

## Fayoum Textiles Features during Tulunid Period (868-905 AD)

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### Abstract

The production of textiles is one of the oldest activities of the ancient Egyptian civilization, and during Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman periods, Egypt was well known for its intricately woven textiles. During the *Byzantine period* (AD 395-642), textiles factories were widely spread throughout Egypt, especially in Upper Egypt. These textiles were famous, and given the designations, 'Coptic textiles'. After Islamic entering to Egypt in AD 640-641, Muslims continued to develop the textile industry. Muslim traditions, such as the *qiswa* (covering) of the *Ka`ba* and the conferring of robes of honor on special occasions, helped to promote the textile industry. During the Islamic period, there were many canthers for the textile industry in Egypt, including *Fayoum*. The city of Fayoum was famous for a certain type of textiles that retained Coptic features; this will be discussed in detail in this paper, this paper aim to investigate the remarkable features of *Fayoum* textiles during Tulunid period, depending on decorated pieces which were attributed to Fayoum during that time. This paper was developed using analytical and comparative approaches based on document and picture analyses. The paper concluded that *Fayoum* textiles industry had distinctive features during Tulunid period, and Coptic features were the most distinctive features of Fayoum Textiles.

**Key words:** Coptic, Fayoum, Textiles, Tiraz, Tulunid, Weave.

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## Introduction

Fayoum was famous city for its textile production through different ages, it played a vital role in textile industry beginning with Paleolithic age<sup>1</sup> and this role continued to the Islamic era<sup>2</sup> Fayoum became a remarkable center for unique kind of textile which was named after '*Fayoum Textile*'.<sup>3</sup> So the manufacturing of textile continued in Islamic periods with many effects of the obvious age (Coptic age) on the first times of it.<sup>4</sup> As mention in many historical resources such as *El Makrizi* and *YaKubi*: there are many towns in Fayoum were famous in manufacturing of textile of wool, linen and dyes, for example: Coars cloth (garments) in Kais, tent, Carpets, Hangings, shawls and curtains in Bahnasa and robes in *Ehnas*.<sup>5</sup> *Tiraz* workshops were spread during early Islamic era and its production was directed for both royal and public use.<sup>6</sup> The two types of *Tiraz* factories were those of the caliph (*khassa*, meaning private or exclusive) and those of commercial or state production (*'amma*, meaning public). *Tiraz* produced in private factories were intended for the caliph and his court (29.179.13), while those woven in public factories were made for both the aristocracy and the wider public (32.129.2). Because a range of materials and techniques were used in *Tiraz* from both *khassa* and *'amma* factories, and because both could be inscribed with the name of the caliph, the institutional affiliation of a

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<sup>1</sup> E. J. Baumgatel., *Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt*, (Oxford 1947),12-13; G. Brunton, and Caton-Thompson, G., *The Badarian Civilization and Predynastic Remains near Badari* (London 1928), 64-67; W.M.F. Petri., *The Arts and Crafts of Ancient Egypt*, (London 1909), 147-150; G. Caton-Thompson, and E.W. Gardner., 'Neolithic Industry of the Northern Fayum Desert', *JRAI* 56, (1926), 13-18.

<sup>2</sup> It was found in Fayoum Civilization A, remaining of flax seeds and clothing pieces; G. Brunton, and G. Caton-Thompson, 'The Badarian Civilization and Predynastic Remains near Badari', *BSAE* 46, (London 1928), pl. XIVIII; H. Lutz, *Textiles and Costumes among the People of the Near East*, (Leipzig 1923, p. 45-47.

