The Palestinian Thobe: Our Embroidered History
Forthcoming Issues

April 2022
Inspirational Youth

May 2022
Life in Pre-1948 West Jerusalem

June 2022
Palestinian Archives

Advisory Board

Hani Alami, CEO of COOLNET

H.E. Mounir Anastas, Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO

Sari Khoury, architect

Rima Najjar, activist, researcher, and retired professor of English literature

Muzna Shihabi, communications expert

Sari Taha, principal consultant, Momentum Labs

This Week in Palestine
Publisher: Sani P. Meo
Art Director: Taisir Masrieh
Content Editor: Tina Basem

This issue of This Week in Palestine, The Palestinian Thobe: Our Embroidered History” has been funded by Bank of Palestine and PHARMACARE through two bronze sponsorships. We sincerely thank both institutions for their support and confidence.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsors. Bank of Palestine and PHARMACARE are not responsible for any inaccurate or libellous information, or for any erroneous use of information within these pages.

The views presented in the articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

Maps herein have been prepared solely for the convenience of the reader; the designations and presentation of material do not imply any expression of opinion of This Week in Palestine, its publisher, editor, or its advisory board as to the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area, or the authorities thereof, or as to the delimitation of boundaries or national affiliation.

My mother-in-law always wore the dresses that she and her oldest daughter had sewn by hand. Made of white soft fabric, they were embroidered in red, yellow, orange, and green. Sadly, she passed away twenty-six years ago. It has been almost twenty years since my sister-in-law made her last dress. My daughter, like most girls of her generation, has never learned to embroider. The knowledge and craft that was an integral part of daily life and that — amidst avid engagement to preserve it not only from time but also from appropriation — was included on UNESCO’s list of intangible heritage in December 2021 is falling prey to our fast modern lifestyle. But the dresses that once were the most precious possession of Palestinian women have not lost their splendor. Most fascinating is that their design tells you where the wearer lived and what marital status she had. The intricacies and splendor of traditional jellaya (popular before the 1930s) or malak (more modern) wedding dresses will enchant you, even though images can never match the experience of seeing or touching a real thobe.

This beautifully illustrated issue introduces you to some of the most important experts, collectors, and collections of Palestinian embroidery. TWiP’s special thanks go to Bank of Palestine and Pharmacare PLC who each supported this issue with a bronze sponsorship. Our gratitude goes also to Maha Abu Shusheh for her financial support, and to both her and George Al-Ama for their help in gathering the content of this benchmark issue. Moreover, we wish to thank our authors: Widad Kawar, venerated as the “mother of the Palestinian dress,” and her daughter Mary Kawar; Inaash Association that supports Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon; novelist Amani Al-Junaidi, the director of the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture; Maha Abu Shusheh, a collector of Palestinian embroidery and jewelry; George Al-Ama, an academic, researcher, and collector, and the founder of Dar Al Sabagh Diaspora Studies and Research Centre; Maha Saca, the founder and head of the Palestinian Heritage Center; Giovanni Scepi, the head of the Culture Unit at the UNESCO Ramallah Office; anthropologist and artist Dr. Ali Qleibo; H.E. Mounir Anastas, ambassador and cultural adviser of the delegation in Palestine to UNESCO in Paris; Baha Jubeh, a museum registrar and curator; and Haidar Hajjeh, the general manager of the Palestine Standards Institution. Our Historical Personality of the Month is Samihah Khalil and our Artist of the Month Riham Isaac. Instead of one Book of the Month, we present a selection of books on Palestinian embroidery. Visit our Exhibition of the Month, Trails of Colours, and enjoy the listed events.

The entire team at TWiP wishes you a happy International Women’s Day and peace in Ukraine and Eastern Europe!

Sincerely,

Tina Basem
Palestinian Embroidery Has Shaped My Life
By Widad Kawar (with Mary Kawar)
6

The Hidden Thobes
By George Al-Ama
32

Through the Eye of a Needle
Preserving Skills, Empowering Lives
Courtesy of Inaash Association
14

Our Heritage, Our Future
A Journey of Protecting and Promoting Palestinian Heritage
By Maha Saca
38

Palestinian Embroidery: An Expression of Identity
By Amani Al-Junaidi
20

Living Heritage
A Treasure UNESCO Strives to Safeguard
By Giovanni Scepi
46

The Journey of Palestinian Embroidery
From Its Roots to Collectors
By Maha AbuShusheh
24

Azure Blue, Crimson, Indigo, and Scarlet
Embroidery and Intangible Amorite Cultural Heritage
By Ali Qleibo
54

The Art of Palestinian Embroidery
By Mounir Anstas
60

Ten Years and Growing
The Story of Power Group
Courtesy of Power Group
64

Safeguarding Heritage
The Role of Museums and Institutions in Preserving Palestinian Heritage
By Baha Jubeh
68

Of Highest Caliber
Standards of Traditional Palestinian Hand-Manufactured Embroidery
By Haidar Hajjeh
76

The Last Word
98
Palestinian Embroidery Has Shaped My Life

By Widad Kawar
(with Mary Kawar)

I am often filled with pride as I reflect on how Tiraz Centre, where my collection is exhibited, has become an inspiration for many. I frequently spend time there, appreciating all the activity that is created by students preparing for various projects; awestruck tourists, journalists, and academics seeking information; artisans looking for inspiration to create modern items; visiting expatriate Arabs wanting to expose their children to their culture, and more.

The center is home to my collection, and everyone is welcome to experience it, learn about it, and enjoy it.

Some people call me “the mother of the Palestinian dress” or other similar titles, but deep down, that does not make me too comfortable. You see, I never set out to have such a big collection, and I certainly never set myself up for fame. I can honestly say, however, that I am deeply connected to people and places, and preserving Palestinian embroidery was the way I initiated and maintained these connections. I could follow my passion because I am fortunate to have had a supportive husband and children who encouraged me. But, for me, the most important aspect was always the story behind the dress. Through my connection to people and places, I somehow contributed to preserving the past. We Palestinians live with the deep trauma of dispossession. In my case, I channeled this into a desire to understand, document, and preserve every single detail of women’s costumes and lives.

My connection to places started with my early upbringing in Bethlehem and continued during my school days in Ramallah, where I used to watch women converge in the town center on market days. At that stage in my life, I was simply mesmerized by the exquisite Bethlehem dress, aptly called al-malak (the royal), and the intricate, refined Ramallah dress with its signature red colors and an abundance of specific patterns. My mother’s family originated from the village of Aboud, which is close to Ramallah, and the place and its dresses are imprinted in my early memory. The costumes

My passion for Palestinian embroidery has been driven by the desire to connect with places and people, especially women, as well as to connect our past to the future.
and accessories of Bethlehem and Ramallah continue to have a special place in my heart. They represent the happy places of my childhood and early adulthood.

I married Kamel Kawar and moved to Amman in the late 1950s. Amman was a small, diverse, and friendly city back then. I started to volunteer in Palestinian refugee camps even before the issue of refugees became increasingly acute after 1967. As I got to know many women who lived in these camps, I connected to what I later referred to as camp culture. You see, in this new environment, the traditional dress was changing as a result of a number of factors, including modernization and the exposure to new “foreign” patterns, the experience of people from different parts of Palestine learning from each other, the introduction of synthetic materials and threads, and the development of embroidery skills as an economic value for women. So, for me, the refugee camp culture was also a place of connection, a place where Palestine was being preserved outside its borders. Even though the dresses were changing, they were still Palestinian.

My life in Amman and exposure to Jordanian and, later, Syrian traditions expanded my horizons. While Palestinian embroidery traditions were facing imminent danger, the same threat existed for Jordanian and Syrian traditions. This was due to the ongoing rapid modernization and urbanization and a lack of awareness as to the need to preserve traditional knowledge. In addition, if one understands the history of Palestine, one understands very clearly its regional integration, which includes costume traditions. For example, residents of the geographical area called Houran, which comprises southern Syria and the northern tips of Jordan and Palestine, share the same costume, and the people who live on both sides of the Jordan River wear the same costume as well. Syria was the source of silk and textiles for Palestine and engaged in vibrant trade. And cities such as Jerusalem shared with Damascus and Aleppo the late-Ottoman urban dress style. So, my attachment to Jordan, my new home, and my enchantment with Syria lured me to expand my research and enlarge my collection. It is important for me to have this broad perspective and a deep understanding of our regional costume heritage.

Interestingly, this expanded view of the dresses of the Levant opened the door for me to have international exhibitions in Europe and Asia. While many countries were, regrettably, too “careful” about engaging with anything Palestinian and reluctant to even use the word, the rich textile heritage of Palestine slipped right through these exhibitions and was shown in all its glory for the whole world to see. Although it is easier today to promote Palestinian culture, during the 1970s and 1980s it was virtually impossible. There was an overwhelming demonization of Palestinians during that period. These exhibitions, which took place in many European, Asian, and Arab countries, exposed thousands of people to our heritage. Most touching was seeing Arab migrants visit with their families. Once, outside an exhibition in Cologne, Germany, Palestinians and other Arabs gathered to celebrate, holding a small festival with food, music, and dancing. What a happy atmosphere and how much pride was brought about by the exhibition! I recall how my heart expanded when they asked me to join them right outside the museum.

Today, my head is filled with memories of the women whose life histories crossed with mine. I cannot do justice to all of them in this article, but their courage, resilience, wisdom, kindness, generosity, humor, and intelligence have enriched my life. I am so grateful for those who entrusted their costumes to me and to those who shared their life’s joys and sorrows with me.

You see, to better understand any dress I acquired, I would seek the story behind it. For me, the costumes were but a living testimony of the owner. I recall each life story and how the costume and embroidery were at the center of the individual’s life: There is the story of a young woman who saw her future groom for the first time; of aunts who helped embroider a dress on social afternoons; of a wedding day when the bride was fetched from her father’s house; of a mother-in-law who had great embroidery talent but a challenging disposition; of market days when women used to dress their best; of an innocent love affair in the fields; of the firstborn daughter; and on and on.
on. Unfortunately, many of these stories also have painful sides rooted in dispossession and trauma.

Another category of women I connected with were what I call al-tarazat, the embroiderers. These are the women who used their embroidery skill to gain an economic advantage. Many of them still exist in my life today, as we have enjoyed lifelong relationships. I was able to connect the dots: the women who had the required skills and needed an income, the market demand for Palestinian embroidery on modern, usable items such as cushions, runners, coasters, jackets, table covers, etc. I helped many NGOs and handicraft shops in Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon to develop this tradition, and I helped link the tarazat with these income-earning opportunities. Just as with the women who entrusted me with their dresses, I also developed a great connection with these women, their marriages, their financial situations, and their children’s education. I was simply part of their life cycle, and it gives me pleasure to know that I have somehow contributed to their welfare.

I would like to mention one woman, known as Im Ibrahim or Ruqiyya al-Santarisy, with whom I had a deep connection and who sadly passed away in Amman a couple of years ago. She had fled from her home in Beit Dajan in 1948, and anybody who knows Palestinian embroidery knows the richness of the Beit Dajan dress. This sumptuousness was a reflection of wealth because the town is located in an area of orange groves that used to export as far as Europe at the time, when the “Jaffa Orange” brand was known as the best kind of orange — only to be appropriated later on by the Israelis. Anyhow, Amman became Im Ibrahim’s home, alongside her husband and eight children. By the 1960s, she turned her embroidery skills, which she had learned when she was ten years old, into an income for her family. She was able to build a nice house and send most of her children to university. But much more than that, her legacy is that she trained hundreds of women over several generations in what became her signature products due to their high quality and accuracy. Im Ibrahim and I shared a particular connection with the patterns, and we would sit and gaze at them or discuss and analyze them and their names. I do miss her.

Thinking back today on my life, and having amassed possibly one of the largest Palestinian and Arab costume collections, I think I was trying to capture the past through the act of preserving these dresses. The Palestine I knew and, later on, the Jordan I knew have dramatically changed. So by surrounding myself with this collection I forged my connection with my past. When I connect the dots of my life history, I see that it has been punctuated with...
traditional costume heritage. This heritage is my life story. I am happy to have published the book *Threads of Identity* that pays homage to Palestinian women. I am also pleased at the success of Tiraz Centre, especially as my daughter Mary and my granddaughter Laila are taking a special interest in this art as well. We also have a lovely team with the designer Salua Qidan and our curator Ruba Thaher. So institutionally, there is certainly continuity. I am also pleased to see that creative young people have a substantial interest in heritage. I am always delighted to see the innovation around me and how our heritage is being taken into another sphere. There is brilliance and artistic talent out there. Embroidery has become an inspiration to a new generation, and this is a great sign that this tradition will live on and thrive. There is, however, an element of cheap commercialization of embroidery that somehow bothers me. But never mind, such is life, and things move on from one generation to the next with the positive and not so positive. I am very proud that the art of Palestinian embroidery, with its practices, skills, knowledge, and rituals, has been added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. This is a clear recognition of the Palestinian women who fought for their country with their fingers and through needles and threads, who persisted in embroidering their identity, preserving their history, and transmitting it all to the next generation. Together with these women, I know in my heart that my life’s work has contributed to this UNESCO recognition. I also know that this tradition will live on through the next generation of strong women.

