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## **Amulets and talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in context: transmission, efficacy and collections**

Sijpesteijn, P.M.; Garcia Probert, M.A.; A. Garcia Probert Marcela, M. Sijpesteijn Petra

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# Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context

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# Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context

*Transmission, Efficacy and Collections*

*Edited by*

Marcela A. Garcia Probert  
Petra M. Sijpesteijn



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Leiden, 23 April 2021



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# Notes on Transliteration, Names of Persons and Places and Dates

The transliteration of Arabic and Persian words and phrases follows the system used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide>).

For some of the most common Arabic words a simplified transliteration is used following the IJMES word list (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-filemanager/file/57d9042c58fb76353506c8e7/IJMES-WordList.pdf>).

Unlike the IJMES guidelines, in historical contexts Arabic and Persian personal and place names are transliterated according to their medieval forms, except for very common place names such as Alexandria (not al-Iskandariyya) or Damascus (not al-Dimashq). Greek, Coptic or Latin names of places are added to the Arabic names when relevant. When no Arabic equivalent is known for a place, only the Greek, Coptic or Latin is mentioned. In other words not always are the Greek and Coptic equivalents of Arabic toponyms provided. Modern place names are only mentioned when referring to the modern location, for example in reports on finding places or archaeological activities.

If not otherwise specified, dates given in this volume are Common Era (CE) dates. If two dates are provided (e.g. 17/639), the first one is the year according to the Muslim hijra calendar (AH) and the second, the CE date. Only one CE date is given even when the Muslim year falls in two CE years. For dates preceding the year 1AH only the CE date is provided.

The reference works *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2 and 3 and *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* are used extensively and therefore the references are simplified both in the footnotes and the bibliography, to respectively *EI2*, *EI3* and *EQ*.

*Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition*. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill). Print and online.

*Encyclopedia of Islam, THREE*. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson. (Leiden: Brill). Online.

*Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Johanna Pink et al. (Leiden: Brill). Online.

# Introduction

Marcela A. Garcia Probert and Petra M. Sijpesteijn

Amulets and talismans from the Islamic world have long fascinated collectors and scholars. Although often assembled as part of larger ethnographic, material-culture or art and manuscript collections, amulets have tended to form a distinct interpretative category, labelled semi-literary and consigned to the realm of popular belief and alternative medicine. Given their ostensible function, amulets and talismans have typically been considered within the specialised domain of magic. How they work, how they relate to systems of authority and control, and the means by which their power is manifest and conferred upon a person, family, building, or city, have all been understood within the framework of magical thinking.

More recent studies,<sup>1</sup> however, have approached amulets and talismans as part of a broader system of meaning that shapes how they are manufactured, activated and used in the different networks in which they circulate. In other words, amulets, like other material objects and cultural practices, are grounded in the social-historical context in which they occur and derive their meaning and efficacy through interaction with their cultural environment. This approach has emphasised that amulets and talismans are embedded in

- 
- 1 Juan E. Campo, "Shrines and Talismans: Domestic Islam in the Pilgrimage Paintings of Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 2 (1987): 285–305; Laurel Kendall, "Popular Religion and the Sacred Life of Material Goods in Contemporary Vietnam," *Asian Ethnology* 67, no. 2 (2008): 177–199. Widad K. Kwar, *Threads of Identity* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 2011); Rose Muravchick, "God is the Best Guardian: Islamic Talismanic Shirts from the Gunpowder Empires." (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014). <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1380>; Ariela Popper-Giveon, Atef Abu-Rabia, and Jonathan Ventura, "From White Stone to Blue Bead: Materialised Beliefs and Sacred Beads among Bedouin in Israel," *Material Religion. The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, 10 no. 2 (2014): 132–153; Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2011); Anne Regourd, "A Magic Mirror in the Louvre and Additional Observations on the Use of Magic Mirrors in Contemporary Yemen," in *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135–156.; Don Skimer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Hồng Thuật Vũ, "Amulets and the Marketplace" *Asian Ethnology* 67, no. 2 (2008): 237–255; Travis Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur'an," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 3 (2009): 443–466; Jean-Charles Coulon, "The Kitāb Sharāsīm al-Hindiyya and Medieval Islamic Occult Sciences" in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practise*, ed. Liana Saif et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 317–379.

religious, medical and mystical practices, not as by-products or deviations from orthodox prescription, but integrated into a behavioural continuum. Indeed, it is the amulets' function to obtain aid from the divine to keep or re-establish well-being that forms the common background. Focusing on the ways in which amulets interact with sacred and profane spaces, natural forces and unexplainable phenomena, the question is how amulets interact with and impact devotional experiences. By acknowledging this function within a specific historical, social and cultural context, amulets can be seen for the dynamic objects they are, transmitting knowledge and power, and transforming as they pass from one environment to another.

This scholarly development of understanding amulets as an integral part of the world in which they circulate forms the premise of our volume. This is not a book about magical practices, of which amulets form a part. It also does not engage with contemporary or historical philosophical and religious debates about the use of amulets.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the volume's starting-point is the objects—amulets, talismans, writings about them and any other product of a concern or action that can be interpreted as talismanic. Examining the amulets and texts as *objects*, taking into account materiality, traces of use, reinterpretation and transformation, enables the contributors to trace how people used them and what kind of power these people attributed to them. In some of the cases presented in this volume, it is moreover possible to gain insights into how the objects were used through contemporary historical descriptions. The amulets analysed in this volume are not in use as such at this time, so ethnographic data on how they are used are obviously not available. Through the methods described above—examining the use, re-use and interaction through traces on the historical objects themselves and as discussed in contemporary historical sources—the book's contributors draw inspiration from modern anthropology and material culture studies with the aim of seeing these historical amulets within the framework of a living religion.<sup>3</sup>

The objects presented here as case studies were produced and used by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and differ in size, material, language and shape.

2 Indeed, the presence of amulets and the like is a better indicator of 'magical' practice than such theoretical debates which might or might not interact with those who use amulets.

3 By "living religion" we mean the way individuals and communities engage with the sacred in everyday life. The cases explored in this book come from the past and present. Cfr. Nancy T. Ammerman (ed.) *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion, Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (eds.) *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes. An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

The processes by which they were produced, used and understood, differ enormously from one object to the next. However, whether they were meant to be read out loud, displayed or kept hidden, carried on the body, hung on the wall, folded, ingested or burned, they all share one common feature: their primary function was to establish a channel of communication with the supernatural in order to elicit some kind of divine intervention.

Focusing on this function allows us to see the centrality of the performative aspect of amulets and talismans. This means that the ways in which they were used, as well as the means by which they gained power and meaning, becomes essential to how we understand these objects. Forms of activation are ritual procedures in which someone (usually, but not exclusively, a specialist) invests the object with special powers. That task can be accomplished by uttering or reciting certain (magical or religious) formulae, by marking it with specific features (inscriptions, symbols), by putting it in contact with a source of power such as a holy site, by making it on a particular day of the year or time of the day or night, or by another act that serves to transmit divine or magical power to an otherwise neutral object in the production or activation phase. It can also be achieved through the act of reading, touching or observing (some of) the object's features during its subsequent use. This process of activating the amulet's function can occur multiple times, whenever a new objective or user interacts with the amulet. Similarly, instructions on how to produce amulets and how to use them were adopted according to the text genre (medical, religious, lore) and geographical, historical and socio-intellectual context in which they were produced, acquired and deployed. In this sense the texts *about* protective and healing through amulets operate like the amulets themselves, being activated over and over again in different contexts with different meanings and functions. It is this layering of use and meaning that allows us to see these historical objects as projecting a living religion within the sequence of the historical and geographical contexts in which they circulate.

Amulets are also kept alive in other domains than the protective religious-medical arena. New meaning is given to the amulets by collectors and researchers as they interact with the objects, rearranging, labelling, displaying and interpreting them. Collecting practice, material culture and museum studies thus add yet another disciplinary angle to this work, as many of the objects discussed are now found in museums or libraries. We extend the process of giving meaning and function to the amulets and related objects to this current phase of preservation and collection. So while they are no longer in use for healing and protection, they fulfil a function as collectible items.

Two themes are central to this book. Firstly, the understanding of how, in the eyes of the beholders, amulets and talismans receive their power and are able to distribute it again in the form of protection, health, good fortune and other



positive outcomes; and secondly that they (simultaneously) form the focus of study, aesthetics, commerce and collection. To demonstrate this we present case-studies of amulets and related textual materials. This volume is located at the intersection of history, philology, (historical) anthropology, religious studies and the study of material culture. It connects amulets and talismans to local religiosities, medical traditions as well as to nutritional and pharmaceutical knowledge, and collection practices, then and now, in rural, urban and different social contexts. In doing so the book makes available new material, connecting it to practices of healing, protection, patronage and fortune-enhancement. People sought divine help to safeguard their health and well-being and to deal with the individual and communal ailments, crises and catastrophes they experienced. The 11 chapters in this book all discuss ways in which this was achieved in the Muslim world, using materials stretching from the seventh to twentieth century and from Europe to Africa and Arabia. The different contributions show that amulets were used in all layers of society—by the literate and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, religious scholars and laymen. By focusing on *how* these objects gained their effectiveness, the different case studies help us to imagine the broader context of amulets and talismans in the Muslim world.

The structure of the book follows three main questions, aiming to prompt a number of important reflections. The first line of enquiry concerns how practice and knowledge about amulets moved from one cultural tradition to another, and how this transition affected their form and application as well as understanding of them. Secondly, we focus on how amulets and talismans obtain their efficacy; in other words, how do they *work*? Finally, the book looks at how amulets have been studied (through collections and archives, *in situ*, or through texts reporting about the objects) and how repositories, such as private and public collections, museums, etc., have defined our understanding of these objects.

Before we turn to the specific themes of the book, we need to examine exactly what we mean when talking about amulets and talismans.

## 1 The Terminology: What Are Amulets and Talismans?

In this volume we have chosen to use the English terms *amulets* and *talismans* in the title for practical reasons. The terms amulets and talismans overlap with other words in use, such as charms, incantations, phylacteries and objects that have been referred to as ‘small blessings’.<sup>4</sup> Amulets and talismans are made of

4 Cf. the project of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Cambridge entitled “Small Blessings” (<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/> accessed 3/7/2020).

diverse materials and come in many forms. Despite their variety, certain features appear repeatedly and can be distinguished, such as specific formulae and commonly used materials, drawings and signs, scratches and perforations. The purpose for which the objects were used and the ways in which their function as protectors was activated also shows recurrent identifiable elements.

The distinction between amulets and talismans has been addressed by several scholars. An amulet has been described as an object endowed with magical powers used by the person who carries it.<sup>5</sup> As it exercises its protective powers continuously, an amulet can be used by anyone to target different kinds of problems. By contrast, a talisman is only intended to perform one specific task; therefore, it has to be made to cover the needs of a particular user in a defined situation. Its power exists from the moment it is activated, but it expires once its function is fulfilled.<sup>6</sup> As we will see in the following pages, however, in practice the difference in function between talismans and amulets is much more blurred.<sup>7</sup>

Some definitions of amulets and talismans are unique to certain disciplines and emerge from the kind of material that is researched. Papyrologists, for example, always work with material that has been inscribed. As Ursula Hammed explains in her contribution, providing an overview of the kind of amulets that can be found on papyrus, documents containing certain features, such as specific formulae, random repetition of letters, etc., have all been considered amulets. On the other hand, within the study of architecture, as Juan Campo shows in his article on Ottoman houses from Cairo, inscriptions aiming to protect buildings are generally called talismans or are said to have talismanic power. For disciplines that rely strongly on fieldwork or on a more ethnographic approach, the definitions tend to change according to the trajectories of the objects. This means, as Marcela Garcia Probert shows in her chapter on uninscribed natural objects used to gain protection, that the focus lies on how objects are used here and now, compared to how they were used in the past, or in different historical circumstances. In literary and book studies, the genre under which a text is categorised—medicine, magic, religion—determines for a large part how the text is perceived by scholars, but not necessarily how it was used before it arrived at a research library. Petra Sijpesteijn and Charles

5 Tawfiq Fahd, 'Tamīma,' in *EI2*.

6 Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930), 13–14.; Ursula Hammed in this volume: "Arabic Magical Texts in Original Documents—A Papyrologist Answers Five Questions You Always Wanted to Ask."

7 See also 'one of the most widespread uses of talismans was in the form of amulets' (J. Ruska and B. Carra de Vaux, 'Tilsam,' in *EI2*.)

Coulon show how texts related to amulets can move through different genres, developing features and taking on different shapes as they are transmitted and reworked.

In this volume, amulets and talismans comprise material objects that have been manufactured and used within the Muslim world for protection, healing and to procure good fortune. People ingest them (in the literal sense of eating, drinking or inhaling parts or traces of the amulet) or carry them on their body, but protective objects and texts can also be placed in or on houses, on city buildings or walls or hung on animals, in cars, trucks or on machines and other work-related objects. Amulets are usually used for general protection; however, they can also be manufactured in a way that combines elements that tackle one particular threat or ailment. Talismans on the other hand, can be meant to target one particular problem, but they can be reused later in another context or for general protection, often by another user. This means that a strict definition of these two terms is problematic because it artificially limits the object's identity to one particular function and moment in time. In doing so it neglects the actual fluid nature of amulets and talismans over their lifespan in different contexts. The translation into English of all the terms employed in each chapter might not be the most accurate, so we have encouraged the contributors to make use of the *emic* terminology for the material under consideration.

## 2 **Transmission of Knowledge: Where Do Amulets and Talismans Come From?**

Amulets and talismans, the production of which is almost as old as mankind, served practical purposes. These objects with special powers were intended to protect, to heal and to elicit good fortune. Different forms of knowledge surrounding amulets have developed and accumulated throughout time as practices and information were transmitted from one language, religion, culture, period or region to another. How knowledge about amulets and talismans was transmitted and transformed is a recurrent theme in this book. On the one hand, the process shows the interconnections between seemingly different traditions; on the other hand, it illustrates how well-known elements can adopt a new life and are taken and reused as a result of their seeming efficacy. As a consequence of this transmission deliberately imported foreign as well as hidden or accidentally unknown terms and performances can be introduced. Ancient stones could become highly valued elements in Muslim amulets in forms very different from their original function, as items in the British Museum collec-

tion discussed by Venetia Porter show. Similarly, as Gideon Bohak demonstrates with the aid of magical texts preserved in the Cairo Geniza, Hebrew and Aramaic phrases could turn into magical formulae without semantic meaning when pronounced phonetically by Arabic speakers.

Transmission of knowledge has taken place via oral tradition and written sources. People's knowledge about specific amulets and talismans—the way they are made and used—passed through generations by word of mouth. Since amulets and talismans respond to practical needs, their efficacy determines their longevity: if an object is considered to work, people will continue to use it. Similarly, practices, iconography and other elements were shared and adopted across languages, religions and cultural traditions easily and quickly, on the grounds that whatever works is worth being imitated or copied.

Obviously, the Muslim world was never inhabited solely by Muslims, nor was Arabic the only language in use. Moreover, the environment within which ideas, practices and objects circulated was not confined by either political or religious borders. Nowhere does that become clearer than when studying amulets and talismans. In order to understand these particular objects in their social context, we need to be aware of the different cultural and religious experiences that have co-existed within Muslim societies and which have contributed to the way that these traditions were shaped. Many texts have played a role in grounding systematic knowledge about how to make and use amulets. Some texts come from previous traditions and were adapted to the Arabic-Islamic tradition. Other texts were produced by inhabitants of the Muslim world, but their use changed continually to fit differing historical, social and cultural circumstances and needs. Still others circulated within and outside the Muslim world, transporting knowledge and practice far and wide.

Different forms of transmission are addressed in the contributions in this book. Texts discussing the workings of amulets and offering instruction on their production and application show the transmission and transformation of knowledge through time. Charles Coulon discusses how the corpus ascribed to al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) as it is known today, with its quintessential magical character, obscures its original sufi contents. The recipients of al-Būnī's works adjusted them to fit contemporary needs, adding a layer of magical practice and information on amulets that was not there in the original version. Similarly, Petra Sijpesteijn studies how two processes of reworking, one a systematic rewriting and the other an organic growing and adjusting of texts by users and readers reshaped a popular work of (prophetic) medicine into a magico-medical one. In this sense literature related to amulets fits into other textual and manuscript traditions in the Muslim world, especially those related to 'util-

itarian' texts. Amulets proper sometimes also display traces of such adjustment of understanding and application. The imagery and contents of the Mamluk talismanic roll that Yasmine al-Saleh edits and discusses in her contribution point to the military environment in which the owner and user of the roll operated.

When texts about amulets move between linguistically, religiously and culturally distinct communities, additional explanations and interpretations are generated that facilitate their integration into the receiving tradition. This is clear in the material that Gideon Bohak discusses, which circulated between Jewish and Muslim communities in medieval Cairo and Europe. Arabic glosses and, later, full translations of Hebrew and Aramaic texts, served an Arabicising Jewish community in Fustat. In this way Arabic facilitated the spread of magical Jewish-Hebrew-Aramaic practices and their mixing with classical, Indian and other applications. The circulation of exorcism texts from Yemen through Ethiopia into the Iberian peninsula, as Anne Regourd shows, interacted with different textual traditions along the way. Although originating in different cultural, textual and religious traditions, the texts she discusses all revolved around the custom of calling upon jinn to help with the practice of exorcism.

### 3 Function: Material and Textual Features

Amulets and talismans are a result of human intervention upon existing natural and man-made materials and objects. Amulets acquire their power first through their shape and form and secondly through their application—and both are adjusted to fit the amulet's function. The specific arrangement of elements on the amulet is achieved by carving, modelling or assembling the materials into symbolic shapes or by inscribing them.

Most amulets and talismans that have been studied bear inscriptions. It has been, in fact, the written elements that have attracted most scholarly attention, since inscriptions are very useful for deciphering the way in which a magical object was used and the kind of power with which it had been imbued. Moreover, textual content can also illuminate the ritual actions and the performative aspects of amulets and talismans. Karl Schaefer's contribution makes clear how important these textual elements are, not only for *what* they say but also *how* the text is presented on the amulet, in this case in hand-written or printed form. The talismanic scroll that Yasmine al-Saleh analyses, derived its power from the specific combination of texts, namely Qur'anic and literary, which points to the background of its user. Similarly, the *tafrīq* text edited by Hazem Abbas 'Ali contains the textual elements needed to provoke discord between husband

and wife, but also shows drawings and additional phrases that point to the rituals that activated its power. The amulets discussed in the volume, whether written on papyrus, such as those discussed by Ursula Hammed on the objects of the British Museum as discussed by Venetia Porter or on papers preserved in the Cairo Geniza as discussed by Gideon Bohak, all contain standard textual features, such as certain Qur'anic passages or drawings, that turn them into powerfully numinous objects. They often also contain textual references, such as phrases and sounds, that needed to be spoken aloud to make that power effective.

However, and this might be the most important contribution of this volume, there are amulets and talismans that do not bear inscriptions at all. This absence of text does not indicate a lack of performativity but requires a change in the methodology: a shift of focus from the textual elements to a consideration of the object as a whole. Features other than inscriptions can yield significant information about how objects have been used through time. When objects lack inscriptions, other elements become important keys to understanding their function. Indeed, the material, shape, colour, or traces of use, such as scratches, holes and cracks, can prove just as valuable as inscriptions or other forms of text for informing us of the way in which these objects were used. This comes out most explicitly in the contribution by Marcela Garcia Probert on the twigs used as amulets that are now part of the Tawfik Canaan Collection, but it plays in the background in many other papers. How to interpret a piece of papyrus or paper, for example, that has been folded several times in the way that amulets often are to fit into small containers that can be carried, but that does not contain any of the textual or iconographic features generally associated with amulets?

Focusing on function and the meaning-making processes behind that function allow us to understand better the diversity of materials used. The material aspects of amulets and talismans can be subservient to their function, but they can also define the way the amulet is used. Anything can be made into an amulet or talisman, but there has to be a meaningful connection between the material and function of the object. Indeed, objects that might not obviously possess magical power, can become potent talismans through ritual activation. Moreover, an object that has been used as an amulet or talisman by one individual in a specific context can be used differently by someone else in other circumstances. There are many examples of objects first used as talismans made for an individual in order to target a specific problem that were later used by other individuals as amulets for general protection. When amulets enter museum or private collections or textual sources become part of libraries their function alters again. In choosing a fitting material base for the amulet,

the properties of natural elements are taken into account, but sometimes an object gains power through its antiquity or its origin in a foreign culture. This is clear, for example, in the re-use of Sasanian seals in Islamic amulets preserved in the British Museum, as Venetia Porter discusses.

So, with a fitting material having been chosen, the object shaped according to its function and/or the correct textual and iconographic elements applied, how are amulets made to work? The material properties of the amulet have to be created at the proper time and under the proper circumstances to be effective. Al-Būnī considered certain star constellations and celestial configurations essential for producing certain amulets, as Charles Coulon explains. Magical spells and formulae sometimes had to be uttered to activate the amulet's power. The inhabitants of mediaeval Fustat continued to produce the Hebrew and Aramaic spells considered to be essential for activating the associated amulets. As Gideon Bohak shows, the spells continued to be pronounced in the original language, but became more and more garbled as producers and users lost the capacity to understand them. Some amulets had to be consumed to be effective, thereby destroying any textual evidence of the amulets proper. Practices such as absorbing the amulet's powers by inhaling the smoke generated by burning the amulet or drinking the water in which the ink of the text has been dissolved are known from instruction manuals as Petra Sijpesteijn discusses.

Some amulets exerted their power simply by being worn or being in place. Others could only be activated by reading the text written on them. The poetry lines publicly displayed in Ottoman houses in Cairo became effective talismans when observers read them (aloud), as Juan Campo discusses. Some amulets on papyrus also show traces of having been on display, suggesting a similar practice was expected to effectuate the texts.<sup>8</sup>

Once a talisman had fulfilled its function, it was disposed of by its user. The conditions under which papyri are found, namely discarded in refuse dumps, as Ursula Hammed, discusses, highlight this practice. When an amulet or talisman changed hands, it not only had to be reactivated through one of the rituals described above, but could also be personalised to fit the circumstances of its new owner. Yasmine al-Saleh shows how subsequent owners manipulated a talismanic Mamluk scroll to adjust it to their personal needs. Similarly, manuscripts containing instructions on how to produce and apply amulets and talismans show the traces of subsequent owners and users who have added their personal experiences, opinions and observations, as the contributions by Charles Coulon and Petra Sijpesteijn demonstrate. Amulets also show how

8 W. Matt Malczycki, "A Qur'anic Amulet on Papyrus: P. Utah. AR 342," in *Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World*, eds. Petra M. Sijpesteijn and Alexander T. Schubert (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 235–246.

Qur'anic phrases could be adjusted, for example, by changing the personal pronoun, to fit the specific context of the amulet, as several examples discussed by Ursula Hammed, Yasmine al-Saleh, Hazem Abbas 'Ali and Karl Schaeffer show.

#### 4 Location and Preservation in the Study of Amulets

Amulets and talismans used in research are found either in actual use or in collections. Since the early nineteenth century collections have been the main repositories of amulets and talismans from the Muslim world. Whether private or public, these collections were formed under specific historical circumstances and articulate particular narratives, which have impacted the way amulets have been researched and understood. As Charles Coulon observes in his contribution, discussions of amulets and talismans have been produced by Orientalist scholars and colonial authorities based on material gathered during their missions which was eventually deposited in museum collections. Amulets and talismans were collected for three different purposes: for aesthetic reasons; as magical objects; and out of folkloric interest. Collections thus play an important but mostly neglected role in setting the conditions of our research. Given the potentially distorting effects of selectivity, it is essential that the ownership context is taken into account. Ursula Hammed discusses this in the framework of the papyrological evidence. Similarly, Marcela Garcia Probert explores this aspect in her analysis of the place of 'unrecognisable' amulets, such as twigs in collections.

Besides museum collections, some researchers have focused on amulets and talismans that are still in use. The study of magical objects *in situ* has mainly been carried out through ethnographic work, which in a more comprehensive manner considers the way amulets and talismans interact with other elements of local culture. Anne Regourd does this very effectively in her chapter, as she combines ethnographic with philological research. When we focus on the history of ethnography in the Middle East, we find that for a long time it was undertaken mainly by European missionaries. Quite early, local ethnographers such as Tawfik Canaan got involved in the collection and study of ethnographic objects. More recent ethnographic work analyses amulets in accordance with their processes of manufacture, ritual activation, and circulation. Although this approach is more inclusive, it is mainly limited to contemporary material. For material coming from archives it is difficult if not impossible to retrace the full history of the objects and the context in which they were collected. Still, one of the purposes of this book's diachronic approach has been to see how such observations from the contemporary period can be applied to earlier material.



Book and manuscript studies offer a promising springboard in this respect, as several papers in this volume make clear.

This book is the outcome of the international conference *Amulets and Talismans in the Muslim World* held at Leiden University in May 2016. The written versions of the papers that were presented during the conference and articles that were added afterwards to supplement the volume have been subject to constant revisions until the moment of publication to reflect the latest research.

**PART 1**

*Transmission*





# Specimens of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic Magical Texts from the Cairo Genizah

*Gideon Bohak*

In spite of much progress in recent years, the study of the Jewish magical tradition is still in its infancy.\*<sup>1</sup> Ancient Jewish magic has received some scholarly attention, and we now have several important corpora of the relevant sources and two reliable surveys of these sources and their historical significance.<sup>2</sup> But medieval Jewish magic still lags far behind, with no replacement for Trachtenberg's classic, but dated, survey of the field, and modern Jewish magic has hardly received any scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> This scholarly neglect is not due to the absence of evidence, which is readily available, but to deep-seated scholarly convictions that Jews should not practice magic, and that even when they do, Jewish Studies scholars should focus on other, more "rational," or more "important," aspects of Jewish culture.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 For a fuller substantiation of this claim, and a call for action, see Gideon Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition," *Currents in Biblical Literature* 8, no. 1 (2009): 107–150.
- 2 See Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah*, trans. Batya Stein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); both monographs provide full bibliographies.
- 3 See Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1939); for a preliminary survey of the Jewish magical tradition, see Yuval Harari, "Jewish Magic: An Annotated Overview," *El Prezente: Studies in Sephardic Culture* 5 (2011): 13\*–85\* (Heb.); for modern Jewish magic, see Gideon Bohak, "How Jewish Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," *Aries—Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 19 (2019): 7–37.
- 4 For this point, see Jeffrey Howard Chajes, "Entzauberung" and Jewish Modernity: On "Magic", Enlightenment, and Faith," *Jahrbuch des Simon Dubnow-Instituts* 6 (2007): 191–200; Gideon Bohak, "Gershom Scholem and Jewish Magic," *Kabbalah* 28 (2012): 141–162 (Heb.); and cf. the following note.

One sub-field where this scholarly disdain is readily apparent is the publication and analysis of the Jewish magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, the used paper storage room of a medieval synagogue, in use from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries. After many decades of complete neglect, some Genizah magical texts have finally been published over the last thirty years, but the identification, publication, and study of such texts still lag far behind those of most other types of Genizah texts. Like all the other texts from the Cairo Genizah, the magical texts too are haphazardly strewn among the 300,000 Genizah fragments in numerous collections worldwide. They are only fragmentarily preserved, are written in many different handwritings—ranging from professional to semi-illiterate hands—and often are quite hard to read. And yet, the scholarly avoidance of these fragments is due less to the difficulties involved in their identification and decipherment and more to many scholars' refusal to acknowledge the rich and varied remains of the Jewish magical tradition.<sup>5</sup> Only in recent decades have we seen some bolder attempts to edit, translate, and analyse Genizah magical texts, and thus far these efforts tended to focus more on the Aramaic and Hebrew magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, and less on those written in Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic (by which term I refer to Arabic-language texts written in the Hebrew alphabet and read by Jews, regardless of these texts' specific dialectological features).<sup>6</sup> With the exception of some brief sketches by Norman Golb and by Shaul Shaked, a more programmatic essay by Steven Wasserstrom, and a recent study by Charles Burnett and the

5 For fuller discussions of this issue, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, "The Magical Texts in the Cairo Genizah," in *Genizah Research after Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic*, eds. Joshua Blau and Stefan C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 160–166; Mark R. Cohen, "Goitein, Magic, and the Geniza," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13 (2006): 294–304.

6 For the most important publications, see Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993); Lawrence H. Schiffman and Michael D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1*, *Semitic Texts and Studies* 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, *Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 42, 64, 72, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994–1999); Emma Abate, *Sigillare il mondo: Amuleti e ricette dalla Genizah: Manoscritti magici ebraici della biblioteca della Alliance Israelite Universelle di Parigi* (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2015). For a broad survey of the Genizah magical texts see Gideon Bohak, "Towards a Catalogue of the Magical, Astrological, Divinatory and Alchemical Fragments from the Cambridge Genizah Collections," in *From a Sacred Source: Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Stefan C. Reif*, eds. Ben Outhwaite and Siam Bhayro, *Études sur le Judaïsme Médiéval* 42, *Cambridge Genizah Studies Series* 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 53–79.

present author, no attempt has been made to discuss—let alone publish—those Genizah magical texts which are of a demonstrably Arabic or Muslim origin.<sup>7</sup> And when it comes to analysing such Genizah fragments, and contextualising them within their wider non-Jewish context, we have only sporadic attempts by a handful of scholars.<sup>8</sup> Only in relation to astrology is the situation slightly better, thanks to the pioneering studies of Bernard Goldstein and David Pingree, but even here the number of unpublished fragments far exceeds that of the published ones.<sup>9</sup> And when it comes to other forms of divination,

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- 7 See Norman Golb, "The Esoteric Practices of the Jews of Fatimid Egypt," *American Philosophical Society Yearbook* (1965), 533–535; Norman Golb, "Aspects of the Historical Background of Jewish Life in Medieval Egypt," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1–18, esp. 12–18; Shaul Shaked, "An Early Magic Fragment from the Cairo Geniza," in *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*, ed. Robert Dán (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó and Leiden: Brill, 1988), 361–371; Shaul Shaked, "Between Judaism and Islam: Some Issues in Popular Religion," *Pe'amim* 60 (1994): 4–19 (Heb.); Shaul Shaked, "Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam: Theoretical Attitudes and Genres," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction (Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner)*, ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 97–109; Steven M. Wasserstrom, "The Unwritten Chapter: Notes Towards a Social and Religious History of Geniza Magic," in *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, ed. Shaul Shaked, *IJS Studies in Judaica* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 269–293; Charles Burnett and Gideon Bohak, "A Judaeo-Arabic Version of Ṭābit ibn Qurra's *De Imaginibus* and Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Opus Imaginum*," in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, eds. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 179–200; Gideon Bohak and Charles Burnett, *Thābit ibn Qurra On Talismans, Pseudo-Ptolemy On Images 1–9, Liber prestigiorum Thebidis of Adelard of Bath* (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo), 2021.
- 8 See Karl R. Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), who edits a few Arabic block printed amulets from the Cairo Genizah, and Gideon Bohak and Ortal-Paz Saar, "Genizah Magical Texts Prepared for or Against Named Individuals," *Revue des Études Juives* 174 (2015): 77–110 for a prosopography of the Genizah magical texts.
- 9 For the astrological fragments, mostly in Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic, see Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "Horoscopes from the Cairo Geniza," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977): 113–144; Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "The Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi in a Nineteenth Century Egyptian Text," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98 (1978): 96–99; Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "Astrological Almanacs from the Cairo Geniza," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1979): 153–175, 231–256; Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "More Horoscopes from the Cairo Geniza," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 125 (1981): 155–189; Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "Astronomical Computations for 1299 from the Cairo Geniza," *Centaurus* 25 (1982): 303–318; Bernard R. Goldstein and David Pingree, "Additional Astrological Almanacs from the Cairo Geniza," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 673–690. For another astrological fragment, see below, n. 31. For broader surveys, see Paul Fenton, "Les Manuscrits Astrologiques de la Guénizah du Caire," in *Le monde juif et l'astrologie*, ed. Jacques Halbronn (Milano: Archè,

such as books of *goralot* (lot-casting, or *sortes*), geomancy, physiognomy or dream-interpretation, we have made only some basic steps, but are still far from covering all the materials in these fields.<sup>10</sup>

The neglect of the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts from the Cairo Genizah is not only shameful, it also leads to misleading reconstructions of Jewish cultural history. Reading the published Genizah magical texts one gets the impression that these consist mostly of copies of copies of pre-Muslim Jewish magical texts, often preserved in their original languages and sometimes also translated into Judaeo-Arabic. There is no doubt that in many cases this is true, and we shall examine these processes of transmission and translation in greater detail below, but to this we must add that a large number of Genizah magical texts were borrowed by the Jews from their Arabic-speaking neighbours, and are deeply indebted to the Arabic / Islamic magical tradition. Such texts were read and used by the Jews of medieval Cairo either in their original Arabic manuscripts, or in Judaeo-Arabic copies. In some cases, Arabic magical texts were translated into Hebrew, by Jews whose Arabic was good enough to produce such translations, but who knew that other Jews—including almost all the Jews living in the lands of Christendom—did not possess enough Arabic to make fruitful use of such texts in their original language. Moreover, whole genres of Genizah magical texts which are clearly based on Arabic sources, including elaborate adjurations for summoning and controlling demons, astral-talismanic magic, manuals for finding ancient treasures, handbooks on the medical and magical properties of animal-parts and other substances, and many other magical texts and practices, are either unrepresented or under-represented among the published magical texts from the Cairo Genizah.<sup>11</sup> Thus, our view of medieval Jewish magic as practiced in the

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1985), iii–xvii; Bernard R. Goldstein, “Astronomy and the Jewish Community in Early Islam,” *Aleph* 1 (2001): 17–57.

10 For these divinatory techniques, and their representation in the Cairo Genizah, see Israel Friedlaender, “A Muhammedan Book on Augury in Hebrew Characters,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 19 (1907): 84–103; Blanca Villuendas Sabaté, *La Geomancia en los manuscritos judeo-árabes de la Gueniza de El Cairo*, Cordoba Near Eastern Research Unit, Series Judaeo-Islamica 2 (Córdoba: CNERU-CSIC, 2015); Blanca Villuendas Sabaté, “Arabic Geomancy in Jewish Hands: Specimens from the Cairo Genizah,” in *Geomancy and Other Forms of Divination*, eds. Alessandro Palazzo and Irene Zattero, Micrologus Library 87 (Firenze: SISMELE Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2017), 271–288; Blanca Villuendas Sabaté, *Onirocrítica islámica, judía y cristiana en la Gueniza de El Cairo: edición y estudio de los manuales judeo-árabes de interpretación de sueños*. Estudios árabes e islámicos 23 (Madrid: CSIC, 2020).

11 For the impact on the Jewish world of Muslim demonological tracts, see Gershom Scholem, “Bilar the King of Devils,” *Jewish Studies* 1 (1926): 112–127 (Heb.) (repr., with many additions, in Gershom Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology by Gershom*

Islamicate world is deeply flawed, since many of the magical texts and practices that flourished at the time are still missing in the small body of published magical texts from the Cairo Genizah. This glaring lacuna also inhibits the discussion of the Arabic and Muslim origins of much of medieval Jewish magic in the Christian world, and of the potential contribution of the Jewish magical texts to the study of the history of magic in the Islamic world, two topics to which Genizah evidence can make great contributions.<sup>12</sup>

The present paper does not seek to rectify this imbalance in one fell swoop, but to present a few examples of three basic types of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts attested among the Genizah fragments and to show the potential contribution of this material to the study of cultural adaptation and textual transmission, both within a single language and community and between languages and religious groups. In what follows, I shall briefly introduce several different fragments, illustrating a widely divergent set of magical techniques and practices. I make no claim to completeness, and hope to discuss other genres and types of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts in future publications. Moreover, I have made no attempt to identify the origins of each of these texts—or even the textual parallels to it—in the Arabic magical tradition, a feat for which I am very ill-equipped. In fact, by publishing these textual specimens here I hope to bring them to the attention both of those Jewish Studies scholars who have yet to recognize the importance of such evidence for the reconstruction of Jewish cultural history, and of those scholars of Arabic and Islam who might be able to identify similar texts from the Islamic world and analyse their

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*Scholem*, ed. Esther Liebes (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2004), 9–53 (Heb.); Gershom Scholem, “Some Sources of Jewish-Arabic Demonology,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1965): 1–13 (repr., with many additions, in Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls*, 103–115 (Heb.)); in both papers, Scholem displays no familiarity with the many Genizah fragments that shed much light on this issue; for astral-talismanic magic, see Burnett and Bohak, “A Judaeo-Arabic Version,” and Bohak and Burnett, *Thābit ibn Qurra On Talismans*; for the Egyptian manuals for finding buried treasures, see Christopher Braun, “Treasure Hunting and Grave Robbery in Islamic Egypt: Textual Evidence and Social Context” (unpubl. PhD diss., University of London, 2017) (who refers to the Genizah evidence, but does not analyse it in depth).

12 For some inroads into this vast field, see Alexander Fodor, “Goldziher and Magic in Islam,” in *Goldziher Memorial Conference (June 21–22, 2000)*, eds. Éva Apor and István Ormos (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2005), 51–65; Yair Zoran, “Magic, Theurgy and the Knowledge of Letters in Islam and Their Parallels in Jewish Literature,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 18 (1996): 19–62 (Heb.); Yair Zoran, “The Great Name” and Its Powers in Islam, and Their Parallels in the Jewish World,” *Bein Ever le-Arav* 9 (2017): 70–95 and 10–11 (2019): 91–114 (Heb.); and cf. Gideon Bohak, “Jewish Magic in the Middle Ages,” in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, ed. David Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 280–283.



significance for the study of the Arabic magical tradition. Moreover, it must be noted that in what follows I generally ignore the numerous Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic fragments relating to astrology, to alchemy, physiognomy, palmomancy (twitch divination), lot-casting (*sortes*), and many other divinatory techniques, all of which deserve much more attention than they have thus far received, but cannot receive it here. In the present paper, I shall focus mainly on the “magical” texts, in the narrowest sense of that word, that is, on texts which provide instructions for achieving concrete results by manipulating supernatural powers in ways that are not part and parcel of normative Judaism in the Middle Ages, as codified in its *halakhic* literature.

As noted above, examining the textual history of the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts from the Cairo Genizah soon leads to their division into two major types, which may often be distinguished with relative ease: On the one hand, there are translations or adaptations of older Jewish magical texts, originally written in Aramaic and Hebrew, and subsequently transferred into the Jews’ new vernacular, Arabic. Such texts were mostly written in Judaeo-Arabic, but occasionally they were written in the Arabic script as well.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, there are texts of Arabic and/or Muslim origins, some of which display many Muslim elements, while others are non-Muslim in origin, including, for example, Arabic translations of texts originally written in other languages. In some cases, the Genizah even preserves Hebrew translations or adaptations of the Arabic texts, a process which also enabled the dissemination of these kinds of magical texts to the Jews of Christian Europe, who usually had no knowledge of the Arabic language. In what follows, I shall therefore focus first on the former type of texts, and then on the latter. Finally, I shall turn to a third kind of Judaeo-Arabic magical texts, namely those that apparently were *de novo* Jewish compositions, originally written in Judaeo-Arabic by the Arabic-speaking Jews of the Middle Ages. However, such cases apparently were quite rare.

## 1 Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic Magical Texts Translated from Aramaic or Hebrew

The Arab conquests of the seventh century placed the Jews of Babylonia and Palestine in an entirely new situation. Rather than being divided between

13 For the choice of language and script in the Genizah fragments as a whole (with a brief mention of the magical texts), see Esther-Miriam Wagner, “A Matter of Script? Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic in the Genizah Collections,” in *Jewish-Muslim Relations in Past and Present: A Kaleidoscopic View*, ed. Josef Meri, Studies on the Children of Abraham 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 115–136.

two opposing powers—the Roman Byzantine and the Sasanian Empire—each with its own language(s) and religion(s), the Jews were now living in a world whose main language was Arabic, and whose main religion was Islam. And as the new regime took root, the Jews slowly abandoned their old vernacular, namely Aramaic, and adopted the conquerors' language, Arabic.<sup>14</sup> The shift to a new language had numerous implications, one of which was that older texts, and especially those written in Aramaic, were gradually becoming incomprehensible to the Jews of medieval Cairo. Some knowledge of Hebrew was assured by virtue of it being the language of the Hebrew Bible and of daily Jewish prayer and synagogue liturgy, and Hebrew was still used as a written language by many medieval writers, such as Maimonides, who wrote some of his works in Hebrew, and others in Judaeo-Arabic. But Aramaic was used only in very specific contexts, such as learned discussions between rabbis and in some types of documents—e.g., those connected with marriage and divorce—but even there many of the Aramaic phrases carried over from older times had become frozen and formulaic. Moreover, even those rabbis and scribes who knew Talmudic Aramaic had a much better knowledge of the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic of *the* Talmud, than of the Palestinian Jewish Aramaic in which less-important rabbinic texts—such as the Palestinian Talmud and the Aggadic Midrashim—were written.

The impact of the gradual loss of Aramaic, and especially of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, is readily visible in the Genizah magical texts. First, there are numerous examples of Aramaic texts to which Judaeo-Arabic glosses were added between the lines or on the margins, either by the original copyist or by later readers and users. Such glosses tell us which words the readers found difficult, and therefore in need of an Arabic explanation.<sup>15</sup> Second, there is extensive evidence of the translation of older magical texts into Judaeo-Arabic.

14 For this process, see Rina Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Tel-Aviv University: Porter Institute, 1988) (Heb.), who deals (pp. 25–28) with the non-canonical status of the magical texts, but not with their linguistic aspects; Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Neo-Arabic and Middle Arabic*, 3rd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 1999), esp. 18–24.

15 See, for example, Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 2, No. 27 (= T-S K 1.74), where דין, “ink” is glossed with חִבֵּר טִבִּי; מִשַׁךְ טִבִּי, “gazelle skin” is glossed with רֶקַע גִּזְאֵל, and so on, the glosses apparently added by two different hands. Such glosses are well attested outside the Genizah as well, and see, for example, the many Judaeo-Arabic glosses on the Aramaic text of the *Sword of Moses*, as found in MS Sassoon 290, for which see Yuval Harari, *Harba de-Moshe (The Sword of Moses): A New Edition and a Study* (Jerusalem: Academ, 1997), 176–183 (Heb.).

One well-known example is that of *Sefer ha-Razim* (the “Book of Mysteries”), a late-antique Jewish magical text for which the Cairo Genizah preserves numerous fragments of the Hebrew original and a handful of fragments of a Judaeo-Arabic translation. This shows that there were many Jews in medieval Cairo who could still read a Hebrew magical text in its original language, but that a Judaeo-Arabic version was deemed useful by at least some readers.<sup>16</sup> Another text, *Shimmush Tehillim* (the “Uses of the Psalms”), is preserved in the Cairo Genizah in only a handful of fragments of the Jewish Palestinian Aramaic original, and far more fragments of its Judaeo-Arabic translation, which clearly was much easier to read for its potential users in medieval Cairo.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, we may even see the original text and the translation side-by-side. One possible example is a Genizah bifolium on which we find the Hebrew text of *Sefer ha-Razim* on one folio, the Judaeo-Arabic text on the other, but as several bifolia might be missing between the two folios, it is not clear how exactly the two texts were arranged in the original manuscript.<sup>18</sup> But a much clearer example is provided by a Genizah fragment of *Shimmush Tehillim*, in which each Psalm is followed by instructions on how to use it, given both in Aramaic and in Judaeo-Arabic, the latter clearly being a translation of the former.<sup>19</sup> And in what is perhaps the clearest example of the copying of such texts in two languages, we find a short Jewish Palestinian Aramaic divinatory text intended to help one foretell the price of wheat in the following year, immediately followed by the Judaeo-Arabic phrase: תפסיר דלך, “the translation thereof,” and the Judaeo-Arabic translation of the very same text.<sup>20</sup> But as we can see from

16 For the Hebrew fragments, see Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II—Das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 125, 132, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), vol. 1, 121\*–152\*, 184\*–185\*; for the Judaeo-Arabic fragments, see there, 153\*–183\*, 186\*–188\*. See also Alexander Fodor, “An Arabic Version of *Sefer Ha-Razim*,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13 (2006): 412–427; Dóra Zsom, “Another Arabic version of *Sefer Ha-Razim* and *Harba De-Mošé*: A New *Sifr Ādam* Manuscript,” *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 37 (2016): 179–201.

17 For *Shimmush Tehillim*, see Bill Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim—Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen: Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 137 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). For the Aramaic fragments of this text, see Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 3, Nos. 78–84; the Judaeo-Arabic fragments remain mostly unpublished, but see Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 31 and n. 132.

18 See Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim*, G33 (= T-S AS 143.426) and G34 (= T-S AS 143.429).

19 The fragment is T-S NS 228.23, and covers Psalms 61 to 63. See also Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 3, No. 78 (= T-S Ar. 36.122 + T.S. NS 151.36), where a short excerpt from a Judaeo-Arabic text of *Shimmush Tehillim* is followed by an Aramaic version of (the whole of?) *Shimmush Tehillim*.

20 The fragment is T-S NS 309.51, and it was discussed by Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena*

the many Judaeo-Arabic fragments of *Shimmush Tehillim*, the juxtaposition of the original Aramaic text and its Judaeo-Arabic translation was rare, and it was far more common for the “old” Aramaic text to be abandoned in favour of the “new” Judaeo-Arabic version.

In other cases, such as the astrological text known as the *Treatise of Shem*, we again see several fragments of a Jewish Palestinian Aramaic version of this text, and far more numerous fragments of the Judaeo-Arabic versions, or adaptations, thereof. However, in this specific case we are dealing with a text that definitely did not begin its life in the Jewish world, and that circulated widely in many languages, including Syriac and Arabic.<sup>21</sup> Thus, some of the Judaeo-Arabic fragments of this text may not attest to a direct translation from Aramaic, but to a borrowing from medieval Arabic sources, a process which we shall soon examine in greater detail. However, untangling the transmission-history of the *Treatise of Shem*, which often was modified and “updated” in the course of its transmission, is an issue that only a careful study of all the textual witnesses might elucidate.

Thus far, we focussed on more “literary” works of magic and divination, which are characterized by some kind of internal structure, and which are not very common in early and medieval Jewish magic. Far more common are the individual recipes, transmitted in handbooks that contained numerous magical recipes, copied one after the other in endless, unstructured, succession. Many of the magical recipes found in the Cairo Genizah began their life in late-antique Palestine (or, less frequently, in late-antique Babylonia), and were originally written in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic (with some elements, such as biblical verses or liturgical formulae, written in Hebrew).<sup>22</sup> But in medieval Cairo, where this dialect was only poorly understood, the old recipes had to be translated in order to remain useful. However, translating magical recipes is no simple technical issue, since the incantations which are to be recited or written down as a part of the magical recipe might lose all their affective power when transferred to another language.<sup>23</sup> Thus, when looking at parallel copies of the

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*Judaica: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Astrologischen Literatur der Juden*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 73–75.

21 See Alphonse Mingana, “Some Early Judaeo-Christian Documents in the John Rylands Library,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 4 (1917): 76–85; James H. Charlesworth, “Rylands Syriac Ms. 44 and a New Addition to the Pseudepigrapha: *The Treatise of Shem*, Discussed and Translated,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 60 (1978): 376–403; Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 45–55, and the excellent survey of this and related texts in Alessandro Mengozzi, *Trattato di Sem e altri testi astrologici* (Brescia: Paideia, 1997).

22 See Joseph Naveh, “Hebrew Versus Aramaic in the Epigraphical Finds, Part II,” *Leshonenu* 57 (1992–1993): 24–29 (Heb.).

23 For this well-known issue, much discussed by ancient and modern theoreticians of the

same magical recipe in different Genizah fragments, we often note how (a) the ritual instructions, telling the practitioners what to do, are gradually translated into Judaeo-Arabic or Arabic, but (b) the spell to be recited or inscribed is left in the original language, but is more and more garbled as it is copied and re-copied by people who do not fully understand its meaning. Thus, the multi-lingual layering of such recipes often reflects their textual history, and tells us much about the linguistic abilities and dis-abilities of their copyists and users.<sup>24</sup>

Let us look at one specific example, a recipe for “path jumping,” or instantaneous teleportation, that is found in three different Genizah fragments.<sup>25</sup> All three fragments are paleographically dateable to around the eleventh century, and all three originally belonged to larger collections of magical recipes. The fragments are:

- Cambridge, T(aylor)-S(chechter) AS. 142.28: A single paper folio, which probably came from a larger quire. The extant folio has a standard opening formula (“In the Name of the Merciful One”) in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, immediately followed by the path-jumping recipe which interests us here, and which runs to the end of the recto. On the verso, there is one more recipe, to stop a baby from crying, which runs to the end of the page.
- Cambridge, T-S AR. 43.91: A single paper folio, which must have formed a part of a larger quire. The recto contains the end of a magical recipe for killing a person (which is paralleled in other Genizah fragments), followed by the path-jumping recipe to which we shall soon turn, and then by the names of the seven angels who stand before God, listed in a textual unit that continued onto the next folio and whose nature is not entirely clear.

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potential efficacy of magical spells, see Stanley J. Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words,” *Man* n.s. 3 (1968): 175–208 (repr. in Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), 17–59); Naomi Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity*, *Magic in History* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2002), esp. 19–43. The Jewish practitioners of medieval Cairo were not necessarily aware of such discussions, but clearly were aware of the danger that a translated spell might not work.

- 24 For these processes, see also Gideon Bohak, “The Jewish Magical Tradition from Late Antique Palestine to the Cairo Genizah,” in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, eds. Hannah M. Cotton, Robert G. Hoyland, Jonathan J. Price and David J. Wasserstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 324–339; Gideon Bohak, “A Jewish Charm for Memory and Understanding,” in *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*, eds. George J. Brooke and Renate Smithuis (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 324–340.
- 25 For a useful survey of Jewish “path jumping” rituals, but no discussion of the Genizah fragments, see Mark Verman and Shulamit H. Adler, “Path Jumping in the Jewish Magical Tradition,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993/94): 131–148.

T-S NS. 322.19

T-S AR. 43.91

T-S AS. 142.28



FIGURE 1.1 Three different copies of the same basic recipe

- Cambridge, T-S NS. 322.19: A single paper folio, which consists of a “recycled” piece of paper. In this case, an older Fatimid chancery document, probably written only on one side of the folio, was cut into narrow strips, so as not to be legible to whoever might re-use the paper. The strips were subsequently used to create a vertical rotulus, written on both sides and flipped on a horizontal axis, so that the magical texts on the recto and verso are written upside-down to each other.<sup>26</sup> The result of this process is that the magical text on the verso is occasionally interrupted by inverse Arabic words, which are the remains of the Fatimid document from which this paper was recycled (in Fig. 1.1), one can see this in the fifth line of the text of T-S NS. 322.19). Another result is that the paper folio shows stains that run throughout the paper in a cyclical manner, proving that the rotulus was harmed by humidity when it was rolled up (and long after the original chancery document was cut into strips). This fragment contains several different magical recipes, including a recipe to make someone fall asleep, a recipe for protection during travel, two recipes to win charm and grace, the path-jumping recipe to which we shall soon turn, and recipes against eye-pains, for love, and so on.

<sup>26</sup> For the frequent “recycling” of Fatimid chancery documents in the Cairo Genizah, see Marina Rustow, *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). For the common occurrence of rotuli in the Cairo

The three fragments differ greatly from each other, but they share in common one recipe, which may be printed synoptically, as follows:<sup>27</sup>

TABLE 1.1 Comparing T-S NS. 322.19 / T-S AR. 43.91 / T-S AS. 142.28

T-S NS. 322.19	T-S AR. 43.91	T-S AS. 142.28
<p>إذا اردت ان يطوا لك البعد في سفرك اكتب في رق / غزال واربطه في ذراعك الايمن او في حزامك وهذا هو / בשם אדוניאל רפאל גבריאל עניאל / צוריאל צדקיאל כרוביאל פרתואל / כתרואל טוריאל אתואל (מספר שורות של סימנים מאגיים / ואותיות) איסייה // (סימן מאגי)</p>	<p>אין ארת אין יוטוא עלך אל / בועד פי ספר אכתובה פי ריק אל / [גזל וארבוטוה פי דרעך אלימין / או פי חוזמך: ב[שם] אל רפאל / גבריאל ענאל ] יאל צדקיאל / כרוביאל פרחואל כתרואל טוריאל / אתואל (מספר שורות של סימנים מאגיים / ואותיות) / איסייה (סימן מאגי)</p>	<p>קפיצת דרך: כתוב במשך צב[י] / ותלי בזרועך דימין: זה כתוב / ב[ש]ם אהיניאל ר[פ]אל גבר[י]אל ענאל: / צוריאל [צ]דקיאל: כרוביאל פרחיאל / נתרואל טוריאל [א]תואל: (מספר שורות של סימנים מאגיים / ואותיות) אוסרייה אתון מלאכיה / קדישיא וכלקטיריָא משבחיא עבדו / לי אנא פל בר פל כד וכך א' א' ס' :ס'</p>
<p>If you want the distance to be folded before you on your voyage, write on gazelle / skin and bind it on your right arm or on your belt; and this is it (i.e., what you should write): / In the name of Adoniel Raphael Gabriel Aniel Zuriel Zadqiel Kruviel Partuel / Katruel Turiel (several lines of magic signs and letters) / ??? (Magic sign).</p>	<p>If you want the distance to be folded before you / on a voyage, write it on gazelle / skin and bind it on your right arm / or on your belt: in [the name of ...]el Raphael / Gabriel Anael [ ]iel Zadqiel / Kruviel Parhuel Katruel Turiel / Atuel (several lines of magic signs and letters) / ??? (Magic sign).</p>	<p>Path jumping: Write on gazelle skin / and hang (it) on your right arm; and this (is what you should) write: / In the name of Ahiniel Ra[ph]ael Gabr[iel] Anael / Zuriel Ra[ph]ael Kruviel Parh[iel] / Natruel Turiel [A]tuel / (several lines of magic signs and letters) ???,<sup>28</sup> You holy angels / and exulted characters, perform / for me, NN, such and such (a deed), A(men) A(men) S(elah) S(elah).</p>

Genizah, see Gideon Bohak, "The Magical Rotuli from the Cairo Genizah," in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, eds. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Shaul Shaked, *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture* 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 321–340; Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, "Cheap Books in Medieval Egypt: Rotuli from the Cairo Geniza," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 4 (2016): 82–101; Rustow, *The Lost Archive*, 383–400.

27 In the following transcriptions, [⌘] stands for a lacuna in the manuscript, ⌘ stands for a letter whose reading is doubtful, {⌘} stands for a deletion by the scribe, <⌘> stands for an interlinear or marginal addition by the scribe, and (⌘⌘⌘) are my own comments. In the translation, regular brackets enclose explanatory words which must be added for the translation to make more sense.

28 I am puzzled by the word אוסרייה / איסייה; it might be a plural form of אוסרא, meaning either "angels," or "bindings, charms," or the Greek word *ousia*, "essence," which is frequently found in Greek magical texts in the sense of "stuff belonging to the client or potential victim," but in either case the word does not seem to belong here. In Judaeo-Arabic, איסייה means "entity, being," but this too would not fit the context. Moreover, it is clear that the copyists of T-S NS. 322.19 and T-S Ar. 43.91, and perhaps even of T-S AS. 142.28,

Looking at the synopsis, and at the images of the Genizah fragments themselves (see Fig.1.1), we clearly see that these are three different copies of the same basic recipe, with the same spell and the same instructions. Moreover, a close look at the magical signs—some of which look like the ring-letter *charaktêres* of the Greco-Egyptian magical tradition (correctly identified as כלקטיריא in T-S AS. 142.28),<sup>29</sup> and some of which look like Greek, Hebrew, or Arabic letters—shows that the multiple copies of this recipe are not the result of oral transmission, but of a careful copying of written texts, whence the accurate transmission of the non-verbal components of the spell.

Looking at the three copies of the same basic text, we immediately note the differences between them. First, we note that the text of T-S AS. 142.28 has a whole sentence that is missing from the other two copies of the recipe, but that the latter two have a magic sign at the end of the recipe which is not found in T-S AS. 142.28, and also provide the possibility of tying the inscribed gazelle skin on one's belt, which is not there in T-S AS. 142.28. Such differences are extremely common when we examine different copies of a single recipe, and are due both to textual entropy and to deliberate changes by the texts' copyists and users.<sup>30</sup> Second, we note how in T-S AS. 142.28 the title of the recipe is given in Hebrew, and the ritual instructions are given in a mixture of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Hebrew (משך, "skin" is good פא, but צבי, "gazelle" is Hebrew; in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic it would have been טבי). But in T-S Ar. 43.91, the same contents are given in Judaeo-Arabic, or, more precisely, in the early Judaeo-Arabic phonetic spelling that is typical of the eighth and ninth centuries, characterized by the writing of many words phonetically, regardless of their spelling in Arabic (أردت written as ארת) and by the erratic use of the *scriptio plena* (إذن written as אין; بعد written as بوعد; أر بطة written as ארבוטוה, and so on) and *defectiva*

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had no idea what this word means, and they probably thought it was a *vox magica*. For such processes of textual corruption, which are very common in the magical texts, see Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "From Sense to Nonsense, From Incantation Prayer to Magical Spell," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996): 24–46.

29 For a brief survey of these magic signs and their frequent occurrence in the Jewish magical tradition, see Gideon Bohak, "The *Charaktêres* in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Magic," *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 47 (2011): 25–44.

30 For these processes, see Bill Rebig, "Unterweisung, Überlieferung und Aktualisierung von magischem Wissen im Judentum: Ansätze zu einer Textpragmatik," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 36 (2010): 31–55, and cf. Petra M. Sijpesteijn, "Arabic Medical-Magical Manuscripts: a Living Tradition," in this volume. For the textual instability of medieval Jewish texts in general, see Miriam Frenkel, "Book Lists from the Cairo Genizah: A Window on the Production of Texts in the Middle Ages," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 80 (2017): 233–252.



(עלך written as *عليك*; ذراعك written as *דרעך*).<sup>31</sup> Finally, in T-S NS. 322.19, we find the same Arabic text as in T-S Ar. 43.91, but this time in Arabic letters, mostly without diacritical points.<sup>32</sup> Thus, we have before us a clear case of the gradual transformation of a magical recipe, originally written in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (with some words partly replaced by Hebrew words), then written in an early form of Judaeo-Arabic and then in Arabic, but in the latter two examples it is especially the recipe's aim and ritual instructions that were translated, with the spell itself remaining more or less as it had been in the Aramaic original.

Before we leave this example, one final note is in order. Arranging the three different copies of the same basic recipe in a chronological order is not the same as offering a relative chronology of the fragments in which they were copied. Given the fact that this recipe probably was copied by many different practitioners from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the fact that one manuscript preserves an earlier version thereof does not mean that the manuscript itself is early, but that it was copied from manuscripts where an earlier form of the recipe could still be found. In the present example, we have three fragments that are roughly contemporaneous, but they preserve the same recipe in an “older,” “younger” and “youngest” version. Moreover, a single manuscript could—and often does—contain “older” copies of some recipes, but “younger” copies of others. Thus, the palaeographic dating of the fragments and the relative dating of specific textual units need not lead to identical conclusions. Manuscripts have their own histories, but so do individual magical recipes.

31 For Early Judaeo-Arabic in Phonetic Spelling, see Blau, *Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, 241–243, and Joshua Blau and Simon Hopkins, *Early Judaeo-Arabic in Phonetic Spelling: Texts from the End of the First Millennium*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2017), esp. 26–30 (Heb.). For a published magical text written in EJAPS, see Shaked, “An Early Magic Fragment,” and cf. the astrological text in EJAPS published by Yosef Tobi, *Poetry, Judeo-Arabic Literature, and the Geniza*, *Jewish Culture in Muslim Lands and Cairo Geniza Studies IV* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 51–55 (Heb.). I am currently preparing more such texts for publication in the second volume of Blau and Hopkins, *Early Judaeo-Arabic in Phonetic Spelling*.

32 The fact that the text written in Arabic letters is found on a “recycled” chancery document may be due to pure coincidence, but may also reflect the activities of a scribe whose proficiency in writing Arabic was related to the access he had to such used pieces of official documents.

## 2 Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Magical Texts Borrowed from the Arabic-Speaking World

As noted above, the Arab conquests of the seventh century ushered in a new period of Jewish cultural history, in which Arabic became the main language of communication for many Jews. This necessitated the translation of older Aramaic and Hebrew texts into Arabic, as we already saw, but it also enabled Jews to gain access to numerous Arabic texts whose origins lay outside the Jewish community. This new access was all the more important since Arabic quickly became the *lingua franca* of much of the civilized world, and knowledge of Arabic meant that one could read not only Muslim texts but also Christian Arabic texts, as well as texts whose origins lay in ancient Greece or Egypt, in Persia, in India and elsewhere, as there were many translations from Greek, Coptic, Pahlavi, Sanskrit and many other languages into Arabic.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Jewish magical texts, once translated into Arabic, could be used by non-Jewish practitioners (an issue that lies outside the scope of the present study), and once non-Jewish magical texts written in many languages were translated into Arabic, they could be read and used by the Jewish practitioners. This is why we find in the Cairo Genizah many Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic magical texts whose origins lie in the Muslim world, but also some whose origins lie further afield.

A full typology of all these texts has yet to be produced, but they clearly included many different types of texts from many different provenances. Moreover, they demonstrate the penetration of many new magical and divinatory techniques from or via the Arabic magical tradition into the repertoire of the Jewish practitioners of the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> Among these, we may note elaborate rituals for summoning demons, the recourse to astral-talismanic magic, or the frequent use of geomancy. We may also add to these many different types of *goralot* (lot-casting) handbooks, which are hardly attested in Aramaic in the Cairo Genizah (to date, I have found only one such fragment in Aramaic!), but

33 For a broad survey of this process, as reflected in the book-lists from the Cairo Genizah, see Moshe Sokolow, "Arabic Books in Jewish Libraries: The Evidence of Genizah Booklists," in *The Medieval Mediterranean: Cross-Cultural Contacts*, eds. Marilyn J. Chiat and Kathryn L. Reyerson (St. Cloud, Minnesota: North Star Press, 1988), 96–100.

34 For the impact of these new techniques on the Christian world see, for example, David Pingree, "The Diffusion of Arabic Magical Texts in Western Europe," in *La Diffusione delle Scienze islamiche nel Medio Evo Europeo* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1987), 57–102; Jean-Patrice Boudet, "The Transmission of Arabic Magic in Europe (Middle Ages—Renaissance)," *Micrológus* 28 (2020) (= *The Diffusion of the Islamic Sciences in the Western World*): 143–166.

are extremely well attested in dozens of Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic fragments, and in dozens of Hebrew ones, that seem to be based on translations and especially adaptations of the Arabic ones.

As noted above, all this material has hardly received any scholarly attention. What is worse, for this material to be fruitfully analysed, it must be studied side-by-side with similar Arabic texts from the non-Jewish world, many of which have never been published either.<sup>35</sup> Thus, any real progress in the study of these texts will have to be made by way of a close collaboration between experts in medieval Jewish magic and experts in medieval Islamic and Arabic magic, but at present no framework for such a collaboration has ever been created.

Among the many Arabic-language magical texts from the Cairo Genizah that were borrowed from the outside, some are written in the Arabic alphabet (and may have been produced by non-Jewish scribes), but a large number are written in Hebrew letters. This reflects the frequent process whereby the Jewish practitioners felt that they, or their disciples, would find reading a Judaeo-Arabic text much easier than reading an Arabic one, and therefore transliterated existing Arabic texts. In some cases, this may also reflect the activity of professional copyists, who transliterated Arabic texts in the Hebrew alphabet (as was suggested to me by Judith Olszowy Schlanger). The shift from one writing system to another may also have involved the transformation of the texts themselves—for example, when “un-Jewish” elements were censored out, or “Jewish” elements were added—but to trace such processes, we would have to compare the Judaeo-Arabic versions with their Arabic counterparts, and this has never been done. What we can show, however, is that deciphering Arabic texts—and especially those written in very cursive hands and without diacritical points—was a difficult task, and this difficulty is reflected in the Judaeo-Arabic transliterations. In some cases, we can see how a scribe left some words in their Arabic original, in the midst of his Judaeo-Arabic text, apparently because he was not sure which Arabic word is lurking there, and thus preferred to produce a graphic copy of the problematic word, in the hope that he, or a later reader, would one day know how to transliterate it correctly.<sup>36</sup> In other cases, some of the errors in the Judaeo-Arabic text might be attributed to the faulty transliteration of letters which resemble each other in the Arabic alphabet, but not in the

35 For useful starting-points, and much further bibliography, cf. Ursula Hammed, “Arabic Magical Texts in Original Documents—A Papyrologist Answers Five Questions You Always Wanted to Ask,” in this volume.; Jean-Charles Coulon “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*,” in this volume.

36 See, for example, Burnett and Bohak, “A Judaeo-Arabic Version of Tābit ibn Qurra’s *De Imaginibus*,” 183.

T-S Ar. 43.116

T-S K. 1.113



FIGURE 1.2 A magical text arranged according to the Muslim calendar-dar

Hebrew one. And in all these cases, it is clear that the Judaeo-Arabic versions were produced from written Arabic sources, and not from the oral transmission of these texts.

As a case in point, showing what one Muslim magical text looks like when it is found in a Judaeo-Arabic version in the Cairo Genizah, I adduce a text that is found in a quire of which I have thus far found two different fragments, T-S K. 1.113 and T-S Ar. 43.116, paleographically datable to the twelfth or thirteenth century, and displaying codicological features (tall and narrow pages; see Fig. 1.2) that might point to an origin in the regions of Persia or Iraq. The two fragments contain other texts as well, including what look like Arabic poems, an aggressive magical text based on Gen. 4:14, and some scribbles, but these may have been added on the blank pages of the original manuscript, and will not be dealt with here. It is the magical text on which I wish to focus, and it runs as follows:

(T-S K 1.113) אסמא מקדסה לכל שהר מגרבה / ואימם אלמעלומאת אנולת עלי בני / אסראיל והי אלאסמא אלתי כאן / יעמל בהא שלימאן בן דאוד עליה / אלסלאם ודו / אלקרנין פי אלמ] [ל] את / ואלפנאטיס<sup>37</sup> אלתי ג'אורתהא / [ ] חואיגהם באדן אללה / פמן כתב / שי מן הדה אלאסמא פליתק / באללה סרא ועלי ניה<sup>38</sup> פאן אללה / תבארך / ותעאלי לא יגוז אן יכון אסמה / אלא עלי טהר ואיאך אדנס ואלגנאבה / אסס אלשהר / <אלאול> אלמחרם יכתב פי רק / גזאל ויכון [ ] אים<sup>39</sup> נהארה כלה ויבכרה / בעוד רטב / ויגסל גסדה במא חאר / מן קבל כתאבתה ויכון ענד גרוב / אלשמש וישדה עלי ע'צדה / אלאימן / ויגעל כתאבתה עלי שכל אלו<sup>40</sup> או / כאתם שלימאן פילתקי בה אל / סבאע / פלם יהמה מנהם שי (סימנים מאגיים) (T-S Ar. 43.116) צפר כ'ת' עלי צפיחה נחא[ס] / ויבכרה בלבאן דכר וישד עלי / עצדך פאנה לא יעמל פיה / אלסם למן<sup>41</sup> אלחיה / ואלעקרב / (סימנים מאגיים) / רביע אלאול י<כ>תב<sup>42</sup> רק גזאל ויבכרה / במצטכא / ויגעלה פי קארורה / ויעלק נאחיה לא יציבה ארץ / ולא סמא ויסמי אסס מן / שית / ואסס אמה פאנה יאתיה / סריע אן שא אללה והדא אלדי יכתב / (סימנים מאגיים) / רביע אלאכר יכתב פי רק גזאל / ויבכרה בסגרה מרים ותשדה / עלי נפסך פאנד לא / תטלב / חאנה אלא קצית לך / (סימנים מאגיים)<sup>43</sup> גמאדי אלאול<sup>44</sup> יכתבה פי / רק / גזאל ויבכרה בלבאן דכר / וישדה עלי נפסך פאנד לא / תצלב<sup>45</sup> נכאח אחד אלא קרית / עליה / פאן ארדת לא {ת}גאמע אמראתך / גירך או גאריתך או צדיקתך / פאכתב / הדא אלכתאב וועמל / אלכאתם פי אצבעך אלאוצטי<sup>46</sup> פאנה[א] ? / לא תבדר<sup>47</sup> עלי / מגאמעת גירך / (סימנים מאגיים)

37 The contents of this sentence still elude me; فناطيس, "reservoirs, cisterns, containers," does not seem to fit the context here, unless it refers to some apocryphal traditions about Solomon and Alexander the Great with which I am not yet familiar.

38 Or, ועל[א]ניה, i.e., "secretly and in public."

39 The word may have been נאים, or קאים, but even the reading of the *aleph* is uncertain.

40 The reading might also be אלנח; for lack of a better solution, I take it as an error for אללוח, "the tablet," especially given the shape of the magical sign for this month, which is shaped like a square rather than a horizontal line. Another possibility is that he tried to write אלנחו, "the manner."

41 I assume that a word like לסעה or לדגה, "stung / bit him" fell out of the text here. Another possibility is that the text should have read ואלעקרב ואלחיה מן אלסם, "the venom of the snake and the scorpion," but the reading למן is certain.

42 The word פי, "in / on," fell out of the text here.

43 Here the magical sign clearly was too long to be copied in a single line, so the copyist "folded" it into the next line.

