

Anna Głowa 

(Catholic University of Lublin)

Joanna Sławińska

(Jagiellonian University Museum Collegium Maius)

THE COLLECTION OF LATE ANTIQUUE TEXTILES FROM EGYPT

Acquired in 1893 by the Archaeological Cabinet
of the Jagiellonian University in the Context
of the Early Interest in “Coptic” Weaving

Abstract

Since 1883, when Theodor Graf (1840–1903) exhibited in Vienna a collection of Late Antique textiles from Egypt, a new trend in collecting antiquities was born. In the next decades, thousands of such textiles got to museums and private collections throughout the world. Some treated them as curiosities, others as examples of ancient craft to serve educational purposes, still others valued them as objects that enriched the knowledge of the daily life and culture in the centuries of the transformation of the ancient civilization. One of the oldest collections of this kind in Poland is an assembly of 52 textiles acquired in 1893 by professor Józef Łepkowski (1826–1894) for the Archaeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University (currently the Jagiellonian University Museum). The paper presents the Archaeological Cabinet’s collection of textiles on a broader background of the 19th-century interest in this specific kind of objects.

Keywords: late Antique textiles from Egypt, Archaeological Cabinet of Jagiellonian University, Józef Łepkowski, Robert Forrer

1. BEGINNINGS OF THE INTEREST IN THE LATE ANTIQUE TEXTILES FROM EGYPT AND THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE FIRST COLLECTORS

Fascination with ancient Egyptian culture and collecting Egyptian antiquities has a long history, reaching back to the antiquity itself (Lloyd 2010; Bednarski 2010; Humbert 2015). The interest in Roman and especially Late Antique period in the history of the Land on the Nile is much younger (O'Connell 2014). Only in the last decades of the 19th century, the cemeteries from Roman and Byzantine times began to be systematically explored and the objects found there started to be valued and desired, both by professional scholars and amateur collectors. The textiles the deceased were buried in belong to the most characteristic artifacts unearthed in Late Antique graves (Thomas 2007; O'Connell 2014: 171), which is related to the changes in burial customs. In this period, the traditional mummification process was simplified and eventually completely abandoned. Instead of the former practice of sophisticated bandaging of the naked mummified body with stripes of linen, now the deceased was deposited in a grave dressed in his garments and wrapped in the shrouds, which were typically reused furnishing textiles such as hangings and covers. Depending on the wealth and status, the dead entered the afterlife swathed in several or more layers of textiles and wrapped around with bands (Dunand, Lichtenberg 2006: 123–130; Dunand 2007: 169–179). The most typical garments of that time – not only in Egypt but also in other parts of Late Roman and Early Byzantine world – were tunics, mantles, and shawls made of linen and decorated with woolen insets of various shapes woven in a tapestry technique (Pritchard 2006: 29–145; Pennick Morgan 2018). Besides linen and wool, silk is another material used in Late Antiquity and sometimes found in Egyptian archaeological sites. Patterned fabrics were made of it, most typically weft-faced compound twill (samit). Among other techniques occurring in clothing and furnishing textiles, quite common is a weft-loop pile weaving (bouclé), brocading (broché), weft-faced compound tabby (taqueté); much less often resist-dyeing, painting, printing and embroideries are encountered (Colburn 2012; Fluck, Helmecke 2012: 244–245). Thanks to the preservative qualities of the hot and dry sands of the Egyptian deserts, many of those textiles survived in a good condition. Brought to light at the end of the 19th century, they allowed for a better comprehension of various aspects of everyday life in Late Antiquity, such as weaving techniques, fashion, and

interior design, that previously had been known almost exclusively from written and iconographical sources. Furthermore, studies of the textiles enhanced the general picture of this period from the historical, sociological, and economical points of view, mirroring various processes going on in a multicultural and changing Late Antique world.

Two men started a boom for collecting Late Antique textiles from Egypt: Joseph von Karabacek (1845–1918) and Theodor Graf (1840–1903). Karabacek was a professor of the History of the Orient at the University of Vienna and later the head of the K.K. Hofbibliothek (now the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek); Graf was carpets and antiquities dealer with premises in Vienna and branches in Egypt (Hunger 1962: 7–9). On Karabacek's request, Graf started acquiring the Late Antique papyri for him, which had just begun to be discovered in large quantities (Karabacek 1883a: 7–9). Karabacek was also interested in Oriental textiles (especially Persian rugs) and strived to study as old history pertaining to them as possible. He incited Graf to search for Late Antique cemeteries, on “a prediction that the discovery of such graves would lift the veil that hides the textile art of antiquity from the eyes of modern scholars” (Karabacek 1883b: 2. Bock 1886: 2). After three years of prospecting the Egyptian grounds, in 1882, Graf was able to satisfy the wish of Karabacek and send him an impressive body of the textiles (Karabacek 1883a: 24; Hunger 1962: 25ff). In 1883, they exhibited part of the assembled objects (455 textiles and 295 papyri) in the k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie (today Museum für Angewandte Kunst) in Vienna. Joseph Karabacek delivered an introductory lecture on the findings and compiled a catalogue of exhibited objects (Karabacek 1883a; 1883b). The Viennese Museum of Art and Industry, created in 1863, was the second of this kind in Europe after the South Kensington Museum (today Victoria and Albert Museum) in London, established in 1852. Both institutions, as well as museums of “arts and crafts” that soon followed the London and Viennese model in other European countries,¹ had a mission to promote a reform of design (Rampley 2010). The elites of the 19th century deplored a crisis of style and a lack of “taste” in the arts and artistic crafts of their time. This crisis was

1 An early example of this kind of institution, modelled directly on South Kensington Museum, was Muzeum Techniczno-Przemysłowe (Museum of Technique and Industry) founded in 1863 in Krakow by Dr Adrian Baraniecki; in the 1870s, such museums were created also in Warsaw and Lvov (Szczerki 2002: 200–220). Very vital – and important for collecting ancient textiles – was a design reform and development of Kunstgewerbemuseums in Prussia (Szczerki 2002: 123–156).

considered to arise among others from industrialisation and mass production. The main purpose of assembling examples of ancient crafts was to educate the general public and inspire artists and designers (Houze 2016). This was undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Viennese Museum bought 769 textiles from Theodor Graf immediately after the exhibition in 1883 (Hunger 1962: 45–46). A catalogue of this collection was prepared by Alois Riegl (1858–1905), an art historian at the Vienna University and a curator in the Viennese Museum of Art and Industry (Riegl 1889).

