

Traditional Wall Art in Walata: Caravan City in the Eastern Hawdh

Arte mural tradicional en Walata: ciudad caravana en el Hawdh oriental

DR. John A. SHOUP

Al-Akawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco

J.Shoup@aii.ma

Recibido: noviembre 2010

Aceptado: diciembre 2010

ABSTRACT

Walata is one of the major caravan cities in the southern Sahara located on the route from Timbuktu to the northern cities of either Sijilmasa in the Tafilalt oasis or Nul Lamta on Wadi Nun. The city has a long history stretching back to before it was named Walata which archeology has only recently (2004) begun to investigate. The city is justly famous for the unique wall art on its houses. The art is the realm of women who have passed it on from generation to generation. Local oral history states the wall art found in Walata dates to al-Murabitin period (11th century) when a number of Muslims from al-Andalus were exiled there.

The wall art of Walata is unique not only to its own region of the Hawdh in eastern Mauritania, but to the whole Sahara. The art can be divided into three main types: around the main street entrance to the house, walls of the interior courtyard, and the inside of rooms. The designs are subject to change over time and recently new ones have been introduced from henna for the hands, straw mats, and Moroccan carpets while some of the older designs are no longer being done.

Key Words: Walata, Awlad Hassan, Hassani Arabic, Mauritania, wall art, wall designs, ma'allimin, ma'allimat, al-Murabitin.

RESUMEN

Walata es una de las mayores ciudades caravana en el Sahara septentrional emplazada en el camino desde Timbuktu a las ciudades norteñas de Sijilmasa en el oasis de Tafilalt o a Nul Lamta en Wadi Nun. La ciudad tiene una larga historia que se remonta a antes de que fuera llamada Walata, que la arqueología ha empezado a investigar recientemente (2004). La ciudad es en concreto famosa por el singular arte mural de sus casas. Este arte se da en la esfera de las mujeres, que lo conservan de generación en generación. La tradición oral local establece que el arte mural que se encuentra en Walata data del periodo al-Murabitin (siglo XI), durante el que unos cuantos musulmanes de al-Ándalus se exiliaron en la zona.

El arte mural de Walata es único no sólo en la región de Hawdh, en Mauritania oriental, sino también en el Sahara en su totalidad. Este arte puede dividirse en tres tipos principales: en las entradas de las casas alrededor de la calle principal, en los muros del patio interior, y en el interior de las habitaciones. Los diseños pueden cambiar a lo largo del tiempo y recientemente se han introducido nuevos inspirados en la henna de las manos, en las esteras de paja, y en las alfombras marroquíes, mientras que algunos de los más antiguos ya no se hacen.

Palabras clave: Walata, Awlad Hassan, árabe Hassani, Mauritania, arte mural, diseños murales, ma'allimin, ma'allimat, al-Murabitin.

Walata is located in the eastern Hawdh of Mauritania and was most likely founded originally as a small farming community before the 10th century by Mandé-speaking peoples. Systematic archeological investigation began only in 2004. It may have become a small market center at an early date as its Mandé name Biru indicates; Biru being the plural of the word *bire* meaning an open-sided structure with a straw roof usually found to shade individual stalls in local markets. The name Walata comes from the Malinké word *wala* which means a shady place¹. Walata grew in importance when the Berber city-state at Awdaghost was absorbed by the Murabatin leader ibn Yasin in 1055 in his bid to wrest control of the trans-Saharan trade from the Empire of Ghana². Walata appears to have not been linked that closely to Ghana but to the emerging Kingdom of Mali and throughout most of Walata's history it would remain closely tied to Timbuktu serving as the first customs stop in Mali for caravans coming from northern cities such as Sijilmassa³. The population of the town slowly changed from being primarily Mandé to Masufa Berbers of the large Sanahajah confederation by the 13th century and the name of the city changed from Biru to Iwalatan the berberized version of the Malinké name Wala. With the appearance of the Arab Awlad Hassan tribal confederation in the Hawdh in the late 15th century it was arabized to Walata as the population adopted Hassani Arabic and took on Arab identities⁴.

