

Those Marvelous **GOAT FIBERS**

Mohair doesn't come from a "Mo." It's the long, silky, curly hair of the Angora goat, *Capra hircus angoraenis*, which has been assumed to be indigenous to the province of Angora (or Ancyra, now known as Ankara), Turkey. However, the animals probably originated in the Himalayas and were brought to Turkey in the thirteenth century.

The work mohair is a corruption of the Turkish word *mukhyar*, meaning the best or selected fleece. First mention of this fiber is made in the Old Testament when Moses commanded the Jews who had escaped from Egyptian slavery to "bring white silk and goats' wool to weave the alter covers and curtains for the Tabernacle." Thus, mohair was known as far back as 1500 B.C.

The Angora goat was kept as a Turkish monopoly, highly regarded and jealously protected from exportation until the 19th century. In spite of this, raw fleece did leave Turkey and was greatly admired in Europe. Initial attempts to relocate the animals were frequently unsuccessful due to their delicacy and need for a very specific climate. In 1765 successful transplants were made to France and Spain, and in 1839 the first shipment of goats arrived in South Africa.

The first Angora goats were introduced to the United States in 1849. Seven does and two bucks were given to Dr. James B. Davis of Columbia, South Carolina by the Sultan of Turkey in gratitude for Davis' work to improve Turkish cotton. These goats were imported as Cashmeres, and it wasn't until 1853 that they were confirmed to be Angoras. These Angoras were adaptable to a wide range of conditions, but they seemed most suited to the southwestern part of the country. Today, more than 90 percent of the Angora goats found in the United States are in Texas. The Navajo Indian reservation of Arizona-New Mexico has the second largest concentration.

Fiber Properties

Stronger than wool, mohair is smooth, resilient, and somewhat inelastic. Because of its resilience, it does not wrinkle, and it repels dust and dirt. Naturally occurring colors include gray, various browns, and white. Mohair accepts dye brilliantly, is lustrous, and does not shrink or felt easily. Many

grades and varieties of mohair are available. Because the annual growth of the fiber is so great, mohair is clipped twice a year in the United States. The quality of mohair will change with the age of the animal from which it is taken. Average weight of clipped fiber is 6.5 pounds per animal, and fiber length is 6 to 10 inches. Micron diameter falls between 24 to 48 microns. "Kid" mohair (or six-month clip) is the finest and softest mohair available. Micron diameter for kid mohair will be around 18 microns.

When used in a garment, kid mohair will feel wonderfully silky to the touch. It can be spun into a soft yarn that can be brushed to a shimmering halo. Adult mohair increases in micron size and is less fine and more firm. It is, however, very durable and its strength makes it useful for upholstery fabrics and draperies, as well as clothing.

Blends of wool, mohair, and synthetics will be the combination most often found in "brushed" mohair, a common weaving staple.

Historical Textiles

Published in 1882, *The Dictionary of Needlework* tells us that *mohair* cloth was frequently worn in the Middle Ages. This would describe a cloth that was as lustrous as silk, regular in texture, soft and fine. Mohair yarn was used by the French for lace making, by the Dutch for the creation of Utrecht velvets (or "furniture plush"), and by everyone for the manufacture of dress material. "The English have obtained the highest success in spinning mohair, and it is owing to the stiffness of the fibre that it is rarely woven alone, either the warp or woof being usually of cotton, silk, or wool. A pure mohair fabric is considered nearly indestructible."

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