



AMAZIGH ARTS in MOROCCO

Women Shaping Berber Identity

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Although older Ait Khabbash men and women find it morally and socially inappropriate, *hiwawi* is the most popular form of *ahidous* performed at weddings today. It is common to see lines of twenty or more young men performing with an equally large number of young women. The songs, rhythms, and playing styles of *hiwawi* are constantly changing and evolving, giving this hybrid performance style a dynamic quality. *Hiwawi* songs not only contain fewer poetic metaphors but are often improvised by the performers.

Thus *ahidous* performances are yet another example of how Ait Khabbash forms of artistic expression are changing to fit current realities. Young men and women are beginning to object to the social and religious restrictions that prohibit contact between unrelated men and women and to the arranged marriages that result. *Hiwawi* performances allow them to express their frustrations publicly in a way that they could not in everyday conversations with their elders.⁸

Yet regardless of recent changes in *ahidous* performances, they remain a central aesthetic expression of Ait Khabbash identity, continuing to stand as an important symbolic enactment of what it means to be Ait Khabbash. The songs, the style of dress, and even the dance steps demonstrate not only acceptance of gender roles but the integral association of female fertility, art, and ethnic identity within Ait Khabbash society. They provide yet another means for women to negotiate the complex social and religious issues influencing their society. Despite the recent transformations in *ahidous* performance styles, in Ait Khabbash weddings women's decorated bodies continue to serve as public symbols of identity and the propagation of the group into the future. This centrality to their ongoing survival as a people is perhaps best seen in the adornment of the bride in Ait Khabbash weddings, which, as the following chapter shows, has barely changed since the transition of the Ait Khabbash from a nomadic to sedentary existence in the 1950s and 1960s.

Women as Public Symbols of Identity

THE ADORNMENT OF THE BRIDE AND GROOM

Ait Khabbash women celebrate weddings with a fervor that matches the scorching heat of the summer wedding season. They spend hours sitting with the bride in a tent constructed specifically for the occasion and for three days chant songs, beat drums, and dance, re-creating the marriage ceremony passed down from their Amazigh ancestors. The control that Ait Khabbash women exercise over weddings is another way in which they preserve the cultural distinctiveness of their group despite other societal influences that have changed their daily lives. As discussed in previous chapters, the carpets, tents, and dress styles of the Ait Khabbash that previously reinforced ethnic identity in southeastern Morocco have given way during the last few decades to the influence of the workplace, schools, and the mosque, which now shape people's style of dress and other forms of aesthetic expression more than do their ethnic affiliations.

In Ait Khabbash weddings, however, the communal celebration and adornment of the bride and the groom have barely changed over time. During these weddings, Ait Khabbash women unfold a now infrequently used nomadic tent made by earlier women to serve as a temporary home for the bride. They carefully dress the bride in the red scarf, white clothing, wool belt, and silver jewelry that their ancestors wore on a daily basis, and they chant the songs of their mothers and grandmothers while henna is applied to the bride's hands and feet and sing for the groom as he is dressed in a similar red scarf and white clothing. While life continues to evolve for the Ait Khabbash, weddings allow them to express their distinctiveness and maintain their sense of ethnic identity.

This chapter describes the process of dressing the bride and groom as well as other activities in preparation for the three-day wedding ceremony to demon-

state once again that women, rather than men, are responsible for maintaining the artistic symbols of Ait Khabbash Berber ethnic identity and to explore the implications of this. It argues not only that women manage weddings but that the bride's decorated body serves as the public symbol of what it means to be Ait Khabbash, confounding the public/private dichotomy used by many scholars to describe gender roles in North Africa and elsewhere.

Both the bride and the groom are dressed in specialized ceremonies in their separate homes to mark their change in status. Most scholars describe the Moroccan bride as silently secluded in a private space, passively allowing herself to be dressed by other women, while the groom plays an active public role.¹ During wedding preparations, the Ait Khabbash Berber bride is dressed in public and sits on public display while the groom is dressed under the cover of a white cloth and then restricted to a small tent or house located on the periphery of the wedding celebration, limiting his public participation. Yet this association of women with the public realm does not mean that women hold a powerful position in Ait Khabbash society. Rather, the place constructed for women due to their association with the public expression of ethnic identity can be stifling, restricting women to idealized gender roles and limiting their life options.² This chapter demonstrates that the adornment of the bride is based on an engendered aesthetic that draws from ideas of containment and fertility.³

Constructing the Bridal Tent

Ait Khabbash women control ceremonial life, actively creating most of the art forms used at weddings, while men play a largely peripheral role. Women are also instrumental in arranging marriages, searching for brides for their sons.⁴ Typically an unmarried man's mother, older sisters, and aunts actively ask their friends and family to recommend eligible girls. In the past, marriages were commonly arranged by women without the bride and groom's consent. Today the prospective bride and groom typically meet in a gathering arranged by their mothers and agree or do not agree to the proposed marriage. Once the choice is fixed, the mother of the groom visits the bride's family with gifts of tea, henna, and meat, and a date is set for the marriage.

The wedding itself is also the affair of women. Often the number of women present is more than triple the number of men, and (as we shall see) the men who do participate take on some of the roles typically associated with women in daily life. In order to prepare for the actual three-day wedding, the groom

chooses three men (called *isnain*) to take over a customary responsibility of women by setting up the bride's tent a short distance from the groom's home before leaving to fetch the bride for the wedding. Almost all the events of the three-day wedding ceremony take place in and around the large bridal tent (see Fig. 3.1). The tent serves as an important symbol of Ait Khabbash history and ethnic identity.⁵ When the bride arrives at the groom's home, she and her female family members spend the entire three-day wedding ceremony in the tent, in contrast to Arab weddings in the Tafilalet oasis, which are held almost entirely indoors.

Although the women in the groom's family do not construct the tent, they sing songs to accompany the work of the three *isnain*, who are close friends and/or relatives of the groom. Although Ait Khabbash men are typically not in contact with unmarried or unrelated women, the *isnain* are trusted with the mission of traveling with the bride from her father's to the groom's house or tent.

The word *isnain* comes from the Timaazight verb *nei*, which means "to mount"; in the past the *isnain* would mount camels, horses, or mules and travel several days until they reached the bride's family tent. Today the groom's family typically rents a van complete with a driver who will drive the *isnain* to the bride's home. Before leaving to carry the bride to her soon-to-be husband's house, they are dressed in white *tajellabiys* and white turbans, clothing that marks the importance of their mission and associates them with purity and goodness. Reflecting their nomadic roots, men who perform the task of the *isnain* are expected to be trustworthy, honorable, and capable of the physical hardship of traveling great distances. They wear kohl or antimony on their eyes, a form of makeup otherwise worn by women to protect their eyes from the glare of the sun while traveling across the landscape and to denote their ceremonial status.

The *isnain* are responsible for packing and loading the bride on a mule or camel, much as women would load and unload a nomadic tent as they moved from place to place. Prussin (1995: 188), in her discussion of the African nomadic aesthetic, argues that the action of disassembling and loading a nomadic tent results in the inversion of space. In other words, the nomadic tent is literally turned inside out when it is loaded onto a pack animal; and, when it is reassembled, it is transformed back into a volumetric structure. This inversion of space, Prussin (1995: 18) states, is a feature of African nomadic marriage ceremonies, where nomadic tents can be turned inside out or ridgepoles may be planted upside down for the duration of the wedding. I interpret the con-

struction of the bridal tent by Ait Khabbash men and the role that men play in transporting the bride to the groom's camp or home as representing an inversion of norms that fits Prussin's description of African nomadic weddings. In this case, gender roles are reversed, and this role reversal is acknowledged by Ait Khabbash women through song.

Women's call-and-response songs are performed in Tamazight and accompany almost all events at a wedding.⁶ These songs (called *izʿlan*) are especially rich in visual imagery and use visual metaphors to express the cultural values and beliefs of the Ait Khabbash. These songs are performed sitting down and may continue for an hour or more; they are always performed in public and announce to the community that a wedding is taking place. In unison, one group sings a single line of a song (called *izʿli*) that is repeated several times before the group moves to the next line of the song. Since the *izʿlan* performed during weddings are never improvised, the ability to sing them requires a certain amount of cultural knowledge and considerable memorization of numerous lines of each song. Thus older women, who are more familiar with the *izʿlan*, lead the song and are answered by the younger women. Particular songs are associated with specific events, and each song involves visual images that pertain to the particular event. For example, while the *ismain* are constructing the bride's tent, the women sing the following song:

1. *An-ẓẓur Rebhi i ẓwur-ay.*
2. *An āeqqed i wexyam ugusin.*
3. *Ad ur d-yawiy yid agusif.*
4. *Tay-ay tasa-nnek a yibrurey.*
5. *Amm uxiam igan tirran.*
6. *A yma-new da-kes-s-ay ulli.*
7. *Is n uzal ak-em iɣwan.*
8. *Annayy amedlu yay s-iyir.*
9. *Annayy-k a leâlam ik-d asif.*
10. *Ad wrey ayejdin ad-d gulun.*
11. *Arraw n ugellid a lbaca.*
12. *Ad awen-n-hdu iğɣiwin.*

- [1. With God's help we start.
2. We pound the stakes for the tent.
3. We hope the night does not bring rain.
4. Our liver is worried about you, hail.

