

## Leflara Lace

Walking through the stone-covered streets of Lefkara, one comes across the low, little houses that hide heavens of beautiful flowers behind their wooden doors. That's where the old ladies usually sit and like working bees, they are concentrating on their work... the 'Lefkaritiko' lace. The tradition of making embroideries in Lefkara goes centuries back and the embroideries are famous all over the world as the 'Lefkaritiko' lace.

Even though there is no written historical testimony to tell us how the 'Lefkaritiko' lace started, the manager of the Archeological Museum says that it's highly possible that the embroideries may be rooted back to ancient clay containers whose decorations remind us of the 'Lefkaritiko' design.

According to local tradition, the history of the embroideries begins in the years 1191-1571 when some noble ladies from the West that were staying in Lefkara for their holidays, taught the Lefkara women how to make the embroideries. According to the same source, in 1481, Leonardo Da Vinci, visited Lefkara and took one of the embroideries to the Cathedral in Milan. A similar embroidery was given to the Cathedral in October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1986, when the Cathedral was celebrating 600 years of existence by the Mayor of Lefkara,

However, beyond any scientific explanation, the one thing that is certain is that the 'Lefkaritiko' evolved. This evolution is due to the woman of Lefkara who created, really artistically and with no technological tools, numerous designs for the embroideries that were usually taken from nature such as sun, daisies, rivers etc.

According to the famous painter Telemachos Kanthos, the 'Lefkaritiko' lace that was developed in the years 1920-1930 is perhaps within the ten best kinds of traditional art, internationally. Until the years of the English occupation (1878-1960), embroideries were the main work of Lefkara women.

However, up to that time the financial profits from making the embroideries were minimum. That was until some English noble ladies spotted the embroideries and offered high prices to get them. Slowly, Lefkara people started realizing the true worth of the embroideries.

One important name in the history of the 'Lefkaritiko' lace is Theofila Hajiandoni. She gathered many embroideries and in 1896 she went to Alexandria, where she tried to sell them to Greeks who lived there. But her efforts were not successful. However, when she returned to Lefkara, she knew what buyers were looking for and she promoted it. She and her husband, once again, gathered some embroideries and set off to Alexandria. This time when they returned they were rich enough to make other Lefkara people want to try traveling to Egypt and selling their lace. By 1900, the Egyptian market was full of embroideries from Lefkara.

There was now a new class in the village, the people who made the embroideries. Slowly they started trading all over the world like France, Turkey, Greece, England, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavian countries, Austria, Hungary etc.

The Lefkara people started promoting their embroideries by attending international exhibitions all over Europe. Gradually other villages of Cyprus started making similar embroideries and their trade with other countries was then national news as many articles were written about it in the country's newspapers.

The economic and social life of the people in Lefkara was changed because of their profitable trade. At a time when the rest of Cyprus was in an economical disadvantage, the Lefkara area prospered as the embroidery tradesmen abroad sent huge amounts of money annually. Consequently, the people involved with the embroidery trade became important, powerful figures in the Cypriot society.

After the economic crisis of 1929 and the Second World War, the embroidery trade changed. The attention of the tradesmen turned towards England. In the 1960s many turned towards Greece as well. Today the embroidery trade takes place almost exclusively in Lefkara, where thousands of people go every year, both from Cyprus and from the rest of the world.

The artists are the thousands of anonymous Lefkara women that for about a century now, write the history of Lefkara through the 'Lefkaritiko' lace. You can see them sitting in their yards or in the streets and create the embroideries. Learning how to manipulate the lace is a process of many levels and not all women reach the top level of ability. However most of them know how to make the traditional type while some of them improvise by using new types of figures. Those figures represent the Cyprus tradition as well as the individual personality and mood of the woman making them.

The first embroideries were created on thick cotton fabric, locally made. Later women started using the 'hases', which was an imported thin cotton fabric and 'bakaris', a cotton thread. Around 1913, the local lace was used. It was brought from Zodia and Astromeritis, two other villages in Cyprus. Simultaneously, the 'Lefkritiko' design was used on silk with silk thread.

There are certain means to assist the woman making the embroidery:

- 1) A little pillow, that's made of a wooden board (20x30 cm) wrapped by a woolen cloth.
- 2) Pins that are used to keep the embroidery on the pillow.
- 3) Small scissors for cutting and removing threads.
- 4) A meter rule that's necessary for measuring distances.
- 5) A thin needle for sewing.
- 6) A plastic finger cover to protect the middle finger.

The main characteristics of the 'Lefkaritiko' lace, according to Androulla Hajiyasemi, are the following:

- 1) It has a neutral color.
- 2) Both sides of the cloth look the same and cannot be separated.
- 3) The designs create light and shadow.
- 4) They are geometric.
- 5) There is an interchange of the type of design used.
- 6) Single thread is always used.
- 7) The laced edge is always the finishing touch.

Lefkara hand made lace is one of the main causes of change and evolution in Lefkara during the last hundred years. However, a problem that's faced nowadays is the unwillingness of the young girls in Lefkara to learn how to make these wonderful embroideries. Yet, 'Lefkaritiko' lace will always be one of the best forms of the Cyprus traditional art.

### **Approval for Lefkaritika Ancient Craft**

The traditional hand-made lace produced in the village of Lefkara , the reputed Lefkaritiko , was included in UNESCO's representative List of Intangible Culture Heritage of Humanity on 30 September , 2009.

Lefkaritiko lace-making , this intricate form of needlework passed on from generation to generation , is among the 76 forms of expression added to the list by the 24 member states of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage during its fourth session in Abu Dhabi . The request for the inclusion was made one-and-a-half years ago by the Ministry of Education and Culture in co-operation with the Municipality of Lefkara.

The lace is now one of only two kinds of needlework included in the list, the other being Croatian. This particular lace making has been passed on from mother to daughter, and the young girls started to learn even before they went to school.

The tradition dates back to the Venetian period (1489-1571) when Venetian noble ladies used Lefkara as a retreat during the summer months to escape the heat of the lower plains, passing on their embroidery skills to locals. Nowadays, five centuries later, women of this 1,100 strong community still sit in doorways shaded with lush bougainvillea, nimbly working pieces of beige Irish linen with deft strokes of a needle and thread.

The UNESCO seal of approval will breathe new life into the craft. Lefkara Municipality has already applied to UNESCO for funding its action plan seeking to preserve and expand this art , secure raw materials , assist the women who make the lace , help distribute their products and promote lefkaritiko at international exhibitions.