Both Karabacek's and Riegl's publications are symptomatic for the intellectual atmosphere of the time. Karabacek expressed his admiration for technological qualities of the textiles which "can compete with our fabrics produced in the age of Jacquard machine" (Karabacek 1883a: 30).² He stated emphatically that "the very appearance of the tapestry works just discussed should give a new impulse to our entire textile industry, an impulse which consequently will make us realize to what extent these grave finds have not only contributed to the perfection of our textile arts but also to the refinement of our taste" (Karabacek 1883a: 38).³ Riegl, as a representant of the famous Vienna School of History of Art, which staked on the *Wissenschaftlichkeit* of the field, described all the technical issues in painstaking detail (Riegl 1889: 8–16; Houze 2016: 94). In addition to the technical point of view, both publications reflect on the general character of Late Antique art. Karabacek as the Orientalist could not but connect those textiles with later Persian art and see oriental influences both in techniques and ornaments (Karabacek 1883a: 31–39). Riegl, instead, highlighted the features of classical Greco-Roman art in a process of transformation (Riegl 1889: 17–24), typical for what he defined elsewhere as Late Antique "Kunstwollen" (Riegl 1893. *Idem* 1901). Both Karabacek's and Riegl's voices are representative of important new lines in academic research of the end of the 19th

- 2 "Mehr aber noch als diese die Costümkunde der Alten bereichernde Ausbeute fesseln uns vom Standpunkte der reinen Webertechnik die mannigfachen Stoffarten, welche unser Fund aufzuweisen im Stande ist, Gewebe, welche die Concurrenz mit unseren im Zeitalter der Jacquard-Maschine gefertigten Stoffen gleicher Art wohl siegreich zu bestehen vermöchten".
- 3 "Was ich aber zu guter Letzt noch auf dem Herzen habe, ist, dass meines Erachtens gerade durch die soeben besprochene Erscheinung unserer Gobelinwerke ein neuer Impuls unserer gesammten Textilindustrie gegeben werden dürfte, ein Impuls, welcher in seinen Consequenzen uns erkennen lassen wird, in welch' hohem Grade diese Gräberfunde nicht nur zur Vervollkommnung unserer textilen Künste, sondern auch zur Veredlung unseres Geschmackes in ihren Gebilden bestimmend mitgewirkt haben".

century: on the one hand, oriental studies and on the other, a problem of continuity and change of Roman tradition in the art of the period between Antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁴

After the success of the Vienna exhibition, a new trend in collecting was launched. Graf kept acquiring textiles in Egypt and selling them to museums and private collectors around the world and soon others followed in his footsteps. Until now, it remains uncertain where the first Graf's textiles derived from as the site was kept secret by him and Karabacek to the point that the digs were conducted at night (Karabacek 1883a: 25; 1883b: 2; Hunger 1962: 27, 31),⁵ but soon further discoveries of the Late Antique necropolises occurred. Of special importance was the discovery made by Gaston Maspero (1846–1916), the director of the Egyptian Service of Antiquities in the years 1881–1886 and 1899–1914. In 1884, Maspero identified Late Antique cemeteries in Akhmim, ancient Panopolis (Maspero 1885: 210–212; 1886: 77–78, 83–90). During the following years, this site proved to be a fruitful source of textiles for collectors such as Graf, Franz Bock (1823–1899), Vladimir de Bock (1850–1899), Robert Forrer (1866–1947) and others, who in turn supplied textiles to many museums in Europe and North America (Fluck 2008: 211–213). The cemeteries of Arsinoe in the Fayum Oasis (Fluck 2014: 3; Smalley 2014: 4–10) and of Antinoopolis in Middle Egypt (Calament 2005; Fluck 2014: 5) were other important findspots of the textiles. Several other sites also functioned as “mines” of textiles in the 1880s and 1890s (Török 1993: 13), but the above mentioned provided the largest amounts and the most interesting examples of textiles.

In the contemporary publications of those findings, another factor gained importance besides the features that had already been highlighted by Karabacek and Riegl: the “Christianness” of the textiles (Bock 1886; 1887; Forrer 1891a; 1893; Gayet 1902a; 1902b).⁶ Some of the textiles were even considered to be the earliest known examples of liturgical vestments (Maspero 1886: 211–212) and monastic habits (Gayet 2002a: 56). This seems to be the motivation for one of the most important textile collectors and dealers of this time, Franz Bock

4 Those two “poles” would soon find an eloquent expression in a book by Joseph Strzygowski (1901) with a telling title *Orient oder Rom: Beitrag zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst*, where textiles played a substantial role.

5 Riegl (1889: 5) discloses that their findspot was Saqqara, but today some scholars suspect that it was more likely Arsinoe in the Fayum Oasis. See Fluck 2014: 4.

6 Already Riegl mentions the textiles with depictions of Christian symbols and figural motifs but he does not go deeper into this topic – Riegl 1889: 23.

(1823–1899), a theologian and art historian, canon of Aachen Cathedral. He was associated with the Rhineland reform movement which was developing in the mid-19th century and aimed to revive medieval traditions in church art. Bock initially collected ancient embroidery and textiles to present them to manufacturers of parameters, silk weavers and embroiderers as templates for their works. Inspired by the exhibition of Theodor Graf's collection, in 1885 Bock visited Egypt for the first time and purchased a substantial number of textiles. In the following years, he continued acquiring and selling them to numerous museums (Paetz gen. Schieck 2002: 15–17).⁷

