

**Jean-Ann Weale-Badieritaki**

## **OBSERVATIONS UPON COMMON DECORATIVE MOTIFS ON THE TRADITIONAL WOMEN'S COSTUMES OF BOEOTIA AND ATTICA\***

Greek traditional costumes as a whole and Greek traditional women's costumes in particular, as far as one can glean from the very meagre existing sources (written documents, illustrations from traveller's books, mosaics, wall-paintings, photography etc.) fall into two main categories.

The first, which is the earliest, shows clearly a distinct Byzantine influence, not only in style but also in decoration. The traditional women's costumes of mainland Greece, in the majority, belong to this group.

The second category, in which Byzantine elements are mixed with Western styles, comprises the traditional costumes worn by women in certain areas of mainland Greece and those of Greek islands, which for centuries, came, either through conquest or through peaceful intercourse, under the influence of Western Europe, most notably being that of Italy (Venice, Genoa) and to a lesser degree of France.

The traditional women's costumes in the villages of Boeotia and Attica belong to the first category both in style and, as far as can be seen from the majority of the existing garments, in decoration.

Both these peasant costumes, which have many stylistic and decorative themes in common, were worn by that part of the Greek population, which was descended from groups of Greek-Orthodox Albanian-speakers, who entered Greece from the north-west, present-day South Albania (Greek northern Epirus), during the Middle Ages.

These immigrants, although they had appeared in Greece as early as the 11th and 12th centuries, really made their presence felt during the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly between the years 1350 and 1450 A.D.

During that period, as a result of wars, disease and natural catastrophes, some parts of Greece were not heavily populated, and these people, who were for the most part shepherds and warriors, were invited to settle these areas. Around the end of the 14th Century and the first three decades of the 15th century, the immigrants founded villages in Boeotia and Attica.

These people who were and still are known as «Arvanites», were popular as colonists and soldiers with both the local Greek and foreign overlords of these regions. This trend continued under the Turks, when for centuries the Arvanites, in small numbers, emigrated to Greece. It must be emphasized, that unlike the earlier immigrants, who were Greek-Orthodox in dogma, a

---

\* This article is based on a paper given at the First International Congress of Boeotian Studies. Thebes, 10-14 September 1986.

large proportion of the Albanian-speaking people of the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries was islamised. These people were intended by the Turks to help in suppressing the numerous Greek revolts.

Albanian identity began gradually but steadily to weaken a few years after the immigrants entered Greece. In 1481 one of the Venetian senior officials, Mark Barbarigos, in a letter addressed to the Venetian Senate, informed his compatriots that «the Arvanites and the Greeks compose one ethnicity». In the next century most of the Venetian documents make no further mention of the ethnological term Arvanites. Several factors appear to have played a part in this process of gradual assimilation. Both Greeks and the Arvanites were and are members of the Greek Orthodox Church. In addition for many centuries both people were under the rule of the moslem Ottoman Empire. This factor helped early in their history to unite the two ethnic groups and thus to wage various uprisals against their common oppressor, the most successful being that of the War of Independence. In more recent years the cultural, educational, economic, and political dominance of the Greeks was most instrumental in breaking down the few remaining elements of Arvanite ethnicity. Of the two surviving characteristics of these people, the traditional costume is no longer worn and their language, with a few exceptions, is spoken by the elderly and the middle-aged but very little understood or spoken by the younger generation.

The traditional women's costumes of the above mentioned areas, consist, as do all costumes of this category, of the following garments.

*The chemise.* This garment is a constant item and is found in all traditional costumes in Greece. The chemise of this category is entirely Byzantine in style and is very closely connected to the Byzantine chemise's forerunner, the Roman dalmatic.

In its simplest form it consist of a central panel, which makes up the front and the back parts of the garment and four straight sided or tapered narrow panels at the sides to give freedom of movement. It is naturally sleeveless, at least in the majority of the earlier examples from Boeotia and Attica.

The «*tzakos*», a very short bolero-like jacket with short sleeves, on which the attachable sleeves of the chemise are sewn.

The «*sigouni*», a sleeveless overcoat made of a kind of felted woolen material, called «sayaki».

The «*zonari*» (sash), the «*zoni*» (belt), the «*podhia*» (apron) together with the intricate and complicated head-dress and the elaborate jewellery particularly in the case of the bridal costume, because of their symbolic intimation of fertility, played a very important role in the traditional costumes of these people.

