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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

TRADITIONAL TUNISIAN JEWELLERY TODAY

by

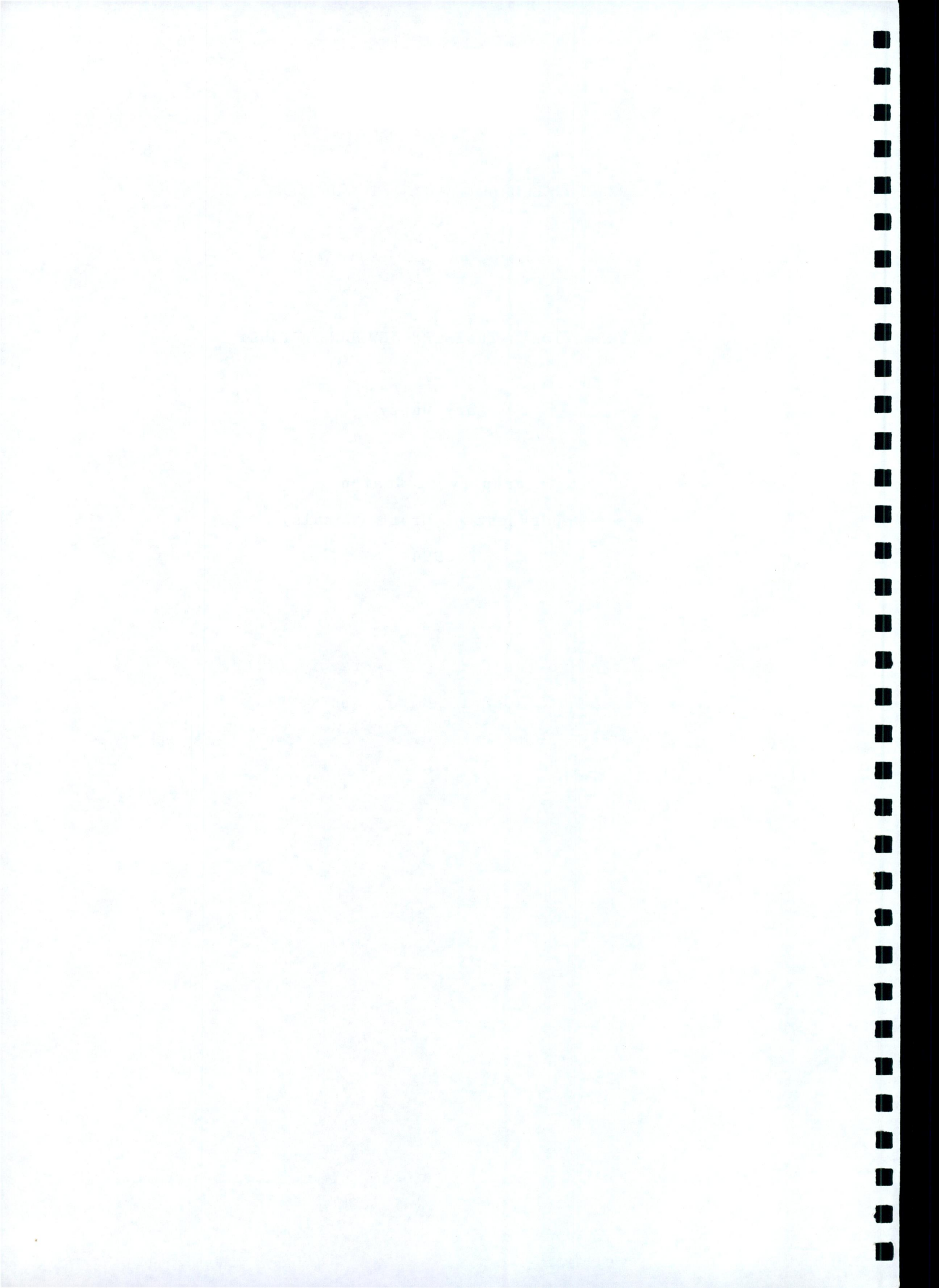
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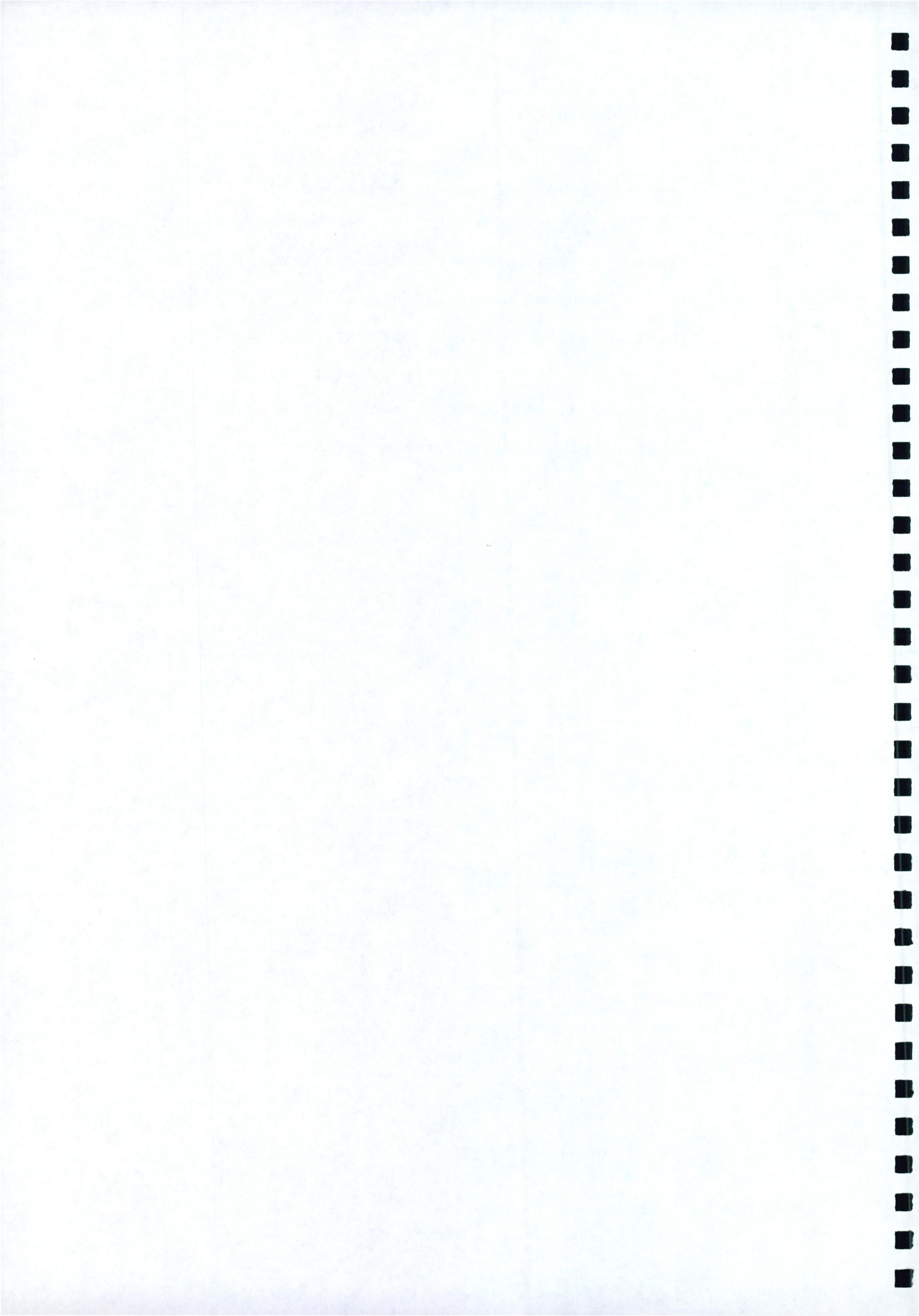
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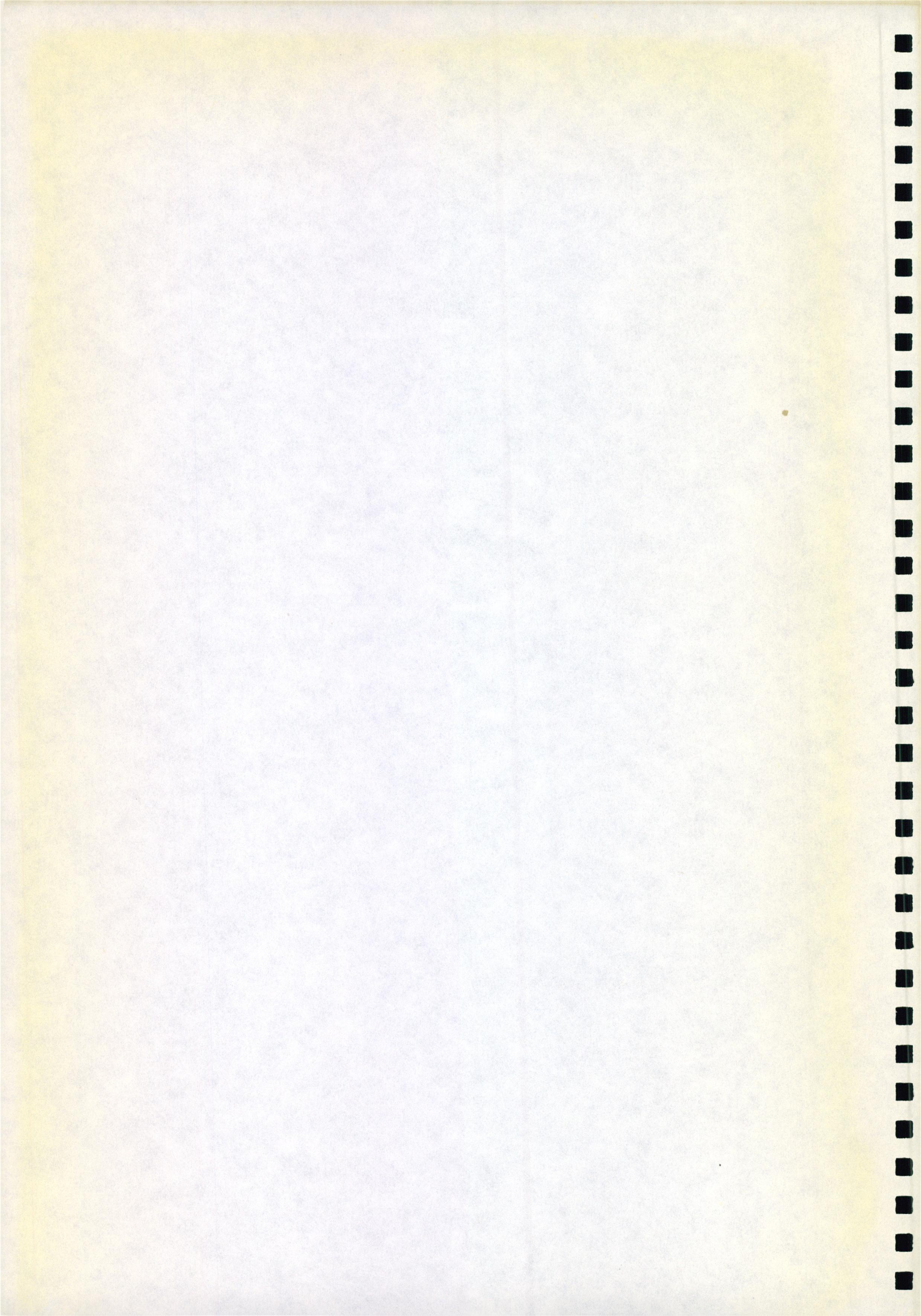
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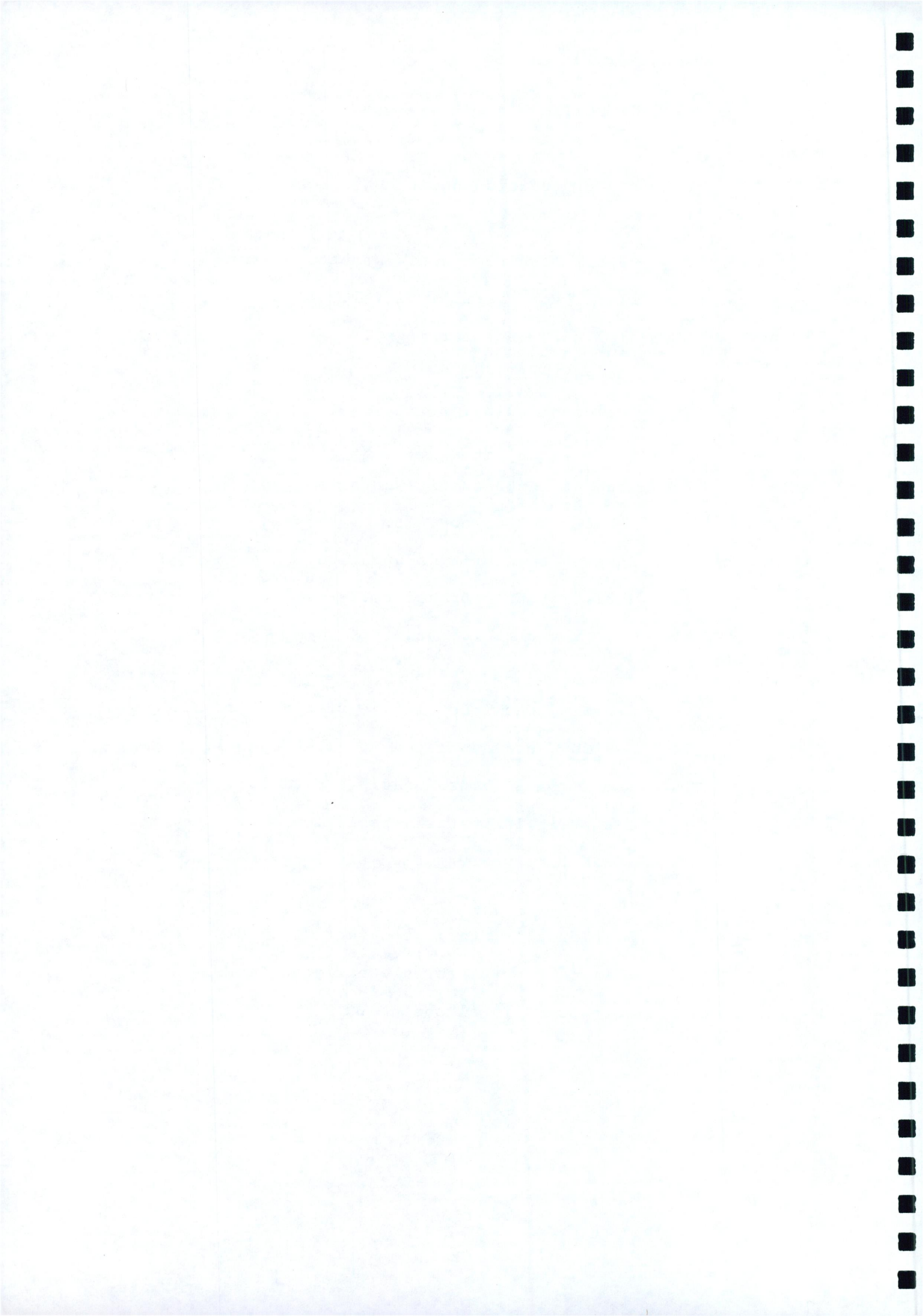
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the traditional jewellery of Tunisia. Although it can be found in museum collections, it is still worn today by the older women of the rural communities. The research was conducted in the outskirts of a village called Cherarda. This belongs to the province of Kairouan which is situated in the centre of Tunisia. Plate 1. During the research the older women of the village were interviewed and with the help of an interpreter they told me about their jewellery. An important idea that emerged was their belief in the amuletic power of the jewellery which co-existed with strong Muslim symbolism. Another aspect of the jewellery expressed by the women was its use as a display of wealth. However their fundamental reason for wearing the jewellery is adornment and they constantly reiterated this aspect throughout my investigation. Their responses were simple but profound. It is a part of their everyday life so they do not question its significance, socially or culturally.



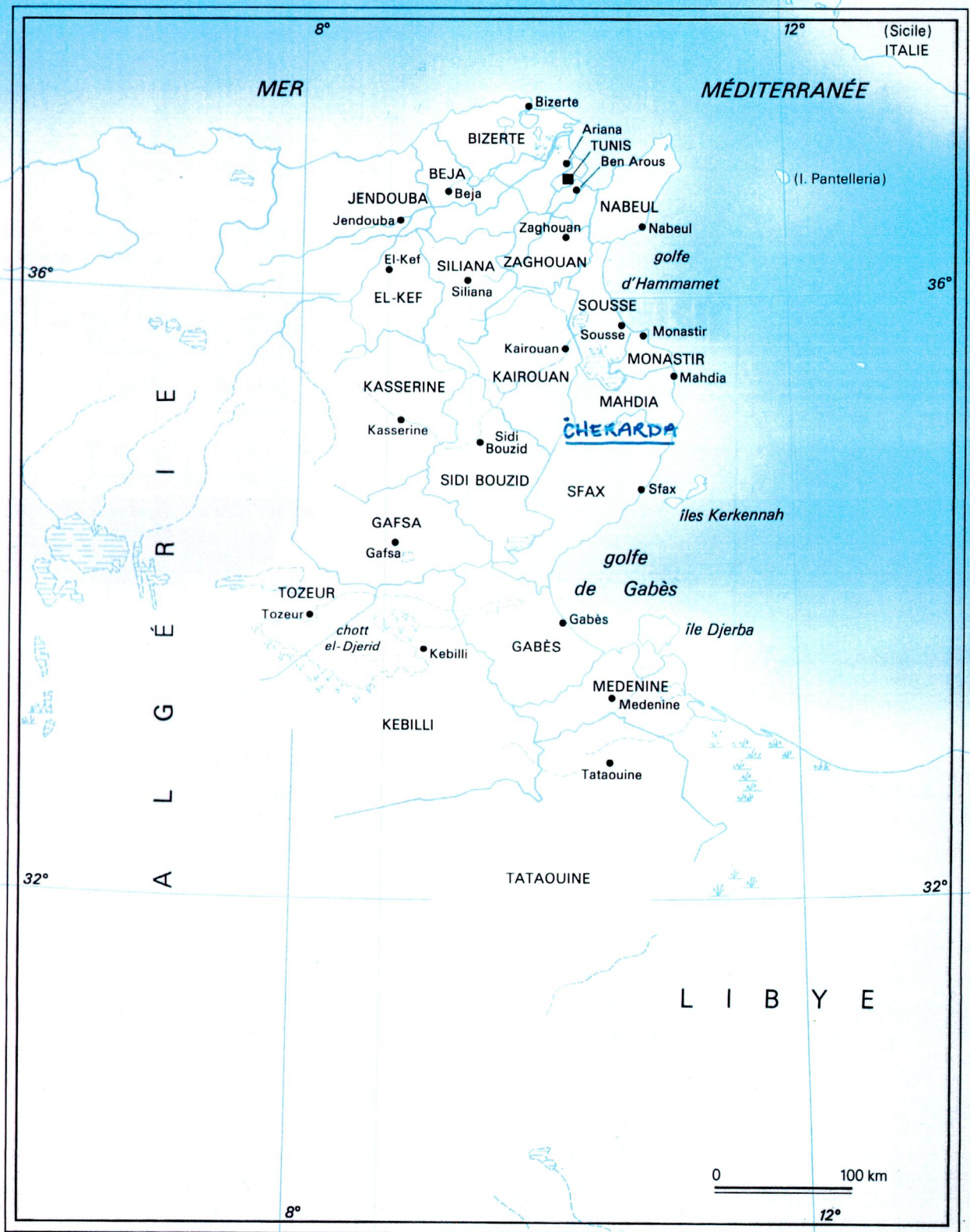
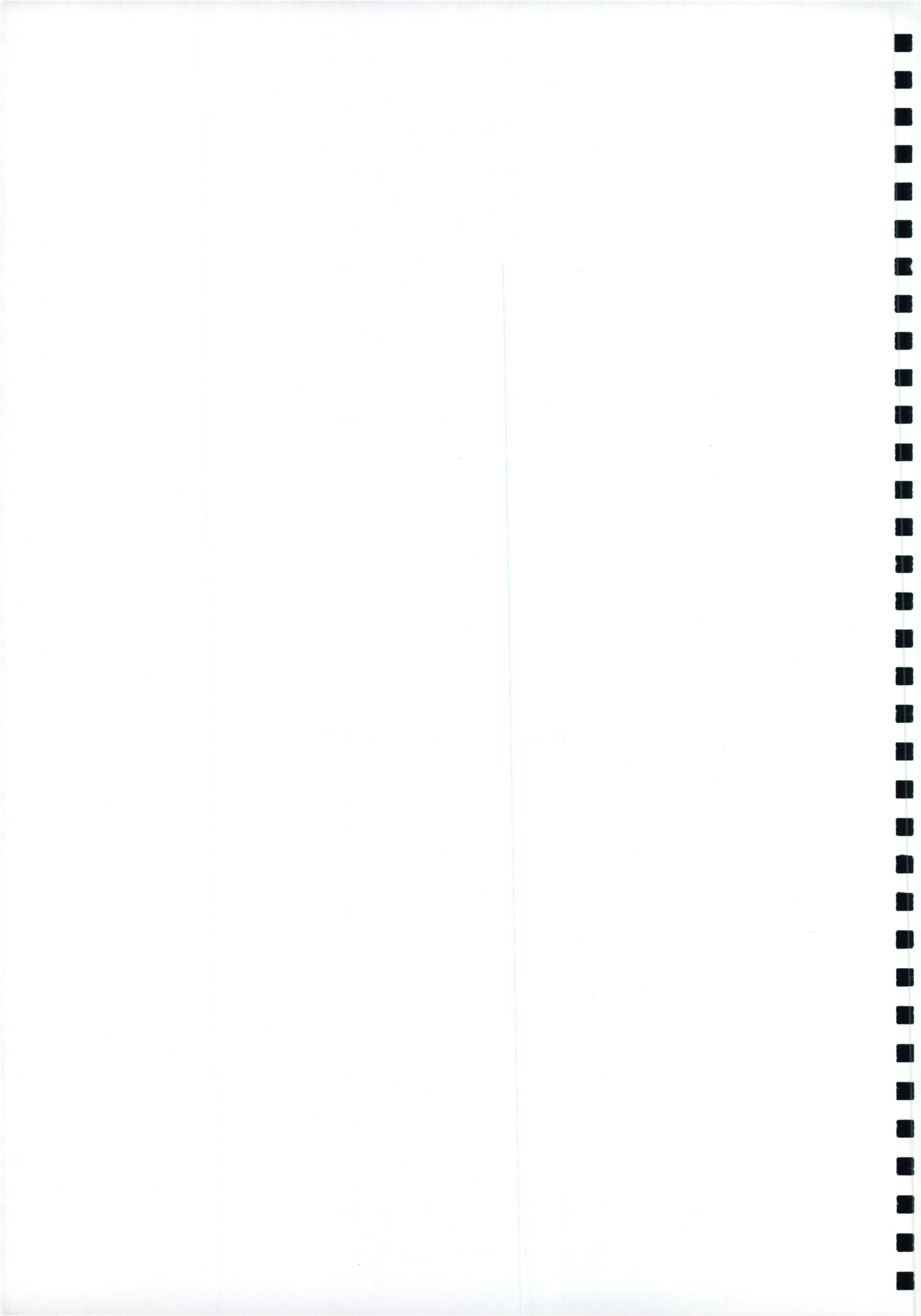


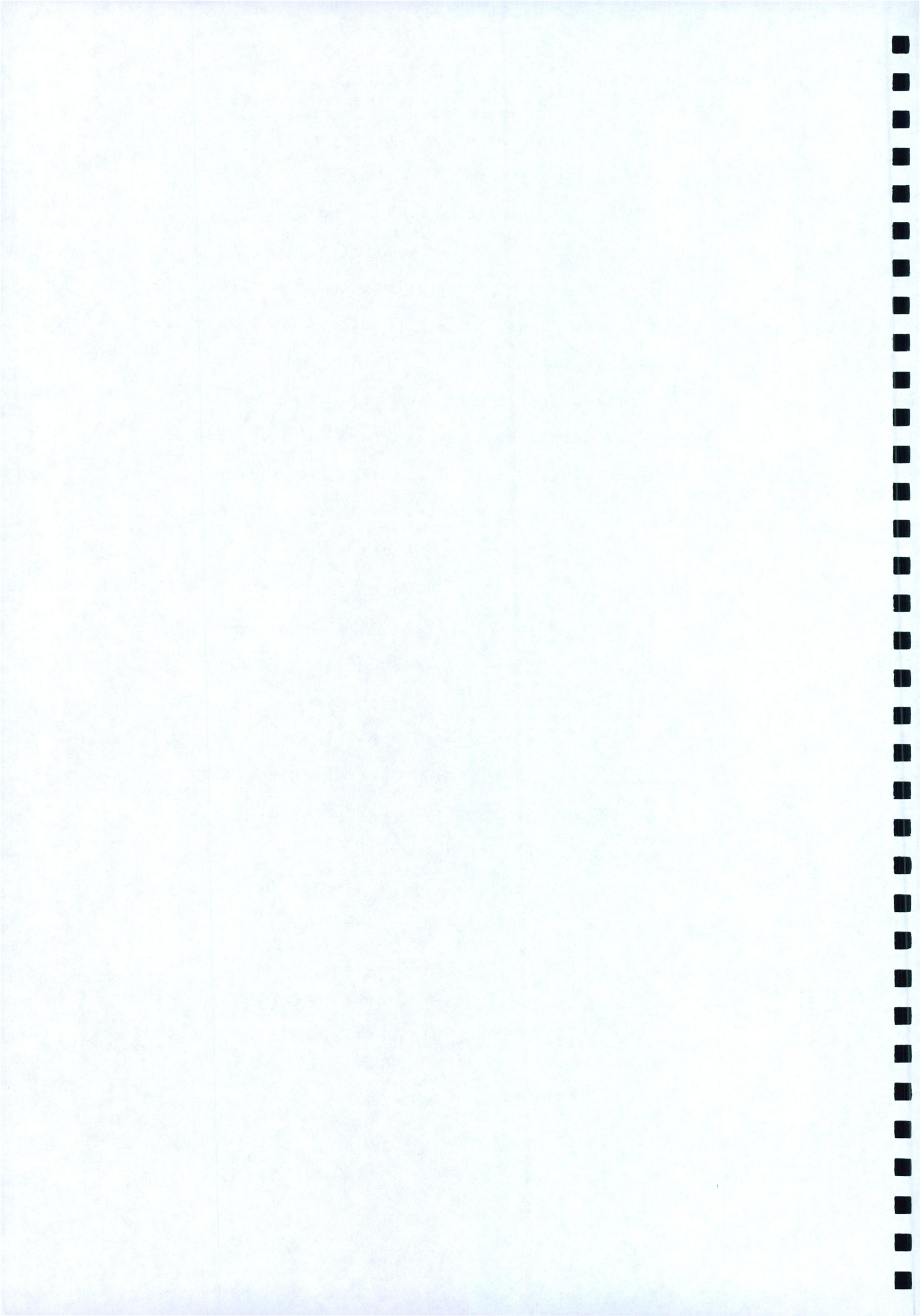
Plate 1. Map of Tunisia showing Cherarda in the south of Kairouan.