44 Either the scribe forgot a *yod*, or he thought that the month's name was جمادى الاول rather than جمادى الاولى.

45 I.e., תסלב.

46 I.e., אלאוסט.

47 I.e., תבאדר.

Holy names for every month, tested. / And this (?) knowledge came down (from heaven) to the sons of / Israel, and these are the names which / Solomon the son of David, peace be / upon him, and Alexander the Great (Dhū al-Qarnayn), were using in their ??? / and ??? that ??? / their needs, with God's help. And whoever writes / any one of these names should trust / God at heart and with intent. And God—/ may He be praised and exulted—his Name cannot be (used) / unless in (state of) purity, and you should beware of impurity and uncleanness. / The name of the first month, al-Muḥarram: One should write it on gazelle skin / and it should stay there (?) all that day, and he should fumigate it / with wet aloe and wash his body in hot water / before writing it, and (this should be) at sunset; / and he should fasten it to his right arm / and form its writing in the form of a tablet (?) or / a Seal of Solomon.<sup>48</sup> And with it, should he come across wild beasts, he would not be bothered by them at all. (Magic signs). // (T-S Ar. 43.116) Šafar: Write (it) on a copper lamella / and he should fumigate it with male frankincense and fasten to / your arm and then the venom will not affect him / whenever a snake or a scorpion (bites him). / (Magic signs). / Rabī al-awwal: One should write (it on) gazelle skin and fumigate it / with mastic and put it in a small vessel / and hang (it) in a place where neither the earth / nor the sky can harm it and he should name the name of whoever / you wish and his mother's name and then he will come to him / quickly, God willing; and this is what he should write: (Magic signs) / Rabī al-ākhar: One should write (it) on gazelle skin / and fumigate it with cyclamen<sup>49</sup> and fasten it / on yourself and whatever you will ask / will be fulfilled.<sup>50</sup> (Magic signs) / Jumāda al-ūla: One should write it on / gazelle skin and fumigate it with male frankincense, / and he should fasten it on yourself and you will not / be denied sexual intercourse with anyone, but you would be received hospitably (?). / And if you wish that no one other than you will have sex with your wife / or

48 For the “Seal of Solomon” in Islamic magic, see Hans Alexander Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Muhammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin & Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1930), 65–69; Rachel Milstein, *The Seal of Solomon* (Jerusalem: Tower of David Museum, 1995); Ali Faraj, “A New Incantation Bowl with Arabic Inscription,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi, Studi in onore di Francesca Lucchetta* n.s. 11 (2016): 214–216.

49 For שגרה מרים, Marwān ibn Ḡanāḥ, *Kitāb al-Talḥiṣ*, says that فقلا مينس يقال إنها شجرة مريم, i.e., it is the cyclamen (κυκλάμιнос). See Gerrit Bos, Fabian Käs, Mailyñ Lübke and Guido Mensching, *Marwān ibn Ḡanāḥ: On the Nomenclature of Medicinal Drugs (Kitāb al-Talḥiṣ)*, *Islamic History and Civilization* 170 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), No. 711. I am grateful to Gerrit Bos for this reference.

50 Or, more literally, “you will not ask / for something without it being realized for you.”

your maid servant or your female friend, / write this text, put / the seal on  
your middle finger and then / she will not rush to have sex with anyone  
but you. / (Magic signs).

The text deals with holy “names,” by which it refers to special magical signs which are associated with each month of the Muslim year, and how to use them for different aims. It begins with a short introduction, which states that this knowledge descended upon the sons of Israel, presumably when they received the Torah on Mt. Sinai, and that it was used by King Solomon—one of the most famous practitioners of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim magical traditions—and that it also was used by Alexander the Great, or Dhū al-Qarnayn, who is mentioned in the Qur’an (18: 83–101) and who was well known to Jewish writers in the Arabic world. The introduction then instructs the practitioner to use the names only in a state of purity, a common feature of both Jewish and Muslim mystical and magical texts.<sup>51</sup> Thus, with the possible exception of the reference to Dhū al-Qarnayn, the introduction could easily have been that of a Jewish magical text, akin to—though much shorter than—the introductions to *Sefer ha-Razim* or the *Sword of Moses*.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the aims for which these names are used (to protect oneself from wild beasts and noxious reptiles, to assure a woman’s sexual fidelity, and so on), and the manner in which they must be used (including writing them on gazelle skin, fumigating them with special kinds of incense, fastening them on one’s body, wearing them on one’s finger, and so on) are so common and banal that they could easily have belonged in a Jewish magical text. But the structure of the text, which is arranged according to the Muslim calendar, with the extant folios covering the first five months of the year—جمادى الاولى, ربيع الاخر, ربيع الاول, صفر, المحرم—certainly argues for a Muslim origin of this text. Moreover, the magical signs which are to be written, and which look like Arabic letters and numerals placed on a string, and arranged either as a long line or as a square tablet (see Fig. 1.2, where one can note how different the magic signs are from those in Fig. 1.1), are very typical of Arabic magic, and are unattested in pre-Islamic Jewish magic.<sup>53</sup> Even some of

51 See, for example, Michael D. Swartz, “‘Like the Ministering Angels’: Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic,” *AJS Review* 19 (1994): 135–167.

52 For such introductions in pre-Islamic Jewish magical and mystical texts, see Michael D. Swartz, “Book and Tradition in Hekhalot and Magical Literature,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1994): 189–229.

53 For these magical signs, see Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, and Tewfik Canaan, “The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans,” *Berytus* 4 (1937): 69–110, 5 (1938): 141–151 (repr. in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate/Vari-orum, 2004), 125–177). For their entry into the Jewish magical tradition, see Bohak, “The *Charaktères*,” 28, 35–36, 43.

the text's obvious errors are due to the transliteration from an Arabic source, which probably was written without diacritical points, or with only some of them in place. This is why the producer of the Judaeo-Arabic text wrote סגרה rather than שגרה (i.e., reading ש as ש).<sup>54</sup> He also began to write תגאמע before realizing that the verb must be masculine, and corrected it to יגאמע (i.e., reading תجامع as يجامع), and he frequently shifts between 2nd person and 3rd person verbs (e.g., ויבכרה ... ותשדה עלי נפסך), in a way that makes my English translation of the text sound quite awkward. This confusion is easily explained by the absence of the two dots above or below the first letter of the word that would have made a distinction between Arabic *tā'*, for the second person, and *yā'* for the third person singular respectively. And although I have not yet found this text outside the Cairo Genizah, this probably is a reflection of my own ignorance of the Muslim magical tradition. Here, students of Islamic and Arabic magic will need to pass the final judgment on the text's origins, but my working hypothesis is that this is a Muslim magical text, which a Jewish practitioner transliterated in the Hebrew alphabet, perhaps slightly modifying it as well, but without trying to re-write it in a more "Jewish" manner.

### 3 Original Judaeo-Arabic Compositions

Thus far, we have seen one example of a Genizah magical text with Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic that began its life in Aramaic, most likely in late-antique Palestine, and one example of a Judaeo-Arabic transliteration of a non-Jewish magical text. In both cases, many more examples of these processes could easily be adduced. But can we also find in the Cairo Genizah original Judaeo-Arabic or Arabic magical texts, produced by the Jews of Cairo as *de novo* compositions? Here, the issue becomes far more tricky, and to date I have found very few Genizah fragments which *may* have been composed by Jews in the Arabic language. One intriguing example is found in T-S NS 90.1, a single folio from a larger quire, which is paleographically dateable to the thirteenth century. The scribe who wrote this text sporadically added some Arabic diacritical points and vocalization marks on the Hebrew letters (see Fig. 1.3), a feature that is attested in other Judaeo-Arabic Genizah fragments as well, and that might

54 It must be noted, however, that the spelling סגרה might also reflect the pronunciation of this word in the scribe's time, and note the references to אלתג'רה, "the tree" (from which Moses' rod was taken), in MS St. Petersburg, RNL: Yevr.-Arab. I 858, as transcribed in the Friedberg Genizah Project.



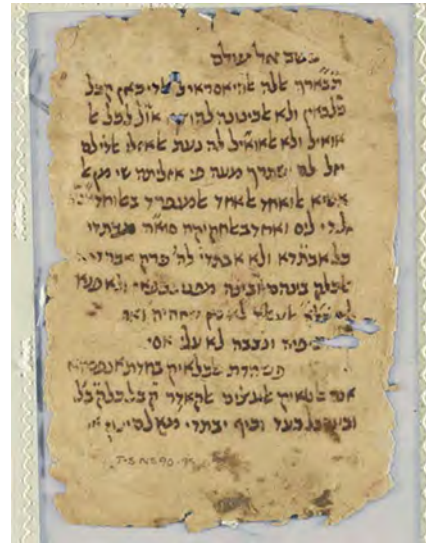
T-S NS. 90.1<sup>v</sup>T-S NS. 90.1<sup>r</sup>

FIGURE 1.3 A set of magical recipes preceded by a long introduction

suggest that here too we are dealing with a Judaeo-Arabic transliteration of an Arabic text, and an attempt to preserve some of its diacritical points. But in this case, the text's contents strongly argue against that possibility. Not only does the text contain an introduction that is made up of praises of God, of the kind that is very common in books composed by Jews in Judaeo-Arabic, this introduction displays a long overlap with the introduction to *Kitāb al-mawārīth* ("The Book of Inheritances") by Saadiah Gaon (882–942), the famous Jewish leader and polymath.<sup>55</sup> The text runs as follows:

(T-S NS. 90.1<sup>r</sup>) בשם אל עולם / תבארך<sup>56</sup> אללה אלהי אסראיל אלדי כאן קבל / כל  
/ כאן ולא אלכינוגה לה וצף אול לכל אל / אואיל ולא אלאואיל לה נעת אלאזלי אלדי לם

55 For this text, see the recent edition by Robert Brody, *Halakhic Monographs of Rav Saadia Gaon* (Jerusalem: Yad Harav Nissim, 2015), 11–125 (Heb.), to which I refer below.

56 The text from תבארך to בעד כל is closely paralleled by Saadiah's text, pp. 12–14 Brody, except for the biblical prooftexts that are adduced in Saadiah's text and are not adduced in our text. Apart from this major difference, there are only minor differences between the two texts, and in some places the text here can help improve the readings in Saadiah's

יזל לם ישתרך מעה פי אזליתה שי מן אל / אשיא אלוואחד אלאחד אלמנפרד  
 באלוחדאניה / אלדי לים וואחד באלחיקיקה סואה מבתדי / כל אבתדא ולא אבתדי  
 לה פרק אבתדאָה / אלכלק בינהם ובינה מִפְנֵי כָל פִּאן וְלֹא פִּנֵא / לֵה כְּלֶקְ אֵלְעֵאלֵם  
 לא מן מֵאֵהִיה ואת[קנה] / [בלא] כִּפִּיה ונצבה לא עלי אסֶסֶט<sup>57</sup> / פשהדת אלכלאיק  
 בחדת אנפסהא / אנה אלטאיק אלעצִים אלקאדר קבל כל קבל / ובעד כל בעד וכיף<sup>58</sup>  
 יבתדי מא לם יכון אן (T-S NS 90.1<sup>v</sup>) ון [אלאב]רץ ואלאגֶדֶם וברו גמיע אל / א  
 [סא] [כלק אללה וקיאם אל / מיית מן אלמִ[ות?]] ואלטִיראן פי אלהוא (.) / פאמא  
 סיר אלבֶסֶט פאנד תאכד בסאט / מרבע ותכתב עלי ארבע א[רכ]אנה אלתוטיה /  
 ותעלק אלמגֶמרה פי ידך אליסרי ואלקֶצֶב / פי אליד אלימני ותתכלם בעד אלתבכיר  
 / באלאסם ותאמר אלבסאט אן יסיר אלי / אית ארץ תריד (.) >> ואמא רד בצר אל  
 / אעמא פאנד תאכד קטֶעָה טין תגֶעֶלֶהא / כבתין ותעמלהא עלי מחאגִיר [ ] /  
 אעמא ינצֶר מן סאעֶתה (.) >> ואמא אל / אבכא פאנד תאכד דהן אליאסמין ויסיר /  
 מן אלזעפראן ותעמל מנה בין עינד  
 (on the margins) נקלת מן כתֶאֱבֶ ר' של[ן]

(T-S NS 90.1<sup>r</sup>) In the name of the eternal God. / Blessed be the God of Israel,  
 who has been before / all existent but existence does not describe Him.  
 The first of all / the first things and the first things are not His description.  
 The eternal who does not / cease to be. Nothing among things shares His  
 eternity. / The Only, the One, the Unique in His oneness, / He who there  
 is indeed no One apart from Him. The beginner of / all beginning, but He  
 has no beginning. He separated, at the beginning / of creation between  
 them (i.e., the created things) and Himself. He who brings to an end all  
 things that end and has no / end. He created the world not from essence  
 and perfected it / with no quality, and established it on no foundations. /  
 And the created things, by virtue of their own newness, testified / that He  
 is the Great Almighty, (who is) before all before / and after every after. For  
 how shall that which had not existed begin to (T-S NS 90.1<sup>v</sup>) [ curing?  
 the le]per and the invalid, and healing all the / [ ] God's creatures, and  
 raising / the dead from [death?] and travelling in the sky. And as for the

text, where the manuscript evidence for this passage is incomplete (see Brody, *Halakhic Monographs*, 4–5). Many of the specific phrases found in this text are paralleled in other

- 57 There is a long blank space in the text here, which may be due to some words becoming utterly effaced, or to a space which the copyist left blank in order to fill it later with words he could not read in the text before him. A comparison with Saadiah's text shows that several sentences are missing here, so the second possibility is far more likely.
- 58 Saadiah's text has [יכון] וכיף יכאלפה מן לם [יכון], but the parallel seems to break off here. It seems as if our text now moves to more specific issues, that will later be covered by the magical recipes themselves.

travelling of the carpet, you should take a square / carpet, and write the introduction on its four corners / and you should tie the incense burner to your left hand, and the rod / to your right hand and after the fumigation you should recite / the Name and order the carpet to travel to / whichever land you wish. And as for returning the blind man's / sight, you should take a piece of clay, make from it / two balls and place them on the blind man's / [eye] sockets, (and) he shall see at once. And as for the much crying (baby?), you should take jasmine oil and a bit / of saffron and place some of it between your eyes<sup>59</sup>

(on the margins) Copied from the book (?) of R. ŠL[ ]WN

This text is highly unusual, in several ways. Least of all its peculiarities, it offers a recipe for making a flying carpet, a magical aim for which I know of no other Jewish parallels, but which fits well in the world in which the *Arabian Nights* came into being.<sup>60</sup> Practices for making blind men see or for stopping babies from crying are, of course, far more common in the Jewish, as in any other, magical tradition, but the text on the subsequent folio probably included recipes for healing lepers and raising the dead, which are almost as unique in the Jewish magical corpus as the one for the flying carpet. All this is quite unusual, but the long introduction which precedes the magical recipes is far more intriguing, as I have yet to see another Jewish magical text that begins with so much verbiage about God's uniqueness and eternity. Finally, and most surprisingly, most of this introduction is closely paralleled in an introduction to one of Saadiah Gaon's *halakhic* manuals.<sup>61</sup> For a magical text to show such close par-

59 The text probably should have read "his eyes." Recipes to prevent babies from crying are extremely common in the Jewish magical tradition, and we already encountered one such recipe above, in our description of T-S AS 142.28.

60 For this famous motif, see Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 59–70; for its entry from the Muslim to the Jewish world, especially in the Hebrew story of King Solomon and the Ant (Adolf Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung Kleiner Midraschim*, vol. 5 (Vienna: Brüder Winter, 1873), 22–26), see Nabil Wataf, "The Story of King Solomon, the Flying Carpet and the Ant: A Narrative Circuit between Judaism and Islam" (unpubl. MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2009) (in Arabic).

61 An alternative interpretation to the one offered below would consist of seeing the two sides of the page as unrelated to each other. As the verso displays vertical and horizontal lines used to erase the text, it is not impossible that this side came first, was erased, and the *halakhic* text was copied on the recto, which originally was blank. However, it must be noted that the two sides were written by the same hand, and that the recipe for making a flying carpet clearly refers to writing אלתוטיה, "the introduction," presumably the introductory invocation on the recto.

allels with a *halakhic* manual is extremely unusual, and the explanation of this phenomenon must lie in the fact that because such praises of God were quite repetitive, they could easily be “borrowed” by one writer who used the work of another writer. But it must also point to the fact that the author of our magical text took his cues neither from older Jewish magical texts nor from the magical texts of the Arabic-speaking world around him, but from the Judaeo-Arabic *halakhic* and philosophical tractates with which he was familiar. However, not only did he open his collection of magical recipes with the kind of introduction one would expect in a *halakhic*, exegetical or philosophical tractate, he also turned that introduction (אלתוטיה, i.e., التوطئة) into a powerful spell, to be written on the four corners of the carpet in order to make it fly.

The text’s indebtedness to other genres of Judaeo-Arabic literature would also explain two additional peculiarities: First, that the introduction moves from general praises of God to those aspects of His greatness that are relevant to this specific text (including אלסראן פי אלסמא, “travelling in the sky,” which is covered by the first recipe), this being a very typical feature of such introductions.<sup>62</sup> Second, that each recipe begins with פאמא or ואמא, “And as for,” which is very different from all other magical recipes books found in the Cairo Genizah, whose recipes usually begin with באב, “a gate, section,” or with -ל, “For xxx,” or with אדא ארדה, “If you wish (to do xxx).”<sup>63</sup>

One final clue pointing to the Jewishness of this text is the note on its lower margin, “Copied from the book (?) of R. ŠL[ ]WN.” Unfortunately, the exact name cannot be deciphered, but the title “R(abbi)” seems quite clear. Whether this Rabbi composed our text or copied it from an earlier source I cannot say, but the close proximity between this text and Saadia’s shows that it too is an original Judaeo-Arabic composition, and not a transliteration of an existing Arabic magical text.

62 See Brody, *Halakhic Monographs of Rav Saadia Gaon*, 13\*–14\*, and Miriam Goldstein, “Judeo-Arabic Versions of *Toledoth Yeshu*,” *Ginzei Qedem* 6 (2010): 39\*–41\*.

63 At present, I am aware only of one other magical text whose recipes begin with ואמא, namely T-S NS. 150.216, a fragment of *Shimmush Tehillim* in which each section begins with ואמא, followed by the incipit of the next Psalm, and then by its magical uses.

#### 4 Conclusion

The fragments from the Cairo Genizah include numerous magical texts, many of which contain at least some words, phrases, or whole sections in Judaeo-Arabic or Arabic. But the presence of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic in the Genizah magical texts clearly reflects three different processes. On the one hand, it reflects the extensive copying and editing in Genizah times of older Jewish magical texts, many of which were written in languages that were no longer in daily use among the Jews of medieval Cairo—Hebrew, and especially Aramaic. Such texts had to be translated—in their entirety, or only in part—into the new vernacular, Arabic, and the translated sections could be written either in Judaeo-Arabic or in Arabic. On the other hand, the abundance of Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic fragments also reflects the frequent use by Jews of magical texts that came to them from the Arabic-speaking world that was all around them. Such texts could be read and used either in Arabic copies or in Judaeo-Arabic transliterations, and in some cases could even be translated into Hebrew, especially when desired by Jews who knew no Arabic, such as those living in Christian Europe.<sup>64</sup> But in addition to these two processes, for each of which dozens of additional examples could easily be adduced, we see a third process, that seems to have been far less common, namely, the composition of new magical texts, written by Arabic-speaking Jews in Judaeo-Arabic (and perhaps also in Arabic): new compositions with obvious connections to the Jewish and Muslim/Arabic milieus in which they were produced. But before ending this paper I would like to stress once again that even this basic typology of the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts from the Cairo Genizah is only tentative, and will have to be reworked in light of future research. Moreover, the only way to make real progress in this field is by combining the efforts of experts in the Jewish magical tradition and experts in the Arabic one. If the Jewish practitioners of medieval Cairo could collaborate so closely with their Muslim counterparts, then so should we.

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64 For this well-known process see, for example, Gad Freudenthal, “Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources for the Hebrew Translation Movement: Comparative Considerations, Both Quantitative and Qualitative,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74–105.

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# A Twentieth-Century Manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* (IES Ar. 286, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia): Texts on Practices & Texts in Practices

Anne Regourd

## 1 Subject\*

*Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* is known from several manuscripts which will be presented here. Passing over the textual variations, we can say that it is a book on exorcism of the twelve tribes of jinn who agreed with Solomon that they would submit themselves to invocations formulated in accordance with Solomonic magic.

The jinns are the causes of the various diseases and possessions of people or places that can be cured using Solomonic magic, which addresses itself to the Chief of each tribe. The exorcists' knowledge of the appearance of the jinn of each tribe and their habits (food, type of settlement, etc.) is therefore crucial. Some passages in these texts introduce a jinn called al-Aḥmar (the Red) as the Chief of all the chiefs.

Names (*asmā'*) are prominent in the magic 'methods' displayed in the course of the different texts; they are used in: magic formulae—written and oral—to protect possessed persons and exorcists (*ḥirz*), and to prevent places and people from being possessed, to chase the jinn away or to summon them to a place (*ṣarḥ*, *mandal*), in incantations, and on rings. Above all, the exorcism based on the use of "*al-mandal*," which appears in the title of the book, involves incantations (*'azā'im*) and geometric figures, such as circles, squares and rectangles.<sup>1</sup>

\* I am grateful to Sam Yahya Husayn al-Ahmar, at one time in charge of the manuscripts and libraries of Yemen at the Ministry of Culture, to the staff of Dār al-makhtūṭāt in Ṣan'ā', and to Ahmed Omer Hassan, Head of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at the University of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and its Chief Librarian Woinishet Behailu, for assisting and supporting my research in their libraries.

1 See a first account in: Anne Regourd, "Le *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī*, un ouvrage d'exorcisme yéménite postérieur au v<sup>e</sup>/xI<sup>e</sup> s. ?", *Démons et merveilles d'Orient*, special issue of *Res Orientales* 13 (2001); id., "Images de djinns et exorcisme dans le *Mandal al-sulaymānī*," in Pica-trix *entre Orient et Occident*, ed. Jean-Patrice Boudet, Anna Caiozzo, and Nicolas Weill-Parot (Paris: Champion, 2011), followed by the text edition of two sections:

In therapeutic practices where success depends on a confrontation with the possessing jinn through speech so that it submits and is convinced to give up its hold on a human, the collection of knowledge that the practitioner has of the world of the jinn is not enough. The texts presented here include the devices he must put in place to protect himself. His piety and his asceticism, constitute another shield. It illustrates the importance of having strong, 'incorruptible' spiritual powers when facing jinn.

The outcome of these confrontations, or should we say clashes, is therefore not guaranteed; it results from a power struggle, at the heart of the therapy, between the practitioner and the possessing jinn, who may refuse the practitioner its allegiance. The inner strength of the practitioner (*quwwa*) is decisive. Beyond written or oral transmission, and even beyond the experience accumulated in contacts with the jinn and religious practice, inner strength is first and foremost granted by God to a chosen individual (*baraka*), according to a pattern known in the Arab world. In Yemen, where the social group of the descendants of the Prophet, *sāda*, have the *baraka* by birth, the elective character of the *baraka* is not absent since its intensity can vary from one individual to another.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, one of the most interesting points to emerge from the observation of practice in contemporary Yemen is the variation introduced by each practitioner from what he receives, observes, hears and, when he can, takes from his reading.

As well as the leaders of the jinn, other individuals apprehended in a group or tribe, whose names the *al-Mandal* gives, are singled out. The demon Zawba'a appears, for example, in the *Mandal* of Ethiopia (ff.20<sup>r</sup>-21<sup>r</sup>). In these texts, as well as in the practice observed in Yemen, Ethiopia and elsewhere, the first mission of the practitioner in his confrontation with the jinni is to have or obtain the name of the possessing jinni. However, in the Hadhramawt, "the decision to exorcise does not depend on whether the jinni names itself or not. Jinn who name themselves and thus appear 'socialised' (...), may nevertheless remain dangerous and require recourse to exorcism."<sup>3</sup> This is the case of a *jinniyya*

1 One is the story of the usurpation of King Solomon's throne, taken away from him by a demon, and the assistance in recovering it which Solomon's faithful Vizier gave him.

2 It is followed by a description of the 12 tribes of jinn who affect the Human world. And id., "*Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* appliqué : une section interpolée dans le ms. *Ṣan'ā'* 2774 ?" in *Studies In Memory of Alexander Fodor*, ed. Kinga Dévényi (*The Arabist. Budapest Studies in Arabic* 37 (2016)).

2 Sylvaine Camelin, "Croyance aux djinns et possession dans le Hadramaout," in *Divination, magie, pouvoirs au Yémen*, ed. Anne Regourd (*Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 13 (1995)), 165.

3 Our translation of Camelin, "Croyance aux djinns et possession dans le Hadramaout," 174-175 and n. 56.

named Umm Šibyān, very popular in Yemen, where she is identified as one of the armies of Solomon: she was diagnosed by an Ethiopian exorcist in two thousands Šan'ā' as the cause of the disorder of many of the possessed.<sup>4</sup>

In Yemen, as well as in Ethiopia, there is another great therapeutic tradition that heals the suffering caused by another group of spiritual entities possessing humans (*ins*), the spiritual *zār*-entities.<sup>5</sup> The cradle of rituals invoking *zār*-entities is not precisely known, but it is generally agreed that they originate in Africa. These rituals are characterised in Yemen, as well as in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and Western India, by a coastal implantation, as well as by actors of the *zār* rituals originating in Africa or being related to it. These first observations on the diffusion of these rituals, as well as the strong presence of *zār* rituals in Egypt, very much alive in Cairo, in Sudan, and in Kenya through the Oromos and Somals presence,<sup>6</sup> have led to the location of their origin in the Horn of Africa, from which they would have spread, but without managing to date the phenomenon precisely.<sup>7</sup> However, historians working on the permanent exhibition at the Slavery Museum in Doha,<sup>8</sup> as well as more recent

4 Regourd, "Représentations d'Umm Sibyân dans les contes yéménites : de la dévoreuse d'enfant à la djinniyya possédant les humains," in *Femmes médiatrices, mythes et imaginaires*, ed. Anna Caiozzo and Nathalie Ernoul (Paris: Colin, 2012), 71. Bombay one-sheet prints with protective value (*hīrz*) were sold in the souk of Šan'ā' in the 2000s bearing a text on Solomon and his troops, among them Umm Šibyān. For block-printed amulets, cf. Karl Schaefer, "The Material Nature of Block Printed Amulets: What Makes Them Amulets?" in this volume.

5 We are limiting our observations to therapeutic *zār* rituals.

6 Elisa Pelizzari, *Possession et thérapie dans la Corne de l'Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997). In the Ethiopian Oromoland, Pelizzari concentrated on Arsi and Bale.

7 This hypothesis was once supported by linguists' assumptions that the word *zār* (*saar*) comes from the archaic cushitic *djar*, and by the existence of other terms for divinities, especially sky gods. See Steven Kaplan, "Zar," in: *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Uhlig Siegbert, vol. 4, 186 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2010). Interestingly, the word *zār* appears in the Ethiopic glosses of the "Arabic-Ethiopic Glossary," preserved in a 14th century manuscript from the private library of the Rasūlid al-Malik al-Afḍal al-'Abbās b. 'Alī (r. 764–776/1363–1377), as a gloss of the word *al-jinn*. See Maria Bulakh, "Al-Malik al-Afḍal's 14th-century 'Arabic-Ethiopic Glossary' as an Attempt at Language Documentation," in *From Mountain to Mountain: Exchange between Yemen and Ethiopia, Medieval to Modern*, ed. Nancy Um and Regourd (*Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen*, Special Issue 1, 2017–2018), 23. The author comments further on the term which, "preserved in Christian Ethiopia into modern times, could well be used by a Christian or Muslim informant of the Glossary." And, "This evidence can be interpreted in different ways, but one cannot fail to see that it fits into the hypothesis of the compilation of the Glossary in Yemen, by the means of questioning Ethiopian slaves, and without deep inquiry into the grammar of the languages in question." *Ibid.*, 27.

8 The International Slavery Museum or Msheireb Museum at Doha (opened in September 2015) is located in the Bin Jelmood House, which belonged to a rich slave trader who traded with Africa in the 19th c. <https://msheirebmuseums.com/en/about/bin-jelmood-house/>. Particu-

ethnomusicological studies on *zār* rituals in Iran, crossed with the work of historians on the Arab slave trade, suggest another line of diffusion, originating with the African slave trade, shipped from Zanzibar and Kilwa to the Persian Gulf via Socotra as early as the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> Recent migrations, of Ethiopian refugees for instance, have opened up additional paths of circulation, which are already the subject of research.<sup>10</sup> Basically, the therapeutic *zār* follows a ritual that ends in a trance and the practitioner, possessed himself, seeks a way out of the possession through adoricism, i.e. an alliance contracted between the possessed person and the possessing spirit.<sup>11</sup> To ensure the descent of the *zār*-entity possessing a human, knowledge of the habits and preferences of the entities, organised in a sung pantheon, is again decisive: they are attracted by offering them what they like, food, music and songs, and the sacrifice of an animal is performed. The whole ritual, structured by music, songs and dances, involves a group of musicians and is carried out under the supervision, of, generally, a woman (*shaykha*).

What can be transmitted is transmitted orally. Therapeutic and non-therapeutic *zār* rituals, covering a large geographical area, have not yet been sufficiently studied. While there are a few studies on therapeutic *zār* rituals for

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larly relevantly for us, the Museum sheds light on the historic importation of slaves from Zanzibar to dive for pearls on behalf of their Qatari owners.

- 9 See Maryam Gharasou, "Du malheur à l'initiation. Les cultes de possession du Zar et leurs musiques (Hormozgan, Iran)," Thèse de doctorat en ethnomusicologie (Paris, Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre, 2014). For the province of Hormozgân alone, she defines three main forms of possession cults: the *nūbān*, whose music is clearly of African origin; the *zār* (in a specific sense), which is a kind of Afro-Arab-Iranian syncretism, but with a strongly African pantheon; the *mashāyekh* a kind of syncretism between the *zār* and popular Sunni and Shafiite Sufism. See also the outcome of the current fieldwork of Neil van der Linden (Amsterdam), who noticed that Swahili phrases are used in the Iranian *zār*, which suggests that the roots of the *zār* rituals are in what is now East-Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This is consistent with the fact that the Northern part of the Indian Ocean was dominated for three centuries by the Sultanate of Oman which had its territories in Zanzibar, the Oman coast, the South-East of Iran and the South-West of Pakistan (communication, May 12, 2021). Among others, see his clip of a concert in Tehran by a *Zār* group from the Iranian island of Qishn, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLvKEjvDyvM&t=1022s&ab\\_channel=NeilvanderLinden](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLvKEjvDyvM&t=1022s&ab_channel=NeilvanderLinden).
- 10 For Nairobi, Mombasa, Roma, Turino, see: Elisa Pelizzari, *Possession et thérapie dans la Corne de l'Afrique*, 7; for Israel, Monica D. Edelstein, "Lost Tribes and Coffee Ceremonies: *zar* Spirit Possession and the Ethnoreligious Identity of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 2 (2002).
- 11 Luc de Heusch, "Cultes de possession et religions initiatiques de salut en Afrique," *Annales du centre d'études des religions, Religions de salut* 2 (1963). Pelizzari does not strictly link *zār* rituals and adoricism but considers that they can also aim at exorcism. Pelizzari, *Possession et thérapie dans la Corne de l'Afrique*.

Ethiopia, some of which have remain celebrated, those of Yemen have not been the subject of any published field study.

In the 1990s, Salafist practitioners flourished in Ṣan‘ā’, they treated possession, the evil eye and witchcraft for a token payment or a fixed fee, by reciting canonical texts accompanied by gestures. For exorcisms, the patient’s ear is whispered in and the soles of the feet are beaten. The patient then falls into a cataleptic state and becomes rigid. One of the practitioners in the city worked in conjunction with a hospital psychologist and sent him people whose psyche (*nafs*) he considered to be the cause of the disorder, but who were not affected by the external causes known from the canonical texts, which are the evil eye, witchcraft and possession. This modern therapy stresses the power of God and His Prophet and the lawfulness of the means, rather than the qualities of the practitioner, and emphasises that in the world of the jinn, who are known to be endowed with free will, character, habits, desires, power, diverse religious denominations, languages and countries, there are Muslims, those who are willing to convert or cooperate. According to field researches conducted in the two thousands in Western Oromoland, “(...) the phenomenon of possession by Muslim spirits, namely *rūhānīyas*, emerged in western Oromoland only after the advent of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar,” i.e. the sufi al-Faqīh Aḥmad b. ‘Umar al-Tijānī (d. 1953), from Bornu. Propagator of the Tijāniyya in Western Ethiopia, he appears in a period of islamization among Oromos, and being very knowledgeable in spiritual sciences, was said to cure diseases caused by jinn. According to informants, “the spirits, being pious Muslim *shaykhs*, were contributing to the Islamization of the Oromo society, etc.”<sup>12</sup>

Some of the texts of *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* contain a section in which incantations are introduced that call upon jinn to help cure diseases through exorcism using a *mandal*. It is this passage in some of our texts that offers information on two trajectories of textual transmission from Yemen to Ethiopia on the one hand and to the Latin world on the other.<sup>13</sup> Reconstructing this

12 See Minako Ishihara, “Spirit Possession and Pilgrimage. The Formation and Configuration of the Tijānī Cult in Western Oromoland,” in *Research in Ethiopian Studies: Selected Papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim, July 2007*, ed. Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra, Shiferaw Bekele, Svein Ege (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 2010), 250, and 254sq. We are aiming in our introduction to contextualize the text which is the main subject of this chapter and not to provide an overview of magic in Ethiopia and Yemen. So we pass over, for example, indigenous monotheisms (“monothéisme de terroir”) of Ethiopia which acknowledge spirit possession. See Ishihara, *ibid.*, 250, on the high god *Waaqa* and the supernatural beings *ayaana*; not exclusive to Ethiopia, see André Julliard, “Pour penser le monothéisme. La religion de terroir des Diola-Adiamat en Guinée-Bissau,” *Revue d’Auvergne*, vol. 3, 539/2 (1997): 76–84.

13 An Indian origin for the word *mandal* leaves open a line of transmission, which could have



textual transmission route on the basis of textual and material comparison of the manuscripts forms the main discussion of this chapter.

## 2 Interest of the Manuscripts and Their Texts

During field work in Yemen in the 1990s, people from many parts of the country, some of them practitioners, many of them not, drew my attention to the interest of *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī*. It is a renowned book and is considered to be dangerous to open and to read, in the same way as the much better known text *Shams al-ma'ārif* supposedly written by al-Būnī.<sup>14</sup>

Manuscripts (A) and (B) belong to the ms. 2774, ulūm khafiyya 22, conserved at Dar al-makhtutat (DaM), the famous public Library of Ṣan'ā' (from now called Ṣan'ā'/DaM (A), (B)); (C) is a separate manuscript, a modern photocopy of which can be found in the private library of a practitioner.

Historians of sciences working on the Latin World have, too, found it interesting. A Latin manuscript, betraying the existence of an earlier Arabic version, the *Liber Almandal* (or *Liber in figura almandal*) describes the production and use of a table to evoke jinn and demons. The manuscript is from the fifteenth century Italy, but the text is believed to have been in circulation in the course of the twelfth-thirteenth century. In the edition of the manuscript he prepared, Julien Véronèse is the first to have compared the Latin text and the Arabic text of *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* discovered in Yemen, and did it on the basis of the first section of the Arabic text, the only one published before 2016.<sup>15</sup> However, the evidence of a Latin adaptation of an Arabic text underlying the text of *Liber Almandal* renders a date prior to 1230 plausible.<sup>16</sup>

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been oral, from India to the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, see Anne Regourd, "Le *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī*, un ouvrage d'exorcisme yéménite postérieur au v<sup>e</sup>/XI<sup>e</sup> s. ?," *Démons et merveilles d'Orient*, special issue of *Res Orientales* 13, no. 1 (2001): 123–124.

14 Very famous book of talismanic magic by Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Būnī (7th/13th C.), see, among other printed editions, *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-thaqāfiyya, s. d.). For more on al-Būnī, cf. Jean-Charles Coulon, "Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum," in this volume.

15 I.e. our text edition "*Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* appliqué: une section interpolée dans le ms. Ṣan'ā' 2774 ?" See: Julien Véronèse, ed., *L'Almandal et l'Almandel latins au Moyen Âge: Introduction et éditions critiques* (Firenze: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012), 15–30, 67–92. Both versions are in ms. Firenze, BNC, II.iii.214, ff.74<sup>v</sup>–78<sup>v</sup>.

16 Through a Solomonian treatise composed in Toledo, and preserved in a manuscript form in Firenze, but only in part. For an attempt to date and localise the production of this manuscript, see David Pingree, "Learned magic in the time of Frederick II," *Microlo-gus: natura, scienze e società medievali* 2 (1994). Most later versions, often dubbed *Almandel* or

Recently, another version of the *Mandal* has been identified in three manuscripts of known or postulated Italian origin, dated to the 13th–14th centuries. It had gone unnoticed because of the title of the collection which contains them, a collection of lapidaries, *De consecratione lapidum*.<sup>17</sup> The table (*areola*) is an altar intended to consecrate, with the help of fumigations, stones whose virtue is associated with the angels, the recipients of the ritual. It allows us to advance to the second half or the end of the 13th century a profound Christianisation of this tradition in Latin texts.<sup>18</sup> As for the *Almadel* or *Liber intelligentiarum*, it presents a version probably reworked in Italy in the fourteenth century in the light of traditions of angelic magic. It is conserved in four manuscripts of the fifteenth century. In this context, the *almadel* is the divine sign revealed to Solomon that allows him to enter into contact with the princes of the angels of the 12 celestial places, themselves linked to a sign of the zodiac and thus to a month of the year determined by the course of the Sun.<sup>19</sup>

An Arabic manuscript of the fourteenth century, the *Misceláneo de Salomon* discovered during building in Toledo, in 1962,<sup>20</sup> also offers material for compar-

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*Almadel*, display 'Hebraicized' or 'Christianized' contents, see Jan R. Veenstra, "The Holy Almandal. Angels and the Intellectual Aims of Magic," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Bernd-Christian Otto, "A discourse historical approach towards medieval 'learned magic,'" in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), chapter III and footnote 69.

- 17 Vajra Regan, "The *De consecratione lapidum*: A Previously Unknown Thirteenth-Century Version of the *Liber Almandal Salomonis*, Newly Introduced with a Critical Edition and Translation," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 28 (2018). These manuscripts are: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 243, ff.40<sup>v</sup>–44<sup>r</sup>, thirteenth-fourteenth century; London, Wellcome Institute, 116, pp. 22a–23b, fourteenth century; Vatican, BAV, Reg. lat. 1106, ff.39<sup>v</sup>–42<sup>v</sup>, thirteenth century.
- 18 Julien Véronèse, "La réécriture des rituels d'invocation des esprits dans les traditions latines attribuées à Salomon (XI<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)." In *La magie entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge: traditions, innovations, autorités*, dir. Thomas Galoppin (*Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 239/4 (2021)), last section "Les principales mutations d'une tradition d'origine arabe: de l'*Almandal* à l'*Almadel*." I am grateful to Julien Véronèse for having shared this unpublished paper.
- 19 Véronèse, *L'Almandal et l'Almadel latins au Moyen Âge*, 40–54, 119–162.
- 20 Text in Arabic and Spanish transl. from the *Misceláneo de Salomon* in: Joaquina Albaracín Navarro and Juan Martínez Ruiz, *Medicina, farmacopea y magia en el "Misceláneo de Salomón": Texto árabe, traducción, glosas aljamiadas, estudio y glosario* (Grenada: University of Grenada, 1987); English transl. in: Nineveh Shadrach, Transl., *Book of Deadly Names as revealed to King Solomon by Jinn King Fiqitush* (Burnaby: Ishtar Publishing, 2007). The Toledan manuscript describes 72 jinn, with their names, explains why they are causes of human sicknesses and specifies rituals which can be employed to drive them out permanently.

ison with the *Mandal* found in Yemen, as they are both related to the developments of Solomonic magic as they are represented in the *Testamentum Salomonis*.<sup>21</sup>

In 2016, I published the text of the section of the *Mandal* which describes the process of an exorcism using a *mandal*, with various steps and cases, which call for this or that particular action. This part is clearly intended for practitioners as it gives instructions. We will call it now “the section on exorcism using a *mandal*.” It almost immediately follows the description of the 12 tribes of jinn, and is the one in which the Latinists have shown the most interest until now. The publication of these folios from the manuscript of Ṣan‘ā’ has substantiated the correspondence with the ff.74<sup>v</sup> sq. of the Latin manuscript edited by Véronèse.<sup>22</sup>

The Latin texts, then, could indicate a first movement of the Yemeni *Mandal* text from the Arab to the Latin world. However, another manuscript related to our text, available in Ethiopia, provides new evidence for the circulation of *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* by a different route. This Ethiopian manuscript and its consequences for the textual transmission of the *Mandal* are discussed below.

### 3 Manuscripts from Yemen

Ms. 2774, which contains manuscripts Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A) and (B) was estimated to have been produced in the last quarter of the eighteenth century or the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and bears in the margin of its f.21<sup>r</sup>, a mark indicating its collation with another manuscript.<sup>23</sup>

Texts of ms. Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A) and (B) are as follows:

- (A) (ff.1<sup>v</sup>–21<sup>r</sup>), with a “title page” *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī li-l-jam‘ wa-l-farq wa-l-ḥurūz*;
- (B) (ff.21<sup>r</sup>–55<sup>v</sup>), which immediately follows (A), and therefore, does not bear any title.

21 Ibid. Otto, “Historicising ‘Western Learned Magic’: *Preliminary Remarks*,” *Aries—Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 16 (2016), for a protoversion of texts which introduced Solomonic art to Europe and had the more complex Solomonic compass, such as *Lemegeton Clavicula Solomonis*. The potential link between *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* and Latin texts, which could somehow echo it, is detailed in: Regourd, “*Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* appliqué: une section interpolée dans le ms. Ṣan‘ā’ 2774?,” 136–137, on the basis of the research published by our Latinist colleagues up to 2016.

22 On the importance and understanding of Arab texts bearing on the casting out of spirits under Solomon’s control in the formation of the framework of magical thought in the Latin West, see Otto, “A discourse historical approach towards medieval ‘learned magic,’” Chapter III.

23 Regourd, “Images de djinns et exorcisme,” 254.

From a photocopy of a manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī li-l-jam' wa-ghayrihi min al-adwīya al-nāfi'a*, that I found in the possession of a practitioner in the vicinity of Ṣan'ā', we know of the existence of another text, which is described as “a book of tested medicine” (“hadhā al-Kitāb fi 'ilm al-ṭibb al-mujarrab”). Also on the title page, we have the date when the copyist started to copy the book: Saturday, Shawwāl, 24, of the year 46 (“yawm al-sabt 24 Shawwāl sanat 46”). The photocopy is, obviously, a twentieth century item. If we accept the date on the title page 1346—and we think this is the right interpretation, the copyist started the 15th of April 1928.<sup>24</sup> In the margin, the birth of a child on a Saturday at the beginning of Rabī' al-thānī 1389/June 1969 was carefully recorded. We call this ms. (C).

In ms. 2774 of Ṣan'ā'/DaM (ff.56<sup>r</sup>–64<sup>v</sup>), another text starts on a separate folio, with a title page, which says: “wa-hadhā Mandal min *Kitāb 'Adāt al-nujūm wa-'alāmāt ghāyāt al-ghuyūm*” of the *shaykh* and *faqīh* Nūr al-Dīn Abī al-Ma'ālī Muslim (?) ibn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī.<sup>25</sup> The topic of this text is “*mandal*” in connection with the stars.

Texts (A), (B) and (C) show colloquial, scriptural and content features that firmly place it in a Yemeni environment. The manuscript of Ṣan'ā' exhibits a known feature of the Yemeni script, i.e. *dāl* and *ṭā'* are, with some exceptions, under-punctuated throughout the text.<sup>26</sup> On ff. 48<sup>r</sup>, l.13–14, and 43<sup>r</sup>, l.10 of (B) linked to the zodiacal sign of Pisces (*burj al-hūt*), are mentioned the tribe of jinn Banū D.lāj<sup>27</sup> “min D.'ayh/D.'aya (village) min Banī Ishaq Ṣāḥib Ḥaḍramawt;” however another tribe is located in a place close to the Lake of Tiberias. Moreover, medicinal plants are, throughout (A) and (B), among the means used to

24 Year 1246H, as the other hypothesis, would bring us to the 7th of April 1831, a date which looks to us to be too early.

25 One Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī appears as commentator of a book by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī composed in 758/1356, see *GAL*, S II, 106, no. 10. The title of another manuscript conserved in the Occidental Library in Ṣan'ā', *al-Mandal 'alā al-ithnay 'ashar*, shelf marked “ṭibb,” no. 10, ff.141–147, in: Muḥammad Sa'īd Al-Maliḥ, and Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Īsawī, *Fihris makhṭū'āt al-Maktaba bi-al-Jāmi' al-kabīr bi-Ṣan'ā'* (Alexandria, s. d. [ca. 1398/1978]), 432, and *majmū'* no. 3033, ff.74–93, in: Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Īsawī et al., *Fihris al-makhṭū'āt al-yamaniyya li-Dār al-makhṭū'āt wa-l-Maktaba al-gharbiyya bi-l-Jāmi' al-kabīr, Ṣan'ā'* (Qom-Tehran, 1425/1384/2005), vol. 2, 1280, suggests a relation between “*mandal*” and the zodiac. However, before drawing conclusions, the meaning of *mandal* in this context would have to be clarified.

26 Jan Just Witkam, “Yemeni Manuscripts in the University of Leiden Library. Acquisitions of the Year 2000: Texts and Themes,” in *Manuscripts en transit. Le cas du Yémen*, ed. Anne Regourd (Guest ed.), *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 5, no. 2–3 (2014); although well attested in Yemen, it is not exclusively a feature of Yemeni manuscripts.

27 Where vowels of Arabic words are unknown, they are marked by a dot.

cure possessed persons, and as a previous study shows, a proportion of 6/7th appear to belong to Yemeni pharmacopeia, of which many are available in Yemen and some are even endemic. Manuscript (C), p. 23, contains a Yemeni colloquial auxiliary “Anā ishtī minnak (kadhā)” used in the high and middle lands, which appears here in a sentence which has to be spoken aloud. Further, a jinni is said to live in a city on Mount Nuqum, overlooking Ṣan‘ā’ (p. 25).<sup>28</sup>

#### 4 The ‘Ethiopian’ Text

This is a manuscript we found in the Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, with the shelve mark IES 286.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence for the circulation of texts, and manuscripts, between Yemen and Ethiopia is commonly accepted, although it deserves more detailed research.<sup>30</sup> The *marginalia* of IES 286 do not provide further information on the origin or circulation of the manuscript. However, close attention to the script, to some characteristic ways of writing flexible vowels and strokes of *kāfs* with a thinner trait, and to the lay out more specifically, how the copyist deals with left margins, as well as the level of knowledge in Arabic, all indicate an Ethiopian hand, and show a Hararī style in several places. This is enough for us to say that the text of *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* was known in Ethiopian milieus, and certainly in that of Harar. In all Ethiopia, Harar is known to be the largest and the most ancient centre for the production of manuscripts in Arabic and ‘Ajamī.<sup>31</sup>

The text is written in a notebook of lined paper. Notebooks have already been described as media for manuscripts in Ethiopia and Yemen,<sup>32</sup> something which

28 For all this, see Regourd, “Le *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī*,” 130a–131b, and the Appendix on the medicinal plants, 132a–136b.

29 A short description of the item can be found in: Alessandro Gori et al., *A Handlist of the Manuscripts in the Institute for Ethiopian Studies. The Arabic Material of the Ethiopian Islamic Tradition* (Eugene (OR): Pickwick Publication, 2014), 11, IES 286. For a more comprehensive presentation of the items of the IES collection, see the database of the Project “Islam in the Horn of Africa,” <https://islahornofr.tors.ku.dk/> under IES.

30 As I tried to show, “Yemen > Ethiopia. Circulation of Texts,” Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, May 20, 2021, talk accessible on line, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFyoY7JF-nI>

31 See Giorgio Banti, “Harari literature,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2005), vol. 2, 1028a–1030a.

32 Yemen: list of 18 manuscripts on notebooks from the collection ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hadhrami, see Regourd, “Papiers filigranés de manuscrits de Zabīd, premier tiers du xviii<sup>e</sup> jusqu’au milieu du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle: papiers importés et ‘locaux,’” in *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*, ed. David Hollenberg, Christoph Rauch and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden/Boston:

shows how long the manuscript tradition lasted in both countries, despite printing and despite, even, photocopying. Manuscript literary texts in notebooks first appear at the beginning of the twentieth century. As for Ms. IES 286, it is an item from the early twentieth century.

It seems therefore that the “*al-Mandal*” method appears in several books on exorcism. Of all four Yemeni texts involving a “*mandal*,” and one more referred to by the extant manuscripts as copy-based, only the last one bears the name of an author, i.e. al-Shīrāzī, and only (A) and (C) were, clearly, copied from other manuscripts. The six texts, once we include the manuscript of Addis/IES, are different if we compare them *in extenso*. The Addis manuscript states clearly that *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* is, by comparison with other protection/exorcism systems, specifically concerned with the use of ‘*azā’im*’, i.e. incantations to summon jinn in order to exorcise people and places, and that this is the method upon which the *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* will elaborate.

We will now proceed to a close comparison of parts of the text of *al-Mandal al-sulaymānī*, which are common to the manuscript Ṣan‘ā’/DaM, and Addis/IES to understand which texts were in circulation.

## 5 Comparison between the Text of Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A) and of Addis/IES

Of the three texts contained in Ṣan‘ā’/DaM, (A) is the one which contains “the section on exorcism,” the transmission of which interests us.

### 5.1 Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A)

The first six folios of manuscript (A) report a version of the usurpation of King Solomon’s throne by a demon, after which he lost the ring that gave him the power to control the entire world of the living; then follows a description of the twelve tribes of the jinn who exist in Muslim countries (their appearance, their food, where they live ...), and symptoms of their respective presence in the afflicted, in all, a compendium of knowledge useful to practitioners (1<sup>r</sup> to 6<sup>r</sup>, l.12).<sup>33</sup>

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Brill, 2015), 231–232. Ethiopia: Ewald Wagner, *Harari-Texte in arabischer Schrift mit Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), tells us about an Italian ledger notebook dated 1938; Gori et al., *A Handlist*, ms. IES 286; numerous other examples in the Abdullahi Sharif collection at the Museum of Harar and in the database of the project “Islam in the Horn of Africa.”

33 See Regourd, “Images de djinns et exorcisme dans le *Mandal al-sulaymānī*,” 265–275 (text in Arabic), 276–288 (transl. into French). A loose folio from a book manuscript in Arabic,

Then, a short passage (ff.6<sup>r</sup>, l.13 to 6<sup>v</sup>, l.4) introduces all the topics which take up the remainder of the book: the various methods of protection, the control of the jinn, and remedies, bearing in mind that each of the twelve tribes of jinn has its own characteristics and requires its own remedies (sing. *‘ilāj*) (6<sup>r</sup>, l.13–17).

Then, a brief section relates the different tribes of the jinn to days of the week, and in some cases to the time of day (6<sup>r</sup>, l.17 to 6<sup>v</sup>, l.4).<sup>34</sup>

The section from the f.6<sup>v</sup>, l.5, at f.7<sup>v</sup>, that we named the “section on exorcism using a *mandal*,” begins with a section mark (*bāb*), but has a second isolated subdivision (*faṣl*, ff.6<sup>b</sup>, l.14). However, it was possible to define the section without difficulty because the exorcism described there proceeds in steps. After the presentation of the twelve tribes of the jinn, where the *mandal* to use for each of them is given, it brings us to the heart of the practice that uses the *mandal*.<sup>35</sup>

Then the text proceeds to a more elaborate discussion of the appropriate protections (*hurūz*) against each tribe (8<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 12<sup>r</sup>, l.1). The text offers examples of protections against all the jinn and against particular groups of jinn (12<sup>r</sup>, l.2–13<sup>r</sup>, l.2).<sup>36</sup>

From here to 17<sup>r</sup>, l.17, the text deals mainly with medication (*‘ilāj*), among them sternutatories (*sa’ūt*), with marks of sections or rubricated titles. Finally, until the end of ms. (A), we have four different incantations (*aza’im*).

However, collation with f.21<sup>r</sup> indicates that the text of (A) is in conformity with the ‘original’ up to the mark in the text (a tick). This original would include, according to the collation, 18 folios (*ṣafha*), 5 at the beginning and 13 at the end. And, if our count is correct, it would take away from (A), first, a dozen lines, coming after the mark in the text, which are also scratched out and which we have not mentioned here, and, on the other hand, precisely the ff.6<sup>v</sup> to 7<sup>v</sup> (the “section on exorcism using a *mandal*”).<sup>37</sup>

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conserved in the David Kauffmann Collection of Geniza (DKG) documents (Cairo), at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest (DKG no. 252a–b), seems on the basis of a very brief examination to be another example of a work giving the appropriate remedies to exorcise each of the twelve tribes of jinn (for a presentation of the DKG documents in Arabic, and DKG 252a–b, see Regourd, “Arabic documents from the Cairo Geniza in the David Kaufmann Collection in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—Budapest,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3/2 (2012): 12, 13). DKG no. 252a–b is currently being edited by the author of this chapter, together with the other DKG documents in Arabic on divination and magic.

34 Part of the original text of ff.6<sup>r</sup>, l.13 to 6<sup>v</sup>, l.4, is accessible in: Regourd, “Images de djinns et exorcisme dans le *Mandal al-sulaymānī*,” 294, Fac-similé 6 (f.6<sup>r</sup>).

35 The main lines of this text are detailed in: Regourd, “Images de djinns et exorcisme dans le *Mandal al-sulaymānī*,” 262–263.

36 See a more detailed description in Table 2.1.

37 We repeat here Regourd, “Le *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* appliqué,” 144–145.

## 5.2 *Addis/IES*

The text of the Addis manuscript is written on 28 ff. and has from 11 to 18 lines a folio.

It opens with a text which lacks its beginning. As the bloc of quires is not fixed to the cover, which is made of rough cardboard with its two boards fixed together with a strip of cloth sewn to the boards with a visible blue thread, it appears that we do not have in our hands the original manuscript, but an incomplete version.

It is composed of the following chapters/sections:

- i. F.1<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 8<sup>r</sup>: [*Kitāb al-ḥirz al-awwal al-musammā al-jalb al-maknūn?*] The text deals with attracting (*jalaba*) jinn by addressing ‘*azā’im*’ to their Chiefs (*amīrs, maliks*). In the context of this book, summoning jinn is a way to cure diseases caused by them and to ensure their submission to God. While performing this operation, the practitioner must protect himself.
  - a. F.1<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 2<sup>r</sup>, l.9: acephalous, without title. *Tatimma*, “tammat.”
  - b. F.2<sup>r</sup>, l.9–10 to 4<sup>r</sup>, l.8: *Bāb al-sharḥ al-jalb al-maknūn*, rubricated. The text of the ‘*azīma*’ which is given here presents the jinni al-Aḥmar as servant and it is also the one used by Sulaymān b. Dāūd to make the jinni submit to him. *Tatimma*, “Tamma<sup>38</sup> al-sharḥ al-jalb al-maknūn al-mubāarak.”

### Separation mark

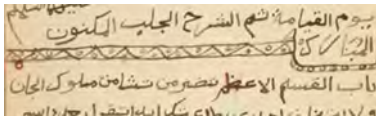


FIGURE 2.1

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- c. F.4<sup>r</sup>, l.9 to 4<sup>v</sup>, l.12: *Bāb al-qism al-aẓam*, which insists specifically on the use of names.
- d. F.4<sup>v</sup>, l.12 to 5<sup>r</sup>, l.9: *Bāb al-aṣḥāb al-aṭwāf*, rubricated. About an extraordinary tribe of jinn. *Tatimma*, “Tamma al-qism.”
- e. F.5<sup>r</sup>, l.9 to 6<sup>v</sup>, l.10: *Bāb ṣifat al-dā’ira*, “Bāb” rubricated. *Tatimma*, which marks the transition between two sections: “Tamm al-ḥirz al-awwal.” For the practitioner to protect himself.

38 In the manuscript: *th.m.*



- f. F.6<sup>v</sup>, l.10 to 8<sup>r</sup>: *Bāb [al]-ḥirz al-thānī mandal al-‘azīma awwal*<sup>39</sup> *wa-l-ṭaṣarruf wa-l-jām‘ alā jamī‘ al-jānn*, “Bāb” rubricated. Same purpose again. *Tatimma*, “Tammat al-‘azīma wa-hadhā šuratuhā,” followed by a red separation mark, between the text and the illustration.



FIGURE 2.2  
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- ii. F.8<sup>v</sup>, l.1 to 16<sup>r</sup>, l.12: *Kitāb al-ḥirz al-thānī wa-l-mandal al-sulaymānī*.<sup>40</sup>

- ب8
1. كتاب الحرز الثاني والماندل السليمي الفائق علي
  2. جميع المنادل المعروفة وهو مندل العزائم في
  3. علاج الجنان والمصارع وفيه ما تحب الاسرار
  4. في تصرف الأجنان وما وصفته لك لسليمن
  5. بن داود عليه السلام لا أخوف من الجنان ان نطغو
  6. او<sup>41</sup>.... على المؤمنین امانة الله (هكذا) عليك يا من و
  7. قف على هذا الكتاب ان لا تعلمه لاحد لا يخنا
  8. ف الله ولا يحفظه واتق الله تبع ولا تطلع عليه
  9. الامن كان شيخا لان السفها ستغراين
  10. له ولكن الحائل الله بينهم وبينه وهو المند
  11. ل العظيم الذي فيه حقائق الجنان وصورهم
  12. فيه علي التحقيق والتصحيح والله اعلم

39 In the manuscript: *w.ā.l.*  
 40 The text of this section is edited as it mentions specifically *al-mandal al-sulaymānī*.  
 41 *طعوا* with a mark on the top of the letter *ayn*.

Separation mark, a red line

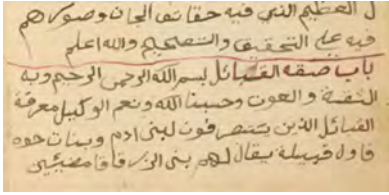


FIGURE 2.3  
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- a. F.8<sup>v</sup>, l.13 to 14<sup>v</sup>, l.10: *Bāb šifāt al-qabā’il* (see detail in Table 1), rubricated. *Tatimma*: “Tammat al-manādīl al-mubārak (sic).”
- b. F.14<sup>v</sup>, l.10 to 15<sup>r</sup>, l.5: Tribes of jinn in relation to the days of the week.
- c. F.15<sup>r</sup>, l.5–16<sup>r</sup>, l.11: On exorcism, without transition in ms. Addis/IES. *Tatimma*: “Tammat hadhā al-mandal.”
- d. F.16<sup>r</sup>, l.11 to 22<sup>v</sup>: Without title in ms. Addis/IES, but a subject: “li-kull qabīla minhum ḥirzuhu,” follows the description of protections against each tribe of jinn.
  - 1. F.16<sup>r</sup>, l.12 to 16<sup>v</sup>, l.1: *ḥirz al-qabīla al-ūlā*.
  - 2. F.16<sup>v</sup>, l.1–6: second tribe.
  - 3. F.16<sup>v</sup>, l.7–13: third tribe.
  - 4. F.16<sup>v</sup>, l.14–16: fourth tribe.
  - 5. F.16<sup>v</sup>, l.16 to 17<sup>r</sup>, l.6: fifth and sixth tribe.
  - 6. F.17<sup>r</sup>, l.7–12: seventh and eighth tribe.

Separation mark, a black line

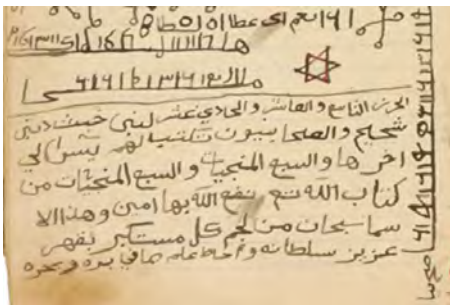


FIGURE 2.4  
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- 7. F.17<sup>r</sup>, l.13–19 and 1 l. in the right margin: ninth, tenth, and eleventh tribe.
- 8. F.17<sup>v</sup>: all about 6-pointed stars (5 of them) and talismanic formulas, against the twelfth tribe?

9. Ff.18<sup>r</sup>, l.1: *Tatimma*, “Tammat al-ḥurūz al-mubāraka al-‘azīma yanfa‘ Allāh bihā.”
- e. Ff.18<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 18<sup>v</sup>, l.5: ‘*azīma* against al-Malik al-Aḥmar, which comes after the use of *ḥirzs*. *Tatimma*, “Tammat al-‘azīma wa-l-ḥamdu li-llāh rabb al-‘ālamīn wa-hadhihi šūratuhu.”
- f. Ff.18<sup>v</sup>, l.6 to 20<sup>r</sup>, l.2: *Bāb*, ‘*azīma* against Abū ‘Alī, “Sayyid al-jānn wa-malikuhum.” *Tatimma*, “Tammat šūratuhu, amīn.”
- g. Ff.20<sup>r</sup>, l.3 to 21<sup>r</sup>: *Bāb ‘azīmat Zawba‘a*.<sup>42</sup> *Tatimma*, “Tammat.”
- h. Ff.21<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 22<sup>v</sup>: On the twelve protective rings used by the practitioner, each one acts against a tribe, with sketches. *Tatimma*, “Tammat al-khawātim al-mubārak (sic) al-ithnā ‘ashar bi-ḥamd Allāh wa-ḥasan tawfiqihi,” followed by three different *taṣṭiyas* and “*amīn*.” The last *taṣṭiya* and “*amīn*” are rubricated in a triangle made of seven lines in black and red ink. Quarter of the folio empty.



FIGURE 2.5

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- iii. Ff.23<sup>r</sup>, l.1 to 23<sup>v</sup>, l.10: Prayer addressed to God. Various requests, not particularly related to the general topic of the manuscript. *Tatimma*, “Tammat.”

42 Terrible and malevolent demon, probably the one who commands hurricanes and whirlwinds, Albert de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1860), vol. 1, 971a.

Separation mark, a red and black border

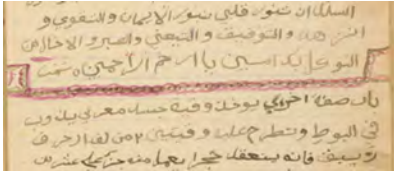


FIGURE 2.6  
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- iv. Ff.23<sup>v</sup>, l.11 to 26<sup>r</sup>, l.9; the first chapter starts straight after the *tatimma*, and the separation marks between iii and iv, and speaks about “other properties” (*ṣifat ukhrā*), which allows us to say it is acephalous.
  - a. Ff.23<sup>v</sup>, l.11 to 25<sup>r</sup>, l.5, recipes
    - 1. F.23<sup>v</sup>, l.11–14: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā*.
    - 2. F.23<sup>v</sup>, l.14–16: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā*.
    - 3. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.1–2: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā*.
    - 4. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.2–4: *Bāb [ṣifat u]khrā*.
    - 5. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.4–8: *Bāb al-ukhrā*.

Separation mark, a thick red line with special features at each end

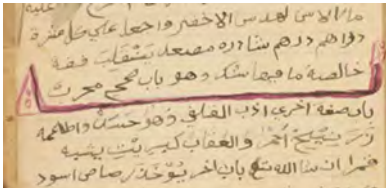


FIGURE 2.7  
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- 6. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.9–11: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā*.
- 7. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.11–14: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā. Tatimma*, “Tammat.”
- 8. F.24<sup>r</sup>, l.15 to 24<sup>v</sup>, l.3: *Bāb ṣifat akhar. Tatimma*, “Tammat.”
- 9. F.24<sup>v</sup>, l.3–12: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā*.
- 10. F.24<sup>v</sup>, l.12–14: *Bāb ukhrā*.
- 11. F.24<sup>v</sup>, l.14–17: *Bāb ṣifat ukhrā. Tatimma*, “Tammat.”
- 12. F.25<sup>r</sup>, l.1–5: “Wa-hadhihi ṣifatuḥā wa-ṣūratuḥā wa-sā’atuhā li-mā ḍayyiq ‘alaynā fi al-kitāb sawwaqnā ilā hunā,” followed by the representation. *Tatimma*, “Tammat.”
- b. Ff.25<sup>v</sup>, l.1 to 26<sup>r</sup>, l.9: “Wa-hadhā ism Allāh al-a‘zam.”

## Separation mark, a black line

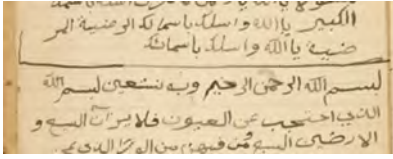


FIGURE 2.8

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- v. Ff.26<sup>r</sup>, l.10 to 28<sup>v</sup>, l.14: incantations (*'azā'im*).  
28<sup>v</sup>, end of the manuscript, which is apodous.

As a general feature, the Addis manuscript indicates that the man holding the *qalam* had acquired esoteric knowledge at some time. He obscures the text by transposing characters in words, as in the science of letters (*'ilm al-ḥurūf*). Here the application is not systematic. See for instance: f.15<sup>r</sup>, l.6 (our Annex) *w.ā.l* (وال) for “first,” i.e. “*awwal* (اول);” this *w.ā.l* with the meaning of *awwal* appears on the same line after a first “*awwal*” correctly spelled; between the two *awwals*, i.e. “*awwal*” then “*w.ā.l*,” stands a word, *ibtidā* (ابتدا), the final *alif* of which precedes *w.ā.l*, like this:

ابتدا وال

at this end, *w.ā.l*, which in itself has no meaning here, looks similar to *awwal* (فأول ابتدا والاحرز نفسك واكتب; (ابتدا وال = ابتدا اول); the all sequence is: “فأول ابتدا والاحرز نفسك واكتب;” the three words, اول ابتدا وال, stand roughly in the middle of the line. Another example is *wāw* = واو for ‘و’ coordination mark, spelled out, like on f.15<sup>r</sup>, l.7 (see the Annex again), “واوا الخواتم” *wāw al-khawātīm*.

In the science of letters, letters can be counted as ‘و’=6, as well as واو *wāw*=13. Gemination of *alifs* can be found in Egyptian manuscripts as early as the Mamlūk period. But here the total number of *alifs* does not change, so that the value of the sentence remains unchanged when turning each letter into numbers. These are features that manuscript Ṣan‘ā’/DaM parts (A) and (B) do not share.

As we can easily see from Table 2.1, the Addis manuscript shares with Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A) the section on the description of the twelve tribes of jinn (ms. (A), 2<sup>v</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>, l.12 / Addis/IES, 8<sup>v</sup>, l.1–14<sup>v</sup>, l.9), then the section which relates the tribes of jinn to the days of the week (ms. (A), 6<sup>r</sup>, l.17–6<sup>v</sup>, l.4 / ms. Addis/IES, 14<sup>v</sup>, l.10–15<sup>r</sup>, l.5), then the section on exorcism using a *mandal* (ms. (A), f.6<sup>v</sup>, l.5–f.7<sup>v</sup> / ms. Addis/IES, 15<sup>r</sup>, l.5–16<sup>r</sup>, l.11). The representations of the Chief of the tribes in the manuscript of Ṣan‘ā’ are not similar to their homologues in the manuscript of Addis.

The twelve rings which each correspond to a tribe of jinn are described in both cases, but while this comes at the end of the section on exorcism by the *mandal* in the ms. Şan‘ā’/DaM (A), 7<sup>v</sup>, l.15sq., it is a complete but untitled section, placed well after the section on protective talismans in the ms. Addis/IES, 21<sup>r</sup>, l.1–22<sup>v</sup>. The representation of the rings themselves also differs.<sup>43</sup> The section on protective talismans (*hurūz*) specific to each tribe, though shared by the two manuscript texts, is much shorter in the ms. Addis, as clearly shown in Table 2.1 (ms. Şan‘ā’/DaM (A), 8<sup>r</sup>, l.1–12<sup>r</sup>, l.1+12<sup>r</sup>, l.2–13<sup>r</sup>, l.2, i.e. ca. 11 ff./ms. Addis/IES, 16<sup>r</sup>, l.11–17<sup>r</sup>, l.13, maybe 17<sup>v</sup>, i.e. 3 to 4 ff.). In both cases, the same protective talisman is prescribed for a grouping of the first five tribes (in the two manuscripts, the fifth and sixth tribes are grouped together, then for tribes seven to ten in Şan‘ā’/DaM (A), but for tribes seven and eight, then tribes nine to eleven in the ms. Addis/IES).

In both manuscripts, Qur’anic sura and names (*asmā’*) are used for protective talismans and it is to these means that the manuscript of Addis is limited. And even in these passages, the two manuscript texts do not overlap: the names are different and the required suras overlap only partially. Neither of the two manuscripts proposes a talisman which protects against the twelfth and last tribe, but the ms. Şan‘ā’/DaM (A) contains a subdivision on a talisman against all jinn (12<sup>r</sup>, l.2–12<sup>v</sup>, l.8).