---

**THE PALESTINIAN THOBE**
**OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY**

**HEBRON HILLS**

**BLACK LINEN DRESS FROM AL-FALUJA OR IRAQ AL-MANSHIYYA**

This black linen dress may have been made in the early twentieth century, as can be seen by the embroidery design used on the sleeve and chest panels where opposing small triangles called *hijbeh* were embroidered in a design called “Waves of the Sea.” The chest panel has an extension to the back panel made of yellow Syrian material. The front panel of the dress has a magnificent embroidered front piece with bright multiple colors on pink silk material called *hermizi*. The side panel is a signature of the Hebron area, and its uniqueness stands out with the use of a combination of hefty embroidery designs of squares, triangles, palm trees, and *kheyam al Pasha* (al-Pasha tents). Finally the lower panel of the dress is framed with silk *hermizi* fabrics called *tashreema.*

From the collection of George Al-Ama
Through the Eye of a Needle
Preserving Skills, Empowering Lives

Inaash is an NGO founded in 1969 by Huguette Khoury Caland, a daughter of the first Lebanese president, along with a group of Lebanese and Palestinian women. They foresaw the need to preserve the rich heritage of Palestinian embroidery while generating financial support for Palestinian refugee women in camps across Lebanon (Aïn el-Helwé, Miyyé Miyyé, Al Jalil, Mar Elias, Rachidieh, and Bourj El Chamali).

“When I saw the state of things, I wanted to break up the ghetto and give these women independence and work, as well as the opportunity to revive their craftsmanship,” explained Huguette Khoury Caland. Since Inaash’s inception, over 2,000 Palestinian women have benefited from their work with the association, both in monetary terms and through a sense of community and cultural continuity. Today, around 350 women are active in six camps. Their work with Inaash not only provides them with a way to earn a decent living, it also enables the women to preserve their traditional skill while transferring this valuable cultural heritage from mother to daughter, thus maintaining a sense of continuity and belonging to their homeland.

Together, Inaash and its embroiderers have established a reputation for unique artisanal collectibles, featuring designs drawn from Inaash’s significant archive of samples dating back over a century. These high-end, exquisitely embroidered products include abayas, shawls, jackets, clutch bags, cushions, and fashion and accessory items.

Inaash’s in-house designers work alongside local and international artists and designers to adapt traditional motifs and patterns to twenty-first-century aesthetics in the form of signature shawls embroidered on handwoven najaf wool or silk fabric, najaf abayas and jackets, contemporary clutch bags, tableware, and a large range of cushions. These products are exhibited and resold locally, regionally, and internationally in Jordan and Egypt, throughout the Gulf (Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Dubai, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia), in Europe (including London, Paris, and Hamburg), and in the United States. Internationally known Lebanese designers who have worked with Inaash include Nada Debs, Rabih Keyrouz, and Mira Hayek. Interior designer May Daouk has long cooperated with Inaash to produce outstanding new cushion designs, embroidered by Inaash, including for a highly successful exhibition and sale of cushions at the John Rosselli Gallery in New York.

In addition, Omar Joseph Nasser-Khoury, a Palestinian embroidery expert and fashion designer from Jerusalem/Birzeit has worked intermittently with Inaash since 2009. His work focuses on historical textiles and dressmaking techniques from Palestine. A graduate of the London College of Fashion, Omar’s first design for Inaash was a crinkled (shambar-style) silk shawl. Omar Joseph says that his first encounter with an Inaash embroidered najaf shawl in 2005 was one of the main reasons he decided to study fashion and pursue a career researching embroidery and textiles from Palestine. A jacket embroidered by Inaash from his first collection was acquired by the British Museum in London in 2011; it is one of the first fashion items the museum acquired.
Twelve Windows

The Twelve Windows installation, a collaboration between Inaash and the internationally recognized Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, comprises twelve exquisitely embroidered panels conceived as a museum installation. Researched and designed by veteran Inaash co-founder Malak Al Husseini Abdelrahim, each panel represents through its motifs and patterns a key region of Palestine, and together they form a visual map of Palestine through the medium of its long-standing tradition of embroidery. In Hatoum’s hands the panels are transformed into a brilliant metaphor for Palestinian life under occupation. The installation has been exhibited in prestigious venues, including Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, Switzerland; the Alexander and Bronin Gallery, New York City, USA; the 2015 Arts of the Islamic World Gala at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA; and in major Hatoum Retrospectives at Le Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, and Tate Modern, London, UK.

Through this high-profile project and the outstanding quality of its 50-plus-year output, Inaash has remained true to its original mission of empowering Palestinian women refugees and safeguarding their cultural heritage. Together, Inaash and its artisans continue to inform the world of a skill and tradition that goes back centuries but is still vibrant, potent, and relevant today.

Kindly check the Inaash website www.inaash.org for further information, and visit Instagram at inaashassociation to learn more about Inaash products.

Jamileh and Nazmieh Salim – A Personal Story from Inaash

Jamileh and Nazmieh Salim are two of six sisters who embroider for Inaash. Their story is emblematic of thousands of Palestinians displaced by Israel in 1948, and later in 1967. It also encapsulates the lives of hundreds of women who have embroidered for Inaash during the last almost 50 years.

Born in Fureidis, a village near Haifa in Palestine, their parents fled their home in face of Israeli aggression in 1948. They headed first to the town of Nabatiyyeh in South Lebanon, believing that they would return home soon. Later they moved to the poetically named Tel ez-Zaater (Hill of Thyme), then the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut. Ten children were born before disaster struck. The camp was razed in 1976, during the Lebanese Civil War, when a bitter massacre wiped out thousands of Palestinian lives.

The Salim family fled once more, this time to Mar Elias, a camp on the other side of Beirut where they still live. To this day they have no idea what happened to their father who disappeared during the fighting. “Our mother raised us,” says Jamileh. “It was not easy to provide for ten children. She cooked for an aid organization and cleaned a school close to the camp. As kids we used to help her. She used to tell us about our home village of Fureidis (from the Arabic, meaning Garden of Eden). To me it seemed like paradise and I longed to go there.”

Jamileh started to embroider when she was 13 years old. It became a lifetime commitment. “I can say that by now embroidery flows in my blood, I could never stop doing it.” Nazmieh too has clocked up almost 30 years of embroidery and between the two of them the sisters have produced some of Inaash’s most outstanding work.

“In Palestine,” Jamileh explains, “the women would gather together to embroider, usually in front of their houses. They would put a basket in the middle with the balls of thread and start to work – a word here and a stitch there, that’s how it’s been for centuries.

“We six sisters embroider, plus my sister-in-law and my nieces. Along with the neighbors, we sit together and chat as we embroider and we survive. During the summer we sit...
outside and in winter we are inside one of the houses, each person takes a corner or a seat and we embroider. While we work we talk about all sorts of things.”

“I am fast,” Jamileh continues. “I work eight or nine hours a day depending on my circumstances, how much time I have with the housework, the cleaning, the cooking, helping my children with their schoolwork. I get up very early, wash, pray, and start my day. But I really like to embroider at night, after I put the children to bed, till 11pm or midnight; on school holidays I can keep going till one or two o’clock in the morning.”

Nazmieh prefers to work alone. “I like solitude, I prefer to sit on my own and let my thoughts drift. I think of my children, my situation, my health and well-being. I reflect on all sorts of things, how to sort this and that out, how to get by. The thoughts drift and wander.”

Both sisters worked on the iconic Inaash project entitled *Twelve Windows*, the museum installation created by internationally acclaimed artist Mona Hatoum from a twelve-panel project designed by one of the Inaash co-founders Malak Al Husseini Abdelrahim. Each 90 x 90cm square panel represents in its motifs, patterns, and colors a different region of Palestine. Together they form a visual map of the country through the medium of traditional embroidery.

“Two pieces are close to my heart,” explains Jamileh. “The Beit Dajan piece took me two and a half months to complete. I don’t know why but when I was working on it, I felt I was in the heart of Palestine; and the Jerusalem piece that I finished in five and a half months. How can I put this? – the Jerusalem piece gave me so much incentive to continue working in order to ensure that our embroidery will never die out, or disappear.”

---

**THE PALESTINIAN THOBE**
**OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY**

---

**THE BLACK NA’ANI DRESS**
**BEIT DAJAN, YAFA**

Introduced in the 1930s, the black Na’ani dress is considered to be the most beautiful dress in Beit Dajan worn by the bride for her first appearance after marriage. It is named after the village of Al-Na’ani, south of Beit Dajan, as it is said that a girl from Al-Na’ani was married in Beit Dajan and brought with her beautiful dresses that were admired by the women in Beit Dajan and that later inspired this dress.

Thobes from Beit Dajan are renowned for their beautiful motifs, including the Beit Dajan cypress trees and triangles, and the orange blossom, among others. This special dress is also decorated with Bethlehem-influenced couching in silver and golden threads.

---

From the collection of Maha AbuShusheh
Palestinian Embroidery: An Expression of Identity

By Amani Al-Junaidi
Translated from Arabic by Haneen Kawasmi

Centuries ago, Palestinian women began to draw their stories with needles and thread by decorating their dresses with colorful embroidered symbols that reflect their narrative, time, and place. These garments thus document and define the Palestinian identity of these women. As successive catastrophes befell the country, the embroidered dresses remained as statements that attest to the presence of these women and tell the stories of the times during which they lived. For this reason, these embroidered garments have become more than dresses worn by Palestinian women on social occasions. They reflect the identity of their homeland and serve to protect the cultural heritage of those who wear them.

The Palestinian Ministry of Culture has a keen interest in Palestinian cultural heritage as it is a fundamental pillar of Palestinian national identity. The significance of its preservation is enshrined in the Palestinian constitution, and the State of Palestine has signed the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, also known as the 2003 Treaty. Pursuant to various programs included in the Sectoral Plan for the State of Palestine, the state has taken significant measures to protect and institutionalize the country’s cultural heritage. First, the Heritage Department was established within the Ministry of Culture and charged with carrying out the necessary measures to safeguard the intangible Palestinian cultural heritage and protect the national identity. Then, the ministry designed a long-term strategy for the protection of cultural heritage. It established the National Heritage Registry and tasked it with facilitating the work necessary for cultural heritage preservation.

The registry started its work through an annual program of collecting, documenting, and archiving cultural heritage elements. In 2017, the ministry published the representative list that contains the national cultural heritage elements most closely related to the culture and heritage of the Palestinian people. Among the twenty cultural elements mentioned, the most important is the art of Palestinian embroidery, including the associated customs, traditions, and rituals. It is worth noting that this list is renewed regularly and that new cultural elements are added to it every year.

The Ministry of Culture is keenly aware of the need for international action to preserve our cultural heritage. Thus, after consulting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and heritage experts, we conducted a case study to detail the most important elements of cultural heritage currently included or proposed to be added to the list. We found that the art, customs, traditions, and rituals of Palestinian embroidery are among our most important elements of heritage. Embroidery is one of the most widespread and meaningful expressions of national identity and a living cultural element that women have safeguarded for decades, even centuries. Palestinian women and refugees have carried these skills with them to wherever in the world their diaspora journey has led them.

For this reason, the Heritage Department embarked on the process of preparing a file for UNESCO to request that the art of embroidery with its associated customs, traditions, and rituals be included on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Ministry of Culture prepared a comprehensive file.
Palestinian embroidery has been added to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the completed papers and documents were sent to the Palestinian embassy in Paris, to Mounir Anastas, a strategic expert involved in the drafting of the 2003 Treaty and an advocate for the file in the corridors of UNESCO. The initial response of the evaluation committees at UNESCO was promising. On December 15, the International Committee for the 2003 Treaty announced the unanimous vote to include Palestinian Embroidery: Customs, Traditions, and Rituals on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This step signaled the inauguration of Palestine’s first cultural heritage element in international forums, thus protecting Palestine from any international or local attempt at the cultural denial of its national identity.

Following the announcement of inclusion, the country was overjoyed, and Palestinian women walked proudly through the streets wearing their embroidered dresses to celebrate this achievement. The State of Palestine affirmed the importance of this cultural element, and the cabinet approved a national day of Palestinian embroidery to be held yearly on December 15. On this day, we celebrate the art of embroidery and honor all women who engage in it as guardians of culture as they cooperate, through their needles and thread, in preserving the identity of the Palestinian nation and creating a brighter future.