The younger women who prefer western style jewellery were also interviewed. Their attitude to the jewellery as something which is no longer fashionable revealed the possibility of the imminent extinction of traditional jewellery in Tunisia. In this thesis the future of the jewellery will also be examined.

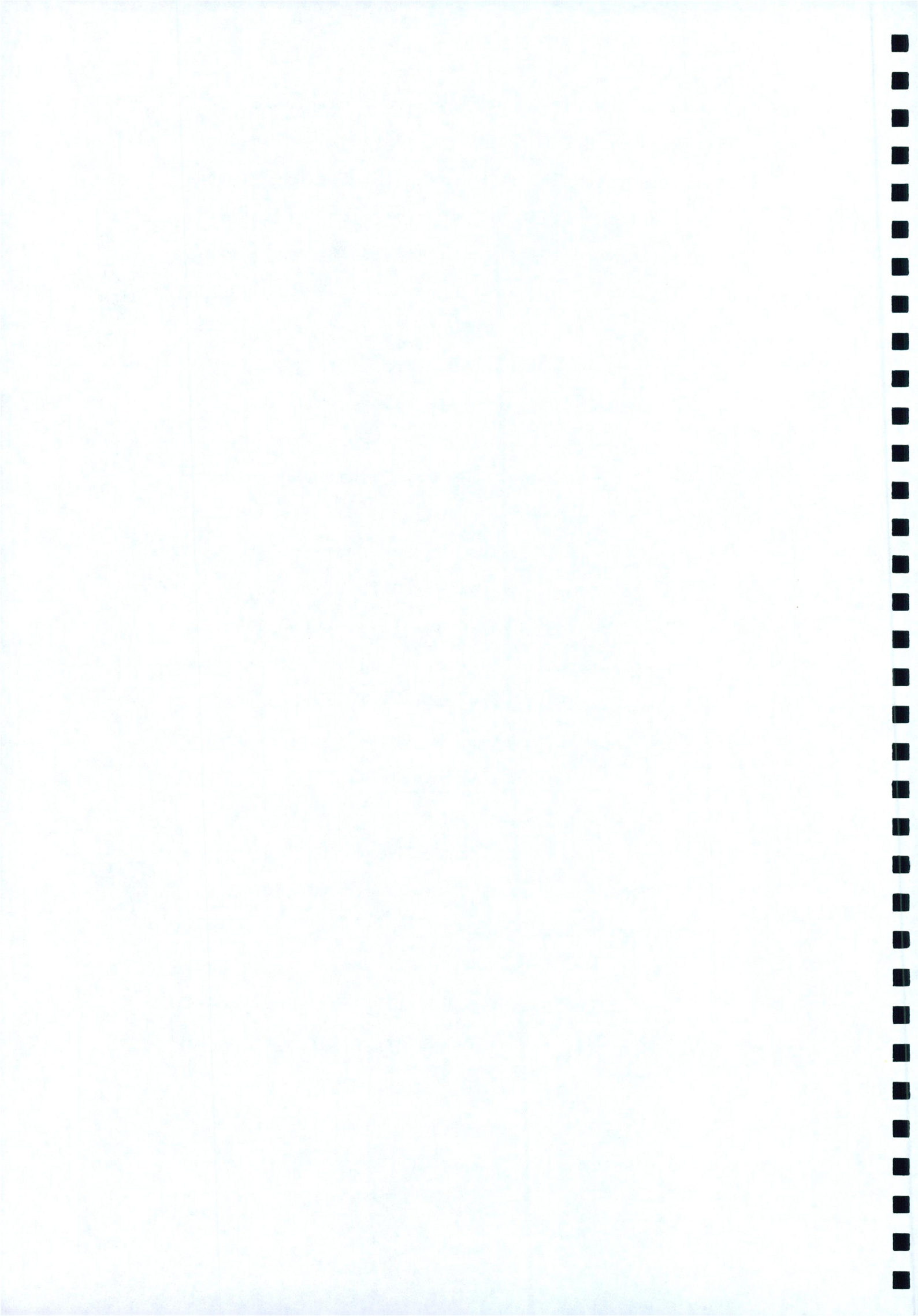
The research in jewellery making was carried out among the jewellers of Sfax which is the nearest city to Cherarda and in Tunis. They were asked about the history and future of this traditional jewellery and proved to be less forthcoming than the village women in their responses. However they allowed an examination of their wares and the workshops where they are made.

The Bardo Museum in Tunis houses a large collection of Tunisia's traditional jewellery. Some of the pieces in the museum were similar to the ones worn by the women of Cherarda but they were constantly referred to as Berber jewellery. This ambiguity was intriguing and led to a search for information on the history of Tunisia and the part the Berbers play in the formation of Tunisian culture.



The first book consulted was Tunisia - Land of Enchantment by Abdelaziz Doulatli. This told a brief informative history of the country but did not provide a sufficient background to contemporary Tunisian culture. This was found in a French Larousse publication entitled Tunisie - Monde et Voyages by Pierre Minvielle. Books specifically dealing with Tunisian traditional jewellery were not available in Tunisia. There had been two publications but they were limited editions. One was a Tunisian publication entitled Bijou Tunisiens by Clemence Sugier. The other was a French book entitled Le Bijou Traditionnel en Tunisie by Samira Gargouri-Sethom which was available through an inter-library loan from the British Library. Other books consulted provided information on Folk jewellery and jewellery of the Arab world.

After two months being exposed to the rural life in Cherarda, the daily pattern became familiar. This allowed for greater observation of how the jewellery functions in the lives of the women. In chapter one their historical background will be examined so as to reveal the different aspects of Tunisian

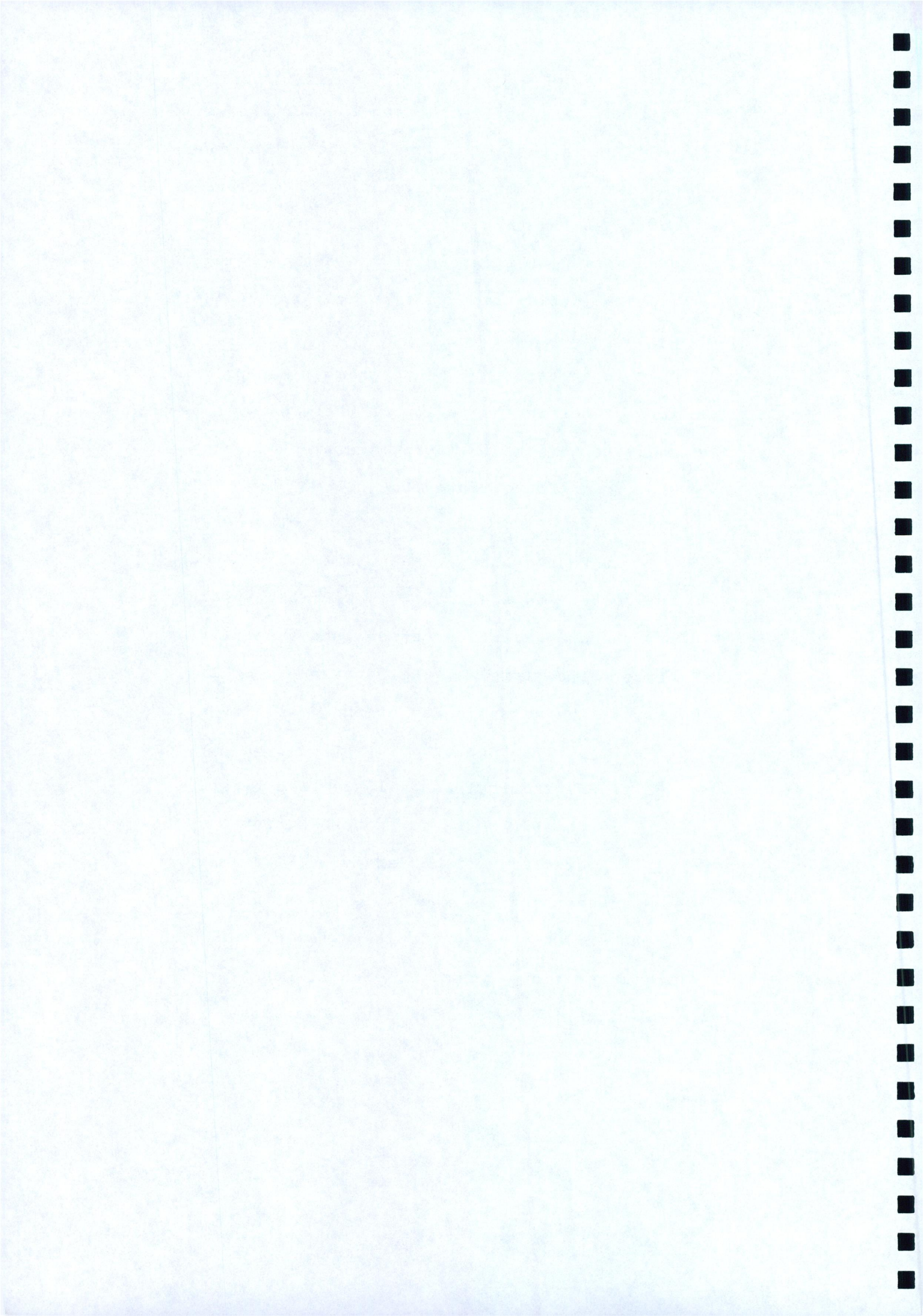


culture. The influence from the Berbers will be shown in the beliefs held today about the amuletic power of the jewellery. Religious motifs and symbols in some pieces prompt an examination of the role of the Muslim religion in rural Tunisia and particularly in the lives of the older women.

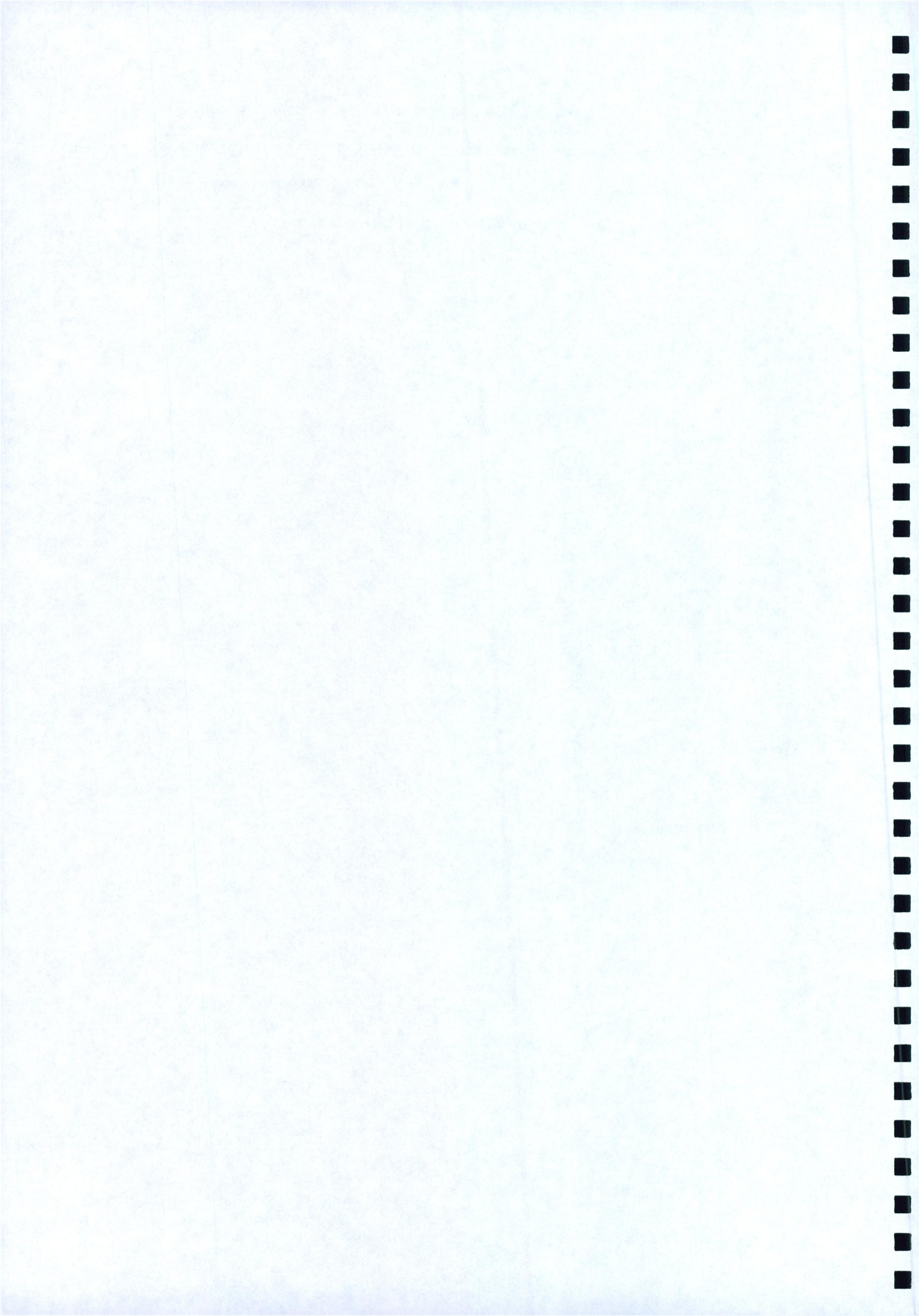
In chapter two the seven most commonly worn pieces in the region of Cherarda will be analysed and the following questions posed: what is the function of the piece? how is it made? what is its purpose in a social context?

In chapter three the relationship between the Berber and Arab cultures will be explored and the contradiction between the superstition of Berber beliefs and the devotion to Muslim beliefs in the symbolism of the jewellery will be examined. Other areas of opposition between the two sets of beliefs will be investigated.

In chapter four the economic importance of the jewellery will be analysed. Jewellery has always been an expendable asset in hard times and this was a prominent feature of rural Tunisian economics. In this chapter the situation today will also be examined and the position of jewellery makers investigated.



The jewellery is also important socially and this is expressed through the story of an old woman who describes the role jewellery played in the different stages of her life.



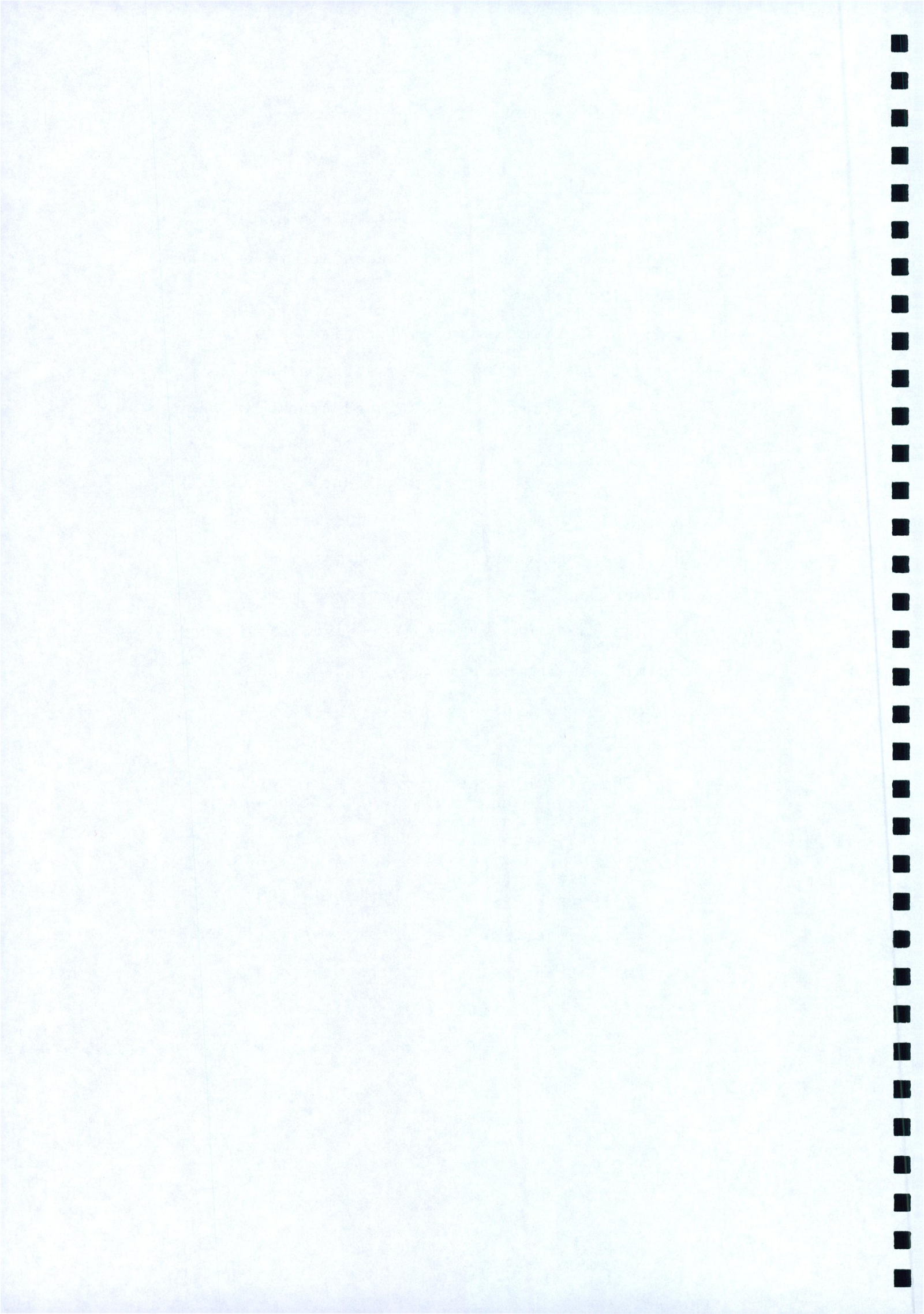
CHAPTER ONE - Background

Berber influence

To understand the significance of Tunisian jewellery, it is necessary to examine the society in which it is worn and the influences that has given Tunisia its unique culture. In 670, when the Arabs invaded Ifriqya, present day Tunisia, they found a nomadic race called Berbers living there. The Berbers had resisted many invasions but found the Arab customs acceptable. They particularly liked the idea of a reward in heaven for a good life on earth which is a fundamental principle of the Muslim faith. They accepted the Arabs and assimilated into one race. Although they intermarried, they managed to retain their strong customs.

They worship the stars (the sun and the moon) and natural forces (such as storms, springs and trees) and remain, even after their conversion to non-pagan religions, particularly superstitious, perpetuating ancestral rites and beliefs. (Doulatli,1993,p2)

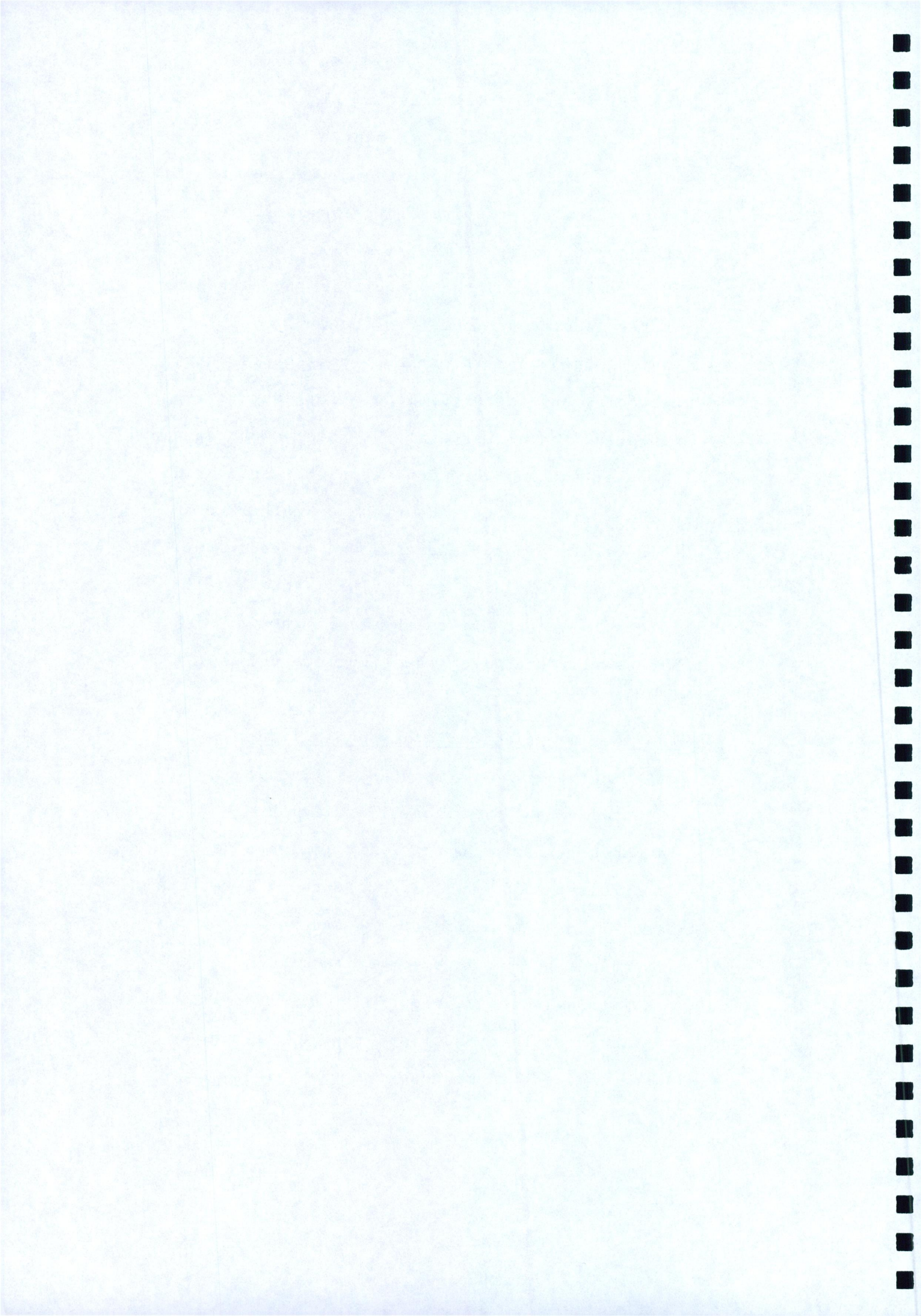
The women interviewed were very superstitious and held strong beliefs in the powers of certain materials in their jewellery. These ideas have evolved from their Berber ancestors.



Nomadic Berbers still exist in Algeria and Morocco where they observe many of the ancient customs. Without the influence of other cultures, they retain the significance of these traditions. An example of a tradition still practised by the Berbers is the tattooing of the face to protect from the evil eye. Many of the women interviewed had subtle face tattooing but its significance for them is different to the Berbers. One old woman explained that her tattoos were done when she was a child by her mother. She recounted how mothers did this with a razor blade as a way of seeing how brave their children were. This shows how the Berber influence exists physically but not necessarily with its true significance.

The role of religion in a woman's life

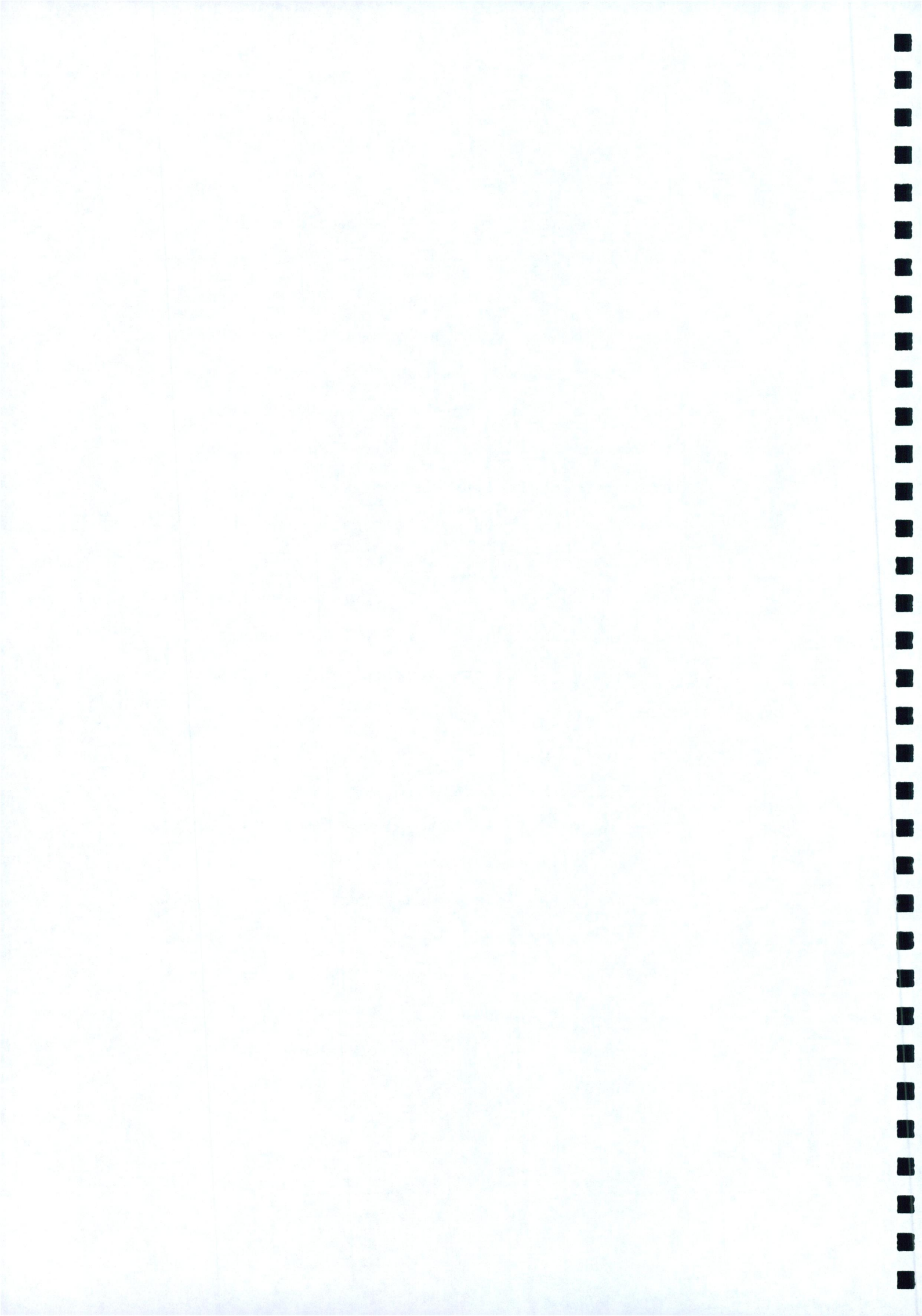
The other most important influence on the traditional jewellery is religion. The country has a 96 to 97% muslim population (Minvielle, 1988, p49), and the faith is strong here with the majority of men and women attending the Mosque every Friday. Alcohol is considered immoral and can only be found in tourist resorts or cities. In the village where I conducted my research there is a very



natural way of life. Religion is an intrinsic part of this life and there are three main religious occasions which are observed by all the people of Tunisia. These are Ramadan, a period of thirty days during which a fast from food and drink is maintained during the hours of daylight and feasting commences when the sun goes down. This is followed by Aid El-Saghir which is a celebration of the end of Ramadan. Two months later Aid El-Kabir is celebrated. This is the most important of the religious occasions and is in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice of a sheep in place of his son. All over the country people slaughter a lamb especially for this feast and a Tunisian speciality called Mechoui, which is the stomach of the sheep is eaten.

