

العنوان:	Al-tally Ascension Journey from an Egyptian Folk Art to International Fashion Trend
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## “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.

### ملخص البحث:

التلي هو نوع من انواع التطريز على اقمشة منسوجة ويتم هذا النوع من التطريز عن طريق لضم ابر عريضة بخيوط معدنية مسطحة بسمك 1/8"

تصنع هذه الخيوط من النيكل او الفضة او النحاس. والاقمشة المستخدمة في صناعة التلي تكون مصنوعة اما من القطن او الكتان.

الوحدات الزخرفية المستخدمة تكون عادة اما اشكال هندسية، نباتات، طيور، اشخاص او جمال وكل وحدة لها دلالة مختلفة

يصنع التلي في مدينة اسيوط في صعيد مصر منذ القرن ال19 وتعود فكرة التطريز بالخيوط المعدنية الى القدماء المصريين كما توجد في عدة مناطق اخرى في الشرق الاوسط ، اسيا، الهند واوروبا

تم رصد اقمشة شفافة في رسومات مقابر قدماء المصريين وقد تم ارسالها اولا الى الولايات المتحدة الامريكية عام 1893

للعرض في معرض مدينة شيكاغو واصبحت مشهورة مرة اخرى عند الاكتشاف العظيم لمقبرة توت عنخ امون عام 1922  
الوحدات الهندسية المستخدمة في هذا الفن تتماشى تماما مع فن ART Deco الذي اشتهرت به الحركة الفنية في هذا الوقت.

اللون السائد في التلي هو الاسود، الابيض، الاوكر يوجد التلي على اشكال مثل الشيلان ، الستائر والازياء الشعبية المصرية وتم استخدام شيلان التلي كقطع للعرض والبيع ابتداء من 1920

ويهدف هذا البحث الى :

- لقاء الضوء على جمال هذا الفن الشعبي الذي اقترب من الانقراض ليحل محله التطريز الالي
- رصد رحلة صعود فن التلي من فن شعبي مصري الى موضحة عالمية يستخدمها اشهر مصممي الازياء

### Research problem:

Egyptian libraries & sites are the poorest in the dissemination of information, images and popular folklore studies in general, especially the popular crafts. While sites and forums in the Gulf (UAE, Bahrain and Oman) Palestinian, Syrian, is lighting all about their folk crafts, fashion, architecture and oral literature.

### Aim of research

- Highlight the beauty of this folk art which is going to extinct by replacing it with machine embroidery
- Focus on traditional symbols of the art and craft of tally, through attention to the vocabulary of folklore,
- Observe Tally ascension journey from an Egyptian folk art to an international fashion trend used by famous fashion designer
- Promoting youth participation at workshops to learn the craft of tally for human resource development and small industries

### What is Tally, Tally or Tulle-bi telli:

'Tally' is an Egyptian netting fabric embroidered with real metal and named after its city of origin, Assiut a region of Upper Egypt at the heart of the textile industry during the 19th century. Known as 'tulle bi telli' or 'Assiut' throughout Egypt (Arabic for 'net with metal'), its alternative spellings (due to its transliteration from Arabic to English) are many.

The fabric is essentially a shawl, 2mtres x 1mtre wide. The base cloth is a net (tulle) on which a design of beaten metal is sewn into the holes to form a design. Because of the net, the designs are almost always geometric. Patterns formed by this unique embroidery include geometric figures as well as plants, birds, people and camels, symbols heavily depicted in Egyptian iconography. The art of decorating a type of net with beaten metal is not new.

Examples of it were found in the tombs of the Pharaohs and in most cases the metallic thread was gold. It has also been popular through the ages as shown in portraits of royalty from the 18th and 19th centuries. In parts of Turkey, they still embroider with metallic thread. With Tally, small strips of silver-coated metal, about 45 cm long and just under 1/2 cm wide, are sewn through the holes of the net and which aids in creating the design. With each “stitch”, the strip is bent down on itself with the fingernail to keep it in place. When the shawl is complete, the fabric is passed through rollers to ensure it is perfectly flat. The finished product gives such a beautiful shimmer which looks as if the entire fabric is covered with metal thread.<sup>(5)</sup>

It is generally black, white or ecru and used mostly as shawls, but is also seen in small squares, large pieces (used as bed canopies) and in traditional Egyptian dress.