Amani Al-Junaidi is a Palestinian novelist and author of ten novels. She works at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture as director of the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage. She had the honor to prepare the file on Palestinian embroidery and submit it for inclusion on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

THE PALESTINIAN THOBE
OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY

WHITE LINEN DRESS
LOD AND YAFA AREA (BEIT DAJAN AND THE 1948 DEPOPULATED VILLAGES OF BEIT NABALA, DAYR TARIF, KAFR ‘ANA, AND AL-‘ABBASIYYA)

Exceptionally, women from the Lod and Yafa area fully embroidered this dress for festivities and special occasions using the Bethlehem couching stitch on white linen. Women from Beit Dajan learned this technique from the famous Manneh Hazboun and later developed it to create their own special version. These dresses were distinguished by their rose branches in festive colors that covered the thobe like a spring garden.

From the collection of Maha AbuShusheh
The Journey of Palestinian Embroidery
From Its Roots to Collectors

By Maha AbuShusheh

In its early days, embroidery on garments was used to adorn the clothing of the ruling elite and high-ranking religious figures, and incorporated metals such as gold and silver into silk and other fabrics to emboss and embellish the garments. With time, embroidery spread throughout villages as a result of religious sisters who trained economically disadvantaged girls in embroidery to create garments for religious figures. Later, the girls transferred these practices to their own villages. This transition allowed more freedom for the artform to flourish, later becoming a popular practice that was distinguishable based on each village’s culture, understanding of nature, and beliefs. Embroidery became a continuing and sustainable practice that connects villagers with their ancestors’ heritage, practices, and histories that were founded on the symbols and motifs of their time.

Palestinian women from villages and Bedouin communities have carried this tradition forward, further developing it and allowing it to evolve over the years as they used silk, linen, and cotton textiles to create their garments. These women were generally known to wear a diverse range of garments, from heavily embroidered dresses (worn at weddings and on special occasions) to everyday dresses that were lightly embroidered. All were adorned with a myriad of stitching techniques, most notably the cross-stitch and Bethlehem couching. These stitches came together in a vibrant and wide spectrum of colors that were combined with highly skilled techniques to create colorful masterpieces in different cuts, reflecting the beauty and modesty of the village and its women.

The earliest samples of embroidered Palestinian clothing are from the nineteenth century. Before then, we only have a description of these pieces based on the observations of travelers. Only a few orientalists and travelers had described the Palestinian dress in relation to their religious interest in the Holy Land, where their contempt and disdain for the local population was apparent through their description of the “primitive” local people.

Missionaries, orientalists, and travelers acquired embroidery for religious interests as well as for economic purposes. For some, the priority was to collect embroidery, for others it was to sell the items in Europe and the United States in order to sponsor their Palestine-based projects. These embroidered pieces became part of the collections of individuals or churches, and eventually ended up in collections at ethnographic museums in the twentieth century, forming the base of museum collections of Palestinian traditional dress.

The John Whiting Collection: As the manager of the American Colony shop in the Old City of Jerusalem, John Whiting was a collector of Palestinian embroidered garments. These pieces are held in collections by John Whiting, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Rolla Foley, Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi, Widad Kawar, the Israel Museum, and the Museum of Bedouin Culture.

The back of a dress from Al-Ramleh that shares elements with dresses from the villages of Yibna, Bashit, and Al-Basheer, depopulated in 1948.
fluent Arabic speaker and well-versed in local traditions. He was also very passionate about acquiring Palestinian traditional dresses from the various villages that he visited. His collection included some pieces that date back to the 1840s.

When John Whiting passed away in the United States in 1951, his collection was initially passed on to his wife and later ended up at The Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe. His 26-piece collection became the core of the museum’s collection of traditional Palestinian dress, which was later complemented by the support of Widad Kawar who was able to fill in the gaps in the Whiting Collection.

**The Church Missionary Society (CMS) Collection:** Sheila Weir worked with the British Museum in selecting a collection of Palestinian traditional dresses from the CMS Collection that had been brought from Palestine. Between 1967 and 1968, Weir conducted a survey across historical Palestine to document the CMS Collection, to learn the vocabulary of embroidery and the names of items, motifs, and stitches, and to identify the distinguishing features of the pieces based on their place of origin.

Between 1969 and 1970, Sheila Weir expanded her survey to include Jordan and Palestinian refugee camps, and acquired a large number of pieces that women in refugee camps had kept following the Nakba and Naksa. Weir also acquired looms from Al-Majdal to add to the expanding ethno-graphic collection of the British Museum. This was followed by the establishment of the Museum of Mankind in London which launched its activities with an exhibition on weaving in Palestine and traditional Palestinian dresses.

**The Rolla Foley Collection:** Rolla Foley was an American music teacher who from 1938 to 1946 worked at the Friends School in Ramallah, where he was responsible for the music program in Palestine, Lebanon, East Jordan and Syria. He published several books about music in English, French, Arabic, and Armenian and founded a folkloric music festival that encompassed his interest in local cultural and artistic production, especially embroidery. Throughout his stay in Palestine, Foley collected Palestinian embroidery pieces as well as paintings and ceramics before returning to the United States in 1946.

Foley returned to Palestine in 1952 to complete his PhD research on folkloric Palestinian music, where he was confronted with the fact that his friends from Yafa had become refugees in Ramallah following the Nakba. They had lost their homes and the majority of their possessions. Foley recognized that due to the forced displacements, Palestinian embroidery was under the threat of erasure, so he started a diverse collection that included embroidered dresses, jackets, and pillows. He also established a small museum in Oakland, Illinois in the early 1960s, but due to his untimely death in 1970 the museum was shut down. His collection was passed on to Hanan and Farah Munayer, with a detailed description of every piece, including the history of the piece itself, the date of acquisition, the name of the owner, and the village from where it had originated. This thorough documentation allowed for this heritage to be passed on to future generations and provided invaluable information about the collection’s pieces. It is worth noting that the collection Foley amassed over the years is one of the few that were acquired by non-Palestinians and later returned to Palestinian hands.

In the early 1930s, Palestinian collectors started to establish their own embroidery collections in an attempt to preserve this heritage and ensure its continuity for future generations. Two main collections are important to mention here.

**The Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi Collection:** Hind Al-Husseini started collecting Palestinian dresses as part of the Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi Collection in the 1930s, then expanded the collection following the 1948
special collection of Palestinian dresses in an interactive and educational setting. She has also contributed greatly to producing invaluable books and materials to document and preserve this heritage. Her collection and efforts have inspired and encouraged the establishment of several individual and organizational collections.

Other collections of Palestinian embroidery are held by Palestinian institutions, including Birzeit University and The Palestinian Museum, and by Palestinian individuals who seek to preserve and document Palestinian heritage and history.

There are also collections of Palestinian embroidered dresses and jewelry, among many other Palestinian items, found today in Israeli museums and private collections. In 1948 Israel wiped off the map more than 400 Palestinian villages and transferred their populations to neighboring countries. Israeli collectors subsequently amassed a great number of Palestinian traditional costumes and tools in an attempt to find a link between these items and the Israeli assumed history in the region.

In parallel to the Israeli state’s ongoing efforts to erase Palestine and Palestinians from map and memory, Israeli museums have paradoxically collected Palestinian traditional clothing and tools in a relentless manner over the years. The following are some examples.

The Widad Kawar Collection:
Sometime later, Widad Kawar started a journey that has now led her to acquire thousands of pieces from Palestine, Jordan, and other parts of the Arab world. She started her collection with a mesmerizing dress from the village of Aboud, and today owns a collection that has travelled the world carrying the message of Palestine. Widad Kawar has also established Tiraz Centre in Amman, Jordan to display her

Nakba. Her response stemmed from her belief in the importance of safeguarding Palestinian heritage from being wiped out in the face of occupation. This was in addition to her philanthropic work, where she provided housing for refugee children in her foundation, Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi. Following the 1967 Naksa, the Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi Collection expanded further to include the embroidery collection from the Palestinian Folk Art Museum.

The Israel Museum:
The museum was founded in 1965, when anthropological researcher and curator Ziva Amir was responsible for collecting Palestinian traditional clothing en masse. Amir took advantage of the extreme vulnerability of Palestinians at the time and used this situation to acquire Palestinian embroidery from impoverished Palestinian refugees. Amir published several books and papers on the topic, focusing on tracing the Old Testament through these collected pieces, without once mentioning Palestine or Palestinians.

Our Embroidered History
The sleeve of Al-Ramleh dress.

The back of a dress from Hebron with elements typical also of dresses from Al-Faluja, Iraq al-Manshiyya, and Beit Jibrin, villages depopulated in 1948.
The Museum of Bedouin Culture: The museum’s collection dates back to its establishment in British Mandate Palestine in 1938. It documents Bedouin life in Al-Naqab and includes a diverse range of pieces that include clothing, tools, tents, and woven rugs and textiles. This history and present-day reality emphasize the importance of developing and expanding Palestinian-owned embroidery collections. In addition to safeguarding a traditional Palestinian artform that has been violently disrupted due to the Nakba and ongoing occupation, these collections can also preserve an essential part of our intangible heritage. The stories they tell do not merely encompass the garments themselves, but also the way of life they were artfully designed to accommodate. In the face of the brutal occupation machine, preserving and celebrating our cultural identity is integral to ensuring the continuity of our culture for generations to come.

Born in Ramallah, Maha AbuShusheh holds a BA in economics from Birzeit University. A collector of Palestinian embroidery and jewelry, she is engaged in the private sector and serves as a board member of many institutions. Ms. AbuShusheh was named as one of Forbes Arabia’s top 50 influential Arab businesswomen for the years 2006 and 2007 – the only Palestinian woman to make the list – and one of Forbes Arabia’s top 100 influential Arabs. She is married and has four children.

‘IRQ AL-LOUZ DRESS
WESTERN HEBRON HILLS (BEIT JIBRIN, AL-FALUJA, IRAQ AL-MANSHIYYA, ZIKRIN, SUMAIL/AL-MAS’UDIYYA, TELL ES-SAFI, VILLAGES DEPOPULATED IN 1948)

This dress is known in these villages as a bride’s wedding dress from the 1930s. As its name indicates, the primary motif is the almond branch that is embroidered with a special stitch called rashiq, specific to this region, with its multiple bright colors on silk fabric in orange and green.

From the collection of Maha AbuShusheh
The Hidden Thobes

By George Al-Ama

The Palestinian thobe is a vital symbol of our cultural heritage and identity, with its skillful stitchery, rich colors and patterns, the thobes preserve stories of a people and a homeland. While today we have access to extensive research and collections on thobes and embroidery, much of our history remains untold as it lies within thobes unknown to us in our own homes. Recently I had the honor to witness such a discovery with the Mukarker family in their home in Beit Jala, and together, we were able to complete a missing piece in their family history.

I have known the Mukarkers for some years now and was told that an heirloom thobe al-malak from the early 1900s had been passed down in the family, yet no one from the last two generations had seen it – it was not to be mentioned or talked about. In the winter of 2019, I joined Rula Nasser Mukarker on a visit to her mother-in-law’s home. It was my first time meeting the notable Sophie Yousef Shamieh, a remarkable woman who has lived through the hardships of Palestine over the last 90 years. Sophie was dedicated to her late husband, Suleiman Mukarker (1927–2011), an activist and leader in the Palestinian People’s Party, supporting him throughout the resistance and struggle. I was amazed by her vivid memories as she recollected stories of life in Jerusalem prior to the Nakba, of her father’s photography studio, as well as how her family was forced to move to Bethlehem. She struck me as the matriarch of the Mukarkers, a strong, educated, and determined woman holding her family together.

We waited patiently for two years, until in January 2022 I received a phone call requesting that I visit to inspect the jibbeh and treat it for moth infestation. I couldn’t help but ask about the thobe, seeing this as an opportunity to preserve it and inevitably, to reveal it. Sophie was intent on protecting the garments and agreed to take them out for inspection. Immediately upon hearing this, her son Imad rushed over and collected the bukjah, the bundle of fabric in which she had carefully wrapped the garments, bringing it back to his home for us to see. In his home, we were joined by his wife, Rula, their children, Razy and Sliman, and his sister, Mary. Together we unwrapped the bukjah and were astonished to find a woman’s complete wardrobe: thobe abu-metein/jiljileh, thobe al-khaddameh, and maqta’ khedary (roll of fabric), amongst them a hizam (belt) and a piece of crochet. Our eyes were fixed on the thobes as we examined each item, the refined and rich embroidery, and vibrant colorful fabrics. We all were amazed by the thobes, and bewildered and equally curious as to why they had been hidden away all these years.

While we conversed and shared stories from the past, Sophie brought out and entrusted us with a perfectly preserved ‘abayeh (cloak) and jibbeh (sheepskin overcoat), the latter of which is a rare item that dates back more than 150 years. The garments, which belonged to her late father-in-law, Salameh Mukarker (1869–1961), a wealthy tradesman working between Bethlehem and Chile, remained in her custodianship after her husband passed away.

I was thrilled to see these items and the condition they were in, and couldn’t help but imagine the glamor of the thobe al-malak in her care. When we inquired about it, Sophie stealthily evaded our curiosities and shrugged us off.

We sat together in an intimate and familial way, each sharing memories and recollections, as we tried to piece together the missing information to complete the story of the thobes. We carefully examined the thobes, studied...
them to better understand their significance and how they shed light on the prosperous region of Bethlehem and the life of the woman who wore them. 

