

Rethinking the Wearable in the Middle Ages (New York, 28–29 Apr 22)

online / Bard Graduate Center, Apr 28–29, 2022

Ittai Weinryb

Covering, protecting, and adorning the body count among the most fundamental of human concerns, at once conveying aspects of an individual's persona while also situating a person within a given social context. Wearable adornment encompasses materials fashioned by human hands (like fabric, metalwork, or even animal bones) and modifications to the body itself (such as tattoos, cosmetics, or hairstyles), which beautify the body while simultaneously conveying social, political, and protective functions and meanings. The wearable is thus the most representational and at the same time most intimate product of material culture.

This conference seeks to expand our current understanding of the wearable in the Middle Ages. Current scholarship on the topic in Byzantine, western medieval, Eurasian art, as well as Islamic traditions tends to encompass clothing and jewelry, and is frequently medium-specific, with minimal regard to the interrelatedness of different aspects of appearance. On the one hand, work on medieval textiles has tended to approach questions of identity, consumption, and appearance by comparing textual sources and visual depictions with surviving textiles. The study of medieval jewelry, on the other hand, largely focuses on the classification and attribution of precious metal pieces from excavations and museum collections, as scholars make sense of pieces long removed from the bodies they once adorned. Tattoos, prosthetics, cosmetics and headgear are almost entirely absent in our understandings of medieval dress practices. This separation was not always so, however, and indeed nineteenth-century art historians such as Gottfried Semper integrated all aspects of bodily adornment in their considerations of the nature of ornamentation and surface decoration.

Thursday, April 28, 1:30–6:15 pm

1:30 pm

Peter N. Miller

Bard Graduate Center

Welcome

Elizabeth Dospel Williams

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

Ittai Weinryb

Bard Graduate Center

Introduction

2 pm

Alicia Walker

Bryn Mawr College

"Christian Bodies Clothed in Pagan Bodies: The Implications of Greco-Roman Mythological Imagery on Early Byzantine Items of Dress and Adornment"

Zvezdana Dode

Nasledie Institute

"The Robe of Honor and the Belt of Submission in the Mongolian Imperial Culture"

Q&A and Discussion

3:30 pm Coffee Break

4 pm

Eiren Shea

Grinnell College

"Clothing the Khatun: Mongol Women's Dress and Political Power"

Juliane von Fircks

Friedrich Schiller University Jena

"To Adorn the Dead Body: The Representation of the Deceased Prince in and outside the Grave (13th–15th Centuries)"

Cecily J. Hilsdale

McGill University

"Crowns and the Situating of Authority"

Q&A and Discussion

Friday, April 29, 9:30 am–5 pm

9:30 am

Corinne Mühlemann

University of Copenhagen, Centre for Textile Research

"From Moon To Fish: A Striped Silk as *filasm*"

Cynthia Hahn

Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

"The Medieval 'Safety' Pin"

Antje Bosselmann-Ruickbie

University of Gießen

"Putting the Empress's Neck on the Line: The Materiality of Imperial Neck Ornamentation"

Q&A and Discussion

12 pm Lunch Break

1 pm

Sarah Laursen

Harvard Art Museums

"Out of Place and Out of Sight: Ornaments from Medieval China in American Collections"

Meredyth Lynn Winter

Colgate University; Philadelphia Museum of Art

"Dressing for Paradise: A Consideration of Designs & Materials Befitting Islamic Burial Clothing"

Q&A and Discussion

2:30 pm Coffee Break

3 pm

Ashley Elizabeth Jones

University of Florida

"Wearable Matter"

Ivan Drpić

University of Pennsylvania

"The Burdened Body: Devotional Jewelry and the Weight of the Sacred"

Q&A and Discussion

4:30 pm Conclusion

5 pm Reception

We have opened registration for a limited in-person audience. Bard Graduate Center requires proof of vaccination and photo identification to enter the building. Guests are required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/symposiumrethinking-the-wearable-in-the-middle-ages-tickets-264333196707>

Reference:

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