



*The Henna Page*TM
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HENNA

North African Henna History and Technique



Catherine Cartwright-Jones

The Henna Page "HowTo" North African Henna: History and Technique
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The “The Henna Page “How To” book series “North African Henna” has two purposes.

The first purpose is to provide a background for understanding traditional North African henna work through analysis of original photographs and texts from the early twentieth century.

The second purpose of this series is to provide a body of pattern motifs based on North African women’s traditional arts so that henna artists will appreciate the of the potential of these styles for contemporary technique.

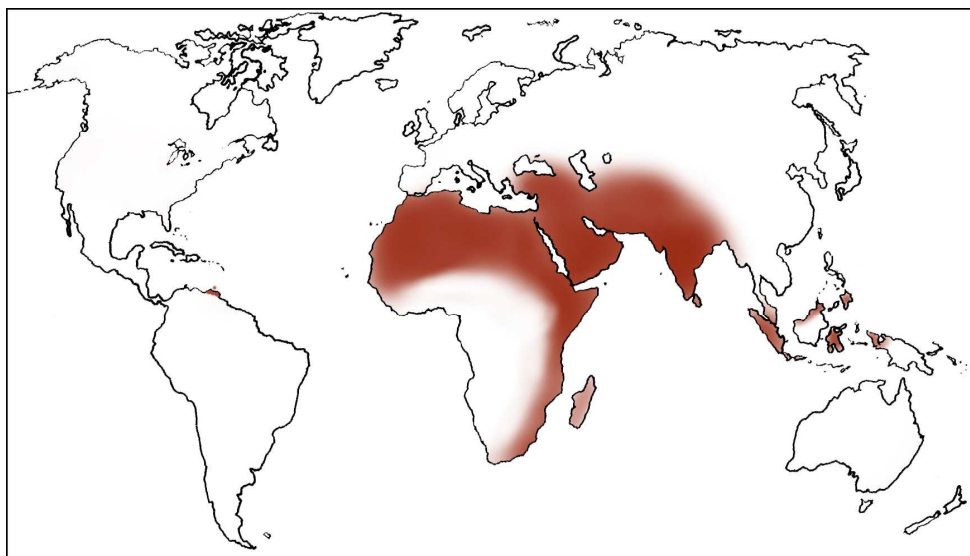
Catherine Cartwright-Jones, February, 2008

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Introduction to North African Henna: History and Approach

A vibrant, indigenous henna practice exists across Africa, from the countries bordering the Mediterranean and the northern desert regions, southward along the Atlantic coast to Mauritania and Nigeria, and down the eastern coast all the way to South Africa. The henna plant is indigenous to the arid and semi-arid regions of this continent and has probably been so since the last Ice Age. Wherever henna grows, people have found uses for it, and have done so since antiquity.



Areas of henna body art practices in the early 20th century

Figure 1

Archaeological evidence in Egypt shows henna use during the Bronze Age, though not as body art during the early dynasties. Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom Egyptians used henna on the fingernails of the dead, to mask graying hair, and to treat skin diseases. The Minoan, Cycladic, Ugaritic, Mycenaean, Canaanite and Punic cultures used henna in an early form of the Night of the Henna between 3500 BCE and the Roman period¹. The Minoan² and Phoenician diasporas carried the practice of celebrational henna body art across the Mediterranean coast into the North African Punic civilization as a part of the fertility religion of Baal and Tanit. There is evidence of cosmetic, tattooing and scarification body adornment in North Africa prior to the Bronze Age, but at present I have found no absolute confirmation of henna body art other than in connection with the early Tunisian, Phoenician, and Punic cultures.

¹ "Geographical Approach" Chapter Five, by Catherine Cartwright-Jones, available at <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/encyclopedia/mastersessay/index.html> presents detailed background information for the historical use of henna in North Africa.

² Henna body art from the pre-eruption Minoan civilization can be seen in the wall paintings at Heraklion, prior to the eruption of Thera prior of 1680 BCE, women are depicted with red-stained fingernails, palms, and soles, in celebration or ritual context (Doumas, C, 1992).

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North African women used henna during the Roman period in North Africa, and henna was used in Italy as a remedy for gray hair during the Roman Empire. The spread of Islam across North Africa reinforced the Night of the Henna traditions, and henna use in other social celebrations³.

Women's henna and tattoo body art in North Africa continued through the centuries, though the evidence is unevenly preserved and we have more information from some areas and less from others. Roman period mummies and mummy cases occasionally show evidence of henna and tattooing. A drawing from the Fatimid period in Egypt shows a woman with complex henna patterns on her hands and feet.⁴ An embroidery fragment from Mamluk Egypt, fourteenth century also has a representation of henna patterned hands. (Ellis, 2001: 34)

Europeans observed and recorded henna practices during their conquest and colonization of North Africa. A representation of henna from French Algeria in 1835, "Jeune Algeroise" shows intricate two-tone henna⁵ patterns on the hands of what appears to be a wealthy urban woman. Later in the nineteenth century, a lithograph of a Kabyle woman shows complex henna patterns on her hands and feet⁶. These patterns are more delicate and intricate than patterns described in the early twentieth century by anthropologists in the region. The sophistication of henna patterns may have deteriorated over the decades, or they may have been differently reported.

From 1900 to 1925, anthropologists such as Westermark⁷, and Gaudry⁸ meticulously documented henna and other folk practices in North Africa, but as European anthropologists of their era, they concentrated on the rural regions rather than urban areas. Their descriptions of crude, simple patterns are in contrast to "Jeune Algeroise", and to two drawn by Besancenot⁹, which record complex henna done in Salé and Tetouan. It would seem probable that a range of henna existed: wealthier families had time and resources sufficient to support finer henna art, particularly for weddings, as

³ "Id al-Adha: The Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, and the Significance of Henna in this Sacrifice" at <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/encyclopedia/id/Id.pdf> and "Developing Guidelines on Henna: a

⁴ D.S Rice, "A Drawing of the Fatimid Period," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (Vol. 21, No. 1/3., 1958) p 33 shows an Egyptian woman of the 10th to 12th century with ornate henna patterns on her hands and feet. These patterns are consistent with henna patterns shown on women in the Maqamat al-Hariri, 1237, Arabe 5847 f 58v, presently in the Paris Bibliotheque.

⁵ Jeune Algeroise en costume de fete, Cabinet des Estampes, watercolor painting from 1835, Cliche Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris

⁶ Femme Kabyle lithography by de B. Roubaud, Cliché Centres des Archives d'outre-mer, Aix-en Provence

⁷ Westermark's books detail henna traditions across Morocco, as they existed in the early 1900's, focusing on the rural tribal regions.

⁸ Gaudry's book on Algerian traditions includes information on henna practices, though like Westermark, the focus is on rural tribal traditions rather than urban use.

⁹ Besancenot was a more skillful artist than either Westermark or Gaudry, and recorded costumes and henna in greater detail. The paintings in Costumes du Maroc show a range of henna work, from simple to elaborate. The two most complex henna representations, those from Sale and Tetouan, show patterns similar to Figure 10. Though these two geometrical pattern reproductions probably accurately represent some henna done in Morocco during the early part of the 20th century, they should not be construed to represent the whole of North African henna art as being geometrical. There is evidence, shown in the images following, that henna styles were as varied as the artists who created them.

