

Ida Demant

# From stone to textile: constructing the costume of the Dama de Baza

In 2007 Professor Carmen Alfaro Giner, University of Valencia contacted Anne Batzer, hand weaver at the Textile workshop at Sagnlandet Lejre, Historical Archaeological Research and Communication Centre, with a request of producing a textile replica of the costume of the Dama de Baza. This life-size stone statue representing a woman dressed in a characteristic Iberian costume is dated to the 3rd century BC and still preserves traces of colour (Fig. 1). The sculpture is cremation urn and was recovered from one of the two necropoleis of the Ibero-Roman town of Baza in the northeast area of the province of Granada, Spain. The figure is seated in an armchair, and an open space in its side is believed to have contained ashes from a cremated person. The costume of the figure presumably represents the costume of a woman belonging to the elite of Iberian society, and similar costumes have been noted on other contemporaneous figurines and statues (Alfaro Giner forthcoming). Characteristic for these outfits are a tunic and a large mantle which covers most of the body, sometimes combined with an elaborate headdress.

The work constructing the costume was initiated in 2009 by Anne Batzer and the author, and is briefly presented here.

The Dama de Baza is depicted in a costume consisting of four garments and a headdress. Besides a mantle which covers her head and body, she is also wearing a tunic. Both these costume items have traces of a blue colour on the surface and are decorated with the same blue and red checked borders. Details depicted above the feet suggest the presence of two undergarments which are longer than the tunic and have no colour traces. The shape of these garments is not evident. Translating this information into a life-size 3D functional costume was not an easy task

and demanded a good deal of experimenting and a profound knowledge of ancient textile production and costume traditions.

In ancient times, it was common to dye wool textiles, whereas linen was praised for its whiteness. Thus it was decided to produce the blue mantle and tunic in wool and the undergarments in linen. Linen is a soft



Figure 1. The lady of Baza on display at the National museum of Madrid (Photo Julia Martínez).



and smooth material which would have been nice to wear next to the skin, whereas wool worn as the outer layers would have offered insulation against both heat and cold.

The greatest challenge in making this costume, however, was to find the right shape of the garments, so when placed on a seated mannequin they would look like the garments on the statue. Costumes produced at the time of the Dama de Baza were rarely cut and sewn to shape. More commonly rectangular off-the-loom pieces of cloth were draped around the body (Granger-Taylor 1982). Only few (if any) edges were cut and hemmed before the garments were ready to wear.

While it seemed likely that the tunic and the undergarments were based on rectangular shapes, it was soon realised that the mantle needed a more

elaborate shape to create the desired folds along the front edge. The angled corners by the feet of the statue indicate that the mantle should have at least one straight edge, but in order to create the characteristic folds of the border at the front of the mantle, a curving edge would be necessary. Therefore we experimented with various semi-circular shapes in order to get the right effect of a wavy frontline. The result was a garment that was 230 cm long and 140 cm high at the maximum, which would fit a woman 160 cm high. The reconstructed mantle was woven to shape on a modern treadle loom, but the semicircular shape could also be woven on an upright warp-weighted loom. It was an important factor in this project that theoretically the garments should be possible to produce using tools and techniques known to the Iberian craftspeople.

After the mantle fabric was finished the checked



**Figure 2.** The fabric for the mantle before adding the border (Photo: Ida Demant).



border was added using the tablet weaving technique. This is a very common method for weaving borders. In Spain tablet weaves dated to the 4th century BC have been found, which are contemporary with the Dama de Baza (Hundt 1968). The long loose warp ends were used as weft threads in the tablet weave and in this subtle way it was possible to make a border that followed the curving edge of the mantle (Fig. 2). On the statue the border is 8 cm wide. To make it this wide we had to use 84 tablets, each holding 4 warp threads (Figs. 3 and 4). It was possible to weave 7-8 cm/hour, and as the border had to be 3.5 m long, it took approximately 50 hours to make this border. This recording gives a hint of the time invested in textile production in antiquity.

The shape of the three other garments cannot be deduced directly from the statue, and was thus open for interpretation. Nevertheless, it was imperative that they should reach the ground, be wide enough for walking and be based on rectangular shape, as common at the time of the Dama de Baza. On this basis it was decided to make wide sleeved tunics for the blue tunic and for one of the undergarments. The other undergarment was made as a skirt. A skirt used as the middle garment, would further give the

**Figure 3. The checked border is added to the mantel using the loose warp-ends as weft in a tablet weave (Photo: Ole Malling).**



**Figure 4. A close-up of the tablet-woven border during weaving. (Photo: Ole Malling).**



advantage of holding the inner tunic tight at the waist and adding a better drape to the tunic. As the tunic and the mantle have several identical details, similar colours and the checked borders, which indicate that they were technically related, they were also produced in the same kind of fabric. The fabric for the two undergarments was also hand-woven in two different qualities – a fine linen fabric for the inner tunic and a coarser quality for the skirt.

### Conclusion

Semicircular mantles and cloaks are though rare known in archaeological textile finds (Stauffer 2002, Granger-Taylor 1982). In the case of the Dama de Baza

the mantle was worn with the curve turned upside, whereas in most cases we would have been inclined to think that they were worn with the curve turned downwards. The textile replica of the outfit of the Dama de Baza is not a reconstruction of an original costume from the 4th century BC in Southern Spain, but it offers a suggestion to how the costume might have looked and how it could have been produced (Fig. 5). As such, experiments reconstructing ancient costumes are an excellent way of testing and communicating theories about various methods for textile production and how costumes were worn. The textile replica of the Dama de Baza will in due time be incorporated in the DressID exhibition “*DressCode im Alten Rom – Kleidung und Identität der Antike*” which will open in Mannheim in February 2012.



### Bibliography

Alfaro Giner, C. (forthcoming) Aspekte der weiblichen Iberischen Kleidung. In *DressCode im Alten Rom – Kleidung und Identität der Antike (exhibition catalogue)* Mannheim.

Granger-Taylor, H. (1982) Weaving cloth to shape in the ancient world: the tunic and toga of Aringatore. *Textile History* 13, 3-25.

Hundt, H. J. (1968) Die Verkohlte Reste von Geweben, Geflechte, Seilen und Schnüren aus Grab 200 von El Cigarralejo. *Madridrer Mitteilungen* 9, 187-205.

Stauffer, A. (2002) I tessuti. In P. Von Eles (ed.) *Guerriero e sacerdote. Autorità è comunità nell'età del ferro a Verucchio. La Tomba del Trono*, Firenze, 192-219.

**Figure 5. The textile replica of the Dama de Baza (Model: Helle C. Andersen; Photo: Ole Malling).**