



The Henna Page[™]
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HENNA

**Developing Guidelines on Henna:
A Geographical Approach**



Catherine Cartwright-Jones

**DEVELOPING GUIDELINES ON HENNA:
A GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH**

Chapter V:

Conclusion: The Potential of a Geographical Approach to Henna

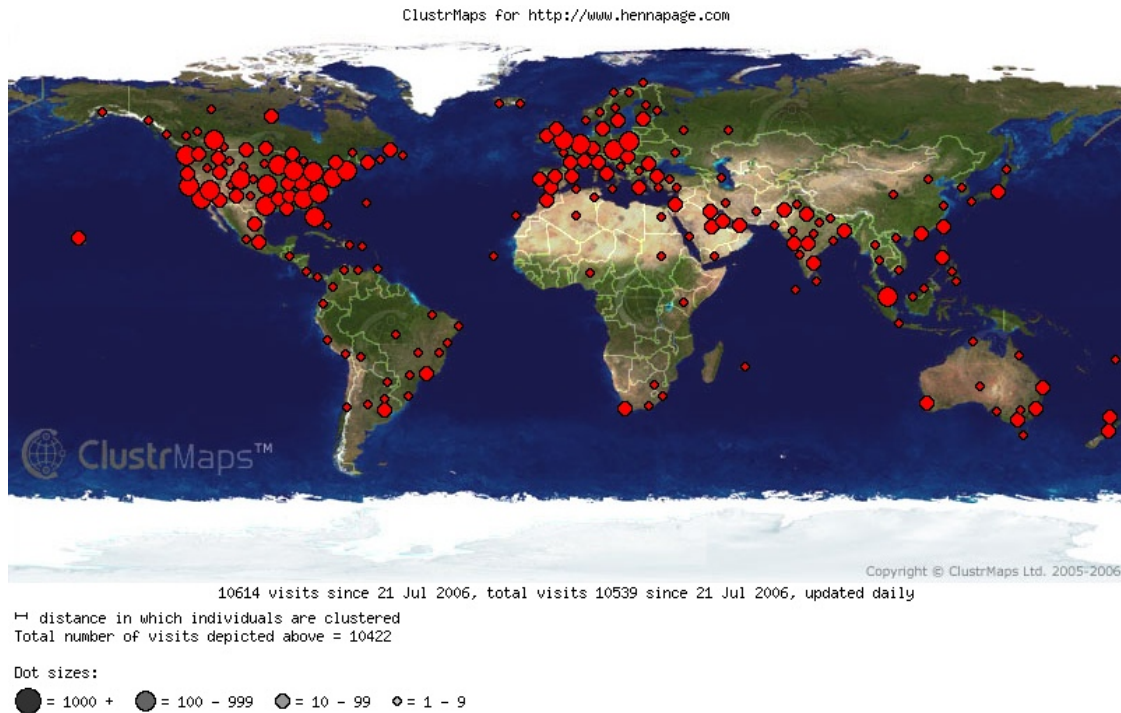


Figure 105: A dynamic map of accesses to <http://www.hennapage.com> for nine days in July 2006 (Clustrmaps TM Beta, 2006) For larger map, see page 174.

The dynamic map of accesses to <http://www.hennapage.com> between July 21 and 30, 2006, Figure 105, clearly shows the new global interest in henna. People access Hennapage.com to get information about henna art, science, history and traditions. Interest is clearly no longer limited to henna's indigenous geographies. To serve this dispersion into new areas, there must be systematic investigation of henna to support the inquiry.

When there is no systematic investigation of a particular subject, laws, regulations, pronouncements and claims will be made in error and ignorance. During my sixteen years as a professional henna artist and teacher, researcher, consultant, Webmaster, and business owner, I have seen how much misinformation is circulating about henna, and the damage it can do.

Vacationers purchase “black henna” tattoos from sidewalk artists around the world, unaware that there is no such thing as “black henna”, and subsequently develop severe allergic reactions. I get emails from these people almost daily, frantic because they or their children (as young as two years old) have blistering, open sores, or worse, full body allergic reactions. I forward them the information to take to their physicians for treatment, when their doctors do not appear to know the difference between para-phenylenediamine and henna. I have worked with the State of Florida and Health Canada to implement legislation and enforcement to prevent these injuries. I forward injury reports to Edith Coulter, the Environmental Manager of the Florida Board of Environmental Health, so the “black henna” artists can be prosecuted. I worked with Health Canada to set up guidelines for recognizing the difference between safe, natural henna and para-phenylenediamine (Health Canada, 2003).

