

Menstruation and Henna Pollution & Purification



Catherine Cartwright-Jones

Menstruation and Henna: Pollution and Purification

Henna's role in Muslim Traditions Regarding Reproductive Blood

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Hands and fingernails hennaed, pattern from 19th c Kish Islands, (Mahlodji 2002)

Henna by Cartwright-Jones

In traditional Islam, a menstruating woman was considered vulnerable, weakened, and polluted, therefore she could not pray, fast, or have intercourse. Menstrual blood was *najis*, polluted, *haram*, very dirty, as were all blood, excrement and reproductive fluids. Islamic tradition emphasizes that Allah values people who are clean and pure, whereas malevolent *jinn*, predatory evil spirits, are not repulsed by filth, blood and decay, and may even find it attractive. In some Islamic traditions the *jinn* are believed strongly attracted to menstrual blood. For these believers, anyone who sees or touches menstrual blood is ritually impure and vulnerable to malevolent spirits, and dire consequences can follow. Running water and a thorough scrub

purified a woman at the end of her menstrual cycle or other reproductive blood flow, so she could resume prayer, fasting and intercourse, and dispel malevolent *jinn*. When she bathed, she also applied henna to her hands, feet and hair. Henna stained her skin and hair dark blood-red, and remained visible for several weeks, showing that she had a purified body, worthy in the eyes of God and her husband, and repellant to malicious *jinn*.



Hennaed hands with Ethiopian patterns to avert the Evil Eye and malevolent spirits that might harm fertility and purity, (from Morgan, 2002:), henna by Cartwright-Jones

Islamic sacred texts, the Quran and Hadith, set the beliefs about *jinn*, menstruation and henna, but the interpretation and practice of these beliefs is always filtered through local tradition. Women throughout the

Muslim world used henna, and cleansed after menstruation, because the Prophet Mohammed recommended it. Different sects and tribes had different henna and cleansing techniques, visual symbols, exorcisms, and rituals reflecting local culture. Henna was frequently part of postmenstrual *ghusl*, the purification bath, applied in patterns and techniques varying according to local taste.

Islam did not create these concepts about reproductive blood and henna; Islam adapted pre-existing Semitic traditions. Islamic menstrual taboos were based on a concept of pollution and vulnerability versus purity and strength. Menstruating women were vulnerable to *jinn* and the Evil Eye, irresistibly drawn to blood, particularly reproductive blood. These evil forces caused *fitna*, or disorder, which manifested as disease, inappropriate conduct, and tragedy. Henna contained *baraka*, or blessedness, which protected the wearer from misfortune. Women used henna and protective patterns drawn with henna to purify their bodies, to preserve the health of their skin and hair, and to protect their souls and minds from attack by malevolent spirits. Women negotiated their menstrual and reproductive vulnerability through henna, wearing visible symbols to show that they were pure, strong, in good spiritual standing, as well as in emotional and physical health.

Western fashion and cosmetics changed henna use patterns in the 20th century. North African and Middle Eastern now often prefer the convenience and style of commercial nail polish and lotions to henna. Though there is a thriving henna tradition in Mauritania and Sudan, many contemporary Muslim women prefer to wear *hijab* and modest clothing to express their purity, and avoid henna because it seems old-fashioned and rural, or too much like tattooing (Messina 1988).

Henna

Henna is the Semitic language word for the plant, *Lawsonia Inermis*, the paste made of pulverized henna leaves, and the body art created with that henna paste. Henna contains a dye, Lawsone, or hennotannic acid, 2-hydroxy-1,4-naphthoquinone, that stains skin, nails and hair dark blood-red. Crushing fresh or dried henna leaves with lemon juice or some other acidic

liquid makes henna paste. Henna paste is applied to skin, fingernails or hair. When the henna paste is left on for several hours, the keratin and collagen become thoroughly saturated, with Lawsone. When the paste is removed, an orange stain remains. This stain darkens to deep



**Dark green dry henna paste flaking off of skin, showing orange stained skin beneath
Moroccan traditional henna pattern to avert the Evil Eye
Pattern adapted from Thevoz, 1984: 71, by Cartwright-Jones**

reddish brown over 48 hours. A skilled henna artist can create complex patterns with shaded colors, and the results can look like dark lace. When the paste is left on longer, and under hotter conditions, such as at a women's bath, or hammam, stains are darker, and retain their vivid color longer. Henna stains usually last about three weeks. When henna is applied at the end of menstruation, the stain is generally bright colored through the time period of ovulation, and fades to vanishing by the onset of the next menstrual period. As the skin exfoliates and regenerates, the henna stained cells exfoliate, so the henna pattern disappears in about 3 weeks. As hair and fingernails grow out, the undyed roots show.

North African and Middle Eastern women stained and ornamented hands, feet, nails and hair with henna when they visited the *hamam*, a traditional women's public bath. This bath was required at the end of their menstrual cycle, though well-to-do women went more frequently (Mernissi, 1994: 233; Masse' 1954:70). Henna was most commonly applied to fingertips and fingernails, staining them red or rust color to near black. Henna was also applied to the feet and soles, in patterns that resembled slippers.



Tunisian patterns to avert the Evil Eye, (Mahlodji 2003) henna by Cartwright-Jones

Applying henna to fingertips and nails prevented cuticles from splitting, and strengthened nails for rough village women's work. Applying henna to soles kept heels from cracking and relieved cuts and blisters from rough sandals or stony ground. Women believed henna purified them and protected them from disease (Tauzin, 1998: 28 – 30; Hart U., 1992:144, Friedl E., 1989:21).

There may be some medical basis for these beliefs, as some studies have demonstrated henna deters some bacterial and fungal growth, and may have a localized analgesic effect (Ali et al 1998: 356 – 363).

In many communities, henna was used to deter malevolent spirits and the Evil Eye (Messina, 1988, Mahlodji, 2002: 47). When a woman felt vulnerable, or believed someone had cast the Evil Eye on her, she might hire a specialist to henna complex patterns on her skin at a henna party (Messina, 1988).



Traditional patterns from Morocco with stars to shatter Jinn and Khamisa to blind the Evil Eye: adapted from Mahlodji, 2003, by Cartwright-Jones

North African women hennaed diamond-shaped *Khamisa* henna patterns to repel the evil eye, protect the wearer, and enhance their sexuality. An old Moroccan proverb stated that “A woman without henna is like wheat without salt,” indicating that a woman is more “appetizing” when she has henna (Hammoudi, 1993: 121). Arab women used a combination of diamond patterns with

written charms to protect the wearer (Addison 2001) as well as patterns intended to enhance beauty and eroticism. Iranian henna artists drew intricate knot work and wrote magic charms to protect women from supernatural harm, and women would have themselves hennaed if they felt they were losing their husband's affection (Mahlodji, 2002: 29). Sudanese women wear floral henna patterns to emphasize their femininity and to attract benevolent spirits. Women used henna because their health and fertility, and husband's love were never guaranteed, and they often wished to actively better their situation rather than passively accept "the will of God". The Evil Eye was often considered the source of lost fertility, lost love, lost health, and women often believed a rival wife or spirit had cast the evil eye. Persian women would henna intricate patterns that would entangle the Evil Eye so it would not touch their skin and penetrate their soul. Many believed that malevolent *jinn*, supernatural spirits were attracted to their menstrual blood, and that their evil intent could be thwarted by henna and protective patterns; *jinn* would "bounce off and shatter" if they touched star shaped henna patterns (Mahlodji 2003). Women soiled with reproductive blood were believed to be highly vulnerable to attack and possession by the Evil Eye and *jinn*, and henna was specifically believed to deter malevolent spirits and encourage benevolent spirits in Persia, Sudan, Morocco, and Mauritania (Mahlodji, 2002; Boddy, 1989:250 – 1; Westermarck, 1926, I: VIII, Tausin, 1998).

Henna and Tannin

Plant tannins, such as henna's Lawsone or hennotannic acid, react with collagen and keratin and preserve proteinacious content in skin and leather, keeping them supple, resistant to desiccation and degradation (Stankiewicz et al 1997, p. 1884-5). Henna stains protect skin by packing the "band" regions of the fibrils with tannin, which prevents them from separating, thus preserving the macro-molecular structure and slowing the spread of decay or disease (Haslam E., 1989).

