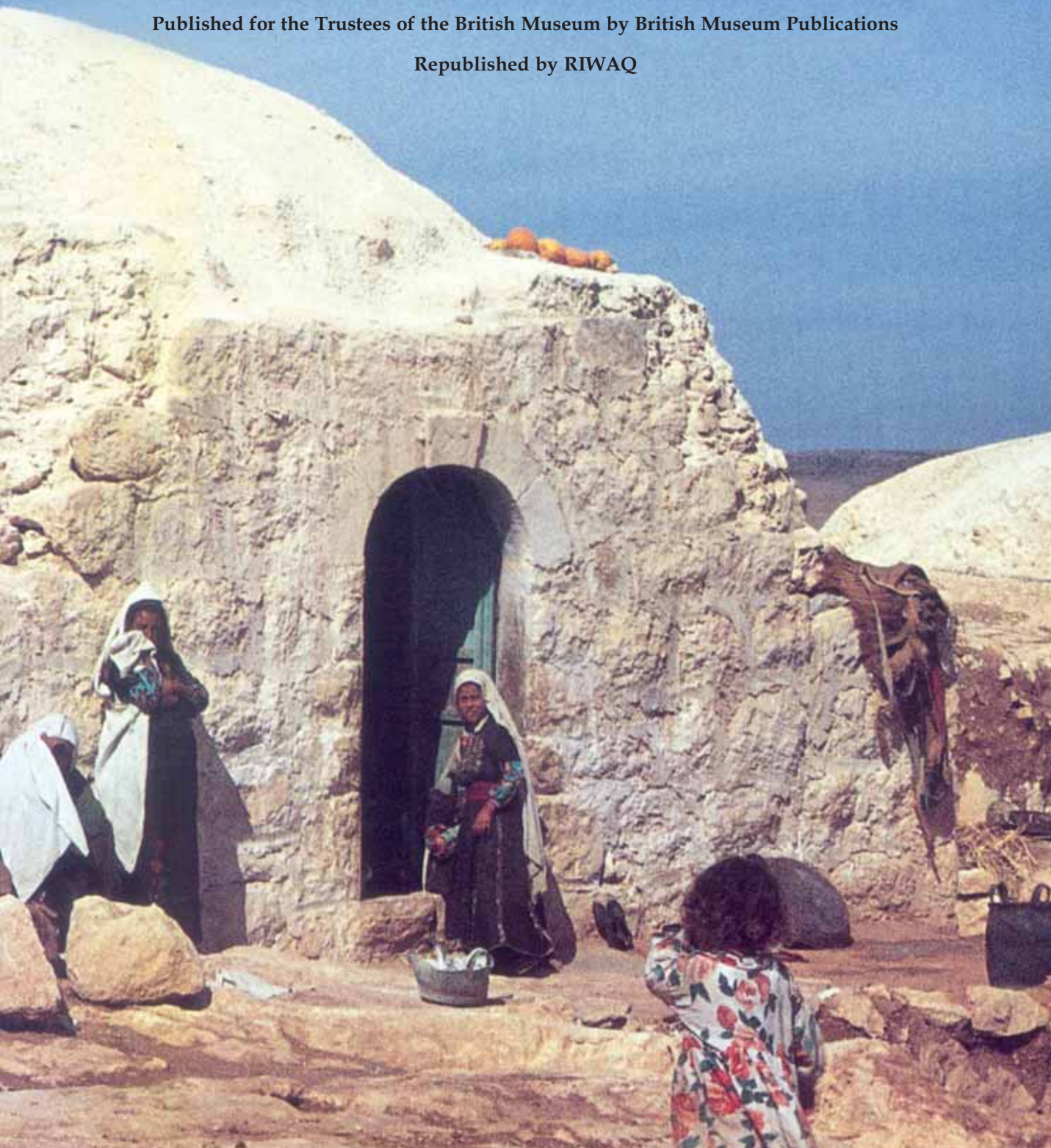


The Palestinian Village Home

Suad Amiry and Vera Tamari

Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Publications

Republished by RIWAQ



© 1989 The Trustees of the British Museum
Published by British Museum Publications
Ltd
460 Bloomsbury Street, London
WC1B 3QQ

British Library Cataloguing in
Publication Data
Amiry, Suad
The Palestinian Village Home.
1. Palestine. Arab Villages.
Vernacular house. Architectural
features
1. Title II. Tamari, Vera
728.3'095694
ISBN 0-7141-1599-1

Designed by Roger Davies
Second Edition 2003 by RIWAQ

Set in Palatino by M & B (Felsted) Ltd.
Printed in Italy by Arti Grafiche Motta.

The Trustees of the British museum acknowledge with
gratitude the generous grant made by the Ancaster Trust
towards the publication of this book.