Lifestyle of the women

The religious festivals provide highlights in the Muslim year along with the different seasons of the farming calendar. Tunisian women play a major role in both religious and farming life. It is their responsibility to prepare the food for Ramadan and the two Aid. They take care of feeding the animals and when their farming and household tasks are completed, they

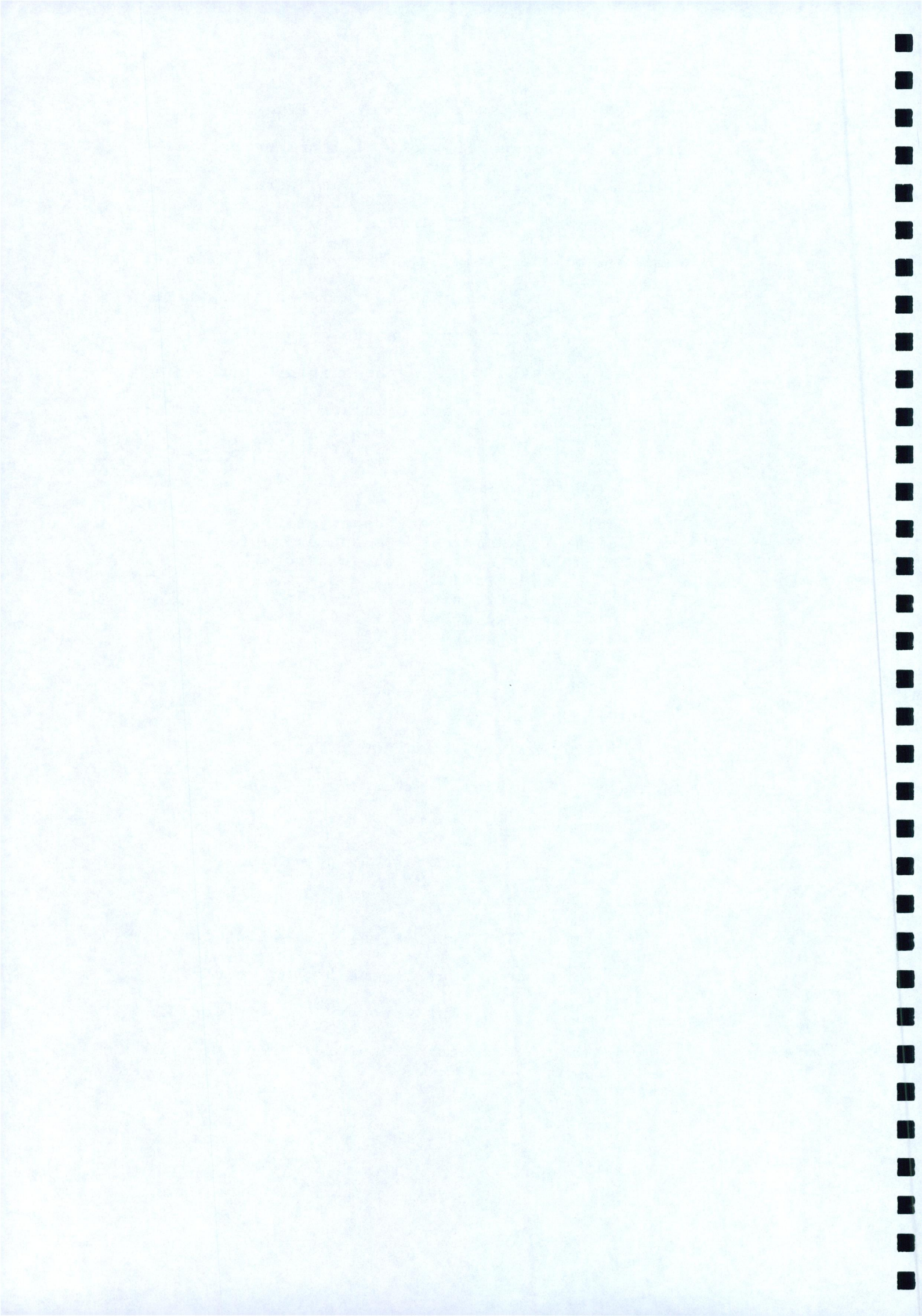


make rag carpets as a way of recycling old clothes and scraps of wool. Television provides nightly entertainment with a soap opera from Brazil translated into Arabic which all the family watch religiously. The women often do their chores together and there is an atmosphere of unity and camaraderie in these gatherings. They can be heard laughing or singing at their work or just talking and drinking their sweet strong blend of tea, heated over a bucket of olive wood cinders.

They delight in every opportunity to celebrate, and weddings are colourful and noisy affairs, with an uproar of music and dancing that continues throughout the night. The celebrations, which involve seemingly endless feasting, may last for a week. (Fisher, 1984, p228)

Jewellery as identity

This jewellery gives the women a national identity. As Daniels writes "The wish to change oneself positively, to distinguish oneself or to show which group one belongs to is as old as mankind itself." (Daniels, 1989, p7) Their costume also denotes which district they come from by the colour of the hirem, which is the traditional garment worn by women in Tunisia. In Awagbia, the region of Cherarda where my studies were concentrated, a black hirem is



worn with a colourful floral border at hip level in red, green, blue and yellow as in Plate 2. By wearing the traditional costume the woman maintains an image of her role as unchanged and static. Tunisian society is changing and there are many options for young women today. The costume conceals this fact and Daniels outlines the reasons:

Today, in the last decade of the twentieth century, traditional body decoration and costumes belong to the past. They are folklore. If these costumes still play a role in everyday life, they are worn primarily by women. At this time, men are still predominantly the first to leave home, to open up new economic possibilities, and to face the norms of the omnipotent community to which they belong. Frequently, adjusting to the values and external forms of a new community seems more promising than adhering to those of the original community. In most cases the women are left at home, and therefore become involved in a rearguard action against the rapidly approaching outer world. (Daniels, 1989,p5)

I found this to be particularly true in Cherarda, which reflects the rest of rural Tunisia where men only wear the traditional costume, a robe called the Jeba, when going to the Mosque, for religious festivals such as Ramadan and for weddings. In their daily life at the marketplace or in the cafe with their friends they wear casual Western clothes. Some of the older men wear the Jeba all the time but the majority

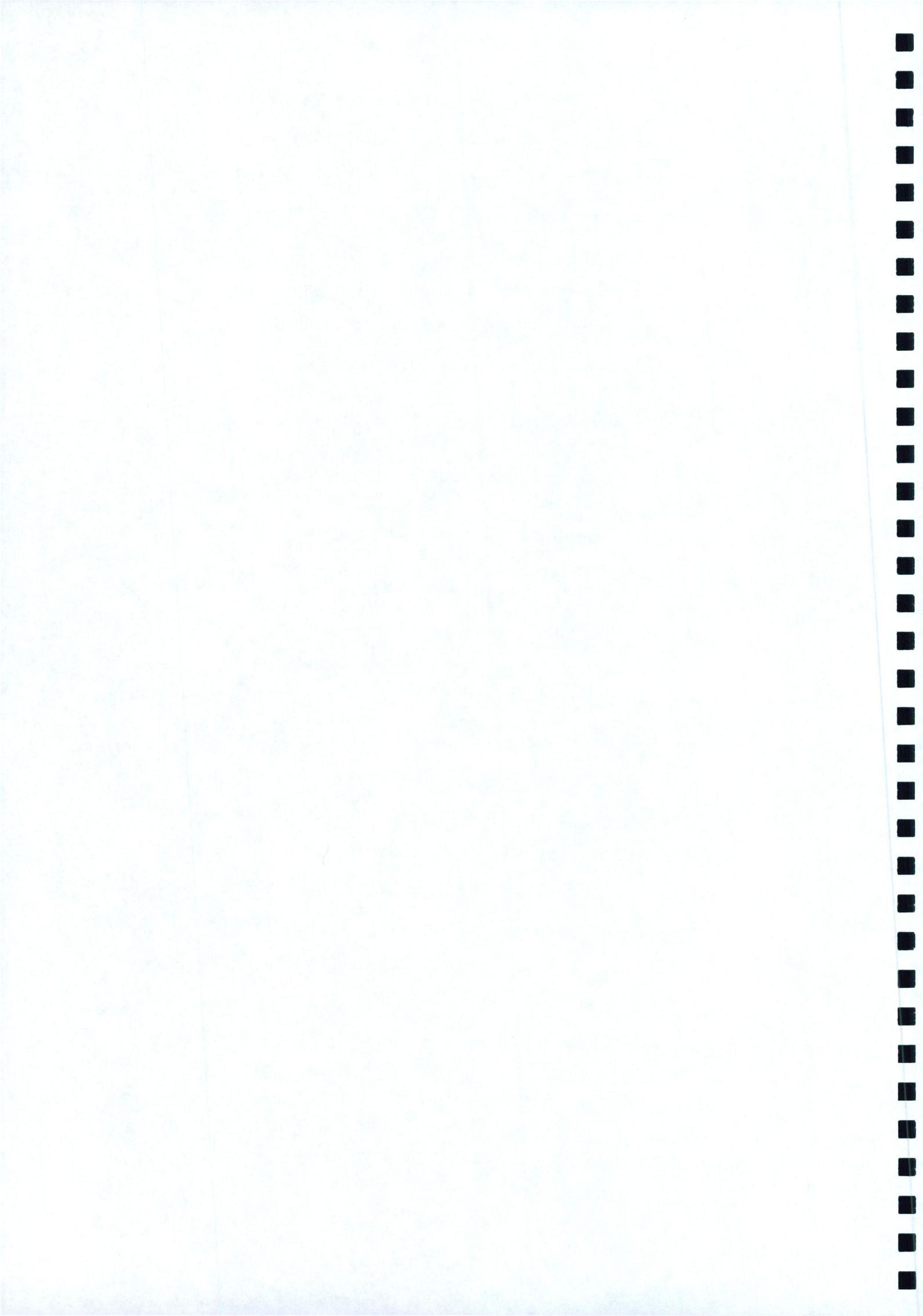
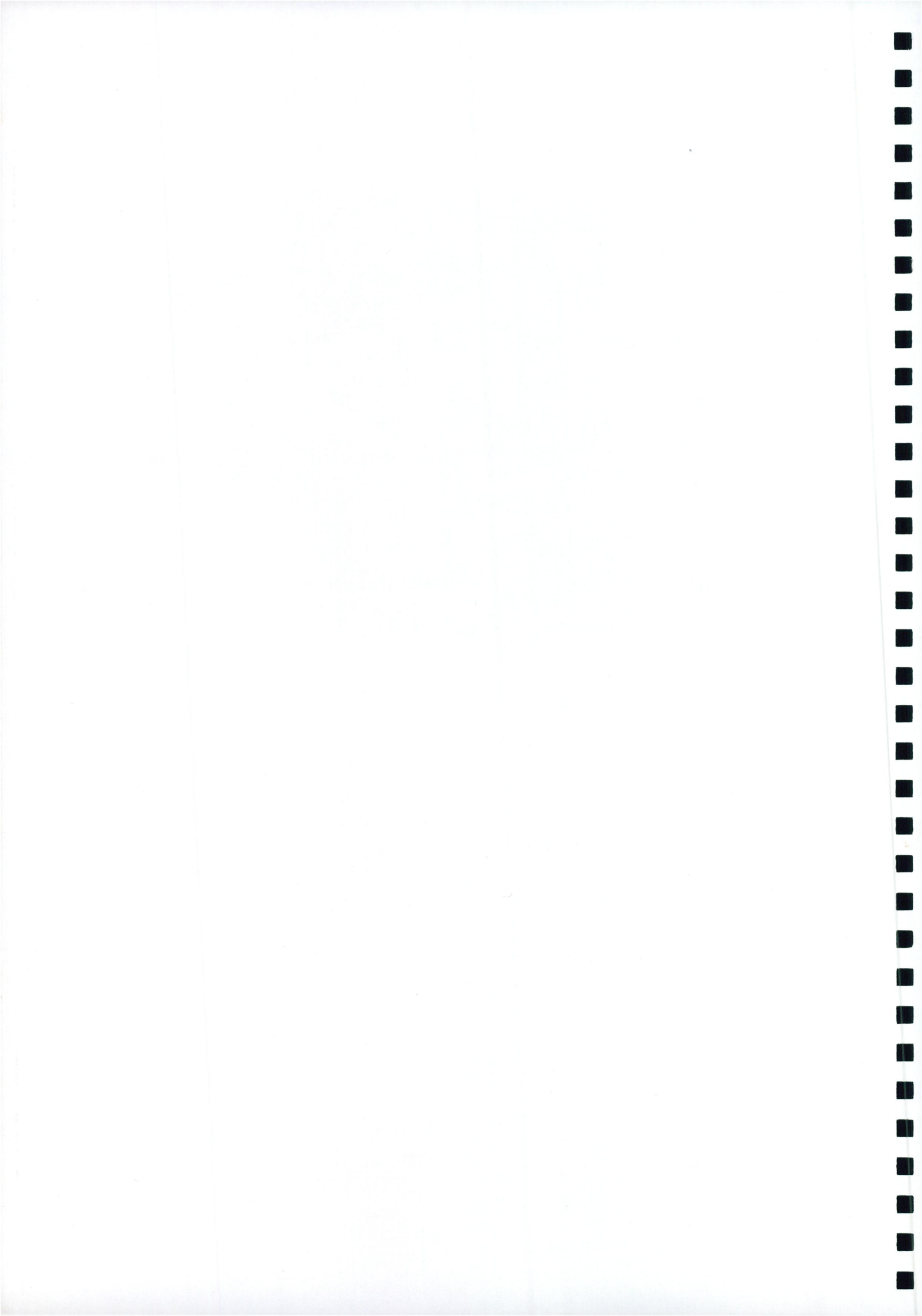


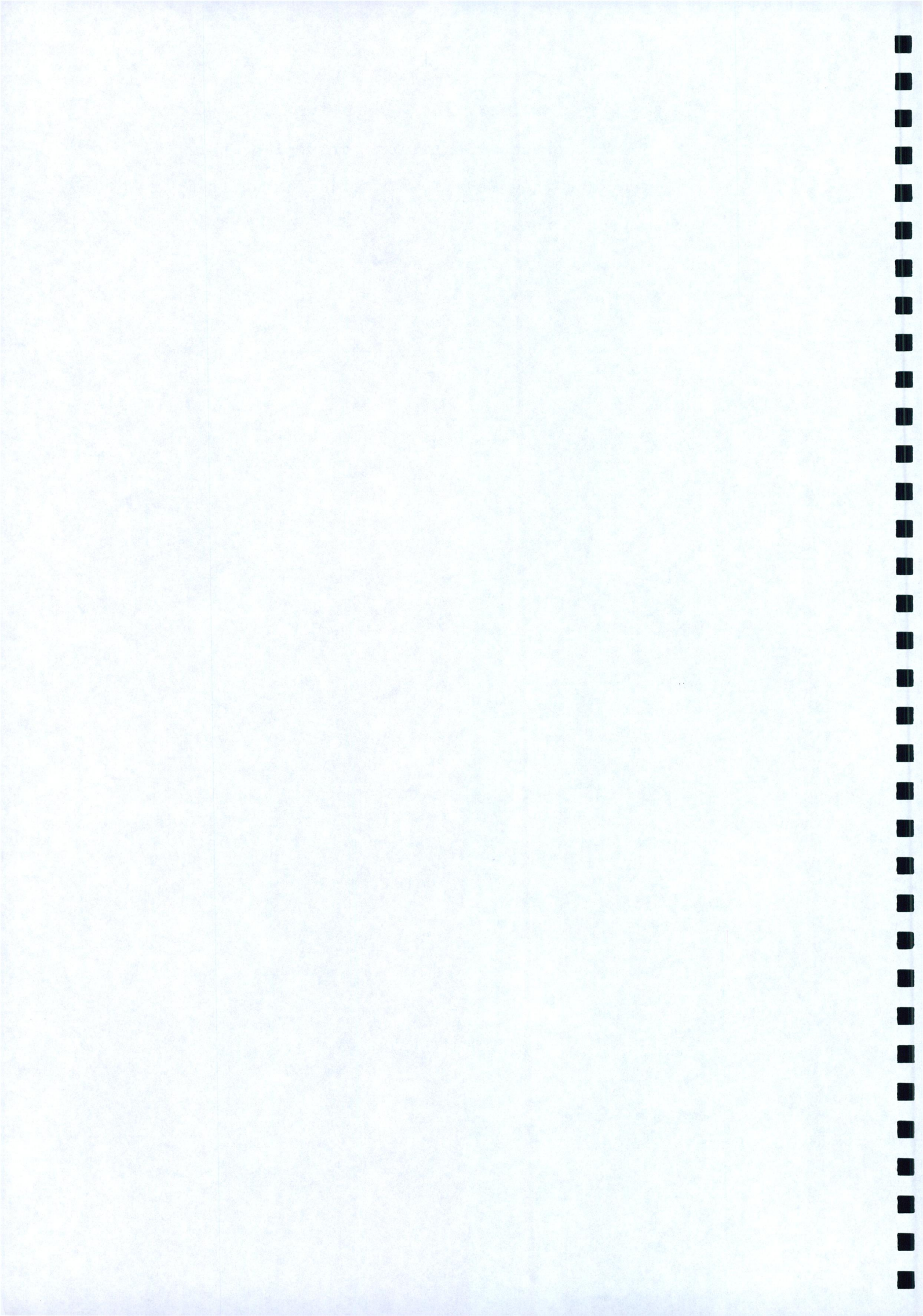


Plate 2. This is a photograph of the hirem at hip level showing the colourful border. Also in this photograph is the woolen belt which is tied through the zouse.



reserve it for traditional activities.

A woman's costume identifies her region, her country and the traditional values of which it is a visual reminder.



CHAPTER TWO - An analysis of the jewellery's purpose, manufacture and meaning.

The traditional jewellery which is most commonly worn in Cherarda consists of seven different pieces. In other regions of the country, preferences may vary. However, I shall restrict my investigation to the jewellery of Cherarda. Although some pieces are functionally integral to the wearing of the hirem, the others are equally important to the social integrity of the costume. The pieces will be analysed in terms of how they are worn, how they are made and their significance symbolically to the wearer.

Blalitte: large hoop earrings

The first piece is the one which is most representative of traditional Tunisian jewellery and which is worn all over rural Tunisia. A pair of these large hoop earrings can be seen in Plate 3. They are worn through the ear lobe but because of their weight (which is at least twenty grams for the metal alone), they are supported by two scarves tied over and around the head. In Cherarda these scarves are

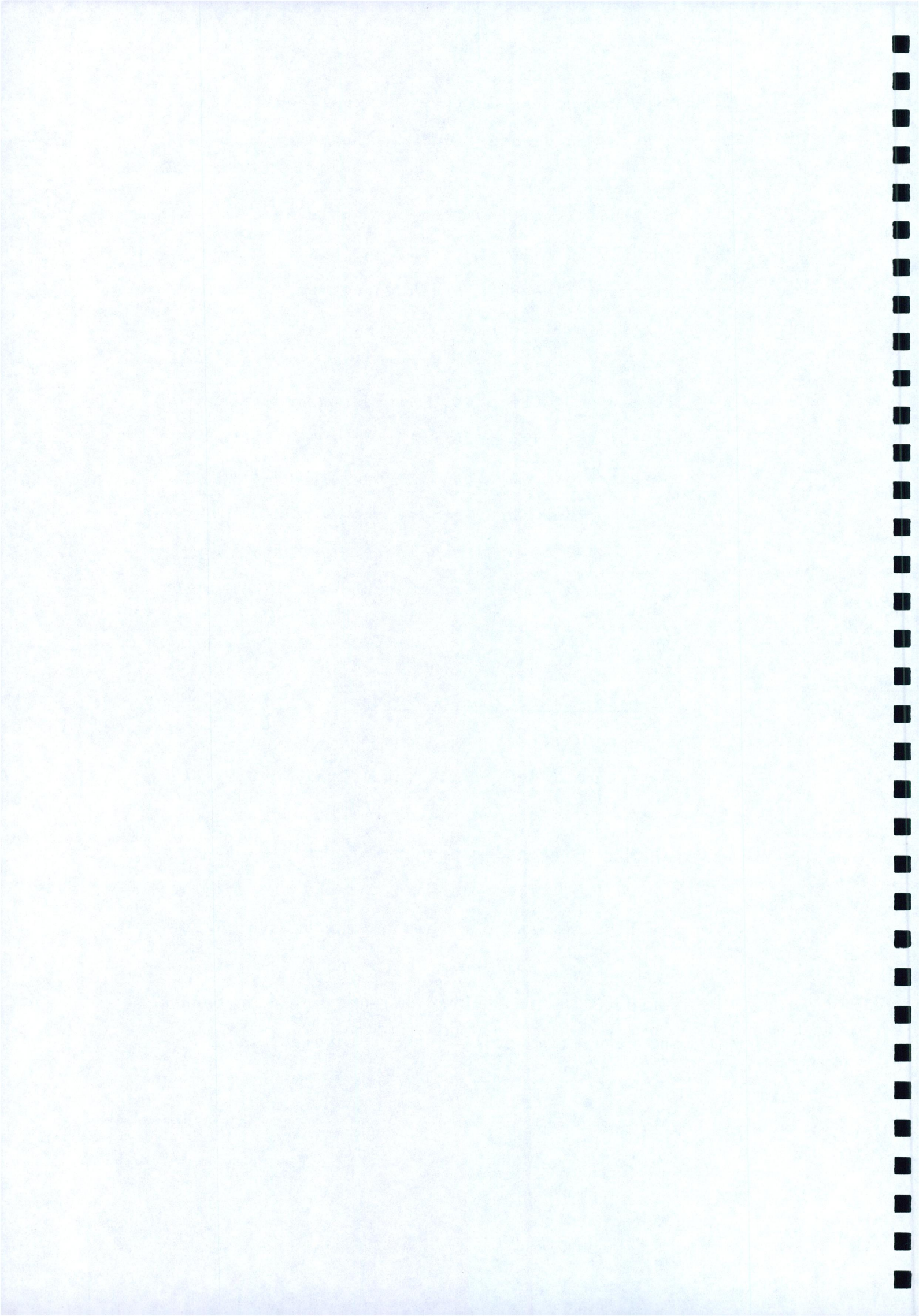




Plate 3. This photograph shows the Blalitte (hoop earrings) with coral, amber and other coloured beads strung on them. The scarves hold the earrings in place and ease the weight carried by the ear-lobe.



invariably brightly coloured in contrast to the black hirem worn in this district.

They are hand fabricated using the traditional techniques of forging, soldering, chasing and repoussage. The wire used to form the ring is of three millimetre gauge and can be either gold or silver. This is flattened at one end with the blow of a hammer and a hole drilled in it. The other end has a fabricated hollow section which resembles the shape of a cobra's head. This form is achieved by raising the metal to the shape desired using the technique of repoussage. Marks are made on the surface using a chisel punch. The base of this hollow section protrudes and a link is soldered in place to receive the strung section of the earring. This is used to attach precious beads and materials of amuletic powers such as the horn of a deer which protects the wearer from the evil eye. These additions are made by the women themselves and only the metal is purchased from the jeweller. This assures the individuality of each woman's earrings as she creates her own strung section. The beads are chosen for their healing or protective powers and for their beauty.



The beaded necklace

The assemblage style used to create individualistic earrings is also used in the beaded necklace. The Berbers have certain principles of construction :

at least one of the materials in the necklace must be of a natural substance, such as amber, coral or shells, in order for it to have the magical and preventive qualities integral to the Berber cultural belief system. The necklace may contain a number of materials, whether fake or real - but at least one of these elements must be strung on the piece - otherwise, there is no perceived power. (Jereb, 1989, p40)

Today in Tunisia some beads have powers attributed to them but many are just worn for their beauty and colour. Perhaps they had significance for the Berbers but if so it is lost now. A woman may have plastic beads separating coral but they are not a substitute, just an addition. She is also very likely to add many found objects such as keys or buttons as an expression of her individuality. Shells are also used in their necklaces especially cowrie shells whose shape is reminiscent of an eye and therefore offers protection against the evil eye. An example of this kind of necklace can be seen in Plate 4 where plastic and glass beads are combined

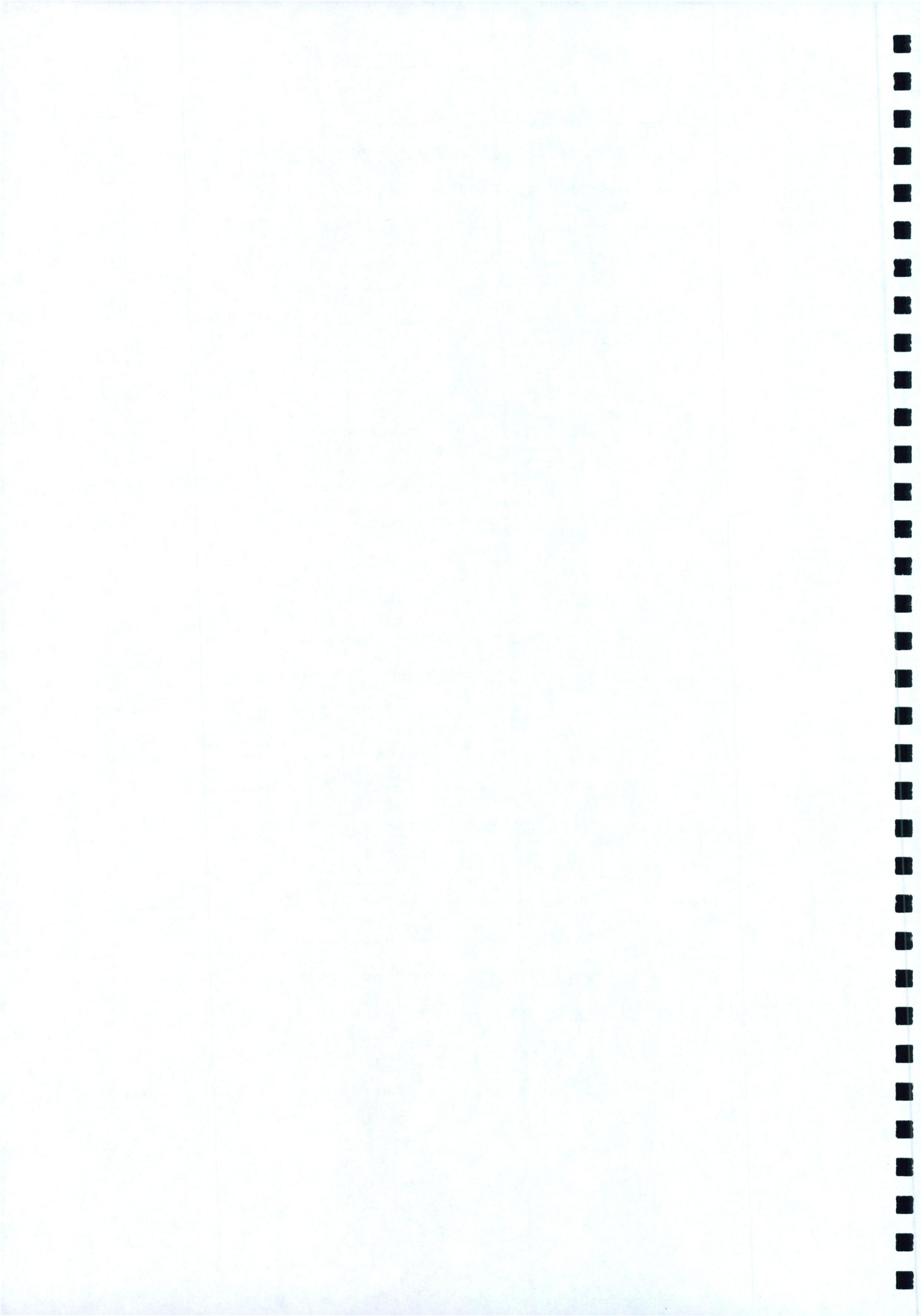




Plate 4. The beaded necklace can be seen here consisting of glass and plastic beads with a bead of coral.



with a large bead of coral. Beaded necklaces are an interesting concoction of natural materials and any other decorative objects that can be strung on a thread.

