

*the harbor of Kalamata*  
Κωνσταντίνος Παρθένης, 1911



*large nude*

Κωνσταντίνος Παρθένης, 1925

**Cheryl Simpson**

Flinders University

## **Greek Embroidery and the Making of Heritage**

### **Abstract**

Textiles have been a part of Greek heritage since ancient times. They feature in myth, legend, and every day life. But what heritage meaning do kendimata hold today, especially for the many women who have kept kendimata collections made by family and friends?

### **Introduction**

This paper questions the relevance of hand made textiles from the past for contemporary Greek women. Do the designs and symbolic motifs of the embroideries of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century feature as part of the heritage for the Greek women with embroidery collections today, or are these older items to be presented as a past way of life in museums. What kinds of kendimata did the women have in their collections and why is it common that a significant number of Greek women still hold collections of textiles? To discover how Greek women today value kendimata, research was conducted in both Australia and Greece. Of interest was whether the views of women with textile collections might differ if they were migrants to Australia or live in Greece. It is acknowledged from the outset that there are many Greek women with whom kendimata hold little or no value at all; so<sup>1</sup> only those women who held collections were sought for interview. It must be said however, that it appears commonplace for women to have kept kendimata passed on from family members; thus finding participants for the research presented no

difficulty at all.<sup>2</sup>This paper represents a small sample of preliminary findings from recent fieldwork.

## The Research Project

Twenty women were interviewed who had kendimata, which they had either made themselves or were made by family members. The interviews were equally divided between participants from Greece or Cyprus, and Australia. The method of obtaining women for interview was random, in that women were asked by word of mouth if they knew of anyone who had kendimata and would be willing to be interviewed about their collection. There was no restriction placed on age or the part of Greece or Cyprus that participants might come from. This “snowball technique” proved to be highly successful, as there was no shortage of women who were more than willing to share the stories of the heritage meaning of their textiles.<sup>3</sup> Interviews ranged from one to two hours per participant. In some interviews the participant asked for a friend or other family member to be present. The addition of more than one participant present for interview led to a greater richness of data as others often supplemented the story of the textiles told by the participant.

Being a non-Greek speaker I was accompanied by my Greek husband, an academic who acted as interpreter where necessary for the duration of the field trip in Greece, and sometimes for the Australian interviews. Presenting as a husband and wife team opened doors which might otherwise have remained closed. Much interest was generated from the fact that I already had some knowledge of kendimata and had a Greek husband supporting the research. There was great hospitality shown by the participants and a ready willingness to assist with the project. In many instances interviews took place in participants homes, thus providing the opportunity for the women to display their embroidery collection.

All of the women interviewed were extremely proud of the textile collections they held, and the narrative of these women is the pivot point of the project.

## Kendimata, Meanings, Definitions and Interpretations

As a member of the Embroiderer’s Guild in my home state of South Australia I have gained a working definition of what embroidery means.

There was, therefore, an expectation that embroidered textiles and other forms of textile handiwork would be automatically separated by the women participants. However, this was not always the case. This led to some examination as to why this might be so. The Greek word *kendimata* loosely translates as “embroidery” in English, however the women interviewed in both Australia and Greece tended to apply the term more broadly to their collections. Often the women also produced other hand made textiles they held significant for, after all, these textiles all formed part of their collection and all remained significant for a variety of reasons.

It was not uncommon for textiles to feature more than one style of work. For example, a number of the textile pieces were small cloths made specifically to go on a side table. These usually had an embroidered surface of brightly coloured flowers and the piece would then be edged in crochet work or needle weaving or knotted lace, commonly referred to as *bibilla*<sup>4</sup> in Greek.

Individual crochet pieces and embroidered work formed the majority of the participant’s collections. Woven rugs or mats created on the loom were excluded by the women themselves although they were occasionally referred to during some of the interviews such as ZZ (A 74 years)<sup>5</sup> originally from Mytilene who talked of coming to Australia at 20 years of age, and of how she still had very strong memories of her mother weaving blankets. Two participants extended their discussion to cover the making of the *paploma* (quilt). One interview had three generations of women present, MN (A77 years, originally from Rhodes), daughter AS 50, grand-daughter ASN 26 years; all were well informed about the *kendimata* kept within the family. Discussion about the *paploma* led to it being shown to indicate how it was made. It was created with needle and thread, was pink on one side and blue on the other, had stitched patterning as part of the embellishment, and was therefore thought to be relevant. MN told how her father was famous on the island as he was the only quilt maker at that time. He would travel around the island on the back of a donkey selling the quilts. Similarly, S (A77 years from Katerini, near Thessaloniki) also mentioned the *Paplomata*, one made by her mother, and one made by her mother in law for a present to her son for his wedding. S has kept both the *Paplomata*. She describes them as being ‘made of two colours, one colour on the top side other colour on the bottom. Very warm and heavy, but very beautiful. Used only for the visitors when they come.’<sup>6</sup>

