



Educating the First Generation of Textile Researchers: The Drawing School for Women and the Development of Textile Research as a Field of Knowledge

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Abstract • This article explores the role of the Drawing School for Women (*Tegneskolen for Kvinder*) in the development of textile research as a field of knowledge, as well as its contribution to women's education and social status in Denmark. Through an examination of the lives and work of early textile researchers associated with the Drawing School for Women, the article first considers the emancipatory potential of knowledge in relation to the professionalization of textile crafts. It then sheds light on the ideals and potentials expressed by the advocates of textile research – as well as how, and to what extent, these were realised. Specifically, it suggests a close relationship between textile research, women's emancipation, and Danish nationalism. It concludes that the proponents of textile research were successful in making women's textile craft – and the study of it – a matter of national pride and interest, furthering the opportunities for women in the field.

Keywords • textiles, women's education, emancipation, applied arts, archaeology, textile research

Introduction

Knowledge is closely linked to power. Like power, knowledge is unevenly distributed in shifting hierarchies that determine restrictions and provide opportunities through exclusions and inclusions.¹ Women in Denmark were explicitly excluded from both knowledge and power until the late nineteenth century, as they were barred from entering higher educations and the professions.

Knowledge may take many forms. Craft knowledge, which has been passed down through example from master to student, can be particularly elusive in leaving scarcely any documentary or archival traces for the historian.² In the case of textile craft, its connection to women and the domestic setting may have prevented its inclusion in the fields of artisanry or art.³ Nevertheless, textile craft has remained an important creative outlet for women over the centuries. The development of textile research at the turn of the twentieth century, in conjunction with the efforts of the Danish Women's Society (*Dansk Kvindesamfund*), therefore provides an interesting case for examination of the emancipatory potential of knowledge.⁴

1 Joel Barnes and Tamson Pietsch, "The History of Knowledge and the History of Education," *History of Education Review* 51, no. 2 (2022), 109–22; Björn Lundberg, "Exploring Histories of Knowledge and Education: An Introduction," *Nordic Journal of Education History* 9, no. 2 (2022), 4–5.

2 Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2015), 36.

3 Rozsika Parker, "A Naturally Revolutionary Art?" in *The Subversive Stitch* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010 [1984]), 189–215.

4 Parker (2010); Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, "Why Young Migrants Matter in the History of Knowledge," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 3, no. 2 (2019), 215.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, women gained access to educational institutions hitherto reserved to men. They were accepted into teachers' colleges in 1859, into the University of Copenhagen (*Københavns Universitet*) in 1873, and into the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (*Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi*) in 1889. Simultaneously, household tasks associated with women were becoming increasingly professionalized in Denmark with, for example, the introduction of home economics and the systematisation of girls' handicrafts education.⁵ In Sweden, a similar process was taking place, but with a greater focus on textile production within the study of home economics and with the establishment of several weaving schools for women.⁶ The textile craft education provided in Danish primary schools was focused on mending and the care of existing household textiles, until the introduction of the Schallensfeld-system towards the end of the century shifted the focus to the production of new and complete textiles.⁷ Training in more advanced techniques such as weaving could be undertaken at certain folk high schools, such as Askov Højskole, and at weaving workshops, but no formal education in weaving was available to women in Denmark.⁸

Nonetheless, it was textile knowledge that permitted women to take up senior positions in Danish museums in the early twentieth century.⁹ Among these women were the first three female curators at the National Museum of Denmark (NMD): Elna Mygdal (1868–1940), the first woman to become a curator at NMD; Ellen Andersen (1898–1989), her successor; and Margrethe Hald (1897–1982), curator at NMD and the first woman to obtain a doctorate in archaeology in Denmark. Besides curators, there were also textile conservators such as Elisabeth Schmedes (1870–1966), who founded and led the textile restoration workshop at Rosenborg Castle for 45 years.¹⁰ Several of these pioneering textile scholars, including Mygdal, Schmedes, and Hald, were alumni of the Drawing School for Women in Copenhagen established by the Danish Women's Society in 1876.

5 Karen E. Andreasen and Annette Rasmussen, "The Development of Home Economics as a Field of Knowledge and its Contribution to the Education and Social Status of Women," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9, no. 2 (2022); Minna Kragelund, *Opdragende Håndarbejde* (København: Damarks Lærerhøjskole, 1990); Minna Kragelund, "Kærlighed til kaldet – et tveægget sværd – om håndarbejdsundervisning og lærerindernes professionalism," *Historisk Meddelelser om København* (1993).

6 Åsa Broberg, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik, "Kvinnors yrkesutbildning: En osynlig historia," in *Kunskapstraditioner och yrkeskunnande: Kvinnors yrkesutbildning i historisk belysning*, ed. Åsa Brobert, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik (Göteborg: Makadam Förlag, 2022), 28–30; Annelie Holmberg, "Väutbildning i Sverige: Kunskap för H(h)emslöjd eller konst, fritid eller arbete," in *Kunskapstraditioner och yrkeskunnande: Kvinnors yrkesutbildning i historisk belysning*, ed. Åsa Brobert, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik (Göteborg: Makadam Förlag, 2022).

7 Kragelund (1990), 57–85, 167–74.

8 Mette Eriksen Havsteen-Mikkelsen, "Omkring Jenny la Cours væveskole i Askov," *Mark og Montre*, no. 30 (1994), 74–81. See also Margrethe Hald, "Mindet lader som ingenting," in *Bjerre Herreds Bogen* (Glud: Glud Museums Forlag, 1963), 319.

