Textiles and Dress in Greece and the Roman East: A Technological and Social Approach

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Literary testimonies and inscripions

INTRODUCTION: WEAVING, DRESS AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ROMAN-ERA GREECE

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If one attempts to treat weaving and dress as discernible subjects during the Roman period in Greece, centered on the Aegean, they appear difficult issues to examine. The limits are hard to set: they can be defined neither geographically, given the constant fluctuation and shifting even during the period in question, nor thematically, as to what exactly the terms "weaving" and "dress" comprise and signify. The content of these terms, or rather their field of signification, is also easily extensible, since the making of clothing and textiles encroaches on various sectors which do not strictly form part of the main fields of weaving and dress (the construction of the social and personal aspect, the display of belonging and so on). This content is also interlinked with various sectors of production, from farming and animal husbandry to dyeing, architecture and the economy. Predictably, linguistic expressions in technical texts or inscriptions are just as detailed and inventive as the literal and metaphorical meanings of weaving terms in literary sources. The main theme underlying this whole treatise is how far fundamental areas of lifestyle such as weaving and dress change – or rather are liable to change – following political events such as a conquest, a political upheaval or the establishment of a different system of administration. Are phenomena of a historically different class, layers of habits imbued with age-old movements, affected? Obviously yes, is the reasonable reply, but at what points of the overall phenomenon, at what rates, with what kinds of resistance?

During the period studied here, the Mediterranean had been internationalized for centuries with all that entails, making it a melting-pot of peripheral and central cultures, or of the centres of political power. At different rates and with different expressions, the different values and customs of ancient and venerable peoples such as those of Egypt and Syro-Palestine, or with different traditions such as the peoples of Arabia, Anatolia or the Achaemenid state, came into contact with Classical tradition and handled it with their own dynamics. And Greek creativity, with its age-old power of assimilation, had by no means run dry. It constantly presented new and unprecedented creations, in the cities, in the fields, on the seas, and even in everyday, conservative areas such as the family, or in painful and traditional issues such as attitudes towards death. In this complex network of Late Hellenistic culture, the manner of dress was one of the main fields of ethnic and social expression and, perhaps, confrontation (e.g. between indigenous populations and Hellenistic kingdoms)[1].

Thus the permutations around the Mediterranean in the context of the internationalized Middle Sea and the adjacent Greek areas, where powerful cit-

1. The fullest synthesis on the Greek territories during the Roman period is found in the *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, vol. VI, 1976,112-270; on Roman dress in general, see Sebesta & Bonfante 2001.

ies formed the source and core of Classical expression, are hard to distinguish. The political centres and state power had moved elsewhere, while many of the major industrial and commercial centres of textile production and distribution were scattered around the Mediterranean, from as early as the Hellenistic period and to an even greater degree in Roman times. What is due to new influences and what is due to tradition?

The stakes in the attempt to study dress and weaving under Roman rule consist precisely in the investigation of differentiation. Does it exist? The weight of Classicism is immense and the presence of the Hellenistic tradition catalytic. How is the Roman presence expressed through dress? It is the unknown quantity in a geographical area which is hugely important because it indelibly bears the mark of Classical and Hellenistic tradition. It must be noted, however, that there is great human mobility, evident from personal names[2]. Many different people, merchants, craftsmen and soldiers, from various parts of the empire settled in Greece, bringing new customs with them: very basic things like food, burial and bringing up their children. These do not change from one day to the next. But those who live there, whether newcomers or established inhabitants, live with the knowledge and weight of ancient glory, even if only through hearing the language or seeing the urban landscape and monuments.

As an introduction to this volume, we will attempt to express experimentally some questions that echo the research issues and try to form a coherent link between the papers.

Dress and the Roman politics of appearance in Greece.

