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# “Palestinian Cultural Heritage, Symbolic Costumes and Textile Designs”

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## Background to the Study

Safeguarding cultural heritage is a primary focus in socio-economic settings. In most developing countries and war zone regions in the Middle East, it's regarded as fundamental to society, as it encases and preserves history as well as promotes identity. For Palestine (a), one aspect of cultural heritage can be attributed to symbolic costumes and textiles (b); however this has suffered gradual disappearance after harsh political, social, and economical transformation of Palestinian regions in past years.

## Rationale and Aim of the Study

Symbolic costumes and textiles within the context of material culture play a large part in defining principles and values for Palestinians; yet, to date processes and features that constitute their establishment are eluded and not widely comprehended. The study aimed to capture and establish a meaning to eluded original Palestinian costumes and textiles.

## Data Collection

Through oral history, critical review of literature and examination of artefacts, this study collates a variety of women's traditional costumes, textiles and their uses; and provides a record of creative, historic and socio-economic conditions of their development.

## Findings and Conclusion

The study's findings underscore that Palestinian traditional costumes are interlaced with historical data that document centuries of textile art and craft developments in regions. This demonstrates the antiquity of Palestinian existence, textiles and costumes; while fostering the sense national identity within regions and in diaspora. By capturing and appreciating traditional Palestinian textiles and their uses, the true significance of its historical, political, economic and social values become firmly established.



(a)



(b)

## Palestinian Embroidery & Processes of Costume Development

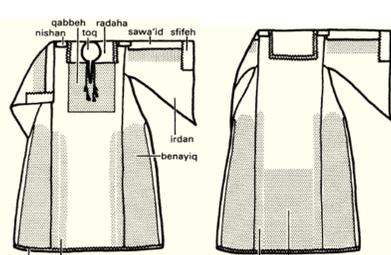
Palestinian traditional dresses were made of different elements that were assembled after the fabric had been embroidered, with various parts attached by different stitches (c-f).

**Thobs** (dresses) provided modesty as garments were not tailored or shaped to the body:

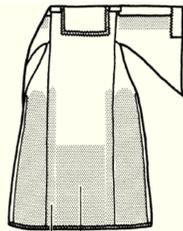
- **Chest Panel:** considered one of the most important parts of the dress, the colours and motifs of the chest panel differ from one village to another, and used as indicator of the wearer's financial status and personal skills.
- **The shoulder pieces:** it's the decorative piece of the dress- used also as a protection from hair dye as well as wear and tear around the neckline.
- **Sleeves:** Two main types which clearly identify the village or region of the dress. The long pointed sleeves "Irdan" had pointed ends which were usually left unembroidered to make it easier for women to tie this part of the sleeves behind their back when they worked on fields, and they were sometimes used to help them carry heavy objects.
- **The side panels of the skirt:** The "Banayeq" were made of triangular pieces of a variety of fabrics that were usually embroidered. Their main purposes were to widen the base of the dress for ease of movement.
- **The front side of the dress:** The "Hijer" featured regional variations, with most costumes featuring two elongated lines of embroidery known as "mawaris" on both sides of the hijer.
- **The back lower panel of the dress:** The "Shinyar" was richly embroidered and classified as one of the most important parts of the dress. It showcased the skills of the one who embroidered it and was usually the most critiqued part of the dress.



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

## Natural dyes:

Several Palestinian regions are associated with specific fabric colours and threads. In developing garments, natural dyes were produced from local plants and insects.

- **Yellow:** was made from **saffron flowers**.
- **Red:** was produced by mixing **pomegranate skins** with other plants like **kermes** and **insects**.
- **Purple:** from crushed **murex shells**.
- **Indigo:** was made from a **plant that was cultivated in the Jordan river valley**, the darker the more expensive as it took several dye baths to achieve deep shades.

## Palestinian Motifs and Symbolic Designs

Embroidery featured in Palestinian textiles have been influenced by social interaction, travel, inter-marriages and European presence.

Embroideries have been inspired by: Nature, symbols/beliefs and events, geometrics, magic and superstition/amulets. Although meaningful to cultural observations, a number of motifs and symbols have humorous underpinnings (g-j)



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)

- The motif with the **zigzag pattern** (g), repeated in Bedouin embroidery for example, reflect the pattern goats make when urinating.
- The motif featuring **two birds facing away from each other** (h) represent an assumed relationship between a woman and her mother in law.
- Based on strong religious beliefs, for marriage costumes, a deliberate 'mark of imperfection' would be **stitched** into each costume (i) to express imperfections of humans, as perfection was ascribed to God only, to avoid possible jinxes and to distract human focus.
- Featured patterns and motifs also recorded political influences (k-o). 'Pasha's tent' was a reference to the Ottoman occupation, and the 'officer's badge' was influenced from the British mandatory military uniforms and featured amongst themes.



(k)

(l)

(m)

(n)

(o)

## The "Intifada" Dress

During the **First Intifada Rebellion**, uprising (1987), Israeli soldiers confiscated the flags of Palestinian women protesting in the streets, the women responded by **embroidering the Palestinian flag** and silhouettes of the country in endless repetition along the chests, sleeves, and back hems of their **Thobs** (traditional Palestinian dresses) (q-r).



(p)



(q)



(r)

**Palestinian Thob**  
(as worn on the body)  
Promoting cultural values, heritage and fostering a sense of identity through Symbolic Costumes and Textiles.



(s)

## Framework



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