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well as more skillful artists. The poor had simpler means so the anthropologists observed simpler henna results. Travelers and others writing descriptions of henna in North Africa may have been biased towards recording relatively primitive body art as an expression of “othering” the tribal groups, showing them to be barbaric in comparison to the European colonists and their collaborators. Also, anthropologists and explorers focused on the most distant, the most isolated, the most primitive and the most “not European” material culture, which they presented as being the most authentic.

The colonial period may have disrupted henna traditions in three ways. First, the flow of European products and ideas began to replace indigenous arts and practices in the marketplace. Second, the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie often adopted European dress, cosmetics, education and manners as part of their political and economic associations with Colonial powers¹⁰. The colonists often remarked disapprovingly on hennaed hands, as they appeared stained and dirty through the fading process. Henna became associated with backwardness, rural isolation and rejection of the modern. Third, during the period of French colonization, some people felt it was inappropriate to celebrate with henna while their country was under military occupation¹¹. When North African countries were liberated, decades later, it appears that many of the old techniques and traditions of henna had eroded.

Henna re-emerged across North Africa in the last three decades as both an expression of folkloric heritage, and as an economic enterprise for women working in the tourist sector. As demand has increased for henna, the henna industry improved cultivation and processing. At present, Morocco produces finely milled high dye content henna, the equal of any in the world. Improved product increased the potential for henna artistry. Moroccan henna artists have evolved unique techniques, using hypodermic syringes with the tips blunted, or the barrels of empty ballpoint pens as applicators, or cones rolled from recycled polypropylene snack packages. Henna artists work quickly with these tools, producing complex, delicate patterning.

Modern North African Marrakechi style henna patterns parallel North African women's tattooing traditions, textile arts and other domestic visual arts (Kapchan 1993 and 1996, Seawright, 1984). The more floral “Khaliji” (Gulf) style is strongly influenced by Sudanese and Somali henna. Immigrant and migrant workers traveling north, seeking employment, carry their henna pattern repertoire with the rest of their memories. These styles are distinctly different from and have developed independently from Indian and Arabic henna work. Individual artists with a strong style and popular following can influence a large group of henna artists as Setona¹² has reinvigorated current Egyptian henna. The most complex henna work is reserved for brides and family celebrations. The tourist industry also influences henna artists' repertoire; artists who serve foreign visitors adapt to market demand. Some visitors want patterns that resemble “modern

¹⁰ Fatima Mernissi, in “Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood” (1994) recalls standoffs between her father and mother, when her father purchased expensive, prestigious western cosmetics for her mother, who preferred to create her own beauty products from her family's recipes.

¹¹ Kapchan, D. (1993) Moroccan Women's Body Signs, p. 24, BodyLore

¹² <http://www.magicriver.net/setona.htm>

primitive” style tattooing, other tourists want “authentic North African” patterns, though with modern inclusions, like scorpions, lizards, names, flowers, and sunbursts.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, henna has been increasingly appreciated as an art form and as a source of income for women. The “street artists” in the tourist areas may be women recovering from economically destabilizing situations such as a divorce; they work the tourist sector until they can acquire more comfortable circumstances. Skillful women who have the resources, talent, and education to do so may open henna shops and concentrate on their art and refine their skills, as well as bringing in additional income for their families (Spurles, 2007). These women serve local families for weddings, parties and celebrations.

The Internet is also redefining henna in North Africa. Many young women in urban North Africa and women of North African descent living in Europe have online blogs featuring their personal interests, including henna. These Arabic and French language personal sites are full of henna images from Bollywood, ethnic bridal magazines, and western henna artists. These new ideas influence henna work across North Africa.

North African henna is a living practice, based in tradition while evolving into the future.



Figure 2: Look into the past and see what can be adapted into the present: contemporary henna techniques adapted to traditional North African patterning, by author (photography by Roy Jones).

Evidence and Analysis: Methodology for Interpreting Henna in Photographs from North African between 1900 and 1930.

There is a body of evidence of North African henna as it existed between 1900 and 1930 in photographs, drawings, and descriptions by tourists, anthropologists, colonists and family recollections. Analyzing the images and descriptions requires an understanding of henna, tattoo, the application and development processes of each, their traditional use and context, skin, the material culture of resources and tools for body art, the limitations of photography and image reproduction, and comparison with other records of women's body arts from the same period.

I provide the following sequence to demonstrate my method of analysis of post card images of hennaed women from North Africa in the early twentieth century:



Figure 3: Photograph of fresh henna stain, by author

In Figure 3, I applied henna to a model's hand and photographed it two days later when the stain was at its darkest. I converted the image to gray scale, as are the images from that period. In this photograph, details of the henna pattern are easy to identify. Without color reproduction, this might be mistaken for a tattoo, but the difficulty of tattooing fingers over knuckles and width of lines would lead to an interpretation of henna rather than a tattoo.



Figure 4: Reduced image of Figure 3, approximating the size of a hennaed hand in a post card

We only have post card images of whole women, not close-ups of hands. The model may not have posed in a position to best display the henna. In a post card size image of a seated woman, the section showing her hand will then be less than an inch wide, as shown in Figure 4. If I then scan the post card for the small section that shows her hand

and enlarge it for examination, the henna pattern on the hand may be blurred and difficult to interpret as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Enlargement of Figure 4

Henna stains are transitory. If a henna pattern is not taken within three days of application, the stain will be fading, and there will be less clear detail visible.



Figure 6 and 6a: The henna from Figure 3, one week later

In Figure 6, I have photographed the same model's hand as Figure 3, seven days later. The stain is faded. If a photographer in 1910 had the model at the studio a week or more after she had henna, even the best photograph would show decreased pattern detail. In Figure 6a, I repeated the process of reducing the hand to half an inch, and then enlarging the image. The henna pattern in 6a is very difficult to discern. This is what we see in most of the images left from one hundred years ago: faint shadows of what was once a pattern. We must combine the best images we have with the best eyewitness descriptions and drawings from the period to reconstruct what North African henna was like one hundred years ago.

Some women in North Africa also enjoyed traditional tattooing on hands, arms, feet, legs, chests, necks and faces. It may be difficult to tell whether a marking is from tattoo or henna in a black and white photograph. Optimal body placement of henna and tattooing are not identical, so position of the marking can assist interpretation.

