

"The Chief of the Sacred Scented Flowers": European Depictions of Henna

Body Art in Islamic Cultures

A thesis submitted for degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

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Covid-19 Impact Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted my initial research plan, which involved collecting data from Saudi Arabia for comparative analysis with existing literature. Pandemic-related restrictions prevented in-person interviews with Saudi locals and foreigners, including residents and visitors.

Virtual interviews offered an alternative but came with challenges, particularly when engaging with the older generation (aged 60 and above) due to limited familiarity with virtual communication. Additionally, virtual interactions imposed time constraints, limiting the depth and breadth of narratives I could gather. This format also made it difficult to document intricate rituals associated with henna application and the cultural significance of its patterns. Regrettably, details were lost in translation, and I couldn't capture visual representations of these rituals and patterns.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

My most cherished henna memory dates to when I was a 7-year-old child. I vividly recall observing a girl with her hands adorned with henna stains, and in that very moment, I longed to be just like her, with the exquisite colour gracing my palms and nails. The impact of that sight left an indelible mark on my mind.

What made this memory even more exceptional was the tender care and love of my mother as she applied henna on my hands for the first time. It was a precious moment shared between a mother and her child, as she carefully placed the henna paste on my little hands and wrapped them up with cloth overnight, creating a magical anticipation for the beautiful outcome. It was a gesture of love that I cherish deeply in my heart.

The application of henna that day, not only revealed my mother's care but also brought to light, the affection of my father for the aroma of henna. He would lovingly place my hands near his nose, enjoying the delightful scent that clung to my skin. It was a tender gesture that fostered a unique bond between us, a precious father-daughter moment that remains etched in my heart. The warmth of this affectionate fatherly gesture and the enchanting fragrance of henna combined to create a sense of comfort and love that words cannot fully describe. It was as though we shared a magical connection through the essence of henna. As time passed, that beautiful memory stayed with me, serving as a reminder of the love my father showered upon me. Whenever I encounter the alluring sight of henna, it transports me back to that cherished moment, evoking feelings of love, nostalgia, and the unbreakable bond I share with my parents.

As a Muslim Saudi woman, I have known throughout my life that henna has been cherished as a tool for adornment, used to beautifully stain the hands and feet and dye the hair. I have often seen brides with elaborate henna patterns extending from their hands to their elbows, and from their feet to their knees, and I have watched girls and women adorn themselves during celebrations such as Eid and other social occasions. This keen observation has sparked my passion to document this valued tradition of Saudi women and beyond.

In the initial phase of my doctoral pursuits, my research endeavours revolved around a comprehensive exploration of henna body art in Saudi Arabia. I aspired to delve into its multi-layered utilization, profound cultural implications, and the meaning of the intricate patterns woven through distinct regions and tribal affiliations. In my capacity as a female photographer, I was uniquely equipped to not only document but also to immerse myself in private female rituals, thereby capturing their essence from an intimate vantage point.

As I embarked on the empirical journey of delving into existing literature, a noticeable shift in perspective emerged—a departure from the familiar narratives I had known and personally encountered. A Western viewpoint became apparent, which introduced an alternate interpretation, contrasting with my lived experiences. This perspective attributed a uniquely Islamic significance to henna,¹ asserting its infusion with the blessings of Prophet Muhammad

¹ See, for example Patricia L. Kelly Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco" (PhD Thesis, Université de Montréal, 2004), 71-74; Diane M. Humphrey-Newell, "Henna, Uses of it in the Middle East and North Africa" (Masters Thesis, Portland State University, 1981), 14, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/3555/; Edward Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 113; Bess Allen Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran* (London: Luzac and Co., 1938), 188. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.217783/page/n7/mode/2up>.

himself. Surprisingly, this revelation presented information that had previously escaped me, despite my extensive residency in Medina—the city where the Prophet resided and was buried—renowned as the cradle of Islamic culture and civilization.²

The assertions put forth by Western scholars indicated a protective nature of henna against evil spirits and the evil eye. Conversely, other declarations suggested that it might attract negative forces.³ Delving into the Western perspective on henna sparked a multitude of questions within me. How is it that as a Muslim woman born in the very cradle of Islam, I could be unaware of the significance of henna within my religion? Why did the application of henna not evoke a sense of blessing within me? Why was I never informed about the potential of henna to safeguard against malevolent influences? The suggestion that my parents may have applied a substance to my skin that could potentially attract malevolent spirits added to the perplexity. This contemplation further raised the question, does the Western understanding of our religion and culture surpass our own?

Recognizing the predominantly anthropological perspective in the existing literature on henna, it became evident that a thorough exploration of the significance of henna must transcend the boundaries of a solely art historical viewpoint. This is particularly salient given the likelihood of inaccuracies in historical documentation pertaining to henna, due to influences of external perspectives coloured by political and racial factors.

² Henri Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, trans. E. Denison Ross (London: Routledge, 2008).

³ Ja'far Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*, trans. Gerhard A. Herklots, ed. William Crooke (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 19, 66.
<https://archive.org/details/dli.ernet.237249/mode/2up>.

Consequently, I felt impelled to embark on a historiographical study centred around scholars who not only documented the practice of body art but also perceived it as a conduit for religious beliefs, the supernatural, and superstitious traditions. Via this endeavour I have sought to unveil how henna might have evolved from being a mere cosmetic and artistic medium to becoming understood as a vessel infused with the power to bestow blessings, provide protection, and facilitate purification.

I decided that a critical examination of history was crucial to unravel and dispel the layers of misinterpretation that may have obscured the authentic essence of henna body art, inadvertently hampering its rightful recognition as a subject worthy of scholarly exploration.

Background of the Study

Henna is a practice associated predominantly with women. To comprehensively explore how it has been documented, it is crucial to scrutinize how both historical and contemporary perceptions of women who use henna have been shaped by societal and scholarly narratives. A notable challenge arises from the scarcity of in-depth historical studies that delve into women's traditions and rituals.⁴

Remarkably, there is a dearth of serious historical investigations centring on women's practices.⁵ This gap is indicative of broader biases that have prevailed over time. Muslim

⁴ Nikki R. Keddie, "Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 2 (1979): 225, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/162128>.

⁵ Ibid.

cultures and their histories have often been inaccurately depicted as socially regressive, economically stagnant, and unengaging to the culturally sophisticated Western world.⁶

Historically, both in the East and West, women have often been perceived as vulnerable to traits such as lust, demonic influences, and deceitfulness. This common perception has been harnessed by imperialists advocating for Western influence and dominion over regions across the globe. Such imperialists have utilized this perspective to portray women's standing in the Middle East as dire and in need of civilization.⁷

Consequently, the study and documentation of the history and traditions of Eastern women have been significantly delayed and disrupted, leading to the irretrievable loss of valuable information. This is particularly evident in the case of practices like henna, which are ephemeral and which have often been labelled as backward ancient traditions.⁸

In response to this problem, my goal here is to analyse and question Western documentation of henna. I use a comprehensive historiographical research approach to investigate how the history of henna body art has been portrayed in Western literature, and to what extent external factors such as political and economic interests and scholars' personal views, have influenced the manner of its documentation. Moreover, I aim to track the evolution

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thomas Dallam and John Covell, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, ed. James Theodore Bent (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1893), 15-16; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 242; Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India* (Edinburgh: George Ramsay and Co., 1812), 18-19.

⁸ As in, for example, Maurice Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord," [The Henna Among the Muslims of North Africa.] *Journal des Africanistes* 4, no. 1 (1934), https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr_0037-9166_1934_num_4_1_1564; Charles Nicolas Sigisbert Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, trans. Henry Hunter, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1799), 264.

of this information over time and discern how it has transformed and developed within the Western narrative.

The Research Gap

Within the realm of existing scholarly endeavours centred around henna body art, a conspicuous research gap becomes evident—there is a lack of comprehensive studies that delve into the historical documentation of this practice, especially from a nuanced cultural standpoint. Surprisingly, Arabian and Eastern scholars have notably omitted the documentation of henna, possibly because of its predominantly female-associated usage. Male scholars, both Western and Eastern, have historically tended to disregard women's practices and their associated adornment tools, perpetuating an imbalance in scholarly attention.

Further contributing to this gap, Eastern scholars might have omitted to document henna due to it being a commonplace element in the culture, not being considered noteworthy enough to document. Consequently, the available Arabic literature concerning henna remains limited and is often confined to specific locations.⁹ While scholars have diligently explored the use of henna among women within their respective hometowns, this localized approach is not

⁹ Latrache Altyeb, "دلالة الحناء في المعتقدات الشعبية لأهل مدينة الجلفة," [The Significance of Henna in the Popular Beliefs of the People of the City of Djelfa.] *Jornal of Afak For Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2021); El-Sayed Abdel-Momen El-Sayed and Ola Abdel Moneim El Zayat, "رموز الحناء بين التقليدية والمعاصرة دراسة إثنوجرافية بإحدى المدن الليبية," [Henna Symbols Between Traditional and Contemporary, an Ethnographic Study in a Libyan City.] *Journal of the Collage of Arts, Benha University*. (2008); Musique Meradi, Kamel Bougurra, and Saleh Bayou, "عشبة الحناء "رموز الحناء بين التقليدية والمعاصرة دراسة إثنوجرافية بإحدى المدن الليبية," [The Henna Herb and Its Place in Eurasian Folk Culture.] *Tabnah Journal of Academic Scientific Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021); Amal Hamdi Asaad Arafat, "الحناء زينة شعبية لدى المرأة العربية: دراسة " [Henna: A Popular Ornamentation among Arab Women - A Historical and Field Study of Henna Patterns and Designs.] *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 15, no. 3 (1995).

a shortcoming, but rather underscores an awareness among Eastern scholars that patterns in the use of henna vary across regions and eras.¹⁰

However, a noticeable void exists within Eastern literature, as it rarely references Western sources on henna. This absence underscores the necessity to bridge this gap. As an Eastern woman, I am poised to address the misconceptions woven into Western literature concerning henna. This endeavour is essential, not only to correct inaccuracies but also to foster a more accurate cross-cultural understanding of this ancient practice.

A recurring theme emerges within Western literature, which may be rooted in the consideration of writings on henna by colonial-era scholars.¹¹ Such sources serve as foundational pillars for constructing arguments, yet they are frequently treated as unquestionable evidence without adequate scrutiny of the information they present, or the underlying motivations that led to the formulation of these claims about henna and the culture as a whole. This gap in critical analysis is another aspect that this thesis endeavours to address, primarily through a comprehensive historiographical investigation. Through this perspective, this thesis seeks to assess the reliability of the contributions of colonial scholars to the discourse on henna. Through meticulous examination and critical evaluation of their work, it aims to

¹⁰ Altyeb, "رموز الحناء بين التقليدية والمعاصرة دراسة"; El-Sayed and Zayat, "دلالة الحناء في المعتقدات الشعبية لأهل مدينة الجلفه"; Meradi, Bougurra, and Bayou, "إثنوجرافية بإحدى المدن الليبية"; Arafat, "عشبة الحناء ومكانتها في الثقافة الشعبية الأوراسية"; "الحناء زينة شعبية لدى المرأة العربية: دراسة تاريخية وميدانية لرخارف ونقوش الحناء".

¹¹ Edward Westermarck, "Midsummer Customs in Morocco," *Folklore* 16, no. 1 (1905), <http://www.jstor.org/uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/1254466>; Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 3rd ed., 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Carles Knight and Co., 1846). <https://archive.org/details/accountofmanners01lane/page/n3/mode/2up?q=henna>; Walter William Skeat, *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900). <https://archive.org/details/malaymagicbeingi00skea/mode/2up>; Arthur John Newman Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk*, 2nd ed. (London: John Bale, 1913). <https://archive.org/details/cu31924026472278>.

shed light on potential biases, agendas, and contextual factors that may have influenced their interpretations.

Another significant gap in the existing literature pertains to the religious dimension of henna. Prevailing misconceptions have led to the erroneous belief that henna holds specific religious endorsement. This fallacy has been exploited by numerous Western scholars who refrain from exploring henna through an artistic lens, using this misconception as the reason.¹² Their actions effectively cast a veil over henna, preventing its consideration as an art form.

Considering this, I will delve into the religious aspects of henna, particularly from an Islamic standpoint. It is paramount to identify if Western scholars have misunderstood Islamic texts due to their limited understanding of the Islamic religion and Arabic language. Through a comprehensive analysis of the study of hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), and associated secondary scholarship, this research will approach the subject of henna from an Islamic perspective. By adopting the approach used by Muslims themselves, I aim to navigate the subject of henna within the framework of Islamic beliefs, thus offering a fresh perspective, distinct from the outsider's viewpoint often taken by Western scholars.

¹² Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk*; Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*; Edward Westermarck, "The Baraka (Holiness or Blessed Virtue): Its Sensitiveness," in *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Routledge, 1926); Edward Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933). <https://archive.org/details/dli.csl.6155/mode/2up>.

The Research Question

The primary goal of this study is to identify and unravel the layers of misrepresentation that have enveloped henna body art within scholarly literature. These layers have obscured the rightful recognition of henna as a creative cultural practice worthy of comprehensive study. Consequently, the core research question guiding this investigation is: What does Western literature and scholarship reveal about the perceptions and interpretations of henna body art as practiced in Islamic cultures?

Max Beerbohm¹³ aptly remarked “History does not repeat itself. The historians repeat one another.”¹⁴ My research question has a sharp focus on this insight, and seeks to determine whether and how scholars have repeated each other's viewpoints, motivated by political factors such as colonialism, and social dynamics including sexism, feminism, and racism, as well as their academic goals.¹⁵ Within this context, the research question serves as a lens through which

¹³ Max Beerbohm, *The Works of Max Beerbohm* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896); Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*.

¹⁴ Beerbohm, *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, 41.

¹⁵ As in, for example, Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (London: W. Bulmer, 1799), 132; Husain Noori Tabarsi, مستندك الوسائل ومستنبط المسائل [The Compendium of Means and the Derivation of Issues], 18 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: The Arab Historian Publishing House, 1987), 395. http://shiaonlineibrary.com/389_الصفحة-ج-1/1237_مستندك-الوسائل-الميرزا-النوري-ج-1/#top; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1898); Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, The Norton Library, (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1845); Knut Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," *Acta Sociologica* 25, no. 4 (1982): 353, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/4194426>; Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk*; Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco."; Amanda E. Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice" (PhD Thesis, Emory University, 2013); Catherine Cartwright-Jones, "The Geographies of the Black Henna Meme Organism and the Epidemic of Para-phenylenediamine Sensitization: A Qualitative History" (PhD Thesis, Kent State University, 2015); Maria Giovanna Messina, "Celebrations of the Body: Female Spirituality and Corporeality in Muslim Morocco" (PhD Thesis, State University of New York, 1991); Edward Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 34 (1904), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2843098>.

I seek to uncover the ways in which such historical repetitions have been instrumentalized. These repetitions are likely to have come at the cost of distorting our understanding of the Islamic religion, Eastern culture, and the experiences of Eastern men and women. My exploration aims to bring forth a comprehensive understanding of the motives and implications behind these repetitions, offering fresh insights into the nuanced interplay between henna, art, culture, and scholarship.

Research Contribution

The historical documentation of henna use, spanning from early history to the mid-20th century, has been predominantly conducted by male authors, the most prominent early example of which is perhaps Pliny the Elder.¹⁶ Throughout history, studies concerning women have been vague and limited, largely due to a prevailing sexism that deemed their lives and rituals less worthy of documentation compared to male subjects. Additionally, this gap would have been the result of social restrictions and the inaccessibility of close interaction and observation of women by male scholars.

As Western women began to receive academic consideration, there emerged a tendency to omit any serious study of Eastern women's rituals. Instead, these rituals were often utilized as tools to empower Western women within the framework of the first wave of feminism in

¹⁶ Gaius Plinius Secundus, *The Natural History of Pliny*, trans. John Bostock and Henry Thomas Riley, 6 vols., vol. 3 (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1890), 147.

1848.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this approach further neglected any thorough documentation of Eastern women's rituals and culture, including henna body art.

Being an Arabian Muslim woman has afforded me a unique opportunity to develop a profound understanding of the cultural, religious, and social aspects of henna. This is a result of my deep-rooted experiences within the Saudi Arabian culture. Through this lens, I can critically analyse Western texts, including historical studies, in a manner that strips away mythical and stereotypical explanations related to the use of henna.

As will be explored in great depth later, a key early anthropological source, Edvard (Edward) Westermarck, attributed the use of henna to protection from evil spirits and the evil eye, linking this perception to Islamic religious texts.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Edward Charles Sonnini associated henna use with low-class women, basing his assertion on street observations without interviewing Eastern women from various social strata. Subsequent studies often built their arguments upon the work of writers such as Westermarck, without subjecting their claims to critical analysis.¹⁹

My social and cultural familiarity with Eastern traditions equips me to analyse henna rituals practiced during social events like weddings and other celebrations. My perspective is rooted in personal involvement as a member of a culture that maintains the henna tradition. It

¹⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, Routledge, (London, 1991), 17-18; Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

¹⁸ Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), 449; Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 111.

¹⁹ Charles Nicolas Sigisbert Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, trans. Henry Hunter, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1977), 264.

stands in contrast to the perspective of Westerners who analyse these practices through the lens of their own culture, often overlooking the specific values and nuances of Muslim African and Asian societies.

Moreover, Western scholars often encountered limitations regarding time and place during their research. They may interact with only a few members of society, a small sample who may not represent the entire cultural spectrum. This limitation is evident in the work of scholars like Patricia Spurles,²⁰ who spent only 18 months in a single Moroccan town, gathering data from just four participants, who appeared to fit her theory on henna rituals being para-religious practices.²¹

A nuanced understanding of Islamic beliefs transcends oversimplification. This includes recognizing the differences between Sunni and Shia doctrines, as well as discerning the authenticity of hadith. Such nuance is particularly relevant when scrutinizing the claimed religious significance of henna, which is based on potentially fabricated hadith.

Furthermore, many Western scholars have lacked proficiency in reading Arabic religious texts relying instead on translations. My project, by contrast, draws heavily on Arabic-language text and intracommunity knowledge. Many translated texts contain linguistic errors that can distort meanings and result in inaccurate information. Additionally, a significant proportion of Western scholars sourced religious information from the work of earlier Western

²⁰ Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco."

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

scholars due to limited access to the original texts—a limitation I do not face, thanks to my ability to read and understand Quranic and hadith text in Arabic.

This thesis represents the first attempt to challenge the existing body of work authored by Western scholars concerning henna within Islamic cultures. Its core objective is to reshape the prevailing perspective on henna body art,²² with a firm commitment to preserving and authentically representing cultural heritage. This endeavour carries the potential to enrich educational curricula by offering a more genuine depiction of cultural practices and historical narratives. Such enrichment could result in a more comprehensive and equitable education, fostering values of cultural diversity and nurturing critical thinking.

This recalibration of perspective has wider implications. It seeks to lay the groundwork for future studies on henna body art. By revealing mythical notions and stereotypical imperialist viewpoints, this work aspires to establish henna as an authentic and distinct form of artistic expression. Through this scholarly journey, my intention is to free henna from the shackles of misinterpretation and bias, positioning it as a legitimate art form. This transformation is not just about art; it extends to fostering cross-cultural appreciation, transcending barriers and prejudices to foster a deeper understanding that spans cultures and epochs.

²² In this thesis, 'body art' refers to the commonly used term for body modifications, such as tattooing. See Matt Lodder. "Body Art: Body Modification as Artistic Practice" (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2010).

Research Methods

To comprehensively explore the history of henna, it is essential to acknowledge the existence of various historical perspectives. These differing interpretations of history have become a point of contention among different religious, national, cultural, and ethnic groups.²³ Marc Ferro's²⁴ insight underscores the idea that controlling historical narratives grants control over the present and serves to establish authority and support legal claims. This control predominantly lies with dominant powers that possess the financial and media resources to shape literature, leading to the propagation of a uniform historical viewpoint.²⁵

In the pursuit of understanding how henna has been documented within scholarly works, delving into historiography—a study of how history is written—proves crucial.²⁶ As illuminated by Conal Furay and Michael Salevouris,²⁷ historiography entails a methodical examination of how individual historians interpret and present specific subjects,²⁸ such as the depiction of henna in Western literature.

Exploring the literature and its authors becomes imperative due to the prevalence of scholars adopting a presumptuous stance when dealing with historical evidence. This often manifests as a neglect or dismissal of critical standards of analysis. Their works frequently lack

²³ Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History: How the Past is Taught to Children* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), ix, x. <https://archive.org/details/useabuseofhistor0000ferr/page/n3/mode/2up?q=factors>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

²⁶ Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Harlan Davidson, 2010), 227.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

proper citations for sources, with instances of treating myths, legends, and even mere gossip as established and trustworthy facts.²⁹ Furthermore, historical records were considered credible, with later scholars lacking scepticism. This cumulative disregard for any meticulous examination or appropriate sourcing ultimately undermines the precision and credibility of historical narratives.³⁰ Therefore, delving into the biographies of scholars who have discussed henna is crucial in understanding the influences that shaped their perspectives. Nineteenth century pilgrim Richard Burton,³¹ for example, demonstrated imperialistic views that influenced his analyses, implying a superior understanding of Eastern cultures.³² Employing this approach also facilitated the analysis of Westermarck's life and experiences that shaped his theories about Eastern culture, even preceding his travels to Morocco.³³ Moreover, it enabled his connection with his informant to be examined, allowing an exploration into the informant's personality and lifestyle. These elements shed light on how Westermarck's research was influenced and how this likely impacted his documentation of henna body art.³⁴

²⁹ Ibid., 229.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/_/oVmZPvL4KBwC?hl=en&gbpv=0.

³² Ibid.; Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Personal_Narrative_of_a_Pilgrimage_to_El/TgUBtLVysk8C?hl=en&gbpv=0; Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1856).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Personal_Narrative_of_a_Pilgrimage_to_El/lbVSx5zKcrEC?hl=en&gbpv=0.

³³ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 353.

³⁴ Edward Westermarck, *Sex år i Marocko* [Six years in Morocco] (Helsingfors: Holger Schildts förlag, 1918), 61-74.

Throughout this thesis, the terms "West" and "East" are used as a binary distinction. "West" primarily refers to Europe and North America, while "East" mainly denotes the Islamic world, though it occasionally includes other non-Muslim regions in Asia and Africa. Nicholas Pagan explains that this framework acknowledges the importance of using terms that go beyond specific cultural and linguistic contexts. One significant benefit of the East/West paradigm is its capacity to navigate around the epistemic biases associated with Western-centrism. If future scholarship refrains from favoring either East or West, it can prevent either side of this enduring dichotomy from becoming hegemonic. This paradigm also serves as a reminder for those with Western backgrounds to remain open to Eastern perspectives, and vice versa. Ultimately, the East/West distinction is likely to maintain its relevance in shaping human thought as long as these terms are viewed as "regions of consciousness".³⁵

Walter D. Mignolo explains these binary terms as "the enduring enchantment of oppositions,"³⁶ - such distinctions continue to hold an allure and can perpetuate biases and hierarchies. The West/East binary hemispheric model has been extensively studied and

³⁵ Nicholas O. Pagan, "In Lieu of a Conclusion: East and West as Regions of Consciousness," in *Literature, Memory, Hegemony: East/West Crossings*, ed. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel and Nicholas O. Pagan (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 182-83.

³⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, "The Enduring Enchantment: (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here)," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 927, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/39114>.

debated,³⁷ and yet despite this, there is a need, particularly in the 21st century, to focus on how academic and political dynamics arise from this interest in this opposition.³⁸

Rather than erasing the historically-inflected hemispheric binary in my methodological approach, using the terms "East" and "West" in this thesis is thus beneficial for several reasons. These terms provide a clear and widely understood framework for discussing cultural, historical, and geopolitical distinctions under Western colonialism, helping readers immediately grasp the broad contexts and contrasts being addressed in the terms understood by the writers with whose work I am engaging here. The binary allows this project to highlight the differences and interactions between these regions as these European writers (mis-)understood them, which are central point in the analysis. Engaging with "East" and "West" in this way, whilst acknowledging and critiquing its implications, also connects the thesis to a vast body of existing scholarship, facilitating comparative analysis and situating the research within the broader academic conversation stretching back though the nineteenth century.

In the context of henna body art, this binary framework is particularly useful for examining how Western scholars and travellers have misrepresented this cultural practice. The terms help in exploring and critiquing power dynamics, colonialism, and post-colonialism,

³⁷ Mark T. Berger and Douglas A. Borer, *The Rise of East Asia: Critical Visions of the Pacific Century* (London: Routledge, 1997); Krzysztof Jaskulowski, "Western(civic) versus Eastern(ethnic) Nationalism. The Origins and Critique of the Dichotomy," *Polish sociological review* 171, no. 3 (2010); Susan Whitfield, "The Perils of Dichotomous Thinking: A Case of Ebb and Flow Rather Than East and West," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*, ed. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Amilcare Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Thorsten J. Pattberg, *The East-West Dichotomy: The Conceptual Contrast Between Eastern and Western Culture* (New York: Lod Press, 2009).

³⁸ Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, *Literature, Memory, Hegemony: East/West Crossings*, ed. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel and Nicholas O. Pagan (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1.

contributing to ongoing debates about global inequalities and historical narratives. By questioning and deconstructing the "East-West" binary whilst acknowledging its persistence as a frequent axiom to thought, I aim to challenge and refine traditional narratives, emphasizing a global perspective and the complexities of diverse histories and cultures. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of henna body art and its cultural significance, countering reductive or exoticized portrayals often found in Western discourse.

Said's Orientalism

The historiographical examination of Western scholars and travellers in this thesis heavily relies on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism.³⁹ Said elucidates that Orientalism constitutes a structured framework of theories and practices that have evolved and endured across numerous generations. This construct demands significant intellectual and practical investment.⁴⁰

Orientalism encapsulates the historical approach through which the Western world has portrayed and studied the East, often veering toward exoticism and "othering." Said's perspective contends that this depiction of the East is not simply a result of imagination or curiosity; rather, it reflects a power dynamic whereby the West exerts dominance over the East.⁴¹ In essence, Europeans fashioned a distinct identity and a sense of superiority by

³⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Kindle Edition ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2014).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

perceiving the East as "other," distinct, and inferior. This facilitated the creation of cultural unity and pride among Europeans, who defined themselves in deliberate opposition to the Orient.⁴² This theory becomes a vital tool with which to scrutinize the Western perspective of Eastern culture while recognizing the role of power in moulding these very perceptions and historical narratives.⁴³

It is important to note that Said theory have been criticized heavily by many scholars such as Michael Richardson,⁴⁴ Joshua Muravchik,⁴⁵ Fikret Güven,⁴⁶ Robert Irwin,⁴⁷ Bernard Lewis,⁴⁸ and Albert Hourani.⁴⁹ Said has been accused of selectively using evidence, disregarding anything that contradicted his thesis, and filling the gaps with conspiracy theories.⁵⁰ Hourani, for example, worries that Said completely overlooks the German tradition and philosophy of history, which were core aspects of orientalist scholarship. As a result, Hourani explains, he neglects figures like Ignác Goldziher who visited the Middle East. For a year-long period (1839-97), Goldziher spent evenings in cafés with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Egypt, getting to know these people personally. Per Hourani, he "knew these people as human

⁴² Ibid., 3.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁴ Michael Richardson, "Enough Said: Reflections on Orientalism," *Anthropology Today* 6, no. 4 (1990), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3032736>.

⁴⁵ Joshua Muravchik, "ENOUGH SAID: The False Scholarship of Edward Said," *World Affairs* 175, no. 6 (2013), <http://www.jstor.org/uni/sexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/43556159>.

⁴⁶ Fikret Güven, "Criticism to Edward W. Said's Orientalism," *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2019, no. 15 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.580700>.

⁴⁷ Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

⁴⁸ Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," in *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

⁵⁰ Martin Kramer, review of *Enough Said* By Robert Irwin, *Commentary*, Mar, 2007, 64, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/195878992?accountid=10766&parentSessionId=8N12NgvaZtugjn%2B1autVyLeQnWiTckSp9ny%2FvHcGx2Q%3D&pq-origsite=primo&sourcetype=Magazines#>.

beings."⁵¹ Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm⁵² has further criticized Said for what he calls Said's "essentialism." He argues that Said treats Orientalism as a uniform and unchanging concept from ancient Greek times to the present, failing to account for the historical variations and developments in the field. According to ‘Azm, this approach contradicts Said's own criticism of those who treat the orient as a single, unchanging entity. Essentially, ‘Azm believes that Said oversimplifies and generalizes Orientalism, despite criticizing others for doing the same with the Orient.⁵³

This criticism does not mean, of course, that Said’s theoretical apparatus is invalid. Rather, perhaps, it simply does not apply to every Orientalist. Charles Issawi⁵⁴ states that it is unreasonable and impractical for Said to expect 19th-century English and French people to have the same perspectives and understanding of the orient as people do today. Although views in general have changed, when examining how European and American scholars and henna artists wrote about henna in the literature review chapter and in Chapter Five, which examines late 20th-century scholars, we find that the perspective on the use of henna has stagnated and has not developed.

⁵¹ Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1994), 40-41.

⁵² Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," in *Orientalism: a Reader*, ed. A. L. Macfie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Charles Issawi, "Change in Western Perceptions of the Orient Since the Eighteenth Century," in *Cross-Cultural Encounters and Conflicts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot⁵⁵ state that many scholars from the new generation –who assert they are doing innovative work – are merely repeating the same methods and neglecting to ask important questions. They still perceive the Middle East as an exotic, distinct culture. from her perspective Said aimed to change this perspective with his theory, with a necessary and sharp critique of the field, but it is evident that some still favour the "old" approach rather than trying to understand the Middle East from within or focusing on raising new questions and providing new answers.⁵⁶ Orientalism became a "dirty word", a slogan offensive to many scholars such as Lewis and Ibn Warraq considers it an anti-western,⁵⁷ according to Nikki Keddie the term "orientalism" has been misinterpreted by many scholars as a shortcut to avoid deeper analysis, enabling them to easily dismiss certain scholars and their works.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Said's work remains a useful heuristic tool for understanding the framework of the historiographical discussions which are the core focus of this thesis. Over the course of the 19th and 20th century, the distinction he determines between "East" and "West" remains the most comprehensible lens through which to understand the dominant fault lines of ideological and anthropological thought, even as more recent scholarship has rightly begun to

⁵⁵ Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *A History of Egypt: From the Arab Conquest to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ Gallagher, *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians*, 106.

⁵⁷ Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," 10; Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2007), 32; Gallagher, *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians*, 40, 145.

⁵⁸ Gallagher, *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians*, 145.

problematise clear distinctions.⁵⁹ The predominantly European academics whose work I examine throughout this thesis, and their (flawed) perceptions of henna in the context of Islamic beliefs, did take as axiomatic this dominant ideological position which divided the world, and its ideological hierarchy, into two contrasting hemispheres.

Given its historiographical dominance, the East/West paradigm looms large over the literature I draw upon throughout. This paradigm is old – it is found, for example, in the Psalms of the Christian bible (Psalm 103.12)⁶⁰ – and it has been unescapable as it has created, per Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, "regions of consciousness, rather than geographical locations".

In this thesis, the East/West paradigm serves as a crucial interpretative framework for examining the perceptions and uses of henna as understood by predominantly European academics. This dichotomy helps to reveal how henna, deployed as a cultural symbol apparently deeply rooted in specific Eastern traditions, was often misinterpreted and exoticized by Western scholars. By situating henna within the broader East/West paradigm, I here illustrate how a Western perspective often reduces this rich cultural practice to mere superstition and backwardness, stripping it of its complex social significance. Furthermore, the Orientalist tradition has tended to generalize the tradition of henna to the entire "East", rather

⁵⁹ Shinobu Kitayama and Cristina E. Salvador, "Cultural Psychology: Beyond East and West," *Annual Review of Psychology* 75 (2024), <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-psych-021723-063333>; G. John Ikenberry, "Three Worlds: The West, East and South and the Competition to Shape Global Order," *International Affairs* 100, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia284>; Giovanni Tarantino and Rolando Minuti, eds., *East and West Entangled (17th-21st Centuries)*, vol. 2 (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2023).

⁶⁰ George A. F. Knight, *Psalms*, 2 vols., vol. 2, ed. John C. L. Gibsons, The Daily Study Bible Series, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 136.

than focusing on the specific cultural and geographic contexts under study. This misrepresentation underscores the broader epistemic biases inherent in Western scholarship, which often treated diverse Asian and African cultures as a monolithic entity under the umbrella of the "East". Through this lens, my analysis of henna becomes a microcosm of the larger issues of cultural misunderstanding and ideological hegemony that characterize the East/West divide, highlighting the need for a more nuanced and respectful engagement with non-Western traditions.

Historiography has also proven invaluable in delving into historical Islamic writings that pertain to the life, sayings, teachings, and actions of Prophet Muhammad, known as hadith.⁶¹ To comprehensively study the hadiths that mention henna, it is crucial to assess their sources, known as the "*isnad*" or chain of transmission, which involves delving into the biographies of the narrators.⁶²

Notably, Islamic scholars specializing in hadith science, like Muhammad Al-Albani and Muhammad Al-Bukhari,⁶³ have conducted such biographical evaluations. By employing a historiographical approach, I have analysed these hadiths. For instance, in Chapter Six, I examine a hadith narrated by Abu Rimthah, where he recounts witnessing the Prophet with

⁶¹ Harald Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 1-2; Muhammad ibn Ismaeel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, ed. Zain-ud-Din Az Zubaidi (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam, 1994), 1031.

⁶² Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 4.

⁶³ Muhammad Al-Albani, *نقد نصوص حديثية في الثقافة العامة* (Damascus: Al-Tarqi, 1387), <https://shamela.ws/book/133363>, Electronic Book; Muhammad ibn Ismaeel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, 9 vols., vol. 9 (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1987).

henna-dyed hair.⁶⁴ An in-depth exploration of Abu Rimthah's biography reveals that he was a young boy at the time of this observation. His description is rooted in his memory from that period, which introduces the possibility of potential inaccuracies or personal interpretations.⁶⁵

Historiography serves as a valuable tool to unravel the intricate historical tapestry surrounding henna. The approach enables us to dissect motivations and perspectives, and to source reliability, shedding light on how history is moulded and conveyed through diverse lenses and agendas.

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. This **first chapter** is an introduction, providing insights into the background of the study and my personal motivation behind its pursuit. The introduction identifies critical gaps within the existing literature that this research endeavours to address. Additionally, this chapter elucidates the central thesis proposition, which aims to unpick prevailing misconceptions and stigmas associated with henna body art in Western scholarly discourse.

The second chapter offers an extensive exploration of recent Anglophone literature from the late 20th century to the 21st century, with the intention of revealing how henna has been portrayed in Western thought, and presenting for scrutiny a current account of existing

⁶⁴ Suliman bin Ash'ath Abu Dawud, سنن ابي داود [Sunan Abu Dawud], trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., vol. 4, ed. Hafiz Ali Za'i and Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), 229.

⁶⁵ Ahmad Al-Asqalani, الإصابة في تمييز الصحابة [The Controversy in Distinguishing the Companions], 8 vols., vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1991), 519. <https://ketabonline.com/ar/books/37679>; Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Ṣaḥîḥ Al-Bukhârî*.

knowledge, both scholarly and popular. The rationale behind focusing on this timeframe is to unveil, early in the project, how contemporary research shapes the current perception of henna. This chapter is structured into three sections, each targeting a specific aspect. The first section examines mainstream media, encompassing magazines, social media platforms, and television broadcasts. The objective is to understand the current representation of henna within Western media outlets. A compelling facet of this section involves contrasting these depictions with portrayals in non-Western media. Of particular importance is evaluating the cultural background of the authors and the linguistic nuances employed. This comparison provides insights into the divergent ways in which henna is portrayed across cultures.

The second section of the chapter offers a thorough examination of how henna is depicted in academic and non-academic literature, both within Western and Eastern societies. A distinctive element of this section is the inclusion of non-academic literature, which aims to explore how Western authors who actively practice henna art perceive and interpret the Eastern tradition and how they portray their craft in a mythical manner. The academic literature within this section exposes a reliance on colonial scholars, with Westermarck as a primary example, without any critical verification of the accuracy of their assertions. This section underscores the limitations inherent in the methodologies, source analysis, and cross-cultural comprehension within these studies.

The third and final section of the literature review chapter concerns non-Western scholarship. Here, the exploration centres on understanding how cultural backgrounds and

academic affiliations of authors impact their portrayal of henna. This part of the chapter strives to illustrate the influence of Western perspectives and the power dynamics at play. By contrasting indigenous research conducted within Western academic institutions and native institutions, this section seeks to shed light on how divergent viewpoints emerge.

Having established the current state of knowledge, I seek to unpack, in detail, how these conceptions and misconceptions came to become so prevalent. **Chapter Three** thus explores the particular impact of Westermarck on the documentation of henna body art, whose work I argue is indicative of the thought which underpins much modern understanding about henna practices.⁶⁶ This emphasis on Westermarck is paramount, given that his work is cited as a primary source of information concerning henna. He notably becomes the first scholar to assert that henna serves as a protective substance against evil spirits and the evil eye.⁶⁷ The goal of the chapter is to assess how his perspectives may have shaped the examination of henna as an anthropological subject intertwined with religious beliefs, moving beyond its portrayal solely as a cosmetic or beauty product. This exploration enhances our comprehension of scholarly discussions surrounding henna and illuminates the intricate cultural significance and symbolism it holds in diverse societies.

⁶⁶ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs."; Westermarck, "Midsummer Customs in Morocco."; Edward Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," *Folklore* 22, no. 2 (1911), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/1255060>; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1; *ibid.*, 2; Westermarck, "The Baraka (Holiness or Blessed Virtue): Its Sensitiveness."

⁶⁷ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 212.

This chapter consists of four sections; the first concerning the accomplishments of Westermarck, which led to his academic acclaim in the fields of philosophy and anthropology.⁶⁸ An investigation into his scholarly achievements is crucial prior to delving into his role in the examination of henna as an anthropological topic linked to religious beliefs. It is essential to recognize how his educational background and prior research might have shaped his perspectives on the utilization of henna.

The second section examines Westermarck's journeys to Morocco, providing an in-depth exploration of the reasons that may have prompted him to shift his focus towards this specific region. It was in the rural areas that he encountered individuals whose ways of life aligned with his theory of an enduring ancient civilization entwined with superstition, which significantly influenced his decision. Additionally, this chapter calculates the total duration of Westermarck's time spent in Morocco, to consider whether the time period spent there would have allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the culture and beliefs, and the depth of his authoritative insights on the subject.

The third section considers the dynamic between Westermarck and his Moroccan informant Abdessalam El-Baqqali.⁶⁹ This scrutiny is crucial as it may unveil possible biases that might have impacted the precision of the henna-related information they amassed.

⁶⁸ Jukka Siikala, "Introduction: Ancestral Images and the Invention of New Ideas," in *Developing Anthropological Ideas: The Edward Westermarck Memorial Lectures, 1983-1997*, ed. Jukka Siikala, Ulla Vuorela, and Tapio Nisula (Helsinki: The Finnish Anthropological Society, 1998), 7; Tuula Sakaranaho, "Finnish Studies on Islam: Themes and Approaches," *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 46, no. 2 (2010): 220, <https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.4517>.

⁶⁹ Westermarck, *Sex år i Marocko*, 22; Edward Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, trans. Anna Barwell (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1929), 136, 39.

Moreover, it is important to consider linguistic and cultural disparities between the two individuals that might have impeded effective communication. Ultimately, this segment raises doubts about the reliability of the henna-related data gathered by Westermarck and his informant, underscoring the necessity to rigorously evaluate sources of cultural insight.

The last section conducts a thorough evaluation of Westermarck's contributions, with a specific focus on how his religious and social perspectives might have shaped his analysis. This part encompasses a range of viewpoints from critics and advocates of Westermarck, offering an all-encompassing comprehension of the reception of his work. Such scrutiny lays the foundation for forthcoming chapters to delve deeper into Westermarck's documentation of henna, considering his substantial role in the realm of henna studies.

Chapter Four directs its attention to the evolution of henna practices from the 15th to the 19th century, specifically investigating the impact of Orientalism and early feminist thought on its portrayal. This examination is achieved through a historiographical analysis of orientalist perspectives, revealing their oversight in acknowledging henna as a form of body art since the era of early travellers. While these earlier accounts did not attribute henna to supernatural beliefs or superstitions, the neglect of its significance as a cultural practice is scrutinized in this context.

In this chapter, the analysis is guided by Edward Said's⁷⁰ theory of Orientalism, which emphasizes that Orientalism is not a mere imaginative concept but a structured body of theory

⁷⁰ Said, *Orientalism*.

and practice that has been developed and ingrained over generations.⁷¹ Said's theory underscores the significance of considering power dynamics when studying different cultures and histories. It suggests that understanding a group's ideas and histories necessitates an awareness of how power influences and shapes them.⁷²

To accurately explore the early literature on henna, the fourth chapter is organized into three sections, each corresponding to a specific era of colonization. The first section looks at the accounts of early Western travellers from the 15th to the 17th centuries. It examines their observations during the initial phase of colonization and their impact on shaping perceptions of the Orient. This section also investigates how Western interest during this period was often driven by economic motives, and how religious justifications were employed to garner support from the Western public and to influence their perception of Muslim culture. The section assesses how henna was linked to notions of oppression and cultural backwardness, even though male travellers had limited interactions with women in segregated societies to make informed remarks.

The second section of this chapter considers the documentation of henna during the 18th century, focusing on a unique approach adopted by some travellers, known as ethno-masquerading. This technique involved these travellers donning Eastern attire to better assimilate and observe the Orient. The section also examines the distinct perspectives of early women travellers compared to their male counterparts. It explores whether their closer

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid., 5.

proximity to women and their customs led to a heightened attention to the use of henna as a form of body adornment.

Furthermore, within this section, an analysis is conducted of the writing style of Western travellers during this era. Travellers often engaged in comparisons between the East and West, employing henna to differentiate between Eastern and Western women and position Western women as more desirable and superior. I examine the early feminist movement and its impact on documenting henna within the accounts of female travellers. This exploration considers how the pursuit of social freedom for Western women has influenced their observations and descriptions of henna practices.

The final section directs its attention towards 19th century travel narratives concerning henna, emphasizing the Western fascination with Eastern cultures and religions. Within this context, the section examines how henna started to be documented for its religious applications, while also engaging in an analysis of colonial methodologies that impacted the portrayal of henna in diverse manners.

Furthermore, this section investigates the accounts and experiences of Western women travellers during the 19th century. It explores the transformative impact of increased mobility for women during this era and whether it influenced the portrayal of Oriental women in written accounts. The investigation also considers how Western women travellers exhibited a heightened awareness of their Eastern counterparts and their cultural practices, which encompassed the utilization of henna.

Chapter Five investigates a remarkable evolution in the documentation of henna and how it underwent significant shifts in perception throughout the 20th century. These shifts were profoundly shaped by the colonial ambitions of European powers, which aimed to challenge Islamic religion and erode the cultural traditions of the nations under their control.⁷³

To thoroughly understand the changes in the documentation of henna during this era, a focused and nuanced analysis within the colonial context is essential. This approach brings to light the underlying factors that drove a transformation in the purpose of the documentation of henna. No longer confined to superficial adornment, henna began to be linked to protective properties against malevolent forces—a shift that was intricately woven into the larger colonial narrative.

This chapter is structured into two primary sections, each examining a crucial aspect of the historical trajectory of henna. The first section is dedicated to the period spanning from 1900 to 1945, a period deeply influenced by the forces of colonization. Within this timeframe, the chapter considers the documentation of henna, exploring the active involvement of academic anthropological scholars such as Walter William Skeat,⁷⁴ and Arthur Tremearne.⁷⁵ It unravels the innovative notions that emerged, proposing the role of henna as a protective agent,

⁷³ Muhamad Ali, "Introduction," in *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya*, ed. Muhamad Ali (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 1.

⁷⁴ Skeat, *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*.

⁷⁵ Arthur John Newman Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa* (London: Heath, Cranton and Ouseley LTD, 1914).
https://archive.org/details/banofboridemonsd00trem_0/mode/2up.

and examines the resulting impact on how henna was perceived and presented within academic discourses.

Moreover, this section examines the perspectives held by male scholars and travellers during this era. It scrutinizes their views on Eastern cultures, their interpretations of Eastern women, and their perceptions of the significance of henna. In parallel, the section provides a platform to explore rarer insights contributed by female travellers, such as Demetra Kenneth Brown,⁷⁶ Jean Pommerol,⁷⁷ and Emily Keene,⁷⁸ infusing the narrative with diverse perspectives shaped by their unique circumstances and experiences.

The second section of this chapter directs its attention to the documentation of henna during the post-colonial phase in the latter half of the 20th century. This period is characterized by the aftermath of colonial influences, shaping new trajectories for the portrayal and understanding of henna. Within this context, the chapter examines the works of the final generation of imperial travellers and highlights the scholarly investigations of that era. Of note is an exploration into the realm of cultural anthropology, where henna emerges as a subject intertwined with superstitious beliefs and practices. The section further probes the enduring impact of literature from the early 20th century on the perceptions of henna held by scholars of the late 20th century. It unravels how these literary foundations may have influenced the

⁷⁶ Demetra Kenneth Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909).

⁷⁷ Jean Pommerol, *Among the Women of the Sahara*, trans. Nancy Bell (London: London Hurst and Blackett, 1900). <https://archive.org/details/amongwomenofsaha00pommuoft/mode/2up>.

⁷⁸ Emily Keene, *My Life Story*, 3rd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1912). <https://archive.org/details/mylifestory00wazarich>.

perspectives of both male and female scholars during this later epoch. This comprehensive examination reveals the intricate interplay between historical contexts, evolving perceptions, and scholarly endeavours.

Chapter Six presents a comprehensive analysis of claims made by Western scholars regarding the Islamic significance of henna. It scrutinizes the foundation of these claims, often rooted in fabricated prophetic sayings, such as henna being dubbed the "light of the Prophet."⁷⁹ This chapter challenges the recurring assertion by Western scholars that they possess a more profound comprehension of the Islamic faith than Muslims themselves.

The primary objective of this chapter is to thoroughly investigate the importance of the Prophet's hadith from an Islamic perspective. It does so while considering the Sunni and Shia doctrines, as well as the diverse cultures encompassed by the Islamic faith. Structured into five sections, the first section concentrates on the portrayal of hadith in Western literature. It navigates through an intricate web of misrepresentations that have emerged, significantly influencing henna research carried out by Western scholars. These inaccuracies often stem from reliance on data compiled by early scholars with potential political motivations. By conducting hadith science, including the classification of hadith, this section unravels the types of hadith that Muslims adhere to and those they dismiss. This forms the foundation for subsequent research.

⁷⁹ Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice," 3.

The second section of this chapter takes a deep dive into the realm of authentic and good-graded hadith. It meticulously unpacks the meanings and purposes inherent in each hadith from an Islamic perspective. This exploration vividly demonstrates how Islamic scholars have played a pivotal role in interpreting these teachings and deriving practical rulings through their extensive knowledge and experiential insights.

The third section of this chapter focuses on a meticulous examination of weak and fabricated hadiths that pertain to henna, scrutinizing them from the Sunni perspective. This explores the nuanced ways in which Muslims approach and handle these hadiths within the realm of religious beliefs. A critical aspect of this examination involves dissecting the motivations that underlie the fabrication of these narrations, often driven by financial incentives or other ulterior motives.

This section examines the intriguing relationship between these questionable hadiths and the broader discourse on henna within an Islamic context. It seeks to shed light on how, at times, Western scholars have employed such unreliable hadiths as evidential support to establish connections between henna and Islamic practices. This scrutiny reveals the complexities surrounding the representation of henna within the realm of Islamic teachings and scholarship.

The fourth section within this chapter is dedicated to a meticulous exploration of hadiths from the Shia perspective. The primary goal of this section is to shed light on the distinctions that demarcate Shia and Sunni beliefs associated with henna. A significant aspect

of the Shia tradition is the veneration of 11 eminent figures who hold a position of paramount importance similar to that of the Prophet. Each of these figures possesses their own collection of hadiths, many of which reference the usage of henna. Within this context, the section meticulously analyses divergences in these hadiths as they exist in the Shia traditions. The emphasis here is on appreciating and understanding these variations and acknowledging their role in enhancing clarity and comprehension.

The fifth section of this chapter considers the intricate practice of henna body adornment among men from a religious perspective. This is controversial across Islamic cultures due to the historical association of henna with women's practices. Consequently, a diverse spectrum of religious opinions, each grounded in distinct hadiths, will be subject to thorough scrutiny. Through this comprehensive examination, the section teases apart the nuances of religious doctrine and cultural perceptions, casting light on the discourse surrounding this matter.

Chapter Seven aims to challenge the prevailing view of Western scholarship that suggests henna as a protective agent. It considers not only henna but also the beliefs surrounding evil spirits (jinn) and the malevolent influence of the evil eye, by examining them through both Islamic and cultural lenses.

The chapter achieves this by engaging in a comparative analysis of two distinct streams of research: Islamic anthropology, primarily conducted by Muslim scholars, and the anthropology of Islam, predominantly carried out by non-Muslim scholars. This comparison

reveals a compelling insight – that there is an intense Western preoccupation with the study of supernatural beliefs. There emerges a tendency to generalize such beliefs across the entire Muslim population, often rooted in scholars' own convictions.⁸⁰ This generalization sometimes results from interactions with a selective group of Muslims, specifically chosen to align with the theoretical framework being advanced.⁸¹

This chapter is structured into three sections. The first section presents a rigorous analysis that sheds light on the debate between Islamic anthropology and the anthropology of Islam. This analysis systematically outlines the criticisms levied against both domains. Critique of the anthropology of Islam often revolves around its tendency to perceive Islam as an abstract concept, consequently disregarding vital literary traditions and the intricate spiritual hierarchy that underpins them.⁸² Conversely, scholars of Islamic anthropology have been faulted for their defensiveness and a tendency to idealize Muslim societies, thus dismissing any semblance of imperfections within these societies.⁸³

From this comprehensive analysis emerges a middle ground that bridges the gap between these two distinct fields of study. It provides a foundation to dissect and examine authentic beliefs surrounding jinn and the evil eye from an Islamic perspective. Furthermore, it offers a platform to meticulously examine the practice of henna body art from a cultural

⁸⁰ Frederick M. Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 36.

⁸¹ Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 24.

⁸² Richard Tapper, "'Islamic Anthropology' and the 'Anthropology of Islam'," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1995): 185, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3318074>.

⁸³ Ibid "Defining Islamic Anthropology," *RAIN*, no. 65: 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3033364>.

standpoint. The goal is to strip away misconceptions around this art form. By intertwining the analytical threads of Islamic and cultural perspectives, this chapter unveils a comprehensive understanding of both the beliefs and practices that have historically been obscured or misunderstood.

The second section of Chapter Seven is dedicated to a comprehensive exploration of the concepts of the evil eye and evil spirits within Islam, elucidating these notions from the vantage point of Muslims themselves. Guided by the insights of Talal Asad,⁸⁴ this section emphasizes the foundational significance of commencing research on Islamic culture with a close examination of the Quran and the hadith as Muslims do.⁸⁵

This section is further subdivided into two parts. The first part meticulously dissects the concept of the evil eye, while the second addresses the beliefs surrounding jinn. A rigorous examination of Islamic religious texts reveals their limited mention of these beliefs. This section further examines the diverse opinions of Islamic scholars such as Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah,⁸⁶ and Ahmad ibn Hanbal⁸⁷ which contribute to the emphasis placed on these beliefs.

⁸⁴ Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20685738>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁶ Ahmed Ibn-Taymiyyah, *مجموع الفتاوى* [Compilation of Fatwas], 39 vols., vol. 24, ed. Amer Aljazar; and Anwar El-Baz (Al-Mansoura: Dar Al-Wafa, 2005), 154.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; Abd Alaziz Bin-Baz, *مجموع فتاوى ومقالات متنوعة* [A Collection of Various Fatwas and Articles], vol. 3, ed. Mohammed Sa'ad Al-Shuwayer (Riyadh: Dar Alqasm, 1999), 303; Muhammad Bin Ahmed Alansari Alqurtubi, *الجامع لاحكام القرآن* [The Compendium of Qur'anic Rulings], 9 vols., vol. 4, ed. Abdallah Ben Abdel Mohsen At-Turki and Mohammed Radwan Erqswsy (Beirut: Alresalah, 2006), 391.

Embedded within these subsections is a critique of the interpretations and analyses of these texts by Western scholars. For instance, the section examines Edward Westermarck's interpretation of the Arabic term "Ruqyah," associated with reciting the Quran, as a form of white magic.⁸⁸ This segment also considers the ways in which the personal perspectives and interpretations of both Western and Islamic scholars have played a role in shaping the perception of supernatural beliefs that permeate various facets of Muslims' lives. This influence has even extended to artistic expressions of Eastern Muslims, such as the practice of henna.

The third section of Chapter Seven examines the henna patterns attributed by Western scholars to protection against evil spirits and the evil eye, viewed through an Eastern cultural lens. This section comprises two subsections: the first analyses patterns associated with the evil eye, while the second examines those connected with evil spirits.

The core focus of this chapter is primarily on Amazigh or Moroccan body art, as this culture is often portrayed as particularly superstitious in comparison to other Islamic cultures. The analysis investigates how the patterns and symbols of traditional Amazigh art have been influenced by the Islamic artistic movement. This fusion has yielded more intricate patterns that simultaneously express cultural roots and religious beliefs.

While henna body art may not have been extensively documented compared to other art forms, such as tattooing, the same cultural influences prevail. This section dissects the

⁸⁸ Birgit Krawietz, "Islamic Conceptions of the Evil Eye," *Medicine and Law* 21, no. 2 (2002): 346, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.mlv21.31&site=eds-live>; Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 55.

symbols used in tattooing and other art forms and considers their meanings within Moroccan culture. It untangles the misinterpretations surrounding the use of the Amazigh alphabet to convey sentiments of love and marital status, which have been misconstrued by Western scholars.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the chapter examines the impact of tribalism, nature, lifestyle, and trade on the evolution of symbols used in henna body art.⁹⁰

The chapter then shifts its focus to the connection of henna with jinn. It explores the existence of contradictory accounts, where henna is sometimes believed to repel jinn due to its colour and scent,⁹¹ while others report that jinn require it as an offering.⁹² This divergence underscores how scholars often interpret Eastern culture through the lenses of their own fields of understanding and personal preferences, selecting data that aligns with their ideas and perceptions. This selection process often leads to generalising beliefs that might be unique to specific individuals, and erroneously attributing them to over 1.8 billion Muslims.⁹³

⁸⁹ Hiba Ahmed Yassin, "أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا" [The Influence of Decorative Elements of Tattoos and Henna on 19th-Century Fashion (including) in North Africa.] *Journal of Gender Education Research - Mansoura University* 46 (2017): 350.

⁹⁰ Karl Gröning, *Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 123; Doha Mustafa Mahmoud Jaber, "الرموز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم" [Tamazight Artistic Symbols and its Impact on Amazigh Life and Art.] *Scientific Journal of Emesia Education Association through Art* 7, no. 28 (2021): 2751; Yassin, "361 أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا".

⁹¹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 212; Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*, 118; Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*, 19, 66.

⁹² Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison, Wisconsin; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); John G. Kennedy, "Circumcision and Excision Ceremonies," in *Nubian Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, ed. John G. Kennedy (New York; Cairo: The University of California Press; The American University in Cairo Press, 1978), 154.

⁹³ "Muslim Population by Country 2023," 2023, accessed 23 Feb, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country#>.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the recent historiography of henna in anglophone literature and its representation to both the public and academic communities. Since the early 20th century, Western scholars have shown an increasing interest in the study of henna, resulting in the formation of various notions concerning religious and supernatural beliefs. Such notions have profoundly influenced the way henna has been presented to date. This review concentrates primarily on recent work from the late 20th and 21st century. Earlier sources which underpin, complicate and problematise these more recent claims will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis to follow.

The primary objective of this review is thus to analyse the way in which Western scholars and media platforms present henna body art in contemporary culture and to distinguish these representations from those of indigenous media and academic research. In short, this review aims to demonstrate as a starting point the unsophisticated, contemporary view of henna's global history within popular and academic discourse, which this thesis will go on to interrogate and, in places, undermine.

The first section of this chapter concentrates on analysing mainstream media, including magazines, social media, and television, to investigate how henna is currently presented within Western media outlets. This section further compares such representations with those from media published beyond the Western world, with specific emphasis on the background of the

respective author and the language employed to evaluate how henna is presented differently across various media channels.

The second section of the chapter provides a comprehensive review of the depiction of henna in academic and non-academic literature of both Western and Eastern societies. The review considers how the authors' cultural backgrounds and academic affiliations have influenced their portrayal of henna, and how indigenous research differs based on whether the research is conducted for a Western academic institution or a native one.

The Representation of Henna in Contemporary Mainstream Media

The prevalent representation of henna in Western media signifies to the audience that women who adorn themselves with it are perceived as being exotic, captivating, and enigmatic. Nonetheless, an important observation is that most of these individuals depicted wearing henna in various media outlets happen to be white females. During the 1990s, numerous prominent Western celebrities were showcased donning intricate henna designs such as Liv Tyler, whose 1997 *Vanity Fair* magazine cover featured her adorned with ornate patterns on her hands, arms, and feet while posing within a stylized Asian backdrop exuding sensual allure and mystery (Figure 1).⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Kevin Sessums, "Liv for the Moment," Online article, *Vanity Fair* (May 1997). <https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/1997/5/liv-for-the-moment>.



Figure 1: Liv Tyler with henna patterns, Live for the Moment (Vanity Fair, May, 1997)

The picture of Liv Tyler is depicted in a style reminiscent of orientalist paintings portraying Eastern women. In this representation, Tyler is portrayed lying down, evoking notions of sexual availability and laziness, and placed in a heavily decorated and luxurious setting. However, it is evident that these elements are not intended for the pleasure of the female figure in the painting, but rather for that of her male master or the viewer. Tyler's objectification in this artwork serves to appease the viewer, perpetuating the association between Eastern culture and the utilization of women for pleasure.

Henna, being evident on Tyler's arms, hands and feet, plays an integral part of this portrayal by accentuating the body for the viewer's gaze. The use of henna highlights the body's aesthetics, drawing attention to the female form and reinforcing the objectifying gaze upon Tyler, thus perpetuating the stereotype that links Eastern culture to the objectification of women for sensual gratification.

In the music video *Frozen* (1998), Madonna prominently showcases henna-adorned hands while situated in a desolate environment, clad in an elegant black dress.⁹⁵ Her transformation into crows also contributes to the mystical suggestions of witchcraft, metamorphosis, and malevolence depicted within the production.⁹⁶ This use of henna serves as a striking visual element that accentuates both Madonna's aesthetic appeal and her portrayal of esoteric concepts.

The 1990s' television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* prominently featured the use of henna as a means to create an alluring and enigmatic atmosphere, showcasing Lucy Lawless and Renee O'Connor adorned with exquisite henna patterns on various parts of their bodies (Figure 2). Henna was portrayed in the show to have mystical powers that were believed to aid in defeating evil forces.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Madonna, "Frozen," (5:29, YouTube, 26 February 2022 1998), Video, 93. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS088Opj9o0>; Michael Angelo Tate, "East is Hot! Madonna's Indian Summer and the Poetics of Appropriation," in *Madonna's Drowned Worlds*, ed. Santiago Fouz-Hernandez and Freya Jarman-Ivens (London; New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁹⁶ Karol Król and Józef Hernik, "Crows and Ravens as Indicators of Socioeconomic and Cultural Changes in Urban Areas," *Sustainability* 12, no. 24 (2020): 5, <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/24/10231>.

⁹⁷ Robert Tapert, Sam Raimi, and R. J. Stewart, "Xena: Between The Lines," ed. Rick Jacobson (44:31, YouTube, 13 May 2021 1999), Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4__bsoBpBI.



Figure 2: *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Between The Lines*, *Lawless* and *O'Connor* applying henna (1999)

This ancient form of body art continues to hold fascination even today, with renowned personalities such as Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Jessica Simpson and Halle Berry utilizing decorative henna patterns for adornment purposes.⁹⁸ Several celebrities have immortalized their fascination with these designs by having them inked permanently on their skin, as exemplified by Rihanna.⁹⁹ Fashion designer Antonio Berardi has also incorporated specialized ink that mimics black henna motifs into his runway shows, where he produces lace-like gloves using this technique with intricate details.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Coldplay, "Hymn For the Weekend (Official Video)," (4:20, YouTube, 2016), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YykjpeuMNEk>; Daily Mail Reporter, "Jessica Simpson Gets a Henna Tattoo and a Bindi as She Films Indian TV Documentary," Online article, *Daily Mail Online* (27 October 2009). <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1223370/Jessica-Simpson-gets-henna-tattoo-bindi-films-Indian-TV-documentary.html>; Tanya Chen, "Halle Berry and Daughter Nahla Get Inked... With Henna Tattoos!," Online article, *E News* (29 March 2013). <https://www.eonline.com/news/402785/halle-berry-and-daughter-nahla-get-inked-with-henna-tattoos-see-the-pic>.