The diverse group of participants had all kept textiles in their possession made by themselves or from some other family members for some particular reason. The interviews with the women indicated a number of common themes, a sample of which is presented here.<sup>7</sup>

### A Heritage Passed Down From Mother to Daughter? Kendimata and Gift Giving

Most of the participants had textiles in their possession from their mother or grandmother or both. Two participants had textiles given as special gifts that had been given by non-family members; but both maintained the connection with the giver of the textiles was like that “of family.”

MZ (A aged 75years) proudly showed the researcher a crocheted textile she estimated was probably about 80 years old indicating that it was made in Samos and given to her by the daughter of the couple who came out on the ship with her. The couple treated MZ like a daughter because she was alone on the ship coming to Australia to get married. She was 22 years old and coming to marry her husband that she had met by proxy. When the wife eventually passed away, the daughter wanted MZ to have this textile made by her mother as a memento. This gift held the story of the unique experience of the migration journey and the bonding of a permanent friendship.

D (G aged 63 years) showed the textiles made by the woman who cleans her house.

*“She came from my father’s house. She loves me. She made all the curtains in the house. She didn’t make anything for her daughter that she didn’t make for me. She has the same name as my mother.”*

From these two non-family examples it is apparent that there was an expectation from the person passing on the textiles that they would be enjoyed by the receiver and seen as a special gift for a special person who was “like family” through the intimacy established by the women.

The textiles provided a thread of connection both literally and figuratively; they were made by the hands of women they cared about deeply.

Another participant, N (G 50 originally from Thessaloniki) had also made the point that: “It is traditional to give hand made things. Grandma and the parents of the daughter and other relatives would give them for the prika (dowry).” Van Steen and Lykiardopoulos reinforce this comment, when writing about the production of the textiles and Costumes of Metsovo they say:

*“Textiles play an important role in village life, and were used on occasions when guests arrived, for engagements, as gifts and as decoration for the home in every important event.”<sup>8</sup>*

The textiles of the participants for the most part however, were not all on display but carefully packed away for safe keeping. Some of the Greek/Australian women had their textiles in a baoulo (a large chest). These chests had a special role in the Greek village home where storage space was limited. In some instances these were part of the luggage to come with them when they migrated, in other instances the chest had been purchased in Australia. Such was the case with T (A 59 originally from Athens) who had purchased a tin chest from the local Italian Home Emporia. T wanted to keep her textiles in a chest as was the common practice in Greece for many years. Placing the textiles in a chest rather than in a cupboard symbolised a strong link with her past heritage.

A much younger participant, TH (A 47) told how when she was growing up in her village, near Tripoli:

*“No one had wardrobes in those days and they used to keep all the blankets piled on top of each other behind my mother’s bedroom door.”*

TH was 13 when she left Greece and like T has her textiles stored in a tin chest she kept in her bedroom. Her spacious, comfortable home had many places which could accommodate her hand crafted textile collection but also like T, TH chose to keep them in the chest, reinforcing the strong connection between a special keeping place for special items.

MN (A 71 originally from Rhodes) however, still had the walnut baoulo her father had made for her. It was a large chest and had significant dates relating to family members marked inside. MN had proudly commented:

*“Others had a flat chest but this one is rounded”*

Her daughter AS (A 50) who was also present at the interview then said:

*“I always wanted the baoulo from the time I was a little girl, I asked my mother to give it to me, it comes from the motherland, from the walnut tree.”*

The very direct connection with the chest being a special keeping place for family textiles and thus a part of family history and heritage was very clear. The variance in age of the participants and the period of time they migrated from Greece, did not appear to make any difference to the significance of the heritage value of the textiles being given such elevated

importance by having a specially made keeping place in which to house these hand made treasures. The baoulo has continued to play an important story as part of domestic village life even in recent times. Ioanna Papantoniou, President of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation has commented:

*"I have the impression that the chest became the number one object collected by Athenian society in the pervasive "return to the "roots atmosphere of the 1960s."*<sup>9</sup>