9 Kirsten Elizabeth Høgsbro, "Kvinder i musealt regi," in *Clios døtre gennem hundrede år*, ed. Marianne Alenius, Nanna Damsholt, and Bente Rosenbeck (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1993); A notable exception being the Egyptologist Maria Mogensen (1882–1932), who became the first woman curator at Ny Carlsberg Glyptoteket in 1926 and head of the Egyptian Collection.

10 Rosenborg Castle is a state-run museum exhibiting the crown jewels of Denmark among other objects.

Method and sources

The Danish Women's Society recognized the emancipatory potential of knowledge from the start. The Women's Society founded several schools to bridge the gap between the education available to men and to women.¹¹ The Drawing School was established with the explicit purpose of educating women so that they might find employment and provide for themselves.¹² At first, the school did not include textile-related courses in the curriculum except for classes in embroidery design. Instead, the school was intended as a counterpart to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts which did not accept female students, although with a focus on applied arts such as porcelain painting, ceramics, and embroidery design. This changed after 1889, when an institute for women was established at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, prompting a corresponding change to the purpose of the Drawing School. But while the Drawing School is noted for its contribution to the textile craft milieu and the Danish handicrafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, its role in the formation of textile research, defined as the study of historical and archaeological textiles, has not previously been treated.¹³

We discovered these connections, as well as the Drawing School's close relationship to the early women's rights movement in Denmark, while employed in a research project on the legacy of Margrethe Hald. Little by little, additional pioneering textile researchers were added to the list of former students and teachers at the school, so that we now may present this first comprehensive study of the Drawing School in Copenhagen and its role in developing textile research as a field of knowledge, as well as its contribution to the education and social status of women in Denmark.

The article presents a narrative based on an empirical study primarily on printed sources such as the Drawing School's annual publications, anniversary publications, and the numerous books and articles in journals and newspapers written by or mentioning the school and its students. In particular the anniversary publication of 1926 by Elna Mygdal, as well as Karin Hoffritz's thesis on the lacemaking milieu at the school have provided much information for the general overview of the school and its personnel. Furthermore, the article is based on archival studies carried out partly in the course of the research project on Margrethe Hald at University of Copenhagen's Centre for Textile Research, supplemented by material from the personal archive of Elisabeth Schmedes at the Danish National Archives.¹⁴

Through the writings of actors engaged in textile research, we will examine the purpose and relevance of textile research expressed in relation to the education and

11 Gyrithe Lemche, *Dansk Kvindesamfundts Historie gennem 40 Aar* (Copenhagen: Dansk Kvindesamfund, 1912), 26–29.

12 Lemche (1912); Karin Hoffritz, *Det københavnske kniplemiljø i de sidste 100 år. Med særligt henblik på Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen for Kvinder* (Brugge: Monitricekursus Kantcentrum, 1988); Elna Mygdal, *Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen for Kvinder 1876–1926. Tilbageblik over Skolens Virksomhed og Udvikling* (Copenhagen: N. C. Roms Officin, 1926), Unpaginated book.

13 Hoffritz (1988). Regarding textile craft in the handicraft movement see e.g., Kristine Holm-Jensen, "Tekstiler – tavs viden mellem hverdagsliv og politik," *Folk og Kultur* 37, no. 1 (2008), 236–47; Carsten Hess, "Sofapuder og klassekamp: En kulturdebat i Husflidsbevægelsen i 1890'erne," *Folk og Kultur* 5, no. 1 (1976), 96–120.

14 Schmedes, Anna Elisabeth (Lisbeth), født Garde (ES), archive no. 07273, box no. 2, Danish National Archives (DNA); Mygdal (1926); Hoffritz (1988).

emancipation of women. Additionally, we will consider the development of textile research in relation to the socio-political movements for women's emancipation and Danish nationalism as they unfolded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Drawing School for Women

In 1871, the Danish Women's Society was founded by Matilde Bajer (1840–1934) and her husband, Fredrik Bajer (1837–1922), as a women's rights organisation agitating for women's right to vote, to enter higher education and to become professionals. In its early years, the focus of the Women's Society was on creating opportunities for women through education. Since institutions offering education beyond primary school were generally closed to women, the Women's Society founded several schools to further this goal. In 1872, it opened a training school for women (*Handelsskolen for Kvinder*), followed by a Sunday school for women (*Søndagsskolen for Kvinder*) in 1874 for the education of working-class women; in 1875 they decided to establish an art school for women, which opened the following year under the name The Drawing School for Women (*Tegneskolen for Kvinder*).¹⁵

Its first principal was Charlotte Klein (1834–1915), who had been involved in the Danish Women's Society since its establishment and had served as the first president of the Women Readers' Association (*Kvindelig Læseforening*) 1872–1874.¹⁶ The board of the Drawing School was composed of Klein's husband, architect Vilhelm Klein (1835–1913), as president and supreme court attorney Frederik Zahle (1842–1930, cousin to educator Nathalie Zahle 1827–1913) and teacher and suffragette Kirstine Fredriksen (1845–1903) as members.¹⁷

The stated purpose of the Drawing School was: "(...) to provide education to women in drawing and other skills that may be of use to them, should they wish to seek employment in the service of the industry."¹⁸ From the beginning there seems to have been two tendencies among the students, those who wished to pursue a career as a painter and those who wished to work in the industry. The latter were primarily porcelain painters, but also designers of textile patterns. At the time of its establishment, the Drawing School did not include textile or textile related crafts in its coursework – except for embroidery design. In the first 10 years or so of its existence, the school focused on both fine art school and art industry.

