


2017

Conceptualizing Greek Textile Terminologies: A Databased System

Kalliope Sarri

University of Copenhagen

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/texterm>

 Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Art and Materials Conservation Commons](#), [Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons](#), [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), [Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons](#), [Indo-European Linguistics and Philology Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), [Museum Studies Commons](#), [Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Sarri, Kalliope, "Conceptualizing Greek Textile Terminologies: A Databased System" (2017). *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD*. 35.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/texterm/35>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centre for Textile Research at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Conceptualizing Greek Textile Terminologies: A Databased System

Kalliope Sarri, University of Copenhagen

In *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa, Cécile Michel, & Marie-Louise Nosch (Lincoln, NE: Zea Books, 2017), pp. 520-527.

doi:10.13014/K27P8WJ3

Copyright © 2017 Salvatore Gaspa, Cécile Michel, & Marie-Louise Nosch.

Photographs copyright as noted.



Conceptualizing Greek Textile Terminologies: A Databased System¹

Kalliope Sarri

One of the major challenges in costume and textile research is dealing with the vast number of terms related to textiles and garments, especially because similar terms are found in different languages and dialects, in various regions and over long periods of time, where they have survived in a complicated network of linguistic and cultural interrelations. There have been many attempts to collect textile terms in glossaries as parts of costume studies or as parts of museum archival projects. These glossaries however are usually limited to specific topics, geographical areas, languages, and time periods.

Creating a diachronic and global costume term base in the Greek language is of considerable value for textile terminology, since the earliest textile terms in the Greek language go back to the second millennium BC, retrieved from the clay tablet archives of the Mycenaean palaces.² These early textile terms can be also traced in the vocabularies of other ancient

languages, such as the word *khiton* (Greek: χιτών), which appears as *ki-to* in Linear B coming from the Semitic *ktn*.³

An effort to systematize Greek textile terms in a databased system was initiated as a pilot program between the years 2000-2003 and it was first presented at the conference on *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe 1000 BC – AD 1000* and at the *Euroscience Open Forum* meeting (Copenhagen 2014). This study is now included in the present volume. The project took place during the recording of a costume collection, which was a joint project of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, the Museum of Greek costumes and the Foundation of the Hellenic World. The term collection was initially focused on Greek traditional costumes of the 19th century. Soon after its first steps it became clear that the collection had to be extended to other periods, languages and areas adjacent to the modern

1. I owe many thanks to Ioanna Papantoniou, Xenia Politou, Nadia Maha-Bizoumi and Angeliki Roumeliotou for their valuable advice and encouragement during the compilation of the terms collection at the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation and the Museum of the History of the Greek Costume of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women between the years 1999-2002. I am very grateful to Marie-Louise Nosch and Susanna Lervad for discussions on the concept and usefulness of the database and for reviewing this paper. I also owe many thanks to Cécile Michel and Salvatore Gaspa for accepting this paper in the conference volume.

2. For the Mycenaean textile vocabulary see Del Freo, Rougement & Nosch 2010.

3. Michel & Nosch 2010, xi.

Greek state in order to enlighten the etymology and the alterations of the terms. Moreover, through this linguistic pathway it is possible to trace a wide range of historical and cultural contacts between various ethnic communities within and outside these borders. Thus, costume terms from the oldest historical periods and from areas outside the current political and cultural boundaries of Greece have been included in this project.

The textile term collection, the structure of which is presented here, contains approximately 6000 terms directly related to clothing items but also to raw materials, treatments, implements and stages of manufacture, and also related to the physical conceptual environment of clothing production, *e.g.* *fõrema* (Greek: φόρεμα): dress and *nyphikó* (Greek: νυφικό): wedding dress, their use by specific social or professional groups, *e.g.* *diadema* (Greek: διάδημα): diadem, as well as special pragmatic and linguistic definitions linked to them, *i.e.* *ghyaloméno* (Greek: γυαλωμένο: textile finishing through applying glass pressure; from γυαλί: glass). At the same time, the collection includes terms concerning ancient garments, textiles and textile implements seen as archaeological finds, exhibition objects and as objects under conservation and research.

While compiling textile terms from various historical periods, we noticed that a high number of words derive from other languages, some of which reached Greek as loans or as results of mutual loans, while the origin of many other terms remains unclear. Alternative etymologies have been included with the main entries, and thus the dictionary, apart from being a place for collecting and explaining the meaning of the textile concepts, can also be used as an etymological tool for monitoring a perpetual traffic of textile related words in space and time.