As we have said, dress and weaving as the object of historical analysis are involved in historical situations of all kinds as an indicator, consequence and precondition. To give some brief examples: in the economic sector, dress, as a the product of accumulated labour and with a lifespan exceeding one or more generations, is one of the major exchangeable and commercial types of goods; it modifies relationships, promotes techniques and workshops, attracts the interest of the state, and contributes to the fame, accumulation of wealth and status of entire regions. It is worth recalling Hierapolis in Phrygia and Thyateira in Lydia, Asia Minor, cities renowned for their huge textile production (Sanidas 2011, 31). This "industrial" textile production never entirely replaced domestic work, which aims to meet needs directly, without an exchange of final products. The relationship between a common household activity, in which both the production and consumption of the output took place within the oikos, and a larger-scale production that went beyond purely domestic needs, while still remaining a household-centered industry is still an open matter. To what degree and under what circumstances the existence of specialized production is possible and even probable, and to what degree the difference between production confined to the needs of a single household and the larger-scale production of a workshop is archaeologically visible, is still debated (Tzachili 2008).

It would seem that the difference was never clear-cut; a domestic workshop could easily undertake work intended for trade, as was apparently the case in Patras (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VII, 21, 16-18), or could equally easily be limited to household use. It obviously depended on the demand, while the skill and prestige of the weaver also played

2. As we can see, for example, from the composition of the population of Beroea (Tataki 1988, 82-306).

an important part. In Patras, especially, there were specialisations, small workshops and perhaps even some form of female guild.

The second example may be of more interest for our subject. Dress, as a means both to differentiate between people's appearance and to include them within a group, highlights and justifies both differences and the absence of differences. The powerful, the ruling groups, expressed and imposed themselves through luxury clothing; but dress also indicates all sorts of characteristics determining human existence: professions, religious organisations, public offices, military ranks. Above all, however, it promotes values. The costumes of every era form a social standard which, while including basic functions such as covering and symbolism, also indicates the social aspect of individuals or groups: practices, prohibitions, bodily postures and customs, where one belongs (nationality, priesthood, religion, age), one's material capabilities. In Central Europe in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, dress was how nations expressed their divergence from the dominant Classical central model (Bianchi Bandinelli 1964, 127-233).

Strict Roman family traditions and Greek Classical tradition

Thus, as we have said, when the Romans appeared in the Aegean, weaving and the cloth-making, as well as the production of various other household textiles (carpets, wall hangings) were extremely refined arts with a very long tradition in the Hellenistic world. The output of world-famous workshops circulated throughout the Mediterranean and was synonymous with fashion and luxury. The political dominance of the Romans in the Aegean was established easily and almost universally in the 2nd c. B.C. But a change in political dominance does not immediately bring about changes either in weaving or in other aspects of life. Shifts in political power do not immediately modify art and technology, or a traditional mode of dress.

In the case of Rome and Greece, however, there was a reverse influence. Even before the conquest of the Greek world, Rome was familiar with its arts and had been influenced by the way of life, art and letters of the Greeks to the point that Roman culture was expressed through Greek artistic style. That is why it is so difficult to differentiate between Greek and Roman identity through dress. It would appear that the mode of dress was also influenced by the quest for luxury and fashion in Rome.

So we cannot expect spectacular changes in the Aegean, whether in weaving technology, textile production and trade, or dress. These are apparent, on the contrary, in Rome: as the sumptuary laws of the Lex Oppia show, dress in Rome, particularly female dress, was one of the areas of resistance to the different modes of clothing and lifestyle that flooded the city (Astin, Walbank, Frederiksen & Ogilvie. 1989, 181-185, 439, 453, 495; Johnston 1980; Heskel 2001).

Thus dress in Greece and Rome during the period of the Roman Republic and the Imperium is an exceptional field in which to evaluate the weight of Classical and Hellenistic tradition in the context of the Roman state with its strict traditions. Moreover, new preferences are clearly apparent compared to traditional ones, as are the widespread reactions to them. When resistance to luxury was worn down, the supranational spirit that predominated in the East Mediterranean spread everywhere including Italy, bearing with it the rich gold-and-purple garments from Egypt and Anatolia, which are found as grave goods and depicted in countless images around the Mediterranean and throughout the Empire.

