



# SPINNERS AND WEAVERS OF MODERN GREECE

*Provide Beautiful Fabrics for Variety of Costumes in Cavalcade of Greek Fashions*

**D**EEP in the heart of the Greek people lies the restless urge of the spirit of creation. It is just as strong in the heart of the simple peasant in the remote mountain village as in the artist who studies in the metropolis. While the artist uses his brush, his sculptor's chisel, his pen to give this spirit a chance for expression, the simple peasant woman throughout the years has used the instruments which will best serve her daily needs—her needle and

her loom. By a tradition so old that its beginning is lost beyond the pages of history the Greek woman uses her loom to make the useful and the beautiful things that she uses in her home. From mother to daughter, from generation to generation the skill passes from one pair of hands to another. All over Greece the women spin and weave their silk, cotton, linen and wool using the wooden loom in all its forms from the tiny primitive loom used by the nomad

tribes of the north to the flying shuttle handloom used by the progressive enterprises in the cities.

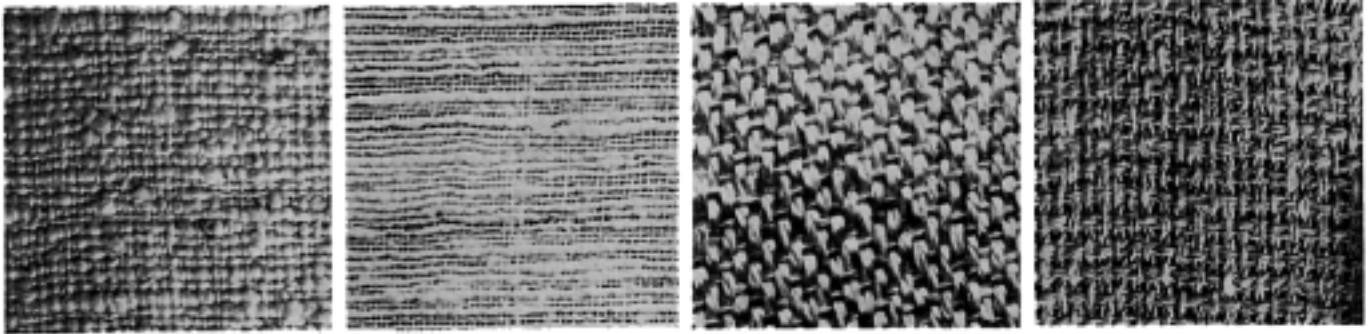
Aside from the carpet looms we find three main types of looms in Greece—the very primitive loom made by the nomad women themselves which is very low and small and easy to dismantle and tie on to the back of a pack mule, its treadles hanging into a hole in the ground dug for that purpose; the ordinary peasant loom in which the shuttle



*Spinning is a family occupation in Country homes in Attika.*



*Peasant girls in Attika weave at home on looms of this type.*



Variety of interesting textures; (left to right) all natural raw silk, natural raw silk and real silk, cotton hemp and art silk, natural raw silk.

is tossed back and forth by hand; and the flying shuttle hand loom which is used mostly by the small private enterprises for higher production and greater width of material. As a rule the healds are made by the village women themselves of cotton yarn while the reeds are made of cane either by wandering peddlers or as a specialized home industry in various villages of Greece, the two best known of which are Kosmas and Vrondamas in the Peloponnesus (Southern Greece). The small private enterprises also use the modern steel healds and combs.

The village woman washes, cards and spins the wool which is quite often sheared from the backs of her own sheep, by hand and in the silk producing areas most of the silk is unreeled and spun by hand. In only a few areas in Greece and on a very small scale is cotton still spun by hand, hand spun cotton having been replaced by the machine spun yarns which are abundantly produced by the spinning factories. Linen thread is as a rule entirely prepared by hand. The spinning in the village is done both with the distaff and by means of low spinning wheels; the small enterprise on the other hand has replaced much of the work done in the village by hand by modern electric machinery, leaving only the actual weaving and beautiful inlay embroidery to be done by hand.

The type of article produced varies with the area, each region having specialized by reason of its climatic conditions and the raw material closest at hand in some special type of product. The North, for instance, is famous for its woolen cloths and rugs and heavy long haired blankets, the islands for

their brightly colored cottons, while Kalamata, Souffi, Euboea and Chalkidiki are famous for their silks. Linen is produced on a very small scale chiefly on the islands of Crete, Corfu and Lefcas. Each area also has its own designs and colors. In some villages the yarns are still dyed with vegetable dyes. The woolen cloths are still processed at the nearest village water mill (nerotrivi) where the mill keeper knows from long experience just how long each piece of material should be whirled about by the rushing waters and how long it should be beaten by the huge wooden treadles to bring it to just the right soft thickness and to raise the right amount of pile.

