Textiles and Dress in Byzantium

Textiles and dress in Byzantium reflect much about Byzantine civilisation. They act as a rich medium for the exploration of power systems in relation to social structures across the elite, as well as the ‘middling’ craft and professions-based sectors of Byzantine society. In Byzantium, signifying systems were constructed around cloth types and tailored cuts, and these systems assumed the role of hierarchical social signifiers. At the same time, the development of elaborate ceremonial and/or ritual display of the most precious of these fabrics, costumes, ecclesiastical furnishings and vestments\(^1\), offered a public arena for the demarcation of boundaries between church and state, and between state and society in Byzantium. On a more private and personal level, textiles and dress served as symbols of both material and of spiritual well-being. ‘Outward appearance’ in relation to private and to public identity, and within open and closed spaces, definitely mattered in Byzantium. The purpose of this paper is to ask why. The research method applied is that of inter-disciplinary Byzantine textile history, and this is characterised by the combination of technical data drawn from the surviving textiles, with evidence gathered from documentary sources, pictorial as well as written\(^2\).

**TEXTILES AND DRESS AS A SIGNIFYING SYSTEM**

Between the fourth and the tenth centuries, elaborate associations of power, prestige, and hierarchy were built up around the use of precious silks by the Imperial house\(^3\). Imperial silk also became a tool for putting administrative, civil, military and ecclesiastical systems into order. Highly developed forms of suitably tailored court attire, and correspondingly splendid tailored uniforms of silks, linen, cotton, and wool distinguished members of the Imperial court, the civil service, the military service, and the professional hierarchy\(^4\). These robes acted as a badge of office, and at the highest level, with the bestowal of silk Imperial robes of office, it is reasonable to suggest, went the transfer of power and authority\(^5\). John Chrysostom, Justinian (CJC), Sophronios of Jerusalem, and Symeon Metaphrastes variously describe the use of uniforms, and they indicated that uniforms served to distinguish the ordinary citizen from the military and the professional sectors of society\(^6\). In court, the judges wore a special uniform, and this Ibn Battuta likened to a thick, black wool-

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\(^1\) For surviving silks, see A. Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, AD 400 to AD 1200. Vienna 1997.


\(^5\) For the concept of a ‘robe of honour’ consider the woollen mantle presented by John Kantakuzenos, see Nikephoros Gregoras, Historia rhomaike xII 8 (II 00 Schopen).

\(^6\) John Chrysostomos, De Lazaro Concio VI. PG 48, 1035; Sophronios of Jerusalem, Narratio miraculorum ss. Cyri et Johannis I 13 (246 Fernandez Marcos or PG 87/3, 3428); Dig. 12.39; Symeon Metaphrastes, Vita S. Acacii Cappadocis. PG 115, 236.
len monastic habit. The wills of provincial magnates, such as Gregory Pakurianos and Michael Attaliates, indicate that silk military tunics, originally presented as Imperial gifts, might later be recycled for use as altar cloths in their private religious foundations.

The Kletorologion of Philotheos dated 899, the tenth century compilation known as the Book of Ceremonies of Constantine VII, and the fourteenth century Treatise of Pseudo-Kodinos, describe a marvellously rich and varied selection of court costumes. According to the Book of Ceremonies, the Emperors wore the chlamys or mantle, which was adorned with a panel called tablion, over different types of tunic, the skaramangion and sagion. The loros or long heavy scarf was wound across the body and hung down in front as an Imperial insignium. Other garments mentioned include the divition, tzitzakion, and kolobion, all tunics. The tzitzakion was based upon ancient Khazar costume from the time of the Emperor Constantine V, who had married a Khazar princess. The simplest non-parade costume was worn as a sign of humility on Easter Thursday. The significant thing about the court costumes is the symbolic pairing and tripling of different items, in a strictly regulated order and colour coding, to serve for key feasts, liturgical celebrations, and Imperial rituals. The golden chlamys was used for the funeral of an Emperor, whereas the scarlet chlamys was worn for the acclamation of the demes. Purple marks the feasts of the Ascension, of Orthodoxy, and of the Presentation and the Dormition, the coronation and the birthday of the Emperor. Also there was use of the golden loros by ‘twelve dignitaries’ during Easter. The very rich purple chlamys of Tyre was worn by the kouropalates at his promotion, and the chlamys made of silk of purple of Tyre, with green yellow medallions, was worn by senior dignitaries at Christmas. In Pseudo-Kodinos, the significance of colour is also clear with each rank and office assigned its own particular colour code. Many other costumes are mentioned including the linen sabanion tunic of the protospatharian eunuchs. The eparch on the occasion of his promo-

