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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 4. Amulets as commodities

### 4.1 Outline

On 4 September 1940, Taufiq Canaan visited Mr. Ohan's antique shop in the old city of Jerusalem where he purchased one copper amulet for 400 mils. After three days Canaan visited him once again to get five more amulets of the same kind, namely arm amulets all made of copper. This time Canaan paid 2250 mils, a considerable amount of money that only few people in Palestine would have destined for the purchase of amulets which were not actually aimed to be used for healing or protective purposes. According to Canaan's notes, he repeatedly bought amulets to enlarge his collection and to complete the small selection prepared for Mr. Wellcome<sup>353</sup>. Most of his purchases took place in Jerusalem's old city market where antiquarians proliferated, but he also got many items from individuals who were not related at all to the antiquities trade.<sup>354</sup> Canaan was not the only one on the hunt for amulets and other objects in Palestine's markets in the early 20th century. Amulets had always been bought and sold by makers and users. Now a third group involved in the commerce of these objects was added: collectors.

This chapter revolves around another stage in the life of the amulets, when they functioned as commodities. In order to become commodities, amulets had to go through a process of commoditisation whereby they lost their personalised and specific characteristics allowing for impersonalised/objective exchange between parties. This exchange was based on the value posed on objects' material and immaterial aspects, such as the use of precious materials, if they were fashionable, new, popular, or reversely antique, old, unique, associated with a special place, or deemed to be efficacious. This value was continuously redefined by the interactions between the manufacturer, the client, the collector, the broker, the seller and the object itself.

By analysing the way amulets were bought, sold, and exchanged, this chapter discloses the commercial dimension of their production, acquisition and circulation in public and private networks. We can see the fabrication and sale of whole (or parts) of new amulets, the sale of used refurbished amulets by travelling merchants, the transfer of amulets within families as heirlooms or

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<sup>353</sup> This selection made for Henry Wellcome is discussed in Chapter 5 where I analyse the political implications of Canaan's collecting process, and I explore the way Canaan exported his ideas about national identity to the British public.

<sup>354</sup> T. Canaan, *Unpublished catalogue of the Tawfik Canaan Collection (in German)*

between acquaintances as gifts, but also the sale of amulets to antiquities dealers, who again put them in the market to be sold, re-used and re-embodied.

Framed in the first half of the 20th century, the chapter analyses the commoditisation processes of amulets that took place before and in parallel with Canaan's acquisition of his collection. These objects had been circulating as healing and protective remedies among family members, local markets, and pilgrimage sites for long time. However, in the early 20th century another network took shape with the raising interests of ethnographers and collectors. Among them amulets began to acquire value not for being efficacious remedies, but for being ethnographic data and collectibles. The chapter explores how this occurred by taking into account the effects of foreign tourism to Jerusalem, the role of foreign scholars and travellers in the creation of new commercial networks, in which specialised antiques' shops traded objects including clothes and amulets, that were considered part of Palestine's folklore. Finally, the chapter analyses the effects of these networks on the local population, and new forms of consumption in which peasants, bedouin and townsmen operated.

#### ***4.2 Commoditisation of amulets***

Beyond being considered sacred and magical objects with healing properties, so far the most studied aspect, amulets fulfil other uses and functions. As this thesis shows throughout the chapters, amulets go through different moments in their life as *things*. At each stage, amulets display different qualities. Exploring the aspect of commoditisation adds yet another dimension to the study of amulets and talismans, which focuses on the processes by which exchange value is imagined for and imposed on objects, and on the networks where this exchange value is set, recognised and bargained keeping amulets in circulation. Examining the commoditisation of amulets in early 20th century Palestine brings to light social transformations such as the creation of new professions like the *médecins diplômés*, the antiquarians, the physician-collector, the ethnographer specialist in Palestine folklore; and the cultural practices such as carrying out ethnographic work, forming collections, and exhibiting them abroad. It also discloses processes of selection and the formation of taste in which certain items became fashionable and more desirable.

Amulets in collections have been generally approached as representatives of a particular culture. The interpretation of these objects was connected to and frozen in time at the moment they were collected, as if they were disconnected of any accumulative past or present. Recently, the focus is no longer only on the documentation made by collectors, but also on how these objects

functioned before they became part of collections. However, amulets in collections are still studied as isolated cases, and when used for an exhibition they are always arranged to narrate a particular story around magical, religious and medical practices.

Scholars began exploring amulets as commodities as result of the growing interest in the production and consumption of material goods. The shifting of the attention from the religious, magical and medical functions of amulets to their circulation as commodities came from examples currently available in the marketplace.<sup>355</sup> Amulets of contemporary manufacture sold as sacred souvenirs or ancient amulets available in antique shops clearly exemplified their status of commodities. However, for objects contained in collections that have not circulated in a long time (as commodities) the commodity status is more difficult to trace. This is because details about their acquisition are not always recorded, and even when available, this aspect of their circulation has not attracted much attention. I argue that the reason is that collections' items have been regarded as representatives of an "interesting" culture to be studied; they have been neglected as representatives of the culture that allowed the collection formation to happen. It is only well documented objects, such as museum master pieces, that have been researched in association to the culture they come from and to the way they have been commoditised in the art networks.<sup>356</sup>

Luckily for us the documentation of Canaan's collecting process is very rich. From all his acquisitions, the amulets he purchased might be the clearest and most immediate examples of commoditisation. However, commoditisation also took place during his encounter with patients where the value of the amulets was negotiated and set as a means of payment; moreover, it can also be seen in all amulets that Canaan received as gifts. In other words, commoditisation appears in different forms based on the engagement between amulet manufacturers, users, traders and collectors.

For centuries, even before collectors like Canaan acquired an interest in collecting, amulets were sold by practitioners, bought by clients, and sold again among users. Villagers and townspeople from different social classes, and representatives of religious communities and professions were involved in their circulation. One reason was their efficacy as discussed in Chapter 2. If people had experienced positive outcomes in terms of protection and healing, they would pay a

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<sup>355</sup> Vũ, Hồng Thuật. "Amulets and the Marketplace" in *Asian Ethnology*, Vol.67, No. 2, Popular Religion and the Sacred Life of Material Goods in Contemporary Vietnam (2008), pp. 237-255

<sup>356</sup> A. Wharton's research on the commoditisation of Jerusalem through relics and replicas show that it was only possible to reconstruct the circulation of objects of the past due to their religious relevance. Cfr. A. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*.



lot of money for more amulets. In general terms, because amulets were very much in demand, prices of amulets varied making them accessible to everyone. Amulets were also purchased for aesthetic reasons. Many amulets were simply very beautiful and were acquired to be shown to others. These kinds of embellishment amulets were mostly jewellery and were used as part of women's attire in all regions of the Levant.

Processes of commoditisation have been key in the circulation of amulets. Amulets enter and exit the status of commodity in different circumstances. From the very moment of manufacture some amulets are meant to be sold or exchanged. Others are not, but eventually find their way into networks where commoditisation takes place. Even when amulets have been made with the aim of being gifts, their capacity to become commodities seems to determine their value. As explored in the following section, gifts create an obligation to reciprocate, an exchange that can be seen as a form of commoditisation.

The final purpose of any amulet was to be used as protective or healing means, a phase that has been explored in Chapter 2. Made to serve a medical purpose, amulets were obtained from a sheikh or a professional healer; a *rāqin* or specialist in *ruqya*; or from the perfumiers or *al-‘aṭṭārīn*<sup>357</sup>. They could also be purchased at the market or local shrine where sellers would come together to offer pilgrims the latest and most popular remedies. The difference between amulets made for specific clients and amulets available in the marketplace, was that the former were personalised at the moment of their manufacture, while the latter were non-personalised objects that could be used by anyone. The first kind of amulets were usually made and used by only one user, but could be sold in the marketplace if the materials were valuable. The second kind of amulets were manufactured without any particular user in mind and contained elements that were popularly recognised as powerful amulets.

After amulets had fulfilled their initial purpose as healing and protective objects, they would either stopped being used, or entered (again) a commodity status. In this transition they went from being personalised objects to non-personalised objects. In other words, commoditisation required a de-personalisation process whereby objects could be once again used by anyone. In order to be effective and to be used by the new owner, amulets had to go through a *singularisation* process, in which they had to be personalised for the new purpose, reason and conditions, and

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<sup>357</sup> I have here left the plural ending in accusative/genitive since it is the form used in the Palestinian dialect, and it is the way they are known among people.

activated again by a specialist healer. If the amulet was bought by a collector, a different kind of singularisation process took place to give the objects meaning in a new context.

According to Kopytoff, *commoditisation* processes are contrasted to those that led to *singularisation*. In the circulation of objects, these two processes take place continuously. On the one hand commoditisation is defined as the process through which an item gets use value and exchange value. These two kinds of value, appear in things in particular phases of their life. Following Kopytoff's theory of things explored in the Introduction, since things are entangled with society and therefore have a social life, a commodity is rather a status or a certain phase in the life of a thing than a permanent quality. Because commodities result from cultural and cognitive processes, when things move around in time and space, their exchange value is modified.<sup>358</sup> This means that things that are commoditised at times might not enter this phase in a different time in history due to cultural and political restrictions. 'Things move in and out of this phase not because it is a temporal phase, but because they are granted some kind of value which allows them to be exchanged with other things or other products such as services'<sup>359</sup>

Singularisation on the other hand, sets the thing as non-exchangeable. Some things are *per se* singular, meaning that from the very beginning they are excluded from exchange; other things enter this phase of singularisation later. Singularisation makes the thing stand out, become distinct or conspicuous, while commoditisation transforms it into something ordinary, common, day-to-day—even though it may appear singular for the one who acquires it, like a person who gets a gift. Things that are considered sacred and unique such as the black stone of the Kaaba or the communion bread are examples of this singularity. They are socially recognised as not able to be subjected to exchange. This recognition or social agreement on what is singular, is determined historically, and objects that were singular at times, entered the market at others.

Beyond things that are classified as singular to a more or lesser degree, there are things whose commoditisation is *terminal*. Kopytoff uses this term to refer to things in which further exchange is prevented by decree.<sup>360</sup> For instance, in many societies medicine men or healers make and sell medicine that is utterly singular, in other words, that cannot be commoditised. It is

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<sup>358</sup> A. Appadurai, "Introduction. Commodities and the Politics of Value" in *The Social Life of Things*, edit. A. Appadurai, Cambridge University Press, p.16

<sup>359</sup> I. Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditisation as Process." in *The Social Life of Things*, edit. A. Appadurai, Op. Cit., p.13

<sup>360</sup> I. Kopytoff, *Op. Cit.*, p.75

efficacious only for the intended patient. In this category we can find most amulets and talismans which are personalised and made for one single user, and that are eventually disposed. The *terminal* aspect of amulets' commoditisation, however, can be contested as we explore how they circulate and function in the different stages in their life as things. After having been used as medical treatment, amulets might no longer be efficacious as amulets. They can, however, enter a commoditisation process again as data or ethnographic evidence, souvenirs, jewels and curiosa. If we think of the different phases of the Canaan amulets (as healing and protective remedies, ethnographic material, collectibles, and cultural heritage) the many different forms in which amulets can be commoditised become clear. Considering this endless sequence of exchange in which objects participate, it does not seem appropriate to speak of a terminal aspect to commoditisation of objects. Canaan's amulets have shown that depending on the value attributed to the materials employed, their rarity, and their representativity of the Palestinian culture, they could be commoditised once again, particularly as their circulation shifted from one network to another.

An interesting shift was that of amulets that were put back into circulation due to the value of the materials employed. Personalised amulets usually remained with the user all the time and were not passed on. They were, however, sometimes passed on to members of the family to be re-used when their efficacy was deemed to be especially great. In other cases, due to their valuable materials they could be also passed on as heirlooms or sold after used.

### ***4.3. The manufacture of amulets***

Amulets enter the phase of commoditisation from the moment they are manufactured. Making an amulet always comes with the goal in mind, to be used by someone. Unless the amulet is made by the user her/himself, amulets are made to be sold or exchanged. The amulets in the Tawfik Canaan Collection point to different manufacture procedures involving professions such as sheikhs, artisans such as smiths, glassmakers, jewellers, and *al-aṭṭārīn*. Each of them was involved either in the manufacture of components of an amulet, or the amulet as a whole. What follows is the description of their role in the manufacture of amulets.

