

a voyage  
of memories  
across landscapes  
of Algeria  
in the 1960s



## Jewellery

The Kabylia jewellery collection dates from the 1960s. It consists of silver bracelets and necklaces with beads and enamel pieces, amulet necklaces, the fibula pin, and glass beads necklaces in various colour combinations.

In Algeria, as elsewhere in Maghreb region, jewellery decoration is a popular tradition. Their shapes, materials and use convey the characteristics of cultural groups and individuals, and symbolic messages.

Berber artisans often use intricate patterns and symbols with deep meanings. Symbols such as the hand (khamisa in Arabic) or the eye (nazar) are believed to bring protection and ward off evil spirits. Jewellery is also a material reflection of the regional characteristics where it is made. The intricate and elaborate forms of jewellery from Kabylia (bracelets and the fibula on display) thus differ from the simpler forms typical of the Aurès region in eastern Algeria.

Kabylia jewellery is renowned for its vibrant colours and craftsmanship. It is produced in different techniques – including carving and enamelling, and in materials such as silver, enamel, pearls and glass beads. Although, authentically Berber in form and function, the colourfulness of Kabylia's jewellery was influenced by the Andalusians, who brought the technique of enamelling to the region. The arrival of Arab-Muslim civilisation enriched traditional jewellery decorations with symmetrical geometric patterns, stars and rosettes, with natural motifs such as acacia and palm leaves, and shells.

The jewellery is used to decorate, to fasten and to protect as an amulet. It comes in a variety of forms and is worn on special occasions as well as in everyday life. In addition to its aesthetic role, the power of amulets protecting life and fertility is attributed to jewellery. The colours and motifs are the carriers of these messages and meanings. Typical colours are: blue – the vastness of the sky and hope; yellow – the sun, light and warmth; green – nature and life; bright red – blood and fire.

Jewellery designs introduce cosmic and animal motifs through decorative geometric patterns, such as a fish, which is a symbol of fertility or a triangle a symbol of femininity.

In a stylised form, the jewellery presents also the 'good eye', which protects against disease and danger. The motifs of the eye, cross and rosette function as amulets.

Although these meanings are disappearing today, traces of the traditional concept of the Berber jewellery are still present. The very famous hand-shaped jewellery and its function as an amulet in North Africa and the Middle East is a symbol of the 'good eye' that protects against the evil eye. The hand, or 'khamsa', symbolises the number five and expresses power with an accentuated middle finger that pierces the evil eye. Amulets of this type are worn as necklaces, pendants, fibulas, tattoos and in many other forms by both Islamic and Jewish believers. The 'khamsa' symbol usually appears in a highly stylised form, which resembles only vaguely the human hand as illustrated by some exhibited pieces of jewellery.