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Hélène Morin - Hamon

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Decorative strips on Ancient Greek garments... Between fashion and weaving technology

In iconography (painting or architecture) Greek clothes often appear with decorative strips, as here, with a wife spinning on this oinochoe.

[How were these ornamental borders created?]

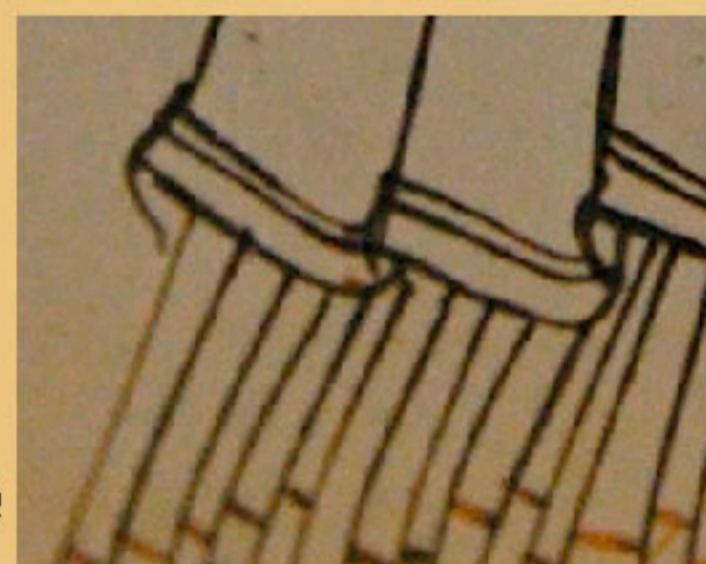
If embroidery was practiced, one hypothesis is that these long ribbons of repetitive motives could have been woven.

[What method was used?]

"Tablet weaving" is a technique using small tablets with holes as a loom to produce long strips of cloth with varied decorative designs.

Attested since Protohistory, this weaving technique was practiced in countries distant from each other. In Germany remains brought to light at Heunenbergr have been dated from the VIth Century BC. While in Austria, woven bands found in the Halstatt salt mines are dated from the VIIIth to the IVth Century BC. The preservation of organic matter in the soil is very difficult, it is rare to uncover such artifacts outside specific environments such as salt mines, shafts, peat bogs...

Although no vestige of this weaving method has yet been found in archaeological excavations, it is possible that this technique associated with traditional weaving was also practiced in Ancient Greece.



Woman spinning, detail of an Attic oinochoe white background Brygos Painter, circa 490 BC. British Museum

[Tablet Weaving and Plain Weave together]

This weaving technique gets its name from the drilled plaques used to hold the warp yarns: the tablets were made with leather, wood, bone...

The width of the finished strips varies according to the number of tablets and the thickness of the selected threads. The fineness of the result depends greatly on the quality of the spinning.

The weaver could execute both weaving techniques simultaneously, incorporating the borders into the garment. Alternatively the strips had to be sewn on once the cloth was woven.

[Conclusion]

Tablet weaving favors the variety of strips in shades of colors and patterns, by guaranteeing quick execution for the repeating patterns. This may have contributed to influence the fashion of this period.



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Autrice : H el ene MORIN-HAMON