Plant tannins preserve mummies and bodies in bogs from desiccation or decay. On living people, henna's tannin keeps skin, hair and nails supple, deterring drying and cracking in arid climates. Henna stains also block damaging UV sunlight, a serious threat to skin health in the latitudes where henna is used. Some medical studies have tested folk remedies that include henna, and found henna is effective against ringworm (Bosoglu et al 1998, 71-2). Henna's reputation as having "*baraka*", blessedness, the ability to deter the Evil Eye, may be associated these beneficial characteristics.



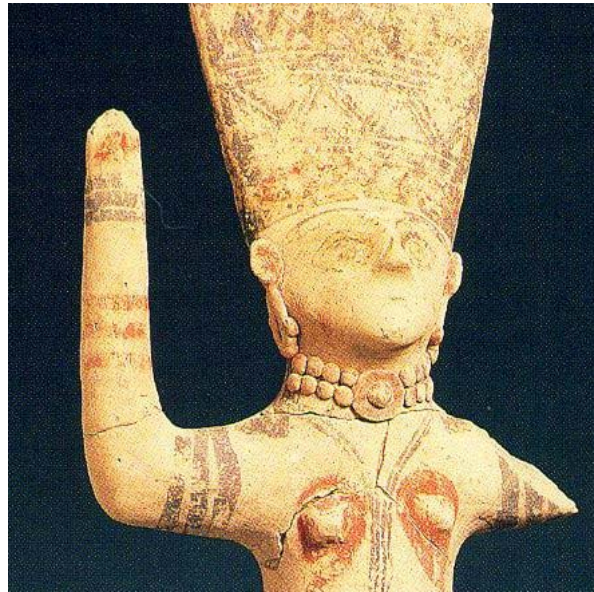
Henna, *Lawsonia Inermis*, 3-year-old plant

Henna Growth and Use

Henna grows in arid subtropical areas, where night temperatures do not fall beneath 11 C. Henna survives on 50mm of rain per year, and daytime temperatures of up to 45C, producing the greatest dye concentrations in the harshest conditions (Al-Ash'af, 2002). Henna is native to the eastern

Mediterranean, where it has been used by women since the Bronze Age (de Moor, 1971: 85) or earlier. Its growth region extends from the Atlantic coast of North Africa, across the Sahel and Mediterranean coast of Africa, Arabia, Egypt, East Africa, the frost free zones of the Middle East, and South Asia to Malaysia.

When did women's henna use originate?



detail of Female figure with hennaed hands and breasts, 7th c BCE, Cyprus, British Museum , BM Cat. Terracotta A 123 (Tatton-Brown, 1997: fig. 70)

Henna stains the palms of hands and soles of feet and nails dark red-brown. Many statues and depictions of young women from Bronze Age Cyclades, Cyprus, Mycenae, and Minos have dark red markings on their hands, breasts and feet, and their hands raised to display the red markings. The Bronze Age Ugaritic legend of Baal and Anath describes “the perfect brides” applying henna before they go seek their husbands (de Moor, 1971 p 85.). In the same text, Anath applied henna for a springtime fertility festival sacrifice and hennaed again before she avenged Baal’s murder by killing his enemy, Mot, the god of summer sun, heat and drought, (Hooke, 1963, p 83). An 8th BCE century Assyrian text describes a bride being hennaed for her wedding (Aubaile-Sallenave,

1982). The Romans recorded henna use by Egyptians, Persians, Jews, Arabs and Palestinians (Josephus, IV: 9 –10, Juvenal Sat. II: 92 - 5).

Henna in Islam

Arab women used henna before Islam, and henna traditions were continued into Islam. The Punic culture used the hennaed hand emblem of Tanith to signify the protective power of the goddess. The protective hand was renamed the Hand of Fatima in Muslim culture, after the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed. The Hand of Fatima is a hand shaped protective symbol used across North Africa and the Middle East in jewelry, ornamentation and in domestic architecture. The hennaed hand and representations of the hennaed hand protect the bearer specifically against the Evil Eye and *jinn* (Westermarck 1926, I: 452-3).



Hand of Fatima Pendant, Morocco 20th c.

The Prophet Mohammed dyed his beard with henna and applied henna to cuts and scratches. He also soothed his migraines by applying henna to his feet and head (Al-Jawziyya, 1998, p. 259).

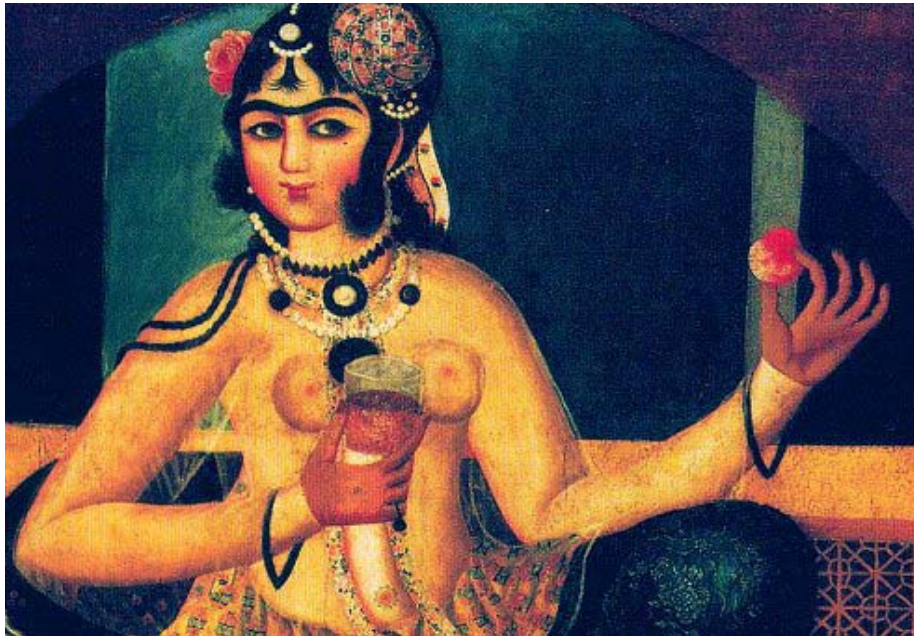
Henna flowers were the favorite flower of the prophet, and henna was called *nor n-nbi*, “the light of the Prophet” (Westermarck, 1926, I: 113).

Mohammed recommended henna adornment for women: “*A woman made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Apostle of Allah. The Prophet closed his hand, saying: I do not know this is a man's or a woman's hand. She said: No, a woman. He said: If you were a woman, you would make a difference to your nails, meaning with henna.*” (Sunan Abu Dawud, 33: 4154: Aisha, Ummul Mu'minin:). Also, when Hind, daughter of Utbah, said: “*Prophet of Allah, accept my allegiance, he replied; I shall not accept your allegiance till you make a difference to the palms of your hands; for they look like the paws of a beast of prey*” (Sunan Abu Dawud 33: 4153: Aisha, Ummul Mu'minin).



Detail from “Listening to the Theologian, MaIamat al-Hariri, 1237, Iran or Iraq;
Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f. 58v, (Baker, 1995: 51)

Mohammed connected henna specifically to sexuality. An observer reported, *“I was seated once in the house of the Prophet. He passed his hand over his head and said, 'Make use of henna, the best of all dyes, for henna strengthens the skin and increases sexual energy’”* (Sahih Buhkari: Abu Rafi`. Another quoted the Prophet as saying, *“Dye your self with henna, for surely henna is rejuvenating, and makes a man handsome, and compels him to sexual intercourse.”* (Al-Suyuti: 18-2:)



detail, Two Harem girls, attributed to Mirza Baba, Iran 1811-14, Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society London, 01.002

Women with henna-stained fingertips, feet and hands are depicted in Islamic art from the 9th century to the present. Women wearing henna in these paintings are usually sexually mature women; children and post-menopausal women are rarely depicted with henna. Prostitutes and courtesans, women of the harem and other women who are valued for their pulchritude are nearly always depicted with henna.

