

**Lise Bender Jørgensen,
Antoinette Rast-Eicher, Lena Hammarlund et al.**

Norway

Studying Creativity in Bronze Age Textiles: a HERA Project

How do we study creativity in archaeological textiles? A collective research project financed by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) 2010-2013 is to explore creativity during Middle and Late Bronze Age Europe through developments in decorative motifs, techniques and skill for three different materials, pottery, metal and textiles. The overall project leader is Dr. Joanna Sofaer, University of Southampton; the study of creativity in textiles will be carried out by researchers from the Norwegian University of Science & Technology and the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, assisted by specialists in fields such as fiber and dyes analysis, and characterization of visual appearance.

The Bronze Age saw key shifts in human history including metallurgy, long-distance contacts, changes in ritual life, and an unprecedented flowering of craft activity with distinctive emphasis on pleasing aesthetic through intricately elaborated objects. Crucially, this period precedes the development of the state and urbanism in which craft production became separated from the domestic sphere. The Bronze Age was a period of common cultural values, but crafts were performed in regionally specific ways leading to diversity of practice with cross-fertilisation between materials and cultural groups. The Middle and Late Bronze Age saw only modest technological changes; e.g. types of looms remained basically the same; changes in material culture are therefore due to developments of technical skill and new ways of designing objects, exploiting the potentials of materials – in particular their surfaces and plasticities. These developments rather than technological innovation or typological changes, constitute the creativity and innovations to be investigated.

The study of creativity in Bronze Age textiles will focus on the rich, extraordinarily well-preserved Bronze Age textiles from Hallstatt, using previous research on Scandinavian Bronze Age textiles for comparisons. The main questions will address the innate qualities of wool, and on how the interplay between raw materials, their processing, and the choice of yarn and weave influence the finished project. Motifs and technical skill will be a further area of investigation, as will spatial and temporal trends. Perceptions of prehistoric textile crafts today will also be an issue.

Contributor:

Lise Bender Jørgensen et al., Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Institutt for arkeologi & religionsvitenskap
N-7491 Trondheim
Norge