Soon, the textiles started to be perceived not only as samples of ancient weaving techniques and ornamentation to be emulated by contemporary artists and craftsmen but also as witnesses of everyday life in the Early Christian times, which could “complement the knowledge offered by Roman catacombs” (Forrer 1891a: 5; Forrer 1893: 4). Despite the fact that the textiles from Egypt illustrate the universal – and not only local – fashion of the Late Roman and early Byzantine Empire and that they show the influences of various foreign traditions, not to mention that some of them might have been produced outside Egypt and imported, the designation “Coptic” was more and more commonly applied to the whole corpus of these objects.⁸ The authors of the publications mentioned above were aware of the intricacies of the textiles’ “identity”, but it seems that what appealed to the imagination of the general public was a connection of the textiles with the beginnings of Christianity on the Egyptian soil. Very telling in this respect are the reflections of Mrs. Anna Szawłowska-Neumann (1854–1918), a Polish writer and journalist. She spent eight years in Egypt, accompanying her husband Theodor, who was appointed Austrian Consul in Cairo in 1882–1891. In her *mémoires*, Mrs. Neumann mentions “Coptic” textiles, noting that “the elaborated textiles of that time, made of linen and wool with colorful woven patterns, are interesting relics as well; with the precision of the drawing, some

7 It is little known that also one of the Polish institutions, Muzeum Przemysłu Artystycznego (Museum of Artistic Industry) in Lvov acquired textiles from Franz Bock, namely, a complete child's tunic and 17 fragments of various decorative parts of garments purchased in 1888 (Трубинов 1991: 148 on commenting a mistake made by Гонтарь 1991: 114, who confused Franz Bock with Russian Egyptologist Vladimir de Bock). Before World War II, when Lvov was within Polish borders, the textiles were published by Gąsiorowski (1928: passim), but he did not mention their provenance.

8 On the problems connected to the usage of the word “Coptic” with reference to the Late Antique textiles, see for example Stauffer 1995: 5; Thomas 2010: 1062.

of them resemble gobelins and depict biblical scenes, which proves they were the work of Christians. As is well known, the Egyptians were one of the firsts to receive the teachings of Christ; their mind, accustomed to mystical reflection, grasped and comprehended the truth more readily than Hellas, infatuated with sensuality, and proud Rome, stubbornly worshipping the old gods” (Neumann 1892: 41).⁹ The alleged association of the Late Antique textiles from Egypt with the Christian heritage became one more reason behind purchasing them by private collectors and public institutions. This seems to be also the case of the Archaeological Cabinet, whose inventory described the textiles with a simple phrase: “cloths from Christian graves”.

LATE ANTIQUE TEXTILES FROM EGYPT IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CABINET OF THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY AND THEIR PROVENANCE

Most of the textiles in the museums in Europe and North America come from the abovementioned first outburst of excavations in the 1880s and 1890s (Thomas 2007: 137–142). The methods of conducting archaeological excavations in those times were far from today’s standards, especially when it came to preserving or at least documenting the context of the findings. Besides the official excavation, illegal digs, undertaken by local “treasure hunters”, were going on a massive scale, irretrievably devastating the sites (Forrer 1895: 31–32). Neither professional scholars nor antiquities dealers hesitated to cut large textiles into smaller fragments to meet the growing demand and increase their income. As a result, most of the textiles acquired in this period are pieces of bigger wholes, deprived of any archaeological context. Museum documentation is often lacking the information on the findspot, let alone details about the circumstances of the findings (Schrenk 2006: 9–14; Thomas 2007: 137). In consequence, nowadays a scholar interested in Late Antique textiles faces two “jigsaw puzzles”.

9 „Również zajmującą pamiątką są misterne tkaniny z tegoż czasu pochodzące, z lnu i wełny w barwne wzory tkane; niektóre dokładnością rysunku przypominają gobeliny i przedstawiają sceny z biblijnej historii, co dowodzi iż zawdzięczają je pracy chrześcijan. Jakoż wiadomą jest rzeczą, iż Egypczanie jedni z pierwszych nauk Chrystusa przyjęli; umysł ich nawykły do mistycznych rozmyślań, łacniej pojął i zrozumiał prawdę niż rozkochana w zmysłowości Hellada, niż dumny Rzym uparcie starym bogom hołdujący”.

First, he has to put back together fragments of a garment or furnishing textile that was cut in pieces and scattered in the collections all over the world. Second, he has to combine the histories of the singular collections and the biographies of the collectors into a broader picture of the early interest in objects of this kind. A deeper knowledge of one piece or one collection allows to understand better others. Such is also the case of 52 fragments purchased by the Archeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University.

The textiles are attached to the cartoon cards which are bound together to form an album (inv. no. 9352; fig. 1). These are small pieces of decorative bands and round, rectangular or star-shaped insets. Most of them represent the tapestry technique; there are also examples of loop pile weaving and brocading. The majority of the tapestries exemplify what is called “monochrome style” of decoration, which consists of using dyed wool in dark blue, dark red or brownish-violet¹⁰ to weave the motifs, and light linen thread to trace the inner contours and details in the so-called “flying shuttle” technique. The monochrome tapestries usually reproduce geometric and vegetal motifs; figural ones are present to a lesser extent. Most typical are complicated interlaces and knots (e.g., inv. no. MUJ 750:35–38, 750:40, 750:47–49, fig. 2), as well as vegetal *rinceaux* (e.g., MUJ 750:21–23, 750:28), sometimes with rabbits, lions or other animals inscribed in the curves (e.g. MUJ 750:20, 750:27, 750:29–30). There are also polychromatic tapestries with floral ornamentations (e.g., MUJ 750:1, 750:3, 750:7, 715:13b, 750:14 – fig. 3) or figural representations subjected to a lesser or bigger degree of abstraction (e.g., MUJ 750:12, 750:17–18). Two examples of brocading show the rhomboidal pattern (inv. no. MUJ 750:25) and a simplified bird (inv. no. 750:50 – fig. 4). Besides, the album contains three examples of loop pile weaving (inv. nos. MUJ 750:6, 750:43, 750:51), which was especially popular in furnishing textiles. Altogether the collection forms a very basic set of the most common techniques and motifs, representative enough to illustrate the typical decoration of Late Antique garments and furnishing textiles.

So far, the textiles have been published twice (Gąsiorowski 1928: passim¹¹; Ostrowski 2007b), but the question of their provenance remained under-re-

10 The most common red and blue dyes detected in Late Antique textiles from Egypt were madder and indigo. When used together, they imitated the color of true purple dye obtained from *Murex* mollusk, which was a luxury product beyond the reach of average people (Colburn 2012: 162).