Student number varied considerably in the period 1876–1889.¹⁹ In 1876 there were 31 students, in the following year 33, and in 1878, 63. Over the succeeding ten years student numbers stabilised at around eighty, with a peak in 1884 and 1885 of 104 and 113 students respectively attending the Drawing School. The first students were girls and women from wealthy and educated families who had received some private education before attending the school.²⁰ They were the daughters of government officials, pastors, even of the aristocracy. Of course, it seems that only a fraction went on

15 Lemche (1912), 26–29.

16 Lemche (1912), 30.

17 Mygdal (1926).

18 Lemche (1912), 29.

19 W. Toussieng, "Kort Oversigt over vore tekniske Undervisningsanstalter, med særligt Hensyn til deres økonomiske Stilling," *Den tekniske Forenings Tidsskrift* (1891), 109.

20 Mygdal (1926).

to work independently.²¹ For most of these women, marriage meant giving up their education or profession; indeed in the school's annual yearbook of 1884, it was stated that there were three types of students at the school; those who wished to study fine art, those who would work in applied arts, and those who attended the school for the sake of "Dannelse," that is self-cultivation or "Bildung."²² The school provided several courses on different levels, but the students were not awarded a formal qualification or certificate allowing them to serve in a specific profession.

Following the admission of female students into the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1889, the focus at the Drawing School shifted in favour of the applied arts, although fine art retained a presence. This change was seemingly in line with the school's purpose, as well as the opinion of the school's principal, Charlotte Klein, who, according to a former student, "(...) always discouraged students from seeking the life of an artist if they did not possess *distinct* facility. She dreaded a proletariat of artists."²³ An examination for embroiderers was introduced at the Drawing School in the same year, although no embroidery teachers were registered among the staff.²⁴ The examination did not focus on embroidery itself, but rather on the drawing and designing of embroidery patterns.²⁵ It was likely Klein herself who was in charge of such courses, as she also supervised the exams, at least until Elna Mygdal joined the teaching staff in 1891, after which several teachers of numerous variants of embroidery are mentioned among the staff members.²⁶ According to students and staff members, Klein was involved in every aspect of teaching at the school and also practiced new crafts suggested for the curriculum; as the principal, registration of her involvement in specific courses may not have been required.²⁷

Charlotte Klein came from a middle-class background in Elsinore. She was a friend of the feminist writer Mathilde Fibiger (1830–1872), whose books sparked the debate on women's rights in Denmark and who, in 1866, became the first female civil servant in Denmark, when she was employed as a telegraphist in Elsinore.²⁸ Like Fibiger, Klein was both an idealist and a practitioner. She dedicated her life to the education of women and worked several years without a salary as the Drawing School's principal, a post she held for 31 years until her retirement in 1907.²⁹ Klein died on 9 March 1915, on 22 April in the same year, a new constitution, giving women the right to vote, was passed by the upper and lower houses of the Danish Parliament and signed into law on 5 June.³⁰

In 1913, at the age of nearly 80, Klein had published the lecture *Hvad jeg venter af*

21 Mygdal (1926).

22 Tegneskolen for Kvinder, "Tegneskolen for Kvinder: Skolens Formaal," in *Meddelelser fra Tegneskolen for Kvinder* (Copenhagen: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1884), 21–23.

23 Mygdal (1926). Translated by the authors.

24 Hoffritz (1988), 19.

25 Hoffritz (1988), 19.

26 Mygdal (1926).

27 Asta Frisch, "Nogle Erindringer fra Tegneskolen for Kvinder," *Kvinden og Samfundet* 30, no. 19 (1914), 290; Mygdal (1926).

28 Charlotte Klein, "Nogle Erindringer om Mathilde Fibiger," *Kvinden og Samfundet* 31, no. 2 (1915), 19–20.

29 Mygdal (1926).

30 Gyrithe Lemche, "Charlotte Klein," *Kvinden og Samfundet* 31, no. 6 (1915), 88–90.

Kvinderne (What I expect of women), in which she declared her disappointment at what had been gained by the women's rights movement. She argued that women had settled for gaining influence in a flawed system, rather than changing it. In this book, Klein formulated her vision for women's education and suffrage:

[...] now that the woman can obtain the same knowledge as the man has, then the time has come where she must use this knowledge in a *different* way than it has been used for centuries, she must use it to *change* the conditions according to the *essential difference* there exists between her and the man, and she must in her *inner world* find the tools for change and renewal.³¹

This passage reveals Klein's belief in an essential difference between men and women. Rather than arguing for the separation of male and female spheres, she argued that the inclusion of both genders in all spheres had the potential to transform society. In Klein's vision, the perceived inherent difference between men and women offered powerful potential if only women could use the education and professions that had become available to them in a new way rather than reproducing existing hierarchies.



Figure 1. Charlotte Klein. Photo: Mary Steen, The Danish Royal Library

31 Charlotte Klein, *Hvad jeg venter af Kvinderne: Et Foredrag* (Copenhagen: Nationale Forfatteres Forlag, 1913), 12–13. Translated by the authors.

