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# Ginderup – Textiles and Dress from the Bronze Age Gleaned from an Excavation Photograph

## Introduction

In general, actual remains of archaeological textiles are the source for data such as weave, spin direction, yarn diameter or thread count, even though impressions on pottery or metal may sometimes serve this purpose. In this paper the information derives from high quality excavation photographs. Unfortunately, despite good intentions, the textiles themselves were destroyed during post-excavation processes.

In 1933 Johannes Brøndsted from the National Museum of Denmark excavated a ploughed out burial mound in Ginderup, Heltborg parish, Thy, Denmark. The central burial, grave A, proved to be a stone cist. It contained a great quantity of organic material, too fragile to recover, but this was at least recorded in drawings, reports and photographs (Brøndsted NM Archive). The interior of the stone cist was 1.7 m long and 0.25-0.45 m wide. The grave contained some skeletal remains and a neck-ring, a fibula, a double button, two arm-rings and one finger-ring (Aner and Kersten 2001, 198; Brøndsted NM Archive). The artefacts help date the grave to Montelius period III, i.e. 1300-1100 BC. The grave goods indicate that the deceased was a woman.

After initial recording and photographing at the site, the grave was removed *en bloc*. First the grave was covered by a layer of sand, followed by tissue paper. Plaster was then poured on top. Then, all of the side stones of the cist were removed and all four sides were covered by plaster. A wooden box was built around this, and the entire block was taken to the museum to be excavated in the conservation

laboratory (Brøndsted NM Archive). The Ginderup grave is briefly mentioned by H.C. Broholm and M. Hald (1935, 286) in their study of Bronze Age clothing, which tells us that they were aware of the find, but only the possibility of it containing a corded skirt was stated. A report from the excavation of the block has not been found by the authors. Despite the fact that large textile fragments can be seen in the excavation photographs, not a single textile fragment survived. Fortunately, two very high quality photographs were taken before the plaster treatment began. Much information can be gained about the textiles from these photographs, particularly when combined with the available measurements of the artefacts.

