

Of Highest Caliber

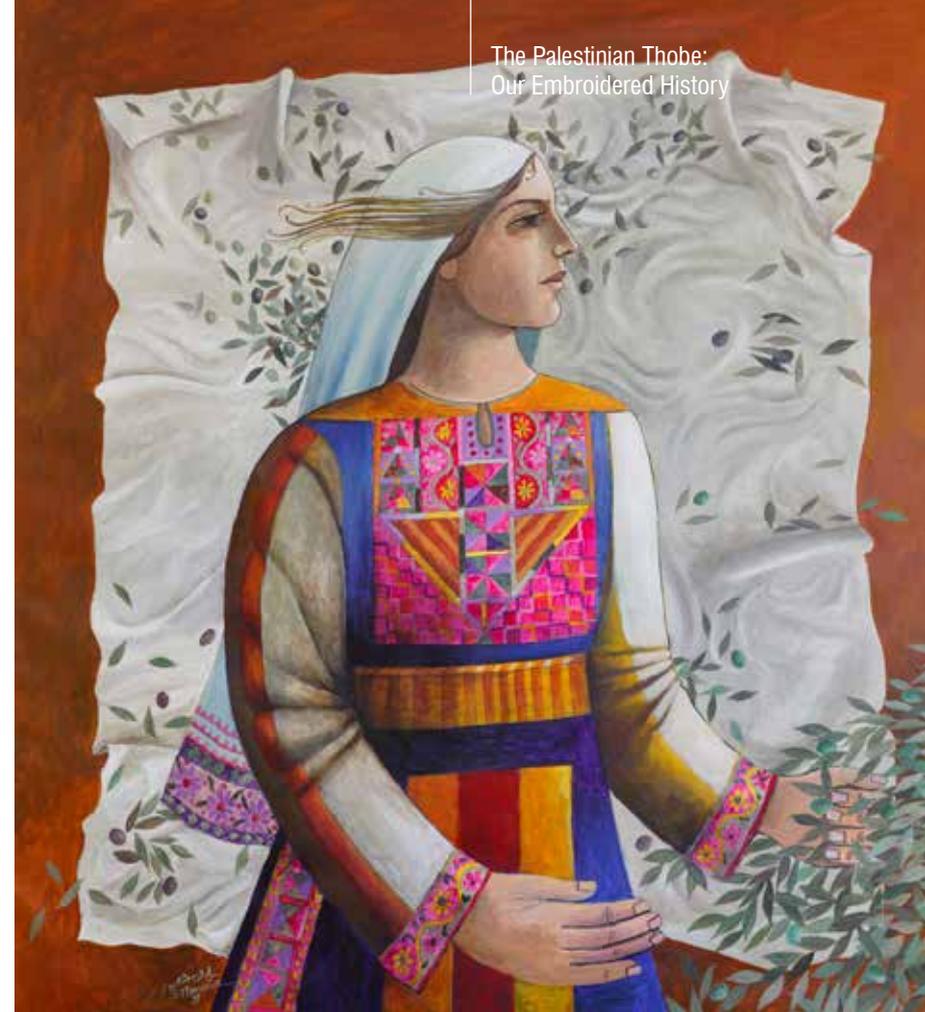
Standards of Traditional Palestinian Hand-Manufactured Embroidery



By Haidar Hajjeh

Traditional craft industries enjoy special attention in Palestine. Not only do their products reflect the history of the Palestinian people and their cultural heritage, these industries also promote development and can provide a source of income when they are exploited and adequately developed. To support and distinguish these crafts and their owners, the Palestine Standards Institution, in collaboration with several partners, has prepared a Quality Charter for Palestinian traditional craft industries. It aims primarily to protect traditional Palestinian craft products from unfair competition through imported or machinery-manufactured products, while also engaging to raise the quality of craft products and thus enhance their competitiveness in domestic and foreign markets. The charter has included 17 traditional crafts that are practiced in Palestine and officially registered in the Federation of Palestinian Tourism and Traditional Industries. Palestinian hand-manufactured embroidery is included among these products – potentially as the most important of them, at least in terms of numbers of workers, with an estimated 10,000 women working in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The history of handmade embroidery dates back to the Canaanites, as indicated by monuments throughout historical Palestine. The eight-pointed star that we find in most embroidery matches the eight-pointed Canaanite stars that have been found engraved in numerous caves in the city of Jericho. The history of this star goes back approximately 4,500 years, indicating when the first embroidered dresses were produced in Palestine, as Canaanites