11 The paper covers all the collections of Late Antique textiles from Egypt in Poland, but it does not consider them as basic entities – instead, individual textiles from all collections are ar-

searched and uncertain.¹² The investigation of the archival documents of the Jagiellonian University (UJ) did not help to elucidate this matter. The inventory of the Archaeological Cabinet describes the textiles as “cloths from Christian graves”, with annotations “acquired with the funds of the Cabinet”, and “bound in a book”. The year of the purchase was 1893. No information on the source of the acquisition is given. A clue to search for this particular information was provided by parallels to some of the UJ pieces (e.g. MUJ 750-50 – fig. 4) in publications of the textiles from a collection of Robert Forrer (1866–1947), an Alsatian archaeologist based in Strasbourg (e.g., Forrer 1891a: Taffel XII.14; Forrer 1893: Taffel VIII.14; fig. 5).¹³ Further investigation in Forrer’s archive in Strasbourg proved that the UJ textiles indeed derived from him.

Forrer was one of the most prominent figures in the early interest in the Late Antique textiles from Egypt. He started collecting them in 1889 (Schnitzler 1999). In the following years, he published a series of studies in which he at-

- ranged chronologically as well as by type of decoration. The UJ textiles are described on the following pages: 248–249 (fig. 11), 255–256 (fig. 19), 257–258 (fig. 22, 23), 260–262 (fig. 26, 27), 263–265 (fig. 29, 30, 31), 273–277 (fig. 41, 42, 45, 46, 50), and 284–285 (fig. 60, 61).
- 12 Gąsiorowski (1928: passim) does not approach this question at all. Ostrowski (2007b: 192) makes an erroneous supposition that the textiles were donated to the Cabinet by Henryk Loewenfeld (1859–1931), a businessman, who according to Ostrowski presented similar textiles also to the Museum of Technique and Industry in Krakow. Yet, according to the documentation in the archives of the Jagiellonian University and the National Museum in Krakow, Loewenfeld was a donor of Late Antique textiles from Egypt to the Czapski Museum (now the branch of the National Museum in Krakow) in 1921 and there are no traces of his donations to Archaeological Cabinet or to the Museum of Technique and Industry. Ostrowski also says (without referring any sources) that Loewenfeld in turn acquired the textiles from Robert Forrer in 1894. As described further, Forrer’s collection was indeed the source of the Archeological Cabinet’s purchase, but the transaction was made directly with him in 1893. The Museum of Technique and Industry also bought their textiles directly from Forrer, one year later, in 1894. The name of Loewenfeld does not appear in Forrer’s register of his sales at all.
- 13 “Siblings” of the UJ textiles can be found in the museum collections in Berlin (Wulff, Volbach 1926: cat. no. 9042, p. 141, taff. 128), Brussels (I. Errera, *Collection d’anciennes étoffes égyptiennes*, Bruxelles 1916, cat. no. 342), Moscow (R. Shurinova, *Coptic Textiles: Collection of Coptic Textiles, State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow*, Leningrad 1967, cat. no. 227), and Madrid (A. Cabrera and L. Rodríguez, The collection of Coptic textiles in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid: the results of the dye analysis and 14C, in: A. de Moor, C. Fluck eds., *Methods of dating ancient textiles of the 1st millennium AD from Egypt and neighbouring countries*, Tilet: Lanoo 2007, 131, fig. 2a). It is worth mentioning that the one in Berlin was also bought from Robert Forrer.

tempted to systematize information about the style and iconography and introduce a basis for dating the objects (Forrer 1889; 1891a; 1891b; 1893). Unsatisfied with the information on the context of findings provided by the merchants, in 1894 Forrer decided to conduct his own excavations in Akhmim. The observations made during the dig helped him to illuminate several questions and to refine his typology and dating of the textiles. Some of his methods and conclusions are of less value in light of the current state of research (El-Sayed 2018: 183–184), nevertheless, Forrer's letters, which relate his excavations in a reportage manner, are one of the rare examples of the detailed description of the circumstances of the late 19th century discoveries of the textiles (Forrer 1895).

From the very beginning, Forrer was not only collecting textiles but also selling them. As Laszlo Török (1993: 13) put it, “there can be no doubt that not only his publications but also Forrer's sales of both large and small groups of textiles, composed with certain didactical and historical considerations in mind, have greatly contributed to the constant rise of professional and public interest in the art of post-pharaonic Egypt”. Forrer kept detailed records of all the transactions, purchases and sales in a notebook entitled *Verkaufs und Einkaufs und Notizbuch über Koptische Stoffe Geschäft Achmim*, which is now kept in the archives of the Archaeological Museum of Strasbourg.¹⁴ This notebook confirmed the supposition that the textiles for the Archaeological Cabinet of UJ were purchased from Forrer. He gives the exact date of transaction (31 October 1893) and the name of professor Józef Łepkowski (“Łepkowsky”), who was a founder of the Archaeological Cabinet, as the contracting party. Forrer divided both his purchases and sales into separate “lots”. Each lot in the purchases corresponds to the lot affixed with the same number in sales. Thanks to this accurate system of registering the transactions, we can take one more step backwards in the history of the objects purchased by Łepkowski and find out that Forrer, in turn, bought them from a merchant named Tano (lot no 8 in Forrer's notebook). Tano held one of the most successful businesses of the Egyptian antiquities trade in Cairo (Hagen, Ryholt 2016: 266–267) and his name spins another web of connections between the UJ ensemble of textiles and other European collections.¹⁵

14 At this point, we would like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Bernadette Schnitzler. Without her kindest assistance in researching Forrer's archive, the provenance of the Archeological Cabinet's textiles would still remain unknown.

15 Textiles acquired from Tano family are among others in the collections of Louvre, Musée des Tissus in Lyon and Musée Archéologique in Marseille.

How the textiles got into the possession of Tano and what their findspot was is a question to be answered in the course of further research. In the title of his notebook, Forrer used the name “Achmim” referring it to all the textiles – not only to the ones that he himself unearthed in this site but also bought from merchants like Tano. It is tempting to assume that this was indeed the place of origin of the textiles, especially that – as said above – the cemeteries of the ancient Panopolis were providing the most abundant “crops” of textiles in this time. Nevertheless, not knowing on what premises Forrer ascribed all the textiles acquired by him to this site, one has to be cautious. The name of Akhmim had already become famous for its textiles, so the merchants could have been claiming it was a findspot of the pieces they wanted to sell at the best prices (Fluck 2008: 213; Schrenk 2006: 10).

