Soft-furnishing textiles from the Egypt Exploration Fund season at Antinoupolis, 1913–14

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At least sixteen woven patterned textiles, of a type almost certainly referred to in classical texts as *polymita*, were recovered during excavations carried out by the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) at Antinoupolis in the winter of 1913–14. As they are now held in nine separate institutions their significance remained overlooked until a recent survey was undertaken of the textiles from these excavations. This article describes the fragments, places them within a more closely dated framework and elaborates on their use.

Excavation background

The EEF was granted a concession from the Egyptian Antiquities Service to investigate a series of rubbish mounds at Antinoupolis in the winter of 1913–14 (Andorlini 1998; O’Connell 2013). The director of the excavations was John de Monins Johnson, a classics scholar and papyrologist, who had undertaken fieldwork for the EEF in Egypt since 1910, and his team consisted of two dozen Egyptian labourers who had worked for the EEF previously and gangs of local workers. The season lasted barely two months, from 9 December 1913 until 7 February 1914, during which time twenty mounds were investigated mainly on the eastern perimeter of the walled town. This resulted in the recovery of the remains of a small Byzantine library which included works by Theocritus, Homer and Euripides from one mound, as well as other papyri ranging from a leaf from a codex of Juvenal containing part of his seventh satire to a colour illustration of six charioteers from a Late Hellenistic-style work dating to c. AD 500 (Johnson 1914, 175–77; Roberts 1935; Gąsiorowski 1931). Many worn-out artefacts relating to daily life were also recovered from the rubbish heaps, including relatively large quantities of footwear and textiles (Johnson 1914, 180).

The textiles

It was a common practice at the time for objects from the same excavations to be dispersed to different institutions. The system of the EEF was for the finds from each season to be distributed to its supporters after an annual exhibition. A survey undertaken in 2011–12 of the textiles from the EEF’s season at Antinoupolis housed in institutions in the UK resulted in 140 textiles being identified, and subsequently another group of fourteen textiles has been traced to Warrington (Pritchard 2013). Overseas institutions included the Nicholson Museum at Sydney University; the Australia Museum, Sydney; the Dominion Museum (now renamed Te Papa Tongarewa), Wellington, New Zealand; the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels; the Brooklyn Museum, New York. This may not represent the full extent...
of the textiles in either UK or overseas collections as pieces may have been sent to individual
subscribers to the EEF who have not been traced. Brooklyn Museum received ninety-six
textiles, which was over twice as many textiles as any other institution, presumably because
Colonel Robert B. Woodward, who was a museum trustee, contributed $350 towards the
evacuations instead of the usual subscription of two guineas (Edward Bleiberg pers. comm.;
Thompson 1971, 36, 42, 48, 68 and 76). It is evident that, when the material was divided for
distribution, no close attention was paid to the different textiles represented beyond ensuring
that the children’s socks were separately allocated.1

Nevertheless, the variety of textiles that were recovered from the rubbish heaps is
considerable, attesting to the important role that textiles played in everyday life. They include
items of clothing ranging from sprang hairnets made from wool and linen thread and wool
socks worked in a needle-looping technique to fragments of tunics, shawls and tapestry-
woven ornaments from garments, as well as furnishings. There are also pieces of goat-hair
sacks, drawstring bags, including one made from a recycled strip of cotton ikat, seven scraps
of pile-woven rugs or carpets, three patterned silks and many cloths of differing weights with
coloured bands. The largest group consists of twenty-seven fragments of weft-patterned wool
bands with geometric motifs in bleached linen thread, with two exceptions that are wholly
made from wool.2 Most of these bands are detached fragments but two remain stitched to
the end of the sleeves of linen tunics; one of these tunics was woven to shape and has pile on
the inside, and the other was probably tailored with cut and sewn-in sleeves (Pritchard 2013,
figs 12 and 13). The next largest group is formed of sixteen fragments woven in weft-faced
compound tabby and is the group that will be discussed further here.