Tally has great lateral elasticity, thanks to its openwork mesh. It is heavy, and retains heat, but is favored for its ability to drape. Vintage Tally shawls are primarily made from the highly superior long-staple Egyptian cotton grown in the Asyut region with a quality so fine that antique dealers sometimes mistake the cloth for linen, or even silk. This allows the fabric to drape and move in a more supple way. When this fabric is completely coated with individual metal stitches, it drapes heavily, conforming to the shape of the body beneath it, but maintaining the sheen and luster of metal. The weight of the pounded metal in the cloth, gives the fabric a unique character during movement, that is better shown than described.

In contrast, Modern Tally can be quite stiff, and the patterns are often widely spaced upon the mesh ground cloth. The modern fabric is made almost exclusively from short-staple cotton on modern machines which create smaller holes. The stitches are fewer and further apart, giving this cloth a primarily black appearance.<sup>(5)</sup>



Detail Tulle-bi-telli



1920's Tally

## History

There is a colorful history concerning the origin of Assiut First, we do know that Tally shawls were first mentioned in travel literature as early as the 1870's. Before the 1870's, there are many references to Egyptian shawls and embroidery, but none made to metallic embroidery on net or mesh. Instead, richly embroidered woven shawls with complex Arabic designs were collected by European travelers

The ground cloth is made from cotton tulle, named after the lace capital of France. However, the machine used to make the mesh ground cloth was invented in 1806-1808 by English inventor John Heathcoat. These machines were quickly exported to France, and then via France to Egypt during the cotton production explosion of the 1840's<sup>(3)</sup>

The invention of the bobbinet machine in Tulle, France in the early 19th century gave impetus to the popularity of hexagonal mesh fabric and it became known as tulle. During the French Protectorate, the bobbinet machine was introduced into the Asyut region of Upper Egypt by the French in hopes of establishing a source of employment and income to the depressed farming area sometime in the latter part of the 19th century. The Asyut region was a logical location since that area was already a well-established textile center.<sup>(11)</sup>

After manufacture, the hexagonal net fabric was given to local artisans. It was then embroidered with 1/8-inch flat strips of metal, gilt silver or copper wire and later, chrome plated copper or brass

Tally shawls were very much in demand in Cairo and according to surveys taken in the mid 1920's, the output was greater between 1908 and 1912. In 1897, Egypt boasted over 9,000 tailors but by 1917, that figure had reached 29,000 comprising tailors, clothiers and costumers. Much of the increase was probably in part due to disruptions in Europe during the Great War and to the European fashions of Upper-class Europeans favoring flowing robes and turbans.<sup>(4)</sup>

In Egypt, it was customary for every bride in the Saidi region, to be presented with a shawl prior to her marriage by either her own family or the groom's. Usually this was used as it was originally intended as a shawl, or made into a galabeya.<sup>(8)</sup>

Shawls began appearing in the last quarter of the 1800s and were first made as tourist art for European and American travelers, with the fabric later described in Edwardian era travel literature as ‘spangled mosquito netting’ (to be worn over hats as protection). Their popularity soared in the 1920s at the height of the rush to uncover the ruins of ancient Egypt culminating in the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922 incorporating the requisite motifs and symbols representative of hieroglyphics, Egyptian iconography and ancient art. Shawls then began to be made into garments, a fashion that neatly juxtaposed the geometric designs and motifs, influenced by the ancient world, with the modern Art Deco sensibilities of the time.<sup>(2)</sup>

Suddenly, everything Egyptian was desirable and its influence permeated dance, fashion and film.<sup>(4)</sup>

Tally’s first appearance in quantity in the U.S. was at the 1893 Chicago Exposition where they were sold as souvenirs of the scandalous Midway Plaisance. Shawls experienced another upsurge with the opening of King Tut’s Tomb in 1922 when all things Egyptian became popular.<sup>(13)</sup>

Finished shawls were sold by weight, if they were silver, to European tourists who then used them as shawls or piano scarves. In the early 20th century many pieces were used to make gowns or robes, the first true lame.

