

Gestingthorpe, EssexTextile impression

P 30 (1) P 75

On curved fragment of tile, two areas of impression made by contact with textile, 0.7 X 2.2 and 0.6 X 1.0 cm overall. The larger impression is very clear, the smaller faint, but both are of the same textile, a half-basket weave (extended tabby), i.e. with single threads, probably in the warp, and paired threads thrown together in the weft, thread count 7/8 prs per cm, the latter count taken as 4 prs on 5 mm. Despite the clarity of the impression, the grain of the pottery makes it impossible to see the spinning direction of the threads.

After tabby (plain) weave, half-basket weave was one of the most popular weaves used in Roman textiles. In the northern provinces fabrics in this weave are usually woollens, but from finds further east it is clear it was also commonly used for heavy linens, including sacking, which would not have survived under the damp conditions necessary for preservation in Europe.

Allowing for shrinkage, reckoned at 5% in impressions on tile, the Gestingthorpe cloth would have been coarser than the woollen half-basket weaves, probably garment fragments, from English sites (1), and is perhaps more likely to come from a good quality flax sacking. Most of the impressions on tile so far recorded are tabby weaves, again either sacking, or perhaps from scraps of cloth used to wipe hands or surfaces while the tiles were being made (2).

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- 1 J.P.Wild, Textile Manufacture in the Northern Roman provinces (1970) 46, Table A.nos.5-9; J.P.Wild, Vindolanda III. The Textiles (1977) 9-10, 27, nos.12-19. (unpublished) recent find, coin hoard from Lackford, Suffolk.
- 2 Wild (1970) Table A.nos.30,33,35,63.