Footwear, is not an important item of their dress, as women, for reasons of economy, preferred to go barefoot and shoes were worn only on special

occasions, on Sundays for festivals and other days of importance to the village.

These costumes, which were worn daily as late as the first decade of the present century are still sporadically worn today only to enhance local or panhellenic celebrations.

The common decorative motifs on both groups of costumes, help to illustrate how and why some motifs and not others survived the passage of time and fashion. They also show how foreign decorative elements found their way into and were subsequently developed in the costumes of the villagers of Boeotia and Attica.

Decoration on all the traditional costumes found in Greece is characterized by its arrangement on the garment itself and by the actual decorative motifs.

Decorative arrangement in itself can be vertical, horizontal or both. The decorative themes can be geometrical, floral, zoo-morphic and anthropomorphic.

This type of decorative arrangement, although it can be traced as far back as the second millenium and, in some cases, even earlier, really came into its own during the last centuries of the Roman empire. This applies not only to the decorative strips around the neck, cuffs and hem but also to the vertical bands of embroidery, which are descended from the clavi found on Roman and Coptic tunics and dalmatics. The various lozenges, circles and squares which also adorn the Boeotian and Attica examples must probably be survivals of the segmenta found on Roman and Coptic dress.

That these decorative arrangements and motifs, which are also found on many other traditional Greek costumes have survived to this day, is due to the extreme conservatism of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine dress, both secular and clerical, which from the 4th Century up to the middle of the 17th Century, were many much the same both in style and in decoration. Secular dress, both men's and women's followed the pattern of clerical attire in some respects from the mid-seventeenth century until the first two decades of the present century. Consequently one can learn a great deal from the clerical garments about the form and decoration of folk Greek costumes in general and the costumes of Boeotia and Attica in particular.

Thus the vertical and horizontal decorative arrangement of the motifs on the chemise of the costumes worn by the village women in Arachova, ill. I, Tanagra, ill. II in Boeotia and on the chemise worn in the villages of Attica, ill. III, to give a few but representative examples, are closely related and very probably originate from the horizontal and vertical arrangements found on the costumes of the past, such as for example the costumes shown in the following illustrations. No IV shows the present attire of a Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church, No V shows young men and women dancing in a painting



done in the early 18th Century at the Monastery of Great Lavra, No VI is a schematic representation of the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus Palaeologus the Second (late thirteenth - early fourteenth Century), and No VII is a drawing of a Coptic tunic dating from the early Christian centuries.

All Greek embroideries fall into two categories. In the first category are embroideries formed by counting stitches while in the second the embroidery strictly follows a drawn design (see ill. No XIV). The embroideries on the traditional costumes of everyday-wear in Boeotia and Attica usually belong to the first category and those for bridal or festive use to the second.

It should be noted that the embroideries of the second category, which were complicated and required expert handling were the work of paid skilled village embroiderers. These embroiderers had a long history, as professionals, for secular, clerical and liturgical garments which were much used not only during the four centuries of Turkish occupation but also during the Byzantine epoch as well as and in Greek and Roman antiquity.

Another centuries-old technique, well-known in Antiquity and which is found on many Greek traditional costumes including the festive and bridal costumes of Boeotia and Attica, is the use of numerous sequins, known in Greek as «poulies», which added extra beauty to the embroideries.

Colour plays also a very important part in these embroideries. Two colour schemes are to be found on the embroideries of the costumes of Boeotia and Attica. The first is that of «alternate» colours and the other that of the «dominant» colour.

In the «alternate» colour scheme, two colours are usually employed and these are alternated as e.g. black or dark brown and light brown on the chemise from Tanagra, ill. I, black or dark blue and dark green as on the overcoat, the «sigouni», of the traditional costume of Attica, ill. VIII.

In the «dominant» colour scheme, which seems to have been more popular, three colours were used in such a way that there was always twice as much of one colour as there was of each of the other two. Two examples will suffice. The first, ill. IX is from the hem of the chemise from the village Arachova in Boeotia and the second, ill. X from the embroidery of the attached sleeve of the bolero type jacket, the «tzakos», of the costume of Attica. In both examples, although other colours are well represented, red, as can clearly be seen, predominates.