Artwork by Sliman Mansour.

are known to be the first to have invented dyeing and embroidery. Popular costumes varied across different Canaanite kingdoms and tribes and distinguished the population of each region or tribe from others. This diversity has continued till today, as every Palestinian region features its own distinct dress. Nevertheless, the costumes share commonalities that allow people to recognize a garment as the dress of a Palestinian woman.

Palestinian women inherited the skill of embroidery from their grandparents, passed it on to their children and grandchildren, and used it not only to decorate their traditional

dresses and other accessories but also to embellish their mattresses, pillows, wallets, and other household items that served as tools and decoration. Throughout history, this craft has taken on productive commercial dimensions and has become a source of income, securing livelihoods for numerous women who have found in this craft characteristics that are appropriate for the social and economic environment of Palestinian society. This development has been accompanied by the creation of new models of embroidered clothing that are suited to the spirit of the times, inspired by the originality of the craft.



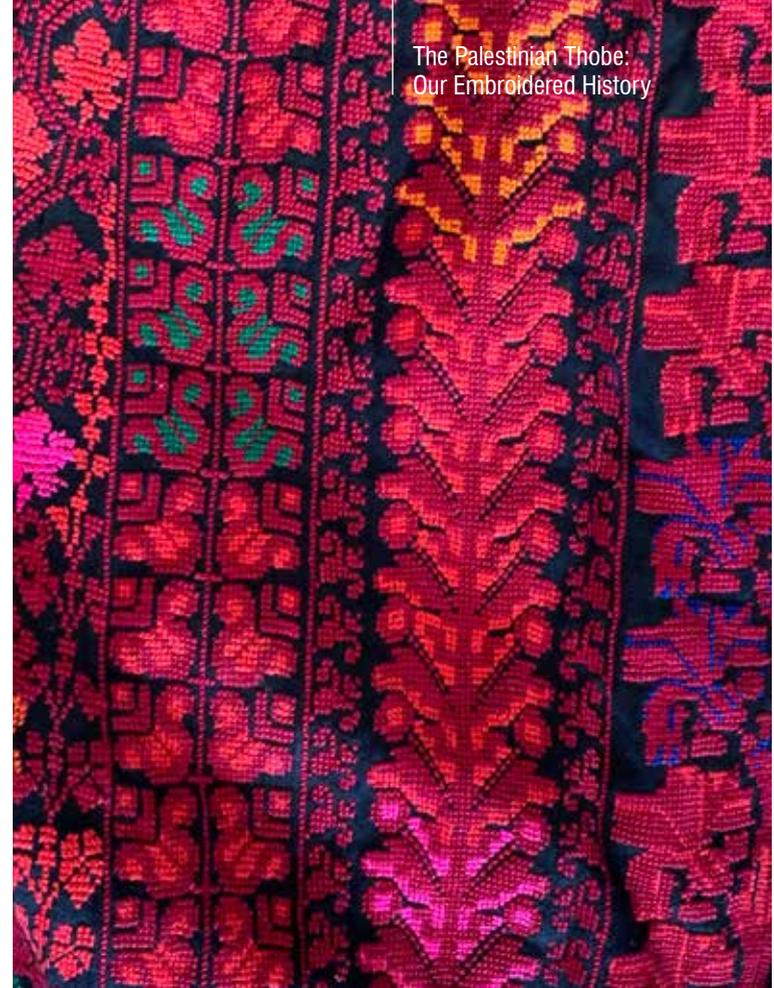
The quality standard applied to Palestinian embroidered products covers key items such as areas of use, raw materials, production method, environmental requirements, and safety instructions as well as packaging methods that ensure consistent product quality.