5. Hey you, whose tent is full of holes.
6. Oh my brother, I take sheep to graze.
7. Taking a nap during the day is what you like.
8. I see fog moving toward the mountain.
9. I see the sign coming by the river.
10. I sit down to wait for them to arrive.
11. People of the king and the pasha.
12. We offer beautiful young girls to you.]

Women reported to me that this song allowed them to tease the *ismain*. When they sing "We pound the stakes for the tent," they are actually referring to the men doing a woman's job; later in the song, they further mock the men by referring to them as lazy. The teasing continues in lines 6 and 7, when women sing about taking the sheep to graze while their male relatives are sleeping, a public recognition of the importance of women's labor to the group, suggesting that men do little work. Line 8, "I see fog moving toward the mountain," refers to the arrival of the *ismain* and the bride, whose white clothing is symbolized by the fog at the "mountain," the groom's home. It is unusual for unrelated men and women to travel together, representing another inversion of social norms. In addition, women express their desire for good weather by hoping that rain does not come and spoil the event and the worry of their livers, believed to be the seat of sentiment, that hail may come.

The physical differences between the bride's tent and the tents formerly used in daily life reflect its ceremonial significance. The bride's tent is much taller than the nomadic tent (shown in Fig. 4.1) and typically takes a square or rectangular shape with a flat roof, distinguishing it from the nomadic tent's sloping roof. One of the wedding tent's sides (the front) remains open during the wedding festivities, so that the wedding spectators can view the bride and her family (Fig. 3.1).

Women's Work and Weddings

Although women are relieved from physically constructing the bridal tent, their labor is crucial to the wedding's success. Women work together to perform the practical aspects of weddings, further illustrating the concept of *adual*, "cooperation." Despite the work involved in the marriage of a friend or relative, women generally love to attend weddings, which relieve them from



Figure 4.1. An Ait Khabbash nomadic tent near Erfoud, 2004.

the drudgery of everyday housework. As Fatima, an Ait Khabbash woman in Rissani, explained,

Weddings mean I don't have to sweep every morning; I don't have to make lunch; I don't have to make bread for at least four days. But if one of your relatives or close friends has a wedding, this means work. Everyone has to help. But this work can be fun. There are many people to talk with, and you see relatives that you never see.

Women from the groom's family share the tasks of cooking, cleaning, and baking for the wedding participants and guests, gathering together in the open air near the bride or groom's home to spend numerous hours on wedding preparations. The women may spend several days grinding wheat into flour to make vast quantities of couscous by hand. (Although families living near a miller often have their wheat ground for them, hand grinding is still common in remote areas of southeastern Morocco.) They may also distribute flour to other households in the area, asking neighboring women to bake ten or more loaves of bread each day of the wedding to relieve them of some of their chores. These loaves are intended for the numerous wedding guests.

Using stone hand mills, Ait Khabbash women grind grain to make flour. They begin in the afternoon and may continue through the night and into the morning. The act of grinding enough grain to support the entire wedding

party can take more than twelve hours and requires considerable communal effort. The groom's family may borrow ten or more hand mills; and as many as five women may sit around each hand mill, helping each other turn the handle so the grain can be ground. If five women work together, one woman pours grain through a hole in the top of the grinder, two women turn the handle 180 degrees, and the other two complete the rotation.

Once the grinding has begun and the women achieve a steady work rhythm, they sing communal songs to pass the time. Publicly announcing the upcoming wedding, the women sing the following song:

1. *Nezzur Rebbi i žwur-ay.*
2. *Ah-imt a tiwetmin idda yini s ofella.*
3. *Ah-imt a tiwetmin iṣ ayed isayin lair.*
4. *Tinṣadin yat tuhel yat tṣqen idhkan n uskmud.*
5. *Timṣadin yat tuhel yat tsellem g yicṣfan i teddu.*
6. *Aymanu gant-ak awnul awi d tinṣayin yuf-ak.*
7. *Yiweyi wṣwu ticiin.*
8. *Arim-d ddehn ara rrihan.*
9. *An-kkes i wedlal anayur.*
10. *Iberkuke an-qqed agerd iny i.*
11. *A lal n uṣreg ara-d tiyni.*
12. *Talbabat ur-id icuccan.*
13. *Yummer-i bab n yinden yummer i.*
14. *Yummer-i ad key udi s-uāmur.*
15. *Lluṣ iāta žur-neṣ i gīy-t-id i krad ilayman.*
16. *Sey-i žžēṣfran meqqar iyla g inkitta meya.*
17. *Zreā imarin a bu tjuja i kin i luḍa.*
18. *Asra g iḥtal umeksa makw-n iggaren a yikerwan?*
19. *Iḥidj wenna-t inewan abrid n lxir ayennay.*
20. *Aṣṣel-d a targwa n waman aṣṣel-d a targwa n uyyu.*
21. *I k-as yat tselhamt i k-as iyyis i wsbahiy.*
22. *I k-as yat tegṣimt iffeyn akal.*
23. *Zwarn-id iṣamarn ulli gan tawenṣa ddan s-aman.*
24. *Ad iṣāawen yay-id afus.*
25. *Seg dadey s-imal i niy-d iyyis yagg-en žar-i yeyr-i.*
26. *Yyer-i ima s-yan umehdar.*
27. *Uggīy-d akṣey axam n ima.*
28. *Uggīy d akṣey axam s-ikdiṣ.*

29. *Uggiy-d akzey axam s-tyyis.*
30. *A yiqer bulla n tegmarin n uqayar.*
31. *A yiḥelbab n tiyḍin yiwey wasif.*
32. *Rar-imt-id irir-inew a tibeshasin.*
33. *Rar-imt-id irir-inew a tibehbahin.*
34. *Muhammad Mulay Ali ili-d yur-i.*
35. *Muhammad Mulay Ali awa ster yuf-i.*

- [1. We start with the help of God.
2. Come on, women, the morning twilight is rising.
3. Come on, women, it's shameful to be sleepy.
4. Grinders, one is tired, the other is putting on shoes of old, hairless goat skin.
5. Grinders, one is tired, the other forfeited saffron and left.
6. Oh my brother, they did not do a good job for you, it is better if you bring *tirggiyin*.⁷
7. The wind took my *tiacin* (platter made of palm leaves).
8. Bring us oil and bring perfumed herbs.
9. To clean the dust from our hair.
10. Soup to soothe our throats.
11. Oh owner of the grinder, bring us dates.
12. Soft dates, not dry ones.
13. The owner of the wheat allowed me.
14. He allowed me large quantities of *udi* (fermented butter).
15. We have so many almonds that we carried them on three camels.
16. Buy me saffron, even if it's expensive and costs more than 100 rials (a form of currency).
17. Sow piles of grain, owner of two work animals, and give them to the vast field.
18. When the shepherd comes back, who will separate you lambs?
19. The one who thinks about taking the pilgrimage, that's a good thing.
20. Flow, canal of water; flow, canal of milk.
21. God gave the cavalier a wool cape and a horse.
22. And gave him a young, beautiful girl who just left the ground (grew up).
23. The line of rams arrived at the water before the ewe and looked like bangs.

24. God help me and give me a hand.
25. Next year he will visit and invite me.
26. My brother will invite me to the birth of his new baby.
27. I went and I recognized my brother's tent.
28. I went and I recognized the tent with the carpet.
29. I went and I recognized the tent with the horse.
30. Oh, you are like horses' hooves from Azayyar (a region famous for horses).
31. Oh, you are like a pack of female dogs taken by the river.
32. Answer my song, hoarse women.
33. Answer my song, women with laryngitis.
34. Muhammad, Mulay Ali, come to me.
35. Muhammad, Mulay Ali, give me your blessing.]

Visual images in these *izlan* reveal Ait Khabbash conceptions of identity and gender, most obviously in the metaphoric references to fertility. Women told me that fermented butter (line 14), almonds (line 15), grain (line 17), canals of water and milk (line 20), a wool cape (line 21), and the line of rams that looked like bangs (line 23) were all metaphors for the fertility of the land and the reproductive potential of the married couple and were also specific references to items associated with women. In lines 25–26, women sing about their brother inviting them to celebrate the birth of his new child, referring to the groom. In lines 27–29, the horse and carpet near the groom's tent predict a successful marriage and prosperous future. Horses are animals of great prestige throughout Morocco, but they are especially valuable in southeastern Morocco, where Saharan climatic conditions make it difficult and impractical to own one. Reinforcing the Ait Khabbash's dependence on women's labor, the mention of carpets and a wool cape (prestige items created by women) self-values the importance of women's economic contribution to Ait Khabbash society.

