

# Anna Drażkowska

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## 17th-18th century clothing from children's graves discovered in the church at Kostrzyn on the Oder, Poland

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Anna Drażkowska

## 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century Clothing from Children's Graves discovered in the Church at Kostrzyn on the Oder, Poland

Remnants of a child's clothing were discovered during excavations carried out inside the ruins of St. Mary's church in Kostrzyn. The assemblage consists of two dresses, three small bonnets, swaddling-bands, textile shoes, and also elements of the grave goods - two pillows and a garland.

The textiles were very deteriorated. A lot of cavities had appeared in the fibres as a result of decay. The fibres had changed their original colour and were also stained in places. Costume analysis revealed that both dresses and bonnets have features specific to grave clothing. A detailed analysis shows that the clothes were sewed according to the current fashion. There are four characteristic features which indicate such a classification:

- cut
- method of joining the individual, structural elements
- method of completing
- style of the decorative elements.

The cut was very simple and economic. For example the dress decorated with bows had no back (Fig.1). The front of the dress was made of 2 rectangular pieces of textile with two short sleeves attached. The edges of this clothing were put under the body of dead child. The second dress was decorated with metal lace (Fig.2). It was sewed from an older textile or had been re-cut from the garment of an adult. In this case the element covering the back was made in a very primitive way, without lining and fastenings. Both dresses have no cut lines under the arms and necks. The necklines were created by folding and pressing the cloth. It was also held in place by pins. The side folds running from the neckline and arms down to the bottom edge of dress were also shaped with their help. Thanks to them the three - dimensional form modelled on the dead body was obtained. Dresses of a similar construction are preserved in the National Museum in Denmark and in the Historical Museum in Hamburg [Johannsen 1988: 48-49; Strate 1985: 34].

The next element indicating the disposable character of these clothes was the way in which their component parts were joined together. The side edges were sewn together with a loose baste stitch. The sleeves were not sewed along their whole length, but were fastened only in a few points or just pinned. This construction helped to dress the inert body. The bows, added as a purely decorative element, were likewise pinned in place.

Analysing the construction of this type of garment we can notice some contradictions: on the one hand the form is very simple and economical, on the other hand they took care of pressing the cut according to the canons of fashion. Both dresses were decorated. One with bows pinned on vertically and with gathered ribbons on the edges of the sleeves. The other dress together with the bonnet and the textile shoes were decorated with metal lace.

From the construction, taking into account the lack of any back or fastenings and the types of seams and pins that were used to join together the parts of garments, we can assume that these clothes were disposable. They were obviously made only for the burial.

That is why the parts of the dress are held together only by loose seams and pins, adequate for the task in hand, and more substantial methods were considered unnecessary. The care taken to make the clothes conform with current fashion and the art of tailoring gave the clothes the illusion of ordinary life and gave a special and very solemn character to the ceremony.

Apart from the dresses, bonnets and shoes, some swaddling-bands were recovered from the crypt. Only one element has survived; a 3m by 80cm silk band. The textiles which had once touched the baby's body have not been preserved. The preserved swaddling band was probably wrapped around some cotton or flax textile bindings which had been secured in place. Together with the swaddling-band a small bonnet was found. It was made of a narrow, gathered ribbon. During analysis it was confirmed that the swad-



Fig. 1. The dress decorated with bows, after restoration.

dling-band had not been sewn together specially for the burial, but had already been used during the baby's lifetime.

The main aim of the conservation work was to prepare the objects for exhibition. This is the reason why they were strengthened and mounted for support so that the original shape of the cloth could be reconstructed. The textiles had to be conserved before they could be subjected to any costume analysis. The conservation work was carried out in the Conservation Laboratory for Archaeological Artefacts of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University. The objects were in a very poor state. They were dried out, and weakened by the decay processes. In this crumbling state every action inflicted new damage on the textiles. All of the fabrics were silk. Probably, on the day of the burial, the children had also been dressed in other garments made from different fibres, but these have not been preserved. Taking the state of the textiles into consideration the conservators decided on the following programme for the conservation work:

- photographing the objects before conservation
- putting the textiles onto glass plates and into plastic boxes and moisturising them with water

- increasing the flexibility of the fibres by bathing them in a water solution of PEG - 200
- cleaning with delicate brushes and needles
- microscopic identification of any soils present
- repeated cleaning
- disinfection
- impregnation
- drying
- reconstruction of clothing
- photographing the objects after conservation
- description and measurement of the objects.

Our attempts to reconstruct and double the will be presented in this article. Doubling is a method of strengthening old, antique fabrics by sticking them onto a backing material [Ślesiński 1995: 52]. The double fills in the cavities and joins the fragments of the weakened fibres into one piece. The most important aim of doubling the textiles was to relieve the old fibres from strain, and to take over their capacity to function. An effort was made to choose materials which would be the most compatible and which would not result in further deterioration. When choosing the doubling materials we took the following factors into consideration:

- similar colour and texture to the original fabric
- identical or similar kind of material
- should not stretch
- should not be stiff
- thickness should be similar to the original fabric

The most important problem before beginning conservation was to find the proper doubling material and glue. On the basis of a number of tests we carried out we decided that the properties which the glue should have should be as follows:

- it should not change its properties over time
- it should be resistant to light
- it should be colourless
- it should not penetrate the fibres too deep
- it should be easy to remove
- it should not seep through to the front side
- it should not react with the ancient textile
- it should stiffen neither the ancient textile nor the backing material, and it should be flexible
- it should be resistant to changes in humidity
- it should be unaffected by micro-organisms
- it should join both materials well

As a result of number of tests we chose acrylic glue appointed 489 HV. Synthetic satin was used as the backing material. Following scientific analysis and costume analysis of the preserved elements, 17 pieces of the garments were selected for reconstruction. In taking this decision we were guided by the fact these are the only examples of children's funeral clothing, ever to have been exhibited in a museum.

There were two methods of joining both materials:



Fig. 2. The dress, bonnet and shoes decorated with the metal lace, after restoration.

- gluing
- gluing and sewing.

In most of cases the results of conservation were satisfactory. The fibres were strengthened permitting

us to carry out the reconstruction. Only one of the dresses and a pillow were insufficiently strengthened for further work. These had, however, been subjected to a very advanced processes of decay, which had deteriorated the fabric very much. The weakened fibres were separating and breaking up. They had lost their cohesion. Consequently large fragments were separating away from the textile, and cavities had appeared in it.

The last problem during the reconstruction was to shape the clothing in such a way as to give the best effect during exhibition. This was especially the case with the dress without a back panel. It had been placed and arranged directly onto the body of the dead child. The sleeves were only pinned on the edge of the textile covering the front of the body. No seams had been made, and the neckline had only been modelled by bending and tucking the top edge underneath. During the reconstruction we decided to sew the neckline in place so that the dress would not lose its shape if moved.

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**Anna Drażkowska**  
Instytut Archeologii UMK  
Szosa Bydgoska 40/44  
87-100 Toruń  
Poland