Bronze Age textiles and the (re)discovery of sprang

In 1871, the same year as Danish Women's Society was founded, an oak coffin was uncovered in a mound known as Borum Eshøj a few miles northwest of Aarhus, by farmers digging the mound for its fertile soil. The coffin was manhandled, and its contents thrown about by the workers in search of valuables. It was not until the landowner had tried to sell some of the bronze artefacts to a goldsmith in Aarhus (believing them to be gold) that the Society for the Historical-Antique Collection (*Selskabet for den Historisk-Antikvariske Samling*) was alerted and three members despatched to the site.³² They were able to secure much of the material from the burial, which was discovered to have been that of a woman in her fifties, who had been buried with numerous bronze goods and an almost intact set of clothes. These latter garnered much attention at the time. The find was published and discussed the following year by antiquarian and museum director J. J. A. Worsaae (1821–1885) in the popular magazine *Illustreret Tidende* alongside illustrations of the woman's clothes.³³ In 1875, the National Museum of Denmark carried out excavations at Borum Eshøj, where two more oak coffins containing the bodies of a man aged in his fifties and a young man were excavated – similarly clad in intact textiles though neither of the two burials was as rich in grave goods as the woman's.³⁴

A decade passed before the Bronze Age textiles from Borum Eshøj once more entered the limelight. A collaboration between the National Museum of Denmark and the Drawing School began sometime in the 1880s, when Charlotte Klein was given access to the archaeological textiles. It was Klein's analyses that formed the basis of the museum's archaeological exhibition on Bronze Age textiles at the Exposition Universelle (1889) in Paris, as well as the fibre studies carried out by microscopist Bille Gram (1857–1934), published in 1891.³⁵ The students at the Drawing School were tasked with creating reproductions of the textiles, which were included in the exhibition at the 1889 Exposition. One student in particular, Petra Godskesen (1865–1951), later Petra Rump, stood out among the rest for her reproduction of the hairnet from the woman's grave at Borum Eshøj. The hairnet was made with a technique today internationally known as *sprang*, which had almost completely disappeared and was generally unknown at the time. The technique is carried out on a special frame, with the vertical threads (the warp) stretched between two narrow sticks, just as in weaving, but because the whole system is held in place by a thread inserted in the middle, the pattern of the fabric is the same at both ends³⁶. Through careful study of archaeological material, Godskesen discovered that a mistake made in the hairnet appeared on

32 P. V. Glob, *Højfolket: Bronzealderens Mennesker bevaret i 3000 År* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1970), 23.

33 J. J. A. Worsaae, "Dragter fra den ældre Bronzealder i Danmark," *Illustreret Tidende* 13, no. 643 (1872), 168–70.

34 Glob (1970), 26; C. Engelhardt, "Egekister fra Borum Æshøj," *Illustreret Tidende* 18, no. 890 (1876), 25–27.

35 Sophus Müller, "L'archéologie préhistorique du Danemark," in *Exposition universelle de 1889, à Paris: exposition rétrospective du travail et des sciences anthropologiques Danemark* (Copenhagen: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1889), 16–17; Bille Gram, "Undersøgelser af archæologisk Materiale, udførte i Prof. Steins Laboratorium," *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 2, no. 6 (1891), 97–123.

36 Morten Grymer-Hansen and Ulrikka Mokdad, "Margrethe Hald og de historiske håndarbejdsteknikker sprang og nålebinding," *Foreningen Haandarbejdets Fremmes Medlemsblad* 1, no. 27 (2022), 26.

both sides at equal distance from the centre, so that from this she could infer how the textile had been produced.

In 1895, the Austrian textile scholar Luise Schinnerer published the book *Antike Handarbeiten*, which describes the sprang-technique along with other ancient methods of textile production.³⁷ Schinnerer's work would go on to become the reference point for later research on the subject. While her work does not mention the studies carried out by Klein and her students, their preliminary studies predate her work by almost ten years, and as the results were widely publicised at the Paris Exposition of 1889, their influence on this and later works must be considered a possibility, even if difficult to prove. Unfortunately, there are few sources to illustrate how Klein and her students worked with the archaeological material. Klein's analyses were not published in their own right, but simply referenced by scientists and scholars such as Bille Gram and museum director Sophus Müller, besides Godskesen, none of the participating students were mentioned by name.

In the foreword to Bille Gram's study of prehistoric fibres supplied with information from Sophus Müller from 1891, the efforts of the Drawing School for Women are noted:

[...] in the following it will be shown how much particular expertise in female craftsmanship has contributed to the understanding of the costumes of the Bronze Age. The professional knowledge of fabrics and their use and the following uniquely educated ability and expertise to observe, utilizing methods only available to the craftsman, will in many ways add information of great value to the archaeologist.³⁸

The contribution of the Drawing School for Women may be viewed as an example of the use of knowledge perceived as female in a new way, in line with Charlotte Klein's hopes for the women's rights movement, to transform or break down the hierarchies separating fields of knowledge. However, although Gram and Müller argue for the inclusion of craftswomen in the study of prehistoric textiles, it is as specialists assisting the (male) archaeologist and not as researchers in their own right, indicating a hierarchy separating craft knowledge from academic knowledge. Rather than writing "textile craftsmanship," they refer to "female craftsmanship," highlighting the close relationship between textiles and women and the influence of gender on hierarchies of knowledge. However, the inclusion of the textile analysis and reproductions carried out by the Drawing School for Women in the Paris Exhibition of 1889 did present historical and contemporary textile craftsmanship as a subject worthy of study on a par with other forms of artisanry.