The concept

The multi-thematic and diachronic collection of textile terms presented here aims – through a systematization of the terminology – at acquiring direct knowledge of as many diverse aspects of the historical

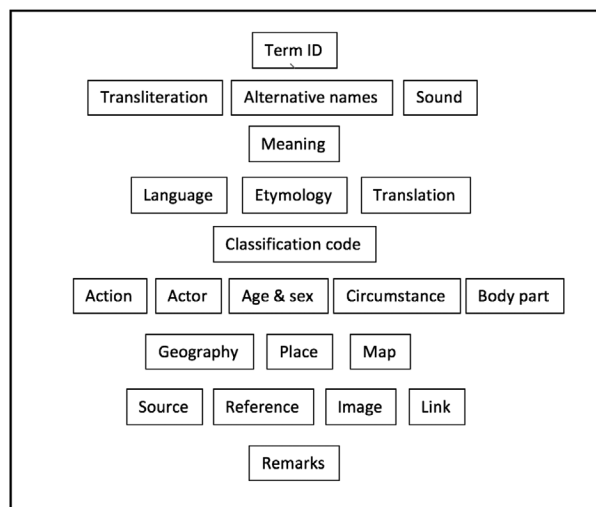


Fig. 1

costumes as possible. In a thesaurus in the form of a dictionary or encyclopaedia it is possible by a simple query to reach the meaning as well as side information about all compiled entries.⁴ The major advantage of a databased system such as the one suggested here is that the search can also be operated in a reverse direction, that is, starting from a survey on a special field of interest one is able to discover many more related words, focused on specific topics and taking into consideration various chronological and geographic parameters (fig. 1). This can be achieved a) through a system of classification fields and b) through a system of keywords directed towards specific thematic units. Thus, a simple lexicographical research can be turned into a search-engine extending beyond time or space limitations. The experience with this kind of structure so far has showed that a search system based on key fields and keywords leads to many more unexpected findings about the origin, the history, and the distribution of clothing items and related terms than those initially targeted.

Terminological sources

The sources of the term collection are of different nature, depending on the periods from which they come. For the prehistoric and proto-historic periods

4. An example of this kind is the online terminology collection *Textilnet*. See Engelhardt Mathiasen & Ringbøl Bitsch 2016 and Ler-
vad & Engelhardt Mathiasen in this volume.

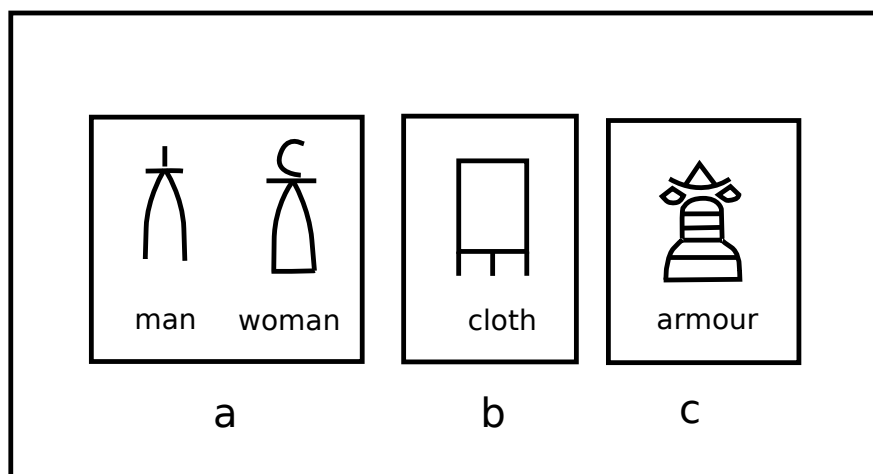


Fig. 2

there is not a verbal terminology, yet archaeological terms referring to a rich imagery or to the use of textile related objects and connotations can suggest visual or linguistic comparisons with later historical terms, revealing the origins of clothing production before they appear in any deciphered language.⁵ An example is the term ‘Minoan dress’, which despite its obvious onomasiological convention, is a definition that shows the pattern of the hieratic garment of the Minoan period and can be compared to costume patterns of other cultures.⁶ In some cases, the archaeological record seems able to indirectly support the terminology and can even lead to the meaning of words and symbols, *i.e.* the prehistoric loom weights explain in reality the shape of ideograms TELA of Linear B script (fig. 2b) but they also clarify the etymology of the ancient Greek word for loom *histos* as this means a standing or vertical loom.⁷ At the transition from prehistory to history during the Late Bronze Age, the first, fragmentary texts in the Linear B script contain the oldest Greek words denoting clothing. Here, pictograms, if compared with their contemporary illustrations and other archaeological evidence, can help link images with words, *i.e.* the different symbols for women and men show that they

