

Tapestry-Weaving.

TAPESTRY-WEAVING usually suggests large decorative hangings; but upon examining its productions the process will be found to have been employed for much smaller things. Lady Marian Alford, in her book, "Needlework as Art," claims tapestry-weaving as a closely-allied branch of needlework. And to some extent the claim is a good one.

The size of a piece of tapestry-weaving, therefore, has little to do with altering its technical character, for the

not work upon a textile fabric. It places its coloured thread upon a web or foundation of stouter threads, or strings, in such a way as to actually form a textile in the course of its operations.

These are a few of the points of difference between an embroidery and a tapestry-weaving. But a web of warp-threads is common to weaving in general, so that it now becomes necessary to indicate some of the points of difference between loom-weaving with a shuttle and tapestry-

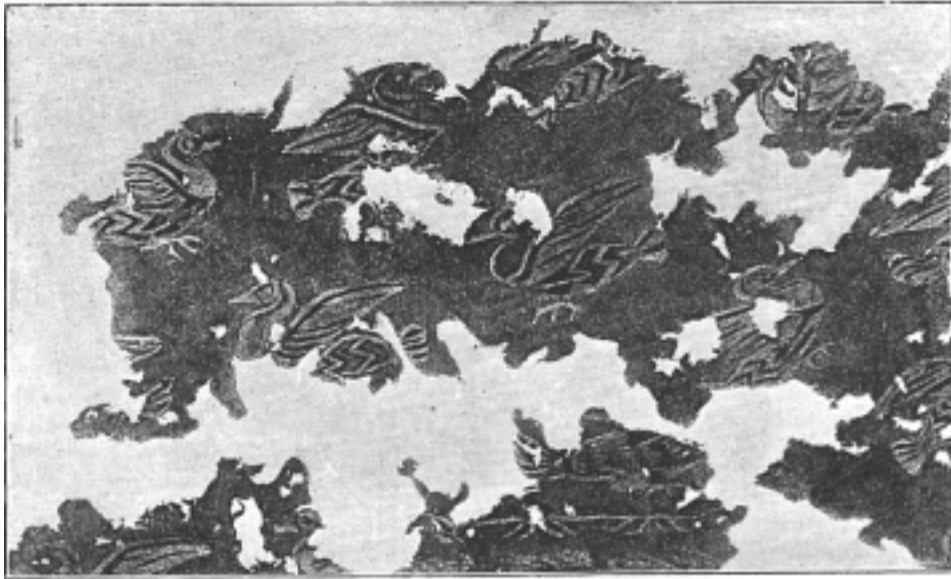


Fig. 1.—FRAGMENT OF LINEN WITH PATTERN OF DUCKS, WOVEN IN COLOURED WORSTEDS.

(Greek. Fourth Century B.C. In the Hermitage at St. Petersburg. Nearly full size.)

main principles of the process remain the same, whether it be a question of making some small ornament for a costume or one of producing a great wall-hanging. Now the gist of this article is to prove this assertion, and the first matter to be stated refers to the difference between tapestry-weaving and embroidery with a needle.

An embroidery is an ornamental needlework done upon a woven material. Monsieur Leon de Laborde regards embroidery as the sister art of painting, especially when used, as it has been, for such delicate results as those finely-wrought panels of figure subjects which occur in early sixteenth-century altar frontals and ecclesiastical vestments. He writes: "*L'aiguille, véritable pinceau, se promenait sur la toile et laissait derrière elle le fil teint en guise de couleur, produisant une peinture d'un ton doux et d'une touche ingénieuse, tableau brillant sans reflet, éclatant sans dureté.*" The same qualities of effect may be equally well claimed for a tapestry-weaving. But the implement in tapestry-weaving, corresponding with the needle in embroidery, is bulkier; and the intricacies of stitching possible with the needle are virtually impossible with the tapestry-weaver's spindle or bobbin. Moreover, the tapestry-maker's spindle or bobbin does

weaving. The starting foundation of both shuttle and tapestry-weaving is a web of threads. But in the former the web is intended to be a visible part of the fabric produced, whilst in the latter it is hidden by the threads twisted around and between it. Shuttle-weaving is done in a loom or frame fitted with various contrivances to act upon the warp-threads and upon the shuttle, which, charged with its weft, is thrown right across and between the warps. An implement, called a batten or comb, is another part of the weaving-loom; the warps pass between its teeth; and after the shuttle has carried its thread through the warp-web, the batten is worked to compress this thread close into the warp-web. The batten is then moved so as to allow the shuttle to make a return journey, leaving another thread between the warp. This is pressed down as the first was; and so, through a rapid repetition of these operations, the textile is woven, and its warp and shuttle threads are equally visible.

