# ΑΘΥΡΜΑΤΑ

# CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE Archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honour of E. Susan Sherratt

**Edited by** 

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**Archaeopress Archaeology** 

### Archaeopress Gordon House 276 Banbury Road Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

### ISBN 978 1 78491 018 1 ISBN 978 1 78491 019 8 (e-Pdf)

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The editors wish to express their gratitude to the Sheffield Centre for Aegean Archaeology and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge for generous financial support that enabled the inclusion of colour images.

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Printed in England by CMP (UK) Ltd This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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# Dressing the house, dressing the pots: textile-inspired decoration in the late 3rd and 2nd millennia BC east Mediterranean

### Toby C. Wilkinson

One of Sue Sherratt's<sup>1</sup> defining approaches to archaeology is a healthy intellectual scepticism toward bureaucracy, orthodoxy and convention: whether that be in the fetishism of pottery-studies or scientific archaeology (Sherratt 2008), the hagiographic dominance in current archaeology of Theory with capital 'T' (Sherratt 2011), or else, on a day-to-day basis, the expansion of administrative departments and poorly-executed government auditing at the expense of university research and teaching. One suspects that the motivation for many of Sue's most productive and illuminating critiques arises from the feeling that orthodoxy prevents us from seeing beyond the ends of our dusty excavating noses or – in perhaps a more sinister reading of academic enterprise – that someone or other is trying to pull the wool over our eyes.

One of the topics on which Sue's wide-ranging and eclectic research eye has focused is that of 2nd millennium wallpaintings in the eastern Mediterranean (Sherratt 1994a; 2000) or, more precisely perhaps, on the relationship between wall-paintings, other patterned media and textiles. Much of the archaeological discussion on Aegean wall-paintings such as those of Thera, or the palaces at Knossos and Pylos, has been locked into a post-Kantian art-historical approach which remains orientated toward painting as the supreme (and occasionally sublime) art of arts. Obvious connections between the fragmentary remains of mural schemes uncovered at various sites in the eastern Mediterranean – e.g., at Tel el-Dab'a, Tel Kabri and Tell Atchana (Morgan 1995; Niemeier and Niemeier 2000; cf. Winter 2000; Figure 27.1) - with Aegean styles during the later 2nd millennium BC have led to seemingly anachronistic stories of 'Aegean masters' travelling around selling their famous painting skills to local elites. As well as combatting Aegeo-centrism that, at least since Evans,<sup>2</sup> has created strange back-to-front assumptions which ignore contemporary (and earlier<sup>3</sup>) activity in Anatolia, Cyprus and the wider Near East (Winter 2000), Sue has

stressed the evidence first highlighted by scholars such as Elizabeth Barber (1991) and Maria Shaw (1970; 2000) for the relationship between wall-paintings and textiles and argued that the value of the Bronze Age wall-paintings was probably far less than the textile tapestries for which the wall-paintings were mere temporary imitative standins (Sherratt 1994a; Shaw and Laxton 2002; Sherratt n.d.).

This insight, supported also by the skeuomorphic 'hooks' and 'tassels' shown in Mesopotamian as well as Aegean murals (e.g., at Mari: Parrot 1958, pl. A), has significant consequences for the interpretation not just of wallpaintings but of other plastic and decorative media including pottery. Rather than seeing the 'influence' of geometric or iconographic schemes on these other media being spread by direct copying, we are reminded to think instead of the invisible and often far more mobile medium of textiles as agent of visual propagation. This does not, of course, exclude the movement of people (including 'travelling artists') or - at least in the latest phase of the 2nd millennium BC - a lucrative (if odd) eastern Mediterranean trade in pottery, but it does create a messier, 'woollier' network through which we must assume the transfer of iconographic and geometric schemes took place. New questions are raised. How far did such tapestries travel? Were there single or multiple centres of production? Through what kinds of social networks should we imagine the exchange of textiles, whether they were tapestries (wall-hangings or carpets to dress architecture) or garments (clothing to dress human agents)? How exactly did such 'tapestries' function? How many of them were there and how did they relate to other types of textile? And why were buildings decorated at all in this way?

### Tapestries and furnishings: 'dressing the house'

Examining the early textual archives of Mari, Mardikh-Ebla, Ur III or Kültepe-Kanesh (see contributions in Michel and Nosch 2010), one can quickly see that the size and range of textile terminology recorded in use during the 3rd and early 2nd millennia BC is extremely wide. In these texts, there are definite terms for specific colour, quality or materials (predominantly wool, but sometimes linen), for place of origin (or at least 'styles' associated with places) – for example, the *ša* -prefix in OldAssyrian texts (Michel and Veenhof 2010: 221-23, 260-61) – or class of the intended consumer (e.g., 'kingly' cloth) and for technical aspects of processing (fulling, dyeing or cleaning). Much harder

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This attempt at a social anthropology of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC through the vehicle of an 'invisible' material (one of Sue's "shadows" she asks us to revel in) is offered in thanks and unceasing respect for my supervisor, mentor and friend, Sue Sherratt. Even if wildly speculative and far below the evidential standards of Sue herself, I hope she will at least enjoy the imaginative journey.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Against whose exaggerated and sometimes distorting influence on the direction of debates in Aegean prehistory even today Sue continues to fight!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The designs of the much older wall-paintings from the Urukian-era (late 4th millennium BC), buildings at Arslantepe (see, e.g., Frangipane 1997: fig. 19) which are also reminiscent of textile patterns.