I have taught henna in a Hillel in Los Angeles where two rabbis were deeply concerned that Jews could not henna because they believed it might be a tattoo or sacred Hindu ritual. They were unaware that Jewish people in Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, India and

Iraq have used henna since the Song of Solomon was written. I have received emails from Christian girls who were chastised for wearing henna to church, and told that henna was heathen and sinful, even though it was clearly used in the Holy Land at the time of the birth of Christ, and continues to be used by Coptic and Armenian Christians. I have had conversations with South Asians who cannot believe there is henna outside of India, nor that a non-Indian could do henna. I have been contacted by clerics who doubt that hennaed hands can be properly washed for prayer. People hoping to open henna parlors in Lebanon and Jordan have contacted me for products and information, thinking that they are bringing henna to their countries for the first time in history. Once, when handing money over the counter for a fast food meal with my hennaed hand, the cashier leapt back, fearing that the henna was a Voodoo curse.

There has been no systematic study of the history, traditions, art and science of henna up to this point. The investigation of body marking as part of material culture, and its function in social hierarchy, cultural reproduction, and ritual is relatively new in academic studies. There has been a strong prejudice against studying body marking, probably because western academics carried the classic Greek and Roman attitude that body markings are “frivolous” and “barbaric”, and not worthy of serious attention. Western academics have rarely taken notice of henna, though it is several millennia old and widespread practice. Not only does the general prejudice against body art incline them against investigating henna, but approaching this body art would have been

hindered because it was largely out of reach of male researchers; henna was primarily a women's art in countries where women's seclusion from men, especially foreign men, was the rule.

This absence of investigation and information may be the reason for the lack of any organized and rigorous approach to the academic study of henna. The criteria groups and geographies of henna that I've proposed in this essay are an attempt to provide a basis for arranging the scraps of information that we do have, so the body of knowledge on this subject can be organized and expanded. An enlarged collection of artifacts and texts about henna can be mapped further, to provide information about the spread of religious and cultural rituals, gender and class, climate and cultural migration or dispersion, particularly in the late Bronze age development of henna traditions around the southern and eastern Mediterranean, and the flowering of henna technique in the Safavid, Turkoman and Ottoman courts. Mapping of henna body markings in the last two hundred years would provide information on the effect of westernization on henna and related body arts in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, as people adapted their construction of beauty from an indigenous model to a western model.

Mapping the spread of henna body markings in the last thirty years would provide information on the effect of immigration patterns from South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa into Europe and the USA, the adaptation of henna into the body model of

immigrant communities of the west, and the western adaptation of henna as a “temporary tattoo”, a novelty to be purchased on vacation.

Taken together, a geographic approach to henna should provide a systematic structure within which the serious study of henna’s science, art, traditions and history may begin.

Appendix:

Larger versions of maps included in Chapter IV:

Mapping the Historical Regions of Henna

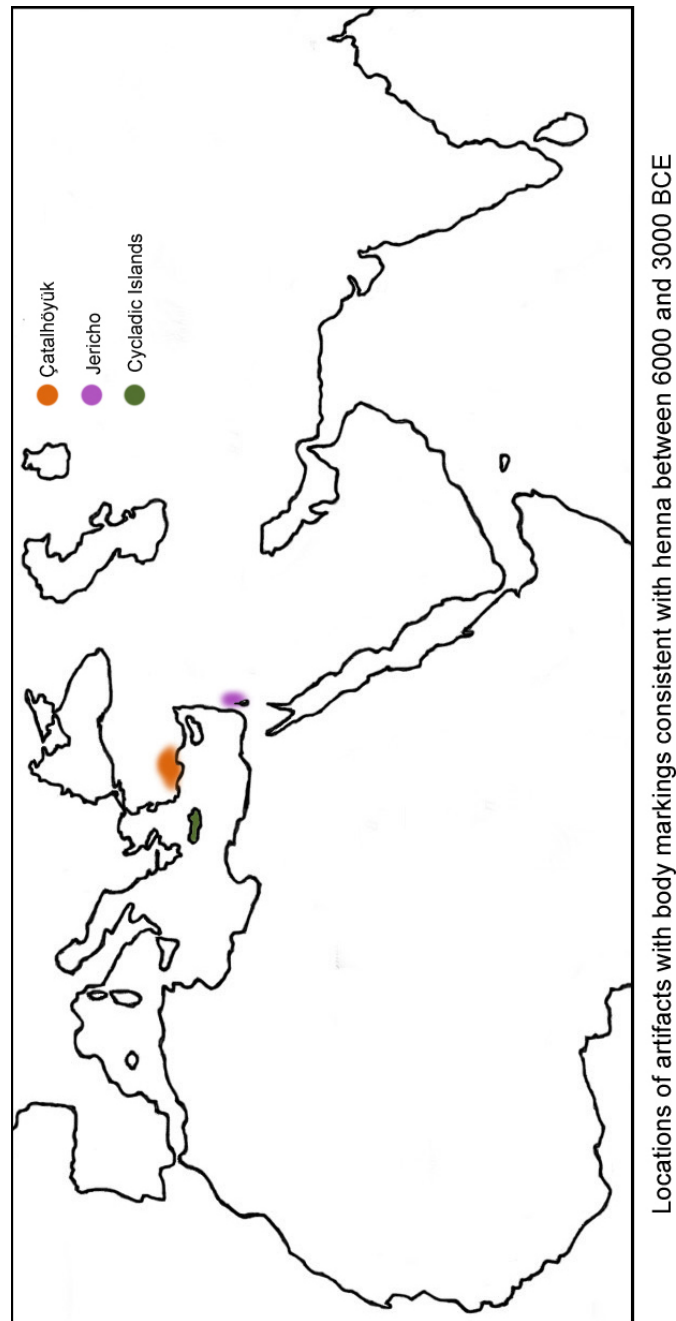


Figure 106: Areas of possible henna use between 6000 and 3000 BCE, based on artifacts that have body markings consistent with henna (Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

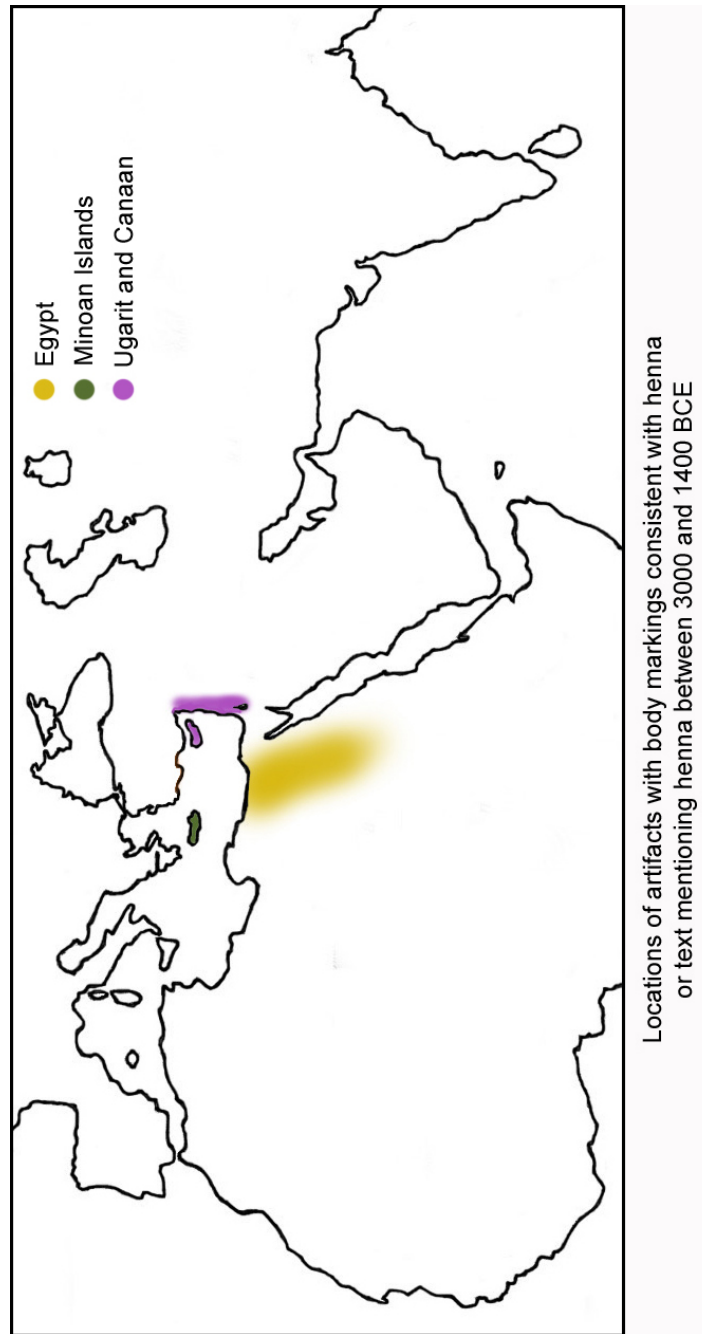


Figure 107: Areas of possible henna use between 3000 and 1400 BCE, based on artifacts that mention henna or body markings consistent with henna

(Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

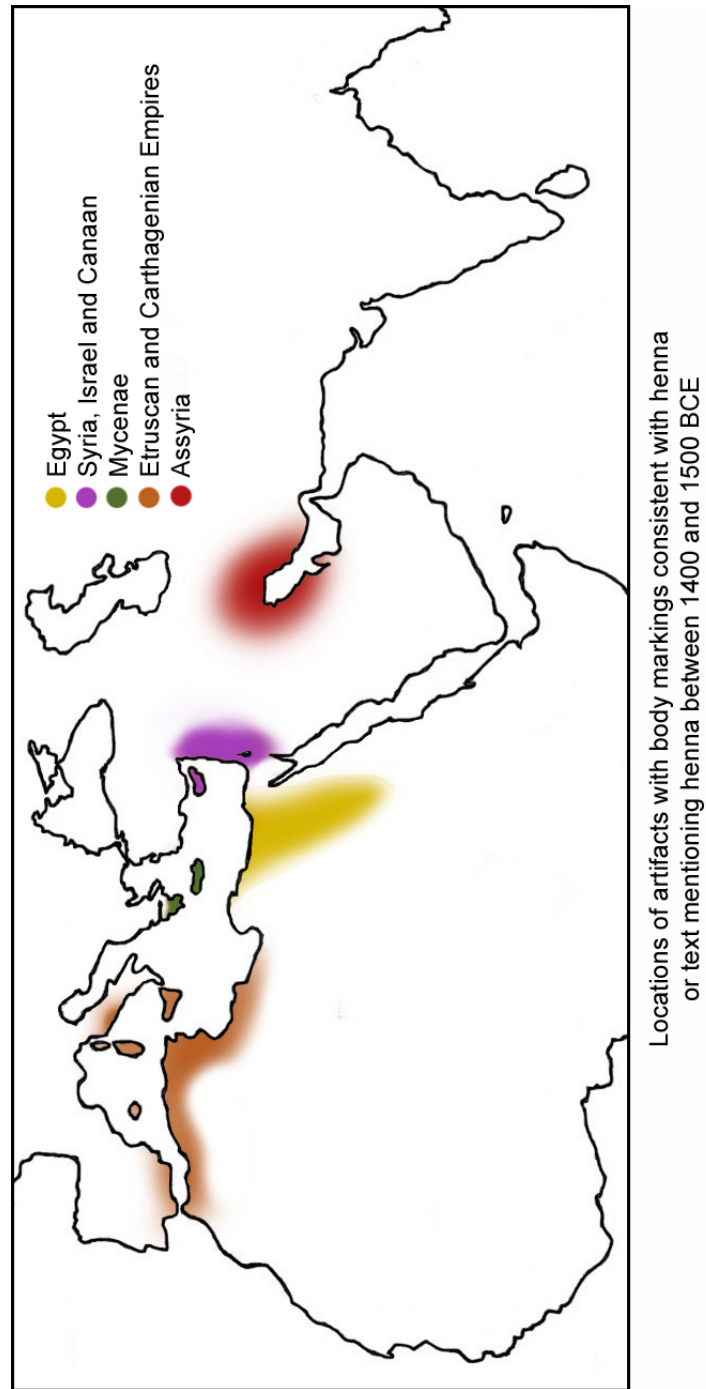


Figure 108: Areas of henna use in 1400 – 500 BCE, as supported in ancient texts and artifacts that have body markings consistent with henna

(Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

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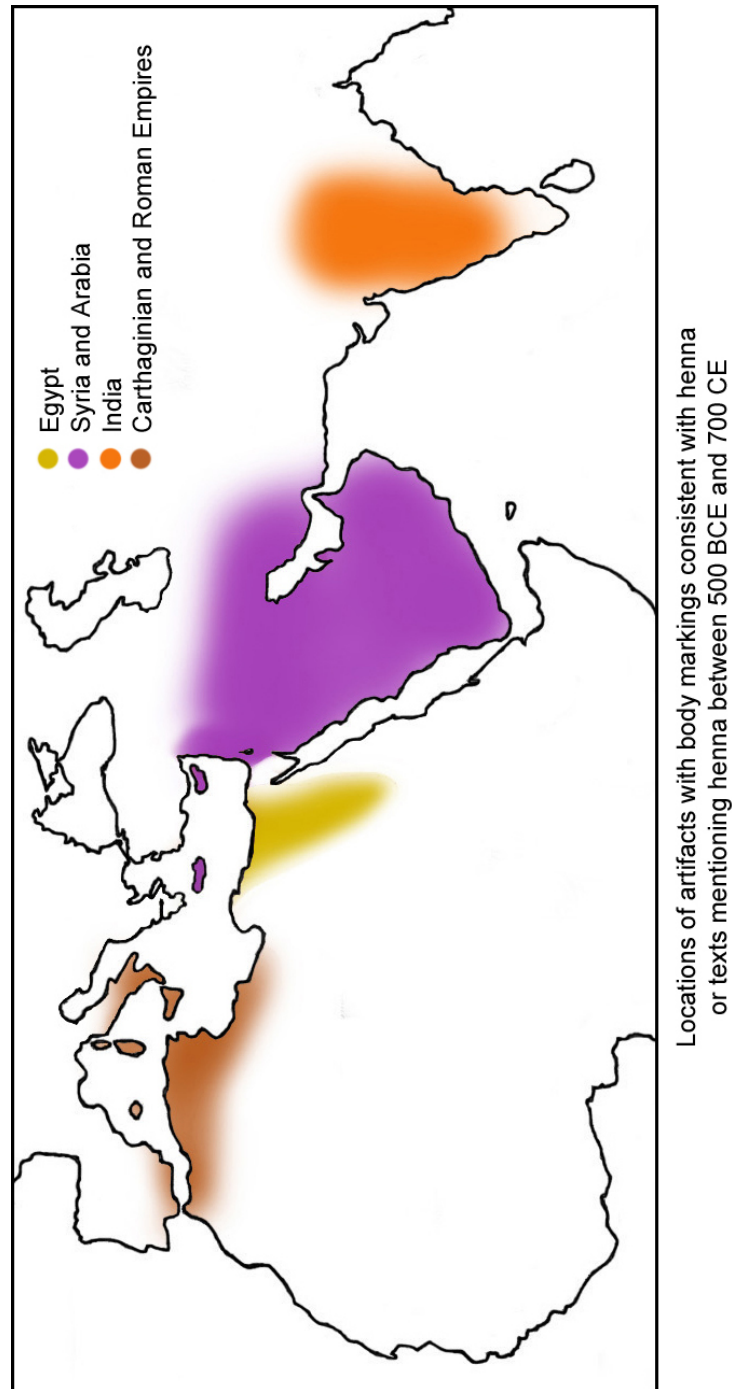