#### ***4.3.1. The sheikhs***

Sheikhs have played an important role in the manufacture and distribution of amulets. They usually stand at the beginning of the life of amulets because they have the knowledge about magical, medical and religious textual and oral traditions needed to prepare amulets. The sheikhs who appear

in Canaan's notes belonged to different social classes, religious communities, and lived in different localities. All of them manufactured and prepared amulets and talismans in different ways and with different means depending on their knowledge and social background. Whether they were from a village, from a town, from a Bedouin tribe or from a well-known Jerusalemite elite family, their amulets depended on the materials available to them, their knowledge on the subject and of course the people's demand for certain amulets. Some sheikhs were famous for producing particular amulets, so while a Bedouin sheikh from the al-ʿAzazme tribe was famous for his herbal remedies, Sheikh Nubani was for his written amulets, and Sheikh Ibrahim Hasan al-Ansari for the amulets connected to *al-haram al-sharif* such as the pilgrimage certificates he issued and stamped.<sup>361</sup>

In his notes, Canaan mentions approximately 20 sheikhs. Why approximately? Ten of them are identified with their full name, nine of them are identified only by their place of origin, one of them is identified by his religious affiliation, and three are just called "a sheikh", which could refer to anyone of the previous.<sup>362</sup> Those identified by name were very well known individuals. Those whose names are not provided, might have been local ones with not enough reputation, or Canaan did not bother to register their names, because he did not meet them and what he knew about them came through his patients or people who have got their amulets. Their designation as "sheikh" does not mean that all of them had the same status, authority and carried out the same tasks. They did not necessarily have the same education. A sheikh could be either at the head of the religious establishment, a Muslim scholar, a tribal chief, a charismatic man within a *ṭarīqa*, or simply an older person who had acquired authority and prestige, in one way or another.<sup>363</sup>

So what enabled someone to be recognised as a sheikh? The authority and prestige of the sheikhs stemmed from their knowledge on religious matters and their ability to apply their knowledge in everyday situations. Their authority could also result from their capacity to make efficacious amulets. They would write them, assemble them or, activate them in the case of ready-made amulets. Some sheikhs lived in towns or villages and people would go visit them to get their amulets. Others, Canaan mentioned, were wandering dervishes, who visited villages and offered all kinds of amulets for sale. There were many amulet makers and because amulets were so much in

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<sup>361</sup> Amulet no.589 from Canaan's catalogue is a stone from *al-haram al-sharif*. The stone is meant to be soaked in water and the water drunk. The intake of healing properties of stones in this way is very common.

<sup>362</sup> See table with names and objects given to Canaan. Table 4 in Appendix B

<sup>363</sup> Geoffroy, E., "Shaykh", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 10 June 2019 <[http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/2048/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_6890](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/2048/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6890)>

demand, “charlatans” ventured to make some profit selling amulets supposedly made by famous amulet makers. Amulets from well-known and socially recognised sheikhs were tried by many people. The prestige of these amulet makers could also result from their ethnic origin. According to Canaan, the Sudanese and the Moghrabiten sheikhs<sup>364</sup> —known as such due to their *maghribī* origin — were well known in Jerusalem for their amulets. They manufactured personalised amulets but also would keep a stock of amulets for trade in faraway villages.<sup>365</sup>

Some sheikhs were well-known because they belonged to prominent families such as al-Ansari, al-Husseini, al-Nashashibi, whose religious authority had been acknowledged in Palestinian society for a long time. Other sheikhs were well-known for their knowledge on *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* and *al-ṭibb al-taqlīdī*<sup>366</sup>, the traditional medicine that included the use of herbs, seeds and fruits to prepare medication, but also the use of animal body parts, stones, and writing in the preparation of amulets.<sup>367</sup> Some of these sheikhs belonged to a Sufi group (*ṣūfī ṭarīqa*) and their reputation spread among its adherents. Canaan mentions for example Sheikh Atif from the *ṭarīqat al-qādiriya* and Sheikh Mahmud al-Falki from Jerusalem<sup>368</sup>, from the *ṭarīqat al-dhāhirīya*. They were professional amulet makers and practitioners of autochthonous medicine.

Most of the amulets prepared by sheikhs contained text, either hand-written or printed. Hand-written amulets were usually made on small pieces of paper, folded or rolled up and kept in a leather or fabric pouch or a metal case. These written amulets were personalised and made for specific clients to be used under prescription following the indications of the sheikh. The contents of the amulets varied from Qur’anic verses to magical formulae, unconnected letters, and signs. They were sometimes copied from manuals or old texts that had been considered part of the

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<sup>364</sup> Canaan has transliterated it as such. Cfr. notes on cardboards.

<sup>365</sup> Canaan, T., *Aberglaube*, p.92; More about mobility of peasants and circulation of goods among villages in Late Ottoman Palestine Cfr. McElrone, Susynne. “Villagers on the Move: Re-thinking Fallahin Rootedness in Late-Ottoman Palestine”, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 54, (2013) pp.56-68

<sup>366</sup> *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* or the medicine of the Prophet, is a kind of medicine derived from the Hadith literature where remedies and cures used by prophet Muhammad are followed to letter. On the other hand, *al-ṭibb al-taqlīdī* is a wider category of medicine that may include elements of the medicine of the Prophet but also local remedies not necessarily based on Islamic texts.

<sup>367</sup> See Chapter 2 of this thesis, on amulets as healing and protective remedies.

<sup>368</sup> Sheikh ‘Āṭif and Sheikh Maḥmūd al-Falkī

magical tradition<sup>369</sup>. Sheikhs also issued printed documents that could be used as amulets. They were printed locally, in Jerusalem, or abroad. Some amulets that Canaan collected came from printing shops in Egypt as discussed below in the next section. Printed matter included pilgrimage certificates, supplications, and prayers; they were believed to protect the household if hung on the wall. They were made for general purposes and could be acquired by anyone. This is shown by the fact that among Canaan's collected certificates, there are a few without name and certification. Only those who had carried out *ziyāra* or pilgrimage to holy places in Palestine could get their certificate personalised. This was done by a sheikh, who as the authority in matter would write the name of the pilgrim on it, sign it and stamp it. Other printed amulets contained stories extracted from the Qur'an, such as the one of *ahl al-kahf*<sup>370</sup>, or stories of a particular amulet such as *hīrz al-andhrūn*<sup>371</sup> and *hīrz al-ghāsila*<sup>372</sup>. These amulets were distributed without personalising them, because their power rested on the magical quality of the story itself.

Some sheikhs who made paper talismans are the following. Sheikh Mahmud al-Falki—also known as Shaykh Mahmud Basha al-Khatib, belonged to *al-ṭarīqat al-dhāhirīya*. He was a well-known amulet maker from Jerusalem who lived outside the Old City. He lived in *jūrat al-'ināb* until 1948 when he moved to Ramallah where he died in 1954.<sup>373</sup> He wrote a famous book *al-muntakhab al-naḥīs min 'ilm nabī allāh idrīs*, which includes a section on *'ilm al-ḥurūf*, where he exposes part of the knowledge he used for amulet-making.<sup>374</sup> His amulets contained inscriptions in special arrangements and letter combinations. Canaan got from him three amulets. The first is no. 837, made of two pieces of glass with a written talisman on them. Prepared for a girl who had epilepsy, the pieces were meant to be submerged in water in order for the writing to be dissolved in it. The

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<sup>369</sup> These texts included the works of al-Buni. On how al-Buni's mystical texts entered the magical tradition Cfr. Coulon, Jean-Charles. "Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum" in *Amulets and Talismans from the Middle East and North Africa in Context*. Leiden Studies in Islam and Society Series. Leiden: Brill (in process of publication)

<sup>370</sup> The People of the Cave or the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

<sup>371</sup> Amulet no. 1075

<sup>372</sup> Amulet no. 1076

<sup>373</sup> "This place as the name indicates is a pit or a small valley, and the name might come from the fact that this kind of tree, the *'enāb* abounded there... *Jawrat al-'enāb* was located nearby Bab al-Khalil outside the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. The place is nowadays part of the National Park of Jerusalem and it is under Israeli control." Cfr. Garcia Probert, M.A. "Twigs in the Tawfiq Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets" in *Amulets and Talismans from the Middle East and North Africa in Context*, Leiden Studies in Islam and Society Series. Leiden: Brill (in process of publication)

<sup>374</sup> Second edition 1950 Cfr. <https://ia800307.us.archive.org/27/items/AlmontakabAl-nafeae/AlmontakabAl-nafeae.pdf>

water was drunk afterwards. The second amulet is no. 887, which contains six pieces of paper with inscriptions written with saffron water. The papers were meant to be burnt, one every day. The third amulets is the one catalogued under no. 1065, it contains two sheets of paper, and was written for a girl (no more information is given).

Other amulets issued by sheikhs were made of materials other than paper or combined a paper inscribed amulet with other elements. Sheikh al-Nubani, a practitioner of *al-ṭibb al-taqlīdī* was known for his written amulets but also for his knowledge of medical remedies using herbs and animal body parts. Canaan registered having acquired from him a few items in 1912. Amulet no. 294 consists of seven needles with threads of different colours wrapped in a paper covered with disconnected letters, and used against the jinn. Amulet no. 835 is a shoulder blade of a lamb. Used to cure mental illness, it was cooked in lentils and drunk for three days in a row. Amulet no. 836 is a shoulder blade of a lamb with written inscriptions to keep Satan away. It was hung at the entrance of a house to keep the owners safe from the jinn. No.1065 is a shoulder blade from a lamb. Written against the face paralysis of a man, the bone had to be burnt hanging attached to an olive tree.

Some sheikhs were involved in the production of non-textual amulets. These amulets were based on the traditional knowledge about the use of herbs and the law of similarities for the use of stones that we have explored in Chapter 2. Although the text was not inscribed in the objects, it was through the pronunciation of certain magico-religious formulae that the sheikhs activated their power. These amulets could be produced by many more than the written amulets that needed specialised literate knowledge—a knowledge that some sheikhs did not have. Un-inscribed amulets could be made by artisans or users themselves. In some cases small souvenirs or healing and protective objects functioned as amulets by themselves.

#### **4.3.1.1. Pilgrimage certificates**

The fact that Canaan included pilgrimage certificates in his collection of amulets shows that they could be used as protective devices. Similar to amulets for general purposes, these certificates were used by putting them in contact to the person or property aimed to be protected. In Palestine, pilgrimage certificates were issued by the corresponding authorities of the holy places for Muslims, Christians and Jews. However, Muslim visitors to *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* were not considered pilgrims by most scholars and imams.<sup>375</sup> By the time Canaan acquired his certificates, *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* including *Al-Aqsa Mosque* and the *Dome of the Rock* had been for decades under the protection of

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<sup>375</sup> See Fada'il al Quds on Muslim pilgrimage

the al-Ansari family. The surname of this family was originally al-Danaf.<sup>376</sup> Canaan registered having acquired amulets from three members of al-Ansari family: Shaykh Yahya al-Danaf<sup>377</sup>, Shaykh Khalil Badr al-Danaf, and Shaykh Ibrahim Hasan al-Ansari. Other names of members of the family also appear in the certificates, as issuers or as responsible for their distribution. This is the case of Abd al-Rahman and Abdallah al-Ansari<sup>378</sup>, names that appear in the colophon of amulet no. 945. This amulet contains on one side a full list of names of the holy sites, in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine, that must be visited. On the back is a hand-written certificate of pilgrimage that contains many seals. The certificate in question was obtained by Canaan from a pilgrim who used it as an amulet, a fact that can also be deduced from the way it was folded, into a small square.

Among the certificates collected by Canaan we can distinguish three main types of documents. All of them were proof of having visited the holy sites in Palestine and were used as amulets because they were embedded with the *baraka* of the sites. The first type were pilgrimage certificates issued for a particular pilgrim after the completion of his *ziyāra*. This kind of document explicitly mentioned that the pilgrim had completed his pilgrimage. Second were the itineraries of holy places that contained a list of places that the pilgrim had to visit. Third were sheets of paper with pictures of the holy sites. These were probably itineraries, but instead of having a written list, they contained visual representations of the sites. They might have been made for pilgrims who could not read. Based on the evidence provided by Canaan, only the first type of certificates were personalised either by writing down the name of the client or pilgrim,<sup>379</sup> or by stamping them with special seals. Stamping the document was a way of validating it, which also activated its protective power making it ready to be hung on the walls of the pilgrim's house. As for the itineraries, they were also used as amulets, probably because the pilgrims had carried them during their visits. All these documents, with or without trace of ownership, could be passed down and reused by relatives

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<sup>376</sup> K. al-Nashef, Introduction to the translation into Arabic of the catalogue.

