

PCP Forum 30/2018: Textiles and Protection of Cultural Property

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Christoph Flury: Editorial. Textiles and Protection of cultural property

Dear reader,

As a native of St. Gallen and a historian, textiles have a double significance for me. The importance and international renown of St. Gallen embroidery, both as a major part of Switzerland's cultural heritage and as a powerful economic force, were instilled in me from a very age, both at school and through the city's age-old Children's Festival.

As an adult, I studied Swiss economic and social history, which for several centuries was shaped by the textile industry. Its impact was felt particularly strongly in Eastern Switzerland: the global economic crisis and the two World Wars in the first half of the 20th century hastened the demise of the textile industry and led to a huge wave of emigration from the region, and thus a considerable population drain. It would be many decades before the industry recovered, largely thanks to the fashion industry rediscovering the beauty, quality and air of exclusivity of Swiss textiles.

Textile production was long one of Switzerland's major employers. This importance is reflected in the Swiss Inventory of Living Traditions, which features four textile-related entries: Neuchâtel lacemaking, the Zurich silk industry, St. Gallen machine embroidery and Basel silk ribbon weaving. Likewise, the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage contains myriad examples of embroidery and weaving traditions from a host of countries around the world.

Textiles are also a particular focus of cultural property protection efforts. One needs look no further than the Swiss PCP Inventory, whose entries include passanterie workshops, weaving cellars, mills, drying towers and even the grand houses built by wealthy owners, not to mention a plethora of textile-related museum and archival collections. Also, inventorying, photographing and documenting textile collections are a frequent subject of PCP training courses; special PCP fact sheets have also been produced on the subject.

The steady decline of the textile industry, which reached its nadir in the 1930–1940 period when a huge number of home workers found themselves out of work, prompted Switzerland to shift its focus and increasingly position itself as a centre of expertise in the collection and conservation of textiles. As this issue of PCP Forum shows, Swiss museums and archives boast well-preserved textile collections, and the Abegg Foundation, set up in 1961 by Werner and Margaret Abegg-Harrington, has become a leading and internationally renowned centre of expertise in the field. As well as collecting, displaying and studying textiles, this institution specialises in the conservation and restoration of fabrics, and even has its own conservation-restoration degree programme. Also, in 2009 the Foundation endowed the Institute of Art History of the University of Bern with a Chair in the History of Textile Arts, the first of its kind in the world.

This issue of PCP Forum explores the world of textiles from many different perspectives – research and teaching, training and practice, as well as mediation, archiving and conservation. By its very nature, the journal is unable to provide an exhaustive overview; certain issues and key institutions are regrettably omitted, such as the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, which is home to one of the most extensive and varied textile collections in the country (fabrics, clothing, traditional Swiss costumes, paraments, flags etc.). However, the journal's editorial team have endeavoured to make up for these unavoidable omissions by providing a list of links and references to other publications and exhibitions on the subject.

This issue of PCP Forum has nevertheless succeeded in providing a fascinating glimpse into the multifaceted and exciting world of the Protection of Cultural Property and Textiles. I hope you enjoy reading these articles as much as I did.

Birgitt Borkopp-Restle: The history of textile arts chair at the University of Bern

In 2009, a new department entirely given over to the teaching and study of the history of textile arts (Abegg Foundation Professor) was founded at the Institute of Art History of the University of Bern. This centre of expertise is the only one of its kind in this highly specialised field.

Students majoring in the History of Textile Arts as part of the Master's programme acquire an in-depth knowledge of the specific properties and technical aspects of textile arts, as well as many different creative uses of textiles (in particular, silk weaving, embroidery, tapestry and costume-making). At the same time, they acquaint themselves with the methods used in the scholarly study of such objects. The programme covers the early Middle Ages right through to the present day and encompasses a broad geographical and cultural landscape. The aim is to equip Master's and doctoral students with the skills needed to undertake research both independently and as part of a multidisciplinary team (alongside professional conservators and experts from other fields) and give them the tools that will allow them to play a part in safeguarding this part of our cultural heritage.

Consequently, field trips and museum internships are a key part of the degree programme. Working hand in hand with museums affords students a valuable opportunity to fully engage with the original work and fosters an informed and professional approach to issues such as preservation, presentation and mediation of historical textiles, as well as other works of art.

