

Discuss woven goods in Classical Macedonia

In the Classical era, the production of textiles, such as weaving, was a predominantly female job. Weaving was a skill which was taught to young girls and it was most often women who can be seen weaving on surviving pottery from the era. Weaving is a form of making clothes, blankets and other things, so the skill was an essential one to life in the Classical era. It was also one of the ways which women would be able to make money in a society which was full of mostly male industries.

Girls were not taught the same skills as boys were during the Classical era, as boys were more useful to the oikos, both financially and in the continuation of it, then girls who would need to leave when they got married. Domestic tasks were what was taught to girls, as they were the things they would need to know when they grew up and were a part of their own oikos¹. Once married women were expected to perform certain roles (though they vary depending on status and subsequent access to the assistance of slaves) during the oikos, including weaving the clothes, cooking, cleaning, running the house and being in charge of the slaves within². Women were the ones most associated with the art of weaving, with the goddess Athena (Goddess of Wisdom and War) being said to be a skilled weaver. In one story, Athena is said to have had a weaving contest with another woman, Arachne, when she stated she was a better weaver than Athena was³. Other legends/myths link together women and the art of weaving, such as the tale of Penelope, wife of Odessyus. This tale links together what it means to be a faithful and proper wife, in Classical times, with weaving; it “exemplifies an ideal of womanhood”⁴.

Men were not the ones who were associated with textile production and weaving. If a man were to be accused of weaving, it would be to imply that he is unmanly and having more characteristics of a woman; this can be seen with Cleisthenes who was mocked for preferring weaving to bearing arms (Ar. Av. 831)⁵.

Weaving was one of the main elements of women’s economy during the Classical era. Woven goods were able to be made and exchanged⁶. A woman’s skill would develop and evolve through her life, as she would begin her weaving at a young age and be expected to weave more when she got married. Women of lower classes were more likely to weave for work and money than those in the Elite, as to become the elite meant the ability to enjoy the life of luxury (not needing to work). “Few women were able to live lives where spinning or weaving was not an expected task”⁷ as it was the primary form of work that women were allowed to do in the Classical era. Men did the majority of the work in society, though in some of the poorer oikos women were also needed to lend a helping hand with the work that needed to be done. In Ancient Sparta, female slaves would also be the ones who would

¹ Lee, 2015, pg43

² <https://sites.google.com/site/slavesandwomeninancientath/womens-jobs-in-ancient-athens>

³ <https://quatr.us/greeks/arachne-athena-greek-mythology.htm><https://quatr.us/greeks/arachne-athena-greek-mythology.htm>

⁴ <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>

⁵ Hornblower and Spawforth, 2012, pg774

⁶ [file:///C:/Users/teri-/Downloads/file%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/teri-/Downloads/file%20(2).pdf)

⁷ <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>

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weave, and, on occasions, the male slaves would also contribute to the weaving⁸. Women had few economic rights during this period, but weaving was one of the things which they had control over.

Weaving was an essential skill in the Classical age; it was of the main roles which women were expected to perform in society and one of the few things which they had economic rights and advantages in. Items woven by a woman during her marriage would remain her own property should the marriage end. There are many myths and legends revolving around women and the craft of weaving, such as Penelope and Arachne. Weaving, in the tale of Penelope especially, was also linked to be a good and proper wife. Weaving was an essential skill in Classical Grecian society.

⁸ <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>