

Algerian Woman #70's Adornments

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**Algerian woman with harquus, tattoos, kohl and henna:
70. *Scenes et Types Mauresque Collection Ideale P. S.***

This Algerian woman from the early 20th century has hennaed hands, tattoos on her hands and wrists, henna patterns on her forearm under the bracelets, and tattoos on her face overlaid with harquus. A 300 dpi scan of the original image reveals fine detail of her tattoos, harquus, and henna, which would otherwise be indistinguishable. Though her hair obscures part of her forehead tattoo, other areas of the tattoo are distinct. Some patterns are similar to those drawn by Mathea Gaudry in her research on Algerian women during that period, so those may be plausibly reconstructed. The patterns at the sides of the nose bridge are unusual, and overall the tattoos are much more delicate and complex than those drawn by Gaudry.

Algerian woman #70's tattoo patterns appear to be made of short straight parallel lines consistent with tattoos made by cutting the skin with a razor blade and rubbing pot black into the cut. As she was a young woman at the time of the photograph, her cuts are still recent and distinct. The depth and intensity of the color varies and this also supports the probability that a razor was used for tattoo application. It is very difficult to maintain an even depth with a razor cut, and impossible to get in precise amounts of pot-black, so some tattoo lines would be dark, and some nearly invisible. Years later, as skin weathered and aged, those patterns would migrate and blur, possibly giving rise to the simplification seen in Gaudry and other anthropologists' drawings. In the reconstructions following, I've attempted to recreate the tattoos worn by this woman as they would have appeared in her youth.



**Recreation of the Algerian woman's tattoos from 70 Scenes et Types Mauresque
with referencing from Mathea Gaudry**



Mathea Gaudery identifies the forehead pattern as a palm tree, a symbol of fertility. The crescent underneath may be either an eye form, or possibly a crescent moon. The broken lines alongside the bridge of the nose are uncommon in North African women's tattooing, but clearly visible in the photograph.



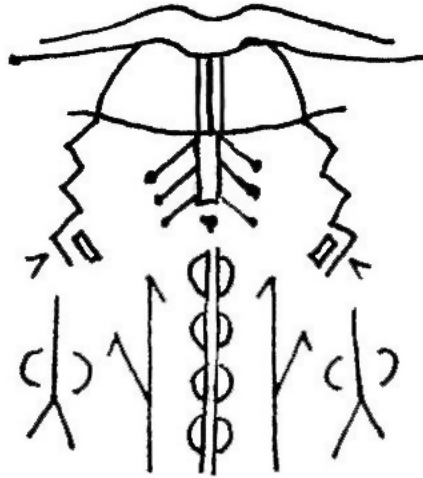
Algerian woman #70 overlaid her tattoos with harquus or kohl and face paint. If she made the black cosmetic herself, with a late 19th century traditional Algerian cosmetic mix, she would have used burnt sugar, lamp-black, and oil, or burnt nutshells and oil. If she wanted the eyebrow paint to last longer, she would have included pitch as a binder. The patches on her cheeks may have been red or black, but indications from Besancenot would favor red for the cheeks. The red would have been mixed from iron-bearing earth, or a red cosmetic called hammair. The dot above the eyebrows may have either been red or black; both colors were used to mark the forehead.



You can see in these photographs how the tattoos inhabit the face, enhancing expression and gaze, more so than is revealed through sketches in an anthropologist's notebook. The simple, geometric patterns act as topographical lines on the face. As facial contours change with smiles, frowns, and grimaces, the lines flex.



The jaw line patterns are broken lines with a diamond at the end. These are situated over a muscle that flexes as a person grits their teeth, and they would enhance the expressiveness of unspoken emotional grimaces. The diamond shape is usually identified as an eye to repel the Evil Eye.



The patterns around the woman's mouth are not identified in Mathea Gaudry's work, but are similar to traditional Algerian weaving and embroidery patterns. Among Amazigh women, the lip was frequently tattooed as well as the underlip and chin. Sometimes this tattooing extended into the inside of the lip, even to the gums of the lower teeth. Nibbling the lower lip was a favorite sexual foreplay, so a tattooed lower lip was an "invitation to nibble".



The woman #70 tattooed and hennaed her hands and arms. In the photograph, her fingers are folded into her arms, so it is not possible to discern a henna pattern. It is also not possible to see the patterning that probably lies underneath her bracelets, so both the

fingers and bracelet area have been left blank on the reconstruction above. However, there is a henna design between her bracelets and elbow, and tattooing on her wrists and the back of her hand between the bracelets and fingers. It is probable that the tattooing extends to the forearm as seen in the postcard painting below.



Painting of Arab Tunisian Woman, 1920's, Postcard Series 1569

Algerian woman #70 was almost certainly a sex worker when the photograph was taken, though one should not assume that she had tattoos because she was a sex worker or because she was in any way dishonorable. Most Algerian women were tattooed prior to marriage, to become suitable for marriage, and virtually all women married. If a woman did not quickly become pregnant, she was likely to be repudiated (divorced) by her husband. If her family did not take her back, sex work was one of the few ways she could earn a living. Her tattoos remained long after the marriage had gone.

The tattoos for this recreation were done with safe temporary tattoo paint, harquus from <http://www.mehandi.com/>.

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