# Preface: Studies of Ancient Textiles in Spain

CARMEN ALFARO GINER

Universitat de València, Carmen, Alfaro@uv.es

# INTRODUCTION1

Fibres and textiles, dated to different periods and from diverse contexts, provide us with invaluable information about textile production despite the perishable nature of these objects. Organic materials are always more or less deteriorated when excavated. In spite of this, their importance from the point of view of the history of ancient technologies is enormous, for they allow us to reconstruct human crafts, customs, fashions, and everyday life in general. Moreover, they greatly complement Classical written sources on the topic of textile production and consumption.

The recovery of organic materials is improving thanks to the care with which objects are currently unearthed and to their subsequent conservation. In most cases, they are small fragments that do not look very attractive, but which, under the expert eye, offer an invaluable amount of information. The degree of preservation varies depending on the environment surrounding the object (e.g. humidity levels, presence of metal objects, constant temperature, etc.). Two elements are fundamental for the successful analysis of textile fragments: their careful excavation and a good

conservation treatment. A complete formal and historical study of the excavated material is the next step. At this stage, the textile researcher should not only focus on the physical description of the object, but also on the social and cultural meaning of the find, that is, the role that the textile could have played in the human environment in which it was created. All these steps require a collaboration between different specialists: archaeologists, conservators, specialists in fibres and textiles, and historians.

Throughout the time that I have personally dedicated to the study of ancient fibres, ropes, baskets, nets, and fabrics, I have been involved in the analysis of many finds that exemplify the points made above. Any organic archaeological object, no matter how damaged it may appear when excavated, provides invaluable information regarding the technologies with which it was made, the intention of its use, and even its economic, religious, and social significance.

The study of ancient textiles is not an easy task and often requires an expert who, once the find and its context have been described, would delve into issues of greater complexity. Reaching a proficient level of knowledge in this field of expertise is a long and complex process

and, until recently, few specialists were available. However, the situation seems to be changing and interest in ancient textiles has lately increased. A wonderful teacher, recently deceased, once told me: If you study textiles you will never get a university position. Fortunately, he was wrong. Indeed, he even ended up devoting some of his later work to the study of purple and ancient fashion. Textiles retain wear traces in the shape of dirt spots and/ or damage, providing significant symbolic and religious information (Alfaro 2015). In ancient times, fabrics were used to wrap precious objects deposited as grave goods such as weapons or tableware (Alfaro 2004; Médard and Sindonino 2014), and to cover the bodies of the dead (e.g. Munigua bustum) (Alfaro 2005), or contained hallucinogenic seeds such as Papaver somniferum (Alfaro 1980) – all examples of usage that inform us about community rituals and emotions.

Despite that, most scholars traditionally have not paid much attention to textiles. I still remember with amazement the answer that an expert in sindonology gave me, after requesting my analysis of a sacred textile, when I asked: But, if this cloth had not wiped, according to you, the face of Jesus Christ when he was going to the Golgotha... What would you think of it? – It would be a cloth without any interest. This cloth, however, was recently well studied (López-Amo 1999; 2000). Fortunately, this is no longer the norm and increasing numbers of archaeological textiles become protagonists in their own right, because any ancient cloth usually exerts on those who find it a kind of attraction and veneration that does not awaken with other objects.

Millions of textiles, baskets, and ropes that were used across the Mediterranean, central and northern Europe during antiquity have been unfortunately lost. Thus, the originally massive presence of fibres, fabrics, ropes, etc. represents today the tiny percentage of findings in most excavations – if any – if we compare textiles and basketry with other everyday life material culture.

### TEXTILE STUDIES IN SPAIN

Archaeological textile remains in Spain were initially studied very unevenly and only briefly mentioned in general descriptions of excavated sites or object collections, in a very perfunctory manner and without a clear methodology (Martínez Santa-Olalla 1933; Beltrán 1979; Catalán and Rojas 2009; Gutiérrez and Hierro 2010).