15 On this garment, see ODB I 639.
16 For the tzizatikion, see Piltz, Court Costume 42.
17 For the kolobion, see Piltz, Court Costume 43.
19 De Ceremoniis I 178 (I 166 Vogt).
20 Ibidem I 60 (II 84 Vogt).
21 Ibidem I 53 (II 36 Vogt).
22 Ibidem I 38 (Coronation, II 1 Vogt); I 37 (Sunday of Orthodoxy, I 145 Vogt); I 46 (Presentation and Ascension, I 178, 176 Vogt).
23 Ibidem I 24 (I 18 Vogt).
26 De Ceremoniis I 58 (II 61 Vogt).
tion wore the *kamision*, *pelonion*, and the *loros*. The *kamision* was also worn at the time of his promotion, so that this may have been a particular sign of his office.

Only the detailed listing of all the costume types and colours, and the occasions on which they were worn, will provide a full picture of the Imperial colour codes in operation. In general brightness rather than colour contrast seems to be emphasised in Byzantine sources. In relation to extant silks, one observes a move to monochrome and less ostentatious colour contrasts in the tenth to eleventh centuries, away from the bold, strong colour juxtapositions of the eighth to ninth centuries. The use of monochrome off-whites and pale yellows, olive greens, and deep blue purples may have been influenced by the use of monochrome colour codes, white and black respectively, in the Fatimid and the Abbasid courts.

Another documentary source which details tailored Imperial silks is the Book of the Eparch, and there, as well as in the Baggage Train account attached to the Book of Ceremonies33, much of the textile and tailoring terminology proves to have no parallels in the surviving Byzantine sources. Scholars have guessed the meaning of terms with only the most tenuous of links. Time does not allow for discussion of individual terms such as *prasinodiblatta megaloxyela* but what must be noted is the undoubtedly complex language of Byzantine textile production.

Three practical categories of names may be applied to cloths: that is technical, trade, and brand names, and these exist quite apart from literary names, and also liturgically influenced textile terms. Literary scholars and historians have vastly simplified the problem in their attempts to provide interpretations of Byzantine textile terminology. The technical and trade names may or may not overlap and the brand names may or may not reflect the provenance or the quality. The technical names generally reflect the ratio of the warp to weft threads, and the trade names may refer to both weaving type and provenance when a particular weave has been taken over by a specific geographical location. These textile languages bear no relationship to the languages of common usage, and it is of no use searching for parallels in official documents or in everyday sources.

The terminology used in relation to Italian silk textiles, has been analysed by Donald King, former Keeper of Textiles of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Sophie Desrosiers has taken the term *draps d’arest* originally surveyed by King, and she has gathered several hundred extant examples. Her studies have dem-

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27 *Ibidem* I 61 (II 70 Vogt). The kamision was also worn by the spatharokubikouarios (I 10) (I 73 Vogt) and by officials of the Imperial bedchamber (I 26 and I 31) (I 92 and I 116 Vogt).
30 Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, chapter VII (polychrome silks, 65–79) and chapter IX (monochrome silks, 85–93).
34 Eparchenbuch 8.1. (102 KÖDER).
36 See D. King, Lucca.
onstrated that the same terminology may cover many variations on a common technical theme, in this case a broken and/or chevron, or a plain twill. She has also indicated that these textiles, originally assigned only to Spain in the thirteenth century, were probably also woven in France. This illustrates only some of the possible pitfalls facing Byzantine documentary historians dealing with the translation of textile terminology. Only the painstaking and first-hand examination of all surviving materials and the thorough knowledge of weaving techniques, in conjunction with analysis of documented textile terms, can serve as adequate method for translation of textile terms.

Less of a problem are the more general terms used for clothing, some of which remain part of the modern Greek language. These include roucha, phoresia, stole, allage and allaximo. Categories of clothing are also fairly well understood. Niketas Choniates, for example, spoke of roucha kala.