Fig. 1. *Votive relief to Artemis, 4th c. B.C. Lamia Archaeological Museum (after Dakoronia & Gounaropoulou 1992)*

Common elements of dress

Greek costume, along very general lines, was not fundamentally different to the Roman way of dressing. The basic principle was the same: a large piece of cloth wrapped round the body in various ways, and secured, also in a variety of ways, using belts or pins. The cloth was not cut and sewn to measure as in other cultures such as the Minoan one, or in Europe from the Renaissance onwards. The large, rectangular piece of cloth, wrapped round the body, hung in folds and gave a sense of motion, looseness and freedom of movement that was much the same in both Greece in Rome, regardless of any differences. Based on this correspondence, an amalgamation of dress modes, particularly in female dress, easily emerged.

The traditional Roman female garments were the *stola*, a long, straight, sleeveless or short-sleeved garment worn under the *palla*, the outer mantle which was wrapped around the body. In their main characteristics and structural elements, the stola and palla corresponded to the Greek *chiton* or *peplos* for the inner garment and the *himation* for the outer one that was wrapped around the body (Sebesta 2001). This easily resulted in an amalgam, forming a common mode of dress in Roman-era Italy, the Aegean and the East Mediterranean. A legacy of the Hellenistic period, it continued in use into Roman times with influences from eastern religions and Egypt (Walters 1988). In contemporary works of art we see the outer garment covering the inner one, leaving folds of drapery and parts of the body visible (v. Moock 1998, n 83, 119, 147, 221, 231, 235). It is worth comparing the garments offered to Artemis in an late-4th-century relief from Achinos near Lamia. On a rope behind the deity and the worshippers, the offered garments hang on display: a himation, a peplos, a sleeveless inner tunic, a belt and shoes (Dakoronia & Gounaropoulou 1992) (Fig. 1 and 2). Note how closely they resemble the Roman stola and palla. With the passing centuries, various influences modified the look. In Greek areas these influences came from the East, Egypt and Syria, rather than the West (Lee Carroll 1988). They included the long, single-piece gold-woven chitons with bands sewn on them, like that described by Moulhérat in this volume. They were very wide, woven in one piece, and followed a very different logic. In their simplest form, they resemble those in the Louvre (Cortopassi 2007).

Provincial art and the codification of dress

In Northern Italy, Gaul, the Rhineland and Noricum, where Classical tradition was weaker, but also closer to Greece, in Mysia, Thrace and even Asia Minor, local cultural traditions were expressed through elements of dress, marks of a person's place in life. They indicated professions (dyers, smiths, traders, etc.) and, above all, a citizen's participation in the army (as in the numerous depictions on grave stelai that made it possible to name this thematology 'military art'), or membership of religious groups such as the priestesses of Isis. These issues are discussed in the paper by Maria Spathi in this volume.

Fig. 2. *Drawing of a detail of the previous relief. Drawing by Andreas Zacharatos*

A similar codification of dress is also found in Greece but to a lesser extent, and it is obviously harder to speak of provincial art, since local workshops largely followed and developed a single tradition. However, the broad outline of "provincial" distinctions is also present here, mainly on the grave stelai. According to Spathi, this is less true of the female figures depicted and more the case with the male ones, which promote the public image of the deceased to a greater degree.

Weaving as a female virtue

Dress, as it is depicted mainly on funerary monuments, not only contributes to the characterisation of an individual in his or her professional and public life, but also promotes values, something met with more frequently on female grave stelai. In Greece and Asia Minor there are many grave stelai depicting the deceased in scenes appropriate to their personality but also indicating their relationship to the oikos and their domestic duties through the inclusion of weaving tools, a spindle and kalathos (basket). The deceased women are either spinning wool or simply have the spindle or kalathos beside them. Sometimes only the weaving tools are depicted, functioning as symbols without the figure of the woman herself. They thereby promote what were considered feminine domestic values: modesty, industry, diligent organisation of the domestic economy, clothing the family and, above all, dedication to the family (see Tzachili on the myth of Arachne, this volume). This thematic continues the corresponding pictorial tradition of Classical times, which is why it is more common in Greek lands (Greece and Asia Minor). However, it is identified with the values of Rome, and the women's names are often Roman or Hellenised Latin ones.

