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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 2. Amulets as healing and protective remedies

2.1 Outline

When Taufiq Canaan collected his amulets, these were functioning within a particular medico-religious culture. With its traditional methods of protection and healing this culture of the peasants and bedouins of Palestine was very rich. It had accumulated elements from diverse religious traditions that had made their way into the Levant throughout the centuries. Everyday engagements of inhabitants with nature, and their beliefs concerning the supernatural and the divine shaped practices that were in a sense very pragmatic.

Material expressions of this culture included amulets. Users considered amulets meaningful and useful. Made to be hung, smelled, ingested or touched, amulets were of diverse kinds. Many amulets were for general use, others were designed for particular needs. Subjected to trial and error, all amulets underwent adjustments in order to improve their efficacy; those that could not be improved were disposed or relegated.

This chapter revolves around the use of amulets amongst Palestine's rural population within the everyday religious culture in the early 20th century. The chapter focuses on the rural culture because it was the predominant culture in Palestine since the larger part of the population lived in the countryside, and because it is where Canaan collected most of his amulets. However, the use of amulets in these areas can be largely extended to include urban areas, where part of the rural population had settled to make a living. In order to understand how these amulets were used, I analyse the cosmology and religious practice that framed the manufacture, use and circulation of the amulets that are nowadays in the T.C.C.P.A. Through particular amulets, the chapter shows their diversity and the multiple ways people engaged with them. By reflecting on how amulets operate in an everyday practice, the chapter discloses how they were adapted and adjusted to new social conditions and changes over time. Finally, I explore the function of amulets as a means of protection and healing, which was sometimes superseded or replaced by other functions as amulets entered other phases in their life and circulated in different networks.

2.2 Material religion and everyday religion

This chapter analyses a particular phase in the life of the amulets, i.e. when people used them to attain well-being through their protective and healing qualities, or through their capacity of

providing good luck. The religious culture that framed the use of these interesting objects is explored in its everyday context and the mechanisms for this are analysed from the methodological approach of "material religion."

The Canaan amulets can be explained within the framework of everyday religion. Located at the core of any religious tradition, everyday religion is the byproduct of the engagement with the sacred that responds to individual practical needs, and it is subjected to continuous adaptation, accumulation and transformation. In fact, everyday religious practice can take place within institutionalised religion, sometimes taking aspects from it and merging them with other meaningful elements: objects, symbols, images, etc. that pertain to individual, familial, or communal symbolic systems. In other words, even when religious practice undergoes strict regulation, there is always space left for the individual interpretation and engagement.[132]

The study of religion in its everyday form challenges the traditional notion of "religion", which has been considered a complete/closed system, whose relation with other "religions" takes place solely via assimilation or influence. Religion in its everyday context shows the fluidity and continuity from one religion to another. It also proposes a bottom-up approach. It shifts the attention from the institutionalised and official forms to how individuals shape their religious practices, experiences and expressions of piety. This shift shows how religiosity is constantly changing and adjusting to practical needs taking elements from wherever is necessary and suitable. This focus on the individual must include religious expressions in relation with any kind of authority, and the possible effects of tradition, as well as family and communal/social regulations.[133]

Within this everyday religion, material objects play an important role. After all people engage with the material world, get meaning from it and give meaning to it. In an everyday practice particular objects are more recurrent than others. This material aspect of religion is the focus of "material religion," an approach to the religious phenomena through the material world and its materiality (the way the material world has been ideologically constructed). It helps to understand the material objects, the role they play within the internal logic of the meaning systems and the meaning making processes of humans in their engagement with the world. Following the definition of Brend Plate:

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[132] M. McGuire, *Lived religion*, p.46

[133] M. McGuire, *Op. Cit.*, p.5

> "material religion is an investigation of the interactions between human bodies and physical objects, both natural and human-made; with much of the interaction taking place through sense perception; in special and identified spaces and times; in order to orient, and disorient, communities and individuals; toward the formal strictures and structures of religious traditions." [134]

In the inaugural issue of the Journal Material Religion, the editors have highlighted the importance of this approach, which adds to the study of religious textual traditions, authorities, and transmission of knowledge a fundamental aspect, that of the everyday engagement with the material objects. "Religion is what people do with material things, places, and how these structure and colour experience and one's sense of oneself and others."135 Focusing on the engagement with spaces, images, objects, etc., this approach aims to "arrive at a more robust account of how religion works in the lives of its adherents and in the societies that shape and are shaped by religion."136

According to this approach, things matter, regardless of their aesthetic evaluation because they are tangled with human relations. Such entanglement considers the haptic interaction; a significant element in the human engagement to material goods in general, and to material culture of religion in particular.[137] It is through the senses that people engage with objects. In the case of amulets, particular sensorial engagements are established from the way they are made and used. Simultaneously, these forms of engaging with them shape and re-shape their physical qualities.

In other phases such as when amulets circulate as commodities, or are collected and exhibited, the main engagement with amulets is through the faculty of touch and sight. However, when they function as a means to re-establish well-being, the engagement includes all the senses. They are not only meant to be seen or touched, but also hung in contact with the body, smelled, heard, seen and ingested. And even when the sense of touch comes to play, touching acquires a different form that involves a purpose of acquiring or transmitting a particular power.

2.3 The world of peasants and bedouins

The amulets that Canaan collected came mainly from rural Palestine. Palestine's countryside has been studied primarily through agricultural villages focusing on the culture of the peasantry, mostly

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[134] S. Brend Plate, *Key Terms in Material Religion*, p.4

[135] S. Brend Plate, B. Meyer, D. Morgan & C. Paine, "Editorial Statement," *Material Religion,* p.5

[136] S. Brend Plate, B. Meyer, D. Morgan & C. Paine, "Editorial Statement," *Material Religion*, p. 6

[137] E.F. King, *Material Religion and Popular Culture*, p.xiv

ignoring the culture of the bedouins, most of whom have a semi-sedentary life but have retained a distinct social structure. Peasant life has attracted a lot of attention because it was widespread, but also because the peasantry became a key symbol in the national imagery of Palestinians.[138] As I will discuss later in Chapter 5, the peasants have become the proof of the preexistence of a Palestinian people in the region and a very powerful symbol due to their connexion with the land. Bedouins, on the other hand, seem to have been excluded from the image of the autochthonous inhabitants due to their nomadic origin. Although most bedouins have become agriculturalists or engage in animal herding, their culture based on a tribal composition has rarely been addressed as an autochthonous feature of Palestine's rural world. However, in exploring the conditions that framed the manufacture, use and circulation of amulets, it is clear that peasants and bedouins interacted, they sometimes used same amulets, but that differences in their manufacture and usage existed as well.

By the the beginning of the 20th century, when Canaan acquired his amulets, the rural world had started to change and become more fragmented. Due to the changing conditions that modernisation brought, most inhabitants were forced to adopt new forms of living. The bedouins were forced to settle and enter agricultural work, changing much of their customs. The peasants and (settled) bedouins became tenants of private land, which turned them into labour workers. The peasants from villages near the towns, due to their location, became dependent on the urban economy. Some remained living in their villages, but continuously travelled back and forth to towns to sell their products. Other villagers migrated to the towns for work and settled there permanently. Although they were now inhabitants of towns, villagers kept many of their rural customs, among them their preference for particular forms of healing in which amulets were central. As a result, amulets kept being manufacured and circulating in the market. In sum, all these changes were fuelled by some events that need further discussion.

2.3.1. Reforms, modernisation

Palestine experienced many transformations since the introduction of the Tanzimat Reforms in 1830, a set of reforms that traversed half a century of regulations, and affected the years that followed. The changes that these reforms brought came after a series of infrastructural developments that further stimulated foreign investments. Roads and railways expanded, facilitating the mobility of products and people throughout the Levant, particularly between the coastal cities and the inland. In Palestine, these reforms were part of a process of economic opening which in

[138] S. Tamari, "Soul of the Nation", p.77

Pappe's words, "redefined the country as a geo-political unit, and changed its modes of means of production."[139] Such an economic change had important and sometimes contrasting effects in the urban and rural world. It affected the everyday life of the inhabitants and therefore the way they engaged with material objects (shrines, landscapes, amulets) related to their religious practice.

The economic changes benefited Jerusalem's urban milieu, to which Taufiq Canaan belonged. The new Europe-inclined economy facilitated the urban bourgeoisie access to social mobility and Westernised modes of culture. Other events in the first half of the 20th century also affected the population's life. The following extract from Canaan's diaries (written originally in English) exemplifies this:

> "We made many excursions with the children, who spoke all week of the coming Sunday and the picnic we will make. Such excursions were made especially after the First World War, as I had a carriage, which was the best one in Jerusalem. A few years later, I got a car. It is interesting to note the change I had during the years: I began my practice walking, and when the work increased I bought a donkey, later I had one then two horses, and after First World War I had a carriage and then a car. In 1948, when the Arab-Jewish war had broken out, I lost my car with my house, and the whole furniture and I again began to do my visits on my feet."[140]

The impact of these events in the countryside, was different. The peasantry, which was the vast majority of the population, experienced the Tanzimat Reforms as "a shadow over the clear skies of rural Palestine."[141] The agricultural land, that had for centuries been the centre of economic, social and religious life was now subjected to new rules that began to be enacted after the Land Code of 1858 (part of the Tanzimat). Having subsisted under a controlled form of cultivation, the land was after this code undergoing a series of transformations: its exploitation for monoculture, its division in plots and registration, opening the possibility for foreigners and wealthy Palestinian families to buy land and property. Plots had to be registered under one single owner abolishing the *musha'* system: the peasants' practice of collectively possessing, inhabiting, and cultivating the land. Since most peasants were not willing to put their name down on a deed, to avoid being controlled and taxed, they became part of the first generation of hired labourers on private lands that once had been leased by themselves from the Ottoman state. In this scheme, peasants became tenants of unknown

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[139] I. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p.22

[140] T. Canaan, *The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs, Part I*, p.26

[141] I. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 21

or absentee landlords. They were no longer free to grow seasonal vegetables and fruits, but had to produce according to the demands of the market as set by the land-owners. They were obliged to pay a fixed percentage of their income to the owner of the plot. The result was considerably lower wages barely enough to live.

Bedouins also suffered from these changes. Nomadic in origin, bedouins were forced to turn their sphere of habitation into registered land consequently reducing the boundaries of what they were used to roam in. Even more invasive was the sedentarisation effort that was introduced and that obliged them to settle and to change their way of life.[142] Since the 19th century, bedouins had begun a semi-sedentary life becoming part of the hired farm labour that developed after the Land Code of 1858 and the abolishment of the *musha'* system. Although bedouin tribes kept distinctive features of their culture such as their clothes, their traditional medicine, and their social hierarchies, most of them assimilated to village life. Widad Kawar, a collector of Palestinian attire who carried out ethnographic research, provides an interesting passage that illustrates this process. It is about Aysheh a villager from Abu al-Fadl located on a hill north of al-Ramlah:

> "She was from the Sutaria Bedouin tribe that originated in the Khan Younis area of Gaza. A century earlier, for some reason, the whole tribe had moved from there to the Hebron area where they worked as hired farm labour. There, women were influenced by the local embroidery patterns and copied some of them… Aysheh said that her tribe found the land around Hebron too mountainous, so they moved to Abu al-Fadl, which was surrounded by agricultural land and connected to the railway…"[143]

These semi-sedentary bedouins kept strong bonds with the bedouins who did not settle before 1948, and functioned as a sort of bridge between the bedouins and the peasants. Trade among them prevailed, and as we can see from the Canaan amulets is the fact that some materials originally used among bedouins were sold to peasants. Materials such as red coral and cowry shells were bedouin in origin, the same applies for the technique of weaving threads of tiny blue beads creating a sort of net that was used to make amulet covers/pouches.[144] Amulets made of such materials were available in the markets of Jerusalem and Nabi Musa, which as explained in Chapter 4 had close ties due to the pilgrimage. In the case of the amulets documented by Canaan, it seems that there was a general

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[142] I. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p.49

[143] W.K. Kawar, *Threads of Identity*, p.260

[144] See amulet no. 490, 491

interest in acquiring bedouin amulets. What kind of reputation did bedouin amulets/ healing remedies have among Palestine's peasants? How were they integrated in amulet use in agricultural areas of Palestine? This aspect needs further investigation.

