LARGE PRINT

VEILED MEANINGS

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#FashioningJewishDress

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INTRODUCTION

VEILED MEANINGS
Fashioning Jewish Dress
From the Collection of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Clothing is intended to cover our bodies, but it also uncovers. To what extent is our choice of dress freely made, and how do our surroundings affect our decisions? The variety of costumes displayed in this exhibition attests to the diversity of Jewish communities around the globe. In many cases, the clothes worn by Jews were similar or even identical to those worn by non-Jewish neighbors, although at times special features distinguished them from the dominant culture.

This exhibition invites viewers to consider the language of clothing in all its complexity. Though this language can disclose information about gender, age, background, and custom, some important meanings remain vague and fluid. Clothing may accentuate or conceal; it may be transitory, but it may also be ageless and universal. These garments, dating primarily to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are drawn from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the repository of the most comprehensive collection of

Jewish costume in the world. Its holdings provide a unique testimony to bygone communities, to forms of dress and craft that no longer exist, and to a sense of beauty that still has the power to enthrall.

SECTION TEXT

THROUGH THE VEIL

The wraps seen here were worn as outdoor garments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Uzbekistan and were influenced by local Islamic cultures. Although they covered a woman's body and face, they revealed important aspects of her identity, such as religion, status, or place of origin. Thus the tension between obscuring the personal and accentuating the collective is manifested in the realm of dress. Wraps of this type were once a universal custom in the Middle East and Central Asia; over time the tradition survived among Muslims and lingered in some Jewish communities. In other cases, the wraps worn by Jewish women testified to the migration of a tradition from Iran to Afghanistan. The extent to which a woman is concealed by her clothing remains a timely issue.

ON THE FIRST PLATFORM

FROM RIGHT TO LEFT

Jewish woman's wrap (chadur) and face veil (ruband)
Herat, Afghanistan, mid-twentieth century
Cotton wrap; netted veil with silk-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Dr. Willy and Charlotte Reber, Switzerland, B77.0466, B71.0526

In Herat, the traditional everyday attire of Jewish women differed from that of Muslim women only in their street wear. The latter wore a wide, colorful one-piece wrap (chadur burka) with a netted opening for the eyes. Jewish women also wore a chadur, but it was typically black, with a white netted and embroidered veil. This type of garment was brought to Afghanistan from Mashhad, Iran, by crypto-Jews, who continued to practice Judaism in secret after their community was forced to convert to Islam in 1839.

Jewish woman's wrap (izar), head cover (fez u-tassa), and face veil (khilliya)
Baghdad, Iraq, late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Made by Menashe Yitzhak Sa'at
Silk wrap with gilt-metal thread; horsehair veil with silver thread band
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Helene Simon and Hanina Shasha, New York, in memory of their mother Louise Zilka née Bashi; Gift of Moshe Ascher, Haron Saltoun, and Helene Simon, New York, to American Friends of The Israel Museum; Gift of Mazli Nawi, Ramat Gan, B79.0241, B68.0697, B82.0455

By the early twentieth century the izar was worn primarily by the older Christian and Jewish women of Baghdad. Christians left the face uncovered, while Jewish women concealed themselves behind a fine-mesh black horsehair veil. Muslim women adopted a black head-to-toe `abaya for outside wear. Many izars were made by the Jewish master weaver Menashe Yitzhak Sa'at, nicknamed Abu al-Izar ("father of the izar"), who immigrated to British-mandate Palestine in 1933. The izar industry in Baghdad dwindled and eventually came to an end.

Mourning cloak (faranji) and face veil (cheshm-band)
Uzbekistan, late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Silk and ikat-dyed silk cloak with printed cotton lining and finger-woven trimming ribbon; horsehair veil
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B64.11.3871, B92.0035

Mourning clothes—part of a Bukharan Jewish bride's trousseau—were worn after the death of a close relative at the funeral and during the first year of mourning, as was the custom among local Muslims. The garments are marked by a gray, green, or blue color (bright hues such as red, pink, and orange were rigorously avoided) and by the special cut of the outer dress, with two nonfunctional joined sleeves hanging on the back—a sign of wealth. An article of outerwear, the faranji was worn as a cape over the head, sometimes concealing the face.