³⁷ Luise Schinnerer, *Antike Handarbeiten* (Wien: R. von Waldheim, 1895).

³⁸ Gram (1891). Translated by the authors.



Figure 2. Illustration of the grave goods from the woman's grave at Borum Eshøj by Magnus Petersen. Photo: Kit Weiss. National Museum of Denmark

The first professional textile researchers

In the 1880s and 1890s, Elna Mygdal and Elisabeth Schmedes (née Garde) both attended and taught at the Drawing School. Their background was similar to that of the other students at this time – Mygdal was the daughter of a vicar on Funen, Schmedes the daughter of a naval officer. Both received considerable education before and since their time at the school, where they had excelled in their studies of drawing and textile design. They shared a common interest in embroidery and drawing – Mygdal was especially interested in folk embroidery and made a name for herself as a drawer of embroidery design – while Schmedes focused on gold embroidery.

Mygdal was a student at the Drawing School at the time when Klein undertook her study of Bronze Age textiles at the National Museum, and she may have been one of the unnamed students who partook in the project. She was hired as a teacher at the school in 1891, but she soon left for Sweden to study damask weaving and mathematical drawing at John Lenning's Weaving School in Norrköping, her move indicating

the different emphases in education in weaving in Sweden and Denmark at the time.³⁹ Mygdal later returned to the school's teaching staff while continuing to produce several award-winning textile designs.⁴⁰ By 1915, Mygdal had begun teaching a course on museum studies at the school.⁴¹ In 1919, Mygdal left the permanent staff of the school for a position as curator at the Danish Folk Museum (*Dansk Folkemuseum*). When in the following year the museum became a collection under the National Museum of Denmark, Mygdal became the first woman curator at the institution. She returned to the Drawing School as a board member later in life.⁴²

Mygdal published an article on sprang in the ladies' magazine *Vore Damer* as early as 1917.⁴³ In her article, she mentions Petra Godskesen's reproduction of the Borum Eshøj hairnet for the National Museum's exhibition at the Exposition Universelle of 1889, and she explains where to find other *sprang* objects in museum collections in Denmark and abroad. She also lists the few remote locations in Galicia, Croatia and Norway where *sprang* was still being produced at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mygdal's article in *Vore Damer* seems heavily influenced by Luise Schinnerer's publication and the illustrations are similar to those in Schinnerer's work.⁴⁴ Mygdal's article helped to popularise the term *sprang* in Danish to refer to this ancient technique, although other terms had been in use historically.⁴⁵

While still a teacher at the Drawing School, Mygdal had published several scholarly articles on historical textiles and textile techniques in Denmark – and in 1932, she published her magnum opus *Amager Costumes: Woven and Sewn (Amagerdragter: Vævninger og Syninger)*, which remains the seminal work on traditional dress on the island of Amager and on Danish folk dress culture.⁴⁶ Mygdal was a diligent and energetic collector and registrar of textiles, and it is thanks to her and museum director Bernhard Olsen's (1836–1922) efforts that folk textiles from the Zealand area are well-represented in museum collections today. She was the first person who succeeded in taking the step from textile craftsperson and artist to researcher.

Elisabeth Schmedes, née Garde, came from a family of government officials and received her primary education at a small private school, then at Natalie Zahle's girls' school. Afterwards she studied to become a schoolteacher in 1887–1889. In the 1890s she followed several courses at the Drawing School “since my passion was drawing and

39 “Fra Indland og Udland,” *Kvinden og Samfundet* 12, no. 9 (1896). Regarding Swedish weaving schools, see Holmberg (2022).

40 “Fra Indland og Udland,” (1896).

41 “Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen for Kvinder,” *40de Aarsberetning og Program for Skoleaaret 1915–16* (Copenhagen: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1916), 11.

42 “Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen for Kvinder,” *57' Aarsberetning og Program for Skoleaaret 1932–33* (Copenhagen: Egmont. H. Petersen, 1932).

43 Elna Mygdal, “Sprang: En Haandarbejdsteknik som er gaet i Forglemmelse,” *Vore Damer*, 5. Aarg., no. 10, Maj 10, 1917.

44 Schinnerer (1895).

45 Margrethe Hald, *Olddanske Tekstiler* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1950), footnote 2, 251.

46 Elna Mygdal, *Amagerdragter: Vævninger og Syninger* (Copenhagen: Schønberg, 1932). Although the “traditional dress” of most Danish regions is generally regarded as creations of nineteenth and twentieth century artists and scholars, Erna Lorenzen has argued for the existence of certain “dress islands” such as Amager where distinct sartorial practices evolved, see Erna Lorenzen, *Hvem sagde nationaldragt?* (Aarhus: Wormianum, 1987), 70–77.

embroidery.”⁴⁷ Among the teaching staff was the newly employed Elna Mygdal, who is frequently mentioned in Schmedes’ diaries from this time.⁴⁸ In 1902–1904, Schmedes undertook her first major work in the preservation and reproduction of historical textiles when she was engaged to make a reproduction of the altar cloth for the church on Christiansø, an island in the Baltic Sea – where Schmedes’ father had been the last commander of the fortress 1861–1863. Her finished work was exhibited in 1904 at the annual exhibition of the Drawing School, where it was described in the newspapers as one of the highlights: “it is so well made that it is almost unbelievable that human eyes and hands have created this piece of art from a worn piece of old altar cloth, which has been lying in the church for hundreds of years.”⁴⁹ In 1906–1907, Schmedes travelled to Paris for eight months to study gold embroidery funded by the Danish interior ministry.⁵⁰ On her return, she was employed at the Drawing School as a teacher.