Figure 27.1. Map showing location of sites and wares mentioned in the text (sites and wares not necessarily contemporaneous).

to deduce are the intended function(s) of the staggering quantities of textiles recorded.<sup>4</sup> The most common textile term in the Old Assyrian records is *kutānum* (Michel and Veenhof 2010: 211-13), often rendered in English simply as 'cloth' or 'textile': a huge number of these unspecified 'cloths' were apparently transported from Assur to central Anatolia to be sold at profit for silver. But to what usage were these 'cloths' finally put at their destination? The Linear B tablets from Knossos are similarly silent about the final act of textile consumption: raw wool is recorded as assigned to certain work(wo)men and returned in the form of finished textiles, denoted by the Linear B logogram TELA (Tzachili 2001; Nosch 2012), but their final

destination (distribution within or outside of the 'palace') is almost never recorded (Killen  $2007)^5$ .

We should probably assume that the majority of textiles manufactured and recorded in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC texts were relatively simple woven cloths of basic quality,<sup>6</sup> not the kind of finely decorated tapestries which, presumably, might have been imitated by the Knossian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For the Ur III period (around 2050 BC), Waetzoldt (2010) puts a *minimum* figure of woollen textile pieces tallied in the published tablets at 60,000, presumably a very small percentage of the overall production. In the Old Assyrian period, around 1850-1750 BC, cuneiform texts document a minimum of 32,000 individual textiles transferred from Assur to Kanesh during the c. 30 year period covered by the texts (Barjamovic 2011: 12-13, citing A.W. Lassen's unpublished masters thesis). Even if, as Gojko Barjamovic estimates, this represents only around 25 textiles per year per family, the nature of the texts suggest that we only have a tiny fragment of the original quantities being circulated, especially those of a lower quality than were worth shipping such a long distance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> A few documents at Knossos label certain bundles of textiles as *ke-se-nu-wi-ja* (*kswenwia*) *e-qe-si-ja* (*xenia*) 'for foreigners' or 'for guests'; 'for the *hequetai*' (followers) (the Ld(1) set, from Knossos, see Killen 2007: 56); similarly a tablet from Mycenae includes a *pu-ka-ra-ri-ja* (an adjective meaning double-thickness which appears to have been used to describe a type of textile) as *te-qa-de*, 'to Thebes' (MY X 508). The exact nature of these transfers (as gifts? commodities?) and their final use remains, however, unknown.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Perhaps represented in the Linear B documents as sign \*146 (Killen 2007: 57), acquired by and occasionally handed out by the palace. At Pylos, one tablet annotates \*146 – where is referred to as *we-a2-no* (*wehanos*), the probable phonetic equivalent – with *re-no* (*linon*), i.e. linen (PY Un 1322.4). As Nosch and Perna point out, whilst this has sometimes been taken to assume that this 'ordinary' cloth was normally made from linen, the fact that the material is marked here may indicate, instead, that different fabrics (i.e. wool or linen) could be used (Nosch and Perna 2001: 472).

or Theran wall-paintings. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that even relatively basic or low quality textiles may have been patterned to some extent.7 And further, although it is often tacitly assumed that most of the recorded textiles were intended for garments or clothing, it might be more sensible to flip this on its head and consider the likelihood that 'non-garment' function (furnishings for houses, tables, shrines, tents, chariots, boats, floors, beds, animals, boats, etc.) was a significant, if not sometimes dominant, proportion of the consumption of these 'fruits of the loom'. Even though the content of archives relating to woven cloths may be incomplete (such that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to ever know the real numbers of such 'non-garment' textiles being produced, especially if we assume there was also considerable amount of production outside of the various official systems), the range of terms pertaining to non-garment textiles, for example in Mari 1800-1750 BC (Beaugeard 2010), is suggestive.

But what difference does it make if the 'non-garment' function was a numerically significant or even dominant part of the intended output of 3rd and 2nd millennia textile producers?