In one sense this comes as no surprise when we consider what

Matseli and Tsaravopoulos point out in that the chest was used to keep special items that were not for everyone to see. They suggest that the chest takes on a very personal role for the owner and that it:

*"Acquires symbolic properties which link it directly with major junctures in the life cycle-mainly marriage but also with death and birth-and with the corresponding rituals and ceremonies, the so called rites of passage. Deposited symbolically in the chest are emotions, spiritual values, secrets."*<sup>10</sup>

The textiles treasured by the women participants also reflect connections with rites of passage and lifestyle. Birth, death and marriage are all memories entwined in the kept textiles. Memories of past village life and the making of textiles are ever present in the narrative of many of the women and for some, those memories are triggered by the special keeping place for their textile collection, the chest which is intimately linked with the heritage of the textiles.

## I Taught Myself

A second theme which emerged, which was also unexpected was that most of the participants when asked how they learnt to make kendimata indicated that it was not a skill taught by their mother This discovery came as something of a surprise given that literature on village life has often accentuated the image of the young girl sitting at mother's knee learning the craft of embroidery from a very early age. The comments by Markrich are typical:

*"To the women who filled dowry chests as on the Greek Islands embroidering came as naturally as eating and drinking. A young woman was accustomed to holding needle and thread from a very early age. Working a stitch was second nature to her by the time a mother and grandmother were ready to entrust her with valuable hand-woven linen and cotton."*<sup>11</sup>



MZ (A 75) originally came from near Tripoli and has lived in Australia since migrating at aged 22 and still has the kendimata she had made when she was 17. When she migrated to Australia she brought many textiles with her on the boat. She came from a large family of 6 girls and 1 brother. Her mother had come from a large family of 12 siblings and had married at about 16 or 17.

*“My mother had no spare time to do anything, I taught myself from books.”*

These were mostly cross-stitch patterns, which were in the Greek handicraft books MZ so highly treasured. These were brought with her in a series of 12 monthly volumes bound in black leather with gold embossed lettering on the spine.

S (A 77) mentioned above, said:

*“I saw how the other young girls did it. If some young friend of mine, I like it (her embroidery) she gives me the pattern and then shows me how” (It is made).*

S then indicated that the friend would show how to make “one flower, then another one.” S was being shown how to embroider by example and thereafter able to produce her own copy.

AN (G 77) lives in Athens, originally from Mykonos.

*“My mother had seven children and was a farmer. I learnt how to make kendimata all by myself, by watching others as mother was working in the fields”.*

AN was a prolific embroiderer who excelled at all levels of textile craft. Her home, (where the interview took place) was full of her handiwork and was akin to stepping back from modern suburban Athens into the past, into a living Mykonos museum. The curtains, bedspread, tablecloths, cloths for the side tables and wall hangings were all proudly displayed. AN was unusual in the abundance of her work which was permanently on display. She was very proud of the fact that she had been commissioned to make embroidered pieces for the church; a clear indication of how highly her work was regarded.

EE (G 88) from Ioannina, Epirus said she learnt a bit of kendimata at school:

*“But mostly at home-all could do it, so we learnt much from each other. Sometimes we used patterns. If there was a pattern around that somebody had, it would be passed around. We all learnt from each other” (EE is talking here about the other young women in her age group at the time.)*

LN (G 87) also from Ioannina, made similar comments.

*"We learnt from others at home as well as at high school."*

AA (A 81) in Adelaide, Australia was originally from Kastellorizo. When asked if she went to a special school to learn embroidery, her response was quit forceful.

*"Oh, no, no, no, we learnt by ourselves."*

H (A 49) migrated to Australia from Corinth in the Peloponnese when she was 24 years of age.

*"I learnt to embroider at primary school in Corinth. My mother did no embroidery, but we did have a loom in the house."*

TH (A 47) from Tripoli, migrated to Australia aged 13.

*"I learnt from my mother and cousins from the time I was about 10 years old. We would sit around the fireplace each evening and embroider as did the other girls from the village."*

Regardless of the age of the women participants or whether they had migrated or remained in Greece, most of the women held the view that they had learnt embroidery "by themselves." Further prompting on this point indicated that the women differentiated between formal learning at school, where they were taught by a teacher and informal learning by watching others embroidering and being shown how to copy the printed designs.