Several historical events and natural disasters at the beginning of the 20th century added to the pressure on the economy. First, the Ottoman government's involvement in the Great War, hindered the economy when a large number of peasants were sent to fight in support of the Germans. During this time, most of the population that remained in Palestine was transformed into unskilled labour force, and pushed to settle on the periphery of Palestine's urban centres.[145] Regarding the situation of the bedouins, after the first World War the British Mandate set political boundaries dividing the Negev Desert, which in actuality stretches between Beersheba, the Sinai Peninsula and Aqaba. Bedouins, in this sense, were restricted to move within specific areas.

Second, some natural disasters hit the country such as the locust plagues and droughts resulting in famines in the 1930's. This led to the pauperisation of the rural areas and their increased dependence on the urban centres. The peasantry left behind their old forms of living to become a rural proletariat that worked in the fields or as hired labour in other professions, eventually moving to the cities. This state of extreme poverty came hand in hand with malnutrition and illnesses related to the poor housing conditions and general living circumstances. The rural proletariat were called *harath* and according to Pappe, their number grew steadily around 1936.[146]

Finally, the Jewish immigration was "intensified during the agricultural depression of the early 30's adding pressure for the development of resources available to the Arab population."[147] These lands once owned by Palestinian absentee landowners, were now Zionist property and subjected to new rules of employment.

The boundaries between town and country started to become blurred as infrastructure gave access to easier and further travels eventually leading to the migration of many peasants to towns. Notwithstanding that these sort of town-country engagements had existed for centuries on a much smaller scale through trade, this new situation led to new settlements of peasants in towns. Despite the accelerated pace in which towns and villages were now interconnected, the urban and rural culture did not fuse in an even way. Peasants who had migrated to Jerusalem and other towns kept much of their rural culture and it was difficult for them to enter the urban circles. To be urban in the

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[145] I. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 44

[146] I. Pappe, *Op.Cit.*, p. 102

147 Y. Miller, "Administrative Policy in Rural Palestine", p.135

late 19th/early 20th-century was not only about living in a town, it was about assimilating to a culture that was incorporating European forms of thinking and codes of conduct.

The social and religious composition, and dynamics together with the geographical location defined the engagement of peasants and bedouins with the different aspects of the modernisation process. The efforts to privatise the land and centralise the administration during the last years of Ottoman and British rule, did not reach all villages in the same way. "The more remote a place was from the central government, the greater was the autonomy of traditional units and therefore the importance of social tradition and the influence of community leaders in choosing the administrative chief of the unit."[148]

The engagement of the population with the governmental policies was defined by the nature of the village itself. In some of them, one family divided into clans was the prevailing controlling force, with the elders of each clan dominating political, economic and religious life. These villages were homogeneous in terms of religious practice. Other villages included diverse religious groups where sectarian lines were followed. Few others had significant portions of land owned by absentee landlords, whose representatives held important positions in the distribution of power.[149] These conditions affected how a place was treated and reacted to the Ottoman administrative and political reforms.

2.3.2 Disengagement with the land

The religious culture of rural Palestinians has never been a uniform condition. These two forms of sedentary and semi-nomadic life had been mingling with each other shaping differences according to locality, economic activity, political status, gender, social status, all of which would define the religious practice. However, the privatisation of land, the creation of a rural proletariat, the natural disasters and the political situation certainly modified social relations and population patterns, and with it, a whole system of cultural practices including the knowledge and application of traditional medicine, and forms of religious veneration.

One of the changes was in terms of physical mobility. Privatisation of the land, forced settlement and migration to urban areas impacted the way peasants and bedouins engaged with the land and the landscape in their daily life. Peasants had lived an autonomous and pastoral life based

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[148] G. Baer, "The Office and Functions of the Village Mukhtar", p.109

[149] Y. Miller, "Administrative Policy in Rural Palestine", p.128

on agricultural cycles and adapted to the changing natural landscape.[150] With all these transformations their everyday religious practice had to be subjected to the new conditions. For some, this meant a loss of contact and familiarity with the landscape through daily engagement. Working the land as hired labour, people were unable to settle permanently in a certain space to live in it. On demand, labour forced workers to leave their villages to settle temporarily in new, unknown places leaving behind relatives, acquaintances and places. This continuous displacement meant the inability to harvest and eat from it, to engage with it in an accumulative and intimate manner, to transit freely from plot to plot, and to visit sacred sites. All which had important consequences in the everyday life of the peasantry and in the material culture that resulted from it.

The rural culture of the peasants remained dominant in both villages and towns of Palestine. The peasants who ended up living in urban settings, had to adapt to the new religious landscape that included an heterogeneous population. The material expressions of the religious practice that resulted from these new engagements in towns led to the use of amulets that added elements from urban settings. Clients had now to turn to practitioners living in towns to get their amulets. Amulets were manufactured with the materials available in town markets, or seemed to have come from abroad, and their activation was now in relation to the saints/sanctuaries in the town.

The use of amulets in urban settings was not exclusive to the peasants. Among Canaan's amulets there are a few with what he distinguished as European manufacture. They come from members of Jerusalem's bourgeoisie, many of whom still used amulets as part of healing remedies. They are a pendant made of porcelain,[151] two drop-shape blue beads used against the evil eye,[152] and a pendant with a particular technique of silver and stone inlay.[153] These amulets were obtained in Jerusalem, and although they are not representative of the material in his collection, show an interesting aspect of urban everyday religious life that has to be explored more. Ritual and prayer seemed to have continued in relation to sanctuaries, with people seeking protection from saints. Forms of traditional healing and the use of amulets seemed to have remained, but now it incorporated aspects of urban material life.

Another change that affected rural Palestine was brought by those like Taufiq Canaan; Palestinians who had been trained in missionary schools in urban settings and interacted with the

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[150] I. Pappe, *Op.Cit.*, p.14

[151] Amulet no. 20 from the catalogue.

[152] Amulet no. 371 from the catalogue. Cfr. Canaan's handwritten notes on cardboards.

[153] Amulet no. 21

rural population. European forms of medicine were firstly introduced through Ottoman institutions, and later by the Western missions through the foundation of schools and hospitals, that played an important role in the formation of new bodies of degree-holder physicians or *médecins diplômées.*[154] These institutions contributed to the awareness of the existence of an autochthonous medico-religious culture, and tried through new infrastructure to regulate education and medical treatment. Education-wise Western schooling introduced a new religious and medical locus. biomedicine —as we will refer to this form of medicine from now on— targeted what the indigenous population had been treating for centuries, although in a different way.[155] Following biomedical logic and language, *illness* was replaced by *disease* and *healing* by *cure.* This new conceptualisation preferred treatment discarding all possibilities of using amulets, which were rendered superstitious.

Although Western medicine spread fast under the missions' sponsorship, sources show that traditional medicine was not easily replaced by western methods. In fact, it seems that biomedicine had a difficult time finding its way in the medical practices of the people, particularly in the countryside. The reason for this, I argue, was the strong connexion that existed between the traditional medical culture, the people's cosmology and engagement with the land, which was mainly expressed in their religious practice, and could not easily be replaced by foreign not-yet-known innovations. Based on this, the conceptualisation of illness, healing and efficacy in the traditional medical culture did not exactly parallel that of biomedicine, making a one-on-one replacement of the one by the other difficult.

Instead, both forms of targeting diseases seem to have coexisted. With time, some of the biomedical procedures were integrated and became part of people's medical culture. In the same way there is plenty of evidence that *médecins diplômées* had to adapt their biomedical treatments to

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[154] P. Bourmaud has analysed the phenomenon of the *médecins diplômées* and the creation of new hierarchies that disrupted the traditional social structure of traditional practitioners. Cfr. P. Bourmaud, *«Ya Doktor»: Devenir médecin et exercer son art en «Terre sainte», une expérience du pluralisme médical dans l'Empire ottoman finissant (1871-1918)*

[155] Biomedicine is a branch of medical science that applies biological and physiological principles to clinical practice. It has been the dominant health system for more than a century. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biomedicine. It is a term that emerges in the 19th century to distinguish between traditional medicine and a medicine that tackles the removal of pathology or the repairing of physiological malfunctions. The criticism here is that biomedical inquiry considers its standards universal for defining and measuring other kinds of medicine, because it has been conceived as universal with a culture-free language of science that could be applicable in any case. Cfr. J. B. Waldram, "The Efficacy of Traditional Medicine: Current Theoretical and Methodological Issues" p. 604-607.

the fact that amulets were still in use, and they were quite often used in parallel. Even nowadays, these traditional forms of healing are still used next to biomedical treatment.

2.4 Everyday religion in Palestine

By the end of the 19th century, the missionary institutions had been successful in founding schools in towns where a modern reformulation of religion began to spread among the first generation of Palestinian students. Missionary schools created a new reading public.[156] In contrast to the traditional oral culture that had prevailed for centuries, reading was necessary to access the religious texts that became the foundation of the new approach to religion. According to Grehan, this textual approach to religion came "announcing its arrival in three interdependent movements: 1. the sharpening of sectarian consciousness; 2. the cultivation of a new religious discipline, more introverted; 3. the shift toward a more strictly scriptural interpretation of religious tradition." [157]

This reformulation of religion did not move in an even pace. In contrast with missionary schools mushrooming in Jerusalem and targeting the urban bourgeoisie, most of rural Palestine remained without access to schools. This lack of infrastructure allowed traditional forms of prayer and healing to continue. In fact the first half of the 20th century while Canaan formed his collection, everyday expressions of piety were still based on an agrarian religiosity. Only with the spread of religious infrastructure in the countryside after 1948, and in the case of the Gaza District until the time of Nasser in the 1960s,[158] a new form of religiosity based on the knowledge of religious texts took shape. This textual education replaced older forms of knowledge transmission, in which family members played the main role in teaching forms of prayer and healing practices. Moreover, in the 1980s the spread of political Islam in most Muslim countries reached Palestinian men who emigrated for work. Palestinians commuting to Israel or emigrating to the Gulf Countries changed their attitude towards traditional practices, which started to be question and corrected according to the religious texts, or to their textual interpretation.

Interesting to mention is the fact that during my interviews in villages in the West Bank, I notice a difference in attitude towards the use of amulets between men and women. On the one hand, many men were reluctant to talk about amulets and immediately referred to them as *ḥarām*.

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[156] J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*, p.197

[157] J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*, p.196

[158] R. Hammami, *Transformations in Religiosity and Labour*, p.111

Women, on the other hand, were knowledgeable about the use of amulets and talked about how they were used in the past. They had stopped using them because "they were not considered Islamic". This aspect of the use of amulets needs further exploration, but seems to be related to what Jamil Hilal identifies as the phenomenon of emigration and conservatism that Palestinian men experienced after the occupation.[159]

2.4.1 Agrarian religion

The amulets that Canaan collected can be very well understood in the context of an *agrarian religion*. Coined by James Grehan in his book *Twilight of the Saints,* it refers to the everyday religion or the total of daily religious behaviour that had been "present in the Levant for centuries and that entered into its historical twilight in the 18th century and ceased gradually."[160] This kind of agrarian religiosity was rooted in a synthesis of naturalism and Byzantine Christian traditions of saints and apostles, and from the 7th century onwards it had been penetrated by Islamic saintly figures and signs.[161] Grehan's *agrarian religion* places the religious culture of the peasants at the centre, defying the notion of centrality of the official religion and its impact on everyday religious practice. He focuses on the religiosity as it was lived by "ordinary" people, not as prescribed by scripture and its defendants.

Although Grehan's agrarian religion comes from his analysis of the religious culture prior to Canaan's collecting activity, it is useful for the purpose of this thesis. First, because the amulets present elements of this agrarian religious culture; second, because they represent the adaptability and flexibility of religion when analysed in its everyday form challenging the notion of rootedness and immobility that has been attributed to Palestinian folklore.[162] Everyday religion stands against the nostalgic idea of the demise of a Palestinian village folk culture showing instead the assimilative, adaptable and fluid nature of an everyday religion that resonates with historical events but also with daily meaning-making processes and engagement with the world.