Woman's outer cloak (`abaya)
Baghdad, Iraq, late 1920s or early 1930s
Silk with gilt-metal thread
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Ayala Dabby, Ramat Gan, from the bequest of and in memory of her aunt Jane Shasha, Baghdad, and her daughter Rosa Dabby, London, B79.0657, B95.1393

In use only for a very brief period in the early twentieth century, colorful `abayas were worn mainly by older Muslim and Jewish women.

MOVING CLOCKWISE TO THE NEXT ROOM

SECTION TEXT

INTERWEAVING CULTURES

Jewish costume often transmitted styles, motifs, and crafts from one community to another as Jews migrated across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The ensembles presented here also reflect the political and social changes that occurred in the regions where they settled. From Spain to Morocco, from the Ottoman Empire to Algeria, from Baghdad to Calcutta, clothing styles developed from the melding of imported and local fashions, materials, and craftsmanship. Indeed, many of these garments themselves took long journeys, as they were passed from one generation to another. These varied influences often led to innovative and eclectic creations. As modernization began to take hold, handcrafted fabrics were frequently used along with industrially produced textiles—or were replaced by them. Over time, western culture gradually pushed aside local traditions in North Africa,

the Middle East, and Central Asia. Today, the opposite trend may also be discerned: nonwestern dress is often a source of European, American, and Middle Eastern fashion inspiration.

ON THE PLATFORM ON THE LEFT

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Woman's ensemble
Tlemcen, Algeria, early twentieth century
Silk satin dress with cotton lace and silk ribbons;
tulle blouse with silk-thread embroidery
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum,
Jerusalem, B63.10.2330, B63.10.2412b

This outfit exemplifies the modernization of the urban Algerian Jewish woman's dress. While its sleeveless cut is customary, the traditional fabric and embroidery are replaced by a European-inspired design that uses silk ribbons and lace.

Woman's ensemble
Algeria, early twentieth century
Cotton velvet, gilt-metal cord embroidery, and silk-thread embroidery on tulle
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Amelie Nicolay, France, in memory of her parents, Zerrada and Gaston Bouchara, who were killed in Auschwitz, B63.10.2412, B63.11.3339, B64.12.3999, B86.0300

This urban ensemble, composed of a dress worn over a jacket, reflects the many changes that forged the Algerian Jewish community. The gilt embroidery at the front is borrowed from medieval Spanish costumes probably brought to North Africa by Muslims and Jews fleeing the Christian Reconquista in the late Middle Ages. The floral embroidery is typically Ottoman—the Empire ruled over Algeria for three centuries—and the sleeveless cut is comparable to that of the entari dress worn by Jewish women in Salonica in northern Greece. While Muslim women stopped wearing this type of dress in the early 1800s, some Algerian Jewish women, especially the elderly, preserved it as a ceremonial garment until they adopted European styles in the mid-twentieth century.

Festive dress
Ioannina, Greece, first half of the nineteenth century
Brocaded silk with silk-cord embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of the Asseo family, in memory of Renee Asseo Abravanel, Kibbutz Afiqim, B10.0868

This dress underwent a long journey; originating in a Jewish community in northwestern Greece, it was taken to British-mandate Palestine by way of Salonica and Paris. Influenced by the "Amalia dress" designed at the behest of Queen Amalia of Greece, this garment incorporates local embroidery and fabrics with a silhouette borrowed from European fashion. Greece won independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, and with nationhood acquired a German-born monarch. Amalia became queen consort in 1837; in an effort to embrace her new country's traditions, she created a hybrid dress style.

ON THE PLATFORM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM

MOVING CLOCKWISE FROM REAR RIGHT

"Great Dress" (berberisca or al-kiswa al-kabira)
Fez, Morocco, early twentieth century
Silk velvet, gilt-metal cords, braided ribbons, and embroidered tulle sleeves
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Perla Ben-Soussan, France; Gift of Armand Amselem, France; Gift of Elise and Eli Davis, Jerusalem, B66.07.1099, B66.12.1551, B71.0267, B79.0460, B78.0132

The Great Dress is a traditional urban Jewish garment brought to Morocco following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. The ensemble has five components: waistcoat, plastron or bodice, sleeves, skirt, and belt. It was worn by a bride at her prenuptial ceremonies, wedding, and on festive occasions thereafter. The cut of the dress retains Spanish elements such as the gilt-embroidered plastron at the front. This example displays the fine craft of gold-thread embroidery, practiced in Morocco by both Jewish women and men, and also Spanish in origin.