THE VERTICAL AND THE HORIZONTAL AXIS IN DRESS AND CLOTHING

The lengthy discussion of sumptuous court costume, together with the presentation of the pictorial evidence from Imperial manuscripts, suggests the tremendous visual impact that such sumptuous display must have had in Byzantium. The public religious ceremonies between churches of the Capital, as well as victory parades and other celebrations, brought this finery into open view. It was essential that the contrast between the clothing of the court, and that of the ordinary, the trade/craft based, and the professionally orientated citizen, should appear extreme. This was the means by which to maintain order and to create a social balance between the élite, and the ‘middling’ sectors of Byzantine society. In a society where authority was expressed vertically, from the court downwards, the broad horizontal spectrum of society, might well have been rendered speechless by ostentatious display. It was also significant that the use of sumptuous and precious cloths became usual in ecclesiastical settings. Many of the most precious furnishings and vestments, designed to reflect the Glory of God, were the gifts of the Emperors themselves.

Documentary sources, and surviving archaeological textiles from Byzantine period sites in Syria and Palaestine, indicate the types of cloths and costumes worn by the ordinary citizens of Byzantium. Linens, woollens, cottons, and mixed fabrics (linen and cotton, or silk or wool mixtures), and animal hair fabrics (goat, camel and rabbit), are both described and survive. Asterios of Amasia reported that linens were imported from Bulgaria, Egypt and the region of the Pontos. He also recorded silk and cotton from Caesarea. According to him, ‘God gave us linen for greater pleasure in the summer’. Fine silk and linen textiles, are described by Gregory the Theologian and the term aerina hylasmata is used by him. The tenth century Book of the

38 See brocade, twill, broken twill, chevron twill, tabby, damask, tapestry, velvet, satin etc. in: Centre International d’Études des Textiles Anciens. Lyon 1964, vocabulary.

39 There is a tendency for Byzantine historians to ignore technical factors. D. Jacoby, Silk in Western Byzantium. BZ 84/85 (1991/1992) 452–500, confuses brocading and embroidery, and treats dye and weave terminology in a superficial way, with a total absence of reference to (or knowledge of) surviving silks. This may lead to conclusions which do not concur with what survives.

40 Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 20 and note 6; 21 and notes 2, 3, 5, 11–13.

41 Niketas Choniates, Chronike diegesis 577 (Van Dieten).

42 See I. Kalavrezou, Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of Relics at the Byzantine Court, in: Byzantine Court Culture (as note 3) 53–80, with reference to bibliography dealing with specific facts in the footnotes. See also note 11 above.

43 For an account of one type of military procession, on which occasion both victorious and vanquished received special uniforms, see A. A. Vasilev, Harun Ibn Yahya and his description of Constantinople. Seminarium Kondakovianum 5 (1932) 149–63.

44 For instance, the altar cloth at Hagia Sophia, a gift of Emperor Justinian, upon which not only Christ’s miracles but also the Emperor’s good deeds were shown, see Paulus Silentarius, Ekphrasis tou naou tes Hagias Sophias, in P. Friedländer, Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentarius. Kunstbeschreibungen justinianischer Zeit. Leipzig-Berlin 1912 (Reprint Hildesheim–New York 1969) 755, cited by C. Mando, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453. Sources and Documents. New Jersey 1972, 88–9.

45 See special issue on medieval textiles, Textile History 32/1 (2001), especially the articles by A. Baginski, Later Islamic and Medieval Textiles from Excavation of the Israeli Antiquities Authority (81–92) and O. Shami, Byzantine and Early Islamic Textiles excavated in Israel (93–105). For textiles excavated in Syria, see A. Schmidt-Colinet – A. Stauffer – K. Al-As ‘Ad, Die Textilien aus Palmyra. Mainz 2000.

46 Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 22 and notes 8 and 9.

47 Asterios of Amasia, Homilia I 2 (8 Datemia). Source discussed by Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 22, note 12.

48 Gregory the Theologian, Oratio VIII 799 (264–5 Calvet-Sebäsi = SC 405).
Eparch includes regulations for linen manufacture, and there a transparent form of linen is noted as being manufactured by the private linen guild of Constantinople. The textile guilds deal with various stages of the processing of raw silk, and of the weaving, dyeing, tailoring and retailing of Constantinopolitan silks, and manufacture of linen. There are also guilds of retailers of non-Byzantine, and of imported (Syrian and Cilician) tailored garments in tenth century Constantinople.