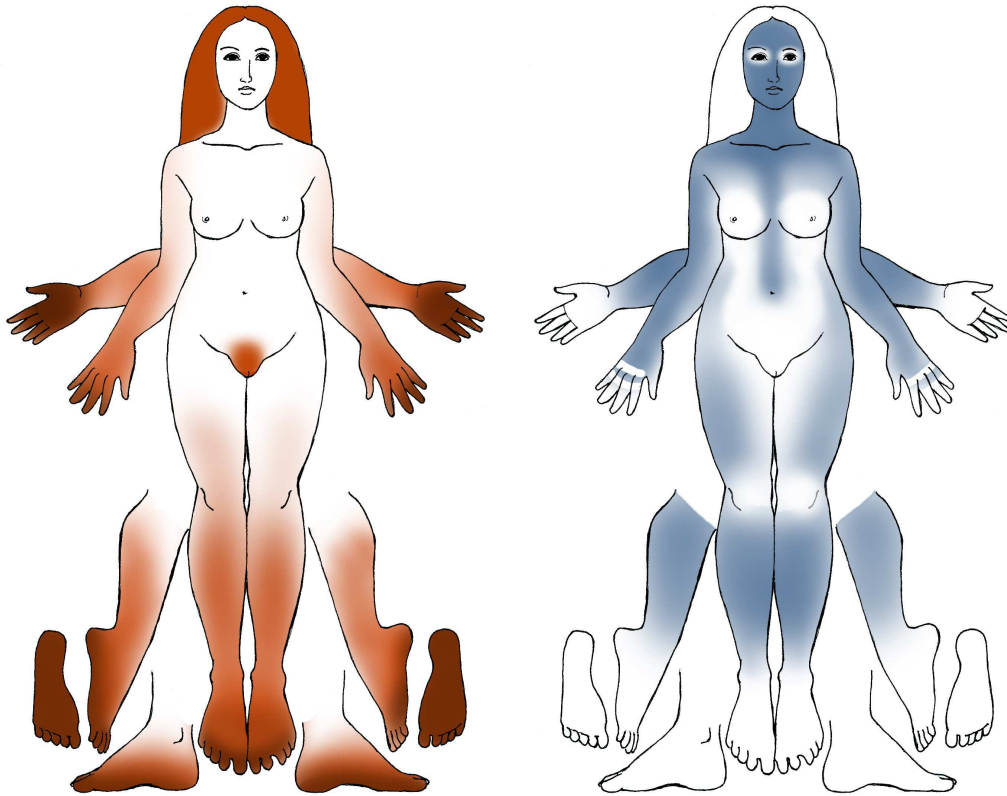


Figure 7 and 7a: In Figure 7 at the left, the brown parts correspond to thicker skin where henna stains easily and where henna is most frequently applied; the darker sections are where henna stains are likely to be deep brown or nearly black. In Figure 7a at right, the blue area corresponds to the parts of the body where skin is thinner to permit easy tattooing, and where tattoo patterns are most frequently inscribed.

Dark markings on palms, soles, knuckles and nails may be assumed to be henna, because tattooing is very difficult on those thick areas of skin, and henna stains thick skin easily. The back of the hand is an ambiguous area, which women used for both henna and tattoo. Gaudry (1929), Seawright (1984), Sijelmassi (1974) and others describe North African women's tattoos and henna, but there are few photographs clearly showing the two together, such as on the woman's hands in Figure 19. In that image, the tattoo patterns are delicate, precise and pale, and the henna lines are thicker and darker. In other images, it is difficult to be certain whether a pattern is henna or tattoo, so we have to examine the evidence farther.

In Figure 8, a Tunisian woman has patterns on the back of one hand and fingers. We know from eyewitness accounts that Tunisian women in the early twentieth century enjoyed both tattoos and henna on their hands. The markings in Figure 8 might be either henna or tattooing or a combination of both, so further investigation is necessary to make a determination of how the marks were made. In the detail in Figure 9, the stains on the woman's knuckles are certainly henna, because her knuckle ridges are stained and the creases are pale. That is typical of henna, and would be unlikely for tattoo. On the back of her hand, the patterns are slightly run together in places and are one eighth to one quarter inch wide. A tattoo would have a narrower design, as the color is laid in with a needle or razor.



Figure 8: Tunisian woman with patterns on the back of her hand, 1900 – 1910, author's collection

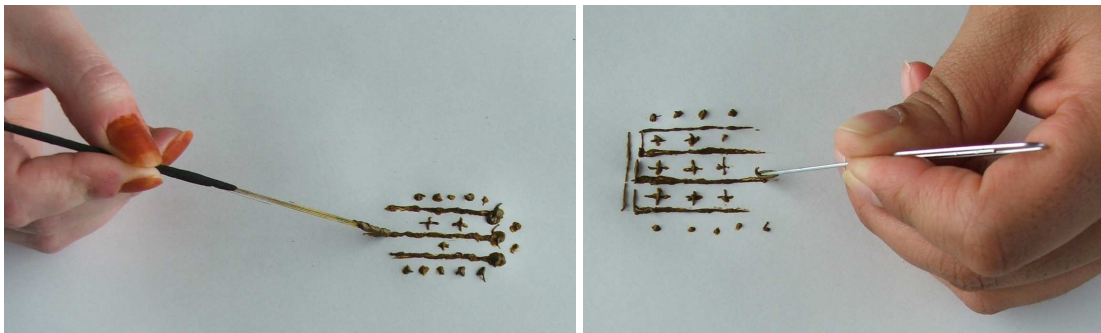
Since there are eyewitness accounts of henna being applied with a wire or twig during the period that photograph was taken, I tried applying henna with a stick and twig to see if the results would resemble the marks on her hand¹³. Henna lines made by applying paste with a wire or twig are about one-eighth inch wide (4 cm), and are imperfect because of the difficulty of applying thick paste. This matches the size and imperfection of the marks on the back of the Tunisian woman's hand. This leads me to conclude that the Tunisian woman's markings were probably made with henna rather than inscribed with a tattoo needle.



Figure 9: Tunisian woman's henna patterns on the back of her hand and on her fingers compared to henna applied with stick and wire.

In the following chapter, I will try to analyze the henna techniques in each image to provide a practical understanding of the history and techniques of henna in North Africa.

¹³ A person can make henna lines and dots as small as one-eighth inch wide with a stick or wire. Twigs and wire were used to apply henna before syringes and cones became widely available. The technique is slow but not difficult, but is best suited to very simple patterns, such as dots and lines.



A Body of Evidence: Images of North African Women from 1910 to 1930



Figure 10: Scenes et types Jeune fille Berbère 602; Edition La Cigogne, Alger, 1900 – 1910, author's collection

There is evidence of North African women's body art recorded in the hundreds of picture post cards of women produced in the French colonies of North Africa during colonial occupation. These post cards were sold to the colonists, tourists, and occupying forces. The women in the photographs were those available to public view: women working in entertainment and pleasure industries rather than women of comfortable means and protective families. We are not certain that the photographed body art was the same as other women, but descriptions of more private women are similar. Photographs and descriptions of these women show henna, tattoo, kohl and paint. We know from many sources that most women enjoyed these adornments. We know that Europeans found them intriguing, focusing on what made these women "exotic and different" from themselves. From photographs such as these in my collection and texts from the period,

it is possible to see some of what henna was, and was not, during the colonial and urbanizing period in North Africa.



Figure 11: A young woman's hennaed hands, detail of Figure 10

The girl in Figure 10 has turned her bracelets so the patterns on the back of her hand and wrists are visible in the photograph. The size of these lines is consistent with the appearance of henna stains applied with a wire or stick shown in Figure 9 and footnote 13. Also, compare these to the wider henna and finer tattoo lines (arm and forehead) in Figure 14.

As already noted, North African women often had permanent tattoos on the backs of hands and wrists, and these patterns are similar to recorded tattoos (Seawright, 1984), but the lines in Figure 10 are broader than one would expect from tattooing. Tattoo lines broaden during the lifetime of the wearer as the pigment gradually migrates, but this girl is too young for that process to have occurred. In North Africa, women's traditional tattooing began when a girl was eight or ten years old, and was completed by the time she was married (Seawright, 1984, and Kapchan, 1993). As this young woman appears to be

in her early teens, these tattoos must have been fairly recently applied, and so would not have had time to fade or broaden.



Figure 12: Diagram of hand pattern in Figure 11

This girl's facial markings are consistent with other records of North African women's tattoos, but may have been accented with kohl or black paint (the dot on her left cheek appears to be smeared) so she would appear as exotic, authentic, and as "different from a French woman" as possible. Facial tattoos do not usually show up as clearly as these, nor are they done with such broad lines.