Tally is still made in Egypt today, but in Suhag and not in Asyut. Much of it ends up in the tourist shops in Cairo.

Egyptian actress and belly dancers such as Samia Gamal and Tahia Carioca wore Tally and the Egyptian Miss Universe Sharllot Wasfy chose to wear it in the official competition in 1934 which she won to be the costume expressing the elegance of the Egyptian heritage in this global competition, also it was worn by the Queen of Egypt «Nazli» in one of the official pictures.<sup>(6)</sup>



**Egyptian Miss Universe Sharllot Wasfy**



**Queen of Egypt «Nazli»**



**Riq Player, Early 20th Century Cabnet Card.  
Courtesy Library of Congress**



**Alma Aicha's dance in the Egyptian café of the  
Rue du Caire, Paris, 1889 – Bibliothèque  
Nationale**





The legend Tahia Carioka wearing tully as a belly dance suit



Samia gamal wearing tully in a movie with Farid Elatrash

### **Production:**

The method for making Tally is fascinating. A special two eyed needle is used. It is approximately 3 or 4 centimeters in length and is flatter than a regular needle. The two eyes are located side by side on one end of the needle and this allows a long flat thin piece of silver thread to be passed through both holes without having to knot it, this is because any knots in the thread would cause it to snag the holes of the tulle. The needle and thread are then passed though the tulle fabric to form individual stitches. After each stitch is taken, the

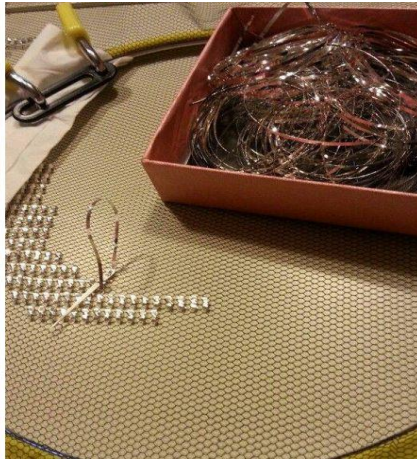


thread is cut and a new stitch is begun. However, it's not cut with a scissors, but rather, it's just quickly snapped off by the artisan's nimble fingers. In this way, patterns are quickly formed on top of the fabric backing.<sup>(3)</sup> The fabric is neither hammered nor passed through a roller, the artisan merely crimps each stitch with her fingers to clamp it more tightly onto the fabric before continuing to the next stitch.<sup>(5)</sup> The needle are purchased at a mabsk (a metal smith) where they are made. In past times, Tally fabric was also made with gold threads but these gold-plated fabrics were purchased only by the very wealthy. It used to be customary. Tally threads are imported from some European countries. They differ from each other. The reddish thread is imported from Germany. The yellowish-colored type from France, one of the finest imported types. It is covered with a thick layer of silver or gold, and has the flexibility to help with embroidery. What is imported from Czechoslovakia is the broad type, not much used. Now and due the expense of the thread they imported it from India the earliest reference dates to the eighteenth century not exclusive to Egypt, the art can also be found in countries of the Gulf and India, where it is embroidered on Saris. What distinguishes Egyptian, however, from that found elsewhere is the subject matter and iconography.<sup>(9)</sup> Here, motifs that are integral to life in Upper Egypt are common such as: marriage (representation of brides and grooms), religion (mosques and crosses), folk belief (amulets and talismanic symbols), nature (water, stars, palm trees and animals indigenous to the area) and motifs related to daily life (candles, lanterns and combs). Essentially, Over the years, production has diminished partially due to changing fashion trends, but also because of the expense associated with the use of gold and silver thread. There were many dresses made from Tally that were originally designed as long traditional dresses, not shawls made into dresses. They are patterned with appropriate protective embroidery designs around the neck openings, sleeve edges, side openings and usually triangular filled areas across the pelvic area. Upon close examination of the rectangular shawls, you will often be able to discern a discrepancy in pattern along the side that is considered the "signature" of the embroiderer<sup>(5)</sup>