The lustre of what is presumably bombyx mori domesticated silk is given the term *lampsin metaxas*. In connection with the shine of fine goat’s hair, wild as well as cultivated silk is known. Wild silk cloth is described by Constantine VII as *imatia koukoulari* [53]. Prodromos mentions linens and silks, and linens with gold thread, *linochrysa*, are mentioned by Theophanes [54]. Eustathios of Thessalonica reveals cloths, which were characterised by their use of gold and silver threads (*argyra kai chrysa nemata*) [55]. Cloths using metal wires were given the name *syrmantina* or *syrmakezika*. Some were entirely of gold (*holou chryshypanta*) woven cloths, others were called *diachrysa* or *chrysoaston*, which seem to me to be technical terms, and not necessarily merely designations for part gold cloths as has been suggested [56]. The use of gold threads takes different forms according to the types of threads used, and whether or not gold wire or gold foil twisted upon a silk or linen core is employed. The gold may also be overside (or surface) couched embroidery, or it may be woven with a brocading weft. Once again translators of textile terminology need to refer closely to the evidence of the surviving gold textiles.

Archaeological textiles reveal the range and qualities of linen, woollen, silk, cotton, and animal hair fabrics available to Byzantine society in the early period. Later sources, collected together by Matschke for Thessalonica in the fourteenth century, indicate the continued availability of this kind of fabric alongside the silks, the provincial manufacture of which in the Peloponnese had particularly flourished from the twelfth century onwards. Twelfth century and later Venetian trade documentation in the archives of the Greek Institute in Venice, only partly read, also promises to increase our knowledge of what textiles Byzantium was producing at the lower end of the textile market, as well as at its upper end. Certainly textile manufacture did not

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49 Eparchenbuch 6.7, 9.1 (98. 106 Koder).
51 Eparchenbuch 5.5.1 (94. 95 Koder).
52 For goat hair or goat hair mixed with silk, see Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 24 and note 4 for *lampsin metaxas*.
54 Theophanes, Chronographia 244 (De Boor). The present author has under publication the silk treasures of St John, Patmos and St Catherine, Sinai, which contain gold couched embroideries.
56 Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 26, with discussion of references to gold and gold workers.
57 Koukoules, op. et. loc. cit. speaks of gold brocading, but in fact, we know little about this from surviving examples. Most extant Byzantine gold work is overside couched embroidery, see notes 58 and 59.
58 Surviving Byzantine overside couched embroidery, using gold thread, usually employs a silver gilt strip wound upon a twisted silk core. Fewer examples exist of the use of pure silver gilt or of pure gold wire. However, these two techniques do seem to stem from the Byzantine period. They are widely imitated in Post-Byzantine embroidery. Italian brocaded silks use either a silk or a linen core, around which a silver gilt membrane is twisted. Islamic and Near Eastern silks are brocaded either using this technique or with the use of gilt leather strips. Spanish and Near Eastern medieaval silks appear to favour the latter technique, whilst most Eastern Mediterranean workshops elsewhere do not. Sicilian silks sometimes use both of these techniques, thus reflecting their Islamic as well as their Byzantine inheritance. Leather, either gold couched or gold brocaded, is not characteristic on Byzantine textiles.
59 For couching, see A. Chatzimichali, Τα χρυσόκλαβαρικά – συρμαντέινα – συρμακέσικα κεντήματα, in: Mélanges O. et M. Mélies, II. Athens 1956, 447–98. For brocading, see CIETA Vocabulary 1964, under brocade.
60 See references in note 45 above.
62 Jacoby, Silk in Western Byzantium (as note 39), emphasises the rise of provincial silk manufacture. He makes assumptions on scant documentary evidence in some cases, which in his later articles he presents as fact. For example, the assumption that red silks were widely woven on Andros requires further documentary proof. He promises further documentary-based conclusions using source materials held in the archives of the Hellenic Institute in Venice. His works so far are collected in his Trade Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean. Aldersholt 1997, and his Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean. Aldersholt 2001. In the latter he promises a study on the silk industry of Latin Constantinople (XI 18, note 74). Whilst
cease with the Latin conquest of Constantinople between 1204–1261: operations were simply taken to Nicæa and elsewhere. Finishing of imported cloths in Constantinople, by Italian textile workers, was recorded in the fourteenth century. Several large, surviving, ecclesiastical gold embroideries datable from the end of the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century onwards, suggest that an Imperial embroidery workshop was operating.