The best-known depiction of this theme of weaving as a family value is found not on private monuments but on a public building, the Temple of Minerva in the Forum Transitorium or Forum of Nerva in Rome, whose construction began during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) and was completed by his successor Nerva (96-98 AD) (D'Ambra 1993; Bauer & Moerselli 1995; La Rocca 1995, 1998) (figs. 3-5, Tzachili this volume). Minerva (the Roman coun-

terpart of Athena) was considered to have a special relationship with the Emperor Domitian as the defender of the family values he espoused, values symbolised by spinning and weaving as the female virtues par excellence (D'Ambra 1993, 11).

The scene in question is found on the frieze. It is a group of female figures arranged around three looms, interpreted as the contest of Athena and Arachne (although this is disputed). The exemplarity of the myth matches the imperial ideology of the period, both through the female virtues of industry and modesty that are depicted symbolically by domestic work, and through submission to the divine. The loom and weaving theme is unique in relief decoration on a public building, which is what makes it so remarkable. The subject is examined in detail by Tzachili (The myth of Arachne, this volume), discussing the context of Athena and the Lydian Arachne, a marvellous weaver - in effect, the clash of two worlds. It is worth noting that there are other scenes elsewhere depicting subjects related to the cycle of activities connected with weaving, such as dyeing, fulling or tapestry weaving, although they do not usually portray women. Men began to take over this specialised and economically important work and so, from the 3rd century onwards, we find grave stelai in Central Europe and even in Greece depicting specialised weaving artisans connected to the cycle of textile and clothing production. These are an expression of the penetration of professional guilds into Greece. They indicate the professional identity of the individual rather than a value system.

Technical developments in weaving

In antiquity, loom techniques occupied a unique position: weaving was, of course, supremely important, it was visible and ever present, it took up a large part of human life as both labour and result (in other words, its products conferred status), and it was also a source of commercial wealth and influence. This is particularly obvious in the Hellenistic kingdoms and the early Roman period. There are corresponding myths and literary themes, and written sources provide various detailed weaving terms. But weaving was not one of the strategic points of technology, it was not one of the technical sectors which could modify groups and relationships. When that happened, it was only through trade, and it only produced gradual changes in social correlations. Although refined techniques created, around the Mare Nostrum and further north, a specific luxury market and intense demand for goods such as silk textiles, they cannot be compared to other technical advances in communications (ships, roads), farming, energy sources (e.g. water management), or industrial sectors such as metallurgy. Textiles marked and increased the wealth of areas and workshops but did not have the same significance in political dominance and social composition as energy or communications, tools or weapons.

Historical evidence of technical developments in weaving

The correlation of technical advances with historical developments and political changes is a critical issue. Most scholars believe that these fields are related, but this is just a general statement. The means and forms in which this occurs, which is where the historical interest lies, are usually hidden beneath the surface. The specific instant when technical choices are made, which would shed light on areas considered strategically important in a historical correlation, usually passes unrecorded, as was the case with the adoption of the major innovation in weaving, the horizontal frame loom. So it is hard to perceive the social context in which the changes are ex-

pressed or adopted, whether gradually or suddenly. The changes are not highlighted, they do not follow important political shifts; they have their own flow, with different rhythms, still social in nature but less obvious.

