The Symbolic and Social Dimensions of Women's Customs and Traditions in Algerian Hammams during the Ottoman Period

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Abstract:

The Islamic bath served as an architectural space which also functioned as a social area while it was created to fulfill cleaning requirements and community standards of cleanliness. The space served practical needs yet it developed into a place for relaxation and social interaction which allowed women to experience leisure and escape from their home and public responsibilities. The group members exchanged their social experiences during this gathering .

It is well known that the Algerian woman has been renowned throughout the Islamic eras for her purity, cleanliness, and elegance in dress and appearance. Therefore, she used to frequent these baths, whether those located in the palaces of the wealthy class or the public baths.

This research examines both physical and symbolic elements of public structures through the study of Ottoman Algerian women's practices in the ḥammām. The practices showed different methods depending on the event which demonstrated how these traditions existed in women's daily lives while expressing cultural and symbolic values.

Keywords: Islamic Hammam; Algeria; Women; Ottoman Period; Dimensions and Symbolisms

Introduction:

Baths have functioned as architectural spaces which people have studied extensively throughout different historical periods. During the Islamic period bath began to develop from ancient bathing facilities which transformed into unique structures during this time. The transformation brought major changes to Islamic bath (hammam) architecture and its operational systems.

The bath functioned under religious rules and social customs which determined its usage throughout Islamic civilization and specifically within Ottoman society. The practice extended its function beyond physical washing for prayer preparation to establish a social area which developed customs that showed how urban communities organized themselves. The Hammam was built following a particular architectural design which fulfilled all sanitary standards. The area functioned as a gathering space for women to experience uncommon freedom during that time. The platform served as a social space which enabled people to share information about their community while also providing entertainment.

This research paper aims to establish a connection between such public utility buildings and Algerian society during the Ottoman period particularly in the city of Algiers and its surrounding areas, by examining a set of customs and traditions rich in symbolism and meaning. These practices, performed by women - and still observed today - took place within the hammam at specific times, employing particular techniques and various accessories. We have adopted a descriptive and analytical approach as far as possible, relying on a number of historical sources, oral accounts, and the customs and traditions passed down among the local inhabitants.

Accordingly, the importance of this topic lies in its ability to highlight the multifaceted architectural, social, and cultural roles of the Islamic bathhouse, and to reveal how local customs and traditions were reflected in its design and

functions within Algerian society during the Ottoman period. In this context, the following questions arise:

What customs and traditions did Algerian women observe during their visits to the hammam?

And how were these practices integrated into their social lives?

1. The Islamic Bath and Its Types

The term "ḥamma" refers to a hot spring used for healing purposes. The verb "*ḥammamtu al-mā"*ʾ means "I heated the water," and "*ḥamīm"* denotes hot water, as in the Qurʾānic verse: ﴿*and they will be given to drink water boiling so it cuts into pieces their intestines*﴾ (Surah Muhammad, Verse: 15). The word "*ḥammām"* (bath; plural: *ḥammamat*) denotes both mineral baths and the facilities used for bathing. The phrase *istahamma al-rajul* means "the man bathed in hot water."

The construction of public baths for bathing purposes was known in ancient civilizations, particularly from the Bronze Age in the Aegean region during the third millennium BCE. These structures underwent significant architectural and decorative development during the Roman period, when increasing attention was devoted to adorning them both inside and out with mosaics and marble (Rizq, 2000, p. 84).

During the era of Islamic conquests and the spread of Islam across various regions, Muslims began to pay close attention to the establishment of public bathhouses, recognizing their importance within the urban fabric of Islamic cities. Hammams were constructed in Bāsra during the time of Saād ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and in al-Fusṭāṭ under ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ. With the rise of the Umayyad Caliphate, interest in their construction grew further. Hammams became integral features of palaces, richly decorated and adorned with exquisite ornamentation and imagery to provide both physical comfort and spiritual delight (Bahnassi, 1997, p. 17).

