 twill each weft passes under and over two subsequent warp threads. The next weft thread repeats this pattern, but shifted by one warp thread, thus creating diagonal lines on the surface of the weave.

Reference :

P.Dury &S. Lervad – Synonymic in the field of textile terminology : A study in diachrony and synchrony , 2010, 2013 in Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the 3rd to the first millenia (paper back version), p. 1-10, Ancient Textile Volume 8, p. 7), Oxbow , Ancient Textil Series)

Susanne Lervad
Terminologist, Termplus Aps
Centre for Textile Research
University of Copenhagen
Karen Blixens Plads
DK-2300 København S

Mail: sl@termplus.dk
www.ctr.hum.ku.dk