



Book Reviews

FIRST TEXTILES: THE BEGINNINGS OF TEXTILE MANUFACTURE IN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN; PROCEEDINGS OF THE EAA SESSION HELD IN ISTANBUL (2014) AND THE 'FIRST TEXTILES' CONFERENCE IN COPENHAGEN (2015) EDITED BY MALGORZATA SIENNICKA, LORENZ RAHMSTORF AND AGATA ULANOWSKA

Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2018, Ancient Textiles Series 32, 231 pages, 90 B&W and colour illustrations, ISBN 9781785707988, £45.00

The study of archaeological textiles has flourished in the last 15 years and this book represents several fruitful research areas in the field. Volume 32 in the Ancient Textiles Series published by Oxbow Books, it is the conference proceedings of two conferences organised by a collaborative research project, *First Textiles*, through the University of Copenhagen. As presented by the editors, Małgorzata Siennicka, Lorenz Rahmstorf and Agata Ulanowska, the main aim of this project is to present recent studies and evidence for the beginnings of textile production and its social meaning in various parts of Europe and the Near East, focusing on the Epipalaeolithic to Bronze Age (p.1). In bringing together 20 chapters with contributions by 30 authors, the editors have compiled a vast range of expertise across a wide geographical area and substantial time span.

The chapters follow a predominantly chronological sequence, they are well illustrated and provide coverage across Europe and the Mediterranean. The majority focus on the Neolithic to Early Bronze Age, with a strong representation of the third millennium BC. In Chapter 1 the editors introduce the main lines of evidence addressed in the volume, which are; 1) preserved textiles and their raw materials, 2) imprints of cord, textiles and basketry on clay, 3) textiles tools such as spindle whorls, loom weights, bone points, 4) comparative results from experimental archaeology. Of these, most chapters focus on evidence for ceramic textile tools.

As a topic, *First Textiles* is inextricably bound to plant fibre raw material, especially flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) domestication, followed by the introduction of sheep's wool, the dates of which vary regionally. These perishable raw materials are rarely recovered from archaeological contexts. Instead, the *longue durée* of textile fibre is frequently traced through other means. In Chapter 4, Sabine Karg and colleagues present a method for tracing flax domestication through

seed biometrics, using reference material from seed banks and uncharred archaeological flax seeds from the ancient land of linen, Egypt, and Neolithic Switzerland. Ulla Mannering presents the Mesolithic and Neolithic plant fibre textiles from Denmark, better known for its Bronze Age wool clothing (Chapter 5). Fabienne Médard (Chapter 9) summarises and expands on her long-standing research into Late Neolithic waterlogged plant fibre fabrics and textile tools from France and Switzerland. Here she reiterates key assertions as to the relationship of spindle whorls to fibre; over time the decreased mass of loom weights and spindle whorls may be an indication of the exploitation of the new fibre – wool. This especially concerns spindle whorls and is both widely accepted and regularly attested. This is significant given that spindle whorls are the textile evidence archaeologists are most likely to come across, and hence it is highly desirable to be able to associate them with raw materials. To understand more about this debate, the reader is directed to further discussion throughout the book (Grabundžija Chapters 12, p.131; Vakirtzi Chapter 17, p.195; Gavalas Chapter 16, p.182–3).

Moving from raw material to weaving, in Chapter 2, Eva Andersson Strand provides a useful summary of looms in ancient societies. The relatively simple components of looms – often little more than a series of wooden sticks – make them difficult to detect archaeologically. The most recognisable archaeological evidence for looms, inorganic weights used to tension the warp-weighted loom, are evident from the Early Neolithic in Hungary and perhaps Anatolia in the 6th and 7th millennium BC, expand into Greece and northern Italy in the later Neolithic, and appear in Scandinavia and England in the Bronze Age (p.23–24). Regional studies throughout the volume, such as the loom weights of Rendon, Portugal (Costeira & Mataloto, Chapter 6), provide metric and typological data to reveal regional datasets.

Textile tools provide all sorts of interpretative problems, not least the designation of ceramic weights to looms. Of these, crescent-shaped loom weights known in the third millennium BC in parts of the Mediterranean and central Europe are some of the most contested in terms of how effective they are for weaving cloth, and what type of cloth they were used to weave. In this volume, two chapters use experimental archaeology to provide potential solutions to their function. In Chapter 11, Karina Grömer experiments with crescent-shaped loom weights in band looms, a warp-weighted loom for textiles, and another for twining. Considering suitability to task, and the closeness of the use wear of the experimental weights to the archaeological examples, she favours interpreting these as weights for warp-twining (p.124), rather than weaving, although noting that the experimental results do not fully tally with the archaeological evidence for twined fabrics. An experiment by Agata Ulanowska (Chapter 15) with several types of loom weight, including crescent-shaped loom weights for weaving twill on a warp-weighted loom, again finds them suited to these tasks (p.167–8), although results suggest this use is potentially at odds with the use wear on archaeological tools. The diverging conclusions are a reminder of the inherent

issues with experiments which offer a range of potential interpretations, rather than hard and fast solutions.

