On 1st September 2000, a workshop of the independent study group “Textiles from the Nile Valley” took place as part of the 7th International Congress for Coptic Studies in Leiden. It was the first time that this group had come together to discuss a specific theme from a variety of different viewpoints. There are many reasons why the theme “Riding costume in Egypt” was chosen. This kind of costume, for example, has a long tradition in the Near East and Central Asia and many scholars have been intrigued by its history. The use of particular coats can be traced back via the nomadic tribes in the central Asian steppe to at least the early 1st millennium BC. Later this style of coat was adapted by the Medes and Parthians living on the Iranian Plateau. The wearing of riding costumes continued to be a fashion among the Sasanians, a Persian dynasty who ruled from the third to the seventh centuries AD. A considerable number of Persian costume and related textiles from this period have been found in Egyptian tombs. It was this crossing point of cultures that made the International Congress for Coptic Studies, Leiden, a suitable venue for a discussion of this ancient Iranian form of dress.

On the eve of the 21st century it seemed to be “en vogue” to deal with Persian Art and artefacts. Extensive exhibitions such as the one that toured Brussels, Mainz and Vienna opened the ancient Persian culture to a broader audience. In particular, there has been a general interest both on scholarly and more general levels in the history of the Sasanians. This form of stimulation explains why it was possible to assemble a group of scholars from different parts of the world who were already working on the same subject, in our case the textiles and costumes of this epoch, but from totally different angles.

The results of the research presented in 2000 took the form of eight papers read at the workshop at Leiden. At the time both participants and contributors expressed their wish to publish these papers, but it was not feasible to include all the papers in the Acts of the Congress. So it was decided to approach the academic publishinghouse, Brill, Leiden, to see if they would be interested. Their response was immediate and very positive and we would like to thank Patricia Radder.
and her team for the excellent editorial work and friendly nudges, as well as inspiring cooperation. The finished size and range of themes discussed in the present volume was due to the encouragement of Brill who wished to have a larger publication than originally envisaged by the editors. As a result, this volume contains original Congress papers, plus additional contributions with more background information, all of which have contributed to a more rounded view on the theme of riding costume.

Sabine Schrenk was the coorganizer of the workshop. Because of other obligations she was unable to join the editorial board, but we thank her very much nevertheless for being there whenever points need to be discussed or specific questions answered.

We would also like to express our thanks to Jacques van der Vliet who generously hosted the study group in the rooms of the Faculteit der Letteren, Leiden University. In addition, he also supported our idea to publish the resulting papers right from the moment when the idea was first suggested.

We should not forget to mention Jacques Debergh, Georg Knauer and Peter von der Osten who helped us to bridge the gap between Macintosh and IBM-computer systems and solve all those apparently small technical problems that can cause such big headaches. Last but not least we should express our warmest gratitude to all the authors of this volume for their extraordinary collaboration and dedication in bringing this work to press.

All contributions of the present volume dealing with the riding costume in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin are dedicated to Arne Effenberger on the occasion of his 60th birthday.

The editors