

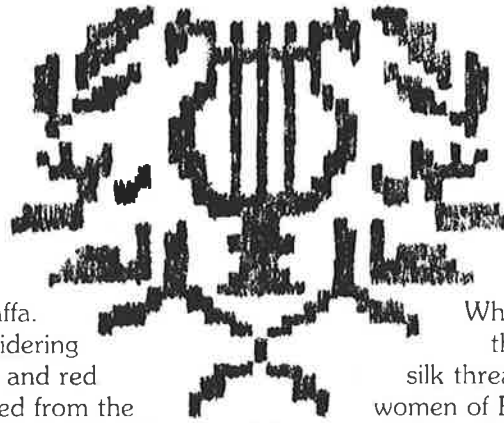
MOONS & ROSES

“Round about the turn of the century live with her brother in a village near Jaffa. carried on the traditional task of embroidering wedding. As she twisted the gold, silver and red nature-inspired patterns she had inherited from the own personal way. Her method of twisting the threads amazed the women of the village. They knew only the plain cross stitch and from it built up their geometric patterns of cypresses and orange trees. The girl taught them her technique, and so it happened that the women of Beit Dajan shared the tradition of Bethlehem.”

This is one of the many stories surrounding the ancient craft of Palestinian embroidery, one of the most legendary and colorful of the traditional handicrafts of Palestine. Palestinian folk culture includes many important crafts — olive wood figures from Jerusalem, colorful woven rugs from Gaza, mother of pearl carvings and jewelry from the religious centers of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the extraordinary black ceramics of Gaza, and blue and gold glasswork from Hebron. Embroidery, however, remains the most widely retained symbol of Palestinian cultural heritage. Unlike ceramics or glass blowing which require scarce materials and special workshops, the embroidery patterns and threads can be fit into the bundles that Palestinian women have carried with them through upheavals and relocation.

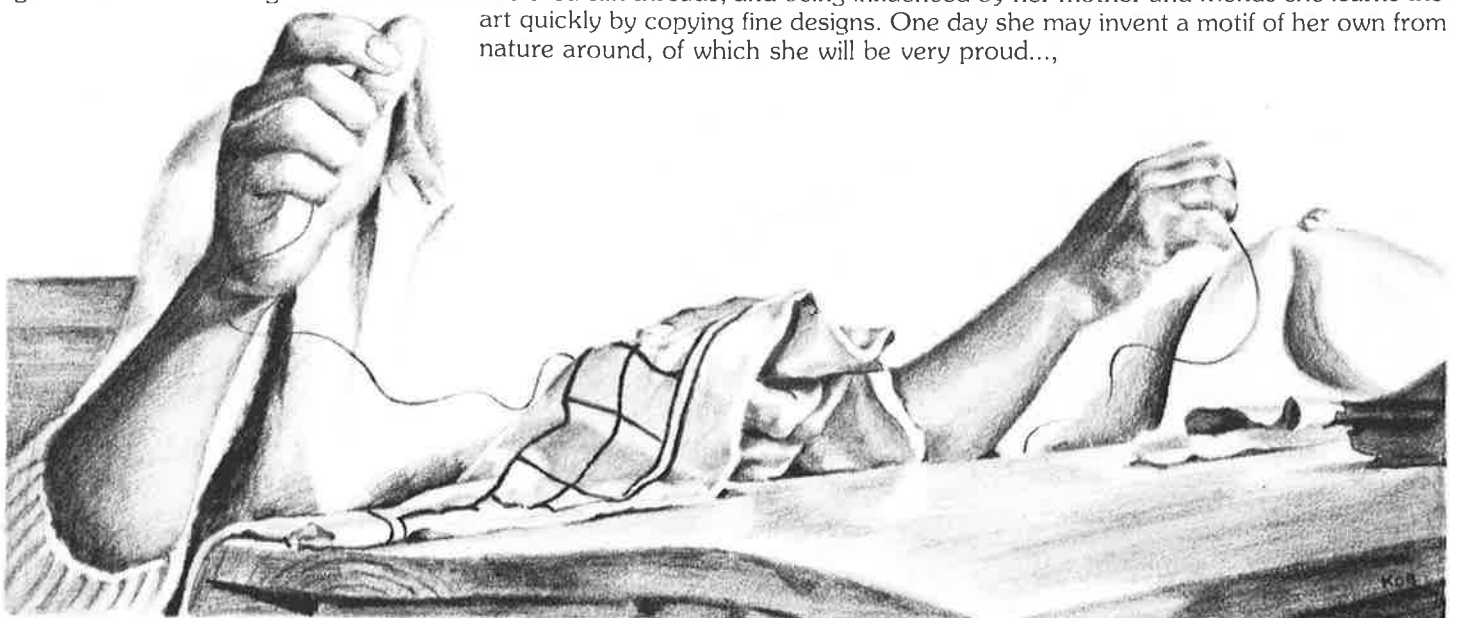
Embroidery was traditionally done by girls on their wedding dress, a project started and worked on from age 13 or 14. Each girl was taught to sew at an early age and in time came to develop her own distinctive arrangement of the cross stitch patterns. This process is recounted in this story by Miss Hind Husseini, President of Dar El Tifl Institution:

A country woman . . . is so keen about teaching her daughter embroidery, that art which runs with the blood in their veins. As soon as her first baby girl is born, she starts saving money by selling eggs, and allotting the price of the eggs of a certain chicken for her daughter's benefit in order to buy her silk threads and material. As she grows up and maybe before she is ten, her mother shows her the charming silk threads and materials, encouraging her to learn embroidery and prepare her trousseau. The little girl is thrilled at the sight of her first multicolored silk threads, and being influenced by her mother and friends she learns the art quickly by copying fine designs. One day she may invent a motif of her own from nature around, of which she will be very proud...



A STORY OF STITCHERY

a peasant girl came from Bethlehem to While he worked in the orange groves, she the dress she would one day wear in her silk threads, all her attention was on the flowing women of Bethlehem and was now adapting in her



THE STITCH...THE PATTERNS

The predominant cross-stitch, in Arabic "peasant stitch", was traditionally the only stitch used to create the many embroidery patterns. The stitches in striking colors of red and orange were sewn in patterns onto black, white, or blue linen material. The patterns were then arranged into various designs on the traditional village dress. Towards the end of the 19th century various religious orders introduced European crewel work to Palestinian girls. The European crewel stitchery came to be known as the nun's stitch. It was ingeniously combined by village women with the old stitches to create many new designs and patterns.

Many embroidery patterns date back to antiquity (indeed Palestinians trace their knowledge of embroidery to the Canaanites). For example, similarities can be seen between the basic geometric embroidery patterns of Palestine and the mosaics and rugs of ancient Islamic mosques, churches, and baths. The village women who inherited, preserved and passed on to their daughters the cross-stitch techniques, gave these patterns imaginative, often humorous names from everyday life — names such as, "The Old Man's Teeth", "Moons and Roses", "The Bald Palms", "the Frogs in a Pond", "the Baker's Wife", and "the Road to Egypt". The patterns

the women used often reflected their surroundings, for example the wave pattern is predominant in the coastal plain dresses. Each village developed its own unique combination of patterns that differed from other villages in arrangement, color and style. In this way, a woman's dress was like her identity card, easily indicating her origin from a particular area or village.

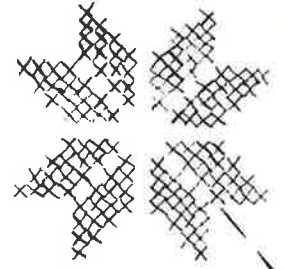
THE HISTORY

The creation of a Palestinian costume is a process as timeless as the very history and existence of the Palestinians themselves. Just as each period in history is planned, occurs, and is remembered; each stitch in the pattern of a dress is prepared, placed, and counted. The pattern unfolds telling the story that each seamstress sets down and often reflecting the surrounding history and geography.

History and political events have influenced the fate of the Palestinian costume especially in this century. Right after the '48 war few Palestinian women had money for embroidery materials and many were forced to sell their beautiful dresses and accessories to feed their families. In the late 50's and 60's there was a revival of embroidery and other Palestinian crafts. Craft workshops were established by cooperatives and women's unions to preserve the Palestinian tradition, maintain the identity of the people, and generate income. During this time, both men and women began to wear the traditional scarf and costume more regularly. Thus the

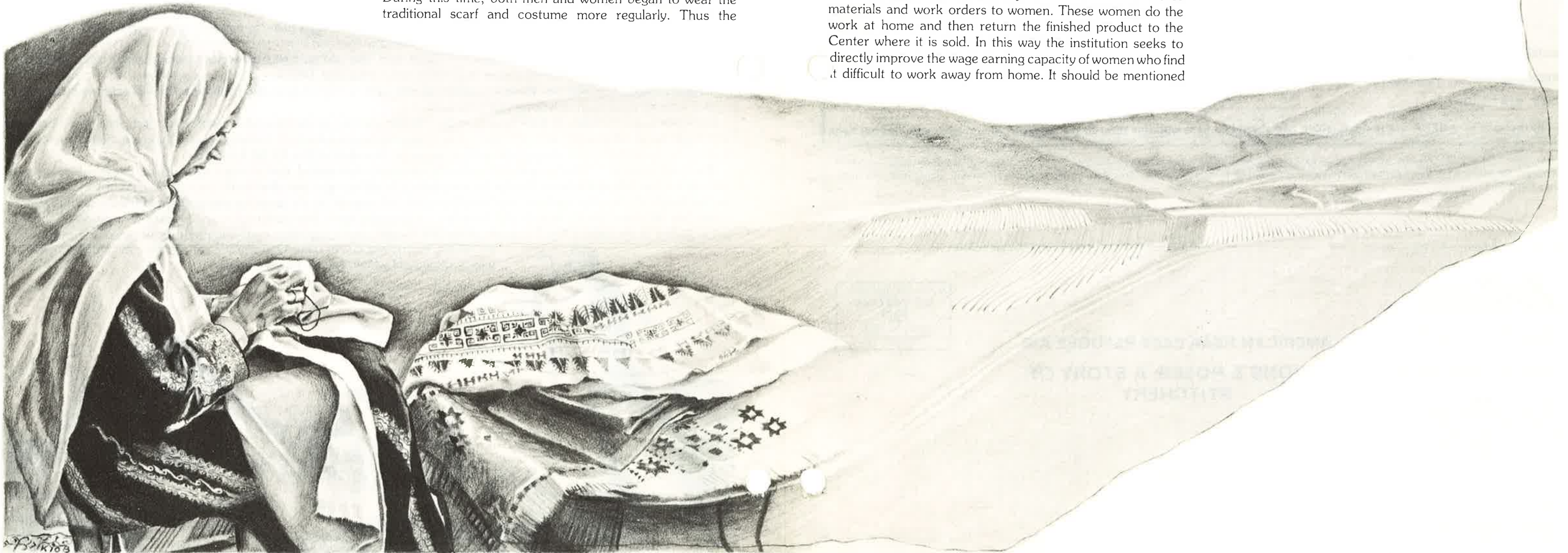
Palestinian costume and embroidery became a symbol of national identity and pride.