The finds are not securely dated as the rubbish heaps were not sealed deposits. Nevertheless,
Johnson does refer to different levels from which artefacts were recovered and especially
noted that ‘gaily woven linen embroideries and braids … were frequent in 6th century strata
onwards’ (Johnson 1914, 180). A few of the textiles have been radiocarbon dated as part of
a European-funded project into Roman clothing (‘DressID: Clothing and identities. New
perspectives on textiles in the Roman Empire’), including three socks and three hairnets
resulting in a date range at its broadest of AD 100 to AD 650.3 In addition, a drawstring bag
made from a recycled strip of ikat cotton, which would originally have come out of either
India or Yemen, is unlikely to date earlier than the 8th century (Royal Museums of Art and
History, Brussels ACO Tx 2498; Baginski and Shamir 1977, 87; Pritchard 2013, 53–54, fig. 19).
It is probable that most of the other textiles fall within this timespan of 800 years and that

1 Many of the textiles have remained unsorted and unidentified. Consequently they are often accessioned
under a single inventory number. This applies to some of the fragments discussed more fully here, including
those in Warrington, Glasgow and Dundee.

2 Discrepancies between the numbers of textiles given here and those listed in an earlier publication (Pritchard
2013) are due to more textiles being identified in other collections since the initial survey.

3 The socks are radiocarbon dated AD 100–350 (British Museum EA 53912), AD 200–400 (British Museum
EA 53913) and AD 240–400 (Royal Museums of Art History, Brussels ACO Tx 2497); the hairnets are
dated AD 340–540 (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester T.1995.5, formerly Manchester Museum 6092a),
AD 430–610 (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester T.1968.290, formerly Manchester Museum 6092b) and
AD 550–650 (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester T.1968.302, formerly Manchester Museum 6093). All the
dates have a 95.4% probability (De Moor et al. 2014; De Moor et al. forthcoming).
the majority date after the 4th century.

**Wool textiles woven in weft-faced compound tabby**

Textiles woven in weft-faced compound tabby are patterned cloths characterised by two warp systems, a main warp and a binding warp, and wefts of at least two colours that predominate on the surface of the fabric. The binding warp makes the tabby weave and the alternating main warp, which is concealed between the weft threads, is responsible for the pattern and in particular which colour of weft is on the front or the back. The weave structure, often referred to by the French term ‘taqueté,’ is discussed in detail by Martin Ciszuk and Chris Verhecken-Lammens (Ciszuk 2000; Verhecken-Lammens 2006; 2007).

Much debate has centred on the type of loom used in Antiquity for this type of figured weave as a special pattern mechanism was required to control the two warps. Initially a type of horizontal loom with a number of heddle rods connected to treadles was postulated (Crowfoot and Griffiths 1939, 46). John Peter Wild argued in favour of a horizontal loom with multiple heddles but no treadles (Wild 1987, 467–68). More recently a vertical loom with heddles tied to two shafts with the addition of a figure harness made from strings which were selected by the weaver when opening the pattern shed for the passing of the weft has been advocated (Thompson and Granger-Taylor 1996, 44–45; Ciszuk 2000, 267). The latter loom has been suggested on the basis of a study of the Zilu-loom which was still used for weaving two-coloured carpets in workshops at Meybod, northeastern Iran, in the 1980s. What is certain, however, is that patterned textiles of this type would only have been produced in specialised workshops (Ciszuk 2004, 112).

The structure of the weave and especially the fact that, whatever type of loom was used, the cloth would have required many strings or heddles to make it has led to such fabrics being identified with those called *polymita* in written Roman sources. A key description occurs in Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis historia*, where he refers to ‘plurimis vero licis texere quae polymita appellant Alexandria instituit’ (Book 8, 196; Crowfoot and Griffiths 1939, 47; Sheffer and Granger-Taylor 1994, 213–14). This passage also indicates that Alexandria was a centre for their manufacture.