<sup>377</sup> In Canaan's notes some of the names of the donors are recorded as al-Ansari, others as al-Danaf, but they refer to the same family. Amulet no. 1094 is a seal from al-Danaf family, used to stamp paper documents used as amulets. This seal was given to Canaan in 1942; Amulets no. 1098, 1099 come from the same donor.

<sup>378</sup> Amulet no. 945 is a full list of names of the holy sites in Jerusalem to be visited by any pilgrim.

<sup>379</sup> No. 947 = 948: Pilgrimage certificate without images with Hebrew inscription. On the back, hand-written certificate. 944: Old pilgrimage certificate with one picture. Obtained in Jerusalem in 1912, from a pilgrim who used it as amulet.



(or others), and after kept circulating within families long after the pilgrimage had been completed.<sup>380</sup> They would keep working as a protective means for the entire family.<sup>381</sup>

The same seals used to stamp pilgrimage certificates were also used to stamp talismans issued to pilgrims. Taufiq Canaan collected a group of 28 seals together with the series of printed and stamped amulets. The seals have various shapes: a sword, a hand (*khamisa*), a circle and a rectangle (with inscriptions). They all came from Shaykh Khalil Badr al-Danaf (al-Ansari)<sup>382</sup>, who reported having them in the family for 80 to 100 years, as they had belonged to his grandfather. The stamped talismans form an interesting group of items that deserve more exploration, particularly on the symbolism of the stamps, the inscriptions they bear, the arrangement of the stamps on the sheets of paper, and the ritual context in which these talismans were produced. Although they were issued by the same authorities, the intended use of the stamped talismans differed from the certificates. While pilgrimage certificates and itineraries were first of all a proof of *ziyāra* and used as an extension of the *baraka* of the holy site, the stamped talismans acquired their power not only from the connexion to the holy site, but also from the seals themselves, their shape, the kind of inscription and, as Venetia Porter mentions, from whether the stamp came from a seal engraved in positive or negative.<sup>383</sup> The power of the stamped talismans also might have derived from the arrangement of the stamps on the sheet most of the times creating geometrical and symmetrical designs.<sup>384</sup>

Given the rising number of pilgrims who were visiting the holy places in Palestine, authorities had to produce more certificates, itineraries, and talismans, and what better way to do by using printed documents and seals. The use of seals allowed amulet-making authorities to produce objects with more speed and frequency than hand-written amulets, and make them available to more

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<sup>380</sup> No. 943: Pilgrimage certificate with seals and pictures of the holy sites. Obtained from a pilgrim who used it as an amulet.

<sup>381</sup> The long life of certificates was due to the fact that it was loaded with the *baraka* of the place or of the religious authority who had issued it. Since it was hung on the wall of the house, it protected the house where the pilgrim lived, but also the members of the house, even after the death of the pilgrim.

<sup>382</sup> The seals are registered in the catalogue from no. 1307-1335

<sup>383</sup> V. Porter, *Arabic and Persian seals and amulets*, p.131

<sup>384</sup> For more on the meaning of amulets and inscriptions go to chapter 5. Amulet no. 951 is a talisman composed of eight seals, three squared, five round. It was obtained from a Muslim woman in Jerusalem in 1912. No. 952-957 are sealed talismans manufactured in Jerusalem by al-Ansari family, distributed to pilgrims and inhabitants of the city, and obtained by Canaan in 1913. For the geometrical disposition of the stamps see paper amulets at the Birzeit University Virtual Gallery, <http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/tour/ethno/coll-items?id=0118>

people. Karl Schaefer has discussed the relation between the block-printed amulets and the increase in the number of consumers.<sup>385</sup> Although we are not dealing here with the same kind of block-printed amulets as those analysed by Schaefer, there must have been a co-relation between stamped amulets and an increase in the number of pilgrims requesting them. In the form of a pilgrimage certificate or a stamped talisman with geometrical composition, these printed material seem to have been popular.



Figure 17. Stamped pilgrimage certificate. Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.  
Catalogued no. 942.  
*Photo taken by the author*

<sup>385</sup> Schaefer, Karl. *Enigmatic Charms, Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums*. Netherlands: Brill, 2006; Schaefer, Karl. The Material Nature of Block Printed Amulets: What Makes Them Amulets? in *Amulets and Talismans from the Middle East and North Africa in Context*, Leiden Studies in Islam and Society Series. Leiden: Brill





Figure 18. Seals used to stamp certificates and talismans. Tawfik Canaan Collection.  
*Photo taken by the author*

Tawfiq Canaan collected some certificates that had been issued by Hasan al-Ansari, sometimes referred to as Shaykh Ibrahim al-Danaf. He was responsible for the protection of the holy sites as indicated in all the documents with a reference to him as *nāshir* (publisher/issuer) and *qā'im basha al-ḥaram al-sharīf bayt al-maqdis*.<sup>386</sup> In 1922, Canaan obtained directly from him item no. 941, an amulet meant to be hung in the house.<sup>387</sup> It is said to be a printed illustrated copy of the letter of the Prophet Muhammad to *al-muqawqis*.<sup>388</sup> It contains the family tree of the Prophet and some invocations. Two other items, no 949 and 950, show that the documents distributed by Ibrahim Hasan al-Ansari's were printed—and probably also circulated—outside of Palestine. They were printed in Cairo, Egypt by the publishing house of Amin Afandi Hindiyah: *maṭba'a wa maktabatay amīn hindīh bi al-muskī wa shāri' al-manākh*, and sent to Palestine for their

<sup>386</sup> *qā'im basha al-ḥaram al-sharīf bayt al-maqdis* was the title given to the custodian of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* which includes the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque.

<sup>387</sup> Cfr. T. Canaan, Unpublished Catalogue to the Tawfiq Canaan Collection/ Nashef, K.

<sup>388</sup> *al-muqawqis* is mentioned in Islamic sources as ruler of Egypt, who corresponded with prophet Muhammad. He was a Greek man, leader of the Copts.

distribution. No. 949 is a supplication with depictions of the Islamic holy sites on the header, and no. 950 is a sheet with the depiction of the three Islamic holy places —in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. These documents must have been printed by thousands, and this printing capacity might have only been found in Cairo.

Under the same authorship are no. 942 and 946, which Canaan obtained in 1913. They are two pilgrimage certificates to the holy sites printed in Jerusalem and issued for diverse pilgrims, they have the picture of the Dome of the Rock. On them there are seals in the shapes of a hand, a sword and circle that might have been added by the Sheikh himself. The certificates have a space to fill in the name of the pilgrim and the issue date. The fact that these certificates have no name on them, points to the fact that Sheikh Ibrahim gave them to Canaan as non-personalised objects, probably with the purpose of contributing a sample to his collection.

#### 4.3.2 *Artisans*

While a sheikh produced the amulet himself on the basis of his expertise and knowledge, he sometimes relied for some parts of the amulet on the market of artisans and their products. Different kinds of artisans were involved in the manufacture of amulets. They had the hardworking skills to craft materials, but did not necessarily know about informing amulets with magical power. Their products were available in the market to be used as or in the preparation of amulets, meaning that they produced parts that were made into amulets by others, or manufactured whole amulets or objects that functioned as amulets in themselves. These artisans included jewellers, smiths, and glass makers. Smiths manufactured big objects such as the magic bowls,<sup>389</sup> and supplied jewellers with metal sheets and wire for the manufacture of pendants, rings, and amulet cases, among others. Canaan collected a group of magic bowls and dedicated one of his articles to this particular kinds of object.<sup>390</sup> Focusing on the physical features of the bowls and the way they were used in healing treatments, Canaan observed that around 1930's the mass production of magic bowls had replaced the manufacture of handcrafted bowls. This is an indication of the how technologies were adapted in the manufacture of bowls, seemingly more adequate to the demand.<sup>391</sup> Jewellers manufactured

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<sup>389</sup> Tawfiq Canaan gives the different Arabic names given to these bowls in Palestine: *ṭaset er-radjfeh*, *ṭaset er-ra'beh*, *ṭaset el-ḥōfeh* and *ṭaset el-ḥaddah*. The names follow the transliteration of Palestinian Arabic. Cfr. Canaan, Tawfiq, "The Fear Cup" in *JPOS* III (1923) pp. 122-131; T. Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls" in *JPOS* XVI (1936) pp.79-127

<sup>390</sup> T. Canaan, *Ibidem*.

<sup>391</sup> T. Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls" in *JPOS* XVI (1936) p. 117

amuletic jewellery by using silver and gold pieces or small objects made of tin and copper. These kinds of objects, available in shops like that of Mr. Ohan, were used right away, or if needed to add a special power, they went through an activation process.<sup>392</sup> In contrast to some written amulets that were kept in pouches and used underneath the clothes, pieces of amuletic jewellery were used to be shown due to their beauty and fine materials.

Canaan mentions that “dealers” visited all these artisans and their respective workshops to get what they needed.<sup>393</sup> I assume that these dealers, as mentioned before, could be the sheikhs, the middlemen sellers who sold to sheikhs or directly to clients, or the antiquarians who would visit the artisans looking for unique objects. This shows that artisans were manufacturers, not always selling directly to clients. The dealers who had a shop in the market were the intermediaries who had a safe steady clientele. In Jerusalem clients were of diverse backgrounds, they were not only those residents of the city, but the seasonal travelers. Traders who sold their products itinerantly such as the wandering dervishes, targeted a different clientele, their business relied on how skilled they were at finding clients. For this they had to study their market to have the amulets that people wanted.

Other important artisans involved in the amulet production were the *khalīlī* glass makers<sup>394</sup>. A number of amulets in the Canaan collection were made of or contained glass beads manufactured in Hebron, a city that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was very well known for its glass production. The Hebron factories made glass products since the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>395</sup> It was only after 1947 with the Israeli occupation that the commercial activities of the city diminished. The factories were owned by a small number of families and manufactured products such as vases, cups, plates, but also jewellery and beads of many colours and shapes. Based on the analysis of the Canaan amulets, *khalīlī* beads appear mainly in bedouin amulets, suggesting that the Bedouins might have been the main clients of glass beads in Palestine. The Bedouins in question were from the south (Negev Dessert/Sinai), and used beads in the manufacture of their handicrafts and amulets. The way these beads travelled to the south is not documented. It is not clear if the Hebronite glass makers had intermediaries selling their products in the south or if the bedouins bought them at the factories.

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<sup>392</sup> Different activation processes are discussed in Chapter 2 on amulets as healing and protective remedies.

<sup>393</sup> T. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, p.93

<sup>394</sup> *khalīlī* is the demonym for the inhabitants of Hebron

<sup>395</sup> N. al-Jubeih, “Hebron Glass A Centuries-old Tradition”, *This Week in Palestine*, Jan. 2007. Cfr. <http://archive.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=2133&ed=140&edid=140>

By the time Canaan collected his amulets, the glass factories were selling not only in Hebron but also in markets and shops in other cities.<sup>396</sup> Glass beads were sold to amulet makers or to suppliers where people could buy them directly to make their own amulets. These glass beads were deemed to be particularly powerful due to the connection they had with *al-ḥaram al-ibrāhīmī* where Prophet Ibrahim and his family are buried. Many of these beads were sold at the site as souvenirs to pilgrims who took them to their hometown. As already mentioned before in Chapter 2, eye beads of different sizes were particularly famous in the composition of amulets. However the most widespread glass bead was the tiny blue one.

#### 4.3.3 Self-made amulets

Users also manufacture amulets themselves. These were amulets that did not require a specialised technique as it happened for instance with jewellery made by specialist artisans who had the proper tools to pierce and mould metal. These self-made amulets hardly ever included inscriptions, which were left to the specialist amulet makers who knew about the uses and application of specific texts.

Simple in their manufacture, these self-made amulets were very diverse in materials and techniques. They could be made of stones, beads, pieces of wood and metallic pendants. Components of these self-made amulets came directly from the landscape like twigs, seeds, coral, shells and stones, but could also be bought in markets and attached to the amulet. These amulets usually contained many parts that were obtained separately and then arranged by the users themselves. For example, flowers, cloves and seeds set in a string, different stones pierced or used in a pouch, or just a mix of organic material like seeds, leaves, twigs wrapped in a cloth.

Although self-made amulets required very little intervention, they were complex objects content-wise. Each part worked to counteract a particular effect of the illness in the person, so all the parts together would have a more complete effect. This for example is the case of garlic cloves combined with leafs from a particular tree, tied with a red ribbon (no. 1046), or the alum-blue bead-*al-mīs* bead/twig analysed in Chapter 2. These mixed-material amulets were so widespread that the users found their own ways to manufacture their own amulets.