In contrast, in the rest of Europe the study of textiles has been considerably more advanced (e.g. see regular publications of *NESAT – North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles*). In Spain, there was a lack of methodology for the study of this type of material culture, and even today that methodology is not consistently applied. This is perhaps because textile studies demand full-time dedication, even though there is a great variety of approaches within the field. Additionally, there is a lack of publications focused on specific textile topics (but see Uscatescu 1994, on fullonicae and dye workshops). Recent PhD dissertations currently in print will give an important impulse to this field of research.

Some previous studies laid the foundation for our understanding of important historical questions regarding textiles in Roman times. Álvaro d'Ors, the great Spanish Roman historian, in his Epigrafía Jurídica de la Hispania Romana published in 1953, was of great help to understand Roman legislation on all types of productive activities. The large corpora Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum (CGL) and Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL) also provided a lot of information on craft activities in the Roman world. I also believe that the work of my old professor Miquel Dolç, Hispania y Marcial (1953), is still very useful to approach the study of wool in the Roman Baetica province. García y Bellido, in his work España y los españoles hace 2000 años según la Geografía de Estrabón (1968) used an interesting ethnographic approach to the study of wool and textile economy. Maluquer de Motes studied the spatial distribution of textile production in archaeological sites.

Other useful publications dealt with textile finds or textile tools. Among the most interesting in terms of methodology are articles by Camps Cazorla on Visigothic textiles (1934; see Cabrera 2017 for a more recent study), Martínez Santa-Olalla (1933) who studied a textile fragment adhering to the back of a belt, and Ardanaz (2000). In the field of textile tools, relevant are works of Vidal and López (1952) on the spindle whorls from San Miguel de Liria in Valencia; Castro Curel (1980), who analysed the distribution of Iberian loom weights and spindle whorls; and Delibes de Castro et al. (1995) who also worked on Celtiberian spindle whorls. Francisco Presedo discovered the Dama de Baza (Lady of Baza), an outstanding find for the study of textile iconography in Spain, and E. Llobregat (1972) studied the textile tools of some Iberian sites such as the Bastida de Les Alcuses (Moixent, Valencia) from a gender perspective.

There have also been important studies relating to the later chronological periods, especially Late Antiquity, e.g. by J. Pinar and Ll. Turell of the Museum of Montserrat (2007). Dominique Cardon published her extraordinary PhD dissertation La draperie au Moyen Age: essor d'une grande industrie européenne in 1999, which included several Spanish case studies. Paulino Iradiel, from the University of Salamanca and then from that of Valencia, led in the 1990s a group of researchers that included textile specialists for the Late Medieval and Early Modern period. Ricardo Franch studied the social aspects of textiles and silk in Valencia in the 17th and 18th centuries (2016). Cristina Partearroyo has been a great expert on Nasrid textiles, the study of which began in the 1950s with the efforts of M. Gómez-Moreno, and continues to this day (Partearroyo 2005; Borrego et al. 2017).

Generally, however, scholars were not fully dedicated to the subject of textiles, but mentioned textile production as part of their general interpretation of a site or specific period. In fact, until the beginning of the 21st century I believe that there was little interest and opportunity for scholars from different fields to join their efforts in a project such as DressID: Clothing and identity. New Perspectives on Textiles and Dyes in the Roman Empire (2008-2013), funded by the Culture Programme of the European Commission. This project involved seven participating countries, and resulted in numerous meetings and colloquia on specific textile topics, as well as large number of publications, mostly in English. The closest initiative in Spain continues to be the triennial international symposium Purpureae Vestes (Ibiza 2002, Athens 2005, Naples 2008, Valencia 2011, Montserrat 2014, Padua-Este-Altino 2016, Granada 2019), with six of the seven symposia that already took place published and the last one in press (Alfaro et al. 2004; Alfaro and Karali 2008; Alfaro et al. 2011; Alfaro et al. 2014; Ortiz et al. 2016; Busana et al. 2018; Bustamante et al. in press). At the same time, three important topical colloquia on textiles were held in Spain: Mujer y Vestimenta: Aspectos de la identidad femenina en la Antigüedad (Alfaro et al. 2011); Luxury and Dress: Political Power and Appearance in the Roman Empire and its Provinces (Alfaro et al. 2013), and Tiarae, Diadems and Headdresses (Alfaro et al. 2014).

