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Book Reviews



WEARING THE CLOAK: DRESSING THE SOLDIER IN ROMAN TIMES. Edited by Marie-Louise Nosch. Pp. 144, Illus 58. Oxbow Books in association with the Centre for Textile Research (Ancient Textiles Series, **10**), 2012. Price: £25.00. ISBN 978 1 842174 37 1.

What did the Roman soldier wear under his armour? Did he follow clothing fashions? How did he present himself in camp and on the street? Answers to such questions will not be found in the textbooks on Roman army equipment. There has been nothing comprehensive on military clothing since Sander's publication in 1963 (*Die Kleidung des Römischen Soldaten, Historia 13*) — and little useful since *The Excavations at Dura-Europos* published in 2004 (James), until Sumner's *Roman Military Dress* (2009), and now this volume.

Expectate veni. Those and related issues are at last addressed in this selection of nine seminal papers from an international conference on 'Roman military and textiles' organized in May 2008 by the Danish Research Foundation's energetic Centre for Textile Research. Ancient historians, textile archaeologists and the leading illustrator of military clothing all bring their particular expertise to the debate.

In a masterly opening paper, Michael Speidel deploys his great knowledge of the Roman army to illuminate the topic of a soldier's self-presentation in clothing, equipment and behaviour: how he struck a pose among his messmates, and inspired fear and awe outside the fort. Self-presentation is also reflected, as Stephanie Hoss explains, in the belt and belt buckle, the distinguishing mark of the soldier. Developing fashions allowed individuality, within conventionalized bounds.

'The soldier is not to be feared if he is well dressed, armed, shod and has something in his belly and purse', as the *Augustan History* puts it (*Alex.* 52). Indeed, the evidence reveals how the high command put much effort into supplying the troops, especially with clothing. Kirsten Dross considers the unique facts and figures on army clothing orders to be found in Egyptian papyri, while Jinju Liu makes the most of the more meagre evidence from the West.

Specialized textiles also play an unexpectedly prominent role in defensive body armour in the ancient world. Margarita Gleba considers the iconographic and archaeological evidence for the tough composite linen corselets of the Greeks and Etruscans. The well-preserved textiles associated with the Flavian siege of Masada include some curious weft-twined linen objects interpreted by Hero Granger-Taylor as the flaps (*pteryges*) projecting from beneath the skirt and shoulders of some Greek and Roman armour.

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The long-sleeved shirt is the mark of the warrior in the Germanic North. Susan Möller-Wiering's discussion of it is important because of its adoption and adaptation by the Roman soldier. A third-century representation of such a garment with tapestry-woven decoration on a painted Roman-period soldier's shroud in Luxor is the focus of the two final articles. Annette Schieck reads to us the messages which it sought to convey, and Graham Sumner recounts the problems of visualizing the vignette in three dimensions and using existing archaeological and iconographic sources to reconstruct it on paper.

This volume, with its exhaustive bibliography, will have immediate textbook status; but it is not without loose ends. How exactly do the various armour-related textile elements, for example, relate to one another in real life — the composite linen scale-armour foundation, Speidel's *subarmales* (beneath-the-armour 'arming doublets') and the Masada-type *pteryges*? *Wearing the Cloak* is not just a notable achievement and benchmark, but a stimulus to further research.

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