In the Maghreb and al-Andalus, hammams were regarded as a continuation of their counterparts in the eastern

Islamic world (Laaradj, 1999, p. 441). Among the cities distinguished by their abundance of such establishments was Córdoba (Mahmoudi, 2022, p. 211), along with Granada, Fez, Tlemcen, and other major centers of the Islamic West and al-Andalus.

In Islamic cities, baths were divided into public and private types. The private ones were reserved for rulers and the wealthy, who avoided mingling with the general populace; these facilities were constructed within their palaces to preserve their dignity and social standing (Laaradj, 1999, p. 441). Notable examples include the private baths built during the Umayyad period as annexes to palaces and residences, such as those at Qusayr ʿAmra (93 AH / 712 CE), Ḥammam al-Sarkh (107 AH / 725 CE), Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (109 AH / 727 CE), and Kharbat al-Mafjar (127 AH / 744 CE) in the Syrian Desert (Rizq, 2000, pp. 84-85).

As for public baths, people frequented them for purification and cleanliness. These baths were of two types: natural mineral baths and constructed baths, each sharing certain characteristics while differing in others. The natural baths typically contained hot water that sprang from the depths of the earth, whereas the constructed baths formed part of the urban fabric of the city. They were built within the neighborhoods of Islamic cities, often adjacent to congregational mosques, local mosques, or in central and residential districts (Laaradj, 1999, p. 441), and were open to all segments of society. Thus, they reflected an aspect of communal life among the people. In most cases, the city authorities were responsible for their establishment and supervision, with the participation of benefactors and philanthropists, so that the public could benefit from them (Kharoubi, 2015, p. 162). Some public baths were designated for men, others for women, and some were shared by both, but at different times to prevent intermixing (Rizq, 2000, pp. 84-85).

2. Architecture of the Islamic Bath:

Islamic baths adhered, in both their management and construction, to the religious regulations prescribed by Islamic law. Separate facilities were allocated for men and women, and the design of the water basins and channels followed specific methods consistent with the jurisprudential rulings concerning the purity of water (Muhammad, p. 506). It is well known that the architectural layout of ancient baths typically consisted of three main chambers: the cold room, the warm room, and the hot room. In addition, three auxiliary spaces were attached to the bath: a dressing hall, a room for physical exercise, and another for lectures and discussions (Rizq, 2000, p. 84).

Although Muslims inherited the concept of public baths from earlier civilizations, they developed and modified their architectural designs to align with their own customs and Islamic traditions, resulting in a distinct departure from earlier models (Muhammad, p. 506). During the Ottoman period, no urban center of the empire was without public hammams for both men and women. The functions of these baths contributed to their continuous development and the enhancement of their aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, the baths in Islamic cities shared a generally similar layout, characterized by the sequential arrangement of the building's various sections.

In most cases, the structure of the bath was divided into two adjoining sections, each with its own entrance. The first section comprised the bath itself, which had a small entrance designed to preserve privacy. This was followed by a narrow, winding passage leading to three main halls and their adjoining rooms.The first was the reception hall, also known as the cold room. At its center lay an open courtyard surrounded by arcades furnished with marble or stone benches, often equipped with cushions and covered with carpets. Above these benches hung hooks or racks for clothing. A fountain sometimes stood at the center of the courtyard, and the space was covered by a domed ceiling

pierced with small windows or skylights to allow filtered light.

Next came the warm room, containing benches where bathers would sit to gradually acclimate their bodies to the heat before entering the hot room or upon returning from it to the cold hall. The hot room, known as the house of heat a (bayt al-ḥarāra), was the principal bathing area. It was surmounted by a large dome with skylights that provided natural illumination while preventing air currents from entering. Along the perimeter of this room were basins and bathing tubs, each supplied with water through taps. At its center stood a cube-shaped marble platform called the surra, an essential feature of the bath, on which bathers would lie to expose their bodies to high temperatures for heating, relaxation, and massage (Muhammad, p. 506).