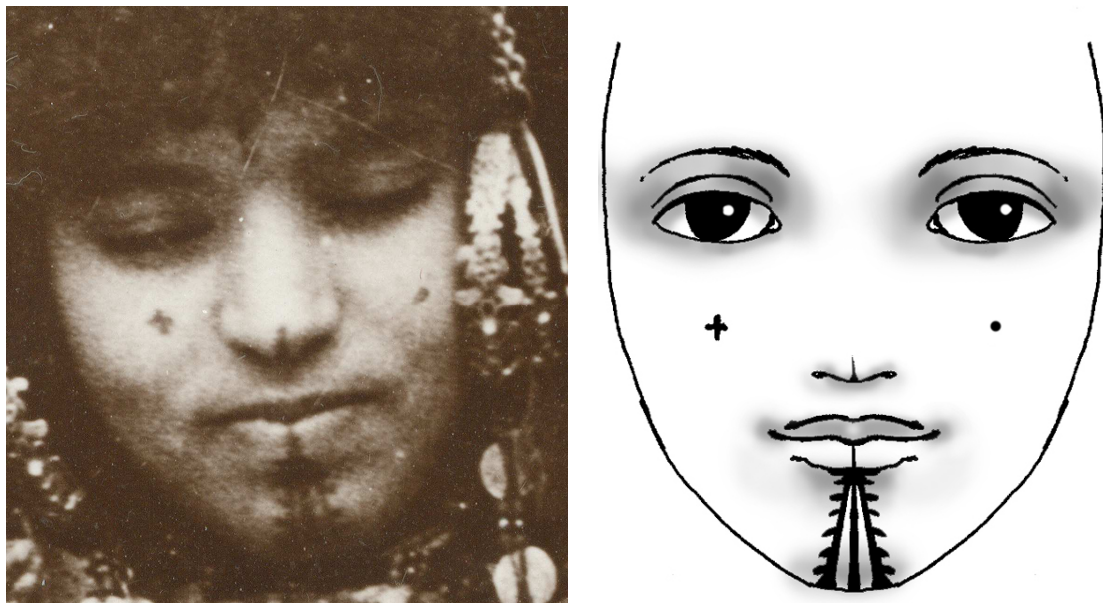


Figure 13: Facial patterns, detail of Figure

Many North African women had traditional facial tattooing prior to the Colonial period, but few have been tattooed since 1940. Those who still have tattoos may have them removed, preferring scars to the old traditions. Modern North African women often feel

tattoos prevent them from getting respect, or a better job, or that tattooing is contrary to their religious belief.



Figure 14: La Belle Zinah, 1900 – 1910, author's collection

Zinah, the woman in Figure 14, has several kinds of body markings. She has a tattoo on her forehead, partly obscured by her hair. She has painted her eyebrows together, a popular style in North Africa in the early twentieth century, with dots above and below the meeting point, and dots on her cheeks. She has an inscription on her chest that is probably a tattoo: HLALI ZINEP SATAUME. She has a clearly visible henna pattern on her right forearm, and a less distinct one on her left forearm. The lines in the henna patterns are broader than those in the forehead tattoo¹⁴, consistent with henna application, and may be applied with a brush as demonstrated in Figure 28b. She has three marks on her right upper arm that appear similar to smallpox vaccination mark, but are more likely to be burns. These marks may have been deliberate: enduring cigarette burns was considered a proof of ardent passion.

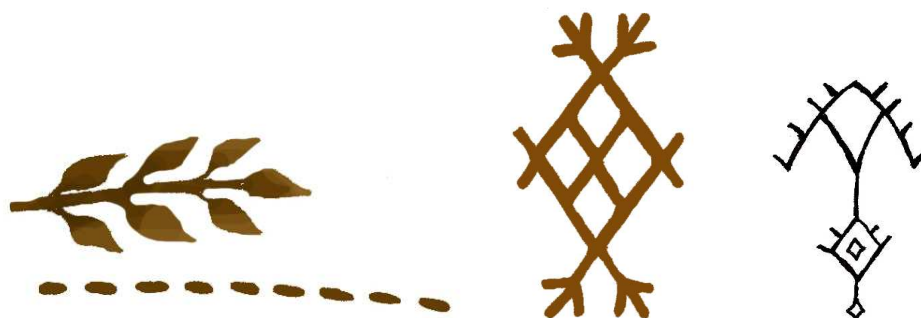


Figure 15: Henna patterns from Zinah's arms, and her forehead tattoo, diagrams by author

Her hair is braided in the style of an Ouled Nail, a semi-nomadic tribal group that specialized in performing traditional music and dance for celebrations. Ouled Nail often wore garlands of coins earned for their entertainment services. They wore heavy bracelets with protruding studs for beauty and for self-defense. The women were admired and somewhat feared by other people. They were beautiful and talented, and they braved the open gaze of strangers. Most women were warned that to expose themselves to public view was not only shameful but also potentially dangerous: they could be attacked by the Evil Eye. Since the Ouled Nail did not veil and survived, they were regarded with some awe. Their dance and music performances were auspicious, their sense of style and adornment magnificent. The Ouled Nail were also itinerant tattoo artists, applying traditional women's tattoos for luck and beauty. The French colonial government classified them as professional prostitutes. Many Ouled Nail gradually assimilated into Algerian society during the colonial period and after the Algerian revolution.

This woman is undressed to the waist not because a North African woman would normally expose her breasts, but because the women in many of these images worked in the pleasure industry in a colonial territory. The colonial postcards were produced to titillate the purchasers without being seized as pornographic materials. Postcards of semi-nude women in "hot climates" were considered as being "natural in their environment", and escaped confiscation in England and France.

¹⁴ In a 600 dpi scan of Figure 15, the average width of the tattoo lines on the forehead is 2 – 4 pixels, and the henna on the arm is 11 – 14 pixels.