The process of copying designs and keeping that design within a village was of course prevalent in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The difference from recent times is that those centuries the designs held particular apotropaic or magic meaning, such as protection from the evil eye, or good wishes for a long life.<sup>12</sup> Some of the designs the women participants had embellished on their embroideries were for the most part commercial western designs, which were mass-produced to prettify the domestic interior but no more than that. However, the much older embroidered pieces they had kept from previous generations did indeed have some symbolic meaning in the designs. The question was, did the interviewees know about the symbolic aspects of these designs and more importantly, did it matter to them. Was it reasons of personal heritage that these were treasured textiles or was there an identified connection with a national heritage?

## Design Elements in the Embroideries: Significance?

A number of textiles presented by the participants were evaluated according to their understanding of the motifs presented in the design and whether they held some significant meaning for them. T (A59) showed a typical paper pattern she had used for copying her embroidery designs. The paper pattern was of a geometric design on a grid, to enable the stitches to be able to be accurately reproduced onto fabric. There were no particular distinguishing Greek features in the designs nor did T indicate that the designs were other than something she liked.

LN (G87, Epirus) was able to show a paper pattern of Sarakastani design from an Angeliki Hatzimichali folk craft book produced in the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> It was similar to a star design. LN had kept this book from her school days many years ago and once again the pattern was on a grid to enable an accurate reproduction of the design by graphing up the design in the book and reproducing it onto fabric. LN knew that the design was identified with the Sarakastani but not whether it was significant for any particular purpose. LN also had the example of the completed work, which was executed in cross stitch.

G (G53 Athens) knew about the symbolic meanings of motifs and said: "Symbols were just handed down in the old days. They did mean good luck, blessings after the animals that were kept, also embroidered as symbols, generally for good luck, but a broader understanding of good luck than particular symbols." G knew about the designs because of her formal studies as well as a personal interest. She did not gain this knowledge as part of the story handed down with the embroideries in her possession.

ET (G 53 Athens, originally from the Peloponnese, ancient Olympia) thought the motifs had to do with "a good life, marriage."

N (G 50, Chios, originally from near Thessaloniki) said she did not know the meanings of the motifs because women in the village copied the designs from each other. They just shared.

## Textiles and the Prika

It was common for the older women to talk about the textiles as they related to the prika, or dowry. Surprisingly the youngest participant in Greece, V (G 24 originally from Cyprus) had items in her possession, which

were for her prika. V was a very modern university educated young woman, who was well travelled and had studied abroad. When asked if she had a prika she responded. "Yes of course. All her grandchildren do" (have items made by the grandmother for the prika). V said her Grandmother had made a number of things for her, which included:

*"Sheets, tablecloths, for the fridge, everything covered with her products, even the washing machine. She had made clothes as well. Like t-shirts, with embroidered flowers daisies."*

When MZ, (A75) years was asked if the textiles she had made were made for a specific purpose she said:

*"Not really, just go through the books and get designs for the prika."*

This was such an automatic activity for M that she did not see it as anything other than the usual pathway of events in a young girl's life.

Another participant in the same age group, MA (A71) commented "I brought one textile with me, part of the prika, will pass them down" (to her daughter and granddaughter). When asked about displaying the items for the prika back in her home village, MN (A71) said there was one place in the house "to hang pillows and show things off." This was a practice taken for granted by MN and one, which demonstrates the significance of the prika in village life at that time. The displaying of one's creative skills for all to see and critically examine was in a sense showing off the capabilities of a young woman in preparation for married life.

S (A77) had commented that with her textile collection "everything she has is for the prika."

The making of textiles for the prika was certainly still flourishing during the 1950s but the designs had changed so very much with the advent of women's magazines and the ready availability of the paper pattern. Industrialised Greece had all the latest Western designs, many of which were featured in women's magazines. The popular Greek magazine *Ergoheiro* (Handicraft) also reflected the changes taking place in Greece at the time. For example the March 1957 issue featured western embroidery pattern designs and articles on the most modern western dress alongside Byzantine designs of birds to be reproduced as border patterns for tablecloths or cushions.<sup>14</sup>

Charmian Clift the Australian writer, when living on the island of Hydra during this period observed one young woman who continued on

with the tradition of preparing her dowry, but with a modern touch. Clift observed:

*“Kyria Spirathoula divides her waking hours between writing letters to lonely sailors who have advertised for pen friends and embroidering a trousseau for the marriage that must one day eventuate from the letters. Innumerable the tablecloths, the cushion, the tea towels, firescreens, doilies, chair-covers, mats, runners, and guest towels already folded carefully away in the old seamen’s chest in Friday’s bedroom. Astronomical the number of minute stitches with which they are decorated—the ladies in crinolines and ladies in poke bonnets, the playing cards, the scotch terriers, the shepherdesses with the sheep, snow mountains and rustic bridges, the sea horses and the dolphins. Friday is far too modern to use the traditional old island patterns, which are abstract and exquisite, Friday’s motifs come from the pages of the genteel ladies magazines.”<sup>15</sup>*

This observation by Clift was quite similar to comments made by H (A49) who said that when she was about 13 years old and living in Corinth she had worked an embroidery of a lady in a crinoline dress and she used to dream of going to where the lady in the crinoline lived. It seemed so beautiful a world to her, far from her world at the time.

The every day domestic textiles for the home executed in modern western designs were held by a number of the participants.

The practice of displaying textiles made for the home has continued for some of the participants and in some very creative ways. Within Australia these included covers for the tops of the fridge, washing machine, old style cabinet televisions as well as numerous other surfaces, which could be covered by textiles, including in one instance an embroidered cover for a toaster. For some of the participants the opportunity to continue to make for the home was seen as important, others simply wanted to keep their collection of textiles; they had neither the time or skill to embark upon such projects, nor did some entertain the idea of including anything that would not fit with the current minimalist décor.

The significance of display of textiles in the Greek/Australian home is far more important to some of the women. Greek/Australian participants who had migrated from Greece all remembered with great clarity what they

carried in their suitcase for the journey to Australia and what was left behind.

T (A59) "When I came to Australia I had no textiles with me, I was 20 years old and had one suitcase". T arrived in Australia in 1972 and has since returned to Athens and collected textiles as well as making a significant number during the many years she has been in Australia.

She has stitched the memory of a past life through pattern designs she purchased in Greece on return trips to Athens. T had framed textiles on display that she had made as well as side tables displayed with her mother's work. For T, the display of textiles enabled her to share the skill of her families work for all to see.

Some of the older participants had displayed textiles in the home which had been gifts brought back from recent trips to Greece. For others significant family textiles were still kept stored in a cupboard or chest.

What can be gleaned from the interviews is what Tobin and Goggin argue that:

*"Women in the process of making and manipulating things were not only engaged in self-definition and identity performance, but were actively engaged in meaning-making practices that involved the construction, circulation and maintenance of knowledge."*<sup>16</sup>

The knowledge the women participants gained, was the memory and images of creative making and decorating for the home. The stories of making and gift giving were intrinsic to the keeping of the textiles. The motifs themselves seemed to be of secondary importance other than this was something shared either through a design on a paper pattern or simply by copying and existing motif from some one else in the village. The participants who had come from urban backgrounds also held these images of the sharing of knowledge in the making of textiles reminiscent of village life. It was seen as a part of their heritage.

The older Greek/Australian women had left Greece at a time when the country had only recently emerged from world war two and the civil war. Many living in Greece had known extreme poverty and the loss of family and friends. Young women of this period were used to hard physical work as well as being highly skilled in home making. There are numerous descriptions of village life throughout Greece during this period such as that of Panagoulia-Koutsoukou Adamantia who relates the contribution those

women made to the village economy of Gortinias in the Peloponnese during the 1950s. She vividly describes all aspects of rural life and how activity was in accord with the seasons. Regarding the home making skills of women in particular, she describes how in winter weaving and the sewing of clothes would take place as the wool from the sheep would have been spun and dyed in preparation for this activity. Knitting, crocheting and embroidery also formed a part of the winter activity. The women also had a highly developed knowledge about the plant life in their direct surroundings, using herbs for cooking and medicinal purposes as well as knowing what natural dyes to extract for the dyeing of wool and cotton. They also knew how to cultivate silk worms for producing silk. Everything was used, nothing was wasted.<sup>17</sup>

This mountainous region of Greece bears its own individuality as do all of the villages in Greece, yet the role of women in village life during this time is consistent with village life generally during this period.

