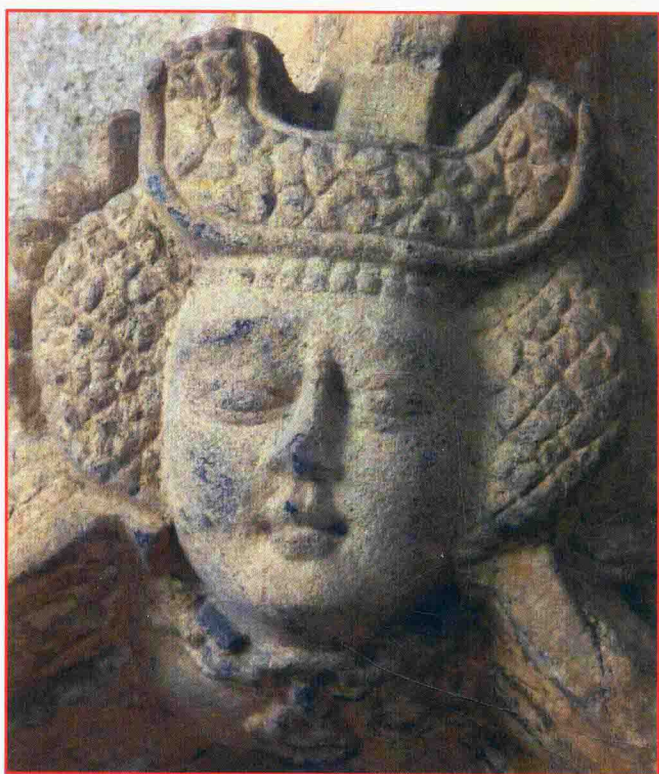


# MEDIEVAL CLOTHING AND TEXTILES



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Edited by Robin Netherton  
and Gale R. Owen-Crocker

# Medieval Clothing and Textiles

Volume 10

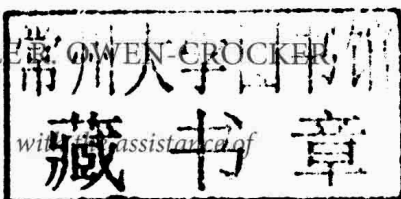
*edited by*

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Medieval  
Clothing and Textiles

Volume 10

# Medieval Clothing and Textiles

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## Preface

This volume celebrates the tenth year of *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* with the interdisciplinary range of approaches that this series has always emphasized. The articles in this volume examine not only the obvious roles of garments and fabrics—to provide warmth, decency, and comfort—but also their social and artistic significance in the medieval and early modern periods.

Three of these papers focus on practical matters of clothing and textiles. Maureen C. Miller describes a remarkable collection of medieval vestments surviving at Castel Sant'Elia in Italy; unlike most such survivals, those at Sant'Elia include utilitarian examples alongside luxury ones. Rebecca Woodward Wendelken provides an overview of the cultivation of silk—the luxury fabric of the Middle Ages—and its spread to Western Europe before 1300, and summarizes the published scholarship on the subject. Lisa Monnas examines some of the medieval colour terms for desirable cloth, refined in the light of some extant examples, and provides definitions that should prove extremely useful to future scholars.

Two articles delve into the social and monetary value of clothing. Michelle L. Beer examines the transformation of the wardrobe of Margaret Tudor, daughter of the English King Henry VII, as she undertook a great dynastic marriage to James IV, King of Scots, exhibiting the power and prestige of her father's Tudor monarchy through her clothes and her domestic furnishings. Christine Meek's ongoing research into the documents of fourteenth-century Lucca reveals details of working-class wardrobes through accounts of garments seized from debtors.

Two essays address artistic representations. Valija Evalds's study of the female heads on roof bosses of St. Frideswide's Priory in Oxford focuses on the significance of portraying headdresses that were old-fashioned at the time they were carved. Christopher J. Monk demonstrates how Anglo-Saxon artists depicted household textile furnishings to indicate emotional tensions and complex human relationships in the narratives they illustrated.

Finally, in an exercise in historiography, Elizabeth Coatsworth examines the life and achievements of a previously obscure figure, Mrs. A. G. I. Christie, whose pioneering *English Medieval Embroidery* remains a classic text. Christie's approach to medieval embroidery was influenced by her own skill as both artist and embroiderer and by her association with the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

With this volume, we welcome Monica Wright to the editorial team, where she continues to apply the expertise she has supplied since the inception of this series as

a member of our editorial board. As always, we also express gratitude to the many scholars in related disciplines who have so generously lent their knowledge and guidance as peer reviewers for article submissions to this series.