<sup>3</sup> Caton-Thompson, G., 'The Desert Fayum', *RAIBI*, London, 1934), 33, 40, 44, pl. XII; H. Jünker, *Mermide, Denkschriften der Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien*, Philhist. Klasse, III, (1941), pl. V; J. Vandier., *Manuel d'archéologie Egyptienne*, I, La Prehistoire, (Paris 1952), p. 153; L. Roth, *Ancient Egyptian and Greek Looms*, (1913), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, "Textiles", in: P.T. Nicholson and Shaw, I (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, (2001), 271-274; R.B Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Materials for the History up to the Mongol Conquest*, Lebanon, 1972, 133-165; see also; M. Seagrott, *A Basic Textile Book*, Toronto, (1973), 47-48; Yakubi, VII, 33 r; Makrizi *Khitat*, 734.

<sup>5</sup> Lucas, A., *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, (London 1962), 142; Clark, Charlotte R., "Egyptian Weaving in 2000 B. C", *BMMA*, (1944), 24-29; E. J. Barber, W., *Prehistoric Textile*, (Princeton 1991).

<sup>6</sup> R.B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Materials for the History up to the Mongol Conquest*, (Lebanon 1972),133-165; E.D. Maguire, *Weaving from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt*, (2006), 3-14, 17-23; S. Friedrich, *Pre-Islamic carpets and textiles from eastern lands*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 123-165; L. Petra, *Late Antique to Early Islamic Textiles from Egypt*, (2001), 17-25.

particular *Tiraz* textile cannot always be identified from its inscriptions or technical quality alone.

It is hardly to distinguish the Coptic and Islamic textile especially in the early times, as they share Techniques and many Decorative motifs.<sup>7</sup> Most of pieces which were woven or embroidered from AD 9-12 centuries provide a basic chronological frame work.<sup>8</sup> At early Islamic periods, the decoration was modified to narrow bands ordered vertically woven in tapestry techniques.<sup>9</sup>

At these early periods of Islamic art the decoration of textile was modified and confined to two groups the first one is: narrow bands waved in tapestry technique. These bands give way to Arabic inscription written in angular Kufic calligraphy which included the ruler's name, place and the date of manufacture.<sup>10</sup> This group of inscribed textile is known as *Tiraz*. A second one is more closely resemble the Coptic types as shown in the pieces we study here at this paper. The pieces are woven in linen in plain weave or in silk which come to be more frequently used under the Arabs. Decoration continued to be made in plain weave stripes or in tapestry weave band in linen. The figures is drawn from last periods and given a definite Islamic character by the inclusion of bands of Kufic calligraphy.

Though the study of textile from Fayoum, it is possible to summarize their general characteristics. They have bright color, modified, folkloric motifs influenced by *Coptic* and *Sasanian* style. And didn't have poor design as the others have

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<sup>7</sup>Scholars divided Coptic period in three sequence period; first is Greek-Roman period, second is a transition period, finally Coptic period. Tapestry was one of the most famous of weaving decoration technique, it is known from Pharaonic period then it became famous during Coptic period and it was carried by Egyptians, for more details see; Baker, Patricia L., *Islamic Textiles*, 1995, 1-13, 35-49, see also; Maguire, E.D., *Weaving from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt*, 2006, 3-14, 17-23; Vogelsang-Eastwood, G and others, *Pharaonic and Early medieval Egyptian Textiles*, 1994, p.139-149.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, Patricia L., *Islamic Textiles*, 1995, 1-13, 35-49; Coptic and early Islamic textile, the royal Scottish museum, Chamber Street, Edinburgh, p.9; Yossef, M., *History of Islamic Arts* , 2003, p.126-130.

<sup>9</sup> Barton, L., *Historic Costume for the Stage*, 1935, p.3-14; Payne, B., *History of Costume: from Ancient Egyptians to Twentieth Century*, 1965, 1-7, 63-87; Sellner, E., *History of Costume Design*, 1949, p. 1-18.

