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Book Reviews



TEXTILES AND TEXTILE PRODUCTION IN EUROPE: FROM PREHISTORY TO AD 400. Edited by Margarita Gleba and Ulla Mannering. Pp. 512, Illus 342. Oxbow Books in association with the Centre for Textile Research (Ancient Textiles Series, **11**), 2012. Price: £48.00. ISBN 978 1 842174 63 0.

This book comprises twenty-three different articles plus one introductory chapter, ranging over fifteen countries: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republics, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Ireland. Some of the countries are dealt with in up to four articles and these are organized via chronological periods or special sites. The twenty-eight authors range from established experts within archaeological textile research to novices.

The book is a very good introduction to archaeological textiles and it must be seen as an excellent starting point for people with an interest in this topic. The introductory chapter is aimed at the non-textile expert and it provides a short and useful introduction to textile production and the basic archaeological material. The book is the first of its kind to present such a wide geographical region within a collected volume in English. Many of the finds in question have previously been published in other languages and this new accessibility to the material is one of the virtues of this book. It provides an easy and simple overview of the assemblages and the state of research.

Key themes addressed in the chapters include the nature of textile tools, the type and quantity of textiles in different areas, and for well researched areas, information such as fibre quality is addressed. Differences in the state of textile research can easily be seen by comparing the different chapters. In some regions, such as Switzerland, much research has been carried out and this ranges from basic textile analysis to fibre analysis. In contrast, textile research in other regions, such as Greece, is still in its infancy. The book may well inspire future research methodologies in those countries that are not presented in the book and where there is not such a strong research tradition in textiles, and it will undoubtedly provide inspiration for well researched areas, such as Scandinavia. This way the book helpfully identifies gaps in the subject area, and it might encourage people to pursue textile research or ask new questions within existing or forthcoming research projects.

On the negative side, the quality of the articles is variable, and the level of information provided is inconsistent among the different authors. This might be inevitable in a book of this kind, which covers such diverse research traditions, time-spans, writing styles and levels of experience. The organization of the book also presents a problem. The separation into modern countries is of course a modern practicality, but where prehistoric

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textiles are concerned, these borders seldom have any relevance. For example, many of the Scandinavian prehistoric textile traditions cross borders which are different from our modern constructs. The resulting patchwork has a more disparate feel than one might wish. In these cases, a different structure for divisions would have been preferable, such as the broad category 'Scandinavia', which might then be divided into different chronological phases, as has been done for some of the other countries.

Taking the book in its entirety, it is a well-produced volume with many useful illustrations and well-compiled material. Drawing this information together in English is useful for many people, and I can heartily recommend the book for beginners as well as established researchers — a 'must' for all well-equipped academic and institutional libraries.

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