



Maciej Szymaszek

A Forgotten Cultural Heritage

Late Antique Textiles in Swedish Museum Collections

Roughly 2000 late antique fabrics of Egyptian origin that were brought to the country in the 19th and the 20th century are now contained in Swedish museums. The ongoing project *A forgotten cultural heritage. Late antique textiles in Swedish museum collections* aims to investigate this largely unknown and unpublished material. The work was initiated in autumn 2013 with a preparatory study and is being continued as a post-doctoral project at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Thanks to funding received from the Swedish Institute and the Birgit och Gad Rausing's Stiftelse, it was possible to carry out enquiries and study visits at a selection of museums in order to conduct a preliminary analysis of the material and to define the direction of future research. The work revealed a number of pieces that are of great interest for the history of late antique textiles collections in Sweden as well as written sources.

The largest collection of late antique textiles in Sweden was formed in the 1930s by Carl Johan Lamm, who purchased over 900 pieces in Egypt, although only a very small part of his collection is mentioned in his reports (Lamm 1933a, 1933b, 1934, 1936). By the mid-20th century, the textiles brought by Lamm had already been spread throughout the country and were incorporated into museums in Gothenburg, Lund and Stockholm. Publications discussing selected objects were mostly written in the 1920s and 1930s by Lamm and his colleagues such as Vivi Sylwan (1920, 1923, 1932) and Maurice Sven Dimand (1922, 1924). Over 50 years later, Marianne Erikson revived these studies by describing a selection of pieces kept in the Röhsska Museum in Gothenburg and presenting a brief overview of the collections of late antique textiles

in Sweden (Erikson 1997). Even the valuable work of Erikson cannot be regarded as sufficient to give a full understanding and appreciation of this material that was brought to Sweden by collectors and textile enthusiasts. The concluding results of the preparatory stage of this project consist of an inventory of late antique textiles and a preliminary analysis of gathered material. During this work it was possible to state that barely 7 % of the textile objects have ever been published and only very few fabrics have been presented to the public. Furthermore, no attention has been paid to the correspondence and connections between textile merchants and museums that offer a promising source for investigating the development of textile studies in Sweden.

A collection of 55 fabrics, which are stored at the Museum of Vänersborg in Sweden, is an example of the significant findings which have been revealed during the preparatory research. The pieces formed the nucleus of the museum, which was established in the 1880s, making it one of the oldest collections of late antique textiles in the Nordic countries. Direct inspection of the objects has allowed the recognition of, among others, large fragments of woollen textiles decorated with the so-called *gammadia* (Szymaszek forthcoming).

The project is scheduled to last for a period of four years and aims to reintroduce late antique textiles stored in Swedish museums into the scholarly community through a comprehensive study, focusing not only on technical and iconographic aspects, but also on issues related to the process of musealisation of ancient fabrics in Sweden.



Fig. 1. Photo of the piece MMT 982 (Photo: Ola Myrin, © Malmö Museum).

Bibliography

Dimand, M. S. (1922) Några koptiska textilier i Lunds Kulturhistoriska Museum. *Svenska Slöjdföreningens Tidskrift* 18, 33-36.

Dimand, M. S. (1924) *Die Ornamentik der Ägyptischen Wollwirkereien. Stilprobleme der spätantiken und koptischen Kunst*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.

Erikson, M. (1997) *Textiles in Egypt 200-1500 A.D. in Swedish Museum Collections*, Göteborg: Röhsska museet.

Lamm, C. J. (1933a) Egyptiska textilier i Nationalmuseum I. *Nationalmusei årsbok*, 1-11.

Lamm, C. J. (1933b) Två egyptiska tyger. *Årstryck. Röhsska konstslöjdmuseet*, 53-60.

Lamm, C. J. (1934) Egyptiska textilier i Nationalmuseum II. *Nationalmusei årsbok*, 14-30.

Lamm, C. J. (1936) Some Woollen Tapestry Weavings from Egypt in Swedish Museums. *Le monde oriental: revue des études orientales* 30, 43-77.

Sylwan, V. (1920) Studier i senantik textil konst. Några tekniska problem. *Rig. Föreningens för svensk kulturhistoria tidskrift*, 129-144.

Sylwan, V. (1923) Studier i senantik textil konst. Några skaftvävnader. *Rig. Föreningens för svensk kulturhistoria tidskrift*, 59-79.

Sylwan, V. (1932) En senantik gobelinmedaljong. Till den textila guldtrådens historia. *Årstryck. Röhsska konstslöjdmuseet*, 49-65.

Author: maciej.szymaszek@gmail.com