

Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection

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For the first time, Dumbarton Oaks has published its complete collection of renowned Byzantine and early Islamic textiles. Taking advantage of the online medium, the born-digital catalogue is intended to be a growing resource that features scholarly essays and technical analyses alongside high-resolution photography. Launched in

2019, Catalogue of the Textiles in the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection is a collaborative project following the standards outlined by the Getty's Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative.

Textile scholars, artists, and museum professionals alike will benefit from this aggregation of research centered on these 260 objects. Users can search the catalogue by keyword, date, or accession number to retrieve records including tombstone information and detailed discussions of each textile's significance. Some entries feature a technical analysis of the material qualities of the work accompanied by condition notes and conservation history. Additionally, some entries include exhibition history, bibliography, and archival photography to give a full picture of the life of the object. Accompanying the catalogue are ten scholarly essays examining furnishing textiles and the functions, settings, and people that give them context. A lengthy bibliography is available to facilitate further research, as is a helpful section on how to cite the essays and catalogue entries.

Digital catalogues have an advantage over their bound counterparts due to the opportunities offered by a networked, online environment. Embracing the connective nature of the Web, the catalogue includes references to related works owned by Dumbarton Oaks as well as objects held by other institutions. By linking to scholarship, other textiles, and archival materials, the catalogue invites users to explore the broader contextual information surrounding these

objects. Extending this effort to build more connections with concepts and themes would further support discoverability and reuse of these materials. In examining future directions for this valuable resource, the creators could consider linking to authorities and leveraging possibilities of linked open data to enhance the already rich information contained in this publication.

Each object record contains high resolution photography to allow for close study. Users can zoom and pan as desired to examine particular areas of each textile using their browser's built in features. An accessibility checker revealed that many of these images lack alternative text, which would allow users with disabilities to better access this material. As many catalogue entries contain physical descriptions of the textile, it could be a simple fix to repurpose that content for alternative text so that each image has a description. The team might also consider using IIIF (the International Image Interoperability Framework) as a method for presenting images. While users can easily zoom in to examine detail on the object page, a IIIF viewer such as Mirador would be useful for scholars. Catalogue entries often contain references to IIIF images from other institutions, as in BZ.1929.1 and BZ.1972.4. A IIIF viewer would allow users to easily compare these different textiles side-by-side, or even annotate aspects of the image, which would be beneficial for scholarship.

When accessing the catalogue, users are presented with the entire collection that can be filtered down with a search. While the search filters are clearly displayed at the top of the search results, it would also be helpful to see how many results each search retrieves. Perhaps due to the smaller size of the collection, there are no visual groupings offered for users interested in browsing the collection. For example, in another one of Dumbarton Oaks' born-digital research projects, Moche Iconography, users can browse by themes such as vessel forms, daily life, and more. In another scholarly catalogue, Roman Mosaics in the J. Paul Getty Museum, users are presented with an interactive map as an option for navigating through the collection. Options to browse by attribution, technique, or subject may be beneficial to users who do not yet know what they are looking for.

Prior to the publication of this catalogue, Dumbarton Oaks' Byzantine textiles collection was known primarily to scholars and specialists. This project not only makes this valuable collection available to a wider audience, but also expands and enriches the interpretation of these materials in order to promote meaningful engagement. With its in-depth object research and connections to other resources, the catalogue is a worthy addition to Dumbarton Oaks' collection of digital projects.