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PALESTINIAN COSTUME

A STUDY OF EMBROIDERY AND COLOUR OF THE
PALESTINIAN COSTUME.

SINEAD EGAN

DEPARTMENT OF FASHION AND TEXTILES

EMBROIDERY.

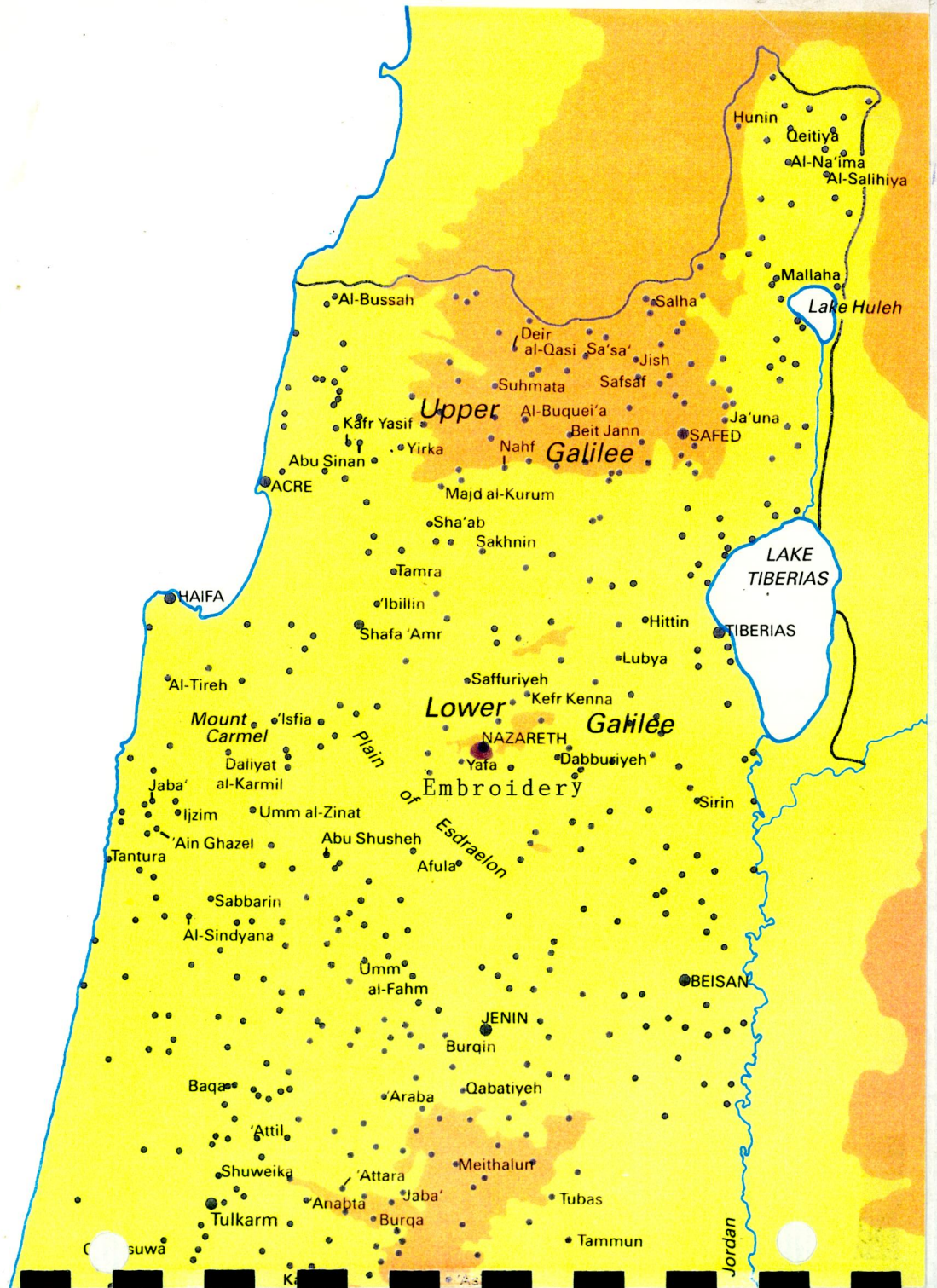
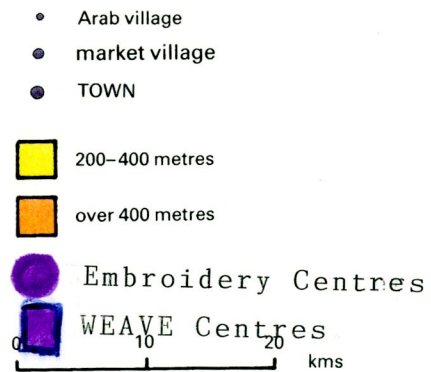
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PALESTINE

before 1948

showing Arab villages



Palestine, 1918-1948.

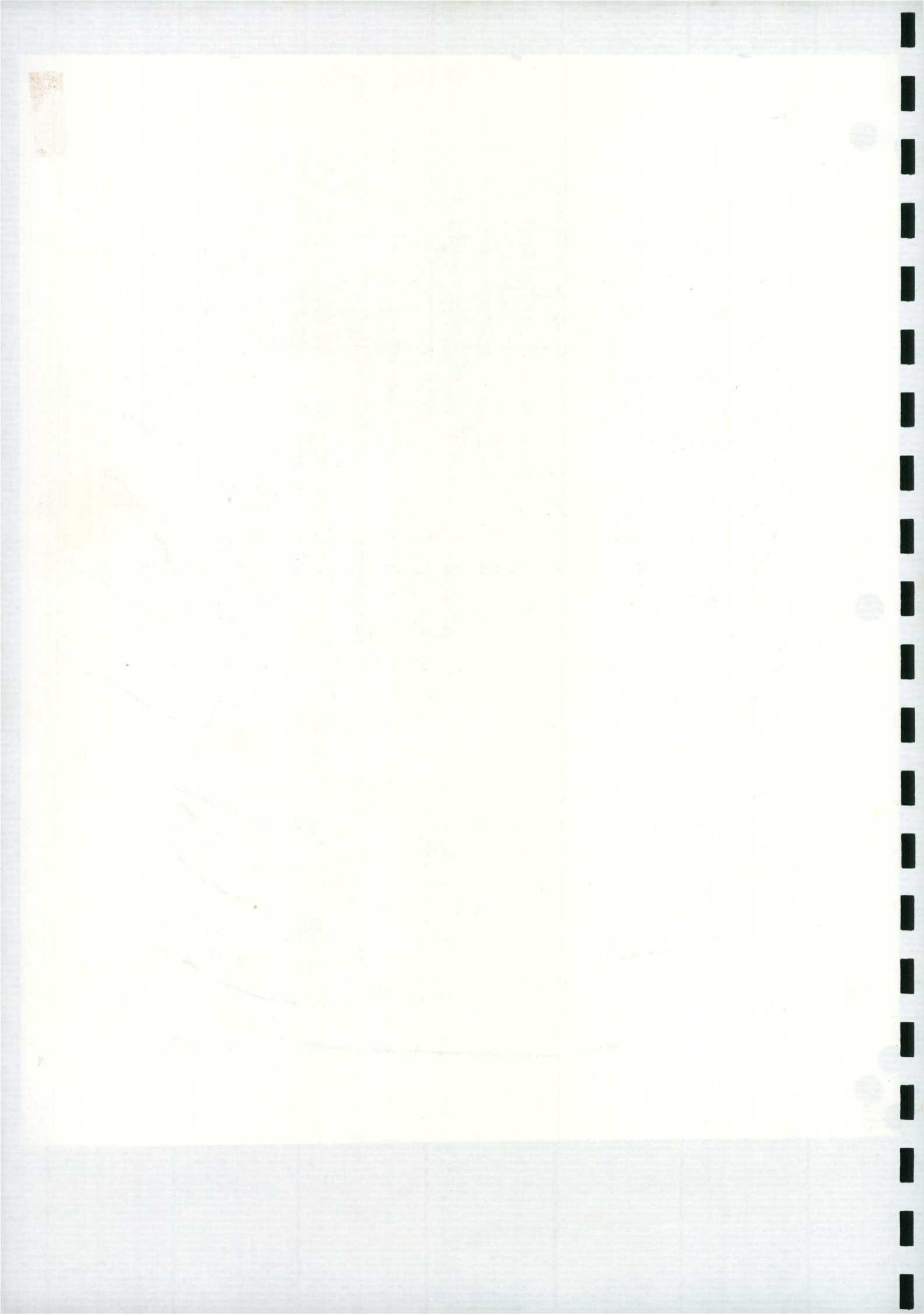


MEDITERRANEAN S

DEAD SEA

Negev Desert

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INTRODUCTION

The study of Palestinian Costume is a complex and captivating one. It is fascinating to explore the relationship between the social, political, religious and historical effects on the State of Palestine and how these influences are reflected in Palestinian costume. The geographical position of Palestine has also led to outside influences, because of its proximity to Europe and Africa. There were also well developed lines of communication between these continents in trading and religious pilgrimages, which all helped to create a rich and diverse costume. Traditionally embroidery is a female artistic talent. In Palestine this art has survived through wars and conquests, but only to survive in the small Arab villages up to the middle of this century. Despite the upsets and dislocation of the Palestinian women the traditions live on in the core of the talents of the Palestinian women today.

Embroidery was seen as a major form of visual expression. Countless women have passed on their knowledge and skills of embroidery, quilting, patchwork and designs, down through the generations of younger women. Each item of embroidery was a testament to their lives, a symbol of their families status in the towns and villages of Palestine. A family's social status was conveyed in the quality of fabrics used in the dress. The wealthier the family the more expensive the fabrics used. But more importantly, the quality of embroidery was an indication of a woman's personal prestige.

Young girls were introduced to needlecraft at a very early age, perhaps as young as six or seven years old.

The Palestinian Arabs are the descendants of people who have been living in this region since Antiquity. The majority of people were Muslims and about 10% are Christian, but they still followed the same cultures as the majority, the muslims. Many Palestinians live in towns now, but before 1948 the majority were peasant farmers. They lived in many villages scattered over the hills and costal plain. 1918 marked the end of Ottoman Turkish rule, Palestine then came under British rule. After the British left in 1948 Israel was established in the western area of Palestine. Eastern Palestine (now known as the West Bank, because it is west of the River Jordan) came under Jordan Rule. A narrow band of land in Southwest Palestine, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian rule. The 6 day war in 1967, between Israel and the Arab States, led to Israel taking the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and this area has since been under Israeli rule. Prior to 1948 the Arab population depended on agriculture and lived in small villages scattered all over Palestine and it was in these villages that the art of embroidery developed.

80% of the population worked on the land, the men working in the fields, the women helping, as well as working on their embroidery. The rest of the Arab population mostly lived in towns i.e. Jaffa, Hebron, Nazareth, Ramallah and Jerusalem. It was in these towns and villages, that the art of embroidery flourished, and spread in to the small villages and to the Bedouin community.

One of the great advantages of embroidery is that, it is portable and easy to carry around - all that is needed is some string, a needle and fabric. Whenever a woman had a spare minute, whether in the fields or waiting at the water well, she would do a few embroidery stitches on her embroidery piece. In the evenings, after their day's work, women would gather together on a doorstep, they would discuss the village news, while working away on their embroidery. They exchanged stitches, motifs and patterns. This was a way of socialising and teaching young girls the skill, art and knowledge of Palestinian embroidery.

In the following chapters I encompass the richness and diversity of the Palestinian costume and embroidery. In chapter 1., I discuss the impact of embroidery on the lives of the Palestinian people. It shows how embroidery was a lifeline of communication between generation to generation. The receiving of skills from mother to the daughter, or from the experience and skills of the village elders to the young village girls. I also emphasise the importance of embroidery on the local economy. After discussing womens' costume, I briefly look at mens' costume, because it has little reference to embroidery. There is a short reference to headwear of both men and women and its importance to the social structure of the costume. Stitches, patterns, and motifs, with plenty of colourful examples are outlined in Chapter 2. I will relate the striking aspect in the way that colour, design and pattern blend together to give Palestinian costume its expression of national identity.

In Chapter 3 I discuss how getting married was a most important occasion in a woman's life, and how the costumes that the bride made and wore played a major role in marking the event. I also outline the symbolism in the colour of the costumes, for example, how the colour white reflects a woman's state between one social status and another, and how red is a sign of sexual maturity. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the shape of the Palestinian dress, and its association and influences from other countries and cultures. Weave, textiles and dyes are discussed in Chapter 5. The influence of other cultures and the advance of modern technology changed the face of embroidery after the British Mandate because of the new trading links between Europe and the East.

With these changes a major source of employment for Palestinian men, who cultivated the cotton, as well as the indigo, madder, kerkes and cochineal for the dyes, began to decline rapidly. Cheaper imports of fabrics from Europe and Asia meant the collapse of the once thriving weave industry, in Mejdal and Gaza.

In the conclusion, I finish with a description of the embroidery community as it is today. Its transition from the local villages to the refugee camps, where the enjoyment of personal achievement, are lost to a commercial tourist trade.

CHAPTER ONE

EMBROIDERY AND COSTUME IN PALESTINE

Embroidery in each region of Palestine is distinctive and diverse from one another, which makes for an opulent range of costumes. In this chapter I will look at the styles and colours of the regional dress, and how embroidery played a large part in the society of Palestine, not only socially but economically and in later years politically. Embroidery was taught at an early age and was nurtured until the woman was married, she was then expected to carry on the tradition herself and teach her own daughters. For some women it was an ideal way of making a living, and the skills required were very particular, and needed a great imagination and technical skill. This chapter will study mens' costume, and the importance of head wear in the social structure of the Palestinian costume.

The ornate and very varied embroidery which adorned female clothing is most impressive. The sewing and decorating of Palestinian womens' traditional costumes are totally female enterprises. Only women acquire the knowledge and skills required and it is only women's hand-work that is involved. It is women who possess the unique costume language - such as the symbolism of patterns, embroidery stitches, motifs, colour combinations etc. Women wore a long dress, known as a thob, and in some areas large baggy pants were worn, tied with a belt, and a head-veil was always worn. Each area or region - Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and the Hebron Region had its own distinctive style of costume and colour. Jerusalem was the religious centre in Palestine

and many pilgrims visited there. The poorer visitors wrapped themselves in their travelling rugs, while the women of Bethany wore long blue or white gowns, with brightly coloured scarves. The women from Bethlehem wore crimson and yellow striped gowns, with long white veils. The Ramallah thob, with its cross-stitch embroidery, was very distinctive, by its neat and restrained patterns. It is probable that the women of Ramallah copied motifs from the small villages around the Ramallah region, but they became masters of the embroidery craft themselves, and ended up influencing other regions with the excellence of their work.

Although embroidery was a women's occupation it has played an important part in Palestine society, it involved a large amount of time, labour and money and has made a significant contribution to the local economy of Palestine. It was a way of educating girls in female values and socialising them for their roles as adult women. Dress styles, patterning and embroidery motifs required detailed knowledge. To share the skill, art and knowhow with other women, gave a sense of belonging and sisterhood.

In the western culture particularly in Victorian England, such practices as embroidery lessons were taught as a means of educating women to retain their delicate feminine nature. Embroidery skills were passed on from mother to daughter, like they did in Palestine, but with much more restrictive and formal guidelines. Palestine embroidery was taught as a form of pleasure and personal achievement, and as a pastime it was more sociable. In Victorian times in England,

some women perceived embroidery to be a form of control and received little enjoyment from it. Victorian women embroidered cushion covers and fire screen pictures, at the same time in Palestine women were embroidering more functional items like their wedding dresses.

