The rich cultural heritage of Akhmim: traditional hand-woven Textiles

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The history of Egypt’s traditional textiles goes back to ancient Egypt. Let’s explore the long tradition of textile manufacturing represented by the weavers of Upper Egypt.

The City of Akhmim, a city in the Sohag Governorate of Upper Egypt Location.
The ancient craft of handmade weaving tradition in Upper Egypt

Akhmim in ancient Egypt

Historically, Akhmim was the capital of the ninth Upper Egyptian region. It was one of the most important religious centres. Akhmim was the main site for the cult of the fertility god Min. Akhmim has a long history dating back to the Pre-dynastic Period. It continued in the ancient Egyptian, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Arabic Periods. The Greek historian Herodotus who visited Egypt in the fifth century BCE (around 484-425 BCE) mentioned Akhmim as a place where “the women take care of the household and the men work in the textile industry.” The Greek geographer Strabo mentioned that there was a linen weaving industry in Akhmim.

Image id: 01613330070
Object type: textile, garment, tunic
Technique: plain weave, tapestry, brocaded, sewn, dyed
Findspot: Akhmim
Materials: linen, wool
Period / culture: Coptic
Production date: 5thC
Department: Ancient Egypt & Sudan
The techniques used by the people of Akhmim in weaving textiles were inherited from the ancient Egyptians, along with the designs of the looms they use. Despite the passage of time, they still continue their traditional crafts.
The design of the traditional handloom used by the people of Akhmim in weaving textiles lends itself more easily to vertical and horizontal geometric shapes. This characteristic puts some limitations on the motif form and patterns used, as well as the variety of innovations available within a traditional craft.
Akhmim Textile Industry Today What is needed?

Nowadays this knowledge is under extinction, a loss of an important element of culture and identity, due to the complexity of the weaving process which requires time, effort, patience and practice. Many steps and techniques from the loom preparation, threading and weaving to get the final product need time and effort. The craft is neglected and not transmitted as before within the families as a profession and a source of income to the new generations.

It is recommended to protect the area's traditional hand-weaving methods, while guaranteeing the community a steady income-generating source. The weavers of Akhmim Textile are still producing many different traditional Egyptian products by hand using big wooden looms, they need to be supported to compete in the textile market.
The UNESCO listed Traditional Loom in Upper Egypt (Sa’eed) to be one of the elements that need the Urgent Safeguarding Inscribed in 2020 (15.COM) on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

Experience the textile industry in Akhmim in the following video