THE TEXTILES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CABINET’S MISSION

Józef Łepkowski (1826–1894) – “Lepkowsky” in Forrer’s notebook – was an art historian and archaeologist interested mainly in prehistoric, mediaeval, and early modern past of Poland. He was the first professor to introduce, in 1863, archaeology as a discipline at the Jagiellonian University. In 1867, he created Archaeological Cabinet to house exhibits which served as visual aids for the lectures (Ostrowski 2007a). Due to the limited funds, at the beginning the Cabinet consisted mostly of the Łepkowski’s private collection and the donations from affluent patrons, such as baron Edward Rastawiecki and counts Alexander and Konstanty Przeździecki, who enriched Cabinet’s collection with numerous archaeological findings from the territory of Poland, or princes Władysław and Marcei Czartoryski, to whom the Cabinet owed most of the Mediterranean artifacts in its collection (Kohn 1877; Gałczyńska 1964; Ostrowski 2007c). In the 1870s, the Cabinet included three sections: prehistorical objects, “classical world” (Greece, Rome and pharaonic Egypt) and “diversa” (Kohn 1877: 152; Żmigrodzki 1877). Besides the Jagiellonian University, Łepkowski was involved with numerous cultural institutions and societies. The one especially worth mentioning is the Princes Czartoryski Library and Museum, which he headed as director for many years (1866–1884) (Ostrowski 2007a: 46).

Taking into consideration the Cabinet’s mission, the questions arise: Why did Łepkowski decide to invest the Cabinet’s funds in objects of this specific

kind? Could they have been used as illustrative material during any lectures at the University?

The Cabinet was not the first Polish museum to acquire the Late Antique textiles from Egypt. As early as 1888, Muzeum Przemysłu Artsytycznego (Museum of Artistic Industry) in Lvov purchased a complete child's tunic and 17 fragments of textiles from Franz Bock (Трубинов 1991). In Krakow, prince Władysław Czartoryski housed in his museum several interesting pieces obtained in winter 1889/90 during his journey in Egypt and in summer 1891, in Paris. Czartoryski's "Coptic" purchases were influenced by French archaeologists and collectors (Głowa 2019a).

Łepkowski must have known those collections, especially the Czartoryski's, but he did not use the contacts to the dealers from whom the purchases in Lvov and Krakow derived. Why did he decide to turn to Robert Forrer? At that time numerous museums, especially in the German-speaking countries, had already purchased textiles from Forrer, for example, Prussian museums of arts and crafts in Wrocław and Gdańsk (Breslau and Danzig at the time), archaeological and arts and crafts museums in Berlin, Nürnberg, Würzburg, Mainz, München, Dresden, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Mitau, Königsberg, and others, as well as Austro-Hungarian museums in Budapest and Prague.¹⁶ Łepkowski was a member of the archaeological societies in several of the mentioned cities (Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Nürnberg, Königsberg, Wrocław) as well as in Vienna (Lepszy 1894: 177). It cannot be excluded that he encountered the Forrer textiles in one of the museums or their divisions.

Besides, textiles from Forrer had one important merit that other dealers' offers did not have: they were provided with scholarly apparatus in the form of Forrer's publications. Both in the Cabinet's inventory and in Forrer's archives in Strasbourg,¹⁷ there are records of Łepkowski's purchase of Forrer's books: *Römische und byzantinische Seiden-Textilien aus dem Gräberfelde von Achmim-Panopolis* and *Die frühchristlichen Alterthümer aus dem Gräberfelde von Achmim-Panopolis*. For the didactical purpose – which the exhibits in the Cabinet

16 Information based on Forrer's ledger *Verkaufs und Einkaufs und Notizbuch über Koptische Stoffe Geschäft Achmim*. We only mention here the institutions in the countries neighboring with Poland and the purchases earlier than Łepkowski's. Apart from them, there are many more museums and private collectors that acquired textiles from Forrer in those and later years.

17 Forrer recorded the sales of his publications in a separate notebook, which is also kept in the archives of the Musée Archéologique in Strasbourg.

were intended to serve – Forrer’s textiles and publications constituted a perfect “teaching set”.

An idea of buying the textiles might have come from Marian Sokołowski (1839–1911), an art historian, who was Łepkowski’s colleague in two institutions: the Jagiellonian University and the Princes Czartoryski Museum. In 1884, he succeeded Łepkowski on the position of the director of the latter one, and since 1894, after Łepkowski’s death, he was in charge of the Archaeological Cabinet (Roztworowski 1998). As the director of the Czartoryski Museum, Sokołowski wrote a paper describing the whole collection with several pages devoted to the Late Antique textiles from Egypt purchased by prince Władysław. He reported the original discoveries of the textiles by Graf and other pioneers in this field, ascertained the meaning of those discoveries for historical studies, mentioned the changes in the burial customs in Late Antiquity and the appearance of the typical clothing of this period, and described the examples in possession of Czartoryski. Sokołowski highlighted the place of those textiles in the history of civilization as a mark of the transition from “classical ancient world to the Christian times” and opening “a new era in the history of art” (Sokołowski 1892: 264). “They”, he went on to say, “bear infallible Christian feature and take our thoughts back to the first centuries and forms of developing Christianity” (Sokołowski 1892: 267). It may be added that in the 19th-century inventory of the Czartoryski Museum the textiles were described in a similar way: “fragments of textiles from the early Christian times”.¹⁸

It must be emphasized that identifying all the Late Antique textiles from Egypt with Early Christian culture is a simplification and today scholars avoid labelling them “Coptic”, nevertheless the point of this paper is to show how the textiles were perceived at the time when they were first brought to light, why they were attractive for the collectors and important for scholars.

