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A Contribution to Understanding the Textile Terminology in the Dalmatian Area between 2 century BC and 9 century AD

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ABSTRACT

The study will focus on the terminology associated with textile production and weaving in Dalmatia between the 2 century BC and the 9 century AD.

Terminology originating from different cultures, such as that of the Roman, proto-Slavic or Slavic territories exercised influence on the Dalmatian culture of that period. Rare artefacts will be used to show a timeline for how these elements have been assimilated in Dalmatia. With the arrival of South Slavs who migrated from the Carpathian Mountains in the 5 and 6 century, the tradition of weaving in Dalmatia takes on the most important characteristics. However it will also face a different fate in the following centuries due to its geographic position where elements of Western and Eastern cultures met and coexisted. Some elements continued to exist while others transformed and adjusted according to new influences during the middle Ages. The study will describe the heritage of different cultures in the textile culture of Dalmatia, with focus on terminology used for the threads, the old textile techniques and the textile tools for weaving. Thanks to the treasured traditional culture of handiwork in Dalmatia, this is a part of heritage that remains preserved even today.

KEYWORDS

Textile, weaving, textile tools, Dalmatia, terminology

INTRODUCTION

The area that will be introduced in this study is Dalmatia (Province of Croatia), on the Adriatic Sea, its coastal areas in particular, as well as parts of the hinterland. It was a place where the wild plant Spanish broom or weaver's broom (*Spartium junceum* L. *Genista Lam juncea*) grew well; wool was also cultivated. This study will focus on terminological aspects of weaving in Dalmatia between the 2 century BC and the 9 century AD. Textile artefacts from this period are very rare. Therefore, the sources are based on archaeological, linguistic, ethnographic and very early historical sources. Particular source category consists of stone monuments: a sculpture in space, reliefs on sarcophagi and steles, as well as fragments of public monuments. However, in this point it is necessary to emphasize the contribution of researcher from different field of science. Through their analysis, the textile culture was not primarily the subject of research but only fragmentary

concerned. The traditional culture kept or better frozen the very important information about ornaments, technology and specific terminology through centuries. Due to ethnologists and their contributions, some of the assumptions, created as results of lack of material artifact from earlier periods, creating a potential for their confirmation. The contributions of this article are in the analyses of different approaches with goal to represent brief history of textile terminology and clothing forms in the Dalmatia Area between 2 century BC and 9 century AD.

The territorial range of Dalmatia underwent extensive changes over the course of history. In certain historical periods, it even encompassed the neighbouring countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania; however, since the classical antiquity, the toponym has been preserved only on the present-day territory of Croatia. It was first mentioned in 8 BC when it was founded by the Roman emperor Augustus and given the name Dalmatia for the territory between the rivers Promina and Cetina, inhabited by the Illyrian tribe *Delmatae*, *i.e.* as a synonym for this part of the Illyricum, the Roman name for a larger territory settled by various Illyrian tribes. A unique culture was formed at the intersection of numerous migrations and trade routes, and it can be observed through three major periods:

- The period from around 4 century BC to 2 century (the major contribution of *Delmatae*)
- The period from around 1 century BC to 4 century AD (contribution of the Roman period)
- The period from around 5 century AD to 9 century AD (contribution of southern Slavs)

THE PERIOD FROM AROUND 4 CENTURY BC TO 2 CENTURY AD

The handicraft of textile in this part of the world can be traced back to early prehistoric periods. Wool and linen were the first raw materials that people in this region could use for producing textiles. At first they were used as they were found in nature. The fleece was plucked from the sheep before the invention of shears. By pressing and pounding, it was matted into felt that could be used from some items of clothing [1]. In the 2 century BC, Dalmatia was officially a part of the Roman Empire, in addition to the strong influence of the Roman culture already present in this area. There was also a highly developed tribal community of *Delmatae*, who had a strong anchorage since the mid of the 2 century BC in central Dalmatia - Salona. They appear from the 4 century BC and they consider themselves Illyrians in a broader sense. According to them, it is called the Roman province Dalmatia. The name of the *Delmatae* community contains the Illyrian basis *Delme* - which means for the sheep [2].

