

# Make-Up Products and the Beauty of Egyptian Women during the Mamluk Period (648-923H/1250-1517)

Salwa AL-SULAIMAN

## *Introduction*

This study deals with the beauty products and their use by women in their daily life or in social gatherings. The importance of this study lies in revealing the connection between the significance that the Egyptian woman attributed to her beauty and the economic and social welfare witnessed by Egypt during the Mamluk period.

The study focuses on the effect of the make-up of the Egyptian women during the fluctuations of the economy in the Mamluk period. Then, it attempts to discover the social changes and the variability of opinions of the religious men.

The study also examines the use of make-up tools, their variety and prices among different social class. For example, the make-up tools of the servant couldn't be the same as those of the wives and mothers of princes and sultans.

It is noteworthy that make-up is an old and new phenomenon at the same time, that is connected with the life of the women of all ages. The Egyptian woman has been using tools of make-up for ten thousands years<sup>1</sup>. The importance of the tools of make-up and ornaments in the different aspects of life was increased in the periods of economic development. The women gave to their beauty a great importance that one of the contemporary writers describe the Egyptian Mamluk women as "one of the most tender women he had ever seen"; specially the *Muwallada* woman which means the woman who had been born to a Turkish father and Egyptian mother and vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Julia Samson *Beautiful Nefriti Who Governed Egypt during Monotheism Religion*, translated by Mokhtar Al-Sawifi and revised by Dr. Mohamed Jamaledin Mokhtar-Egyptian-Lebanese Dar-Cairo, 1991, pp. 108-109

2 Ibn Dhahira, *Al-Fadhail al-Bahira fi Mahasin Misr wa al-Qahira*, ed. M. Saqqa and K. Mouhannis, Cairo, 1969, pp. 57-60

### 1. *Skin beautification*

The measurements quality of beautification differs from one age to another and from one place to another. At an age that is characterized by welfare and prosperity, there was a special significance given to skin beautification that is based on different aspects, such as the whiteness and softness of the skin that helped the Egyptian woman to reach such a degree of beauty. Third is why, the Egyptian woman during this period was so keen on going to public *hammamet* (baths) that were vigorously spread during this time.<sup>3</sup>

The beautification of the skin of the Egyptian woman during this period was also related to the use of special powders in public *hammamet* or her special *hammam*, such as the powder of pomegranate shells which is a well-known material for skin and was spread during this period.<sup>4</sup>

The Egyptian woman in this period was also keen on keeping her softness by removing the hair growing on her face and some parts of the body. This process was known as “frotter” through the use of black chewing gum that is melted on the fire and then put by the woman while it is hot on her face to pluck the hairs from its roots. She repeats the same process on her neck, eyebrows and other parts of the body.<sup>5</sup> She also used *noura* powder, which is a mix of lime and arsenic to remove hair.<sup>6</sup>

The Egyptian woman in this era also used henna powder to give a special kind of beauty to her skin. She was interested in painting her hands, legs and nails with henna.

There was a reference in Ibn Taghri Bardi that the women used this powder during this period, mentioning the incident of killing Khawand bint Sadeq, who was divorced from Sultan Faraj Ibn Barquq, and her hands were draped with henna.<sup>7</sup>

The use of henna is implemented through crushing the leaves of henna and mixing it with water. Then, henna is spread on the hands and tied with linen for one night. The same procedure is applied to the legs. The use of henna on the nails makes it look brighter and shining.<sup>8</sup>

We couldn't talk about the skin beautification without referring to tattoo, that was known by Egyptian women during Mamluk period. This tattoo was implemented by using needles to create the required form on the skin until bleeding. Then, this place is stuck with kohl or cool. Then, the wound is healed and the scar remained green or blue. The most recurrent places subject to tattoo are the arm and lips. The drawing usually takes the form of an animal or plant. It seems that tattoo was provoking the jurists of this age as they referred several times in their

3 Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba fi Ahkam Al-Hisba*, Cairo, 1964, pp. 87-88

4 Ibidem, pp. 87-88

5 A. Amin, *Qamus Al-Adat wa al-Taqlid wa al-Ta'abir al-Misriya*, Cairo, 1953, p. 173

6 A. Abd al-Raziq. *Al-Mar'a fi Misr al-Mamloukiya*, Cairo, 1999, p. 148

7 Ibn Taghribardi, *Al-Nujum al-Zahira*, Cairo, VI, p. 54

8 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 149

writings to the prophet's saying: "Curse of Allah upon those who make tattoos".<sup>9</sup>

If skin whiteness was the most recurrent feature of this age, some poets were fascinated with the features of Non-Arab women who were a part of society during the Mamluk period. For example, Abdulrahman Ibn Al-Wafa<sup>10</sup> wrote in the yellow skin: "In the golden face/ I stay for long times contemplating My heart goes to this face directly/ Oh, Golden face you are unfair"<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Eyes and brows beautification*

The Egyptian woman during the Mamluk period used heavy black antimony<sup>12</sup> to blacken her eyes. The black eyes were among the features of beauty in this period. It is mentioned in the old stories of Ibn Qatibah that Abu Al-Aswad advised his daughter during her wedding: "Keep to make-up and makes it look better by Kohl."

If the Arab poets repeatedly mentioned the eyes blackened with kohl in their poetry, the Mamluk poets were interested in another type of eyes, which are the narrow eyes:

Abadiat Al-Arab, Go away            I'm so interested in the Turkish  
These narrow eyes                    Robbed me of my mind<sup>13</sup>

The Egyptian woman in this period also gave a special kind of interest to her eyebrows, making it like a bow. The beautification of the eyebrows with antimony is known as "Glazing" and still known up to now.