A recent study of another small village in Tsamantas in the region of Epirus reinforces the economic benefit of women's craft skills to village life. Konstadakopoulos, points out, the women were not only adept artisans engaged in the making of blankets and carpets (which involved a detailed knowledge of a varied range of skills) but were also engaged in hard physical labour.<sup>18</sup>

The creative talents of women participating in village life could be repeated in the story of any small village in Greece up until recent times. This way of life was in decline at the time that many Greek women migrated to Australia including a number of the Greek/Australian participants in the current project. Close, noted that in Greece in 1951, 47% of the population still lived in villages and that the values of village life of the 1950s were:

*"on the brink of steady decline. They were undermined by the increasing familiarity of villagers with city values and through them with western mores. This familiarity was much accelerated by internal and external migration, and by the advent of television, through which villagers viewed the very different cultures of the consumptions and habits of the affluent in the United States."*<sup>19</sup>

The dilution of village values over time due to significant social change is to be expected, yet, the connecting thread to village life through the making and gift giving of textiles appears to be a practice which has never

entirely disappeared. Gillian Bouras, who has lived for many years in Greece describes living in a small village in the Peloponnese during the 1980s and notes in passing that in the evenings the old women of the village would still crochet and chatter together on the doorstep.<sup>20</sup>

It is this memory of village life, which many of the participants have captured in the stories of their special kendimata collections, whether they were living in Greece or Australia.

There were three older women interviewed in Greece. Two were in their 80s and one was in her 70s. All three women presently live in urban Greece. These three women also learnt some embroidery at school and some at home. All three had some of their work on display in the home. Cushions executed in cross-stitch, tablecloths and small pieces for side tables were typical of their collections. The similarities between the Greek/Australian women and the Greek women were far greater than the differences. When the two groups were asked about the symbolism of the embroidery designs and whether they knew the meaning the responses again were similar.

EE (88 G) said:

*"I think they (the designs) mean something but I do not know."*

*She showed a cushion design which she said was a pattern from her village in Amboulakia of a type of mussel or similar. EE described it as "Something that grows on the rocks in the sea. You take it off the rock and eat the inside."*

LN (87G) when asked about the possible meanings of the patterns on some of her work said:

*"No, just old designs used for parties in the afternoon, when you have women friends around. I got the design from another lady from Ioannina"*

LN did point out a design featuring the tree of life on an embroidered piece in her collection and also mentioned the pinecone and spring flowers as being symbolic.

One of the people who did know more about the symbolism in some of the embroidery was AN (77G) who was an avid reader of old pattern books and incorporated these designs into her current work. The combination of her embroidery prowess and deep passion for textile handcraft along with her research of pattern books may explain her knowledge of symbolism in embroidery motifs, which remained elusive to most of the participants.



## Conclusion

Regardless of the age of the women, or the area of Greece or Cyprus from which they came, (or the time of migration from Greece) very few of the participants knew very much about the significance of the motifs and their symbolism in textile design from past generations. Heritage meaning for the women was not related to the symbolism found as part of embroidered patterns or ancient geometric designs repeated over hundreds of years. The patterns of the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century, so prevalent in the past and used to identify the work of particular areas were largely a thing of the past for the participants. These patterns were the textiles held in the museums of a past world and not known to them. They did however see the making of textiles as very much a part of their heritage and their Greek identity for as Lowenthal has commented:

*“Heritage is not history at all; while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith into a past tailored to present day purpose.”<sup>21</sup>*

The women intertwined the constraints as well as the pleasures of village life with discussions of textiles and their meaning. Most of the participants had mentioned that they would pass on some of the textiles to younger family members. Some of the children of the participants had kendimata framed and placed on the wall of their homes where they had taken on the role of art pieces.

The modernising of Greece that emphasised turning toward the west and all that encompasses, can be seen to have directly impacted the production of the textiles for the home. But the knowledge of the symbolism of the designs used in the past, although largely lost for the average homemaker, is still cultivated for the tourists. There are numerous examples of the promotion of “traditional Greek textiles” throughout the history of Greece.<sup>22</sup> In recent times the Athens Technological Educational Institute of Athens College has undertaken a project in providing designs for some rural women to make up as a cottage industry for tourism. This project entailed prior research into why the women were not successful in reaching full potential

with the tourist market. One of those given reasons was that the women:

*“lack knowledge of “the true tradition of heritage”<sup>23</sup>*

We see on the one hand a cultivation of “traditional designs” for the tourist market, utilising motifs which have little resonance with many Greek women today juxtaposed with the personal heritage of textile collections many of which feature modern western designs and motifs. Within the public arena the representation of “traditional motifs” portrayed as part of Greek heritage is here to stay and continues to be cultivated. The young duo of the business Post folk was recently featured in the Neoskosmos paper discussing their venture into digital embroideries. Using motifs found in folk art museums and their home village the artists have reproduced the designs digitally and transferred them on to material ready to be framed as art pieces for the wall as one of their lines of production. They were quoted as saying:

*“We want to pay homage to the fine needlework of the countless women who stitched these figures in table runners and toppers, on pillow cases and coverlets, and in doing so literally inscribe figures of joy—a pair of peacocks, a couple in love, a bouquet of flowers—in the very fabric of domestic life”.<sup>24</sup>*

This creative approach of Kostis Vassiliadis and Maria Olga Vlachou serves to keep alive the folk motifs of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century. These are not the motifs or designs featured in the kendimita collections held by many Greek women today.

