

Southampton French Quarter 1382

Specialist Report Download F3: Textile

By Penelope Walton Rogers - The Anglo-Saxon Laboratory www.aslab.co.uk

Three textiles were recovered, all from different phases and tenements. All three are typical of urban English textiles of the periods from which they come and, as such, they form a useful corrective to the only other late medieval collection recorded from Southampton, from late 13th-century Cuckoo Lane (Crowfoot 1975). When first published in 1975, the limited amount of comparative material available could not reveal how unusual the Cuckoo Lane collection was for its date, although it is now clear that the fine-wool tabby-weave textiles, as well as the silks and palm-fibre cordage, probably represent imported goods from the Mediterranean world. The finds from High Street/Castle Way, on the other hand, demonstrate that elsewhere in Southampton there were textiles which had a better fit with English textiles of the period.

Small Find 171

Fragments of a relatively coarse wool textile, sf171, were recovered from the Anglo-Norman cess-pit 7572 in the area that was later tenement 167. It is woven in 2/1 twill, which was a weave structure that first appeared in urban sites in the 10th century and became the standard weave for wool textiles from the 11th to the mid 14th century (Walton Rogers 2001, 166-8; Crowfoot et al 1992, 26-8). Textiles of this very common fabric-type have been found in urban centres in many parts of northern Europe and the use of Z-spun yarn in one system and S-spun in the other is typical (ibid.). Comparable examples have been recorded at 10th- and 11th-century Winchester (E.Crowfoot 1990; Walton Rogers unpublished), but this seems to be the first from Southampton. The low thread-count of sf 171, 10/Z x 6/S per cm, suggests either a low-grade clothing fabric or a piece of household furnishing. It may have been used as a latrine-wipe in its final stage of use, or it may have been part of the general domestic rubbish dumped in the cess-pit.

Small Find 309

Remains of a charred linen textile were found with a length of a fine, tightly plied linen cord in the 14th- or 15th-century demolition layer of tenement 242. The textile has the typical tabby weave and Z x Z spin of medieval linens, but it is relatively coarse, 12-14 x 10-12 threads per cm, in comparison with others of the period (Walton Rogers 2002, 2881-4; Crowfoot et al 1992, 80). It may represent bed linen, or perhaps a working person's dress or shirt material. The fine cord seems coarse for sewing thread and might have been used, for example, to lace a garment.

Small Find 131

A folded wool textile, sf 131, was found with late 15th- and early 16th-century glassware on tenement 237, context 3847. It is woven in tabby weave (plain weave), with 8/Z x 8/S threads per cm. Similar textiles were found among the large collection of 15th- and 16th-century tailors' offcuts from Black Gate, Newcastle upon Tyne, although most of these had received some form of soft-finishing (Walton 1981, 194-5, 197). The wool of sf 131 included pigmented fibres which would have made it less valuable in the eyes of the textile trade and this, together with the low thread-count and the absence of soft-finishing, suggest a household fabric, such as a blanket or cover.

Catalogue

Small Find 131 (Context 3847)

A folded fragment of wool textile woven in tabby, 8/Z x 8/S threads per cm. Fibre is mostly non-pigmented, with occasional coarse pigmented fibre; 12-55 microns diameter. Tested for dye but none detected. 85 x 40 mm.

Small Find 171 (Context 7574)

Three fragments of wool textile woven in 2/1 twill, 10/Z x 6/S threads per cm. Fibre decayed, but areas of wool scale pattern visible in places; up to 62 microns diameter; too poorly preserved to determine pigmentation. Dye test not attempted. Largest fragment 22 x 15 mm.

Small Find 309 (Context 8029)

(i) Several fragments of charred, folded textile woven in tabby, 12-14/Z x 10-12/Z threads per cm. Fibre black and brittle, and internal structure not visible, but fine diameters, 7-20 microns, and the smooth profile with occasional nodes and 'knee-joints', indicate plant fibre, probably flax. Largest fragment 10 x 10 mm.

(ii) Three short lengths of charred fine cord, 2.5 mm diameter, tightly S-ply (possibly 4-ply) from Z-spun yarns. Fibre similar to textile but coarser, up to 35 microns diameter: plant fibre, probably flax or hemp.

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