⁹⁹ Lili Göksenin, "Rihanna's Tattoo Artist Shares the Stories Behind Her Signature Ink," Online article, *Vogue* (17 March 2016). <https://www.vogue.com/article/bang-bang-rihanna-tattoo-artist>.

¹⁰⁰ Khaoula Ghanem, "Henna Designs Make a Head-Turning Beauty Statement at Antonio Berardi," Online article, *Vogue Arabia* (19 September 2017). <https://en.vogue.me/beauty/antonio-berardi-spring-2018-henna/>.

Western media has frequently depicted henna as exotic, enticing, and even mystical. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that such portrayals often stem from stereotypes. According to Hamilton and Trolier's psychological definition, stereotypes are cognitive structures housing the observer's comprehension, convictions, and suppositions about a specific human group.¹⁰¹ The expectation associated with henna revolves around its users being enchanting beings driven by their sexuality while leading an enigmatic existence.

When analysing henna coverage in respected Western publications, such as *Vogue*, it is not uncommon to encounter conflicting information from different journalists. The reported data often varies based on the reporter's cultural background, whether they are from an Eastern or Western culture, and their familiarity with the application of henna. Additionally, while both Arabic and English versions of *Vogue* feature articles about henna, the content presented may differ between the versions due to varying perspectives pertaining to religion. For instance, a piece by Khaoula Ghanem published in both Arabic and English editions of *Vogue Arabia* depicts henna solely as a cosmetic substance used for celebrations without any mention of its religious significance; whereas *Vogue* writer Alexandra Venison's article emphasizes that globally recognized cultural and religious purposes motivate people who practice using henna.¹⁰² Venison particularly emphasized the utilization of henna in North African culture to

¹⁰¹ David L. Hamilton and Tina K. Trolier, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: An Overview of the Cognitive Approach," in *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism*, ed. John F. Dovidio; Samuel L. Gaertner (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), 133.

¹⁰² Alexandra Venison, "Henna Reinvented: How the Art Form is Being Redefined in the Modern World," Online article, *Vogue Arabia* (24 September 2018). <https://en.vogue.me/beauty/henna-reinvented-modern-world/>.

adorn the hands and feet of expectant women before childbirth for the purpose of guaranteeing a safe delivery.

Significantly, Venison also attributed attributes credit to Western influence for enhancing and transforming the use of henna within Eastern traditions. A notable instance cited as an example highlighting this revolutionary adaptation is Beyoncé's application of henna on her abdomen during her baby shower which subsequently led to its adoption among various cultures.¹⁰³ The lack of Arabic translation of Venison's article raises doubts regarding the potential reception of its content among Arab readers. Given their greater familiarity with the cultural practices of their own region, they may question the source and credibility of information presented therein. Conversely, English readers lacking substantial knowledge of Asian and African cultures risk receiving incomplete or inaccurate data that reinforces stereotypes rather than fostering intercultural understanding. The framing of henna use as a mere exotic trend imported from Western culture disregards its significant cultural value and perpetuates a limited perspective on cross-cultural exchange and appropriation.

In seeking henna-related articles in fashion and beauty magazines from Arabia, an abundance of pieces explores the use of henna in various cultural celebrations, including its adoption by Western celebrities. Upon thorough analysis of each article, though, it becomes evident that they were predominantly centred on highlighting the aesthetic and cultural significance attached to henna usage, while lacking any mention pertaining to its religious or

¹⁰³ Ibid.

protective functions. Considering these magazines are published within Islamic countries where Arabic is spoken, one would expect a more comprehensive approach toward discussing the religious importance of henna as well as its function as protection during vulnerable periods. However, such information appears confined solely to literature originating from Western media outlets. The tendency for Western media sources to portray the employment of henna by other cultures as superstitious warrants further inquiry.

A search for "henna" on Google yields over 31 million results. While a considerable proportion of these outcomes comprise commercial sites promoting henna products and services, several sources delve into the historical significance of henna in Muslim societies where it has been employed for religious, superstitious, and protective purposes.¹⁰⁴ Catherine Cartwright-Jones, who holds a Ph.D., disseminates her studies concerning henna practices in Islamic cultures through her website HennaPage.com; nonetheless, she rarely accounts for localized cultural or ritualistic practices within her research findings.¹⁰⁵

Commonly, individuals of Western origin may publish accounts regarding the history of henna on social media with intentions to improve their posts. However, these narratives

¹⁰⁴ "Henna in Early Islam," n.d, accessed January 30, 2023, <http://www.hennabysienna.com/henna-in-the-early-islamic-period.html>; "Henna in the Middle Ages," n.d, accessed January 30, 2023, <http://www.hennabysienna.com/henna-in-the-middle-ages.html>; "The Functions of Childbirth and Postpartum Henna Traditions," 2007, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.tapdancinglizard.com/the-functions-of-childbirth-and-postpartum-henna-traditions/>; "Henna and the Evil Eye, Salt and Lilith, and the Geography of G6PD Deficiency," 2003, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.tapdancinglizard.com/henna-and-the-evil-eye-salt-and-lilith-and-the-geography-of-g6pd-deficiency/>; "Henna's Significance in Amazigh Id, Circumcision and "Night of the Henna" Celebrations," 2003, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.tapdancinglizard.com/hennas-significancein-amazigh-id-circumcisionand-night-of-the-henna-celebrations/>; "Menstruation and Henna: Pollution and Purification," 2003, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.tapdancinglizard.com/menstruation-and-henna-pollution-purification/>.

¹⁰⁵ "The Henna Page," (Website), 2003, accessed 26 February, 2023, <http://www.hennapage.com>.

often lack precision and originate from unspecified sources. Consequently, readers are prone to accept this information without scepticism despite its recurrent appearance across multiple websites. The prevalent representation of henna within social media depicts it as a safeguarding agent, particularly amongst Asian, North African and Muslim communities; however, it is pertinent that we acknowledge that the greater portion of content relates to decorative body art purposes.

The Representation of Henna in Academic and Popular Writing

Henna art has long been a traditional form of body adornment spanning multiple cultures and epochs. Numerous authors have explored the diverse applications, cultural significances, and religious connotations associated with henna art over time. However, it was only in the early 1900s when a deeper academic interest began to emerge into the study of this art form. The subsequent chapters will investigate literature from this era to assess how colonialism and patriarchal systems impacted the documentation of henna throughout history. This section focuses on contemporary research conducted by both Eastern and Western scholars, examining the ways in which henna is portrayed based on each author's cultural background as well as their institutional affiliation within academia.

At the commencement of my scholarly inquiry, I conducted an extensive search for literature on henna in libraries. My findings revealed that most publications were authored by professional henna artists with the intention of promoting their art and commercializing related

products. These books offer sparse historical context on the subject matter while uniformly asserting that henna is utilized as a protective measure against malevolent forces within Asian and African cultures.¹⁰⁶ Many texts, such as 2010's *Henna Magic: Crafting Charms and Rituals with Sacred Body*, extensively underscore the mystical properties of henna without proper attribution to credible sources.¹⁰⁷ The target audience for these works is primarily comprised of non-experts seeking general knowledge about this topic rather than scrutinizing its veracity. As I will argue throughout this thesis, however, caution must be exercised when examining such materials since they perpetuate stereotypical narratives concerning cultural applications of henna amongst Asians and Africans, especially Muslims who are often portrayed as being preoccupied by superstitious beliefs, witchcraft, or spells.

It is noteworthy that I have found no comparable literature on henna body art published in Arabic. The dearth of such resources suggests that the subject matter of henna art lacks popularity in Eastern literary circles, unlike among the Western counterparts. It merits consideration that texts written by Western writers may contain perspectives and values not aligning with those held by Muslim Arab readers, thereby rendering their translation and publication unfeasible for this region.

¹⁰⁶ Philippa Faulks, *Henna Magic: Crafting Charms and Rituals With Sacred Body Art* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2010); Marie Anakee Miczak, *Henna's Secret History: The History, Mystery & Folklore of Henna* (New York: Writers Club Press, 2001); Aileen Marron, *The Henna Body Art Book* (Toronto: Elan Press, 1998); Pamela Nichols, *The Art of Henna: The Ultimate Body Art Book* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 2002); Loretta Roome, *Mehndi: The Timeless Art of Henna Painting* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998); Sumita Batra, *The Art of Mehndi: Henna Body Decoration* (London: Carlton Books, 2013); Desmond Morris, *Body Guards: Protective Amulets & Charms* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1999).

<https://archive.org/details/bodyguardsprotec0000morr/page/102/mode/2up?q=HENNA>.

¹⁰⁷ Faulks, *Henna Magic: Crafting Charms and Rituals With Sacred Body Art*.

Regrettably, the historical and cultural significance of henna as a form of body adornment has been overlooked by academic inquiry. Unlike for other forms of body modification, such as tattooing, scholarly attention towards henna art has been scarce. Marie Anakee Miczak, a henna artist and aromatherapy teacher, identified the gap between Eastern and Western academic literature regarding this subject matter, inspiring her to publish an extensive book entitled *Henna's Secret History*.¹⁰⁸ This publication consists of 14 chapters that comprehensively explore the origins and evolution of henna practice throughout ancient times to present-day societies. It also delves into the medicinal uses of henna along with various cultural interpretations across diverse communities.¹⁰⁹ Miczak's commendable contribution to the field of henna body art research comprises her recognition of a literature gap and subsequent comprehensive research. However, this work lacks critical analysis as it heavily relies on orientalist accounts that are riven with colonialism and sexism. The non-academic nature of Miczak's book further means that her sources are not subjected to the rigorous scrutiny expected for academic research. Furthermore, as an expert henna artist with historical interest, there is potential for Miczak to incorporate data collected from diverse clients and students and use comparative research methods to enhance the depth and nuance of her findings pertaining to the history and cultural significance of henna body art.

Academic research into henna in the 21st century is predominantly centred around its chemical and medicinal applications, including an examination of the adverse effects of black

¹⁰⁸ Miczak, *Henna's Secret History: The History, Mystery & Folklore of Henna*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-22, 23-110, 11-54.

henna.¹¹⁰ However, certain scholars such as Griffin Basas and Youssef Oumeish offer a historical perspective on the utilization of henna, though not with rigorous application of historical methods.¹¹¹ Regrettably, some sources used by these researchers are thus dubious. For example, although Oumeish alleges that cosmetic use of henna was first introduced by Arabs,¹¹² there exists no citation or archaeological evidence corroborating this assertion. Moreover, Basas cites Oumeish without conducting due diligence regarding the veracity of this information. Moreover, Basas posits that henna possesses mystical attributes including the ability to evoke prosperity and to safeguard individuals against harm.¹¹³ The belief in these powers has been ingrained for millennia, prompting a discourse between the individual and intangible realms.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the sources utilized by the author comprise non-scholarly material such as articles authored by a Canadian journalist. Basas tends to homogenize cultural and religious divergences within various regions while conforming beliefs to an ideal constructed by early 20th-century scholars.

¹¹⁰ Shahla Kakoei et al., "The Efficacy of Henna (*Lawsonia Inermis* L.) Mouthwash Versus Chlorhexidine Gluconate 0.2% Mouthwash as Adjuvant Therapy of Oral Lichen Planus: A Randomized Double-Blind Clinical Trial," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 290 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2022.115037>; Ismail A. Ajaj et al., "Determination of Heavy Metals in Henna Leaves and Cosmetic Henna Products Available in Zliten, Libya," *Al-Mukhtar Journal of Sciences* 37, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.54172/mjsc.v37i2.372>; Sepideh Elyasi et al., "Topical Henna and Curcumin (Alpha®) Ointment Efficacy for Prevention of Capecitabine Induced Hand-Foot Syndrome: A Randomized, Triple-Blinded, Placebo-Controlled Clinical," *Daru* 30, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40199-022-00438-8>; Linda Khefacha et al., "Henna Hnduced Heinz Bodies in Glucose 6 Phosphate Dehydrogenase Deficient Newborn," *International Journal of Laboratory Hematology* 44, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ijlh.13713>.

¹¹¹ Carrie Griffin Basas, "Henna Tattooing: Cultural Tradition Meets Regulation," article, *Food and Drug Law Journal* 62, no. 4 (2007): 780-82, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.foodlj62.52&site=eds-live>; Oumeish Youssef Oumeish, "The Cultural and Philosophical Concepts of Cosmetics in Beauty and Art Through the Medical History of Mankind," *Clinics in Dermatology* 19, no. 4 (2001): 384, [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-081X\(01\)00194-8](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-081X(01)00194-8).

¹¹² Oumeish, "The Cultural and Philosophical Concepts of Cosmetics in Beauty and Art Through the Medical History of Mankind," 384.

¹¹³ Basas, "Henna Tattooing: Cultural Tradition Meets Regulation," 782.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 781.

When analysing contemporary academic literature on henna authored by anthropologists and social scientists, a recurring issue surfaces: the references to henna predominantly stem from the scholarship of famed Finnish anthropologist Edward Westermarck, with no independent interrogation of its veracity. Westermarck's work and legacy will be covered in much greater detail in Chapter Three, but in short: Westermarck is celebrated as the most esteemed Finnish scholar with an outstanding global reputation, and is widely credited as the individual who laid the foundations for Finnish sociology and anthropology.¹¹⁵

In much of the literature which is grounded in Westermarck's fieldwork and analysis, henna is chiefly discussed in connection to mystical convictions and safeguards, notably within investigations of Islamic societies.¹¹⁶ Several scholarly works, including *Culture Counts* by Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms,¹¹⁷ *Culture and Customs of Morocco* by Raphael Njoku,¹¹⁸ and *Health and Ritual in Morocco: Conceptions of the Body and Healing Practices* by Josep Dieste, have delved into the role of henna within Moroccan culture.¹¹⁹ These authors examine henna as a culturally important beauty substance with magical properties that are believed to ward off misfortune through placating malevolent jinn spirits, while also

¹¹⁵ Siikala, "Introduction: Ancestral Images and the Invention of New Ideas," 7; Sakaranaho, "Finnish Studies on Islam: Themes and Approaches," 220.

¹¹⁶ Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms, *Culture Counts: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2012); Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, *Health and Ritual in Morocco: Conceptions of the Body and Healing Practices* (Leden; Boston: Brill, 2013); Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (London: University of California Press, 2021).

¹¹⁷ Nanda and Warms, *Culture Counts: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 305.

¹¹⁸ Raphael Chijioke Njoku, *Culture and Customs of Morocco* (Westport; London: Greenwood Press, 2006).

¹¹⁹ Dieste, *Health and Ritual in Morocco: Conceptions of the Body and Healing Practices*.

emphasizing its significance as an Islamic religious symbol. Although traditional dress is explored in detail within some texts, such as Njoku's work, the use of henna specifically for adornment purposes is not discussed.¹²⁰ Notwithstanding, the author observes that henna is utilized in wedding ceremonies as a means of safeguarding the bride and groom against jinn assaults.¹²¹ According to Dieste, incorporating henna into nuptial festivities serves to cleanse and shield the bride while endowing her with "*baraka*", or spiritual blessings that are believed to transfer onto those who apply it.¹²² These assertions draw upon Westermarck's interpretations regarding the purpose behind using henna within Moroccan customs.

In the context of Westermarck's literature, henna is also argued to have a significant role to play in relation to protection from jinn possession and evil spirits. For instance, Robert W. Lebling's *Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar* briefly mentions how henna can be utilized as a defence against jinn in Tunisia and may offer relief for illnesses caused by these spirits, such as epilepsy or depression.¹²³ Lebling is an accomplished American journalist and communications specialist who has worked extensively throughout Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Despite extensive travel in Asia and Africa for career purposes, Lebling relies heavily on Westermarck's published accounts of henna without questioning their authenticity or scrutinizing them through independent field research similar to Miczak's approach towards these sources.

¹²⁰ Njoku, *Culture and Customs of Morocco*, 88.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹²² Dieste, *Health and Ritual in Morocco: Conceptions of the Body and Healing Practices*, 146, 96.

¹²³ Robert W. Lebling, *Legends of The Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 179-80.

Anthropologist Adeline Masquelier conducted an empirical study entitled *Prayer Has Spoiled Everything: Possession, Power, and Identity in an Islamic Town of Niger* which scrutinizes the beliefs concerning evil spirits and possession amongst the Hausa population residing in Niger. The research delves into how religious customs have adapted to changes occurring within political frameworks as well as cultural distributions.

In Chapter Three of her work, Masquelier elucidates on a specific ritual that entails applying henna onto patients who are possessed by evil spirits with the purpose of driving them away whilst simultaneously facilitating patient recovery.¹²⁴ Although she employs terms such as “medicated henna,” this aspect remains inadequately explained; thus, it is unclear what sets it apart from regular henna applications. Moreover, Masquelier’s footnotes in the chapter elucidate a belief that spirits are inclined towards pleasant scents like henna and are averse to unpleasant odours.¹²⁵

Despite this explanation seeming to be at odds with using henna to drive away evil spirits, this and other scholarly works such as Gerda Sengers’ *Women and Demons*,¹²⁶ Emilio Spadola’s *Calls of Islam*,¹²⁷ and Brian Morris’ *Religion and Anthropology*¹²⁸, document this, without addressing the inconsistency. This discrepancy has persisted since the 19th century

¹²⁴ Adeline Marie Masquelier, *Prayer has Spoiled Everything: Possession, Power, and Identity in an Islamic Town of Niger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 112-15.

<https://archive.org/details/prayerhasspoiled00adel/page/112/mode/2up?q=henna>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹²⁶ Gerda Sengers, *Women and Demons: Cult Healing in Islamic Egypt* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 99, 176.

¹²⁷ Emilio Spadola, *Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 81, 87, 94, 105.

¹²⁸ Brian Morris, *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 90.

when supernatural beliefs appear to first become intertwined with henna usage; henceforth, subsequent chapters of this thesis shall delve further into this matter. In short, Western scholars hold contradictory views on the use of henna. At times, it is claimed to be a means to ward off evil spirits, while on other occasions, it is perceived as a way to appease them. As outsiders to the Eastern culture and traditions, they often interpret and understand it through the lens of Western values and lifestyle. However, their interpretations are often based on misinterpretations of religious texts, a topic that will be further explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Three recent doctoral dissertations have also focused on the mystical and religious applications of henna. Maria Giovanna Messina's *Celebrations of the Body: Female Spirituality and Corporeality in Muslim Morocco*¹²⁹ is an anthropological analysis of the human body as a significant source for cultural reflection and interpretation across all societies. Messina focuses on henna as a medium for communication and foundational concepts within societal constructs, specifically in modern-day Islamic Morocco. She pays particular attention to symbolism and social organization amongst women residing in Fez.

The dissertation presents ethnographic data that centres on the engagement of women with Islamic concepts of purity and pollution. Women, she argues, achieve this primarily through various means, such as the utilization of public baths and henna parties held at home during ordinary and special occasions. Additionally, the study investigates how women demonstrate their commitment to their faith by fasting, while also celebrating life and feminine

¹²⁹ Messina, "Celebrations of the Body: Female Spirituality and Corporeality in Muslim Morocco."

beauty, adorning their bodies with henna designs, and caring for themselves both physically and spiritually through these rituals. Messina's analysis uses psychological allusions as the appropriate framework for analysis between the symbolic and psychological aspects of the subject matter.¹³⁰

Messina highlights significant aspects of past research regarding henna and women's practices, arguing that previous studies conducted by male scholars were insufficient due to sexual segregation, hampering the collection of precise information from female participants.¹³¹ However, she too relies heavily on her analysis of Westermarck's views on women and their rituals,¹³² which is a limitation of the study. She also acknowledges that research conducted by women about their own gender is now receiving more recognition than in the past but still identifies several challenges, including problems with overgeneralization, unclear definitions, and insufficient conceptual frameworks.¹³³

Messina claims that her investigation into the subject is more accurate than earlier studies as all her informants are female, and the focus is primarily on women's perspectives.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, she assumes that all women hold popular beliefs in using henna against evil forces, and deems them as being psychologically delusional despite acknowledging that some individuals reject these practices as un-Islamic.¹³⁵ Messina argues that henna occasions serve

¹³⁰ Ibid., 222.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 16, 174, 77, 215, 18-19, 22, 24-25, 61, 75, 77, 81, 303.

¹³³ Ibid., 125.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 214, 64.

to both socially mark and spiritually protect females who are vulnerable to potential dangers and uncertainties typically associated with "transitional periods."¹³⁶ However, when interviewed about their use of henna, many informants provided a common answer, stating that they employ it "to celebrate, to be happy and to be beautiful".¹³⁷ Such alternative viewpoints could have been explored further in the study.

It is crucial to acknowledge that despite being a female researcher, one's cultural and religious background can hinder the ability to impartially comprehend and depict women's practices and convictions from diverse cultures and religions. Such constraints manifest in research on Islamic customs, like prayer rituals, or convictions, such as faith in jinn or evil eye forces. Messina's limitations are evident when analysing jinn through the Quran, as she presents her own perspective on this subject, drawing from personal conjecture and analytical reasoning to offer an interpretation of the Quran. She critiques the Quran by stating that it exhibits significant ambiguity regarding jinn, which has given rise to popular folklore and beliefs.¹³⁸ Furthermore, she asserts that the use of henna to decorate the body is forbidden in religion, and that Allah curses women who alter or decorate their bodies. However, this conclusion is based on a misinterpretation of the Prophet's saying on tattooing.¹³⁹ Chapter Six of this thesis will argue that such interpretations of hadiths are inaccurate.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 252.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 213.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 253-54, 59.

The second recent thesis, entitled *Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco* authored by Canadian cultural anthropologist Patricia Spurles, adopts a social perspective to examine art production.¹⁴⁰ Specifically, the study explores the commercialization of henna practices in Morocco with an emphasis on the emergence of henna artisans serving both local and international tourists at public markets. Employing a cultural biography methodology - as opposed to a method that evaluates traditional impact-oriented tourism - allows Spurles to analyse how the significance of henna is constructed and embedded within what she considers as newly commoditized rituals in the tourist sector.¹⁴¹ This research identifies general characteristics as well as culture-specific nuances inherent within diverse henna practices that span Muslim and Jewish Moroccan communities.

In her analysis of the historical usage of henna in Morocco, Spurles predominantly relies on primary sources from orientalist and scholars, with an emphasis on French records. She restricts her historical data to reports by two 17th-century travellers while acknowledging that these early accounts may exhibit ethnocentric bias and limited ethnographic information.¹⁴² The author subsequently explores literature from the 20th century, notably works authored by Edward Westermarck, M. Vonderheyden, and J. Herber.¹⁴³ She employs these texts as a reference for the utilization of henna in Morocco, but regrettably fails to offer an extensive analysis or to challenge these accounts. Additionally, she asserts that the custom

¹⁴⁰ Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco."

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 224.

¹⁴² Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 76-78.

of adorning one's body with henna originated from the Middle East and propagated throughout Africa and Asia along with Islamic domination.¹⁴⁴ However, no mention is made regarding any historical botanical data confirming pre-Islamic occurrence of henna plants on African soil or evidence pertaining to its application during ancient times.¹⁴⁵

Spurles provides an Islamic perspective on henna, focusing on Prophet Muhammad's hadiths that recommend men to dye their grey hair with henna.¹⁴⁶ In her research, the author references authentic hadiths alongside other hadiths that Islamic scholars consider weak¹⁴⁷ to support the argument that women use henna as a body adornment based on religious requirements.¹⁴⁸ Though lacking religious textual evidence in ritual contexts like birth and marriage ceremonies, the author acknowledges its religious approval has led to it being used in rituals over time. The author highlights the fact that henna holds a significant place in cultural practices beyond religious literature. A comparison between these contrasting traditions leads to the conclusion that henna acquired its religious connotations after the time of Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴⁹ Among Western scholars, Spurles stands out as one who discerns between popular and religious beliefs regarding henna; however, her research is limited to her area of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴⁷ Abdul-Rahman Al-Jawzi, *الموضوعات* [The Fabricated], 3 vols., vol. 3, ed. Abdul-Rahman Mohammad Othman (Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah: The Salafi Library, 1966), 56; Mohammed bin Ali bin Mohammed Al-Shawkani, *الفوائد المجموعة في الأحاديث الموضوعية* [The Compiled Fenefits in Fabricated Hadiths], ed. Abdulrahman bin Yahya Al-Mualimi Al-Yamani (Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah: Beirut, 2003), 195.

¹⁴⁸ Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco," 72-73.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 73-74.

expertise and fails to address earlier scholars' erroneous representations of popular customs as rooted in religion.

Spurles' research does not specifically delve into the utilization of henna with respect to jinn, evil eye, and magic in practice. However, her study frequently cites early 20th-century orientalist accounts which rely on accounts which connect henna with superstition.¹⁵⁰ Spurles analyses the use of henna in relation to supernatural beliefs and practices based on James Frazer's theory of Sympathetic Magic: a belief that certain things sharing common properties can influence each other through an invisible connection even when physically distant from one another.

The theory encompasses two distinct forms, namely contagious and homeopathic. The former asserts that objects or body parts that have previously been linked together as well as those which have come into contact with the body retain a connection even after separation. On the other hand, the latter operates on the principle of "like produces like," where similar items can influence events or circumstances through their interaction with each other. According to Spurles' argument, henna plays a significant role in various cultural practices such as weddings, circumcisions, and childbirth by incorporating both principles of contagion and protection.¹⁵¹ Specifically, wearing henna is believed to bestow protective blessings from religious figures upon individuals based on prophetic advice; thus aligning with the principle

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 231, 33.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 230.

of contagion suggesting lasting effects between objects or persons once in contact with one another.¹⁵²

Spurles' analysis of henna lacks original cultural insights as it predominantly draws upon Western sources and analytical frameworks. She fails to evaluate the credibility of prior research in her examination of this practice. Such limitations suggest a need for more nuanced, culturally informed analyses of henna that draw from diverse perspectives and methodological approaches.

The third thesis worth mentioning here is by Amanda Rogers, entitled *Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice*.¹⁵³

Rogers posits that scholars have underestimated the significance of henna body adornment within Moroccan culture by regarding it solely as a cosmetic substance.¹⁵⁴ According to Rogers, this dismissive attitude towards henna has prevented a deeper understanding of its powerful symbolism in Moroccan society.¹⁵⁵ This practice, she argues, is deeply rooted both in canonical religious texts and popular tradition and serves as a potent symbol for normative gender roles, female spirituality, and monarchical legitimacy within Morocco.¹⁵⁶ Rogers fails to acknowledge the substantial body of scholarly and travel literature on the subject such as

¹⁵² Ibid., 230-31.

¹⁵³ Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice."

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 4, 42-43.

works by William Lane,¹⁵⁷ Charles Sonnini,¹⁵⁸ and Richard Burton.¹⁵⁹ These missing lines of evidence will be addressed in Chapters Four and Five. Nevertheless, she posits that her thesis represents a valuable contribution to academic discourse by shedding light on henna as a religious practice rather than being merely cosmetic in character.

Rogers' thesis on henna in Morocco poses twelve inquiries, examining the popularity and gender significance of henna. She delves into the spiritual function of henna as a medium for blessings and how it is linked to taboos around female menstruation and sexuality. Rogers also analyses the Moroccan monarchy's control over "gendered religious art" in claiming their throne, while studying the economic role of henna in attracting tourists and locals, including whether commodification detaches it from cultural rituals. Lastly, she explores the correspondence of neighbouring countries with Moroccan heritage and cultural strategies at the political level.¹⁶⁰

Although the research conducted by Rogers encompasses a vast range of subjects, it is imperative to acknowledge that methodological constraints and a limited sample size constrain the strength and robustness of her findings. To be more specific, Rogers' study only involved semi-structured interviews with four participants who were specifically selected for the purpose.¹⁶¹ The author emphasizes the commonality with the work of scholars in the early 20th

¹⁵⁷ Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice," 4-6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

century, in her depiction of the utilization of henna for mystical objectives. This focus constrains her inquiry, restricting the scope of her examination, and placing her in a comparable position to that of earlier scholars who objectified and vilified women and Eastern cultures. The aforementioned limitations have been attributed to cultural prejudices prevalent during that period.

Henna in Recent Non-Western Scholarship

Academic inquiry into the use of henna has been extensive, though scholarship has been primarily carried out by academics who do not originate from cultures who have traditionally used henna as part of their cultural practices. Linda Tuhiwai Smith¹⁶² draws attention to the discrepancies observed between the portrayal of culture by indigenous researchers themselves, and the portrayal presented by Western academic institutions, highlighting challenges indigenous scholars face when reconciling research expectations with the realities experienced within their own communities.¹⁶³ Over the past three decades, researchers have aimed to highlight the overwhelming dominance of Western influences in cultural research, which often overshadows the valuable contributions of other theories and models relevant to Indigenous

¹⁶² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2021).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

and other non-Western cultures.¹⁶⁴ Eastern researchers, educated in the West, are by this account put in a position as outsiders within their own culture.

Insider and outsider perspectives have been extensively theorised in the social sciences, with their definitions evolving over time and across various disciplines. Deeply rooted in the histories of both anthropology and sociology, these viewpoints are crucial to discussions about what constitutes valid research.¹⁶⁵ Any scholars have discussed the concept of insiderness and outsidership, challenging the notion that these are fixed dichotomies.¹⁶⁶ Lore Arthur, for example, contends that a researcher's identity can change depending on the situation, with their status as an insider or outsider influenced by the location, social, political, and cultural values of a particular context or moment.¹⁶⁷ Indigenous researchers often face the challenge of being both insiders and outsiders. They are insiders due to their cultural connections but are seen as outsiders because of their Western education and the diverse boundaries they cross.¹⁶⁸ This dual

¹⁶⁴ Patrick O'Leary, Ming-Sum Tsui, and Gillian Ruch, "The Boundaries of the Social Work Relationship Revisited: Towards a Connected, Inclusive and Dynamic Conceptualisation," *The British Journal of Social Work* 43, no. 1 (2013): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr181>.

¹⁶⁵ Lizzi Milligan, "Insider-Outsider-Inbetween? Researcher Positioning, Participative Methods and Cross-Cultural Educational Research," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46, no. 2 (2016): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2014.928510>.

¹⁶⁶ Lore Arthur, "Insider-Outsider Perspectives in Comparative Education" (Seminar presentation at the Research Centre for International and Comparative Studies, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, Bristol, 2 November 2010); Kokila Roy Katyal and Mark King, "'Outsidership' and 'Insiderness' in a Confucian Society: Complexity of Contexts," *Comparative Education* 47, no. 3 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.586765>; Elizabeth McNess, Lore Arthur, and Michael Crossley, "'Ethnographic Dazzle' and the Construction of the 'Other': Revisiting Dimensions of Insider and Outsider Research for International and Comparative Education," *Compare* 45, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.854616>; *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Arthur, "Short Insider-Outsider Perspectives in Comparative Education."

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 5.

role, described by Patricia Hill Collins as the "outsider within,"¹⁶⁹ highlights their marginalization and the complexity of their position within research projects and institutions.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating the diverse scholarship on henna, particularly as it varies between researchers based in Eastern universities and those in Western institutions. Scholars in Eastern universities often focus on preserving and documenting the traditional uses and cultural significance of henna within their communities. In contrast, researchers from Eastern backgrounds working in Western universities frequently adopt Western perspectives when studying their own cultures, examining henna practices as outsiders. This often leads to a reinterpretation of cultural practices through a Western lens, which can both enrich and complicate the understanding of henna's role in contemporary and traditional settings. Moving forward, the following sections will delve into specific case studies and research findings from both Eastern and Western academic environments. This analysis will illustrate the interplay between traditional practices and contemporary interpretations, offering a comprehensive understanding of henna's evolving significance across different cultural and scholarly landscapes.

Tuba Ustuner, Ger Güliz, and Douglas Holt conducted an academic study into consumer behaviour regarding the historical and contemporary usage of henna. Their objective was to analyse a newly emerged form of the "Henna Night" party in Turkey which revolves around playful consumption as an expression of emerging urban Turkish identity. This study

¹⁶⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): 14-15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/800672>.

offers insights into evolving societal trends surrounding cultural practices within modern-day Turkey. The research highlights how rituals can serve as valuable cultural resources that enable individuals to establish novel social boundaries and challenge patriarchal gender roles.¹⁷⁰ The introduction of this new version of a Henna Night provides a space for negotiating cultural forms and delineations, thereby providing perspectives on how consumers shape fresh identities within dynamic and multifaceted environments. The authors also neglect earlier evidence of henna use in Turkey and other regions, dating its origins back to the time of Prophet Muhammad. They suggest that he and his companions used it before going to war as a symbol of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for God. They surmised that, over time, this practice evolved into a wedding tradition.¹⁷¹ Notwithstanding, the authors omit to provide a reference for their information on the employment of henna in Islamic history, resulting in a weakened historical analysis that neglects to differentiate between religious convictions and cultural myths. The evidence of the Islamic history of henna will be examined in Chapter Six.

The depiction of jinn beliefs in Muslim versus Western works demonstrates a dearth of mention of the prophylactic application of henna against jinn, as Amira El-Zein elucidates in her work *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*.¹⁷² The author observes that Western sources tend to disregard jinn belief as unsophisticated superstition while contemporary Arab Muslim sources heavily draw upon antecedent literature without

¹⁷⁰ Tuba Ustuner, Ger Güliz, and Douglas Holt, "Consuming Ritual: Reframing the Turkish Henna-Night Ceremony," 27, no. 1 (2000).

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 209.

¹⁷² Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse; New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

conducting additional scrutiny.¹⁷³ This incongruity accentuates the likelihood of misinterpretation in assorted literary settings of practices such as utilizing henna for safeguarding purposes.

In contrast to previous studies, Eda Acara's¹⁷⁴ investigation is conducted in a domestic institution and explores the usage of henna as a tool for fostering militarization and reinforcing gender roles within Turkey.¹⁷⁵ The study represents an innovative stride forward from earlier research efforts dedicated to this area of inquiry. The author presents an analysis of the role of henna in the departure ritual for conscripts joining military ceremonies in Turkey. Traditionally considered a feminine practice and associated with good luck, henna is reinterpreted as a symbol of sacrifice for one's nation within the context of compulsory military service. The author argues that this transformation highlights not only gendered expectations but also reinforces militarized narratives about masculinity and femininity. The author draws comparisons between women's loyalty to their husbands and men's willingness to die for their country. Ultimately, the use of henna serves as a marker representing national identity while revealing prevailing gender norms constructed around hegemonic masculinity within Turkish society.

Petek Onur's research, which was also carried out at an institution in Turkey, examines the contemporary phenomenon of neo-Ottoman henna nights. His work illuminates how this

¹⁷³ Ibid., ix.

¹⁷⁴ Eda Acara, "The Militarization of Henna," *Fe Dergi: Feminist Eleştiri* 2, no. 2 (2010), <https://www.ajindex.com/fe-dergi/the-militarization-of-henna-13057>.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 92-93.

tradition has been reinvented over time.¹⁷⁶ By his account, henna nights now reflect nostalgia for the Ottoman era and conform to wedding industry expectations while also examining gender roles and authenticity. Onur's research analyses how standardization has affected regional customs and cultural diversity, and perpetuated orientalist portrayals of Ottoman heritage.¹⁷⁷ Onur's investigation into the cultural phenomenon of henna nights exposes a nuanced understanding of the role that forgetting and remembering plays in traditions, resulting in an increased sense of connectedness to cultural heritage.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, Onur delves further into how changes within these practices impact gender dynamics, female identity formation, and self-perception. Despite outward appearances suggesting women hold significant influence during their respective henna ceremonies due to ostentatious displays fuelled by expanding wedding industries, such power is rather ephemeral in nature and is highly influenced by social class distinctions whereby experiences diverge dramatically based on economic status within families.¹⁷⁹

Both Acara and Onur present valuable insights into the contemporary use of henna in Turkey. These scholars provide a clear, focused analysis of this tradition without perpetuating cultural myths or religious connotations. As Turkish natives with deep understanding of their subject matter, they avoid stigmatizing henna usage. Through their contributions, both authors

¹⁷⁶ Petek Onur, "The New Ottoman Henna Nights and Women in the Palace of Nostalgia," in *Neo-Ottoman Imaginaries in Contemporary Turkey*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Petek Onur (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 233-34.

enhance our comprehension of phenomena such as "henna nights" and how they shape gender roles, cultural heritage, and authenticity within the societal fabric of modern-day Turkey.

The demonstration of cultural awareness is exemplified through research conducted by ethnic scholars on their respective indigenous institutions. A case in point is the comprehensive anthropological study on henna usage among Jews, with a particular emphasis on the Yemeni Jewish community, undertaken by Rachel Sharaby.¹⁸⁰ The author's origin and location in Israel provide an authentic and unparalleled perspective to this exploration. Sharaby's significant contribution to this field can be evidenced through her numerous publications pertaining to the employment of henna within Yemeni Jewish culture.¹⁸¹ Through analysing *The Bride's Henna Ritual: Symbols, Meanings and Changes*,¹⁸² Sharaby provides insights into traditional bridal use of henna as well as its resurgence following decades of immigration into Israel along with exposure to Western customs.¹⁸³

In her article, Sharaby expounds on the process of henna preparation for weddings and delves into its historical usage.¹⁸⁴ However, she asserts that the practice was assimilated from

¹⁸⁰ Rachel Sharaby, "The Bride's Henna Ritual: Symbols, Meanings and Changes," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 11 (2006), www.jstor.org/stable/40326803.

¹⁸¹ Rachel Sharaby, "Looking Forward and Backward: Modern and Traditional Gender Patterns Among Yemenite Immigrant Women in a Moshav," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 8 (2004), <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.40326777&site=eds-live>; Sharaby, "The Bride's Henna Ritual: Symbols, Meanings and Changes."; Rachel Sharaby, "Intercultural Mediators: Women Organizers of Henna Rituals of Yemenite Jews in Israel," *Sociological Papers* 13 (2008), <http://din-online.info/pdf/sp13-6.pdf>; Rachel Sharaby, "Dual Liminality: Marriage Rituals of the Mountain Jews in a Changing Social Context," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011), www.jstor.org/stable/44368873; Rachel Sharaby, "Significance of Prenuptial Rituals as Ethnic Definitional Ceremonies Among Immigrants," *Advances in Anthropology*, no. 7 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4236/aa.2017.72005>.

¹⁸² Sharaby, "The Bride's Henna Ritual: Symbols, Meanings and Changes."

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 13-14.

Muslims during their residency in Yemen.¹⁸⁵ Conversely, both Jewish and Muslim inhabitants of Yemen share a common culture and tradition despite any religious disparities. Ken Blady supports this viewpoint by providing sufficient evidence indicating that Jews resided in Yemen prior to Islam's advent while contributing significantly to shaping Yemeni society just as they did elsewhere.¹⁸⁶

Sharaby's investigation explores the protective properties of henna use through interviews with individuals from Yemen and Caucasus Georgia. Interviewees believed that the red stains on skin and natural green hue provide protection against malevolent spirits and negative influences, including those cast by the evil eye during weddings. Sharaby emphasizes how intricate patterns drawn using henna serve as a customary adornment for brides, featuring five dots to protect them from ill-wishing gazes.¹⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that while examining Jewish customs, Sharaby refrains from attributing any influence on Islamic religious beliefs or practices.

In contrast, William Buse,¹⁸⁸ a scholar of Jewish heritage at an American university, conducts research on henna use among Jewish individuals. His study entitled *Mediating Nations and Generations: The Yemenite Jewish Marital Henna Ceremony* posits that in pre-modern times the usage of henna was exclusively associated with magic and religion devoid

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁶ Ken Blady, *Jewish Communities in Exotic Places* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2000), 32.

¹⁸⁷ Sharaby, "The Bride's Henna Ritual: Symbols, Meanings and Changes," 15, 21; Sharaby, "Intercultural Mediators: Women Organizers of Henna Rituals of Yemenite Jews in Israel," 76-77, 79; Sharaby, "Dual Liminality: Marriage Rituals of the Mountain Jews in a Changing Social Context," 30, 32; Sharaby, "Significance of Prenuptial Rituals as Ethnic Definitional Ceremonies Among Immigrants," 67.

¹⁸⁸ William Buse, "Mediating Nations and Generations: The Yemenite Jewish Marital Henna Ceremony," *Marriage & Family Review* 53, no. 8 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2017.1347546>.

of any indications of its cosmetic purposes.¹⁸⁹ He contends that during this era, brides employed henna as supernatural protection upon entering adulthood, married life and transitioning into their husband's home.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, he notes that while similar practices are observed across the Middle East and Far East regions; the Yemeni Jewish community has a unique tradition regarding henna ceremonies which distinguishes it from other cultural identities.¹⁹¹ Although acknowledging various religious factions coexisting within Yemeni society along with their interactions, he neglects to address what distinctive aspects surrounding Yemeni-Jewish culture set it apart from mainstream Yemeni cultural identity.

Moreover, the aforementioned statement presents a contradiction. Buse concedes that Jews in Yemen integrated into the prevailing culture and embraced certain beliefs propagated by Muslims, which encompassed supernatural notions pertaining to malevolent entities such as evil spirits and the evil eye.¹⁹² However, he subsequently acknowledges these same tenets of faith within Talmudic teachings and does not include henna in Jewish religious study.¹⁹³ Buse fails to recognize their presence earlier on, thereby insinuating a negative connotation associated with this aspect of Jewish religion. Buse neglects to acknowledge the extensive history of Jews residing in Yemen and their considerable contributions towards shaping Yemeni customs.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 760.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² William Buse, "Dreams, Djinn, and the Evil Eye: Interpreting the Supernatural Idiom of Yemenite Jewish Immigration," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 18, no. 1 (10 August 2020): 4, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1675>.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 5.

The academic discourse reveals a prevalent tendency of non-Muslim researchers to misrepresent religion in scholarly investigations of Islamic culture. Such studies frequently reveal issues concerning a lack of accuracy and precision, particularly with respect to evidence utilization and the interpretation of religious texts. One notable example is Hadas Hirsch's¹⁹⁴ article on medieval Islamic body modification which posits the usage of henna as an obligatory practice for women based on weak-graded hadiths issued by the Prophet. This flawed argument is compounded by generalizations about henna use among all Muslims as a protective measure against evil eye instead of its association with specific cultural groups across the Islamic world.¹⁹⁵

Additionally, the assertions made by the author concerning the role of henna in purification rituals among Muslim women lack substantiation from credible Islamic religious literature. Rather than drawing on established theological texts, such claims appear to be founded solely upon conjecture advanced by prior scholars who may not possess a comprehensive understanding of Islam.¹⁹⁶ Such an approach curtails their capacity to conduct precise analyses of cultural customs and to distinguish them from dogmatic beliefs. This disparity as a result of work being undertaken by outsiders with inadequate knowledge of the subject matter can be juxtaposed with more reliable findings produced by Jewish experts who study their own cultural practices.

¹⁹⁴ Hadas Hirsch, "Temporary and Permanent Body Modifications in Medieval Islam: The Legal Discussion," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1708266>.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Arabic research that relies on Western accounts as a source of information is therefore also influenced by Western biases. An example is the study by Khinch Ahmed, Bin Jeddo Al-Jilali, and Syed Ahmed Belhabib¹⁹⁷ that provides a broad view of henna usage within Islamic wedding traditions extending from Malaysia to Morocco. The authors emphasize how henna represents a good omen and *baraka* for those who engage with it through their cultural practices; but this is an observation informed by the work of Jean Pommerol¹⁹⁸ and M. Vonderheyden¹⁹⁹ among other Western sources cited in their work.²⁰⁰ The objective of the author's analysis pertaining to Islamic marriage entails a comparative study between wedding customs in ancient civilizations, such as those observed among the Sumerians, Egyptians and Romans.²⁰¹ However, it appears that this comparison does not take into account substantial differences spanning centuries or religions. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of emphasis on investigating potential syncretism within these traditions.

In contrast, alternative research conducted by scholars from the Arabic region engage in a field of study that excluded foreign influence. These investigations concentrate on specific locations with an emphasis on exploring the cultural traditions, rituals, and popular beliefs of this region without any prior conjecture or speculation. These inquiries do not categorize the

¹⁹⁷ Khinch Ahmed, Bin Jeddo Abdul Qadir Mohiuddin Al-Jilali, and Syed Ahmed bin Belhabib, " الزواج التقليدي في " الأوغواط من منظور أنثروبولوجي " [Traditional marriage in Laghouat from an anthropological perspective.] *Social Empowerment Journal* 1, no. 4 (2019).

¹⁹⁸ Pommerol, *Among the Women of the Sahara*.

¹⁹⁹ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord."

²⁰⁰ Ahmed, Al-Jilali, and Belhabib, "139" الزواج التقليدي في الأوغواط من منظور أنثروبولوجي.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 129-31.

use of henna as solely a religious practice nor do they centre around establishing any potential association between applying henna and supernatural convictions.²⁰²

This is evident, for example, in Latrache Altyeb's research *The Significance of Henna in The Popular Beliefs of the People of the City of Djelfa*,²⁰³ which focusses on two tribes sharing one geographic location and analyses the culture and popular beliefs they practise in relation to henna. According to Altyeb, the interaction between the tribes and their full integration in some popular life phenomena hinders the ability to observe them independently, which makes it difficult to pinpoint a specific reason for using henna. Furthermore, he notes that many scholars have tried to explore the topic of body art by examining its relationship with folk practices, folk medicine, saints, and other fields. However, while this approach provides an approximate and explanatory way to analyse the subject, it does not have a significant impact on the topic of body art.²⁰⁴

In his study, Altyeb explains the historic genealogy of the group under study,²⁰⁵ and highlights their culture and popular beliefs that cannot be separated from society, as they have occupied a prestigious position in society and have become entangled with every situation in

²⁰² Meradi, Bougurra, and Bayou, "عشبة الحناء ومكانتها في الثقافة الشعبية الأوراسية"; Altyeb, "دلالة الحناء في المعتقدات الشعبية"; Musa Shweihat, "1830-1519 العثمانية بالجزائر الاجتماعية بالجزائر العثمانية 1830-1519"; "لأهل مدينة الجلفه التجليات الرمزية للوشم في المعتقد"; Abdul Hakim Khalil Sayed Ahmed, "الشعبي بين الخصوصية الثقافية والثقافة الشعبية (The Fourth Palestinian Art and Folklore Conference / Reality and Challenges, An-Najah National University, An-Najah National University, 2012); Kamel Omran, Ezz Eddin Diab, and Eva Kharna, "وظائفها وطقوسها الاجتماعية (دراسة أنثروبولوجية في قرية بللوران الساحلية"; [AL- Henna: Function and Social Rites (Anthropological Study in the Costal Village of Balloran).] *Journal of Tishreen University for Research and Practical Studies: Arts and Humanities Series* 33, no. 1 (2011); El-Sayed and Zayat, "رموز الحناء بين التقليدية والمعاصرة دراسة إثنوجرافية بإحدى المدن الليبية".

²⁰³ Altyeb, "دلالة الحناء في المعتقدات الشعبية لأهل مدينة الجلفه".

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 216.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 212-16.

their lives, in turn because these beliefs have been instilled in them and acquired through social upbringing. One of the popular beliefs is continuity, and it does not stop following them and is attached to them constantly.²⁰⁶ Altyeb did not observe the use of henna but conducted interviews with three old women from the city,²⁰⁷ which limited the scope of the research to cultural anthropology, without looking into the feminine significant of using henna.

Another piece of research looks at El-Sayed Abdel-Momen El-Sayed and Ola El Zayat's article *Henna Symbols Between Traditional and Contemporary, an Ethnographic Study in a Libyan City*.²⁰⁸ In their study, they look into the use of henna by those of all ages and marital status, and they examine the use of henna in magic, evil eye, dream and death.²⁰⁹ To analyse these subjects, the authors highlight the importance of distinguishing between individual and social norms to examine the level of the belief that henna is used for supernatural purposes.²¹⁰ The result of the interviews shows that only five interviewees out of 50 burn henna in the house to get rid of trouble and to counter arguments between the family members. None of them mention applying henna to protect from evil spirit or the evil eye,²¹¹ as reported in Western scholar accounts mentioned earlier.

A further study was carried out by researchers from the same cultural and geographical background, namely Musique Merradi, Kamel Bouguerra, and Saleh Bayou; scholars from

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 216.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 221.

²⁰⁸ El-Sayed and Zayat, "رموز الحناء بين التقليدية والمعاصرة دراسة إثنوجرافية بإحدى المدن الليبية."

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

²¹¹ Ibid., 49-50.

Algeria.²¹² Their research explores Aures popular culture with a particular focus on the application of henna.²¹³ An in-depth anthropological inquiry into the use of henna within a culturally rich Syrian village was conducted by Kamel Omran, Ezz Eddin Diab, and Eva Kharma.²¹⁴ The selection of these locations is no coincidence, as they reflect the homelands of the authors who are deeply rooted within their own culture. This grants them exceptional access to observe, comprehend, and elucidate subtle practices unique to that particular setting; something which may prove elusive for external researchers from different communities who may not possess an intimate first-hand experience with the cultural behaviours they aim to scrutinize.

The authors shed a light on the ancient myths that may have influenced the use of henna body art in contemporary cultures,²¹⁵ and briefly mention how ancient beliefs have syncretized to influence the use of henna as protection from supernatural powers.²¹⁶ There is a notable absence of the use of henna from an Islamic religious perspective in both pieces of research, which indicates that the use of henna as a body adornment substance had never been considered as a religious practise from the perspective of indigenous people. The research focuses on popular culture which is deeply rooted within the people who have lived in the region since ancient times. It considers how it has traversed different periods, remains an inherited legacy

²¹² Meradi, Bougurra, and Bayou, "عشبة الحناء ومكانتها في الثقافة الشعبية الأوراسية".

²¹³ Ibid., 220-34.

²¹⁴ Omran, Diab, and Kharma, "(الحنّة: وظائفها وطقوسها الاجتماعية (دائرة أنثروبولوجية في قرية بللوران الساحلية)".

²¹⁵ Meradi, Bougurra, and Bayou, "عشبة الحناء ومكانتها في الثقافة الشعبية الأوراسية", 26-225; Omran, Diab, and Kharma, "(الحنّة: وظائفها وطقوسها الاجتماعية (دائرة أنثروبولوجية في قرية بللوران الساحلية)", 177.

²¹⁶ Meradi, Bougurra, and Bayou, "عشبة الحناء ومكانتها في الثقافة الشعبية الأوراسية", 31-230.

passed down from generation to generation, and includes various elements of ideas and beliefs, practices and rituals, occasions, customs and traditions, norms, knowledge, experiences, and other cultural elements that have remained to this day, making the region and the culture unique in its own way.²¹⁷ The authors highlight that most people who use henna for cultural reasons do not have knowledge of its historical use nor do they associate it with any hidden meaning, but rather it is associated with a simple explanation of body adornment and celebration.²¹⁸

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to conduct a comprehensive literature review on the topic of henna, with a primary focus on sources published in the 21st century. The review aimed to explore the various representations of henna in different types of sources, including media platforms, henna artist books, and academic studies. Furthermore, the analysis considered the geographical origin of the authors and their affiliated academic institutions, to examine how the presentation of henna may differ between Western and Eastern research contexts.

The results of the literature review indicate that scholars primarily from Western countries have approached henna research with a religious and paranormal lens, neglecting to adequately consider cultural nuances and variations in henna practices across diverse contexts. This narrow approach leads to generalizations regarding the use of henna in Islamic nations

²¹⁷ Ibid., 224; Omran, Diab, and Kharma, " الحنة: وظائفها وطقوسها الاجتماعية (داسة أنثروبولوجية في قرية بلوران الساحلية)", " 171.

²¹⁸ Omran, Diab, and Kharma, " الحنة: وظائفها وطقوسها الاجتماعية (داسة أنثروبولوجية في قرية بلوران الساحلية)", " 173.

without due consideration of individual experiences, local beliefs, and inherited traditions unique to each culture. Additionally, the review reveals that field studies conducted by foreigners, particularly Western researchers, do not contribute significantly to a comprehensive understanding of the purpose behind using henna. Furthermore, the review highlights a reliance on assumptions based on early 20th-century literature when discussing these practices, emphasizing the need for further critical examination and evaluation within this area of research.

The chapter examined the approaches of indigenous studies on henna use. The analysis distinguishes between two types of indigenous research. Firstly, studies conducted in Western institutions where the researchers have adopted the same perspectives as Western scholars without challenging the information provided by the West, thus suppressing their own knowledge of their cultures. Secondly, studies conducted by indigenous researchers in their home institutions, where the researchers were more focused on specific locations and the cultures to which they belong and therefore analyse the practice without resorting to assumptions. Furthermore, the indigenous Muslim authors did not associate henna with religious beliefs; rather, they approached the subject from an anthropological and cultural perspective. It is important to note that this avoidance does not imply that some cultures do not associate the practice with religion, but it is not the primary focus in Eastern studies.

In general, the literature of the 21st century has failed to challenge the orientalist accounts of the early 20th century, resulting in a gap that this dissertation seeks to fill. The

existing literature has allowed historical layers to accumulate over the centuries, resulting in a cosmetic body art using henna being associated with superstitious beliefs, thus preventing it from being recognized as an art subject. The present study aims to remove these layers and provide a comprehensive understanding of henna as a cultural and artistic practice, free from any preconceived notions and superstitious beliefs.

Chapter Three

Examining the Influence of Westermarck on the Documentation of Henna

Body Art: A Critical Review

Introduction

Henna body art has not received the same level of academic attention as other forms of body modification, such as tattooing and body piercing. Despite its widespread use in various cultures across the world, contemporary study of henna often relies on early 20th-century anthropological studies as a primary source of information. In this regard, the name that frequently appears in the literature is Edward Westermarck, a renowned philosopher, sociologist, and anthropologist who made significant contributions to the study of human behaviour and culture.

Given Westermarck's extensive body of work and his engagement with various anthropological subjects, several of his publications mention henna. This chapter aims to analyse the impact of his views on the study of henna as an anthropological subject related to religious beliefs, rather than merely as a beauty or cosmetic substance. This investigation will contribute to a better understanding of the scholarly discourse on henna and will shed light on the complexities of its cultural significance and symbolism in various societies.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to examining the achievements of Edward Westermarck, which enabled him to earn academic recognition in the disciplines of philosophy and anthropology. It is necessary to investigate his scholarly accomplishments before delving into his contributions to the study of henna as an anthropological subject related to religious beliefs, to appreciate how his background and previous study may have contributed to the forming of his views on the use of henna.

The second section examines the relationship between Westermarck and his Moroccan informant. This analysis is important because this relationship reveals the potentially compromised basis of Westermarck's information, casting doubt over the accuracy of the information on henna that they collected. Additionally, linguistic and cultural differences between the two men may have hindered effective communication. Ultimately, this section scrutinizes the reliability of the information on henna gathered by Westermarck and his informant, emphasizing the need to critically assess sources of cultural knowledge.

The third section is dedicated to a critical assessment of Westermarck's work, particularly in terms of the extent to which his religious and social views may have influenced his analysis. This section incorporates diverse perspectives from both critics and supporters of Westermarck to provide a comprehensive understanding of how his work was received. Such an analysis sets the stage for the subsequent chapters to examine Westermarck's documentation of henna in greater detail, given his standing as a significant figure in henna studies.

Westermarck's Academic Contributions

Edward Alexander Westermarck, was born on 20th November 1862, in Helsingfors, Finland, and passed away on 3rd September 1939, in Lapilahti, Finland.²¹⁹ Westermarck's illustrious academic career was characterized by his appointments to three prestigious professorship chairs. His initial appointment was as Professor of Moral Philosophy at the

²¹⁹ "Obituary: Edward Alexander Westermarck: 1862-1939," *American Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 3 (1939): 452, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/2769859>.

University of Helsinki in 1906, followed by his appointment as Rector and Professor of Philosophy at Åbo Akademi University in Turku from 1918 to 1933. Lastly, he held the distinguished position of Professor of Sociology at the University of London from 1914 to 1935.²²⁰ Westermarck's accomplishments as a scholar have been recognized globally and he remains a prominent and foundational figure in the fields of sociology, philosophy, and anthropology.

Westermarck is recognized as having an exceptional international reputation, and he is widely acknowledged as the founder of Finnish sociology and anthropology.²²¹ The core thesis of Westermarck's scholarship – as articulated by Nils Uddenberg – is that there exists an inseparable link between nature and culture.²²² This connection is particularly evident in Westermarck's studies of marriage and family, his Moroccan fieldwork examining rituals and moral beliefs, and his inquiry into the origin of moral ideas and emotions, as explained by Erik Allardt.²²³ Westermarck's intellectual interests spanned diverse fields, and as an anthropologist, he was recognized as a pioneer in fieldwork conducted into alien cultures.²²⁴ His fascination

²²⁰ Sakaranaho, "Finnish Studies on Islam: Themes and Approaches," 220.

²²¹ Siikala, "Introduction: Ancestral Images and the Invention of New Ideas," 7; Sakaranaho, "Finnish Studies on Islam: Themes and Approaches," 220.

²²² Nils Uddenberg, *Arvsdygden: Biologisk Utveckling och Mänsklig Gemenskap* [The Original Virtue: Biological Development and Human Togetherness] (Stockholm: Bokförlagen Natur och Kultur, 1998). cited in; Erik Allardt, "Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture," *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 4 (2000): 300, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4201223>.

²²³ Allardt, "Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture," 300.

²²⁴ Timothy Stroup, ed., *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, vol. 34 (Helsinki: The Philosophical Society of Finland, 1982), x.

with the customs of African and Asian cultures was developed to address complex issues in social philosophy.²²⁵

In the late 19th century, Edward Westermarck's reputation was established with the publication of his Ph.D. thesis, which he transformed into a commercial book entitled *The History of Human Marriage* (1891).²²⁶ This seminal work employs a comparative method to analyse social data,²²⁷ a methodology that would later attract criticism. Despite such criticisms, the book was immensely popular and generated extensive discussion among both academics and the general public.²²⁸ Westermarck's book was notable for his liberal views on sexual morality, gender roles and marriage, which garnered both admiration and disapproval.²²⁹ In his autobiography, *Memories of My Life* (1929),²³⁰ Westermarck reflects on the success of his book, stating that his research had begun to take on the characteristics of a formal study.²³¹ This realization spurred him to embark on a journey to study and observe the behaviour of the "savages" whom he had previously read about in great detail.²³²

During the first decade of the 20th century, other Finnish scholars did not receive the same level of international recognition as did Westermarck, who was regarded as a leading

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1891).

²²⁷ Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 5th ed., 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan And Co., 1921), 1-3; Stroup, *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, x.

²²⁸ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 347-48.

²²⁹ Ibid., 348.

²³⁰ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*.

²³¹ Ibid., 129.

²³² Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 353.

sociologist and theorist.²³³ Despite his popularity, however, Westermarck faced severe criticism from Emile Durkheim.²³⁴ Westermarck was among the earliest Finnish philosophers to espouse radical ideas inspired by Charles Darwin, and Durkheim had who argued that "to rest sociology on Darwinism is to fix all of science on hypothesis; it is contrary to proper method".²³⁵ However, according to Knut Pipping,²³⁶ Durkheim failed to notice the distinction between Westermarck's theories and social Darwinian theories. Pipping further explains that Westermarck believed that emotions, which maintain the norms that embody the moral ideas of a society, evolved through natural selection in a manner analogous to the evolution of the human genotype.²³⁷

Furthermore, Ted Honderich²³⁸ notes that Westermarck's philosophical work, which focused on empiricism and evolutionary theory, had a significant international impact on moral philosophy and social anthropology.²³⁹ Although Westermarck conducted an extensive analysis of wedding customs across various cultures after his work on Morocco, including of cultural traditions Asia and Africa, he does not mention the use of henna elsewhere.²⁴⁰ This omission

²³³ Rolf Lagerborg, "The Essence of Morals: Fifty Years (1895- 1945) of Rivalry Between French and English Sociology," *Transactions of the Westermarck Society* II (1935): 17; R. Fletcher, "On the Contribution of Edward Westermarck. The Process of Institutionalization: A General Theory," in *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, ed. Timothy Stroup (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica Fennica, 1982), 194-95; George W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (London: Athlone, 1996), 151- 63.

²³⁴ Émile Durkheim, "Review," review of *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*. Vol. I, Edward Westermarck, *L'Année Sociologique* 10 (1905), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27882994>.

²³⁵ Stroup, *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, xiii.

²³⁶ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work."