Long before girls started school, they learned to embroider at a very early age, perhaps six or seven years old. Girls were given scraps of material to start their stitching on, then they progressed to samplers, to work on. After their days work, the older women would gather outside their houses, to sit and talk and work on their embroidery. They helped the young girls with their first stitches - the cross-stitch, and then a few simple motifs. By the age of ten, a young girl would have a repertoire of samplers of village stitches and patterns. By the time of her wedding, she was expected to have finished her bridal dress, veils, cushion covers and pillow cases, plus other household items. Her wedding trousseau was the most important item she made. (See Fig.2). Using her mother as a guage of her size, she would design the length and size of her dress panels. These were not sewn together until her wedding was arranged. It was then passed on to a dressmaker to be fitted and altered. It was the bridegroom who paid for the completion of the dress. If he was wealthy, and could afford it, silk was added in patchwork, to enhance the dress and reflected his social standing. Women took great pride in their trousseaus, which sometimes contained up to ten or twelve outfits. They were shown to other women for inspection and admiration. Even after their marriage, women still continued to embroider articles for the home, or replace old dresses or those gone

out of fashion. The Palestinian women never threw out their embroidery, as a dress got old or worn, the embroidery was painstakingly taken off and sewn on a new dress or put onto cushion covers or pillow cases. All embroidery was recycled. Sometimes a new bride found it difficult moving into a new village. The elders of the village could be critical of her work, but if her trousseau was lavish and well-executed and contained some interesting new stitches and motifs, her prestige and status was enhanced among the elders, they were even eager to learn new patterns and designs from the Bride. It was important to have a good repertoire of embroideries, it made the transition from one village to the new village easier.

Not all Palestine women made and embroidered their own dresses. Some women were too busy doing agriculture work, to embroider, while others were from wealthy families and could afford to hire someone else to make their clothing for them. The number of dresses required for a trousseau or the lack of time before a wedding, would necessitate the ordering of outfits from other people. Many women were professional embroiderists, the only occupation appropriate for a woman at that time. These women were usually widows, with no fixed income or land to live off. Embroidery was their only source of income. A good embroideress would be commissioned to make several dresses a year. Usually the request would come from the young women from the community, as the embroideress would be familiar with the local motifs and colours.

At the opposite end of the social scale, many wealthy village women, owing to their social status had much leisure time so they too involved themselves in professional embroidery, but only as a means of occupying their time. Or these women would start a house of embroidery, this would have several women working on wedding trousseaus, wealthier women would be able to pay their wages. These houses were usually in the big towns and cities.

Some towns and villages such as Ramallah and Bethlehem had large Christian populations which attracted mission schools. One result was a rising of educational levels and ultimately of living standards. Bethlehem and other Christian sites also benefited economically from the influx of pilgrims and tourists. These towns became the fashion centres of Palestine and other villages strove to buy and copy their distinctive styles of dresses and embroidery. The luxurious couched embroidery of Bethlehem and neighbouring villages, using gold and silver cord, was particularly popular.

The demand for fashionable couched embroidery from Bethlehem and neighbouring villages came mainly from brides to be. Bridegrooms were obliged to contribute garments to their brides' trousseau, and most brides insisted on Bethlehem style embroidered panels to add to their locally made dresses. As a result, there were many commercial embroiderers in Bethlehem. As I mentioned above, many women had household and family responsibilities, others worked in the fields and had little spare time for embroidery. Others lacked the skill of embroidery - embroidery was like a language - some women just could not learn it.

Men's clothing in Palestine was more or less the same throughout most of the Middle East, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, Townspeople, Peasants and Bedoins wore clothes that differed slightly, but within each category, the rich and poor wore the same clothing, the difference was in the material, the decoration and the fashion in which the men wore the clothes. The basic male outfit consisted of a tunic or long shirt (thob), an overgarment (jibbeh) usually made of broadcloth and lined with sheepskin, and a turban. Village men wore a form of baggy pants (sirwal), these pants were usually in white, blue or black, wide at the waist and tight fitting on the lower leg. They were tied at the waist by a drawstring. Men's head wear was used as an indication, showing if the man was a villager, bedouin or townsman. The turban was a cloth wrapped several times around the head and was very common among peasants. The city gentlemen wore headwear of fine material, wrapped in the same manner as a turban, known as a tarbush.

Men did not usually wear embroidered items. Women did embroider special belts for their husbands and older sons, decorated with simple motifs. Men considered these belts to be special and were only worn on festive occasions and in Mosques. Women only used simple motifs in these belts because they did not wear them and they did not use them to express themselves as they did with the embroidery motifs in their wedding dresses.

To conform to the accepted code of modesty, when Palestinian women reached marriageable age, they covered their heads in public. Headwear usually consisted of a cap or bonnet-style headdress and a veil or scarf worn over the top. See Fig.7.

These as with other articles of the woman's costume, varied regionally. As part of her wedding costume, a woman wore an elaborate headdress called a money-hat, "Shatweh", this was decorated with gold and silver coins (see Fig.3). These coins came from her 'bride price', and money given by the groom to the bride's father. In the Hebron Hills women wear a distinctive everyday headdress. This is a heavily embroidered circular cap gathered into a point at the crown, padded with wool and lined, it is decorated with large coins. The women in Ramallah wear a headdress common in central Palestine, it is a rectangular piece of material with flaps and two bands attached to the back and sides, the women gather the material at the back to make it into a bonnet (see Fig.7). The Ramallah headdress have a padded roll across the top of the headdress to which a row of silver coins are attached. A similar horse-shoe shaped roll is also found on the hats and headdresses from Galilee. Another distinctive headdress is that of Bethlehem. It resembles in shape the man's hat, the 'tarbush'. It is made of broadcloth, stiffened and shaped by padding, the front is covered with rows of coins, beads and coral (see Fig.4). Some women wore just a veil while others wore veils and the tall hats. Like all parts of the women's wardrobe, the veil differed regionally. Veils are usually flat rectangular pieces of fabric, woven in narrow strips about 30 centimeters wide and one meter long. Two or three of these strips were sewn together to form the scarf shape. Women from Nazareth had tassels at the end of their scarves and relied on a woven pattern to give the veil some decoration. In Ramallah women embroidered their scarves with strong motifs and colour was very vivid. (See Fig.5 and 5A)

Men were immediately recognised as townsmen, villagers or bedouin, by the headwear that they wore. Headwear also declared the religious affiliation, politics and status of the men. The headwear of the villagers comprised of several layers, first there was a 'sweat-cap' made of white cotton, then there was a white felt cap, followed by a red felt hat, a 'tarbush', and ultimately a black or dark blue tassel, in cotton or silk attached to the crown.

The turban 'laffeh' was worn only by adult men, it was made from silk and cotton from Syria, it was either checked or striped in a variety of colours. A plain white cloth was wrapped around a red felt hat 'tarbush'. This made the turban look bulkier, (wide bulky turbans signified social importance) finally a 'laffeh' was wound around the white cloth, this covered the end of the tassel. Men often carried money and other small items in the folds of their turbans. As mentioned above, turbans proclaimed the politics, wealth and religion of men. Smooth plain white turbans signified superior holiness and incorruptability, it was usually worn by Muslim scholars. Muslim and Christian villagers in the Bethlehem wore an orange/yellow turban on a red 'tarbush'. A green turban on a red 'tarbush' was worn by Sufti religious orders. Lower-class urban workers such as porters and labourers wore a yellow/orange turban on a felt cap. On the day of his circumcision, one of the most important days of his life, a small boy wore an ornamental 'tarbush', it was made and embroidered by his mother. The whole village came out to pay their respects to the boy and his family, on his most important day.

The history and culture of embroidery is deep-rooted in the lives of all Palestinian women, the skills of embroidery are taught at a very early age, and passed on from generation to generation. Colour symbolism is also embedded in Palestinian culture, men were recognised as Townspeople, Peasants or Bedouins by the colours and style of their headwear. The women of Bethany, Bethlehem, Hebron Region and Ramallah were distinctive by their embroidery patterns, motifs and colour of their dresses, the type of embroidery used on their dresses, which are outlined in the next chapter.



Fig. 2

This is a studio portrait of a young girl from Southern Palestine. Her dress is typical of the 1920's. The young girl is dressed like a bride, and comes from a wealthy family, due to the amount of coins on her headdress, and the quality of the embroidery on her jacket and headveil.

Her veil is cotton, with silk embroidery, in stem-stitch and running-stitch.

Her dress was made of green and red taffeta, with an embroidered chest panel. The jacket is embroidered with large floral patterns, with gold cord couching in a wreath pattern.

Her headdress has many gold, silver and copper coins, with pendant chains and coins - it was probably part of her brideprice.





Fig. 3

A headdress from the Bethlehem region, 1920. It was made of red broadcloth, with gold cord couching and satin-stitch embroidery. The front was covered with brass coins, with pendant metal chains, ornaments and coins.

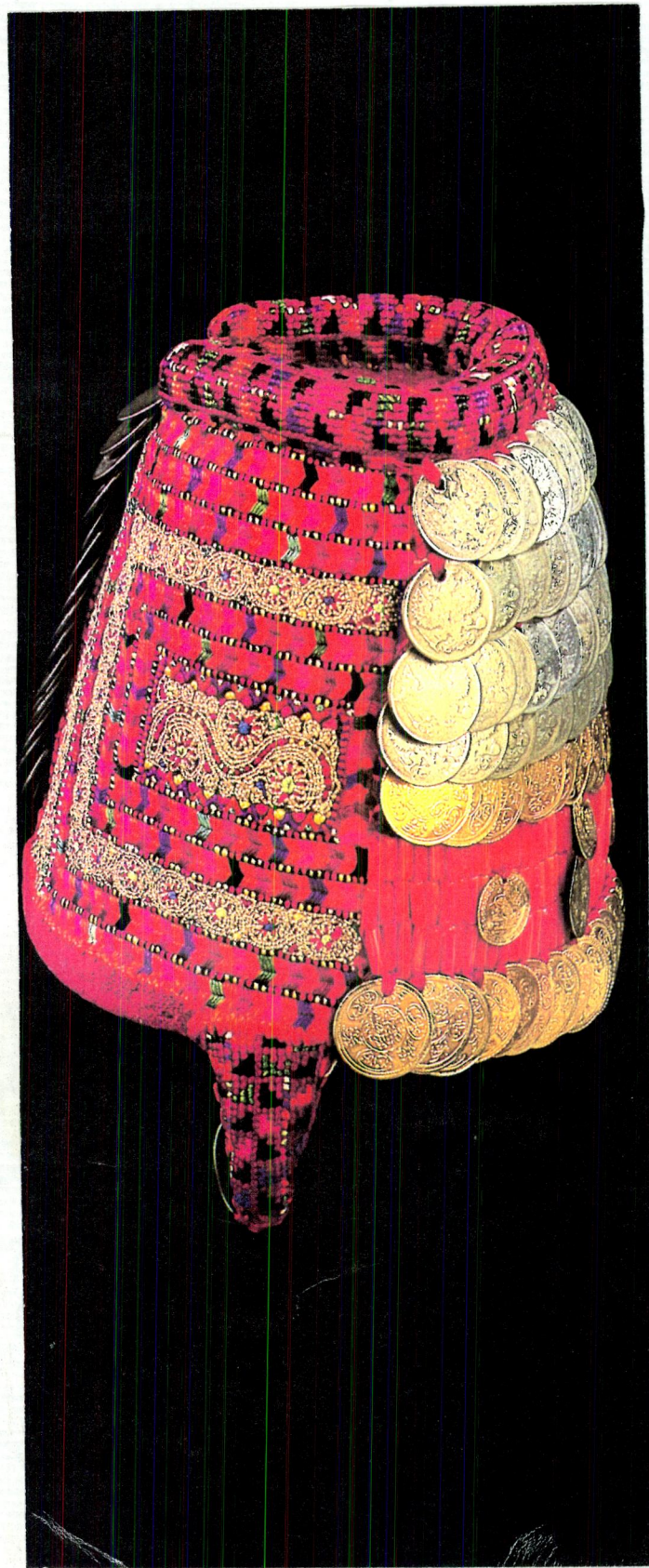


Fig. 4

A headdress from Bethlehem, 1930, notice the change in headdress from 1920, this is tall and narrow, the sides are embroidered in herringbone stitch and gold couching, the crown is embroidered in cross-stitch. There are silver and gold coins attached to the front.

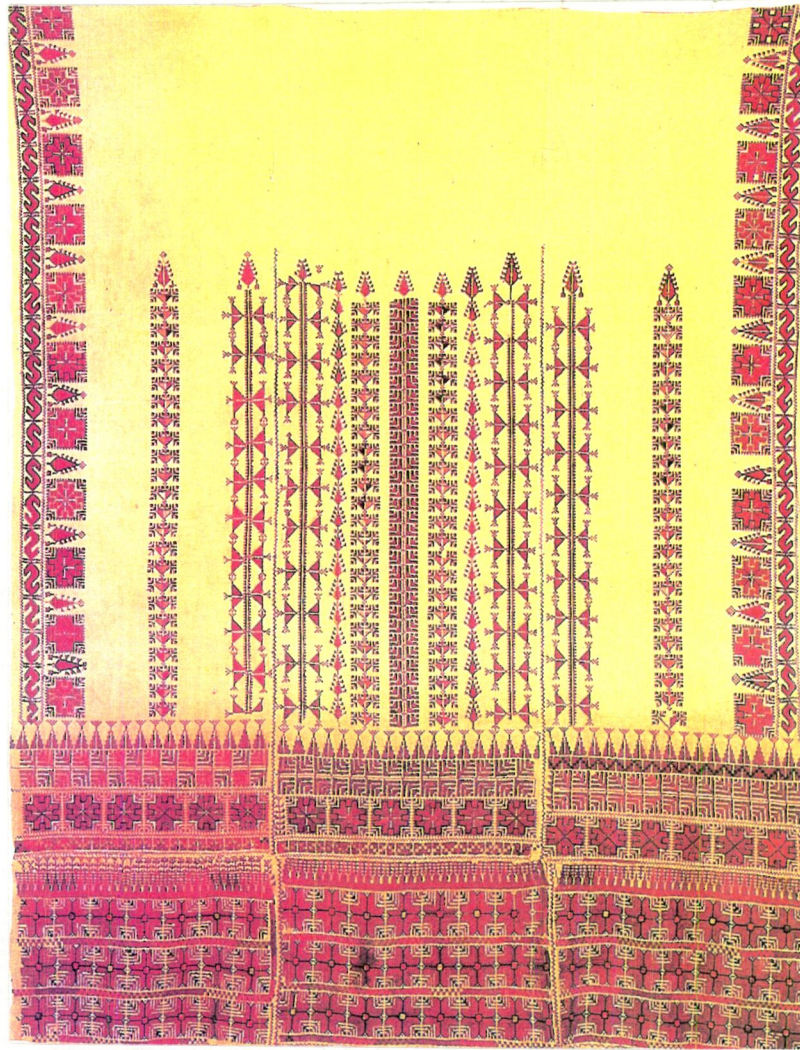


Fig. 5 A veil from the Hebron Region, made of cotton, with cross-stitch embroidery, in 'cypress tree', 'camels eyes', 'leech and roses', and rows of 'branches' designs. A wonderful mix of vertical and horizontal design.



Fig. 6 A woman from Ramallah region, with a large halo of coins on her headdress. This was her brideprice. This was taken during the Mandate, 1928.