Family records and field studies from Morocco, Sudan, Iraq and Iran report everyone in a family may have henna applied for special occasions such as Id (Hammoudi, 1993: 114), or a wedding (Westermarck, 1914), and Persian children hennaed for their birthdays and New Years (Mahlodji, 2002: 24, 34, 16), but married women during menarche are most likely to wear henna regularly. There are a few depictions of men with hennaed hands and fingertips in the Maqamat and Persian manuscripts and descriptions in text (Mahlodji, 2002: 21) but generally men seem to have worn henna infrequently, and with less elaborate patterning than women. Men were hennaed prior to their wedding night and for making the Id sacrifice, and occasions when they would touch blood (Mahlodji, 2002; Westermarck 1916; Hammoudi, 1993).



Embracing Lovers, Attributed to Muhammad Sadiq, Shiraz, circa 1770 – 80, Collection of Mrs. Eskandar Aryeh

In depictions and descriptions of childbirth, the physician, mother, and midwives are hennaed in Morocco, Sudan, (Westermarck 1926, II, 383, Boddy, 1989:248), Persia and Muslim India. Henna use frequently parallels the person's their contact with blood, and their presumed vulnerability to attack by predatory *jinn*, spirits.

Menstruation and Islam

Early Semitic traditions concerning menstruation became institutionalized as behavior restrictions on women. Leviticus 15:19 - 23, in the Old Testament of the Bible, states that any menstruating woman is unclean and impure: *"When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening"*. Not only is the woman impure, but her impurity *"infects"* others as well. Anyone or anything she touches becomes unclean for a day.

These traditions were modified by Muhammed, and incorporated into Islam: In The Book of Menstruation (Kitab Al-Haid), 'A'isha reported: *"When anyone amongst us was menstruating the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) asked her to tie waist-wrapper daring the time when the menstrual blood profusely flowed and then embraced her; and she ('A'isha) observed: And who amongst you can have control over his desires as the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) had over his desires."* (Sahih Bukhari: 003, :0578)

The Quran states in 2:222 “*And if they ask you about menstruation, say: 'It is an illness, so let women alone during menstruation, and do not go near them until they are cleansed; and when they have purified themselves, then go into them as Allah has commanded you. Surely Allah loves those who turn to Him, and He loves those who purify themselves.'*” And “*For that blood is decaying blood, and can harm the sexual organ of a man, causing ulceration [and cause great harm in a child born]. Indeed, I have seen this myself.*“ Women who are clean and pure have spiritual approval, and demonstrable purity with is associated with appropriate sexual contact. The justification for abstinence during menstruation and purification following is that menstrual blood is dangerous to the man and to unborn children. A man may and should approach a wife sexually who has purified herself of menstrual blood at the end of her cycle. Visible marks of purification, such as henna, demonstrate that the bearer’s vagina is again safe for entry, and that she is worthy of divine approval.

Because of her impurity during her menstrual cycle, a woman cannot perform many aspects of her spiritual life. She may not pray during menses, as the prayers from an impure person have no consequence. She may not touch the Qur’an. She may not circumambulate the Q’aba on a pilgrimage to Mecca. She may not fast during her menstrual days during Ramadan, though she may fast later during the year to make up these lost days. She should not visit the *musallah*, where prayers are performed in the mosque.

The purification following a menstrual cycle, *ghusl*, must be thorough, and the procedure is described in Islamic texts such as The Book of *Taharah*, “cleanliness”, from 'Nur al Idaah', Imaam Shurnbalali's Fiqh Manual: when a woman’s menstrual cycle is ended, determined by inserting a bit of cotton cloth into the vagina and finding it clean on removal, she was to perform a purifying bath, a *ghusl*, which includes washing the entire body, including the head. Cleanliness and hygiene are clearly significant issues for menstruation in Islamic life, and the necessity of *ghusl* following menstrual cycles and other events of bodily pollution are

universalized across the Islamic world, as they are a matter of faith. They were particularized locally, in regional practices of bathing and henna patterning preferences.

Cleanliness in Islamic Marriage: Henna and *Ghusl*

In the 14th century text “Medicine of the Prophet” Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya detailed henna’s use and its connections with sexuality. He quoteed Al-Tirmidhi, in *Nikah*, who stated, “Four things form the way of life of the prophets: marriage, the toothbrush (*siwak*) perfuming, and henna”, though Abu al-Hajjaj al-Hafiz believed that circumcision (*khitan*) was meant to be included. This grouping notes the sexual and opened body in marriage, a valued and recommended part of a religious life, is also a source of vulnerability. Three (or four) things manage the vulnerability of that sexual opened body: the toothbrush purifies the mouth of putrefying food, perfume purifies an adult’s the perspiration odor, circumcision purifies a penis by removing the cache for residual ejaculate, and henna purifies the woman’s body. Purity and cleanliness following intercourse were highly valued, as God was presumed to love cleanliness and despise pollution. Purification following intercourse protected health and well-being because vital energy was dissolved through intercourse. (Al-Jawziyya, 2001: 183). Marital intercourse, like menstruation, was to be followed by *ghusl*, washing with running water, before prayer, to purify, restore and protect that energy. Hadith Volume 1, Book 5, Number 290: narrated by Abu Huraira states: “*The Prophet said, "When a man sits in between the four parts of a woman and did the sexual intercourse with her, bath becomes compulsory."* (Shahi Bukari)

Ghusl is required of a Muslim following any physically polluting act to purify one of vulnerability caused by specific situations. *Ghusl* is required when a person is *janaabah* (a state of sexually impurity) from sexual intercourse or a genital emission. *Ghusl* is required of a woman at the end of her *haidh* (menstruation), and at the end of her *nifaas* (post-childbirth bleeding).

Ghusl is obligatory when a man sees or feels wetness in his clothes due to sperm ejaculation or for a woman, vaginal discharge. *Ghusl* must be performed before the person in a state of *janaabah* can pray or touch the Quran. Any prayers made in a state of *janaabah* are invalid. A menstruating woman's prayers are of no use until she has completely purified herself at the end of



Turkish Woman and her Slave, 1742, Jean-Etienne Liotard, Musee' d'Art et d'Histoire de Geneve (Croutier, 1989: 181)

her cycle. However, washing, cleaning teeth, perfuming, and circumcisions cannot be seen when a person is dressed. These *ghusl* actions do not provide an obvious visible marker that a person is purified. When a woman marks her hands and feet with henna, she can be identified as pure, from a distance, the stains last for about three weeks, the duration of her sexual availability prior to her next menstrual cycle, or pregnancy. Henna stains communicate that she is pure, worthy of

human and supernatural approval, and an appropriate sexual partner. The fresh dark henna stains denote her readiness, and worthiness, for sexual intercourse. Since henna stains last about 3



**Detail from Shirin Examines Khusraw's Portrait,
detached folio from a manuscript of the Khamseh of Nizami, Iran, late 15th c.,
Arthur Sackler Gallery s1986.120 (Diba, 1999: pl 2)**

weeks, the demise of the henna stain is complete about the time of her next menstrual cycle, and she enters menstruation without the mark of sexual availability. Bright, dark, henna stains, then are a marker of the sexual, available, pure, woman. Absence of henna stain is the mark of a woman who is menstruous, or an otherwise inappropriate sexual partner. If henna is applied at the end of the menstrual period, the stain will peak 2 days later and be at its most vivid for the seven days following and gradually fade during the following 14 days. The stain will typically



Henna pattern 2 days after application at the end of menses, just prior to ovulation, approaching peak fertility

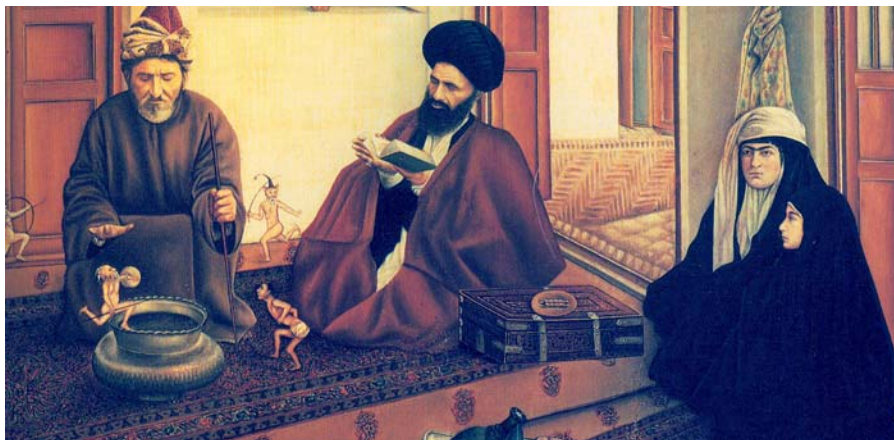


Henna pattern 12 days after application, presumably 19 days into menstrual cycle, when ovum would be either in demise or fertilized, and past peak fertility.

have exfoliated by the 21st day after application, leaving the skin without the protective henna stain and patterns as the woman enters her subsequent menstrual period. If henna is applied after the no menstrual blood can be observed by wiping the interior of the vagina with a cotton rag, then henna stains will be the most vivid during the ovulation sequence, and fading after the ovum is either in demise or fertilization has been accomplished.