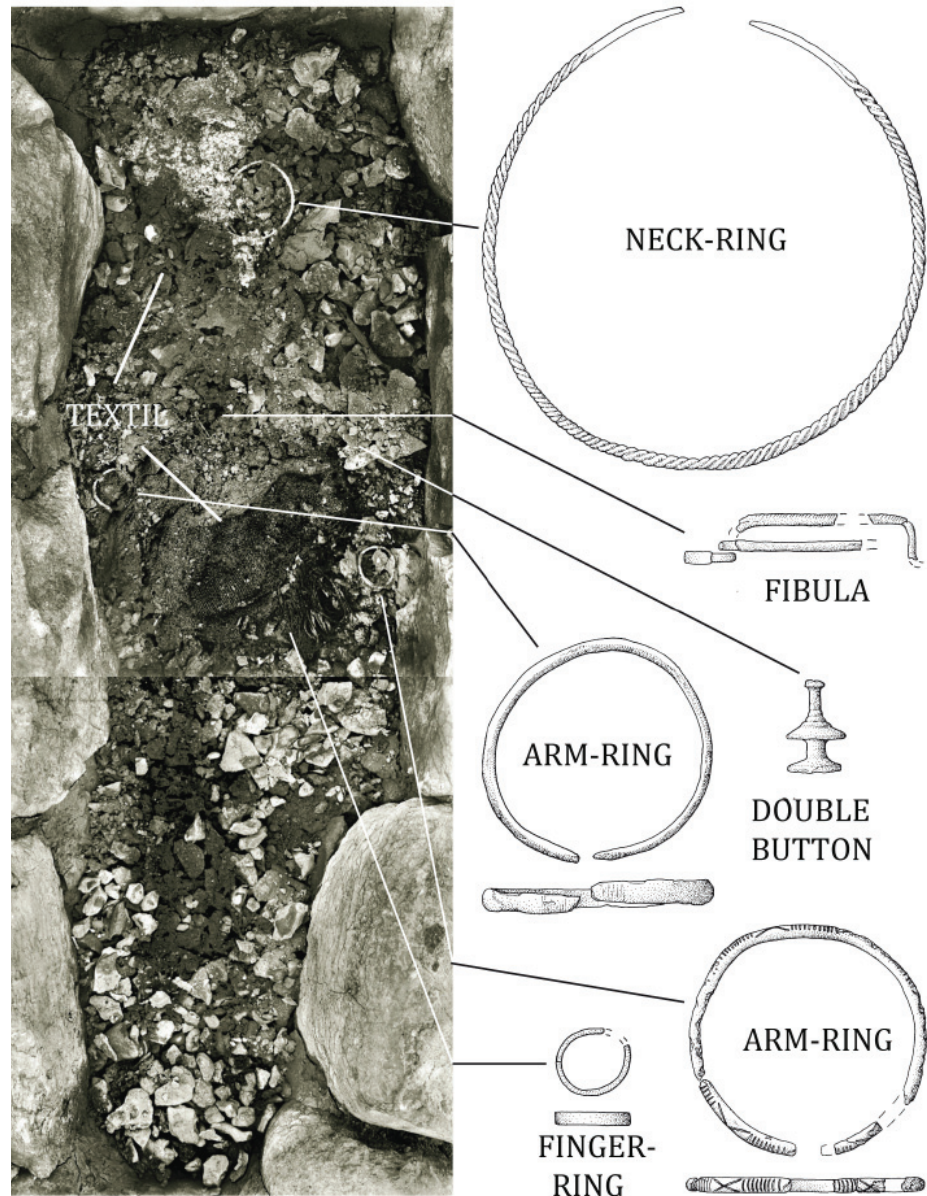
## Blanket

The entire inner space of the grave was originally more or less covered by textiles (Brøndsted NM Archive). Not all of these textile fragments are visible in the photographs (Fig. 1). It is however clear that the deceased was covered by a large textile woven in tabby. Close examination of the photographs shows that the fabric was made with s-twisted yarn in one direction and z in the other (however, it is impossible to determine warp and weft direction) and the thread count was 3.5/4.5 threads/cm, the threads being c. 1.2 mm thick. This can most clearly be seen in the larger piece of textile that survived in the waist area of the deceased. As all visible pieces of woven fabric have the same visual appearance, it is likely that all the tabby woven textiles derive from the same fabric.

As far as we know, all of the well-known oak-log



**Fig. 1. The Ginderup burial, based on the photographs in the National Museum of Denmark and illustration from Aner and Kersten 1973 (After Bergerbrant et al. 2012, © Skalk).**



coffin burials with complete garments had a textile placed on top of the deceased. In the four male graves, i.e. Muldbjerg burial, Borum Eshøj graves A and B, and Trindhøj, the cloak had been used as a cover, and in the case of Muldbjerg the deceased was also covered by a 2.15 x 1.2 m blanket under the cloak (Boye 1896, 35, 54, 57, 91). The female burial of Egtved was also covered with a large piece of woven cloth, determined by Broholm and Hald (1940, 82) to have been a blanket (Thomsen 1929, 175-176). In the case of Skrydstrup, the deceased was covered by two large folded textiles, A and B (Broholm and Hald 1939, 21, 49-51). The female burial of Borum Eshøj grave C had been found by farmers, the coffin turned over and the garments removed before the contents could be documented (Boye 1896, 51). According to the description obtained from the perpetrators, this body had also been covered by woven fabric (Broholm and Hald 1935, 276). In two other oak coffins, Store Kongehøi A and B, the deceased had also been covered by cloth that unfortunately could not be salvaged (Boye 1896, 81-3). The cremation grave from Hvidegård was likewise covered by a woven cloth (Aner and Kersten 1973, 143-45). The textile covering

of the Ginderup grave is made of *s/z* yarn like most of the other examples, except one of the blankets from Skrydstrup and the cloak from Borum Eshøj grave A (Tables 1 and 2). Generally the thread count varies between c. 3/3 threads/cm (Egtved) and c. 4/6 threads/cm (Hvidegård).

#### **Corded skirt**

Even more interestingly, remains of another item of clothing can be glimpsed under the large tabby woven textile visible in the photographs. These are cords, deriving from a corded skirt like the well-known example from the Egtved oak-log coffin and fragmented remains of similar skirts from several other Bronze Age sites in Denmark (Broholm and



Blankets	Twist warp	Twist weft	Thread count warp (per cm)	Thread count weft (per cm)	Reference
Borum Eshøj grave C	s	z	4.6	3.1	Broholm and Hald 1935, 276
Egtved	s	z	2.8-4.2	2.6-3.2	Broholm and Hald 1935, 281f
Muldbjerg	s	z	4.2	3.4	Broholm and Hald 1935, 224
Skrydstrup blanket A	s	s	4.4-4.7	3.0-3.2	Broholm and Hald 1939, 49
Skrydstrup blanket B	s	z	4.1-4.5	4	Broholm and Hald 1939, 49f
Trindhøj	s	z	4.3-5.4	2.9-4.2	Broholm and Hald 1935, 240ff
Hvidegård	s	z	4	6	Bender Jørgensen 1986, 189

**Table 1. Technical characteristics of blankets recovered from various oak-log coffins and the cremation grave of Hvidegård in Denmark.**

Cloaks	Twist warp	Twist weft	Thread count warp (per cm)	Thread count weft (per cm)	Reference
Borum Eshøj grave A	s	s	3-4.5	2.1-3.5	Broholm and Hald 1935, 255
Borum Eshøj grave B	s	z	3.6-4.6	2.2-3.2	Broholm and Hald 1935, 264
Muldbjerg	s	z	3.7	2.7-2.8	Broholm and Hald 1935, 216
Trindhøj	s	z	4	3	Broholm and Hald 1935, 232

**Table 2. Technical characteristics of cloaks recovered from various oak-log coffins in Denmark.**

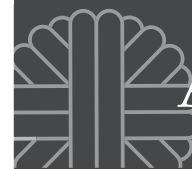


Fig. 2. Illustration of cords from Ginderup burial (Drawing: S. H. Fossøy).

Hald 1935, 286f; Bergerbrant 2005; Fossøy and Bergerbrant in press). However, the Ginderup cords are made differently from all other known corded skirts from the Danish Bronze Age. Most skirts have cords constructed as cabled plied threads, S2Z2s or Z2S2z, and two skirts have cords made from 2-ply threads, Z2s or S2z (Fossøy and Bergerbrant in press). The Ginderup cords, however, are Z3s, plied of three single threads (Fig. 2). In total, more than 20 cords, 3 mm thick, the longest c. 12 cm, can be identified on the western side of the burial, i.e. by the left hand of the deceased. As one cannot see the top of the skirt it is hard to say how different this corded skirt is from the other known fully or partly preserved corded skirts. The photographs do, however, indicate that the lower part of the skirt is made in a manner similar to that of the fully preserved Egtved skirt, i.e. the cords end in a thread ring made from the end of the cord. A thin thread has been twisted tightly around the ring to make it thicker and to keep it together. A string is threaded through the rings, above the rings two twined threads can be seen. Together, these keep the skirt in place. There are indications that the Ginderup skirt might be shorter than the Egtved skirt (Fig. 3), as the cords on the photograph end higher up the leg than in the Egtved burial, but this is difficult to determine due to the lack of information.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that it is indeed possible to glean important information about prehistoric textiles, even if the textiles themselves are not preserved, if good excavation photographs are available. It emphasises the value of taking good quality photographs of

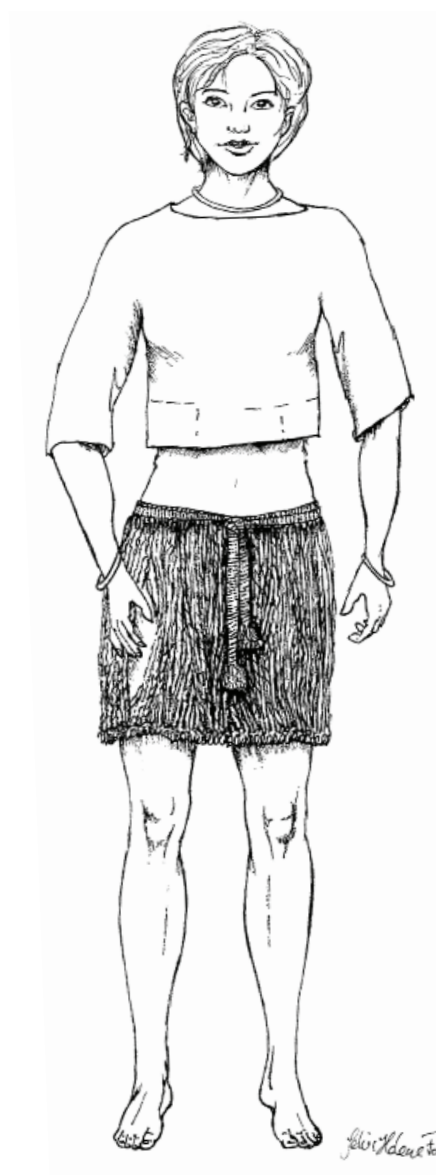


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of Ginderup costume (Drawing: S. H. Fossøy).



organic materials before removing them from the excavation site. Today, with modern equipment, this is easy to do and should be routine practice. An archive search for photographs from old excavations where textiles were found (but not preserved) can also produce good results, as has been shown here. The photographs taken during the excavation of the burial in Ginderup in 1933 have presented us with a previously unrecorded type of corded skirt, preserving information that might otherwise have slipped into obscurity.

#### Acknowledgements

This paper is based on work conducted within the HERA-funded project Creativity and Craft Production in the Middle and Late Bronze Age Europe (CinBA). Thanks are due to Helga Schütze of the National Museum in Denmark who facilitated our search for the photographs and the excavation report, and to the National Museum for giving us permission to publish the photographs.

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