THE NORTH EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEXTILES

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Colour Plates
In the Summer of 2006 in North-West Russia, during a rescue excavation in the southern section of the Okolnyi Gorod (Roundabout City) of Pskov, directed by Elena A. Yakovleva, a third wooden chamber burial of the Scandinavian type was uncovered (Burial no. 1 had previously been excavated under E. A. Yakovleva; Burial 2 under A.V. Mikhailov). The chamber had been looted in antiquity and contained no human remains. Nevertheless, the nature of the set of goods preserved, enabled the identification of the grave as a female burial and to date it by analogy with Burial no. 1 to the mid-10th–early 11th century (Yakovleva 2006, 70).

A block of soil with traces of textiles recovered from under the remains of the floor of the chamber is the focus of this study (Fig. 49.1). The cleaning and disassembling of the block of soil (0.3 × 0.26 m) was carried out under laboratory conditions. This process included several phases. In order to examine the features of the textiles, microscopic methods were applied with the use of MBS-10 and POLARM R-211 microscopes; the nature of the fibres was identified using histochemistry and spectrometry, and microscopic analyses in reflected and transmitted light with a magnification of 16–400×.

The aim of the first stage of the investigation was to distinguish the outlines and dimensions of the textile remains, as well as to identify other objects present in the soil block. This study has enabled us to state firstly that the textiles were placed in a birch-bark container, possibly with a leather cover. Secondly, we were able to clean and unravel the bundle of textiles and extricate an oval bronze ‘tortoise’ brooch from it. Thirdly, a number of textile types were identified and divided into two main groups: fabrics from plant fibres interwoven with linen threads and silk fabrics. Fourthly, the plant fibres were identified as linen. And finally, the technological features of each group of textiles were defined.

It became already evident at the first stage of the studies that the tabby linen cloth was present in practically all layers of the investigated soil block (Table 49.1). The plant fibres which were the base of the tabby were destructurized and had lost their morphological parameters completely. These remains presented just a black layer of decomposed organics, which covered the relatively well preserved silk cloth. Therefore, it was decided to concentrate on the silk textile. All layers of the tabby textiles were removed from the silk, although some of the separate fragments that still preserved their structure were strengthened and stabilized.

The aim of the second stage of the work was the final cleaning and unfolding of the main mass of textiles based on silk. The process resulted in separating two fragments from it. From the first, three elements of silk fabric were sorted out.
Two of these were identified as sleeve cuffs from a garment (Fig. 49.2). The third element separated from fragment 1 of the main part of the textiles was a scrap of narrow (4.5 cm wide) silk band. In the process of unfolding fragment 2, a second bronze oval brooch was discovered. On its pin, straps of linen and a fragment of a collar from a garment made from a similar linen textile were preserved (Fig. 49.3). Fragment 2 was a large single element (Fig. 49.4). Its total length was 1.5 m, and width was over 0.3 m.

After the complete dismantling of the block of soil, the following objects were found: the remains of the base of a birch bark container reinforced by wood, 11 elements of clothing made of two kinds of fabric (linen and silk), and two oval brooches, which once held the items of costume together.

The various analyses conducted give us grounds to state that the main bulk of the textiles placed in the container consisted of linen tabby cloth folded in several layers. In addition, it was ascertained that all the elements made of silk were covered on the reverse side by a thin layer of degraded linen tabby, with the exception of the tucked-in edges and connecting seams. These facts, as well as traces of the sewing threads, enable us to state that all the silk parts were sewn onto a linen garment. A meticulous examination of all the elements identified led us to the conclusion that the birch bark container contained a set of female clothes, which consisted of two articles sewn from thin blue linen cloth and faced with silk. The date and type of the burial chamber, as well as the presence of two oval bronze brooches undoubtedly belonging to the Viking Age, define the search for parallels of the Pskov find among Scandinavian materials.

From the preliminary studies of the Pskov grave, we have already achieved some interesting results. After the final disassembling of the block of soil and the identification of considerable remains of textiles, of particular interest was detail no. 6. As mentioned above, this item was sewn together from a number of strips of silk cloth. A meticulous examination of each constituent of detail no. 6 showed that they were cut from different fabrics of varying quality. Although in terms of the weave they all belong to a type of samite, each has its own peculiarities, and thus it has proved possible to distinguish among three kinds of silk. (Table 49.2)

Table 49.2. Textiles from detail no. 6.
and IIb were cut. Cloth of type III was used as trimming in area Ib.