Ghusl and henna do not only protect the person from unpleasant smells, excreta and residue; ritual cleanliness protects the person from the malevolent spirits attracted to filth and menstrual blood, and from the damage caused by these spirits, *Jinn*.

Islam and the presumption of *Jinn*



**detail of *Exorcists and Clients*,
attributed to Muhammad Ghaffari, Kamal al Mulk or his circle,
Tehran, circa 1900, private collection (Diba, 199: pl 93)**

Islam presumes the existence of *Jinn*, an order of spirits, lower than angels, made of flame or air. *Jinn* are believed to have the supernatural power and influence over men and women. The Qur'an states that *Jinn* were been created from smokeless fire, and that there are various orders of *jinn*, some beneficent, others malevolent (Oxford Encyclopedia, 1998). Despite formal Islam's

uncompromising monotheism, many Muslims believed in the existence of *Jinn*, said to be descended from *Iblis*, a spirit fallen from heaven. The belief in *Jinn* was universal through Islam, though as these spirits were interpreted through village mediums, they took on had localized characteristics. Women's negotiations with village healers, physicians, and their neighborhood *Jinn* varied with local tradition.

Jinn are race of spirit beings created before mankind, and belief in *jinn* predates Islam. Some *Jinn* are helpful whereas others dangerous. The malevolent *Jinn* are attracted to urine, feces, foul odors, semen and blood. Thus cleanliness was crucial to managing vulnerability to malevolent *Jinn*. *Jinn* were especially drawn to genital blood from



**detail of *Exorcists and Clients*,
 attributed to Muhammad Ghaffari, Kamal al Mulk or his circle,
 Tehran, circa 1900, private collection (Diba, 199: pl 93)**

menstruation, childbirth, miscarriage, or circumcision. These spirits were personified within local cultural context, such as a predatory spirit who regularly harassed a Hofriyti midwife in Sudan was characterized as an Ethiopian uncircumcised prostitute, who steals women's fertility, who attacked the hemorrhaging from difficult births and the screaming from circumcisions (Boddy, 1989: 249. If *Jinn* attacked a woman during her menstrual period, she may become infertile, argue with her husband, have severe headaches, depression, and lose her husband's affection, even become ill or die (Westermarck 1926, I: IV). Therefore, if a menstruating woman felt vulnerable to infertility, irritability, headaches, depression, rejection, or illness she would interpret this as proof of an attack by *Jinn* who were drawn to her menstrual blood. *Jinn* could enter the woman through her menstrual blood, possess her, and cause her great harm (Westermarck, 1926, I: IV). At the end of a menstrual period, a woman could purify herself of these *jinn* with running water and henna. If a woman was unable to purify herself during and at the end of a menstrual period, she could feel vulnerable and deeply shamed, even losing honor and marriageability (Rashid and Michaud, 2000)

Jinn may also be benevolent, as the *zayran* described by Boddy in "Wombs and Alien Spirits". *Zayran* are drawn to beauty, cleanliness, gold, fine clothing, perfume, and loveliness. *Zayran* appreciate elegant henna. Some Sudanese women negotiated their fertility and well being by seeking the approval of benevolent *Jinn* who specified that they required henna for favors:

"What needs have I?

We want henna, incense,

A bottle of Perfume on which there appears the face of a man,

A tob of plain crepe with no design

We are an ancient illness in the books of knowledge

Tell us noble persons that you fear the dastur

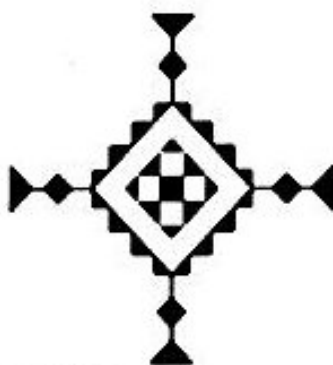
Wilad Mama" (1989:248).

Massina (1998) also described Moroccan henna parties given to secure the favor of specific *Jinn*, and the belief that henna patterns could be used specifically to attract or repel helpful or harmful *Jinn*. Henna artists supplied patterns to curry the favor of *jinn* who would enflame husband's waning affection (Mahlodji 2002), or allow a woman to see if her husband was adulterous (Mahlodji, 2003). The henna stain was not only a symbol that a woman was a pure and suitable sexual partner, the patterns negotiated her reproductive health and spousal relationship.

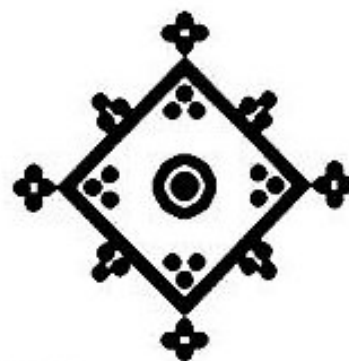
Henna, *Jinn* and the Evil Eye



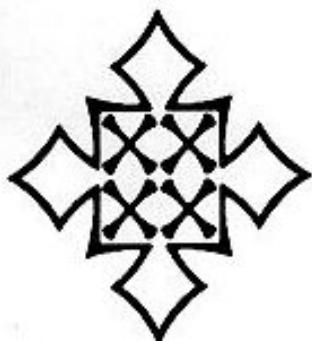
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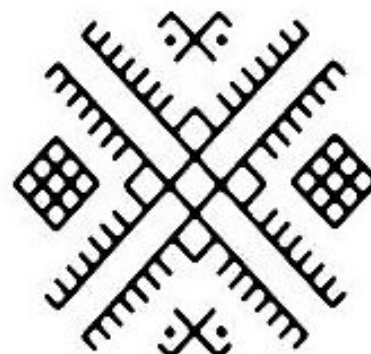
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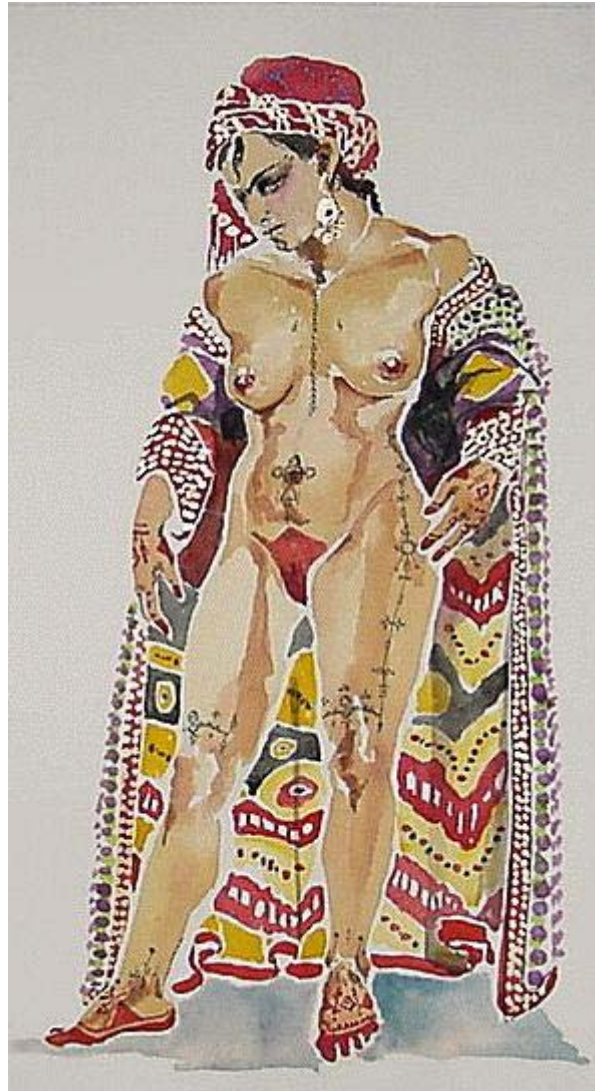
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Immouzzar