We are saddened to report the death of John Munro on Dec. 23, 2013. A distinguished economic historian who focused on textile studies, John was a member of the editorial board of *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* from its founding and contributed much wisdom to it, as well as a major article (in volume 3). He will be greatly missed.

We continue to consider for publication in this journal both independent submissions as well as papers read at sessions sponsored by DISTAFF (Discussion, Interpretation, and Study of Textile Arts, Fabrics, and Fashion) at the international congresses held annually in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Leeds, England. Proposals from potential conference speakers should be sent to [robin@netherton.net](mailto:robin@netherton.net) (for Kalamazoo) and [gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com](mailto:gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com) (for Leeds). Potential authors for *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* should send a 300-word synopsis to Professor Gale R. Owen-Crocker, English, American Studies and Creative Writing, Samuel Alexander Building, The University of Manchester, M13 9PL, UK; e-mail [gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com](mailto:gale.owencrocker@ntlworld.com). For author guidelines, see <http://www.distaff.org/MCTguidelines.pdf>.

Authors who are interested in submitting a book proposal for our subsidia series "Medieval and Renaissance Clothing and Textiles" should apply using the publication proposal form available on the Web site of our publisher, Boydell & Brewer, at <http://www.boydellandbrewer.com>. We encourage potential authors of monographs or collaborative books for this series to discuss their ideas with the General Editors before making a formal proposal.

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# Behind the Curtains, Under the Covers, Inside the Tent: Textile Items and Narrative Strategies in Anglo-Saxon Old Testament Art

*Christopher J. Monk*

It is easy to dismiss representations of textile items in Anglo-Saxon manuscript art as incidental: A pair of curtains, bedclothes, or a tent might be read as nothing more than decorative embellishments. When examined more closely, however, such items may take on an important role in the structuring of a visual narrative, or their deployment may even become, in effect, commentary or discourse. Moreover, it can be demonstrated that some textile items are used strategically to compel the viewer toward interacting intellectually and/or emotionally with what is on the page.

The research of Catherine Karkov has done much to dispel the notion that the drawings that form part of Old Testament narratives in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts are merely illustrations of the text. In her study of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, for example, she explains and demonstrates the idea of “a metonymic compilation of text and illustration” which creates a “dialogue that echoes back and forth throughout the manuscript.”<sup>1</sup> This is a useful way of understanding how image-text relationships produce discourse: As images trigger associations with words, and vice versa, the mind of the active reader-viewer absorbs the echoing dialogue, and as a consequence the reader-viewer is propelled into an exercise of hermeneutic endeavour. Stephen Nichols perhaps hints at something more. He remarks on the “two kinds of literacy” within “the dynamic of the medieval manuscript matrix,” observing how “reading text and interpreting visual signs [...] offer a dual route of penetration to the underside

This essay represents a reworking of sections of the final chapter of my 2012 doctoral thesis at the University of Manchester, “Framing Sex: Sexual Discourse in Text and Image in Anglo-Saxon England.” I would like to acknowledge the Arts and Humanities Research Council for its funding of my doctoral research. A version of the section on Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar was presented in May 2012 at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, where the paper received the David R. Tashjian Travel Award.

1 Catherine E. Karkov, *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.

of consciousness.<sup>22</sup> In essence, this essay attempts to penetrate both the consciousness of the artist and that of the reader-viewer. Its particular angle is the analysis of representations of everyday textile items as part of narrative strategies. Appreciating these strategies opens up our understanding of artistic intent and audience reception in the Anglo-Saxon period. Several scenes from two late-Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, scenes that are in actuality sexual narratives, will provide the focus for this study. The manuscripts are the Illustrated Old English Hexateuch<sup>3</sup> and MS Junius 11.<sup>4</sup>

## CURTAINS THAT REVEAL

Anyone who has been to a theatre production can relate to the metaphor of the revealing curtain: The drawing back of theatrical curtains may reveal the identity of an individual, perhaps a villain or a hero; or it may open up to the audience an imagined world, perhaps a private, inner space; or it may stimulate anticipation in some other way.<sup>5</sup> What is clear is that revealing curtains trigger audience response and engagement. This is the case, too, with the use of curtains in medieval manuscript iconography. Famously, for example, the miniature of Matthew the Evangelist in the Lindisfarne