Walata's architecture belongs to one of the three main categories of stone architecture of the Sahara⁵. The buildings are made of rough cut stone walls, mainly limestone, using mortar to bind the layers. The buildings are usually two stories and the outer walls are partially supported by a second wall about half a meter high built around the outer base of the building. This second wall is called *abnab tijrit* and is also used for benches where older men of the town gather⁶. Different quarters of the city are entered through shaded passage way called *zullaylat* meaning simply a small, shady place⁷. The houses are referred to as *qusur* (singular *qasr*) because they have high outer walls with only one entrance. The house plans are basically a large square or rectangle with the rooms built around a large open courtyard; each room with its own doorway. The upper levels are reached by staircases most of which are accessed from the courtyard. The walls are covered with a thick layer of red clay or banco which is maintained by a new yearly coat of clay. A unique feature of Walata's houses is the colorful designs around the main doorways, on courtyard walls, and on the walls inside the rooms. Local oral history relates that these designs are a legacy of a group of Andalusian Muslims exiled to Walata by the al-Murabatin (1040?-1147) in the 11th century following the Murabatin's annexation of the Muslim states in Spain. Walata may have been an out

¹ CLEAVELAND, Timothy, 2002, *Becoming Walata: A History of Saharan Social Formation and Transformation*, Hienemann, Portsmouth, NH.

² NORRIS, Harry, 1986, *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*, Longman, Harlow, Essex.

³ CLEAVELAND, Timothy, 2002, *Becoming Walata...*

⁴ CLEAVELAND, Timothy, 2002, *Becoming Walata...*

⁵ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2006, *Maisona du Sahara: Habiter e desert*, Editions Hazan, Paris.

⁶ BARGADOS, Alberto Lopez, 2005, *Walata, la cuitat de les caravanes – Walata Madinat al-Qawafil*, Mon-3, Barcelona.

⁷ BARGADOS, Alberto Lopez, 2005, *Walata, la cuitat de les caravanes...*

lying town of the Murabatin Empire but there is no written record of the settlement before 1240 nearly one hundred years after the al-Murabatin had fallen to the al-Muwahhidin and there is no secondary source to corroborate the story. Nonetheless, some art historians believe that the wall art in Walata is the last living element of Murabatin architectural decoration⁸.

Walata is famous for the beauty of the decorations that ornament the houses around the main entrances, in the courtyards, and on the surface of inside of room walls. These decorations are called *takhtad* or a trace (from the root *khadd* meaning to make a furrow) or more simply *al-huful* or the finery worn by Walatan women for festive occasions⁹. Walata's house decorations are unique not only in the Hawdh of Mauritania, but in the entire Sahara. There is only one other place where the women decorate the walls in the same way, Ni'amah located just to the south of Walata where families from Walata have moved in the early 20th century. Du Puigadeau noted that in her extensive travels in the Sahara during the 1930s she observed only a few other examples of Walatan art outside of Walata; in the *ziyarah* complex of Shaykh Muhammad Fadil in the Adrar and at the home of the Kunta scholar Hayballah in Qasr al-Barkah in Tagant¹⁰. In a visit by the author to the *ziyarah* of Shaykh Muhammad Fadil in 2006 there was no trace of the example du Puigadeau noted. Le Quellec (2006)¹¹ notes that several other Saharan caravan cities, such as Ghadames in Libya, historically had decorated walls, but the custom seems to have ceased.

Walata's decorations are made by women from a specific social class of professional artisans called *ma'allimat*. Many of the specific motifs relate the stages of a woman's life. Women use no patterns but produce the designs free hand with simple tools. The design elements and their names are passed down from generation to generation among Walata's women of all social categories. Some of the designs have been lost over the years and new ones have recently been added.

1. MAIN DOORWAY

The first element of Walatan house decoration is found around the main doorway. The whole door assemblage is called the *kiffiyah*¹². The *kiffiyah* is composed of several inset doorframes, wooden door of red acacia decorated with metal ornamentations, and two side decorations placed one on each side of the entrance. Each of the doorframes is set off from the other by a deep incised line several centimeters wide and equally deep called simply a divider (*qardah*)¹³. The entire outer frame around the door is whitewashed and the second inset frame is

⁸ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, *Impressions of the Sahara*, Susan Pickford (trs), Editions Flammarion, Paris.

⁹ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2006, *Maisons du Sahara...*

¹⁰ DU PUIGAUDEAU, Odette, 2002, *Arts et coutumes des Maures*, Monique Vérité (ed), Ibis Press, Paris.

