

## Notes and News

### *Present-day Crafts of Palestine*

MANY handicrafts are still practised in Palestine; some are mere relics of industries more highly developed in the past, but others, though still primitive, serve to provide for all the simpler needs of many village communities.

The masons of Palestine are excellent workmen, equal to those of Syria, from whose ancestors, the Phoenicians, their craft is believed to descend. They build mainly two types of houses, flat roofed and vaulted, the latter having the low domes so characteristic of the Palestinian landscape; the Arab method of making the cross vault, on a mould of brushwood and plaster, is both original and simple.

Agricultural implements such as ploughs, yokes, threshing machines, and so forth, are still made in the traditional ways, very little changed since the times of the Bible; cradles, decorated chests and the big wooden lock and key still used for keeping the house safe, are other examples of the woodworkers' craft.

The weaving craft of late years has tended to decay. Palestine never had such centres as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama, in Syria, with their highly developed textile industries. Probably the villagers in the past, as they do now, would buy the silks for their festival clothes from Syrian pedlars, but till recently they had enough looms to provide for all everyday needs. Now only one weaving centre remains, Mejdel, near Gaza, where cotton goods are woven from machine-spun thread, and some woollen goods from hand-spun. Besides these, there are still treadle-loom plying in villages, producing mainly *abayas* and coats for men and short coats for women, all striped or patterned. Two other primitive forms of hand-loom are also to be found: the vertical loom used by men in some towns—Hebron, Nablus, Safad—to weave sacking from goats' hair, and the horizontal ground loom, used by women in villages to weave rugs, saddle-bags and hammock cradles from hand-spun woollen yarn.

Palestine women delight in embroidering their dresses, more especially in those districts where the long, wide-sleeved dresses are worn, said to be derived from the dalmatic.

There are numerous basket- and mat-making crafts: rush mats are made on the horizontal mat loom in Abu Dis and other villages, papyrus reed mats at Lake Hule on the vertical mat loom; plaited rush baskets used in agriculture and on archaeological excavations are made in many foothill villages; large market baskets are made from lentisk in the Hebron district; platters and baskets of many types, both plain and coloured, are made in coiled work of corn straw throughout the country.

Earthenware pottery is made on the wheel by men, and a few centres, such as Gaza, Hebron, Nazareth, and Rasheya, have several kilns, while a number of villages have one or two kilns. The products are water jars and bottles, jugs, bowls, &c. Women in the villages make great water jars and other household ware in summertime, building up the clay by hand and baking the pots in a brushwood or dung fire; these pots are often decorated with designs in red ochre. In a few villages this pottery craft has become a local industry; for example, the cooking-pots of Jib and of Kufr Labbad are sold throughout the surrounding districts.

Silver-work and jewellery crafts are practised on a small scale, chiefly in Safad, and some copper work is done at Haifa. Gypsies specialize in small knives and other tools and visit certain villages from time to time. (*Communicated by* MRS. G. M. CROWFOOT.)