Shawls come in different sizes: most are long and narrow, and the designs vary, ranging from the simple to the elaborate. Some people believe designs have been passed down through families, as with weaving and embroidery work. Tally fabric isn't made in Assiut very much anymore. Most of the Tally that is sold today is made in Suhag by highly skilled artisans and it is then sold at tourist shops in Cairo or overseas.<sup>(1)</sup>



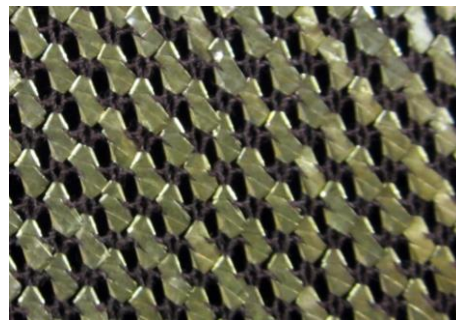
**Tally**



**threads**



**Hand Crafted Needle and Plate for Tally Embroidery**



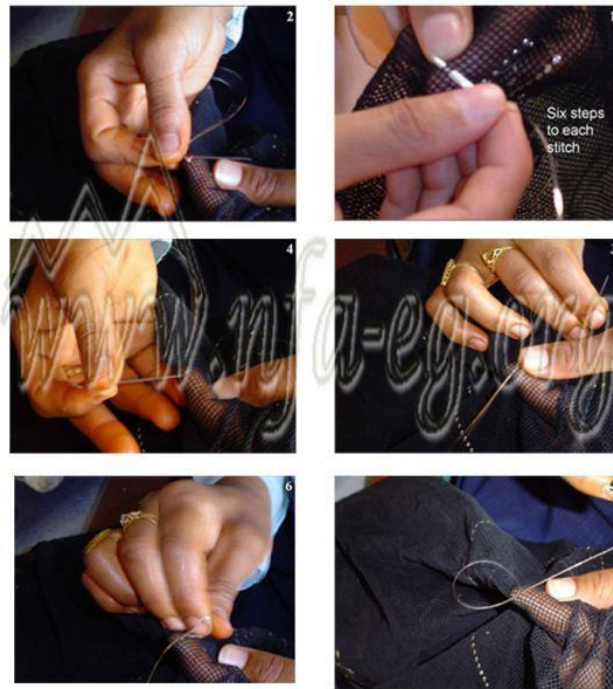
**Antique Assiut - Stitch Detail.**



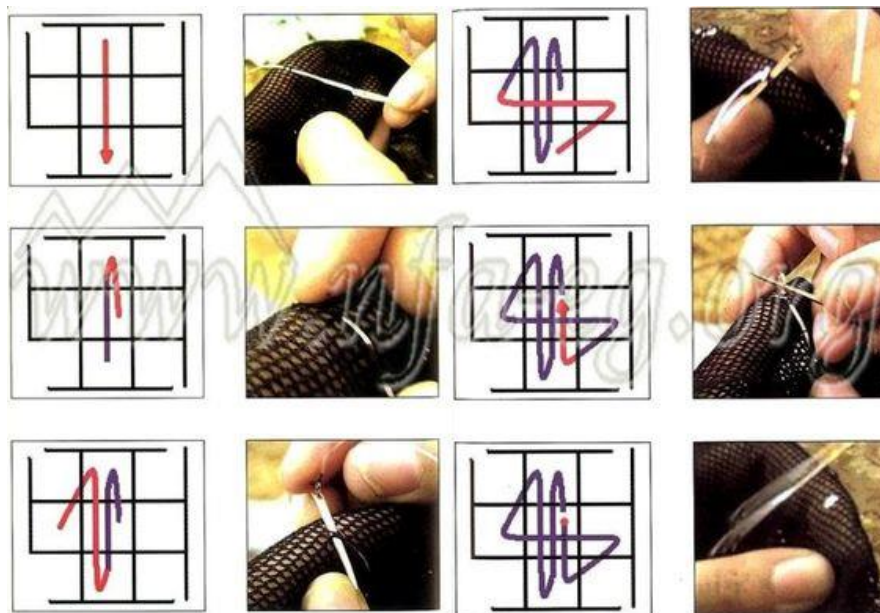
**Front of Tally stitch**



**Back of Tally stitch**



Six steps to each Tally stitch



Charts expaling how Tally stitch is formed

## Patterns

Many of the art motifs that the artisans used tell a story of post- or pre-biblical civilizations. For example, a triangle may denote an amulet, for the practicing sorcerers of the middle ages liked to fold the amulets in this form. A tree can be a symbol of life, borrowed from ancient Egyptian or Persian mythology. And the eye is a symbol of protection, often referring to Horus, the falcon deity whose eyes were said to be the sun and the moon.