Red is the most popular colour found on most, if not all, festive and bridal costumes in Greece as far as it is possible to judge from the evidence, the prevalence may be connected with the survival of very ancient customs and beliefs which associated red with blood, sacrifice and the like.

A further distinction could be made in connection with the actual decorative motifs. The themes can be described as geometric floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic.

The geometric designs, as seen on the bridal chemise from Arachova, ill. I and especially on the bridal chemise from Attica, ill. X can be related not only to one of the female dancers of ill IV, but also to the costume worn by the emperor Andronicus Palaeologus of ill. VI and to that, ill. XI, worn by the emperor of Trebizond Alexius the Third (1349-1396).

The following illustrations all have one main motif in common, although differing chronologically and offering variety of decorative themes.

Illustration XII shows the decorative motif on the upper and lower sleeves of the «tzakos», from the bridal costume of Arachova. This garment, which is not very old, was cut and embroidered during the last years of the use of this type of costume. The main theme consists of a vase from which emerge three flowers, two from the lower part of the vase and one from its mouth. On either side of the third flower a bird is seen pecking.

The second examples, ill. XIII from the same village, consists of an earlier embroidered piece from a «tzakos». A vase, with flowers, seems to stand on a curved mound. On either side of the mound a bird can be seen pecking.

The third example, ill. XIV, which dates from the 18th Century, is part of the embroidery of a bridal «tzakos» from Attica, and shows the same motif, more elaborately executed.

All three illustrations portray the same central motif. A vase with flowers. This theme is very old and well known in the Mediterranean world, as can be seen from the following illustration No XV. This is a Coptic example and dates either from the 4th or 5th Century A.D. The theme of a vase with flowers, is very closely associated with the sacred tree, known to all or at least to the most of the important religions of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. For the Christian religion it very early acquired a Christian symbolism, representing Christ as the tree of life and thus it was popular in clerical embroidery.

The popularity of the theme and its associations in clerical embroidery accounts for the subsequent popularity of the «vase with flowers» motif in Greek folk embroidery.

It should be noted that the principal flowers in the above mentioned illustrations are the carnation and the tulip. Both flowers were two of the principal oriental floral designs, the others being the pomegranate and the rose. As a floral design all four flourished in Persia, in the 16th Century, but very soon found their way to Asia Minor, the Greek islands and the Greek mainland. All became very popular floral designs and as such they can be seen not only on domestic embroidery used to embellish the Greek house but also on Greek traditional costumes.

The next three illustrations belong to the last category, where the main motifs are anthropomorphic.

The first example, ill. XVI, is from the hem of an old chemise from

Arachova. It shows male figures (warriors?) waving. They are dressed in a style, which had long ceased to exist in the village and indeed that part of the Greek mainland, by the time this particular hem was embroidered.

The second illustration, XVII, is from the hem of a festive chemise from the village of Tanagra in southern Boetia. It illustrates, in schematic form, small anthropomorphic figures, dancing women and children.

Anthropomorphic figures, in a much more schematic forms adorn the upper part of the embroidered hem of the bridal chemise of the traditional costume of Attica, as can be seen in the last illustration, No XVIII.

Anthropomorphic embroidered figures are also well-known from Antiquity and most probably have found their way in folk embroidery through the rich Byzantine tradition.

From the above presentation of examples from the common decorative motifs of the traditional costumes from Boeotia and Attica one can conclude that their origins can either be found in Greek-Roman antiquity of the early Christian centuries or from the eastern (Persian) decorative influence of the 16th Century.