Khulel:fibulae

The basic garment of the Tunisian woman's costume is called a hirem. Two fibulae hold the garment together at the chest and these are called khulel.

The most common form of the khulel can be seen in Plate 5. The khulel is the most important functional piece and is integral to the wearing of the hirem. Each khulel consists of a triangular plate of metal with a section of tubing soldered to the edge of its base. A pin is soldered to the outside wall of the tube. A flattened split ring fits through the tubing and the pin and ring form the clasp mechanism of the khulel. The triangular section is often fabricated in an openwork style which is a common feature of Tunisian jewellery. This means that the surface has holes pierced out to reveal the design. Some khulel also feature cast elements soldered to the surface.

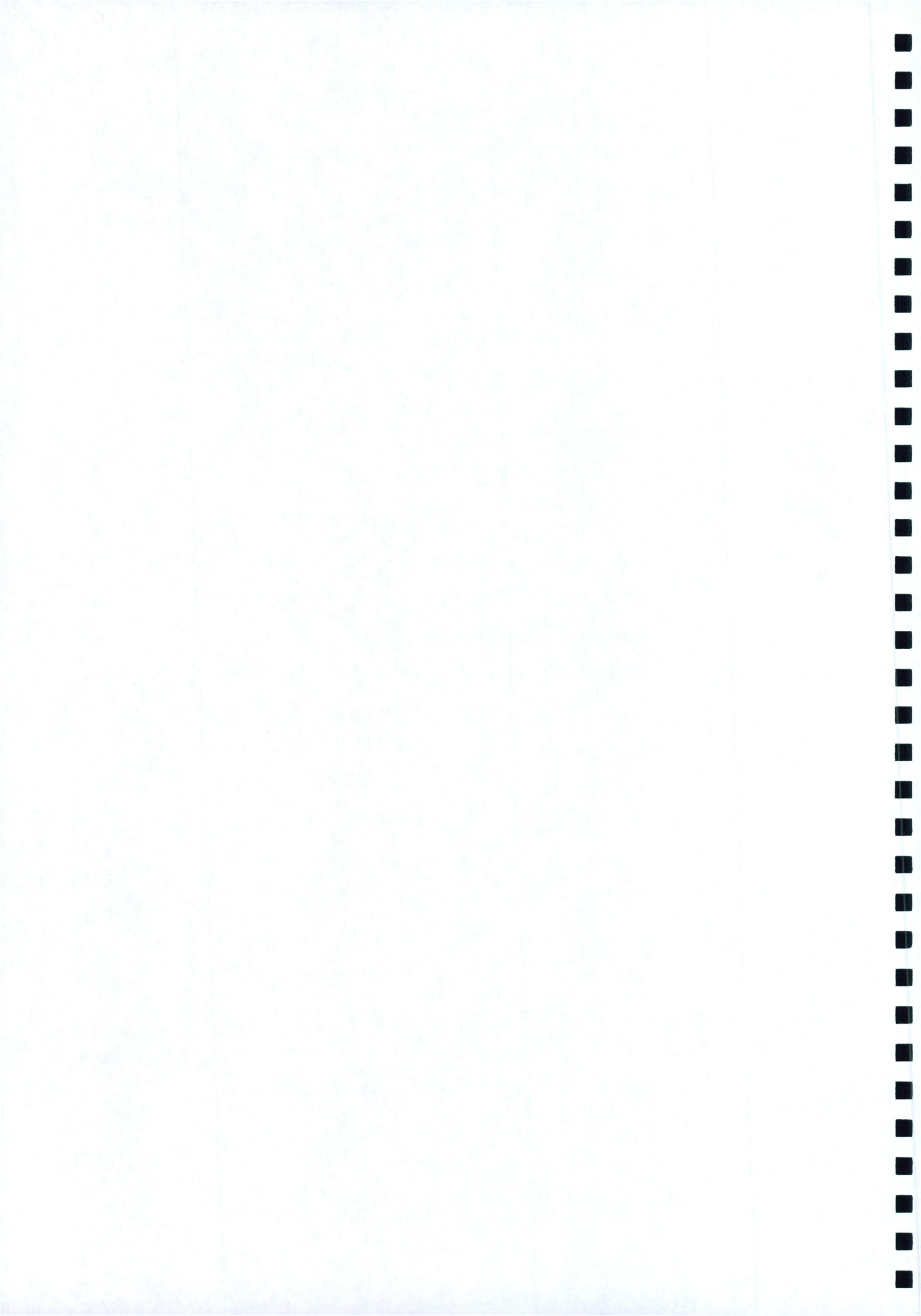
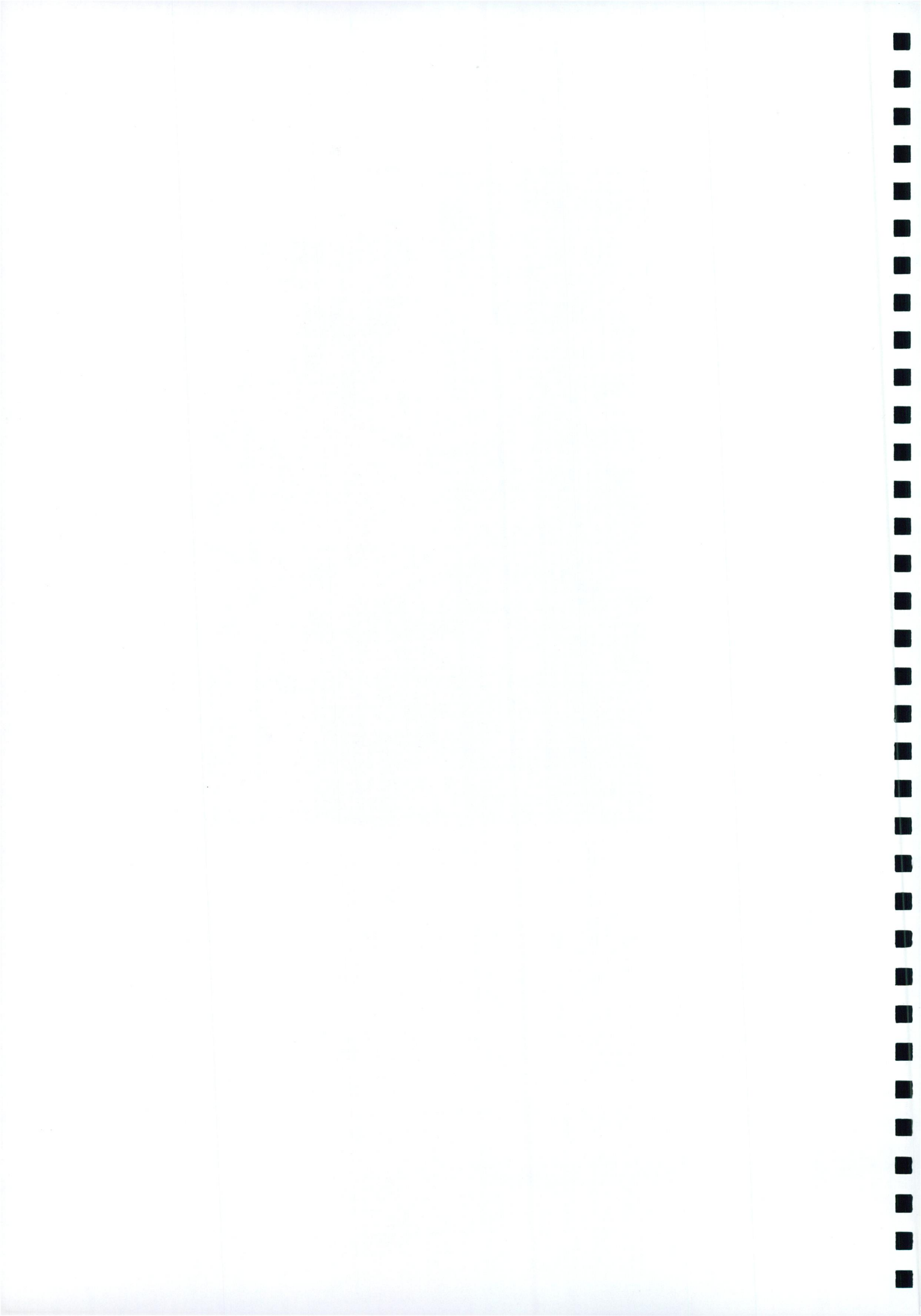




Plate 5. This fibula is called a khulel and is one of two which hold the hirem together. It is of openwork design and features cast elements of a fish and the Tunisian flag symbol of a five-pointed star encircled by a quarter moon.



The khulel also has a ceremonial function in different social events. If a woman's son is to be circumcised, the khulel on the left is worn on the hip. If her son is to be married she wears the horizontal chains which often connect the two khulel, behind her head. This is both symbolic and practical as she needs it out of her way while she is preparing the wedding feast.

Pendants

Pendants are often hung from the chains of the khulel usually to make an arrangement of five pieces, which is the holy number in the muslim faith. In Plate 6 an arrangement like this can be seen. The pendants in this photograph are called The Hand of Fatima and are of an openwork style. The other pendant in the photograph is circular and features a quarter moon with a five-pointed star encircled in it. These motifs will be analysed for their significance in Chapter 3. The pendants are worn as amulets to protect from the evil eye. They are often worn strung on a thread with beads of coral and other

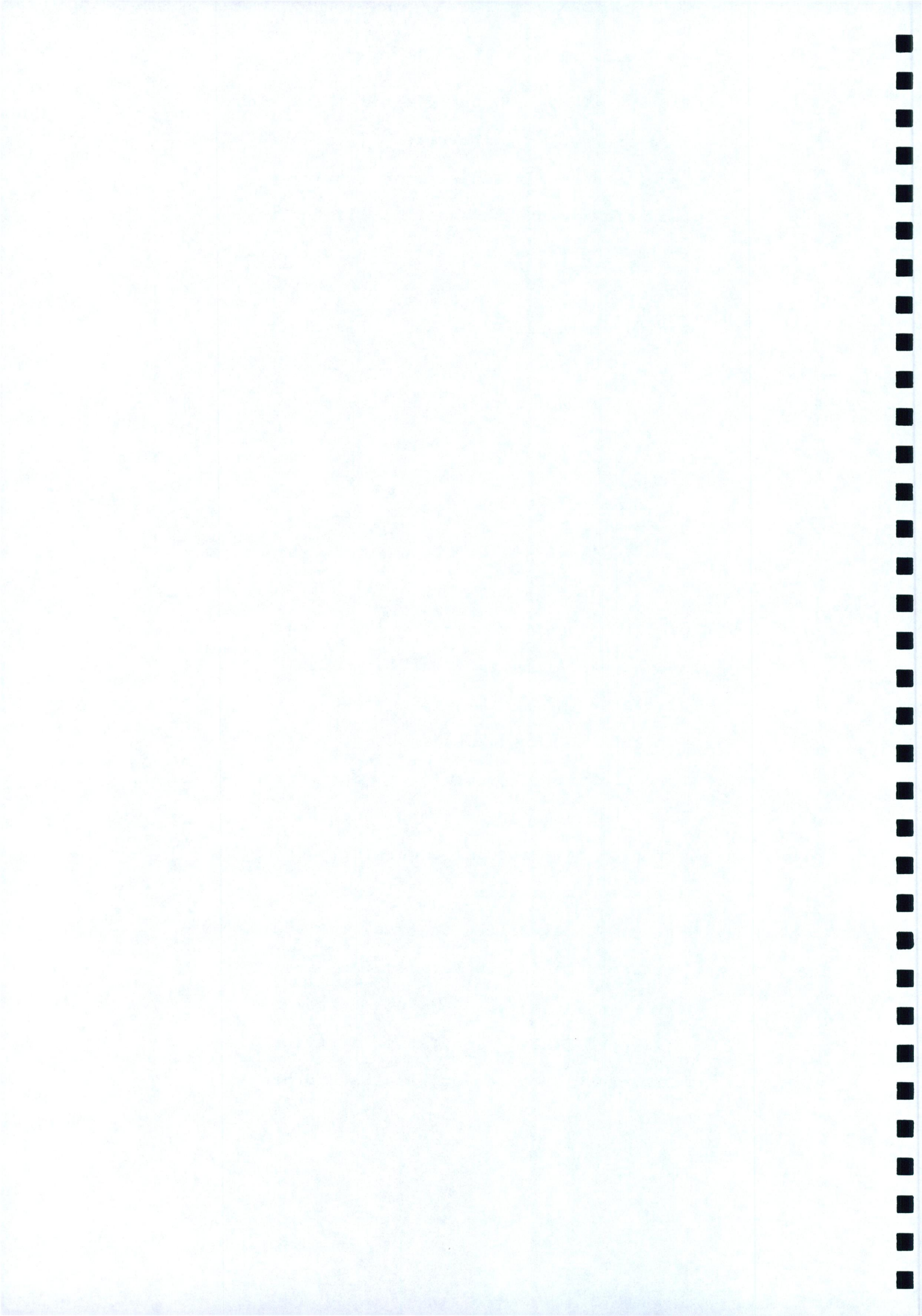
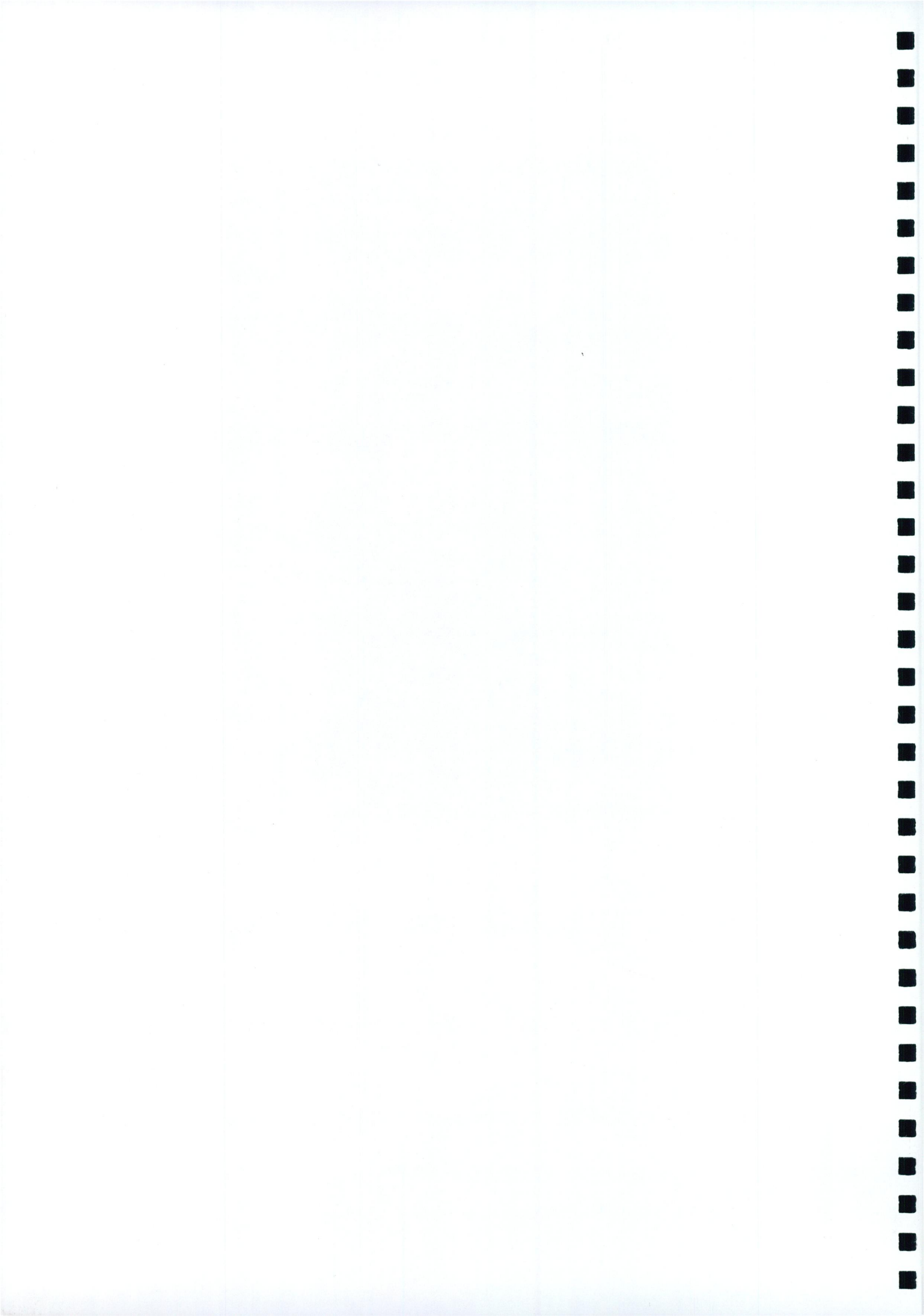




Plate 6. The typical arrangement of the pendants can be seen in this photograph.



coloured beads as in Plate 7. Pendants are often used in this way interspersed in a beaded necklace.

Zouse: belt ring

Another functional piece is the zouse. Plate 8. It acts as a belt buckle for the woolen yarn that is wrapped around the hirem at hip level. It is the most simple design in all the traditional jewellery but it is also functionally one of the most important. It is usually made in silver or a silver coloured metal and is very dramatically decorated. It is not unlike a horse shoe in size and shape except it forms a complete circle. It has a diameter of ten centimetres and is made of heavy gauge material, perhaps ten millimetres thick. It bears a crude geometric pattern of lines and dots which are used to symbolise the holy number five. The marks are made with a chisel punch while the metal is hot. The dots are not so deep and were chased with a punch when the metal was cold. Women often use these functional items of jewellery for another function, a keyring. One zouse actually

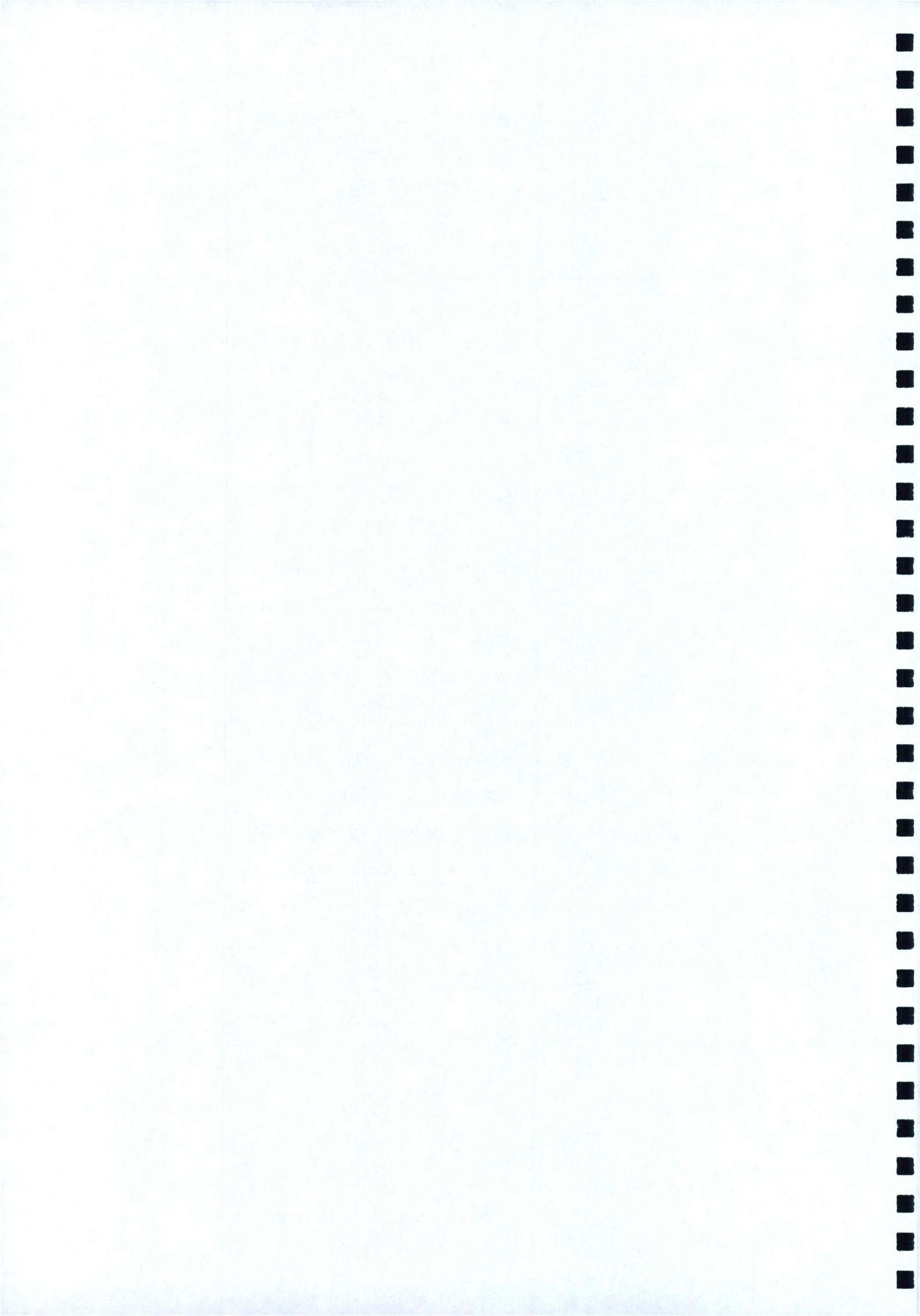




Plate 7. Here the pendants are interspersed with beads of coral and other coloured beads.





Plate 8. This is a photograph of a zouse through which the woolen belt of the hirem is tied. The crude appearance of the chiselled lines can be seen clearly here.



had a flat section attached to it with holes in it for keys to be tied on.

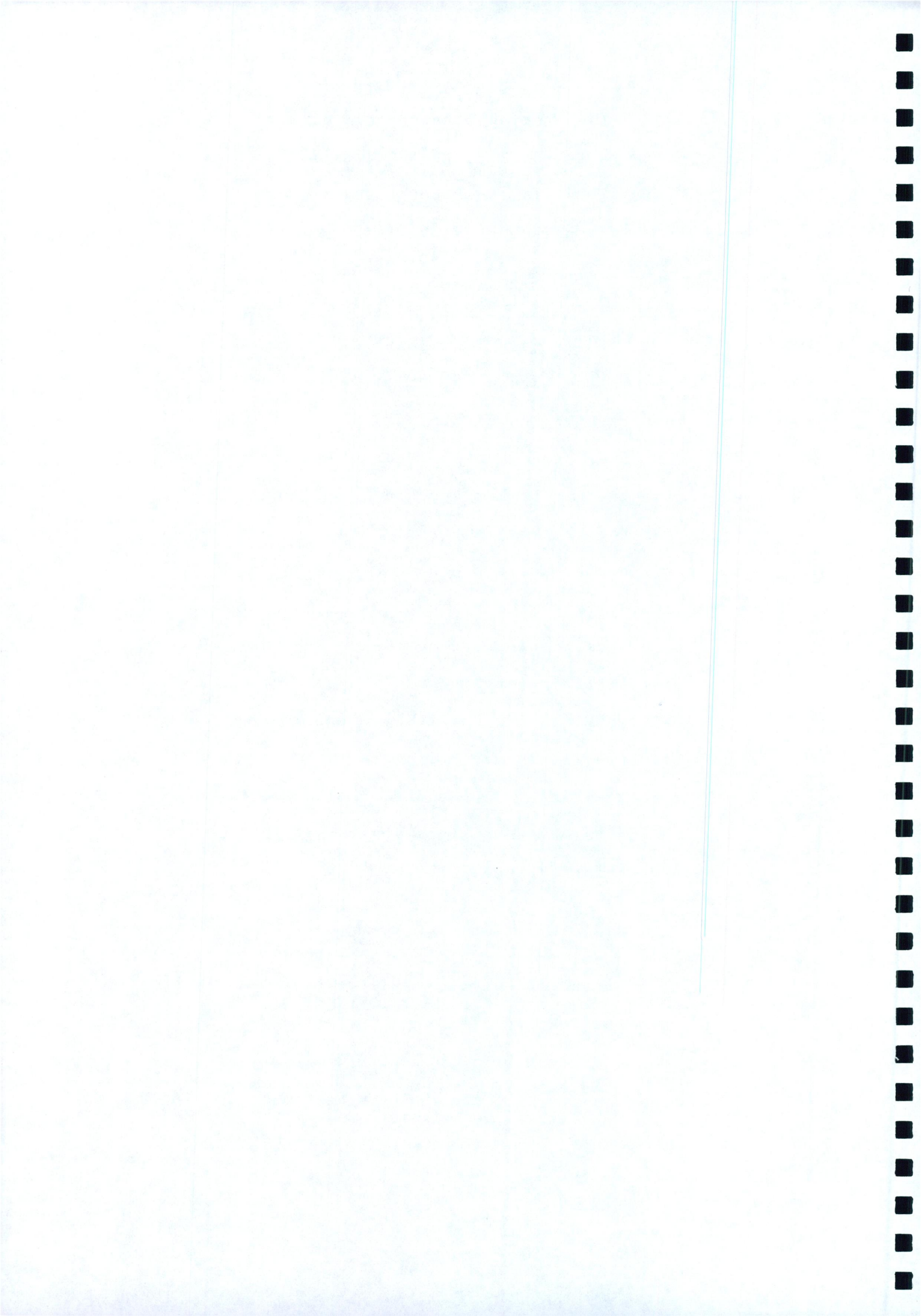
Plate 9. This shows how the jewellery is reinterpreted by women for a modern use.

Khulkel: ankle bracelet

This is usually made of silver and is a hollow tube with a hollow box interrupting the circle. It is customarily worn by a bride on her wedding day and is given to her by her husband. Some women wear the khulkel in the place of a zouse as it is not worn on the ankle in daily life. It is made by lost wax casting and sometimes pebbles are put in during casting so that their rattling will chase away evil spirits. With a twelve centimetre diameter, it is slightly larger than the zouse. It has a crude design of lines and dents on its surface which gives it a rough appearance. Plate 10.