Sometimes authors will remember and refer to the old technology after the event, once the new technology has become widespread. This was the case with loom technology, once the two-beam loom had replaced the familiar warp-weighted loom of Classical and Hellenistic times. Some Latin authors (Seneca epistulae) mentioned the old type, in order to stress that the warp-weighted loom was only used to weave certain kinds of cloth and ceremonial garments. The weight of tradition associated with dress obstructed or prohibited the adoption of the new type; both dress and loom were subject to the same inertia.

The two-beam loom that replaced the warp-weighted loom had two advantages: on the one hand it made the work easier because the weaver could work sitting down, and on the other it permitted wider pieces of cloth to be woven (Forbes 1956, 195. Barber 1991, 141-149. Wild 1988, 36-37. Tzachili 1997, 153-156). It was adopted in most parts of the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. This is most obvious from the gradual disappearance of loomweights, the only preserved part and thus an irrefutable indication of warp-weighted looms. These were gradually replaced, disappearing by the 2nd c. AD.

It is therefore almost certain that the exceptional-quality Hellenistic textiles were woven on warp-weighted looms (as in the Pergamon workshops, for example), as evidenced by the presence of loomweights. The loomweights were standardised, as we can see from those from Trypitos (see Sofianou, in this volume), and were actually cast in a special mould, making them identical. Sofianou concludes that different textiles were woven on the same type of loom. The loomweights of Messene in the 3rd century B.C., when it was a major urban centre with industrial activity, are also discussed in this volume (see Gkika). The same paper also raises another important issue, that of the use of inscribed loomweights, for which various interpretations have been proposed (Chaniotis 2005, 95-96. Bowsky 2011, 176-185). The percentage of inscribed loomweights at Messene is especially high, a particularly interesting characteristic of the group.

In Late Antiquity another great change which cannot be precisely dated took place: the adoption of the horizontal foot loom. This is a thorny question, very significant for the new possibilities it presented but passing completely unrecorded in the written sources (Wild 2007). From the iconography it appears that the vertical loom and horizontal foot loom coexisted for many centuries. The geography of the use of the various loom types would be a subject of enormous historical interest, but unfortunately the primary evidence is scanty. The only thing of which we can be certain is that the horizontal foot loom originated in the eastern provinces of the Roman state. An interesting third-century funerary monument, the Beroea stele, depicts a horizontal structure connected to weaving (Tataki 1988, 195, pl. VIII), but its actual function is obscure. It is braced and the tension held steady by the large stone block hanging underneath. There are several different shuttles, presumably for various colours and qualities of wool, linen or silk (Fig. 3).

Before closing this chapter, we will refer briefly to the phenomenon of technical inertia. This does not have negative undertones. There are fields in which the technique and therefore the tools remain unaltered for centuries. People have achieved the best shape,