**Dating evidence**

A 1st-century date for patterned textiles of this type being in circulation within the Roman empire is supported by the recovery of two fragments from Masada (Sheffer and Granger-Taylor 1994, 153 and 212–15). The earliest examples from Egypt have been recovered from sites in the Eastern Desert and Red Sea ports, where there was a significant military presence and transient population. They include Mons Claudianus, where diorite was quarried for use in prestigious imperial buildings; Maximianon, Didymoi, Dios and Xeron which were small garrison towns; and Berenike and Myos Hormos, ports that depended on trade with South Arabia, East Africa and India (Ciszuk 2000, 265; Cardon 2003, 635; 2011, 18, fig. 7; Wild 2006, 179, fig. 3; Handley 2004, 27, figs 28 and 29). All these early fragments were retrieved from rubbish heaps. Settlements in other parts of Egypt, including Kellis, a farming village in the Dakhleh Oasis which was abandoned by AD 395 and Karanis in the Fayum which became depopulated in the 5th century, have also yielded fragments from rubbish deposits.
indicating that textiles of this type were not confined to towns with a prosperous population (Livingstone 2009, 79–80; Wilson 1933, 17–18, pl. 3.16–18). However, the total number of fragments recovered from each site is small, for example six fragments out of a random sample of 1262 from Mons Claudianus; two out of 624 from one season’s work at Myos Hormos; twelve out of 3400 textiles from several seasons of recording at Berenike, where one fragment possibly dates to the early-1st century while the others were recovered from late 4th- and 5th-century deposits; and eight out of 3450 textiles from Karanis (Bender Jørgensen 2004, 74; 2007, 27–28; Handle 2004, 27; Wild 2006, 178–81; Vogelsang-Eastwood 1988, 15). Compared with these numbers, the sixteen fragments out of 240 textiles from the EEF excavations can be seen to represent a larger overall proportion. Production of the specialised cloth continued into the Islamic period. However, these more recent textiles from sites such as Quseir al-Qadim, Fustat and Qasr Ibrim can be distinguished for example by the use of cotton yarn in combination with wool, variations in the weave structure and occasionally religious inscriptions (Mackie 1985, 33, figs 14 and 15; Vogelsang-Eastwood 1988, vol. 3: 769, no. 55; 4: fig. 119).

This comparative range of textiles provides a framework in which to place fragments recovered from sites conducted under less rigorous methods, such as the EEF season at Antinoupolis. In addition, some textiles with this weave structure have undergone radiocarbon dating as part of recent research projects (Schrenk 2004; De Moor 2007, 103–10). They include a selection of pieces recovered from the cemeteries at Antinoupolis during the seasons conducted by Albert Gayet, as well as others with elaborate figurative designs.

The EEF weft-faced compound tabbies

The sixteen fragments can be divided into several groups based on differences in the spin of the yarn, the weave structure and the designs, but firstly each piece will be briefly described. Unless otherwise specified, the main warp is single.