Woman's festive attire
Tripoli, Libya, early or mid-twentieth century
Artificial silk wrap; silk chiffon blouse; velvet vest; silk sash
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Louise Djerbi, Jerusalem, in memory of Luly Raccah; Gift of Lillo Arbib, Bat Yam, in memory of his mother Ida Arbib née Nahum; Gift of the Moshav Uzah Synagogue, B83.0816, B79.206, B71.0532, B94.0096

Dresses of this kind were worn by Jewish women in Tripoli and probably other urban centers in Libya. The chiffon blouse is either European or locally made, based on European models. Older women set the trend by adopting these fashionable items, while younger women and girls wore a white blouse under the traditional striped dress.

Woman's attire
Mashhad, Iran, early twentieth century
Silk, silk velvet, cotton satin, and gilt-metal cord embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Bruce Kovner, New York, B78.0749, B95.0735, B95.0737, B95.0738

No garments specific to the Jews of Mashhad are known, since after 1839 they were crypto-Jews, forced converts to Islam who practiced Judaism in secret. However, the color combination of dark purple and green seen here is found in garments worn by Jewish women in Herat, Afghanistan, where some Mashhadi crypto-Jews immigrated. This type of costume, worn by both Muslim and Jewish women, reflects the early stages of westernization in Persia. The fashion for the shalita, a skirt resembling a ballet tutu, was popularized by the Shah of Persia, Nasir al-Din, and his favorite wife, Anis al-Dawla, after they visited Europe in 1873.

Henna dress
Baghdad, Iraq, 1891
Silk satin, silk and lace ribbons, and tinsel embroidery; tulle underdress with metal-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Dakhla Rachel Mu`allem's daughter, Naomi Inbar, Ramat Gan; Gift of Cora Ginsburg, New York, B83.0099, B82.00935

Dakhla Rachel Mu`allem (1880–1960) was only eleven when she was married in Baghdad. She first wore this dress, sewn by her mother, at her henna ceremony, an event held before the wedding when the bride's palms are painted with henna dye to protect her from evil and as a symbol of fertility. Mu`allem's family fled to Iran in 1948 to escape anti-Jewish violence in the wake of the establishment of Israel. When her children in turn left Iran for London during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, they took the dress with them. This type of garment may have developed from the entari, the Ottoman coatdress worn by Muslim and Jewish women, but the gathered long skirt sewn to a long-sleeved top is European in style. Festive versions such as this example were made from luxurious Ottoman, Syrian, Indian, or Iranian fabrics with European lace and local tinsel embroidery. Although they emphasized the bust, these garments were considered modest.

Woman's ceremonial attire
Calcutta, India, late nineteenth century
Made for Baghdadi Jews
Brocaded silk dress; cotton chemise; cotton bodice with wool thread
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Ramah Yehuda, London; Gift of Anne Menasseh, London, B85.0006, B85.0004, B68.0583

Baghdadi Jewish traders came to India with the East India Company in the eighteenth century and remained closely associated with the British Raj. Dresses worn by women in their community emulated the Victorian silhouette, while Mediterranean, Indian, and European fabrics gave the garments an international flair. Like the dresses worn by Jewish women in Baghdad, this garment emphasizes the bust, but the multicolor bodice (angia) seen through a transparent chemise was adopted from local Indian dress.

ON THE NEXT PLATFORM

MOVING CLOCKWISE

Wedding sari
India, mid-twentieth century
Made for a member of the Bene Israel community
Brocaded silk and silver and silk thread
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B84.0629

The sari was the accepted everyday and festive wear for the women of the Bene Israel Jewish community in India, just as it was for local women. Under European influence, however, Bene Israel women wore white saris at their weddings, as opposed to the customary red ones. A white sari was likewise worn on Yom Kippur, while a simple white one indicated mourning, as is customary throughout India.

Bridal attire
Tunis, Tunisia, early twentieth century
Silk satin vest and trousers with gilt-metal cords and purl (metallic) and sequin embroidery; tulle blouse with cotton-thread embroidery
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2382, B63.10.2412

Until the early twentieth century, the traditional Jewish bridal outfit from Tunis included trousers. This practice is thought to have originated in the Balkans, while the use of white suggests influences from European wedding dresses.