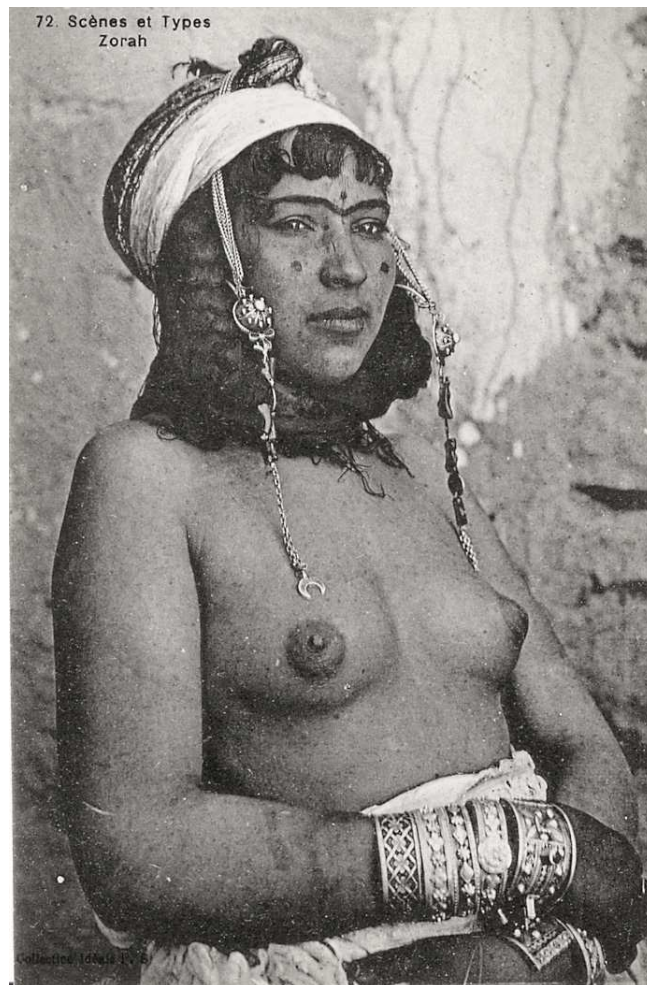


Figure 16: Scenes et Types 72, Zorah, 1900 - 1910, author's collection

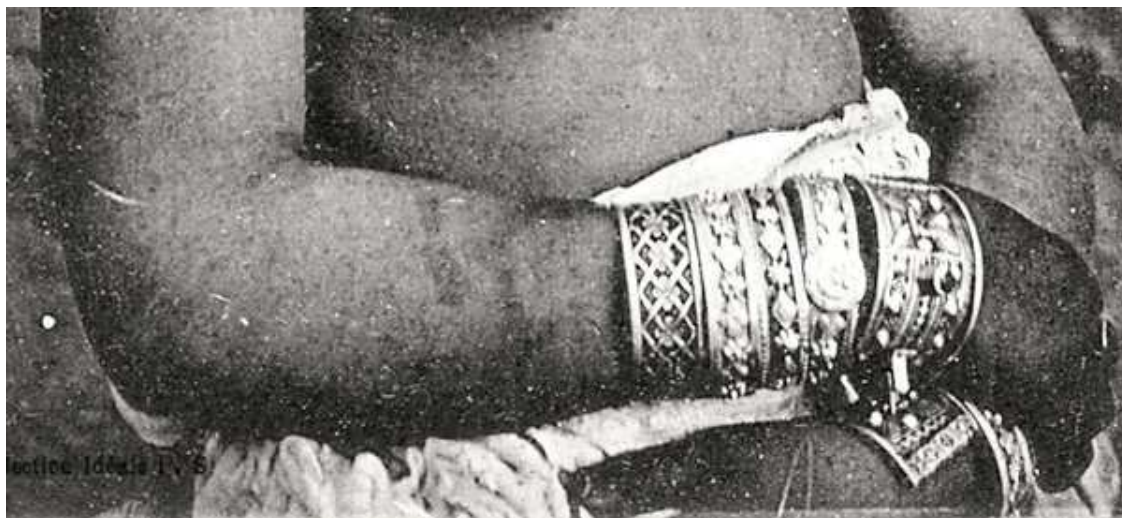


Figure 17: Detail of Figure16 showing henna and tattoo markings

Zorah, the woman in Figure 16, wears henna, tattooing, harquus, cosmetic paint and kohl. Even in a high-resolution scan, the markings on her hands and arms cannot be clearly distinguished in this deteriorated reproduction, though one can determine that she has henna markings on her forearms, and some combination of henna and tattooing on the backs of her hands. She has painted her eyebrows to come together at the center, in the same way as Zinah in Figure 14, and she wears the same hairstyle and similar bracelets. Zinah and Zorah may have known each other or worked together.



Figure 18: Type M'Daka ~ Le Maroc Pittoresque. - Femme Marocaine en Costume d'Interieur, postmarked 1907, author's collection



Figure 19: Detail of Figure 18, hands with tattoo and henna markings

The girl in Figure 18 has markings on her hands consistent with tattoos described by Gaudry (1929) and catalogued by Seawright (1984), as well as henna patterns. Henna and tattoo can be distinguished from each other by the size of the lines (footnote 13): her tattoo patterns are relatively delicate and faint; her henna patterns have broader lines and are larger in scale. Henna and tattoo seem to be used in this case to accent and complement each other¹⁵.

¹⁵ Temporary tattoo techniques for reproducing this work are described in Appendix 1

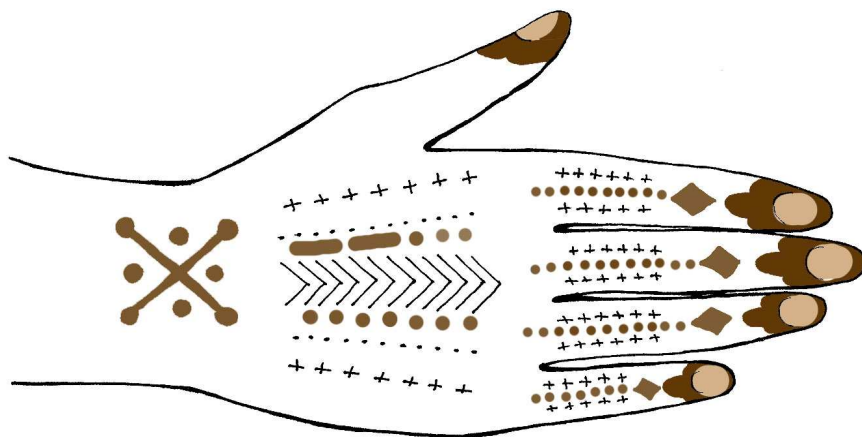


Figure 20 Diagram of henna and tattoos in Figure 19 by author



Figure 21: Scenes et Types Fez 185 - Beauti Marocaine, Edit. H. D Serero, 1900 - 1910, postmarked 1919, author's collection

Figure 21, a woman from Fez also has henna on her hands and tattoos on her face. Her face is scarred from may have been a severe scalding or third degree burn between the time of her facial tattooing and the time of this photograph. She was probably tattooed by age 12 judging by reported traditions and other images. This picture was probably taken in late adolescence and after she had given birth to a child, judging by the shape of her breasts. The tattoos were deep enough for the pigment to have survived the burn, but the original pattern is blurred. Her henna, recently applied, is clear, as seen in Figure 22.

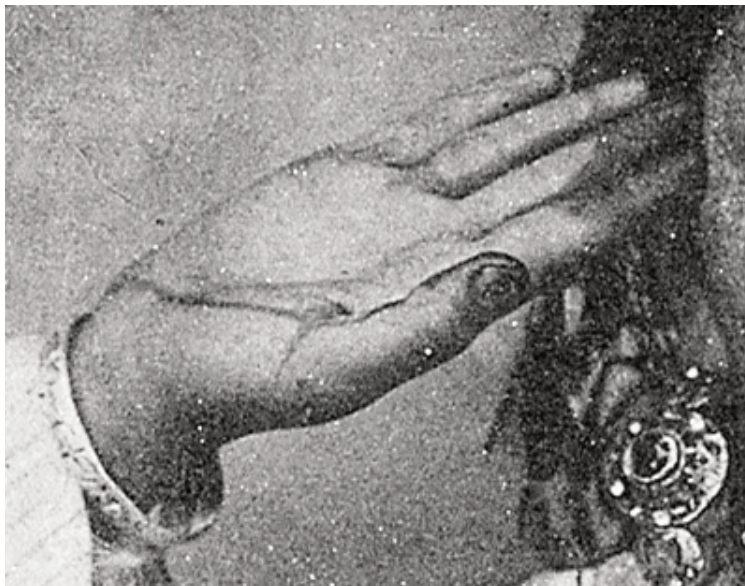


Figure 22: Detail of Figure 21 showing henna pattern



Figure 23: Diagram of henna work from Figure 21 by author

This henna pattern is asymmetrical and shaded, and is very different from what we presently conceive as being North African style¹⁶.

¹⁶ Appendix 2 demonstrates shading technique.