For one thing, we are forced to take a mental step into an otherwise invisible human environment of fabricstrewn rooms, tents, beds - of 'dressed' houses - which must have been far more colourful than our imaginations normally allow. The act of decorating a house with soft furnishings, whether expensive fine-woven tapestries or simple 'curtains', 'cushions' or 'carpets',<sup>8</sup> is far from an innocuous or 'domestic' activity of beautification. Besides practical and sensuous functions (exclusion of cold or wind, shielding from sun or dust, creating more comfortable surfaces), textile furnishings have 'symbolic' values derived from the association of pattern or colour to human, natural or supernatural qualities: from status (gender, class, kinship or tribal identities) to protective spirits or 'luck'. As anthropological literature has shown, homes and houses are not simply places to live in, but embedded agents within and common metaphors for wider social structures (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1982 [1979], on societés à maison, 'house societies'; see also recent applications of this concept in Minoan Crete: Driessen 2010). The selection and placement of activities, people and objects (including textiles) within a home is thus of importance to understanding the way in which particular social power structures were played out (Bourdieu 1970). The spread of certain social configurations (such as those associated with the urban and commercializing economies of the Uruk, or Old Assyrian trade into Anatolia) depended as much on building the correct 'built environment' as encouraging

certain kinds of consumer behaviour—much in the same way that modern global capitalism has produced worldwide commonalities of building and décor (e.g., Scandinavian minimalism), alongside international uniform (e.g., Denim jeans) and pastimes (e.g., watching football).

Another consequence of shifting our emphasis to 'nongarment' textiles is that it throws a rather different light on the idea that textiles were used as ethnic identity markers during this period. Many have pointed out that the presence of 'foreign' Assyrian merchants in Central Anatolia at trade emporia such as the Kanesh karum at Kültepe would have been undetectable to archaeologists if it were not for the preservation of decipherable cuneiform tablets. Houses in the karum colony show no obviously 'foreign' material elements (either in the form of the houses or in the manufacture of pottery which is locally produced). This fact has led some to suggest that Assyrian male merchants married local women and hence (following the standard gender divisions) homes were 'local' in character even if half of the residents were not. One can easily imagine, however, an Assyrian merchant who wanted to emphasize some aspect of Assyrian or urbane identity could use textile furnishings to achieve a visual effect much more easily than through other materials – if, that is, such a behaviour were deemed important or expedient - with the additional nomadic benefit that such items could be packed up and taken to a different home as needs required.

Unlike the Linear B archives,9 the Old Assyrian archives are packed with 'geographic' labels for textiles (Michel and Veenhof 2010: 218-26) which could be interpreted either as indicating productive origin or, more likely, a distinctive style associated with a locale. Representations of clothed figures from different countries, for example in Egyptian contexts, seem to emphasize the association of dress with geographic (or loosely 'ethnic') origins. The best known examples are, perhaps, the depictions of ambassadors from keftiu (the Egyptian name for Crete) in distinctive kilts from the tomb of Rekhmire (Th 100) or Menkheperraseneb (Th 86) both dating to the 15th century BC (see Barber 1991: 330-40, figs. 15.18 and 15.19).<sup>10</sup> Other examples of identifiable and colourfullydressed 'foreigners' in Egypt are to be found even earlier, for example in the depiction of 'Bedouin'11 in tombs at Beni Hassan dating to the 12th dynasty, c. 2000-1750 BC (for picture see Shaw 2000: pl. opp. 192). It must be remembered that Egyptian textiles were characterized for the most part by plain (white?) linen cloths (Kemp and Vogelsang 2001), with decoration restricted to special

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Patterned twill weaves, for example, seem to have been very popular in Anatolia in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, judging by fragmentary direct evidence, the depictions on Anatolian cylinder seals and the distribution of 'crescent-shaped loom weights' that are ideal for twill manufacture (Wisti Lassen 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> These terms should be used with caution since they have strong functional meanings whose boundaries may not coincide with similar items in the past.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The only candidate for a 'geographical' label is the abbreviation ku applied to some textiles at Knossos (TELA-ku), which might indicate a locally-made cloth in a Cypriot style (Nosch 2012: 333-4).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Note, however, that despite the apparent 'Aegean' clothing of these 'ambassadors', their hair follows Egyptian conventions and some of the items of tribute, e.g. the oxhide ingot, are unlikely to be of strictly 'Aegean' origin, reminding us of the hybrid nature of these depictions and the social milieu depicted. See Panagiotopoulos (2001) on the highly constructed nature of these representations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Or at least people living in the region between Egypt and the southern Levant, where coloured woollen textiles were apparently more popular than plain Egyptian linen.

often divine contexts and certain periods (particularly, for example, the 18th dynasty which is an exceptionally international and innovative period in Egyptian history) and often associated with beading (including precious stone and metal beads) rather than woven patterns (see, e.g., Riefstahl 1944).