In the ms. Şan‘ā’/DaM (A), a section (*faşl*) is inserted on men who have become mad and possessed (11<sup>r</sup>, last line–11<sup>v</sup>, l.2) and a chapter (*bāb*) on declaiming a credo (*‘aḳīda*) to drive away all the vicious and sinner (*al-fasaqa*), jinn, demons (*al-shayātīn*), and giants (*al-marada*) (12<sup>v</sup>, l.9–13<sup>r</sup>, l.2).

43 For talismanic rings, cf. Venetia Porter, “The collection of Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum: Notes on a History,” in this volume.

TABLE 2.1 Sections shared by manuscripts Ṣan'ā'/DaM (A) and Addis/IES

Sections	Divisions of the text		Manuscripts	
	Subsections	Ṣan'ā'/DaM (A) ff.	Addis/IES ff.	
	Title	1 <sup>r</sup> , title page <i>Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī li-l-jam' wa-l-farq wa-l-ḥurūz</i>	8 <sup>v</sup> , l.1, title of a chapter-like "Kitāb al-ḥirz al-thānī wa-l-Mandal al-sulaymānī ..."	
Description of the 12 tribes of jinn, rubricated	Bāb šifat al-qabā'il	2 <sup>v</sup> -6 <sup>r</sup> , l.12	8 <sup>v</sup> , l.1-14 <sup>v</sup> , l.9	(separation mark, and rubrication)
	First tribe, Banū al-Zarqā'	2 <sup>v</sup> , l.2	8 <sup>v</sup> , l.16	
		Image of the Chief: 2 <sup>v</sup> , l.10	IMAGE: 9 <sup>r</sup> , l.10	
	Second tribe, Banū Arḥam (Ṣan'ā') / Banū al-Tāmm al-Arḥam (Addis)	2 <sup>v</sup> , l.11	9 <sup>r</sup> , l.12	
		IMAGE: 3 <sup>r</sup> , l.4	IMAGE: 9 <sup>v</sup> , l.9	
	Third tribe, Banū Hawj.l (Ṣan'ā') / Banū Hawjal (Addis)	3 <sup>r</sup> , l.5	9 <sup>v</sup> , l.11	
		IMAGE: 3 <sup>r</sup> , l.15	IMAGE: 10 <sup>r</sup> , l.7	
	Fourth tribe, Banū Khaṭṭān	3 <sup>r</sup> , l.17	10 <sup>r</sup> , l.8	
		IMAGE: 3 <sup>v</sup> , l.12	IMAGE: 10 <sup>v</sup> , l.3	
	Fifth tribe, Banū H.r.h.ra	3 <sup>v</sup> , l.13	10 <sup>v</sup> , l.5	
		IMAGE: 4 <sup>r</sup> , l.3	IMAGE: 11 <sup>r</sup> , l.5	
	Sixth tribe, Banū Araq, Banū Shu'la (Ṣan'ā') / Banū Araq <sup>44</sup> (Addis)	4 <sup>r</sup> , l.4	11 <sup>r</sup> , l.7 (rubrication)	
		IMAGE: 4 <sup>r</sup> , l.14	IMAGE: 11 <sup>v</sup> , l.3	
	Seventh tribe, Ḥabashā (Ṣan'ā') / Banū Khayshān (Addis)	4 <sup>r</sup> , l.15	11 <sup>v</sup> , l.5 (rubrication)	
		IMAGE: 4 <sup>v</sup> , l.8	IMAGE: 12 <sup>r</sup> , l.5	
	Eighth tribe, Abnā' al-Ṭayr (Ṣan'ā') / Banū al-Siḥāb (Addis)	4 <sup>v</sup> , l.9	12 <sup>r</sup> , l.7	
		IMAGE: 4 <sup>v</sup> , l.18	IMAGE: 12 <sup>v</sup> , l.3	

44 In the original, Araf.

TABLE 2.1 Sections shared by manuscripts Ṣan'ā'/DaM (A) and Addis/IES (*cont.*)

Sections	Divisions of the text		Manuscripts	
	Subsections	Ṣan'ā'/DaM (A) ff.	Addis/IES ff.	
	Ninth tribe, Banū Sh.jih̄ (Ṣan'ā') / without diacritics, Banū S.hih̄ (Addis)	4 <sup>v</sup> , l.19  IMAGE: 5 <sup>r</sup> , l.11	12 <sup>v</sup> , l.5  IMAGE: 13 <sup>r</sup> , l.3	
	Tenth tribe, Banū D.l.hāsh (Ṣan'ā') / Banū D.ʿit.m (Addis)	5 <sup>r</sup> , l.12  IMAGE: 5 <sup>v</sup> , l.2	13 <sup>r</sup> , l.6  IMAGE: 13 <sup>v</sup> , l.2	
	Eleventh tribe, al-Ṣaḥāb(?)iyyūn (ou al-Ṣ.hāb(?)i'ūn, al-Ṣaḥ- hāb(?)iyyūn, al-Ṣ.hhāb(?)i'ūn)	5 <sup>v</sup> , l.3  IMAGE: 5 <sup>v</sup> , l.12	13 <sup>v</sup> , l.5  IMAGE: 14 <sup>r</sup> , l.5	
	Twelfth tribe, (Banū) Qawā'id, "Wa-hum min Iblīs (...) wa-hum yuwaswisūna" (Ṣan'ā') / al-Muwaswasūn (Addis)	5 <sup>v</sup> , l.13  IMAGE: 6 <sup>r</sup> , l.11	14 <sup>r</sup> , l.6  IMAGE: 14 <sup>v</sup> , l.8	
	<i>Tatimma</i>	6 <sup>r</sup> , l.12, "tammāt al- ṣifa"	14 <sup>v</sup> , l.9, "tammāt al-manādil al-mubāarak (sic)"	
Tribes of jinn in relation to the days of the week		6 <sup>r</sup> , l.17–6 <sup>v</sup> , l.4	14 <sup>v</sup> , l.10–5 <sup>r</sup> , l.5	
On exorcism using a <i>mandal</i>		6 <sup>v</sup> , l.5–7 <sup>v</sup>	15 <sup>r</sup> , l.5–16 <sup>r</sup> , l.11 (see Annex)	
Twelve rings ( <i>khawātim</i> )		Part of the section on exorcism, 7 <sup>v</sup> , l.15 sq.	21 <sup>r</sup> , l.1–22 <sup>v</sup> , with <i>tatimma</i> , and colophon-like	
Protections ( <i>ḥurūz</i> ) against each tribe		8 <sup>r</sup> , l.1–12 <sup>r</sup> , l.1+12 <sup>r</sup> , l.2– 13 <sup>r</sup> , l.2 (= 11 ff.)	16 <sup>r</sup> , l.11–17 <sup>r</sup> , l.13, maybe 17 <sup>v</sup> (= 3 to 4 ff.)	
	<i>ḥirz al-qabīla al-ūlā</i> , Banū al- Zarqā'	8 <sup>r</sup>	16 <sup>r</sup> , l.12 to 16 <sup>v</sup> , l.1 only suras and <i>asmā</i> '	
	second tribe, Banū Arḥam	8 <sup>v</sup> –9 <sup>r</sup> , l.3	16 <sup>v</sup> , l.1–6 only suras and <i>asmā</i> '	
	third tribe, Banū Hawjal	9 <sup>r</sup> , l.4–9 <sup>v</sup> , l.1	16 <sup>v</sup> , l.7–13 only suras and <i>asmā</i> '	
	fourth tribe, Banū Khaṭfān	9 <sup>v</sup> , l.2–10 <sup>r</sup> , l.6	16 <sup>v</sup> , l.14–16 only suras and <i>asmā</i> '	
	fifth and sixth tribe, Banū H.r.h.ra and Qāfila (Ṣan'ā') / Fāliqa (Addis)	10 <sup>r</sup> , l.6–11 <sup>r</sup> including two six- pointed stars rings bearing <i>asmā</i> '	16 <sup>v</sup> , l.16 to 17 <sup>r</sup> , l.6 only suras and <i>asmā</i> '  (rubrication)	



TABLE 2.1 Sections shared by manuscripts *Şan‘ā’/DaM (A)* and *Addis/IES (cont.)*

Sections	Divisions of the text		Manuscripts	
	Subsections	<i>Şan‘ā’/DaM (A)</i> ff.	<i>Addis/IES</i> ff.	
	Faṣl ‘an al-rajul al-majnūn wa-l-maṣḥūr aw fihi balgham tribes grouped	11 <sup>r</sup> , l. at the bottom of the page–11 <sup>v</sup> , l.2 Banū Ḥabashā, Banū Siḥāb, Banū Sh.jīḥ, Banū Dayl.hāsh (?) 11 <sup>v</sup> , l.3–12 <sup>r</sup> , l.1	/ seventh and eighth tribe, Banū Siḥāb and Banū D.‘ith 17 <sup>r</sup> , l.7–12 only suras and <i>asmā’</i> ninth, tenth, and eleventh tribe, Banū Khubth, Banū Sh.jīḥ, and al-Şaḥāb(?)iyyūn (ou al-Ş.ḥāb(?)i’ūn, al-Şaḥ-ḥāb(?)iyyūn, al-Ş.ḥāb(?)i’ūn) 17 <sup>r</sup> , l.13–19 and 1 l. in the right margin only suras and <i>asmā’</i> (separation mark) 17 <sup>v</sup> all about 6-pointed stars (5 of them) and talismanic formulas, against the twelfth tribe?	
	Bāb ḥirz jāmi‘	12 <sup>r</sup> , l.2–12 <sup>v</sup> , l.8	/	
	Bāb ‘aqīda ‘alā jamī‘ al-fusaqa	12 <sup>v</sup> , l.9–13 <sup>r</sup> , l.2	/	
		/	18 <sup>r</sup> , l.1 <i>Tatimma</i> , “Tammat al-ḥurūz al-mubāraka al-‘aẓīma yanfa‘ Allāh bihā.”	

## 6 Comparison between Addis and Other Yemeni Manuscripts

During the preparation of this chapter, we proceeded further to a comparison between *Şan‘ā’/DaM (B)* and *Addis/IES*. But it is between the manuscripts *Şan‘ā’/DaM (A)* and *Addis/IES* that textual cross-references are most obvious. The *Şan‘ā’/DaM (A)* and (B) manuscripts share with the ms. *Addis/IES* the same subject, exorcism, and propose similar means, eg. the eviction of jinn or “*jalb*” corresponds to “*şarf ‘an*,” evoked in the ms. *Şan‘ā’ (B)* (f.49<sup>r</sup>, l.1sq.). One feels here an affinity of attitude and practice. However, the *Şan‘ā’/DaM (A)* and (B) manuscripts regularly refer to the *şar‘* (or formula of exorcism) while the ms.

Addis/IES, as we have it, refers to the couple *ṣarʿ/maṣrūʿ* (or possessed person) only in the section on exorcism by the *mandal* (ms. Ṣanʿāʿ/DaM (A), 6<sup>v</sup>, l.5–7<sup>v</sup>; ms. Addis/IES, 15<sup>r</sup>, l.5–16<sup>r</sup>, l.11) and by an irregular plural (*jamʿa taksīr*), derived from the same root, *maṣāriʿ*, which appears in the general introduction to “Kitāb al-ḥirz al-thānī wa-l-Mandal al-sulaymānī ...” (ms. Addis/IES, 8<sup>v</sup>, l.3, Arabic text *supra*).

If we now look at the literal text of both manuscripts, the same sections follow, the same themes are treated, often sentence by sentence, and the terminology is generally shared, although the sentences are differently formulated. In addition, many sections start without headings in Addis/IES.

## 7 Discussion & Conclusions

The ms. Addis/IES as we have it in our hands is composed of two or three books. Book one is acephalous, a book two (?) starts maybe f.4<sup>r</sup>, l.9, book (*kitāb*) three follows without transition, and is apodous. It is therefore difficult to infer from the manuscript that these three books were considered as parts of the same work. Book three starts with a general statement on its subject, giving an idea of some of its further developments and of the means used, but does not detail its general organisation, or display paragraphs of transition from one section/chapter to another. In addition, several chapters and sections have no headings like *bāb*, *faṣl*, etc. followed by a rubricated title: new sections are rather suggested by a *tatimma* which closes the previous section. Moreover, ms. Addis/IES bears separation marks like red lines which sometimes mark the end of a section, but may also stand in the middle of a list like f.24<sup>r</sup>, l.8, or between two sections not easily related like 26<sup>r</sup>, l.9–l.10, or at what might be the end of Book one (4<sup>r</sup>, l.8–9), or between Book three, section iii, the position of which is difficult to understand, and section iv, which seems apodous (23<sup>v</sup>, l.10–l.11). As a result, the text as it appears in the manuscript of Addis does not seem to have been written to be seen or accessible by others, but looks much more like personal notes made from one or more manuscripts in a notebook/scrapbook by a practitioner. The ‘hidden script’ system supports the idea that a practitioner augmented the text on the basis of his own knowledge.

The ‘hidden script’ works as a kind of warning that only those readers who have knowledge of this science can access the text, and as a warning to the unprepared not to continue reading. Furthermore, the hidden script ensures that not everyone can make out the text, which could fall into almost anyone’s hands.

In comparison ms. Ṣanʿāʿ/DaM (A), bearing a collation on its f.21<sup>r</sup>, seems to be the result of the general system of literary transmission.

The section on exorcism using a *mandal* is at the heart of the work of deconstruction of the manuscript texts carried out here in order to establish their circulation. This section, which does not seem to have belonged to the ‘mother’ manuscript that was used for the collation of ms. Ṣan‘ā’/DaM (A), does appear in the ms. Addis/IES. So, although it was previously regarded as an addition to the ‘original’<sup>45</sup> it is an integral part of the Addis/IES manuscript and shows that more than one manuscript served as a source for the text of Ṣan‘ā’ and Addis. The evidence both manuscripts provide of their copyist, their place of conservation, and their language, implies that this section was known in the twentieth century to a Yemeni and Ethiopian, or at least to a Harari audience, and that it was known in the last quarter of the eighteenth century/first quarter of the nineteenth century to one in Yemen, so that we can infer the existence of a complementary path of transmission between the medieval Arab and Latin worlds. This inference is supported by the strong tradition of Solomonic magic in Ethiopia as magic in Christian contexts testifies.<sup>46</sup>

The *Kitāb al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* is a ‘technical’ work for the use of specialists. Yemeni ms. (C) was found in the possession of a practitioner, and Addis (IES) is a kind of holograph which seems to address a specialized audience. The way in which the latter reached a public library remains to be understood, but beyond the six (maybe more) texts in our hands or inferred, we expect there are many more items in private hands.

The example of a holograph and a manuscript treated as a copy both referring to a common text once more reveals the limits to the method of text editing based on the establishment of a *stemma codicum*<sup>47</sup> and, by extension, the limits to the notion of *hapax*, arguments that are added to those of contextualization by the social conditions of the production of a text.<sup>48</sup> All these cases are especially relevant in the case of Magic.<sup>49</sup>

45 Regourd, “*Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī* appliqué,” 144–145.

46 For Solomonic magic in a Christian contexts, see the current research of Eyob Derillo (British Library, Department of Asia and Africa Studies) which focuses on the nature and historical development of the concept of Ethiopian ‘magic’ and its use in such a context: he is currently completing his doctorate at SOAS, Department of Religions and Philosophies.

47 Paul Mertens, “Pour ou contre le ‘stemma codicum’? À propos d’un livre récent sur les manuscrits d’Eschyle,” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 43, no. 1 (1965): 72–78; Witkam, “Establishing the stemma: fact or fiction?,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1988): 88–101; Charlotte Touati, “Pourquoi éditer un manuscrit unique? L’édiction critique des écrits apocryphes: de l’arbre au mycélium,” 2013 onwards, 13 p., PDF on line.

48 Stamatiadou and Tsamadou-Jacoberger, eds, *Texte et contexte. Méthodes et outils de l’édiction critique de quelques manuscrits arabes, grecs, italiens et latins* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2019).

49 For the issue of the history of the copying of manuscripts of subjects like medicine and

8 Annex

Text edition of the section on exorcism using a *mandal* in ms. Addis/IES 286.<sup>50</sup>



FIGURE 2.9 Amulet with teardrop shape at top. Ms. Addis/IES 286, ff.14<sup>v</sup>-15<sup>r</sup> (Col. Univ. Papyrus 705b)

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14ب

12. (... فلكل قبيلة

13. منهم صرف وعلاج في ساعات معروفة

15أ

1. مختلفة واول قبيلة منهم يعتزلون يوم الا

2. حد القبيلة الثانية يوم الاثنين الثالثة بيوم

magic, cf. Petra Sijpesteijn, "Arabic Medical-Magical Manuscripts: A Living Tradition," in this volume.

50 For comparison, see the text of the same section in Şan'ā' (A) in Regourd, "Al-Mandal al-sulaymānī appliqué," text in Arabic, 137-141; description of its content, 141-144.

3. الثلاثة الرابعة (هكذا) بيوم الاربعاء الخامسة
4. بيوم الخميس السادسة بيوم الجمعة السابعة
5. بيوم السبت وكل قبيلة منهم يوم فاذا ار[دت]
6. [ار]دت علاجهم فاول ابتداء وال<sup>51</sup> احرز نفسك واكتب
7. **الابجام** واوالخواتم وعلقهن عليك واذا<sup>52</sup> دخلت
8. علي من فيه الم فاسل<sup>53</sup> اهل بيته فانه لا يزال فيه
9. احد هولاء القبائل فاكتب له الخاتم والصروع
10. واكتب له سورة الم نشرح لك صدرك الخ علي
11. انا ثلاث مرات<sup>54</sup> وترش بها وجهه ويديه بها
12. وجهه قبضة واذا اردت صرع المصروع اربط
13. ابهميه وخبيه (ق)<sup>55</sup> ويديه بخيت<sup>56</sup> من صوف وقل
14. مهمه يا ملعون اخرج واقتلك ويكون قد لبس
15. ثوبا جديدا حين ييدا في علاجه وهذا صفة
16. المنديل الذي تكتبه للعاصي عليك على هذا الهيئه<sup>57</sup>
17. التي تراها وصلي الله علي سيدنا محمد واله وصحبه
18. وسلم

15ب

1. وهو هذا

51 Stands probably for: اول.

52 وادا.

53 Stands probably for: اسئل, from the verb *sa'ala*.

54 No diacritics on *tā*'.

55 حبيه.

56 No diacritics on *tā*'.

57 *Alif*, first letter of the following word, *allatī*, that the copyist rewrote in full on the following line.

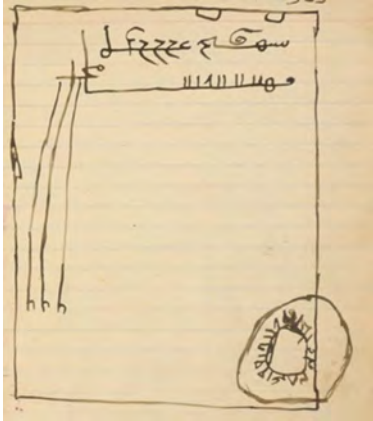


FIGURE 2.10  
 Ms. Addis/IES 286, f.15v  
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(رسم ←)

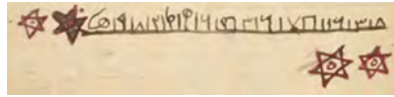


FIGURE 2.11  
 Ms. Addis/IES 286, f.16r  
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أ16

1. ثم (مرتان) تكتب مندل كل قبيلة علي باب هذا المنديل (هكذا) و
2. تخط 58 في الارض بسكين هندوان حاد وتجعل المنديل

3. الجديد<sup>59</sup> في وسط وتجر في قسط والعلك والصبر وتجعل [...] ..
4. [.. قرة وأترك المصاب في موضع<sup>60</sup> عال مطلع عليك حيث
5. يراك ولا تراه وقل مثل<sup>61</sup> الكلاب والذباب<sup>62</sup> واساله فان قال
6. حيات وحشرات فرش بالما وبجر بالبيان<sup>63</sup> واجلب وادعى بما
7. شئت وهذا الجلب الذي تجلبه يا معشر الجن ولأنس
8. الي قوله بسطان سنضرع لكم ايها الثقلان ثم قل م<sup>64</sup>
9. ما تري فان قال علي فراش **فأكتب**<sup>65</sup> علي طهرك سلام ا
10. آمين وقل ما ترى في خلق الرحمن من تفاوت فارجع البصر
11. كرتين<sup>66</sup> هل تري من فطور الي حسير واساله فإنه<sup>67</sup>
12. يجيبك ويخبرك<sup>68</sup> بأمره<sup>69</sup> تمت هذا المندل لكل قبيلة<sup>70</sup>
13. منهم حرزه اهد القبيلة الاولي يكتب لهم الفاتحة و
14. **آية**<sup>71</sup> **الكرسي**<sup>72</sup> والمعوذتين<sup>73</sup>
- 15-16



59. الحديد.
60. موضع.
61. مثل.
62. الذباب.
63. بالبيان.
64. *Mim* is the first letter of the following word “mā” that the copyist could not complete on the line.
65. From here up to the end of the folio, some of the flexible vowels are in red.
66. The word was scratched out using red ink.
67. *Hamza* and *shadda* in red ink.
68. *Fatḥa* and *sukūn* in red ink.
69. *Hamza* in red ink.
70. Vowels in red ink.
71. *Madda* in red ink.
72. *Shadda* in red ink.
73. *Idem*.

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## Arabic Medical-Magical Manuscripts: A Living Tradition

*Petra M. Sijpesteijn*

Sometime in the eleventh century a man in Egypt wrote to a close associate with news about different people in his environment.\* Towards the end of his letter he adds: 'I further let you know that lately I have been dogged by illness (*marad*). Whenever some breeze touches me (*in akhadanī hawā'*), my voice, as you know it, cuts out (*in qaṭa'a ṣawṭī*) and I cannot talk. I do not know what to do, and I wonder whether someone has perpetrated an evil act against me (*tarāda'a insān 'alayya*) and given me something to drink that prevents me from speaking. So I ask God for a happy outcome and a good ending, may He be willing.'<sup>1</sup> We do not know who wrote this letter or for whom it was destined. We do not know the outcome of the sender's voice box problems, and whether he found out what was causing them. What we do know is that he suspected foul play by some anonymous 'person' (*insān*), who had used some kind of potion to injure and undermine him.

While scholars of the past, relying mostly on written sources, are unable to examine human practice in real time, let alone question historical actors about their behaviour, ancient written sources contain traces of daily practice that can nevertheless be revealing. Via this thousand-year-old letter we witness an unidentified individual somewhere in medieval Egypt speculating about malign forces impacting his life and wondering what to do about it. Besides praying to God for a good ending, which he mentions in his letter, the sender, considering his suspicion of a potion interfering with his ability to speak freely, probably also consulted a healer. And just as our letter-writer connects disease with evil-doing in his account, healing practices combined religion and medi-

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1 Werner Diem, *Arabische Privatbriefe des 9. bis 15. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 1, no. 20, provenance in Egypt unknown.

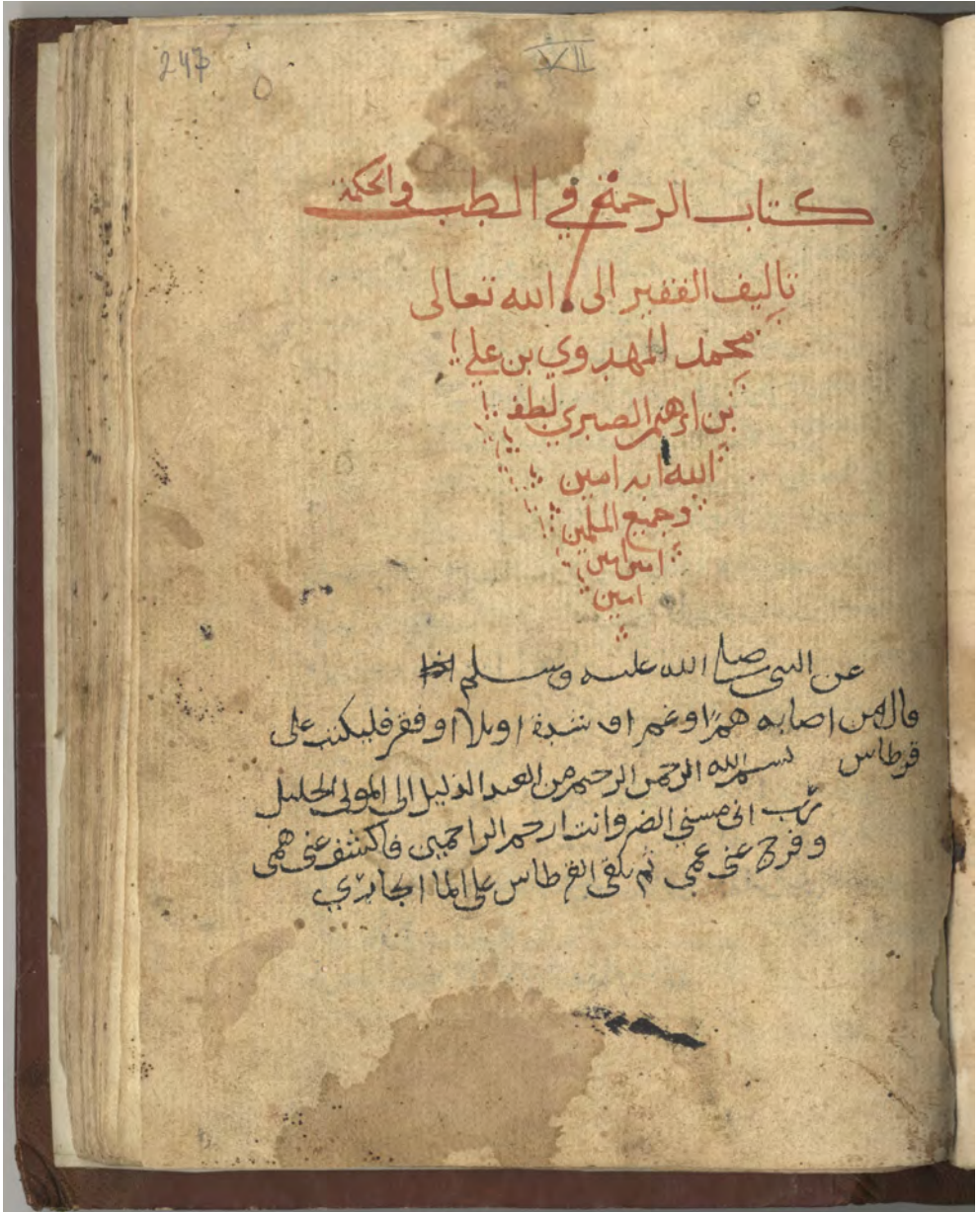


FIGURE 3.1 OR 1250 f. 243<sup>a</sup> Title page of al-Šanawbarī's *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* with instruction for how to prepare and deal with an amulet against worry and stress © Leiden University Library

cal recipes in combatting the perceived natural and unnatural causes that lay behind illness. Driven by the needs and concerns of their patients, as well as the experience and insights they acquired over the course of their careers, healers adapted, elaborated on, and further developed their repertoire of treatments and interventions—the traces of which can be found in the notes and case-books healers kept and used in their practice.

I start with this example not only because it provides a bridge between ‘books’ and practice, but because the concerns of the poor man who lost his voice and the treatment he was seeking also shaped the book that forms the subject of this contribution, the fifteenth-century medical treatise the *Book of mercy concerned with medicine and wisdom*, Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma, (*Raḥma*).

First of all, the *Raḥma* served a clientele similar to our letter-writer, seeking relief, protection and explanation through a mix of religious and medical or pharmaceutical applications. Indeed, the text underwent changes as a result of usage and patient/user demand, reflecting a similar intertwining of religious and pharmaceutical or medical knowledge, including magical practices. That written texts in the manuscript age were in a dynamic relationship with the practices of their transmission and use, and that texts were not closed, but flexible and malleable, is now widely understood.<sup>2</sup> These insights are especially applicable to so-called utilitarian texts, such as medical, pharmaceutical and legal handbooks, which were used by their owners in daily practice. A good example of this process whereby a composite text is at some point attributed to one author is discussed in this volume by Jean-Charles Coulon.<sup>3</sup> Coulon shows that the magical corpus attributed to al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) obtained foundational status amongst scholars in the Muslim world and those outside, in fact developed over a long period. In this chapter, I will use the manuscript and textual tradition of the *Raḥma* to examine how production, use and reception interacted to shape texts in the Arabic medico-magical tradition. The starting point is to examine how the text’s social embeddedness—that is, its use in daily clinical practice—affected its manuscript form and literary presentation. The discussion will not engage with the question of what the mixing of religious and medical thinking in this text tells us about the development of medical

2 Jan Just Witkam, “Establishing the Stemma: Fact or Fiction?” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1988): 88–101; Travis Zadeh, “Of Mummies, Poets and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s Geography,” in *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* IV, ed. Monique Bernhards (Exeter: Short Run Press, 2013), 8–75.

3 Jean-Charles Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*,” in this volume.

knowledge, ideas of piety or legal and theological debates about the use of magic in the Islamic world. Rather, the *Raḥma* in its different manifestations will be used to examine how this text interacted with social practice, and, by means of the light it casts on notions of social threat, bodily illness and personal harm, what it says about the shape and course of inter-personal conflicts at this time.

## 1 Multiple Texts or One?

The *Raḥma* was a very popular work that circulated widely in the later medieval Arabic-speaking world. The text combines traditions of the Prophet Muhammad related to medical matters, classical humoral theory and the experience of practising doctors about the workings of the human body, the physiological effects of various foodstuffs, and actions necessary to maintain bodily health, and the treatment of ailments and diseases. Produced in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century, the *Raḥma* quickly found an audience and its popularity can be deduced from the large number of manuscripts and printed editions that were—and are still up to today—in circulation, especially in the western part of the Islamic world, Egypt and North Africa. It is also evidenced by its having been incorporated into other texts, not so much in the form of commentaries or abridgements, but through a process of stepwise transformations.

The *Raḥma* is transmitted in several related but rather different versions, and there is some confusion in the scholarly literature about both its authorship and origin. In the first place the work has at least two supposed authors. Furthermore, a composite version circulated with a title echoing that of the *Raḥma*, which is clearly heavily based on it, but which has its own author. What is the relationship between these texts?

The *Raḥma* is mainly associated with two writers. A large number of manuscripts in collections throughout the world list the text under the name of the Yemeni doctor and scholar Muḥammad al-Mahdawī b. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Ṣanawbarī (d. 815/1412).<sup>4</sup> The other name under which it appears, not just in

4 There exists disagreement about the author's name, some giving his first name as Muḥammad Mahdawī, others as Mahdī. Cf. Ibn al-Jazarī, *Kitāb Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrāʾ*, eds. Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1932–1935), 2, 315. Some manuscripts add Jamāl al-Dīn to his name: Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1893), 5, 564, no. 6305; Yūsuf Zaydān, *Fihris makḥḥūṭāt jāmiʿat al-Iskandariyya* (Cairo: Maʿhad al-Makḥḥūṭāt al-

manuscript collections, but in a large number of printed versions, is that of the prolific Egyptian polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Some scholars insist that all texts with the *Rahma* title were written by al-Ṣanawbarī, dismissing those instances that cite al-Suyūṭī's authorship as false attributions.<sup>5</sup> Others

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‘Arabiyya, 1995), 1, 325; Princeton inv. No. 918 as listed in Rudolf Mach and Eric L. Ormsby, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts (New Series) in the Princeton University Library* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 213. His *nisba* is spelled and vocalised in various ways: al-Ṣanawbarī in Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: Brill, 1932–1949), G11 189; S11 252 which is followed by many modern authors such as Manfred Ullmann, *Die Medizin in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 188 and in manuscript catalogues like Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*. Vol. 2. *Manuscripts OR. 1001-OR. 2000 Registered in Leiden University Library in the Period between 1665 and 1871* (Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 2007), 92; Savage-Smith, *A New Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Volume 1: Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 734, no. 217; al-Ṣubunrī in Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, 2, 315–316, which is followed by Khayr al-Dīn Zirīklī, *Al-A‘lām: Qāmūs tarājīm li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-l-musta‘ribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1979), 7, 313, who adds in a footnote that all other interpretations of the name are based on misreadings; Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1068/1657), *Kashf al-ẓunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, cited by Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss*, 5, 564; several manuscripts in UK collections as listed in [www.fihrist.org.uk/catalog](http://www.fihrist.org.uk/catalog); al-Ṣunburī, possibly indicating a relationship to the Indian town of Ṣunpur for which see also, below the *nisba* al-Hindī which is sometimes added to his name in Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss*, 5, 564, no. 6305; Wetzstein 1719.6 in Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss*, 5, 565, no. 6306.3; Emily Savage-Smith, *A New Catalogue*, 734, no. 217; al-Ṣubayrī/al-Ṣabīrī in Yūsuf Zaydān, *Fihris makḥṭūṭāt*, 1, 325; al-Ḍibīrī in Hans Daiber, “Neue Handschriftenfunde aus dem Jemen und aus der Südosttürkei. Die Erstversion des Tashil al-manafī‘ fi al-tibb wa-al-hikma,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Supplement 111/1* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), 662; al-Ṣuburī in Leiden manuscript OR 1250 f. 243<sup>a</sup>; al-Azraqī, *Tashīl al-manāfi‘ fi al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* (Cairo: Maktabat wa-maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1367/1948), 2; al-Azraqī, *Tashīl al-manāfi‘ fi al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* (Istanbul: Maktabat Īshīq, 1976), 2; al-Azraqī, *Tashīl al-manāfi‘ fi al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* (Delhi: Maktabat Ishā‘at al-Islām, ca. 1985), 2. Sometimes additional elements are added to the name. See for example the following additions: Maḥdī al-Ṣayrafī al-Yamanī in BNF Arabe 7027 f. 1<sup>a</sup>; Maḥdī b. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Yamanī in MSA 29 f. 1<sup>a</sup>; Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Shāmī al-Mutaṭabbib in Princeton inv. No 918 as mentioned in Mach and Ormsby, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts*, 213. Al-Hindī is added in several manuscripts (see references in Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 734).

- 5 E.g. Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, S11 252; Ullmann, *Medizin*, 188; Irmeli Perho, *The Prophet's Medicine. A Creation of the Muslim Traditionalist Scholars* (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1995), 60 no. 212; Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 734, no. 217. In (on-line) catalogues the ‘false’ attribution to al-Suyūṭī is often mentioned even in relation to texts that contain a different recension than the one attributed to al-Ṣanawbarī (cf. “BNF Archives et Manuscripts 7281”, accessed June 30, 2020, [archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4383z/cdoe82](http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc4383z/cdoe82); “Islamic Medical Manuscripts at the National Library of Manuscripts” accessed June 30, 2020, [www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/prophetic\\_med5.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/prophetic_med5.html)). See also the correction made to the authorship of the text translated by Florian Pharaon under the title *Livre de la miséricorde dans*

consider the two texts as distinct works bearing the same title.<sup>6</sup> A small number of manuscripts have the same title, but are associated with yet other authors.<sup>7</sup>

For al-Šanawbarī the *Raḥma* is his only known work.<sup>8</sup> His birth date is unrecorded, but he is said to have died a middle-aged man in 815/1412 in al-Mahjam in Yemen.<sup>9</sup> He was reputed to be an excellent (*fāḍil*) Qurʾan reciter

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*l'art de guérir les maladies et de conserver la santé* from al-Suyūṭī to al-Šanawbarī in on-line sources and catalogues (e.g. in Worldcat). In this case, the text used is indeed the shorter one devoid of magical elements that circulates under the name of al-Šanawbarī. It is unlikely, however, that those who corrected the name based their decision on a comparison of the texts. More probable is that they followed the example of Brockelmann in his opinion that all texts with this title were the same one authored by al-Šanawbarī.

6 Cf. al-Ziriklī, *A'lām*, 6, 313; Martin Schwartz “Qumran, Turfan, Arabic Magic, and Noah's Name,” in *Charmes et sortilèges. Magie et magiciens. Res Orientalis* 14 (2002): 231 no. 1. Mach and Ormsby write “The text printed under the name of al-Suyūṭī ... with identical title and khutbah, but divided into 195 babs, is an entirely different work” (Mach and Ormsby, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts*, 213). Haddad names al-Sunawbary as author of *Raḥma* which he calls ‘an abridgment of Sunyuty's (sic) book with the same title’ (Farid Sami Haddad, “Arabic Medical Manuscripts in the Sami I. Haddad Memorial Library,” in *XXVII Congreso internacional de historia de la medicina* [Barcelona: Acadèmia de Ciències Mèdiques de Catalunya i Balears: 1981], 1, 257). See for the issue of *Raḥma* being an abridgement, further on in footnote 11.

7 See the two manuscripts with the title *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* and the author's name: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454) kept in Turkey in the Sulaymaniyya library (inv. 2116) and in Ankara University (inv. 10327) (cf. “The Islamisation of Anatolia; Biṣṭāmī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, Approximately 1380–1454,” accessed July 10, 2020 arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/anatolia/data/documents/auth/lccn:nr93001806). A *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* is listed in Ahlwardt with the authorship of al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) as a treatise on poisons (*Verzeichniss*, 5, 565–566; nos. 6306-1 and 6306-6). Similarly, the Wellcome Library is said to contain a work entitled *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* whose author is given in the catalogue of the library as Aristotle and al-Būnī (Nikolaj Serikoff, *Arabic Medical Manuscripts of the Wellcome Library: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Ḥaddād Collection* [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 259–260, cited by Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 734). Two manuscripts with the same title kept in the Center for Islamic Studies (CIS), Specialist Library in Sokoto, Nigeria and the Nigerian National Archives of Kaduna give as its author Muhammad Bello (d. 1253/1837) (John O. Hunbin and Rex Séan O’Fahey, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 2 The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 114–149). A description of the contents and form of the Sokoto manuscript (with a third chapter on how to keep the body healthy another one on the natural attributes of foodstuffs and sections ending with ‘*mujarrab ṣaḥīḥ*,’ ‘tested and found effective’) suggests this is the same text that circulates under the name of al-Šanawbarī. Cf. Mukhtar Umar Bunza, “Arabic Medicinal Manuscripts of Pre-Colonial Northern Nigeria: A Descriptive List,” <https://themuslimtimes.info/2018/01/09/arabic-medicinal-manuscripts-of-pre-colonial-northern-nigeria-a-descriptive-list/> accessed 28/6/2021. In the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris the author of the partially preserved *Raḥma* in *majmūʿ* manuscript BNF 5718 is identified as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Naṣr al-Širāzī (d. 476/1083).

8 Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, GII, 242; SII 252.

9 Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, 2, 315 cited by al-Ziriklī, *A'lām*, 6, 313. Mahjam fell under the



and a skilful doctor.<sup>10</sup> Al-Ṣanawbarī's *Rahma* is a typical example of a basic medical text, both in terms of its contents and organisation. It combines disquisitions on humoral theory with discussions of the medicinal properties of foodstuffs and other substances (*khawāṣṣ* or *mujarrabāt*), and gives instructions on how to produce and apply electuaries (*ma'ajīn*), ointments (*marāhim*), laxatives (*mushilāt*), as well as physical and dietary treatments to heal wounds and other physical and psychological ailments. Al-Ṣanawbarī states in his introduction that he designed his text to be concise (*mukhtaṣar*), 'to facilitate its comprehension by students and its study and memorisation by those eager to do so' (*li-yusahhala tanāwulahu li-l-ṭālib wa-darsahu wa-ḥifẓahu li-l-rāghib*).<sup>11</sup> While his text is often mentioned under 'prophetic medicine,' al-Ṣanawbarī classifies it as 'medical,'<sup>12</sup> and mentions only a small number of well-known prophetic hadiths. He does not provide *isnāds* and does not follow the organisation typical of works of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī*.<sup>13</sup> He follows, in other words, a

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administration of the town of Zabīd in south-western Yemen according to al-Ya'qūbī (al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān* [Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957], 5, 229). In addition the *nisba* al-Muqrī is sometimes mentioned (e.g. Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 734). This name might refer to Muqrā also located in south-west Yemen (George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* [Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing company, 1927–1948], 3.2, 1725). Another *nisba* associated with him is al-Hindī which might point to an Indian background (idem, 1725). Sarton does not give any references to primary sources where the *nisbas* might be found, but Savage-Smith lists some manuscripts where this *nisba* occurs (see above, footnote 4).

10 Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, 2, 315–316.

11 OR 1250 f. 243<sup>b</sup>. *Mukhtaṣar* follows the meaning of *mabsūṭ* in this sense (Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition* [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 41). Understanding *mukhtaṣar* as abridgement in this context makes less sense as al-Ṣanawbarī does not mention a text that he summarised and it is difficult to find a suitable text that would have formed the base of the current text. Presenting the work as a means through which scholars can study a topic by themselves, without the aid of a master forms a major departure from medieval scientific writings characteristic of early modern scientific activity throughout the Islamicate world (Matt Melvin-Koushki, "Is (Islamic) Occult Science Science?" *Theology and Science* 18 [2020]: 315).

12 *Wa-hādā kitāb mukhtaṣar waḍa'tuhu fī 'ilm al-ṭibb* (OR 1250 f. 243<sup>b</sup>).

13 See for example the hadiths quoted about the benefits of black seed, aloe, garden cress and black myrobalan (spelled *الهلبيج الأسود* in OR 1250 f. 254<sup>a</sup> instead of *الإهليلج الأسود*). Cf. Vollers 758 f. 23<sup>a</sup>) (OR 1250 f. 252<sup>b</sup>–254<sup>a</sup>) and cupping (*ḥijāma*) (OR 1250 f. 255<sup>a</sup>). For the classification as prophetic medicine, cf. Mohammed Ghaly, "Prophetic Medicine," in *Muhammad in History, Thought and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, eds. Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam H. Walker (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 2, 502–506; Perho, *Prophet's Medicine*, 59–60; Peter Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 74; Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 734; Ghada Karmi, "Al-ṭibb al-nabawī. The Prophet's Medicine," in *Technology, Tradition and*

medical rather than a piety paradigm,<sup>14</sup> even if still finding space for some mild literary pretension with an anecdote from the court of the Sasanian king Chosroes, transmitted by the general al-Aḥnaf b. Qays (d. 67/686),<sup>15</sup> and a couple of lines of poetry.<sup>16</sup> Mostly though al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* is intended as a practical and manageable medical handbook with recipes and treatments labelled as 'useful, true and tried' (*nāfi', ṣaḥīḥ, mujarrab*), presumably on the basis of his clinical experience as a practitioner.<sup>17</sup> The text is accordingly divided into five chapters covering 'human nature and what wisdom God placed in it'; 'characteristics of foodstuffs and medicines and their benefits'; 'what benefits a healthy body'; 'the treatment of specific diseases in each body part'; and 'knowledge of nature and what God preserved concerning the treatment of diseases that spread throughout the body (*mutanaqqila fī al-badan*).<sup>18</sup> The last two chapters follow the common organisation of moving through the body from head to toe.

The famous polymath and prolific Egyptian scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (911/1505) is the supposed author of a text with the same title, *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*.<sup>19</sup> Al-Suyūṭī wrote hundreds of works on a wide range of

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*Survival. Aspects of Material Culture and Survival in the Middle East and Central Asia*, eds. Richard Tapper and Keith Mclachlan (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 32–39. Cf. 'stark von Propheten Medizin durchsetzt' (Johann Christoph Bürgel, *Ärztliches Leben und Denken im arabischen Mittelalter* [Leiden: Brill, 2016], 471). Ahmed Ragab showed that works of prophetic medicine follow a specific order of topics and contain a substantial number of hadiths, neither applies to the *Raḥma*. Cf. *Piety and Patienthood in Medieval Islam* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2018), chapter 2.

- 14 See for this distinction Ahmed Ragab's excellent analysis of the genre of Prophetic medicine in which ideas of illness and health were intimately connected to understandings of pietistic and religious actions (*Piety*, introduction).
- 15 OR 1250 f. 257<sup>b</sup>.
- 16 OR 1250 f. 257<sup>a</sup> and 261<sup>a</sup>.
- 17 Basing scientific truth on experimentalism and empirical findings has, however, also been identified as another (see above footnote 11) deviation from medieval scientific attitude characteristic of early modern works (Melvin-Koushki, "Science," 314–315).
- 18 I have used six manuscripts of this text (BSB Cod. Arab. 835; Leiden OR 1250; Paris BNF 7027; London Wellcome MS Arabic 444 all four undated; Bethesda, Maryland MS A 29, copied at the end of Rabī' 11 1226/1811; Leipzig Vollers 758 copied 1 Jumādā 1 1262/27 April 1846). For general references to the text I use OR 1250 while the others are used for the purpose of comparison only. I have not made an effort to retrieve all extant copies of the text nor did I establish a hierarchy or order between them. In this chapter I want to demonstrate a phenomenon characteristic of these kinds of texts, rather than produce an exhaustive study of the *Raḥma* manuscript tradition. OR 1250 is a fairly nice copy although some mistakes have crept into the text. See for example the spelling of الإهلبيج for الهليلج (OR 1250 f. 254<sup>a</sup>). *Al-'adas* was left out by the scribe and was added later to the text (OR 1250 f. 248<sup>a</sup>). A sentence is also dropped out on f. 261<sup>a</sup> but not corrected.
- 19 I have used four printed editions: Ed. Aḥmad Sa'd 'Alī. Cairo: Maṭba'a Muṣṭafā al-Bābī

topics. Amongst these is also a well-known treatise on prophetic medicine entitled *al-Manhaj al-sawī wa-l-manhal al-rawī fī al-ṭibb al-nabawī* (*The correct method and refreshing source of the prophet's medicine*), which consists entirely of hadiths, without medical context or supporting information.<sup>20</sup> The *Raḥma* that circulates under al-Suyūṭī's name covers the same major topics as al-Ṣanawbarī's—successively, human nature, the characteristics and effects of food stuffs and medicines, and the treatment of injuries, diseases and other conditions. The text of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* appears in its entirety, albeit divided over different chapters and following a different order. Al-Suyūṭī's text is, however, more extensive, containing 195 chapters. The book contains much more elaborate information about the use of foodstuffs for medicinal applications and offers many additional recipes and treatments for ailments, including, most notably, amulets and magical compounds, which are entirely lacking in al-Ṣanawbarī's text. A discussion of the treatment of pregnancy and its possible complications is added as well. At the end of the book instructions on how to make amulets and the other magical materials needed for social and economic interventions are included.<sup>21</sup>

Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Azraqī's (d. 890/1485) work, *Tashīl al-manāfi' fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* (*Facilitation of benefits in medicine and wisdom*), refers in its title to the *Raḥma* and explains in the introduction that this is al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* in particular.<sup>22</sup> Al-Azraqī calls it the most systematic work, as it mentions each disease or ailment with its characteristics and cause, but also points out that due to al-Ṣanawbarī's attempts to be concise some informa-

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al-Ḥalabī, 1357/1938 (From now on referred to as *Raḥma*, Cairo 1357/1938); Cairo: 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad, 1345/1927 (From now on referred to as *Raḥma*, Cairo, 1345/1927); Cairo: Maktabat Jumhūriyyat Miṣr al-'Arabiyya s.d. (From now on referred to as *Raḥma*, Cairo, Maktabat Jumhūriyyat Miṣr); Cairo: Dār Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, s.d. (From now on referred to as *Raḥma*, Cairo, Dār Ihyā'). The Cairo 1357/1938 edition I use for general referencing, the others make an occasional appearance for comparative purposes. No information on the manuscripts that the printed editions are based on is given in the books.

20 Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, GII 147; SII 182; Perho, *Prophet's Medicine*, 61. Cf. Éric Geoffroy, "al-Suyūṭī" *ELI2*.

21 Pregnancy: *Raḥma* Cairo 1357/1938, 193–202; materials, amulets that help with the hunt on animals on land and fish, etc.: *Raḥma* Cairo 1357/1938, 243–288.

22 I used three printed editions of this text: Delhi: Maktabat Ishā'at al-Islām, ca. 1985 (From now on referred to as *Tashīl*, Delhi); Cairo: Maktabat wa-maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1367/1948 (referred to from now on as *Tashīl*, Cairo); Istanbul: Maktabat İshiq, 1396/1976 (referred to from now on as *Tashīl*, Istanbul). No information on the manuscript that the printed editions are based on is given in the books. Cf. Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, SII 170. For the reference to *Raḥma*, see *Tashīl*, Istanbul, 2; *Tashīl*, Cairo, 2. Al-Azraqī calls al-*Raḥma*'s author al-Ṣubūrī.

tion is missing.<sup>23</sup> As his other main source al-Azraqī mentions *Kitāb Shifā' al-ajsām* (*Book on the curing of bodies*) by his teacher Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ghayth al-Kamrānī (d. 857/1453),<sup>24</sup> Al-Azraqī adds that he used a host of other books to help him to round out the information provided by the two aforementioned works, including, for example, al-Razī's (d. 313/925) *Bur' al-sā'a* (*One-hour recovery*), Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *Luqaṭ al-manāfi' fi al-ṭibb* (*Selections of benefits of medicine*), and works by physicians such as al-Mārdīnī (d. 690/1292) and al-Suwaydī (d. 690/1292).<sup>25</sup> Like al-Ṣanawbarī, al-Azraqī was a Yemeni practising doctor.<sup>26</sup> The *Tashīl* is divided into five chapters, which exactly follow those of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma*.<sup>27</sup> The chapters contain, however, much additional information both on topics that the *Raḥma* covers and adding supplementary subjects, especially concerning sexual relations, aphrodisiacs and pregnancy. A section on the evil eye and instructions on amulets are combined with medical treatments and dietary recommendations.

In subsequent centuries other authors made use of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma*. Rāshid b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Hāshim al-Qurashī put the *Raḥma* to verse and provided a commentary with the title *Zād al-faqīr* (*Provisions for the poor person*),<sup>28</sup> an abridgement of which was produced by the author Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad al-Mullā al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1270/1853) with the title *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-raḥma fi al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*.<sup>29</sup>

Of the two ways in which the *Raḥma* has generally been seen—either as one text authored by al-Ṣanawbarī but misattributed in certain instances to al-Ṣuyūṭī, or as two 'entirely different' texts—neither opinion is correct. The result is some confusing discussions in the literature.<sup>30</sup> An examination of the two

23 *Tashīl*, Istanbul, 3; *Tashīl*, Cairo, 3.

24 Besides al-Kamrānī (Bürgel, *Ärztliches Leben*, 471; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*), his name is given as al-Kirmānī (Brockelmann, *Geschichte*) and al-Karamānī (last two are also both used in Savage-Smith, *New Catalogue*, 738, no. 218).

25 *Tashīl*, Istanbul, 3; *Tashīl*, Cairo, 3.

26 Perho, *Prophet's Medicine*, 59–60.

27 *Tashīl*, Istanbul, 3; *Tashīl*, Cairo, 3.

28 Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, sII 252.

29 A manuscript of this work is kept in the King Saud Library in Saudi Arabia. Cf. *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-Raḥma fi al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*. Accessed on July 14, 2020 [almoqtabas.com/ar/manuscripts/view/26491188932509769](http://almoqtabas.com/ar/manuscripts/view/26491188932509769). This title nor the author make an appearance in Brockelmann, *Geschichte*.

30 See for example: "al-Ṣanawbarī (d. 1412) in his still popular *Book on Mercy on Medicine and Wisdom* devoted only a very short paragraph to the four humours and a slightly longer one to the four corresponding temperaments, with but one brief mention of Hippocrates and none of Galen. The remainder of the sizeable book is devoted to quotations of hadiths, instructions for the use of substances such as honey, and magical and talismanic

texts makes clear that the two *Raḥmas* are obviously and intimately related, but different texts. (Ps.) Al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* word for word, but supplements it by providing additional medical information and, most strikingly, providing a magical dimension. Similarly, al-Ṣanawbarī's text was used to produce subsequent texts, such as al-Azraqī's *Tashīl* and al-Iḥsā'ī's *Talkhīṣ*. The next section zeroes in on the relationship between the two *Raḥmas* that have traditionally been considered one and the same text, examining how these versions of the *Raḥma* are interconnected and what this tells us about the circulation and use of these texts.

## 2 Reworking and Interdependency

The introduction of the *Raḥma*, in which the 'author' explains the purpose of his book (to provide a concise text that will allow students to learn and memorise it), is exactly the same in both versions of the text. In the version ascribed to al-Suyūṭī a couple of lines are added to the very beginning, which give the name of the author and state that he 'composed this book from the words of Abū al-Ṭayyib, from the words of experts (*kalām al-shuyūkh*), may God the Almighty have mercy on them, and all kinds of (other) books (*kutub shattā*).'<sup>31</sup> Abū al-Ṭayyib is presumably a miswriting for the famous scholar Abū al-Faraj 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ṭayyib (d. 435/1043), who worked as a doctor in Bīmāristān al-ʿAḍudī in Baghdad and produced numerous commentaries in the field of philosophy, theology and medicine.<sup>32</sup>

Both versions of the *Raḥma* start with the same two chapters, on human nature and on the essences whereby they follow the same sub-sections on 'the humours, temperaments, the benefits of food' and 'foodstuffs, medicines, laxatives' respectively. Al-Ṣanawbarī's third chapter, on how to maintain a healthy body, is listed as chapter four in al-Suyūṭī's text after a chapter on the 'treatment of emaciation in the body.' The last two chapters of al-Ṣanawbarī's on 'afflictions of specific parts of the body' and on 'general diseases' are in al-Suyūṭī divided

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procedures" (Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Islamic Medicine*, 74). This discussion does not concern al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* but deals with al-Suyūṭī's text although several references to Galen (Jalīnūs) can be found in al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* as well. It is repeated in subsequent studies like Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, "Medicine in Islam and Islamic medicine," in *A Global History of Medicine*, ed. Mark Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 85.

31 *Raḥma*, Cairo 1357/1938, 2; *Raḥma*, Cairo: Dār Iḥyā, 2; *Raḥma*, Cairo: Maktabat Jumhuriyyat Miṣr, 2; *Raḥma*, Cairo 1345/1927, 2; BNF 7281, f. 2<sup>b</sup>.

32 Cleophea Ferrari, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 528–531.

into many smaller chapters, named after the body parts where ailments occur or the problems that affect the different limbs, organs and other parts of the body.

Al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* contains many more chapters (195) than al-Ṣanawbarī's (5). It is also more elaborate, offering additional recipes, treatments and measures for every ailment, disease or wound for which the *Raḥma* provides relief, such as, for example, his detailed treatments for ear pain and baldness.<sup>33</sup> It also contains supplementary information and applications using foodstuffs and substances such as kohl.<sup>34</sup> Additional items of food are mentioned as well in al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma*.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, al-Suyūṭī deals with topics that are not found in al-Ṣanawbarī. Al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* contains, for example, an extensive section on pregnancy—ways to know whether a woman is pregnant, how to treat infertility, methods to make a foetus fall asleep, treat it while asleep or wake it up, ways to drive out a foetus or to keep it in its mother's belly, and how to handle stress during childbirth—and on the relationship between husband and wife, which are entirely absent from al-Ṣanawbarī's text.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the section in al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* on 'how to turn married or divorced women into virgins again,' that is to say how to tighten their vagina, is missing from al-Ṣanawbarī.<sup>37</sup>

Another important addition are the instructions on how to produce amulets to deal with medical problems. These are interspersed with the pharmacological, dietary, behavioural and other medical treatments. The amulets that are discussed contain Qur'anic verses and names of God, but also magical squares, 'Brillenbuchstaben' (or sigils, drawings consisting of circles connected

33 The section on earache is larger in al-Suyūṭī (Cairo 1357/1938, 36–37) than in al-Ṣanawbarī (OR 1250 f. 263<sup>b</sup>). More treatments against baldness are mentioned in al-Suyūṭī (Cairo 1357/1938, 79–80) than in al-Ṣanawbarī (OR 1250 f. 262<sup>b</sup>).

34 Kohl in al-Ṣanawbarī (OR 1250 f. 261<sup>a</sup>) and al-Suyūṭī (Cairo 1357/1938, 50–51).

35 E.g. information on the walnut (*jawz*) is missing in al-Ṣanawbarī's text (OR 1250 f. 261<sup>a</sup>), but is included in al-Suyūṭī's version (Cairo 1357/1938, 9). Al-Azraqī has yet additional foods such as lemon (*utrujj*) which do not appear in al-Ṣanawbarī nor in al-Suyūṭī (*Tashīl*, Delhi, 20).

36 Pregnancy: Cairo 1357/1938, 193–202; relation husband and wife: Cairo 1357/1938, 216–217. Al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* does contain a section on weak sexual intercourse (OR 1250 f. 270<sup>a</sup>).

37 Cairo 1357/1938, 176; Paris BNF Arabe 7281, chapter 135, ff. 151<sup>a–b</sup>. 'She will be again like she was as a virgin' (*fa-innamā tarjī'u kamā kānat bikran*) it says in Paris BNF Arabe 7281 f. 151<sup>a</sup>. Cf. Sara Verskin, *Barren Women. Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 171, who quotes another printed edition of al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* which treats the topic in chapter 136 no. 484. (I would like to thank Shireen Hamza for pointing me to this reference). For the practice of tightening the vagina to ensure female orgasm and thereby fertilization, see Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* (London etc.: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 34–39, esp. 36 and 39; 50.

with lines), and Solomon's seals which show a direct connection to the magical corpus ascribed to al-Būnī.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, al-Suyūṭī often ascribes the cause of ailments and diseases to the negative influence of demons, black magic or the evil eye, whereas al-Ṣanawbarī's text limits such analysis to the occasional explanation that a specific affliction, such as excessive anger, is caused by Satan.<sup>39</sup> A section at the end of al-Suyūṭī's text contains instructions on what amulets and other magical methods can be applied to deal with problems that someone might face in daily life. There is, for example, a description of a method that can be used to prove a theft and to know who has done the stealing.<sup>40</sup> A way to find out whether someone has drunk alcohol is also available.<sup>41</sup> The book offers methods to deal with bad memory and a lack of understanding.<sup>42</sup> There are instructions on how to be successful during a hunt for birds and fish, and ways to avoid the bites of insects and snakes or to ward off wild boars and locusts.<sup>43</sup> This final section contains a description of 'an amazing amulet that protects against any jinn or demon' and ways to protect against *al-tābi'a*, the female demon who accompanies women.<sup>44</sup>

Another element that is added to the end of al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* are instructions on how to produce certain substances that are used in magical recipes, such as red and black ink, yellow and black kohl, verdigris, soap and ammonia, but also on how to extract gold and other minerals.<sup>45</sup>

Al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma*, on the other hand, ends with 'four basic qualities' (*hādhihi al-arba' al-ṣifāt al-uṣūliyya*), derived from this and other medical books, which are useful against diseases caused by the four humours.<sup>46</sup> This part is missing from al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma*. Another element that seems to have been lost in the transition to al-Suyūṭī's version are the details of internal references. Whereas al-Ṣanawbarī offers precise pointers to additional discussions ('which we will mention in the second chapter on medicaments'),<sup>47</sup> the references in al-Suyūṭī are more general ('which we will discuss').<sup>48</sup> Apart from these minor omissions, al-Ṣanawbarī's text is present in its entirety in

38 Sabine Dorpsmüller, *Religiöse Magie im „Buch der probaten Mittel“: Analyse, kritische Edition, und Übersetzung des Kitāb al-Muğarrabāt von Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf as-Sanūsī (gest. um 895/1490)* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2005), 37–38.

39 See below the discussion on the treatment of worry and anxiety.

40 Cairo 1357/1938, 220.

41 Cairo 1357/1938, 283.

42 Cairo 1357/1938, 271.

43 Cairo 1357/1938, 212–216; 254.

44 Cairo 1357/1938, 243–248; 233.

45 Cairo 1357/1938, 257–288.

46 OR 1250 f. 278<sup>a</sup>–278<sup>b</sup>; Vollers 758 f. 70<sup>a</sup>–72.

47 *Wa-nadhkuruhu fī al-bāb al-thānī fī al-adwīya in shā'a allāh* (OR 1250 f. 247<sup>a</sup>).

48 *Wa-sanadhkuruhu in shā'a allāh* (Cairo 1357/1938, 6).

al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma*. Certain sections are, however, moved to a different location in the text—for example, the discussion on cupping (*ḥijāma*), which occurs in al-Ṣanawbarī at the end of the section on laxatives, but appears much later in al-Suyūṭī, after the discussion of afflictions of coughing.<sup>49</sup> In al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* the discussion on the application of kohl is included in the section on eye diseases, while al-Ṣanawbarī lists it under the different foodstuffs.<sup>50</sup> The names of some substances systematically differ between the two texts. Where al-Ṣanawbarī mentions garden cress seeds as *ḥabb al-rashād* (Lt. *Lepidium sativum*) for example, al-Suyūṭī has Indian cress (Lt. *nasturtium indicum*) or *al-thuffā*.<sup>51</sup>

The *Raḥma* transmitted on the authority of al-Suyūṭī used al-Ṣanawbarī as a base text, adding supplementary pharmacological, medical and magical information. This was an active rewriting process whereby the sections of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* were ordered differently and the text's character turned from a basic medical text into one characterised by magical theories and magic in an Islamic context.<sup>52</sup> Whether the well-known scholar al-Suyūṭī should be credited with this re-orientation remains difficult to decide.<sup>53</sup> The famous and extremely prolific scholar al-Suyūṭī who produced plenty of works in the field of prophetic medicine and magic was in any case a likely candidate. The fact that the two authors' names are rather similar might have contributed to the confusion. Besides their nisbas, their first names—in some manuscripts al-Ṣanawbarī's is given as Jamāl al-Dīn which is very similar to al-Suyūṭī's first name, Jalāl al-Dīn—show close similarity. The addition of amulets and

49 OR 1250 f. 254<sup>b</sup>–255<sup>b</sup>; Cairo 1357/1938, 128–129.

50 OR 1250 f. 261<sup>a</sup>; Cairo 1357/1938, 50–51.

51 *ḥabb al-rashād*: OR 1250 f. 252<sup>b</sup>; Vollers 758 f. 20<sup>a</sup>; BNF 7027 f. 7<sup>a</sup>; Welcome MS Arabic 444 f. 3<sup>b</sup> (top); Bethesda, Maryland: National Library of Medicine MS A 29 f. 6<sup>b</sup>; *al-thuffā*: Cairo 1357/1938, 13; Cairo: Dār Iḥyā', 12; Cairo: Maktabat Jumhūriyyat Miṣr, 15; Cairo 1345/1927, 12; BNF 7281 f. 9<sup>b</sup> (but the word is written شَقَاء with one dot over the *qāf* as is common in Maghribī script) *ḥabb al-rashād* appears in the instructions, however, in BNF 7281 f. 10a. Similarly, black and yellow myrobalan are called *al-ihlilaj al-aswad* and *al-ihlilaj al-asfar* in al-Ṣanawbarī's text (OR 1250 f. 254<sup>a</sup> where the word is written الهليلج الأصفر and الهليلج الأسود), but *al-ihlilaj al-Kābulī* in al-Suyūṭī's version (Cairo 1357/1938, 15).

52 For this move from *ṭibb* (medicine) to *ḥikma* (occult sciences), see also Dorpsmüller, *Religiöse Magie*, 37–38. Matthew Melvin-Koushki described how occultism became an integral and highly valued element of scientific activity throughout the Islamic world flourishing especially from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards (see his articles: "In Defence of Geomancy: Šaraf al-Dīn Yazdī Rebutts Ibn Ḥaldūn's Critique of the Occult Sciences," *Arabica* 64 [2017]: 357; "Science," 311). Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition: Change and Identity* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) and Karmi, *Al-Tibb al-Nabawī* on the development of prophetic medicine texts.

53 It might be helpful to pursue whether some of the additions in al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* can be traced to other works by this author.



magical rituals to the *Raḥma*, fits the context of Mamluk Cairo which from the late eighth/fourteenth century witnessed a ‘renaissance of occultism.’<sup>54</sup> A textual connection might be pointed at as well. Al-Suyūṭī was clearly well aware of erotic and medical manuals that contain elaborate discussions on subjects related to sexuality, including vaginal tightening, which he made use of in some of his other works.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, other reworkings of the *Raḥma* are similarly characterised by the addition of topics related to sexuality, making it possible that such elaborations were added by some other author disguising as al-Suyūṭī.<sup>56</sup>

As stated above, the manuscripts containing al-Suyūṭī’s version of *Raḥma* give the author’s name in the introduction. There are at least as many versions of al-Ṣanawbarī’s as al-Suyūṭī’s *Raḥma* extant in manuscript collections around the world.<sup>57</sup> The magical version of the *Raḥma* with al-Suyūṭī’s authorship is definitely the more popular one in the Arabic-speaking world today considering the large number of cheap and simple versions of the text that circulate in printed form.<sup>58</sup> The process whereby texts are attributed to well-known authors is of course well-known and is discussed in this volume by Jean-Charles Coulon in the framework of his analysis of the corpus of texts ascribed to the thirteenth-century scholar al-Būnī.

### 3 An Expanding Repository of Knowledge

This first process of active alteration of the *Raḥma* was the rewriting undertaken by (Ps.) al-Suyūṭī as just discussed. The second process or reworking, however, comes from the users of each recension. Manuscripts of al-Ṣanawbarī’s and al-Suyūṭī’s *Raḥma* and the printed editions that are based on them show minor differences in the wording and composition, with additional ingre-

54 Melvin-Koushki, “Defence,” 357, 369; Melvin-Koushki, “Science,” 311–312. The flourishing of occultism in Mamluk Cairo lead to increased activity and valorisation of disciplines like alchemy and letterism which are both well represented in (ps) al-Suyūṭī’s *Raḥma* (Cf. Melvin-Koushki, “Science,” 313; 314).

55 Pernilla Myrme, ‘Women and Men in al-Suyūṭī’s Guides to Sex and Marriage,’ *Mamlūk Studies Review* 21 (2018): 47–67.

56 As discussed above, al-Azraqī’s reworking of the *Raḥma* is also characterised by the addition of the treatment of topics related to sexuality.

57 Hence perhaps Brockelmann’s insistence on giving preference to al-Ṣanawbarī as the author of this text.

58 The Leiden University Library has five printed editions of al-Suyūṭī’s *Raḥma* but none of al-Ṣanawbarī’s. In general less of the latter text in print are mentioned in library catalogues.

dients for recipes and medicines or alternative treatments left out. This lack of uniformity in the textual practice is a characteristic of what has been called the ‘fluid tradition’ of utilitarian texts.<sup>59</sup> The changes that resulted from this second process of transformation were never as invasive as those that resulted from a thorough-going recension by an author who had a specific goal in mind. Readers, copyists and users, however, constantly engaged in an active and interventionist way with these texts when they applied them to new practical uses. They added insights and comments on the effectiveness of certain products and recipes and included additional treatments and products in the margins of the text and to the beginning and end of the work. Some of these annotations might have been taken from works that bore the same title, but were in fact different textual recensions. That is to say, textual elements from al-Suyūṭī’s *Raḥma* seem to have infiltrated al-Ṣanawbarī’s on several occasions, showing textual exchanges across the *Raḥma* corpus. These comments could be incorporated into the body of the text by subsequent copyists and scribes, making for a multitude of textual variations in two nevertheless clearly distinguishable documented *Raḥma* traditions.<sup>60</sup> This process of adjusting a manuscript for or by the users that employ it can also be observed in the contributions to this volume by Yasmin al-Saleh and Gideon Bohak.<sup>61</sup> Al-Saleh shows how a magical scroll was decorated with military symbols for the Mamluk soldier who ordered its production. The magical texts preserved in the Geniza of the Cairene Ben Ezra synagogue show an interplay of Hebrew and Arabic scripts representing multiple magical traditions and examples in a composite protective text aiming to ‘cover all bases.’ Traditions and practices were easily borrowed across linguistic and cultural boundaries and simply added to existing texts to reinforce the protective power.

59 Paolo Trovato, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lachmann’s Method. A Non-Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text* (Padua: Libreriauniversitaria.it, 2014), 155–160, cited by Lucia Raggetti, *ʿIsā ibn ʿAlī’s Book on the Useful Properties of Animal Parts. Edition, Translation and Study of a Fluid Tradition* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), xxvi.

60 Due to collation processes, whereby different manuscripts of the same text were compared, when copying the text such additions could similarly be ignored—as they would occur in only one version of the manuscript. Depending on the purpose of the copy made and who did so, whether for practical use by a practitioner, doctor or a professional copyist, the decision would be made to include or ignore additions of this kind to the text.

61 Yasmine al-Saleh, “A Talismanic Scroll: Language, Illumination, and Diagrams,” in this volume.; Gideon Bohak, “Specimens of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic Magical Texts from the Cairo Genizah,” in this volume.

