



## BEERSHEBA Costume

The southern-most area of Palestine - a vast desert with a few oases and wadies, and a dry climate - is inhabited by Bedouin tribes. The lack of a permanent water supply, the dearth of rainfall, and the distance between oases made the Bedouin desert dwellers - a wandering people - constantly move in order to supply their needs and those of their herds of sheep, goats, and camels. Now these same tribes, due to progress, are semi-settled.

The Beersheba woman is a clever weaver. She spins her wool, colours it, and weaves a large variety of items for her tent, rugs, and bags, using geometric patterns of triangles . . .

The tribal dresses, always of black fabric, are larger than the dresses of other areas of Palestine. The colour of the embroidery threads reflects marital status. As a bride, the woman decorates her costume with many shades of red embroidery. If widowed, she embroiders the costume with dark blue threads, the colour of mourning. When she remarries, she accents the blue with pink embroidery.

Another distinctive feature of the Beersheba dress is its wide (5cm) hem decorated with a stem-stitch in blue or red. The Beersheba woman completes her trousseau by embroidering her head dress, her black head veil, her face veil, her jacket, and cushions for her home.

(from "*Palestinian Embroidery*"  
by Widad Kamel Kawar and Tania Tamari Nasir



## BETHLEHEM Costume

The costumes and embroideries of Bethlehem were esteemed by villages throughout the Judean Hills and the Coastal Plain. So esteemed, in fact, that the women embroiderers of Bethlehem and the neighbouring villages of Beit Jala and Beit Sahur were able to operate on a professional basis for the production of wedding costumes.

Every day dresses in Bethlehem were generally of indigo fabric, worn with a sleeveless coat bisht made from local wool. Special occasion dresses were made of striped silk on top of which was worn a short jacket taqsireh, known throughout Palestine as the Bethlehem jacket.

The unique feature of Bethlehem work was the couching of gilt silver cord or silver cord onto the silk, wool, felt, or velvet of the garment which enabled the creation of stylised floral patterns. Some have traced this technique to Byzantium, others to the more formal costumes of the ruling class during the Ottoman empire. Its appearance in Bethlehem may perhaps be credited to the fact that Bethlehem was a Christian village, and the local women were much exposed to the ornate embellishments of church vestments with their heavy embroidery and silver brocade.

(from "*Portraits without Names: Palestinian Costume*" by Jeni Allenby)



## Palestinian Pottery & Ceramics

Pottery making is an ancient industry in Palestine going back to the Canaanites around 3000BC and the Bronze Age. The ancient Palestinians used to bake their clay and ceramics in fire and then colour and polish them. They used to bury their dead in clay or ceramic coffins and then carved the picture of the deceased on the cover of the coffin.

The traditional shapes and designs used in contemporary pottery are similar to those found on artefacts unearthed at old archaeological sites. Traditional pottery includes cooking pots, jugs, mugs and plates and is manufactured by men and women from historic villages like al-Jib (Gibeon), Beitin (Bethel) and Senjel. This pottery is produced, as in ancient times, without the use of modern wheels or ovens. It is made by hand and fired in open, charcoal-fuelled kilns.

Palestinian ceramics are produced at traditional family owned factories in Hebron and some other cities. They include a wide range of colourful hand painted plates, vases, hanging ornaments, tiles, cups, jars and framed mirrors. They are known the world over for the intricate detail of their flower and arabesque patterns.



## Mother-of-Pearl

One special form of art that is associated only with Palestine is carved mother-of-pearl shells and Bethlehem particularly has a long tradition of working with mother-of-pearl. However, mother-of-pearl is not native to the area. It is taken from marine animals such as oysters and snails and was first brought from the Red Sea. Today, it comes mainly from the sea around Australia and New Zealand.

Mother-of-pearl consists of 97% lime, but like the pearl, it has a thousand times higher breaking strength because it is composed of alternate layers of calcium carbonate.

The highly-developed technique used in hand-crafting these items has been passed down from generation to generation in very select families, and over the years, this technique has developed into an exquisite art form. A variety of souvenir shops in Bethlehem offer tourists an assortment of these artefacts which predominantly depict religious images dear to Christians and Muslims alike. However, it has also been incorporated into jewellery, making such pieces distinctively Palestinian.