Front cover: Stone house in Yatta near Hebron, 1967.

Photo: Shelagh Weir

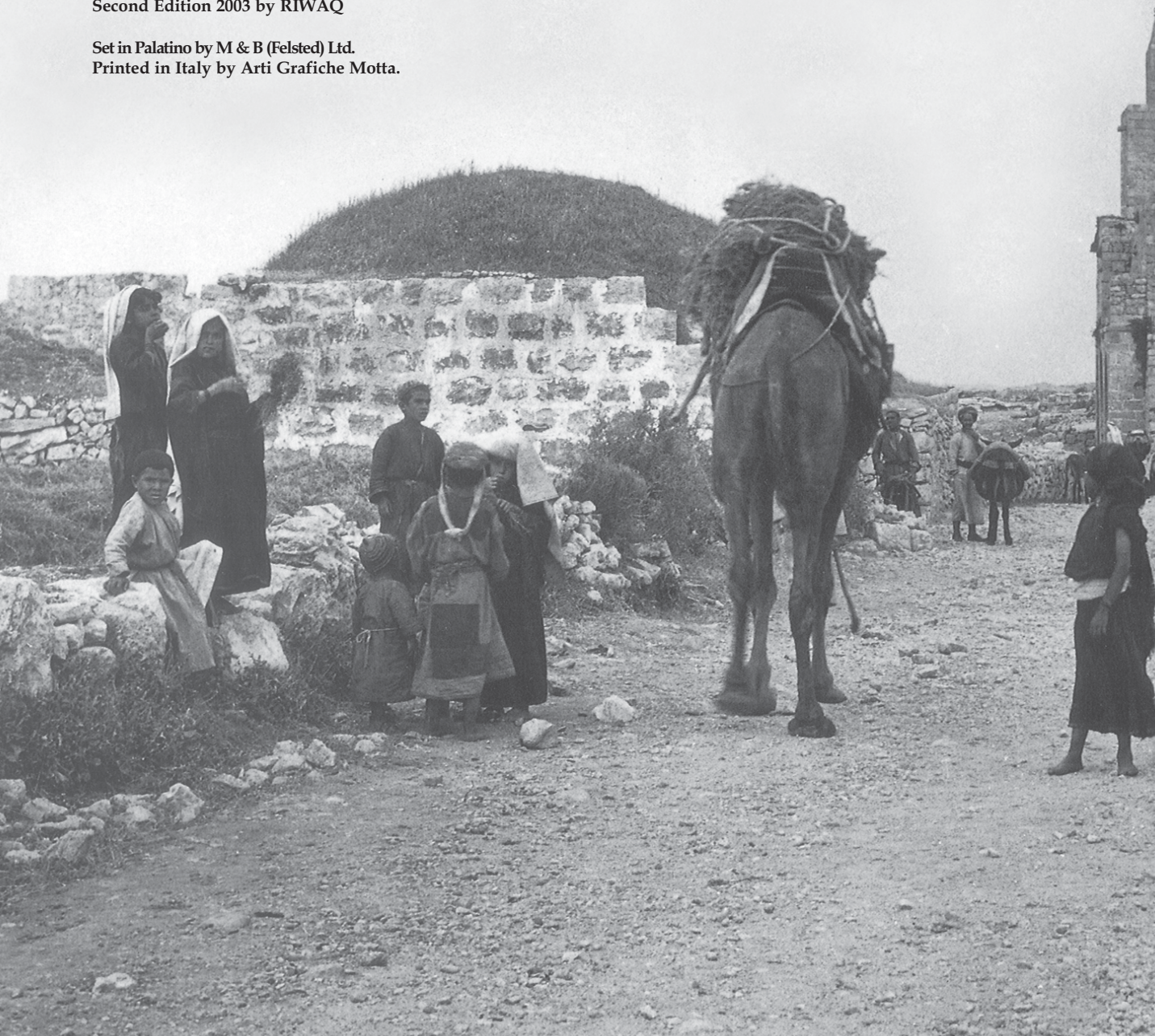
Back cover: living room in a house in Silwan, 1886.

Watercolour by James Clark RA, *Palestine Exploration Fund*

This page: The approach of Halhul near Hebron, 1940.

On the right is the shrine of Nabi Yunis.

