

Hans-Jürgen Hundt, *Die Textil- und Schnurreste aus der frühgeschichtlichen Wurt Elisenhof*. Elisenhof 4. Studien zur Küstenarchäologie Schleswig-Holsteins Serie A. Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt-Bern 1981. 196 pages, 24 figures, 69 and 1 additional plate.

The volume under review is of fundamental importance for textile history, both as a publication of a body of primary evidence and as a discussion of its significance in a wider context. Over 500 individual textiles are recorded from the Elisenhof. They offer a representative cross-section of the woollen fabrics in use at a typical farming settlement on the North Sea coast in the eighth century A. D. (flax fibres do not survive). The date is crucial: for the collection fills a chronological gap in our knowledge of north European textiles in the first millennium A. D.

Professor Hundt reviews the material in ascending order of structural complexity, beginning with the handful of plain weaves. There are just two 2-over-1 twills, both webbing; the overwhelming majority of fabrics are in 2-over-2 twill – plain (142 examples), warp-chevron (125) and diamond (184). Hard Z-spun warp and weaker S-spun weft are the norm.

There follows an important study of the surviving starting-borders, both tablet-woven and plain. Taken with the site-finds of loom-weights, they provide firm evidence – not unexpected – for the use of the warp-weighted loom at the Elisenhof, and incidentally reveal considerable diversity within the local weaving tradition. Less variety is evident in the structures of the side-selvages; but hollow selvages were popular on twill cloth.

Most of the textiles are rags, jettisoned by their erstwhile owners; but the author makes a brave attempt to identify their original uses (p. 47 ff.). It is above all clear that the Elisenhof farmers wore heavily patched clothing, virtually until it dropped apart. There is a wealth of evidence for seaming and hemming techniques, and the author offers some penetrating remarks on early methods of cutting and tailoring.

A striking feature of the assemblage from the Elisenhof, duly recorded in the title of the book, is a large corpus of plaited and twisted cords and string (p. 77 ff.). Most items are of wool, but horsehair and an unidentified bast fibre are also represented. The author's painstaking analysis and description of this material, and the graphic summary set out in Abb. 22, greatly add to its value as a reference collection.

The volume closes with a full catalogue of all the fragments of cloth, band, cord and string, described but not tabulated, and supported by a comprehensive series of drafts, line-drawings and selected photographs.

Just a few of the many interesting points arising from this work may be touched upon here. Most 2-over-2 diamond twills from Northern Europe have full displacement in both warp and weft. It has been argued, and widely accepted, that this reflects the Icelandic method of threading up the heddles in which up to two adjacent warp-threads are controlled by a single heddle-loop and one heddle-rod controls one complete shed. Marta Hoffmann in 1964 noted some exceptions in which three adjacent warp-threads were lifted together for a twill with point-repeat in the warp direction. At Elisenhof there are 6 examples of point-repeat in the warp direction (warp-chevron twills Elb, E423, E424c and diamond twills E251d, E418, E419) – but in 4 cases, and perhaps originally all 6, point-repeat in the warp is accompanied by displacement in the warp at other places in the same textile. Point-repeat, it could be argued, was a fault here.

L. Bender Jørgensen has recently drawn attention to a 'standard diamond twill' based on a pattern unit of 10 warp-threads by 9 weft-threads. Half the diamond twills from the Elisenhof fall into this category.

The presence of two pieces of Kreuzköper on the site (E240, E425), a weave so far not attested in a pre-Carolingian context, leads one to seek other chronological indicators in the collection. Three structurally interesting textiles are without parallel – the Gittergeflecht (E457), the 'sweatband' (E415) and the 'false damask' (E477). But the absence of 2-over-1 diamond twills characteristic of the Viking period – at York and Birka, for instance – is noteworthy. The Elisenhof group may close too early; but there are two such 2-over-1 diamond twills from Dunum (Kr. Friesland) of about A. D. 800.

The quality of the line-drawings is first-rate, but the photographs have not been printed so successfully. The book-production is excellent, but the paper is too light in weight to withstand the constant use which it can be expected to receive.

Throughout the book Professor Hundt's mastery of his material is obvious. His style is distinguished by lucid exposition, perspicacious and at times amusing comment. It is good to see the master at work.