PROPRIETY OF DRESS

John Chrysostom saw ordinary simple wool as the best cloth. Silk for women he abhorred, but he did think that dress should indicate the difference between freeman and slave, and between servant and master. Basil the Great spoke of a Christian attitude towards dress that transcended the material world. Christian being in Christ allowed for the wretched physical human body to be transformed into the spiritual Christian soul. The Koran, on a human level, advocated a sense of modesty and propriety in regard to dress for women. Dress should be appropriate to status, and reflective of spiritual rather than material well-being.

Fallen nobles were advised to dress not in the costumes of excessive fabric, which formerly reflected their rich status, but in the clothes expressive of their disrepute and of their remorse. It was also possible for discredited members of the elite to hide more successfully if they did not seek to treat their dress as a form of cultural capital. On the other hand, in order to enhance their own status, rich masters might wish to dress their servants in silk and gold uniforms, and the servant lover of the master might enjoy the use of silks and gold belts. Certainly the poorest in Byzantine society wore rags; and those people, little better off than the destitute possessing only the clothes on their backs, took to the practice of wearing old clothes turned inside out.

Promiscuity through revealing costume is also documented. Michael Psellos mentions a place of refuge for harlots established under Michael IV, where sinful women wishing to enter had to discard fine clothing for the habit of nuns. One source complains of the women who dress so that the whole of their bodies are revealed: men, too, wore this kind of shockingly transparent cloth. Metaphors of dress were sometimes applied, so for instance stripes denoting debauchery...
were imposed on prostitutes. In the early period, actresses were prevented from wearing silks by Imperial decree; and later in the twelfth century, silk was still considered inappropriate for prostitutes.

Cloth types, as well as the use of gold borders and gold belts as insignia of status, real or imagined, unquestionably did occupy the mind of the Byzantine citizen. These types of dress seem to be clearly reflected in Byzantine manuscripts. Indeed, the degree of accuracy of the depiction of cloth is perhaps quite astonishing. The nature of ‘working’ clothing can be well appreciated in the eleventh century Agricultural treatise, the Pseudo-Oppian (Marcianus gr. Z 479). Here the artisan, shown wearing a long tunic, carves an ivory horn (Diagram, a). The agricultural workers wear short tunics, and the two forms of tunic both hark back to the classical tradition of loose clothing.

Excavated tunics from Syria and Egypt survive, and indicate the general form of this type of dress. On the other hand, in the Eros scene, the buttoned fashionable short jacket imitates Persian fashion.

A range of surviving costumes, excavated in the Caucasus, indicate the type of tailored wear that was worn even in distant hill tribes, under the influence of what had originally been Sasanian costume. The Caucasian finds amalgamate scraps of Byzantine, Central Asian, and Chinese silks, which the tribesmen received in exchange for guiding traders across the Caucasians passes on to the Silk Road. Amongst the finds was the Byzantine Imperial tablet woven silk band of an official stationed in the Caucasus, Ivanes, whose name suggests Bulgarian origin.

Returning to the Marcianus gr Z. 479 manuscript, folio 47r shows a particularly interesting scene, with a dominant female figure. She is depicted in a white inner, thin, and delicate tunic with a long and wide sleeved mantle, and a cummerbund about the waist. A large, fashionable turban embellishes her head, which is encircled by a pearl band (Diagram, c). The other female figures shown on folio 47 are in long sleeveless tunics. In the hunting scenes (3r–4v), short tunics and fancy hose are the order of the day (Diagram, d). The depiction of ‘the other’ occurs on folio 53v, where two black individuals lead camels. One wears a striped Islamic head cloth and short tunic, whilst the other wears a long tunic and wrap (Furlan, Codici greci illustrati VI, fig. 20b). Only the headgear really distinguishes this costume. In further miniatures, other tiny details are interesting: the small fancy cap in the bear hunt on folio 44r (Furlan, Codici greci illustrati VI, fig. 9a), and the fur hats in the Eros scene, for example (Diagram, b). On folio 20r in a ‘how to net a camel scene’, a splendid pair of fancy stockings, and white boots are shown in combination with a short tunic bearing stripes, and a decoration or clavus about the neck (Furlan, Codici greci illustrati V, fig. 30c). The fancy collar and hem of the tunic of folio 14r (Diagram, f) is reminiscent of West European mediaeval dress. The loincloth of the wrestler, tied at the waist with string, can be seen on folio 13v (Diagram, g); and the fancy long costume of the dancer appears with belt and pearled collar, on folio 12v (Diagram, h). The soldier’s uniform is found