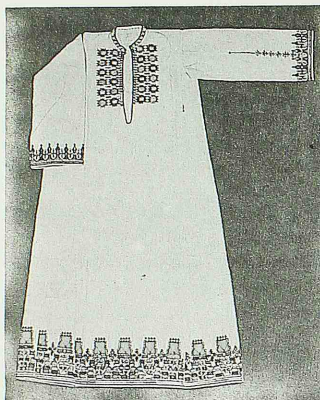
## REFERENCES

- 1) Ioanna Papantoniou, «A first attempt at an introduction to Greek traditional costume (women's)», *Ethnografica*, Nauplia 1978, v. I pp 85-86. (in Greek with an English summary).
- 2) Jean A. Weale-Badieritaki, *The traditional women's chemise of mainland Greece*. Athens 1980, pp. 85-97, 122-125. (in Greek with an English summary).
- 3) Angeliki Hadzernichali, *Greek Folk Art. Greek Folk Costume*. Athens 1978, v. I.
- 4) Jean-Ann Weale-Badieritaki, «The folk jewellery of Greece», *Contact* Clwyd 1985, v. I, pp. 1-6.
- 5) Angelos Delivorias, *Greek traditional jewellery*. Athens 1980, pp. 6-24.
- 6) George D. Hadzesoteriou, *A history of Paeania and of the areas east of Hymettus. (1205-1973)*. Athens 1973, pp. 25-75 (in Greek).
- 7) V. Bérard, *Turkey and Hellenism. A journey in Macedonia. Greeks-Turks-Vlachs-Albanians-Bulgarians-Serbs*. Athens 1987. (a Greek translation from the French publication of 1896).
- 8) Peter Trudgill – George A. Tzavaras, *A Sociolinguistic Study of Albanian Dialects spoken in the Attica and Biotia Areas of Greece*. London 1975. Social Science Research Council Report. University of Reading.
- 9) Peter Trudgill – George A. Tzavaras, «Why Albanian-Greeks are not Albanians: Language shift in Attica and Biotia». *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London 1977, pp. 171-183 (ed. H. Giles).
- 10) Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, *The textiles of Macedonia and Thrace*, Athens 1983<sup>2</sup>.
- 11) Mary G. Houston, *Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Persian Costume*. London (1972).
- 12) Mary G. Houston, *Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine Costume and Decoration*. London (1966).
- 13) André Grabar, *La Peinture Byzantine*. Genève 1953.
- 14) Walter Oakeshott, *The mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries*. London (1967).
- 15) John Beckwith, *The Art of Constantinople. An introduction to Byzantine Art. 330-1453*. London (1961).
- 16) Jean-Ann Weale-Badieritaki, «A possible interpretation for the appearance of the pomegranate as a decorative motif in Greek traditional women's dress», *Parousia*, Athens, 1985, v. III, pp. 199-218. (in Greek with an English summary).
- 17) Costas E. Biris, *Arvanites. The Dorians of modern Hellenism*. Athens 1960. (in Greek).



- 18) Apostotle Vacalopoulos, *The history of modern Hellenism*, Salonika 1972<sup>2</sup>, v. I p. 25. (in Greek).
- 19) Lukas D. Tsitsipis, «Narative performance in a dying Language. Evidence from Albanian in Greece», *Word*, v. 34, No. 1, p. 25-35.
- 20) Titos Jochalas, «Über die Einwanderung der Albaner in Griechenland. (Eine zusammenfassende Betrachtung). *Dissertationes Albanicae*, München 1971, p. 89, 91, 93, 95-97, 99, 105.
- 21) Basil Panagiotopoulos, *Population and habitations in the Peloponnese during the 13th-18th centuries*. Athens 1985, p. 69. (in Greek).
- 22) Popi Zora, *Embroideries and jewellery of the Greek costume*. Athens 1981. (in Greek).
- 23) Veronika Gervers, *The influence of Ottoman Turkish textiles and costume in eastern Europe*. Toronto 1982.
- 24) Andromachi Gjergji, «Veshjet populore. Këmisha a grave. Për Atlasin Ethnografik Shqiptar», *Ethnografia Shqiptare*, Tiranë 1981, No. 11, p. 23-61.
- 25) Walter Deny, «Textiles», in *Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans. Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire*. London 1982, pp. 121-139. (ed. Yanni Petsopoulos).
- 26) Pauline Johnstone, *The Byzantine tradition in Church embroidery*. London 1967.
- 27) Ann Apostolaki, «Dionysos Dentritis» in *Archaeological Ephemeris* (1942-4), Athens 1948, (a reprint, in Greek).
- 28) George Wheler, *A journey into Greece*. London 1682, book IV, p. 303, 319.
- 29) Helen Romeou-Karastamati, *The «podia» of the Karagouna*. Athens 1980 (with an English summary).





\* Illustration I. Chemise. Arachova-Boeotia (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, *Greek Folk Art. Greek Folk Costume*. Athens 1978, v. I, p. 126, ill. 118. (in Greek).

