



A WEAVER OF BROUSSA
KINDNESS OF THE NEAR EAST RELIEF COMMITTEE

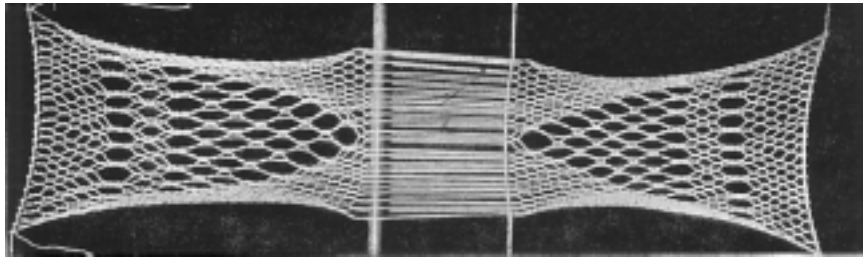


FIGURE A

FROM THOMAS WRIGHT'S "ROMANCE OF THE LACE PILLOW." THIS TECHNIQUE WAS REVIVED BY MISS M. MAIDSTONE WHO, LIKE MISS DE REESEMA, HAS INTERESTED HERSELF IN DECIPHERING THE METHODS EMPLOYED IN THE PRODUCTION OF ANCIENT LACE-WEAVES. (CF. N. B. C. BULLETIN, VOL. 4, NO. 1.)
IN THE COMPLETED ARTICLE, THE NET IS DOUBLED AT THE CENTRE AND THE TWO SIDES ARE SEWED TOGETHER

DEMIRDASH AND BROUSSA WEAVING

BY CONSTANCE SHELTMAN, OF THE NEAR EAST RELIEF

WHEN the arabadji who had served us regularly, overcharged us on Friday, we did not recognize in him the proverbial ill wind. He bawled lustily as we emerged from the hotel to go to Demirdash, but we were obdurate and proved that all Americans could not be "done," by mounting with dignity the shiniest araba to be found. The arabadji was a Turk, garrulous and invaluable, for he was full of yarns. He had beautiful brass lanterns on his carriage, which he had gone to Constantinople to buy and which cost him thirty liras. By the time we returned to Broussa he had still something to tell of local lore and his domestic and financial difficulties, though he had talked every inch of the way.

