An Insight into an Egyptian Intangible Cultural Heritage Tradition: The Hammām

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Abstract
Looking after one’s health and personal hygiene is crucial for the sanity of our minds and souls. Egyptians have always been fastidious about their health and cleanliness since the dawn of history. This fact can be traced as far back as the Pharaonic, through the Graeco-Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Modern and Contemporary eras. This paper sheds the light on one of the most favourable Egyptian traditions that is still currently in practice, which is “visiting the public bathhouse Hammām”. Bathhouses have always been considered as a social hub for the Egyptians, not only for body care and beautification but also for meeting up with friends. The Hammām provides us with extremely rich material for our Egyptian intangible cultural heritage. On a final note, it is rational to extrapolate that traditional Hammāms are the nucleus for the contemporary luxurious spas and health clubs.

Keywords
Public Bath - Hammām - Intangible Cultural Heritage - Egypt - Hygiene

Introduction
Personal hygiene is a key component of human well-being regardless of religion, culture or place of origin. It is defined as the healthy practices and lifestyle, which helps in the maintenance and promotion of individual health; physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Undoubtedly, it has a significant role in every society as an essential-health need. Throughout the history, it has been an integral part of the religion and health-culture of any community around the world. Poor personal hygiene or self-neglect behavior is regarded by many cultures as an offensive conduct or an indication for specific illness, particularly mental disorders. Thus, personal hygiene is not only limited to maintain the cleanliness of the body, but it is strongly connected with the mental and spiritual aspects as well.1

Every culture develops its own standards and methods of maintaining personal hygiene that are associated with different personal factors including bathing, clothing, washing hands, grooming the hair, caring for various body parts including the hands, feet, nails, nose, ears, teeth and mouth.2

Ancient Egyptian Culture
Some cultures equated cleanliness and self-caring with godliness and associated hygiene with diverse religious beliefs and practices. For instance, personal hygiene and cleanliness in the ancient Egyptian culture were highly emphasized. They were common features of the religious practices and essential parts of the whole culture. The ancient Egyptians were aware of the diseases that might occur as a result of the lack of self-cleaning and consequently they paid great attention to self-caring and bathed frequently, almost twice daily, to avoid any infection or illness. Priests, in particular, were fixated with cleanliness to the extent that they used to shave their whole bodies every three days and bathed twice a day and twice during the night.3

Regarding the ancient Egyptian religion and its relevance to personal hygiene, the Egyptian Book of the Dead entailed a collection of magical and religious spells which stipulate that one cannot speak in the afterlife unless they are pure, clean and presentable.4 For example, Spell 125, which deals with the Egyptian ethical standards, prohibits anyone from speaking in the judgment hall unless they are clean, dressed in fresh clothes, shod in white sandals, adorned with eye-paint, and anointed with

2 Clement, Manual, 70.
the finest oil of myrrh.5 This strongly reflects the fact of how cleanliness matters in the life and afterlife of the ancient Egyptians. According to Herodotus, 5th century B.C., the ancient Egyptians were the most hygienic and healthy of all nations at that time and they were easily distinguished from other peoples by their manners and customs.6 They adopted many of the personal hygiene habits including bathing, washing, and laundring since they were very concerned with cleanliness and bathed frequently. They used to wash their clothes, gloves, and planes before, and after eating and drinking. Moreover, they exploited the waters of the Nile river, especially in the hot climate days, to bathe and to wash their clothes. They wore freshly washed garments made of linen, which was by far the most common textile. These different daily life practices may refer to the strong bond created between the ancient Egyptians and water through their appreciation for the Nile and their relevant deities. It is worth here to mention that the practices of clothes laundry and bathing in the waters of the Nile river and its canals are ancient Egyptian habits that continue to be existing and are still practiced frequently in some of the rural areas in Egypt till our present day.7

Pointing to the importance of self-care and personal hygiene, the ancient Egyptians were aware of the value of bathing to keep them clean, happy and satisfy their gods. The lower social class used to bathe in ponds, rivers or canals, but wealthier ancient Egyptians had private baths within their homes with large tubs or basins. Servants would bring waters from the Nile river, carried by hand in clay jars or animal skin containers, to fill the basins since even the Egyptians of the higher social class did not have running water in their homes. In the royal palaces and the private houses of the wealthy, there were private baths with basins or stone-shower stalls where the bather would stand on a limestone slab with raised edges and a drain cut in it to dispose of sewage. Running water would have been poured over the head and body through a shower and streams were used to heat the water, while lined towels were used for drying.8 Some indoor bathing facilities have been revealed in ancient sites such as Tell El-Amarna. An example of an elaborate bath with innovative water-supply system can be found inside the house of one of the high officials of the 18th dynasty at Tell El-Amarna.9

