

Kerstin Droß-Krüpe, ed., *Textile Trade and Distribution in Antiquity/ Textilhandel und – distribution in der Antike* (Philippika. Altertumswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen/ Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 73), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014. ISSN 1613-5628 ISBN 978-3-447-10220-9.

The recognition of the economic, social and political importance of textiles is a relatively new but now flourishing development in Ancient World studies. Among recent publications one may cite, for example, M. Carroll and J. P. Wild (eds), *Dressing the Dead in Classical Antiquity*, Stroud, 2012. Compared to theirs, Droß-Krüpe's volume, the proceedings of a conference held in Marburg in 2013, is much wider in chronological and geographical scope, and range of topics addressed. While it attempts no overall picture, it illustrates the current state of historical and archaeological textile-studies, and identifies many lines of enquiry and future advance.

Sixteen papers deal with various aspects of the ancient textile industry, from raw materials and their processing to the mechanisms of trade and their socio-economic implications. Margarita Gleba, 'Sheep to textiles: approaches to investigating ancient wool trade' (123–33), provides a useful introduction. She explains why sheep-wool became the dominant raw material, and how wool-farming developed as a specialised activity, from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. She then considers the techniques and difficulties of studying wool and textiles archaeologically. Though Gleba notes that flax is a much more demanding textile source than sheep-wool, Marie-Louise Nosch, 'Linen textiles and flax in Classical Greece: provenance and trade' (17–42), argues very forcefully that it was widely grown and processed in the Mediterranean region, especially in Classical Greece. She points up the extensive use made of linen and tow, and emphasises their huge importance as war matériel, for sails and ropes.

In 'The economics of weaving. Aspects of labour in the Bronze Age Aegean' (151–9), Agata Ulanowska takes us to production in reporting a Polish project in experimental archaeology, aimed at assessing the input of labour and attention at various stages of woollen and linen textile-production. The project found that, within limits, weaving and finishing were the least demanding processes, and suggested that weaving, done at home, would allow the predominantly female weavers time for their customary household chores. Agnès Garcia-Ventura, 'Weaving in Ur III Mesopotamia: women's work?' (135–40), continues the theme of the role of women in confronting the assumption that in the later second millennium B.C. Sumerian weaving was a purely female preserve. While accepting that most weavers probably were women, she proposes that in this, as in other trades (especially milling), males are hidden by language structure. Labour was divided, but the principal criterion was not necessarily gender: in certain circumstances, men could weave, and grind. Female labour is also the topic of Juliane Meyenburg's 'Berufsbezeichnungen von Frauen in kaiserzeitlichen Papyri' (177–87). Meyenburg similarly questions a traditional view, that in Antiquity a woman's place was always in the home, by examining papyri from Roman Egypt. These show females involved in a wide range of 'real' (i.e. not the somewhat exotic roles, ranging from

prostitutes to professors, of the literary sources) work. They appear most frequently as child-carers, but this is followed by their involvement, evidenced by apprenticeship-agreements and contracts, in the textile trade, as workers and employers.

Malgorzata Siennicka, 'Changes in textile production in Late Bronze Age Tiryns, Greece' (161–76), considers the technology of spinning and weaving. She suggests that changes in spindle-whorls and loom-weights indicate changes in the techniques of textile production in order to produce more and different textiles. This is likely to have been in response to changing socio-economic conditions in the post-Palatial period. In similar vein, David R. A. Lumb, 'Textile traditions of northwest Syria during the Early Iron Age' (141–50), argues that on the Amuq plain, in south-east Turkey, in the period 1300–1000 B.C., changes in the weight and size of spindle-whorls and the weight and shape of loom-weights may be associated with changes in the type of fabrics being produced, from coarser to lighter. These new textiles, exported to or requisitioned by the Assyrians, had a significant socio-economic impact. Lumb also proposes that the new technology came from the Aegean.

In terms of cloth produced, Maciej Szymaszek, 'The distribution of textiles with 'Greek letter' signs in the Roman world: the case of the so-called *gammadia*' (189–97), investigates designs woven into corners of rectangular woollen fabrics dating to the early Roman Empire and found mainly in Egypt, but also as far afield as Gaul and Britain. He prefers to see these not as a range of Greek letters but as just three symbols, the most frequent of which is a sort of compressed 'L'. He notes the presence of similar symbols on contemporary graphic representations of clothing, but offers no explanation for them, except to say that they are certainly not religious in significance.

Trading in cloth is mainly considered with regard to the Roman period, but Cécile Michel, 'The Assyrian textile trade in Anatolia (19th century BCE). From traded goods to prestigious gifts' (111–22), begins much earlier by considering the export of Assyrian woollens into Anatolia, in exchange for bullion, in the second millennium B.C. Assyrian traders settled in many places, the chief of which was Kane (near Roman Caesarea): an earlier Palmyra, or an ancient Venice. The main evidence comes from a remarkable find of over 22,000 cuneiform tablets. These present a detailed picture of where and how textiles were produced and traded, down to the activities of individuals. They reveal the functioning of sophisticated systems for producing, carrying and trading goods, and managing associated financial transactions, including credit and taxation. The great importance of textiles as prestige goods for local Anatolian leaders is revealed in their sworn cooperation. Palmyra itself is dealt with by Kai Ruffing, 'Seidenhandel in der römischen Kaiserzeit' (71–81). Taking Pliny I's disapproving remarks about Roman use of silk as a sure indication of the popularity of this material, Ruffing looks at its sources and how it was imported into the Empire. He finds two main routes. The eastern, through Palmyra, was controlled by Palmyrene nobles, with agents as far afield as western India. Palmyrene need for Mediterranean products in turn galvanised the economy of neighbouring Syria, and allowed Syrians access to the silk trade as middlemen. The southern route, through Egypt, belonged to Greco-Egyptians and,

somewhat unexpectedly, Italians. The regular supply of silk over huge distances is an indication of the power of the Roman economy in the imperial period, and a measure of the divergence between the literary and the everyday world. Palmyra is also taken up by Eivind Heldaas Seland, 'Caravans, smugglers and trading fairs: organizing textile trade on the Syrian frontier' (83–90). He makes much of modern socio-economic theory, and its premise that any exchange of goods – trade, robbery, taxation – is ultimately based on a rational maximisation of profit, based on both economic and political considerations which therefore need to be appreciated as a whole. He argues that the historically unusual desert caravan-route via Palmyra was created by textile-traders carefully picking a way between the Parthian and Roman empires. This avoided internal taxation, but also suited these imperial neighbours because it minimised political and military friction between them while allowing them – while accepting certain level of smuggling -- to exact customs duties at recognised frontier-posts. All this changed with Aurelian's destruction of Palmyra in 272–3. Silk figures in John Peter and Felicity C. Wild, 'Berenike and textile trade on the Indian Ocean' (91–109), a review of maritime textile trade in the Indian Ocean in the early Empire based on the first century A.D. *Periplus Maris Erythraei* -- 'Red Sea Sailing-Book'. The Wilds offer an enthralling introduction to the 'Periplus skipper' and his world, which stretched from East Africa to southern India; and, with their unrivalled knowledge of textiles, ancient and modern, give a lively impression of the variety in shape, texture, colour and utility of a range of textile-products. They relate this, where possible, to their own study of finds at Berenike. The most important textile movement was east to west, of silks and, very significantly, of cottons; but boats should never travel empty, and they note a significant west-east textile trade, as far as India. Further westwards, Herbert Graßl, 'Neue Texte zur Textilwirtschaft im südlichen Noricum' (43–53), offers a (re)-reading of seven small, double-sided lead tags of the Augustan period found on the Magdalensberg, Austria, in 1966. These record the association of particular provincials, male and female, free and unfree (on the obverse), with the importation, production and sale of textiles and, in one case, of hides (on the reverse). Though few in number, these tags point up the scope of this activity, the number of skilled tradespeople it involved and, generally, how the textile industry was one of the major legs of Noricum's economy. As with the silk trade, the availability of high quality goods in the provinces suggests the dynamism of the early imperial economy and the scale of its integration.

Two papers pick up the continuing debate between 'primitivists' and 'modernists' on the nature of the Roman economy. Wim Broekaert, 'Modelling the Roman textile industry in the northern provinces. Conceptions and comparisons' (55–70), takes issue with what he sees as a negative, overly 'primitivist', view of the growth of the textile industry in the north-western provinces of the Empire. This proposes that Roman entrepreneurs were never able to shape conditions to their advantage because of their relatively low social position. Unlike their English medieval counterparts, they could never enhance their status by providing the state with war-loans, and so were unable to exact favourable terms of taxation. B. argues that elites were involved, indirectly and directly, in provincial textile-production and –sale, and that the ordered state of the

Empire at its height was more conducive to industry and trade than that of the medieval period. Broekart's study is regional, but Miko Flohr, 'Towards an economic history of textile-manufacturing and trade in the Roman world' (1–15), complains about current emphasis on the regional in studies of the Roman textile industry, which leads to the lack of an overall sense of this industry's evolution under the Empire. He attributes this to the patchiness of the evidence, and the distraction of the 'primitivist'/'modernist' controversy. He suggests that there is enough evidence to begin to hazard an overall 'narrative', which can accommodate both views. Like Graßl, he sees the Empire as a force for economic integration, which resulted in the supply of more standardised products – e.g., in the case of textiles, more standardised clothing -- to more distant markets through inter-provincial nodal points such as Rome and Lyon. Appreciation of the profits to be won led to capital investment in particular processes of production: but probably not all and not everywhere. Smaller scale production, especially of lower-value products, for local sale remained important. Flohr's basic point is that the Empire had a major impact on textile-production, making the industry 'considerably more integrated and, if you wish, a bit more 'advanced'.'

A final, outlying, regional study takes us back to eastern silk, albeit at a much later period. Hang Lin, 'Fine craftsmanship and cultural bearers: silk textiles from the Khitan Liao' (199–209), deals with the Liao dynasty (A.D. 907–1125), and its 'Khitan' Empire, which exacted silk from a subservient China to the south to feed its leaders' love of silken clothing (hats, robes, boots). These were based on the patterns and techniques of Chinese tailoring, but made of fabrics designed and woven in Khitan territory to Khitan taste. This may be seen as an important sign of cultural interaction between Chinese and 'barbarians' – barbarians who also created a bridge between East and West, and in doing so caused medieval Europeans to call China 'Cathay'.

The editing of such a diverse range of papers can have been no easy undertaking, and Droß-Krüpe is to be congratulated for bringing it so quickly and successfully to fruition. However, I feel that stronger editing would have made the volume even more useful. The huge range of dates and places confuses the reader. At the start, there should have been a timeline, and a good composite map, or maps. I am not convinced that papers are presented in the best order, which is why I re-arrange them somewhat above. Some papers are not an easy read, being one or more of: over-long; over-technical; clumsy and obscure in expression; over-querulous in tone; repetitive; not always writing to the main theme; inconsistent in their manner of citation of ancient texts, etc. Many shared themes (such as the difficulties of textile-archaeology, and so the importance of experimental archaeology; flax and linen; sailcloth; silk; the Palmyrene 'caravan inscriptions'; the trading of textiles as bolts or as finished garments) are not cross-referenced in footnotes. Such themes might, indeed, have been addressed in Droß-Krüpe's 'Textiles between trade and distribution: in lieu of a preface' (vii–xii), which is disappointingly thin.

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