Self-made amulets resulted from the creativity and the needs of every client. They display a knowledge of the sacred landscape of Palestine and the use of natural ingredients. In contrast to printed amulets that were standardised or written amulets with fixed formulae, these self-made

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<sup>396</sup> This information was obtained from an interview conducted in 2015 with members of the Natsheh family, owners of Khalili glass factory.

amulets show individuality in dealing with illness and ailments. They disclose that even when a sheikh was not involved in their manufacture, self-made amulets could be very effective. As mentioned before, without proper documentation, it is difficult to assess with certainty which amulets would have been made by users themselves. However self-made amulets were mainly coming from sacred sites, and they were made with natural or mineral ingredients available in their surroundings.

#### ***4.4 The passing on amulets***

For amulet makers there was no point to manufacture an amulet if there is was no intend to put it into circulation. Although we have previously dealt with the circulation of amulets from the manufacturer to the client, this second part of the chapter goes deeper into the networks where amulets circulated once they had left their manufacturer. In this sense, the chapter explores three ways of passing on amulets: inheriting, buying/selling, and giving/getting gifts.

From Canaan's records, we know that amulets were available everywhere. From the client's hands to consequently his/her relatives', or to a merchant's stock in the village, or in the far away shrine, amulets followed different paths from small-scale to regional inter-village networks. Local networks started with the family, where amulets, if efficacious or made of valuable materials, were passed down from relative to relative. Families could keep such amulets for generations, re-use them as amulets, or simply keep them as a part of the family treasure. In other cases, amulets that were efficacious could be given as a gift to acquaintances, close friends or anyone held in high esteem that was in the need of help.

Amulets were also sold, especially if they were made of valuable metals and stones, or were part of a piece of jewellery. Amuletic jewellery mainly bracelets, necklaces or adornments used as part of the attire that contained particular elements (shapes) were recognised for their protective power. These kinds of amulets had also an aesthetic function. In times of economic hardship, the users of this jewellery were forced to sell their pieces. They would sell to them to jewellery traders, or in the case of an old item, to antiquarians, who were known for having in their stock particular old or unique objects. Once sold these pieces of jewellery could move across villages and towns, reaching markets where they were sold again. Outlets were many, from small stalls to proper shops in city markets or in the markets adjacent to pilgrimage sites, such as the shrines of Nabi Musa. Many of these pieces of jewellery that had been used as amulets entered pilgrims' networks, they

were bought as souvenirs, and many were taken outside Palestine, where they either remained within the family or were passed on again.

Paradoxically, part of this circulation of amulets was the moment when amulets were taken out of circulation, as when they were bought by or donated to a private collector or a museum. In Palestine, ethnographers who focused on Palestinian folklore played an important role in taking many amulets out of the networks they had been circulating in for long time. These ethnographers, Canaan included, aimed to collect samples of a traditional life that was threatened to disappear. The amulets that we find now in collections stopped being available for exchange as they turned into ethnographic evidence of practices that later on were to be considered part of the cultural patrimony of Palestine. This process of *singularisation* —using Kopytoff’s terminology— ended the amulet’s commodity status in some cases; some were never sold again, others at some point were commoditised again as they were sold, bought or auctioned for private collections’ or the market of art/antiquities.

Most of the amulets that Canaan acquired throughout his life were bought in shops from specialised dealers. He bought the majority in Jerusalem, but was also active in other cities and in smaller markets attached to pilgrimage sites. From informal sellers to established shops in markets, in the following section I explore the different outlets where amulets, and materials for amulets were sold, and the availability of amulets and materials for amulets before and during Canaan’s collecting activity. I also explore the engagements Canaan had with particular dealers with whom he had regular contact as they became suppliers of objects for ethnographers and collectors.

#### 4.4.1 *Al-‘aṭṭārīn*

“After their engagement, they went to the Nablus market for their *kisweh* (wedding shopping). Wardeh remembered in detail what she had bought: white rosa silk and three pieces of cut velvet for her traditional dress... for her head, she bought a green scarf, a longer scarf for special occasions, a band of gold coins, and silver *karameel*. From Zakharia, they bought broad silver bracelets and chokers. They also purchased a piece of silk for trousers to go with her costume... Then on to the *attareen* (perfume sellers) and spice market to buy henna, cloves for necklaces, indigo, herbs for tea and amulet beads for protection from evil.”<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> W. K. Kavar, *Threads of Identity*, p.330





Figure 19. Recreation of a bedouin 'aṭṭārīn. Joe Alon Centre, The Museum of Bedouin Culture  
*Photo taken by the author*

*Al-‘aṭṭārīn* was one of the shopping markets that any engaged woman would visit to get products for her wedding preparations: oils, soap and herbs for her pre-nuptial visit to the *hammām*; but also materials for the preparation of healing and protective remedies against the evil eye such as the amulet beads. Since marriage was one of the most expected and desired moments in the life of women, when exposed to the community, the bride could be the object of the evil eye from other women. Thus, protective beads and specialised amulets had to be carried for protection. Beads were combined in different ways into jewellery or attached to the garments of her attire.

The name of these kinds of shops stood for the people working there. Known as *al-‘aṭṭār*<sup>398</sup>, they were perfumers in charge of the business of *al-‘aṭṭāra*. Part of *al-ṭibb al-taqlidī*, these specialists knew how to use herbs and minerals for medical remedies. The business and knowledge of *al-‘aṭṭārīn* was kept among members of a family, but could also be taken over by anyone after learning about the ingredients and the methods in the manufacture of perfumes and other

<sup>398</sup> *al-‘aṭṭār* pl. *al-‘aṭṭārūn/al-‘aṭṭārīn*

remedies.<sup>399</sup> It would take up to several years to become knowledgeable about all kinds of products and their application in the treatment of illnesses, as well as to know all new the herbs that entered the market as trade developed and opened up to new regions. Moreover, they also had to be acquainted with whatever had been written about herbs in manuals.

*Al-‘aṭṭārīn* shops were available mainly in towns, and would sell different products according to the location. Revising an inventory of the products that were available in these shops in Jerusalem by the late Ottoman period (see Table 2)<sup>400</sup>, and an inventory prepared by the Museum of Bedouin Culture in the late 20th century of products sold among bedouin *‘aṭṭārīn* (Table 3)<sup>401</sup>, we can see that the products varied. There were local and imported products in the Jerusalem shop, and more local products were sold in the bedouin case. This can be explained by the fact that Jerusalem had become a crossroad where products from different origins were available. Moreover, as a cosmopolitan centre, its population was very diverse and products coming from different regions were available from the demand of the different groups living in the city. Although it is not under the scope of this research to track the networks of imports that were sold at *al-‘aṭṭārīn*, it is important to reflect on the accessibility to medical products in Jerusalem and other towns and the effect this had on the centralisation of medical facilities in urban settings. As new imported products arrived from abroad, they were included in the stock of *al-‘aṭṭārīn* and some were incorporated into healing remedies. In Jerusalem or at the bedouin *‘aṭṭārīn*, the predominance of certain products might have indicated the practitioners’ and clients’ preferences and demands. So, even when circulation of new products occurred, their successful incorporation in the market might have been subjected to their efficacy.<sup>402</sup>

Amulets are not listed in neither of the inventories of the two cases mentioned above, this is because, as previously discussed, amulets were not ready-made objects for sale in *al-‘aṭṭārīn* shops,

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<sup>399</sup> M. al-Nasri, "Sūq al-‘aṭṭārīn.. siḥr tūnis al-‘aṭīqa fī rawā’ihīha," *al-‘arabī al-jadīd*, Sept. 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/سوق-العطارين-سحر-تونيس-العتيقة-في-روائحها/>

<sup>400</sup> P. Bourmaud, *Ya Doktor*, p.84

<sup>401</sup> The Museum of Bedouin Culture situated in the Joe Alon Center, which is 27km northeast of Be'er Sheva, behind Kibbutz Lahav. The permanent exhibition includes a reproduction of a bedouin *‘aṭṭār* shop including all kinds of products sold there. The research behind the curation of the permanent exhibition was carried out with the advice of Aref Abu-Rabia.

<sup>402</sup> The use of industrialised amulets in the Negev occurred but the traditional roles of healers continued to exist. Cfr. Popper-Giveon, A., Abu-Rabia, A., & Ventura, J. "From White Stone to Blue Bead: Materialised Beliefs and Sacred Beads among Bedouin in Israel." *Material Religion The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*,

rather they could be prepared with the products available there. In other words, some products had the potential to become amulets, they could be used in protective methods, healing treatments, or in order to attain good luck. Each one of the products was known for its particular properties and they were used in accordance to local knowledge based on sheikhs' recommendations, and local preferences. Many of the ingredients were used in curative remedies, they were particularly known to have a magical effect such as the alum or the love potion<sup>403</sup>. The Canaan Collection comprises many amulets made with ingredients available at *al-'aṭṭārīn*. Alum for example, was widely used in the manufacture of amulets and it was purchased in these shops. As we have seen alum could be used alone or in combination with other materials. Other ingredients available for sale were cloves, hibiscus, black pepper, etc.; spices used in amulets. A more detailed list of materials used for the preparation of amulets can be seen in Table 5. Based on the fact that amulets were not only prepared by practitioners, but also by users themselves, *al-'aṭṭārīn* were a perfect supplier for people who, like Wardeh, wanted to purchase beads to attach them to the clothes or set them in an amulet to be carried in a pouch.

#### **4.4.2 Pilgrimage, holy souvenirs and amulets**

Inhabitants of Palestine who have been users, buyers, sellers of amulets and/or of materials to make them, have played a role in their commoditisation. We have mentioned before the role of sheikhs and artisans in manufacturing amulets, and how local inhabitants would acquire them in different locations such as city markets, at specialised shops, at the sheikh's practice. Other locations that were key in the circulation of amulets were pilgrimage sites. They ranged from small tombs of local saints to big shrines such as those in Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem, Nabi Rubin, Nabi Saleh, and Nabi Musa. Local and foreign pilgrims visited these places and acquired souvenirs and objects sold there.

Since the Byzantine era Christian, Jewish and Muslim pilgrims who have visited sites mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, have acquired artefacts whose significance is based on their connexion to the holy sites.<sup>404</sup> Christian pilgrims were interested in relics such as bones of saints, garments, and shrouds of Biblical figures, which were highly priced for their spiritual and healing

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<sup>403</sup> Love potion: it is a resin obtained from a tree called *kalkh* or giant fennel (lat. *ferula sinaica*) autochthonous from the Maghreb. It is also called *fasūkh* because it nullifies any kind of magic work. There are two kinds, one the white resin is used to cure poisoning or intoxication, the black one is used as incense externally and internally by infusing it or boiling it, or crushing it. Cfr. The Museum of Bedouin Culture.

<sup>404</sup> M. Kersel, "The Trade in Palestinian Antiquities", *Jerusalem Quarterly* 33 (2008) 21-38, p.22

power.<sup>405</sup> Muslim pilgrims coming from other parts of the Levant on their way to Mecca stopped in Palestine's holy sites, where they aimed for objects related to figures in Islamic history such as prophets, the *saḥaba*, and the martyrs who died in battle during the Crusades.

Some of these pilgrims were merchants who travelled for their work and also often visited the holy sites during their journeys providing to local merchants objects manufactured in other places. In the 17th century, the Arab writers Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641-1731) and Mustafa al-Bakri al-Siddiqi<sup>406</sup>, visited Jerusalem to perform *ziyāra*. They recorded in their travelogues that by that time Jerusalem and other cities such as Bethlehem, Mar Saba, Nablus, Hebron, etc. were already part of multidirectional flows of visitors and goods that established strong commercial and cultural bonds between the northern and southern parts of the Levant and beyond, providing the ideal network for the circulation of many kinds of amulets. This “multifarious nature of pilgrimage” as Jacob Norris calls it, tackles the often assumed unidirectional flow of western visitors and their role as main buyers of goods.<sup>407</sup>

The 19th century inaugurated a new phase in the history of pilgrimages to the Holy Land resulting from the economic opening brought by the Tanzimat Reforms. The influx of foreign pilgrims into Palestine increased dramatically, but also the kind of pilgrims and the way pilgrimage was carried out. Pilgrims from all Christian denominations travelled from Europe to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem and other cities. These pilgrimages were mainly organised by the Christian missions, who had set their own pilgrimage routes that included different places according to their denomination. With these *en-masse* but organised pilgrimages, a more suitable infrastructure was developed to accommodate pilgrims and their needs. As the pilgrim business became more and more profitable, many merchants oriented their activities towards it. The development of this new form of pilgrimage, stimulated the production of material goods associated to the pilgrimage sites. Sacred souvenirs, as I call them, had to be produced faster and in much bigger amounts, as we already discussed before in the context of the pilgrimage certificates and magical bowls.