In addition to these main spaces, there were small private chambers known as khalawāt or maqṣūrāt, used by individuals who preferred to bathe in seclusion and preserve their modesty(Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Model of a Hammam in Algeria during the Ottoman Period



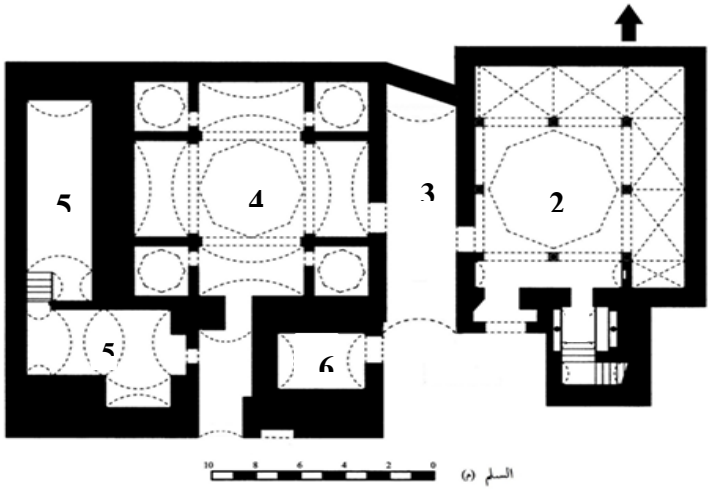
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The Ottoman baths in Algeria were engineered with a distinctive architectural style that created an environment combining heat and humidity, which explains their

significance in daily life - especially for women. The bath served not only as a place for cleansing but also as a space for warmth, perspiration, and rejuvenation, enhancing the process of scrubbing and rinsing. Architects gave particular attention to maintaining suitable temperatures in each hall and to ensuring the continuous heating of both the water and the building. This was achieved by heating the inner walls through the furnace system (farnāq), which distributed warmth evenly throughout the structure (Ben Abdallah, 2015, p. 96).

The second section of the bath was devoted to service and operation. It contained the boiler, as well as tanks for hot and cold water, which were distributed throughout the bath by a network of pipes and channels. It also housed the furnace room, known as the bayt al-nār (house of fire), located beneath the bath's floor, ensuring the distribution of heat. In this area stood the āṭūn, or main stove of the bath (Ben Abdallah, 2015, p. 96), used to heat the water flowing through channels beneath the floors of the bathing halls, thereby maintaining a consistent temperature and ensuring the continuous circulation of heated water (Mahmoudi, 2022, pp. 211-212). (Plan 1).

Plan 1. A Model of a Hammam in Algeria during the Ottoman Period (Hammam al-Bey Oran)



1- The entrance hall (al-saqīfa) 2- The cold room 3- The warm room 4- The hot room 5- The furnace (al-maawqid) and its annexes 6- A chamber

3. The Construction of Baths in Islamic Civilization:

Muslims built hammams in great numbers in response to the Islamic injunctions encouraging purification and ritual cleansing from impurities, as well as the emphasis placed on cleanliness and bodily care. Another significant motivation - no less important than the religious one - was the inability of most Muslims to construct private baths within their homes. Consequently, hammams proliferated throughout Islamic cities, becoming destinations frequented by people of all social classes, both regularly and on special occasions. Many of these facilities were endowed to mosques, thus serving a dual and widespread communal benefit (Boutchicha, 2022, pp. 84-85).

Undoubtedly, public hammams played a prominent role in Islamic society (Muhammad, p. 507). The Islamic bath, together with the mosque, the marketplace, and the governor's residence, constituted essential elements in the urban fabric of Islamic cities. In pre-Islamic times, such establishments served as gathering places for the social elite - wealthy individuals, athletes, and rulers - who met there for leisure, entertainment, and pleasure. In contrast, during the Islamic era, hammams became accessible to the general public, who visited them primarily for cleanliness and purification, fulfilling a religious obligation prescribed by Islam. The adoption of bathhouse architecture in the Islamic period was therefore not a manifestation of luxury or opulence, as it had been in earlier civilizations, but rather a necessity dictated by the religious duty of purification incumbent upon all Muslims without distinction (Rizq, 2000, pp. 84-85).