The proceedings of these meetings, together with the publications of the *DressID* project, involved numerous researchers in diverse disciplines (philologists, chemists, physicists, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians,

Roman law scholars, etc.). Until the implementation of the DressID Project, textile specialists in Europe were connected to each other via small meetings that involved a limited number of researchers that mostly focused on the study of textiles as objects (e.g. NESAT - North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles, Dyes in History and Archaeology, Textiles of the Nile Valley, and occasional sessions dedicated to textile studies at the annual meetings of the European Association of Archaeologists). These regular meetings continue, but the latest trend is to organise specific small colloquia that are later published as an edited volume. The participation in these encounters of Spanish researchers has increased since the recent years (Joan Ramón Torres, Manel García Sánchez, Miguel-Angel Andrés, Estíbaliz Tébar, Benjamín Costa, Sergi Moreno, Laura Rodríguez-Peinado, Silvia Saladrigas, Pilar Borrego Macarena Bustamante, Ana Cabrera, Lluis Turell, Ma Sagrario Carrascosa, Juan de Dios Hernández, Antonio Tejera, Mª Esther Chávez, Ana Roquero, Ifigenia Quintanilla, Enrique Parra, Ángela Arteaga, Manuel Albaladejo, Albert Ribera, Carmen Rueda, Ma Julia Martínez, Jónatan Ortiz, R. González-Villaescusa, María Antón Peset, Darío Bernal, L. A. Hidalgo, L. Roldán, J. Blanquez, F. Prados, B. Raissouni, A. El Khayari, J. J. Díaz, Macarena Bustamente, A. M. Sáez, J. J. Cantillo, M. Lara, J. M. Vargas, Antonio Ferrer, Irene Ruiz de Haro, Enrique Gutierrez Cuenca, J. Antonio Hierro Gárate, and the group of colleagues from the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (S. Vicente, E. M. Montesinos, L. Fuster, and D. J. Yusá).

### THE DEVELOPEMENT OF THE WORKSHOP

Textile studies in Spain have experienced a boom in the initial period of the 21st century, especially with the discoveries of new textile fragments at several archaeological sites. The workshop *The fabric of society: Textile production, rituality and trade in the Late Bronze - Early Iron Age Iberian Peninsula*, held at the National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid in February 2017, demonstrated the significant advances of this field of studies in Spain over the recent years. The topic of the workshop focused on a very specific historical period – the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age in the Iberian Peninsula, although some speakers went beyond these chronological limits due to the limited number of textile remains in the Iberian Peninsula.

After the warm welcome of the Director of the National Archaeological Museum, Dr. Andrés Carretero Pérez, Margarita Gleba and Beatriz Marín-Aguilera (University of Cambridge, UK) opened the workshop with an introduction of the project *Production and Consumption*: Textile Economy and Urbanisation in Mediterranean Europe 1000-500 BCE (PROCON) funded by the European Research Council. Margarita Gleba, the principal investigator of the project, offered a brief overview of textile production in the northern Mediterranean from 1000-500 BC, focusing on various aspects of textile preservation, analytical methods, raw materials and techniques. Following the extensive analyses of textiles and textile-related materials in Italy and Greece, PROCON project aims to review evidence for textile production in the Iberian Peninsula during the same period, with the collaboration of Iberian archaeologists and projects. Beatriz Marín-Aguilera presented preliminary overview of PROCON's research and results in Spain to date.

The rest of the workshop was divided into four sections. The first, on *Sources of evidence*, comprised two papers by Marisa Ruiz-Gálvez (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and Ma J. Martínez (Universitat de València). The first of them was dedicated to the interesting question of pottery decoration and its possible connection with textile weaves, especially in the early Bronze Age Iberia and during the Phoenician contact in the Iron Age. María Julia Martínez, a specialist in vegetable dyes and their production, delved into written sources and juxtaposed them with the dyed textile remains found in the Iberian Peninsula. The purple-red colour, often associated with blood, could be achieved, according to her, with madder (*Rubia* sp.), the seeds of which are frequently found at archaeological sites.