REAR

Wedding dress
Tiberias, Ottoman Palestine, 1907
Silk satin
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Adelle Maman, Ashdod, in memory of her mother Leah Skili Cohen, B03.1335

Leah Skili Cohen wore this dress at her wedding in 1907. The fear of arousing envy and inciting the evil eye may account for its simplicity. Skili Cohen's daughter, Adelle Maman, writes that at the time in Tiberias "it was not customary for the bride to wear jewelry, or even a fine wedding dress. Instead she wore a plain white dress and a tulle crown decorated with artificial citrus blossom so as not to cause distress to poor local girls who might see her. . . . The real reason was quite different: should a woman be consumed with jealousy and venture to curse the bride in her finery, disaster could befall her."

Woman's ensemble
Probably Alexandria, Egypt, 1920s
Tulle and silver-tinsel embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Dr. Willy and Charlotte Reber, Valbella, Switzerland, B77.0114

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast, was a bustling mercantile center and international hub, whose shops offered the best of European fashion. This dress combines a European cut with local fabrics and traditional silver-tinsel embroidery.

Bridal attire(?)
Bukhara, Uzbekistan, early twentieth century
Tulle and silk and sequin embroidery; silk underdress
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B66.07.1115, B64.12.4242

Bridal attire
New York, United States, 1947
Silk satin with early nineteenth-century Burano lace and pearls
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Beatrice L. Eytan, New York, B82.0439

Inspired by Queen Victoria's 1840 wedding dress, white gowns were popularized throughout the far-reaching British Empire. The features of this traditional dress, including its color, long train, and veil, remain common to this day.

MOVING TO THE NEXT ROOM

SECTION TEXT

EXPOSING THE UNSEEN

A clothing ensemble has many layers, both literally and symbolically. An examination of these may uncover occult meanings and fascinating narratives. Exquisite linings, embroideries worn beneath outer garments, and other fine yet hidden components attest to the importance accorded to beauty and fine craftsmanship even when those details were enjoyed only by the wearer. Conversely, even some aspects of clothing visible to all were appreciated only by those familiar with local motifs and their meanings. Dress is an ongoing dialogue between the desire to reveal and the wish to conceal. In Jewish traditions this impulse sometimes inspired special articles of clothing such as bodices worn by women to modestly cover specific areas of the body or belts that divided the nether regions—regarded as spiritually baser—from the heart and the mind. Paradoxically, these garments, elaborately crafted and ornamented, often drew attention to the very areas they were supposed to obscure.

IN THE WALL CASES

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Women's undertrousers
Uzbekistan, early twentieth century
Plangi and ikat-dyed silk and printed cotton
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B64.12.4211, B64.11.3885, B66.07.1071, B66.12.1519, B67.0487, B14.0007

In Central Asia trousers were generally considered woman's attire. These baggy garments, similar to bloomers, were worn for reasons of modesty beneath a dress and extended slightly below its hem. They are often decorated with colorful details and spectacular patterns that were primarily enjoyed by the women themselves. The upper, concealed portion was made from printed cotton fabric, while the lower, exposed bit was made of shiny ikat-dyed silk.

Woman's trousers
Tunis, Tunisia, late nineteenth century
Artificial silk and gilt-metal cord embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Menahem Nany Perez, Paris, B79.1010

In nineteenth-century North Africa, a plump appearance evoked the ideal of feminine beauty and represented health, wealth, and fertility. Tunisian Jewish brides-to-be were encouraged to increase their eating and were even woken up at night to snack. Trousers were part of the ceremonial dress of a bride and were sewn large to accommodate her new shape.

Women's bodices (angias)
Calcutta, India, late nineteenth century
Made for Baghdadi Jews
Silk, cotton, gilt-metal thread ribbon, sequins, and silk-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Ramah Yehuda, London; Gift of Lily Tate, London, B68.0586, B68.0587, B73.1020

The Baghdadi Jewish women of Calcutta maintained the traditional outfit worn in their original community of Baghdad, but incorporated several elements from Indian attire into it. Most notable is the stiff, richly embroidered angia, a bodice worn under the Indian-inspired semitransparent underdress and visible through it.

