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COSMETICS

COSMETICS (Pers. *bazak* “makeup” < Azeri *bäzäk* “ornamentation”; Doerfer, II, p. 291), preparations for personal beautification, in Persian tradition used mainly by women on special occasions. A Persian girl brought up in a traditional home was not allowed to wear most cosmetics, but before her wedding she underwent a long process of preparation, including the application of makeup, usually under the direction of a close relative or a professional bride dresser (*maššāṭa*). Married women generally called upon the services of a *maššāṭa* only for removing facial hair or to help beautify themselves before attending weddings and other special occasions. Because seven different preparations were required for the complete bridal makeup, *bazak* was also known as *haft-qalam* (seven pens), *haft-dar-haft* (seven in seven), or *har-haft* (all seven). The seven items were henna (*ḥanā*), white powder (*safīdāb*), powdered rouge (*sorḵāb*, *ḡāza*), kohl (*sorma* < Turk. *sürmä* “antimony, collyrium”; Doerfer, III, pp. 250-51), woad or indigo (*wasma*), perfume (*ḡālīa*), and gold spangles (*zarak*; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 87-88). Although some of these preparations are still used, they have been largely replaced by modern cosmetics, which were introduced in Persia early in the 20th century.

Once a girl had received a proposal of marriage, she was allowed to wash her hands and face with a special soap made of almond oil and scented with rose water. Two or three days before the wedding a *maššāṭa* initiated the process of making up the bride by removing hair from the forehead, around the eyes, and the cheeks. Traditionally a woman from the groom’s family who was considered fortunate (*safīd-baḵt*) in her marriage removed the first hair from

the girl's forehead (Katīrāʾī, pp. 136-38; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, p. 67). Although some people also removed hair from the upper lip, others preferred to leave it (Moqaddam, pp. 16, 18; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, p. 91) and even to darken it. Hair growing across the bridge of the nose was not removed, as joined eyebrows were considered attractive; hence the phrase *abrū-peyvasta* (having joined eyebrows), referring to a beautiful person. In order to soften the skin and make the hair to be removed more visible, the *maššāṭa* first applied *safīdāb*, also called *safīdāb-e zanān* (women's white powder; Katīrāʾī, p. 142), made from bone ash mixed with animal fat, colocynth, and jasmine oil (Ḥakīm Moʾmen, p. 283). The area beneath the eyebrows was plucked with tweezers, and the brows were shaped in arched (*kamānī*) or crescent (*helālī*) curves with tapering outer ends. Other facial hair, like the hair growing on the arms and legs, could be removed by applying wax, gum, or honeydew (*šahd*; a sweet, sticky substance that forms on some plant leaves) as a depilatory, but most *maššāṭa*s plucked it out by a process known as *band andāḵtan* (applying string). A piece of cotton string was first tightly twisted, then pressed hard against the skin and allowed to unwind, pulling out the hair (cf. Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 67, 91). After the hair was removed, beaten egg white, sometimes with a few drops of rose water and lemon juice added, was rubbed on the face to make the skin shiny and prevent pimples from developing. About half an hour later the face was washed and powdered lightly with *safīdāb*.

Long and luxuriant hair was considered attractive in women, and cutting it was viewed as improper; one of the punishments for prostitutes was to have their hair cut (hence the insulting term *gīsū-borīda* "cut-hair"). Henna, a reddish-brown dye obtained from the leaves of *Lawsonia alba* (*EI*[2], s.v. Ḥinnāʾ), was used to color gray or white hair but also to enhance the natural color; its fragrance was considered pleasant as well (Golpāyagānī). The hair was first washed with soap, gum tragacanth, powdered lotus, ground barilla root (*ošnān*), or fuller's earth (*gel-e saršūʾī*). Next a paste made from henna leaves soaked in water was spread over it; the paste was washed off an hour or so later (cf. Schlimmer, p. 343; Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 92-94). Girls had their hair washed at the public bath and arranged in two or more braids, depending on its luxuriance; the ends were tied with ribbons from which silver or gold coins, colored beads, or tassels were suspended. Two braids were common, though there could be as many as six on each side; *čehel-gīs* "forty braids" was a term applied to women with thick hair. It was considered very attractive for an adult woman to wear a ringlet (*kasma*, *zolf*) in front of each ear; bangs,

known as *ṭorra* or *čatrī* (umbrella-shaped), could also be worn.

On the day before the wedding, at a gathering of women, henna paste was applied (*ḥanābandān*) to the bride's hands and feet. Music was played, and ritual songs (couplets relating to henna) were chanted. Plantain (*bārhang*) or similar large leaves were wound around the hands and feet to cover the paste and then wrapped in triangular cloths (*ḥanāband*). To prevent the bride's feet from touching the ground, they were placed on a small slab of marble (*sang-e ḥanā*). Although drawing floral patterns on the palms and soles was fashionable among women, it was believed that the knots involved might bring bad luck to brides (Kāšān; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, p. 66). The bride was then ceremoniously accompanied to the public bath, where she was washed completely by an attendant. Some superstitious people rubbed a mixture of orpiment, quicklime, ashes (called *nūra*), and water on the bride's back, from the nape to the coccyx, believing that it would "remove the devil's hair" (Schlimmer, p. 187; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, p. 67; Katīrāʾī, pp. 141-42).