One wonders to what extent these painted representations reflect an Egyptian attempt to classify and make sense of their curious and colourfully-dressed neighbours, one which recalls the classificatory drive of 19th-century folklorist and ethnographic collectors in Europe and North America, and their predecessors, the European explorers who depicted 'exotic' peoples from both New and Old Worlds. In the latter case, part of this drive was in the creation of national myths based very loosely on folk traditions: the 'national dress' of certain European countries (Norway and Greece spring to mind as places where there was a conscious effort to encourage their use) arose in this context from a desire to fix ethnic and visual identities often around the concept of the 'nation' (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The other part was in creating knowledge and therefore control of colonial possessions (for the British in India, it became important to recognise a person by their dress to understand their potential 'threat' to various colonial projects: see, e.g., Pinney 1997: 1-17 for the use of photography with this aim). For the most part, the product of these various scholarly, colonialist or nationalist projects was of course a necessary but dramatic over-simplification of the complex use to which clothing was put in 'traditional' society. Today the fixation with classification of dress has been inherited by unreflective ethnographic museums but, for the most part, has fallen out of favour in mainstream anthropology. One other place a strong classificatory drive over textiles has remained, however, is in the study of carpets...

### 'Carpetology': the circulation of (non-garment) textiles through information networks

The study of the history of carpets, by which is normally meant so-called 'Oriental' carpets (variously labelled 'Turkish' or 'Persian' carpets, though the geographic or ethnic origins of certain styles or particular items is often at odds with these general attributions) including kilim rugs and pile (halı) carpets,<sup>12</sup> lies awkwardly in an interstice between academia and elite art collection. The majority of published literature on carpet history is aimed at, if not actually produced by, those interested primarily in collecting carpets. As any examination of the dedicated magazines (*Halı*) or the online forums (e.g., http://www.turkotek.com/VB37/) will reveal, considerable research effort has been expended by interested amateurs – or 'ruggies' as they sometimes affectionately style

themselves – in tracing motifs, styles of manufacture and places of origins back at least 500-750 years in an often laudable scholarly manner. The resulting work is concerned primarily with vintage (how old), authenticity (including of materials and technique of manufacture) and origins (who made it and where) – questions familiar to the archaeological world. But the question of price is never far away: as anyone who has attempted to buy an 'oriental carpet' from a carpet bazaar will know, without detailed foreknowledge of the sort produced by the 'ruggie' world, one is lost in a confusing mess of colours, patterns and techniques laid out by the hawker, and left with a deep and discomforting sense that you are being taken for a ride.

These studies<sup>13</sup> are of interest to those researching very early textiles because, in theory, they should provide a set of models for understanding their circulation – at least of very highly-valued examples – with a relatively good dataset of actual surviving pieces (sometimes with detailed ownership histories) and parallel depictions<sup>14</sup> in paintings. We should forget, of course, the relatively modern assumption of the 'carpet' as primarily a floor covering, only one of several places an equivalent decorated textile might adorn (roofs, tables and walls being the most obvious alternatives). What, then, can 'carpet studies' tell us about the circulation of special furnishings in recent or ancient history?

At the risk of creating a 'straw man', it is useful to examine this question through the lens of a particular project within 'carpet studies', namely Volkmar Gantzhorn's The Oriental Carpet (1998) or, in its original title, Der christlich orientalische Teppich (Gantzhorn 1991). Gantzhorn's book had immense commercial success in part because of its lavish illustrations and successful distribution (published by Taschen). The book remains controversial within many 'ruggie' circles because of its radical recasting of the history of carpet manufacture: in brief, Gantzhorn argues that throughout much of recent history (until the late 18th or 19th centuries) 'Turkish carpets' circulating across Europe were actually produced by Armenian workshops using Christian motifs and often with a deliberate religious (Christian) purpose. Tracing the usage of certain motifs including crosses, or rather what Gantzhorn controversially identifies as such) and the appearance of textiles in western European church contexts (documented through paintings, manuscript illumination and architectural decoration), he creates a provocative alternative history.

Not content simply to highlight our relative ignorance of the mechanics of pre-modern carpet manufacture,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Though an historico-ethnographic study of modern wall-to-wall carpetry and its sudden disappearance in the late 1990s – killed by laminate flooring which forms part of the 'IKEA horizon' – might provide fascinating insights into socio-economic trends in millennial Britain. Sue, I am sure, would only be too happy to add her flat in Sheffield – rented with 'pre-IKEA' carpets – to the corpus for examination.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> For the most part operating well away from scholarship of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC. An exception is Khlopin's paper arguing for a mid-2nd millennium or earlier origin for pile-carpet manufacture from southwest Central Asian based on a set of specialist knives found in the region (Khlopin 1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Most famously of course in the lush textile worlds of painters such as Hans Holbein, but sometimes perceived in earlier, less photographic but pattern-rich religious iconography which once decorated churches and chapels.