In 1917, the director and general manager of Rosenborg Castle contracted Schmedes to undertake the restoration of the so-called “Rosenborg Tapestries” from the 17th century. Schmedes established the textile workshop at Rosenborg Castle, where she engaged five of her most promising students as assistants in the painstaking work of restoring and conserving the dilapidated tapestries.⁵¹ Schmedes spent several decades restoring the tapestries, travelling to Stockholm to compare and learn methods and techniques.⁵² Besides her pioneering efforts within textile restoration and conservation, Schmedes was involved in the foundation of a number of textile craft societies such as the Danish Handcrafts Guild (*Selskabet til Haandarbejdets Fremme*) in 1928 and the Society for Ecclesiastical Art (*Selskabet for Kirkelig Kunst*).

On their return, Mygdal and Schmedes were hired as teachers by Klein, whereupon they made their newly acquired knowledge available to other women in Copenhagen. They also became driving forces in several societies and institutions established at the time and involved themselves directly in the preservation of traditional textiles, crafts, and history.

However, it was Mygdal’s student, Margrethe Hald, who in 1950 was the first woman to attain a doctorate in archaeology with her dissertation on Iron Age textiles – two years before the first woman, Elise Thorvildsen, to obtain a Master of Arts in archaeology.⁵³ Hald had learned to weave at a local village weaver’s workshop in Eastern Jutland and she had also attended classes at Askov Folk High School (*Askov Højskole*), at that time regarded as one of the most important centres for weaving in Denmark. In October 1917, she moved to Copenhagen to study at the Drawing School for Women where she was among Mygdal’s last students.

In the 1920s, Hald studied the prehistoric textiles at the National Museum of

47 Draft for autobiography to the Chapter of the Royal Orders of Chivalry, ES, DNA. Unpaginated.

48 Diary of Elisabeth Schmedes 1898–1899, ES, DNA. Unpaginated.

49 Article titled “Kvindelig Kunstshistorie” from 1904, cutout from unknown newspaper, ES, DNA.

50 Letter from the Danish Foreign Ministry to Schmedes, 1 June 1907, ES, DNA.

51 Draft for autobiography to The Chapter of the Royal Orders of Chivalry, ES, DNA.

52 Though the place is not mentioned, it is highly likely that Schmedes visited Agnes Branting’s conservation workshop Pietas in Stockholm that had been established in 1908.

53 Hald (1950); Lise Bender Jørgensen, “The State of Denmark: Lis Jacobsen and Others,” in *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology*, ed. Margarite Díaz-Andreu and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (London: Routledge, 1998), 222–25.

Denmark, and in 1930 she published her first scholarly work on tablet-weaving in Danish prehistory. This resulted in her being engaged as assistant and protégé to the Bronze Age specialist H. C. Broholm (1893–1966), with whom she published two major works on Bronze Age dress in the 1930s.⁵⁴

In her research, Hald was particularly concerned with clarifying how and with what tools the National Museum of Denmark's archaeological textiles from both the Bronze and the Iron Age had been produced. Hald's research in textile techniques, analysing historical as well as archaeological textiles and textile fragments, was conducted both at the National Museum of Denmark and at other museums at home and abroad. As with her research on the so-called "tubular loom," she succeeded in several cases in getting in touch with textile artisans living in remote places in the world who were still masters of the techniques and could teach her.⁵⁵

In 1967, the same year Hald retired from her position at the national museum, the Drawing School for Women effectively ceased to exist as it was merged with the Applied Arts School (*Kunsthåndværkerskolen*). Another student at the Drawing School, Erna Lorenzen (1909–2006), followed a path similar to Hald's at the open-air museum *Den Gamle By* in Aarhus from assistant to curator, like Hald in 1975 Lorenzen obtained a doctorate with her dissertation on the clothes of people in and around Aarhus c. 1675–1850.⁵⁶



Figure 3. Elna Mygdal and her colleagues Kai Uldall and Jørgen Olrik in 1926. Photo: National Museum of Denmark. CC-BY-SA.

54 H. C. Broholm and Margrethe Hald, "To sprangede Textilarbejder i danske Oldfund," in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (København: Nordisk Forlag, 1935a), 29–47; H. C. Broholm and Margrethe Hald, *Danske Bronzealders Dragter* (Copenhagen: Det Kgl. Nordiske Oldskriftselskab and Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1935b); H. C. Broholm and Margrethe Hald, *Skrydstrupfundet: en sønderjydsk Kvindegrav fra den ældre Bronzealder* (Copenhagen: Det Kgl. Nordiske Oldskriftselskab and Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1939).

55 Ulrikka Mokdad and Morten Grymer-Hansen, "Margrethe Hald: The Quest for the Tubular Loom," *Archaeological Textiles Review* 63 (2022), 101–12.

56 Erna Lorenzen, *Folks tøj i og omkring Aarhus ca. 1675–1850* (Aarhus: Jysk Selskab for Historie and Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus, 1975).