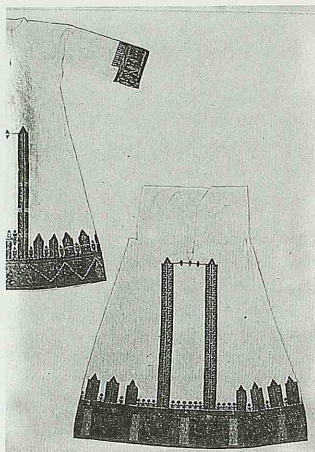


Illustration II. Chemise. Tanagra-Boeotia (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p. 99, ill. 88 a, b).

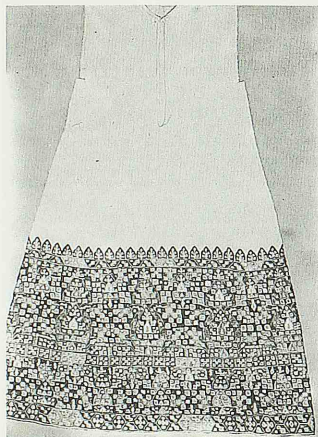


Illustration III. Chemise. Attica. (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p. 40, ill. 15).



Illustration IV. A Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church. (Mary G. Houston, *Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine Costume and Decoration*. London 1966, ill. 177).

\* Για τεχνικούς λόγους δεν έγινε δυνατή η έγχρωμη εκτύπωση των εικόνων I, VII, IX, X.

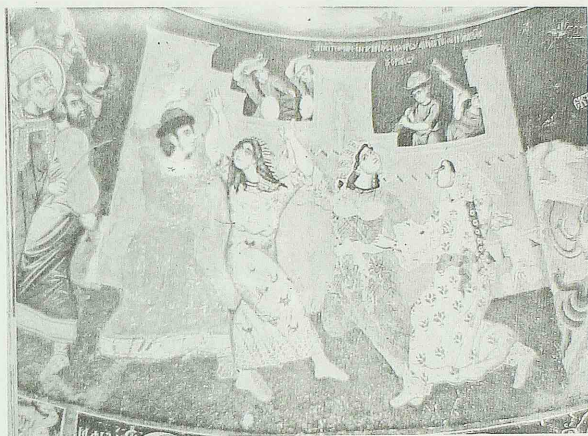
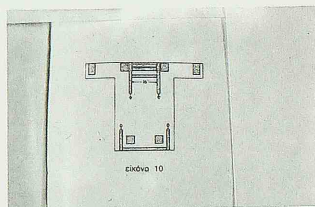


Illustration V. Young men and women dancing. A painting from the Monastery of Great Lavra, Mt. Athos. *History of the Greek Nation*, v. 10, p. 450 (in Greek).

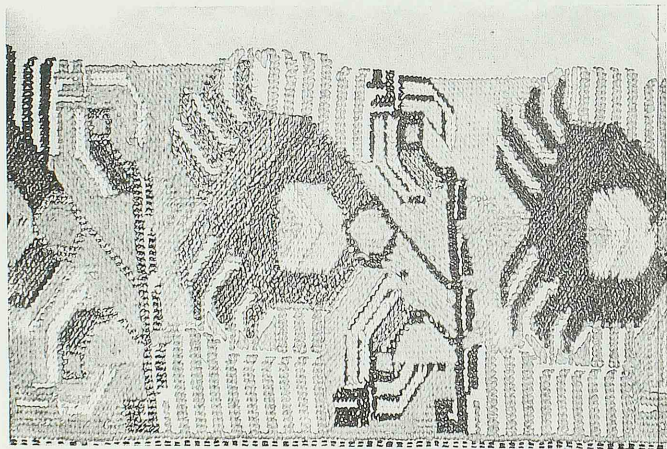


Illustration VI. Andronicus Palaeologus the Second. (Mary G. Houston, ill. 166).