<sup>10</sup> Crowfoot, G. M., "Textiles, Basketry and Mats", in: *History of Technology from early time to the fall of ancient Empire*, I, Oxford, 1956, p. 18-20; Giovanni, T., *The Development of the Egyptian Textile Industry*, PhD, Utah University, 1986, p. 80-85.

suggest.<sup>11</sup> The manufacturing of textile is flourishing at the beginning of Tulunid period as the main Premise is the development of local aspects as a result of changes Happen in the Islamic world as whole.<sup>12</sup> Manufacturing of woolen textile is spread in Fayoum from the Abbasside Period; the textile was weaved of linen thread, decorated by wool threads in strips of repeated motifs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Minister of Culture, Egyptian Textile Museum, Cairo, 2013, p.119-121; Randa, Ernest William, *The Tulunid Dynasty in Egypt: Loyalty and state formation during the dissolution of the 'Abbasid caliphate*, Published PhD, University of Utah, 1990, p.12-24, 130-145.

<sup>12</sup> Yossef, M., *History of Islamic Arts*, 2003, p.126-130; Baker, Patricia L., *Islamic Textiles*, 1995, 1-13, 35-49; Vogelsang-Eastwood, G and others, *Pharaonic and Early medieval Egyptian Textiles*, 1994, (Ancient Egyptian 37-43) (Greek 89-123), (Coptic 139-149); Maguire, E.D., *Weaving from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt*, 2006, 3-14, 17-23.

<sup>13</sup> G. John, *Textiles of the Islamic world*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2010, 23-28; A. Mond, 'The Earliest Dated Islamic Textiles', *BMC* 60, 1932, 262; Rhuvon Guest and A. F. Kendrick, 'The Earliest Dated Islamic Textiles', *BMC* 60, 1932, 181-190.

Catalog#  Date   
Sort #  Box number



**Object Description:** two fragments of archaeological textile  
**Acquisition Date:** Tulunid period  
**Culture:** Islamic Culture  
**Old storage Location:** Azhar Textile Museum, Islamic Part.  
**Remarks, Catalog, Publication information:**  
The pieces exhibited in the first floor case number

### Image Documentation

Photography   
Illustration  Re-photography needed   
Height  Diameter, Length  Width   
Fabrication technology  Warp /cm   
Weft /cm  thickness   
Old manufacturing Location

### Comments shape, Form

The archaeological pieces is one of the most famous objects known at this period .it is look like a two fragments of woolen shawl , decorated with broad band and another one above and below, in addition to a line of inscription. This object has twisted fringe from the warp at the end. There are three broad bands with three frames the central frame is decorated with camels in green and white , each pair are shown face to face. This band is located between two narrow rows containing different oval and geometric figures. The other band has strange Kufic inscription that has never appeared before in a pieces of Islamic textile. The text on the band reads as follow: '*happy made at the nobles*'. And plants figure appeared in two vertical rows of flower of Lotus in term of units , consisted of two flowers of lotus connected together vertically , and motifs of triangle was weaved between them.

## Materials

### Foundation Elements

Made of wool yarns used as warp thread and dyed wool yarn used as weft thread, by which mixed of geometric and plant figures weaved along the width of the archaeological piece.

### Materials comment

The shawl made of wool yarn dyed with natural dyes with different mordant to obtain several shades of colors

### Surface component comments

Dye  Paint  Pitch

The surface consisted of dyed wool threads dyed with organic natural dyes.

### Attachments:

Beads  Metal Beads  Textile  metal thread

### Condition:

Percent present  Complete  Fragment  in pieces  number of pieces

### Condition Summary

The pieces is in a bad condition, because of brittle and high drying fibers, besides to fading in many parts of dying places and some residues on the surface such as soft dust and impurities. Loosing in the edges of every piece which causes separating some fibers.

Evidence of repair  Evidence of restoration  Evidence of coating

### Structure Stable

The structure is almost stable because of some separated parts of the edges of the two pieces.

Cracks  Break  Loss  Deformed  Insect Damage

Surface stable

Stain  Darken  Faded  Soot  Flaking

### Accretions described

High drying of the yarns, resulting in weakness and brittle of fibers. Appearing in missing some parts of the objects.