Figure 109: Areas of henna use in 500 BCE – 700 CE, as supported by Roman texts, Pre-Islamic texts, Indian texts, and artifacts that have body markings consistent with

henna (Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

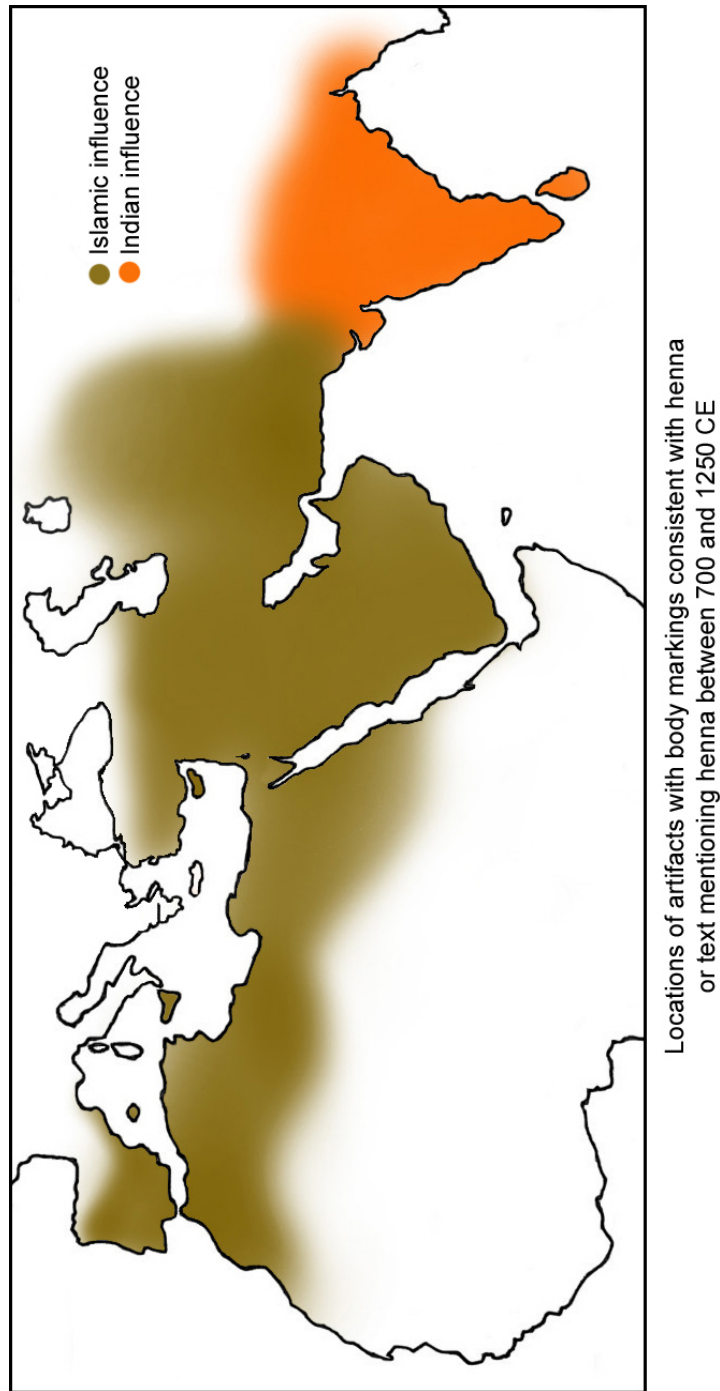


Figure 110: Areas of henna use in 700 CE – 1250 CE, as supported by European, Arabic, and Indian texts, and artifacts that have body markings consistent with henna

(Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

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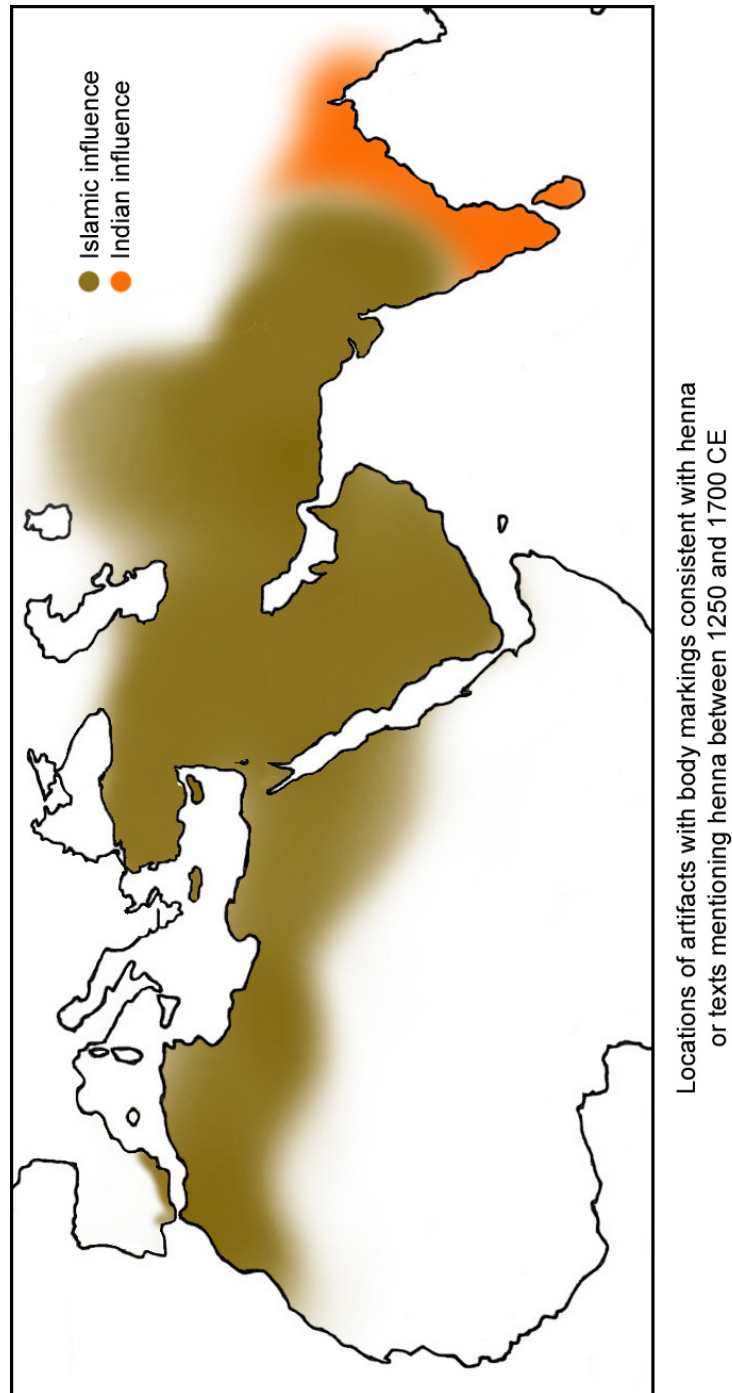


Figure 172: Areas of henna use in 1250 BCE – 1750 CE, as supported by Arabic, Persian, Indian, European texts and artifacts that have body markings consistent with

henna (Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 179)

