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Ruiha Smalley

Abstract

This article discusses an attempt to identify provenance details of textiles that came to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London through an association with the archaeologist Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie. This study revealed that Petrie is responsible, directly or indirectly, for over 500 Egyptian textile pieces held at the Museum. He donated and sold items to the Museum while others came via individuals who had personal or institutional associations with Petrie. The collection is mainly representative of the Late Antique period. Many of the textiles have no reliable provenance details while others came from known sites that were attributed to the object upon arrival at the Museum or through this study. Sites to which they are attributed include Meidum, Tarkhan, the Fayum, Hawara, Kahun, Tanis, Oxyrhynchus, Qarara, the Qau el-Kebir and Badari district and Akhmim.
Introduction

The archaeologist Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie's role in helping to develop the Egyptian textile collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (V&A) has been highlighted by H. Persson, curator with the Asian Depatment of the V&A. The following article discusses attempts, by the author, to identify provenance details of textiles that came to the Museum through an association with Petrie, either through excavation or purchase by Petrie or individuals or institutions with connections to Petrie. Archaeology in the late 19th and early 20th century was a different discipline than that which is undertaken today. Today, detailed records are made of all excavations and associated activities but this was not so at the time Petrie undertook much of his work. Many of the artefacts that came to the V&A around this time arrived without reliable provenance details or with only a few notes added to the acquisition files to indicate where they may have originated. It was hoped that by taking a closer look at the textiles associated with Petrie more information on their provenance would be revealed. Museum acquisition and correspondence files were examined and matched against the Museum's database to produce a list of textiles with a Petrie association. Published excavation reports were studied along with Petrie's diaries and notebooks with the hope of finding references that might enable context to be given to the finds. Unfortunately Petrie's diaries and notebooks did not have enough detail to be of assistance but published reports were able to clarify some points.

Five hundred and three Petrie associated textiles are currently registered to the Museum. The majority are representative of the Late Antique period, while the remainder are dynastic or Islamic. Most have no provenance details while others came from known sites that were attributed to the object upon arrival at the Museum or through this study. Sites to which they are attributed include Meidum, Tarkhan, the Fayum, Hawara, Kahun, Tanis, Oxyrhynchus, Qarara, the Qau el-Kebir and Badari district and Akhmim. This contribution looks at the textiles in reference to the period to which they belong, the sites to which they are attributed and how they hold association with Petrie. Textiles with an unknown provenance are not discussed.

Dynastic textiles

Only a small proportion of Petrie associated textiles come from dynastic Egypt. Sites associated with these textiles include Meidum and Tarkhan.

Meidum

At Meidum, about 65 km south of Cairo in the Fayum region, Petrie worked on the pyramid and temple complex of King Sneferu (early Dynasty 4, 2613-2589 BC) and the necropolis of around the same period. During 1890/91 he excavated a number of mastabas and tombs including those of Sneferu's sons Nefermat, Rahotep and Ranefer.

Textiles 559-1891, 559a-1891, 559b-1891 and 559c-1891, registered in 1891, are recorded as coming from Meidum. The acquisition files include the following notes:

- 559-1891: Portions of cloth from the interior recess of the mastaba (Fig. 1)
- 559a-1891: Portion of cloth round intestines in Ranefer's tomb (Fig. 1)
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Petrie's excavation report 'Medum'\textsuperscript{7} gives some detail on the context of these finds. A description of Ranefer's remains highlights the role of linen in wrapping internal organs, prior to the use of canopic jars in the burial ritual:

Ranefer's mummy lay hitched up against the west wall ... The mode of embalming was very singular. The body was shrunk, wrapped in a linen cloth, then modelled all over with resin ... this was wrapped round in a few turns of the finest gauze ... In the recess in the south end, similar to that in Rahotep's chamber, there were parts of the internal organs embalmed, forming lumps of resined matter wrapped round in linen, and fragments of such were in Rahotep's recess ... There was no sign of these organs having been in jars or enclosures; and it seems as if these recesses in the tombs were intended to lay the internal parts on after embalming, before the use of jars for such was introduced\textsuperscript{8}.