With the development of this new form of pilgrimage, the visits to holy sites by local Muslims, Christians and Jews had to be adapted to the new conditions as well. Locals carried out pilgrimages to many other sacred sites, in fact Jerusalem's holy places were only few among

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<sup>405</sup> Op. Cit. M. Kersel, p.22

<sup>406</sup> A Syrian Sufi who traveled in the region in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Cfr. Norris, “Exporting the Holy Land: Artisans and Merchant Migrants in Ottoman-Era Bethlehem,” p. 23

<sup>407</sup> J. Norris, “Exporting the Holy Land: Artisans and Merchant Migrants in Ottoman-Era Bethlehem,” p.23

hundreds of sites scattered all over Palestine. Throughout the year, these smaller local sites were mostly visited by inhabitants of the surrounding villages. However, annual celebrations would usually attract larger audiences, with people travelling to a particular shrine even from far away.<sup>408</sup> By early 20th century, when Canaan collected his amulets, four sites were the most visited. The annual celebrations carried out there were fertility rituals related to the agrarian calendar. In September, a festival was held at the shrine of Nabi Rubin (close to Jaffa). The shrine was part of the *waqf* and was visited by people from the vicinity of Jaffa, Ramleh and Lydda. In spring, the commemoration of Nabi Saleh took place in the village by the same name. Around the time of the Greek Orthodox Easter, people from around Jerusalem and far away villages would gather and carry out processions to Nabi Musa. On the 17th of November, the ceremony at the Church of St. George (al-Khader) in Lydda, marked the end of the olive harvest.

These local pilgrimage sites gave space for the circulation of goods in a very important way. Accounts of pilgrimages to regional sanctuaries show how attire (including dress, jewellery and amulets) functioned to demarcate the place of origin, and how aware women were regarding the differences in styles and materials used in each village. <sup>409</sup>. Encounters during the *mawasim* served to get acquainted with new styles, to influence and exchange (buying/selling) jewellery.

The goods that circulated as the outcome of the pilgrimages to Palestine, functioned in different ways as links to the holy sites. Wharton has analysed different forms of reproducing Jerusalem in objects that have been circulating for centuries. Although the material she analyses is different, because she does not deal with amulets *per se*, the three forms of reproduction she proposes are useful to explore Palestinian amulets. According to her, relics, souvenirs and replicas are three ways to “possess” Jerusalem (through its different holy sites). From Canaan’s collection we can distinguish two kinds of amulets that pilgrims obtained from holy sites or in connection to them that fit into Wharton’s category of relic and souvenir. On the one hand, there were objects that possessed the *baraka* of the holy place, and for this reason they were taken back home, abroad or to other cities. People would cherish them and take them along if they travelled or moved and they would be given as gifts or be inherited, thus quite often ending up far from the places where they were originally obtained. These amulets from holy sites share with Wharton’s definition of relic the fact that they have an identical nature to what they represent.<sup>410</sup> On the other hand, some objects

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<sup>408</sup> W. Kavar, *Threads of Identity*, p.251

<sup>409</sup> W. Kavar, *Threads of Identity*, p.297

<sup>410</sup> A. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, p.50

that Canaan collected were sold as souvenirs, such as the pilgrimage certificates. They acted as souvenirs because they reminded the pilgrim of his visit to the holy site. However, once in the pilgrim's possession, the certificates could be fold, carried as amulets or hung on the wall of their house for protection. In this way, they acquired the function of a relic as they were seen as extensions of the *baraka* of the place they originated.

This fluid nature of souvenirs and relics can be complemented with that of the replicas. With the increasing demand for amulets, many objects might have been replicated to be sold and to maintain their availability in the market. Once bought these replicas could be activate and used as amulets; their efficacy in this case did not rely on the skills of the manufacturer but on the process of activation. These replicas acquired an actual power when the user took them to a particular shrine or to a practitioner to endow them with magical power. Moreover, the replicas that Canaan acquired from his patients became souvenirs of his ethnographic experience, and souvenirs of a form of life in Palestine that was coming to an end. Canaan's amulets show that the boundaries between the different forms of representing Jerusalem become blurred as we explore the different stages in the life of an object.

Canaan documented many pilgrimage sites in his famous work *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, however only a few of these sites were origin of his amulets. *Al-ḥaram al-sharīf* and Nabi Musa are two sites where Canaan got many objects. What follows is the description of these two holy sites and the relevance in the manufacture and circulation of amulets. These two sites have been visited by many pilgrims because they are believed to be source of blessings, and visiting them provide good health and protection. However, they differ from each other in the way pilgrimage is carried out, as well as in the kinds of pilgrims that visit the places.

#### **4.4.2.1 *Al-ḥaram al-sharīf***

In the heart of the old city of Jerusalem, *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* has received Muslim pilgrims for centuries. Visitors to the holy site included local Jerusalemites, inhabitants of other parts of Palestine, the Levant, and from faraway lands. Since Jerusalem was located not very far from the *ḥajj* caravan route that set out from Damascus to Mecca, it was a common stop for pilgrims, who often made a detour on their way to or returning from Mecca. Other Muslim pilgrims would carry out visits exclusively to Jerusalem's holy sites. Only after the Tanzimat, non-Muslims were permitted to visit *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* but with special permits. Christians pilgrims going to Jerusalem aimed to visit the Holy Sepulchre and other sites in Jerusalem's surroundings for their

connexion with Jesus. For them, *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* was not part of their itineraries, and visits to this beautiful building were out of curiosity. However their presence in the Old City and their demand for particular goods effected the market's offer.

*Al-ḥaram al-ṣharīf* was visited by Muslims due to its importance in religious history so it functioned as a site for the confluence of pilgrims from many different origins. For the local population praying at *al-masjid al-aqsā* and visiting *al-qubba al-ṣaḥrā* (the Dome of the Rock), constituted part of their everyday religious life. However, for visitors from other parts of Palestine and beyond, these visits took place sporadically. During their visits, pilgrims could buy holy souvenirs from the shops adjacent to the site. Some were souvenirs to take back home, other objects functioned as containers of the *baraka* of the place. These goods sold around the Temple were not all produced in Jerusalem, some came from surrounding villages: Lifta, Malha, Deir Yasin, En Kerem, Ezariya (Bethany), Beit Hanina, Shu'fat, Silwan, and Abu Deis. They all contributed greatly to the local economy of Jerusalem.<sup>411</sup>

The most common souvenirs from *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* were the pilgrimage certificates. Made by the authorities of the site, these certificates were sold to pilgrims who wanted certified proof of completion of their pilgrimage. Taufiq Canaan collected these kinds of certificates, some were printed in Cairo and sold in the shops adjacent to the holy site. These certificates could be bought by anyone, but they needed to be signed or stamped by the authorities. Other objects obtained in the site were written amulets from sheikhs such as printed letters of protection with magical signs, and were sold in the time of Ramadan.<sup>412</sup> We also know about the wood of *al-mīs*, that was obtained from the trees that grow in the esplanade of the Temple, which were associated to the protective power of the jinns. This type of wood was used in mixed amulets, as explored in Chapter 2.

#### **4.4.2.2 Nabi Musa**

A very interesting group of amulets in the Canaan Collection comes from the *maqām* of Nabi Musa. The documentation points to the fact that amulets were not only sold there, but manufactured on site. Located on the road that connects Jerusalem to Jericho, Nabi Musa is a site that has witnessed the confluence of people and products from different origins. Its construction dates back to 1269 when the Mamluk Sultan Baibars built a small shrine dedicated to the prophet Moses, at the spot

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<sup>411</sup> W. Kavar, *Threads of Identity*, p.203

<sup>412</sup> Kriss & Kriss, *Volks Glaube im Bereich des Islam*, p.148



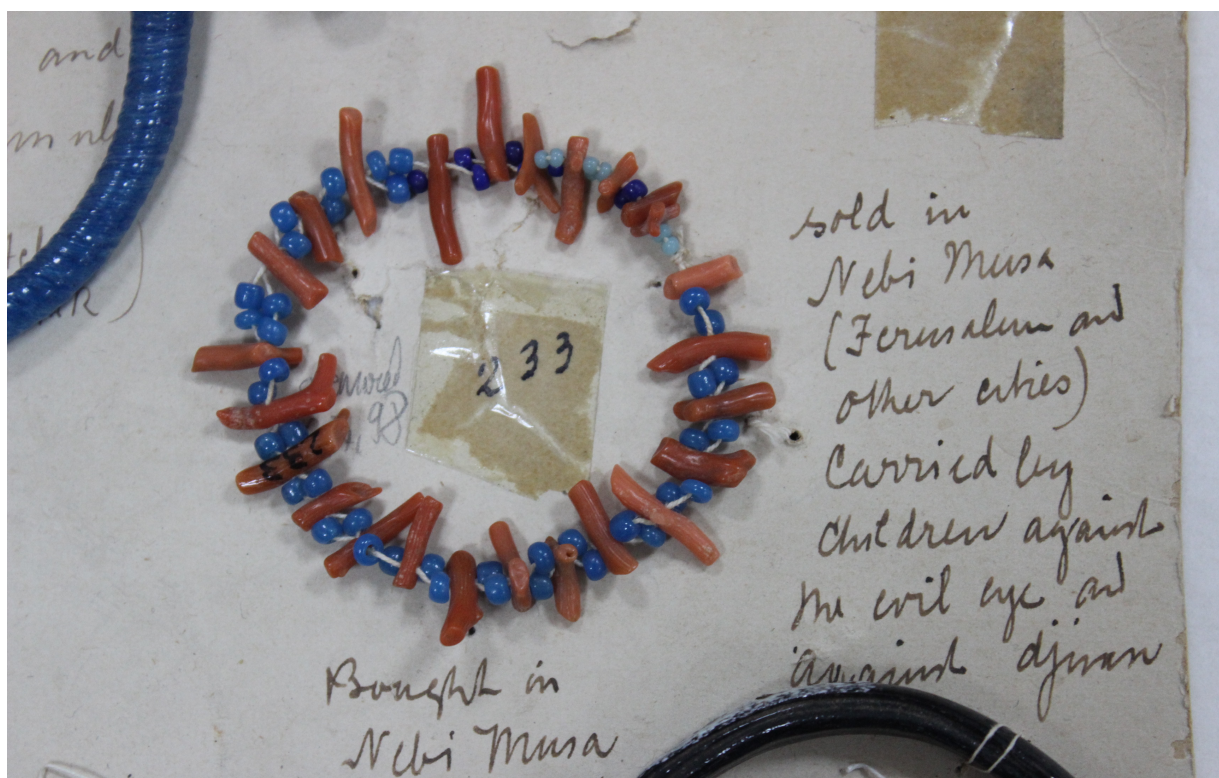


Fig. 20 Bracelet made of coral from the Red Sea. Bedouin manufacture. Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets. Catalogued no. 233.

*Photo taken by the author*

where he was supposedly buried. However, in Arabic sources the first mention precedes this date; in fact al-Harawi d.611 after the Hijra /1214 AD mentioned the location of the tomb of Moses near Jericho according to what he had heard from other people who had visited Palestine.<sup>413</sup> Whatever the exact date is, the first mentions of the site appear during the time of the Crusades, and were concerned with the possible destruction of the site by the crusaders. Over the years, hostels were built adjacent to the shrine. By the 17th century when Sheikh Abd al-Ghani al-Nablusi visited Palestine, the site was already important and received a lot of visitors because previous pilgrims had witnessed miracles there. So the importance of the site lay not only in the presence of the prophet's tomb, but in the fact that he was still working miracles.

Although the *maqām* had been visited throughout the centuries, it was in the early 19th century that the Ottoman authorities promoted an organised festive pilgrimage or *mawsim* to the site. This pilgrimage was decided to take place the same week as the Christian celebration of Easter, and was intended to allow people from all parts of Palestine to come together. Nabi Musa became a

<sup>413</sup> K. J. al-‘Asali, *Mawsim al-nabī mūsā fī filisṭīn*, Amman: al-Jāmi‘a al-Urduniya, 1990



symbolic space for Palestinians to counterbalance the massive number of foreign Christian pilgrims going to Jerusalem and the respective Easter festivities that had been taken over by the missions. In order to allocate the number of pilgrims in Nabi Musa, the Ottomans carried out restoration work in 1820 to enlarge the complex. It is this last restoration of the shrine that to this day includes a complex of domed buildings built around prophet's tomb, a prayer hall, a mosque, and guesthouses for the pilgrims.