1. Warrington Museum and Art Gallery 1914.124. Geometric pattern, squares and bars in blue and undyed wool; warp yarns S-spun, weft yarns Z-spun; height 45mm, width 120mm.
2. Warrington Museum and Art Gallery 1914.124. Geometric pattern, octagonal framework enclosing rosettes with eight-pointed petals and dots between the segments and lozenges in the intervening spaces in dark red and dark blue wool; all yarns S-spun; height 45mm, width 50mm.
3. Glasgow Museums 1914.60u. Geometric pattern, small checks in blue and tan wool; all yarns S-spun; height 90mm, width 115mm.
4. Glasgow Museums 1914.60u. Geometric pattern, band of squares alternating with lozenges in blue and undyed wool between plain bands of red wool; all yarns S-spun; paired main warp; selvedge of two cords; height 75mm, width 85mm.
5. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa FE001731/13. Geometric pattern, squares, bars and small checks in blue and undyed wool flanked with four bands in red, blue and undyed wool; all yarns S-spun; height 97mm; width 160mm (Fig. 1; Livingstone 2005, 2).
crosses with smaller crosses in the intervening spaces in dark blue and undyed wool; all
yarns S-spun; height 55mm; width 130mm (Fig. 2; Kendrick 1921, 74, no. 545).
foliate crosses with small checks on four sides in dark blue and undyed wool; all yarns
S-spun; height 130mm, width 46mm (Fig. 3; Kendrick 1921, 75, no. 546).
framework in dark blue and undyed wool; all yarns S-spun; selvedge of two cords;
height 160mm, width 150mm (Fig. 4).
in dark blue and yellow wool; all yarns S-spun; selvedge of three cords; height 205mm,
width 73mm (Fig. 5).
palmettes in red and undyed wool; all yarns S-spun; height 75mm, width 45mm (Fig. 6).
palmettes on bands of blue and white or green and yellow wool; all yarns S-spun;
height 95mm, width 95mm (Fig. 7).
12. Dundee Art Galleries and Museum 1914-214-5. Geometric pattern, square grid enclosing
octofoils, blocks and chevrons in red and yellow wool; rows of knotted pile in yellow
wool at intervals of c. 15mm; pile yarn S2Z, other yarns S-spun; height 85mm, width
70mm (Fig. 8).
13. Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels ACO Tx 2494. Geometric pattern,
sequence of seven bands: (i) plain red wool, (ii) squares alternating with lozenges in
blue and undyed wool, (iii) crosses in octagons in blue and pink wool, (iv) intersecting
octagons enclosing squares in blue and undyed wool, (v) chevrons in blue and pink
wool, (vi) chevrons with opposing rosettes in blue and undyed wool, (vii) too damaged
to determine in pink and blue wool; all yarns S-spun; paired main warp; selvedge of
two cords; height 220mm, width 160mm.
framework in blue and yellow wool; all yarn S-spun; height 215mm, width 85mm.
15. Brooklyn Museum 15.448. Geometric pattern, octofoils within a lozenge framework in
blue and undyed wool, edged with bands in blue, pink and undyed wool; all yarn S-spun;
paired main warp; height 89mm, width 127mm (http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/
opencollection/objects/9181/Double_Cloth_Weave/set/0f397bc5773725044be102fa4
ceef1da?referring-q=double+cloth+weave [3 March 2014]).
16. Brooklyn Museum 15.447. Geometric pattern, alternating rows of stepped blocks in
pink, green and blue wool on a yellow ground; all yarn S-spun; height 76mm,
width 152mm (http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/9180/
Compound_Cloth_Weave/set/207a9543646beb8bd4c66aa615043f70c?referring-
q=compound+cloth+weave [3 March 2014]).

Twelve out of the sixteen fragments are characterised by geometric patterns. However,
only one (No. 1, above) which is in a very worn condition is distinctive for using Z-spun
weft yarn in combination with S-spun yarn in the warp. This fragment is patterned with a grid of squares, lines, blocks and bars that create a subtle optical effect which is a feature of many of these textiles. Three examples with a similar combination of mixed spinning, weave and design are a fragment from Karanis (Wilson 1933, 17, no. 17, pl. 3), an unprovenanced textile which was originally collected by W. M. Flinders Petrie, of which three fragments are in the Victoria and Albert Museum and a fourth piece is in the Norwich Castle Museum (Crowfoot and Griffiths 1939, 40–42; Verhecken-Lammens 2006, 10; 2007, 202), and another unprovenanced textile now divided between three collections in Brussels, Paris and New York (Verhecken-Lammens 2007, 201–2). This latter cloth, which has been radiocarbon dated to AD 320–550 (De Moor 2007, 103–6, fig. 12, table 1), has wefts of three colours, red, green and blue, of which the blue weft is S-spun. The combination of Z-spun weft yarn with S-spun warp yarn is characteristic of many of the earlier weft-faced compound tabbies, including all six examples from Mons Claudianus (Ciszuk 2000, 278), and it is probable that the scrap from Antinoupolis is the earliest from the EEF excavation season.

Z-spun yarn is more often associated with textiles woven outside Egypt. However, it is possible that workshops in a cosmopolitan city such as Alexandria may have had access to supplies of yarn spun elsewhere or spun locally by other people from another country of origin. Good-quality linen tunics from Egypt also occasionally combine Z-spun wool weft yarn in the tapestry-woven decoration with S-spun linen yarn (Pritchard 2006, 62; Cortopassi and Verhecken-Lammens 2007, 140, table 2). It is worth noting that no examples of weft-faced compound tabbies with mixed spinning were recorded from the cemeteries at Antinoupolis, where pieces which mainly formed pillows placed under the heads in some burials were characterised either by Z-spun yarn and considered to be imports or S-spun yarn and thus locally produced (Pfister 1948, 67).