Man’s belt
Iraqi Kurdistan, early twentieth century
Wool, cashmere weave, and cotton-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B75.0417

TOP RIGHT

Woman’s belt and buckle
Kairouan or Moknine region, Tunisia, mid-twentieth century
Repoussé and engraved silver and cord
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Charlotte Bergman, Jerusalem, B92.0842

The belt, a bundle of cords that is wound around the hips, is fastened with a ring. The chains soldered to the ring may hang down as far as the hem and jangle as the woman walks to repel demons.

Man’s sash
Taliouine, Morocco, mid-twentieth century
Silk and linen
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2473

IN THE DISPLAY TABLES IN THE CENTER

OF THE ROOM

FIRST TABLE, MOVING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

FROM REAR TO FRONT

Festive "great" leggings
Sanaa, Yemen, 1930s
Cotton and silver-cord embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, O.S B79.0012

Called kabir (great) in Yemenite Arabic, festive leggings were produced by Jewish embroiderers and worn only by Jewish women in urban Yemen. Usually a gift from the bridegroom, they were part of the Yemenite bride's ceremonial garb.

Leggings
Sanaa, Yemen, 1930s
Cotton, silk-thread embroidery, silver beads, and sequins
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, O.S B79.0013

Women’s socks
Bukhara, Uzbekistan, first half of the twentieth century
Wool
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B66.12.1502

Bridal jacket
Isfahan, Iran, early twentieth century
Silk velvet and silver-tinsel embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B92.0433

Item from a trousseau
Rome, Italy, early twentieth century
Cotton, silk, openwork à jour embroidery, cotton-thread embroidery, tulle, and lace
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Marina Della Seta, Rome, in memory of her mother Elvira Ester Della Seta née Calò and her grandmother Virtuosa Calò née Di Cave, B92.0427, B92.0426, B92.0429a

Known as a fardello or "bundle," the trousseau was an important component of the Italian Jewish bride's dowry. It comprised lingerie, clothing, bedding, linens, and accessories. The fardello of Elvira Calò (b. 1890), who was married in the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1911, included thirty pieces. Her mother, Virtuosa, commissioned nuns to create these delicately embroidered garments, each embellished with a tiny EC monogram.

Waistcoat
Tunis, Tunisia, early twentieth century
Silk velvet, metal- and silk-cord embroidery, and sequins
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2378

Man’s jacket
Constantine, Algeria, early twentieth century
Silk and silk-cord embroidery
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2400

Bodice-pieces (brusttikhl)
Poland, nineteenth century
Cotton over cardboard, brocaded silk, purl and sequin embroidery, and shpanyer work
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Received through JRSO (Jewish Restitution Successor Organization), Wiesbaden Collection point, B50.02.1679, B50.02.1680

Worn by Jewish women in Eastern Europe, the brusttikhl was placed over the blouse on the front of the body, fastened around the neck, and tucked into the skirt. Elaborate pieces such as these were worn on the Sabbath and during festivals. Artisans, typically Jewish men, created the special metallic embroidery (shpanyer arbayt).

SECOND TABLE, MOVING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

FROM REAR TO FRONT

Baby's coat
Turkey, late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Linen and gilt-metal thread with silk embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Yossi Benyaminoff, Tel-Aviv and New York, B79.1036

This baby's coat was made from a woman's dress. Repurposing fine materials was a common practice; on a symbolic level, the garment connected a new baby with family members and sometimes the memory of relatives who had died.

Baby's coat
Copenhagen, Denmark, late nineteenth century
Brocaded silk
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Julius Margolinsky, Copenhagen, B75.0544

Baby’s coat
Milan, Italy, early twentieth century
Crocheted cotton
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Fabio and Laura Rocca, Milan, in memory of Andreina Corcos Rocca, Rome, B06.0807

Woman's dress
Sharaf, Yemen, early twentieth century
Cotton and silk with cotton-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B95.0756

The motifs in this dress include a symbolic representation of the female (triangle) and male (pole or lizard) sexual organs and their union. The asymmetric design may have been meant to enhance the embroidery's amuletic power.

Woman's jacket
Marrakech, Morocco, early twentieth century
Cotton velvet, gilt-metal thread embroidery, silver filigree buttons, and filigree work
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2327

The spiral-pattern embroidery on this jacket symbolizes the cycles of life and human destiny, which have a beginning and an end but are also infinite. Such symbols are also found in Tétouan, in northern Morocco, on Jewish tombstones, on embroidered vests that are part of Jewish bridal dress, and on the burial shrouds usually worn underneath them.