## 3. *Hair beautification*

We could know the indicators of hair beautification in the Mamluk period through the poems describing the beauty of the hair, such as its length, density and blackness. "I'm so careful of long, dense hair, as it goes directly to My Heart"<sup>14</sup>

This is why, the woman in the Mamluk period was so keen on lefting to her hair spread on her back, leaving some curls of hair in front of her ears. The most prevailing features of the hair combing at this period is to release the curls of hair a cheek in a zigzag form like a scorpion, and so many poets describe the scorpion-like cheeks in their poems, that one of them said:

9 Ibn al-Haj, *Al-Madkhal*, Cairo, p. 107; A. Abd al-Raziq. *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 152

10 He is Abdulrahman and also called Mohamed Bin Ahmed Wafa Sakendari- drowned in River Nile in 814H. See Al-Sakhawi, *Al-Dhaw al-Lami' gi Ahl al-Qarn al-Tasi'*, Beyrouth (sd) IV, pp. 58-59

11 Ibidem, p. 59

12 See Ibn Qotaiba, *'Uyoun al-Akhbar*, Cairo, 1947, IV, p. 77

13 The poet is Ala Eddin Al-Jawini. T680H/1281, see Ibn Al-Wardi "Omar Ibn Muzafar T749H/1348" *Tarikh Ibn al-Wardi*; Beyrouth, 1996-II, p. 222

14 Ibn Afif al-Tlmsani, *Diwan Al-Shabb al-Dharif*, ed. Shakir Hadi, Beyrouth, 1985, p. 96

These scorpion-like cheeks are worthy of flattery<sup>15</sup>

The pigtailed spread on the shoulders of the women were also known in this period. The women in that period kept on tying together their hair. Al-Sharani, one of writers in this period said: "Our great Prophet peace be upon Him prohibited the women hairdressers who tied the hair together."<sup>16</sup>

The women of this period colored their hair with henna. They sometimes mixed henna with other materials, like *Katm*, which makes the hair darker and smother seem.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. *Body beautification*

It is worthy of attention that the women in the Mamluk Period valued fatness. That is why the women were so keen on having a fat body to gain the admiration of men. The famous faqiah Ibn al-Haj had directed his offensive against women who followed illegal ways to increase their weight, which includes women not fasting breakfasting of some women in Ramadan without any legitimate reason in order not to lose any weight. Some parents were also urging their virgin daughters not to fast in Ramadan to preserve their fat bodies.<sup>18</sup>

Among other means that the women followed in the Mamluk period to maintain their fat bodies, Ibn al-Haj said that "when the woman went to her bed after taking her dinner, she took some pieces of bread and swallowed them with water as her stomach is so full that she could not eat any more. She may repeat the same thing again during another part of the night."<sup>19</sup>

#### 5. *Tools of Beautification*

##### 5-1 *Kohl pots and sticks*

As mentioned before, kohl was an important material that is used during the Mamluk period. That's why, kohl pots had become such an important tool of beatification during this period, which were made of different materials like wood, glass, crystal, silver or copper. There were also some kohl sticks for blackening the eyes, which were made of woods, ivory, silver, copper or glass<sup>20</sup>. These sticks were so precise as to pass between eyelash easily and were also placed distilled flower water before being plunged into the kohl powder. They were also used for drawing the eyebrows.

There were various kinds of kohl sticks from the top of the cover. The kohl stick may be ending with different shapes taking the form of a bird or animal or different vacuumed

15 See about this poet cited above Al-Sakhawi, *Al-Dhaw al-Lami'*, op. cit., p. 59

16 Al-Sha'rani, *Lawaqih al-Anwar al-Qudsiya fi al-Uhud al-Muhammadiya*, Cairo, 1311H, II, p. 211

17 Ibn al-Haj, *Al-Madkhil*, op. cit., II, pp. 60-65

18 Ibidem II, p. 63

19 Ibidem II, p. 63

20 Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., p. 329

ornaments to give a special kind of beauty.

### 5-2 Combs

It is the tool used for combing the hair of the woman. A. Abd al-Raziq mentioned that he had seen at the Museum of Islamic Arts in Cairo a large collection of combs made of wood and ebony.<sup>21</sup>

### 5-3 Mirror

It is one of the important tools used by the Mamluk woman for make-up. The beautification tools of high and middle class women couldn't be found without the mirror. The mirrors were made of bright metals, especially copper or silver and gold in the past.<sup>22</sup>

### 5-4 Bottles of perfumes and vials of lipoids

The Mamluk period is regarded as one of the most flourishing Islamic period in the production of perfumes. During this period, there were small and big bottles of metal mixed with gold and silver and decorated pottery. They took the cylindrical or polygonal or ball form and grow slimmer towards the top to keep the perfume from falling down.<sup>23</sup>

### 5-5 Al-Khafaf rock<sup>24</sup>

This rock is made of burnet silt. It is divided into two kinds: one of them having a coarse edge, while the other is made of soft silt, except the used side which is coarse. Both of the two rocks are heavy black and used by the woman to clean her leg and remove any flaws.<sup>25</sup>

### 5-6 Tooth stick

The tooth stick was used to clean the teeth; it is *Sunna* (Prophet's Traditions). As the woman of this period was so interested in make-up and liked to show herself in the most beautiful image, it was normal to use the stick to preserve the beauty of her teeth. She was also used to carry it wrapped in a precious piece of silk and put the cleaning powder in a special bottle.<sup>26</sup>

What assures that the woman used the tooth stick in this period is mentioned by one of the poets of that period:

21 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., pp. 158-159

22 H. al-Basha, *Al-Qahira Tarikhouha, Founouniha wa Athariha*, Cairo, p. 575

23 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., pp. 158-159

24 Al-Khafa rock is a volcanic, glassy rock, full of holes resulting from gases imprisonment during being solid from volcanic eruption. See M. Shafiq Ghourbal, *Al-Maousou'a al-'Arabiya al-Mouyassara*, Cairo, 1965, p. 754