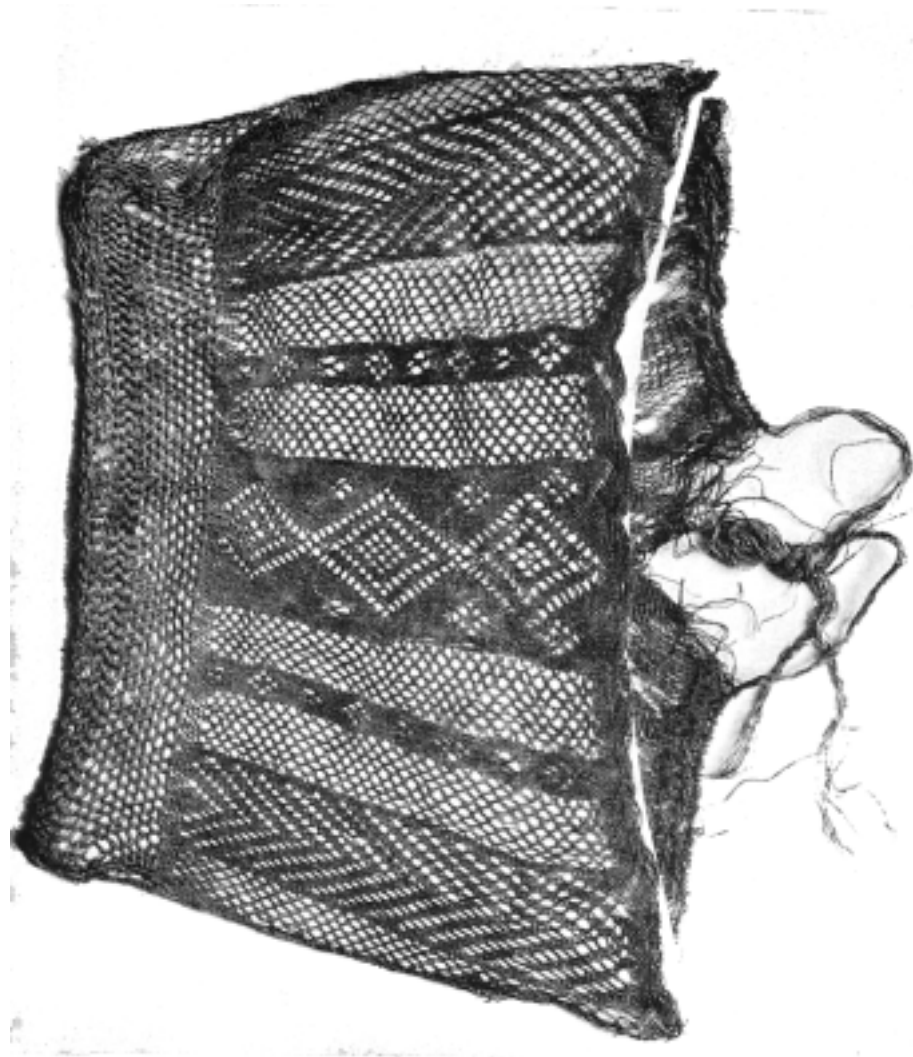
We had barely started across the plain down one of the white poplar-lined roads, when we found ourselves passing lovely pantalooned Greek women, men with gorgeous stomachers, donkeys laden past recognition; and all the other charming things to be seen in the "Interior." We dismounted to snap the picture of a moving mulberry grove, which, judging from the pedestal extremities barely discernible beneath, we imagined to be carried by a donkey. After that our arabadji stopped for every animal on the landscape,—cows, calves, water buffalo, oxen, dogs,—all he saw he pointed out with a grand flourish of the whip and advised us to

photograph. We were already late and he made us later. But nothing could spoil the enjoyment of the ride.

Everyone who has ever been to Broussa says it is the loveliest spot they ever saw. It really is the only place we know of which stands a second visit without disappointment. Sitting at the foot of Mount Olympus it reminds one of a Bible city. Being weak on Bible quotation we could not quote but "a city set on a hill"; and a "promised land" kept recurring through one's mind. The plain from the mountain is spread out ten kilometers toward the ridges that border the sea. A valley of olive groves, mulberry groves, and patches of golden wheat, with only a few mud and red-tiled villages to mar it. Broussa Plain is beyond the imagination of anyone who has not seen it, certainly past the descriptive power of an amateur!

Do you remember when you were little, watching cake being made? How the flour as it was sifted fell into the pan in a mountain with deep ridges running to its foot? Demirdash is set at the foot of a mountain ridge which looks just like that, with its feet in the yellow cake batter—we mean, wheat field. To the right of it is Kelleesen, where the church, built by women and children, as well as men, looks like a first cousin to the Tower of Pisa. Both villages are of ugly mud houses with red-tiled roofs, looking very hot and uninviting. In fact, as we drove into Demirdash we agreed that there was never so uninteresting a place. The people make a place, do they not? Before we had gone any distance, a troop of lovely Greek children were following the araba and soon some old folks joined them. The streets proving too narrow and bumpy for comfortable riding, we abandoned it and set out on foot to get pictures and to learn what we could of the weaving. If the thought, "how could anything so pretty as Demirdash weaving come out of Demirdash?" flitted through our minds at first, we soon found that it produces something lovelier—the women and children—they were beautiful and their hospitality more so.

Every one wanted us to come to see them and when we looked into door after door and found the houses all the same, tumble-down beyond belief, with just a bare earth floor, and for all the world like a rather behind-the-times barn at home, we wanted to go into every one of them to find whatever it could be that made the people so smiling and apparently contented.



