

THE • BULLETIN • OF  
THE • NEEDLE • AND • BOBBIN  
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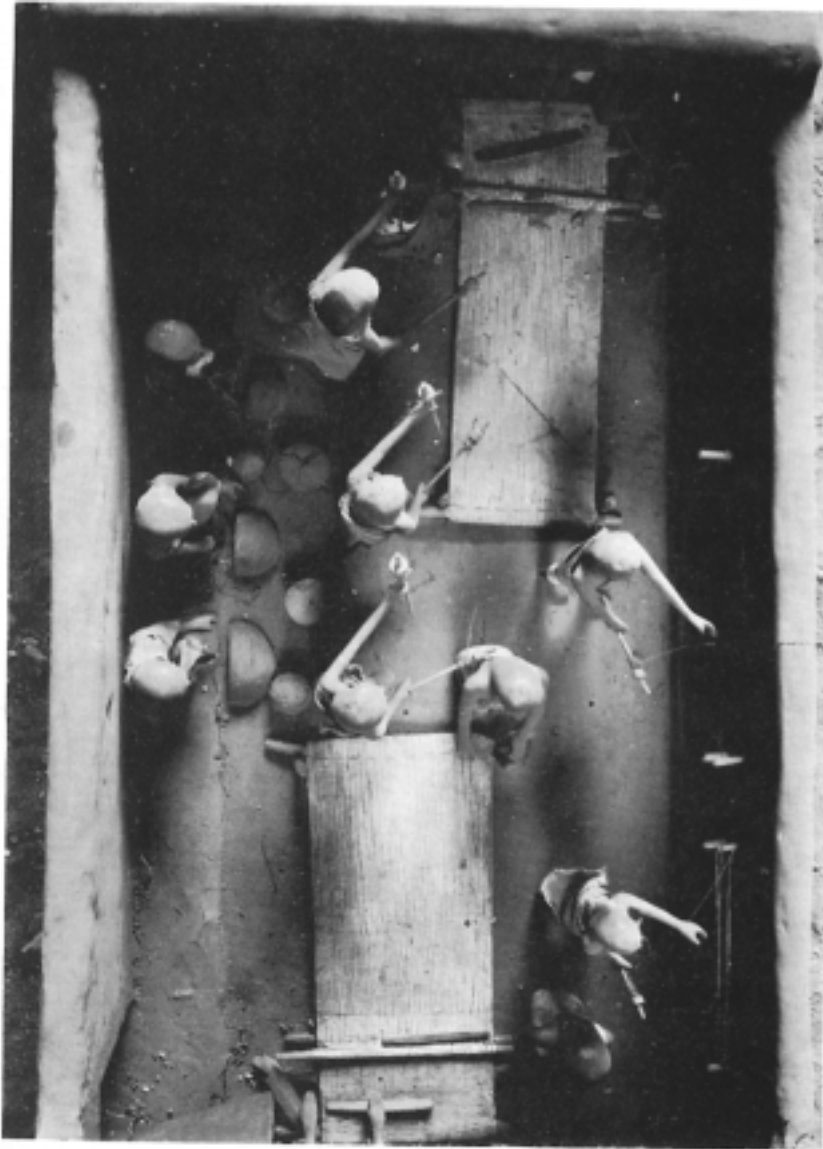


Plate 1. Weaving shop from the tomb of Meket-Ré, in Thebes, about 2000 B.C.  
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## TEXTILES FROM GORDION

By

Louisa Bellinger

THE Museum of the University of Pennsylvania is engaged in a widespread program of excavation in many parts of the world. One of their most interesting long-term projects has been the excavation of grave mounds at Gordion in Turkey, which they began in 1950. The mounds belong to the Phrygian Kingdom, which fell before an invasion of Cimmerian barbarians early in the seventh century B.C. At that time Gordion was burned and never flourished again as the capital of a powerful and independent state.

Rodney S. Young, director of the Gordion Expedition from its inception, and Curator of the Mediterranean Section of the University Museum, writing in 1958 of the tomb found in the royal grave mound, says, "Our tomb, then, demonstrated that by the end of the eight century the Phrygians had attained to unexpected heights of skill as architects and engineers; that they were past-masters at cabinet making, inlaying, and small woodworking; that they had a bronze-working industry which could compete with the workshops of Assyria and Urarto. They had wide connections toward the east and south, importing flax or linen thread, perhaps cotton, glass, bronzes and vessels of faience and pottery. These objects attest wide connections and developed culture, but they cannot speak for themselves. Let us hope that future work in the city will give us some of the contemporary archives to fill in details of the picture of a people hitherto all but unknown, now shown to have been among the leaders of the civilization of their time."

Among the "minor arts" which were found at Gordion are fragments of fabrics. A great many of the fragments are charred and most of the samples which came for analysis were of sizes to be housed comfortably in cotton batting in cigarette boxes! However, as the making of fabrics entails inducing many small fibers to cooperate with each other to become yarns, and weaving requires a certain amount of machinery to assist in interlacing the yarns into fabrics, it may be that careful study of even small bits of fabric may provide interesting, if mute, information. In fact, since the Phrygians had wide connections to the east and

south it may be useful to archaeologists if we treat these specimens as the basis for a chapter of "What in the World" and try to determine what is domestic and what imported.

To begin with, hardly anyone stops to think of the fact that the making of a woven fabric is entirely different from the crafts of metal-working or wood-working. When a craftsman carves wood he removes certain portions to get the shape he wants. The result is stable, and, unless pieces crack off, it will be the same next year as last. Bronze cast in a mold comes out in a prearranged pattern and may be duplicated by casting more bronze in the same mold. Cast bronze is stable. But fabrics are not stable. Yarns are built up by inducing a mass of fibers to cooperate, but individual fibers can change their positions within the yarns, for there is nothing in the crafts of spinning to keep fibers from trying to behave as nature dictated, and nature dictated an active role for each fiber. Vegetable fibers move characteristically when getting wet or drying. Wool absorbs and desorbs moisture, swelling and contracting in the process. The yarns in a fabric are interlaced in a certain order, but can be pulled out of line or removed entirely. The Phrygians of the eighth century B.C. seem to have been well acquainted with the behavior of the fibers they used, or they imported yarns from areas where the fibers were understood, for they were induced into making various types of fine fabrics any one of which, if not too charred, can still be unravelled today and have its yarns unwound, so that the original fibers are entirely free once more to act as nature, rather than man, dictates. Our first task, then, is to set forth the natural behavior of each fiber and the particular ways in which each was made into yarns in various areas.

As it seems to be true that in all parts of the world vegetable fibers were spun before animal fibers, let us start with a study of the vegetable fibers. Linen is a bast fiber, coming from the stem of the flax plant. When the plant has matured, it is gathered and soaked in water until the outer portion of the stem has rotted away, releasing the long fibers beneath. These linen fibers are strong so as to hold the flax stem upright, and their sides are smooth to let them lie closely together in the stem of the plant so that moisture can travel up them from the ground to the flower and leaves by capillary attraction. Flax may be retted in still or running water, or, where the dew is heavy, flax may be laid out

flat to be alternately wet by the dew and dried by the sun, as is recounted in Joshua 2:6 "But she (Rehab) brought them (the two spies sent by Joshua) up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof." Linen retted this way by dew usually turns out white or silver-grey, but is apt to be harsh and brittle, whereas linen retted in the Nile turned out yellow, soft and pliable. Egyptian linen was comfortable for clothing and, when made into sails, would not cut itself in a gale. Egyptian linen, then was in great demand and was a major export.

In the tomb of Meket-Ré who was buried in Thebes about 2000 B.C., H.E. Winlock, excavating for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, found a model of a weaving shop which he published in 1955 in MODELS OF DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT (Pl. 1). Here we are shown how linen fibers were made into yarns in the country where linen was the chief fiber. Three girls sit against the wall, each with a heap of flax in front of her. These girls take two very small bundles of linen fibers and overlap their ends by about two inches. This overlap, or splice, they roll in the "S" direction on their right thighs. This process follows the natural habit of the fiber, for when a linen fiber or single yarn has been wet it will turn slowly in the direction of the center part of a letter "S" as it dries. In New Kingdom times in Egypt there seems to have been no spinning of linen yarn, just the rolling on of new fibers at stated intervals. (The term spinning connotes drawing out while turning.) The Egyptian roving was neither drawn out nor turned throughout its length. Each new bundle of fibers was spliced on in the same way as the first, and the yarn was rolled into a ball. When the ball was sufficiently large, it was put into a pot of water in which an eye or handle had been incorporated near the bottom through which the end of the yarn was run, so that the ball would be held down in the water as the roving was twined with others, from the same pot or other pots, by craftsmen with spindles. Here we see warp and weft being made by three craftsmen for the sheets which are being woven on the two looms in the shop. For sheets, three rovings are twined together in the "S" direction; only two are used for some of the sheer scarves or transparent tunics shown so graphically in Egyptian murals. Among natural fibers, only bast fibers can be prepared in this fashion, for only they are

designed to lie closely side by side and act in concert in the stem of a plant. Silk filaments will lie smoothly side by side, especially if the gum sericin is not entirely boiled off, but as 400 to 1000 yards of silk can be reeled from a single cocoon, it is not necessary to splice silk to make continuous yarns. However, bast fibers can be spun from a distaff as the other natural fibers have to be. A vase from Orvieto (490 - 480 B.C.) shows a girl spinning from a distaff and wetting the thread between her lips as she spins. This must mean that she is spinning a vegetable fiber. In the Mediterranean region linen was spun, like the Egyptian twining, in the "S" direction and there was no plying of yarns spun from a distaff, which were usually as large or larger than the twined rovings from Egypt. (In early Christian centuries the Persian-Mesopotamian tradition of spinning a single yarn in one direction and plying two or more in the other direction seems to have worked its way west over the trade routes.)

Some hemp is found at Gordion which seems to have been spun from a distaff. It is comparable to linen, being a bast fiber, although it turns by nature in the "Z" direction and does not absorb moisture so readily.

There seems to be no cotton in the fragments so far excavated at Gordion, but we should say a word about it, for, being the vegetable fiber most widely used in India and Asia, it seems to have been responsible for the "Z" spinning tradition. Cotton is a seed hair. Its duty in life is not to transport moisture, but to protect a cotton seed from excess moisture in its embryonic condition after the boll has opened. It is a flat fiber with convolutions in it. This formation insures that each fiber will patrol its own territory, for no two fibers can lie closely together. It also insures that moisture will not travel along the sides of two adjacent fibers by capillary attraction. Even when tightly spun, unbleached cotton fibers make excellent water barriers. Cotton fibers as they dry do not turn sedately like linen, they move energetically in many directions. However, a cotton yarn when drying will usually roll in the "Z" direction, and we have noticed when washing very old fabrics that cotton with yarns "Z"-spun washes well, while cotton with yarns "S"-spun has a tendency to pull apart unless handled very gently. In India, where the spinning of cotton seems to have begun,



yarns were spun in the "Z" direction. The cotton fibers of India and the Near East generally ran from about  $\frac{3}{8}$ " to 1" in length, and so were about half the length of a dynastic linen splice. These short fibers were first removed from the cotton seeds and then were carded into slivers with all fibers lying in the same direction. The sliver was rolled onto a distaff in such a way that fibers could be drawn from it by the spinner. The first few fibers were attached to the spindle which was then twirled with one hand to spin the yarn, while more fibers were drawn from the distaff with the other hand. When spinning cotton, the point of the spindle usually rests on the ground or in a bowl, so that no sudden jerk would be likely to break the fragile cotton thread. Hemp was longer than cotton, but seems to have been spun from a distaff also. However, because of its added length, the spindle may have been allowed to hang free, as was shown on the Orvieto vase.