25 Ibn Taghribardi, *Al-Manhal al-Safi*, ed. N. Abd al-Aziz, Cairo, 1986, III, p. 28

26 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 149

“Oh, tooth stick, you enjoyed a hole”<sup>27</sup>

## 6. *Jobs related to beautification*

Many jobs related to beautification were found in the Mamluk period, which include:

### 6-1 **Balanah (Massage maker)**

It is one of the jobs that came into being during this period, held in public *hammamet* where the women get massage, color their hair and wash their heads with cold or hot water.<sup>28</sup>

### 6-2 **Al-Mashta (Coiffure maker)**

She is responsible for the beautification of women inside the public *hammamet*. *Mashta* may be summoned inside the house for beautification of women. This job was also closely related to the make-up of the bride.<sup>29</sup>

### 6-3 **Al-Aymah (Hairstylist assistant)**

This job is related to opening hot and cold water taps and putting powder during hammam. She was also assistant to massage maker and hairstylist.

### 6-4 **Al-Hafafah (Shaver)**

She may be found inside the public *hammamet* and may be summoned inside homes to remove hair from the body of the women, using the above-mentioned methods.

Traveler Pero Tafour mentioned that there was a huge number of black slaves, whose ages ranged between (10-12), wandering the streets and shouting “Who needs make-up?”. When he asked about these people, he knew that these slaves are doing shaving for females who like cleaning secretly in *hammamet*.<sup>30</sup> What proves this point is when Ibn al-Haj blamed the men of his age for accepting male hairstylists to touch their women’s hands, cheeks and lips.<sup>31</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the rich woman was frequently accompanied her *balanah* or *mashta* to *hammam*.

27 The poet is Alqadi Najmedin Abu Al-Abas Ahmed Ibn Emadedin Al-Thalabi Al-Dimashqi, 723H/1323

28 Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., pp. 240-244

29 Al-Shayzari, *Nihayat al-Rutba fi Talab al-Hisba*, ed. al-Baz al-Arini, Cairo, 1964, pp. 87-88; Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., pp. 240-244. See the Travelers and specially Pero Tafur who was the ambassador of the Cypriot King to mamlouk Sultan in 839h/1435. See Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures 1435-1439*, Arabic translation H. Habshi, Egypt, 2002, p. 97

30 Ibidem; op. cit., p. 97

31 Ibn al-Haj, *al-Madkhil*, op. cit., IV; Said Ashour, *al-Mujtama' al-Misri fi 'Asr al-Mamalik*, Cairo, 1992, p. 141

## 7. *Perfumes and incense*

Perfumes are considered as basic element for beautification at different ages. The Mamluk period was distinguished more than any other period in the expansion of using different kinds of precious perfumes.

These materials include incense, musk, ambergris, Sandal wood<sup>32</sup> and gum, from forests in India and China. Musk comes at the top of the list of perfumes. Musk is a material that comes from mammoths animals, known as “Dhabaa Al-Musk”<sup>33</sup>. The best kinds of Musk include Al-Tabet Musk, followed by Al-Safadi Musk and the Chinese Musk. Khanqo city, later known as “Kantoon”, export most of it.<sup>34</sup>

The poet said “ And Musk and Good are attached to your ankle”<sup>35</sup>

The other kind is ambergris: which is a solid material, when it is exposed to heating, it gives a nice smell. Ibn Al-Bitar referred to the ambergris as “the stool of sea animal, grown at the bottom of the sea and eaten by other sea animals. When they get their sufficiency, they threw them out.”<sup>36</sup>

## 8. *Beautification Facilities*

### 8-1 Markets

The most fascinating thing you could see in Cairo is the market where you could see great amounts of goods and commodities coming from India, especially holy marbles, gems, and perfumes, silk and other commodities as well as incenses.<sup>37</sup> Egyptian people always decorated the markets in celebrations and hung silk clothes on their tombs.<sup>38</sup>

The Egyptian markets knew a special kind of commodities which were commensurate with the nature of social life at this time, as every group with a particular profession lived in a district taking the name of that profession.<sup>39</sup> That’s why the markets of clothes and make-up have an specific place for selling those goods.

There was a market completely specified for wanderer sellers, known as Al-Qofisat Market where the sellers sat upon yachts having small iron cages in front of Al-Mansouriah dome. These sellers rented the lands where they were settling.<sup>40</sup> There was also Al-Ambariyyin

32 Al-Shayzari, *Nihayat al-Rutba*, op. cit., pp. 202-204; Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., pp. 202-204

33 Al-Idrissi, *Nuzhat al-Moustaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, II, p. 137

34 Qalqashandi, *Subh al-A'cha fi Sina'at al-Insha*, ed. M. Hsin, Beyrouth, 1987, III, pp. 128-129

35 Ibn Taghribardi, *Al-Nujoum al-Zahira*, op. cit., II, p. 103

36 Ibn al-Baytar, *Al-Jam' l-moufradat al-Adwiya wa al-Aghdhiya*, Beyrouth, 1991, III, p. 134

37 Pero Tafur, *Travels*, op. cit., p. 97

38 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Rabat, 1999, I, p. 203, (known as “*Tohaft al-Nodhar fi Ghara'eb al-Amasar*”)

39 Q. A. Qasim, *Asr Salatin al-Mamalik*, Cairo, 1998, p. 222

40 Ibidem, p. 227; A. Aouf, *Ahwalou Misr min 'Asrin li 'Asr*, Cairo, pp. 83-84

market where the amber necklaces were sold. Al-Maqrizi mentioned that it was Al-Khaleen market. Al-Khaleen is a plural of *khaleei*. This market is currently one of the most important Cairo markets for the many clothes of the State that were sold at this place.<sup>41</sup> One of the markets that was catered the needs of the women is Al-Akhfafeen market. The source mentioned that this market had been recently established during the era of al-Sultan al-Zahir Barqouq.<sup>42</sup>

Cairo markets also had the profession of drawers who embroidered the clothes with gold and silk.<sup>43</sup>

## 8-2 Public *Hammamet* (baths)

Public *hammamet* were regarded as a landmark for make-up for Egyptian woman at the Mamluk Period as it served as a center for beautification in our modern era. There were *mashta* and *balanah* who performed all beautification works such as combing hair and removing it from the body. There were also female servants who did massage for women while taking showers.<sup>44</sup>

It is noteworthy that the idea of hot *hammamet* was taken from Greece and Rome. Muslims excelled in building their *hammamet* in Islamic Egypt. The first hammam (bath) was built in Fustat by Amer Ibn Alas at Sawiqat Al-Magharbah, which was called Mouse *hammam*<sup>45</sup> due to its narrowness. Then the number of bath (*hammam*) increased until it reached to (1170) *hammam*. The *hammam* at the Mamluk period was a building and in its middle there was a small gate with architectural and decorative features. There were sometimes two gates: one for men and the other for women. At the entrance, there was a corner reserved for the supervisor who kept the money and the valuable objects of the customers who were taking *hammam*. This entrance led to a wide corridor which is composed of a hall prepared for taking a rest before and after taking the *hammam*. In the middle of this corridor, there was a reception that is tiled with mosaic. On the sides, there were also canopies covered with small carpets. These canopies were surrounded by wood to prevent those who like to see what is inside. There were also small shelves for keeping shoes, topped by a lighting lamp for giving a dim light.

This reception is followed by the main parts of the *hammam*: *Bayet Al-Awal* (First House): it is a small square room where the women undress. This room is warm, and it takes this name because it is the first warm room.

When the woman takes off her clothes, she puts a piece of clothes covering her body until the knees. Then, this woman moves to the main room that is known as *Bayet Al-Hararh* "hot room" which is dim, and topped by a dome. It has four (4) sides, with each one having a rock

41 Al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, III, p. 188

42 Ibidem, p. 189

43 Ala' Taha, 'Ammat al-Qahira fi 'Asr Slatin al-Mamalik, Cairo, 2003, p. 100

44 Al-Shayzari, *Nihayat al-Rutba*, op. cit., p. 240

45 Ibn Duqmaq, *Al-Intisar li Wasitat 'Uqdat al-Amsar*, Cairo, 1309H, pp. 34-35

basin. There were also (2) *khalwa* (spaces) and *Noura Bayet*. In *Bayet Al-Hararh*, *balanah* do massage for the woman assist them in taking shower and drying her body with towels as well as removing hair from her body. After *balanah* finishes her works, the woman goes to *Bayet Al-Awal* where she spends sometime with *mashta* who makes make-up for her body and face.<sup>46</sup>

## 9. Jewels and clothing

### 9-1 Jewels

Jewels played a pivotal role in the make-up of the woman during the Mamluk period. In Cairo, there was a market for selling the different kinds of jewels, known as “Al-Sagha market”. There was another market, known as Al-Sanadqiyyin<sup>47</sup> market, where different kinds of rings and jewels were sold. The women of Al-Qasra, especially coming from Cairo, were famous for using these jewels.

The jewels that the women of the Mamluk period liked very much are the bracelets which were made of gold, with heads taking the form of a lion or snake.<sup>48</sup> The woman of this period was also interested in wearing gold and silver rings. As so many women of the Mamluk period gave a special importance to this kind of jewels, the rings sellers were usually swore that their weight is correct. They were also banned from covering it with silver and bitumen in order to strengthen it.

Cairo women at this period were also interested in having silver and gold earrings. There was a reference in contemporary resources that there was a kind of earrings, known as “*al-balkhash halq*”.<sup>49</sup>

The Egyptian woman knew different kinds of necklace, which includes gold decorated with multi-colored *mania*. *Mania* is half-transparent glassy material and is used in polishing minerals such as gold, silver and copper.<sup>50</sup> They also knew *qlaed* made of amber, known as “*ambarya*”. Al-Maqrizi mentioned that there was “no home in Egypt, even low-ranking, without having *ambar qalada*.”<sup>51</sup>

The women of this period were also used to decorating their legs with *khalkheel*. Ibn al-Haj said that “the women of this period were always making sounds with these *khalkheels* in their ankles”.<sup>52</sup>

46 Al-Shayzari, *Nihayat al-Rutba*, op. cit., p. 87; Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., pp. 240; A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi misr*, op. cit., p. 148

47 Al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, II, p. 103

48 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi misr*, op. cit., p. 168

49 *Balakhstan* is made of red-colored, precious minerals. See Ibn Mandhour, *Lisan al-'Arab*; Ibn Taghribardi, *Al-Nujum al-Zahira*, op. cit., VI, p. 54

50 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 166

51 Al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, II, p. 102

52 Ibn al-Haj, *Al-Madkhal*, II, p. 168

## 9-2 Clothing

Clothes were considered as a feature of make-up in the Mamluk period some times to the extent of exaggeration. Ibn Al-Akhwa referred to this exaggeration, as follows “they made new clothes that even the devils could not think of”<sup>53</sup>.