As discussed by the Moroccan scholar Fatima Mernissi (1989: 5), most Moroccan women see themselves as participating actively in the economic life of the family, and Ait Khabbash women are no exception. While Ait Khabbash nomadic men herded the livestock, women milked the animals when they returned to the tent at the end of the day. In line 18 women ask, "When the shepherd comes back, who will separate you lambs?"; this suggests that the groom is the wealthy owner of a large number of livestock. That phrase also refers to nomadic women's separating of lambs from their mothers so the ewes can be milked, once again praising women's work, enhancing their position

in the community. The women sing that their efforts at grinding grain should be rewarded, asking the groom to bring them saffron, which is very expensive and used by women to paint designs on their faces, and *rrihan*, a perfumed herb applied to the hair. Line 10, "Soup to soothe our throats," refers to the soup that Ait Khabbash typically consume for breakfast and thus suggests that the women have worked throughout the night into the morning.

As demonstrated in this song, Ait Khabbash women are proud of their abilities to support their families economically. This song is a public self-recognition of their social and physical strength, reinforcing Fatima Mernissi's claims that Moroccan women do not fit into what she calls the "pervasive male discourse" propagated by the Moroccan media and public policies based on the idea that men economically support women. Rather, Mernissi (1989: 5) suggests, Moroccan women see themselves "as a race of giants doing daily battle," caring for themselves and their families. The Ait Khabbash wedding songs demonstrate that these women, too, do not view themselves as economically dependent on men but recognize that their labor is essential to the financial well-being of their families. The strong ties of women to each other also provide them with powerful supportive relationships that benefit themselves, their children, and the entire society.

Dressing the Bride

As the women from the groom's family continue to prepare for the wedding, the *isnain* travel to the bride's house, carrying gifts from the groom. An Ait Khabbash man is expected to buy his bride the jewelry and clothing that she will wear as a married woman, which she returns to her husband if divorce occurs. This is in sharp contrast to Arabs in the region: an Arab bride's family provides her with a dowry that includes gold jewelry, a bedroom set, tables, sofas, and cooking utensils that she keeps in the event of a divorce. Fatouh, an Ait Khabbash friend from Mezguida, explained what she believed to be one of the key differences between Arab and Berber marriage practices:

At our weddings, the groom buys the bride her jewelry and she wears it after the wedding. He also buys her clothes, and today he even buys a bed and armoire for their bedroom. We are not like the Filala [Arabs from the Tafilalet oasis], where the bride's father buys her a bed, armoire, dishes, and much gold jewelry. He buys her everything and she takes it to her husband's house. If she does not bring a lot of things, her mother-in-law will

make trouble for her. It's terrible. This is why Filala and Ait Khabbash rarely marry. We refuse to buy our daughters all these things because it's not our way. Filala hate to have daughters because they are expensive. Our way is much better. We do not have to pay men to marry us.

When the *isnain* arrive, women friends and relatives of the bride greet them by performing songs in their honor. After their arrival, the *isnain* would have remained seated on their horses, but today they sit on top of the van they have driven as they wait for the women to begin singing. The *isnain* then lower the bride's gifts one by one, as they hear each item referenced in the women's song. As the gifts are lowered, they are placed on a tray carried on a woman's head (Fig. 4-2) while the women sing:

1. *Bismi neẓẓur-k a Rebhi.*
2. *Neẓẓur-k t-ẓwur-m i lhanur.*
3. *Muhammiad, Mulay Ali.*
4. *Ad iẓwur iq-ay amicksa.*
5. *Awī-d a sidi Rebhi lxir.*
6. *Ad-d-ig am ugustif ẓar i.*
7. *A yisnain d-iẓwaren ulli.*
8. *Hag-g-iwt an-ẓẓeg akwn sili.*
9. *Neẓẓeg yan idiri isul yan.*
10. *Mrahba s-wudmawen n-yelli.*
11. *Ariw-d ikebran melluhin.*
12. *Ariw-d iẓbian d-tiserynas.*
13. *Ariw-d iheẓẓuma n lehrir.*
14. *Ariw-d sebbat n ufasty.*
15. *Ariw-d lluban n ufasty.*
16. *Ariw-d aydda diy kullu.*
17. *Akwn iâeẓza Mulana.*
18. *Ariw-d aserdun ariw-d ikdif.*
19. *Akwn iâeẓza Mulana.*

- [1. We start with the name of God.
2. God guide us and help with our things.
3. Muhammad, Mulay Ali.
4. God leads us and is our guardian.
5. Oh God, bring blessings
6. To me like a downpour.

7. Oh *isnain* who came before the sheep returned,
8. Wait until we milk so we can be free for you.
9. We milked half and still have half to milk.
10. Welcome to the faces who came for my daughter.
11. Give us white *ihruyn* (draped garments).
12. Give us bracelets and fibulae.
13. Give us belts of silk.
14. Give us shoes of Fez.⁸
15. Give us amber of Fez.
16. Give us everything else.
17. May God give you glory and power.
18. Give us the mule and carpet.
19. God gives you glory and power.]

Like many women's songs, after first calling upon God, this song begins by affirming the importance of women's labor. Lines 7–10 refer to flocks of sheep and their abundance of milk, symbols of fertility that suggest the bride's

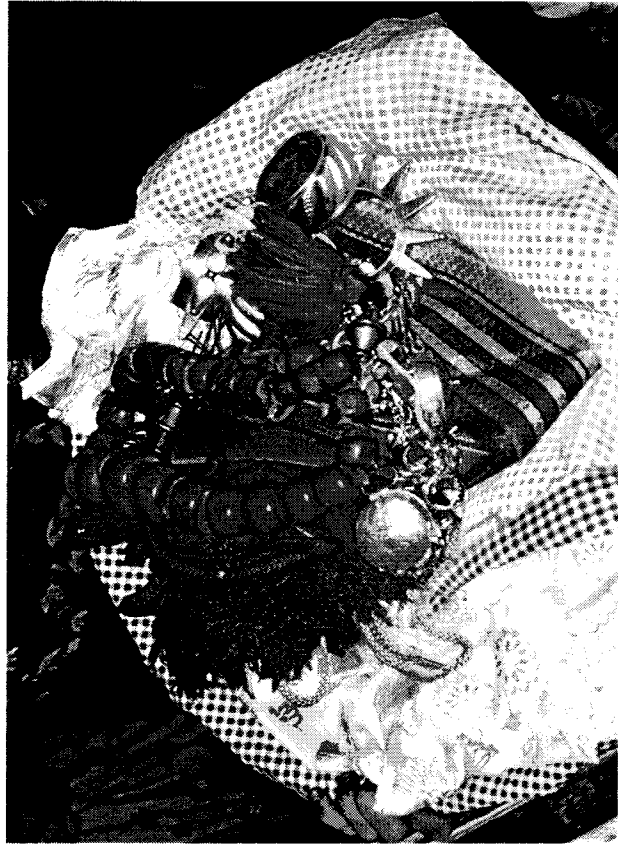


Figure 4.2. The bride's fibulae, silver bracelets, amber necklace, red headress, and tassels are placed on a platter and presented to the bride by the groom's representatives, 1999. Photo by Adli Gualderrou.

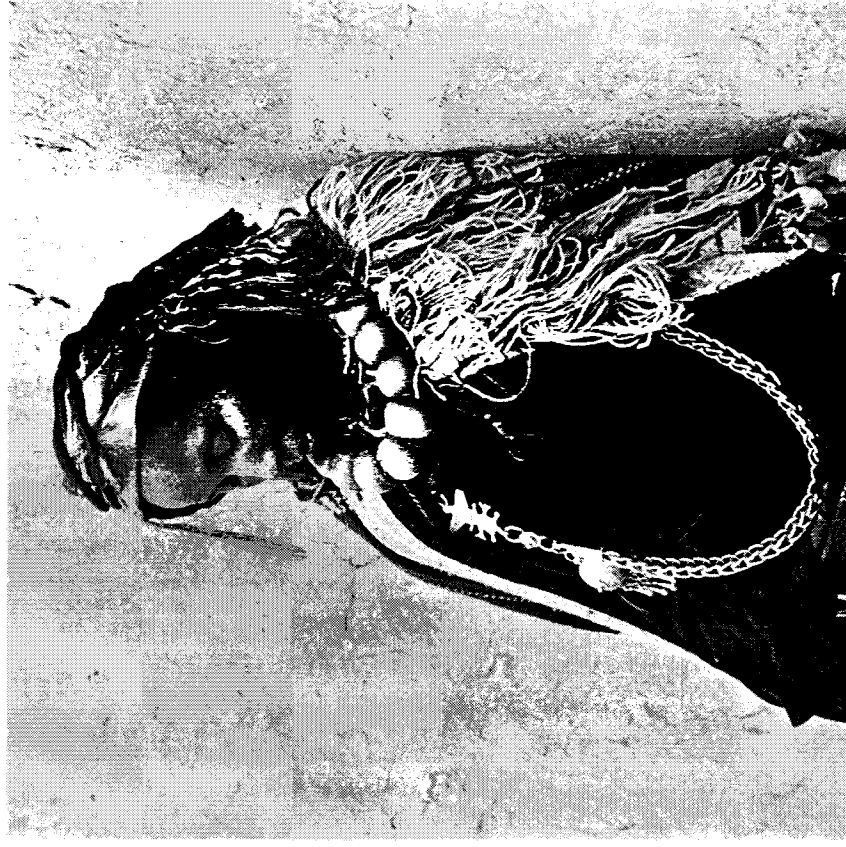


Figure 4.3. This colonial photograph of an Ait Khabbash woman depicts the style of dress commonly worn in the past. Photo by Jean Besancenot, 1934–1939. Image courtesy of the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.