*Thobe abu-metein/jiljileh* (a variation of a *malak* dress), is the most elaborate dress in a woman’s trousseau, initially worn on her wedding day and then on festive occasions. The *malak* style emerged in the Bethlehem region and became a must-have item in every woman’s trousseau in Palestine. The fabric in this dress is a blend of linen and silk striped in red and black, decorated with patches of deep orange and green *heremzi* (Syrian silk taffeta) along the sleeves and side skirts, as well as imported cotton and broadcloth in pink and purple encircling the neck. Yet the *qabbeh* (chest panel) is the most important and intricate part of the *malak* that is finely embellished with *tahriry* (couching) stitch, a unique style developed in Bethlehem using silver, gold, and silk cords that are twisted into elaborate floral and curvilinear patterns and additionally framed with colorful *menajel* (herringbone) stitch. 

What is unique about this dress is the subtle deviation from the classical *malak* patterns as the seamstress added six circles in the chest’s centerpiece as opposed to the usual five, and introduced the ‘*erq al-tufah* (apple branch) pattern, replacing the usual *sa’aa* (watch) on the ends of the embroidered strip along the *benayiq* (side skirt). The ‘*erq al-tufah* became known mostly in Bethlehem, amongst prosperous Christian families who wanted to create new and distinct trends in their dresses. These particular details suggest that the woman who made this dress intended to personalize it and distinguish it from others, leaving her signature mark on it, possibly to be worn by herself or someone dear to her.

*Thobe al-khaddameh* is a simpler and plain dress intended for everyday use. It is made from *habar* (a light black silk) fabric and has a cross-stitch embroidered chest piece as opposed to the glistening *tahriry* stitch in the *malak* dress. The *sawa’id* (sleeves) are embellished in patches of deep red *heremzi*, and *malak* fabric, with a *tishrimeh* (zig-zag stitch) edge, and a small yet elaborate panel at the *sfifeh* (cuff of the sleeve) filled with colorful and dense *tahriry* and *menajel* stitching. Despite its simplicity, the *thobe* is rich and noble in its colors, skillful stitchery, and fabrics attributed to the Bethlehem style. It is claimed that Bethlehem women preferred modest *thobes* embroidered with the cross-stitch, possibly as a reaction to the growth and popularity of the couching that was appropriated in dresses in villages and other cities.

The *maqta’ khedary* is a roll of fabric striped in red, green, and orange, we can only assume was intended for a *khedary* dress and that the woman was still in the process of preparing a new dress to add to her attire. As we recollected pieces of the story, we learned that the *thobes* belonged to Sophie’s mother-in-law, the late Maria Jiries Saba-Mukarker (1900–1942). After reviewing the birth and death dates on the family gravestones, we confirmed the heartbreaking story of Maria’s sudden death while she was baking a cake in the taboon on the occasion of her son’s fifteenth birthday. Losing his mother at such a young age was a traumatic experience for the young Suleiman. He couldn’t bear to see the *thobes* and be constantly reminded of the...
pains brought on by her death. Yet he cherished the thobes, as they were the only remaining memory of his mother, and thus carefully hid them away to preserve her memory. Sophie felt her husband’s pain and, respecting his wishes, followed through in safeguarding the thobes.

The story continued to unravel as we spoke to Khaled, Sophie’s youngest son, to inquire further about the thobes. He informed us that he knew of an additional malak owned by Maria, which he personally had seen upon opening the family tomb some years ago. He recalled identifying the silk tahiriy stitching as well as a shatweh (head-dress) in the casket, like the ones commonly worn by brides and married women. With this information, we are able to attribute four thobes to Maria, which would have been expected of a woman of her stature living in Beit Jala during the 1900s. Khaled also shared that he was told by his aunt and father that Maria was well-known for her skills as a seamstress and sought after by her sisters-in-law and relatives who would ask her to prepare thobes for them. With this detail, we were able to confirm our earlier assessment that the thobes were personalized and indeed sewn by the hands of Maria herself.

It was such a magical and intimate moment to witness the Mukarkers uncover the hidden thobes and the untold stories of their family history. Surely, there are more stories of Maria and the thobes amongst family members in the diaspora who hold her memory, yet on that evening, the thobes were finally liberated from the traumas of the past and redeemed when Mary finally wore her grandmother’s thobe. With every thobe, we remember those who came before us, and celebrate our cultural identity as we preserve it for future generations.

George Al-Ama, an academic, researcher, and collector who specializes in Palestinian material culture and visual arts, is the founder of Dar Al Sabagh Diaspora Studies and Research Centre. He currently lectures at Dar Al-Kalima University and Birzeit University. He also heads the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, works as an adviser to the Bank of Palestine in the fields of arts and culture, and serves as a member of the scientific committee of the Terra Sancta Museum.

2 Ibid.

**RAMALLAH DRESS (JELLAYE)**

This black linen bridal dress can be dated to the late nineteenth century and is among the oldest from Ramallah. The dress was embroidered mostly with red silk threads garnished with orange, green, and purple. The unique design has short sleeves and a long slit that runs through the front of the dress to the bottom of the chest panel. The stars on the chest panel framed with feathers and the two large crosses on the sides are designs specific to Ramallah during that period.

From the collection of George Al-Ama
Our Heritage, Our Future
A Journey of Protecting and Promoting Palestinian Heritage

By Maha Saca

My journey in documenting, reviving, and promoting Palestinian heritage began more than thirty years ago. I felt strongly, especially in the late 1980s, that all Palestinians had a patriotic duty to serve their country in their own capacity and within their own expertise and interest. Very intrigued by the unique beauty of our heritage, I embarked on field studies in various villages and refugee camps to document this knowledge directly through the men and women who lived this heritage. I wanted to hear firsthand about their experience because I consider this to be the truest form of knowledge. The field research made me realize that the most important aspect of our heritage, especially for Palestinian women, is women’s traditional dress, the thobe.

Why the traditional Palestinian dress? This is the dress that girls used to learn to embroider, starting at the very young age of seven years; it is a woman’s traditional wedding dress, the dress of the village from which she was forcefully displaced, and the dress she will wear when she undeniably returns to her home.

My first Palestinian fashion show was held in 1991. The public’s reaction was more than positive, and all visitors showed deep enthusiasm and great interest in learning more about the beauty, richness, and diversity of our Palestinian dresses. Armed with such a realization, and with the great encouragement and support of my family, I established the Palestinian Heritage Center (PHC) in Bethlehem, which was officially registered as a heritage center in 1991 by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.
The PHC receives visitors that include school children, university students, and those interested in the field of heritage, and it has produced and printed more than 200 posters and postcards that document historical, religious, and archaeological sites in various cities and villages in Palestine. All these documents are accompanied by images of the Palestinian dress, highlighting the identity of each place and affirming our presence in each village and town throughout Palestine. The crown jewel of these images is the Map of Historic Palestine, produced in 2003, that demonstrates the clear linkages between the geographic locations, their historic monuments, and their traditional dresses.

I have also participated, and had the honor of presenting our heritage, in more than 40 related events, both in Palestine and internationally. These events varied from exhibitions of embroidery to fashion shows, shows focused on posters and postcards, lectures, workshops, and museum exhibits. Among the most important events was our participation in the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and a curated exhibit at the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute Museum. The curated exhibit at the museum lasted for six months. I have also participated in various events in the United States, Spain, Germany, Tunisia, Algeria, the Gulf countries, and others. Audiences consistently react with amazement at the beauty, variety, and richness of our Palestinian dresses and the Palestinian art of embroidery. In the homeland, I have organized many exhibitions and fashion shows in a variety of places, including Nazareth, various universities and institutions, the two diaspora conventions in Ramallah and Bethlehem, and the Young Presidents’ Organization (YPO) event. Indeed, the beauty of our heritage has always been enthusiastically received and highly appreciated by any audience, nationally or internationally.

During travels for international events abroad, I made it a habit to visit the museums and libraries of the host city to learn about its heritage and buy a book or two that represented that country’s heritage. These books are on display at the PHC as well. In 1992, I was invited to organize an exhibition on Palestinian traditional dresses in the state of Michigan. During my time there, I visited the library of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. While looking through some books, I was surprised to see my grandmother’s dress, the Bethlehem iconic traditional dress, identified as the traditional dress of Israel. I made copies of the encyclopedia and upon my return to Palestine, I repeatedly sent letters to the publisher explaining that this dress is the traditional dress of Palestine, not of Israel, and I included various items of documentation to support my claims. The strongest evidence I sent came in 2007. Together with sixty countries, Palestine participated in an international competition for the World Tourism Organization (ALECSO) entitled “Women and Heritage.” Palestine entered the competition with a poster I had produced at the PHC. The image showcased all our Palestinian dresses, with the Bethlehem traditional dress at the center. Palestine won first place and received the highest number of votes; three thousand more votes than the second place winner. I was honored for my work at a large ALECSO celebratory event in Madrid. With this win, I wrote again to the encyclopedia’s publisher to share the news of this victory and the international recognition of our traditional Palestinian dress. I felt a sense of accomplishment when I saw that the falsely identified image had been removed from the 2008 edition. The struggle should continue to add the dress with the correct identification.
Another proud moment in promoting and celebrating our heritage was when our office of the president asked me to design and embroider a papal stole for Pope Benedict XVI, who visited Bethlehem in 2009, and again for Pope Francis, who visited Bethlehem in 2014. Both stoles were embroidered with traditional Palestinian embroidery patterns, beautified with Palestinian symbols such as the key of return, the olive tree, and other Palestinian symbols. Pope Francis wore it during his visit and carried the stole home as a gift from the Palestinian people.

That same year, the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology approved the embroidered image of the key of return that was on the stole together with the image of Pope Francis as the official postage stamp of the State of Palestine. This image has become our best ambassador, traveling the world and representing the Palestinian people.

Theft and appropriation attempts are ongoing, which is why we must stay diligent. When an Israeli flight attendant, who was wearing a Palestinian dress on an El Al flight, challenged us by saying, “If this embroidery belonged to you and your ancestors, you would wear it at your universities and in the streets,” we were provoked and pushed to think of ways to respond. In 2010, in cooperation with the House of the Palestinian Child in Hebron, we designed the largest Palestinian dress (400 square meters in size). Tasked with designing the dress’s embroidered motifs, I selected all of them from the rich variety that is embroidered on our traditional dresses from various cities and villages of Palestine. This dress won the Guinness title of world’s largest embroidered Palestinian dress in 2010* in yet another effort to document our embroidery and protect it from the ongoing attempts at theft and appropriation.

Sadly, the theft and appropriation of our heritage continues until today, most recently using a world event as a vehicle for appropriation. In December 2021, the Miss Universe Pageant took place in the city of Eilat in Israel. Photos were circulated of the contestants wearing Palestinian traditional dresses and preparing Palestinian dishes as part of an activity organized by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism for the contestants. They also visited the Naqab and participated in what they called a day in the life of a Bedouin settlement in Israel. During that visit there was no mention of the fact that these Bedouins are Palestinian and that what the visitors were experiencing is an integral part of Palestinian culture and heritage. To make matters worse, there was no mention of the displacement and constant threat to the Bedouin way of life and livelihood. Israel used this international event to yet again appropriate our heritage, our identity, and our Palestinian dress, an undisputable symbol of our identity.

Palestinians yet again fought back! The continued efforts of many Palestinians, especially the thousands of Palestinian women who continue to practice this amazing art, were not in vain. Last year, we the people were able to assert our will and protect our dress and our art of embroidery. With the international support of more than 194 countries at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting, “The art of embroidery in Palestine, practices, skills, knowledge and rituals” was added to the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2021.

This was a great cultural victory for the Palestinian people. Indeed, a right is seldom lost if it is pursued by the people.

Maha Saca is the founder and head of the Palestinian Heritage Center in Bethlehem. For more information, please visit www.phc.ps.

Article photos © by Maha Saca Collection.

*Although the dress won the Guinness title, it was not included in the annual Guinness yearbook, as is the case with many Guinness record winners. A copy of the official letter of confirmation from Guinness is available on request from the author or from TWIP.
THE PALESTINIAN THOBE
OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY

BETHLEHEM MALAK THOBE
THE BRIDAL DRESS OF BETHLEHEM, BEIT JALA, AND BEIT SAHOUR.

The dress is made of handwoven multicolored linen and silk strips of fabric, embroidered with the famous taheer and qasab stitch. The chest panel is embroidered with the qwar motif with five stars; and the central part of the panel is framed with the motifs of the subyan, njoum. The phoenix adorned the chest panel. The sleeves (al-erdan) and side panels (benayiq) are adorned with colored silk strips decorated with the famous Bethlehem sa’aa motif.

