Exploring the life of amulets in Palestine: from healing and protective remedies to the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets

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Chapter 1. What is an amulet?

1.1. Outline

In 1995, after the donation of the T.C.C.P.A. to BZU, a reordering of the material took place. The 1379 objects of different shapes, materials, some with inscriptions, some without and used for different purposes in different contexts, were labeled and put under one single category: "Palestinian amulets". While the term amulet seems to have included diverse kinds of objects, the objects themselves got restricted to their function as amulets, especially under the premises of being part of a "collection of Palestinian amulets." But, have they always been amulets, or better said, Palestinian amulets? Rather than being a universal connotation, I argue that our use of the concept of amulet, applied to the objects that Canaan collected, must be seen in its historicity. It is a general concept that has been used to describe material objects that have specificities. As any other concept, it has been subjected to our perception and knowledge of the world, which has changed considerably from the time Taufiq Canaan gathered the objects in the early 20th century, to current research, especially after the material turn of the 1990's.

The category of amulet is applied to objects that have been used as a means to protect from evil and misfortune, to avert and heal disease, and to bring good luck. The kinds of power that amulets bear and the ways they convey such power to the users are diverse. As analysed in the following chapters, even if we agree that these objects were produced as amulets, they could take subsequent roles, which have not always incorporated in the word "amulet" and not generally understood to be part of amulets. Objects made with the purpose to be amulets are not only used as such, they enter and exit contexts in which they function in multiple ways. These functions vary, and we see they take the form of commodities, ethnographic evidence, collectibles and tokens of national identity.

This chapter explores the term amulet and talisman, and the reason why they sometimes have been used as interchangeable synonyms. It supposes a reflective exercise on the historicity of our analytical categories, and the mechanisms behind the conceptualisation of objects as amulets and talismans. It enquires into the usefulness of the English terms *amulet* and *talisman* when analysing the objects used in Palestine, particularly contrasting them with *emic* references that come from ethnographic research such as those provided by Taufiq Canaan.

This chapter is divided in two parts. In the first, the chapter explores the conceptualisation of amulets as magical objects, and how the magical framework has erased the possibility to see them operating in other functions. It looks into amulets and talismans from the Levant and their conceptualisation in the work of 19th-century and early 20th-century scholars. It then addresses more recent approaches to amulets resulting from the material turn focusing on materiality and reflects on the feasibility of applying recent analytical tools on the T.C.C.P.A. The second part of the chapter revolves around Taufiq Canaan's use of the terms amulet and talisman. Although his work fits into the anthropological studies about Palestine at large scale in the early 20th century, it is at the same time noteworthy because of the way he carried out ethnographic research. This section analyses the writings where he explicitly dealt with amulets, either in a descriptive way or by providing analytical tools to study them.

1.2. Amulets as magical objects

Magic has been the main and immediate explanatory framework in the study of amulets and talismans to the extent that it has erased the possibility of objects to display other capacities.[45] This is because the study of amulets and talismans has focused on the way they are used, but not on the way they are commercialised, collected and exhibited. And within the context of their use, magic has taken over and has left the religious and medical use far behind. However, definitional boundaries are perhaps clear, but in reality this position is not useful when it comes to analysing amulets used in an everyday religious practice. In her study of the role of magic in contemporary the Gulf States, Remke Kruk observes that the boundaries between the realms, magic and religion, are so blurred that "neither the practitioner nor the clients, those who seek his aid, are aware of going beyond the boundaries of what is permitted."[46] Practitioners and users may recur to elements that come from the domain of magic, which is most of the times forbidden or restricted. If this is the case in practice, how can we as scholars get rid of the artificial boundaries that limit our understanding of the amulets? So before I answer this question, I will first examine why the language of magic has dominated the study of amulets.

Since the late 19th century, with the advent of anthropology and the study of religion, magic became an explanatory framework for practices characterised for their automatic ritual efficacy,

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[45] R. Muravchick, *God is the Best Guardian*, p. 52

[46] R. Kruk, "Harry Potter in the Gulf: Contemporary Islam and the Occult." p. 48

which by extension were understood as non-Christian.[47] The terms amulet and talisman therefore were used with reference to the European experience of magic.[48] Within the colonial context, magic was embedded with orientalist ideas of the other and it was used as an *etic* concept that functioned as a global designator of ritual practices carried out by peoples under European dominion. It was argued, as formulated according to well-known prejudices, that colonised peoples incapable of developing complex, rational and religious thinking were in need of colonial domination.

Magic was used as an explanatory category to distinguish a mode of engagement with the supernatural or divine, opposed to the religious. This differentiation has its origin in the time of the Reformation, that took place in Western Europe between 1400 and 1700 CE. In this period religious reforms aimed to re-shape, re-form and re-define the core of Christian faith and practice.[49] Based on Western, particularly Protestant norms,[50] this reformation meant the establishment of clear boundaries between the sacred and the profane, and the elimination of any kind of magical elements from religious practice.[51]

In colonial settings, the magical and the religious were considered two ontological qualities of modes of thinking that emanate from two different kinds of peoples. While the religious was reserved for Western European Christian rituals, the magical was used to define most practices of the indigenous population of the colonised regions even including Eastern Christians such as those living in Palestine. This differentiation was useful for the European Christian missions inasmuch as it legitimised their activities through institutions, which sought to introduce a new form of religiosity and spread values and codes of European origin.

1.3. Islamic amulets

Reformation as a project that sought to depurate religion from any kind of magical element and popular practice, also took place in the Islamic world. Although since the medieval period we find

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[47] J. Sørensen, "Magic Reconsidered. Towards a Scientifically Valid Concept of Magic" in *Defining Magic: A Reader*, edit. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Strausberg, p. 230

[48] Mostly with reference to the European experience of magic, i.e., with regard to the invocation of forces other than God; employing concepts such as ghosts and witchcraft; and involving dichotomies such as black vs white magic, learned vs popular, prayers vs spells; which have little or no counterpart in Islam. Cfr. E. Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam,* p. xiii

[49] M. McGuire, *Lived Religion, Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. p.22

[50] M. McGuire, *Op.Cit*. p.11

[51] M. McGuire, *Op.Cit.,* p.33

scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) proposing reformational ideas, it is in the 19th century that the Islamic world thoroughly experienced a reformational movement in which the legal discourse became the arbiter and determiner of the theoretical object of "Islam" through the jurists.[52]. Reformational efforts took place through the intellectual activity of Muslim scholars who had been trained in Europe and got acquainted with the Western conceptualisation of religion, such as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897). For them, the consideration, regulation and legitimation of behaviour and religious practice had to be based on the Qur'an and Hadith. It excluded all non-textual sources, literary sources, and local Muslim traditions, which had for centuries, been important sources of customs and culture. This textual interpretation of Islam endorsed the authority of the jurists, who belonging to the four juridical schools, read and interpreted the texts while leaving out many other authorities such as local sheikhs, tribal leaders, philosophers, Sufis and poets, who in Shahab Ahmed's words represented: "the human and historical phenomenon of Islam".[53] Reformist scholars in this sense set the guidelines for assuring the correct practice of Islam differentiating it from popular practices. These guidelines set by the scholars did not reach the entire population, but spread in urban centres where state institutions could provide infrastructure and a regulation of Islamic practice. Beliefs and expressions of piety in everyday life were only considered Islamic if they were based on the textual sources. Everything else coming from sources other than the Qur'an and the Sunna, such as popular practices, saint venerations and foreign manners imported by Western missionaries, were labeled innovation (*bid'a pl. bida'*), thus rejected in the strongest terms.

In the 19th century, travellers and missionaries who settled in many parts of the Muslim world got acquainted with this Muslim normative discourse prevailing in urban centres, which had defined the understanding of religion at the level of the elite scholars. Reformist ideas within the Islamic world made it easier for European scholars to study the Islamic world with categories such as religion vs magic, elite culture vs popular culture, pure vs polluted, etc.

This understanding of "Islamic" turned out to be decisive also in defining Western collecting practices. Only material objects that fitted within the label "Islamic" were included in collections of Islamic arts. These repositories in turn, led to the first Western studies on the material culture from the Islamic world like the *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte,* published in 1925; Titus Burckhardt's publications starting in the 1940's, and *L'Islam et l'art musulman* by Alexandre Papadopoulo in

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[52] S. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, p.117

[53] S. Ahmed, *Op .Cit.*, p.123

1976.[54] The material analysed came primarily from archaeological sites in the Near East (the Levant & Mesopotamia), and from what missionaries, travellers and scholars had collected during fieldwork stays. The material was organised around topics or around historic periods of 'Islamic history", a predominantly Arab/Muslim history.[55] The focus of these studies was on Islamic architecture and on objects related to it, such as tiles (ceramic works), mosque lamps and stained-glass windows (glass works), minbars (wooden work), etc. As for every-day life objects, they were placed under the "minor arts" section. Even so, they focused entirely on examples drawn from elite culture, and showed no interest in everyday objects from middle and lower classes. Amulets and talismans were also included in collections but only those containing "Islamic" elements, most of which belonged to the elite culture. Example of this are the inscribed seals that are nowadays part of the collections of the British Museum.[56]

What is Islamic about these objects? What did the collectors mean by "Islamic" when they labelled them as such? Within the Islamic cosmology, magic is a reality and the amulets to counteract it are accepted by religious authorities. However, amulets had to fulfil certain guidelines, i.e., they had to be made and used in accordance to the Qur'an and the Hadith. In this sense, Qur'anic quotes were the easiest way to recognise an amulet as Islamic, and so those were included in collections. Amulets that did not contain Qur'anic inscriptions or were used according to he Prophet's sayings, were left out from the category. They were not included in collections, and therefore, not studied.

