Spinning, Weaving and Textile Manufacture
in Prehistoric Greece

from the beginning of the Neolithic to the end of
the mycenaean Ages; with particular reference to
the evidence found on archaeological excavations.

Volume I

Text

by

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FOREGROUND.

During the course of the first excavation in which I took part, a heap of objects which I now believe to have been loomweights was discovered. Their date was readily ascertained from associated pottery, but such a storm of argument broke out over their nature and function, that my attention was caught, and I felt that while archaeology was providing sufficient information about when events took place, there were unnecessary gaps in our knowledge of how people lived, and that artifacts such as those before me might have something to contribute to the question.

This thesis is the outcome of that moment - an attempt to bridge one of the gaps.

There is no general survey of all aspects of textile manufacture in prehistoric Greece, and little has been written on the subject. A background work on a particular prehistoric phase may devote a few paragraphs to it; a book on some other specific subject, such as costume, or Linear B, may contain subsidiary discussion of whatever factors are relevant to that subject; and, rarely, an archaeologist may speculate upon the use of finds which may have


2. E.g. A. J. B. Wace "A Cretan Statuette in the Fitzwilliam Museum", 1927, pp. 27 - 34; P. Zora "Τα πολύελαια φορτώσεις των κριθωματων κυρίν", 1956, pp. 49 - 73. Unfortunately I did not discover the latter work until it was too late to take it into consideration in the thesis. The chapter indicated discusses loom types (on a theoretical and art-historical basis - no mention is made of archaeological finds); raw materials (wool and linen); and the methods by which decorated cloth could have been produced, favouring embroidery.

been connected with textiles - and that is all.

Comparative material is of more than usual importance to any subject concerned with technology, as basic principles and practices often remain unaffected by differences in time and place; and works on textiles in the ancient world as a whole, on classical Greece and Rome in particular, and, in some cases, on methods still in use in the present century, have all been valuable - in fact it would not have been possible to have understood and interpreted the Greek prehistoric material, had it not been for the work already done in these fields.

The most useful general surveys of all aspects of textile manufacture in the ancient world are Grace K. Crowfoot's chapter on "Textiles, Basketry and Mats" in Singer, Holmyard and Hall's first volume of "A History of Technology", and Volume IV of R. J. Forbes' "Studies in Ancient Technology". Noteworthy among earlier works on the subject are Hugo Blümner's "Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern", V. Chapot's article headed "Textrinum" in Daremberg and Saglio's "Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines" and Albert Neuberger's "The Technical Arts and Sciences of the Ancients". One of the best shorter general accounts is that contained in the first two chapters of Lillian M. Wilson's "The Clothing of the Ancient Romans". Elsa Gullberg and Paul Aström have a brief but useful account of ancient fibres and their preparation in another book also basically devoted to costume, "The Thread of Ariadne". The warp-weighted loom, which, as will be seen, was the one in use throughout most of

Greek prehistory, as well as in later times, is carefully considered (together with other ancient looms) in H. Ling Roth's "Ancient Egyptian and Greek Looms", and in Grace M. Crowfoot's "Of the Warp-Weighted Loom"; the two major accounts of loomweights in classical Greece, contained in Gladys R. Davidson's and Dorothy Burr Thompson's "Small Objects from the Pnyx: I", and Gladys R. Davidson's "Corinth Vol. XII - The Minor Objects", also include valuable comment on the loom's use and history.

Two studies on modern practice which have been essential to the subject are Grace M. Crowfoot's "Methods of Hand Spinning in Egypt and the Sudan", which covers almost every possible method of hand spinning in both ancient and modern times; and Marta Hoffmann's "The Warp-Weighted Loom", a study of the loom's history in Europe, and it continuing use in the remoter parts of Scandinavia today, which illumines its advantages and limitations in action as none of the more theoretical works can do.

Helpful as these general and comparative works have been, the collection and interpretation of the evidence at present available for the understanding of the manufacture of textiles in prehistoric Greece has necessarily involved breaking much new ground. The result may be compared with the early maps of the Mediterranean world. There is undoubtedly information that is missing; there are outlines that are faint, or distorted, or, no doubt, totally wrong in places -

but the subject has been given form for the first time, and, though it will require the alterations and emendations of the future, I believe it is a form that will remain essentially recognisable.