

Arachne Revisited:

Hubris and Technological Sophistication in the Friezes surrounding Domitian's Temple to Minerva in the Forum Transitorium

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Overview of the extant parts of the frieze



Narrative panel

Arachne and Minerva?

The narrative panel of the frieze



Arachne

Minerva

Old woman

Adult woman

Young girl

For the identification of the panel as Arachne and Minerva, esp. E. D'Ambra *Private lives, imperial virtues. The frieze of the Forum*

Transitorium in Rome. Princeton 1993.

Contra: M. Picard-Schmitter 'Recherches sur les metiers a tisser antiques', *Latomus* 24, 1965.

Different aspects of textile work across the frieze



Instruction in spinning
(Minerva Ergane)
(2nd left of narrative
panel)
(D'Ambra section 4)



Warping or
preparation of
heddling mechanism
(final panel of the
southernmost section
of frieze)
(D'Ambra section 8)



Warping or weaving in
progress
(2nd right of narrative
panel)
(D'Ambra section 4)



Inspection of cloth
(left of narrative panel)

Other work processes displayed elsewhere in the frieze: weighing of wool, bringing of wool baskets, winding of yarn

Arachne and Minerva?

The narrative panel of the frieze



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Arachne & Minerva in Manilius' *Astronomica* (4.128-139)

dives fecundis Aries in uellera lanis
exutusque nouis rursus spem semper habebit,
naufragiumque inter subitum censusque beatos
crescendo cadet et uotis in damna feretur,
in uulgumque dabit fructus et mille per artes
uellera diuersos ex se parientia quaestus;
nunc glomerare rudis nunc rursus soluere lanas, **130**
nunc tenuare leui filo nunc ducere telas, 131
nunc emere et uarias in quaestum uendere uestes, 132
quis sine non poterant ullae subsistere gentes **133**
uel sine luxuria. Tantum est opus, ipsa suismet
asseruit Pallas manibus dignumque putauit,
seque in Arachnaeo magnam putat esse triumpho. **136**
haec studia et similis dicet nascentibus artes,
et dubia in trepido praecordia pectore finget
seque sua semper cupientia uendere laude.

The Ram, rich in abundant wool, and, when shorn of this, with a fresh supply, will always take new hope: He will rise from the sudden shipwreck of his rich wealth and fall, carried by his bounty into loss. <Yet> he gives rewards to the people and through thousands of arts his fleeces grant varied benefits: now they roll up the rough wool, now they tease it apart, now with light hand they spin the fine thread, now they work the loom, now they buy and sell for profit various cloth. Even without luxury, no people survives without this. So important is this work, that Pallas claimed it for herself and deemed it worthy of her own hands, and claimed her triumph over Arachne as a great one. He [the Ram] decrees for those born these and similar arts, and shapes doubting hearts in worried breast, which always seek to sell themselves for praise.

The workings of the two-beam loom: warping?



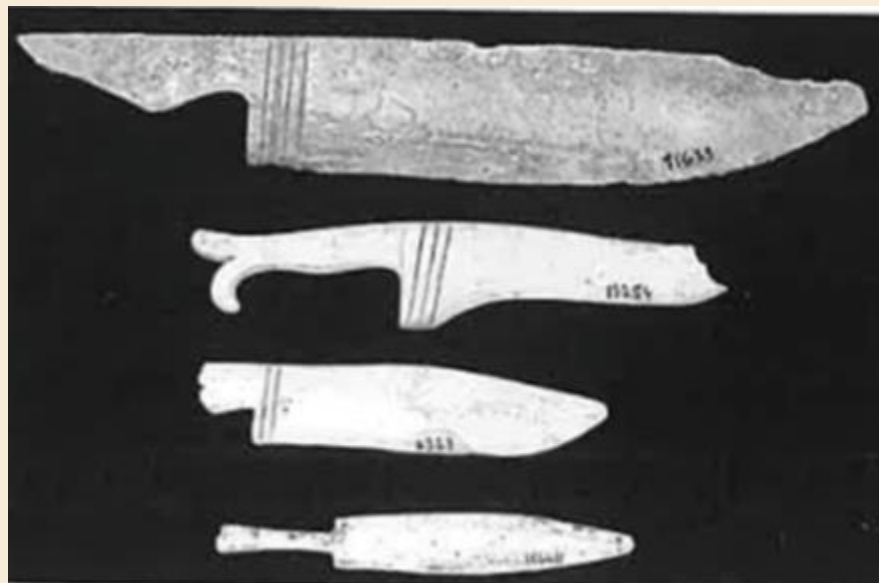
Warping a two-beam loom with a tubular set-up: experiment for the TEXREX project, CTR 2018. Weaver: Ulrikka Mokdad