Figure 24: Dancer, Egypt, 1900 – 1910, author's collection

The young Egyptian woman in Figure 24 has henna patterns on both of her hands, though the position of her hands and image cropping obscure the details. She has hennaed the front and backs of her hands, and her fingernails. Though the pattern on her right hand follows the lines in her hands, the patterns appear to be deliberate, not accidental, as one would expect from the reported folk technique of “clutching a lump of henna” to create a pattern. She has dark and medium toned henna, with both curving and angular patterns. The patterns are not strictly geometric, nor are the two hands symmetrical. Both of her hands are hennaed, so another person must have done the henna work for her, or at least assisted her.



Figure 25: Scenes et Types Jeunes Mauresques, 87, 1910 – 1920, author's collection



Figure 26: Detail of Figure 25

Both girls in Figure 25 have marks consistent with henna stains on their feet, but the ones on the right are more visible. The girl on the right has a two-tone pattern up to her ankles. It appears that her feet were first rubbed all over with henna up to her ankles, the paste removed, and a darker pattern applied. Westermarck and others describe henna applications where a lighter color was applied one day and the darker color on the next day of a multi-day ceremony¹⁷.

¹⁷ Appendix 2 demonstrates double application technique.



Figure 27: Femme des Ouled-Nail, Morocco, with floral henna pattern on woman's arm, 1900 – 1910, author's collection.

The woman in Figure 27 has a small pattern near the inside of her elbow at the lower left of the image. The strokes creating the pattern are consistent with henna applied with a brush as seen in Figure 28b. Henna will stain arms, though the color is not as dark as on palms and soles. There are accounts of henna patterns being done over the whole body in North Africa, but images of such are rare. In a personal conversation, Halim El-Dabh¹⁸ told me that on his wedding night in Egypt in the early 1940's, his whole body was hennaed with vines and rabbits.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halim_El-Dabh Halim El-Dabh was born to a wealthy Coptic family in Cairo in 1921, and is a famous composer, performer, ethnomusicologist, educator, and is best known for his innovations in electronic music.



Figure 28: Henna pattern detail from Figure 27



Figure 28a, diagram and demonstration of brushwork henna by author.



Figure 28b: Henna paste can be applied with a brush; leafy patterns are especially easy to create with brushwork.



Figure 29: Beantes Arabes - Jeune Mauresque, 1910 - 1920, author's collection

The girl in Figure 29 has hennaed hands with the pattern extending from her palm to the back of her hand. Though only a fragment of this pattern is visible in the pose, detail is visible in enlargement, shown in Figure 30. The pattern has dark and light tones, and may be double application henna¹⁹, or applied with a brush as seen in Figure 28c.

The Tunisian dancer in Figure 31 has a similar pattern, wrapping from the back of the hand to the palm in a bold geometric pattern. Unfortunately, she is posed with her hands clasped behind her head, and the image reproduction is insufficient to show pattern detail.

¹⁹ Appendix 2 shows double application shading technique



Figure 30: Detail of Figure 29, showing pattern across the palm and back of hand.



Figure 31: Tunisian Dancer, 1900 – 1910, author's collection



Figure 32: Femme de l'Extreme Sud Oranais, J Geiser – Alger, 1910 – 1920, author's collection

The young woman in Figure 32 has stained fingernails and a stained heel. The stain on her heel is consistent with henna fading from a prior application. The stain shape on her heel is similar to that of a stocking heel. The heel area is prone to cracking, and henna soothes cracked skin, so that coverage area may have been functional, or it may have been decorative, in imitation of fashionable European silk stockings. Figure 25 and 35 also show henna in the shape of shoes and socks, as if henna could be a substitute for shoes when barefoot inside a house.



Figure 33: Diagram of hennaed heel from figure 32 by author



Figure 34: Detail of Figure 32

There are markings on the backs of this young woman's left hand fingers that might be the faded remains of henna patterns. Fingernails and toenails are useful for estimating the time of a previous henna application, because they grow out from the cuticle at a predictable rate. Henna on fingernails and toenails will fade slightly over weeks, but even two months after henna, a fingernail will still have an orange crescent stain near the tip. This woman's fingernails have an outgrowth pattern indicating application about two weeks prior to the photography session, consistent with the fading color on her heel.

In Figure 35, the woman Antinea has a henna stain on her feet in the shape of slippers. She may have had multi-tonal henna, but the reproduction isn't sufficient to reveal more than the general shape of application. This woman also appears to have a stained pubic area. Henna was traditionally used to soothe pubic skin following the caustic depilatory applied at the bath. She is holding a blanket as if the photographer wishes for us to believe she is just emerging from a bath: henna was often applied to hair, feet, hands, and pubic areas at the public bath, the hamam.

The girl in Figure 37 also seems to have a stained pubic area, as well as henna stained hands.



Figure 35: "Antinea" la charmeuse, 1309, 1900 - 1910, author's collection

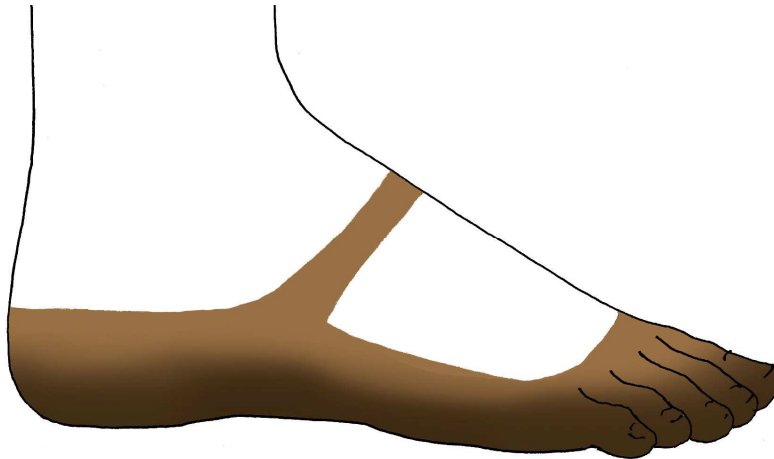


Figure 36: Diagram of stain in Figure 35 by author



Figure 37: Photo Flandrin, Casablanca, 690, En Afrique: Le modele fatigue commence a se facher! 1910 – 20, author’s collection,

The girl described as a “tired model” in Figure 37, has dark stains from below her navel to the pubic area, probably from henna, as in seen in Figure 35, though extending farther up her abdomen. Her forearm shows scarring that is random and not in a pattern, and the position is consistent with that of a defensive wound. She has a dot on the tip of her nose, as does the girl in Figure 10, and a chin tattoo, but poor image reproduction obscures the pattern.

She has stained hands patterned differently from previous examples: there are pale lines in the henna at her wrist indicating reverse henna technique. Henna can be smeared on the skin in broad strokes, and then pushed into patterns with a small stick. This is an easy

way to make patterns if the henna paste is not well sifted²⁰. There are also faint indications of tattooing on the backs of her hands, diagrammed in Figure 38.