The particular tomb from which 559-1891 was taken is not given yet the similarity between the file's reference to an 'interior recess' and the report's description suggests that these fragments may have originated from Ranefer's tomb, along with 559a-1891. Yet given that the recess in Ranefer's tomb is described as similar to that in Rahotep's, and therefore may also have held embalmed internal organs wrapped in linen, it must also be considered that the fragments were found in Rahotep's tomb.

The publication describes body positioning in the tombs, including a missing left leg that matches the description of 559b-1891:

The skeletons lay exactly as placed ... In one instance the whole left leg was missing from the knee: the end of the thigh bone came close to the brick wall, and not a trace of knee cap, leg bones, or foot was present. The end of the bone did not shew [sic] any change in the joint surface, so the amputation must have been shortly before death\textsuperscript{9}.

Descriptions of mastaba eight and tomb 24 allow them to be considered as possible origins for 559c-1891, but with no mention of 'find no. 5' in the publication, diaries or notebooks either may be appropriate. In mastaba eight a number of wells are described:

We then tried to the N. of this, and found another well quite untouched. This was cleared down to the level of the top of the doorway on the south side ... At this level a mat of rushes had been spread on loose rubbish thrown into the well. Upon this mat were laid 4 alabaster bowls all tied up in cloths; a broken red dish with 28 flint flakes in it tied up in a cloth\textsuperscript{10}.

Tomb 24 also suggests a context for wrappings around bowls:

Passing to the Southern cemetery ... No. 24 had water nearly to the roof of the chamber ... To the S.W. of it was a small pit in the mastaba ... in this was a large quantity of pottery ... nearly all broken ... some of the bowls were wrapped in cloth ... Thus it is evident that a custom existed of forming a small secondary pit into which the offerings were thrown; the bowls were probably wrapped in cloth to retain the food placed in them, and much dark brown organic matter was found saturating this pottery\textsuperscript{11}.
The references above suggest a date for these pieces near the time of King Sneferu, c. 2613-2589, while the artefacts themselves provide examples of the use of textiles in ancient Egyptian burial practices.

Other textiles associated with Meidum arrived at the Museum in 1974 from University College London (UCL). Correspondence from 1973 admits that sorting would take time to complete. In fact, processing didn't finish until 1977. At this time dynastic pieces were registered as T.344-1977, T.345-1977 and T.345a-1977 (Fig. 2). These were noted as wrapped in pages of the Daily Telegraph dated February 25th 1896 and labelled 'Linen. 3 pieces. Unwashed'. Petrie dug at many sites prior to this date but the Museum database records these textiles as dating to c. 3100–2686 BC (Dynasties 1-2). These dates narrow the focus to two sites – Naqada and Meidum – as features of this period are limited to these sites.

Petrie's report on the Naqada dig does mention cloth but most of it was 'blackened with age'.12 The textile finds at Naqada were limited and in poor condition, while the textiles under consideration are in good condition, despite staining, so are unlikely to originate from Naqada. A number of textiles are mentioned in the excavation report 'Medum' (some identified above) but descriptions do not match these objects. As textile finds were rarely presented in detail in excavation reports it is possible that other pieces from the site were unaccounted for in the publication. Assuming the objects date to c. 3000 BC, Meidum remains their likely origin.

Tarkhan

Between 1911 and 1913 Petrie dug at Tarkhan, approximately 60km south of Cairo. He excavated a number of graves containing human remains from the earliest dynasties with the resulting publication focusing on the osteology of the remains.13

