

Egyptian Late Antique Textiles: From Archaeological Fields to Museums

Denisa Hradilová^{1,2}

¹Department of Art History, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic
²Department of Humanities, Silesian Museum, Opava; curator of Fine Arts and PhD student, Krnov 79401, Czech Republic

Abstract

One of the largest groups of archaeological artefacts from archaeological sites in Egypt held in museums in Central Europe is Late Antique textiles, formerly referred to as “Coptic textiles” since the mid-19th century. Whole garments, but mainly fragments of former clothes, were cut into small pieces of decorative applications by explorers and archaeologists to sell them at higher prices to private collectors, museum institutions and educational offices. As with all objects, their complete processing begins with the collection of detailed information about the textiles. This paper will outline possible approaches and procedures regarding Egyptian textile items in the Silesian Museum in the Czech Republic with a comparison with other European museums.

Keywords: Silesian Museum, Opava, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Coptic, Late Antique, textiles, Egypt, Akhmīm, Panopolis, Theodor Graf, Franz H. Richter

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المنسوجات الأثرية المتأخرة هي إحدى أكبر مجموعات القطع الأثرية في مصر المحفوظة في متاحف أوروبا، التي كان يشار إليها سابقاً باسم “المنسوجات القبطية” منذ منتصف القرن التاسع عشر. وقُطعت الملابس الكاملة، ولكن على نحو رئيس أجزاء من الملابس السابقة، إلى قطع صغيرة من التطبيقات الزخرفية من قبل المستكشفين وعلماء الآثار؛ لبيعها بأسعار أعلى لهواة جمع التحف الخاصة ومؤسسات المتاحف والمكاتب التعليمية. وكما هو الحال مع كل القطع، فإن معالجتها الكاملة تبدأ بجمع معلومات مفصلة عن المنسوجات. ستحدد الورقة البحثية المناهج والإجراءات الممكنة فيما يتعلق بقطع المنسوجات المصرية في متحف سيليزيا في جمهورية التشيك مع مقارنة مع المتاحف الأوروبية الأخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متحف سيليزيان، أوبافا، المتحف الوطني الألماني، نورنبرغ، متحف ريجكس أمستردام، القبطية، العصور القديمة المتأخرة، المنسوجات، مصر، أخميم، بانوبوليس، تيودور غراف، فرانز ريختر

1. Introduction

The Slezské zemské muzeum (= the Silesian Museum) in Opava in the Czech Republic (hereinafter referred to as SZM), the third largest museum in this Central European country, has a convolute of 51 pieces of Late Antique and Early Byzantine textile fragments in the collections of Oddělení společenských věd (= the Department of Social Sciences) at Uměleckohistorické pracoviště (= the Department of Art History) (hereinafter referred to as UH). These fragments were found in the late 19th and early 20th cen-

turies at archaeological sites in present-day Egypt.¹ Due to the unprofessional

¹ Previously, these textiles, dated to between the 3rd and 10th centuries Anno Domini (AD), were called ‘Coptic’ because of their association with the Coptic Christian community that formed between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD in present-day Egypt and in whose tombs the burial cloths were found. However, since the find-spot itself, often inconclusively documented or not at all, does not automatically indicate that the textiles were not foreign imports from another region, the phrase ‘Late Antique’ or ‘Early Byzantine’ is now used to describe them.

handling of these artefacts, no precise information on the circumstances of their discovery has been preserved for researchers, and only very scant reports on their provenance exist.² Messrs. Theodor Graf and Franz Richter are mentioned in přírůstkové knihy (= the accessory books/book, hereinafter referred to as PK) of SZM as sellers of a total of twenty-one preserved fragments of Egyptian textiles [1]. In 1920, the merchant Otto Ch. Retz generously donated twenty textile fragments to the nearby Městské muzeum (= Municipal Museum) in Krnov, and these items later became part of the SZM collections [2]. For the remaining ten pieces of clothing from the SZM convolute, the PK column contains a note 'old museum property' explaining the method of acquisition. This means that no information about the origin and acquisition of the collection items has been preserved or has yet been found [3]. The Resolution of the International Association of Coptic Studies (IACS), issued in 2022, in point 2, considers knowledge of the archaeological provenience and subsequent provenance of any artefact as essential to scientific research on it [4]. In the case of Late Antique and Early Byzantine textiles from Egypt, this resolution poses a number of research challenges. Nevertheless, it is possible to work with these archaeological materials, which, in the case of the fragments in the SZM collections, are isolated items without a known finding situation, through the study of preserved historical documents, research into weaving

² In this article, the English word 'provenience', from the Latin 'provenire', refers to the origin of an item, i.e. where it originated or was found. The term 'provenance' refers to the sequential history of ownership of an artefact, from individual sellers and buyers to the current holder.

techniques, formal and iconographic features of textiles (art-historical analysis), and their comparison with other related or similar artefacts with a better-clarified history in other museums and other cultural institutions.

2. Collector Theodor Graf and Engineer Franz Richter

In July 1897, the SZM purchased its first two Late Antique clothing fragments from Theodor Graf (1840–1903), a renowned Viennese oriental carpet merchant and collector of the so-called Fayum portraits and other Egyptian antiquities [5]. Only a decorative square tabula, filled with four round medallions depicting animal figures, registered under inventory number U 21 T, has been preserved (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1: Tabula fragment, inv. n. U 21 T, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch.

Its seller had a carpet business named 'Theodor Graf' in Vienna with a branch in Cairo and many informants and dealers at the excavation sites in Egypt [6]. In November 1905, in Vienna, the SZM purchased another twenty-six fragments of Late Antique and Early Byzantine textiles for its textile collection from Franz Rich-

ter [7]. The annual report of SZM from the years 1904 to 1905 contains an important note in addition to the record of this acquisition for the year 1905. *“Finally, on 9 November [1905, author’s note], an exhibition of Coptic textiles from the estate of the Viennese merchant Theodor Graf was opened and is scheduled to last until early December. The textiles were discovered in the tombs of Egyptian Christians”* (K. Fr. Jos. Museum: 1905: 15). This entry is not accidental and draws attention to the exhibition from which the purchase of Egyptian clothing fragments made that year originated. Franz Richter was an employee of Theodor Graf’s business. Their joint activity is documented, for example, in the El-Rubaiyat area in the Fayum oasis in Egypt, where Richter, together with Graf, conducted research on the painting techniques of the encaustic portraits found there. *“Because of this, Theodor Graf and his collaborator Franz Richter teamed up [with Otto Philipp Donner von Richter (1828–1911), a painter; author’s note] to assess the painting technique”* (Parlasca: 2003: 32). This collaboration resulted in a publication published in 1893, the catalogue of Theodor Graf’s *Collection of unique Ancient Greek portraits, recently discovered and now on display in the Old Vienna, Midway Plaisance*, at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in the then-unfinished South Park section of Chicago.³ A very important note appears at the bottom of the second unnumbered page of the catalogue. *“Intending purchasers may communicate with Mr. Theod. Graf or Mr. F. H. Richter, on the premises”* (Graf: Donner. v. Richter: Richter: 1893: unpaginated). Franz H. Richter, whose biograph-

ical data are not yet known, is shown to have worked for Theodor Graf as a co-author of publications and an intermediary to sell his finds. In a letter written in Amsterdam on 29 October, 1889, to the director of the Dutch Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (hereinafter referred to as RMO), now in the museum collection at the National Archives in Hague (hereinafter referred to as NAH), Graf offers Conrad Leemans (1809–1893) his services as an antiquities merchant and recommends ‘Mr Franz Richter’ as a helpful person [8]. A brief announcement on the front page of the *Maatschappij tot bevordering der Bouwkunst* (= Society for the Promotion of Architecture; hereafter referred to as MBK) weekly magazine, dated 28 September 1889, draws attention to a lecture by Engineer F. H. Richter, scheduled for Friday, 4 October of that year at 8 o’clock in the evening, on the portraits in the property of Mr. Theodor Graf of Vienna, which are exhibited in the hall of the ‘Ancient Greek period’ of Egypt at the MBK headquarters in Amsterdam at Marnixstraat 402. The following promotional article at the end adds, *“The collection of paintings is so important that you should not miss a visit. It remains only a tacit hope that the Dutch government will not forget to buy some pieces for RMO”* (Louis Rieber: 39/1889: 229-230). An extensive article in the following issue of the MBK weekly magazine, dated 12 October 1889, recounts a lecture where F. H. Richter, an Engineer from Vienna, with permission, spoke about 2000 years old portraits. At the end, the writer remarks, *“The Chairman thanked Mr. Richter warmly for the readiness with which he had given the suggestion to invite people to this lecture, and also thanked Mr. Th. Graf, the owner of such a valuable collection, for his great willingness to make the portraits available for viewing tonight”* (Louis

³ Franz Richter a Fritz von Ostini (1861–1927) then published other works on the finds of Theodor Graf listed in the bibliography.

Rieber: 41/1889: 243-244). Franz H. Richter, referred to for the second time as an Engineer from Vienna, worked for Theodor Graf as a manager, co-author of publications, intermediary in purchases and sales, and also provider of lectures, which served as advertising for the antiquarian and merchant Graf. After Graf's death in 1903, Franz Richter was entrusted by members of Graf's family (one of his heirs was his brother Wilhelm Graf) to sell his estate to museums and other public institutions. "After Graf's death, in 1906-07, the textiles of inventory numbers AS-VIII 1a, 1b, 2-7, 8a, 8b, 9-12 passed through his former employee Franz Richter to the antiquities sub-collection of the k.k. Kunsthistorisches Hofmuseum Wien [today's Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien; author's note]" (Lirsch: 2006: 38). On 29 April 1904, Franz Richter sent a letter from Vienna to the new director of RMO, offering a number of encaustic portraits for purchase and this letter was on letterhead paper with the heading *Theodor Graf Antike Portraits-Galerie Wien VI K stlergasse no. 4*. The last statement is interesting. "Mummy masks and Coptic textiles are also being sold at unbelievably low prices" (NAH RMO:1904: 1904/45) [9]. With this document also came the official announcement from Graf's gallery to the RMO. "After the death of Mr. Theodor Graf on November 25, 1903, the heirs decided to utilise his collection, consisting of Hellenistic portraits, one complete mummy portrait, three-dimensional mummy masks made of sandy clay, plaster and papier-m ch , as well as valuable carpets from the 13th and 14th centuries... and also figurative tapestries and clothing materials from Lower Egypt, for sale as a whole or individually. The realisation of this was entrusted to the undersigned Franz Richter, the author of the catalogue on Theodor Graf's gallery of ancient portraits" (NAH

RMO:1904: 1904/45) [9]. Most often, the offers and sales were carried out through exhibitions. One Fayum portrait from Theodor Graf's inventory found its way to the collections of the Anthropology Department at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. According to the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution, the museum acquired a Greco-Egyptian encaustic portrait from a tomb in Rubaiyat, Fayum Province, Egypt, from Franz Richter of Vienna at the international exhibition Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904, listed as item No. 43048 [10]. At the 'Exhibition of Coptic Textiles from Graf's estate' in Vienna in 1905, the SZM purchased twenty-six textile fragments from Franz Richter, of which now only twenty remain in the collection. The acquisition payment of 264 Austro-Hungarian crowns took place on 10 March 1906, as recorded in the museum's PK [11]. Until the conservation treatment in 2021, the textiles from this acquisition were sewn onto a simple linen canvas stretched on a wooden frame.⁴ Reports on their origin or earlier provenance have not been preserved. One of the reasons is the then approach to archaeological textiles, which did not pay much attention to the precise documentation of the circumstances of their discovery. More detailed information can only be found for some of them. For textile fragment with inventory number U 35 T, a handwritten note in German with black ink on a small piece of white linen label has been preserved within the old adjustment. "Part of a linen garment with an embroidery in the form of

⁴ Conservation treatment on the textiles was done by Martina Holl , SZM employee.

flowering branches in a vase, dyed purple with a yellow contour/line. Coptic burial site at Akhmīm, 5th–7th centuries AD” (SZM UH PK: 1903–1911: 88) (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2: Embroidery fragment, inv. n. U 35 T, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch.

This is a piece of coarse undyed linen woven in a simple plain weave,⁵ into which a motif of a vase with a bouquet of grapevines with a tiny bird sitting in is woven using the tapestry technique⁶ with undyed linen and dyed wool yarn. The PK exactly quotes the text on the textile label,

⁵ The most common weave used in the times of Pharaonic Egypt was a simple weave called plain/linen weave, less frequently tabby weave. This weave was very popular among the ancient Copts. It is characterised by warp and weft threads that intersect at right angles, forming a cross pattern. It is a balanced (double) weave, consisting of an equal number of warp and weft threads per centimeter, resulting in the fabric having the same appearance on the reverse and the face.

⁶ In textile production of Early Egyptian Christians, tapestry weave became absolutely indispensable as it allowed them to complement simple linen textiles in plain weave with uniquely coloured patterned appliquéés, decorative ornaments and figurative motifs. In tapestry weave, the weft thread is usually packed very densely during weaving so as to cover the warp thread, making it very similar to the technique of weft rib.

excluding the last sentence mentioning the find site in Akhmīm and the dating to the 5th to 7th centuries. The textile is recorded as a separate item in the PK, unlike other Richter’s fragments, which were adjusted in groups and recorded as such [12]. The mounting of the textile on canvas, with the attached label mentioned above, remained in place until 2021, when, due to conservation treatment, the textile received a new adjustment. A SZM staff member added, with a marker, the assigned accession number 05.124 to the label written in ink. Most likely, the label does not come from the Vienna exhibition and was added to the textile later during work with the collection in SZM, which would also explain the added place of discovery and the dating, both of which are omitted in the PK. The Late Antique burial site in the city of Akhmīm (Greek: Panopolis), an ancient and still active textile center in Upper Egypt, was identified in 1884 by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846–1916), and later, this place became a very good and famous source of textile finds for Theodor Graf and other treasure hunters [13]. In many cases, Akhmīm was mentioned as the find site in exhibition catalogues and item inventories without any evidence, solely to increase the value of antiquities [14]. Among the fragments of Egyptian textiles acquired into the SZM collection in 1905 in Vienna is also a larger piece of a tunic woven from raw linen in a regular plain weave. Partially preserved on it is a decorative shoulder band—clavus, inventory number U 22 T, measuring 30 × 9 cm, woven in the weft rib technique⁷ from raw

⁷ Weft rib is an irregular form of plain weave in which the number of threads in the weft direction is higher than in the warp direction, completely covering the warp.

linen and purple-dyed wool yarn. The PK of SZM describes the collection item as “Part of a linen garment with a border, featuring a figure in a three-quarter position, woven with purple-dyed wool, Coptic, 5th to 7th centuries” (SZM UH PK: 1903–1911: 88). The central rectangular compartment of the clavus is filled with a figure of a naked dancing woman—a Bacchante in a sinuous body position. The dancer holds castanets in both hands and a yet unidentified object in her right hand (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3: Clavus fragment, inv. n. U 22 T, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wunsch.

Adjacent to the rectangular compartment with the dancer is a square-shaped compartment at the top, with a circular medallion inside. Before the complete degradation of the less durable wool yarn, there was an equal-armed cross with four distinctive circular shapes, one between each arm of the cross. Below the compartment of the dancing Bacchante is a square-

shaped compartment with the figure of a running hare in a circular medallion. This decoration continued vertically across the entire canvas. In other parts, the purple wool yarn degraded so much that it completely disappeared from the structure of the clavus, revealing its inner warp structure with ornaments of undyed linen. This phenomenon is called ‘ghost weave’. Based on the remaining warp, we know that in the band there was not only the Coptic cross but also another human figure and another medallion with the figure of a running hare.

The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, Germany (hereinafter referred to as GNM), preserves in its collections a very similar clavus fragment, with an inventory number Gew6, measuring 30.2 × 8.6 cm, dated to the 5th to 6th centuries AD. This fragment comes from a Late Antique tunic, and its two rectangular compartments contain two figures, the dancing Bacchante and Dionysus. The Bacchante holds castanets in both hands and an unidentified object in her right hand; Dionysus is accompanied by the figure of a lion [15]. The heads of the figures are turned toward an equal-armed circular cross [16] between them. The cross includes four distinctive circular shapes, one between each arm of the cross (Figure 4). Similar to the fragment from the SZM collections, the cross is positioned within a circle and then a square. The textile band, restored by Petra Kress of GNM in 2011 and currently on display in the permanent exhibition at GNM on the ground floor of the gallery building, is very close in size to the fragment of the preserved band from the SZM collections. But the mutual correspondence is far from over. A closer comparison of the two textiles reveals further similarities. In both cases, a weft rib technique was used

to make the decorative clavus. A decorative pattern in purple-dyed wool is vertically in the direction of the weft threads inserted into the horizontal structure of warp threads made of raw undyed linen, running across the linen. The wool yarn has disappeared in some places, revealing the structure of the warp threads in this part, creating a 'ghost weave'. In certain areas in the weft direction, there are also undyed threads of raw linen depicting the anatomy of the scene. Additional details, such as facial elements of the figures, are created using undyed linen with a technique called 'flying shuttle'.⁸ It seems very important to compare the ground cloth, which, in the case of the GNM fragment, has been preserved only in the form of precisely cut side parts around the decorative purple band. On the artefact from SZM, we can observe the preserved fabric of the tunic in a simple plain weave with a weft-faced⁹ compound structure made of raw linen. Before the decorative clavus was woven into the structure of the linen, three strong vertical weft threads were introduced into the fabric structure on each side in three groups. Three strong vertical weft threads were also woven into the ground cloth on the side of the clavus from the GNM collections. The preserved part of the three strong weft threads is still most prominently visible in the cut bottom right corner next to the figure of the dancer [17] or cross (Figures 5 and 6).

⁸ In this technique, additional passes of the thread are made to create lines of ornamentation that do not follow the regular weave pattern. The ornamentation emerges on the surface of the textile weave.

⁹ The weft threads are threaded over the warp threads.



FIGURE 4: Clavus fragment, inv. n. Gew6, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg. Photo J. Mulsolf.



FIGURE 5: Clavus fragment, cross detail, inv. n. U 22 T, Slezské zemské museum. Photo M. Polášek. Purple-dyed wool with an S spin of the threads, with a thread count of about 50 weft threads per 1 cm. Raw undyed linen with an S spin of threads, with a thread count of 8 to 9 warp threads per 1 cm.



FIGURE 6: Clavus fragment, cross detail, inv. n. Gew6, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg. Photo J. Musolf. Purple-dyed wool with an S spin of the threads, with a thread count of about 50 weft threads per 1 cm. Raw undyed linen with an S spin of threads, with a thread count of 8 to 9 warp threads per 1 cm.

Once the three weft groups were established, thinner warp threads were grouped into bundles of two to four threads in a 'warp bundle' in the GNM artefact [17] and two and three threads in a warp bundle in the SZM artefact (Figures 7 and 8). In this way, the individual bundles horizontally pass over the strong weft threads and gradually intertwine into the structure of the decorative clavus.



FIGURE 7: Clavus fragment, inv. n. U 22 T, weave detail, Slezské museum. Photo M. Polášek. The artefact alternates bundles of 3, 2, 3, 2 threads in the warp bundle with a thread count of 20 threads per 1 cm.



FIGURE 8: Clavus fragment, inv. n. Gew6, weave detail, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg. Photo J. Musolf. The warp bundles are grouped in a rhythm of 2, 3, 2, 4 threads in the warp bundle with a thread count of 24 threads per 1 cm.

Both fragments are woven with the same technique, from the same material, and the formal features and iconography of both clavi correspond in many elements to such an extent that one can rightly assume the same area of origin or textile workshop. As mentioned above, the artefact held in the SZM collections was purchased from the estate of Theodor Graf from Franz Richter in Vienna in 1905. The artefact held in the GNM collections was acquired by the institution in 1886-1887 from the clergyman and collector Franz Bock (1823-1899) of Aachen [17]. The first acquisitions of funerary textiles from Egypt are recorded in the PK of GNM as "*a number of Early Christian and Ancient Christian textiles*" (Zander-Seidel: 2005: 10). Franz Bock acquired the textiles from several suppliers in Cairo, including the brother of the German Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch, who was then a museum curator at the Egyptian Museum, and a Greek named Tano [18]. Bock claimed that the textiles were found in Akhmīm [18]. However, from later correspondence of another antiquarian and archaeologist Robert Forrer (1866-1947), we know

that, unlike him, Bock never visited Akhmīm himself [18]. A very interesting indirect indication seems to be that, in addition to Bock, Forrer himself also purchased a group of textile finds from Akhmīm from a merchant named Tano.¹⁰ However, the mere fact that Forrer attributed the word 'Akhmīm' to the purchase from Tano in his diary does not prove with certainty that it was the actual place of their discovery.¹¹ The textile from the SZM may have its origin in an ancient textile center in Upper Egypt, where, according to all indications, Theodor Graf also stopped during his explorations. The fragment of clothing comes from his estate inventory. However, reliable evidence for this has not been found yet. Both fragments of Late Antique tunics with Bacchic figures show significant stylistic similarities with other documented finds from Akhmīm and are dated to the same period from the 5th to the 7th centuries. An example is a small carving of a nude Dionysus, inventory number FG1807, carved in bone and held in the GNM collections [19]. The exact origin and place of discovery of both textiles remain a matter for further research.

3. Rijksmuseum

Another case of research, based on technical and formal analysis of textiles and the study of preserved historical documents, might be the comparison of the two pieces of textiles held in the SZM col-

lections and the two fragments of textiles kept in the depositories of Dutch Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (hereinafter referred to as RMA). One of the pair of textiles from the SZM collections shows exactly the same technical, formal, and iconographic elements as one of the two fragments held in the RMA collections. The first pair of the compared textiles consists of very damaged fragments of coarse fabric (likely a blanket) woven in an irregular plain weave from raw undyed linen with three decorative bands created by the so-called lancing¹² (Figures 9 and 10) of horizontal weft threads with a dyed wool yarn: the RMA fragment, inventory number BK-BR-453-J, measuring 39 × 29.5 cm, and the SZM fragment, inventory number U 47 T, measuring 33 × 23 cm.



FIGURE 9: Cloth fragment, inv. n. BK-BR-453-J, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain. Warp threads with an S spin of threads and with a thread count of 16/17 strong warp threads per 1 cm.

¹⁰ The Tano family ran one of the most successful textile shops in Cairo.

¹¹ Robert Forrer's transaction diary 'Verkaufs und Einkaufs und Notizbuch über Koptische Stoffe Geschäft Achmim' is now in the archives of the Archaeological Museum in Strasbourg (Glowa: Sławińska 2021: 297).

¹² A pattern is inserted across the entire width of the fabric.



FIGURE 10: Cloth fragment, inv. n. U 47 T, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch. Warp threads with an S spin of threads and with a thread count of 16/17 strong warp threads per 1 cm.

In both cases, the structure of the plain weave is irregular with dominant warp threads running vertically (warp threads are upon the weft threads).¹³ When comparing the structure of both textiles, it is noticeable that the weft bundles are strengthened horizontally, where every third row is always twice as wide as the surrounding two rows (Figures 11 and 12).



FIGURE 11: Cloth fragment, inv. n. BK-BR-453-J, weave detail, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain.

¹³ The warp point is the point at which the weft and warp threads cross and the warp thread is upon the weft thread, when looking at the face of the fabric.



FIGURE 12: Cloth, inv. n. U 47 T, weave detail, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch.

The decoration of both fragments is very simple. It consists of three bands, where the bottom and the central band are separated by 11 horizontal weft rows and the central and the top band are separated by 13 weft rows. The bottom and the top band are formed by three weft rows each, lanced with green and red-dyed wool yarn; the top and bottom red yarn is introduced into the warp structure by alternately passing the yarn over seven warp threads and under the three warp attachment points (a point where a warp thread goes upon a weft thread). The central green yarn lances the weft yarn and is introduced into the warp, alternately passing over the five and eight warp threads and under three warp attachment points (Figures 13 and 14).



FIGURE 13: Cloth fragment, inv. n. BK-BR-453-J, lancing detail, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain.



FIGURE 14: Cloth fragment, inv. n. U 47 T, lancing detail, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo M. Polášek.

The wider central band is composed of nine weft rows lanced with green and red wool yarn using the same technique, alternating the introduction of yarn over the warp threads and under three to six warp attachment points in a manner that creates alternating pattern of lozenges and 'St. Andrew's crosses' in the band. Both textile fragments bear identical contamination on their surface in the form of remnants of linen fibers, which originally belonged to neither of the fragments. They likely adhered to their surface during the joint wrapping around the body of the deceased (Figures 15 and 16). The fragments show the identical material, weaving technique, formal and iconographic features, and degree of degradation and damage, and in the past, they formed one textile.



FIGURES 15: Cloth fragment, inv. n. BK-BR-453-J, cloth remains, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain.



FIGURES 16: Cloth fragment, inv. n. U 47 T, cloth remains, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch.

The fragment in the property of SZM is described in the PK as 'old museum property'. In this case, the textile was officially registered in the museum's collections in 1967 on the basis of the accession number and we have no information on its acquisition [20]. The textile fragment in the RMA collections (with a very broad dating from the 2nd to 10th centuries AD) was transferred to the museum as a museum loan from the Nederlandse Maatschappij voor Nijverheid en Handel (Dutch Society for Industry and Commerce; hereafter referred to as NMNH) in 1942 [21]. In 1889, the aforementioned Franz Richter lectured in the Netherlands [22]. The twenty Late Antique textiles, currently in the RMA collection on museum loan, could have been purchased from Theodor Graf or obtained from his estate by NMNH [23]. Graf's family sold part of his collection to an organization that supplied teaching aids to textile schools. The organization distributed a portion of the collection to weaving schools in Austria-Hungary, which were mostly located in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia [24]. SZM could have received the textile fragment with inventory number U 47 T from the inventory of the dissolved German Weaving School in Krnov (= Jägerndorf in German). The school might have been one of the donated institutions. However, the Opava Museum has either lost records of the transfer or has not yet located them. It is also unknown whether the NMNH was

an organization that donated Late Antique textiles from Egypt as teaching aids to schools or textile factories. “Some time ago, our readers learned about the discovery of rare fabrics coming from the excavations of Coptic burial fields in Egypt, on which the sites of Achim, Panopolis and Fayum are labeled. These very rare fabrics... were until now in the training school of the Karnola textile factory in Krnov. The Karnola National Enterprise has now donated them to the Municipal Museum in Krnov.” (Anonymous: 1960: not paginated).¹⁴ As discussed above, this article suggests the label on the textile inventory number U 35 T from Theodor Graf’s estate, now kept in the SZM, can be actually original. The exact provenience of the fragment of burial cloth in the SZM collection continues to be the subject of archival research.

The provenience is clearer for the last compared pair of early Byzantine textiles, likely fragments from the same hanging tapestry woven in the tapestry weave technique (Figures 17 and 18).



FIGURE 17: Blanket fragment, inv. n. BK- NM-12053, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain.

¹⁴ These donated textiles are still in the Municipal Museum in Krnov.

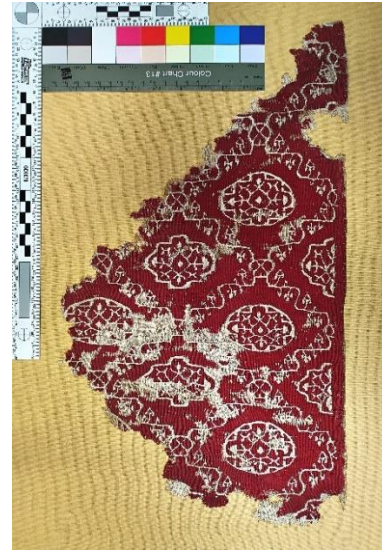


FIGURE 18: Blanket fragment, inv. n. U 36 T, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo M. Polášek.

The RMA artefact measuring 29.5 × 36.5 cm, with inventory number BK-NM-12053, dated to from the 5th to the 8th centuries, consists of two pieces sewn together. The triangular fragment from the SZM, measuring 45 × 35 × 37 cm, is a solid piece, registered under inventory number U 36 T and currently dated to between the 5th and the 8th centuries. A comparison of the two fragments reveals the same weaving technique—a delicate slit tapestry weave.¹⁵

In the weft direction, undyed linen threads also run through the structure in slit tapestry weave, which leaves small gaps between the undyed linen elements and the colored wool area. In this way, they form decorative ornaments in the deep red surface with small additions in the so-called ‘soumak stitch’ [25] (Figures 19 and 20). This structure of linen ornamental patterns emerges to the surface

¹⁵ This type of tapestry technique leaves an open slit between adjacent areas of color.



FIGURE 19: Blanket fragment, inv. n. BK- NM-12053, weave detail, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain. Warp threads from undyed raw linen with a Z spin, running horizontally (a thread count of 9 to 11 warp threads per 1 cm), overlaid with vertical weft threads of red-dyed wool yarn with an S spin (a thread count of 24 to 29 weft threads per 1 cm).



FIGURE 20: Blanket fragment, inv. n. U 36 T, weave detail, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo M. Polášek. Warp threads from undyed raw linen with a Z spin, running horizontally (a thread count of 9 to 11 warp threads per 1 cm), overlaid with vertical weft threads of red-dyed wool yarn with an S spin (a thread count of 24 to 29 weft threads per 1 cm).

along with the warp structure where the weft layer of red wool threads has disappeared, revealing areas of ‘ghost weave’ [26]. The two fragments correspond not only in material and weaving technique but also in the overall layout of the icono-

graphic elements. In the red area, we find a regular structure of lozenges, rendered in undyed linen in the form of laurel branches with small leaves. At the intersection of the lines of the lozenges, there are circles with a tiny cross inside, depicting the symbol of a pomegranate. In the center of each lozenge, we find an oval ornamental motif, often interpreted as a pomegranate cut open [27]. Both fragments rest on the original ground weave in a regular plain weave of raw undyed linen, to which they are attached on the sides by clearly visible binding stitches (Figures 21 and 22). The SZM fragment, mounted on canvas adjusted to a sololith board, belongs to the group of 26 textiles purchased in 1905 at the Vienna exhibition by Franz Richter from the estate of Theodor Graf. The PK entry specifies “*Triangular red linen textile with slit [so-called slit tapestry weave, author’s note] yellow round ornaments, Coptic, 5th–7th century*” (SZM UH PK: 1903–1911: 89).



FIGURE 21: Blanket fragment, inv. n. BK-NM-12053, stitches detail, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Public domain.



FIGURE 22: Blanket fragment, inv. n. U 36 T, stitches detail, Slezské zemské muzeum. Photo L. Wünsch.

The RMA fragment, now mounted on a fixing ground weave, was purchased by the institution in 1908 from the estate of Theodor Graf [28]. The inventory card for the RMA textile states “*Purchased from Theodor Graf in Vienna for 166,-*” [29]. Considering the year of acquisition, 1908, it can be assumed that the intermediary was likely Franz Richter, and the RMA purchased the textile from Graf’s business [30]. It is not possible to determine the origin or place of the discovery of both textiles in the current state of research. In the case of Late Antique and Early Byzantine textiles from Theodor Graf’s inventory, potential sites of discovery include burial sites in Fayum, where Theodor Graf worked during the 1880s, or the burial sites in Akhmīm, where excavation work began in the late 19th century [31]. Given the wide network of his suppliers and dealers of Egyptian artefacts, and the inconsistent recording of the circumstances of acquisition or discovery of individual items, it is not certain whether we will be able to determine with certainty the deeper history of Late Antique and Early Byzantine textiles in the SZM collections in the future. In the future, the mutual relatedness of artefacts in the SZM collections and those in the RMA collections can be proven by chemical analyses of the dyes used, employing high-performance

liquid chromatography combined with photo-diode array detection and more detailed specification of the natural fibers used, such as wool and linen. Studying the mutual relatedness of seemingly isolated collection items, which also represent valuable archaeological material, and the associated relationships between antiquarians and collectors of Egyptian finds in the 19th and early 20th centuries is very important for understanding the work and mindset of the ‘treasure hunters’ of that time, who treated individual artefacts as commercial commodities rather than a cultural heritage of modern Egypt. It may thus help to clarify the fate of many illegally taken historical items.

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