As already mentioned, Łepkowski specialized in Polish archaeology and his lectures did not go beyond Slavic territories. Sokołowski’s ambition, as expressed in the program presented during his habilitation, was to provide a cycle of lectures that would cover the history of art starting from ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome through the Middle Ages and ending with the Renaissance

18 These are the words used in case of first acquisitions (made in Egypt on the turn of 1889/90); in case of the second purchase (made in Paris in 1891) the words “form the first centuries of Christianity” are crossed out and the dates “VIII–IX century” as well as information “from Fayoum and Akhmim” is added.

(Kunińska 2014: 74–87). Based on the indexes of lectures given at the Jagiellonian University,¹⁹ it seems that Sokołowski was trying to carry out this plan in the 1880s. He lectured general history of art complemented by classes dedicated to individual periods. Of a particular interest, he delivered lectures titled *The History of Early Christian Art* (1881/82) and *The General History of Christian Art* (1886/87). The current state of research does not allow to analyze Sokołowski's interests in this period, which might connect the decision of purchasing Late Antique textiles for the Cabinet with Sokołowski and clarify if the acquisition was made with a specific purpose in mind or was simply motivated by keeping up with the latest discoveries and trends in collecting antiquities.

RÉSUMÉ

The Late Antique textiles from Egypt acquired by the Archaeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University in 1893 from Robert Forrer are an interesting example of an early collection of this particular sort. The textiles themselves still deserve attention for the same reasons that attracted people to them in the time of their discovery: they illustrate materials and techniques typical for the Late Antique weaving, styles of decoration in dress and interior design, the processes of formal and iconographical evolution characterizing all branches of art in this period. They stimulate imagination by providing – metaphorically but in this case also literally – a “cutaway” of everyday life in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire. Besides the qualities contained in the individual textiles, there are additional cognitive values of the collection as a whole. One is strictly museological and concerns the way of storing and exhibiting the textiles in the 19th century. The Jagiellonian University album exemplifies a typical for this time practice of arranging the textiles on cardboards and binding them together to form a kind of sampler book, which suited one of the basic functions that the textile collections had in the era of the design reform: providing a template of weaving techniques and ornaments typical for a certain period. Another advantage of studying this collection is that it gives an insight to the intellectual atmosphere at the end of the 19th century – the crisis (not only of style but also

¹⁹ *Spis wykładów mających się odbywać w c.k. Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim* published for each academic year.

in other spheres) and growing interest in the periods in the history of civilization (and art) that were undergoing “critical” changes, too. Worth special attention is how the fascination in those textiles mirrors the flourishing interest in Early Christian archaeology, however, this issue goes beyond the scope of the current paper.

Bibliography

Archival sources

- Forrer R. *Verkaufs und Einkaufs und Notizbuch über Koptische Stoffe Geschäft Achmim* – a notebook in the archives of the Archaeological Museum in Strasbourg.
- Inventory book of the Archaeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University – manuscript in the archives of the Jagiellonian University Museum.
- Katalog starożytności zagranicznych* – manuscript in the Czartoryski Library, inv. no. 12779.

Published primary sources

- Bock F. 1886. *Kunstgeschichtliche Beiträge über die vielfarbigen Gobelin-Wirkereien und Purpurstickereien der spätrömischen und frühbyzantinischen Kunstperiode (3.–4. Jahrhundert) aufgefunden in altkoptischen Begräbnisstätten Oberaegyptens im Frühjahr und Sommer 1886*. Düsseldorf: Druck von August Bagel.
- Bock F. 1887. *Katalog der frühchristlichen Textilfunde des Jahres 1886. Beschreibung von Gobelin-Wirkereien in verschiedenfarbiger Purpurwolle und von vollständig erhaltenen Bekleidungsgegenständen der spätrömischen und früh-byzantinischen Kunstperiode (4.–8. Jahrhundert) aufgefunden in koptischen Begräbnisstätten Oberägyptens*. Düsseldorf: Druck von August Bagel. <https://doi.org/10.5479/sil.184570.39088006312540>.
- Forrer R. 1889. Versuch einer Klassifikation der antik-koptischen Textilfunde von R. Forrer. *Antiqua*, 8(9), 57–68.
- Forrer R. 1891a. *Die Gräber- und Textilfunde von Achmim-Panopolis*. Strassbourg: E. Birkhäuser. <https://doi.org/10.5479/sil.183811.39088006312425>.
- Forrer R. 1891b. *Römische und byzantinische Seiden-Textilien aus dem Gräberfelde von Achmim-Panopolis*. Strassbourg: E. Birkhäuser.
- Forrer R. 1893. *Die frühchristlichen Alterthümer aus dem Gräberfelde von Achmim-Panopolis*. Strassbourg: E. Birkhäuser.
- Forrer R. 1895. *Mein Besuch in El-Achmim: Reisebriefe aus Aegypten*. Strassbourg: Verlag von Fritz Schlesier.
- Gayet A. 1902a. *Antinoë et les sépultures de Thaïs et Sérapion*. Paris: Société française d'éditions d'art.

- Gayet A. 1902b. *L'Art copte. École d'Alexandrie, architecture monastique, sculpture, peinture, art somptuaire*. Paris: E. Leroux.
- Hunger H. (ed.) 1962. *Aus der Vorgeschichte der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Briefe Theodor Grafs, Josef von Karabaceks, Erzherzog Rainers und anderer*. Wien: Georg Prachner Verlag.
- Karabacek J. 1883a. *Theodor Graf'schen Funde in Aegypten*, Wien: [Verlag des K.K. Österreichischen Museum].
- Karabacek J. 1883b. *Katalog der Theodor Graf'schen Funde in Aegypten*. Wien: Verlag des K.K. Österreichischen Museum.
- Kohn A. 1877. Das archäologische Cabinet der Jagiellonischen Univeristät in Krakau. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 9, 151–155.
- Lepszy L. 1894. Dr Józef Łepkowski. *Wiadomości Numizmatyczno-Archeologiczne*, 2(1–2), 177–180.
- Maspero G. 1885. Sur les fouilles executées en Egypte de 1881 à 1885. *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien*, 2. Ser. 6, 3–91.
- Maspero G. 1886. Rapport à l'institut Égyptien sur les fouilles et travaux exécutés en Égypte pendant l'hiver de 1885–1886. *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien*, 2. Ser. 7, 196–251.
- Neumann A. 1892. Obrazki z życia nad Nilem (II). *Kronika Rodzinna*, 2, 36–41.
- Riegl A. 1889. *Die ägyptischen Textilfunde im K. K. Oesterreichischen Museum*. Wien: R.v. Waldheim.
- Sokołowski M. 1892. *Muzeum XX Czartoryskich w Krakowie*. Lwów.
- Żmigrodzki M. 1877. Pamiątki przeszłości. Parę godzin spędzonych w Gabinecie Archeologicznym Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 3(63): 151; 3(64): 164–167; 3(65): 186.