The functions of the hammam eventually expanded beyond its original purposes to encompass social, economic, and even spiritual dimensions. In Algerian cities during the Ottoman period, men and women - each in separate quarters -

would gather in baths to discuss matters such as funeral arrangements, commercial agreements, and business transactions. hammams were also venues for negotiating marriages and engagements (Spencer, 2006, p. 114). Their use was closely tied to various social occasions, including wedding preparations, postpartum purification rituals, and circumcision celebrations. Moreover, they served as places for social interaction, where families and friends exchanged news and information. The spiritual aspect was also present, as some bathhouses were located near the tombs of revered saints, and their waters were believed to possess healing and blessed properties (Boutchicha, 2022, p. 84).

4. Functions of the hammam:

The hammam has long held, and continues to hold, vital and multifaceted functions within Islamic cities, providing essential services of great social and practical value. These functions can be summarized as follows:

4.1 Health Function:

The hammam served primarily as a water-based establishment with a clear health and hygienic function. It provided a space for bodily cleanliness and purification from dirt and impurities, as well as a means of treatment for certain dermatological and internal ailments, such as itching, scabies, colds (Al-Maqtouf, 2021, pp. 431–432), leprosy, and lice. Healing was believed to occur through bathing in or drinking its water - particularly in natural baths whose waters flowed over mineral-rich beds. Such baths were also thought to be beneficial for some cases of infertility (Ben Hammou, 2013, p. 32).

Beyond its physical benefits, the bath had a psychological and therapeutic dimension. It was regarded as a place for relaxation and body massage, helping to relieve fatigue and exhaustion resulting from work or long travel. However, its benefits were not without risks: excessive exposure to heat or pouring hot water on sensitive areas of the body could be harmful and cause adverse health effects (Al-Maqtouf, 2021, pp. 431-432).

4.2. Social Function:

The hammam also played a significant social role, serving as a gathering place where people met to exchange public news and engage in social discourse. For women in particular, it was a venue for discussing private matters, including arranging marriages and selecting brides.

In earlier times, the bath was used for community celebrations, such as weddings, during which food was prepared for guests. The *farnāq* - the furnace used for heating wate - was also employed as a cooking hearth, with bath workers themselves taking charge of meal preparation.

From this practice emerged the traditional figure of the *ṭayyāba*, the woman responsible for scrubbing and massaging the bodies of female bathers with exfoliating mitts (*līfa*), as well as carrying water and other necessities for their use. In addition to these duties, the *ṭayyāba* would often prepare food for clients using the bath furnace, combining the roles of attendant and cook (Ben Abdallah, 2015, pp. 96-97).

4.3. Economic and Commercial Function:

The hammam also fulfilled an economic and commercial function, operating as a site of modest yet steady trade and employment. It provided opportunities for the sale of bathing-related products such as soap, perfumes, powdered lotus leaves (*sidr*), and clay cleanser (*ghassūl*), among others. Moreover, the hammam created diverse job opportunities, ranging from attendants and masseurs to managers and vendors, thereby contributing to the local urban economy through the services it offered and the livelihood it sustained (Al-Maqtouf, 2021, pp. 430-431).

5. What does the hammam represent for the Algerian woman?:

It was customary for public baths to be situated at the heart of Islamic cities and towns, often adjacent to mosques and markets. The term ḥammām al-sūq (market bath) was widely used during the Ottoman period to refer to the public bath. For this reason, women, both then and now, have

preferred to frequent the market bath as it allowed them to combine the pleasure of venturing into public spaces for shopping with that of caring for their bodies (Ben Abdallah, 2015, p. 90).

Algerian women traditionally visited the hammam once a week, and this practice served as an occasion for displaying fashions as well as exchanging family news. On such occasions, wealthy women of Algiers would take pride in showing off their affluence, wearing heavy gold jewelry around their waists and necks (known as *al-maḥzama* and *al-ʻiqd* or *al-silsila*), with crescent-shaped earrings dangling from their ears. Their weekly visits to the hammam thus represented a customary form of entertainment and social engagement (Spencer, 2006, pp. 108-112).

