Women | The Private Lives of Muslim Women

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Sometimes the entire day was spent at the hammam, enjoying the benefits of a massage or a hot steam-bath. Women would share expertise in cosmetics and skin care, such as the application of make-up and the concoction of scented moisturising creams mixed with powdered mineral salts or alum. They would share recipes or suppliers' names for aromatic essences and perfumes, made from animal sources such as ambergris, or from flowers or plants. The Persian traveller Nassir Khusraw on a visit to Egypt during the Fatimid period noted that traders in violets, narcissuses, irises and lilies sold their products to perfume factories. Great care was extended in grooming hair, and elaborate combs survive which are often found to carry witty inscriptions, such as 'I will not style other than a beauty's hair'.

Name:
Mirror

Dynasty:
Hegira 7th century / AD 13th century Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Topkap# Palace Museum
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Türkiye

Justification:
Highly polished mirrors were an essential tool for women, often enhanced with decorative or talismanic motifs.

Name:
Spherical bottle

Dynasty:
Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:
Perfume containers were made of glass, rock-crystal, silver and ceramics, and were decorated with a variety of floral and animal motifs.

Name:
Comb

Dynasty:
Hegira 8th century / AD 14th century Mamluk

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
Combs like this were designed to disentangle even the finest hair.

Name:
Casket

Dynasty:
Probably after hegira 350 / AD 961 Spanish Umayyad

Details:
Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
Generally described as jewellery boxes, these luxurious caskets would probably also have been used to hold personal grooming implements.