As a rule the chief products of the homeloom are the household linens and the family wearing apparel, and by far its most important use in the eyes of the family is for the preparation of the daughter's dowry in which all the skill and love of creation is used by both the mother and her daughters to make quantities of beautiful things that will last out the daughter's lifetime and will often be handed down to the next generation. But the peasant loom also has its market. The North sends its beautiful rugs, its woolen bags and sport materials (samroskouti) to the market, while the silk producing areas send their beautiful "coucoularico" (material woven from silk thread spun by



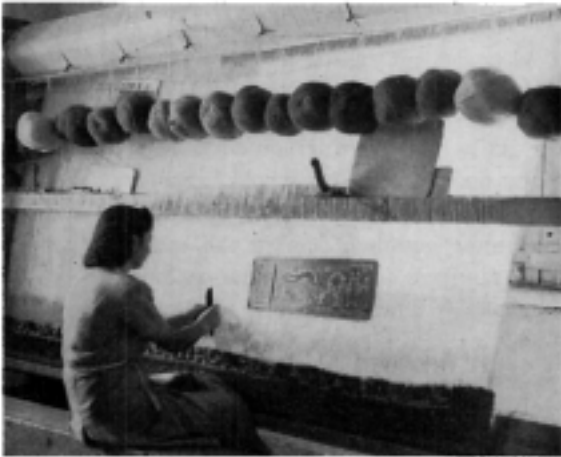
Silk is spun by most primitive methods.



Woman washing wool at a Village Well.



*Nuns in Hydra, twisting silk.*



*Carpet weaving in Hydra.*



*Primitive looms, made by nomads.*

*Working at the loom in Arachova.*



hand from the waste products of the cocoon—commonly known in America as raw silk), their many colored tafetas, their half silk, half cotton materials used for men's shirting and women's dresses. The islands send their gaily colored cottons either in plain weaving or with the inlay embroidery used for women's garments, table linen, couch covers, curtains and draperies. Rhodes, Macedonia, Chios and others send their beautiful Persian carpets.

Characteristic of Greece is the combination of various types of raw material to make a large variety of cloths suitable for every purpose. Silk is combined with wool or with cotton to give cool summer or spring garments; cotton is combined with linen; cotton wool is combined with woolen warp for warm bed linens in the cold mountain villages. Goats' hair is woven alone to make the heavy shepherds' cloaks which are almost entirely waterproof, or combined with sheep's wool to make rugs or blankets which are warm and more durable than the all wool rugs.

But weaving is not only important for its use as a medium for the creative urge; it is of tremendous economic significance. In a country like Greece where two-thirds of the population is rural and yet where the greater portion of the land is mountainous and rocky and owned by the people in small tracts, 70 to 80 per cent owning as little as eight acres or under per family, the average agricultural income is very low, too low to be able to provide most families with much beyond their basic food needs. The income is also too low to permit a large market to the manufacturer wherever his products can be replaced by the wooden loom which will make just as beautiful and more durable things for the use of the family. The time element is not important, since the small land owner has an abundance of time on his hands and the inhabitant of the mountain village is snowed in as a rule from three to four months every year. With time on her hands and an income insufficient to cover the needs of her family, the woman sits at her loom and creates, and, in creating, doubles the buying power of her husband's income in her spare time.

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*The preceding article was written in Greece for HANDWEAVER AND CRAFTSMAN through the interest of the Greek Government Foreign Trade Administration which also arranged for photographs of the native spinners and weavers.*

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Spinners and weavers of Greece played as important a part as the artists, designers and couturiers of Athens in the brilliant presentation of the Cavalcade of Greek Fashions, which rather took the fashion editors by storm when it was shown in New York and other cities in the spring. Handwoven silks, linens, cottons, and wools made by spinners and weavers from all sections of Greece were used as effectively in the collection of modern dresses, coats, negligees and lingerie created by modern Greek designers as they were in the recreations of the antique costumes, also part of the exhibition, which dated back to designs of 2000 B.C. when the women of Crete were famed for their beautiful clothes as well as their great personal beauty.

The Cavalcade of Fashions was an advance showing of a type of handicraft by which, among other means, Greece has supported herself in the past. Greek textiles always have been important industrially and in that field the country has made an amazing recovery, according to members of the Greek Government Foreign Trade Administration. The project was organized with the help of Mrs. Henry Grady, wife of the American ambassador to Greece, and officials of the Economic Cooperation Commission in Greece, both to show the American public some of the country's accomplishments under the Marshall plan, in the rehabilitation of Greek industry, and to present styles which it was believed would be of interest to a world market. Muriel King, well-known fashion expert of New York, has been working in Greece with E.C.A. and served as technical adviser.