The bathing culture inherited by Islamic societies from earlier civilizations facilitated the integration of the hammam into daily life and social practice. Women typically visited the baths during the day, while men went in the evening, except in the case of a dual hammam containing separate sections for men and women. For men, the bath served as an ideal venue for meeting friends, hosting banquets with music and dancing (Abu Khater, 2014, p. 87), or exchanging political opinions. Moreover, the bath offered refreshment during hot weather or after a day's work, and between prayer times.

Men usually visited the bath once or twice a week, spending half an hour to an hour there after bathing, during which they drank coffee or tea in the main reception hall before leaving. For women, however, the experience was somewhat different, as they rarely went outside the home. Wealthy women typically ventured out only to visit relatives and friends or to go to the hammam, which they did regularly or weekly. Consequently, they spent more time bathing than men.

For the Algerian woman, visiting the hammam symbolized a transitional stage - a passage from one state of life to another. Each milestone - such as marriage, childbirth,

or other major life events - was traditionally accompanied by a visit to the bath.

As previously mentioned, beyond its hygienic function, the hammam also served therapeutic and recreational purposes. It was a place for healing and rejuvenation, especially after illness, where massages were performed and oils and medicinal herbs were used during bathing. It was also a space for bodily care and preparation for marriage. These practices persist in many Algerian cities to this day. Furthermore, visiting the bath before attending celebrations or special events remains a cherished custom. The hammam also serves as a periodic social gathering for women - a venue for exchanging opinions, sharing news and gossip, seeking potential brides, and even negotiating business arrangements (Abu Khater, 2014, pp. 88-89).

6. The Personal items and accessories of algerian women in the hammam:

Undoubtedly, when an Algerian woman went to the public bath, she was expected to bring along a set of essential items. In particular, when a bride visited the hammam to perform the traditional pre-wedding bathing rituals, she carried with her a special collection of accessories known as the bridal trousseau (jihāz al-ʿarūs). These items were placed either in a wooden chest or bundled in fabric, depending on the bride's social standing. Among the most important of these objects were the following:

6.1 *Al-Maḥbas* (The bucket):

The *maḥbas* is a deep vessel with a wide base and opening, allowing the easy use of the ladle (*ṭāsa*). It was typically employed in the hamma to store water during bathing. There was also a separate maḥbas used to keep personal clothing items, such as the towel (fūṭa) and dryer (tanshīfa), ensuring they remained dry and organized (Tayane, 2008, p. 133). (Figure 2).

6.2 *As-Saṭl* (The large bowl):

This is a large, convex, and often ornamented cup-shaped vessel, used as a personal container in the bath. Women placed inside it their soap, comb, hairpins, and other personal bathing accessories (Tayane, 2008, p. 132).

6.3 *Aṭ-Ṭāsa* (The bowl):

The *ṭāsa*, literally "basin," is a round container used for scooping water during bathing and for preparing henna by mixing it with water. Larger bowls were often used to hold rose water during special occasions such as weddings and circumcisions (Tayane, 2008, p. 131). (Figure 3).

6.4 *Al-Mrak* (The Set of copper containers):

The *mrak* is a set of engraved copper vessels, usually comprising three or four nested containers. In one compartment, women kept "Ṣābūn ad-Dzāyir" (Algiers soap); in another, they stored ṭifl, a natural clay used to whiten and soften the skin; and in the third, henna for dyeing hair or decorating hands and feet. (Figure 4).

6.5. *Al-Mrash* (The perfume sprinkler):

The *mrash* is a vessel designed for holding perfumes. After bathing, fragrance was sprayed on the bride, or the bride herself, or even a woman celebrating a birth, would sprinkle the scent upon the guests gathered in the hammam. (Figure 5).

6.6. *Al-Qabqāb* (The bath clogs):

The *qabqāb* are wooden sandals worn upon entering the bath. They were typically elevated, made of wood and fabric, and sometimes inlaid with mother-of-pearl (Ben Chamma. Jamii, 2020, p. 14). (Figure 6).