They were herders and they bred sheep for wool. The demonym for the community of *Delmatae* was the basis for the term *dalmatica*, a name for a tunic with long sleeves (*tunica manicata*) for both genders, bell cut, without belt with ribbons. The Illyrians also wore it. *Delmatae*, the indigenous population of Dalmatia, separated themselves from the Roman population in urban cities of Salona and Narona, which accepted ***dalmatica*** only from the third century [2].

The tribal community of *Delmatae* was located in the wider area of Salona, on the western Herzegovina, between the Krka River and the Neretva River. They were familiar with a vertical flat, as evidenced by the finding of stone and clay weights from the 4 century BC onwards. A particularly nice example of fabric from this culture is now exposed in the Archaeological Museum in Livno (Picture 1) [1]. Found in the funerary tumulus in Kupreško polje at the beginning of the 1980s, the fabric was used as the wrap for a dead body in a contracted position. The body was placed on a wooden sled. The finding of the unique wool fabric was woven from undyed woollen fibres, probably from domesticated Balkan mouflon (*Ovis orientalis orientalis* group), a subspecies group of the wild sheep (*Ovis orientalis*). This is one of the earliest finds in Europe dating from the Late Neolithic. Different weaving techniques were identified on the shroud, forming the

main part of the fabric a wide border, and a narrower selvage, along with a decorative interlace. The fabric was of good quality, suggesting that at this early date the wool was already being combed to isolate the best fibres, from which yarn was produced. A large portable wooden frame loom with crossbeams was then used to weave the textiles. It was made of pure, high quality sheep's wool, which was probably plucked and not shorn. It is woven in a thick, cross weave, plain weave, with a thicker selvage along the edge, woven with two threads in the weft. The dimensions are 300 X 170 cm.



Picture 1. Wool fabric found in the funerary tumulus in Kupreško polje, from the late Neolithic period, Archaeological Museum in Livno (photo K.N. Simončič)

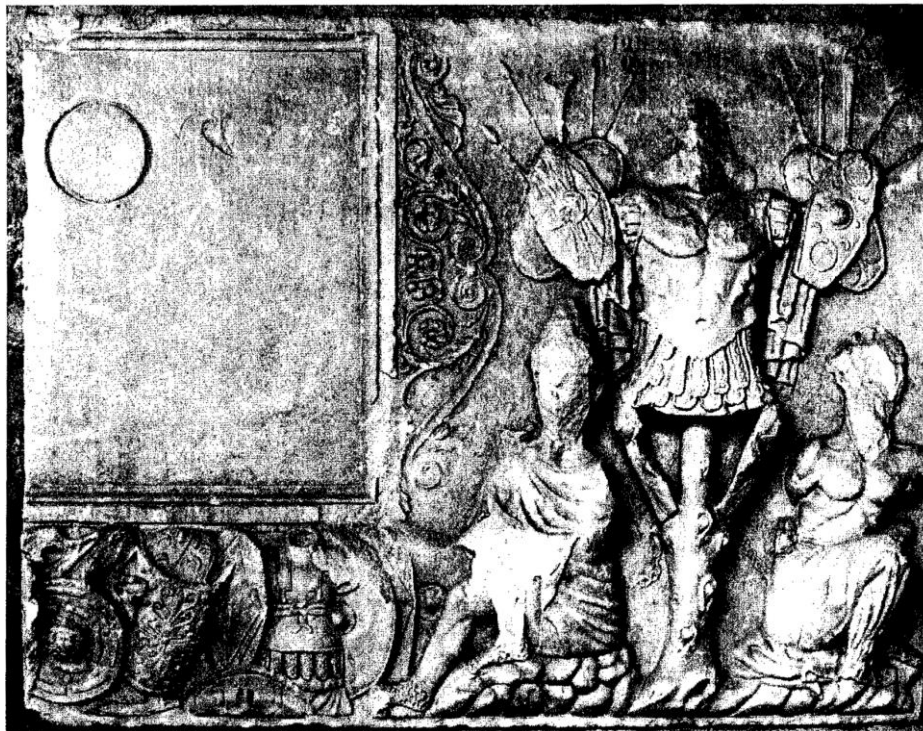
The found fabric is approximately 3500 years old [1]. It was made on a type of an upright loom in the shape of the frame with a warp held tight by clay or stone weights [4]. Reconstruction of this loom from Bronze Age was first presented in the exhibition “*The Wonder of Weaving*” in Zagreb in 1988, while the last reconstructed example of loom was made for permanent exhibition in the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica Livno [3]. Trampuž Orel explained that the warp in this period is till quite short, but is has already been divided into two layers [4]. However, recent studies of experts in the field of technology give us an important new insight about loom. According to them, wool fabric found in the funerary tumulus in Kupreško polje was made on the upright loom without stone weights.