Textile research between tradition and nationalism

The development of textile research as a field of knowledge coincided with the national romanticism movement of the nineteenth century which considered the Danish peasantry to be the ‘true Danes,’ upholding traditions long forgotten by the privileged and urban classes.⁵⁷ This led to the establishment of numerous museums for the preservation of peasant culture, which was now increasingly threatened by industrialisation and urbanisation. Among the first of such museums was the ‘Danish Folk Museum’ (*Dansk Folkemuseum*) established by Bernhard Olsen in 1881 and opened to the public in 1885. As we have seen, Olsen engaged Elna Mygdal as a consultant, leading eventually to her employment as a curator in 1919. Mygdal’s research and collection of peasant dress and household textiles figured prominently in the efforts to preserve crafts traditions, aesthetics, and the cultural history of Danish peasant communities, and her work was influential in forming the perception of “traditional dress” among peasants.⁵⁸ From 1920, her efforts were supported by a five-year-grant from the Danish government for the study and collection of Danish folk dress, illustrating the significance attributed to these studies at the time.⁵⁹

The scope of Mygdal’s research was however wider than the preservation and documentation of past traditions and craft. She advocated for these traditions to be revived and to inform contemporary design and production. She expressed this sentiment in an article from 1928 on Danish weaving, regarding the pattern of a cushion from a traditional rural context:

This weave has been common across the country for clothes as well as blankets and pillows, where the bottom part was white with coloured stripes... There is however no doubt that this could readily be used for pillows and such by a weaver in possession of proper materials and a sense of taste and colour.⁶⁰

In 1913, Mygdal was among the initiators of Anton Rosens Vævestue, later known simply as Vævestuen (*the weaving workshop*) together with architect Anton Rosen, weaver Johanne la Cour Siegumfeldt, and the president of the Danish Handicraft Society (*Dansk Husflidsselskab*) N. C. Rom with the intention of reviving traditional textile crafts.⁶¹ In that same year, Mygdal and Siegumfeldt were engaged in a project to select and produce textile samples based on peasant textiles to be used as patterns for textile designs.⁶² Mygdal and Siegumfeldt’s samples formed the basis of the textiles produced at the Vævestuen workshop, which proved to be a significant influence on

57 Thorkild Kjærgaard, “Gårdmandslinien i dansk historieskrivning,” *Fortid og Nutid* 1 (1980), 178–91; Karin Lützen, “De gode gamle dage ude på landet,” *Folk og Kultur* 37 (2008), 154–64. The term “peasant” is used as a general term for people living in the countryside.

58 Lorenzen (1987).

59 Dansk Folkemuseum, “Dansk Folkemuseums Virksomhed i Finansaarene 1920–21 og 1921–22,” *Fortid og Nutid* 4 (1923), 220–21.

60 Elna Mygdal, “Dansk Vævning,” *Nyt Tidsskrift for Kunstindustri* 1 (1928). Translated by the authors.

61 Birgit Jensen, “Funktionalismens boligtekstiler: eller hvordan en ny stilart blev til,” *Folk og Kultur* 15 (1986), 69.

62 Jensen (1986), 69.

the textile patterns produced by Danish modernist designers such as Lis Ahlmann and Gerda Hansen.⁶³

Similar arguments were formulated by Mygdal and Schmedes regarding Danish needlework. In the 1930s, they expressed the sentiment that both expertise and taste were lacking in contemporary needlework.⁶⁴ The solution, according to them, was to study historical textiles and techniques.

The efforts of Mygdal and Schmedes were continued into the 1940s by Margrethe Hald, by then an assistant at the National Museum of Denmark. In 1940 and 1941, she published two booklets sponsored by the weekly magazine *LANDET* for the instruction of women in needlework alphabets and numbers found in peasant textiles. The instructions were accompanied by Hald's descriptions and arguments for their use in contemporary settings:

In a modern household, one may be less troubled by the duties of caring for large quantities of linen, but contemporary hygiene demands require us to change and wash the fabrics more frequently than in the past, and the tradition of numbering washcloths and bed linen may still be reasonable to uphold.⁶⁵

The intended audience for Hald's booklets were farmers' wives rather than people with a distinct interest in textiles, and there is a marked difference in the arguments used by Hald and those by Mygdal and Schmedes. Hald's arguments are based on the practicality and usefulness of needlework, rather than the craftsmanship and aesthetics of the designs. Despite this, she reached the same conclusion, that peasant textile craft should be preserved and practised.

Hald was predominantly engaged in research on prehistoric textile techniques based on the textile collections in the National Museum of Denmark. Her studies were closely linked to her background as a weaver, she had taught herself several of the textile techniques used in prehistoric textile production, such as tablet weaving, sprang, and nalbinding. Her research was often combined with outreach to a wider public. Her research article on tablet weaving published in 1930, for example, was followed by a popular instruction book on the technique in 1932.⁶⁶

The powerful nationalistic meaning attributed to textile crafts in the first half of the twentieth century is further suggested by the German Reichsleiter Heinrich Himmler's interest in the subject during the German occupation of Denmark in the Second World War, 1940–1945. In 1940, the National Museum of Denmark had been made aware of a woman, Sigrig Smidt, living in a village close to Ribe in Jutland and still practising the nalbinding-technique known from prehistoric textile finds. Hald was despatched to Jutland to learn the technique.⁶⁷ Following Hald's visit and her receiving instruc-

63 Jensen (1986), 70–78.

64 Elna Mygdal, "Om dansk Tekstilkunst," *Haandarbejdets Fremme* 1 (1934), 4–6; Elisabeth Schmedes, "Vor Broderi-Undervisning," *Haandarbejdets Fremme* 2 (1935), 31–32.