¹¹ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2006, *Maisons du Sahara...*

¹² All of the names of the various decorations for the traditional house were provided by Maya mint Dah wuld 'Idi, the main *ma'allimah* in Walata. Interviewed by the author 2 and 3 January, 2005. with assistance from Mounir Arous, a student at Al Akhawayn University.

¹³ Information about traditional doors was provided by the *ma'allim* al-Za'im wuld Khatri al-Dawudi. Interviewed by the author January 3, 2005.

decorated with special designs on the top above the entrance and down the sides. The top center design refers to the women of the household to announce to all passer bys that there is a young unmarried girl (*'azbah*) living there, a young woman (*masufalah*), a married woman (*al-mar'ah al-saghirah*), married woman with children (*al-mar'ah ma' gashushtful*), or an elderly woman (*al-mar'ah al-kabirah*) and woman who has had a number of children, literally a woman with hips (*umm al-harayqfat*). The corners have a design called a water drain (*balamiyah*) and some of them do function as water drains though for the most part the designs are only decorative. Half way down the two sides of the doorframe are the only male symbol shown to the outside world in what is called the young man (*arwaydgij*). The inner frame is decorated with a continuous linked designs, often a charm box which is a square with a cross inside (*kitab*) or the Arabic letter *waw*. Because the designs are linked together they are called a chain (*silsilah*) or a throw (*tarraha*).

The doorway is also marked by two large designs one on each side beyond the doorframe. These are often roundels with a square center made of blue slate or more frequently today a painted blue square which is called an ablution stone (*hajar al-taymum*). The square is surrounded by more elaborate designs most often crosses with arms of equal length with rounded ends giving them a mushroom effect. Between the arms of the cross and the *hajar al-taymum* women paint chevrons or zig zags to fill in the spaces. The whole roundel is reminiscent of those used in Saharan manuscripts to mark different parts of a book. In the past it seems more muted natural colors were used for the roundels while today bright acrylics are in style. The whole roundel is referred to as a candelabra or candle stick (*musham'ah*), though when interviewed by the author local women did not agree on use of this term for all of the roundels. Most agreed that the term *musham'ah* is a correct word while the recognized expert in making house decoration Maya mint Dah stated that the term should be used only when there is an inset the wall where a lamp or candle could be placed. Unless there is such an inset, the roundel is properly called a *hajar al-taymum* after the most important element. Locals touch one of the stones when entering and exiting the house to receive a blessing (*barakat Allah*). This is similar to the Jewish custom of touching a charm called a *mazuzah* placed in a niche next to the doorway and it has been suggested that the Walatan custom indicates a Jewish presence in the town's past. It is known that during the height of the trans-Saharan trade a large number of Jews were involved in commerce and established communities in most Saharan caravan cities, but there is no record of their existence in Walata. Nonetheless, it is an interesting feature of Walatan homes that this custom is still practiced. Other towns in Mauritania such as Widan and Tishit have older homes with a *hajar al-taymum* above the main door which again is touched when entering or exiting the house for a blessing. In addition, local mosques often do not have water for ablution and instead *hajar al-taymum* are placed above the entrances to the prayer hall. It is difficult to say whether or not the custom of placing a *hajar al-taymum* at house entrances is a Jewish legacy or a local Islamic practice. Today the only association of the practice is with Islam.

The doorways are periodically redone by the women when the designs begin to fade or when there is a change in the status of the household's females which they feel needs to be announced to the outside world. The entire surface is whitewashed and the new designs lightly etched into the mud surface with a blunt object such as a butter knife or a Neolithic stone ax head. Today the new designs are then painted with bright acrylics that will stand up to the sun.

2. COURTYARDS

The walls of the inner courtyards (courtyards are referred to as *hawsh* in Walata) are also decorated with either large rosettes (*tarhat al-hawsh*) or false doors (*fum al-hawsh*). They often made to highlight around windows and above doorways in addition to being wall decorations. The women make use of many of the same designs used over the main entrance to the house giving symbolic information about the women of the household. The area to be used for one of these decorations is first resurfaced with a layer of red mud mined from the nearby wadi. Women use a blunt instrument such as the back of a spoon, a butter knife, or a Neolithic stone tool to incise the designs into the mud. The whole surface is then whitewashed and the incisions are picked out in red and yellow paints made from local mineral sources mined in the wadi. Women use their fingers to apply the paints.