The underwear of women of this period was known as “*mae'zer*” which was a piece of clothes reaching to the knees, similar to the wearing of men in public *hammamet*. When reviewing the Islamic Monuments of the Mamluk period, there were no pictures of women wearing such kind of clothing as it was so short and couldn't appear from the outside clothing.<sup>54</sup>

Women of this period wore also long *saraweel* “pieces of clothing reaching to the knees”. The references showed such kind of clothing at the time of the killing of Shajarat Al-Durr, whose corpse was thrown out from the fences of the castle, wearing *saraweel* and tied with Tikka.<sup>55</sup>

There was also a kind of shirt for women that could be seen from their outside clothing. The exaggeration in the designs of new clothes led to the intervention of the authority for its materialistic exaggeration.<sup>56</sup>

There was also a kind of clothing above the underwear, which was very common among young women. The woman of this period was covered her body with a wide sheet, known as “*ezar*”, covering the whole clothing. *Ezar* for Muslim women was generally white. Non-Muslim women wore *ezar* with different color. Christian women wore blue-colored *ezar* and Jewish, women wore yellow-colored *Ezar* and Samaritan women wore red-colored *ezar*.<sup>57</sup>

The women of this period also wore a piece of clothing as a hair-cover, known as “*asabah*”, which was like a turban round a piece of *ezar* on the hair. The turbans of women were a topic for debate. Though the turbans were not used by many women in this period, they were criticized by religious men. Such criticism assured the existence of such kind of turbans in this period.<sup>58</sup> These turbans are usually white and made of *shash*. Nonetheless, they were made of a different kind of clothing such as black silk covered with gold or red and white wool.

The wearing of *taqia* (hair covering) was also widespread during the Jarkasi period (784-922H/ 1382-1517G). The *taqias* had different colors such as green, red and blue. They were used without turbans. These *taqia* were so high as 1/6 arm height, and ended with a round, flat cutting. Then, they were developed at the era of Al-Nasser Faraj to what is known as *Jarkasi taqia*; with the height of 2/3 arm and having tops like dome.<sup>59</sup>

53 Ibidem, p. 157

54 Maier, *Al-Malabis al-Mamloukiya*, Arabic translation S. Chichi, Cairo, 1952, p. 124

55 Ibidem, p. 124, Al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, ed. M. A. Ata, Beyrouth, 1997, I, p. 494

56 Al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, V, p. 427

57 Ibn Taghribardi, *Nujoum*, VII, p. 722

58 Ibn Iyas, *Badai' al-Zuhour*, ed. M. Mustapha, Cairo, 1983, II, p. 429

59 Maier, *Al-Malabis*, op. cit., p. 129

As for the shoes, they were very similar to the men's in their shape, known as "*khof*", and were made of colored leather. The women wore short shoes upon the *khof* known as *sarmouza*<sup>60</sup>. *Sarmouza* were short shoes, known as "*na 'el*" and were taken off when entering the house. These three kinds of shoes were sold at a private market in Cairo, known as Al-Akhfafeen market<sup>61</sup>. There was also another kind of shoes, known as *madras* which was used by the public women when going outside. They were also used as a weapon by women against the aggressors who would like to wreak vengeance upon them, such as striking the head of al-Shujai after being killed in 693G/1294G.<sup>62</sup>

As for the *qobaqab* (Patten), the Egyptian woman in the Mamluk period was so interested in wearing it. Patten was made of wood, with high heels that were usually made of gold and holy marbles. Both men and women used the patten in *hammamet* and were scarcely used inside the houses. Nonetheless, some women wore *qobaqab* to seem tall<sup>63</sup>. This is in addition to wearing tall socks that were made of cotton or wool.<sup>64</sup>

### 10. *Effects of economic life on women's make-up*

The economy is the artery of the state and is the main indicator of society's mobility. When the economy prospers, the markets flourish and conversely when the economy slows down, the markets stagnate.

No doubt that any country must experience the two situations because economy must be affected by the circumstances of the country. In war, the budget of the state is affected. And in natural disasters, the compensations are paid as a result of material losses. This is in addition to the effect of the administration of the country. If the country is administered by swindlers, the administrative corruption will spread in the whole country. Egypt had experienced the two states during the Mamluk period. What is important in this study is the effects of the economy on the fashion of Egyptian woman during this period. This fact is reflected in the difference between the welfare line during the Maritime Mamluk (647H-783H/1250-1382G) and the decadence during the Jarksi period (783H-922H/ 1382G-1517G).<sup>65</sup> As long as the first period is characterized by welfare, it is normal to find women's luxury. The women of the first period did not care how much they paid to get what they wanted and to appear in a prestigious position. For instance, you could find the women of the first period wore long-sleeve shirts. Al-Sharbini mentioned that these clothes had been used before by public women. "The sleeve of

60 Greek word meaning hear of *Khof*. See A. Atiyat Allah, *Al-Qamous al-Islami*, Cairo, 1966, II, p. 264

61 Al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, II, p. 105

62 Ibidem.

63 E. W. Lin, *Al-Misriyoun al-Mouhdathoun*, Arabic translation A. T. Nour, Cairo, 1975, p. 45

64 G. Wiet, *Al-Qahira Madinat al-Fann wa al-Tijara*, Arabic translation, M. Abbadi, Beyrouth, 1968, p. 146

65 Q. A. Qasim, *Asr Salatin al-Mamalik*, op. cit., p. 342

the woman...could allow a man to enter and go out from the second sleeve".<sup>66</sup> Regardless of its design, the women had consumed large quantities of clothes with great amount of money to have a beautiful look. The expenses of the shirt reached one thousand dirham<sup>67</sup>. This is known as *bahtalah*. This is in addition to wearing very expensive silk clothes. The cost of the *khouff* for woman reached 100-500 dirham.<sup>68</sup>