family is wealthy. Lines 11–16 and 18 refer to the gifts that the groom has sent for the bride. In line 12, women ask the *isnain* to give them *izhian*, the heavy, thick silver bracelets worn by married women, and *tiseynas* or fibulae, large silver pins with a thick silver chain draped between them, such as those worn by the woman in Figure 4.3. The belts referred to in line 13 are long, thin belts made of red silk fabric imported from the city of Fez (and slightly visible in Fig. 4.3).⁹ Although this belt is given as a gift to the bride, during the wedding ceremony she actually wears a wool belt made by her mother. Wool is linked to fertility, symbolizing that the bride will soon become a mother herself.

The *isnain* typically bring a red carpet to the bride's home that is then taken with her to her husband's home. The color red suggests virginal blood, men-

circumcision, and childbirth. The carpets used during the Ait Khabbash wedding ceremony were typically made by Ait Khabbash women but today are sometimes purchased in the local market. The bride sits on this red wool carpet both at her home and when she arrives at the bridal tent. In the past, when traveling across the desert for days, the bride would sleep on this carpet. After the *isnain* have lowered the gifts, the bride sits down on this carpet, covers her entire upper body with a cloth, and wears one of her new silver bracelets, marking her entrance into a liminal or in-between state and signaling her transition from virginal girl to married woman. From this point, the bride does not show her face to anyone but her husband and the woman who dresses her every morning until the wedding ceremony is complete, four days later. The clothing given to the bride by her husband is hung on a string behind the bride along with the clothing from her family, giving her relatives and the entire community a chance to evaluate their wealth.

Later in the evening the bride is dressed at her family's home in a ceremony called *asqimu*. The dressing of the bride is so crucial to the wedding ceremony that a special term is used for the one woman who carries out this ritualized duty: *tamaccat*, meaning "the woman who brushes," a fitting name since one of the primary responsibilities of the *tamaccat* is to brush and style the typically long hair of the bride. The *tamaccat* must be a married woman with grown children who has never been divorced. Typically a relative or close friend of the bride's family, she is never paid for her services but rather considers it an honor and a privilege to perform the services of *tamaccat*, because it suggests that she is recognized as having extensive cultural knowledge.

The bride is dressed outside and in public, and the public nature of this role in the wedding can also increase the anxiety of young brides. Expected to be virgins, they are nervous about their first sexual encounter and the prospect of leaving their families for an uncertain future with their new husbands. To help the bride during this time, she is given emotional support by her female elders, who share their cultural knowledge and life experience. Once the young girl is dressed in her bridal clothing, the elder women circle her and collectively perform a solemn song in Tamazight. No musical instruments, clapping of the hands, or dancing accompany this song. The women sit motionless while singing, reflecting the seriousness of the occasion. The song begins with the *tamaccat* removing the previous covering that the bride has worn since the arrival of the *isnain*, instead covering only her face with a small cloth and allowing her hair to hang down her back (Fig. 4-4).



Figure 4-4. A bride's hair is braided before her headress is applied, 1997.

The song begins by praising God and refers to the bride as the Prophet's daughter:

*Yelli zzurey zar-m Rebbi.
Yellis n nmabi a yelli.*

[My daughter, God be with you.
Daughter of the Prophet, hey, my daughter.]

Young unmarried girls hearing this song gather some distance away from the bridal tent, distancing themselves from the bride physically as well as psychologically. One young Ait Khabbash girl explained that hearing this song often makes her feel nervous and sad,¹⁰ since it makes her think about when she too must be married and leave her family. She, like other girls, equates the song with marriage and sex, a sensitive topic for a virginal girl, and this embarrasses her in front of her female relatives. Instead young girls remove themselves from the somberness of dressing the bride to engage in a celebration based on the sheer enjoyment of being relieved of the drudgery of everyday housework, passing their time singing and dancing with scarves around their hips



Figure 4.5. An Ait Khabbash bride has a perfumed herb called *rrihan* brushed through her hair, 2000.

to the rhythms created by other girls on the *allun* (frame drum), enhanced by rhythmically hitting tea glasses on a metal tray or clapping their hands.

Meanwhile, in the bridal tent the *tamaccat* brushes a perfumed herb called *rrihan* through the bride's hair (Fig. 4.5). Great importance is attached to the styling of the bride's hair. Women told me that the thickness and the length of the bride's hair are seen as a direct reflection of her fertility. Women comment

on this during a wedding, because they believe that the more abundant her hair, the more children the couple will have. It is also believed that the very brush used to style the bride's hair absorbs the essence of her reproductive power; if a woman sees the brush used to style her hair during her wedding, it can induce pregnancy. Thus brides who do not want to get pregnant immediately after their marriages, possibly fearing divorce, ask their mothers to hide their brush until they are ready to start having children, giving them a sense of control over their reproductive abilities.¹¹

After *rrihan* is applied to the bride's hair, the bowl containing the mixture is passed around the room so that female guests may put a small smudge under their noses and continue to smell the herb throughout the wedding ceremony. Scents are yet another important aspect of the Ait Khabbash aesthetic system. To the Ait Khabbash, pleasant-smelling substances appease not only humans but also the spirit world, pacifying the *jinoun* and protecting people from their disfavor and harm.¹²

After the bride's hair is brushed and tied into two braids, the women's song continues:

Les-imt ikebran melluhin.

Ger s-uderhal ay lehrir.

K-imt-as i liqur ayenna trit.

[Wear white *ihrayn* (draped garments).

Throw old clothes away and put on silk.

Choose the clothes that you want.]

The women's instructions to the bride to throw away her old clothes refer to her changing status from unmarried virgin to married woman. During this part of the ceremony, the bride stands as the *ahray* (the draped garment discussed in Chapter Three) is wrapped around her body, its white color symbolizing purity and blessings. The bride literally throws away her old clothing, which in most cases, I observed, consisted of old skirts and faded t-shirts. Their mothers essentially treat teenaged girls as wives-in-training, requiring them to do most of the housework and cooking and making it impractical for them to wear nice new clothes. To dress an unmarried girl nicely might signal to the community that she is frivolous, possibly even promiscuous, and unpriored to take on arduous household chores typical of Ait Khabbash women. Over the back and sometimes front of the white *ahray*, a red cloth with yellow vertical and horizontal stripes (called *tamaccayit*) and a thin, sheer black cloth



Figure 4.6. A bride's headdress in Merqouga is sewn over her head, 1997.

(called *tawkayt*) are placed (Fig. 4.6). Both the *tamxezqiyyt* and the *tawkayt* are reminiscent of the *tabarda*, meaning "saddle," a cloth that Berber women commonly wore attached to their shoulders and draped over their upper backs (Fig. 4.7). Although *tabarda* are rarely seen today, all Ait Khabbash women once wore embroidered *tabarda* to protect their daily clothing from staining by henna and other herbs commonly worn in their hair.

The bride is now dressed in clothing that marks her new role as a wife and her entry into the groom's family, which the song now praises:

*Nka-kem i widda kem-ilan.
Arrow n igeldan ak-em ilan.*

[We gave you to those to whom you belong.
You belong to the sons of the rulers.]

The phrase "sons of the rulers" in the second line refers to the groom, suggesting that he comes from a prestigious family.

The next several lines of song describe the following steps in the bride's adornment by the *tamaccat* and may be repeated several times until the particular action that they are singing about is completed. The first of these lines is sung as the *tamaccat* covers the bride's head with a headdress called *aâbroq*:

*Yuley ukenbuc iyef iṭil.
[Aâbroq tops the head and looks nice.]*

After a rectangular thin pad (*igorran*) is tied to the top of her head, the bride's head is covered with a rectangular red silk cloth with yellow stripes called *tuschniyt n uâbroq* (Fig. 4.6),¹³ which the *tamaccat* secures by sewing its sides shut. The fabric over the bride's eyes is then rubbed with water to allow her to see through the cloth. Once the basic shape of the headdress has been created, the *tamaccat* covers it with additional tassels and jewelry. First she ties a small band embroidered with sequins (called *tacheddat n muzun*) around the head, simulating bangs. This is the preferred hairstyle of Ait Khabbash women because of its association with female fertility, as discussed earlier.