Woman's chemise
Djerba, Tunisia, early twentieth century
Silk and cotton strips, silk-thread embroidery, and metal-thread woven ribbon
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Charlotte and Dr. Willy Reber, Valbella, Switzerland, B80.1017

These chemises, worn by Jewish women in Djerba, were often asymmetrical because they were worn under a wrap that covered one shoulder. To make the garment less costly, only the visible parts were made of fine fabrics and decorated.

Children's aprons
Herat, Afghanistan, early or mid-twentieth century
Silk, cotton, and silk with gilt ribbons and mother-of-pearl buttons
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B66.07.1163, B78.0136

These aprons, regarded as protective talismans, feature a central symbolic button that closely resembles a watchful eye.

ON THE NEXT PLATFORM

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Groom's attire with amuletic symbols
Zakho, Iraqi Kurdistan, early twentieth century
Indigo-dyed goat hair and brocade jacket and trousers with silk-floss embroidery; cotton shirt; artificial silk sash
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Itzhak and Zipporah Nahum, Menuha; Purchased through the gift of Charlotte and Dr. Willy Reber, Valbella, Switzerland, B80.0996, B78.0201, B76.0468

The diamond-shaped patterns adorning this Jewish groom's outfit have protective powers. After a man's wedding he would wear the suit on ceremonial occasions and holidays. In Zakho, Armenian weavers were renowned for the superior quality of their geometrically patterned goat-hair fabrics, while in other areas of Iraqi Kurdistan weaving was one of the main occupations among Jewish men and women.

Woman's attire
Ethiopia, mid-twentieth century
Cotton with cotton- and wool-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Uzi Zucker, New York; Purchase, Fritz and Camilla Hollander Foundation, Stockholm, B88.0460, B92.0744

White fabric with a narrow embroidered band characterizes Ethiopian dress of people of all faiths. The symmetrical geometric designs carry amuletic and symbolic significance, meant to guard sensitive areas of a woman's body. The cross pattern (mesqel) above the hem at front resembles Christian crosses used by Ethiopian priests to bless believers and was a popular motif among both Jews and non-Jews. The Jews of Ethiopia had long been isolated from other Jewish communities, but came into contact with others in the early twentieth century. At that time they began to emphasize their religious identity by adding new embroidered images such as the Star of David and the menorah to their garments.

IN THE WALL CASES BEHIND THE PLATFORM

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Baby's dress for postnatal ceremonies
Baghdad, Iraq, 1920s
Silk with gilt-metal thread and silver-tinsel embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Charlotte and Willy Reber, Valbella, Switzerland, B77.0322

This long dress is tailored in European style, but features the silver-tinsel and gilt-metal embroidery typical of Baghdadi Jewish textiles. A hamsa, or hand motif, has been embroidered to protect the infant against the evil eye. Babies wore this type of dress during ceremonies held in the first eight days after birth. These included the "sixth night," observed for both sons and daughters and meant to chase away evil spirits and protect the newborn, and the "myrtle knot," held on the eve of a boy's circumcision—when he was considered to be particularly vulnerable—in order to strengthen the child's bond with the Prophet Elijah, who was believed to play a special role in this rite.

Boy's suit for a symbolic children's wedding
Tafilalt, Morocco, mid-twentieth century
Cotton and cotton-thread embroidery
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2680

Symbolic weddings of five-year-olds were held in some Moroccan Jewish communities until the mid-twentieth century. The ceremony took place on Shavuot, the holiday that celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and was meant to strengthen the children's connection to the Torah and its commandments. It may also have reflected parents' desire for their children to marry one another later on. This boy's suit, like that of a real groom, is embroidered with symbolic patterns, including hamsas (hand symbols), a common North African emblem to ward off evil.

Girl's amuletic dress
Sanaa, Yemen, 1930s
Indigo-dyed cotton, cotton-thread embroidery, and kauri shells
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, O.S B79.0014

Amulets were often used as protection for children before the advent of modern medicine. The shells, red stitching, and asymmetry of this dress were intended to protect a child who had fallen ill with smallpox. Although she recovered from her illness, the girl for whom it was made continued to wear the dress as protection against the many other dangers threatening children.