Textile T.4-1957, believed to have been compiled by Petrie, includes 28 samples of dynastic cloth. Museum correspondence files indicate that the Museum wrote to Petrie in January 1918 on the possibility of obtaining textiles to establish a 'small index of production of all periods'. Petrie hadn't known the Museum was looking for 'plain technical specimens of cloth' and wrote in return that he had a number of sets made up and distributed to other museums in 1913. He offered to go through the stocks at the British School of Archaeology in Egypt (BSAE)14 and pick out 'the best remaining examples to be sent over'. These arrived some time later but were not registered. A.F. Kendrick, Keeper of the Department of Textiles at the Museum, wrote to the Museum's Director that he did not propose to give a registered number to the specimens as they did not 'form a continuous series'. Acquisition files record that T.4-1957 was received by the Museum in October 1956 as an anonymous gift found in the Department of Textiles. D. King, then Assistant Keeper, wrote:

These are almost certainly identical with an unregistered gift of early linen from graves in Egypt, from the British School of Archaeology in Egypt per Flinders Petrie in 1918.

Correspondence also refers to the origin of some of the samples. Petrie wrote to the Museum and noted that published details of mastaba 2050 could be found in 'Tarkhan II' and a technical study of linen could be found in 'Heliopolis'. Unfortunately while the structural aspects of mastaba 2050 are discussed no textiles are mentioned. Yet in 'Heliopolis, Kafr Ammar and Shurafa' W. Midgley writes a detailed chapter on early Egyptian linens, covering cloth from the Tarkhan dig. Petrie introduces the chapter to say that some of the linens include...
those from mastaba 2050, 'samples of which were made up in mounted sets and distributed in cases to many museums'\textsuperscript{15}.

Each T.4-1957 sample has a written label sewn to it on which a dynasty is recorded (Fig. 3). A comparison of Midgley's description of textiles from mastaba 2050 with T.4-1957's Dynasty 1 textiles (c. 3000-2800 BC) reveals similarities in the weave. For example, Midgley's samples included warps greater in diameter than the wefts and doubled and paired yarns, as do some V&A samples. The labels and correspondence from Petrie help to place the origin of the first 10 samples at mastaba 2050. Although the technical similarities do not prove the pieces are the same as those studied by Midgley, they support the possibility that they came from the same source. No details for the later dynastic samples are given but as Tarkhan is a multi-period site it is tempting to think that the remaining samples were also uncovered there.

These samples, not only of interest due to their extreme age (c. 5000 BP) are relevant to the study of textile history as they alerted Midgley to the prior existence of doubled yarns. It had been assumed that the use of doubling threads to gain strength originated in Nottingham in the early half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and these samples proved otherwise.

**Late Antique textiles\textsuperscript{16}**

Most of the Petrie associated textiles are from the Late Antique period. Related sites, discussed below with regard to their association with Petrie, include the Fayum (including Hawara and Kahun), Tanis, Oxyrhynchus, Qarara, the Qau el-Kebir and Badari district and Akhmim.

**Textiles acquired through Petrie excavations**

**The Fayum**

The Fayum is a fertile area less than 100 km south west of Cairo. Archaeological sites include the pyramid at Hawara, its cemeteries and temples; the pyramid of Lahun, its cemeteries, temples and settlement of Kahun; and the necropolis and pyramid complex at Meidum\textsuperscript{17}. Petrie dug in the area in the late 1880s and during a number of seasons from 1903 to 1921.

Textiles from this region arrived at the Museum in 1888 and were registered the next year as 318-1889 to 323-1889 (Fig. 4). Petrie wrote to the Museum in September 1888 saying:

> A friend of mine, Miss Bradbury, has been engaged in washing and sorting the large mass of embroideries that I found in the Fayum. I have asked her to select such as are most unusual and unlike what you have, and to send them to you for inspection. If there are any of them that you would think important for the South Kensington\textsuperscript{18} collection I have authorised to offer them to you from M. Kennard\textsuperscript{19}.

In 1889 a few pieces from the Fayum region were found in Museum stores and registered 417-1889 to 420-1889. These are assumed to be part of the 1888 package. Objects 451-1889 to 482-1889 are not mentioned in Museum correspondence but being a numerical sequence close to those just mentioned leads to the assumption that they were also from the same package. This is supported by acquisition file entries describing the objects as from an 'ancient
Roman cemetery in the Fayum, Middle Egypt'. This is likely to be a reference to the site of Hawara as Petrie was digging there at the time.