In the type I textile, elements of a woven pattern, which included zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs, as well as a floral design, were discernible. It has been possible in the drawings of the single pieces of parts I, III, IV and V in detail no. 6 to identify the fragments of a woven design representing a well-known hunting scene involving the Sassanian prince, Bahram Gur, who ruled Persia in the 5th century AD (Figs. 49.6–49.7). Fabrics with a similar motif are known from finds throughout Europe (Muthesius 1997, 68–72). One example is housed in Milan, Italy (Muthesius 1997, 174, pl. 25a, cat. M 31). It was used for upholstering a part of the golden throne of St. Ambrose manufactured

### Type I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>golden-pink (visual evaluation) pattern against blue background. In some areas, green bands are discernible instead of blue (interchangeable wefts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations with elements of floral design; the repetition of the cloth pattern was impossible to restore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of textile</td>
<td>samite (direction of twill – S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warps</td>
<td>two yarns of the inner warp (in some areas up to three yarns together) and one yarn of the binding warp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the inner warp</td>
<td>1 order, X-twist (step 1.00 mm), thickness 0.20 – 0.30 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the binding warp</td>
<td>1 order, Z-twist (step 0.60 – 0.80 mm), thickness 0.25 – 0.35 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the weft</td>
<td>four: blue, vague yellow, vague pink, green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.25 – 0.5 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.25 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague pink weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.25 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague yellow weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.50 – 0.60 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>16 yarns of the inner warp, 8 yarns of the binding warp and 18 – 40 yarns of the weft per 1 cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Type II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>reddish-violet (visual evaluation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>fine treatment of details; the repeat of the cloth pattern impossible to identify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of textile</td>
<td>samite (direction of twill – S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warps</td>
<td>two yarns of the inner warp and one yarn of the binding warp; up to four yarns of warp together are distinguishable in some areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the inner warp</td>
<td>1 order, Z-twist (step = 0.75 mm), thickness = 0.10 – 0.15 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the binding warp</td>
<td>1 order, Z-twist (step = 1.00 – 0.80 mm), thickness = 0.20 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-violet weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.35 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness = 0.20–0.25 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow weft</td>
<td>without twist, thickness = 0.50 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>40 yarns of the inner warp per 20 yarns of the binding warp and 20–45 yarns of the weft per 1 cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Type III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>unidentifiable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>unidentifiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of textile</td>
<td>samite (direction of twill – S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warps</td>
<td>one yarn of the inner warp and one yarn of the binding warp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the inner warp</td>
<td>1 order, Z-twist (step = 1.00 mm), thickness = 0.25 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the binding warp</td>
<td>1 order, Z-twist (step = 1.00 mm), thickness = 0.20 – 0.25 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarns of the weft</td>
<td>three (colour unidentifiable).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weft 1</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 20 mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weft 2</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.30 mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weft 3</td>
<td>without twist, thickness 0.35 mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>20 yarns of the inner warp per 20 yarns of the binding warp and 20–50 yarns of the weft per 1 cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 49.2. Characteristics of silk types.
Another example of fabric with a depiction of Bahram Gur was found in the tomb of St. Kunibert in Cologne, Germany (Muthesius 1997, pl. 25b, cat. M 347). It was positioned on the line of the lateral seam of the blue sarafan. Moreover, the narrow strip (VII in Fig. 49.5) was sewn onto detail no. 6 (so that in all probability it was positioned on the line of the lateral seam of the blue sarafan). However, the colours of the middle (red-violet) band and of the outer ones (blue-green with a yellow tint) setting the former off, which comprise detail no. 6, as well as the differing directions of the type I fabrics sewn together, give grounds to suggest that the person who trimmed the garment, were mainly interested in the colour combinations of the various parts, and neglected the integrity and direction of the fabric designs. It is probable that the red band (coupled with the same colour of the trimming of the sleeves) decorated the hem of the underdress. Moreover, the narrow strip (VII in Fig. 49.5) sewn onto detail no. 6 (so that in all probability it was positioned on the line of the lateral seam of the blue sarafan), was perhaps red-violet too (it was impossible to identify its colour during the investigation). On detail no. 6, sewn together from seven parts, two types of seams are recognizable. The first is known as an open seam (Khanus 1991). This type of seam is used to join parts Ia and Ib, IIa and IIb, IIIa and IIIb, III and IV, and III and V of detail no. 6 and to sew details no. 3 and 5 (cuffs). The elements sewn to each other are folded with the right side in and stitched together at a distance of 0.5 cm from the edge. The second type of seam, is termed a patching seam (Khanus 1991). This type of seam is used to join parts Ia and Ib, IIa and IIb, IIIa and IIIb, III and IV, and III and V of detail no. 6. A. A. Ierusalimskaja dates their manufacture to the 1st half of the 7th–9th century AD (Ierusalimskaja 1996, 239, abb 222). In Russia, silk textiles with similar designs are so far known only from two archaeological excavations of rock tombs in the cemeteries of Moščevaja Balka and Nižnij Archyz in the North Caucasus (Ierusalimskaja 1996, 239, abb 222). In these burial grounds, the burial goods of Bahram Gur was found in the tomb of St. Kunibert in the Royal Capital of Prague, Czech Republic (Muthesius 1997, pl. 25b, cat. M 347). It was found that the design with the depiction of Bahram Gur is repeated in them with varying sets of elements taken from the complete scene. Moreover, the orientation of the pattern is not followed in these cut outs. First, it looks as if detail no. 6 was sewn together from different scraps of silk. Meanwhile, an attempt to unite all parts of detail no. 6 made from cloth of Type I has demonstrated that the fragments all fit together, supplementing each other and composing a complete repetitive design of the hunting scene. The scene is repeated twice throughout the length of the cloth (Fig. 49.8). Thus, knowing the width of each piece of cloth, it was possible to define the size of the entire woven silk textile from which they were cut. The width did not exceed 46 cm, and the length was at least 1.05 m as defined from the length of the central bands (I, II, III). At present, it is extremely difficult to judge the manufacture of the Pskov silk textiles. In terms of their technological features, they belong to the kind of Byzantine textiles, which are copies of earlier Sassanian cloths. The design of the pattern undoubtedly depicts a hunting scene with Bahram Gur, but the execution of certain elements and details of the pattern display numerous differences from the hitherto known parallels. This is, however, a subject for further study. Here, we will limit ourselves to descriptions of a number of observations recorded during the careful investigation of detail no. 6.