The *fum al-hawsh* is made up of three distinct parts: 1.) the top referred to as the head cover (*tarhah*); 2.) the divider (*qardah*); and 3.) the bottom (*dibbi*). The top makes use of the same designs as noted for the main design above the outer door. The divider in this instance is a simple straight line incised into wall and painted in a dark red color. The bottom part is very different from the rest of the design being made up of a series of vertical fields each one filled with one decorative motif. Many of these have their inspiration from the designs found on cane/straw and leather mats made by *ma'allimat*. This imitates many of the inner rooms where such mats are used to line the lower part of the walls. Among the most common are the designs called open head (*ra's maftuh*) and the Arabic letter *sad* (*harf sad*).

3. INSIDE OF ROOMS

The insides of rooms are also highly decorated. The rooms are whitewashed and the designs painted in red made from local red clay. Decorations in the rooms are in three parts using the same terms as for the false doors in the courtyards: 1.) top part called *tarhah*; 2.) divider called *qardah*; and 3.) the bottom part called *dibbi*. Unlike the main doorways or the courtyard, the decorations inside the rooms are all painted in dark red by a woman using her fingers; drawn freehand directly onto the surface and not incised into the wall. The *tarhah* designs include all of those used both on the main door and in the courtyard as well as ones found only in the courtyard and inside rooms such as one called mud head (*ra's tamanagah* – *tamanagah* being the name of a local mud) and two ears (*wudhnayn*) or back flap of a woman's slipper

(*wudhn gurg*). Women make full use of the entire wall area creating massive *tarhah* decorations by combining as many motifs as will fit. Frequently the ends of any one such decoration is marked with a cross-like motif referred to as siblings (*al-khut*). When this design is used to mark the corner of the room, it is called the father (*al-buh*). A smaller version of the same design when used other than to mark the ends or the corners is called the little girl (*tafaylah*). The fact that many of the same designs are reused with different names by different women has caused a degree of confusion in the name lists provided by early French ethnographers. This is compounded by the fact that some ethnographers recorded the names according to how they are spelled in Arabic while others merely recorded the way the names sounded to them when given by a local person speaking in the Hassani dialect. For example the motif noted above can be found as *al-akhawat* and *al-khut*, *al-ab* and *al-buh* but they are the same names for the same symbols.

The divider is a simple straight line that separates the upper part from the lower section. It marks the transition from the top's horizontal orientation to the lower section's vertical orientation. The bottom is composed of a number of vertical rows each with a single design. Like the *dibbi* in the courtyard, these often take their inspiration from mat designs such as the *ra's maftuh*, *harfsad*, or *silsilah*.

Rooms have windows, shelves, niches for lamps or candles, and other features recessed into the walls. Women decorate them using the same set of motifs. Windows, shelves and the like are framed with the designs used on the main entrance to the house; chains composed of the letter *waw* or of the charm box. In some instances they use the more fanciful *tarhah* which seems to flow down the sides like a woman's scarf or hair braids. Niches for lamps or candles are called *musham'ah* and some of them are double; that is the actual niche is within a larger niche. These are called candle inside a candle (*musham'ah dakhil musham'ah*). There are also niches that are purely decorative, too shallow to be used to hold anything which have a number of names. Such novelty decorations are said to come from the woman's fancy (*mizaj*).

Women decorate as much of the inside area as is possible. They cover the walls, frame features and furniture, and support columns with designs. Their imagination (*mizaj*) is allowed free reign in how they decide to paint the walls and in the combinations they will use. In more recent decades they have begun to include motifs they have seen in imported Moroccan carpets, especially rosettes, and from eastern (*Mashraqi*) *henna* designs. Most of these do not have specific names as of yet; some are known by the name of the woman who first used them such as *al-Mas'udah* while others have more generic designations such as Moroccan (*Maghribi*).

4. CONCLUSION

Some scholars have tried to ascribe deep meanings into the use of particular designs, especially of those related to the stages of life for a woman. Where these are located, in the most prominent positions such as in the center above the main door, have been given special meaning by some ethnographers. It is proposed that

the action of entering through or under certain of the motifs has strong sexual connotations while for some it is a coming home to the womb that bore the individual¹⁴. This is especially so for the woman with hips (*umm al-harayqfat*) which clearly shows a squat position with wide open legs and for the woman with the chest of a child (*mar'ah ma' gashushtful*) where there is obvious representation of a child still in the womb¹⁵. André Mary has noted that symbolism of the womb is an important feature for many sub-Saharan peoples¹⁶.