Further textiles from the Fayum arrived at the V&A in the 1970s when the Petrie Museum, UCL, redistributed some of its collection to other museums. Many of the pieces included the provenance of Hawara and were registered in 1977. Other pieces, registered in 1975 and 1976, include a note in the records saying that Petrie gave the items, presumably to UCL, in 1890. These are discussed below.

The Fayum - Hawara

As noted, in 1977 a number of textiles were registered with the provenance of Hawara (Fig. 5). Hawara is the site of a multi-period necropolis, temple complex and the pyramid of Amenemhat III (Dynasty 12, 1831-1786 BC). The portrait mummies of the early Roman period, for which the site has become well known, were mainly in the southern area, while in the north there were burials from the 4th–6th centuries AD.

Petrie’s 1889 excavation report describes the different types of burials uncovered at Hawara and the role of textiles in some:

Another great change of custom took place about 250 A.D. The mummies were no longer kept in the house after embalming and consequently the inducement to decorate them with portraits ceased... The mummies of this period are without preservative oils or resins... The embroidered garments in which they are buried are the worn clothes of the person; often patched and darned, and generally soiled and rubbed through. The elaborate and expensive embroideries which we find, were therefore in constant use, not merely intended for state costumes seldom put on. This burial of embroideries probably continued until the cessation of interments at Hawara about the beginning of the VIth century.

There is a problem in using this report to identify specific items held at the V&A. Petrie only refers to a few textiles in plates at the back of the volume (including a sock of brown wool, a sample of embroidery, a hairnet and a rag doll) but there is no mention of how these objects were finally distributed. There is an acknowledgement of a 'mass of textiles' that were 'soaked, cleaned and ironed' by Miss Bradbury and distributed to different collections. It is assumed that this refers to textiles mentioned in Museum files and registered in 1889.

The Fayum - The settlement of Kahun

In 1889/90, after working at Hawara, Petrie moved to the pyramid of Senusret II at Lahun (Dynasty 12, 1877-1870 BC) and the town of Medinet Gurob (Dynasties 18-19, 1550-1069 BC). North of this area Petrie discovered the settlement known as Kahun, built to house workers of the pyramid complex and their families. He returned in 1913/4 and 1919/20 and dug briefly at Kahun. The report on the earlier excavations mentions rubbish heaps of a Coptic dier, located about a mile and a half north of Kahun. Here Petrie uncovered a number of papyri but was unable to continue working as he did not have permission to dig at the site, as it was located just outside the Fayum province. Petrie was still able to purchase finds uncovered by others and noted that a Coptic burial ground lay about the temple and from this he obtained 'many garments and other objects'. What was purchased and where it went, is not expanded upon.
Four textiles, given to the V&A by the Petrie Museum, are noted in acquisition files as coming from the dynastic site of Kahun (T.252-1975, T.253-1975, T.201-1977, T.248-1977; Fig. 6). Yet these are stylistically of a later period and dated c. AD 300–900. It is suggested by this author that they were uncovered at the Coptic dior near Kahun.

Four other textiles, given by the Petrie Museum, also date to c. AD 300–900 (T.248-1975, T.249-1975, T.250-1975, T.173-1976). The files note these as coming from the Fayum and given to UCL by Petrie in 1890. Looking at Fayum sites dug prior to 1890 suggests a provenance of Hawara or the Coptic dior near Kahun, as other sites are of earlier periods.

**Tanis**

Tanis, situated in the north east of the Delta, gained prominence as a royal city in the Third Intermediate Period (1069-664 BC). Petrie excavated around the temple enclosure at Tanis in 1883/84 and in tombs from the Roman period he uncovered a woman's body, covered by a board. Petrie described her appearance as follows:

> A woman who had been buried in the rich attire she had worn during her life. Her body was swathed in several garments ornamented with woven patterns and also a large quantity of outer wrappers of good quality (Find 63). In all twenty-one varieties of material and pattern were brought over, besides pieces of cord, of felt or loose wool, and of the long hair of the mummy.