Photo: Matson Collection, Library of Congress



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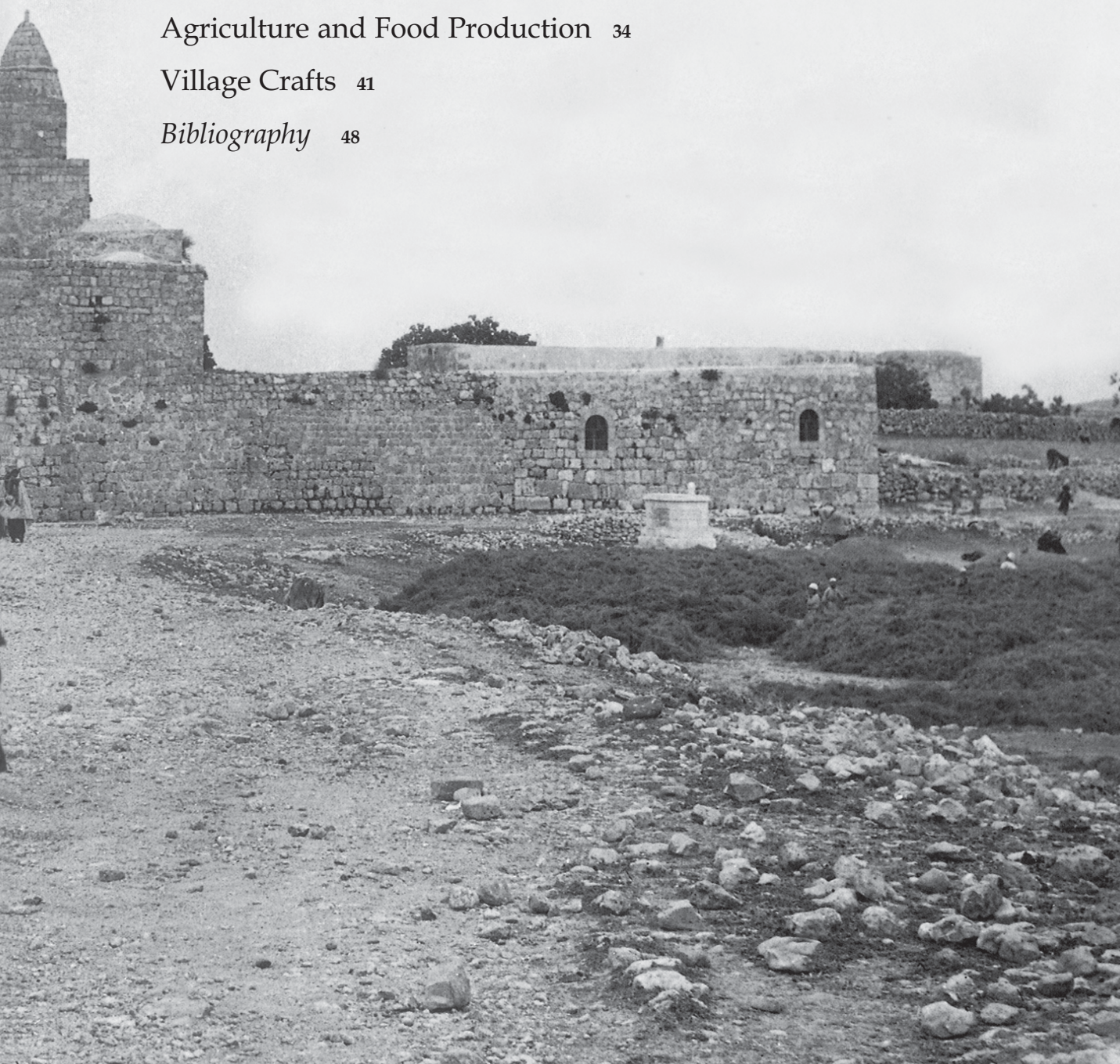
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Foreword



Palestine before 1948, showing main towns and highlands.

Drawn by Rebecca Jewell

The village of Kufur Malik north east of Ramallah, British Mandate period.

Photo: Matson Collection, Library of Congress

Radical transformations have taken place in Palestine since the late nineteenth century which have been reflected in its traditional material culture. This has created an urgent need to document and, where possible, preserve the traditional artefacts and constructions which are rapidly disappearing, and to do this while information about them can still be collected from the generation who remember making and using them. *The Palestinian Village Home* is intended as a contribution to this endeavour, and has been published to coincide with the *Palestinian Costume* exhibition at the Museum of Mankind which opened in late 1989.

This book is concerned with the material culture of the *fellahin*, the village peasants who formed the majority of the Palestinian population, and focuses in particular on the villagers of the central highlands of Palestine at the turn of this century. Most of the information was obtained from field research in the late 1970s and mid 1980s among villagers in the West Bank, and from the study of surviving buildings and artefacts. The illustrations include field photographs taken during this work, archive photographs from the British Mandate period in Palestine (1922-48), and watercolours from the 1880s by James Clark RA. An inspiring reference work has been the photographs taken in the village of Artas, south of Bethlehem, by anthropologist Hilma Granqvist in the 1920s, and published in *Portrait of a Palestinian Village* K. Seger, (1981). We are grateful to the Library of Congress and the Palestine Exploration Fund for permission to reproduce these pictures.