Then the *tamaccat* wraps a *taboqest* (a green cord with thick tassels on its end) around the top of the *aâbroq*, creating hornlike projections at the top of the headdress (Fig. 4.8).¹⁴ She tops the *aâbroq* with a silver chain and pendant called *isensirn* (the plural of the word *asenser*, meaning "chain": the *isensirn* consists of a series of pendants connected by chains). This headdress is removed at the end of the wedding ceremony; in the past, however, the woman would have worn a red scarf, tassels, and *isensirn* on a daily basis, marking her marital status (Fig. 4.3). While the origin of this headdress is unknown, it is interesting to note that colonial-era photographs of Jewish women from the 1930s show them wearing similar headdresses with hornlike projections (Fig. 4.9).

The bride wears this headdress over her face during the entire three-day

wedding ceremony, removing it while she is with her husband and returning each morning to the *tamaccat*, who redresses her in the *aâbroq*. The Ait Khabbash adornment of the bride's head is analogous to the act of dressing the head in many other African societies, which commonly consider the head to be the site of intelligence and culture. In *Crowning Achievements*, for instance, Mary Jo Arnoldi (1995: 13–14) writes that Africans “use hats and hair styles to express and explore shared and deeply held cultural beliefs and values towards ethnicity, gender, life stages, status and authority, occupation, and social decorum.” The headress worn by the Ait Khabbash bride does all of these things and more, publicly demonstrating the bride's liminal status and serving as an important symbol of Ait Khabbash identity. Because wedding guests and female members of the community do not see the bride's face until the last day of the wedding, the *aâbroq* diminishes the bride's individuality, transforming her instead into a symbol of her group.

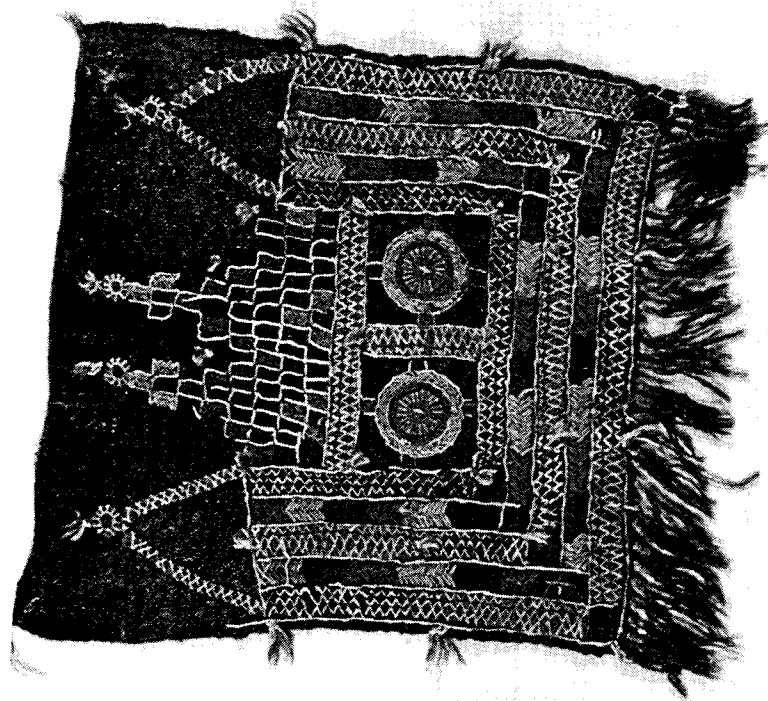


Figure 4.7. An Amazigh woman's embroidered back panel, early twentieth century, from the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund.

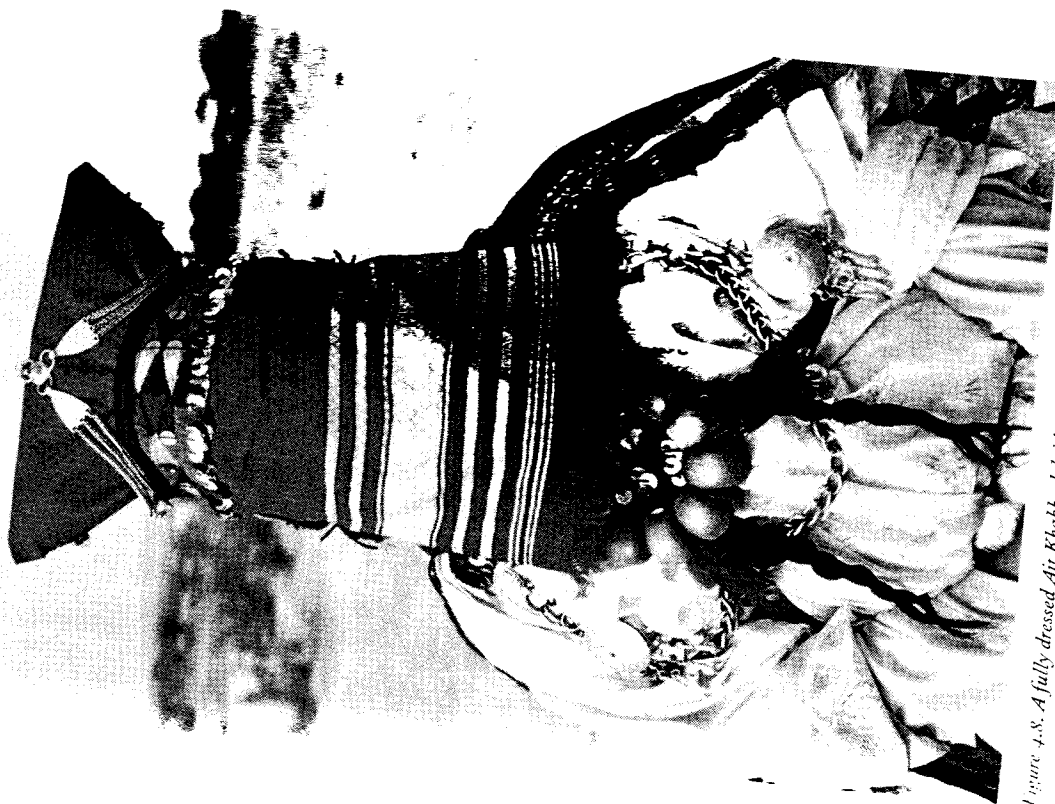


Figure 4.8. A fully dressed Ait Khabbash bride in Hafira, 2000.

At the weddings that I attended, women discussed with me the meaning and practical functions of the bride's headress. All attention is centered on the bride during the wedding ceremony, as people scrutinize how her clothes drape around her body, the length and thickness of her braids, and even the shape and texture of her hands. The bride's headress, they told me, provides her with a mechanism by which she can distance herself from the community.



Figure 4.9. Jewish women from the Tafilalet. Two wear hornlike headaddresses reminiscent of those of Ait Khabbash brides. Photo by Germaine Laouine Chantreaux, 1930s. Image courtesy of the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme, Fonds Roux, Aix-en-Provence.

the sometimes hurtful critiques of other women. As one Ait Khabbash woman explained:

The bride wears the *aâbroq* because she is shy. She is from far away and maybe never saw her husband and he never saw her. She pokes small holes in her *aâbroq* so she can see her surroundings but no one can see her. The *aâbroq* makes her more comfortable.

The same Ait Khabbash woman also described how the headdress helps the bride hide all emotion from viewers. "If she seems too happy," she explained, "people are suspicious. Why is she so happy to be married? Maybe she had a boyfriend and likes men." Conversely, if the bride expresses sadness at her wedding, the woman explained, "People will say that she is unhappy to be married and maybe they will divorce quickly." Furthermore, the bride's headdress is intended to protect both her and her viewers from jealousy and the evil eye. It is believed not only that other women, especially the mothers of unmarried daughters, are likely to be jealous of the bride but also that the gaze of the bride has the power to steal the beauty or outer physical essence

of other women. The headdress also covers the bride's facial orifices, openings that are vulnerable to invasion by the *jnoun* that prey on people passing through important life phases.

The *aâbroq* can also be viewed as a metaphor for the female-constructed nomadic tent and a reflection of an African nomadic aesthetic. Labelle Prussin first made this connection between nomadic marriage practices and women's tent construction in her book *African Nomadic Architecture* (1995). Prussin writes that female-dominated African nomadic arts are based on the aesthetics of the tent, an enclosed, bounded space associated with female fertility and containment. She also interprets the aesthetics of nomadic marriage ceremonies as being based on the desire by nomads to create an enclosed, concentrated space to counter the expansive, open space that is part of the nomads' physical realm. Therefore, the nomadic bride is often placed in a palanquin, defined by Prussin (1995: 47) as a saddle with a framework built above it that can support a canopy-like enclosure. Prussin (1995: 195) analyzes the symbolic nature of the palanquin as a "closed container within which the protected bride can move through the dangerous, unknown, infinite space to her new domicile."