wore different clothes and that women’s clothes were long wide dresses while men wore short garments. A characteristic example of linking texts and objects is the symbol of armour, which can be verified by means of Mycenaean items known from the archaeological record (fig. 2c).

Historic textile terms

In the Greek and Latin texts of history and philosophy, poetry and in the texts referring to nature, *i.e.* the works of Pliny, there is a large amount of costume and textile terms, most of which have been already recorded in the classical language dictionaries. So, it is possible to search and find exactly, meanwhile on the web as well, in which ancient text certain terms occur and how their meanings are differentiated by diverse authors.⁸ At this point, it is worth mentioning that ancient writers and modern translators – especially those who were not particularly interested in giving very precise descriptions of nature or technicalities – do not always give accurate information in the fields of textile production and costumes and sometimes they even give confusing or misleading information. Classical examples are the Greek words

5. For aspects of nonverbal terminology see Lervad, Flemestad & Weilgaard Christiansen 2016.

6. Jones 2015, 27-55.

7. See the different versions of the logograms in Nosch 2016, fig. 17.2, table B.

8. See, *e.g.*, the Perseus Digital Library: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>.

byssos and *mitos*, discussed in the present volume,⁹ as well as the word *diplax* in the translations of Homer.¹⁰ In such cases the search and comparison between alternative meanings and descriptions can lead to corrections or altered interpretations of the primary information. Numerous depictions of people in ancient art, *i.e.* in sculpture, vase painting and architecture, sometimes show with many details how ancient clothing was made and how it was worn, so that we can easily compare pictures with words.¹¹

For the term collection from Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Medieval period we have used similar historical and literary sources, which are supported by a rapidly growing number of –in the areas of the east Orthodox church Greece’s mostly religious – iconographic data. Mutual loans during these historical periods can be traced more accurately with knowledge of other languages and through the increasing amount of information saved in the literature and other written sources.¹²

Encyclopaedias and lexica, especially of an older date and concept, bridge the linguistic distance to our modern era¹³ while when approaching our time, the number of special costume studies increases and these are very often accompanied by term glossaries, which can be included in the database. Museums and textile research centres have also accumulated large numbers of textile terms in archives, publications, exhibition and educational material, which can be further systematized and used as direct information sources.¹⁴ In the modern era of media and multimedia environments, journalistic texts, documentary films, interviews, ethnographic photography and blogs presented on the Web have been also proven a valuable pathway for discovering unknown or laboriously accessible textile terms.

The structure of the database

The textile term database consists of two kinds of fields: fields to be filled out with textual information and fields planned as multiple choice lists based on preselected categories (fig. 3). All entries can be classified by the users in order to form queries based on certain groups of criteria. In this way, users can collect and study comparatively terms from specific areas, historical periods and languages, as well as terms related to special research fields and terms referred by certain authors or in special kinds of publications.

Close to the term ID, the etymology of this word is given as the first, second or third language of attestation. Here various authors and sources can give diverse information or their personal view on the derivation of the terms, which can be compared and evaluated by the database users and researchers. For a better tracking of the terms’ *mobility*, it is also very useful to supply a phonetic transcription as well as a sonic performance of the terms. In this way, it is easier to compare terms, which may offer a weak phonological but a stronger sound relation, maybe altered by local dialects and language loans.

One of the crucial features of this database is a field containing classification codes, which makes it easier to approach, detect and categorize the semantic and functional environment of the terms. The codes appear as acronyms consisting of three letters and function as key words leading to information asked with a query. Through this, users can reach information on the conceptual or functional environment of the term, *i.e.* to find if entries denote textile fibres, dyes, weaving implements, workshops, clothes, decorations, accessories or parts of accessories. For example: a chemical substance for cleaning or fixing

9. See for example the contribution by Felicitas Maeder.

10. Kolonas *et al.* 2017.

11. For an updated study of ancient Greek clothing see Spantidaki 2016.

12. A crucial source of nonverbal information about the costumes of the Ottoman period are the illustrations based on travellers’ reports, *i.e.* Stackelberg c. 1828. This publication has been recently accessible online at the webpage of the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation: <http://www.sylviaioannoufoundation.org/digital-library.html?view=book&id=32>

13. A very useful source for terms of the medieval period is the 19 volumes *Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature* (1100-1669) by E. Kriaras, See Kriaras 1968/2014 and Kazazis 2001/2003.

14. A large number of studies on the traditional Greek costumes are published by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation. See Papantoniou 1996.

Name of field / field group	Description & Function	Field type
Name	Term ID	Text
Sound	Acoustic value	Button
Transliteration	Phonetic value	Text
Alternative name/s	Alternative name/s	Text
Meaning	Description of the term	Text
Language	Greek, Italian, Arabic, Turkish, Albanian, etc.	Check field Yes/No
Original Language	Intermediate	Text
Translation to other languages (if applicable)	European languages / English plus Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew	Text
Action	e.g. Spinning, Weaving, sewing, dyeing, pleating, wearing etc.	Multiple Choice
Classification code	e.g. Textile, dress, shoe, hat, weapon etc.	Multiple Choice
Body part	e.g Head, hand, foot, neck, bodice, lower part	Multiple Choice
Age & sex	e.g. Man, woman, child, baby, old person	Multiple Choice
Actor	e.g. worker, warrior, bride, priest, royalty, not defined	Multiple Choice
Circumstance	e.g. Everyday dress, work, wedding, funeral, dance, sport, war	Multiple Choice
Geography (three fields)	Continent, country & region	Multiple Choice Multiple Choice Text
Place	Name of the place (town or village)	Text
Map	Coordinates and & map	Text & GPS map
Source	e.g. Ancient archive, historiography, literature, lexicon, research, modern archive, internet, visual art, sound art	Multiple Choice
Reference (five fields)	Author, Title, Year, Page & figure number	Alphanumeric
Image	Visual evidence	Image
Remarks	Special observations related to the entry	Text field
Internet citation	External document where information is given	Hyperlink

Fig. 3

textiles would belong to the category ‘conservation’, a coloring plant to the ‘dyes’, a pattern to decoration, a clothing item to ‘part of costume’. The more specific codes are, the easier it is for the database user to discover new terms and evidence in particular fields of interest.

Apart from this main classification code, a series of other fields are aimed at yielding classified information. The field ‘activity’ *e.g.* leads to a certain stage of textile and costume manufacture or use (*i.e.* weaving, sewing, dyeing, pleating, wearing); the field ‘body part’ tells us which part of the body the clothing item covers (head, legs, feet, hands, shoulder, *etc.*) The field ‘age/sex’ shows that the item was worn or used by a man or a woman, a young child or an older person or it was a unisex or universal garment worn by everyone. The field ‘actor’ informs us more precisely – whenever possible – about the identity or the social role of the user (worker, warrior, bride, priest, royalty or undefined). The field ‘circumstance’ shows in which case a clothing item or tool was used (work, wedding, celebration, performance, battle, funeral).

A group of geography specifying fields informs about the places, where costumes, textiles and textile related items, dressed people or actions have been localized. Here the geographical names of regions, countries, towns or villages can be entered, so that the database users will be able to make their research on specific geographical areas. If the users’ search focuses in areas of special interest, it is possible to make targeted queries with a combination of many pre-classified fields, *i.e.* on the kind and names of head covers abundant in a certain area or during a special chronological period, used by a certain social class or under certain circumstances.

Queries can also be made based on bibliographical sources, since entries are accompanied with a full citation leading to the authors or other information sources. A special field informs us about the kind of the source used, *i.e.* lexicon, museum archive, ancient literature, individual research work, so as to enable comparisons, cross references and evaluations.

An ideal terminology collection should contain **pictures**, which illustrate and explain visually the compiled terms. This is unfortunately not possible for many periods in Greek textile history since the

majority of written sources are not illustrated. However, the dictionary should include pictures and visual examples whenever available. This is much easier for archaeological and museological terms and for terms coming from iconographic sources.

Application fields

The term-collection aims at offering knowledge about historical clothing to anyone interested in this topic. There are some areas of historical and technological research though, where it is particularly valuable to use a textile dictionary. The most important among these are the history of costumes, the archaeological research, ethnology, the conservation of historical fabrics and museology.