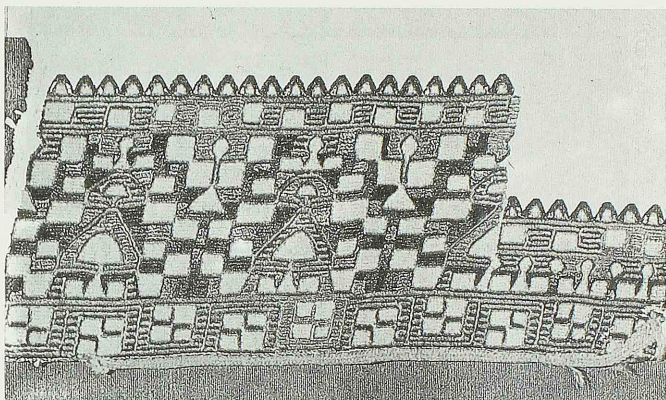
\* Illustration VII. A Coptic tunic. (Mary G. Houston p. 118, figure 132).

Illustration VIII. A «sigouni»  
from Attica (Angeliki  
Hadzemichali, p. 57, ill 35).



\* Illustration IX. Hem of a chemise from Arachova (Angeliki Hadzemichali, p. 124, ill. 117).





\* Illustration X. Bridal costume of Attica. Ioanna Papantoniou. (Athens 1973) (in Greek with an English summary).

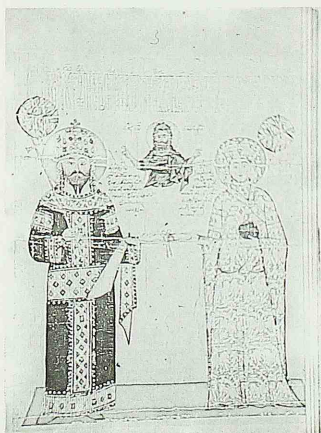


Illustration XI. The emperor of Trebizond Alexius the Third. (History of the Greek Nation, v. 9, p. 327).



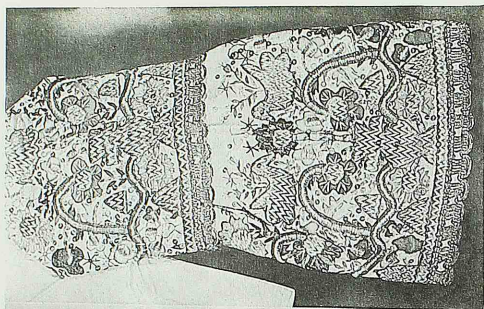


Illustration XII. The «upper» and «lower» sleeves from a «tzakos» from Arachova. (Angeliki Hadzemichali, p. 133, ill. 130).

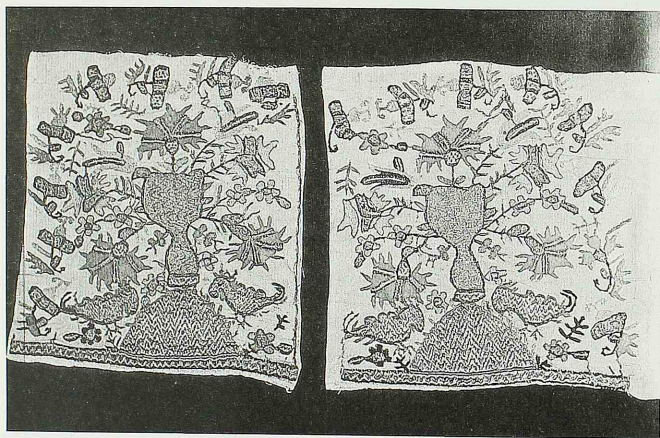


Illustration XIII. The «upper» sleeves from a «tzakos». Arachova. (Angeliki Hadzemichali, p. 132, ill. 129).

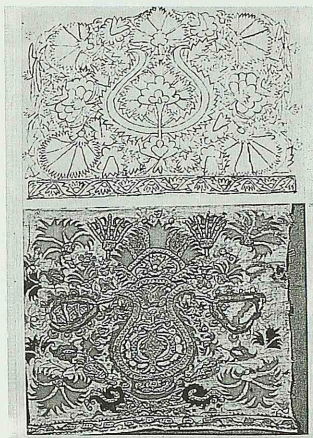


Illustration XIV. A motif from a bridal «tzakos» from Attica. (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p. 52, ill. 25).