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75 For the subject of prostitutes and their dress, see S. LEONTSINI, Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz. Wien 1988, especially 88–9 for references to fine clothes, some perhaps of silk.
76 Theatre costumes were also elaborate. See KOUKOULES, Byzantinoin Bios, II/2, 15 with notes 8–10 for specific examples and source references.
77 Cf. the contribution of B. Bjornholt – L. James in the present publication. The Madrid Skylitzes (A. GRABAR – M. MANOUSSACAS, L’illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzes de Madrid. Venice 1979) may well show non-Byzantine influences but other specifically Byzantine manuscripts (e.g. Pseudo-Oppian, Venice Marcianus gr. Z. 479) appear very precise in their depiction of Byzantine costume.
79 For Syrian tunics, see Palmyra reference in note 45 above. For Egyptian tunics, see E. KENDRICK, Catalogue of Textiles from Burying Grounds in Egypt, 1–3. London 1920–1922.
80 The costume occurs on folio 33r and it is illustrated by FURLAN, Codici greci illustrati V tav. XI and fig. 48b. The Sasanian short, buttoned jacket is reflected on a doll’s jacket excavated in the Caucasus, see Von China nach Byzanz, eds. A. IERUSALIMSKAJA – B. BORKOPP. München 1996, 44, plates 28–32.
83 FURLAN, Codici greci illustrati VI, fig. 13a.
84 The Western element is the neck border with downward curled projections, cf. negative F1266 in the Venice Marciana slide archive.
on folio 6v (Furlan, Codici greci illustrati V, fig. 9a). The short tunic, tucked up in a way similar to that of agricultural workers in the West, is found on folio 3v in a hunting scene (Diagram, d).

In other manuscripts, the depiction of the drape of cloth (the head and shoulder veil on folio 23r of Marcianus gr Z. 538, for instance, Diagram, i), reveals what a marked grasp of the feel and the fall of cloth some Byzantine miniaturist enjoyed.

In the Imperial portraits also, very fine mastery of the depiction of cloth is displayed with painstaking depiction of every detail. Take, for example, the portrait of Alexius V with griffin tunic, or the portrait of Alexios Apokaukos (d. 1345), who is wearing a splendid rearing, addorsed panther in medallion motif silk. Close parallels for this design exist amongst the extant Byzantine silks.

The surviving pieces typically date from the eleventh to twelfth centuries, and they represent the period of greatest technological experimentation, when the draw-loom with pattern device, developed in Byzantium over the previous five hundred years, was adapted for greater economy and efficiency. In Byzantium, in the tenth to eleventh centuries, there occurred the introduction of monochrome fashions, as mentioned earlier. Along with this hand draw-looms were adapted to produce new weaves, the lampases, whose advantage over the traditional twills was that the same motifs (now monochrome entities) required only half as much manipulation of the pattern creating device to produce them.

The textiles used for the costumes (with griffins or addorsed panthers), as shown in the mentioned miniatures, are strangely old fashioned for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is almost as if the artist has depicted cherished favourites of the sitters in these thirteenth century manuscripts. With the intervention of the Latin occupation of Constantinople from 1204–1261, older costumes would have been pressed into use. What must be briefly emphasised is that images such as the eagle or the bicephalous eagle, the griffin, and the lion, took on great political significance in themselves.

The variety of textiles and dress in Byzantine miniatures, and their close correspondence with surviving pieces and tailored garments, lends credence to the idea that they may indeed offer quite accurate records of actual costumes of the time. Imaginary cloths and fashions could have been much more simply depicted.