MOVING TO THE NEXT ROOM

ON THE PLATFORM

MOVING CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT REAR

Hasidic rebbe's Sabbath coat
Israel, early twenty-first century
Silk, synthetic thread, and appliqué synthetic velvet bands; compound-weave silk sash
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Josef Grunwald, Ashdod, B09.1523, B09.1539

During the week Hasidic leaders (rebbes) wear a black silk coat to distinguish themselves from their followers, who wear one only on the Sabbath; thus, to honor the Sabbath, rebbes wear fancier coats made of colored silk. The black velvet trim on this example refers to the straps of tefillin, the two small boxes containing biblical passages that are tied to the arm and forehead on days other than the Sabbath and holidays.

Coat of Rabbi Saliman Menachem Mani
Hebron, Ottoman Palestine, early twentieth century
Broadcloth and gilt-metal-thread couched embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of the Mani family descendants in memory of the Mani and Hasson families, Hebron, B70.1009

In the nineteenth century, the attire of the Chief Rabbi of Turkey was also worn by the Chief Sephardic Rabbi in Ottoman Palestine, as mandated by the Ottoman government. To this day it continues to serve as the model for the robe worn by Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi. The embroidery, which follows the typical Ottoman style, also shows the influence of European officers' coats from the late eighteenth century.

Boy’s coat for his bar mitzvah
Bukhara, Uzbekistan, late nineteenth or early twentieth century
Linen and silk-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Anonymous gift, B79.1261

Girl's dress
Uzbekistan, mid-twentieth century
Ikat-dyed silk
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B66.12.1490

Man's attire
Bukhara, Uzbekistan, early twentieth century
Ikat-dyed silk
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of the Schatz Foundation; Purchased through the gift of Charlotte and Dr. Willy Reber, Valbella, Switzerland, B76.0165, B76.0166, B64.11.3890

Coats of this kind were worn one over the other, by both Jews and Muslims. The monumental look indicated high social standing. In Central Asia Jews were dyers of ikat cloth, considered a lowly craft because it stained the hands and smelled foul. They were also traders in indigo, one of the colors typically used for such thread-dyed fabrics. Ikat is an intricate resist-dye technique in which threads are repeatedly bound and dyed before they are woven to produce patterns.

Boy’s coat
Uzbekistan, mid-twentieth century
Ikat-dyed ribbed silk
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B78.0289

Married woman's ensemble
Salonica, Greece, early twentieth century
Compound-weave silk coatdress (sáyo); ribbed moiré silk sleeveless dress (entari) with chiné warp printing; brocaded silk apron (devantál); cotton chest apron (pečadúra) with openwork embroidery and lace
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Esther Jeanne Aelion Ben-Susan, Paris, in memory of her mother Gracia; Gift of Flora and Shlomo Perahia, Claire and Robert Saltiel, Paris, in memory of their mother Rivka Perahia née Cohen; Gift of Vicki Sciaky, Tel Aviv, in memory of her husband Haim Joseph and her son Joseph Haim Sciaky; Gift of the Saloniki Jewry Research Center, Tel Aviv, B78.0191, B00.1322, B79.0666, B81.0780

Probably meant to emphasize motherhood and nursing, this multilayer outfit accentuates the bosom by means of a semitransparent lacy covering and an apron worn directly under the breasts. The outer robe (sáyo) is a version of the tight-fitting entari coatdress worn by women in Ottoman Turkey. Its front inner flaps were folded backward to display their decoration.

Wedding dress
Sandor, Iraqi Kurdistan, 1930s
Raw silk and silk-thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the gift of Joseph Boxenbaum, Herzliya, B77.0121

This wedding dress was made by the bride Farha Kirma and her father. She recalled that the two collected the silk cocoons and spun, dyed, wove, sewed, and embroidered the garment.

IN THE WALL CASES

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Woman's coat (kaltachak)
Bukhara, Uzbekistan, late nineteenth century
Brocaded silk; ikat-dyed silk and cotton lining
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B64.12.4226

The kaltachak is a collarless coat gathered below the arms, worn by both Jewish and Muslim women. This luxurious example is made of Russian brocade and local ikat (thread-dyed) fabric. The combination of textiles reflects political and social changes in Bukhara following the Russian conquest of the region in 1868. Under Russian rule, Jews were able to emigrate to Ottoman Palestine. A Bukharan quarter was established in Jerusalem, and this kaltachak likely once belonged to a woman from one of its first families.