Leiden manuscript OR 1250 of the Leiden Oriental Manuscript Collection contains several works of (prophetic) medicine.<sup>62</sup> The last text included is the *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*, the title of which appears together with the name of the author al-Ṣanawbarī (al-Ṣuburī) written in red ink on folio 243<sup>a</sup> (fig. 3.1).<sup>63</sup> Below it an instruction for the production of an amulet to counter stress and anxiety is added in black ink. It says: ‘On the authority of the prophet, may God bless and grant him salvation. He said: whoever is afflicted by anxiety, grief, stress, misfortune or poverty, let him write on a piece of paper “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. From the humble slave to the sublime master, Lord, injury has befallen me and you are the most merciful, so take away from me my worry and remove from me my stress.” Then throw the paper in running water.’<sup>64</sup> These words giving instructions about the wording of the amulet and what to do with it have clearly been added by a later reader of the text. The hand of this note differs from that of the main text but shows similarities to some marginal notes that appear throughout the text, for example on folios 260<sup>b</sup>, 268<sup>a</sup> and b, 269 a and b, and 270<sup>a</sup>. All these additional writings might be written by the same person who also appended some further commentary at the end of the book (see below). The note on the title page offering instructions on how to make an amulet is a wonderful example of the dynamic aspect of a text like the *Raḥma*.<sup>65</sup>

As we have seen, al-Ṣanawbarī’s *Raḥma* does not contain instructions on amulets and talismans, but the reworked *Raḥma* by al-Suyūṭī does. In fact al-Ṣanawbarī’s text offers an alternative non-talismanic but obviously related treatment to deal with ‘excessive anger (*ghayṣ*) and fury (*ghaḍab*),’ closely connected to the worries and stress the amulet promises to ameliorate (fig. 3.2). Because, al-Ṣanawbarī writes, such great anger is caused by Satan who

62 Witkam, *Inventory*, 2, 92.

63 *Kitāb al-raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma ta’līf al-faqīr ilā allāh ta’ālā Muḥammad al-Mahdawī ibn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ṣuburī laṭṭafa allāh bihi āmin wa-jamī’ al-muslimīn āmin āmin āmin* (OR 1250 f. 243<sup>a</sup>). An *alif* is written erroneously between *allāh* and *bihi* (I should like to thank Geert Jan van Gelder for suggesting this reading).

64 عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال من أصابه هم أو شدة أو بلاء أو فقر فيكتب على قرطاس بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم من العبد الذليل الى المولى الجليل رب إني مسني الضر وأنت أرحم الراحمين واكشف عني همي وفرج عني غمي ثم تلقي القرطاس على الماء الجاري.

65 Deborah Schlein examined the function of paratextual notes in manuscripts of one particular medical text and its commentaries to examine its use and reception (*Medicine Without Borders: Ṭibb and the Asbāb Tradition in Mughal and Colonial India* [PhD diss., Princeton University, 2019]). I would like to thank Shireen Hamza for making me aware of this work. I was not able to access the unpublished dissertation for the purpose of this publication.).

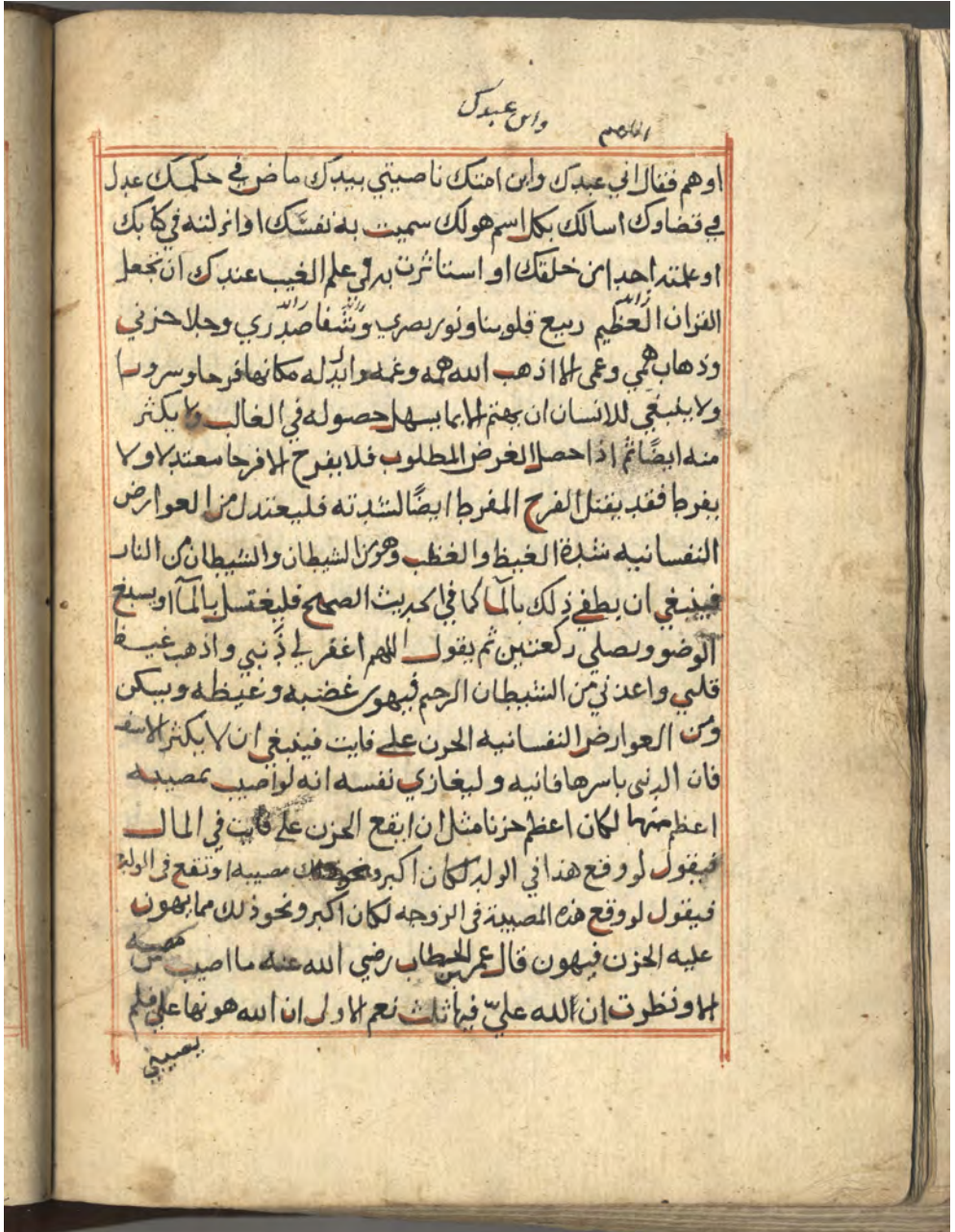


FIGURE 3.2 OR 1250 f. 260<sup>b</sup> Instruction from al-Šanawbarī's *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* on the prayer and washings to perform to handle excessive anger © Leiden University Library

originates in fire, the most appropriate substance with which to extinguish (*yafʿaʿu*) the power that causes this psychological disturbance is water. Al-Ṣanawbarī quotes a hadith that recommends the following actions in this situation: ‘Wash yourself in water, perform the ablution (*wuḍūʿ*) and pray two *rakʿas*. Then say: “God, forgive me my sins and remove the anger from my heart and protect me from Satan, o Merciful!” This will make the anger and fury disappear.’<sup>66</sup> This passage is maintained in al-Suyūṭī’s reworked *Raḥma*.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of the amulet described on the title page of the Leiden manuscript and the prayer and actions recommended in the main part of the text are the same: asking God to interfere and remove the power that afflicts the person issuing the prayer/amulet. The means by which it is done, an amulet and prayer respectively, is, however, crucially different and this difference is directly connected to the premise of the corresponding work.

Texts such as the *Raḥma* were used by practising healers or (prospective) patients. Manuscripts and printed versions of al-Ṣanawbarī’s and al-Suyūṭī’s text display visual markers that facilitate the text’s navigation for quick reference. Different sections are easily recognisable in the manuscripts and printed editions through the use of rubrics, supra-linear strokes, bold, elongated or large letter shapes, decorations, the repetition of the topic in the margin or punctuation marks, such as brackets.<sup>68</sup> The manuscripts of the *Raḥma* show the typical traces of collation with corrections and additions added in the margins based on comparisons with other versions of the same text and using the well-known system of signs to indicate this. These manuscripts, however, also display another kind of comment. While applying the treatments prescribed in *Raḥma*, readers and users of the work added their own observations, additional information or alternative methods, which could include magical recipes and talismanic devices such as the one added to the title page of al-Ṣanawbarī’s *Raḥma* manuscript preserved at Leiden. After all, these kind of simple medical texts aimed at practical applications were closely linked to magical practice. Other manuscripts of this text also show signs of such usage. Sometimes the addition is small and concerns simply an additional ingredient to be supplemented to a recipe or an explanation or alternative description

66 OR 1250 f. 260<sup>b</sup>. At the top of this page a more elaborate version of the prayer is quoted but without the reference to washing with water to extinguish the anger’s heat.

67 Cairo 1357/1938, 25.

68 In manuscripts rubrication (e.g. OR 1250; BNF 7027), supra-linear strokes (e.g. Vollers 758; BSB Cod. arab. 835), decorative chapter divisions (e.g. BNF 7281) or elongated letter shapes (e.g. BNF 7027) are used to find the title in the text or the title of a section is written in the margin (e.g. BNF 7027 f. 21<sup>b</sup>; Vollers 758 folios 64<sup>b</sup> and 68<sup>a</sup>). In printed versions use is made of chapter headings, bold and larger writing and brackets.



FIGURE 3.3 Bethesda, Maryland: National Library of Medicine MS A 29 f. 6<sup>a</sup>. Page from al-Šanawbarī's *Kitāb al-Rahma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* showing the many additions made by readers and users  
 COURTESY OF THE U.S. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE



of elements that are lacking from other manuscript versions once started off as marginal notes left by readers and users of the text.

Indeed, although two distinct textual recensions of the *Raḥma* exist, one following the text ascribed to al-Ṣanawbarī, the other to al-Suyūṭī, many variations occur within each recension. Nevertheless, some patterns are discernible that point to threads in the transmission history. A short display of this in relation to the section on legumes and grains illustrates this well. Both al-Ṣanawbarī and al-Suyūṭī's versions generally include a discussion of the characteristics and application of cotton seeds in the second chapter on the essence of substances. Some striking differences nevertheless occur. Al-Suyūṭī's version speaks of cotton seeds (*ḥabb al-quṭn*), while al-Ṣanawbarī's text has simply *quṭn*. One manuscript of al-Ṣanawbarī lacks the discussion entirely.<sup>76</sup> Several others have a presentation on 'sour cheese' (*aqiṭ*) instead.<sup>77</sup> As for the discussion on the working of cotton seeds, al-Suyūṭī's text as well as some of al-Ṣanawbarī's mentions that boiling the cotton seeds in 'milk and butter' gives them a 'moist hot' (*ḥārr raṭb*) character, which loosens up the chest, veins, limbs and joints.<sup>78</sup> The manuscript kept in Leiden of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* stipulates that the boiling should be done in 'milk and sugar' in order to have this effect.<sup>79</sup> Several other versions of the text assign the same characteristics of cotton seeds boiled in milk and butter/sugar to 'sour cheese' (*aqiṭ*).<sup>80</sup> Amongst the foodstuffs following the section on cotton, another striking difference occurs. In al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* a discussion on almonds is directly followed by the treatment of sesame seeds. Al-Suyūṭī's versions do not mention sesame seeds, but do list walnuts (although one of the versions I looked at did not have it), which are absent from al-Ṣanawbarī's text.<sup>81</sup> This chapter only made use of a handful of manuscripts to point out the dynamic aspect of utilitarian texts. Only a more systematic and extensive comparison of the different versions will

76 BNF 7027 f. 4<sup>a</sup>–4<sup>b</sup> moves from French beans (*al-lūbiyā'*) directly to broad beans (*al-bāqilā'*) while other versions of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* include a discussion on cotton or sour cheese in between these two legumes.

77 Vollers 758 f. 12<sup>a</sup>.

78 *Fa-idhā taṭbukhū bi-l-laban wa-l-samn šāra ḥārran raṭban yulayyinu al-ṣadr wa-l-ʿurūq wa-l-aʿdā' wa-l-mafāṣil* (al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma*: BSB Cod. arab. 835 f. 59<sup>a</sup>; Cairo 1357/1938, 9; Cairo 1345/1927, 8; Cairo: Dār Iḥyā', 8; Cairo: Maktabat Jumhūriyyat Miṣr, 10). BNF 7281 contains the *Raḥma* by al-Suyūṭī which discusses the working of cotton seeds boiled with milk and butter on f. 7<sup>a</sup>.

79 OR 1250 f. 249<sup>a</sup>.

80 'Sour cheese is moist and hot. It loosens the chest, veins, limbs and joints.' (*al-aqiṭ ḥārr raṭb yulayyinu al-ṣadr wa-l-ʿurūq wa-l-aʿdā' wa-l-mafāṣil*): Vollers 758 f. 12<sup>a</sup>; London Welcome MS Arabic 444 all three undated; Bethesda, Maryland MS A 29.

81 Cairo: Dār al-Jumhūriyya, 10 does not list walnuts (*al-jawz*).



allow us to trace the dynamics in the textual traditions more precisely. Suffice it to observe here the great diversity of texts in circulation, which was a direct result of their practical and applicable nature. This does not mean obviously that the texts were not also subject to the general effects of the copyist trade.

#### 4 Conclusion

*Kitāb al-rahma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* circulates in two distinct but closely related recensions. The manuscripts and printed editions that are based on the handwritten works also show minor variations within each recension. What do these textual versions tell about the social embeddedness of protective and healing practices?

In the early fifteenth century the Yemeni doctor and religious scholar al-Ṣanawbarī composed a concise, practical medical guide combining classical humorology, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, pharmacological and dietary analyses of food and other essences, and medical experience. Shortly after that the text was reworked, seemingly by the famous Egyptian polymath al-Suyūṭī to include more prophetic hadiths and magical treatments, using amulets for medical conditions but also covering socio-economic concerns. Information on the fabrication of certain substances, especially those needed in the production of talismans and other magical as well as alchemical rituals, was added.

The text of the *Rahma* shows the emphasis on its practical applications. Many of the recipes and other treatments are closed off by the remark that 'it was tried and found to be effective (*mujarrab*)'. This emphasis on the experimental context of the work connects to the manuscript tradition of the text. Many of the manuscripts of the *Rahma* show traces of users and readers adding their own observations to the information offered. In this sense the *Rahma* fits in with other kinds of utilitarian texts, especially those in the realm of legal, pharmacological, medical and magical handbooks. Subsequent copies of such texts could incorporate marginal notes, as well as remarks added to the end or beginning of the work, into the main text, producing a fluid textual tradition that nevertheless allows for an identification of different text recensions.

This chapter does not aim to present an exhaustive study of the text of the *Rahma*. Rather, its textual and manuscript tradition as presented in a handful of manuscripts was used to show that these kinds of utilitarian texts were never complete or 'closed'. Active reworkings, but especially the additions in the form of paratext in the margins, beginning and at the end of the texts, which sometimes made their way into the recensions in subsequent copies, show that they were socially embedded. It was the living and dynamic environment in which

these texts circulated that continuously shaped and reshaped them. This phenomenon has already been observed in Arabic pharmaceutical and medical treatises.<sup>82</sup> Three examples of interventions in the *Raḥma*'s text throughout its lifetime show that this did not happen only as a result of the addition of supplementary insights from *ṭibb* (medicine), but also in response to the demand for and interest in *ḥikma* (occult sciences) in combatting and dealing with concerns of health. (Ps.) al-Suyūṭī's reworking of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma*, the instruction of how to take away one's worries with a magical ritual that was added to the title page of al-Ṣanawbarī's *Raḥma* preserved at Leiden, and the popularity of al-Suyūṭī's *Raḥma* recension in the print age, all point to the influence that clients, patients, users and practitioners had on the text. Like the person expressing his concerns about his loss of voice in the eleventh-century letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter, people in need of medical help to heal and protection against physical ailments turned to multiple traditions and treatments. In his search for a solution to the problem with his voice, the letter-writer would be driven to demand comparable treatment involving *ṭibb* and *ḥikma*. It is very exciting to be able to trace the social operation of protective and healing practices in the past via the traces in manuscripts and other textual sources as examined in this chapter.

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82 See notably the work of Sabine Dorpsmüller, Lucia Raggetti and Deborah Schlein.

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**PART 2**

*Efficacy*





## Casting Discord: An Unpublished Spell from the Egyptian National Library

*Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali*

There are many amulets, talismans and spells preserved in papyrus and paper document collections.\* The permissibility of manipulation of events and conditions with the help of divine or other kind of supernatural powers is constantly debated in Muslim societies. Yet, the large amount of documents preserved as well as the instruction texts, handbooks and other background literature that was and is up to this day produced in Arabic, shows how prevalent the practice was and continues to be. In this paper I will edit a medieval paper spell which was meant to achieve discord amongst a group of people (five women and one man), a so-called and much feared *tafriq*. I will discuss the names and phrases that appear in the text comparing them with handbook texts and other published and unpublished sources. In addition, I will use observations of magical exorcist practices in contemporary Egypt to understand better how the spell obtained its efficacy through a combination of written and spoken or performed actions. Although the two instances of magical practice lie centuries apart, present different kinds of performances and each represents a unique, rather than a representative case, the document and exorcist rituals share scriptural elements and mechanisms of power such as a religious authority who is involved in the production and execution of the magical action, the presence of spirits or demons, and the use of Qur'anic verses that can be compared. Moreover, the exorcist practices provide an opportunity to reconstruct a dimension of human interaction and action in magical rituals that is lost for most of our written sources. The ultimate goal of the paper is to understand how the document edited at the end of the paper obtained its efficacy, what written and drawn features added to its power and what we might be able to suggest about the power added through human interaction as part of an activation ritual.

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\* I would like to thank Remke Kruk, Birte Kristiansen and Petra Sijpesteijn for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Asmahan Abu al-Asad provided useful information on the papyrus identification number in the Dār al-Kutub.



## 1 P.CAIR No. 408 Recto (Card Number 4287): Material Aspects

The paper document which contains the spell that forms the topic of this paper is currently housed in the Egyptian National Library collection. Its provenance is not known, but an origin in Egypt seems likely as by far the majority of documents in Egyptian collections have an Egyptian provenance. The exact date of the paper remains obscure. Paper appears as a writing support in Egypt from the ninth century C.E. onwards,<sup>1</sup> to become wide-spread by the tenth century. The writing used in the document, especially the shape of the medial *hā'* points to a date after the thirteenth century C.E.<sup>2</sup> Although the document contains the names and patronymics of the six individuals against whom the spell is cast, there is nothing in these names that enables us to identify them or locate the text further in time and place.

The physical features of the document and lay-out of the text point to its magic function. They also, interestingly, hint at the spoken and acted out rituals that effected its magical power. The document shows many horizontal folding lines and at least one vertical one, pointing to the fact that this text was rolled up and folded at least once probably because the spell was disposed of or deposited in a subsequent ritual manner to effectuate the magic effect sought.<sup>3</sup> The text further consists of three parts. In the left upper corner the names of the six individuals against whom the incantation is directed, are written in seven short lines. The names are written with all the necessary diacritical dots, presumably to prevent any misunderstanding or misreading of the individuals involved when the names would be read out loud. This contrasts starkly with the text of the spell itself, which has only very few diacritical marks. Next to the list of names a drawing of a human figure is added, presumably a depiction of a demon.<sup>4</sup> The rest of the paper is filled with the text of the spell. Part of

1 Clément Huart and Adolf Grohman, "Kāghad" in EI2; Eva Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus: Form and Function, Content and Context* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

2 Marijn van Putten helped me to identify the chronology of the handwriting of the document.

3 Rudolf Kriss and Hubert Kriss-Heinrichs, *Volks Glaube im Bereich des Islam 2: Amulette, Zauberformeln und Beschwörungen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962). For more information on how the material aspects of objects can betray talismanic use. Cf. Marcela A. Garcia Probert, "Twigs in the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets," in this volume. Also see the chapter 1 of her thesis: Marcela Garcia Probert, "Exploring the Life of Amulets in Palestine. From Healing and Protective Remedies to the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2021).

4 Drawings on Arabic amulets from Egypt are less common than on Greek and Coptic ones, but paper amulets contain more than papyrus ones (Johannes Thomann, "Arabische magische Dokumente: Typen, visuelle Gestaltung und Traditionslinien" in *Die Geheimnisse der oberen*

the text of the spell overlaps with the drawing, making it harder to read all the words. However, the list of names in the upper left corner remains clear. This lay-out of the page suggests that the list of names was written first, with the text of the spell then added around it, and that the drawing was completed later, while no space had been reserved for it. There is no *basmala* at the beginning, which is rather common in magical texts and the spell seems to be complete with the last line starting about one third into the page.

## 2 Spells and Incantations

Magical practices are widespread and varied in the Muslim world. The papers in this volume present the wide array of practices and applications. They cover a wide range of practices over a large time-span, and while they display great variety in practices and written expressions of those, there are also recurring patterns. The amount of material available on this topic in the form of amulets, documents, manuscripts, talismanic scrolls, printed books, and more, furthermore affirms that 'magic' in its wide range, is and has been from the beginning an integral part of Islamic societies, but so have the debates on the permissibility of magic. Scholars, practicing healers and users attempt to design unambivalent divisions between permissible and unlawful practices, but it is exactly the ambiguity and diversity of magical traditions that defy clear-cut categories. Their attempts have nonetheless left their traces in the study of Islamic magic and the kind of texts that have been studied and edited.<sup>5</sup> The following section does not aim to provide a full treatment of this on-going debate, but rather discusses some features that are relevant to our understanding of the status and functioning of the discord spell discussed here.

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*und der unteren Welt: Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, eds. Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 229; Ursula Bsees, "Qur'anic Quotations in Arabic Papyrus Amulets," in *Qur'an Quotations Preserved on Papyrus Documents, 7th–10th Centuries*, eds. Andreas Kaplony and Michael Merx (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 218).

- 5 Cf. Remke Kruk, "Harry Potter in the Gulf: Contemporary Islam and the Occult," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2005): 48; Charles Burnett, "The Three Divisions of Arabic Magic" in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* eds. Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya (Leiden: Brill, 2021) 43–46.; Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow, "Magie im Islam. Gegenstand, Geschichte und Diskurs" in *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt: Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft* eds. Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow (Leiden: Brill, 2019) 3–115.; Liana Saif and Francesca Leoni, "Introduction" in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* eds. Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Farouk Yahya (Leiden: Brill, 2021) 19.

One division, which has become especially prominent in the contemporary Muslim world, is that between magical rituals and objects that use Qur'anic citations and/or the names of God exclusively and those in which Qur'anic citations and God's names are combined with the names of demons, jinn or angels. The former is a widely accepted and applied procedure even in medical practices.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, I have witnessed this treatment in Egypt myself performed by Sheikh A. Yousef.<sup>7</sup> Sheikh Yousef is a teacher who has also memorized the Qur'an. He identifies enchantment in patients by reading Qur'anic verses to them while observing changes in their physical condition or awareness. Reciting the Qur'an functions not only to detect the presence of magical forces, but also functions in the 'curing' of the condition.

Spells that invoke spiritual beings other than God are widely condemned by the orthodox *fuqahā'* and have been so for centuries.<sup>8</sup> This practice is associated with *shirk*,<sup>9</sup> because powers other than God are called upon for help. Nevertheless this form of magic never ceased to exist. Indeed, between these clear-cut categories of, on the one hand, exclusive reference to God, His names and His word and, on the other, the invocation of other spiritual powers, we find a large scope of rituals that contain some elements of both in which other powers than God, like angels, demons or jinn<sup>10</sup> are addressed often in combination with Qur'anic verses and/or references to God's names. With its drawing of a jinni on the one hand, and Qur'anic quotations on the other, the discord spell falls somewhere in this scope. This kind of magic is, moreover, widely associated with the wish to make a change in a person's situation (other than curing from illness), for example finding a treasure, becoming rich, joining or separating lovers, etc. This fits the context of the discord spell as well.

A modern-day example of a practice in which other entities than God were addressed, I have witnessed in Egypt too.<sup>11</sup> Sheikh Refaey, a resident of Upper Egypt attracts clients from all over the country and even from beyond Egypt's borders thanks to his ability to communicate with jinn. I was present when he treated the student A. Ali who was 18 years old. A. Ali's family had noticed that

6 Cf. Kruk, "Harry Potter," 51.

7 I was present at two meetings when Sheikh Yousef treated patients in February 2002. This was in Upper Egypt.

8 Tawfiq Fahd, "Sihr" in *EI2*; Kruk, "Harry Potter," 48.

9 Daniel Gimaret, "Shirk" in *EI2*.

10 Jacqueline Chabbi, "Jinn," in *EQ*. See also the extensive description of the 'world of demons in Islam' by Pierre Lory (Pierre Lory, "Sexual Intercourse between Humans and Demons in the Islamic Tradition," in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, and Jeffrey Kripal [Leiden: Brill, 2008]), 50–53.

11 The sessions took place in 2011 at the house of the patient.

their son spoke in an abnormal way and had strange visions and they visited a medical doctor. The doctor did not find any physical irregularities. When the complaints continued, they prescribed antidepressants which only intensified A. Ali's problems without solving the former one. Finally, the family decided to approach Sheikh Refaey. During several sessions the sheikh recited parts of Qur'anic verses, names of jinn and some unintelligible words. Suddenly the student's voice changed, and it was as if he became another person speaking in a different voice. A female voice said: "I took the student's body." The sheikh began to negotiate asking her to leave the student's body. Finally the voice disappeared while a small wound had appeared on the student's finger.

There are many local varieties in the specifics of the rituals used to exorcize jinn. At the same time the concept of, or belief in, jinn possession and exorcism itself is wide-spread and shows some stability throughout time and place. Moreover orthodox Islam recognizes the existence of jinn as well. So it is not the concept that jinn interact with the human world that is under discussion, the debate evolves around the question to what extent and in which way humans can interact with the world of jinn. Recurring ingredients of the rituals are the recitation of Qur'anic verses and the addressing of the jinnī itself. In many cases the belief in the special *baraka* of the exorcist or the place where the ritual is performed also plays a part.<sup>12</sup>

The exorcism ritual is connected to the spell of discord discussed here, through the premise that jinn have a physical, bodily presence in daily life which underlies both. The jinni depicted on the document discussed here symbolises the spiritual power called upon for help and contains a reference to the ways in which demons can interfere with human relations on earth through their physical contact and presence. In the exorcism ritual the sheikh conversed with the jinni who had taken possession of the student, making it leave the body while leaving a physical trace in the form of the cut on the student's finger.

Another division *fuqahā'* sometimes make when trying to distinguish between permissible and prohibited magic, is that based on the ritual's intent. In other words, is the ritual meant to benefit or to harm someone?<sup>13</sup> Unlike common assumptions, magic that searches for the intercession of other spiritual creatures is not by definition intended to inflict harm on people, but

12 cf: Mohammed Maarouf, *Jinn Eviction as a Discourse of Power: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Moroccan Magical Beliefs and Practices* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 159–166.; Richard Tapper, *Afghan Village Voices: Stories from a Tribal Community* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 425–456.

13 Fahd, "Sihr."

sometimes it does aim to do so. When magic seeking to change one's situation and position—which often, as mentioned above, involves the call for intervention by demons—aims to harm others, the magic is labelled *'amal suflī* (pl. *a'māl suflīyya*), 'lower acts.' Many people in Egypt are afraid of *'amal suflī*, a form of magic that is considered to be born out of feelings of jealousy or the desire to take revenge. However, the division between magic seeking to harm someone else or to benefit the person involved, is problematic in many cases. In the case of *tafriq*, the topic of the document discussed here, for example, being in love with someone who is already in a relationship can be a reason to try and break up that relationship. The breaking up of the relationship thus benefits one person, the one who is in love, harms another, the person(s) in the relationship while the object of the person's love might or might not be harmed by the action depending on his/her own feelings. To what extent the performed magic is harmful or beneficial for the people involved, thus very much depends on the viewpoint.

Rituals, amulets and talismans that are imbued with *baraka*—mainly based on the presence of Qur'anic phrases and God's names, or through their association with a place, event or person with *baraka*—and that are used to ward off evil or gain good fortune,<sup>14</sup> can be encountered everywhere in the geographical area that forms the scope of this volume, as the contributions show. Most contributions discuss Muslim magical practices that benefit the patient undergoing a magical ritual, wearer of an amulet, visitor to a shrine or other building with *baraka* etc. Indeed, the practice of seeking God's protection against the evil eye and other evil powers or asking for His help in protecting against or curing illnesses and misfortune is in general more present in the scholarly literature especially in those articles based on written sources from the past. This is because these practices have, in general, left more lasting traces in the historical record.

Magic that has been forbidden by orthodoxy, has by its very nature been more hidden from view historically as it leaves less tactile and durable remains. However, based on how much has been written through the ages on how to protect oneself against all kind of evil spiritual influence, and the large amount of protective items against the evil eye, to ward off evil jinn and combat harming spells, it has to be concluded that it was in fact fairly common practice. The survival of actual documents that were used to cast such a spell, like the docu-

14 cf. A. Osman El-Tom, "Berti Qur'anic Amulets," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17, no. 3 (1987): 224–244; Christiane Gruber, "Bereket Bargains: Islamic Amulets in Today's "New Turkey"" in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* eds. Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 585–595.

ment under research here, are definitely not as common as protective charms. This might be because such spells were less often entrusted to writing which would provide physical evidence of the act. It is also the result, however, of active destruction. A document containing such harmful and condemned practice would likely be annihilated when encountered. As Remke Kruk describes, also in the 21st century a document that supposedly contains magic intended to inflict harm, still causes panic.<sup>15</sup> So while beneficial amulets could be passed on from generation to generation,<sup>16</sup> it is hard to imagine this would be the case for objects or documents containing evil spells.

Although basing our judgement solely on the material evidence in collections, would be short-sighted, some scholars have nevertheless maintained that, as an outcome of the *fuqahā*'s disapproval, certain kinds of magic might have become less popular in societies where such rituals were widely practiced before Islam. As Emilie Savage-Smith writes when referring to differences between (Late) Antique and early Islamic practices: "Binding spells continued to play a role, ..., but perhaps can be seen to be of somewhat less importance."<sup>17</sup>

How such spells might look, is known from documents containing such spells, like the document under discussion, but also from works that condemn the making of such spells; from descriptions that discuss what *not* to do, we gain information on what these spells might look like as well. According to these works, evil spells contain incomplete Qur'anic verses referring to the action that is sought. Jinn or angels are asked for help using the expression 'by the power off' (*bi-ḥaqq*) followed by names of demons or angels. The people that are the subject of the spell are identified by their first name and the name of their mother as instructions in books of amulets and documents show. Drawn shapes such as human figures occur on these kinds of spells occasionally as well.<sup>18</sup>

*Tafriq*, creating discord or separation, forms the topic of the document edited below. Indeed medieval and contemporary works offering magical recipes and formulae explain in depth how to achieve or break blockages in personal, love and sexual relations.<sup>19</sup> Amongst the topics treated in these works

15 Kruk "Harry Potter" 49.

16 Cf: Yasmine al-Saleh, "A Talismanic Scroll: Language, Illumination, and Diagrams," in this volume; Probert, "Twigs."

17 Emilie Savage-Smith, "Introduction," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, (Aldershot & Burlington VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), xxi.

18 See further, below notes 29 and 30.

19 Most attention is paid to male impotence and creating or stopping feelings of love. It occurs frequently in the works of the popular Egyptian writer of 'modern' magical treatises based on medieval texts 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Sayyid al-Ṭūkhī. See for example: Sayyid

it is clear that the practice of putting a spell on a couple or group of people so that they fall out or break their relationship was and is a common and much feared practice. Moreover, any physical or mental harm someone was experiencing could be readily explained by considering that someone was targeted by a spell or hit by the evil eye. A good example of how this was perceived in medieval times is illustrated by the letter discussed in Petra Sijpesteijn's contribution in this volume in which someone complains of having been given to drink a magic potion so that now his ability to speak is negatively affected. Modern-day examples of that same phenomenon are amply available as well.<sup>20</sup>

### 3 Creating Discord with God's Aid

The document edited below aims to injure the six individuals mentioned in the upper left corner through the act of *tafrīq*, creating friction and separation between them. It calls upon God to do so, but also invokes the power of the 'kings of the jinn'. Where is the practice of *tafrīq* as it is presented in this document located in the Muslim magical spectrum?

*Tafrīq*, the sowing of discord between people, especially husband and wife, is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Humans were introduced to it, the Qur'an states, by the two fallen angels Hārūt and Mārūt. Nevertheless, humans cannot hurt anyone with such magical ruse without God's approval.<sup>21</sup> That causing

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al-Tūkhī, *Tashkhīr al-shayātīn fī wiṣāl al-‘āshiqīn* (Cairo, s.d.). I would like to thank Remke Kruk for letting me search through her collection of books by this author. See also, Gerda Sengers, *Women and Demons: Cult Healing in Islamic Egypt*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 261–262; 264–266; 268. See also the short work offering newlyweds instructions on how to break bewitchings in their first night together: Jamāl b. Muḥammad al-Shāmī, *A'māl shay-tāniyya fī awwal layālī al-zawjiyya* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nūr al-Muḥammadi, 1998), 12–20. The Saudi scholar 'Abd al-Salām Wāḥid Balī wrote a work entitled *Al-Ṣarīm al-battār fī taṣaddī li-l-saḥara al-ashrār* which is popular across the Muslim world and which contains a chapter on how to break a *tafrīq* spell (Kruk, "Harry Potter," 66–73). For medieval examples, see: Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490), *Kitāb al-mujarrabāt*, chapters 34–36 (Sabine Dorpmüller, *Religiöse Magie im "Buch der probaten Mittel": Analyse, kritische Edition und Übersetzung des Kitāb al-Muḡarrabāt von Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf as-Sanūsī* [gest. um 895/1490] [Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2005], 183–184); Muḥammad b. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥajj (d. 737/1336), *Shumūs al-anwār wa-kunūz al-asrār al-kubrā* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sha'biyya, 1970), 149–151.

20 cf: Maarouf, "Jinn Eviction," chapter 3; Richard Tapper, "Afghan Village Voices," 430–445.

21 Q 11:102 *fa-yata'allamūna minhumā mā yufarrīqūna bihi bayna al-mar'ī wa-zawjihi wa-mā huma bidārrīna bihi min aḥadin illā bi-idhni allāhi*—And from these two (angels) they learned to sow discord between wife and husband, but they could not injure anyone without God's permission.

a rift between husband and wife was a prevalent and feared practice is clear from a second reference to it in the Qur'an. Sura 113:4 calls for God's protection against the magical practice of "blowing on knots," which is generally also considered to be aimed at creating disagreement between husband and wife. The practice of "blowing knots" refers to magical beliefs that were supposedly current in Arabia before Islam.<sup>22</sup> However, in other parts of what later became Muslim-ruled territory, including Egypt, spells for creating discord existed prior to Islam as well.<sup>23</sup> Sura 113:4 is considered a powerful antidote for all kinds of magic and its protective power is thus believed to extend beyond "blowing knots."<sup>24</sup>

While *tafrīq* is a feared practice against which protection is sought from God, God can also be called upon to achieve *tafrīq* in 'deserving cases,' it is then called *fāriq bi-llāh*. An example of when this kind of *tafrīq* could be applied is when one of the people involved in the relationship (mostly the husband) uses oppression (*zulm*) towards the other (the wife) and the latter is unable to stop the oppression.<sup>25</sup>

Works with instructions for magical practices contain information on how to go about achieving *tafrīq*. The emphasis lies—up to the present day—with dissention between husband and wife and the discussion of *tafrīq* is therefore often found in discussions on love and sexuality and problems therewith.<sup>26</sup>

There seems to be a difference, however, between medieval and contemporary ideas about what powers cause *tafrīq* and consequently what measures are to be undertaken to achieve or break it. *Tafrīq* is now often considered to be achieved by evil jinn and instructions on how to break *tafrīq* address these

22 Fahd, "Sihr."

23 In Coptic documents, both instructions on how to produce amulets and amulets proper, from contemporary and pre-Islamic Egypt the same practice is described. See the so-called London Hay "cookbook" (BM EA10391) dating to the 6th–7th c. C.E. In lines 82–85 we read: "Friends you wish to separate from each other: Write the 24 elders and their powers. Pronounce the prayer over wild mustard. Bury them at the place where they ordinarily come by." Translation by Marvin Meyer en David Frankfurter (Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* [San Francisco: Harper, 1994], no. 127, 263–269). I would like to thank Eline Scheerlinck for referring me to this reference.

24 Gabriel Mandel Khān, "Magic" in *EQ*.

25 Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Shumūs*, 149; Sa'dūn ibn al-Ḥājj al-Qaylūbi al-Mahgribī, *Khizānat al-ṭalāsīm al-Maghribiyya fi al-'ilājāt al-rūḥāniyya*, ed. Mas'ūd 'Abd al-Razzāq (Beirut: Dār al-Mizān, 2015), 136.

26 See also in the short work offering newlyweds instructions on how to break bewitchings in their first night together: al-Shāmī, *A'māl shayṭāniyya*. Al-Ṭūkhī, *Tashkhīr al-shayāṭīn*, 25–30; 34–35; al-Ṭūkhī, *Sihr al-kuhḥān fi ḥudūr al-jānn* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Ḥadītha s.d.) 92, 156–158, 179–182.



jinn.<sup>27</sup> In medieval examples of *tafrīq*, God is considered the (main) power to have caused the discord. Instructions on how to achieve *tafrīq* in medieval and contemporary works use Qur'anic verses that discuss separation or discord. Strikingly, the latter, unlike medieval examples, do not regularly involve God as a power to produce *tafrīq* as our document does.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4 The Magical Power of P.CAIR no. 408 Recto

As mentioned above the document edited below can be identified as an incantation through some external characteristics. These concern, the absence of the *basmala*, the lay-out of the text with a column listing the names of the individuals to whom the spell applies, the folding of the paper, the spell itself and the drawing of a demon most noticeably. The contents of the spell and the use of the language in it, further add to the magical nature of the text.

As is usual in amulets and spells, the document does not start with the *basmala*. The text ends with a repeated '*al-baghdā' al-baghdā'*, 'animosity, animosity'. Such repetition of single words mostly to enforce the urgency of the action called for, occur often at the end of spells. The request to the powers called upon in the document to 'hurry' at the end of the text fall into the same category and are also a staple feature of similar spells.

A characteristic of spells aiming to harm others is the partial use of Qur'anic verses. This does indeed occur in this document. Except for the citation of the full verse 31 of sura 26 in lines 13–14, all Qur'anic quotes in this text quote verses only partially. In line 6 of the text verse 38 of sura 43 has been adjusted to fit the specific circumstances of this spell. It is thanks to this adjustment that we can conclude that the person who desired the separation between the individuals mentioned in the document and who ordered it to be written was a woman. The verbal form has been changed from *qāla*, third person male singular that appears in the Qur'an to *qālat*, third person female singular. The mixed language in lines 4–6 which repeat parts of Qur'anic verses and names might fulfil a magical role as well.

The main power that is asked to establish *tafrīq* between the people mentioned is God. He is addressed as the 'Lord of heavens and earth' (l. 8). He is

27 Sengers, *Women and Demons*, 264–265.

28 An exception is the model amulet that al-Ṭūkhī gives to create animosity between people which ends with the call: *allāhumma bi-ḥaqq hādhihi al-ṭalāsīm wa-l-āyāt wa-l-aḥrāf an talqa al-'adāwa bayna kadhā wa-kadhā bi-ḥaqq šūsh ṭūsh marīsh al-waḥā \ al-'ajal \ al-sā'a \ wa-llāh al'am tamma* (Siḥr, 180).

also addressed as the One who caused the separation of opposites such as that of heaven and earth, sun and moon, cat and mouse etc. (ll. 8–11). He is also the One who caused a rift between Pharaoh and Moses and who separated the sea for Moses (ll. 11–12). While this places the spell in the category of *firāq bi-llāh*, rift achieved through God, the document also calls upon the ‘kings of the jinn’ two of whom are mentioned by name: Maymūn and al-Aḥmar (ll. 13 and 16). Finally, reference is made to a “Lord No” whose power (*bi-ḥaqq*) is called upon to effectuate the incantation (l. 7).

The persons to whom the spell should apply are identified by their name and their mother’s name as instructions for amulets prescribe. Their names appear twice, once in the upper left corner in seven lines set apart from the rest of the text by the drawing. Here their names are written using all diacritical marks to prevent any miss-readings. The names also appear in the main text where the names are not dotted.

Finally the drawing that appears at the top of the document can be either that of a demon or of one of the people at whom the spell is directed. In a 19th-century work on how to write amulets and spells including *tafrīq* charms, instructions are given to draw images of the jinni that causes the separation or of the individuals involved with their backs to each other.<sup>29</sup> See also the image of the desperate man pulling out his hair, presumably reflecting his condition after the spell has taken effect, which appears on the back of a Coptic 10th-century *tafrīq* spell from Edfu in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> Considering the fact that the figure on the spell discussed here is alone, facing the reader without any sign of being separated, an interpretation as demon might be more likely.

## 5 Conclusion

Within the corpus of medieval magical documents, that is to say written reflections of rituals calling on spiritual powers to influence humans’ conditions, spells aiming to harm others are less frequently found than those that offer protection. The unusual character of the document without many parallel examples to compare it with, means that the edition offered at the end of this article still contains many lacunae and question marks. The document, written on

29 Sa’dūn ibn al-Ḥājj al-Qaylūbī al-Maghribī, *Khizānat al-ṭalāsīm al-Maghribiyya fī al-‘ilājāt al-rūḥāniyya*, ed. Maṣ’ūd ‘Abd al-Razzāq (Beirut: Dār al-Mīzān, 2015), 401.

30 Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), no. 109. I would like to thank Eline Scheerlinck for pointing this example out to me.

paper dating to the thirteenth century CE and was most likely produced and used in Egypt where it was found and is currently kept in the Dār al-Kutub.

The document records a practice called *tafrīq*, the causing of discord or animosity between pairs or groups of individuals. In the case of this document a woman asks God as well as the 'kings of the jinn' to cast discord between six individuals whose names appear in the text. As is common in magical writings they are identified by their mothers' names. Besides naming and describing the might of the powers called upon for help, the text consists of (partial) Qur'anic quotations of verses related to fighting and disagreement. The document also contains a drawing of what is supposedly one of the demons asked upon for help.

To understand the function of this document better, we discussed it within the longstanding magical tradition in Egypt. Some of the pre-islamic papyri referred to in the footnotes, confirm that the practice of *tafrīq* in Egypt preceded Islam. Modern-day practices confirm that many centuries of disapproval by Islamic orthodoxy, especially of the kind of magical ritual or spell that this paper documents (combining Qur'anic verses and calling upon God besides other spiritual beings and aiming to altering someone's situation by harming others), have not led to the abandonment or oblivion of such practices. Considering jinn as physically present and acting creatures who walk the earth and interfere with human lives on a daily basis underlies both medieval and contemporary understandings of how the spiritual and physical world interact. Comparing the document to modern-day practices the striking aspect is that the medieval document seems to rely mostly on *fāriq bi-llāh*, whereas contemporary discord spells would prioritise other spirits rather than mention God.

By showing that *tafrīq* practices existed in different stages we tried to establish that being firmly rooted in Egyptian society and being heavily influenced by Islam do not contradict each other. To understand how the document under review functioned in society we need to place it in a long tradition of magical belief within Egyptian society. If we approach this document from either an exclusively religious angle or a solely sociological one, we will fail to understand its impact. Only by studying this document within the different historical traditions that shaped it, can we begin to understand how people tried to shape their world using magic spells.



## 6 Edition P.CAIR No. 408 (R)

Paper 17.5×13

The text is written on a clear, middle brown paper of good quality. The original cutting lines are preserved on all four sides. The text is written in black ink in a regular hand. There are few diacritical dots. There are fifteen horizontal folding lines and one vertical one. The verso of *P.CAIR No. 408* contains two columns; the right one contains eight lines the other contains five lines.

1. تحسبهم جميعا وقلوبهم شتا والقينا بينهم العداوة
2. والبغضا الى يوم القيامة ومزقناهم عوينة
3. بنت زينب وشريفة بنت حرامها ونهيلة بنت جويرية
4. ومسعودة بنت حرامها وسعيدة بنت عزيزة الى يوم
5. واحمد بن جوزية والقينا بينهم العداوة والبغضا عزيزة
6. القيامة وقالت ياليت بينهم بعد المشرقين فييس
7. .... العزيمة رب لا بحق لا لا يرون لا عليه مدا ولا عليه معيد الفتحات
8. حرکم علله رب السموات والارض اللهم كما افرت بين السموات والارض
9. ان تفرق بينهم وكما افرت بين القط والفار وكما افرت بين الحداة والسقر وكما افرت
10. بين الكلب والديب وكما افرت {بين} السبع والخروف وكما افرت بين الليل والنهار
11. وبين الشمس والقمر ان تفرق بينهم وكما افرت لموسى البحر وكما افرت بين موسى
12. وفرعون ان تفرق بينهم بحق بهلوك عما عمه من للبغضا فله .....
13. عبيدو ..... من ملوك الجن ولك الطير انه من سليمان وان لا تعلقوا
14. علي واتوني مسلمين بعلطوس بعلطوس بعلطوس بعلطوس بعلطوس .....
15. ختم حكيم بخدمته بسر ... فلا يستطيعون بحق ... والموت
16. والميمون والاحمر ورويع ودلهس فلجوايم الى موضعهم فانكم
17. تستطيع فانكم ضيق من انتم تعجلون و ... انتم تعجلون عجلا بها والبغضة يا ..
18. .... كم وعليهم. البغضة البغضة

## Upper left corner

- .1 عوينة بنت  
 .2 زينب  
 .3 احمد بن جوزية  
 .4 وشريفة بنت حرامها  
 .5 ونهيلة بنت جويرية  
 .6 ومسعودة بنت حرامها  
 .7 وسعيدة بنت عزيزة

## Translation:

1. You think they are united, but their hearts are divided. We have cast among them animosity
2. and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. We dispersed them. Uwayna
3. daughter of Zaynab and Sharīfa daughter of Harāmhā and Nuhayla daughter of Juwayriyya
4. and Mas‘ūda daughter of Harāmhā and Sa‘īda daughter of ‘Azīza until the Day of
5. and Aḥmad son of Jawziyya. We cast between them animosity and hatred ‘Azīza
6. Judgment. She says: “O, I wish there was between me and you the distance of the two Easts—how wretched” (there is no)
7. ...by the lord No, by the right of No who is not seen, who has no ... and no ...
8. ... Lord of the heavens and the earth. O God, as You separated heaven and earth,
9. separate them! As You separated the cat and the mouse and as You separated the kite and the falcon and as You separated
10. the dog and the wolf and as You separated the lion and the sheep and as You separated the day and the night
11. and the sun and the moon, separate them! As You split the sea for Moses and as You separated Moses
12. and Pharaoh, separate them by the power of *Bahlulak* (+ other names of demons?)
13. ‘Ubayd and ... From the kings of the jinn and for you are the birds. It is from Sulaymān do not be arrogant;
14. come to me as submitters. Ba‘alaṭūs ‘alaṭūs bahalmūs halmūs baṭalmus ...

15. a wise seal through his service ... and they are not able by the power of ... and
16. the auspicious one and the red one and ... and the ... and ... To their place for you
17. you are able ... you hurry ... and you hurry, hurry the rift and animosity
18. ... and there is for them animosity, animosity

#### Upper left corner

1. Uwayna daughter of
2. Zaynab
3. Aḥmad son of Jawziyya
4. and Sharīfa daughter of Harāmhā
5. Nuhayla daughter of Juwayriyya
6. and Mas'ūda daughter of Harāmhā
7. and Sa'īda daughter of 'Azīza

#### Commentary

1. *Taḥsabuhu jamī'an wa-qulūbuhum shattā* is a quote from Q 59:14. *Shattā* is written with an *alif* instead of a *yā*. *Alqaynā baynahum al-'adāwa wa-l-baghdā' ilā yawm al-qiyāma* is a quote from Q 5:64 and is also given in a model *tafriq* charm by al-Maghribī, in his *Khizānat*, 60, 545 and 662–663. *Al-'adāwa* is written with a very small *wāw*.

2. *Wa-mazzaqnāhum* can be found in Q 34:19. The complete quote is: *wa-mazzaqnāhum kulla mumazzaqin*; “and we dispersed them completely.”

3. It is not clear how the mother's name of Sharīfa and Mas'ūda (l. 4), written as حرامها, should be read. Ibn Ḥarām is used to refer to children from illicit relationships, but that does not seem to be the correct interpretation here. The name Nuhayla is not usual.

4–6. These lines mix part of a Qur'anic verse already written in lines 1–2 and names of the people to whom the spell is to be applied. This mixing might be another way to confirm the magical aspect of the text.

6. Q 43:38. The Qur'anic quote has been adjusted slightly. In the Qur'an it says: *qālā yālayta baynī wa-baynaka bu'da al-mashriqayni fa-bi'sa al-qarīnu*; he (i.e. the devil) says: “I wish that between you and me there were the distance of the two Easts, an evil comrade!” The final word on this line can also be read as *laysa*.

7. This line contains a series of negations perhaps referring to the irreversibility of the charm similar to the legal language that appears in Arabic contracts and that confirms the absoluteness of the transaction.

8. It is not clear what the reference to the Lord of the heavens and earth at the beginning of this line means. *Allāhumma kamā afraqta ...* God is asked to cause the *tafrīq* in other models of *tafrīq* charms. E.g. al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 60; 254; 428–429; 540; Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Shumūs*, 82. *Kamā afraqta bayna al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ ... an tufrīqa baynahum* is the model that is given for *tafrīq* charms in model books as well. The opposites given in our *tafrīq* charm are more elaborate than those I found in the model books and also use some alternative imagery. Cf. *kamā faraqta bayna al-samā' wa-l-arḍ* (Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Shumūs*, 82); *allāhumma ufruq bayna al-samā' wa-l-arḍ allāhumma ufruq bayna al-maghrib wa-l-mashriq allāhumma ufruq bayna al-junūb wa-l-shamāl allāhumma ufruq bayna al-zulmāt wa-l-nūr allāhumma ufruq bayna al-janna wa-l-nār kamā faraqta bayna Muḥammad wa Abī Jahl wa-kamā faraqta bayna Mūsā wa-Fara'un wa-kamā faraqta bayna 'Alī wa-mubghidihī ... ufruq bayna al-barr wa-l-baḥr ufruq bayna al-nār wa-l-ṭīn ufruq bayna fulān wa-fulān* (al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 429). Cf. al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 60, 540, 727

9. *Kamā afraqta bayna al-qatt wa-l-fār* is also used by al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 60 together with other pairs not mentioned here. *Ṣaqr* is written with *sīn* rather than *ṣād*.

11. *Bayna al-shams wa-l-qamar* is also used by al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 60 together with other pairs not mentioned here.

11/12. *Bayna Mūsā wa-Fara'un* is also used by al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 429 together with other pairs mentioned here.

12. Other *tafrīq* documents contain the words *bi-ḥaqq* which is then followed by the elements that enforce the spell, for example *bi-ḥaqq ḥādhihi asmā'*. Often a list of names of the powers invoked appears. Is it possible to read the word following this expression in this line as the name of a Demon?

13. *Min mulūk al-jinn* seems a reference to the powers that are invoked besides God in this *tafrīq* charm, but it is not possible to identify more than two or possibly three kings of the jinn below in line 16.

13/14. *Allā ta'lū 'alaya wa-tūnī muslimīn* (Q 26:31) is also used in a *tafrīq* charm in al-Maghribī, *Khizānat*, 721–722. It is a quote from a letter from King Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. It is preceded in the Qur'an in verse 30 of the same sura by: *innahu min Sulaymāna wa-innahu bi-smi allāhi al-rahmāni al-rahīmi*. Is it possible to read the word before Sulaymān in line 13 as *innahu*? The reference to the birds in line 13 is doubtlessly connected to Sulaymān whose special relation to the birds is well-known.

14/15. These lines seem to refer to the service that the powers that can achieve *tafrīq* should offer. Allusions to servitude and submission frequently appear in these amulets.

16. Maymūn and Aḥmar are among the seven kings of the jinn that are



generally listed. Madhab is a third one and it might be possible to read it here too. The other names cannot be reconstructed.

17/18. These lines continue to address the powers that can achieve the *tafrīq* and urge them to make activate the spell.

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## “This Blessed Place”: The Talismanic Significance of House Inscriptions in Ottoman Cairo

*Juan E. Campo*

Cairo has long been recognized as having the richest surviving urban architectural heritage in the eastern Mediterranean region. Its mosques, madrasas, palaces, fortresses and defensive walls, caravanserais, *sabīls*, Sufi hospices, funerary monuments, hospitals, churches, synagogues, and residential structures range in age from the time of the Islamic conquest and settlement in the seventh century CE to the end of the Ottoman era in the early twentieth century. Its built environment bears witness to some thirteen centuries of history and has been chronicled and described since the fifteenth century, including most notably in al-Maqrīzī's (d. 1442) medieval topographic history,<sup>1</sup> the encyclopaedic depiction provided by the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–1828) produced by Napoleon's savants,<sup>2</sup> 'Ali Mubārak's (d. 1893) *al-Khiṭaṭ al-tawfiqiyya*,<sup>3</sup> and more recently works by modern scholars like Gaston Wiet, Caroline Williams, Nelly Hanna, Irene Bierman, André Raymond, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, and Nezar al-Sayyad, among others.<sup>4</sup>

This study is concerned with two commonly neglected features of Cairo's architectural heritage: its houses and the surviving epigraphic repertoire

- 1 Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-al-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār*, vols. 5–7 (London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān li'l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2002–2004).
- 2 Commission des sciences et arts d'Égypte, *Description de l'Égypte; ou, Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, état moderne*, 2.2 (Paris: Imprimerie Imperial, 1822).
- 3 'Alī Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida li-Miṣr al-Qāhira wa-mudunihā wa-bilādihā al-qadīma wa'l-shahīra* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Amīriyya, 1886–1889).
- 4 Gaston Wiet, *Cairo: City of Art and Commerce* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); Caroline Williams, “The Cult of the 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo,” pt. 1, *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 37–52 and pt. 2, *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 39–60; Nelly Hanna, *Habiter au Caire: La maison moyenne et ses habitants aux xvii<sup>e</sup> xviii<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1991); Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); André Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. William Wood (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Nezar al-Sayyad, *Cairo: Histories of a City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

displayed in their interiors that, as will be argued here, helped render them into sacred places. These calligraphic epigraphs were first evidenced in European depictions of the domestic spaces of Cairo’s elites, starting in the early nineteenth century, most notably in the *Description de l’Égypte* and Pascal Coste’s *Architecture Arabe*.<sup>5</sup> In both cases the artists who produced the accompanying illustrations apparently did not know Arabic, so they only rendered the inscriptions in pseudo-Arabic script (Fig. 5.1).<sup>6</sup> Coste (d. 1879) and Edward Lane (d. 1876) noted Arabic inscriptions on house doors, and Lane even mentioned ornamental inscriptions written on paper and displayed in house interiors in his time.<sup>7</sup> In the twentieth century, historians of Islamic art and architecture typically overlooked domestic architecture, yet even when their attention did turn to it, they treated it in regard to design, material composition, functionality, and historical development, neglecting inscriptional evidence. Inscriptions are more commonly given attention when they occur on mosques, madrasas, mausoleums, and other monumental buildings associated with institutional Islam.<sup>8</sup> This blind spot for inscriptional evidence in habitations is evident

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- 5 An earlier depiction of an Aleppan sitting room with calligraphic epigraphy was published in: Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent* (London: 1756), pl. xv. Material evidence for the practice of displaying Arabic calligraphy in domestic interiors is evident for early Islamic Egypt as well, as mentioned by Ursula Hammed: Ursula Hammed, “Arabic Magical texts in Original Documents: A Papyrologist Answers Five Questions You Always Wanted to Ask,” in this volume.
- 6 See *Description de l’Égypte, Etat moderne 2*, plate B; Pascal Coste, *Architecture arabe; ou Monuments du Kaire: mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 à 1826* (Böblingen: Codex-Verlag, 1975 [1839]), plates XLV and XLVI.
- 7 Pascal Coste, *Architecture arabe*, 40; Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (New York: Dover, 1973 [1860]), 6–7, 18. For more on the representation of domestic space in Lane’s *Modern Egyptians*, see: Juan E. Campo, “Orientalist Representations of Muslim Domestic Space in Egypt,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 3 (1991): 29–42.
- 8 Sheila Blair provides a useful introduction to the subject in: Sheila Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), which includes inscriptions on movable objects in addition to architecture. Leading treatments of the use of inscriptions on Islamic monuments include Richard Ettinghausen, “Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation,” in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 297–318; Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1981); and Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001). Notable treatments of the inscriptional repertoire of individual monuments include E. Begley, “Amanat Khan and the Calligraphy on the Taj Mahal,” *Kunst des Orients* 12 (1978–1979): 5–39; Dodd and Khairallah, *ibid.*, vol. 1 (chapters on the Dome of the



FIGURE 5.1 A poet (left) and an astronomer (right) portrayed in 19th-century domestic reception areas, showing pseudo-Arabic script in upper cartouches. Description de l'Égypte, état moderne II, plates A and B

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in van Berchem's *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum* (1903), where domestic inscriptions do not function at all, and in an otherwise excellent series of publications concerning the palaces and mansions of Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo and the wider Mediterranean region issued by the Institut

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Rock, the Cairo Nilometer, Maristān Nūrī in Damascus, and Sultan Ḥassan Mosque in Cairo); Doris Behrens Abou-Seif, "The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque in the Context of Fatimid Ceremonial," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 29–38; Nuha N.N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80–98; Oleg Grabar, *Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006). For more recent scholarship, see Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick, eds., *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) starting in the 1930s and resuming in 1970s and 80s, where inscriptions are mentioned only in passing.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the inscriptions preserved in elite mansions of Ottoman Cairo reveal a lot about the world of their inhabitants and the integration of religion in their everyday lives. What role did the inscriptions play in this regard and what meanings did they hold for the household and their guests? In order to answer these questions, I have assembled an epigraphic inventory based on findings published in the IFAO volumes, the Islamic Art Network and Archnet,<sup>10</sup> and field research that I undertook in 1979–1980, 1985, 1990, and 2018. Additional material has also been obtained from Noha Abou-Khatwa's survey of Cairene Ottoman house inscriptions that were drawn from al-Būṣīrī's (d. 1294) famous devotional poem in honour of Muḥammad, *Qasīdat al-Burda*.<sup>11</sup>

IFAO surveyed more than fifty surviving palaces and mansions of Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo, built between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the earliest surviving domestic epigraphs *in situ* are in Mamluk palaces dating to the fifteenth century, the most complete examples are to be found in Ottoman-era mansions dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For purposes of this study, I have selected four with the best pre-

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- 9 Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1903); Edmond Pauty, *Les palais et les maisons de l'époque musulmane du Caire* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1932); Alexandre Lézine, *Trois palais d'époque ottomane au Caire* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1972); Jacques Revault and Bernard Maury, *Palais et maisons du Caire du XI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1975–1983); Jean-Claude Garcin, Bernard Maury, Jacques Revault, André Raymond, et al., *Palais et maisons du Caire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982–1983), hereafter cited as Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*. In addition to on-site research, these publications also relied heavily on the *Bulletins of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, which recorded the proceedings of the Comité between 1882 and 1961. These valuable records have been digitally archived by the Islamic Art Network in association with the Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the American University in Cairo. They are available at <http://www.islamic-art.org/Comitte/comite.asp>, accessed 22 August 2017. See also Laila 'Ali Ibrahim, "Residential Architecture in Mamluk Cairo," *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 47–59; and the analysis of the design and socio-spatial organization of Bayt al-Suḥaymī in: Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, *The Architecture of Home in Cairo: Socio-Spatial Practice of the Hawari's Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
- 10 The Islamic Art Network photographic archives are available at <http://www.islamic-art.org/PhotoArchive/PhotoArchive.asp>, accessed 22 August 2017; the Archnet archives are available at [www.archnet.org](http://www.archnet.org), accessed 22 August 2017.
- 11 Noha Abou-Khatwa, "An Ode to Remember: The *Burda* of al-Busiri in Cairene Ottoman Houses," in *Creswell Photographs Re-Examined: New Perspectives on Islamic Architecture*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 43–69.

served epigraphs, all located within a one-kilometre radius from each other to the east of Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh Street (the medieval *Qasaba*), the main north-south thoroughfare situated in the commercial heart of Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo. They were built in neighbourhoods of the wealthy bourgeoisie and emulated the features of the religious monuments and palaces of the ruling Mamluk and Ottoman elite, who had moved out of this area further to the south and west, where there was more open space upon which to build.<sup>12</sup> Based on information provided by their foundation inscriptions, the houses originally belonged to local merchants and religious scholars.

These houses are known today as Bayt (or *Manzil*) al-Suḥaymī (*Index* no. 339), named after Shaykh Muḥammad Amīr al-Suḥaymī of al-Azhar (d. 1778),<sup>13</sup> Bayt al-Harāwī (*Index* no. 446), named after Muḥammad al-Harāwī (fl. early nineteenth century), a physician at Qaṣr al-‘Aynī Hospital,<sup>14</sup> Bayt al-Sitt Wasīla (*Index* no. 445), named after an otherwise unknown manumitted slave, the last registered owner,<sup>15</sup> and Bayt Jamāl al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (*Index* no. 72), named after the seventeenth-century chief of Cairo’s merchants.<sup>16</sup> Based on informa-

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- 12 André Raymond, “Le Caire sous les Ottomans (1517–1798),” in Maury et al, *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 84–86; Hanna, *Habiter au Caire*, 208–210.
- 13 The *Index* number provided for this and other houses were assigned to Cairo’s Islamic monuments by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe and are still used by Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities. The Suḥaymī house was originally built in 1648 by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ṭablāwī of al-Azhar, and was expanded northward in 1699. A detailed discussion of its history and design is provided in Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, *The Architecture of Home in Cairo: Socio-Spatial Practice of the Hawari’s Everyday Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 145–154. This mansion has undergone significant restoration since 1997, making it a favourite for tourists. See Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and Majlis al-A‘lā li’l-Āthār (Egypt), *Mashrū‘ taṭwīq wa-tarmīm Bayt al-Suḥaymī = Bayt el Suḥaymī documentation, restoration and conservation project* (Cairo: al-sandūq al-‘arabī li’l-inmā’ al-iqtiṣādī wa- al-ijtimā’ī, 1997) and <http://www.arabfund.org/suhaymi/renovate.htm>, accessed 14 April 2021.
- 14 The house was originally built by Ḥājj Aḥmad, the son of Yūsuf ‘Allām, a shaykh, in 1731 (Abou-Khatwa, “Ode to Remember,” 53–54). A report by Anna Bardos on a joint Franco-Egyptian restoration project on this site in 1986–1993 is available at <http://web.mit.edu/akpia/www/AKPsite/4.239/harawi/harawi.html>, accessed 14 April 2021.
- 15 According to the foundation inscription this house was originally built in 1664 by two brothers, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and Lutfī, sons of Muḥammad al-Kanānī. See further Lézine, *Trois palais*, 35 and pl. XLVI A; and Osama Kamel, “A Talisman for Luck and Love,” <http://www.masress.com/en/ahramweekly/897>, accessed 14 April 2021 (originally published in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 8 May 2010). This house underwent restoration in 2002–2005, under the auspices of Egypt’s Historic Cairo Restoration Project, with support from the UNESCO World Heritage Committee; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1302>, accessed 14 April 2021. In 2019 it was rededicated as a cultural center, Bayt al-Sha‘r (House of Poetry).
- 16 The Center for Conservation and Preservation of Islamic Cultural Heritage conducted

tion provided by foundation inscriptions, we know that all were built between 1637 and 1731, though several were situated on the sites of older Fatimid and Mamluk-era structures, but were modified in the ensuing century. Bayt al-Suḥaymī is located at the northern end of the Fatimid city, near the mosques of al-Ḥākīm and al-ʿAqmar. Further south, in an alley near the southeast corner of al-ʿAzhar Mosque, stand the mansions of al-Harāwī and al-Sitt Wasīla, which share a wall. Bayt al-Dhahabī stands a short distance to the south in an alley that leads eastward from Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh Street, near the al-Fakahānī (‘the fruitseller’s’) Mosque.

The dwellings vary in size and layout, but all bear features indicating that they belonged to members of the local elite, particularly leading ‘ulamā’ and merchants. The largest is Bayt al-Suḥaymī, covering an area of 2500m<sup>2</sup>, followed by those of al-Harāwī (about 850m<sup>2</sup>), al-Dhahabī (718m<sup>2</sup>), and al-Sitt Wasīla (about 400m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>17</sup> The architectural features that they share include: two or more floors, enclosed courtyards, two or more reception halls (sing. *qāʿa*<sup>18</sup>), sitting rooms on the ground floor (*takhtabūsh*) or first floor (*maqʿad*) that are enclosed on three sides, but open to the courtyard,<sup>19</sup> opulent interior decoration in these reception areas, corridors and stairways leading to private rooms and apartments, delicately wrought wooden lattice windows (sing. *mashrabiyya*) on the upper floors, and various annexes and utility areas (store rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens). All domiciles had bent-access doorways connecting the street with the courtyard, although that of Bayt al-Harāwī has not survived.<sup>20</sup> Scholars conventionally regard the reception halls on the ground floor, together with the *takhtabūsh* and the *maqʿad*, the more public areas of the house where men gather. A *qāʿa* used for this purpose was called a *manẓara* (Egyptian colloquial *mandara*), but this term only came into use in the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> It was the place of honour where guests and dignitaries

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restorations at this site in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Details are provided in their 1991 report; <https://www.ciah.biz/ar/node>, accessed 5 December 2016.

17 These figures are based on Hanna, *Habiter au Caire*, 129, and the author’s own estimates based on site plans provided in Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 182, plate XLII.

18 The *qāʿa* typically consists of a floor-level entry area with a high-ceiling (*durqāʿa*) and two elevated wings (sing. *īwān*), where people were seated. IFAO publications favour the word *mandara* for the main reception hall, but this term only became current in the 18th century. Alternately, in Damascus mansions of this time, the *durqāʿa* was known as an *ataba*, while the *īwān* was called a *ṭazar*.

19 Following European designations for building floors used in IFAO publications, “ground floor” is the *rez-de-chaussé* (first floor in U.S. English) and “first floor” is used for *premier étage* (second floor in U.S. English).

20 Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, 2: 189.

21 Hanna, *Habiter au Caire*, 43.



would be able to “view” (*naẓara*) the ranking member of the household. Within the *qā’a* the most important place is believed to have been in the larger *īwān* where the host and high-ranking visitors would be seated, especially in winter months. Reception areas and apartments on the upper floors are believed to have been set aside for the women of the household. After the eighteenth century the male area came to be known by the Turkish term *salamlık* and the female area the *haremlık*.<sup>22</sup> However, caution should be exercised so as not to impose an absolute gender-based dichotomy on these domestic spaces, as will be discussed further below.

## 1 Inscription Placement and Appearance

In all four houses the extant inscriptions were written calligraphically and displayed inside the more public spaces: reception halls and rooms where social gatherings, celebrations, and feasts were customarily held. These were 1) the large *qā’āt* on the ground floors of the al-Suḥaymī and al-Harāwī mansions and the first floors of the al-Harāwī, al-Sitt Wasīla and al-Dhahabī mansions; 2) the small *qā’āt* located on the ground floor and first floor of the al-Suḥaymī mansion; 3) the *maqā’id* (sing. *maq’ad*) on the first floors of the al-Suḥaymī, al-Sitt Wasīla, and al-Dhahabī mansions; and 4) the *takhtabūsh* next to the ground-floor *qā’a* of the al-Harāwī mansion. All of these areas were accessible via a central courtyard; those on the upper floors could be reached via stairways leading up from the courtyard.

The epigraphs were executed in Arabic script large enough to insure their visibility to someone standing on the floor. All, except the few displayed in the wooden lattices of *mashrabīyya* windows,<sup>23</sup> or rendered in carved marble or plaster, were written with light-coloured or golden paint within cartouches displayed on dark wooden bands on the cornices or affixed to walls just above adult eye level, following the contours of each room’s floorplan. Qur’anic verses were usually rendered in monumental *thuluth* (*jalī thuluth*) script (Fig. 5.2), as were several of the foundation inscriptions (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4). Non-Qur’anic

22 Ibid., 42–43. However, IFAO publications about Cairene dwellings of this period make use of the *salamlık* and *haremlık* classifications consistently.

23 These are projecting windows featuring manually turned wooden latticework. The lattice work usually follows a geometric pattern, but it can also be designed to form patterns of Arabic script or material objects. In the houses under study, only Bayt al-Suḥaymī and Bayt al-Harāwī display an Arabic inscription in their *mashrabīyya*; see Maury et al., *Palais et maisons du Caire*, vol. 2, figs. 58 and 64.



FIGURE 5.2 The Throne Verse (top) and Q 67:1 (bottom) in the south *iwān* of Bayt al-Dhahabī in *thuluth* script

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN E. CAMPO



FIGURE 5.3 First part of the foundation inscription in lintel of north *iwān* of the Bayt al-Dhahabī first-floor *qā'a* in *thuluth* script

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN E. CAMPO



FIGURE 5.4 Second part of foundation inscription in lintel of south *iwān* of the Bayt al-Dhahabī first-floor *qā'a* in *thuluth* script

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN E. CAMPO



FIGURE 5.5 Verses of al-Būsīrī's *Burda* (vv. 4–6) as displayed in the *maq'ad* of Bayt al-Suḥaymī in *nasta'liq* script

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUAN E. CAMPO

inscriptions, particularly those of the *Burda* poem, as well as several Qur'anic verses, were rendered in delicate *muḥaqqaq* and *nasta'liq* (Ottoman *jālī ta'liq*) scripts (Fig. 5.5). Diacritical marks were minimal, with the exception of verses of poetry in the *muḥaqqaq* script. Several houses had poetic epigraphs praising the home and its owner that were carved in marble and mounted in the lintels of the doorways leading to their large ground floor *qā'a*. These were in *thuluth* script with ornate diacritical markings. All inscriptions would have been visible to any person standing nearby, though the complex interweaving of letters and use of two or three baselines of script in a single cartouche may have rendered them difficult to decipher even for a literate viewer. However, the Muslim reader would likely have been able to recall from memory an entire passage of scripture or verses from the *Burda* after identifying a key word or phrase.