Wool also was longer than cotton. The wool on the varieties of sheep native to the Near East had prominent scales. In fact, centuries before wool was spun and woven, it had been made into felt in Central Asia, with nothing but its scales to hold it together. We must remember that, until shears were invented in the Iron Age, wool was plucked from a sheep with a tool resembling a comb, and it was easier to mat these flocks of wool still further, into felt, than it was to card them into slivers and spin them into thread, which then had to be woven into a fabric. Also the yield per animal was much lower when the wool was plucked instead of being sheared. Therefore spinning and weaving of wool was not as much of an industry as it later became. The material available from goats followed the same rules, but the scales on goats-wool are not prominent and goats-wool has no felting properties. There is one advantage of plucking over shearing. The wool obtained by plucking sheep or goats is apt to be the fine undercoat and not the coarse hair, so the craftsmen using plucked wool can spin a very fine thread. Since wool is an animal fiber, it has no preference as to the direction of spinning. A spinner having learned to spin cotton in the "Z" direction, or one having been taught to spin by a cotton spinner, would probably spin in the "Z" direction. If he had been trained on linen in Egypt, he would have learned to turn his spindle in the "S" direction. Along the trade routes, we sometimes find wool fabrics with warp spun in one direction

and wefts in the other, particularly if a dense fabric is wanted. No matter which way the wool spinner turned his spindle, he could make a good yarn, and wool was long enough so he did not need to rest his spindle in a bowl to keep from breaking his thread. In fact, wool spinners found that, though they could stand still and spin with the spindle in mid-air the act of walking helped to keep the spindle in motion. Shepherds could and did spin as they tended their flocks and walked them from pasturage to pasturage. Perhaps this is one reason why so many areas in the Near East spin in the "Z" direction, started in India. Distaff spinning may have come over the trade routes brought west with the sheep whose original home was Asia, and have spread around the Mediterranean with them, to lands which had not already learned the sedentary methods of Egypt.

Here then we have the chief fibers native to the Near East which were used to make fabrics. Each fiber made a different type of yarn. Linen yarns were sturdy, smooth, and would not stretch. Hemp yarns were much the same but not so pliable. Cotton yarns were fragile and were not smooth. Wool yarns were springy, not very strong, and were weaker when wet. They would stretch and contract, for it was the natural duty of a wool fiber to provide an equable atmosphere for its sheep or goat, and therefore it absorbed and desorbed moisture, swelling and contracting in the process.

The next thing to concern us should be the types of looms extant. The model from Meket-Ré's tomb shows a horizontal loom. However, about 1450 B.C., the Egyptians began to set this loom upright, so that gravity would help beat down the weft yarns in their wide webs. Therefore, in the 8th century B.C., the typical Egyptian loom was vertical and had two beams, the lower one being the cloth beam. Herodotus remarks that Egyptian weavers beat their wefts down whereas everyone else beat up, for the Greek loom was vertical too, but the cloth beam was at the top and there were loom weights at the bottom. Except that very tightly packed fabrics could not be made on this loom because gravity tended to make the wefts sag, this was a very versatile loom. The tension on the warp ends was uniform whether a shed was open or not, and it was possible to pull ends out of line when weaving, if the

weaver wanted to shape his fabric. In Palestine, and undoubtedly in other places as well, a narrow horizontal loom was used, just wide enough to be worked by one person. One end might be tied to a tree or tent pole and the other end, the cloth beam, was held either by two pegs in the ground or by a belt which went around the weaver's waist. When weaving on this horizontal loom, or on the Greek loom with loom weights, the craftsmen were in front of the loom in positions from which they were able to work patterns in their webs at any time. The Egyptian weavers, on the other hand, sat on either side of the loom and had to make special preparations to weave a pattern. The wall paintings of this loom (Pl. -- 2) also make it clear that, as there was no reed to keep the warp spaced, the ends were pulled together during the weaving. A definite characteristic of Egyptian linen is that it has more warp than weft to the centimeter.

One other detail must be reviewed before we have finished this preamble, which, though over simplified, will give us a basis for classifying the bits of fabric which were found at Gordion. This point is the preparation of the warp to be threaded on the loom. The craftsmen in the weaving shop who are preparing their warps are winding yarn around pegs in the wall in such a way as to make alternate passes of the yarns cross each other, so that the ends could be threaded in order to form two sheds, one containing all odd yarns, the second all even yarns. When a longer warp was wanted, it was wound over more pegs. This is an excellent way to prepare a linen warp which will not stretch, one which was to be held against a cloth beam. However, when a warp was being arranged for a warp-weighted loom, a narrow heading was woven in the process, so that the fabric would have a sturdy edge against which to begin the normal weaving. Peter Collingwood writing on Neolithic weaving techniques\* gives an interesting explanation of the starting edges of the New Stone Age linen fabrics found in the Swiss lake dwellings. In the heading there are two weft yarns -- which become warp ends in the material proper -- in each shed. Collingwood thinks that that is because it is easier to draw a loop through the shed and pass it

\*Quarterly Journal of the Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers, No. 35, Sept. 1960, London.

around a measuring stake, leaving a ball of yarn on the right of the narrow web, than it would have been to pass a shuttle through a shed, around the stake and back through the next shed, with the necessity of unwinding the yarn, possibly ten feet of it each time, from a shuttle. Provided the weaving of the heading is carefully done, the warp ends for the piece will be evenly spaced – an important consideration when there is no reed nor even a second beam to keep the warp in line. This heading also gives the fabric woven on a warp-weighted loom three finished edges, for the two sides have the usual selvages.

With this data at our command, let us see how it can be applied to the fragments from Gordion. It may be that we shall find other elements in these fabrics beside spinning, weaving, and our usual division of fibers.

The first group that we examined were a number of specimens marked in the inventory as "doilies" or "studded plaque-doilies" with an occasional notation of "leather backing". These looked like bronze studs surrounded by a knotted fabric of some sort. Under the microscope they turned out to be, in fact, bronze studs of reasonable sizes surrounded by incredibly small bronze studs applied to a leather backing. The little studs, most of which were only 0.001m in diameter, were made just like the large ones, with a prong on either side, which were put through tiny slits in the leather and were then bent inward like a staple. The large studs are from 0.012 to 0.015m in diameter. Smaller ones are 0.002, 0.001 and 0.0005m respectively. Though these can not properly be called textiles, we illustrate them (Pl. 3) to explain the natural confusion.

The next group of specimens were marked "blankets" or "bed cover samples". These turned out to be felt of various types. In Central Asia, wool is laid out on a large mat, the first layer going in one direction, the second at right angles to the first, and so on until the desired thickness is achieved. The mat is then rolled up tightly and unrolled again. Next it is rolled from a different point. When the rolling and unrolling has been done from all points of the compass, the wool has become a fabric. The felt here at Gordion has been made by a variation of this method, as far as we can discover from these tiny chunks. In

Phrygian times in Asia Minor, it would have been customary to spin wool and to weave it also. Therefore, we are not surprised to find that these "blankets" show spun yarns at least in some layers, woven into sheer fabrics upon which wool flocks were laid out and to which they were felted. Where the blanket is thick, there seems to have been one or more woven fabrics to which the wool was felted. Apparently various patterns were laid out, using one or two colors on a ground of a third color. For instance, the "mattress cake from the bed", which was the #1 sample in 1957, seems to be felt, with an occasional layer of tan wool very loosely woven with 8 warps to the centimeter and 40 wefts. The warps are "S" spun and the wefts "Z". Between these layers are layers of dark-grey – which looks like purple-brown, apricot and red unspun flocks lying in a solid color layer, or arranged in patterns, now beyond interpretation. This whole aggregation seems to have been rolled together into a single thick fabric. Other specimens have slightly spun yarns of various colors loosely interlaced and then felted. We illustrate the tan wool which seems to be the base of blanket #1; a photomicrograph of the wool laid out to be felted; a cross section of the blanket; and various fragments which show different consistencies (Pls. 3-4).

The bags or cloths in which fibulae were found, as well as the fabrics adhered to bronze bowls or situlae, seem to have been made mostly of linen or hemp. In their present state they are very hard to tell apart. We show excavation photographs (Pls. 5-8) of the head of the bed with a large linen cloth out of which fibulae have spilled – probably when the bed collapsed – and the lion situla with a piece of linen behind his ear. There are details also of the lion situla and the ram situla with a piece of hemp on his horn. These fabrics, used for wrapping, are quite sturdy and they are among the coarser woven fabrics found in this mound. They may have been woven on either a horizontal loom or a vertical one with loom weights.

Another group of sturdy fabrics are made of golden-brown goats-wool, probably mohair, and show the heading usually denoting a fabric woven on a warp-weighted loom. It is interesting to see (Pl. 9) that the heading is as described for the neolithic fabrics from Switzerland. However, the wefts-turned-into-warps are not set up on the loom proper, as in Switzerland. The two yarns which lay in a single shed are threaded

on the loom next each other, rather than crossing with yarns from the next shed. We, therefore, either have to do with the warp-weighted loom, but a local system of set-up, or we have the traditional heading for a warp-weighted loom applied to a horizontal loom. The latter suggestion seems more probable, as the fabric is quite dense and the thread count is fairly even. When we came to examine the fabrics from the 1959 campaign, there was a specimen of linen tabby with a heading, almost like the goats-wool one, with the whipping still in place which must have held it to a cord attached to the loom. However, this heading differs from the goats-wool one in that, every once in a while, there is for two sheds, only one yarn in the shed of the heading. If the linen warp was a long warp, these might be the places where a new yarn was attached. Or, when the ball got small, it may have slipped through the shed and have been put back in the next one. At any rate, this linen heading was only attached to a cord instead of to a warp beam, for the whipping is pulled beyond the heading just far enough to accommodate a cord, which has been pulled out when the fabric was taken from the loom. Therefore, the fabric may quite possibly have been woven on a horizontal loom.

The last group of fabrics from the 1957 campaign were very fine and usually a brownish-grey. For the most part the warp ends ran in the neighborhood of forty to the centimeter – 100 to an inch – and the weft count was either about forty or about thirty. These fabrics were all mohair. Other mohair fabrics were woven with the same fine yarns spaced further apart, giving thread counts of 16 to 16, 24 to 24, 33 to 22 and 20 to 16. Warp ends from the linen specimens were about 20 to the centimeter, with the wefts from 16 to 18; hemp warp ends ran from 14 to 24, the wefts from 14 to 20, and sheeps-wool warps were only 8 to 10, but their wefts ranged from 40 to 60. In other words, some mohair fabrics were made with relatively low thread counts like linen and hemp, but most of them were considerably finer, and all the mohair yarns were spun in the "S" direction of Egypt. The wool fabrics had widely spaced "S" spun warp ends, but their "Z" spun wefts were much closer set (Pl. 9d). These would seem to be the precursors of tapestry weaving, which was such a favorite wool technique in the early Christian cen-

turies. Two pieces from Tumulus P (1956) are exceptions. They both have an even count of 10 to 10 and all the yarns are "Z" spun.

A somewhat different set of fabrics was recovered in the 1959 campaign. Besides the linen tabby with the heading and whipping intact, there were several fragments of charred wool tabby, one piece of which we show in its entirety as well as in detail (Pl. 9). There were also three pieces of linen tape in much better condition. These were made on a narrow loom, undoubtedly horizontal (Pl. 10d). Other fabrics also point toward the use of an horizontal loom. There is one pile fabric which must have been made on a loom with two beams, for an extra yarn carried at the back was pulled to the face of the fabric, apparently over a gauge, after every warp end. Then ten shots of weft were inserted over two, under two, and packed down tightly. This piece is too charred to photograph well, so there is a drawing of back and front (Pl. 10a).

Next there was a group of two-color patterns, which were probably woven on a horizontal loom (Pls. 10 - 12). An extra weft is floated across the back of the web taking the place of the ground weft in the pattern areas. The Beduin weaves such patterns in the warp direction, setting up two yarns together where there is to be a pattern in the stripe and then pulling the pattern warp forward with his fingers when it is needed. However, these patterns seem to have been worked in weft bands, for the bands are occasionally edged with a wide border of sumak wrapping, which cannot be done up a warp, but must be done across the web. A weft yarn passes forward in front of two warp ends and back under one, making a "Z" slant in one row and an "S" slant in the next. After two rows of sumak, two shots of tabby weft are inserted. The materials in these patterns with the floated wefts seem to be a wool warp with wool and linen wefts. The wool is "Z" spun, the linen "S". As a great many specimens at Gordion are mohair rather than sheeps-wool and are "S" spun, it may be that this "Z" spun wool is an import from the east. They were found in the same Tumulus with two pieces of "Z" spun linen which must be imports. At any rate, these may have been the inspiration for a number of exciting patterns made out of wool and mohair in a slit tapestry technique, which may have been the ancestor of some of the darned openwork on linen ascribed to Persia at a much later date. At any rate, the warp and one weft are "S" spun wool, the other weft is

“Z” spun mohair. Their color now is brown and grey, which were probably the natural colors of the material. Some of these also have a sumak edge and one or two have braided fringe, the ends of the braids being wrapped with a ring of the pattern weft. A great many of these pieces seem to have been wadded up to act as a pillow, or possibly they were just folded neatly for storage. They are now so brittle that it is hard to unfold them without cracking them at the folds and losing the pattern. We illustrate a few by drawings as well as photographs (Pls. 11-16).

To recapitulate: the fabrics found at Gordion are much finer than fabrics in the early Christian period. There is wool felt in several colors, a great deal of woven goats-hair, a little linen and less hemp (Pls. 17) Plain tabby fabrics predominate. When there are patterns, they also are woven over one, under one. Sewing consisted of basting with paired yarns. The examples, except for one rolled and whipped edge, are mostly basting four layers of fabric together (Pl. 18). There is nothing like tailoring or the felling of seams which is found at Dura. The spinning is very fine, both in quality and in size of yarns, the goats-wool being spun generally much finer than the vegetable fibers. The coarsest weave has at least 20 yarns to the inch and much of the mohair has 100; there are even a few pieces of wool with 150. This is as remarkable in its way as making bronze studs half a millimeter in diameter. Certainly the Phrygians were remarkable craftsmen making excellent use of simple tools; and they obviously understood all about the materials they used.





Plate 2. Wall painting of women weaving and twining yarn. Egyptian, Dyanasty XII.  
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

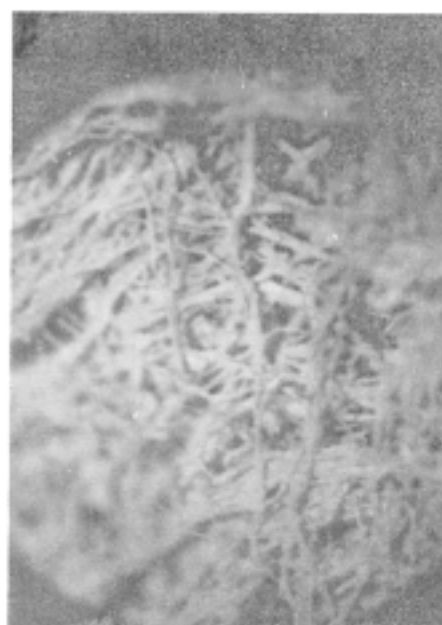
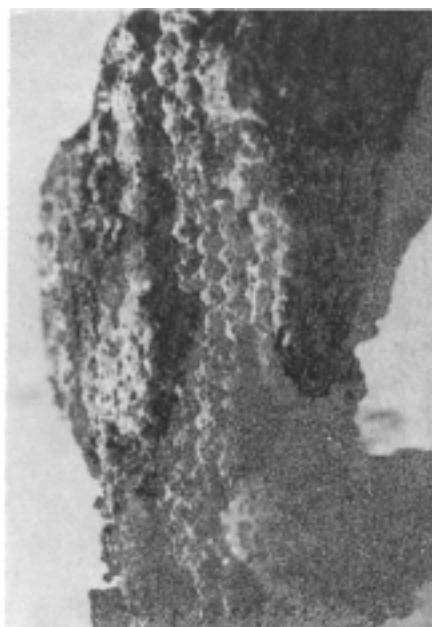
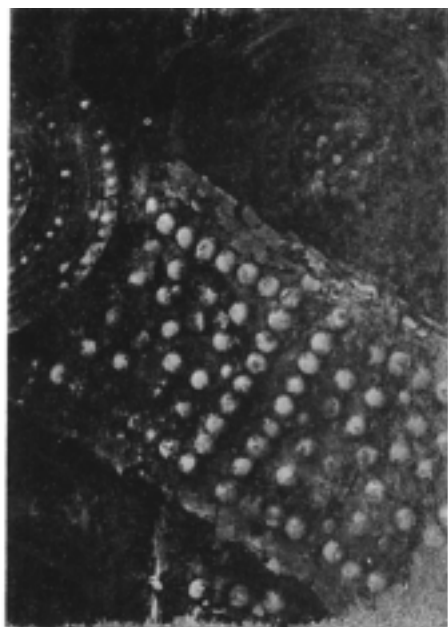


Plate 3. a (above left): bronze studs as found. b (above right): photomicrograph of small bronze studs, 0.002m and 0.001m. c (below left): tan wool, basis of felt. d (below right): photomicrograph of wool laid out for felting.

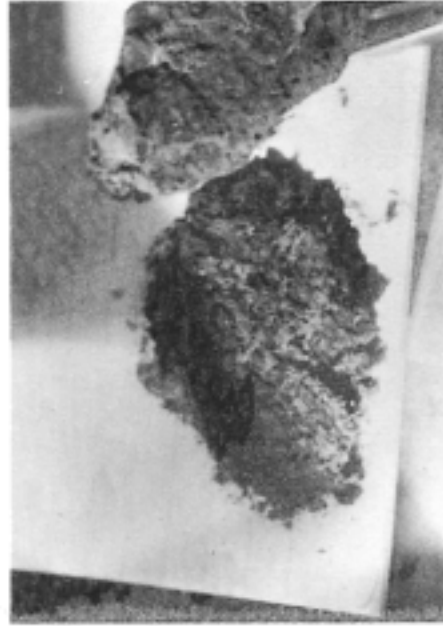
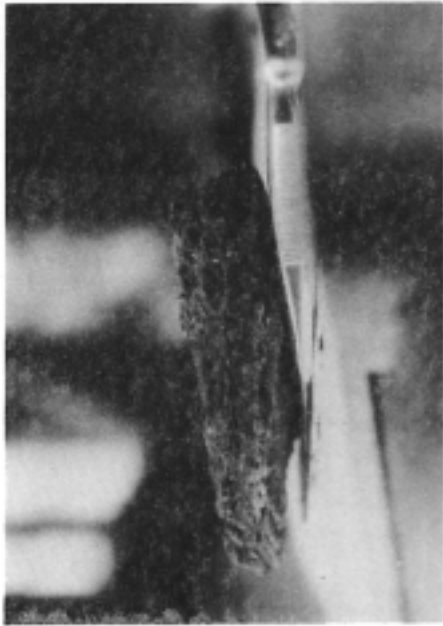


Plate 4. a (above left): cross section of a blanket. b (above right): colors laid out in felt. c (below left): loose weave felted. d (below right): felt within a woven fabric.

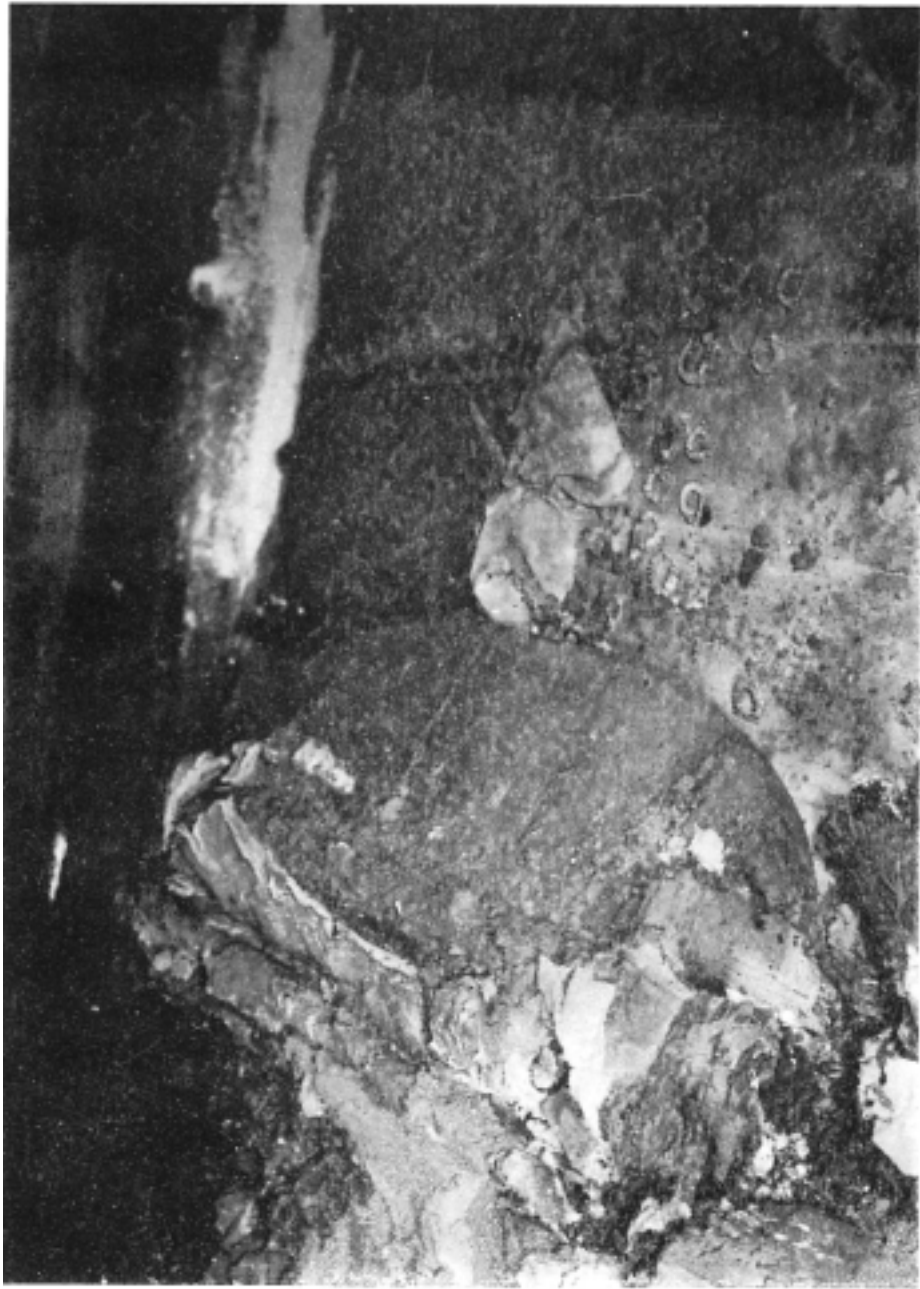


Plate 5. Collapsed head of bed with linea cloth spilling fibulae.



Plate 6. Lion situla as found with piece of linen behind ear.



Plate 7. Detail of lion situla.



Plate 8. Detail of ram situla with hemp behind horn.

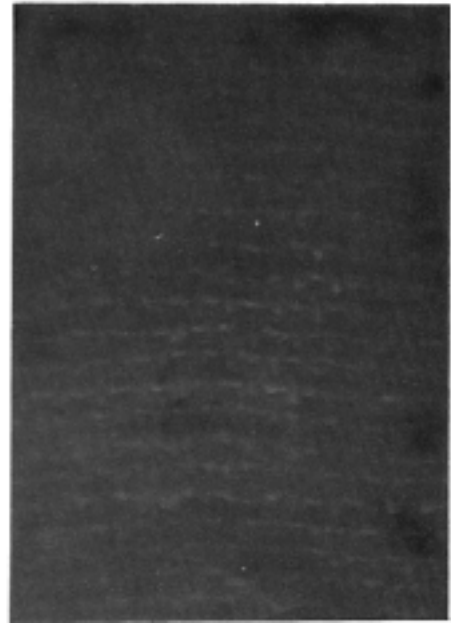
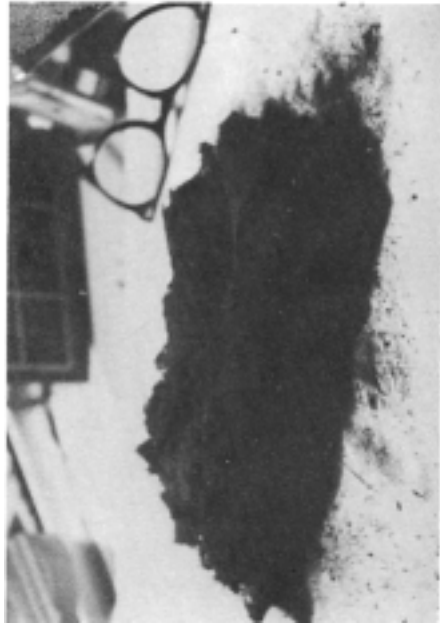
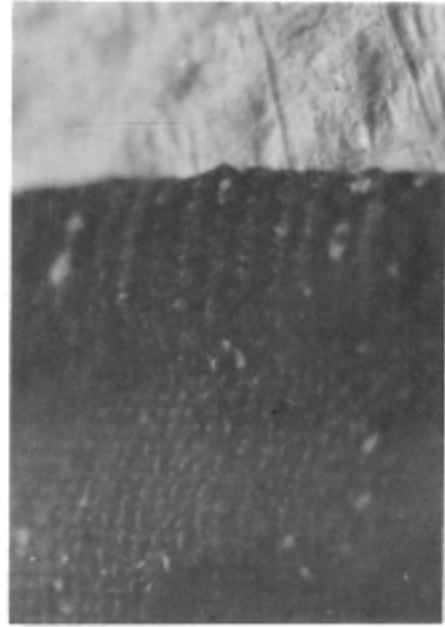
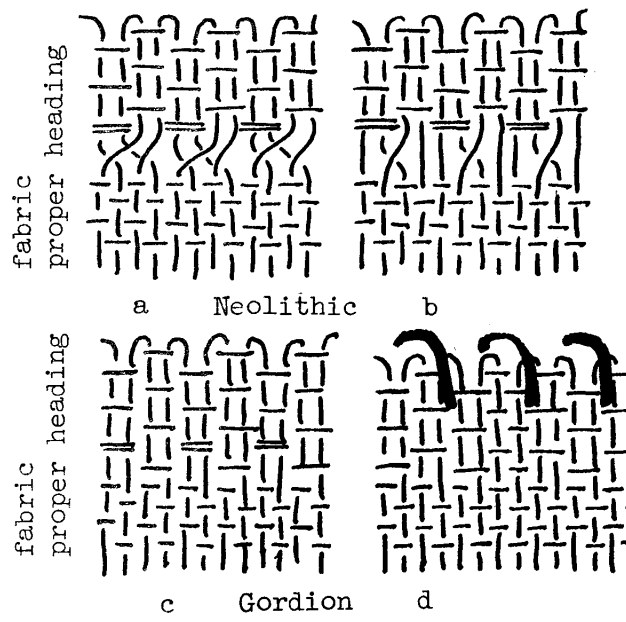


Plate 9. a (above left): charts of Neolithic (a,b) and Gordion (c,d) set-ups. b (above right): mohair fragment with heading. c (below left): charred mass of wool tabby with glasses for scale. d (below right): microphotograph of wool tabby.



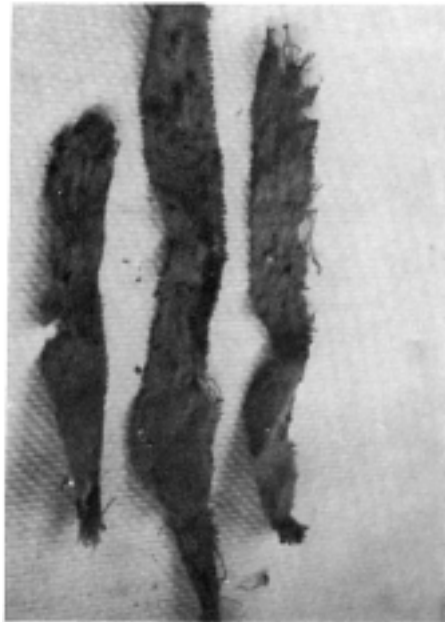
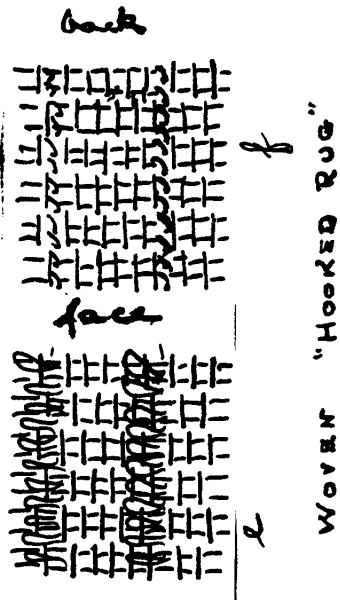
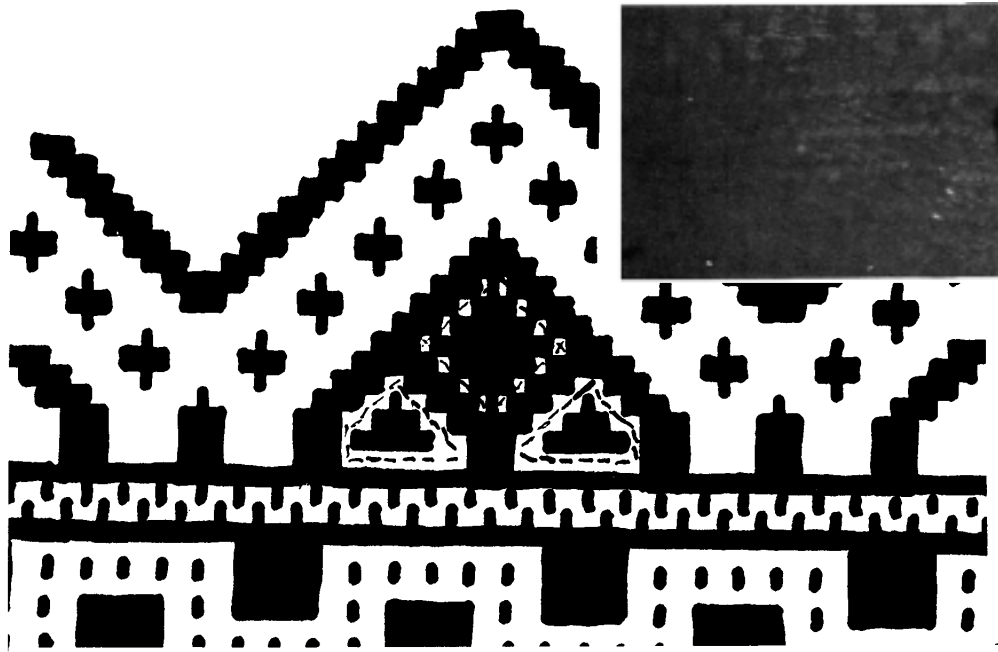


Plate 10. a (above left): drawing of weft float pattern. b (above right): weft float pattern with sumak border. c (below left): chart of "hooked rug." d (below right): linen tapes, 0.25m and 0.20m wide.

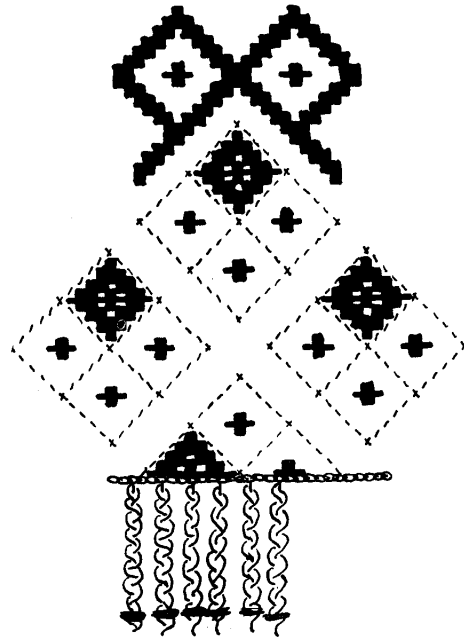
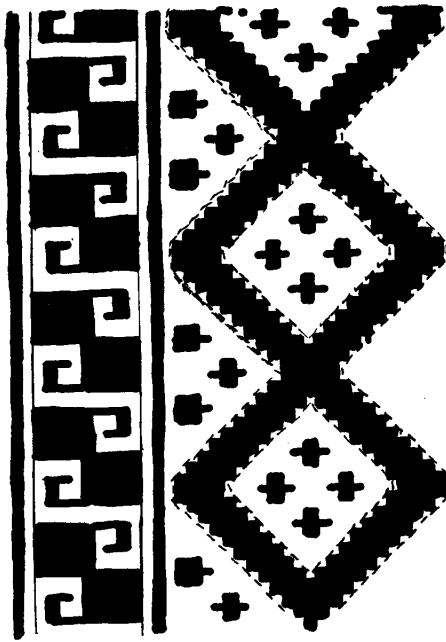


Plate 11. a (above left): "S" pattern border, crooked. b (above right): slit tapestry, braided fringe. c (below left): drawing of "S" pattern border above, as it was woven. d (below right): drawing of slit tapestry pattern above.

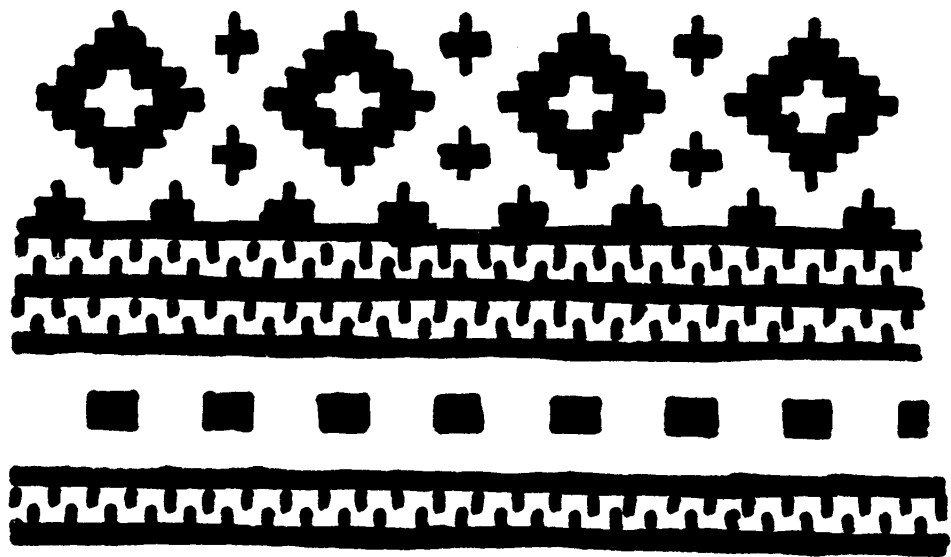
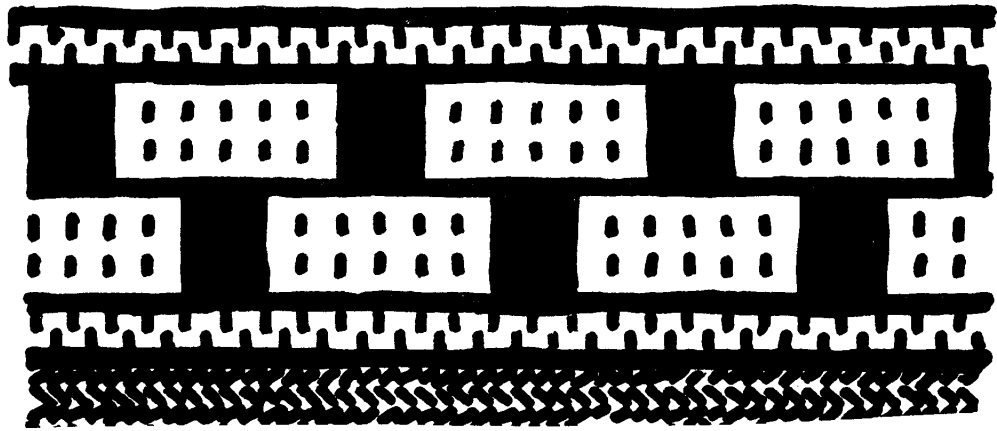


Plate 12. a (above): floated weft border, sumak edge. b (below): floated weft border, slit tapestry above.

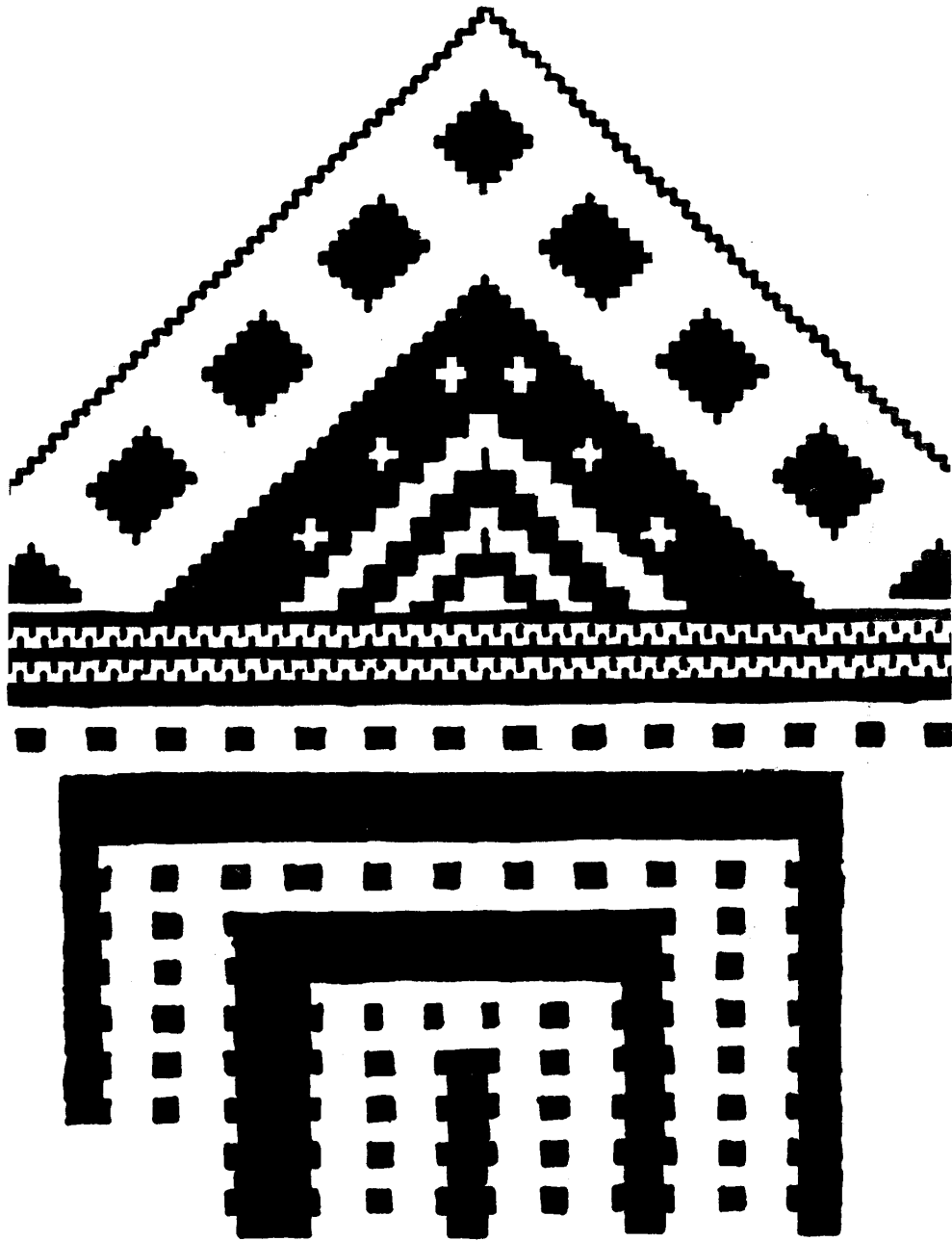


Plate 13. Slit tapestry pattern.

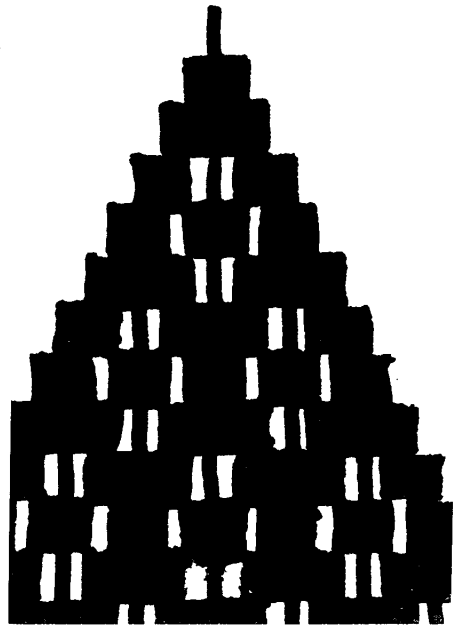


Plate 14. a (above): drawing, slit tapestry pattern; light is wool, dark is mohair. b (below left): slit tapestry triangle in plain tapestry ground. c (below right): drawing of b.

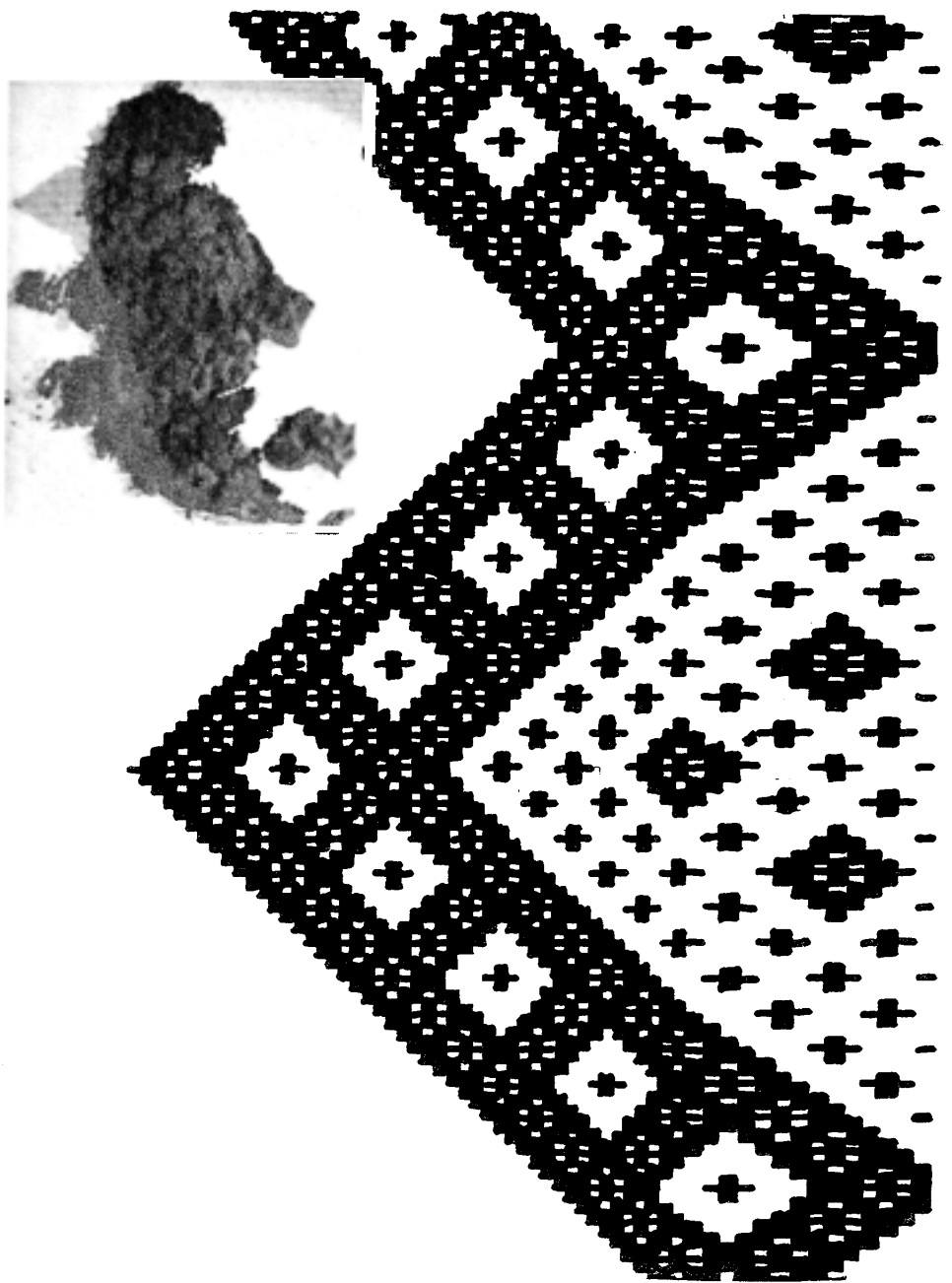


Plate 15. Slit tapestry; the pattern lengthens at the bottom.

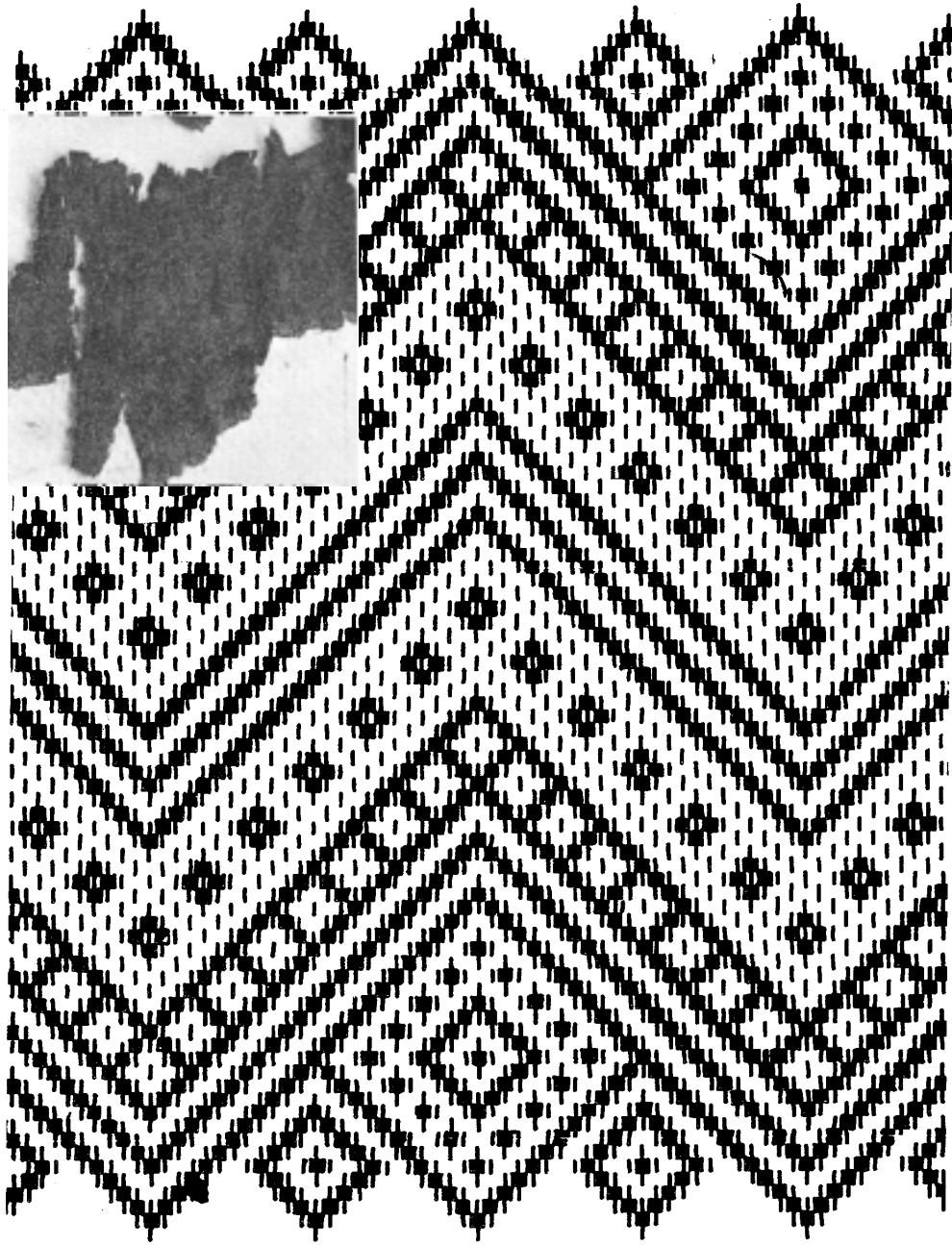


Plate 16. Slit tapestry with sumak border.

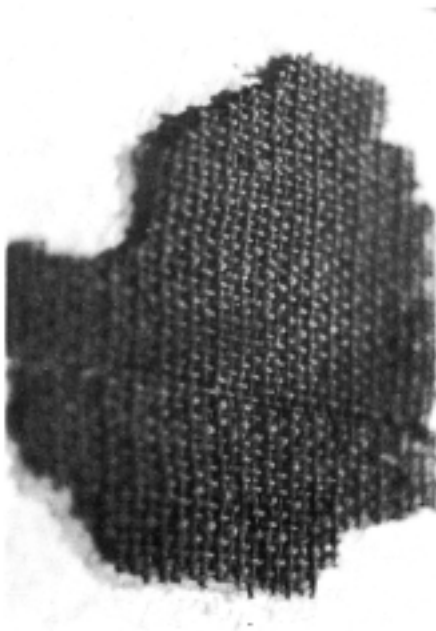
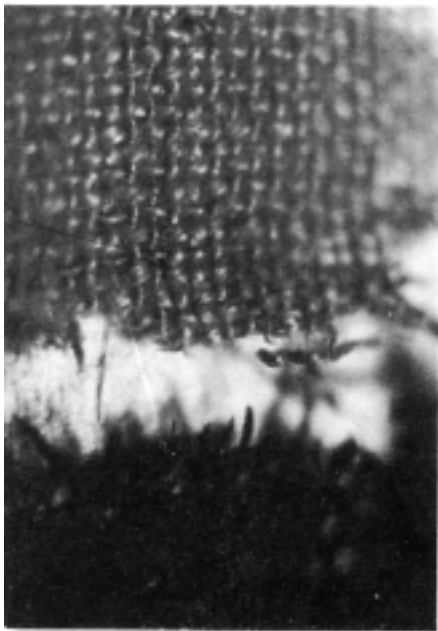
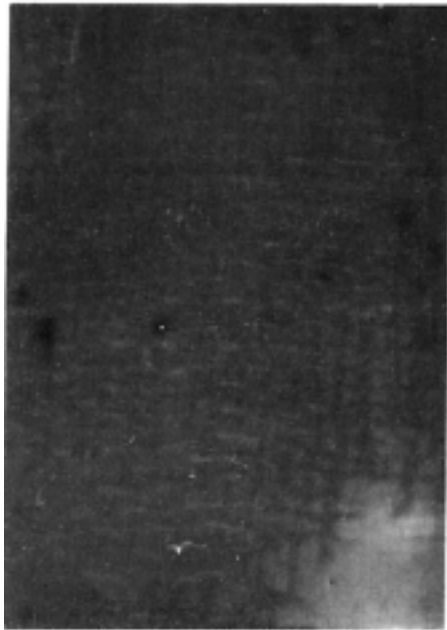


Plate 17. a (above left): wool tabby. b (above right): hemp tabby. c (below left): linen tabby.  
d (below right): mohair tabby.



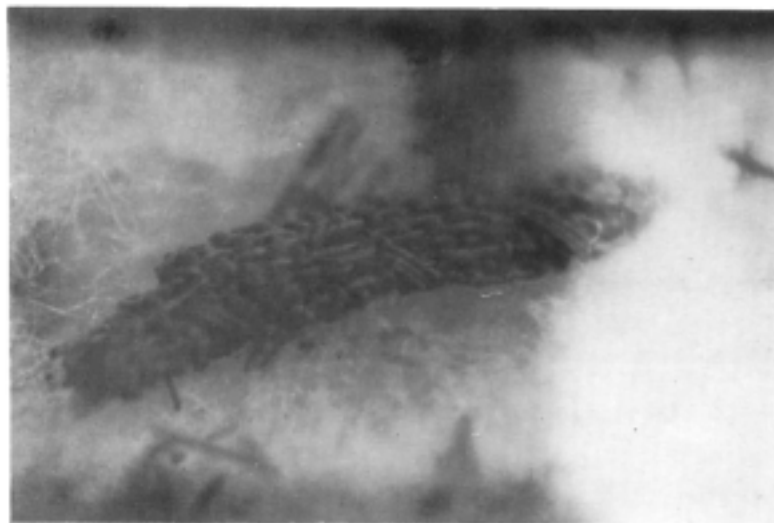


Plate 18. a (above): rolled and whipped edge from mohair fabric. b (below): four layers of mohair basted together with paired yarns.

Unless otherwise indicated, all objects illustrated are the property of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania.



Plate 1. Embroidered altar-cloth, German, dated 1630. Marianne A. Huebner Collection. A copy of this piece is on Richard Wagner's piano in Bayreuth.

## THE DRAMATIC HISTORY OF A WELL-KNOWN COLLECTION

By  
MARIANNE A. HUEBNER

A lecture given to the Needle and Bobbin Club in December, 1961

**T**HIS topic, selected by your president, Mrs. Norris W. Harkness, gives me an opportunity to recall some historical events that occurred during my lifetime. And since – in retrospect – it appears to me that I have had a rather unusual experience, I should like to ask you to follow me back . . . let us say about fifty years.

It is 1911 in Germany – to be exact, in Frankfurt-am-Main, a city rich in the tradition of a democratic administration, very conscious of a long history, and with an unusually fine cultural life.

Growing up as I did, in the home of a physician, whose devoted mission was to serve, to help – and, if possible, to heal, I did not think it was unusual, when, as an eleven year old girl, I was taken by one of my father's friends into fields that he had rented during the wintertime. It was his hobby to sponsor private excavations. I was given a small spade and allowed to dig all by myself. I saw pre-historic objects, as well as Roman glass and pottery, come to light. Important objects were carefully taken into the museum, but minor, little, things, I was allowed to take home . . . So, as a matter of fact, at an age when I was still wrestling with the three R's, I was very much at home and familiar with the thrills of discovering – and collecting.

There was still another facet of interest in my young life. An aunt of mine owned an establishment, that of R. RIESSER, honored with five "By special appointment to . . ." notices, given by royal personages, H.I.H. the Empress Frederick of Germany (daughter of Queen Victoria), H.I.H. the Crown Princess of Prussia, H.M. King Umberto I of Italy, H.R.H. Queen Olga of Württemberg, and H.R.H. King Albert of Saxony. These royalties used my aunt's studio for fine art needlework of any kind for interior decoration. They were joined by a large number of most exclusive clients.

At the turn of the century, quite a noticeable CHANGE IN TASTE had taken place. People had grown tired of Victorian profuseness. A

genuine interest in EARLIER PERIODS AND STYLES came to the fore. This tendency coincided with the newly developed interest in collecting fine art. Paris was still the hub of creation for all fashions, and numerous trips to this fashion metropolis were essential to my aunt's business. As early as about 1900, it appeared to my aunt that she could alter this situation by branching out in a different direction: WHY NOT CREATE A COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE ORIGINAL TEXTILES? This would enable her to offer faithfully done reproductions, or even to furnish her clients with original pieces. With an industrial dynamism, so typical of her generation, she went about this new project. Soon she was a very familiar figure at all important textile auctions. Consultations and exchanges of opinion with museum directors became frequent. She refrained from any association with antique dealers and concentrated exclusively on her private clientèle. And this was a very unusual one – indeed.

THE CHURCH, once second to none as a user of fine textiles, still received important donations from time to time, and frequently provided commissions. In our democratic city, there was no discrimination between the various Christian churches, and commissions from synagogues also came in quite often.

THE COURTS, imperial, royal, and other, did not consider themselves collectors, but rather, as custodians of an inherited wealth of art. Both, however, churches as well as courts, took great pride in having their treasures kept in excellent repair.

INDUSTRIAL and FINANCIAL ARISTOCRATS, who wished to join the two older groups of art sponsors, had sprung up simultaneously in Europe and in the New World. (A situation very much like the early Renaissance.) These PRE-FIRST WORLD WAR TIMES were wonderful. To us, today, they look like a paradise lost.

I – then still at my studies – listened with great awe when I heard about the activities in my aunt's house, which was located next to the finest hotel in town, the Frankfurter Hof. A chamberlain might enter, announcing the intended visit of a royal highness. (At this time, the telephone was a rather unusual commodity and, in any case, not at all "comme il faut.") A deep curtsy had to greet the royal personage, and the 18th century-court language, using the third person singular, was

expected of us. Such visits took place only when our collection was consulted; any other meetings, of course, took place in the castles.

A shipping magnate from Berlin once called up and wished to order antique tapestries to cover his entire dining hall, the work to be done in eight days. We accepted. A night train-ride to Paris, a day's work buying, another night-train trip back home, four days of work by the entire staff of sixty people, another night-train trip to Berlin by four men to install the pieces. . . . and in seven days everything was done. With a sigh of relief, the client could proudly receive his distinguished guests at dinner; among them was the KAISER.

When it came to acquisitions, another occasion is still very vividly in my mind. Dr. Franz Bock, a French priest, had died, leaving a vast collection of Coptic textiles. The collection was offered to my aunt, but it involved a huge investment, almost a gamble. And yet my aunt took it. A great part of the Bock collection is now, VIA our house, in the Museums of Goteborg in Sweden, Darmstadt in Germany, Basel in Switzerland, and many others.

As sure as the month of May brings flowers, so did every spring bring the VISITORS FROM ABROAD. They took rooms at the hotel Frankfurter Hof and came with new ideas every year. One time it was beaded bags, the next year it had to be petitpoint embroidery. In any case, this enlarged the scope of our collection. We had become the collector's collector of antique textiles.

Such was the sparkling picture of the time; then – like lightning – in 1914 the first World War broke out. The Americans were stranded, unable to leave, unable to draw money. We gladly gave them credit, and the hotel management asked them to consider themselves their guests. . . . During the war years, 1914-1918, we somehow carried on with a display of fine textiles in a showcase at the hotel. Most of the precious antique originals remained in storage. Yet the entire staff was paid in full – for knitting socks for the soldiers! By November, 1918, a revolution had broken out. The Spartacists (then the name for Communists) had taken the city and quartered themselves in the hotel next door. By then, I had been an apprentice for over two years and I got anxious about the vitrine at the hotel. I went downtown, and where, only yesterday, the Americans

had lounged leisurely – there stood four big cannons, aimed at the people! Nasty, sinister-looking creatures scared me home. The next morning I succeeded in entering the hotel hall . . . and there was our vitrine and the antique textiles . . . completely intact. Only a filthy cap had been put on top of it. This was my first encounter with the Communists. I already knew then that they had no use for the finer things in life. Our collection, and the city at large, were saved by an ingenious act of the hotel owner. He opened the wine cellars for the Communists, had the waiters serve the finest foods, . . . and so . . . dead drunk . . . and well fed . . . they forgot . . . to loot. But it was really an ugly finale to a very fine era.

With 1918, an entirely new age began. It was meant to have had a lasting impact on the world; there is a strange similarity to another impact exactly three hundred years earlier, when the Thirty Years War broke out in 1618. Perhaps it is not accidental that both events took place in Germany. The next five years were nightmarish. I do not remember how we carried on. The staff was still paid in full. Prices were spiraling into astronomical figures. We would accept any odd job. The collection of fine antique textiles was carefully stored. It would not have occurred to us to part with a single piece, even one which would have brought a very high price. It was a temptation, when one had to pay a million marks – for a loaf of bread. An impressive figure, even today.

After 1924, with the stabilization of money, slowly, very slowly, things came back to normal. There was a thirst for, and a longing to think about, the finer things in life. One had to replace long-worn-out items in the house. The museums were eager to take up where they had left off. A fine flow of work started. Museums did not now acquire new items. We worked on a barter system, by exchanging items. Somehow, there was a fraternity of collectors, and it was a very fine thing indeed. I do not recall any important commissions from the churches at that time; I am convinced that all their means went into healing the war-wounds of the population. Former crowned princes had lost their power and their principalities and had become private people. They were now squires, taking care of their estates. For the first time in history, they joined the ranks of art collectors.

By now, my aunt had passed away, and I was in full charge of the entire establishment, though I was quite young for such a position. The Grand-duke of Hesse, cousin to King George VI of England, came to the house; no more chamberlains, no more curtsies, but, as a matter of courtesy, still the court language. When he saw an unusual embroidery, he asked me what it was. My heart stood still; you see, he was the brother of the late Czarina, just murdered by the Communists, and no-one would ever mention Russia in his presence – and this was a Russian embroidery! Stammering, I said, "I do not know." But he, very kindly, said, "It is Russian," and he even explained the stitch to me. Not all aristocrats were left solvent financially. The Hohenzollerns, the emperor's family, were hardest up. The Kaiser had fled to Holland with the entire family fortune. One of his sisters had to close her castle, live in the coachman's quarters, eat canned food . . . and even had to wear cleaned(!) gloves. One of her sons, Prince Phillip, approached us, ever so quietly, and sold us laces and fine antique textiles. The trade had gone into reverse and we received things from royal inventories. The Kaiser's youngest son, Prince Adalbert, offered us four tablecovers; two were stolen by my staff, but I nevertheless bought all four of them. The American clients came back and were even more welcome than ever before.

Another ten years had slipped by when 1933 brought the Nazis into power. Boastfully, these parvenus played art sponsors, after a fashion. They "requested" everything they wished to have from museums and private collections. This was brazen highway robbery. Our collection was quickly marked, "Models ONLY," and nothing was sold. The ladies imitated the English aristocracy and did a lot of embroidery. An Italian baptismal font-cover, dated 1630, was copied by a Hitler admirer for Frau Wagner's tea-table when the Führer was her guest (Pl. 1). But it ended up as the piano-cover on the instrument that Richard Wagner had played. Frau Ribbentrop did not detect the early Renaissance pattern and took it, with delight, for an ultra-modern set of place-mats. Yes, those times had a comical aspect too. And yet I was not under any delusion; I knew that a disaster was in the making. I applied for a visa to the U.S.A. and happily obtained it rather quickly. But how could I get my collection out of Germany? Summoning up a great deal of courage, I "consulted" the Nazi authorities about the possibility of having enough

“models” to establish a branch in the U.S.A. At that time, the Nazis were under great pressure to get foreign currency and – since “fragments have no cultural value” (!) – I was allowed to take them. My inquiry about lace made the Nazi in charge blush, because he thought that such a thing was used only on ladies’ underwear. I welcomed this hint. My Coptic pieces – after all – were just fragments. And my underwear was “very handsomely trimmed” when I packed it for the trip to the U.S.A. Under the protection of my German sheepdog, in the quiet of the night, I sneaked into the studio and had four hundred photos taken, so that there was a record of the designs. On other nights, I took out some threads, to have a record of the colors. On Friday, January 13th, 1939, I arrived in the U.S.A. with my “fragments and laces.”

But during the war, from 1939 to 1945, my business was under foreign management and I was worried about what would become of the fine collection. When I came to Frankfurt in 1948, I found the city 70% bombed out. Someone gave me the keys to my house . . . but there was no house left. I asked for my collection and got only vacant looks and shrugged shoulders. It came into my mind to tell the Nazis (you know, a cocksure Nazi is an unpleasant person, but a beaten one is an ugly creature) that I would hand in my four hundred photos to the American military government in Germany. Their police force would find my property. Upon which, out came my 16th-century tapestry wall-hangings, which they had hidden by using them as mattresses. American bullets had gone through the “mattresses” and left their marks. This part of the collection was shipped to me in the U.S.A. Other parts of the collection, mainly glass and china, were stored in the cellar, and had partly melted under the terrific heat of the fire caused by bombs. Another section of the collection was stored in a former stable and was in quite good shape. But the bulk of the collection – indeed, the finest items – had been shipped to the eastern part of the country. Hitler himself had ordered that all known collections, listed with the Kulturkammer (Office of Culture), should be stored in safe places. He did not tell the people that the Russians were also moving in, from the east. After the collapse of the Third Reich, nobody had bothered about my case. I had to find the banker in whose care the things were, after I had proved to the Russian authorities then in power there that I was an American. However, I had not taken into ac-



count the mentality of a beaten Nazi. Just because he knew that the owner was an American and – to make matters worse – a former German, he insisted on a bribe of a thousand marks – because his wife needed a vacation! The amount was equal in buying power to \$1000, so I refused to pay. And the banker would not budge.