Heritage value clearly takes on many and varied forms from the personal to the political. This paper has explored the personal.

\*My heartfelt thanks to the Greek women who made this research possible.

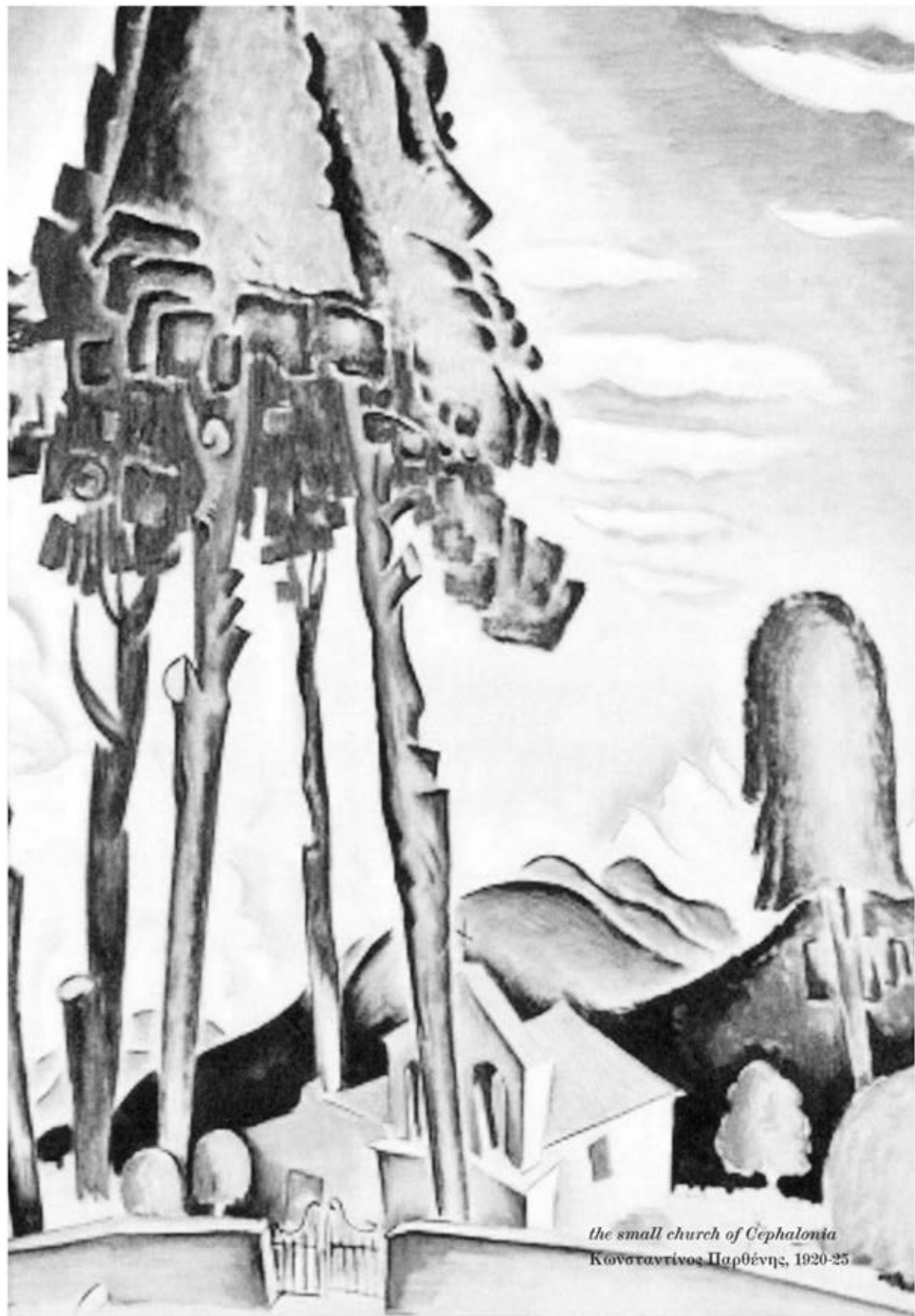
## Notes

- 1 See for example Artemis Leontis evaluation of Papanikolas's memoir in Leontis Artemis, “Greek American Identity: What Women's Handwork Tells Us,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (England: Ashgate, 2008) 379-398.
- 2 I have given a number of public lectures on this topic and have had women and men of various age groups, approach me after the lecture to tell me about their own collections.