## 2 The Inscriptional Repertoire

Table 5.1 shows that the most frequently occurring epigraphs, aside from the *basmala*,<sup>24</sup> and invocations to God and Muhammad,<sup>25</sup> were verses from the Qur’an.<sup>26</sup> All houses featured the opening lines of *sūrat al-Faṭḥ* (Q 48:1–5), which proclaims God’s power to grant victory, rewards awaiting the faithful in paradise, and punishments facing the damned in hellfire. In two houses, another verse concerned with the theme of victory (61:13) occurred five times. Three featured the Throne Verse from *sūrat al-Baqara* (Q 2: 255, Fig. 5.2), which affirms God’s oneness, eternal vigilance, and omniscience. It occurred twice in Bayt al-Suḥaymī: in the large *qā’a* on the ground floor and the *maq’ad*. Verses from *Āl Imrān* (Q 3: 190–191, or 190–193), which praise God as the creator of the universe who forgives the faithful and punishes wrongdoers, occurred in two houses. They were inscribed on the skylight (sing. *manwar*) cornices in the reception halls of Bayt al-Harāwī and Bayt al-Dhahabī. Other verses used in the epigraphs were concerned with extolling God’s bounty (*faḍl*) (Q 57: 21), his universal dominion and power over life and death (Q 67:1–2), and blessings awaiting the righteous in paradise, with its lush gardens and rivers (Q 54: 54–55).<sup>27</sup> The *shahāda*, which also occurs on amulets and amulet containers, was displayed in the *mashrabīyya* lattice windows of the large ground-floor *qā’a* of Bayt al-Suḥaymī and first-floor *qā’a* of Bayt al-Harāwī.

Select verses from Al-Būṣīrī’s *Burda* (Appendix 2) can be found in three locations in Bayt al-Suḥaymī: on the walls of the small ground-floor southeast *qā’a* located just inside to the right of the main entrance (vv. 1–33); inside the first-floor *qā’a* in the southwest corner of the residential complex (vv. 1–17), and inside the *maq’ad* (vv. 1–9, Fig. 5.5). It was displayed in Bayt al-Harāwī in

24 The phrase is used to introduce all Qur’anic *sūras* but one (Q 9): *bi-ism Allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* (“In the name of God, the most compassionate merciful one”). In the house inscriptions, the *basmala* was written at the beginning of each inscription, except some of the foundation inscriptions and carved marble overdoor inscriptions. It is only noted in Table 5.1 where it occurred in the *mashrabīyya* of Bayt al-Harāwī. The *Burda* epigraphs in Bayt al-Suḥaymī also feature use of the *basmala* accompanied by the name of Sulayman (Solomon) as found in Q 27:30 (Abou-Khatwa, “Ode to Remember,” 49). It also was used to introduce Q 67:1–2 in the first-floor *qā’a* of Bayt al-Dhahabī.

25 These are primarily the invocatory exclamations, “*Yā Allāh, Yā Muḥammad.*” Several of them were written on wooden bands adjacent to other inscriptions. Some occur in *mashrabīyyāt* and on restored wall surfaces, making it difficult to judge their authenticity with regard to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century structures.

26 A list of Qur’anic inscriptions that occur in the epigraphs is provided in Appendix I.

27 For translations, see Appendix I.

TABLE 5.1 Cairene Ottoman house inscriptions and their locations

House	Q 2:255	Q 48:1–5	Other Q	al-Burda	Foundation inscription	Other
Al-Suḥaymī	large ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> ceiling; <i>maq'ad</i> ceiling cornice; 1st-floor southwest <i>qā'a</i>	small ground-floor south-east <i>qā'a</i> ceiling cornice; large ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> ceiling cornice	door to small ground-floor south <i>qā'a</i> : Q 61:13, Q 15:46; 1st-floor south-west <i>qā'a</i> window: Q 61:13 <sup>a</sup>	small ground-floor southeast <i>qā'a</i> : vv. 1–33; 1st-floor south-west <i>qā'a</i> : vv. 1–17; <i>maq'ad</i> : vv. 1–9,	large ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> ceiling; <i>maq'ad</i>	large ground-floor <i>qā'a mashrabiyya</i> , door to small ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> , 1st-floor southwest <i>qā'a</i> , and 3d-floor <i>qā'a mashrabiyya</i> windows: invocations of God and Muhammad, <sup>b</sup> large ground-floor <i>qā'a mashrabiyya</i> : <i>shahāda</i>
Al-Harāwī		ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> ceiling	ground-floor <i>qā'a manwar</i> ceiling: Q 3:190–193; 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> : Q 15:46; Q 61:13; 1st-floor <i>qā'a mashrabiyya</i> : <i>basmala</i> and Q 61:13	ground-floor <i>qā'a</i> : vv. 1–26; 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> : vv. 1–15, 17–58	<i>takhtabūsh</i> ; 1st floor <i>qā'a</i>	<i>takhtabūsh</i> : al-Būṣīrī's <i>Hamziyya</i> vv. 1–15; <i>maq'ad mashrabiyya</i> and 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> : invocations of God and Muhammad; <sup>c</sup> 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> : <i>mashrabiyya</i> : <i>shahāda</i>
Al-Sitt Wasīla	<i>maq'ad</i>	ground-floor <i>qā'a</i>			<i>maq'ad</i>	
Al-Dhahabī	south <i>iwān</i> of 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i>	<i>maq'ad</i> ceiling	north <i>iwān</i> of 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> : Q 57:21, Q 25:10; <i>manwar</i> ceiling: 3:190–191; north <i>iwān</i> : Q 54:54–55; south <i>iwān</i> : Q 67:1–2		1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> ; <i>maq'ad</i>	<i>maq'ad mashrabiyya</i> and 1st-floor <i>qā'a</i> upper west wall and upper east wall: invocations of God and Muhammad

a A variation of Q 61:13 was inscribed in a *mashrabiyya* in the large ground-floor *qā'a*: *nūr Allāh wa-faṭḥ qarīb* (God's light and an immanent victory).

b Most of these invocations consist of the expression *Yā Allāh! Yā Muḥammad!* or variations thereof. The exemplar in the third-floor *qā'a*'s *mashrabiyya* includes the name of the artisan and the restoration date (Muhammad Amīn, 1331 [1912]). In one instance *Yā Muḥammad!* was inscribed in plaster *relief* on the east wall of the first-floor southwest *qā'a*. A similar inscription also occurs in Bayt al-Dhahabī. The cluster of inscriptions inlaid in the door of the ground-floor *qā'a* includes the Qur'anic invocation: *Bashshir li'l-mu'minīn, yā Muḥammad!* (Preach to the believers, O Muhammad!), together with the artisan's name and date (Sa'd, [AH] 1143/[1730–1731]).

c The invocations here resemble those found in the other houses. One in the 1st-floor *qā'a* proclaims *Allāh ḥayy* (God lives!). Another combines Q 61:13 with the exhortation for Muhammad to preach to the believers, like the inscription inlaid in the courtyard door of Bayt al-Suḥaymī. The same artisan created both: Sa'd.

two places: on the walls of the ground-floor *qā'a* (vv. 1–26, with some verses effaced) and inside the first-floor *qā'a* (vv. 1–15 and 17–58).<sup>28</sup> Customarily these inscriptions were written on wooden bands that stretched across walls and over recesses and apertures in each room. The number of verses displayed, from the *Burda*'s total of 160, therefore depended largely on the circumference of the room, intervening structural features (e.g., doors, windows, and columns), as well as the size of the script. In the case of the first-floor *qā'a* of Bayt al-Harāwī nearly the entire poem was accommodated by writing in two bands, one above the other, rather than in a single band around the room's circumference. Additionally, in the case of Bayt al-Suḥaymī, a short passage of the *Burda* (vv. 1–9) in the *maq'ad* was accompanied by a foundation inscription. Al-Būṣīrī's *Hamziyya* (vv. 1–15), another popular pangyric for Muhammad, was inscribed on the walls of the *taktabūsh* in Bayt al-Harāwī.<sup>29</sup>

All the houses contained foundation inscriptions commemorating their owners and giving the foundation or renovation dates. These were typically displayed in the *maq'ad*, *taktabūsh*, or *qā'a* and referred to the residence as a sacred place (*hādhā 'l-makān al-mubārak*). For example, the inscription in Bayt al-Dhahabī (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4), declares,

انشأ هذا المكان المبارك العبد الفقير الى الله الخواجا جمال الدين الذهبي شاه بندر التجار ابن  
المرحوم الخواجا ناصر الدين غفر الله لهما أجمعين بتاريخ سنة اربعة وأربعين بعد ألف

“This blessed place was founded by God's poor servant Khawājā Jamāl al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *shāh bandar* of the merchants, son of the late Khawājā Nāṣir al-Dīn, may God forgive them both, in the year [A.H.] 1044” [A.D. 1634–1635]. (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4).<sup>30</sup>

Similar phrases referring to the house as a “blessed place” (*al-makān al-mubārak*) were included in the foundation inscriptions of al-Suḥaymī and al-Harāwī

28 See Table 5.1 and Abou-Khatwa, “Ode to Remember,” 49–50. Abou-Khatwa identified four other Cairene mansions of the same period that also had verses of the *Burda* inscribed on the walls of their reception halls and *maqā'id*.

29 The formal title for this poem is *Umm al-qūrā fi madh khayr al-warā*; the conventional one is based in its rhyming pattern of words ending in *hamza*. For text and translation, see Linda Komaroff and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (Los Angeles: The Museum, 1998), 24–25, 291–293.

30 This inscription was written in the *durqā'a* of the large first floor *qā'a*, above the entrances into the north and south *dwāns*; a similar foundation inscription was placed on a cornice of the *maq'ad*, accompanied by Q 48.1. See Lézine, *Trois palais*, 3 and pl. 11.

mansions.<sup>31</sup> A second foundation inscription in the first floor *qā'a* of Bayt al-Harāwī, declares that the house (*manzil*) is a place of happiness (*sa'd*) and a palace (*ṣarḥ*) for its inhabitants. This epigraph was placed at the end of the *Burda* verses and also included praise for Muhammad.<sup>32</sup>

### 3 The Sacralising and Talismanic Functions of the Inscriptions

Arabic calligraphy was used in Islamic material culture for different purposes. When it involved quotations from the Qur'an and other kinds of religious language, the most common one was to invoke blessings and celebrate or engender good fortune.<sup>33</sup> It can therefore be both visually remarkable and performative. In the grand houses of Cairo's elite Arabic calligraphy sacralised the social gathering areas where it was displayed and the adjacent private quarters. The inscriptions most frequently used—the *basmala*, the Throne Verse, and the first verses from *sūrat al-Faḥ* (Q 48:1–5)—were also widely used in the sacred architecture of the Mamluks and Ottomans in Cairo and beyond.<sup>34</sup> Muslim's recite these verses commonly in everyday speech. As inscriptions, according to Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah's index of Qur'anic inscriptions occurring on pre-modern Islamic monuments, the Throne Verse is attested nearly forty times on Cairene architecture, more than half of which were situated in Mamluk mosques, madrasas, mausoleums, tombs, and Sufi hospices.<sup>35</sup> Of the twenty-one occurrences of the first verses of Q 48, nineteen were on Mamluk and Ottoman mosques, madrasas, and mausoleums.<sup>36</sup> The verses from

31 For the Bayt al-Suḥaymī inscriptions, see Revault et al., *Palais et maisons* 3:103, 105 n. 9; Maury et al., *Palais et maisons* 2: 215 n. 8 and fig. 80. For Bayt al-Harāwī, see Maury et al., *ibid.*, 2: 193 and fig. 59; Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: A Practical Guide* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 174. Similar inscriptions are attested in the houses surveyed by Abou-Khatwa in her study of the *Burda*, particularly in Bayt al-Razzāz; see "Ode to Remember," 56. The foundation inscription for Bayt al-Sitt Wasila is partially effaced; Lézine, *Trois palais*, pl. XLV; and Maury et al., *ibid.*, vol. 2, 181.

32 Abou-Khatwa, "Ode to Remember," 53.

33 In addition to its occurrence on monumental architecture, this was also a reason for the use of religious inscriptions on metalwork, woodwork, ceramics, and glassware. See further Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions, passim*.

34 On the use of these three inscriptions in Cairene religious monuments, see Dina Montasser, "Modes of Utilizing Qur'anic Inscriptions on Cairene Mamluk Religious Monuments," in *Creswell Photographs Re-Examined*, ed. Bernard O'Kane, 187–218.

35 Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, vol. 2, 10–16.

36 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 118–120.

*Āl Imrān* (Q 3:190–193) occurred only five times on Cairene monumental structures, but all were Mamluk madrasas, mosques, or tombs.<sup>37</sup>

Other Qur’anic passages inscribed on the walls of the houses under study (Q 25:10; 54:54–55; and 61:13), which spoke of paradise and obtaining God’s help and victory, were used less commonly on Cairene monuments, but in all cases, they occurred on religious buildings. The Qur’anic citation: “Enter it securely, in peace!” (Q 15:46), which refers to entering paradise, was widely used on Mamluk religious buildings, but occurred only twice among the four Ottoman houses.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Q 57:21, which is concerned with receiving God’s bounty (*faḍl*), is attested only once among these houses and only once on a Mamluk religious building.<sup>39</sup> Instances of the occurrence of these Qur’anic verses on Cairene palaces before the seventeenth century are also rare. The only extant ones are Q 54:54–55 on the façade of Qaytbay’s palace (1474) and the Throne Verse and Q 48:1ff. on the loggia walls and doorway of the Amīr Mamā’ī palace (Bayt al-Qāḍī, 1496).<sup>40</sup> Both structures are situated less than two kilometres from the four mansions under study here.

Although the evidence is fragmentary due to demolition of older housing stock, reconstruction, and the deteriorating condition of surviving dwellings, it appears that the use of Qur’anic inscriptions in elite dwellings during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was inspired by that of the monumental palaces and religious buildings of earlier and contemporary Mamluk rulers, indicating a shared symbolism of religion, power, prestige, and wealth. As Bernard O’Kane has pointed out, a convergence of other signature architectural features found in domestic and religious architecture—the *iwān*, *qa’ā*, *maq’ad*,

37 Ibid, vol. 2, 35–36.

38 It was inscribed as an ivory inlay in the door leading into the small *qa’ā* on the southern side of Bayt al-Suḥaymī, accompanied by Q 61:13 and a foundation date (1143AH [= 1730–1731AD]). It was also placed on a panel in the first-floor *qa’ā* in Bayt al-Harawī, together with the name of the artisan. For its use on religious monuments, see Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, vol. 2, 66–67. It is possible that other examples have been effaced by time. On the other hand, Q 15:46 is used widely in Egyptian vernacular architecture, including Hajj murals. See Juan E. Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise: Explorations into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam* (Columbia, s.c.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 153, 172, 177.

39 Al-Ashraf Qaytbay’s *madrasa* (1472–1473); Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, 2: 129.

40 Ibid, 2:14, 118, 123. For more details on the architecture of the earlier Mamluk palaces, see Revault et al., *Palais et maisons*, 1:11–33; Garcin et al., *Palais et maisons*, 1:207–216; and Nairy Hampikian and May al-Ibrashy, “Archival Photography and the Formulation of Conservation Policy: The Case of Manzil Qaytbay,” in *Creswell Photographs Re-Examined*, ed. Bernard O’Kane (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009): 121–143.



and elegant interior decoration—had already begun to occur during the reign of the Burjī Mamluks in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>41</sup>

Another feature occurring in several of Cairo's residential mansions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may also have been intended to invoke a divine presence. These were landscape murals of the holy cities Mecca and Medina. Like the inscriptions, they were painted on the walls of rooms dedicated to receiving guests and conducting ceremonies and ritual performances. Among the houses included in this study, they were located in a room adjoining the *maq'ad* of Bayt al-Sitt Wasīla.<sup>42</sup>

If the Cairene house inscriptions could invoke divine presence, blessing, and worldly accomplishment, they could also perform apotropaic functions. This is evident in the efficacy attributed to select Qur'anic verses by religious authorities, their use in talismans and amulets, and the fact that they were accompanied by verses from al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, which were widely held to possess the protective and healing powers.<sup>43</sup> Both the *basmala* and the Throne Verse were considered to be efficacious in shielding the home from evil and misfortune. According to hadith found in authoritative collections, in addition to bringing blessing (*baraka*), mentioning (or remembering) God's name when entering the home or before a meal would keep Satan's companions away; failing to do

41 Bernard O'Kane, "Domestic and Religious Architecture in Cairo: Mutual Influences," in *The Cairo Heritage: Essays in Honor of Laila Ali Ibrahim*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 149–182.

42 Lézine, *Trois palais*, 41–42, pls. XLIX A and XL A; and Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, 2: 186–187. Another dwelling featuring such images is that of Ali Katkhuda (*Index* no. 540, built in 1716), where they are located in the second-floor *qā'ū* accompanied by verses 1–34 of the *Burda*. In both houses there are murals showing other landscapes such as that of Jerusalem and, possibly, the Bosphorus. See Lézine, *op cit.*, pl. xxiv B; Maury et al., *op cit.*, 258 and figs. 121 and 122; Abou-Khatwa, "Ode to Remember," 51. Murals of Mecca and Medina were also noted by Lane in the houses of the wealthy in the early nineteenth century (Edward W. Lane, *Manners and Customs*, 18). Generally, murals composed of Islamic and European styles featuring landscapes and cities became a popular feature in Ottoman houses and public buildings during the nineteenth century; Stefan Weber, "Images of Imagined Worlds: Self-image and Worldview in Late Ottoman Wall Paintings," in *The Empire and the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, eds. J. Hanssen, T. Philipp, and S. Weber (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 154–169.

43 Suzanne Pinkney Stetkevych, "From Text to Talisman: Al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-burdah* (*Mantle Ode*) and the supplicatory ode," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 (2006): 145–189. One of the earliest complete manuscripts of the poem is a late thirteenth-century Ilkhanid talismanic scroll. It continued to be used in later Mamluk talismanic scrolls, as described by Yasmine F. Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic: The Touch and Sight of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014), 148, n. 578, 160.

so, on the other hand, invited their presence.<sup>44</sup> It was also supposed to have the capacity to rescue believers from the fires of hell.<sup>45</sup> According to another set of hadith and manuals of prophetic medicine (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī*), the *bas-mala* was included in pronouncements to protect a person from illness, evil people, and the evil eye.<sup>46</sup> Its benefits were also detailed in Arabic talismanic texts and it was widely used in amulets.<sup>47</sup>

The Throne Verse (Q 2:255) has long been recognized in Islamic tradition for its apotropaic powers. According to one *ḥadīth*, if recited at home or before sleep, it will protect one from Satan (or a thief) until dawn.<sup>48</sup> In a discussion of the most outstanding parts of the Qurʾan and their virtues, the Egyptian scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) cited traditions that identified Q 2:255 as the foremost Qurʾanic verse and noted, based on a *ḥadīth*, that reciting it brings protection to the householder, his family, dwelling, and up to seven neighbouring houses.<sup>49</sup> In talismanic texts it was considered to be efficacious against the evil eye (*al-ʿayn*) and it was used frequently in amulets.<sup>50</sup> In addition, reciting the chapter that contains the Throne Verse (Q 2 *al-Baqara*) at home was said to cause Satan to flee.<sup>51</sup>

The apotropaic efficacy of another common house inscription, Q 48:1–5 (*al-Fath*), was not established in the authoritative *ḥadīth*. Rather, it was occasionally attributed this quality in Arabic talismanic manuals, along with the

44 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Adab al-ṭaʿām*, 3:730 and *Ashriba* 36.136; Abū Daʿūd, *Sunan, Aḥīma*, 27:3766. hadith citations are obtained from the online hadith database at Sunnah.com.

45 ʿAbd al-Majīd ʿAlī ʿAdawī, *Al-Tuḥfa al-marḍīyya fī l-akhbār al-qudsīya wa l-aḥādīth al-nabawīyya* (Cairo: n.d.), 3–4. See also Arthur Jeffrey, *Reader on Islam: Passages from Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims* (ʿs-Gravenhage: Mouton and Company, 1962), 558–559.

46 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, ʿAyādat al-marīḍ*, 7:908; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 31:3652; see also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet*, trans. Jalal Abual Rub (Riyadh: Maktabat Dar-us-Salam, 2003), 154.

47 The medieval Egyptian occultist Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yusuf al-Bunī (d. 1225) devoted an entire section to the *bas-mala* in his book on talismanic magic, *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā*, where he recognized its ability to obtain the assistance of angels in protecting a person from the fires of hell and achieving success in everyday affairs. See further Yasmine F. Al-Saleh, “Licit Magic,” 72–76.

48 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Wakāla*, 40:11; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ, Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, 45:3121.

49 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), vol. 2, 209.

50 On its occurrence in talismanic texts and amulets, see Al-Saleh, “Licit Magic,” 59, 73, 137, 150, 201 n. 820, 218, 220, 237, 241, 249, 259, 266, 280, and 289; the amulets depicted in Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum, 2011), 131–174 and Rudolf Kriss and Hubert Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam: Band 11: Amulette, Zauberformeln und Beschwörungen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962), 61, 65, 66 and accompanying plates.

51 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Ṣalāt*, 6:252.

*basmala*, the Throne Verse, and other Qur'anic passages. In addition, the promise and threat that it expresses of victory bestowed by God on His believers and punishment that will befall his enemies might have been understood to have possessed protective associations, as other verses concerned with the theme of victory (*futūḥ al-Qur'ān*) did.<sup>52</sup> The use of Q 61:13 “Help from God and a speedy victory” on *qā'a* doors, *mashrabiyya* windows, and epigraphic panels in Bayt al-Suḥaymī and Bayt al-Ḥarāwī may also have been meant to have a protective purpose. This verse was widely employed in amulets and talismanic scrolls.<sup>53</sup> Q 67:1–2, which proclaims God's power over life and death, as well as his capacity for forgiveness, seldom occurred on talismanic scrolls, but it was used occasionally on Cairene religious buildings.<sup>54</sup>

The use of al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (The Mantle Ode) confirms the talismanic functions of the Cairene house inscriptions (Fig. 5.5). Unlike the verses from the Qur'an, the *Burda* was rarely used in earlier Mamluk religious monuments or palaces, but it was used in Mamluk talismanic scrolls and subsequently on Ottoman-era talismanic shirts. The earliest exemplars for its use on buildings in Cairo are a mosque, a shrine, and a mausoleum dating to 1505–1507.<sup>55</sup> Composed in thirteenth-century Egypt by al-Būṣīrī (d. c. 1294), an Egyptian poet who is said to have been miraculously healed when the Prophet Muhammad wrapped him in his mantle, the *Burda* is one of the most beloved and popular devotional poems in Arabic literature—one that is still revered in many Muslim cultures. As an ode, it expands upon the classic form of the Arabic *qaṣīda* panegyric (*madḥ*). It consists of ten sections of a total of 160 verses: a prelude (vv. 1–11, Appendix 2), a warning against the desires of the self (vv. 11–28, Appendix 2), praise of the Prophet Muhammad (vv. 29–58), accounts of his birth (vv. 59–71) and miracles (vv. 72–87), the miraculous nature of the Qur'an

52 Al-Saleh, “‘Licit Magic,’” 237; Kathleen Malone O'Connor “Popular and Talismanic Uses of the Qur'ān,” in *EQ*, 176.

53 The inscription on the Bayt al-Suḥaymī door was rendered as an ivory inlay. Perhaps underscoring its apotropaic function, the sculpted stone lintel above the door that is composed of geometric elements, depicts three cypress trees and two flower vases; Revault et al., *Palais et maisons* 3: 96, n. 5. Concerning its use in amulets and talismanic scrolls, see Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, 132 and A 33, A 110 and Al-Saleh, “‘Licit Magic,’” 158, 229, 235, 260, 289.

54 Al-Saleh, “‘Licit Magic,’” 156, 262, 384; Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, 2:136.

55 Al-Saleh, “‘Licit Magic,’” 160–167; Rose Evelyn Muravchick, “God is the Best Guardian: Islamic Talismanic Shirts from the Gunpowder Empires,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 106–113; and Bernard O’Kane, “Medium and Message in the Monumental Epigraphy of Medieval Cairo,” in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, eds. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin C. Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 429, n. 49.

(88–104), narratives about the Prophet’s Night Journey, Ascension (vv. 105–117) and military campaigns (vv. 118–139), a final confession of past sins accompanied by a plea for protection (vv. 140–151), and a petition for assistance from the Prophet and God (vv. 152–160).<sup>56</sup>

As shown in Table 5.1, the surviving evidence indicates that both Bayt al-Suḥaymī and Bayt al-Ḥarāwī featured verses from the first two sections of the poem multiple times in their ceremonial rooms,<sup>57</sup> a nearly complete rendering was inscribed only once, in the first-floor *qā’a* of Bayt al-Ḥarāwī. While the limitations of available wall space and aesthetic balance were likely considerations, the fact that calligraphers/householders decided to render only the beginning of the poem in each room begs explanation. One possibility is that people would have been most familiar with the first verses, which would enhance their participation in recitations of the poem on ceremonial occasions conducted in each room. However, the content of the two opening sections is also relevant. The elegiac prelude (*nasīb*) about the profound despair sparked by remembrance of the lost beloved, followed by a confession of sins and warning against following the worldly desires of the self (*nafs*) address the experience of existential suffering that the poem seeks to redress. The absent beloved here is the Prophet, whereas the human subject confesses his/her own faults and cravings, thereby establishing the basis for obtaining the Prophet’s intercession and the gift of his presence. Although the *Burda* has manifest devotional importance, Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych has shown that reciting it was also a ritual performance believed to possess talismanic efficacy that could bring about healing and salvation on Judgement Day.<sup>58</sup> Written on the walls of a dwelling, the *Burda* sacralised it with the Prophet’s presence, complementing the Qur’anic verses, which invoke God’s blessing. The desire for sacred presence is also conveyed by the invocatory exclamations, *Yā Allāh, yā Muḥammad* (O God! O Muḥammad!) found on epigraphic panels, *mashrabiyya* windows, and plaster reliefs on interior walls of three of the houses.<sup>59</sup> Together they recognize the closeness or

56 The division of the poem into thematic sections is based on the commentary of Muḥammad al-Ghazzī (d. 1577) as presented in Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 90–91. For the Arabic text with translation, see Stetkevych, *ibid*, 70–150 (translation), 245–252 (Arabic). The Arabic is also provided in Abou-Khatwa, “Ode to Remember,” 58–66. See also the translation in Arthur Jeffrey, *A Reader on Islam: Passages from Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962), 605–620.

57 See Appendix II.

58 Stetkevych, *Mantle Ode*, 148–149.

59 These are in areas that have been restored, so they may not be original to the dwellings.

presence of both sacred beings. Such invocations were commonly inscribed on amulets and house doors.<sup>60</sup>

Commentators on the poem, such as Egyptian scholar Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Bajūrī (d. 1860), detailed the talismanic efficacy of reciting it or writing individual verses. A given verse, usually accompanied by specific ritual actions, could help detect marital infidelity, obtain a thief's confession, win a nocturnal vision of the Prophet, cure all sorts of bodily ailments, protect children from Satan, and of course, safeguard the home.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, written copies of its verses were widely used as amulets and a small manuscript version of the entire poem could be enclosed in a metal case and worn on the body. The poem was also included in Mamluk talismanic scrolls.<sup>62</sup>

The dual capacity of the epigraphs to invoke blessing and repel evil is also evident in the poetic inscriptions carved into the marble lintels of doorways leading into the large ground-floor reception halls. These were present in Bayt al-Suḥaymī and the nearby Musāfirkhāna Palace, birthplace of Khedive Ismail (r. 1863–1879), grandson of Muḥammad Ali Pasha (r. 1805–1848).<sup>63</sup> The Suḥaymī lintel inscription praises the *qā'a* as a paradisaical garden (*rawḍa*) and place of carefree happiness protected by God (*al-muḥaymin*) from the envious (*ḥāsīd*) and ungrateful (*kafūr*).<sup>64</sup> Invoking both paradise and defence against the evil eye, the poem carved over the south entrance to the Musāfirkhāna reception hall declares,

O 'Azīz, you have a beautiful *qā'a*,  
 In Egypt it is the paradise of all *qā'as*.  
 May God protect it from the envious (*al-ḥasūd*) and may it always  
 Be a refuge of magnificence and pleasure for you.  
 May anyone who sees its brilliance say, "Date it thusly:  
 It is a *qā'a* from paradise." A.H. 1203 [A.D. 1788–1789]<sup>65</sup>

60 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, nos. A4, A5, A18, A28; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, 253.

61 Stetkevych, *Mantle Ode*, 86–87.

62 Ibid, 71, 86–87; Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic," 160–161.

63 The Musāfirkhāna was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1998, but not before it was photographed and researched for the IFAO volumes. See Revault et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 3, 139, n. 3; and Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 223–235 and corresponding figures.

64 A photograph of this inscription is available at the Islamic Art Network photo archive: [www.islamic-art.org/PhotoArchive/MonumentInfo.asp](http://www.islamic-art.org/PhotoArchive/MonumentInfo.asp), no. M339P0141.

65 Revault et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 3, 139, n. 3 and pl. LXXXIX. The sum of the numerical values of the Arabic letters in the last phrase equals 1203. Similar themes are evident in a band of eulogistic poetry inside the *qā'a*; Campo, *Other Sides of Paradise*, 85.

#### 4 Inscribing Gender in the Home

The selection and display of religious inscriptions was but one in an assemblage of corporeal practices that contributed to the sacralisation of Cairene Muslim dwellings. Their creation would have been initially embedded in the construction and decoration of the house, inauguration rites, subsequently playing a role in the temporal flows of daily life, religious holidays, and the observance of rites of passage connected with birth, marriage, and death.<sup>66</sup> Male and female members of the household would have participated in these activities, but what role did gender play with regard to the inscriptions?

Although Mamluk and Ottoman *waqf* documents indicate that women in elite classes owned houses,<sup>67</sup> all four homes under consideration were built by men, as attested in the foundation inscriptions. One of them, however, came to be known by the name of a woman, al-Sitt Wasīla (d. 1835), its last owner. A former slave, she had reportedly purchased it some two centuries after it was built from her owner 'Ādila, the daughter of Ibrāhīm Bey (d. 1816/1817), one of Egypt's most powerful Mamluk emirs.<sup>68</sup> Based on information provided by the foundation inscriptions, the epigraphs in the home probably cannot be attributed either to her or her owner, but instead to its seventeenth-century male owners, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq and Luṭfi, the sons of Muḥammad al-Kanānī.<sup>69</sup>

In the absence of textual evidence for women's engagement in the production of the inscriptions, an alternative line of inquiry would be to examine the inscriptions' location within the home and their thematic content. The houses were designed to ensure the cultural norms of gender segregation and privacy for female members of the household. Gender segregation, however, did not mean gender exclusion. House design allowed for flows of men, women and children through the domestic complex in accordance with the demands of daily life and social interaction between members of the extended family, concubines, household slaves, guests, and others from outside the household. As Mary Ann Fay has noted in her study of Cairene Mamluk households at this time, the home, and particularly its harem areas (Turkish *haremlik*), was the locus of a "family's emotional and affective life."

66 A reconstruction of ritual in the daily lives of Cairene Muslims with particularly reference to their homes during the nineteenth century is provided in Abdelmonem, *Architecture of Home*, 104–109. For the contemporary period, see Campo, *Other Sides of Paradise*, 85.

67 Mary Ann Fay, *Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 123–154.

68 See Osama Kamel, "A Talisman for Luck and Love," <http://www.masress.com/en/ahramweekly/897>, accessed 28 August 2017, originally published in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 8 May 2010.

69 Lézine, *Trois palais*, pl. XLV; Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 181.

Rather than a bounded space that enclosed, sequestered, and imprisoned elite women within it, the harem was instead flexible, mobile, and porous, constructed not by walls or other barriers but by the movement of a woman's body as she moved through space.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, common areas such as the courtyard, hallways, terraces, and some rooms, communicated with public reception and ceremonial areas where males could gather as well as females. When the occasion required it, household privacy and the segregation of females was architecturally accomplished with devices such as bent-access entries from streets into the interior courtyard, separate entrances and stairways to private quarters, and placement of *mashrabiyya* window screens that would allow better circulation of air and afford women an opportunity to observe the street, the courtyard, or interior reception areas without themselves being seen. Whereas the *maq'ad*, *takhtabūsh*, and large ground-floor *qā'a* were pre-eminently sites for male gatherings, men and women both could make use of the other *qā'āt* depending on their location, time of day, the season, and the occasion. Women would be able to view the inscriptions in all the public areas of one of these houses, but how common were inscriptions to be found in areas where women would be most likely to gather?

The gendered allocation of inscriptions in domestic space is evident in the layout of Bayt al-Suḥaymī. In addition to a *maq'ad* and a *takhtabūsh*, Bayt al-Suḥaymī had a remarkable thirteen *qā'āt* distributed on three different levels of the house: three small *qā'āt* and one large one on the ground floor that opened to a courtyard, five on the first floor, one on the second, and three more on the third. Of these, three of the ground floor *qā'āt*, two *qā'āt* on the first and third floors, and the *maq'ad* had inscriptions. Most of these were spaces where a male presence would have been most prevalent as they were located near the entryway and directly accessible via the courtyard. The large first-floor reception hall on the northern side of the courtyard, usually identified as part of the harem, was beautifully decorated, but lacked inscriptions. However, the interior of the small *qā'a* on the southwest corner of the first floor in the harem quarters was inscribed with the *Burda* (vv. 1–17) in *nasta'liq* script, like the *maq'ad* in the adjacent men's area (Fig. 5.5). Only one other *qā'a* on the upper floors of Bayt al-Suḥaymī had an inscription. It was a third-floor reception hall near the harem that had an inscription in its *mashrabiyya* window, but this may have been added during renovations in the early twentieth century. Regardless,

<sup>70</sup> Fay, *Unveiling the Harem*, 184.

based on the surviving evidence, preference was given to displaying epigraphs in the more public, male spaces, but not exclusively. At least one reception hall where women were most likely to gather also had them.

In the surviving portions of Bayt al-Harāwī, epigraphs were placed in the *takhtabūsh* and both surviving *qā'āt*. The upstairs reception hall, where most of the *Burda* was inscribed, is thought to have been part of the harem.<sup>71</sup> However, it can be accessed both from the private quarters to the east and by a stairway from the conventionally male reception areas to the west, indicating that its gender-specificity could vary according to the occasion. It should be noted that the upstairs *qā'a* also featured two foundation inscriptions that provided the name of the mansion's male founder, Ḥājj Ahmad ibn Yūsuf 'Allām al-Ṣayrafi.<sup>72</sup> This would tend to underscore the association of the space with patrilineal male authority and prestige even if it may have been dedicated primarily for female gatherings.

Only limited sections of Bayt al-Sitt Wasīla have been preserved, making it difficult to arrive at any certainty concerning the allocation of epigraphs among its gendered spaces. The ground-floor *qā'a* and the *maq'ad* each have inscriptions, which is consistent with how they were allocated in the first two houses. Murals of Mecca and Medina were painted on the walls of a chamber next to the *maq'ad*, which may also have been an assertion of male status. There is a small second-floor *qā'a*, which may have served for gatherings of women, but very little of it remains.

Bayt al-Dhahabī confirms the preference for assigning inscriptions to ceremonial areas and reception halls where men usually congregated, but also where males and females might be present. The epigraphs in the *maq'ad* and the adjacent first-floor *qā'a*,<sup>73</sup> both of which are exquisitely decorated, include foundation inscriptions that prominently display the name of the founder and his title, Jamal al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *shah bandar* of the merchants, as quoted above. IFAO researchers identify this *qā'a* as being in the harem of the house because of its proximity to the private apartments and a stairway connecting them to the kitchen.<sup>74</sup> However, it is equally accessible from the *maq'ad*. Moreover, two upper galleries with *mashrabīyya* screens overlook the *qā'a*'s north *iwān* on the eastern and western sides.<sup>75</sup> These probably allowed women to

71 See Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 198–199.

72 Abou-Khatwa, “An Ode to Remember,” 53–54. The foundation date was A.H. 1144 H/A.D. 1731.

73 There is also a large ground-floor reception hall, but it was largely in ruins when surveyed by the Comité and IFAO researchers. Nothing remains of its inscriptions.

74 Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 148–150.

75 Lézine, *Trois palais*, pl. VI B; Maury et al., *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, fig. 22. Bayt al-Sitt Wasīla



observe male guests below while remaining concealed. They would not have been necessary if this hall were exclusively for the female occupants of the harem and their female guests. Lane observed that such galleries were used by female singers, again so as to remain unseen to men.<sup>76</sup> The Qur'anic verses inscribed underneath these galleries speak of God's bounty (Q 57:21) and the gardens of paradise awaiting the faithful (Q 25:10), but lack explicit references to women. Indeed, the only inscription that mentions women—but together with men—is one in the *maq'ad* that describes the blessed in paradise: "So that believing men and women enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, living there eternally. He will forgive them their sins (Q 48:5)."<sup>77</sup> It is most likely that the hall was not exclusively a male or female space, but accommodated gatherings of both men and women, depending on the occasion.

The asymmetrical distribution of inscriptions in these four houses mirrored the asymmetrical character of male-female relations in society and at home. Documentary evidence shows that elite women had agency in managing household affairs, owning property, and holding receptions for family and female guests.<sup>78</sup> Although women could attain varying degrees of literacy in the medieval and Ottoman eras,<sup>79</sup> and traditionally took a leading role in protecting their homes and children with amulets,<sup>80</sup> there is as yet no evidence to indicate that they had a direct role in the selection and writing of the epigraphs in the homes of the elite. It is important to remember that literacy, though not widespread, was more an attribute of elite male status, especially among

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may have had a similar gallery overlooking the *maq'ad*; see Lézine, *Trois palais*, 40 and pl. XLVI A.

76 Lane, *Manners and Customs*, 18, n. 1.

77 This verse also occurred in male reception rooms in the other three houses. See Table 5.1 for details.

78 Fay, *Unveiling the Harem*, *passim*.

79 For treatments of women and formal religious education in pre-modern Islamic societies, see Jonathan P. Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

80 Eleanor Doumato, *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 148–152. Male shaykhs customarily have been the producers of written amulets, but ethnographic evidence indicates that women may also do so. See Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, "The Vision was of Written Words': Negotiating Authority as a Female Muslim Healer in South India," in *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization*, ed. David Shulman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 249–282. The female healer described in this account used Qur'an recitation and written verses in weekly house exorcisms for her clients.

the ‘ulamā’, than of female status; men were more likely to be able to create and read the epigraphs. This does not mean that women and men with lesser degrees of literacy were oblivious to their significance. For both sexes, Qur’anic inscriptions and verses from the *Burda* were familiar enough to be understood and possessed iconic meaning that signalled sacred presence and apotropaic power. Their meaning would have also been communicated during ceremonial gatherings in the home that involved Qur’an recitations and readings of the *Burda*.

Knowledge of the written word and its efficacy was acquired through embodied practices at home, in the market places, mosques, shrines, and mausolea that stood out so prominently in their urban environments. These practices—prayer, Sufi gatherings, poetry recital, business transactions, shrine visitation, attending religious elementary schools (*kuttābs* and *maktabs*) and study circles, musical performances at home and in public, funerary practices, and acquiring amulets—would have been part of oral and performative culture, which intersected in complex ways with literate culture, especially in urban Muslim societies such as that of Cairo.<sup>81</sup> Rather than being dichotomous with literacy, orality played a dynamic role in the scriptural culture that pervaded urban life at this time. Thus, familiarity with the *basmala*, the Throne Verse, the opening verses of Q 48, and the *Burda*, including their apotropaic power, could have been acquired by many. Moreover, even illiterate Muslim women and men would have developed the ability to identify the distinctive forms of the most familiar words and phrases such as the *basmala* and the names “Allah” and “Muhammad” when rendered in cursive Arabic. Once recognized, the inscriptions could be interpreted on different registers, from that of the talismanic to that of piety and visual aesthetics, according to the ontological and emotional disposition of all viewers, lettered and unlettered.

81 On the complexity of literacy in Islamic society, see Nelly Hanna, “Literacy and the Great Divide in the Islamic World,” *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 175–194. Discussions of women’s participation in practices that allowed them to acquire and embody religious knowledge can be found in Huda Lutfi, “Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Shar’i Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises,” in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 99–121. Marion Holmes Katz, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

## 5 Conclusion

Doris Behrens-Abouseif has concluded that when it comes to the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions used on the Cairene monumental architecture of the Mamluks, "the rule seems to have been the absence of rules."<sup>82</sup> Whereas this may have been the case with the selection and precise placement of inscriptions on Islamic monuments, the present study has demonstrated that Cairene house inscriptions of a later era were chosen with deliberation on the part of householders and the calligraphers and craftsmen they commissioned in accordance with a basic set of themes. They reveal that wealthy Cairene Muslims were concerned with employing the word of God and praise of the Prophet Muhammad to do two things: 1) sacralise their homes, as suggested by the use of the phrase *hād̄hā al-makān al-mubārak* ("this blessed place") in foundation inscriptions, and 2) protect them from misfortune and malevolent forces.<sup>83</sup> The processes of sacralisation set the domestic sphere apart from mundane or profane places, creating a focal point for divine presence, blessing (*baraka*) and an earthly paradise. Concomitantly, these place-making practices also had talismanic or apotropaic purposes, thus transforming the home into a defensive enclave. In both regards, the benefits desired were material and spiritual: wellness, prosperity, domestic harmony, and salvation in the hereafter on the one hand; deflection of illness, impoverishment, theft, disaster, enemies, the evil eye and other malevolent forces on the other.

The calligraphic repertoire was also intended to aesthetically enhance the appearance of the home's ceremonial spaces, together with an array of other distinctive features: marble columns, *muqarnas* squinches, artfully rendered doors, cabinets, and window lattices (*mashrabiyyas*), carved wooden ceilings elegantly ornamented in gold inlay and colourful geometric and floral patterns, sculpted stone corbelling, moulding, and lintels, polychrome marble arabesque mosaics on the walls and flooring, and sculpted marble fountains.<sup>84</sup> These decorative features, which reflect significant expenditures of wealth, could win the attention and admiration of visitors, but aesthetics alone does not explain the presence of the inscriptional program. Rather, this program was embedded in

82 Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 97.

83 The Arabic *makān* (place) had a wide range of meanings in the eighteenth century. Studies of *waqf* documents reveal that it could mean "house," but it could also refer to a place of business, a workshop or even a place for washing the dead (Fay, *Unveiling the Harem*, 142 f.). The term *mubārak* (or *mubāraka*) occurred in Tulunid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk foundation inscriptions for describing religious buildings such as mosques, madrasas and tombs.

84 Maury et al, *Palais et maisons*, vol. 2, 312–368.

a living cultural tradition that transcended “decorative” conventions through the use of religious language. In addition, as the foundation epigraphs indicate, this religious language was mobilized for the benefit of specific persons—the householders and, by extension, their households and guests.

To argue that the inscriptions had a talismanic function is not to say that they were talismans or amulets (Arabic *tilsam*, *hīrz*, *ḥijāb*) *per se*. Talismans and amulets, which predate Islam, have a long history in Islamicate cultures, and they enjoy widespread use to this day.<sup>85</sup> Though their production can involve astrology, numerology, and other occult sciences, they also possess a popular, *exoteric* dimension entailing the use of scripture, prayers, geometric designs, figures of humans (or human body parts) and animals, and objects such as beads, colourful stones, and even twigs, as noted in Marcela Garcia Probert’s contribution to this volume.<sup>86</sup> Amulets are customarily placed in a pouch or locket and worn to bring good fortune and healing, or to deflect evil and bodily harm. They have also been used to protect homes. The Cairene Ottoman house inscriptions operated as amulets, employing some of the same elements, as detailed above. Just as amulets protected a person, home, or valued possession, the house inscriptions, displayed on its walls, protected the home as an extension of the person and his or her family. Indeed domestic space in Islamicate cultures, particularly Arabic-speaking ones, has occasioned a semantic overlap between the constructed dwelling and its inhabitants. The Arabic words *bayt* and *dār* can designate both the dwelling and the kin group that inhabits it.<sup>87</sup> Both the corporeal and the domestic, therefore, are sites where revealing and concealing are at play; this is also where the iconographic and apotropaic qualities of the talismanic are believed to have their efficacy.

In closing, the question of the historical and geographic frames for the specific formation of spatial significance embodied by the homes of Cairo’s elite in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries deserves consideration. Is it a manifestation of cultural belief and practice that has persisted over the *longue durée* in Egypt and the wider Middle Eastern region since ancient times? Or is it a result of more specific historical factors? The power of the written word to

85 cf. J. Ruska, B. Carra De Vaux, and C.E. Bosworth, “*Tilsam*” in *EI2*.; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, 131; and Al-Saleh, “‘Licit Magic.’” See also Ibn Khaldun’s extensive essay on magic and talismans in *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, vol. 3, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 157–227.

86 Marcela A. Garcia Probert, “Twigs in the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets,” in this volume.

87 See Campo, *Other Sides of Paradise*, 8–9, 91; cf. Edward William Lane, and Stanley Lane-Poole. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1968), 280, 931.

convey divine engagement with the world, as well as to serve as a device for salvation from its troubles, has been an enduring feature of the religious life of the region for centuries if not millennia. This power has clearly been attributed to the Qurʾān in Islamic societies, not to mention numerous other religious texts, such as the *Burda*. Prosperous householders drew upon this calligraphic tradition to enhance and construct meaning to their domestic spaces. However, because of the inherent ephemerality of domestic buildings in comparison to monumental ones, any attempt to ascertain the historical development of the use of religious inscriptions in Cairene homes must be tentative.

Nonetheless, other factors likely also affected the builders' decision to embellish their reception halls and ceremonial spaces in such a grand fashion. Among these were:

1. Emulation of the Mamluk elite's use of Qurʾanic inscriptions on religious buildings and palaces, including the use of the *thuluth* and *muhaqqaq* scripts that were generally applied in these.<sup>88</sup>
2. The remarkable prosperity enjoyed by Cairo's leading 'ulamā', merchants, and artisans at the time, combined with a belief that this prosperity was a reflection of God's bounty, as expressed in the epigraphs.<sup>89</sup>
3. An inclination to invest their fortunes in the construction of spacious residences with elegantly decorated reception areas for the entertainment of the extended family and their guests.<sup>90</sup>
4. The precarity of conditions faced by all Egyptians due to factional conflicts between Mamluk and Ottoman rivals, combined with periodic plagues and famines (especially in the latter eighteenth century), as well as economic crises, fostered increased attention for the talismanic significance of the inscriptions to protect family and property.<sup>91</sup>

The homes of Ottoman elites in greater Syria, particularly in Damascus and Aleppo, bear the closest similarity to those of Cairo in layout and decoration.<sup>92</sup>

88 Bernard O'Kane has argued for a convergence of religious and domestic architecture during the early Mamluk period (13th to 14th centuries) in "Domestic and Religious Architecture in Cairo," 149–182.

89 Raymond, *Cairo*, 205–209; and Raymond, "Le Caire sous les Ottomans (1517–1798)," in Maury et al, *Palais et maisons*, 2: 80–85.

90 According to Hanna's findings, at least 60 palaces were built between 1619 and 1682, including 80 *qā'āt*. In 1777 to 1781 76 palaces with 120 *qā'āt* were constructed; Hanna, *Habiter au Caire*, 74.

91 On the crises that confronted Egyptians at this time, see Raymond, *Cairo*, 225, 238–239; Hanna, *Habiter au Caire*, 172 and Alan Mikhail, "The Nature of Plague in Late Eighteenth-Century Egypt," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82, no. 2 (2008): 249–275.

92 Mamluk features from Cairo are evident in mansions of Ottoman Damascus, as noted by

Their reception halls also featured beautifully rendered inscriptions in their interiors, reflecting the prosperity in that region. The inscriptional program was similar to that deployed in Cairo: verses from the Qur’an, selections from the *Burda* and other poems eulogising Muhammad, and foundation inscriptions and poetry praising the house and its owner. Talismanic motifs are in evidence, but there also appear to be differences that reflect local preferences. Sporadic attention has been given to these inscriptions, but comparison with those in the Cairene mansions must await publication of more systematic studies of the Syrian inscriptional repertoires.<sup>93</sup>

With the onset of European colonialism and conditions of modernity, the formation of domestic sacrality of the sort represented by the homes of the prosperous Cairene elites in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave way to new ones that nonetheless bore traces of their predecessors. Some apartment buildings in Cairo and in southern Egypt displayed religious epigraphs at their entrances,<sup>94</sup> while print culture provided members of all social classes an

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Bernard Maury, “La Maison damascène au XVIII<sup>e</sup> et au début XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *L’Habitat traditionnel dans les pays musulmans autour de la Méditerranée: rencontre d’Aix-en-Provence, 6–8 juin 1984*, vol. 1, *L’Héritage architectural: forms et fonctions*, by the Groupe de recherches et d’études sur le Proche Orient ([Cairo]: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1988), 41; and Annie-Christine Daskalakis Mathews, “Mamluk Elements in the Damascene Decorative System of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Pearls from Water, Rubies from Stone: Studies in Islamic Art in Honor of Priscilla Soucek*, 2 vols, 1: 69–96, ed. Linda Komaroff (Zurich: Artibus Asiae, Museum Rietberg [2008]).

- 93 Inscriptions from the remnants of Syrian mansions preserved in the Pharaon collection in Beirut have been collected and transcribed by Dorothea Duda, *Innenarchitektur syrischer Stadthäuser des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts* (Beirut: In Kommission F. Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1971). Ottoman-era Syrian inscriptions for individual *qa’at* have also been described in Annie-Christine Daskalakis Mathews, “‘A Room of Splendor and Generosity’ from Ottoman Damascus,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 32 (1997): 129–134; and Komaroff and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, 24–25, 291–293. Scottish naturalist Alexander Russell depicted the interior of a mid-eighteenth-century Aleppo reception room with pseudo-Arabic script in *The Natural History of Aleppo and Parts Adjacent* (London: 1756), pl. xv. The reception room of an early seventeenth-century Aleppan Christian home is under restoration at the Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Its walls display selections from the book of Psalms and figural art inspired by Old and New Testament themes in Ottoman Persianate style; see Annette Hagedorn “Aleppo Room” in *Discover Islamic Art, Museum With No Frontiers*, [http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database\\_item.php?id=object;isl;de;muso1;39;en](http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=object;isl;de;muso1;39;en); accessed 7 October 2018.
- 94 Ahmed Abdel-Gawad, *Enter in Peace: The Doorways of Cairo Homes 1872–1950* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), pls. 45 and 46; and *idem*, *Veiling Architecture: The Decoration of Domestic Buildings in Upper Egypt 1672–1950* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 33–34.

inexpensive way to display religious epigraphs and pictures of holy places in the reception areas of their homes. Perhaps one of the most enduring legacies of the tradition of displaying hand-drawn Qur'anic epigraphs in the home is the practice of painting epigraphic murals in commemoration of the hajj on the exteriors and interiors of the houses of Egyptians who completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, especially in Upper Egypt and working class neighbourhoods of Cairo.<sup>95</sup> The use of religious epigraphs in these modern formations manifests continued belief in their sacralising and talismanic efficacy.

## 6 Appendix 1: Qur'anic Verses Used in Cairene House Inscriptions<sup>96</sup>

*Āyat al-Kursī* Q 2:255. God, there is no god but He, the Living and Everlasting. He does not tire or sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. Who is it that intercedes with Him except by His leave? He knows what they have done and what they will do. They cannot encompass Him in knowledge except as He permits. His throne extends across the heavens and earth and He never tires in preserving them. He is the high and mighty one.

*Āl Imrān* 3:190–193: Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth and the alternation of night and day there are signs for those with reason, who remember God while standing, sitting, and reclining. They contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth, (thinking) 'Our Lord, You did not create this in vain. Praise be to You! Protect us from the torment of the fire! Our Lord, whomever You have caused to enter the fire, You have shamed. There is no one who can help the wrongdoers. Our Lord, we have heard someone calling us to belief, 'You believe in your Lord.' O Lord, forgive us our sins, cover up our wrongdoings, and reward us with the righteous.'

*Āl-Hijr* 15:46. Enter it securely in peace.

*Āl-Furqān* 25:10. Blessed be He who if He wishes can bring about something better than that—gardens beneath which rivers flow [and He made for you palaces.]

*Āl-Fathḥ* 48:1–7. Indeed we have granted you a clear revelation (victory) so that God may forgive you for the wrong you have done or will do; and so that

95 Campo, *Other Sides of Paradise*, 139–165.

96 The translations are those of the author, in consultation with those of Ahmed Ali (*The Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988]) and Arthur J. Arberry (*The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* [New York: Macmillan, 1955]). See Table 5.1 for the location of each in the houses.

He may perfect His grace for you and guide you on the straight path. God will give you a mighty victory. He brings tranquillity to the hearts of believers so that they might enhance their belief. The legions of the heavens and earth are God's. God is most knowing and wise. So that believing men and women enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, living there eternally. He will forgive them their sins. That is a great prize in God's eyes. He will torture men and women who are hypocrites and idolaters, thinking ill of God. They will be encircled by evil and God's anger will be upon them and He will curse them and prepare hell for them. How evil is their fate! The legions of the heavens and earth are God's. God is most mighty and wise.

*Al-Qamar* 54:54–55: The God-fearing are among gardens and rivers in a seat of truth in the presence of a capable sovereign.

*Al-Ḥadīd* 57:21. That is God's bounty (*faḍl*)—He bestows it on whomever He wishes. The greatest grace is possessed by God.

*Al-Ṣaf* 61:13. Help (*naṣr*) from God and a speedy victory (*fath*).

*Al-Mulk* 67:1–2. Blessed be He who holds dominion and power over everything, Who created death and life in order to test which of you is best in deeds. He is all-mighty and most forgiving.

## 7 Appendix 2: Verses from Al-Būṣīrī's Al-Burda Used in Cairene House Inscriptions

### *Part 1: Prophetic Nasīb (vv. 1–12)*<sup>97</sup>

- 1 In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful  
Was it the memory of those you loved at Dhū Salām  
That made you weep so hard your tears were mixed with blood?
- 2 Or was it the wind that stirred from the direction of Kazimah  
And the lightning that flashed in the darkness of Idam?
- 3 What ails your eyes? If you say, “Cease!” they flow with tears;  
What ails your heart? If you say, “Be still!” Its passion flares once more.
- 4 Does the lover think that his passion can be concealed  
When his tears are flowing with it and his heart inflamed?
- 5 But for passion you would not shed tears] over a ruined abode,  
Nor spend nights sleepless from remembering the ben-tree's fragrance  
and the supple banner-spear.<sup>98</sup>

97 Translation by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 92–93, 95–96. Arabic words added in parentheses by the author.

98 OR: from remembering the ben-tree and the mountain peak.



- 6 How can you deny your love when two upstanding witnesses,  
Tears and lovesickness, have testified to it?
- 7 And passion has borne witness to it  
With two streaks of tears upon your cheeks, as red as ‘*anam*-boughs,  
and a sickly face, as yellow as the blossoms of *bahar*?
- 8 Oh yes, the phantom of the one I love did come by night  
And leave me sleepless; love does indeed impede delight with pain.
- 9 O you who fault me for chaste ‘Udhri passion, forgive me!  
For were you fair, you would not censure me.
- 10 May you be stricken with the same affliction!  
My secret is not hidden from my enemies; my sickness never ends!]
- 11 You gave me sound counsel, but I did not listen,  
For lovers are deaf to those that reproach them.
- 12 Even the advice of grey hair I held suspect,

*Part 2: Warning against the Desires of the Self (hawā al-nafs)*

- 13 My wilful wicked soul in its folly refused all warnings  
From the harbingers of grey hair and old age.
- 14 It did not prepare the repast of good deeds to welcome  
The guest (grey hair) that, unabashed, alighted on my head.
- 15 Had I known that I could not honor this guest,  
I would have concealed his arrival with *katam*-dye.
- 16 Who will restrain my defiant soul from error?  
The way that bolting steeds are curbed by yanking back the reins?
- 17 Don't hope to curb her craving for defiance by indulging it,  
For food only increases the glutton's appetite.
- 18 The self (*nafs*) is like a little child: if you ignore it, it won't outgrow  
Its love of suckling; only if you wean it will it stop.
- 19 Curb the passion of your wilful soul; don't let it rule you!  
When passion reigns it brings death or disgrace.
- 20 Watch over her when she is grazing freely among deeds:  
If she finds a pasture sweet, don't let her graze there.
- 21 How often has she made the deadly seem delicious,  
So man doesn't know that his rich dish holds poison.
- 22 Fear the tricks that hunger and satiety can play!  
An empty belly can do as much harm as a full one.
- 23 Purge with tears an eye sated with forbidden sights;  
Adhere to a strict repentance (*nadm*).
- 24 Disobey your wilful soul (*nafs*) and Satan, defy them!

- And if they offer you advice, don't trust them!
- 25 Don't let them play litigant or judge in your deliberations,  
For you know the tricks that litigants and judges play.
- 26 I seek God's forgiveness for my saying what I do not do;  
It's as though I've claimed a sterile man has children.
- 27 I ordered you to do good, but I did not obey my own command;  
I have not done right, so how can I tell you “Do right!”?
- 28 I have not set by, before death, a store of extra prayers;  
I've prayed only the required prayers, and have not fasted more than is  
required.

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# A Talismanic Scroll: Language, Illumination, and Diagrams

*Yasmine Al-Saleh*

According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the Arabic word, *ṭilsam* (“talisman”) carries the meaning of endowing an object with potency.<sup>1</sup> Talismans from the Islamic world come in a variety of shapes and forms, from small amulets, to bowls, to talismanic shirts.<sup>2</sup> As explained in the introduction, the use of the words ‘talisman’ versus ‘amulet’ is ambiguous. The general definition given in this volume assumes that amulets are reused for a variety of purposes, while talismans are used for one particular goal. However, even though its use definitely extended beyond a single instance, historically the kind of scroll that forms the focus of this paper came to be known as a “Talismanic scroll”. In the interest of readability, I will thus use the word “talisman” but note here that it is used in a broader sense than suggested by the general definition given in this volume’s introduction. In this paper I discuss an incomplete medieval Islamic talismanic scroll now housed at the Dār al-Athār al-Islāmiyya (DAI) in Kuwait as part of the Al-Sabah collection (LNS 12 MS, 11.3 × 545 cm) to show how the salient textual and decorative elements work together to establish the scroll’s power as a talisman. I demonstrate how the word of God (Qur’an) and the structure of the Arabic text together with the beautiful, red, blue, and gold decorative motives empower this talismanic scroll. Thus to understand how the scroll functioned in the context in which it was manufactured and circulated, we have to take both the textual and material features of this item into consideration.

1 J. Ruska and B. Carra de Vaux, “Ṭilsam” in *EI2*.

2 Two recent exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology at Oxford University respectively include a variety of objects that are considered talismanic. “Power and Piety: Islamic Talismans on the Battlefield,” Accessed online May 6, 2020. [www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/power-and-piety](http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/power-and-piety). And “spellbound,” Accessed online August 1, 2020 [www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/details/?exh=128](http://www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/details/?exh=128).

## 1 Characteristics of the Scroll

Although the beginning of the scroll is lost, enough of it remains to observe its beauty which arises from the high standard of calligraphy and the rich gold and coloured decorations. As such, solely based on its material features, it immediately becomes clear that this object must have been commissioned by someone in the upper social classes. There are three distinguishing features that mark it as talismanic: the Qur'anic quotations and prayers, the structure and layout of the illuminations, and the images. The text has a vertical orientation. In the right and left margins thin gold and black lines enclose the horizontally aligned Qur'anic text which is written in red and black *naskh* and *thuluth* script. The red script repeats *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q112) and serves as a border that curves above and below a monumental black *naskh-thuluth* inscription.<sup>3</sup> The black marginal text comprises verses from *Sūrat Yāʾ-Sīn* (Q36:37–83) and ends with a large part of *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q2:285).<sup>4</sup>

The main text block is written in black *naskh* and consists of four main parts. The text opens with a few of the well-known names of God and a prayer (*duʿā*) thanking God for his eternal blessings. Then follows a series of clearly defined and self-contained chapters related to diverse topics. The content of the various chapters in the scroll is made up of predominantly Qur'anic quotations and devotional prayers used with a talismanic purpose. The first of those formulas are devoted to the “seven sanctuaries” giving instructions on performing prayers that protect against evil powers. The second part, lavishly decorated with illustrations, aims to offer protection against daily-life threats from animals, illnesses and human aggression. Then follows a part that stands out within the scroll through its script and contents placing it firmly in a military context. Finally, there is a magic square surrounded by a semi-circular inscription. Each section has an illuminated heading that serves to introduce the section. The illuminated headings alternate between two colour compositions, either a white *naskh-thuluth* text outlined in black, on a gold, abstracted vegetal background; or a white *naskh-thuluth* text, outlined in black on a blue and gold background. There are gold rosettes throughout the text and the pattern is either one or two rosettes every seven to eight lines.

3 For script identification, see: Nabil F. Safwat and Mohamed U. Zakariya, *The Art of the Pen: Calligraphy of the 14th to 20th Centuries* (London: Published by the Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1996), 234.

4 For the eschatological significance of the borders see: Yasmine Al-Saleh. “Licit Magic: The Touch and Sight of Talismanic Scrolls” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014).





FIGURE 6.1  
 A talismanic scroll  
 COURTESY OF YARMOUK CULTURAL CENTRE,  
 DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH, KUWAIT LNS 12  
 MS-V 1

## 2 The Seven Sanctuaries

The first part of LNS 12 MS lists seven sanctuaries. All seven seek refuge in God and His creations including protection against demonic powers. The first heading reads: *al-haykal al-awwal* (the first sanctuary).<sup>5</sup> It begins with the *basmala* and asks for refuge for the scroll's carrier (*ḥāmīluhu*).<sup>6</sup> The content of the section is activated by the protective Throne verse (Q2:255) followed by two other verses from *Sūrat al-Baqara*: (Q2:284, and the partial text of Q2:286). The Throne verse states that God alone can intercede in time of need.<sup>7</sup> As for the last two to three verses of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, they are known to benefit the person seeking forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> In other words, *al-haykal al-awwal* is seeking protection in and forgiveness from God. The first sanctuary ends with an instruction that will become an essential part of most other sections of this scroll: to recite one thousand times *lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* (there is no strength or power except in God).<sup>9</sup> The section ends with a prayer and blessing on the Prophet Muhammad who is called "the last of the prophets" (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*), and on his family and companions (*'alā ālihi wa-ṣaḥbihi ajma'in*). This is known as the formulated prayer, *taṣliya*, which is an extensive version of the Islamic creed.<sup>10</sup> It is an expression of devotion and request for salvation.<sup>11</sup> The epithet, "last of the prophets" (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*), derives from the Qur'an (Q33:40).<sup>12</sup> The basic structure of this first sanctuary sets the tone for the next six.

However, the second through seventh sanctuaries each commence in a style related to but different from the first. They start with the *basmala* and then proceed to ask God for the refuge and protection of the scroll's carrier or owner. This extends to every man and woman, freeman or slave, young or old, emir or vizier, rich or poor who possesses the scroll. The second through fifth sanctuaries have a mostly Qur'anic composition.<sup>13</sup>

5 For a historical and textual analysis of the scroll, see Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic" and Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1961), 86. Padwick translates *haykal* as a sanctuary against demonic power.

6 Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 83–93.

7 Ibid. 39.

8 Ibid. 116.

9 Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic," chapters three and four.

10 Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 154. Please note that when the Prophet's family and companions are mentioned in this catalog, it is usually a translation of this particular Arabic phrase.

11 Ibid.

12 Elaine Wright, *Islam: Faith, Art, Culture: Manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Library*, (London: Scala Publishers Ltd., 2009), 41.

13 Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic."

The sixth sanctuary is mostly non-Qur'anic. The passage lists God's creations on earth and in the sky including the sun, moon, and stars. The inventory ends with a direct request: "may this evil escape" (*arziq al-wahsh fi l-falat*).<sup>14</sup> The two protective Qur'anic chapters, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās* (Q113 and 114) that follow, suggest that the phrase refers to some form of demon. These chapters are known as the two refuge-seeking chapters, *al-mu'awwidhatān* and are used to ask for protection against demons and other evil powers.<sup>15</sup> Once again, the text asks the reader to utter: *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* one thousand times. It ends with a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions and a part of *Sūrat Āl'Imrān* (end of Q3:173) "God is sufficient for us and the best of guardians."

The seventh sanctuary has a beginning that is similar to the others and continues with the list of God's creations. However, the list includes non-tangible items such as the truth and blessings of God. Once again, the passage addresses the demon: "may this demon escape". It proceeds to ask the reader to repeat the phrase *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* one thousand times. Then follows a quotation from *Sūrat Āl'Imrān* (end of Q 3:173): "God is sufficient for us and the best of guardians." *Ṭā'a wa-qubūl* ends in a unique way by asking God to bless the Prophet Muhammad and each of his individually-named ten companions.<sup>16</sup> This is followed by a request to God to make the carrier of the scroll victorious.

### 3 Court Anxiety

This last request is an appropriate transition into the next part of the scroll, which, unlike the interconnected seven sanctuaries, has specific themes mostly referenced through Qur'anic verses and prophetic stories.

The next part of the scroll has individual headings that are related to issues of daily life. The first section suggests that the context is one of high court culture, while the later sections relate to military life. The first heading in the next section is "for entering the (company of) kings" (*li-l-dukḥūl 'alā l-mulūk*). It starts with the *basmala* followed by a continuous Qur'anic text comprising verses from various chapters: *Āl'Imrān* (Q3), *al-Mā'ida* (Q5) and *al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q28). The

14 Wolfhart P. Heinrichs "Wahsh (a.)," in *EI* 2. I would like to thank Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali for assisting me with the word *falat* (escape).

15 Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 85.

16 See Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic" chapters three and four on the auditive and visual aspects of the scroll.

verses quoted are, in the following order: Q 5:23, end of Q 28:31, end of Q 28:25, and Q 3:37. These are all stories of prophets, mostly from the life of Moses, while one verse narrates the story of Mary.<sup>17</sup>

All these verses make implicit or explicit references to entering fearlessly into unfamiliar or impressive company. The first verse from *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* (Q5:23) recounts the story of two of Moses' messengers: Joshua and Caleb. They were afraid to enter a village with Moses' prophecy and God advised them not to be scared for they carried the message of God.<sup>18</sup> Thus instructed, the two men do indeed enter the gate of the village trusting in the power of God to guide them. The next story from *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (end of Q28:31) explicitly deals with the theme of kingship. Readers familiar with the Qur'an and the full verse will know that before the quoted verse, Moses has just thrown his rod on the floor which then changed into a snake. In the final part of the verse (end of Q28:31) that is included on the scroll, God tells Moses not to be afraid of Pharaoh because Moses carries God's message. The next verse from *al-Qaṣaṣ* (end of Q28:25) is the end of another story regarding Moses' virtues. In this case, he is in an oasis where he helps two daughters of a shepherd to get water for their flocks.<sup>19</sup> The father of the two daughters was an esteemed leader who later helps Moses. In all these accounts the theme is the same: as long as one has faith in God, one does not have to fear powerful or unknown people such as kings or other rulers and one can even offer them a helping hand. It is interesting that the text on the scroll only references the end of each of the verses, which highlights the importance of not being afraid when being in the presence of a king or powerful leader. Yet, for those who are familiar with the Qur'an, the fuller content of each story is implied.

The last verse quoted on the scroll, *Āl'Imrān* (Q3:37), narrates the story of Mary, daughter of Zakariyya, who was also protected by God.<sup>20</sup> This is a peculiar

17 Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic." In my dissertation, I discuss the relationship of this section to two other scrolls LNS 25 MS at DAI and one other scroll at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and I propose that there is a template for the creation of these talismanic scrolls.

18 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Qur'ān al-karīm: Bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī wa-bi-hāmishihi tafsīr al-imāmāyn al-jalālayn*, ed. Marwan Sawar (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1990), 140.

19 Abdelhaqq Bewley and Aisha Bewley, *The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of Its Meaning in English*, (Norwich: Bookwork, 1999), 371–372.

20 Arent Jan Wensinck "Maryam," in *EI2*. In addition, the 'Mihrāb of Mary' is located at the south wall of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. It is known as the spot where the angels brought fruits to her. See: Gülrü Necipoğlu, "The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest: 'Abd Al-Malik's Grand Narrative and Sultan Süleyman's Glosses," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 27. Also see: Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā'il bayt al-maqdis* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2002), 176–181.

verse in this context since it does not directly fit the theme of kingship. However, it does address God's dominion and God's protection of Mary throughout her pregnancy. The section ends with the staple request to repeat *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* one thousand times. It is followed by a blessing from *Sūrat Āl'Imrān* (end of Q3:173) "God is sufficient for us and the best of guardians," and a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, his family and his companions.