Secondary sources

- Bednarski A. 2010. *The Reception of Egypt in Europe*. In: A.B. Lloyd (ed.). *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1086–1108. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444320053.ch47>.
- Calament F. 2005. *La révélation d'Antinoé par Albert Gayet*, vol. 1–2. Cairo: Bibliothèque d'études coptes.
- Carroll D.L. 1988. *Looms and Textiles of the Copts*. Seattle–London: California Academy of Sciences.
- Colburn K. 2012. Materials and Techniques of Late Antique and Early Islamic Textiles Found in Egypt. In: H.C. Evans, B. Ratliff, (eds.). *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*. New York–New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art–Yale University Press, pp. 161–163.
- Dunand F., Lichtenberg R. 2006. *Mummies and Death in Egypt*. New York: Cornell University Press.

- Dunand F. 2007. Between Tradition and Innovation: Egyptian Funerary Practices in Late Antiquity. In: R.S. Bagnall (ed.). *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 163–184.
- El-Sayed R. 2018. Spätantike Fundobjekte aus Ahmim-Panopolis (Ägypten) in Nürnberg. In: *Beitrag zur Sammlungsgeschichte des Germanischen Nationalmuseums und zur Rekonstruktion der ehemaligen Collection Robert Forrer, Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums 2016*. Nürnberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, pp. 183–204.
- Fluck C. 2008. Akhmim as a source of textiles. In: G. Gabra, H. Takla (eds.). *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, vol 1: *Akhmim and Sohag*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 211–223. <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774161223.003.0019>.
- Fluck C., Helmecke G. 2014. Egypt's Post-Pharaonic Textiles. In: G. Gabra (ed.). *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, pp. 237–260.
- Fluck C. 2014. Findspot known: Treasures from excavation sites in Egypt in the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin. *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan*, 21, 1–30.
- Gałczyńska C.Z. 1964. Historia zbioru zabytków archeologicznych w Muzeum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. *Meander*, 19(10), 452–463.
- Gąsiorowski St. J. 1928. Późnohellenistyczne i wczesnochrześcijańskie tkaniny egipskie w zbiorach polskich. *Prace Komisji. Historii Sztuki PAU*, 6, 251–292.
- Głowa A. 2019a. “French connection”. The contacts of Władysław Czartoryski in Egypt and his acquisition of late antique textiles – the background for the history of the collection. In: A. de Moor, C. Fluck, P. Linscheid (eds.). *Egypt as a textile hub. Textile interrelationships in the 1st millennium AD*. Tiel: Lannoo Publishers, pp. 192–201.
- Gontar' T.A. 1991. Koptskie tkani v sobranii L'vovskogo Muzeâ Ètnografii i Hudożestvennogo Promysla an USSR. *Sovetskaâ ètnografiâ*, 1, 114–119.
- Hagen F., Ryholt K. 2016. *The Antiquities Trade in Egypt 1880–1930*. Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab.
- Houze R. 2016. *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary Before the First World War*. New York: Routledge.
- Humbert J.-M. 2015. Egyptomania: Fascination for Egypt and Its Expression in the Modern World. In: M.K. Hartwig (ed.). *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 465–481. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118325070.ch24>.
- Kunińska M. 2014. *Historia sztuki Mariana Sokołowskiego*. Kraków: Universitas.
- Lloyd A.B. 2010. The Reception of Pharaonic Egypt in Classical Antiquity. In: Lloyd A.B. (ed.). *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1067–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444320053.ch46>.
- O'Connell E. 2014. The Discovery of Christian Egypt: From Manuscript Hunters toward an Archaeology of Late Antique Egypt. In: G. Gabra (ed.). *Coptic Civilization:*

- Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, pp. 163–176.
- Ostrowski J. 2007a. Profesor Józef Łepkowski (1826–1894) – twórca uniwersyteckiego Gabinetu Archeologicznego. In: J. Śliwa (ed.). *Egipt, Grecja, Italia...: zabytki starożytne z dawnej kolekcji Gabinetu Archeologicznego Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, pp. 43–48.
- Ostrowski J. 2007b. Antyczne tkaniny znad Nilu w zbiorach Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. In: J. Śliwa (ed.). *Egipt, Grecja, Italia...: zabytki starożytne z dawnej kolekcji Gabinetu Archeologicznego Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, pp. 188–192.
- Ostrowski J. 2007c. Książęta Czartoryscy darczyńcami Gabinetu Archeologicznego UJ. In: J. Śliwa (ed.). *Egipt, Grecja, Italia...: zabytki starożytne z dawnej kolekcji Gabinetu Archeologicznego Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, pp. 91–96.
- Paetz gen. Schieck A. 2002. *Textile Bilderwelten. Wechselwirkungen zwischen Ägypten und Rom. Untersuchungen an 'koptischen' Textilien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung unbearbeiteter Sammlungsbestände in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (PhD thesis). [S.n.]: Universität zu Köln, <https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/2130/>, accessed on 12.11.2021.
- Pennick Morgan F. 2018. *Dress and personal Appearance in Late Antiquity. The Clothing of the Middle and Lower Classes*. Leiden–Boston: Brill. *Late Antique Archaeology (Supplementary Series)*, vol. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004353466>.
- Pritchard F. 2006. *Clothing culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium AD*. Manchester: The Whitworth Gallery, The University of Manchester.
- Rampley M. 2010. Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire: Technology, Aesthetics and Ideology. *Journal of Design History* 23(3), 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epq021>.
- Roztworowski M. 1998. Kraków, [cz. 3]. In: Z. Żygulski (ed.). *Muzeum Czartoryskich. Historia i zbiory*. Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, pp. 158–162.
- Schnitzler B. 1999. *Robert Forrer (1866–1947): Archéologue, écrivain et antiquaire*. Strasbourg: Société Savante d'Alsace et Musées des Strasbourg.
- Schrenk S. 2006. Introduction. In: S. Schrenk (ed.). *Textiles in situ. Their Find Spots in Egypt and Neighbouring Countries in the First Millennium CE*. Riggisberg: Abegg Stiftung, 9–14.
- Smalley R. 2014. Identifying Provenance: Flinders Petrie's Textile Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. *Journal of the History of Collections*, 27(2), 1–12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhu055>.
- Stauffer A. 1995. *Textiles of Late Antiquity*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Szczerski A. 2002. *Wzorce tożsamości. Recepcja sztuki brytyjskiej w Europie Środkowej około roku 1900*. Kraków: Universitas.