During the British Mandate, there was an increase in the number of pilgrims to Nabi Musa particularly during the annual *mawsim*, which had become an official religious celebration, that on closer inspection, served as political event. Emma Aubin Boltanski has analysed how this celebration reaffirmed the social hierarchies and political allegiances, while simultaneously strengthening a Palestinian identity.<sup>414</sup> Religiously and politically speaking, Palestinian authorities positioned prophet Moses as a national saint. The shrine and the *mawsim* were important as a space for pan-Palestinian reunion and for political mobilisation. In Nabi Musa, pilgrims from all parts of Palestine could meet once a year in the annual celebration of prophet. It was a space of confluence where people from different villages and towns. Mainly, but not exclusively, a Muslim celebration, it attracted people from all social classes and religious backgrounds such as adherents of the many *sūfī tarīqāt*, sheikhs, practitioners of traditional medicine, etc.

The visits to the shrine and the organisation of the *mawsim* also had economic implications. Adjacent to the shrine, the market was an important commercial spot. Given the fact that this place was where inhabitants from all over Palestine met, material goods manufactured, exchanged, sold and bought were many and diverse. Pilgrims and traders together were responsible for the circulation of goods. There was an influx of objects coming in from different regions that would spread again out all over Palestine and beyond, when pilgrims returned back home. Traders and sellers possibly also being pilgrims themselves, enjoyed the *baraka* of the site while simultaneously also earned some money.

The result of the affluence of pilgrims from different origins and their religious engagements with the saint, was that the market offered a great diversity of products, among them specialised amulets related to the prophet or the *maqām* itself. For the pilgrims who bought them, some of these amulets possessed the *baraka* of the site, others had to be activated through different ritual

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<sup>414</sup> E. Aubin Boltanski, "Le mawsin de Nabī Mūsā: processions, espace en miettes et mémoire blessée. Territoires palestiniens (1998-2000)" in *Les pèlerinages au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient* edit. Sylvia Chiffolleaus & Anna Madoeuf, Presses de l'Ifpo, p.59-80

procedures, such as placing them in contact with the tomb.<sup>415</sup> Based on the evidence provided by Canaan, amulets sold in Nabi Musa were of two types. On the one hand, there were amulets connected to the story and miracles of Prophet Moses, which were made with *ḥajar mūsā* (Moses stone), a kind of stone obtained from the surrounding areas of the *maqām*, already analysed in Chapter 2. On the other hand, there were amulets that came from other places such as the Red Sea and the Negev Desert. Made of materials not related to the abode of the prophet, they were available there since they were known to be efficacious amulets. Many of them were manufactured by the Bedouins of the Negev, who used them as part of their ways of protection and healing. Their amulets seem to have been popular among inhabitants of Palestine. Objects of bedouin manufacture were bracelets, necklaces, and amulet pouches and contained red coral, cowrie shells and blue beads. (See figure 20) A feature of the Bedouin amulets is the use of tiny beads (of many colours), pierced and set in long threads that were knotted creating a sort of fabric used to make amulets cases.<sup>416</sup> Most of the times these cases contained paper amulets, but Canaan also collected a few items that contained triangular pieces of alum instead. The fact that these amulet cases with written amulets inside were sold in Nabi Musa, points to the fact that they might have been related to Prophet Moses. In Canaan's notes there is no mention of whom could have been responsible for writing these amulets, but it seems probable that they were written *in situ* to be blessed and carried right away.

At Nabi Musa, pilgrims not only bought, but might have used the opportunity to sell or exchange old amulets or precious objects. Pilgrims and merchants would sell to travellers and collectors, like Taufiq Canaan. All these kinds of amulets available at Nabi Musa were traded the year around, but especially during the *mawsim*. In his diaries, Canaan informs us of his visits to Nabi Musa in 1912, 1914 and 1930. The first two times coincide with the period when he worked in the Jericho area. Being an itinerant doctor, he had the chance to visit the shrine. His third visit occurred in very different circumstances; Canaan mentions in his memoirs that he visited the site during the *mawsim* looking for the support of the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Hussaini in the organisation of the International Congress of the YMCA Associations in Jerusalem. This visit to Nabi Musa can be framed within Canaan's political activities and networking as honorary member

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<sup>415</sup> Information about how objects were loaded with *baraka* in Nabi Musa come from an interview with the custodian of the shrine, carried out in October 2015.

<sup>416</sup> Amulet no. 428, 429, 430, 2055

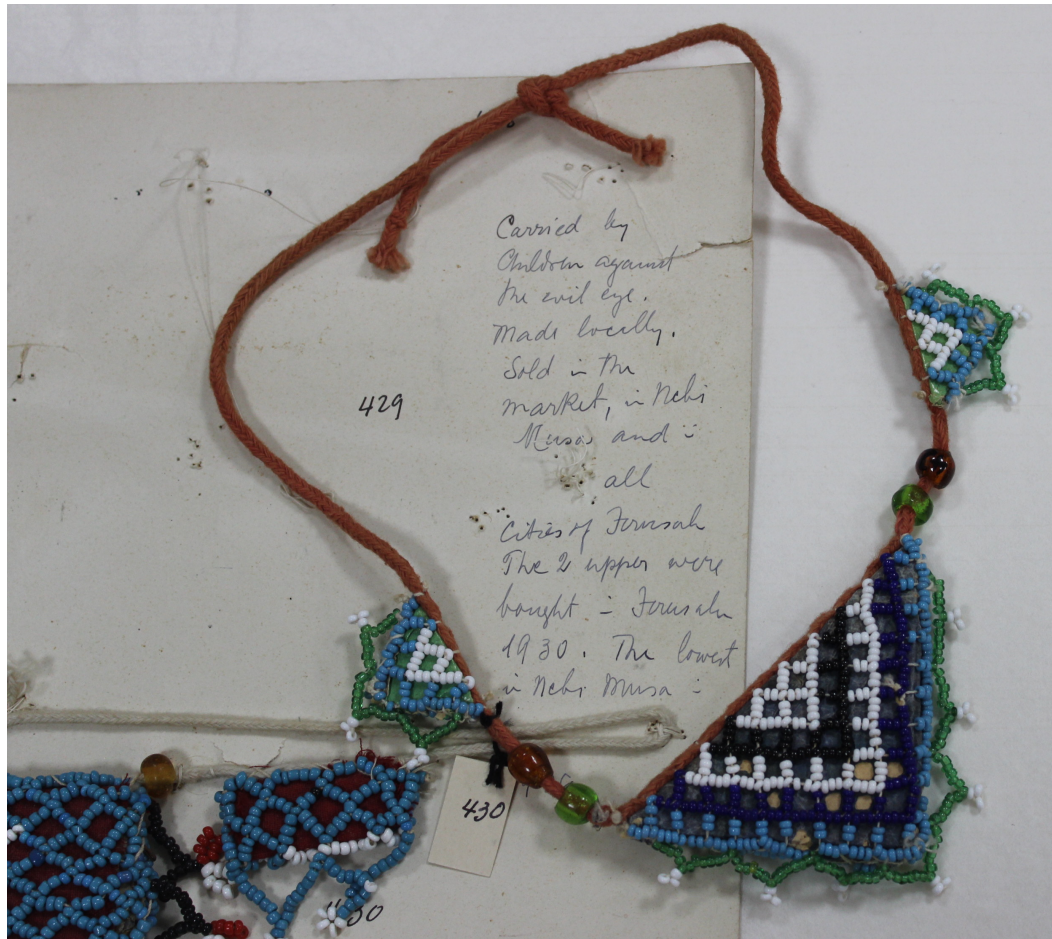


Figure 21. Paper amulet in amulet case. Sold in Jerusalem and Nabi Musa. Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.  
Photo taken by the author

of the YMCA.<sup>417</sup> It is not clear whether Canaan visited the site more to carry out fieldwork and obtain amulets, in any case, many observations and comments about the *maqām* and *mawsim* were recorded in his writings, as well as the important number of objects in his Collection that come from this site.

#### 4.4.3 The antiquarians

The world of antiques and antiquarians is a unique aspect of commoditisation, in which objects acquire value based on the conceptualisation of the old or the ancient. Considering particular objects as antiquities depends on how the past is conceptualised and with it, the categories of old and ancient. Granting this kind of value to objects affects their price and availability. Since antiques are *per se* valuable objects, their circulation responds to the desire of acquiring them either for the pure pleasure and curiosity, as an investment, or to include them in a collection. Circulation of

<sup>417</sup> T. Canaan, *The Tawfik Canaan Memoirs*, Part 2, Jerusalem Quarterly 75, p.138

antiques occurs in networks that involve scholars, government officials, artists, photographers, collectors, and tourism providers, among others.<sup>418</sup>

The trade of antiques in the Levant is documented since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman official documents, in the accounts of European travellers and by indigenous Arab authors, although these latter ones have not been considered much.<sup>419</sup> These objects originated mostly from the archaeological excavations that had been taking place in the Levant since the late Ottoman period. Despite the fact that foreign archaeological work was restricted before British rule, excavations were carried out under the supervision of the Ottoman administration. Illegal excavations took place as well resulting in looting by the foreigners and locals. As a result, lots of objects circulated as antiques legally and illegally before the establishment of the Mandate government. In this business antiquarians played an important role.

One interesting source that mentioned this business is the *Qāmūs al-ṣanā'āt al-shāmiyya* written by Muhammad Said al-Qasimi (d.1900) and his eldest son Jamal al-Din al-Qasimī (d.1914).<sup>420</sup> Written in Damascus between 1890 and 1905, it contains a description of the items sold in the Vilayet Syria by antique dealers during the last years of the Ottoman period. In it the profession of the antiquarian or *antikjī* is mentioned for the first time in an Arabic source, and it is defined as someone who sells '*al-athār al-qadīma*' or antiquities.<sup>421</sup> It also mentions that this profession originated from the desire of '*al-faranj*' (referring to foreigners) to buy such '*athār*'. By the time the *Qāmūs* was written, the profession of *antikjī* was widespread due to the strong marketability of the objects sold by them. What the *Qāmūs* refers to as *athār*, ranged from buildings to objects of different kinds, like rugs, clothes, tiles, metalwork, swords, or arms, either complete objects or just pieces of them. These antiquities were considered quite valuable by some local inhabitants, because they were old and belonged to different periods of the history of the region, part of their collective memory. For Western foreigners, they were valuable in terms of classical or general history, and because some of these antiques were part of an exotic oriental world. Although the *Qāmūs* traced the origins of the antiquities trade back to foreign demand, it is important to

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<sup>418</sup> A. Thornton, *Tents, Tours and Treks*...., p. 3

<sup>419</sup> M. Milwright. "An Arabic description of the activities of antique dealers", p.8

<sup>420</sup> Muhammad Sa'īd al-Qasimī and Jamal al-Dīn al-Qasimī. Cfr. M. Milwright, "An Arabic Description of the Activities of Antique Dealers in Late Ottoman Damascus", p.9

<sup>421</sup> *Qāmūs al-ṣanā'āt al-shāmiyah*. Cfr. Milwright, An Arabic Description of the Activities of Antique Dealers, p.10

mention that locals were also clients of these kind of goods, which were available at the *antikjī* shops to supply desired objects on demand to all kinds of clientele.

Although the *Qāmūs* revolves around Damascene dealers and the types of objects that they acquired and sold, it mentions that their trade was not limited to Syria. Jerusalem was one of the main cities where these antique dealers found clients, some of whom were also dealers sacred souvenirs and antiquities related to the holy sites. The presence of this kind of trade in the 19th century, responded to the historical and religious significance of the city which had led to *en masse* pilgrimages and to archeological excavations, from which many antique traders got their products.

The proliferation of the antiques business came with the investment in archaeology in Jerusalem and the Holy Land during the Mandate, when the British authorities took the control of the archaeological excavations and the flux of objects coming from them. Amara Thornton points that the regulation of archaeological work in the Levant was as a measure to protect from vandalism the archaeological sites that were considered heritage sites.<sup>422</sup> However, this regulation that explicitly targeted the circulation of objects on the black market, re-directed the circulation of objects to different networks, that of the museums and private collectors.

The more the regulations, the more attractive the business became. Control over the circulation of archaeological remains had to be imposed to try to reduce their circulation in illegal networks. These kinds of objects became exposed to different publics leading to raising interests in acquiring them. It was through organised guided tours and through the visit to the newly founded museums in Palestine that visitors became acquainted with the material culture. A similar effect resulted from the exhibitions of archaeological remains in London, which was a key mechanism in promoting archaeological work in the Middle East to potential collectors. These exhibitions and their corresponding catalogues, with detailed information about the objects, were the means through which wealthy amateur collectors got involved in the market. Some of the people who fuelled the archaeological trade got involved by funding exhibitions or research such as Mr. Henry Mond, who sponsored the research in Petra where Canaan was hired in 1929<sup>423</sup>, others got involved just by purchasing objects for their own collections such as Mr. Wellcome, who collected medical artefacts, as discussed in Chapter 5. The demand for certain objects in London coincided with seasonal excavations and exhibitions, when objects were brought in from Palestine to be presented to a

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<sup>422</sup> Thornton, Amara. "Tents, Tours and Treks: Archaeologists, Antiquities Services, and Tourism in Mandate Palestine and Transjordan." *Public Archaeology* 11, no. 4 (2012):195-216.

<sup>423</sup> Canaan, T. *Studies in the Topography and Folklore of Petra*. Jerusalem: Beyt-Ul-Makdes Press 1930

foreign public. The demand of Palestine's antiquities abroad was a way through which locals became acquainted with their value in the market.

The particularity of Jerusalem and its holy sites led local antique dealers, operating in the city, to offer also unique kinds of *athār*. *Antikjī* seem to have adapted to the local markets where clients demanded particular objects. In Jerusalem, despite the common understanding of the *athār*, goods worthy to be collected differed from group to group. There were local pilgrims who visited the holy sites, *al-faranj* including tourists, pilgrims, and later on members of the missions, who settled permanently in Palestine, and Palestinians with close ties to the missions that developed collecting practices.

With all these different groups in mind, antique dealers included not only archaeological remains or ancient objects from Islamic or earlier periods, but also objects coming from pilgrimage sites that could be acquired as souvenirs. Pilgrimage sites as holy sites were connected to the primordial time — in Mircea Eliade's words<sup>424</sup>— and objects coming from there obtained a value of antiquity through their association to particular events and holy persons. Objects coming from these sites were not necessarily old in years, as archaeological remains, but they acquired the antique value because they were connected to a religious past. Moreover, since antique dealers targeted tourists who were visiting Jerusalem mainly as pilgrims, they had to diversify their merchandise, and what better way to do that, than to include objects that had become fashionable and in demand.

#### **4.4.3.1 Ohan the Armenian antiquarian and collector**

In his introductory study to the catalogue of the Tawfik Canaan Collection, Khaled Nashef mentions the names of three antiquarians from whom Canaan reported having acquired some of the amulets: Mr. Ohan, Klayn, and Muhammad Ali.<sup>425</sup> From among them, Canaan seems to have established a good relation with Ohan, an Armenian antiquarian who had a shop in Jerusalem. Canaan purchased many objects from him; the first time was in 1940 and in subsequent years Canaan bought more amulets.<sup>426</sup> It is not clear if Ohan had just opened his shop that year, since there are no previous mentions of him. However, it might be the case because by 1940 Canaan had already been collecting for three decades, and became acquainted with the amulets market. Ohan was much

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<sup>424</sup> M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, p.23

<sup>425</sup> Nashef, Khaled, trans. *Majmū'a tawfīq kan'ān li l-hujub. Makhtūṭa bi khaṭ Tawfīq Kan'ān*. Birzeit University. Unpublished.

<sup>426</sup> For the description of all amulets bought at Ohan's shop, see Table 3 in Appendix B



younger than Canaan. He is mentioned in later sources by Ms. Widad Kavar, another collector of Palestinian objects, mainly jewellery and dresses. Referring to him as Ohan, Ms. Kavar mentions that he was a jeweller who had assembled a collection of amulets in Jerusalem.<sup>427</sup> The fact that Ohan formed a collection himself as well is very interesting. It shows that as a merchant he got also interested in acquiring objects himself. Knowing that he had met Canaan and probably other collectors raises the question to what extent Ohan as a local merchant could have found inspiration from them to form his own collection. What kinds of amulets were included in his collection? And how did the relation with collectors of similar objects affect the value of the objects for sale in his shop? The objects that Ohan sold were mainly pieces of jewellery. The amulets Canaan got from him were arm amulets made of copper, a kind of jewellery that was used as a protective amulet. Jewellery was frequently sold in antique shops, and some of the pieces could be used as amulets. The fact that they were small, easy to carry and made of fancy materials like silver, precious and semi precious stones must have attracted the attention of collectors. But another attractive feature must have been the inscriptions engraved in some items such as the magical text of Figure 20.



Figure 22. Arm amulet made of copper.  
Bought in Ohan's shop in 1940 for 350 mils.  
*Photo credit: Birzeit University Museum*

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<sup>427</sup> Kavar, W. *Threads of Identity*, p.57

As for the objects in Ohan's private collection, we know that it included magic bowls. In 1936 Taufiq Canaan published *Arabic Magic Bowls*<sup>428</sup> where he analysed the contents of a big selection of magic bowls including a few from his own collection and also from Ohan's and Lydia Einsler's. Although the selection was representative of the major collectors of magic bowls in Palestine, Canaan's notes do not give the exact number of items comprised in each. Canaan's references to these two collectors and the fact that he documented their bowls, show how close he was to them in terms of exchanging, studying and collecting amulets.<sup>429</sup> It might have been these kinds of research collaborations that inspired Ohan to acquire collectibles for himself.

In Jerusalem, antiquarians seem to have diversified their inventory by including souvenirs from holy places. Canaan recorded having bought from Muhammad Ali, also an antiquities dealer, a *masbaha* (rosary) from Mecca (no. 846) and a written amulet (no. 935). Thus, although in principle antiquarians specialised in old objects coming from archaeological sites, in Jerusalem they sought

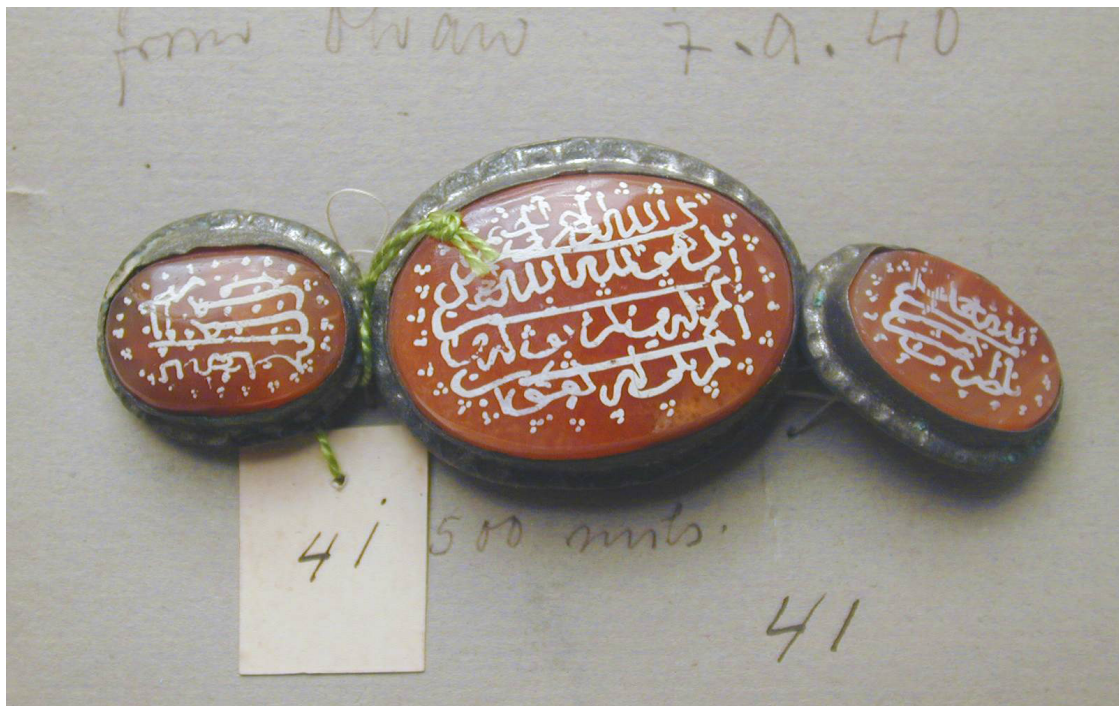


Figure 23. Arm amulet with inscribed stones.  
Bought in Ohan's shop in 1940 for 500 mils.  
*Photo credit: Birzeit University Museum*

<sup>428</sup>Canaan, Taufiq. "Arabic Magic Bowls" in JPOS XVI (1936) pp. 104-110

<sup>429</sup> Description of Ohan's bowls. Cfr. Canaan, Taufiq. "Arabic Magic Bowls" in JPOS XVI (1936) pp. 104-110



the opportunity to open up to the new kinds of clients. Among these new clients were the collectors such as Canaan, who in contrast to local and foreign pilgrims, bought particular objects for their folkloric value.

#### ***4.5 Amulets in lieu of payment***

An interesting aspect of the commoditisation of amulets can be seen in Canaan's collecting process. As we have mentioned, especially during the first years of his collecting activity Canaan accepted and requested amulets as a means to pay for his medical services, a kind of service that did not exist before in Palestine. So what we witness here is that—for the first time— amulets were exchanged for their ethnographic value. So even though amulets circulated as commodities long before they became object of ethnographic interest, in Canaan's collecting activity we see the mechanism at work where an amulet as an object aimed to heal/protect changes into an amulet as an object with ethnographic value, passing through a phase of an amulet as a means of payment.

Canaan obtained the amulets in this way mostly in the decade of the 1910's. This phase of collecting began in 1910 when he was appointed head of the Polyclinic of the Municipality of Jerusalem and of the Laboratories of the Sinai Front, a job that allowed him to explore the Palestinian hinterland, the Negev Desert, the Sinai Peninsula and Transjordan. From 1910 to 1919 he worked as an itinerant doctor offering low cost medical services to peasants and bedouins. During his medical visits, Canaan noticed that patients used “trinkets” as remedies to illnesses believed to have originated with *jinn-s* and the evil eye. These objects ranged from stones, twigs, to pendants and jewellery, which had been used in traditional medicine for centuries as analysed in Chapter 2. For Canaan, a representative of a “modern” western medical practice, these beliefs and practices were backwards and resulting from ignorance towards the real causes of illness, but valuable to record since they could be analysed within the logic of medical practices. Seeing the poverty of most of his patients, he charged very low fees and in many cases offered his patients to pay in kind.

“There were very few doctors in practice at that time, and people were steeped in superstition and folk medicine. He noticed beads, the ‘eye’ and/or ‘hand’ amulets, and other jewellery his patients were wearing. He also noted how poor most of his patients were, and that even his modest fees were

more than they could afford. So he decided that in lieu of payment he would ask to be told the history and purpose of whatever trinket the people were wearing and also asked for replicas.”<sup>430</sup>

The exchange of amulets for medical service did not occur all the time. Canaan established diverse relations with his patients. In some cases, he encountered patients only once. In a one-time-only medical visit, he would get to know the patients and prescribe them the intake of a specific kind of medication that he would provide. In other cases, Canaan paid regular visits to particular villages where he encountered patients to whom he would prescribe medication and follow up in a long treatment. The relation with some patients must have become closer as the treatments were longer and required several medical consultations.

Out of these regular visits, Canaan became acquainted with particular cases. Patients who had been following a treatment were more open to give Canaan information about their state of being and their feeling about it. This intimate relation that he established with his patients led Canaan to inquire about the provenance and use of their amulets, as well as to express his willingness to acquire them. It is not explicit in the sources whether the idea of using the amulets as a means of payment came from Canaan or from the patients.

Canaan’s offer to obtain their amulets may have provoked different responses. Since patients used amulets as part of a treatment, it was unthinkable to get rid of them while in the treatment. So even when Canaan offered alternative medication, patients kept using their amulets. It was only at the end of the treatment, when they recovered or felt better, that some patients decided to give their amulets away since they were no longer needed. Some patients might have opted to stop using the prescribed amulet and began the treatment suggested by Canaan; however, this scenario does not seem very plausible since modern medicine had difficulties finding its way.<sup>431</sup> Moreover, the presence of replicas in the collection of Canaan further supports the idea that people were attached to their amulets and wished to hold on to them.