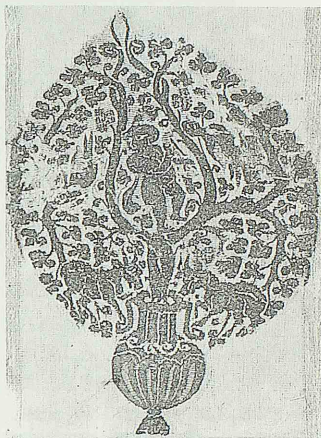


Illustration XV. A decorative motif from a Coptic tunic. (Ann Apostolaki. Dionysos Dendritis. Athens 1948. p. 74, ill. 1).

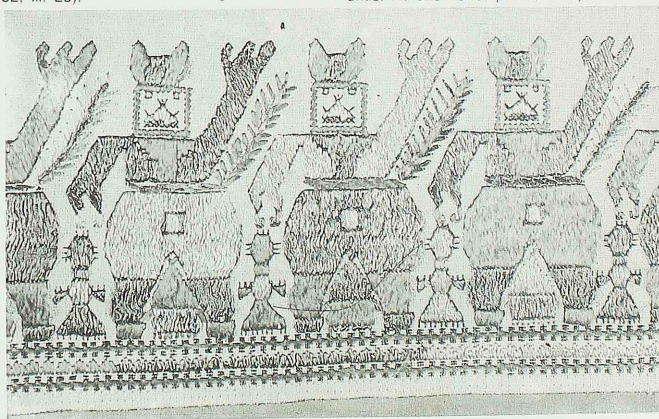


Illustration XVI. Waiving warriors. From a hem of a chemise from Arachova. (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p. 127, ill. 120).

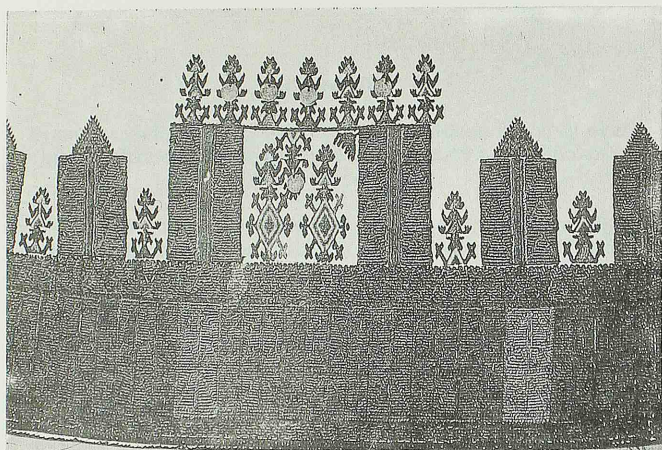


Illustration XVII. A hem from a chemise from Tanagra (Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p. 96, ill. 86).

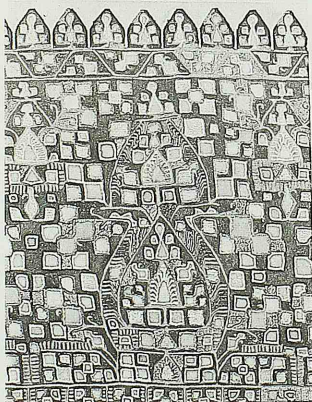


Illustration XVIII. The hem of  
a bridal chemise from Attica.  
(Angeliki Hadzemicchali, p.  
41, ill. 16).



## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Άννα-Ιωάννα Γουήλ-Μπαδιεριτάκη, *Παρατηρήσεις πάνω σε κοινά διακοσμητικά θέματα ορισμένων παραδοσιακών ενδυμασιών Βοιωτίας και Αττικής.*

Το θέμα αυτής της εργασίας έχει βασιστεί σε παρατηρήσεις πάνω σε κοινά διακοσμητικά μοτίβα (γεωμετρικά, φυτικά, ζωόμορφα και ανθρωπόμορφα) των παραδοσιακών γυναικείων ενδυμασιών των αρβανίτικων χωριών της Βοιωτίας και της Αττικής.

Μετά από μια σύντομη ιστορική παρουσίαση των παραπάνω πληθυσμών καθώς και μια μορφολογική και ενδυματολογική γνωριμία με τις ίδιες τις φορεσιές, επιχειρείται στη συνέχεια ο διαχωρισμός των διακοσμητικών τους μοτίβων σ' εκείνα που προέρχονται από τη βυζαντινή παράδοση και σε θέματα ανατολικής καταγωγής.