- 3 Qualitative research was the methodology used to conduct the research. The same series of open-ended questions were given to all participants and recorded for later analysis.
- 4 See Elena Dickson where she says: "In the Greek language *bibilla* is the term used for any small or delicate lace edging" in Elena Dickson, *Knotted Lace in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition* (Australia: Sally Milner Publishing, 1992) 10
- 5 Hereafter, A signifies the interview took place in Australia and G in Greece. To protect the privacy of the participants no identifying names are used.
- 6 See the *National Quilt Register* for a number of examples of paplomata held within Australia by Greek migrant women at: <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/nqr/lula.php>
- 7 The findings presented in this paper are a small sample of interviews conducted for the author's doctorate.
- 8 Catherine Van Steen and Eleni Kykiardopoulos, *With Warp or Weft: The Textiles and Costumes of Metsovo* (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2006) 25. It should be noted that Metsovo has a predominately Vlach population, but the comments are equally applicable to village life throughout Greece in the recent past.
- 9 Ioanna Papantoniou, foreword to *The Greek Chest*, by Virginia Matseli and Aris Tsaravopoulos (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2011) 10.
- 10 Virginia Matseli and Aris Tsaravopoulos, *The Greek Chest* (Athens:Kapon Editions, 2011) 28.
- 11 Lilo Markrich, "Embroidery: A Mirror of Social Expression," in *Aegean Crossroads: Greek Island Embroideries in the Textile Museum*, James Trilling (Washington:The Textile Museum Washington, D.C.. 1983) 62.
- 12 For a further discussion of symbolic meanings in textiles see: Sheila Paine, *Amulets: Sacred Charms and Powers of Protection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).
- 13 Angeliki Hatzimichali (1895-1996) was highly influential in her promotion of Greek handcraft and her craftbook was used in the schooling system over a number of years.
- 14 *Ergoheiro*, Issue 111, March 1957, 3-11. For a comparison of the similarity in fashion trends between Australia and Greece in the 1950s see : Deborah Thomas and Kirstie Clements, *The Australian Women's Weekly Fashion: The First 50 Years* (Canberra: The National Library of Australia, 2014) 57-67
- 15 Charmian Clift, *Peel Me a Lotus* (Australia: Angus and Roberston,1989) 320-321.
- 16 Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin, *Women and Things 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (England, Ashgate, 2009), 4.
- 17 Panagoulia-Koutsoukou Admantia, *The Dynamics of Traditional Women's Contribution from the Local Economy Gortinias* (Athens, [www.inarcadia.gr](http://www.inarcadia.gr) electronic case study publication, March 2010).
- 18 Dimitrios Konstadakopoulos, *From Pax Ottomanica to Pax Europaea:The Growth and Decline of a Greek Village's Micro-Economy* (Bern, Switzerland, Peter Lang, 2014) 80-84.
- 19 David Close, *Greece Since 1945: Politics, Economy, and Society* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 17.
- 20 Gillian Bouras, *A Foreign Wife* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books,1990), 40.
- 21 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Preface x.
- 22 See for example, De Vries book on Joyce Nankivell Loch's work in promoting Pyrgos Rugs in Australia, featuring traditional Greek designs. Susanna De Vries, *Blue Ribbons and Bitter Bread: The Life of Joice Nankivell Loch* (Alexandria, NSW: hale and Iremonger, 2000), 209-216

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- 23 Margaret Perivoliotis-Chrysosovergis, "Long Distance Training for Rural Women Craft Producers," *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology* (IJEDICT) Volume 2 (2006) 82-89
- 24 Tina Nikiforati and Helen Velissaris, "Postfolk with yiayia's knitting," *Neoskosmos*, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 accessed August 4, 2013 <http://neoskosmos.com/news/en/Postfolk-with-yiayia-knitting>



*the small church of Cephalonia*  
Κωνσταντίνος Παρθένης, 1920-25