



# Traditional Textile Craft – an Intangible Cultural Heritage

REPORT OF THE PRE-VISIT TO AMMAN, JORDAN, JANUARY 6-11 2014

Camilla Ebert 16. januar 2014

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### PURPOSE:

In connection to the workshop: *Traditional Textile Craft – an Intangible Cultural Heritage* that will be held in Amman, Jordan, from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014, we made a pre-visit to Amman to meet with our co-organizer Jihad Kafafi (curator at the Jordan Museum). He had arranged an interesting week for us with different visits to relevant places and meetings with relevant people. During our stay we were resident at the American Centre for Oriental Research (ACOR) (Director, Barbara A. Porter).

### PRE-VISIT PARTICIPANTS:

Eva Andersson Strand (Co-organizer), Mary Harlow (Co-organizer), Kerstin Andersson (KINARESOR) and Camilla Ebert (Workshop coordinator).

### TUESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY:

On our first day in Amman, Jihad had arranged two visits for us. The first with Mrs Widad Kamel Kawar. The second to the Jordan Museum.

Mrs Widad Kawar has her own private costume collection of Palestinian, Jordanian and other Arab costumes from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

She has collected costumes for over 50 years, and her collection consist of more than 3000 pieces. She started the collection by collecting garments from women in refugee camps after the wars in 1948 and 1967. Mrs Widad Kawar is a renowned figure in the field of Arab textiles. Mrs Widad Kawar greeted us in her own private home in Amman, and showed us many pieces from her extensive collection of dress items.

During the visit, we got a chance to meet the director of Widad's private centre, Salua Qidan, and another renowned textile expert, Laila Pio. The purpose of



Mrs Widad Kawar showing one of her many textiles.  
Photo: Camilla Ebert.

our visit to Widad's was to discuss their part in the workshop, since we are planning to go to Widad's private centre on the second day of the workshop.

For further information on Widad Kawal and her collection see:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Widad-Kawar/15531921238506>

<http://www.arabheritage.org/index.html>



The conference hall at the Jordan Museum. Photo: Camilla Ebert

Our first action at the Jordan Museum was to see the location for the workshop, which provides excellent facilities. There is a large, well equipped conference hall and several adjacent rooms for the discussions and 'show and tell' sessions. This was followed up by a private tour through their otherwise closed collection by Jihad (the museum only opens three days a week). So far, only the first floor of the Jordan Museum collection is open, but they are working very hard to get the second floor opened for visitors. After the private tour, we met with the Director of the Jordan Museum, Sharifa Nasser, to discuss many

practical details regarding the workshop (an opening event to be attended by the Museum patron, a member of the Jordanian royal family, and other dignitaries; catering and other practicalities).

We found the first day of our pre-visit extremely productive and felt both more confident and excited about the prospects for the workshop having seen the museum and met Jihad, who had done so much to plan our week in Jordan. After this first day, we were also very much aware of importance of the workshop both for participants and the various disciplines involved but also for the potential for creating new networks and new research directions for all concerned.

## WEDNESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY

We were optimistic for the second day, since the first day had been such a success. Jihad had arranged a private chauffeur, who was going to drive us around Wednesday and Thursday. During those day Ameer Saied al Zaben, curator at Jordan museum joined us.

Wednesday we started with a visit to the Iraq Al Amir Women's Cooperative Society in the region of Iraq Al Amir, famous for the black iris, the national flower of Jordan. The handicraft village was established in 2001 for the purpose of conserving the region's environment and preserving its unique architectural heritage, as well as comprehensive development of women; providing them with training and education on



Woman on loom from the Iraq Al Amir Handicraft Village. Photo: Camilla Ebert

environmental and health-related issues. In the handicrafts village they make hand-made fabrics on manual looms in many colours and sizes, clear soaps using natural dyes, ceramics and pottery, using both the potter's wheel and build molds and chemical free hand-made paper from local resources (e.g. pampas grass, okra, roses, banana, palm leaves etc.). We were hoping to make the Iraq Al Amir handicraft village the setting for our first day of our post-workshop excursion, since they have so much to offer.



Wall hanging from the Jerash Women Society.  
Photo: Camilla Ebert

After the handicraft village, we went to Jerash, north of Amman, to visit the Ladies Charitable Society of Jerash. Here we meet with Enayat Khalil Haoubsh, the president of the society, who showed us around. The society in Jerash is trying to keep their heads above water, since its initial funding has ended. The women are instructed in weaving but not the marketing side and the textile side of the work has unfortunate lapsed.

## THURSDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY:

Thursday we went to see the Bani Hamida weaving project located in Makawir, 75 kilometres south west of Amman. The Bani Hamida were nomads, whom decided to make a permanent home in this area back in the 1970's. In 1985, a survey of the villages found that the weaving skills still existed, but were not often practised. As the older generation died, so did their weaving art. The weaving thrived when the women were making the panels that formed the tents in which they lived, but as they became settled both the need and the skill disappeared. As a result, the Save the Children began the Bani Hamida Women's Weaving project with a small core of 12 women in the village of Makawir, where traditional weaving skills were now put to making rugs. At Bani Hamida, Halima Abu Qaaydeh, director of the Bani Hamida Bedouin weaving society, greeted us. She showed us their products, which we were really impressed



Halima showing wool from New Zealand. Photo: Camilla Ebert



Mary and Eva studying the horizontal ground level loom. Photo: Camilla Ebert

by. The quality of the weaving was excellent. Compared to some of the other weaving centres for women, the Bani Hamida centre has also taken an interest in marketing, and thereby doing better than some of the other women centres. They have started doing quality control before they ship their products. The Bani Hamida project cannot survive on textiles alone,

so they have also started making candles. There were no looms in the centre, because the women do most of their work from home. We were lucky to visit a woman's private home, where we saw how they operated a horizontal ground level loom. A visit to Bani Hamida will be included in the post-workshop tour.

Near the Bani Hamida project lies the Qal'at al-Meshneqeh also called the Citadel of the Gallows where we made a quick stop.

On our way back to Amman, we stopped in Madaba and saw the famous Byzantine mosaic map of the Holy World in St George's Church and the Archaeological Park where many late Roman and Byzantine mosaics are on display.

## FRIDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY:

In Amman we also had the possibility to check out the accommodation possibilities for the workshop participants. Our travel organiser is represented by Kerstin Andersson. Kerstin has arranged textile tours for many years and in several countries and CTR has travelled with her in both China and India. In the morning we meet with Hussam Othman, the owner/General Manager of Hussam Tours, the Jordanian travelling agency we are collaborating with, and some of his colleagues to get some final details in place. After the meeting, we went to see the Toledo Hotel, situated in the heart of Amman, on the edge of the old city centre, in walking distance to the new downtown. We felt this hotel would be able to fill our requirements and decided to book them for the workshop.



Toledo Hotel entrance lobby. Photo: Camilla Ebert

On the first day of our workshop the 25<sup>th</sup> March, we are planning a small excursion to some of the textile showrooms in Amman. Hussam's son was kind enough to take us to the River Foundation Showroom (JRF) in Jabal Amman. In the JRF showroom they have an exquisite collection of fine and high quality handicrafts, all produced with an exclusive array of materials and rich accents. Many of the items are designed and produced individually. JRF's handicrafts projects have the dual objective of preserving Jordanian heritage and enhancing the well-being of women and their families.



The Jordan River Foundation Showroom. Photo: Camilla Ebert

In the evening, we were invited to Mrs Widad Kamel Kawar's private house where we met with other collectors and experts e.g. Ahmad Hussein and Aysar Akrawi all of whom were very supportive of the workshop and offered their help and guidance.

## FINAL REMARKS

During our five day stay in Jordan we were met with a great enthusiasm and hospitality, we met many people, colleagues at the museum, women at the craft centres we visited, our fantastic driver during the excursion, the couple that offered four Scandinavian women lift when they couldn't get a taxi and several others, we thank them all.

A special thanks to our collaborator and colleague Jihad Kafafi for his efforts and for spending those very intense days with us, Barbara Porter director at ACOR for her's and ACORs hospitality and all new contacts and suggestions and Mrs Widad K Kawar for opening her home for us.

We are all looking forward to returning in March,  
and to welcoming all the participants to our workshop and to Jordan.

## PICTURES:



Camilla Ebert, Eva Andersson, Mary Harlow, Jihad Kafafi and Kerstin Andersson at the Jordan Museum. Photo: unknown



Ameera Abdullah, Eva Andersson, Jihad Kafafi, Kerstin Andersson, Mary Harlow and Camilla Ebert at the Iraq Al Amir Women Society. Photo: unknown



Mary Harlow, Kerstin Andersson, Jihad Kafafi, Camilla Ebert, Ameera Abdullah and Eva Andersson at ACOR. Photo: unknown



*Kerstin Andersson, Mary Harlow, Jihad Kafafi, Camilla Ebert and Eva Andersson at Bani Hamida Weaving Project Centre and Gallery. Photo: unknown*