#### TOBY C. WILKINSON: DRESSING THE HOUSE, DRESSING THE POTS

however, Gantzhorn goes even further to suggest that the geographical and cultural origin of the earliest carpets, specifically knotted-pile techniques, lies in a pre-Christian Armenian milieu of the early to mid-1st millennium BC. Following Ulrich Schürmann, he locates the creators (and place of manufacture) for what is usually claimed as the world's oldest surviving carpet - that of the Pazyryk tomb in eastern Altai - in "Proto-Armenia". The Pazyryk 'carpet', a piece of textile 200 x 183 cm, buried in a richlyfurnished kurgan over 3750 kilometres (as the crows fly) north-east of the Caucasus in the 5th or 4th century BC, is most often described as an Achaemenid work based on the stylistic parallels to friezes in Persepolis (Rudenko 1970; Pinner 1982), although certain stylistic and technical features have led others to suggest that it represents a Central Asian or Altaic 'copy' or adaptation (Böhmer and Thompson 1991).

Gantzhorn's unusual claims for the earliest carpets controversial or millennial at best, and tunnel-vision at worst<sup>15</sup> – contrast with the 'nomadic thesis' most famously championed by Kurt Erdmann (1977 [1957]) in which carpets were created as woven stand-ins for traditional hides of (Turkic) nomads and the 'urban thesis' which looks, predominantly, at Neo-Assyrian thresholds as the earliest evidence for carpets (Dalley 1991). Gantzhorn's approach, and indeed those of many others who follow or disagree with him, illustrate a common tendency in many carpet studies, one which will be familiar to archaeologists used to fighting against the 'pots as people' paradigm: the desire to 'fix' patterns and techniques in textile manufacture to clear bounded (often ethnic) traditions. In reality carpets continually resist easy classification, their production documenting endless cross-fertilization and borrowing of styles, patterns and techniques. In fact indeterminate polysemy or hybridity is the most striking feature of carpet design.<sup>16</sup> Ethnographic studies of recent nomadic textile-producing groups in Anatolia confirm the eclecticism and, sometimes, arbitrary choices made by the weavers.17

Although this appears on the surface to be a rather negative conclusion, in fact it should open a more productive and chaotic reading of textile exchange in history and prehistory. Motifs and techniques do travel along social networks of exchange, intermarriage and migration, and some of these networks may be dimly identifiable. 'Carpet studies', and the world of modern day carpet circulation, have a further lesson to offer: 'being taken for a ride' in a carpet shop, is, of course, half the point of the experience; it highlights a knowledge gap that an upwardly mobile or ambitious customer feels impelled to fill. The price of carpets is almost certainly not based on their use-value, and their exchange value varies enormously from piece to piece. Most important are the stories which are attached to the individual carpet: the stories told by the dealers (for the uninitiated) or the stories told by 'experts' relating to the piece, its materials, its style of manufacture or the other carpets which have directly or indirectly inspired its design. Such 'cultural biographies' (cf. Kopytoff 1986), each appropriate for different audiences, help to construct value within receptive social contexts. Besides the specific material qualities of colour, pattern and feel, I think we have to imagine ancient decorated textiles circulating through similar kinds of 'story'-based information networks. The difference, of course, is the medium of information exchange: in the modern day paper or digital photographic reproductions circulate freely - it is difficult to imagine the emergence of 'ruggies' in the days before the 'age of mechanical reproduction', to use Walter Benjamin's apt phrase (Benjamin 1968) – but in earlier eras such as the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, textiles themselves may have been the most mobile of patterned surfaces.

### Dressing houses and dressing pots?

An inescapable problem, of course, is that direct evidence for the kinds of furnishings (carpets, tapestries etc.) discussed above is almost entirely lacking for the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, and the indirect evidence mentioned so far (wall-paintings imitating wall-hangings) applies to only a small, if economically important, part of the overall population of Near Eastern and Aegean communities. Nonetheless, one category of indirect evidence, which has so far been under-exploited by archaeologists - since it is normally used for its dating potential - is that of painted pottery. The end of the 3rd millennium and much of the 2nd millennium BC is characterized by the rise of highquality painted pottery wares from Mesopotamia and the Caucasus to the Aegean, with even a brief flirtation with blue-painted pots in Egypt during the – here it is again – 18th dynasty (Figure 27.2).<sup>18</sup>

Painted pottery is known, of course, in many parts of the Near East in earlier eras (the Neolithic Hacılar, Can Hasan and Halaf wares being the most obvious). What is striking in the late 3rd and 2nd millennium BC examples, however, is the broadly contemporaneous rise of painted wares, each distinctive and 'local' but each with patterns which could easily recall textiles: there is also a loose trend from monochrome net or strap patterns toward polychrome geometric decorations through this time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Notable in the vocabulary used to describe the work: "In this oldest carpet there is none of the long-pile hide substitute of the nomads, as Erdmann would have us believe. Rather, it is a *highly cultivated*, intricately patterned, short-pile piece of work created by *experienced craftsmen*" (Gantzhorn 1998: 49; emphasis mine).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Even in Gantzhorn's book, an example of an explicitly Islamic carpet is shown (1998: 28) with a cruciform design filled with Arabic text recording the many names of Allah. Gantzhorn suggests that it was produced by Armenians who had converted to Islam around the 16th century: his interpretation is not implausible if moot – given lack of corroborating evidence – but the piece could just as easily be used to illustrate the 'slipperiness' of motifs which may be subconsciously reused or consciously re-interpreted by different groups.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Based on Jocelyn Powell's notes, for the most part unpublished, which are currently kept at Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations in Istanbul.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Additionally, contemporary 'net wares' from north-eastern Europe may echo a related process (Kosmenko 1996). Textiles were even used to form clay pottery in parts of central and northern Eurasia at this time (Doumani and Frachetti 2012), as well as certain Kura-Arax wares (Heinsch and Vandiver 2006).

