



THE TRAVEL

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A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP
ATALLAH HANNA

UNESCO IN PALESTINE

WEAVING THE FABRIC
OF PALESTINIAN CULTURE

NATIVITY CHURCH AT THE TIME OF CRUSADERS
BY PROFESSOR DENYS PRINGLE

THE MAGI FOLLOWING THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM



WEAVING THE FABRIC OF PALESTINIAN CULTURE: MAHA SACA AND THE PALESTINIAN HERITAGE CENTER.

A passer-by on Bethlehem's Manger Street can be forgiven for not taking a second notice of a modest-looking stone and concrete structure across from the old Sansour Building. The brightly-colored pictures of Palestinian folklore painted on its outside cheer up the general gloom that the IDF watchtower, the unwelcome, overstayed guest of the neighborhood, has imposed upon the busy street, giving off the impression that the building may be a well-kept souvenir shop, were it not for the words Palestinian Heritage Center that are painted over its entrance.

However, one quick look inside this busy little building will dispel any notion that the Palestinian Heritage Center is anything but an extraordinary place to visit. Beyond the glass door of the entrance, the visitor steps into another world: one of brightly-colored Palestinian dresses, carpets, pillow-cases and wall hangings. Jewelry and amulets, headdresses and coffee-pots, paintings and posters depicting Palestinian figures and scenes are dotted across the expansive room, while a massive Bedouin tent awaits its next visitors, accompanied by one of the oldest surviving looms in the West Bank.

Through a corridor crammed with the traditional dresses of village women for every region and

culture of Palestine is a room lined with even more cultural items, posted on the wall between generations of photos. Here, Mrs. Maha Saca, a lively Palestinian woman from neighboring Beit Jala, manages and builds the PHC, to date Palestine's largest ethnographic museums and cultural center.



Maha Saca is well-known to the people of Bethlehem. Her name is synonymous to the preservation of village traditions, handicrafts and culture threatened with extinction from the Nakba of 1948 and modernization. For the last twenty years, Maha and her supporters have been re-





searching, collecting and promoting the tangible items of everyday Palestinian life.

Maha's cultural and family ties are strongest in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Jerusalem, as seen in the many family photos that line the wall of her office. While



her vocation of researching and collecting cultural items and traditions began in the late 1980s, she is proud to point out that it was her grandmother, who broke with tradition and decided to pass on her traditional wedding dress to her family rather than be buried in it, that started her lifelong passion for all things cultural in Palestine.

The depth and diversity of the items that the center retains is astounding. At present, the collection of the Palestinian Heritage Center includes more than 200 dresses and robes, 1000 household and agricultural items and 300 pieces of jewelry and amulets from across the breadth of contemporary and historic Palestine. Each dress and tatreez pattern identifies the region and social status of its owner, ranging from the black robes of the Jordan Valley and Negev Bedouin to the brightly-colored sashes of the Nablus city-dwellers. The collection ranges from original items from the late Ottoman Era to recent creations, with a few artifacts dating prior to the 19th century. But the center is not a museum but an interactive institution with a focus on keeping the heritage of Palestine relevant to contemporary culture, both within the country and the international community. With the help of young women acting as models for the traditional dresses, the center has participated in multiple cultural festivals and fairs and developed a popular series of posters and ethnographic maps of traditional costumes. In recent years, the center has begun a new tradition of taking part in Christmas day celebrations in Manger Square, with young women dressing in traditional Bethlehemite costumes. In 2008, the center won in a UNESCO Women and Culture Competition in Spain, gaining first place in the category of tourist organizations.



In 2010, the Guinness Book of World Records acknowledged the center's role in the creation of the world's largest dress in Hebron, made in traditional Palestinian style by some 150 women, measuring some 32 meters/107 feet long and 18 meters/59 feet across. The center designed and produced the scarf given to Pope Benedict during his 2008 visit to Bethlehem, and has been visited by national and international political leaders from multiple countries. Yet these achievements are secondary to the day-to-day accomplishments of the center supporting itself through the selling of handicraft products made by women from over 40 Palestinian families to tourists coming to Bethlehem, and the continuing education of the younger generations on the uniqueness of Palestinian culture.

The center hopes to build on its current work through establishing a permanent research center with using the nearly one thousand books on history and culture that it has collected as its base, and to find a larger facility to display all of its items in a proper fashion. In the meantime, the Palestinian Heritage Center continues to lead the way in ensuring that the "living stones" of Palestine are not forgotten alongside the religious and historical sites of the land, serving as a cultural embassy for a people whose resilience is matched only in the richness of the fabric of their national story.



The Palestinian Heritage Center

Founded: 1991

Director: Maha Saca

Function: Preservation and cultivation of Palestinian heritage through education, research, exhibitions and employment of Palestinians engaged in the creation of handicrafts.

Activities: Participation in cultural, tourism and heritage events, fairs and Palestinian festivals, educational courses, hosting visiting delegations and tourists, creation and selling handicrafts through the museum's gift shop.

Hours of operation: Monday-Saturday, 10 PM -6PM, other hours available.

www.palestinianheritagecenter.com

مركز التراث الفلسطيني في بيت لحم Palestinian Heritage Center in Bethlehem

We welcome you to visit the Palestinian Heritage Center in Bethlehem and to experience firsthand the richness of Palestinian embroidery culture and heritage. The Center Gift Shop produces fair trade, handmade embroidered pieces crafted by Palestinian women. You can find purses, wall hangings, pants, blouses, modern dresses, shawls, and more. Items can be shipped overseas. **Please visit our gift shop page at www.giftshop.phc.ps.**
Founder Maha Saca

ندعوكم بمناسبة الاعياد السعيدة لزيارة مركز التراث الفلسطيني في بيت لحم للإطلاع على متحفه وعلى إنتاجه من التطريز الفلسطيني المميز. يعرض قسم الهدايا التابع للمركز والمتحف قطعاً مطرزة يدوياً، قامت بإنتاجها نساء فلسطينيات ماهرات. بإمكانكم شراء الشالات، الحقائب اليدوية، المعلقات، الوسائد، كذلك الملابس الحديثة المطرزة. إمكانية الشراء والشحن الى الخارج متوفرة، **الرجاء زيارة ركن الهدايا على موقعنا الإلكتروني www.giftshop.phc.ps**
مديرة المركز مها السقا ترحب بكم



Open hours: Monday–Saturday: 10 am–8 pm. For more info, please visit our website: www.phc.ps. Call the center for visitation outside working hours. Tel.: +972 2-2742381, 0599-279760, 0598-591720. Email: info@phc.ps.
The center is located on Manger Street at the northern entrance of Bethlehem