On the other hand, the tapestry-weaver's web of warps is fixed in a frame, which has no such contrivances for moving the threads as in shuttle-weaving. The tapestry-weaver's frame may be vertical to, or

parallel with the ground, whence the two sorts of frames are respectively known as the *haute lisse* and the *basse lisse*. The tapestry-weaver makes use of a number of bobbins or spindles, and taking one at a time he twists its thread around and between a particular number of warps which are to be covered with the selected thread, an operation which has some analogy with darning. As this intertwisting proceeds, the tapestry-maker strikes or presses it compactly with a hand-comb or sley, a portable prototype of the shuttle-weaver's batten. The warp-web for a tapestry-weaving is usually of hemp or string; and the tapestry as woven has a ribbed appearance more or less marked according to the size of the warp-threads. In great tapestry wall-hangings of the fifteenth century and onwards the warps are generally stout strings, whereas in tapestry-woven ornaments of the third or fourth century B.C. the warps are single flax threads.

As will have been inferred, the apparatus for tapestry-weaving is less complex than that for shuttle-weaving, and may be readily adapted for producing small things. Its frame may be but a few inches wide, and quite handy; whereas a weaving-loom is never of such a character, unless, indeed, it be one for making a narrow braid only, and like little archaic hand-loom, sometimes to be found in India.

The tapestry-weaving method is the decorative, as distinct from the utilitarian, weaving process. And, although loom-weaving is of great age, tapestry-weaving is as old. Tapestry-weaving was in use with people of ancient civilisations, like the Egyptian and Grecian, as well as with people of primitive habits, such as inhabitants in Borneo, wandering tribes in Central Asia, and peasants in Peru.

In Egypt and Greece, for centuries before Christ, the texture of embroidery was woolly or flaxen, and of a broader quality than that of later times, when very slender silken threads and equally slender steel needles were invented and used. And from the available evidence to hand it appears that the ornament of costumes was more frequently of tapestry-weaving than of embroidery. The space where such ornament was to appear as an insertion into an already woven fabric, was untraversed by the shuttle of the loom-weaver, and the warp-threads in it were left for the

tapestry-weaver to work upon. This, perhaps, may be better understood by referring to Fig. 1, which gives the reproduction of a linen fragment ornamented with oblique series of ducks. The birds are of coloured worsted tapestry-weaving, whereas the linen ground between them is of shuttle-weaving. This specimen is preserved in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg. It

was taken, with many other Greek works of art, from a tomb, identified as the Tomb of the Seven Brothers, near Tenriouk, in the province of Kouban (once a Greek colony), on the eastern shores of the Sea of Azoff. A full account, with illustrations of these relics, is given in the *Compte Rendu* of the Imperial Archaeological Commission (1878-1879). There is little room for doubting that they are, according to Stephani, of the third and fourth centuries B.C. Apart from the style of the ornament, the drawing of the ducks, their colouring, and so forth, the bare fact that they are witnesses to the use at this early date of the tapestry-weaving process



Fig. 2.—TAPESTRY-WOVEN SQUARE.

(From a Linen Robe of the Seventh Century. Egypto-Persian. Nearly full size.)

is of interest. It supplies evidence of the sameness of process in simple handicrafts throughout long periods. You may take this bit of work done by a Grecian colonist at a time when Athens was in her glory under Alexander the Great, and you may compare it with a finely-wrought panel of Gobelin's work, two thousand two hundred years younger, and you will see that the rules followed by the men and women manipulating the materials in each piece are the same. This might be still more remarkable if we had no corresponding pieces of work done at intermediate periods. However, there are plenty of these, and to a few we shall make reference shortly. But another circumstance presents itself for earlier consideration, and arises from the widespread practice of this comparatively simple process of coloured weaving. As already stated, it is to be traced among the arts of Greece, of Egypt under Greek and Roman dominations, of Borneo, of Central Asia, and of Peru. To these are to be added Central and Southern Europe, as well as Norway, China, and Japan. Broadly speaking, then, the tapestry-weaving process has been practised from one end of the world to the other, and apparently from the earliest to the latest of historic periods; whilst it is found to have been as easy of accomplishment by artificers belonging to historic civilisations as by those of semi-civilised people.