2500	Aegean	C. Anatolia	Cyprus & Levant	E. Anatolia & N. Syria	Egypt	Transcaucasia
2500 BC	straps and nets d-o-l, EMII	'Cappadocian w.'		Karababa w. Keban w. (A & B) embroidery d-o-l, EBII Keban w. (G) straps and nets		Monochrome w. (Bedeni etc.) mostly d-o-l
2000	Kamares w. I-o-d	nets, bands d-o-l, EBIII-MB Kanesh period w.	Cypriot White P. w. EBIII - MB			Aras (Van-Urmia,
	MMIA	nets, bands, panels, d-o-l	cf. Levantine P. w. Syro-Cilician w.	Khabur w. d-o-l, nets, bands c. 1900-1400		Karmirberd etc.) polychrome bands, nets, birds MB c. 2000-1400?
1500	Mycenaean w. swirls, straps d-o-l, LM / LH		Cyp / Myc. w.	Nuzi w. I-o-d, swirls c. 1500-1200	Blue-Collar w.	
1000			d-o-l	d-0-1 =	18th dyn. d-o-w dark on light ; l-o-d = ligl	t on dark: w = ware(s)

Figure 27.2. Simplified schematic diagram showing approximate emergence of various textile- or netinspired painted pottery in Near East and eastern Mediterranean, 2500-1000 BC.

Such painted wares occur over large areas previously dominated by unpainted, shiny and apparently metallicinspired wares. Compare, for example, assemblages from two ends of Anatolia: the EBA Aegean's ceramic Metallschock or burnished Transcaucasian 'Kura-Arax' wares and their respective 'successors', the painted 2nd millennium BC wares of the Aegean and painted 'Aras' wares. I have previously argued (Wilkinson 2012; 2014: 269-74) that this 'emergent' phenomenon may relate to a common elaboration of the role of coloured and patterned textiles (particularly wool) in individual and corporate identity, culminating in the use of dress hems as an acceptable stand-in for personal seals (and hence signatures of personal identity). Such patterns may even indicate the fact that pots were 'dressed' with real textiles (especially bands and belts), just as walls were decorated with tapestries, and humans and gods<sup>19</sup> with clothing. Occasionally fragmentary textile remains survive attached to other types of objects, normally metals and normally mineralized (one example of a linen cloth wrapped around the neck and rim of two LH IIIA2 jars from a burial in Pylona chamber tomb 1 in Rhodes suggests some kind of 'lid'; see notes by de Wild 2001: col. pl. 2; pl. 27, 51; Figure 27.3). Yet decorated textiles are rarely found, since

wool (which can be more easily dyed) does not survive as well as linen in the archaeological record.

If painted decorations do indeed represent displaced textile pattern appearing on pots, then there are two obvious, but important, consequences: first that the mechanism of influence between different painted wares (e.g., Bagh 2003) may have been through the mobility of woven textiles rather than direct copying of pots; second, the size of the ceramic corpus may provide a unique window into the social networks of the era, by similarities and dissimilarities in motifs which imply on-going interaction or distance, albeit fragmentarily.

For the purposes of this short paper, however, we will simply concentrate on why pots should be 'dressed' at all and what the social causes and consequences of this practice might be.

Prosaically, there are a number of practical reasons why pots might be literally 'dressed' with textiles of some sort. Perhaps the most obvious is to allow users to transport or carry pots more easily. Various types of pottery vessels can be seen with clear skeuomorphic rope patterns (large storage pithoi from Cretan palaces, for example, Figure 27.4, have both the skeuomorphic ropes and loop handles by which real ropes could be attached), so it is not a huge stretch to imagine decorated woven bands offering a similar function for smaller vessels. Indeed bold vertical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> The fabric impression on early 3rd millennium BC metal figures from Tell Tayinat in the Amuq (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 300, 305) may suggest that many of the naked figurines from this era were, when used, clothed with actual textiles.



Figure 27.3. Calcified (linen?) fragments wrapped around neck of LH IIIA2 jug from chamber tomb 1, Pylona, Rhodes (after Karantzali 2001: col. pl. 2).