Khamsa patterns to blind the Evil Eye, from 19th century Morocco

Henna and henna patterns were drawn to protect a woman from jinn and the Evil Eye. The most widespread protective are variants of diamonds and stars, used from North Africa to Arabia and Yemen and Persia. The diamond shapes with a dot at the center represent an eye that stares back



Woman cleansed following menstruation, with patterning to protect fertility and avert *jinn*, Cartwright-Jones 2001, after descriptions in Field 1958

forcing the Evil Eye to blink and not see the wearer (Mahlodji 2002). Khamsa patterns represent five fingers reaching to blind the Evil Eye's malevolent gaze, a pictorial representation of the curse "five in your eye", spoken to avert its evil power (Westermarck 1926, I: 458 -62). Jinn who

attempt to land on a star pattern will bounce off and be dispersed. (Mahlodji 2003:13) Complex patterns dazzle and entrap spirits (Mahlodji 2002: 47). In Mauritania, hennaed hands protect a woman down to her waist; hennaed feet protect her up to waist (Tauzin, 1998). Henna protects a woman through patterns, and through its intrinsic *baraka*, or blessedness. A woman's henna patterns identified her as pure, invulnerable to malevolent spirits and appropriate for receiving God's and her husband's approval, and identifies her as a "ready" sexual partner.

People other than women, who might be vulnerable to *jinn* on occasion, wore henna. Men making the Id sacrifice hennaed (Westermarck 1926: 107 – 8). Blood spilled at the Id sacrifice attracted the Evil Eye and *jinn*, and if participants were not protected, they could be harmed. People hennaed the goat or lamb prior to sacrifice to make certain the animal was kept safe from malevolent spirits that would pollute a sacrifice and render it unacceptable (Hammoudi, 1993: 114-5).

The potential pollution from touching blood was taken seriously, and that vulnerability had to be addressed. Men in war had contact with blood and wore henna: men in Persia were recorded to have used henna before going into battle (Foster 1928; 233-4). The Algerian French battle flag, the Tirailleurs Algeriens, used between 1857 to 1871 for the "Turcos" regiments, had a red Hand of Fatima at the center. Men were hennaed before marital defloration, as they would come in contact with hymeneal blood (Al-Dabh 2000; Westermarck, 1914: 90). Boys were hennaed prior to their circumcision, to protect them from malevolent *jinn* that could attack the penile blood, bringing infection, impotence and death (Westermarck 1926, II: 416-43).

Henna is regarded to have *baraka*, to purify and protect the wearer from evil

Baraka is blessedness, the benign force of virtue, well-being and strength. *Baraka* wards off the forces of evil (Briggs: 1960: 96). Henna is believed to have *baraka*, and is therefore capable of

conferring health, benefit and invulnerability to malevolent spirits. *Baraka* is a quality found in several traditional women's cosmetics such as *kohl* (a traditional black eye makeup), and *swak* (a walnut stick used to color the lips), perfume, as well as salt, incense, bread, horses, silver, wool, and other highly valued items (Westermarck, 1926, I: 1).

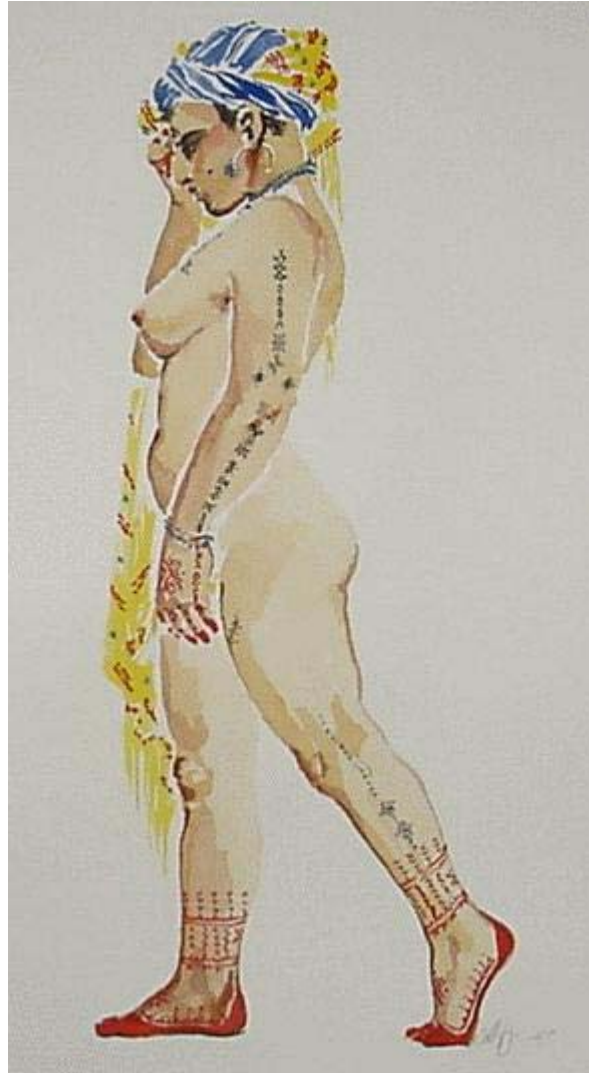
The Prophet Mohammed, the *bismillah*, and the Koran have the greatest *baraka*, the greatest powers of protection, healing and blessing. Saints and those claiming descent from Mohammed,



Baraka, by Cartwright-Jones 2002

have *baraka*, and were believed to effect cures by spitting into henna and applying it to wounds (Westermarck, 1926: I: 157). Though henna can protect skin from sunburn, chapping and cracking, its ability to avert malevolent spirits and protect a woman from their attack is attributed to *baraka*.

Henna was applied to a woman prior to and after childbirth to protect her from Evil Eye and *Jinn* attracted to birth blood. Her midwife hennaed her each day for seven days after birth to protect her from hemorrhage, infection, infant death, or illness that Djinn would bring as they attempted to infest the mother and child through the birth blood (Legey, 1926: 124) (Westermarck II 1926: 383-5).



Women cleansed following menstruation, Cartwright-Jones, from descriptions in Field, 1958

Muslim people in Malawi believed that women's reproductive blood was very dangerous. Menstrual, postpartum, post abortion and miscarriage bleeding were all dangerous to the male sexual partner's health. A man would develop diarrhea, weakness, impotence, and could die from

coming into contact with this “dirty blood”. All these reproductive-bleeding events had to be cleansed by ritual bathing before a woman could safely resume intercourse and full social and spiritual life (Zulu, E. M., 2001, 474-5).

A woman went to the *hamam* after her menstrual cycle or other reproductive bleeding event, bathed in running water, was vigorously and thoroughly scrubbed, and had her hair, her fingertips, and her feet hennaed. Her pubic hair was removed, and her vulva also was hennaed extending upwards towards the navel (Bassano da Zara 1545) (Omar 2000). The running water and henna cleansed her body of remaining blood, as well as malevolent spirits that might have entered her through menstrual blood. The henna remained as a visible marker that she had taken care of her vulnerability to malevolent spirits, and was therefore no longer a potential threat to others.

The Dangerousness of a Menstruating Woman

Menstruating women were a threat to their community because they were presumed infested with malevolent spirits drawn to their menstrual blood. In 19th century Morocco, a menstruating woman could not step onto a threshing floor, as the malevolent spirits could spread from her and ruin the grain’s *baraka*, causing it to rot. Among the Ait Nder, a menstruating woman could not ride a donkey or mule for fear the animal would be harmed. A Moroccan menstruating woman was not to enter a shop as the “luck” or “*baraka*” would leave the shop and there would be no sales (Westermarck 126, I: 230).

Women cleansed themselves thoroughly at the end of their menstrual cycle to rid themselves of residual blood and possible malevolent entities that might have entered them through menstrual blood and restore their *baraka*. To remain unclean would be to remain possessed by the

malevolent spirits and to be unacceptable to the benevolent spirits. (Boddy, 1989: 188 - 9) The most dangerous spirits bring extreme disorder and disruption to life, lack of control, chaos, and death. Vulnerability to these disasters is undesirable: a woman who is unable to properly cleanse herself is avoided by her peers, suffers emotionally from a sense of impurity and humiliation, and may be unmarriageable. (Rashid, Michaud, 2000: 54-70). If a woman has visible markers of protection, cleanliness and beauty, signs that she a potential host for benevolent spirits, she may be more highly valued socially and by her husband, and respected in her community (Boddy, 1989:130).

