

Anne Hedeager Krag

Denmark

The Eagle Silk and Other Silks in the Shrine of St. Canute in Odense Cathedral, Denmark

A new dye analysis of the silks shows that six different vegetable dyes were used to colour the Odense silks, one of the colours is an orange yellow colour, which is rarely seen in Denmark. It comes from “Persian Berries” of the *rhamnus* family.

This may be the saffron yellow silk referred to in *Ælnoth's Chronicle*, written a good twenty years after the canonisation of Saint Canute in the year 1100 AD.

This paper discusses two silk textiles from Odense, Denmark. It presents new colour analyses of the silk textiles, as well as an interpretation of their motives, style and use on a wider European background illuminated by the latest research. Contacts between Denmark and Byzantium, the East Roman empire, in the 12th century are reflected in the silk finds from Odense. Presently two rare patterned silk weavings are on display in the crypt of St. Canute, the Cathedral of Odense: one larger piece, red with a pattern of eagles and a smaller yellow cushion with a motive of birds and crosses. Both are attributed the reliquary shrine of King Canute the Saint, murdered in 1086 and canonized in 1100/1. Plausibly the silk textiles were gifts from Canute's widow Ethele, later married to the South Italian Duke Roger of Apulia. International research acclaim the silk finds from Odense to be highlights in a European context, and attribute them to the great Christian Byzantine empire. Next to the Reliquary of King Canute is another reliquary, probably that of Benedict, the king's brother. In this reliquary are two monochrome yellow silk cushions, a short and an oblong one.

Contributor:

Anne Hedeager Krag
hedeager@stofanet.dk