From the collection of Maha Saca
Living Heritage
A Treasure UNESCO Strives to Safeguard

By Giovanni Scepi

In 2023, the world will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The adoption of the 2003 Convention has shaped a new global understanding of heritage, beyond monuments and artefacts, to include the so-called living heritage, hence recognizing this as an instrument for innovation, social transformation, and sustainable development, while at the same time showcasing the living culture of people, its evolution and continual development, and representing the communities and people as custodians and bearers of cultural expressions. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage entered into force in 2006. Since then, 180 Member States have ratified it, including Palestine, which has been a State Party since 2011.

Intangible cultural heritage is manifested in cultural expressions that are transmitted from ancestors and passed on to posterity. These various expressions include festive events and community gatherings, oral traditions and songs, food-related practices and skills, traditional craftsmanship, and performing arts, in addition to knowledge, skills, and practices concerning nature and the universe, rituals, and healing traditions, just to mention a few. Intangible cultural heritage is traditional, contemporary, and dynamic at the same time. It is inclusive, representative, and community-based.

Safeguarding embraces a broader and more holistic understanding of protection, as it stresses the processes of knowledge production and notions of communities’ transmission of knowledge and skills from generation to generation to keep them alive.

Intangible cultural heritage is constantly recreated by communities and groups of people in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history, hence safeguarding it enhances their collective identities and ensures respect for cultural diversity, human creativity, and community heritage. The provisions of the 2003 Convention aim to raise awareness about the importance of this heritage at the local, national, and international levels, which consequently facilitates its appreciation and aids in lobbying efforts for international cooperation to further promote and safeguard it.

The 2003 Convention introduced to the international community the possibility of inscribing elements on two main international mechanisms: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is undoubtedly the more popular one. This list presents the diverse cultural practices and expressions of humanity and sheds light on the richness and diversity of human culture.

Palestine is a partner in two multinational inscriptions that safeguard date palm cultivation and Arabic calligraphy and has listed two national elements of intangible cultural heritage: Palestinian women’s art of storytelling and Palestinian embroidery.

Palestinian intangible cultural heritage, hikaye, a narrative expression practised by storyteller Fidaa Atayaa. Photos courtesy of UNESCO Ramallah Office.
light on their importance while encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity and acknowledges expressions of communities worldwide. The Representative List is made up of those intangible heritage elements that help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance. In 2008, the first elements were inscribed on this list that currently includes a total of 529 intangible cultural heritage elements from 135 countries.

The other mechanism is the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding that is composed of intangible heritage elements that are considered by respective communities and States to require urgent measures to keep them alive. Inscriptions on this list help to mobilize international cooperation and assistance for stakeholders to undertake appropriate safeguarding measures. Today, the Urgent Safeguarding List contains 71 elements inscribed by 38 countries.

A country’s successful listing of an element on UNESCO’s lists does not imply that this element is unique, superior to another, or that it belongs exclusively to, originates from, or exists only in that country. It is also possible that the lists include similar elements inscribed by different States since the bottom-up approach of this Convention allows for communities and bearers to be the main masters of practicing and safeguarding their own cultural expressions, without geographical borders.

Palestinian living heritage is a vivid manifestation of the community-based resilience that is deeply rooted in Palestinian society. Given the sentimental and pivotal role that intangible cultural heritage plays in enhancing the cultural identity of Palestinians, efforts invested in safeguarding it, which include recognition at the international level, become crucial as they can foster intangible heritage as a catalyst for sustainable development in general.

The viability of the intangible cultural heritage of Palestine reflects the historical evolution of the Palestinian communities, their traditional knowledge and popular rituals. Safeguarding and preserving this heritage by constantly practicing it and persistently working towards transmitting it to future generations means ensuring the revitalization of Palestinian cultural heritage and presenting its significance and value to the entire world.

Palestine has been able thus far to inscribe four elements on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Two of them are part of multinational inscriptions: “Date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions and practices” was included on the list in 2019, and “Arabic calligraphy: knowledge, skills and practices” in 2021. Two others are national inscriptions. The first, inscribed in 2008, is “Palestinian Hikaye,” which safeguards the tradition of narrative expression in fictitious tales, practiced by Palestinian women. The second was inscribed in December 2021 and is titled “The art of embroidery in Palestine, practices, skills, knowledge and rituals.”

Giovanni Scepi is the head of the Culture Unit at the UNESCO Ramallah Office and the programme specialist for culture at UNESCO.
For the ancient Canaanites, ancestors of modern-day Palestinians, wheat was a symbol of life, health, and fertility. It was also used as a beautiful decorative motif. This symbol and tradition survived to our modern times and is still used in traditional Palestinian embroidery. When Pharmacare was established in 1985, it adopted “Expression of TRUST” as its slogan and used this traditional motif as the company’s emblem.

Pharmacare Palestine (PCP) was established by a group of Palestinian entrepreneurs with a clear focus on quality. From humble beginnings, Pharmacare is proud to have built state-of-the-art pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities in Palestine and obtained the following quality certificates: EU GMP, Anvisa – Brazilian GMP, ISO 14001, ISO 9001, WHO GMP, and the Palestinian GMP. Since 2008, Pharmacare has been continuously exporting pharmaceutical products to several EU, East European, and other world markets.
THE PALESTINIAN THOBE

BLACK JELLAYE
WESTERN HEBRON HILLS (AL-FALUJA, IRAQ AL-MANSHIYYA, AND BEIT JIRBIN, VILLAGES DEPOPULATED IN 1948)

This dress belongs to the 1920s or earlier in the century and is known as a festive dress for brides on their wedding day and other special occasions in the Western Hebron region. It is known for its distinctive use of hermizi silk in orange and red on the front skirt panels (sija) and sleeves, in addition to the Abu al-Metein fabric, with yellow, fucia, and green stripes, made in Majdal. The most exceptional pattern used on this jellaye is that of opposing triangles/chevrons (hijabat), which are known to be the oldest motifs for dresses from this region.

From the collection of Maha AbuShusheh

OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY

GAZA DRESS

This dress is named after the fabric Abu al-Metein, which was woven in the city of Al-Majdal. It was the custom dress of northern Gaza, including Brair, Hamama, Herbia, Beit Lahia, and Beit Hanun. This type of material was characterized by bright pink stripes on the sides of the central panel, exclusive to the women of the Gaza area.

The embroidery design of the entire dress used brownish-red silk threads as the main color and added bright pink, blue, green, and orange rutoosh. The extensive and rich embroidery design is apparent not only on the squared front panel bordered with a peculiar blue frame but also on the heavily embroidered side panels.

From the collection of Bank of Palestine
Embroidery,” explained Iyad, “is commonplace in Palestinian society. Early on, women learn to embroider but for exquisite craftmanship they commission specialized ladies from Rabud.” The semi-nomadic cave city Rabud, the Amorite “Debir,” has long been recognized for the art of elaborate embroidery and refined aesthetic artistic sense. Over the years the craftsmanship and artistry of the ancient walled city, known in the Bible as the City of the Holy Book of the Canaanites, attracted the villages from the Dura region, from as far away as Idhna, Beit Ummar, and Al Sa’ir, who would commission embroidery with floral and geometric patterns and colors specific to their villages. “Rabud is celebrated for its outstanding craftsmanship and artistry as a center for the manufacture of embroidery akin in fame to the village of Al-Samu’,” he further explained. Al Samu’ is renowned for its homemade rugs, Al-Samu’i kilims, on a par with Al-Majdal’s indigo cloth used in making al-thobe, the dress on which the embroidery was applied.

“It hurts me to see the special needlework reserved for the breast panel of al-thobe being used as a pattern for slippers.” My friend Yasmine from Ramallah was indignant about the over-commercialization of Palestinian embroidery. “My mother used to proudly wear it on her neck…and now it is used to trample the dusty floors.”

Patterns include themes that abstract striking elements of nature, bearing great resemblance to Byzantine mosaic floral patterns visible in the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Nativity.

The ethical problematic related to the use and abuse of embroidery as a commercial enterprise does not undermine its privileged, almost sacrosanct status in Palestinian culture which has acquired a political nationalist denotation. Its highly valued status, ubiquity, and present symbolism’s deep roots strike into our primordial history in which Al-Naqab Bedouins and the semi-pastoral settlements in the basin of Mount Hebron play a major role as centers of origin.

Embroidery as intangible heritage invites us to reexamine the traditional rigid tripartite Palestinian social structures – Bedouin, peasant, and urban – as a durational ecological adaptation to diverse geographic zones and corresponding resources descending from common ancestral origins, i.e., the Amorites. As amply demonstrated in both the ancient colorful pharaonic murals and the sculpted Canaanite religious reliefs revealed by archaeologists, our Amorite ancestors had already set the stage for modern Palestinian embroidery by providing both the inventory of colors and floral geometric patterns. The colors of azure blue, crimson, indigo, and scarlet are depicted to single out the chevron-checkered garments of the fair skin with smooth hair Amorite procession of prisoners or, alternately, gift-bearing supplicants.
in homage to the Egyptian pharaohs. Canaanite sculptural reliefs, recovered by archaeologists, reveal an array of patterns whose floral designs, such as the lily, the wheat shaft, and geometric stars representing Astarte, are integral components of the Palestinian repertoire of embroidered patterns. Through time, the embroidered motifs further diversified to include decorative patterns that abstract striking elements of nature such as seagulls in coastal villages, mosaic patterns in the Church of the Nativity in the Bethlehem region, and sundry motifs derived from acute perceptions of Palestinian fauna and flora. Over the past two centuries, the colors of green and golden yellow were added to the spectrum of color used and new patterns were introduced from European embroidery magazines.

The diversity of ensuing floral geometric patterns and the rich set of colors provided a kaleidoscope of infinite patterns to select from and to give each village its own characteristic patterns passed down from one generation to the next which imparted to each village its distinct ethnic identity.

Embroidery reveals a common thread that weaves the fabric of cultural life in the arid desert and pastoral hinterland as two distinct ecological niches sharing one common primordial heritage within the context of a precarious climate and finite ecological resources. In fact, there is no prototype Bedouin. The stereotypical image of the Bedouin as the lonely, rugged nomad with a camel and a tent is merely an adaptation to a particular environment, and the same applies to pastoral and urban socioeconomic formations.

Embroidery that had once assumed a prominent position, indicating gender and the status of women as virgins, married, or widowed, has been revitalized as a nationalist symbol that asserts the unrelenting will of the Palestinian people to survive in their homeland.

Ethnographic and archaeological finds reveal that the contiguous Sina and Al-Naqab deserts merge as the backbone of Palestinian culture, and the geographic basin formed by the major valleys in Mount Hebron presents the ecological context for the onset of the process of “sedentarization” of the Semitic nomads throughout time in whose socioeconomic political environment the Palestinian elementary form of cultural identity emerged. This complex lengthy process of acculturation emerged within the internecine tribal context of raids and counter raids (ghazu), which entail stealing, pillaging, and usurping land and water wells and expanding into new territories (diyar) – itself a form of ecological adaptation creating structural conflict in Bedouin peasant relationships that overshadow the common origin. Modern studies of the Palestinian DNA inherited clusters of alleles point to the fact that Al-Naqab Bedouins, through natural drift and isolation, have preserved a significant cluster of traits inherited from the early Natufian Palestinians whose tribes had built Jericho (12,000 years ago) in juxtaposition to the rural Palestinians whose genetic structure reveals a higher percentage of Amorite phenotypes including the fair skin, smooth hair, and colored eyes that we notice in the Mount Hebron hinterland!

The Mount Hebron valleys, following the desertification that took place four thousand years ago, provided the environment that has over the past six millennia served as a cultural niche, replenished the early settlements which straddled mountaintops, and infused the mythos of the land with its spiritual tenor. Throughout history, our nomadic predecessors’ interaction...
with the environment has been a complex dynamic intellectual process, conditioned by the primordial process of ecological cultural dialectic adaptation within the basin. In the lengthy process of ecological adaptation to the new environment, our ancestors’ perception did not merely reflect and react to but also incorporated the new ecological and techno-economic resources, working them into a system that was conducive to the survival of the tribal structure as an integral whole. The complex dynamic process underlies the transformation of the environment into a resource and can be viewed as the origin of the pragmatic adaptability of the Palestinians to the diverse challenges in war and peace, under contemporary occupation and in the diaspora.

Throughout history, Palestinian society has preserved its tribal structure of social solidarity within the clan. Unity within the four-generation family unit is one of its most salient political, economic, and religious structures in which embroidery that had once assumed a prominent position indicating gender, status of women as virgins, married, or widowed has been revitalized as a nationalist symbol asserting the unrelenting will of the Palestinian people to survive in their homeland.

Anthropologist Dr. Ali Qleibo has lectured at Al-Quds University, held a fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute, and was a visiting professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies and Kyoto University, Japan. As a specialist in Palestinian social history and through his work at the Jerusalem Research Center, he has developed the Palestinian Social and Muslim Tourism Itinerary. Dr. Qleibo has authored many books on Jerusalem and its history. A renowned oil painter, he has held numerous art shows. He may be reached at aqleibo@yahoo.com.