COPTIC CAP, IIIRD-VTH CENTURIES, FROM THE COLLECTION IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
THIS PLATE SHOWS THE COMPLETED WORK, THE TECHNIQUE OF WHICH IS DEMONSTRATED IN FIGURE A

The houses were so close together and the streets so narrow that the shadows were too dark for a kodak, even at noon. It was a pity, for high up under the eaves were old Byzantine windows, picked up from neighboring ruins, and funny old designs and inscriptions painted on the houses, which were of a little plaster over mud. We found a community oven or two and a reservoir where the sunshine was strong enough for our kodak: but the children gathered too thickly about them and were not to be dispersed.

All along the way we asked about the weaving. Especially old women were assailed,—anyone who looked antiquarian and whom we suspected of being a “character.”

One old woman, carrying a trough of black, moth-eaten appearing bread from a town oven, told us between her two surviving teeth that her grandmother who had lived in Demirdash, had a loom and made the same patterns as were being made to-day. Another woman who was sixty-five, declared that her great-grandmother had come from Macedonia and brought her patterns with her. It used to be that certain patterns were only used by certain families, and these were handed down from generation to generation.

We stopped in several doorways where the looms were almost stumbled over, they encroached so much on the only light hole in the room. In all the upstairs windows we could see evidences of silk worms, which explained the innumerable bundles of oak and mulberry leaves being carried along the roads. One woman invited us into the loft to see the worms, and we were surprised indeed to hear the worms eat. They were so many and so busy that there really was a dull hum all the time, like the sound of a gentle rain.

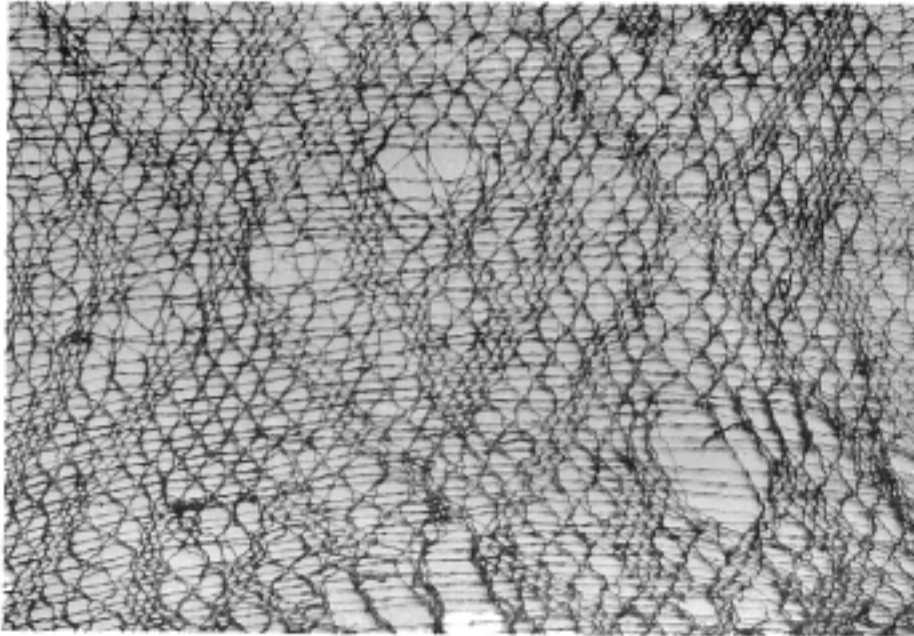
Our final visit was in the house of a woman who was reported to be a teacher of weaving for fifteen years. She was making her trousseau and had some lovely pieces the like of which we had never seen. But nicer things were to come, for some of the many neighbors who had followed us in, said they would run home and get their trousseaux, and, as always in such an art, the older the things the better and more beautiful they proved to be. Every woman makes two wedding sheets with deep borders of embroidery and of the heaviest thread she can find. The finest piece we saw, so far as workmanship and design were concerned, was as heavy as a board. The woman had lovely pillow

and bolster slips to match it, and when we exclaimed over the intricacy of the design, she flew to the loom standing by and showed us how it was done. Most of the Demirdash weaving we see to-day simply resembles filet. Not many of the women have their wedding finery now, for during the war and raids by tchettas, they lost so much that they were compelled to take their precious weaving into Broussa and sell it for whatever they could get in the bazaars.

