

Textile Remains on Roman Vessel from Řepov, Czech Republic

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Animal Fur Hairs

On one-half and inner part of the pail are remains animal fur hair. Two significant clusters of hair (both of approximate length 8 cm, width 6 cm) centred mainly under the upper edge of the pail, but they do not appear in the flexion below the edge. However, the structure of hairs is strong disturbed, so analyses (species determination) done at the Criminology Institute in Prague weren't successful.



Detail of plain weave, first half is still in original state, real fabric, second half is already metamorphized by bronze corrosion, 10 x maximalized, photo: RNDr. M. Králík.

Fabric with plain weave

Small relics of fabric with plain weave are preserved at many points of almost half of the pail surface, on an area of 150 mm (height) x 250 mm (width).

The fabric with plain weave is preserved in three varying forms – 1, as a separate preserved real fabric covered with a layer of patina at some points; 2, as only remains of the lower part of the fabric thread that closely adheres to the pail surface; 3, as through corroded and metamorphous thread that is fraught with corrosion products. It is clear at several points that the fabric is folded in 2 layers.

The fabric is interlaced in plain weave, its remains do not allow for identification of the design and pick of the thread. In one set of the thread, the texture is 20 threads/10 mm, thread thickness 0.3 – 0.4 mm and thread lay Z. In the second set of the thread, the texture is 18 threads/10 mm, thread thickness 0.5 mm and thread lay Z.

At all points in the immediate surroundings of the fabric with plain weave are discernible imprints of very minute and fine hairs of maximum length 3 – 5 mm, which could be traces of the initial surface finish of the fabric (beating?).

We could interpret the fabric with plain weave as a relic of apparel, apparel component or other textile product, which was kept close to the pail as part of the funeral paraphernalia.



Detail of twill weave, 8 x maximalized, photo: RNDr. Králík.

Fabric with twill weave

A small relic of fabric with twill weave is preserved on the bottom of the pail on an area of 103 mm (length) and 25mm (width). The textile relic is in very bad condition; only the bottom of the thread is discernible, the fabric structure is illegible. The fabric is interlaced in dual twill weave 2/1 (the design thread is always interlaced in identical pairs). The design has a texture 18 – 19 threads / 10 mm (i.e. 9 double threads), thread lay Z and thread thickness 0.6 mm (thread pairs alongside 1.2 mm). The pick has a texture of 9 threads / 10 mm, thread lay S and thread thickness 0.6 mm.

Just like the rest of the textile relics, we could interpret the fabric with twill weave as a relic of apparel, apparel component or other textile product, which was kept close to the pail as part of the funeral paraphernalia.

We encounter a very similar, almost analogous case in the territory of modern-day Poland, at Leśnie, where a princely tomb was discovered in 1985, in which a girl was buried. The grave contained a number of textile items, among others, also on a bronze vessel at the head of the deceased. The cloth in this case is interpreted as a relic of funeral attire or parts of apparel, respectively as a gift – consisting of other clothes or fabrics, buried with the body. A further example of textile relics on a metallic vessel is the finding of a silver pan with silk fabric relics. The finding is also from a bone grave at Stráž (Slovakia, beginning of the 4th century), and the author of the publication judges that it is evidence of the clothing of important deceased people in chrisom.

Concerning the cover of the items buried with the body, such a finding is not unique – the items that show traces of cloth coverings were also found at other burial locations from the Roman era in Bohemia (Třebušice – 1st and 2nd century). It seems that some items that were subjected to the heat of the funeral pyre were placed into the caskets only upon burial of the dead. In the case of some smaller shallow graves, we encounter traces of placement of ash directly into the organic containers – textile bags. The preservation of the imprints of the fur is unique in this case. We have not yet encountered such direct proof of the use of furs in the bone rite in the Czech Republic. We usually encounter only bone evidence of a fur animal, as applies, for instance, to the imperial tomb in Muschau (beaver, bear). Also from the findings of bear claws from incandescent burial-grounds in the territory of the Czech Republic, it is judged that important individuals were laid on furs on the funeral pyre.

Although we cannot be certain at present whether this concerned a container for items buried with the dead or an imprint of the chrisom. However, this is not the most important aspect, the finding is important mainly for the fact that it shows the variation in the processing of textile fibre. The textile relics in the bronze pail from Řepov document most of the known weaving techniques, which were used by the German tribes in Northern Europe. Here, we encounter braid with fine plain weave, twill weave and braid made on a tablet loom. To date, no evidence of the latest technique in the pre-historic period has been found in the territory of the Czech Republic. It only remains for us to hope that similar findings will increase and their detailed processing will help put together the picture of textile production in the territory of Bohemia and Moravia in the Roman era.

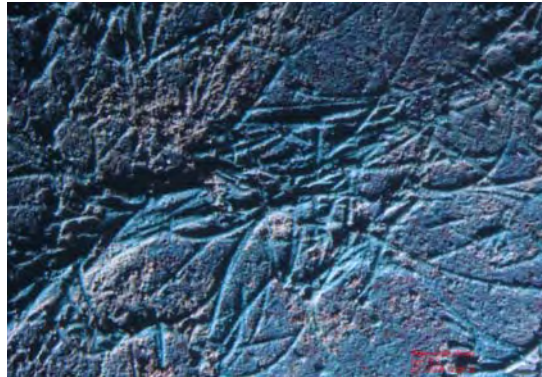
Location of the findings

In 1904, two larger metallic vessels were found beside one another at the location known as "Na Včelníku" on the eastern edge of the Municipality of Řepov, one of them was full of smaller items, and according to the witness of the workmen, also "some bones". Because of this reference and nature of the finding, it is possible to judge that it was not a depot, but a tomb of some important individual (a man?), who was buried some time in the first half of the 2nd century (period B1). That it was necessarily a bone grave is clear from the fact that none of the items were deformed by the heat of the funeral pile. In 1909, the full set was given as a gift to the National Museum in Prague, which has it in its collection to date. The basic items of this set are two large metallic vessels – bronze pail and precious bronze pan with the head of a menadione and a hanging ringlet. The pail contained a set consisting of a strainer with ladle, bronze bowl and other smaller charitable gifts – bronze forging of two drinking horns decorated with silver rivets, a ring, cutthroat razor and scissors.

