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**REVIEW OF ŁUKASZ ANTOSIK'S *Wczesnośredniowieczne włókiennictwo na Śląsku (XI–XIII wiek)* / EARLY MEDIEVAL TEXTILE PRODUCTION IN SILESIA (10<sup>TH</sup>–13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY). ŁÓDŹ 2025, PP. 315, PUBLISHED BY INSTYTUT ARCHEOLOGII I ETNOLOGII POLSKIEJ AKADEMII NAUK**

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The textile production, and in particular drapery, was already highly developed in late medieval Silesia when the intensive urbanisation and colonisation of Silesia and the cultural breakthrough took place in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and became, to a large extent, the driving force behind the civilisational and economic growth of the Silesian towns established at that time. This was particularly manifested through the development of market squares, which were the economic heart of every town and where the stalls of Silesian clothiers occupied a central place usually in the form of cloth halls built at great expense from stone and brick, which were the foundations of later market square blocks.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, for years there have been calls for synthetic research into early medieval textile production in Silesia to identify the roots of the high level of craftsmanship that developed in this province.

This challenge was taken up by Łukasz Antosik, who, as part of his work at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, prepared and defended in 2023 his doctoral thesis entitled *Wczesnośredniowieczne*

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<sup>1</sup> Czerner and Lasota 2000, 331–335.

**KEYWORDS**

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- early Middle Ages
- textile production
- drapery
- weaving



*włókiennictwo na Śląsku (X–XIII w.)* / Early Medieval Textile Production in Silesia (10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries), which has now been published in print. Łukasz Antosik is a renowned specialist in the field of archaeological textiles and has participated

in numerous studies of finds from the territory of present-day Poland, from the Bronze Age to modern times. However, his research interests focus primarily on the Middle Ages.

The reviewed book consists of 11 chapters divided into further subchapters, followed by a summary in English (p. 269) and a list of references (p. 281). The introduction unusually opens with a short Glossary of Textile Terms (p. 7) – this is justified by the specific terminology used in this field of archaeology, which is largely derived from ethnographic research<sup>2</sup> and is used throughout the rest of the publication. It seems reasonable to familiarise the reader with specialist vocabulary at the very beginning of the book. The glossary is supplemented by distinctive black-and-white diagrams showing the weaves described later in the text in a schematic way.

The author set himself the goal of researching and describing, as comprehensively as possible, the history of textile production in early medieval Silesia. In addition, he wanted to highlight the relationship between textile production and other crafts, the organisation of raw material procurement and distribution of finished products, the transition from home weaving to commercial production, and the influence of various ethnic groups that arrived in Silesia as part of the so-called ‘colonisation’ on the development of textile production.

To this end, Łukasz Antosik collected in an extensive catalogue (p. 17) 1998 textile fragments (1618 from the 6<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries and 380 fragments from the late Middle Ages as comparative material) stored in museum collections throughout Silesia, including artefacts from sites in Stěbořice and Hradec nad Moravicí in Czechia. He also included in the catalogue imprints visible on metal artefacts. All fabrics were subjected to microscopic analysis to determine their most important parameters: type of weave, raw material, fabric density, fibre thickness, yarn thickness and twist, and felting or lack thereof. This allowed him to determine the types and sorts of fabrics, which form the basis for understanding the tools and working methods of the medieval craftsmen. The majority of the artefacts come from two proto-urban settlement sites: Opole-Ostrówek (487 items) and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski (1,038 items), as well as other areas of Wrocław (32 items). In total, the catalogue includes textiles from 16 sites. The analysed fragments are listed in tables and then discussed in the following order: type of raw material, fabric type, fabric grade and product type, separately for each occupation phase

of the given archaeological site identified during the excavations.

Then the author compiled the examined fabrics manufactured in early medieval Silesia and compared them with textile finds from other areas of Poland and Europe (p. 163). Thus, we learn that the range of products available in Silesia at that time included wool, half-wool and linen fabrics, as well as silk products, various ribbons, strings and felt – products that were also popular in other regions of Europe. It should be noted here that textiles, as artefacts made of organic materials, rarely survive in the ground. Furthermore, while organic compounds contained in cultural layers may contribute to the survival of animal fibres, at the same time, they may destroy plant fibres. Therefore, the vast majority of the analysed material consists of wool fabrics – and the plant fabrics are seriously underrepresented in the archaeological material.