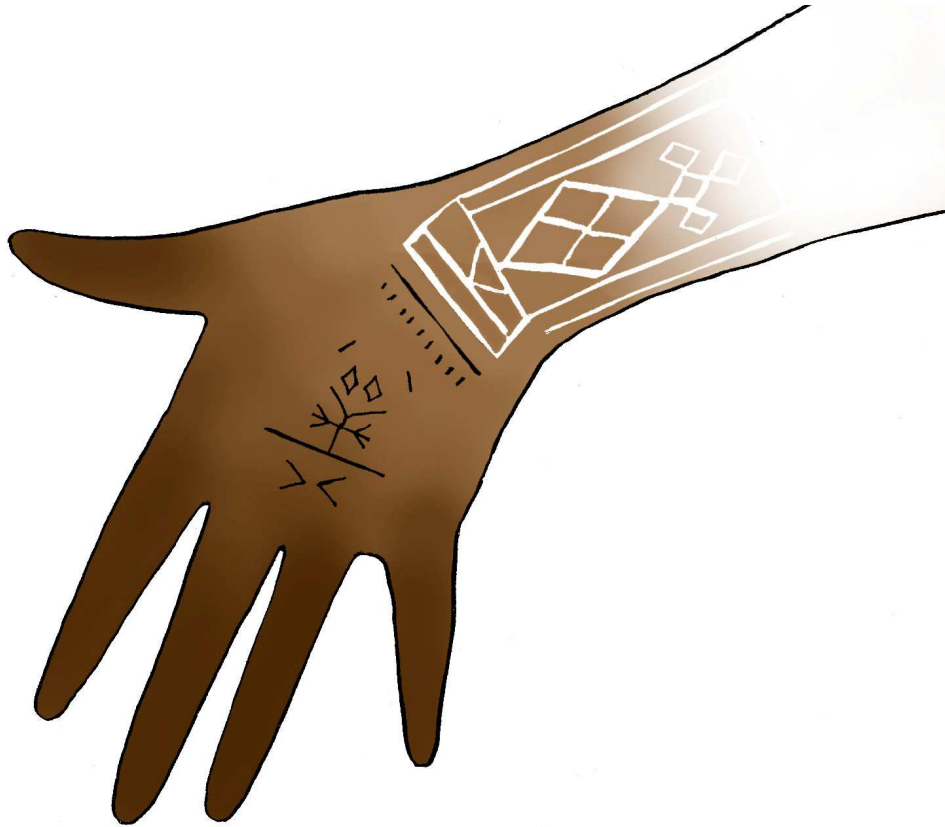


Figure 38: Diagram of reverse henna pattern in Figure 37, by author

²⁰ Reverse henna patterns are created by smearing henna onto the skin and pushing it into patterns with a small stick.



North African Henna Techniques



Figure 39: Woman mixing henna: 1505 L'Afrique du Nord - Type de femme, 1910 - 1920, author's collection

The woman in Figure 40 appears to be mixing henna in the manner described by Westermarck and others²¹. Henna leaves were purchased whole at the market and ground in a large bowl with a pestle. Women would sift some crushed henna through a fine cloth, and the resulting fine powder would be used for patterns. Coarser henna powder was used to dye hair, feet, and to smear on areas such as the pubic region that needed the soothing effect of henna, but were not to be ornamented. Henna powder was

²¹ A woman in North Africa would not normally mix henna without her clothes on.

kneaded with a little liquid into a paste. The results of application techniques recorded by Westermarck and others were of stick or wire, paintbrush, or reverse work can be seen in the photographs in the previous chapter. Women could create beautiful patterns with these older techniques, but the processes were slow. Modern henna processing eliminates the difficulty of pounding henna and fine milling provides a fine texture for the complex, delicate designs favored by contemporary North African henna artists.



Figure 40: Purchase pure, finely sifted henna powder



Figure 41: Mix the henna powder with a mildly acidic liquid until it is the consistency of thick mashed potatoes.

For a complete discussion of mixing paste, download the free e-book “The Henna Page “HowTo” Mix Henna” instructions from <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/mix.pdf>.



Figure 42: Cover the henna paste and allow it to rest from four to twelve hours.



Figure 43: Add essential oils (terps)²² to the paste for a darker stain result, and allow the paste to rest a few hours more.

²² “Terps” refers to aromatherapy grade essential oils with a high content of monoterpene alcohols. For a more detailed discussion of what terps are and what they do, see <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/how/terp.html>



Figure 44: Add dextrose or fructose to make the henna paste stringy.

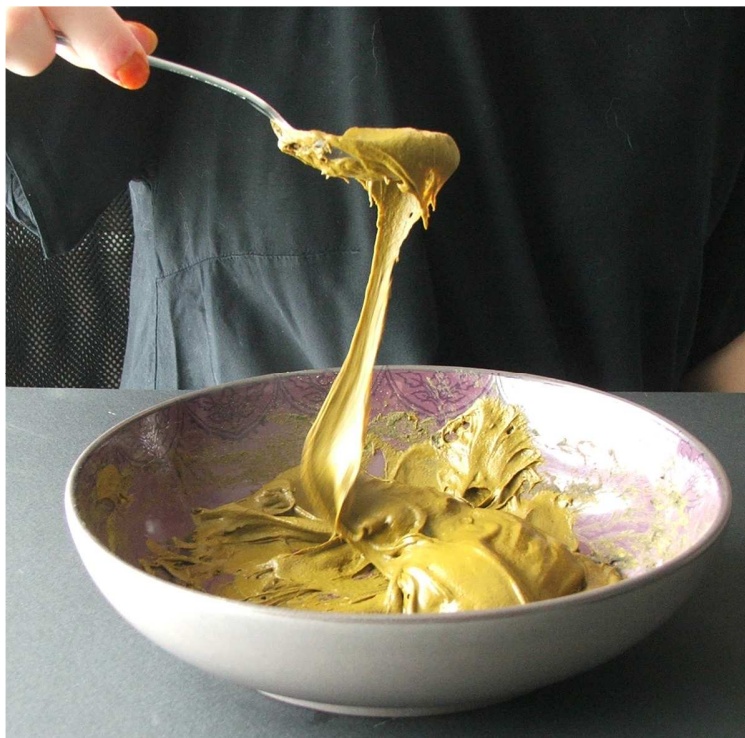


Figure 45: Stringy henna paste

Marrakechi henna technique is based on a stringy henna paste, one that is naturally gooey, with which you can stretch long strands of paste into straight lines. You can make a henna paste stringy by adding dextrose.

Fill a cone or syringe with stringy henna paste. Touch the tip to skin to make a bead of henna. Pull the cone slightly up and away in the direction of the line you want to draw. Touch the tip down again where you want the line to end. If your henna is stringy, the line will drape without breaking in a straight line onto the skin.



Figure 46: Apply stringy henna paste by touching the paste to the skin, and then pull the cone up and allow the paste to drape into a perfect straight line.

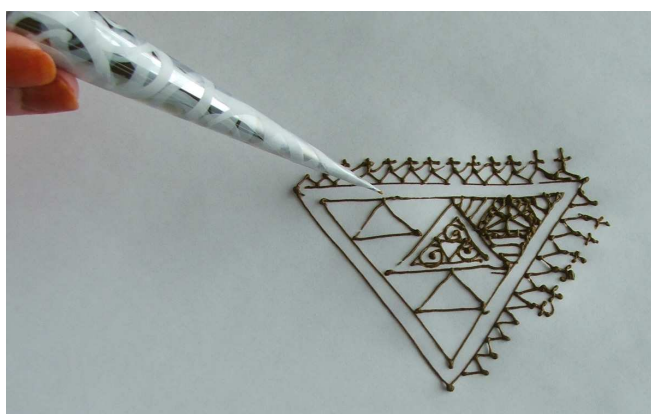


Figure 47: Create complex geometric patterns by draping the longest lines first. Then, divide these patterns into smaller ones, filling the smallest areas with the finest detail last.

Begin the pattern with long, straight, draped lines. When these lines dry slightly, divide the large areas into smaller ones. Keep dividing the areas into smaller and smaller geometries until the whole pattern is filled and intricate.²³

Though henna in the North African tourist market is often adulterated with para-phenylenediamine and paint thinner to create quick, dark stains, these additives are not traditional and may injure both artist and client. Always use pure henna for beautiful, safe results.