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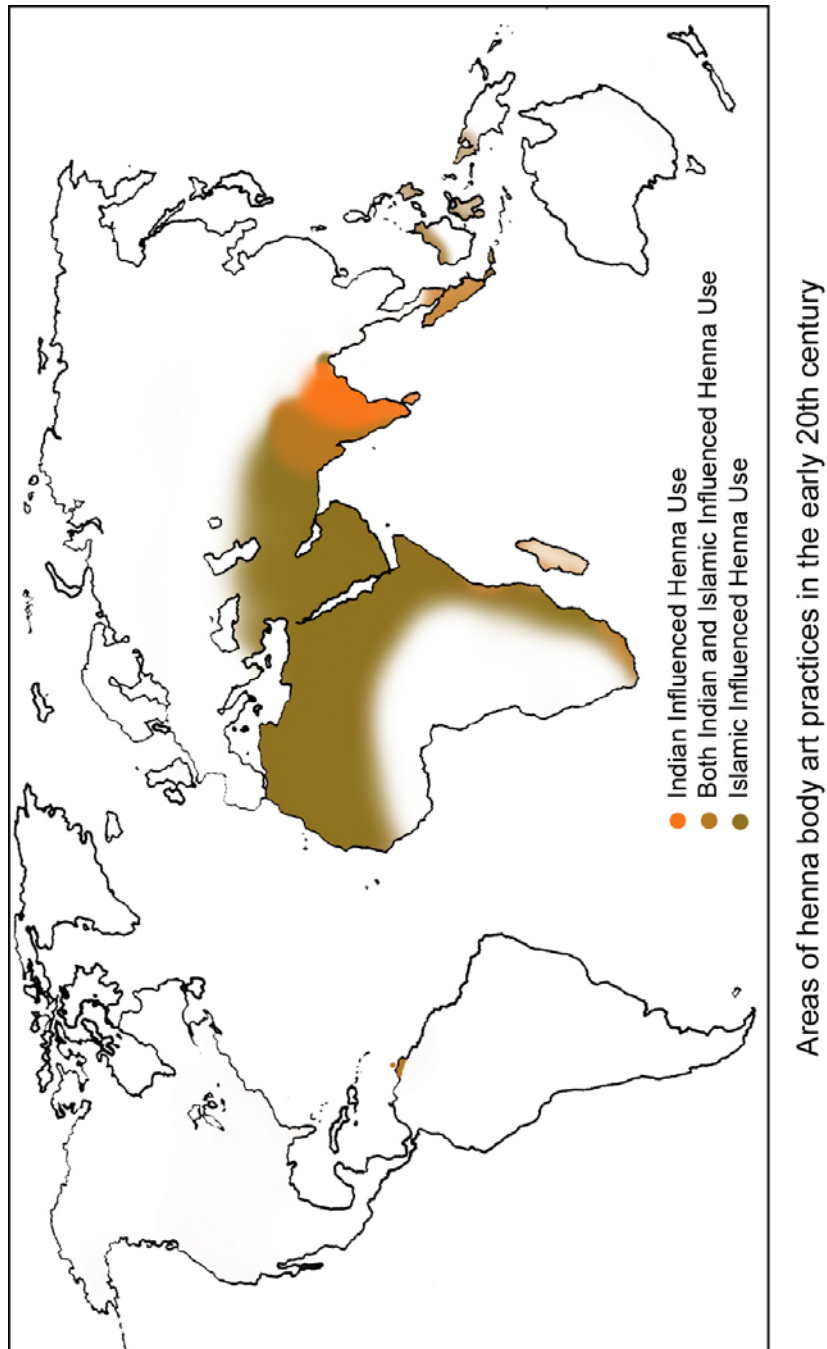
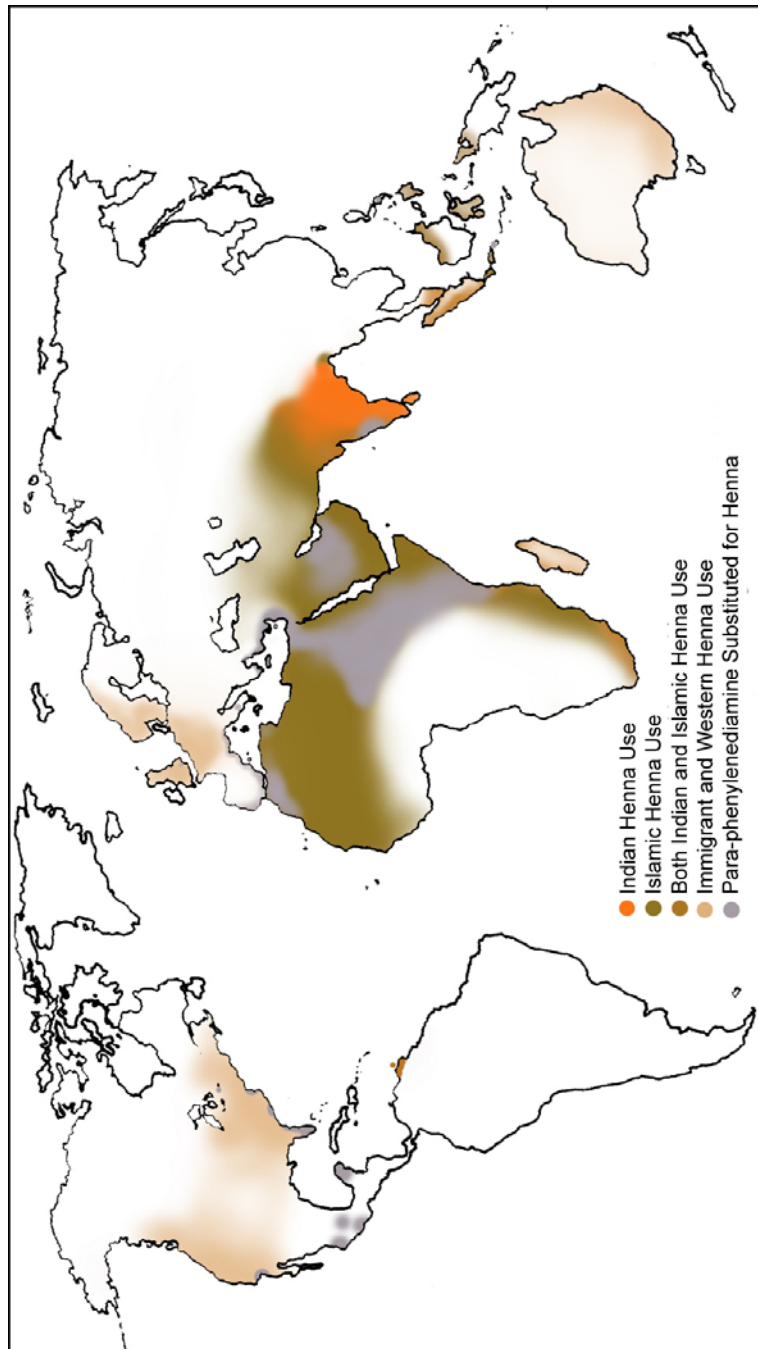


Figure 112: Areas henna body art practices in the early 20th century

(Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 211)



Areas of henna body art practices between 2000 and 2006

Figure 113: Areas of henna body art practice in the early 21th century

(Kartographisches Institut Bertelsmann, 1989: 211)

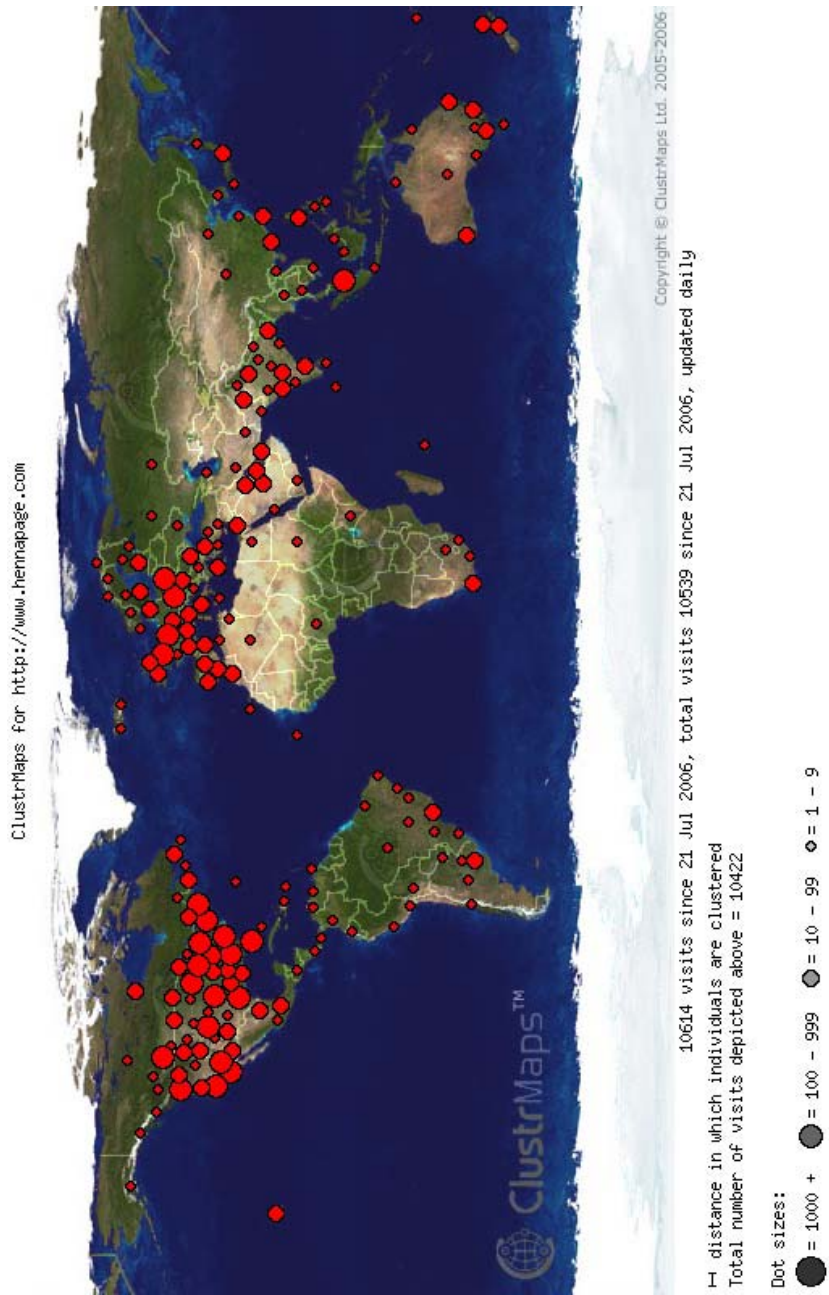


Figure 114: A dynamic map of accesses to <http://www.hennapage.com> for nine days in July 2006 (Clustrmaps TM Beta, 2006)

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