The tapestry-weaving process, as the duck-patterned

cloth in Fig. 1 shows, was used at an early date for far smaller articles than the great Flemish wall-hangings of the fifteenth century. Still, it was most likely employed in early times for hangings as well. But as regards the decoration of ancient costume by this process, we may mention one or two instances of its apparent use. The first is that of the peplos for the sacred wooden figure of Athene Polias, which stood in the Erechtheum. This peplos is generally supposed to have been wrought by high-born Athenian ladies, who, like Penelope, no doubt possessed, for their home occupations of weaving and embroidery, small looms or frames similar to those used by English ladies in the twelfth century for the "opus pectineum," or comb-work. A sley or hand-comb has been mentioned as one of the more important instruments in the making of tapestry-weaving, and the mediæval name "opus pectineum" clearly arose from the sley or comb employed in this work. To return, however, to the peplos made by the Athenian ladies. "It was a woven mantle, renewed every five years. On the ground, which is described as dark violet, and also as saffron-coloured, was inwoven the battle of the gods and the giants." The expression "inwoven" sufficiently indicates that the ornamentation was not of needlework, though, for the matter of that, the Greeks were skilled in embroidery, and worked chain-stitch and feather-stitch as well as the best embroiderers of any period. This is no mere hasty assertion, as specimens of such needlework found at Kouban very distinctly prove. The "battle of the giants" on the peplos was probably depicted in a series of panels forming a sort of border,

Similar provision of such spaces is to be seen in hundreds of Egypto-Roman and Egypto-Byzantine specimens of tapestry-weaving applied to costume, which have lately been rescued from burial-grounds at Akhmîm in Upper Egypt. Before alluding more fully to these we will speak of a second Classic example of what seems to have been tapestry-weaving. This was the corselet sent to Greece by Amasis, King of the Egyptians. Herodotus describes it as made of linen, "with a vast number of figures of animals inwoven into its fabric, and likewise embroidered with gold and tree-wool. What is most worthy of admiration in it is that each of the twists, although of fine texture, contains within it 360 threads, all of them clearly visible." The above translation is by Rawlinson. Bohn's Herodotus gives a slightly different version. From both, however, it certainly appears that Herodotus marvelled that each thread should be made up of 360 fibres. I have ventured to point out, in the catalogue of Egyptian tapestry-weavings at South Kensington Museum, that perhaps Herodotus did not really mean this. For "at the present day, and with the aid of a microscope even, practical experience of the labour of counting the fibres in a single thread" suggests the doubtfulness of the meaning which attaches to his reputed words. His expression may, perhaps, have related to the texture of the corselet rather than to each thread. The ribbed character of tapestry-weaving has been alluded to as a peculiarity; and that of the corselet possibly aroused his astonishment. Herodotus might have, therefore, proceeded to count the number of visible ribs marked by the warp-threads in



Fig. 3.—TAPESTRY-WOVEN WINGED FIGURE INSERTED INTO A LINEN CLOTH.

(*Egypto-Roman. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D. About one-fourth the actual size.*)

and hung much in the manner of the vertical insertions of ornamented textiles which nowadays ornament the fronts of ladies' skirts. But unlike them, the tapestry-woven border or orphrey of the peplos formed part of the robe itself. It was not sewn on to it, it was woven into it, as the ducks were in Fig. 1. The weavers, who made the main ground of purple or saffron-coloured material, left a space of warp-threads unwoven with wefts. The web of warp-threads in this space was then worked over in the tapestry-weaving manner.

the corselet after he had admired "the figures of animals inwrought and adorned with cotton-wool." In the width of a corselet or breast ornament of the same sort of texture as the Kouban ducks (Fig. 1), some 360 warp-threads would be used. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that the corselet was of tapestry-weaving, and the statistics as to the 360 threads apply to its warps. But my conclusion is somewhat fortified by the discovery of the Akhmîm specimens of tapestry-weaving.

All of them are wrought with coloured worsteds and

flax threads, and many clearly belong to the period of Roman domination in Egypt. In some there are ornaments which proclaim Grecian origin. The majority, however, are of a period which can be placed between the sixth and ninth centuries, at latest. Thus, then, from the fourth century B.C. to the ninth century A.D., we have a good deal of substantial and circumstantial evidence to prove the employment of the tapestry-weaving process during those twelve hundred years.

upon the rock-hewn throne of Rustem near Kermanschah in Central Persia.

An intermingling of Roman and Persian influences is traced in certain ornamented works of the Sassanian epoch (third to seventh century A.D.), and blossomed in Egypt during the conquest of that country by Chosroes II. (seventh century A.D.). The horseman of Fig. 2 has a Perso-Roman appearance, whilst the rectangular border about him composed of ducks and fish, a pomegranate



Fig. 4.—PART OF A WALL-HANGING OF SILK AND WORSTED TAPESTRY-WEAVING ON STRING WARPS.

(An Episode in the Siege of Troy. Early Fourteenth Century. Flemish.)