#### 4 Daily Life Medical Concerns

The scroll also contains a number of talismanic headings with healing or protective power that occur one after the other: "to relief pain" (*al-sāyir al-awjā'*), "against throbbing pain" (*bāb li-l-ḍarbān*), "for stomach aches and intestinal diseases" (*li-l-maghaṣ wa-l-qawlānj*). In fact, as this scroll and other evidence show, in times of need, people consulted specific verses and chapters of the Qur'an for healing purposes.<sup>21</sup> Other contributions in this volume indicate that this practice continues up to today.<sup>22</sup>

The evil eye is considered to be the cause of many physical and psychological ailments and defects. It can cast its destructive powers on someone from many directions and protection against it, even pre-eminently, is considered to be essential. One of the directly talismanic headings on the scroll is the section entitled: "against the evil eye and its gaze" (*li-l-'ayn wa-l-naẓra*). The word for "gaze" is misspelled by the scribe: he wrote *naẓra* with *dād* instead of *naẓra* with *zād* a common orthographic mistake due to the similar pronunciation of the two letters in colloquial (Egyptian) Arabic. It begins with the familiar *bas-mala*. The text reads: "It has been determined that the carrier of this document (i.e. this scroll) will be protected from every person or jinn that has an evil eye" (*aqadit 'an ḥāmil kitāb hādhā kull 'ayn mu'ān min al-ins wa-l-jānn*). The text then proceeds to the most powerful refuge-seeking Qur'anic verse, the Throne verse (Q2:255).<sup>23</sup> Succinctly, the passage seeks protection in the name of God through the repetition of: *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* one thousand times. It ends with a blessing on the prophet Muhammad, his family and his companions.

21 Peter Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); and see the work of Ahmed Ragab, *The Prophets of Medicine and the Medicine of the Prophet* (unpublished paper Harvard, 2009).

22 See for example Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali, "Casting Discord: An Unpublished Spell from the Egyptian National Library," in this volume.

23 Tawfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Burlington: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 131.

## 5 A Soldier's Concerns

One of the most unique and fascinating components of the scroll is the last part consisting of six sections containing beautiful illustrations of weapons, worldly dangers and, finally, supernatural threats. These drawings are talismanic in function. They are meant to ward off the misfortune related to each event symbolised by the illustration or to conjure the power and spirit of the item illustrated. Talismanic objects and motifs were frequently carried by soldiers on the battlefield, but mostly in the form of either small objects (rings, amulets, Qur'an cases)<sup>24</sup> or as adornment on arms and armor.<sup>25</sup> The illustrations depicted on the present scroll seem more rare, though it is not the only scroll of its kind. The illustrated weapons show similarity with the illustrations on another scroll at DAI (LNS 25 MS) as well as with two other illustrated ones which remain unpublished.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, the common features appearing in these scrolls make it evident that there was a template for the creation of these talismanic scrolls.<sup>27</sup> The differences between the scrolls indicate on the other hand that they were personalised for their users as well.

The first illustrated segment is entitled, "against the striking of the sword" (*li-darb al-sayf*). Similar to the other sections, it contains predominately Qur'anic verses. The first two verses from *Sūrat Saba'* (Q34:10–11) relate the story of the gifts that David received from God.<sup>28</sup> In particular, God instructed David to "make coats of mail," an appropriate verse when seeking protection from a sword blow.<sup>29</sup> The section continues with a verse from *Sūrat Muḥammad* (Q47:4) which contains a clear *jihād* message. It instructs the reader that when confronted with enemies he should strike their necks. It also informs the reader that God will not forget those slain in war. Two drawn intertwined swords in

24 Maryam Ekhtiar and Rachel Parikh, "Power and Piety: Islamic Talismans on the Battlefield," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. Liana Saif et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 423.

25 Ibid., 422.

26 Two unpublished scrolls were depicted in catalogues for auction houses. See Christie's London, *Islamic Art and Manuscripts*, Thursday, April 29, 2003, "Qur'an Scroll," lot 57 and Sotheby's London, *Arts of the Islamic World Day Sale: Including Fine Carpets and Textiles*. October 5, 2011, "An Ilkhanid Illuminated Talismanic Scroll Containing One of the Earliest Complete Copies of al-Busiri's (d. circa 1294–1296 AD) *Al-Burdah*. A Poem in Praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Persia. Late 13th–14th century," lot 61. There is also one other scroll that I have not yet examined in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France that seems to be similar: BNF Arabe 6088.

27 Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic."

28 Isaac Hasson "David" in *EQ*.

29 Ibid.



FIGURE 6.2  
 A talismanic scroll  
 COURTESY OF YARMOUK CULTURAL CENTRE, DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH, KUWAIT LNS 12 MS-V 9-V 10

gold and blue are intermingled amidst the text of this verse. The theme of striking the enemy's neck continues in the next verse from *Sūrat al-Anfāl* (the end of Q8:12–13). The section ends by reiterating, *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh*, along with the Qur'anic verse from *Āl'Imrān* (end of Q3:173), "God is enough for us and the best of guardians," and a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, identified as the "last of the prophets" (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*).

A gold and blue image of two arrows and a bow illustrates the next section, which is entitled: "against the casting of arrows" (*li-ramī al-nushāb*). The passage states that once the bow has been strung and the arrows cast, one should evoke the name of God and recall the following Qur'anic verse: *Sūrat al-Anfāl* (partial Q8:17). It recalls a moment from the Battle of Badr, Muhammad's first victory over the Meccans, when he threw dust into the eyes of the enemy.<sup>30</sup> This verse is a perfect linguistic play on words because the Arabic verb *ramī*, "to throw", also means "to cast." In other words, the arrows are cast like the sand that was thrown by Muhammad. Again, the text then offers a general protection for the scroll's owner: "It has been commanded that the carrier of this scroll will be protected from everything seen by the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve." Once again, the section ends with the order to utter one thousand times *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* and a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, his family and his companions.

A gold spear with blue accents adorns the next section entitled: "against being pierced by a spear" (*li-ṭa'n al-ramḥ*). This section does not contain Qur'anic quotations, but calls on the name of God in a rhythmic pattern of successive verbs: "I call on the name of God" (*sammaytu*), "I nullify in the name of God" (*laghaytu*), "I reverberate in the name of God" (*rannatu*), "I succeed in the name of God" (*'aqabtu*) and, finally, "I pierce in the name of God humans and jinn" (*ṭa'antu*). The text poetically states that one should pierce and swallow the aims of one's enemies, nicely echoing the piercing with spear or lance against which these phrases protect the utterer.

The text continues vertically around the left and right sides of the illustrated spear. The passage begins on the left side and reads: "One should pierce anyone with *Hā' Mīm 'Ayn Sīn Qāf* and protection comes from *Kāf Hā' Yā' 'Ayn Šād*." The talisman thus invokes some mystical letters, which also appear in the Qur'an, namely at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (Q42) and *Sūrat Maryam* (Q19), respectively.<sup>31</sup> The passage ends with an evocation of one thousand *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* and a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, identified as

<sup>30</sup> John Nawas, "Badr," in *EQ*.

<sup>31</sup> Canaan, "Decipherment," 150–152.



“the last of the prophets” (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*) and the preceding prophets (*al-mursilīn*).

In the section entitled “against snake and scorpion (bites)” (*li-l-ḥayya wa-l-ʿaqrab*), gold and blue illustrations of a snake and scorpion can be found. The section begins with the name of God and a partial Qurʾanic verse from *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q2:243). It is a captivating verse that recounts the tale of the forced migration of the Banū Israʿīl due to a plague epidemic. God orders them to die, and they die.<sup>32</sup> However, the scroll turns God’s order against the snakes and scorpions, utilising the context of the verse to force the snakes and scorpions out of the homes and to die when God orders them to die. The text prescribes one thousand utterances of *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh*, and the *taṣliya* (prayer) on Muhammad, his family and his companions which are interrupted by the depictions of the snake and scorpion.

The next section aims to “annul magic” (*ibtāl al-sihr*). It appropriately recounts various Qurʾanic verses dealing with Moses and the magicians at Pharaoh’s court. The first verse from *Sūrat Yūnus* (Q10:81) is the confrontation between Moses and the magicians. Empowered by God, Moses informs the magicians that their magic is invalid. When the magicians see Moses’ rod convert into a snake, they drop down and prostrate to God as is stated in *Sūrat al-Aʿraf* (Q7:118–122). The gold flame-like hand with a blue outline and faded blue accents located at the centre of these verses is most likely an abstract depiction of Moses’ hand that turns white, also known as the “white hand” (*al-yad al-bayḍaʾ*).<sup>33</sup> Therefore, two signs of Moses’ prophethood appear before Pharaoh and his magicians: his staff turning into a serpent and his hand turning white.<sup>34</sup> It is no surprise that in the section concerning the annulment of magic these two signs are referenced: Moses’ rod in the text and the hand in the illustration. The section ends by asking God to protect the carrier of the scroll from magicians and deceitful people with the utterance of one thousand times *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa ilā bi-l-llāh* and the *āya* from *Sūrat Āl-Imrān* (end of Q3:173), “God is enough for us and the best of guardians.”

The last of the headings on the oblong portion of the scroll is entitled, “to break a binding charm” (*li-l-muṭālaqa*). Starting with a Qurʾanic quotation from *Sūrat Yāʾ Sīn* (Q36:1–5). This is part of the same chapter that appears in the margin of the scroll, although not consisting of the same verses. These verses are a perfect transition from the above section to the current one. They discuss the sign of Muhammad’s prophethood: the Qurʾan. This is similar to an earlier

32 al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Jalālayn*, 53.

33 Duncan B. MacDonald, “Mūsā” in *EQ*.

34 *Ibid.*



FIGURE 6.3  
LNS 12 MS V 11 Talismanic scroll

passage in the scroll, namely between the third and fourth sanctuaries, where a connection is made between the two sections. The third sanctuary is about Moses' nine signs and the fourth is about the ninety-nine names of God and the implied miracle of the Qur'an. Here, the text transitions from the two important signs of Moses' prophethood (the white hand and the changing rod) to *Sūrat Yā' Sīn* (Q36:1–5). In addition, *Yā' Sīn* is known for its apotropaic power and its association with death and the last judgment.<sup>35</sup> This is an appropriate theme for the last section of the scroll. After addressing all worldly concerns, it now asks for protection on judgement day and in the afterlife. Therefore, it is no surprise that the next set of verses from *Sūrat al-Inshiqāq* (Q84:1–the middle of 4) describes the signs of judgment day. The image of the sky tearing apart and the earth separating is a perfect metaphor for the following textual affirmation that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Amīna the mother of Muhammad, each had a safe childbirth thanks to God's assistance. In other words: thank God for the miracles of prophethood and you will be protected. The text then reiterates the familiar phrase *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa illā bi-l-llāh*, along with the Qur'anic verse *Āl'Imrān* (end of Q3:173), and a blessing on the Prophet Muhammad, the last of the prophets.

The scroll ends with a magic square that contains mystical letters that are known as the seal of the “first nine letters of the alphabet (*abdjadiya*),” which is also known as *budūḥ* or *jahzt*.<sup>36</sup> The seal is rumoured to have been depicted on Adam's ring and to have been transmitted via the eighth-century founder of alchemy, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān.<sup>37</sup> Surrounding the magic square is a golden semicircle that reads “The blessed sanctuary is completed.”

## 6 Additions

The last two sections of the scroll are not part of the main text block. They seem to be later additions, either by subsequent owners or as part of a ritual personalising of the talisman for its carrier. As has been highlighted by other contributions in this volume<sup>38</sup> the materiality forms an important key to

35 Necipoğlu, “The Dome of the Rock,” 71.

36 Canaan, “The Decipherment,” 157.

37 Ibid., 158. Also see the ‘Lidded Box of Muhammad al-Hamawī’: MMA 91.1.538; it is inscribed with the word *budūḥ*. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/91.1.538>. Accessed online July 4, 2020.

38 See for example: Marcela A. Garcia Probert, “Twigs in the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian amulets,” in this volume.

understand how amulets and talismans were used and reused. Also in this case it is not so much the content of the text but the materiality of the scroll that discloses that certain parts were added later. They form an indication of how new owners of such a talismanic object would adapt the existing piece to their specific needs. The differences are clear from the hands used, the decorations and is even visible in the paper of the scroll. The added sections contain, however, the clearest indication with regards to the date and origin of the scroll.

The first part that starts after the main block of text has been penned in a different hand. The extension seems to be pasted on the same kind of paper with evidence that it had been trimmed. Unlike the rest of the scroll, the passage starts with a black *muḥaqqaq* script and then transitions into a *naskh* script.<sup>39</sup> The writing and decoration are reminiscent of features found on Mamluk works on paper and in the art of the book.<sup>40</sup> The black ink, gold rosettes, and the red circular markers create a visual rhythm to the section. The content is similar to the rest of the scroll in that it is a mixture of Qur'anic verses and prayers that offer supplications in the name of God to protect the carrier of the scroll through prophetic stories and acknowledging God's creation.

At the end of the scroll in yet another scribal hand, a red *naskh* text gives thanks to God. Underneath it, in yellowish-gold ink with a black outline in yet a different hand, a final blessing for the Prophet Muhammad along with the familiar verse from *Sūrat Āl'Imrān* (end of Q3:173) occurs. Lastly, like an epilogue to the text, the scroll ends with the apotropaic Throne verse (Q2:255) written in black scribal script. This seems to be yet a later addition. On the back of the scroll there is a *basmala* written at the final end of the scroll that seems to be a later addition as well. Considering that the additions were contributed shortly after the completion of the first part of the scroll we can ascribe the scroll a Mamluk provenance.

39 For representations of each of the *muḥaqqaq* and *naskh* scripts see: David James, *The Master Scribes: Qur'ans of the 10th to 14th Centuries. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art*, (London: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992). For an example of *naskh* script, see 24–27; for *muḥaqqaq* script, see 34–39.

40 For an analytical discussion of this section, see Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic," chapter three. The combination of the black and gold *muḥaqqaq* script is reminiscent of a Mamluk style. See James, *The Master Scribes: Qur'ans of the 10th to 14th Centuries AD*, 160–161, 184–182. They are representations of a single folio that has been attributed to Yemen that is a combination of *muḥaqqaq*, *thuluth* and *naskh* script: (Qur 850). The other set are two folios from a Mamluk Qur'an (Qur 582) that uses the gold *muḥaqqaq* script. I discuss the issue of dating the scroll along with another scroll from DAI (LNS 25 MS) in Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic," chapter three.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper I discussed in detail one talismanic scroll of exquisite execution. There are, however, several similar scrolls, published and unpublished, with which this one can be compared. From my previous research, comparing all of these examples, it has become clear that there is a specific language, decoration and purpose that these talismanic scrolls share. First of all, they have a certain structure and specific details that make them talismanic: the way they address God, the choice of Qur'anic verses, and the titles of the different sections as well as how they begin and end. It is clear that supplications to God and the use of the Qur'an empower the scroll. What makes this scroll a talisman, however, in the sense of obtaining its power over worldly and supernatural entities, is the use of specific Qur'anic verses, the visual elements, the arrangement of the text, and above all, the *combination* of all the elements.

Another important factor is the way that the scrolls share material and textual elements. The illumination and decorative motifs on the scroll, rendered in a careful balance of red and black marginal Qur'anic text along with gold headings set on a blue or white background to initiate the themes of the scroll are shared with other samples in more or less the same variations. The configuration of the diagrams at the end of the scroll and the title of the last section "to break a binding charm" with a magic square is, moreover, very similar to another scroll at DAI (LNS 25 MS).<sup>41</sup> There are overlaps with other scrolls in other collections as well. It is thus highly likely that there was a template for the creation of these talismanic scrolls.

The additions at the end of our scroll point at its continuing use with subsequent owners who added their own invocations to reinforce or personalise the scroll to fit their own purposes. This part also contains a hint towards the date and provenance of the scroll as the calligraphy and decoration in the last section compares well with Mamluk book art and other paper models. Some of the other scrolls that our scroll can be compared with have, moreover, a more explicit Mamluk origin. It is thus safe to conclude that our scroll was created and used in a Mamluk context.

The materiality of the scroll forms a clear indication that this scroll was made for a rich patron in a military context. However, focussing on the material features also tells us that the scroll must have been passed on several times after it served the original owner. With later additions the scope of protection that is covered by the scroll became wider. Ultimately in its present shape the contents

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<sup>41</sup> Al-Saleh, "Licit Magic."

of the scroll range from military and courtly concerns to day-to-day physical ailments, natural and supernatural threats to one's well-being and the After Life. They suggest a personalised context of use, where new owners would have their specific concerns added. Considering that the scroll was modelled after a standard, however, we can also imagine that some parts which once served a specific and personal purpose became a standard element in these scrolls and lost their particular purpose for subsequent users thus eventually obtaining a more general protective function.

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## The Material Nature of Block Printed Amulets: What Makes Them Amulets?

*Karl R. Schaefer*

The use of amulets and talismans to invoke divine protection, to enhance one's innate abilities, or to improve chances of fulfilling a desire seems unbound by time or culture. Amulets have varied widely in form and nature, ranging from found objects or assemblages of found objects to elaborately constructed documents that may include graphic, numerological, and textual elements.<sup>1</sup> These features appear to be culturally determined, with some amulets and talismans found to be unique to one culture or civilization while other closely related groups may share amuletic elements, symbols, or even content. Moreover, within a given culture, the forms of amulets and talismans as well as their content may change over time, due to both internal and external influences. This is to say that new societal or social circumstances might require new forms or formulae of protection, for example.

The use of amulets by inhabitants of the Middle East predates Islam and evidence for the sharing of amulets among Jews, Christians, and Muslims after the advent of Islam is quite plentiful.<sup>2</sup> Handwritten amulets had been a

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- 1 The literature on amulets and talismans is extensive and varied in quality and range and I shall not attempt to list all the pertinent scholarship here. For a general introduction, one might consult Claude Lecouteaux, *Le livre des talismans et des amulettes* (Paris: Editions Imago, 2005); published in English as *The High Magic of Talismans and Amulets: Tradition and Craft* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014). For works devoted to talismans and magic in the medieval period in the Near East, the works of E.A. Wallace Budge, especially *Amulets and Magic* (London: Kegan Paul International, 2001), are useful. For Hebrew and Aramaic, look at Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation* (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) and Lawrence Schiffman and Michael Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). For Islamic Africa, see David Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Asante*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991) and, for Europe, Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2006). Numerous museum and library amulet collections have been published as well.
  - 2 On this, see Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Michael G. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

feature of Islamic culture since its inception. Invocations for divine assistance or protection took many forms, including the use of mystical or magical symbols, magic squares using either letters or numbers, and combinations of letters understood to have “inherent” occult power.<sup>3</sup> In the medieval Islamic period, one of the most significant changes to occur with regard to the creation of textual amulets was the adoption of block printing to produce them. Presumably, the ability to create more than one copy of any given amulet met a need that obtained among the population of those who were “consumers” of such things. Material evidence for the employment of block printing to create amulets is increasingly abundant.

Exactly where and when block printed talismans were introduced into the medieval Islamic realms—and by whom—is uncertain. Contemporary literary accounts are exceedingly rare and even then they are cryptic and provide less than unequivocal proof that some sort of “printing” was being carried out.<sup>4</sup> The earliest date for the introduction of block printing into the Islamic world would appear to be the late fourth/tenth century, given the textual and epigraphic evidence available. Ibn al-Nadīm’s bio-bibliographical work, the *Fihrist*, from that time mentions Egyptian magicians who used “stamps” (*hawāṭim*)<sup>5</sup> although to what purpose is not made explicit therein. Elaborate *Kūfī* script, which dates to the early centuries of Islam, is employed in some of the oldest Qur’ans and on early Islamic public buildings. It is also found in many block printed amulets and this has been adduced as evidence of an early origin for them.

The latest example is the only one that can be dated with any certainty. That piece, currently held by the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz am Rhein, bears a partial watermark that indicates that the paper upon which the text is printed was made in Italy around 1405 (see Fig. 7.6). Thus, Arabic block printing spans a period of somewhat less than four centuries after which time its practice appears to cease without explanation. There is no suggestion that block printed amulets displaced handwritten ones, for the latter continued to be produced and used during that time and indeed people request them even today.

As to the question of who was responsible for introducing block printing technology to the medieval Islamic world, the answer remains elusive. One theory holds that knowledge of the technology came to Egypt via textile trade with

3 See the contribution of Ursula Hammed, “Arabic Magical Texts in Original Documents: A Papyrologist Answers Five Questions You Always Wanted to Ask,” in this volume, for a discussion of handwritten amulets dating to the early Islamic period.

4 For a discussion of this, see the introduction to my *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 5–25 and the sources given there.

5 Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubrā, 1960–), 623.

India where cloth was decorated with block printed designs.<sup>6</sup> The other possibility is that block printing followed the same path from China that papermaking took into the Islamic realms in the second/eighth century.<sup>7</sup> Some research conducted on medieval Islamic society points to the involvement of a rather amorphous, shadowy, and peripatetic group called the Banū Sāsān.<sup>8</sup> Members of this group were known to engage in the creation of amulets which may have been block printed.<sup>9</sup> If this is so, then the argument for an Indian origin for Arabic block printing is strengthened because the ancestry of the Banū Sāsān can be traced to India.<sup>10</sup> Having said this, no incontrovertible evidence for either position has been found.

The source of the vast majority of the surviving examples of medieval Arabic block printing, which now number nearly one hundred,<sup>11</sup> appears to be Egypt, where dealers in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries sold them to European travellers and scholars who were prowling the country in search of ancient artefacts of all kinds. Other examples appear to have come from elsewhere in the medieval Islamic world.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the locus of their creation, the vast majority lack an archaeological pedigree and their origins must there-

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- 6 See Ruth Barnes, "Indian Cotton for Cairo: The Royal Ontario Museum's Gujarati Textiles and the Early Western Indian Ocean Trade," *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (May 2017), 15–30. Suggestions that the original idea for block printing came from India through China may be found in Katharina Mayer Haunton, "Woodcut: I. Materials and Techniques; II. History: § 1: Before the 15th Century," *Dictionary of Art*, vol. 33 (New York: Grove, 1996), 347 and T.H. Barrett, *The Woman Who Discovered Printing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 72.
- 7 Thomas Francis Carter advanced this view in his *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward*, rev. ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1955).
- 8 C.E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).
- 9 Bosworth, *Medieval Islamic Underworld*, 90 ff. See also, Richard W. Bulliet, "Medieval Arabic *Ṭarsh*: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of Arabic Printing," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), 427–438.
- 10 See the excellent article by Kristina Richardson, "Tracing a Gypsy Mixed Language through Medieval and Early Modern Arabic and Persian Literature," *Der Islam* 94, no. 1 (2017): 115–157.
- 11 *Enigmatic Charms* covers the fifty-five block printed amulets known to exist at that time. Subsequently, a nearly equal number has come to light due to the work of several scholars. Those interested in a basic introduction to the field should consult my work mentioned here above.
- 12 More recent work on medieval Arabic block printing suggests that production may not have been limited geographically to Egypt. See for example, Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, "Unpublished exemplars of block-printed Arabic amulets from the Qubbat al-khazna" in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*. Edited by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler, Ronny Vollandt (Beirut: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2020), 409–438.

fore be deduced from other clues.<sup>13</sup> Today, Arabic block prints are found in the collections of museums and libraries from Qatar to California and there is no doubt that more will come to light in the years ahead.

This innovation—if such it may be considered—raises several questions relating to the use and acceptance of printed amulets and of amulets in general. Do block printed amulets differ from handwritten amulets in terms of their content or form? Were printed amulets perceived to be less or more efficacious than those handwritten by people considered to have ‘special relationships’ with the divine or the supernatural? Most intriguing perhaps: What was the impetus behind the application of printing technology to the creation of amulets? While these questions have no definitive answers at this point, this paper will attempt to point out possible directions future investigators might want to pursue.

Given the almost total lack of contemporary accounts about the introduction, practice and technological development of block printing in medieval Islam, much remains unknown about this activity. Barring the discovery of a detailed—or even a general—description of the creation of block prints or their creators, their material aspects may be the best remaining evidence for an understanding of them and their role in the Islamic societies of the time. We do know that block printing was put to many uses. A stamp bearing the name “al-Imam al-Ḥākim”<sup>14</sup> lies in the Taylor-Schechter Collection at Cambridge University. A second example of block printing for mundane use is a stamp bearing three lines of text from Almería, Spain. This block print shows the term *qaysarīya*, a sort of warehouse where commercial goods were stored.<sup>15</sup> It appears to have been used as a mark indicating ownership of property or perhaps as proof that commercial items entering the city had been assessed the required tax.<sup>16</sup> Yet a third class of block prints is pilgrimage certificates,

13 Two studies of Arabic block prints that have archeological contexts may be found in Wladyslaw Kubiak and George T. Scanlon, *Fuṣṭāṭ Expedition Final Report*, vol. 2, *Fuṣṭāṭ-C* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989); Li Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For a list of institutions holding examples of Arabic block printing, see my *Enigmatic Charms*, 225–234. An updated list of such holdings is currently being prepared.

14 See *Enigmatic Charms*, 94 and Plate 13.

15 M. Streck, “Kaysāriyya,” *EI2*: 4, 840–841.

16 Karl R. Schaefer, “Block Printing as an Extension of the Practice of Stamping,” in *Seals and Sealing Practice in the Near East: Developments in Administration and Magic from Prehistory to the Islamic Period. Proceedings of an International Workshop at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo on December 2–3, 2009*, eds. Ilona Regulski, Kim Duistermaat and Peter Verkinderen, (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 219) (Leiden: Peeters, 2012), 209–218 and Karl R. Schaefer, “Medieval Arabic Block Printing: State of the Field,” in *Histori-*

a cache of which was found in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus in 1893 and subsequently published by the scholars J. Sourdel-Thomine, D. Sourdel,<sup>17</sup> Şule Aksoy and R. Milstein.<sup>18</sup> These documents date from the fifth/eleventh to the eighth/fourteenth centuries and range in style from simple text to elaborate combinations of script and illustration. From this evidence, it is clear that amulets represent but one of several applications of block printing in the medieval Islamic world. Judging from the number of surviving examples of all block prints, one might conclude that amulets constituted the primary activity, but the survival of a greater number of amuletic block prints may be due to factors such as being encased in protective containers, treatment not afforded to other types of block printed texts. Unfortunately, for only one of these categories of block prints has a printing matrix survived<sup>19</sup> and that one is not for an amulet.

This is to say that one must look to the amulets themselves for clues. For example, it is understood that these block printed amulets were, almost without exception, carried on one's person. Does the paper, therefore, exhibit the marks that one associates with its having been folded or rolled in such a manner that would indicate that it had been placed inside a hollow metal pendant or a leather pouch which was then hung around a person's neck or in some other way worn on the body?<sup>20</sup> Many of the amulets do indeed carry fold marks

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*cal Aspects of Printing and Publishing in Languages of the Middle East: Papers from the Third Symposium on the History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East, University of Leipzig, September 2008*, ed. Geoffrey Roper, (Islamic Manuscripts and Books 4), (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1–16.

- 17 Janine Sourdel-Thomine and Dominique Sourdel, "Nouveaux documents sur l'histoire religieuse et social de Damas au moyen Âge," *Revue des Études Islamiques* 32 (1964): 1–25; Sourdel-Thomine and Sourdel, "Une collection medieval de certificats de pèlerinage à la Mekke conserves à Istanbul," in *Études médiévales et patrimoine Turc*, Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, eds. (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1983), 167–271, and Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Certificats de pèlerinage d'époque Ayyoubide* (Paris: Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2006), 227–245, 348–354.
- 18 Şule Aksoy and Rachel Milstein, "A Collection of Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Hajj Certificates," in *M. Uğur Derman 65th Birthday Festschrift*, ed. Irvin Cemil Schick (Istanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi, 2000), 101–134.
- 19 See Josef von Hammer Purgstall, "Sur un Passage Curieux de *L'hathet*," *Journal Asiatique* 4<sup>e</sup> serie, 20 (Aug.–Sept. 1852), 254 where an image of this object is shown. Whether the object is still extant and, if so, where it is preserved, has not been determined.
- 20 Talismans, particularly textual magical formulations, have been used in a variety of ways in addition to being carried about one's person. Such uses would include—but not be limited to—dissolving or soaking a talismanic text in water so that its "magical" power might be ingested or allowing food or beverage to come in contact with a magic formula inscribed

indicating that they were intended to be placed inside a container of some sort. Proof for this may be found in at least two collections. A block printed amulet acquired by the Agha Khan Museum was found inside a small metal container<sup>21</sup> and images of three additional block printed amulets from the Tonegawa Collection<sup>22</sup> exhibit both the metal containers and amulets with folds. It is clear from the size of the containers and the marks on the paper of the amulets that these were items meant to be borne on one's person. Finally, it should be pointed out that many of the block printed amulets bear the phrase "Man 'alaqa 'alayhī hadhā al-kitāb ..." ("Whosoever hangs upon himself this writing ...") or some variation thereof, providing convincing proof for their purpose and mode of use.<sup>23</sup>

The recent discovery by Gideon Bohak of a twelfth-century sheet of paper containing handwritten multiples of an amulet against scorpion stings suggests that the idea of mass producing amulets with a specific object or containing a specific protection was not a new one.<sup>24</sup> His research further indicates that multiple copies of amulets had been produced for some time and in a variety of media. To proceed to the employment of mechanical means to achieve the same result, in the manner of striking coins or imprinting repetitive designs on fabric or stucco, seems to us at any rate to be a logical step. And the Arabs had been involved in the creation of those items, to which the numismatic, architectural, and textile evidence of those times readily attests.

In basic terms, block printed amulets are constituted of the same materials as their handwritten cousins: paper and ink. They differ in that the ink has been applied to the surface of the paper not with the nib of a pen, but by a printing block onto which a text has been carved or incised in reverse (see Figure 7.1).

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on the interior of a bowl or vessel. On such practices, see the introduction above and, for example, T. Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society* 16 (1936), 79–127; J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem, 1987) and E. Savage-Smith, "Magic-Medicinal Bowls," *Science, Tools & Magic* 1, 72–105.

21 See Aimée Froom, *Spirit & Life: Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Aga Khan Museum Collection* (Geneva: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2007), 58, no. 30 and Anne Regourd, "Amulette et sa boîte," in *Chefs-d'œuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum [accompagne l'Exposition Chefs-d'Œuvre Islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum, Paris, Musée du Louvre, du 5 octobre 2007 au 7 janvier 2008]*, Exposition Louvre (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 5 Continents, 2007), 130–131, no. 45.

22 <https://www.amuletosdealandalus.com/BAmuletos.html>. See under the heading "Amuletos con Papeles"

23 See *Enigmatic Charms*, 73, 79, 89, 110, 161, 174, 200.

24 See Gideon Bohak, "Specimens of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic magical texts from the Cairo Genizah," in this volume. On scorpions and amulets in Islam, see Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, "The Scorpion in Muslim Folklore," *Asian Folklore Studies* 63, no. 1 (2004), 95–123.



FIGURE 7.1 Fragment of a talismanic scroll (Met. Mus. 1971.237.1)  
 © THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.  
[HTTPS://WWW.METMUSEUM.ORG/ART/](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452301)  
 COLLECTION/SEARCH/452301

The use of printing blocks to create textual amulets also permitted the inclusion of elaborate designs, decorations, and combinations of script styles. The significance of such features remains unknown at this point but I shall suggest some interpretations later.

What features is one likely to find in a medieval Muslim amulet? An amulet (*‘awadh* or *ta‘wīdh*),<sup>25</sup> must be valid to be efficacious. By validity, I refer to a talisman’s ability to effect a desired outcome. This depended, to a great extent, on the perceived authority of its creator, that the purchaser had confidence in the amulet maker’s knowledge of magic and his (or her) ability to be successful in its application. For a talisman to “work,” it must be created under specific conditions and contain certain elements or features that would ensure that the appropriate magical powers were evoked. Instructions regarding the

25 See Edward William Lane, “A-W-DH,” in *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), 2192.

procedures for producing Islamic talismans are recorded in various Arabic literary works on magic (*grimoires*), including the *Ġāyat al-Ḥakīm* (also known as the *Picatrix*), *Sirr al-Asrār*, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, *Kitāb al-Mandal al-Sulaymānī* (treated here *infra*), and *Šams al-Ma'ārif* among others. There one finds many “recipes” for talismans and amulets. They dictate, for example, the materials to be used, the time of day at which the amulet was to be made, and what rituals the creator or recipient was to perform in order to assure the talisman’s potency.<sup>26</sup>

Many theories about the origin of magical forces and their control co-existed in medieval Islam. They run from the influence of the planets and stars, to the angels and jinn, and to the inherent power of numbers and letters.<sup>27</sup> Over time the rules for creating a valid talisman under Islam changed and evolved. Early—and even some later—Islamic handwritten examples often included concepts and symbols borrowed or adopted from earlier or neighboring cultures<sup>28</sup> as well as occult “alphabets.”<sup>29</sup> Such adaptations were considered by some to be un-Islamic, even pagan, and therefore anathema to the proper practice of the religion by its adherents.

The theory that seems to be most relevant to block printed Arabic talismans is that known as *lettrism*. In brief, it holds that since all power derived from Allah, it was only through him that magic could be made to work. The one tangible source of that power available to humans—Muslims specifically—was the Qur’an, the embodiment of His power.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, its language, its words, its letters and their inherent properties, were the only licit means by which

26 For a thorough account of these works, see Liana Saif, “From *Ġāyat al-Ḥakīm* to *Šams al-Ma'ārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam,” *Arabica* 64 (2017), 297–345. Jean-Charles Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*,” in this volume.

27 See, for example, Porter, Venetia, Liana Saif and Emilie Savage-Smith, “Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic” in *Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülrü Neçipoğlu (Wiley Blackwell Companions to Art History, 12) (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 521–557.

28 See Lloyd D. Graham, “A comparison of the Seven Seals in Islamic esotericism and Jewish Kabbalah.” [https://academia.edu/5998229/A\\_comparison\\_of\\_the\\_Seven\\_Seals\\_in\\_Islamic\\_esotericism\\_and\\_Jewish\\_Kabbalah](https://academia.edu/5998229/A_comparison_of_the_Seven_Seals_in_Islamic_esotericism_and_Jewish_Kabbalah).

29 The most recognizable of these is perhaps the one exhibiting circles at the termini of the strokes and known alternatively as *lunette sigla* or *Brillenbuchstaben*. On this, see Porter, et al., “Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic,” 521–557.

30 Matthew Melvin-Koushki refers to the Qur’an and the cosmos as the “twin books” indicating that the universe is essentially textual. Both are “uncreated” or perhaps more correctly in Islamic terms the creations of Allah. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, *The Quest for a Universal Science* (PhD. diss., Yale University, 2014), 4, 25 ff.



his power could be accessed.<sup>31</sup> The only way that *Islamic* magic could be practiced, the argument went, was by invoking the word of Allah. This was taken to mean that only when talismans contained *āyāt* (s. *āya*), i.e. verses, or *sūrāt* (s. *sūra*), i.e. chapters, from the Qur'an could they call forth the power necessary to achieve the effect desired. Exactly how much Qur'anic text is necessary to make an amulet "valid" is unclear but the examples we have to hand indicate that, at a minimum, at least one *āya* or two must be included. Some block printed amulets are comprised almost exclusively of Qur'an text. Whether these should be considered "ta'wīdh" may depend on whether the *sūrāt* or *āyāt* reproduced are attested in the literature as having prophylactic or apotropaic powers. On the other hand, given the protective power ascribed to the revealed text and its unquestioned origin in the Muslim universe's one true source of authority, one might reasonably conclude that Qur'anic verses were considered *the* most effective protection one could invoke. Moreover, the use of Qur'anic text to the exclusion of any other prose, particularly any that employed questionable "magical" practices, might have been seen, at least by some Muslim religious authorities, as the most legitimate form of amuletic protection.<sup>32</sup> Indeed miniature Qur'ans intended for use as amulets are readily found.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, some sections of the Qur'an seem to feature more prominently in block printed amulets than others. In my study of fifty-five examples of Arabic block printing,<sup>34</sup> *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* verse 18 (3:18)<sup>35</sup> was the most commonly used quotation, appearing in eleven amulets, followed by the *Fātiḥa* and *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (seven amulets) and then the *Mu'awidhatayn* (*sūrāt* 113 & 114) (six amulets). In total, twenty-seven different *sūrāt* of the 114 comprising the text of the Qur'an are represented in the amulets I studied at that time. Of those

31 *ibid.*, 183 ff.

32 The legitimacy of using the text of the Qur'an as an amulet falls outside the scope of the present article. Suffice it to say that passages from the Qur'an were used to invoke divine protection upon those who carried them from very early in the Islamic period—with certain caveats. For a very useful treatment of this topic, see Travis Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur'an," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 3 (July–September 2009): 463–466.

33 See Heather Coffee, "Between Amulet and Devotion: Islamic Miniature Books in the Lilly Library," in *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*, ed. Christiane Gruber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 78–115 and the comments of Barbara Brend in her review of this work which appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2012): 163–165.

34 Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms*.

35 "There is no god but He; that is the witness of God, His Angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise."

27 chapters, most are identified as Meccan. Of these, fourteen *sūrāt* are unique occurrences in the amulets examined in that volume.

In other block prints,<sup>36</sup> (see Figure 7.2) many of which also contain Qur'anic citations, appear texts whose invocations for divine intervention begin with the word *a'ūdhu* or *u'ūdhu* ("I seek refuge [in]" or "I invoke"), forms of the root *'wdh*, and so are clearly meant to be amulets. One of these two words introduces a sentence or a number of sentences in which the danger—more commonly a list of dangers—from which the bearer is seeking protection, is stated. This feature follows in the tradition of Arabic amulets composed by hand. Edward W. Lane makes explicit reference to this practice in the entry for *a-w-dh* in his lexicon, citing several Arabic lexicographers from the medieval period as his sources.<sup>37</sup> For example, Al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 537/1143) entry for *a-w-dh* in his *Asās al-Balāgha* repeatedly cites the phrase "a'ūdhu bi-Allah" and associates the substantive form "*ta'āwidh*" (pl. of *ta'wīdh*) or "amulet" with the phrase "a'ūdhu bi-Allāh" ("I seek refuge with God").<sup>38</sup> Ibn Manẓūr's (d. 710/1311) *Lisān al-'Arab* makes a further connection of the phrase with the practice of magic and specifically with the *written* form of magic (*ta'wīdh*).<sup>39</sup>

Also often found in the block printed amulets are the *asmā' al-ḥusnā*, the so-called "Beautiful Names" of God. These may take the form of a list (see Figure 7.3), sometimes in four or more columns, occasionally composed in a grid with the names of God appearing on the diagonal within boxes (see Figure 7.4). One should read these from the lower left corner, the adjacent one from the upper right, or vice versa. Just as often, the names appear as part of the text, coming after the adjuration by which the supplicant (or amulet composer) addresses his or her request to God. In such cases the names appear in series, often interspersed with other phrases in praise of God (e.g. "Responder to prayers"). The importance of the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* for invoking divine favour or protection is clearly evidenced by an extensive section devoted to this topic in *Shams al-Ma'ārif*.<sup>40</sup>

36 See fig. 2, lines 7 & 63 for example.

37 See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*.

38 Al-Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar, *Asās al-Balāgha*. <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/>.

39 Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-'Arab*. <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/>. He explicitly cites the use of the *Mu'awidhatayn* suras in amulets.

40 *Shams al-Ma'ārif al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Maktabat Jumhūriyat Miṣr, [2005]). See particularly part 1, chapter 16, 164–205. A work originally attributed to Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Būnī, but now recognized as a compendium of works on magic. See Jan Just Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work" in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, ed. Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183–199.



FIGURE 7.2  
 Talisman with decorative text heading (P. Vindob. A.  
 Ch. 12.140)  
 © ÖSTERREICHISCHE NATIONALBIBLIOTHEK,  
 PAPYRUSSAMMLUNG



FIGURE 7.3

Fragment with list of God's Names  
(P. Vindob. A. Ch. 12.142)

© ÖSTERREICHISCHE NATION-  
ALBIBLIOTHEK, PAPYRUSSAMM-  
LUNG

Many block printed amulets also contain other elements found in the handwritten variety, continuing the traditional practices regarding the construction of protective texts. In addition to the lists or grids of the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* of varying length and sophistication exhibited in some, others have magic squares, as seen in the centre of the rosette in the top half of figure 7.5, involving numerical sums believed to invoke protections against certain insalubrious powers. Rarely, series of letters or numbers with presumably esoteric or magical powers are also seen (see Figure 7.6).

That letters of the Arabic alphabet and their numerical values held the key to the control of occult powers can be traced back as far as the 9th century CE in works attributed to the legendary Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (d. 159/815).<sup>41</sup>

41 See Saif, "From *Ġāyat al-Ḥakīm* to *Shams al-Ma'ārif*," 326 and Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-Ḥurūf* (*Epistle on Letters*) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in al-Andalus," *Journal Asiatique* 299, no. 1 (2011), 213–270.



FIGURE 7.4 Fragment with God's Names in boxes (Cambr. T-S ns. 306.27)  
REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE SYNDICS OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



FIGURE 7.5 Fragment showing “magic square” (Cambr. Univ. Mich. E 33)  
 REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE SYNDICS OF CAM-  
 BRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



FIGURE 7.6  
Complete amulet with magic numbers at bottom (Gutenberg Mus. GM 03.1 Schr.)  
© GUTENBERG-MUSEUM MAINZ

An early scholar of the medieval period, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) expressed the concept that creation was literal and that letters, specifically the opening words of the suras in the Qur'an, contained hidden powers. A second philosopher of the period, Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931), held that letters were the "foundation of creation" and that understanding their powers could allow one to influence their occult (*bāṭin*) actions<sup>42</sup> Among the most powerful letters are the so-called "mysterious letters" (*fawātiḥ* or *hurūf al-muqaṭṭa'āt*) which appear in various combinations at the beginning of fourteen Qur'anic suras. The block printed talisman held by the Gutenberg Museum contains, at its very end, the five letters that begin sūra 19 (*Maryam*): *kāf, hā', yā', 'ayn, šād*. This is the only sūra in the Qur'an to begin with this combination of letters and for this reason they are thought to hold particular magical significance.<sup>43</sup> The amulet also contains a series of numbers (31312141 (or 5?)136) in the final line. Whether these are to be read simply as discrete numbers (or as their sum—26 or 30—depending on whether the eighth number is a one or a five), or as the numerical equivalents of letters (jīm, alif, jīm, alif, bā', alif, dāl, alif (or hā'?), alif, jīm, wāw), I have been unable to determine.

A number of block printed amulets exhibit a third feature that is found in many handwritten examples. I refer here to certain geometric forms that were perceived to have magical powers or which served to reinforce the protections afforded by the text in the amulets. Such devices as frames, circles, teardrops, and five- or six-pointed stars, among other symbols, have long been part of the graphic magical repertoire. Circles and the six-pointed star were part of Jewish magic that was shared with Muslims.<sup>44</sup> These devices also appear on handwritten Arabic talismans as well as on ceramic "medicinal bowls."<sup>45</sup> The circular

42 Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, translated by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler. (Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an) (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), 74. <https://archive.org/details/TafsirAlQuranAlAzimBySahlAlTustari/page/n1/mode/2up>.

43 On the meaning of these letters, see Ebstein and Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-Ḥurūf*," 235 and *Shams al-Ma'ārif*, part 2, chapter 17, 206–209.

44 Lloyd D. Graham "The Seven Seals of Judeo-Islamic Magic: Possible Origins of the Symbols." [https://www.academia.edu/1509428/The\\_Seven\\_Seals\\_of\\_Judeo-Islamic\\_Magic\\_Possible\\_Origins\\_of\\_the\\_Symbols](https://www.academia.edu/1509428/The_Seven_Seals_of_Judeo-Islamic_Magic_Possible_Origins_of_the_Symbols) and A. Fodor, "The Rod of Moses in Arabic Magic," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1978): 1–21. Reprinted in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*. ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 103–123. The critical apparatus there is a rich source for studies on specific symbols. To my knowledge, a comprehensive examination of the figural elements in Islamic magic has yet to appear.

45 See H. Henry Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55:3 (1935), 237–256. Géza Fehérvári's *Ceramics of the Islamic World in the Tareq Rajab Museum* (London, 2000) has several examples. See pages 107, 224, 247–248, 255 and 273 among others.





FIGURE 7.7 Block-printed talismanic circular leaf (Met. Mus. 1978.546.37)

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form (see Figure 7.7), either as a figure on the amulet or as a piece of paper itself cut into a circle and bearing the amuletic text, is described in *Shams al-Ma'ārif* (ch. 19, pt. 2) as being one way to assure the power of an amulet. At least two examples of circular block printed amulets are known and other examples containing circular devices exist. Indeed, *Shams al-Ma'ārif* describes and illustrates circles with four concentric rings<sup>46</sup> and such circles composed of four rings are frequently represented in the block printed amulets.

46 *Shams al-Ma'ārif*, part 1, chapter 2.



FIGURE 7.8 Talismanic scrolls with star shapes (Left: Bayer. A. or. 2022; Right: Met. Mus. 1978.546.35)  
 © THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. [HTTPS://WWW.METMUSEUM.ORG/ART/](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452896)  
 COLLECTION/SEARCH/452896

Likewise, an eight-pointed star motif (see Figure 7.8), composed of two interlocking squares and containing textual elements is found in at least two block prints. These may also serve some magical function. Moreover, *Shams al-Ma'ārif* mentions a “teardrop” device<sup>47</sup> (see Figure 7.9) as being a form which amulets might contain to affirm their power. There are at least two examples of this in extant block prints. Both the circle and the teardrop forms generally contain text.

On the other hand, mystical letter combinations and series of numbers, commonly found in handwritten amulets where they occasionally constitute the majority of the amulet, do not seem to be so prevalent in the block printed examples. As noted above, the block print held by the Gutenberg Museum contains both, but the letters there are Qur'anic in nature and not “magical” in the sense that their esoteric power has not been ascribed to them by some practitioner of the “secret arts.” To date, the Gutenberg block print is the only example that exhibits a linear series of numbers with clearly magical purport.

47 *Shams al-Ma'ārif*, part 2, chapter 19.



**FIGURE 7.9**  
 Amulet with teardrop shape at top (Col. Univ. Papyrus 705b)  
 RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN  
 THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Magic squares containing numbers, on the other hand, are quite common in the block printed amulets.

While the block printed amulets seem, then, to conform in broad terms to the compositional patterns found in handwritten textual amulets from the same general period of time, many take the form further by virtue of the fact that they are frequently embellished with decoration (see Fig. 7.7). These decorative elements take a variety of forms and are employed in many combinations. Some decoration is textual; this is to say that a particular script style or script size (see Figure 7.10) is used to introduce or set off the main text. Kūfī script is perhaps the most commonly used script for such purposes (See Fig. 7.2). It is tempting to conclude from this use of Kūfī script that the intent of the amulet maker was to associate visually powerful monumental architectural inscriptions in this style with the power of an amulet bearing it.

In those block printed amulets that feature Kūfī sections, some eighteen or more known examples have a Kūfī section at the top of the amulet, a feature Mark Muehlhaeusler calls a “headpiece.”<sup>48</sup> As he points out, the use of Kūfī script, often rendered in reserve, seems to be intended as an aesthetic statement as much as an invocation of divine aid. In other instances, lines of Kūfī text, often comprising simple mottos or epigrams, are interspersed at more or less regular intervals throughout the text of the amulet (see Figure 7.11). In still other examples, a single line of larger text in a different script (in two cases *thuluth*) composed in outline, is arranged vertically, at right angles to the main text. The outline of the vertical line of text is comprised of parts of the letters of the horizontal text, a very sophisticated approach to block printing text (see Figure 7.12).

In addition, decorative devices such as flower petals, geometric forms, foliation, complex and occasionally elaborate frames, the artistic combination of texts in relief and bas relief, the supplementing of colours by hand after the printing process (and in one instance by printing itself) indicate an understanding of the potential for the technology to provide an aesthetic component to the product.

That medieval Muslims purchased and composed<sup>49</sup> amulets in quantity is indicated not only by the number of surviving examples, but also by works such as the *Shams al-Ma‘ārif*, which gives instructions for the composition of amulets for a variety of purposes and outcomes. This also implies that amulets were governed by a set of generally accepted conventions pertaining to their

48 Mark Muehlhaeusler, “Eight Arabic Block Prints from the Collection of Aziz S. Atiya,” *Arabica* 55, no. 5 (October 2008), 543.

49 Muehlhaeusler, “Block Prints,” 573.



FIGURE 7.10 Amulet with two script styles (Camb. T-S ar. 20.1)  
 REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE SYNDICS OF CAM-  
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FIGURE 7.11  
Talismanic scroll with Kufi text in reserve  
(Met. Mus. 1978.546.33)  
© THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF  
ART. [HTTPS://WWW.METMUSEUM.ORG/  
ART/COLLECTION/SEARCH/452893](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452893)



FIGURE 7.12  
 Amulet with vertical text in reserve  
 (Camb. Mich. E 31)  
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content and design, employed a broadly understood rhetorical grammar, and were widely sought after. On the other hand, as Muehlhaeusler has noted, the market for amulets was, at least at one point in the eleventh century, rather weak.<sup>50</sup> According to Maṣṣūr ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī (d. 420/1030), a writer of the time, amulet vendors were having trouble moving their product.

Regarding the examples of medieval Arabic block printing that we have considered here, the evidence suggests that they are indeed amulets and were employed as such by those who obtained them. They contain text and textual formulae consistent with handwritten amulets, including Qur'anic citations and the *asmā' al-ḥusnā*. Some also exhibit geometric forms—circles, teardrops, stars—that are considered important components in amulets. Some have magic squares. Many, if not most, also contain typical expressions of invocation for divine assistance or favour. While the block printed amulets do not consistently contain some of the features found in handwritten amulets—mystical letters or numbers particularly are almost entirely lacking—they do show many of the other features one expects in medieval Islamic amulets.

The use of decorative elements, geometric designs, vegetal devices and even colour as frames and text divisions strongly suggests that such enhancements were meant to appeal to a specific clientele for the amulets. Evidence for the importance of aesthetics in Islamic culture in general is seen everywhere, from buildings to manuscripts, and clearly the block printed amulets were considered an arena for artistic expression.

This noteworthy difference between the handwritten and block printed amulets, the extensive and elaborate nature of the decorative features found on many of the block prints, points to an attempt to appeal to a cultured, urbane consumer. Decorative features are not required for an amulet to be considered effective, at least not insofar as the authorities on amulets are concerned and whether this decoration was believed to enhance the power or efficacy of the block printed amulets is open to speculation. Granted, some of the decorations do have a function, as I have noted above, but others do not. The use of Kūfī script, for example, is not necessary to improve the protective power of an amulet, nor is the use of two or more script styles or foliated borders. The only reason for the inclusion of such features must be to increase the visual appeal of the item to a prospective buyer or user.

Moreover, the creation of such decoration, at least in the design phase, must have been very labor-intensive and therefore the creators must have seen sufficient if not substantial value in including it. Might one see in the elaborate

<sup>50</sup> Muehlhaeusler, 573–574.



decorations an attempt to address the weak market for handwritten amulets that seems to have existed in the eleventh century? Of course, the use of decoration is not universally found on the block printed amulets but this may be an indication of a range of technical proficiency or skill on the part of the maker. In other words, the undecorated or less decorated amulets may be earlier examples representing a less developed technology. Alternatively, the inclusion or absence of such features may suggest a range of quality offered by the vendor.

In any case, the method of production indicates a level of skill associated with a specialist or group of specialists which, in turn, implies an urban, commercial setting and concomitantly a critical mass of sophisticated, cultured buyers. In other words, block printed amulets were created to meet the need of a clientele that associated an amulet's efficacy not only with an appropriate textual and symbolic content, but also with an aesthetic element. An amulet with an eloquently composed supplication might well prompt the intervention of the Unseen Power; one that also appealed to its artistic sense may have sought to awaken its affection too.

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**PART 3**

*Collecting and Collections*





# Arabic Magical Texts in Original Documents: A Papyrologist Answers Five Questions You Always Wanted to Ask

*Ursula Hammed*

## 1 Theoretical Remark: Magic and Islam

In theory, Islam officially acknowledges the existence of different kinds of practices that could be called “magical.” The Qur’an mentions magic in several instances, but sometimes without a clear definition of the term. Dorpmüller sums this issue up by saying:

While the Qur’an condemns the practice of magic in general, it does not say explicitly which practices are illicit. Consequently, no wonder that discussions about the classification and judgment of magical practices erupt over and over again.<sup>1</sup>

The most famous and important instances of magic in the Qur’an are as follows: First there is negative magic, aggressive magic (*siḥr*) mentioned in the Qur’an as being used for separating couples (Q 2/102) and as something one needs protection from (by seeking refuge in God, Q 113). The Qur’an also mentions the evil eye (Q 113) and accounts of jinn are found abundantly in it. As cited above, manifold practices that might be classified as “magical” or somehow connected to a supernatural realm, have existed and still exist, and discussions about their legitimacy abound, both historical and modern.<sup>2</sup> As an example, the *ruqya*, meaning all (exorcism) spells for curing consequences of the evil eye, aggressive magic, and jinn possession, with some Qur’anic verses

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- 1 Sabine Dorpmüller, *Religiöse Magie in „Buch der probaten Mittel“: Analyse, kritische Edition, und Übersetzung des Kitāb al-Muğarrabāt von Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf as-Sanūsī (gest. um 895/1490)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 4 (translated from German by me, Ursula Hammed).
  - 2 Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī uses lengthy *ḥadīth* quotes, many transmitted by Ibn Ḥanbal, in order to back his argument that using amulets/talismans is a sign of unbelief and polytheism (*kufṛ wa-shirk*) Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām fī l-Islām*, 22nd edition, (*al-Qāhira: unknown*, 1997), 213–215.



specifically recommended by Prophet Muhammad,<sup>3</sup> has been given the labels *sharʿī* and *ghayr sharʿī* or *shirkī* (lawful or unlawful/polytheistic according to Islamic law) according to its content.<sup>4</sup> A “lawful” *ruqya* should consist exclusively of Qurʿanic verses and prayers from the prophetic tradition, whereas the *ghayr sharʿī* versions might include invocations of angels or jinn, or unintelligible utterances.<sup>5</sup> Calling upon other entities than God and therefore ascribing some power to them can be regarded as unlawful or even *shirk* (polytheism) according to Islamic theology. As illustrated by the example of the *ruqya*, many practices constitute intersectional areas covering part of *ʿaqīda* (orthodox doctrine), medicine and magic at the same time. Likewise, the belief in angels and jinn is unshakably laid down in the Qurʿan and therefore an indisputable part of Islamic doctrine, but using the names of said creatures in exorcisms or acts of magic is oftentimes considered *shirk*, since it implies ceding some powers over man to them; powers that ultimately belong to God only.

It becomes clear that the boundaries between *ʿaqīda*, traditional medicine (*ṭibb nabawī*), and all forms of what could be called Islamic magic are permeable.<sup>6</sup> Their delimitation and the (virtual) size of the overlapping areas between them depends on the practitioner’s view of magic, medicine, and ultimately of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Question 1: What Is a Documentary Magical Text?

The following remarks are based on mostly Arabic documentary texts with magical content from late antique and early medieval times, most of them from Egypt, many of them on papyrus and paper, though other materials might

3 al-Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīḥ* vi 187–188 & al-Dārimī: *Sunan* iv 2128.

4 Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Jūrānī, *al-Ruqya al-sharʿiyya min al-kitāb wa-l-sunna l-nabawīyya*, 4th edition (*Ammān: unknown 2013/1434*), 84–87.

5 A popular (modern) Egyptian *ruqya* compares the evil eye to agricultural tools harming the body and orders the evil eye to exit from all body parts of the victim. The power of God is invoked for achieving the desired result, and puppets representing the evildoer are made and pierced with pins and/or burnt (oral communication from a practitioner).

6 Similar thoughts are shared by Tawfik Canaan. See: Tawfik Canaan “The decipherment of Arabic talismans,” *Berytus Archaeological Studies* 4 (1937): 73.

7 In the contribution to this volume by Hazem Abbas Ali examples are discussed of healing/exorcising rituals using Qurʿanic verses only and those that call upon other powers than God. Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali, “Casting Discord: An Unpublished Spell from the Egyptian National Library,” in this volume; The contribution of Petra Sijpesteijn to this volume shows how the boundaries between magic and medicine are very fluid. Petra M. Sijpesteijn, “Arabic Medical-Magical Manuscripts: A Living Tradition,” in this volume.

also be mentioned. A documentary text is in our case an original text (mostly handwritten), a document that conveys direct historical information without embedding it into a literary narrative. It does not give us narrations about events or circumstances of times past, but a direct documentation of them. The advantage of documentary studies is that normative, pejorative, or other manipulative elements that literary accounts might bear, can be excluded in our sources from a textual point of view. However, the modern excavation and preservation context and the editor's own academic or personal background can impact the way the documents are presented.

A "magical" content in a document means, in a very basic definition, all contents based on

a complex of belief and action on the basis and by means of which persons and groups may attempt to control their environment in such a way as to achieve their ends, the efficacy of such control being untested and in some cases untestable by the methods of empirical science.<sup>8</sup>

Magical means availing oneself of a powerful entity (in many cases God) in order to change one's own or another's situation. This entity's power is meant to be pulled into substances that are then regarded as invested with "magical" properties, either because they represent said entity's power, like religious texts and symbols, or because some of their characteristics seem mysterious or inexplicable and are consequently being traditionally regarded as "magical."

Magical objects are often used in the form of amulets (most commonly *ḥamā'il*, *ḥijāb*, *ḥirz*, *tamīma* or *ta'wīdh(a)* in Arabic<sup>9</sup>) and/or talismans (*ṭilsam* or *ṭilasm* in Arabic, from the Greek *telesma*<sup>10</sup>). Here we will be dealing with documents with writing that do not receive magical relevance by their material and/or form (except perhaps for drawings), but by their written content. These will be called "amulets" here, although not by conviction, but out of papyrological convention. It was probably out of a simple lack of interest in magical texts that Arabic papyrologists started using the term "amulet" without further

8 Edmund Ronald Leach, "Magic." In *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, eds. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb (London: Tavistock Publications, 1964.), 398–399.

9 Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow. "Magie im Islam. Gegenstand, Geschichte und Diskurs," in *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt. Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, edited by Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 13. idem. "Terminologischer Appendix," 596, 605.

10 loc.cit.

consideration, and the following generations of researchers have carried on using it. Budge's definition is as follows:

To us an 'amulet' is an object which is endowed with magical powers, and which of its own accord uses these powers ceaselessly on behalf of the person who carries it [...], to protect him and his belongings from the attacks of evil spirits or the Evil Eye. [...] The object of the talisman is quite different from that of the amulet. The amulet is supposed to exercise its protective powers on behalf of individual or thing continually, whereas the talisman is only intended to perform one specific task. [...] But the thin line which divides the amulet from the talisman has rarely been observed [...]. And the experts are not agreed on the subject.<sup>11</sup>

Like Budge, Canaan uses the term "amulet" for objects that are *per se* magical and "talisman" for objects with protective writing.<sup>12</sup> The papyrological agreement on calling magical texts "amulets" should probably be thought over and revised. Porter et al. even say that the terms "amulet" and "talisman" can be used interchangeably.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the decision if the Arabic papyri discussed here should be called amulets or talismans is difficult and depends on which aspect of their contents and life cycle one focuses on most. Since they were written in response to a specific situation, composed of texts specifically chosen for a purpose, the term "talisman" seems more appropriate, and fits the general definition that is promoted in the introduction of the current volume. Depending on what happened once their primary purpose was fulfilled, their life span might have been extended to an amulet in the sense that the efficacy of the Qur'anic verses then served the aim of general protection. It is clear that the matter deserves discussion, which can however not be undertaken at this place. As is often the case, additional studies of Arabic papyri are needed in order to gain a deeper insight into the use and life cycle of papyrus amulets.

Amulets worn on the body were used mainly for protection and less as a cure. Especially apotropaic drawings of animals (scorpions, snakes, etc.) appear often in amulets. Apart from these amulets for individual persons, there are also protective charms for buildings. Ibn Kannān's account of amulets stored in

11 Ernest A.T. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New York: University Books, 1961), 13–14.

12 Tawfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," *Berytus Archaeological Studies*, no. 4 (1937): 69–110 (1937) and (1938): 141–152.

13 Venetia Porter, Liana Saif, and Emilie Savage-Smith, "Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, eds. Finbarr Barry Flood, Gulru Necipoglu, and Dana Arnold (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 542.

small compartments over pillars of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus could be an example for this,<sup>14</sup> although it is also possible that the protection was primarily meant to be for the *waqf* documents kept in the same place. He mentions that the amulets were against bats, birds and bugs which allows for both uses, as a protection for the whole mosque as well as for the documents kept in it. Sadan has suggested that the mentioned compartments make up some kind of Geniza,<sup>15</sup> which, though an intriguing thought, seems less likely in the face of the more convenient and also simpler explanations just mentioned.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 Question 2: Where Can I Find Magical Texts?

Early Islamic magical documents on different kinds of material are being kept in papyrus collections worldwide. The Austrian National Library in Vienna is renowned for preserving the world's largest collection of Arabic papyri as a whole (more than 100,000 pieces, though many fragmentary), followed by Cairo and Berlin. Nonetheless, this tells us nothing about the number of existing magical texts, of which other collections might have higher numbers than the Vienna collection. Unfortunately, one can only hazard a guess at the total existing number of Arabic magical documents. It probably amounts to 100,000 pieces worldwide, but this assumption is still uncertain. The reasons for this situation are manifold. While some collections have stock that has never been sighted (properly or at all), others follow restrictive access policies making a thorough screening of the material impossible. Fortunately, some collections make their documents or at least part of them accessible online, among them the Vienna collection, the Michaelides collection at Cambridge University Library, the Heidelberg collection, and the University of Utah collection (founded by Aziz S. Atiya).<sup>17</sup> The same can be said about the Geniza material. Much of it is accessible online; the two most prominent collections for Geniza

14 Muḥammad Ibn-ʿĪsā Ibn Kannān, *Al-mawākib al-islāmīyya, fi 'l-mamālik wa-'l-maḥāsin al-shāmīya*, vol. 1 edited by Ismāʿīl Ḥikmat (Dammām: unknown, 1998), 404.

15 Joseph Sadan, "Genizah and Genizah-like practices in Islamic and Jewish Traditions," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43 (1986): 42.

16 Muranyi proposes a similar view. Miklos Muryani, "Geniza or ḥubus. Some observations on the library of the great mosque in Qayrawān," *JSAI* 42 (2015): 183–199.

17 For the Vienna collection: [http://search.obvsg.at/primolibweb/action/search.do?dscnt=0&scp.scps=scope%3A%28ONB\\_aleph\\_onb%29&tab=default\\_tab&mode=Basic&vid=ONB](http://search.obvsg.at/primolibweb/action/search.do?dscnt=0&scp.scps=scope%3A%28ONB_aleph_onb%29&tab=default_tab&mode=Basic&vid=ONB), for Cambridge: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/neareastern/michaelides.html>, for Heidelberg: [http://zaw-papy.zaw.uni-heidelberg.de/fini/xsl/Arabisch/home\\_xsl](http://zaw-papy.zaw.uni-heidelberg.de/fini/xsl/Arabisch/home_xsl), for Utah: <http://mwdl.org/collections/1168.php>.

texts are the Taylor-Schechter collection at Cambridge University Library and the Jewish Theological Seminar collection in New York.

Papyri and other documentary texts are still being sold at auctions. Consequently, many end up in private collections that are at most times inaccessible for researchers.

All this information is only needed when one is looking for unpublished magical texts. Fortunately, some Arabic magical texts have been published, although their number is very small. In this respect, they share the fate of all Arabic literary and semi-literary original texts from Early Islamic times. Of all published Arabic papyri, 95 percent are of documentary nature, being tax lists, letters, decrees, legal documents etc. The remaining five percent of published Arabic papyri are all literary or semi-literary. This unspecific definition includes a very wide range of texts, among them Qur'an, hadith, other religious and "profane" sciences, historiography, poetry and ultimately also magical texts. The fact that all semi-literary and literary texts, no matter how disparate their contents, writers and backgrounds may be, have always been and are still being thrown into this broad category without further distinction, is a vivid expression of the lack of attention that these texts get from the papyrological community.

Nevertheless, some magical papyri have been published, though truthfully speaking most of them in volumes describing whole collections or archives that so happened to have magical texts among their material. This is true for the Rylands papyri described by Margoliouth, for the Philadelphia University Library papyri described by Levi della Vida, for the Viennese papyri in *PERF* and even more for the Geniza finds, whose magical material was, as Cohen assumes, to a large extent deliberately, looked over by Goitein.<sup>18</sup>

Among the most elaborate editions of magical papyrus documents from early Islamic and early medieval times are P.Bad. V, edited by Bilabel and Grohmann, and Diem's "Magische Texte." Schaefer's edition of a large corpus of block printed amulets is likewise important, although not as a direct source for handwritten amulets, but as a reference for textual structure, recurring composition patterns and content, let alone the social and cultural context that both papyrus amulets and their block-printed counterparts share.<sup>19</sup>

However, there is still no comprehensive study of Arabic magical texts. Neither amulets, nor recipes, nor other magical texts have in any way been studied systematically. Many statements on magical documents must therefore

18 Mark Cohen, "Goitein, Magic, and the Geniza," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2006): 3.

19 Karl R. Schaefer: *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

remain speculations, especially regarding the religious, social, cultural and educational background of their writers. Studies of the Geniza material in this respect have already brought astonishing results,<sup>20</sup> and some of the Coptic material leads into the same direction (cf. p. 10 and Fn 34). It is only to be expected that similar proofs for cross-cultural transmission of traditions and knowledge will show themselves in Arabic magical texts on papyrus, on the condition that they be properly studied. A comprehensive study of a large text corpus would also enable us to see which texts were most widely and frequently used. These texts could then be examined concerning different kinds of writing mistakes. If some mistakes occur frequently, then research on the reasons for this phenomenon could follow. Since many magical documents consist of Qur'anic verses, the mentioned potential study could even touch upon the Qur'anic text, its function and its use in late antique and early medieval Egypt.

#### 4 Question 3: What Do Magical Texts Look Like?

Due to our still ongoing need for a comprehensive study of Arabic magical papyri, quantitative methods like a classification of the texts according to layout can only be undertaken preliminarily. A very basic and simple step is separating magical texts in those that do, and those that do not give optical hints toward their content. There are magical texts that are easily discernible by their representations of magical symbols or drawings, while others are written in a nondescript, casual style devoid of magical symbols, just like the writing in contemporaneous letters, lists or notes.<sup>21</sup> Even if no magical signs or symbols occur in a text, the optical impression that the script gives, can point to a magical content. Literary works on magic, like pages from recipe books, can be written in typical "book hands," meaning angular styles often used for literary texts like hadith. A nice example for this style can be found in P.Vind.inv. A.P. 10002, which has pages from a magical recipe book (presumably from the 3rd/9th century). Magic also calls for styles that express the texts' mysterious contents already optically. Tiny, crammed and therefore illegible writing is obviously "magical" at first sight,<sup>22</sup> the same can be said about lines or words written

20 Gideon Bohak, "Greek, Coptic, and Jewish Magic in the Cairo Genizah," *BASP* 36 (1999): 27–44.

21 The contribution to this volume by Hazem Abbas Ali, shows an example of a magical text on papyrus with optical hints. Abbas, "Casting discord," in this volume.

22 As seen in P.Vind.inv. A.P. 6175.

above each other, which hinders legibility, but underlines the special and enigmatic character of the text.<sup>23</sup>

In the special case of P.Vind.inv. A.P. 7719<sup>r</sup>, an Arabic papyrus amulet from the 3rd c. AH (9th c. CE, dated according to paleography), the text (Q 2/137, 7/182, 112) has been written in an archaic style that resembles inscriptional Kūfī.<sup>24</sup> The reason for this can be found in the character of inscriptions. Practitioners of magic have always sought to increase their texts' efficacy, a purpose for which an imitation of an inscription is suitable, since inscriptions demonstrate the power of the ruling elite. Behind the use of a script known from inscriptions stands the wish to pull some of the rulers' power into one's own magical "products." Amulets with Kūfī writing style generally seem to be quite frequent.<sup>25</sup>

Another peculiar, eye-catching way of amplifying the magical properties of Qur'anic verses or other religious utterances is writing them in separate consonants, which is based on the belief that splitting religiously relevant words into their single, separate consonants helps to evoke each letter's special power.

In combination with the Qur'anic text, these conspicuous, optically discernible strategies are being used in order to multiply the magical properties of the document.

A not originally Arabic element found in magical texts is the *tabula ansata*, the "tablet with handles." It has a long tradition in the Greco-Roman world, having been used originally for writing tablets. Its shape was then adapted as frame for inscriptions and also for magical documents.<sup>26</sup> Coptic magical documents have made use of it,<sup>27</sup> and apparently the same can be said for Arabic magical texts. The only specimen hitherto known to have a (probably) magical, Arabic text inside a *tabula ansata* is P.Vind.inv. A.P. 10042, published as P.Bad. V 151 by Grohmann, who could not read all of it. The text has, according to Grohmann, the *shahāda* and at least part of Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (Q 112) and was written into a vertically aligned *tabula ansata* that is framed by a zigzag pattern. It is divided into sections by horizontal lines, which could remind readers of the *tabula ansata*'s use for writing tablets in antiquity, making P.Vind.inv. A.P. 10042 an imitation of a school exercise or the like. However, when keeping in mind that Islamic epigraphy has also used the tablet with handles as decorative

23 As seen in P.Vind.inv. A.Ch. 15777.

24 Adolf Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie* ii (Wien: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachf., 1967–1971), 196–197; ii 72.

25 Porter et al., "Medieval Islamic Amulets," 537.

26 Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Tabula ansata in der islamischen Epigraphik und Ornamentik* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1915), 192–193.