Bettina Niekamp, Caroline Vogt: History of textile restoration in Switzerland

The "Bernische Historische Museum" opened to the public in 1894; the Swiss National Museum in Zurich in 1898. From the outset, those in charge of these institutions afforded particular attention to their extensive collections of textiles, which included medieval flags and banners, uniforms and traditional Swiss costumes.

The 20th century saw pioneering advances in textile preservation techniques. Some are still used today, while others have been abandoned due to the detrimental effect they were later found to have. Since the late 1960^s, textile restorers have availed themselves of scientifically tested and approved products like pesticides and synthetic adhesives developed by the pharmaceutical industry. Medieval flags present conservators with unique challenges due to their size, their relatively thin and fragile silk fabrics, their double-sided decoration and their display in museum settings. Given the long history of both museums in relation to the management and preservation of textiles, it reflects the development in the field of textile conservation-restoration from skilled craftspeople and interested amateurs to specially trained graduates from universities of applied sciences.

When the Abegg-Stiftung was founded in 1961, one of its main priorities was training professional conservators and restorers of historical textiles. In 1997, this four-year programme (originally three years) was affiliated to the Bern University of Applied Sciences as a four-year diploma degree programme; it was organised as a Bachelor and Master's programme in 2005. While the introductory modules on conservation, cultural and natural sciences are taught at the Bern campus, the textile-specific and practical modules are taught at the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg. A Master's degree not only qualifies graduates to practice independently as conservators-restorers but can also be a stepping stone to a doctoral degree in this field.

Anna Jolly: A taste for the exotic – European silks of the 18th century.

The early 18th century saw the emergence of silks featuring hitherto unknown and strange motifs. These designs drew inspiration from illustrated travelogues of the time and from Asian art which had found its way to Europe via the East India Company.

These brightly coloured and luxuriously figured silks were used in the confection of garments for genteel society, and their ever-changing designs came to dominate international fashion. Added to these were bizarre silks, named for their extravagant and fantastical motifs, and persiennes, which were noted for their filigree decoration.

Some manufacturers in Amsterdam specialised in the production of silk fabrics with chinoiserie motifs, which they sold as indiennes. Measuring 80 cm across, this width was typical among silks woven in China, and led to them being confused with imported Asian fabrics. Conversely, textile designers in China drew inspiration from the patterns and designs of imported European fabrics.

The current exhibition at the Abegg Foundation in Riggisberg showcases these lavish silks with their exotic patterns and the clothing that was made from them and worn by the fashion-conscious elite (29 April–11 November 2018).

Sibyll Kindlimann: History of the "Glarner Tüechli".

Red "Glarner Tüechli", or Fazonetli (neckerchiefs) have long been popular in Switzerland. Yet, what is less well-known is that these cotton squares were once exported all over the world.

With their distinctive patterns, these bandanas were picked up by tourists as a souvenir of their time in Switzerland. Yet, they also came to symbolise an impressive period in the industrial history of Glarus and the canton's burgeoning sense of community and thriving entrepreneurial spirit.

Given conditions at that time, exporting its products to far-flung destinations was not a primary objective of the remote, primarily agricultural mountain valley. However, this would begin to change in the early 19th century with the arrival of the first factories in the canton. Goods were exported initially to the Eastern Mediterranean via Italian trading posts, then across the entire Ottoman Empire, and ultimately to Asia and Africa.

Although the textile industry went into decline (late 19th–early 20th century), the Glarus economic miracle had been driven by a readiness to take risks, innovative experimentation in terms of precision machining, and a clear and systematic focus on the customer. This is extensively documented in the Glarner Wirtschaftsarchiv. Guided tours and exhibitions offer the general public a glimpse into this voluminous and incredibly diverse repository of the region's industrial history.

Silvia Gross: The textile industry of Eastern Switzerland – where innovation and tradition meet

The exquisite quality of St Gallen embroidery has enraptured the world of high fashion since the 19th century. However, its history has been punctuated with times of tremendous highs and tremendous lows.

Medieval Switzerland saw a flourishing trade in flax and linen ("white gold"). Later, it would begin to import cotton, primarily from England. By the end of the 18th century, the industrial revolution had ushered in the steam engine and mechanical spinning and weaving machines. As a result, countries

like Switzerland began to abandon manual production in favour of industrial manufacturing techniques.

The textile industry of Eastern Switzerland managed to weather volatile economic conditions, experiencing meteoric growth up until the outbreak of the First World War. On international markets, it was all-conquering, and St Gallen embroidery became one of Switzerland's top exports.