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[159] J. Hilal, "Emigration, Conservatism, and Class Formation", p.190

[160] This approach to religion through its everyday form is common in the study of contemporary phenomena, but it is not applied to past centuries. Cfr. J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*., p.17

[161] R. Hammami, *Transformations in Religiosity and Labour,* p.46

[162] For a critical position regarding the notion of rootedness among the fellahin Cfr. S. McElrone, "Villagers on the Move: Re-thinking Fallahin Rootedness in Late-Ottoman Palestine." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 54

The term *agrarian religion* comes from the fact that it emerged and developed first in rural, agrarian societies. Since prior to the 19th-century most of Palestine's population was agricultural,[163] the peasants' every-day religion was the dominant expression, both in the countryside and in urban centres. In towns and cities, most of the population had not yet been exposed to literacy, keeping them "trapped within the constraints of an oral culture, and obstinate in their commitment to values and customs that were not very far removed from those of the peasantry."[164] The prevailing presence of an agrarian culture in the urban milieu, was also facilitated by the long history of interactions inter and intra towns and villages, but also by the fact that the distinction between rural and urban ways/culture even within towns remained quite distinct.[165]

Grehan has pointed out that Palestine's everyday religion had space to operate due to the absence of institutionalised religion. This was the case for Greater Syria, which as a peripheral province of the Ottoman Empire did not benefit from a religious infrastructure, allowing religious practice find a freer space to develop. Prior to the 19th century, the absence of institutions and regulation of ritual practice was a widespread reality, not only in the Palestinian countryside, but also in the towns.[166] The absence of churches, mosques, and madrasas meant that there was no central administration interfering with the religious culture of most inhabitants of the Levant. Some towns had a *zawiyya,*[167] which was the only religious institution that regulated prayer and rituals for protection and healing.[168] In villages, the authority of local sheikhs and the sporadic visits of recognised living saints from the towns maintained regular forms of devotion. As for the bedouins, the regulation of such rituals had been in the hands of the elderly women of each tribe.[169] The everyday practice remained in motion, changing and incorporating elements in every personal

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[163] This is evidenced in the censuses of 1922 and 1931 carried out by the British government. For a detailed demographic analysis of the population of Palestine based on these two censuses, as well the report on the population of Palestine of 1947, Cfr. J. L. Abu Lughod, "Demographic Transformation of Palestine"

[164] J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*, p. 15

[165] This is the main thesis of S. McElrone, *Ibidem.*

[166] This is based on Grehan's analysis of the Ottoman Salname-yi Vilayet-i Suriye, that shows the unevenness in the distribution of houses of worship according to urban and rural areas. Cfr. J. Grehan, *Op. Cit.,* p.29

[167] *zawiyya pl. zawāyā:* A small cupolaed mosque erected over the tomb of a Muslim saint, with teaching facilities and a hospice attached to it, usually the establishment of a religious order." Cfr. H. Wehr, Dictionary of Modern Standard Arabic, p. 450

[168] B. Masters, "A World of Scholars and Saints", in *The Arabs in the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918: A Social and Cultural History*, p.112

[169] Popper-Giveon, A., Abu-Rabia, A., & Ventura, J. "From White Stone to Blue Bead: Materialised Beliefs and Sacred Beads among Bedouin in Israel", p.145

Figure 8. Pilgrimage certificate in Arabic with stamps of the Jewish holy sites with their corresponding name in Hebrew.
Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets
Photo taken by the author

interpretation and performance but keeping elements that had been part of local religiosities.

The dominant position of this agrarian religious culture within the full range of ideas, attitudes and activities was shared and regarded as conventional in rural and urban areas, within different social classes, among Muslims, Christians and Jews, men and women. The representatives of the religious establishment, that is to say, priests, rabbis, sheikhs, and *'ulamā'* interacted differently with this religious culture. Some of them "were involved in intellectual exercises aimed at adapting religion to a developing reality, other senior clerics worked in the opposite direction, adapting reality to a fundamental and inflexible interpretation of religious texts."[170] Some '*ulamā'* with their incomparable expertise in religious matters, had various responsibilities, and "participated in the ubiquitous oral culture around them, but kept a second culture, exclusive and literate, almost entire to themselves".[171]

The major transformations within the economic and political sphere that took place in 19th- and early-20th century Palestine had an impact on the way agrarian religion was lived in major towns and in the countryside. The population's re-accommodation, a consequence of foreign immigration, internal displacement, and change of land tenure and urban centralisation, altered the regulatory instances and added new forms of religious practice.

2.4.2 Inter-confessionality and the fluid nature of everyday religion

The religious culture of Palestine included diverse possibilities that had coexisted in the Levant for centuries. By this, I refer first to the different forms of religious practice in towns and villages based on the degree of institutionalisation that religious infrastructure allowed and second, to the confessional possibilities, namely to be Jew, Christian, Muslim or Druze. The practical dimension of religion, which was for a large part unregulated, was what accounted for the religious diversity and "inter-confessional" interactions in Palestine. In other words, the everyday rituals, material expressions of piety and social interactions resulted from individual and communal engagements with sacred places and sacred histories. Mediated by different kinds of regulatory instances such as family, village hierarchies, sheikhs, and visiting sufis, these engagements were defined more by geographical location than by the allegiance to one or another religious tradition. This is not to say that a transnational religious consciousness did not exist or did not contribute to define self-

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[170] I. Pappe, *Op. Cit.*, p.16

[171] J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*, p.5

identities, but expressions of religious piety were circumscribed, before anything else, locally and then regionally.

These forms of piety permeated the life of people regardless of gender, religious affiliation or social position. Expressed on an everyday basis, this kind of religiosity had its foundations in traditional worship but also in everyday needs, making it so lively. Characterised by an essential worldliness and pragmatism, it used propitiatory magic, reverence for miracle workers, nature and spirit cults, and different forms of ancestor veneration.[172] Its pragmatic nature did not know institutions and religious sectarianism until the 19th century.

Inter-confessionality is probably the aspect of this agrarian religious culture that attracts more attention because of the contemporary tensions between ethnic and religious communities in most parts of the world. The inter-confessional character of Palestine's religious culture that prevailed before the 20th century, and continued to be part of the everyday religious practice even after 1947, discloses that the Palestine-Israeli conflict is not based on a religious discord.

Inter-confessionality, however is a concept that needs further explanation. The idea of confessions as differentiated religions or forms of it, separate from each other has been criticised in recent scholarship on religious studies. As Carl W. Ernst points out, the concept of religions as ideologies competing for world domination disclosed the historicity of our notion of confession.[173] Inter-confessionality proposes that confessions can mingle and interact, but it still assumes that confessions exist in a pure differentiated state.[174] In this regard, if religious human practice is seen as fluid and accumulative, confession becomes a useless term, so does inter-confessionality.

Confessionality however exists as a concept, and so does inter-confessionality as a tool to explore how these confessions interacted. It began with the creation of the millet system, a state project of categorisation of religious communities applied in 1830 by the Ottoman state. This classificatory system was already part of the modern reformulation of religion that gave prominence to the scripture becoming the framework for prayer, ritual and religious experience.[175] Its aim was to classify the population and exercise more control over communities of non-Muslims (Christians and Jews). However in practice, in the periphery of the Ottoman lands, this differentiation of religious community was difficult to demarcate. The study of Palestinian villages, the agrarian

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[172] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.192

[173] C.W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga", p.18

[174] C. W. Ernst, *Op. Cit.* p 18

[175] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.197

religion, and the use of amulets discloses that the millet system did not function in the same way as it (probably) did in the administrative/political centres of the Ottoman Empire.

During the late Ottoman and Mandate periods, the Palestinian society began to experience major changes regarding its religious composition. By analysing five mayor pilgrimage sites, Philippe Bourmaud has distinguished two dimensions of the religious practice that affected the development of "inter-confessionality". On the one hand the formal practice introduced by religious institutions led to a strict regulation and set the differentiation of religious practice between confessional groups. In the case of pilgrimage and religious celebrations, these became object of a strict police control while the conflicts that arose in them were not much based on confession as on community.[176] On the other hand, however, "the festive dimension of religious practice and forms of popular religiosity" kept its inter-confessional character until 1947 as shown in the pilgrimages and celebrations in al-Nabi Musa, al-Nabi Rubin, al-Nabi Samwil, the Tomb of Rachel, and Mar Elias.[177] It was with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 that the period of religious festivals and saint visitation around regional and national *awliyā'*[178] came to an end. This established new national boundaries that impeded Palestinians to access sacred sites[179] and provoked the displacement of Palestinians to neighbouring countries, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, making it impossible for them to keep visiting the tombs of the local *awliyā'*.

In the countryside the persistence of a fluid agrarian culture, —or better said, the absence of a strict confessional differentiation, even after the establishment of religious institutions in the urban areas, responded to different reasons. First, the lack of religious infrastructure in the countryside allowed the persistence of undifferentiated spaces, forms of prayer and supplication revolving around religious sites that had been common for all. The interactions in these sites, however, did not respond to an ecumenism but to the "possibilité spatiale de se recuellir, de tenir une liturgie ou du moins des rites.. et cela signifie la possibilité d'y pratiquer sa religion, à côte et dans la même temps qu'un croyant d'une autre foi ou d'une autre confession."[180] Moreover, these

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[176] P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor,* p.24

[177] P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor,* p.8

[178] *walī* pl. *awliyā' :* a man close to God, holy man, saint. Cfr. H. Wehr, *Dictionary,* p. 1289

[179] For a detailed narration of the transformation of the landscape, the occupation, appropriation and destruction of sacred sites in pre 1948 Palestinian territories Cfr. M. Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948*, California: University of California Press, 2000.

[180] P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor*, p. 11

places were visited by all not because they provided a setting for the an inter-confessional religious practice (of differentiated religious communities), but because they were spaces that superseded sectarian affiliation. Seeking the intercession of Mar Elias or St. George (al-Khader) in the next extract was beyond the Muslim, Christian or Jewish affiliation of their practitioners.

> "One Muslim woman, cradling her gasping infant at the shrine of the prophet Saba in Rashaya, called out to her mother, "To whom shall I vow?" Her mother's response pithily summed up the eclecticism of folk religiosity: "They are all God's prophets. Vow to whom you please." Her daughter then called upon St. Elias, and promised to baptise her son at the local church if the Christian saint were to make him better. The little boy quickly recovered, prompting his grateful mother to keep her word." [181]

Behind this fluidity between religious communities in terms of practice, there was an acknowledgement that "whatever their doctrinal differences, their religions sprung from the same tradition, replete with prophets, legends and landmarks which appeared in all the holy books."[182] — As Salim Tamari says, this was a kind of acknowledgement of an Abrahamic or even pagan practice (in the case of al-Khader).[183] So, as illustrated in the above-mentioned passage of the Muslim woman who decided to make a vow to the Christian saint Elias aiming to get his *baraka,*[184] and accepted to baptise her child to "gain the spiritual protection of prophet Jesus to combat threatening spirits and keep the baby safe,"[185] shows the appropriation by one religious community of the other's saintly figures and the recognition of the efficacy of other's rituals. This phenomenon has always been present in the development of religion. The case of Nabi Musa and Nabi Ruben appropriated by Muslims, Simon the Just appropriated by Jews, al-Khader originally a pagan figure, but appropriated by Muslims and Cristians, all disclose the recognition of the fluid nature of everyday religious practices.

Another reason of the prevalence of such fluid nature comes from the fact that the agrarian religious culture was shaped in the everyday engagement with the landscape by living in it and living from it, limiting the area of activity to the immediate lands and their features; creating small-

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[181] J. Grehan, *Op. Cit.*, p.178

[182] J. Grehan, *Op. Cit.*, p.182

[183] Personal correspondence, October 2020

[184] *baraka* pl. *barakāt*: blessing, benediction, Cfr. H. Wehr, *Dictionary*, p.67

[185] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.178

scale geographies based on human action. The agrarian religious culture was a feature common to all the Levant. However, although peasants and bedouins had established networks with other localities, and their mobility had made them aware of the existence of saints, amulet-makers and sheikhs in other villages and towns, specific cults and preference for some saints was determined more by proximity and familiarity. Particularities in rituals and the use of certain material objects as part of healing practices, responded to geographical location rather than trans-geographical religious affiliation. This meant that, there were more commonalities in religious practice and expressions of piety among Muslims, Christians and Jews of the same village than among Sunni Muslims from different parts of the Levant.

2.4.3 Amulets for all

Within these religious engagements many amulets become quite difficult to define in terms of religious denomination. If strict separation of religious practice did not occur at all times, then how did material objects function within these indistinctive and fluid spaces/rituals? The engagement with the landscape and the awareness of a common religious history and its symbols, kept sanctuaries and other ritual sites as spaces for mingling and interaction. Material objects were manufactured, sanctified and activated in these spaces. They were used for practical reasons, for the power they conveyed, and could later be passed on to other people.

Examples of amulets that were available for anyone are those that came from pilgrimage sites. The *ziyāra*[186] to sacred places and their corresponding celebrations were moments when mingling and interaction took place in a more intense form. Only a few sites would serve only one community. People from different origins converged in pilgrimage sites creating a very unique space that involved the circulation of objects used to express religious piety. Among the Canaan amulets there are some items that disclose the pragmatic nature of amulet use, and how one same object could be regarded efficacious by pilgrims regardless of their religious affiliation.

From the group of pilgrimage certificates, there is one that deserves our attention, it stands out for its Arabic and Hebrew inscriptions and depictions of Muslim and Jewish sacred sites. Catalogued by Canaan under no. 945, it is a block-printed certificate. On the one side it contains a description of the places that a Muslim pilgrim should visit during *ziyāra* to Jerusalem and associated sites. The description is in Arabic and contains a long list of sites related to prophets (some Biblical), companions of Prophet Muhammad, and sheikhs. At the top of the page, the

[186] visitation/ pilgrimage to a shrine

formula *bismillah al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*[187], two stamps with the *shahāda,*[188] and a picture of the Dome of the Rock appears. The opening formula and the text content point to the fact that it was meant for a Muslim visitor/pilgrim. In the margins of the certificate, however, there are 10 stamps of images of Jewish holy places with their respective names in Hebrew. The ones that are readable are: Rachel's Tomb, the Machpelah or the Abrahamic Mosque in Hebron, the Tomb of Absalom, the Tomb of Prophet Samuel and King David's Tomb. These stamps were probably added to the Muslim certificate for Jewish visitors only. On the other (reverse) side, the certificate has a handwritten text that certifies the completion of the *ziyāra* and many other stamps. The issuers of these documents as it reads at the bottom were *'Abd al-Raḥmān* and *'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī*. They probably issued them to Jewish pilgrims as well because there was no Jewish authority who could issue certificates to validate the pilgrimage to these specific sites. The certificate seems to have been folded many times into a small square. We know from Canaan that this certificate was carried as an amulet by a pilgrim. The identity of the pilgrim however, is not given; the pilgrim could have been a Muslim, who visited the Jewish sites or acquired the certificate already with the stamps on it. Another possibility is that the pilgrim was a Jew, and did not consider the content of the amulet, such as the Islamic formulae, an impediment to use it. For the Muslim or Jewish pilgrim the amulet worked because of its connexion with the sites that he/she had visited, but the other elements on it could have added power to it. There is no doubt that the pilgrim recognised the authority of the issuer and the value that this certificate acquired once it was signed and stamped.

Another amulet used by people from different religious backgrounds, was the *ḥirz ḥalīb* (milk bead). Obtained in the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem, these amulets were believed to contain a beneficial power. Canaan registered that they were extensively used by women from different religious backgrounds. Visited mainly by women, this place was considered sacred due to its connection with the Virgin Mary. By visiting the place, women would take pieces of the white limestone from the cave for their supposed capacity to boost milk during lactation. This limestone could be engraved with Christian iconography as exemplified in some of Canaan's items.[189] There were also beads made of whitish stones other than limestone, but they would be referred to as milk beads too, probably due to the colour. This variation in milk beads might point to a high demand for such beads. It is not clear if they were also obtained at the Milk Grotto since they are not made of

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[187] In the name of God, the greatest, the most merciful.

[188] The profession of faith: There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.

[189] See complete list of amulets/materials in Table 1 of the Appendixes.

Figure 9. Pendant *(maskeh)* with Arabic and Hebrew inscriptions, catalogued no. 95 of the Tawfik Canaan Collection.
Photo credit: Birzeit University Museum

limestone —probably these were effective due to their colour and to their power that after all came from their association with the holy site.

A third example is amulet no. 95 (Figure 8). It is a drop-shape *maskeh*[190] made of gold-plated silver inscribed on both sides. On one side the inscription is only in Arabic and on the other the inscriptions are in both Arabic and Hebrew. The Arabic reads on the top *yā ḥāfiẓ*, on the right *yā kāfī*, on the left *yā shāfī*. These three ways of addressing God or a saint refer to their protective and healing power. The Hebrew: *eloha* (in the centre surrounded by a circle), *aleija ayn* (at the bottom), probably alludes to God who sees everything and protects from the evil eye. Canaan bought this pendant in Jerusalem in 1913. He did not mentioned where, but probably in a shop that sold this kind of jewellery. The fact that the pendant is inscribed in both languages points to two possible explanations. The first possibility is that the availability of these kinds of pendants might have

190 In MSA *maska* pl. *masakāt*: grip, hold; in Palestinian Arabic *maskeh* pl. *mawasik:* a piece of jewellery that hands from a chain around the neck.

targeted a very particular group of clients, namely the Arab Jews who were acquainted with religious formulae in both languages. The second option is that these pendants might have been manufactured with the intention to put them on the market purposely making them available to different kinds of clients. This would enable the pendant's quick sale. Both those who read Arabic and those who used Hebrew could use the pendant for the protection it offered. Sold in Jerusalem, these kinds of pendants must have also been offered to foreign pilgrims looking for souvenirs.

2.5. Internal conceptualisations of illness, healing and efficacy

Different attitudes towards adopting new, keeping old, and replacing traditional forms of treatment are found among Canaan's interlocutors. These attitudes refer to individual and communal mechanisms of adapting to a changing reality and of finding spiritual and physical solutions to everyday problems. Amulets were part of everyday solutions and functioned within an internal logic of adaptation to new conditions. In order to understand amulets as healing and protective objects, it is important to dedicate a section to the conceptualisation and articulation of illness, healing and efficacy.

2.5.1. Illness and healing

In 1918, Dr. E. W. G. Masterman, while executing a research project for the Palestine Exploration Fund, identified the following diseases in Palestine: malaria, backwater fever, enteric fever, smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, dysentery, cholera, plague, erysipelas, rheumatism, rheumatoid arthritis, tuberculosis, phthisis, leprosy, rickets, nervous diseases, diabetes, intestinal worms, cancer, congenital deformities, skin diseases, ophthalmia, trachoma and cases of death during labor.[191] These diseases had long been in Palestine the main cause of death among peasants and bedouins. Categorised differently than Masterman had done, traditional healers had grouped the diseases based on common origin and symptoms, and had developed forms of prophylaxis and healing according to the main cause of the illness with remedies targeting its source.

Between Masterman's approach and that of traditional healers lay different explanations of the manifestation of disease and its underlying causes. During the years Canaan collected the amulets, he noted that the origin of most illnesses and ailments was believed to come from two main sources: the evil eye and supernatural forces (including the *jinns* or evil spirits). Few ailments

[191] E. W. G. Masterman, "Hygiene and Disease in Palestine in Modern and in Biblical Times", p.61

Figure 10. Cardboard with amulets organised under the category of blue beads (as indicated on the top margin). Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

were reported to have come as punishment from misbehaviour in a *maqām,*[192] or as a result of a spell. What follows is the description of the sources of illness and the different kinds of amulets that in Palestine were used to counteract them.

The '*ayn* (evil eye) or *'ayn al-hasūd* (envious eye) could originate by the gaze of any person involuntarily or purposely with the aim of affecting the person. According to Evans-Pritchard, in different cultures the evil eye is associated with particular social groups often related to gender and kinship. It is an hereditary phenomenon, often based on envy of material or social standing.[193] Finneran would argue that, in the Ethiopian case, it has its roots in patron-client relations, where the subjugated client being envious conveys the evil eye towards his patron who belongs to a higher

[192] *Maqām* is a holy site that can be a tomb or a memorial of a saint. For the usage of the term see subchapter *2.6.2. Dust of prophets and patriarchs.* Cfr. T. Canaan. *Mohammedan Saints and Sactuaries*, p.247.

[193] E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, p.100

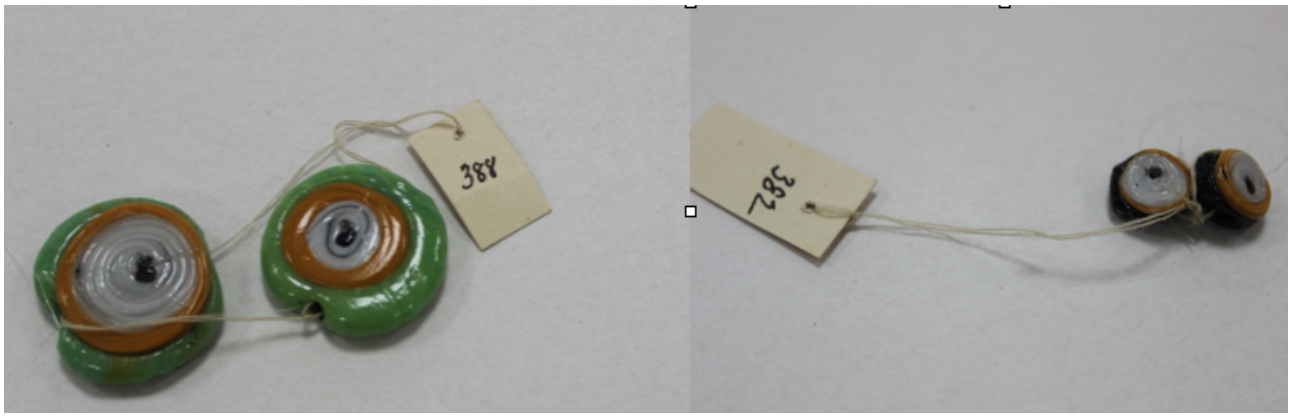

Figure 11. *Khalīlī* glass eyes of different sizes (see size in relation to the tag): no. 382 *'ayn al-dīk* or rooster eye and no. 388 *'ayn al-jamal* or camel eye.
Photos taken by the author

social class and possesses wealth.[194] Evil eye, seems to appear in any situation of perceived inequality.

In Palestine, the belief that people with blue eyes posses the ability to give the evil eye, explains why it is mainly combated with the use of amulets that contain blue beads. Following the logic of homeopathy where the same poison that causes disease can also have a healing effect, blue beads –representing the eyes, are used as remedies to cancel the effect.[195] Human-made representations of eyes included blue beads of different kinds. The most commonly used was *khirzat al-bizilla* (pea bead), named after its round shape that resembled a pea. This was made and sold to be used in amulets, set in necklaces, with other pieces of silver jewellery like amulet cases, or coins (Fig. 9). According to Nazmi al-Jubeh, this type of bead was also sold to be used in fishing nets.[196]

Other blue beads that were meticulously manufactured to resemble eyes were those made of *khalīlī* glass, widespread in the early 20th century. They were manufactured in Hebron but available around Palestine. These were flat beads made of four concentric layers or circles of different colours resembling an eye. The outer circle could be blue, green or black; the outer middle circle was yellow/orange; the inner middle cycle was always white, and the inner circle which in most cases was just a dot, was always black since it represented the pupil of the eye. These *khalīlī* glass

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[194] N. Finneran, "Ethiopian Evil Eye Belief and the Magical Symbolism of Iron Working", p. 427

[195] T. Canaan, *Auberglaube*, p.58

[196] N. al-Jubeh, "Hebron Glass A Centuries-old Tradition." *This Week in Palestine*, Jan. 2007.

eyes included different kinds: the small ones attested in green, blue, light blue and dark brown were called *'ayn al-dīk* (rooster eye) or *'ayn al-'īfrīt*[197]; the medium-size ones, *'ayn al-qā'ūd* (dromedary eye); and the big ones, *'ayn al-jamal* (camel eye) (Fig. 10); a kind of bead with three pupils, called in Palestinian colloquial *imtallat*[198]*;* and some that resemble a blind eye, without a pupil, were called *'ayn 'amyā'* or *'ūra* .[199] Once the evil eye was given to someone, it could manifest itself in different illnesses and symptoms. Although there is not much information about these glass eyes, their use might have corresponded to the severity of the symptoms. Objects with eye-shapes could also be taken from nature, such as shells, stones with circular shapes or seeds, and used to counteract the evil eye.[200] Amulets had to be made as a complete remedy, not only to protect the person from the evil eye, but also to heal the effects that it had on the individual. Therefore, these natural eye-shape eyes could be used without modification or by placing them in a metal case or fastened together with other amulets.[201]

The second origin of illness was the affection by the *jinns, al-arwāḥ al-sharīra* (evil spirits) and demons such as *al-'ifrīt*, *al-qarīna*, *al-ghul*. From all these, *al-qarīna* appeared as the most feared demon. Most amulets collected by Canaan used against evil from a non-human source, were precisely those targeting this female demon.[202] *Al-qarīna* is still believed to affect children causing their death. From Canaan's notes it is possible to distinguish a wide variety of amulets used to protect children from her: from watermelon seeds, pieces of tin, blue beads, rags (previously tied in a holy tree or in a tomb), to the case of a medallion with Christian iconography set together with an Ottoman coin and a blue bead. Most of these amulets worked by means of being seen and thus they were attached to the children's caps or clothes. Other kinds of amulets that targeted evil spirits and *jinn* were made to produce sounds while worn, like little bells.

Amulets do not only target the origin of illness, they are also used to cure the illness itself. In these cases they no longer work as protective but as healing means. Following the law of similarities, they often include herbs and stones with a colour similar to that of the symptom. So for

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[197] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.61

[198] The correspondent Arabic word for *imtallat* is *muthallath*, which means triple, threefold.

[199] The absence of pupil implies that the eye has no effect, and it might have been used only for aesthetic reasons. Cfr. T. Canaan, *Aberglaube,* p.61; See catalogue no. 384, 390, 391, 404-406, 414

[200] Among Canaan's amulets we find *'ayn baqara* a kind of dried fruit (*no. 783,786)*, *'ayn al-hirr* a chatoyant white stone (no. 116, 331, 569, 1357)

[201] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.61

[202] For a complete list of amulets and their use see Table 1 in the Appendixes.

instance, red stones are used to control haemorrhage; yellow stones or amber to treat jaundice; and white stones called *ḥajar* or *khirzat ḥalīb*[203] —from the Milk Grotto— to boost the increase of maternal milk during breastfeeding. Other amulets, not necessarily based on their colour, are used due to their intrinsic properties such as *ḥajar al-dam*[204]; *khirzat al-marāra*[205]; *khirzat kabās*[206];

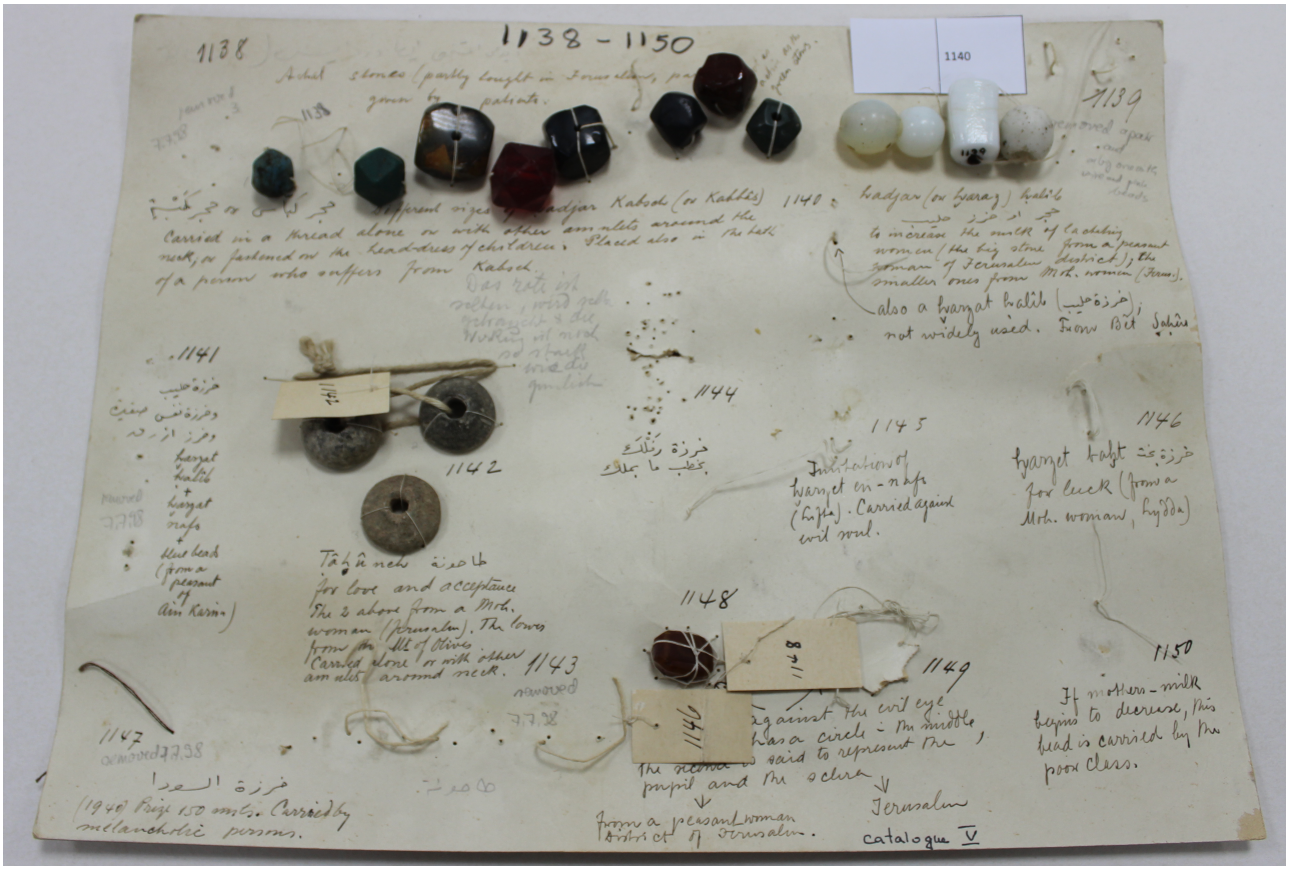

Figure 12. Stones used as amulets. (*ḥajar or khirzat ḥalīb, khirzat kabās, etc.)*
Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

[203] Amulets no. 317, 324, 1139, 1140, 1141, 1150 in the Catalogue.

[204] Blood stone, which is a heliotrope (kind of agate) used to control nose bleeding by pressing it against the front of the head. Amulets no. 196, 581, 608, 613, 581, 585, 920, 1291 in the Catalogue.

[205] *Khirzat al-marāra* bitterness /gallbladder stone, used for illnesses of the gallbladder. It is put in water and then the water is drunk. See amulet no. 594 in the Catalogue.

[206] Pressure beads against high blood pressure. They are hung around the neck of sick people. See no. 1363 in the Catalogue.

khirzat al-ḥalamāt[207]*;* garlic[208]; dates, etc. Some of these remedies have been always used because they are part of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* or prophetic medicine.[209]

2.5.2 Efficacy

The use of certain materials for prophylactic and therapeutic procedures has been primarily based on the perception that people have of their efficacious nature.[210] Efficacy is measured by the extent to which a remedy can heal. In traditional medicine, being healed is not the equivalent of being cured, and it is not necessary to have a biomedical diagnosis to go through a healing procedure because "the ultimate goal of traditional medicine is not necessarily the elimination of disease"[211], which in biomedical terms, would mean to be cured. What traditional medicine seeks through healing is the restitution of order, which might include alleviating physical pain and repairing the emotional state.

Amulets in this sense have been used to restitute well-being. If an object is used with no result, it is disposed. But what caused an object to be deemed effective? First of all, it had to be manufactured by a well-known and recognised authority on the matter. The psychological predispositions in believing in the healing capabilities of a sheikh, a doctor, etc., may have added to the efficacy of an amulet. Second, efficacy relied on the materials employed, which included those with curative properties like some herbs and minerals, but also materials connected with a holy site. The amulet maker would make the remedy with the right ingredients and proportions/amounts, in the same way that an antidote has to be prepared by mixing different substances in the right amounts. The healer had to be capable of the manipulation of symbols such as naming the patient's problems in order to prepare an amulet suitable for him/her. Third, the efficacy of an amulet relied on the prescription; an amulet had to be used according to carefully followed instructions. The treatment and doses must be instructed by the healer, or by anyone with an acknowledged authority on the matter.

Recent research on the confluence of traditional medicine and biomedicine has shifted the focus to the aspect of efficacy. It "must be seen as fluid and shifting, the product of a negotiated, but

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[207] Nipple bead used against cracking of nipples during the lactation period. See no. 593 in the Catalogue.

[208] Used for its antibacterial properties to cure sty.

[209] The medicine of the Prophet (Muhammad)

[210] For more about how amulets with similar materials as Canaan's are still used until now, see Conclusion

[211] J.B. Waldram, *The Efficacy of Traditional Medicine*, p.605

not necessarily shared, understanding by those involved in the sickness episode, including physicians or healers, patients, and members of the community."[212] Such an understanding of efficacy blurs the strict separation of different forms of medicine unable to cope with each other, and explains how in Palestine traditional forms of protection and healing adopted new biomedical treatment, while in turn biomedical doctors adapted and adopted elements from the traditional forms.

The theoretical difference between both forms of medicine began in the 18th century with Western doctors starting to use lab research and microbiology to explain the cause and cures of illness. Prior to this point, Western medicine shared with traditional medicine the idea that the cause of illnesses was a disequilibrium of substances and humours, and other external causes such as the evil eye, spirit possession, etc. It seems that despite this differentiation, the boundaries were more subtle. Bourmaud has analysed how in the 19th century Palestinian context, doctors trained in Western institutions also had to cope with how their patients understood illness and healing. The latter in turn saw in the doctors with a bio-medical training a new version of the practitioner/sheikh. The following passage taken from Bourmaud's research exemplifies the situation:

> "Je fus conduit au harem du patron du Shilaal, afin de visiter une jeune femme très jolie; après avoir pris son pouls et examiné sa langue, je lui demandai où elle avait mal. Elle mit sa main sur son coeur; je demandai ce dont elle se plaignait. «Mais du mal d'amour, bien sûr,» dit une autre femme; «elle veut vous lui fassiez un talisman pour qu'un jeune homme de Dayr tombe amoraux d'elle.» «Mais je ne suis pas un magicien», dis-je en arabe, «mes braves gens, je puis vous procurer remèdes, mais non vous donner des talismans.» «Ah, ne parle pas ainsi, Hawadgi,» crièrent une demi-douzaine de personne, «nous savons que tu es un magicien, nous savons que tu peux rendre le visage d'une petite femme aussi grosse que la Lune, et nous savons que tu peux faire qu'un homme de Dayr tombe amoureux d'une femme de Shilaal, en écrivant une *waraga* [papier].»[213]

The client requesting an amulet from the doctor, and the doctor probably having prepared one, shows how both sides had to negotiate and adapt. Canaan's engagement with his patients was similar to this. Some patients regarded his bio-medicaments an addition to the traditional cures, others adopted them fully but still used them to counteract evil eye and the effect of evil spirits, which were part of a complex agrarian cosmology as we will explore in the next section.

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[212] J.B. Waldram, *The Efficacy of Traditional Medicine*, p.603

[213] P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor*, p.79; Cfr. R. R. Madden, *Travels in Turkey, Egypt, Nubia and Palestine, in 1824, 1825, 1826, 1927*, p.124-125.

2.6 Components of early 20th century Palestine's religious culture

Canaan's amulets functioned within the everyday religious culture of Palestine described above whose internal logic included particular conceptualisations of illness, healing and efficacy. By analysing the parts of the amulets and the way they were used —sometimes interrelated, it is possible to distinguish the different components of the agrarian religious culture, as well as the way they interacted with each other. James Grehan has distinguished three main components: the world of saints or magic men, a sacred landscape full of natural landmarks, and the world of spirits. These were functional layers with each having their own unofficial rules and mechanics based on efficacy and taboos.[214] These three layers, however, were most of the time interwoven. The way people engaged with the saints, the landscape and the spirits shaped forms of piety where material objects played a role. People's engagement with and within these three layers led to the manufacture and use of amulets. Tiny but powerful, the amulets articulated beliefs on the cause and nature of illnesses with practices to protect and counteract them. What follows is the description of these three layers and the amulets related to them.

2.6.1 The world of spirits

The realm of spirits has been acknowledged by peasants and *'ulamā'* to be one of the main causes of illness and death. Some spirits are harmful, but others can be helpful in protecting people. The way they affect humans is diverse and so are the amulets used to counteract them. The spirits are called *jinn* and *al-arwāḥ.*[215] The *jinn* are beings that reflect the complete gamut of humanity: male, female, good, bad, passive, active, and can take human or animal form.[216] Some of them are believed to have helped the prophets in their quest to spread monotheism, such as those who were summoned by Prophet Salomon; they helped him to build Jerusalem and planted rows of *al-mīs (celtis australis)* trees to protect his temple. Good and obedient *jinn,* who have submitted to the will of God, are very powerful. So any part of the landscape associated with them can be turned to for protection. An example of this is the recurrent use of *al-mīs* trees' shade to rest. It is believed that this kind of tree offers protection to herders who stop there during the day. Moreover, the use of *al-*

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[214] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints,* p.165

[215] *arwāḥ sing. rūḥ*

[216] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.143

mīs wood from the trees that grow in the esplanade of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* is widely used in amulets.[217]

Spirits can be the ghosts of local saints who appear in the same shape, and in the places where they once lived.[218] Within the realm of the spirits, *al-arwāḥ al-sharīra* is a generic term for spirits that deceive and are harmful to people. One of their common features is the places where they dwell: wells, caves, or under most kinds of trees. They like these places because they are dark. In their everyday life, peasants visit wells to get water and use trees as resting spots, so they need to be protected against evil spirits that could be around. Evil spirits like darkness and act primarily during the night or when light is very scarce. This is the reason that protection against them is sought through amulets that sound and smell. These two qualities are a priority in the making of amulets against evil spirits. Among Canaan's amulets we find various examples.[219] Smells are a way to drive evil spirits away. Sometimes amulets contain materials with intense odour, like garlic, or are meant to be used in fumigations in which material is burnt. Common fumigations are those with incense, herbs that can be acquired on a particular day of the year or in a religious celebration, and alum. An example of the fumigation with alum is described in detail in the Conclusion, where pieces of alum are used for their cleansing qualities.

Amulets very often contain elements such as loose strings with beads or bells, aimed at producing sound. Well known is the so called *dandūsha,*[220] a tassel-shaped element that in Palestinian Arabic refers to one part of an amulet that contains a few —commonly three loose strings, or three bunches of strings, that produce a sound as they are shaken.[221] The *dandūsha* can be seen in the widely used amulet *'aqd al-badawiya*, which is a bedouin necklace composed of blue, red, white and yellow glass beads combined with alum, cloves, blue hands and flickering coins. Hanging in the lowest part of the necklace is the *dandūsha.* In the example in Canaan's collection it is a piece of alum in pyramidal shape completely covered with small beads (of different

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[217] More about *al-mis* wood can be found in an article M. Garcia Probert, "Twigs in the Tawfik 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.; For more references to this kind of wood see T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.63

[218] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p. 144

[219] For the amulets with bells, see the complete list of materials in Table 1.

[220] *dandūsha,* pl. *danādīsh*

[221] Amulet no. 420

colours), and three coins hanging from it.[222] Despite their bedouin origin, tassels appear in village accessories showing the influence that semi-nomad bedouins had in villages.[223]

The last group of amulets that target evil spirits and demons are those that include religious prayer or are somehow connected with a saint. These amulets often come from holy sites or are connected to a *maqām*[224] and offer protection through the writing on the amulet or the *baraka* that they posses, as explained in the following section.

2.6.2 Dust of prophets and patriarchs[225]

What better way to get protection from evil than recurring to the power of God, his prophets and *awliyā'*. As mentioned before, the most important religious celebrations were for centuries the pilgrimages to specific sanctuaries on special feast days as well as throughout the year. Visitations to sacred sites had been a central part of the religious life in Palestine even before the organisation of *en masse* pilgrimages to Jerusalem's holy sites during Easter in the 19th century. Saint veneration and the correspondent rituals around saintly figures remained at the core of religious practice for a long time. Some sanctuaries were abandoned only after 1947 with the Israeli occupation of lands, and with the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, which restricted the movement of Palestinians.

Many of the amulets in the Canaan collection were made, activated or used in connection with sanctuaries. Different kinds of sanctuaries in the form of tombs and memorials stand up to this day as architectural landmarks. During my fieldwork in Palestine between 2015 and 2016, I encountered that the usage of the term *maqām* was exclusively for those memorials or places connected to a saint's life. These could be where the saint had passed, sat, slept, eaten, prayed, or performed a miracle. It differed from the term *maqbar,*[226] which was applied to those sites that by common knowledge, contain the saint's physical remains. Shukri Arraf, in his monumental research

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[222] T. Canaan, *Auberglaube*, p.57 Examples of this kind of *dandūsha* are the objects no. 424-427 in the Catalogue.

[223] In village dresses, tassels are found in the neck opening. Headdress also contain tassels, Cfr. W.K. Kawar, *Threads of Identity*, p.372

[224] *maqām,* pl. *maqāmāt* shrine, memorial or tomb of a saint

[225] The title of this sub-chapter is taken from J. Grehan's description of Palestine. It evokes the way Palestine has been imagined as the scenario where prophets, patriarchs, and saints have lived and died, and the extent to which they are present, everywhere as dust, in the Palestinian imagination and everyday life. Cfr. J. Grehan, *The Twilight of the Saints*, p.16

[226] *maqbar,* pl. *maqābir or* tomb

on sanctuaries in Palestine uses the term *maqām* for all kinds of sites.[227] In this thesis, the term *maqām* is also used as a generic term for both tombs and memorials.

The material evidence of saint veneration is the great number of sanctuaries in Palestine. Shukri Arraf, assessing archival and field data in 1976, located 2571 sites in Palestine, most of them abandoned and in ruins.[228] These sites vary immensely in size en shape, some are merely parked by a pile of stones, others include full-scale rectangular buildings with domes. The architectural diversity of these sites represents on the one hand, a clear hierarchy among the saints, and on the other hand, the economic conditions during their construction. There are Biblical and Qur'anic figures, among whom *al-anbiyā'* (the prophets), have been considered to be on the top of the hierarchy.[229] Their *maqāmāt* are the biggest, as the one dedicated to Prophet Ibrahim Khalil Allah in Hebron, the one of Prophet Moses or Nabi Musa near Jericho, and the one of Nabi Saleh in the town with the same name. Other sites are dedicated to commanders or warriors from Islamic History, including the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, *al-saḥāba*. These companions come from a key moment in the history of Islam, the conquest of the Levant by the righteous caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab in the 7th century. Some of them died and were buried there, others did not die in Palestine, but have a shrine due to their miracles, such as that of Ukasha ibn Mihsan, to whom some of Canaan's amulets are dedicated.[230] Another group of saints are those who fought next to Salah el-Din al-Ayyubi against the Crusaders in the 12th century. Many of his companions died in battle and were eventually venerated as saints.[231] The last group of saints are the friends of God, *awliyā'*. This group includes village founders, local holy men and Sufi sheikhs; persons who were locally well-known for their deeds and spirituality.

From all saintly figures, the *awliyā'* are considered to have the closest relation with the inhabitants of the country. They understand human afflictions, because they were once human beings who lived and experienced their own miseries, difficulties, and diseases. Due to their human

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[227] Cfr. S. Arraf, *Tabaqat maqamaat al-anbiya`wa al-awliya`fi al-ard al-muqadasa*; al-Karmi, Mar'i. *Shifa' al-sudur fi ziyarat al-mashahid wa al-qubur,* ed. 'Adil Salih al-Jatili. Beirut: Maktabat al-Sahwa, 1991.

[228] S. Arraf, *Ibidem*

[229] T. Canaan, *Muhammadan Saints and Sanctuaries*, 272-273

[230] T. Canaan, *Ibid*., p. 298.

[231] Saints connected with Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi are mentioned even nowadays, such as Al-Khadra, a female saint who fought in the battle to liberate Ashkelon from the Crusaders, Cfr. R. Hammami, *Between Heaven and Earth*, p.58

condition, they also know human falsehoods and intrigues.[232] Moreover, since they were locally known, people in their respective villages have been acquainted with their exemplary lives.

The veneration of saints has been motivated by a pragmatic logic. Some saints were more famous than others due to their miracles. The more efficacious a saint's intervention was, the more he was visited. "Sainthood in the agrarian religion was a matter of popular consensus, forged mainly within local communities who were not in the habit of asking for official confirmation. Holiness and proof were considered their own incontrovertible proofs."[233]

2.6.3 Amulets as vehicles for baraka

Engagement with saints takes place mainly in their *maqām*, which are religious and social institutions where prayer, ritual and social interaction takes place.[234] The power of these sites comes through the figure of a saint, who has the capacity for the distribution of *baraka.* According to Chelhod, it is a *bienfasante* power that restores individual physical, emotional and psychological health, but also involves the re-establishment of the social order, primarily based on social solidarity.[235] In order to obtain this power, the visitor to the sanctuary must observe a series of rules and follow a protocol, which have been formulated on communal experiences and a shared knowledge about the personality and qualities of the saint. Some of such experiences circulate in the forms of stories and have a pedagogical aim, to learn to respect the saint's abode. These visits can take place any time of the year, although some shrines are visited more during particular times of the year, when commemorations of the saint are celebrated.

Baraka can be obtained in many ways, by performing a prayer, touching the tomb or lighting candles.[236] For a specific petition or a request to solve a particular problem, a vow must be made. The obtention of *baraka* sometimes involves material objects that are either manufactured or activated in the *maqām*. There are different kinds of natural and human-made objects loaded with *baraka* from the site for general or specific purposes, used as part of traditional remedies for healing. Though they are activated in the proximity of the holy site, once the power is contained

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[232] T. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 280

[233] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.62

[234] Although saint veneration has diminished considerably, it is still part of the religious culture of Palestinians. Contemporary cases of saint veneration shows how the role of the saint as a mediator within the community still predominate.

[235] J. Chelhod, "La baraka chez les Arabes ou l'influence bienfaisante du sacre", p.68-88

[236] J. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, p.167

within the objects, they are often carried over and used to distribute the power to distant places and people.[237]

Taufiq Canaan collected amulets related to different *maqāmāt.* Some of them were manufactured in situ and others only sold there. The examples of amulets made at the sites or made with materials meaningful and powerful due to their relation with the sites are many, disclosing different forms of engagement with the saint and the site. Amulet no. 1009, obtained in Medina discloses ways in which people added power to an amulet. It is a pear-shape cone made of clay with two leather strings attached to it. The clay is actually a mix of the sweepings (dust) of the mosque with water. Canaan informed us that it had been placed on the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad and later hung in the house of the owner for protection. These clay amulets were also commonly hung on the headboard of the bed of a sick child.[238] According to Luit Mols, these kinds of amulets are made out of mixing soil or dust of the Prophet's grave, that has been collected by sweeping it, with water from the Zamzam well in Mecca.[239] Canaan mentions that the sweepings could come not only from the inside of the shrine, but also from the surroundings of the site. Sweeping a grave is generally the result of a vow and occurred not only in the Prophet Muhammad's grave. A devotee would promise a saint or prophet to take care of his/her abode in exchange for blessings. The activity of sweeping the graves is mentioned by Canaan as a common activity of cleaning that used to take place in all graves in Palestine.[240] The dust from the sites is believed to have a certain power. In addition, the (Zamzam) water allowed the dust to get a shape suitable to be carried. According to Mols, once the amulet was manufactured, it was hung for extended periods in the shrine of Medina to acquire *baraka*. In this way, the object was loaded with blessings in multiple ways, first by using the sacred dust, second by using the Zamzam water, and third by placing it in the shrine.[241] A similar adding of layers of *baraka* can be detected in Palestine. According to Canaan, once the

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[237] Taken from the lecture *Zamzam-water and the rituals for transferring its benevolent qualities*, presented by Luit Mols at the International Conference Amulets and Talismans in the Muslim World, Leiden University, May 2016.

[238] Description in Arabic taken from the catalogue and translated into English by the author of this research. انجاصة, حجاب اسلامي احضر من المدينة, مصنوع من كناسة الجامع؛ وضع على قبر النبي؛ يعلق في البيوت كحماية كمايوضع على رأس سرير طفل مريض.

[239] Cfr. Luit Mols, description of Volkenkunde Collections. http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/Default.aspx?ccid=832670

[240] T. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p.153

[241] T. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 99

amulet was made, it was submerged in the blood of a sacrificial victim offered as part of the vow (in a local shrine), allowing the amulet to get even more blessings.[242]

Another group of amulets that exemplify the connexion with a *maqām* are the Musa stones. Connected with the tomb of Prophet Moses these stones known as *ḥajar mūsā,* are used as amulets. They come from the area surrounding the *maqām*. Due to their black colour, they are easy to spot as they contrast with the light brown limestone and sand of the landscape. The stones are of a tarry limestone kind, and used for lighting fire due to bituminous properties. This inflammability is not only explained geologically but also in connexion with Prophet Moses' revelation. al-Asali reports that according to popular knowledge, the fire of the stone in which the Ten Commandments were revealed to Moses was the same kind of mineral.[243] So the stones found at the *maqām* share somehow the same nature and power with the sacred stone.

The power of the Musa stones does not only stem from the intrinsic properties of the mineral, it also comes from the rituals they are part of. Visitors to the *maqām* put the stones in contact with the tomb of Prophet Moses to get *baraka*. The stones can be cut into geometrical shapes to be carried as amulets. Particular are those with a triangular shape that resembled that of the *ḥijāb* (discussed in Chapter 1). Some bear inscriptions, others are only pierced with the purpose

Figure 13. *ḥajar mūsā* with inscription on both sides. Catalogue no.181, Tawfik Canaan Collection
Photo taken by the author

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[242] T. Canaan, *Auberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel*. Abhanlungen des Hamburgischen Kolonialinstituts, Band XX, Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co, 1914.

[243] K. J. al-Asali, *Mawsim al-nabī mūsā fī filisṭīn*, p.3

to be hung. Item no. 181 shows that the inscribed stones actually address Prophet Moses and God (Fig. 12). On the one side of the stone it reads: *ashhadu ilāh huwa allāh yā muḥammad 'alayka al-salām allāh,* on the other side: *yā shāfī, yā 'āfī, yā nabī mūsā 'alayka al-salām*.[244] Other specimens in the Canaan Collection are pieces of jewellery with the Musa stone. These are triangular or rectangular shaped stones set in silver, to which a *dandūsha* or hanging coins are attached, giving additional power by the sound they produce. So again, we see that in many amulets different protective properties are combined to make it extra powerful.

The power of an amulet in connexion with a sacred site, does not necessarily come from the materials obtained there. Some amulets werere manufactured in other localities, then taken to a certain *maqām* for activation through one of the rituals described before. Traders and pilgrims were all part of the circulation of amulets that ended up being sold in markets adjacent to these sites. The case of the Nabi Musa market is relevant because Canaan obtained many amulets there. The role of this market and the phenomenon of circulation of amulets is further explored in Chapter 4.

2.6.4 Landmarks and the power of nature

In the context of an every-day religion based on the engagement with the agricultural land, the landscape in its natural form also played an important role. Next to the *maqāmāt*, which constitute the human-made aspect of the landscape, natural landmarks are another kind of sites that have been loaded with a special power. In poetic terms we could consider natural landmarks as the spots nature itself chose to highlight. Indeed it seems that this is how the rural population of Palestine looked upon these places, they were favoured over the rest of the landscape and tales full of miracles and heroic deeds that supposedly took place on or near these natural landmarks, circulated. The power of landmarks was believed to originate from two sources, on the one hand from the intrinsic properties of the natural world, and on the other hand, from a saint. If related to a saint, a landmark possessed *baraka*. The power of the saint, not only present inside the shrine, could be found anywhere in the landscape where the saint had passed, sat, or stood. A cave, a strange rock formation, a lonely tree in an empty plain, a grove of a particular kind of tree (not common in the area), etc., were often related to passages in the life of the saints and placed under their protection.

Next to the role of landscape and its natural resources in facilitating the communication with supernatural forces and phenomena, there is the pragmatical aspect of the intrinsic properties of the natural world (mineral, vegetal and animal form). In all cultures plants have been widely used for

[244] "I witness (that) god is God (Allah), oh Muhammad, may the peace of Allah be upon you. Oh healer, oh you who grant well-being." Translation by the author

their healing and prophylactic properties. Ethnobotanical studies have shown to what extent plants are used in traditional remedies.[245] In Palestine, the knowledge about the properties of the plants has been passed on through generations and is based on experiential knowledge. However, the use of certain plants is based on the tradition of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* or Prophetic medicine, i.e., the healing remedies that Prophet Muhammad used during his lifetime. The most immediate example is the use of dates, particularly from Mecca. Although not endemic to the Levant, they are used in newborn babies according to the sunna of Prophet Muhammad. Considered one of the most nutritious foods, its juice is rubbed on the babies' gums to strengthen their immune system. Dates are also used as remedies for digestive problems. Dates, however, were not always ingested. Sometimes they were just kept. Their association with Mecca and the Prophet Muhammad might have been the reason why they were used as amulets and also entered Canaan's Collection. Some dates that Canaan collected were kept in small carton boxes. Old and dry due to the years, these dates came from Mecca and were believed to have a special power in connexion to the site.

Next to the use of plants, many of the remedies for protection and healing included stones. We have mentioned before that the logic behind their use was that they targeted a particular illness trough the law of similarity. Having the same colour, red stones were used to control and cure haemorrhage; yellow stones to cure jaundice; and so on. This way of using stones could have resulted from the knowledge of intrinsic properties contained in the Arabic genre of *khawāṣṣ* literature. Established in late antiquity, the practice continued in the context of Islam.[246] It contained considerations of the occult properties of plants, animals and minerals and the way they can be used as means for protection and healing. *Khawāṣṣ* is based on the idea of the existence of certain hidden properties, intrinsic to the materials, that become active when used under certain circumstances. The properties of all the natural and mineral world are different, but all behave in accordance with two kinds of principles, that of compatibility and that of incompatibility.[247] Whatever the origin of the logic behind the use of stones, what is clear is that intrinsic properties were only one source of the power of amulets.

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[245] Ali-Shtayeh et al., "Traditional knowledge of wild edible plants used in Palestine (Northern West Bank): A comparative study", *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 2008, 4:13

[246] E. Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination*, p.xix

[247] E. Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination*, p.xx

2.7 Mixed-material amulets

As analysed in the previous sections, everyday-religion in early 20th-century Palestine was fluid, dynamic and subjected to trial and error. Within its own formulation of illness, healing and efficacy, amulets were made taking into account three different domains: 1. the knowledge of the intrinsic properties of the natural world: minerals, plants, and animals, and their application in re-establishing well-being; 2. the world of spirits and demons that inhabited the landscape and co-habited with humans; and 3. the landscape in relation to saints and prophets' and their respective abodes that included all kinds of *maqāmāt*.

These three domains defined the nature and power of amulets, but being components of one single medico-religious culture they very often overlapped. Through the analysis of the amulets collected by Canaan, it is possible to show the fluid relation of these three domains. Materialised in the amulets, the fluidity appears in mixed-material multifunctional amulets whose components belong to one or another domain, and are combined in particular ways to enhance their power.

Mixed-material amulets, as I call them, are complex objects because they not only combine different elements and materials, but also lead to materials acquiring new and different uses and meaning as a result of this combination. Materials are no longer used as when they were used separately. Rather materials acquire new properties through their combination with others. The same logic is behind the preparation of medications, where components get new curing powers when mixed with others in specific proportions. In the Tawfik Canaan Collection, a small amount of amulets are made of only one material, or at least Canaan preserved them as such; instances are the Nabi Musa stones, other kinds of stones that seem to be used alone, milk beads from the Milk Grotto, and the twigs from *al-mīs* tree. However, most amulets contain various materials/parts.

Among the mixed-material amulets there are particular combinations that appear repeatedly pointing to the fact that they might have been well-known for their efficacy. Catalogued with the following numbers 370, 417, 1029, 1111, 1113, 1114, these amulets comprise three materials: a blue bead, a triangular piece of alum, and a bead of *al-mīs* wood. These three materials could be also used as amulets separately or in combination with other materials. In each way, they would target a different illness or problem.

What follows is the description of these three materials, the way they are used alone and in their respective combination. The first material or part of the amulets is the blue bead. Drawing evidence from the Canaan Collection, blue beads are by far the most common amulet or part of an

amulet. Blue beads are used as a prophylactic measure. They are used under the logic of similarity, in which an object of the same or similar colour counteracts the effect of an ailment coming from anything of that colour. This logic explains why blue beads are used to counteract the evil eye, which is believed to come primarily from people with blue eyes. Because they counteract the evil eye, they are used in amulets in a way they can attract the attention of the eye. In contrast with other materials that target other senses of perception, blue beads are meant to be seen. Blue beads in amulets are pierced and set most of the times with other materials that have striking colors/shapes to be seen, produce a sound, have a strong odour, and/or have flammable qualities. In contrast with other kinds of beads, blue beads —which represent an eye, are mostly used for protection and not for healing. In this sense, blue beads might be combined with other materials with prophylactic purposes, or with materials used in healing remedies. Beads are pierced and used to form chains/ necklaces to be hung around the neck or on the head. The materials employed for the blue beads might be stone or glass, however industrialised beads and amulets circulate as well. [248]

Next to the blue bead, the second part of the amulet is a piece of alum, in Palestinian Arabic called *shabbeh*. Besides the mixed-material amulet under scope, alum is a common material in amulets. The kind of alum that concerns us here is also called potassium alum. Due to its physicochemical properties, it can be used as a water purifier,[249] as a skin astringent and antiseptic, as a natural deodorant by inhibiting the growth of bacteria, and supposedly to reduce haemorrhage. Its main use in traditional medicine is for curing internal and external wounds or irritations by wetting and rubbing it on body tissues. Alum is widely used by barbers (*ḥallāq)* as a disinfecting treatment for shaving wounds.

Due to the belief in its cleansing and purifying properties, alum is part of the world of amulets. It is commonly used for treating people afflicted by the evil eye or evil spirits. Different kinds of procedures are found in Palestine depending on the region. The best documented are the rites of exorcism performed among the Bedouins of the Negev.[250] Aref Abu-Rabia who has done extensive research on amulets among the Bedouins, informs us how alum is used as a medium to know the source of the affection or ailment, and as a catalyser to expel the evil eye from the body. The alum is cut in small pieces and used to scan the patient. After this the alum is burnt and the

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

[249] Samuel D. Faust & Osman M. Aly. *Chemistry of water treatment (2nd ed.)*. Chelsea, MI: Ann Arbor Press, 1999

[250] A. Abu Rabia, *Evil Eye and Cultural Beliefs among the Bedouin Tribes of the Negev,* p.249

shape it takes is interpreted, it is then crushed and smeared on the patient's forehead, elbows and heels; the remaining powder is mixed with water and thrown away.[251] In these rituals, alum cleansing properties are conveyed through the smoke by smelling it and impregnating the body with it. The smoke fills the air with its cleansing properties helping to drive away evil spirits.

In the amulets under scope, alum is shaped in a triangle, pierced and set in a way that can be hung. The triangular shape resembles that of the *hijāb*, which is mentioned in Chapter 1. Abu-Rabia has interpreted pyramidal and triangular-shape materials used in amulets. He says that they are used as geometrical abstractions of the human body, which is composed by a series of triangles where joints are the vertices. His hypothesis comes from a very particular ritual practice in which alum is used to scan the body and identify the cause of the ailment. The healer touches three body parts (the vertices of the triangle) and draws invisible lines with the movement of his hands while grabbing the alum. This scan-based analysis of the human body is extended to the material objects aimed to cure or protect the body, physically, spiritually and mentally (psychologically).

The third component of the amulets under inspection here, is the elongated bead of *al-mīs* wood. The wood of this kind of tree appears in other amulets as well, but not in the shape of a bead Used to attract and deviate the attention of anyone who could potentially give the evil eye, these other amulets are actually an entire twig worn by attaching them to children's caps.[252] Obtained at *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, this kind of wood has a protective power due to its connexion to the site but also through popular stories that tell how the trees were planted by the jinns to protect the shrine.[253] Although the beads are used differently from the twigs, the underlying power is the same. In combination with the alum and the blue bead, *al-mīs* beads rely on the intrinsic qualities of the wood. *Al-mīs* is a particular kind of tree that is found in the esplanade of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*. Stories about how they ended in the esplanade connect the trees with Prophet Salomon, and due to their location, the trees posses the *baraka* of the holy site. Moreover, the efficacy of the wood is increased if it is cut on 27th Ramadan during *lailat al-qadr,* so it is quite probable that the beads

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251 Information about these rites come from personal communication with Aref Abu-Rabia during my fieldwork in the Summer of 2018.

252 M.A. Garcia Probert, "Twigs in the Tawfik 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)

253 T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.62

come from twigs cut on that day. The wood of these trees is used by Muslims, but some Christians use it as well. They get it from the *al-mīs* trees that grow in Bir Qadisma (Mar Elias).[254]

This alum-blue bead-*al-mīs* kind of amulet articulates the cleansing power of the alum, the protective quality of the blue bead against evil eye, and the *baraka* of the wood from the trees of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf.* Each material adds layers of power to the amulet, which grants general protection and healing qualities at the same time. The arrangement of the materials point to the fact that they were meant to be hung or attached to the clothes. They are kept together by a wool string or can appear as the ending part of a necklace. Canaan registered that no. 417 was used against the envious eye (*'ayn al-ḥasūd*)—another way of calling the evil eye. The amulet was attached to the

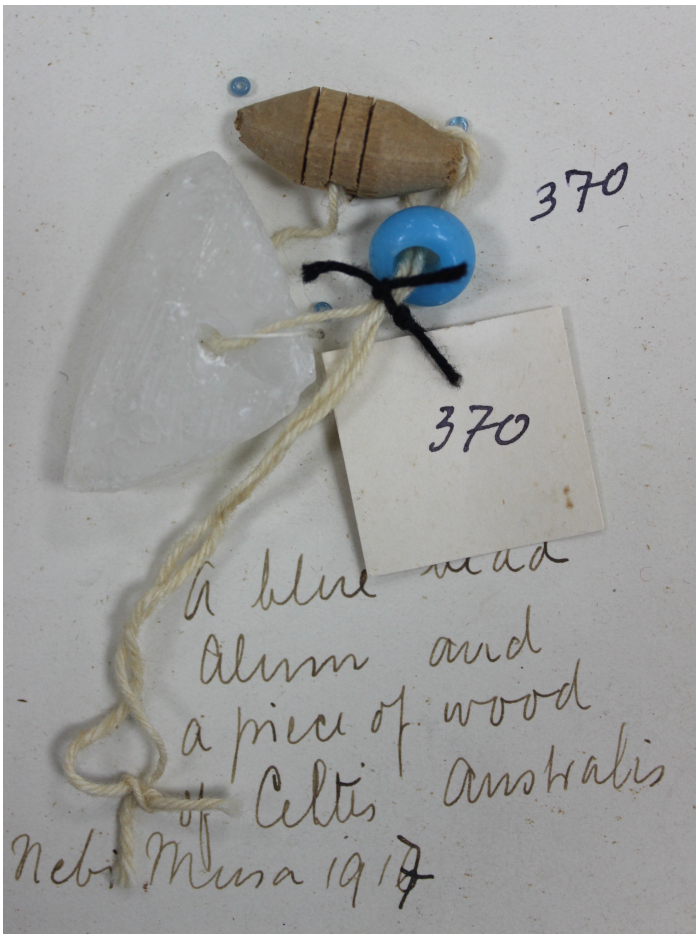

Figure 14. Bead/alum/*al-mīs* amulet. Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets
Photo taken by the author

[254] T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.62-63

clothes or the cap of a child. This kind of amulet seems to have been well-known, which can be concluded based on its widespread availability in Jerusalem and Nabi Musa.[255]

Amulets 1111, 1113, and 1114 are amulets similar to the two discussed previously but they were manufactured later. Canaan recorded that these amulets were of "new fabrication", and sold in Jerusalem since the 1920's.[256] The difference between these newer amulets and the older ones is the way the materials are set. While it seems that the first two amulets could have been set by anyone (by the practitioner or the users) by just obtaining the three different parts separately, the newer amulets seems to have been manufactured as such from the very beginning. The parts are connected with metal wire and also contain sequins of different colours. In contrast with the older items that were attached to the clothes, these amulets were meant to be hung, which we know based on the fact that a chain came together with the amulets. With a more striking design, they might no longer have been used only for their protective power, but also for their look. This hypothesis requires more research, especially in relation to the questions how and when amulets developed into fashion-items. The disjunctive on whether an amulet was used primarily for protection/ healing or for aesthetic reasons is not part of this thesis, however it is a good point to reflect on for future research.

The last case to explore is no. 1029. It is a wooden box with many different objects from the *maqām* of Nabi Yaqin. It includes colourful threads, two pieces of glass (similar to the *khalīlī* glass discussed in Chapter 4), a shell, a coin, a pinch of clay[257], two red beads, a thread with beads, and two amulets like those mentioned in the previous paragraph. According to Canaan's notes, all these amulets were tied to or put in contact with the shrine by a woman whose child was very sick. The objects had to remain in the shrine until the *walī* paid attention to the child and cured him. Obtained in 1923, there is no explicit mention on how Canaan got them, but I assume that it must have been directly from the mother of the child (most amulets used by children were obtained directly from their mothers). What is interesting to note here is that the mother in her desperation to search a cure for her sick child, turned to as many amulets as possible. This could have been in order to increase the chances that one might work if another failed, or intentionally to recur to different kinds of beneficial power.

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[255] No. 370 is mentioned to have been acquired in Nabi Musa in 1917.

[256] Canaan's cardboards and handwritten catalogue in German.

[257] The clay is found in a compact flat cookie-like shape inside a folded sheet of paper. Drawing similarities to how clay from other sites were used, this might have come from the shrine of Nebi Yaqin.

Figure 15. Bead/alum/*al-mīs* amulets of new fabrication, rags, glass beads, and soil from the tomb of Prophet Yaqin. Catalogued under no. 1029. Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

Regarding the alum-blue bead-*al-mīs* amulet and its association with Prophet Yaqin might show two scenarios. One is that the user of this amulet (the mother) was not aware of the origin of the wooden bead and its connexion to *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, a fact that led her to activate its power in the abode of another saintly figure, Prophet Yaqin. Since this type of amulet seems to have been well-known, it is then also probable that the wooden beads originated from other trees just for the purpose of selling them. Bearing this in mind, the amulet could be activated at any sanctuary. A second scenario is that, despite knowing about the origin of the wood of *al-mīs* from the *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, the woman had no hesitation to link it to another holy site. This would certainly add another layer of power and make the amulet even more efficacious. Taking an amulet that contains parts from *al-ḥaram*, but using it in connection with a saint, shows the loyalties that people had towards a particular saint. While for one person the mixed materials of the amulet would suffice due to their intrinsic qualities and origin, for another these materials had to be linked to a saint

regardless the object in question. This example tackles our notions of hierarchies within religious practice and shows that in everyday practice everything is possible. Remedies were activated by means of the right combination of materials, through specific rituals, and by following the "magical/medical" prescription to the letter.[258] But all these were subjected to different authorities who might combine the materials differently, prescribe different intake procedures and activate the amulets through different rituals.

2.8 Conclusions

In the first half of the 20th century, when Canaan assembled his collection of amulets, two medical cultures coexisted in Palestine. These medical cultures were prevalent throughout greater Syria, and used same of slightly different terminology. On the one hand the traditional forms of healing and protection which were predominant in the rural areas among peasants and bedouins, on the other hand new forms of biomedical practice recently introduced by Western doctors/institutions. These two medical cultures conceptualised illness, healing and efficacy, in different ways. Their encounter however, did not produce a clash, rather, interesting ways of negotiation and adaptation. Although efforts were made to replace traditional forms of healing with modern ones, the local population continued to use traditional remedies into the 20th century. In some areas, like in the South, the process of abandoning amulets in favour of the biomedical approach started even only with the spread of public education with the Egyptian administration in Gaza. The synergy between modern medicine and traditional healing can be seen in the mechanisms of adaptation and the changes in both practices over time. On the one hand, amulets continued to function even after the introduction of biomedicine, however the pragmatic logic behind their use allowed for new forms of treatment to be incorporated. On the other hand modern doctors had to adjust to the centuries-old practices and negotiate treatments where their medicaments could be combined with amulets.

An important result of the encounter of these two forms of medicine was the "discovery" and documentation of the use of different materials in the manufacture of traditional remedies and the ways they were applied in cures. This anthropological interest in traditional medicine was recorded by many scholars: Taufiq Canaan, Gustaf Dalman, Henry Spoer, Grace Crowfoot and

[258] For the importance of following prescriptions correctly, see the case study of the bedouins in the Negev in A. Popper-Giveon; A. Abu-Rabia and J. Ventura, "From White Stone to Blue Bead: Materialised Beliefs and Sacred Beads Among the Bedouin in Israel" in *Material Religion*, 10.2 (2014)

Louise Baldensperger.[259] Had it not been for their work, un-inscribed amulets and those made of organic materials, would never become object of academic research.

Although the ethnographic /medical eye of these modern scholars of late the 19th century and early 20th century in general explained amulets as superstition and residual elements of a corrupted Biblical past, some provided insights describing amulets functioning within an internal logic. Contemporary studies on traditional medicine have used tools to analyse amulets focusing on how users evaluate their efficacy and continue using certain remedies or dispose them. Approaching them in this way, amulets reveal their complexity in the way they integrate different aspects of the cosmology of the users and reflect aspects of the society. For instance, the mixed-material multi-purpose amulets articulate the belief in the sanctity of persons, the landmarks and the intrinsic power of nature; and the inter-confessional amulets disclose that geographical location was more important than religious affiliation, as well as the fluid nature of agrarian religion. Features of the landscape, climate and geological formation, as well as the location of sanctuaries defined the cult around certain saints and the use of certain materials in amulets such as milk beads, and Musa stones.

The function of healing and protection lays at the base of the existence of amulets. The power to restore well-being is their raison-d'être. However, there were other powers that executed an influence on the amulets sometimes directly in the production process, sometimes at later stages in the life of the amulets. Such alternative or additional uses and functions that developed in parallel and subsequently in the 20th century when they become ethnographic data, collectibles, commodities in antique shops, and museographic objects will be the topic of the following chapters.

[259] Their work and relation to Canaan will be explored in the next chapter. References to their work can be seen in the bibliography.