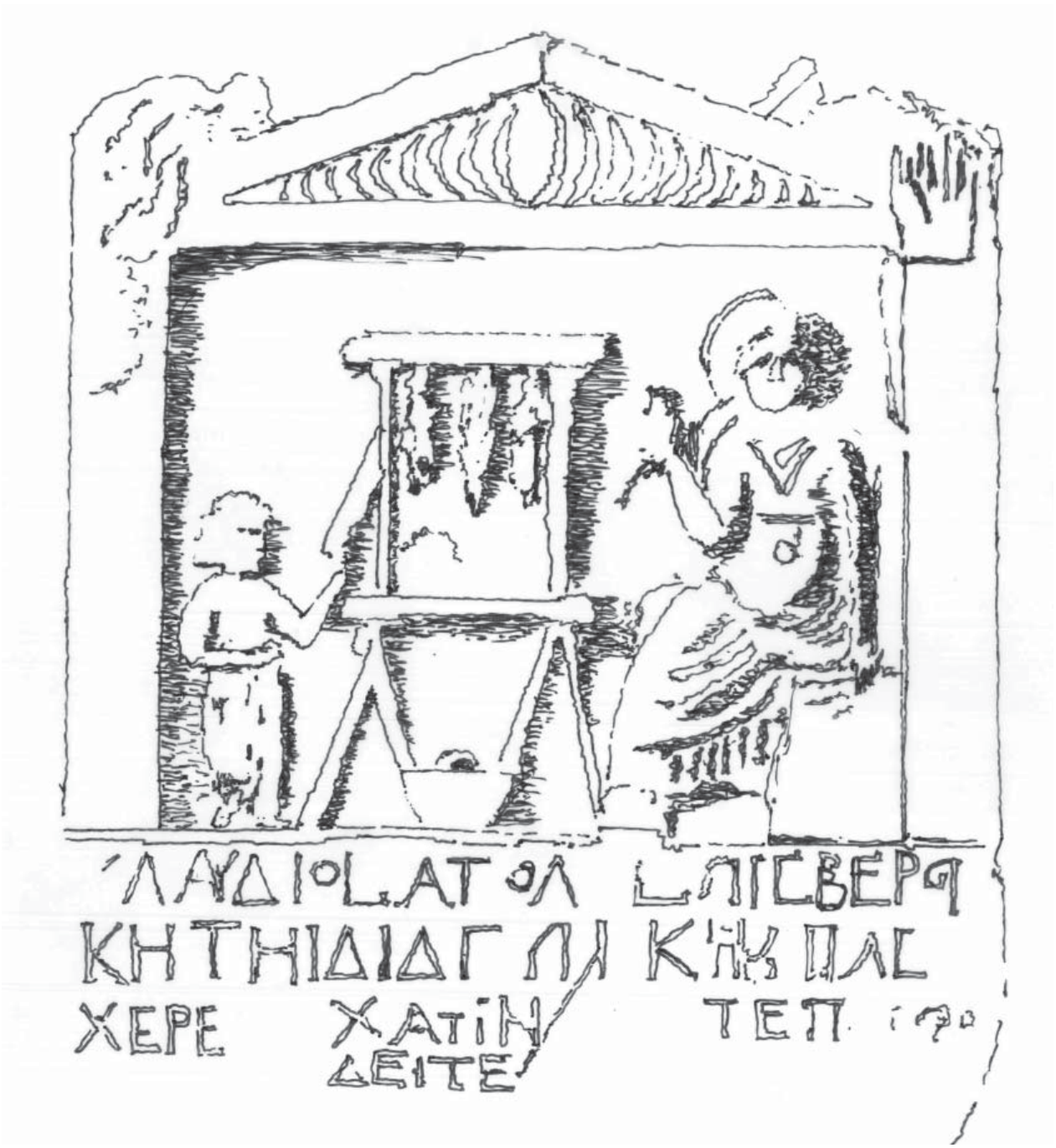

Fig. 3. *Relief funerary stele from Beroea (after Tataki 1988). Drawing by Andreas Zacharatos*

the best weight, the most perfect corporeal techniques, the best learning and teaching method, and these do not change for millennia. One such field is spinning. By various finger movements, finding the

rhythm and with the participation of other parts of the body, a perfect output was achieved, often without the use of any tool. There was the spindle, which came in various sizes and was held in various ways; but the basis of the action, the twisting motion using the weight of the spindle whorl and other impedimenta, remained unchanged. In Late Antiquity the quality of the fibres changed (with the gradual appearance of silk and cotton), but the spinning of the fibres into thread remained the same. The visual effect of the threads became ever more complex, due to the dissemination of gold thread (see Karatzani and Moulhérat, this volume), but the vast quantities of simple textiles were spun in the same way. That is why we continue to find spindle whorls that indicate the same general spinning methods. Spinning was always a traditional female occupation, interwoven with feminine virtues. It was only when purple-dyeing and gold thread became widespread that male specialisations appeared.