Historical research

The collection of textile terms can shed light on many aspects of historical research concerning the regional history of clothing production but also on population movements, trading and cultural relations between regions. Through a comparison of terms in different languages, we can trace word movements from one region to another which signify trade and contacts between those countries (*e.g.* fez). Generally speaking words and terms occur in certain places where they remain until they are replaced by new ones coming from new local traditions or via distant influences. In contrast, other textile terms remained unchanged for thousands of years in the Greek language such as the word for loom (*histos*, Greek: ἱστός), wool (*erion*, Greek: ἔριον), flax (*lino*, Greek: λινό) and distaff (Greek: ἡλακάτη).

History of arts and crafts

In the ancient and modern figurative arts we can find images of costumes represented with clarity, sometimes even with many details. These comprise valuable evidence for historical fashion, clothing technology and for the raw materials used but they are also valuable for giving us information about the wearer in his or her historical background. In Greek-speaking regions the main source of information about ancient

costumes can be found on vase painting, sculpture and later in religious iconography and in the fine arts. In all these cases we have images of clothing elements, but not their names, since both ancient and modern iconography have usually only an ideological or decorative character and do not aim at describing the material culture in much detail. Terms fill here the role of imaginary captions missing from the pictorial representations. The search for textile terms based on iconography is a very effective approach for textile research because it makes it possible to compare and verify data (materials, structure, design) by combining names, verbal descriptions and pictures. For example, if we search the name of a male headdress seen on a picture from a historical period and if we know the area of the persons' activity, we can search in the database for male headdresses from this particular period and region and eventually find this word from a textual source.

Archaeology

The use of accurate textile and costume terminology is of great value for the archaeological record. In the case of ancient civilizations for which we have only limited information, it helps to standardize the terminology of raw materials, manufacturing methods, tools and techniques but also the terminology of fashionable choices and dress codes of the periods under investigation. As the costume design and the fabric technology have not yet been included in academic archaeological training,¹⁵ a common and technical language is needed for descriptions of tools and manufacturing techniques of historical textiles.

Ethnology

Textile terminology in the field of ethnological studies can illuminate aspects of manufacture and the use of fabrics and garments in various lesser known cultural communities. The nomenclature of clothing often links these activities with other related tasks such as dyeing, tools, the selection of raw materials and the

manufacture of utilitarian objects. Ethnological terms derive from relatively recent periods from which there is ample illustrative and historical evidence, thus through a systematic collection, it is possible to detect and rescue large numbers of textile terms which are becoming extinct or forgotten.

Conservation

From the perspective of the rescuing strategies of historical and archaeological textiles, both traditional and modern conservation tools and methods can be tried and marked with a special classification code (e.g. COM: conservation material). Moreover, knowledge of ancient or traditional methods supplies ideas for the conservation of old natural materials, which causes less damage to the fibers. By selecting relevant terms, textile conservators may find a wide range of information on the appropriate materials required at every work stage. In the group of terms concerning conservation materials and methods we have so far included so far are also terms for traditional methods for cleaning, treating and repairing of clothing and fabrics.

Museology

With the aid of a textile term dictionary, museum objects can be recorded by using their authentic names (e.g. we can use the word *ependýtis* and not coat for the traditional overcoat of the Ottoman period or *peplos* and not dress for the specific female dress of the classical period), preferably the original names used during their time and place of use, with a standardised terminology. In this way, costume collections can be supported with the use of accurate information, while they will be, at the same time, able to save old terms. In addition, by using standardized terms, museum recordings can also be operated also by non-fully specialized staff or trainees. During exhibitions, museum curators can use correct and unified terms for the legends and accompanying texts, and in this way they will be able to disseminate accurate information to the public.

15. I would like to mention here the exceptional work of Marina Vrelli Zachou (University of Ioannina) in gathering information on traditional Greek costumes and textile terms in collaboration with the students in the framework of the seminars. Vrelli-Zachou, <http://users.uoi.gr/mvrelli/ergasies/xeirografa-endyamtologikis-laografias.pdf>

Conclusions

The aim of this ongoing project is to collect Greek costume, textile and related terms from all periods and regions including terms from other languages, which have been integrated into Greek. Beyond the technological and the linguistic part, a textile term dictionary, by tracing the human and social conditions behind the terms, aims to illuminate social aspects of clothing manufacture and dress codes, providing understanding of the society and economy of former periods and cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean. The collection of entries can be a tedious task when terms are scattered in various texts and different kinds of sources, while it becomes much easier and effective when they are grouped together in lists and indexes. This makes the existence of glossaries in every costume publication a valuable vehicle for collecting and evaluating textile related terms.