How identified:  Visual Examination

Documentation  Visual  Spot  Microscopy  FTIR   
IR

Residues described 

Some soft dust and impurities residues on the surface in many parts of the piece, but no evidence to existence of deterioration products.

How identified:  
Documentation  Visual  XRF  FTIR  spot  Microscopy

Bio-deterioration: Mold  Insect  Rodent  Odor

Evidence of cleaning  Evidence of coating

Evidence of repair  No evidence of repair  evidence of restoration

Evidence of mount/display

Pesticide

How identified: Visual  documentation  FTIR  XRF

Microscope

Treatment comment 

There are no treatment made, the fragment only was fixed on linen support prepared for exhibition of the object.

Catalog#  Date

Sort #  Box number



**Object Description:** fragment of archaeological Textile.  
**Acquisition Date:** early Islamic period  
**Culture:** Islamic art (Coptic and Islamic decoration)  
**Old storage Location:** Azhar Textile Museum  
**Remarks, Catalog, Publication information**

### Image Documentation

Photography

Illustration  Re-photography needed

Height  Diameter, Length  Width

Fabrication technology  Warp /cm

Weft /cm  thickness

### Comments shape, Form

The piece is weaved with linen and woolen motifs of large scale animals and birds, colored in orange, black and white dyes. The object consists of horizontal decorative band in which simple figures were made, regarding to the beliefs of the weavers through the Islamic periods not to simulate the nature in their works. So the general features appear respectively in this object. There are two strips of geometric motifs at the top and the bottom of the main decoration, consist of repeated square shapes in white color the piece is influenced by the style of samara and sasanian style.



## Materials

### Foundation Elements

The fragment consists of linen warp and dyed woolen weft thread by which the design was performed in Tapestry technique.

### Materials comment

Woolen thread dyed with organic dyes used in decoration, and linen thread used as warp thread.

### Surface component comments

Dye  Paint  Pitch

Attachments:

Beads  Metal Beads  Textile  metal thread

### Condition:

Percent present  Complete  Fragment  in pieces  number of pieces

### Condition Summary

The fragment is in a bad condition, as the fading exist in some parts of dyed yarns and high drying of fibers resulting in brittle and weakness of the whole textile

Evidence of repair  Evidence of restoration  Evidence of coating

Structure Stable

Cracks  Break  Loss  Deformed  Insect Damage

Surface stable

Stain  Darken  Faded  Soot  Flaking

Accretions described

How identified:

Documentation  Visual  Spot  Microscopy  FTIR   
IR

Residues described

Little dust and impurities residues on the surface in many parts of the piece, but no indication to bio-deterioration, or chemical deterioration products

How identified:

Documentation  Visual  XRF  FTIR  spot  Microscopy

Bio-deterioration: Mold  Insect  Rodent  Odor

Evidence of cleaning  Evidence of coating

Evidence of repair  No evidence of repair  evidence of restoration

Evidence of mount/display

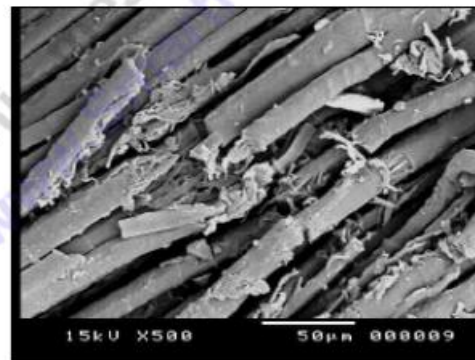
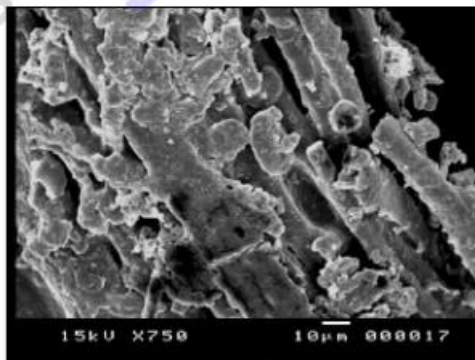
Pesticide

