Finds of textile fragments and evidence of textile production at a major excavation site of the Great Moravia in Mikulčice

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Mikulčice

Czech Republic
South Moravia
Mikulčice
A settlement of the Great Moravia

• a large and exceptionally well preserved excavation site for the Great Moravia in the 9th to 10th centuries

• a settlement agglomeration – an acropolis, a fortified inner bailey, an unfortified outer bailey, lords’ farmsteads, burial sites, and rural settlements
The Mikulčice finds
Fire at the Mikulčice research base

- September 2007

- the fire destroyed the depository, the finds and documentation
- objects made of ceramics, iron, bronze and bone destroyed
- the most precious finds rescued at a strongroom outside the location
- organic remains on surface of the finds destroyed

Photographed by: M. Frouz
Processing of preserved textile fragments

- Marie Kostelníková
- 1970s through 1990s
- analyses of textile remains from the Great Moravia excavation sites
- textiles from the Mikulčice acropolis and outer bailey – a total of 92 textiles
Textiles from the central settlement

• fabrics in tabby weave and twill – typical products of local textile craft

• 11 fabrics with a complex weave with two warps (main and binding) and two or more wefts bound to the binding warp – *samitum* (weft-faced compound twill)

• silk, flax

• present in rich graves, imported goods, evidence of long-distance trading with luxury fabrics for the nobility
Current state of processing of textile fragments from Mikulčice and the surrounding areas

5 locations, burial sites with skeleton remains, 9th to 10th centuries

- Outer bailey: Kostelec, Kostelisko
- Backbone of the central settlement: Panské, Josefov
- Surrounding areas of the central settlement: Čejč

- analyses and assessments done in the period 2000 – 2009
- 244 different textiles identified
State of preservation of textile fragments

- textile fragments of a very small size
- different layers on the surface of metal objects
- textile remains full of corrosive products
Kostelec, Kostelisko

- Kostelisko
- southern outer bailey of the Mikulčice central settlement
- 88 different textiles

- Kostelec
- northern outer bailey of the Mikulčice central settlement
- 14 different textiles
Panské, Josefov

- Panské
- closest to the Mikulčice central settlement
  4 km to north-west
- 59 different textile remains

- Josefov
- closest to the Mikulčice central settlement
  8 km to north-west
- 42 different textiles
Čejč

- area of rural burial sites;
- 25 km to north-west
- 55 different textiles
Weaves

- 235 woven fabrics
- 9 separate thread with no binding or strings
  - tabby weave (161 pieces)
  - twill 2/1 (17 pieces)
  - twill 2/2 (11 pieces)
- 14 patterned fabrics
- weaves of the samitum type have not been found
Patterned fabrics

- patterned fabrics with small-size geometric patterns in the shape of lozenge made of pairs of thicker patterning yarns
- 14 pieces (6 from Kostelisko in the outer bailey)
- tabby weave of the foundation cloth
- thicker, frequently twisted threads; plastic patterns
- creating a pattern during weaving (broché fabric) or on a finished textile (embroidery)
Identifying textile material

- microscopic observation of the cell structure of fibers
- infrared spectroscopy
- electron microscopy

- successful only for 21 fabrics
- fibers mostly of vegetable origin, probably flax (*Linum usitatissimum*)
Presence of objects with textile remains

- total of 251 objects made of iron or bronze
- spur assemblies
- penknives, knives, axes, buckles, fittings of buckets, buttons, bells, jewelry, sharpening steels, fittings, spears, swords
Interpretation of original function of textiles

- analyzing the textile’s position on each object
- wrappings of tools, precious weapons or object of daily use
- remains of clothes
- textile decoration of wooden sheaths
- textile wrapping of sword handles
- textile covering of buckets
Number of different textiles in a single grave

Fabric A
Fabric B
Fabric C
Fabric D
Fabric E
Fabric F
Fabric G
Evidence of textile production in Mikulčice

- Spindle whorls (over 2,000 pieces)
- Spindle (1 piece)
- Weaving weights (50 pieces)
- Net needles (5 pieces)
Thank you for your attention

Drawing: L. Balák.