Bronze pail with textile relics

The most interesting item from the set is the bronze pail of the östland type (Eggers 39), 242 mm tall, dated up to mid-2nd century, which is preserved in perfect condition and according to the available archive materials, it is probable that it has not yet been subjected to conservation procedures.

The lining of the pail is a true treasury of organic relics. Almost half of the outer surface is covered by corrosion and preserved textile fragments or their imprints, twisted thread and remnants of animal fur and grasses. The relics of a fur coat were also preserved inside the vessel. We encounter several textile techniques here: most of the vessel surface is covered by fine cloth and loose twisted threads without any interlacing; on the outer side, we find two small imprints of twill weave and a fragment of braid made on a tablet loom. It is strange that the organic remains have been preserved only on one-half of the vessel – the second half is without any organic fragments. However, it is not ruled out that destruction could occur as a result of inconsiderate handling or earlier (undocumented) efforts to clean the surface of the vessel. It is also remarkable that no textile or organic remains were found on any other item in the set, not even on the items inside the pail.

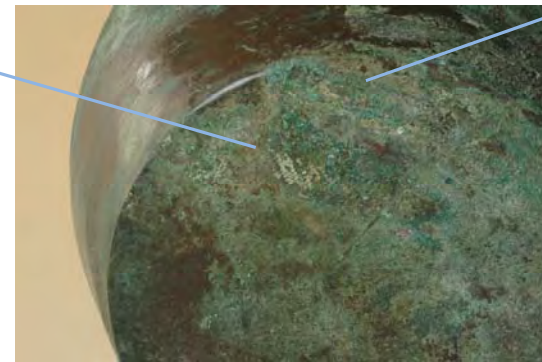


Microscopic photo of hairs, 6.3 x maximalized, photo: RNDr. M. Králík.



View of bronze pail with organic remains, photo: L. Káčová.

View of under side of pail with rests of tablet weave and twill weave, photo: L. Káčová.



Epilogue



Detail of twisted threads, photo: L. Káčová.

Twisted threads

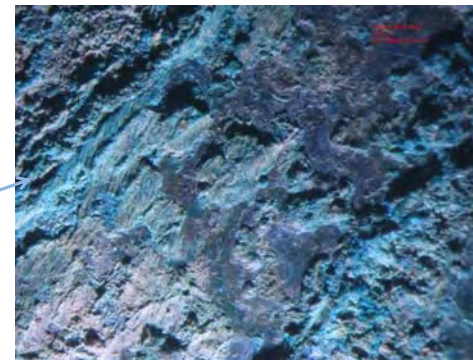
Numerous relics of twisted threads are preserved on almost half of the pail surface, on an area of 150 mm (pail height) x 250 mm (pail width); the largest portion of the remains is found on the maximum bulge of the vessel.

The twisted thread is preserved in three varying forms – 1, as a separate preserved real thread covered with a layer of patina at some points; 2, as only remains of the lower part of the thread that closely adheres to the pail surface; 3, as through corroded and metamorphous thread that is fraught with corrosion products. The twisted thread is preserved as fortuitous clusters, without interlink or clear system; at many points, the threads are intertwined or are interwoven (but not intentionally). At some points, the threads are unwoven into individual strands, which are mutually accidentally interwoven. Neither the initial start nor method for termination of the individual threads is preserved anywhere, the length of the longest discernible twisted thread is 130 mm.

The lay of the twisted thread is 2Z/S, the number of lays per 1 mm is 8. The thickness of the twisted thread is 1 mm and the thickness of the individual strands is 0.5 mm.

The twisted thread survives on the same surface of the pail as the remains of textile with plain weave. The remains of both types of textile products mutually overlap in various ways, but their relationship or sequence of their layering cannot be determined. Between the twisted threads and cloth are arbitrary surviving remains of grass stalks, which probably got close to the pail together with the fill of the object into which the vessel was placed.

We could interpret the twisted threads as fringed decorative finishing of apparel (coat?), the garment components or other textile product, which was kept close to the pail as part of the funeral paraphernalia. Because of the thickness of the individual strands of the twisted threads and their lay, it could have been a decorative finish of a fabric with plain weave, which the twisted thread mingles in various ways on the surface of the pail.



Detail of tablet weave, 6 x maximalized, photo: RNDr. M. Králík.

Tablet weave

Close to the outer side of the pail is fabric with twill weave, but without mutual contact and possibility to ascertain their relationship; a small fragment of braid made on a tablet loom survives. The condition is very bad, only the lower parts of the metamorphous threads are visible at both edges and the middle section of the braid. The width of the initial braid delimited by two traces of the surviving edge is 19 mm, the discernible length of the braid is 80 mm. The number of blocks used cannot be determined with certainty; the thickness of two significantly preserved and measurable strands of the twisted threads from one tablet (1.5 mm and 2 mm) would be about 10 tablets. At the centre of the braid is a clear S-shaped twist.

The tablet weave can be interpreted as a firm girdle (belt, sling), which could be used independently or formed the firm edge of another fabric (twill weave lying close by?). However, the small size of the fragment and its very bad state do not permit evaluation of the relationship between the braid and the other fabric remains in the pail.