Marafah

Another piece of jewellery associated with the wedding ceremony is the marafah. This piece can be worn on the head or across the chest connected to the khulel,



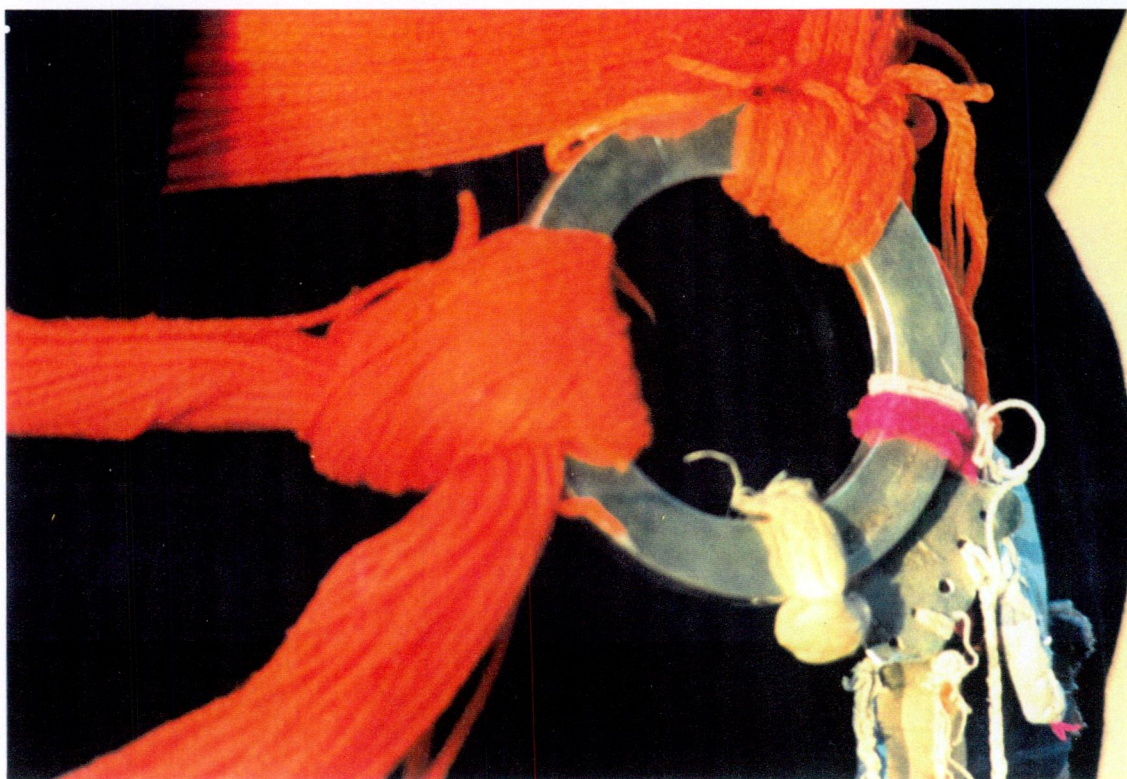
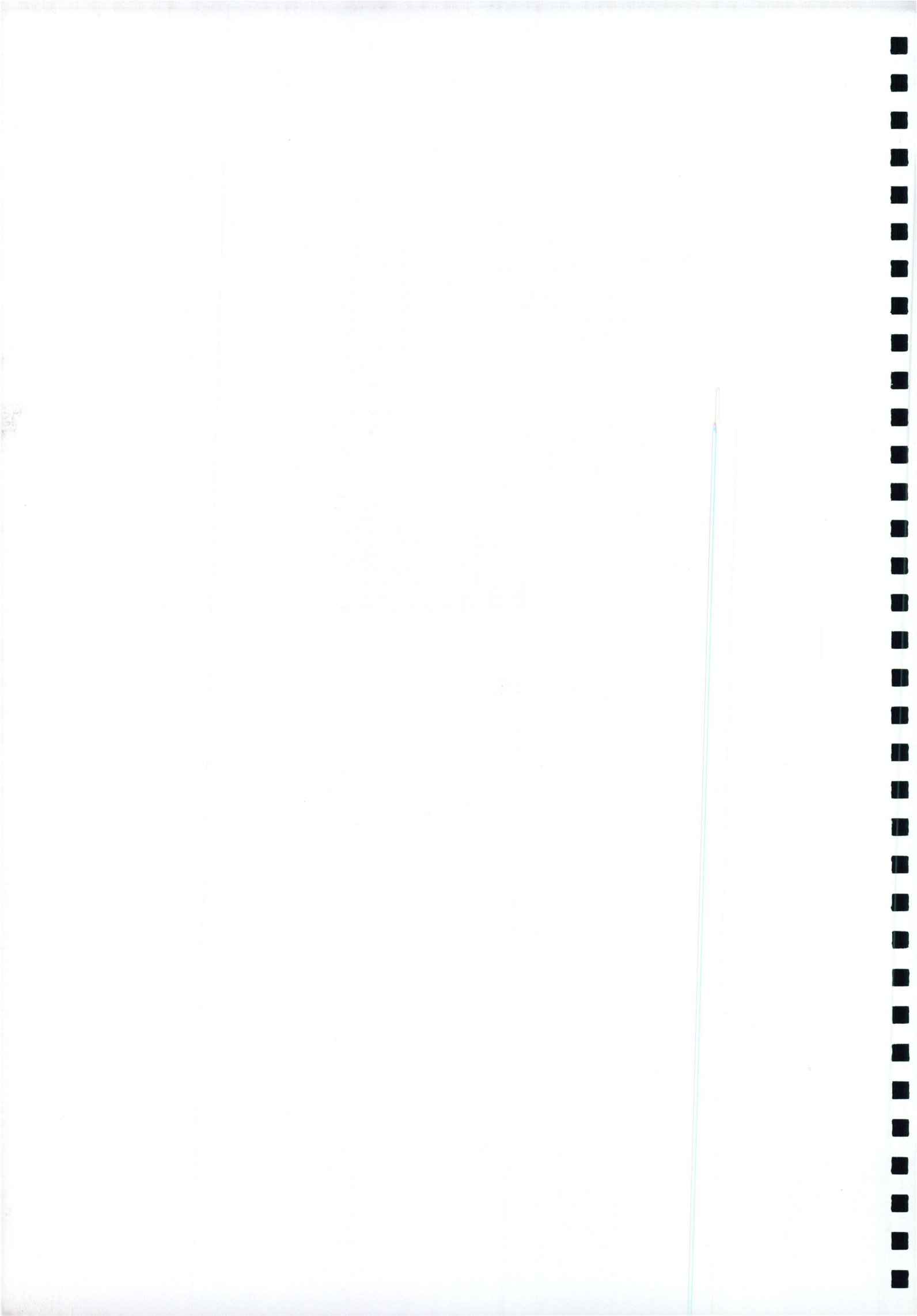


Plate 9. This zouse has a flat panel attached to the edge so it can be used as a keyring.



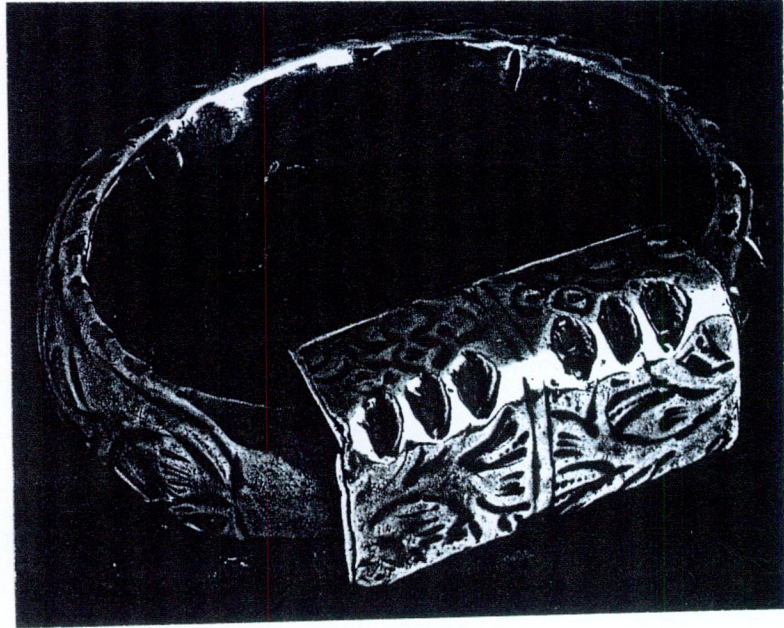


Plate 10. This is a Khulkel which in the past was worn on the ankle but is now just used in the wedding ceremony.



depending on the marital status of the woman. The custom is for it to be worn across the chest for single women and across the forehead for married women. It consists of a horizontal chain and four vertical chains suspended from pendants which hook onto a headdress or to the front of the headdress. Hand of Fatima pendants hang from the chains giving the piece amuletic power.

The hooking pendants are of openwork design in the typical Tunisian style. The chains can be of round or forged links and made of gold or silver. A silver marafah can be seen in Plate 11. The amount of vertical chains denotes the number of children a woman will have. Thus the marafah has symbolic significance for the wearer and amuletic power to protect her.

These pieces represent the ones most commonly worn in Cherarda and also the treasures of the women which are only worn for special occasions. While Cherarda represents a rural community, other districts may have an emphasis on different pieces. However, these examples give a foundation

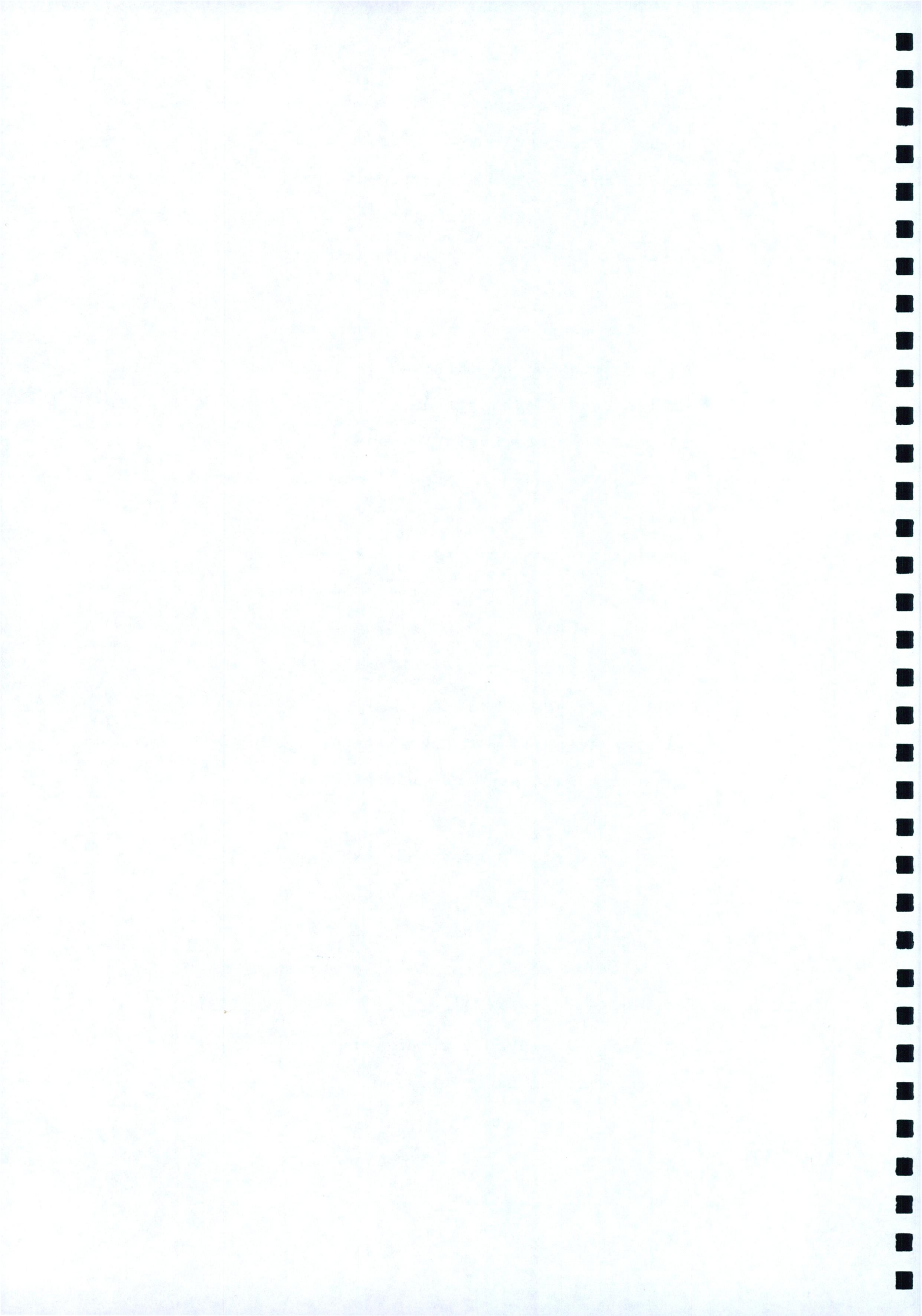
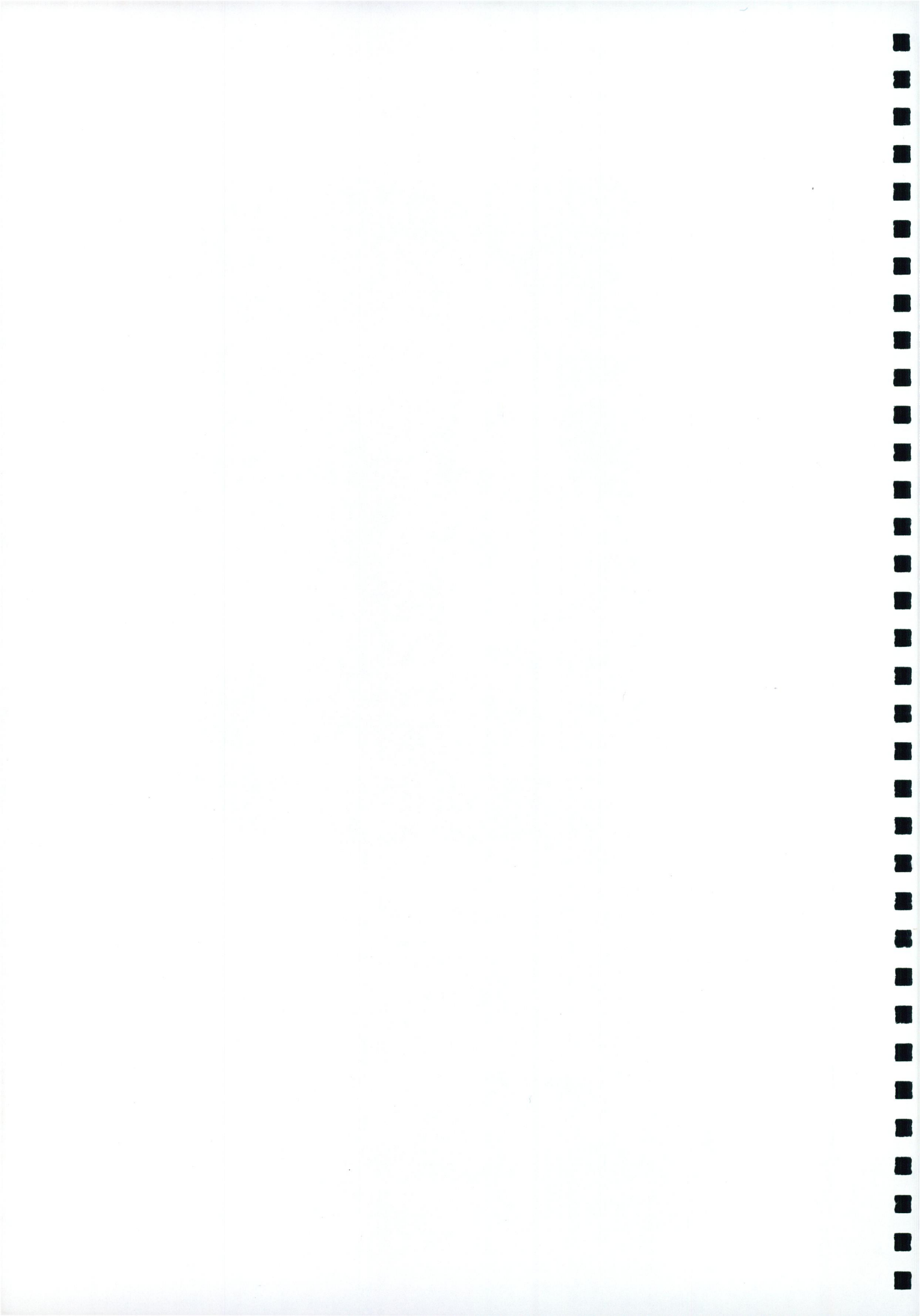




Plate 11. The Marafah can be seen here worn on the head. It is not an everyday piece of jewellery but is only worn for weddings.



from which to investigate the important aspects of Tunisian jewellery and provide material for the exploration of issues relating to the jewellery.



CHAPTER THREE - The unity of Muslim and Berber Traditions

Religion and Magic

An interesting aspect of Tunisian jewellery is the strong religious influence combined with an equally strong superstitious element. This is not surprising in a country where Muslim Arabs and the nomadic Berbers have created a unique culture which is neither Arab nor Berber but Tunisian and combines influences from the two. This is reflected in three aspects of the jewellery: The contrasting meanings in the pieces; the materials used and their significance; and the different styles worn today.

The dual nature of this culture is expressed in one piece of jewellery in particular which is a commonly worn pendant called the Hand of Fatima. Plate 12 shows a brass pendant on a forged chain which is part of my collection. This pendant is an amulet shaped like a hand. In religious symbolism of the Mediterranean peoples the hand has always had special significance. For Jews, hands were painted on walls and doors of their houses and they called them 'the hand of God',

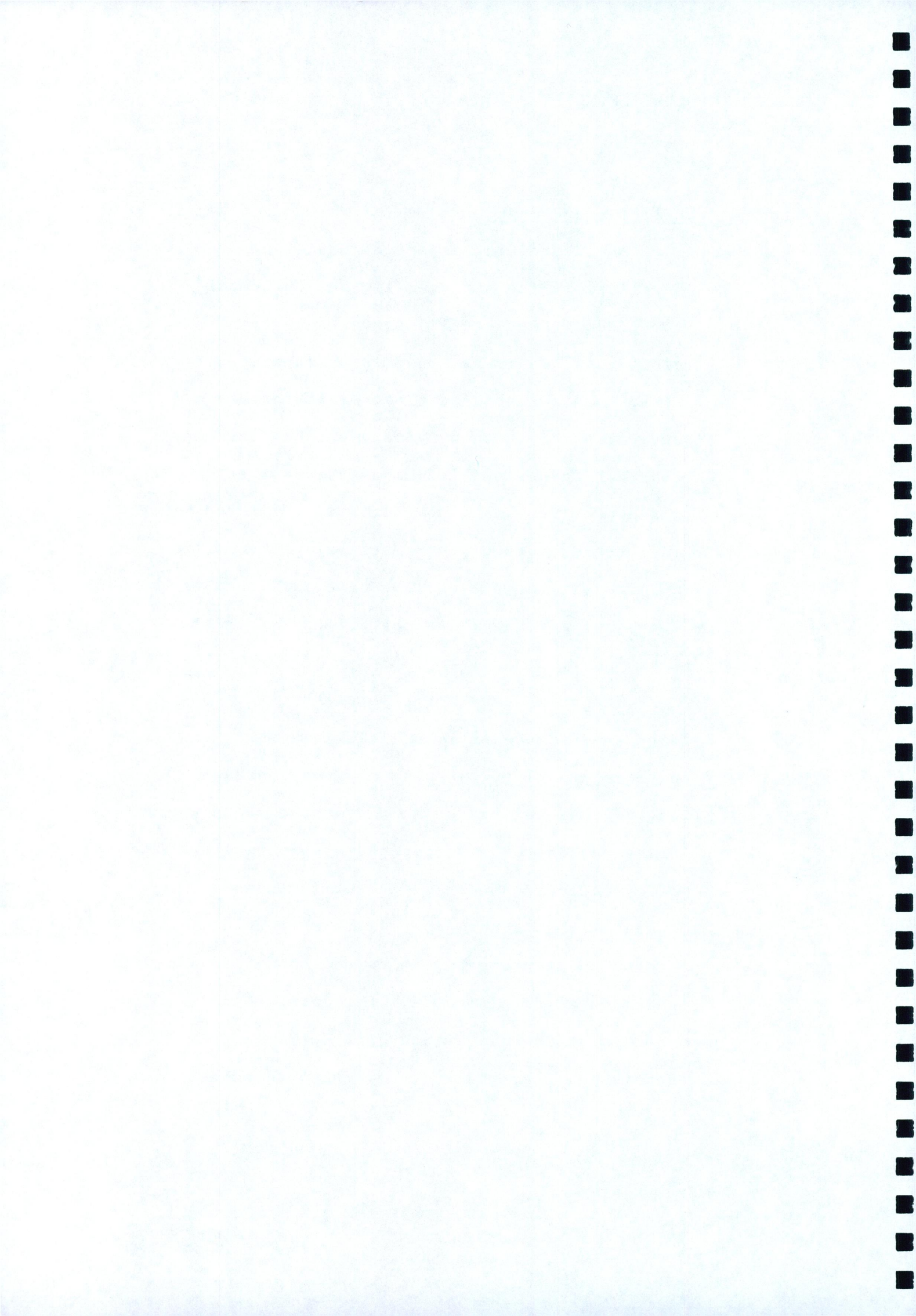




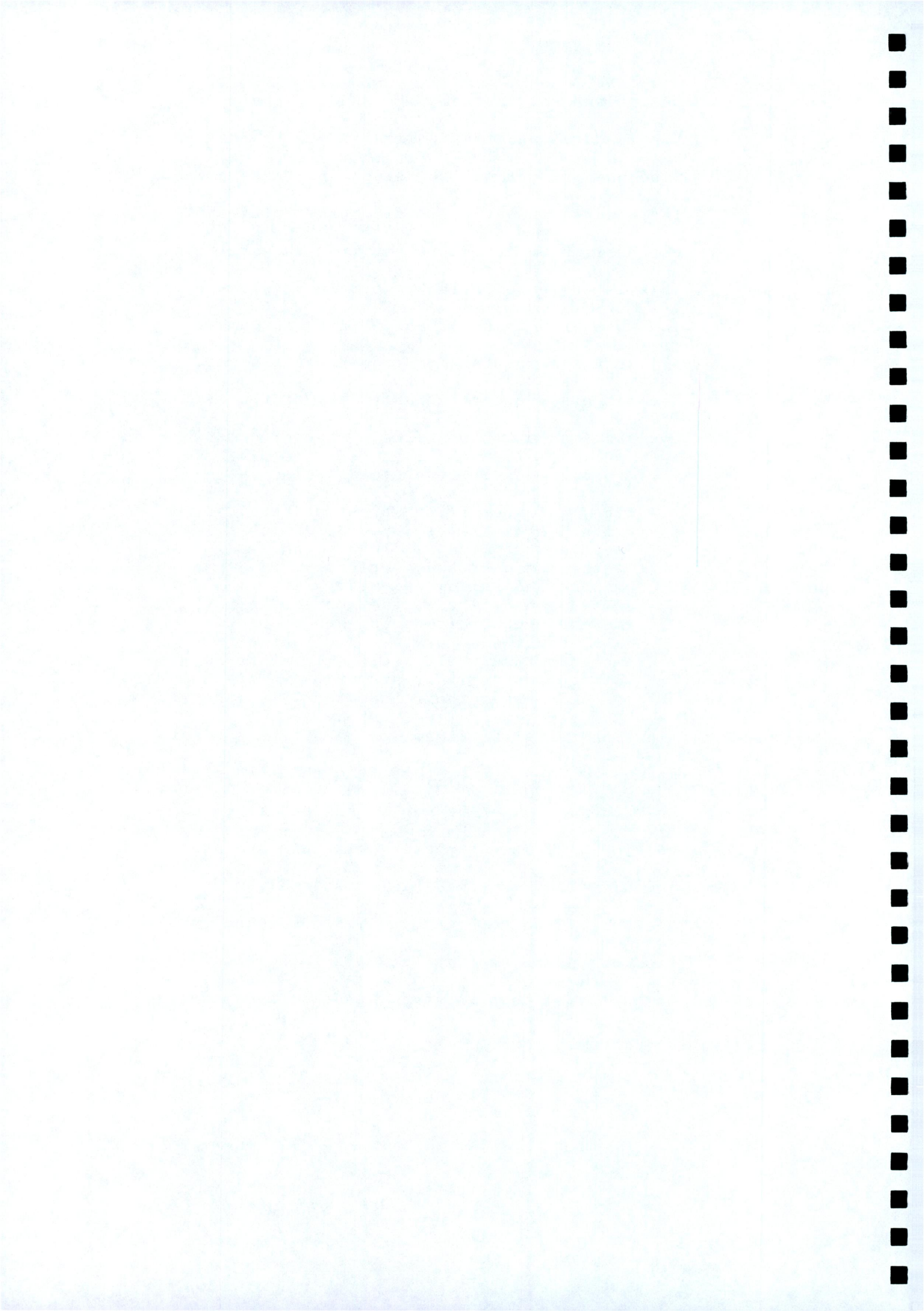
Plate 12. Hand of Fatima pendant on a forged link chain.



Christians called them 'the hand of the Virgin Mary' and the Muslims called theirs 'the hand of Fatima' the daughter of the prophet. The hand is an amulet in all three religions. For Muslims it is to protect from the evil eye. This is the power held by certain people whose look can bring bad fortune. Tunisian women all wear some protection from these glances. The Berbers are particularly wary of the evil eye and Angela Fisher tells of the extents they go to in order to protect themselves.