6.8. *At-Tanshīfa* (The drying cloth):

The *tanshīfa* is a rectangular, decorated cloth used by women to cover and dry their hair after bathing. Once the hair was partially dried, it was replaced by the banīqa (Tayane, 2008, p. 248).

6.9. *Al-Banīqa* (The head covering):

The *banīqa* is a cotton, embroidered headpiece introduced to North Africa with the arrival of Andalusian refugees, and it later spread across the Maghreb. The term is

still in use today, albeit with regional variations: in Tlemcen, it is called *qardūn*; in *Constantine*, *malwa*; and in *Tunisia*, *kūfiya* or *shukūfiya*. The latter terms derive from the Italian "scuffia," Spanish "escofia," and French "escoffion" (Ben Chamma. Jamii, 2020, p. 112).

The *banīqa* is a square or round cap with two long ribbons, worn to gather and cover the hair - either after leaving the bath, during household work, or throughout the day to preserve the hair's neatness and cleanliness (Benmesbah, 2018, pp. 257-258). (Figure 7).

6.10. *Al-Fūṭa* (The bath towel):

The *fūṭa* is a decorative piece of cloth used by women to wrap their bodies after removing their garments in preparation for bathing.

6.11. *Ṣābūn ad-Dzāyir* (Algiers soap):

This is a traditional cleansing product made from natural clay, used by women to wash and soften the body.



Figure 2. Al-Maḥbas (The Copper bucket), Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE.

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.

Figure 3. Aṭ-Ṭāsa (Copper bowl), Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE.

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.





Figure 4. Al-Mrak (Set containers copper) Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE.

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.

Figure 5. Al-Mrash (The perfume sprinkler), Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE.

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.





Figure 6. Al-Qabqāb (The bath clogs): Pair of wooden sandals inlaid with mother and pearl, Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE.

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.



Figure 7. Al-Banīqa (The head covering): Linen towel embroidered with gold and silk threads, Algiers, 12th–18th centuries CE..

National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts.

7-Dimensions and Symbolism of Algerian Women's Practices in the Hammam during the Ottoman Period:

The frequent visits of Algerian women to public hammams were associated with a set of customs and practices that were often elaborate and lengthy. Despite the dim lighting and heat of the place, these rituals were performed with ease due to the feelings of pleasure, relaxation, and fulfillment they evoked. Over time, many of these customs became inseparable from the bathing experience, forming an essential part of Algeria's intangible cultural heritage and holding significant importance in women's social lives. These practices varied in their meanings and modes of performance, depending on the occasion or celebration. Each event had its own specific rituals, many of which remain practiced to this day.

Islam places great emphasis on bodily purity, viewing it as a means of spiritual closeness to God through acts of worship. Within this context, the hammam played a vital role in maintaining cleanliness and ritual purity. Women regarded it as a place for washing and purification - an essential act for regaining the purity lost through daily exposure to physical and spiritual impurities. Visiting the hammam thus brought pleasure and relief, helping women overcome anxiety and tension. It absorbed the pressures of daily life, providing calm and relaxation (Ben Ziyane, n.d., p. 02).

The hammam was also perceived as a space where women could restore both physical and psychological balance- a transitional site marking the passage from impurity to purity. The process of bathing followed a series of structured stages corresponding to the architectural divisions of the hammam. In the cold room, women began by undressing and wrapping themselves in a towel for modesty. They then moved to the warm room to adjust their body temperature before entering the hot room, where the main bathing rituals took place. There, the bather exposed her body to steam and heat to open the pores in preparation for exfoliation and cleansing. This final step was usually performed by a kayyassa (bath attendant) or tayyaba (masseuse). Among the customs observed was the striking of a metal basin against the floor to produce a sharp sound-an auditory signal used to summon the attendant (Barrou, 2021, p. 02).

William Spencer also noted additional practices among women in the hammam. After massage and cleansing, women perfumed their bodies with musk, dyed their eyebrows, drank beverages, and ate fruit and sweets. The bath supervisor often created a festive atmosphere with music and prepared young girls to dance. In this way, Algerian women spent a pleasurable and rejuvenating day in the hammam - an experience that combined hygiene, socialization, and celebration (Spencer, 2006, p. 45).

