

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



The Berber Arts and Crafts Objects at the Exhibition

The Berber craftsmanship traditions reflect exceptional creativity as shown by the family collection of handicrafts on display, most of which come from the Algerian regions of Kabylia, and the M'Zab Valley.

The Berber arts and crafts, which include products such as jewellery, carpets, pottery and copper vessels, play an important role in preserving and presenting the North African culture, traditional values and symbolic meanings. Each object carries a piece of cultural history and identity.

They raise interest in the use of signs and symbols of geometric patterns and figures, triangles, rosettes, diamonds, circles, lines and dots. The decorative motifs on jewellery, carpets, ceramics and clothing show an abundance of ideas and are artistic philosophical interpretations of the world and life, religion and mysticism.

Besides their practical, utilitarian and decorative aspects, these objects also had a religious and magical function, which is illustrated in the exhibition by the jewellery used as amulets.

The Berber culture and art are one of the few remaining witnesses of the great Mediterranean civilisation of the past millennia, whose individual customs have survived to the present day. Algeria is interwoven with the traditions of the Berbers or Amazigh in Arabic, who are the descendants of the pre-Arabian inhabitants of North Africa and the largest indigenous population, numbering tens of millions, comprising several ethnic groups (in Algeria, the Kabyles, Tuaregs, Mozabites, etc.). They live in scattered communities all around the Maghreb region and speak a variety of Amazigh languages. Almost one fourth of the population in Algeria is estimated to be descendants of the Berbers.

Kabylia in the north of Algeria, the homeland of the Kabyle farmers, is a beautiful mountainous region that rises to over two thousand metres in the Tell Atlas Mountains and includes fertile coastal agricultural land. Its landscape is characterised by vast forests, olive groves, vineyards, fields and characteristic villages built of stones on rocky ridges. These environmental features have influenced and shaped the culture of the Kabyle people and their rich handicrafts traditions.

The Kabyle people have developed a variety of arts and crafts forms and skills, which are particularly evident in the production of pottery and jewellery as well as copper and textile products.

The diversity of the Berber arts and crafts techniques and designs at the exhibition is highlighted as well by the colourful and symbolically decorated carpets from the M'Zab Valley, a region in the northern Sahara.

The M'Zab valley is a natural area of an outstanding beauty, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where in the 10th century the Ibadis built five fortified desert small towns (ksour) with the main town Ghardaía, an important trading centre and once a meeting point for caravans. The M'Zab Valley reveals an exceptional and unique tangible and intangible heritage, marked by the ancient culture of the Mozabite ethnic group, with particular social codes and religion as evidenced by the components of their lifestyle, craft and architectural history with the preserved original structures and functionality of traditional settlements, harmoniously blended with the desert environment.