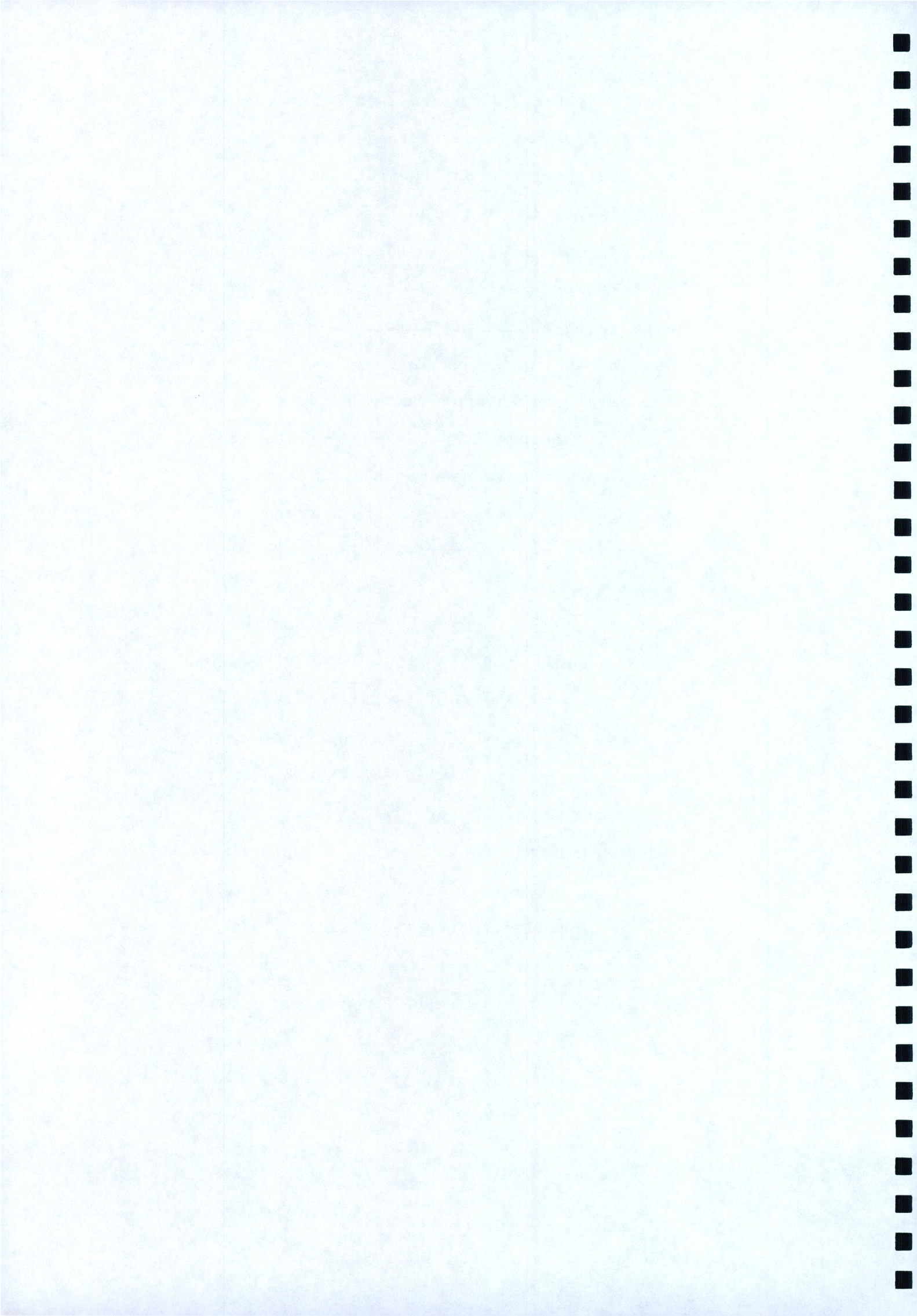
They particularly mistrust people with deep-set eyes, eyebrows which meet in the middle, elderly women with blue eyes and, curiously, misers who seldom eat meat. To avoid the evil eye, they cover their mouths with their hands when passing a stranger and for the same reason women tattoo their faces, tie a strand of wool on their wrists or put a piece of salt under their headdress. (Fisher, 1984,p19)

The religious significance of the hand of Fatima is due to the story from the life of the Prophet. When he was a child an angel came to him while he was playing with his brother and sister. He opened his chest and removed his heart. He took out the jealousy and envy from his heart, put it back and fixed him like he had never been touched. Another story tells of a day when he was preaching to some people and a man sitting nearby was jealous of how the



people listened to him. Then something came out from his heart onto the ground. Mohammed told the people about the need to guard against jealousy and envy. The hand is also a reminder of the laws of Islam. Each of the five fingers represents one of the fundamental aspects of the Muslim faith: the first is fasting which in Tunisia is observed during the period of Ramadan which lasts for thirty days; the second is pilgrimage which requires a Muslim to visit Mecca; the third is faith in God and his messenger; the fourth is almsgiving which requires a Muslim to give one tenth of his annual income to the poor; and the fifth is prayer which means that a Muslim must pray five times a day. The Hand of Fatima has the dual purpose as an amulet to ward off the evil eye and as a reminder to the wearer of the laws of the Muslim faith.

Another area where Berber and Muslim traditions overlap is in the representation of human and animal forms. In Muslim tradition, it is forbidden to represent these forms. This law derives from a famous hadith attributed to the prophet which runs "The angels will not enter a house where there is an image or a dog". Islamic art reflects



this idea. It is thought that this law was to discourage the early Muslims from idolatry which had been practised by the people of Arabia before the arrival of Islam. This restriction is in contrast to the Berber culture which uses animal motifs and representation profusely. Jereb writes that

The Berbers are one of the few purely animistic cultures in all of Africa... the Berber universe is a world of nature. The sun, moon and stars and numerous fauna and flora are part of their artistic vocabulary. The forms may be stylised, but one finds amulets, pendants and charms resembling the turtle, scorpion, snake, penis, tattoo designs, stars, and the many aspects of nature. (Jereb, 1989, p43)

In Tunisian jewellery a highly stylised fish motif is used widely as a decorative element. This involves a compromise between the two ideas. Fisher writes that the Berbers

often depict creatures believed to have magical powers in their decorative designs...fish, depicted whole but in a highly stylised form. Faith in the power of these animals stems from ancient Berber beliefs. With the passing of time, although animal designs remained in use some of the symbolism lost its significance. But those symbols which offer protection against the evil eye have continued to exert their power and still provide the inspiration for many pieces of jewellery made today. (Fisher, 1984, p228)

The fish obviously has a special significance for Tunisian people today as it is so often



used. It is even part of a wedding tradition in Bizerte in the north of Tunisia for the bride to have a real fish tied to her ankle during the ceremony. It is a symbol of life and fertility and also an amulet against the evil eye. It is often seen on the fibulae with another popular symbol, the quarter moon encircling a five pointed star. This is taken from the Tunisian flag but also has a religious significance. The quarter moon represents the west of the Arab world and the five pointed star represents the five aspects of the Muslim faith. These fibulae are often triangular with the point facing downwards which is a female symbol and also a symbol of fertility and can be traced back to ancient Mediterranean cultures.

Significance of materials

In the traditional jewellery of Tunisia the materials have a magical element to them. In Berber traditions the different metals have their own significance. Silver was thought of as a pure metal and gold was associated with vice. Angela Fisher writes how in the past the Berbers from the towns inherited wealth in the form of jewellery so, naturally they preferred gold.



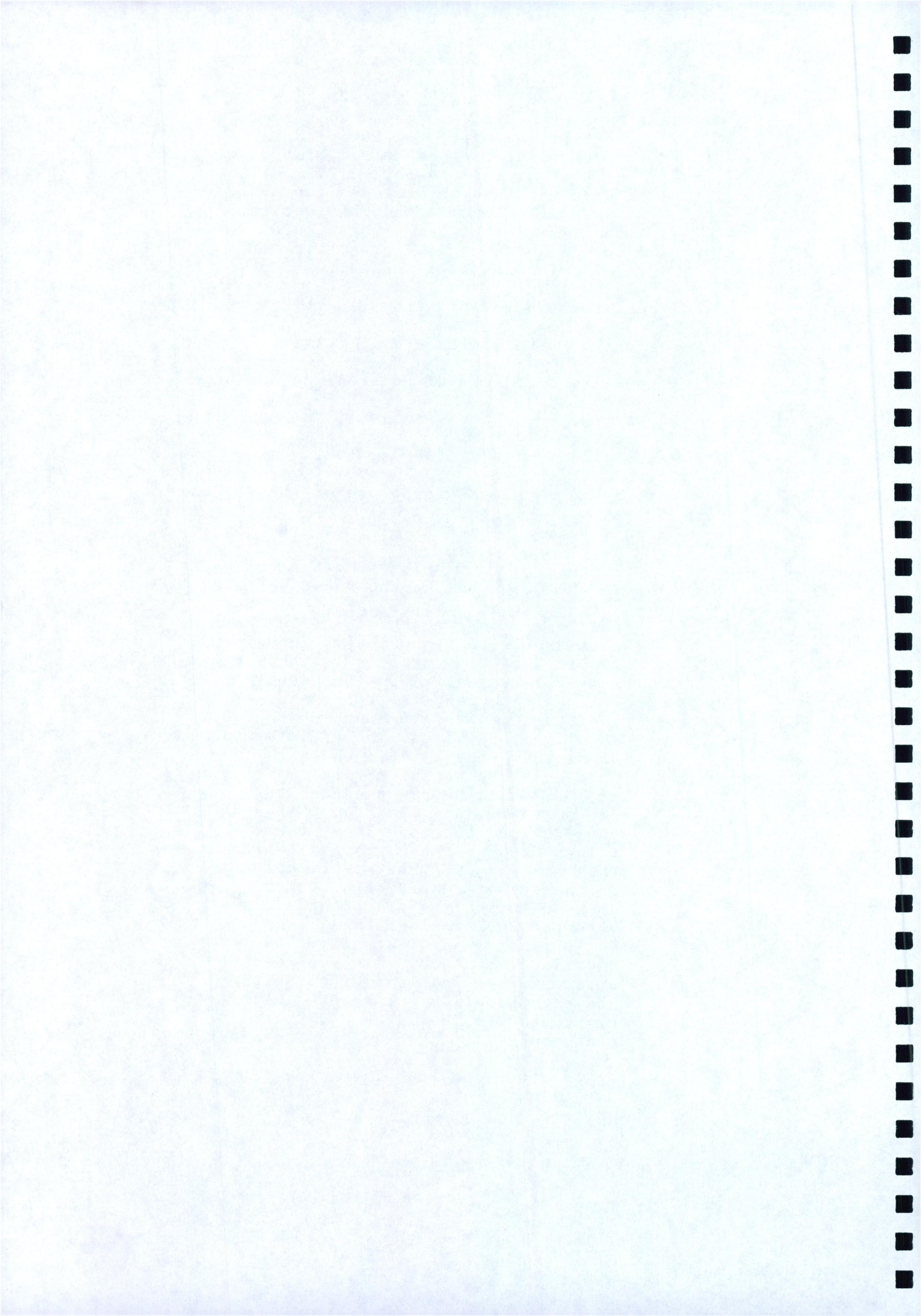
This form of wealth is forbidden among the village and nomadic Berbers, however, to whom gold is a symbol of vice, despised almost to the point of taboo. Silver on the other hand, symbolises purity and honesty and is thought particularly beneficial when set with certain stones whose magical properties are determined by their colour. (Fisher, 1984, p230)

Jereb writes how there are also religious reasons for the preference of silver: "Berbers love silver, it is praised by Allah and used in many of the charms, amulets, talismans, beads and fibulas". (Jereb, 1989, p41)

Some devout Muslims disapprove of the wearing of gold by men. Saad Al-Jadir writes how

There is no authority for this reaction in the Quran but in the hadith of the prophet it is written that 'silk and gold are taboos to the men of my nation, permissible to its women'. Therefore men in strictly orthodox regions wear silver betrothal rings instead of gold. The Quran itself permits adornment, but states that moderation should be exercised. So whileverse32 of Al-Araf reads: Say, who has forbidden the decent apparel of God, which He has produced for his servants, And the good things He has provided for food, Say, these things are for those who believe in this present life, but peculiarly on the day of resurrection. Thus do we distinctly explain our signs unto people who understand. Verse 31 of Al-Araf states: O Children of Adam, take your decent apparel at every place of worship, and eat and drink but be not guilty of excess, for He loves not those that are guilty of excess. (Al-Jadir, 1981, p18)

Today people buy the jewellery they can afford



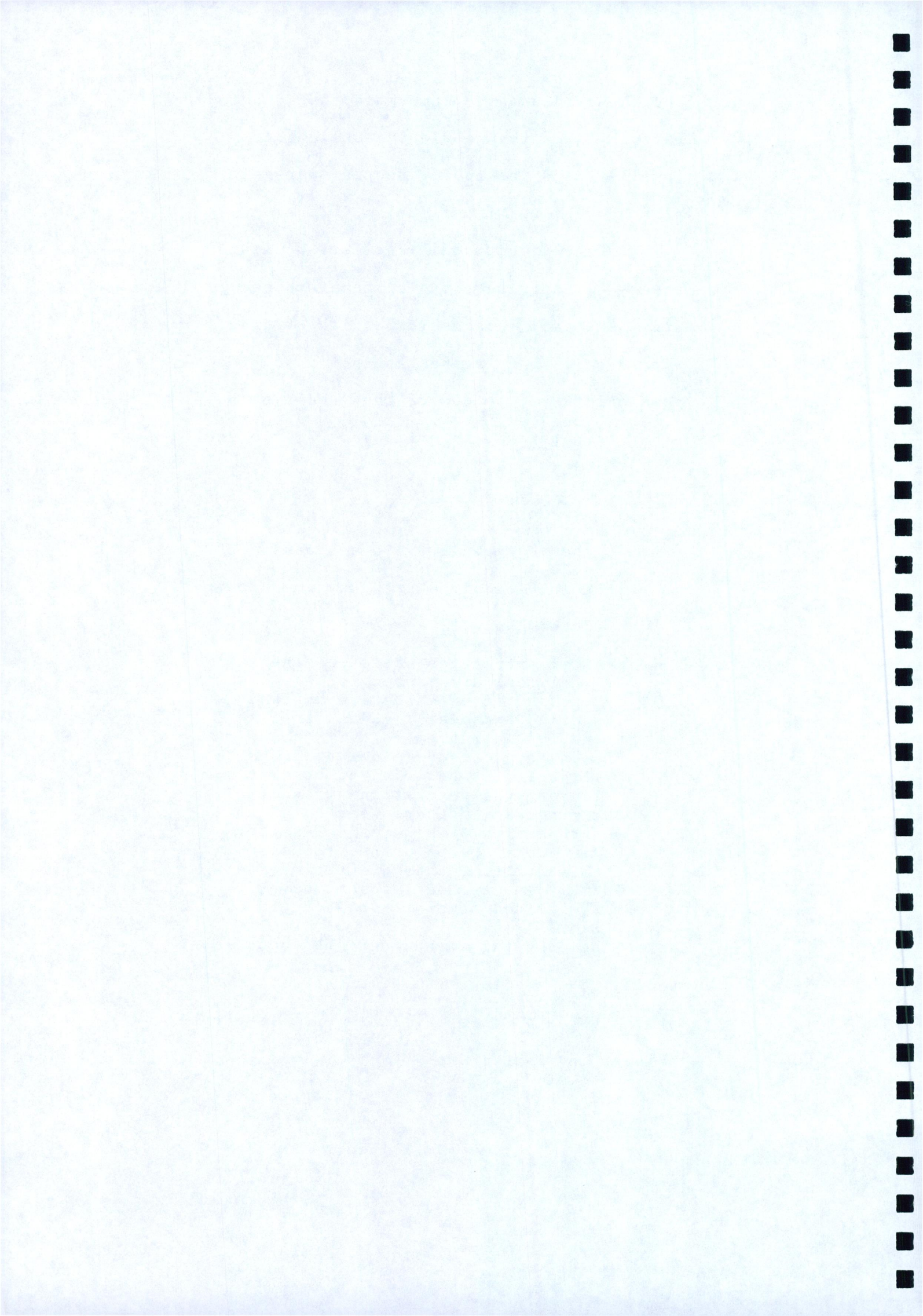
and these ideas have succumbed to economic factors. Wealthy people buy solid gold jewellery and the poorer people wear gold plated or silver jewellery.

In the traditional jewellery healing powers are attributed to certain stones. Tunisians call this medicine without drugs tiprahweni. Blue stones are set into pieces to simulate the colour of the good eye in order to outstare the evil eye. Cowrie shells are worn around the wrist of children to offer similar protection. They are often tied to other pieces of jewellery in a spontaneous manner as in plate 11 where they are attached to one of the khulel. Fisher writes that the

magical properties are determined by their colour: topaz for example is thought to be effective against jaundice, and emerald against snake bites, while rubies fortify the heart. Branch coral, found along the coast of Algeria, is believed to protect children, who wear it hung round their necks. Mothers wear coral to assure a flow of milk, and men wear it in the shape of horns, to make them fertile; round corals, imported from Italy, are believed to have more limited powers. (Fisher, 1984, p229)

Heart shaped coral worn around the neck is thought to be effective against a sickness of the throat. This particular necklace can be seen in plate 13.

Scent has a special significance for



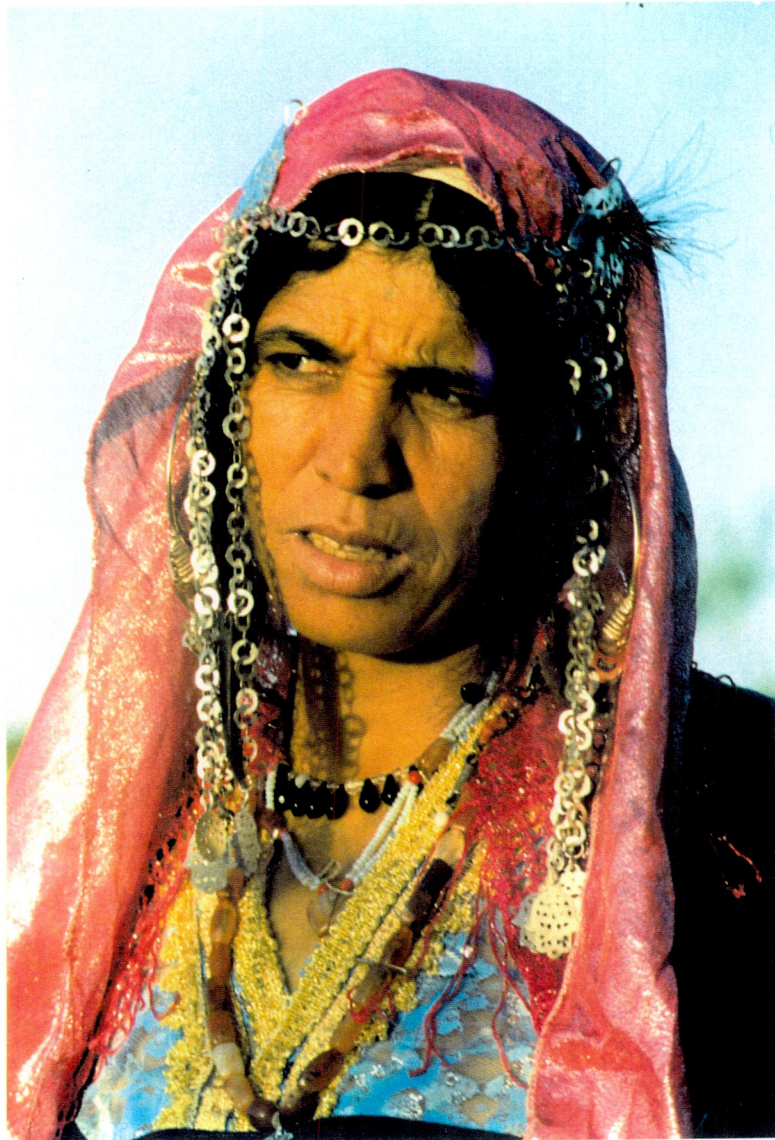
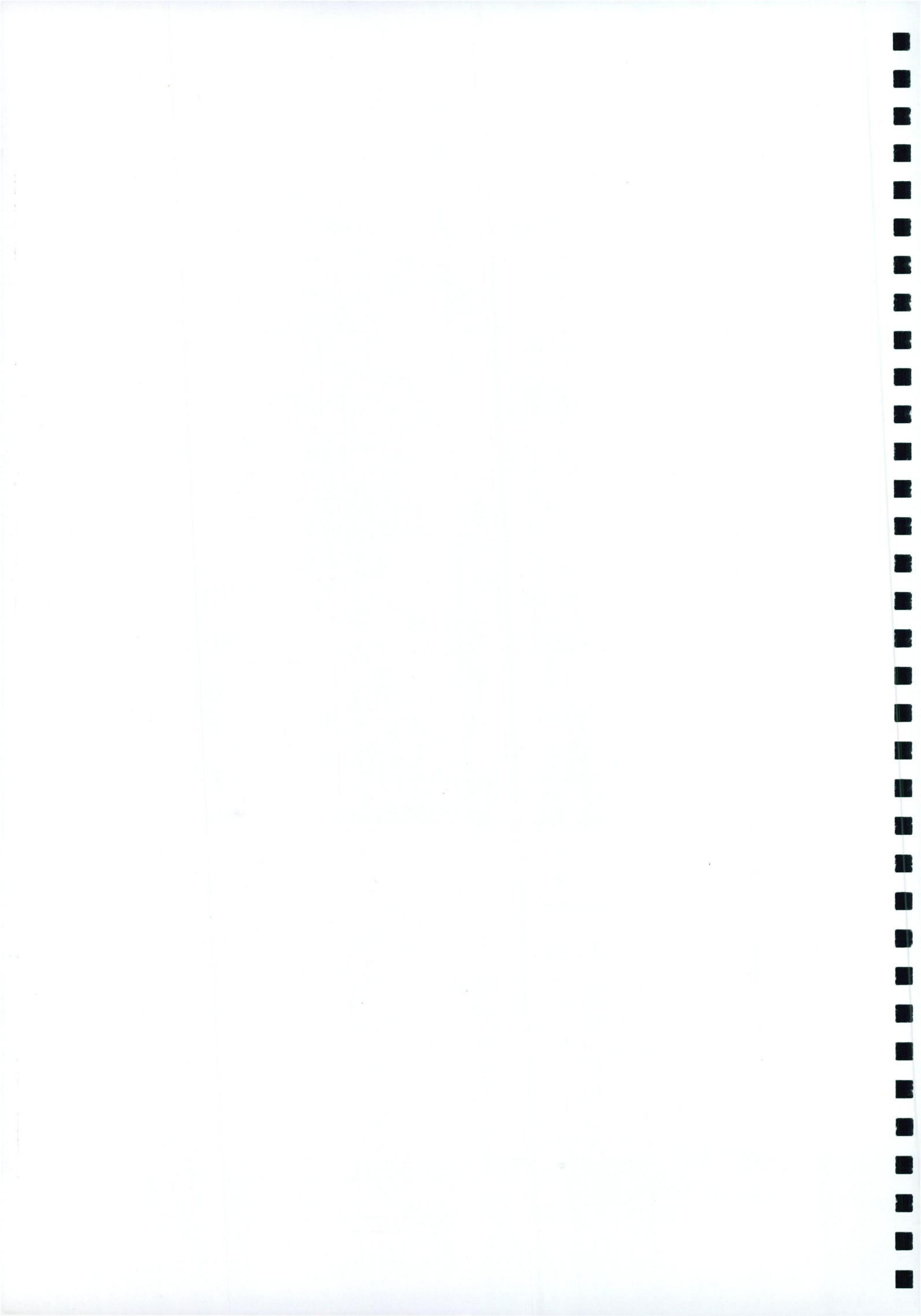


Plate 13. A beaded necklace with a heart shaped coral can be seen here. This is thought to guard against a sickness of the throat. Other beaded necklaces are also worn which are assembled by the wearer herself.



Tunisian women and is much used in their jewellery.

Cloves, roseleaves, musk, saffron and perfume made from these are believed to be a defence against evil as well as an aphrodisiac, and are given to young girls before marriage to increase their powers of seduction. (Fisher, 1984, p229)

In plate 14 one can see a necklace of saffron beads which is part of my collection. It includes a fish symbol with five dots as a symbol of fertility. The perfume of the spice is an aphrodisiac but the five dots reminds the wearer of the Islamic laws. Throughout the jewellery there is a concoction of magical beliefs and religious symbols which expresses the dual nature in the traditions of the culture.

Village and town jewellery contrasted

The jewellery can also be categorised into town and village jewellery. Jewellery that the village women wear is traditional and it has not succumbed to any outside influence. But the jewellery of the towns and cities is becoming more westernised. In design terms this means that the jewellery is becoming more removed from Berber jewellery and losing its dramatic but simple quality in favour of a more

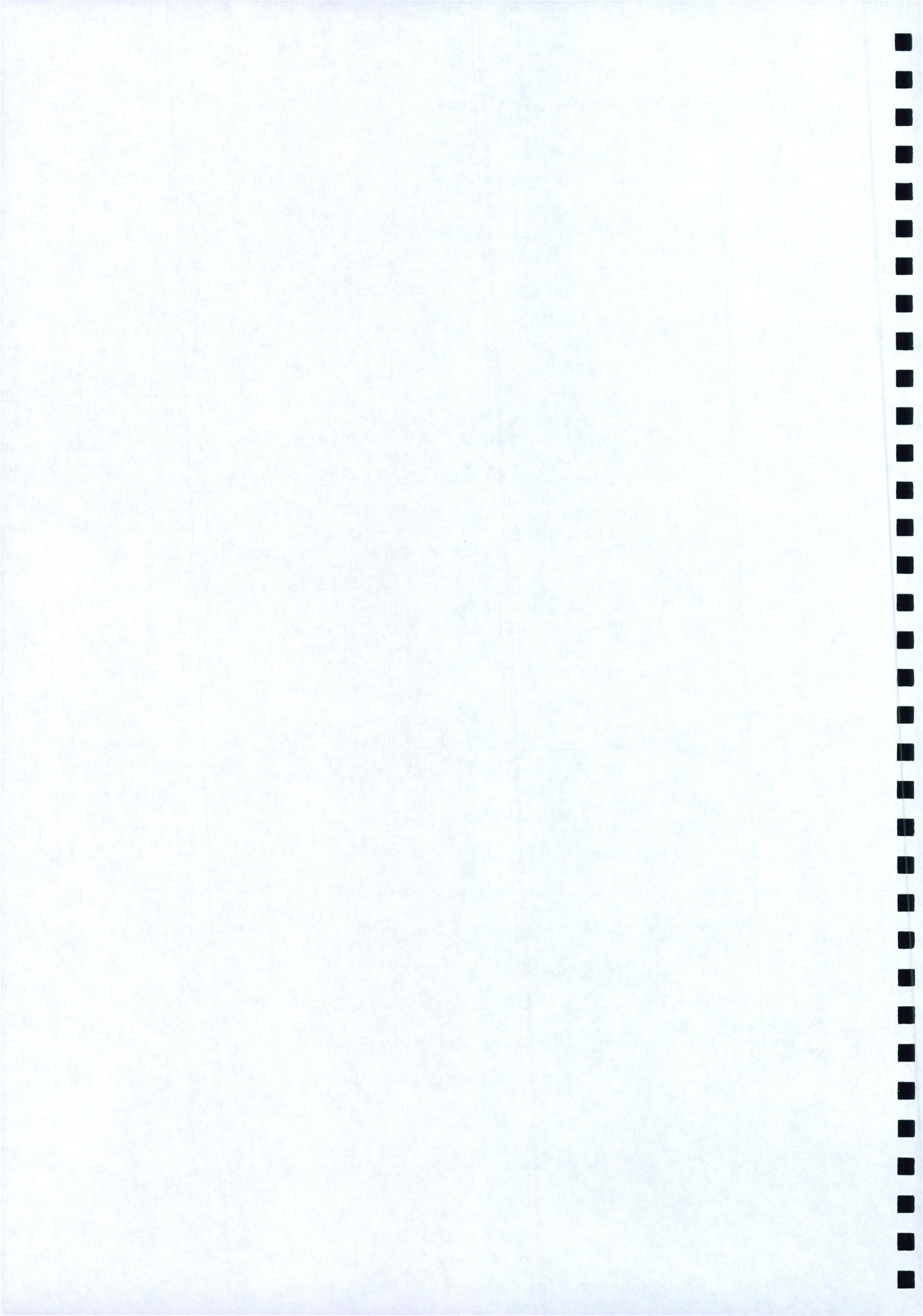




Plate 14. Saffron bead necklace with fish pendant.



gaudy, elaborate style. However, young girls of the villages are more interested in this type of jewellery so a mixture of the two styles is often found in the same home. One village girl's wedding jewellery combined a khulkel, the large ankle bangle in a dramatic style and an extremely delicate filigree bracelet with a fish symbol as a clasp, reminiscent of traditional motifs. A photograph of her in her wedding clothes and jewellery shows the two different styles together. Plate 15. She is wearing a traditional headdress with a marafah and pendants of fish and hand of Fatima symbols. On her wrists are the filigree bracelets mentioned. Plate 16 shows her in a white dress with her mother in the traditional costume and it's associated jewellery. This photograph reveals how even the villages are influenced by western fashion.