A 1940s BEDOUIN DRESS
This cotton dress is designed with bright and colorful embroidery on the sleeves and chest panel, and the rest of the dress is heavily embroidered with blue thread that can be an insinuation of the marital status of the “single” or widowed woman who owns the dress.

From the collection of Bank of Palestine
The Art of Palestinian Embroidery

The Importance and Consequences of Its Inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2021

By H.E. Mounir Anastas

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) defines ICH “… as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity…”

One of the lists of the convention is the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which was designed to ensure better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and to raise awareness of its significance. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage reviews the lists for new inclusions each year.

At its last session, in December 2021, the Intergovernmental Committee examined the nomination submitted by the State of Palestine for the inscription of The art of embroidery in Palestine, practices, skills, knowledge, and rituals on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The file was submitted with the help of civil society actors as well as many local women’s associations that provided materials on the art and use of embroidery across generations.

Members of the committee unanimously adopted the decision to inscribe Palestinian embroidery. The inscription on the list was motivated by many factors and became essential to the practitioners in Palestine and in the Palestinian refugee camps outside of Palestine. Palestinian embroidery became a public affair when Israel dressed its national airline flight attendants with Palestinian embroidery in an attempt to culturally appropriate Palestinian heritage. Moreover, young Palestinians inside and outside Palestine are playing a very important role in safeguarding their cultural heritage in general and the art of Palestinian embroidery in particular.
Palestinians worldwide consider the tradition of embroidery to be part of their identity. In fact, the embroidered symbols and shapes on the traditional Palestinian dress (*thobe*) are typically inspired by the nature of the region where it was embroidered. The colors and designs used indicate not only the region but also the social, marital, and economic status of women wearing these dresses. In this article, we will not expand on the technical details since many books and articles have already been dedicated to aspects such as stitches, thread, etc., as well as the significance of embroidered symbols and designs on the dresses.

The purpose of this article is to explain the importance of the UNESCO inscription and its positive consequences. The number one goal was to ensure the safeguarding of the embroidery tradition that all Palestinians consider as part of their identity. The inscription was a clear encouragement to Palestinian youth to practice the traditional art of embroidery. Some Palestinian artists are creatively using embroidery designs in the decoration of furniture, jewelry, and other everyday objects. The inscription of Palestinian embroidery has galvanized Palestinian communities around the world. Many Palestinian brides proudly embrace traditional embroidered dresses for their weddings. Pictures of beautifully embroidered wedding gowns are being widely shared on social media and creating a new trend.

The inscription has raised visibility of Palestinian embroidery on the regional and global levels. Before the inscription, Palestinian embroidery inspired many international fashion designers around the world. Some, such as Maki Yamamoto, have rightfully acknowledged its Palestinian origin whereas others have not, as can be seen in Tory Burch summer 2021 embroidered dresses.

The inscription of Palestinian embroidery on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is to be considered a protection against the cultural appropriation of this Palestinian tradition by any international designer and/or the Israeli occupier.

*Mounir Anastas is Ambassador, Permanent Delegate, and cultural adviser of the delegation in Palestine to UNESCO in Paris. He is also a music composer.*

**BEDOUIN DRESS**

This black *habar* (satin-like fabric) dress can be dated to the 1940s or 1950s. We can assume that the dress belonged to a married woman due to the bright colors and heavily embroidered designs used on the side and front panels. Finally, the short sleeves also display the same extensive and extravagant bright color designs.

From the collection of Bank of Palestine
Ten Years and Growing
The Story of Power Group

We are always told that our future lies in the hands of our youth, hoping that they will be the change makers of the future. Indeed, today we are seeing youth groups sprouting up across Palestine that enable young people to make their voices heard in creative and impactful ways. One such collective is Power Group, an independent entrepreneurial youth group based in Bethlehem that produces and publishes audio and visual media as a tool for social change. As Power Group approaches its ten-year anniversary, we look back at its story and at the ongoing inspirational work of its members.

In 2012, the reality and prospects for Palestinian youth were bleak. Unemployment levels in the West Bank were soaring at around 40 percent, and job opportunities in the creative sector were scarce. Nabil Hamouz had a dream to change this reality. He was determined to create a platform where youth could use audio-visual productions to express themselves and their aspirations for their future and well-being.

He brought together peers and classmates from university to start a youth group and launched the first meetings in a room in his home, where eventually Power Group broadcast its first online radio program and implemented its activities. From the start, Power Group insisted on being independent, self-financing all activities to avoid falling into the traps and conditions of funding schemes and instead choosing to foster an ethos of voluntary and collaborative work. Nabil was a role model and leader who created a dynamic, creative, and enjoyable environment for the team. He was known as an eternal optimist, always motivating his peers and fostering a positive atmosphere.

Two years later, without any sign or warning, Nabil decided to end his life. Everyone was devastated by this tragedy and couldn’t comprehend what had happened. Despite the challenges brought by Nabil’s loss, the team insisted that his dream should continue, and they chose to follow in his footsteps. During the next year, Power Group members powered through and succeeded in starting anew, renting and equipping a new office space and continuing the journey. Their productions, programs, and partnerships began...
to grow year by year, extending their activities across Bethlehem, Hebron, and beyond.

Power Productions, one of the group’s main departments, creates audio and visual productions that range from short films to reportages, photography, TV shows, and advertisements. Its expanding work has led to the documentation of Palestinian culture and heritage, which recently included documenting the private collections of Palestinian clothing and embroidery that belong to Ms. Maha Abu Shusheh and Ms. Maha Saca.

At one time, Power Radio was the only youth-run radio station in Bethlehem. Today the youth involved focus on producing a podcast and have expanded their reach through several partnerships with radio stations across Palestine. Through this platform, youth share and discuss a variety of social and cultural issues that affect their lives.

Power Group has extended its programs to include organizing art and cultural activities as a way to further engage with the community. Last year alone, the group organized over 40 film screenings. Events are held in different locations as a way to raise awareness of Palestinian heritage sites.

Without a doubt, the members of Power Group have proven themselves to be a professional and visionary group whose ambitions and reach are limitless. We look forward to seeing what the next ten years hold for Power Group’s members and Palestine’s youth.

THE PALESTINIAN THOBE
OUR EMBROIDERED HISTORY

This dress can be dated to the 1930s and is characterized by the dark red embroidery, a wide chest panel, and balanced side panels on the front and back of the dress. The panels were connected by manajel, which collectively distinguish the Ramallah area dress. The dress was considered a hybrid of Ramallah and Bethlehem, which is apparent in the sleeve design. The sleeves here were embroidered on red and orange extravagant hermizi silk material. The hybrid design included both Ramallah and Bethlehem styles together in one dress and was a result of the expansion of Bethlehem embroidery designs that were sold in Bethlehem and Jerusalem to people in Ramallah.

From the collection of George Al-Ama
Safeguarding Heritage

The Role of Museums and Institutions in Preserving Palestinian Heritage

By Baha Jubeh
Translated from Arabic by Hind Husseini

Based on my experience of more than 25 years of documenting, preserving, and exhibiting Palestinian heritage at Palestinian museums and institutions, I believe that the remarkable accomplishments of Palestinian institutions and museums are even more valuable than what is reported in the media, especially in light of the Israeli occupation’s continuous attempts to steal and assail Palestinian heritage. Moreover, these museums with their rich history and valuable heritage collections of dresses and tools shed light on Palestinian social and cultural history and its preservation. Each museum owns a distinctive collection that tells its own story. By reviewing these archives and tracing the history of Palestinian heritage museums, one can understand the important role that these museums play in heritage documentation and preservation. Through thorough documentation and the publication of the findings, heritage can be recorded and remembered, archives produced, and studies carried out.

Several collections in Palestine are dedicated to the preservation of heritage, and I have contributed to the documentation of collections held by the following museums: The Museum of Palestinian Popular Heritage of the In’ash Al-Usra Society in Al-Bireh, Baituna Al-Talhami Museum of the Arab Women’s Union in Bethlehem, the Birzeit University Museum, the Palestinian Heritage Museum of Dar Al-Tifi Al-Arabi in Jerusalem, and The Palestinian Museum in Birzeit. I am proud to have worked and continue to work with these time-honored institutions that play a significant role in promoting and preserving Palestinian cultural heritage and contributing to the production of knowledge through various methods. Each collection has its own significance and plays a crucial role in preserving Palestinian heritage. This article sheds light on the collections that belong to the two museums for which I currently work.

The first collection tells the story of the first museum dedicated to Palestinian heritage, established during the British Mandate, namely the collection of the Palestine Folk Museum. I consider this collection, currently owned by the Palestinian Heritage Museum of Dar Al-Tifi Al-Arabi in Jerusalem, to be the most important collection of this type. The second important collection contains the historic dresses, thobes, and accessories that arrived at The Palestinian Museum in Birzeit in 2021 to join its growing permanent collection.

The story behind the 1936 establishment of the Palestine Folk Museum and its distinctive collection chronicles not only the history of Palestinian heritage museums but also Palestinian history during the British Mandate and beyond. Moreover, by tracing the history of this museum, we can also find an abundance of information related to Dar Al-Tifi’s role in protecting heritage.

The re-examination and review of documents related to the museum’s collection were carried out prior to the reopening of the Palestinian Heritage Museum at Dar Al-Tifi Al-Arabi in 2012. Our team delved deeply into the history of the museum that was established by Ms. Hind Al-Husseini in 1962, based on the private collection that she had accumulated since she had established Dar Al-Tifi Al-Arabi in 1948. The search unveiled unexpected information about the collections that are the heart and soul of this museum. Archival records under the frequently repeated label “donated to the association” contained a letter by the Folk Museum dating back to December 1969, stating that the museum’s entire collection would be donated to Dar Al-Tifi Al-Arabi. Reviewing the Folk Museum’s original records, original English handwritten lists bearing its name, various archives, such as the Palestine Exploration Fund in London and the archives of newspapers issued during the British Mandate, including the Palestine Post, we found a vast amount of information that reveals the importance of this collection and sets it apart from the collections of other institutions and individuals. These items were gathered in the 1920s and 1930s to form the nucleus of the Palestinian Folk Museum’s collection. They form a real treasure trove, as even the smallest piece is more than one hundred years old.

As relating all details of the collection’s history goes beyond the scope of this article (the research unit of Dar Al-Tifi
is already researching this topic), I will summarize the information as much as possible, yet wish to demonstrate the significant role museums and their collections have played in preserving Palestinian heritage. They serve as a source to gain knowledge, education, compelling arguments based on scientific facts, and tangible evidence, which contributes to heritage protection rather than expressing nostalgia for the past. The professional research and documentation carried out by Dar Al-Tifl and its museum are a good example of such an endeavor. The archives indicate that the first attempt to establish a folklore museum in Palestine dates back to 1923 and originated with the Pro-Jerusalem Society. But the society succeeded only in obtaining some metal and wooden items which they stored at the Jerusalem Citadel. In 1926, the Palestinian Department of Antiquities embarked on a new project that aimed to establish the Museum of National Life. The Mandate government donated 500 pounds to assist with its establishment, but the collectors only succeeded in purchasing a few heritage items that were stored at the department; ten years later, the remainder of the budget, which amounted to 475 pounds, was returned to the government treasury. In 1935, the Association of the Palestine Folk Museum was formed to establish the museum of the same name. In accordance with Article VI of the Ottoman Associations Law, the museum obtained an official license from the Government of Palestine on November 29, 1935. In 1936, the museum was inaugurated in temporary premises: two rooms in Al-Dabbagh neighborhood, next to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The government promised to allocate a more suitable space in the Jerusalem Citadel at a later date. At this stage, Violet Barber, the wife of Neville Barber, played a prominent role in establishing and managing the museum. She was elected its honorary curator until she and her husband left Palestine in June 1939. A farewell party was held to honor her efforts at the museum, and she remained dedicated to the museum and its collection even after she left the country. Her name was mentioned everywhere, even after the collection became part of the Palestinian Heritage Museum at Dar Al-Tifl. Archives and letters indicate that she visited Palestine more than once in attempts to revive the museum and document its collection. In 1982, she celebrated her eightieth birthday at the home of Hind Al-Husseini in Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi.
The museum was not eligible to receive aid from the Association of British Museums on the grounds that Palestine was under the British Mandate. Thus, an appeal for donations was published in The Times on April 9, 1937, and to further encourage the British to donate to the museum, 25 dresses from its valuable collection of clothing were sent to England to be displayed in an exhibition in London in 1938. In 1939, the collection was moved to the headquarters of the former Department of Antiquities in the Way House building in Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and in 1941 to the Jerusalem Citadel under the supervision of the Palestine Folk Museum Society. But another location had to be found when after the 1948 Nakba, the Jerusalem Citadel was used as barracks for the Jordanian army. The collections were boxed and transferred to the Palestinian Archaeological Museum, known today as the Rockefeller Museum, where they were placed under the watchful eye of its curator, Youssef Saad, pending a decision regarding their fate. The Committee of Friends of the Folk Museum in Arab Jerusalem, based in London, remained officially responsible for following up on the collections’ affairs. Violet Barber was authorized to transfer the responsibility for the museum to an official Jordanian authority in return for guarantees: the collections would be re-displayed in an appropriate building within a specific location within 12 months, otherwise the committee would give it to a museum in England. This condition was approved by Folk Museum’s board of trustees during a session held in May 1966, but not met in practice, and the dresses were donated to the British Museum instead.