These are some of the behaviors of the women that witnessed materialistic exaggeration which reflected the reality of the economic welfare in the Mamluk period. Due to the welfare of this period, the women sought materialistic beauty as a means in itself and to emerge in the most beautiful image. They competed with each other in their appearance only which was not serving the interest of the society. It only created a limited-ambitious category that only corrupted the spirit and aimlessly wasted the money. However this doesn't mean the women only sought materialistic purposes. As long as there were years of welfare and prosperity, there were also years of poverty and barrenness. Mamluk Egypt witnessed periods of war and famine that the man or woman could hardly find a loaf of bread to satisfy hunger. Such hard economic condition ultimately affected the appearance of women. Ibn Shaheen mentioned that the events of 618H in Muharam "The expensive prices reached cotton and linen clothes"<sup>69</sup> The spread of plague was the cause for the expensive prices. Ibn Shaheen asserts that the prices of linen and cotton clothes were cheap and had become expensive. Egypt was famous for linen clothes. That's why the farmers were planting linen in large quantities. The prices of linen were improved during the plague and epidemic period as the need for linen increased to shroud the dead people. 815H/1412G and 816/1413G witnessed a remarkable growth in the price. Sultan Barsbay tried to monopoly the Upper Egyptian linen in 832H/1428G to overcome the financial needs of the State.<sup>70</sup>

Al-Maqrizi mentioned that the hardships that Egypt had been exposed to, at the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> centuryH/15<sup>th</sup>G led to the hiking prices and most people had become wearing broadcloth.<sup>71</sup> Normally, the women wore the same kind of clothing due to deterioration in economic conditions. The Sultans were also resorting to imposing temporary taxes procedures during wartimes in case of budget shortage, known as "war taxes". They were taking financial support from people. Women were giving their jewels and pompous clothing to contribute to

66 Al-Shirbini, *Hazz al-Maqhouf bi Charhi Qasidat Abi Shadouf*, Cairo, 1962, II, p. 223; A. M. Oudwan, "Al-Makana al-Ilmiya wa al-Ijtimai'ya li al-Mar'a fi Misr fi al-Asr al-Mamlouki" *review al-'Usur*, 4, I, 1989, p. 155

67 S. M. Abou Zayd, *Al-Hisba fi Misr al-Islamiya min al-Fath al-Arabi ila Nihayat al-Asr al-Mamlouki*, Cairo, 1986, p. 92

68 Al-Maqrizi, *Sulouk*, II, 3, p. 81; Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., p. 20; Said Ashour, *Al-Mujtama' al-Misri*, op. cit., p. 42

69 Ibn Shahin al-Dhahiri, *Nayl al-Amal fi Dhayl al-Doual*, ed. A. Tadmouri, Beyrouth, 2002, p. 248

70 A. Najib Mousa, *Al-Hayet al-Iqtisadiya fi Misr fi al-'Asr al-Mamlouki*, Amman, 2003, p. 261

71 Al-Maqrizi, *Ighathat Al-Umma bi Kashf al-Ghoumma*, Cairo, 1940, p. 92

H. A. al-Batawi, *Ahl al-Imama fi Misr Salatin al-Mamalik*, Cairo, 2007, p. 136

the military efforts.<sup>72</sup>

Ibn Iyas described the end of the State, as follows: “There was no bread in the shops or flour. Poverty spread among people. People made their prayers against the Sultan. The clothes markets were sealed and the tailors disappeared. Cairo conditions were disrupted.... The conditions had become like the Day of Judgment and every body said: Myself.... Myself”.<sup>73</sup>

The above-mentioned explanations showed the economic indicators and its impacts on the women’s behavior towards the markets and bringing beautification tools. The women’s facilities, including markets or *hammamet*, were mostly affected by the economic conditions. In case of welfare, women were used to going to these facilities as a part of their daily schedule. During economic deterioration, stagnation had swept the whole country. For example in 841H/1437G during the Barsbey period, the women were banned from leaving their homes. This ban created a bad effect on the process of purchasing in markets.

Al-Maqrizi explained in detail the events of this period. He said that when the epidemic swept through the country in 841H/1437G, the Sultan asked judges and intellectual people about the guilt and bad deeds committed by people and consequently Allah had punished them with plague and epidemic. Some of these people said: “when adultery spread, epidemic propagate. Many women were decorated and walked in markets day and night. The public interest necessitated the banning of women from going to markets.”<sup>74</sup>

If women were banned from going to markets, despite worsening economic conditions, it was normal that the markets stagnated and closed their doors. This is because women were refreshing and mobilizing markets. The interpretation of the natural circumstances from a religious perspective may lead to pitfalls. Instead of solving the problem by knowing the actual cause behind it and finding proper solutions, they content themselves with illogical reasons, which revealed the moral terms with which the peoples of this period interpreted the reasons behind catastrophes and hardships.<sup>75</sup> We still make use of religion for purposes not related to it.

As long as the markets were badly affected by the worsening economic conditions, *hammamet* were affected in the same way. Women were enjoying make-up inside during the first period of the Mamluk welfare. But during poverty and barrenness, the image was completely changed. What is mentioned traveler Pero Tafour that some children between 10-12yrs were secretly decorating the women in *hammamet* revealed that there was something wrong with going to *hammamet*.<sup>76</sup> His trip in 9<sup>th</sup> centuryH/15<sup>th</sup>G coincided with the deterioration of the economic conditions. The banning imposed on women to leave their homes was ultimately limiting the role of *hammamet*.

72 A. Najib Mousa, *Al-Hayet al-Iqtisadiya*, op. cit., p. 318

73 Ibn Iyas, *Badai' al-Zuhour*, V, p. 28

74 Al-Maqrizi, *Sulouk*, IV, p. 1032-1033; A. Udwan, *Al-Makana al-Ilmiya*, op. cit., p. 185

75 Q. A. Qasim, *Asr Salatin al-Mamalik*, op. cit., p. 233

76 P. Tafur, *Travels*, op. cit., p. 97

### 11. *The Mamluk woman's make-up facing legislative authority*

The woman of this period sought her beautification needs regardless of any thing that might stir the anger of legislative authority. It was clear that women of this period were very keen on beautification. They invented new beautification methods that challenged old traditions. The acceptance of this change is not an easy matter. Human communities are different in their norms and customs. There were primitive communities which believed in old traditions and lived in silence without taking any step forward for fear of getting in trouble with these old traditions. This is called Reaction Progress.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, there were free communities that accepted any change and never minded passing the experience as it is not restricted by certain ideas and easily adjusted to such changes.