The ancient Egyptians bathed nearly on daily basis and they used perfumes or scented water to stay clean and fragrant. Scented natron soaps were used, and their ingredients had antibacterial, anti-fungal and whitening properties as well. This cleansing agent is substantially a mineral salt consisting of hydrated sodium carbonate or sodium sesquicarbonate with small quantities of sodium chloride and sodium sulfate. Unliabeled, natron salt was used as a mouthwash and natural cleanser for the teeth, between the teeth, under the fingernails and the heels. This would provide fresh breath. Natron was also an important ingredient in the mummification process as it absorbs water and behaves as a drying agent.10

Other ingredients for cleanliness purposes, described in Ebers Medical Papyrus,11 were also included using animal fat and vegetable oils, which were beneficial for maintaining the skin and fight against different skin diseases.12 Scented oils were widely used as mentioned in Ebers Medical Papyrus13 that records using placing a cake of bread mixed with scent under the arms after bathing. Ground carob beans and porridge were used as deodorant.14 The mixture of an ostrich egg, a shelf of a tortoise and a gallant of tamarisk is roasted and rubbed to the body of both men and women to expel stinky smell is also highlighted.15 Women often had coffins of perfumed wax on their heads that would slowly melt until the wax ran down their heads and then the spreading of a pleasant scent.16 Aside from the fine hair removal tools, the ancient Egyptians were famous for their superb scents and perfumes that their use was mentioned in ancient texts and referred to by several by Greek and Roman writers.17

Religiously, it was believed that fragrances were created by the gods in most of the ancient cultures. Consequently, scented offerings or incense formed an important part of ceremonies and rituals along with worship, prayers, and sacrifices.18 The ancient Egyptian gods discovered that any aromatic plant if soaked in oil or melted fat, its scent will transfer to the oil and this process is known as “maceration”. The scented oil would retain its colour longer than fragrance smoke or incense do. Thus, fragrant oils were used for skin application, personal and medicinal use and sacred purposes. They were usually applied on skin and hair to enjoy their lingering fragrance long after bathing and during attending ceremonies. These unscented oils-based perfumes were stored in ceramic, glass and alabaster containers. It should be mentioned that Nefertum was considered to be the god of perfumes, known as the aromastrictus in ancient Egypt, who had healing properties and was believed to smell as fragrant as the blue lotus flower.19

Ancient Egyptian women were concerned with their personal hygiene, cleanliness, and beauty. They used perfumes and unguents not only to mask their body odours but also to enhance their personal care routines. Myrrh was the favoured fragrance of queen Hatchepsut as it reminded her of the scent of god Amun-Re. She used to rub myrrh at the bottom of her feet so that she would continuously emit pleasant fragrance for herself and others surrounding her wherever she went. Myrrh oil was proved to stimulate the immune system to create white blood cells, when absorbed by the skin and enter the bloodstream. Moreover, it was used as an antiseptic ointment that prevented the heels of the queen from cracking in the hot weather days and provided vitality to her mind and body.20 At that time, the Egyptians used opaque glass coloured with metallic oxides in addition to containers made out of granitic, diorite and especially alabaster carved in adorable animal or lotus shapes to hold the scented oils and keep them cool.21 An alabaster container in the form of a flower, measuring 4.7 cm., carved with the name of Hatchepsut is currently displayed at the British Museum Egyptian Museum. It was examined by the German Egyptologist Michael Howerl-Moller, who was looking for a perfume residue since the shape of the flacon is that of the well-known perfume bottles, as depicted on the walls of Deir el-Bahri Temple, Thebes. After two years of research, he announced that the container did not include a perfume and the substance inside is a kind of skin care lotion or a medication used by the queen for treating eczema.22 Ancient Egyptian women knew depletion to get rid of the unwanted body hair and to stay clean and smooth. Shaving body hair was mainly facilitated by applying scented oil to the skin. Beeswax, special oils or cream depilatories made with an alkali, such as quicklime, were also effective in body hair removal and were used as shaving lotions.23 Aside from being fashionable, some of the Egyptians used to shave the eyebrows and the heads to get shaved their heads with wigs made of human hair to protect the scalp mainly from the sun and to avoid the infestation of lice. Women who kept their natural hair used hair extensions or wigs that were carefully woven and knotted to their own hair with beeswax and resin.24 As for the males, they paid great attention to their personal hygiene and self-care as well. Upper-class men also shaved their bodies and heads to keep cool and prevent lice infestation.25 They used different hair removal tools including tweezers, knives, razors of flint or metal and whetstones. In ceremonial occasions, wealthy men and women wore elaborate wigs made of human hair, while the worst were made of coarse red date palm fibers. Furthermore, tomb reliefs and paintings show that not only females but also males adorn their heads with perfumed corsets to release sweet aroma during the feasts and celebrations.26