I was given the opportunity to try on the clothes and jewellery of one family that I visited. In plate 17 one can see all the mother's traditional jewellery and her daughter's and daughter-in-law's jewellery worn together. Her daughter's necklace consists of a gold rope chain and a box with

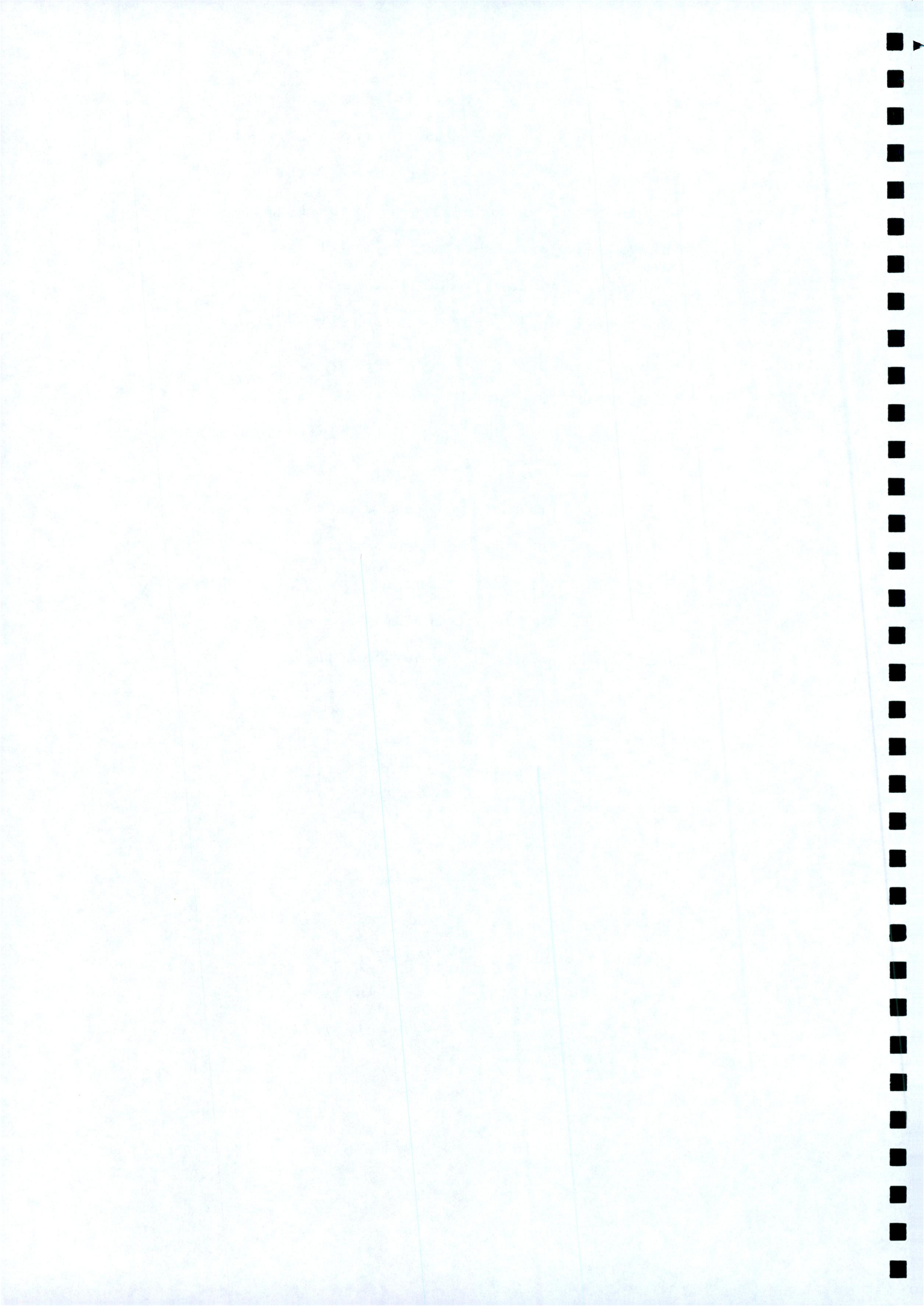




Plate 15. This is a photograph of a young woman in her wedding costume but with a combination of traditional and modern jewellery.

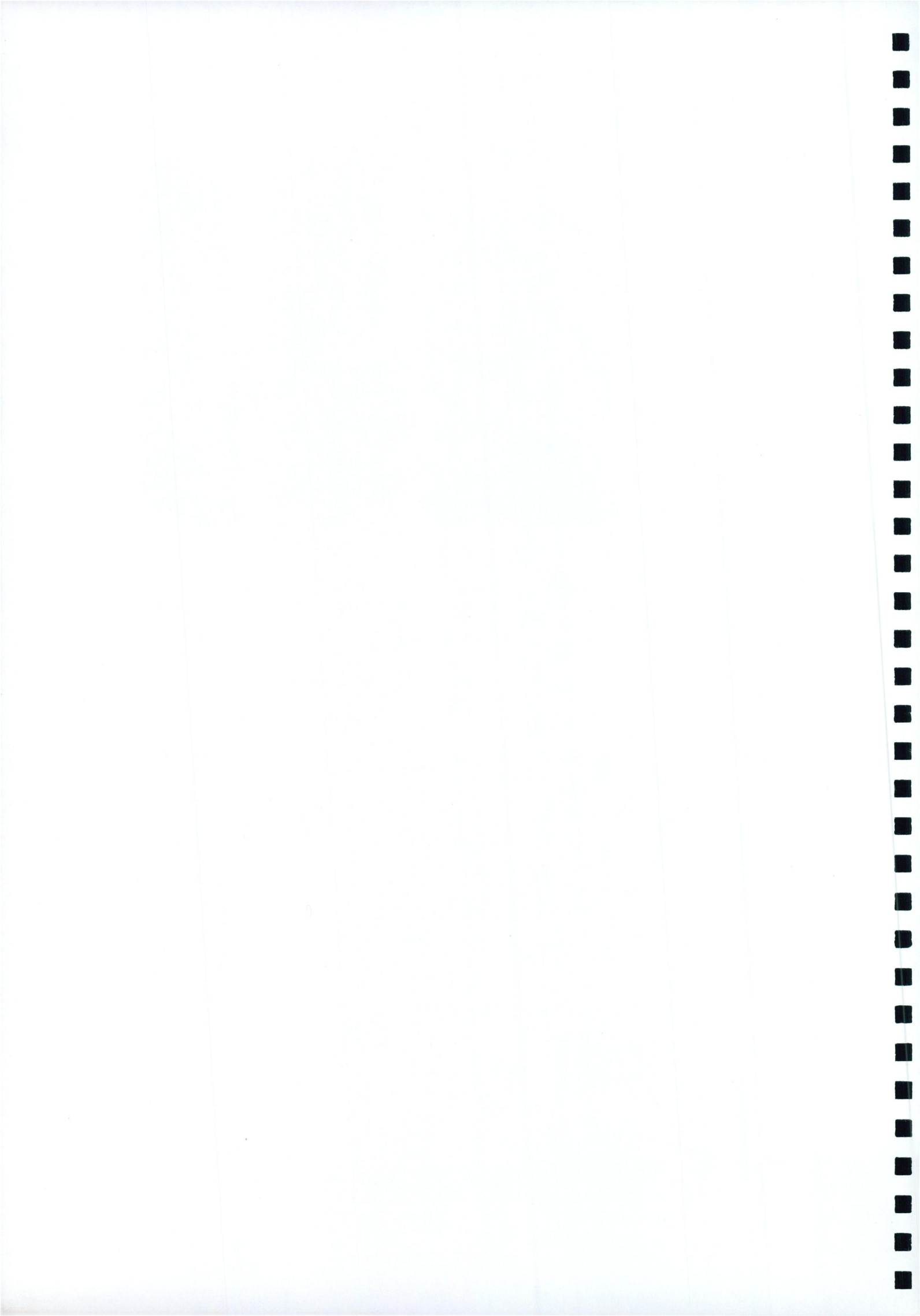




Plate 16. This is a photograph of the bride in western fashion and her mother in the traditional costume.



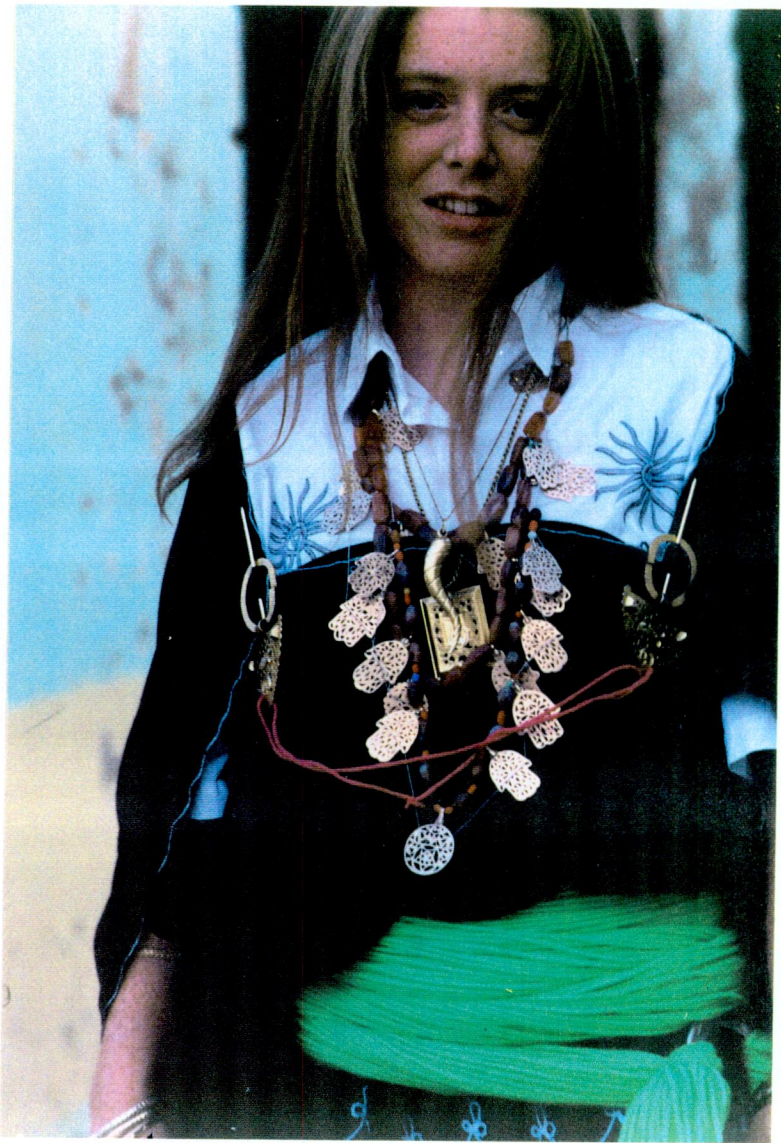


Plate 17. This photograph shows the jewellery of one of the families visited. There is a combination of styles which reflects the different generations tastes. *(worn by the author)*



a verse from the Quran engraved on it. Her daughter-in-law's necklace is a hollow serpent shaped pendant on a gold chain. The other coral and Hand of Fatima necklaces are the mothers. Their jewellery is from the city and is fashionable for young people to wear. So although the distinction was originally between village and town jewellery, now it has become old womens' and young womens' jewellery. It is clear that Tunisian jewellery is full of contrasts and this is seen in many aspects relating to the jewellery.

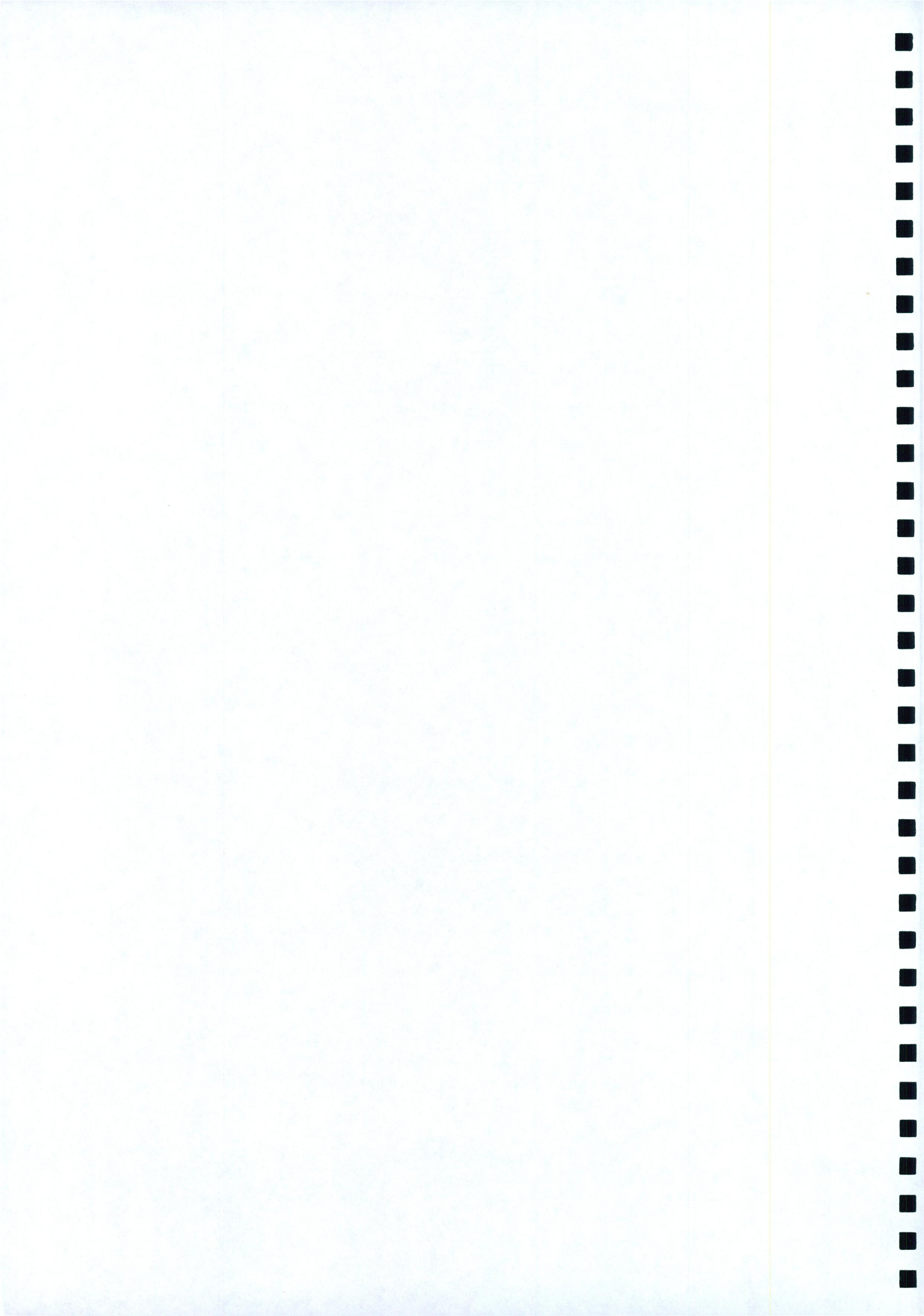


CHAPTER FOUR - Economic and social importance of the jewellery

Jewellery as economic security

One of the most significant aspects of Tunisian jewellery is its economic value. It is seen as a display of wealth and it denotes the financial status of a family. In rural Tunisia, the failure of a harvest or a decimated livestock makes it necessary to sell the jewellery. In this way, a lack of jewellery or a sparse display denotes that the family are suffering a financial crises. It can play the role of savings or an investment for the future. The value of the jewellery is not for its craftsmanship or design but the cost is based on the metal alone. The increase in the price of gold has affected the design of the large hoop earrings. They are made in a much lighter gauge of metal now than in the past which reveals how it is the value of the metal which is most important and other details can be compromised. There is an Arabic saying "Metals are for hard times" which stresses the importance of acquiring jewellery as a financial security.

This attitude to jewellery persists to



a much lesser degree in the farming communities today. Very few of the young brides still receive traditional jewellery from their husbands. It is now a matter of personal choice. If a woman likes the traditional jewellery and can afford it she will get it. It is expensive to buy solid gold jewellery so they know if they need money in the future they have a source at their disposal. Fisher writes

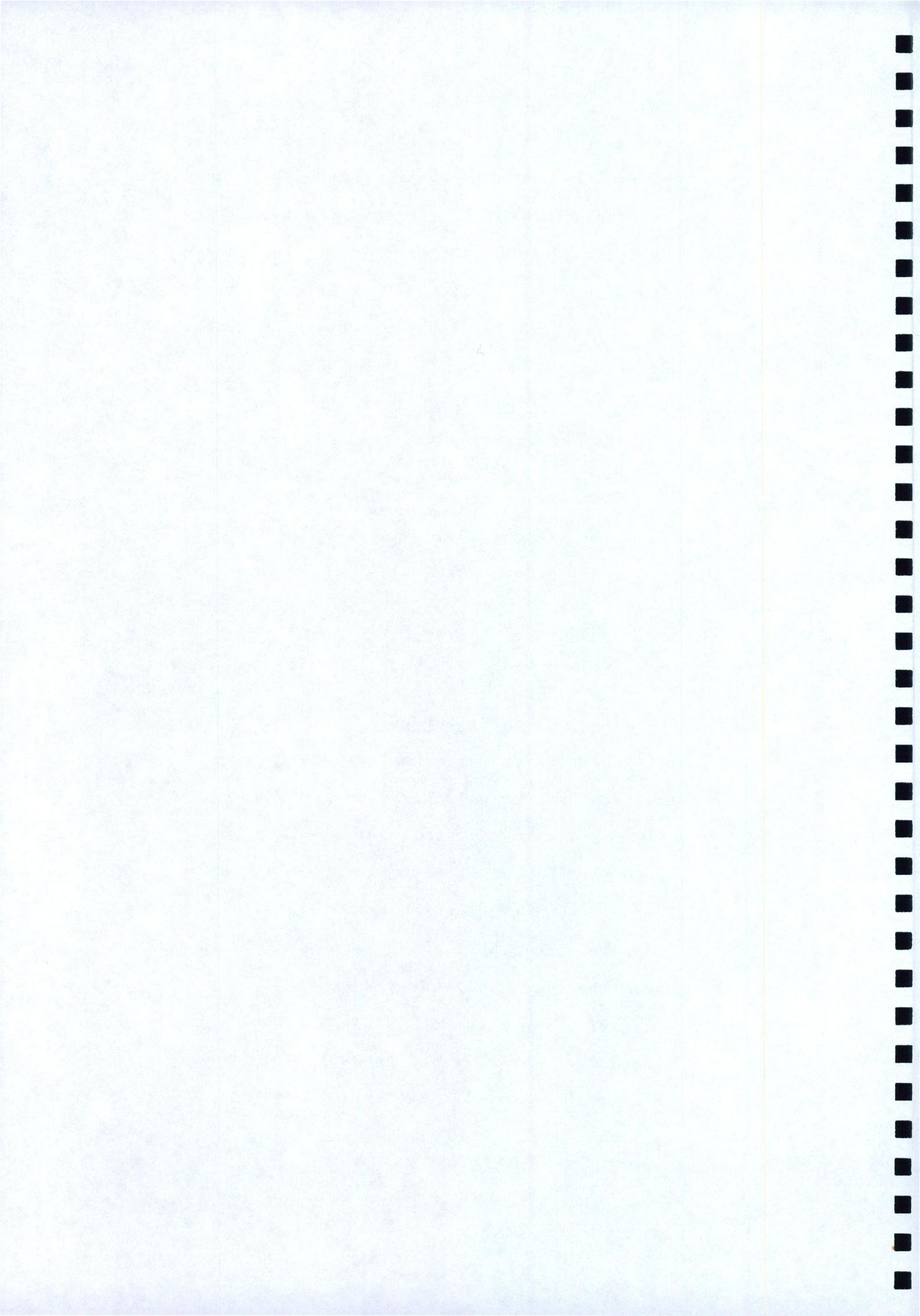
The men provide the money for the jewellery but the women are responsible for its safe-keeping in wooden chests when it is not being worn. (Fisher, 1984, p230)

This is a burden on the women but it is also a powerful position. As Al-Jadir writes

By selling or pawning her jewellery, a woman can always realise funds to overcome a crises in her life. (Al-Jadir, 1981, p19)

Jewellers and their market

Women of Cherarda can buy their jewellery from the Medinas of Sfax or in the Souk (market) of Cherarda where a trader will set up his wares for the weekly market day. Plate 18 In the Medina the jewellers are all situated close to each other. Some have small shops where they just sell the jewellery. One jeweller I spoke to told how his father travelled to Tripoli and Benghazi in Lybia to find the cheapest jewellery to sell in his



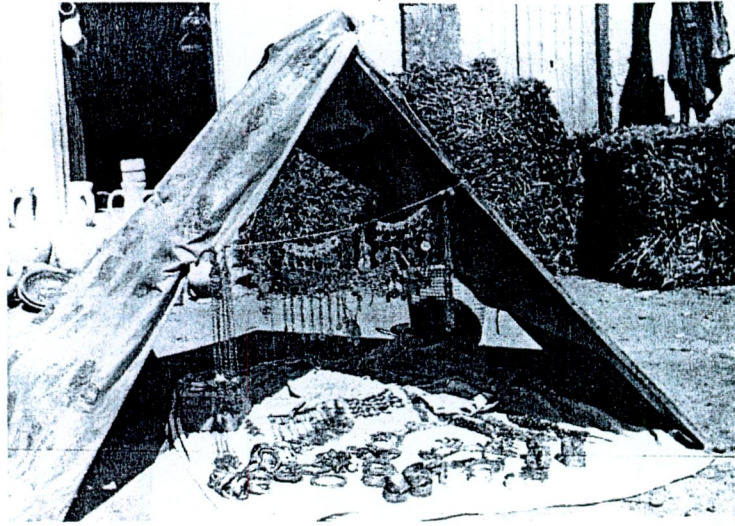


Plate 18. This is a jewellery trader's tent set up for the weekly marketday in a village. Women can buy their jewellery here if they are unable to go to the town.



shop in the medina of Sfax. Others have workshops behind their shops where they make the jewellery and fix broken pieces. Although the jewellers were reluctant to speak about their wares, one of them did allow the viewing of his workshop. It was arranged in a traditional way with a row of benches on one side and table-top machinery on the other. The tools were mostly manual and gas torches were used for heating the metal. There was an absence of highly technical machines which is reflected in the jewellery which uses traditional techniques. The shops which sold the western jewellery did not have workshops attached which indicated the importation of this jewellery.

The lifecycle of traditional jewellery

One old woman spoke to me about her life and her jewellery. As a young girl she wore small gold hoops. Considering the size of her earrings now (which can be seen in plate 4) I can imagine that the hoops were at least three centimetres in diameter. When she was twenty her parents bought her large silver earrings like the ones she wears now and some other silver pieces. She later sold these to provide money for her son's education. This

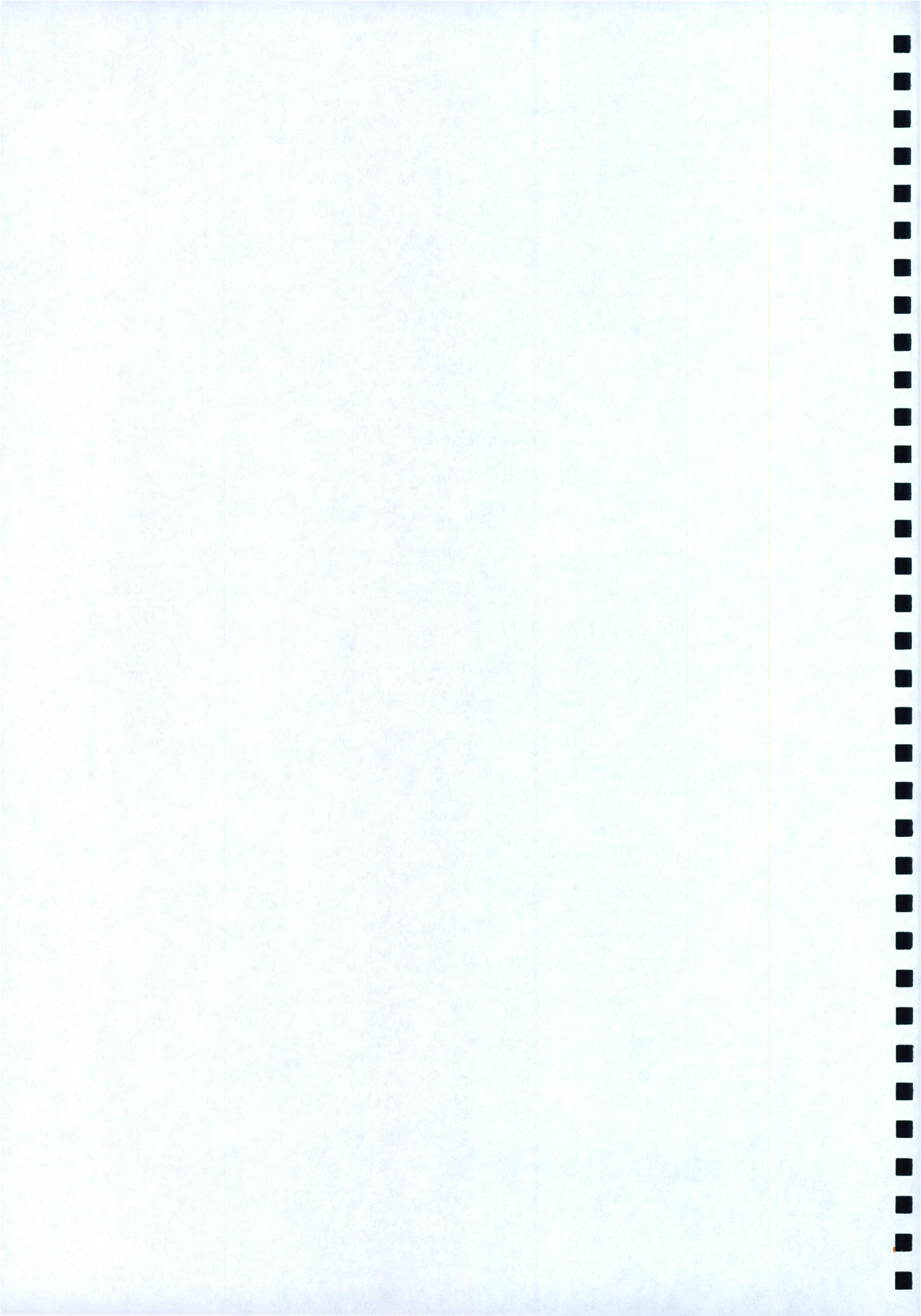


is an example of a woman using her jewellery as a source of money for a needy situation.