Although the Ait Khabbash bride is not placed in an actual palanquin, her body is contained and enclosed by the red headdress and many layers of cloth and tassels wrapped around her body. As the bride travels from her father's to her husband's home, her headdress serves as a closed container to protect her from the exterior world. Hence my analysis of the bride's headdress builds upon Prussin's discussion and argues that the headdress reinforces acceptable gender behavior as dictated by the control of female fertility and reproduction necessary to ensure the continuation of the Ait Khabbash lineage and culture; the act of binding the bride's head symbolizes the physical control of female sexuality. The headdress's red color, reminiscent of hymeneal blood, menstrual blood, and the blood of childbirth, denotes female reproduction.¹⁵ The *aâbroq* also contains other colors associated with female fertility: green tassels wrapped around the top and yellow and black horizontal stripes near the bottom. Thus while the *aâbroq* is a celebration of the bride's sexuality and fertility and symbolizes the pivotal role that women play in nomadic cultures, it also represents the control necessary for the maintenance of a distinct Ait Khabbash ethnic identity.

As evident from the following lines of the song, the bride's sexuality is further bound and contained by the additional layers of bulky jewelry in which the *tamaccat* dresses her:

Qen-d a âezza toruni.

Qyen-d a âezza tiseynas.

[Oh my dear, get the leash.

Oh my dear, get the *tiseynas*.]

Women explained that the word "leash" in this song is also used to describe the rope tied around a goat or sheep's neck and refers to the bride's large necklace with more than thirty amber beads, called *taẓra n lluban* (Fig. 4.8). Beginning with the Phoenicians, amber from the Baltic regions of Eastern Europe has been traded all over the Mediterranean world for centuries. The honey-colored amber, a lightweight material made from fossilized pinesap, is relatively rare and expensive, so the Ait Khabbash sometimes wear necklaces made from less expensive copal, ambroid, bakelite, or casein beads. Copal, a semifossilized amber found in many areas of the world (including the west coast of Africa), could easily have been traded across the trans-Saharan trade routes into Morocco. Ambroid, formed by melting amber pebbles and pressing them together into larger pieces, is another less expensive substitute. Imazighen also wear necklaces of beads made of bakelite, a hard plastic invented in Europe in 1909, and cloudy yellow beads made from casein, an inexpensive manufactured substance produced from milk.¹⁶ Amber is valued by the Ait Khabbash for its protective and healing qualities. An herb seller in the market of Rissani, for instance, once offered to grind an amber bead he was holding to make medicinal incense for me.

The two *tiseynas* (commonly called fibulae or brooches) that attach the *ahruy* at the bride's shoulders are made of silver, another material believed to have beneficial properties. Amazigh groups throughout North Africa commonly wear fibulae; each group has its own shape, style, and size, making them an important symbol of ethnic identity. The *tiseynas* can be divided into three distinct sections: two pins, two pendants, and a chain (Fig. 4.3). Some scholars have suggested that the pins of the *tiseynas* are meant to protect the bride against the evil eye, symbolically having the ability to burst or pop the eye (Bynon 1984: 147).¹⁷ Women also told me that in the past women were known to have used pointed tips of the *tiseynas* as weapons to protect them during warfare. The triangular pendant is referred to as *tadmert* (from the Tamazighit *admer*, which means "chest," referring to the location where the pendant is worn). Attached to the bottom of each pendant is a large silver chain that drapes between them. Ait Khabbash women attach to the chain two small

round boxes with bulging carved lids called *lamriat* (meaning "shiny boxes"); five smaller pendants dangle from each box (Fig. 4.3). Women use the *lamriat* to hold perfumed herbs.

The design of the *tiseynas* reflects the aesthetic of symmetry and movement that is a feature of Ait Khabbash arts more generally. The two sides of the *tiseynas* are mirror images of one another, echoing the symmetry of the human body. As the wearer walks, the chain moves to the rhythm of her body and the *lamriat* swing back and forth, suggesting an analogy to women's breasts that is furthered by their rounded, conical shape and placement over the chest and the five small pendants intensifying their kinetic energy. Through these references to the human body, the *tiseynas* are yet another way in which Ait Khabbash women carry symbols of group identity on their bodies, and draw attention to the importance of female sexuality for the propagation and continuation of that group.

Scholars have frequently noted that the triangular shape of the fibula's pendant, one of the most common motifs found in Amazigh art, represents a stylized hand or eye motif, intended to protect women from the evil eye.¹⁸ The triangle motif is also featured in the silver bracelets worn by married women and brides. Of the two styles of cast silver bracelets worn by Ait Khabbash brides, the most extraordinary is the one called *izbian n iqueroin*, "bracelets of animal horns," which are made of a series of triangular pointed projections and worn on each wrist. Figure 1.9, a photograph from the 1950s, shows an Ait Atta woman wearing these silver bracelets. Each *azbiy n iqueroin* (the singular form) is a very heavy, solidly cast bracelet with twelve triangular-shaped points that radiate from its central band. *Izbian n iqueroin* are usually not worn alone but with other bracelets called *izbian n masmod*, "flat bracelets." Between the two bracelets is a thin circle of leather to prevent the wearer's skin from being pinched. Until the 1970s a married woman continued to wear these heavy bracelets on a daily basis, even while setting up tents, milking ewes and goats, and grinding grain. These bracelets could be used as weapons to protect women from outsiders and sometimes unintentionally inflicted harm on "in-laws" as well; one woman showed me a scar on her head where her mother, who had been angry with her, had hit her on the head with an *azbiy n iqueroin* harder than intended.

Further binding and containing the bride's body is the wool belt wrapped around her waist. The bride stands while the *tamaccat* lifts the folds of her white *ahruy*, wrapping the long braided belt called a *tasmet* around the bride's waist several times, (Fig. 4.10) while the women sing:

*Tubedda beddant-am liam.
Heḡgem iheḡḡuma n leḡrir.*

[Stand up, the days stand up for you.
Put on silk belts.]

Although the song calls for the bride to wear a silk belt, today women typically make belts out of wool for their young daughters in anticipation of their eventual weddings. The belt is created out of dyed red, green, yellow, and black fibers, colors typical of Ait Khabbash art; at the ends it has a fringe of purple, blue, yellow, pink, and green strands of wool (named *ihirran*) that hang down behind her, swinging when she moves (Fig. 1.11).

This binding and tying of the bride's waist, the area where female reproductive organs are located, is another example of the way in which the bride's dress serves as a metaphor for the control of female reproduction; this is further supported by the belt being made of wool, an Ait Khabbash symbol of fertility.

Significantly, the wool belt is given to the bride by her mother and not by her future husband, as it is the bride's family that is responsible for monitoring her behavior and ensuring that she remains a virgin until marriage. The belt is bound and tied around her waist for the first time on the eve of her wedding night, when her virginity is to be demonstrated and her family's reputation and honor upheld or destroyed.¹⁹ Married women continue to wear wool or silk belts around their waists.

The final stage in the dressing of the bride is the application of henna to the bride's hands and feet as the women sing these lines:

*Ara-d afus n iffus, ara-d afus s-iyman.
Ara-d adar n iffus, ara-d adar s-iyman.*

[Give your right hand, give your hand to be decorated.
Give your right foot, give your foot to be decorated.]

The application of henna is an elaborate form of body adornment that has become one of the central features of almost all Moroccan wedding ceremonies. In many areas henna is applied by a professional *neggaḡa* (makeup artist), who may spend as many as eight hours elaborately decorating the bride's hands and feet with henna.²⁰ During Ait Khabbash weddings, henna plays a less central role in the bride's adornment and usually takes less than fifteen minutes to



Figure 4.10. An Ait Khabbash bride in Rissani has a wool belt, a symbol of fertility, wrapped around her waist, 1997.

apply. The *tamaccat* uses her index finger to smear henna on the palms and tops of the bride's extended hands, continuing it several inches beyond the wrist (Fig. 4.11). The tops and bottoms of the bride's feet are also decorated up to her ankles. Her hands and feet are then covered with a white cloth in order to allow the henna to dry and dye the skin a deep red color.

Among the Ait Khabbash, the actual henna designs are considered less im-



Figure 4.11. An Ait Khabbash bride in Hafira has henna applied to her hands, 1989.

portant than the auspicious nature of the henna itself. As discussed in Chapter Two, henna is believed to protect and purify the body during rites of passage ceremonies due to its association with "divine blessing" (*baraka*). The *baraka* of henna further protects the bride against the danger of the evil eye and the *jinoun* that prey on people as they pass through crucial moments of the life cycle.

While henna is applied, the women continue to sing for the bride. The words they sing call for the protection of the bride from the spiritual as well as the human world:

Tisent am iqṭṭan a yelli.

