

Call for Papers



The
Society for
Medieval
Archaeology

“Cultures of Cloth”

The Archaeology of Textiles in Medieval Northwest Europe

Society for Medieval Archaeology Annual Conference

University of Nottingham, 10-12 July 2020

Textiles were the single most important manufactured product in the medieval world. Moving from domestic household production to the commercialisation of the textile industry was a primary driver of the development of the medieval European economy and helped to shape medieval landscapes and settlements ranging from rural villages to international cities. Textiles were one of the most prominent commodities in medieval trade networks; wool and linen were the stuff of everyday life while silks, damasks and cloth of gold were among the most valuable luxuries in the medieval world. Textiles were used as clothes, bedding, tablecloths, wall-hangings, sails, sacks, altar-cloths and shrouds; they were integral to every aspect of the routine and ritual lives of medieval people, through which they expressed identities based on geography, status, gender, age and ethnicity. For better or for worse, spreading disease and depopulation as well as wealth, opportunities and knowledge, cloth production and trade interconnected communities of all sizes across Europe, surviving and driving a millennium of profound social, economic, political and environmental change.

Interest in medieval textiles amongst social and economic historians has been growing, while archaeology provides unique data and new perspectives. Textiles only rarely survive in the ground, but permeate all aspects of the medieval archaeological record – from the production of raw materials and the development of manufacturing processes to the growth of international trade, from the use of textiles in ritual and everyday life to the impact of new wealth on the physical fabric of the medieval world. Archaeological evidence for medieval textiles therefore encompasses sheep cotes, deserted villages and retting ponds; seeds, sheep bones and DNA; fulling mills, guildhalls, merchant’s houses and churches; seals, loom weights and spindle whorls; clothing, brooches and dress-pins; shroud-pins and funerary effigies; chantry chapels and stained glass windows.

Networks of textile production, exchange and consumption drew together medieval communities across Europe and beyond, but the north-western European zone of textile manufacture and trade connecting farmers, craftspeople and merchants across the North Sea and English Channel was particularly significant. This conference aims to bring together scholars from both sides of the channel, across the fields of archaeology and allied disciplines, covering both earlier and later medieval periods in Northwest Europe, to explore the multifaceted evidence for the ways in which ‘cultures of cloth’ drove medieval society and wove the fabric of medieval life.

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We welcome proposals for papers of 20 minutes length from scholars at any stage in their career using physical evidence to explore the impact of the production, trade or consumption of textiles in medieval Northwest Europe, for any period between the sixth and sixteenth centuries.

We would particularly welcome contributions that address international connections between England and the Continent. Questions which might be addressed include (but are not restricted to): to what extent did medieval 'cultures of cloth' represent, reinforce or transcend personal, local, national or international boundaries and identities? What was the impact of the textile industry on the physical world and what lessons might this us hold for today? Can the archaeology of textiles help us better understand risk and resilience in medieval society? How useful is an international perspective for research into the medieval textile trade, and what questions should we be exploring in the future?

We are keen to encourage interdisciplinary approaches and welcome proposals from scholars in the fields of economic, social or cultural history who wish to explore material culture perspectives on these topics.

Please submit paper proposals of no more than 300 words along with a short bio to Chris.King@nottingham.ac.uk by ~~15 December 2019~~ 31 January 2020 (deadline extended).

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The Society for Medieval Archaeology

The Society for Medieval Archaeology exists to further the study of the physical remains of the medieval period, whether standing buildings, landscapes, buried remains or artefacts in museums. The society publishes a highly regarded journal, *Medieval Archaeology*, and holds regular meetings and conferences bringing together a wide range of disciplines to explore and develop current and emerging research themes. Membership of the Society is open to all those interested in medieval archaeology and members receive two issues of the journal and two issues of the society Newsletter per annum. Members are also entitled to discounted rates for conferences and monographs, while a number of other institutions also offer special discounts to society members.