The simplest of the other geometric patterns consists of small all-over checks in blue and tan (possibly faded red) wool (No. 3). A similar chequerboard pattern was recorded on a fragment which was recovered from the top layer in a house at Karanis with associated coins dated AD 277–450 (Wilson 1933, 17, no. 16, pl. 3). However, as the checks in this instance are woven in yellow and green wool and the two warps are dyed red, the cloth would have been more costly to produce. A fragment from a 4th-century deposit at Kellis has groups of green and red checks and green and beige (undyed) checks separated by bands of plain orange and undyed wool (Livingstone 2009, 79–80, fig. 8). Another example also woven only from S-spun wool yarn was recorded from two burials (graves B 259 and Q 134) at Qustul, Nubia, a Meroitic site on the east bank of the Nile, north of the Second Cataract. Dating no later than AD 350, the colourful fragments with bands of yellow and green checks and red and blue checks separated by plain bands of red and yellow have been interpreted as being part of the same cloth and they were also considered to have derived from tunics (Mayer Thurman and Williams 1979, 71 no. 33 and 97 no. 83), although this use here may be questioned.

Between 1913 and 1974 three of the fragments formed part of the Petrie Collection at University College London; they were then transferred to the Victoria and Albert Museum (Helen Persson, pers. comm.). The fourth fragment, which is cut along all four edges, was donated to Norwich Castle Museum in 1919 as part of the Spurrell collection; Flaxman Spurrell (1842–1915) had been given the piece some years earlier by his friend Flinders Petrie (Faye Kallonitis, pers. comm.).
The division of the cloth into a series of bands is typical of many of these textiles. The bands may be either plain or patterned and the plain bands are not restricted to the beginning or end of the cloth. A fragment now in New Zealand which has a grid pattern with alternating blue and white squares and blocks of different sizes, giving an illusion of octagons, has a group of red, white and blue bands (No. 5, Fig. 1). A fragment in Glasgow has a deeper expanse of plain red with only a single patterned band running across it (No. 4). The band has white squares framed in blue alternating with a lozenge infilled with small checks that may be compared to a woven band edging a sequence of patterned bands in another fragment from the site that is now in Brussels (No. 13). Both the Glasgow and the Brussels fragments have a main warp of paired undyed threads as well as preserving part of a selvedge strengthened with two edge cords but it cannot be assumed that they were formerly part of the same cloth. The layout of the pattern on the Brussels fragment shows a wide band of overlapping octagons enclosing squares arranged in a cross formation flanked by a series of narrower bands.

Octagonal grids occur on three of the other fragments. One fragment in Warrington has at least three rows of octagons enclosing rosettes with diamond-shaped segments and dots in between (No. 2), a motif similar to that repeated across three rows forming the central band of a large coverlet preserved in the Textile Museum, Washington (Trilling 1982, 98, no. 108, pl. 8). Both fragments from the excavations in the Victoria and Albert Museum are also characterised by octagonal grids at least three rows deep (Nos 6 and 7, Figs 2 and 3).\(^5\) A weaving error can be seen in the middle row of the octagons on the slightly larger fragment where the square terminal at the base of the cross shaft is approximately half the height of the other terminals. This type of error, which can also be observed on the chequerboard fragment in Glasgow, resulted from the weaver skipping several rows of the pattern showing that it was worked from memory on a loom without a fixed pattern device.

A lozenge grid featured on another fragment (No. 8, Fig. 4) is less common among the surviving repertoire of textiles of this general type. An example with a framework of interlocking lozenges enclosing small palmettes appears to have come from the cemetery at Antinoupolis (Martiniani-Reber and Bénazeth 1997, 131, no. 78) and another with palmettes in a lozenge framework composed of tiny squares that has been radiocarbon dated to AD 320–430 was recovered from tomb 117 of necropolis B at Antinoupolis (Martiniani-Reber and Bénazeth 1997, 123–24, no. 71; De Moor 2007, 105, table 1). As this latter cloth is woven throughout from Z-spun yarn, it is not directly comparable, but both these examples show that broader zones of lozenge patterning were favoured rather than narrow bands. Two other fragments from the EEF excavations have a lozenge framework enclosing octofoil rosettes (Nos 14 and 15). There are at least nine rows of the smaller rosettes on the Bolton fragment whereas only three rows are preserved on the Brooklyn fragment where one row is cut short by a sequence of white, blue and pink bands.

A very different geometric pattern can be observed on another fragment in Brooklyn (No. 16). Stepped pyramidal blocks in four colours are arranged in alternating rows but, unfortunately, there is nothing to hint at the rest of the design.

\(^5\) The framework of No. 7 is described as a ‘diaper of hexagons’ (Kendrick 1921, 75, no. 546) but octagons appear to be more probable.
Plant motifs are another popular feature in the designs of these cloths and there are three with different variations of palmettes among the fragments recovered during the EEF season. Two of these have repeating rows of palmettes on a ground of a contrasting colour (Nos 9 and 10, Figs 5 and 6), although in the Dundee fragment the contrasting weft appears not to have been dyed. The size of the repeat on this cloth is also smaller than the others, with the exception of the chequerboard pattern and perhaps, as a cheaper product, its overall appearance was less impressive. Another fragment in Dundee patterned with distinctive palmettes of four curling fronds is more colourful as the palmettes are positioned against a background of two bands of changing colours (No. 11, Fig. 7). Three rows of fairly similar palmettes are present on a much larger textile fragment recovered from a tomb in the necropolis (Martiniani-Reber and Bénazeth 1997, 120–21, no. 67). The textile, which has been radiocarbon dated to AD 400–540, is, however, woven throughout from Z-spun yarn (De Moor 2007, 107, table 1).

The final fragment also has a geometric pattern which consists of a grid enclosing octofoils, square blocks and chevrons woven in red and yellow wool, but it is unusual in having rows of knotted pile (No. 12, Fig. 8). The pile is very worn so that it is not possible to determine how long it originally would have been and in some rows it is only the line of white warp ends round which the yellow pile was wrapped that indicates where the pile was formerly inserted. A number of weft-faced compound tabbies recorded from Akhmim in particular include panels of linen with looped linen pile (Kendrick 1921, 72, nos 535 and 536; Schluck 2007, 191), but fewer all-wool weft-faced compound tabbies with wool pile have been preserved from the 1st millennium AD. An example patterned with little lions in octagonal frames woven in yellow and brownish purple wool with matching brownish purple pile in the collection of Katoen Natie, Antwerp, has been radiocarbon dated to AD 560–660 (Verhecken-Lammens 2007, 197, fig. 4; De Moor 2007, 108, table 1). Part of a cover also patterned with lions in octagons but woven in red, green and white (undyed) wool has rows of white pile (Trilling 1982, 99, no. 110). Both of these examples are woven with a paired main warp whereas the Dundee fragment has a single main warp.

The function of the textiles
As the fragments from the EEF excavation are so small, they provide only a few clues as to their original use. Fortunately, there are larger examples of similar textiles in various museum collections that offer help with interpretation. For example, a coverlet at least 2.39m in length preserved in the Textile Museum, Washington (Trilling 1982, 98, no. 108, pl. 8) provides a good guide to the possible positioning of many of the small fragments from Antinoupolis as it shows the layout of a cloth divided into a series of patterned bands. The coverlet has fifteen primary bands with seven mirroring the opposing seven and a one-off central band. Some bands are more highly decorated than any of those on the Antinoupolis fragments with vine leaves and grapes arranged in a triangular formation, overlapping octagonal frames enclosing face masks and pairs of addorsed birds perched on canthari, but the geometric patterns of rows of octagons enclosing octofoil rosettes and eight-pointed stars, crosses in the intervening spaces and overlapping octagonal frames, are stylistically similar to those of many of the fragments.
A range of textiles woven in weft-faced compound tabby from the cemeteries in Antinoupolis provide evidence for the use of the fabrics as pillow covers with some even retaining traces of their feather fillings (Pfister 1948, 46). The layout of the patterns on these pillow covers shows a broader zone in the centre with matching bands at each end (Martiniani-Reber and Bénazeth 1997, 120–25, nos 67, 70, 71 and 72) but, as the surviving examples are woven throughout from Z-spun yarn and therefore probably foreign in origin, they may not necessarily have been imitated. Indeed, possibly the best-preserved piece from the cemeteries woven from S-spun yarn, measuring 875mm in length by 290mm, is patterned all over with squares enclosing hunting dogs and leopards and is finished at each end with plain white bands (Martiniani-Reber and Bénazeth 1997, 132, no. 80). Although elaborate in its design, one of its two pattern wefts is an undyed white yarn and the other, a red hue, was dyed with madder, a relatively inexpensive and common dyestuff which appears to have been the preferred choice for red on textiles of this weave (Verhecken-Lammens 2007, 204, table 3). A complete cloth (720mm × 510mm) woven in weft-faced compound tabby and reputed to have been recovered at Akhmim also shows an all-over pattern of octagons enclosing birds, although it includes the addition of two tapestry-woven squares and reveals a different decorative finish with a fringe at either end (Kendrick 1921, 73, no. 537, pl. 25). It is possible, therefore, that both the Kirklees fragments at the very least derive from cushion covers rather than larger coverlets.