Banama women of Mali abstain from prayer, visits to the mosque, food preparation and sexual intercourse during their menstrual period, until they have purified themselves. They believe that sexual intercourse during a menstrual period will cause the men to become ill, and children conceived during menstruation to develop deformities or leprosy (Madhavan and Diarra, 2001: 175). The purifying *ghusl* ends women's danger, and henna patterns applied at the ritual bath become a visual cue that they are again worthy spiritual, social, and sexual members of their community.

Collection and Management of Dangerous Blood:

If it is presumed that malevolent *jinn* are attracted to blood that has exited the body (Westermarck 1926, I: 237), then any items used to collect menstrual blood must be handled with care. Rural Egyptian Muslim women constructed menstrual pads from old cloth, and washed them separately from other clothing, seven times, while repeating the first pillar of Islam, "*la ilaha il Allah*"-'there is no god except Allah', to purge the rags of spiritual impurity along with menstrual blood (Snowdon and Christian, 1983: 132). Bedouin women in the southern part their traditional nomadic region, Arabia, plucked fleece from their camels, and wrapped that in a bit of rag to

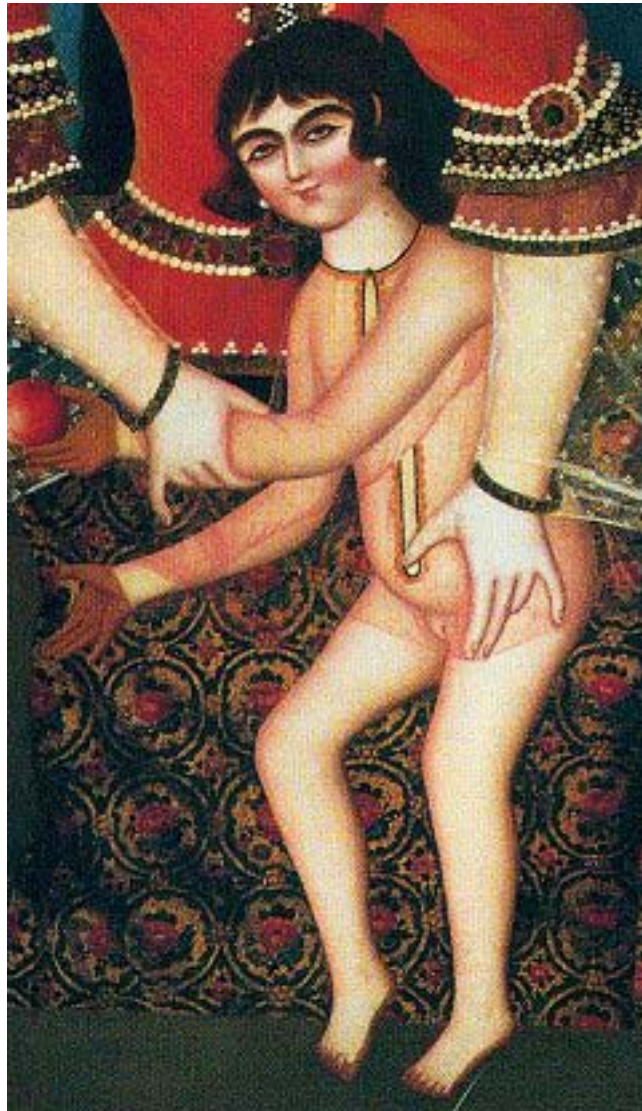
create a menstrual pad. This was burned after use, to dispel the impurity. When Bangladeshi Muslim girls, during a severe monsoon flood, were unable to properly rinse and purify their menstrual rags, felt “dirty” and socially unworthy for years afterwards (Rashid and Michaud, 2000). The disposal of reproductive and menstrual blood was a serious matter. A person could take postpartum blood from a woman, mix it in her husband’s food, and it would cause him to hate his wife. If a woman soaked a lump of sugar in her menstrual blood and put it into her husband’s tea, he would become dangerously ill or die (Westermarck, 1926, I: 577).

In Morocco, people would chide a man who was indifferent about his wife’s improper behavior by asking “*Kliti shor fe l-mraqq da glag*”, literally, “did you eat *shor*, menstrual blood, in snail gravy?” (Westermarck, 1926 II: 258).

The sexually mature woman regularly bleeds reproductive blood, touches it, and handles the items used to collect it. When Muslims believed that contact with this blood attracted malevolent spirits, the purity and blamelessness of a sexually mature woman was always in doubt. She might not be completely purified, or she might have improperly disposed of the blood.

There are two terms used to refer to dirty things in the UAE. Dirt may be *khais* (dirt) or *adha* (that which is *haram*, very dirty and forbidden). Materials associated with *khais* can be restored to cleanliness, but those that are *adha* cannot. Menstrual blood, post delivery reproductive blood and materials, urine and feces are inherently so dirty that they cannot be purified. Bathrooms, even if scoured with antiseptic are still never restored to purity. A sexually mature woman, in regular contact with reproductive blood, restores her purity with running water. She also uses perfume and henna, with their inherent *baraka*, and both recommended by Islam, to reinforce her purity (Kanafi, 1983: 129-30).

Young females who had no contact with reproductive blood or parallel sexual emissions, females whose bodies were not “open” and vulnerable, not polluted by menstrual blood or sexual intercourse, were regarded as inherently more pure. These young unmarried females rarely wore henna other than at family celebrations, and then their henna was kept simple. Community standards frowned on young unmarried women with elaborate henna, as such was interpreted as a sign of too much interest in sexuality, if not loose morals (Hall and Ismail, 1981:161-2),.



detail from *Mother and Child*, attributed to Muhammad Hasan, Iran, early 19th c,
Hashem Khosrovani Qajar Collection (Diba, 1999: pl 58)

The vulnerability of the sexual body, the strength of the pure

A child's body was believed "pure" in traditional Islam, and a child was legally sinless. A child had *baraka*. This boundary of purity was crossed at *bulugh*, puberty, or literally, ripeness, when a boy began to have nocturnal emissions, grew pubic and facial hair or a girl began to develop breasts and menstruate. A eunuch, castrated before adolescence, was also pure, because he never reached *bulugh*. Eunuchs, because of their purity, was employed to guard holy sites such as tombs and sanctuaries (Marmon, 1995: 86). Children were hennaed right after birth when the reproductive blood still posed a threat, then were hennaed only family celebrations, and only with simple patterns until marriage in most Islamic communities (Mahlodji 2002: 16) (Hall and Ismail, 1981: 161).



detail of Transvestite, Qajar Persia, early 19th c, Christie's Images, London (Cawthorne, 1997: 134)

Depictions and descriptions of feminine homosexual men and transgendered males from literature and art indicate that they wore henna in patterns similar to women (Cawthorne, 1997: 134). Effeminate wore henna, “*A mukhannath, an effeminate man, who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet. He asked: What is the matter with this man? He was told: Apostle of Allah! he affects women's adornment*” (Sunan Abu-Dawud, Hadith 41, 4910: Abu Hurayrah).

Transgendered men often worked as musicians and entertainers, performing at “Night of the Henna” and other celebrations, and were often considered more acceptable if female performers



**Pattern on Peri, from 17th century painting from Karaj (Mahlodji, 2002: 22)
henna by Cartwright-Jones**

were believed to be prostitutes. They dressed in feminine clothing, though not necessarily female clothing, adopted female mannerisms, and they may have worn henna to further emulate women (Wikan, 1982: 168-86) (Malodji, E., 2002). If they were active sexually, the purpose of henna may also have been a protection from contact with semen, which was considered as polluting as menstrual blood, or henna could have been read as a symbol of sexual availability.

Peris, angels, are frequently hennaed in Islamic art. These creatures are absolutely and perpetually pure, though they may be the sexual partners of men who have died in a state of blessedness.

Women rarely used henna when widowed or after menopause, though they would henna a little at weddings, Ids, and after Ramadan with the rest of the family. This is in accordance with the Hadith: Book 12, Number 2297: narrated by Umm Salamah, Ummul Mu'minin: *“The Prophet said: A woman whose husband has died must not wear clothes dyed with safflower (usfur) or with red ochre (mishq) and ornaments. She must not apply henna and collyrium”* (Sunan Abu Dawud).