Man’s coat
Georgia, early twentieth century
Silk, gilt ribbons, and silver niello; imitation gunpowder cartridges
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Beckie Molho, Herzliya, B69.0460

This coat is part of the traditional costume worn on special occasions by both Christian and Jewish men in Georgia. Defining its wearer as a warrior, the outfit also included a dagger hanging from a belt. Unusually in Central Asia, Georgian Jewish men were allowed to wear weapons.

MOVING TO THE NEXT ROOM

SECTION TEXT

CLOTHING THAT REMEMBERS

The clothes we wear become a sort of second skin. Perhaps that is why clothing often serves to perpetuate the memory of the dead, sometimes after being redesigned to fulfill a new role, as in the transformation of a bridal dress into a commemorative curtain for a Torah ark. At times, too, clothing symbolizes events from collective memory: in North African communities, for example, the wearing of black has been associated with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In other cases, the memory enshrined in clothing is personal, marking a rite of passage. For example, until the mid-twentieth century it was customary in Tétouan, Morocco, for a bridal couple to wear their shroud tunics under their wedding clothes, in order to recall the transience of life. In a sense, the display of Jewish costumes in an exhibition is also a commemorative act, preserving and kindling memory long after the people who wore these garments have passed from the world.

IN THE WALL CASES

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Man's ritual robe (kitl)
Romania, early twentieth century
Cotton with machine-made openwork embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Anna Lang, Kfar-Saba in memory of her husband, B87.0067

The kitl is a ritual robe worn by observant Ashkenazi Jewish men at their wedding over or under the coat, as well as on Yom Kippur and at the Passover Seder. The color white evokes notions of purity and sacredness and serves as a reminder of the wearer's mortality through its association with burial shrouds.

Prayer shawl (tallit)
Germany, eighteenth century
Damask and silk brocade with gilt-metal cord lace
Inscribed in Hebrew: Crown of Torah
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Jakob Michael, New York, in memory of his wife, Erna Sondheimer-Michael, B68.0178

The tallit, or prayer shawl, reminds the wearer of God and is imbued with collective memory. The wearing of this four-cornered garment with four fringes (tzitzit) also fulfills a biblical mandate (Numbers: 15:38–41). It is customary to bury a Jewish man in shrouds wrapped in his tallit as evidence of his religious observance. One of its fringes is usually cut off, indicating that the deceased is no longer required to keep the commandments. This example, made of luxurious damask and silk brocade, is a rarity.

ON THE PLATFORM IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Wedding dress
Edirne, Ottoman Empire, nineteenth century
Velvet and gilt-metal thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Purchased through the generosity of the Jacques Lévy Foundation, Barcelona, B85.0108

An elaborate bridal gown such as this one accompanied an Ottoman Jewish woman throughout her life; after her death, it was unstitched and refashioned as a Torah ark curtain for the synagogue.

Groom’s coat and shroud tunic
Tétouan, Morocco, c. 1950
Felted wool coat with silk-cord embroidery; cotton and linen shrouds with cotton-cord embroidery
The Zeyde Schulmann Collection in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B63.10.2405, B64.3992

In Tétouan it was customary for both bride and groom to wear a burial shroud tunic under their wedding clothes, as a reminder of their mortality and in memory of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

IN THE WALL CASES BEHIND THE PLATFORM

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Ceremonial dress (lulwi)
Sanaa, Yemen, late nineteenth century
Indigo-dyed cotton and cotton and gilt-silver thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Carl Rathjens Collection, on permanent loan from Salman Schocken, Tel Aviv, L-B99.0607

On the first Sabbath after giving birth, a new mother in Sanaa received female guests at home in a grand dress called a lulwi. She later wore it again on Yom Kippur. At death it became her burial dress, placed over her funeral shroud. The lulwi reminded a new mother that she had been close to death while giving birth, symbolically linking the beginning and the end of life.

Torah ark curtain made from a woman's dress
Ottoman Empire, early twentieth century
Velvet and gilt-metal thread embroidery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Anonymous gift, B80.3019

IN THE CASES AGAINST THE WALL

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Women's mourning scarves
Uzbekistan, early twentieth century
Silk with reserved-dye printing
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B66.07.1116, B66.12.1526

Woman's kerchief
Afghanistan, early twentieth century
Silk and brocaded silk
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, B01.0266