On the morning of the wedding the bride's eyebrows were dyed dark blue, usually with a preparation made from woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) or indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) leaves (Bīrūnī, tr., p. 584; cf. Massé, *Croyances*, p. 92). Before a wedding or other special event women would go together to gather the leaves (*wasma-konān*), which were then ground and steeped in water to make a thick dark-blue paste. This paste was applied to the eyebrows with an ivory wand tipped by a small cotton swab. An hour or so afterward they looked darker and more distinct. A beauty spot might also be painted between the eyebrows.

Early in the afternoon the *maššāṭa* parted the bride's hair in the center, then cut and curled the sides in *kasma*s and combed down the bangs. A sticky liquid (e.g., quince seed soaked in hot water) kept both *kasma*s and *ṭorra*s in their proper shape (Šakūrzāda, p. 150). Finally, drops of soaked starch were flicked onto the hair, so that it would look as if it were studded with pearls. An ornament (*tītak* or *tīta*) consisting of two or three fine gold chains with pearls mounted in the middle was set on the bride's forehead. The rest of the hair was worn in braids down the back and sides and sprinkled with gold spangles (*zarak*, *pūlak*). A *gīla*, consisting of a silk-lace band from which small gold or silver wires and artificial flowers were suspended might also be worn; the glittering wires were threaded through the hair. Some *maššāṭa*s braided the hair with colored beads, feathers (usually pink or silver), and even gold coins.

Next kohl was applied to the eyelids to make the eyes look darker and shinier. Kohl was used not only as a cosmetic but also as a medication; mothers put it on their children's eyes in the belief that it would keep the eyes healthy and enhance sight. It was also believed that it would cure cataracts and prevent night blindness and tearing in children ([Pseudo] Ḵayyām, p. 21). In folk tales there are frequent references to people who apply kohl to render themselves invisible or able to see through the earth and locate buried treasure. As a cosmetic kohl was highly recommended (Golpāyagānī), and even young girls were allowed to wear it. It could consist of any of several different substances. One was a kind of powdered iron ore (often misidentified as antimony sulfide; e.g., Ebn Sīnā, tr., II, p. 65; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 88; Doerfer, III, p. 250; cf. Schlimmer, p. 523; *EI*^{2}, s.v. al-Kuḥl); since the 10th century the best quality, known to be helpful in curing certain diseases (Kāšānī), has come from Isfahan (specifically the nearby village of Kūhpāya; Schlimmer, p. 523; cf. Eṣṭaḵrī, p. 203; Ṯaʿālebī, p. 181) and Mecca. Eyelids could also be blackened with soot obtained from burning animal fat or nuts like almonds and pistachios. Some women soaked fine woolen wicks in butter and then burned them to obtain soot; others used goat fat or bone marrow from cattle. The nuts or fats were burned in a lamp with a plate held over the flame, so that the soot would collect on it. Powdered silk added to kohl enhanced its quality (Ebn Sīnā, tr., II, p. 79). Kohl was carried in a small bag, the *sormadān* (kohl container), which was made of velvet, wool, or fine leather and decorated with braid and lace. A ball of cotton soaked in animal fat was kept in the *sormadān*; the slight greasiness imparted to the kohl powder lightened its color slightly and made it last longer on the face. Kohl was applied to the eyes with a thin applicator of bone or, preferably, gazelle horn, with one broad end. This wand was first dipped briefly in rose water so that the powder would adhere to it more readily (Katīrāʾī, p. 329). To perfume her body the bride might stand beside a charcoal brazier in which frankincense, green myrtle, and wild rue seeds were being roasted; attar of roses or rose water was also used. Marshmallow flowers and leaves were boiled in water and the cooled liquid rubbed on the breasts and body to soften the skin.

Just before the bride made her appearance a fresh coat of *safīdāb* was applied to her face, and the cheeks, lips, and sometimes the whole face were reddened with *sorḵāb* (also called *ḡāza* or *golgūna*). *Sorḵāb* originally consisted of powdered red marble (*lāk-e roḵām*; Ḥakīm Moʾmen, p. 233), and it was recommended that only a light coating be worn. Two spangles in the shape of a star and a crescent were set in the middle of the forehead and others pasted

on the cheeks. Finally, a beauty spot (*ḵāl*, *kajak*) was painted at one corner of the mouth or on the cheek with *ḡālīa*, an expensive mixture of musk, oil of myrobalan (*ban*), black wax, and ambergris also used as a medicine. Yellow *ḡālīa*, used as a cosmetic for brides, also contained saffron (Kāšānī, pp. 230, 288).

The bride carried her cosmetics, jewelry, and mirror in a small wooden box called a *mejrī*, secured by hasp and lock. The box was normally covered with red velvet and decorated with filigree work and pearls. Wealthier women could afford more valuable fretted boxes. After the bridal dinner the bride washed her mouth and chewed a mixture of ground betel nut (*fūfal*) and clove wrapped in the leaf of a sour orange.

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