How identified: Visual  documentation  FTIR  XRF

Microscope

**Treatment comment**

There is an evidence for mechanical and chemical cleaning, because of the bright color of dyed threads, in addition to fixing the object on support of linen for save exhibition



Catalog#	No. 10/14954	Date	Tulunid period, 12-13 Century
Sort #	Five Textile Archaeological	Box number	13/14953



**Object Description** five fragments of archaeological textile  
**Acquisition Date:** Tulunid period  
**Culture:** Islamic Culture  
**Old storage Location:** Azhar Textile Museum, Islamic Part.  
**Remarks, Catalog, Publication information:**  
The pieces exhibited in the first floor case number

### Image Documentation

Photography

Illustration  Re-photography needed

Height  Diameter, Length  Width

Fabrication technology  Warp /cm

Weft /cm thickness

Old manufacturing Location

These five fragments attributed to village of Mutawel in El Fayoum City and decorated with Tapestry

### Comments shape, Form

Five circular woolen textile fragments each decorated with a depiction of a bird, perhaps a duck or a goose, in different sizes and colours, and woven in a non-extended weft pattern, a tapestry technique. The fragments were taken from bigger textiles, perhaps used as a counterpane or curtains, and which may have consisted of a decorative design with repetitive motifs. Upper Egypt was famous for sumptuous woven cloth such as this, with Asyut, Akhmim and the City of *Fustat* prominent places of production during the Tulunid period (AH 3rd / AD 9th century). During the Tulunid period, textiles were distinguished by the appearance of a shadow in the decorative components, where the colour was graded from light to dark, as well as for their powerful expression. They were also influenced by the Sassanid style, brought by *Ahmad ibn Tulun* (r. AH 254–70 / AD 868–84) from Iraq. The production of textiles in the Tulunid period represents a period of transition in Egypt between the Coptic period and the Islamic period with regard to the decorative components and their development.

Most of the *jizya* (tribute) which Ahmad ibn Tulun sent to the court of the Abbasid caliphs consisted of textiles made in the Tiraz workshops, under royal decree, which produced magnificent fabrics of wool and linen. Tulun took a personal interest in the textile factories of Egypt, which were widespread in the north delta regions of Tanis, Dabik, Damietta, and other cities. These regions were famous for the manufacture of linen cloth with inscriptions woven in silk in a multitude of colours. Interest in textile manufacture increased in Egypt with the rule of the sons of *Ibn Tulun: Khumarawayh*

## Materials

### Foundation Elements

Wool with the woven decorations woven in a non-extended weft pattern (tapestry technique)

### Materials comment

These five fragment of textile made of wool yarn dyed with natural dyes with different mordant to obtain several shades of colors. These fragments have been dated based on a study of their decorative components that include the depiction of birds similar to those found in *Tulunid Tiraz* textiles from the Upper Egypt region, and which also resemble the depictions of birds on other Iraqi applied arts with Sassanid roots. Furthermore, the colours used in these textiles, whether it be different shades of yellow, degrees of green or blue, are colours that were customary on Tulunid textiles.

### Surface component comments

Dye  Paint  Pitch

The surface consisted of dyed wool threads dyed with organic natural dyes.

### Attachments:

Beads  Metal Beads  Textile  metal thread

### Condition:

Percent present  85%  Complete  Fragment  in pieces  number of pieces  2

### Condition Summary

The pieces is in a bad condition, because of brittle and high drying fibers, besides to fading in many parts of dying places and some residues on the surface such as soft dust and impurities. Loosing in the edges of every piece which causes separating some fibers.

Evidence of repair  Evidence of restoration  Evidence of coating

### Structure Stable

The structure is almost stable because of some separated parts of the edges of the two pieces.

Cracks  Break  Loss  Deformed  Insect Damage

Surface stable

Stain  Darken  Faded  Soot  Flaking

Accretions described

High drying of the yarns, resulting in weakness and brittle of fibers. Appearing in missing some parts of the objects.