The performance of male circumcision scene is illustrated on the walls of the tomb of the royal architect Ankhmahor at Saqqara showing details of

7 Lassus, The Material World of Ancient Egypt, 176.
this process and the importance attached to this ceremony. According to the Greeks, circumcision was primarily performed in order to prevent the priests appealing further purification and cleanliness, and then it was adopted by the nobles and the higher warriors as a hygienic practice. There is no direct evidence that circumcision was practiced for girls. According to the loss of the context of Herodotus in the 5th century BCE, the majority of the Egyptian upper-class males adopted circumcision for hygienic reasons, and it was conducted by a priest and not a doctor which may indicate that it had more ritual than practical significance.37

**Greek- Roman Culture**

Practices of personal hygiene and cleanliness of the Greeks were similar to those adopted by the ancient Egyptians. It is noteworthy here to mention that the Latin word "hygiene" is originally derived from the ancient Greek word "hygros" (Yykrî or Yyrî) in reference to the Greek goddess of health, cleanliness, and sanitation, who is depicted in the classical sculptures as a woman holding a large serpent in her arms.38 The Greek hygiene emerged as a specialised medical discipline that attempted to control every aspect of the human environment from air, diet, sleep, works, exercises, daily practices to the passions of the mind and incorporates them into a sanitary lifestyle. Generally, early Greek hygiene included four mental and physical disciplines, balneology, religion, sport, and medicine. Hippocrates, the founder of medicine and the greatest physician of his time, recommended daily bathing and massaging different oils on the body for good health and optimal relaxation. Moreover, he advised the Greeks on a healthy program known as the Greek Regimen of health, which affirms that the ordinary should focus on both careful diet and regular exercise to acquire a healthy body and mental health.39

According to the Greek culture, shaving was considered as an aesthetic approach for personal hygiene. The removal of body hair may have been practiced by both ancient Greek men and women as seen through their nude artistic depictions. Ancient Greek women removed their pubic hair because it was thought to be uncivilised to appear in public baths with pubic hair. Shaving body and face hair was also adopted by the Greek rulers especially Alexander the Great who was fixated on shaving and appeared in many scenes and depictions. He ordered his warriors to shave their faces and bodies before battles so that their enemies fail to grab them by the beard.40

The ancient Greeks used different cleansing tools such as the "scratch", which was a Graeco-roman tool used to scrape oil, sand, dirt or perspiration off the skin before bathing. This tool was made out of bronze, shaped like the letter "J" with a looped handle and sometimes inscribed with the name of its owner. Strigil is principally associated with athletes as they used to coat themselves with olive oil before practicing athletic activities. Nevertheless, tomb excavations in an early Ptolemaic grave at sand, dirt or perspiration off the skin before bathing. This tool was made out of bronze, shaped like the letter "J" with a looped handle and sometimes inscribed with the name of its owner. Strigil is principally associated with athletes as they used to coat themselves with olive oil before practicing athletic activities. Nevertheless, tomb excavations in an early Ptolemaic grave at

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Under the rule of the Ptolemies, a substantial number of Greek public baths were built in Egypt following the original Greek style which includes circular bathing rooms (tholoi), separating men from women, with individual large hip-bathubs where water was poured directly from jars over the bather sitting in the tubs. For the earlier Greek baths, water was heated on portable braziers through coal burning or heating up rocks. Later on, the baths consisted of two main sections; a hygienic section fitted with hip-bathubs, and a relaxation section equipped with individual tubs filled with hot water used after cleaning in hip-bathubs. The relaxing section was primarily added to the typical Greek bathhouses to provide its visitors with leisure, pleasure, and indulgence.40 Surrounding rooms were used for storing personal belongings, waiting areas with benches, alternative forms of bathing at fountains or stand basins and other amenities, such as massage, are proved to be existing.41 Euratio Brescia discovered the earliest Greek baths of Egypt in 1905 at Taposiris Magna.42 With the decline of the Greek society and the rise of the Roman empire in Egypt, the Romans adopted much of the Greek philosophy and experience related to health and personal hygiene. They added their own innovations and achievements to the field of public health so that the ordinary people, and not just the rich, could keep clean and healthy.43 They were extremely skilled in the engineering of water supply, particularly the invention of lead or bronze water pipes that brought filtered water into and around the town, good sewage and drainage systems, public baths, latrines, and medical care. The Romans were particularly famous for their precision in choosing the most appropriate sites for their towns or settlements to be located away from mosquito-infested swamps and marshes.