The effects of change on the individuals of the community are different depending in the conditions in which they lived . For instance, in a conservative community there is a complete denial of any change, especially if these changes ran against the customs and systems of this community. On the other hand, the free community easily welcomes the winds of changes and its individuals may be the pioneers of this change. The communities had to find out what was useful and harmful from any thing new. There should be a mechanism for knowing the effects of the new things when applied to community and then taking what is in the best interest of the community. The selection shouldn't be random.

Generally, eastern communities have a tendency for keeping on the old habits and traditions. What is important at this part is that Mamluk women stirred Sultan perspective several times. For example in 662H/1263G, it was noticed that many women became wearing turban like men. This is a prohibited act. Sultan Baibars issued a decree banning woman from wearing such turbans or any other clothing similar to men. They threatened any woman doing this banned behavior of robbing her clothes after (3) days of issuing this decree.<sup>78</sup> In 751H/1350G, Al-Maqrizi mentioned that *Khawateen* women<sup>79</sup> and their servants invented long shirts touching the ground, with wide sleeves. The width of the sleeve reached to (3) arms. This shirt was known as *bahtalah* and its price one thousand dirham. Cairo women imitated them in having this kind of *bahtalah*. The minister Menjak stopped this kind of shirts and ordered to cut the sleeves of women who proved to have these shirts.<sup>80</sup> The women were traced and the punishment was applied. They were intimidated in many ways: Many temples taking the form of women and wearing long shirts were fixed upon wood pillars at Zawilah door, Naser door and Al-Futouh door to make women hate such kind of clothing.<sup>81</sup>

---

77 A. Shalafi and A. al-Rashi, *La Tatafalsif, Rawai' Afkar Dr. Ali al-Ouardi*, Damas, p. 19

78 Al-Maqrizi, *Sulouk*, II, 3, p. 156; A.Udwan, *Al-Makana al-Ilmiya*, op. cit., p. 165

79 *Khatoon* is a name related to princess and women of high class and later used with the meaning of Sayda. See A. Shantanwi and others, *Dairat al-Maraif al-Islamiya*, VIII, p. 179

80 Al-Maqrizi, *Sulouk*, III, 3, p. 81; Ibn al-Ukhwa, *Maathir al-Qurba*, op. cit., p. 20

81 *Ibidem*, p. 312

However such a kind of clothing remained in the minds of the women of this age. After (4) decades of stopping and prohibiting these shirts and namely in 793H/1390G, a ban was imposed in Cairo that prohibits the women from wearing wide shirts and the sewing of the shirts more than (14) arms. The women were exaggerating in the width of the shirts that the sewing of the shirt reached (92) arms of *Bondog*, with three and half arms wide, and a total space of more than (320) arms. Even the public women were imitating the influential women in having this kind of clothing.<sup>82</sup>

What is really surprising is that the references don't stately mention the application of this ban on *khawateen* and the Sultan's servants. It is noteworthy in this respect to mention this saying: "Every habit or custom adopted by the upper class in society turned to be a fashion imitated by other classes."<sup>83</sup> The Mamluk public women adopted ideas and notions coming from the upper classes. Does this mean that the deeds of high class are only exclusive to them by prohibiting them to others?

The answer to this question differs according to the nature of societies. The classy societies always try to make a difference between the categories of society. Every individual deals with the society according to his social class.

Meanwhile in the communities where differences among categories of society are melted and become more flexible without inferiority complexes, they will have a wider circle of thinking without seeking to reach a certain category. Such kind of communities could compose a collective mindset when classifying the Mamluk society, I intend to classify it as a classy society where there are differences among categories. Even if such differences are only in the form, they affected the cohesion of society. This is because the Mamluk Muslim community had different social categories and several cultures.<sup>84</sup> The category of women itself was divided into different subcategories. The make-up of woman was an apparent evidence to this difference. This was also clear in the reaction of the authority which regulated laws banning some kinds of clothing on public women only. Such difference led women to insurgency and rebellion. They felt unfairness. That's why once the storm was lulled; they went back to wearing the prohibited clothes.

Beauty had some well-known indicators for Mamluk women that led some of them to committing unlawful excesses. Every woman of this period was so keen to appear in the most beautiful image to gain the satisfaction of people around her. Such indicators were only a feature of the culture of the society that could be recognized through the references mentioned in Egyptian stories "Thousand Nights". It is understood that the woman was considered beautiful if she had a soft, white skin, round face, heavy weight, big breasts and wide asses.<sup>85</sup>

82 Al-Maqrizi, *Sulouk*, III, 3, p. 312

83 A. Shalafi and A. al-Rashi, *La Tatafalsif*, op. cit., p. 26

84 L. Jasim and Imen Mouhammad, "Daour al-Mar'a al-Hadhari fi al-Qarn al-Tasiq al-Hijri," *Majal-lat Ulum Insaniya*, 37, Malaysia, 2008, p. 14

85 A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 166

There is no surprise when talking about the culture of fatty woman as every culture has its own canons of beauty. These canons of beauty are shared by most present societies. There is no wonder also if we know that western societies shared the Mamluk community the same criteria of beauty, namely heavy weight. An evidence for this sharing was clear in the portrait of European artists, especially the Italians. The Mona Liza engraved at Louvre Museum by Leonard de Vinci<sup>86</sup> showed a portrait of a fatty woman with wide figure. Leonardo De Vinci lived at the same period Mamluks.