The development of weaving specialisations followed the general development of specialised professionals who organised themselves into guilds, groups of craftsmen with internal rules and a specific area of activity. Weaving specialisations and guilds developed particularly in Asia Minor, where there had been a tradition of textile production from the time of the Lydian state (see Tzachili, in this volume). It may be worth mentioning that artisans in Anatolia were concentrated in the two production centres (Hierapolis and Saittai) and covered most weaving specialisations, thereby becoming an index of the various specialisations and the particular importance of the industry. Most were fullers. In contemporary Greece there were far fewer guilds and hardly any were engaged in weaving activities (Sanidas 2011).

Exceptional products

Specialisations in various fields echoed the particular market demand for quality goods. The results, i.e. the textile products, were exceptional. This volume includes the publication of the splendid textile from Thessaloniki (Moulhérat). The amazing technical details are analysed, detailing the creation of the fine metal fibres of the gold threads and the patterns they form. Such textiles, linked to the East but widespread throughout Europe (see Zimi on the inscriptions of purple-dyers in Macedonia, in this volume), were of huge economic and symbolic significance. The garment of the dead woman is a luxury grave good in itself. In the paper by Karatzani, also in this volume, the history and technology of gold thread is discussed in detail, together with the various theories on its creation. Many questions remain open, including the presence of such large quantities of gold. Raw materials and the discussion of the newly appearing ones, silk and cotton, occupy most of the authors. The presence of silk and other raw materials is mainly developed in the papers by Margariti and Kinti and touched on in Hildebrandt's contribution.

The ambiguity of technical weaving terms

Archaeological evidence regarding textiles is hard to recover. In the attempt to provide an overall interpretation, it must be studied in combination with other sources. So we come to the other difficulty faced by textile experts: the "impenetrable nature" of technical weaving terms (Wild 2007, 5). There are some phrases containing obscure words from which a technical construction detail can be extrapolated, but usually the terms are ambiguous or even polysemous, open to different interpretations depending on our explanation of the practice. This, too, is open to many interpretations. Furthermore, the literal sense is confused with the symbolic one. Thus the

argument is in danger of becoming a circular one, and the only solution is the fullest possible comparison of all the examples of each term, in order to shed light on their breadth of meaning. This is the approach adopted by Maria Patera in her contribution to a much-discussed a subject: embroidery. The question is to what extent decorated textiles were created as embroideries, working over the original textile. This would allow unlimited variations or patterns, although the cloth becomes stiff and unyielding. The other possibility is that the patterns were created during the actual weaving process, something that entails prior planning and probably the use of tapestry weaving. In order to evaluate these possibilities, the author has collated and discussed all the cases available, with their literal meanings and symbolic projections. The subject has already been discussed with regard to Homeric terms.

In Berit Hildebrandt's paper the process is reversed. The author starts out with a specific textual extract and attempts to provide a technical explanation, analysing the terms, mustering the possibilities and proposing a new, powerful interpretation.

Textiles through funerary customs

Towards the end of Antiquity, as we approach the Middle Ages with the transfer of the capital to Constantinople, a multinational and multicultural expressive idiom had developed in the Greek areas. This is found in many different fields of vital importance to human existence: religion, death and the ethics of human relations, something which is apparent, for example, in the complexity of human attitudes towards the dead. Here the significance of dress and the value attributed to the textile is perhaps most apparent. We will refer to the burial example mentioned above, the Thessaloniki tomb (Tzanavari, this volume). The funerary monument is relatively plain. The marble sarcophagus was unadorned and contained a lead coffin. This is a Syrian custom found throughout the Roman Empire, from Syria to Gaul, from the 3rd century onwards. The dead woman was placed in it, dressed in her gold-woven, richly decorated chiton. That was her only grave good, a status object of immense economic and symbolic value. By that we can measure the magnitude of the offering and the depth of the love shown to the deceased. The presence of such valuable textiles demonstrates both the love of the deceased and the love of textiles. It is probably no coincidence that this textile was found in a city with such a long history, where the Macedonian substrate was settled by different nations with different forms of cultural expression.

The collection of papers in this volume should be seen as small pieces of gravel in a roadway under construction. We hope that they will be treated more as questions, as points of departure of a long road, than as a final word.

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