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.

²³⁸ Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 303; Siikala, "Introduction: Ancestral Images and the Invention of New Ideas," 4.

²⁴⁰ Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* 418-30.

may be attributed to the fact that henna was mainly practiced in gender-segregated societies and was viewed as a predominantly female activity – and therefore was likely not even visible to many male researchers. This is likely to be why earlier scholars and travellers, whose documentation Westermarck relied upon, did not give it much attention. Furthermore, although Westermarck acknowledged the belief in evil spirits in Africa,²⁴¹ his research does not establish a clear connection between body staining and supernatural beliefs.²⁴² This suggests that henna was likely primarily viewed as a cultural or decorative practice rather than a religious or ritualistic one by earlier scholars.

Westermarck's Moroccan Travels

Westermarck's original itinerary for his exploratory studies was to commence in Morocco in 1898, extended subsequently to Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) and the South Sea Islands, with the intention of permitting his travels to evolve organically, following his research interests.²⁴³ Nonetheless, during the initial months of his sojourn in Morocco, he recognized that the rural areas of Morocco presented a compelling subject for investigation. Westermarck evocatively described his feelings of the place, stating that it felt as if he had been transported back a millennium, and that he fancied himself as a wayfarer in Europe at a time when there were no roads or bridges, and the traveller had to find his own way as best he could. Moreover,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 485.

²⁴² Ibid., 159, 68, 366.

²⁴³ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 146.

Westermarck had acquired an idea of oriental life and had been brought into daily contact with individuals who maintained their ancient belief in magic powers and mystic spirits that inhabited every corner of the country.²⁴⁴

Westermarck expressed contentment with his change of focus, stating that it was "better much about little than a little about much."²⁴⁵ He learned the language, familiarized himself with the people, and conducted ethnological research.²⁴⁶ During his stay in Morocco, Westermarck received research grants from the Finnish government and the University of Helsingfors,²⁴⁷ allowing him to purchase a property in Tangier on the shores of the Straits of Gibraltar and use it as a base for his excursions.²⁴⁸ Morocco thus became Westermarck's third home country after Finland and England. Between 1898 and 1926, Westermarck made 21 visits to Morocco, spending a total of seven years in the country.²⁴⁹

However, it is important to note that this represents a relatively short period in Morocco and this may have limited Westermarck's understanding of the culture and beliefs he encountered. According to Smith, Western researchers often assume that they know all there is to know about other cultures based on brief encounters with some of their members.²⁵⁰ This sentiment is reflected in Westermarck's preconceived notions about the cultures and beliefs he studied, which may have influenced his interpretation of every ritual he observed, including

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 145.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 146; Stroup, *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, xii.

²⁴⁶ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 145.

²⁴⁷ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 353.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 356.

²⁴⁹ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, v.

²⁵⁰ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

the use of henna, as being rooted in supernatural beliefs. His analysis may have been biased by his prior assumptions and expectations. Furthermore, his condescending attitude towards the culture he studied may have further impacted his understanding and interpretation of their beliefs and rituals. It is essential to approach the study of other cultures with an open mind and a willingness to learn and understand from the perspective of the indigenous people themselves.

It is also important to consider the concept of Western discourse about the Orient, as described by Edward Said.²⁵¹ This refers to the process by which Western scholars and institutions construct ideas about the Orient and the people who live there. Said argues that this discourse is supported by a corporate institution that "makes statements about the Orient, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching about it, settling it, ruling over it."²⁵² This adds a critical perspective to the discussion of Westermarck's research and highlights the need to critically evaluate the ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated in academic and cultural contexts. Orientalism cannot, of course, simply be confined to accounts about France and Britain, from where concepts of the Orient as an exotic world of daydreams and erotic escapism bloomed. It can be argued that Westermarck, a Finnish scholar, would not necessarily be straightforwardly understood as embodying an Orientalist imperialist perspective though his work simply on the basis of his subjective position, since Finland did not have overseas colonies like Britain and France. However, Finnish sociological study, to which Westermarck contributed as a professor, evolved into a nationalistic project suggesting

²⁵¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

that all Finns share the same cultural or ethnic characteristics. This project became closely associated with scientific racism, which involves using scientific claims or theories to support or justify racist beliefs and practices.²⁵³

While Finland did not engage in colonization, its intellectual culture did however produce its own orientalists, such as Georg August Wallin (1811–1852),²⁵⁴ Orientalism cannot, of course, simply be confined to accounts about France and Britain, from where concepts of the Orient as an exotic world of daydreams and erotic escapism bloomed. Other Europeans also embraced the idea of primitive people, fitting the notion of the 'noble savage,' popularized in Europe by the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)²⁵⁵ in the 18th century, and originally influenced by the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592).²⁵⁶ This broader context highlights the pervasive nature of orientalist ideologies across Europe, transcending national boundaries and historical circumstances.

While Said's theory of Orientalism primarily focuses on colonial powers like Britain and France, the imperialistic mindset permeated European scholarship more broadly. Anthropologists such as Westermarck benefited both financially and academically from their

²⁵³ Lena Näre, "Roots and Routes of Finnish Sociology: A Contemporary Perspective on Early Sociology," *Research on Finnish Society* 9 (2016): 41, <https://doi.org/10.51815/fjsr.110754>.

²⁵⁴ Georg August Wallin, *Reseanteckningar från Orienten åren 1843-1849* [Travel Notes from the Orient 1843-1849], 2 vols. (Project Gutenberg).

²⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality: On the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (Auckland, N.Z.: The Floating Press, 2009).

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=330736&site=ehost-live&authtype=sso&custid=s9814295>.

²⁵⁶ Michaell de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals," in *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne* (London: Edward Blount, 1603), 218-19; Näre, "Roots and Routes of Finnish Sociology: A Contemporary Perspective on Early Sociology."

engagements with these colonial powers. Therefore, applying Said's theory helps contextualize Westermarck's work within the framework of Orientalism, despite Finland's lack of overseas colonies. It is crucial to examine Westermarck not only as a Finnish scholar but also to consider the ideological and political influences of his time, which likely shaped his perspectives. From a historiographical standpoint, analyzing Westermarck's views on phenomena like henna and Moroccan culture provides insight into how orientalist discourses were constructed and perpetuated in academic circles. This approach sheds light on the complexities of his scholarship and its broader implications for understanding Western interpretations of Eastern societies.

Westermarck's choice of words such as "savage"²⁵⁷ and "civilization"²⁵⁸ reflects the evaluative bias inherent in Westermarck's time, a bias from which modern anthropology seeks to distance itself. Contemporary anthropologists strive to relativize claims to knowledge, recognizing that our interpretations are deeply influenced by our historical and cultural contexts.²⁵⁹ This shift is exemplified by the introduction of critical theories like Said's, or the post-colonialism of Franz Fanon²⁶⁰ which address the power dynamics and biases in Western representations of non-Western societies. Westermarck's wording highlights his perspective

²⁵⁷ Edward Westermarck, "The Nature of the Arab Ginn, Illustrated by the Present Beliefs of the People of Morocco," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 29, no. 3/4 (1899), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2843009>, www.jstor.org/stable/2843009; Edward Westermarck, "The Principles of Fasting," *Folklore* 18, no. 4 (1907): 391, 409, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1254491>.

²⁵⁸ Edward Westermarck, "The Position of Women in Early Civilization," *American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1904), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2762238>; Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*.

²⁵⁹ Camilla Kronqvist, "The Relativity of Westermarck's Moral Relativism," in *Westermarck*, ed. David Shankland (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2014), 142.

²⁶⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

and demonstrates his belief that one morality can be seen as superior to another. Critics such as George Edward Moore and Krister Segerberg argue that claiming one morality is higher than another often reflects personal bias rather than an objective truth.²⁶¹

Despite their intellectual pursuits, Westermarck and his anthropologist contemporaries produced knowledge intended to aid colonial administration.²⁶² According to Talal Asad,²⁶³ anthropology has been seen as the handmaiden of colonialism. Anthropologists have played a role, sometimes indirectly, in upholding the power structures of colonial systems. Although these contributions were not crucial for the vast empire that provided support and received knowledge, they were significant for the small discipline that offered knowledge and received patronage. The power structures influenced the theoretical choices and treatment of what social anthropology focused on, more in some areas than others.²⁶⁴

Westermarck's Moroccan Informant

The process of obtaining information is an ongoing task that necessitates using social skills and strategies that are naturally developed through our daily interactions. This is

²⁶¹ Krister Segerberg, "Moore's kritik av Westermarck," [Moore's Criticism of Westermarck.] *Årsskrift utgiven av Åbo Akademi* (1973): 76; George Edward Moore, "The Nature of Moral Philosophy," in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1922), 334-35.

²⁶² Ulla Vuorela, "Colonial Complicity: The 'Postcolonial' in a Nordic Context," in *Complying With Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, ed. Suvi Keskinen et al. (London: Routledge, 2009), 26.

²⁶³ Talal Asad, "Introduction," in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (New York: Humanities Press, 1985).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

particularly evident when researchers seek information from cultures unfamiliar to them,²⁶⁵ such as in the case of Westermarck and Moroccan culture. In this regard, Westermarck highlights the importance of gaining access to Moroccan culture and acquiring informants. The role of research informants is critical in any research study as they provide valuable insights and perspectives that aid researchers in developing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation.²⁶⁶

Abdessalam El-Baqqali was introduced to Westermarck as one of three servants accompanying an English nobleman during his travels to Morocco.²⁶⁷ As recounted by Westermarck, El-Baqqali went on to become a trusted confidant and friend for the remainder of his life. Such was their closeness that Westermarck dedicated an entire chapter to El-Baqqali in his book, *Sex år i Marocko* (Six years in Morocco).²⁶⁸

Upon analysis of the nature of the relationship that developed between Westermarck and El-Baqqali, who had limited proficiency in the English language,²⁶⁹ it becomes apparent that it was mutually beneficial. Westermarck found in El-Baqqali a potential subject of study, specifically with regard to the belief in *baraka* – blessing – that the local populace in Morocco attributed to El-Baqqali. This holiness was believed to have been inherited from his great

²⁶⁵ Hammersley Martyn and Atkinson Paul, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 4 ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 44. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102503&site=ehost-live&authtype=sso&custid=s9814295>.

²⁶⁶ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 300.

²⁶⁷ Westermarck, *Sex år i Marocko*, 22; Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 136, 39.

²⁶⁸ Westermarck, *Sex år i Marocko*, 61-74.

²⁶⁹ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 139.

ancestor, the Prophet Mohammed.²⁷⁰ El-Baqqali was a shereef belonging to the well-known Baqqali family, reputed to possess the ability to cast powerful curses over an enemy. The potent holiness attributed to the shereefs of this family was so revered that even their goatherds were feared by locals. This characteristic offered Westermarck a sense of security, obviating the need for him to engage a soldier as a companion during his travels.²⁷¹

Throughout his fieldwork, Westermarck derived significant benefits from his association with El-Baqqali, who assisted him in identifying informants for interviews.²⁷² Although Westermarck placed emphasis on the importance of learning the local language to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and its people, El-Baqqali continued to serve as a translator, despite his limited proficiency in English.²⁷³ It is unclear to what extent El-Baqqali influenced the selection of interviewees, particularly given his perceived status as a shereef, as noted by Michael Ashkenazi²⁷⁴: "Informants convey information ("data") to anthropologists in a variety of forms. I would claim that such transfers of information are managed by informants in ways that they perceive as to their benefits."²⁷⁵ It is highly likely that the information gathered through El-Baqqali reflected his perspective on the culture and his position as a superior figure within it, and that the interviewees selected were seeking his approval and

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., 160.

²⁷³ Kirsti Suolinna, Catherine af Hällström, and Tommy Lahtinen, *Portraying Morocco: Edward Westermarck's Fieldwork and Photographs 1898-1913* (Abo: Abo Akademis University Press, 2000), 25.

²⁷⁴ Michael Ashkenazi, "Informant Networks and Their Anthropologists," *Human Organization* 56, no. 4 (1997), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/44127884>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 471.

blessing. Therefore, the data collected through El-Baqqali may have been subject to a certain degree of bias and should be interpreted critically.

El-Baqqali received a financial benefit from his collaboration with Westermarck during their research journey and the former's stay in Europe. The nature of their relationship has been extensively documented in a collection of more than 200 letters from El-Baqqali to Westermarck, which are archived in the Åbo Akademi University Library.²⁷⁶ These letters indicate that El-Baqqali frequently reminded Westermarck of his monthly payment, which began at two pounds and was later raised to five pounds. Additionally, El-Baqqali occasionally requested further financial assistance.²⁷⁷ Moreover, the correspondence between Westermarck and El-Baqqali reveals that Westermarck had promised that El-Baqqali would be entitled to live on his villa for the remainder of his life.²⁷⁸ Ragnar Nummelin, who was a student of Westermarck, visited the villa in 1960 and reported that El-Baqqali lived there until his death and that his relatives still reside in the villa, which remains under ownership of the Westermarck family.²⁷⁹ However, Westermarck's memoir did not mention the regular payments made to El-Baqqali and portrayed him as being content with his financial situation.²⁸⁰ This raises questions about the accuracy of Westermarck's portrayal of their relationship and suggests that the financial aspect of their collaboration may have been intentionally understated or omitted.

²⁷⁶ Kirsti Suolinna, "Abdessalam El-Baqqali as a Key Person and Friend of Edward Westermarck" (paper presented at the The Third Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies: Ethnic Encounter and Culture Change, Joensuu, Finland, 1995), 2.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁰ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 148.

Hans Langlet's²⁸¹ depiction of El-Baqqali suggests that he possessed the ability to comprehend his employer's requirements and preferences. Langlet recounts a conversation with El-Baqqali in which the latter expounded on his religious beliefs and explained why he deemed Islam to be superior to Christianity.²⁸² This conversation, however, did not take place with Westermarck, as he was a confirmed agnostic and an active member of the Society for Freedom from Religion.²⁸³ It is highly probable that El-Baqqali was aware of Westermarck's stance on religion and learned to tailor his language and demeanour to suit each of his paying employers to maximize financial gain.

Compensating or rewarding informants for their assistance has been a common practice among social scientists and anthropologists since the early orientalists, although discussions on what constitutes an acceptable level of compensation have diminished in recent times.²⁸⁴ The modern guidelines provided by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK state that "there should be no economic exploitation of individual participants, translators, groups, nonhuman animals, cultural or biological materials, and a fair return should be made for their help and services."²⁸⁵ However, it appears that Westermarck's compensation to El-Baqqali may

²⁸¹ Hans Langlet, *Riff. Strövtåg I Abd-El-Krims Sultanat* [Excursions In The Sultanate of Abd-el-Krim] (Stockholm: Lars Hökerbergs förlag, 1927).

²⁸² Ibid. Cited in Suolinna, "Abdessalam El-Baqqali as a Key Person and Friend of Edward Westermarck," 5.

²⁸³ Suolinna, "Abdessalam El-Baqqali as a Key Person and Friend of Edward Westermarck," 5; Kenneth Brown, "The 'Curse' of Westermarck," *Ethnos* 47, no. 3-4 (1982): 200-01, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1982.9981241>.

²⁸⁴ Juan Cajas and Yoliliztli Pérez, "Anthropologists, Economic Retribution and Informants: Notes about Ethics in Social Research," *Agathos* 8, no. 1 (2017): 147, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/anthropologists-economic-retribution-informants/docview/1897266671/se-2?accountid=10766>.

²⁸⁵ "Ethical Guidelines 2021 for Good Research Practice," (Theasa: Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK, 2021). <https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>.

have reached a level of exploitation, particularly considering Westermarck's knowledge of El-Baqqali's addiction to alcohol and gambling.²⁸⁶

The documentation of henna body art and its use, as recorded by Westermarck with the help of El-Baqqali, for the same reasons, raises questions regarding its reliability and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, the information was gathered by two male individuals, despite it being a practice predominantly concerning women. Furthermore, the cultural biases stemming from their respective backgrounds, with Westermarck as a Westerner and El-Baqqali as a holy man charged with *baraka*, may have influenced their perceptions of the practice. Additionally, the linguistic limitations of the author and his informant may have hindered their ability to communicate effectively with each other, potentially leading to a lack of representation of women's perspectives and cultural nuances. Therefore, it is important to approach these sources with a critical lens and to recognize their limitations in providing a complete understanding of henna body art and its cultural significance.

Westermarck's Work and Publications

During his stay in Morocco, Westermarck conducted extensive fieldwork and authored his second publication, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*.²⁸⁷ Published in two volumes in 1906 and 1908, the work serves as a continuation of his earlier work, *The History*

²⁸⁶ Suolinna, "Abdessalam El-Baqqali as a Key Person and Friend of Edward Westermarck," 4.

²⁸⁷ Edward Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906); Edward Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908).

of *Human Marriage*.²⁸⁸ Westermarck's oeuvre traces the historical origins and evolution of moral thought across diverse cultures and epochs. Many scholars from the early 20th century praised Westermarck's work for its moral ideas, describing it as a noble piece of research and a source book of great value.²⁸⁹ The author himself considered this work to be an empirical exercise that was needed to precede the formulation of his philosophical theory of ethics. During the time of its initial publication, however, Westermarck's work on moral ideas was met with considerable criticism, particularly from Durkheim. Durkheim questions the extent of the data presented by Westermarck, as he opted to collect a broad range of information on the moral life of humans, rather than focusing on specific factual subjects.²⁹⁰

Additionally, Durkheim also criticised Westermarck's research methods in return, and describes them as outdated and not allowing for certainty of outcomes, given the lack of focus on limited subjects.²⁹¹ This is evident in Westermarck's emphasis on supernatural beliefs, which he applies to a wide range of cultures he did not observe himself.²⁹² The idea of ancient beliefs consuming the daily life and practices of people from different cultures is overarching in his analysis, as also reflected in later research that includes the use of henna.

²⁸⁸ Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 100.

²⁸⁹ R. R. Marett, "Review," review of *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, Edward Westermarck, *Mind* 18, no. 72 (1909): 608-09, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2248354>; Madison Bentley, "Review," review of *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, Edward Westermarck, *The American Journal of Psychology* 21, no. 2 (1910): 334-36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1413009>; Carl Kelsey, "Review," review of *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas. Vol. I*, Edward Westermarck, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 28 (1906), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1010543>.

²⁹⁰ Durkheim, "Review," 384.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 384-85.

²⁹² Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 1, 11, 29, 53, 69, 281, 393, 406, 63-66, 74, 561; Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2, 80, 93, 117-18, 234, 39, 56, 310, 13, 54-55, 58, 62, 70, 418, 91, 523-35, 42-44, 93, 619, 41, 44, 50, 54, 56, 66-68, 75-76, 79, 81, 83-84, 93, 700-18, 29.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Westermarck's own assumptions in the collection of facts was noted,²⁹³ as reflected in his statement "We have completed our task. Only a few words will be added to emphasize the leading features of our theory of the moral consciousness and to point out some general conclusions which may be drawn as regards its evolution".²⁹⁴ Durkheim acknowledges Westermarck's immense contribution to the literature, but deems this work not useful from a philosophical point of view.²⁹⁵ He criticizes Westermarck's evolutionary philosophies, noting that in order to reconstruct the process by which moral ideas were formed and developed, it was necessary to take into account the entire moral evolution of the human species, rather than isolated cultural beliefs and rituals.²⁹⁶ Westermarck's unwillingness or inability to study cultural characteristics and social rituals as a whole rather than isolated cultural beliefs and features of rituals even riddles his supporters in the 21st century.²⁹⁷

Westermarck referred to his anthropological research in Morocco as his "Moorish investigations"²⁹⁸ and published a significant number of articles concerning his fieldwork before releasing his books on the subject.²⁹⁹ Following 16 journeys spanning six years of intensive fieldwork in Morocco, Westermarck published *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco* in

²⁹³ Evander Bradley McGilvary, "McGilvary," review of *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, Edward Westermarck, *The Philosophical Review* 18, no. 4 (1909): 429, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2177778>.

²⁹⁴ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2, 738.

²⁹⁵ Durkheim, "Review," 385.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 384.

²⁹⁷ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 353.

²⁹⁸ Allardt, "Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture," 302.

²⁹⁹ Westermarck, "Midsummer Customs in Morocco."; Westermarck, "The Position of Women in Early Civilization."; Westermarck, "The Principles of Fasting." Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco."; Edward Westermarck and A. Lang, "Totemism and Exogamy," *Folklore* 22, no. 1 (1911), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/1254960>.

1914,³⁰⁰ in which he expresses remorse for the errors he committed in *The History of Human Marriage*.³⁰¹ In the latter work, he only dedicates a single chapter to wedding ceremonies, failing to recognize their enchanting significance.³⁰² From the outset of his book, Westermarck suggests that the Moroccan Islamic cultural group under study is consumed by supernatural beliefs and practices³⁰³ and he adds that he does not attempt to formulate a general theory regarding the origin of marriage ceremonies.³⁰⁴ He emphasises the importance of the primitive concept of danger attached to the sexual act, referring to Ernest Crawley's³⁰⁵ theory that marriage ceremonies intended to neutralise dangers faced by the bride and groom, though he does not adopt the theory in his work.³⁰⁶

However, Westermarck generalizes the wedding beliefs and rituals of a small isolated group to all Muslims, especially Arabs. He asserts that the Arab invaders significantly influenced the Berbers, who adopted their religion and incorporated their customs and superstitions. Westermarck did not observe Arab practices to compare with his Moorish investigation.³⁰⁷ Westermarck admits that, although he attended a few weddings during his fieldwork, he did not witness the rituals himself and relied on the accounts of his informants.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁰ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*.

³⁰¹ Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 1.

³⁰² Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 1.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ernest Crawley, *The Mystic Rose: A Study of Primitive Marriage and of Primitive Thought in its Bearing on Marriage* (Oxon: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018).

³⁰⁶ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 1.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 10.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

He also acknowledges that the information provided by native informants from the same group differs.³⁰⁹ He explains this discrepancy by stating that "the reason for this may be either that the same ceremony has in different cases sprung from different sources, or that it has a mixed motive, or that its real origin has been forgotten and a new interpretation substituted for the idea from which it rose."³¹⁰

In his analysis of weddings, Westermarck fails to account for the idiosyncratic experiences of individual interviewees, as well as the distinct cultural traditions that characterized each group he observed. This deficiency in his methodology has been noted by Robert Lowie,³¹¹ who argues that Westermarck was not primarily concerned with understanding cultural phenomena, but rather sought to utilize such phenomena to support his philosophical arguments.³¹² Lowie further criticizes Westermarck's tendency to make sweeping generalizations based on selective observations, arguing that this approach demonstrates a fundamental lack of ethnographic competence. In light of these observations, it is evident that Westermarck's approach to anthropology was limited by his disregard for the nuances of cultural experience and his reliance on overly simplistic generalizations.³¹³

The study of the traditions and rituals of "savages" has long captivated Western Islamist scholars, who have shown great interest in acquiring new information on the subject.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 7.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Robert Harry Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937).

³¹² Ibid., 97.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ The Athenaeum, *The Athenaeum*, no. 4516 (1914): 683-84, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/marriage-ceremonies-morocco/docview/9161388/se-2?accountid=10766>; William Crooke,

Westermarck argues that field ethnologists should not limit themselves to observation and description of customs but should aim to interpret their meaning. The field ethnologist's understanding of the native mind and ways of thinking and feeling may enable them to make conjectures of greater value than those offered by ethnologists of the study when the significance of a custom is unclear or lost over time. Westermarck disputes the idea that the role of the field anthropologist should be confined to collecting facts and leaving interpretation to anthropologists working from their home institutions.³¹⁵ However, both views of anthropological analysis have limitations, particularly in the case of Western researchers who may assume that they possess a comprehensive understanding of a culture based on brief encounters with a select few members.³¹⁶ This limited perspective oversimplifies the culture's complexities and can result in misrepresentations and erroneous interpretations of the culture under study.

Westermarck's book focuses on a culture that has been of interest to the West for centuries.³¹⁷ One of the issues observed in the Western study of Islam is that anthropologists did not view each culture on its own terms.³¹⁸ However, Westermarck himself can be placed among these anthropologists, as he makes references to what he considered parallel cases

"Review," review of Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco, Edward Westermarck; Ceremonies and Beliefs Connected with Agriculture, Certain Dates of the Solar Year, and the Weather in Morocco, Edward Westermarck, *Folklore* 25, no. 4 (1914): 501-04, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1255129>; H. T. C, review of Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco., Edward Westermarck, *Man* 15 (1915): 13-15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787358>.

³¹⁵ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 8.

³¹⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

³¹⁷ Nils G Holm, ed., *Teaching Islam in Finland* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi 1993), 14.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

among Muslims outside Morocco and Europeans.³¹⁹ Moreover, throughout his book, he treats the tribes under study as Islamic, neglecting elements of social, traditional and popular beliefs. In addition, he does not compare the religious Islamic teachings mentioned in the authentic hadiths by the Prophet with the popular cultural practices he documents from informants as factual.³²⁰ The author's analysis of the henna ritual also fails to compare the religious Islamic teachings mentioned in the authentic hadiths with the popular cultural practices he recorded from his informants.³²¹ As a result, his documentation of henna use lacks an in-depth examination of its cultural and female perspective, instead mainly emphasizing its association with supernatural beliefs and religion, which he generalizes to all Muslims beyond the scope of his research.³²²

In 1923, after a 10-year hiatus, Edward Westermarck returned to Morocco and embarked on a large-scale research project. The fruits of this endeavor were, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (1926),³²³ *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco* (1930),³²⁴ *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence* (1932),³²⁵ and *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation* (1933).³²⁶ However, a delay in the publication of these works may have had adverse effects on Westermarck's reputation as an anthropologist.³²⁷ The emergence of a new school of anthropology in the 1920s

³¹⁹ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 10.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid., 160.

³²³ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1; *ibid.*, 2.

³²⁴ Edward Westermarck, *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco: A Study of Native Proverbs* (London: Routledge, 1930).

³²⁵ Edward Westermarck, *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1932).

³²⁶ Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*.

³²⁷ Pipping, "The First Finnish Sociologist: A Reappraisal of Edward Westermarck's Work," 348.

positioned Westermarck as an old-school anthropologist, thus weakening his position within the field.³²⁸ He was harshly criticized for his approach, which was viewed as that of an armchair comparativist, a naive evolutionist, a psychological reductionist, a linguistic analyst, and an inconsistent relativist.³²⁹

But his work had received good reviews. Alfred Haddon³³⁰ states that Westermarck's book *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* approaches the study of the relationship between magic and religion in a sensible and pragmatic way.³³¹ He lauds Westermarck's ability to show that magico-religious conceptions and acts are pervasive in the everyday life of Moroccans, thereby adding to the existing evidence of "primitive people" in Western society.³³² Moreover, Haddon argues that Westermarck's research has broader significance beyond Moroccan cultures.³³³ Haddon regards Westermarck as a preeminent figure in the field of research, interpretation of alien ideas, and ethnology in the broadest sense.³³⁴

Robert Park³³⁵ commends Westermarck for his rich study and use of first-hand materials on Moroccan culture.³³⁶ Park also supports Westermarck's comparative method,

³²⁸ Kirsti Suolinna, "Focusing on Fieldwork: Edvard Westermarck and Hilma Granqvist – Before and After Bronislaw Malinowski," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 17, no. 2 (1999): 263-364, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67277>.

³²⁹ Stroup, *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, xi.

³³⁰ A. C. Haddon, review of *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, Edward Westermarck, *Folklore* 38, no. 1 (1927), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/1255743>.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*, 91.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Robert E. Park, "Review," review of *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, *American Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 5 (1927), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/2765658>.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 836.

which emphasizes fundamental characteristics of human nature by displaying similar motives across a range of cultural expressions.³³⁷ Park notes, however, that Westermarck's method of classification is an abstract category with little regard for temporal succession, geographic distribution, or other cultural complexities.³³⁸ Park argues that this method runs counter to the general principle that nothing human can be understood except in relation to the milieu in which it occurs.³³⁹ He concludes that the book is a sourcebook without a clear thesis, full of materials for a natural history of gods and devils.³⁴⁰

However, it should be noted that Westermarck was not considered an authority on the subject at the time.³⁴¹ This was due to the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Westermarck did not systematically separate religion, tribes, and villages, but rather studied them as comprehensive and social units.³⁴² This approach may have hindered his ability to provide a more nuanced understanding of the cultural practices and beliefs in Morocco. Westermarck's work has not escaped criticism from his peers, with some offering particularly scathing evaluations of his methods and analyses. For instance, John Davis characterizes Westermarck's fieldwork as "wasteful,"³⁴³ due to the lack of analysis of the collected data. The

³³⁷ Ibid., 834.

³³⁸ Ibid., 833.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 835-36.

³⁴¹ Allardt, "Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture," 302.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ John Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology*, ed. Adam Kuper (London: Taylor and Francis, 1977), 2.

information is presented as a mere list of customs and beliefs that, according to Westermarck, were common to almost all Moroccan groups but were purportedly independent.³⁴⁴

C. Wright Mills,³⁴⁵ another critic of Westermarck's work, condemns his planless empiricism, which manifested as a flat ideographic portrayal of culture.³⁴⁶ Wright Mills also accuses Westermarck of not offering much methodological information, contending that a collection of facts is meaningless unless logically linked to a sharp theory and incisive method. Wright Mills further expounds on methodology, asserting that scholars should be able to learn from an individual's work and apply it to their own research.³⁴⁷ Wright Mills provides reasons for rejecting the data collected by Westermarck, arguing that such data do not provide empirical evidence that is indispensable in solving carefully defined problems. Ethnologists, he notes, reject this method because it dislocates particular phases and bits of a "total culture" and removes societal characteristics from their contexts.³⁴⁸

The decline in Westermarck's popularity is evidenced by statistics, with only 19 citations of his work appearing in the International Social Science Citation Index between 1989 and 1990. These criticisms demonstrate the extent to which Westermarck's methods and analyses were deemed insufficient by some within the field of anthropology.³⁴⁹ Nonetheless,

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ C. Wright Mills, "Edward Alexander Westermarck and the Application of Ethnographic Methods to Marriage and Moral," in *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, ed. Harry Elmer Barnes (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 167-68.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 170.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 171.

³⁴⁹ Allardt, "Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture," 304.

his work remains a valuable contribution to the field of anthropology and offers insights into the way the social and cultural milieu of Morocco in the early 20th century was viewed by Western scholars.

Despite the declining influence of Westermarck as an anthropologist, his publications have significantly shaped the discourse on henna from the early 20th century to the present day. Westermarck's imprint on the study of henna endures as an intellectual anachronism. In his work *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*,³⁵⁰ Westermarck endeavours to trace the origin of the religious and magical beliefs and practices that have shaped Moroccan culture. He investigates whether these beliefs originate from various historical and cultural influences, including Romans, ancient Carthaginians, ancient Egyptians, black Africans, Christians, Christian slaves, Arabs, and Islamic religion.³⁵¹ The book covers various topics from henna to *baraka*, jinns, the evil eye, omens, dreams, and death. In explaining the limited analysis and depth of his argument, Westermarck posits that the term "religion" can legitimately be used in two different senses, an abstract and a concrete one.³⁵² However, he does not distinguish between the two in his analysis.

Westermarck's inclusion of henna as a religious belief that incorporates *baraka* and functions as a method of cleansing and safeguarding against negative influences in his book, can be attributed to his reliance on a hadith that is considered weak and deemed invalid by

³⁵⁰ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 10-15. Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*.

³⁵¹ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 10-15. Westermarck, *Memories of My Life*, 301.

³⁵² Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 34.

Islamic scholars.³⁵³ Despite this, Westermarck asserts that henna is a practice rooted in Islam, citing a reference in Edward Lane's³⁵⁴ *Arabic Society in the Middle Ages* as his source of evidence, rather than exploring the issue from an Islamic religious perspective.³⁵⁵

Westermarck's treatment of henna as a religious belief that contains *baraka* and serves as a means of purification and protection against evil influences is limited to a passing mention in *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence*.³⁵⁶ Specifically, he identifies henna as one of the elements involved in marriage rites influenced by magical beliefs, where the bride uses henna in a spell to gain power over her husband.³⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Westermarck provides little elaboration on the significance of the substances and rituals involved, and he fails to offer his own analysis or insights based on informant accounts.

Herbert Rose³⁵⁸ criticizes Westermarck's lack of depth in his analysis, noting that the book lacks technical details and fails to provide references for numerous quotations. Instead, Westermarck provides vague directions to the reader.³⁵⁹ Rose further asserts that the book is not of a scale that allows for elaborate arguments to support Westermarck's viewpoints. Thus, Westermarck cannot devote much space to discussing the book contents to a sufficient

³⁵³ Ibid., 113.

³⁵⁴ Edward William Lane, *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from The Thousand and one Nights*, ed. Stanley Lane-Poole (London: Curzon Press, 1883).
<https://archive.org/details/arabiansocietyin00laneuoft/mode/2up?q=henna>.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 156. Cited in; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 113.

³⁵⁶ Westermarck, *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence*.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

³⁵⁸ H. J. Rose, "Review: 140," review of *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence*, Edward Westermarck, *Man* 33 (1933), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2790204>.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 137.

degree.³⁶⁰ In general, Westermarck's book does not present a favourable view of religion's role in the development of mankind,³⁶¹ which reflects his own view on religion.

Westermarck's book, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, seeks to investigate the assimilation of pagan beliefs and practices into Islam and its culture in North Africa and Asia. Using data collected from Morocco and literature from other countries,³⁶² Westermarck provides insights into the use of henna by Muslims in North Africa as a means of protection against jinn and the evil eye. He speculates that its strong taste, smell, and supernatural characteristics were the reasons behind its use,³⁶³ and suggests that henna contained *baraka* since it was the favourite flower of the Prophet.³⁶⁴ However, there is no religious or historical evidence to support this claim, and this religious misrepresentation will be analysed further in Chapter Seven.

Scholars such as Rose and Rudolf Rahmann³⁶⁵ praise Westermarck's book for containing the best collection of material ever compiled and being a competent historical-critical study that sheds light on how Islamic religion degraded women and viewed them as impure and dangerous.³⁶⁶ David Margoliouth³⁶⁷ also praises Westermarck for exposing the truth

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Westermarck, *Early Beliefs and Their Social Influence*, 104.

³⁶² Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 1.

³⁶³ Ibid., 11, 30.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 111.

³⁶⁵ Rudolf Rahmann, review of *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, Edward Westermarck, *Anthropos* 29, no. 5/6 (1934), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/40447017>.

³⁶⁶ H. J. Rose, "Review: 38," review of *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, Edward Westermarck, *Man* 34 (1934): 29, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/2790628>; Rahmann.

³⁶⁷ D. S. Margoliouth, "Review," review of *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, Edward Westermarck, *Folklore* 45, no. 2 (1934), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/1256085>.

about the Islamic faith, revealing ancient practices and beliefs across all Islamic communities from Morocco to Java.³⁶⁸ However, Margoliouth disagrees with Westermarck's characterization of these beliefs and rituals as pagan survivals,³⁶⁹ and asserts that they were introduced by Muslim invaders.³⁷⁰

Westermarck's primary argument in his books is to distinguish between primitive (Eastern) and enlightened minds (Western) and to establish that Islam received its quota of pagan beliefs and practices from Arab communities, and continued to absorb alien superstitions from other ancient religions.³⁷¹ However, his view is disputed by *Current Science*,³⁷² which argues that a number of the beliefs he mentions are universal, such as the malicious intentions of jinn in human affairs, the influence of the evil eye, the potency of curses, and remedies for them all, which are prevalent in all nations and civilizations.³⁷³ The article states that many of the things we are familiar with from childhood are brought back into our minds as we read the book, the products of misunderstandings or incorrect beliefs are identical everywhere regardless of where they originate, and most likely influenced may be influenced local beliefs³⁷⁴

It is unfortunate that Westermarck overlooks the anthropological and sociological reasons for using henna to decorate the body, focusing only on its use against jinn, evil eye and

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 180.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 181.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ "Review," review of Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation, Edward Westermarck, *Current Science* 2, no. 12 (1934): v, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/24221771>.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid., v.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

for *baraka*, without providing any evidence to back up his claim. His focus on documenting popular beliefs and treating them as religious beliefs to prove his point weakens his argument.³⁷⁵

Westermarck acknowledges his failure to discover the origins of any common beliefs or practices, as the origins had been forgotten and obscured due to a layered development of cultures, from which a new interpretation emerged.³⁷⁶ Westermarck's analysis would have been more relevant had he focused on investigating the similarities between ancient beliefs and the popular beliefs within the culture under study, and also if he had focused on a single subject rather than covering a wide range of beliefs. This criticism is grounded in the notion that a more focused analysis of specific beliefs or practices would have allowed for a deeper understanding of their origins and cultural significance.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the life, achievements, and work of Edward Westermarck. In doing so, the study sought to identify the factors that may have influenced Westermarck's analysis of Eastern cultures and their use of henna, as well as to critically evaluate his accounts of the rituals from a religious and cultural perspective. The analysis herein also examined Westermarck's work with a view to identifying any potential weaknesses or gaps in his scholarship.

³⁷⁵ Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 21, 56, 143.

³⁷⁶ Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: University books Inc, 1986), 9-10.

The first section focused on Westermarck's academic accomplishments during the early 20th century, which earned him a respected reputation among his peers. It revealed that his reputation declined due to his selected research methods and theory analysis, which were criticized for being overly focused on hypotheses rather than facts. Moreover, the section demonstrated how, from the outset of his research, Westermarck formed a negative opinion of Eastern cultures, which he considered uncivilized and consumed by superstitions and supernatural beliefs. Additionally, the chapter investigated his relationship with his Moroccan informant, which was based on personal and financial gain for both parties. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted how Westermarck chose an informant who aligned with his predetermined perception of Moroccan culture before he commenced his observations. This analysis demonstrated how this relationship might have influenced the documentation of henna rituals as both men did not observe the rituals in person and held prejudiced views of the culture, religion, and women. The final section of the chapter evaluated how Westermarck, even after years of separation from his Moroccan research, continued to repeat the same methodological mistakes and relied on his assumptions to analyse the culture and religion. Moreover, the section explored how he generalized the practices and beliefs to cover all Muslims, not just the society under study. This section demonstrates how Westermarck's approach contributed to critical criticisms of his work and calls into question the validity of his analysis.

Chapter Four

The Evolution of the Documentation of Henna from the 15th to the 19th

Century: The Influence of Orientalism and Feminism

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to analyse and examine several aspects of the documentation of henna in travellers' accounts. Firstly, it aims to explore how scholars have neglected to consider henna as a form of body art since the time of early travellers. Secondly, it delves into how colonial views have affected the representation of henna. Thirdly, it examines how henna has been associated with a stereotypical image of Eastern women. Fourthly, it compares the way male and female travellers have documented henna. Lastly, the chapter explores the impact of the feminist movement on the documentation of henna.

To achieve these objectives, the chapter will be divided into sections that analyse different centuries, based on major colonial and political events. Each section will provide a detailed analysis of key events, such as religious conflicts and economic interests, to illustrate how they led to a change in the discourse of henna among travellers.

Westerners travelled to the East for a variety of reasons, including diplomacy, colonialism, travel, missionary work, and art. This chapter will analyse travellers who have mentioned henna, looking at how their personal life experiences may have shaped their subjective views of the Orient. Personal experiences can provide a more accurate and detailed account of what happened during a journey, compared to generalizations and assumptions based on preconceived notions. By analysing individual experiences, we can gain a better understanding of travellers' perspectives and how their personal biases may have influenced their observations and writings. This method is adopted from Edward Said's analysis, who

purports that it is impossible for a scholar or academic to detach themselves from the context of their life, including their social class, beliefs, and position in society. In other words, a scholar's work and ideas are inevitably shaped by their personal experiences and the society they are a part of, even if not consciously so.³⁷⁷

Women travellers will be similarly examined regarding the political and colonial situation. However, this analysis will include an examination of whether the feminist movement encouraged Western women celebrate those from other cultures, or whether the result was to objectify them to achieve colonial, social, and personal gain at the expense of oriental women.

The analysis of this chapter relies on Edward Said's³⁷⁸ theory of Orientalism. Said explains that "Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment".³⁷⁹ Said highlights the importance of studying power dynamics when examining different cultures and histories. He argues that it is inadequate to solely study the ideas, cultures, and histories of a group without considering how power shapes those ideas and histories.³⁸⁰

Orientalism is the way in which the West has historically depicted and studied the East, often through a lens of exoticism and "othering". Said posits that this portrayal of the East is

³⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 10.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

not merely a product of imagination or curiosity, but rather a reflection of a power dynamic in which the West dominates the East.³⁸¹ In other words, Europeans created a sense of identity and superiority by viewing the East as "other," different, and inferior. This allowed Europeans to create a sense of cultural unity and pride by defining themselves in opposition to the Orient.³⁸²

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on henna in early Western travellers' accounts between the 15th and 17th centuries. It examines the early era of colonization and travellers' accounts and their role in shaping the image of the Orient. It also investigates how Western interest was primarily economic and how religious reasons were used to gain the support of the Western public and shape their opinion of Muslim culture. Throughout this section, mentions of henna will be examined to evaluate the way it was associated with oppression and backwardness, even though male travellers were not able to interact with women in segregated cultures.

The second section of this chapter delves into the documentation of henna during the 18th century, examining a new approach of travellers who engaged in ethno-masquerading by adopting Eastern costumes to blend in and observe the Orient more closely. This section also explores how early women travellers viewed the Orient differently from their male counterparts and looks at whether their proximity to women and their practices led to a greater attention to the use of henna as body adornment.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid., 3.

In addition, this section analyses the writing style of Westerners during this era, who often compared the East and West and used henna to distinguish between Eastern and Western women, positioning the latter in a more desirable and superior position. Furthermore, the section delves into the early feminist movement and its approach to gaining social freedom for Western women and how it may have impacted the documentation of henna in female travel accounts.

The last section focuses on 19th century travel accounts in relation to henna, examining the Western interest in Eastern cultures and religions. The section explores whether henna was mentioned as being used for religious purposes and includes an analysis of colonial techniques that influenced writing about henna in different ways.

Moreover, this section investigates the situation and accounts of Western women travellers, exploring how the increased flexibility of movement for women during the 19th century changed the way oriental women were written about. It also examines whether Western women travellers paid attention to these women and their cultural practices, including henna use.

Early Western Travel Accounts of Henna 15th-17th Century

This section of the study aims to describe the political climate during a specific historical period, which is necessary to provide context for a thorough and nuanced analysis of Western literature about henna, with a particular focus on the portrayal of Eastern culture and

women. By shedding light on the socio-political context of the time, this inquiry seeks to offer an informative account of how henna and its associated practices were depicted in Western discussions. Moreover, this examination aims to reveal how the Western literature of the time contributed to shaping the identity and representation of Eastern women and their cultural practices, considering possible Western biases and assumptions.

The era of colonialism commenced with the European exploration of sea routes around Africa's southern coast in 1488 and the discovery of the Americas in 1492. It is also plausible to claim that the genesis of colonialism commenced slightly earlier, with the colonization of previously uninhabited islands, such as Cape Verde in 1462.³⁸³ During this period, Western control was primarily geared towards economic gains and trade domination, exemplifying the phenomenon of exploitation colonialism.³⁸⁴ Interest in trade and economic control is evident in the work of Pierre Belon (1517–1564),³⁸⁵ a renowned French traveller and diplomat who is considered the first Western explorer to document henna and its usage in Turkish and Egyptian cultures.³⁸⁶ Belon recorded the henna trade, whereby henna plants were imported from Egypt to Istanbul, and notes that the annual revenue generated was substantial, exceeding 18,000

³⁸³ David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are So Rich and Some So Poor* (London: Abacus, 1999), 69.

³⁸⁴ Martin J. Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina (1870-1940)* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1980), 1, 3.

³⁸⁵ Pierre Belon, *Les Observations De Plusieurs Singularitez Et Choses Memorables Trouvées En Grèce, Asie, Judée, Egypte, Arabie Et Autres Pays Étrangers* [Observations of Many Singularities and Memorable Things Found in Greece, Asia, Judea, Egypt, Arabia and Other Foreign Countries] (Paris: Chez Guillaume Cauellat, 1553).

³⁸⁶ W. Watson and Laurence Garcin, "A Letter from Dr. Laurence Garcin, of Neuchatel, F. R. S. to Sir Hans Sloane Bart. Late P. R. S. concerning the Cyprus of the Ancients: Done from the French by W. Watson, F. R. S.," *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)* 45 (1748): 575, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/104579>.

Ducats.³⁸⁷ He explains the reasons for the widespread use of henna among Turkish women and children as being mainly a cosmetic substance for staining nails, decorating skin with intricate patterns, and dyeing hair.³⁸⁸

As Western powers expanded their reach, particularly the British Empire, Christianity and Islam clashed at the time of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.³⁸⁹ Despite a commercial partnership between the West and East, this did not serve to bridge the cultural divide and instead widened the gap. The travel accounts of merchants reinforced the notion of the Orient as a distinct, peculiar, and backward place.³⁹⁰ This image of the Orient started to form early on, as evidenced in the accounts of William Biddulph (late 16th – early 17th century),³⁹¹ and Thomas Dallam (1575–1620).³⁹² Biddulph was one of the earliest chaplains appointed by the Levant Company to Aleppo and the first English clergyman to write about the Ottoman Empire.³⁹³ Although Biddulph's account did not mention henna, he is an important figure in shaping the image of the Orient and creating the Eastern stereotype. In Biddulph's case, we see a

³⁸⁷ Belon, *Les Observations De Plusieurs Singularitez Et Choses Memorables Trouvées En Grèce, Asie, Judée, Egypte, Arabie Et Autres Pays Étrangers*. Cited in; Watson and Garcin, "A Letter from Dr. Laurence Garcin, of Neuchatel, F. R. S. to Sir Hans Sloane Bart. Late P. R. S. concerning the Cyprus of the Ancients: Done from the French by W. Watson, F. R. S."

³⁸⁸ Belon, *Les Observations De Plusieurs Singularitez Et Choses Memorables Trouvées En Grèce, Asie, Judée, Egypte, Arabie Et Autres Pays Étrangers*. cited in; Watson and Garcin, "A Letter from Dr. Laurence Garcin, of Neuchatel, F. R. S. to Sir Hans Sloane Bart. Late P. R. S. concerning the Cyprus of the Ancients: Done from the French by W. Watson, F. R. S.," 575.

³⁸⁹ Ceyda Birol, "Feminist Tradition in 18th - 19th Century Orientalist Literature: Unveiling Western Women's Orientalist Tropes in Their Travelogues" (Masters Thesis, Fatih University, 2015), 5, <https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/616363>.

³⁹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 206.

³⁹¹ William Biddulph and Theophilus Lavender, *The Travels of Certain Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea. And into Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Mesopotamia, Damascus. Palestina. And to the Red Sea: And to Sun-dry Other Places*. (London: T. Haviland for W. Aspley, 1609).

³⁹² Dallam and Covel, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*; Gerald M MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), xvii.

³⁹³ William Biddulph, "William Biddulph (fl. 1600–12)," in *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*, ed. Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 171.

condemnation of Muslims for simply being different. Because Islam was not much to his taste, he did not even bother to draw historical and cultural lines between Arabs, Saracens, and Turks; all were tyrannical and devilish in his perspective.³⁹⁴ Biddulph presents Islam and Muslims as barbaric, encouraging of immorality, and degrading of women.³⁹⁵ Biddulph's literature has been criticized by Gerald MacLean³⁹⁶ for its similarity to Thomas Washington's 1585 translation of Nicolas de Nicolay's *Navigations*.³⁹⁷

One of the primary aims of Biddulph's literature was to give the English public a lesson on how privileged they were by portraying Eastern nations as backward and underprivileged, living in "ungodly places."³⁹⁸ where the people are superstitious and blindly follow the guide of religion and "not knowing the right hand from the left,"³⁹⁹ and they are under the rule of "tyrannous government."⁴⁰⁰ Biddulph further addresses English women in particular, stating that "Here wives may learn to love their husbands when they shall read in what slavery women

³⁹⁴ Biddulph and Lavender, *The Travels of Certain Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea. And into Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Mesopotamia, Damascus. Palestina. And to the Red Sea: And to Sun-dry Other Places*. .cited in; Birol, "Feminist Tradition in 18th - 19th Century Orientalist Literature: Unveiling Western Women's Orientalist Tropes in Their Travelogues," 58.

³⁹⁵ Biddulph, "William Biddulph (fl. 1600–12)," 172, .

³⁹⁶ MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 73.

³⁹⁸ Biddulph and Lavender, *The Travels of Certain Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea. And into Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Mesopotamia, Damascus. Palestina. And to the Red Sea: And to Sun-dry Other Places*. .cited in; MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*, 53.

³⁹⁹ Biddulph and Lavender, *The Travels of Certain Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bythinia, Thracia, and to the Blacke Sea. And into Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Mesopotamia, Damascus. Palestina. And to the Red Sea: And to Sun-dry Other Places*. , vii.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

live in other countries" and learn to appreciate "what liberty and freedom they themselves enjoy."⁴⁰¹

This style was also exhibited by Dallam, a musician who gained prominence at the Ottoman court in Turkey and claimed to be the first Englishman to observe harem women.⁴⁰² He describes women in a degrading and discriminatory way, stating "The Turkische, and Morishe, weomen, do goo all ways in the streets with there facis covered, and the common reporte Goethe thare that they believe, or thinke that the weomen have no souls. And I doe thinke, that it weare well for them if they had none, for they never goo to church, or other prayers, as the men do."⁴⁰³ His analysis of women was based on the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who had a negative view of Islam and Eastern culture and considered himself a pioneer in the new representation of Islam.⁴⁰⁴

It is also worth noting that Goethe's literary works were not grounded in first-hand field study and observation but were instead derived from an early traveller's account that he subsequently refined and augmented using various techniques. These techniques were principally applied to texts, myths, ideas, and languages that were essentially acquired from the Orient by Western imperial powers.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720*, 3; Dallam and Covell, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, 74.

⁴⁰³ Dallam and Covell, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, 15-16.

⁴⁰⁴ Ian Almond, "Keeping the Turks Out of Islam," in *History of Islam in German Thought: From Leibniz to Nietzsche* (New York; London: Routledge, 2009), 72.

⁴⁰⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 19.

Said explains that this type of orientalist documentation serves to construct Western identity by manifesting the differences between people of two distant spheres and emphasizing the other (Eastern) as antagonistic, and observing the Orient from afar and, so to speak, from above. This false position hides historical change. "Even more important, from my standpoint, it hides the interests of the Orientalist."⁴⁰⁶

Another aspect of the Western traveller's style of documentation is that they used the Orient as a tool to create a sense of drama and uniqueness for themselves. The Orient was viewed as a flexible and adaptable space, allowing people to act out their egocentric fantasies and project their own personal desires onto the cultural landscape of the Orient. This is evident in Dallam's work when he observed the lavish procession of the Sultan's daughter's wedding and documented a questionable encounter with a beautiful woman who peeped out of the extravagantly covered carriage through a small hole, her nails stained with henna. It is surprising to consider the level of detail he observed through such a small aperture.⁴⁰⁷ Rana Kabbani notes,⁴⁰⁸ "The Orient becomes a pretext for self-dramatization and differentness; it is the malleable theatrical space in which can be played out the egocentric fantasies of Romanticism".⁴⁰⁹ This approach of writing emerged after the Ottoman emperor took control of North Africa, leading Western powers to portray them as the "satanic other of Christian Europe"

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 333-34.

⁴⁰⁷ Dallam and Covel, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, 236.

⁴⁰⁸ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions* (London: Pandora, 1979).

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., ii.

to justify their actions of colonisation and piracy.⁴¹⁰ Such imaginative scenarios of voyeurism drew attention away from inequalities within Western society, depicted the Orient as requiring westernization, and portrayed Europe as liberated and civilized. Such stories cleared the path for male readers to envision themselves as saviours, akin to colonial heroes, who "rescue brown women from brown men."⁴¹¹ This orientalist literature regarding Islam perpetuates stereotypes and preconceived notions about Islamic culture, chiefly by Western men who have also acknowledged the supposed inferiority of Western women.

Such notions will reflect on the development of the documentation of henna over the centuries.⁴¹² This is particularly evident in the 17th century because the expansion of the British empire and the establishment of the East India Company provided access to India and Southeast Asia to numerous travellers.⁴¹³ This period is marked by a growing interest to study the cultures of these regions. The tone of literature during this time demonstrates a fascination with the primitive and backward aspects of Eastern culture. For instance, Thomas Herbert (1606–1682),⁴¹⁴ who travelled to India, Persia, and parts of Africa between (1626–1629),⁴¹⁵ states that the Persians do not hold gloves in high regard and that, instead, they use henna to paint their nails and hands, resulting in a red or tawny colour. This practice not only serves as

⁴¹⁰ Barbara Fuchs, "Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegades, and the English Nation," *ELH* 67, no. 1 (2000): 49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30031906>.

⁴¹¹ Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 242.

⁴¹² Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (1982): 523, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177710>.

⁴¹³ Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858* (Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 1.

⁴¹⁴ Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels Into Divers Parts of Africa, and Asia the Great* (London: R. Everingham for R. Scot, etc., 1677).

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

an ornamentation but also has a cooling effect on the liver. Furthermore, Herbert recounts that Persians claim that it makes them brave in battle. He adds that their nails are coloured with white and vermilion, the reason for which he could not explain except that it may be a mimicry of the ancient king Cyrus the Great's practice of ordering his top officers to dye their nails and faces with vermilion as a symbol of honour. Herbert adds that this act was intended to distinguish them from the common people and, like the warlike Britons, inspire fear in their enemies.⁴¹⁶

Herbert's account endeavours to present the Orient as an ancient culture, often drawing comparisons with the British to emphasize the West's sophistication and the East's backwardness. A similar tone is noted in John Fryer's (1650–1733) account.⁴¹⁷ Fryer was an English surgeon in the employ of the East India Company, and he embarked on a journey to India and Persia spanning the years 1672 to 1681. In his written account of his travels, Fryer briefly mentions the use of henna as a part of Persian dress. Specifically, he notes that Persians do not wear gloves but rather use henna to stain their hands and feet, as well as to dye their hair. Fryer subsequently digresses from this description of Persian henna use to a discussion of the Turkish culture's fondness for the substance. Although Fryer did not personally encounter Turkish culture during his travels, he nonetheless provides a detailed account of the manner in which Turks utilize henna to dye their hair and stain their hands, feet, and nails, as well as other

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 297.

⁴¹⁷ John Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia, in Eight Letters: Being Nine Years' Travels, Begun 1672 and Finished 1681*, vol. 3, ed. William Crooke (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1909).

parts of the body which he does not specify. Furthermore, Fryer does not specify whether this tradition was practiced by males or females.⁴¹⁸ Fryer does not clarify the source of his information on the Turks, and this practice was not mentioned by earlier travellers.

There was a significant level of ignorance when other cultures were encountered in the 17th century, as evident from the account of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1698).⁴¹⁹ Tavernier, a French jewel merchant, made six voyages to Persia between 1632 and 1667,⁴²⁰ utilizing his profession to gain access to Persian royalty.⁴²¹ Although Tavernier's accounts contain numerous details, his focus on trade meant that he was more of a merchant than a scholar.

While Tavernier's writings offer valuable insights into the Persian government, society, and religion, his emphasis on providing information for fellow merchants often overshadowed other aspects of Persian culture.⁴²² Roger Stevens⁴²³ has criticized Tavernier's writing style, describing it as "weak on antiquities and fairly successful in concealing his ignorance of Persian."⁴²⁴ His ignorance is visible in his documentation of henna, however, as despite visiting Turkey, India, and the Mughal Empire, Tavernier only briefly mentions henna in his book, specifically in Persia. He describes henna as part of the production process for creating henna

⁴¹⁸ John Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia, in Eight Letters. Being Nine Years Travels, Begun 1672 And Finished 1681* (London: Printed by R. R. for Ri. Chiswell, at the Rose and Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1698).

⁴¹⁹ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six Voyages De Turquie Et De Perse* [The Six Voyages of Turkey and Persia], 2 vols., vol. 1, ed. Stefanos Yerasimos (Paris: F. Maspero, 1981); *ibid.*, 2.

⁴²⁰ Roger Stevens, "European Visitors to the Safavid Court," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 3/4 (1974): 424, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310173>.

⁴²¹ Clare Williamson, "Safavid Persia Through the Eyes of French Travellers," *La Trobe Journal*, no. 91 (2013): 66.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Stevens, "European Visitors to the Safavid Court."

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 424.

water or extract, which was used to stain the hands and nails.⁴²⁵ It is clear that Tavernier did not pay much attention to the ritualistic aspects of henna, and it did not interest him enough to provide accurate information. He likely observed henna mixed with water, forming a paste that could be applied to the skin.

The style of documentation prevalent in the 15th to 17th centuries has tended to portray the Eastern region as being isolated from the scientific, artistic, and commercial advances of Europe. Consequently, any values or traits attributed to the Orient were regarded as highly specialized and distinct from what was deemed normal or desirable in Europe.⁴²⁶ This gave rise to an identity that was perceived as "lamentably alien," or markedly different from Western societies.⁴²⁷ People hailing from the Orient were often associated with undesirable elements of Western society, such as delinquents, the mentally ill, women, and the poor. Individuals from the Orient were rarely regarded as individuals in their own right, but rather as obstacles to be subdued or resolved.⁴²⁸ This was partly due to the colonial desire to acquire control over other territories, which led to a view of the inhabitants of those areas as hindrances to be overcome.⁴²⁹

In the 17th century, it was uncommon to write detailed accounts of the practice of applying henna, especially from an observer's perspective. However, a musician named Pietro della Valle (1586–1652)⁴³⁰ reported on this practice during his journey to Māzandarān in 1618.

⁴²⁵ Tavernier, *Les Six Voyages De Turquie Et De Perse*, 1, 171.

⁴²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 206.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, trans. George Bull (London: Hutchinson, 1990).

He and his wife, who was Christian and from Baghdad,⁴³¹ spent a night at a local lady's home in a village where all the local women gathered to see them. As a welcoming gesture, his host gave each woman henna as a gift. The host insisted on celebrating their arrival by using the henna, which della Valle reported was customarily done in the East on joyous occasions such as weddings.⁴³² Pietro explains that the purpose of using henna was to protect the hands from the weather and to embellish them, as Easterners do not wear gloves.⁴³³ He describes a man's appearance in relation to the effect of the harsh hot environment in Persia, explaining how his hand was very darkly painted with henna to protect him from the weather. He adds that henna looked elegant on both men and women.⁴³⁴ Valle's style of writing differed from other travellers at the time. His descriptions show an interest in the cultures and traditions he encountered and do not use a comparative style of writing. Instead, he explains how traditions, such as henna, are necessary because of the environment. He even comments on how his skin colour changed as a result of the environment.⁴³⁵ Valle's openness to other cultures may have been influenced by his wife's and his acceptance of others, in this case, the "Orient".

During these centuries, there was a paucity of female travellers and writers, leaving a gap in comparative accounts with their male counterparts. This absence of female representation was due to prevailing societal norms, which placed a moral critique on

⁴³¹ Ibid., 165.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ John Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*, 17 vols., vol. 9 (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811), 48-49.

⁴³⁴ Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 159.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

individuals of both genders who travelled without a legitimate reason, consequently limiting their ability to document and share their experiences.⁴³⁶ Henna was of negligible significance to travellers during these periods; instead, its mention primarily served to demarcate cultural differences between the East and West. Henna was used as an example of how Eastern cultures were underdeveloped, with an attachment to their archaic vulgar customs.

The Documentation of Henna in the 18th Century

During the early 18th century, the Ottoman Empire implemented a series of reforms aimed at Westernization, which came to be known as the Tulip Period (1718–1730). The primary objective of these reforms was to modernize the Ottoman state and society, following the empire's defeat in Vienna in the late 17th century, by incorporating Western cultural elements and improving its economic, social, and political standing.⁴³⁷ This period marked a significant turning point in Ottoman history, as it brought about a comprehensive transformation of various aspects of Ottoman life. This exposed the Ottoman Empire to criticism and was seen as a weakness, as Bayle St. John noted,⁴³⁸ “this change has gone a great way towards destroying the nationality of the Turks, and revealing their nakedness to the world.

⁴³⁶ Edward Peters, "The Desire to Know the Secrets of the World," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 4 (2001): 604, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3654329>.

⁴³⁷ Kader Konuk, "Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 393, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23127324>.

⁴³⁸ Bayle St. John, *The Turks in Europe: A Sketch of Manners and Politics in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853).

It was thought that with the European dress these barbarians would assume the activity and energy of the Giaours; perhaps, also, their instruction and their civilization.”⁴³⁹

Moreover, during the 18th and the 19th centuries, a new type of Western traveller emerged who ethno-masqueraded or mimicked the Orient to experience what it felt like to be Eastern. Kader Konuk⁴⁴⁰ argues that this performance of an ethnic identity was achieved through mimicking clothes, gestures, appearance, language, cultural codes, or other components of identity formation.⁴⁴¹ Bhabha explains the concept of "colonial mimicry", which is the desire to imitate or copy the colonizers in order to gain acceptance and recognition. The imitator wants to be seen as similar to the colonizer, but not exactly the same. Bhabha argues that this desire for mimicry is rooted in an ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.⁴⁴² He adds to be successful, mimicry must continuously produce a sense of difference or excess. This means that even though the imitator may strive for sameness, there will always be subtle differences that reveal the inherent tension in the act of mimicry.⁴⁴³

There are many travellers who engage in ethno-masquerading, both male and female, and who cross-dress for various reasons. One of the earliest known examples of such a traveller is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), the wife of the British ambassador to the

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 78-79.

⁴⁴⁰ Konuk, "Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu."

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics, (London: Routledge, 2004), Electronic Book, 122. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=495202&site=ehost-live&authtype=sso&custid=s9814295>.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Ottoman Empire.⁴⁴⁴ Montagu has been described as having a complex and nuanced perspective on cultural differences, being able to resist the influence of stereotypes, and being open to learning about different cultures and appreciating the artistic and aesthetic elements of other cultures through travel and the use of descriptive language. At the same time, she is critical of the orientalist ideas prevalent in their time and is careful not to demonize or oversimplify the people she encounters.⁴⁴⁵

Montagu mentions henna only once and does not refer to it by name. She describes the colour that Turkish women use to stain their nails but admitted that she did not find it beautiful and therefore did not apply it herself. Despite this, she admired the beauty of Turkish women, which she believed exceeded even that of the women at the Court of England.⁴⁴⁶ Montagu considered herself a more reliable eyewitness as a woman writing about Turkish women, unlike her male predecessors. Montagu criticizes the masculine perspective of her predecessors, believing it to be necessary to correct any misrepresentations from her own unique perspective as a woman. She asserts that her anthropological skills in deciphering cultures were far superior to those of her predecessors, despite only spending two years in Istanbul (1716–1718).⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Konuk, "Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," 393.

⁴⁴⁵ Arthur J. Weitzman, "Voyeurism and Aesthetics in the Turkish Bath: Lady Mary's School of Female Beauty," *Comparative Literature Studies* 39, no. 4 (2002): 357, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40247364>.

⁴⁴⁶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Robert Halsband ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 96.

⁴⁴⁷ Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 80; Srinivas Aravamudan, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization," *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69, 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030261>.

However, Montagu faced unjust criticism at the time because her proximate descriptions of Eastern harems and baths differed from those of the fabulous Arabian Nights tales.⁴⁴⁸

The male ethno-masqueraded travellers of the past often used mimicry as a tactic to gain the trust of Eastern people and to create an impression that they were knowledgeable of the culture about which they wrote. They often included a portrait of themselves dressed as an Easterner at the beginning of their books. In contrast, Montagu aimed to fully immerse herself in the culture she wrote about.

One such traveller was Richard Pococke (1704–1765),⁴⁴⁹ an English bishop who journeyed to the Middle East, visiting Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria between 1737–1740.⁴⁵⁰ In his book *A Description of The East*, he describes women who were entertainers on the streets of Egypt, dancing and playing musical instruments, as vulgar and lacking virtue. He notes that they painted their lips and chin blue (tattooed) and dyed their nails and feet with henna.⁴⁵¹ Interestingly, Pococke mentions that henna was also used to paint camels.⁴⁵² This detail may suggest that henna had a negative connotation as it was associated with animals and people who held low status in society.

⁴⁴⁸ Birol, "Feminist Tradition in 18th - 19th Century Orientalist Literature: Unveiling Western Women's Orientalist Tropes in Their Travelogues," 65.

⁴⁴⁹ Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: W. Bowyer, 1743); *ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁵⁰ Jan Marten Ivo Klaver, "Richard Pococke and the Natural Curiosities of the East," in *Scholarship Between Europe and the Levant* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 260.

⁴⁵¹ Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries*, 1, 192-93.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 187.

Pococke presents a negative portrayal of these women for not covering their faces as did most women in the country. However, locals explained to him that their virtues were not under suspicion.⁴⁵³ Pococke does not take into consideration their cultural background and is more concerned about their reputation than examining the cultural aspects of their lives. This demonstrates that his background as a churchman influenced his observations as a traveller.

Similarly, Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815),⁴⁵⁴ a German explorer, utilizes an ethnomasquerade approach to establish rapport with the Arabs he encountered during his travels to Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁵⁵ Niebuhr was aware of the limited interactions he could have with women in Egypt due to its segregated society, and he criticizes male travellers who solely wrote about Eastern women in terms of their shortcomings. He emphasizes the need for a more nuanced and respectful approach.⁴⁵⁶ Niebuhr's description of Arab women is limited to those of the lower class, whom he observed from a distance. He notes that these women painted their hands yellow and their nails red, believing that these whimsical colourings were irresistible charms.⁴⁵⁷

When Niebuhr arrived in Arabia, he encountered two women among his hosts for the night. He describes them as beautiful and almost naked, and they requested henna to dye their nails in preparation for receiving guests.⁴⁵⁸ He also claims observing the use of henna in Yemen,

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁵⁴ Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, trans. Robert Heron, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Morison and Son, 1792); *ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁵⁵ Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, 1, 243.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

where women stained their hands and feet. He speculates that these women used henna to cover the natural fallowness of their complexion and adds that they believed staining the palms and soles of the feet, which are lighter in colour, would make the rest of their bodies look lighter.⁴⁵⁹ In contrast, men stained their entire bodies with henna to achieve dark brown skin.⁴⁶⁰ Niebuhr attempts to highlight the differences in beauty practices and cultural norms between the East and the West, creating a sense of curiosity and fascination with the "backward," women-degrading cultures of the East. He notes that women in the East tried as much as possible to achieve the natural beauty of white European women. However, it can be argued that Niebuhr's own account repeated the style and mistakes of earlier travellers' accounts about women, thereby weakening his criticism and making it seem as though he was only attempting to lend credibility to his own observations.

Charles Sonnini (1751–1812)⁴⁶¹ was a French nobleman, naturalist, and traveller who served in the military. In his book *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*,⁴⁶² Sonnini allocates a chapter to women's beauty and cosmetics, where he discusses the use of henna in many cultures, not just Egypt. His focus is directed towards the lower class of Egyptian society and

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 2: 236.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1.

⁴⁶² Ibid.; *ibid.*, 2; *ibid.*, 3.

their efforts to enhance their beauty,⁴⁶³ which he believes indicated a lack of progress in their culture.⁴⁶⁴ He refers to the use of henna by ancient Egyptians to dye the nails of mummies.⁴⁶⁵

Sonnini emphasizes the cultural importance of henna, stating that it was considered indecent for a woman not to dye her hands and nails red with henna.⁴⁶⁶ He also notes that upper-class women refrained from staining their hands and instead wrapped thread around their fingers at certain intervals and the paint between the threads to create small, orange-coloured belts. This process ensured that the colour only applied to the desired spaces on the fingers.

However, Sonnini does not take into account the differences in lifestyle between the upper and lower classes, and how henna may have protected the hands of working women from the weather while working in the home or land. Furthermore, while upper-class women had the luxury of time to create elaborate designs on their henna decoration, working-class women typically wore simpler designs due to their heavy daily work activities.

Sonnini mentions that this practice was common among Syrians, who further darkened the henna by using sal-ammoniac, lime, and honey, resulting in a shiny, disagreeable mixture of black on their white skin.⁴⁶⁷ Despite Sonnini's comprehensive documentation of henna use, including body art, perfume, hair dye, and botany, it is unclear how he obtained such detailed

⁴⁶³ Sonnini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1, 261-62.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 265-66.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

information. Furthermore, his perspective as a colonizer looking down on the colonized influenced his portrayal of the culture as ancient and in need of civilization.

Other orientalist in Africa, such as the Scottish explorer Mungo Park (1771–1806),⁴⁶⁸ paid little attention to Eastern women, their descriptions, or rituals. For instance, when Park mentions henna, he simply states, "About this time, all the women of the camp had their feet and the ends of their fingers stained of a dark Saffron colour. I could never ascertain whether this was done from motives of religion or by way of ornament."⁴⁶⁹ Park's colonial prejudice prevented him from investigating the subject further and instead diverted the focus to himself, as he was the main object of curiosity for the Moorish women. He states, "The curiosity of the Moorish ladies had been very troublesome to me ever since my arrival at Benowm. A party of them came into my hut and gave me plainly to understand that the object of their visit was to ascertain, by actual inspection... I observed to them that it was not customary in my country to give ocular demonstration in such cases before so many beautiful women. But that if all of them would retire, except the young lady to whom I pointed (selecting the youngest and handsomest), I would satisfy her curiosity."⁴⁷⁰ Said explains this way of travel writing as a way to display the Orient as a place to find sexual experiences inaccessible in Europe.⁴⁷¹ In such cases, the mention of henna serves only to depict a sexually alluring young woman, for example, with henna stains on the tips of her fingers and the soles of her feet.

⁴⁶⁸ Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

Women in the Western world during this era did not have the opportunity to document their travel experiences or knowledge. The social norms of the time placed greater importance on a woman's appearance and social skills, rather than on her intellectual abilities.⁴⁷² Jane Austen⁴⁷³ portrayed this reality in her novel *Northanger Abbey*, suggesting that if a woman "had the misfortune of knowing anything, she should conceal it as well as she can."⁴⁷⁴ This sentiment echoes the bitter advice of Lady Montagu, who recommends that girls be taught "to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness."⁴⁷⁵

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)⁴⁷⁶ published her book *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which is considered one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy and feminist Orientalism. According to Joyce Zonana "feminist Orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority."⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, feminist Orientalism refers to a particular approach in literature

⁴⁷² Elizabeth A. Bohls, "Introduction," in *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

⁴⁷³ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), 107-08.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Works of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Including Her Correspondence, Poems and Essays*, 5 vols., vol. 4 (London: Printed for Rhichard Pjillip, 1803), 185.

⁴⁷⁶ Lady Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Boston: Printed by Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, 1792).

⁴⁷⁷ Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of "Jane Eyre"," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (1993): 594, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174859>.

where the Orient is utilized as a tool for what Saad Albazei⁴⁷⁸ terms "Western self-redemption."

This involves using the Orient and oriental Muslims to criticize the West itself.⁴⁷⁹

As a result of the popularity of 18th-century Western travellers' tales about the East featuring desperate women, this theme became a significant aspect of an emerging discourse on liberal feminism that addressed the condition of women in both the East and West. Writers such as Wollstonecraft and others from the 19th and 20th centuries, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861),⁴⁸⁰ Margaret Fuller (1810–1850),⁴⁸¹ and Florence Nightingale (1820–1910),⁴⁸² used images of oriental life, especially Muslim women, to express their criticisms of women's lives in the West. Their purpose was not solely to establish Western domination over the East, although inadvertently they reinforced such domination. Rather, by portraying objectionable aspects of Western life as "Eastern," these Western feminist writers rhetorically defined their mission as the removal of Eastern elements from Western life.⁴⁸³

Wollstonecraft treats Eastern women in the same way that Western men had done so before her, relying heavily on preconceived stereotypes that painted the East, and Islam specifically, in a negative light. Her portrayal suggests that Islam treated women as inferior or

⁴⁷⁸ Saad Albazei, "Literary Orientalism In Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature: Its Formation and Continuity" (Doctor of Philosophy Purdue University, 1983), <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/literary-orientalism-nineteenth-century-anglo/docview/303182430/se-2>.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸⁰ Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*.

⁴⁸¹ Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁴⁸² Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

⁴⁸³ Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of "Jane Eyre", " 594.

subservient,⁴⁸⁴ and she is more aggressive in her language than her male contemporaries. She describes Muslim women as "mere animals... weak beings only fit for the seraglio,"⁴⁸⁵ and compares the situation of woman in Western society with "the true Mahometan strain, [where men are] meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience."⁴⁸⁶ Additionally, she claims that "in the true style of Mahometanism, they are only considered as females, and not as a part of the human species."⁴⁸⁷

The feminist movement, along with the restrictive nature of Western society for women, has led some women to travel while disguised as men, such as Jeanne Baret (1740–1807) and Mary Anne Talbot (1778–1808).⁴⁸⁸ The practice of disguising themselves as men presented a challenge for these women. They had to avoid being exposed as women in order to maintain their disguise and ensure a successful journey. However, this also limited their ability to observe certain cultural practices, such as the henna rituals performed by women in other cultures.

⁴⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 40.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸⁸ Londa Schiebinger, "Jeanne Baret: The First Woman to Circumnavigate the Globe," *Endeavour* 27, no. 1 (2003): 22, [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-9327\(03\)00018-8](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-9327(03)00018-8); Margaret Creighton; Lisa Norling, ed., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 43.

Henna in Western Literature during the 19th Century

From the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century, the West had control over the Orient, and, as a result, this created a complex and artificial image of these regions. This image was used for various purposes, such as academic studies, museum displays, colonial administration, and theoretical explanations in fields such as anthropology, biology, linguistics, history, and sociology. It was also used as an example in economic and sociological theories related to development, revolution, cultural personality, and national or religious character.⁴⁸⁹ The field of study of the Orient became wider for the West, and an understanding of religion became important in order to control the colonised. As the 19th century marked the peak of British rule in India, which employed the "divide and rule" strategy to weaken the Muslim aristocracy, previously treated as imperial rulers, and transform them into ordinary subjects.⁴⁹⁰ This strategy aimed to create a rift between Muslim and Hindu communities,⁴⁹¹ as seen in the biased portrayal of Muslims as backward, illiterate, and lazy compared to Hindus in the accounts of travellers, such as that of Maria Graham (1785–1842).⁴⁹² Despite this bias, Graham's approach differs from that of her female predecessors, who disguised themselves as men. Instead, she adopted a mixed approach to dressing in Eastern attire that was both male and female. This style was adopted by Graham after visiting India with her father in 1809.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 7-8.

⁴⁹⁰ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857-170* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 300.

⁴⁹¹ Aziz Rahman, Mohsin Ali, and Saad Kahn, "The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 25, no. 1 (2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.46743/1082-7307/2018.1439>.

⁴⁹² Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

She depicted herself wearing a turban, which was traditionally associated with Muslim men in the East.⁴⁹⁴ This style may have offered her a balance between the confidence and the power of a man and the femininity of a woman during that era.

Graham's descriptions of Muslim men and women demonstrate Western colonial prejudice. For instance, in her visit to "Our Mussulman friend," whom she describes as a sincere Muslim and "therefore a great bigot; ... I doubt if his natural parts are so good, he is, I believe, a man of more learning; his manners are correct and gentleman-like, but not so refined as those of his Hindoo friend."⁴⁹⁵ Graham's writing style that compared Muslims and Hindus reflects a colonial tactic used to serve the interests of the British colonizers by creating divisions between the two religions and placing blame on the Muslim community.⁴⁹⁶

Furthermore, Graham had a preconceived, stereotyped image of the oriental harem as living as prisoners on the upper floor of the house,⁴⁹⁷ accessible only by a ladder that was removed when not in use "to prevent the ladies from escaping."⁴⁹⁸ She describes the women as illiterate, "totally void of cultivation," reading the Quran but rarely understanding it. She describes them as lazy, sleeping and eating all day, with monotony broken only by events such as death, birth, or marriage.⁴⁹⁹ Despite her criticisms of the Islamic culture and the treatment

⁴⁹⁴ Eleanore Neumann, "Maria Graham as Naturalist" (Decolonial Agencies, Yale University, New Haven, Paul Mellon Centre, 2020).

⁴⁹⁵ Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 16.

⁴⁹⁶ Belkacem Belmekki, "Muslim Separatism in Post-Revolt India: A British Game of "Divide et Impera"?," *Oriente Moderno* 94, no. 1 (2014): 113-14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44280740>.

⁴⁹⁷ Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 18-19.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

of Indian Muslim women, Graham describes the women in a gentle manner, referring to them as "fine lively young women."⁵⁰⁰ She further compliments her host's wife's beauty, describing her to be adorned with henna, stating that "Fatima's beautiful face reconciled me to the nose-jewel... and the palms of her hands, the soles of her feet, and her nails, were stained with henna."⁵⁰¹ She also describes her manners as modest, gentle, and indolent in the presence of her husband, unable to look him in the eye or to speak.⁵⁰² The henna in Graham's documentation only serves to emphasize the image of the harem, as according to Reina Lewis "the harem sold books".⁵⁰³ The portrayal of the harem as beautiful, ornamented, oppressed and vacant was crucial for Western travel writers to reinforce the preconceived notion of the Orient for Western readers and to generate profits from their publications.

The divide and rule method also manifested in the British education policy of India. The British included Hindus in their educational system, but excluded Muslims, which resulted in Muslims falling behind in terms of education and economic development.⁵⁰⁴ Further increasing this gap, travellers used a method of publishing books on the customs of Indian Muslims, displaying them as consumed with superstitions. This is evident in *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*, which was translated and composed under the

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 12.

⁵⁰⁴ Rahman, Ali, and Kahn, "The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division," 4.

direction of Gerhard Herklots (1798–1834) in 1832.⁵⁰⁵ Not much is known about Herklots other than he worked as a physician for the East India Company,⁵⁰⁶ and that he translated a book authored by Ja'far Sharif (early 19th century),⁵⁰⁷ a Muslim employee in the company. Little is known about Sharif other than Herklots' description of him as different from other natives, and demonstrating a European way of thinking and acting that is very dedicated to learning, even though he may present notions that appear amusing or outdated to an enlightened English reader.⁵⁰⁸

Henna is mentioned as being applied to the body at weddings by the bride and the groom, but no details are provided about specific rituals or patterns involved.⁵⁰⁹ The few times henna is mentioned, it is said to be transported in trays as part of a religious festival, the Moharram month; Herklots assumes that the seventh night that month is called "henna night" and is celebrated to represent and revive the memory of the marriage ceremony of the of the Prophet's great-granddaughter and great-granddaughter.⁵¹⁰ Another religious celebration for which henna is mentioned as being distributed to two people was during a Sufi ritual to celebrate a saint.⁵¹¹ On neither occasion did the author or the translator explain the purpose of

⁵⁰⁵ Ja'far Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death*, ed. and trans. Gerhard Andreas Herklots (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1832).

⁵⁰⁶ Sylvia Vatak, "Shurreef, Herklots, Crooke, and Qanoon-E-Islam: Constructing an Ethnography of 'the Moosulmans of India'," *South Asia Research* 19, no. 1 (1999): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272809901900102>.

⁵⁰⁷ Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death*.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, xi, xxv.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 134, 47-48.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

giving away henna to the people; it only can be assumed that its use was to bring joy and to reflect an element of celebration when used to decorate the body.

For supernatural beliefs, the book describes the practice of burning henna seeds (Ispund) when visitors come following a child's birth, to protect the mother and child from any evil influences that may accompany them.⁵¹² The smoke from the burning henna seeds is believed to protect infants from the gaze and shadows of people.⁵¹³

Furthermore, henna has been mentioned as an ingredient in Fairy Trays, which are used for the magical ritual known as a Fairy Bath. This ritual is employed to remove evil and devils and is used by both men and women for various reasons.⁵¹⁴ For women, it is used if they become pregnant at the age of 13 or 14 without being unwell, or if they are possessed by fairies, devils, or enchantments.⁵¹⁵ For men, it is used if they are unable to obtain employment, if their employment proves unprofitable, or if they and their wives do not agree.⁵¹⁶ These reasons for using the ritual highlight how women are more commonly associated with sorcery and the control of supernatural beliefs, whereas men are depicted as the victims of unfortunate financial circumstances.

Despite the book's focus on portraying Muslims as consumed with superstition and linking every action they do to the Prophet and his family, it is worth noting that the use of

⁵¹² Gerhard Andreas Herklots, "Glossary," in *Qanoon-E-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death* (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1832), 4, lxxvii.

⁵¹³ Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death*, 7.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 381- 90.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

henna body adornment is not mentioned in the context of protection from supernatural powers. Instead, the book mentions henna as being continuously associated with celebrations, and cleanliness.

Herklots gives Sharif full credit for the book, minimizing his own contribution to just revising and occasionally suggesting subjects that had escaped Sharif's memory.⁵¹⁷ It is not clear to what extent Herklots controlled and directed the book, as the original manuscript written by Sharif in Urdu was lost after Herklots' death.⁵¹⁸ Sharif explains that he limited his book to just a narration of the customs and beliefs practiced by Muslims in the southern part of India known as Dukhan.⁵¹⁹ He asserts to have not presented a comprehensive account of the customs of all Indian Muslims or Muslims from other countries.⁵²⁰ However, even though Herklots acknowledges that many of the customs described in the book are particular to Dukhan, he also asserts that many of the described customs and manners can be found among Muslims in every part of the country. The Western sense of generalization has influenced his understanding of localised cultures and rituals.

Conversely, upon further investigation into the beliefs and rituals included in the book, such as the fairy bath, it is noted that no other source has mentioned them. Herklots tries to justify the uniqueness of his information by stating that Westerners are often unaware of

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., xi.

⁵¹⁸ Vatuk, "Shurreef, Herklots, Crooke, and Qanoon-E-Islam: Constructing an Ethnography of 'the Moosulmans of India'," 5.

⁵¹⁹ Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death*, xxvii.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., viii.

Muslim customs and beliefs because Muslims are reluctant "to expose themselves to the ridicule of persons of totally different national customs and religious faith; or from a wish simply to keep Europeans in the dark, under a vague apprehension that frankness would ultimately prove to their own detriment."⁵²¹

There has been a transition in writing style from travel accounts documenting experiences and adventures to ethnographic research, aimed at studying the culture and religions of colonized nations. This change in writing style was driven by political and economic agendas that emerged just prior to the colonial era known as the Scramble for Africa.⁵²² Western knowledge about native people was created by involving them closely in projects as cultural experts and informants.⁵²³ However, as noted by Nicholas Dirks, in the 19th century the imbalance shifted in favour of the Western administrator, and the "voices, meanings, and histories" of the native collaborator became more fully appropriated by "colonial forms and logics of knowledge."⁵²⁴ This led to the development of anthropological knowledge that was used to order and control native life in accordance with the demands of imperial rule.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ Ibid., xi.

⁵²² Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 311.

⁵²³ C. A. Bayly, "Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 6, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/312877>; Vatuk, "Shurreef, Herklots, Crooke, and Qanoon-E-Islam: Constructing an Ethnography of 'the Moosulmans of India'," 8.

⁵²⁴ Nicholas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 310.

⁵²⁵ Nicholas B. Dirks, "The Policing of Tradition: Colonialism and Anthropology in Southern India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 1 (1997): 185, <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/179243>.

Edward William Lane (1801–1876)⁵²⁶ was one of the most important writers of the 19th century and was widely considered an authority and a standard reference for anyone writing or thinking about the Orient.⁵²⁷ After arriving in Egypt in 1825, Lane made the deliberate decision "to throw myself entirely among strangers; to adopt their language, their customs and their dress; and, in associating almost exclusively with the natives, to prosecute the study of their literature."⁵²⁸ One of the ways Lane accomplished this was by adopting the style of the Turks. This decision was driven by a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Turks were the ruling class at the time, and adopting their style gave Lane an air of authority. Secondly, posing as a Turk allowed Lane to disguise his Englishness from the public. It was not possible for him to pass as an Egyptian due to his physical appearance and lack of language proficiency, but the Turks' diverse appearances and limited Arabic language proficiency gave him the flexibility to pose as one.⁵²⁹

Lane's book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*,⁵³⁰ which Said describes as a "classic of historical and anthropological observation" due to its style and brilliant details, rather than simple reflection of racial superiority.⁵³¹ Unlike previous travellers, Lane paid attention to the use of henna by women for body adornment. He

⁵²⁶ Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 1.

⁵²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

⁵²⁸ Edward William Lane, First Draft of Description of Egypt, d. 234, f.5: cited in, Bodleian Library, Department of Western Manuscripts; Jason Thompson, "'Of the 'Osma'nees, or Turks': An Unpublished Chapter from Edward William Lane's Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (1995): 20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43384496>.

⁵²⁹ Thompson, "'Of the 'Osma'nees, or Turks': An Unpublished Chapter from Edward William Lane's Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians," 20-21.

⁵³⁰ Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 1.

⁵³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 15.

documents his observations that women mainly from the upper and middle classes use henna to stain their hands and feet.⁵³² He describes the henna patterns as beautiful with very few exceptions that he observed occasionally.⁵³³ Additionally, he provides sketches detailing the most common patterns used (Figure 3, Figure 4).

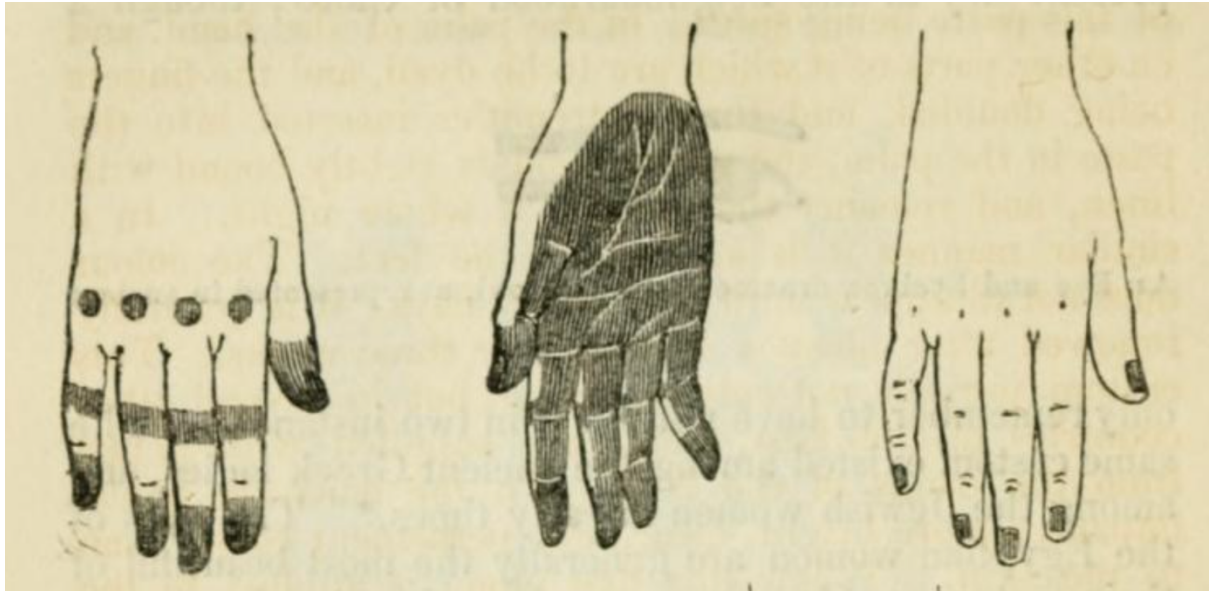


Figure 3: Hands stained with henna (Lane, 1846, VI, p.64)

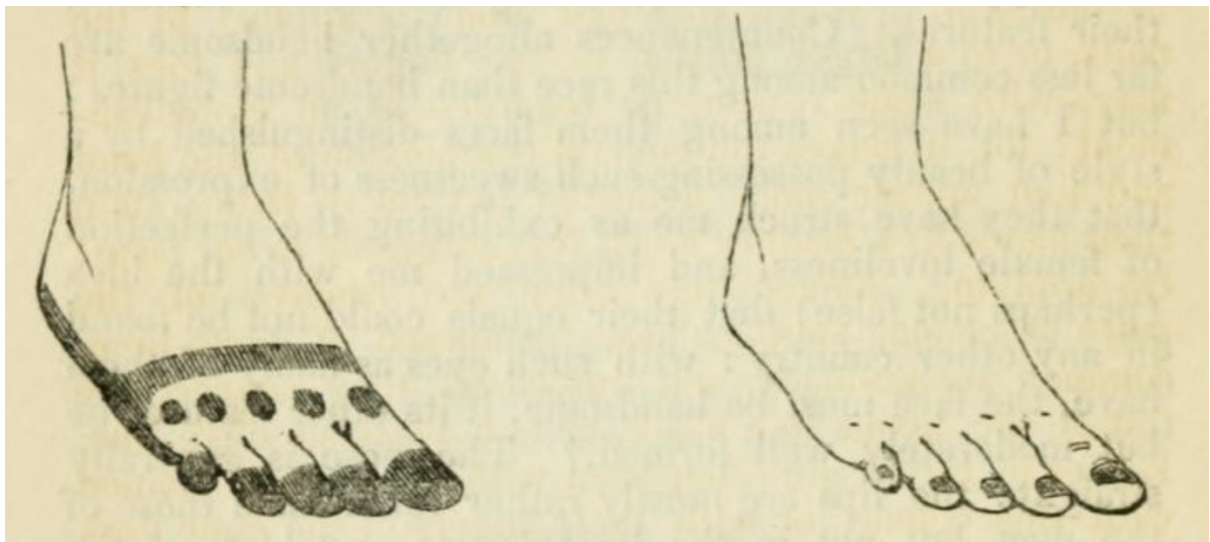


Figure 4: Feet stained with henna (Lane, 1846, VI, p.64)

⁵³² Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 1, 63.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

Lane provides detailed information about how henna is applied, the amount of time it needs to set on the skin, and the different shades that can be achieved by adding ingredients like lime juice and oil.⁵³⁴ He explains that henna is used not only for adornment but also to protect the skin from being too tender and sensitive.⁵³⁵

In his observations of trade and traders in Egypt, Lane documents the way henna sellers call out loudly to attract customers, using phrases like "The rose was a thorn; from the sweat of the Prophet it blossomed" and "Odours of paradise! O flowers of the henna!" Lane explains that this cry "alludes to the miracle related to the prophet," but he does not elaborate on the subject from a religious perspective, presenting it as he observed it in the market.⁵³⁶

Lane's book provides a more realistic sense of the lifestyle and beliefs of Muslim Egyptians than the work of other scholars of his time. His European orientalist perspective is evident despite his attempts at neutrality;⁵³⁷ however, he does not make any assumptions or connections between the use of henna and Islam and superstition.

Between 1839 and 1841, Lane published his translated version of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Arabian tales.⁵³⁸ While many orientalists had previously published

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 2: 152.

⁵³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 158.

⁵³⁸ Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1839).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Thousand_and_One_Nights/gh0-AAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1; Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1840).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Thousand_and_One_Nights/0R0-AAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1; Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1841).

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Thousand_and_One_Nights/8x0-AAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

translations of the tales,⁵³⁹ Lane aimed to correct cultural and religious misunderstandings of earlier versions and to bring the stories closer to the truth, particularly in relation to Arab Muslim and Egyptian culture.⁵⁴⁰ His goal was to consolidate the knowledge he had gained from his earlier book, *The Modern Egyptians*.⁵⁴¹ In Lane's work, henna use is mentioned when he is describing the Arabian beauty standard for women and the adornment of brides during wedding rituals.⁵⁴² These references connect the tales to reality and provide readers with an understanding of true cultural practices. Throughout the three volumes of *The Thousand and One Nights*, henna is consistently mentioned for its beautification use for both men and women.⁵⁴³ Although Lane mentions the Islamic religion, the jinn, and henna in his works,⁵⁴⁴ he maintains a standard of not making assumptions or exaggerating the significance of henna and he never references henna as having religious or protective significance.

⁵³⁹ Jonathan Scott, *Tales, Anecdotes, and Letters. Translated from the Arabic and Parsian* (London: J. and W. Eddowes, 1800), 315.

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Tales_Anecdotes_and_Letters/BgpnDG1e24wC?hl=en&gbpv=0; Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights, or, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments: Translated and Arranged for Family Reading, With Explanatory Notes*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1848), 430-31, 54; *ibid.*, 1: 56, 166, 383, 475.

⁵⁴⁰ Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 1, xiii-xiv.

⁵⁴¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 164.

⁵⁴² Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 1, 29, 323; Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 2, 219.

⁵⁴³ Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 1, 341; Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 2, 82, 201; Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3, 529.

⁵⁴⁴ Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 1, 18, 30-35, 39, 66-70, 80-81, 116-17, 67, 217, 28, 87, 331; Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 2, 70, 87-88, 111, 39, 96, 317, 222, 23-24, 366, 451, 20, 568, 607, 20; Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 3, 112, 20, 31, 33, 58, 80, 93, 201, 25, 96, 312, 65, 91, 402, 19, 78, 503, 05-06, 36, 454, 63, 503, 06, 09, 58, 681.

One of the key contributors to the gathering of information on Islam and the Orient was Richard Burton (1821–1890). He gained popularity as a travel writer due to his ability to immerse himself in Eastern cultures and free himself from his European origins enough to be able to live as an oriental.⁵⁴⁵ Burton began his career in 1842 as an army man for the East India Company, where he spent seven years in service.⁵⁴⁶ According to Edward Rice,⁵⁴⁷ Burton was fluent in 29 languages, including many dialects, six of which he learned while working in India.⁵⁴⁸ In addition, he had various religious experiences, including adopting Kabbalah, alchemy, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, and passing through several forms of Islam before finally settling on Sufism.⁵⁴⁹

In 1853, Burton disguised himself in Arab clothing and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, which he documents in his book *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*.⁵⁵⁰ In the book, he exhibits a colonial style when documenting the people, culture, and traditions, through which he purports to hold more knowledge about the Orient than the Orient holds about itself. While Burton was not the first Western traveller to visit the holy Islamic cities, he remains the most well-known.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 196.

⁵⁴⁶ Edward Rice, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton: The Secret Agent Who Made the Pilgrimage to Mecca, Discovered the Kama Sutra, and Brought the Arabian Nights to the West* (Cambridge: DA Capo Press, 2001), 45.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 208.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 85, 177.

⁵⁵⁰ Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 1; Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 2; Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3.

⁵⁵¹ Ludovico di Varthema, *Itinerario De Ludovico De Verthema Bolognese Ne Lo Egipto Ne La Suria Ne La Arabia Deserta & Felice Ne La Persia Ne La India, & Ne La Ethiopia. La Fede El Vivere & Costumi De Tutte Le Prefate Provincie* [Itinerary of Ludovico de Verthema Bolognese in the Egipto, the Suria, the Arabia Deserta

In his accounts, Burton only discusses henna in terms of its applications in beauty and hygiene for men and women.⁵⁵² He notes that the Arabs in Egypt use henna in the bath to cool the body by applying it in a thin paste.⁵⁵³ His account of the use of henna by El-Medinah women is fairly vague as he only mentions how important henna is for women in his footnotes while documenting the market and the vast collection of products available to trade. As he states, a visitor is expected to bring back gifts for the women in his family, one of which is leather bags full of henna powder. If the visitor fails to do so, he will be badly received.⁵⁵⁴ He adds that all women from *El Hejaz* region dye their hands and feet with henna and mix it with gall nut and lime juice to get a black colour stain.⁵⁵⁵ Burton constantly describes the Arab men as a third-class race after the Western and the Turks, and states that they dye their beards with henna, gall nut and other substances to make their hair look black to emulate the Turks.⁵⁵⁶

Although Burton went on pilgrimage and documented the religious rituals of Hajj, his interest in documenting the trade, products used in the country, and what pilgrims bring with them to sell or buy from the holy cities to take back home stands out more than his attention to

and Felice, the Persia, the India and the Ethiopia. The Faith and Living and Customs of all the Prefate Provinces] (Milan: Giovanni Angelo Scinzenzeler, 1523); Joseph Pitts, *A True and Faithful Account of the Religion & Manners of the Mohametans* (London: George Bishop, 1717); Ali Bey el Abbassi Domingo Badia Lebllich, *Voyages D'Ali Bey El Abbassi En Afrique Et En Asie, Pendant Les Années 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, et 1807* [Travels of Ali Bey el Abbassi in Africa and Asia during the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, and 1807], 3 vols. (Paris: De l'imprimerie de P. Didot l'aîné, 1814); "Review," review of Life and Adventures of Giovanni Finati, *The National Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1831), <https://doi.org/10.2307/30057791>; Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia, Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hedjaz Which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred* (London: H. Colburn, 1829).

⁵⁵² Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 1, 256.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 169.

⁵⁵⁴ Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 2, 199.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 276.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

cultural and religious practices.⁵⁵⁷ Said criticizes Burton's book, stating that it "is rigidly chronological and dutifully linear, as if what the authors were describing was a shopping trip to an Oriental bazaar rather than an adventure."⁵⁵⁸

There are extensive references to henna in Burton's 17-volume translation of *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night, A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments*.⁵⁵⁹ Burton provides an extensive number of notes, attempting to showcase his expertise on the subject, and mentions the use of henna by the Prophet Muhammad's companions.⁵⁶⁰ Additionally, Burton explains why Muslim women do not use henna during times of mourning, stating that it resembles "the pink legs and feet of the dove."⁵⁶¹ However, Burton's explanation is based on his own assumptions rather than evidence. He subtly connects henna to Islamic religion and superstition, making assumptions about its use from his religious perspective to bridge the gap between oriental legends and Western perceptions of Eastern cultures. Burton's assumptions about henna are among the earliest found in orientalist literature and have influenced later perceptions of its use. Said highlights that each of Burton's footnotes, in both books, was meant to be a testament to his triumph over the often-controversial system of oriental knowledge, which he had independently mastered.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁷ Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3, 318.

⁵⁵⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 193.

⁵⁵⁹ Richard Francis Burton, *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 17 vols., vol. 1 (London: Kamashastra Society, 1885), 186, 271; *ibid.*, 2: 49, 138; *ibid.*, 5: 289; *ibid.*, 7: 190, 250; *ibid.*, 8: 147-48; *ibid.*, 9: 281; *ibid.*, 10: 236; *ibid.*, 12: 49, 138.

⁵⁶⁰ Burton, *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 2, 167; *ibid.*, 4: 195.

⁵⁶¹ Richard Francis Burton, *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 17 vols., vol. 3 (London: Kamashastra Society, 1885), 63.

⁵⁶² Said, *Orientalism*, 196.

Isabel Burton (1831–1896),⁵⁶³ the wife of the famous explorer Richard Burton, differed from her husband in her approach to presenting herself to the public. Rather than portraying herself as an adventurer, she carefully constructed a persona that emphasized her devotion to her husband and her role as a proper Victorian woman.⁵⁶⁴ As a woman living in the Victorian era, Lady Burton was aware of the societal restrictions placed upon women and was hesitant to write about her experiences in a first-hand manner.⁵⁶⁵ Mary Morris points out that "For centuries it was frowned upon for women to travel without escort, chaperon, or husband. To journey was to put oneself at risk not only physically but morally as well. A little freedom could be a dangerous thing."⁵⁶⁶ To avoid social criticism, Lady Burton took great care in documenting her travels in her book *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*.⁵⁶⁷ In the first four chapters, she writes about the long and exhausting journey from London to Syria, which she undertook in the company of others.⁵⁶⁸ However, from the fifth chapter onwards, Lady Burton creates an imaginary female friend whom she guides around Damascus. In Chapter 15, she pretends that her friend has departed, and Lady Burton joins her husband on an adventure in the desert. By doing so, Lady Burton avoids giving the impression that she had been traveling alone in Syria, visiting the bazaars or even the women's hammams.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶³ Isabel Burton, *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1875); *ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶⁴ Silvia Antosa, "Domesticising the Exotic: Isabel Burton's the Inner Life of Syria," *Victorian Popular Fictions Journal* (2019): 56, <https://doi.org/10.46911/ACGL7854>.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ Mary Morris, ed., *The Illustrated Virago Book of Women Travellers* (London: Virago, 2007), 8.

⁵⁶⁷ Burton, *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, 1; *ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶⁸ Burton, *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, 1, 1-53.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-92, 144-65.

Lady Burton informs her imaginative friend, who asked about the powder sold in the bazaar, that it is henna used to stain the hands, feet, and fingernails. It is especially used by Muslim brides, as they are embellished with moon-shaped patterns.⁵⁷⁰ Lady Burton's way of writing on this occasion was as if she had been told in the market by the henna trader, and it was not a first-hand experience of henna. As she describes all the uses of henna for human hair and animal hair and lists the benefits and different kinds of henna, stating, "it cleans and strengthens it, and makes it glossy and bright. There is black henna from Baghdad and red from Mecca. The former is the powdered leaf of indigo."⁵⁷¹

For her description of the henna use in the hammam she states that she addresses her imaginary friend stating "I only wished you to come to-day, on the principle of seeing everything once, to know what the Hammam really is... also to henna your hands and feet with little crescents and stars."⁵⁷² Lady Burton was the first to describe henna patterns, which were most likely shaped using a small sticks, but she was not interested in henna rituals and female affairs as much as the architecture and punctuality of the hammam and its procedures. She displays the harem women the same as did earlier travellers: when she invites her imaginary friend to join her at the hammam she states, "would you like to pass a lazy day, and go to the Turkish bath?"⁵⁷³ However, she does not display the same style of colonial male gaze towards Eastern women. In fact it seems that Lady Burton gave little attention to women even when

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 146.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 144.

she was observing for the purpose of her documentation; for example, when attending a Kurdish harem wedding she describes the bride's adornment with henna stating: "Her face was painted, her hands, feet and face were dyed with henna in stars and crescents."⁵⁷⁴ She did not identify what the bride's face was painted with, as most likely the bride had facial tattooing or had other substances applied, such as kohl. Her lack of interest in women is similar to that displayed by male travellers and she herself confesses her desire to be a man, as she states, "I wish I were a man – if I were, I would be Richard Burton. But as I am a woman, I would be Richard Burton's wife."⁵⁷⁵ This shows her desire for freedom and her interest in male adventures over female adventures.

The period from 1870 onwards saw a dramatic social and cultural change for Western women, whereby a large number of women started to travel, motivated by economic need, a desire to start a new life, faith, health, love, or curiosity.⁵⁷⁶ Many of these women who published their travel accounts in the 19th century were interested in having an adventure, similar to the men of that time, to the point where they cross-dressed and in some cases changed their names for this purpose. Travelers such as Isabelle Eberhardt (1877–1904),⁵⁷⁷ Mary

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 264.

⁵⁷⁵ Isabel Burton, *Arabia, Egypt, India: A Narrative of Travel*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London; Belfast: Mullan, 1897), 91.

⁵⁷⁶ Emma Robinson-Tomsett, *Women, Travel and Identity: Journeys by Rail and Sea, 1870-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 1.

⁵⁷⁷ Hedi Abdel-Jaouad, "Isabelle Eberhardt: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad," *Yale French Studies*, no. 83 (1993): 96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930089>.

Kingsley (1862–1900),⁵⁷⁸ Isabella Bird (1831–1904),⁵⁷⁹ and Jane Dieulafoy (1851–1916)⁵⁸⁰ are included among such women.

From the accounts of women travellers, it is evident that they adopt a slightly different tone compared to their male counterparts when discussing the Orient, its culture, and rituals such as the use of henna. According to Sara Mills,⁵⁸¹ this is because female travellers were unable to fully adopt the imperialist voice utilized by men.⁵⁸² Resultingly, they focused on describing individuals rather than making sweeping assumptions and statements about entire races based on isolated encounters. Consequently, their writing tended to be more tentative than that of their male counterparts. Western women travellers played a secondary supporting role in portraying colonialism and though many actively wrote about the colonial situation, their writing was not accorded the same level of credibility as that of male orientalists.⁵⁸³

Summary

This chapter delves into the portrayal of henna in Western travellers' accounts from the 15th to the 19th century, with an emphasis on the influence of colonization and feminism. It argues that the West's contempt for Islam and Eastern cultures, especially for women of those cultures, served to bolster Western status and make Western women feel content with their

⁵⁷⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1897).

⁵⁷⁹ Isabella Bird, *Journeys In Persia and Kurdistan*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1891); *ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁸⁰ Jane Dieulafoy, *L'Orient Sous Le Voile: De Chiraz À Bagdad, 1881 1882* [The Orient Under the Veil: From Shiraz to Baghdad, 1881 1882] (Paris: Phébus, 2011).

⁵⁸¹ Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*.

⁵⁸² Tavernier, *Les Six Voyages De Turquie Et De Perse*, 1, 171.

⁵⁸³ Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, 3.

lifestyle. However, this contempt resulted in the neglect of seeking a true understanding of Muslim women and their practices, including the use of henna, which male travellers could not observe due to gender segregation.

Moreover, the analysis shows that many travellers relied on earlier accounts of women rather than observing them directly or acknowledging the challenges of accessing information in a segregated society. These repeated accounts reinforced stereotypes of Eastern women as lazy, illiterate, and subservient, with no agency or individuality.

The political and colonial context shaped the way travellers wrote, as most were funded by governments to explore the East and promote Western civilization as superior. Therefore, henna became associated with Muslim women who were portrayed as passive and in need of Western help to liberate themselves from barbaric Muslim men. Henna was often associated with lower-class or oppressed women, with its meaning and purpose in Eastern cultures being neglected.

The chapter also examines the travel accounts of Western women and their perspectives of the rituals carried out by Eastern women before and during significant milestones in feminist history. Prior to the influence of Wollstonecraft's work and the emergence of the first wave of feminism in 1848,⁵⁸⁴ many Western women travellers approached Eastern cultures with limited interest in their rituals, as evidenced by sparse mentions of practices such as henna. However, as feminism gained momentum, there emerged a notable shift in attitudes. Later, many women

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.; Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 17-18.

participated in perpetuating the Western colonial image of the East, representing Eastern women similarly to the way male travellers had done before them. The chapter explores these contrasting attitudes and their implications for cross-cultural understanding and representation.

From the late 19th century onwards, Western women travellers were more interested in experiencing adventure like their male counterparts and less interested in documenting Eastern women's cultural practices. Consequently, henna rituals by Eastern women were overlooked, even by female travellers who had greater access to observe them within the restrictions of religion and culture.

The chapter's main conclusion is that henna was not associated with Islamic religion or supernatural beliefs during these centuries. Despite numerous travel writers and the negative image created of Eastern women, henna was not recognized as a source of *baraka* or a substance used for protection from evil.

Chapter Five

Beyond Tradition: The Evolution of Henna in 20th-Century

Documentation

Introduction

The depiction of Islamic cultures in Western literature has undergone a significant transformation, largely influenced by the colonial endeavours of European powers seeking to challenge the religion and undermine the cultural traditions of these nations.⁵⁸⁵ Reflecting this pattern, the portrayal of henna in literature has also experienced notable changes. In the 20th century, there was a substantial increase in available information about henna and its applications, surpassing levels of knowledge accessible in earlier centuries. This shift can be attributed to a colonial interest in studying and comprehending the diverse aspects of oriental cultures, with the aim of emphasizing differences and asserting dominance.

To comprehensively examine the documentation of henna during this era, it is essential to incorporate a nuanced analysis within a colonial framework. This approach helps shed light on the underlying factors that contributed to a transformation in the documentation of the purpose of henna, moving beyond mere adornment to becoming associated with a belief in its protective properties against evil forces.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section delves into the documentation of henna between 1900 and 1945, a period marked by colonization. It explores the interest of academic anthropological scholars in the subject of henna, the pioneering suggestions regarding its use as a protective substance, and the subsequent impact on the perception and portrayal of henna in academic studies. This section further explores the

⁵⁸⁵ Ali, "Introduction," 1.

perspectives of male scholars and travellers, examining their perception of Eastern culture at the time and their perspective of Eastern women and of henna. The section also considers the viewpoints of female travellers, thus offering different perspectives as influenced by their unique personal situations.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the documentation of henna in the post-colonial era of the latter half of the 20th century. It examines the works of the last imperial travellers and highlights scholarly research of the time, particularly in cultural anthropology, which centred on henna as a substance associated with superstitions. This section explores the effects of early 20th century literature on the perspectives regarding henna of late 20th century male and female scholars.

The Representation of Henna in the First Half of the 20th Century

The Documentation of Henna in Male Travellers' Accounts 1900-1945:

Since the late 19th century and the period of African colonization referred to as the Scramble for Africa, there was a significant transformation in the portrayal of Islamic cultures within Western literature. This transformation can be attributed to the efforts of European colonizers, who sought to challenge Islamic religion and undermine its cultural practices, particularly those associated with African Arabs.⁵⁸⁶ The objective was to establish a division

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

between African Arabs and other ethnic groups, thereby legitimizing colonial presence in the region as providing protection for the local population against Arab Muslim leaders.⁵⁸⁷

In order to implement the "divide and rule" strategy effectively, colonial powers needed a comprehensive understanding of the diverse social groups present in the region. They aimed to highlight and exaggerate differences among these groups, based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, and geographical region. In some cases, divisions were fabricated when deemed necessary. This calculated process sought to cement and institutionalize these divisions, rendering them easier to manage and exploit for the benefit of the colonial rulers.⁵⁸⁸

During the colonial era, orientalists and anthropologists, particularly men, were motivated by the colonial mission to distort and selectively present information, thus leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes. This phenomenon becomes evident in their studies of North Africa and Asia. Throughout this period, scholars intentionally directed their focus toward nomads and pastoralists, creating a depiction of Islamic societies as static, isolated, and disconnected from external influences.⁵⁸⁹ Moreover, they frequently attributed the perceived backwardness of the culture to the Islamic religion itself. These portrayals projected a fixed and exoticized image onto Islamic societies, further reinforcing the perception of dramatic characters and solidifying an exoticized perspective.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁷ Jonathan Wrytzen, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1, 23, 94.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁸⁹ Sean McLoughlin, "Islam(s) in Context: Orientalism and The Anthropology of Muslim Societies and Cultures," *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 28, no. 3 (2007): 280.

⁵⁹⁰ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 15.

Through analysis and engagement with local customs, colonial authorities observed the significance attributed to henna and its application beyond decorative purposes. Recognizing the potency of cultural beliefs and rituals, they strategically employed this knowledge to their advantage. The colonial narrative surrounding henna began to emphasize its perceived protective qualities, portraying it as a substance capable of safeguarding individuals from malevolent forces or evil influences.

During the early 20th century, there was a gradual shift in the perception of henna, as the association of its use with beliefs in evil spirits, superstitions, and witchcraft hardened. This transformation is evident in Walter William Skeat's (1835–1912) book *Malay Magic*,⁵⁹¹ where he delves into the folklore of the Muslim Malay population and highlights the influences of other religions such as Buddhism, Brahminism, and their indigenous ancient belief system of Animism.⁵⁹² Skeat's portrayal attempts to present the Islamic religion as adaptable and without a solid foundation. He emphasizes that Malay culture encompasses a belief in sympathetic magic, resulting in a diverse tapestry of beliefs, ceremonies, magic charms, and taboos.⁵⁹³ Henna occupies a significant position within this cultural framework, entwined with rituals abundant in charms, ceremonies, and superstitions.⁵⁹⁴ However, it is important to note that Skeat does not explicitly attribute protective or magical properties to henna in his work.

⁵⁹¹ Skeat, *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 46, 86, 54.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44, 82, 132, 244, 82-300.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 374-77, 992-393.

Numerous researchers, including Richard Wilkinson,⁵⁹⁵ Murray and Rosalie Wax,⁵⁹⁶ and Richard Winstedt,⁵⁹⁷ have extensively studied this subject. Notably, Winstedt's earlier research does not include any mention of henna, but in his 1951 book *The Malay Magician*,⁵⁹⁸ he briefly alludes to its use as a protective measure against evil influences, particularly in the context of safeguarding the bride and groom.⁵⁹⁹ It is worth noting that this reference indicates the emergence of the idea of henna as a magical protective substance during a later period, rather than it being an established belief during an earlier era or a concept thoroughly observed by the scholars themselves.

According to William Roff,⁶⁰⁰ the relationship between 'mystical' beliefs and practices and orthodox Islam is closely connected to how Islam was adopted and understood by Southeast Asian societies.⁶⁰¹ Scholars now understand that the two categories of 'indigenous customs' and 'Islam' are deeply and syncretically intertwined and cannot be easily separated.

⁵⁹⁵ Richard James Wilkinson, *Malay Beliefs* (London: Luzac and Co., 1906); Richard James Wilkinson, "Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 4(180) (1957), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41503118>.

⁵⁹⁶ Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," *Current Anthropology* 4, no. 5 (1963), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2739651>.

⁵⁹⁷ Richard Winstedt, "'Karamat': Sacred Places and Persons in Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2, no. 3(92) (1924), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41559590>; Richard Winstedt, "Notes on Malay Magic," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 3(95) (1925), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560443>; Richard Winstedt, "More Notes on Malay Magic," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5, no. 2(100) (1927), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24249123>; Richard Winstedt, "The Perak Genies," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 7, no. 3(108) (1929), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41559746>; Richard Winstedt, *The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951). <https://archive.org/details/malaymagicianbei0000wins/page/n7/mode/2up?q=henna>.

⁵⁹⁸ Skeat, *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*.

⁵⁹⁹ Winstedt, *The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi*, 122-23.

⁶⁰⁰ William R Roff, "Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam & Society in Southeast Asia," *Archipel* 29 (1985).

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

They have influenced each other over time, resulting in a complex, blended cultural landscape.⁶⁰²

The particular blending of Islam and indigenous belief in certain descriptive and analytical accounts has had charged political consequences. Robert Winzeler, for example,⁶⁰³ asserts that a significant body of research on Malay beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies labelled as "magic" was largely generated to serve the colonial mission.⁶⁰⁴ Colonials perceived Islam as a threat to their control over the region. Consequently, colonial policies aimed to diminish the cultural and historical significance of Islam. Farouk Yahya,⁶⁰⁵ explains that despite Southeast Asian populations identifying as Muslims and practicing Islam, colonial authorities often downplayed the rich cultural and historical aspects associated with Islam in Malay and Javanese societies. This approach stemmed from fears that Islam could mobilize resistance against colonial rule. Instead, colonial powers promoted narratives that justified and reinforced their dominance, idealizing earlier periods in Southeast Asian history, such as the Hindu-Buddhist era, as 'golden ages,' while portraying the contemporary era shaped by Islam as decadent and in decline.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² Farouk Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts*, vol. 6, ed. Marcus Milwright, Mariam Rosser-Owen, and Lorenz Korn, *Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World*, (Boston: Brill, 2016), 31-32.

⁶⁰³ Robert Winzeler, "The Study of Malay Magic," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 139, no. 4 (1983), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27863530>.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 435-36.

⁶⁰⁵ Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts*, 6.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 31; Mark Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam* (London: Springer, 2011), 51-52.

Despite this extensive research on the subject of Malay magic, there is still a lack of comprehensive understanding, and it is likely that the topic itself does not hold a substantial position as a genuine category or dimension of Malay culture.⁶⁰⁷ Moreover, it is noteworthy that these studies often aim to depict Islam as backward, associating any resistance to colonial advancements with religious intolerance. This biased perspective overlooks the intricate complexity and richness of Eastern culture.⁶⁰⁸

The notion of henna possessing magical powers was seemingly first suggested by Edward Westermarck in his work *The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs*.⁶⁰⁹ Westermarck asserts that henna can protect against evil influences due to its distinct characteristics and colour.⁶¹⁰ However, he does not elaborate on the specific qualities or colours of henna that contribute to its perceived magical properties. This suggests that Westermarck's statement might be based on assumptions drawn from other superstitions prevalent in Morocco, such as the belief in the khamsa (hand-shaped amulet) to ward off the evil eye.⁶¹¹

Throughout his research, Westermarck extensively analyses various objects and patterns found in Moroccan culture, interpreting them as protective amulets.⁶¹² He explores a wide range of examples, including silver accessories, fabric patterns used in clothing, and even

⁶⁰⁷ Winzeler, "The Study of Malay Magic," 437.

⁶⁰⁸ Brien K. Parkinson, "Non-Economic Factors in the Economic Retardation of the Rural Malays," *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1967): 36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311583>.

⁶⁰⁹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs."

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 212-13.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 213-23.

weapons like swords and daggers.⁶¹³ For instance, when examining a square pattern found on trays (Figure 5), Westermarck suggests that the intricate design serves a deeper purpose, claiming that the shape of an eye is hidden within every motif to provide protection against the evil eye.⁶¹⁴ Westermarck consistently reinforces the idea that nothing used or adorned with patterns by Moroccans is free from superstitions. Although he does not explicitly state it, his underlying implication seems to be an association of ancient civilization with the present time, suggesting that these superstitions persist in modern Moroccan society.

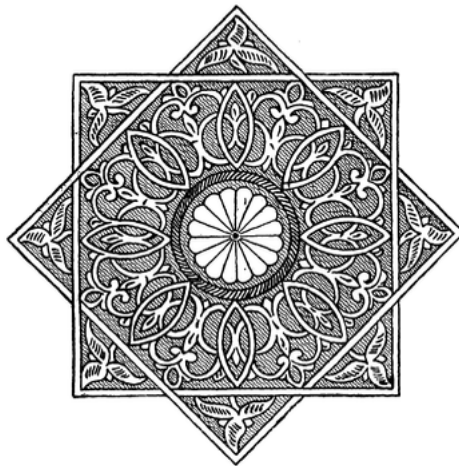


Figure 5: Double square pattern (Westermarck, 1904, p.217)

In subsequent research, Westermarck further explores the topic of henna and links it to the concept of 'baraka', explaining why henna is regarded as a proactive substance. This can be observed in his works *The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco*⁶¹⁵ and *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*.⁶¹⁶ It appears that Westermarck's intention is to provide a resolution or

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 217.

⁶¹⁵ Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," 132.

⁶¹⁶ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 113, 18, 20.

clarification for his earlier assertion of the magical properties attributed to henna due to its unique characteristics and colour.

However, it is worth noting that Westermarck's emphasis in both works seems to be primarily on the role of henna as a form of protection from evil influences, with an emphasis on superstition.⁶¹⁷ This perspective overlooks the aspect of henna as a cultural practice for body adornment. For instance, Westermarck mentions that henna is not solely seen as a means of enhancing beauty but also as a preventive measure to avoid hair loss, which is believed to occur unless henna is applied before the hair of a sacrificed animal is removed on the first day of the religious feast.⁶¹⁸

According to Westermarck, the concept of *baraka* extends to various substances used for body staining, such as antimony, walnut root, and saffron.⁶¹⁹ He also suggests that individuals including saints⁶²⁰ and shereefs⁶²¹ can possess *baraka*, but that in the case of a bride and groom, it may be temporary. Additionally, Westermarck believes that *baraka* can be attributed to numerous objects, ranging from rifles and vegetables to fruits,⁶²² honey,⁶²³ milk,⁶²⁴ butter,⁶²⁵ animals,⁶²⁶ and even animal dung,⁶²⁷ among many others. In his analysis, he

⁶¹⁷ Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," 132.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 133.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 134.

⁶²⁰ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 148. Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," 134.

⁶²¹ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 154.

⁶²² Ibid., 74, 106-13.

⁶²³ Ibid., 104.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 91, 97-101.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 103.

highlights the widespread presence of *baraka* in different aspects of Moroccan culture and traditions.

Westermarck's theory challenges the notion that possessing more *baraka* is beneficial. He posits that the interaction of *baraka* with other instances of *baraka* can result in disastrous consequences,⁶²⁸ and he even suggests that *baraka* itself can harbour elements of danger or evil.⁶²⁹ In light of these observations, Westermarck highlights the heightened vulnerability of individuals, particularly the bride and groom, who possess *baraka*, as they are exposed to significant risks from malevolent influences.⁶³⁰ This raises an intriguing question: if Moroccans are indeed highly superstitious, as Westermarck claims, would they not exercise caution when using henna to prevent further endangering the bride and groom? The contradiction in Westermarck's argument becomes evident as he states that there is "no contradiction between their *baraka* and their dangerous condition"⁶³¹ without offering a more explicit explanation. Without a clearer understanding of the specific characteristics or mechanisms through which *baraka* can be potentially harmful, his argument appears speculative, lacks a solid foundation, and exhibits a lack of understanding of the meaning of *baraka* from an Islamic perspective. Westermarck, along with other scholars who have documented Malay magic, seems to have aimed to portray the culture as backward due to religious beliefs. However, their failure to provide substantial evidence can be attributed to their limited knowledge and understanding of

⁶²⁸ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 205.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113, 21, 26-26, 79, 83, 90-91, 95-96, 205, 08, 11, 17, 45, 92,303, 60-62.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 360.

both the religion and the intricacies of the culture. Their interpretations may overlook the simple meanings of *baraka* from an Islamic perspective.

Westermarck's documentation of henna appears to reflect his intention to depict the Moroccan Islamic culture as inherently discriminatory towards women, portraying them as inferior to men. Through his observations, Westermarck emphasizes the special treatment afforded to the groom during weddings in Morocco. He notes that the groom is regarded as sacred and addressed as Sultan throughout the duration of the wedding festivities.⁶³² According to Westermarck, the application of henna serves the purpose of purifying and protecting the groom from malevolent influences, as he is believed to be exposed to supernatural dangers during this time.⁶³³ However, the portrayal of the bride is quite different. Despite also being considered sacred and possessing *baraka*, she is characterized as dangerous, and harbouring inherent evil within her.⁶³⁴ Westermarck suggests that her gaze is harmful, particularly to men.⁶³⁵

Westermarck portrays the bride in a negative light, highlighting a perception of danger associated with her presence. He describes how people from the village express relief when the bride departs, throwing stones at her to symbolize the expulsion of her perceived evil.⁶³⁶ Similarly, upon her arrival at her new village, she is also met with stone-throwing to prevent

⁶³² Ibid., 97-99, 103-04, 06-09, 13, 18, 26, 28, 55, 233-35, 74-76, 81-83-87, 329, 33, 38, 61.

⁶³³ Ibid., 118.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 360.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 176-77.

her from bringing any evil with her.⁶³⁷ Westermarck documents various ceremonies performed before the bride's arrival at her husband's home, all focused on purifying her from this perceived evil.⁶³⁸ Upon reaching her husband's home, the bride is offered henna by her mother-in-law, while the groom strikes her with a cane as a final attempt to cleanse her from her evil.⁶³⁹ Even the animal she rides during her journey is subjected to henna purification, to ensure that she has not affected it with her evil.⁶⁴⁰

Several additional travellers, including James Budgett Meakin (1866–1906)⁶⁴¹ and Albert Bartels (1911–1973),⁶⁴² provide accounts that shed light on the bridal procession, presenting a different image from that of Westermarck. In their narratives, the bride is depicted as being accompanied to her new home amidst music and a joyous atmosphere.⁶⁴³ These testimonies directly contradict Westermarck's description of the treatment of the bride as an embodiment of evil, suggesting that she should be stoned and driven away from the village. Westermarck's portrayal strips away any semblance of celebration from what is, naturally, a joyous occasion, serving his own theoretical framework rather than reflecting the reality.

Furthermore, Westermarck makes noteworthy observations regarding the restricted usage of henna among certain groups of women. He highlights that menstruating woman,⁶⁴⁴

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 186.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 189-90.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 217, 326.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 327.

⁶⁴¹ James Budgett Meakin, *The Moors: A Comprehensive Description* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1902).

⁶⁴² Albert Bartels, *Fighting the French in Morocco*, trans. Henry J. Stenning (London: Alston Rivers Ltd, 1932).

⁶⁴³ Meakin, *The Moors: A Comprehensive Description*, 368; Bartels, *Fighting the French in Morocco*, 34-34.

⁶⁴⁴ Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," 134.

divorced women, and widows, even if they plan to remarry, are discouraged from using henna.⁶⁴⁵ This restriction is attributed to the belief that the *baraka* within henna should remain untainted by them.⁶⁴⁶ Throughout his work, Westermarck consistently draws parallels between the rituals observed in Morocco and ancient Arab cultures, which strongly believed in the influence of malevolent forces. He posits that these beliefs became integrated into Islam and subsequently manifested in Moroccan customs.⁶⁴⁷ However, it is worth considering that this notion could be influenced by the colonial agenda of division and control, as Westermarck's research primarily focused on the Berber ethnic group and their traditions.

One notable issue with Westermarck's documentation, particularly regarding women's rituals, is that he heavily relies on second-hand accounts and informant testimonies without having witnessed the rituals himself. This raises questions about the reliability and accuracy of the information he presents, as discussed in Chapter Three. By basing his findings on questionable accounts, Westermarck introduces a potential bias and undermines the credibility of his observations.

Westermarck's research ventures beyond the confines of Moroccan culture as he assumes certain attitudes towards women in Islam and generalizes the rituals he encountered. He makes sweeping statements, such as claiming that "Islam does not look upon women with friendly eyes,"⁶⁴⁸ and depicts women as depraved, defective, associated with the devil,

⁶⁴⁵ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 330-33.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco," 181-82.

⁶⁴⁸ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 338.

possessed by evil spirits, and excluded from God's mercy,⁶⁴⁹ and in doing so reflects cultural essentialism and reinforces negative stereotypes.

Moreover, this broader approach brings about concerns regarding the generalization of popular rituals to encompass all Muslims across West Asia to East Africa, without taking into account the distinct characteristics of each culture. By neglecting the nuances and uniqueness of individual cultural practices, Westermarck's generalizations risk oversimplification and undermine the rich diversity within the Muslim world.

Arthur Tremearne (1877–1915),⁶⁵⁰ a Major in the British army and an anthropologist known for his work on incest taboos, shares a similar perspective to Westermarck. Tremearne, with a particular interest in the Hausa ethnic group, sought to uncover ancient traditions and beliefs within African and Muslim cultures.⁶⁵¹ In his book entitled *The Ban of the Bori*,⁶⁵² Tremearne delves into the Hausa people's belief in demons as is prevalent in North and West Africa. His central argument revolves around the notion that Hausawi Muslims are influenced by ancient Totemism beliefs, which he believes results in the Hausa being under the complete control of malevolent spirits from birth until death.⁶⁵³

Tremearne highlights the taboo surrounding henna for unmarried Hausa girls. According to him, use of henna by unmarried girls is considered forbidden, as it is believed

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*.

⁶⁵¹ A. C. Haddon, "Major A. J. N. Tremearne," *Folklore* 26, no. 4 (1915): 431, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1915.9718903>.

⁶⁵² Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 36.

that such an act imitates the Bori Shamowa, a demon-like entity that then condemns them to sickness and death.⁶⁵⁴ However, Tremearne's sole focus on a belief in evil spirits leads him to overlook cultural customs that restrict unmarried girls from applying henna. In a seemingly contradictory move, Tremearne provides a sketch of an unmarried girl's hands adorned with henna (Figure 6). Confusingly, this contradicts his earlier statement that young Hausa girls are prohibited from using henna due to their fear of the Bori.⁶⁵⁵

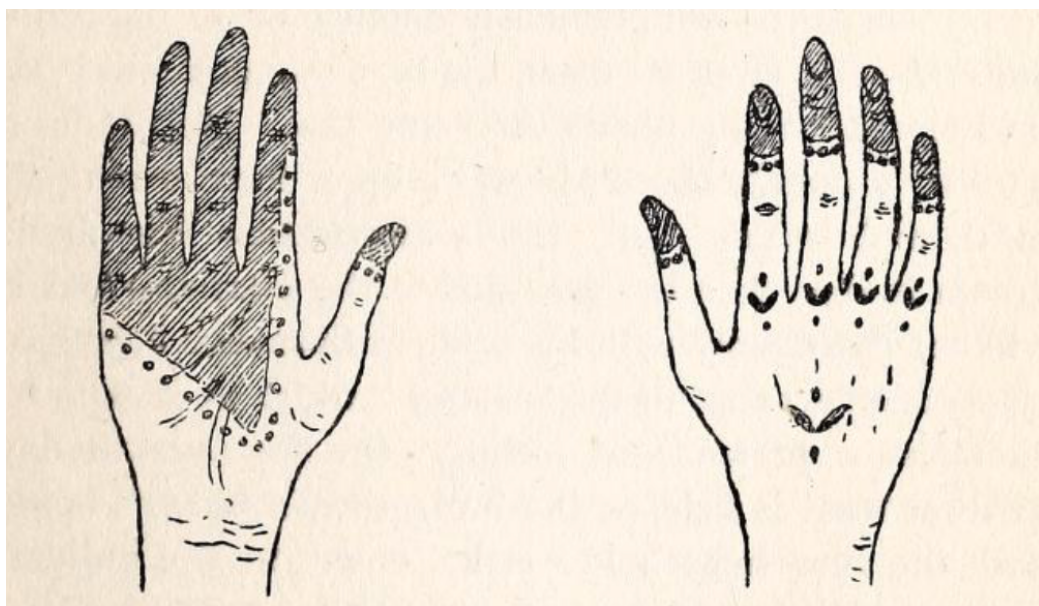


Figure 6: Front and back view of henna decorated hands (Tremearne, 1914, p.115)

Furthermore, Tremearne puts forth a belief held by the Hausa people that every person possesses a sexual spirit from the opposite sex, and these spirits are highly protective of their human partners. As a result, it is believed that the bride and groom must appear as if they are forced to apply henna and resist the idea of marriage. The belief is that when henna is applied,

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

it serves as a protective measure against any harm caused by their sexual Bori.⁶⁵⁶ This account shares similarities with Westermarck's observations on jinn abducting brides.⁶⁵⁷ However, Tremearne goes a step further by introducing a sexualized dimension to the relationship between humans and evil spirits.

Tremearne claims that henna possesses the power to preserve against evil.⁶⁵⁸ However, similar to Westermarck, he fails to provide an explanation for what imbues henna with this protective ability. Moreover, the information Tremearne presents regarding the Hausa's use of henna in relation to the Bori lacks verification from other scholarly sources. Therefore, it becomes crucial to scrutinize the methodology he employed in gathering his data.

Tremearne collected his data during a period of four months from the Hausa residing in Tunis and Tripoli, where the majority of the population consisted of slaves.⁶⁵⁹ The population being initially oppressed and easily intimidated by white Western colonists may have influenced the data collected. Additionally, Tremearne's choice of interview location raises questions. Instead of directly observing and interviewing people in their own surroundings, he opted to conduct interviews at the British consulate in Tripoli, a location that might have intimidated interviewees and may even have led to confirmation of preconceived notions.⁶⁶⁰ The meetings may have seemed more like interrogations than genuine interviews.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁵⁷ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 160.

⁶⁵⁸ Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*, 118, 75.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 13, 25.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

Furthermore, Tremearne often uses a condescending tone toward the culture and people he studies. For example, he mentions attempting to comprehend the Hausas' way of thinking or "to think black."⁶⁶¹ He also acknowledges that his book might seem disorganized to Western readers, but he intentionally presents the information as it is perceived in the Hausa people's minds—distorted and unorganized—to depict their way of life accurately.⁶⁶²

It becomes evident, when comparing Tremearne's earlier works on Hausa culture, such as *Hausa Superstitions and Customs*⁶⁶³ and *Some Austral-African Notes and Anecdotes*,⁶⁶⁴ that henna is mentioned, but primarily in the context of body adornment rather than paranormal beliefs.⁶⁶⁵ It is highly plausible that Tremearne was influenced by Westermarck's observations on *The Great Feast in Morocco*,⁶⁶⁶ as he references the works in the appendix of his book when discussing the use of henna to stain animals in Morocco.⁶⁶⁷ However, it is important to note that Tremearne does not explicitly credit Westermarck for the notion of henna as a protective substance.

The desire to depict the Orient, particularly the Muslim world, as antiquated and archaic through expedited studies of their religion, beliefs, and customs has resulted in the editing and

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk*.

⁶⁶⁴ Arthur John Newman Tremearne, *Some Austral-African Notes and Anecdotes* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, LTD, 1913). <https://archive.org/details/someaustralafri00trem/mode/1up>.

⁶⁶⁵ Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk*, 82, 85, 87-88, 291; Tremearne, *Some Austral-African Notes and Anecdotes*, 212.

⁶⁶⁶ Westermarck, "The Popular Ritual of the Great Feast in Morocco."

⁶⁶⁷ Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*.

republishing of Ja'far Sharif's book *Qanoon-e-Islam*⁶⁶⁸ almost a century later. This resurgence of information on practices that may have existed a century earlier is employed to deny the Orient's rightful claims to land, self-determination, language, and cultural knowledge.⁶⁶⁹

The transformation of the representation of henna in the book is exemplified in William Crooke's (1832–1919) edition entitled *Islam in India or The Qanun-I-Islam*.⁶⁷⁰ This revised edition goes beyond being a simple reissue and instead constitutes a significant overhaul of the original text.⁶⁷¹ A comparison between the two editions reveals notable differences, indicating that Crooke took considerable liberties in his revisions.⁶⁷² Of particular note is Crooke's treatment of henna in his edition. He asserts that henna attracts evil spirits but that it can also be used as a protective charm against evil influences during weddings.⁶⁷³ In contrast, the first edition makes no mention of the use of henna as a protective charm in weddings nor that it attracts evil spirits. Such a portrayal suggests a distinct shift in the Western perception of henna properties.

Additionally, Crooke endeavours to correct what he deems as Sharif's erroneous information on the burning of henna seeds for protection.⁶⁷⁴ He replaces Sharif's reference to

⁶⁶⁸ Sharif, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India: Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death*.

⁶⁶⁹ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

⁶⁷⁰ Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*.

⁶⁷¹ Vatuk, "Shurreef, Herklots, Crooke, and Qanoon-E-Islam: Constructing an Ethnography of 'the Moosulmans of India'," 6.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷³ Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*, 19, 66.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

Ispund seeds with *Peganum harmala* seeds,⁶⁷⁵ ostensibly to showcase his superior knowledge of Indian culture compared to that of a native Indian. This act of revisionism by Crooke transforms the book from a purely descriptive work to one that espouses his own interpretations and biases. Furthermore, he states, "the work in its new form was to be made more useful to students of the Musalmans of India, it was necessary to rearrange and partially rewrite it,"⁶⁷⁶ thereby reflecting a Western discourse in which knowledge about the Orient is collected, classified, represented to the West, and then returned to the colonized Orient.⁶⁷⁷ Moreover, he transforms the book from a descriptive ethnography limited to a specific time and location into a timeless and comparative ethnography. As a result, the new version includes customs and beliefs from diverse cultures that may deviate from or contradict Islamic teachings.⁶⁷⁸

Maurice Vonderheyden (1898–1973)⁶⁷⁹ is another significant figure in the documentation of henna, being the first researcher to specifically delve into the topic. Unfortunately, little information is available about Vonderheyden himself. However, his study involved conducting field research in Algeria and heavily relying on accounts from travellers who mentioned henna.⁶⁸⁰ His work, entitled *Le henné chez les musulmans de l'Afrique du Nord*,⁶⁸¹ focuses on the Muslim population of North Africa and generalizes the use of henna to

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., xxiv.

⁶⁷⁷ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

⁶⁷⁸ Vatuk, "Shurreef, Herklots, Crooke, and Qanoon-E-Islam: Constructing an Ethnography of 'the Moosulmans of India'," 19.

⁶⁷⁹ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord."

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

all Muslims from Malaysia to Morocco,⁶⁸² without considering the cultural and racial differences that exist, grouping them all under the umbrella of Islam. His data are based on only three Algerian informants, which he deems sufficient to apply to all Muslims in North Africa.⁶⁸³

In the opening paragraph of his work, Vonderheyden attributes the use of henna to Prophet Mohammed and considers it a plant blessed by Allah.⁶⁸⁴ This religious significance in Islam grants henna respect and makes it an integral aspect of tradition and magic.⁶⁸⁵ He goes on to claim that the Prophet dyed his beard with henna,⁶⁸⁶ despite the lack of any evidence supporting this assertion.

According to Vonderheyden, although henna can be produced in an industrial setting, women prefer to grind it at home, speculating that this is done to preserve its magical qualities.⁶⁸⁷ He asserts that the entire population believes that industrially produced henna should be avoided; otherwise, henna ceremonies would lose part of their value and charm.⁶⁸⁸ However, this disregards the fact that people are often seeking pure, high-quality henna rather than the kind that is produced and mixed with other plants solely for the purpose of increasing profit.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.

Throughout his research, Vonderheyden connects henna to superstition. For instance, he claims that women only use henna on Mondays or Fridays because these days are considered auspicious, while other days bring bad luck.⁶⁸⁹ Additionally, he states that henna artists in Morocco are women who possess expertise in magic and casting spells.⁶⁹⁰ According to Vonderheyden, every aspect of henna, from the plant itself and its harvesting, to the various occasions for which it is used, is imbued with magical purpose.⁶⁹¹ However, upon examining the main sources of information provided by Vonderheyden, it becomes apparent that he heavily relied on Westermarck's theory that henna is a protective and magical substance, either as a first hand reference or through secondary sources.

Henna in the early 20th century was seldom mentioned by male orientalists, except in relation to magic and supernatural beliefs. Travelers such as Melville Hilton-Simpson (1881–1938),⁶⁹² who spent seven years studying the Berber people in Algeria,⁶⁹³ only briefly mentions henna in his book *Among the Hill-folk of Algeria*.⁶⁹⁴ In this passage, he notes that henna was used by women who possessed knowledge of magic, known as the "Sorceress of the Moon."⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁹² Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Among the Hill-Folk of Algeria: Journeys Among the Shawia of the Aurès Mountains*, ed. H. T. C (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1921).

<https://archive.org/details/amonghillfolkofa00hiltuoft/mode/2up>.

⁶⁹³ "Obituary: Mr. M. W. Hilton-Simpson," *Nature* 141, no. 3570 (1938): 587,

<https://doi.org/10.1038/141587a0>.

⁶⁹⁴ Hilton-Simpson, *Among the Hill-Folk of Algeria: Journeys Among the Shawia of the Aurès Mountains*, 47.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

Hilton-Simpson paints a vivid picture of this sorceress conducting her witchcraft at the cemetery at night. According to his account, she would dig up the bones of old human corpses and burn them in a fire. She would then proceed to stain one eyelid with antimony, one lip with walnut bark, and one hand and one foot with henna.⁶⁹⁶ However, there seems to be a contradiction in his description. Unlike antimony and walnut bark, which provide instant dyeing effects, henna requires hours of waiting for it to dry and develop its desired colour. Furthermore, the application of henna would restrict the movement of the elderly woman, hindering her ability to perform her alleged witchcraft effectively. This raises questions about the practicality of such a practice and its likely compatibility with the rituals described by Hilton-Simpson.

Numerous male travellers ventured to Africa and Asia during the colonial era with the objective of studying culture and religion. In their accounts, many of these travellers make mention of henna, primarily emphasizing its use for adornment. Richard Wilkinson,⁶⁹⁷ a chronicler of Malay culture, documents henna as a means of beautification and attributed its adoption to Arab influence.⁶⁹⁸ Isaac Adams⁶⁹⁹ states that henna is considered “an emblem of joy” in Persia,⁷⁰⁰ further illustrating its significance.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ Richard James Wilkinson, *The Incidents of Malay Life* (Kuala Lumpur: Printed by J. Russell at The F.M.S Government Press, 1908).

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 17, 29-30, 37, 64-65, 54, 77.

⁶⁹⁹ Isaac Adams, *Persia by a Persian: Personal Experiences, Manners, Customs, Habits, Religious and Social Life in Persia* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Publishing Office, 1900), 145, 74, 78, 80, 228.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 228.

A multitude of travellers and scholars also note the prevalence of henna use in Morocco. Henna is described as a form of decoration and cosmetics by Samuel Bensusan (1872–1958),⁷⁰¹ Lawrence Harris (1885–1970),⁷⁰² Edward Powell(1879–1957),⁷⁰³ Bartels,⁷⁰⁴ Will Durant (1885–1981),⁷⁰⁵ Hedley Atkins (1905–1983),⁷⁰⁶ and James Budgett Meakin (1866–1906),⁷⁰⁷ who extensively studied Morocco.⁷⁰⁸ John Fraser (1868–1936),⁷⁰⁹ renowned for his comprehensive research on North African women, elucidates the purpose of henna as enhancing the beauty of their hands.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, John Horne conveys that henna is considered a sign of joy and seduction,⁷¹¹ playing a pivotal role in a Moroccan woman's life.⁷¹² The captivating designs created with henna are particularly alluring to a bridegroom when he first lays eyes on his bride.⁷¹³

These accounts, among numerous others by male travellers, challenge the prevailing notion that henna primarily serves as protection against evil influences. These testimonies

⁷⁰¹ Samuel L. Bensusan, *Morocco* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1904), 117.

⁷⁰² Lawrence Harris, *With Mulai Hafid at Fez: Behind the Scenes in Morocco* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1909), 176, 80-81.

⁷⁰³ Edward Alexander Powell, *In Barbary* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926), 33, 120, 231.

⁷⁰⁴ Bartels, *Fighting the French in Morocco*, 20, 34.

⁷⁰⁵ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), 85. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.76588/mode/2up?q=evil+eye>.

⁷⁰⁶ H. J. B. Atkins, "The North African Background: III. Private Life," *African Affairs* 47, no. 187 (1948): 110-11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/718660>.

⁷⁰⁷ James Budgett Meakin, *Land of the Moors* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1901), 45; Meakin, *The Moors: A Comprehensive Description*, 70-71, 113, 53, 365-67, 72, 74; James Budgett Meakin, *Life in Morocco and Glimpses Beyond* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1905), 84-85, 88-89, 100. <https://archive.org/details/lifeinmoroccogli00meakrich/page/n9/mode/2up>.

⁷⁰⁸ Meakin, *Life in Morocco and Glimpses Beyond*, 84; Meakin, *The Moors: A Comprehensive Description*, 70.

⁷⁰⁹ John Foster Fraser, *The Land of Veiled Women: Some Wanderings in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco* (London: Cassell and Co., 1911), 17, 50, 88, 102, 64, 99, 251.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁷¹¹ John Horne, *Many Days In Morocco* (London: Philip Allan and Co, 1925).

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*

demonstrate that the idea of henna as a protective agent was predominantly propagated by Westermarck and subsequently adopted by others. This notion sought to present a new, updated image of the Orient, depicting it as steeped in superstitions that leave their mark on the skin of its inhabitants.

Another important element of creating the image of the Orient is the use of photography to produce postcards. This is an art form accessible to all classes, unlike orientalist paintings that were accessible to rich people only.⁷¹⁴ Postcards can provide information about the time and offers a snapshot of an action.⁷¹⁵ Naomi Schor⁷¹⁶ explains such a function of postcards from the beginning of the century stating: "The turn-of-the century pictorial postcard . . . functioned like a cross between the modern print and communication media, something like CNN, People, Sports Illustrated, and National Geographic, all rolled into one. . . I will argue, a forerunner of these lighter modes of social control."⁷¹⁷

Marie-Christine Massé⁷¹⁸ suggests that the photographers of the era captured a small part of the territory which serve to forge a certain idea of the colony through their distribution in the mainland.⁷¹⁹ To understand the depiction of Orientalism on such postcards it is important

⁷¹⁴ Gilles Teulié, "Orientalism and the British Picture Postcard Industry: Popularizing the Empire in Victorian and Edwardian Homes," *Cahiers Victoriens & Édouardiens*, no. 89 (2019): 1, 3, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.5178>.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Naomi Schor, "'Cartes Postales': Representing Paris 1900," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992), <https://doi.org/10.1086/448630>.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 193.

⁷¹⁸ Marie-Christine Massé, "Etude Des Cartes Postales Des Antilles Françaises Et De La Guyane Des Années 1900-1920," [Study of Postcards From the French Antilles and Guyana From the 1900s-1920s.] *The French Review* 80, no. 2 (2006).

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 372.

to consider the pre-Said definition, according to Graham Huggan.⁷²⁰ Orientalism refers to an artistic movement championed by Western artists and writers who ventured to the East, depicting their own interpretations of the Orient through descriptions, drawings, and paintings. This artistic expression was characterized by the polarizing rhetoric of European Orientalism, emphasizing the stark contrast between the East and the West. Within this context, Orientalism encompasses a broader notion of exoticism, as defined by Huggan: "Exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to immanent mystery"⁷²¹

The development of Western photographic imagery of women in the Middle East is characterized by three interrelated themes, according to Sarah Graham-Brown.⁷²² Firstly, photography emerged during the era of European imperialism, influencing how women in the region were portrayed. Secondly, the cultural relationship between Europe and the Middle East shaped these depictions with unique assumptions and stereotypes. Thirdly, there was a tension between orientalist representations of Middle Eastern women and evolving European attitudes towards women's roles. Throughout these themes, unequal power dynamics between colonizers

⁷²⁰ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 187.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷²² Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

and the colonized, the creators and subjects of orientalist fantasies, and between genders, underpin the portrayal of women in Western photography of the Middle East.⁷²³

Western photography of Eastern Muslim women in the East often follows a pattern seen in photographic depictions of people from other regions, where women are portrayed as exotic and erotic objects of the European gaze. However, there are distinct characteristics in the development of this style of photography for Muslim women. Many of these images have become clichéd, drawing inspiration from established themes found in orientalist paintings that emerged during the 19th century. Unlike painting, photography is considered a representation of reality, offering a perceived proof of how people in the East appeared and behaved.⁷²⁴

Marina Warner's analysis of the portrayal of the female nude in Western art suggests that photographs such as Figure 7 and Figure 8, featuring nude and semi-nude North African women, symbolize sin, danger, and corruption.⁷²⁵ Due to the inaccessibility of ordinary women, these photographs were often taken in studios.⁷²⁶ Every element within the photographs carries meaning, including the props used such as the background, accessories, facial tattoos, and henna, all of which are symbolic of their culture and religion.

According to Graham-Brown, these types of images create an environment that both the photographer and many viewers consider appropriate.⁷²⁷ The women in the photographs

⁷²³ Ibid., 4.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 295.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 40.

present themselves as culturally sexual objects, isolated and portrayed as weak and obedient to the Western viewer. This reinforces the notion, prevalent in Western perception, that Islam is the primary determinant of various aspects of life in the Orient. Such visual narratives oversimplify the complex realities of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and social classes present in the Orient, reducing them to a narrow lens of religious influence.⁷²⁸

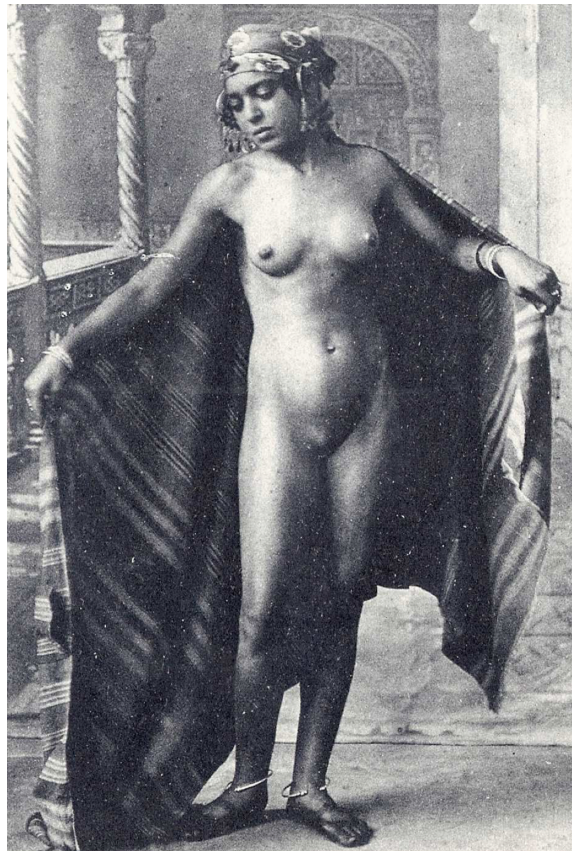


Figure 7: Nude North African girl, 1910-1920 (Cartwright-Jones, 2008, p.33)

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 6.

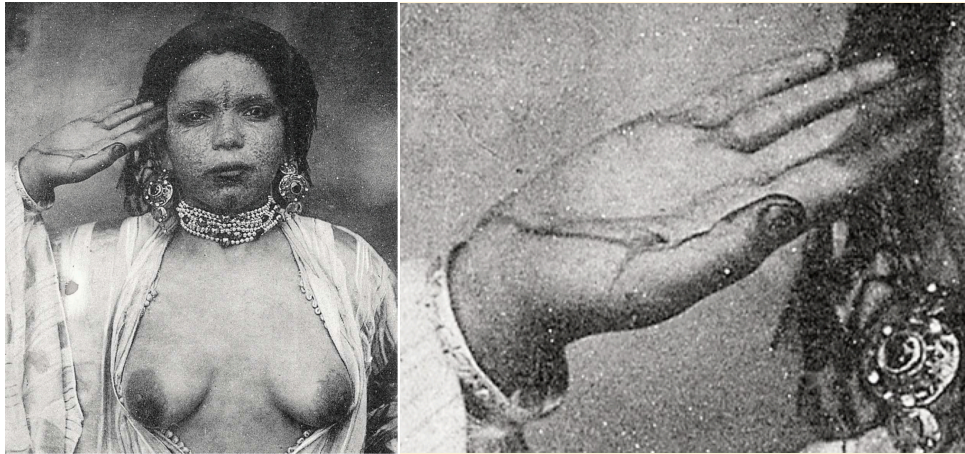


Figure 8: Moroccan women with henna patterns 1900-1910 (Cartwright-Jones, 2008, p.22)

The Documentation of Henna in Female Travellers' Accounts 1900-1950:

The changing social and cultural circumstances experienced by women in the Western world motivated them to embark on various journeys. This may have been because of financial necessity, the need for a fresh start, religious reasons, health concerns, romantic interests, or simply a genuine curiosity about the world.⁷²⁹ When we examine the accounts of women travellers, a distinct contrast in tone becomes apparent when compared to the narratives provided by their male counterparts regarding the Orient, its culture, and practices like henna.

Sara Mills argues that this disparity arises due to the limitations imposed on women travellers, preventing them from adopting the imperialistic voice commonly utilized by their male counterparts. Instead, women focused on describing individuals they encountered rather than making sweeping assumptions or generalizations about entire races based on isolated

⁷²⁹ Robinson-Tomsett, *Women, Travel and Identity: Journeys by Rail and Sea, 1870-1940*, 1.

experiences. Consequently, their writings tend to convey a more tentative approach in contrast to the confident assertions made by male travellers.⁷³⁰

Reina Lewis and Nancy Micklewright⁷³¹ highlight that regardless of whether women writers saw themselves as expanding or challenging existing orientalist knowledge, they recognized that their representations of the Orient were always interconnected with a broader discursive framework. For Orientalism, as a concept, to establish its authority, it relied on the circulation and repetition of Western knowledge about the Orient. Women writers understood that their accounts of the Orient did not exist in isolation; rather, they were part of a citational discourse, drawing on and influenced by existing Western knowledge about the Orient.⁷³²

It is indeed important to recognize that Western women travellers often occupied a secondary and supporting position in the depiction of colonialism. Despite actively engaging with and writing about the colonial situation, their accounts did not receive the same level of credibility as those produced by male orientalists. The patriarchal biases deeply ingrained in society hindered the acknowledgment and validation of women's perspectives, resulting in their contributions being marginalized and assigned a lower status within the colonial discourse. This systemic gender bias further reinforced the unequal power dynamics and limited

⁷³⁰ Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, 3.

⁷³¹ Reina Lewis and Nancy Micklewright, "Introduction: Writing Change: Middle Eastern and Western Women in Dialogue," in *Gender, Modernity and Liberty: Middle Eastern and Western Womens Writings: A Critical Sourcebook* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006).

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 3.

opportunities for women to shape and influence the narratives surrounding colonialism and Orientalism.

In the early 20th century, the mention of henna by Western women travellers was relatively scarce. However, among those who did mention it, a few found the subject of Eastern women captivating and took great care in offering detailed accounts of their lifestyles, cultures, and rituals. Regrettably, a significant number of women travellers perpetuated narratives that predominantly portrayed oriental women as subjects confined to the harem. These narratives, fuelled by market demand and often sensationalized, played a decisive role in shaping the books that were published and sold, irrespective of the genuine lived experiences of Eastern women.⁷³³

It is disheartening to acknowledge that these narratives contributed to the reinforcement of stereotypes and the objectification of Eastern women, further perpetuating prevailing orientalist perspectives. By focusing primarily on the harem and indulging in sensationalism, the intricate and diverse realities of Eastern women's lives were continuing to be overlooked or misrepresented. However, it is important to recognize that not all women travellers contributed to such narratives. Some writers were genuinely committed to providing a more nuanced and respectful understanding of Eastern women, striving to illuminate their multifaceted experiences and challenge the prevailing stereotypes. Their efforts played a vital

⁷³³ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, 12.

role in expanding the representation and recognition of Eastern women beyond the confines of harem-centric narratives.

One notable woman traveller is Demetra Kenneth Brown (1877–1946),⁷³⁴ who hailed from an ethnic Greek Ottoman family and spent her early years on the island of Prinkipo near Istanbul.⁷³⁵ She emigrated to the United States of America in 1895.⁷³⁶ In 1909, Brown published her book *Haremlik*.⁷³⁷ Firstly, she sought to transform her experiences in the Ottoman Empire into a marketable commodity.⁷³⁸ Secondly, she aimed to rectify Western misconceptions about Turkey and Turkish women. The book draws upon her childhood memories and a brief visit to Turkey in 1900.⁷³⁹

While Brown presents herself in the book as a modern, independent, westernized woman,⁷⁴⁰ she was aware that her friends from the Muslim elite enjoyed more material comforts than she, even though she possessed greater personal freedoms.⁷⁴¹ Contrary to earlier scholars' depictions of segregation and oppression, Brown acknowledges that her friends' lives did not align with such portrayals. However, for feminist writers like Brown, modernity was equated with Western lifestyles, leading to a tendency to dismiss or view Eastern cultural

⁷³⁴ Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women*.

⁷³⁵ Houghton Mifflin, "Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946): Haremlik Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women," in *Gender, Modernity and Liberty: Middle Eastern and Western Womens Writings: A Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Reina Lewis and Nancy Micklewright (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 134.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women*.

⁷³⁸ Mifflin, "Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946): Haremlik Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women," 134.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women*, 12-13.

⁷⁴¹ Mifflin, "Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946): Haremlik Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women," 134.

practices as outdated or "old school." This perspective becomes evident in her mention of henna, which she associates with women living in strict traditional households.⁷⁴²

These associations of henna with undesirable or outdated situations have negative implications for the documentation of the use and history of henna. By solely considering henna as a relic of the past and disregarding its contemporary significance from the perspective of those who use it, Brown inadvertently reinforces the opinions of others, reflecting her own shift in perception after living in a Western society where she came to view henna as old-fashioned, and an object of the past.

Many female travellers in the early 20th century continued to perpetuate stereotypical views of Eastern women, regardless of the cultural context or social class they encountered. They took on the role of adventurers, emulating the earlier male travellers of past centuries. Jean Pommerol (1859–1921),⁷⁴³ a French traveller, stands as a notable example, providing a more comprehensive account of Arab women in the Sahara in her book *Among the Women of the Sahara*.⁷⁴⁴ Pommerol discusses henna more frequently than female travellers of earlier periods, noting that Arab women in the Sahara adorn their hands and feet with henna, while girls in towns and villages display stained fingernails.⁷⁴⁵ She also highlights the association of henna with women of questionable reputation, such as dancers and sex workers.⁷⁴⁶ Pommerol's

⁷⁴² Brown, *Haremlik: Some Pages From the Life of Turkish Women*, 24, 71.

⁷⁴³ Pommerol, *Among the Women of the Sahara*.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 37, 62, 100.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 246.

book also includes one of the earliest photographs depicting a woman with henna-covered hands (Figure 9). However, Pommerol overlooks the fact that during that time, there were limited cosmetic substances available, making henna one of the most desirable forms of adornment. Both higher-class and lower-class women adorned themselves with henna, indicating that its use was not strictly limited to one social class.



Figure 9: A professional dancer with henna (Pommerol, 1900, p.245)

Pommerol distinguishes herself as the first female traveller to describe the application technique used on brides, specifically focusing on the practice of covering the bride's hands with linen and coating her fingers with candle grease before applying henna. Once the henna dried, the linen and grease were removed, leaving pale patches on the hands.⁷⁴⁷ Furthermore, Pommerol sheds light on a custom tied to brides prior to their weddings, symbolizing the transition from freedom to the constraints of married life and being "under the control of her master."⁷⁴⁸ She refers to this custom as "stealing henna."⁷⁴⁹ During this ritual, the bride, accompanied by her friends and children, playfully visited various households, requesting henna while announcing their presence through laughter and song. Those who welcomed them would proceed to adorn the girls' hands and feet with henna.⁷⁵⁰ Pommerol vividly describes a group of girls participating in this tradition, depicting them as a "little party of fugitives, half afraid of their own liberty, gliding along the grey walls, disappearing in the dark, gloomy alleys."⁷⁵¹ In emphasizing the limitations experienced by these women, Pommerol's perspective reflects her Western background rather than solely focusing on the joyous celebration between the bride and her neighbours in the village.

From the very beginning of the book, Eastern women and their culture are negatively portrayed, particularly in Nancy Bell's translator's notes.⁷⁵² Bell discusses the challenges

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 205-06.

⁷⁴⁸⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁴⁹⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 201-04.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁵² Nancy Bell, "Translator's Notes," in *Among the Women of the Sahara* (London: London Hurst and Blackett, 1900).

Pommerol encountered while navigating the intricate cultural complexities and beliefs of these women. Despite facing hostility and occasionally being forced to retreat, Pommerol's courage and determination are acknowledged by Bell, who admires her for venturing into the traditionally closed-off homes of North Africans. Pommerol managed to form friendships with some of the local inhabitants. Bell also highlights Pommerol's meticulous documentation of her experiences, using vivid descriptions, sketches, and photographs. However, capturing these photographs proved to be a difficult task. The women of the Sahara strongly believed that cameras were evil and taking their portraits was seen as a punishable offense.⁷⁵³

While Bell portrays Pommerol as a daring adventurer bravely facing challenging circumstances,⁷⁵⁴ it is important to consider the perspective of the Sahara people themselves. They may have viewed Pommerol as an outsider and a French colonizer intruding upon their lives, expecting a warm welcome from each individual. Any signs of rejection or reluctance on their part could be conveniently explained away as mere superstition.

It is indeed a rarity to encounter Western travellers who possess a deep and comprehensive understanding of Eastern cultures, gained through extensive first-hand experiences and a balanced perspective. Emily Keene (1849–1944)⁷⁵⁵ and Evelyn Cobbold (1867–1963)⁷⁵⁶ stand out as remarkable examples. Both women engaged with Eastern cultures on a personal level, with Keene being married to the Sharif of Wazan, a powerful regional

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Keene, *My Life Story*.

⁷⁵⁶ Evelyn Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca* (London: John Murray, 1934).

governor in Morocco,⁷⁵⁷ and Cobbold, a Scottish woman who embraced Islam from an early age,⁷⁵⁸ demonstrating a natural inclination and profound interest in the religion.⁷⁵⁹ Their personal connections to the East allowed Keene and Cobbold to present an authentic portrayal of henna, drawing from their vast knowledge of the people and the religion that they documented based on their own experiences.

Keene spent an impressive seven decades in Morocco, from 1870 until her death in 1943.⁷⁶⁰ Her marriage to the Sharif of Wazan fuelled her fascination with Moroccan customs and beliefs, strengthening her profound connection to the culture and its intricacies.⁷⁶¹ Despite being a devoted Christian and a loyal supporter of the British Empire,⁷⁶² Keene offers a unique and nuanced account of Moroccan culture and the use of henna, setting herself apart from male travellers and scholars like Westermarck.

Keene's profound knowledge and prolonged interactions with Moroccan women allows her to shed a realistic light on the purpose of using henna from the standpoint of the women who employed it. In her book *My Life Story* in which she documents Moroccan culture and

⁷⁵⁷ Francisco Javier Martínez, "A Woman's Grace: Gender, Imperialism and Religion in Emily Keene's Philanthropic Activities in Morocco, 1873-1941," *Medicine, Conflict, and Survival* 36, no. 1 (2020): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2019.1703528>.

⁷⁵⁸ *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, 2nd ed., ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Rose Pipes (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 91. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/new-biographical-dictionary-of-scottish-women/E7407E5276D61ED07E2A9EBA962D9BE5>.

⁷⁵⁹ Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, xiii.

⁷⁶⁰ Lahoucine Aammari, "A Woman Traveller in the Moorish Sanctum: A Look at Emily Keene, Shareefa of Wazzan's *My Life Story*," *Prague Journal of English Studies* 6, no. 1 (2017): 11, 23, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/pjes-2017-0001>.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁶² Francisco Javier Martínez, "A Woman's Grace: Gender, Imperialism and Religion in Emily Keene's Philanthropic Activities in Morocco, 1873-1941," *Medicine, Conflict, and Survival* 36, no. 1 (2020): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2019.1703528>.

rituals, she notably omits any mention of henna being used solely for *baraka*, purification, or protection from evil forces, despite acknowledging these beliefs.⁷⁶³ This lack of association between henna and supernatural beliefs contradicts and weakens the accounts of Westermarck and other male travelers who suggest that henna was primarily used for protection.

Keene provides a detailed account of the use of henna for newborn babies, emphasizing its role in strengthening their bones and skin through a mixture of henna powder and oil.⁷⁶⁴ In contrast, Westermarck's analysis primarily focuses on henna as a protective measure against supernatural dangers, paying little attention to its practical applications. He merely mentions that henna "may also serve other purposes,"⁷⁶⁵ emphasizing his own theories.

Furthermore, in stark contrast to male travelers and scholars who relied on secondhand experiences from informants, Keene distinguishes herself through her firsthand encounters with henna. Notably, she documents her personal application of henna to stain her feet, which provided both skin protection and a cooling effect during her travels.⁷⁶⁶ In witnessing the intricate adornment of brides, her extensive documentation encompasses various techniques employed in the use of henna.⁷⁶⁷ This record highlights yet another discrepancy between Keene and Westermarck, particularly in their explanations for the practice of covering the bride's face. While Westermarck proposes that the bride's gaze and sight are deemed dangerous,⁷⁶⁸ Keene,

⁷⁶³ Keene, *My Life Story*, 20, 68, 76, 146-47, 206, 11, 308, 10.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17, 68.

⁷⁶⁵ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 2, 383.

⁷⁶⁶ Keene, *My Life Story*, 127.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 163, 89.

drawing from her close observations of numerous brides, including her own daughters-in-law, emphasizes that the bride's face was covered as a mark of etiquette and extreme shyness, regardless of the bride's emotions. Keene's direct engagement with henna allows her to present a more comprehensive and authentic account of its usage, surpassing the limitations associated with relying solely on secondhand information. Her firsthand experiences provide valuable insights into the practical applications and cultural significance of henna, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this tradition.

As for Cobbold, her religious beliefs guided her in distinguishing between cultural superstitions, popular beliefs, and true religious practices. Her early travel writings include *Wayfarers in the Libyan Desert*⁷⁶⁹ and *Pilgrimage to Mecca*,⁷⁷⁰ which is considered a valuable record of the Hajj as it documents and describes the experience from a woman's view from the inside out.⁷⁷¹

Within these writings, Cobbold briefly mentions the use of henna, predominantly in the context of staining nails and appreciating the beauty of the women she encountered.⁷⁷² However, her contributions extend beyond mere observations. Cobbold's remarkable open-mindedness enabled her to genuinely comprehend and appreciate the cultural nuances and lifestyles of Eastern societies. She took it upon herself to challenge and dispel prevailing

⁷⁶⁹ Frances Gordon Alexander and Evelyn Cobbold, *Wayfarers in the Libyan Desert* (New York; London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912).

⁷⁷⁰ Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, 24.

⁷⁷¹ Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 41.

⁷⁷² Alexander and Cobbold, *Wayfarers in the Libyan Desert*, 124, 250.

misconceptions in the Western world regarding the harem,⁷⁷³ utilizing her extensive knowledge of the religion, language, and culture to refute paranormal beliefs associated with henna and other aspects.

Furthermore, Cobbold makes sincere efforts to explain the concept of jinn from a cultural perspective, simplifying it for English readers while ensuring that the subject is treated respectfully without undermining the religion and culture it derived from.⁷⁷⁴ Through her travel writings, she aimed to bridge the gap between the East and the West, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for the rich diversity of Eastern traditions.

Western female feminist travellers used oriental women to gain power, as argued by Chandra Mohanty,⁷⁷⁵ perpetuating a form of power known as orientalist power, which is deeply rooted in Western perspectives on the East. This power is exerted through discourse, where oriental women are consistently portrayed in a simplistic and uniform manner, resulting in a monolithic representation. This representation is then contrasted with the self-representation of Western feminism. The consequence of this power dynamic is the historical and political agency of oriental women being erased, relegating them to the status of mere "objects" devoid of individuality and agency. In contrast, Western feminists are positioned as the primary "subjects" in a counter-narrative.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷³ Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, 193.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁷⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2*, 13, no. 1 (1984), <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.

An example of this power dynamic can be seen in the works of Elizabeth Cooper,⁷⁷⁷ particularly in her books *Women of Egypt*⁷⁷⁸ and *The Harim and The Purdah*.⁷⁷⁹ Cooper describes henna as a hair dye and fashionable body adornment primarily used by lower-class women living outside the cities of Egypt or in desert regions.⁷⁸⁰ Her portrayal of henna demonstrates her lack of recognition of it as a contemporary form of adornment for these women from a modern Western perspective.⁷⁸¹ While limited information is available about Cooper's background and life, her books reveal her identity as a traveller and feminist who aimed to document the lives of Eastern women across various countries, including Japan, China, India, Burma, and Egypt.⁷⁸²

Cooper asserts the importance of studying Eastern women's customs and lifestyles in order to empower them, freeing them from traditional influences and ancient superstitions.⁷⁸³ She consistently draws comparisons between Eastern and Western women to emphasize the significant differences between the two. Cooper concludes that modernizing Eastern women is a challenging task, stating, "The ocean that geographically divides the East from the West is not wider nor deeper than that invisible ocean between the minds of the woman of the Orient and the woman of the Occident."⁷⁸⁴ Despite her critical views on Eastern culture and women,

⁷⁷⁷ Elizabeth Cooper, *Women of Egypt* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1914); Elizabeth Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women* (New York: The Century Co., 1915).

⁷⁷⁸ Cooper, *Women of Egypt*.

⁷⁷⁹ Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women*.

⁷⁸⁰ Cooper, *Women of Egypt*, 154, 259; Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women*, 41, 76.

⁷⁸¹ Cooper, *Women of Egypt*, 154.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 154, 259; Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women*, 41, 76.

⁷⁸³ Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women*, 9; Cooper, *Women of Egypt*, 9-10.

⁷⁸⁴ Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women*, 307.

Cooper, like many other female travellers, does not associate the use of henna with supernatural or superstitious beliefs.

Joanna Liddle and Shirin Rai⁷⁸⁵ argue that Western female travellers had a better understanding and were more credible than Western men when it comes to comprehending the lives of secluded women in Eastern societies. Their ability to go beyond the purdah, the practice of seclusion or segregation of women, allowed them to gain insights into the experiences of these women.⁷⁸⁶ However, Antoinette Burton presents a contrasting viewpoint. She suggests that feminist writings about Eastern women depicts them as "enslaved, degraded, and in need of salvation."⁷⁸⁷ This perspective is evident in the accounts of travellers such as Cooper, Freya Stark (1893–1993),⁷⁸⁸ and Rosita Forbes (1890–1967).⁷⁸⁹ Stark and Forbes were imperialists,⁷⁹⁰ and although they never explicitly claimed to be feminists, their writings express strong views on women's liberation. However, their interests primarily revolved around

⁷⁸⁵ Joanna Liddle and Shirin Rai, "Feminism, Imperialism and Orientalism: The Challenge of the 'Indian Woman'," *Women's History Review* 7, no. 4 (1998): 499, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029800200185>.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Antoinette Burton, "The White Woman's Burden," in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 145.

⁷⁸⁸ Freya Stark, *The Valleys of the Assassins and Other Persian Travels* (London: John Murray, 1934). <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.211087/page/n7/mode/2up>; Freya Stark, *Baghdad Sketches* (London: John Murray, 1937); Freya Stark, *Southern Gates Of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut* (London: John Murray, 1936). <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.51917/mode/2up>; Freya Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (London: John Murray, 1940). <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.175638/mode/2up>.

⁷⁸⁹ Rosita Forbes, *Adventure* (London: Cassell and Co., 1928). <https://archive.org/details/adventurebeinggi00forbuoft/page/n5/mode/2up?q=henna>; Rosita Forbes, *El Raisuni: The Sultan of the Mountains* (London: Thornton Butterworth LTD, 1924). <https://archive.org/details/dli.ernet.523420/page/n3/mode/2up?q=henna>; Rosita Forbes, *Unconducted Wanderers* (London: John Lane, 1919). <https://archive.org/details/cu31924006071751>.

⁷⁹⁰ Lisa Regan, "Women and the "War Machine" in the Desert Romances of E. M. Hull and Rosita Forbes," *Women's Writing* 24, no. 1 (2017): 109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2016.1233773>; Malise Ruthven, "A Subversive Imperialist: Reappraising Freya Stark," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 26 (2006): 152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30197947>.

politics rather than the culture and lives of Eastern women. In the early 20th century, female orientalists became more confident in discussing politics and religion, and their writings became more critical. This was not the case for earlier women travellers, as it was considered controversial for them to express their opinions.⁷⁹¹

Both Stark and Forbes mention henna in their books, drawing from a wide range of cultures. Stark travelled to various countries in Asia, including Persia, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and Arabia,⁷⁹² and published several books in which she references henna, such as *The Valleys of The Assassins and Other Persian Travels*,⁷⁹³ *Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in The Hadhramaut*,⁷⁹⁴ *Baghdad Sketches*,⁷⁹⁵ and *A Winter in Arabia*.⁷⁹⁶ Similarly, Forbes explored many African and Asian countries, including Turkey, Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, and Morocco, and wrote numerous books in which she mentions henna. For example, her book *El Raisuni: The Sultan of The Mountains*,⁷⁹⁷ documents her visit to Morocco, and in *Adventure*,⁷⁹⁸ she explores Yemen. Additionally, in her book *Unconducted Wanderers*,⁷⁹⁹ she mentions henna use for staining fingers in Java, Sumatra, and Southern China. Neither of these women associates henna with supernatural beliefs. However, they clearly associate it with weak,

⁷⁹¹ Susan Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 231.

⁷⁹³ Stark, *The Valleys of the Assassins and Other Persian Travels*, 18, 275.

⁷⁹⁴ Stark, *Southern Gates Of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut*, 150, 78, 91.

⁷⁹⁵ Stark, *Baghdad Sketches*, 213-14, 62, 65.

⁷⁹⁶ Stark, *A Winter in Arabia*, 50, 57, 111, 50-51, 78, 313.

⁷⁹⁷ Forbes, *El Raisuni: The Sultan of the Mountains*, 33, 221-22, 25.

⁷⁹⁸ Forbes, *Adventure*, 117, 36, 77.

⁷⁹⁹ Forbes, *Unconducted Wanderers*, 103, 55.

submissive women in need of rescue. Forbes, despite having a low opinion of Islamic culture and Arab traditions,⁸⁰⁰ portrays the culture as heavily influenced by superstitions and paranormal beliefs. She dedicates chapters to magic,⁸⁰¹ and witchcraft,⁸⁰² and mentions jinn, evil spirits, and the evil eye. However, she does not mention henna being used in rituals or beliefs.⁸⁰³

The Representation of Henna in the Second Half of the 20th Century

During the 20th century, a significant transformation took place in the geopolitical landscapes of South Asia and Africa. By 1945, European powers had colonized a significant portion of these regions. However, from 1946 to 1976, a remarkable shift occurred as the majority of these colonized countries achieved independence.⁸⁰⁴ This marked a pivotal moment in their histories and also influenced the literature and writing about the Orient.

Coinciding with these changes, the 20th century witnessed the rise of travel writing as a prominent genre. Travel writing had its own distinct characteristics, target markets, and authors who were primarily, if not exclusively, recognized as travel writers rather than novelists, explorers, or adventurers.⁸⁰⁵ However, some travel writers, like Wilfred Thesiger

⁸⁰⁰ Forbes, *Adventure*, 176.

⁸⁰¹ Rosita Forbes, "Black Magic," in *Adventure* (London: Cassell and Co., 1928).

⁸⁰² Forbes, "Concerning Witchcraft."

⁸⁰³ Forbes, *Adventure*, 52-35, 62, 34, 102; Forbes, *El Raisuni: The Sultan of the Mountains*, 61, 141, 42, 65, 290-93; Forbes, *Unconducted Wanderers*, 65, 153, 67.

⁸⁰⁴ Herschel I. Grossman and Murat F. Iyigun, "Population Increase and the End of Colonialism," *Economica* 64, no. 255 (1997): 483, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0335.00092>.

⁸⁰⁵ Gareth Griffiths, "Postcolonialism and Travel Writing," in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70.

(1910–2003),⁸⁰⁶ actively revives the archetype of the classic imperial explorer in their travel accounts.⁸⁰⁷

Thesiger's works, such as *In Arabian Sands*,⁸⁰⁸ and *The Marsh Arabs*,⁸⁰⁹ briefly mention the use of henna. These accounts aim to establish the idea that the writer possesses unique insights and genuine empathy for the lives of the people encountered during their travels. In this sense, Thesiger aligns himself with the insider/outsider heroes of imperial fiction, reminiscent of characters like Kipling's Kim and Strickland Sahib.⁸¹⁰ These figures either come from the countries they govern or form deep connections with the local inhabitants, sometimes blurring the line between assimilation into native culture and maintaining an outsider perspective.⁸¹¹ The insider/outsider heroes depicted in travel and adventure memoirs also symbolize a larger phenomenon. Scholars like Said and Homi Bhabha⁸¹² have noted that these figures represent the construction of an enabling symbol of Otherness, which contributes to the emergence of metropolitan imperial cultures.⁸¹³

Similar to these fictional protagonists, Thesiger himself was born and raised outside of England, specifically in Ethiopia, due to his father's diplomatic service.⁸¹⁴ According to Gareth

⁸⁰⁶ Wilfred Thesiger, *In Arabian Sands* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1959).

⁸⁰⁷ Griffiths, "Postcolonialism and Travel Writing," 71.

⁸⁰⁸ Thesiger, *In Arabian Sands*.

⁸⁰⁹ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1964).

⁸¹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (New York: Doubleday Page and Co., 1901).

⁸¹¹ Griffiths, "Postcolonialism and Travel Writing," 71-72.

⁸¹² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

⁸¹³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Digital, 2014), 186-94; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 97, 108.

⁸¹⁴ Wilfred Thesiger, *My Life and Travels: An Anthology*, ed. Alexander Maitland (London: Flamingo, 2003), 1.

Griffiths,⁸¹⁵ the experiences of these native-born figures supposedly grant them a special ability to understand the lives of the colonized peoples while remaining detached from and superior to them. They perceive admiration for these individuals as embodiments of an uncorrupted state, untouched by the negative influences of "civilization". This trope paradoxically contradicts the notion that colonialism's primary objective is to civilize the subjects of imperial rule, shedding light on the enigmatic aspects inherent in these texts and their portrayal of the imperial enterprise.⁸¹⁶

Two instances stand out regarding Thesiger's mention of henna in his travels in Asia and adventures among Arab tribes. Firstly, in Saudi Arabia, he recounts a story reported by his informant about an execution, where the condemned man dressed in clean white clothes, darkened his eyes with kohl, and stained his hands with henna, mimicking the appearance of a groom on his wedding day according to Arabic custom.⁸¹⁷ However, upon researching this information, there is no record of henna being used by men at weddings in the central region of Saudi Arabia. The scene Thesiger describes resembles the style of fictional stories like Arabian nights, where the admired person is captured by a villain, and executed by a large black slave, embodying the stereotypical image of an Arab in the adventure's books.

The second mention of henna occurs among an Arab tribe in Iraq,⁸¹⁸ where henna is associated with superstitions. Thesiger describes how the Arabs build halls known as mudhifs

⁸¹⁵ Griffiths, "Postcolonialism and Travel Writing."

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 71-72.

⁸¹⁷ Thesiger, *In Arabian Sands*, 111.

⁸¹⁸ Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs*, 216.

to receive guests, and upon completion, they mark the pillars with henna-stained handprints, often renewing them during festivals. The discreet use of henna in this context implies its importance among Iraqi Arabs for purposes of protection or other cultural significance. However, when examining the photographs Thesiger provides of the homes he witnessed being built during and after construction, not a single image depicts the use of henna as a cultural amulet on the pillars (Figure 10 and Figure 11). In both instances, it appears that Thesiger may have either misinterpreted or embellished the use of henna within the cultures he encountered. The discrepancies between his accounts and historical/cultural evidence raise questions about the reliability and accuracy of his depictions of henna practices among the Arab tribes he encountered during his travels.



Figure 10: A mudhif during construction (Thesiger, 1964)

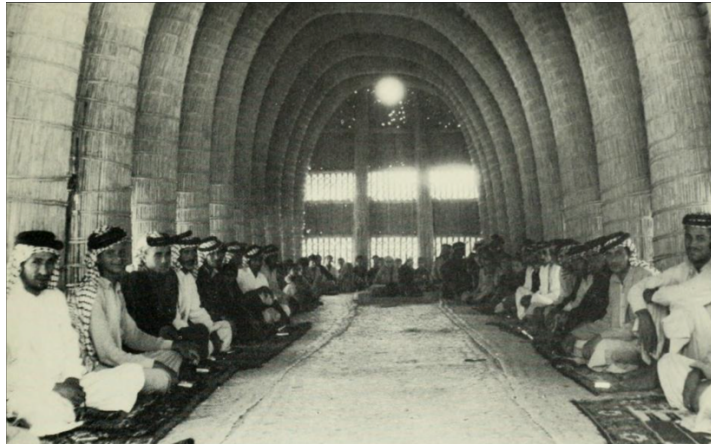


Figure 11: A mudhif after construction (Thesiger, 1964)

There has been a shift in the purpose of traveling to the East from mere adventure and discovery to becoming a scholarly pursuit encompassing various fields such as anthropology, history, philosophy, semiotics, cultural studies, popular psychology, and psychology. This transformation reflects a deeper interest in understanding Eastern cultures in a comprehensive and academic manner. In light of this academic attention, it is expected that henna would be examined from perspectives other than those exhibited in the early 20th century and before.

One notable ethnographic study that exemplifies this shift is Susan Searight's⁸¹⁹ research titled *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*.⁸²⁰ Searight spent three years conducting fieldwork in Morocco, and dedicated a small portion of her study to the connection between henna and tattooing in Moroccan culture.⁸²¹ She observes that women who had tattoos did not use henna on their bodies, as henna would overlap with the tattoos.⁸²²

⁸¹⁹ Susan Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1984).

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

⁸²¹ Ibid., 152-59.

⁸²² Ibid., 153.

Additionally, Searight focuses the majority of her discussion on the function of henna as *baraka*,⁸²³ a protective substance believed to ward off jinn.⁸²⁴ Importantly, all her information regarding the function of henna references the works of Westermarck and Vonderheyden.⁸²⁵

However, it is worth noting that henna itself did not fall within the scope of Searight's study. Despite her extensive interaction with Moroccan women over three years, there is no mention of whether or not henna was used for *baraka* and protection by the women she interviewed. This omission raises questions about the validity of Searight's conclusions regarding the role of henna in Moroccan culture. Regrettably, these data have been adopted by subsequent scholars for half a century without further examination, leading to their acceptance as unquestioned facts. This perpetuates the notion that Eastern cultures remain stagnant and unchanging over centuries.

In scholarly discourse concerning the use of henna in Islamic cultures, it is established that henna is employed as a protective substance. Distinguished scholars, such as Henry Field,⁸²⁶ draw conclusions from the data of early travellers, asserting that the body is adorned with henna to guard against evil influences.⁸²⁷ Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave⁸²⁸ confidently affirms that henna holds a significant position as a prominent plant within the realm of Islam,

⁸²³ Ibid., 154-55, 58.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 155, 58.

⁸²⁵ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord."; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1; *ibid.*, 2.

⁸²⁶ Henry Field, *Body Marking in Southwestern Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Peabody Museum, 1958).

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸²⁸ Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave, "Les Voyages Du Henné," *Journal d'Agriculture Traditionnelle et de Botanique Appliquée* (1982): 131, https://www.persee.fr/doc/jatba_0183-5173_1982_num_29_2_3866.

deeply intertwined with Islamic practices and beliefs. Its extensive application as a magical and religious dye for the hands and feet exemplifies the close association of henna with the faith.⁸²⁹

In a thought-provoking perspective, Diane Humphrey-Newell⁸³⁰ highlights how the original purpose and symbolic meanings of henna as a protective substance has gradually faded from the consciousness of Muslims in the Middle East and Africa. She contends that the true essence and intentions behind the use of henna have been overlooked and forgotten.⁸³¹

Deborah Kapchan⁸³² offers a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to the neglect of henna as an artistic tool in scholarly research. She astutely highlights the overshadowing effect of the predominant focus on tattoos, which unfortunately marginalizes the study of henna as an independent art form. Moreover, Kapchan draws attention to the underestimation of the value attributed to ephemeral feminine art, illuminating the necessity for a more holistic understanding.⁸³³

Regrettably, Kapchan's exploration of subjects such as the evil eye, jinn,⁸³⁴ and *baraka* diverted her attention from studying henna as a pure art form. However, this diversion transformed her research on henna into a classical anthropological study, whereby she builds upon Westermarck's ideas while incorporating her own interpretations and insights. It is

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁸³⁰ Humphrey-Newell, "Henna, Uses of it in the Middle East and North Africa."

⁸³¹ Ibid., 1.

⁸³² Deborah Kapchan, "Moroccan Women's Body Signs," in *Bodylore*, ed. Katharine Yoing (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

⁸³³ Ibid., 5-6.

⁸³⁴ Ibid., 6, 22, 28-29.

through this lens that she delves into the intricate relationship between henna and broader cultural phenomena.

Kapchan reinterprets the concept of *baraka*, surpassing the conventional notion of blessing as proposed by Westermarck. By translating it to "enough,"⁸³⁵ she provides an alternative understanding that carries profound implications. Kapchan elucidates this new perspective by explaining that the bride is "blessed with sufficiency."⁸³⁶ Through this redefinition, she brings to the forefront the issue of Western scholars feeling entitled to freely interpret Eastern cultures without duly considering the actual cultural context and language they are engaging with.

The usage of henna has varied in different studies. In the early 20th century, its purpose is documented as being primarily protective against evil influences, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, when examining henna in the context of supernatural beliefs, its significance has evolved. Research by John Kennedy⁸³⁷ and Fadwa Al-Guindi⁸³⁸ demonstrates that henna is now sought after and desired by supernatural beings, having transitioned from a protective measure to a requirement to appease aggressive male jinn. These supernatural entities are believed to be attracted to the bride's beauty, and the application of henna is seen as a way to distract and pacify them. By engaging in these rituals, it is thought that the bride's beauty

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ Kennedy, "Mushahara: A Nubian Concept of Supernatural Danger and The Theory of Taboo," 129-30, 32.

⁸³⁸ Fadwa Al-Guindi, "The Angels in the Nile: A Theme in Nubian Ritual," in *Nubian Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, ed. John G. Kennedy (New York; Cairo: The University of California Press; The American University in Cairo Press, 1978), 108.

becomes a focal point for the jinn, redirecting their attention and potentially mitigating any harm or interference they may pose.⁸³⁹

Janice Boddy⁸⁴⁰ further expands on this notion by asserting that women, especially married women, are more susceptible to spiritual attacks due to their use of henna "which spirits are known to covet."⁸⁴¹ Interestingly, she reports that possessed women themselves apply henna to their bodies in accordance with the spirits' requirements, seeking to please them.⁸⁴²

The documentation of henna usage has undergone significant evolutionary changes, as outlined earlier, transitioning from being a protective substance for the vulnerable to being demanded by spirits who were believed to be repelled by the colour and fragrance of henna. This transition involved scholars building on inherited secondary data from the first half of the century.

Scholars utilized secondary data that exhibits the collective memory of imperialism, and which is used against the Orient, according to Smith: "It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of Indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments."⁸⁴³ The data used by these scholars do not present

⁸³⁹ Kennedy, "Circumcision and Excision Ceremonies," 154.

⁸⁴⁰ Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, 215, 18, 26, 41.

⁸⁴³ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

a culture that has changed and progressed, but rather reveals multiple layers of cultural and religious implications that continue to be uncovered by Western scholars, who have assumed a role of heroic interpreters, replacing earlier travellers' accounts.

No scholars of the late 20th century provide credible evidence regarding the purpose of henna from the perspective of the women who use it. The primary significance of scientific research lies in the ability of individual researchers to convincingly establish the credibility and reliability of their findings.⁸⁴⁴

In the context of henna research, this issue becomes particularly prominent, as scholars, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, heavily relied on unverified secondary data from Westermarck. By building upon Westermarck's work, researchers aimed to achieve internal reliability, ensuring that their analyses align with previously generated and accepted findings, thus enhancing the overall reliability of their findings.⁸⁴⁵

In this era, female scholars held a different position compared to earlier women travellers and feminists. The objective of their writing was not to compare Eastern women but to improve their own situation. However, they did adopt a male perspective, particularly that of the early 20th century, which viewed Eastern women as consumed by superstitions. Despite having access to observe and study women from every aspect, female scholars chose to support Westermarck's data and selectively interviewed women who fit his narrative.

⁸⁴⁴ Margaret D. LeCompte and Judith Preissle Goetz, "Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research," *Review of Educational Research* 52, no. 1 (1982): 31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170272>.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

Summary

Deliberate efforts of European colonizers to challenge the Islamic religion and undermine cultural practices led to a transformation of the portrayal of Islamic cultures in early 20th-century Western literature. This shift in narrative was perpetuated by orientalist and anthropologists who selectively presented information, ultimately reinforcing stereotypes.

Westermarck was influential in shaping this portrayal, with theories on henna that profoundly impacted how it has been perceived in Western literature from the early 20th century until today. Westermarck introduced the notion of superstition and evil influences among Muslims, which was then incorporated into travel writing, further distorting the understanding of henna. As a consequence, henna was no longer perceived as a form of body art but instead became a tool for photographers to depict the exotic Eastern culture as imagined in fairy tales and adventure books.

Women writers from the Western world during this era approached the topic from various perspectives, including imperialists, feminists, and those who had personal connections through marriage or religion. Imperialist writers sought to portray Eastern women and their henna traditions as backward, ancient, and in need of modernization. Feminist writers, on the other hand, utilized Eastern women and their cultural practices to advance their own cause for greater freedom in the West. Unfortunately, the authentic accounts of women deeply rooted in the culture were often overlooked in this scholarly research.

Scholars from the latter half of the century adopted secondary data without verification. Westermarck's data and that of others were treated as unquestionable facts about the Orient, with no attempt to compare or corroborate their accounts with others from the same period or earlier. This lack of critical examination led to a perpetuation of misconceptions and generalizations.

These scholars further developed the notion that henna, and the Islamic culture, are associated with evil spirits, reinforcing an imperialist mindset of "us versus them." They generalized the distorted beliefs held by a few individuals and applied them to the entire Islamic society. In doing so, they overlooked the intricate complexities and rich diversity that existed within Islamic cultures.

By understanding the historical context and the biases embedded in early 20th-century Western literature, we can strive for a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic cultures, recognizing the need to challenge stereotypes and embrace a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Chapter Six

Henna in Hadith: A Complex Interplay of Culture and Religion

Introduction

Literature can have a profound influence on public behaviour, thought processes, and even social norms, capable of shaping the very fabric of society.⁸⁴⁶ A pertinent illustration of this phenomenon can be found in the study of Islamic culture, where certain literary works have exerted a considerable impact on Islamic society. One such historical example, dating back to the 3rd century of Islam, highlights the transformative power of literature on societal behaviour.

During this period, a trader arrived in Madinah⁸⁴⁷ with an assortment of women's veils in different colours. However, despite selling out most of his stock, he faced difficulty in selling the black veils, as women at the time were not inclined to cover themselves in black attire. Seeking a solution, he enlisted the help of Aamir Al-Darmi,⁸⁴⁸ a renowned poet known for his piety and dedication to worship. With compassion for the trader's plight, Al-Darmi crafted one of his most famous poems, commencing with the words, "Tell the beauty in the black veil, what have you done to the pious worshipper?"⁸⁴⁹ In this poem, Al-Darmi described being infatuated with a woman he saw wearing a black veil. The poem quickly gained popularity, especially considering the reputation of the poet, leading women to buy black veils, each aspiring to be

⁸⁴⁶ Milton C. Albrecht, "The Relationship of Literature and Society," *American Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 5 (1954): 425, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2772244>.

⁸⁴⁷ The second holy city, located in Saudi Arabia.

⁸⁴⁸ Abdullah bin Muslim bin Qutaibah Al-Dinawari, *الشعر والشعراء* [The Poetry and the Poets], 2 vols., vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar Al-Hadith, 1423), 536.

⁸⁴⁹ Shams al-Din Ibn Khaldun, *وفيات الأعيان وأنباء أبناء الزمان* [Eminent Men and the Sons of the Epoch], 7 vols., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1971), 161.

the beautiful woman alluded to in the poem.⁸⁵⁰ The trader succeeded in selling his entire stock with a profit, and over time, the colour black became the customary and traditional attire for women, even acquiring religious significance according to some Islamic scholars.⁸⁵¹

This anecdote vividly exemplifies how literature can sway societal beliefs and customs, despite the origins of the idea being rooted in a talented individual's creativity. Considering the vast influence of literature, especially literature documenting events related to the Prophet, it becomes evident that the impact is significant. Regrettably, throughout history, certain individuals have exploited this power for personal gain, particularly when it comes to religious practices, such as the use of henna. Fabricated hadiths and reports about the Prophet have been disseminated to achieve publicity and financial benefits.

This chapter seeks to address the question of whether henna holds a significant place in Islam. From a Western perspective, the answer might appear obvious, as henna is viewed as a source of blessings,⁸⁵² a main substance for purification,⁸⁵³ a tool to aid in winning jihad,⁸⁵⁴ and is believed to possess magical powers that protect from evil influences.⁸⁵⁵ This perception

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ Mohammed Al-Munajjid, *دروس للشيخ محمد المنجد* [Lessons by Sheikh Mohammed Al-Munajjid] (shamela.ws: Al-Maktabah Al-Shamila, 12 July 2020, 1990), Electronic Book, 5. <https://shamela.ws/book/7704>.

⁸⁵² Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 111; Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord," 39; Susan Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1984), 158; Deborah Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 159.

⁸⁵³ John G. Kennedy, *Struggle for Change in a Nubian Community: An Individual in Society and History* (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1977), 45.

<https://archive.org/details/struggleforchang0000kenn/page/n7/mode/2up>.

⁸⁵⁴ Ustuner, Güliz, and Holt, "Consuming Ritual: Reframing the Turkish Henna-Night Ceremony," 209.

⁸⁵⁵ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord," 39; Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 111.

is reinforced by Western scholars who report henna to be "the light of the Prophet" and as his favourite flower in hadiths with limited knowledge of Islamic study.⁸⁵⁶ However, it is important to acknowledge that Western perspectives on Islam might sometimes imply a deeper understanding of the religion compared to Muslims' own knowledge about their faith.

To address this question from an Islamic point of view, Talal Asad⁸⁵⁷ suggests that when writing an anthropology of Islam, one should mirror Muslims approach to their faith. This requires starting with the concept of a discursive tradition, which not only includes but also establishes a connection to the foundational texts of the Quran and the hadith.⁸⁵⁸ Therefore, this chapter delves into the subject of henna from an Islamic perspective, acknowledging that the Quran does not specifically mention it. Instead, it centres on the secondary sources of Islamic legislation—the hadith of the Prophet and the reports of his companions—to shed light on the position of henna within the faith. The primary objective is to discern the true stance of henna in Islam while determining its distinction from matters of culture and, on occasion, marketing endeavours that may falsely exploit religious connotations for publicity.

This chapter aims to thoroughly examine the significance of the Prophet's hadith, which holds profound importance for the two billion Muslims worldwide.⁸⁵⁹ It will particularly focus on the two major Islamic doctrines, Sunni and Shia, with Sunni representing approximately

⁸⁵⁶ Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice," 3.

⁸⁵⁷ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁵⁹ Review, "Muslim Population by Country 2023."

90% of the Muslim population and Shia about 10%.⁸⁶⁰ By including the Shia perspective, the goal is to highlight how some hadith is interpreted differently by Shia compared to Sunni Muslims, which can sometimes lead to confusion for outsiders of Islam, resulting in generalizations about beliefs and practices.

The first section of this chapter will shed light on the representation of hadith in Western literature. It will explore how a considerable amount of misrepresentation has been created, affecting the research of henna conducted by Western scholars. This misrepresentation stems from a reliance on data collected by early scholars who might have had political agendas. By delving into the science of hadith, including the grades of hadith, this section will elucidate which types of hadith Muslims adhere to and which they disregard.

Building on this understanding, the second section will focus on authentic and well-graded hadith. The meaning and purpose of each hadith will be explained from an Islamic perspective, showing the influence of Islamic scholars in interpreting, and deriving rulings based on their knowledge and experiences.

The third section of this chapter will centre on examining the weak and fabricated hadiths related to henna from a Sunni perspective. It will delve into how Muslims approach and treat these hadiths from a religious standpoint, scrutinizing the reasons that led to the fabrication of such narrations, often motivated by financial gain. Additionally, the section will

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

explore how Western scholars have sometimes used these questionable hadiths as evidence to associate henna with Islamic practices.

The fourth section of this chapter is dedicated to examining the hadiths from a Shia perspective, aiming to illuminate the distinctions between Shia and Sunni beliefs regarding henna-related narrations. Notably, within the Shia tradition, there are 11 revered figures who hold a position of significance akin to the Prophet. Each of these figures has their own hadiths, and it is believed that they all contain references to the use of henna. This section will carefully analyse the variations in these hadiths between Shia and Sunni traditions, emphasizing the importance of understanding and appreciating these differences for the purpose of clarification.

The final section of this chapter will delve into the practice of henna body adornment by men from a religious perspective. This subject is considered controversial across Islamic cultures primarily because henna is traditionally associated with women's practices. As a result, a diverse range of religious opinions, based on various hadiths, will be thoroughly examined to explore the nuances between the religious and cultural perspectives on this matter.

Hadith and the Science of Hadith

In Islamic studies, two essential terms are "hadith" and "sunnah." These terms are often used interchangeably and refer to concise reports that are understood to meticulously document the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad. This vast collection of narrations covers a wide range of historical events from the Prophet's life, including his statements, opinions, actions,

approvals, silences, manners, physical descriptions, and daily habits.⁸⁶¹ Seyyed Nasr⁸⁶² explains that the hadith contains the words of Prophet Muhammad, while the sunnah includes his words, actions, and practices.⁸⁶³

Sunni and Shia Hadith Differences

Like other major religions, Islam is divided into several branches, each with differing and often conflicting perspectives. The two primary sects are Sunni and Shia. Shia Islam emerged from dissatisfaction with the exclusion of Imam Ali Ibn Abi-Talib, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, during the selection of the first caliph in the 7th century CE. Although Ali eventually became the fourth caliph, by then the divisions within the Muslim community had deepened, making reconciliation difficult.⁸⁶⁴

Sunni Hadith scholars developed a meticulous methodology involving a two-fold examination of each hadith. Firstly, scholars rigorously study and verify the "*isnad*," the chain of narrators who transmitted the hadith. They confirm the identities of these narrators and assess their trustworthiness and reliability.⁸⁶⁵ Secondly, they scrutinize the "*matn*," the actual text of the hadith, to ensure it aligns with the teachings of the Quran, is supported by

⁸⁶¹ Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments*, 1-2; Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 1031.

⁸⁶² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Sunnah and Hadith," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2013).

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁶⁴ Shakir Mustafa, "Defining Islam and Muslims," in *Islamic Beliefs, Practices, and Cultures*, ed. Fehcity Crowe et al. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010), 13.

⁸⁶⁵ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 4.

other reliable hadiths, and is consistent with historical events.⁸⁶⁶ Based on this rigorous examination, individual hadiths are classified and categorized by jurists as authentic, good, weak, or fabricated. This classification system plays a crucial role in establishing the reliability and validity of each hadith within hadith scholarship.

An example of hadith *isnad* and *matn* from Sahih Muslim is: "Abu Tahir narrated to me, Abdullah ibn Wahb informed us, from Ibn Jurayj, from Abu al-Zubayr, from Jabir ibn Abdullah, who said: that Abu Qubafa was led to the audience of the Holy Prophet on the day of the Conquest of Mecca and his head and beard were white like hyssop, whereupon Allah's Messenger said: Change it with something but avoid black."⁸⁶⁷

To simplify the hadith science, the hadith scholar such as Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim⁸⁶⁸ met the narrator Abu Tahir and he told him the chain of hadith. The hadith scholars must conduct a study to determine the grade of hadith. The *isnad* must meet five conditions to be considered authentic: first, continuity of the chain, as it must be uninterrupted, with each narrator having received the narration directly from the one above them; second, integrity of each narrator, with every narrator in the chain being of upright character and trustworthy; third, precision of each narrator, with each having a strong memory and accuracy in narrating the hadith; fourth, absence of irregularities, with the chain being free from anomalies or

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols., vol. 5, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 468-69.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

contradictions with more reliable narrations; fifth, absence of defects, with the chain being free from any defects that could affect the authenticity of the narration.⁸⁶⁹

For the hadith *matn* to be considered authentic, it must meet two conditions: first, the text must be free from irregularities, as if a single trustworthy narrator alone reports a hadith, and its text contradicts what is reported by a more reliable source, then the text of the hadith is considered irregular; second, the text must be free from hidden defects, as if there is a defect in the text of the hadith, such as the narrator adding words not said by the Prophet, then the text of the hadith is considered defective.⁸⁷⁰

Hadith collections in the Sunni sect are typically classified into four categories based on their level of authenticity. First are collections regarded as the most authentic, such as those by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.⁸⁷¹ Second are collections that include only a few questionable reports, such as those by Al-Tirmidhi, Al-Nasa'i, and Abu Dawud.⁸⁷² Third are collections with

⁸⁶⁹ Amr Abd al-Mun'im Saleem, *يسير دراسة الاسانيد للمبتدئين* [An Easy Introduction to Studying Chains of Narration for Beginners] (Tanta: Dar al-Diya, 2005), 10.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁸⁷¹ Muhammad ibn Ismaeel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols., vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997); Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols., vol. 1, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007).

⁸⁷² Hafiz Abu Isa Muhammad Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, trans. Abu Khaliyl, 6 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007); Ahmed ibn Shua'ib Al-Nasa'i, *كتاب السنن الصغرى* (Riyadh: Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, 1999), <https://www.noor-book.com/pdf-كتاب-سنن-النسائي-الصغرى-المجتبى-من-السنن-ط-الأوقاف-السعودية/>, Electronic Book; Suliman bin Ash'ath Abu Dawud, *سنن ابي داود*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., ed. Hafiz Ali Za'i and Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008).

numerous problematic traditions, such as those by Ibn Majah and Ibn Hanbal.⁸⁷³ Fourth are collections with many weak or fabricated traditions, such as those by al-Tabarani.⁸⁷⁴

The Shia have developed their own unique collections of hadith. In the 4th and 5th centuries of Islam, leading Shia hadith scholars compiled four major collections, collectively referred to as "al-kutub al-arba'ah" (the four books):⁸⁷⁵ Kitab Al-Kafi,⁸⁷⁶ Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih,⁸⁷⁷ Tahdhib al-Ahkam,⁸⁷⁸ and Al-Istibsar.⁸⁷⁹ According to Scott Girdner,⁸⁸⁰ when Shia share a hadith with Sunnis, the chain of transmission typically differs. The Shia approach involves carefully examining the chain of narrators (*isnad*) and accepting only hadiths from narrators who are believed to have supported Ali ibn Abi-Talib and the Shiite cause. For a hadith to be considered valid, it must be transmitted by Ali, whom they regard as an infallible authority.⁸⁸¹ Additionally, Shia reject hadiths narrated by most of the Prophet's wives and many of his companions, viewing them as corrupt or antagonistic toward Ali and the faith. This

⁸⁷³ Muhammad Bin Yazeed Ibn-Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007); Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *المسند للإمام أحمد بن حنبل* [Musnad of the Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal], 52 vols., ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut (Beirut: Alresalah).

⁸⁷⁴ Israr Ahmad Khan, *Authentication of Hadith: Redefining the Criteria* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2010), XVI; Sulayman ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani, *المعجم الكبير* [The Great Dictionary], 25 vols., ed. Humaidi Abdulmajid Al-Sulifi (Cairo: Ibn Taymiyyah's Library, 1994).

⁸⁷⁵ Shia Muhammad Yahya et al., "Comparative Critical Analysis of Methodologies for Establishing the Validity of Hadith Among Sunni and Shia," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 6 (2024): 778, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61707/31ec2561>.

⁸⁷⁶ Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Al-Kulayni, *الكافي في الأصول والفروع* [Al-Kafi in Principles and Branches], 8 vols., vol. 7 (Amman: Al-Khayyam Printing Press, 1983).

⁸⁷⁷ Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh Al-Qummi, *من لا يحضره الفقيه* [Whoever is not Attended by The Jurist], 4 vols., vol. 1 (Qom: Islamic Publication Foundation, 1993).

⁸⁷⁸ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *تهذيب الأحكام* [The Refinement of the Laws], vol. 10, ed. Ali Akbar Al-Ghaffari (Tehran: Dar Al-Kutob Aleslamiah, 1384).

⁸⁷⁹ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *الاستبصار* [The Insight], vol. 4, ed. Hassan Al-Musawi Al-Khurasani (Najaf: Dar Al-Kutob Aleslamiah, 1957).

⁸⁸⁰ Scott Girdner, "Scriptures and Doctrine," in *Islamic Beliefs, Practices, and Cultures*, ed. Fehcity Crowe et al. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010).

⁸⁸¹ Saleh Al-Wardani, *عقائد السنة وعقائد الشيعة* [Sunni Beliefs and Shia Beliefs] (Beirut: Al-Ghadeer for Research and Publishing, 1999), 107-08.

selective acceptance of narrators is a key distinction between Shia and Sunni hadith study.⁸⁸²

In addition to the sayings of Muhammad, the Shia record the sayings of imams such as Ali ibn Abi-Talib, Husayn ibn Ali, and Jafar al-Sadiq, which hold even greater authority in Shiite eyes than those of Muhammad's companions do for Sunnis.⁸⁸³

Fadhlullah Muhammad Said⁸⁸⁴ explains the Shia perspective on hadith study, noting that Shia hadith scholars, both from earlier and later periods, may differ in the criteria they use to determine the authenticity of hadiths, but they agree that the concept of hadith can be adapted to meet the needs of their respective times. Early Shia scholars believed that the authenticity of a hadith does not depend solely on the narrator's righteousness; a hadith can be considered authentic if it comes from a reliable source, such as one of the foundational texts or a book presented to one of the Imams. On the other hand, later Shia scholars argue that a hadith's authenticity, after meeting certain conditions, primarily depends on its unbroken chain of narrators leading back to an infallible Imam. Alternatively, the chain should include only narrators from the Shia sect, without considering the hadith's controversial aspects. In shaping Shia beliefs, the authenticity of a hadith is closely tied to the authority of the Imams, and an unbroken chain back to an Imam is an essential requirement.⁸⁸⁵

⁸⁸² Alwrdany (1999).

⁸⁸³ Girdner, "Scriptures and Doctrine," 120.

⁸⁸⁴ Fadhlullah Muhammad Said, "أحاديث أهل السنة في تفسير الميزان" (PhD Thesis Universitas Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2010).

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 49-50.

In Sunni Islam, the exclusion of certain hadiths is not due to a disregard for figures like Ali ibn Abi Talib but rather because of issues related to the integrity of the chain of narrators (*isnad*) or contradictions within the hadith itself. Sunni scholars meticulously evaluate each hadith by examining the reliability of the narrators and ensuring that the content (*matn*) aligns with the teachings of the Quran and other established hadiths. If a hadith's chain of transmission is weak or the content contradicts other reliable sources, it may be excluded, regardless of who the narrator is. In contrast, Shia Islam places significant emphasis on the authority of their Imams. As long as the chain of narrators includes one of the Imams, the content of the hadith is rarely questioned. This reflects a fundamental difference between the two sects: while Sunnis prioritize the reliability of the chain and consistency of the content, Shias emphasize the connection to their infallible Imams, giving less scrutiny to the hadith's content if it comes through this sacred lineage.

For example, a hadith in Kitab Al-Kafi,⁸⁸⁶ states "A number of our companions reported from Ahmad ibn Abi Abdullah, from his father, from Fudala ibn Ayyub, from Hariz, from a servant of Ali ibn al-Husayn (peace be upon them), who said: I heard Ali ibn al-Husayn (peace be upon them) say that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said, 'Dye with henna, for it brightens the eyesight, promotes hair growth, improves the scent, and calms the wife.'⁸⁸⁷ For the Shia, this hadith is regarded as authentic and meets their *isnad* and

⁸⁸⁶ Al-Kulayni, 7, الكافي في الأصول والفروع.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 6: 483.

matn standards. However, the Shia scholar Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Al-Kulayni⁸⁸⁸ did not mention the names of the narrators he heard the hadith from, merely stating "A number of our companions reported" and including "from a servant of Ali ibn al-Husayn," which would be considered ambiguous from a Sunni perspective.

The chain must be free from any hidden defects that could affect the authenticity of the narration. For Shia, as long as it mentions the Infallibles (*al-ma'ṣūmeen*), it is considered authentic and has a sound *isnad* and *matn*.⁸⁸⁹ From a Sunni perspective, the hadith contains unrealistic information, such as "brightens the eyesight" and "calms the wife," which has not been verified by other Sunni hadiths, and the vocabulary used was not reported in any other hadith by the Prophet, leading to its classification as fabricated.⁸⁹⁰

This divergence highlights the different approaches both sects take in preserving and interpreting the teachings of Islam, shaped by their respective historical and theological contexts. This explains why, in Shia tradition, hadiths mentioning henna often refer primarily to the Imams, while those mentioning the Prophet are frequently considered fabricated or weak in Sunni tradition due to discrepancies in the chain of narrators and *matn*.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸⁹ Ihsan Ilahi Zaheer, *الشيعة والسنة* [The Shia and the Sunni] (Islamabad: "Administration of Sunni Translation, 1979), 93. <https://shamela.ws/book/37548/160>.

⁸⁹⁰ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 4.

Western Perspectives on Hadith and Criticisms

The study of Islamic texts, including hadith, by Western scholars began as part of a broader interest in understanding the religious, cultural, and legal traditions of the Islamic world. This interest intensified during the Enlightenment and colonial periods,⁸⁹¹ as Western nations expanded their influence in the Middle East and sought to understand the foundations of Islamic civilization. The hadith, as a critical source of Islamic law and theology, naturally became a focal point of Western scholarship, leading to both genuine scholarly inquiry and attempts to challenge the authenticity of these texts.

Ajeel Jassim Al-Nashmi states that no source of Islamic legislation has been subjected to criticism and distortion as much as the Sunnah has been by orientalists.⁸⁹² Wael Hallaq⁸⁹³ asserts that the primary challenge associated with Prophetic hadith is the question of their authenticity. This matter has engaged Muslim scholars since the early classical period and has continued to attract significant attention from Western scholars.⁸⁹⁴ Their role, claims Muthanna Al-Zaidi, has been to cast doubts upon and undermine the authenticity of the pure Prophetic sunnah.⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁹¹ David Allen Harvey, "Religion(s) and the Enlightenment," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 40, no. 2 (2014), <http://www.jstor.org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/24720582>.

⁸⁹² Ajeel Jassim Al-Nashmi, *المستشرقون ومصادر التشريع الإسلامي* (Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature, 1984), Noor Book, 83, <https://www.noor-book.com/كتاب-المستشرقون-ومصادر-التشريع-الإسلامي-pdf>, Electronic Book.

⁸⁹³ Wael B. Hallaq, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: A Pseudo-Problem," *Studia Islamica*, no. 89 (1999), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1596086>.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁹⁵ Muthanna Al-Zaidi, *نظرة المستشرقين للسنة النبوية المطهرة* [The View of Orientalists Towards the Prophetic Sunnah] (Shamela: Al-Maktabah Al-Shamila, 23 June 2022, 2011), Electronic Book, 1-2. <https://shamela.ws/book/1338/1>.

The interest in studying the Islamic religion in-depth began to develop further from the late 17th century. Notable works, such as Barthélemy d'Herbelot's (1625–1695) *Bibliothèque Orientale*⁸⁹⁶ and Antoine Galland's (1646–1715) *Arabian Nights*,⁸⁹⁷ played a prominent role in guiding orientalist to explore Islamic culture from fresh perspectives. Gustav Weil (1808–1889) was among the earliest Western academic scholars, possibly the very first, to propose in 1848 that a significant portion of the hadith should be considered spurious.⁸⁹⁸ But it was Ignac Goldziher (1850–1921) who inaugurated the critical study of the hadith's authenticity.

Concerned with the early evolution of Islamic dogma and theology, Goldziher concluded that the great majority of the Prophetic sunnah constitutes evidence not of the Prophet's time to which they claim to belong, but rather of much later periods.⁸⁹⁹ As he states: "There was no need for Muslims to invent this concept and its practical significance; they were already current among the old pagans of the Jahiliyya⁹⁰⁰... For them, sunna⁹⁰¹ was all that corresponded to the traditions of the Arabs and the customs and habits of their ancestors."⁹⁰² Goldziher did not consider first the actual meaning of the word sunnah that existed before

⁸⁹⁶ Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale* (Maestricht: J.E. Dufour and Ph. Roux, 1776).

⁸⁹⁷ Antoine Galland, *Les Mille Et Une Nuits* [The Thousand and One Nights], 12 vols. (Paris: la Veuve Claude Barbin, 1704–1717).

⁸⁹⁸ Gustav Weil, *Geschichte der Chaliphen* [History of the Caliphs], 5 vols., vol. 2 (Mannheim: Friedrich Bassermann, 1848), 289.

⁸⁹⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, 2 vols., vol. 2, ed. S. M. Stern (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971).

⁹⁰⁰ Jahiliyya is an Islamic term refers to the life of nations before Islam and associates them with religious ignorance. This reference is not specific to the Arabs but includes all peoples.

⁹⁰¹ Sunna here means prophet Mohammad's saying, actions, and teaching.

⁹⁰² Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2, 25.

Islam, which refers to manner of acting and habits, whether good or bad.⁹⁰³ Daniel W. Brown⁹⁰⁴ explains that since the emergence of Islam, the term sunnah refers to the authoritative example set by Muhammad and recorded in traditions about his words, his actions, his acquiescence to the words or actions of others, and his personal characteristics.⁹⁰⁵ Second, Nasr explains that the Prophet sunnah contain the pre-Islamic Arab traditions he approved and allowed Muslims to continue.⁹⁰⁶ Prophet Mohammad have approved many of the pre-Islamic traditions such as the use of henna to dye the grey hair⁹⁰⁷ (which will be examined later in this chapter) but he also forbade other pre-Islamic practises, such as tattooing.

Goldziher's critical examination of hadith was further developed by Joseph Schacht (1902–1969),⁹⁰⁸ who argued that hadith should be considered fictional unless proven otherwise.⁹⁰⁹ Since Schacht's influential work was published, the academic discussion on this topic has grown significantly. Scholars have generally divided into three groups: one group supports and expands upon Schacht's conclusions such as John Wansbrough⁹¹⁰ and Michael Cook,⁹¹¹ another group challenges and refutes them often defending the authenticity of hadith,

⁹⁰³ C. E. Bosworth et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 878–79.

⁹⁰⁴ Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Traditions in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁰⁶ Nasr, "Sunnah and Hadith," 97.

⁹⁰⁷ Suliman bin Ash'ath Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., vol. 4, ed. Hafiz Ali Za'i and Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), 466.

<https://www.kalamullah.com/Books/Hadith/Sunan%20Abu%20Dawud%20Vol.%204%20-%203242-4350.pdf>

⁹⁰⁸ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁰ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1977).

⁹¹¹ Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

as Nabia Abbott,⁹¹² Gregor Schoeler,⁹¹³ and Johann Fück,⁹¹⁴ and a third group seeks a balanced position between the two extremes such as Harald Motzki,⁹¹⁵ Gualtherüs Juynboll,⁹¹⁶ and James Robson.⁹¹⁷

The critiques of hadith authenticity by Western scholars have not gone unanswered within the Islamic scholarly tradition. Muslim scholars, both classical and modern, have engaged with these criticisms rigorously, defending the integrity of hadith literature while also developing new methodologies to address the concerns raised. For example, Mustafa A'zami's 1978 work *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*⁹¹⁸ provides a detailed refutation of Joseph Schacht's claims, arguing for the reliability of traditional hadith transmission methods.⁹¹⁹ Similarly, scholars like Jonathan Brown have emphasized the sophistication of classical Islamic approaches to hadith criticism, which continue to be relevant in modern academic discourse.⁹²⁰ Said contextualizes these responses, arguing that much of Western scholarship on Islam has been driven by a desire to assert dominance rather than an objective

⁹¹² Nabia Abbott, "Hadith Literature-II: Collection and Transmission of Hadith," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al., The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁹¹³ Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and The Written in Early Islam*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. James E. Montgomery (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁹¹⁴ Johann Fück, "Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 93 (n.F. 18), no. 1/2 (1939), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43371230>.

⁹¹⁵ Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments*.

⁹¹⁶ Gualtherüs H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁹¹⁷ James Robson, "The Transmission of Nasa'i's 'Sunan'," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1956), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/1.1.38>.

⁹¹⁸ Muhammad Mustafa A'zami, *Studies In Early Hadith Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978).

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 237-60.

⁹²⁰ Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon*, ed. Wadad Kadi and Rotraud Wielandt (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

search for truth.⁹²¹ These responses demonstrate that while Western critiques have influenced Islamic scholarship, they have also strengthened it by prompting a deeper examination and reaffirmation of traditional Islamic principles.⁹²²

Henna in Hadith from a Sunni Perspective

Authentic and Good-Graded Hadiths:

The process of identifying authentic hadiths serves as a safeguard against the use of weak and fabricated narrations in everyday life.⁹²³ To classify a hadith as authentic,⁹²⁴ it must meet several criteria. Firstly, it must be narrated by continuous and just narrators, ensuring an unbroken chain of transmission from the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, the hadith should be reasonable and free from any odd or defective information, ensuring its reliability and coherence.⁹²⁵

Hadith scholars employ the classification of "good"⁹²⁶ to signify narrations that have not achieved the ultimate level of authenticity but that possess minor corroborating factors among the narrators. These factors may include numerous chains of narration supporting the same hadith, the presence of only one unknown narrator in the chain, or a time gap between

⁹²¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 208-10.

⁹²² Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

⁹²³ Ina Najiyah et al., "Hadith Degree Classification for Shahih Hadith Identification Web Based" (5th International Conference on Cyber and IT Service Management, Jakarta, STMIK, 2017).

⁹²⁴ Known as Sahih in Arabic and Islamic studies.

⁹²⁵ Najiyah et al., "Short Hadith Degree Classification for Shahih Hadith Identification Web Based." 1.

⁹²⁶ Known as Hassan in Arabic and Islamic studies.

narrators. While not reaching the highest level of authenticity, these good-graded hadiths are still considered reliable by Islamic scholars.⁹²⁷

One essential observation regarding the Prophet's use of henna is that there is no recorded hadith where he explicitly states using henna to dye his hair, beard, or stain his hands and feet. Instead, what we find are reports from his companions and their successors describing the Prophet's appearance, such as the hadith narrated by Abu Rimthah, wherein he states, "I went with my father to the Prophet. He had locks hanging down as far as the lobes of the ears stained with henna..."⁹²⁸

However, it is crucial to note that this particular hadith does not serve as definitive proof that the Prophet used henna to dye his hair, for several reasons. Firstly, Abu Rimthah was merely a young boy when he saw the Prophet, and his description is based on his memory from that time, making it subject to potential inaccuracies or personal interpretations.⁹²⁹

Secondly, variations in wording are common in hadith studies, and other versions of the hadith do not mention henna. Moreover, upon examining the chapter on hair dye in the hadith book, it becomes evident that this particular hadith is the only one mentioning the Prophet's use of henna for dyeing his hair.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁷ Ziauddin Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1979), 17.

⁹²⁸ سنن ابي داود, 4, 229, Abu Dawud.

⁹²⁹ الإصباة في تمييز الصحابة, 5, 519, Al-Asqalani.

⁹³⁰ سنن ابي داود, 4, 404, Abu Dawud.

Additionally, when delving into the meaning of the Arabic words used in the hadith, it is evident that the term "ردع" (stain),⁹³¹ which is inaccurately translated as dyeing with henna, suggests that not all the hair was dyed with henna. This raises the possibility that the Prophet may have used henna or other substances for medicinal purposes rather than for cosmetic reasons, such as to dye his hair.

Another hadith that is sometimes cited as evidence of the Prophet's use of henna to dye his hair is one that describes a lock of his hair kept by his wife Um Salama⁹³² after his passing. This lock of hair has been described as red,⁹³³ leading many Islamic scholars to attribute it to having been coloured by henna.⁹³⁴ However, a careful examination of the hadith in comparison to other authentic narrations reveals some important points. Firstly, the description of the lock of hair being red comes from a man who had never seen the Prophet himself; he only described what he witnessed, which was a red lock of hair.

Secondly, when one of the close companions of the Prophet was asked about the red hair seen at Um Salama's possession, he states that it turned red because of the application of scent. Um Salama used this scent for the purpose of looking after the lock of hair.⁹³⁵ According to the scholar Ahmed Al-Qastalani,⁹³⁶ the use of scent on dark hair can change its colour to a

⁹³¹ Rohi Baalabaki, المورد [Al-Mawrid], 4th ed. (Beirut: House of Knowledge for Millions, 1992), 582.

⁹³² The prophet's wife Hind bint Abi Umayya.

⁹³³ Muhammad ibn Ismaeel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols., vol. 7 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 422.

⁹³⁴ هل خضب النبي ﷺ لحيته؟" n.a, accessed 15 June, 2020, <https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/23100/-هل-خضب-النبي-ﷺ-لحيته>. إلا 20% شعرات 20% قليلة 20% من 20% الشيب, A الجواب 3%:~:##لحيته

⁹³⁵ Muhammad ibn Ismaeel Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols., vol. 4 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 458.

⁹³⁶ Ahmed Al-Qastalani, إرشاد الساري لشرح صحيح البخاري [Guidance of Al-Sari in Explaining the Sahih of Al-Bukhari], 10 vols., vol. 8 (Cairo: The Grand Amiri Printing Press, 1323).

lighter shade of brown, which may naturally have a red hue to it.⁹³⁷ Additionally, Ali Al-Qari,⁹³⁸ has pointed out that when hair is detached from the body, it may turn red as it loses its pigmentation naturally.⁹³⁹ Therefore, it is plausible that the combination of perfuming the hair and the fact that it was detached from the body might have contributed to the red colour described in the lock of hair.

Another significant issue arises when examining references to henna in the authentic hadith book *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*.⁹⁴⁰ It becomes apparent that there are translation errors in one of the reports translated by Muhammad Khan.⁹⁴¹ Specifically, Abdullah bin 'Umar's⁹⁴² report, where one of the Prophet's companions' states, "...And about the dyeing of hair with Hinna; no doubt I saw Allah's Messenger dyeing his hair with it, and that is why I like to dye my hair with it."⁹⁴³ However, upon examining the Arabic report, the word "hinna" does not appear. Instead, the companion describes curcuma or saffron, referring to it as "*Suffrah*," which denotes the colour yellow.⁹⁴⁴ Moreover, it remains unclear how the Prophet used this substance. This mistranslation creates an opportunity for false arguments suggesting that the Prophet was seen using henna, especially in research written in English.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 465.

⁹³⁸ Ali Al-Qari, *جمع الوسائل في شرح الشمائل* [Collecting Resources in Explaining the Virtues], 2 vols., vol. 1 (Cairo: The Sharafiya Printing Press, 1318).

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁴⁰ Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 1.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² Ahmad Al-Asqalani, *الإصابة في تمييز الصحابة* [The Controversy in Distinguishing the Companions], 8 vols., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1991), 155.

<https://ketabonline.com/ar/books/37679/read?part=4&page=1898&index=5841599>.

⁹⁴³ Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 1, 150.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

It is essential to note that in the English-translated report, it specifies "my hair with it,"⁹⁴⁵ whereas in the Arabic report, there is no explicit indication of what exactly was dyed with "*Suffrah*." However, in another report, it is stated, "Ibn Umar used to dye his beard with yellow colour so much so that his clothes were filled (dyed) with yellowness. He was asked: Why do you dye with yellow colour? He replied: I saw the Messenger of Allah dyeing with yellow colour, and nothing was dearer to him than it. He would dye all his clothes with it, even his turban."⁹⁴⁶ This second report clarifies that the Prophet preferred dyeing his clothes with "*Suffrah*" to achieve the effect of the colour yellow, and it was the companion Ibn Umar who liked to dye his beard with it, along with his clothes, as an expression of his love and devotion to the Prophet.

When we closely examine other reports from another of the Prophet's close companions, Anas ibn Malik,⁹⁴⁷ a clear perspective on the matter emerges. Anas was asked whether the Prophet used hair dye or not, and he replies, "The Prophet did not have enough grey hair to dye... if I wanted to count the fading hairs in his beard."⁹⁴⁸ It is important to note that Anas ibn Malik served as a servant for the Prophet for an extensive period of 20 years until the Prophet's passing,⁹⁴⁹ giving him an unparalleled level of knowledge about the Prophet's

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 4, 403.

⁹⁴⁷ Ahmad Al-Asqalani, *الإصابة في تمييز الصحابة* [The Controversy in Distinguishing the Companions], 8 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1991), 275-76.

<https://ketabonline.com/ar/books/37679/read?part=1&page=1&index=5841058>.

⁹⁴⁸ Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 7, 422.

⁹⁴⁹ Al-Asqalani, *الإصابة في تمييز الصحابة*, 1, 76-275.

habits and demeanour due to his close interaction. This first-hand experience makes Anas ibn Malik's account highly reliable.

Furthermore, in the authentic hadith book "Sahih Muslim,"⁹⁵⁰ there are seven reports that indicate the Prophet did not have many grey hairs to dye,⁹⁵¹ further supporting Anas ibn Malik's report. These additional accounts reinforce the reliability of the information.

It is important to highlight that there are no reports from the Prophet's wives indicating that he dyed his hair. Logically, the Prophet's family members would be aware of such practices and would likely report them if they were true. The absence of any such reports from the Prophet's family therefore adds weight to the conclusion that there are no authentic or good hadiths supporting the claim that the Prophet used henna to dye his hair, as asserted by some Western scholars.⁹⁵²

The authentic hadiths clearly indicate that the Prophet recommended the use of henna, as stated in one narration: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'The best of that with which you can change these grey hairs are henna and Katam.'"⁹⁵³ There are multiple hadiths that emphasize the combination of henna with katam,⁹⁵⁴ found in "Sunan an-Nasa'i"⁹⁵⁵ and "Sunan Ibn

⁹⁵⁰ Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols., vol. 6, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007).

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 187-90.

⁹⁵² Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco," 70-74; Miczak, *Henna's Secret History: The History, Mystery & Folklore of Henna*, 90; Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 113; Humphrey-Newell, "Henna, Uses of it in the Middle East and North Africa."; Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran*, 188.

⁹⁵³ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 4, 466.

⁹⁵⁴ Katam is a plant grows in the Arabian Peninsula, its dried leaves used to extract dark blue dye.

⁹⁵⁵ Ahmad An-Nasa'i, *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 6 vols., vol. 6, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 64-66.

Majah."⁹⁵⁶ Katam has a dark blue colour,⁹⁵⁷ and when mixed with the red of henna, it results in a natural dark brown shade, commonly found to be used among people from the Eastern regions.⁹⁵⁸

It is important to note that none of the authentic hadiths recommend using henna alone as a hair dye; it is always mentioned in conjunction with katam. The Prophet's closest companions, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Umar ibn al-Khattab, were known to dye their hair with henna and katam,⁹⁵⁹ indicating that this practice was common and accepted among men and even encouraged by the Prophet. In one instance, when the Prophet saw a man with grey hair, he advised him to "Change it with something but avoid black."⁹⁶⁰ as black hair was not a natural look for people from Arabia.

Now that it is established that henna was never recommended by the Prophet to be used alone for hair dye, it is important to examine an authentic hadith that both Islamic and Western scholars have used as evidence of the recommendation of using henna.⁹⁶¹ The hadith states: "The Prophet said, 'Jews and Christians do not dye their hair, so you should do the opposite of

⁹⁵⁶ Muhammad Bin Yazeed Ibn-Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., vol. 4, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 501-02.

⁹⁵⁷ Miryahan Magdi Mahmoud, "شرح أبواب صفة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم" [Explanation of the Chapters of the Description of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him.] *Journal of the International Islamic University for Hadith Sciences* 55 (2013): 2, <http://dspace.medi.u.edu.my:8181/xmlui/handle/123456789/15461>.

⁹⁵⁸ "يما يزال الشيب وما حكم تغيير الشيب بالكتم أو الحناء؟" Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Baz Charitable Foundation, 1444, accessed 8 July, 2023, <https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/25349/الحناء-او-الكتم-والتغيير-الشيب> (Audio interview).

⁹⁵⁹ Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, 6, 187.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5: 468-69.

⁹⁶¹ G. H. A. Juynboll, "Dyeing the Hair and Beard in Early Islam A Ḥadīth-Analytical Study," *Arabica* 33, no. 1 (1986): 60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057156>; Haggai Mazuz, "External Characteristics," in *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 81.

what they do."⁹⁶² According to Yusuf Al-Qaradawi,⁹⁶³ understanding a hadith correctly requires knowledge of the context in which it was said and the circumstances surrounding it. This is crucial to determine the precise intended meaning of the hadith and avoid misinterpretation or blindly following superficial appearances.⁹⁶⁴ This hadith was stated by the Prophet at a time when Islam was spreading and gaining strength. It was essential to distinguish Muslims from other religious groups, and as it was customary for Jews and Christians not to dye their hair, the Prophet therefore encouraged Muslims to adopt practices that differed from those of other religions.⁹⁶⁵ The purpose of dyeing the grey hair was to exhibit youth and vigour, especially during a time when Muslims were expanding and facing challenges in spreading their religion.

It is crucial to note that this hadith does not specifically mention henna as the substance to use for dyeing the hair. Yet, the hadith has been erroneously used to claim that the Prophet encouraged the use of henna. In truth, the hadith only emphasizes the importance of distinguishing Muslim practices from those of other religions and does not single out henna as the recommended dye for the hair.

⁹⁶² Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 7, 423.

⁹⁶³ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *كيف نتعامل مع السنة النبوية* [How Do We Deal With the Prophetic Sunnah] (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2002).

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁶⁵ Ahmed Al-Zouman, "مخالفة غير المسلمين," Electronic Article, *Islamic Rulings* (23 October 2017 2011). <https://cp.alukah.net/fayad/11020/121923/مخالفة-غير-المسلمين/>.

Weak and Fabricated Hadiths:

The concept of weak hadiths and reports in Islamic scholarship refers to those narrations that are understood to contain errors in their chain of transmission, that include unusual or unknown words attributed to the Prophet, or ones that present contradictory statements in comparison to the Quran and authentic hadiths.⁹⁶⁶

Ruwayda Al-Anzi highlights what he sees as the troubling prevalence of fabricated hadiths within public discourse and their occasional endorsement by some Islamic scholars. Despite the considerable efforts of renowned Islamic scholars to identify and warn against weak and fabricated hadiths, these unreliable narrations continue to spread widely through religious sermons, lectures, and publications. By this account, the situation has worsened with rapid technological advancements and the proliferation of social media, which have transformed the world into a closely interconnected global village. This environment has made it easier for individuals without proper knowledge to disseminate misinformation, falsely attributing statements to the Prophet Muhammad without credible authority. Such falsehoods proliferate across various platforms—television, newspapers, and websites—leading to their widespread acceptance among the public. Unfortunately, many within the Muslim community embrace these weak and fabricated hadiths without critical scrutiny, exacerbating the confusion and detrimental impact of these misleading practices.⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶⁶ Uthman ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Shahrazuri, علوم الحديث [Science of Hadith], ed. Nooruddin Itr (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Mu'asir, 1986), 41.

⁹⁶⁷ Ruwayda Al-Anzi, "لحديث الموضوع.. شره وخطورته، وسبل الوقاية منه" [On Fabricated Fadiths: Their Harm and Danger, and Ways to Protect Against it.] *Journal of the Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies for Women in Alexandria* 36, no. 10 (2020): 219, <https://doi.org/10.21608/bfda.2021.144812>.

Distinguished Sunni scholars, such as Muhammad Al-Albani,⁹⁶⁸ have excluded weak hadiths from being considered as Islamic text, treating them as fabricated, and emphasizing that they should not be considered as valid hadiths, even if they seemingly encourage good deeds.⁹⁶⁹ This is because such weak hadiths can lead to a confusion between popular beliefs and authentic Islamic beliefs, potentially giving rise to superstitions.⁹⁷⁰ Therefore, they are considered the most harmful to the Islamic community.⁹⁷¹

Fabricated narrations are produced for various reasons, but this study will focus on three relevant reasons. First, there are extremists who exaggerate the religious importance of certain people or objects, such as henna, and they fabricate hadiths to project an Islamic association with everything surrounding them.

Examples of fabricated hadiths about henna include statements like, "There is no tree that is dearer to Allah than the henna tree"⁹⁷² and the attribution of the use of henna to all prophets, stating, "Henna... among the (religious) practices of the messengers" and "Henna is my sunnah and it is mine, and the suffrah for the angels, and the whiteness (grey hair) for our father Abraham."⁹⁷³ However, these hadiths contradict each other, as the first implies that henna was used by all of God's prophets, while the second excludes Abraham from using hair dye,

⁹⁶⁸ Muhammad Al-Albani, 1 سلسلة الأحاديث الضعيفة والموضوعة وأثرها السيئ في الأمة (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, 1992), <https://shamela.ws/book/12762/45>, Electronic Book.

⁹⁶⁹ Muhammad Al-Albani, "ما حكم العمل بالحديث الضعيف في فضائل الأعمال؟", in *Series of Guidance and Enlightenment* (51:13, Al-albany, 2017), Audio. <https://www.al-albany.com/audios/content/2380/-ما-حكم-العمل-بالحديث-الضعيف-في-فضائل-الأعمال>.

⁹⁷⁰ Al-Albani, 47 سلسلة الأحاديث الضعيفة والموضوعة وأثرها السيئ في الأمة.

⁹⁷¹ Al-Shahrazuri, 98 علوم الحديث.

⁹⁷² Abd al-Rahman Al-Jawzi, العلل المتناهية في الأحاديث الواهية [The Extreme Flaws in Fabricated Hadiths], 2 vols., vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 1983), 290.

⁹⁷³ Al-Albani, 12 نقد نصوص حديثية في الثقافة العامة.

even though another weak hadith claims, "The first to dye with henna and katam was Ibrahim."⁹⁷⁴ Such attempts to elevate henna and other substances to a sacred status using religious perspectives can influence the public to hold henna dear, due to their trust in those who spread this false information and their limited knowledge, particularly in matters of religion.

For Western scholars attempting to utilize hadith as evidence to claim the association of henna with Islam, they often rely on fabricated hadiths to portray henna as a sacred substance in the Islamic faith. Scholars like William Lane⁹⁷⁵ and Westermarck, for instance, have cited fabricated hadiths to assert that henna was the Prophet's favourite flower and that it has a significant status in both this world and the afterlife, as evident in the statement, "Muhammad said, 'The chief of the sweet-scented flowers of this world and of the next.'"⁹⁷⁶ These scholars predominantly sourced this fabricated hadith from the Arabian Nights book, which Lane used in his study of Arabian culture, and Westermarck cited Lane as the reference. Notably, there is no evidence suggesting that these scholars obtained the hadith from Islamic books or through authentic field studies. This raises concerns that Western scholars may have played a role in disseminating fabricated hadiths to shape readers' opinions about the Islamic religion and Eastern cultures.

⁹⁷⁴ Muhammad Al-Albani, ضعيف الجامع الصغير [The Small Collection of Weak Hadiths] (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islami, 1990), 314.

⁹⁷⁵ Lane, *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from The Thousand and one Nights*.

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 165; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 113.

The second reason for the fabrication of such hadiths lies in financial gain, particularly among storytellers and traders.⁹⁷⁷ Storytellers often weave tales involving prophets, heroes, adventures, and romance, skilfully integrating poetry and hadiths to make their stories come alive and appear more realistic.⁹⁷⁸ These storytellers strategically position themselves in places where people gather, such as mosques, cafes, and markets. Traders, in turn, pay these storytellers—similar to modern sponsorships—to popularize their products, like henna, by associating them with the religion, the Prophet, his family, and his companions.

In the past, storytellers held a prominent position in society, serving as sources of entertainment and learning for the public. They would narrate stories from past generations, diverse cultures, and various religions, shaping the perspectives of those who listened.⁹⁷⁹ As a result, henna and other products were often promoted through these fabricated hadiths, making them more appealing to the masses and contributing to financial gains for both storytellers and traders alike.

Upon examination of the texts of the fabricated hadiths, it becomes apparent that their style resembles that of marketing campaigns utilized by traders to persuade customers into purchasing henna and other mentioned substances. This becomes evident in the fabricated

⁹⁷⁷ A person who had embraced the art of storytelling, captivating the audience in various settings such as homes, shops, cafes, and even on the streets. Storytelling went beyond merely recounting the events of the tale. His passion and enthusiasm compelled him to go further, immersing himself in the narrative by physically and vocally embodying the characters he depicted, fostering a dynamic and engaging connection with his audience.

⁹⁷⁸ Arthur Goldschmidt and Aomar Boum, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 11th ed. (Westview Press, 2016), 106.

⁹⁷⁹ Safaa Khumoom and Wissam Louz, "البعد النفسي في الحكاية الشعبية: نماذج مختارة من الوطن العربي" (Masters Thesis, Alarab Ibn Mahidi University of Umm Al-Bouaghi., 2017), <http://bib.univ-oeb.dz:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1304/1/20%البعد%النفسي%في%20%الحكاية%الشعبية%20%الشعبية.pdf>.

hadiths that specifically endorse buying henna from apothecaries (*Atar*) and exaggerate the benefits of henna well beyond those pertaining to hair and skin. These fraudulent hadiths assert claims like: "Dye your grey hair with henna, for it enhances your beauty, improves your breath smell, and increases sexual intercourse. Henna is the master of the scents of Paradise. Henna distinguishes between disbelief and faith."⁹⁸⁰

The resemblance to a marketing campaign is striking, as it conjures an image of an ideal lifestyle for consumers, skilfully amalgamating beauty, romance, and faith into a single package, much akin to the following fabricated hadith: "Dye your grey hair with henna, for it is more beautiful for your faces, cleaner for your garments, purer for your hearts, and increases your sexual intercourse. It also protects you in the grave after death. Henna is the master of the scents of paradise, and the sleeper who is adorned with henna is like the one who is bathed in his own blood in the cause of Allah, the Almighty. A good deed is multiplied tenfold, and a dirham spent on henna is multiplied seven hundred times."⁹⁸¹

The fabricated hadith cleverly adopts the tone characteristic of authentic hadiths, thereby endeavouring to gain legitimacy in the ears of the listener.⁹⁸² Moreover, the fabricator ventures to create a rhyming structure, albeit at the cost of employing misleading information concerning the notions of garment cleanliness, heart purification, and sexual relations.

⁹⁸⁰ Al-Albani, 498 , ضعيف الجامع الصغير .

⁹⁸¹ Ali bin Al-Hasan Ibn-Asakir, تاريخ مدينة دمشق [History of Damascus], 8 vols., vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1995), 397.

⁹⁸² Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 9, 358.

Nonetheless, this artful manipulation may prove appealing to certain customers for various personal reasons.

The initial portion of the fabricated hadith mentioned above pertains to the desires and necessities of this worldly life, particularly the aspiration to be attractive, especially to the opposite sex. In some other narrations of this fabricated hadith, it is further claimed that henna improves the smell of one's breath.⁹⁸³ These additions demonstrate how traders employ various tactics to persuade customers, catering to their individual preferences and needs.

The second section accentuates the perceived significance of henna in safeguarding a person after death, particularly in the grave. According to Islamic belief, angels Munkar and Nakīr⁹⁸⁴ will question the deceased regarding their faith immediately after burial.⁹⁸⁵ Fabricated hadiths instil the notion that henna acts as a protective shield, guarding individuals from punishment in the grave. Some fabricated narrations even assert that angels cannot question the deceased if they are wearing henna, as it is considered proof of Islam.⁹⁸⁶ As expressed in the hadith: "When a person is laid in the grave, Munkar and Nakīr will enter upon him. One of the angels will say to his companion, 'Ask him.' the other will respond, 'How can I ask him when he has the evidence of Islam? - meaning the henna.'"⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸³ Muhammad Al-Albani, 8 سلسلة الأحاديث الضعيفة والموضوعة وأثرها السيئ في الأمة, (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, 1992), 220, <https://shamela.ws/book/12762/4700>, Electronic Book.

⁹⁸⁴ The names of the angels.

⁹⁸⁵ Al-Jawzi, 56, 3, الموضوعات.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

From a Sunni perspective, such fabricated hadiths seemingly equate henna with one's belief in Allah. Consequently, these narratives may influence families of the deceased to purchase henna and apply it to their departed loved ones as a means of protection, albeit this practice lacks any authentic basis in Islam. The actual Islamic ritual of preparing a deceased for burial involves washing the body with dried and ground leaves of a lote (sider) tree mixed with water, and then a final wash with water mixed with camphor (karfour). The use of these substances aligns with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and is considered Sunnah.⁹⁸⁸ However, it is essential to clarify that this practice is not religiously obligatory, and modern alternatives can suffice.

Regarding Western scholars' accounts of funeral preparations, John Kennedy states that henna is rubbed on the body,⁹⁸⁹ while Diane Humphrey-Newell⁹⁹⁰ claims that in Saudi Arabia and Oman, henna is applied to the hands, feet, and hair of deceased women to protect them from evil and enhance their appearance on their judgment day.⁹⁹¹ Westermarck similarly reports the practice of staining both male and female deceased individuals if they were unmarried, as they are considered the bride or groom of the afterlife.⁹⁹² Nonetheless, these scholars' observations do not include the ritual of cleansing a deceased with henna, thereby highlighting

⁹⁸⁸ Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols., vol. 2, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 466-67.

⁹⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Struggle for Change in a Nubian Community: An Individual in Society and History*, 45.

⁹⁹⁰ Humphrey-Newell, "Henna, Uses of it in the Middle East and North Africa."

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁹² Edward Westermarck, "Abdessalam El-Baqqali in Andjra," (Ritual and Belief in Morocco V.1: MacMillan and Co., 1926), Photograph, 448.

the possible misinterpretation due to similarities in the appearance of different substances used in such rituals.

The concluding segment of the fabricated hadith incentivizes spending money on henna, drawing a parallel between such expenditure and charitable donations. It asserts that these acts of benevolence will be rewarded manifold on the Day of Judgment. Some versions even elevate the rewards for spending on henna, suggesting that one dirham spent on henna brings seven thousand rewards, while one spent in charity garners seven hundred rewards.⁹⁹³ These claims have been recorded by Western scholars like Bess Allen Donaldson,⁹⁹⁴ Humphrey-Newell,⁹⁹⁵ and Patricia Spurles.⁹⁹⁶ Interestingly, each scholar cites the other as the source for the hadith, indicating that they did not gather this information from first hand field studies.

However, there are other fabricated hadiths that focus solely on the spiritual benefits of using henna during worship and prayer. According to these narratives, every prayer performed while adorned with henna is multiplied 24 times in reward on the Day of Judgment.⁹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the fabricated hadith promotes the idea of being blessed when adorned with henna. It attributes blessings from Allah, angels, and messengers, extending even to the creatures of the sea and the birds in their nests, upon the one who adorns themselves with

⁹⁹³ Al-Shawkani, 195, الفوائد المجموعة في الأحاديث الموضوعة.

⁹⁹⁴ Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran*, 188.

⁹⁹⁵ Humphrey-Newell, "Henna, Uses of it in the Middle East and North Africa," 14.

⁹⁹⁶ Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco," 74.

⁹⁹⁷ Al-Jawzi, 56, 3, الموضوعات.

henna.⁹⁹⁸ Remarkably, these fabricated narrations are directed towards both sexes, strategically maximizing their impact and the potential financial profit for the sellers.

The third motive behind fabricating hadiths seems to be a combination of trade and sexism, exploiting cultural traditions to benefit traders.⁹⁹⁹ Such fabricated hadiths imply that henna is a compulsory requirement for Muslim women, insinuating that they would not be considered truly adherent to Islam if they did not use henna. For instance, two fabricated hadiths state: "Hind... 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 (with henna); for they look like the paws of a beast of prey."¹⁰⁰⁰ And: "We (women) pledged allegiance to The Messenger of God, he told us to pledge to ... smear our hands with henna."¹⁰⁰¹ This kind of narrative attempts to assign women a lesser status compared to men, in contrast to authentic reports where the act of pledging allegiance is treated as equal for both genders.¹⁰⁰² Furthermore, these fabricated reports portray the Prophet to be acting in a disrespectful and degrading manner towards women. Some of these hadiths imply that it is unnatural for women not to use henna, and that they should change the appearance of their nails by dyeing them with henna, as it states: "A woman reached out her hand (to give) a letter to the Prophet and he withdrew his hand. She

⁹⁹⁸ Al-Shawkani, 195, الفوائد المجموعة في الأحاديث الموضوعة.

⁹⁹⁹ Hassan Tahir Malham, "الأحاديث الموضوعة، أسبابها ونتائجها," [False Hadiths, Causes and Consequences.] *Magazine of The Islamic University College* 1, no. 16 (2012): 407, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/9374c049af956d26>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Abu Dawud, 76, 4, سنن أبي داود.

¹⁰⁰¹ Nuruddin Ali Al-Heithami, مجمع الزوائد ومنبع الفوائد [Collection of Extra Narrations and Source of Benefit], 10 vols., vol. 5, ed. Hussam Al-Din Al-Qudsi (Cairo: Al-Qudsi Library, 1994), 171.

¹⁰⁰² Ahmad An-Nasa'i, *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 6 vols., vol. 5, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 109.

said: "O Messenger of Allah, I reached out my hand (to give you) a letter and you did not take it." He said: "I did not know whether it was the hand of a woman or a man." She said: "It is the hand of a woman." He said: "If you were a woman, you would change your nails (by dyeing them with Henna)."¹⁰⁰³ Such narratives appear to serve the purpose of pressuring women into using henna and fostering the belief that their faith might be questioned if they do not comply.

Interestingly, Western scholars like Spurles have mistakenly listed these fabricated hadiths as authentic,¹⁰⁰⁴ leading to misunderstandings. Her limited understanding of the grading system for hadiths resulted in a misleading claim that the Prophet commanded women to use henna while disliking its smell.¹⁰⁰⁵ However, she did not question the conflicting accounts regarding the Prophet's stance on henna, such as other fabricated hadiths claiming that henna is his favourite flower. This highlights the need for accurate scholarship to avoid misrepresentations and misunderstandings about Islamic practices.

Henna in Hadith from a Shia Perspective

The Shia is also known as the Twelver group.¹⁰⁰⁶ They constitute the majority in Iran, southern Iraq, and parts of Yemen, and can also be found in Syria, Lebanon, East Africa, northern India, and Pakistan.¹⁰⁰⁷ Their origins trace back to the time after the Prophet's death,

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid., 6: 69-70.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Spurles, "Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work, and Tourism in Morocco," 72.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Anne Kerr and Edmund Wright, "Shiites," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199685691.001.0001/acref-9780199685691-e-3351>.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., 2; O. Bengio and Meir Litvak, *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

when they called themselves Shiat Ali Ibn Abi-Talib,¹⁰⁰⁸ the 'party of Ali,' who was both the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰⁰⁹ According to Shiite belief, Ali and his descendants are the rightful heirs to Muhammad's leadership among Muslims. They are considered to have inherited the Prophet's charisma and are entitled to be his political successors and religious authorities.¹⁰¹⁰ Known as the Infallibles (*al ma 'ṣṣūmeen*), they carried forth the message of Islam after the Prophet's passing.¹⁰¹¹

As a result of their distinct beliefs, the Shia approach the study of hadith, the sayings and the actions of Prophet Muhammad, differently from Sunni Muslims. Their method involves scrutinizing the chain of narrators (*isnad*) and accepting hadiths only from certain narrators whom they believe have shown support for Ali Ibn Abi-Talib and the Shiite cause. For a hadith to be accepted, it must be reported by Ali bin Abi-Talib, whom they view as an infallible authority.¹⁰¹² In contrast, the Shia do not acknowledge hadiths transmitted by most of the Prophet's wives or many of his companions, as they consider them to be corrupt and hostile towards Ali and the faith. This distinction in the acceptance of hadith narrators is a fundamental aspect that sets the Shia apart from the Sunni tradition.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁸ It is Important to note that for Sunni Ali bin Abi-Talib and his sons Alhassan and Alhusain, do not represent Shia and they did not share in any of their believes.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Husain Mohammad Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1976), 1.

¹⁰¹⁰ Bengio and Litvak, *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, 2.

¹⁰¹¹ Zaheer, 93, الشيعية والسنة.

¹⁰¹² Al-Wardani, 08-107, عقائد السنة وعقائد الشيعة.

¹⁰¹³ Alwrdany (1999).

In Shia hadith, the mention of henna appears extensively, with reports from all the Infallible who used it to dye their hair and stain their hands and feet.¹⁰¹⁴ It is crucial to note that what may be considered fabricated hadith by Sunni Islamic scholars is often regarded as authentic by Shia scholars. This divergence in evaluation stems from the Shia belief that a weak hadith can gain strength if it is widely accepted among the early Shia scholars and has been transmitted through a chain of trustworthy narrators. The piety and diligence of these early scholars, combined with their proximity to the early generations of Islam, provide corroborative evidence that might not be apparent to contemporary scholars.¹⁰¹⁵

In the Shia hadith books, there is no doubt that Prophet Muhammad used henna, as it is explicitly recorded. For instance, in one Shia hadith book, Ali al-Hadi¹⁰¹⁶ was asked about using henna as a hair dye, to which he responded by affirming that Prophet Mohammed used to dye his hair with it, even presenting a lock of the Prophet's hair as evidence.¹⁰¹⁷ This hadith bears similarity to the account of the Prophet's wife, Zainab, mentioned earlier. However, the Shia do not consider the Prophet's wives as reliable sources, and instead choose to rely on the narrations they trust.¹⁰¹⁸ It is important to note, though, that from a logical perspective, there are some challenges with the authenticity of such accounts. For example, al-Hadi was born around 240

¹⁰¹⁴ Aqa Hussein Tabatabai Al-Borujerdi, *جامع أحاديث الشيعة* [Collection of Shia Hadiths], 26 vols., vol. 16 (Aleppo: Scientific Printing House, 1979), 579-92.

¹⁰¹⁵ Mohammad Jawad Mughniyah, *الشيعة في الميزان* [Shiites on the Scale] (Beirut: Shurooq Publishing House, 1979), 319. <https://www.kotobati.com/book/reading/1e27cbcb-1a6f-4aef-980a-cd74c2689817>.

¹⁰¹⁶ The tenth of the Infallibles Twelver Shia Imams.

¹⁰¹⁷ Aqa Hussein Tabatabai Al-Borujerdi, *جامع أحاديث الشيعة* [Collection of Shia Hadiths], 26 vols., vol. 1 (Aleppo: Scientific Printing House, 1979), 122.

¹⁰¹⁸ Zaheer, 49-47, *الشيعة والسنة*.

years after the Prophet's death,¹⁰¹⁹ making it highly unlikely for him to possess an actual lock of the Prophet's hair. Moreover, the natural processes of hair would lead to changes in its colour and potentially turn it red over such an extended period.

Other Shia hadiths go a step further than the Sunnah tradition,¹⁰²⁰ as they depict the Prophet explicitly commanding the use of henna rather than merely recommending it. One particular hadith highlights the significance of henna, describing it as "...the master of fragrances [of the people] of Paradise, and the one who sleeps while wearing henna is like a warrior fighting for Allah."¹⁰²¹

As previously discussed, Sunni hadith studies consider any hadith that attributes heavenly or holy properties to henna as invalid. However, in Shia hadith studies, such narratives are esteemed and considered authentic. Even hadiths that encourage the purchase of henna are regarded with reverence. For instance, a hadith cited by a Shia scholar quotes the Prophet as saying, "A dirham spent on henna is better than a thousand dirhams spent on something else in the path of Allah. Henna has fourteen benefits: it repels wind from the ears, clears the vision, softens the skin, perfumes the taste, strengthens the gums, dispels doubts, reduces Satan's whispers, delights the angels, brings joy to the believer, angers the disbeliever, serves as an adornment and fragrance, and is respected by those who enjoin good and forbid evil. It becomes

¹⁰¹⁹ Muhammad Ali Al-Ordabadi, *ابو جعفر محمد بن الإمام علي الهادي*, [Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin Imam Ali Al-Hadi] (Najaf: Dar Alfikr, 1956), 6.

¹⁰²⁰ Ali Tabarsi, *مكارم الأخلاق* [Virtues of Character] (Beirut: Al-Alfin Library, 1972), 78.

http://shiaonlinelibrary.com/78_الصفحة_الطبرسي/مكارم-الأخلاق-الشيخ-الطبرسي/#الكتب/1340_مكارم-الأخلاق-الشيخ-الطبرسي/الصفحة_78.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

hair dyeing process, and the result depends on the subsequent substance used. In particular, when wasma is used after henna, it yields a very dark brown colour, nearly black, which aligns with the preferred colour choice among the Shia. This preference for darker hair colour, in accordance with the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, plays a significant role in the Shia's choice of hair dyeing substances, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the teachings of their faith.

A significant point to note is that men are advised to dye their hair black primarily to safeguard women's virtue. One of the Infallible emphasizes this idea in many narrations, stating "That a man use of hair dye and beautification increases the modesty of women, but women have forsaken modesty when their husbands refrain from adorning themselves for them."¹⁰²⁷ This perspective implies the importance of men presenting themselves as attractive to their wives and suggesting that failure to do so could potentially lead women to seek attention elsewhere, raising concerns of infidelity. It also implies that women are sexually driven, and that henna and other hair dyes please and tame them.

The use of henna for body adornment is not limited to women; it has been mentioned to have been used by some of the Infallible figures. For instance, the Infallible Musa al-Kazim,¹⁰²⁸ states that he used to stain his feet with henna.¹⁰²⁹ Muhammad al-Jawad¹⁰³⁰ was reported to stain his nails with henna. When asked about this practice, he explained that when the

¹⁰²⁷ Al-Majlisi, 02, 100, 73, بحار الأنوار; Tabarsi, 79, مكارم الأخلاق.

¹⁰²⁸ The 7th of the Infallibles Twelver Shia Imams.

¹⁰²⁹ Al-Borujerdi, 591, 16, جامع أحاديث الشيعة.

¹⁰³⁰ The 9th of the Infallibles Twelver Shia Imams.

fingernails are left their natural colour and thus appear white, they can resemble the fingernails of a deceased person.¹⁰³¹ To avoid this, he advises changing their colour using henna, and that stained fingernails symbolize life. Similarly, there is a report about the Infallible Musa al-Kazim, that states that he used to stain his feet with henna. However, it is important to note that henna use is not considered compulsory for men. Instead, it is recommended for men to embrace the natural aging process, particularly when it comes to hair turning grey. A saying advises men not to pluck out or cover their grey hair, as it is considered the "light of a Muslim." Embracing one's grey hair in Islam is believed to bring about spiritual benefits, symbolizing wisdom and maturity.¹⁰³² Such individuals are said to have a special "light" on the Day of Resurrection.¹⁰³³ However, this perspective appears contradictory to the earlier saying of the Prophet and some reports by the earlier Shia Infallibles in Shia hadith books, which emphasize the use of henna and dark hair dye, particularly for men. Despite this apparent contradiction, the Shia perspective holds that each Infallible possesses the authority to provide interpretations and adjustments within the framework of Islam.¹⁰³⁴

In Shia belief, the use of henna for women is considered religiously compulsory. Their hadith includes a statement that "I curse women who do not have henna in their hands."¹⁰³⁵ Additionally, according to Shia teachings, the Prophet reportedly ordered women not to pray

¹⁰³¹ Al-Kulayni, 509, 6, الكافي في الأصول والفروع.

¹⁰³² Al-Majlisi, 106, 73, بحار الأنوار.

¹⁰³³ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁴ Jafar Subhani, مع الشيعة الامامية في عقائدهم [With the Shia Imamiyah in Their Beliefs] (Mashear, 1992), 46.

¹⁰³⁵ Tabarsi, 395, 1, مستدرك الوسائل ومستنبط المسائل.

without henna,¹⁰³⁶ emphasizing that they should stain their hands with henna, whether they are married or single. When a married women adorns herself with henna it is seen as a way to beautify herself for their husband, while if carried out by a single women, it is considered to be to distinguish their hands from those of men. At the very least, the fingernails should be stained.¹⁰³⁷

However, according to Shia beliefs, there are certain restrictions on how and when women are allowed to use henna. Henna patterns are not permitted, and there are references in Shia hadith that (inaccurately and falsely) attribute the “destruction of Jews”¹⁰³⁸ to the use of henna patterns by Jewish women.¹⁰³⁹ This displays a sexist and controlling perspective, dictating how women should adorn themselves. The Shia scholar Abdul Karim al-Qazwini¹⁰⁴⁰ suggests that it is preferable for women to use henna to stain their faces, hands, arms up to their elbows, and feet up to their knees to cover their skin from the view of foreign men. According to al-Qazwini, women should avoid patterns and should only stain their fingertips, so as to not fully cover the skin and attract unwanted attention from men.¹⁰⁴¹

In Shia belief, men were initially prohibited from using henna, as Ali al-Rida¹⁰⁴² states:

"it is loathed for a man to use henna dye after having sex, he must have purification bath first

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁷ Tabarsi, 82, مكارم الأخلاق; Tabarsi, 96, 394, 1, مستدرك الوسائل ومستنبط المسائل.

¹⁰³⁸ An event recorded only on Shia hadith books.

¹⁰³⁹ Husain Noori Tabarsi, مستدرك الوسائل ومستنبط المسائل [The Compendium of Means and the Derivation of Issues], 18 vols., vol. 14 (Beirut: The Arab Historian Publishing House, 1987), 267.

ج-٤/١ الصفحة 257-الكتب/1250_مستدرك-الوسائل-الميرزا-النوري/ <http://shiaonlineibrary.com>

¹⁰⁴⁰ Abdul Karim ibn Muhammad al-Rafi'i Al-Qazwini, فتح العزيز بشرح الوجيز [Opening of the Mighty by Explaining the Concise], 12 vols., vol. 7 (Amman: Dar al-Fikr, 1997).

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., 252.

¹⁰⁴² The 8th of the Infallible Twelver Shia Imams.

otherwise he will be venerable the devil."¹⁰⁴³ However, this prohibition was later lifted by the Shia scholar Muhammad al-Qummi¹⁰⁴⁴ in the 4th century of Shi'ism. Al-Qummi's decision granted men more flexibility and freedom to fulfil their sexual needs without undue restrictions.¹⁰⁴⁵ On the other hand, in Shia tradition, women are not allowed to use henna while they are 'impure' due to sexual intercourse. Additionally, the Infallible Ja'far al-Sadiq¹⁰⁴⁶ further emphasizes this restriction, instructing: "Do not use henna while in a state of ... menstruation. Indeed, Satan is their companion."¹⁰⁴⁷ When comparing the restrictions on men and women in this context, it is evident that men are viewed as vulnerable to evil spirits, while women are perceived to be accompanied by the evil spirit during certain periods. Such beliefs are reflected in the treatment of women in Shia hadith books. One hadith states, "Consult with women and act contrary to their opinion, as their opposition brings blessings."¹⁰⁴⁸

Men's Henna: Between Culture and Religion

Henna body staining has traditionally been considered women's practice, while henna use by men is relatively rare and documented only in certain Islamic cultures, particularly during weddings. This distinction has led to the general perception that henna body adornment is primarily for women.

¹⁰⁴³ مكارم الأخلاق, 83, Tabarsi.

¹⁰⁴⁴ من لا يحضره الفقيه, 1, Al-Qummi.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁴⁶ The 6th of the Infallible Twelver Shia Imams.

¹⁰⁴⁷ مكارم الأخلاق, 83, Tabarsi.

¹⁰⁴⁸ مستدرك الوسائل ومستنبط المسائل, 14, 264, Tabarsi.

In Yemen, the groom's henna night is a significant pre-wedding celebration held the night before the wedding ceremony.¹⁰⁴⁹ In rural areas like Dhamar, the groom's hands and feet are stained with henna; however, there are no intricate patterns and instead the entire hands and feet are covered (Figure 12). Male friends and family also apply henna in a similar manner. However, this tradition can vary among different Yemeni families. In some cases, the groom may choose to stain only part of his feet, creating a frame around the sole and covering the toes. Additionally, he might opt to stain only the right hand in a round shape (Figure 13).



Figure 12: Yemeni groom and his friends stained with henna (Mohsen, 2017)

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ohood Mohsen, "الحناء" ليس حكراً على النساء في اليمن", *Irem* (2017).
<https://www.iremnews.com/entertainment/society/830584>.



Figure 13: Yemeni groom staining his right hands and feet (Mohsen, 2017)

People in the Tihama area of Yemen take a unique approach to henna staining. Women prepare large quantities of henna and distribute it to the men of the town, including friends and relatives of the groom. They then gather in a spacious field and apply henna to the groom's hair and various parts of his body while dancing and singing to music and traditional folk songs specific to the henna procession. The event takes on a playful tone as the groom's friends smear henna on the faces and bodies of those present in the procession, even chasing after anyone trying to escape the staining. Passersby who stop to watch the celebration also become part of the joyous event and receive their share of henna staining (Figure 14).¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁵⁰ Abdulrahman Al-Bayl, "زفة الحناء في الأعراس التهامية... تراث يأبى الإندثار," News Report, *Al-Mashhad Al-Yamani* (10 May 2018). <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/109756>.



Figure 14: Groom's procession in Tihama (Al-Bayl, 2018)

A similar custom is found in rural areas of Egypt, particularly practiced by the Al-Saidia community. The groom, along with his relatives and friends, partakes in a henna shower before meeting his bride on the day of the wedding. This tradition spreads joy, creates a fun-filled activity, and celebrates the groom (Figure 15).¹⁰⁵¹



Figure 15: The groom's henna in one of the villages of Qena (Abduljawad, 2022)

¹⁰⁵¹ Egypt Channel One, "التاسعة | فيديو حنة العريس في قنا.. المصور أحمد يحيى يستعرض الطقوس التراثية من زفاف الصعايدة", (5:24), YouTube, 2 September 2022), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oB3IWGaH3E&t=69s>; Abu Al-Ma'arif Al-Hafnawi, "حكايات | حموم الحناء والقفز في النيل.. عريس «من جهة صعيدية»", *News Today Portal* (19 November 2019). <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/2948340/1/حكايات-حموم-الحناء-والقفز-في-النيل-عريس->

Leaving a stain on the body is not the primary purpose of this tradition in both Yemen and Egypt, as a significant amount of water is added to the henna mixture. In contrast, when henna is applied for body art purposes, it is prepared thicker and left on the skin for an extended period. The henna shower tradition instead serves to prepare the groom for his pre-wedding bath before meeting the bride. It symbolizes his excitement and readiness for the upcoming marriage ceremony. By involving family and friends in this celebratory event, the henna shower fosters a sense of togetherness and enhances the festive atmosphere of the wedding celebration.

In the United Arab Emirates and Oman, a groom's henna night is a customary event organized by male companions and relatives. Aligning with cultural preferences, the focus is on staining the feet, unlike in bridal henna events. In Oman, a henna night typically involves staining only the soles of the feet (Figure 16).¹⁰⁵² Meanwhile, in the United Arab Emirates, henna is applied to the entire foot above the ankle, creating a sock-like appearance (Figure 17).¹⁰⁵³

While brides meticulously apply henna and wait for the henna to dry to achieve a darker and longer-lasting stain, a groom's henna night is centered around celebration rather than the appearance of the stain. As a result, the henna applied during the groom's henna night typically persists for only a few days.

¹⁰⁵² Khalil Al-bloushi, "5:58) ", حفل حناء المعرس مازن البوسعيدي, YouTube, 20 June 2020 2015), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGerVtpWkVc>.

¹⁰⁵³ Variety, "1:44) ", ليلة الحنأ, عرس منزلي في الإمارات .. ليلة الحنأ, YouTube, 13 July 2020 2018), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV0famVaKZw>.



Figure 16: The henna ceremony of Omani groom (Al-bloushi, 2015)



Figure 17: A traditional henna night in the Emirates (Variety, 2018)

In Palestine, the tradition of applying henna for wedding celebrations has evolved, taking on a more artistic and symbolic approach.¹⁰⁵⁴ Palestinian weddings have embraced a modernized version of the tradition, quite unlike the use of henna for body staining in other countries. During a groom's henna night, he receives intricate henna patterns on his hands, featuring heart shapes and the initials of the couple (Figure 18). This artistic application serves

¹⁰⁵⁴ David A. McDonald, "Geographies of the Body: Music, Violence and Manhood in Palestine," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 19, no. 2 (2010): 207-08, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27895867>; "Henna Wa Zaffe: An inside Look at Palestinian Wedding Traditions," *Middle East Eye*, 2022, accessed 23 June, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/palestine-henna-zaffe-wedding-traditions-inside-look>.

as a beautiful gesture expressing love and affection for the bride. The focus is on cherishing the tradition and culture rather than adhering to a compulsory practice for the groom.¹⁰⁵⁵



Figure 18: Palestinian groom's hand stained with henna (Abahri, 2016)

In Sudan, the tradition of the groom applying henna takes on a different purpose and approach. Here, the groom applies henna to his skin with the intention of staining it in a deep red to black colour for his wedding (Figure 19, Figure 20).¹⁰⁵⁶ This practice serves as a joyful expression and a showcase of his status as a groom. By applying henna in this manner, people can easily identify him as a newly married man wherever he goes.¹⁰⁵⁷

¹⁰⁵⁵ Nedal Abahri, "عرس الحناء الفلسطيني", YouTube, 28 November 2016), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avOjdPVwtY4>.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Huda Ali, "طقوس خاصة لـ «حناء» العريس السوداني", *Al-Watan* (2018). <https://www.al-watan.com/article/127324/NEWS/الطقوس-الخاصة-ل-حناء-العريس-السوداني>.

¹⁰⁵⁷ "حناء العريس-ركن-أصيل-من-طقوس-الزواج-السوداني" (Article), *www.arabstoday.net*, 2017, accessed 17 February, 2021, <https://www.arabstoday.net/329/012813-الحناء-العريس-ركن-أصيل-من-طقوس-الزواج-السوداني>.



Figure 19: Sudanese groom with henna paste on his hands (Ali, 2018)



Figure 20: Groom's hands with henna stains (El-Sayyid, 2020)

Men's henna body adornment varies across different Muslim societies and is not widespread. Even in societies where it is a tradition, many men question its acceptability from a religious standpoint. As is common in Muslim culture, individuals often seek guidance from Islamic scholars and clerics to ensure that their actions align with religious teachings, and scholars respond based on their knowledge and interpretation of the Quran and hadiths. These sources may indicate approval or disapproval of certain practices, including henna use by men.

As a result, questions on this topic have been addressed to numerous Islamic scholars from different cultures, and while some scholars forbid the practice, others approve of it, depending on their understanding and interpretation of religious texts. This diversity of opinions reflects the nuanced nature of henna use among Muslim communities worldwide.

It is worth noting that the use of henna body adornment by men is not explicitly mentioned in authentic hadiths. Scholars who oppose the practice, such as Mohammed bin Uthaymeen,¹⁰⁵⁸ argue that henna use is solely reserved for women and not permissible for men.¹⁰⁵⁹ His opinion is based on a hadith that states, "Allah's Messenger cursed those men who are in the similitude of women and those women who are in the similitude of men."¹⁰⁶⁰

Examining Uthaymeen's background sheds light on possible influences on his opinion. He hailed from Al-Qassim Province in Saudi Arabia, known for its strict religious and social traditions, where henna body adornment is primarily associated with women and considered a feminine practice.¹⁰⁶¹ Therefore, Uthaymeen is likely to have formulated his stance based on the cultural norms of this region, but he may have overlooked the fact that, in other cultures, henna use by men is common and is not used to imitate women. However, another Saudi Islamic scholar, Abd Alaziz Ibn-Baz,¹⁰⁶² has a different perspective due to his extensive

¹⁰⁵⁸ Mohammed bin Saleh bin-Uthaymeen, "خضاب الرجل بالحناء بمناسبة الزواج," ed. Ibrahim Damati (Fatawa Nur 'ala al-Darb, 12 July 2018 n.d), Audio. <https://binothaimen.net/content/10523>.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 7, 418.

¹⁰⁶¹ Turki bin Abdullah Al-Maiman, الثمين من أخبار الشيخ ابن عثيمين [Precious News from the Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen's Accounts] (Riyadh: Dar Al-Hadara, 3 May 2022, 2019), Electronic book, 10. <https://www.noor-book.com/كتاب-التمين-من-اخبار-الشيخ-ابن-عثيمين-pdf>.

¹⁰⁶² Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Hamad, جوانب من سيرة الإمام عبد العزيز بن باز [Aspects of the Biography of Imam Abdulaziz Bin-Baz] (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzaimah, 2002).

interactions with diverse societies and people from various cultures while residing in Riyadh. He acknowledged that henna is used for women's adornment in Saudi culture, but he recognized that in other cultures, both men and women use henna equally without the intention of imitating the opposite sex.¹⁰⁶³ As a result, he viewed the use of henna by men in such cultures as permissible without restrictions.¹⁰⁶⁴

We find differing opinions when examining the perspectives of scholars from cultures where men use henna to stain their hands and feet, such as in Sudan. Scholar Qassim-Allah Abdul Ghaffar¹⁰⁶⁵ notes that it is uncommon for men to use henna regularly, as it is more commonly known as an adornment for women. However, in the Sudanese culture, exceptions are made for men to use henna during weddings as a celebratory tradition, particularly by the groom.¹⁰⁶⁶

On the other hand, the religious authorities of the Egyptian and Palestinian House of Ifta¹⁰⁶⁷ have forbidden men to use henna, despite it being a tradition in the culture of some regions within these countries, especially rural areas.¹⁰⁶⁸ Unfortunately, in rendering their judgment, these religious rulings may not have fully considered the cultural elements at play,

¹⁰⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁴ "حكم استعمال الحناء للرجل", n.a, accessed 15 June, 2020, <https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/10031/-الحناء-استعمال-للرجل>.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Tayba TV Channel, "هل يجوز خضاب الرجل عند الزواج (حنة العريس)", in *The Office of Fatwa* (2:51, YouTube, 25 Mar 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUboZhvJgV0>.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁷ "ماحكم استعمال الرجل للحناء (الخضاب)؟", Islamic Council for Fatwa, 2009, accessed 15 June, 2002, [http://www.fatawah.net/Fatawah/250.aspx#:~:text=20%...20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ](http://www.fatawah.net/Fatawah/250.aspx#:~:text=20%...20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ,20%الرجل%20%يدي%20%خضب%20%وقوله%20%عذر%20%بلا%إلخ); "ما حكم الحناء في اليد والقدم للرجل؟", Egyptian House of Ifta, 2019, accessed 25 June, 2022, <https://www.dar-alifta.org/ar/viewvfatwa/2759/؟-اليد-والقدم-للرجل>.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Fatwa, "ما حكم الحناء في اليد والقدم للرجل؟"; Ifta, "ماحكم استعمال الرجل للحناء (الخضاب)؟".

nor the fact that in certain local societies, men's use of henna is solely for celebratory purposes and not to imitate women or to stimulate them in any way.

Islamic scholars have placed restrictions on the use of henna by men because the practice is not explicitly mentioned in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. In Islamic jurisprudence, when a matter is not specifically addressed in the Quran or hadith, scholars often look to similar cases and apply similar rules to derive their rulings. Scholars may therefore have considered henna use a feminine practice because it is historically associated with women, and thus they forbade its use by men.

However, some scholars have used a hadith to support their stance against men using henna. The hadith states: "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: He imitates the look of women..., and he was banished to an-Naqi'..."¹⁰⁶⁹

According to Al-Albani, this hadith is very weak and is classed as a denied hadith (munkar), because many of its narrators are unknown and others deemed untrustworthy. Also, he states that the order of the Prophet to banish a third-gender man is strange, as the man did not choose to be a third gender, and because this hadith was not repeated by any other narrators to support its credibility.¹⁰⁷⁰

¹⁰⁶⁹ Suliman bin Ash'ath Abu Dawud, سنن ابي داود [Sunan Abu Dawud], trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 vols., vol. 5, ed. Hafiz Ali Za'i and Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), 324.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Muhammad Al-Albani, 2 ضعيف الترغيب والترهيب (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, 2000), 37-38, <https://shamela.ws/book/179/622#p1>, Electronic Book.

Western scholars, like Spurles, have cited this hadith as evidence that henna is an Islamic practice, using a hadith from the Sunan Abu Dawud collection.¹⁰⁷¹ However, it is important to note that the grading and authenticity of this hadith were not provided by its collector, Suliman Abu-Dawud.¹⁰⁷² This crucial detail may easily escape the attention of outsiders to the religion or individuals with limited knowledge, leading to potential misrepresentations of the religion and therefore their descriptions of the use of henna.

Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive examination of the hadith from varying perspectives within Islam. The aim was to challenge the notion that henna is inherently Islamic and to refute any definitive association with the Prophet. Through rigorous analysis and historical context, the chapter sought to establish a clear understanding of henna's place within Eastern traditions.

Upon a comprehensive examination of authentic hadith, there is no definitive evidence confirming that the Prophet used henna for his hair or body. It is essential to note that the Prophet never explicitly referred to henna as a blessed substance or favoured it over other plants, contrary to the assertions made by certain Western scholars. Such misinterpretations often arise due to inaccuracies in translating hadiths into English and other languages.

¹⁰⁷¹ Abu Dawud, 5, سنن أبي داود.

¹⁰⁷² Mohammed Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya, تهذيب سنن أبي داود [Refinement of Sunnah Sunan Abu Dawoud], 5 vols., vol. 1, ed. Ismail bin Ghazi (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Ma'arif, 2007).

In the instances where the Prophet mentions henna as a hair dye, he always associates it with other substances that darken its colour. This practice suggests that if henna held significant religious importance, the Prophet would have explicitly recommended its sole and extensive use. Moreover, dyeing the hair with henna alone results in an unnatural red-orange colour on grey hair, which is not a typical appearance for human hair. Logically, it seems unlikely that the Prophet would have advised Muslims to adopt an odd or unnatural appearance.

These observations raise doubts about the purported association between the Prophet and henna, leading one to question whether this connection was fabricated to link Islam with ancient practices from the perspective of the West. Additionally, this notion might be exploited by traders seeking to profit from the unwavering beliefs and dedication of Muslims in adhering to the teachings of the Prophet.

This chapter has presented a comprehensive list of hadiths related to henna, which some Western scholars have cited as evidence to support the claim of henna use being an Islamic practice associated with the Prophet. It has highlighted how Islamic scholars have thoroughly examined these hadiths and many of them have been deemed ‘fabricated’, stripping them of legitimacy and any relevance to the Islamic religion for many adherents. To ensure an accurate understanding of Islamic practices and teachings, it is imperative to exercise caution and rely solely on authentic and verified sources and to acknowledge disagreements which exist within and across Islamic traditions.

Three main reasons have contributed to the fabrication of hadiths about henna. Firstly, there are those who take a particularly strong view, exaggerating the significance of henna as a virtuous act from the textual sources. Secondly, henna traders and storytellers have propagated false hadiths for financial gain. And lastly, sexism was exploited by some traders to encourage henna use, specifically by women. These explanations shed light on the underlying motivations behind the creation and spread of such misleading information and underscore the need for discernment when engaging with religious practices and their associated narrations.

This section has provided ample evidence to refute the consideration of henna as an inherently Islamic practice. Instead, henna should be recognized as a form of cultural art used predominantly by Muslim populations, rather than being regarded as a specifically Islamic substance enforced on the entire nation religiously.

This chapter has thoroughly examined the perspective of henna by Shia Muslims, revealing that in their belief, henna holds an Islamic significance and has been used by the Prophet and the Infallibles. When studying henna body art, it is important to consider the beliefs of the society and the individuals using henna, as religious beliefs can vary significantly from person to person. Understanding the depth of a religious belief and its influence on cultural practices is crucial to fully grasp the significance of henna in different contexts.

This section highlights the importance of avoiding generalizations about henna practices and beliefs within the Muslim community. It is essential to recognize that while henna

may hold religious significance for some Shia Muslims, the majority of Muslims, who follow the Sunni tradition, do not associate henna with Islam in the same way. Each individual's interpretation of their faith and cultural practices may differ, making it necessary to approach the topic with sensitivity and openness to diverse perspectives.

Upon examining the use of henna by men in weddings, we find that it is culturally acceptable in many societies. However, from a religious perspective, the majority of scholars have prohibited henna use by men, fearing it may lead to female stimulation. It is important to recognize that such restrictions are based on personal cultural experiences and should be considered as scholarly opinions rather than strict Islamic guidelines, as they are not derived from the Quran or any authentic hadith.

The use of henna by men in weddings illustrates that their intention is primarily artistic for the purpose of adornment and cultural expression. In some societies, cultural practices may hold more significance than strict adherence to religious norms. This further underscores the complexity of the role of henna within different communities and the need to approach it with an understanding of the intertwining of art, culture, and religion. By doing so, we can avoid oversimplifications and appreciate the rich diversity of perspectives and practices surrounding henna within the Muslim world.

Chapter Seven

Henna and the Supernatural: Exploring Cultural and Religious Perspectives

Introduction

A belief in evil spirits is almost universal across cultures and religions.¹⁰⁷³ Throughout history, people have held beliefs in supernatural creatures such as spirits, ghosts, demons, and jinn, which are feared to bring misfortune and illness.¹⁰⁷⁴

The connection between demonology and body art is significant. In some cases, individuals use body art, including tattooing, body modification, and henna, to convey social signals. The decoration of the body plays a vital role in expressing and reinforcing social relationships and values, reflecting the individual's relationship with society.¹⁰⁷⁵ Body art serves to communicate one's identity to others. Various cultures worldwide employ body art to represent past experiences, current circumstances, and traits such as bravery, status, beauty, fertility, magic, protection, transformations, and connections with others.

People have sought protection from malevolent powers through various rituals, such as using figurines to ward off evil spirits, reciting religious texts, and performing exorcisms. Anthropological studies have documented these practices throughout history, often examined

¹⁰⁷³ Manal Hammad, "Demonic Beings in Ancient Egypt," *International Academic Journal Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management* 4 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijaf.2018.95495>; Wm Theodore De Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2001), 18-19; Douglas A. Fox, "Darkness and Light: The Zoroastrian View," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 35, no. 2 (1967): 130, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1460843>; Henryk Drawnel, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Enochic Giants and Evil Spirits," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 21, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-12341263>.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Thomas R. Martin, *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*, 2nd ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 165; Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 319; William Crooke, *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Allahabad, India: Allahabad Government Press, North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 1894), 164; H. A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, vol. 1 (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1978), 203, 12, 15, 17.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Geoffrey J. Tassie, "Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia," *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 14 (2003): 85, <https://doi.org/10.5334/pia.200>.

from the perspective of scholars rather than the individuals practicing the rituals and beliefs. If henna is used for protection from evil spirits, the origins of this practice are unclear and undocumented in religious texts. There is no mention in any religion that henna is used specifically for protection against evil forces, and there is a lack of data on the use of henna in relation to evil spirits before the early 20th century.

This chapter aims to challenge the perception held by Western scholars that henna is used as a means of protection. There is no prior research on henna concerning demonology studies by Muslim or Eastern scholars, which indicates that from an Eastern and Islamic perspective, henna has never been considered a protective substance against evil forces. Moreover, most anthropological research on the subject was conducted by Western scholars who lack intimate knowledge of the beliefs and culture under study. Their limited exposure to native communities leads them to believe they have sufficient understanding of history, practices, culture, traditions, and faith.¹⁰⁷⁶ Much of the research that briefly mentions henna in relation to supernatural beliefs was conducted by colonial scholars whose political and imperial biases influenced their perception.

According to anthropologist Robert Redfield,¹⁰⁷⁷ it is crucial to understand the "Great Tradition" of any religion, which encompasses its core original beliefs, in order to comprehend how traditions and beliefs are interpreted, used, and adapted by the community members. It is

¹⁰⁷⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: and Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

equally important for scholars to grasp these overarching traditions to analyse the "Little Traditions," which are the ways by which the study subjects understand, select, and modify elements for their own purposes.¹⁰⁷⁸ Therefore, the chapter will examine religious texts pertaining to the evil eye and evil spirits (jinn) to demonstrate that while Islam acknowledges these beliefs, it does not endorse superstitions or the use of henna or patterns to protect against evil forces.

Additionally, the chapter will explore how the social and personal reasons for adorning a woman's body with henna were overlooked due to a Western opinion of the subject of supernatural beliefs. As Frederick Smith¹⁰⁷⁹ points out, "Historically, the study of possession has been a Eurocentric concern, mostly by white men studying an experience of mostly nonwhite men and women. Certain fallacies incumbent in this enterprise in early studies of possession, which are apparent to the turn-of-the-millennium eye (but which continue to the present in many cases)".¹⁰⁸⁰

This chapter will primarily focus on Amazigh or Moroccan body art, as it is the culture most often portrayed as superstitious in comparison to other Islamic cultures. The analysis will center on patterns and symbols from the Amazigh perspective and examine how their

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibid., 40-50.

Charles White, *Three Years in Constantinople: Or, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1844*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), 195, 207, 307; Thomas Harmer, *Observations on Divers Passages of Scripture*, 3rd ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: J. Johnson, 1797), 363; Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (London: A. Millar, 1756), 101-05.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*, 36.

traditional art has been influenced by the Islamic artistic movement, resulting in more elaborate patterns that express their cultural roots and religion.

Analyses of Islamic Anthropology and Anthropology of Islam

The term "Islam" is defined as submission and obedience in the dictionary.¹⁰⁸¹ Religiously, Islam signifies surrender to Allah through monotheism and obedience to His commands.¹⁰⁸² However, comprehending the beliefs of Muslims has proven challenging for the Western world. Anthropologists, like Edith Turner,¹⁰⁸³ comment on how Western anthropologists faced difficulties in dealing with religious facts and understanding people's actual feelings stating:

"As for the anthropologists, the facts about religion have been inconvenient for them, too. Documentation by the modernist school of critical and interpretive anthropology deliberately stops short of actually dealing with what the people feel."¹⁰⁸⁴

When scholars discuss concepts like the evil eye and evil spirits, they often rely on field studies. However, a significant problem arises when they assume a broader understanding of Islam and Muslims beyond the scope of their research. Anthropologists tend to generalize about

¹⁰⁸¹ Rohi Baalabaki, إنكليزي - قاموس عربي- المورد: [Almawrid: Amodern Arabic-English Dictionary], 7th ed. (Beirute; London: Daar Al Ilm Lilmalayin, 1995), 107.

¹⁰⁸² Abdul Rahim Al-Salami, شرح رسالة العبودية لابن تيمية [Explanation of Ibn Taymiyyah's Treatise on Servitude] (Alshamela, 2022), Electronic book, 107. <https://shamela.ws/book/36581/233>.

¹⁰⁸³ Edith L. Turner, "Our Lady of Knock: Reflections of a Believing Anthropologist," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 15, no. 2 (2011): 125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23068253>.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid.

Islam based on their own assumptions and beliefs.¹⁰⁸⁵ This becomes evident when examining henna body art in relation to the evil eye and evil spirits. Anthropologists generalize the belief in the protective qualities of henna against the evil eye to apply to all Muslims without thoroughly examining the specific cultural context under study. This generalization is exemplified by Westermarck, who states that "the beliefs and practices of other Mohammedan countries are in substantial agreement with it."¹⁰⁸⁶

Another prevalent issue in the anthropology of Islam is how information obtained from individual interviews about a religion or culture has been disproportionately validated, as Peter Stephenson¹⁰⁸⁷ explains, "The anthropologist also tends to accept all statements on evil eye as a factual data and works from the premise that informants cannot lie about their culture because even their fabrications are cultural artefacts."¹⁰⁸⁸

This can lead to intentional misrepresentation and the selective use of information, resulting in creating or reinforcing stereotypes.¹⁰⁸⁹ For instance, when studying North Africa and the Middle East, researchers intentionally focused on nomads and pastoralists¹⁰⁹⁰, thus portraying Islamic societies as unchanging, isolated, and disconnected from external relations. This fixed image perpetuates an exotic and dramatic representation of Islamic societies.¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁵ "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 3, 7.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 24.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Peter H. Stephenson, "Hutterite Belief in Evil Eye: Beyond Paranoia and Towards a General Theory of Invidia," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 3, no. 3 (1979), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00114613>.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Tapper, "'Islamic Anthropology' and the 'Anthropology of Islam'," 186- 87.

¹⁰⁹⁰ McLoughlin, "Islam(s) in Context: Orientalism and The Anthropology of Muslim Societies and Cultures," 280.

¹⁰⁹¹ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 15.

Boris Gershman¹⁰⁹² suggests that supernatural beliefs are widespread among less fortunate individuals, but studying these beliefs does not define the nature of the people under study; it merely reflects their religion.¹⁰⁹³ This shows that Western scholars reflect on the culture religiously rather than anthropologically, which leads to intentional inaccurate information about the religion.

Some anthropologists of Islam, such as Michael Gilsenan,¹⁰⁹⁴ propose a methodology that emphasizes the need to consider what Muslims in each society regard as Islamic. This approach aims to examine the behaviour, lives, and development of various Islamic societies without examining the origin of practise or the beliefs they hold.¹⁰⁹⁵ In other words, Gilsenan suggests that Islam should be defined by what Muslims themselves everywhere claim it to be, according to their personal perspective.¹⁰⁹⁶ Talal Asad criticises the way by which some Islamic anthropologists define Islam, stating the idea that Islam is merely what Muslims universally say it is falls short, primarily because Muslims often claim that others' interpretations of Islam are incorrect. This paradox cannot be resolved by suggesting that an anthropologist should only accept definitions of Islam based on the individual's own beliefs and practices. This is because beliefs and practices cannot typically be defined by considering an individual in isolation. A

¹⁰⁹² Boris Gershman, "The Economic Origins of the Evil Eye Belief," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 110 (15 June 2015), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2014.12.002>.

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰⁹⁵ Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*, 242.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 2-3.

Muslim's opinions about others' beliefs and practices are also part of his own beliefs. Like all beliefs, these are shaped and sustained by his social relationships with others.¹⁰⁹⁷

Richard Tapper¹⁰⁹⁸ argues that Western anthropology of Islam has been largely historical, insofar as it perceives Islam as an abstract idea while disregarding literary traditions and spiritual hierarchy.¹⁰⁹⁹ The European consciousness of the Arab and Islamic world predates its awareness of other cultures. European impressions of the Arab world were shaped by the historical opposition between Christianity and Islam. Although Islam is a monotheistic religion, European discourse has often emphasized its differences from Christianity, labeling it as heretical and degenerate.¹¹⁰⁰ Muslims have frequently been perceived as barbarous, ignorant savages who pose a threat to Christians. Consequently, due to this misconception, military encouragement, and ideological conflict between the two religions, European methodologies concerning the Arab Islamic world emerged in realms such as government, art, and sexuality in an attempt to weaken the position of Islamic states. By the Victorian era, Europeans had established an image of Muslims not only as a threat but also as an erotic, sexually driven culture lacking moral order. This image was conveyed through translated poetry and romantic tales.¹¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Tapper, ""Islamic Anthropology" and the "Anthropology of Islam"."

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 185.

¹¹⁰⁰ Robert A. Fernea and James M. Malarkey, "Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: A Critical Assessment," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4 (1975): 184-85, <http://www.jstor.org.uniesssexlib.idm.oclc.org/stable/2949355>.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Western scholars have examined the relationship between religion and science and have devised theories to rationalize the supernatural. However, the result is often an abstract ideal explanation rather than an understanding of the believers' actual psychological reality.¹¹⁰² Richard Tapper explains that Western discourse is secular and views religion as a human creation, which hinders the West's understanding of Muslim civilization.¹¹⁰³

It is important to consider the criticism raised against Islamic anthropology, which asserts that many Muslim anthropologists are conservative and defensive of the Islamic religion. This influence leads them to idealize Muslim societies and deny any imperfections in society, culture, and tradition. Akbar Ahmed¹¹⁰⁴ considers Muslim men and women not as individuals but as part of the Islamic nation (*ummah*), which provides them with a social identity, and their immediate group belongs to the Islamic nation.¹¹⁰⁵ He emphasizes that Islam not only encourages a commitment to its principles but also demands it, as Islamic ideology offers guidance throughout a person's life, including marriage traditions, rituals, and guidelines for behaviour, speech, and dietary practices.¹¹⁰⁶ Although Ahmed acknowledges the spread of Islam worldwide, being present in many societies and cultures, he fails to consider traditions inherited from other cultures and instead implies that all Muslims behave in the same manner.

¹¹⁰² Cristine H. Legare and Aku Visala, "Between Religion and Science: Integrating Psychological and Philosophical Accounts of Explanatory Coexistence," *Human Development* 54, no. 3 (2011): 169, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26765003>.

¹¹⁰³ Tapper, "'Islamic Anthropology' and the 'Anthropology of Islam'," 186-87.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid "Defining Islamic Anthropology," 3.

¹¹⁰⁵ Akbar Ahmed, *Toward Islamic Anthropology: Definition, Dogma, and Directions* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986), 57.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid "Defining Islamic Anthropology," 3.

Furthermore, he dismisses the fact that many Muslims are not religiously educated and therefore identify as Muslims by name only. Therefore, it is important to consider the behaviour of each individual as well as the culture and history of the society to conduct a more accurate anthropological analysis, supported by evidence, and to depict a realistic image of the culture, traditions, and beliefs.

According to Tapper, Muslim anthropologists from the Middle East are best equipped to respond to Western anthropologists and rectify the misrepresented image of their culture.¹¹⁰⁷ However, challenges remain as non-Muslim readers may focus more on Islam in the research than on anthropology itself. Similarly, Muslims may pay more attention to Islam rather than anthropology when writing about the anthropology of Islam. Nonetheless, there may still be criticism, as Said Mauroof¹¹⁰⁸ explains, since Muslim anthropologists may find themselves under attack for betraying their tradition and religion by adopting a Western scholarly approach. He disagrees with some of their points in studying Islamic societies and examines the practices to demonstrate how these societies possess their own beliefs and rituals that Islam does not fully align with.¹¹⁰⁹

To overcome these challenges, it's important to recognize that anthropology aims to document and analyze social relations and cultural practices.¹¹¹⁰ Finding a middle ground

¹¹⁰⁷ Tapper, "Islamic Anthropology" and the "Anthropology of Islam," 188.

¹¹⁰⁸ Said Mohamed Mauroof, "Element for an Islamic Anthropology," in *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective*, ed. Ismail al-Faruqi and Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 133.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁰ McLoughlin, "Islam(s) in Context: Orientalism and The Anthropology of Muslim Societies and Cultures," 274.

between the anthropology of Islam and Islamic anthropology is crucial for a nuanced understanding. This approach is particularly relevant when examining cultural practices like the use of henna and associated patterns, as it allows the scholar to explore the personal and artistic perspective rooted in the culture. By adopting this balanced approach, generalizations, stereotypes, and idealizations of Islamic societies can be avoided, and instead it is possible to gain an objective understanding of the interpretations of the Islamic faith. Furthermore, by directing our attention towards analyzing the practice as a cultural art form that has been developed and influenced by civilizations, faith, and languages, we can truly appreciate the patterns used as a language to express personal sentiments towards oneself, society, culture, and religion.

Evil Eye and Evil Spirit in Islam

Understanding the concept of the evil eye and evil spirits in Islam requires exploring the discursive tradition that intertwines with the foundational texts of the Quran and the hadith, as Muslims do. By exploring beliefs surrounding the evil eye as described in these texts, we can differentiate between religious rituals and inherited traditions. Additionally, we can examine how henna came to be associated with protection from the evil eye. As Asad astutely remarks: "If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin as Muslims do from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Quran and the hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous

collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals."¹¹¹¹

The Evil Eye:

It is important to note that the term "evil eye" (known as "*Al-Ain*" in Arabic) is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran. However, the word "envy" is mentioned four times.¹¹¹² According to Islamic scholar Al-Jawziyya, envy drives individuals to compete and strive for perfection and superiority over others.¹¹¹³ However, when this feeling of envy becomes excessive, it becomes harmful and unacceptable because the envious may wish harm and loss upon the envied.¹¹¹⁴

Some Western scholars, such as Westermarck, utilize a verse from the Quran, "And from the evil of an envier when he envies,"¹¹¹⁵ to support the notion that the evil eye is mentioned in the Quran. However, they overlook the fact that this verse does not refer to physical harm caused by envy. Westermarck attempts to associate the mention of envy with belief in the evil eye within ancient Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations, suggesting that elements of paganism survived within Islam. This perspective disregards the fact that Islam is

¹¹¹¹ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 20.

¹¹¹² *The Quran*, Translation of the Meanings of this Noble Qur'ān Into the English Language, trans. M.T. D. Alhilālī and M. M. Khān (Al-Madīnah Al-Munawwarah: King Fahd's Glorious Qur'ān Printing Complex, 1441), 113:5, 2:09, 4:54, 48:15.

¹¹¹³ An example of the unharmed envy is mentioned in the Quran:

“And wish not for the things in which Allāh has made some of you to excel others.”
(ibid. 5:4, Verse. 32)

¹¹¹⁴ Mohammed Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya, الفوائد (Riyadh: Dar Al-Ilm Al-Fawa'id, 2008), Noor book, 203, <https://www.noor-book.com/ابن-قيم-الجوزيه-كتاب-الفوائد-pdf>, Electronic Book.

¹¹¹⁵ *The Quran*, 113:5; Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 55.

an Abrahamic religion sharing many beliefs with Judaism and Christianity.¹¹¹⁶

In contrast, the hadith confirms a belief in the evil eye within Islam. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad said, "The evil eye is real."¹¹¹⁷ Protection against the evil eye and evil in general is sought through the recitation of specific verses from the Quran known as Al-Mu'awwidhat,¹¹¹⁸ also known as *Ruqyah*. According to the hadith, prophet Muhammad used to seek refuge from God and recite prayers for protection from the eyes of humans and jinn. Eventually, the Mu'awwidhat were revealed, and they became the preferred recitation for protection against evil.¹¹¹⁹

Western scholars have misinterpreted the term "*Ruqyah*" as a form of magic in Islam, often labeling it as white magic,¹¹²⁰ such as Westermarck citing the hadiths that mention the use of spells against the harmful effects of the evil eye, such as the hadith stating: "According to the traditions, the Prophet, being asked whether spells might be used against the baleful influences of an evil eye, answered, "Yes; for the eye has a complete influence; because verily, if there was a thing to overcome fate, it most certainly would be a malignant eye".¹¹²¹ However, due to the lack of an exact equivalent term in English for "*Ruqyah*," this has led non-Arabic-speaking, non-Muslim individuals to mistakenly analyze and speculate that Islam

¹¹¹⁶ Thomas S. Bremer, *Formed from This Soil: The Diversity of Religious Life in American History: An Introduction to the Diverse History of Religion in America* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 19-20.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibn-Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, 4, 441.

¹¹¹⁸ Which means the Verses of Refuge, they are Surat Al-Falaq (The Daybreak), Sūrat Al-Ikhlās (The Purity), and And Sūrat An-Nās (Mankind).

¹¹¹⁹ Al-Nasa'i, 747, كتاب السنن الصغرى.

¹¹²⁰ Krawietz, "Islamic Conceptions of the Evil Eye," 346.

¹¹²¹ Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisation*, 55.

accommodates witchcraft practices and pagan beliefs.

Religiously, there is no other prescribed treatment for the evil eye apart from what has been discussed above. The use of charms or any form of spell is forbidden, as stated in the hadith: "spells, charms and love-potions are polytheism."¹¹²² However, many Muslims adorn sacrificial animals with ornaments or henna. This practice serves to distinguish the animals and prevent them from being mistakenly used for personal purposes. This tradition existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, as mentioned in the hadith: "On one occasion the Messenger of Allāh sent sheep as sacrificial animals to the Kabah, and he garlanded them."¹¹²³ Westermarck, however, erroneously portrays the use of henna on sacrificial animals as a means of protection against the evil eye,¹¹²⁴ disregarding the functional purpose of marking the animals and instead regarding it as a form of charm. He fails to acknowledge that any form of charm used on animals for purposes other than decoration or marking is forbidden, as the hadith states:

"No camel is to be left among any group of people with a garland of sinew" or "a garland, but it is to be cut off." Mâlik said: "I think that this prohibition was for those who do it for protection against the evil eye."¹¹²⁵

The absence of direct mention of the evil eye in the Quran may suggest that the term "eye" is used metaphorically to represent envy, a prevalent concept in the language of that time. However, many scholars and individuals have interpreted it to imply actual physical harm

¹¹²² Abu Dawud, 317, سنن ابي داود, 4.

¹¹²³ Muslim bin al-Hajjaj bin Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols., vol. 3, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 462.

¹¹²⁴ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 449.

¹¹²⁵ Muslim, *English Translation of Sahih Muslim*, 5, 484.

caused by the eye. In reality, feelings of envy are typically triggered by seeing something or someone that provokes such emotions. The limited references to the evil eye and envy in the Quran and the hadith indicate that Islam itself does not overly emphasize this concept. Instead, it is the individuals, both the Muslims who believe in it and the outsiders studying the subject, who tend to focus on it.

If Islam were excessively concerned about the harm caused by the evil eye, all Muslims would be perpetually shielded from the gaze of others, constantly consumed by superstitions, and afraid to display any signs of privilege or blessings in front of anyone. However, this is not the case. Islam encourages believers to be mindful of envy and its negative implications but does not promote an exaggerated fear or preoccupation with the evil eye. It emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility, personal piety, and maintaining a balanced perspective rather than solely relying on external factors like the evil eye for one's well-being.

Evil Spirits (jinn) in Islam:

Muslims hold a belief in the existence of jinn, which is rooted in references from the Quran and hadith.¹¹²⁶ Jinn are considered conscious beings who possess the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.¹¹²⁷ They coexist with humans, having inhabited the Earth long before the advent of humankind. It is believed that Satan is a jinni.¹¹²⁸

¹¹²⁶ "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me" (*The Quran*, 51:65.)

¹¹²⁷ Umar Sulaiman Al-Ashqar, سلسلة العقيدة في ضوء الكتاب والسنة [The Creed Series in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah], 8 vols., vol. 3 (Kuwait: Alfalah Library, 1984), 13.

¹¹²⁸ *The Quran*, 438.v.27

It is important to note that while the Quran mentions jinn 27 times,¹¹²⁹ primarily in the context of worshipping Allah, it does not explicitly state that jinn have the power to harm or possess humans. However, there exists a scholarly disagreement regarding the potential of jinn to possess and inflict harm upon humans. This divergence of opinions emerged around 200 years after the establishment of Islam. The expansion of Islam resulted in the merging of the Arabic language with other languages, leading to confusion in interpreting the Arabic text of the Quran.¹¹³⁰ The influence of prominent Islamic scholars and their perspectives on jinn should be considered. Over the centuries, Muslim scholars have presented three distinct viewpoints regarding jinn, each employing different analytical approaches to Quranic verses.

The first group believes in the power of jinn. Scholars such as Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah¹¹³¹ refer to early mentions of jinn possession by figures like Ahmad ibn Hanbal¹¹³² in the 2nd century of Islam.¹¹³³ These scholars support their view by citing Quranic verses that primarily address usury,¹¹³⁴ as well as hadiths where the Prophet discredits negative assumptions¹¹³⁵ and speaks about women suffering from epileptic episodes.¹¹³⁶ However, it is

¹¹²⁹ Ibid., 6:100, 6:12, 6:28, 6:30, 7:38, 7:79, 15:26, 17:88, 18:50, 27:17, 27:39, 34:12, 34:14, 34:41, 41:25, 41:29, 46:18, 46:29, 51:56, 55:15, 55:33, 55:39, 55:56: 55:74, 72:1, 72:5, 72:6.

¹¹³⁰ Khalid Mohammed Shwill, *نحن والجان: البرهان أن الشيطان لا يدخل جسد الإنسان* ["We and the Demons: The Proof that Satan Does Not Enter the Human Body"] (London: E-Kutub Ltd, 2017), 20.

¹¹³¹ Ibn-Taymiyyah, 154, 24, *مجموع الفتاوى*.

¹¹³² Ibid.; Bin-Baz, 303, 3, *مجموع فتاوى ومقالات متنوعة*; Alqurtubi, 391, 4, *الجامع لاحكام القرآن*.

¹¹³³ Ibn-Taymiyyah, 154, 24, *مجموع الفتاوى*.

¹¹³⁴ "Those who eat Ribā (usury) will not stand (on the Day of Resurrection) except like the standing of a person beaten by Shaitān (Satan) leading him to insanity" (*The Quran*, 2:275.)

¹¹³⁵ "... Satan (Shaitan) circulates in the human body as blood does..." (Al-Bukhari, 98: 283)

¹¹³⁶ "...May I show you a woman of Paradise? I said: Yes. He said: Here is this dark-complexioned woman. She came to Allah's Apostle and said: I am suffering from falling sickness and I become naked; supplicate Allah for me, whereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: Show endurance as you can do and there would be Paradise for you and, if you desire, I supplicate Allah that He may cure you. She said: I am prepared to show endurance (but the unbearable trouble is) that I become naked, so supplicate Allah that He should not let me become naked, so he

important to recognize that the Quranic example may employ metaphoric language to describe a particular state of people. A potential issue lies in the tendency of many individuals to analyze Islamic texts narrowly, focusing solely on textual meaning rather than considering them in a holistic sense. A more appropriate approach to understanding the Quran and hadith is to treat them as cohesive topics, rather than fragmented texts.¹¹³⁷

The second group of scholars believes in the existence of jinn but denies their power over humans. Scholars like Abu al-Fida Ibn Kathir,¹¹³⁸ Saleh Al Maghamsi,¹¹³⁹ and Ali Al-Amri,¹¹⁴⁰ interpret Quranic verses metaphorically and do not consider them as evidence of jinn's ability to influence humans.¹¹⁴¹ They rely on a Quranic verse stating that Satan has no authority over Allah's worshipers,¹¹⁴² which can be extended to include all jinn. Philosophers such as Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun¹¹⁴³ approach the subject from an Islamic anthropological standpoint, excluding any attribution of power to jinn over humans, and viewing the subject from a standpoint of cultural and popular beliefs.¹¹⁴⁴ Similarly, philosophers like Muhammad

supplicated for her." (Muslim, 32: 6245)

¹¹³⁷ Shwill, 22-21 نحن والجان: البرهان أن الشيطان لا يدخل جسد الإنسان.

¹¹³⁸ Abu al-Fiḍā Ibn Kathir, تفسير القرآن العظيم [Interpretation of the Great Qur'an] (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazem, 2000), 334.

¹¹³⁹ Saleh Al-Maghamsi, "هل يدخل الجن جسد الإنسان ويستطيع تغيير صوته؟ المغامسي يوضح," interview by Sultan Al-Qhtani, *Alabwab Almutafariqah*, TV interview, 3:21, 6 April, 2019, <https://arabic.cnn.com/entertainment/article/2019/04/07/almaghamsi-demons-human-body>.

¹¹⁴⁰ M M, "كعب في ضيافتهم مع الشيخ علي العمري," in *In Their Hospitality* ed. Mohammed bin Shafloot, YouTube (13:04, YouTube, 2011), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5JHdj8m5pE>.

¹¹⁴¹ Ibn Kathir, 334 تفسير القرآن العظيم.

¹¹⁴² *The Quran*, 15:42.

¹¹⁴³ A Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun*, 3 vols., vol. 1, ed. Abdullah Muhammad Darwish (Damascus: Dar Yarub, 2004), 211- 14.

¹¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Al-Farabi¹¹⁴⁵ and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali¹¹⁴⁶ acknowledge the existence of jinn but hold differing views on their nature and capabilities.¹¹⁴⁷

The last group denies the existence of jinn, despite their mention in the Quran. Philosophers like Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Bajja¹¹⁴⁸ liken jinn to ogres, suggesting that these beings do not correspond to reality but instead stem from human imagination.¹¹⁴⁹ Additionally, a group of philosophers known as the Brethren of Purity¹¹⁵⁰ presents a distinct perspective, asserting that humans with malevolent and desperate tendencies transform into demons after death, while those with virtuous spirits become angels.¹¹⁵¹ This viewpoint shares similarities with the Western concepts of ghosts and angels.

It is therefore evident that belief in jinn is largely influenced by human imagination, as the Quran and hadith do not assign the subject the same level of significance ascribed by scholars. If evil spirits possessed the ability to exert control over humans, one might expect a more prominent treatment of the topic in the Quran, which serves as the primary source of Islamic faith.

Realistically, it is impossible to regulate human imagination, fears, and superstitions. While some individuals may be influenced by such beliefs, it is not representative of the entire

¹¹⁴⁵ Muhammad Al-Farabi, *Rasayil Al-Farabi* (Hyderabad: Dayirat Alma'arif Alothmania, 1926), 3.

¹¹⁴⁶ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, معيار العلم في فن المنطق [The Criterion of Knowledge in the Art of Logic], ed. Suleiman Dunya (Cairo: Dar Almaref, 1960), 284-85.

¹¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁸ A. M Ibn Bājja, رسائل ابن باجة الإلهية, [Ibn Bajja's Divine Messages] (Beirut: Dar Alnahr, 1968), 139, 63.

¹¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁰ Ibrahim Al-Zein, "العلوم والكائنات الخفية عند فلاسفة الإسلام" (Masters Thesis, Lebanese University, 1983), 25.

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Muslim population across all cultures, as suggested by certain Western scholars in their studies.

Henna Patterns from a Cultural Perspective

Interpretations of Evil Eye Patterns:

North African culture, particularly the Amazigh culture, has often been unfairly regarded as primitive and lacking development.¹¹⁵² This perspective has led scholars to explore the symbolism of body art, considering ancient meanings, without acknowledging that the meaning of symbols evolves over time and varies by location and cultural exchange. Symbols and decorations are authentic products of various civilizations throughout history. These symbols reflect the beliefs, ideas, and nature of the humans upon which these civilizations were built and are closely intertwined with the lives of these individuals. Most symbols in ancient and authentic civilizations are a result of human interaction with nature, their concerns and thoughts, and a form of translation of the environment surrounding the artist.

Some scholars, like Westermarck, modify the meaning of symbols to fit their analyses. For instance, Westermarck observes the actions of Moroccans who, when suspecting someone of giving them an evil eye, say, "five in your eye."¹¹⁵³ They stretch out the five fingers of their right hand towards the other person's eyes, aiming to throw back the evil power that they

¹¹⁵² Bruno Barbatti, *Berber Carpets of Morocco: The Symbols: Origin and Meaning* (Paris: ECR Edition, 2008), 18.

¹¹⁵³ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 212.

believe emanated from the other person's gaze.¹¹⁵⁴ Based on this observation, Westermarck analyses patterns used in textiles, home decoration, pottery, and tattooing, assuming that if a pattern has five points, it must be intended for protection from the evil eye (Figure 21 and Figure 23).¹¹⁵⁵ To make his assumption more plausible, Westermarck argues, "In magic the difference between reality and image disappears, and little or no importance is attached to the likeness of the image."¹¹⁵⁶ This statement indicates that his explanation of the patterns is not accurate, and his focus seems to be solely on proving his point that Moroccans are irrationally preoccupied with superstitions.



Figure 21: Five points patterns (Westermarck, 1904, p.213)

The interpretation of the patterns from an Amazigh standpoint offers a contrasting meaning. According to Hiba Yassin,¹¹⁵⁷ the symbols depicted in Figure 21 actually represent the comb used in the weaving process (Figure 22).¹¹⁵⁸ In contrast, Westermarck asserts that these symbols adorn the doors of many shops and houses to ward off the evil eye.¹¹⁵⁹ However, a more reasonable explanation is that these symbols are primarily found on the homes and shops of weavers themselves, serving as a form of advertising or identification. They likely

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 213.

¹¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁷ Yassin, "أنثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا"

¹¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 352.

¹¹⁵⁹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 213.

signify weavers' craftsmanship, tribal affiliation, and unique style,¹¹⁶⁰ akin to modern-day logos for branding purposes. By utilizing different symbols, these artisans distinguish themselves from one another and convey their distinct heritage and products to potential customers. Disregarding such considerations, Westermarck appears solely focused on validating his argument that Moroccans are excessively superstitious, overlooking the nuanced meanings and cultural significance of these symbols.



Figure 22: Weaving comb (Afify, 2020, p.396)

The abstraction and simplification of objects, living creatures, or vegetation was a common artistic style in ancient tattooing. In Figure 23, there are symbols that, at first glance, resemble trees. However, different scholars offer varied interpretations of these symbols. Westermarck puts forth an interpretation that diverges from the initial impression of trees and instead sees them as a hand with five fingers.¹¹⁶¹ However, Doha Jaber¹¹⁶² offers an alternative explanation, suggesting that the symbols represent olive trees. According to this interpretation,

¹¹⁶⁰ Yassin, "361", "أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا", 361.

¹¹⁶¹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 213.

¹¹⁶² Jaber, "الرموز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم".

the symbols symbolize the power of wisdom associated with olive trees.¹¹⁶³ Karl Gröning¹¹⁶⁴ suggests that the symbols depict palm trees called *Siyalas*, arguing that they serve as a symbol to announce fertility and readiness for motherhood, making them the most feminine pattern.¹¹⁶⁵



Figure 23: Five points patterns (Westermarck, 1904, p.213)

Westermarck continues with his claim suggesting that the symbols in Figure 24, despite occasionally featuring more than five fingers, are representations of various hand modifications.¹¹⁶⁶ These symbols are commonly found adorning the walls of houses in Morocco, serving as protective amulets from the evil eye.¹¹⁶⁷ Figure 25 and Figure 26 exhibit tattoo patterns placed on the noses of a man and a woman, respectively.¹¹⁶⁸ While the symbols may bear a resemblance to tree imagery, their actual meaning pertains to pegs or stakes. In the case of men, the upward-facing pegs symbolize stability and a sense of being grounded. Conversely, for women, the downward-facing pegs may imply their marital status, signifying being "pegged" or claimed by their husbands.¹¹⁶⁹ Another interpretation for these two symbols

¹¹⁶³ Ibid., 2751.

¹¹⁶⁴ Gröning, *Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art*.

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁶⁶ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 449.

¹¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁹ Jaber, "2750", الرموز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم.

is that they are representations of fish scalations which are used for the purpose of medical healing.¹¹⁷⁰

Moreover, within the Atlas Mountains, these symbols were utilized to denote the ethnic identity of individuals, as depicted in Figure 27.¹¹⁷¹ This illustrates that the interpretation of a symbol can vary over time, among different groups, and from one person to another.

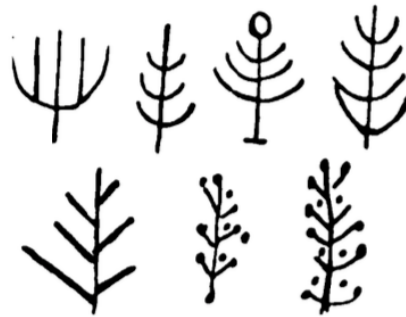


Figure 24: Symbols found inside homes (Westermarck, 1926, Vol.1, p.449)



Figure 25: Moroccan man's nose tattoo (Westermarck, 1926, Vol.1, p.449)



Figure 26: Moroccan woman's nose tattoo (Westermarck, 1926, Vol.1, p.449)

¹¹⁷⁰ Sara Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, "إستحداث حلول تشكيلية من خلال توظيف رموز الوشم في التصوير الجداري المعاصر", [Innovating Artistic Solutions by Utilizing Tattoo Symbols in Contemporary Mural Painting.] *Art Education* 9, no. 33 (2023): 82, <https://doi.org/10.21608/AMESEA.2023.286568>.

¹¹⁷¹ Cynthia J. Becker, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 60.



Figure 27: Amazigh woman from the High Atlas Mountains with chin tattoo (Becker, 2006, p.61)

According to Jaber, the traditional Amazigh practice involved tattooing a single dot on the nose to symbolize tribal affiliation.¹¹⁷² Furthermore, dots, whether solitary or arranged in a pattern, hold significant meaning as they represent the notion of home.¹¹⁷³ These dots are often placed beneath a woman's eyes or on her forehead between the eyes, ensuring their visibility regardless of the style of headdress or hijab¹¹⁷⁴ she wears.¹¹⁷⁵ The concept of home embodies protection and indicates that she is under the care and guardianship of men who ensure her well-being. Moreover, the presence of the dots serves as a warning to anyone who may consider mistreating or disrespecting her.¹¹⁷⁶

However, it is important to acknowledge that the use of dots in tattooing has been appropriated by colonial authorities for their own purposes. They would mark individuals with tattoos, positioning them on the lips, nose, between the lip and nose, or under the lip, to assign

¹¹⁷² Jaber, "2753", الرموز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم.

¹¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁴ A garment worn by Muslim women to cover their hair.

¹¹⁷⁵ Hannah Mesouani, "Inked Bodies, Blank Pages: A study of Amazigh Tattooing" (Masters Thesis, Illinois State University, 2019), 39.

¹¹⁷⁶ Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 1, 179.

and control work locations. These markings served as means of identification and categorization, perpetuating a system of control and subjugation.¹¹⁷⁷

It is worth noting that the practice of nose tattoos has evolved to encompass various shapes and designs, each serving different purposes. For instance, tribal symbols are now incorporated into the tattoos. The tree symbol, for example, signifies power, and when adorned with dots, these dots symbolize fruits, representing fertility and abundance.¹¹⁷⁸

In the analysis by Westermarck, the zigzag pattern is interpreted as a row of eyes and eyebrows (Figure 28),¹¹⁷⁹ neglecting the historical significance and the influence of nature on art. However, Amazigh symbols offer multiple interpretations of the zigzag pattern. Firstly, it symbolizes lightning and celestial energy, representing a sense of momentum. Secondly, it signifies the axis of balance, conveying ideas of stability, firmness, and loyalty.¹¹⁸⁰ Thirdly, it serves as a symbol of male fertility.¹¹⁸¹ Fourthly, when applied to women, it represents feminine libido and is often used by those seeking to conceive.¹¹⁸² Fifthly, it embodies the strength of women, symbolizing their ability to overcome illness and to recover, as depicted by the lines descending and ascending.¹¹⁸³

¹¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁸ Jaber, "2756", الرمز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم.

¹¹⁷⁹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 221.

¹¹⁸⁰ Mohammed Afify, "القيمة والرمز في تراث الفن التطبيقي الأمازيغي مصدرا لاستحداث تصميم طباعة أقمشة التأتيت" [Value and Symbol in The Heritage of Applied Amazigh Art as a Source of Design Innovation of Printing Upholstery Fabrics.] *Journal of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities* 5, no. 24 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.21608/MJAF.2020.22200.1471>.

¹¹⁸¹ Jaber, "2750", الرمز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم.

¹¹⁸² Mesouani, "Inked Bodies, Blank Pages: A study of Amazigh Tattooing," 37.

¹¹⁸³ Jaber, "2756", الرمز التشكيلية الأمازيغية وأثرها على حياة الأمازيغ وفنونهم.



Figure 28: Zigzag pattern (Westermarck, 1904, p.221)



Figure 29: The chevron symbol (Westermarck, 1904, p.221)

Westermarck describes the chevron pattern in Figure 29 as eyebrows, with the eye presented in the form of a triangle or dot. He suggests that it functions as an amulet to ward off the evil eye.¹¹⁸⁴ However, according to Bruno Barbatti,¹¹⁸⁵ the meaning of these symbols varies depending on the gender of the wearer.¹¹⁸⁶ For females, the chevron represents the vulva or opened thighs.¹¹⁸⁷ The dot is typically added after marriage to indicate that she is no longer available,¹¹⁸⁸ as exemplified in Figure 30, where the female on the right has the chevron with the dot, symbolizing stability and home. The absence of a symbol beneath the chevron on the other female, who appears younger, indicates her availability for marriage. However, Barbatti's analysis focuses on interpreting the symbols as having a sexual meaning between Amazigh men and women and is not open to any alternative interpretation regarding the individuals and the location. Furthermore, the Amazigh derive their symbols from their surroundings, as

¹¹⁸⁴ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 221.

¹¹⁸⁵ Barbatti, *Berber Carpets of Morocco: The Symbols: Origin and Meaning*.

¹¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

several Amazigh women have reported that the chevron motif is used to symbolize home, as it resembles the *tarsal*, which are the wooden bars used to support the tent (Figure 31).¹¹⁸⁹

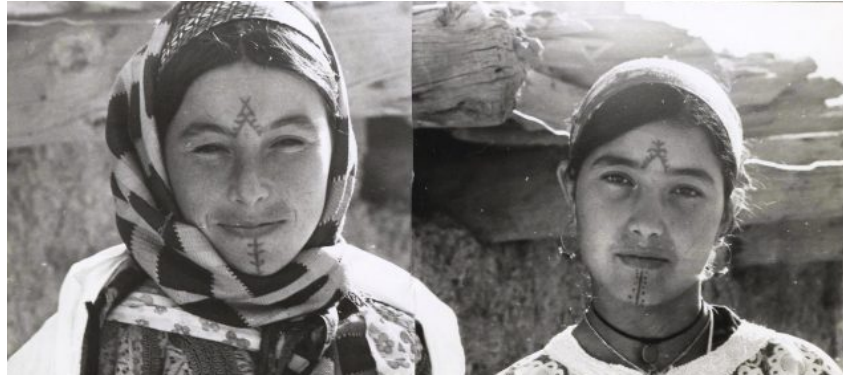


Figure 30: Two females with facial tattoos (Carolina McCabe, 2007)



Figure 31: Interior of an Ait Khabbash tent (Becker, 2006, p.62)

For men, the chevron may symbolize the eye, but not as a protective amulet. Instead, it may represent the eyelashes, while the dot signifies the moon, symbolizing the act of looking upwards and never downwards.¹¹⁹⁰ However, it is important to note that, according to Susan Searight,¹¹⁹¹ facial tattooing primarily serves as a way to denote kinship within families.¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁹ Becker, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity*, 61.

¹¹⁹⁰ Yassin, "351", *أنثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا*, 351.

¹¹⁹¹ Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 2.

¹¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 1: 293.

She also mentions that facial tattoos are a matter of personal preference, and individuals have the freedom to modify their facial tattoos according to their own desires. In some cases, friends may even exchange tattoo marks as a lifelong expression of friendship.¹¹⁹³

Regarding the triangle symbol, as seen in Figure 29 beneath the chevron, it may indicate an abundance of crops and symbolize nourishment,¹¹⁹⁴ fullness, and prosperity.¹¹⁹⁵ Additionally, the chevron represents the letter "D" in the Amazigh language, possibly serving as an initial for a word or the name of a tribe or family (Figure 34).

Furthermore, Westermarck's interpretation of the triangle as an eye symbol, forming a star comprised of two triangles with a dot in the center to represent the pupil (Figure 32),¹¹⁹⁶ fails to acknowledge that the symbol is the seal of the House of Sulayman, the royal family of Morocco since the late 18th century.¹¹⁹⁷ Originally, it denoted the power and wisdom of Suliman, with the five points symbolizing the five pillars of Islam.¹¹⁹⁸ Over time, the modern meaning of the triangle has evolved to represent female beauty.¹¹⁹⁹

¹¹⁹³ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁹⁴ Yassin, "352", أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا, "352".

¹¹⁹⁵ Barbatti, *Berber Carpets of Morocco: The Symbols: Origin and Meaning*, 22.

¹¹⁹⁶ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 221.

¹¹⁹⁷ Mohamed El Mansour, "Political and Social Developments in Morocco During the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman 1792-1822" (PhD Thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1981), 374, <https://login.uniesssexlib.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/political-social-developments-morocco-during/docview/2176903309/se-2?accountid=10766>.

¹¹⁹⁸ Robin Nelson, *Morocco* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2012), 44.

¹¹⁹⁹ Mai Abu Zeid et al., "الوشم الجزائري كمصدر لاستحداث معلقات نسجية", [Algerian Tattoo as a Source for Creating Weaving Patterns.] *Journal of Gender Education - Port Said University* 8, no. 8 (2018): 111.



Figure 32: Moroccan coin (Westermarck, 1904, p.221)

Westermarck's analysis of the cross symbol (Figure 33) as solely representing the hand and serving as a protective charm against the evil eye, overlooks the profound connection between body art and the Tamazight alphabet. As he states, "I believe that the cross-form by itself is looked upon as a conductor of baneful energy emanating from an evil eye."¹²⁰⁰ However, examining the Tifinagh alphabets reveals a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the cross symbol. It corresponds to the letter "T" in Tifinagh, as seen in Figure 34, suggesting its function as a tribal symbol to easily identify and protect individuals within their community. Moreover, Yassin explains that when women adorn themselves with a cross tattoo or henna, it symbolizes the word ⵜⴰⵎⵏⵜⵓⵜ "tamttut," meaning beautiful wife.¹²⁰¹ Other words starting with the letter "T," such as love, beloved (for both men and women), bride, and pregnant,¹²⁰² could also be represented in tattoos. Therefore, it is highly possible that the cross symbol analyzed by Westermarck represents married, fertile women, with the number of dots potentially indicating the number of sons they have or an indication of fertility. By considering the intricate relationship between the Tamazight alphabet and body art, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and symbolism inherent in these tattoos. It is

¹²⁰⁰ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 214.

¹²⁰¹ Yassin, "350 أنثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا,"

¹²⁰² "مصطلحات الزواج باللغة الأمازيغية" N/A, <https://www.portail-amazigh.com/2021/01/mariage-amazigh.html>.

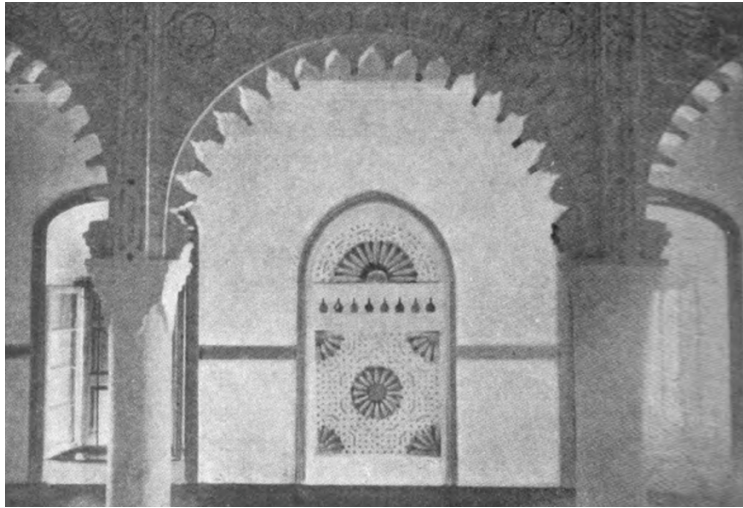


Figure 35: Moroccan home interior decoration (Westermarck, 1926, Vol.1, p.458)

It is also important to consider the incorporation of Islamic geometric patterns or Islamic art when considering henna body art. These patterns were originally used in architecture to reflect the development of Islamic culture and science, particularly in mathematics.¹²⁰³ Islamic art, influenced by various cultures within Islamic states, assimilated knowledge, and styles, resulting in a unique form of artistic expression.¹²⁰⁴

However, Westermarck disregards any artistic influence on Moroccan culture and focuses solely on Islamic geometric patterns found in houses and objects, perceiving them as protection against evil spirits, as depicted in Figure 35. Describing the image, he states: "the interior of a Moorish house outside Tangier, there is a twelve-petalled rosette in each of the two double-squares on the central arch, while a sixteen-petalled rosette occupies the Centre of the large ornament on the wall. The latter rosette is itself the central figure in a five, the four other

¹²⁰³ Sheila R. Canby, *Islamic Art in Detail* (London: The British Museum press, 2005), 20. <https://archive.org/details/islamicartindeta00canb/page/n5/mode/2up?q=mathematics>.

¹²⁰⁴ Afif Bahnassi, الفن الإسلامي [The Islamic Art] (36), (1986), دمشق: دار طلاس للدراسات والنشر.

parts of which consist of hands. The sixteen-petalled rosette is expressly said to be a charm against the evil eye."¹²⁰⁵

By disregarding the influences of Islamic art and the expressive nature of Muslim thought through artistic styles, Westermarck fails to recognize the deeper symbolism of the design. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the pattern references the dome of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as depicted in Figure 36. Additionally, Westermarck's interpretation of numbers as magical influences, reducing nearly every number from two to 16 to a representation of five,¹²⁰⁶ presents an unexplained mathematical equation without addressing a specific problem.



Figure 36: *The dome of Temple Mount (Bahnassi, 1986, p.416)*

The use of geometric shapes to create eight-pointed stars, as seen in Figure 37 and Figure 38, is interpreted by Westermarck as each star being formed by two squares,

¹²⁰⁵ Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1, 459-59.

¹²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 556-447.

representing a pair of eyes and forming a cross shape.¹²⁰⁷ Afif Bahnassi¹²⁰⁸ explains that during the colonization period, Western scholars viewed Islamic art as amusing riddles to solve, without fully recognizing their profound philosophical dimensions. Afifi adds that this approach to deciphering Islamic art granted Western scholars scholarly fame and positioned them as experts in uncovering hidden metaphors within art.¹²⁰⁹

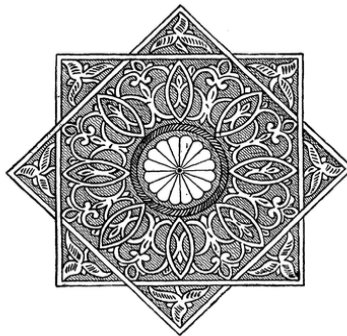


Figure 37: Eight-pointed star pattern (Westermarck, 1904, p.217)

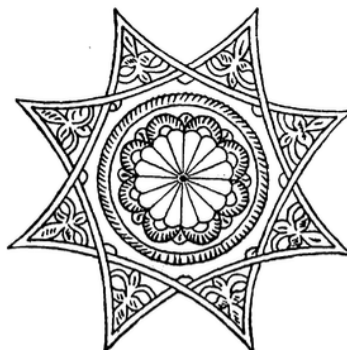


Figure 38: Eight-pointed star pattern (Westermarck, 1904, p.217)

The eight-pointed star shape created with two squares is undoubtedly rooted in Islamic art, as the square shape cannot be found among ancient Amazigh symbols used for tattooing. On the other hand, the diamond shape symbolizes attractiveness, fertility, and marital

¹²⁰⁷ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 216-18.

¹²⁰⁸ Bahnassi, الفن الإسلامي.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid., 19.

happiness.¹²¹⁰ This shape did not escape Westermarck's analysis, and he presents it as an amulet representing the eye.¹²¹¹ Likewise, he claims that the circle symbolizes the number five in Arabic (٥), offering protection against the evil eye.¹²¹² However, in Amazigh tattooing, the circle symbolizes eternal harmony when applied to older women;¹²¹³ femininity and beauty when applied to young girls or women;¹²¹⁴ and is also interpreted as a representation of the moon.¹²¹⁵ Furthermore, it represents the letter "R" in the Amazigh alphabet (Figure 34).

The Amazigh culture merged with Islamic art and was embraced by henna artists, resulting in a distinct Moroccan style of henna that utilizes mathematical calculations to create symmetrical patterns, reflecting their Islamic heritage while preserving their national and historical identity. The spread of Islam from India to Andalusia encompassed various cultures, each with its unique characteristics influenced by Islam and Arabic art. Arabic calligraphy became a central element of Islamic art, being the language of the Quran, which all Muslims read in Arabic. In henna art, artists often incorporate poetry and quotations (Figure 39). Many cultures have adopted Arabic calligraphy for their languages, such as Urdu, Persian, and Turkish.¹²¹⁶

This influence has also inspired artists to integrate henna and Arabic calligraphy into

¹²¹⁰ Zeid et al., "111", "الوشم الجزائري كمصدر لاستحداثات معلقة نسجية", Afify, "القيمة والرمز في تراث الفن التطبيقي الأمازيغي", مصدرًا لاستحداثات تصميم طباعة أقمشة الناثيث, "398

¹²¹¹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 214.

¹²¹² Ibid.

¹²¹³ Mesouani, "Inked Bodies, Blank Pages: A study of Amazigh Tattooing," 38.

¹²¹⁴ Zeid et al., "111", "الوشم الجزائري كمصدر لاستحداثات معلقة نسجية",

¹²¹⁵ Yassin, "351", "أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا",

¹²¹⁶ Sheila Canby, *الفن الإسلامي [Islamic Art]*, trans. Hizam Nahar (Abu Dhabi: Kalima, 2013).

their work, as evident in the works of Shirin Neshat¹²¹⁷ (Figure 40) and Lalla Essaydi¹²¹⁸ (Figure 41). Interestingly, none of the henna artists and photographers have explored the use of henna as a means of protection against evil spirits or incorporated Quranic text, which holds significance for Muslims in relation to the evil eye. The absence of such practices suggests that the idea of using henna as a protective measure rooted in Islamic beliefs is a Western theory that does not align with reality.



Figure 39: Henna pattern with Arabic calligraphy (2017)

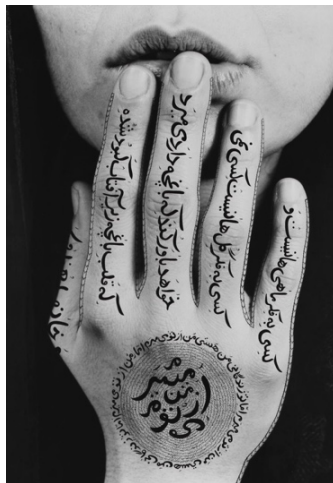


Figure 40: Shirin Neshat, *Women of Allah* (1996)

¹²¹⁷ Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010).

¹²¹⁸ Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories* (Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books, 2005).



Figure 41: Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories* (#24), (2006)

In the late 20th century, henna artists began using medical syringes and cones as tools to control the henna paste, enabling them to create intricate and elaborate patterns. The designs applied to the front and back of the hand differ, as observed by Rogers, who remarks that the composition may initially appear random but is intentionally designed to confuse and prevent the gaze of envious individuals.¹²¹⁹ However, Rogers fails to acknowledge the adaptation of Islamic art, specifically the art of Arabesque. Arabesque incorporates intricate forms that rely on rotation, loss of linear perspective, density, and an intention to fill empty spaces with intertwined geometric shapes and curves. These formations transcend boundaries and, when viewed from a Sufi Moroccan perspective, symbolize the infinite capacity of divine power.¹²²⁰

It is important to recognize that henna does not always carry religious or superstitious connotations. In Figure 42, we see a striking example of Moroccan bridal henna, where the hands and feet are adorned with intricate geometric patterns, flowing curves, and stylized vegetation. These designs draw inspiration from Moroccan cultural motifs intertwined with

¹²¹⁹ Rogers, "Politics, Gender, and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice," 130.

¹²²⁰ Bahnassi, 60-59, الفن الإسلامي.

Islamic art, intentionally exaggerated to commemorate the joyous celebration of a bride and evoke a sense of enchantment.

Moreover, it is crucial to avoid generalizing that all women use henna and its patterns solely for the purpose of warding off the evil eye. For many, the artistry adorning their hands and feet does not hold explicit symbolic meanings. Instead, each henna artist employs her own creative vision to craft a design that is both aesthetically pleasing and appropriate for the individual and the occasion. Henna serves as a medium for self-expression, celebrating beauty, and embracing cultural traditions, transcending any singular belief or intention.



Figure 42: Bridal henna, Morocco, (2018)

Interpretations of Evil Spirit Protective Patterns:

The subject of jinn or evil spirits is complex according to the Western perspective, even more so than the evil eye. While it is often depicted that the evil eye refers to Muslims protecting themselves from its harm, interpretations of spirits among Western scholars vary. Some suggest that Muslims seek protection from spirits out of absolute fear of their harm, while others propose that Muslims aim to please the spirits and attract their favour. There are also

contrasting accounts in relation to henna and its connection to spirits. Henna is portrayed as both a protective substance against evil spirits and an attraction for them, which could potentially cause harm to the person using or applying it. Scholars, such as Westermarck,¹²²¹ Tremearne,¹²²² Crooke,¹²²³ Vonderheyden,¹²²⁴ Winstedt,¹²²⁵ Searight,¹²²⁶ Kapchan,¹²²⁷ Kennedy,¹²²⁸ Messina,¹²²⁹ and Boddy,¹²³⁰ discuss these aspects as shown in Chapter Five.

One notable observation made by these scholars is that there are no specific henna patterns associated with jinn, unlike the patterns associated with the evil eye. However, scholars do mention the practice of smearing henna on the face, hands, and feet, interpreting this as a way to avoid unintentional contact with jinn or as a means to appease them.¹²³¹ Although scholars rarely provide detailed descriptions of these designs or supporting sketches or photographs, they do analyze the use of henna on the face.¹²³² It is mentioned that henna is

¹²²¹ Westermarck, "The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs," 212.

¹²²² Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*, 118, 75.

¹²²³ Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-I-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India*, 19, 66; William Crooke, *Natives of Northern India* (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), 204.

¹²²⁴ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord."

¹²²⁵ Winstedt, *The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi*, 122-23.

¹²²⁶ Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 1, 155, 58.

¹²²⁷ Kapchan, "Moroccan Women's Body Signs," 6, 22, 28-29.

¹²²⁸ Kennedy, "Circumcision and Excision Ceremonies," 154.

¹²²⁹ Messina, "Celebrations of the Body: Female Spirituality and Corporeality in Muslim Morocco," 252, 62.

¹²³⁰ Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*, 141.

¹²³¹ Vonderheyden, "Le Henné Chez Les Musulmans De L'Afrique Du Nord," 195. Kennedy, "Mushahara: A Nubian Concept of Supernatural Danger and The Theory of Taboo," 129.

¹²³² Janice Boddy, "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (1988): 11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645483>; Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*, 215.

primarily applied during weddings by the bride and groom, believed to offer protection against evil spirits.¹²³³

As a Middle Eastern woman, I have personally experienced the use of henna in the context of Moroccan and Nubian baths. Henna is one of the ingredients in a face and body mask called Dalkah, which is applied after the steam and scrubbing process. The Dalkah is left on for a short period, typically no more than 15 minutes, and serves to nourish and calm the skin while providing a subtle sun-kissed appearance, resulting in a healthy look. Similar practices are observed in some African cultures, such as Mauritania, where a simpler version of the Dalkah, made only with butter and henna, is used (Figure 43).¹²³⁴ The documentation provided by these scholars regarding the use of henna during celebratory occasions appears to confirm that henna was primarily used for beautification and hygiene purposes. This suggests that their claims are based on assumptions rather than facts collected directly from the individuals who used henna.

¹²³³ Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 5th ed., 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: Macmillan And Co., 1921), 503; Edward Westermarck, *A Short History of Marriage* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), 202; Kennedy, "Mushahara: A Nubian Concept of Supernatural Danger and The Theory of Taboo," 129; Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa*, 175; Al-Guindi, "The Angels in the Nile: A Theme in Nunian Ritual," 110.

¹²³⁴ Aline Tauzin, *Le Henné: L'Art Des Femmes De Mauritanie* [The Henna, Art of the Women of Mauritania] (Paris: IBIS Press, 1998), 28-30.



Figure 43: Aline Tauzin, *Mauritanian woman applying Dalkah* (1988, p.31)

Regarding the hands, scholars mention specific patterns applied to protect individuals from jinn or when following the instructions of the jinn themselves.¹²³⁵ This analysis aligns with the interpretation of tattoo patterns, which are predominantly seen as a form of protection against the evil eye. While some patterns have been associated with protection from evil spirits (Figure 44– Figure 48), Ernest Gobert,¹²³⁶ who provides the patterns, does not offer an analysis of why they are believed to provide such protection. For instance, the circle in Figure 44 represents the Amazigh letter "R," while the circle with a dot in Figure 45 represents the letter "S." Both are likely tribal symbols. The line with surrounding dots may indicate a counting

¹²³⁵ Boddy, "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance," 11; John G. Kennedy, "Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapy," *Human Organization* 26, no. 4 (1967): 187, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44124521>; Kennedy, "Mushahara: A Nubian Concept of Supernatural Danger and The Theory of Taboo," 129; Kirk M Endicott, *An Analysis of Malay Magic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 161; Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 108; Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*, 215.

¹²³⁶ Ernest Gobert, "Notes Sur Les Tatouages Des Indigènes Tunisiens " *L'Anthropologie* 34 (1924).

system,¹²³⁷ potentially representing wealth or alliances. The two triangles in Figure 44 symbolize Amazigh power.¹²³⁸

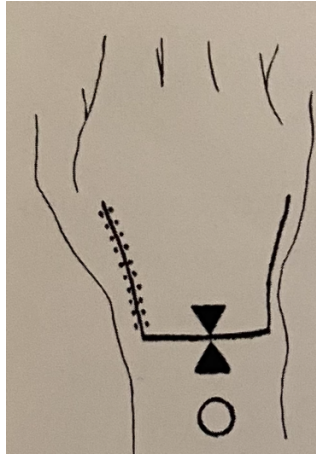


Figure 44: Hand tattoo (Gobert, 1924, p.75)

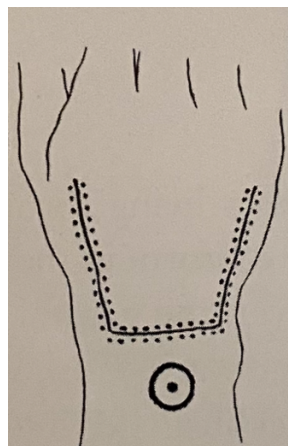


Figure 45: Hand tattoo (Gobert, 1924, p.75)

According to Yassine, the pattern at the centre of Figure 46 symbolizes date trees and is commonly found on the hands of individuals working in fields in Tunisia.¹²³⁹ The crossed line with small lines in Figure 46 and Figure 47 is another representation of palm trees.¹²⁴⁰ In Figure 48, the central symbol resembles a waving comb, which signifies the person's trade.¹²⁴¹

¹²³⁷ Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 2, 225.

¹²³⁸ Afify, "397", القيمة والرمز في تراث الفن التطبيقي الأمازيغي مصدرا لاستحداث تصميم طباعة أقمشة الناثيث,

¹²³⁹ Yassin, "352", أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا,

¹²⁴⁰ Searight, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, 2, 225.

¹²⁴¹ Yassin, "352", أثر العناصر الزخرفية للوشم والحناء في القرن التاسع عشر على الأزياء (المشتملة) في شمال أفريقيا,

However, since it is surrounded by lines with small lines representing date trees, the central symbol can be interpreted as a chip reflecting water availability, land power, and wisdom.¹²⁴²

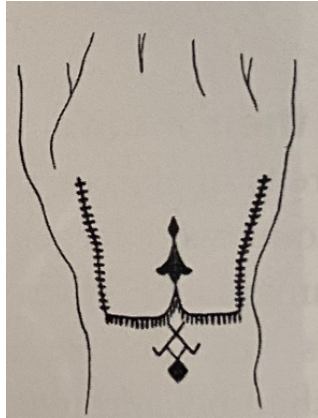


Figure 46: Hand tattoo (Gobert, 1924, p.75)

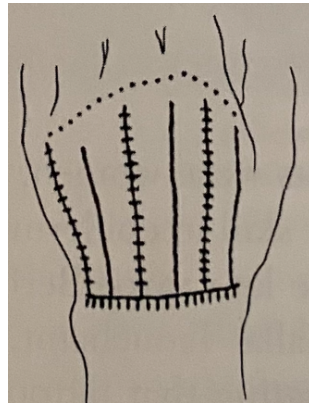


Figure 47: Hand tattoo (Gobert, 1924, p.75)

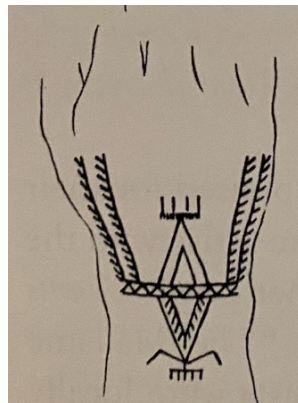


Figure 48: Hand tattoo (Gobert, 1924, p.75)

¹²⁴² Afify, "398", القيمة والرمز في تراث الفن التطبيقي الأمازيغي مصدرا لاستحداث تصميم طباعة أقمشة الناثيث,

When it comes to the use of henna on the feet in relation to evil spirits, Boddy mentions a case in Northern Sudan where a supposedly possessed woman applied henna to the soles of her feet in intricate patterns according to the jinn's instructions.¹²⁴³ Her account describes henna stains covering the entire heel and ball of each foot, while the instep, typically covered with henna paste, displayed partial dyeing in three broad stripes.¹²⁴⁴ Exploring the tradition of henna application in Sudan reveals that Sudanese women have developed their own unique artistic style, set apart from other cultures (Figure 49 and Figure 50).



Figure 49: Sudanese foot henna (Henna Alanan, 2022)



Figure 50: Sudanese foot henna (Henna Alanan, 2022)

Boddy's research primarily focuses on the anthropological aspect of demonology, and it is beyond the scope of her study to analyze the subject from a psychological perspective.

¹²⁴³ Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*.

¹²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

However, it is worth mentioning that Islamic scholars attribute claims of possession to psychological problems and a desire for attention.¹²⁴⁵ This is evident in the materialistic requests made by those claiming to be possessed, such as demanding gold, money, and beauty products like henna.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to challenge the Western interpretation of henna usage as a means of protection against the evil eye and evil spirits (jinn) by adopting an approach situated between anthropology of Islam and Islamic anthropology. It sought to explain these concepts from an Islamic perspective, focusing on the Quranic texts and authentic hadiths that Muslims universally believe in.

It has shown that while religious texts acknowledge the existence of these beliefs within Islam, they do not emphasize their importance or suggest that Muslims must constantly fear supernatural dangers. The exaggeration of these fears can be attributed to local people's imagination, popular beliefs, lack of religious education, and psychological factors, which are exploited to shape beliefs and culture. Furthermore, Western scholars often lack the capacity to interpret religious texts accurately and discern between different grades of hadith, which

¹²⁴⁵ Mohammed Metwally Al-Shaarawy, "لقاء الإيمان," in *Liqaa Al-Iman*, ed. Fawzi Nassef (4:36, YouTube: Sammi Productions for Artistic and Media Production, 51 February 2022), Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHVnd0jpyQc>.

significantly impacts their analysis of the culture and the distinction between religious and cultural beliefs.

The Western style of writing about Muslims tends to recognize beliefs or practices carried by an isolated minority and generalize them to all Muslims from the Far East to the Far West, without acknowledging differences in lifestyle, culture, language, and education. This approach was inherited from early scholars during colonization and perpetuates a dismissive attitude toward non-Western cultures. Contemporary scholars are encouraged to not continue in the same vein and disregard the perspectives of the people under study or dismiss their voices to gain credibility as experts on Eastern culture, solving the mysteries of an exotic and mysterious lifestyle.

This chapter has demonstrated how henna is frequently mentioned by Western scholars as a means of protection from the evil eye. However, there are varied interpretations of henna and its relation to evil spirits, ranging from being a substance used for protection and appeasement to one that puts the user in a state of vulnerability. Each opinion appears to have been formed according to the preferences and theories of the scholars and is not supported with specific details of the patterns used or any photographic evidence.

A cultural examination of the symbols and patterns used in tattooing that have influenced henna body art reveals that they hold different meanings. This contradicts the interpretation of some Western scholars, particularly those of the early 20th century, who primarily focused on protection being the sole purpose. Body art, including henna, serves as a

means of expression for people, enabling them to express love between spouses, to display the power and physical ability by men, or to mark tribal members for identity and solidarity. Symbolism in henna often encompasses elements related to home, wealth, nature, and fertility. It is the Western fascination with protection from supernatural forces that sometimes overshadows the actual concerns and intentions of the individuals being studied.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Research Question and Objectives

The objective of this thesis was to explore the portrayal of henna in Western literature and to investigate disparities between the information provided by scholars and orientalists versus my understanding as a Muslim Eastern woman. The study identified references to henna in the accounts of early Western travellers and scholars and analysed them through a historiographical lens. The central research question guiding this inquiry was: "What does Western literature and scholarship reveal about the perceptions and interpretations of henna body art as practiced in Islamic cultures?"

This question served as a foundational thread, illustrating the evolution of the documentation of henna over time. Henna was initially documented as a commodity of potential financial gain and was later described in vague terms as being used to adorn women's hands, feet, and nails, seemingly to conjure an allure of the exotic Eastern harem. Subsequently, the portrayal of henna evolved to becoming associated with notions of barbarism, backwardness, indolence, and the perceived sexual availability of Eastern women. Ultimately, this study argues that henna was predominantly mentioned in Western narratives for Western benefit, whether financially, socially, or academically.

The research objectives were devised to address a gap in the existing literature: a lack of consideration of henna body art as an art form. The investigation was achieved via critical review and interrogation of the Western perspective on henna and its role within Islamic

culture, particularly from the standpoint of an Islamic Eastern perspective. This approach encompassed three key aspects, as follows.

First, a critical evaluation of Western literature was undertaken to assess its accuracy and validity in its portrayal of henna and its significance within Islamic culture. Throughout the research, particular attention was paid to the underlying perspectives of authors regarding culture and religion. The investigation considered how the authors' political and social viewpoints might have influenced their interpretations, potentially hindering an objective understanding of henna and its embedded culture.

Second, the research illuminates the challenges within Eastern research concerning our understanding of henna. Eastern records initially neglected mention of henna rituals and use, as such practices were considered feminine practices, while there was a predominance of male perspectives in historical and scientific documentation. This investigation examines and compares literature authored by Eastern scholars educated within Eastern institutions with those educated in Western institutions. Eastern scholars based in their home regions often exhibit a focused approach, drawing from personal experiences and local cultural understanding. However, they often overlooked engagement with Western literature or omitted to recognise what it revealed about henna in Islamic cultures. Conversely, Eastern scholars based in Western countries frequently endorsed the depictions of Eastern culture found in Western literature, inadvertently side-lining their cultural knowledge.

Third, was to elucidate the role of henna in the Islamic religion. The aim was to demonstrate that henna, like other products, was used by Prophet Muhammad, and subsequently, its significance was Islamized more than any other substance within Eastern cultures. This exploration involved scrutinizing the references to henna found in Western literature and hadith books, including their authenticity grades. Furthermore, it examined the diverse opinions of Islamic scholars regarding henna, revealing variations influenced by cultural, social, and regional backgrounds.

It is noteworthy that the aspiration was not to compile a historical account of the use of henna throughout time or its cultural significance. Instead, the focus was on the obfuscation of the historical trail of henna due to a disregard of it as a valuable art form. This work considers how this disregard was further compounded by the influence of external agendas on the study of this culturally rooted art form and how Eastern and Western patriarchal biases resulting in the overlooking of women's roles and their associated arts and rituals.

The answer to the research question is unequivocal: the Western perspective has consistently overlooked henna as a contemporary art form, irrespective of the era. Early Western orientalist and scholars portrayed the East in a way that served their personal, political, and social agendas. Later scholars refrained from challenging this portrayal, and it was broadly accepted as fact. Western literature reveals an apparent reluctance to acknowledge henna as an art form. From an academic standpoint, it seems more advantageous to position

oneself as an expert on Muslim beliefs and superstitions rather than having to address body art practices.

Thesis Summary

The thesis comprises eight chapters, including the present Conclusion. The introductory chapter sets the stage by providing the background to the subject and outlining the main structure of the study, including aims, objectives, and the identified gaps in the existing literature. Within this initial chapter, the research question is formulated, establishing a framework for exploring aspects related to the documentation of henna in Western literature.

The second chapter presents a comprehensive literature review covering the late 20th to the 21st century. It explores the evolving historiography of henna, mainly focusing on the impact of the perspectives of early 20th-century Western scholars. These perspectives were pivotal in shaping various notions surrounding religious and supernatural beliefs associated with henna. This review reveals how henna has often been portrayed in Western media as a means of protection against evil spirits and the evil eye. This representation mirrors what has been documented in academic studies concerning the use of henna in the East. An in-depth investigation of Eastern Arabic media outlets was undertaken for this review. It revealed that Eastern authors did not present the idea of henna being a protective substance in their works and that this was not prominently featured for Arabic readers. This finding underscores a

crucial point: that it was not acceptable within Eastern cultures for henna to serve purposes beyond cosmetic body and hair adornment and therefore this was documented.

In contrast, Western audiences held perceptions of the East that had been significantly influenced by fairy tales, stories, and accounts of imperial travellers. It is evident that the depiction of henna as a protective substance is primarily based on Westermarck's accounts, often without independent verification. This pattern highlights the tendency of scholars to perpetuate each other's work without critical examination. This phenomenon can be attributed, in part, to the fascination of Western readers of a romanticized portrayal of Eastern life, often characterized by superstition and magic. This chapter underscores the magnitude of this issue within Western literature, reflecting remnants of ingrained imperialism that persist into the 21st century.

In response to the literature review, Chapter Three closely examined the work of Westermarck and in particular his exploration of henna body art. He stands out as the pioneer scholar who proposed henna as being employed as a safeguard against supernatural forces. This chapter thoroughly examined Westermarck's background, scholarly accomplishments, perspectives, and interactions with his informant from a historiographical standpoint.

The findings of this chapter reveal that Westermarck's perceptions of Eastern culture and Islamic religion had taken shape prior to his sojourn in the East. His choice of study location and subjects was tailored to align with his theory that ancient civilizations persisted into the 20th century. This was accomplished by concentrating on marginalized and secluded

individuals. His data collection methodology met with contemporaneous criticism for its partiality, leaning excessively toward hypotheses rather than verifiable facts. Notably, the chapter highlights that Westermarck's data collection approach would be considered questionable by today's ethical standards due to the nature of his relationship with his Moroccan informant, El-Baqqali. This association seemed driven by personal and financial interests for both men.

This chapter showcases how Westermarck's portrayal of henna and other aspects of Eastern culture are not firmly grounded in empirical evidence but stem from hypotheses. It argues that these accounts therefore cannot serve as a secure foundation for understanding the role of henna in body art, as observed in Western literature, where his assertions often go unchallenged.

Chapter Four conducted a comprehensive historiographical examination of the documentation of henna. The chapter concentrated on accounts written by travellers from the 15th century to the 19th century. These accounts were scrutinized within the context of the travellers' own personal encounters, as well as geopolitical occurrences, religious tensions, and economic motivations. The aim was to discern how these factors may have collectively influenced and transformed the discourse surrounding henna as observed through the lens of travellers. Additionally, the chapter examined accounts of female travellers, aiming to understand their impact on the documentation of henna, given their unique proximity to the subject.

The findings of this chapter reveal significant revelations. Early male travellers played a pivotal role in shaping the Western perception of the East, often portraying it as primitive and disadvantaged. This portrayal conveniently bolsters the Western self-image as a model of modern civilization, downplaying inadequacies such as gender inequality. The documentation of henna as an adornment of Eastern women was exploited to emphasise the perceived privileges of Western women.

This chapter highlights how most Western women exhibited limited interest in their Eastern counterparts and their traditions. This stemmed from the constraints that Western women experienced in their own societies, leading them to view the East as a realm of freedom and adventure much as Western male travellers experienced it. Regrettably, this came at the cost of missing out on the chance to closely document Eastern feminine customs.

Interestingly, when Western women later embraced feminism and began to demand their rights, they unwittingly employed biased information about Eastern women perpetuated by male travellers. This misinformed narrative was then used to objectify and victimize Eastern women to benefit Western women.

The chapter highlights how the West historically marginalized Eastern women and disregarded their traditions and artistic expressions, considering them mere adornments synonymous with oppression, segregation, and sexual objectification. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the conception of henna as an Islamic practice or a protective agent against evil spirits was not prevalent during the early stages of Western travellers' accounts.

Ultimately, this chapter establishes a timeline of the documentation of henna as being intricately woven into the fabric of political and social events. This exploration of the historiography of henna adds depth and understanding to its evolving narrative.

Chapter Five explored the development of the documentation of henna during the 20th century. It examined how our understanding of the purpose of henna transformed from it being simply decorative to it acquiring associations with protective qualities against evil forces. The chapter examined how, at the beginning of the 20th century, henna became closely linked with religion and magic within Islamic cultures across regions ranging from the Far East to Morocco. The aim of this emphasis on religious and magical aspects was primarily to differentiate Muslims from other religions in these areas, even though there was limited evidence supporting such claims.

This chapter focused on Westermarck's argument that henna is believed to have protective properties against malevolent spirits and the evil eye. Notably, his assertion was not limited to the specific cultural group he studied but encompassed all Muslims with limited regard for cultural differences and popular beliefs. Additionally, the chapter explored how Westermarck's claims evolved over time, transitioning from a claim that henna offers protection to a later claim that henna is a potential source of vulnerability; this contradiction in his claims went unchallenged.

The chapter highlights a significant aspect of Westermarck's analysis that revolves around his perception of Eastern women as potential threats to men. This perspective was

subsequently propagated in the work of other orientalists and scholars, resulting in a widespread association of henna body art with beliefs in evil spirits and the evil eye. This perception also permeated earlier texts, as evident through re-edited texts that incorporated henna within the context of supernatural beliefs.

The chapter explored the different viewpoints of Western women travellers in the early 20th century. These perspectives range from imperialist views of Eastern women and their henna traditions as outdated and needing modernization, to feminist views whereby these practices were used to support the cause for the liberation of Western women. The finding is that feminist writers did not associate henna with evil spirits as some male authors did. This comparison reveals how Western men manipulated the significance of henna in order to uphold patriarchal dominance.

The chapter shows how scholars from the latter half of the century accessed and used secondary data without verification. Claims made in the works of Westermarck and other scholars were accepted as undeniable facts about the Orient, with later scholars neglecting to cross-reference or validate their findings with contemporary or historical accounts. This absence of critical analysis only served to perpetuate misinterpretations and reinforce broad generalizations.

These academics thus propagated the idea that henna and Islamic culture are intrinsically associated with supernatural beliefs and superstitions, reinforcing a colonialist perspective. They expanded upon distorted beliefs held by select individuals to encompass all

aspects of Islamic society, overlooking the intricate complexities and inherently diverse nature of Islamic cultures.

The chapter sheds light on the Western perspective of the East by offering a contextual understanding of historical biases ingrained in 20th-century Western literature. It becomes evident how the West has consistently marginalized legitimate forms of Eastern body art, seeking to manipulate its significance and appropriating its essence in an attempt to assert dominance over the enigmatic Eastern culture.

The sixth chapter conducted an inquiry into the significance of henna in Islam. It achieved this by thoroughly examining the Prophet's hadiths that mention henna and interpreting them within the context of the two Islamic doctrines, Sunni and Shia. The primary objective of this chapter was to articulate the portrayal of henna-related hadith in Western literature. This involved exploring how Western misconceptions of these hadith have impacted the study of henna body art in Western contexts.

The analysis was conducted by examining the hadiths from an Islamic perspective and employing the methodologies of the science of hadith, including the classification of hadith grades. This classification system enables a differentiation between the types of hadiths that Muslims adhere to—authentic and good-graded—and those deemed weak or fabricated and are consequently disregarded.

The chapter investigated nuances in the interpretation of hadith by Shia and Sunni Muslims. Divergences in interpretation occasionally led to confusion among those outside the

Islamic faith, potentially resulting in broad generalizations about beliefs and practices. This highlights the intricacies and complexities inherent in understanding these religious texts and emphasizes the importance of contextualizing interpretations within the specific doctrinal frameworks of these two major branches of Islam in history.

In this chapter, it is demonstrated that there is no definitive evidence that the Prophet used henna for his hair or body, nor that he attributed any holy significance to henna, as has been claimed in Western literature. Part of this misinterpretation was caused by the limited ability of Western scholars to understand the Arabic language, as well as because of linguistic mistakes made by the translators of the hadiths. Another contributing factor is a lack of knowledge about the science of hadith, which may have led Western studies on henna to rely on fabricated sayings falsely attributed to the Prophet and being circulated among the public.

The chapter puts forth reasons for fabricating hadiths about henna. First, some extremists exaggerated the significance of henna as a virtuous act. Second, henna traders and storytellers propagated false hadiths for financial gain. Third, some traders exploited sexism to encourage the use of henna, particularly by women. These explanations suggest the motivations behind creating and spreading misleading information, highlighting the need for discernment when engaging with religious practices and their associated narrations.

The chapter thoroughly examined the perspective regarding henna of Shia Muslims, revealing that henna has an Islamic significance in their belief and was used by the Prophet and other revered figures. When studying henna body art, it is essential to consider the beliefs of

society and its members who use henna, as religious beliefs can vary significantly from person to person. Understanding the depth of a religious belief and its influence on cultural practices is crucial to grasp the significance of henna in different contexts.

The study finds that it is culturally unacceptable for men in many societies to use henna for weddings. From a religious perspective, most Islamic scholars prohibited henna use by men, fearing it might lead to female stimulation. It is essential to clarify that such restrictions are based on personal cultural experiences and should be considered scholarly opinions rather than strict Islamic guidelines, as they were not derived from the Quran or any authentic hadith.

This analysis reveals that the main reason for men to use henna for weddings is primarily artistic, for adornment and cultural expression. In some societies, cultural practices hold more significance than strict adherence to religious norms. This further underscores the complexity of the role of henna within different communities and the need to approach the topic with an understanding of the intertwining of art, culture, and religion. Doing so means we can avoid oversimplifications and allows us to appreciate the rich diversity of perspectives and practices surrounding henna within the Muslim world.

Chapter Seven challenged the perception held by Western scholars that henna is used as a means of protection from evil spirits and evil eye to show how Muslims approach the subject of supernatural beliefs religiously and how it is documented in Western literature. This was performed by comparing Islamic anthropology and the anthropology of Islam. The chapter shows that there is no Islamic religious basis to the claim that henna is a holy substance used

for protection and explains the belief in jinn from an Islamic perspective, showing that jinn has no power over humans. This suggests that Western scholars may have attributed localised popular beliefs to all Muslims based on the beliefs of a subgroup of Muslims, perhaps to serve a colonial mission and ultimately becoming embedded as a fact about all Muslims and their use of henna in Western literature.

It demonstrates how there are varied interpretations of the relation between henna and evil spirits, ranging from being a substance used for protection and appeasement to one that puts the user in a state of vulnerability. Each opinion appears to have been formed according to the preferences and theories of the scholars and is not supported with specific details of the patterns used or any photographic evidence.

The primary focus of this chapter was on Amazigh or Moroccan body art, as this culture is frequently depicted as more superstitious than other Islamic cultures. The analysis centred around patterns and symbols from an Amazigh perspective, examining how the Islamic artistic movement had shaped their traditional art. This evolution led to the creation of more intricate patterns that skilfully conveyed their cultural heritage and religious beliefs.

Examining the symbols and patterns used in tattooing that have influenced henna body art reveals that they hold different meanings than the interpretations of Western scholars. It shows that body art, including henna, is used to express love between spouses, display men's power and physical ability, or mark tribal members for identity and solidarity. Symbolism in henna often encompasses home, wealth, nature, and fertility elements. It reveals the Western

fascination with protection from supernatural forces that sometimes overshadows the actual concerns and intentions of the studied individuals.

Limitations of the Study

The primary goal of my study was to thoroughly explore the practice of henna body art in Saudi Arabia. I set out to comprehensively analyse how henna is utilized, for what intended purpose, and what patterns prevail across all regions within the country. Additionally, I examined the diverse applications of henna across different tribal groups, seeking to understand the nuances that distinguish these practices. I investigated the influence on the distinct patterns of henna art of geographical locations—whether situated along the coast, centrally within desert landscapes, or nestled within mountainous terrains.

However, my initial objective underwent a significant shift for two main reasons. First, I rapidly identified a widespread misconception about henna body art in the existing literature, particularly from Western sources. I felt the need to address and challenge these misconceptions before advancing with my examination of henna as a form of body art, so I repositioned the central focus of my thesis to the realm of art history. This transition involved a meticulous analysis of the literature to identify the underlying reasons for a lack of acknowledgement of henna as a legitimate art form. As a result, I refrained from discussing henna as an art form until the existing misconceptions within the available data were duly explored.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted my initial plan to gather data directly from Saudi Arabia to compare it with the existing literature. The restrictions imposed by the pandemic made it impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews with both Saudi locals and foreigners who were either residents of or visitors to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, virtual interviews, although an alternative, posed their own set of challenges, particularly when engaging with the older generation (aged 60 and above) who might not be as comfortable with virtual communication due to limited familiarity with the technology. Additionally, virtual interactions were often constrained by time, which limited the depth and breadth of the narratives I could gather. This format also hindered the documentation of rituals around the application of henna and the intricate patterns that hold cultural significance, as details were lost through virtual communication, and I was unable to photograph these rituals and patterns. Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic extended to disrupting social gatherings where henna is traditionally applied, such as henna nights, weddings, and Eid celebrations. As a result, I was unable to capture these occasions as an insider, thereby missing the opportunity to document the cultural and religious dimensions of henna art.

When I initially chose to investigate henna use in Western literature, my intention was to encompass all relevant cultures across Asia and Africa in my analysis, irrespective of their religious affiliations. However, as my analysis progressed, I recognized that my approach inadvertently mirrored the Western perspective—a stance of an outsider observing the beliefs and rituals of cultures from an external standpoint, lacking an in-depth understanding of their

core beliefs and cultural intricacies. Considering this, I made a pivotal decision to refine the scope of my study. I chose to centre my focus primarily on Islamic culture, particularly on how Western perspective have perceived the use of henna within various cultures that adhere to Islam as a religion. This shift in focus enabled me to investigate how Western scholars have observed cultures adapting and transforming henna traditions into religious practices within an Islamic framework.

Another significant challenge is the limited historical data pertaining to henna art. There is a dearth of documentation from Eastern cultures where it is practiced. This scarcity of documentation can be attributed to various factors. First, it might have been considered natural and commonplace to apply henna in the East, resulting in a lack of motivation to document it. Alternatively, it may be because it was predominantly women who applied henna, while historical writers were primarily men documenting cultural and traditional aspects from their own perspectives.

Moreover, the lack of interest from Western scholars in henna presents another challenge. Henna did not capture their attention, likely due to its divergence from the modern forms of adornment prevalent in the West. Additionally, the aesthetic value of henna art might not have been appreciated within the Western context. Regrettably, the historical use of henna body art cannot be reconstructed to establish a comprehensive historical record of its use based on singular evidence.

Another notable challenge pertains to cross-linguistic aspects, particularly involving religious texts such as the Quran and hadith. During my study, I employed English-translated versions of the Quran and hadith. However, a significant predicament emerged: numerous linguistic errors were evident, distorting the intended meanings of Quranic verses and hadiths. It became evident that the English translations did not faithfully convey the nuances present in the original Arabic text.

Addressing this issue, I reported the identified mistakes to the relevant authorities, resulting in the removal of the erroneously translated English version of the Quran from the online library of King Fahd's Glorious Qur'ān Printing Complex. Unfortunately, my attempts to rectify the situation for the hadiths yielded no response from publishers. Regrettably, the volumes of hadith containing linguistic inaccuracies cannot be retracted or revised.

This matter serves as a cautionary reminder, particularly for non-Arabic readers. When using translated religious texts, it is necessary to employ vigilant scrutiny to ascertain the accuracy of conveyed meanings. The potential for misinterpretation looms large when relying on mistranslated texts, potentially triggering contentious debates that could undermine subsequent research.

A significant factor that constrained the scope of this study was the language barrier. Regrettably, my proficiency is limited to Arabic and English, which reduced my access to a considerable portion of resources. An expanded linguistic repertoire would have enabled a more comprehensive investigation. It would have substantially enriched my study to have

incorporated works written in French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Italian—the languages predominantly associated with the colonial powers in Asia and Africa. This approach could have offered a more nuanced and expansive view of the Western perspective on henna, facilitating a more thorough examination of both collective and individual authorial viewpoints.

Despite these limitations, the study offers invaluable insights into the documentation and perception of henna as revealed in both Western and Islamic literature. The findings of this study serve as a foundational steppingstone for the exploration of our understanding of henna as an art form, considering the perspectives of the cultures that employ it. My approach challenged the assumptions that have obscured the inherent beauty of this art and have veered its purpose away from being an artistic medium of expression. By embracing this multidimensional perspective, my study enriches the discourse around henna, releasing it from its confinement within the realms of psychology and anthropology.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the limitations of this study, several promising avenues for future research emerge. Further research is needed to enhance the understanding of henna body art by employing alternative theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as exploring the use of henna across diverse temporal and spatial contexts. This section presents suggestions for

future research that could contribute to a deeper understanding of the use of henna, extending beyond Muslim cultures to encompass other cultural contexts.

First, a prospective field study could complement and extend this research by undertaking a comparative analysis. Such an analysis could juxtapose the observations of Western scholars regarding henna with first-hand accounts from individuals within Islamic cultures. There is a pressing demand to gather data from the older generation, those who have witnessed their mothers and grandmothers engaging in henna practices that are now on the brink of disappearance. This investigation could concentrate on exploring henna usage patterns among Eastern women and men during the early 20th century. This inquiry should consider various factors, including individuals' societal environments, tribal affiliations, personal beliefs, and customary habits. Such research could offer valuable insights into the contextual nuances that shaped the utilization of henna during that period.

Second, the use of henna waned for many decades in response to the rising popularity of makeup. However, in recent years, there has been a resurgence in the tradition of henna body art. A wave of the younger generation in Saudi Arabia has reconnected with their cultural heritage, infusing their traditions with a modern twist. They have incorporated abstract patterns and reinterpreted symbols to add new layers of significance. A pertinent question for future research could be: To what extent has the resurgence of henna body art among youth in Saudi Arabia influenced traditional patterns and symbolism, providing valuable insights into the convergence of tradition and contemporary forms of self-expression?

This research could question the motivations, creative processes, and cultural implications of this contemporary reimagining of henna body art, shedding light on how traditional practices adapt and evolve in response to modern influences.

By conducting a thorough analysis of the ways in which traditional customs undergo changes to align with modern influences, scholars could enhance the scholarly discussion on the enduring importance of henna. Ultimately, exploring these potential areas for future research has the capacity to heighten our understanding and recognition of henna as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that continues to evolve while remaining deeply connected to its traditional roots.

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