In this connection, there are many poets who crafted their poems around the beauty of the women. One of the poems talking about the beautiful face:

Take the place of the moon      And replace the sun at dawn times  
You have the same lighting of the Sun      And the sun enjoys your smiling<sup>87</sup>

The poets of the Mamluk period were affected by the descriptions of the Mamluk. They talked about the Mamluk and we know that Arab Literature is full of descriptions of boys and girls with wide eyes. The situation changed in the Mamluk period and they concentrated on the narrow eyes. Ibn Nabath, the Egyptian poet, died in 768H/1384 said:

I noticed a Turkish woman      Calling Alhaleem as foul  
These narrow-eyes are      So charming that I couldn't resist<sup>88</sup>

This means that the narrow eyes were preferred by the Mamluk Period and was a feature of beauty. Whiteness was another feature of beauty. However, some Mamluk poets had aleaning towards for black women. This in clear in another lines by Ibn Nabath:

The beauty spot in the face      Gives it a special kind of beauty  
So why you blamed any body      So admired by this spot<sup>89</sup>

Ahmed Ibn Younes, another poet, preferred to liken the cheeks to flowers than to narcissus.

The flower-like cheeks is a story      How you deny such beauty<sup>90</sup>

The women of this age were generally so keen on having such criteria of beauty. As long as heavy weighty was one of the beauty features, the women had devised sinful methods to have a fatty body. They stopped fasting in the holy month of Ramadan, one of the main pillars of Islam, for fear of losing any gram of their weight. Losing weight means that the woman shall not gain any flattery from her society. This reveals the extent of the Mamluk society's adherence to their customs. Some women weren't fasting in Ramadan without any legitim reason. Some virgin girls were forced by their families not to fast in Ramadan for fear of losing their weight. Other girls stopped fasting in Ramadan before their wedding for the same

86 A. Nawar and M. Jameleddine, *Al-Tarikh al-Oroubi al-Hadith*, Damascus, 2005, p. 29

87 Al-Abshihi, *Al-Mustatraf fi Koulli Fanning Mustadhraf*, Beyrouth, 1999, p. 270

88 A. S. al-Jammal, *Al-Adab al-Amami fi Misr fi al-'Asr al-Mamlouki*, Cairo, 1966, p. 46

89 Ibn Iyas, *Jawahir al-Sulouk fi Amri al-Khoulafa wa al-Moulouk*, ed. M. Zinhom, Cairo, 2006, p. 185; Ibidem, *Badai' al-Zuhour*, op. cit., I, 1, p. 505

90 M. al-Faqqi, *Al-Adab fi al-'sr al-Mamlouki*, Cairo, 1976, p. 177

reason.<sup>91</sup>

This act had aroused the anger of Fuqahaa (Religious men). Ibn al-Haj was one of them who denied this behavior as fasting is one of the main pillars of Islam. Stopping fasting in Ramadan is a prohibited matter.

Ibn al-Haj goes further as to criticize their method of clothing and make-up. He violently stood against the wearing of turbans by women, referring to the prophet's saying that "The Day of judgment won't come until women would be dressed, yet naked and would arrange their hair to look like the hump of a camel. Such women would never set foot in paradise or even smell it." Ibn al-Haj explained that the turban of women had two humps. These humps had many problems. First, when wearing this turban, the woman covered most of her face and did not give the chance to her husband to enjoy the beauty of her face, which is one of the most beautiful parts. Second, such a turban shall cover parts of the woman's head and face during ablution. If she removed it, she might have a cold because she was accustomed to covering such part of her body. In this way, this turban shall lead the women to committing many legal violations. First, the woman shall not be enabled to wash her face and head during ablution. Second, the woman shall not be enabled to decorate herself well for her husband in the presence of such turban. Such an act is enough reason for separation between the couple. If we say that this turban might give the woman some kind of beauty, it is so scarce and not usual. In the *Sunna* (Prophet's traditions), we should follow what is usual and recurrent.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear that the fatwa (religious edict) of Ibn al-Haj reveals his clarity of vision that is so removed from the appearances which might lead to separation between the couple.

The fatwa of Ibn al-Haj criticized the grooming of women through wearing thewide, short sleeves that reveals prohibited parts of the body of the women.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, Ibn al-Haj condemned the women for not wearing *saraweel* (long Pants). This is because *saraweel* cover the genitals of the women when going on the roof. Islamic rules (*Shari'a*) order the woman to cover the parts of her body.<sup>94</sup>

## 12. Conclusion

Welfare and prosperity propagated through the different aspects of life in Egypt during the Mamluk period. This welfare was also reflected in the tools of beautification used by women. This was clear in the exaggeration and sophistication of the women of this period in decorating themselves with different tools of beautifications.

The existence of so many *Jawari* (female servants) at this period and their skills in

---

91 Ibn al-Haj, *Al-Madkhil*, op. cit., II, p. 63; A. Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Mar'a fi Misr*, op. cit., p. 157

92 Ibn al-Haj, *Al-Madkhil*, op. cit., I, pp. 242-243

93 Ibidem I, pp. 234-244

94 Ibidem I, p. 244

revealing their beauty that was so appreciated by men, might lead these women to give a special attention to their beauty.

Such care for the women's beauty might be especially clear in the attention given to her skin and the use of different powders such as the pomegranate powder, henna, perfumes, and lipids. The women of this period were also interested in decorating their eyebrows, using kohl and antimony.

The variation in the criteria of beauty from time to another also had its effects on the Egyptian women namely whether from the skin color, eyes space, and weight.

The Egyptian woman in this period was keen on having the different kinds of jewels, necklaces and earrings. She was also interested in her clothes design to an exaggerated level that led to the interference of Statesmen to stop such exaggerations.

This study also reveals that the progress in make-up and beautification does not mean a continual situation. The women were affected by the economic conditions and the evolution of legislation. We saw how the legislative authority dealt with the exaggeration of the women's make-up during economic barrenness and welfare. During welfare, the legislative authority remained silent and did not interfere. When the authority states its views, it made make-up exclusive to a certain category of society (only the rich).