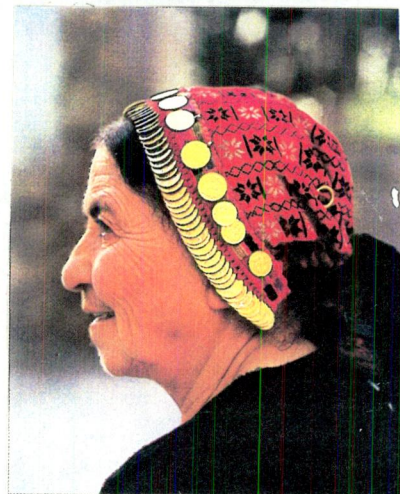


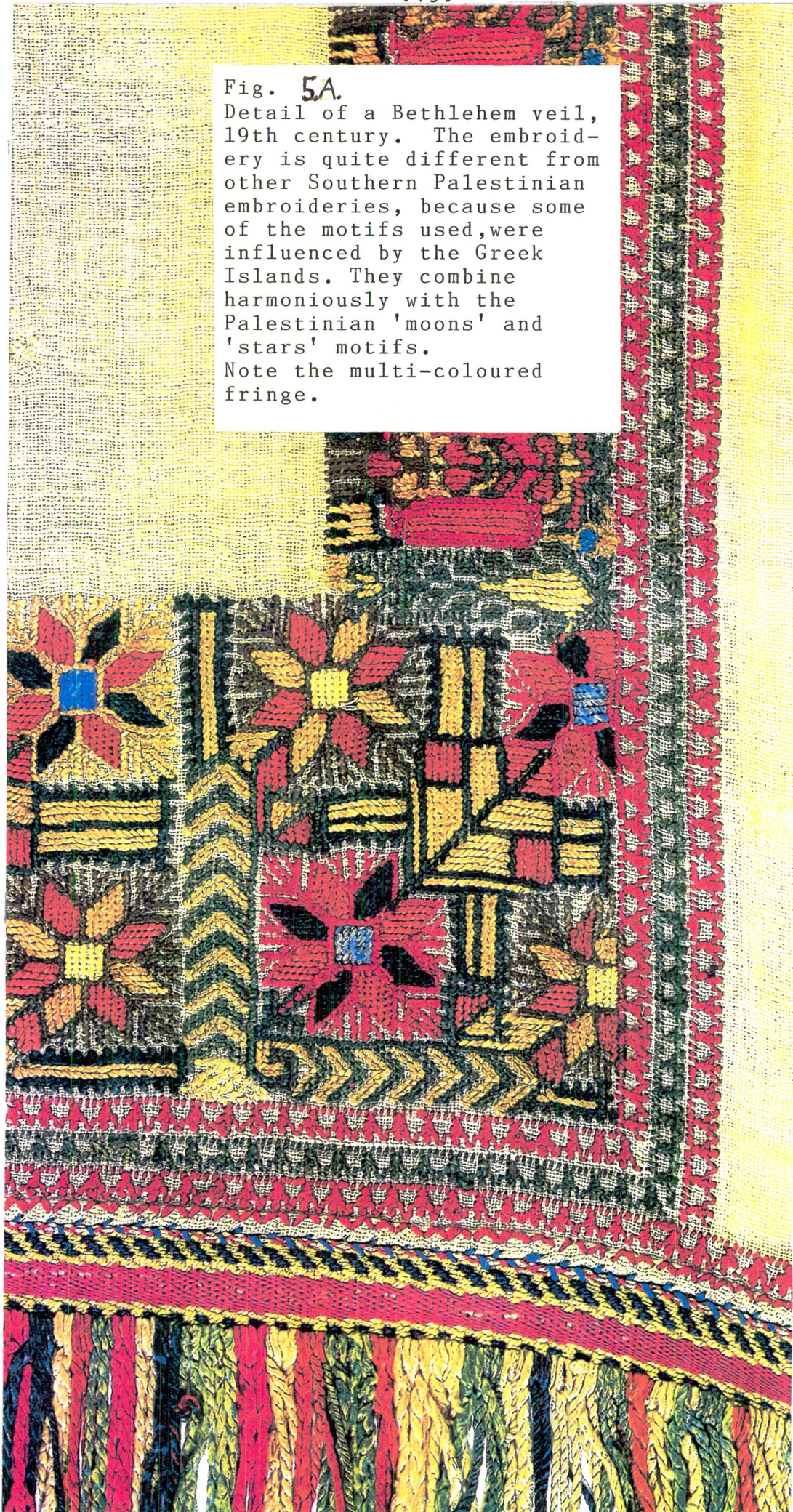
Fig. 7 An older Palestinian woman, with a cloth skull-cap, with a flap behind, The front is covered with coins. The crown is embroidered with cross-stitch. Taken in 1971, in a refugee-camp.



COMPTON



Fig. 5A.
Detail of a Bethlehem veil,
19th century. The embroi-
dery is quite different from
other Southern Palestinian
embroideries, because some
of the motifs used, were
influenced by the Greek
Islands. They combine
harmoniously with the
Palestinian 'moons' and
'stars' motifs.
Note the multi-coloured
fringe.





CHAPTER TWO

STITCHES, PATTERNS AND MOTIFS IN PALESTINIAN EMBROIDERY.

It is often said by the people of Palestine that the motifs used in a design can be read like a language, and each form of pattern design is unique to each village. The 'vocabulary' is the decoration and how it is assembled is the 'grammar'. In order to look at this 'language', one has to take a closer look at the stitches and the motifs that create the visual imagery. Patterns, include patterns of colour as well as design. Motifs and patterns are a blend of each other and some technical patterns require certain stitches to make them look effective and visually pleasing. In this chapter I look at the history of the motifs and how embroidery and patterns are linked with superstition and religion.

CHAPTER TWO

EMBROIDERY STITCHES

The most commonly used stitch in Palestinian embroidery is the cross-stitch, also called 'the village stitch' (See Fig.8). The other most highly valued embroidery technique is couching, in which the thread or cord is laid on the fabric in a design and then attached by oversewing. The Herringbone stitch, sometimes called the fishbone stitch - the Islamic term was 'sabaleh', or "ears of corn"; this stitch was used for joining seams, framing hems and applique panels. It was also used to work leaf shapes, where all the stitches graduated. When this stitch was used for borders or geometric designs, the stitches were worked in equal lengths. The buttonhole, 'binding stitch' (habkeh), was used for edges, borders and outlines around neck and sleeves as well as for filling in areas or shapes. The zig-zag, the 'chick's eye', (owaynet al-sus) was used as edging stitch to incorporate applique patches. It is interesting to note that the women chose names for the motifs from common agriculture terms, or from the every day object they found around them in their homes.

The satin stitch, 'tifsireh', plain and padded, lends itself to any shape and could be worked in one colour, or in different colour shades. Satis stitches lie close together and are not too long or too short. A softer effect was obtained by going over the same area in an opposite direction. The couching stitch was used to outline borders or as a filling stitch. The basic couching stitch was small straight stitches which tack down longer threads in single or multiple strands. (See Fig.29).

The Palestinian cross-stitch was the most popular of all stitches used to embellish dresses. The cross-stitch spans two weft and two warp threads of the fabric, so an open-weave fabric was essential. Embroideresses sometimes alternated the direction of their stitches to give a special effect, when they changed colours and motifs, this caused the light to catch the colours, in different directions and gave an especially beautiful effect. When there were large areas of solid embroidery, such as chest panels and side panels of dresses, this was specially effective. The size of the stitch also indicated the region where the dress was made. (See Fig. 20).

In the Hebron and Ramallah regions, the stitches were particularly small and neat, this made their work greatly admired, partly because it took longer to stitch and partly because the tiny neat stitches were considered more beautiful. Solid embroidery required more time and labour and was highly valued. If you were to ask a Palestinian woman what she regarded as to what the best stitches and patterns were, she would answer, that those on her trousseau were the best. Each village and town had their own style, none better than the other, only different.

The Bedouins, a nomadic tribe that travelled around Palestine, had a very different technique, compared to that of the village people. The pattern was created by leaving the spaces with no embroidery in them to create the pattern. While in the villages the opposite was the case. Stitches were used to create the design. (See Fig. 28).

The formation of embroidery is a marriage of stitches and pattern. Dresses in southern Palestine are decorated with the most embroidery. Originally this form of decoration developed from the functional sewing together of pieces of fabric. Functional stitching became decorative and some embroidery was added. All village embroidery was done in floss silk, until the 1930s and 1940s then perle cotton threads became more popular. During the British occupancy, trade opened up between Europe and the East, in particular Palestine. Included in this trade were new materials never seen before in Palestine as well as new dye stuffs, patterns, and cotton embroidery threads. Floss silk was imported from Syria, the embroideress usually twisted it into required thickness, about 8 ply (eight threads). Perle cotton has an endless colour range, and is cheaper than the floss silk. Choosing the right thickness of thread, fabric and pattern is an art in itself. If the thread is too fine, on fine fabric, such as silk, the pattern would take forever, and if the thread was too thick, the shape of the stitches would be too bold and obvious. Ideally the stitches should be close together and the fabric should not be seen in any spaces between the motifs.

Women's creative talent in embroidery also extended to their innovative ideas of what they used their beautiful embroidery for, after a dress had worn-out. The time and money spent on a chest panel was expensive and the labour hours intensive, so a well embroidered chest piece, especially from Bethlehem, far outlasted the wear and tear of the material of the dress. The women would cut out this panel and re-use it in another dress if it was still considered to be in fashion. Or they

would pass it on to the next generation to include in their trousseau, this was usually done between mother and daughter. If the embroidered section was damaged, the women would salvage what they could of the threads, by undoing them one at a time. A lot of embroidered pieces and threads had second and third lives. A side panel or chest panel from a dress or coat would be stripped (after its use) and cut into squares to be re-used again in patchwork on cushions, pillows or blankets. The original pattern contained on the dress embroidery was lost in a frenzy of patchwork.

MOTIFS

All Palestinian embroidery motifs are of great interest to most village women who can recognise even the smallest variation in detail. All the motifs have names and they vary considerably from region to region. Similar-looking motifs may or may not have the same name. The earliest Palestinian patterns known, used as far back as the 9th and 10th centuries were abstract and geometrical designs such as triangles, chevrons, squares, pointed stars and moons. Birds and trees were popular in Egypt in the 10th century, a motif 'birds facing each other on the tree of life' and 'animals facing each other' as seen in Copic textiles, are said to have originated then.

The body of motifs is constantly changing and being updated, but many old motifs retain their popularity to the present day. Some patterns have political or historical connections, such as 'the tents of the Pasha' and in more recent times, the 'Bar Lev Line' and 'Sadat and Begin', Palestinian women had a passion for naming their motifs.

Every embroidery motif carries a name, but they have no real symbolic significance to the motif, they are names chosen to represent the motif, but some pattern inspiration and names refer to the natural environment around the women, trees, animals and birds, which were plump and usually appeared in twos. Other motifs were inspired by the home, these were "lamps", "bars of soap" and "combs". (See Fig.12). Some motifs had a sense of fun such as 'The old man's teeth'. 'The eye of the camel' and 'The worm of an apple' or "S". (See Fig. 16). Patterns also suggest that the women were inspired by art forms, such as costumes, uniforms, vestments, architecture, tiles, carpets, vestments and church furnishings. Before World War I Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire, in 1831 Palestine was invaded by Ibrahim Pasha, during his rule a large number of European artists, scholars and preachers came to Palestine and from their books, drawings, paintings and photographs, the Palestinian women gleaned inspiration for their embroidery. The uniform of the Turkish ruling gentry, also inspired the Palestinian women with their embroidery, this was mainly reflected in the mens' clothing, such as the broadcloth jacket (salta), it was embroidered with trim, the satin waistcoat (sidriyeh) decorated with gold braid trim and fastened with bobbles and the long sleeved jackets, (mintiyan) also made of satin and embroidered with gold braid. The baggy pants (sirwal) was probably inspired by the Turkish Officials. (See Fig. 29).

Whatever the source and age of the motifs, they became authentically Palestinian, once they were absorbed into the culture, by acquiring social and symbolic meaning for the Palestinians

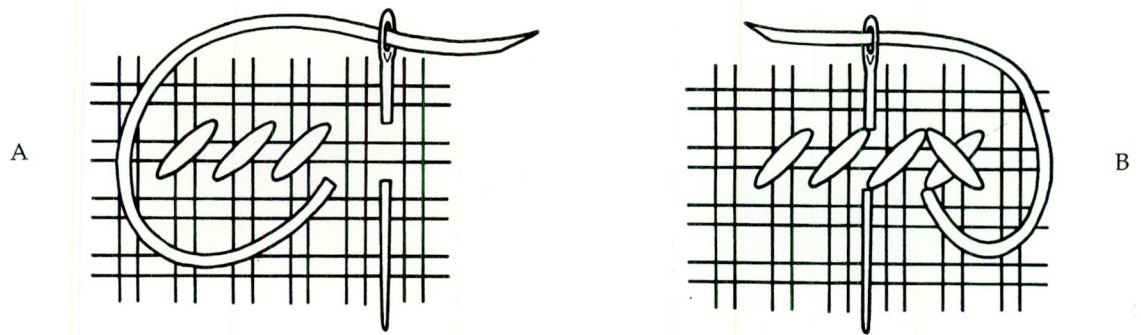
who make and wear them. Although there are a great number of different motifs, many are really variations of a few basic forms - such as triangles, rosettes, feathered shapes and trees. The Cypress Tree appeared in many different guises, it was enlarged, and reduced, the leaves extended or made small, occasionally the tree had no base or was shown upside down (See Fig.20B). The same pattern appeared again and again on a dress and similar motifs looked completely different because of a change of colour, design, shape and scale. Some women were so intune with particular motifs they were able to recognise minute differences in the patterns, and could tell what village the particular motif had been ebroidered in. The professional embroideress needed to know all the local patterns and stitches of each village around her. (See Fig. 21.a and 21.b).

Superstition and religion played a large part in the design of embroidery patterns chosen. To ward off 'the evil eye' sometimes the embroidery motifs were arranged in clusters of five - five cypress trees, five amulets (triangles), five tall palms, or five moons and so on. On older costumes and Bedu costumes, motifs were frequently grouped in threes, fives or sevens, these were healing and holy numbers. Small beads and charms were also used as symbols of protection, as well as ornament. These were used on the chest panels in particular, because it was considered that the chest was vulnerable to illness and the 'evil eye'.

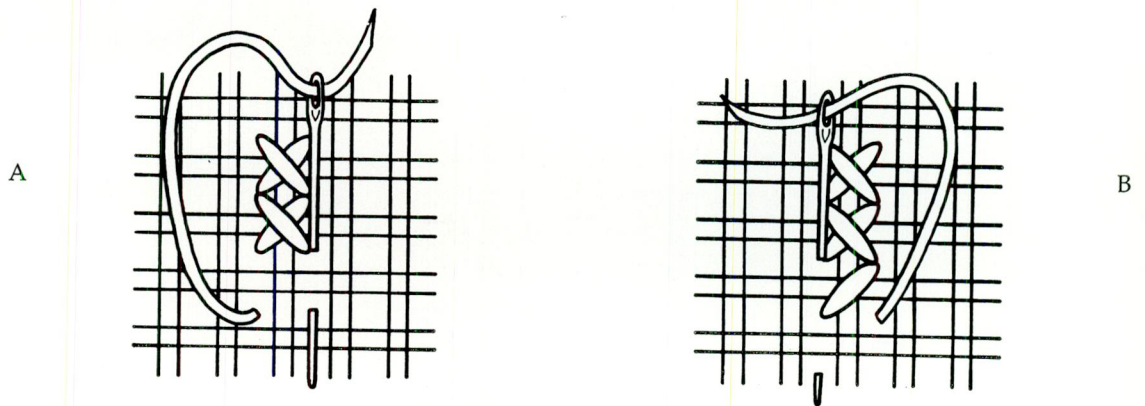
Unfortunately while the thrifty Palestinian women recycled most of their embroidery by using old motifs from their dresses on cushions, pillows and other household articles, they also

destroyed a lot of their embroideries by undoing them stitch by stitch so that they could re-use the threads again.