The ancient Romans were fastidious about their personal hygiene, appearance, and health. It was crucial to obtain the needed facilities to ensure their ability to bathe and clean themselves. Ancient Romans sometimes bathed several times a day.44 The Roman baths were not only places for cleanliness and self-caring, but also for social and business interactions in addition to their leisure and health aspects. Sometimes, they served as state propaganda used as a physical reminder for the emperor’s beneficence, power, wealth and influence.45 Thus, in Roman Egypt, most of the baths were named after Roman emperors such as Tiberius, Nero, Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus, seeking for the emperors’ honour and satisfaction. Meanwhile, examples of Roman baths were built to mark Roman emperors’ significant events such as the bath which was built especially for Nero’s intended visit to Alexandria. The Roman baths varied in their design, size, decorations, function, and arrangement. By constructing aqueducts, fresh and clean water was easily supplied to baths and fountains. There were special baths for men and women. Mixed bathing was an unusual feature of the Roman culture, however, it happened on a very limited scale.46 Other baths allocated specific hours or days for women to bathe and enjoy the existing facilities. Plutarch warned Roman men from bathing with women or using their baths believing that women’s bodies release effluvia and excretions that are distasteful when absorbed by men.47 Archaeological excavations revealed the discovery of a wide variety of jewellery, tweezers and other personal and public items suggesting that the Roman baths were lively and busy social centres.

Both ancient Greeks and Romans used abrasive materials, including pumice stones, for hair removal. They also used tweezers-like tools and the metal strigil to get rid of the unwanted body hair through applying a depilatory paste made of pitch, the great gall, donkey fat, blood, and powdered viper. Shaves were required to shave their heads as a mark of their lesser class. Roman emperors paid particular attention to their appearance and personal hygiene. It was said that Emperor Augustus used red-hot marbles on his legs as a form of depilation and to make the hair grow slow.48

40 Fournet and Redon, Bathing in the Shadow of the Pyramids, 102.
46 Tselos, Emotions, Artifacts from Ancient Rome, 143.
48 Tselos, Emotions, Artifacts from Ancient Rome, 143.
49 Sherrow, Encyclopedia of Hair, 100.
50 Kelly Olson, Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity (New York: Routledge, 2017), 129.
With the beginning of the Roman period in Egypt, the small Greek baths, "sholos" baths, disappeared. The Roman bathhouses were a continuation of the Greek baths and shared some characteristics while following a new layout that differs from the classical Graeco-Egyptian baths. The new generation of the Roman baths in Egypt, that can be called "Graeco-Roman-Egyptian", are hybrid baths sharing specific features of the Graeco-Egyptian baths integrated with the Roman ones. The classical Roman baths commonly include only one or two multifunctional entrance rooms for all activities relevant to bathing "apodyterium, tepidarium" and a single bathing room with a collective heated immersion pool "caldarium". The best-known hybrid example of the Graeco-Egyptian-Roman baths is located at Tell El-Herr, north Sinai. It combines the traditional elements of the Graeco-Egyptian-Roman architecture represented in hip-bathubs, individual immersion baths in relaxation rooms, furnace system heating waters and the neighbouring rooms by radiation, possible heating walls and finally baths organised in two parallel circuits, as a romanisation feature. Other examples of the hybrid baths dating back to the Late Ptolemaic and Early Roman Period can be found at Karm El-Barassi, Xios, Hermopolis and possibly the large baths at Kom Wasit, Athribis, Bi'r Samut, Buto, Dakhla Oasis, Tell el-Herr, Marina El-'Alamein, and others.

According to the finds of the archaeological excavations and the documentary evidence, it can be concluded that the majority of the Graeco-Roman baths in Egypt were similar in their structure that fundamentally contained four principal rooms: cold water room "Frigidarium", hot air room "Tepidarium", hot water room "Caldarium", and "Sauna" room "Faconicum". The heating system used to warm up the water and air in baths is known as "Hydrosanctum". Holes where boiled water flows through pipes, under the hot air and the hot water room grounds, to warm them up "Suppressor" were also added. Other rooms were attached to the baths including room for changing clothes with niches "Opodyterium", waiting room "Aula", and toilets "Furnins/Latrine". Additionally, several baths' attachments existed including stores for fuel, oven, water tanks, cleansing and adorning tools and towels. Luxurious baths were painted, decorated with wall paintings, pediments, and columns, and on the contrary to poor baths, which lack the presence of these elements.

It is worth here to mention that around forty-six typical Greek baths have been discovered in Egypt and around forty-nine Roman baths were revealed between the 1st and the 6th century A.D. The majority of these baths are distributed between Syene, Kom West, Ashbīs, Bī Samut, Buto, Διάθλειος, Tell El-Herr, Marina El-'Alamein, and others.