Negotiating purity and fertility with henna in Sudan, Morocco and Turkey

In Sudan, Muslim Hofriyati women's purity was negotiated with “closure” and “smallness” of body openings, in addition to *ghusl* and henna. Infibulation, in their belief system, makes a womb pure, smooth, and fertile, as a seal over a water source or unbroken shell of an egg, or intact rind of a melon assures people that the fertile waters inside are pure (Boddy, 1989: 72).

Purity and moisture retention are closely linked in Hofriyati belief. Dryness is associated with infertility in Sudan's arid climate and water sources, just as women, are guarded, covered and protected from evaporation or pollution (Boddy 1989: 65). Objects and cosmetics that "enclose" a woman's moisture are believed to promote and protect fertility. Henna's tannin protects skin and hair from desiccation. Henna applied to soles prevents cracking; henna prevents cuticles splitting and bleeding, keeps the palms supple, and the hair silky. Henna is applied to the vulva to prevent chapping and irritation from depilatory use. Sudanese women use henna as part of their purification and adornment to improve their social and marital worth as it communicates symbols of fertility, *baraka*, and purity. Sudanese women use henna is used frequently enough, and value it highly enough for some women to become specialists, applying henna patterns professionally (Hall and Ismail, 1981: 163). The Sudanese artists presently apply floral patterns, similar to those embroidered on fashionable *tob* (women's long loose dresses), emphasizing women's femininity and readiness for sexuality.



Contemporary Sudanese Pattern by Catherine Cartwright-Jones 2002

The vagina is the entrance to a woman's womb, open during her menstrual cycle. Menstrual blood flow, was believed in Sudan as other Muslim countries, to increase a woman's vulnerability

to spirit attack and possession, causing disease, infertility, and disaster (Kennedy, 1978: 159). A menstruating Hofriyati woman was at risk from *jinn* and *zayran*, spirits, which could enter her body through her vagina, via the blood. If they did so and possessed her womb, she would be sterile. Graveyards, teeming with *jinn*, were avoided by menstruating women, as she was so vulnerable to their attack. These *jinn* could accompany people returning from a funeral or butchery, and if not ritually cleansed of these spirits, could inadvertently transmit them to the menstruating woman (Boddy 1989: 100 – 4).

If the woman fell ill or infertile, she might have been diagnosed as spirit possessed, and could choose to be exorcised through a *Zar* ritual, an ethnomedical spirit trance ceremony. She would have elaborate purification and henna done in preparation for a *Zar*, as a ritual state of purity was necessary to attract benevolent spirits. Guests at the *Zar* also prepared themselves by bathing, dressing beautifully, and hennaing to negotiate an appropriate relationship with a *zayran*, a spirit, rather than an intrusive or destructive relationship with a malevolent spirit. Women who were menstruating knotted their braids so spirits would know they were unavailable for entry.

Moroccan women had similar trance and dance therapeutic events, as well as *halfa diel henna*, henna parties. A woman would hold a henna party to quell malevolent *jinn*, or encourage protective ones. Women often held these parties, inviting all their adult female friends, in the month prior to Ramadan, *Sha'ban*, to secure additional protection during fasting, when they would be weakened, and thus more vulnerable to evil spirits. If a family did not have a skillful artist, they hired a *mu'allima*, a professional henna artist, to come and apply henna. These artists were often of low social status, former dancers and entertainers, who had learned traditional patterns from their mothers. The *mu'allima* hennaed protective patterns to assuage, deter and coax spirits while flattering and comforting her clients (Messina, 1988: 41-2). The woman arranging the party usually provided the henna. She took pride in choosing quality henna, with

rich color and long lasting stain, because henna's protective power diminished as the stain vanished. Henna parties were also arranged for late pregnancy, birth, and postpartum to avert jinn attracted to reproductive blood (Westermarck, 1926, II: 383-5, 397).

Henna purified, adorned, and protected the bride for her "Night of the Henna" prior to marital defloration in all Islamic countries. In Turkey, henna was regarded as "the sacred soil of *Cennet*, heaven or paradise. The scent of henna was the scent of heavenly, purified, soil rather than earthly, dirty, soil. A woman's body represented earthly soil, and was purified by application of sacred soil, transforming her to a "Bride of Heaven". In Turkish folk songs, henna is said to be auspicious, and a bringer of fertility (Delaney, 1991, 137-9). In this localized interpretation of henna as a purifier of reproductive blood, and negotiator for health and fertility, the focus was on



detail from Turkish sexual illustration, Christie's Images, London (Cawthorne, 1997: 87)

henna as a metaphor for pure, fertile soil. Turkish folk belief, and the Koran both compared a woman's womb to a fertile field, to kept pure for implantation with seed or semen. Menstrual blood was considered very defiling (Delaney, 1988, 83-5), and the purification following menstruation and marital intercourse generally included henna application to hair, feet and fingertips.

Henna's use in aspects of reproductive health, including the manifestations of attack by the Evil Eye or *Jinn*



Tunisian pattern to avert the Evil Eye, Cartwright-Jones

In old Islamic medical tradition, illnesses and injuries did not simply occur, they befell a victim in a particular manner and at a particular time because of specific causal actions. Both the Evil Eye and *Jinn* could enter through an opening in the body: a wound, the eyes, mouth, vagina or other

orifice, and once inside a woman's body, could cause mental, emotional or physical disease (Shiloh, 1968: 235). Both the Evil Eye and *Jinn* imperiled women and both were averted with henna. People could knowingly or unknowingly cast the Evil Eye on a woman, or it could be from a disembodied source. Women often regarded co-wives or other women in their community as likely sources of the Evil Eye, and the reason for various reproductive and emotional difficulties. Women applied henna and henna patterns to relieve these problems.



Tunisian pattern to avert the Evil Eye, (Mahlodji, 2003); by Cartwright-Jones

Migraines and headaches accompany menstruation, and henna was the traditional treatment in Islamic medicine. The Prophet Mohammed suffered from migraines and would apply henna to his head to relieve the pain, saying, “It (henna) is beneficial for headache by God’s permission” (Al-Jawziyya, 1998: 63-5). Iranian women hennaed their feet to relieve a headache (Mahlodji, M). A person must sit quietly for up to several hours for henna to stain properly, and that in itself may help a headache. Henna has been shown to have some analgesic and antipyretic effect on

rats, as well as potentiating pentobarbitone-induced sleeping time (Ali, Bashir, Tanira, 1995: 356-363), so there may be some basis for the belief that henna can relieve a headache.

Henna was applied to the vulva when the pubic hair was removed during *ghusl* following menstruation, and was done in the hamaam. Purity required removal of all body hair. Pubic hair was removed in one of two ways, by sugaring or by a caustic. To sugar, an assistant worked a viscous taffy-like sugar mix to the hair, then quickly pulled it away and the hair with it. Nura, a caustic of quicklime and zinc was also applied dissolve the hair. The Prophet Mohammed used nura for pubic cleanliness, leaving the paste on for an hour. He soothed the irritated skin afterwards with henna (Al-Jawziyya, 1998:279), thus this became the proscribed method of depilation.

Both sugaring and nura left the pubic area irritated, and poorly washed, reused, menstrual rags exacerbated irritations and infections. Henna strengthened vulva skin. Rat tests show henna may have some anti-inflammatory effect, which might have added to the comfort (Ali, Bashir, Tanira, 1995: 356-63). Henna was recommended for ulcerations and infections, because the Prophet Mohammed applied henna on his own injuries (Al-Jawziyya, 1998: 65)

The Evil Eye was often personified as the cause of cramps and cravings, menstrual psychosis and irritability, depression, stillbirth, miscarriage, (Boddy: 1989: 145; Westermarck, 1926, I: VIII). People who carried the Evil Eye could intentionally or unintentionally cast a jealous, malevolent or even loving glance at a person, and bring them illness, bad luck, or even death. Women carried the Evil Eye more than men, because malevolent spirits could enter women when they were “open” during menstrual bleeding. Old women, who have been vulnerable to attack by malevolent spirits through the most menstrual cycles, are believed to be the most likely to have the Evil Eye (Westermarck, 1926, I: 420) When women became carriers of the Evil Eye, they

were shunned or treated with suspicion in their communities (Westermarck 1926, I: 414-415, 423). Henna prevented the Evil Eye from penetrating the skin. (Tausin, 1998) Diamond and Khamsa patterns also averted the evil eye, and complex patterns mesmerized and entangled the Evil Eye, and strengthened henna's protective power (Mahlodji 2002: 47; 2003).