The motifs often have Islamist or Coptic connotations, but their roots may go further back in time.

Water, for example, is traditionally shown as a zigzagging line, which is how ancient Egyptians wrote the word “water”. Temples and crosses are common, so are a variety of birds and stars. The designs are highly geometric and look quite “folkloric” today, but they often repeat ancient art forms found in Egyptian tombs and preserved in Coptic fabrics.<sup>(10)</sup>

The motifs used were either geometric or figurative and sometimes combinations of both the geometric pieces were older, although the use of figures by Coptic artisans’ dates to the introduction of Christianity into Egypt. It was common for bird and animal motifs to be used for ornamentation during the Ottoman occupation (1517-1914 except for a brief French occupation during the Napoleonic wars). Some older pieces were very elaborately decorated or even solidly filled in with little or no exposed net and little discernible pattern.<sup>(2)</sup>



**Candle  
Sticks**



**Groom on  
Camel**



**Sift**



**Ewer  
Variation**



**Headband  
Amulet**



**Flower**



**Comb**



**Camel for  
Holy  
Curtain  
(Mahmal)**



**Ewer**



**Stars**



**Palm Reed**



**Innovative  
Cross**



Brides

Bride in  
BedDecorative  
Squares

Guard

### Tally Patterns and symbols

#### Tally in Hollywood:

Throughout the history of motion pictures, the costume designers of Hollywood, and the stars they dress, have had their own love affair with this gorgeous cloth. Tally fabric was used initially to breathe life into an ancient past and later to provide a connective link to the 20's when the popularity of Tally was at its zenith.

Off screen, this fabulous fabric appeared in publicity stills and was worked into revealing costumes for exotically themed parties, worn draped over the head or as divinely decorated wraps, and transformed into the most stunning and seductive of wedding gowns. Throughout the early days of film, when the cloth represented the luxury of travel and a mythologized east, it became symbolic of an educated, well-travelled bohemian lifestyle and encouraged starlets off screen to collect shawls to wear as elegant accessories or even as garments (Clara Bow Hollywood's 'It' girl famously wore an Tally shawl as a gloriously glamorous dress).<sup>(13)</sup>

One of the first epics to feature Tally was the 1916 DW Griffith masterpiece, *Intolerance*...by using modern fabrics sourced from Egypt, the film and the costumes evoked the exoticism of a fantastical and timeless place. Travis Banton considered one of the most important costumiers in Hollywood in the 1930s used Tally in Cecil B DeMille's classic *Cleopatra* (1934); June Havoc's Tally dress lent her statuesque frame a cool, metallic quality in *Intrigue* (1947); and it was draped to dramatic effect in *Samson and Delilah* (1949) in an Edith Head designed, stunning two-piece ensemble cut on the bias to emphasize the contours and curves of the inimitable Hedy Lamar.

Elizabeth Taylor was pictured maintaining a stylishly subtle connection to Egypt (and her hallmark roll of *Cleopatra*) in a beautiful Tally robe in 2007 and lately, period movies have used Tally to reference and echo the last century prompting designers to incorporate this fine vintage cloth to appropriately evoke its popularity with the beautiful and the bohemian during the 1900s and the 1920s. It was used in the film *Water for Elephants*, to reinforce the subtle connection between the fabric and dance and more recently, Tom Cruise wore a vintage Tally scarf to channel his 80s 'metal guru' in *Rock of Ages*.<sup>(12)</sup>

Even Rudolf Valentino wears Tally in one of his films the costume was designed for a controversial film called *The Young Rajah*, which was one of Valentino's least commercially successful films. The costumes were designed by Natacha Rambova who of course was also his wife. The costumes are quite something.