In 1966, a Jerusalemite board of trustees for the Folk Museum was formed that included Anwar Al-Khatib, governor of Jerusalem as chairman of the council; Rawhi Al-Khatib, mayor of Jerusalem as vice-chairman; Youssef Saad as secretary general; Saadia Al-Tal; Nadia Al-Issa; Najwa Al-Husseini; Nahil Bishara; Asiya Halabi; Jamal Badran; Daoud Talib; Awni Dajani, director of the Department of Antiquities; and Ghaleb Barakat, director of the Department of Tourism. That same year, the London-based Committee of Friends of the Folk Museum in Arab Jerusalem purchased a collection of Palestinian thobes from the Church Missionary Society. They informed Youssef Saad that they intended to add these to the Folk Museum collection at the Palestinian Museum, provided that the museum would exhibit it to the public under suitable conditions and in a suitable place who ensure that the storage and display of the collections are appropriately managed. The presence of such skilled and expert staff at The Palestinian Museum gives its collection

The exhibition of Palestine Peasant Costumes was held at St. Andrew’s Hall, Overend House, Park Road, Birzeit on Tuesday, November 12th, 1968 at 6 p.m.

Part of the items exhibited at the Folk Museum when it was located in Al-Dabbagha neighborhood.

An invitation card for the exhibition that was held in London in 1938.
great value. Although this collection might not be considered the most important collection in Palestine, I believe that it will undoubtedly become one of the most famous Palestinian collections due to the professionalism of its management, as well as the related projects, programs, and activities that are being carried out by The Palestinian Museum.

Born in the Old City of Jerusalem 1970, Baha Jubeh is the museum registrar at The Palestinian Museum, and the curator of the Palestine Heritage Museum at Dar Al-Tifl Association in Jerusalem. Baha holds a BA in history and archaeology from Birzeit University, and an MA in Jerusalem studies from Al-Quds University. Previously, Mr. Jubeh worked as the director of Riwag’s Registry and Archive Unit and director of the Collections and Preservation unit at Yasser Arafat Museum.

(Photo 14) A document confirming the donation of the collections of the Folk Museum to Dar Al-Tifl Al-Arabi in Jerusalem.

The fabric is made of yellow Damascus silk, embroidered with the famous tahreer and qasab embroidery stitch. The chest and side panels are decorated with motifs similar to those of the Bethlehem bridal dress since the women of Bethlehem were the ones commissioned to embroider Jerusalem-area dresses.

From the collection of Maha Saca
raditional 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 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 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 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...
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.

Haidar Hajjeh is one of the recognized experts in Palestine in the field of quality assurance. Currently the general manager of the Palestine Standards Institution (PSI), he is one of the core team members who established PSI in 1996. Mr. Hajjeh holds a bachelor’s degree in electronic engineering and a master’s degree in human resources and institution development. He can be reached at hhajjeh@psi.pna.ps.

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
A Stout Oak Tree Called Samiha

By Saleem Zoughbi

On March 8, International Women’s Day, we commemorate the cultural, political, and socioeconomic achievements of women. In Palestine, we have historical as well as contemporary female personalities to recognize. Today, however, I will talk about an historic tree: an Oak Tree.

This tree, named Samiha, was born in 1923 in Anabta near Tulkarem. She attended primary school in Nablus and Tulkarem until the seventh grade, then enrolled in the Friends Boarding School in Ramallah. She got married at an early age to Salama Khalil, who lovingly supported her to complete her education.

Samiha grew up to become a well-educated woman, a loving mother, a loyal friend, and above all a human spirit grounded in ethical values. Yet, this was not enough for her. She became a pioneer in the Palestinian women’s movement, an activist, fighter, leader, and president of civil associations. In short, she became the “Oak Tree of Palestine.” One of the most loved trees in the world, the oak tree is a symbol of strength, morale, resistance, knowledge, and wisdom. Similarly, towering in strength, Samiha realized the enormous need of the people who had been harmed and driven out of their villages and towns by the Zionist militias and, like the Lady of the Lamp (Florence Nightingale) almost 100 years earlier, she attended to the needs of the refugees displaced by the Nakba in 1948.

Samiha worked tirelessly and comprehensively to collect money, clothes, and food from the women around her to help the needy and began to search for ways to empower women, enabling them to play a major role in mitigating this gross injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people.

In 1955, she founded and led the Arab Women’s Union Association in Al-Bireh. In 1965, she founded the Inash al-Usra (revitalization of the family) Society with the help of a group of female volunteers and remained its president until her death. She also assumed active roles in many national women’s committees, such as the General Union of Palestinian Women, the General Union of Women, the Palestinian National Council, and others.

The 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza precipitated her determination to assume a stronger, more radical, more effective, and sterner role. Just like a small oak seedling grows into a tough and towering tree, Samiha became an icon of national resistance. Providing immediate care, she rushed to the relief of the displaced, especially the people of the villages of Latroun that Israel destroyed immediately after the occupation of the West Bank. She stepped up her struggle to become the only woman in the leadership of the Palestinian National Front in 1973, a political coalition of Palestinian organizations and personalities and partisan trade unions. She was chosen in 1979 as a member of the National Steering Committee, the supreme leadership of the Palestinian people at home.

The Israeli occupation authorities arrested her several times for interrogation and imprisoned her. They also placed her under house arrest in the early eighties for two and a half years and then prevented her from traveling for twelve years.

Samiha was always a passionate advocate of women’s rights. She wanted to communicate a strong message to all women in Palestine when she decided to run for president of Palestine against Yasser Arafat in the 1996 elections even though the odds were clearly against her.

Always maintaining her participation in activities related to culture, heritage, and traditional culture, Samiha also wrote books and started an open journal that continues today, over two decades after her passing, expanded upon regularly by Inash al-Usra. She established a museum for traditional culture and Palestinian heritage.

I had the chance to meet her once. In 1996, when I founded the Bethlehem Academy of Music with the late Samih Murad, we invited her to the opening celebration in the Bethlehem Hotel ballroom. We greatly appreciated her presence and words of encouragement. After signing the guest book, she wished us well: “As long as our society stands on its feet through such organizations as yours, there will be more oak trees blossoming.”

Twenty-three years ago, on February 26, 1999, an epitaph was inscribed on her tombstone that reads: “Samiha Khalil: She fought for the freedom and independence of the Palestinian people.”

However, as she said unequivocally over and over again: “Ancient trees strengthen their stems whenever they are sown and their branches are riven, and the original plants bourgeois and grow stouter as they are separated as their saplings are dispersed. The land that is watered with the blood of innocents will bloom with the most beautiful and thorniest roses.”
Palestinian Embroidery

Traditional Fallahi cross-stitch
By Widad Kamel Kawar and Tania Tamari Nasir
In cooperation with Iman Assali Dajani, Hala Tomeh Ibrahim, and Farideh Saleh Mayer
Printed and published by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, 2019.
Available also at https://bit.ly/3elHjDt

A pioneering endeavor to document and preserve classical Palestinian embroidery and its distinctive motifs, the first edition of this book was published in 1990 with versions in Arabic, English, and German, followed by several editions in Arabic. It was the fruition of five years of diligent preparatory work in which hundreds of sample dresses and accessories from the Widad Kawar collection, representing the five areas of Ramallah, Jaffa, Hebron, Gaza, and Beersheba, were surveyed to design and create representative patterns.

The aim was to preserve these items from the wear and tear of time, protect them from theft and appropriation, and encourage women to embroider and innovate (thereby allowing them to generate an income) by distributing these patterns to individuals and women’s associations, in camps and elsewhere, throughout the (Arab) world.

Poet and artist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, who grew up in Bethlehem and Jerusalem in the 1940s, had this to say about the book, “Palestinians are right to pride themselves on the distinctive embroidery found on the traditional dresses of their women… embroidery is a reflection of a woman’s individual artistic expression, … her humanity and her own life experience… In its entirety, this embroidery symbolizes a joie de vivre…. A joyous exultation in the powerful miracle of resurrection, in nature as in mankind.”

The latest edition of this book was published for the celebration of Jerusalem as the Capital of Islamic Culture in 2019. Because its aim has always been to preserve cultural heritage, it has also been made available for download on the Tiraz Centre website.

Palestinian Costume

By Shelagh Weir
Interlink Books, 2008, paperback with full-color illustrations, 288 pages, $40

The traditional costumes of Palestinian villagers and Bedouin are of exceptional beauty and diversity, especially the festive costumes of the women with their lavish silk embroidery and patchwork and their dramatic headdresses encrusted with coins.

A Treasury of Stitches

Palestinian Embroidery Motifs 1850–1950
By Margarita Skinner, in association with Widad Kamel Kawar

This book surveys male and female fashions from the early nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth and describes the main regional styles of costume with their materials and ornamentation against the background of Palestinian life and culture. The emphasis throughout the book is on the social and symbolic significance of costume, and the final chapters analyze in detail the language of costume in the context of the wedding.

“As a luxurious coffee-table edition, this book is richly illustrated with the most exquisite hand-woven textiles and embroidered dresses, extending over a century of development,” says The Muslim World Book Review. “As shown here, authentic tradition is always colorful and beautiful.”

The book is based on extensive field research that the author has conducted at intervals since 1967 among Palestinians in Israel, the Occupied Territories, and Jordan. The illustrations include studio photographs of magnificent garments in museum collections, archive photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and recent photographs of costumes still made and worn.

Unlike previously published books on Palestinian embroidery, Palestinian Embroidery Motifs 1850–1950: A Treasury of Stitches is the first to document by origin and by name all the different motifs that were used on the old dresses.
Sew to Speak: A Woman’s Journey to Preserving Palestinian Identity
By Siham N. Abu-Ghazaleh
Interlink Books, 2021, hardback with colored illustrations, 288 pages, $29.95

Sew to Speak tells the moving story of one Palestinian woman and her 50-year quest to safeguard Palestinian culture through the preservation and promotion of its national costume. It is also an effort to document the vital contributions of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), a group of dedicated volunteers who have worked tirelessly to preserve Palestinian identity and culture through love, conviction, pride, and hope.

The book describes the rewarding work of GUPW as well as the obstacles faced by the group. It documents its activities in detail as a part of the history of Palestinian women’s struggle for liberation, the role it plays, and the impact of its work in promoting and fulfilling Palestinian rights, including empowering Palestinian women and their families towards self-sufficiency, protecting Palestinian culture and identity from Zionist theft, fundraising for student education and social welfare programs, and much more.

In short, Sew to Speak preserves Palestinian identity from the 1948 occupation to the present. It leaves for future generations an important historical record that chronicles how Palestinians from all walks of life have fought for their humanity, education, identity, and dignity on a daily basis — peacefully, but passionately.

The Journeys of Motifs
From Orient to Occident
By Margarita Skinner
Rimal Books, 2018, 280 pages, €35

This book is divided into two sections. Section One traces the history of pattern books in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century central Europe. The motifs were brought by merchants from Persia, Mesopotamia, and Mamluk Egypt and collected in books that served as instructions and inspiration for lace-making and embroidery, considered appropriate activities for educated ladies besides music, spinning, and languages. The development of printing allowed for the spreading of such knowledge. It furthermore summarizes the accounts of more than 44 early travelers to Palestine from the sixteenth century onward, particularly in search of expressions of their fascination with Palestinian embroidered dresses and headdresses from Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramleh, Nablus, Jaffa, Haifa, Gaza, the Galilee, and more.

The second section gives samples of motifs, tracing them back as far as possible and including the meaning of the patterns. As Palestinian women loved their motifs, the patterns were given names and had specific meanings that are explained and shown with variations in the book. Popular were various bird patterns, S-shapes, stars, and rosettes. Particularly interesting is a motif from Hebron named horn that is traced back to prehistoric times when curved animal horns were styled in the form of a heart. Today, the motifs of the dresses have become expressions of identity and heritage.

Exhaustively researched and beautifully illustrated, the book includes more than 150 pages of embroidered garments and specific motifs, including paintings and sculpture, photography and colored dresses as well as stitch patterns. As the author writes: “If a library is the pharmacy of the mind, Palestinian embroidery is the pharmacy of the soul.”
Threads of Identity
Preserving Palestinian Costume and Heritage
By Widad Kamel Kawar
Rimal Books, 2011; second edition, second print, 2019, 464 pages, €45

This book is a record of the 50 years that Widad Kamel Kawar spent researching, collecting, and preserving a large part of the heritage of Palestine. This endeavor evolved into the Widad Kawar Collection, the largest to date of Palestinian traditional dresses and accessories, comprising more than 3,000 items. Kawar presents the story of how the collection evolved and introduces the life stories of the women who produced the beautiful costumes it contains. For her, each item calls to mind an individual or a place: a wife, a mother, a daughter, a family, a house, a village, a town, a field, a market. Each item was worn on special occasions, happy and sad, that marked the owner’s life. Much of Widad Kawar’s knowledge stems from the personal narratives of these women whose embroidery and dressmaking skills she so admires.