²³ View the technique of creating complex geometric henna patterns at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6VMqlr5OoE> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/hennapage>

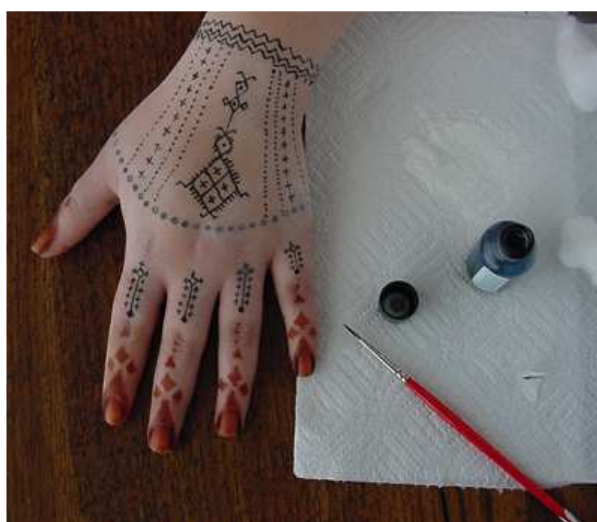
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The Henna Page "HowTo" North African Henna is provided free to you by www.hennapage.com
For information on the art, science, history and traditions of henna, visit www.hennapage.com
Purchase henna and body art supplies from <http://www.mehandi.com>

Appendix 1: Recreating North African Style Women's Tattoos



Step 1: temporary tattoo technique to reconstruct traditional henna and tattooing, adapted from Gaudry (1929) by author

Henna hands the day before applying the harquus temporary tattoo paint. Harquus from mehandi.com is safe, has FDA approval, and makes an authentic temporary tattoo that can be removed with baby oil or alcohol. The temporary tattoo paint is resin based, and becomes durable when dusted with talcum powder. Clean the skin and powder it lightly with talcum powder. Paint on the harquus with a fine paintbrush.



Step 2: continue the pattern with harquus. Clean the brush as necessary with isopropyl alcohol.



Step 3: dust the pattern with talcum powder to set the harquus.



The finished work looks exactly like a traditional North African women's tattoo.



Harquus technique can also be used to safely recreate traditional North African women's facial tattoos (by author)

Patterns, and additional information on this technique are available at www.harquus.com



For more information on creating safe temporary tattoos, read "The Henna Page "How To" Harquus": A guide to creating SAFE black temporary tattoos without dangerous "black henna", without para-phenylenediamine or other coal tar dyes.

Download this free ebook at

<http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/harquus1.pdf>

Appendix 2: North African Double Application Technique

First, apply henna in broad areas and remove it with soap and water after half an hour. This can be seen as the orange color under the patterns in 1 and 2. Then, apply a fine pattern with your best quality henna over the broad areas of stain. This can be seen as the dark green henna paste lines over the orange stain.



1: North African double paste application, by author



2: Double application, back of the hand

Relatively low quality or coarsely ground henna may be used for the broad stains. Finely ground, higher quality henna should be used for the darker, more detailed pattern. As the

women began their process with whole leaves, pounding and sifting them, they would have had a range of henna to work with: a large amount of coarse material, and a small amount of finer powder that would make darker stains.



3: The pattern after paste removal

The second application of henna is left in place overnight. When the paste is removed, the pattern will be barely visible.



4: The pattern 24 hours after paste removal

The second application of paste will begin to darken, while the first application will stay light. Twenty-four hours after the paste is removed, the two patterns will be clearly visible.



5: Two days after paste removal, palm of hand



6: Two days after paste removal, back of hand

Two days after the paste is removed, the stains have matured and the pattern is distinct. These variations in tone are consistent with what is visible on the girl's feet in Figure 25, and the women's hands in Figures 22, and possibly in 24 and 29. Pattern detail is unclear in the older images, but the patterns are visibly multi-tonal

Appendix 3: Additional Information on Mixing, Application, and Gilding Henna



Learn to mix henna for safe, dark, beautiful stains.

Download the free e-book “The Henna Page “HowTo” Mix Henna” instructions from <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/mix.pdf>.

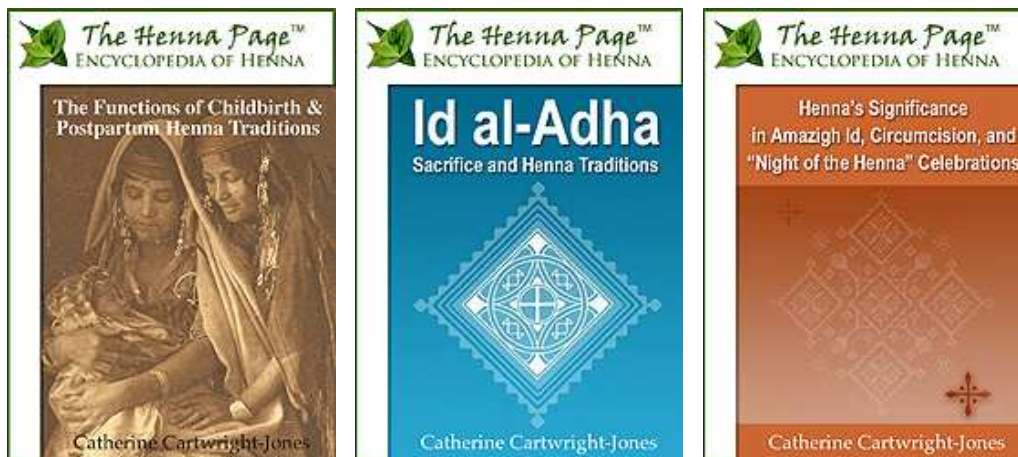
Learn to apply henna in traditional and contemporary techniques:

Download the free e-book “The Henna Page “HowTo” Apply Henna” instructions from <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/howtoapply.pdf>.

Learn to use gilding, glitter and gems with your henna

Download free e-books “The Henna Page “HowTo” Gilding, Glitter and Gems” from <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/gilding.pdf> .
And <http://www.mehandi.com/shop/gilding/gildinghowto.pdf>

Appendix 4: Additional Information on North African Henna Traditions



The Henna Page "Encyclopedia of Henna" "The Functions of Childbirth and Postpartum Henna Traditions"

This book has information on North African childbirth henna traditions, G6PD deficiency and kohl, with citations from medical and scientific journal articles. Download this free e-book at

<http://www.hennapage.com/henna/what/freebooks/HPJpp2.pdf>

The Henna Page "Encyclopedia of Henna" Id al-Adha: The Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, and the Significance of Henna in this Sacrifice.

This paper details Id sacrifice traditions and effects, focusing on henna and ecosystem management, from its origins in the Neolithic Mediterranean world, to present day, and includes simple traditional North African patterns. Download this free e-book at

<http://www.hennapage.com/henna/encyclopedia/id/Id.pdf>

The Henna Page "Encyclopedia of Henna" "Henna's Significance in Amazigh Id, Circumcision and "Night of the Henna" Celebrations"

This book has information and analysis of Moroccan traditions of henna for Id al-Adha, circumcision, and the "Night of the Henna", based on eyewitness accounts from the late 1800's and early 1900's. Download this free e-book at

<http://www.tapdancinglizard.com/biblos/significanceofhenna1/sighenna.pdf>

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