In terms of textile products and production, Janet Levy (Chapter 4) considers the iconography and artefactual evidence for clothing and dress in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A to C in the southern Levant. In Chapter 10, Johanna Banck-Burgess presents ropes, hats, containers and twined objects of the Neolithic pile dwellings of Baden-Württemberg, southwest Germany, as part of a major new project covering textile manufacture in the prehistoric pile dwellings. There are extraordinary and ephemeral remains of mats and shrouds excavated from an Early Bronze Age grave mound in Romania (Bolohan & Lazanu, Chapter 13). An underlying theme is the social contexts of textile production, the potential of textile tools to answer questions of the organization of production at household or intra-site levels, issues of status and power related to textiles crafts, and cross-crafts. Petya Hristova (Chapter 14), for example, investigates textiles alongside stone and gold in the context of household production of the Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic Varna Culture, Bulgaria.

To my mind, what is most memorable about this book is the varied research carried out on assemblages of textiles tools. These are the spindle whorls, loom weights, and lesser known tools such spinning bowls (Ruiz de Haro, Chapter 8), or simple implements such as bone points and combs at the Early Neolithic site of La Draga, Spain (de Diego *et al.* Chapter 7). These humble objects, in previous decades often overlooked for their lack of apparent interpretative significance, have been embraced as functional tools, cultural markers, indicators of technological continuity or change, contextual indicators of textile activity and specialisation or the lack of it. I was impressed by Ana Grabundžija's sample size of 928 spindle whorls from Middle and Late Neolithic sites in central and southern Europe (Chapter 12). Using a recording protocol taking four main measurements (whorl diameter, perforation diameter, height and width) together with typology, the data analysis Grabundžija brings out the resemblance of tools between archaeological cultural groupings and a period level comparison (p.135–6). Similar analysis at site and intra-site scale, such as the Eskişehir region in northwest Anatolia (Sari, Chapter 19), and Arslantepe, Turkey (Laurito, Chapter 20) offer diachronic and synchronic results for their study areas. Together these chapters provide a rich entry point into the analysis of textile tools.

The main achievement of many chapters in *First Textiles* is taking rather elusive evidence, relating it to textiles and their manufacture, and making the most of it by bringing textiles into the foreground, then contextualising textiles in local archaeologies. Both a strength and a weakness of this volume is that there are multiple approaches to textile tools in terms of typology, documentation parameters, analytical method and interpretation. Bringing together current research provides ample detail in specific case studies and diversity in the application of evidence.

It is encouraging to see new authors working on textiles and textile related evidence. What is lost is the broader overview of chronological and inter-regional developments, which tend to be helpful to non-specialist readers seeking to integrate their study area into these trends. The introduction provides a brief chronological synopsis of the earliest preserved textile evidence across Europe and the Mediterranean; individual chapters provide contextual overviews for specific areas. Inevitably, in places there could have been greater editorial control. I was frustrated by author's use of named periods rather than specific dates, making it hard to build one's own chronological narrative and conclusions.

In a field that is currently rich in publications, it is worth mentioning how *First Textiles* complements several recent edited volumes on early textiles. Volume 11 in the Ancient Textile Series, '*Textiles and Textile Production in Europe: From Prehistory to AD 400*' (Gleba & Mannering 2012) is a survey of preserved organic textile remains country by country, written mainly by established textile researchers, and has become an important reference in the field. *First Textiles* supplements this book by addressing the evidence for textile tools across a similar geographical area and periods. A second book, volume 21 in the Ancient Textile Series, '*Tools, Textiles and Contexts: Investigating Textile Production in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age*' (Andersson Strand & Nosch 2015), presents a significant methodological development in the functional analysis of textile tools – notably spindle whorls and loom weights – and applies this method to Bronze Age sites across the study area. In its scope, *First Textiles* complements this book in its regional and methodological diversity. As part of the Ancient Textiles Series, *First Textiles* fills a gap in addressing the Neolithic evidence and less well-studied areas, provides a wide range of approaches to tool analysis, covers debates in several contested area, such as seed biometrics and the use of crescent-shaped loom weights, and showcases results from projects established since 2013. A third book crossing over with the later periods in *First Textiles* and with more north and central European focus is '*The Textile Revolution in Bronze Age Europe; Production, Specialisation, Consumption.*' (Sabatini & Bergerbrant 2020), which focuses on the changes associated with the introduction of sheep's wool. Textile Revolution provides a natural chronological progression from *First Textiles* and complements it well.

First Textiles has succeeded in its aim to bring together recent studies in early textiles. In terms of academic level, this volume will suit a specialist audience who are either already versant with archaeological textiles or are potentially seeking to find information or inspiration on the analysis of textile evidence in their study region. After many years in the shadows, it is excellent to see the ongoing interest and detailed work on early evidence for archaeological textiles. For this reason, the publication of the papers presented at these two conferences offers an important arena for a wide range of research and voices in this now well-established field.

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Review submitted: January 2020

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