

Project of Historical Textiles and Terms of Costume – Textilnet.dk

SUSANNE LERVAD

Danish National Centre for Textile Research, Termplus

In Denmark over the recent years we have been working on a large digitization project of historical textiles and terms of costumes. The project is called *textilnet.dk* and takes place primarily in Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum) in Århus and the Centre for Textile Research in close co-operation with a working group of researchers from the entire country. Most of them are members of the academic network the Costume Network (www.dragt.dk) and some of the members are working at the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for Textile Research (CTR) at the University of Copenhagen. This research centre works with interdisciplinary analyses of the many unique Danish textile collections – especially weaving from the Bronze Age to the present day compared to textile finds from the Mediterranean – in particular epigraphic and iconographic materials. In the Mediterranean we rarely find remaining textile objects – except from a few areas in Egypt.

In the *textilnet.dk* project we are working with collections from 1600 and onwards at Danish museums for culture and design, especially the work of two textile curators – Erna Lorenzen and Ellen Andersen. We planned the work with classifications and methods of registration. This first classification model and organization of the field assured a conceptual way of digitizing the collections of the different museums.

The textile terminology work in Denmark is very intense and CTR is hosting workshops and conferences on terminology, for instance in co-operation with the TOTh Network for Terminology and Ontology in France on the topic of the verbal and non-verbal representation of textile terms (proceedings forthcoming) and two conferences on diachronic terminology work from the Bronze age to the first millennium AC.

The first book of proceedings *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC* (by Cécile Michel and Marie-Louise Nosch (eds.), Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2010, ISBN 978-1-84217-975-8) is the best seller of our centre and sold out as hardback book – and now only available as a paper back. It is an overwhelming success for a difficult book on a complex topic.

Marie-Louise Nosch, Director of the Centre for Textile Research, and I have together for this network series TOTH proceedings 2011 written about *Verbal and non-verbal configurations of textiles – a diachronic study*. Other activities on terminology are masterclasses for applicants for EU Marie Curie Fellowships, and we have a fine successrate on the applications. At the moment the centre has nine outstanding international Marie Curie fellows and many of them are working with terminology.

These scholars are for instance Matteo Vigo, Miguel Angel Andrés-Toledo, and Salvatore Gaspa and they have all published articles on the topic in CTR's numerous publications – particularly in the bestseller *Textile Terminologies* from 2010.

Matteo Vigo has written in the bestseller about the terminology of linen *Linen in Hittite Inventory Texts* and Miguel Angel Andrés-Toldeo has written the contribution *Some considerations about Vedic, Avestan and Indo-Iranian Textile Terminology* and finally Salvatore Gaspa has recently written about *The language of textiles: textiles in (non) verbal communication in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Over the next years the CTR will be working on more angles of terminology.

You can read more about the conference at ctr.hum.ku.dk under "Conferences". And a sequel to *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the 1st to the 1st millennia B.C.* is scheduled for release in 2015.

But back to textilnet.dk. In the first place a working group from the Costume Network under the Agency for Culture, spent some time on designing the structure for the work and collecting the various ways of registration from both design and culture museums in Denmark (e.g. Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum), Design Museum Denmark and The National Museum of Denmark). This project resulted in a classification, which formed the basis for working with more term bases in the tool "Termplus Manager".

Categories:

- materials,
- textiles,
- production techniques,
- costumes and their different parts,
- concepts of decorations and the decoration techniques,
- concepts of dyes and dye techniques and
- style.

This work is documented in the Nordterm proceedings from 2009 published on the website FORVIR - blogs.cbs.dk/forvir—a knowledge forum for modelling in the public sector.

Since 2004 the working group of textilnet.dk has been working towards the goal now realized on the basis of generous funding and a 1,1 DKK million grant from the Danish Agency for Culture. Two employees from Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum) are reviewing words and definitions from collection indexes of well-known textile researchers. It is all set up in a format created by the working group.

We note the language of each term, formulate a short definition and provide a thorough explanation as well as meaningful quotes. In addition to this we also mention the periodas terms change meaning over time.

For each concept and the term to look up, there is a section on sources. The database uses MediaWiki, which is widely used and therefore known by future users - and almost most importantly in this context - will be updated.

HOLBERG, DIARIES, OLD LETTERS AND OTHER TEXTS:

But why should we digitize textile terms? Isn't it completely irrelevant what Holberg believed in his texts from the 1700's, for example, in an epistle to "harnieskensskiorter"? With these words from the project Tove Mathiassen from Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum):

"Does this mean that women in the mid 1700's was dressed in a kind of armour? You see Amazons with shield and sword in his mind's eye. But no, it's not what Holberg's ironic comment about the hottest fashion is all about. It's about underwear. About the kind of underwear that transforms the body, so you cannot see a woman's legs. In the mid-1700s it was modern with wide petticoats stiffened with oval rings, for example, the flexible material: baleen. Skirts formed a kind of tent on the lower body, and the majestic silk fabrics in the dresses were lifted and shaped by the petticoat.