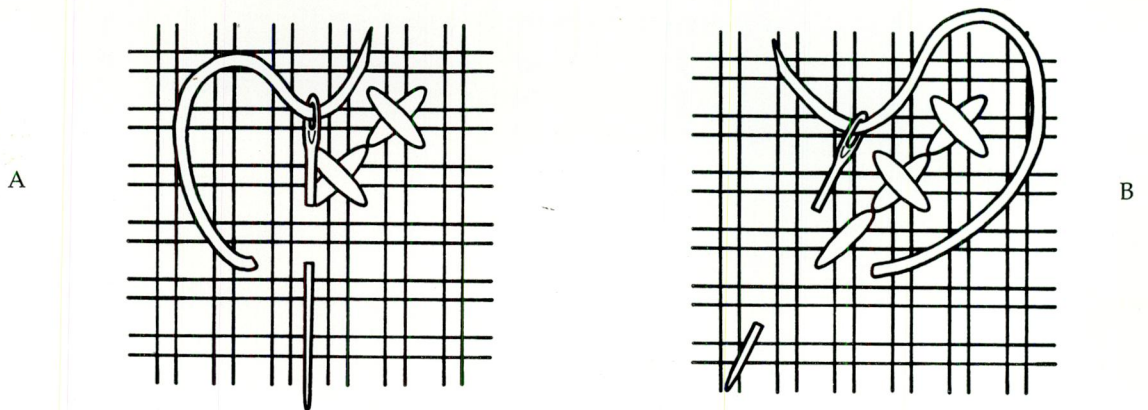
It is also very fortunate that many of the finer pieces of embroidery are to be found in the Village Home Museum in Bethlehem and the Folk Museum in Amman.



Working cross-stitch horizontally



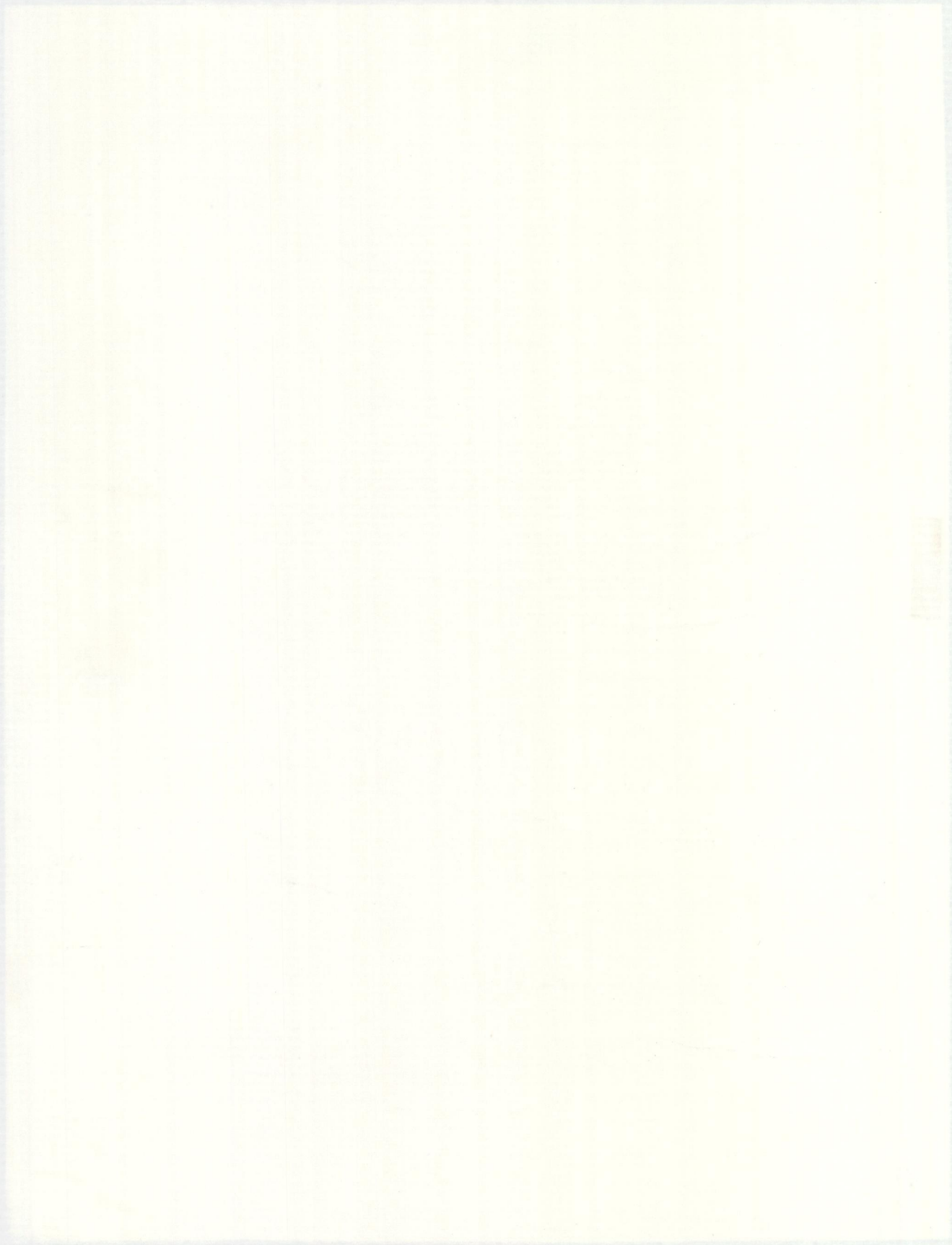
Working cross-stitch vertically



Working cross-stitch diagonally

Fig. 8

The most commonly used stitch in Palestinian embroidery is the cross-stitch.



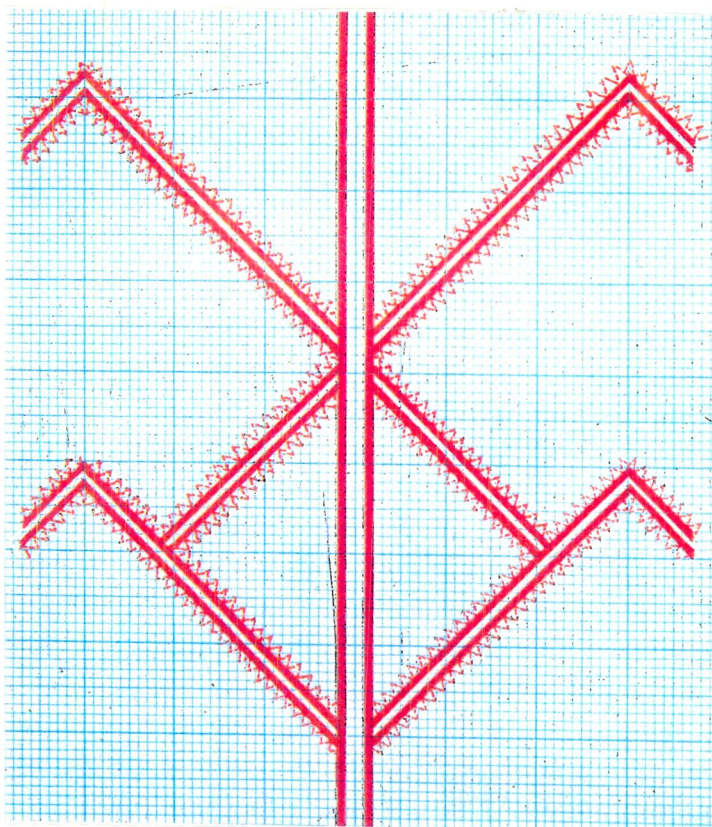


Fig.9 A new motif 'railway lines' from Syria.

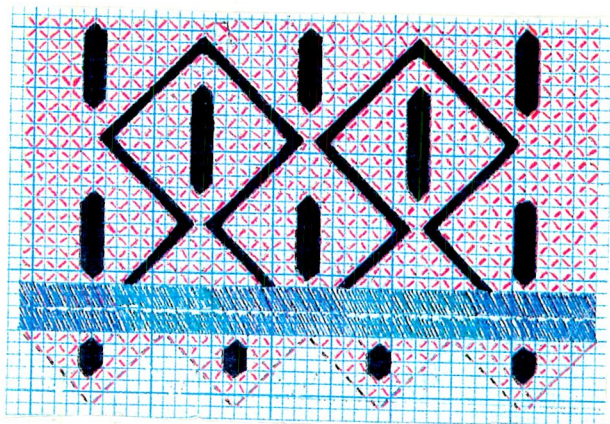


Fig.10 This motif is 'horse footprints'

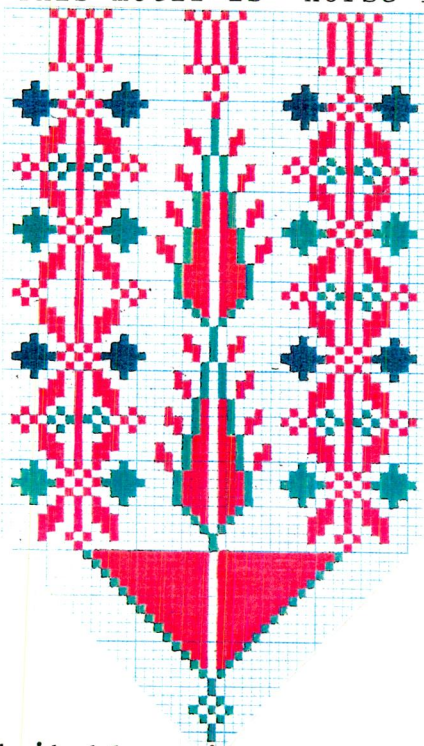


Fig. 11 'kohl-pot'

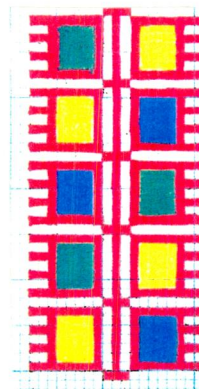


Fig. 12 'combs'

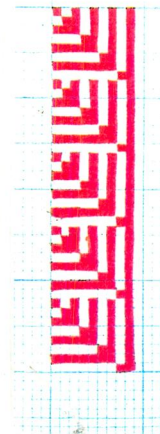


Fig. 13 'feathers'

All names were taken from domestic, geographical, agricultural and political sources.



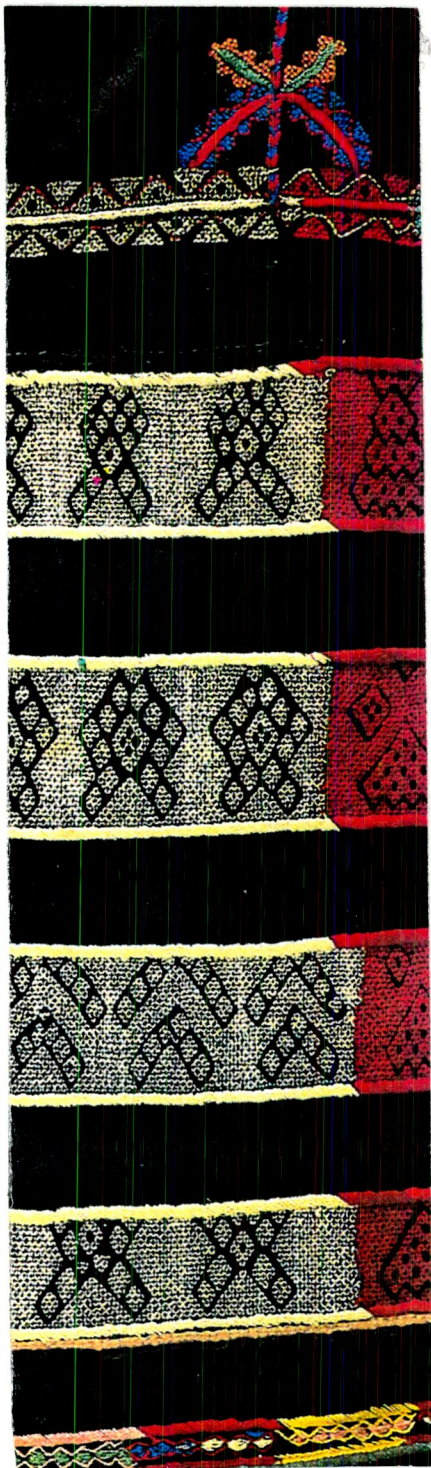


Fig 14.
Bedouin style of embroidery.
The pattern was created,
by leaving the required
motif blank. While the
usual tradation was to
create the pattern , by
filling in the pattern
with stitches. Usually
the cross-stitch.

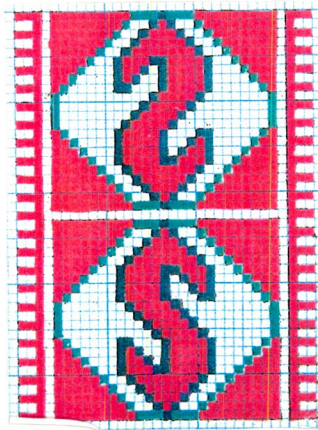


Fig 15

' Rose and leech ' or 'S'



Fig 16

'Eye of the Camel'

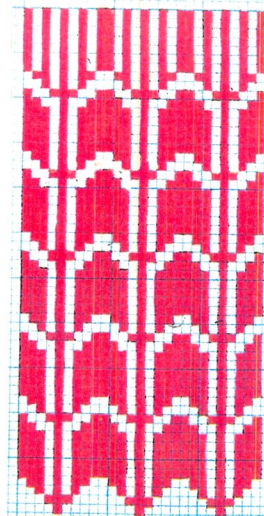


Fig 17

' Tall Palms '



Fig 18
Double stitch

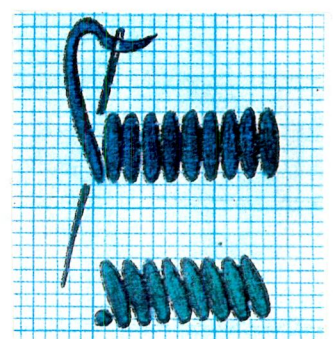


Fig 19
Flat stitch

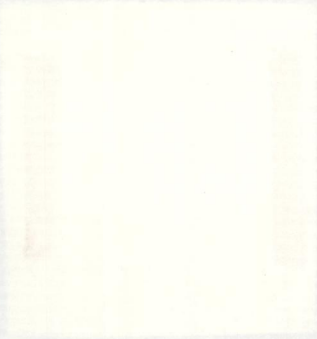
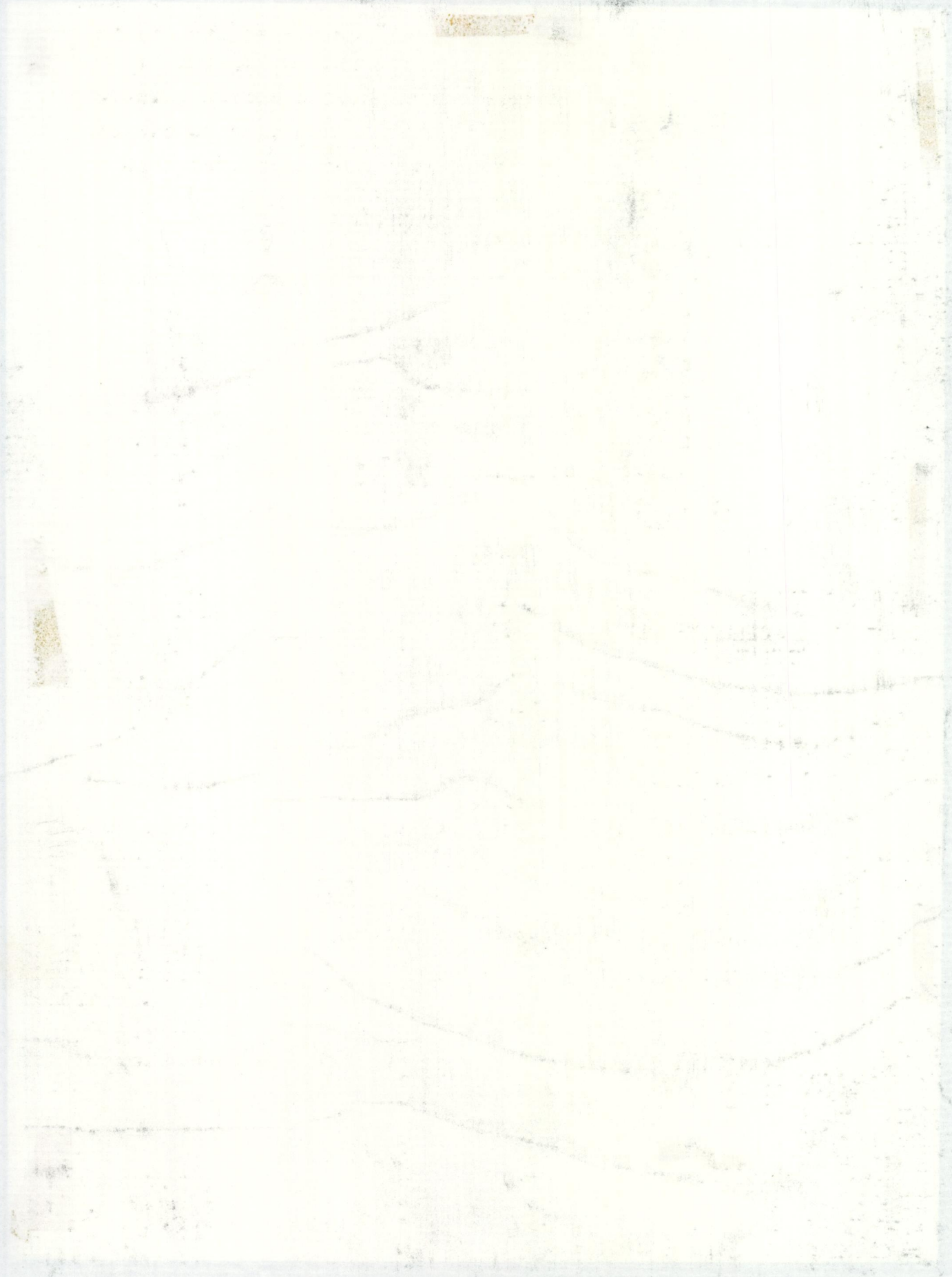




Fig. 20

Detail from the back panel of a dress, from the Hebron Region, 1920. The embroidery was worked mainly in red, with touches of yellow, cerise, blue and white. The pattern is an 'S' or 'leech' design, in cross-stitch.



"Cypress Trees" motifs is one of the most popular in the collection of patterns. This motif can take a variety of forms on the dress, it also can be effective in a repeat pattern form.

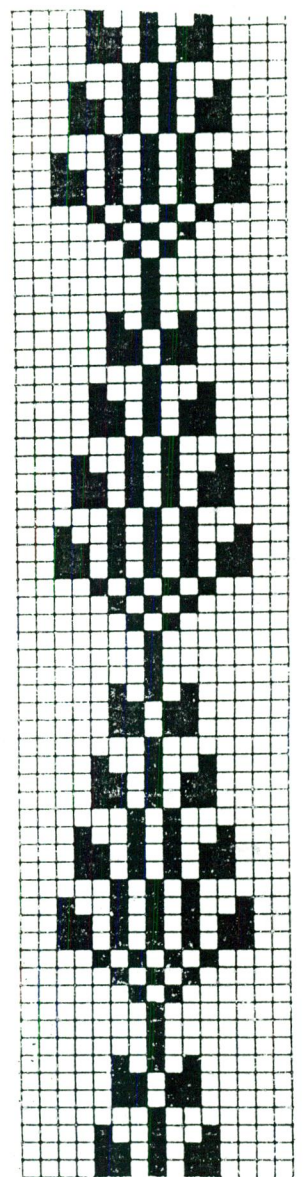
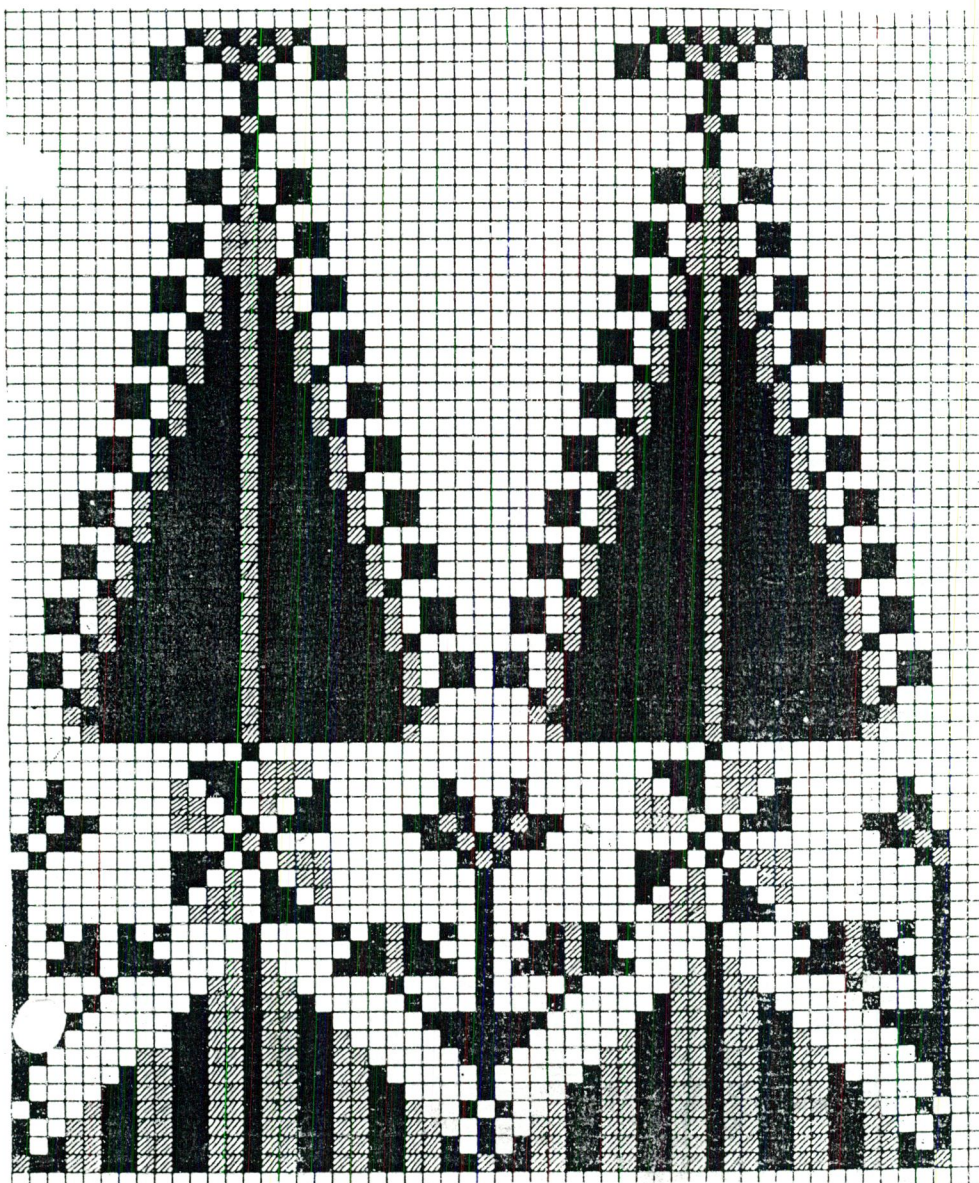
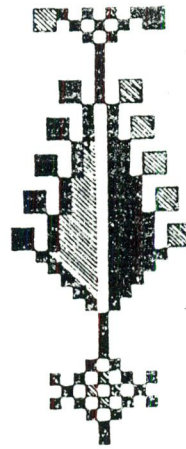
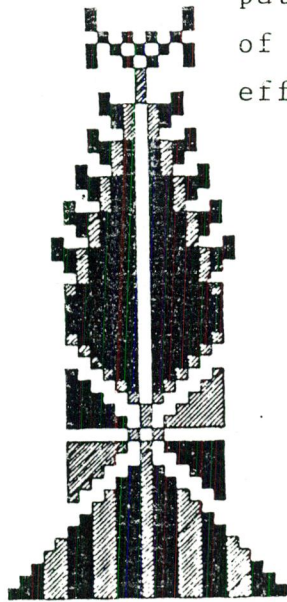
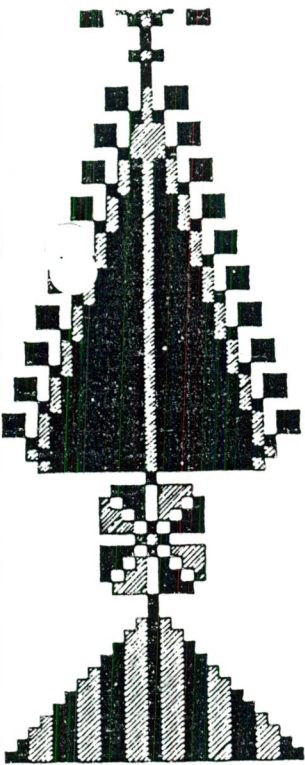




Fig. 21 a

A section of a head-veil
from Bethlehem,
19th century



Fig. 21 b

A section of a head-veil,
North of Gaillee.
Two different styles of
embroidery, the one from
Gaillee is more geometric
than the type from Beth-
lehem, which is a combin-
ation of Greek Island
and Palestinian motifs.



CONFIDENTIAL



CHAPTER THREE

WEDDING COSTUME AND CUSTOMS

Weddings, and their social importance within the community are outlined in this chapter, I analyse the direct relationship of the costumes and the customs of Palestine, and how colour and symbolism were important in the ceremonies. The wealthier the family, the more elaborate the trousseau, it was a case of wearing your family's wealth. The whole village would celebrate with the family and rejoice in the new couple's happiness

"Oh daughters of the wedding
Trail your "jillayhes" .F.1.
a wedding is here again
may it be happen to your families".

"Oh daughters of the wedding,
Oh mothers of 'white dresses'
a wedding is here again
may it happen to every beloved".

Beit Dajan wedding song.

Weir, Shelagh. Palestine costume,
London, 1989.

F.1. "Jillayhes" are coats worn on the wedding day
See Fig. 24.

For the majority of Palestinian women, her wedding was the most important day of her life. The costumes she wore played a major role in marking the event. To understand, we will look at the different events of the wedding, the wedding preparation and the costumes used. (See Fig. 22). There were always differences in wealth between individuals and villages. Some people were landowners, others had no property. Some areas were more fertile and suitable for cash crops such as oranges and olives, these people were considered wealthy, others were labourers on the roads and railroads. Each lifestyle was reflected in the costume worn. If the bridegroom could afford it, the bride would be presented with material for an engagement dress and for four other dresses for her wedding day. (It was not unusual for a bride to change her dress as many as seven times). Beit Dajan, in Jaffa, was one of the more wealthier villages, due to the cultivation of citrus fruit. The villagers gained a reputation for ostentatious clothing. It became a local centre for fashion, with people from other villages copying or ordering its styles of dress and embroidery. (See Fig. ²⁴23)

Palestinian wedding rituals are very interesting. First there were the negotiations, these were meetings between the groom and the bride's father to negotiate the marriage. There was the bethrotal, when the wedding contract was signed. The trousseau celebration followed, here the groom purchased trousseau gifts for the bride. A farewell party for the bride and her friends the night before the wedding was known as the Henna night. This is when the bride's friends painted henna on to the bride's hands and feet in the same or similar motifs that were on her wedding dress.

On the wedding day itself, the bride went in a procession from her father's house to the groom's house, they had a feast there and a money ceremony. The wedding night followed and the consummation of the marriage. The next morning was the bride's money ceremony where the bride received gifts from her female friends, usually in the form of money. A week later, the bride emerged from seclusion, this event was called 'the going out to the well', it was a procession to the village well. There was considerable ceremony and song when the bride and groom's family went shopping for materials for the trousseau.

Songs were an important feature in the wedding day. They celebrated the joy of the day and many of the songs include references to embroidery or the cloth used in making the dresses.

"We embroidered the side panels for such a long time
Remember Halimeh when we were pals)
we embroidered the chest panels for such a long time
Remember Halimeh when we were girls. "

WEIR, Shelagh, Palestinian Costume
London, 1989.

COLOUR AND SYMBOLISM OF PALESTINIAN WEDDING COSTUME

In a Palestinian wedding the meaning and force of symbols vary according to the social and ceremonial context. In the 1920's in a Beit Dajan, (near Jaffa) wedding ceremony, white (or absence of colour) reflected a bride's state between one social status and another - her transformation from single to married life and girl to womanhood. This transformation is shown symbolically in costume. The bride wore a white coat over her head during the 'first procession' when she was between single and married. Strong colours, by contrast, signifies the presence of status - The Bride wore a black or indigo embroidered dress in the 'coming out' procession to the well. This showed that she was a fully-fledged married woman. Older women also wear white dresses, with little embroidery when they are past the age of menopause.

White was also the colour of the dress used to wrap a deceased body in, its transition from this world to the next.

As mentioned the bride's white costume in the 'first procession' suggested an absence of status. She sat passively on horseback completely covered by coats and veil, she had an anonymous shape, without sex or identity. On the other hand, in the procession to the well, when she was no longer in a state of transition, but had achieved her new status, as a fully married woman, the bride wore bright dramatic clothing, with jangling jewellery, she marched along with her friends and relatives, her face uncovered.

Red was a sign of sexual maturity, representing the blood of menstruation, consummation and circumcision. Red featured prominently in both the woman's wedding and young boy's circumcision.

Red was the main embroidery colour for women's dresses, the largest and richest amount appearing on the 'coming out' dress, and red was generally seen on the dresses of young married women of childbearing age. Older women and young girls had much less embroidery on their clothing.

Red satin (actually red and thin yellow stripes) was the fabric of the bride's other coat, worn on the first procession, and the same fabric was used as patches on mature women's dresses, (Palestinian women recycled all their embroidery) (See Fig.25 and 26). Red satin was also used as patches on mature women's bonnets and for their ceremonial girdles. Older women and women in mourning wore darker girdles. Red taffette is also used to decorate women's festive dresses and the bride's white underdress. A coat-dress, worn over and underdress had red taffeta decoration down the front of the skirt, usually in patchwork of different colours or all red. (See Fig.24).

The men's wedding wardrobe was plainer and had little decoration, compared to the females. Yet their costume was a clear indication of their wealth, status and origin. They wore a long coat, a 'thob' over pants, a jacket and a satin waistcoat. The better-off wore a variety of sashes (hizam, zunnar or ishdad) made from wool, silk or cotton. Some with multi-coloured woven patterns.

The 'Qumbaz' a long line coat, which was usually worn in the cities, was worn over the 'thob'. This had long narrow sleeves, it was calf or ankle length and was made from plain or striped cotton or Syrian silk.



Fig. 22

A trousseau dress from a small village, Lifta, in Jerusalem, 1906. It was made of natural linen, with vertical 'branches' of embroidery on side panels. Note the couching in metallic and silk cord on the chest panel and sleeves. The sleeves were also decorated with red and yellow taffeta inserts.

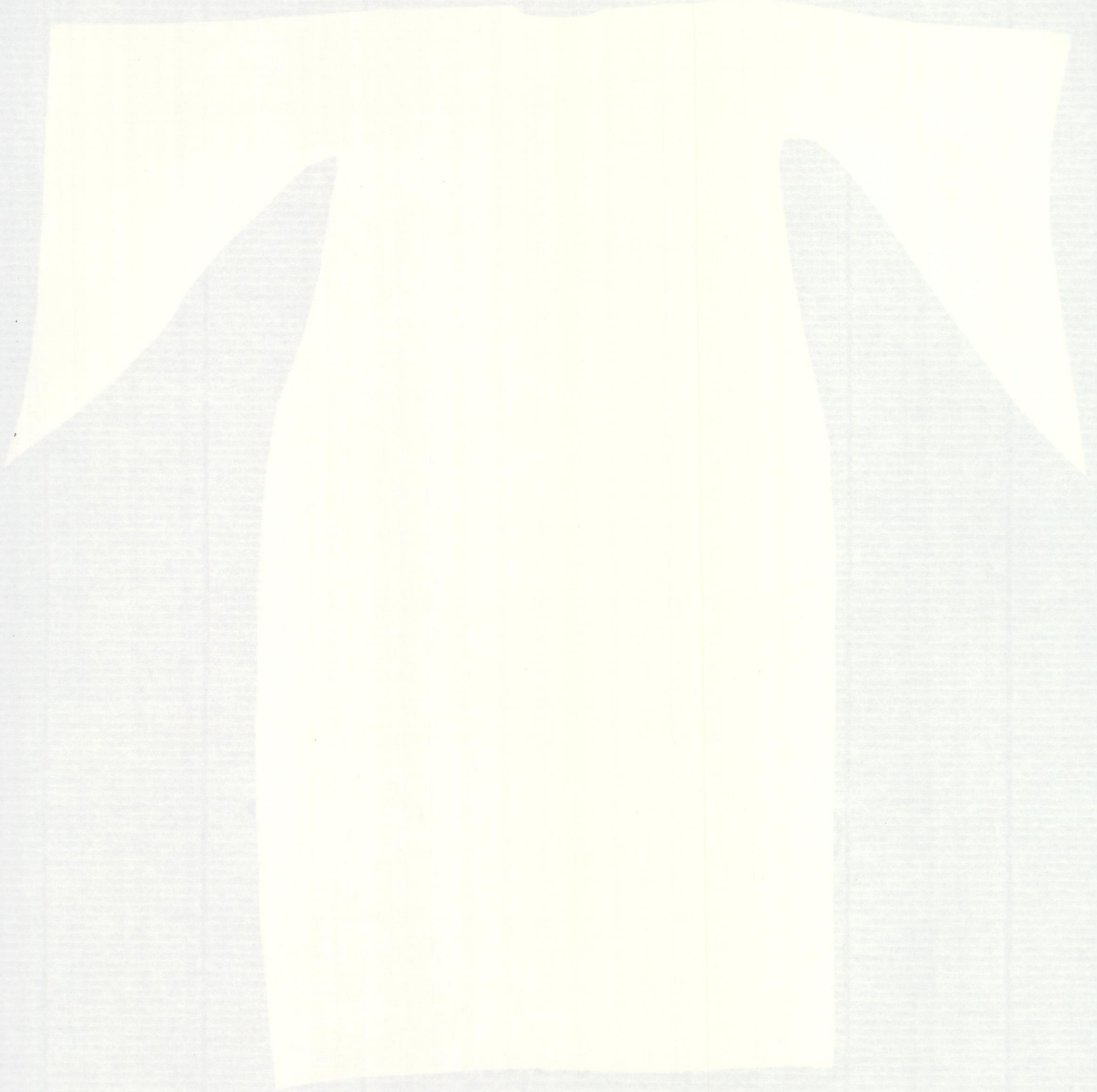




Fig. 23

Chest panel from a dress embroidered in Southern Palestine - Hebron or Bethlehem Regions. The cross-stitch was the main embroidery technique. Bethlehem was noted for couching with silk and metallic cord. The back yoke is made of silk, 'Malak',





Fig. 24

A Coat-dress (jillayeh) from Beit Dajan, early 1920's. This dress was an important part of a brides trousseau, it was used in the 'going to the well' ceremony. The dress was beautifully decorated with silk and satin patchwork pieces.





Fig. 25

Reversible Coat (jillayeh) from Galilee and Nazareth regions. It was short-sleeved, made of thick blue cotton, and decorated with patches of red, yellow and green taffeta, in irregular or rectangular shapes. The outlines were marked with silk thread. It had inserts of Indigo blue cotton patchwork under the arms and at the neckline.



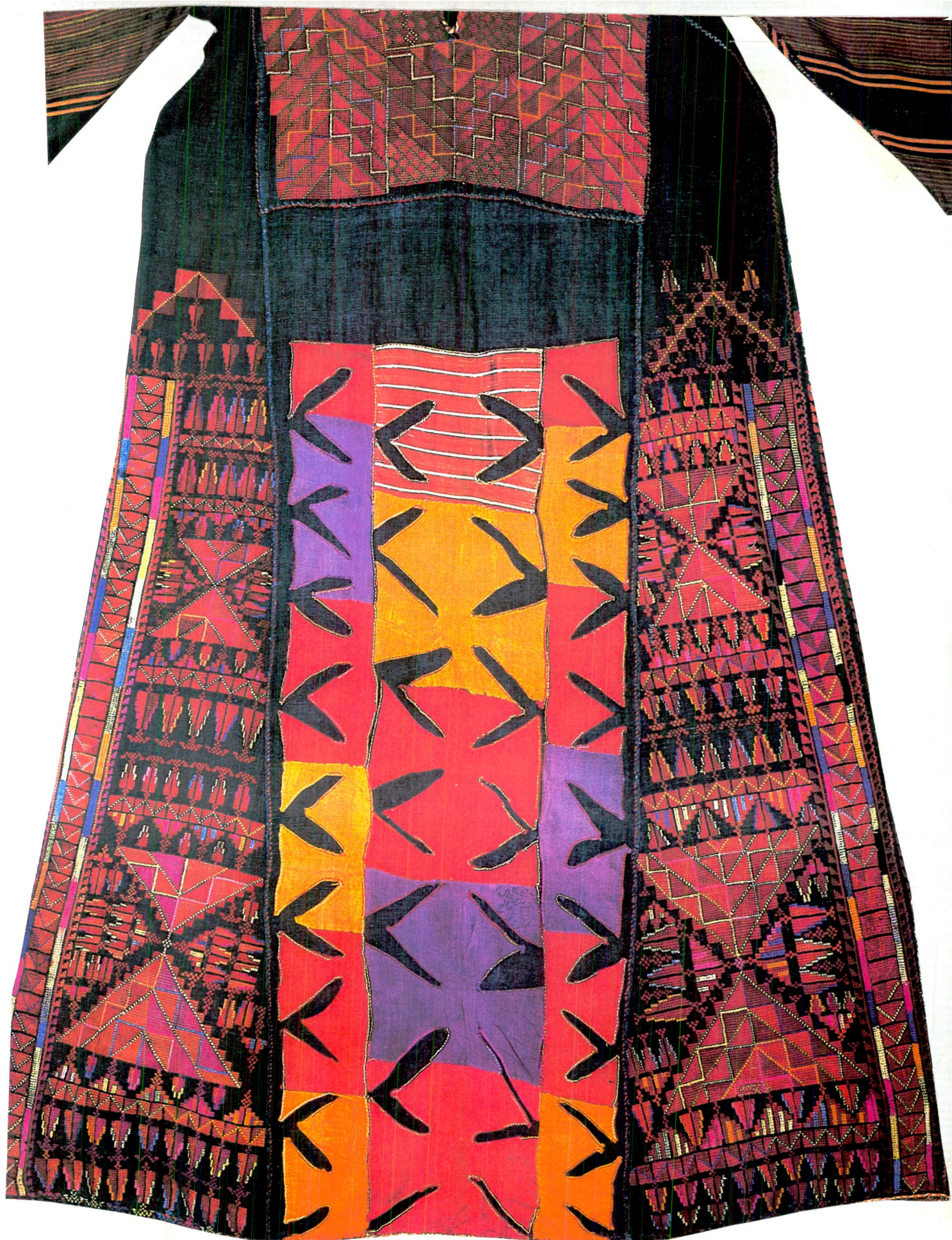


Fig. 26

A Wedding dress, 1920's, from Bethlehem, embroidered in cross-stitch, with taffeta applique. The side panels are solid with embroidery, worked in rows of Triangles and chevrons. The center panel is embroidered with vertical rows of colourful motifs.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRESS SHAPE

The shape of the Palestinian dress was easily identifiable to a particular region in the north or south of the country. The Bedouin dress, for example, was a huge dress which was always dyed black. In the towns of Ramallah, Jaffa and Ashod a more fitting type dress was worn and it was usually dyed indigo. The standard type Thob was a long dress to the ground with long sleeves and a round neckline (See Illus.2). There were many variations to this shape including v-shaped necklines, sleeve lengths and sleeve shape. In this chapter the dress shapes are examined with the aid of illustrations. (See Illus. 1 to 3).

The bedu or bedouin people lived a nomadic life, in a harsh environment and they did not have a lot of worldly goods, so they channelled their creative talents into weaving and embroidery. Their independence, pride and individuality was a counter-influence to the embroideries in the cities. Because the Bedouins were travelling people they moved from village to village exchanging patterns and materials.

The Bedu were nothing if not adaptable, they integrated with the local people of small towns and villages in southern Palestine. The costumes of the Bedouin had the basic shape of the Muslim world, but they were much fuller, bulier and had longer, more pointed wing sleeves. These sleeves were tied behind the shoulders when the women were working. The dress was always black or dark blue. Although influenced by village designs and patters they fashioned them to their own interpretation of a geometrical design of stars, moons, squares, palm and cypress-tree motifs. (See Fig.No.28).

A feature of the Bedu costume was the red scalloped applique on the edges of the sleeves, they were mostly embroidered in red with touches of brown, blue, yellow, green, purple and orange. (See Fig 28) Dresses or thobs of northern Palestine were somewhat different in style, to those in the south of the country. Each dress was made of front, back and side panels and sleeves, they were made of one piece of folded fabric and sewn. (See Illus 4 to 6) (Fig.27 and 28)

A characteristic of the hand woven fabrics originally used on these dresses is their narrow width (about 45cm-55cm). This allowed women to construct their dresses without extensively cutting the side edges (selvedges), which the dress-makers disliked doing. Most had a rounded neck, a chest slit and a yoke at the back.

In south-west Jaffa, they had a V-shaped neckline, with little embroidery on the chest panel. There were differences in number and shape of side panels, these might include inserts of two or more fabrics. The dress of the Ramallah region, while having narrow sleeves, had a wide middle section right down to the hem-line. A dress of the southwest region was A-shape, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. The women in southern Palestine did not see the need for lavishly embroidered coats, (they justified it only for their wedding) but they wore a hybrid of a coat-dress in the areas of Ramallah, Jaffa and Ashod. The coat-dress had a round neck, it had either long or short sleeves, a slit in the front that went from waist to hip. Palestinian women always wore pants or an under-skirt with everything. The slit was decorated with embroidery and patchwork along the edge. The style

of dress was popular until the Mandate. The slit was known as a "womans picture" or "picture of Life" and during the Mandate it was considered to be immoral because it was an open expression of womens sexuality. The dress was sewn up and this style has not been used since. Women and men set themselves very strict dress and behaviour codes. See Illus. 11 and Fig. 24. The names quoted are from Weir, Shelagh, Palestinian Costume, London 1989, P.214.

Festive dresses from the Hebron Hills are commonly decorated with appliqued taffeta panels on the front of their skirts in red, green, orange or only in red. Although there is a variety of designs throughout the region, there is a common, underlying structure: a central panel, often with a pointed top, flanked by two narrower panels. They may be left plain, slashed or embroidered. Couched embroidery in silver and gold thread was Bethlehem's speciality, the patterns usually, leaves or flowers, were filled in with silk threads in yellows, greens, purples, reds and fuschia. (See Fig.23) The piece de resistance of Bethlehem embroidery work was the chest panel, it was completely covered in a riot of leaves and flowers, sequins were scattered over the embroidery also little Bethlehem birds, this all massed together in a luxurious brightly coloured garden-picture. (See Fig.29).

Like in every society costume and fashion in Palestine was in a constant state of flux and as fashions change, other countries influence the shape and style of Palestinian dress. In particular Turkey influenced the coats and dresses in northern Palestine. The Bedouins had a totally different style of dress, they scaled down their large voluminous size of dress to the ordinary thob, this was due to economic changes in the country.



Fig. 27

A Bedouin woman embroidering a dress, very similar to the one she is wearing. All embroidery patterns are sewn in horizontal bands.



COMPLIMENT

18



Fig. 28.

Detail from the bottom of a skirt from a Bedouin dress. The material is cotton sateen, dyed black, with cotton embroidery threads in several colours. The pattern was created by leaving spaces between stitches, giving it a geometrical design, the stitch used was a zig-zag stitch. The pattern was sewn in 4 or 5 horizontal bands along the skirt or sleeve hem. The style was particularly unique to the Bedouins and has a very interesting effect.



A back section of a jacket, made in Bethlehem, 1920's. Red wool broadcloth, embroidered with gold silk cord in a couching stitch, filled in with a satin stitch.

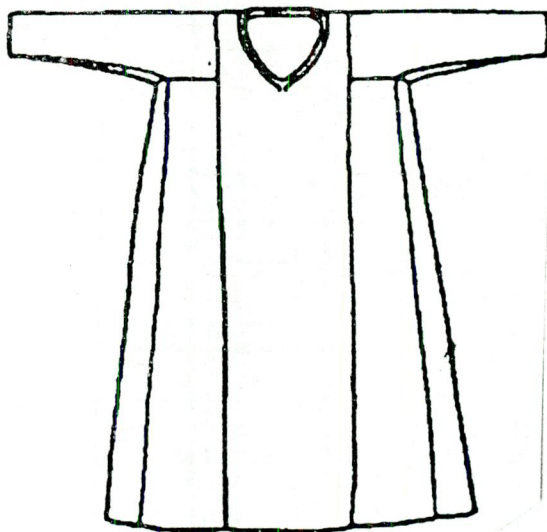
Fig. 29.



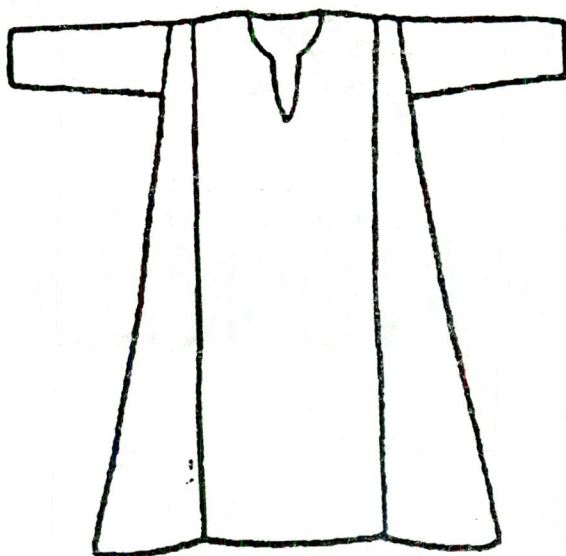




Dress, southern region.
Illustration.1.

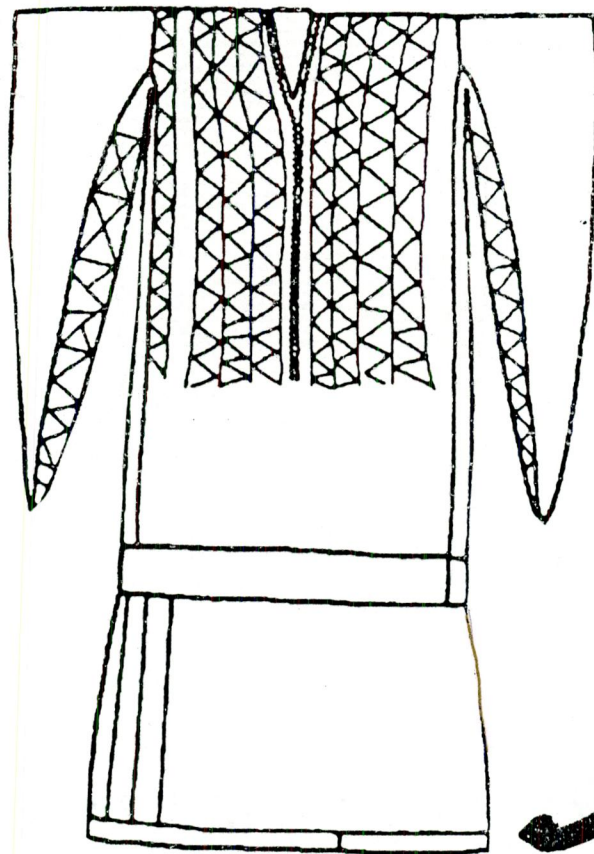


Dress, southwest region.
Illustration.2.



Underdress, common to all
Palestine, 19th or 20th century.
Illustration .3.

Illustration . 4.

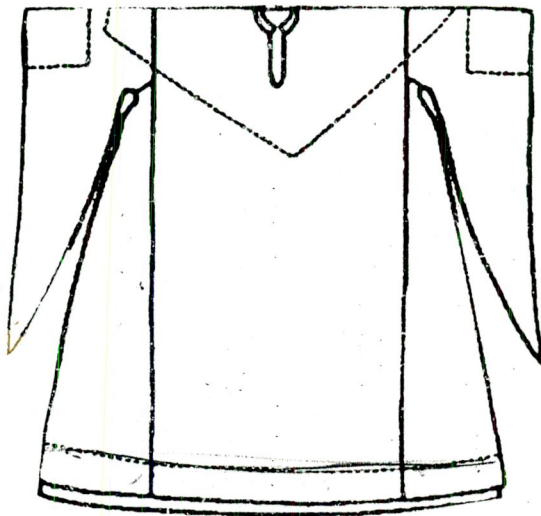


A Bedouin dress , 1930
The front , back side panels
and sleeves were made of one
piece of fabric, folded in hal
and sewn. The dress was
between 12 to 14 meters long.



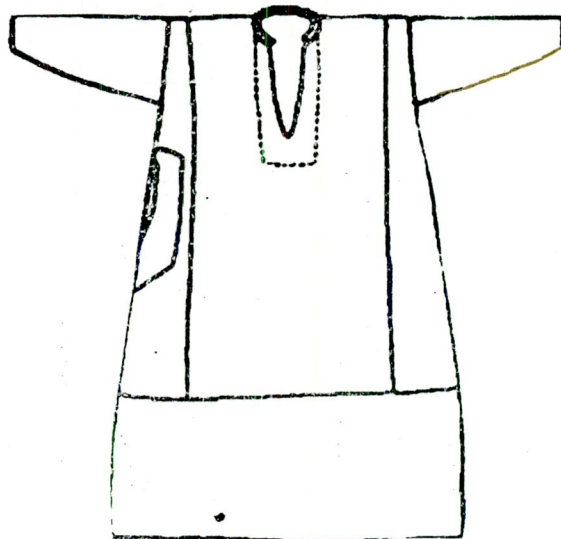
Pre 1948

Illustration . 5.



Post 1948.

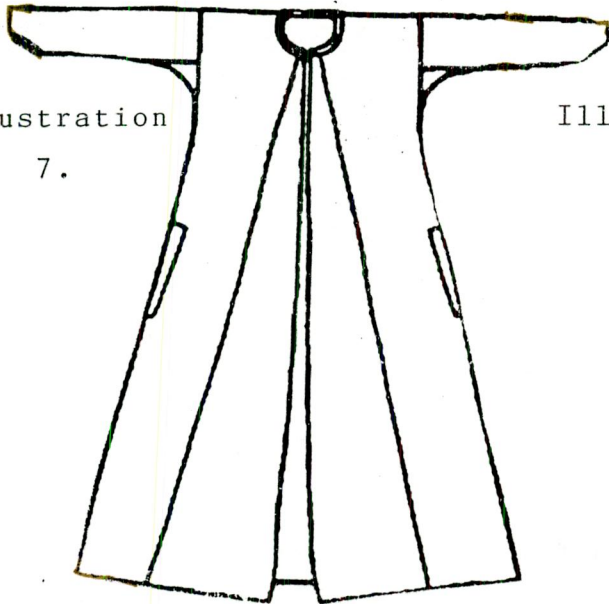
Illustration . 6.



Bedouin dresses (thob or shirsh) were worn by nomadic people. Before the Mandate the dresses were of a voluminous size, the sleeves were so large that women carried things in them, and tied them while they were working. They were made of cotton and were dyed black.

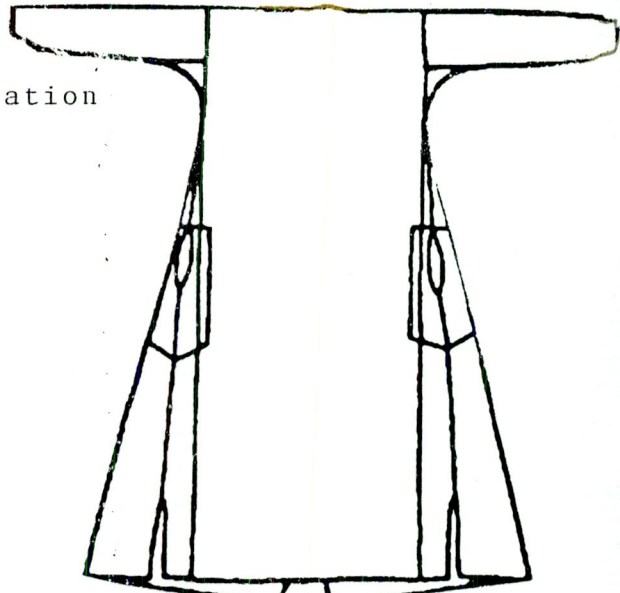
.51.
TAILORED WEDDING COATS

Illustration
7.



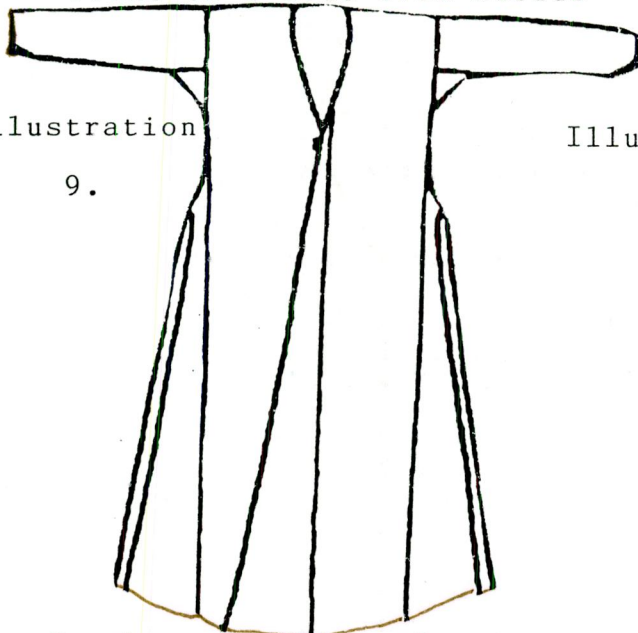
Front of a coat from Nablus

Illustration
8.



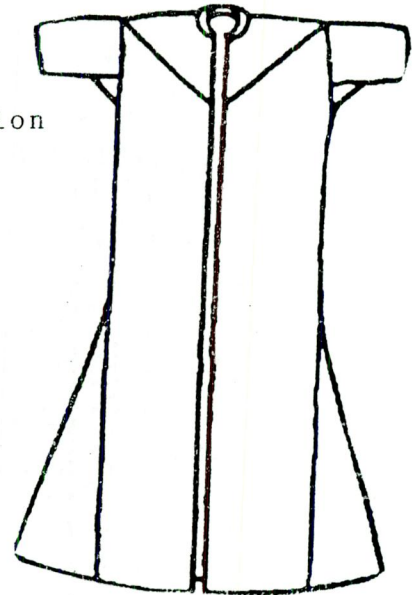
Back view of Nablus Coat

Illustration
9.



Southern Palestine Coat

Illustration
10 .



Gaillee Coat

These coats are made of several parts, a back panel, two front panels, usually overlapped, side panels folded over sleeves and gussets. They were dark blue or black in colour and were made of cotton. Special coats for weddings were made of silk and satin.

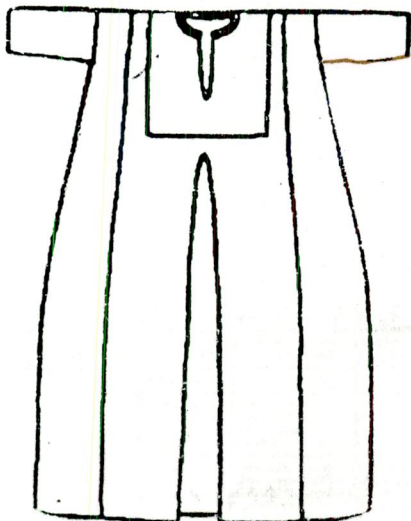


Illustration . 11 .
Coat dress or Jillayeh.
Beit Dajan .

CHAPTER FIVE

WEAVE AND DYEING IN PALESTINIAN COSTUME

The production of the fabrics used in the embroidery of Palestinian costume, from local raw materials to large industrial manufacturing centres in Mejdal and Gaza, is discussed in this chapter. The different techniques of woven material, include the most exclusive 'Royle Fabric' to the cheapest cotton and wool. The dying of the fabric was also most important, and was a symbol of origin and wealth. Modern technology, such as machine looms were introduced into Syria from France and England in the late 1920's. New dye products arrived from Europe also in the late 1920's and they slowly began to replace the old traditional herbs and home-grown dyes. The variety of colours was endless, with the synthetic dyes.

CHAPTER FIVE

WEAVING, DYES AND TEXTILES

Palestinian costumes are made from various fabrics, cottons, linens, woollens, silks and satins. Some were woven in Palestine, most however were imported from Syria, where there were large textile producing centres. The weaving of the cloth was produced by men on treadle looms. It was a skilled trade and usually passed on, from generation to generation. Mejdal, in Southern Palestine was the most flourishing of the weaving centres, with several hundred looms in operation. Gaza, came a close second, and was famous for producing the 'gause' style fabric.

Most textiles in Palestine were made from cotton, linen and silk, the yarns were imported from Egypt and Syria. The cotton and wool locally produced was also used for making costumes, especially for the poorer members of the population, who could not afford the imported fabrics. Cotton was grown in Galilee and the Nablus hills, it was locally spun and sold in the markets. Wool was handspun by men, it was left in its natural colour, white or brown or dyed red or blue. Important clothing and articles of dress were made from local wool : women's jackets, men's coats, belts and head bands. Imported yarns, silk and linen, and the more luxurious fabrics with silk stripes, for festive dresses and trousseau dresses, veils and headdresses, came from Europe after World War I and later Asia. These were mass produced and machine-made textiles.

In 1943 Abd al Aziz Daud of Mejdal in Southern Palestine started a weaving establishment, employing local weavers. They produced the greatest variety of fabrics in Palestine. Several grades and colours of cotton were woven there, (shash),

white muslin used for women's veils, (burak), plain white cotton used for underdresses, (karnaysh), white crinkled cotton, (bazayl) a flannelette cotton was used for men's nightgowns and women's dresses, (durzi), an indigo-blue, dyed cotton used for women's everyday dresses, and (dendeki) rather like (durzi) but it was a rusty-red colour, was used for women's headdresses, cushion covers and hem-binding.

Mejdel also produced luxury dress fabrics of cotton and linen, with silk stripes. The most expensive of these was the (malak) or "Royal fabric" because it required the most amount of labour to make it, it had gold or silver threads incorporated into the weave, and it had a red floral pattern. Another important fabric was the (ikhdari), meaning green, this had narrow red and green bands, and it also had a floral pattern occasionally. The (jiljileh), with plain dark red bands at each edge was an important fabric also, though not as expensive as the other two.

DYES

Some wool and cotton fabrics were left in their natural colour, white or brown, these materials were used for making men's undershirts, women's underskirts, head veils and men's overcoats. Other cottons and wool were dyed indigo or dark blue, this was the most important dye in Palestinian costume. Indigo was cultivated along the Jordan valley and stored like grain, in underground silos. Natural indigo was mixed with synthetic dye imported from India, in the late 19th century, this was much easier to use and stayed on the fabric longer. Fabrics were soaked in several containers of dye to get the darkest

shades, dark blue cloth was more expensive and prestigious, the light blue cloth was therefore cheaper.

Red was a very important colour in Palestinian costume, the fabric for coats, veils, headdresses, jackets and embroidery threads were dyed red, using madder and cochineal and kermes. Madder was widely cultivated in Palestine, it was the cheapest dye and was used for wool dyeing. Cochineal and Kermes was also grown locally, though some supplies were imported. Orange and yellow was obtained from local dye-plants, both were combined with red, to make exciting new colours.

Synthetic dyes, such as alkaline were developed in Germany in the 1880s, and they were widely used in Palestine after the First World War, almost displacing the use of natural dyes.

Originally the dyes were used just to dye the local cotton and embroidery threads. However during the Mandate synthetic dyed fabrics and threads were imported from Europe and Syria. These fabrics and silk threads came in to Palestine in colours never seen or used by Palestinians before. Such as brilliant pinks, green, purples, fuchsia and reds. This opened up a whole new area of creativity and fashion styling.

These new synthetic dyes and fabrics were introduced to the cities and town and slowly filtered their way to the villages and the Bedouin people. These changes did not happen overnight, it was gradual and lasting. Rarely are the old local dyes used in Palestinian costumes today. There is neither the land or the money to waste on such sedimential produce when the modern products are more functional.

The textile industry in Palestine has come a long way from its humble origins in local villages to the industrial factories that are in production today. The introduction of competitive trade from Europe and the Asian countries meant the market was flooded with an abundance of produce cheaper than their own. Unfortunately this meant that local production ceased to be profitable and they closed down, these skilled men moved to the cities and due to their technical expertise worked in the weave industries threading the looms.

The production of textile and dyeing techniques have changed dramatically from the local family weave centre, to the big industrial factories they are today. The fabrics used in Palestine today are a mixture of cotton and polyester, the same as every country in the world. It is interesting to note that we have the city of 'Gaza' a famous weave centre, to thank for first creating the fine-weave mesh of 'gauze', from which its name is taken.

APPENDIX

DYES

1. INDIGO

Indigo was a natural grown dye until nearly this century. Now the dyes used are synthetic, imported in from Europe and Asia. Some women use a mixture of both synthetic and natural dyes. The colour was commonly used in all of Palestine but in particular the coats of Galilee, and the main dresses of South Palestine.

2. RED

Natural dyes include, Madder, Kermes, Cochineal. As soon as synthetic dyes were available they came popular, probably in the nineteen-thirties, but they did not replace natural dyes immediately. It was a most important colour for embroidery, applique, headdress and coats.

3. YELLOW AND ORANGE

These colours were obtained from local dye plants, they were mixed with red in early Palestinian embroidery. Yellow was used in embroidery, applique, stripes and in woven fabric.

4. PINKS AND GREENS

Other colours such as bright pinks and brilliant greens and shaded coloured threads were synthetic, introduced into Palestine after the First World War, from Germany. They are used to the present day in embroidery and applique.

1. HANDWOVEN LINEN

HANDWOVEN COTTON

Imported from Egypt or woven locally. Most common in the late nineteenth century, and used up to the end of the British Mandate. It was in every day costume and for festive clothing.

2. HANDWOVEN COTTON/LINEN MIX

Locally woven. Most common in the late nineteenth century and to the end of the Mandate. It was very popular because the open weave was suitable for embroidery. It was used on ceremonial dress especially ceremonial coats.

3. HANDWOVEN LINEN WITH SILK STRIPES

Imported mainly from Syria or locally woven. Used before and during the Mandate, for festive costume, on both men and women. It was also used in turbans.

4. SILK

Imported from Syria or Europe. Used all the time in festive costume, as patchwork designs, or in speciam 'Qumbazs'.

5. WOOL BROADCLOTH.

Imported from Europe, early this century, used in a lot of day clothing and jackets in particular.

6. WOOL

Locally woven, used all the time in all clothing items including belts, hats and coats.

7. IMPORTED COTTON

Imported from Europe and Asia, used in everything, including lining in garments, undergarments, decorative patches, etc.

8. SYNTHETIC FIBRES

Imported from Europe first and then Asia. Commonly used in every day clothing and in particular velvets were used for sections of the wedding dresses.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the hardships and the dislocation of the Palestinian people, many village women and those living in refugee camps in the West Bank, Jordan and Gaza Strip, still wear their embroidered dresses and flowing veils, either for everyday wear or on special occasions. Since the present conflict in the Occupied Territories began, many Palestinians do not celebrate weddings in the elaborate fashion that they did, in the earlier part of the century. The new tradition from the 1940s was to import the western culture of white dresses and head veils. Embroidery is not an essential skill any more, and is only taught to those willing and eager to learn, or retain their heritage. Other women want to leave the past behind them and copy the fashions of the West. Young girls now wear T-shirts and jeans, as they do in the West, but only according to their families' code of dress. Other girls regard it more modest to wear Thobs or long dresses. These new Thobs do not have any embroidery on them and are made of cotton and their colours are plain. The traditional 'Islamic' dress, is still worn by the elders and younger women who come from more nationalistic families, who want to preserve their culture and costumes.

Men wear full length trousers and western style shirts and they no longer wear the long Thob shirt. Older Palestinian men have their heads covered with the "Keffiyeh", a black and white checked scarf. In 1989 Yasser Arafat went to an important political meeting, with the then, British Foreign Minister, Mr. William Waldegrave. This 'keffiyeh' became widely popular among young people, worldwide, partly as a political statement of sympathy with the Palestinian liberation movement and partly as a fashion accessory. Young women

wear this scarf as a shawl. This wearing of the scarf symbolises the political feelings of the people in Palestine.

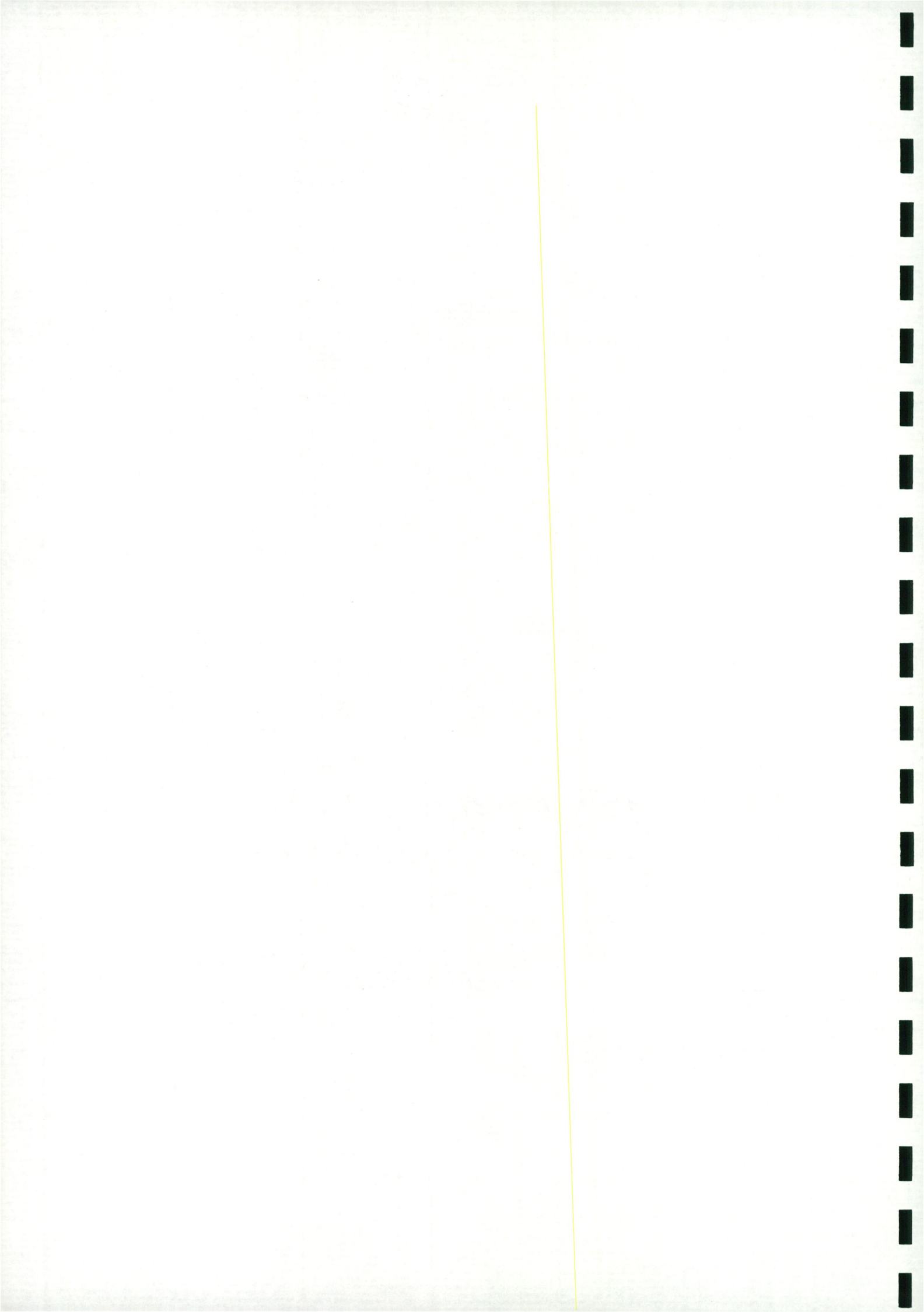
For many Palestinian village women, modern traditional-style costume continues to reflect their village and regional origins, age, status and fashion consciousness. Distinctions in modern dress 'thob' styles and decoration are much more subtle today. A variety of different characteristics can still identify the regional origins of the embroidery, not only among the women still living in villages, but among the refugee women who have lived in camps for the past twenty or thirty years. The embroidery stitch, the shade of embroidery, dress colour, the seam stitching and type of veil worn all signify the regional origin of the dress. (See Fig.31). To this day, older Beit Dajan women, living in refugee camps in Amman, wear their white 'thobs' and proudly declare that wherever they go, people know that they are women from Beit Dajan.

Many of the Palestinian women in the refugee camps in the West Bank, Jordan, and Gaza Strip, have been economically forced to put their embroidery skills to a profitable use. They sell their beautiful embroidered dresses, jackets, cushion covers and other articles to the tourist market. There are a few dresses that are made in the traditional hand embroidered way, those that are in the traditional style are commissioned by wealthy compatriots to do their embroidery for them. Fewer women are doing embroidery for themselves. These dresses, although they are hand embroidered do not have the traditional Thob shape. They are altered for an external market or western tastes. They have darts at the

waist and bust, and have set-in sleeves. The traditional style dresses were made up of front and back panels, side panels and sleeves and was constructed out of one piece of material that was folded in half and sewn. Today the shape is cut out of a pattern from material imported from the West. Despite these slight differences, they are still authentically Palestinian, and express a desire of Palestinian women to hang on to their culture. Some women, even those living abroad are buying and wearing traditional costume for special occasions, instead of wearing western style evening dress.

While some women strive hard to retain their traditional skills, it is inevitable that the tide of change has affected the traditional Palestinian embroidery. Modern computer sewing machines are able to reproduce the motifs and pattern on the dress more efficiently than the embroideress. The introduction of such embroidery machines have made Palestinian embroidery more rigid in form. As a result the artistic continuity of the embroidery is lost and it is this element which has made traditional embroidery a more charismatic and appealing technique.

Perhaps it is because Palestine is a fragmented society, where the land is occupied, villages are destroyed, people and families separated and displaced, that there has been a revival in the embroidery tradition. Young women are researching the old patterns and motifs in the museums and archives that are in the refugee camps. The political nature of the country is also reflected in many of the more modern motifs, which are often used in conjunction with the traditional



motifs. (See Fig.31). These modern symbols and motifs, show the level to which embroidery can be used as a means for the dissemination of ideas in a more popular manner, they include the symbol of the national flag. The initials P.L.O. which stand for the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and Islamic motifs and writings which pronounce "Freedom" and "Liberty". The religion nature is more obviously denotes through the use of mosques as a motif. (See Fig.30).

The variety and beauty of Palestinian embroidery has been a fascinating discovery of Palestinian society and culture. It shows how one of the most simplistic of crafts can become a powerful means of symbolism and meaning, that can reflect the ideas and aspirations so visually and beautifully in their national costume. Even if the embroidery on the costume is not to be read for its symbolism and meanings, it still provides enjoyment and beauty in the colours used and the skill of embroidery itself.

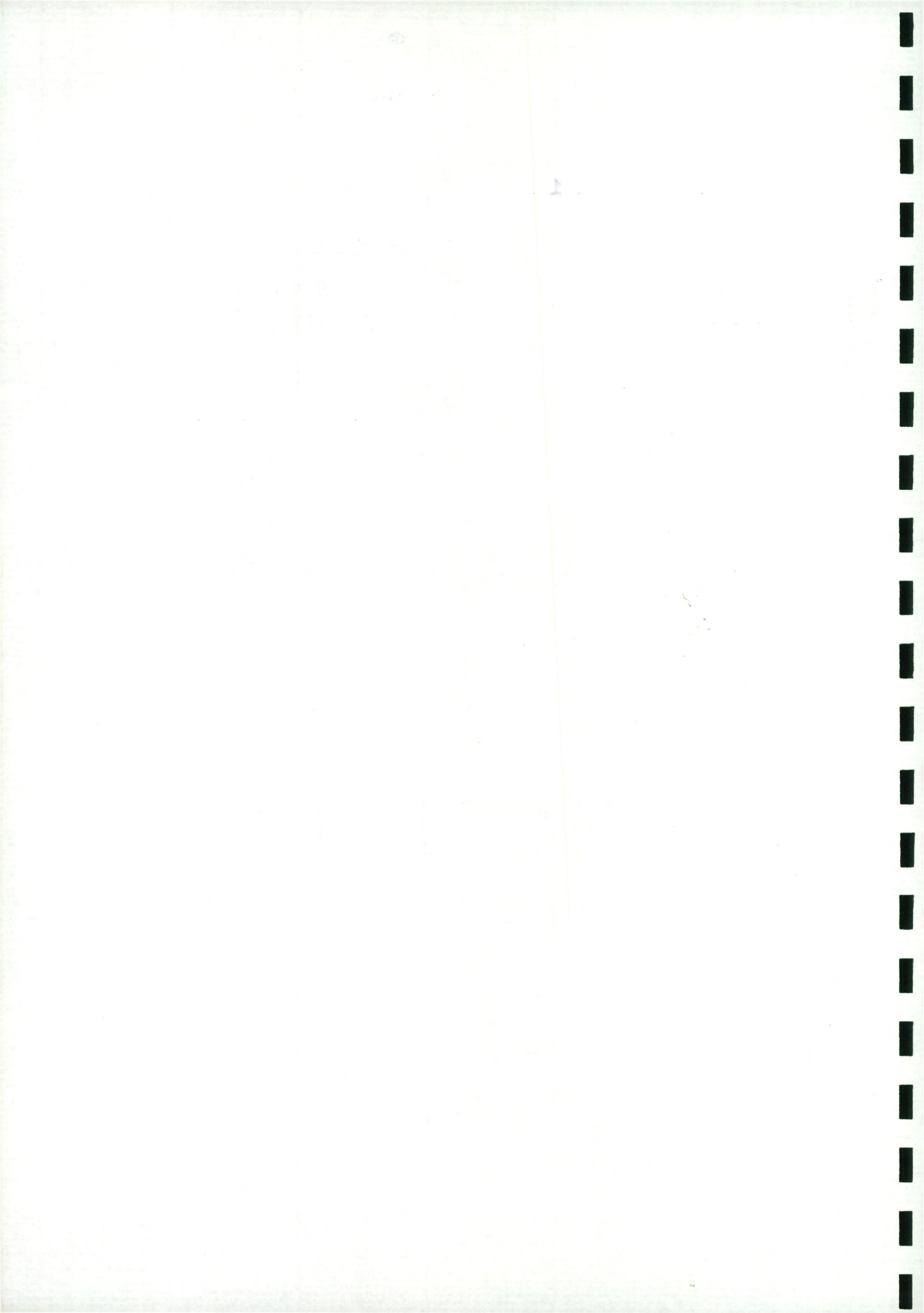




Fig. 30 This is a 'shawal'-style dress, embroidered in an embroidery center, in a refugee camp. It is called a 'flag dress', because of its patriotic motifs, note Palestinian flag incorporated in side panels, chest and sleeves, the 'cypress tree', 'leech', branch and feather patterns are included. Lettering has become a new and popular motif form, P.L.O., is incorporated into the embroidery.

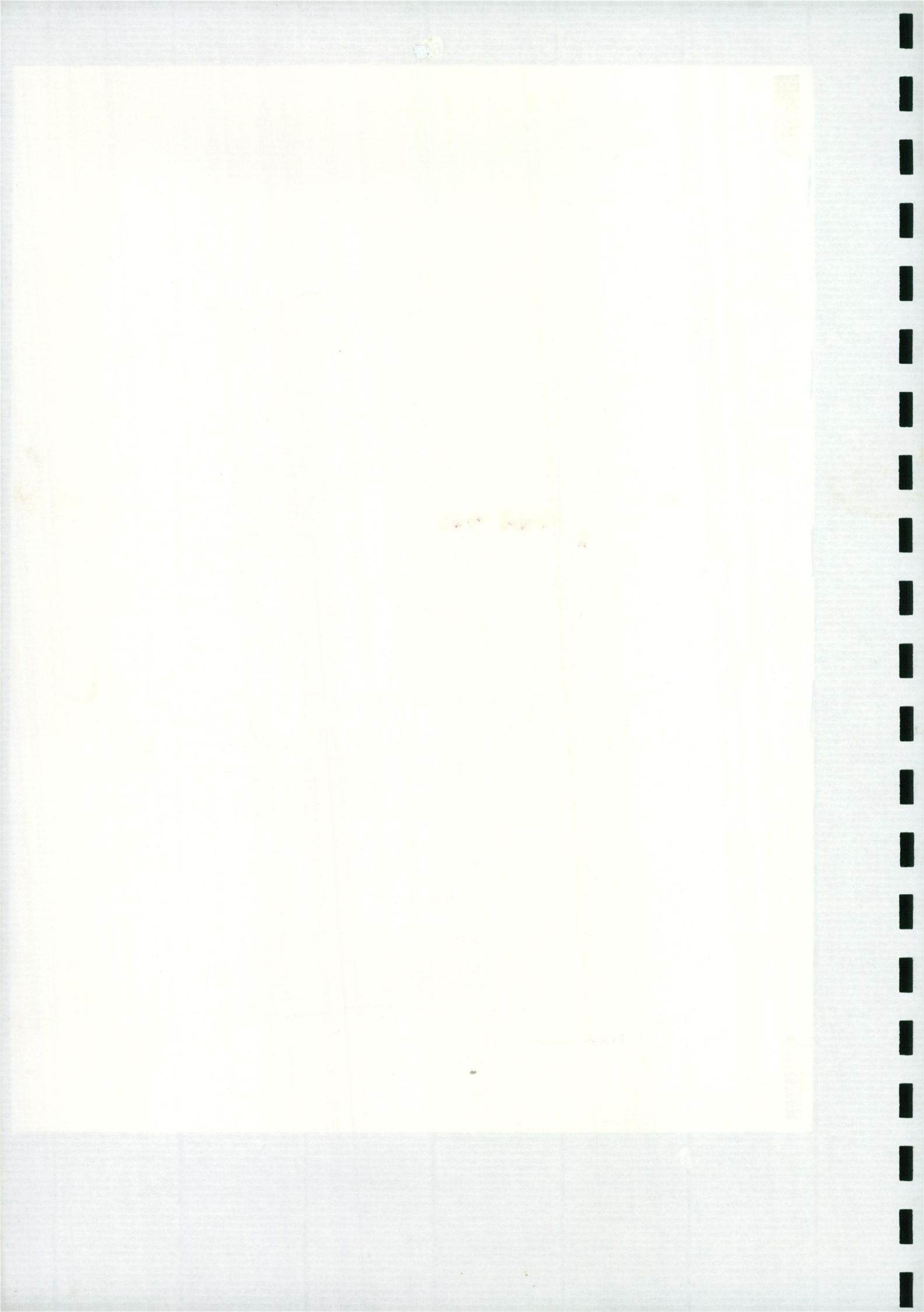
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Fig. 31

Detail from the side of a dress from Bethlehem, early 20th century. This is a perfect example of decorative patch-work, in harmony with the embroidery stitches and coloured threads. This dress was made for a wedding trousseau.



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