The second session focused on *Raw Materials* and featured five papers. Ruth Maicas and Eduardo Galán (both from the National Museum of Archaeology) reviewed the important collections of basketry and textiles at the National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid. Ramón Buxó (Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya–Girona) focused on the exploitation of flax and esparto grass in the Iberian Peninsula in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (Buxo 2010). A large group of collaborators from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM) and the Cádiz City Council led by José Yravedra presented the results of their excavations at the Phoenician site of the Teatro Cómico in Cádiz, where the analysis of sheep bones suggests the possibility of the secondary

use of wool for textile production, while the presence of muricid shells suggests shellfish purple production. Verónica Estaca-Gómez, together with José Yravedra (both from the UCM), further deepened our understanding of livestock economy in the territory of the Carpetania (central Iberian Peninsula), demonstrating the importance of sheep and goat herds for textile economy as indicated by the slaughter patterns. The session concluded with a paper by Enrique García Vargas (Universidad de Cádiz), who focused on the production and trade of purple dye in the Iberian Peninsula during the Iron Age, suggesting that purple dye and purple-dyed textiles were as important for trade as silver in that period across the Mediterranean.

Textile production and maintenance activities was the title of the third block of papers. Carmen Rísquez, Carmen Rueda, Ana B. Herranz, and Miriam Vilches (Universidad de Jaén) discussed textile production among Iberian societies in light of what is now known as 'maintenance activities.' Their work is of importance for anyone studying spinning and weaving in this vast territory. Irene Ruiz de Haro (Universidad de Granada) concentrated on the material culture of textiles in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Period, with special interest on the textiles, their uses and symbolism among the Phoenicians in Andalusia. Francisco Javier Jover (Universitat d'Alacant) and Juan Antonio López Padilla (Museo Arqueólogico de Alicante) presented an overview of the textile remains dated to the second millennium BC, found in the excavations in the Iberian southeast. Their work reaffirms the importance of textile production during the Bronze Age. Assumpció Malgosa (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) presented the recently found goatskins and ropes that were used to wrap the deceased in the Talayotic cave known as Cova des Pas (Ferreries, Menorca) (Fullola et al. 2007; Guerrero et al. 2006; 2007). This last paper connected very well the third session with the last one on Textiles and rituality, which included two papers.

Luis Berrocal-Rangel (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Sebastián Celestino and Esther Rodríguez (Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida—CSIC) presented two buildings covered by *tumuli*, Cancho Roano (Zalamea de la Serena, Badajoz) and La Mata (Campanario, Badajoz), which ceased to be active at the end of the fifth century BC. The outstanding numbers of textile tools found in both archaeological sites are connected with the recent discovery at the site of Casas del Turuñuelo

(Guareña, Badajoz), another *tumulus* that will definitely advance our knowledge regarding the Iron Age of this region (see Marín-Aguilera *et al.* 2019 and Marín-Aguilera 2019 for the latest textile research on the Extremadura region). Lourdes Prados Torreira (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) delved into the subject of textiles and rituals in the Iberian Culture, based on the numerous spindle whorls, loom weights, needles and other textile tools found in funerary and religious contexts. This material culture approach correlates well with the representation of clothing (veils, mantles, etc.) in Iberian iconography and sculpture, which predominantly represent women.

All papers were well elaborated and provided an overview of old and newly excavated findings. Perishable material remains such as fabrics, ropes and baskets were placed at the forefront of archaeological research for the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age, with special attention to the Iberian culture. The workshop revealed the current state of textile studies in Spain from an archaeological standpoint.

The aim of studying textile fragments, baskets, nets, etc. is to further advance the discussion on the economic and social life of the people who lived in the Iberian Peninsula during a very long period of time. In order to do so, it is necessary to go beyond textile technology or very detailed descriptions of textile contexts and fragments. A comprehensive interpretation of textile activities should always include the social, economic, and religious circumstances of the historical period in which those textiles were manufactured and people used them.

#### **NOTES**

 Translated to English by Beatriz Marín-Aguilera and edited by Margarita Gleba and Beatriz Marín-Aguilera.

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the organisers of the workshop *The fabric of society: textile production, rituality and trade in the Late Bronze - Early Iron Age Iberian Peninsula*, who have made a great effort in gathering wonderful scholars together. I am grateful to Margarita Gleba, because with her expertise she can really contribute to the study of ancient textiles in Spain; and to the young promise of research in textile archaeology, Beatriz Marín-Aguilera for her diligence in the organisational aspects of the colloquium.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- ALFARO, C. (1980): Estudio de los materiales de cestería procedentes de la Cueva de los Murciélagos, Albuñol, Granada, Trabajos de Prehistoria 37, 109-139.
- ALFARO, C. (1999): Gold textiles from a Roman Burial at Munigua (Mulva, Seville), Northern Archaeological Textiles (NESAT VII), Textile Symposium in Edinburgh, 5th-7th May 1999 (F. Pritchard, J.-P. Wild), Oxford, 1-4.
- ALFARO, C. (2004). Late Roman textiles in the North of Spain ("Las Ermitas", Vitoria), *Priceless Invention of Humanity Textiles*, *NESAT VIII* (J. Maick, ed.), Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe (Acta Archaeologica Lødziensia n. 50/1), Lødz, 27-31.
- ALFARO, C. (2015): Das Einhüllen und Fesseln des Körpers in den indoeuropäischen Kulturen. Zu einigen Metaphoren des magischen Schutzes vor Toten und Wiedergeborenen, Zeischrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung 6/2, 45-59.
- ALFARO, C.; BRUN, J.-P.; BORGARD, P.; PIEROBON-BENOIT, R. (eds.) (2011): Purpureae Vestes III. Textiles y Tintes en la Ciudad Antigua, Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; KARALI, L. (eds.) (2008): Purpureae Vestes II, Vestidos, textiles y tintes. Estudios sobre la producción de bienes de consumo en la Antigüedad. Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; MARTÍNEZ, J. M.; ORTIZ, J. (eds.) (2011): Mujer y vestimenta. Aspectos de la identidad femenina en la Antigüedad, Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; ORTÍZ, J.; ANTÓN, M. (2014): Tiarae, Diadems and Headdresses, Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; ORTÍZ, J.; MARTÍNEZ, M. J. (eds.) (2013): Luxury and Dress: Political power and appearance in the Roman Empire and its provinces, Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; TELLENBACH, M.; ORTIZ, J. (eds.) (2014): Purpureae Vestes IV. Production and Trade of Textiles and Dyes in the Roman Empire and Neighbouring Regions, Valencia.
- ALFARO, C.; WILD, J.-P.; COSTA, B. (eds.) (2004): Purpureae Vestes. Actas del I Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterráneo en época romana (Ibiza, 8 al 10 de noviembre, 2002), Valencia.
- ARDANAZ, F. (2000): La necrópolis visigoda de Cacera de las Ranas (Aranjuez, Madrid), Madrid.
- BORREGO, P.; PÉREZ, P. P.; ALBAR, A.; ARTEAGA, A.; MARRAS, S.; ROQUERO, A.; PARTEARROYO, C.; SANZ, E. (2017): Caracterización de materiales y análisis técnico de tejidos medievales, *Geo-conservación/conservação* 12, 6-30.
- BUSANA, M. S.; GLEBA, M.; MEO, F. (eds.) (2018) *Purpureae Vestes VI*, Valencia.
- BUXÓ, R. (2010): The prehistoric exploitation of esparto grass (*Sti-pa tenacissima* L.) on the Iberian Peninsula: characteristics and use, *Of Plants and Snails* (C. C. Bakels, K. Fennema, W. A. Out, C. Vermeeren, eds.), Leiden, 41-50.

- CABRERA, A. (2017): Tejidos e improntas textiles en objetos procedentes de la necrópolis de Castiltierra, Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid), La necrópolis de época visigoda de Castiltierra (Segovia). Excavaciones dirigidas por E. Camps y J. M.a de Navascués, 1932-1935. Materiales conservados en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Tomo II: Estudios (I. Arias, L. J. Balmaseda, eds.), Madrid, 122-137.
- CAMPS CAZORLA, E. (1934): Tejidos visigodos de la necrópolis de Castiltierra, Anuario del Cuerpo Facultativo de Archiveros, Bibliotecarios y Arqueólogos, Homenaje a Mélida, Vol. 2, Madrid. 87-96.
- CARDON, D. (1999): Teintures précieuses de la Méditerranée, Carcassonne.
- CASTRO, Z. (1980): Fusayolas Ibéricas, antecedentes y empleo, *Cypsela* 3, 127-146.
- DELIBES, M.; MARTÍN, J.; MARTÍN, F. J.; SARABIA, F. J. (1995): Caracterización de fusayolas celtibéricas por medio de la densidad, Actas del XXI Congreso Nacional de Arqueología, Vol. 2, Zaragoza, 453-468.
- FRANCH, R. (2016): Salario y condiciones de trabajo en la industria de la seda valenciana del siglo XVIII, Obradoiro de historia moderna 25, 207-242.
- FULLOLA, J. M.; PETIT, M. A. P.; GUERRERO, V.; CALVO, M.; MALGOSA, A. (2007): Los hallazgos de la Cova des Pas de Ferreries, *Revista de Menorca* 90, 171-176.
- LLOBREGAT, E. (1972). Contestania ibérica, Alicante.
- LÓPEZ-AMO, F. (1999): Estudio técnico-textil de dos piezas singulares de la arqueología paleo-cristiana: la sindone de Torino y el sudario de Oviedo, Parte 1a, *Boletín Intexter* (*UPC*) 116, 59-75.
- LÓPEZ-AMO, F. (2000): Estudio técnico-textil de dos piezas singulares de la arqueología paleo-cristiana: la sindone de Torino y el sudario de Oviedo, Parte 1a, *Boletín Intexter* (*UPC*) 117, 69-78.

- MARÍN-AGUILERA, B. (2019): Weaving Rural Economies: Textile Production and Societal Complexity in Iron Age Southwestern Iberia, *World Archaeology* 51 (2), 226-251. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2019.1627064
- MARÍN-AGUILERA, B.; RODRÍGUEZ-GONZÁLEZ, E.; CE-LESTINO, S.; GLEBA, M. (2019): Dressing the sacrifice: textiles and sacrificial economy at Casas del Turuñuelo, Spain, in the fifth century BC, *Antiquity* 93 (370), 933-953. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2019.42
- MARTÍNEZ SANTA OLALLA, J. (1933): Excavaciones en la necrópolis visigoda de Herrera de Pisuerga (Palencia), Junta superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades, Memoria nº. 125, Madrid.
- MÉDARD, F.; SINDONINO, S. (2014): Emballage d'un depot d'argenterie d'epoque romaine sur le site de Reims-Tramway (France, Marne), *Purpureae Vestes IV* (C. Alfaro, M. Tellenbach, J. Ortiz, eds.), Valencia, 83-96.
- ORTIZ, J.; ALFARO, C.; TURELL, L.; MARTÍNEZ, M. J. (eds.) (2016): Purpureae Vestes V. Textiles, Basketry and Dyes in the Ancient Mediterranean World, Valencia.
- PARTEARROYO, C. (2005): Estudio histórico-artístico de los tejidos de al-Andalus y afines, *Bienes culturales: revista del Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español*, 37-74.
- PINAR, J.; TURELL, LL. (2007): Ornamenta vel vestimenta ex sepulchro abstulere. Reflexiones en torno a la presencia de tejidos, adornos y accesorios de indumentaria en el mundo funerario del Mediterráneo tardoantiguo, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 4, 127-167.
- USCATESCU, A. (1994): "Fullonicae" y "tinctoriae" en el mundo romano, Barcelona.
- VIDAL Y LÓPEZ, M. (1952): Tipología de las fusayolas del poblado Ibérico del "Cerro de San Miguel" de Liria, *Archivo de Prehistoria Levantina* III, 147-154.