Perhaps we could consider this shroud a proto-form for the straight woollen cloak that was called **struka**, still an essential part of the wardrobe in the Dinaric area (a part of Dalmatia) for both men and women, especially as dress for shepherds [1, 5, 6, 7]. The similarity lies in the raw material of dark, undyed wool, similar shape, and partially in the similarity of the fabric structure. This remarkable archaeological find is the earliest textile item apparel preserved over the centuries from the life of sheepherding and livestock care typical to that region.

Delmatae and Illyrian tribes of this area in general were the carriers of weaving techniques that could not be labelled as elementary (canvas weaving), but as slantwise cross (*kober*) weave by Gavazzi. It was especially present in aprons with rhombus patterned cross in the upper part. This typical weaving technique (as well as samples) belongs to the Hallstatt era [8].

Therefore, the other elementary piece of clothing in the Dalmatian area that could be made in the simplest loom was a woollen apron. Differently coloured threads were drawn through the taut threads of the warp by finger or with wooden shuttle creating a colourful weft. This kind of weaving is called *klječano, iverano na prste* (ground, tapestry of finger weaving) [1] and was kept through centuries due to nurturing traditional culture.

For the *Delmatae* and Illyrians in general, there was also a typical conical headgear, mentioned by Srđana Schönauer in her study (2000), together with its display on the stele named "*Gurdunska tropeja*" today preserved in Archaeological Museum of Split [9]. According to the Croatian archaeologist Nenad Cambi, an imprisoned *Delmata* is portrayed wearing a conical fur cap, *i.e.* an *ushanka* with earflaps, which represents an indigenous garment for the *Delmatae*, as well as the Illyrians (Picture 2) [10].



Picture 2. Gurdunska tropeja, around 1th century AD, Archaeological Museum of Split

Therefore, we can assume the *Delmatae* were communities that had a developed culture of weaving, and their accommodation in the area of Salona – the capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia – led to the subsequent development of the city in the direction of textile production.

THE PERIOD FROM AROUND 1 CENTURY BC TO 4 CENTURY AD

In Salona and its surroundings, there were imperial workshops for purple dye, workshops for colouring textile raw materials and finished textiles *baphium*, weaving workshop *gynaecium* and cloth-weaving workshop *officinae fullonum* [11, 1]. Along with Salona as a Dalmatian metropolis and one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, Narona is also considered one of the most important ancient cities on the east coast of the

Adriatic. It was granted the status of a Roman colony. Life in Naronas as well as the other provincial territories of Dalmatia ceased in the course of the 7th century¹. Weaving was also a household practice, so there were common displays of weaving supplies on steles from the 1st to 3rd century AD, like the stele with a frieze of women's accessories in Salona from the 1st century AD (Picture 3), also noted in Srđana Schönauer's study and today preserved in Archaeological Museum of Split [9].



Picture 3. Stele with a frieze of women's accessories, Salona from 1st century AD, Archaeological Museum of Split

The frieze consists of 13 items, interesting to us because of baskets for handwork for raw wool, spindle *fusus*, for winding twisted wool with weight *vertivillus* or *turbo*, which tightened at the bottom and accelerated rotation. In Dalmatia, this form has remained unchanged until today [9]. Another stele from Salona, named "Mala stela Elije Aleksandrije" (The Little Stele of Eglia Alexandria) (Picture 4) from the turn of the 2nd to the 3rd century testifies to the presence of *dalmatica*.

¹ The notion of antique Dalmatia was common until the 7th century. The emperor Theodosius I, also known as Theodosius the Great, divided the Roman Empire into western and eastern part in 395 AD. Dalmatia remained in the western half of the Empire, which would later have far-reaching consequences in channelling the development of this province towards western civilization. Liburnia with its centre in Zadar would always bear significant importance in Dalmatia; its name would still be mentioned in the later periods during the reign of Croatian national leaders from the beginning of the 9th century AD.



Picture 4. *The Little Stele of Eglia Alexandria* from the end of 2nd and beginning of 3rd century AD, Archaeological Museum of Split

Schouenauer considers the female character in the picture to be wearing simple linen or woollen *dalmatica* without the *clavi* ornaments, whereas *segmenta* ornaments are possibly present on the lower part of the garment which is not displayed. According to Schoenauer, *dalmatica* was commonly worn across the Roman Empire, with records of manufactures for its production in Laodicea, Tarsa and Byblos Scitopolui Alexandria. From the Diocletian's Edict on Prices dated 301 AD, we learn of the different versions of the *dalmatica*: made of linen, wool, half silk, silk, with or without *clavi* and *segmenta* ornaments [12, 13]. In the chapter XVII of this the Edict, there are records of both men's and women's *dalmaticas*, classified by quality and the dimensions of the fabric, with their prices ranging significantly from the most expensive woollen ones to the cheapest and simplest women's garments made of linen. From another document titled *Notitia Dignatum*, dated c. 100 years later, we learn that the northern part of Diocletian's Palace, *i.e.* present-day Split, was converted into workshops where women wove wool cloth for military supplies [1, 13]. The wool used to manufacture these clothes was obviously obtained from the provincial territory. The Romans were familiar with the upright loom with the warp, described in detail by Ovid in the story of *Arachne* and it was introduced in the area of Dalmatia during the first century [14]. Radauš Ribarić discovered the reflection of the Roman period in woven blankets such as are still used as ceremonial bed cover in the villages of north-eastern Pannonia. The artistic component on them reflects many features of Roman mosaic, and could also be recognized in the traditional production of woollen blankets in the beginning of the 20th century in the Dalmatian hinterland [15]. We can trace textile production during Roman period through certain terms.

The term **rakno** for woollen cloth comes from the Latin word **rachana**, and **stomanja**, a word for shirt in Dalmatia comes from the Latin word **stamina**, which means both the warp itself, and fine woollen fabric [16, 17]. The wool used for the manufacture of garments in the coastal Dalmatia was mainly purchased from domestic tribes inhabiting the hinterland, although the coastal population also owned sheep flocks shepherded by slaves. The wool obtained from these flocks was used to manufacture woollen clothes such as *stomanje*, which rivaled with somewhat coarser wool from Gaul.

THE PERIOD FROM AROUND 5 CENTURY AD TO 9 CENTURY AD

But the most important wave that marked this area and the culture of weaving happened at 5 and 6 century AD with arrival of the Slavs. Culture heritage, which southern Slavs brought with them from their original homeland in the north, probably somewhere beyond the Carpathian Mountains, here in southeast Europe has experienced a different fate². Some words from the common Slavic language treasures are found only in one part of the South Slav area, while elsewhere they do not exist. Old Slavic terminology can serve as the most convincing evidence of the suppression of old customs of indigenous people. Weaver's art was so extraordinarily developed and maintained thanks to the socio-economic formations of South Slavic **farms** – **zadruga** (old parents living with married sons and their children, to up to four generations: a common economy, the male elders, conclusions were adopted by the family council which consisted of older men) [8]. The Slavs in Dalmatia were familiar with the technics of cultivating flax and hemp. Pulling out of the soil, the separation of seeds and roots of these plants, soaking in rettery, drying, friction in pillar or mallet with boon, cleaning and carding, bending cleaned yarn in hank (**povjesmo**), still spinning, or rewinding threads, beaming and weaving, tool for winding spun thread with the spindle - the **motovilo**, term **blizna** – label for error in weaving³, distaff (**preslica**) in the form of a cone. The nouns for loom (**stan**, **stativa**, **krosna**), were used by the Slavs in the original proto-Slavic community and they existed also in the Dalmatian area. The immediate predecessor of the horizontal loom was the weaving grid, **daščica** (board), also called the **brdo**, a wooden contrivance quipped with grooves and holes [18]. The odd and even threads were guided through them, and held horizontally strung when working. By raising and lowering the contrivance, a shed was created through which the shuttle could be moved. The length of the piece of sloth could be extended by winding the finished fabric on two cylinders, which means that this contrivance indeed had the basic contours of a horizontal loom [19]. Then there was a simple loom in the form of a wooden grid (**tkanje na dašticu** [19]) for weaving narrow straps or a similar loom used for weaving ribbons or belts with the help of a series of small rectangular wooden plates with four holes on the angles. The preserved names for garments include the term **opleće** (woman's blouse), and a garb-rug named **struke** [5].

Specific Slavic terms and nomenclature that was used were accepted in spinning and weaving. In Dalmatia, **čiznica** or **čismenica** is the smallest unit of three threads (from **čitati**, to read, means to count). **Pasmo** – In Dalmatia, it consists of **ten** čismenica (30 threads). This measure is used to measure the warp (especially in

² There are only few contemporary sources in the immigration of Croats. In his work *De administrando imperio* (On the Governance of the Empire), the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus noted that the Croats were moved to Galicia in the 7 century at the order of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, to serve as a protection from the Avars. In the era of the medieval Kingdom of Croatia, the following peoples were settled in Dalmatia: the indigenous Romanized population (the Illyrians), Slavic immigrants, Croats and the ruling class (dynasty) of the Croatian kingdom.

³ In case of a broken thread in the warp, the weaver does not mend it, but leaves the error in the fabric – common practice with the Ukrainians, Belarusians, South Slavs, also familiar on the Dalmatian territory as concluded Gavazzi [4].

the process of beaming) [20]. These examples prove that this way of counting has come down to us from proto-Slavic community, and it reflects remnants of the Babylonian sexagesimal system⁴, combined with the proto-Indo-European decimal system [5].

Firstly canvas – cloth (*platno*) was produced as a means of payment, and then as a common technique of weaving fabrics. The fact that the Slavic term *platno* (cloth) had purchasing power, like furs among Dalmatians as an exchange in the later form of goods for goods trade, with an accepted value, is confirmed by the term *platiti* which means “to pay” [8].

CONCLUSION

Based on a brief historical overview of textile terminology and production on Dalmatian territory, we can assume that weaving skills and the manufacture of specific garments had reached a significant level in the transitional period from the Neolithic Era to the Bronze Age. Analyses from different field of science, where textile culture was not primarily the subject of research, contributed to knowledge of textile terminology and clothing forms.

The data on the intensive manufacture within the Diocletian Palace in the period of the Late Roman Empire, as presented by Bulić and Karaman, indicate the existence of not only household weaving practices for personal purposes but also of organised weaving activities in urban centres as a specific form of a female semi-professional work on Dalmatian territory of that time. Analyses of traditional Slavic ornament and Roman mosaics made by Radauš Ribarić support the theory of important impact of Roman Era in Dalmatian artistic textile heritage.

By the mid 3 century, the Roman Empire had already started facing ever-growing tribulations, weakened by internal distress and incessant threats to its borders by the barbarian tribes. The strength of the empire would continue to decline over the following three centuries. By that time, the onset of the 6 century, the Slavs would already be present on the territory of Dalmatia, having mastered the weaving skills. The indigenous inhabitants of Dalmatia were widely Slavenized, whereas the cultural heritage of the indigenous and the new immigrant population would begin to overlap and become intertwined.

⁴ Sexagesimal number system of counting threads with units of three threads.

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