In the 70's and 80's although fewer women embroider their own wedding dresses, the art of embroidery is being carefully preserved and practiced. Today, the main centers preserving and teaching the embroidery craft are the Arab Women's Unions, Charitable Societies and Handicraft Cooperatives which can be found throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These organizations are among the oldest continuous Palestinian institutions, dating back to the creation of the first Palestine Arab Women's Union at a 1928 Women's Conference in Jerusalem. Their overall goals are to improve the educational, cultural, health and social levels of women. Some, such as the Arab Women's Union in Jerusalem, founded in 1929, the Arab Women's Union in Ramallah, (1939) and the Women's Charitable Society of Hebron, (1948), have become well-established and independent institutions. Their wide ranging programs include pre and post natal care, elementary and preparatory education, daycare centers, vocational training, and homes for the aged as well as embroidery classes and workshops. Others, such as the Kalandia Camp Handicraft and Sewing Cooperative, founded in 1958 in the Kalandia Refugee Camp work closely with women in the refugee camps, teaching them embroidery and sewing by hand and by machine. The Palestine Women's Union in Gaza like most, operates an embroidery center which distributes materials and work orders to women. These women do the work at home and then return the finished product to the Center where it is sold. In this way the institution seeks to directly improve the wage earning capacity of women who find it difficult to work away from home. It should be mentioned



that although not all women's unions and societies are as large as the Jerusalem and Ramallah unions, they all provide women and children with educational and social services besides embroidery classes and workshops. In this way these institutions function as an essential part of the community. ANERA has contributed to all of the above mentioned organizations as well as others and continues to do so.

Thus the ancient handicraft of embroidery endures even in these times of upheaval and uncertainty. Perhaps in the future Palestinian women through whom the art of embroidery "runs like the blood in their veins" will once again be able to use their own distinctive village dresses as their means of identification.





ANERA has received special gifts...

In memory of: Sadie Halkias ■ Anna Abbott ■ Anne Richdorf ■ Dr. A. P. Francine ■ John R. & Julia E. Lee ■ Bishop Raphael Hawaweeny ■ Thomas Kouzes ■ Noura Doumar Cressaty ■ Frank Szluk ■ Anthony Craig Mansour ■ Sol Hamady ■ Janet D. Waterbury ■ Mary & Yahia Al Hajj Moussa whose family was devastated in the recent invasion and devastation of Saida, Lebanon.

In honor of: Lucile Beauchamp ■ Mr. & Mrs. H. B. Sanders ■ Mrs. A. Yabroudy ■ Mrs. Hattie Lilly ■ Mr. & Mrs. Ibrahim Mattar ■ Jesus Christ ■ Dr. Raymond Haddad ■ Rev. Philip H. Ward ■ Dr. Rosa Lee Nemir ■ Mr. & Mrs. David L. Hendry ■ Palestinian and Lebanese homeless ■ Elizabeth S. Coats.

In birthday tribute to: Russell K. Safar

ANERA is a participant for the first time this year in the Combined Federal Campaign, which solicits contributions from federal employees to help meet the health and welfare needs of many in our own communities and in communities abroad. As one of twenty-six International Services Agencies within the Campaign, ANERA will benefit from greater publicity about our work both in the U.S. and abroad and from increased contributions to support our program in the Middle East.

Enclosed is a special gift for ANERA's work with women's organizations:

_____ \$15 _____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$75 _____ \$100 _____ \$500 _____ \$1000

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Contributions to ANERA are tax-deductible and should be sent with this form to the ANERA office. Thank you for your help.

This issue of the ANERA Newsletter was written by Jody Z. Ellis, ANERA Administrative Assistant. Illustrations are by Washington artist, Kathleen O'Brien. We also wish to thank Zeina Azzam Seikaly at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, whose research made this Newsletter possible.

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