During the Late Roman/Byzantine Period, the construction of public baths continued to be a significant feature of the public architecture. The great public baths of Kom El-Dikka in Alexandria, dating back to the second half of the 4th century, is considered to be the best existing example of baths constructed on imperial standards. The interior design follows the classical Roman bath models except for the Sudatorium or "steam room", which was originally a preferred Greek feature. Almost half of the complex's heated rooms survived together with the underground service systems.

Starting from the 5th century onwards, the conventional heating techniques developed quite gradually with the installation of steam diffusion devices in the heated rooms. This evolution in the heating techniques helped in reducing the size of tubs and consequently the volume of the hot rooms. The innovation of the steam diffusion devices marked the birth of Hammām in Egypt, whose main characteristic is heating through steam rather than through the hypocaust's dry heat.

Islamic Culture

Hammān (or Public Bath) was a key element of the Egyptian urban fabric during the Islamic era. It constituted an integral part of a network of social buildings e.g. Kuttah (school for young children), Madrasa (religious schools) and Zawaya (small prayer hall). The Egyptian community thought of it as a place for social activity e.g. meetings, celebrations and networking as well as somewhere to maintain their well-being and personal hygiene by relaxing and bathing. Controversially, hammānīs were also noted for being used as discreet locations for political negotiations and discussions, not to mention being linked to evil conspiracies for example the murder of the famous Shagar el Durr during the Mamluk Period.

As a matter of fact, hammānīs were integrated as one of the main components of the Mamluk’s socio-economic life in Egypt spanning the period from the 13th to the 16th centuries and continued to be so till at least the 19th century. Arguably, they began to lose their value by the mid-19th century and definitely after the 1960s, especially with the rising westernisation and exposure of the Egyptians to international cultures. Better sanitisation and more efficient water systems reaching almost every home, highly contributed to the decrease of public bath users in favour of using their own private facilities. Accordingly, the maintenance for public baths became a burden on their owners instead of being a good economic source. Moreover, the discontinuation of awqāf (religious endowments) had a massive impact, as around 95% of the historic public baths were waqf properties. Furthermore, harsh operational regulations imposed by governmental bodies on public baths limited their sustainability and negatively affected their role in the community.

Subsequent to their introduction to Egypt by the Greeks, bathhouses sustained a rather abundant use throughout the Islamic timeline, especially in Cairo. In fact, it has been recounted by Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, that the bathhouses of Cairo were said to be the most "beautiful, spacious and well-planned of the Orient". Although, they are still being favoured in some North African and Mediterranean countries, for instance Morocco, their existence in Egypt has suffered a great decline. Undoubtedly, the hammānīs popular in Islamic cities evolved from the Roman and Byzantine public baths, as these were integrated when the Umayyad dynasty conquered Byzantine territories in the Middle East between 661 - 750 AD. The period subsequent to the rise of Islam is associated with a prompt development in the architecture of baths and the consequent adaptation from Roman to Islamic bathing habits. The only exception was the heating system which was hypocaust or underfloor heating system, that was prevailing during the Greek period, was substituted by using hot water plume pools "mīghāz" as a source of heating, the later era.

It is worthy to mention that, the tradition of separating the two sexes was initiated by the Greeks, much earlier than the advent of Islam. Unnecessary to say that this arrangement was totally appreciated and respected during the Islamic era.

The oldest Egyptian hammānīs of the Islamic era were located in the city of al-Fustāt, typically adjacent to places of prayer, relating to their cleansing function for wudu (partial ablution) or ghosl (full body ablution) performed before prayers. It is said that the very first one built in the city was dubbed by the Egyptians as the bath of the mouse or "Hammam el-far" and it was located in the area known as suwaqiat al-magariba. The reason for this peculiar name was that when the locals compared it to earlier Roman baths, it was much smaller, so they considered it only for a mouse. The earliest discovered bath dates back to the Tulide Era, in the "Akkar" area. They were also located near other secular establishments such as sanaa (market) or caravanserais (hotels for traders). One of the main reasons for their proximity to the capital, was related to being near adequate

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60. A physician from Baghdad who wrote an account on Cairo after visiting it in AD 1231.
64. First Islamic capital established by General Amer ibn El-Ansari after the Arab Conquest in Egypt in 641 A.D.
urban water distribution system, where saqqa (water carriers) followed a specific pre-set route. Even though, most of the hammāms had their own bīl (well), but it was not sufficient for the overall usage to fill their cisterns and tanks, especially during the hot summer months. Hence, the water supply depended on the water carriers “saqqa” who would store the water in adjacent cisterns or fountains “saḥil”, which formed beautiful architectural fundamental components of the city.69 Looking after one’s personal hygiene was an important issue for the Egyptians during the Ottoman Period, as it had been reported that the number of daily bathers to a modestly sized bathroom was around fifty to sixty users. This was deduced from the number of towels used per day.70