Tisent am ibruṛin wala.

[Salt stays on you, my daughter.

The salt that is on you makes you look beautiful.]

The mention of salt refers to the need to protect the bride from dangerous *jinoun*, who are also called *wida tsentel tsisent*, meaning "those who are hidden by salt" (referring to the idea that salt protects against them).

The conclusion of the song is often met with tears on the part of the bride's family, allowing women to express sentimental emotions not typically manifested in public:

Yelli-new yelli a ta qqim g lman.

A talli segmiy tuyul tṛery-i.

A tamaccaṭ-inew a taneḍdamt-inew.

A tamaccaṭ-inew, a tanagamit-inew.

Udjir-am amareg a mma-new.

A baba ya baba qqim g lman.

Yayi wmareg yay ait mam.

Willi-γ d-iddalet s-ikdiḥ.

Yayi wmareg yay ikerwan.

Ad ur tiḥkat-em ula tergem t tit.

Terwa ur terwi tuyul-id yelli.

Anim imurig a mma n tislit.

[My daughter, stay in peace.

The one that I raised and left me.

Oh my brusher, oh my wood collector.

Oh my brusher, oh my water fetcher.

Oh mother, I will miss you.

Oh father, oh father, stay in peace.

Your brothers and I will miss you.

Those with whom you were covered by the same carpet.

The sheep and I will miss you.

Don't hit her or insult her.

If she is good, fine. If she is not, my daughter comes back to me.

Oh, the bride's mother with tears.]

In most areas of North Africa, women normally hide emotions of love and remorse except during the recitation of poetry or in private situations.²¹ Thus wedding songs are socially acceptable outlets for Ait Khabbash women to express their sentiments of grief at the marriage of a female family member. As previously discussed, women spend many hours of the day with their unmarried daughters, making the marriage of a daughter particularly difficult for mothers, because it typically results in long periods of separation. Transportation between different areas is difficult and tedious, and a new bride may be separated from her family for a long time before she sees them again.

The song recognizes and addresses the difficult situation encountered by a new bride. Women of the bride's family ask that her husband's family treat

their daughter justly and fairly when they sing, "Don't hit her or insult her. If she is good, fine. If she is not, my daughter comes back to me." Women ask for their daughters to be sent home if they misbehave rather than be treated harshly by her husband's family. Women told me that they are often fearful that their daughters will be mistreated when they marry. New brides are the lowest members in the family hierarchy and are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their husband's family. Mothers-in-law often overburden their daughters-in-law with work in order to keep them busy so that their sons do not have the opportunity to bond with their new wives. Some women fear that, if their sons become emotionally attached to their wives, their wives may easily control them and may pressure them to break away from the extended family structure. The disintegration of the extended family means that women may lose an important source of financial support in their old age.²²

After the bride is dressed, she gets ready to leave her parents' house. In the past, travel was done by camel or mule, requiring the bride and the *ismain* to travel many hours or days before reaching the groom. Typically the bride arrives at the groom's house at sunrise, a time when the *jnoun*, who are most active at night, are less likely to cause trouble. Concerns about sexual modesty prevent the bride's father from attending the wedding at the groom's home, since sexual intercourse between his daughter and her husband (in a desire to demonstrate the bride's virginity) becomes a topic of public conversation.

Dressing the Groom

Although the process of adorning the groom is not as complex or deeply symbolic as dressing the bride, women from the groom's family also sing for the groom as he is dressed. They are not able to see the actual ceremony in which he is dressed by a small group of men from his family, however, because a large white cloth is draped behind him to create a visual barrier between the groom and the women (Fig. 4.12).

While the groom is being dressed, he sits on his mother's lap, although the white cloth draped around the groom's back also blocks her view of the ceremony. When I asked women why they were not allowed to see the groom, they said it was not for modesty reasons but to protect him from *inkuraren*.²³ Most people did not want to talk to me about *inkuraren*, saying that I did not need to learn about evil things. One Ait Khabbash man suggested that I "spend [my] time learning about important things, not superstitions." After I kept insisting, my mother-in-law finally relented and explained that *inkuraren*



Figure 4.12. An Ait Khabbash groom in *thafra* is dressed, 1999

refers to the use of certain incantations, plant materials, and other objects to influence people to act in certain ways for good or evil purposes. Women practice *inkuraren* more than men, she explained, recounting how she suspected that her son's first wife, unhappy in her marriage, had put herbal mixtures in their family's food with the intention of making them ill. Their suspicion of her caused so much discord in the household that he eventually divorced her, illustrating that women, who rarely have the economic and social means required to initiate divorce, can use *inkuraren* to end bad marriages.

My mother-in-law finished her story by recounting a local saying, "If two women talk together, the devil is between them"; she explained that women are often accused of plotting together against someone. I asked her if she agreed with this, and she responded in the affirmative. She felt that women commonly practiced *inkuraren*, especially at weddings. Some types of *inkuraren*, especially a type called *thiqaf*, are so powerful that they can be used to stop the bride and groom from consummating their marriage. *Thiqaf* (deriving from the Arabic word *qif*, meaning "stop") describes an action performed against a person to stop him or her from achieving something. One form of *thiqaf* is the placement of two small metal objects, such as brand-new needles or nails, on the ground some distance apart; when a victim unwittingly passes between them, the objects are later tied together with thread. The act of binding the

metal objects symbolizes the action of closing or binding something. It is believed that *thiqaf* can "close up" the bride by making her hymen resistant to sexual penetration, leaving her unable to engage in sexual intercourse until the two metal pieces are untied and separated. Other remedies to such problems are available, however; at several weddings that I attended, the bride, having difficulties with sexual intercourse, notified a woman at the wedding party, who then undid *thiqaf* by walking the bride between two tall cones of Moroccan sugar (associated with purity due to their white color).

My mother-in-law explained that a woman who may secretly be jealous or resentful of the groom's marriage can use *imkuraren* and *thiqaf* to make him impotent.²⁴ Anger that her daughter was not chosen to marry the groom may cause a woman to seek revenge against him and his family. A woman who is unhappy in her marital situation can threaten her husband with *imkuraren* to create disorder in her household.²⁵ Therefore, the white cloth (a color associated with purity) is used during the dressing ceremony to stop the potentially harmful power of women by setting up a physical barrier of protection.

Although they cannot actually see the groom, the women sing a song to accompany the act of dressing him:

Bismi Allah Rahman rrahim.

Muhammad, Mulay Ali.

Ad iqwur ig-ay ameksa.

Awi-d a sidi Rebhi lxir

Ad-dig am ugusif zar-i.

Iqwar-ak Rebhi a memmi.

Iqwar-ak i gger-ak.

Ikjem diry ubir timelsa.

Ayisli a bu leâmamât,

Ara-d afus n iffus, ara-d afus s-iyman.

Ara-d adar n iffus, ara-d adar s-iyman.

A bu tkurbyin tiwrayin,

Tubedda bedant-ak liam.

[In the name of God, the merciful and the beneficent.
Muhammad, Mulay Ali.

God leads us and is our guardian.

Oh God, bring blessings

To me like a downpour.

God guides you, my son.
He guides you, and he follows you.
The pigeon enters his clothes.
Oh groom with the turbans,
Give your right hand, give your hand to be decorated
(with henna).
Give your right foot, give your foot to be decorated
(with henna).
Oh wearer of yellow shoes,
Stand up, the days stand for you.]

While these lines are sung, the groom begins to be dressed in white clothing, a red scarf, a white *tajellabiyt* (hooded gown), and a white *asilham* (hooded cape) (Fig. 4-13).

After calling upon God, the women's song, rather surprisingly refers to the groom as a pigeon, a gendered symbol associated with women (as in the motifs referred to as "pigeon's tracks" that adorn women's embroidered veils and references to the bride as a pigeon in wedding songs and *ahidous* performances). The use of similar metaphors to describe both the bride and the groom is unusual in Morocco. Instead, scholars who write about Moroccan weddings commonly remark that the groom is symbolically transformed into a sultan or king;²⁶ as Henry Munson, Jr. (1993: 122) notes, this "is certainly a significant metaphor, reflecting among other things a homology between the authority of husbands and that of kings" and thus reinforcing the Moroccan definition of manhood. During Ait Khabbash weddings, however, the reference to the groom as a sultan is rarely made. The word "pigeon" praises the groom, implying that he is beautiful. My analysis also suggests that the use of this word (commonly used to refer to women) demonstrates that women, who control ceremonial life, apply feminized symbols to the groom, further illustrating that group identity is created and maintained by women.