Later in the book, the author discusses various tools used for processing fibres and producing fabrics (p. 195). The list begins with spindles and distaffs used for twisting yarn, as well as spindle whorls, commonly found during archaeological excavations, which served as weights for spindles, facilitating their rotational movement. The author lists the forms of spindle whorls and the raw materials from which they were made, which – in addition to clay and stone – included wood, bone, antlers, and even wax. Interestingly, the stone raw material for their production was imported even from what is now Ukraine and Norway, despite the existence of local materials and workshops, such as the one discovered in Opole. Next, the book discusses finds of tools for flax scutching (scutching sticks, flax beater, clubs, and weaving swords/knives) and combing (combs and brushes). An important topic in this chapter is weaving tools (p. 202). The author presents the principles of operation and actual finds of tools that were used in early medieval Silesia for textile making, namely: tablet weaving and heddle used to produce small fabrics, strips, ribbons and fringes; vertical weight looms, attested mainly by finds of weaving weights; horizontal foot looms, whose individual elements in the form of heddle blocks, shuttles and weights are known from Opole-Ostrówek and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski. Łukasz Antosik also suggests that as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the wide loom, commonly used only in the late Middle Ages, may have already been known in Silesia. This is because of the felted fabric from Opole, which was originally over 112 cm wide. The overview of tools is completed by combs, smoothing tools, scissors and knives, i.e., items that also have non-textile purposes.

<sup>2</sup> Maik 2019, 75.

The rest of the book is devoted to the organisation of textile work, from the acquisition and processing of raw materials (p. 215), through spinning (p. 223) and weaving (p. 229), to the finishing of ready-made products (p. 243). Most of these activities are not evident in the archaeological record, and their reconstruction is based mainly on written sources, iconography and ethnographic research. The author presents the characteristics of each of the raw materials used in the early Middle Ages (wool, flax, and other plants), their quality, surviving information about breeding animals for wool or cultivation of specific plants, their varieties, as well as the subsequent stages of gathering raw material and its processing. In the chapter dedicated to spinning, he discusses the mechanics of the spindle and the benefits of using spindles with different parameters. The author notes that although spinning was the domain of women, spindles are also found in men's graves. He also speculates on the possibility of the appearance of the hand spinning wheel in Silesia as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the Beguine order. The chapter on weaving presents the construction and principles of operation of various types of looms, from the simplest vertical weight looms, through vertical shaft looms, which allow the production of fabric of any length, pit looms known so far from a single discovery in Hungary, to horizontal weaving looms, which may have appeared in Silesia as early as the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and gradually replaced vertical looms, which remained in use in rural areas.

Finally, finishing techniques and evidence of their use in early medieval Silesia are presented. These included felting fabrics, initially performed by trampling in barrels and later using mechanical energy in fulling mills, levelling, carding, i.e., scratching the surface with a dyeing comb, trimming excessively protruding hairs, and dyeing with natural plant and animal dyes, which under favourable conditions is detectable in archaeological material.

A very important chapter concerns the import of fabrics to Silesia. Silk, most likely imported from Byzantium in the form of finished products, but also threads used, for example, for embroidery, should undoubtedly be considered imports. In addition, cotton fabrics and tied carpets, primitive imitations of which were discovered in Opole, as well as a single fragment of a high-quality Birka-type fabric with a characteristic weave, may also have come from distant lands.

The next chapter (p. 257) answers the question about the transition from home weaving to organised

craft production. According to the author, this took place in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and was associated with the spread of horizontal weaving looms. Łukasz Antosik showed that during these two centuries, there was a noticeable tendency to simplify the weaving process and increase its efficiency by using 2/1 and 2/2 twill weaves and a 1/1 plain weave, characteristic of foot looms, which led to the production of a significant surplus of goods for sale. These weaves were found in 79% of the analysed artefacts, with a noticeable increase in their proportion over time. The author adds in the following conclusion (p. 265) that the main distributors of these innovations could have been Cistercian monasteries and the Beguines, which had been established since the 1140s and originated in areas of Europe where the textile industry was already well-developed at that time.

Łukasz Antosik's book is a study that seems to respond to research demands that the scholars have made for many years. The analysis of the material, together with the written sources cited, sheds light on the development of the textile industry and the emergence of professional weaving in Silesia, and explains the high level of cloth production at the dawn of the arrival in Silesia of the new settlers from Western Europe – issues that have not been sufficiently explored to date. The study also describes the entire process of fabric production, from the sources of raw materials to the finishing of the product, explaining the principles of the individual stages and tools.

In addition to wool, which is best represented in archaeological material, the author also devotes considerable attention to linen, one of the main sources of fibre in the Middle Ages, which unfortunately rarely survives in the ground. The issue of imported silk and cotton fabrics is also addressed. An unquestionable advantage of the work is the catalogue section that for the first time brings together all the early medieval Silesian textiles discovered to date. At the same time, it is a difficult book for readers unfamiliar with the specifics of archaeological textile research, including the author of the following review, requiring a great deal of attention while reading and constant reference to the issues explained in the introduction. Nevertheless, it is an important study that broadens our knowledge of one of the basic branches of the early medieval economy in Silesia.

#### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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