Years went by and I could not do anything at all. Suddenly, like lightning out of a clear, blue sky, I got word that I was wanted by a young Catholic priest, living in a small town near Frankfurt-am-Main. He, in turn, had been approached by a very young priest in eastern Germany. The Communist government, slowly but surely, had got very much annoyed by the “unmovable” American property (by now, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. were no longer on good terms), so they took everything and gave it as a gift to the Catholic Church. Indeed, there were a large number of fine ecclesiastical pieces, some dating from the early 15th century. But, when the young priest took a closer look at the donation, he was shocked and was dead certain that these were stolen goods. Most carefully, he examined everything and found the name and address of a woman in the small town near Frankfurt. He sent the priest of this town to her and found out that I, an American, was the legal owner of all the property. During another stay in Europe, I contacted the priest as Fraülein Hübner of 27 Kirchberg, Frankfurt-am-Main, concealing, for the sake of his safety, my American citizenship. I offered him whatever he might like to keep for his church, since I was so greatly indebted to him for his efforts to find me. “No,” was the answer, “stolen goods must be returned in full.” I offered to have an entire set of vestments made for his church, as a donation, and again the answer was no. Only some coffee and a bit of shortening could be sent and not returned. I heard through friends that nuns were looking after my collection, but that they were dismayed by the extensive moth damage. Little did they know how old the pieces were!

By now, the relationship between the East Zone (under Russian domination) and West Germany – not to mention the U.S.A. – had reached its lowest ebb, and I had to reconcile myself to the fact that I should never, never see my things again. At least, they were now in excellent hands; not a greedy Nazi, but a priest had charge of them.

And again, after another seven years, like lightning from a clear, blue sky, I got word . . . this time from a forwarding house in Frankfurt-am-Main. A huge shipment had arrived for me; its origin was not disclosed. I wondered if it could be from East Germany and hoped that that it might be. I had it forwarded to me. The huge case arrived here, in New York, at the end of 1960, only months before the ill-famed wall went up in Berlin and NO communication was left between East and West. The emotional shock was great. For almost two weeks I could not get myself to open the case. And when I finally broke the lid open . . . I thought myself in a dungeon – so penetrating was the odor coming from the case. Twelve long years the collection had been hidden in moist cellars. With trembling hands, I took the pieces out, one by one. There was no moth damage at all; it was the deterioration of age. And I remembered them well, just as they were now. With German orderliness, my staff had made an exact inventory before the shipment, and, from fear of being caught by the American Military Police, they had given this inventory to me. And when I checked it with the contents of the case – not a single piece was missing.

But I did not know, and I never shall know, HOW ON EARTH DID THE YOUNG PRIEST SMUGGLE THE THINGS OUT? My attempts to contact the priest and the nuns again . . . were fruitless. They pretended NEVER TO HAVE HEARD FROM ME, or ABOUT ME, or of ANYTHING BELONGING TO ME. I was assured that it must all be a mistake on my part. Yes, today – as matters now stand – it might be best to leave everything like this. It is still a miracle to me that I really have these fine things back in my possession . . . here in New York.

Greed, spite, political ambition (on the right or on the left) had woven a sinister wreath of thorns – like barbed wire – around my collection. Yet the strength of a deeply religious, active young man, in a courageous way, had done away with it completely. WHAT a lesson! Now, with the wall up, it is a breath-taking thought to me that, had the priest not hurried . . . it would have been too late. TOO LATE FOR EVER! Not only human beings have sought – and found – refuge in the U.S.A., to escape the horrors of annihilation, but, in my case, even a fine collection of antique textiles sought for the same way out, and succeeded in finding it.

## CLUB NOTES

As in the previous years, the members of the Needle and Bobbin Club have been enabled to learn a great deal about textiles old and new during 1962, as well as to meet each other frequently in agreeable surroundings at lunch or tea. As always, thanks are extended to the large number of generous hostesses, whose hospitality adds so much to the social side of all the Club's activities. By an unplanned co-incident, many of the talks during the year dealt with embroidery, but this was of several kinds, American, English, Danish, and modern, and other types of textiles were also considered. One could perhaps say that the great interest now taken in embroidery in America and the membership of many practising needlewomen in the Club make an emphasis on this variety of textile quite appropriate for the present day.

The Museum of the City of New York invited Club members and guests to the first meeting of the year. This was held on January 17th in the auditorium of the Museum, which had been especially hung with examples of early New York needlework. A large company were greatly impressed by the variety and beauty of the work shown, and much enjoyed the gallery talks given by Miss V. Isabelle Miller and Miss Margaret Stearns, as well as the tea kindly provided by the Museum. The amount of work involved in putting on a temporary exhibition of this magnitude is very substantial and the Club is deeply indebted to Miss Miller and the other members of the Museum staff.

On February 21st, a lecture was given at the New York Academy of Sciences by Dr. Renate Jaques, Curator of the Textile Collection at the Textile Engineering School of Krefeld, Germany. Dr. Jaques spoke on textiles in Germany, a field in which she is an authority, and her well-illustrated talk was of much interest to the Club members and their guests. These also enjoyed the tea, for which they thanked the generous hostesses, Mrs. Chauncey J. Hamlin, Mrs. Charles King Morrison, Mrs. Frances H. Sanford, and Mrs. Charles C. Warren.

Also at the Academy of Sciences, four ladies, Mrs. Charles M. Clark, Miss Mildred D. McCormick, Mrs. Malcolm E. Smith, and Miss Mary Alice Smith, were hostesses at the annual Meeting on March 29th. After a short business session, members and guests had the pleasure of hearing Mr. John L. Nevinson, formerly of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, speak on the fascinating early 17th-century English embroidery designs by Thomas Trevelyon. These drawings, all now in this country, have never before received the intensive study that Mr. Nevinson has given them. The tea that followed the lecture was also much appreciated.

The names of Mrs. William D. Disston and Mrs. John Gilpin appeared on a most generous invitation to members to lunch at the Acorn Club in Philadelphia on April 10th. A bus-load of members accordingly made the trip and, after a substantial and delicious meal, visited the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Here

the Curator of Textiles, Mrs. Marianna Hornor, showed them some of the Museum's collections, including the well-designed storage rooms. The outing was voted a great success.

The May 9th meeting was also an excursion, in this case to the home of Mrs. A. Victor Barnes, on Canoe Hill, in New Canann, Connecticut. Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. G. Norman Robinson invited members to luncheon and to hear Mr. William L. Warren of the Connecticut Historical Society speak on textiles in Connecticut. Mrs. Barnes' beautiful house in its lovely setting was greatly admired and the lecture proved stimulating and enlightening. Both hostesses were warmly thanked for a delightful and memorable event.

The Lotus Club was the setting for the meeting on October 17th, when Mrs. Fford Burchell, Mrs. Roger Glenn Mook, Mrs. John S. Taber, and Miss Pauline Wells invited members and guests to hear a lecture on Danish Renaissance embroideries and to have tea afterwards. The speaker was Mrs. Gertie Wandel, who presented the results of her extensive research in an almost unknown field with great charm and liveliness. It was a much appreciated privilege for the Club to meet this distinguished visitor, President of the Danish Handicraft Guild and member of the Danish Parliament, who brought with her some modern reproductions of the work she discussed; these were examined and admired by all present with the greatest interest and pleasure.

Another foreign speaker, Miss Helen Lowenthal, chief lecturer of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, delighted Club members at the meeting on November 14th with a talk on gardens and embroideries. This meeting was held at the New York Academy of Sciences at the invitation of Mrs. Lewis Coffin, Mrs. John O. Outwater, Mrs. Frederick M. Schall, and the Duchesse de Crussel d'Uzès. The "parterres de broderie," so well known in accounts of early gardens, seemed to bloom again, thanks to Miss Lowenthal's unusual pictures and skilled presentation of her subject. The tea that followed was also much enjoyed.

After so many lectures by scholars, it was an agreeable change for Club members to hear a practising artist at the last meeting of the year, held on December 5th. For this the Club extends its thanks to the Embroiderers' Guild (American Branch), which co-ordinated the engagements for Miss Beryl Dean of London during her visit to this country. Miss Dean has been described as "quite the most accomplished needlewoman of our time"; her talk, entitled "Creative embroidery," and the samples of work that she brought with her certainly convinced her audience of the truth of this statement. Thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Rush Harrison Kress and Mrs. Earl Kress Williams, the meeting was held in Mrs. Kress's apartment, where every room contains superlative art treasures. The Club members made the most of this wonderful opportunity to see so many beautiful things and warmly thanked the hostesses for the great privilege and for the delicious tea that was provided.

## IN MEMORIAM

Mrs. Frank B. Rowell, president of the Needle and Bobbin Club from 1943 until 1960, died on March 13th, 1962. She had been a member of the Club for some forty years and a director since 1936; she entertained the Club almost yearly, at first in her apartments on Fifth Avenue or 79th Street, and later at the Colony Club or elsewhere. But her contribution was much greater than this brief summary of her responsibilities and hospitality can convey; it is not too much to say that it was her devotion and infectious enthusiasm over so many years that made the Club what it is today. Her unforgettable, sparkling excitement, so noticeable when she introduced or thanked a speaker; her boundless energy; her love of beauty in nature and art, and the sense that she gave of unquenchable vivacity, happiness, and affection for all the world were so immediately apparent to everyone who knew her, that each member of the Club must feel her loss as that of a dear personal friend.

The Club also mourns the death of another much loved member, Mrs. Montgomery Hare, second vice-president from 1951 to 1958 and honorary director from 1959 to 1961. Mrs. Hare was deeply interested in antiquities and the decorative arts, and was active in many organizations connected with them, such as the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities and the Cooper Union Museum. The Needle and Bobbin Club, however, where she had so many close friends, was always dear to her; members will recall her hospitality, especially the delightful meeting in the historic house of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, in 1957, for which Mrs. Hare was a co-hostess.

Another sad loss to the Club is that of Mrs. Stanley M. Rumbough. It was thanks to her that the members enjoyed one of the most fascinating experiences in the history of the Club, their visit to the home of Mrs. Joseph E. Davies (now Mrs. Herbert May) in Washington, where Mrs. Davis invited them to see her extraordinary collections and to hear her account of them. Mrs. Rumbough's unfailing interest in the Club and her many instances of kindness and hospitality will cause her to be long remembered with affection and regret.

THE NEEDLE AND BOBBIN CLUB

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1962

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