The hidden heroes of today's Swiss textile industry are technical fabrics, which can be found in myriad everyday products. Used for example in the automotive and aeronautic construction, medical technology, architecture, as well as protective and functional clothing, these often unprepossessing materials tend to be overlooked. Yet, these fabrics have enormous potential and the role they play in our lives is only set to increase.

The St Gallen Textile Museum, founded in 1878 by the "Kaufmännisches Directorium" [local merchants' association] regularly stages exhibitions that bring these and many other aspects of textiles to the attention of a wider public.

Werner Merz: SEFAR historical archives and the PCP Inventory.

The SEFAR Group, which was founded in 1830, is one of the world's leading manufacturers of technical textiles. The company employs some 2600 people worldwide, 900 of whom are based at its sites in Switzerland. In 2005, the group celebrated its 175th anniversary and an extensive history of the company was published in honour of this historic event. It drew on a wealth of historical material accumulated over decades, as well as the private papers held by members of the founding family.

The archives of a now global company presented the editorial team with a whole host of challenges. The international expansion of the group's operations meant that the reference material was not only vast but also had to be sourced from multiple sites around the world. Added to this was the fact that a number of key events primarily concerned the group's foreign subsidiaries, which meant that there were language barriers to overcome, too. A further difficulty was the increasingly electronic and decentralised nature of business correspondence.

The mission of the SEFAR Historical Archives is to document the activities and development of the company, the history of its founding family and the environment in which the Group operates. Work will continue to focus on processing documentation held by the parent company. However, steps will also be taken in the future to incorporate material like annual reports, minutes, company publications and documentation on major projects into the archives on an ongoing basis and, where possible, in a digitised format. All documents are indexed according to the International Standard Archival Description (G) in an archive database (docuteam curator); the digital archives are entered into the digital long-term archive (docuteam cosmos).

Camille Jéquier, Sarah Besson-Coppotelli: Lace conservation at the château et musée de Valangin

The Château et Musée de Valangin boasts a collection of over 5000 pieces of lace work as well as the tools used to make it. Some of the items are extremely old, dating as far back as the early 17th century, while others are incredibly rare and of exquisite quality. Consequently, the museum has long sought out relatively inexpensive but effective ways of protecting its lace collection from damage caused by various factors. In certain cases, the disrepair can be traced back to how the lace was handled and stored before it found its way to the museum. In others, the source is natural, biological or chemical agents that pose a serious threat to its long-term survival.

How should we treat grand-dad's christening cap with its lovely 19th century Valenciennes lace trim? What about great-aunt's beautiful bridal trousseau filled with delicate Mechlin lace dating from the time of Louis XIV, which has been lovingly preserved and passed down from one generation to the next? Once left to languish in the attic or at the back of a wardrobe, these examples of our cultural heritage are inherited or discovered by chance without any real idea of what they represented at the time they were made. As a result, they are left to disintegrate until someone happens to remember that they exist.

The depots of the Château et musée de Valangin in the canton of Neuchâtel are home to over 5000 artefacts made from or used to make lace. Many date from the 17th century and are of a sumptuousness and finesse that is rarely matched by 19th century machine-made lace. The collection also features many lace cushions, most of which were made locally but many also originate in other European countries with a long-established tradition of lace making.

The bobbins used to make these intricate objects also feature in our collection.

Lisa Laurenti: Indiennes made in Neuchâtel?

The appearance of chintz are evidence of the huge popularity of new products imported from the East during the 17th century. The emergence of factories right across Europe, including Neuchâtel, coupled with the advent of cotton-printing processes meant that these could be produced locally, a practice which continued over subsequent centuries. These fabrics reflect the penchant for "exotic" motifs at that time; the resulting demand would eventually usher in mass industrial production and distribution on a global scale. By the end of the 18th century, Neuchâtel had gained access to international outlets for its products, exporting most of its output abroad and employing close to 2000 workers across a dozen factories, sited primarily along the shores of Lake Neuchâtel.

A study of the collections of the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Neuchâtel and the archives of the factories and trading houses involved in the Neuchâtel indienne industry raises a number of questions: what influence did fashions in the decorative arts in the 18th and 19th centuries exert on the Neuchâtel textile industry? Did Neuchâtel produce original designs of its own? Conversely, how and to what extent were producers and designers influenced by the financial and business constraints imposed on them by merchants and competitors?

The exhibition "Made in Neuchâtel. Deux siècles d'indiennes" (7 October 2018–20 May 2019) aims to answer these questions while showcasing the region's textile heritage with a decidedly international flair.

