

Hygiene: Perfume, Soap and Shampoo

Hygiene

Islam knows very strict rules about personal and public hygiene. It is necessary to wash your hands, feet and face before praying. Also before and after eating and using the toilet it is important to present your cleanliness. Muslim of the past and present still have the reputation as being hygienic people. This is also measured by the occurrence of contagious diseases in large Muslim populations. Besides the widespread common culture of washing and hygiene, Islamic societies pioneered the use of soap, shampoo and perfume. These were commonly available for regular household (in the Ummah) from the 3rd and 4th century AH (10th century CE). It would be another 9 centuries before these would be generally available to western cultures.

Perfume

Nice scents have always been popular. The elite of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (1000 BCE) used perfumes. In the old Vedic civilization (Indus Valley Civilization, now Pakistan/India) perfumes were well known (3500 BCE). In the 9th and 10th CE century, with great developments in chemistry (al-khemia), perfume manufacture changed into a science and a common industry. Abu Yusuf al-Kindi (2nd century AH, 801-873 CE), an Islamic scholar, wrote a book containing the recipe and manufacturing process for 107 kinds of perfumes. With the use of steam distillation, alcohol and newer ingredients he was able to make stronger and more complex scents. Muslims also manufactured perfumes without the use of alcohol. Now better known as Attar. Modern perfumes can contain hundreds of chemical substances. Some of which are damaging to skin and health. Eczema, allergies and even birth defects have been linked to synthetic perfumes and cosmetics. Not most Attars, these contain only natural ingredients.

Soap

Even soap has existed for thousands of years, these were made out of animal fat and ash. These animal fat soaps often made things dirtier than clean. Muslims used vegetable fats together with ash (al-kali) and potassium hydroxide to make their soap. This is the basis of most modern kinds of soap. Soap was soon combined with perfumes. These modern soaps were manufactured at very large scales and were found in almost every Muslim household. Muslims traded their soap in the form of solid blocks, soap bars. In contrast to animal fat based soaps from Europe that was more like a thick porridge, wrapped in animal skin.

Shampoo

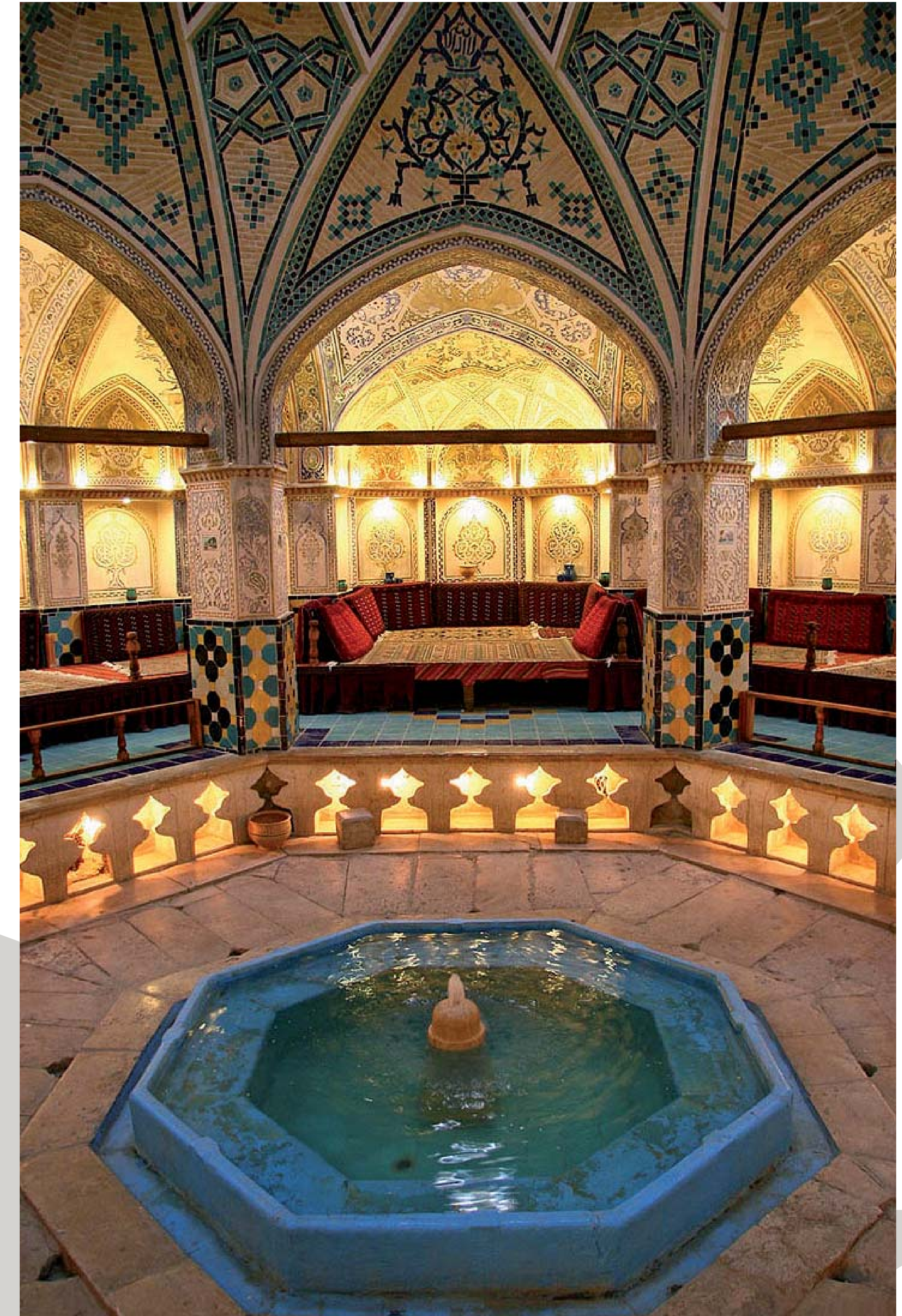
These were in fact liquid soaps and were sold in ceramic or glass jars. Shampoo was more complex and richly laced with perfumes. Shampoos were invented in Mughal India and often used together with cosmetic oils, like coconut oil.



Handmade Block Soap. West Africa.



Attar Oil. Perfume without alcohol. Pakistan, 2010.



Soltan Amir badhuis, Turkije.