Figure 27.4. Storage pithoi with skeuomorphic rope patterns from Phaistos (photo by author).

or diagonal 'straps' on some painted schemes of various regions may echo this function (in the upper Euphrates, Keban 'Groupe G', see Marro 1997: pl. 71 G34 and G35; or in Cyprus, the White Painted VI, Eriksson 2009: 59 figs. 11-13). In Transcaucasia in the 2nd millennium BC, a high level of mobility (normally if anachronistically attributed to 'pastoral nomadism') has often been assumed for those groups manufacturing the 'Aras', 'Yayla', 'Van-Urmia' or

'Karmirberd' painted wares, given the lack of settlement evidence (Özfirat 2001; 2005). The painted globular 'cauldrons' of these Transcaucasian painted wares, where found in primary context, appear to be funerary accoutrements and their form and decoration may even, therefore, be symbolic stand-ins for everyday vessels and textile bands of a more mobile nature. On the other hand, many of the painted wares of the 2nd millennium



Figure 27.5. Goblet from karum-era Kültepe (after Özgüç 2003: 171 fig. 150), and a modern knitted equivalent on mass-produced Starbucks coffee cup.

BC Aegean and Near East are not distinctively transport vessels nor do they show obvious 'bands' which might be used to carry the vessels. This is despite the fact that, at least by the end of the millennium, certain ceramic vessels do begin to be transported over large distances as addedvalue cash goods, normally by sea (Sherratt 1994b).

The modern 'tea-cosy' or 'cup-cosy' (Figure 27.5) suggest an alternative motivation to cover vessels with textiles: textiles can help to keep the contents of vessels warm or cool; or, perhaps more importantly, they can insulate hands from heat or cold.<sup>20</sup> On the face of things such an insulation function does not make an awful lot of sense for ceramics: clay pots already have strong insulating properties. But bearing in mind that some of the most valuable vessels in the past were probably made from metal, it makes more sense if we imagine that textiles (bands, cosies, etc.) were in fact used to cover and decorate metal vessels. The textileinspired decoration seen on pottery vessels of the late 3rd and 2nd millennium may, therefore, be a skeuomorphic transfer of such practices: ceramic copies designed to look like 'dressed' metal vessels. The surface design of certain Middle Bronze vessels from Central Anatolia offers a clearer possible echo of such a practice: these mostly shiny red jars (suggesting the mimicry, as in the preceding Early Bronze assemblages, of metallic prototypes) often have small painted bands or panels with geometric patterns which could easily represent net or textile bands (Figure 27.6; see Özgüç 2003: 150 fig. 107; 165-67 figs. 139-42). If so, the emergence of painted pottery might even be seen as a distant index of changing or widening practices of consumption, based on a desire to keep drinks warm (or cool) even when drunk out of metal vessels.



Figure 27.6. A possible echo of textile decorated metallic vases: a shiny red ('metallic'-inspired?) pottery hydria with geometric ('textile'-inspired?) band, Kültepe, c. 1950-1835 BC (after Özgüç 2003: 165 fig. 139).

Of course, a generalized tradition of painting pottery with geometric patterns based on textiles does not mean that there was a simple one-to-one copying of designs from textiles to pots: potters may simply have been drawing on the 'aura' of textiles and textile motifs to create objects in a completely different medium. Indeed the large extent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Some culinary practices might benefit from this: yoghurt making or bread baking benefit from insulating or wet fabric covers, for example. Contrarily one would be unlikely to put textiles around a pot on a fire, for fear of burning the cloth, unless that was part of the performance.

TOBY C. WILKINSON: DRESSING THE HOUSE, DRESSING THE POTS



34.389 (2:5)



34.390 (4:5)



III-15 (1:2)



33.215 (1:2)



33.216 (1:2)





79. Face-pots and Face-lids. Troy III

Figure 27.7. Face-pots and face-lids from Troy III (after Blegen *et al.* 1951 vol. 2 part 2: pl. 79).

of the 'painted horizon' suggest that prosaic explanations may not be enough by themselves, and that some shared semiotic or discursive function may have also played a role, perhaps one with a longer pedigree than the visible phenomenon itself.

The most likely bases of any such semiotic link, I would suggest, are the metaphorical links often made between the human body and ceramic (or other) vessels. As Gosselain (1999) has documented for recent sub-Saharan potterymaking groups, pottery can offer a rich source of material metaphors for structuring society (as containers, pots of all materials can stand for bodily vessels, including mouths, anuses, wombs, stomachs), just as parts of pots are often given names referring back the human body (in English, 'body' sherd, 'foot', 'mouth' etc.). It is dangerous of course to transfer ethnographically-derived parallels directly to the past, but there are various clues which might point to similar kinds of metaphorical links being made in Mesopotamian and related east Mediterranean prehistory. Early Mesopotamian texts abound with clay metaphors relating particularly to the body, including as part of human creation myths,<sup>21</sup> or in which bodies are talked about as vessels (see e.g., Foster 2010 with further references). Actual pots made with strong bodily components or human attributes are also known in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean: the 'face-urns' and 'face-lids' of Troy provide a well-known example from the mid-to-late 3rd millennium BC (Lamb 1951; Figure 27.7), before painted pottery becomes popular, but there are similar kinds of anthropomorphic face and body-pots (from Kültepe, rhyta such as those illustrated in Özgüç 2003: 222-27 figs. 229-34; the 'screaming baby mouths' box: Özgüc 2003: 177 fig. 165; Figure 27.8) continuing into the early 2nd millennium BC in central Anatolia. Turning back in time to the 5th millennium BC, the similarity of the swirling designs on jars, figure-jars and voluptuous figurines in the Hacılar III/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> One Mesopotamian myth even ascribes the creation of humanity to the god Nammu (and her son Enki) who fashioned bodies out of clay (Kramer 1959: 109).