How identified:

Visual Examination

Documentation  Visual  Spot  Microscopy  FTIR   
IR

Residues described

Some soft dust and impurities residues on the surface in many parts of the piece, but no evidence to existence of deterioration products.

How identified:

Documentation  Visual  XRF  FTIR  spot  Microscopy

Bio-deterioration: Mold  Insect  Rodent  Odor

Evidence of cleaning  Evidence of coating

Evidence of repair  No evidence of repair  evidence of restoration

Evidence of mount/display

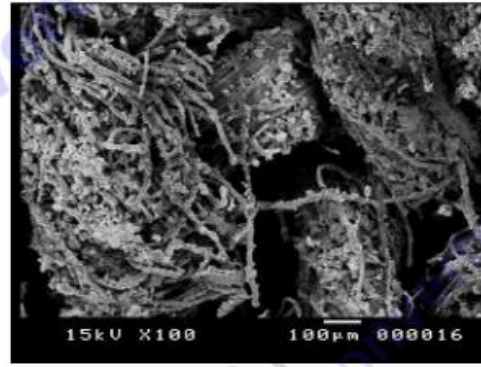
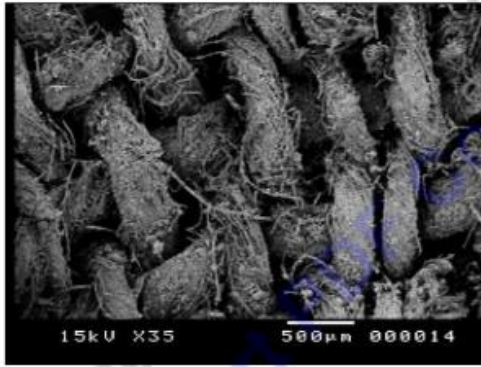
Pesticide

How identified: Visual  documentation  FTIR  XRF

Microscope

**Treatment comment**

There are no treatment made, the fragment only was fixed on linen support prepared for exhibition of the object.



## Conclusion:

This article concluded that *Fayoum* had its own textile industry with remarkable features, also took its name of the place where the manufacturing of textile spread during Islamic Period in general and in *Tulunid period*. *Fayoum* textile in *Tulunid Period* characterized with using woolen yarn dyed with organic dyes, and tapestry technique to performed decoration motifs in addition to the decorations methods and topics which were simple, the decoration topics were such as, simple plant, animals and geometric figures which appeared on the two pieces. The two pieces which the authors have taken in *Azhar* museum of Textiles incarnated some of Coptic decoration elements, all these elements are adapted during the early Islamic art in Fayoum city and it became clear in Tulunid period. The artists in *Tulunid Period* succeeded in overlapping different elements from Coptic and Islamic Period, that they utilize the animals but in simple way differed from the nature to fit with the Islamic beliefs, also they decorated the first piece with vertical bands with *Kufic* inscription which prove its place of industry. Also the article discuss five fragments of textile made of wool yarn dyed with natural dyes with different mordant to obtain several shades of colors. These fragments have been dated based on a study of their decorative components that include the depiction of birds similar to those found in *Tulunid Tiraz* textiles from the Upper Egypt region, and which also resemble the depictions of birds on other Iraqi applied arts with *Sassanid* roots. Furthermore, the colours used in these textiles, whether it be different shades of yellow, degrees of green or blue, are colours that were customary on Tulunid textile. During the Tulunid period, textiles were distinguished by the appearance of a shadow in the decorative components, where the colour was graded from light to dark, as well as for their powerful expression. They were also influenced by the Sassanid style, brought by *Ahmad ibn Tulun* (r. AH 254–70 / AD 868–84) from Iraq. The production of textiles in the Tulunid period represents a period of transition in Egypt between the Coptic period and the Islamic period with regard to the decorative components and their development.

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