Others have tried to break down the individual elements of any one design and found similarities with art produced over a wide number of very diverse cultures¹⁷. Du Puigaudeau did her work in Walata in the 1930s and published it in the *Bulletin de l'IFAN* in 1957. Du Puigaudeau was influenced by the Diffusionist theory of her day and she spent a great deal of effort trying to match designs to find the *kulturkreise* or the original culture cradle. She suggested commonalities with designs from as diverse origins as the cave paintings at Mas d'Azil in France, the Hittite alphabet, the Indus Valley, the Marques Islands of the Pacific, and the Dogon of Mali¹⁸. In recent years her study has been greatly criticized though it should be recognized as a pioneering effort in the study of Walata. Du Puigaudeau's study was followed by that of G.J. Duchemin who was the director of IFAN in St. Louis, Senegal who conducted his study between 1948 and 1949 and published in the *Bulletin de l'IFAN* in 1950. Duchemin based his information on that provided by two *ma'allimat* – wives of builders and who themselves created murals. The women gave him an exhaustive list of the designs and their names. Duchemin suggested the Walata designs might be linked to the urban culture of the Kingdom of Ghana or other contemporary Sahelian cultures. His study was followed by that of Jean Gabus in the 1960s which also used local classification of the wall patterns. Gabus divided them into the large motifs (*al-tarhah al-kabirah*) and the small motifs (*al-tarhah al-saghirah*) then placed specific designs within each one of these categories¹⁹.

It is important to note that women are the artists and what they paint is more for other women than they are for men. The symbolism used can tell a trained eye a good deal about a household, and the best trained eye is that of another Walatan woman. Du Puigaudeau in her study advanced the idea that for women, who were often poorly literate or illiterate, the symbols they paint on the walls of their houses is a form of “written” communication not unlike the written communication used by the men. For this reason the one main “male” symbol used by the women is the Arabic letter *waw* which represents literacy²⁰.

¹⁴ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, Impressions of the Sahara

¹⁵ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, Impressions of the Sahara

¹⁶ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, Impressions of the Sahara

¹⁷ DU PUIGAUDEAU, Odette, 1957, Contribution à l'étude du symbolisme dans le decor mural et l'artisan de Walata, Bulletin de l'IFAN, XIX, séries B (1-2), 137-179.

DU PUIGAUDEAU, Odette, 2002, Arts et coutumes des Maures

¹⁸ DU PUIGAUDEAU, Odette, 1957, Contribution à l'étude du symbolisme dans le decor mural et l'artisan de Walata

LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, Impressions of the Sahara

LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2006, Maisons du Sahara

¹⁹ LE QUELLEC, Jean-Loïc, 2004, Impressions of the Sahara

²⁰ National Museum of Nouakchott, ND, ethnographie, National Museum of Nouakchott, Nouakchott.

Those who create the art are women from the special social class called master craftsmen (*ma'allimin* singular *ma'allim*) and in the past their husbands were often master builders or workers in metal and wood. The social class of the *ma'allimin* and *ma'allimat* is more like that of a caste with restrictions on who they can marry, ownership of land and water, and rights of inheritance. They are often not tribally organized but depend on tribal elite patrons. Because of the close patron/client relationship between noble patron and client artisan, the artisans take the tribal identity of their patrons but not their lineage. Women from the noble elite have generally not made the art that decorates their houses but rely on the *ma'allimat* or, in the past, on female household slaves or *haratin* women, descendants of the original inhabitants of the Sahara or former slaves who are in an serf-like relationship with the elite²¹. For this reason, elements of the motifs used in the wall art appear in other objects made by *ma'allimat* in leather, calabash, and clay. The *ma'allimat* make a number of traditional toys in clay including model houses which they decorate like real houses.

Unlike many other traditional arts in much of North or West Africa, the wall art of Walata is not yet under threat of being lost. There is renewed interest in it from the side of the Mauritanian government that has asked for some officials' offices (including the office and house of the local *wali*) to be painted with traditional designs. More importantly the Junta de Andalucia has assisted in building both a library for rare manuscripts and a museum of local culture. The provincial government of Andalusia has a major interest in the cultural heritage of the western Sahara because of the al-Murabatin connection with Spanish history as well as Spain's more recent occupation of the contested Western Sahara. The library and the museum have been extensively decorated by Maya mint Dah. Several local people have converted homes into hotels and in 2005 a new tourist center was built in Walata using only traditional building methods and traditional decorations made by a young woman recently trained by Maya mint Dah.

