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Conceptualizing Greek Textile Terminologies: A Databased System

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. 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.

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 world.
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. ἕραμα (Greek: φόρεμα): dress and μυθικό (Greek: νυφικό): wedding dress, their use by specific social or professional groups, e.g. διάδημα (Greek: διάδημα): diadem, as well as special pragmatic and linguistic definitions linked to them, i.e. γυαλωμένο (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 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. 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 Mathiassen & Ringbol Bitsch 2016 and Lervad & Engelhardt Mathiassen in this volume.
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 onomasioological 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, \textit{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 \textit{histro} 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, \textit{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, \textit{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

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\(^5\) 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, \textit{e.g.}, the Perseus Digital Library: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/.
byssos and mitos, discussed in the present volume, as well as the word diplax in the translations of Homer. 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.

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.

Encyclopaedias and lexica, especially of an older date and concept, bridge the linguistic distance to our modern era 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. 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.
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
14. A large number of studies on the traditional Greek costumes are published by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation. See Papantonioiu 1996.
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<th>Description &amp; Function</th>
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<td>Phonetic value</td>
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<td>Translation to other languages (if applicable)</td>
<td>European languages / English plus Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
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<td>e.g. Spinning, Weaving, sewing, dyeing, pleating, wearing etc.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification code</td>
<td>e.g. Textile, dress, shoe, hat, weapon etc.</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body part</td>
<td>e.g. Head, hand, foot, neck, bodice, lower part</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age &amp; sex</td>
<td>e.g. Man, woman, child, baby, old person</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>e.g. worker, warrior, bride, priest, royalty, not defined</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstance</td>
<td>e.g. Everyday dress, work, wedding, funeral, dance, sport, war</td>
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<td>Continent, country &amp; region</td>
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<td>Name of the place (town or village)</td>
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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: ιστός), wool (erion, Greek: έριον), flax (lino, Greek: λινό) and distaff (Greek: ηλακάτη).

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, 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 Vreli 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. Vreli-Zachou, http://users.uoi.gr/mvreli/ergasies/xeiografa-ndyamtologikis-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