7-1. Postpartum's Bath Traditions:

Among the customs practiced by Algerian women in traditional hammams was the ritual known as the *postpartum bath* (*ḥammām al-nouffasah*). This practice possessed distinctive features that reflected deep social and cultural meanings (Barrou, 2021, pp. 07-08). The term *nouffasah* refers to a woman who has recently given birth; the postpartum period typically lasts forty days, after which the woman must perform a ritual purification bath to resume religious practices.

Within the hammam, this event took on both a purificatory and therapeutic character, commonly referred to as *qfīl al-naffsah* in the local dialect. The new mother would enter the bath accompanied by a close female relative experienced in massage and traditional healing techniques. According to popular beliefs, this cleansing process helped the reproductive organs return to their place, as physical exertion after childbirth was thought to displace the uterus. The hot steam and warm water of the hammam were believed to provide comfort and aid in restoring the body's balance from head to toe. The bath, by virtue of its architectural design and specialized facilities, was considered the most suitable place for this restorative process (Ben Ziyane, n.d., p. 04).

The ritual began with the new mother being immersed in a large hot-water basin located in the warmest chamber. The water had to be extremely hot to remove bodily impurities and, symbolically, to ward off evil influences, in line with prevailing traditional beliefs. Her companion would then begin the treatment, followed by the kayyassa (bath attendant), who would wash, scrub, and massage her body. Upon completion of the cleansing, a small celebratory ceremony took place in the cooler section of the bathhouse, where sweets and refreshments were distributed (Barrou, 2021, pp. 07-08).

7-2. Newborn's Bath Traditions:

The newborn was traditionally brought to the hammam for the first time at the age of forty days. The occasion was marked with joyful ululations, the lighting of candles, and the distribution of sweets by the grandmothers and relatives in celebration of the child's arrival - especially when the baby was a boy (Barrou, 2021, pp. 07-08). The grandmother, or a woman acting in her place, would bathe the infant and apply henna. If the newborn was a girl, she would be gently immersed in water scented with rose petals amid joyous cries of celebration, symbolizing her preservation as a beautiful, radiant flower exuding sweet fragrance.

The newborn's first entrance into—and exit from—the bathhouse signified purity and readiness to embrace new life. This ritual underscored the communal joy surrounding birth and reflected broader notions of renewal, blessing, and protection within Algerian cultural tradition.

7-3 Bride's Bath Traditions:

The bride's bath is considered one of the most deeply rooted customs practiced in Algeria since the Ottoman era, and it remains an essential part of wedding celebrations to this day. The occasion of joy is deemed incomplete without a visit to the public bath, for which various preparations are made in the days leading up to the wedding - most notably, the bride's bath. This ritual marks the symbolic transition between single life and married life, representing a significant passage for the bride from one social status to another (Ben Ziyane, n.d., p. 04). Preparations are made both before and during the bath itself. After the wedding date is set, the bride, accompanied by her female relatives and friends, chooses a day or two before the ceremony to go to the hammam. They gather all the necessary items and sweets in anticipation of the event, which is a special day with its own distinct customs and practices, meant to be enjoyed to the fullest so that the bride may begin her marriage with good omens.

This day is one of joy, especially for the women who accompany and serve the bride, treating her like a princess surrounded by attendants. They celebrate her with ululations, candlelight, and at times with songs and drumming. The bride enters the hammam amid a festive procession filled with singing and ululation, adorned with jewelry and traditional embroidered garments. In earlier times, this display reflected the family's wealth and social standing, as the bride wore numerous pieces of jewelry from head to toe. Women of higher social classes were often accompanied by their maids, who carried their clothes and bathing accessories. The bride's bathing items - expressing her family's social and economic status- were carefully prepared, notable for their

craftsmanship and decoration. These items were placed in a wooden chest and included a copper basin, perfumed soaps, incense, a comb, and a mirror. To distinguish the bride from the other women in the bath, her body was wrapped in a special towel with ornate embroidery, made specifically for the occasion.