INTERVIEWS IN WALATA DECEMBER 2005 – JANUARY 2006

Mawlay Ahmad wuld Dah – during the winter of 2005 – 2006 he was building a new tourist center in Walata and allowed the author the chance to photograph the sequence of making the designs. He also provided some information on the names of the more common designs.

Maya mint Dah wuld 'Idi al-Dawudi – Main source of information on traditional house decoration and the premier *ma'allimah* in Walata. Photographs of house decorations from the different houses in the city were shown to her and asked the names. She helped either correct or give more details on them.

Maya mint Shaykh Mdadi – Allowed her house to be photographed and provided names of the different house designs.

²¹ National Musuem of Nouakchott, ND, ethnographie

Mbuya wuld Dah wuld ‘Idi al-Dawudi – Brother of Maya mint Dah and curator of the museum in in Walata. He is an important source on the history of the city.

Nah wuld ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahjubi – Helped introduce the author to the *ma’allimin* and *ma’allimat* in Walata. He also provided social and historical information.

Sarkah mint Sidi – wife of *ma’allim* al-Za’im wuld Khatri and a *ma’allimah* herself working mainly in leather.

Sidi Muhammad wuld Bah wuld al-Gig – direct descendant of the person who hosted the French ethnographer Odette du Puigaudeau during her stay in Walata and allowed the author to photograph the family home. He provided names of the designs found in the family house, which were checked with those recorded by du Puigaudeau for the same house in the 1930s.

Al-Za’im wuld Khatri al-Dawudi – Main source of information on the traditional Walata door and the one and only door maker left in Walata. He is a well known *ma’allim*.

Fotos:



Excavations of Biru – Wadi



Walata - view looking north over Walata



Street scene in Walata



Building technique – Walata



Architecture - resurfacing a stone house – Walata



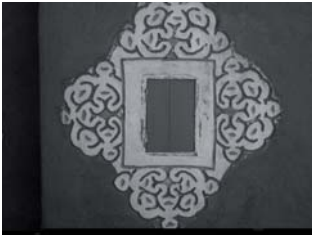
Door being redone in Walata



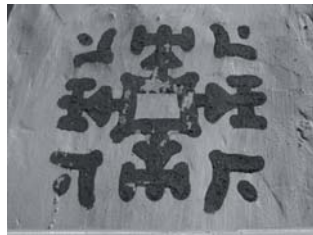
Hajar timum 'aziba -tarrayhat al-hank –Arwaydgij



Mushamat al-binna-Arwaydgij-l-balamiyyah- msoufalah – t



Tarhat al-hush



Tarhat al-balimiyyah



not original from henna designs - called mas'udah
from the name of the woman who frist started using it



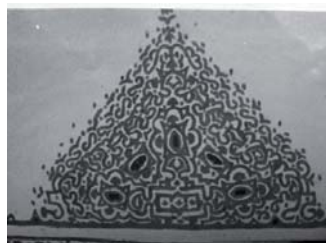
Naqar al-tarhah plus azleg - umm al-harayqfat



View into the courtyard of a Walatan home



Perhaps 200 yrs old—showing distribution of bakamiyah - home of Muhammad wuld Bah wuld Gig - Walata



Large design in the governor's house – composed of numer



Salsul composed of mar'ah saghirah



Gashushtful



Tarrhat al-tamingah - top is called nagar tarrhat al-hu



Top is ras al-mtifinah - mar'ah kabirah



Tarrahah kabirah - arwaydjij - umm al-rus



Musham'ah



Mushamah dakhil mushamah – wudhinat



Musham'ah dakhil musham'ah with al-mar'ah al-saghirah inside-lower part is the dabbi ra's maftuh



Gashustful at the top-rest is tarhat al-halq-dibbi



Gshushtful, silsilah, dibbi



Dibbi



Tarrahat al-halq, 'azibah, al-khut, ru'us (salsul or silsilah) wudhinat-single is called ras maftuh



Juf al-mtifinah



Tarrahat al-hasirah (new design) - only inside the house



Mar'ah kabirah in middle - al-khut on each corner - tarha