Therese Schaltenbrand Felber: Silk-ribbon weaving and the "Webstuhlrattern" project

Silk ribbons from Basel were once in demand around the world, adorning fashionable ladies' gowns and bonnets. From the 18th to the early 20th century, the production of these luxury ribbons, known as passanterie, greatly shaped the cultural and industrial history of the region. From that point on, it was Basel's chemical industry, which had in fact started out producing artificial dyes for the silk ribbon industry, which would go on to define the region's economic and social landscape.

The ribbons were woven using powerful looms set up either in the living rooms of home workers or factories. With the advent of simpler fashions in the 1920^s, silk ribbons began to fall out of favour. In 2001, Basel's last surviving ribbon-making factory closed its doors.

Today, mechanical looms dating from the last two centuries are put to regular use in 13 museums around the Basel region. Until recently, knowledge of the mechanics of these shuttle looms, as well as their maintenance and use, rested with only a handful of former professional weavers. As such, this example of our intangible cultural heritage was on the verge of being lost forever. The Webstuhlrattern [clatter of the loom] project was therefore developed to safeguard and pass on this traditional know-how. As well as schooling amateur enthusiasts, the project team spoke to the retired loom operators, documented their stories and expertise, and transformed this information into a manual, which can now be accessed online (<http://www.webstuhlrattern.ch>). In doing so, the project is helping to ensure that the clatter of shuttle looms will continue to ring out for many years to come!

Susan Marti: Conservation and preservation of Bern's medieval tapestries

Over the last 500 years, court tapestries from the late 15th century have been in the care of the state. However, these prized objects knew various homes during that time initially stored in boxes and cupboards in Bern City Hall, they were moved to the sacristy of Bern Münster for safekeeping, before finally going on permanent display in the capital's "Historisches Museum". Occasionally, sources contain information on how to manage these large but very fragile works of art. The study of this documentation shows that while conservation techniques may have changed dramatically over the centuries, the strong appreciation of the value and historical significance of these precious wall hangings has not.

The inset provides a short description of the "Historisches Museum's" efforts to conserve its four Caesar tapestries. When the project was launched in 2012, a special workshop was set up to allow the public to watch the team of restorers and conservators close-up as they carried out the delicate operation; since 2017, work has continued in workshops away from prying eyes. The project has three main aims: to generate the first detailed account of the tapestries' state of repair, which will serve as a reference for all future work; to remove the old and inadequate supportive straps; and to carry out preventive conservation treatment so that these works of art can be optimally displayed in the future.

Rino Büchel in an interview with Peter Netzer: The art of embroidery before automation

The interview explores the art of hand embroidery in St Gallen during the 19th and 20th centuries before automated machines took over.

This account by an eye witness, who as a child was charged with certain menial needlework-related tasks, reveals the economic, social and regional importance of this craft, and how buildings were adapted to accommodate this work.

For many families in Eastern Switzerland, this work was an additional if not the main source of income. The arrival of automated embroidery machines would lead to much stiffer competition from the 1970^s onwards, depriving many families of a livelihood, plunging them into financial uncertainty and compelling them to find other ways to make ends meet.

Agnes Ziegler: Ottoman rugs in Transylvania

The largest collection of Ottoman rugs and carpets outside present-day Turkey can be found in Evangelical churches across Romania. These jewel-coloured artefacts bear witness to a once

flourishing trade, reflect how guilds propagated their image, and illustrate the specific purpose that Ottoman rugs served in Christian churches.

These objects create a sense of identity and are a popular visitor attraction, but the fact that they are on permanent display is contrary to their original use and poses several risks in terms of the conservation and protection of this cultural heritage. Given that their removal to a museum setting is not an option, efforts need to focus on ensuring optimal exhibition conditions in their original location in order to mitigate the risk of damage. As regards conservation, professional textile restorers carry out regular inspections; these are supplemented by monitoring measures introduced by the municipality concerned. Conservational and administrative problems are handled centrally by the centre of expertise in Kronstadt. Safeguarding the collection also comes with its own special set of challenges, which can only be addressed by equally special strategies. For example, the presence of contamination in the rugs poses an invisible threat which requires highly specialised expertise and the appropriate infrastructure to combat it.

The A. B. Evangelical Church in Kronstadt, which has the largest Ottoman rug collection in the country oversees the nationwide coordination of conservation efforts.