Working with textilnet.dk rooted in the belief that words are a heritage that must be preserved for posterity, so that future generations can also be amused by Holberg's sense of humour or understand ancient texts about their own family and everything else concerning historical costume and textile terms."

And furthermore she adds:

"...part of my daily work as a curator is to answer questions. I often get questions about the significance of various textile and costume terms from genealogists, writers and other museum professionals, literary historians and all potentially interested. Digitization is currently a very effective way to share knowledge with many people and not just those who ask directly. Digitization can open for the inclusion of knowledge".

VARIATION

Headwords in textilnet.dk are lined up with their different variations. There may be many spellings of the same term or terms of the same fabric.

An example of entries in the term base is 'tabby or plain weave' (in Danish: lærred). This reference will have two entries, as there are two different concepts - relating to the binding and to the product.

There will also be a diagram or other image to represent the concept non-verbally, and to show how a design is made in such a way as to avoid confusion across language boundaries.

The most challenging part of our work has been to include all variations of material.

Several of the concepts are associated with 8-10 variants and it has been difficult to control such variety, but this is the result of the extensive trade and exchange of textiles (ex. Bielerfelder lærred, Arraslærred, Krefelder lærred etc.).

Another example of variation is the fiber Abaka, with the following variations in textilnet.dk:

Abaka, abaca, abacca, abaca mendohamp, siamhamp and banantrævler.

Other examples of variation take into account the historical development as 'girafrusser' that became 'gamacher' (e.g. 'gaiter') and 'leggings'. Here are three different terms that cover roughly the same concept but at different periods of time. It has been difficult to identify the source material and reference books, but now we have provided sources and a detailed reference at the end of each entry.

Currently we have only a demo/prototype of the termwiki, but hope for funding to make a permanent and full scale termwiki soon.

PICTURES AND WORDS ARE LINKED

Images and other non-verbal means of communication help us to understand things better and textilnet.dk works with double digitization, for example by scanning the slides of textile samples recorded in Danish archives and museums by MA (Master of Art) Ingeborg Cock Clausen in the 1980's.

Some of the pictures were published here in the book *Textile Samples from Danish Archives and Museums, 1750-1975*, published at "Borgen" in 1987, but many of the pictures have not been published before.

In textilnet.dk many different textile terms are collected. By now we already have contact with researchers from many countries such as England, France, India and Norway. The working group for textilnet.dk also co-operates with the Danish Language Council and Centre for Language Technology, University of Copenhagen and their DanNet project, a research- and development project concerned with the development of a Danish lexical semantic word net and a fine visual presentation platform (cst.hum.ku.dk).

MORE INFORMATION:

The digitizing process is based on the material of the two well-known and very important Danish textile researchers:

- Erna Lorenzen whose handwritten files we scan in the textilnet.dk was a curator of Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum) from 1959-1979 and she had DPhil. on the thesis *People's Clothing in and around Aarhus in 1975*. It can be purchased in the shop in Den Gamle By (Open Air Museum). Read about Erna Lorenzen: kvinfo.dk/side/1597/BIO/336/origin/70.
- Ellen Andersen who was a curator at the National Museum of Denmark and published several volumes in the series *Danish Costumes. The Fashion in Denmark*. Read about Ellen Andersen: [www/kvinfo/page/597/bio/336/origin/170](http://www.kvinfo/page/597/bio/336/origin/170).

LINK FOR THE COSTUME NETWORK'S WEBSITE:

www.dragtpuljen.dk
<http://ctr.hum.ku.dk>

READ MORE ABOUT TEXTILNET.DK:

<http://www.dragt.dk/orddatabase>

<http://ctr.hum.ku.dk/otherprojects/danishcostumegroup/>

<http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/artikel/422666%3aDanmark-Hvad-betyder-aal-i-stroemperne>

<http://www.dragt.dk/assets/PDF-filer/SyddanskUniversitet20nov2008PUB.pdf>

Nordterm Proceedings 2009, Copenhagen: *Establishing a term base of costume and textile concepts* by Susanne Lervad (www.forvir.dk)

Dury P., Lervad S., Nosch M.L. *Verbal and non-verbal configurations of textiles – a diachronic study* in TOTH proceedings 2011, Annecy.

Gauta 2014-07-05

Susanne Lervad

Danish National Centre for Textile Research,

Terminus

Fruebjergvej 3, 2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

E-mail: sl@terminus.dk