

# TEXTILES

## GLOSSARY

**Textiles:** made from fibres which are derived either from plants (cellulose) or from animals and insects (proteins). i.e. wool, hair, silk, cotton, flax, jute, hemp, nettle, grass.

## STORAGE

Textile storage areas need to be stable, without extremes of temperature, humidity or risk of flooding.

- ◆ Quarantine new (non-archaeological) acquisitions and examine carefully for signs of infestation before introducing them into existing collections. Freezing is the best method for killing insects and their larvae.
- ◆ Air circulation is important, do not overcrowd boxes or hanging cupboards.
- ◆ Support textiles with padded boards if needed. Bag them and retain detached fibres if needed.
- ◆ Use inert conservation-grade packing. Textiles deteriorate more rapidly in contact with acid-releasing materials (e.g. cheap mount board or acidic cardboard rolls).

## LABELLING AND MARKING

Label bags or boxes, not the textiles themselves.

- ◆ Undertake a documentation check to ensure that the information is correct before remains are marked.
- ◆ Ensure that marking is clear and legible.



Preserved textile © Bristol Culture & Portable Antiquities Scheme  
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## ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

- ◆ Temperature: below 10°C.
- ◆ Humidity: 45-65% (over 65% RH high risk for mould).
- ◆ Illuminance: 50 lux maximum.
- ◆ UV Radiation: 0-10 microwatts per lumen ideal. 75 microwatts per lumen maximum.

## INDICATORS OF DECAY

- ◆ Splitting of fibres.
- ◆ Pests (e.g. clothes moths, carpet beetle).
- ◆ Fading of colours (colours are rare in archaeological textiles).

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## WHERE YOU WILL COME ACROSS TEXTILES

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- ◆ As mineralised fragments on archaeological objects.
- ◆ In costume collections.
- ◆ In archaeological excavation archives (including waterlogged objects).
- ◆ In Ancient Egyptian and American collections.
- ◆ In World Culture collections.

## HANDLING

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Textiles are especially at risk of damage from poor handling. Handle textiles only when absolutely necessary.

- ◆ Check visually for weaknesses before handling.
- ◆ Support the textile with materials like acid-free tissue and Tyvek when moving.
- ◆ Do not unfold textiles without specialist advice.
- ◆ Use a clean, uncluttered surface (e.g. table) or clean dustsheets on the floor when inspecting textiles outside their boxes.
- ◆ Nitrile gloves are usually recommended (definitely for metallic finishes). Sometimes clean hands without gloves are best to ensure a safe and sensitive grip.
- ◆ Keep dangling ID passes, jewellery, pens, liquids and sharp objects well away. Use pencils for notetaking.



Egyptian textile © Catriona Wilson, Petrie Museum UCL

## LOOK OUT FOR

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- ◆ Pins or tacks used for past mounting and framing, which corrode when in contact with textiles. Removing them is recommended but this requires specialist advice.
- ◆ Fragments of mineralised textiles on archaeological metal objects.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

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- ◆ Textiles and fur may have been coloured or treated with mercury, arsenic or pesticides (as part of historic conservation treatments).
- ◆ Archaeological textiles can be contaminated with mould or with chemicals from the excavation site (e.g. toxic metal salts, faeces).
- ◆ Use gloves, avoid opening bags and boxes where necessary.

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## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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Collections Trust (2009) *Labelling and Marking Museum Objects*.

Cronyn, J. M. (1990) *The Elements of Archaeological Conservation*. London: Routledge

Watkinson, D. and Neal, V. (1998) *First Aid for Finds* (Third Edition; London; Rescue/UKIC Archaeology Section, revised 2001)