The specification of traditional hand-manufactured embroidery products (No. 4250), was prepared by experts who held several workshops for craftswomen working in this field. These specifications were subsequently reformulated and studied by the Committee for Tourism Specifications and Related Services. The Palestine Standards Institution relies on these Palestinian standards and on the Traditional Craft Industry Quality Charter to grant quality certificates for handmade embroidery products by checking the requirements of these specifications and the charter requirements and by ensuring that the product or service provider implement these requirements. It awards the certificate in accordance with the organization's quality and certification regulations.

These standards apply to hand-embroidered products in all forms, including clothing, accessories, wallets, furniture, mattresses, cushions, ornamented tools, and antiques. The raw materials used

in the embroidery process include various types of fabrics and threads that must conform to Palestinian specifications and mandatory technical instructions. (If these are not available, reference is made to global specifications.) Fabrics and threads are chosen to give quality to the embroidered piece, not only ensuring its attractiveness but also preventing it from shrinking during laundering. The same principle applies to the color stability of threads during the laundry process (provided that the washing and ironing instructions on the label are followed). Furthermore, threads are classified according to robustness, the ability to preserve their shape when embroidered, and the extent of their suitability for the type and thickness of the fabric; they must be free from any defects that would affect the product's usability.

The specifications include a description of the production tools and guidance regarding their use, for example, the choice of a needle that is appropriate for the type and



The Palestinian Thobe:
Our Embroidered History

thickness of the fabric, as this is very important for the quality of the final product. Recommendations specify the embroidery net (*marka*, a piece of cloth that has small squares that facilitate the embroidery process), the canvas, the stretching tools (hoop or loom), the scissors used to cut the threads, the use of a finger guard (thimble), and the container that houses embroidery tools, all with the aim to facilitate production.

The production process in all its detail is addressed by the standards and specifications, starting with the process of cutting the fabric to make the cloth suitable for the

intended purpose and culminating in the attainment of the final product. The issued specifications and recommendations include instructions for each stage to ensure the beauty and quality of the embroidered piece.

Moreover, the specifications address the general and environmental requirements to ensure proper ventilation of the working space, the provision of adequate and appropriate lighting, the observation of hygiene matters, and the manner of disposal of the remaining fabrics and threads. They furthermore include health and safety tips on such matters as proper seating to



Artwork by Maher Najj.

ensure that the artisan experiences no harm to the back, neck, or eyes and the necessity of using a finger guard (thimble) during embroidery to protect the finger from needle pokes. The specifications also address the need to ensure that the fabric components are adequate for embroidery in order to prevent workers from being harmed by potential sensitivity to certain components. They provide other guidance that aims to protect the workers, the product users, and the environment.

The specifications also include general and specific points that must be listed on the product label. Each embroidery product has its own label, and specifications vary depending on whether the embroidered item is a garment, an accessory, or a piece of furniture. The same applies to packaging, as each product has its own specificity according to its use, and the packaging materials are required to conform to the relevant Palestinian specifications and standards.

Embroidery is an art. The quality and the beauty of the final product are equally important.

Finally, Palestinian embroidered products must be in conformity not only with the outlined specifications but also with Palestinian values, customs, culture, and identity in line with the Palestinian national vision. These detailed specifications illustrate that utmost care is taken to protect workers and the environment while at the same time making sure that our customers enjoy the highest quality products in terms of both esthetics and safety of production and use.

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SCAN
TO SHARE

THE PALESTINIAN THOBE OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY



BRIDAL JELLAYE

YAFFA, BEIT DAJAN, c. 1880. A CELEBRATORY DRESS WORN AT WEDDINGS AND SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS.

The dress is made from handwoven blue linen. The opening in the front is encircled with colored silk fabric. The sleeves are short to show off the long sleeves of the white dress worn beneath the *jellaye*. The cross-stitch is used to beautifully embroider the dress mainly with the motifs of the cypress tree, inverted triangles, and the *Pash tent* motif.

From the collection of Maha Saca