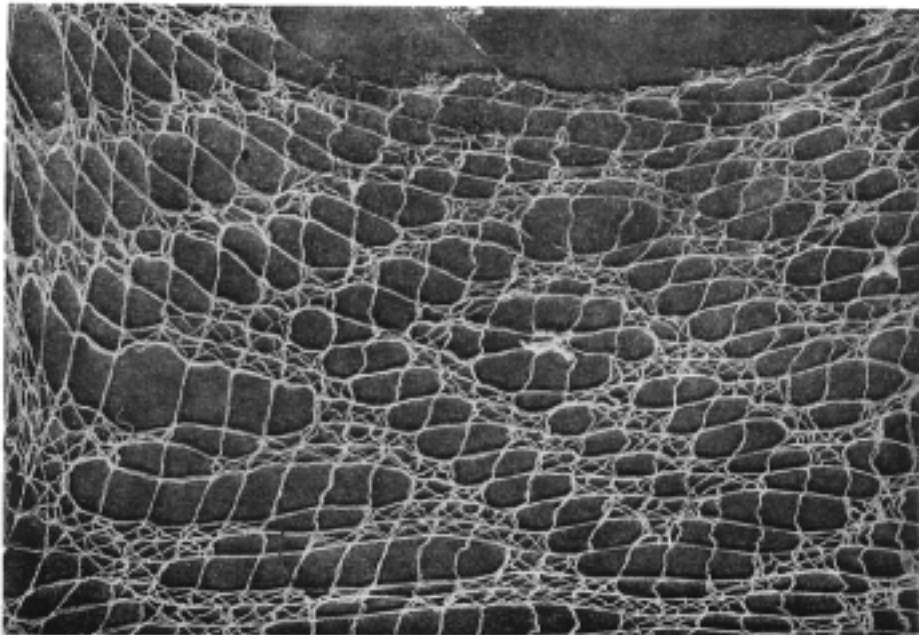
While we had Turkish coffee and sweets, they told us what they knew of Demirdash,—how it was settled originally by twelve young men who had been banished by one Demir Pasha from Broussa, and the village had been named for him. We did not understand why, if his reputation for cruelty were true, the young men had paid them the compliment of naming their place of refuge and new home for him, and were much inclined to believe the arabadji who told us that it was named Demir Tasha originally, which means "iron rock."

Every one in Demirdash speaks pure Greek, while Tapetjk, scarcely a kilo distant from it, and for that matter almost all the villages about, speak Turkish and understand no Greek. When we asked about this, the interpreter told us with bated breath that a friend of her father's owned a book of the histories of the thirty-three villages around Broussa and that in it she had read of how the tongues of the people in some villages had been cut in order to keep them from speaking their own language. We literally pounced upon her and demanded why she had not told us of the book. Would she get the book for us? Perhaps it told all the history of Demirdash weaving, which we were trying to get with so little result. But she at once became vague and Eastern, saying she did not remember what the name was, and that he was very peculiar, that he would not let us see the book unless we begged it of him for three or four years, that he had concealed the book all his life and it was worth his head to let the public know he had it. Besides it wasn't his, he had borrowed it of someone else and had loaned it to her father, who was the only person beside the man himself who had ever seen it. In spite of such insurmountable difficulties we immediately asked her to put in an application to see the book, hoping in 1925 or 1926 to satisfy our curiosity!