Unfortunately, the surviving hammāms in Cairo are in all in a bad condition. Five of them were either restored during the past decade or still under restoration by the MoA.71 However, even after their restoration, they remain closed. The question is now: how they will be used. According to the MoA inspectors supervising the restoration work, the restored baths will most likely be used as a “ma’zar”, a type of small museum probably dedicated to recounting the hammāms traditions. The reason for this, is that there is still a fear that using water inside a restored building is a threat to its existence72, which implies the reluctance to re-use it as its original function. Fodil and Sibley have a different argument; “However, hammāms are dedicated to using water and were originally conceived and built to cope with varying levels of heat and humidity. The fact is, they cannot survive without water.” As a matter of fact, the restoration of hammāms cannot be successful unless their adaptive re-use is an intrinsic part of the restoration process.73

Regarding the numbers of hammāms recorded in Cairo over the last few centuries. According to El Kerdany, Al-Maqtrī (early 15th Century AD) identified 52 hammāms which increased to 80 during the 18th century. Whilst the scientists of the French Expedition observed 72 baths in the early 19th Century. The Tawfīqī plans “Kitāb tawfīqī” of Ali Pasha Mubarak counted 62 hammāms.74 At the time of writing his hook (1860), Edward William Lane recognised the number of 60 or 70 functioning hammāms. They ranged between male-only baths, female-only baths or both male/female baths with special times being allocated for each sex, the latter type being the most common75. Subsequently, in 1933, Edmond Pauty stated in MIFAQ Vol. 64 on Cairo hammāms 76, that there were around 47 buildings. André Raymond recorded 33 hammāms in use in 1967.77 In 2004, Nicholas Warner documented 17 hammāms within the area of Historic Cairo.78 Two other hammāms were identified by Mimar Group as part of their EC-funded research entitled "Hammam", outside the area studied by Warner. These are known as: Hammām al-Tanbālī and Bāb al-Bāhr, both located in Bāb al-Sharqiy. Four other hammāms in Bāb al-Aziz, al-Muṣa文档参考内容。
that he visited, there were no less than seventy bathers. It is
hammām with vacancy until his fourth attempt, where he was
hammām. The frequency of visiting the bathhouse was a clear indication of how the Egyptians living in the capital during the Middle
ages highly regarded cleanliness and personal hygiene. Al-Makrizi recounts his bathing experience during the Ninth Century
AD. He was visiting the city of al-Fustāt and could not find any hammām with vacancy until his fourth attempt, where he was
ever served by a "novice". He explains that in the first hammām that he visited, there were no less than seventy bathers. It is
obvious that all social classes looked after their personal hygiene, bathing for at least once a week (in the Nile for the poorer
categories), while the higher social class could use the baths twice per week. The distribution of hammāms around the more
elevated Cairoene districts, suggests that they were predominantly used by the Middle class.

The city of Cairo has always been reputed for its relatively large number of well-designed and beautifully decorated Hammāms. They were constructed of different materials such as stone and brick covered in plaster, with some examples where the brick copula in the ceiling of the undressing room is replaced by a large wooden ceiling surrounded by windows and topped by a lantern "shokhsheka". The windowless walls were always far thicker than required, in order to retain the heat. For the same reason, the entrance was always small and narrow (not to mention discreet), yet it was also usually grandly framed, ornamented [mostly with Arabic calligraphy] with stalactites and painted in bright colours, perhaps to allude to the tranquility that could be found within. Hammāms were clearly thought of as places of relaxation and rest in the busy urban chaos of Cairo.

The typical basic structure of an Ottoman public bath consisted of three main sections: an outer section comprising the entrance "madkhal", which is typically discreet and leads to the undressing room "musākhā", which is the most decorated room and normally includes a fountain of cold water or "faskeya" which has an octagonal base as a centrepiece, through a bench corridor. This is where people undress/dress, socialize, rest and enjoy food and drink, as in some cases, it may also contain a stall for coffee for the bathers’ convenience. Each bench is furnished with either a mattress and cushions or a simple mat according to the status of its user. The ceiling contains wooden beams where towels used by bathers were hung to naturally dry. It was designed as a large square room with high wooden ceilings up to ten metres in height. Another narrow and bench corridor leads to the second main space of the hammām, "bāyt al-Harara" or "chamber" for first chamber). This is a small bathroom which acts as a bumpers/transition zone between the cold changing room and the inner hot bathing rooms. "Bayt al-Harara" (hot room), which is the main bathing space consisting of a cross-shaped space organised centrally around the central space saff. This room is normally cruciform with four marble "leewangee" or "leewan" seen on the sides and a hot-water fountain rising from a high octagonal base with white and black marble and pieces of red tiles, in the centre. In other words, it serves as a "central hub" surrounded by the annexing rooms in a cruciform setting.