THE SUBVERSION OF SIGNIFYING SYSTEMS

Discussion of textiles which express material and spiritual well-being, propriety, morality, allure and yet not wanton abandon, suggest that a certain in-built restraint existed within Byzantine society. But there were also opportunities for subversion of signifying systems. Certainly, by the thirteenth century, subversion of elite dress codes was a problem, under the influence of the import of foreign cloths and styles. John Dukas in Nicaea ordered the prohibition of sumptuous foreign dress imported into his Empire. The Venetian had...

85 For Marcianus gr Z. 538, see Furlan, Codici greci illustrati I 27–33. On folio 23r a female figure is shown wearing a fringed mantle. This covers her head, neck, shoulders, and two arms, uplifted towards her face. The mantle has two lower stripes. The drapery of the mantle is shown as a series of complex hanging folds. The stripes moving in and out across these folds are accurately depicted. Sound knowledge of how cloth drapes is demonstrated.


88 On technical innovation, see Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving, chapter II (19–26) with bibliography in footnotes. Also chapter IX (85–93) and footnote 2 with reference to lampases.

89 The pattern producing device is called the ‘figure harness’: CIETA Vocabulary 1964, under this name.

90 Court costumes with gold or gold trellis designs are illustrated in Byzance (as note 87), plate 356 on page 463, and J. Beckwith, The art of Constantinople. London 1968, 150, plate 202.


92 See Joseph Bryennios, Tines aitiai tōn kath’ēmas lyperōn 3, 121 (Boulgares) as cited by Koukoules, Byzantinon Bios II/2, 10.

to issue strong sumptuary prohibitions against wearing of velvet, silk, or gold woven cloths, embroideries, and gold bands\textsuperscript{94}. Extortionate sums of money must also have been exchanged for these costumes at that time. In Egypt, even in the tenth to eleventh centuries, one pound of raw silk cost .5 dinars, a sum sufficient to maintain an average-sized family for a period of one month\textsuperscript{95}. The relative absence of sumptuary legislation in Byzantium, as against the stringent and repeated levying of such prohibitions in the Latin West, suggests that Western influence may have encouraged excesses in dress amongst those rich enough to enjoy such finery in Byzantium.

THE DISPLAY OF SIGNIFYING SYSTEMS IN RELATION TO PUBLIC AND TO PRIVATE SPACE

It is evident from housing legislation, that the concept of private as opposed to public space, and the respect for the boundaries between the two, did exist in Byzantium\textsuperscript{96}. The wealth of exposure to gorgeous and costly cloths enjoyed by the Byzantine citizen, particularly in the Metropolis, is also well attested; but how did textiles function in the privacy of closed and personal space?

The Emperor had a private as well as a public wardrobe\textsuperscript{97}. Would it have been a tremendous relief to wear some fashionable and comfortable item of one’s own? Niketas Choniates playfully suggests that the Emperor Andronikos I enjoyed the sensation of tightly tailored garments\textsuperscript{98}. The personal observation and recording of a pattern on a lady’s dress, found in a popular poem, and the existence of a Byzantine silk with precisely the described motif, a lion with multiple bodies, suggests that textiles could be enjoyed for themselves\textsuperscript{99}. Individuals might also identify with their popular heroes or heroines, described in Romances, as being dressed in idealised costumes\textsuperscript{100}. In the same way, they could identify with the purity of the Virgin, whose virtues were recorded in a series of weaving metaphors\textsuperscript{101}. The homely practice of cottage based weaving is evoked also in Theodoret of Cyrus’ description of God’s ingenuity in developing the weaving arts\textsuperscript{102}. These spiritual, romantic, and popular literary references to textiles, with their use of textile metaphors on a popular level, bring textiles and dress alive on a smaller and more intimate stage, quite distinct from that of the Imperial mass spectacle arena.

The broadening out of textile markets, to meet increased popular demand, is apparent in Byzantium as early as the twelfth century, when the fine silk dresses made in Thebes and Corinth are recorded\textsuperscript{103}. The use of individual provincial dress codes in the capital also points to a sense of fashion, as opposed to one of ceremonial display. At precisely this period the Abbasids were developing a marked sense of etiquette and fashion, with manuals on the subject, which drew attention to individualism and style\textsuperscript{104}. Time does not allow for elaboration along these lines of enquiry. Nevertheless any such discussion could make detailed use of the descriptions of the bridal trousseaux of the Cairo Geniza brides and all that these imply about gender roles, etc.

