

“Al-tally” ascension journey from an Egyptian folk art to international fashion trend

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Introduction:

Tally is a netting fabric embroidered with metal. The embroidery is done by threading wide needles with flat strips of metal about 1/8” wide. The metal may be nickel silver, copper or brass. The netting is made of cotton or linen. The fabric is also called tulle-bi-telli.

The patterns formed by this metal embroidery include geometric figures as well as plants, birds, people and camels.

Tally has been made in the Asyut region of Upper Egypt since the late 19th century, although the concept of metal embroidery dates to ancient Egypt, as well as other areas of the Middle East, Asia, India and Europe. A very sheer fabric is shown in Ancient Egyptian tomb paintings. The fabric was first imported to the U.S. for the 1893 Chicago. The geometric motifs were well suited to the Art Deco style of the time. Tally is generally black, white or ecru. It is found most often in the form of a shawl, but also seen in small squares, large pieces used as bed canopies and even traditional Egyptian dresses. Tally shawls were made into garments by purchasers, particularly during the 1920s.