**Threads of Identity** is a history of Palestinian women told through aspects of popular heritage, focusing on traditional dresses but also including textiles and rug weaving, rural and urban customs, jewelry, cuisine, and festivities. Interviews with women who lived through the traumas and changes of the twentieth century are a contribution to oral history, augmenting standard historical accounts. While most writing about the Middle East concentrates on politics, Kawar’s book focuses on the dignity of ordinary people and of women in particular, bridging the gap between the major events of history and everyday life. With this book, Widad Kamel Kawar pays homage to Palestinian women.

---

Traditional Palestinian Costume:
Origins and Evolution
By Hanan Karaman Munayyer
(with a foreword by Hanan Ashrawi)
Interlink Books, 2020, hardback with slip case, full-color photos and maps, 560 pages, $100

The historical and cultural richness of Palestine is reflected visually in its costume and embroidery. Distinguished by boldness of color, richness of pattern, and diversity of style, combined with great needlework skill, these textiles have long played an important role in Palestinian culture and identity.

Based on over 25 years of extensive field research and the culling of museum resources and publications from around the world, this book presents the most exhaustive and up-to-date study of the origins of Palestinian embroidery and costume—from antiquity through medieval Arab textile arts to the present. It documents region by region the evolution of costume and the textile arts in Palestine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is lavishly illustrated with over 500 full-color photographs from the highly praised Munayyer Collection, which includes a whole range of embroidered textiles from traditional costumes and coin headdresses of Palestinian village women to cloaks and jackets worn by village men to belts, sashes, and footwear.

“Traditional Palestinian Costume is a magnificent work of deep love; among the most elegant artistic productions between two covers I have seen,” says Dick Doughty, the managing editor at Aramco World. “Meeting this book is like opening a treasure box.”
Riham Isaac

Three years ago, Riham Isaac embarked on a journey to explore what it means to love: what ideas do we have about it and what is holding her back from it? She mashes up interviews with friends, family, and strangers, combining video, music, performance, and original film to explore the complexity of love and relationships. This inventive new multimedia performance by one of Palestine’s most exciting contemporary artists invites us to think differently about love, shake off stereotypes, free ourselves from old traditions, and think about what we actually want.

Another Lover’s Discourse is Riham’s first solo performance, created and performed by her. This irreverent look at romance will resonate with anyone who has ever wondered: Is this really all there is?

Riham is a theater maker and performance artist who brings together a range of practices, including acting, singing, dancing, and video, and explores new mediums of live performance and multidisciplinary arts. Riham’s work is a playful and profound commentary on a wide range of pressing issues related to gender, politics, and arts. Her practice reflects on what it means to be producing innovative artistic work in Palestine at the moment, exploring themes such as love, women and resistance, public space, multiple selves, and collective imagination from the perspective of a woman and a citizen in occupied Palestine.

Riham has extensive experience leading and creating artistic projects. In 2017, she co-directed The Alternativity with Oscar-winning director Danny Boyle and Banksy, which was featured as a program on BBC2. In 2016, she directed and produced I Am You, a multidisciplinary performance that toured Palestine, Sweden, and Denmark. In 2014, she performed Stone on Road during Qalandiya International Biennale. An MA graduate from Goldsmiths (University of London) in performance, she lectures at Birzeit University and Bard College and is the founder of Art Salon صالون فني, an independent art space in the old city of Beit Sahour.

Another Lover’s Discourse will premiere in Ramallah, Palestine, at Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque on March 24 and 26, 2022. The show was commissioned by Belfast International Arts Festival and will be part of its main festival’s 60th anniversary program in October 2022. Riham is planning to tour with Another Lover’s Discourse across the United Kingdom and potentially participate in festivals or platforms around the world which can be a great home for a new female Palestinian-led artwork that combines theater, dance, video, and music!

“Isaac’s theatrical work is entertaining and humorous and takes audiences on a journey. Her work raises awareness, encourages debate, and tackles issues of social injustice.” Aser Elsaqqa, artistic director, AWAN Festival.

To follow her work, please visit her Instagram page @rihamisaac or her website at www.rihamisaac.com.
Trails of Colours
New Oil Paintings by Ali Qleibo

Trails of Colours explores the painterly presentation of Jerusalem and the Palestinian rural landscape. The collection features approximately 25 oil paintings by the veteran Jerusalem artist Ali Qleibo. The exhibition is organized by the French Cultural Center and will be on view at Chateaubriand Art Gallery on Salah El Din Street in Jerusalem from March 10 through March 23, 2022.

In Trails of Colours, artist, anthropologist, and renowned author Ali Qleibo argues that the artist’s principal goal should be “truth to nature.” For the artist, this “truth” is more than just a technical representation of the natural world on canvas. Rather, he believes that art should depict the perceived reality as humanity experiences it. In his oil works, Qleibo depicts the trees, mountains, sky, and stones in his landscapes as ethereal and majestic—but also as overwhelming and, at times, mysterious. The artist believes that in depicting landscape in a manner that elicits sensations of mystical beauty, he is able to render an authentic representation of the sublime, evoking feelings of awe and human transcendence.

Qleibo notes that “the sense of sight mediates our relationship with the plastic arts, be it in the form of sculpture, architecture, or painting. Neither words, nor singing, nor dancing can express the visual tactile experience and nuances of color, texture, and rhythm.” He elaborates, “We are both allured and rendered speechless, overwhelmed by the tactile visual experience of color.”

Qleibo further explains: “The painterly artwork is a poetic narrative in color whose discursive semiology and syntax find expression in color and form. Trails of Colours invites the viewer to a vista in which color, line, lighting, and shading are underscored. Time plays an important role in reading the artwork. Each painting may be compared to a musical score composed of movements with different moods, each of which rich with its own separate color hues and values, its own pitch, texture, and cadence, that dovetail with each other, bound by a thematic leitmotif that imparts the painterly composition its coherence.”

“My paintings express a unity of vision,” Qleibo continues. “Each artwork has its details and its own distinctive nuances, its points of lyrical harmony and of dissonant cacophony. Each painting encapsulates a set of challenges and corresponding solutions in which sheer coincidence determines the final image... In the creative process the artist unleashes the intellectual, psychological, and emotional convulsions. In the elusive process of self-discovery, the artwork assumes the function of transcendence, personal expression, and identity. In these stressful times, feelings of melancholic nostalgia imbue my paintings with a wistful romantic feel, a reflection of the sad turbulences Jerusalem experiences and my sense of exile.”

The gallery is open Monday through Thursday, and Saturday: 10:00 to 18:00; closed Sunday and Friday.
**BETHLEHEM**

**CHILDREN’S EVENTS**
Fridays 4, 11, 18, 25
9:00–12:00 Kids club for children between the ages of 5 and 12, encompassing various activities of storytelling, film screening, art and crafts, and music. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**THEATER**
Monday 14
15:00 No Cheri stand-up comedy show organized by Al-Harah Theater and performed by the blind artist Shareehan Hadweh. President Putin Palestinian Organization for Culture and Economy.

Wednesday 16
15:00 Kharareef, a play in Arabic for adults, is organized by Al-Harah Theater and directed by Mohammad Eid. President Putin Palestinian Organization for Culture and Economy.

**BIRZEIT**

**EXHIBITIONS**
Tuesday 8
9:00–19:00 Night at the Museum extends the visiting hours of the exhibition A People by the Sea: Narratives of the Palestinian Coast and the museum’s general facilities. The Palestinian Museum.

**JENIN**

**CONCERTS**
Saturday 18
18:00 A concert by the American contrabass musician Dobbs, who has more than 30 years of experience performing chamber music, and who offers workshops to and performs concerts with Al Kamandjati Association students. Al Kamandjati Center.

Tuesday 22
18:00 ACP MUSIC tour in Palestine performed by Al Kamandjati Association musicians and Spanish musicians as part of the Spanish Foundation of Catalonia (ACP), which aims to increase awareness and commitment to advocacy rights and freedoms of peoples among Catalan citizens in Spain and among the Palestinian people. Al Kamandjati Center.

**THEATER**
Tuesday 1
16:30 Kharareef, a play in Arabic for adults, is organized by Al-Harah Theater and directed by Mohammad Eid. The Freedom Theater.

**RAMALLAH**

**BOOK LAUNCHES**
Sunday 27
19:00 A book launch to celebrate Masterpieces from the Arab World and the East (five parts) and the Arabic Oud Methods (four parts), musical books that contain accurate transcriptions of a selection of classical works from the history of Arabic and Oriental song and music, prepared by the Palestinian musician Khaled Sadouq, and produced by Al Kamandjati Association. Mahmoud Darwish Theater.

**CONCERTS**
Wednesday 2, 6
18:00 Piano and guitar concert to highlight student talents and provide a means for them to express themselves in an innovative atmosphere. Al Kamandjati Center.

Sunday 13
17:30 Spring concert organized by Al Kamandjati Association to highlight its students’ talents and provide a means for them to express themselves in an innovative atmosphere. Al Kamandjati Center. Women’s Programs Center, Qalandiya Refugee Camp.

Monday 14
17:30 Spring concert organized by Al Kamandjati Association to highlight its students’ talents and provide a means for them to express themselves in an innovative atmosphere. Al Kamandjati Center. Palestinian Child Center, Jalazon Refugee Camp.

Wednesday 16
18:00 A concert by the American contrabass musician Dobbs, who has more than 30 years of experience performing chamber music, and who offers workshops to and performs concerts with Al Kamandjati Association students. Al Kamandjati Center, Bani Zeid.

**THURSDAY**

Thursday 24
17:30 A concert by the American contrabass musician Dobbs, who has more than 30 years of experience performing chamber music, and who offers workshops to and performs concerts with Al Kamandjati Association students. Women’s Programs Center, Qalandiya Refugee Camp.

Saturday 26
19:00 Musical concert organized by Al Kamandjati Association in cooperation with The Cancer Center. Movenpick Hotel.

**EXHIBITIONS**
Wednesday 9
17:00 The opening of the exhibition And We Still Follow Its Path, organized by Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center and Palestinian Art Court - al Hoash. The exhibition encompasses 10 artistic projects by 13 artists from all over Palestine, presenting personal and collective narratives centered on Jerusalem through their featured works that challenge colonial narratives and bring about multi-layered stories of personal intimacies, nostalgic imaginaries, and local narratives. The exhibition is curated by Rawan Sharaf and includes interactive participatory works that invite the audience into becoming active contributors to the process of constructing the city’s narratives. The exhibition runs till May 9, 2022, from Sunday to Thursday, 10:00–17:00. Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center.
I’d like to believe that, at least.

Regarding COVID-19, it’s as if the world has finally decided to really move on and simply live with it. Of course, right after that comes the Russian military operation in Ukraine. I expected that, under the pretext of “saving Ukraine,” the West would go all out against Russia, rightly foreseeing the imminent threat to the current world order. In all honesty, though, as much as I personally would like to see a change in how the world is run, it looks like it’s going to stay the same, for now at least. In all likelihood, it’ll be the same powerful countries bullying the weaker ones. The same economic sanctions imposed on countries that are not submissive to the current world order. The same bombings under ridiculous pretexts in order to break these countries or to preposterously “bring” them democracy. The same reality of sitting idly by while millions starve to death because their countries’ leaders are rebellious and do not belong to a certain camp. The same hypocrisy and racism that differentiate between blue-eyed, blond, Christian refugees and darker-skinned, Muslim refugees. The list, unfortunately, is long. Do I have a guarantee that a new world order would be more fair and human? I most definitely do not, but I’m willing to take my chances.

The almond trees are now in full bloom in Palestine and they’re gorgeous. International Women’s Day is at the door, and the first day of the spring season (in our hemisphere) is approaching. With the nightmare of the pandemic hopefully behind us, and praying that the Russian escapade (I know many will object to using this word!) will end soon, I truly hope that this spring will herald a new beginning. Maybe with all the bad things that have happened, leaders will finally realize that, indeed, we do not live in a fair world and that people in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Donbass, China, and Chad deserve more.

I can’t end without a warning, though. Seeing how Russia is being marginalized and pushed to the wall, and knowing the mentality of Russian leaders which is interwoven with pride, I wouldn’t be surprised if things do escalate, and rapidly. It is said that the clash is inevitable. The doomsday scenario of WWII is no longer a remote possibility. We are talking about a country that is armed to the teeth with nukes, after all. But let’s focus on spring, shall we?

Long live Palestine!
Pay for your purchases with one touch on your mobile by using a QR code.

Download the app for free without visiting our branches.