The bathing process began with the bride's companions removing her adornments and dressing her in a towel and *banīqa* (head cover) to prepare her for the warm room. There, her body was cleansed of unwanted hair, and henna was applied to her hair, hands, and feet. She would then enter the hot room, where exfoliation, massage, and various beauty treatments took place. Her body was washed and rubbed with scented materials, rose water, and other natural substances. After finishing, the bride moved to the cool room, where she was adorned amidst a festive atmosphere filled with flower petals, sweets distributed among the women present, and traditional songs and ululations echoing through the bathhouse (Barrou, 2021, p. 06).

A related custom took place after the wedding, when the newlywed bride would visit the bath again. On this occasion, she wore the *ḥāyik* (a traditional white wrap) and *ʿijār* (face veil), leaving only her eyes visible, as a sign of modesty and to conceal her beauty. She was accompanied by a group of women - either her own relatives or those of her husband - who brought along sweets and various beverages. Upon the bride's arrival, ululations resounded to announce her entrance. A special seat was prepared for her comfort, candles were lit above her head, and it became another opportunity for her to display her fine jewelry and luxurious traditional garments (Ben Ziyane, n.d., p. 04) as a reflection of her husband's and his family's social standing.

7-4 Circumcision's Bath Traditions:

The custom of taking young boys to the hammam before their circumcision ceremony has been passed down through generations. On this occasion, the child is dressed in

his finest garments—such as a *burnous* (traditional cloak), *ṭarbūsh* (fez), and embroidered shirt, or a complete outfit adorned with golden threads. The boy is then taken to the bathhouse in a festive procession accompanied by drums, ululations, and the lighting of candles. His mother or grandmother usually accompanies him to oversee the bathing process. During the ceremony, the woman applies henna to the boy's hands and feet before he begins the ritual bath. Once the bathing is complete, sweets are distributed among those present. Upon leaving the bathhouse, the child returns home in the same joyous procession, surrounded by celebration and cheer.

7-5 Betrothal's Bath Traditions:

The hammam was also considered an important place for social interaction and matchmaking. It was there that mothers often found potential brides for their sons. Some women would discreetly observe the girls who came to bathe with their mothers, evaluating their beauty, physique, and behavior. The groom's mother - or another woman entrusted with the task by the family - would then attempt to identify a suitable bride for her son. Because communal bathing allowed women to see one another in a natural setting, it provided an opportunity to assess not only a girl's physical appearance but also her manners and demeanor.

If a mother was impressed by a particular girl, she would try to learn more about her family through mutual acquaintances or the bath attendant, ensuring that she obtained accurate information. Thus, the hammam served as a discreet social space where marriages were often initiated, linking the institution of the bath to the formation of familial and social alliances.

Conclusion:

During the Ottoman period in Algeria particularly in the city of Algiers and its surrounding areas, the hammam was governed by both religious and social norms. The space served multiple functions which extended past personal

hygiene and religious preparation because it acted as a crucial social area where women performed various traditional customs. The hammam provided women with a secluded space which enabled them to cleanse their bodies and unwind while they participated in social conversations during their group events.

The customs followed different practices based on the event because they included specific rituals for the bride's bath and for postpartum women and newborns and children who underwent circumcision. The ḥammam served as a social hub where people could find marriage prospects while exchanging information about neighborhood happenings. Each of these customs had its own distinctive rituals and symbolic meanings shaped by popular beliefs.

The hammam functioned as a social environment which Algerian women used to create an independent world that followed its own rules and organization to fulfill their health requirements and social interactions. The location fulfilled dual purposes as women used it for cleansing activities while they also enjoyed recreational activities which helped them demonstrate their social status through storytelling sessions.

The traditional practices which served to unite women while maintaining their health and beauty now exist as part of Algeria's intangible cultural heritage. These traditions continue to exist in present times because Algerian communities preserve them through continuous transmission from one generation to the next.

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