Bibliography

- Anstey, H. & T. Weston (1999) *The Anstey Weston Guide to textile Terms*. Frome-London. (2nd ed.).
- Burnham, D. (1980) *Warp and weft. Adapted and expanded from the Vocabulary of Technical Terms, 1964, with permission of the Centre International d'Étude des Textiles Anciens*. Toronto.
- Del Freo M., F. Rougement & M.-L. Nosch (2010) The terminology of textiles in the Linear B Tablets, including some considerations on Linear A Logograms and Abbreviations. In C. Michel and M.-L. Nosch (eds.) *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC*, 338-373. Ancient Textile Series 8. Oxford.
- Desrosier, S. (2010) Textile Terminologies and Classifications: Some methodological and chronological aspects. In C. Michel & M.-L. Nosch (eds.) *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC*, 23-51. Ancient Textile Series 8. Oxford.
- Engelhardt Mathiassen, T. & B. Ringbøl Bitsch (2016) A New Danish Project in Textile Terminology: textilnet.dk. In: S. Lervad, P. Flemestad, L. Weilgaard Christensen (eds.) *Verbal and Nonverbal Representation in Terminology. Proceedings of the TOTh (Theorie et Ontologie: Théories et applications) Workshop 2013, Copenhagen 8 November 2013*, 171-175. Copenhagen.
- Jones, B. (2015) *Ariadne's Threads. The Construction and Significance of clothes in the Aegean Bronze Age*. Aegeum 38. Leuven-Liège.
- Kolonas, L., K. Sarri, Chr. Margariti, I. Vanden Berghe, I. Skals & M.-L. Nosch (in print) Heirs of the Loom: Funerary textiles from Stamna (Aitolia, Greece). A preliminary analysis. In M. Fotiadis, R. Laffineur, Y. Lolos & A. Vlachopoulos (eds.) *Hesperos. The Aegean seen from the West. 6th International Aegean Conference*, Ioannina, 18-21 May 2016.
- Kriaras, E. (1968 - 2014) *Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature (1100-1669), I-XIX* (19 Volumes). Online publication: http://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/medieval_greek/kriaras/index.html
- Kazazis, I. (ed.) (2001/2003) Επιτομή του Λεξικού της Μεσαιωνικής Ελληνικής Δημόδους Γραμματείας, 1100-1669 του Εμμανουήλ Κριαρά.
- Epitome of the Kriaras Dictionary. *The concise Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature (1100-1669), Vol. I-XIV*: http://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/medieval_greek/kriaras/index.html
- Nosch, M.-L. (2016) What's in a Name? What's in a Sign? Writing Wool, Scripting Shirts, Lettering Linen, Word-ing Wool, Phrasing Pants, Typing Tunics. In S. Lervad, P. Flemestad, L. Weilgaard Christensen (eds.) *Verbal and Nonverbal Representation in Terminology. Proceedings of the TOTh (Theorie et Ontologie: Théories et applications) 2013 Workshop, Copenhagen 8 November 2013*. 93-115, Copenhagen. Online publication: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01354950/document>
- Palmer, T. F. (1929) *Dictionary of technical textile terms (Tri-lingual). Vol. I. English, French, Spanish*, London. <https://archive.org/details/dictionaryoftech00palmrich>
- Papantoniou, I. (1996) *Greek Regional Costumes*. Nafplion.
- Stackelberg, O. M. von. (c. 1828) *Costumes & Usages des Peuples de la Grèce Moderne dessinés sur les lieux par Le Baron O. M. De Stackelberg*, Lithographiés par Levilly & Publiés par P. Marino, Editeur de la Collection des Costumes de l'Italie, Rue Montmorency, N^o. 13. Paris. Online Publication: Sylvia Ioannou Foundation. Digital library (2016): <http://www.sylviaioannou-foundation.org/digital-library.html?view=book&id=32>
- Vrelli M. (1964/1992) Χειρόγραφα ενδυματολογικής Λαογραφίας Πανεπιστημίου Ιωαννίνων. Συλλογή φοιτητών. Online: <http://users.uoi.gr/mvrelli/ergasies/xeirografa-endyamtologikis-laografias.pdf>