Petrie then describes, in rarely seen detail, the varieties of textile patterns found. His comments include:

> Borders of red with white pattern, edged with purple and black....two varieties of white on dark blue ground...violet and black, pattern of separate leaves... orange and green needlework on very coarse canvas...brown open stuff with black stripes...crimson open stuff like crape with pink border and plaited edge.

The textiles were cut and divided to create sets and sent to the British Museum. Sets of smaller numbers of samples were sent to other institutions. The V&A did not receive a set at that time and it was not until 1974 that UCL gave the Museum eight of these pieces. Four (T.229-1975, T.229a-1975, T.231-1975, T.235-1975) can be directly associated with 'Find 63'. These are glued to cardboard and include a handwritten note in ink (Fig. 7):

> Found on the mummy of a Woman buried at San (Tanis) S. mound. Mr Petrie's excavations 1884.

Petrie's Tanis publication goes to some effort to list principle and miscellaneous finds and their recipients. The only textiles listed are those of 'Find 63'. It is possible that other textiles may have been omitted but the extreme detail of listings suggests they too should have been noted. This may suggest that the other textiles that remained with Petrie, to be distributed to the V&A many years later, also originated from 'Find 63'.
Textiles acquired through Petrie associations

Oxyrhynchus

Oxyrhynchus, site of the modern town Bahnasa, is chiefly known for the many papyri documents found in the rubbish heaps of the old city and which cover much of the 1st Millennium AD. In 1897 Petrie, through the Egyptian Exploration Fund (EEF), gave the V&A objects uncovered at Oxyrhynchus between 1896 and 1897. These items included pottery, metal work, ivory, glass and textiles – two individual socks, two dolls and a ball of wool (Fig. 8). In 1922 the Museum also purchased a larger number of Petrie's Oxyrhynchus textiles.

In 1896 Petrie gave Oxford University students B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt permission to excavate 'anywhere in the strip of desert ... between the Faiyum and Minyeh'. Work began at Oxyrhynchus in December of that year by Petrie who dug for a week. Grenfell and Hunt continued to excavate while Petrie left to explore Deshasheh, forty miles north. Grenfell and Hunt recovered little from the cemeteries but in the town they found papyri scraps when digging through a rubbish mound. They continued onto other mounds and the 'flow of papyri soon became a torrent which it difficult to cope with'. Their excavation report indicates they found artefacts including broken ostraca, coins, dice, bronze knives, beads and lamps but there is little mention of textiles. Only in later reports are items such as rag dolls and woollen socks listed. With this information the items received by the Museum in 1897 can be set in the general context of the rubbish heaps from Oxyrhynchus.

Items purchased by the Museum in 1922 were noted in acquisition files as coming from the rubbish heaps at Oxyrhynchus and were presented by Petrie. Kendrick was able to select 'all those which would be of interest as giving new types' for the Museum. Kendrick’s correspondence to the Museum’s Director includes reference to the objects’ origins:

I have received a formal letter from him offering these stuffs for the sum of £25. This amount can be paid to Professor Petrie ... I happen to know that a large number of the stuffs which come to the Museum were actually bought by Professor Petrie on the spot and not excavated by him, so that there was an actual outlay of money beyond the cost of digging.

Grenfell and Hunt had ended their excavations at Oxyrhynchus by the time Petrie returned to dig in 1922. Although Petrie did not return to the rubbish heaps of the ancient city, he obtained textiles from those who scavenged the heaps for financial gain and passed some of these items onto the V&A.

The Oxyrhynchus textiles held at the V&A were not excavated by Petrie. The items registered in 1897 and 1904 came from the rubbish heaps excavated by Grenfell and Hunt and the 1922 material, while also from the rubbish heaps, was uncovered by unknown persons. These items remain a part of the Petrie story due to his purchases and his connections with the excavations at the site.