The availability of Canaan’s medical services were part of institutional and individual efforts to reduce cases of illnesses in Palestine. The fact that these reached some parts of the population was not enough to replace traditional forms of medicine that had prevailed for centuries. However, patients who used Canaan’s medical services believed that this kind of modern medicine

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<sup>430</sup> Canaan, Yasma. *Some Biographical Notes on Dr. T. Canaan, Society and Heritage* (al-Bire) 15, 147-152. Cfr. Merschen, B. & U. Hubner, Op. Cit., p.255

<sup>431</sup> Bourmaud, Philippe., «Ya Doktor»: *Devenir médecin et exercer son art en «Terre sainte», une expérience du pluralisme médical dans l’Empire ottoman finissant (1871-1918)*

was worth a try and paid for it. To what extent patients believed in the efficacy of Canaan's medication is very difficult to assess.

Many of the amulets that Canaan got in lieu of payment were not the actual amulets used by the patients. They were replicas. Canaan reports that in some cases patients were not willing to give their amulets away, which points to the value they had for them in medical treatments especially when they had proven to work as these patients were cured from whatever ailment they had suffered from. However, since Canaan had raised the possibility of them being used as a means of payment, patients were willing to collaborate or felt the need to come up with an alternative since they could not afford paying him otherwise. If the patient wanted to keep the amulet, he/she could also offer a replica to the doctor. The idea of replication might have come from Canaan or from the patients themselves, but this is not recorded at all. On the one hand, the necessity to pay Canaan's services might have pushed patients to be creative, on the other hand, Canaan's goal in acquiring these amulets was to have samples of amulets used among his clients so the acquiring the original might not have been important. In any case, the creation of replicas of amulets display a very interesting outcome of the engagement between Canaan and the patients, where negotiation and flexibility played an important role in the commoditisation of amulets.

Since to replicate is to make an exact copy of something, a replica must have the physical qualities of the original; the same materials and designs, and the same proportions. But in the case of an amulet, what about the power that informs it? Annabel Wharton's mentions that "a material replica participates more fully in its prototype's uniqueness or authenticity."<sup>432</sup> In this sense we can use her definition for the amulets under scope, meaning that even when these replicas that Canaan got were not meant to be used as amulets, at least for the time being, they retained a latent capacity. The same happened with the original amulets given to Canaan as payment. Since they had already been used, the amulets were no longer active, and when gathered by Canaan they only functioned as part of the collection. Nevertheless, they would at some point become commoditised as amulets again. Canaan and the patients recognised this latent capacity giving value to the objects based on their original healing and protective use.<sup>433</sup>

The idea of replicating an amulet to give it to the collector might have affected the way users related to their amulets. Canaan's request for their amulets might have been an eye opener for

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<sup>432</sup> A. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem*, p.4

<sup>433</sup> Benjamin, W., *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility*, Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2008

the users, who would realised that the amulets were commercialised not only for healing purposes, but for the sake of forming a collection. It is plausible that after having been in contact with Canaan, and being exposed to a different view towards amulets, patients in rural areas became aware of the value of their amulets in the eyes of a modern physician from the city. As for users of amulets living in towns, they had more contact with this other view on amulets as they could see objects being sold in shops and requested by collectors.

#### **4.6 Donation of amulets**

Another group of amulets was neither bought nor obtained in lieu of payment, but given to Taufiq Canaan as gifts. These amulets are not many but they are significant inasmuch as they come from individuals who were interested in contributing to Canaan's collection. In contrast to the rest of the objects that were chosen by Canaan, these donations came to him from acquaintances who knew about his interest and decided what to contribute.

These donations can be framed in what anthropology has studied as the phenomenon of gifts. Gifts can be of two kinds. On the one hand non-monetary gifts, which are the most studied ones since they appear in all kinds of societies, and on the other hand, cash gifts. In this research I only deal with non-monetary gifts, the kinds of gifts that Canaan received. The phenomenon of gifts has got a lot of attention in scholarly debates since Marcel Mauss' essay, *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. In exploring the relation between persons and things, gift giving is a process in which someone gives something to someone else. This giving seems to bear no intention of getting anything back, but as Mauss says "gifts generate an obligation to reciprocate" because "to make a gift to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself."<sup>434</sup>

Reciprocation comes as a way to balance social relations. According to Prendergast & Stole, that part of oneself displayed in the gift, is in fact the knowledge of the recipient's preferences, which is key in establishing social relations.<sup>435</sup> The more we know about another person, the better the quality and prediction of what to give.<sup>436</sup> A person who shows understanding of the other is more desirable as a friend. Giving away a small part of oneself is to disclose aspects of oneself. In

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<sup>434</sup> Miyazaki, Hirokazu, "Gifts and Exchange" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, edit. Dan Hicks & Mary C. Beaudry, p.250; Cfr. Mauss, M. 1990, p.12

<sup>435</sup> Prendergast, C. & L. Stole, "The non-monetary nature of gifts" in *European Economic Review* 45 (2001) 1793-1810, p.1795

<sup>436</sup> Prendergast, C. & L. Stole, *Op. Cit.*, p.1797

many societies this personal presence in gifts turns them into inalienable things, meaning that once they are given, they go out of circulation. This inalienability has similar consequences to Kopytoff's process of singularisation that occurs for instance with sacred objects. In both cases circulation is no longer possible.

Canaan recorded the identity of some of these individuals who donated amulets. The donors came from different social backgrounds, some came from well-known families of notables, were religious authorities or active in the political life of the country, others had a simple background and fulfilled no prominent role in society; some were of local fame, others were regular people that Canaan happened to be acquainted with or with whom he engaged at some point of his life. As analysed previously, Taufiq Canaan moved in different networks as a physician, ethnographer, but also played an important role as a member of diverse associations and as an academic figure and political activist.

In exploring the kind of gifts that Canaan got and their circulation in the act of giving and receiving, we can understand the motivations behind his acquaintances' contributions. Some of these individuals donated their own amulets, or valuable objects that had been used as amulets by old relatives. Others, amulet makers, made amulets exclusively for his collection. All these acts of giving show on the one hand how well-known Taufiq Canaan's ethnographic work and collecting activity were, and on the other hand, the donors' intention to become part of it. The donations also display the understanding that people had of "amulets" as part of Palestine's folklore, and show how the study of folklore had acquired a certain status, and was considered valuable.

Some of the donors came from al-Ansari family such as Shaykh Yahya al-Danaf al-Ansari and Shaykh Ibrahim Hassan al-Danaf al-Ansari, *qayim bāshā masjid al-aqṣā wa qubbat al-ṣakhrā*. As keepers of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, they were involved in the manufacture and distribution of objects related to the holy site, and as explored before, they were responsible for the issuing of pilgrimage certificates. Two pilgrimage certificates no. 942 and no. 943 were given to Canaan as gifts. The fact that religious authorities gave Canaan samples of pilgrimage certificates and others documents to be part of his collection of amulets is very interesting. It raises the question of how aware they were of the nature of Canaan's collection, but also of how Canaan framed his collecting activity and the objects he gathered. Did he describe them as medical objects, religious objects, magical objects, or ethnographic evidence? What understanding did these authorities have of an "amulet" that led them to collaborate by giving a pilgrimage certificate? I argue that since Canaan was very faithful to the scientificity of his research and his comparisons of the healing and protective uses of amulets with

biomedical treatments, he must have described his collecting activity in the same terms. Therefore, the donors, aware of the use of these pilgrimage certificates as protective objects, gave to Canaan some amulets.

Next to religious authorities responsible for the holy sites, other donors were also religious authorities of local fame. Sheikh Atif from the *ṭarīqat al-qādiriyya* gave Canaan three items in 1914: 886, 889, 897. They are paper amulets written by him and folded in a triangular shape. The first one was against miscarriage, the second was to lower or cease fever, and the third was to obtain “anything” (*li-l-ḥuṣūl ‘alā kull shay’*), must have been just samples of the variety of amulets that the Sheikh prepared.<sup>437</sup> Another amulet maker was Sheikh Najib al-Nubani, from a family famous for practicing traditional medicine. Located in *Wādī al-Jūz*, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, he prepared amulets of different kinds. In 1914 he prepared, exclusively for Canaan, two amulets against *jinn* (no. 283, 284). These were not the first ones; in his notes we know that by that time, Canaan had already got other amulets from his clients manufactured by the Sheikh. All these amulets, no. 835, 836, 1053, 1054, and 1055, were sheep shoulder blades with inscriptions aimed to cure different illnesses. The fact that Canaan had acquired a few amulets made by the Sheikh, it must have been interesting for him to get samples directly from him. It is not clear to what extent Canaan had contact with the Sheikh, but both were located in Jerusalem and were medical practitioners. I assume that the two amulets that Canaan got directly from him were made exclusively to be added to his collection since Canaan did not believe in jinns and did not ask for the services of the Sheikh to get a remedy for himself. What is not clear is whether Canaan asked for these specific kinds of amulets or if the Sheikh chose what to prepare. In any case, the presence of the Sheikh’s name in Canaan’s collection is quite important because he was one of the most representatives of the medical tradition that Canaan was trying to record. The addition of amulets in the Collection made by such famous amulet makers, gave these objects a singular status that prevented them from becoming commoditised.

Other donors to Canaan’s collection came from well-known families such as al-Husaini,<sup>438</sup> al-Nammari, al-Nashashibi, and from the urban bourgeoisie of Jerusalem. Surnames such as al-Mamluk, Qlibu or Klaybo, Hamuda, Jaltini, Hadad, and al-Barghuthi appear in Canaan’s notes as

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<sup>437</sup> Cfr. T. Canaan notebooks. Cfr. K. Nashef, Arabic translation and Introduction to Canaan’s catalogue.

<sup>438</sup> Musa Kazim (Basha) al-Ḥusaynī (1853-1934) was politically active, held senior posts in the Ottoman administration. Appointed mayor of Jerusalem by the British in 1918 he was dismissed by the British authorities in 1920. He was head of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Arab Congress from 1922 to 1934

parts of the list of donors of amulets. The network that Canaan established and particular relations with each one are somehow mentioned in his memoirs and biographical works. However, the role these people played in contributing to his Collection still needs more exploration.

#### ***4.7 Concluding remarks***

The ways Taufiq Canaan obtained the items for his collection point to different processes of commoditisation that accommodated an array of human engagements. Taking place in different networks, the engagements between amulet users, merchants, collectors and ethnographers determined the exchange value of the amulets, as medical remedies, ethnographic data, and collectables. Considering the capacity of amulets of acquiring value to be exchanged for other services, objects, or money adds a deeper understanding of how amulets moved around and went through different phases. This chapter shows different ways whereby objects lose their particular and personal characteristics allowing them to be exchanged. It also explores the networks in which they circulated, the people involved in such circulation and the places where this took place. Focusing on the continuity and the diversity of commoditisation processes we can understand the social context amulets circulated, plus the interactions between Taufiq Canaan and his many interlocutors during his collecting years. Moreover, a focus on the exchange of commodities shows that obtaining amulets as ethnographic data and collectibles, has never been a unidirectional activity where collectors take what they please, rather it is a process in which all parties are active and have the ability to negotiate. Users of amulets, including clients and collectors have to negotiate; they bargain, buy, accept replicas, and exchange rates in order to get what they want. They set new values in the spot where the transaction takes place. Their agency is shown in how they sell, buy, exchange and donate. Moreover, the users of the amulets who get them as part of medical treatment, did not only passively receive amulets made by the sheikh, they were active in finding, activating, passing on, and selling the amulets.

Taufiq Canaan's exchange of his modern medical remedies for traditional remedies points to a process of commoditisation of the "traditional" life in Palestine. It does not mean that prior to Canaan's collecting years, amulets were not circulating as commodities, but Canaan's engagement shows how a generation of travellers/ethnographers and amateur collectors of Palestine's folklore, by engaging with the local population, were effecting the way amulets were understood, used, and commercialised. The exchange value that Canaan gave to his amulets relied on the way folklore was imagined. For urbanites like Canaan and other ethnographers, objects coming from the local

people were worthy to study and collect since they were under threat of disappearing. This same ethnographic value appears to be present in the objects that Canaan obtained as gifts from the sheikhs. How they saw Canaan in his various facets, as a doctor, a folklorist, and a political activist, must have motivated them to become part of his collecting project that after all was becoming more and more politicised.

Now that we have examined the amulets in their phase as commodities we should turn to the most recent phase that formed the *Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets*, in which amulets are explored as tokens of the Palestinian national identity.