The 1950's production of Samson and Delilah starring Hedy Lamar shows the splendor of its use as exotic costuming for Ms. Lamar. She appears in two magnificent outfits, one of white and one of black Tally shawls made into dresses. The more modern film adaptation of Agatha Christie's Death on the Nile features Mia Farrow wearing a late '20's, early '30's style gown of ecru Tally.<sup>(7)</sup>



**Intolerance – DW Griffith Masterpiece of 1916 –  
assiut cloth draped over the shoulder of an actress in the far-left bottom corner.**



**Rudolph Valentino wearing an Tally costume for the film The Young Rajah, 1922**



**Mrs Paul Abbott by Edward Steichen.  
1924**



**Hedy Lamar in "Samson and Delilah"**





Clara Bow Hollywood's "it girl" wearing an assiut shawl transformed into a dress



Aryiel Harman wears assiut shrug in the movie Water for Elephants



Dame Elizabeth Taylor attends the Macys Passport Gala 2007 wearing Tally dress



, Tom Cruise wearing a vintage assiut scarf for his role in the film Rock of Ages



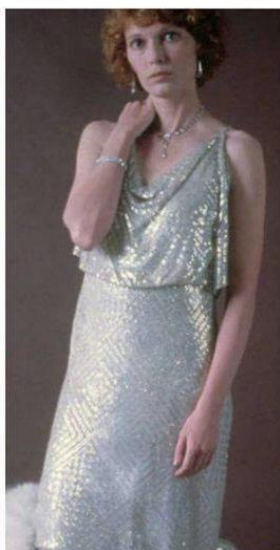
Brooke Shields. Sahara, 1983.



Tally dress worn by Pippa Hayward playing Susan Wyse.



Antique Tally coat used in the film Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky 2010

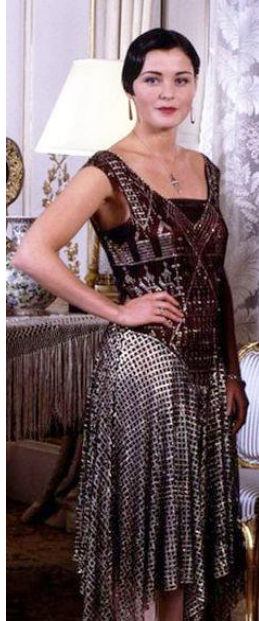


Gorgeous 1930s Tally gown worn by Mia Farrow in Death on the Nile, 1978.



Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond in Sunset Boulevard in assiut shawl





**Gorgeous Assiut Dress from the BBC show, The House of Elliot.**



**House of Elliott Tally loveliness**



**In the episode 2x19 ("Abandoned") Queen Mary wears a vintage 1920s Art Deco Egyptian Tally Shawl.**



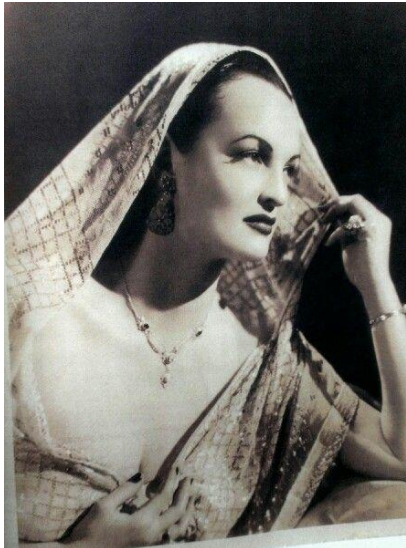
**Melanie in Tally - sometime in the 1970s i'd guess**



**Katie McGrath in The Adventures of Merlin**



**The character Elinor from the 2001 movie, The Cat's Meow**



**Beautiful Lois De Fee, American burlesque queen. Wearing Tally shawl.**



**Bianca Jagger arriving at Studio 54**



**Bianca Jagger wearing an Tally scarf as a turban -head wrap.**



**Smoking hot assiut dress Babs & Kris Kristofferson, A Star Is Born 1976.**



**Singer Natacha Atlas wearing an Assiut Robe.**



**Pam & Jim from the Themis boutique photo session. Jim financed the boutique for Pam.**





**Lauren Hutton advertising perfume wearing an Tally dress.**



**Lenny Kravitz wearing Tally at CMT Music Awards Tom & Lorenzo**

**Images of famous Hollywood Actress And singers wearing Tally in movies**

### **Tally in High Fashion:**

In terms of modern designers, Galliano used Tally in his 1998 Autumn collection for Christian Dior a major style statement that went on to grace every fashion magazine that season.