In Hofriyat, Sudan, women believed malevolent spirits were responsible for chronic headaches, depression, "blues" and infertility. A person who had the Evil Eye might inflict these on a woman, or a spirit could possess her and cause these difficulties (Boddy, 1989: 145). Henna parties, and specific henna patterns offered protection from these disabilities, so often associated with menstruation.



**Detail from Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait,
detached folio from a manuscript of the Khamseh of Nizami, Iran, late 15th c,
Arthur Sackler Gallery s1986.120 (Diba, 1999: pl 2)**

In Iran, women were concerned about injury from coming in contact with another woman's menstrual blood by accident in the *hamam*, bathhouse, left by a woman was still spotting after her period. Accidental contact with such menstrual blood was believed to kill a child, or abort a

pregnancy (Friedl, 1991: 16-17). A woman might also interpret infertility, madness, or spousal rejection as witchcraft, often worked by a jealous co-wife with menstrual blood. A woman, who believed the Evil Eye had been cast on her, could protect herself through complex henna patterning. The Evil Eye would become lost in the complicated design, and be unable to penetrate the skin and reach her soul (Mahlodji, 2002: 26). If a woman wished to determine who had cast the Evil Eye on her, she hennaed all the potential names on an egg, put a silver coin at the apex of the egg, wrapped it in silk, held the egg firmly and pressed down on the coin with her thumbs. Then she would recite the names, while pressing. The egg would break when she spoke



**Detail from “Listening to the Theologian, Ma1amat al-Hariri, 1237, Iran or Iraq;
Paris Bibliotheque, Arabe 5847, f. 58v, (Baker, 1995: 51)**

the name of the person who cast the Evil Eye. The spell may have been accidental, even a loving glance from a person unaware that they were carrying the Evil Eye. Once the source of the infliction was discovered, the person would take steps to expel the evil (Mahlodji, E: 2002).

Negotiating vulnerability, purity and fertility through henna

As Islam spread, the beliefs of henna and menstruation and Jinn spread with it, because Qur'an and Hadith dealt specifically with each, and were articles of faith. Bathing habits, henna patterning, and personification of Jinn were localized, but the fundamental assumptions were universal throughout the Muslim world. Scholars, physicians and theologians also specified and interpreted the basic assumptions of henna, menstruation and Jinn as they applied to everyday life.

Women, as all people, have vulnerabilities, and negotiate them daily with a variety of tools. Visible symbols inform members of a community about the wearer. Though running water purified a woman at the end of reproductive bleeding, it left no lasting visual cue that the woman



**Detail from Shirin Examines Khusraws Portrait,
detached folio from a manuscript of the Khamseh of Nizami, Iran, late 15th c,
Arthur Sackler Gallery s1986.120 (Diba, 1999: pl 2)**

was purified. Henna stains informed observers that a woman had tended to her purification, and specific patterns communicated her intent to protect herself, and raise her social worth. A woman wore henna to inform people of her marital status, to inform her husband she desires his attention

and is purified to receive it, to indicate that she was not willing to be vulnerable to malicious spells or witchcraft, and to make herself acceptable to God and the Angels. A woman managed her vulnerabilities with henna's inherent *baraka*.



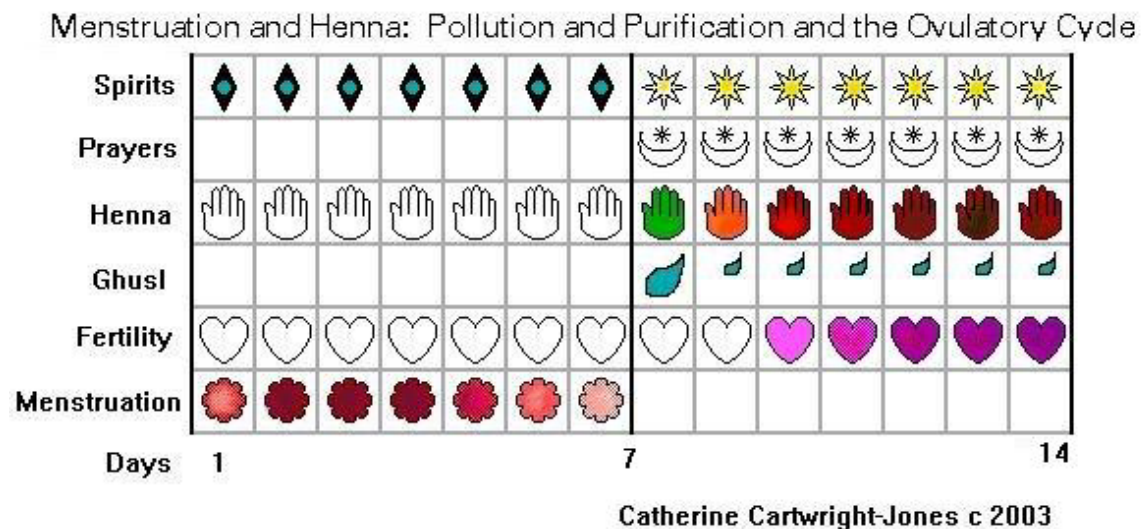
Hands and fingernails hennaed, pattern from 19th c Kish Islands, (Mahlodji 2002)

Henna by Cartwright-Jones

Henna was applied at the end of a menstrual cycle were vivid for a week and then gradually exfoliated over the next two weeks. The week of vivid color coincided with the optimal time for conception, and faded towards the following menstrual cycle, generally disappearing by the onset of menses. This provided a visible fertility gauge for optimizing chances for conception. The more reliably a woman could conceive and bear, the more likely she was to retain her husband's

affection and esteem. Therefore, a vivid henna stain was strongly associated with the end of menstruation and the onset of productive sexual activity through a woman's reproductive cycle. This sequence of menstruation, henna, intercourse and conception may have been reinforced by the success of its remarkable coincidence: Henna stains peak during the days of greatest fertility, and demise during the least fertility.

A woman believed she was impure through her menstrual cycle, and that malevolent spirits prevented her from conceiving during that week. At the end of that week, when she was free of blood, she prepared henna and went to the hammam for purification. As the henna stain darkened, she felt most blessed, most protected, and was regarded as most desirable with her dark henna stains.



The brightest stains, associated with great protection, great purity, and great desirability, peaked on the days she was most likely to conceive.

Subsequently, as the stain exfoliated, the protection from fertility-stealing spirits decreased. This protection decrease paralleled her decreased fertility during the next two-week sequence.

their feet hennaed in preparation for childbirth (Al-Majed et al, 1994) Upwardly mobile middle class women increasingly communicate their purity through *hijab*, wearing a scarf or veil, and modest clothing rather than henna which is often regarded as unfashionable and outdated.

Some Muslim women shop for western nail polish, lotions, hair dye, and shampoos, others maintain their henna traditions as a matter of ethnic identity, or combine henna, western medicine, western cosmetics and hygiene. When women go to the lipstick and nail polish displays, they find many of the same sexual issues addressed that were addressed by henna in the first place: the need to entice and arouse a spouse, the wish to appear lusciously sexual. Contemporary nail polish is similar in appearance to hennaed fingernails, and the time and care lavished on nail extensions parallels time spent in the hamman to create a visual display of female health and well-being. Revlon red nail polish colors are named *Love her Madly*, *Cherish*, *Coy*, *Swoon*, *Enrapture*, *Affection*, *Infatuation*, *Temptress* and *Enticing*. Maybelline red nail polish colors are named *Go Naked*, *Chill the Champagne*, and *Honeymoon Heather*. Loreal sells *Seduce*, *Forbidden*, *Yearning*, *Carnal*, *Passionate* and *Naked Ambition* as well as *Goddess* colored nail polish. The *Goddess* fingernail color is similar to the fertility Goddesses Tanith's and Anath's henna stained hands, and the color names parallel the original intent of henna: to incite sexual desire, and present a woman cleansed of menstruation, ready and marked for intercourse leading to conception.

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