Hammāms were considered as a kind of "matrimonial market", according to Atassi and Abou Khater, “Hammam in the Mediterranean Region”, 340. People mostly undressed in the "leewan" during the spring or summer months, while they prefer to use an inner closed room, "bayt-awaeel", during the cooler seasons of autumn or winter. In this area, one could also find two or three restrooms/bathrooms. The servant/attendant (normally a young beardless boy), aka the "lawingee" - which is how the contemporary Egyptians use to pronounce the term “leewangee” (or “leewan” keeper) - would then provide the bather with a number of towels (up to five) to be used in the following manner: one to place his clothes inside it, another to wrap around his waist (known as ‘mulgam’), a third to put around his head (like a turban), a fourth over his chest and a fifth around his shoulders to cover his back. After getting undressed and wrapped with towels, the attendant would lead the user to the main “chamber, “bayt al-Harara” (the hot chamber).
The bathing rituals in the hammams of the Mediterranean region are described by Sibley and Jackson as follows: “The bathing ritual in the hammams of the Mediterranean region follows almost the same sequence with slight variations. The body is never entirely exposed to the gaze of other bathers and is traditionally wrapped in a ‘fouta’, a cotton towel. After sweating in the hot room and then having their body scrubbed by a hammām attendant, the bathers wash their body facing the individual stone or marble table under the pierced dome of the hot room.”

Ironically, it was believed that the level of cleanliness was measured by the sound of clapping the hands on the body, the louder the clap the cleaner the body! After finishing the bath, massage was offered, either with or without oil then the latter offered service was called “al-qawqād.”

Concerning the cost of using the public baths, it didn’t seem to be very high. According to the Jewish Geniza, a person was estimated to pay five loaves of bread. According to Lane in 1890, a full treatment at the Hammāms costed around a piaster (this could mount up to four piasters if adding the tips of the bath attendants). It could even cost less for a simple rinse with soap and water.113

As regards to the health benefits of visiting the bathhouses, they were thought to have both physical and psychological advantages for one’s health. A person was supposed to go there to clear his mind as well as to revive his exhausted body by relaxing, getting a massage done and enjoying taking a plunge in the deep hot tub after a long day’s work. An important action was to go to the bathhouse right after catching an illness to sweat it out or after recovering from it (known as “washing of health” or Ghusl al-siHa) to feel that you are completely cured and wash away all traces of the disease.114

Hamamāt also had a good share of contribution to the socio-economic structure of the Egyptian state, as several jobs were provided to the locals. Any public bath offered at least six different types of jobs, e.g., manager “al-maamul or al-maamulāma”, observer “al-natūra or al-natūra”, masseur “al-ballūs or al-ballūna”, hairdresser “al-mihūt or al-mihūna”, rubbish collector “al-qawqād” plus of course some extra personnel as assistants. The previous set of jobs emphasise how the Egyptians seriously considered the body hygiene and personal care.

Once one enters the bath, the “mukeyyis” or the keeper of the bath greets him, then is supposed to hand in his personal belongings for safe keeping. Consequently, he appoints a servant to tend to the user’s needs starting by taking off the shoes and supplying a pair of wooden clogs then leading to the “masdakli”. The user then proceeds to the middle section which includes the plunging pool and the tap room, which are also known as the heated rooms or “furūt al-Harāthah”. Inside the user, starts to sweat as a result of the hot and steamy atmosphere, he is immediately tended by the “mukeyyise” (or the massager) who starts to knead his body and tracks his joints in a specific skilled manner which is both relaxing and medicating to make the joints supple. During the process, he also scrubs the soles of the feet by a special rasp or a stone-like object, known as “Hagar al-Hammām” or (stone of the bath). The next procedure would be rubbing the bather’s body with a coarse woolen bag (known in Arabic as “kkes”). This act is known as “takyes”, hence the name of the “makisayse”.

After this point, the bather can have a dip in the “mabghas” or proceed to the “Haniyeyeh” where he is lathered by a “fekr” (or fibres of the palm tree of Hejaz i.e., Saudi Arabia) containing plenty of soap using water brought in a copper container and warmed in one of the tanks. The soap is then washed off using tap water, and if required, the attendant would shave the bather’s arm-pits and then leaves him to enjoy further washing as he pleases. Later on, the bather covers himself with his towels and moves back to the first chamber to recline on the cushioned mattresses for a while if he wants and enjoys a cup of coffee and smokes the “shisha” (or the water-pipe). He then gets dressed, retrieves his personal belongings and goes out. On the way out, the services offered in the Hammamāt are paid to the keeper of the bath as “al-Salafī” or the Hammam Shaαybā (local bathhouse).