Qarara

Qarara was an early Christian settlement, approximately 180 km south of Cairo. In 1903 the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston announced that the EEF had discovered some interesting objects of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, resulting from Grenfell and Hunt’s work at el-Hibeh and Qarara. This appears to be the only published reference to work at Qarara in 1903. German excavations took place at
the site in 1913/14 and publications covering this dig include photos of a variety of highly decorative Late Antique textiles that were recovered, indicating that the site was rich in textile finds.

In September 1903 the EEF gave the V&A a number of finds from a Qarara. Pieces included ivory, statues, beads, bronzes, a ring and one woven, linen textile with figures and inscriptions, dating to the 6th–7th centuries AD (Fig. 9). Acquisition files note that the textile came from a cemetery and that all pieces arrived 'per University College'. In effect they arrived via Petrie as he was, by this time, Professor of Egyptology at the College. The Qarara textile can therefore be associated with Petrie.

The Qau el-Kebir and Badari district

The Qau el-Kebir and Badari district lies approximately 350km south of Cairo and contains multi-period tombs from prehistory to the Late Antique period. Textiles from this area came to the V&A in 1923, 1924, 1925 and 1974. The BSAE, of which Petrie was the Director, excavated the district between 1922 and 1925. For the first and third season there was one camp on site, supervised by G. Brunton. During the second season Petrie ran a second camp. In 1923 University College held an exhibition of excavation finds and an exhibition catalogue is held in V&A records. The textiles on display were described as:

Woven tapestries of Byzantine age. With these are parts of a woven silk border with blue fret pattern and red flowers ... Hood or red woollen stuff, with woven border down the back and a thick ruche around the front edge. A hood of linen with front ruche, animals on the side and square bordered bib in front...plaited roundel with central cross.

In August of that year the Museum received a number of textiles from the exhibition including tapestry woven bands and panels, woven fragments (Fig. 10), hoods, a tunic and knotted woollen bangles, a sleeve fragment, a silk band and a fragment of a sprang cap.

Petrie and Kendrick corresponded the following year regarding the 1923/24 excavations. Petrie wrote that he had a few more 'scraps of textiles' for the Museum. As per the previous year textiles were on display to the public yet this time the catalogue entry was limited to 'coloured stuffs from Qau'. The Museum received woollen cloths, tunic fragments, tapestry woven fragments and a fragment of a hair-net. Two more textiles from the site were given to the Museum: one in 1925, found by Petrie 'in reserve', and another in the 1970s, noted in acquisition files as from Petrie in 1923.

Details of BSAE digs were published, with volume III relating to material held at the V&A. Textiles are discussed briefly in the summary of the Roman period:

The Wrappings. These are mostly plain until the Christian period is reached when the well known coloured textiles with elaborate patterns become common ... On one body was a hood of red woollen material, with a thick runching round the face, and a patterned strip down the back ... Another hood, of linen with ruche, had a pattern of animals at the side. The rarest textile found was a silk border to a garment with blue fret pattern alternating with red flowering plants ... This shows Persian influence, and may be of about the 6th century.

The tomb register for the Roman period (there is no register for the Late Antique/Coptic period) lists specific details including grave orientation and grave
goods. Textiles are noted in the ‘coffins & bricks’ column. This table allows a rare chance to examine contextual detail for some textile finds, for example:

- Grave 1698 - textiles + finger ring, silver ear-ring and glass bangle
- Grave 4702 - textiles + copper bangle, copper ear-ring and finger rings
- Grave 4704 - textiles + copper bangle, 4 finger rings
- Grave 4706 - running + bangles, rings, bone hair pin

Yet there are problems with interpreting the data. The same number may be used for an area, a cemetery or a tomb. For example, in the register tomb 5300 does not include textiles, while cemetery 5300 does. Insufficient and conflicting data also becomes problematic. For example, the distribution list states that the V&A received ‘Coptic textiles’ from cemetery 5700 but gives no details regarding the objects. An anomaly also lies with the discovery of an Arab cloth. The distribution list indicates it came from cemetery 5500 but the text describes it differently:

In Area 5400 at Badari, from house ruins, we dug up two rolls of cloth in good preservation. They are blue, with a border of white irises, edged with a band of yellow and a red fringe (South Kensington).

It is important to note that the find was made within an urban setting at Badari and not a burial one at Qau el-Kebir. The note ‘South Kensington’ suggests the V&A received a portion of the find although this textile has yet to be identified in the Museum’s collection.

The University College exhibitions announced the collection as Egyptian antiquities found at ‘Qau el-Kebir’ or simply ‘Qau’. After reading the excavation reports and noting the position of graves on a map of the district, it is more likely that some of the objects acquired by the V&A were uncovered closer to Badari. Therefore it seems more appropriate to refer to them as originating from the Qau el-Kebir and Badari district. The excavator for the V&A material was Brunton, not Petrie, but the items remain part of the Petrie collection due to his relationship with excavation management.

Akhmim

Most archaeological evidence for Akhmim’s history has come from tombs outside the city. The richness of these sites, approximately 475km south of Cairo, attracted much European interest in the late 1800s and led to illegal excavations and ransacking. In 1892 Petrie noted:

The present system of allowing native overseers and others to plunder tombs for their private benefit, without the publication of any results, is most deplorable and it has cost us the loss of all the information that might have been recorded from ... innumerable ... sites. Destruction is not the less to be deplored because it is done by legalised agents.

Akhmim developed as a centre for the illegal trade in antiquities, specifically textiles, and many textile finds were attributed to Akhmim even if excavated elsewhere. Any specific provenance details are unlikely to surface for such textiles. In 1974 UCL sent the V&A textiles said to come from Akhmim (Fig. 11). Petrie never dug at the site but the textiles remain part of his associated collection as it is assumed they were purchased by him during his time in Egypt.
Limitations

Uncovering the provenance of Petrie associated textiles long held by the Museum was difficult due to the lack of relevant detail in Petrie’s notebooks and diaries and the insufficient, conflicting or non-existent data regarding textile finds in published excavation reports. Museum records were generally helpful but some very early records were compromised through the purging of correspondence or incomplete number runs in acquisition files. Museum acquisition policies of the past also meant that not all objects were catalogued upon arrival, therefore any associated object information available at the time, including provenance, was lost.

The counting of textiles also presented a problem in that one reference number can refer to two or more pieces of cloth. For example, the single reference T.4-1957 accounts for 28 samples of cloth. Therefore the counts in this study relate to registration numbers, including those with extensions 'a' or 'b' etc, and not numbers of individual pieces. The actual number of textiles pieces attributed to Petrie is therefore higher than stated.

Conclusion

Poor excavation and recording methods employed on Egyptian archaeological sites in the late 1800s and early 1900s have made it difficult for modern researchers to study and explore the fuller implications of textile use in life and death through Egyptian history. Textiles uncovered at this time were not considered of great importance and could be tossed away or cut into pieces. Assemblages were usually divided between institutions and rarely did publications refer to specific items. Yet it is still possible to identify provenance details through a combined examination of such publications along with museum records and the objects themselves. In choosing this approach to examine textiles acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum through an association with Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, this study has revealed that Petrie is responsible, directly or indirectly, for over 500 Egyptian textiles held at the Museum. He donated and sold items to the Museum while others came via individuals or organisations who themselves had associations with Petrie. The study helped clarify the positioning of a few of the textiles within their original context but a lack of detailed recording at the time of excavation has made it almost impossible to take the study any further. Regardless, having textiles such as these available for research highlights the role that early archaeologists, like Petrie, played in forming collections that still hold relevance today.

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Notes and References


2. The Late Antique period extends roughly from the 3rd–7th centuries AD. (J. Trilling, *The Roman heritage: textiles from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean 300 to 600 AD* (Washington, 1982), p.11.)