Tally makes a splash on the high-fashion runway in the Etro spring 2014 collection during fashion week in Milan. Designed by Veronica Etro and inspired by vintage photos from her family's Bohemian past, her collection includes beautiful silk floral and paisley prints the Italian design house known for. These luxurious silk is paired with the drape and shine of modern Tally dresses, tanks, and fringed scarves made from densely embroidered assiut cloth add a vintage flavor to this lighter, brighter take on boho eclecticism.

Jean-Paul Gaultier reworked the styles but the fabric always remained true to its original beauty in 2013 Spring Summer Haute Couture Collection

Roberto Cavalli in his collection for spring<sup>7</sup>/summer 2014 at Milan fashion week used Tally And a Turkish fashion designer Zeynep Tosun also inspired from Tally in Spring/Summer 2014 Ready-To-Wear Collection

Mary Bishara Egyptian fashion designer inspired also from Tally in her collection for Summer 2009-2010. Here are some of Haute Couture designs inspired from Tally

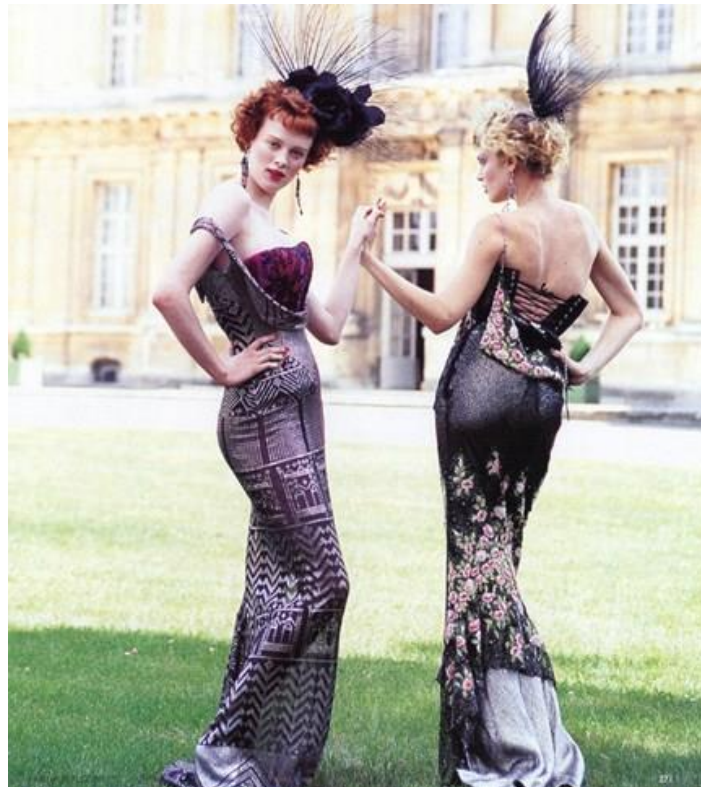


**Etro 2014 runway looks. Women's fashion and style**





Jean Paul Gaultier 2013 Spring Summer Haute Couture Collection



**John Galliano for The House of Dior, Spring Summer 1998,**





Magnificent Tally dress....1998 - Galliano for Dior



Roberto Cavalli spring -summer 2014 collection – Milan fashion week



Roberto Cavalli spring -summer 2014 collection – Milan fashion week





Zeynep Tosun Spring Summer 2014 Ready-To-Wear Collection4



Marie Bishara Summer 2009-2010

### Research Recommendations:

- Giving more attention to the Tally art as one of the important Egyptian handicrafts
- Held exhibitions for tally this heritage within and outside Egypt
- Besides strengthening the handicraft business before perishing.



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