On occasion, researching ancient weaves can uncover some interesting information... Take for instance the Twentieth Century Fox Studio movie "The Robe" from the early 1950's. Based on the novel by Lloyd Douglas, the robe is a symbol of Christ in the movie—the seamless robe Christ wore before the Crucifixion and for which the Roman centurians cast lots. In accordance with the policy of the studio, every detail of the picture needed to be as historically accurate as possible, including the planned garment, handwoven as in Biblical times, used for the robe.

A handweaver from the Los Angeles area, Dorothea Hulse, wove the garment. A great deal of research and experimenting went into the production of the garment. Charles LeMaire, costume designer for the movie, did many drawings. Yarn markets in this country and in Europe were searched for the right grade of sheep's wool for it had to be of the type used in Galilee at the time of the Crucifixion. Mrs. Hulse's own copy of Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible gave them a description of how yarn was spun, dyed with walnut shells, and woven in the first century. They also had a contemporary sample of a robe, woven in Bethlehem, as a replica of the garment.

The appropriately textured yarn was found in England but it was much too heavy. Research had brought out that the garment was "finely textured." In the book (and the script) the Robe is not only worn by Christ, it is also carried in the tunic belt of Marcellus, in the kinsman of Demetrius, and passed from the hands of Marcellus to Diana, to Peter. Once the problem of the yarn was solved, the garment was planned using tubular and double weave, using four shuttles to make the neck and arm openings.

The garment, once finished, was not yet free of problems. The walnut dye was deemed "unphotogenic" and had to go through another dye bath to be "technicolor-perfect." And, in addition to being insured for $50,000, three duplicates were made.

About the weaver... Dorothea Hulse did much therapeutic work in California, private tutoring (how many of us remember Gail Patrick!), and had her own weaving shop. She also had a previous motion picture studio assignment—weaving Susan Hayward's costumes for "David and Bathsheba," which were so light that a six to eight-yard length could be pulled through a wedding ring without wrinkling.

Perhaps one of our local television stations will have a showing of "The Robe" and we can take a closer look at this "handwoven" garment!

NOTE: this has been based on an article by Bertha Marshall from the Summer 1953 issue of Handweaver & Craftsman.

please wear name tags at Guild meetings; it will help us know one another.