The designs for the modern fashions had their inspiration either in the historic costumes or the modern regional costumes, which in many areas have changed little in hundreds of years. Almost every corner of Greece has its characteristic dress, preserved to this day because of strong nationalist feeling. One of the most picturesque of these modern survivals is the famous Mace-



*White goat's wool coat, inspired by shepherds of Pogonia; taffeta coat, Cretan style.*



*Wool cape costume, Cretan inspired—Evzone type embroidered silk jacket, cotton skirt.*

donian costume called Gida, after the historically important northern village. Its most characteristic feature is the helmet-like headdress, derived from the helmet of Alexander the Great, which can be worn only by married women. Legend says that Alexander permitted the Macedonian women to wear the helmet as a tribute to their bravery and reward for their important role in battles.

The great cloaks worn by the shepherds, used for tents when other shelter is lacking, were the inspiration for several coats, lined with the beautiful changeable silks and worn with matching silk costumes.

Many of the exquisite changeable silks come from the looms founded by I. N. Karastamati, a woman, in 1860. Only pure silks are woven there. In 1899 her son took over the enterprise and transformed it into an industry. In that year the looms provided the gowns for the bride and other ladies of the court for the marriage of King Constantine, then heir to the throne. Their beauty aroused



*Evening coat modeled after native Ipirus costume, natural raw handwoven silk, embroidered in gold braid.*

so much admiration that many royal orders followed from Greece and other countries. The business is still in the hands of the family.

Handwoven fabrics from the following firms were shown: A. Sicilianou, George Topoglides (G. S. Richardson), Tzanetouleas, Soufli, H. Euclides, K. Iliadi, A. Hadjimabali, F. Caloutsi (Cretan Double Axe).

The looms of F. Caloutsi, which have the Cretan double axe for a trade-mark, represent the ancient Cretan weaving as well as Mrs. Caloutsi's original designs and, before the war, were established on the Island of Crete. Mrs. Caloutsi, an artist, became interested in reviving the ancient art of Cretan weaving about 20 years ago and before the war more than 200 women were at work weaving beautiful fabrics, mostly in their own homes. These are the famous embroidered textiles, with the embroidery done on the loom. Her entire enterprise was destroyed by the Germans during the war but, after many difficulties, she now has 200 looms in operation and production averages about 1,000 yards a month. Blouses and skirts are made there, as well as drapery and upholstery materials,

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## On Textures

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identity and become almost textile-like. During this arrangement of materials, in themselves unrelated to yarn and the loom, the artist-weaver must bear in mind the nature of cloth and the practice and experience of weaving. Through these experiments he increases his ability to feel and see. In this way the weaver learns to make imaginative comparisons between life products and the loom products, which enrich life. • • •

## SPINNERS AND WEAVERS OF MODERN GREECE

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luncheon and tea sets, and yardages of various kinds.

Among other groups of handweavers in Greece is that established by G. Stewart Richardson, an English lady, a designer and an artist, where fine cottons and other fabrics are produced, both for apparel and upholstery use. George Topoglides, a designer, is an associate. This firm also is noted for its handwoven raw silks called "coucoulariko."

Handwoven raw silks were used not only for sports and summer day dresses but also for a most luxurious evening coat, embroidered in gold, designed by

Jean Desses, best known among Greek contemporary designers, who is now a member of Paris *haute couture*.

Heavy cottons in natural tones as well as brilliant colors were used for sportswear, as were peasant handkerchiefs combined in different ways. Fine cottons appeared in other styles. Modern as well as ancient dress employed embroidery, done while the fabric is on the loom as it was in earlier times. Several enormous peasant skirts of cotton, one black pleated all the way round, were combined with raw silk blouses.

Although the brilliant colors won high praise, the natural tones of the silk, linen, cotton, and wool fabrics almost stole the show. Textures derived from blending the different natural handspun yarns, usually in plain weaves, showed great beauty and variety.

The production of the beautiful fabrics seen in New York is an extension of everyday activity, since almost all Greek families in the country districts spin and weave for their own use, as pointed out in the first section of this article. They want beautiful things to wear and to use in their homes and if they did not make them by hand they would not have them. Not only are the textiles for personal and home use beautifully made, but also such articles as the sacks to hold the wool which is carried from farm to market on donkey back.

Primitive spindles and handlooms, as well as the fly shuttle looms in the small "factories" have been set to work for the rehabilitation of the country, now that conditions have become more stabilized. Neither the great destruction and suffering caused by the war or the years of civil strife following it destroyed the Greeks' love for beautiful textiles or their interest and skill in producing them. Production was carried on under incredible difficulties and now this devotion to a traditional art has a most practical application in the development of Greek trade with other countries.

The Cavalcade of Greek Fashions was presented in the United States under the patronage of Mme. Vassili Dendramis, wife of the Greek ambassador to the United States, Mrs. Henry Grady, wife of the American ambassador to Greece, and Mrs. William O'Dwyer, wife of the mayor of the City of New York, for the benefit of Queen Frederika's Fund for Greek War Orphans. • • •

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