3. Dynastic textiles were woven mainly with undyed flax fibres, with natural colour variations from white to light or golden brown. Dyes were used, developed from plants and minerals, and included blue, red, dark brown, yellow and green. Cloth textures varied from the very fine to very coarse. Thread was usually spun in an S direction and warps/wefts might be paired on the loom. The most common form of weave was plain weave while pile might be used for towels and garments. Borders and selvedges often displayed fringing. (R. Hall, *Egyptian textiles* (Aylesbury, 1986); W. Midgley, ‘Reports on early linen’, in W. M. F. Petrie and E. J. Mackay, *Heliopolis, Kafr Ammar and Shurafa* (London, 1915), pp. 4—51.)


8. Ibid., pp. 17—18.


10. Ibid p. 18.


16 Archaeological evidence shows changes in Egyptian burial customs early in the 1st Millenium AD, attributed generally to the country’s conversion to Christianity. Egyptians began to bury their dead in clothes from daily life or domestic furnishings and the dry conditions of burial allowed for their preservation. Recovered textiles show that tapestry weaves were popular for furnishings, wall-hangings and as decorative panels and bands on clothing. Fibres used were linen and wool with silk introduced at a later period. Looped fabrics used by earlier Egyptians continued, as did the use of dyes. Purple and its variations were popular. Motifs used in Late Antique textiles were influenced by Hellenistic styles. Medallions with guilloche designs and bands of vine leafs were common, as were geometric patterns and borders of waves or scallops. Motifs often included animals, mythical figures and flora, while the representation of Christian saints appeared in the second half of the millennium. (B. Watterson, *Coptic Egypt* (Edinburgh, 1988); J. Kamil, *Coptic Egypt: history and guide* (Cairo, 1990); M. Seagroat, *Coptic weaves* (Merseyside, nd)).


18 The South Kensington Museum was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899, but references to ‘South Kensington’ continued for some years thereafter.

19 Petrie accepted financial assistance from Egyptian enthusiast Martyn Kennard from 1887 to 1892. (University College London, op. cit., (note 5)).


21 Ibid., Petrie, p. 21.

22 Ibid., p. 4.


27 Ibid.

The EEF was founded in 1882 by Egyptian enthusiasts concerned about the destruction of monuments in Egypt. It changed its name to the Egyptian Exploration Society in 1919 and remains a leading institution in the field of Egyptology. (T. G. H. James, *Excavating in Egypt: the Egypt Exploration Society 1882-1982* (London, 1982), p. 6.).


Ibid.

Ibid., p. 349.


British School of Archaeology in Egypt, *Catalogue of Egyptian antiquities found by Prof. Flinders Petrie and students at Qau and Hammamieh 1924*. (London, 1924), p. 11.


Ibid., p. XXXIX.

Ibid., p. 40.

See Brunton, op. cit. (note 41), p. 32.


See Persson, op. cit. (note 1).
Fig. 1: Dynastic linen, V&A 559-1891 and V&A 559a-1891 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).
499x319mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 2: Dynastic linen, V&A T.344-1977, V&A T.345-1977 and V&A T.345a-1977 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).
214x231mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 3: 1st Dynasty linen, V&A T.4-1957 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley). 218x309mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 4: Decorative fragment from the Fayum, V&A 321-1889 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).  
298x248mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 5: Textile fragment from Hawara, V&A T.266-1977 (© Victoria and Albert Museum). 159x184mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 6: Textile fragment from Kahun, V&A T.252-1975 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).
338x216mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 7: Decorative fragments from Tanis and handwritten label, V&A T.229-1975 and V&A T.229a-1975 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).

260x265mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 8: Ball from Oxyrhynchus, V&A 1939-1897 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).
214x254mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 9: Tapestry fragment from Qarara, V&A 1327-1903 (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley). 263x228mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 10: Woollen fragment from the Qau-el Kebir and Badari district, V&A T.239-1923 ( Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).

205x210mm (300 x 300 DPI)
Fig. 11: Linen cloth from Akhmim, V&A T.139-1976. (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, photo R. Smalley).

319x240mm (300 x 300 DPI)