27 British Museum EA 56472 is a stone engraved with a figure standing on a *tabula ansata* that contains a Coptic magical text.

frame, a new explanation for its use in the mentioned papyrus can be offered. Unfortunately, the papyrus is torn at the lower margin that could have shown if the drawn frame should represent a tablet with one or two handles. A tablet with one handle would mean the imitation of a writing tablet, whereas two handles would represent an imitation of an epigraphic inscription or maybe already of another magical text—either Arabic or other—that had used this peculiar shape for its special purpose.<sup>28</sup> The assumption that the *tabula ansata* was used in magic in the Arabic tradition is backed by small copper tablets found in Fustāt.<sup>29</sup> Their shape closely resembles the layout of P.Vind.inv. A.P. 10042 and their small size might hint at their use as pendants with magical properties. The similarities in the layout of the papyrus and the copper amulets might suggest that the former served as a model for metal amulets. Similarly, the British Museum houses a talismanic brass plate dated to the 19th century CE in the form of a *tabula ansata* with one handle (OA 2606).<sup>30</sup> Apparently this layout was ascribed some kind of talismanic character, which it kept until modern times.

## 5 Question 4: What Do Magical Texts Contain?

Above, magical texts were divided into two categories according to their layout, meaning on the one hand texts whose outer shape makes their magical content very clear and on the other hand “plain” texts that do not hint at their magical purpose by means of their form. Similarly, magical texts can also be categorized in respect of their content. Accordingly, two groups of “instructive” and “active” magical texts can be separated. By the first category I mean all recipes and other texts that explain how to carry out magic or that talk about magic. They lack the performative aspect. Then the second group is made up by “active” magical texts. By and through them magic is performed. Talismans and amulets fall into this category.

Below, we will see documentary evidence for possible contents of both instructive and active magical texts. Pertinent works of magic specify more

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- 28 Thomann has argued on similar lines. Johannes Thomann, “Arabische magische Dokumente. Typen, visuelle Gestaltung und Traditionslinien.” In *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt. Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, eds. Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 227.
- 29 Jere L. Bacharach and Elizabeth Rodenbeck, “Metal Objects,” in *Fustāt Finds: Beads, Coins, Medical Instruments, Textiles, and Other Artifacts from the Awad Collection* ed. Jere L. Bacharach (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 199; pl. 9.
- 30 Image in Porter et al., “Medieval Islamic Amulets,” 539, fig. 21.5.



possible textual elements, but only elements attested in documentary texts, preferably on papyrus, will be mentioned here.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the examples presented so far, there are documents that have probably been wrongly categorized as magical. Not every papyrus (or paper, or other piece of material) that contains Qur'anic verses was necessarily meant to be a magical text. Most scholars who came across pieces of material with some Qur'anic text or other (Islamic) religious content marked the pieces as "magical" and moved on to topics of interest to them that mostly did not cover the field of magical documents in any way. For instance, Levi della Vida has classified P.Philad.Arab. 148 and 149 as magical because they contain a decorative pattern with star-like shapes most probably meant to separate Qur'anic verses or even parts of hadith from each other (uncertain due to the document's fragmentary status). Grohmann has included P.Berl.inv.Arab. 8505 in P.Bad. V as number 143, regardless of the absence of any indication for the magical use of the Qur'anic verses on the papyrus. It contains al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) and the Sūras al-Ikhlāṣ until al-Nās (Q 112–114). It is true that these verses have often been used for protection charms, exorcisms and other magical purposes, but if there is absolutely no indication for this, why suggest so? The same doubt has been uttered by Torallas Tovar and Martín-Hernández for Greek and Coptic texts. The mere appearance of verses or other words often being used for magic in a text does not justify the text's uncritical classification as "magical."<sup>32</sup> Khan has classified many Qur'an fragments as texts for private study.<sup>33</sup> In other words, some of the "amulets" found in editions or descriptions of Arabic papyri might as well be notes, documents for private devotional practice or parts of hadith texts without direct magical purpose. Again, only a comprehensive handbook on magical documents in the Early and Classical Islamic period could clarify the easily undertaken, but oftentimes problematic definition of Arabic magical texts.

31 Detailed descriptions of elements hitherto unattested in early Islamic documents can be found in Hans Alexander Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der muhammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1930), 114–116; 156–158, and Canaan "Decipherment," 98–101; 144–150.

32 Raquel Martín Hernández, and Sofia Torallas Tovar, "The Use of the *Ostrakon* in Magical Practice in Late Antique Egypt. Magical Handbooks vs. Material Evidence," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 80, no. 2 (2014): 790–795.

33 Geoffrey Khan, "Standardisation and Variation in the Orthography of Hebrew Bible and Arabic Qur'an Manuscripts," in *The Role of the Book in the Civilisations of the Near East, Proceedings of the conference held at the Royal Irish academy and the Chester Beatty library, Dublin, 29 June–1 July 1998*, eds. John Barlett, David Wasserstein, and David James. (Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 1993), 57.

As already mentioned, Qur'anic verses are extremely popular in Arabic magical texts, especially in amulets. Naturally, the word of God is the most powerful speech imaginable in Islam and therefore predestined for protection from and defense against harmful situations or acts.<sup>34</sup> Some verses are being regarded as especially powerful, either because their text self-explanatorily states so, or because they have been classified as such in the prophetic tradition.

The last two sūras of the Qur'an (Q 113 and 114, al-Falaq and al-Nās) are commonly known as *al-mu'awwidhatān*, "the two exorcist suras". Their wording already points to the protection they can offer, i.e. protection against witchcraft, the evil eye and jinn. They appear predominantly in amulets, matched only by al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), Āyat al-Kursī (Q 2/255), and al-Ikhlāṣ (Q 112). The hadiths can tell us why these three are predestined for protective and/or healing purposes. Al-Fātiḥa, apart from being the opening chapter of the Qur'an, is the best *ruqya* according to Prophet Muhammad.<sup>35</sup> In another hadith, the Prophet calls it "cure against every disease."<sup>36</sup> Āyat al-Kursī, the Throne Verse, is mentioned in the hadith as the most powerful verse revealed by God.<sup>37</sup> Another verse that often appears is Q 2/137, but its frequency in magical texts is, other than with the *āyāt* just mentioned, not due to advice from Prophet Muhammad, but due to its content on the one hand, but also and maybe more due to one word it contains: *fa-sayakfīkahum* is, for an Arabic word, unusually long. It is this strange, almost mysterious property that makes it interesting to practitioners of magic.

Other popular verses are Q 2/284–286, Q 9/129–130, Verses from Q 36,<sup>38</sup> and other verses not specifically recommended in the hadith or elsewhere. Many of these verses are being used according to their content, e.g. verses mentioning being saved by God and guided towards the light could appear in an amulet meant to ensure safe travel and the like.

Apart from verses from the Qur'an, names of angels and/or demons have their place in magical texts. The text of P.Vind.inv. A. P. 10002r (a recipe for a love charm<sup>39</sup>) invokes several names of angels (Ruqiyā'īl, Mikā'īl and others) meant

34 See Kristina Stock, *Sprache als ein Instrument der Macht. Strategien der arabischen politischen Rhetorik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 19–20.

35 al-Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīḥ* vi 187–188.

36 al-Bayhaqī: *Shu'ab al-īmān* iv 42 ("Fātiḥat al-kitāb shifā' min kulli dā").

37 al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān* iv 55 'qāla qultu yā rasūla llāhi ayyumā āyatīn unzilat 'alayka a'ẓamu? Qāla allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūm'.

38 Sūrat Yā Sīn (Q 36) is called "the heart of the Qur'an" and one reading of it is said to equal reading the whole Qur'an (al-Dārimī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Abd al-Raḥmān, *Musnad al-Dārimī al-ma'rūf bi-Sunan al-Dārimī*, edited by Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī (Al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Mughnī 1421/2000), iv 2149).

39 Published in Ursula Bsees (Hammed), "Dokumentarische Materialien zur Magie aus der

to help in achieving the desired result. Another Viennese papyrus, P.Vind.inv. A.P. 399, uses the expression “obey me so I can accomplish [this] matter [of mine].”<sup>40</sup> The papyrus’ fragmentary condition does not allow for more precise statements of the addressed entity, but it is imaginable that jinn were meant.

Magical symbols appear frequently in magical texts. There are simple stars (five-pointed or six-pointed) or bullets (see P.Vind.inv. A.P. 7719<sup>r</sup>), but also more complex sequences of signs like the so-called “eyeglass-letters.” These mysterious signs’ primary characteristic is their shape that resembles joined strokes ending in circles. They are called *qalfatīriyyāt*, *falaqṭīriyyāt* or similar names in Arabic, which is an obvious hint at their origin in another magical tradition, more precisely the Greek tradition, from which not only their use, but also their name *charaktēres* was inferred into the Arabic language and magical tradition.<sup>41</sup> They occur often in Arabic magical texts on papyrus, paper and parchment.<sup>42</sup>

The separation of Qur’anic verses’ consonants has already been mentioned, but Arabic letters can also be used for magic in other ways. Some Suras of the Qur’an begin with short combinations of letters whose meaning still remains unexplained. Although there are different suggestions, there is no final solution on which scholars agree. These mysterious consonants that Muslims have always been trying to understand are often used in a magical context. The mystery about their meaning makes them ideal candidates for magical use.

Then there are combinations of Arabic letters that make no sense at first sight. They are often composed of *ṭā*, *lām*, *hā*, *ṣād* and *yā* and commonly called *al-ṭahātil*. Different combinations of them are apparently used for different purposes. In P.Quseir 82, they are mentioned in a text giving magical advice to a woman who wants to give birth to a boy. P.Vind.inv. A.P. 10002r has a combination of these letters in a recipe that is most probably a love charm aimed at a woman.

Drawings appear in Arabic magical texts, although in much less elaborate form than in neighboring magical traditions like the Coptic tradition. However, apotropaic drawings of snakes, crocodiles, dogs and first and foremost scorpions occur abundantly in Arabic magical texts.<sup>43</sup>

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Frühzeit des Islams. Forschungsfragen und Forschungsansätze,” in *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt. Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, eds. Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Pielow, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 213–219.

40 *ʾaṭīnī ḥattā ʾaḡḏīya ḥā[ḡatī]*, transcription and translation of the unpublished text by me (Ursula Hammed).

41 Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 150–151; 158–167.

42 Examples are P.Vind.inv. A.P. 1762, P.Vind.inv. A.Ch. 15777, P.Vind.inv. A.Perg. 33.

43 E.g. P.Vind.inv. A.P. 1762, P.Bad. V 163c (= PERF 1013) & 164 (both on paper) and many more.

So far, no magical squares have been attested on papyrus, but they appear on paper documents, both handwritten and block-printed. There is even one example of magical squares on an Arabic ostrakon. This remarkable piece of evidence was edited by Canova,<sup>44</sup> who suggested that it had been hung up in a house. It measures 30×18 cm and has the words of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* in separate consonants. Dating the piece is quite hard, we only know for sure that the place it was found at was abandoned by the local population by the third century AH. We can see this date either as *terminus ante quem*, meaning that the ostrakon was in use before that time, which is compatible with Canova's suggestion that the text was used as an amulet for a house. Another thought would be regarding the date as a *terminus post quem* and suggesting that the text was brought to the place it was found at later in the course of a magical ritual. Still, small holes on the upper part of the ostrakon show that it had actually been affixed in some way at some point and so Canova's statements on its use seem very plausible.

Magical squares on paper often contain some of God's 99 Beautiful Names or numbers with a special meaning in magic. Examples for such documents are P.Vind.inv. A.Ch. 14007 (= PERF 1255) and P.Vind.inv. A.Ch. 5606 (block-printed). Other textual elements in magical squares are not yet attested in documents from the Early and Classical Islamic period.<sup>45</sup>

## 6 Question 5: Why Are Magical Texts Relevant?

As already mentioned above, documentary sources are unrivalled witnesses of their time, while accounts transmitted in literary works are at risk of being prone to idealizations, projections or normative tendencies from the side of their author. The challenge in documentary texts lies in the contextualization of the information conveyed by them.

First, magical texts show clearly that what is often subsumed under the broad term "Arabic culture" is in fact a cultural fabric that has absorbed influences from numerous neighboring cultures that have all left distinctive footprints.

These footprints start to show when one looks into traditions of *mise-en-page* in magical texts. Thomann has taken upon himself the task of tracing three kinds of "magical layout" to their non-Arabic origins. He concludes that

44 Giovanni Canova, "Magia e religione in un ostrakon arabo," *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 27 (2004) 33–44.

45 Canaan, "Decipherment," 79–90.

the use of the *tabula ansata* and the so-called “eyeglass-letters” have been inferred from the classical, Greco-Roman tradition, whereas spiral writing most probably comes from the Sasanian tradition. Magical squares (and geomantic figures) have been borrowed from the (Central) Asian divinatory and magical tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Not only the layout of Arabic magical documents reveals influences from other magical traditions, some of the texts’ contents can be found in similar or almost identical representations in other documents. When considering papyri, especially the neighboring Greek and Coptic tradition have been profitable sources for practitioners of magic in an Arabic context. It is almost superfluous to say that apotropaic scorpion amulets on papyrus found on Egyptian soil have existed long before the Islamic conquest, but also textual elements like expressions demanding that the magic should happen quickly (“now, now, quick, quick”) have their roots in magical traditions practiced in Egypt before.<sup>47</sup>

This kind of cultural one-way influence is remarkable enough, but the matter is in fact more complex. Just like the Arabic magical tradition has adopted originally “foreign” magical practices, neighboring magical traditions have in turn borrowed from Arabic magic.

The Coptic magical text P.Vind.inv. K 11088 (recipes, 10th or 11th century CE) has a line of separate Arabic consonants. Put together, their meaning could allude to a biblical phrase about evil leaving the house.<sup>48</sup> While a Christian text has been used according to the religious background of the scribe and the amulet, the Arabic style of magnifying the consonants’ efficacy by separating them—originally meant for the powerful word of God, the Qur’an—has been taken for this Coptic magical text. We could therefore speak of a “double adaptation”: Not only was the use of isolated Arabic consonants inferred into a Coptic recipe, but it was also “christianized” by using the consonants in a sentence close to a biblical passage. This means no less than a transfer of magical know-how across linguistic and confessional borders.

Another important source for cross-cultural and interreligious influences in the field of magic can be found in Geniza documents. P.Cam.inv. T-S K 1.56 fol. 2<sup>b</sup>, edited by Bohak,<sup>49</sup> has a Judaeo-Arabic recipe for causing ophthalmia.

46 Thomann, “Arabische magische Dokumente,” 16.

47 Many examples can be found in Preisendanz’ *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, transl. by Betz, e.g. PGM 15 (Betz 251), PGM 18b (Betz 255), PGM 33 (Betz 267) and many more. For an Arabic example see Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, 29.

48 Krisztina Hevesi, “The Coptic Medico-Magical Text K 11088 from the Papyrus Collection of the Austrian National Library.” *Journal of Coptic Studies* 17 (2015), 63 and fig.1.

49 Bohak, “Greek, Coptic and Jewish magic,” 35–37 and fig. 4.

In lines 14–16 are “magical symbols” that, as Bohak convincingly proves, are a corrupted version of the Coptic introductory formula “God, Jesus Christ” in combination with rests of another Coptic recipe. Since direct contacts between the urban Jewish and the Coptic population were too weak for such a way of knowledge exchange, it must be assumed that the recipe has entered the materials of a Jewish practitioner of magic via an Arabic Muslim intermediate. While the question of how exactly the corrupted Coptic recipe was passed on cannot be answered—directly, by copying from a written source, or another way—the mere fact that such an interreligious and inter-traditional exchange was possible points to the flexibility and multifaceted applicability that magical practices were treated with in Late Antique and (Early) Islamic Egypt.

Something Arabic magical texts have in common with texts from other magical traditions is the fact that they even exist in papyrus collections nowadays. Considering not only the sphere of secrecy in which all magical sciences operated, but also the sacred character of much of its religiously relevant content, it seems surprising that they should have ended up in papyrus heaps as trash. This fact was already observed by Luigendijk for Greek literary papyri from Oxyrhynchus,<sup>50</sup> she even mentions papyri with Biblical content that had been used as “toilet papyrus,” but she cannot say definitely why some religious texts were treated with a total absence of the reverence they should be given by definition. The situation of Arabic magical texts is probably easier to explain. First, while it is true that worn-out Qur’an exemplars should not be discarded, but disposed of in special ways avoiding any defilement whatsoever,<sup>51</sup> the same prescriptions do not necessarily apply to texts that are either religiously relevant but do not bear Qur’anic citations, or texts that are not meant to be used as a Qur’an exemplar in a strict sense. Also to texts like works of hadith and grammar (that could and did contain Qur’anic passages), nothing like the strict rules for Qur’an disposal applied. Magical texts probably fall into the same category. Secondly, the hesitation one could imagine when it came to exposing magical texts and especially amulets bearing personal names to public trash heaps, where everybody could pick them up and theoretically convert them into harmful spells probably was not as big, since magical texts were part of a ritual. The words on the material were in all likelihood practically worthless without the corresponding magical practices and rituals surrounding the

50 AnneMarie Luigendijk. “Sacred Scriptures as Trash. Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64, no. 3 (2010): 217–254.

51 Sadan “Genizah and Genizah-like Practices,” 44–45.

composition of the amulet. They were little more than a proof for a magical ritual that had been carried out, mere remnants of a magical operation that could, once the magical effect had expired, be discarded like any other slip of papyrus or paper.

The mentioned use of Qur'anic verses in magical texts can give us important insights on the early tradition of the Qur'an as practical text, it can help us understand how the Qur'anic text learned and perceived while papyrus was in use. Apart from a few variant readings that do not make significant differences in meaning, we also find what must be called writing mistakes in Qur'anic verses in talismans. While some are simple spelling mistakes, others seem inexplicable at first, since they seem to point to a poor understanding of the Arabic wording of the text as well as its grammar. However, when considering that written, complete Qur'an exemplars were probably not widely found in early Islamic Egypt, especially not in regions outside of the capital or even far away from it, we can approach a solution for the mentioned mistakes in the Qur'anic text. If the Qur'an was taught primarily orally, by hearing and repeating, scribes of talismans probably had no visual image of the text. They did know the text very well, but in the form of a "virtual" text without the corresponding written, optical representation. This backs the assumption that the Qur'an was learned by heart from recitation and that some writers, probably from middle to lower social and educational status, had problems in transporting the text into written form.

As already mentioned, recommendations about which verses to use for which purpose (healing from different ailments, protection etc.) often come from the hadith. Therefore, the "magical" or medicinal use of Qur'anic verses recommended in the prophetic tradition could tell us about the hadith's development and spread during the first centuries of the Islamic era. Frequent occurrences of such verses or other religious formulae taken from the hadith can mean only one thing: There was sufficient knowledge of the hadith concerning which words to use for which spiritual practice by the time papyrus was in use. Moreover, when we consider that some talisman scribes' educational level was certainly not very high, we see that these passages from the prophetic tradition were even spread among people who, by their limited abilities to handle complex texts, could not have taken them from original works of hadith, meaning that by the time papyrus was in use, abbreviated or specialized works of tradition were circulating, probably accessible to the general population in oral teachings and as part of (Friday) sermons. This could be a proof for the quick spread of knowledge and also of the Arabic language across territory outside the core lands of hadith scholarship, i.e. Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

In conclusion, it must be said that the study of Arabic magical texts covers several fields of research, some closer to papyrology, other closer to Geniza studies, all of them closely connected to the study of Arabic magic and the Arabic writing and manuscript tradition. At the same time, magical texts on original documents are direct sources for so-called “popular religion,” for the daily religious practice of the majority of the Islamic population in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

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# Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*

*Jean-Charles Coulon*

The thirteenth-century Sufi *shaykh* al-Būnī is the putative author of an important corpus dealing with occult sciences in the Islamicate world, known in Western scholarship as the *corpus bunianum*.<sup>\*</sup> The best-known of these magical texts attributed to him is *The Great Sun of Knowledge* (*Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*), and another of the more famous works in this corpus is the *Source of the Foundations of Wisdom* (*Manba'ūsūl al-ḥikma*), a compilation of four epistles. It has now become clear, however, that the works that al-Būnī actually authored have more to do in nature with Sufi theory and practice rather than strictly magical purposes. His limited corpus nevertheless became the basis of an important magical tradition especially through the extensive commentaries by later esoterists. While al-Būnī's earliest books were seminal in feeding the later magical tradition, the information they contain about amulets and talismans per se, is in fact limited. In this paper, I will analyse the vocabulary, processes and figures related to amulets and talismans in the ancient core of the *corpus bunianum*.

## 1 Al-Būnī, the Putative Key-Author for the Analysis of Islamic Amulets and Talismans

Al-Būnī (d. 622/1225 or 630/1232) holds a special place in the understanding of magical practices in the Islamicate world, both medieval and contemporary. During the colonial period, Orientalist scholars and colonial authorities (administrative and military) produced numerous discussions of amulets and talismans that they encountered in local museum collections or acquired during their missions. In the context of colonialist and Orientalist works, the first studies dealing with al-Būnī did not demonstrate any historical perspective.

\* I am very grateful to Korshi Dosoo and the editors of the volume for their comments and remarks to improve this paper. All errors are my own.

To the contrary, al-Būnī was considered as the actual author of the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, in accordance with the Islamic tradition, and the starting point of Islamic talismanic tradition. The colonial administrator Edmond Doutté,<sup>1</sup> for example, connected Islamic talismans and magical practices to the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, Ibn al-Ḥājj al-Tilimsānī's (d. 930/1524) *Shumūs al-anwār*, and al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Kitāb al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, he introduced these texts to European Orientalist scholarship, with lasting consequences. Later, particular attention was brought to the problem of magic squares, especially in relation to apocryphal texts circulating under al-Būnī's name.<sup>3</sup>

The works of Tawfik Canaan also drew attention to al-Būnī. Canaan was a Palestinian physician in the Ottoman army, and a skilled Orientalist involved in Orientalist and local interests in preserving "traditional" aspects of Palestinian culture.<sup>4</sup> Hence, he wanted to preserve Palestinian traditions and popular culture. He wrote a number of papers dealing with such traditions. At the same time, he gathered a collection of artefacts, among which were several talismanic bowls. He analysed these "fear cups" in two papers, and went on to produce an influential study entitled "The decipherment of Arabic talismans".<sup>5</sup> In this article, he supported his decipherment with the *Shams al-ma'ārif* and the *Manba' uṣūl al-ḥikma*, two works falsely attributed to al-Būnī also by Canaan.

Curiosity about al-Būnī has generally been driven by the desire to understand the Islamic talismanic tradition as a way to decipher talismans,<sup>6</sup> as well

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- 1 For whom see Alain Messaoudi, "Carra de Vaux," in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, ed. François Pouillon (Paris: IISMM and Kharthala, 2008), 310–312.
  - 2 Edmond Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Alger: Typographie Adolphe Jourdan, 1909).
  - 3 Wilhelm Ahrens, "Studien über die "magischen Quadrate" der Araber," *Der Islam* 7 (1917): 186–250; and Wilhelm Ahrens, "Die "magischen Quadrate" al-Būnīs," *Der Islam* 12 (1922): 157–177; Bernard Carra de Vaux, "Une solution arabe au problème des carrés magiques," *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 1 (1948): 206–212.
  - 4 Marcela Probert, "Exploring the Life of Amulets in Palestine. From Healing and Protective Remedies to the the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2021).
  - 5 For the bowls, see Tawfik Canaan, "Ṭāsit er-radḡfeh (fear cup)," *Journal of Palestine Oriental Studies* 3 (1923): 122–131; Tawfik Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls," *Journal of Palestine Oriental Studies* 16 (1936): 79–127. For talismans, see Tawfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," *Berytus* 4 (1937): 69–110 and 5 (1938): 141–151. Reprinted in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate and Variorum, 2004), 125–177.
  - 6 Georges Chehata Anawati, "Trois talismans musulmans en arabe provenant du Mali (marché de Mopti)," *Annales islamologiques* 11 (1972): 287–339; Constant Hamès, "Le Coran talismanique, De l'Arabie des origines à l'Afrique occidentale contemporaine, Délimitation et inventaire des textes et des procédés linguistiques utilisés," in *Religion et pratiques de puis-*

as what was considered as the “margins” of Muslim religious practices, especially “practical” *Ṣūfism*.<sup>7</sup>

However, all these works are based upon the *corpus bunianum*,<sup>8</sup> a theme-based collection supposedly produced by one author, in this case al-Būnī. In fact, recent research has pointed out that both *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* and *Manba' uṣūl al-ḥikma* are later works falsely attributed to al-Būnī.<sup>9</sup> Even the “short version” of the *Shams al-ma'ārif* is an apocryphal compilation.

On the other hand, we must add that astral and natural magic works of the ninth-tenth centuries were not taken in account for the decipherment of Islamic amulets and talismans. Indeed, the most famous book in this tradition, Maslama al-Qurṭubī's (d. 353/964) *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*,<sup>10</sup> contains a lot of instructions for the making of talismans or magical objects (*ṭilasm*, *nīranj*, *nushra*, etc.), and introduces itself as a book on magic (*siḥr*). However, despite its firmly established reputation, it was not considered as a valuable source to analyse Islamic amulets and talismans. The obvious reason is that the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* does not contain a lot of instructions based upon the Arabic alphabet, the divine names, the Qur'anic verses or the magic squares.

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sance, ed. Alain de Surgy (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 129–160; Constant Hamès, “Taktub ou la magie de l'écriture islamique. Textes soninké à usage magique,” *Arabica* 34, no. 3 (1987): 305–325; Constant Hamès, “Entre recette magique et prière islamique,” *Fétiches II. Puissance des objets, charme des mots, Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire* 12 (1993): 187–223; Constant Hamès, “L'usage talismanique du Coran,” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 218, no. 1 (2001): 83–95; Constant Hamès, “Problématiques de la magie-sorcellerie en islam et perspectives africaines,” *Cahiers d'études africaines* 189–190 (2008): 81–99; Karl R. Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 19.

7 Pierre Lory, “Magie et religion dans l'oeuvre de Muhiy al-Dīn al-Būnī,” *Horizons maghrébains* 7–8 (1986): 4–15; Pierre Lory, “La magie des lettres dans le *Ṣams al-ma'ārif* d'al-Būnī,” *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 39–40 (1987–1988): 97–111.

8 On this concept, see Jan Just Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, eds. Jan P. Hogendijk and Arnoud Vrolijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183–199.

9 See Jean-Charles Coulon, “La magie islamique et le *corpus bunianum* au Moyen Âge” (PhD diss. Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 2013): vol. 1, 479–499, 544–552 and 552–564; Jean-Charles Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam au Moyen Âge* (Paris: CTHS, 2017), 219–229; Noah Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad al-Būnī,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 81–143.

10 On the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, see, among many others, Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 143–169; and Liana Saif, “From *Gāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Ṣams al-ma'ārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam,” *Arabica* 64, no. 3–4 (2017): 297–345.

To the contrary, in the *corpus bunianum*, we can find that the earliest works by al-Būnī seem to ignore the magical objects terminology that can be found in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, although later works in the same corpus in the 16th century seem to rehabilitate these words. Hence, we might ask which elements of the Islamic talismanic tradition can be truly related to al-Būnī. Do al-Būnī's own genuine works deal with amulets and talismans, or is this topic a later development in the apocryphal *corpus bunianum* works?

## 2 A Brief History of the *Corpus Bunianum*

First of all, we need to introduce the outlines of the constitution of the *corpus bunianum*.<sup>11</sup> Who was al-Būnī? Al-Būnī was a ṣūfī master. During the Mamluk and Ottoman era, hagiographical notices described him as “the source (*zamzam*) of secrets, the mine of lights, the master of miracles, glorious stations,” and he is known as one whose prayers are granted (*mujāb al-da'awāt*).<sup>12</sup> He was probably born in Annaba (Būna in the Middle Ages, hence his *nisba* al-Būnī, it is located in Algeria). He was instructed in the Qur'anic recitation, Mālikī fiqh and other sciences in Tūnis where his ṣūfī master 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224) lived. He then went on to al-Andalus where he met scholars such as the theologian and *adīb* Abū al-Qāsim al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185), the historian and traditionalist Abū al-Qāsim b. Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183) and the ṣūfī master Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Ja'far al-Khazrajī al-Sabtī (d. 601/1205).

11 For this presentation of al-Būnī, I have summarized the conclusions of the work of Noah Gardiner and myself: Noah Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad al-Būnī,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 81–143 and Noah Gardiner, “Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī's Works,” *Arabica* 64, no. 3–4 (2017): 405–441; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 205–232; Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 1, 447–565. In those publications, extensive references can be found for the biographical information provided here.

12 The quotation is from 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621; *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya fī tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfīyya* [= *Ṭabaqāt al-Munāwī al-kubrā*], ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān [Le Caire: al-Maktaba al-azhariyya li-l-turāth, 1994], vol. 2, 35–38). The first hagiographical notice known about al-Būnī is from the Ottoman scholar 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454), a prolific commentator of al-Būnī's work and a major actor in the spread of al-Būnī's works in the Ottoman high society and sultanian court: see his *Shams al-āfāq* (MS Paris, BnF, ARABE 2689), fol. 24<sup>b</sup>–26<sup>a</sup>. See also Jean-Charles Coulon, “Building al-Būnī's Legend: The Figure of al-Būnī through 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's *Shams al-āfāq*,” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5 (2016) 1–26; Noah Gardiner, “The Occultist Encyclopedism of 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 20 (2017): 3–38.

Afterwards he travelled to Alexandria, where he met Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Salafī (d. 576/1180) and the jurist Abū al-Ṭāhir Ismāʿīl b. ʿAwf al-Zuhrī al-Mālikī (d. 581/1185).

He settled in Cairo in the time of the last Fatimid caliph, al-ʿĀḍid li-Dīn Allāh (r. 555/1160–567/1171), performed the hajj, and then travelled through Jerusalem, Damascus, where he met Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), Wāsiṭ, and Baghdad, where he interacted with Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). He returned to Cairo, and from there perhaps went to Tūnis, where he lived until his death. The end of his life remains unclear. We have traces of his presence in Cairo until 622/1225. Ḥājji Khalīfa indicates that he died in 622/1225 or 630/1232, but does not give the place where he died.

Noah Gardiner and I have analysed a large number of manuscripts in our doctoral theses, and have pointed out several stages in the composition of the *corpus bunianum*. A number of works can be attributed with certainty to the authorship of al-Būnī, according to a cluster of indications. These form the historical core of the *corpus*. They are: a cosmological work and esoteric commentary of the Arabic alphabet entitled *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-ʿuluwiyyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Signs: On the Celestial Letters*);<sup>13</sup> an esoteric commentary of the divine names entitled *ʿAlam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ih̄tidāʾ fī sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (*The Banner of Guidance and the Secrets of the Right Path: Commentary on the Beautiful Names of God*); and two manuals of ṣūfī spiritual development and exercises entitled *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyādāt* (*The Stations of the Goals: On the Secrets of the Exercises*) and *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāsilīn* (*The Guidance of the Candidates and the End of the Arrivals*). None of those texts can be considered to have a magical content, except a few passages of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* dealing with the ways to use the occult properties of Arabic letters.

I also include in the historical core another famous treatise entitled *al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fī al-awrād al-rabbāniyya* (*The Luminous Light: The Orisons of the Lord*).<sup>14</sup> Noah Gardiner considers this work to fall outside this core, but he admits that it is an ancient work in the *corpus* and suggests that it could be the work of one of al-Būnī's disciples, or even might be by al-Būnī himself.<sup>15</sup>

13 al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, MS Paris, BnF, ARABE 2637 (compared to MS Paris, BnF, ARABE 2658).

14 al-Būnī, *al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fī al-awrād al-rabbāniyya*, Damascus, BnA, 3679 and 18554; Paris, BnF, ARABE 1225 and ARABE 1226; Princeton, Princeton University Library, 1895, fol. 1<sup>b</sup>–48<sup>b</sup>; Dublin, Chester Beatty, 4284; Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 1870, fol. 43<sup>a</sup>–84<sup>a</sup> and Shahid Ali Pasa, 2764.

15 Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?" 96. In this page, Noah Gardiner considered that three major Būnian works fall outside the core: *al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fī al-awrād al-rabbāniyya*; *Tartīb al-daʿawāt fī taḥṣīṣ al-awqāt ʿalā ḥtilāf al-irādāt*, and *Qabs al-iqtidāʾ ilā wafq al-saʿāda*

On the other hand, al-Būnī often cites his own works in the four texts mentioned above, but in *al-Lum'a al-nūrāniyya* there is no mention of al-Būnī's other works. This casts doubt upon the authenticity of this work, but it is in my opinion not sufficient at this stage to prove that it was not written by al-Būnī. Whatever its authorship, *al-Lum'a al-nūrāniyya* is certainly among the oldest works of the *corpus bunianum*.

The second work whose relationship to the historical core is unclear is *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*. Indeed, in my doctoral thesis, I demonstrated that the text usually known under its shorter title, *Shams al-ma'ārif*, and often considered as authentically composed by al-Būnī does in fact not belong to the historical core. The text contains many anachronisms.<sup>16</sup> However, the four above mentioned works do quote a book entitled *Shams al-ma'ārif*, which makes it likely that al-Būnī did indeed write a text with that title. The solution to this apparent contradiction came with the discovery of a unique manuscript in the National Library of Damascus whose title is *Shams al-ma'ārif*.<sup>17</sup> The content of this work is totally different from that which was previously identified by that title. The Damascus manuscript is a cosmological Ṣūfī work and all quotations of the *Shams al-ma'ārif* in the four works authored by al-Būnī previously mentioned perfectly match the content of this text. Another point that supports al-Būnī as the author of this text is that he calls 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī his master—indeed al-Mahdawī was al-Būnī's teacher.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the content and style of the text perfectly match the themes and style of the historical core of al-Būnī's oeuvre. It was therefore possible to finally reject the attribution to al-Būnī of the magical *Shams al-ma'ārif*, and affirm that the Ṣūfī cosmological text of the same name may be the one authored by al-Būnī.

The next major step in the composition of the *corpus bunianum* and the development of al-Būnī's reputation was due to an Ottoman scholar and *adīb* named 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454). This author bears primary responsibility for al-Būnī's fame in the Ottoman era. He wrote commentaries

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*wa-najm al-ihtidā'*. I defended the same idea concerning *Tartīb al-da'awāt fi taḥṣīṣ al-awqāt 'alā ihtilāf al-irādāt* and *Qabs al-iqtidā' ilā waḥq al-sa'āda wa-najm al-ihtidā'* based upon philological arguments and a comparison with the other Būnian works, however, although we cannot definitely prove that *al-Lum'a al-nūrāniyya* is a genuine work by al-Būnī, I also think that there is not enough convincing evidence at this stage to consider this work out of the core. See Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 451–461; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 221.

16 About these anachronisms, see Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 482–483; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 227–229; Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?" 102–103.

17 About this manuscript and hypothetically authentic version, see Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 484–491; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 227–229.

18 Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 488; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 227–228.



on the works of al-Būnī, adding much information on talismanic uses and recipes to al-Būnī's original treatises in the process. For instance, his *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikma al-rabbaniyya* written in 815/1413 is an extensive commentary on *al-Lum'a al-nūrāniyya*, in which he included instructions for the creation of amulets in the addenda.

Finally, the last major step in the development of the *corpus bunianum* is the composition of the *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* (*The Great Sun of Knowledge*). Indeed, this apocryphal huge compilation, based upon some authentic works by al-Būnī, some apocryphal works attributed to him—particularly the *Shams al-ma'ārif*—and some of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmī's works, has been wide spread in the Ottoman high society. Lithographical reproductions also contributed to its success in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* is a magical encyclopaedia, containing a few hundred recipes and formulas. Although this work contains a lot of anachronisms with regard to al-Būnī's days, it has been considered as al-Būnī's major work.

In his authentic works, al-Būnī himself never used terms such as *ṭilasm*,<sup>19</sup> *nushra*, *tamīma*,<sup>20</sup> *ḥijāb*,<sup>21</sup> or other words with similar meanings. However, he did describe practices that could subsequently be used in the confection of amulets and talismans. This is what I would like to introduce now.

### 3 Amulets and Talismans in *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*

*Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* is a ṣūfī cosmological work. Indeed, the first part of this treatise deals with cosmology and God's creation of the world. The second part is an esoteric commentary on the Arabic letters. In light of this text, it is not surprising that later scholars considered al-Būnī as the master of the science of letters and magic squares (*ilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-awfāq*). The author of the magical *Shams al-ma'ārif* indeed copied a number of sections from the *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*.

19 The word *ṭilasm*, from the Greek *telesma*, was used in the ninth and tenth centuries mainly for talismans referring to Greek authorities. A lot of monumental buildings of the Antiquity were depicted as ancient talismans settled to protect countries and cities. However, the term is used in the *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* for any kind of written talisman. See for example Coulon, *La Magie*, 92–98.

20 *Nushra* and *tamīma* are two words often used for anteislamic amulets. We can find these terms in later Arabic literature for protective objects. See for example Coulon, *La Magie*, 48–51.

21 This latter word appears in al-Būnī's works, but exclusively in a ṣūfī meaning, i.e. a veil that the ṣūfī path enables to raise to see the world as it is. To the contrary, the term *ḥijāb* is used in the *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* as a synonym of protective talisman. Some later talismans called *ḥijāb* refer to al-Būnī although his authentic works do not use the word in this meaning.



FIGURE 9.1 The hierarchy of the spheres. MS Paris, BULAC, ARA.572, fol. 37<sup>b</sup>  
© BULAC

In the *Latā'if*, al-Būnī sketched out creation in a cosmological perspective, and for this reason it contains many schematic drawings, but these must not be confused with magical drawings *per se*. Indeed, some of these drawings can be both considered as a representation of a kind of knowledge and magical item as well, but a lot of them are only added for a mnemonic purpose or to

help the reader to figure organized data.<sup>22</sup> For example, the following diagram represents the hierarchy of the spheres and introduces the creation.

This image is, however, taken from a late and anonymous manuscript on occult sciences partly based upon some chapters of the *Shams al-ma'arif* and now kept in the collections of the BULAC (Bibliothèque des Langues et Civilisations).<sup>23</sup> This diagram representing the cosmos which originally appeared in al-Būnī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, became so popular that it was subsequently taken up by the compiler of *Shams al-ma'arif* and many other writers.

In fact, the greater part of the *Laṭā'if* deals with ṣūfī cosmological theory. Before we get into the text itself, it should be reiterated that we do not find references to words describing amulets or talismans such as *nushra*, *tamūma*, *ṭilasm*, *ḥirz*, *ḥijāb*, etc. in the *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. Nevertheless, the use of such objects can well be deduced from the text, but al-Būnī did not use these words himself.

There are, however, some instructions for certain praxes, as well as allusions and references to the utilisation of written elements, especially Arabic letters and magic squares, and, although al-Būnī was celebrated at his time as a ṣūfī master, these occult elements were the basis of commentaries and magic oriented additions and development, which finally made al-Būnī more famous as a “theurgist” than a ṣūfī master. Indeed, al-Būnī describes the esoteric properties (*khawāṣṣ*) of the letters. The instructions to use the properties for a material gain usually indicate that the letter has to be written on a specific material (parchment, paper, etc.), sometimes with a specific ink (rosewater, orange blossom water, etc.), in specific conditions to produce a specific effect (*taṭhīr*). Al-Būnī developed the idea that each letter has a shape (*shakl*, pl. *ashkāl*) which synthesises its occult properties and esoteric meaning. These *ashkāl* are mainly magic squares and circles.

For example, in the section on the letter *ḥā'*, we can read:

And for this reason, he who writes this letter on a seal eight times with the four names mentioned above is preserved by God's praise against all diseases. If he puts it in water and gives it to sick people to drink, they

22 We developed this aspect in Jean-Charles Coulon, “Écrire et figurer le cosmos: l'emploi des figures dans les manuscrits de sciences occultes islamiques attribués à al-Būnī (m. 1225),” in *La plume et le calame entre Orient et Occident, les métiers de l'écrit à la marge*, eds. Isabelle Bretthauer, Anna Caiozzo, and François Rivière (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2020): 399–421.

23 This diagram can be found in a lot of manuscripts. We chose this one particularly because the BULAC freely and kindly allows the use of its manuscripts for scholarly publication purposes.

will experience relief. If they continue to drink this water and to refresh themselves with it, it will cure all sickness. It is also beneficial for wrathful men among those who suffer from yellow bile. He who wears this seal, if he lives a long life, he will not be often confused. Among its properties (are that) it removes the inclination for sexual intercourse. If one is a young man, it is better to hide this seal and not to wear it on Saturday nor on Monday, but one may wear it on any other day. [This seal] ensures that the one who holds it will not experience thirst and be able to drink water copiously. If it is suspended in a garden, it makes the fruit grow and flourish, if God—exalted be He!—so wishes.<sup>24</sup>

For this letter, an offensive utilisation exists, but it is not possible to mention it here. We have introduced the religious benefits leading to God—exalted be He!—by the secret of the Oneness. He who writes it on a parchment, when the moon is in the rays [of the sun] in the hour of Mercury, and who is summoned by a sultan or a tyrant, God makes their inner thoughts removed from mentioning him and He distracts them from him with another. He [must] wear it directly on his bare head and cover his head over this [object], and leave it until he is no longer afraid. This frees prisoners.

He who writes it with *sūrat al-Mulk* in a cup and drinks [water poured in it] after an eight days' fasting, God improves his memory and his ability to concentrate to complete matters. He preserves him from anything that harms him—I mean the complete figure that will follow—if God—exalted be He!—wants.

In the same way, he who engraves in a circle (*mustadīr*) [made] of silver eight [times the letter] *ḥā'* and the four names and suspends it upon his heart and firmly believes in God cools his heart for worldly desire or what is hidden in his will, and [if he does] this in the hour of the moon while the moon is in an auspicious conjunction (*fī al-su'ūd*), or in the hour of Venus while the moon is in an auspicious conjunction (*mas'ūd*), and suspends it while he is pure, fasting and remembering God—exalted be He!—and does not approach it when he is [already] close: if he does [all of] this, God removes the fear and the terror from his heart of hearts. This may also be a protection (litt. "cause") against the loss of understanding from his heart and the tyranny of forgetting; consider it carefully. This is its drawn and marked figure:<sup>25</sup>

24 This entire paragraph was reproduced by al-Nuwayrī in his *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, Cairo: Maṭba'at dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, 1937, (vol. 12, 226).

25 Coulon, "La magie islamique," vol. 4, 123–124; fol. 39<sup>b</sup>–40<sup>a</sup>.

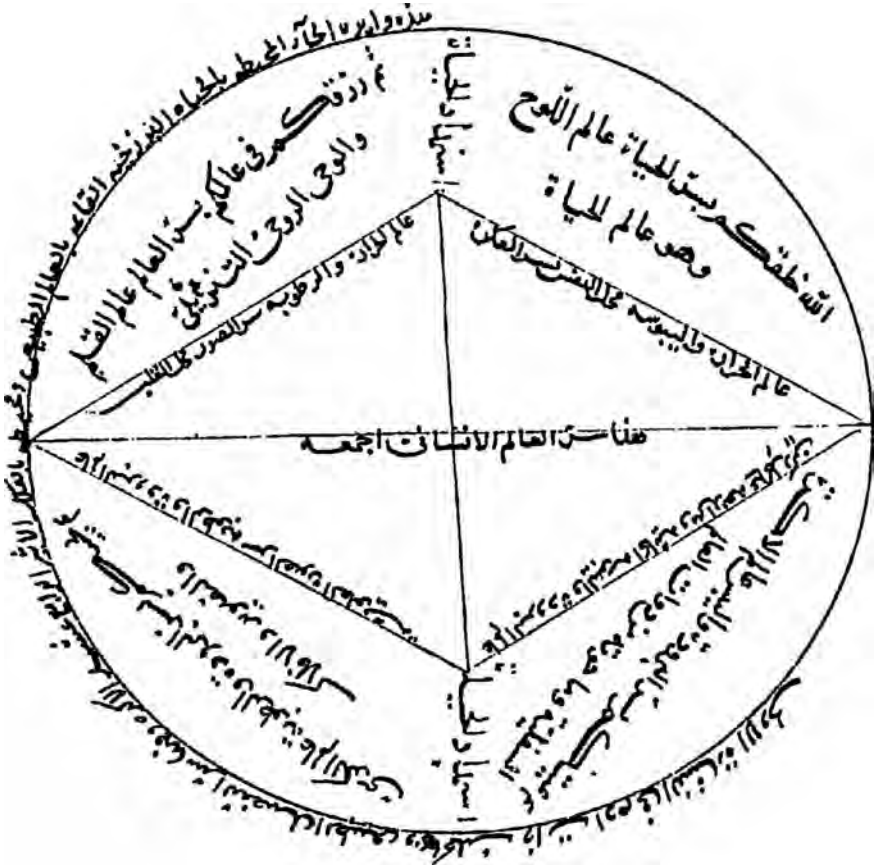


FIGURE 9.2 The circle of the letter *hāʾ*. Adapted from MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2637, fol. 40<sup>a</sup>

The figure consists of a lozenge in a circle accompanied by writing. This figure is not only a cosmological drawing but a talismanic figure that can be used in the creation of talismans. The cosmological meaning of the figure is evident in the writing: the sentence surrounding the circle states that “this is the circle (*dāʾira*) of the *hāʾ* which surrounds the isthmus of life (*al-ḥayāt al-barzakhiyya*) which binds the natural world and which surrounds the fourth sphere of the ether from the [celestial] Globe. In [this circle] is the secret of the natural dissecting (*al-taḥṣīl al-ṭabīʿī*). The essence of Ādam was completed by [this circle] in the first growth.” This sentence expresses the esoteric meanings of the letter *hāʾ*, which is supposed to refer to life (*ḥayāt*) since it is the first letter of this word in Arabic. The circle is then divided in four parts by the diagonals of the lozenge. The four parts of the circle contain four sentences dealing with the successive steps of the Creation, and the four parts of the lozenge contain four

sentences, each associated with the Aristotelian natural properties. Thus, the four sentences of the circle explain that “God created you by the secret of life in the world of the Tablet, which is the world of life,” that “He then placed you in your world through the descent of the secret of science and spiritual inspiration into the World of the Pen (*‘ālam al-qalam wa-l-wahy al-rūḥī*),” that “He then makes you live by the secret of the cold and the moist in the World of the Throne (*‘ālam al-kursī*), the Representation (*al-taṣwīr*) and the Spheres (*al-aflāk*),” and finally that “He then makes you die by the secret of the cold and the dry in the world of the lower globe and the essences of the world which surround it.” The four sentences of the lozenge explain that they represent “the world of the hot and the dry, which is the place of the soul (*maḥall al-naḥs*) by the secret of the thought (*sirr al-fikra*),” “the world of the hot and the moist, secret of the representations (*sirr al-ṣuwar*), place of the heart (*maḥall al-qalb*),” “the world of the cold and the moist, secret of the celestial representation (*al-ṣūra al-‘uluwiyya*),” and “the world of the cold and the dry of the *ḥā’*, which are four for each essence (*rukṇ*).” The sentences in the diagonals are “This is the secret of the whole human world” and “asking help for life (*istimdād al-ḥayāt*).” Therefore, each quarter of the figure corresponds both to a stage of the Creation and a humour. It should be noted that the numerical equivalent of the letter *ḥā’* is eight, and the lozenge divides the circle in eight parts.

This kind of circle-shaped figure is common in the *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*. However, the second important kind of talismanic figure in this treatise is the magical square (*wafq*, pl. *awfāq*).

Here is an example of the four-based magic square, as introduced by al-Būnī:

He who makes a table of four by four squares and puts in it numerical relation (*nisba ‘adadiyya*), must do it on a Monday, which is the birthday of the Prophet, the day of his mission and the day of his death. Know that the letters are efficient by their own properties: no particular moment is required, it is a choice to be made by the one who desires it. The numbers are efficient by nature: they depend on the auspicious celestial moments by God’s wisdom, the One who does what He wants. Do it when the Moon is in exaltation, without any evil influence, during the hour of the Moon. Write it after achieving ritual purity through ablutions using the Throne Verse (Q: 2:255), and [the verse] “Say: He is God, the One” (Q112:1) a hundred times on a blank/pure parchment. God will allow its wearer memory, understanding and access to wisdom, He will increase his power over the lower world in its entirety, he will free the prisoners, defeat the enemy in any controversy, and so many things that it is not possible to describe them. Here is the figure:

1	8	11	14
12	13	2	7
6	3	16	9
15	10	5	4

As for the secret of this letter-square, it too is wonderful. Put the letters instead of the numbers and perform this operation after two weeks of fasting. During this period of fasting, you must eat only bread, stay pure and invoke God. You should take a moon-plate (i.e. a plate made of silver) and engrave on it the above-mentioned numbers (*sic*) and face the *qibla*. Do this on Thursday during the hour of Jupiter. The moon must be in conjunction with the Sun, and Jupiter and the Gemini should be in the ascendant. You must burn mastic and white aloe each Thursday. God will make the one who wears the seal love what concerns religion, God will make easy for him acts of obedience [to God], and He will give him the power over “the causes” (*fī al-asbāb*).<sup>26</sup> God will bless anything he attempts. He who writes it on a blank paper at the same time and wears it in the seam of his coat will be safe, with God’s power, against thieves and all appalling things. Take care not to put it in any impurity or to put it in a dirty place. Here it is. Consider it carefully. This is the first product of the secrets of the even numbers:<sup>27</sup>

A	Ḥ	Y.Ā	Y.D
Y.B	Y.J	B	Ḍ
W	J	Y.W	Ṭ
Y.H	Y	H	D

<sup>26</sup> That is, the principles of causation which will enable him to achieve his desired results.

<sup>27</sup> Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 1, 962–964; 4, 81–82; *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, fol. 14<sup>a</sup>–15<sup>a</sup>.

The compiler of the *Shams al-ma'arif* borrowed this introduction to the four by four magic square, which led to its spread in magical treatises.<sup>28</sup> We also find in the *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*:

- two  $3 \times 3$  magic squares (Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 4, 85; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 17<sup>a</sup>; and Coulon, 4, 174; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 62<sup>a</sup>),
- another  $4 \times 4$  square (Coulon, 4, 149; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 53<sup>a-b</sup>),
- a  $5 \times 5$  square (Coulon, 4, 119–120; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 37<sup>a</sup>–38<sup>a</sup>),
- two  $6 \times 6$  squares (Coulon, 4, 155–156; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 55<sup>a</sup>; and Coulon, 4, 172; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 61<sup>a</sup>–61<sup>b</sup>),
- a  $7 \times 7$  square (Coulon, 4, 170; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 60<sup>a</sup>–60<sup>b</sup>),
- two  $8 \times 8$  squares (Coulon, 4, 83–85; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 15<sup>b</sup>–16<sup>b</sup>; and Coulon, 4, 112–113; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 32<sup>b</sup>–33<sup>b</sup>),
- a  $9 \times 9$  square (Coulon, 4, 144; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 50<sup>b</sup>–51<sup>a</sup>),
- a  $10 \times 10$  square (Coulon, 4, 133–134; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 44<sup>b</sup>–45<sup>a</sup>),
- an  $11 \times 11$  square (Coulon, 4, 175–176; *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 63<sup>a</sup>).

This list clearly shows that magic squares are not peripheral in al-Būnī's work. But they are not the primary subject itself, rather they are used as a seal, i.e. as a way to represent the esoteric meaning and properties of a letter (or number) although it also makes it inunderstandable for a non-initiated individual.

What was the place of the magic square during al-Būnī's era? The most famous magic square was obviously the three by three magic square. This probably originated from China, where it was known as the *Lo-Shu*.<sup>29</sup> The first mention of this magic square in an Arabic text is in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's (fl. 9th century) *Firdaws al-ḥikma*. This physician prescribed a recipe based upon the properties of the three by three magic square to help women in labour. A similar use with slightly different recipes can be found in (pseudo-)Jābir b. Ḥayyān's *Kitāb al-Mawāzīn al-ṣaghīr* (probably dating to the fourth/tenth century), in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (fl. 4th/10th century) and in Maslama al-Qurṭubī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*. Mathematicians also wrote treatises exclusively devoted to the mathematical aspects of magic squares; these include Abū al-Wafā' al-Buzjānī (d. 997–998), 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Anṭākī (d. 987) and Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. al-Haytham (d. 1041).<sup>30</sup> However, there is another scholar who might have

28 Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 2, 180–187.

29 Schuyler Cammann, “The Magic Square of Three in Old Chinese Philosophy and Religion,” *History of Religions* 1 (1961): 37–80; Schuyler Cammann, “Old Chinese Magic Squares,” *Sinologica* 7 (1962): 14–53; Schuyler Cammann, “Islamic and Indian Magic Squares,” *History of Religions* 8, no. 3–4 (1969): 180–209, 271–299.

30 All of these authors are introduced in Jacques Sesiano, *Les carrés magiques dans les pays islamiques* (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2004), 10–12.



had some influence in the development of the esoteric properties of the magic squares, namely Abū Ishāq al-Zarqālī (d. 493/1100). In his treatise, he associated a planet with each magic square.<sup>31</sup> Al-Zarqālī's treatise was well-known in al-Andalus, and so one might postulate that al-Būnī could have known this text and used it.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4 Amulets and Talismans in *al-Lum'ā al-Nūrāniyya*

*Al-Lum'ā al-nūrāniyya* was one of al-Būnī's most widely-known works. Many commentaries and addenda were written on it during the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern period, and these added many additional magical elements. However, originally the work was a kind of book of prayers with a section entitled *al-Anmāṭ*, the purpose of which was to facilitate the learning of the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God. These *Anmāṭ* were so famous that Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb (d. 776-1375) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406) considered them as a separate treaty.<sup>33</sup> After the *Anmāṭ*, the next section concerned the invocations of the different thirds of the nights, and the next the prayers that one could perform during the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*) or the Day of *ʿArafā*.<sup>34</sup> The last part discussed the composition of magic squares.

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- 31 Sesiano, *Les carrés magique*, 14; Marcè and Rosa Comes, "Los cuadrados mágicos matemáticos en al-Andalus: El tratado de Azarquiel," *Al-Qanṭara* 30, no. 1 (2009): 137-169.
- 32 Since the writing of this paper, a major contribution on the history of magic squares has been published and must be pointed out here, as it renewed our knowledge of the magic squares in the first centuries of Islam: Bink Hallum, "New Light on Early Arabic Awfāq Literature," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, eds Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020): 57-161.
- 33 Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Ḥaṭīb, *Rawḍat al-ta'rīf bi-l-ḥubb al-sharīf*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā' (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-'arabī, n.d.): 330-331; Ibn Khaldūn, *Shifā' al-sā'il li-tahdhīb al-masā'il*, ed. Muḥammad b. Tāwīt al-Ṭanjī (Istanbul: Osman Yalçın matbaası, 1957): 67-68; *La voie et la loi*, French transl. René Pérez (Paris: Actes Sud, 2010): 190-191; and Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Ḥaldūn*, ed. Étienne Marc Quatremère (Paris: B. Duprat, 1858): 3, 142; *Les prolégomènes*, French transl. William Mac Guckin De Slane (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1863-1868): 3, 194; *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, English transl. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958): 3, 177.
- 34 *Laylat al-qadr* is the 27th night of the month of Ramaḍān. In the Qur'an, *laylat al-qadr* is depicted as the moment the Qur'an was sent down and as "better than a thousand months" (Q: 97, 1-3). As *yawm ʿArafā*, it is the ninth day of Dhū l-ḥijja and the second day of the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). It commemorates Muhammad's last sermon.

This treatise deals particularly with invocations, prayers (*du'ā'*) and *dhikr*. But the book also reveals some talismanic uses of the Beautiful Names, and some of their uses in a written or engraved form to produce various effects upon the world. We may note a few examples here.

In the section for the prayer of the first hour of Sunday (*yawm al-aḥad*), the related names of God are listed as follows:

Among the Beautiful Names [related to this prayer] there are the King, the Light (*al-Malik al-Nūr*). He who recites this Qur'anic verse the aforementioned number of times in a dark house with closed eyes, he will see wonderful lights filling up his heart. If he continues to do so, [the lights] take shape in the sensory world, and this *dhikr* is beneficial for the masters of concentration (*arbāb al-himam*) and the masters of ascetic retreats (*arbāb al-khalawāt*). He who writes and wears it will see for himself increases in the forces of his soul, contrition for his enemy and opponent as he could never have seen before. And it is possible to cure with it diseases of the head, especially the cold. This effect (*ta'thīr*) exists in its moment.<sup>35</sup>

This extract is very typical of the other sections about the prayers. It begins with an oral use of the names by means of prayers and invocations (*du'ā'* and *dhikr*). Then, the written use is introduced. There is no precise word used to refer to this kind of amulet: they are introduced as undefined written objects. Moreover, the recipe is not necessarily as precise as in the *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. Indeed, in the current case, we have only the indication of what should be written, and that it must be worn. There are no indications for a specific moment or astral compilation at which the writing should take place, for a suitable writing material, for a peculiar ink or colour, etc.

In the paragraph of the invocation for the second hour of Sunday, we can find a reference to another practice:

He who "breaks" His name the Generous (*al-Bāsiṭ wa-l-Jawwād*) and wears His names himself, no-one will see him without loving him and opening his heart to him, thanks to the property of this prayer, the name and the Qur'anic verse. This *dhikr* is good for the masters of contrition among the masters of the ascetic retreats.<sup>36</sup>

35 Coulon, "La magie islamique," 3, 7–8.

36 Coulon, 3, 11.

TABLE 9.1 Tafṣīl—taksīr-bast

		Alif																																						
tafṣīl	Ā (alif)						L (lām)						F (fā')																											
taksīr	Ā	L			F			L			Ā	M			F	Ā																								
	1 (aḥad)	30 (thalāthūn)			80 (thamānūn)			30 (thalāthūn)			1 (aḥad)	40 (arbaʿūn)			80 (thamānūn)			1 (aḥad)																						
bast	Ā	Ḥ	D	Th	L	Ā	Th	W	N	Th	M	Ā	N	W	N	Th	L	Ā	Th	W	N	Ā	Ḥ	D	Ā	R	B	ʿ	W	N	Th	M	Ā	N	W	N	Ā	Ḥ	D	s

The verb “to break” (*kassara*) appears in other passages. For example, about the invocation for the third hour:

He who breaks His name the Fast (*al-Sarīʿ*), the Heart Turner (*al-Muqallib* = *muqallib al-qulūb*) and maintains it, God will make anything he wants happen quickly and he will know what is far from him.<sup>37</sup>

“To break” (*kassara*) refers here to the *taksīr* operation. The *tafṣīl*, the *taksīr* and the *bast* are the names of three operations within the “science of the letters and the magic squares” (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-awfāq*) aiming to deconstruct letters in order to increase their esoteric properties. The *tafṣīl* is the operation which consists in writing a letter with the name of the letters of its own name. Thus, *alif* would be written Ā-L-F. In a sense, the *taksīr* is the *tafṣīl* of the result of the *tafṣīl*. Thus, the *taksīr* of *alif* is Ā-L-F (*alif*) L-Ā-M (*lām*) F-Ā (*fāʿ*). Finally, the *bast* consists in converting the *taksīr* in the numeric equivalent, and then, in doing the *tafṣīl* of the name of each number. Table 9.1. sums up the three operations for the letter *alif*. Concerning a divine name, we may take the example of al-Ḥayy, and the *taksīr* would be Ā L F M Ḥ Y, as shown in table 9.2.

These operations are not explained by al-Būnī in *al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya*, and so we may infer that these techniques were already known to its readership. Although the process seems simple, the text presupposes specific skills and knowledge by the practitioner.

37 Coulon, 3, 13–14.

TABLE 9.2 Example for a letter

al-Ḥayy									
Ā			L			Ḥ		Y	
<i>Alif</i>			<i>Lām</i>			<i>Ḥā'</i>		<i>Yā'</i>	
Ā	L	F	L	Ā	M	Ḥ	Ā	Y	Ā
Ā	L	F			M	Ḥ		Y	

The section *Anmāt* is devoted to the Beautiful Names of God. As in the previous section on invocations, similar instructions are given. Here is the second *namaṭ*:

Second *namaṭ* among the names.

Al-Wāḥid al-Aḥad al-Ṣamad al-Fa‘āl al-Baṣīr al-Samī‘ al-Qādir al-Muqtadir al-Qawī al-Qā‘im. Those ten names are one path in the approach to the *dhikrs* (invocations). In this section are the *dhikrs* of those who walk upon the path, depending (litt. “hanging”) upon the secrets of Oneness. And their *dhikr* is al-Aḥad al-Wāḥid.

As for al-Ṣamad, this is a good *dhikr*, especially for starving people. The one who does *dhikr* with this name do not feel any pain of starvation unless he introduces another *dhikr*. You must understand!

Al-Fa‘āl is a name for those who are dominated by thoughts, evil whispers, an overabundance of ideas and affliction in the heart because of these. The one of this description who practices *dhikr* will have his thoughts turned to what is for him joy and happiness.

As for al-Baṣīr and al-Samī‘, it is a good *dhikr* especially for those who are persistent in praying (*du‘ā’*). This may make an answer come more quickly to them.

As for al-Qādir al-Muqtadir al-Qawī al-Qā‘im, it is a *dhikr* good for those with burdens and the heavy letter. If one who suffers from a burden knows its secret and perseveres, he will not feel the burden or the exhaustion in anything he does. If someone engraves it on a seal and wears it on his finger, it will work in a moment. And if one who is weak for some reason wears it (“hangs it upon himself”) and does *dhikr* with it, he will strengthen himself at once.<sup>38</sup>

This second *namaṭ* is also very typical of the structure of this section. The Beautiful Names of God are used as *dhikr*, a well-known ṣūfī practice. We know that al-Būnī was a ṣūfī master, had a group of disciples, and may have conducted *dhikr* sessions when he was still living in al-Qarāfa area in Cairo.<sup>39</sup> However, another practice appears here: the making of rings. Indeed, he prescribes the engraving of the divine name on a seal. In this second example, the instructions are also very brief: no mention of a proper moment when the writing of the seal should take place or of astral influence on the action, of the need to use a peculiar material, etc. This seal aims to help the ṣūfī disciple to practise *dhikr*, as it is indicated.

Lastly, we must add that a final section is entirely devoted to the construction of magic squares. This final section may be a kind of appendix, or even an interpolation. Indeed, a sentence explains that this passage was added in order to explain the method of constructing magic squares.<sup>40</sup> This method was distributed as a booklet entitled *Sharḥ al-ism al-aʿẓam* (*The Commentary of the Greatest Name*), later analysed by Bernard Carra de Vaux.<sup>41</sup> This method of construction is based upon the game of chess and is especially simple, appropriate for readers who might not be mathematicians. Although *al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya* does not explain in detail the magical uses of the squares, the presence of this section suggests that this work was intended for readers who might want to make amulets.

## 5 Conclusion

Although al-Būnī's works are in general Sufi cosmological treatises, the descriptions of the occult properties of the letters, the Beautiful Names of God, and the Qur'anic verses take a very important place in his works. Can we speak about amulets and talismans in the *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* and *al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya*? Al-Būnī only wrote about the "properties of letters" (*khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*), which included their use in a written form and how these could be used to protect the bearer of the written form or the one orally expressing the names or phrases. Al-Būnī never calls these practices in his work by the regularly used words for talisman or amulet. It is these elements in his work, however, that turned

38 Coulon, "La magie islamique," 3, 72–73.

39 Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 408–413; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam au Moyen Âge*, 207–209; Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?" 90–92.

40 Coulon, "La magie islamique," 1, 459.

41 For whom see Messaoudi, "Carra de Vaux," 181–182.

al-Būnī into the expert on amulets and talismans. Indeed, al-Būnī's descriptions of the esoteric properties was easily applied in the creation of protective objects, and he gave instruction to make objects we can depict as amulets and talismans, but he carefully avoided to use the words that can relate those effective objects to amulets and talismans. It is these properties which explain why al-Būnī has long been considered as the author of a huge corpus of texts about magic, and why he remains up to today the main reference in the analysis of Islamic amulets and talismans. Indeed, building on al-Būnī's supposed expertise and reputation in this domain, subsequent authors embellished and expanded on the descriptions by adding more instructions on making amulets and even ascribed to him entire treatises on amulets and talismans that he did not write. Thus, *ṭilasm*, *ḥijāb* or other words are clearly used in the late *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* for any recipe designed to produce protective objects. The different attitude towards this vocabulary choice can be explained by a slow evolution in the field of occult sciences. Indeed, words such as *ṭilasm*, *nīranj* or *nushra* are mainly used for objects based upon the natural occult properties known since Antiquity. However, they are common words in treatises such as Maslama al-Qurṭubī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* which clearly assumes to deal with magic (*siḥr*) as the ultimate knowledge or nature. Of course, al-Būnī had to clearly differentiate his speech about the occult properties of Arabic letters and divine names from the natural properties. However, as the later commentators of al-Būnī's works added a lot of astrological and natural data for the fabrication of protective objects, they appropriate the rich vocabulary of amulets and talismans.

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## Twigs in the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets

*Marcela A. Garcia Probert*

In 2015 when I first visited the *Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets* at Birzeit University, I got surprised by the different kinds of items comprised in it. From elaborate jewellery pieces, to apparently unaltered organic material, Tawfik Canaan collected and categorised all the objects as amulets. For him, amulets functioned, just as medicine, to reestablish well-being through their healing and protective power. Most of the objects that he collected have clear signs of human intervention: they are shaped, carved, inscribed or moulded. Other objects were used in their raw or natural shape, such as flowers, seeds, and leaves, but they were ultimately arranged in bracelets, necklaces, or sometimes combined in the preparation of herbal *mélanges* used for infusions or fumigations, such as the *qishret el-khamīs* (*qishrat al-khamīs*) or the *arbaʿīn*.<sup>1</sup> There are a few objects in the Collection, however, that were used as amulets as they were found in nature, with almost no visible intervention. Among them, there are some twigs of various lengths and widths obtained from different kinds of trees. This paper revolves around this particular group of items. It explores the materiality of the twigs and the process through which they became to be considered meaningful and powerful by people that used them. They were the *fellāhīn* (*fallāḥūn*),<sup>2</sup> bedouin and townsmen in Palestine in the early twentieth century, and it is from them that the Palestinian physician and anthropologist Tawfik Canaan collected the amulets.<sup>3</sup>

1 *arbaʿīn* is a mixture of forty plants considered to be a cure for all aches and pains. Cfr. Aref Abu-Rabia, *Indigenous Medicine Among the Bedouin in the Middle East* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 9.

2 I use the term *fellāhīn* (peasant) and other terms to refer to the amulets as they are used in the Palestinian dialect. No nominative case is used in this paper. For accuracy, a MSA transliteration is provided in parenthesis next to all Arabic terms.

3 Tawfik Canaan was a Palestinian physician who studied tropical diseases, particularly malaria, which was among the most common infectious disease in the early twentieth century. He also carried out a lot of ethnographic research and contributed to the knowledge on Palestinian customs and beliefs among the rural population. He formed the largest collection of amulets from Palestine and the Levant.

The aim of this paper is to show how the study of material culture is complementary to textual sources because objects offer alternative visions of the past that are not written.<sup>4</sup> The analysis of the materiality of the twigs is based on the careful observation of their physical features, which serve as indexes of the way they were used. Interpretation comes later and derives from the written records that Dr. Canaan left for each one of the twigs. Based on his ethnographic research, the notes about the twigs are compared with his systematic studies about Palestinian folklore, where twigs are mentioned as part of a wider, more complex, articulation of elements. For a more accurate assessment of the use and meaning of the twigs, I have compared Canaan's written records with the information provided by other scholars who also carried out research on Palestine's culture, and with contemporary practices and beliefs surrounding trees and twigs.

Venetia Porter points out that collecting activities do not only disclose the kinds of objects circulating in the market, but also the stage of knowledge of such objects.<sup>5</sup> The majority of amulets collected in the Middle East and North Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth century were inscribed objects showing that collectors and scholars considered the text a central feature for the study of the people in the Arab colonies. This is explainable in a scholarly tradition that has paid so much attention to texts in the study of culture and that considers the textual tradition key to understand it. If we go through the literature about amulets manufactured and used in the Muslim world, it is easy to notice that studies have been much more concerned with textual amulets than with un-inscribed amulets. An example of this is shown in this volume, where most scholars focus on the textual aspect of amulets and analyse inscribed amulets and talismans. Inscriptions, of course, are key in deciphering the meaning and use of amulets and talismans. Through analysing inscriptions it is possible to track influences and forms of transmission, from one culture to another such as Gideon Bohak's analysis of the Cairo Genizah amulets,<sup>6</sup> or within one same culture as Jean-Charles Coulon shows in his paper about the circulation and re-use of al-Buni's texts.<sup>7</sup> However, I argue that the focus on inscriptions has led to

4 Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 249.

5 Venetia Porter, "Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum: Notes on a History," in this volume.

6 Gideon Bohak, "Specimens of Judeo-Arabic and Arabic Magical Texts from the Cairo Genizah," in this volume.

7 Jean-Charles Coulon, "Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*," in this volume.

neglect the existence of other kinds of amulets that do not bear any writing and lack traces of manipulation and manufacture, which have also been part of a lively culture for centuries, have been transmitted for generations and deserve further exploration.