A few ornately patterned textiles with figurative hunting scenes woven in weft-faced compound tabby from S-spun yarn have been identified from their layout and construction details as woven-to-shape sleeveless tunics dating to the 4th–6th centuries (Schrenk 2004, 173–77). However, none of the fragments from the EEF season at Antinoupolis hint at any such use.

The presence of knotted pile on one example suggests that it was likely to have been part of a coverlet with the pile providing additional warmth. Worked in rows across the pattern of the wool cloth, the pile produces a different effect to the pile restricted to white zones on the wool and linen examples, which have been interpreted as various types of soft-furnishings (Vogelsang-Eastwood 1988, vol. 3: 591–615).

Conclusion

The sixteen modest textile fragments examined here and now dispersed among nine collections on three continents form a significant addition to the corpus of cloths woven in weft-faced compound tabby dating to the 1st millennium AD. Recovered from the excavation of a known site they indicate that textiles of this type were in common use in Antinoupolis around the 3rd–7th centuries based on the dating framework provided by more recent excavations and radiocarbon analyses. All sixteen pieces appear to represent cheaper varieties of the cloth produced in specialised workshops in Egypt as they employ undyed wool in the warp and the range of designs is limited. They, therefore, offer a different perspective on a type of furnishing textile in use in Antinoupolis to that gained from the well-known cemetery finds.
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Fig. 1: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a geometric pattern in three colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 97mm, W 160mm. The front and the back are both shown (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, FE001731/13, http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/).
Fig. 2: Reconstruction of the design of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a geometric pattern in two colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. The shaded area indicates the extent of the fragment, H 55mm, W 130mm (Victoria and Albert Museum, T.167-1914, illustration: Christina Unwin).

Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the design of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a geometric pattern in two colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. The shaded area indicates the extent of the fragment, H 130mm, W 46mm (Victoria and Albert Museum, T.168-1914, illustration: Christina Unwin).
Fig. 4: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a geometric pattern in two colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 160mm, W 150mm (Bagshaw Museum, Kirklees Museums and Galleries, KLMUS 2002.178, photo: Katina Bill).

Fig. 5: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a plant pattern in two colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 205mm, W 73mm (Bagshaw Museum, Kirklees Museums and Galleries, KLMUS 2002.184, photo: Katina Bill).
Fig. 6: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a plant pattern in two colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 75mm, W 45mm (Dundee Art Galleries and Museum 1914-214-5, photo: Bruce Pert).

Fig. 7: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a plant pattern in five colours from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 95mm, W 95mm (Dundee Art Galleries and Museum 1914-214-5, photo: Bruce Pert).

Fig. 8: Fragment of a weft-faced compound tabby wool cloth woven with a geometric pattern in two colours and occasional rows of knotted pile from the 1913–14 EEF season at Antinoupolis. H 85mm, W 70mm (Dundee Art Galleries and Museum 1914-214-5, photo: Bruce Pert).