- Śliwa J. 2017. Archeologia śródziemnomorska w Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim (1897–1998). *Meander*, 72, 143–163.
- Thomas Th.K. 2007. Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt: Corpora, Collections and Scholarly Perspectives. In: R.S. Bagnall (ed.). *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 137–162.
- Thomas Th.K. 2010. Egyptian Art of Late Antiquity. In: Lloyd A.B. (ed.). *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 1032–1063. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444320053.ch45>.
- Török L. 1993. Textiles. In: *Coptic Antiquities*, vol. 2. Roma: L'erma di Bretschneider. *Bibliotheca archaeologica* (Rome, Italy), 11–12.
- Trubinov Ū.V. 1991. Po povodu odnoj publikacii. *Rossijskoj arheologii*, 6, 148.
- Woźny M., Dziegielewski K. 2018. 150 years of the Jagiellonian University Archaeological Cabinet. Past and present. *Recherches Archeologiques. Nouvelle Serie*, 9, 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.33547/RechACrac.NS9.07>.
- Wulff O., Volbach W.F. 1926. *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Grabfunden in den Staatlichen Museen, Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Ägyptisches Museum, Schliemann-Sammlung*. Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth.
- Гонтарь Т.А. 1991. Коптские ткани в собрании Львовского Музея Этнографии и Художественного Промысла ан УССР. *Советская этнография*, 1, 114–119.
- Трубинов Ю.В. 1991. По поводу одной публикации. *Российской археологии*, 6, 148.

List of illustrations

- Fig. 1. A textile album acquired in 1893 by the Archaeological Cabinet of the Jagiellonian University (now the Museum of the Jagiellonian University; textiles inv. nos. MUJ 750:19; 750:20, 750:21).
- Fig. 2. Monochrome tapestries with geometrical and floral designs (inv. nos. MUJ 750:45, 750:46, 750:47).
- Fig. 3. Polychrome tapestries with vegetal and figural motifs (inv. nos. MUJ 750:15, 750:16, 750:17, 750:18).
- Fig. 4. A simplified bird brocaded with wool on linen tabby ground (inv. no. MUJ 750:50).
- Fig. 5. A plate from Robert Forrer's publication *Die frühchristlichen Alterthümer aus dem Gräberfelde von Achmim-Panopolis* (Forrer 1893).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

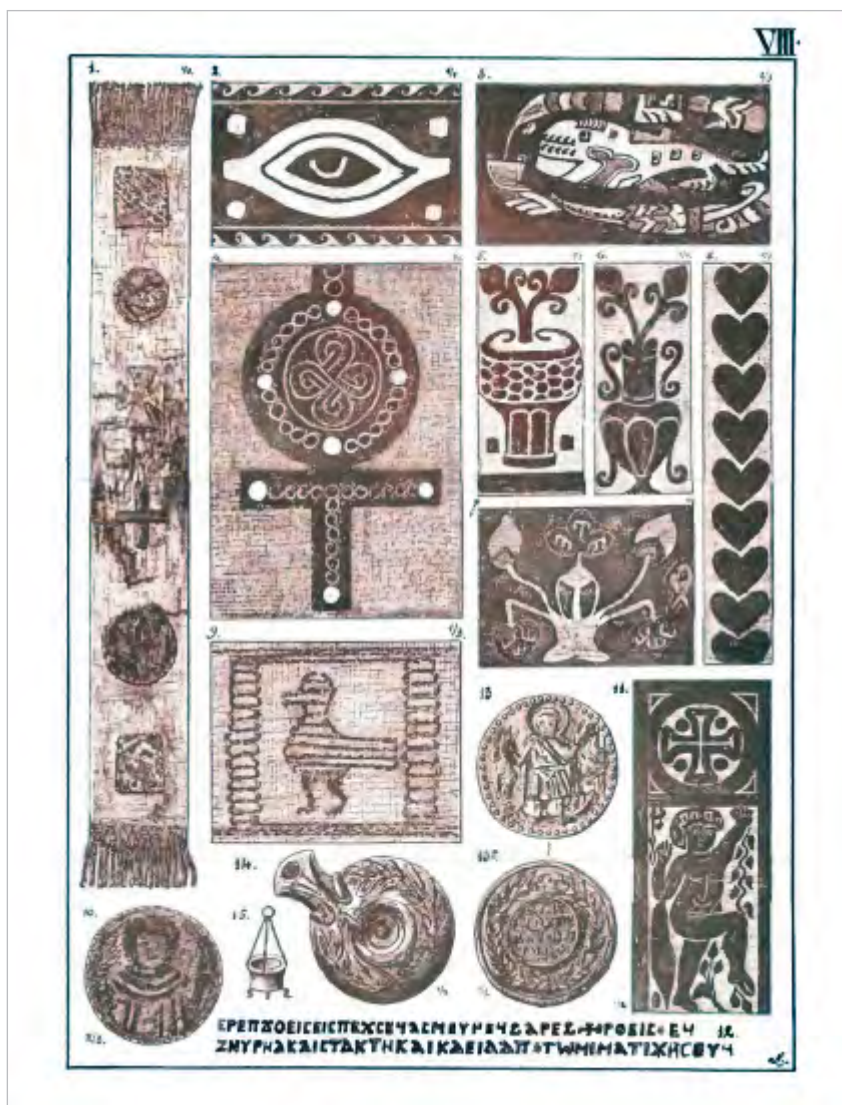


Fig. 5