



Traditional Weaving and local patterns

Maria Sgourou



The art of weaving is tradition in Greece since antiquity. The ancient Greek poet Homer wrote about mortal women but also queens, goddesses, and fairies that card, spin and weave.



References of the great art of weaving that was gifted to people by ancient Greek Goddess of wisdom and handicraft, Athena, can be found not only in Homer's epic poems, but in mythology and philosophy as well.



The art of weaving was the first art taught to people by Gods. It is from Goddess Athena Ergani that the Greeks learn how to card, spin and weave. Goddess Athena weave her veil and Hera's veil.



The words “carding”, “spinning” and “weaving” are exactly the same through time from ancient to contemporary Greece.



In Greece, the art of weaving always goes alongside with singing. From Kirke, an enchantress and minor goddess, in Greek mythology who is described by Homer spending her time weaving and singing and Nymph Kalypso who is also described singing and weaving with a shuttle made of gold, to weavers in recent years who are weaving while singing:

*Fly shuttle fly
to ravel and weave
for my sweetheart is
coming
and I am preparing my
trousseau*



Young girls with guidance from mothers and aunts are still learning to weave in some Greek villages.



Woven with traditional decorative themes reflect their place of origin but also the character of the weaver who chose them.

For example, Cretan woven have different themes and colors from Epirote or Macedonian woven.



Cretan woven



Macedonian woven

Weaving never stopped growing even during the years of Ottoman rule. In fact, during the 15th century, the growth of livestock and weaving led to exports of wool. From 18th to 20th century textile industry was developed.



The basic tool of weaving is the loom. We come across the word “loom”, for the first time, in Homer’s *Odyssey*.



Loom was the basic tool of household economy in regards of clothing.

Owing a loom made a house independent and self-sustained while having control over the fashion chosen by the residents, according to the writer George Lekakis.



The growth of weaving in Metsovo - although considered a part of the wider context of commercial competition in the Mediterranean - is not a primary economic activity. With its routes deep in the traditional logic of self-sustained consumerism, the products of the loom remained domestic creations without being subjected to the wider economical rules determined by the contemporary industrial production.



Weaving started to decline in Metsovo when its development needed to be in compliance with the spirit oriented towards commercial development instead of the needs of the community, notes Vassiliki Rokou in her book "Rural world and technical groups" EPIRUS.



Another example of weaving growth and decline can be found in the Greek village called Abellakia. In 1788 the whole village participated in founding a very successful cooperative organization that exported dyed yarn. They produced the yarn themselves from the beginning. They cultivated the cotton and the dye rizari or erythrodane. The yarn was dyed, spun and woven. In 1811 Ali Passas of Ioannina persecuted the cooperative organization and thus Abellakia was financially destroyed.



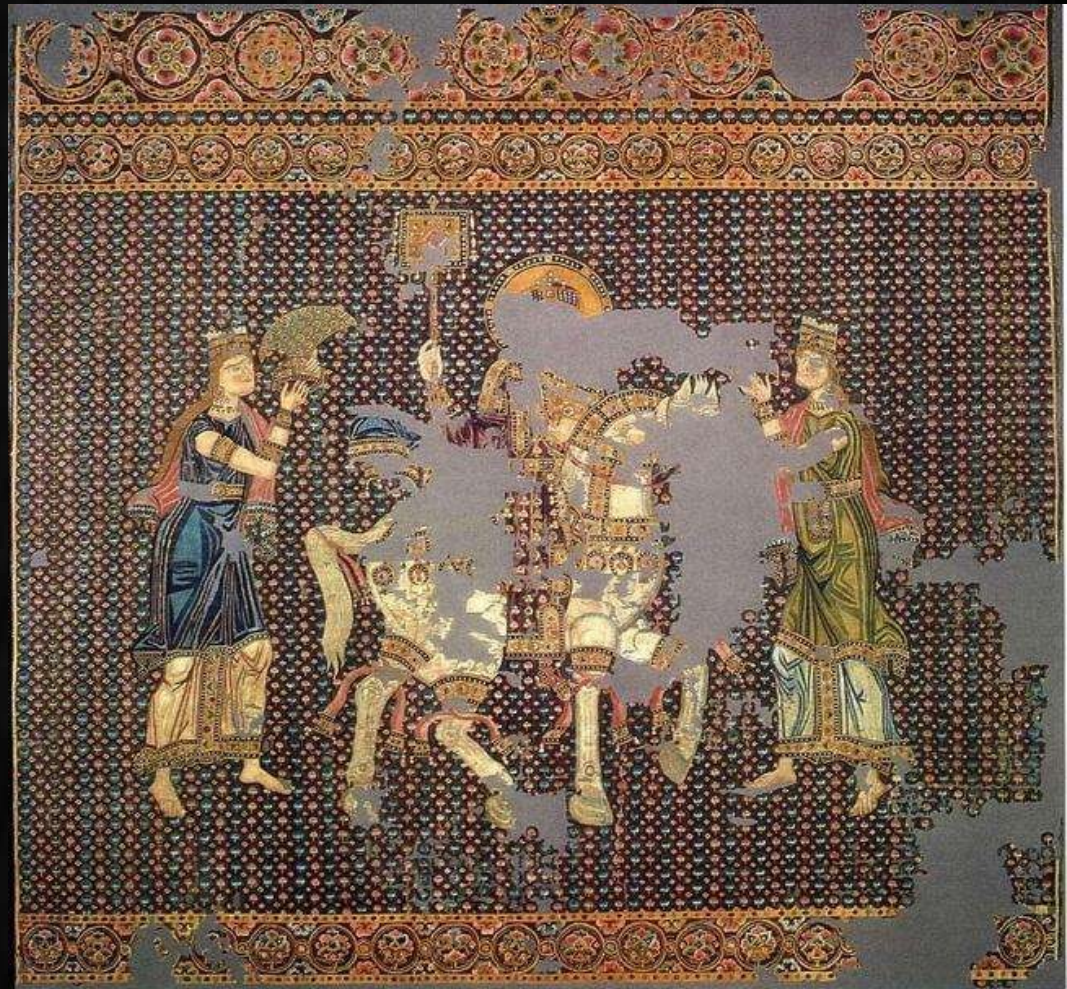
Many years later, starting in 1948 the sericulture flourished in Soufli and there was a boost in textile development in Soufli.



In Crete, a Greek island, the weaving development never stopped growing due to the tourist development especially since 1960.



A great cultural tradition regarding weaving can also be found during Roman Empire and Byzantium period but its description would be impossible to be included in a short presentation.



The fabrics of antiquity testify to knowledge and elegance. They were transparent fabrics, extremely thin, mainly linen but also thick ones made of wool and quite decorated.



The main theme in Minoan Crete is the simple geometric shapes, but also the crocus or lily flowers as well as animal designs.



In recent years the local areas of the country have developed their own style so it is easily recognizable. For example, Thracian woven, Epirote woven, etc.



Thracian woven



Epirote woven



The main types of weavers other than clothing are: Flokates, couscouse, embroidery of the loom, stripes, rugs, wall tapestries



Flokates



couscouse



embroidery of the loom



stripes



rugs





wall tapestry



Before the recent economic crisis, 2 state schools, with branches all over Greece, operated in Greece: PRONOIA and EOMMEX. Today we only have rudimentary private seminars in Athens, Heraklion and Thessaloniki. Teaching the art of weaving and keeping it alive is critical. Otherwise, its knowledge will be lost and the world will become poorer.

