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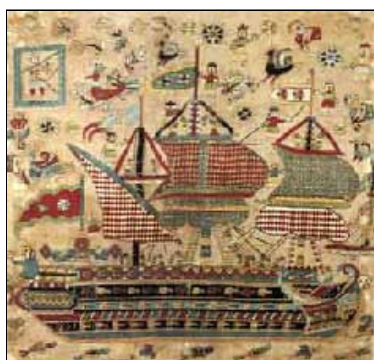
Volume 4, January 2002

ISSN 1538-893X

Decorative Arts of the Aegean

 [PRINT VERSION](#)

Tuesday, June 08, 2004

by Dr. Caterina Pizanias, Director, [The ArtExchange](#)

Skyrian embroidered pillow

Throughout the millennia of Greek history and civilization, the Aegean Sea has played a pivotal role. It has not only been at the crossroads of the traffic of peoples, ideas and customs, it has also been the cauldron within which all elements become resolutely "Greek."

Early on, the Greek islanders exhibited a decorative bent, probably rooted in their efforts to balance two basic needs: the need to survive a rather unforgiving physical environment (windswept, schistose stone landscapes), as well as the need to create a social life strong enough to withstand seemingly unending foreign invasions. Towards the end of the 17th century, the Ottoman conquerors felt secure enough to loosen their grip on the Greek merchants

and ship owners, which begat many social and economic changes in Greece. Once again Greek ships began criss-crossing the Aegean carrying goods – wheat, silk, marble – and Greek merchants and craftsmen traveled as far north as the Black Sea and all across the Mediterranean.

During the next 250 years, the Aegean experienced an unprecedented revival of traditional decorative arts. The seamen, merchants and craftsmen brought back money, objects, and ideas which were adopted and adapted to the local needs. Some islands prospered more than others, new classes were established, and these changes were reflected in the way people presented themselves and their homes to the outside world. Despite the socio-economic changes, one finds that some aesthetic constants remained: a painterly view of the world, and a predilection to over-decorating. To this day one can witness the aesthetic constants and/or variations by traveling to different islands of the archipelago. The following two examples will make this clear.

Skyros, a fertile island in the center of the northern Aegean, was a favorite stop of the many pirates who ravaged the Greek seas. It was sparsely populated and the main town was built at the highest point of the island in order to allow the inhabitants early and easy views of invaders. At the top is the Kastro/Citadel and around it in narrow, cobblestone streets are the houses of the notables. Further down are those of the lesser classes, such as herders and farm hands. One sees hardly any decoration on the outside of Skyrian homes – it is as if they did not want to attract any more pirates.

Most likely because of the many invasions, Skyrians have developed a very elaborate social life and customs, probably to counteract the effects of forcible change. Their interesting and long-standing social rituals are reflected in their costumes,

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The New Year brings change to European Currency.



You've seen the word but on your next trip to the European Community you'll hold it in your hand.

The euro makes its debut this month as *the* currency of the 12 countries that form the EMS (European Monetary System).

The eight coins each will carry a common front but countries will be able to customize the backs. The seven notes will all have a standardized front and back.

home decorations and public festivals. Skyros is famous for its embroideries – from women’s costumes to pillow covers, curtains and table coverings – and its locally produced ceramic pots, as well as those imported from Western Europe and proudly exhibited on the fireplace mantle.

While on Skyros one will be hard pressed to find decoration on the outside of homes, the opposite is true of the island of Tinos. Tiniots have not created elaborate costumes for their women or embroideries that tell the stories of the community, but they have developed some of the most unusual architecture in the Aegean, replete with outside ornaments and decorations. Tinos is a barren land, constantly pounded by the north winds (myth has it that the island is the home of Aeolos, the god of the winds.) Over the centuries they managed through the building of stone retaining walls to create arable pieces of land and built their homes using stone and marble, found almost everywhere. The Tiniots, too, were attacked by pirates and invaded by foreigners, something that affected their settlements, which they eventually changed into small fortified mazes, difficult to penetrate.



Interior of a Skyrian Home

As of January 1, 2002 both notes and coins will be available and used as legal tender. The countries have until the end of February to take national currency out of commission. After this time, travelers will be able to exchange national currency *only* at national central banks.

Should auld currency be forgotten? No just exchanged ASAP or kept as souvenirs.



Fanlights, Tinos home

Because of their efforts to tame their physical environment, Tiniots became some of the most skilled and imaginative craftsmen of the Aegean. They tamed the marble and worked it so imaginatively that their door frames and fanlights became stone versions of the other islands’ embroideries. By the second half of the 18th century, Tiniots were widely known not only as marble carvers, but also as silk growers, wine producers, basket weavers, and like the rest of the Aegean islanders, seafaring men. In the town of Tinos, as well in other villages, such those of Pyrgos, wealthy Tiniots built large homes, decorating the windows and doors with marble frames that remind one the white embroidery of other islands. They

told their stories and protected themselves and property from the “evil eye” through the intricate designs of the carved marbles frames and fanlights.

The ArtExchange invites you to explore Tinos, Skyros and other islands through their expressive culture, a facet of Greece rarely known to its millions of visitors. Our journeys focus on taking travelers beyond the expected, and introducing them to the art, places and people that define and shape Greek culture.