- 2 Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (January 1990): 8.
- 3 The Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius B.iv (? Canterbury, 1020–40), hereafter the Hexateuch. The drawings in the manuscript accompany a vernacular translation of the first six books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. For a full-colour digital facsimile of the Hexateuch, the sharpest images are available via the British Library Manuscript Viewer, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton\\_MS\\_Claudius\\_B\\_IV](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Claudius_B_IV) (accessed March 21, 2013). A CD-ROM with full-colour facsimile images accompanies Benjamin C. Withers' study of the manuscript, *The Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, Cotton Claudius B.iv: The Frontier of Seeing and Reading in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). A black-and-white facsimile is also available: C. R. Dodwell and Peter Clemoes, eds., *The Old English Illustrated Hexateuch: British Museum Cotton Claudius B. IV, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile* 18 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974). The dating of the manuscript here is that of Withers, *Illustrated Old English Hexateuch*, chap. 2. In view of the probable location of production, the artist will be referred to as male.
- 4 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11 (? Canterbury, Christ Church (Cathedral)). Leslie Lockett puts the manuscript in the period ca. 960–ca. 980; L. Lockett, "An Integrated Re-Examination of the Dating of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11," *Anglo-Saxon England* 31 (2002): 141–73. For a full-colour, digital facsimile on CD-ROM, see B. J. Muir, ed., *A Digital Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 11* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004). Colour images can also be accessed via the Bodleian Library's Luna catalogue: <http://bodley30.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/allCollections> (accessed March 28, 2013). For a black-and-white facsimile, see Israel Gollancz, ed., *The Cædmon Manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Biblical Poetry: Junius XI in the Bodleian Library* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927); see also Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration: Photographs of Sixteen Manuscripts with Descriptions and Index* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), plates 16.1–16.51. In view of the probable location of production, the artist will be referred to as male.
- 5 For an art-historical perspective on the theatricality of curtains, see Açılyya Allmer, "In-Between Stage Life and Everyday Life: Curtains and Their Pictorial Representations," *Textile* 6, no. 1 (2008): 18–31.

Gospels depicts a mysterious figure peeping out from behind a curtain, looking at the evangelist as he writes the gospel; as well as wondering who the man may be, the viewer is encouraged to share with him in his gaze.<sup>6</sup>

In the Hexateuch, curtains are used in various ways: They reveal spaces both as imagined realities and as figurative, or symbolic, spaces. In the story of Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham, parted curtains reveal the most private of spaces, the inner sanctum of sexual intimacy, but they also reveal the absence associated with barrenness. In both instances, as is argued below, curtains are central to the artistic strategy of the visual narrative; both scenes deploy curtains to elicit an emotional response from the reader-viewer. Also in the Hexateuch, in the story of Lot in Sodom, curtains form part of a narrative structure aimed at drawing a contrast between the inner, blessed space of Lot's dwelling and the outer, sordid world of the Sodomite men. In this particular story, as we shall see, curtains are deployed as part of a strategy to reveal that which is actually obscured by the text.

### CURTAINS, SARAH, AND POLYGYNY

Polygyny, in the form of concubinage, was a custom that persisted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. It was, unsurprisingly, a practice that prompted a significant measure of ecclesiastical anxiety.<sup>7</sup> For example, the Anglo-Saxon penitentials, which served as handbooks for confessors, leave us in no doubt that the Church considered a man having both a wife and a concubine to be guilty of a serious sin;<sup>8</sup> and by the late Anglo-Saxon period, the Church's position on this matter had influenced law, so

6 Janet Backhouse has suggested the mysterious figure "may possibly represent Christ." Backhouse, *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981), 47, plate 23.

7 For a comprehensive analysis of the evidence of the practice of concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England, see Margaret Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 3–34; see also Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998).

8 The *Old English Penitential* states: "Se man þe riht æwe hæfð 7 eac cyfese: ne sylle him nan preost husl, ne nane gerihto þe man cristenum mannum deð, buton he to bote gecyrre; 7 gif he cyfesan hæbbe 7 nane riht æwe, he ah þæs to donne swa him gepincð; wite he þeah þæt he beo on anre gehealdan, beo hit cyfese, beo hit æwe." ("The man who has a lawful wife and also a concubine: No priest shall give him the Eucharist, nor perform any rites which one does for Christian men, unless he should turn to repentance; and if he has a concubine but no lawful wife, he should take charge of that to do as he thinks; nevertheless, he should know that he should have keeping of one, be it concubine, be it wife.") Similarly, the *Old English Handbook* states: "Se þe hafað æwe 7 eac cifese: ne do him nan preost nane gerihta mid cristenum mannum, butan he to bote gecyrre; beo hym on anre gehealdan, beo hit æwe beo hit cyfes." ("He who has a wife and also a concubine: Let no priest perform for him any rites associated with Christian men, unless he turns to repentance; he should have keeping of one, be it the wife, be it the concubine.") Old English text is based on the editions of the penitentials by Allen J. Frantzen in his online database, *The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*: <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/>; see S42.09.01 and D54.17.01 (accessed March 21, 2013). Translation of Old English throughout this study is my own.