We are indebted to a number of people for their help in the production of this book. First and foremost we wish to acknowledge the generous assistance of the many villagers who shared their life experiences with us so that we could in turn share them with others. We would especially like to thank Khader and his mother Umm Khader of Qatannah, Umm Elias Khalaf in Ramallah, Umm il-'Abid in Deir al-Sudan, Abu Maher in Al-Bireh, Abu Hani from Deir Ghassaneh, Umm Musa from Sinjil and Umm Nasir and Umm Muhammad from Samu'.

Lisa Taraki gave generously of her time in editing and offering insightful remarks on the manuscript. Shelagh Weir proposed and discussed the idea of the book with us, helped select photographs and prepared it for publication. To both of them goes our special gratitude.

We would also like to thank Salim Tamari for his valuable

Terraces in Wadi Battir, central
Palestinian highlands, before 1892. On
the left is the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway
which was built in the late 1880s.

Photo: Krikorian, Palestine Exploration Fund

help in selecting the photographs, Roger Davies for designing
the book, the British Museum Photographic Service for studio
photographs, and British Museum Publications Limited for
agreeing to publish the book.



Introduction

The visitor to a Palestinian village today is struck by the sharp contrast between old and new. At the centre of the village are clusters of old, soft-coloured, traditional houses, their gentle domes blending naturally with the rolling hills surrounding them. Scattered around this old village core are large, individual houses, recently built from smoothly-cut limestone blocks. These modern structures are cluttered by showy multi-faceted walls built in a haphazard order, their flat roofs often crowned by television antennae resembling the Eiffel Tower, symbols of new affluence. Neither the building style nor the 'aesthetics' of these new houses reflect any clear link with the past.

This incongruity in physical appearance and organisation of the modern Palestinian village is due to the social and economic transformations which have greatly affected Palestinian village settlement patterns and daily life since the late nineteenth century. These transformations have come about as a result of the following factors:

(a) the shift in land tenure from communal to private land ownership, begun by the Ottomans in the late nineteenth century, and implemented more thoroughly under the British;

(b) wage labour, which has drawn increasing numbers of villagers away from agriculture. During the British Mandate period, many highland villagers sought employment as labourers in the citrus industry in the coastal plain, or as British Government employees in schools and the police force. The 1950s witnessed another wave of labour migration towards the Arab Gulf and the two Americas; and during the 1970s, large numbers of Palestinian villagers found employment in Israeli farms, factories, construction projects and the service sector.

These factors contributed towards the marginalisation of agriculture, the fragmentation of extended family landholdings, and the trend towards the nucleation of the family. The accumulation of wealth from wage labour also contributed to the great changes which took place in the material aspects of traditional village life. These changes are manifested most prominently in building and construction, where new materials, building techniques and spatial formations are responses to individual needs rather than to the social and spatial rules that formerly determined the shape of traditional Palestinian homes.

The turn of the century was a relatively stable period, especially in the central highlands (known today as the West

Bank) where rural sheikhs enjoyed a quasi-independent status. The coastal plain was subject to much greater political, social and demographic transformations, the most critical of which was brought about by Jewish colonial settlement which started in 1882 (and has continued until today).

Later, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the devastating dispersion of a large proportion of the Palestinian people was a crucial factor in the decline and disappearance of Palestinian urban and rural settlements on the coastal plain. After 1948 approximately 390 Palestinian Arab villages inside the State of Israel were eradicated, most of them in the plain (Abdulfattah, 1983). The villagers of the central highlands, with whom this book is concerned, were less drastically affected by these events, since they came under Jordanian rule in 1948. They have, however, been greatly affected by the Israeli occupation which began in 1967, and by the economic changes of the past four decades.

Women seated under a brushwood shelter in their courtyard, Yatta near Hebron, 1967. Behind the donkey is the bread oven (*tabun*) made from mud mixed with straw.

Photo: Shelagh Weir



woven row was tightly beaten-in with the sword beater, and a smooth metal point (*qarn*).

Weaving required strength, technical ability and a great degree of rhythm and harmony in the body and hand movements of the weavers, who often worked in pairs or threes. Sitting on one end of the rug, their body weight keeping the warp threads in tension, they worked in unison swaying back and forth picking the thread, passing the stick spool and beating in the weft threads tightly towards them. A complete rug required a full week's work by three women.

The articles they produced were all indispensable household items. For instance, rugs (*bsat*, *mizwadeh* or *bjad* depending on their size and colour) which had colourful thick tassels at each corner; fringed storage bags (*khurj*) for storing grain and clothes; saddle bags for donkeys, camels and horses; hammock cradles for carrying babies.

The main colours of these articles were deep crimson as background, with dark green, dark blue and white stripes. Rugs and bags provided a warm note of colour inside the often dark village home.

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