On ethnographic parallels, cf. K.H. Staermose Nilsen, 'So simple and yet so complicated', *ATN* 52, 2011.

The workings of the two-beam loom: weaving?

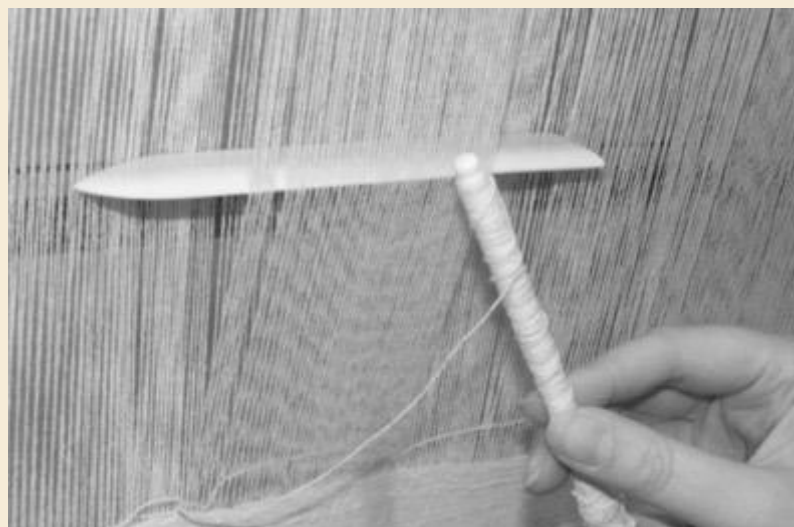


Detail: weaving in progress?
(2nd right of narrative panel)
(D'Ambra section 4)



Bone weaving swords from Pompeii, max length 20 cm.

Image after: C. Cheval, 'Le travail de l'os au service de l'artisanat textile: l'exemple de pompéi', *Textiles y tintes en la ciudad antigua. Purpureae vestes III*, 2011, 145.



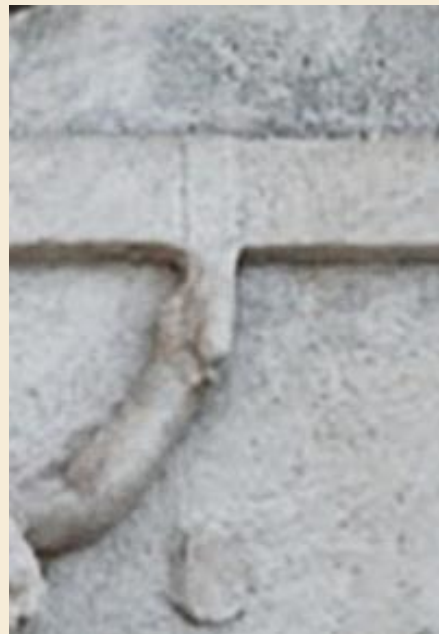
Reconstructed weaving sword from Ulpia Traiana used for weaving in the two-beam loom at LVR Archaeology Park, Xanten 2015. Weaver: Barbara Köstner.

Image after: B. Köstner, 'Auf Tuchföhlung' T. 2, *Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa, Jahrbuch 2016*, 179.

The workings of the two-beam loom: warping or completion?



(final panel of the southernmost
section of frieze)
(D'Ambra section 8)



Object passing
over the top beam



Two-beam loom
depicted in the grave
inscription for Seuera
Seluciane, Capitoline
museum, Rome
(3rd C CE)



Two-beam loom
depicted in the
ipogeo degli Aurelii,
Rome (3rd C CE)

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