As mentioned earlier, the middle band in the central part of detail no. 6 was composed of red-violet silk of type II (IIa, IIb in Fig. 49.5). Microscopic analysis of details no. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (scraps of trimming bands and cuffs) showed that they were cut from a similar cloth. This discovery has allowed us to interpret the scraps of silk bands (with an identical width of 4.5 cm) as remains of the decoration of the lower hem of the underdress, especially as they are identical in colour to the trimming of the sleeves. A further fact that supports this argument is that during the examination of parts of detail no. 6 from the silk of type I (Ia, Ib, IIIa, IIIb, IV, V), it was found that the design with the depiction of Bahram Gur was repeated in them with varying sets of elements taken from the complete scene. Moreover, the orientation of the pattern is not followed in these cut outs. First, it looks as if detail no. 6 was sewn together from different scraps of silk. Meanwhile, an attempt to unite all parts of detail no. 6 made from cloth of Type I has demonstrated that the fragments all fit together, supplementing each other and composing a complete repetitive design of the hunting scene. The scene is repeated twice throughout the length of the cloth (Fig. 49.8). Thus, knowing the width of each piece of cloth, it was possible to define the size of the entire woven silk textile from which they were cut. The width did not exceed 46 cm, and the length was at least 1.05 m as defined from the length of the central bands (I, II, III).
This seam both connects and is decorative at the same time. One of the edges of parts I and III was turned inside out, superimposed onto the right side of part II and sewn to it (Figs. 49.9–49.10). The two types of seam were both sewn with back stitch (Khanus 1991, 21, 37, 43, 62). Stitches of that kind form very strong seams. On the reverse side their length is two-three times greater than that on the front side. In our case, it was 1 mm on the front and 2–3 mm on the reverse.