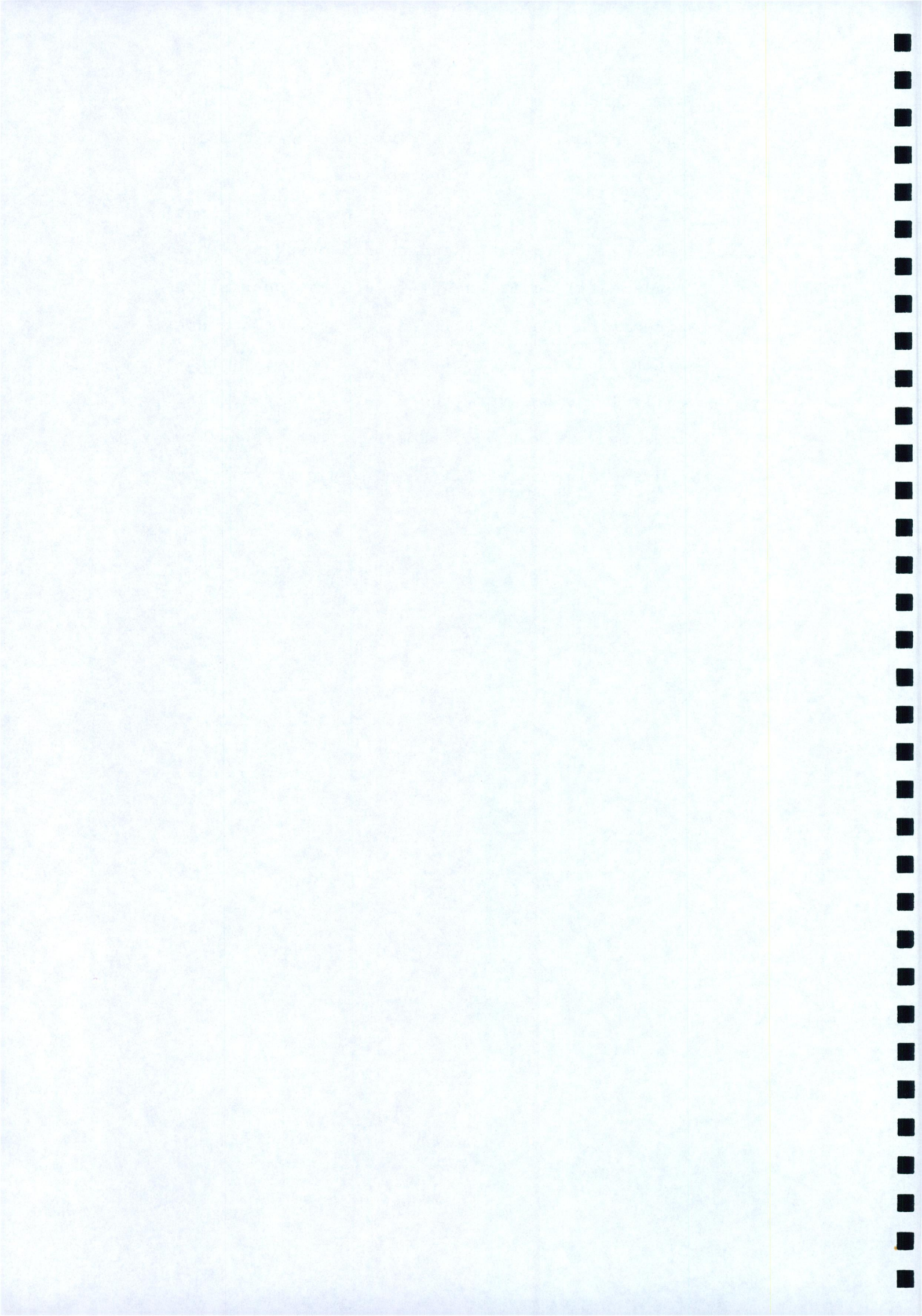
Her brother bought her the gold ones in 1970 as a way of giving her the profit from her olive crop which he took care of for her. He gave it to her in this form as a way of safeguarding the money. She told me that he knew if he gave it to her as cash that her children would take it. One of her earrings has the horn of a deer strung on it. She told me how her husband brought it back to her from a hunting expedition in the Sahara and she wears it to protect herself from bad eyes. She also has other beads taken from the sea which were bought from fish sellers in the town of Sfax in the medina.

She feels secure in the knowledge that she has this financial security and she says that she will keep them for life and leave the gold to her children when she dies.

This old woman attributed the influence of western culture from the big towns as the cause of the decline in the traditional costume and jewellery. She told me that in the more isolated towns of the south, young girls still wear traditional costume. In Cherarda there are some young girls who



wear the hirem and the jewellery for weddings and parties. This is because of the prominence of Arabic dancing as part of festive occasions. In plate 19 they can be seen dancing at a local wedding. With this dancing hip movement is fundamental so if the girls are not wearing the hirem with its hip belt they need to tie a scarf around the hips before they can dance. In their daily life, however, they wear western fashion. This shows how the costume functions economically and socially in the lives of Tunisian women of the past and the present.



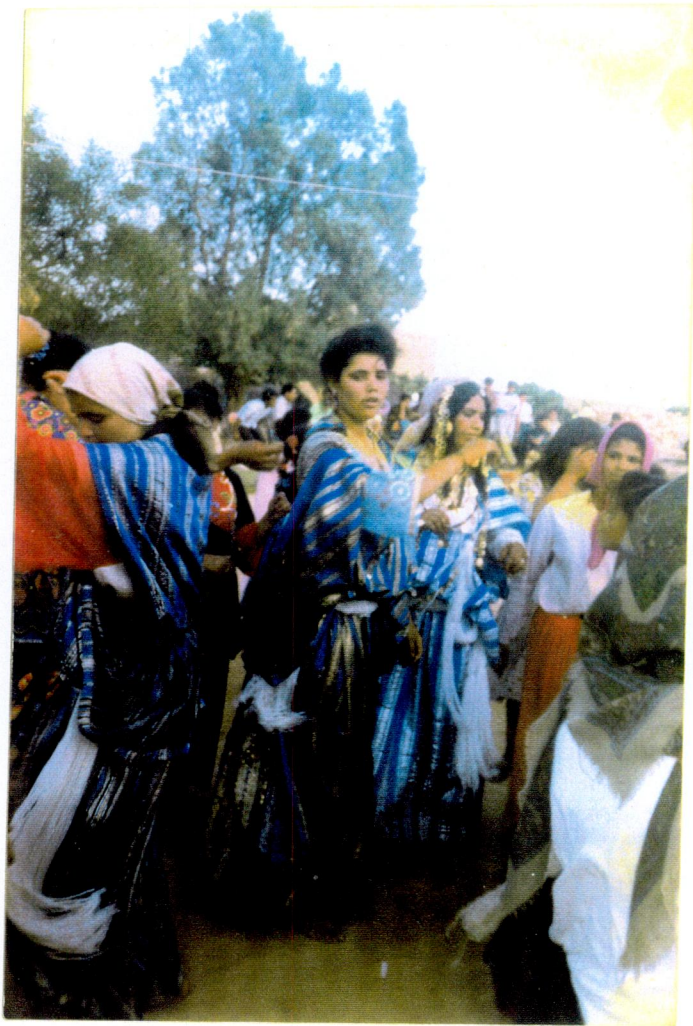
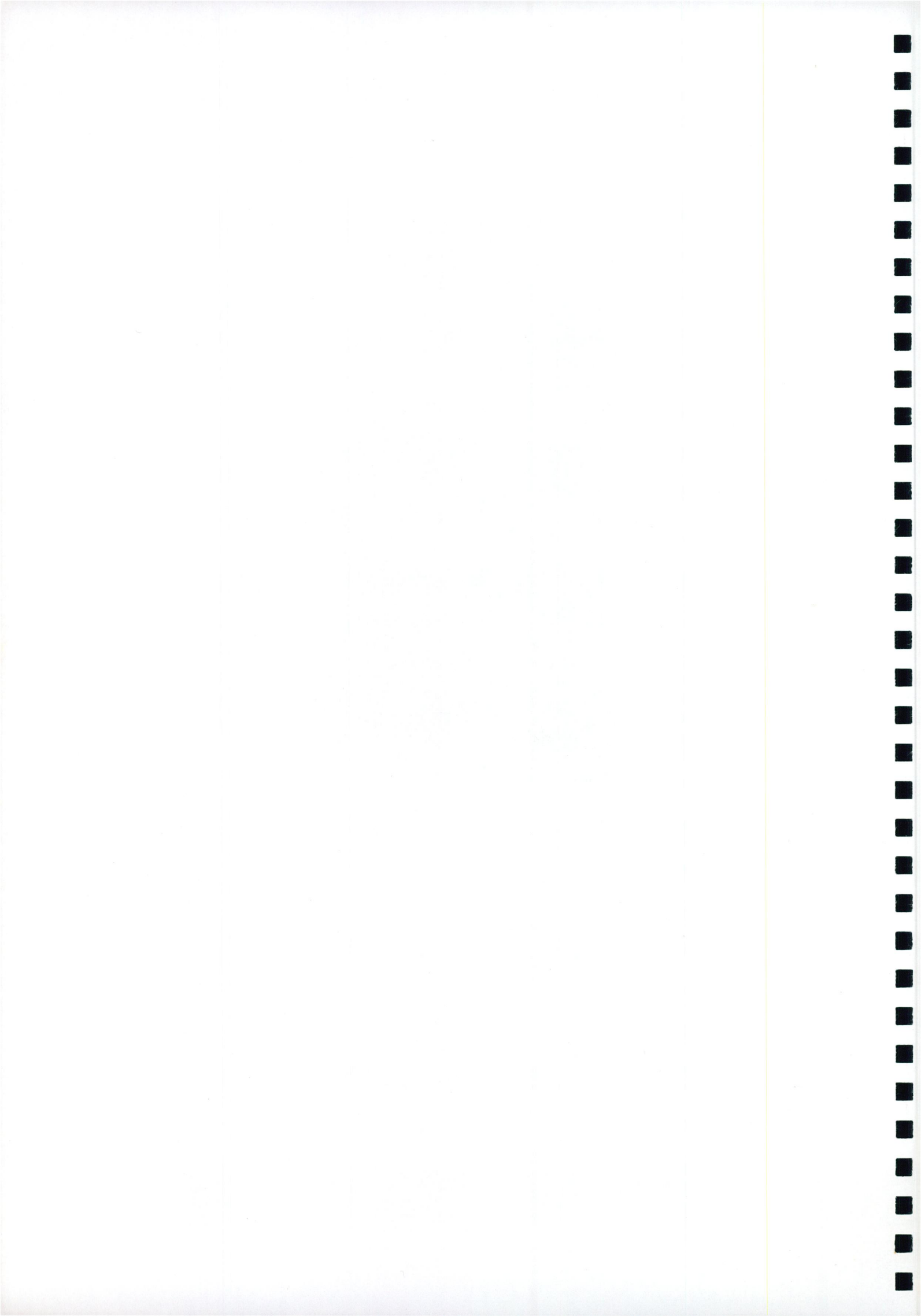


Plate 19. This is a photograph of a wedding in Cherarda where the young girls wear the traditional costume for dancing.



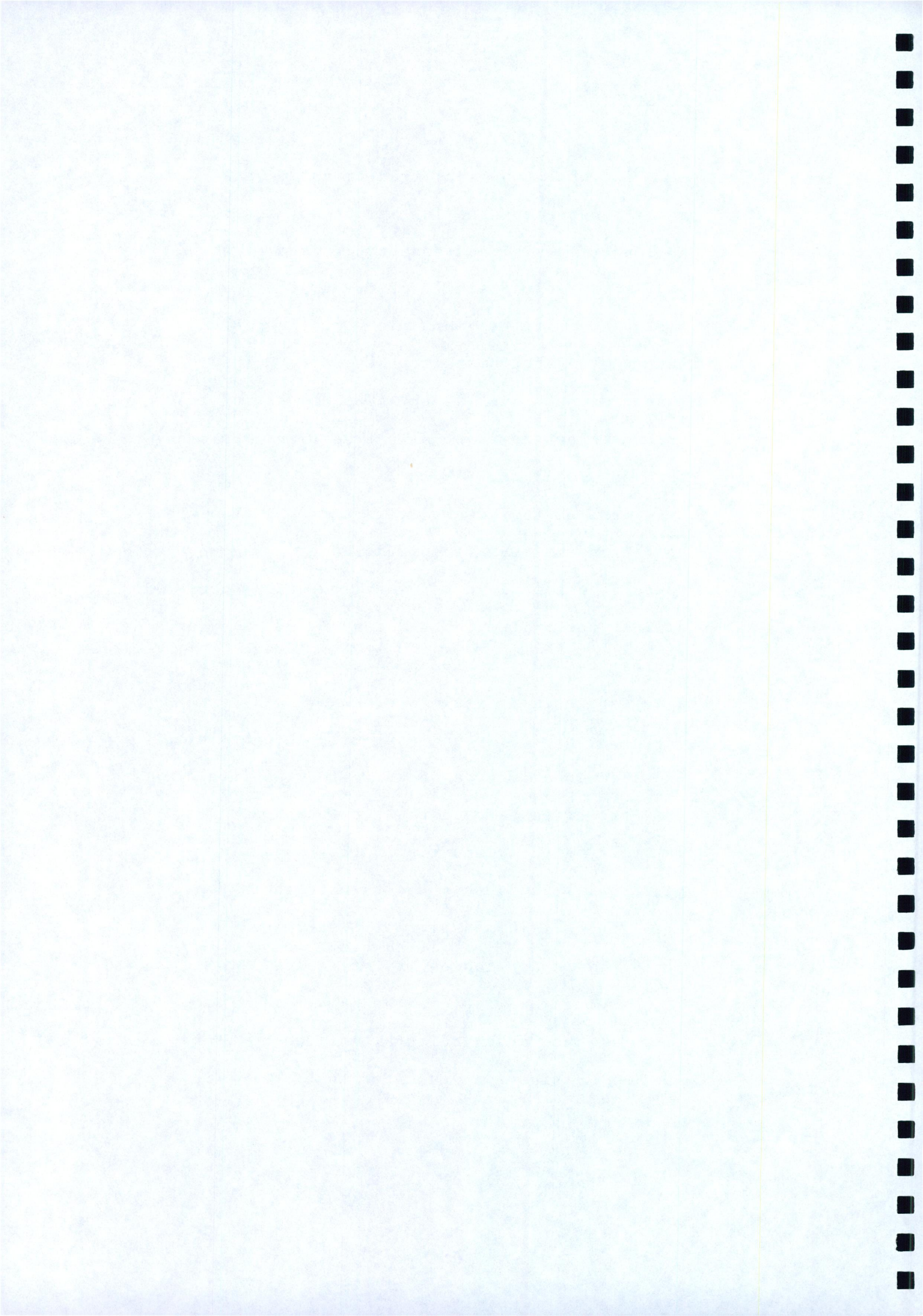
CONCLUSION

The women who wear traditional jewellery today are perhaps the last to do so. It is no longer considered fashionable even by women of forty. In one family observed, all the sisters over fifty years old wore the costume but the youngest sister chose not to. The younger women laugh at the idea of wearing the costume except as part of a traditional ceremony such as a wedding.

Just as the jewellery is becoming obsolete, so too is its amuletic significance. The younger women do not find it necessary to guard themselves against the evil eye with deer horns. They are content to wear fashionable jewellery to accessorize their western clothes.

Financially, young couples no longer invest in traditionally as a security for the future. They prefer to save in the local bank and get interest on their money. If they have a financial crises, they can turn to their family and friends. This aspect of traditional jewellery is now losing its relevance.

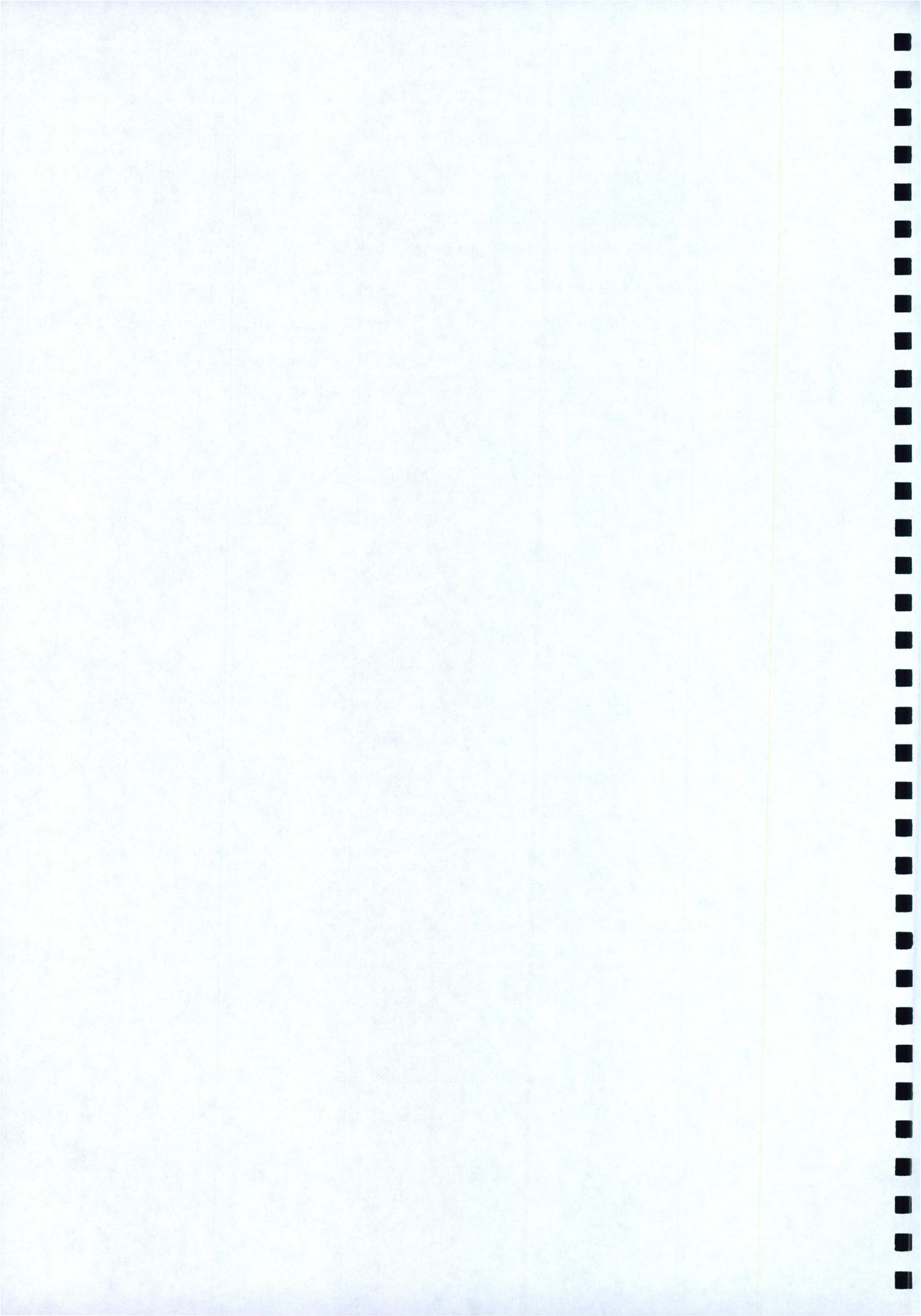
As the jewellery is the only remaining trace of the Berber cultural influence, this imminent extinction indicates that their beliefs



and customs will soon be forgotten. As I have shown, much of the symbolic significance of the traditional jewellery has already been lost or reinterpreted by the Tunisians. Losing this cultural heritage is the next stage in the lifecycle of the jewellery and is a natural progression from the introduction of western culture and the fashion industry that accompanies it.

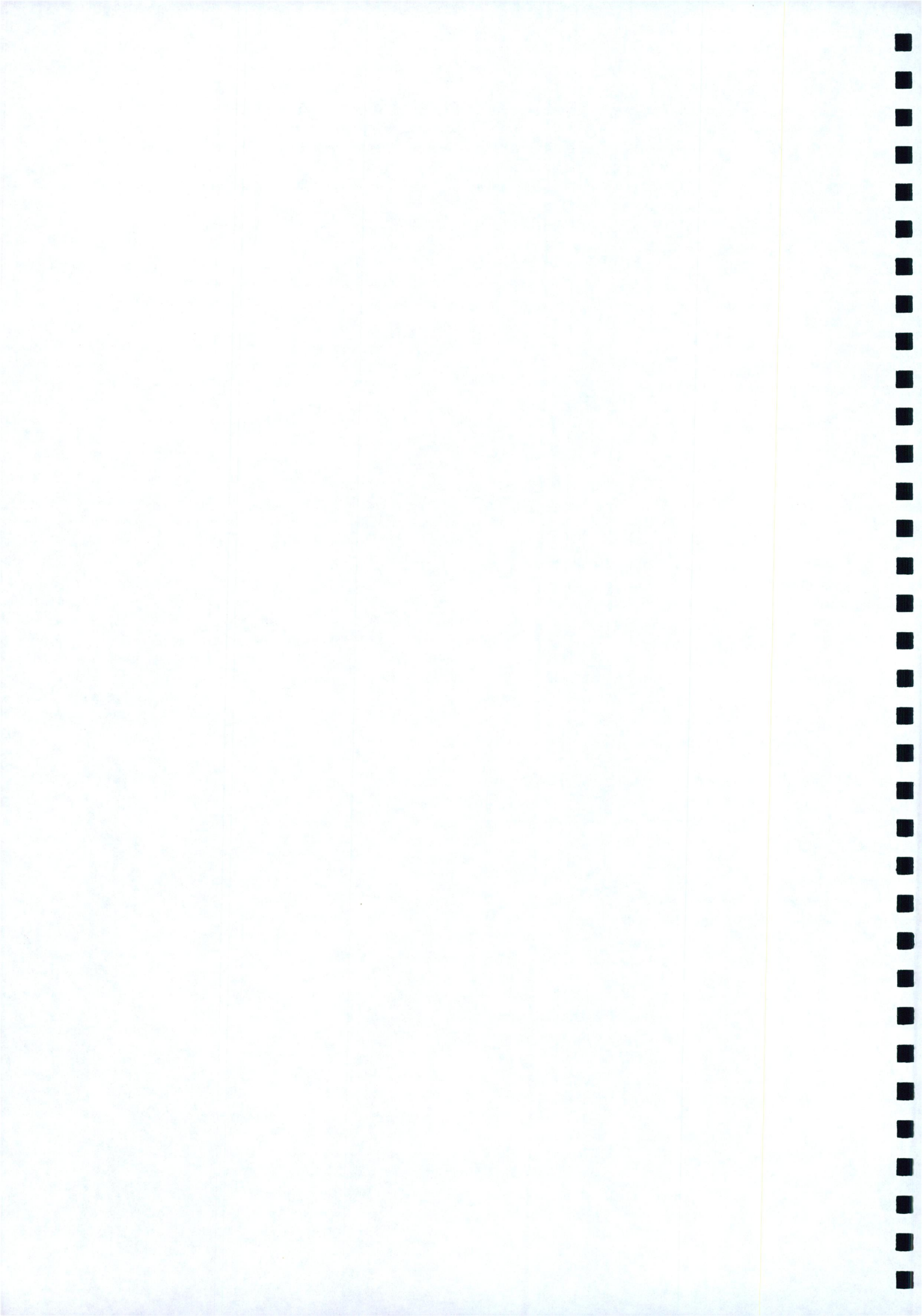
Religion still plays a role in some of the modern jewellery such as the verse of the Quran in plate 17. More ornate versions of the hand of Fatima with pearls and precious stones are produced now. So although the Berber influence is waning, the Muslim religion still influences the design of jewellery.

This jewellery is very meaningful to the women who wear it. They wear it principally for adornment and they are not affected by the younger women who tell them that it is not fashionable. In their lives the jewellery has been important as an amulet, as a way of showing their creativity, as financial security and as something to give them national and local identity. The jewellery is also precious for the memories it holds. The strung section of the earrings of the old woman interviewed held the horn of a deer given to her by her late husband. The



earrings themselves from her late brother.

The jewellery serves as a memory of them for the woman. The jewellery may not be worn in the future but it will continue to be valued for what it meant to these women.



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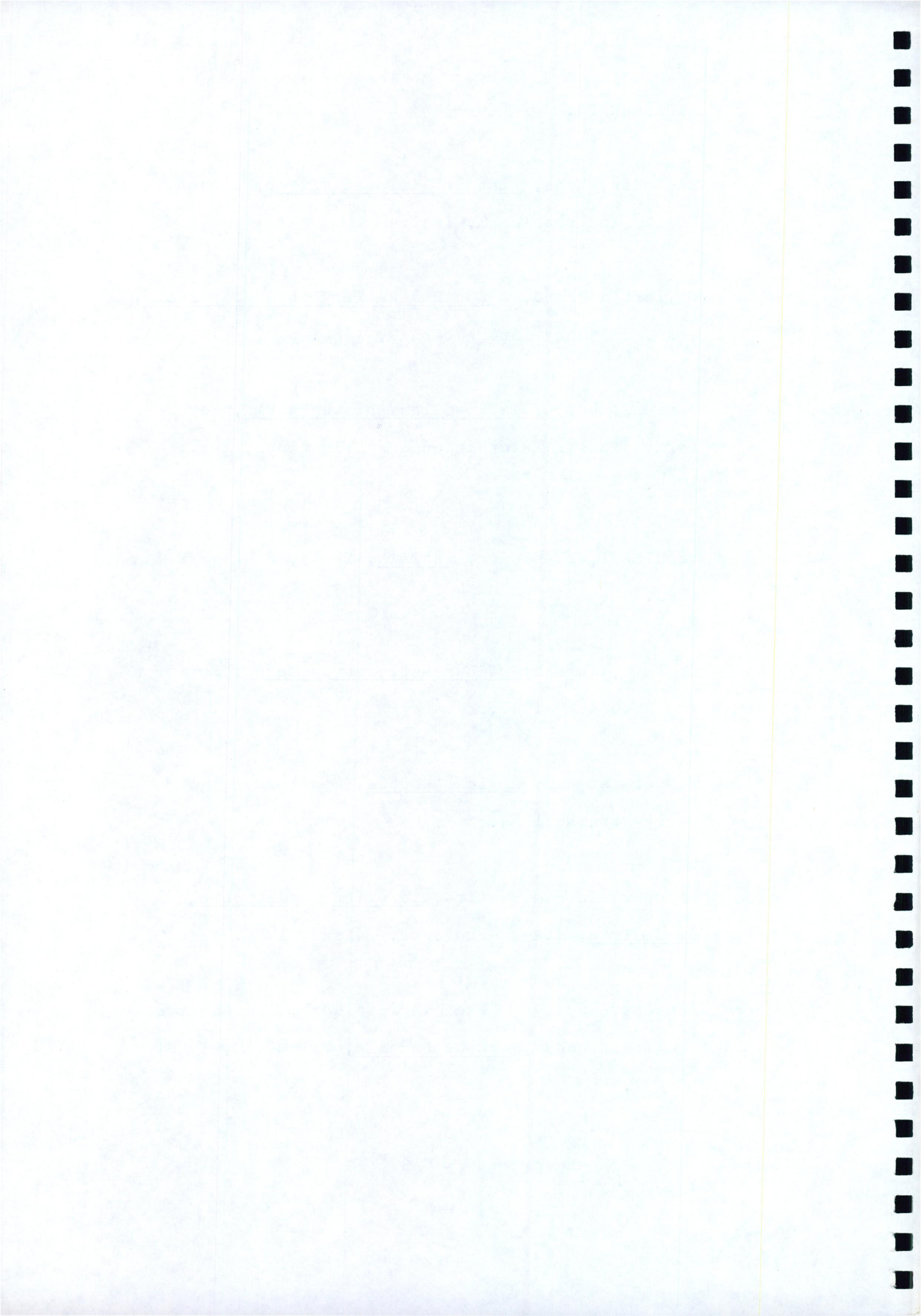
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