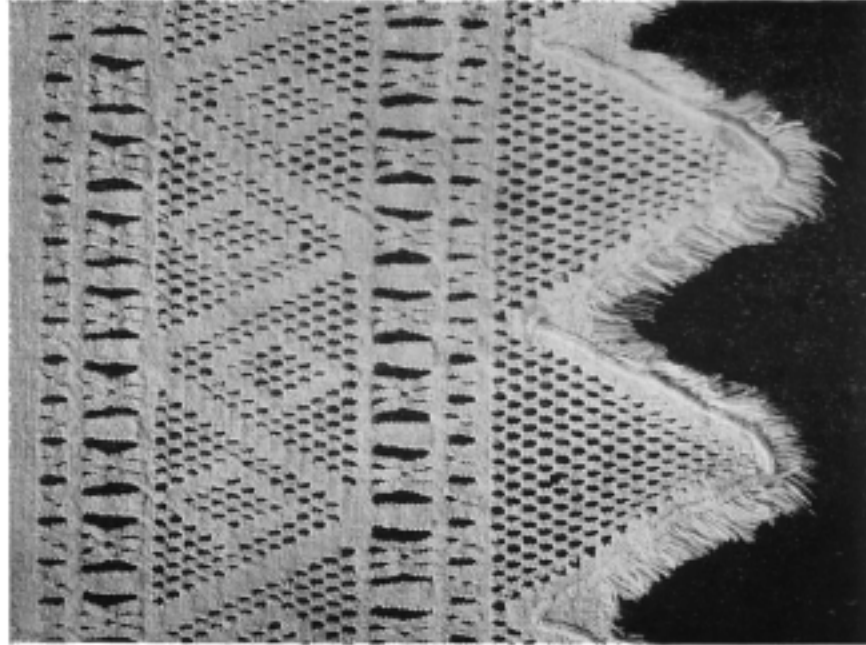
We left all sorts of advice in Demirdash about keeping on with old patterns, for the village is full of modern books with patterns of filet crochet, all of which can be adapted to the Demirdash weaving.



PREHISTORIC NET, FROM THE VICINITY OF LIMA, PERU
COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK



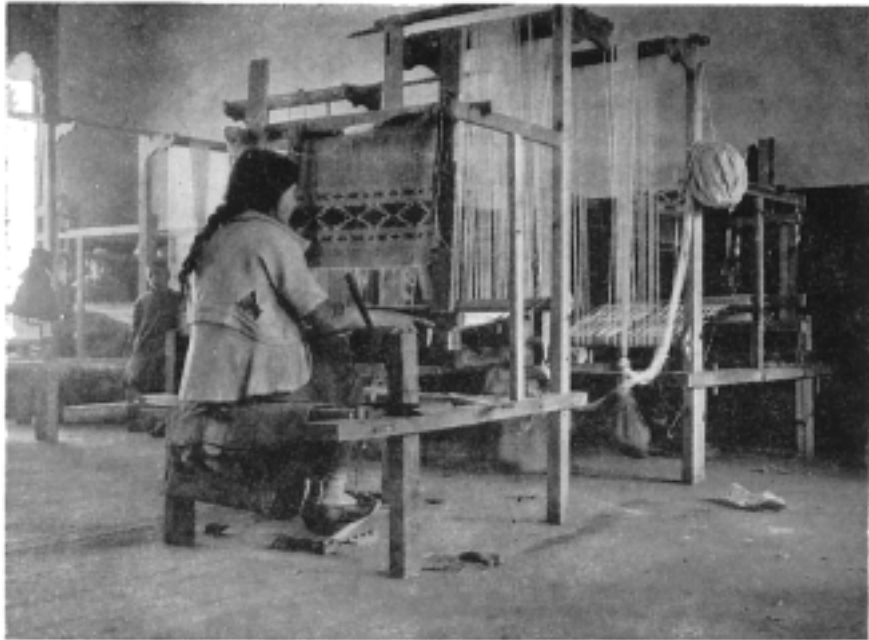
PREHISTORIC NET, FROM COAST OF PERU
COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK



SO-CALLED "MOORISH WEAVING"
DETAILS OF TOWEL BORDERS FROM THE NEAR EAST, IN THE COLLECTION OF TEXTILES IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

As we drove out of the village the church bell was ringing for the death of a villager. It sounded unusually sweet, for bells are rare in Turkey. We passed through a Turkish village where the women were sitting in the street before their doors, braiding onions to be dried and carried to market. The road was full of women and children coming home from the fields. One Greek soldier hailed us in "American" and reminded us that every place we had been we had found such a bit of home to greet us. As we rode across the valley toward Olympus a lot of little lights suddenly appeared at the foot of the mountain and we knew it was Broussa, dressed up in her month-old electric lights,—growing spoiled and modern like Demirdash weaving.

Cf. *Antike Handarbeiten*, by Luise Schinnerer, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library.



BROUSSA LOOMS

COURTESY OF THE "NEW NEAR EAST"