Over time, the study of the Islamic world developed alongside different understandings of the concept "Islamic". The study of Muslim local cultures as representatives of the diversity of the Islamic world, the inclusion of the "popular" aspect of Islam, and the application of ethnographic research methods, contributed to broaden the categories of Islamic.[57] It has been particularly the ethnographic research derived from the anthropological approach to Islam, which has allowed us to better understand the material culture in its engagement with individuals and communities in specific contexts. Moreover, the study of material culture has also contributed to the study of

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[54] T. Burckhardt, Art of Islam: Language and Meaning. London: Islamic Festival Trust, 1976.; O. Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art", p. 5

[55] O. Grabar, *Op. Cit..*, p. 4

[56] V. Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals in the British Museum,* p.131

[57] S. Ahmed discusses the development of terms in the study of the Islamic world. Cfr. S. Ahmed *What is Islam? The importance of Being Islamic.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Islamic objects by shifting the attention to the materiality of objects and their perfomative aspect. Example of this is the approach to the Qur'anic contents in amulets. There are indeed particular verses recurrently used in amulets for their power such as *ayat al-kursī* (the Throne verse), or stories such as *ahl al-kahf* (the people of the cave). Scholars now know that these verses are not always engraved or written, rather, they can be pronounced while manufacturing or activating the power of the amulet, recited and even ingested as prescribed by the practitioner.[58] Finally, another development that has contributed to category of Islamic is the study and conceptualisation of religion, from viewing religions as separate entities with exclusive beliefs, practices and symbols, to a fluid and connected view in which religions share elements with each other and overlap.[59]

1.4. Definitions and terminology

In the same way the development of the study of material culture has allowed new kinds of objects to enter the category of Islamic amulets, the analytical tools to study them have developed alongside the material culture of the Islamic world. Many of the first amulets that entered collections were only described in general terms as objects belonging to a certain period of Islamic history. It was only when scholars started consulting sources in Arabic (and other languages used in the Islamic world) that they started finding how amulets were referred to in the texts and how they were used. Moreover, ethnographic research gave a more nuanced understanding of the different terms. Scholars doing fieldwork were able to register the ways people referred to the amulets in their own languages and dialects. In sum, terms became more accurate as they relied on more diverse material provided by textual sources and ethnographic data.

1.4.1. Amulet and talisman

One of the first scholars who studied amulets was E.A. Wallis Budge, who worked in the British Museum from 1883 until his resignation in 1924. His definitions came from analysing the objects that had been catalogued as amulets in the Museum's collections, as well as the objects from his own collection. In his work *Amulets and Superstition,*[60] Budge analyses amulets and talismans from

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[58] This performative aspect is explored in Chapter 2. For the material and perforative aspect of the Qur'an Cfr. Zadeh, Travis. "Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur'an." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 3 (2009): 443-466.

[59] The discussion of religions as separate or connected comes in Chapter 2, in the subchapter about interconfessionality.

[60] W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstition*. London: Oxford University Press, 1930

different time periods and geographies as the material expression of superstitions, a phenomenon that appeared to be common to many Eastern cultures. Although his work does not deal exclusively with material culture from the Islamic world, it does include reflexions on objects from Muslim lands. In his work he distinguishes between an amulet and a talisman and mentions that although the terms had been used interchangeably they actually seem to refer to two different functions of objects. [61]

Budge's differentiation of the terms points to the object's purpose and intention. On the one hand, "an amulet is an object which is endowed with magical powers, and which of its own accord uses these powers ceaselessly on behalf of the person who carries it, or causes it to be laid up in his house, or attaches it to some one of his possessions, to protect him and his belongings from the attacks of evil spirits or from the evil eye."[62] On the other hand, a talisman is only intended to perform one specific task. Therefore it has to be made to cover the needs of the user. In this way, the talisman bears power from the moment it is manufactured, but it expires once the talisman has fulfilled its function.[63] So while an amulet bears a protective power which serves for general and continuous protection, a talisman is only intended to perform one specific task.[64]

Another more recent distinction of the terms has been made by Emilie Savage Smith and used by Venetia Porter in the analysis of amulets in the collections of the British Museum. Accordingly, amulets are objects with small dimensions manufactured to be worn to ensure protection and well-being. They have long-lasting materials in order to function over a long period of time. On the contrary, talismans are made with ephemeral materials such as paper, and although they are made for the same purposes, they have a short-term function.[65] Following this definition, it is not possible to use the terms interchangeably since they refer to different functions.

A distinction between amulets and talismans, however, is even more complicated when analysing material that has been decontextualised in time and place, such as material that has been re-arranged in the form of a collection and transferred to a different spatial context. Based on the biographical analysis to objects mentioned in the introduction, I argue that an object used as a

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[61] E. Savage-Smith, *Op. Cit.*, p. xxii

[62] W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstition*, p.13

[63] W. Budge, *Op. Cit*., p.13

[64] W. Budge, *Op. Cit.,* p.14

[65] V. Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*, p.131

talisman at one moment of its life can end up being re-used as an amulet in a different context. Sometimes it is difficult to assess whether an object was intended to be an amulet or a talisman if there is lack of documentation. And even when documentation is available we encounter another problem; the evaluation of an object as an amulet or a talisman is not so easy when we analyse the objects according to the way they are named locally. The *emic* terms sometimes refer to the way they were used, and challenge the material-based distinction in which objects with long lasting materials such as stone, metal, or glass are regarded as amulets, while objects made from paper and organic materials such as leafs, flowers, and fruits, are considered talismans.

1.4.2. Arabic terms

Arabic terms used to refer to amulet and talisman have been explored in the Encyclopaedia of Islam. In the article of the entry "amulet" C. Hamès offers the following definition that derives from the study of amulets in the Islamic world, which although very general, helps us to identify aspects/ elements that can be applied to the Canaan amulets. An amulet Hamès says:

> "an object that one wears, with the conviction that it possesses beneficial magic… connoted by the word *ḥamala* and its derivatives *ḥimāla, ḥamīla, ḥamā'il*, is perhaps defined from the point of view of anthropology of magic, by the fact of wearing an object with magical powers by attaching or suspending it. It is generally intended for human beings but can also be suspended around the neck or head of an animal or hung from a building or vehicle. In the Muslim world, these objects serve to support and encase the magical texts written in Arabic, inspired by a particular reading of the Qur'an or by written magical traditions. The texts and inscriptions constitute the talismans, which are the actively magical element; whereas the amulet constitutes the particular instrument of application."[66]

Following this definition two things can be said. On the one hand a talisman needs an amulet since it serves as its means for conveying the magical element of the talisman. On the other hand, an amulet needs to be worn, hung, or attached to the object of its protection. An amulet then requires to be placed in contact with the user or whatever it is meant to protect. This contact or the act of carrying an amulet, is what lies at the core of Hamès definition.

In the Arabic language however, amulets are not only referred to as *ḥamala* and its derivatives, other terms used in written sources have been equated to the terms: amulet/talisman.

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[66] C. Hamès, "Amulet", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 01 August 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_SIM_0219>

The first one *ṭilsam,*[67] *ṭilsim*, *ṭilism* or *ṭilasm* is derived from the greek *telesma* (τέλεσμα), and can in fact be traced to the same origins as the English word "talisman". It appears in Arabic translations of Greek texts, but is hardly ever used in the Palestinian context for everyday amulets and talismans. Another term is *tamīma*[68]*,* that comes from the verbal root *tamma* which in its various forms II, IV, X, means to complete and to be achieved. *Tamīma* is mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry alongside with *taʿwīdh.* Lisan al-Arab mentions that *tamīma is an 'ūdha* hung on a person.[69] According to H. Wehr, *taʿwīdh and 'ūdha* means amulet, talisman, but also refers to a charm, spell or incantation.[70] The root of this term in its form II *ʿawwadha* means to pronounce a charm or incantation, to fortify someone with a charm, but also to place someone under God's protection by praying. Another term which, according to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, is to be found in the writings of the 10th century author Abu Dulaf al-Khazraji is *ḥirz* which means amulet, but also has been used to refer to a fortified place, refuge, sanctuary.[71] The verbal root of this term is *ḥaraza,* it means to keep, guard, protect, to take care of. Another term which appears in Arabic literature, specifically in *ḥadīth* and consequently in the Medicine of the Prophet (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī)* literature is *ruqya*[72] which according to H. Wehr refers to a spell, charm, magic, incantation, exorcism; but whose meaning in the context of *ḥadīth* refers to specific formulae in which God is the ultimate force from which refuge is sought. Oral sources show that nowadays people use terms in the different Arabic dialects, such as *ḥurz* in the Maghrib, *ḥijāb* in Egypt and in the Levant[73]; *ḥimāla*, *ḥāfiẓ*, *'ūdha*, *mi'wadha* in the Mashriq. Another term used to denominate a certain design of a talisman is *jadwal* (table or chart) or a *khātim* (seal)*,* which are geometrical figures that bear

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[67] J. Ruska, Carra de Vaux, B. and Bosworth, C.E., "Tilsam", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 01 August 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7553>

[68] *tamīma* pl. *tamāʾim. Cfr. T.* Fahd, "Tamīma", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 01 August 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7383>

69 *Lisan al-Arab*, p.448

70 *taʿwīdh* pl. *taʿāwīdh. Cfr.* H. Wehr, *Dictionary,* p.768

71 *ḥirz* pl. *aḥrāz Cfr.* H. Wehr, *Dictionary*, p.196

[72] *ruqya* pl. *ruqan Cfr.* T. Fahd, "Ruḳya", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 01 August 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6333>

[73] J. Chelhod, "Ḥidjāb", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 01 August 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2855>

inscribed names and signs with magical powers and which appear sometimes on pendants, but are also prepared on pieces of paper to be folded and kept in an amulet case.

1.4.3. Palestinian use of the terms

In Palestine the term *ḥijāb* is used to refer in general to amulets and talismans of diverse kinds. It is the term that in the 90's Khaled Nashef used for the Arabic edition he prepared of Canaan's catalogue of the T.C.C.P.A.: *Majmū'a tawfīq kan'ān li l-ḥujub.* Using the term *ḥijāb* to designate so many different kinds of objects might be explained by the fact that it was the most widespread term in use in Palestine for decades, and because Dr. Canaan himself used it in his research as a general term that included both inscribed and uninscribed amulets. In most cases, however, *ḥijāb* has a specific meaning and refers to a paper amulet with "secret writing", folded in a triangular shape and wrapped in a leather or fabric pouch. (See Figure 3) According to Salim Tamari, in Palestine people also use the term *ṭalṭamīs*[74], which seems to derive from the term talisman. It means "gibberish"

Figure 3. Paper *ḥijābāt* (folded and kept in leather, cloth or metal pouches). Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

[74] *ṭalṭamees* or *ṭalṭamīs*

and refers to this unintelligible/secret writing seen by the viewer who is unable to decipher the meaning of the inscription on a *ḥijāb.*[75]

A *ḥijāb* is hung making it visible, but we can also find examples attached to the inner clothes. It has been so commonly used, that the term also entered the vocabulary of traditional embroidery. In that context, *ḥijāb* is the triangular-shape motif used in Palestinian traditional attire. It is embroidered for decorative purposes in many different colours and in different arrangements, sometimes the motif stands alone or it is combined with other motifs. The motif is meant to protect the woman who wears the dress, and probably to indicate that the woman is also carrying an actual paper *ḥijāb* in between her clothes.[76]

P. Bourmaud, in his study on the medical practices in Late Ottoman Palestine also reflects on the term and shows how, even before the 20th century, the term *ḥijāb* was already in use. It was meant to designate manufactured objects that usually contained invocations, such as the names of God, particularly those corresponding to the desired healing power such as *yā kāfī* and *yā shafī*.[77] These objects were often manufactured or prepared by sheikhs,[78] but they were also manufactured by the users themselves since they had common knowledge on how to prepare remedies. Besides the use of the term in historical sources, Bourmaud gives an interpretation based on its etymology. "Le *ḥijāb* recèle une part de prière, de mise en scène, de secret, mais aussi d'autorité et de technicité dans l'écriture." [79]

Etymologically, this term comes from the verbal root *ḥajaba* which means to cover, conceal, and hide from sight.[80] Used in the context of an amulet, it conceals part of the ritual, which actually activates the power of the object. An object becomes a *ḥijāb* through the ritual action of the prayer,

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[75] *ḥijāb (pl. ḥijābāt/ ḥujub)* Personal communication with Salim Tamari. 17 October, 2020

[76] In the Palestinian traditional attire, the protection against evil eye is achieved by embroidering the triangular shaped "amulet" pattern, by recurring to certain colours, or by making a "mistake" in the patterns, on which a stitch with a different colour is sawn in order to deviate the attention of anyone who sees the woman. Figure 4. shows one of the dresses I investigated while documenting objects from the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Collections in 2017. This is a festive dress from Beit Dajan embroidered with different patterns, among them the "amulet" pattern, which resembles the triangular shape of the paper amulets.

[77] This formula is used in amulets to address God. The item catalogued under number 1 of the Canaan Collection is an amulet with an inscribed gold coin it reads: *yā kāfī, yā shafī, yā ḥāfīdh, yā amīn. The same formula also appears* in the Nabi Musa amulets in which Prophet Musa is invoked. More about the Nabi Musa amulets, see Chapter 4.

[78] P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor*, p.78

[79] P. Bourmaud, *Op.Cit.*, p.78

[80] H. Wehr, *Dictionary*, p.184

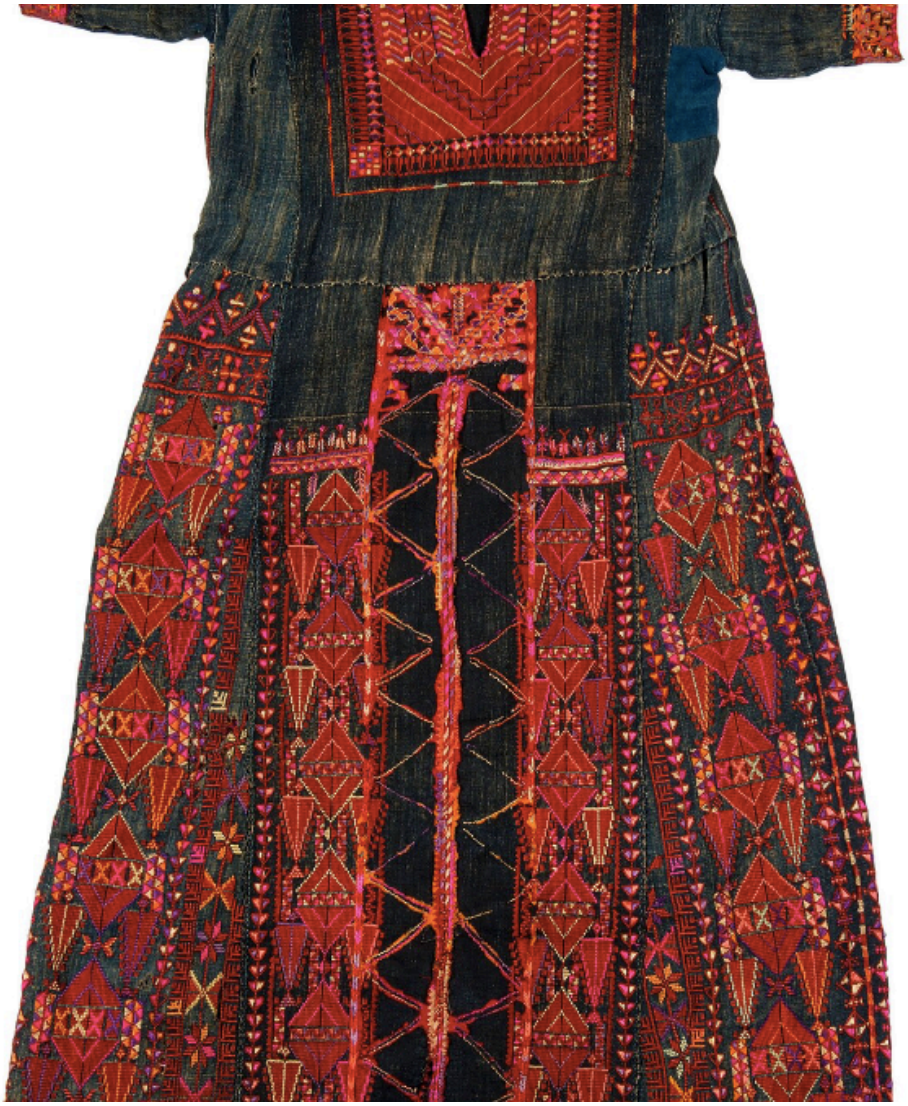

Figure 4. “amulet” (*ḥijāb)* embroidery pattern on dress from Beit Dajan.
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Collections.
Photo credit: NMVW

by activating its powers through the writing or invocation of a formula during its preparation. A *ḥijāb* conceals the authority of the manufacturer and his role in the activation of the amulet. At the same time, it protects the user (carrier of the object) from any sort of evil by covering or hiding him/her from the sight of any source of the evil eye. At times a *ḥijāb* is used hidden within the clothes or folded in a pouch, but it can also be used by exposing it on the clothes with the aim to deviate the attention of the source of the evil eye. The concealment of a *ḥijāb* can be expanded as well to the way an object hides multiple and simultaneous functions that co-exist throughout the life

stages, such as the Canaan objects, which were also medical remedies, commodities, ethnographic data, collectibles, and part of the national heritage.

1.5 From magical objects to small blessings

Attention to the material qualities of the amulets has shifted from deciphering the inscriptions to observing how the object is used in a ritual context. As a result of developments in the fields of religious studies, anthropology and historical studies, amulets in collections are no longer studied exclusively as objects whose only purpose was to carry and convey the message of their inscriptions. The "mysterious" inscriptions seemed to have been one of the main attractive features —next to the precious stones— for collectors of Islamic amulets. The decipherment of the inscriptions, their meaning and symbolism was crucial in the study of these magical objects. However, the focus on amulets used in actual living settings has opened the possibility of comparing and reconstructing the live of amulets in different historical contexts.

1.5.1. Amulets in collections

The advantage of studying collections is that they act as repositories of material from different origins which allow comparative analysis. If well documented, objects in collections can offer insights into the role of material culture in certain practices. As mentioned before, collections were the first repositories where scholars could find specimens to study, and even after the development of the study of objects in live settings, collections are still waiting for new approaches. The kinds of objects that were included in collections sometimes fitted the guidelines of what collectors wanted to acquire and to the story they wanted to tell. Other collections were formed by very wealthy individuals who acquired objects en masse, in some of these cases collectors were not even aware of the kinds of objects they possessed, a fact that indicates that there was no intended story to tell.[81] In other cases, the collected amulets were the only ones accessible to collectors, meaning that the stories they developed had to be adapted to the availability of objects.[82]

Amulets and talismans in collections have been studied in relation to the status of the collections. On the one hand, there are collections in process of formation and are the result of

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[81] Example of this situation is the case J.P. Morgan's collection. Cfr. A. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, p.38-41

[82] About the absence of particular objects in collections Crf. S. Byrne, A. Clarke, R. Harrison and R. Torrence "Networks, Agents and Objects: Frameworks for Unpacking Museum Collections" in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum* edited by S. Byrne, A. Clarke, R. Harrison and R. Torrence, p. 9

museographic arrangement, in other words, they comprise objects from different origins (even from diverse smaller collections) being put together by museum keepers. On the other hand, there are collections fully formed, many of them composed by one single collector such as the T.C.C.P.A. or Alexander Fodor's collection of Islamic amulets. Alexander Fodor was among the most prominent scholars who studied amulets from the Islamic world in the 20th century. His work mainly revolved around objects that he had collected for himself. *Amulets from the Islamic World* is the catalogue of the exhibition of his own collection of amulets, held in Budapest in 1988.[83] His collection included different kinds of objects gathered during his 20 years of research in the Middle East and North Africa. He described the amulets in the context of the "popular culture of Islam", which included not only amulets used by Muslims, but also those of Christian and Jews who lived in Muslim lands. As part of the machinery of magic, these amulets were considered to allow occasional contact with supernatural powers, they could bring good and bad luck, or offer protection and healing.

In the 1990's interest in Islamic amulets and talismans seems to have grown as evidenced in the numerous publications on the topic. In these publications we find a reformulation of magic. I mentioned before that magic was the immediate reference for the explanation of amulets, but it was an exclusive category that excluded other possible explanations. This time, however, magic was treated as a more inclusive category. In the introduction to *Magic and Divination,* E. Savage-Smith says that magic "seeks to alter the course of events, usually by calling upon a supernatural force (most often God or one of his intercessors, the prophets, saints, and angels). It can be viewed as a form of rationality with its own sets of assumptions, based upon a process of analogy rather than proven causes and effects"[84] In the Islamic world "one of the primary uses of magic is to ward off disease and to preserve well-being"[85]. In this sense, amulets become a potential source for the study not only of the magical, but also of the religious and medical practices.[86] Following this reformulation of magic, in 1992 Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith published *Science, Tools and Magic.* Based on the Nasser D. Khalili Collections of artefacts from the Islamic world, amulets and talismans are treated as the material expression of the science of astrology and also as

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[83] Fodor, Alexander. *Amulets from the Islamic World. Catalogue of the Exhibition held in Budapest in 1988*, Budapest : Eötvös Loránd University, Chair for Arabic Studies : Csoma de Kőrös Society, Section of Islamic Studies, 1990.

[84] E. Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination*, p. xiii

[85] E. Savage-Smith, *Op. Cit.*, p.xxii

[86] E. Savage-Smith, *Op. Cit.*, p. xv

tools used in medical practice. In line with this reformulation is Stefano Carboni's *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art.* It revolves around the role of astrologic imagery for imbuing objects with talismanic and apotropaic power. The items included in his study come mostly from the eastern Iranian peoples, these are mirrors and metal objects such as pen boxes, inkwells, bowls, mortars, ewers, and coins that alternate images and inscriptions.[87]

Even when the reformulation of magic put together the idea of fluidity between the medical, religious and magical aspects, the kinds of objects explored continued to come from the same repositories that contained amulets and talismans from the elite culture. Made with valuable materials and meant to be used by sultans and kings, these amulets were all inscribed and included pieces of jewellery such as rings and pendants; talismanic shirts, and other objects inscribed with magical and religious formulae or with zodiac signs. Despite the fact that these objects are quite diverse, their inscriptions were the main focus. Studies on these kinds of elite objects included the publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York. Yasmine al-Saleh's *Amulets and Talismans of the Islamic World* is a short text that revolves around inscriptions as the main physical features of amulets and talismans in the world of Islam. Amulets and talismans (terms that she uses indistinctly), are objects imbued with powers through the inscriptions they bear. Inscriptions are of a different nature and come from different sources, so depending on them, objects function as part of occult practices, or as cures prescribed by a physician. In this sense, since the nature of the inscription determines the nature of the amulet/talismans, inscriptions are regarded the main object of analysis and it is the content of the inscription alone that provides the tools for interpretation.

Inscribed amulets seem to have been the most pursued objects to collect. Inscriptions provide an entry point to the study of objects and may very well disclose aspects of how they were manufactured and used. However in the study of amulets, inscriptions are only one aspect. The shift from the content/meaning of the inscription, to the text itself as part of the materiality of the object, and as result of a historical development of material culture occurred after the material turn. The material turn has impacted in the way disciplines approach their study objects. The focus on the materiality of objects, the way humans engage with them and the meanings that derive, from these relations, are the main features of more contemporary studies on amulets. Moreover, since objects

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[87] S. Carboni, *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997

are studied in their engagement with humans, the ethnographic approach has turned to be useful to explore particular cases.

Moving on to more contemporary studies that have contributed to our better understanding of amulets and talismans, I can mention the following. One of them is the project *Small Blessings: Amulets at the Pitt Rivers Museum.*[88] As part of the study of the Pitt Rivers' collections, this project sought to explore objects from different backgrounds collected by the French ethnologist Adrien de Mortillet in the early 20th century. The objects came from all continents and were used in different periods. Unconnected at first sight due to their different materials and shapes, and despite the fact that the amulets were made for various purposes such as to bring good luck, protect from evil, misfortune and disease, and heal ailments and disease, all these objects catalogued under the category of "amulet" bear a common feature. "…people created and used them, believed they had the power to alter or affect the world around them. In this sense amulets can help us understand the human need for well-being and universal concepts of hope and believe."[89] This being said, the above mentioned study of amulets focuses on the intention of their makes and users, a human intention that is shared by all regardless the cultural background. *Small blessings* offered a fresh perspective on amulets. It goes beyond old orientalist ideas of the "other" that have loaded amulets with ideas of backwardness and irrationality, and it links amulets to a shared human experience.

Although collections have been the main repositories of amulets, very few scholars have reflected on how collection formation implicates the construction of a particular narrative.[90] Reflections on narrating or telling a story through collecting are to be found after the formation of Collection Studies, a result from the material turn that occurred during the 1980's and 1990's within the field of archaeology and anthropology.[91] In the case of amulets from the Muslim world in general and amulets from Palestine in particular, these reflections came from scholars involved in museum studies.[92]

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[88] *Small Blessings. Amulets at the Pitt Rivers Museum.* http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/

[89] "Introduction" in *Small Blessings. Amulets at the Pitt Rivers Museum*. http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/

[90] V. Porter. "The collection of Arabic and Persian seals and amulets in the British Museum: notes on a history" in *Amulets and Talismans in the Middle East and North Africa in Context. Transmission, Efficacy and Collections,* Leiden: Brill (in process of publication.)

[91] D. Hicks, "The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. p. 26-98

[92] V. Tamari's study on the formation of the Canaan Collection; For more about collecting relics Cfr. A. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, p.9

An interesting approach to the study of amulets that has been useful for this thesis is Rose Muravchick's PhD dissertation *God is the Best Guardian: Islamic Talismanic Shirts from the Gunpowder Empires*.[93] It is a study of a selection of Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid talismanic shirts and the way they have been used to narrate different museum/exhibition stories. The shirts are an example of the varied material objects that have functioned as talismans in the Muslim world. As objects that entered collections, they have been studied within the discourses formulated in museums' exhibitions around Islamic art, Islamic talismans, Islamic magic, etc. In her thesis, Muravchick analyses how the meaning and function of the shirts have been constructed through time in exhibitions, and proposes an alternative way to analyse the talismanic shirts through their materiality.[94] Focusing on the shirt-ness of these talismans, her focus shifts from the magical to the material aspect of the talismans allowing them to be explored through the engagement that each user had with them.

1.5.2. The study of amulets in live settings

The second mode of studying amulets has been in situ. Ethnography has contributed to the study of objects in the environment where they are produced and used. In Palestine, ethnographic work started in the early 19th century by scholars who carried out long stays and were able to register the way people used certain objects in everyday life. In this sense, ethnographers were able to witness how the use of amulets took place in ritual settings and find the connexion that these amulets had with other objects, places and particular people. Through ethnographic work, it was also possible to explore the many uses of one amulet based on the user, the circumstances and the geographical location.

One of the ethnographers who explored amulets in live settings was precisely Taufiq Canaan. His writings have contributed enormously to the study of amulets in general because he informed us of a folk cosmology that articulated beliefs and practices in which material objects, that at first sight would have never been considered amulets, were actually used for their healing and protective power. As mentioned before, the amulets from the Muslim world were considered by scholars if they contained inscribed references to the Qur'an, but also if they had any kind of "mysterious" inscription to decipher. Canaan, however, based on his ethnographic research was able

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[93] R.E. Muravchick, "God is the Best Guardian: Islamic Talismanic Shirts from the Gunpowder Empires" (2014). *Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations*. 1380. https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1380

[94] R.E. Muravchick, *Ibidem.*

to collect not only inscribed amulets, but also objects that did not bear inscriptions and that were made of natural materials. These amulets allow us, for the first time, to delve into another aspect of the religiosity of Palestine's inhabitants, the practical solutions of Muslims, Christians and Jews to obtain or establish well-being in their everyday life.

In general terms, ethnography added a better understanding of amulets already comprised in collections by comparing the objects that merely functioned as museum pieces to objects that were still in use as medico/magical/religious devices. It also disclosed that the performative aspect behind the objects was crucial to reconstruct the way they had been used before being collected, not only as immobile objects in a glass case, but as dynamic objects that had been moving around. Moreover, ethnographers added objects that would never be included before, like objects used for their healing and protective powers that could only be discovered by looking at them within ritual contexts or everyday life religious practices. This is the case of objects without inscriptions, made of natural materials and with seemingly no human intervention at all such as stones and twigs of *al-*

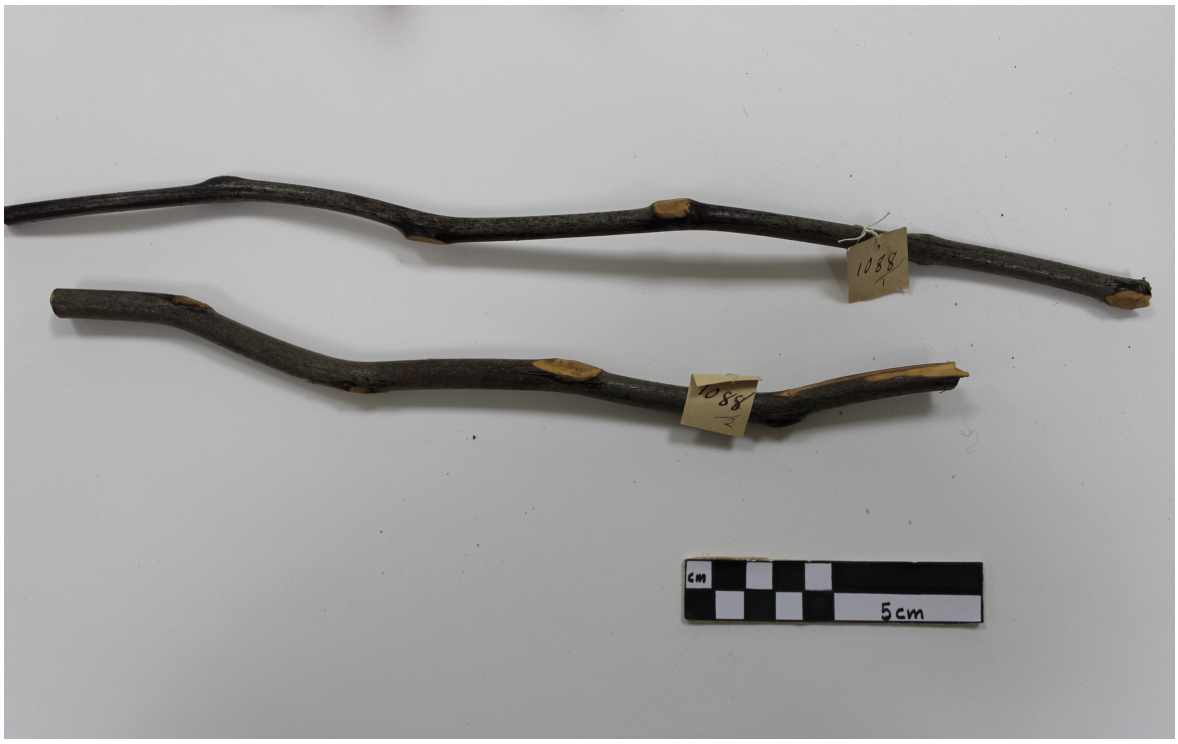

Figure 5. Twigs from *al-mīs* tree (celtis australis). Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

mīs tree described in Chapter 2. (Fig. 5) The T.C.C.P.A. is one of the best examples of collections with such sort of amulets.

The study of amulets in situ has also benefited from the reflection on the agency of objects. The focus on materiality and agency involves the study of objects in the way humans engage with them, and the meanings that from these relations unfold. The study of amulets in this way adds to our knowledge a better understanding of how and why particular amulets are used in particular contexts and how, as they circulate in time and space, change meaning/ are used differently and acquire other functions.

In exploring the materiality in particular amulets, some studies have reflected on the importance of the materials employed. Certain materials are chosen to be in amulets because in common knowledge, they are useful means to convey a protective and healing power such as the black bituminous mineral of the Musa stones explored in Chapter 2. However, when the materials are not available, substitutes or representations of such materials are employed, which discloses that the perception of the materials employed is sometimes more important than the actual materials. By focusing on the agency of the amulet maker and the ritual that activates its powers, and the kind of power he/she imbues the amulet with, authenticity of materials turns less relevant. This is the case of the "industrialised" amulets analysed by Ventura, Popper-Giveon and Abu-Rabia,[95] and amulets that we find in the T.C.C.P.A. such as the blue beads in necklaces and bracelets.

Another interesting reflection on amulets in Palestine that has come from the study of live settings is their social function. Based on the Widad Kamel Kawar Collection of Palestinian dress and jewellery, it is possible to see amulets in a wider context, in this case, the context set by the attire. They were not isolated objects, they worked in articulation with other objects such as coins, garments, etc. From the Canaan amulets I can asses that most of the items were at some point attached to clothes. The rest were meant to be hung on the walls of the house or were part of remedies that the client had to ingest or burn.

Some amulets carried on clothes also had an aesthetic value due to their long lasting materials which would ensure a continuous protective power. The amuletic jewellery, meaning jewellery made of different metals and stones, was used also to adorn the person who carried amulets. These pieces of jewellery were meant to be seen and as such they were public statements functioning as social markers. They could either be used alone or in combination with other amulets

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[95] J. Ventura, A. Popper-Giveon and A. Abu-Rabia, "Materialised Beliefs: 'Industrialised' Islamic Amulets", *Visual Ethnography* 3.2 (2014): 30-47.

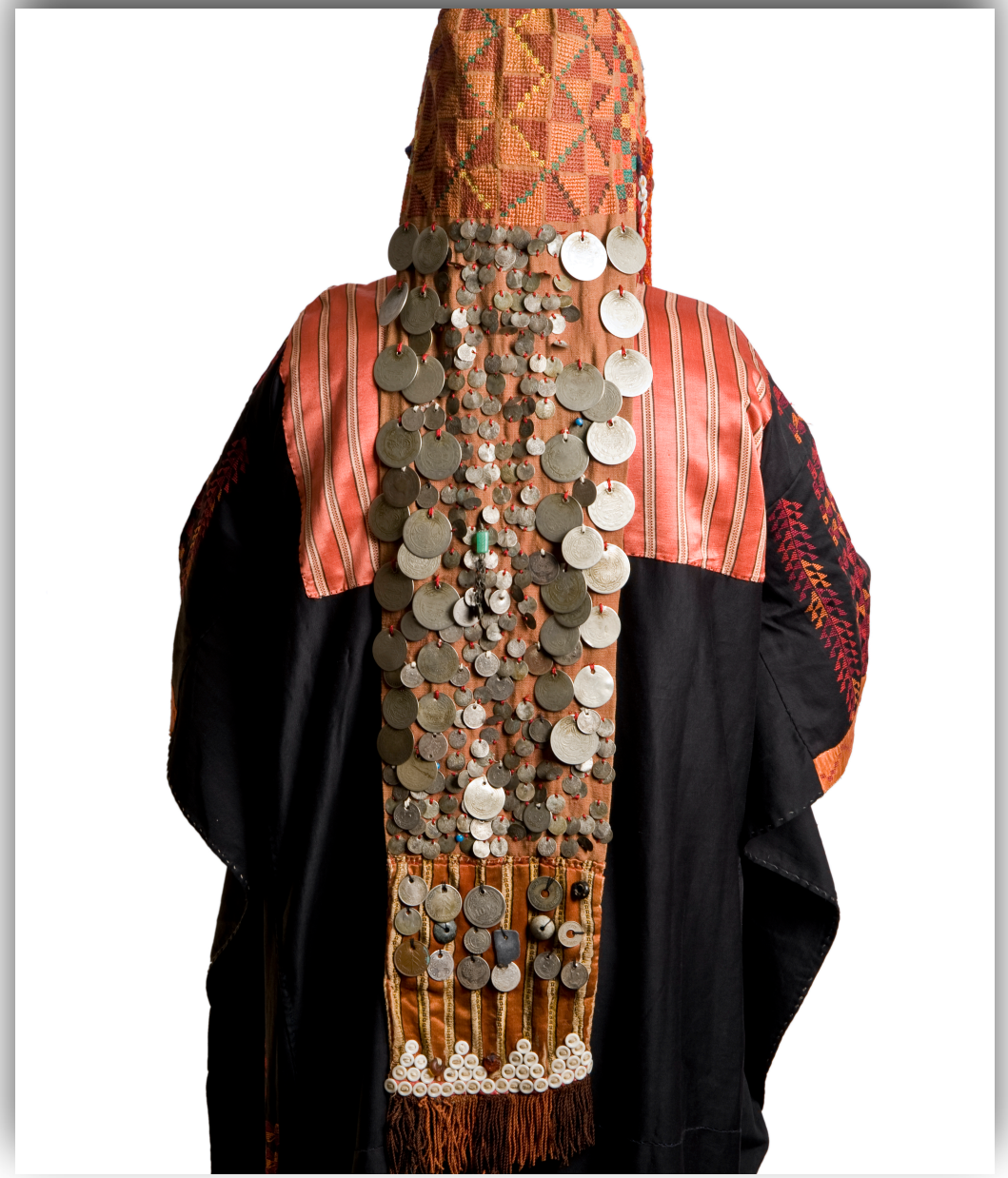

Figure 6. Headdress (*meklab*) from Hebron covered with coins from the dowry and amulets. Widad Kawar Collection
Photo credits: Widad Kawar

and objects. When used alone, the single object would acquire meaning as part of the dress; when used with other objects they formed part of a bigger and complex "text". As if each one of the objects was a word in a written text, they would tell a story and establish a sort of intertextuality between them. This intertextuality has been explored in the embroidery patterns on Palestinian attire.[96] In this way, I argue that amuletic jewellery and visible amulets, as part of the attire, were in

[96] M. Skinner, *Palestinian Embroidery Motifs: A Treasury of Stitches 1850-1950,* Melisende Publishing of London and Rimal Publications of Nicosia, 2007

a sort of interplay with the embroidery patterns and with the clothes, contributing to the story that the owner wanted to tell.

One example is the Hebronite *meklab* (bridal ornament) from the Widad Kamel Kawar Collection.[97] Made around the year 1900, it was worn on the back, on top of the bridal wear. It consisted of a piece of fabric covered with Ottoman, Egyptian and European coins; different kinds of pendants with inscriptions; amulets made of fangs and *dandūsha*[98]; silver amulets in the shape of animals; stones; and beads. Each object was acquired in a different moment of the life of the owner, and was attached with a specific purpose in mind. In some cases, coins and silver amulets could be detached to be sold or given away (to solve a financial problem). The coins were part of the dowry and were attached to the clothes to disclose publicly the social and economic status of the bride. This public display of one's possessions came with the disadvantage of potentially being subjected to the envy of others. The amulets were then attached to protect the bride and her dowry from any evil eye, but also amulets through their shapes and materials showed if the woman had made a vow to a saint, or had gone to a particular sheikh in order to cure an ailment, increase fertility, etc. The more amulets, the more protection the woman gets.

1.6. The study of amulets in modern Palestine

Mentions of amulets and talismans used by the inhabitants of Palestine appear for the first time in the 19th century in the work of European travellers and missionaries that visited the "Holy Land". Described as curious manifestations of the primitive folk magic practiced by illiterate peasants,[99] amulets were seen as a residual from Biblical times. The "other" was embodied in the figure of the *fellāḥ* (peasant)[100], who was seen as living in a state of backwardness. Peasants' beliefs and customs were set in a frame of superstition and magic.

Members of the Christian missions who carried out research on the local population considered the inhabitants heirs of the Biblical past, whose customs and manners could be

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[97] Figure 6. A pictures of this *meklab* shows in detail the different components. Cfr. Kawar W.K. Threads of Identity, p. 111, 128

[98] *dandūsha (pl.danādīsh)* refers to the ending part of some jewellery and amulets that commonly contains three parts that hang and produce a sound..

[99] D. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, p. 3

[100] In MSA *fallāḥ pl. fallāḥūn*

interpreted in Biblical terms.[101] This idea of immobility and permanence that characterised the local population was very appealing[102]; the life depicted in the Bible could be seen in the life of actual Palestinians. However, to the missionaries' surprise, local inhabitants had some customs that did not completely correspond to the Biblical ones, which disclosed that after all there had been some changes. Even the practices of Palestinian Christians seemed to have gone through some sort of distortion and to have been influenced by the superstitious mind of other communities. Interestingly, these Biblical traces were mainly sought in the peasant population who happened to be in its majority Muslims. So paradoxically, the idealised Biblical culture that missionaries and travellers were looking for was actually deeply intertwined with the practices of Muslim peasantry.

Beliefs, practices and the material culture of the peasants were worthy of being recorded and collected despite the fact that they were seen with inferiority. They were all part of a culture that was threatened to disappear due to the urbanisation process that had boomed after the Tanzimat Reforms. The concern that the Biblical remains were once and for all going to disappear was the main drive for the first ethnographers to record expressions of Palestinian folklore. Among them were European scholars such as Philip Baldenspergen, Gustaf Dalman, Elizabeth Finn, Hilda Granqvist, J.E. Hanauer, Lees Robinson, born-in-Palestine scholars such as Lidia Einsler, and Palestinian scholars such as Stephan H. Stephan, Elias Haddad and Taufiq Canaan.

Palestinian folklore was deposited mainly in the customs of peasants and bedouins who had been through a sedentarisation process.[103] Amulets were part of these customs and superstitious beliefs. Predominantly Muslim, or Mohammedan —as it was the common way to call a Muslim, the peasantry was referred to as the ethnographic "other." Even for Palestinian ethnographers, mainly urbanites and educated in missionary schools, life in the countryside was the source of folklore; a life that they recognised as part of their own culture and past, but simultaneously one that they distanced themselves from. Taufiq Canaan is an example of a locally born, Protestant raised

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[101]Among these we find the work published in 1907 by J.E. Hanauer, *Folk-lore of the Holy Land: Moslem, Christian and Jewish*, edited by Marmaduke Pickthall; P.J. Baldenspergen, *The Immovable East: Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine*, ed. Frederic Less, Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1913; the publications of the Palestine Exploration Fund; among others. Then it comes the work done by the Palestinian ethnographers and Western anthropologist such as Gustav Dalman and Hilma Granqvist.

[102] The idea of a Biblical past that had been preserved was very present in scholars who wrote about Palestine. Cfr. P. J. Baldenspergen, *The Immovable East: Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine*, ed. Frederic Less, Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1913

[103] Tawfiq Canaan's *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries* is one of interesting because it shows how Palestinian folklore was deposited mainly in peasant life.

Palestinian researcher, who nonetheless, had an ambivalent engagement with the folklore of his country, as explored in the next chapters.

1.7. Amulet and talisman in the writings of Taufiq Canaan

Taufiq Canaan is one of the most important references for the study of amulets and talismans in the modern Palestinian context. It is through his writings and collection, the largest one of amulets from the Levant, that we know about the diversity of objects used in healing practices, the terms employed to refer to them, their form of use and application, and different and simultaneous social, religious, magical, medical functions. This subchapter, therefore, revolves around Taufiq Canaan's works and the way he referred to the amulets and talismans. Based on his ethnographic findings and on the usage of the terms that circulated among other scholars researching the same kinds of objects, I aim to show the development of the terminology used by Canaan. This thesis follows the way Canaan referred to particular objects in his collection, either as amulets, talismans, or by using *emic* terms.

Taufiq Canaan's works are available in English, German and Arabic. Most of his academic work in English corresponds to his academic production under the British Mandate. Canaan also wrote in German, mainly at the beginning of his career and at the end, and published a few works in Arabic. His English and German publications targeted an audience that included Western scholars residing in Palestine and abroad, as well as Palestinian scholars most of whom had studied in missionary schools and were part of his own urban milieu. The way he addressed his audience took shape throughout the years; it was influenced by his education in missionary schools, his work in missionary institutes, and by his political involvement in different kinds of associations.

Taufiq Canaan was very active in the medical and the anthropological field but also in the political life of Palestine. From his childhood, he was exposed to different social circles through the labour of his father as a Lutheran pastor and through his attendance of missionary schools. After his studies at the Syrian Protestant College, he worked in German institutions that gave him access to circles of German scholars. His research on medicine was published in local journals such as *al-Kulliya*, the Bulletin of his alma mater. He was very active as a member in different associations, such as the Alumni Association of the Syrian Protestant College, the YMCA, and the Jerusalem Arab Medical Association. He was co-founder of The Palestine Arab Medical Association, in 1944, and president of the Jerusalem branch until 1954 and of the Palestine Association until 1948. As for his involvement in anthropological research, Canaan joined the American School of Oriental

Research, and got easy access to the latest research on Folklore in Palestine that was already circulating among foreign scholars. He became acquainted with the history of customs and folk beliefs of Palestinian peasants, as well as with the Biblical approach that was used to explain much of the life of the peasants.

After the First World War, Canaan gave yearly lectures on Palestinian Folk Medicine to the students of the German Archaeological School and sometimes to the members of the American School for Oriental Research. Through these lectures he got a good name among scholars affiliated to different institutions. He followed closely the investigations of researchers at The German Protestant Institute of Archaeology; Research Unit of the German Archaeological Institute (*Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes)*[104] such as Gustaf Dalman (1855-1941), Albrecht Alt (1883-1956) and Martin Noth (1902-1968) who influenced his approach to the study Palestine's folklore.[105] His knowledge on the subject was so highly respected that he was eventually invited by Prof. Herzberg to collaborate in the posthumous publication of the last volume of Dalman's *Arbeit und Sitte*.[106]

Taufiq Canaan's most important involvement was in the POS where he occupied various posts and was able to publish most of his work. As soon as the POS was founded, he became a member and started publishing regularly in its journal. He was appointed its secretary, and editor of the journal between 1920 and 1939. In this period, Canaan was able to enlarge the Society's membership list, leading to the improvement of the Journal, which eventually had to be extended in length in order to include the works of more scholars.[107] For Canaan's own research this period is also the most prolific. The Journal of the POS was the main outlet of his research. He was able to publish around 30 articles and 5 books through it.

The contents of his publications are full of *emic* forms of designation for the different elements of Palestinian folklore, which shows an early attempt to translate the culture he studied into his own. Cultural translation has been at the core of much anthropological research and postcolonial studies. Although it became a topic in the 1950's among British anthropologists, the

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[104] K. Nashef, "Tawfik Canaan: His Life and Works." Translated by Khalil Sleibi. *Majallat ad-Dirasat al-Filastiniya* 50 (2002): 69-91.

[105] K. Nashef, "Tawfik Canaan: His Life and Works", p.16

[106] T. Canaan, *The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs, Part 2*, p.135

[107] T. Canaan, *Dr. Taufik Canaan, Family Story: His Memoirs.* Unpublished manuscript typed out by Fauzi Mantoura in 2016, p.39; T. Canaan, *Dr. Taufik Canaan, Family Story: His Memoirs.* (with Intro by Mitri Raheb) Dar al-Kalima: Bethlehem, 2021; JPOS, Vol XV, 1935, p.194

approach of some earlier ethnographers, such as Canaan, to the study of "the other" was loaded with carefulness in the use of concepts, and an awareness in differentiating themselves from their study object. Implicit in this distinction, was not only a critical approach and acknowledgement of the historicity of their own ways of thinking, but a colonial attitude of distinction based on their superiority. From this perspective, Canaan's works show how he "translated" cultural features of his study object "the folklore of the *fallāḥīn*" into his own cultural framework by including *emic* concepts. His vocabulary and style is very much in tune with the cultural translation of his time, but it is unique in the way he includes concepts to accurately describe his study "object". The role that Canaan played in translating one culture into another has another aspect as we see him oscillating between his familiarity and closeness to his study object, and his distance and differentiation from it. The way he categorised the "other" shows his acknowledgement of himself as coming from a shared Palestinian culture where key concepts have to be left in the original language.

Taufiq Canaan's forms of identification with Palestinian folklore is key to understand the usage of the concept of amulet and talisman in his work. He used the English terms amulet and talisman extensively, which in Arabic were named in various ways according to the material composition, shape, and how they were used; aspects that were very fluid as the *emic* forms of reference show.[108] A good example of this is the term *shabbeh,*[109] it is used to refer to the alum as material, but it also designates an alum bead which is meant to be hung either alone or in combination with other materials. Another example is *keff sadabie* (spray of rue)[110]. The name comes from the fact that it resembles the palm of a hand (*keff*), and due to the shape it is used as a *khamsa* to protect from the evil eye.[111] *Khamsa* might be one of the best examples, because although it refers first of all to the number five, it has been associated with the open hand with five fingers. When uttering the word *khamsa*, the form is intended, but also the function of the *khamsa* as protection against the evil eye.

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[108] For a complete list of epic terms used for the Canaan amulets, see Table 1 in the Appendixes.

[109] In MSA *shabba*

[110] In MSA *kaff sadhabiya*

[111] Garcia Probert, M.A. "Twigs in the Tawfiq Canaan Collection" in *Amulets and Talismans from the Middle East and North Africa in Context. Transmission, Efficacy and Collections*. Leiden: Brill (In process of publication)

1.7.1 Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel

Taufiq Canaan's first written work that addresses the phenomenon of amulets within a wider study of Palestinian folklore is *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel,* published in 1914. In this work, he analyses beliefs and popular medicine by using medical terminology: aetiology; diagnosis; prognosis; prophylaxis; vows; and treatment. Amulets are discussed in two parts of the book. First, under the chapter on aetiology or the cause of diseases, where they are considered protective measures against the effects of the evil eye, which according to Palestinian belief is the main cause of illness.[112] Second, amulets and talismans are analysed under treatment procedures where he distinguishes between amulets and talismans, talks about the origin of their use, the kinds, and functions.

Amulette is the German term that Canaan uses to refer in general to amulets. He points out that this is the translation he uses for many Arabic terms, among which are the three most commonly used terms: *ḥirz* (Schutz), *ḥijāb* (Decke/was deckt), and *ṭalsam* (Talisman/ Zauberschutzmittel).[113] According to Canaan amulets are the result of the need to seek protection against evil, supernatural forces. An amulet then, can refer to almost anything that is used for protection. The way they work is by attracting the gaze of whoever gives the evil eye. Amulets are small objects that can easily be overlooked, so Palestinians recur to all sorts of beautiful and strange objects with striking shapes and colours such as attractive pieces of jewellery or uncommon objects such as twigs, fangs, gilded plants, to deviate the attention. In this way the evil eye that comes from the gaze of a person cannot take effect.[114] As mentioned, the other function of amulets is to alleviate sickness, pain or discomfort. So their form of application may be determined by the fact that they should come in contact with the sick part of the body.[115] Amulets for general protection, or all-embracing amulets as Canaan calls them “allgemeinschützendes Amulett”, are usually worn underneath or between the clothes.

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[112] T. Canaan, *Auberglaube*, p.56

[113] Canaan mentions that *ḥaraza* is said to have derived from *ḥarasa*, which means to guard, watch and control. Cfr. T. Canaan, *Auberglaube*, p.77

[114] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.78

[115] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.79

On the other hand, according to Canaan talismans refer to inscribed objects that in Arabic are called *ḥijābāt*.[116] Talismans always contain sacred text and should not be desecrated when worn. This is why users are careful wearing them underneath clothes, or folded, wrapped and put into containers. There are different types of containers such as the well known *khiyār,* a cucumber-shaped silver case, there are also fabric and leather pouches. The inscriptions in a talisman come in many forms, they range from Qur'anic inscriptions, specific names of God (*al-'asmā' al-ḥusnā*), the story of a particular talisman,[117] references to particular evil spirits, magic squares, symbols, and what could seem to be "meaningless" scratches."[118] As there is no standard form, talismans can also contain extracts from the New and Old Testament; mainly but not exclusively for Christian amulets. From these texts, particular verses, and words are extracted and arranged in different ways such as in squares where the complete word is written or where the word is broken up into its many letters.

The power of these *ḥijābāt* is transmitted in different ways. The most common material used in talismans is paper, on which the inscription is either written or printed. Most of the times they are carried on the body or hung on the bed of a patient, from where the power is transmitted by direct physical contact. There are cases where the *ḥijāb* is burnt and the patient is cleansed by his/her exposure to the smoke of the inscribed leaves. The talisman can also be dissolved in ritually pure water and drunk. Another way to transfer the power of the inscription is described by Canaan: "The *ḥijāb* is placed directly on the skin where the spleen is, over the writing one holds a metal spoon where burning coals are placed. The fire drives the power of the inscriptions into the spleen, which shrinks immediately." [119]

1.7.2 The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans

The second text by Canaan is *The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans.* It was written in English and published in the journal *Berytus: Archaological Studies* in 1937.[120] It was re-published in a

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[116] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p. 99

[117] See *ḥirz al-ghāsila* about the washerwoman *Murjāne*. Amulet catalogued no. 960 and 1076.

[118] Dr. Canaan uses "meaningless" not as a pejorative adjective, but as the quality of those inscriptions that he was not able to understand. Canaan was aware of the use of separate letters, made-up words with "no meaning", and scratches, in amulets.

[119] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.115

[120] T. Canaan, "Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," *Berytus: Archaeological Studies*, v. 4 & 5 (1937).

monograph on magic and divination in 2004.[121] In this work, Canaan analyses in detail the features of talismanic inscriptions and highlights the power of the written word in the efficacy of the object. He develops with further detail the topic of talismans that he had been working on in *Aberglaube*. Canaan mentions that amulets and talismans are those objects that in the Levant are called: *ḥijāb*[122], *wifq*[123], *ḥamīla, ta'wīdha*[124] *and ḥirz*[125]. Although these terms are used indistinctly to refer to inscribed amulets and talismans, *ḥijāb* and *ḥirz* may also refer to uninscribed ones.[126] *Ḥijāb* and *ḥirz* are more generic, and Canaan employs them for any object with or without inscriptions that possesses and conveys protection or healing. Due to the inherent qualities, the object is used as part of ritual practices to achieve love, good health, well-being, to help in finding a lost object, or establish favour from others.

Although I explained that in theory a difference between amulet and talisman can be established, in practice it is difficult to apply this distinction rigorously. The use of the terms seems to correspond to different categories based on different functions. Moreover, another problem comes when amulets are added to talismans,[127] or when different amulets/talismans become part of a more complex/bigger amulet that combines materials and contains little pieces that when used alone could work as amulets as well. Although this is a feature of many amulets in Canaan's collection, he did not explore this issue in depth.

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[121] T. Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans." In *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, edited by Emilie Savage-Smith, 125–77. Aldershot: Ashgate/Varorium, 2004.

[122] From the root *ḥajaba*, to cover, to hide from sight, to conceal, a *ḥijāb* covers and protects the one who bear it. Cfr. H. Wehr, Dictionary, p.184; An amulet which renders its wearer invulnerable and ensures success for his enterprises. Cfr. "ḥidjāb", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Glossary and Index of Terms*, Edited by: P.J. Bearman, Th. Banquis, C.E. Bowworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs Bowworth. Consulted online on 20 June 2016 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/10.1163/1573-3912_ei2glos_SIM_gi_01579>

[123] From the passive form *wuffiqa*, to have success, have good fortune. Cfr. H. Wehr, Dictionary, p.1270

[124] First used in preislamic poetry, *taʿwīdh* pl. *taʿāwīdh* which according to H. Wehr means amulet, talisman, but also refer to a charm, spell or incantation. Interesting is to note that the root of this term in its form II *ʿawadha* means to pronounce a charm or incantation, to fortify someone with a charm, but also to place someone under God´s protection by praying.

[125] Another term which, according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, is to be found in the writings of the 10th century author Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī is *ḥirz* pl. *aḥrāz, ḥarraza*, which means amulet, but also has been used to refer to a fortified place, refuge, sanctuary. The root of this term is *ḥaraza* that means to keep, guard, protect, to take care of.

[126] T. Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans" p.69

[127] T. Canaan, *The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans*, p.70

1.7.3 The cardboards and the catalogue

Another two important sources to know how Taufiq Canaan conceptualised amulets are the cardboards where he attached the objects he gathered over almost 50 years. Next to each object, he jotted down in Arabic, English and German, information about their provenance, material, former owners, and sometimes the way they had been used. These notes are highly valuable because they document the ethnographic material he collected, but also because they contain terminology in three languages, which discloses Canaan's effort to translate as accurately as possible. The date of these cardboards is rather uncertain; they might have been made by Canaan throughout the years that he collected the objects, or prepared once he had acquired most of the items, which seems more plausible since the amulets are arranged per kind and this could have been done only when the collection was almost complete. So for instance, animal amulets are all on one cardboard, glass beads from Hebron on another cardboard, *mawāsik* (pendants) on a separate one, and so on.

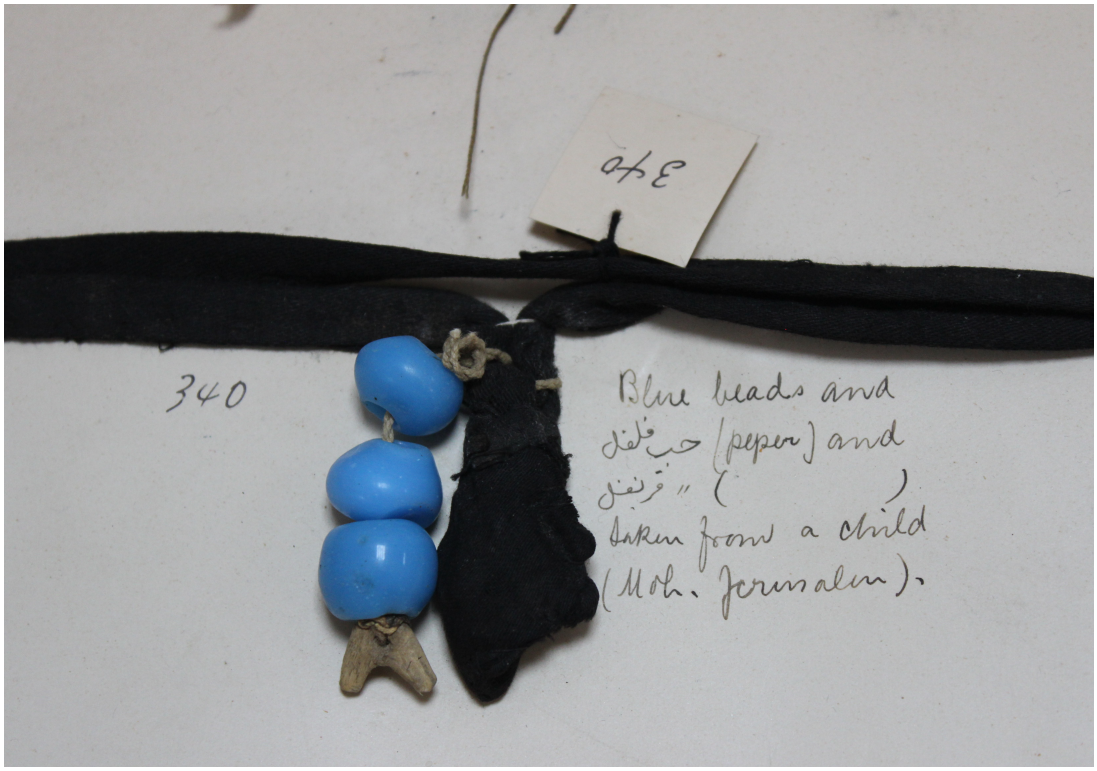

Figure 7. Amulets attached to cardboards with notes in various languages. Tawfik Canaan Collection Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

According to the cardboards, the material that Canaan collected includes both amulets and talismans. Items explicitly described as talismans[128] are those made of paper, folded or rolled and kept in a cylindrical case, a cloth, leather or metal pouch intended to be used with a particular goal in mind and its power is more of reestablishing well-being than protection. These talismans are described in Arabic as *ḥijāb.* Few *ḥijābāt* in the Collection are similar in shape, they have triangular shape, but the pouch contains other materials such as *habb barakeh,* a kind of seed, (see amulet 290, Fig. 3), which points to the fact that the term may also refer more to the triangular shape of the pouch than the actual written talisman inside it. In the case of amulet 290, the *habb barakeh* replaced the writing, and worked as the message of the talisman. This would explain why the term *ḥijāb* is also used as a general term not only to refer to paper amulets but to a wide range of objects meant to protect the user, such as the the embroidery patterns described in previous pages.

Because the cardboards do not always offer full documentation, there are items that are not so easy to define as amulet or talismans, and might have been used in one way or another. It is only in comparing them with similar objects in the collection, or objects currently used, or mentioned by Canaan, that we can know about them.

The last source that we have from Canaan, is the catalogue of the whole collection. Handwritten in German in five notebooks, the catalogue, unpublished until now, contains the information of the cardboards in a systematic way. What is interesting to note here is his choice for the German language, and the way that even in the German description he retained the *emic* terms from which we know the many different names of the amulets. The complete catalogue is a complementary source to the cardboards since many of the objects that were originally attached to them had been detached throughout the years. Moreover, there are some items from the collection whose format does not allow them to be attached to the cardboards, so they are kept in separate cardboard boxes, the original containers where Canaan kept them.

The ways the objects are described relate to their shape and function. So besides the general terms such as *ḥijāb*, *ḥirz*, we have designations based on the actual name of stones such as *ḥajar damm*[129] and *ḥajar mūsā*[130]; based on the beads size and shape such as *'ayn al-jamal;* and for

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[128] See image with talismans catalogued with numbers: 289 to 297

[129] It is a dark red stone; a variety of jasper known as heliotrope that may have red inclusions that resemble spots of blood. The name of the stone comes from its red colour, but also from the way it has been used to prevent bleeding or to cure haemorrhage. *ḥajr damm* or blood stone appears in Canaan notes in the description of objects no. 196, 581, 608, 585, 920 and 1291.

[130] This kind of stone is described in detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

inscribed amulets based on the contents such as *ḥirz al-andrūn*, *ḥirz al-jawshān*, *ḥirz du'ā' 'ukāsha*; *ḥirz al-ghāsila*[131].

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter reflects on the historicity of the terms amulet and talisman, as well as the many other terms. It takes into account the local references that in Palestine exist to designate different kinds of objects used to restore well-being (to get protection, to achieve healing and to attract good luck). The English terminology to refer to these objects is not enough to analyse the amulets that are used in the Muslim world in general and in Palestine in particular, because it opaques the local forms of categorisation. Studying a particular case, such as the amulets collected by Taufiq Canaan, discloses that the *emic* terms offer a better understanding on how particular amulets were used. Paying attention to the way people name and refer to the material world, provides a better understanding of their own ways of seeing the world. For amulets used in Palestine, the *emic* terms registered by Taufiq Canaan show that their designation was based on different aspects: on the materials employed (like *ḥajar mūsā*), the shape they resembled or the abstraction of it (*khamsa* or '*ayn al -jamal*), some other amulets were called after their combination of materials (*'aqd al-badawīyya*), and some others after their use (*ḥajar ḥalīb, ḥajar damm*). All these designations, however, can be subsumed under the category of *ḥijāb.* This category is on the one hand, a generic term for all kinds of amulets, and on the other hand, a term that refers to triangular shaped talismans, most of the times made of paper with inscriptions. I employ the term *ḥijāb* in this thesis to refer to amulets and talismans indistinctively.

The inclusion of *emic* terms in the study of amulets and talismans of the Muslim world has gone through a long development. In colonial settings amulets were seen as part of the superstitious practices of the local population and therefore explained through the framework of magic. It was later on with the development of ethnography that attention was given to the ethnographic subjects and their active role in meaning making processes. *Emic* terms used by them were recorded and interpreted. Taufiq Canaan, representative of scholars who carried out studies on folklore, used his ethnographic data to document amulets. The way he wrote about the amulets provided an example of approaching amulets in living settings. Even though his research was embedded in a sort of Palestinian orientalism, his detailed descriptions of amulets based on ethnographic research and their contextualisation within a wider peasant culture has been useful.

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131 For the translation of all amulets and materials in the T.C.C.P.A., see Table 1

Through time, approaches to amulets and talismans developed in relation to the available sources. First, collections were considered the main source where amulets could be found. Later, the study of amulets included ethnographic studies that sent scholars to study the objects in actual living contexts. More and more attention was paid to how amulets not only carried meaning through an inscription, but also in relation to the ritual practices where the materials' inner power was activated in forms other than through the written word. Within the ritual context, amulets are seen not only as means but as active in effecting people's practices. Within these new approaches to amulets and talismans, we proceed to the next chapter in which we explore how amulets were used as part of the healing practices of Palestinians.