Figure 27.8. 'Screaming baby mouths', storage box from Kültepe, c. 1950-1835 BC (after Özgüç 2003: 177 fig. 165).

II tradition (e.g., Duru 2010: pls. 44-54, 59-80) suggest a strong metaphorical association between ceramics and flesh, pot and human, perhaps, in this instance echoing otherwise invisible tattoes or body paints. 'Dressing' pots with textiles either literally or with painted standins, should perhaps be read, therefore, as an era-specific manifestation of these kinds of long-lived metaphorical connections: coming to the fore when they did as human dress was becoming a more widespread social tool of identity and power negotiation.

### Final comments: houses and bodies?

The footprint of the painted pottery horizon provides a clue to the extent of a 'dressing' tradition in which the adornment of human bodies and clay vessels with textile designs was in some way symbolically charged. How though, does this relate to tapestries or indeed their circulation? Is there any sense in which 'dressing houses' is somehow equivalent to 'dressing bodies'?

For the moment, I can offer no simple answer to this question. But in thinking about this further, it is worth recalling the context of Lévi-Strauss's original conception of societés à maison or 'house societies' touched on briefly above. Lévi-Strauss was primarily interested in the structure of kinship relations: the concept was originally designed to explain how relationships and roles were established in societies such as in medieval (feudal) Europe, the Pacific north-west coast (e.g., the Kwakwaka'wakw, or 'Kwakiutl' as they are more often known) or in south-east Asia (e.g., in Bali), in which the "elementary structures" of decent and kinship were negotiated and maintained through corporate 'houses' rather than decent groups or classes (Carston and Hugh-Jones 1995). In the case of the 'Kwakiutl' and similar groups, the transfer of defined roles was enacted through ceremonies such as the (in)famous 'potlatch' (Joanitis 1991).

I do not wish to suggest that the elites of the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BC can be likened directly to these ethnographic or historical examples; nor even should we rely too heavily on Lévi-Strauss' idealistic conceptions of kinship for any period in history. Nonetheless, it is striking that when one looks at the material content of ceremonies relating to the house, for example as part of the 'classic' potlatch, textiles form a central part of the physical exchange of goods (including, e.g., so-called 'Chilkat blankets'). 'Feasting' has played a big role in recent discussions of Aegean and Near Eastern researchers as an arena for social action (see also critical comments in Whitelaw, this volume). But non-'consumable' goods are also likely to have had a place in these same ceremonies: they are merely forgotten because they are harder to perceive in the archaeological record than ceramic vessels (for storage or consumption) or relevant faunal remains. Perhaps, then, the textile patterns seen (vicariously or not) on clothing, wall-decorations and pots in the 2nd millennium BC may represent the identities of idealised roles within corporate groups rather than 'individual' identity in the sense that we sometimes associate fashion choices today.

In this attempt to provide an anthropological account of textile decoration and its circulation in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, we have considered the relative amount of 'non-garment' textile manufacture and use, the possible social contexts for exchange of elite tapestries, the practical and metaphorical mechanisms which might have inspired the depiction of textile patterns on pottery traditions and touched on the potential role of textiles in creating corporate groups. Ultimately these explorations require further investigation: but, the idea of a 'dressing' tradition - revealed through the elaboration of patterns on clothing, house-decoration and pottery - which came to the fore in the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC may not be a simple fantasy. In terms of technology and social organization, this was a period in which texts tell us that textile technology became industrialized to a scale that transformed the social structure of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Aegean and the Levant, facilitating new kinds of intraand inter-community interdependency. Thereby, like the earlier Uruk transformation in Mesopotamia (McCorriston 1997), textiles created new forms of labour division and consumptive practices, and, inevitably, new bureaucracies to manage emerging orthodoxies in towns and palaces across the east Mediterranean.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Anja Slawisch and Yannis Galanakis for comments on drafts of this paper, and to John Bennet for detailed pointers and references regarding textiles in the Linear B sources. I am grateful to Eli Karantzali and Fikri Kulakoğlu for permission to reproduce some of the figures shown here from Pylona and Kültepe respectively. Anja Slawisch was also responsible for finding out about the existence of 'cup cosies' and, with my encouragement, for producing the excellent knitted cosy, mimicking the pattern from the Kültepe goblet, shown in Figure 27.5.

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