

Lebanese Handicrafts

“Keep Lebanon in your mind”

A handicraft, sometimes more precisely expressed as artisanal handicraft, is one among a wide variety of types of work where useful and decorative objects are made completely by hand or by using only simple tools with an esthetic sense born of historical, social and environmental influences.

Blown glass

It is a very ancient technique, the oldest among the handicrafts, where the glassmaker blows air into the hot molten glass and the art of transformation into attractive shapes begins. Glassmakers create many shapes and colors as water glasses, wineglasses, beer mugs, water pitchers, vases, candle sticks...

Blown glass workshops appeared in all Phoenician cities, and more particularly in Tyre, Sidon and Tripoli.



Near Tripoli, in Beddaoui, blown glass is manufactured in a gloomy archaic workshop where color is only brought on by the craftsman’s production of glass blown pieces aligned on improvised shelves.

On the contrary, the Sarafand workshop (located at 14km from Sidon) manufactures a clear transparent glass that is free from air bubbles.

Weaving

In weaving many methods are used with horizontal looms to create tablemats, jackets, abayas (an Arabic cloth) and caftans in wool decorated with motifs. Others use vertical looms to create tents and carpets from goat hair or sheep’s wool.



The major weaving centers in Lebanon are now Baskinta, Zouk, Barja, Bchetfine, Baadaran, Kousba, Chhim, Fekhe, Irsal and Bakkifa.

Pottery

In Lebanon , whether dyed with yellow or gray on the coast or in the mountain, whenever man discovered how to give it form with his hand , he started creating reddish brown soup bowls, platters, the meter –high jars (that are used for conserving provisions as olive oil, vinegar, arak), coffee or tea sets ,bowls ,wine glasses, mezze plates or spouted water jars (used to cool water at any hour or season).



The major ceramics workshops in Lebanon are located in Beit Chabab, Rachaya el Fakhar, Assia, Aita el-Fakhar, and Jisr el-Qadi, Jamhour, Al-Mina, Khaldeh and Ghazieh.

Copper

There are four techniques used by the artisans to manufacture copper, brass and silver articles: hammering, chiseling, embossing and filigree. After spending long hours of concentrated work, metal is transformed into articles like oil lamps, tapered spears, carafes, platters covers for plant pots, oriental lamps and chandeliers.



The craft of copper is perpetuated in workshops concentrated in Tripoli, Qalamoun, Beirut, Zahleh, Sidon, Baalbek and it is exclusively perpetuated in Beit Chabab, a village in the Lebanese mountains located at 30km from Beirut.

Woodwork

Woodwork in Lebanon is of various kinds including veneer, painted, turned or sculpted wood .Inlaid veneer is used to decorate furniture in Arab households: chairs, small tables, chests, mirrors as well as chess sets, game tables, pencil holders and boxes.

This type of handicraft requires a master craftsman for composing and setting the inlay.



In turned wood, workers use cedar wood to turn them into coffee cups, vases, and bowls. Artisans also use designs based on geometric and floral patterns. Woodcraftsmen are currently concentrated in the suburbs of Beirut and the old souks in Tripoli.

Cutlery with carved handles

The interesting thing about this cutlery is that the handles are shaped like a bird's head; this cutlery includes table services, salad servers, pocketknives, bottle openers and paper cutters.



At present, the center of handicraft cutlery is in Jezzine, a small town located 80 km from Beirut. Jezzine workshops use materials like ivory, and buffalo, goat or sheep horns, as well as stainless steel, silver steel and copper.

Jewelry

The typical productions of jewelry crafts men are: byzantine crosses, pins of Indian inspiration and Egyptian earrings .They also create necklaces, brooches, rings and bells.



The jewelry crafting art is still very much alive in Lebanon and great local artists have remained loyal to their ancestors and masters, working with gold, silver and bronze with the equal passion. Gold jewelry crafting workshops are concentrated in Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Zahleh and Baalbek. As for silver jewelry it is mostly handcrafted in Beirut and Rachaya al-Wadi.

Embroidery

The two techniques used in embroidery are “Tark” and “Oya” .The”Tark” is a dress embroidered with silver thread using black, beige or marron muslin held in hoops. The “Oya” is somehow similar to crochet but made with a needle and a thin cotton thread.

In Lebanon **“La Maison de l’Artisan”** is an official body that looks after a large number of embroidery workshops, supporting them financially, technically, and helping them sell off their produce.



One can also find a multitude of embroidery works showcased and sold in the regions, thus reflecting the specificities of the area: In the North in Tripoli, Batroun and Zghorta - in Mount-Lebanon in Zouk-Mikhael and Jounieh - in the Chouf in Deir el-Qamar and Baaqline -in the Beqaa, in Zahleh, Baalbek and Jibjanine - in the

South, in Sidon and Tyre – and in Beirut, in the neighborhoods of Achrafieh, Hamra, Aïn el-Mreisseh and Clémenceau.

Specifically, the *Tark* and *Oya* techniques are specific to workers of the Baalbek region. The *tark* designates the silver thread embroidery of large scarves, or muslin dresses.

Perfumed soap

The perfumed and colored balls of soap are still made of olive oil since early centuries.

Each kind of soap reflects an idea .There is also small soaps in geometric shapes decorated with various floral motifs.

“Khan Saboun” (soap souk) in Tripoli is the famous and ancient place in Lebanon to discover this kind of handicraft.



Marzipan

Marzipan flowers in Lebanon are made of almond paste, sugar and orange –flower water, besides making paste into daisy flowers, poppies and roses. Some people at various occasions create related motifs of it (Christmas, Easter, Ramadan...).

The famous company that makes Marzipan in Lebanon is “patina’s” located in Beirut.



Basket making

A very old craft weaving baskets, mats and prayer rugs has been an art of Lebanese rural villagers for centuries.

The main components are reeds and palm leaves.

These baskets are useful for fruits and vegetables where other reeds are woven into mats of variegated colors. Today; they provide more useful items as straw hats or covers for potted plants.

The Lebanese authorities with the help of the “*Maison de l’Artisan*”, encourages wicker workers to perpetuate their tradition. The latter’s productions are dispatched to Beirut where the “*Maison de l’Artisan*” promotes and sells them.



Near Jbeil, in Amchit, wicker workers have developed the craft of palm weaving to produce caps, baskets and flower pot baskets. In Kouachra, 3 km from the northern frontier, halfah or esparto grass, is used to manufacture multicolored mats and large trays. While in the village of Hermel, 58 km of Baalbek, workshops weave praying rugs with colored corn straw. Finally, coastal villages like Zghorta and Helweh in the north, Kefraya and Sidon in the south, are specialized in braded cane or wicker with which they manufacture large baskets for the transportation of fruits and citrus fruits.

These are the famous handicrafts in Lebanon, sure there is more and more. Don’t hesitate to visit our country to know it better and to keep the oriental Lebanese touch in your mind as a souvenir gift especially that you can find it easily at any traditional souvenirs shop or during a walk in the old souks (markets).

Written by: Manal Ayoubi & Rim Tizani
Reception & Information Hostesses, Tripoli Office
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