\textsuperscript{96} See the contribution of C. Saliou in the present publication.
\textsuperscript{97} On public and private Imperial wardrobes, see Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving 41 and note 37. Also see Eadem, Courtly and aristocratic patronage and the uses of silk in Byzantium, in: Studies in silk in Byzantium. London 2004, chapter V (85–108).
\textsuperscript{98} Niketas Choniates, Chronike diegesis 252 (Van Dieten).
\textsuperscript{99} For the multi-bodied lion silk, see Muthesius, Byzantine Silk Weaving 43 and note 53 with reference to literary description of this motif.
\textsuperscript{100} Dress is vividly described for example in Byzantine Epics, see E. M. Jeffreys (ed. and transl.), Digenis Akritas (Cambridge Medieval Classics 7). Cambridge 1998, 59. Here a ‘surcoat of purple silk, sprinkled with gold with white triple border and ornamental griffins’; a costume called ‘Roman dress’ is described.
\textsuperscript{101} Proklos, Oratio 1. PG 65–681. Discussed in Muthesius, Cult of Imperial and Ecclesiastical silks (as note 3).
\textsuperscript{103} On silks of Thebes and Corinth, see Niketas Choniates, Chronike diegesis 461 (Van Dieten). Cf. E. Kislinger, Demenna und die byzantinische Seidenproduktion. BSI 54/1 (1993) 43–52, esp. 44–5.
\textsuperscript{104} For Abbasid etiquette, see Ahsan, Social Life under the Abbasids, chapter II on Costume (29–75), and chapter VII (275–96) on Festivals and Festivities.
social expectations, and the nature of well-being, in the privacy of domestic space in the eastern Mediterranean. Suffice it to note, that the Byzantine silk covers took pride of place in dowry lists.

CONCLUSION

This paper asked why textiles and dress played such a prominent part in Byzantium. The answer lies, perhaps, in the multiplicity of levels and the complexity of structures that cloth managed to penetrate. The evidence suggests that, within complex ritual and ceremonial display, the relationship of Church to state, and of state to society, might be anchored. Political and economic concerns could be addressed using silk, in particular, as valuable economic asset but also as powerful political weapon. At the same time, the development of intricate signifying systems for the purpose of social stratification, as well as the opportunity to subvert such imposed order, might have allowed textiles to act as a medium for the expression of greater individuality in Byzantium. This, taken in conjunction with the effect of widening markets and of greater exposure to foreign influences between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, might explain why some authors lamented the intrusion of foreign textiles and dress codes into Byzantium by the time of the fall of the Empire. It is perhaps ironic that Byzantine textiles and dress codes, initially developed by the court as symbols of power and authority, and subsequently variously adapted and appropriated into the private realm, became subject to overthrow, somehow foreshadowing the fall of the Empire itself.

105 For the bridal dowries, consult Goitein, Mediterranean Society IV (section Bi, Clothing, 150–200), and Y. K. Stillmann, Female attire of Medieval Egypt: according to the trousseau lists and cognate Material from the Cairo Geniza. Washington, D.C. 1972 (PhD), 93–6.
106 The Byzantine bedcovers are described in Goitein, Mediterranean Society IV 105–37 and appendix C, 297–309, 303, especially, cites Byzantine brocade covers.
107 The present author has under publication a paper ‘Silk as Politics’ delivered at the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, as part of the public lecture series, Byzantium as Oecumenical State. This will be published by the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens.
Diagrams: Marcianus gr. Z. 479 (s. XI), Pseudo-Oppian, Cynegetta.
a – ivory carver (folio 36r), b – detail of Eros scene, showing figure in fitted jacket and fur cap (33r), c – the mistress of the house from a domestic scene (47r),
d – detail of a hunting scene, with hunter wearing a tunic (3v),
e – detail of a figure wearing tunic with clavi decoration (20v), f – detail of a costume with fancy collar and hem (14r), g – detail of a scene with wrestler wearing a loin cloth (13v), h – detail of a dancer (12v),
Marcianus gr. Z. 538 (ca. 905), Job manuscript. i – detail of a figure wearing a head veil and a shoulder wrap with fringe (23r).