Uninscribed amulets in the Middle East and North Africa are as diverse as the different communities living there. Their material, shape and forms of use usually respond to local practice. However, when amulets are taken out of their context as collections tend to do, the study of such objects becomes difficult. So, how can we approach them? The study of objects through their material qualities is a useful approach to understand amulets without writing, but also textual amulets benefit from such an approach. Analysing the materiality of things requires shifting our attention from the meaning of the text to the physical features of the text, the style of calligraphy, the consistency of the handwriting, the ink employed, the inscribing techniques, as well as the features of the object such as the size, the material, and any trace of how it was made and used. The material features may disclose aspects of the context and history of the object, and may bring awareness of the different stages which an object goes through during its lifetime. This approach or state of knowledge requires a shift from analysing one particular feature, the text, to an approach that considers the entirety of its features. Moreover, it requires changing our engagement with the object, from seeing it as complete, finished, and distinct from the rest of the objects, to seeing it as only one part of a wider fluid human phenomenon, in which objects are interconnected with the rest of the material world. The study of materiality demands considering the intrinsic properties of materials, but also the rituals in which they have been embedded. Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali shows in his contribution,<sup>8</sup> that the performative aspect of the rituals while manufacturing, activating, and using an amulet disclose that the same amulet can be used in different ways. As I mentioned before, the documentation of collected objects is particularly important for those coming from distant cultures or from the past. Moreover, for some amulets, the knowledge about them was only transmitted orally. For most collections the act of retrieving the oral tradition to study the objects is a difficult task. The twigs analysed in this chapter come from a collection that was well documented from the beginning. Tawfik Canaan was one of the pioneer ethnographer-collectors in Palestine, who showed interest in the ritual background and in the materiality of the amulets, and described how amulets articulated with other elements of Palestine's folklore.

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8 Hazem Hussein Abbas Ali, "Casting Discord: An Unpublished Spell from the Egyptian National Library," in this volume.

Using the land for agriculture, and engaging with the diverse components of the agricultural landscape has been one of the foundations for the use of natural ingredients in traditional medicine. In the last two centuries, the way Palestinians engage with their landscape has experienced many transformations. The first reason was the land-tenure reforms of the Tanzimat (starting in 1830) that led to the privatisation of land and the displacement of many peasants to the urban centres. The second, due to the Israeli occupation, which led to the drawing of new political boundaries and an internal displacement of Palestinians. The land, that had been mainly used for agriculture for centuries, has acquired a political meaning from the moment it was confiscated in 1947 and onwards. Moreover, since the 19th century, modern physicians first educated in Ottoman schools, and later in missionary institutions, started introducing new/modern forms of medicine, trying to replace traditional forms of healing that had been a component of the agrarian way of life.<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays, as we approach the few fields that are still cultivated, we notice a particular relation between man and nature that has survived from the agricultural and pastoral life. Outcome of a daily engagement of the people with their surroundings, this relation lies underneath the use of natural ingredients in amulets. Many elements of traditional cures are still in use in the everyday life of contemporary Palestinians, however, they have adapted to the historical circumstances. The twigs analysed in this chapter are part of this tradition that has been adapted to the new conditions.

Twigs contain wood, and wood is a widely used material in Palestine's autochthonous medicine. The virtue of wood is that it is easy to carve, to burn and to use in fumigations. It is sometimes used in infusions where it is boiled to bring out its medicinal properties. Wood is used alone or in combination with other parts of the plant, such as the leaves, flowers or fruits. Healing and protective remedies may include one type, or a combination of different woods. In the same way, when used as an amulet, wood might be combined with other materials.<sup>10</sup>

The twigs analysed in this article come from trees, not from bushes. Trees are very important in Palestinian popular culture for many reasons. Endemic or not, trees have made their way into the core of Palestinian culture. One rea-

9 Philippe Bourmaud, "*«Ya Doktor»: Devenir médecin et exercer son art en «Terre sainte», une expérience du pluralisme médical dans l'Empire ottoman finissant (1871–1918)*," (PhD diss., Université Aix-Marseille, 2007).

10 The use of wooden beads in combination with pieces of alum and blue beads can be observed repeatedly in the Tawfik Canaan Collection. Cfr. Birzeit University Virtual Gallery <http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/tour/ethno/item?item=01095000>.

son is that they provide shade to humans and animals. For people working the land, this is crucial since working days are long and most of the year the temperatures are very high. Being a spot to rest, the shade of the trees also provides a space to gather during the working hours of the day. It is a space for social interaction outdoors. Even in villages where houses could be used for gatherings, to sit under the trees is the preferred option as it offers a cooler place and welcomes more people to join.

The second reason of the importance of trees is that some kinds are connected to the stories of prophets and saints, therefore they are considered holy. Travellers and missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the reverence for trees as a trace of an ancient veneration.<sup>11</sup> In the pre-Islamic period trees were considered to be sacred or places where gods dwelled, and therefore, they stood as sites of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) from which *baraka*,<sup>12</sup> could be obtained. During the days of Muhammad's prophetic activity, they were considered safe sites where pacts could be made and allegiances could be pledged. The Qur'an says: "*laqad raḍiya allah 'an al-mu'minīn idh yubāy'i'ūnaka taḥta al-shajara...*"<sup>13</sup> Their neutral and protective nature was a reminiscence of the sacrality attributed to in earlier times. In the cosmology of Palestine's inhabitants, trees became conceptualised as part of God's creation and appeared frequently in the Qur'an and hadith. Remarkable is the case of *sidrat al-muntahā* (Lote tree), a kind of tree that became very highly esteemed since it is the same species as the one Prophet Muhammad encountered during his *mī'raj*, which marked the end of the seventh heaven.<sup>14</sup>

11 Grace M. Crowfoot and Louise Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop: A Study in the Folklore of Plants in Palestine* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932), 106. Tawfik Canaan's research on the types of sanctuaries in Palestine includes the role of trees in saint veneration, Cfr. Tawfik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London: Luzac & co., 1927), 30.

12 *Baraka* est essentiellement synonyme d'abondance et de prospérité ... Chez la pensée islamique, elle vient de Dieu l'unique source du sacré, en réduit à n'être qu'une manifestation de sa miséricorde. Dans la pensée populaire elle héritière a la fois du legs islamique, l'animisme des nomades et des soufis, accepte l'enseignement coranique sans rejeter pour autant les vieilles superstitions. Elle est l'influence bienfaisante du sacré. Cfr. Joseph Chelhod, "La baraka chez les Arabes ou l'influence bienfaisante du sacré," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 148, no. 1 (1955): 87–88.

13 Cfr. [quran.com](http://quran.com).

لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرَةِ فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَثَابَهُمْ  
فَتْحًا قَرِيبًا 48:18.

Certainly was Allah pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you, [O Muhammad], under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest.

14 Qur'an 53: 1–20.

Plants and trees made their way into Palestinians' popular imagination not only through textual references in the Bible and the Qur'an, but also through the stories of local village saints. Based on an everyday engagement with the natural surroundings, people in different locations, articulated stories about the trees and other elements of the landscape, with stories of the saints. The trees acquired special status since they were somehow connected with saints that had lived there or visited it.<sup>15</sup> In this way, as stories about the saints flourished and circulated, so did different explanations of the efficacy of the vegetal world in amulets.<sup>16</sup> Trees also made their way into popular imagination through Sufism, which in the Levant had developed in many ways through the different *ṭarīqāt*. Shukri Arraf mentions that in Palestinian Sufism, the tree is a symbol of renovation and endurance.<sup>17</sup> This symbolism comes from the direct observation of the life and cycle of trees, whose change throughout the year symbolise cyclical renovation, while evergreen trees are symbols of eternity.

Nowadays, trees are still considered to be sacred landmarks. They are called *manāhil* or pools/springs/water reservoirs, pointing to the presence of underground water.<sup>18</sup> In Palestine water is obtained from the rainfall during the rainy season, from early November until April;<sup>19</sup> the rest of the year, water is subtracted mainly from the ground. Therefore, when a tree stands out marking a water reservoir, it is possible to approach it, take water from it and use it to satisfy the needs of a thirsty passer-by.

The holiness of trees depends on the species but also on the particular story behind each tree. Some species of trees are always holy such as the Olive (*Olea europaea*), Storax or Snowbell (*Styrax*), and the Cedar (*Cedrus libani*). These belong to the type of evergreen or perennial trees, whose natural quality to stay green throughout the year has a very important place in popular imagination, as they symbolise eternity. Other kinds of trees more commonly found across the country are the Oak and the Terebinth, which usually mark some ancient sanctuary. Either in groves or standing alone, these trees are

15 Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, 30; Stories of trees associated to village saints still circulate. One example that I encountered during my fieldwork in the Palestine in 2017, are the stories of *al-balūt* tree in Bil'in, which tell the connexion of the trees to the local saint Abu Laymun.

16 Canaan, *Ibidem*.

17 Shukri 'Arraf, *Ṭabaqāt al-anbiyā' wa l-awliyā' al-ṣāliḥīn fi l-arḍ al-muqaddasa* (Haifa: Tarshiba, 1993), 398.

18 *ibid.*

19 E.W. Rice, "Rainfall in Palestine," *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* 6, no. 1 (June 1886): 69.

believed to be inhabited by a *welī* (*walī*).<sup>20</sup> The sanctity of other kinds of trees depends on their location, they are considered holy if they are inside the abode of a saint.

Next to the positive associations, there are also negative aspects associated with trees; it is believed that most of them attract evil spirits and thus, should be avoided. So a tree that does not belong to one of the always-holy species or does not lie within the abode of a saint, might be inhabited by evil spirits. Evil spirits choose to reside in these trees when they grow in the middle of nowhere, far away from any kind of human settlement. Also, it is often the case that these trees grow because they get water from a nearby well where evil spirits like to dwell. The trees that evil spirits like the most are the Christ's thorn jujube or *sidr* (*Zizyphus spina-christi*), carob tree or *kharrūb* (*Ceratonia siliqua*), fig or *tīn* (*Ficus carica*)<sup>21</sup> and sycamore fig or *jamīz* (*Ficus sycomorus*), therefore these trees should be avoided.<sup>22</sup> Only the pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) and European Nettle Tree (*Celtis australis*) or *al-mēs* as it is known in Arabic, are known to be immune to this evil presence. Their power and holiness is based on the fact that no evil spirits can dwell in them, making them a safe place to rest under.<sup>23</sup>

When trees are connected to a saintly figure, their power is sought in the form of *baraka*, which is obtained through engaging with the tree in different ways. One way is by tying rags to the branches. The act of tying is a particular form of petition, whereas the person who looks for help offers a vow, which is symbolised by the rag.<sup>24</sup> The aim of leaving the rag is to establish a continuous presence of the petitioner/vower. Vows are offered to a saint, and the trees where rags are tied are considered part of the abode of the saint, and extensions of his/her power. These rags acquire the *baraka* of the saint through the tree, and can be later removed and used as carriers/containers of the blessing. Rags that have been removed from a tree circulate from person to person

20 *Welī* in Palestinian dialect, *walī* in MSA, is translatable as saint but does not have the same meaning as the concept of sainthood in Christianity, therefore using the Arabic word is preferred. According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "a *walī* (pl. *awliyā*) is someone who is near (to God), he is also a friend, and in his being as a friend he possesses friendship, and in a way, he also acquires his friend's (God's) good qualities, and therefore he possesses particular authority, forces, capabilities and abilities." Cfr. B. Radtke, P. Lory, Th. Zarcone, D. DeWeese, M. Gaborieau, F.M. et al., "Wali," in *EI2*.

21 Gustaf Dalman, *Work and Customs in Palestine*, vol. 1/1 (Ramallah: Dar al-Nasher, 2013), 59.

22 Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop*, 107.

23 Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *Op. Cit.*, 106.

24 Amots Dafni, "Why are rags tied to the sacred trees of the Holy Land?" *Economy Botany* 56, no. 4 (2002): 315–327; Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, 103.



TABLE 10.1 Kind of trees

Number in catalogue	Kind of tree	Latin classification	Arabic name
810, 814, 815 and 818	European nettle tree/ Mediterranean hackberry/ Lote tree/ Honeyberry	<i>Celtis australis</i>	<i>shajaret mēs</i>
1017	Rue/ herb-of-grace	<i>Ruta graveolens</i>	<i>fayjan/sidhdhāb/adhfār keff sadabie</i>
1088	Jujube	<i>Ziziphus jujuba</i>	<i>shajaret ʿenāb</i>

carrying with it the power of the saint.<sup>25</sup> Another way of approaching the tree to get *baraka* is by cutting a small part out of it. Depending on the kind of tree, leaves, fruits, twigs, or bark can be used. Each part of the tree undergoes a different ritual procedure in order to extract this *bienfasante* power.<sup>26</sup> Due to the fact that the tree is connected to a saint, any approach requires a particular protocol. Permission must be asked to the saint or to the tree before taking anything from it. If something is taken from a sacred abode without permission, it could lead to negative effects such as illness.<sup>27</sup>

Having described the general beneficial associations with trees, the kinds of trees and their specific qualities, I should now turn to the twigs from the Tawfik Canaan Collection. These appear under the following catalogue numbers and are of the following kinds (see table 10.1).

At first sight these twigs could be grouped under one single category due to their raw nature and because they do not have any sort of alteration or human intervention. However, this could be misleading as there are important differences according to the kind of tree they come from and the ritual framework in which their power is circumscribed.

25 Some rags were collected by Tawfik Canaan. They are among the items of the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.

26 Chelhod, "La baraka chez les Arabes," 68–88.

27 Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, 14; Päivi Miettunen, *Our Ancestors were Bedouin. Memory, Identity and Change: The Case of Holy Sites in Southern Jordan* (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Helsinki, Department of World Cultures, 2013), 151.

## 1 Keff Sadabie (Kaff Sadhāb)

Item no. 1017 (see Fig. 10.1) is a small box that contains a few sprays of rue. The sprays were collected by Tawfik Canaan during one of his medical visits to the countryside. He obtained them directly from his patient, a Muslim child. The mother of the child used the sprays to protect her child by attaching them to his cap.

Called in Arabic *fayjan* or *sadhāb*, this plant grows in Palestine and it is used as a medicinal herb. Leaves, flowers and twigs are all used. By squeezing the flowers the extract is used as drops to cure ear infections. In combination with other wild rues such as garden rue (*ruta chalepensis*), wild rue (*haplophyllum tuberculatum*), and white rue (*peganum harmala*), it is used as an ointment in the treatment of rheumatism. It is also used as an ingredient of drinking infusions for stomachache and for cases of *khof* (*khauf*).<sup>28</sup>

Besides its medicinal properties, rue is used as a powerful amulet. Twigs and sprays in general are very efficacious to protect from the evil eye (*ʿayn*, *ʿayn al-ḥasūd*),<sup>29</sup> because they stand out when worn attached to the clothes. Their power lies in the way they deviate the attention of the envious person; the focus on the victim is directed towards the twig. Functioning as an eye-catcher, twigs and sprays are usually attached to the clothes or hung in a visible spot. The sprays of the *ruta graveolens* are particularly used because besides their eye-catching quality, as any other twig, people believe in their magical effect due to the shape of its fivefold leaves. In Palestine it is called *keff sadabie*<sup>30</sup> or hand of rue as it resembles the fingers of an open hand, a *khamsa*.<sup>31</sup>

Representations of hands are widespread and diverse. They might have originated from the mere gesture of raising the hand to protect from danger,<sup>32</sup> and

28 *Khof* or *khauf* means fright. Cfr. Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop*, 93. According to Abu-Rabia, *khuf*, *khawf*, *khilia'h*, *rajfih*, *rajjih*, are all names to refer to undefined anxieties and sudden fear. Negev Bedouin believe that the origin of this condition is the jinni and that it is healed using *tassit al-rajjih* or fear cups. Cfr. Abu-Rabia, *Indigenous Medicine*, 128.

29 Evil eye is referred to in Arabic as *ʿayn* and *ʿayn al-sharīra*. Since it is caused by the envy of someone else, it is also called *ʿayn al-ḥasūd* or envious eye. Abu Rabia describes the evil eye under the heading of *nafs*, being the way it is referred to among the Bedouins. Cfr. Abu-Rabia, *Indigenous Medicine*, 83.

30 *Keff sadabie* (*kaff sadhābiya* in MSA) is the transliteration from the Palestinian dialect registered by Crowfoot and Baldensperger. Cfr. Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop*, 94.

31 Tawfiq Canaan, *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel* (Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co, 1914), 64.

32 Walter L. Hildburg, "Images of the Human Hand as Amulets in Spain," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18, no. 1/2 (1955): 71.



FIGURE 10.1 Box with sprays of rue. Object no. 1017 Tawfik Canaan Collection  
COURTESY OF BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

developed into abstract shapes made of different materials. The *khamsa* is the term to refer to an open hand with the five fingers visible. *Khamsa-s* are used as amulets because their association with the number five is believed to be efficacious against the evil eye.<sup>33</sup> They are mostly human-made, but there are cases of *khamsa-s* found in nature, such as the spray of rue. Resembling a hand, the *keff sadabie* is the result of the phenomenon of anthropomorphism found in the autochthonous medical tradition in Palestine, where human aspects are recognised in nature and used for their given qualities.

*Keff sadabie* is widely used to protect children and adults. However, children are believed to be the most vulnerable to any kind of evil, so they are usually covered with different kinds of amulets. Small twigs and sprays are mostly hung on children's caps to protect them against the evil eye. These same sprays are worn by women who are a frequent target of people's envy, particularly in moments of their life such as marriage, pregnancy, and child delivery. Sometimes the sprays are gilded and put on the head of brides. In her fieldwork notes, Lydia Einsler described how she found a young mother in Jerusalem wearing a blue *mandil* decorated with sprays from different plants. Among them there was one gilded rue spray, considered to be efficacious due to its apotropaic qualities.<sup>34</sup>

33 Ibid.

34 Lydia Einsler, *Mosaik aus dem heiligen Lande: Schilderung einiger Gebräuche und Anschauungen der arabischen Bevölkerung Palästinas* (Jerusalem: Druck des Syrischen Waisenhauses, 1898).

## 2 Shajaret 'Enāb (Shajarat 'Ināb)

The jujube (*Ziziphus jujuba*) belongs to the same genus as the holy tree *Ziziphus Spina-Christi*, but are slightly different. With very similar foliage and fruits it is easy to confuse one with the other. It belongs to the evergreen trees, so its foliage gives shade all year round. Due to its size, it is very appealing to sit under. According to N. Jaradat, fruits of the jujube are used to get rid of toxic material, against coughing, chest pain and the relief of asthma.<sup>35</sup>

Jujube twigs are used as amulets. Tawfik Canaan collected samples that can be seen in his collection. Catalogued with number 1088 (see Fig. 10.2) there are two twigs of 30 cm and 40 cm long respectively. Tawfik Canaan acquired both from the same person. He registered (in German) in his notes the widespread use of jujube twigs among people suffering from *Bäulen*.<sup>36</sup> Translated into English as bulges, this medical term that he used could refer to any other kind of inflammation, swelling or protruding, such as tumours or *waram*.<sup>37</sup> People suffering from it believed in the efficacy of cutting a knot of the twig and pulling it apart. What is interesting to note here is that the twigs used to cure illnesses with a swelling effect, must have a knob resembling the bulge or protuberance. The procedure then followed the logic of sympathetic magic. It was simple; the twig went through a process of anthropomorphism, so by breaking the knob of the twig, the patient's swelling was addressed, treated and cured.

According to Tawfik Canaan the twigs had to be cut in pieces of approximately one inch long and then had to be attached to the clothes. The two twigs in the collection, however, are too long to have been used as such. Their length suggests that they were collected by Canaan before having been cut up and used, or just after the owner had acquired them directly from the tree, from a particular shaykh or at *al-ʿaṭṭārīn* (*al-ʿaṭṭārūn*).<sup>38</sup> Probably the aim was to cut

35 Nidal Jaradat, "Medical Plants Utilized in Palestinian Folk Medicine for Treatment of Diabetes Mellitus and Cardiac Diseases," *Al-Aqsa University* 9 (2005), 21.

36 In his notes the description of 1088 comes as follows: "Ein Zweigchen v. Innāb-Baum (von djöret al-ʿinnaāb) 1912. Bei Bäulen soll ein Knoten geschnitten werden (v. Zweig) u. ausgezogen." Cfr. Tawfik Canaan, Catalogue of his collection in five notebooks written in German (unpublished manuscript, available at Birzeit University).

37 *waram* means swelling or tumor, it comes from the root *warima* to be swollen. Cfr. H. Wehr, *Dictionary*, 1245.

38 *al-ʿaṭṭārīn* sing. *aṭṭār* comes from the word *oitr*, which means perfume or fragrance. The name is given to the seller of perfumes, but also of spices and herbs. Traditionally *al-ʿaṭṭārīn* sell the ingredients for medical remedies. Basic ingredients might appear in all shops despite the location, but there are particular ingredients that differ from place to place. Since the owners of these kinds of shops come from specific families, they are also sought for medical advice. Cfr. Marcela Garcia Probert, "Exploring the life of amulets in



FIGURE 10.2 Two jujube twigs. Object no. 1088 Tawfik Canaan Collection  
COURTESY OF BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

them in many pieces and use them on multiple occasions as part of one treatment. If this is the case, I argue that the twigs were collected before being used as an amulet. It is not clear in Canaan's records whether the knob of the twig was supposed to be pulled apart before or after attaching it to the clothes. However, it seems plausible that the twigs were attached to the clothes after being depurated from their knob (the illness), and were worn to slowly release their healing power and transmit it to the user.

According to Canaan, these two twigs came from the trees that grew at *jawrat al-'enāb*. The place, as the name indicates, was a pit or a small valley, and the 'enāb tree abounded there. The pit became also known as Sultan's pool, after the construction of the dam in the Valley of Hinnom by the Ottoman sultans. In other sources this place is also called *berkat el-ta'wabīn* (*birkat al-tha'ābīn*) or the pond of the snakes.<sup>39</sup> *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. Before the occupation of West Jerusalem, it was an important resting spot for the merchants who came from surrounding villages to sell their products in the Old City. Its importance relied on the water reservoir. Mainly fed from rainwater, the reservoir served as part of the water supply of the city, as well as for the itinerant peasants and merchants and their animals.

Tawfik Canaan did not specify from whom he got the twigs. According to the year of obtention and the kinds of amulets he collected in this period—when he worked as an itinerant doctor in the countryside—it is feasible that

Palestine. From healing and protective remedies to the the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2021), chapter 4.

39 In Standard Arabic *barkat al-tha'ābīn*, in Palestinian dialect *berkat el-ta'wabīn*. Cfr. <http://alqudslana.com/print.php?id=4698>.

they came from one of his patients that paid Dr. Canaan's medical services with their own amulets. The way that the patient acquired the twigs is also unknown. Another possibility is that Canaan got the twigs directly from a healer. From Canaan's notes we know that he was in close contact with some *shuyūkh*, who in fact were involved in his collecting activity of amulets.<sup>40</sup> At *jawrat al-'enāb* there was a well-known amulet maker, Shaykh Maḥmūd Basha al-'Askarī also known as Sheikh al-Falakī. His amulets were famous in Jerusalem. He wrote a famous book *al-muntakhab al-naḥīs min 'ilm nabī allah idrīs*,<sup>41</sup> which includes a section on *'ilm al-ḥurūf*, where he shared part of the knowledge he used for amulet-making. His amulets contained inscriptions in special arrangements and letter combinations. It is not certain whether he also resorted to other kinds of healing techniques such as the use of herbs. In this case it is arguable that the twigs might have been prescribed by him as a cure.

The trees of *jawrat al-'enāb* do not seem to have been connected with any saintly figure, but were used because they resembled the inflammation in the body. The jujube tree, like many other plants in Palestine, has been used in medical treatments; its power lay in the natural intrinsic medicinal properties.<sup>42</sup> Since the jujube twigs belong to a tree from the same family of the jujube-spines christi, they might have been considered an alternative to it. Moreover, the jujube twigs were used as amulets due to the connexion of the trees with a water supply. As mentioned before, these spots are called *manāhil*, they are markers and as such they stand out from the rest of the landscape. Finally, being obtained from a well-known sheikh, these twigs might have been considered efficacious due to the reliance on him as a good amulet maker and healer.

### 3 Shajaret-al-Mēs (Shajarat al-Mīs)

*Al-mēs (al-mīs)* tree belongs to the group of perennial trees, its foliage is green throughout the year. Due to the big size of its canopy and foliage it is one of the preferred trees to sit under. It is a species that grows in the Mediterranean

40 Khaled Nashef, "Tawfiq Canaan: His Life and Works," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 16 (2002): 12–26. For a detailed discussion on how Tawfiq Canaan collected the objects in his collection Cfr. Garcia Probert "Exploring the life of amulets," chapter 3.

41 Shaykh Maḥmūd Basha al-'Askarī, *al-muntakhab al-naḥīs min 'ilm nabī allah idrīs*, 2nd ed. (1950). Cfr. <https://ia800307.us.archive.org/27/items/AlmontakabAl-nafeae/AlmontakabAl-nafeae.pdf>.

42 Jaradat, "Medical Plants," 21.

climate. This tree grows naturally but can also be found in cultivated land where it is planted in open fields for its shade.<sup>43</sup>

Contrary to most trees, this is one of the kinds, in which no evil spirits (*arwāh sharīra*) can dwell.<sup>44</sup> It is believed that evil spirits like the darkness, so the night is their favourite time to become active. They dwell in dark places such as caves, wells, grottos, groves or trees with abundant foliage, so people are careful not to approach these trees particularly after sunset. Ironically, the bigger the tree, the better the shade, and the more appealing to men, the more avoided they should be. There are trees however, that according to popular beliefs are immune to evil spirits. *Al-mēs* is one of them. It offers refuge, it is possible to sit under it during day and night.<sup>45</sup>

The protective power of this kind of tree has to do with its intrinsic qualities, but is also related to its location. Although *al-mēs* tree is generally considered protective regardless of where it grows, particular trees stand out for various reasons.<sup>46</sup> First, when a tree stands alone in a huge open field where no other protection is offered, it is considered a good spot to rest especially if it is in the middle of the way between two villages. An example is the tree of *al-mēs* located between the village of al-Khadr and Bait Zakkariya near Bethlehem, which is believed to be a sprout of the tree in which the Virgin hid during the persecution of the Jews.<sup>47</sup> Second, the tree marks the place where a miracle or an important event took place. Particularly famous among Christians is the *al-mēs* tree of Bir Qādīsmu (Kathisma) on the way to Bethlehem, which grew from a small pond said to have been where the three magicians saw the reflection of the light of the star during Epiphany.<sup>48</sup> Third, trees are believed to be protective if they grow near a shrine or belong to the abode of a saint. Their power relies on their location, but is also connected to the site through the sacred stories. This is the case of the *al-mēs* trees that grow in the area of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, the place where the twigs studied here come from.

Apart from the protection that *al-mēs* tree offers to passers-by, the protective power of this kind of tree can be extended through the use of its wood in amulets. Based on the material collected by Tawfik Canaan and Lydia Einsler, it is possible to trace two main applications of the *al-mēs* wood in amulets. The wood was carved in a triangular or cylindrical shape, pierced and attached

43 Dalman, *Work and Customs*, 69.

44 'Arraf, *Ṭabaqāt*.

45 Ibid.

46 Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop*, 449.

47 Canaan, *Aberglaube*, 63.

48 Arraf, *Ṭabaqāt*, 449.



FIGURE 10.3 Twig of *celtis australis*. Object no. 810 Tawfik Canaan Collection  
COURTESY OF BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

to other beads or stones as part of a more elaborate amulet.<sup>49</sup> In other cases, the wood was left unaltered, as in the case of the twigs. The difference between both forms of using the wood lies in the way the material is manipulated, which in turn shows the techniques of cutting, carving and piercing the wood, as well as the intended use. For the purpose of this article, I only delve into the second form, the twig amulets.

Twig-amulets from *al-mēs* are usually small. According to Canaan, they should be between 2 or 3 cm long, but the ones he collected are up to 8 cm long, as shown in objects no. 810, 814, 815 and 818 from the Tawfik Canaan Collection. (see Fig. 10.3) The shape differs, sometimes a regular twig, sometimes a bifurcate twig. The belief in the power of these twigs is widespread in Palestine. Peasants, Bedouins and townsmen have used this wood extensively. It is used to protect children, horses, and to cure ill people.<sup>50</sup> The twigs are used as amulets by attaching them to children's caps, by hanging them at the entrance of the house or at the base of the entrance arch. The twigs are sometimes accompanied by a piece of egg shell, a garlic clove, a blue bead, and a piece of alum.

49 Evidence of this use of the wood is the amulets in the Tawfik Canaan Collection at Birzeit University and the Lydia Einsler Collection at the Museum of Ethnology in Dresden.

50 'Arraf, Ṭabaqāt, 448.



Three different concepts have been used to describe the protective function of the twigs: *ruqya*, *ta'āwīdh* and *tamīma*. Shukri Araf informs us that the wood of *al-mēs* is used among the *fellahīn* and *non-fellahīn* in *ruqya*.<sup>51</sup> *Ruqya* is a general term that refers to the formulae that the Prophet Muhammad used to pronounce when healing someone.<sup>52</sup> *Ruqya*, however, is not an exclusive Muslim practice, in Palestine it can be found among Christians as well. Moreover, *ruqya* has developed in different ways, and in early twentieth-century Palestine when the twigs were collected, it also referred to the material objects and ingredients of respective cures administered in conjunction with the recitation of the formulae. One formula is the *ista'ādha*, in which by the uttering or writing *a'ūdhu bi-llahi min al-shaytān al-rajīm* one places oneself under the protection of God. *Ta'āwīdh*, the second concept under scope, refers to those material objects that bear such formula or have been affected by its recitation.<sup>53</sup> The third is *tamīma*, a term that contains the idea of completion and perfection. By wearing a twig, an efficacious complete remedy or perfect cure is expected.<sup>54</sup>

The use of *al-mēs* twigs varies according to the tree and the beliefs around it. Beliefs may also differ according to religious denomination. For instance, Christian inhabitants from Artas use the twigs under the belief that the better wood for *ruqya* is the one taken from a tree that has not heard the *adhān* or the Muslim call for prayer. Therefore, the wood is taken from trees that grow far away from villages. This belief gave rise to the following saying: *al-mīs illī mā bitisma' al-adhān did al-naḥs wa did al-'ayn*<sup>55</sup> This belief points to the fact that the location of the tree matters, the most efficacious twigs come from a pure, uninhabited, natural space. Such a belief, however, could be considered as an expression of religious differentiation, but it could also be understood within a logic in which the natural world is powerful and efficacious through its intrinsic qualities. A twig should not be used in *ruqya* unless it is new. The twig has to be unaltered physically and never subjected to previous religious invocations.

For inhabitants of Jerusalem and visitors to *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, the most efficacious *al-mēs* wood is the one from the trees that grow in the esplanade between the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. According to Canaan, the sacredness of these trees rests on the fact that they grow in the area of the holy site. The *al-mēs* is not the only kind of tree that grows there, but it is the only one used for amulets. Stories revolving around the sacredness and power of

51 'Arraf, *Ṭabaqāt*, 448.

52 Toufic Fahd, "Ruqya," in *EI2*.

53 Toufic Fahd, "Tamīma," in *EI2*.

54 *idem*.

55 Crowfoot and Baldensperger, *From Cedar to Hyssop*, 449.

this tree circulate orally. The importance of popular stories and sayings must be highlighted here, since it is through the mechanism of orality that knowledge about the efficacy of some amulets is transmitted. This knowledge is based on the experience of the residents on how nature behaves throughout the year, how nature has been subsumed to sacred history and how it has become powerful in offering protection and healing.<sup>56</sup>

There are two main stories about the origin of *al-mēs* trees in the esplanade of the *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*. According to both, the jinn offered the trees to King Salomon as a gift to protect his temple from any harm. The temple was so beautiful that it could attract the envy of many. The trees were therefore planted in rows in the esplanade. Tawfik Canaan registered the stories in his *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin*:

After the King [Salomon] had finished building the Temple, kings, angels and even animals sought to offer the best gifts. However, the jinn were reluctant to do the same. In answer to the king's question about why they did not want to give something to the temple, the jinn responded: 'O kind and great ruler, the Temple is the most beautiful structure man's hands have ever built, and no one will ever succeed again to build a glorious building. We think we have something to donate, which should protect this miracle from the "evil eye". Not a blue pearl because it would disappear into the size of the building, so it would always be exposed to the "evil eye". Thus, we have decided to plant two rows of *mīs*-trees around the temple.<sup>57</sup>

A different version of the story goes as follows:

When King David started to build the temple, his construction collapsed every few years. He implored God for help. Then a jinn appeared to him

56 James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 116.

57 Translated into English by the author. Cfr. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, 62. "Nachdem der König mit dem Bau des Tempels fertig war, wetteiferten Könige, Engel, ja Tiere bei der Einweihung Geschenke darzubringen. Jedoch die 'dschinn's zögerten noch, es den andern gleich zu tun. Auf des Königs Frage, ob sie nicht auch dem Tempel etwas schenken wollten, antwortete ihr Oberster: 'O König und großer Herrscher, der Tempel ist der schönste Bau, den Menschenhände je gebaut haben, und niemals wird es jemand gelingen, wieder so etwas Herrliches auszuführen. Wir denken wohl etwas zu stiften, was dieses Wunderwerk vor dem 'bösen Blick' schützen soll. Da aber eine blaue Perle in der Größe des Baues verschwinden würde, und er so den 'bösen Blicken' trotzdem stets ausgesetzt wäre, so haben wir beschlossen, zwei Reihen *mēs*-Bäume um den Tempel herum zu pflanzen."

and told him to give up the work, but his son [Salomon] and heir to the throne continued to build the temple. When his son had ascended to the throne, he began again building, but the work fell again. He asked God for help and the same jinn who had appeared to his father said to him: "The evil eye of the many envious persons harms this unprotected building". Behold, I give you trees to plant around the temple. After the king had these trees planted, he could continue building. The Temple of Salomon is still standing today because these trees still protect it.<sup>58</sup>

As part of his research on Palestinian folklore, Tawfik Canaan collected amulets and recorded oral accounts about them. These two stories about the origin of the *al-mēs* trees seem to have been well known by Jerusalemites who used the wood, and they might have been also heard by the people who visited *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*. But more interesting is the fact that these two stories disclose the agency of the jinn when giving the trees to Salomon, and their submission to the power of God and his prophets. When Canaan obtained the twigs, there was a widespread belief that the most powerful were those cut on the 27th of Ramadan, after sunset and before day-break. This night, also known as *laylat al-qadr*, is believed to be the most powerful night when any kind of petition to God is heard. It is feasible to assume that any kind of amulet obtained on that day would be more efficacious, however, Canaan's records do not provide any evidence of this belief applied to other amulets. Besides cutting twigs on *laylat al-qadr*, twigs could be cut on Thursday afternoon. Properties of the twigs were believed to diminish if cut on Saturday before sunrise, and become not beneficial if cut any other day. According to Canaan, the efficacy of the twigs was reaffirmed by sheikhs, who claimed that the twigs were powerful regardless of when the twig had been cut. This claim could have come as a response to the custom of cutting the twigs on particular days.

58 Translated into English by the author. Cfr. Canaan, *Aberglaube*, 62. "Als König David den Tempel zu errichten anfang, fiel sein Bau alle paar Jahre zusammen. Er flehte zu Gott um Hilfe; da erschien ihm ein *dschān* und sagte ihm, er solle die Arbeit aufstecken, denn sein Sohn und Thronfolger werde den Tempel bauen. Als nun sein Sohn den Thron bestiegen hatte, fing er mit dem Gebäude von neuem an; aber siehe, die Arbeit fiel doch wieder zusammen. Er bat Gott um Hilfe; und derselbe *dschān*, der seinem Vater erschienen war, sagte ihm: "das 'böse Auge' der vielen Neider schadet diesem ungeschützten Bauwerk. Siehe! Ich gebe dir *mēs*-Bäume, die um den Tempel herum gepflanzt werden sollen." Nachdem der König diese Bäume hatte einsetzen lassen, konnte er ununterbrochen weiter bauen und der Tempel Salomons steht bis zum hantigen Tage, weil diese Bäume ihn noch beschützen!!"

The two main explanations of the beneficial power of *al-mēs* shows that the power of the twigs is on the one hand, related to the jinn, and on the other hand, to particular times of ritual twig cutting. The efficacy of the twigs in relation to the jinn's power seem to have been a problematic explanation for some. Seeking the jinn for protection and healing is, in strict terms, considered *shirk*, because the only one who can grant protection and healing is God. The belief in cutting the twigs in specific days of the Muslim calendar tries to re-assert the belief of God as the ultimate source for protection and healing. The religious debates that might have influenced the stories around the use of twigs is material for another paper. For now, what is important to observe is the different ways in which the twigs functioned and acquired meaning.

#### 4 Conclusion

Plants are considered an integral part of the Palestinian medical tradition. The Palestinian landscape is covered with more than 2600 plant species, from which more than 700 are used for their medicinal properties.<sup>59</sup> All the parts of the plant (leaves, twigs, fruit, roots, stem) can be used. Infusions, fumigations, and ointments, are some of the ways in which the properties can be extracted. Another way is through applying these ingredients in amulets, which are either used for their apotropaic power or for their healing qualities. In each case, the plant requires to be processed in a different way to activate its properties, which are apprehended/assimilated through the senses. Some plants function by attracting the gaze of others in order to deviate the evil eye; other plants work through their odour and have to be burnt; in other cases, the plants have to be infused or ingested.

Although the plants have intrinsic properties that act fully when prepared as medicinal remedies, extra beneficial powers can be added to them. The power can derive from the holiness attributed to the place of origin, such as the twigs obtained at *al-ḥaram al-sharīf*, and by means of ritual actions performed by the user himself or by the practitioner or healer who makes the amulet, such as *ruqya* procedures. The different rituals to activate plants' properties with extra beneficial power are for instance, cutting twigs at a certain time of the day, on specific holy days, and pronouncing invocations on them such as invoking God for His protection.

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59 Jaradat, "Medical Plants," 2.

The twigs analysed in this chapter are carried, hung and displayed in order to deviate the focus of the evil-eye. The efficacy of the twigs depends on the kind of tree they originate from, which is believed to have special qualities in relation to the life of a saint, or to the place where it grows. Beliefs around the trees take shape in stories which are told and re-told conveying knowledge about the elements/parts of the natural landscape but also emphasising their connexion with episodes of sacred history or with holy characters.

The materiality of the twigs can be explored by looking at them carefully. Even the more subtle features disclose traces of how they have been cut, manipulated, and reached the shape that they currently have. These aspects have to be considered when analysing their uses and functions through their life as objects. Cutting a twig in one way or another points to different ritual contexts which effect and affect the meaning of the twig itself. In each act of cutting the twig, making and incision on it, engraving it, etc., many elements must be considered: first of all the kind of wood; second whether the act was performed by a healer or by the user himself; then, the time and spacial context. Once this is set, the function can be disclosed, and the different stages through which the object has been.

Approaching any amulet through its material qualities counterbalances the dominant textual approach to the amulets' inscriptions, and shows that texts are not necessary to produce potent amulets.

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Birzeit University Virtual Gallery <http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/tour/ethno/item?item=01095000>

# Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum: Notes on a History

*Venetia Porter*

The British Museum's collection of seals and amulets, some 800 objects altogether, comprises a number of interesting groups, the most important of which were put together by key individuals, the earliest in the mid 18th century, with most of the rest following a century later.\* These collections reflect not only what was circulating at the time, whether in the bazaars of the Middle East or elsewhere, but in addition, offer a perspective on the state of knowledge about these objects and their broader cultural context at the time they were collected. Travellers to the Middle East, generally steeped in the cultures of the Ancient rather than the Islamic worlds intrigued by these objects, might acquire Islamic seals and amulets made from materials such as carnelian or chalcedony if they were interested in gemstones generally, or simply as curios. Seals and amulets often circulated together alongside coins, and collectors of classical coins might also acquire Islamic coins at the same time.<sup>1</sup> For those collections that entered museums, the British Museum in London, or the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for example, the work of deciphering and dating generally took place when specialists were available often decades after the objects had entered the collections.<sup>2</sup> At the British Museum, two groups are exceptional because of the study initiated on them before they entered the

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- 1 For a discussion of the collecting of Islamic coins during the 17th and 18th centuries see Andrew Burnett, *The Hidden Treasures of this Happy Island. A History of Numismatics in Britain from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication no. 58; British Numismatic Society Special Publication no. 14. (London: Spink 2020), 645 ff.
- 2 Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*. British Museum Research Papers no. 160. (London: British Museum 2011). Accessible on-line: [https://projects.britishmuseum.org/pdf/RP\\_160\\_Arabic\\_Persian\\_Seals\\_Amulets\\_British\\_Museum.pdf](https://projects.britishmuseum.org/pdf/RP_160_Arabic_Persian_Seals_Amulets_British_Museum.pdf); Ludvik Kalus, *Catalogue des cachets, bulles et talismans islamiques*. Bibliothèque Nationale Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques. (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale 1981).



collection: those of Sir Hans Sloane (d. 1753), founder of the British Museum, and Louis Duc de Blacas (d. 1866). This essay considers the Sloane and Blacas collections from this perspective and also discusses collections of similar material including those acquired by the banker Henry Christy (d. 1865) and by the archaeologist and adventurer Charles Masson (d. 1853). The essay concludes with further remarks about the nature of the objects themselves.

Sir Hans Sloane was a physician and polymath whose thirst for knowledge epitomised the 18th century Enlightenment era. His wealth came as a result of his sojourn in Jamaica where from 1867, he served as the physician for the English colony. This was at the height of England's development of the island as a major sugar exporting economy made possible through the large scale import of African slaves brought to work on the sugar plantations. During his time there he began research on an encyclopaedic work on Jamaica and other Caribbean islands that took in natural history and the lives of the inhabitants, and started to collect objects that caught his eye. His marriage to an heiress of Jamaican sugar plantations enabled him to fund his passion for collecting and over subsequent years, using trading networks he had developed, and employing individuals to collect for him, he made extensive collections from every culture. An astounding 71,000 objects were bequeathed to the nation following his death in 1753. His aim, as James Delbourgo describes it was 'to sample and survey every single thing in God's creation—to collect and catalogue the variety of the world'.<sup>3</sup> In amongst these vast collections, are a group of Persian seals and amulets.<sup>4</sup> The four seals are engraved in reverse in *nasta'liq* script, and have the names of their owners on them, some with benedictory texts in addition.<sup>5</sup> Sloane's amulets made for the most part of chalcedony or carnelian exemplify the best in the engraving techniques and artistry of hardstone

3 James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane*, (London: Penguin, 2017), xxvi. For details of the different constituent collections, see Arthur MacGregor, (ed), *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum* (London, 1994), 291–294.

4 The term amulet for these objects is preferred to talisman. As defined by Emilie Savage-Smith: an amulet is 'any relatively small object intended to be worn to ensure protection and well-being ....usually made of long-lasting materials and apparently made to function over a long period.' Emilie Savage-Smith "Magic and Islam," in *Science, Tools and Magic* (2 vols.), eds. Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, 12. (London/Oxford: Azimuth editions and Oxford University Press, 1997), 1: 133. For the wider context of amulets and magic see Venetia Porter, Liana Saif and Emilie Savage-Smith, 'Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans and Magic' in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, eds. Finbarr Barry Flood, and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2017), 521–558.

5 *Gemmae & Lapides continentes Inscriptiones Arabicas, Persicas* etc. nos. 19, 20, 23, 24. Two of these are transcribed in Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets* nos. 436 and 443.

amulets made in Iran in the 17th–18th centuries. With predominantly Qur’anic texts, features include the adaptation of the script *gulzār* (where ornamentation occurs inside the contours of the script) to write verses from the Qur’an within the word Muhammad; and the use of etching to bring the inscription out in white against the ground of the stone. There are also dated examples—a rare feature of amulets.<sup>6</sup> Although the exact circumstances are not known, the seal rings and amulets were acquired in Iran probably at the same time as a costume album with portraits of people representing the social fabric of seventeenth-century Isfahan commissioned by Engelbert Kaempfer (d. 1716), a botanist who was also German physician to the Safavid court at Isfahan, and an astrolabe dated 1712 inscribed with the name of the Safavid ruler Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1694–1722).<sup>7</sup> Sloane kept meticulous catalogues, one of which, entitled *Gemmae & Lapides continens Inscriptiones Arabicas, Persicas etc.* contains detailed descriptions and transcriptions of each object in Latin.<sup>8</sup> At this time there were several significant scholars working in different capacities in London and elsewhere, to whom Sloane was able to turn to get help to translate the texts as he was keen to learn what was inscribed upon these objects. As regards the amulets, (of which there are 22 recorded in the catalogue), these objects were not chosen by Sloane merely for the beauty of the stone, but, as amulets with perceived protective powers, they fitted in with his interest in the role of ‘medical superstition’ in the various societies across the world that he was learning about while building his collections, classing them among his ‘Magical follies’. As Delbourgo notes: ‘Given his deep-seated antipathy to magic, it becomes clear that Sloane’s interest in such curiosities was motivated by the desire to expose superstition’ and with it came a ‘crusade against credulity [that] generated a stream of prejudicial and essentialising statements about foreign people.’<sup>9</sup> Therefore it was necessary for him to know what they said, and, as we learn from the annotations in the catalogue, he consulted a number of scholars. It is curious that unlike the amulets, the Persian rings are not transcribed, suggesting that Sloane could not find anyone to read them or that he was less interested in them than he was in the amulets. The scholars involved

6 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*. The Sloane amulets are the following: A14, A15, A16, A17, A18, A19, A20, A21, A22, A30, A31, A46, A58, A59, A84, A78, A86. A110 (1077/1666–1667) and A114 (1070/1659–1670). This was wrongly read as AH1170 in the Porter catalogue.

7 Sheila Canby, *The Golden Age of Persian Art*, (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 171–172 and pl.161. See also <http://islamicworld.britishmuseum.org/collection/RRM37/>; Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 272 and 226 ff. Ladan Akbarnia, Venetia Porter, Fahmida Suleman et al. *The Islamic World: A History in Objects* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 240.

8 *Gemmae & Lapides Continentes Inscriptiones Arabicas, Persicas etc.* British Museum Archives.

9 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 253 and 282–283.

in the translations from Arabic were George Sale (d. 1736), who made a translation of the Qur'an in 1734, Theocharis Dadichi (d. 1743), a Syriac Christian and the King's interpreter and an Armenian from Diyarbakir Melchior de Jaspas who was working as a translator for the African Company (involved during the 1730s with the opening up of trade with west Africa) and who were each in London during this time.<sup>10</sup> Another key figure in the story of the translations of Sloane's amulets, was Job ben Solomon, also known as Diallo. A Muslim slave trader from the Fula people of Bundu in present day Senegal, Diallo's father was an imam. Captured by a rival group of slave traders and enslaved himself, Diallo spent time imprisoned in Boston, and was taken pity on by Thomas Bluett, an evangelical Christian who brought him to London in 1733. He wrote a memoir about him, which he published in 1734, and here, at Diallo's request, he begins: 'JOB's Name, in his own Country, is HYUBA, BOON SALUMENA, BOON HIBRAHEMA; i.e. JOB, the Son of Solomon, the Son of Abraham. The Sirname of his Family is Jallo.'<sup>11</sup> 'Hyuba' is Ayyub, and Diallo is the interpretation of Jallo.

It was in London, that Diallo met Hans Sloane, Melchior de Jaspas, and others. Sloane enlisted Diallo's support to help transcribe his amulets and the Islamic coins he had also acquired. Delighted with the help, Sloane was later to boast about 'coins I had interpreted by a native of the inward parts of Africa a black mahometan priest who had great knowledge of the ancient as well as modern Arabick.'<sup>12</sup> In writing to Abbé Bignon (d. 1743) about Diallo and his ability to read these coins, Bignon replied: 'I congratulate you upon the curious discoveries you have obtained by the Mahometan Priest that was brought over from the West Indies, upon the medals of the Chalifs, & upon Amulets, which is a very puzzling matter ...'<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Bluett, noted that Diallo had not only memorised the whole Qur'an but copied the Qur'an three times during his stay in London,<sup>14</sup> and he comments on how Diallo 'could fraternize with London's elite, obtaining many gifts and new friendships' while at the same time being of particular service to Hans Sloane by his ability and willingness to work on his amulets. So esteemed was Diallo that in 1733, he was painted by the celebrated portrait

10 Gerald J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: the Study of Arabic in 17th Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 307 ff.; John Milner Gray *History of the Gambia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015 (reprint of 1940 edition), 14 and ff.

11 Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Bounda in Africa* (London printed for Richard Ford, 1734), 12 and ff. Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 250 ff.

12 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 255.

13 Burnett, *Hidden Treasures*, 667.

14 Bluett, *Some Memoirs*, 48.

painter William Hoare (d. 1792), the leather Qur'an pouch placed prominently around his neck.<sup>15</sup> A year later his freedom was purchased by Sloane and members of the Royal African Company and he returned home resuming his work in the slave trade.<sup>16</sup> The experts consulted by Sloane: Sale, Dadichi and Diallo are fully credited in the Sloane catalogue which includes diagrams of the amulets, the translation of the verses from the Qur'an into Latin, the *sura* (chapter) number. Diallo's readings are referred to as *interprete eadem Job, or legente Job* in some cases alongside the names of Sale or Dadichi sometimes together with Job after each. As regards the texts of the amulets themselves, there are clear Shi'i connotations in two of them—unsurprising as Shi'a Islam was the national religion of Iran since the Safavid era which began in 1501—and two of them cite the invocation to Imām 'Alī known as the *nādi 'Aliyan*, (Call upon 'Alī who makes wonders appear, you will find him a help to you in adversity, all care and grief will clear away through your Prophethood O Muhammad, through your friendship O 'Alī'). One of these, (Sloane amulet 1) is an armband, a dark red carnelian within a chalcedony frame, the other, (Sloane amulet 15) a pear-shaped carnelian, where the *nādi 'Aliyan* is combined with verses from the Qur'an and benedictory phrases.<sup>17</sup> What is intriguing however, is that while Diallo's transcriptions in Sloane's catalogue are for the most part accurate, the transcription for Amulet 1 is not. It may be that Diallo, being a Sunni Muslim, was not familiar with this particular phrase (Sale, however, correctly interprets the *nādi 'Aliyan* on Sloane amulet 15). A later note (possibly from A.W. Franks, see below) comments that the use of the *nādi 'Aliyan* on Sloane amulet 1 was 'against fascination by evil eyes'—very much fitting in with Sloane's earlier prejudices against objects of this sort.<sup>18</sup>

The other annotations in the Sloane catalogue are those of Augustus Wollaston Franks (d. 1897), another significant person in the history of the British

15 This portrait belongs to the Orientalist Museum in Doha currently on display in the National Portrait Gallery on London. Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, pl. 25; See also <https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/display/2011/ayuba-suleiman-diallo.php>. A print after this portrait made by William Hoare is in the British Museum. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1847-0713-65](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1847-0713-65).

16 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 251 (take note of note 66)–257. Delbourgo has pieced together material that I had previously not had access to when I wrote the section on Sloane in the introduction to: Porter *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, 19–22.

17 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, nos. A78 and A86. Delbourgo *Collecting the World*, 2017, 254.

18 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 251 (note note 66)–257. Delbourgo has pieced together material that I had previously not had access to when I wrote the section on Sloane in the introduction to the Porter *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, 19–22.

Museum, often regarded as its 'second founder'.<sup>19</sup> As Keeper of the newly formed departments 'British and Medieval Antiquities' and 'Ethnography', it was he who was responsible for the creation of the Islamic collection at the museum, adding over 3,000 objects from the Islamic world.<sup>20</sup> The mid-19th century was a period of great fascination with the Middle East. The Bible tours to the Holy Land, as an extension of the Grand Tour, enticed more people to travel, and there were major developments in archaeological discovery. This fascination also extended to scholars and collectors in the Middle East. (See: Tawfik Canaan and his circle in Jerusalem discussed several times in this volume<sup>21</sup>). As regards collections of objects, these were being amassed in Europe by artists, travellers, businessmen and government officials. Exhibitions such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace were hugely influential in making Islamic pottery, metalwork and other objects originating in the Middle East fashionable, even though their new owners may not actually have travelled in the region, and there were several dealers active in this market.<sup>22</sup> In London there was a significant group of collectors, connected to Franks whose collections, including his own, that were to eventually find a permanent home in the British Museum. Franks had a very clear idea of what types of objects the museum should collect. As suggested by Rachel Ward, 'Franks saw the Islamic realm as both a geographical and cultural buffer zone between Europe, Asia and Africa, and as a bridge linking the artistic achievement of Antiquity with Renaissance Europe'.<sup>23</sup> He could be described as a taxonomist, he was interested in objects which were documentary in the sense that they bore inscriptions of makers or dedicatees, and which filled gaps in series. He created a special display devoted to Islam remarking, in the context of how to represent Islamic culture, that 'Islamism was no easy matter'.<sup>24</sup> His own modest collection of Islamic seals

19 David Wilson, 'Auguston Wollaston Franks—Towards a Portrait.' In Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (eds), *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Press 1997): 1.

20 Rachel Ward 'Islamism, not an easy matter' in Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (eds), *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Press 1997), 272–285.

21 Cfr: Marcela A. Garcia Probert, "Twigs in the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets," in this volume; Jean-Charles Coulon, "Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the *Corpus Bunianum*," in this volume.

22 Stephen Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art, Scholars Collectors, and Collections, 1850–1950* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 14 ff.

23 Ward, 'Islamism', 272.

24 Ward, 'Islamism', 272.

and amulets numbered some 20 items,<sup>25</sup> but, significantly, he was responsible for two major collections of this material entering the museum, those of Henry Christy and Louis Duc de Blacas. Of the two generations of collectors, Casimir (d. 1839) and Louis Duc de Blacas (d. 1866), it was the latter who was interested in gems and coins amongst objects pertaining to Islamic culture and, he invited the scholar Jean-Toussaint Reinaud (d. 1867), a specialist on Oriental manuscripts at the 'Bibliothèque du Roi', member of the 'Société Asiatique de Paris' and connected to the Royal Asiatic Society in London to catalogue his collection. As Reinaud describes in the preface to his comprehensive book in two volumes *Monumens Musulmans* which comprised the Blacas and other collections, published in 1828, the Duke had been collecting Islamic objects for some time along with Greek vases, cameos and other objects, but was struck by the ignorance relating to the Islamic objects and decided that it was time for scholars to gain knowledge about them.<sup>26</sup> In the catalogue of 1828, are 129 Islamic engraved gems of which 56 (both seals and amulets) entered the British Museum collection following the death of the Duke. His entire collection was purchased by the British Museum in 1866, an act which provoked an outcry in France.<sup>27</sup> Among other significant Islamic objects in this collection was the well-known inlaid metal ewer made in Mosul in 1232 CE (629 AH), signed by the craftsman Shuja' ibn Man'a.<sup>28</sup> Reinaud was a remarkable scholar and a numismatist and the inscriptions on the seals and amulets clearly presented little difficulty for him. He transcribed each one and accompanied his entries with rich contextual material on the texts, the use of the objects and on Islam itself. It can be said to represent the summation of western knowledge on the subject at this time. Of the engraved gems Reinaud interestingly commented that they were becoming an important element among the *Monumens* acquired in 'the Orient', were increasingly sought after, that 'les amateurs', the collectors, were regularly now including them in their collections in order to understand them.<sup>29</sup> The majority of the Islamic seals and amulets in his collection had been collected by Colonel Bernard Eugène Antione Rottiers (d. 1858), who was in the

25 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*. Registration numbers: 1893,0426.160–179) Cat.nos. 49, 74, 85, 139, 140, 371, 438, 465, 501, 502, 571, 615, 616, A133, A134.

26 Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud, *Monumens Arabes, Persans et Turcs, du cabinet de M. Le Duc de Blacas* (2 vols). (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1828), iii.

27 Rémi Labrusse, *Islamophilies: l'Europe moderne et les arts de l'Islam* (Lyon: Musée des beaux-arts de Lyon, 2011), 100 ff.

28 Rachel Ward, *Court & Craft: A Masterpiece from Northern Iraq* (London: Courtauld Gallery, 2014), 136.

29 Reinaud, *Monumens* vol. 1, vi.

service of the Russian army had engaged in campaigns in Georgia and Iran in 1812 and had also travelled widely across the Middle East.<sup>30</sup>

An intriguing object in the collection of the Duc de Blacas is one of which there are three virtually identical examples in the British Museum collection. Made of cameo glass, these bear an inscription in elaborate Kufic in positive with the phrase, 'Neither a firm decision nor caution can save on from fate.'<sup>31</sup> Reinaud asserted that the original of this object once belonged to the King of Naples and was found in Calabria. The inscription, he suggested, dated to the 10th or 11th century, and he associated it with the period when Sicily was under Muslim influence. He further recounted that a certain Vella had pretended to see in the inscription the name of Roger II (r. 1095–1154) and that it had been set into his matrimonial ring. This, he said, lent great fame to this object and copies were made of it of which the example in the Blacas collection is one. It is not clear therefore, if there is indeed an original or where it is. The interesting point however, is how far these copies had spread; of the one entering the British Museum collection in 1872, there are no acquisition details, but the third one came with the collection of Charles Masson (d. 1853) who had a colourful career as explorer, spy and archaeologist who built most of his collection of seals in Afghanistan while in the service of the East India Company there.<sup>32</sup> More about him will be said below.

As discussed above, it is only the Sloane and Blacas collections of seals and amulets whose detailed decipherment and study was initiated by their owners for particular purposes; Sloane, as we saw above, within the context of his bias against superstition and magic, the Duc de Blacas on the other hand, a century later, as part of a mission to educate about the material culture of Islam. The other collections, no less important, were built up by a variety of individuals

30 Labrusse, *Islamophilies*, 100.; Reinaud, *Monumens*, vol. 1, iv. Note 1. In 1825 Colonel Rottiers conducted a scientific mission to the region and his *Itinéraire de Tiflis à Constantinople* was published in Brussels in 1829.

31 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets* nos. A106–A108.; Reinaud, *Monumens*, vol. 2, 28–33 no. 8 and note 1 citing the research into this object by the Orientalist Christian Martin Fraehn, *Antiquitatis muhammedanae Monumenta varia*, Part. i, Saint-Petersbourg, 1820.

32 Elisabeth Errington "Rediscovering the Collections of Charles Masson" in *Coins, Art, and Chronology*, eds. Michael Alram and Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 207–237. See also Elisabeth Errington, *The Charles Masson Archive: British Library, British Museum and Other Documents Relating to the 1832–1838 Masson Collection from Afghanistan* (British Museum Research Publications, 2017). Accessible online: [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190801105206/https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/research\\_publications\\_series.aspx#AllResearchPublications](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190801105206/https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/research_publications_series.aspx#AllResearchPublications).

who travelled in the Middle East, Central or South Asia for work or pleasure acquiring objects that caught their eye.

The largest group of these, some 300 objects, as with the Blacas collection comprising both seals and amulets, belonged to Henry Christy (d. 1865) a banker with 'an ethnological turn of mind' who collected everything from Cypriot antiquities to Turkish bath clogs during his travels around the British colonies, Iran and the Ottoman Empire—where specifically he acquired the seals and amulets is not known. Following a visit to Istanbul in 1850, much taken by Turkish towels, he introduced towelling to England by constructing specialist looms.<sup>33</sup> As with several of the 19th century British collectors, it was the Great Exhibition of 1851 that turned him towards archaeology and ethnography.<sup>34</sup> He had a museum in Victoria street in London and following his death a large part of his collection, numbering thousands of items from across the world, came to the British Museum.

We have more information, however, about the circumstances surrounding some of the other collections. A small but important group of lead seals and some rings and amulets that entered the museum in 1861 belonged to the Frenchman Julius Richard (d. 1891), secretary and translator to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1846–1896). Residing in Iran for many years, he shared an interest with the Shah in the newly invented technique of photography and was also an amateur archaeologist.<sup>35</sup> He had excavated at the site of Rayy, where Persian Kashan pottery was found and some of these fragments as well as other pottery from Iran entered the collection of the British Museum.<sup>36</sup> It is likely that he acquired the group of lead seals from the Russian General Resident of Iran, Iwan Bartholomäi (d. 1870) who had a large collection of these objects, many acquired in 1858 near Hamadan, and which were later distributed among various collectors.<sup>37</sup> Highly significant and completely different from all the other collections, these are in fact administrative sealings, connected to the collection of tax revenues, and are part of a rare group with inscriptions with the

33 There are too many to list here, but they can be searched for in the Porter catalogue under the registration numbers 1878 12–20 1 and following, or by searching Christy. Obituary of Henry Christy in *Geological Magazine* 1865: 286 and further biographical details on British Museum website: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG122138>.

34 Vernoit, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 14 ff.

35 For Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh and photography see: Layla S. Diba, "Qajar Photography and its Relationship to Iranian Art: A Reassessment," *History of Photography* 37, no. 1 (2013): 85–98.

36 See British Museum Collections online: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=Julius&keyword=Richard>.

37 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, no. 4.



names of Abbasid caliphs and the 9th century Dulafid rulers of the Jibal in the vicinity of Isfahan.<sup>38</sup>

Charles Masson (d. 1853), during the mid-19th century, worked for the Bombay government purchasing seals along with coins and other objects from the Kabul bazaar, keeping meticulous records. He employed local people to acquire objects for him, many of which originated from the historic site of Begram. Amongst these is a fine dark orange carnelian seal, which is of particular interest as it an Indo-Greek seal of the 2nd century CE re-engraved on the other side with an inscription bearing an owner's name ('Abd Allāh ibn Murtaḏā in *nasta'liq* script). Such re-use of ancient seals is relatively rare. In this case, it may have been simply not to waste the stone with the seal engraver totally disregarding the figural side. This is in contrast to a Roman seal of the 2nd–3rd century CE in the museum's collection adeptly re-engraved with a Kufic inscription within the design itself of two helmeted figures; in between each is the name of its new owner, al-Ḥasan ibn Ja'far.<sup>39</sup> Other ancient seals may have been used on account of the scripts on them in the belief that these had magical properties—a notable example in this regard is the important Himyarite seal (3rd–6th centuries) acquired in Iraq by Felix Jones (d. 1878), an employee of the East India Company who conducted archaeological surveys in Iraq during the 1840s and 1850s and was political agent in Baghdad in 1854. With the monogram Nadim in South Arabian script on the face of the stone, a verse from the Qur'an (3:91) in Kufic script around the sides, was added some centuries later. Adapted for prophylactic use, as noted by John Walker, the verse was changed from 'keep us' to 'keep me' from the punishment of the fire'. The script *musnad* (Himyaritic) is listed amongst a number of 'magical' scripts listed by the alchemist and astrologer Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. ca. 935) and this may therefore have been a deliberate re-use for added protection.<sup>40</sup>

38 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, nos. 30–31. Chase Robinson "Neck-Sealing in Early Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 48, no. 3 (2005): 401–441.

39 Masson appointed as 'Agent in Kabul' 1835, in [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190801105206/https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/research\\_publications\\_series.aspx#AllResearchPublications](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190801105206/https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/research_publications_series.aspx#AllResearchPublications), p. 62; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, nos. 365 and 366.

40 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, no. 36.; John Walker, "A South Arabian Gem with Sabaeen and Kufic legends," *Le Museon* 65 no. 3–4 (1962), 75: 455–458; For Felix Jones see [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/term\\_details.aspx?bioId=93349](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx?bioId=93349). Venetia Porter, "The use of the Arabic script in magic," in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, ed. Michael C.A. Macdonald, Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 40 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 136.

While Masson was, amongst other things, an archaeologist and working for the Bombay government, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Haversham Godwin-Austin (d. 1923) was also in India, in the army.<sup>41</sup> A geologist and fellow of the prestigious Royal Society as well as a mountaineer, ornithologist and collector of fresh-water molluscs, he was also a convert to Buddhism. The Islamic seals that he acquired probably between the years 1852 and 1877 in Northwest India, were collected alongside Sasanian and Indian seals. A note in the British Museum catalogue of the period indicates that he acquired them from a certain 'Mason', likely to be Charles Masson referred to above. Although we do not know the circumstances that drew him to these objects, perhaps a shared interest with Masson, he may have been attracted to them on account of the stones themselves, as there are some fine carnelian and agate examples amongst the seals he acquired.<sup>42</sup>

William Marsden (d. 1836) was a linguist, numismatist, scholar of the Malay world and one of the founders of the Royal Asiatic Society. His prodigious collection was donated to the British Museum in 1834 and with it came a small but interesting group of seals. In 1825 he had published *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata*, in which he focused, as he described it, on 'Cufic or early Arabian series.' His interest in Islamic coins was sparked by the acquisition of a collection belonging to Sir Robert Ainslie (d. 1812), the British Ambassador to Constantinople, which included coins and 'a few Persian engraved stones, and some other works of art' that had once been in the possession of a certain Abbé de Beauchamps, (d. 1779 or 1780) Bishop of Baghdad and the first to undertake archaeological surveys in Babylon. 'Among the coins' Marsden wrote, 'were many Parthian, Cufic, Persian and old Turkish, not infrequently found in the environs of Baghdad Kerkat, Maradine, and other places on the frontier of Turkey and Persia.'<sup>43</sup> Marsden describes how upon Ainslie's return to England, he disposed of his Greek and Roman medals to two distinguished collectors, but he notes 'the Cufic were foreign to the scope of their classical pursuit, which embraced nothing barbarous and they declined to take any concern with what they did not profess to understand.'<sup>44</sup> Marsden purchased Ainslie's collection

41 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*. These are registered under 1943 10 09 1 and following or by searching under Godwin-Austin.

42 Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets*, nos. 34, 97, 142.

43 William Marsden, *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata: The Oriental Coins, Ancient and Modern, of His Collection, Described and Historically Illustrated, Part I* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1823), v–vi. For Abbé Beauchamp see: Svend Aage Pallis, *Early Exploration in Mesopotamia: with a list of the Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform texts published before 1851* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskaberne Selskab, 1954), 11–12 f.

44 Marsden, *Numismata*, vii.

and Islamic coins, being barely studied at this stage, his meticulous work in deciphering and translating them has meant that this publication is still a standard work. There are no records unfortunately of Marsden having worked on the seals and amulets, however.

The small group of seals and amulets from Marsden's collection allow us, by way of conclusion, to make a few remarks about this material and these collections in general. As suggested by the composition of the various groups discussed above, seals and amulets circulated and were acquired together (sometimes with coins) and those collectors who could not read the inscriptions made no distinction between whether the object was a seal or an amulet. This is unsurprising as both seals and amulets are made of the same hardstones such as carnelian or chalcedony, they are often similar in size, and show the same repertoire of scripts. It could also be said that the definition of amulet and seal is not clear-cut. This is also reflected in the Arabic word *khātam*, applied as Allan describes 'not only to seals proper, engraved in incuse characters with retrograde inscriptions, but also in the very common seal-like objects with regular inscriptions of a pious or auspicious character ... which are amulets and further distinguished from seals by the absence of a personal name ... indeed anything with an inscription stamped upon it may be called *khātam*.<sup>45</sup>

Although a seal which identifies its owner is generally engraved in reverse and an amulet is engraved in positive, there are seals as referred to by Allan, engraved simply with benedictory texts which serve as much to protect the wearer and the object that is being stamped.<sup>46</sup> Of the 12 Marsden objects, seven are seals in Kufic script with one in cursive, and they bear standard inscriptions: owners' names with the addition of a benedictory phrase, single phrases and invocations to God. They are characteristic of early seals made between about the 9th–12th centuries, of which thousands survive and are found in several public and private collections. The remaining five are amulets, one, about 18th century in date, is engraved on one side with several of the '99 Names of God' and on the other with the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and their dog Qīṭmīr who are revered in Islamic tradition, their story is told in the Qur'an. They are associated with a range of powers such as preventing ships from foundering, and the names start to appear with some frequency in late

45 Allan J. 'Khātam' in *ETZ*.

46 This is discussed in Venetia Porter and Barry Ager, "Islamic Amuletic Seals: the Case of the Carolingian Cross Brooch from Ballycotton," in *La Science des Cieux* edited by Ryka Gyselen, *Res Orientales* 12 (1999): 211–218. For further discussion of seals and seal practice and including magical seals see Annabel Gallop and Venetia Porter, *Lasting Impressions* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia Publications London, 2012).

Ottoman contexts and particularly on amulets.<sup>47</sup> Several of the Marsden group can be considered magical in that they include elements such as rows of letters and numbers and the use of Linear Kufic—a term first coined by Casanova in which individual letters are joined together with no apparent meaning. Many of the Linear-Kufic gems—including one in the Marsden group—are made of rock crystal, an intriguing collection of objects in which inscriptions are engraved in positive or negative, with the suggestion by Ludvik Kalus that they may have been employed to bring rain.<sup>48</sup>

Multiple layers of history are embodied in these objects from what is written on them to how they were used. How and why they were acquired is another facet of the story and it was the curiosity and thirst for knowledge of the collectors who came across them in their different ways who enabled the foundations to be laid for the study of this fascinating aspect of the material culture of Islam.

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47 Venetia Porter, "Amulets inscribed with the names of the 'Seven Sleepers' of Ephesus in the British Museum" in *Word of God, Art of Man*, edited by Fahmida Suleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 123–134.

48 M. Casanova, 'Alphabets magiques arabes', *Journal Asiatique 11th series*, 1921/18: 37–55; Venetia Porter, "The use of the Arabic script in magic," in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, edited by Michael C.A. Macdonald, Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40 (20120): 131–140. Ludvik Kalus, "Rock Crystal Talismans Against Drought" in *Jewellery and Goldsmithing in the Islamic World*, edited by Na'ama Brosh (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1987), 101–105. Venetia Porter, "Early Seals and Amulets Made from Rock Crystal," in *Seeking Transparency: Rock Crystals Across the Medieval Mediterranean*, edited by Cynthia Hann and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2020), 251–256.

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