65 Margrethe Hald, *Korssting: Navne og Tal* (København: LANDET, 1940), 4. Translated by the authors.

66 Margrethe Hald, "Brikvævning i danske Oldtidsfund," *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1930), 277–301; Margrethe Hald, *Brikvævning* (København: Gyldendal, 1932).

67 Lars Schreiber Pedersen, "Heinrich Hihmmler og oldtidsvanterne fra Hviding," *Levende viden* 7 (2019), 42.

tion in the technique, the museum placed a notice in the newspaper *Nationaltidende* in January 1943 seeking to identify other craftspeople who might still be practising the technique.⁶⁸ This caught Himmler's attention, and he prepared to send a delegation from the SS-research institution Ahnenerbe⁶⁹ to Jutland to study nalbinding. Twice Himmler engaged weavers to take part in this mission but, despite continued reminders from his office, the German representation in Copenhagen was unable to identify Smidt and consequently nalbinding was never studied by Ahnenerbe.⁷⁰

The efforts by Mygdal, Schmedes, and Hald exemplify the scale of the attempts at this time to preserve and revive textile craftsmanship associated with the peasant way of life, and framed as Danish traditions, for the sake of national taste, industry, and domestic life. These three figures succeeded in framing the study and teaching of textile crafts as a matter of national interest, and they succeeded in aligning their research in textile craft with the ideals of influential nationalist movements of the early twentieth century so as to form societies and institutions for the study, teaching, and application of textile crafts. That this caught the attention of Himmler and Ahnenerbe illustrates the uneasy relationship between the Danish "peasant romance" movement's search for original Danish traditions among a waning peasant culture and Nazi-Germany's search for an original Germanic people and their traditions.

Conclusion

The development of textile research as a field of knowledge was the result of the successful alignment of its advocates and major proponents with powerful movements for women's emancipation and Danish nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The uniquely well-preserved textile finds from the Danish Bronze and Iron Age, provided the Drawing School for Women and Charlotte Klein with the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of women's textile crafts and its application beyond the domestic sphere. The change in the school's curriculum to include several classes on textile crafts following its pioneering study of the Borum Eshøj textiles suggests that this change was not just a reaction to the admission of female students by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

The curriculum of the Drawing School for Women remained varying and dependent on the skills of the individual teachers. Subjects that were not taught at the school at first – or indeed in Denmark – were brought into the school curriculum through the employment of former students such as Mygdal and Schmedes, who had studied weaving and mathematical drawing in Sweden and gold embroidery in France respectively. Another notable addition was that of classes on museum studies taught by Mygdal in the 1910s, exemplifying the school's strong connection with the National Museum of Denmark after the collaboration of 1889.

Following Klein's retirement and the assumption by Mygdal and Schmedes of

68 Schreiber Pedersen (2019), 45.

69 The *Ahnenerbe* was a *Schutzstaffel* (SS) pseudo-scientific organization which was active in Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1945. It was established by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler in July 1935 as an SS appendage devoted to the task of promoting the racial doctrines espoused by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. The *Ahnenerbe* was composed of scholars and scientists from a broad range of academic disciplines and fostered the idea that the German people descended from an Aryan race which was racially superior to other racial groups.

70 Schreiber Pedersen (2019), 46.

museum positions in the 1910s, the Drawing School gradually lost its position as the centre for textile research. However, Mygdal and Schmedes remained important actors involved in the establishment of societies and institutions for the preservation and application of traditional textile craft. They utilised a nationalistic discourse to argue not just for the preservation, but the revival of historical textile crafts. These efforts continued into the 1940s – when the German occupation of Denmark may both have bolstered Danish nationalist sentiments and opened opportunities for Nazi-German institutions to utilise textile research to their own ends.

The importance of the Drawing School for Women for women's education in Denmark cannot be underestimated. It contributed to the professionalization and revaluation of textile crafts associated with women by demonstrating their wide application and successfully making textile crafts a matter of national interest and widespread appeal. The development of textile research within this arena was highly dependent on individual actors and their networks. Through their work these women facilitated the spread of knowledge through the establishment of societies, workshops, and journals. Their influence on several aspects of Danish society in the first half of the twentieth century was profound.

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⁷¹ Morten Grymer-Hansen and Ulrikka Mokdad, "... en bitter Kamp for en Plads": Tracking Margrethe Hald's Path from the Loom to the National Museum" (paper presented at the Gender and Education workshop, DPU, Denmark, February 24–25, 2022); Morten Grymer-Hansen, "Køn, kvindehåndværk og emancipation: Tekstiltforskningens tidlige historie i Danmark" (presentation given at opening of the exhibition Margrethe Hald – A Textile Pioneer at KUB Southern Campus, UCPH, Denmark, February 10, 2022a); Morten Grymer-Hansen, "Women's Work: Suffragettes and the Early History of Textile Research in Denmark" (paper presented at the Margrethe Hald and the Nordic History of Textile Research seminar, UCPH, Denmark, April 22, 2022b).

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