A similar contrast can be made between the style of dress worn by the Ait Khabbash groom and the Arab groom in southeastern Morocco, who wears a white hooded gown (*jellaba*), black cape, and a curved dagger—all symbols of masculinity. The latter does not cover his face but pulls the hoods of his *jellaba* and cape over his head. Instead, after the Ait Khabbash groom is dressed in the white clothing, a long red silk cloth with multicolored stripes is wrapped around his head so that his entire face is covered except for his eyes. A similar cloth is then draped over the groom's right shoulder, across his



Figure 4.13. An Ait Khabbash groom has henna applied to his hands, 1999.

chest, and tied at his left hip (Fig. 4.14). A woman's silver bracelet is tied to the end of the belt. This red silk cloth and the red silk cloth over his face (sometimes partially covered by a white turban and the hood of his cape) are actually women's silk belts and are similar in color to the bride's headdress. I would argue that the use of "pigeon" (a feminine construct) to refer to the groom and his being dressed in clothing and jewelry associated with women reflect

the Ait Khabbash recognition of women as models for group unity. In their song for the groom, women appear to be projecting the power of procreation associated with female symbols, such as pigeons, to the groom. Thus the red silk belt, a metaphor for the controlled sexuality and fertility of women, is at the same time a potent symbol of male reliance on women to ensure the continuation of Ait Khabbash identity into the future and a recognition that

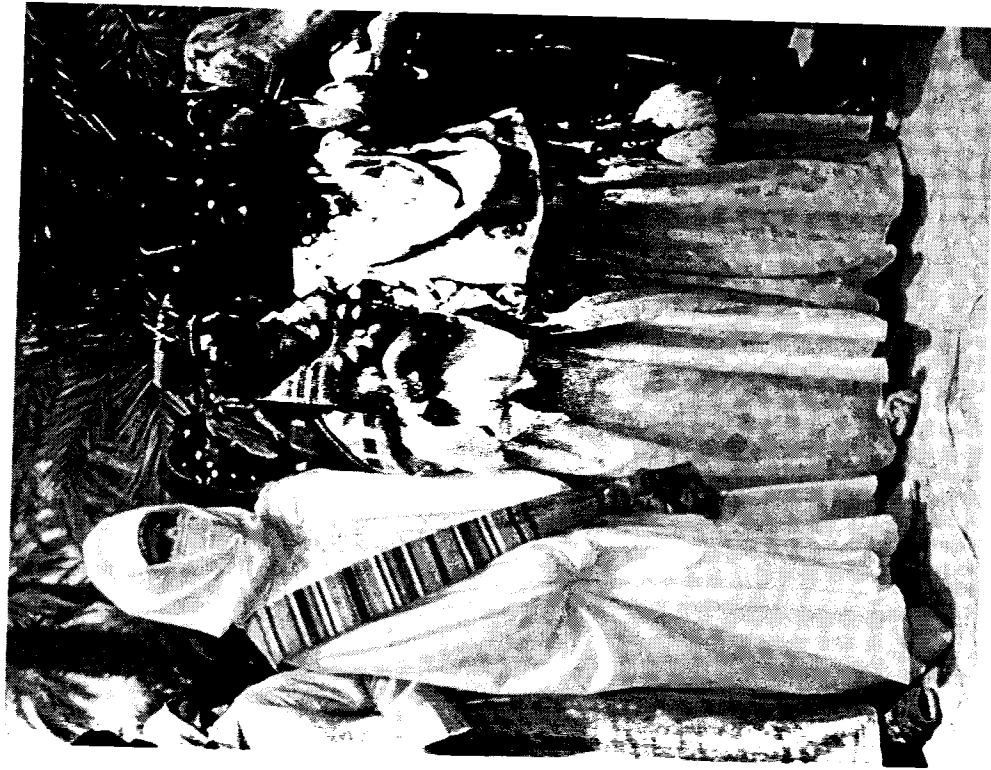


Figure 4.14. The bride, groom, and groom's mother pose for a photograph in Merguida, 2001. (The groom's mother requested anonymity, so this photograph was altered using photo retouching software, extending the woman's head covering to conceal her lower face.)

female imagery is crucial to Ait Khabbash identity. One Ait Khabbash man also explained to me that the use of the red belt and woman's silver bracelet by the groom also suggests that men and women must work together during marriage. The groom, by wearing a woman's red belt across his chest with a silver bracelet at the end, visually pledges to support his wife during marriage. Hence the dress of the groom shows that men and women do not exist in separate spheres; rather, gender categories overlap with each other, demonstrating gender cooperation typical of Ait Khabbash society.

Next the entire palm of the groom's hand and his feet are covered with wet green henna and wrapped in pieces of white cloth. The groom then slips on his backless yellow leather shoes, which are imported from the central Moroccan city of Fez and are only worn on ceremonial occasions. The men who dress the groom place a needle in his right shoe; its pointed shape and metallic silver color are believed to protect him from evil forces such as the evil eye, *imkuren*, and the *jnoun*, who dislike shiny metal objects. Men then outline the groom's eyes with kohl, a type of eyeliner typically used by women. On a red carpet laid on the ground, the groom faces a brazier filled with hot charcoal. Incense placed on the charcoal envelops the groom's body, perfuming him with its sweet-smelling smoke and pacifying the *jnoun*, who prey on people passing through the life cycle. After the smoke perfumes his body, the song continues:

*Ur irḍi ad it-t-akel akal.
Akel ikḍif ayd-ak it-t-watan.
Akel ikḍif ayd-ak ik waḍu.
Gimt-as ur giry a lemluk.*

[He does not like to walk on the ground.

Walk on the carpet spread out for you.

Walk on the carpet intended for you.

Oh angels, do things for him that I could not do.]

The women's song for the groom concludes with a metaphor referring to male fertility:

*Memmi a yigimi n waḍil,
Isilewn i weṭtur ar akal.*

[My son, you are like a grapevine,
That hangs down to the ground.]

Women told me that grapes, a rare and highly desired fruit in the desert climate of southeastern Morocco, are considered symbols of fertility. The groom is compared to a grapevine that does not simply bear fruit but is so heavy with an abundance of grapes that it hangs down and touches the ground, again referring to sexuality and reproduction as themes of the Ait Khabbash wedding. After the conclusion of the song and the dressing of the groom, he is removed from public to shield him from the evil eye and *thiqaf*, which the Ait Khabbash believe have the power to make him impotent.²⁷

This contrasts greatly with the Arab groom in the Tafilalet oasis. The dressing of the Arab groom occurs at a large party restricted to men and accompanied by much feasting, singing, and dancing. The groom's female relatives make a brief appearance at sunrise, when they enter the party to apply henna to the groom's hands and feet. While his mother and sisters apply henna, other female relatives cross knives over his head to drive away the *jnoun* and the evil eye. The next day the Arab groom publicly tours his village on horseback, dressed in white with a black hooded cloak and carrying a sword as a demonstration of his manhood. Women from the village greet him by waving red scarves at him, trying to touch him and his horse with their scarves. This honors the groom as if he is a sultan or a king; as M. Elaine Combs-Schilling (1993: 122) argues, the groom "takes on the ruler's persona, embodies his postures, affects his attitudes, adopts his authority, and becomes central and pivotal to all that transpires." Thus the Arab groom in the Tafilalet oasis plays a central, active role in the wedding, while his bride is rarely seen in public. All of the ceremonies surrounding the bride take place in the privacy of her family's house.

In contrast, the Ait Khabbash groom is hidden from public view after he is dressed. One of the *ismain* carries the groom on his back to a small tent set up at a distance from the wedding celebration, and this man will be the only person who has contact with the groom until the bride is brought to spend the night (Fig. 4-15).

The most striking difference between the participation of the bride and of the groom in the wedding ceremony is the public role played by the bride and the concealment of the groom from the public eye. Confined to the nuptial tent, he does not become a public part of the wedding ceremony until he successfully pierces the hymen of the bride. While a woman is transformed into a public symbol of Ait Khabbash identity, the groom is hidden away from sight in order to protect his reproductive abilities from outside manipulation.²⁸

The roles played by the bride and the groom and the groom's reliance on



Figure 4.15. An Ait Khabbash groom in *Merguida* is carried to a secluded room, where he will await the bride's arrival, 1997.

female symbols of identity together argue against a simplistic public-private dichotomy. Instead they demonstrate that men and women do not occupy opposing spheres of influence: their roles in Ait Khabbash society overlap and influence each other.²⁹ Therefore I argue that the public and the private, treated by previous scholars as discrete categories, exist in a reciprocal relationship. While the public role of the bride reveals the complexity of gender roles and

demonstrates how binary categories tend to oversimplify gender relations, it also shows that the public realm should not necessarily be equated with power. (Once again we see that although women control the public visual symbols of Berber ethnic identity, a position that grants them prestige, it also restricts them to specific roles in that society. As noted by Valentine Moghadam (1994: 19), when women are defined as reproducers of a collective group, this often leads to the control of their reproduction and sexuality in the interests of maintaining boundaries between their group and others. The visual and performing arts surrounding the actual three-day wedding ceremony itself further emphasize the physical and symbolic continuation of the society through the bodies of women. This association of women, wedding, arts, and identity is discussed in the next chapter.