The top edge of detail no. 6, the edges of the cuffs at the wrist and one of the edges of details no. 1, 2 and 4 were trimmed with a strip of cloth. A strip of cloth about 3 cm wide was overlaid on the right side of the detail, overlapping it 1 cm from the edge, and was sewn with running stitch. The free hem of the band was then turned round the edge of the detail, folded and sewn onto the reverse side. The opposite edge of the trimming was folded and fixed on the front side of the detail (width 0.5 cm) with back stitch (Fig. 49.11).

Scandinavian Comparisons

At present, there are a number of interpretations of the Viking Age female costume, suggested by researchers such as A. Geijer, M. Hald, I. Hägg, and F. Bau (Geijer 1938; Hald 1950; Hägg 1974; Bau 1982). These reconstructions are based on contemporary archaeological textile finds and iconographic evidence, particularly the textiles from the large
burial ground in Birka (Sweden) and burials in Denmark and Norway. Despite certain variations in the details, the female costume is in general regarded to be a set of four garments: the underdress with a long-sleeved overdress or gown over it. Over the gown, a garment which looked like a pinafore or apron was worn. It was held in place by a pair of oval ‘tortoise’ brooches that fastened the straps sewn on the front and back of the apron. A mantle or cloak served as an addition to the costume. Its edges were drawn together and fastened by means of an equal-armed or round brooch (Geijer 1938, 149–156; Hägg 1974; Bau 1982). Regrettably, neither archaeological textiles (in view of their fragmentary state) nor iconographic evidence (by virtue of its relatively subjective character) can give us a complete idea of the costume type or cut. The so-called apron especially aroused great interest among textile scholars. Its identification and reconstruction was first made by A. Geijer (1938) and later revised by I. Hägg (1974). This part of the female costume seemed to be made of a single piece of cloth folded in two. The longitudinal edges were sewn together by a short seam running from the top down, and placed at the side. On the front, short straps and in the back long straps passing over the shoulders were sewn on. The straps were held together and fastened to the underlying garment by means of fibulae (Fig. 49.12).

Continuing these studies, F. Bau proposed several other suggestions on how to reconstruct the apron. These are based on the comparative analysis of the positions of the remains of the straps corroded onto the pins of brooches, and representations of female figurines (Bau 1982, 25, fig. 9).

A. An apron was a piece of cloth wrapped around the body covering the back and sides and leaving the front open. At the top corners straps were sewn on and two similar straps were placed in the middle of the top edge. The back straps then passed from the back – one over each shoulder to the front – and fastened to the corners by the brooches.

B. To the open front of variant A, a plastron (like a long bib) was added, fastened to the fibulae through additional straps. An apron of exactly this kind is believed to be discernible on a figurine from Tisso in Zealand, Denmark (Jørgensen 1999, 62; Jørgensen 2000, 4.19, p. 85, fig. 4.19).

C. Finally, on the figurines from Tuna in Alsike parish, Uppland and Sibble in Grödinge parish, Södermanland, Sweden (Holmqvist 1960, 113, fig. 23–24), a third arrangement adding a train (again fastened with straps to the same brooches) to the pinafore and bib may be observed.

There is no doubt that the costume of Scandinavian Viking Age women was composed of several articles. Their number possibly varied but the presence of an underdress and (or) overdress over which an apronlike item of clothing was worn is confirmed by several sources dated to the Viking Age. However, as already mentioned above, this evidence does not allow us to determine the construction of these garments with certainty. In that respect, the Pskov find considerably extends the scope of the reconstruction of the costume in general, and such parts as the apron, in particular.
The costume from Pskov

After the complete disassembling of the block of soil with the remains of textiles, 11 elements of clothing made of linen and silk textiles were identified. Their careful examination allowed us to suggest the presence of an ensemble of a female garment consisting only of two articles. These two were both sewn from thin blue linen. The first is an underdress to which details nos. 3, 5, 7 and 10 may be related. The two latter are the remains of a collar (Fig. 49.13) which was turned inside out along the edge of its neck, cut-out and gathered in fine pleats. In front, there was an upright slit in the middle. The folds were fixed with a thin band, which pulled together the edges of the collar. Details no. 3 and 5 made of silk were cuffs – evidently sewn onto the long tapering sleeves of the underdress. The length of the complete cuff (Fig. 49.2) was 12.5 cm, the width near the wrist 10 cm when folded. The lower hems of the cuffs were trimmed with a narrow band of cloth; the upper ones were rolled inside out.

The second article, in Slavic areas traditionally called a sarafan may be akin to the Scandinavian apron. This is connected to details no. 6 (Fig. 49.4) and no. 8 – an apron strap (Fig. 49.14). Detail no. 6 is of particular interest in terms of the reconstruction of the type of garment which it decorated. This detail, sewn from several strips of silk cloth, probably served as the trim of the top edge of the sarafan (as mentioned above, over the entire surface of the reverse side, a destroyed layer of blue linen and the remains of sewing threads have been observed). On the broad central area of detail no. 6, at equal distances from the centre, the base of a strap of blue linen on one side, and the traces of needle holes and the remains of sewing threads on the other, have been identified. The distance between the holes was equal to the width of the preserved fragment of the strap. On one of the narrow lateral strips of the detail described, at a distance of 20 and 25 cm from the place to which it is attached on the broad central part, the remains of threads and signs of sewn on straps have also been recognized (Fig. 49.5). The general symmetry of detail no. 6, as well as the symmetrical position of the remains of one of the straps, and the traces of a similar one on the central part, all suggest the presence of the identical straps on its second narrow lateral strip. Furthermore, since any trace of sewing on the straps is absent on the narrow strip, we may suppose that these were long straps. Such straps are also mentioned by I. Hägg (1974) and F. Bau (1982) in their descriptions of apron. These consisted of a narrow long strip of cloth turned into several layers and folded in two in the middle. The ends of the strips (each separately but close to each other) were sewn to the top edge of the clothing from the back, thus forming a long loop.

Thus all in all this suggests that detail no. 6 constitutes the entire top section of the sarafan, this being the most informative for a reconstruction of this type of clothing. Its broad central part was sewn to the front, passing to the back by narrow strips which were evidently joined at the centre. On the chest, short straps were sewn to the top edge of the sarafan and the long ones were passed from the back over each shoulder (fastened probably to the middle of the back cloth). The front and back straps were fastened by means of brooches, thus fixing the sarafan to the underlying garment. A possible reconstruction of the second article from the Pskov burial most closely resembles the apron reconstructed by A. Geijer. The completely decayed lower part of this garment unfortunately cannot give us any idea of its length nor its design below the silk trimming. Nevertheless, a small detail in the form of a 2 cm wide strip (measured without the folds) sewn to the narrow lateral parts of detail no. 6 (VII in Fig. 49.5) apparently served either as the trim of the cut in the lateral seam or, on the contrary, covered the lateral seam. None of these suggestions contradicts the reconstruction of the apron as proposed by A. Geijer (Geijer 1938, 153–155, abb. 49; Gale R. Owen-Crocker 1986, 29, fig.19, 20). Moreover, detailed examination of the inner parts of the brooches with the traces of a pair of straps on the pins have led us to question the presence of either a pinafare or a train as proposed in F. Bau’s reconstructions (Bau 1982).

The other details (nos. 1, 2 and 4) which are fragments of strips of various lengths (Fig. 49.15) cannot be reliably connected with either of the two above described costumes. The 4.5 cm wide strips turned inside out on one side and trimmed by an additional detail on the other edge probably were sewn onto the hem of either the underdress or the sarafan. On the reverse side of details no. 1, 2 and 4, similar to the cuffs and detail no. 6, a very thin layer of almost completely degraded linen and the remains of sewing threads were recognizable. The general view of the costume from the birch-bark container is shown in Figure 49.16. This is...
a reconstruction based on the evidence and the results of various analyses.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, the unique character of the Pskov find not only allows us to expand our knowledge of the female Viking costume, but also yields rich evidence for understanding the techniques of needlework, principles of tailoring and finally the aesthetic tastes of medieval women. Hopefully, the further examination of the material presented here will shed more light on these issues.

Finds of clothing remains are not uncommon during archaeological excavations in Russia. However, these are mostly small fragments in which the seams are rarely preserved. From this perspective, the Pskov find promises significant information as to the character of the seams and type of the stitches. Summarizing the results of the studies described above, it can be concluded that the Pskov find is of undoubted interest for researchers of ancient textiles, the technology of sewing and the history of costume.

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