These Akhmim specimens are of the highest interest, not merely because they exemplify the tapestry-weaving process, but also on account of the extraordinary variety of their patterns. Fig. 3 is a reduced illustration of a portion of a linen burial-cloth (or it might even have been a curtain) on which the principal ornamentation consisted of a pair of winged figures holding up a wreath encircling a cross and other emblems. This device occurs in carved ivory book-covers, used by Romans and Byzantines in the fourth and sixth centuries. It re-appears in Italian sculptures of the fifteenth century, and the Persians of the Sassanian dynasty adopted it from their vanquished foes the Romans, causing it to be sculptured

and apparently peaches (or fruit of the sacred Persea at Hermopolis), recalls the style of some of those mosaics worked with small tesserae, a specimen of which, with ducks represented in it, is in the sacristy of S. Maria in Trastevere at Rome. This little square (Fig. 2) is only slightly reduced in size. The original at South Kensington came from Akhmim. The threads—both warp and weft—are very small as compared with those used in Fig. 3 or those in Fig. 4. The colouring is bright, and the texture of the material so glossy as at first sight to seem to be silken. It is, however, of fine flax and worsted. Squares like this one were conventional decorations of loose garments shaped like

dalmatics. A band of woven decoration was inserted over the shoulders, in equal lengths back and front. The squares were worked on the shoulders and on the four corners of the skirts. They are termed *tabulæ adjunctæ*, and the fashion of them survived as late as the eleventh century.

Now, all the specimens of tapestry-weaving which have been discussed are in the nature of insertions into woven grounds. But in course of time larger pieces of

remarkable specimen extant of this shape for wall-hangings. But a very early if not the earliest known wall-hanging of tapestry-weaving is Byzantine in style of pattern, and dates from the twelfth or thirteenth century. A large fragment of it is in the Museum at Lyons, and a little bit of its border only in the South Kensington Museum. The ornament consists of a series of repeated roundels, in each of which is a species of dragon or bird pinning some emblematical quadruped. A cen-



Fig. 5.—PART OF A SILK TAPESTRY-WEAVING.

(Modern Chinese.)

tapestry-weaving were made separately and not as parts of other textiles. The process thereupon became specialised, and large frames, in which webs of stout strong warps could be fixed, came into use. The peculiar characteristics of twisting coloured threads between and around the warps, and of pressing them together with a comb, were, however, the same as in the inserted tapestry-weavings.

It would require more space than is now available to give a sketch of the gradual development in size of tapestry hangings. Earlier hangings of this class seem to have been of considerable length as compared with their width; and the needle-embroidered linen strip—some 210 feet in length and 18 inches wide—commonly known as the Bayeux Tapestry, is probably the most

tapestry later such patterns were superseded by figure subjects.

To the revival of painting in Italy, frescoes for wall decorations, such as Giotto's at Padua, was the change largely due; for from the fourteenth century onwards designs for tapestry-woven wall-hangings were chiefly in the nature of compositions with figures illustrating episodes of sacred and secular history, and of the same decorative intention as the wall-paintings of Italy. The reproduction of the figure designs in tapestry-weaving possessed a marked peculiarity, which was enhanced as the designers became more and more careful to observe the influence which the process necessarily exercised upon the textile reproductions of their works. A certain quality of flatness, due to comparative absence

of perspective, and the rich ornamental effects of wealth in well-contrasted details, figures, and groups, are features in representative tapestries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As illustrative of this, we have selected a portion of a famous tapestry-hanging long known to connoisseurs as one of a set illustrating the Siege of Troy, which hung in the château of the Chevalier de Bayard, near Grenoble. The late Monsieur Jubinal, to whom this remaining piece formerly belonged, has written of it, "Architecture, costumes, arms, all denote that this monument of tapestry-weaving dates from the commencement of the fifteenth century. The lettering of the legends explaining the subject has even certain characteristics which belong to the lettering of the late fourteenth century." The knightly panoplies are unplumed, and plumes were not generally worn in helmets until after the middle of the fifteenth century. The subject of the design is the assistance given by Queen Panthesilea and her Amazons to King Priam during the Siege of Troy. Fig. 4 displays the tent of "Pirus," with the youthful king in the midst of his atten-

dants. Outside, and to the left, is the *mêlée* of fighting Greeks and Trojans; and towards the foreground is Queen Panthesilea in armour, on a richly caparisoned palfrey, striking Diomedes to the ground. Some literary interest attaches to this episode, which, as a post-Homeric continuation of the account of the Siege of Troy, has been set forth by Quintus Smyrnaeus—a fourth-century Roman poet, and imitator of the Greek cyclic poets, Arctinus and Lesches.

Flemish, Italian, French, Spanish, and English tapestry-woven wall-hangings have been produced in abundant quantities since the fifteenth century, and the bare mention of the fact must suffice here. The Chinese have adapted, or, indeed, may only have revived the process. They usually employ silk warps and wefts, thereby carrying the effects of the art to what may be their limits in regard to minute and dainty work. Fig. 5 is taken from a silken tapestry-weaving of modern Chinese make. But the *finesse* of the work does not surpass that of the Egypto-Persian piece of the seventh century shown in Fig. 2.

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