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Modern/Contemporary Culture

In 2019, there is only a handful of surviving hammāms that are still fully operational in Cairo. Two of them are historic and are under the supervision of the Ministry of Antiquities, Bāb al-Bāhr and Manial (Margouš). They are known by the locals as “Hammam Rūdāysh” or “Hammam Shaαybā” (local bathhouse). The structure of the modernly built ones is highly executive of older hammāms. Additionally, the offered services underwent negligible change. The main difference is that it is not visited by the “Middle-Classed” Egyptians as it used to, but mostly by the lower social class or the local communities.

The recent decline of bathhouses could be attributed to several socio-economic reasons, for example: religious beliefs, modesty, hygiene, convenience or financial causes. Moreover, in our modern-day society, public baths are unfortunately linked to negative conceptions like homosexuality or facilitating immoral sexual encounters despite the segregation of both sexes to two different times of the day or to separate buildings.

The different reasons for clients to use versus not use the bathhouses were incorporated in a study published in 2010. Dina Shaeheya investigated together with her team members – as a part of a larger research study - a number of public baths in five countries: Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Syria and Turkey. Two hammām were studied in Cairo: Bāb al-Tanbali and Bāb al-Bāhr. Participatory observation, interviews and questionnaires were all used to complete the survey. The conclusions indicated that there was a clear benefit, whether health, beauty, social or spiritual purposes (celebrations of pre-wedding or childbirth) for the bath users, while the non-users were reluctant to go for many reasons; for example: bad reputation, poor hygiene and mostly lack of privacy (people being shy of showering a bathing experience with strangers). Hence, health hazards, moral judgment, and ignorance of the benefits are three main challenges facing the future of the use of hammāms in Cairo. However, there could be an interest to use the hammām if certain conditions were changed such as: certified cleanliness of water, repair and contemporary upkeep, additional services such as a gym and service of food and beverage, and the option to go through the bathing process in less time. Another important factor that could affect women in particular, is allocating a discreet entrance

113 This service was offered as recommended every forty days.
114 Warner, “Taking the Plunge”, 64.
115 Shelomo Dov Goitein, A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Community of the Arab World as portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, (Berkley, 1984).
116 Warner, Manners and Customs, 341-342.
117 Warner, Manners and Customs, 341-342.
118 Warner, Manners and Customs, 341-342.
119 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
120 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
121 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
122 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
123 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
124 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
125 Warner, Manners and Customs, 337-338.
126 Mohammed Hocine Benkheira, “Hammam, nudité et ordre moral dans l’Islam médiéval (1)”, Revue de l’histoire de religions (en-ligne) 224, no. 3 (July 2019): 314-342. The study is entitled (Hammam – Nudity and Moral Order in Medieval Islam (1)).
127 vii, 224, no. 3 (July 2019): 314-342. The study is entitled (Hammam – Nudity and Moral Order in Medieval Islam (1)).
especially in commercial streets like the case of Bah al-Bahr, for example.

On another note, the middle and higher social classes have found a convenient replacement offered by luxurious health clubs and spas that are available in most high calibre hotels or social sporting clubs. Customers of these establishments receive deluxe body care or skin treatments as well as sumptuous massages. However, these modern services are more inclined to offer body care and beautification therapies on personal basis rather than being a place for social gatherings. On the other hand, it is also worth mentioning that pre-marriage preparations and special celebrations e.g. "filler el-Ḥenna" (male or female) are still enjoyed in groups within these facilities.

Conclusions

Looking after one’s health and personal hygiene is crucial for the sanity of our minds and souls. Egyptians have always been fastidious about their health and cleanliness since the dawn of history. This fact could be traced as far back as the Pharaonic civilisation, through the Graeco-Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Modern and Contemporary eras. The ancient Egyptians considered bathing linked with religious purity, which is also relevant to our contemporary religious beliefs. The Greeks introduced public baths to Egypt and encouraged their use. This practice was promptly welcomed and even favoured by the Egyptians. Bathhouses increased in number steadily over the ages, noting some changes in their structure or heating techniques but they always maintained their function as a social hub for the Egyptians, not only for body care and beautification but also for meeting up with friends. Unfortunately, over the past decades, the use of traditional public baths has suffered a great decline due to several reasons e.g., level of cleanliness, change of religious beliefs or even bad stereotypes. But on the other hand, a new type of establishments evolved to cater for the needs of higher social class, like health clubs or spas which are mostly located in high calibre hotels. However, these modern services are more inclined to offer body care and beautification therapies e.g., massage and skin care rather than being a place for social gatherings. It could be concluded that the hammām provides us with extremely rich material for Egyptian intangible cultural heritage ranging from the traditional wooden slippers worn in the bathhouse to avoid slipping, songs, poems and sayings etc... On a final note, it is rational to extrapolate that traditional hammāms are the nucleus for our contemporary spas and health clubs.

Bibliography:


