Silver of the possessed: jewellery in the Egyptian zār

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4

LIVING OBJECTS

4.1 CHALLENGES WITH INTERPRETING DECONTEXTUALISED OBJECTS

What is *zār* jewellery? We know the jewellery with spirit images was produced for *zār*, but other than that, how do we distinguish between regular and *zār*-jewellery? Scholars and collectors have been struggling with this very question since the 1960s. As *zār* jewellery has become a decontextualised group of material culture, that struggle becomes even more challenging. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the sample collection, as well as the written sources, to trace what jewellery has been described as used in *zār*, and if we may learn anything about that use. This exploration will show that distinguishing *zār* jewellery from regular jewellery based on visual characteristics is nearly impossible. However, this exploration has not been entirely fruitless: while it may reveal that this has been the wrong approach, it also paves the way for a better understanding of what *zār* jewellery is.

4.1.1 Jewellery in written sources pre-dating the collection phase

I turn first to the written sources that pre-date the collection phase. As these describe bits and pieces of the events witnessed, at this point I would like to refer back to chapter 2 for the general framework of the ritual. With this framework in mind, I will look at what picture written sources, pre-dating the collecting phase, paint. And what did its authors believe the jewellery was used for?

Klunzinger

In 1878, Klunzinger mentions a thick silver ring without a stone, and occasionally bracelets and anklets as the only jewellery used in *zār*.[281] They are used to satisfy the spirit: as an example, Klunzinger related that the possessed are shown a silver ring, henna paste or *busa* (a form of beer), which they will snatch from the hands of the offeror after which they will calm down, a sign that the spirit has indeed been satisfied. It is unclear whether the patient keeps the silver ring, or returns it to whoever showed it to her once the spirit had calmed down. The chosen moment of offering jewellery is when the patient apparently already is possessed by her spirit: one could argue that the spirit, rather than the patient, is the intended recipient. And while the exact title is

281 Klunzinger 1878, pp. 388-389.

not specified, it lies within reason to assume that the individual offering the jewellery to the spirit possessing the patient is the ritual specialist.

Le Brun

In 1902, Le Brun attended a *zār* in Cairo and noted of the women as they were coming into the venue these were wearing 'clanking jewellery of bizarre forms, outfitted with dangles and light sequins suspended from their headdresses, shimmering in the dim light.'[282] While describing as much of the ritual as she could see, Le Brun notes that after the sacrificial animal had been led away and slaughtered out of her sight, the possessed returned into the room preceded by the ritual specialist who carried a platter filled with jewellery, 'bathing in blood'.[283] The purpose of this jewellery remains undiscussed, although her explanation of the success of the ritual specialist with their clients may shed light on her perception of this aspect. Regarding this success, she says that *kōdiyas* are able to convince people that their suffering is caused by spirit possession, and can be cured by means of a *zār*, incense and 'consecrated jewellery'.[284] A second *zār* she attended stretched for multiple days and is different in that it was a gathering of ritual specialists in the house of a colleague.[285] Here, all elements of the previous *zār* occur, but Le Brun only briefly mentions jewellery at the beginning of her observation, before the incensing starts. She describes how the jewellery worn by the ritual specialists present at this point glinted when it caught the sunlight, and mentions in particular necklaces from fine shells and coral beads, that hung down to their waist.[286]

Sidqi

In 1911, Mahmud Sidqi describes a *zār* as it was carried out for normal and rich people. In the section about regular people, he describes the *zār* 'bride as wearing white clothing.[287] The ritual specialist is also wearing white.[288] She wears silver rings on her thumbs, on the index finger and middle finger of her right hand and on the ring finger and little finger of the left hand. Around her neck she wears several amulets in silver, among which round ones that carry the Throne Verse, and another silver rounded amulet that sports bells all around it. These may very well be what was visible of *zār* pendants with spirit images as we know them today – but whether they actually sported such images is not mentioned. In addition, she wears a 'heart' amulet, consisting of a deep red carnelian set in silver, sometimes in the shape of an egg and sometimes round, with bells, and an amulet depicting the mermaid Sitt Safīna. As I have noted earlier, none of the literature mentions the now familiar pendants with engraved spirit representations. So, how does Sidqi's description fit in with that statement? The mere fact that this particular amulet was described, means that it must have been visible. This, in turn, indicates the type of jewellery worn:

282 Le Brun 1902, p. 268.
283 Le Brun 1902, p. 273.
284 Le Brun 1902, p. 293.
285 Le Brun 1902, p. 283.
286 Le Brun 1902, p. 278.
287 Littmann 1950, p. 2, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.
288 Littmann 1950, p. 2, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.

Figure 4.1. Embossed pendant with mermaid, hallmarked before 1916 (sample coll. 970). Not to scale. Collection Qilada Foundation – Eric and Marion Crince Le Roy. Photo S. van Roode.

pendants with mermaids worn around 1911 looked different. They are often embossed, like the example shown in Figure 4.1, and so are meant to be seen from one side only. I will return to these amulets in the final part of this thesis.

The outfit is described in the paragraph preceding the detailed description of the actual ceremony, leading me to conclude that the ritual specialist wore all this from the start of the events. Upon the slaughter of the animals, only the thaler used earlier to diagnose the patient is put into the blood.[289] After the week of seclusion, the patient puts the thaler on her neck, hanging on her chest, 'for ever and ever'.[290] This wearing of the thaler is described as the 'binding' or the contract between spirit and patient. The thaler is used before the ceremony, during diagnosis, and at the end of the ceremony, serving as the material part of the contract between patient and spirit.

For the rich, the same manuscript lists a variety of jewellery. First, Sidqi mentions how the ritual specialist discusses the necessary offerings, clothing, and amulets for the patient. Following this, he describes the clothing and jewellery in two separate paragraphs. Based on this sequence, and the statements in the jewellery paragraph, it appears that this description pertains to the patient's jewellery rather than that of the ritual specialist.[291] The jewellery is usually made of silver, but the very rich can order some of these in pure gold. Sidqi describes the following items:

- A heart amulet;
- A head amulet;
- A small band of silver or gold, decorated with small bells, worn on the upper arms and called 'shinshillu';
- Silver rings with bezels in a round and flat shape, or in the shape of baklava (trapezoid). Sidqi explicitly notes that these bezels are made in this shape instead of inlaid stones;
- Rings without bezels;
- Anklets with small bells;
- *Zu'ra*, a round piece in gold or silver with small and delicate plaquettes hanging from it. These are used for pregnant patients;
- Earrings worn in the earlobe;
- Small rings without bezels with delicate round plaquettes, worn in the upper ear;
- A side-amulet: a long plaquette, with holes on the upper side, worn on a thin silver chain around the neck and below the left armpit.

289 Littmann 1950, p. 3, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.
290 Littmann 1950, p. 4, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.
291 Littmann 1950, p. 4-5, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.

Upon the slaughter of the animals, all jewellery is put into the blood. The patient is daubed with the blood and stays in seclusion for a week. The manuscript does not mention when the jewellery is taken from the blood and worn, and it remains wholly unclear whether the patient continues to wear all jewellery or just a few items.

Kahle

In 1912, Paul Kahle describes the *zār* 'bride' being dressed in precious clothing, adorned with jewellery,[292] but makes little mention of jewellery in his paper, although he touches upon all other aspects such as the slaughter of animals and the trances.[293] In the translation of the Arabic text he presents, however, the *zār* bride is described as being dressed in white and wearing amulets called '*dandara*'.[294] In the annotation, Kahle refers to 'roughly triangular amulets in silver or gold, with texts such as Ya Hafez and Ya Amin, surrounded by small coins, as in Lane III 208 and Plate 62'.[295] He states that these jewellery items have been created for this purpose.[296] The reference to Lane is interesting, albeit confusing: Kahle does not clarify which edition of Lane's work he refers to and Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* is typically published in two volumes, not three. The only plate showing jewellery with the texts *Ya Hafez* and *Ya Amin* is in the section on female ornaments: here these are called *kamarah*,[297] rather than *dandara* as Kahle writes. Lane does not mention *zār* at all, and this absence is one of the main anchors for establishing the time of appearance of *zār* in Egypt. However, the jewellery items mentioned by Kahle are depicted in his book, and described by Kahle as 'purpose-made'. This discrepancy is significant and I will return to it later in this chapter.

Thompson & Franke

Writing in 1913, Anna Thompson relates how she and a few other missionaries attended a ceremony in a house where she and her companions often read the Bible to its inhabitants. She describes how, after the setting of the altar, 'the woman began to dress for the performance which casts out Sudanese spirits.' It is not clear who 'the woman' is. Thompson then describes how 'she and others were wearing blue and white Sudan charms, silver chains, anklets, bracelets etc., which had cowries or shells that rattled.'[298] In this case, the spirit was Christian, and the possessed woman wore a silver cross and crucifix. Thompson notes that this is to keep the spirit happy: if she would take these items off, she would suffer. In addition, she wore 'a silver medallion with bells on it, and silver rings on each finger, one having a cross on it.'[299] The threat of suffering if she were to remove these items indicates that these are supposed to be worn permanently. The silver medallion with bells on it may have been a *zār* pendant

292 Kahle 1912, p. 5.
293 Kahle 1912, p. 25 mentions a *zar*-song with a Sudanese beat including amulets from blue beads and an apron decorated with gold coins to be worn for Abu Danfa, and on p. 28 the song for Sitt Safina mentions rings.
294 Kahle 1912, p. 31.
295 Kahle 1912, p. 31, note 2.
296 Kahle 1912, p. 31 note 2.
297 Lane 1842, p. 402; Lane 1860, p. 563-564.
298 Thompson & Franke, p. 276.
299 Ibid.

as we recognise it today, similar to the description in Sidqi 1911. She left before the animal sacrifice was made.

In the same publication, Elisabet Franke describes what she calls 'charms', consisting of 'silver ornaments and coins, worn on the breast beneath the dress, a ring with special inscriptions, or some other article'. These are given to the *zār* bride during the performances.[300] She also notes: 'The charms which are given to the Zar bride during the performances must never be removed, or the spirit will return at once.'[301] The generic description of 'ornaments' and 'articles' is not very precise, although she continues to describe amulets with Christian symbols such as the cross and the Virgin Mary engraved upon them, carrying the Throne Verse on the reverse side.[302]

Zwemer

In 1920, Zwemer noted the following items in his own collection which had been worn 'at the time of exorcism by the sheikh: First, a head-dress made of beads and cowrie shells with a fringe six inches wide, and a three-fold tassel. It is called a *takiet kharz*. A belt of the same beadwork, green and white beads mounted on a red girdle with border of cowrie shells. In addition to these, two small amulets are worn of the same material: one square and containing Koran passages and the other circular of the same character with other potent material against demons.'[303]

Sidqi

In 1930, the same Mahmud Sidqi wrote another manuscript on *zār*. Here, the description of jewellery follows only after the description of the ceremony and its songs, is much shorter and does not clarify who is wearing what. The items listed are[304]:

- An amulet for the head in silver or gold with little bells all around it;
- A heart amulet, carried on the chest;
- An amulet for the joints[305];
- Anklets;
- A head amulet, worn on the head;
- A bracelet with small bells, worn on the upper arm;
- A silver belt, worn on the body;
- Gold and silver rings, stuck on the fingers;
- Diamond earrings with gold and silver, made upon special request by the spirits, etc.
- The ominous 'etc' hints at more jewellery items used, but not listed.

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300 Thompson & Franke, p. 284.
301 Thompson & Franke p. 284.
302 Zwemer 1920, p. 230, referring to this same article by Thompson & Franke, mentions having seen these in the bazaar in Cairo.
303 Zwemer 1920, p. 236.
304 Littmann 1950, p. 37, translating a manuscript by Mahmud Sidqi from 1930.
305 In German 'Gelenke'.

'Abd er-Rasoul

In 1955, 'Abd er-Rasoul published in article on *zār* in which she lists the jewellery items used. This is the first time jewellery with spirit images is mentioned. She identifies these as '*hegab*', 'amulets', and describes them as 'square, oval, rectangular or round 'plates', with rattles or stones attached. Some of them have certain words in Arabic or designs engraved. These designs may be humans, fish, swords, stars or a crescent'.[306] She indicates that these may have different names depending on where they are worn on the body, such as heart amulets worn on the heart and head amulets worn on the forehead. The possessed person may also wear thumb rings, and/or bracelets and anklets.[307] She further notes that these amulets must be worn by the patient throughout their life.

Discussion

The identifications of '*zār* jewellery' diverge significantly in all these publications: the jewellery items listed differ from *zār* to *zār*. However, a few common features appear with regard to their agency and function within the ritual. Le Brun is the first to mention that jewellery is put in blood. Based on her description of 'consecrated' jewellery, this appears to be a central point of the proceedings. Blood is also mentioned by Sidqi 1911, but solely for the thaler that was used during the diagnosis stage, and once again in 1930 when he describes all jewellery being immersed in blood. Thompson and Franke both mention that the jewellery may not be parted with, lest the spirit becomes angry – a notion also present with Sidqi 1911 for the thaler, which must be worn forever. Beaded jewellery appears in the accounts of both Thompson and Zwemer. Two other points that stand out are the existence of jewellery made upon special request by the spirit, and the use of amulets for pregnant women. Jewellery made upon request for the spirit is mentioned for Egypt by Blackman as well, in the possession case addressed in chapter 2, where the spirit requested gold earrings and a new yellow garment.[308] The specific use of amulets for pregnant women aligns with the presence of numerous amulets in the sample collection, reflecting fear of uninvited spirits, as I have introduced in chapter 2. In the next section, I will go over the sample collection itself, to see what its collectors identified as *zār* jewellery.

4.1.2 Purpose-made *zār* jewellery in the sample collection

Three types of jewellery are undoubtedly purpose-made for *zār*: jewellery with spirit images, jewellery with written mentions of spirits, and beaded jewellery. The last type, beaded jewellery, may require a brief introduction as it is commonly worn in Egypt, with each region having its own distinctive style. Beaded jewellery used in *zār*, however, stands out: it forms a recognizable category of its own. None of the jewellery labelled as *zār* in the sample collection bears any resemblance to regional styles of jewellery. Considering that they were obtained from *zār*-dealers, and are included in the description by Blackman, I believe these to be purpose-made as well. In this section, I will go over all three types of purpose-made jewellery.

306 'Abd er-Rasoul 1955, p. 7.
307 'Abd er-Rasoul 1955, p. 7.
308 Blackman 1927, p. 187.

Jewellery with spirit images: pendants

The largest group of jewellery in the sample collection consists of the pendants with spirit images (n = 681). The spirit images are enclosed in a zigzag border design. The pendants are in the shape of disc, pear, triangle, rectangle, a writing board, or crescent. Five of these pendants still bear the remains of dried blood. Most of these pendants are either to be worn on a necklace, or (in the case of rectangular pendants) suspended from a headdress by a hook connected to a small chain attached on both upper corners. Following the terminology used by every author, starting with Blackman, these are generally referred to as '*zār* amulets'. Whether they are, in fact, to be labelled as amulets remains to be determined.

Jewellery with spirit images: other items

A few other items carry spirit images (n = 20). These are upper arm bracelets, and necklaces called *kirdan*. The upper arm bracelets and necklaces belong to a type commonly worn in the south of Egypt, but the pieces with spirit images seem to have been specifically created for *zār*.

The nine upper arm bracelets are of a type generally worn on the southern Red Sea coast, and across the Red Sea in Saudi-Arabia as well.[309] They feature a rectangular silver plaquette, usually decorated with geometrical designs, on a narrow silver band: see an example in cat. no. 100 in the catalogue. This common type of upper

Figure 4.2. Upper arm bracelet in *zār* variety (sample coll. 315). Not to scale. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

309 Weeks 1984.

Figure 4.3. Silver necklace with an imitation pillar dollar (sample coll. 369), not exclusively made for *zār*. Not to scale. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

arm bracelet also exists in a designated *zār* variety. Here, the plaquette features a representation of one or more spirits, usually accompanied by text of some sort. An example is shown in Figure 4.2. The existence of these bracelets in a *zār* variety has spilled over into their regular occurrence: collectors increasingly identify common upper arm bracelets as *zār*.

Another ten pieces with spirit images form part of necklaces usually called *kirdan*[310], commonly worn in the southern Nile Valley. These necklaces feature an elaborate pendant as a central piece, consisting of a crescent with tips pointing downwards, above a central coin or decorated pendant (Figure 4.3). The necklace itself is constructed of small silver bars, connected with loops. Both bars and loops feature one or more dangles. The ten necklaces and necklace elements in the sample collection have their crescent and/or central pendant decorated with *zār* spirits. In three of these cases, it is unclear whether the central *zār* pendant is even original to the necklace, as it does not match the decoration on the crescent element. It is not improbable that an incomplete, common *kirdan* was finished with an old *zār* pendant lying around in the workshop, to be sold as a complete

310 Meaning 'necklace' in general, and not referring to a particular type.

Figure 4.4. Pair of rings inscribed for a general pair of *zār* spirits indicated by 'Sultan' and 'Sister of the Sultan' (sample coll. 0372 and 0373). Not to scale. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

piece to cultural outsiders. In this case, too, it would seem that regular *kirdan* necklaces are not exclusively intended for *zār*. These necklaces are addressed below again for their regular variety.

Finally, one ring labelled as *zār* (sample coll. 832)[311] carries an image of a male bust with a *tarbush*. This image is shown *en profil* however, rather than *en face* like spirits are invariably shown on the jewellery, and the zigzag border around the image is missing. Therefore, I suspect that this is an attempt at mimicking a coin, rather than a piece of *zār* jewellery.

Jewellery with written mentions of spirits

Seventeen other rings appear to have a direct relation with *zār* because of their text inscriptions. These refer to *zār* spirits, recognizable by their prefix 'Sultan'. An example is shown in Figure 4.4.

Beaded jewellery

The beaded jewellery items in the sample collection (n = 52) vary from simple bracelets and single-strand necklaces to elaborate copies of known types of silver jewellery. Additionally, the sample collection includes headdresses and a beaded apron. The beaded copies of regular jewellery show amulet necklaces with square and cylindrical amulet containers, necklaces with beaded forms of *zār* pendants such as shown in Figure 4.5, solid anklets, and even the upper arm bracelets with the rectangular plaque described in the previous paragraph. All of these items are constructed around a core of tightly folded textile sewn into the desired shape. An intricate netting of beads has been threaded around it, obscuring the core from sight.[312]

Where the silver originals would have carried silver bells, their beaded counterparts are decorated with cowrie shells. According to the ledger kept by

311 Weltmuseum Vienna, inventory number 165754.

312 I have been able to observe the construction on two beaded items in Dresden that were damaged. Using a microscope, I have been able to identify the construction of the core. I have not been able to inspect the core for further contents and so cannot verify Zwemer's claim that they hold Qur'an verses or 'other potent material against demons'.

Schienerl, these beaded items were available as recently as the first decade of the 21st century. Their attribution to *zār* is already apparent in the work by Zwemer, as we have seen above. Blackman depicts a set of beaded jewellery in her *Fellahin of Upper Egypt*,[313] and the collection of the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford holds two similar beaded necklaces in blue and white.[314] Schienerl acquired this type of beaded jewellery from a specialised *zār* dealer. These are present in the collections currently in Vienna and Dresden.

Figure 4.5. Beaded pendant. Not to scale. Collection Museum fur Völkerkunde, Dresden (inv. no. 86878), photo S. van Roode.

4.1.3 Other jewellery ascribed to *zār* in the sample collection

Apart from purpose-made jewellery, the sample collection contains a large variety in other pieces that are sometimes ascribed to *zār*, but also function outside of *zār*. These include necklaces, bracelets, anklets, rings and other jewellery items.

Necklaces

Necklaces in the sample collection labelled as *zār* (n = 35, including the pieces with spirit images) are either *kirdans* in the fashion of southern Egypt, or a long necklace with amulet boxes. I will discuss both types here.

Southern Egyptian kirdans

These necklaces are among the regular jewellery types of southern Egypt. As mentioned above, the sample collection holds ten of these with spirit images. And as with the upper arm bracelets, here, too, there seems to be confusion about whether the regular variety also can be ascribed to *zār*. Over the past decades, they have increasingly been labelled as *zār*. Schienerl, however, does not identify these as *zār* necklaces, either in his acquisition ledgers or in his articles dealing with *zār* jewellery. In his book from 1984, the *kirdans* are presented as regular necklaces from Nubia, while the book also presents several pages of *zār* items.[315] Azza Fahmy on the other hand presents them as *zār* necklaces in her 2007 book, and does not include them in the section on Nubian jewellery.[316] In private collections and online, these are now invariably presented as *zār* jewellery. The sample collection holds 25 of them: see cat. nos 110 and 111 in the catalogue for an example.

313 Blackman 1927, p. 200.
314 Inv. nos. 1985.54.1652 and 1985.54.1612, both collected in 1928.
315 Bachinger & Schienerl 1984, p. 68-69. The only doubt seems to be their ascription to Nubia.
316 Fahmy 2007, p. 171.

Necklaces with amulet boxes

Among the private collections, ten necklaces with triangular or square amulet boxes that can be opened have been labelled as *zār*. Two of the necklaces have been embellished with facetted carnelian beads. The amulet boxes are usually executed in repoussé and show floral or geometrical decoration, or in some cases the word Allah. An example is shown in Figure 4.6 and cat. no. 112 in the catalogue. From the amulet boxes usually several silver bells or (imitation) coins are suspended. The association of these necklaces with *zār* however is unclear: they have been collected as such only by later collectors, are not included as *zār* in the Schienerl collection[317] or mentioned in earlier literature. These amulet boxes are of a general type found in the Ottoman realm of the eastern Mediterranean: comparable boxes are also worn in southern Palestine, Jordan, and Syria, without association to *zār*.[318] These are also the ornaments depicted in Lane[319] and referred to by Kahle as purpose-made *zār* jewellery, as discussed above in 4.1.1. I will present a possible explanation for this claim in chapter 5.

Figure 4.6. Amulet boxes of a type often associated with *zār*. Collection Qilada Foundation – Eric and Marion Crince Le Roy. Photo S. van Roode.

Bracelets and anklets

Bracelets and anklets are equally difficult to identify with certainty as *zār* jewellery. There appear to be no clear commonalities underpinning their identification as such, other than the presence of silver bells. Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich list silver bracelets with small silver protrusions on the outside, as well as silver anklets with bells.[320] These silver anklets, consisting of a small silver band with large bells, are of a widespread type of children's anklets throughout Egypt and further afield in Saudi-Arabia.[321] Anklets as worn by the ritual specialist in the ceremony for Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich, featuring red beads and silver bells, are present in the sample collection and identified as *zār* by their collectors and curators (see cat. no. 102 in the catalogue), but in other museum collections, they are listed simply as anklets.[322] Conversely, a type of anklets mentioned in relation to *zār* in earlier literature but notably absent from the sample collection are anklets made of iron, as have been presented in chapter 2. These will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

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317 Schienerl 1976b, p. 311 illustrates these and makes no mention of *zār* in the description on p. 318; Bachinger & Schienerl 1984, p. 70-72 list these as amulet containers only.

318 See for example Volger 1989, p. 335 PL 262, inv. no. TR IX 4 J from the region of Jaffa; Kalter 1992, p. 98-99 for Syria. A comparable embossed amulet box is in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv. no. 1102-1869, acquired in 1869 in Cairo, without association to *zār*).

319 Lane 1842, p. 411.

320 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 149 and Fig 113 2-3.

321 An example is inv. no. 1113-1869 of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, which was acquired in 1869 in Cairo without association to *zār*. The type is illustrated in Weeks 1983a and discussed in Weeks 1984b, where they are said to protect children from the *Qarina*. For Saudi-Arabia, see Colyer Ross 1981, p. 100.

322 Bachinger & Schienerl 1984, p. 58 list a comparable anklet simply as anklet.

Figure 4.7. Ring associated with *zār*. Not to scale. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

Figure 4.8. Rings with polyhedral terminals and with bells (sample coll. 0376 and 0377). Not to scale. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

Rings

Rings are plentiful in the sample collection (n = 70), but their association to *zār* is again troublesome except for the seventeen pieces presented above.[323] Even in the collection assembled by Schienerl, some rings are labelled *zār*, while identical examples in the same collection are not.

A particular type of ring featured in the sample collection as *zār* ring (n = 13) is a solid silver ring with flower-like protrusions underneath a solid silver, usually undecorated, round, oval or square bezel. These exist in both very large and heavy as well as regular and even small varieties: a regular piece is shown in Figure 4.7. These rings are also present in the collection of Winifred Blackman, but not as *zār* jewellery: she lists one as 'worn by women to cure pain in the arm'[324] and one as 'to appease the evil spirits'.[325]

Rings with bells (n = 4) and polyhedral terminals (n = 2), both as pictured in Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich Fig 113, are also in the sample collection (Figure 4.8), but the ring with coral or red glass that Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich describe, worn 'in honour of the sister of sultan', is not. The Schienerl collection presents various other rings as *zār* rings, but it is impossible to determine what Schienerl based his identification on. Several examples of rings associated with *zār* are shown in cat. nos.104-110 in the catalogue.

Coin pendants

A selection of coin pendants (n = 26) is also present in the sample collection. Twelve of them are part of a *kirdan*, as mentioned above, while another twelve are individual pendants, and two are fashioned onto a ring. Their association with *zār* is also problematic. Using coins in jewellery is a common practice throughout the Middle

323 This is also visible in publications. Compare for example Fahmy 2007, p. 169 and Mayer 2021, p. 62-63. Both show a set of rings, among which several identical pieces. Fahmy lists them as *zār*, Mayer as Nubian jewellery in general (but does specify these have a high symbolic function).

324 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.9, collection year not listed.

325 Liverpool inv. No 285, collected in 1920. A third example is in the British Museum, bought on a local market in Shantur, Upper Egypt, inventory number Af1981,14.61. The description on the website does not match the depicted ring however. J. Hudson of The British Museum has kindly verified that the original description of Blackman for this particular ring is missing or never existed (email, July 20th, 2018).

East. Coins in jewellery show value and often indicate the financial position of the wearer. The coin most often encountered in the sample collection is the Spanish pillar dollar or imitations thereof. As introduced in chapter 2, the pillar dollar also plays a role in *zār*: the ritual specialist uses it to determine which spirit is ailing her client. However, as this particular coin holds its own amuletic value, it is frequently used in regular jewellery and in my view does not necessarily imply a connection to *zār* – the presence of the pillar dollar itself is not enough to definitively identify a piece of jewellery as *zār*. Other coins also appear: the Maria Theresia Thaler or imitations thereof, coins depicting King Farouk, and commemorative coins from Sudan. A few examples are included in cat. nos. 95-99 in the catalogue. I will go into the role of coins later in this chapter.

Other jewellery pieces

The collection holds also a variety of other jewellery items. A silver belt and silver diadem in a private collection (sample coll. 286 and 287) were both acquired as *zār* jewellery. An applique in the shape of a mermaid, in a private collection, (sample coll. 132) was also listed as *zār* jewellery. A final piece worth mentioning is a silver wand with dangles (sample coll. 1136)[326] in the collection of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Although technically not a piece of jewellery, it was included in the jewellery section by its collector. In some cases, the attribution to *zār* changes over time: the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna holds a segment of a Rashayda jewellery piece, recognizable by its characteristic dangles, that has not been labelled as *zār* by its collector Schienerl, but its inventory card has additional information scribbled onto it identifying it as *zār*.[327]

Amulets

Finally, the sample collection holds a large group of amulets (n = 383) in varying materials and forms that were ascribed to *zār* by its collectors, but whose use is widely attested outside *zār* as well. Among these are many text amulets that share the same shape (disc, pear, triangle, the shape of a writing board or rectangular), size and zigzag border on both sides as the pendants with spirit images. However, instead of images of *zār* spirits, these pieces display verses from the Quran, the five- or six-pointed star, or general formulas. Rectangular pendants in filigree are often ascribed to *zār*, but are also widely used headdress adornments of a general Ottoman type.[328] Other amulets associated with *zār* in the sample collection include cylindrical amulet containers of a general type, pendants in the shape of fish, banded agate known as *sumlūk*, and a selection of Christian crosses. The pendants in the shape of fish are a popular necklace design in general in the south of Egypt, according to Weeks, who also recounts one instance of such a pendant having been used for *zār*.[329] Banded agate, also known as 'Sulemani', is considered a powerful amulet throughout the Islamic world, referencing

326 Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology inventory number DB-2149.

327 Inventory number 86526.

328 See for example the two pendants in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv. no. 303&A01901, acquired in 1901 in Cairo, without association to *zār*); Schienerl 1976b, p. 310 (figs 17-19) and p. 316, where he identifies these as temple pendants (hung from the headdress at the level of the temples).

329 Weeks 1983b.

King Solomon.[330] The Christian crosses are shown in Schienerl 1976b, along with a pendant in the shape of the Qur'an: he identifies these as regular amulets for Christian people, just as the Qur'an is for Muslims.[331] See the catalogue for several examples of regular amulets identified as *zār* by their collectors.

Discussion

This overview illustrates that the sample collection, too, is ambiguous in what *zār* jewellery is. Like in the written sources predating the collection phase, a wide variety in jewellery is present. Of course, this variety may be due to the fact that the sample collection was largely assembled by cultural outsiders buying from a secondary or even third source. Most of it was purchased from vendors, either in or outside Egypt, and the selection is based in publications where jewellery was already dislodged from the ritual itself. However, since earlier sources also lack unanimity, I believe this this variety to be significant in itself. It appears that, beyond the well-known purpose-made *zār* items, all other jewellery exhibits varying degrees of bricolage. This concept, coined by Lévi Strauss, proposes the use of changing and varying objects to deal with a matter at hand instead of working with a pre-organised set of items.[332] When we consider the fluid world of spirit interactions, governed by multiplicity of approaches as I have introduced in chapter 2, bricolage is a far more fitting approach for its material culture than a rigid classification. An exploration of the amulet collection of Winifred Blackman will illustrate this point.

4.1.4 The spirit world in Egypt: the Blackman collection of amulets

Zār is not the only method of dealing with spirit possession in Egypt, as I have introduced in chapter 2: *zār* is part of a much larger landscape of traditions in spirit engagement. In this light, the collection of Winifred Blackman, introduced in chapter 3, is particularly relevant. She collected all sorts of objects related to informal ritual, including possession.[333]

Only a few of the objects connected to spirit possession in her collection meet the description of jewellery used in a *zār* context as other authors have mentioned: a silver ring with a red stone[334] or a red glass amulet in a silver setting[335]. Blackman however does not list these as *zār*, but as objects to be used with spirit possession in general. From her notes with each object, it appears these are not even exclusive to possession remedies. An iron ring of identical shape and stone is listed as 'worn by men only to bring happiness to the wearer'[336], and an identical red glass amulet is listed as 'effective against pain in the temples'[337].

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330 Weeks 1986, p. 22 writes glass beads called *sumluk*, can be found widely in the Muski: the beads were imported from India.

331 Schienerl 1976b, p. 311 (figs 26 and 27), p. 306 and p. 317-318 for his identification.

332 Lévi Strauss 1962, p. 11.

333 I have used the online database of both the British Museum and the Pitt-Rivers Museum, as well as a preliminary unpublished inventory of the Liverpool collection.

334 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.2687, collected in 1930.

335 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1750, collected in 1929.

336 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1739.

337 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.397.

Iron anklets, mentioned in the chapter on *zār* by Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich as being worn by the ritual specialist during a *zār*, are present in the Blackman collection, but their use appears to be varied and not directly tied to spirit possession. Several pairs of iron anklets in the Blackman collection are labelled as keeping the Qarina away[338] – a stance we have seen in chapter 2. Another pair of iron anklets must be worn by a pregnant woman if she is visited by a menstruating woman, to avoid *kabsa* (see chapter 2).[339] The collection however also holds identical iron anklets for other causes entirely: to cure pain, swelling and tumours in the ankle[340] or to enable a boy to walk[341]. It appears that a given object is not exclusively tied to one purpose.

When we look at the type of objects related to spirit possession in the Blackman collection, this notion of bricolage only grows stronger. The largest number of objects related to spirit possession are not jewellery, but pebbles, animal teeth, pieces of incense, wood, bone, glass or early plastics. I present a few examples from her collection here, with the descriptions she provided with these. She has included a brown polished stone, 'to be used by a possessed woman'[342], another brown smooth stone 'to be used by a woman who has been possessed by two sheikhs'[343], a piece of amber 'used by young girls that have a spirit'[344], or a black stone 'used by possessed men and women'[345]. The fascinating thing is that her collection holds hundreds of such pebbles, bones etcetera. And these are not exclusive to spirit possession, but are used for an astounding variety of ailments: pebbles, bones, pieces of incense, that cannot be visually distinguished from the pieces used for spirit possession, are listed as helping against infertility and with cramps in the right or left leg, headaches, muscle problems, fever, neck pain, toothaches, eye diseases and more. It would seem any given object could be useful for or against just about anything.

The Blackman collection shows how dealing with spirits and spirit possession may involve an endless variety of material culture. There is not one single purpose for a single type of object. Rather, her collection reflects the dynamics of dealing with the invisible. Instead of absolute and final coherency, the bricolage in material culture used in spirit engagement demonstrates a multiplicity of approaches, that permeates every interaction with the spirit world.

Based on the brief comparison with the Blackman collection, the wide variety of jewellery in the sample collection other than purpose-made jewellery in my view is indeed indicative of bricolage. Before discussing how this observation affects our understanding of *zār* jewellery, there is one last point I would like to address: where did this acknowledgement of bricolage in *zār* disappear, and how did people start wanting to make lists, classifications and attributions of individual jewellery pieces?

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338 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1775 and 1985.54.1780, collected in 1929.
339 Liverpool inv. no 148, collected in 1929.
340 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.419, collected in 1929.
341 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1737, collected in 1929.
342 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.2405, collected in 1931.
343 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1414, collected in 1933. A sheikh is a possessing spirit.
344 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.2342, collected in 1931.
345 Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.2046, collection year unknown.

4.1.5 From generic to specific

To see where this critically different way of thinking originated, I return to the collection and publication phase once again. The work by Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich is the first publication to attribute specific jewellery to individual spirits. I will now turn to their account in more detail to illustrate how their publication and its reception by later authors on the one hand, and the transition from publications on ritual to publications on jewellery on the other, have shaped our thinking about *zār* jewellery.

Jewellery in Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962

Although this is a lengthy chapter in their book on amulets, it is not always that clear. It remains occasionally vague whether jewellery is described as *zār* jewellery or as general amulet,[346] or how the various jewellery items were used and by whom.

The ritual specialist wore rings without stones on her thumb, shaped like miniature anklets: plain bands with polyhedral knobs on both ends.[347] On her ring finger, a ring with a round cabochon of coral or red glass was worn. These are of a simple design, and refer to the female spirit accompanying the male spirit.[348] Together with the coral ring, a silver ring with a round plaque was worn. On the round plaque, the word 'sultan' is inscribed, a reference to the male spirit.[349] Rings with banded agate are also used, but unclear is how and by whom.[350]

The ritual specialist wore amulets in abundance on her head. Here, Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich describe the pendants with spirit representations. An important distinction they make is that pendants with the Throne Verse on both sides can be used in *zār*, but also as regular amulets.[351] They identify the spirits depicted generally as Sīd (male) and Sitt (female): this identification is found in numerous later publications and has become the standard description of pendants bearing representations of spirits. Very significant is that they also state that the most famous spirits are represented individually in just a few occasions. Next, the authors list a range of amulets. Unclear is whether these still fall under the description of amulets worn by the ritual specialist on her head, as the original description started out with, or if general amulets used in *zār* are meant. They list [352]

- pear-shaped amulets;
- rectangular amulets;
- amulets depicting a fish (identified by the authors with Sultān al Bahrī or Sitt al Bahrīya) or a mermaid (identified with Sitt Safīna);
- amulets in the shape of a fish to honour Sitt al Bahrīya;
- amulets in the shape of a crescent;
- amulets in the shape of a writing board.

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346 An example is the discussion of iron anklets as protection against the Qarina in Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 149-150. They are presented in the chapter on *zār*, but were these used specifically in *zār*?

347 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 151 and Fig. 113, 4.

348 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 151.

349 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 151 and Fig 113, 4-10.

350 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 151 and Fig 113, 4-10.

351 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 151.

352 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 152-153.

A distinct amulet is a rectangular amulet made of silver filigree and mentioned as being worn for the spirits called Hawanim al-Habash, the Abyssinian Ladies, although sometimes also for as-Sa'īdī.[353] The authors continue their list of amulets with silver amulets called *zu'ra*. These are generally worn by new-borns and their mothers, but can also be used in *zār* and in general by pregnant women.[354] A small cucumber-shaped amulet container that can be opened is described as being used for as-Sa'īdī.[355] Another important type of amulet mentioned by the authors is made of banded agate. These are used for Sitt as-Sūdānīya, but also for other *zār* spirits.[356] Silver crosses are worn for a Coptic spirit[357], and a group of iron amulets were used by the ritual specialist in those cases where infertility or child mortality were specific causes to have a *zār*.[358]

Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich in later publications

The publication by Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich features detailed descriptions and attributions of individual jewellery pieces for the first time. Their work marks the start of the separation of jewellery and ritual, not just because it is an external account instead of an emic lived experience, but because it has been misinterpreted itself as well.

Important nuances Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich were aware of and have written down, have been omitted from later publications. One example is how they write that some ornaments can be used for other *zār* spirits besides the one they list.[359] Further, their fundamental observation that only in a few occasions individual spirits are depicted for example, is not picked up: later authors often present identities for the spirits depicted, such as all military officers being presented as Yawri Bey.

While the jewellery pieces described in the account of Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich may definitely have been of use in those particular circumstances of possession and have been selected at the discretion and with the knowledge of the ritual specialist, subsequent publications and collections seem to have taken their account as a rational and universal truth. Instead of a unique, individual account of a personal *zār* tailored to the needs of a specific patient, their work has been interpreted as a definitive list of items belonging to 'the' *zār* in general.

From ritual to jewellery studies

Where Weeks' article in 1984 shows keen awareness of the multi-faceted nature of *zār* images[360], the popular publication by Bachinger & Schienerl in the same year does not: from that point on, *zār* jewellery is presented and described based on stylistic capacities only: if it looks like this, it is meant for that spirit.

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353 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 153.

354 See Van Roode 2016 for their use as amulets for children.

355 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 154 and Fig 114, 3.

356 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 154 and Fig 123, 5-7.

357 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 155.

358 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 155.

359 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 154, speaking of the *sumlūk* pendants. They count these among the 'zār amulets'.

360 She mentions how the male-female spirit pair is also called 'Faruk and his wife' in Abydos, and 'King and Queen' in Qurna. These local differences are incredibly important, but have rarely been included in descriptions by foreigners.

I attribute these gradual omissions and simplifications to the transition of the study of *zār* jewellery to the field of jewellery and adornment. Jewellery studies are largely conducted from an iconographic perspective without much consideration for context, a point jewellery historian Unger devoted her PhD-thesis to.[361] Much like jewellery historians determine whether a piece of jewellery is Georgian or Victorian, ancient, antique or modern based on the way it looks, visual characteristics became the first factor to determine whether or not a piece of jewellery is *zār* jewellery. This iconographic approach however is incompatible with the nature of *zār* jewellery. And with that, I return to the significance of bricolage.

The wide variety in the available accounts, the sample collection and the Blackman collection clearly shows it is not so much the visible capacities of the object itself, be it its material, colour or shape, that constitute its relevance. A pebble can be used for anything from spirit possession to throat aches, a piece of jewellery can be worn as amulet for a number of reasons. Sengers has demonstrated how *zār* itself draws upon bricolage[362], and I would like to expand that notion to include the jewellery as well. So, instead of searching for iconographic parameters to establish what is, and what is not, *zār* jewellery, I will now turn once again to the ritual this jewellery belongs to in order to trace the meaning it may have carried.

4.2 HUMANS, SPIRITS, AND OBJECTS

4.2.1 *Z*ārs ancestors: possession cults in Africa

When writing about *zār* in Egypt, scholars often emphasise that *zār* is not Islamic. It is described as a form of popular Islam, or even as a relic of ancient Egyptian traditions.[363] In recent decades increasing attention has been drawn to the fact that *zār* has its roots in African cults.[364] Looking at *zār* through the lens of its African ancestors and their way of interacting with objects may result in a shift in our understanding of and terminology for the jewellery items used. As I wrote in chapter 1, *zār* as it is practised in Egypt is one leaf on a complex family tree. It has certain elements that are unique to Egypt, such as the weekly public *zār*, but the version of *zār* as it was brought to Egypt through the slave trade was itself already an amalgam of East African and West African cults, which had flowed together in Sudan.[365] This amalgam is generally called *zār-bori* after its two main components. *Zār* stems from East Africa, notably Ethiopia, while *bori* has its roots in West Africa, mainly in Nigeria and Niger.[366] Both *zār* and *bori* are in turn umbrella terms for a variety of possession cults. Constantinides describes for Sudan the existence of *zār-tumbura* and *zār-bori* as the main branches, with additional mentions of a *zār* particular to Suakin and a *zār-Habashi*, referring to Ethiopia.[367] This Ethiopian *zār* in turn is pluriform as well: Natvig has argued that

361 Unger 2019.
362 Sengers 2003, p. 172-175; Hadidi 2016, p. 51 writes how *zār* is infinitely malleable.
363 Naguib 1993 includes the *zār* in a treatise on ancient Egyptian echoes; Nabhan 1994 speaks of pre-Islamic symbols (p. 66), expressly mentioning ancient Egyptian symbols on p. 68.
364 For example in the works by Richard Natvig, also Kramer 1987; Lewis et al. 1991; Behrend & Luig 1999.
365 For an overview, see Lewis 1991.
366 Lewis 1991, p. 2.
367 Constantinides 1991, p. 94.

zār as it was eventually exported northward to Egypt may have originated from the violent cultural encounter between the Oromo and the Amhara in Ethiopia.[368] East African and West African possession cults share many elements, that are also present in *zār*, such as the interaction with the spirit during a trance, the manifestation of the spirit through dress and adornment, the music and drumming, and the sacrifice of animals.

There is, however, a significant difference that is of consequence here: the presence of particular objects that stretches beyond the ritual itself into everyday life. West African possession cults employ these, while East African cults do not. Observing how objects interact with humans in West African possession cults provides a framework to re-evaluate *zār* jewellery. In the next section, I will use candomblé as experimental case-study to explore that relation, because both cults share a similar history: both are possession cults, transported via forcibly displaced people into another country with a monotheistic religion.

4.2.2 *Z*ārs cousin: candomblé

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian cult, rooted in the cults of several African ethnic groups, notably the Yoruba from Nigeria and Benin, but also the Fon and Bantu[369], mixed with Catholic elements. Candomblé is an umbrella term for the varieties of this cult, such as Xangô, Batuque and Tambor de Mina.[370] Just as *zār* devotees are faithful Muslims, candomblé devotees operate in the realm of Catholicism. Central to the cult are deities called *orixás*, which are often equated to Catholic saints.[371] These can possess devotees, who are guided in their contact with their *orixá* by a ritual specialist. While all varieties of candomblé have their own characteristics, they also share common basics. These are in turn quite similar to the elements of *zār* as outlined in chapter 2. As in *zār*, the possessed person is reconciled with its possessing deity during an initiation, called *assentamento*.[372] Here as well an altar is set up, from which the ceremony derives its name, which displays objects the deity wants presented to him/her. These objects are 'powerful objects' or 'cultic objects' and necklaces called *conta fina*.[373] As part of the initiation, an animal is slaughtered and its blood poured over the objects on the altar as well as over the initiate, who may also drink from the blood.[374] The use of blood is central to all candomblé gatherings, not only to initiations. In the following, I will go over the characteristics of each element.

Transferring life through blood

The use of blood is a central feature of many African possession cults, both Eastern and Western, as blood literally transfers life and identity from one being to another.[375] Most possession cults use the sacrifice of animals as the culmination of the ritual, the

368 Natvig 1991, p. 181.
369 Motta 2019.
370 Motta 2019.
371 Halloy 2013, p. 136; Motta 2019.
372 Halloy 2013, p. 136.
373 Halloy 2013, p. 143.
374 Halloy 2013, p. 143.
375 Colleyn 1999, p. 73; Motta 2005, p. 297

moment where possessed and possessor become one. As Motta describes in the context of candomblé: 'saints and humans eat, communicate, commingle and assimilate one another'.[376] In West-African possession cults, this transfer of life and identity includes a third party: the powerful object. Halloy describes the importance of the sacrificial blood for the bond between deity and possessed in Xangô.[377] Pouring blood over both the powerful objects and the possessed person is treating all three equally: deity, person and object are equals and become one.[378] Blood itself holds the power of life and can transfer life and identity to inanimate objects as well. So, what are these powerful objects?

Powerful objects

Many West African diaspora cults make use of an intermediate object between human host and possessing entity: a powerful object. As Halloy presents for Xangô, these objects are a mediator between humans and their personal deity.[379] During the *assentamento*, particular objects are consecrated, connecting the possessed and their deity. When these objects are discarded, misfortune befalls the possessed.[380] The change in nature of the object during the ritual is crucial: after the sacrificial blood has touched it, it does not simply symbolise the deity, but *is* the deity itself.[381] The *orixá* can manifest itself in both the human host and in the object: object, deity and human body are interwoven. These powerful objects in turn take two forms: location-based objects of stone or iron (called *otás* or *ferramentas*), and wearable objects. The location-based objects remain on the altar to the *orixá*, while the wearable objects are permanently with the human. These are the *conta fina*, beaded necklaces, worn under the clothes by Xangô cult initiates. Halloy describes these necklaces as providing 'material continuity, outside the ritual sphere, of a spiritual relation established through ritual action between the initiate, his/her *orixás* and the initiators'.[382] The wearing of these necklaces is present in all candomblé affiliations, the colours and materials of the beads vary per *orixá*.

Manifestation objects

Both Eastern and Western African cults employ a range of other pieces of dress and adornment for the possessed during the ritual. Different headdresses, sashes, sticks, staves and other attributes are used for different possessing entities. These are not be understood as mere props or costumes to dress up as a possessing deity. As Rasmussen put it, these objects are used by the spirits 'to manifest themselves into being'[383]: spirits embody themselves in humans through objects.

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376 Motta 2019, see also Motta 1998, Motta 2005 for a variant: 'Gods and men eat, communicate, commingle, assimilate and identify with one another'.
377 Halloy 2013, p. 143-144.
378 Halloy 2013, p. 145.
379 Halloy 2013.
380 Halloy 2013, p. 137.
381 Halloy 2013, p. 137-140.
382 Halloy 2013, p. 142.
383 As expressed by Rune Rasmussen in his talk at EASR Resilient Religion on Sept. 2nd, 2021.

4.2.3 Purpose-made jewellery in *zār*: an interpretation of its role

After this brief exploration into candomblé, let us now turn to *zār* again. Here, I would like to address the consistent use of the term 'amulets' for all jewellery, which presupposes a particular agency, usually of protection and prevention.[384] The purpose-made jewellery items however come into play after the diagnosis of spirit possession: protection from a *zār* spirit when the spirit is already present, so 'after the fact', makes little sense. Also, the spirit representations are unique to *zār* jewellery and do not occur on general amulets.[385] They are in my view not to be understood as amulets, but as powerful objects as West African possession religions employ. Although the contemporary descriptions of *zār* and its use of jewellery are imprecise and vague, a few recurring observations stand out. These are that jewellery is put in blood, some of it must be worn continuously and none of it can be parted with.

Powerful Objects

I now turn to the most particular jewellery in the *zār*: pendants with spirit representations. In keeping with the parallel in candomblé, I propose the agency of these is that of a powerful object. I arrive at this proposal based on three arguments, following the use cycle of the pendants.

First, these jewellery items are put in blood. This is not only evident from written descriptions, but also from jewellery pieces in the sample collection that still show traces of blood. Although these are very few, they indicate that these pieces have indeed been subjected to this process. The pouring of blood during the *zār* is the culmination of the ritual. At this point the three parties (spirit, possessed and power object) become symbiotically linked through the force of blood.[386]

Here, I should reflect briefly on the use of blood. This is also attested in non-*zār* possession cases when an animal sacrifice has to be made to appease the possessing spirit, or in non-possession cases dealing with the invisible. For example, animals are slaughtered when a new home is occupied or a new well dug to appease spirits that may be living in that spot.[387] It is in *zār* however the specific physical appearance of the objects (carrying spirit images), combined with the following two points, that lead me to believe that in this case the use of blood is more analogous with its role in African possession cults.

Second, acts by humans pertaining to the jewellery have a direct effect on the symbiosis of spirit, possessed and object reached during the *zār*. Treating the jewellery in a particular way is akin to treating the spirit itself in the same manner. The additional decorating of the pendants such as presented above serves to honour the spirit: embellishing the object is embellishing the spirit. Reversely, parting with

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384 The term 'amulet' has a wide range of definitions. See for example Garcia Probert & Sijpesteijn 2022, p. 1-12 for a discussion of definitions.

385 See van Roode 2016, pp 110-152 for a general introduction into shapes and forms of amulets and Probert Garcia for a collection of Palestinian amulets. Pielow 1997, p. 367, notes this discrepancy in imagery in her article on protection from demons, but as she considers the *zār* to be ultimately an act of magic, she defines these objects as amulets.

386 Hadidi 2016, p. 50 writes 'The blood of the sacrificial animals anointing the body of the possessed initiand binds her to her zars. For the rest of her life, the initiate wears the *zar* amuletic jewelry that has been anointed by the sacrificial blood'.

387 Blackman 1929, p. 236.

jewellery objects also has a direct effect on this symbiosis, and one the spirit does not take kindly to. Several authors stress how nothing used in connection to *zār* could be sold or given away until the owner died, while others assert that some jewellery pieces must be worn every day after the ritual.[388]

Expanding on this idea, I would thirdly like to recall how the pendants have sometimes been intentionally damaged. When the need arises to intentionally disfigure an object, apparently that object carries power that needs to be annulled at some point, possibly after the wearer had died. Inflicting damage on the pendant may be another way of treating object and human as equals: as the human had lost their life, so the object should as well.

Manifestation objects

The spirits need objects to manifest themselves with in *zār* as well. Like in candomblé, these are items of dress and paraphernalia such as staves and sticks. The *zār* items of dress are regular pieces of clothing, in an adaptation for the spirits: tarbushes carry additional symbols in sequins, and colour is of great importance. I propose the beaded jewellery pieces are part of this set and are to be understood as manifestation objects.

4.2.4 Roles of jewellery in and beyond *zār*

With this capacity of material culture in mind, I will now present my suggestion for a comprehensive overview of jewellery in the Egyptian *zār*: what did these living objects do? I propose five roles for jewellery used in *zār*. These range from *zār*-specific to general, as outlined in Figure 4.9. I will elaborate on these roles below, with an emphasis on the most *zār*-specific objects: the jewellery items with spirit images.

Role 1: Powerful objects

The first role is that of the powerful objects. These are the purpose-made and *zār*-specific pieces with spirit images, which continue to be active outside the ritual as well. They are not merely jewellery with meaningful decoration, but powerful objects themselves. They exist in symbiosis with human and spirit and have become living entities of their own.

Spirit images

In the use of images, Egyptian *zār* powerful objects are unique: images of spirits do not occur in other countries where *zār* is practised.[389] In the symbiosis of possessed, spirit and object I suggest these images provide us with an extraordinary point of view, and that is how the spirits are imagined to experience their encounter with the possessed. To my knowledge these are the only objects used in possession religions that show us the perceived spirits' outlook on events. How do they do that?

The spirits look directly at us and interact with us from their side of the powerful object. Half of the anthropomorphic spirits have one arm raised up

388 Darmody 2001, pp. 34-35; Bonotto 2010, p. 87.

389 Some Iranian amulets labeled as 'zār' show depictions of spirits, however, I have not been able to establish whether these are in fact *zār* jewellery, or ascribed to *zār* based on their visual analogy with Egyptian pendants.

(317 of 649 anthropomorphic spirits). Some of these spirits raise their hand in a gesture of greeting (n = 57) as shown in Figure 4.10.

The remainder is holding something up (n = 260), with the vast majority holding plants or flowers (n = 189). Another ten spirits hold plants or flowers with both hands. I suggest this interaction reveals a fundamental aspect of the expected reciprocity between humans and spirits in *zār*. I base this on the significance that the acts of

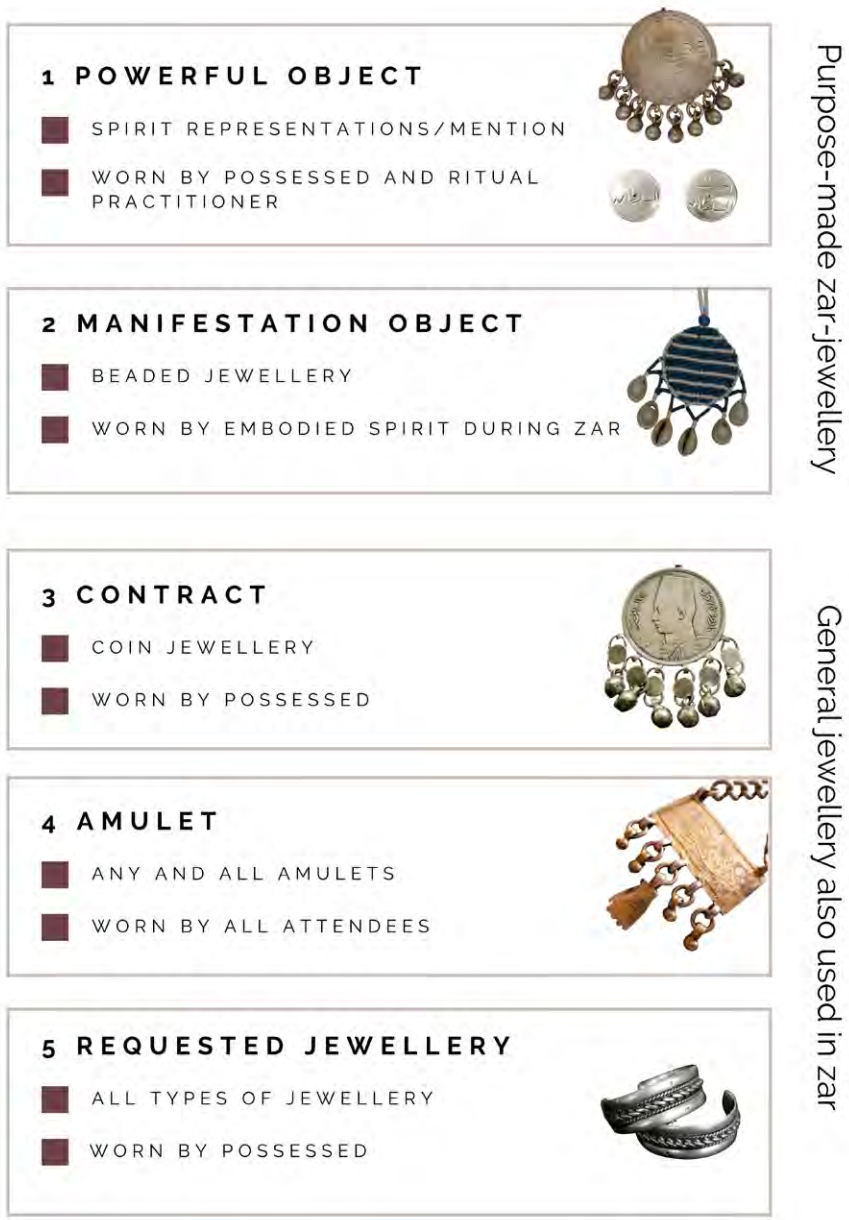

Figure 4.9. Schematic overview of the various roles jewellery can have in *zār*, with indicative reference images of the type of jewellery.

waving palm branches and offering flowers carry in the human world. Palm branches are used on happy occasions, as decoration of a house or in festive processions. In 1867, Lucy Duff Gordon wrote in a letter to her mother how one morning she woke up to find her house covered in palm branches and lemon blossom in celebration of the arrival of a much-anticipated visitor later that day.[390] According to the introduction to the book in which her letters were published, branches were also thrown on her path by villagers when she passed by, as they were happy to see her.[391] Palm branches are believed to convey that happiness to the dead as well: according to Blackman, palm branches were carried in funeral processions and placed on graves to bring happiness and blessings to the deceased.[392] On the *zār* powerful objects, these roles are reversed: it is the spirits holding these and waving. As such, I believe the powerful objects show the desired outcome of the ritual: happy and content spirits. This may even work along the lines of analogous magic, where depicting an event is believed to manifest it in reality.[393]

When half of the anthropomorphic spirits interacts with humans, what does the other half do? These look at humans as well, but do not engage. In some cases that is because it is anatomically impossible: several of the mermaids do not have limbs. Much more telling however is that none of the anthropomorphic spirits dressed in military uniforms interact: they take the form of a static portrait, as shown in Figure 4.11. The spirits dressed in Arab garb, including a headdress with headband, are also not waving or greeting: instead, they firmly grasp their sword with both hands. Only one of them holds his sword with one hand and presents a flower (sample coll. 715)[394]. I believe this to be very relevant to the world these spirits reflect, and will address this in the final part of this thesis.

Powerful objects are worn by the possessed and by the ritual specialist. The possessed will only wear powerful objects embodying their spirit(s), while the ritual specialist may wear multiple powerful objects. The reason for this abundance is that the ritual specialist had to appease all spirits she was working with, and would try to prevent any one of them from feeling excluded; the possessed only wore the powerful objects that embodied her personal *zār* spirits.[395] Whereas for the possessed exclusivity is key, for the ritual specialist inclusivity is of prime importance.

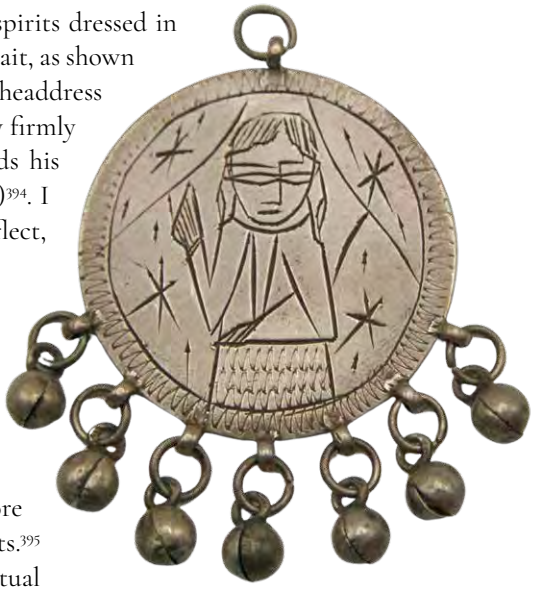

Figure 4.10. *Z*ār pendant with a spirit raising its hand (sample coll. 982). Not to scale. Collection Qilada Foundation – Eric and Marion Crince Le Roy. Photo S. van Roode.

Visibility and invisibility

As we have seen in chapter 3, the powerful objects managed to stay largely out of sight for nearly half a century. On the other hand, we find pieces with spirit images that are impossible to keep out

390 Duff Gordon 1902, p. 343.
391 Duff Gordon 1902, p. 12.
392 Blackman 1929, p. 116, 242, 259-260.
393 A familiar concept already in ancient Egypt: see Frankfort 1948.
394 Private collection, no inventory number.
395 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 144.

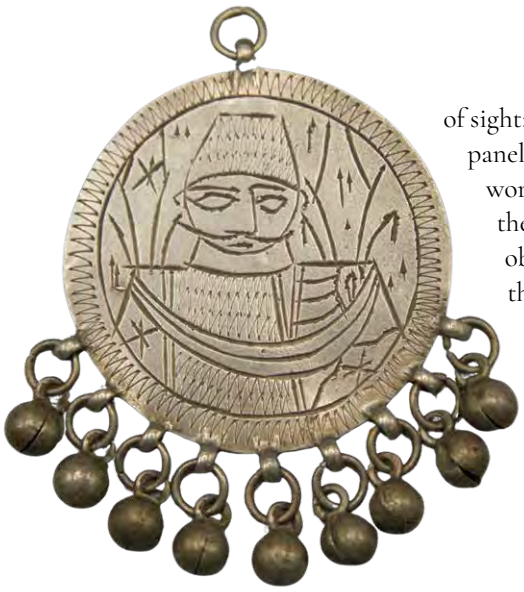

Figure 4.11. All military spirits are depicted as a bust and show no signs of interaction. Collection and photo S. van Roode.

of sight: rings with inscriptions, upper arm bracelets with large panels. How to reconcile the two? I suggest visibility when worn may be a discerning factor between objects worn by the patient, and those worn by the specialist. The powerful objects stayed out of sight because they were worn with the 'spirit-side' inward and the other side, carrying the Throne Verse, outward.[396] This is also evident from the location of the hallmark, which is usually placed on the visible side of jewellery.[397] In case the pendant is hung with southern-style bells, these also indicate the Throne Verse as the front side. When worn like this, the Throne Verse facing outward, they are indistinguishable from regular amulets. Sidqi makes mention of several silver amulets with the Throne Verse on it[398]: he may never have seen their reverse side. The upper arm bracelets and rings with spirit names engraved in them, are far too visible to be worn in everyday life as well. They serve in my opinion the ritual specialist during a *zār*.

Economics

The powerful object is purchased from a jeweller who is also, but not exclusively, specialised in *zār* items. It can be manufactured according to the instructions of the ritual specialist,[399] or alternatively, the diagnosis stage of the *zār* takes place in a jewellery store, where the possessed is drawn to a particular piece of jewellery. This in turn informs the ritual specialist about the spirit possessing her client.[400] The only author to discuss the market of buying and selling such pieces is el-Hadidi. She observes that in Middle Egypt, the craftsmen creating these pieces were part of the business network but remained outsiders to *zār* itself.[401] This illustrates the position of these items as 'terminal commodity', in the terminology of Kopytoff: a commodity that cannot be sold again, as it has turned into a singularity. El-Hadidi further describes the extent of this market, noting that during the 1960s and 1970s, approximately 60% of the production and sale of silver jewellery in the Sohag governorate consisted of *zār* jewellery.[402] I will return to this observation in the next chapter.

396 Bogner & Klein-Wisenberg 1979, p. 26 describe the front- and backside of the amulet correctly. Fahmy 2007 shows a necklace with the spirit side up and many newly made composite necklaces also show the spirit side. This however is not how they would have been worn.

397 See Van Roode 2017 for a short introduction on this custom.

398 Littmann 1950, p. 2, translating a manuscript by Sidqi from 1911.

399 Hadidi 2006, p. 102-103, describes how one *shaykha* was considered a business partner of the silversmiths in that respect.

400 Hadidi 2006, p. 127, describes an instance of divination in a jewellery store where 'the possessed spoke in tongues as a response to seeing the amulets that her spirit required'.

401 Hadidi 2016, p. 20-21.

402 Hadidi 2016, p. 21.

Role 2: Manifestation objects

The second role is the pieces used by the spirits to manifest themselves. These are also custom-made and *zār*-specific, but unlike powerful objects these are only active during a *zār*. These pieces, too, add to our understanding of the symbiosis between possessed, spirit and object: the beaded jewellery mirrors silver jewellery from the human world. Noteworthy in this context is that some beaded pieces visually resemble silver powerful objects (Figure 4.12). Their banded decoration evokes an abstract rendering of the lines of text visible on the powerful objects. As we have seen, these latter are worn with the spirit representation inwards and the Throne Verse outwards. When the spirit wears its beaded version, this creates a mirror image of the possessed wearing a powerful object. This reciprocity in dressing reveals the desired dynamics between human, spirit and object during the *zār*: they are indeed equals. These beaded items are not put in blood.

Colours play a crucial role in distinguishing between the various spirits manifested through these objects.[403] This is governed by particular rules: each spirit is associated with certain colours. For example, 'Abd er-Rasoul describes in 1955 how the 'Sudanese Sultan' requires a head-cover of cowrie shells and blue stones[404], much like Thompson noted the use of blue beads for a Sudanese spirit in 1913. In addition to jewellery, the visiting spirits demand to be clad in specific garments such as coloured dresses, robes and headgear. They also make use of an array of other objects such as sticks, staves, swords etc. The Schienerl collections in Dresden and Vienna also hold beaded sticks and staves as well as *zār* garments and tarbushes, all bought from a specialised *zār* dealer.[405] A few of these paraphernalia have found their way into the sample collection as well because they have been executed in silver. The silver diadem and belt (sample coll. 286 and 287)[406] and the silver wand with bells (sample coll. 1136)[407] mentioned earlier were purchased as belonging to *zār* and are most likely part of the spirit paraphernalia.[408] An ornament of three crescents (sample coll. 828)[409] may also belong in the category of manifestation objects. The manifestation set is changed when a new spirit announces itself: the possessed person in which the spirit manifests itself will change into the costume and jewellery the spirit desires. Le Brun describes this change of dress already in her 1902 account.[410]

Jewellery and dress are only 'activated' when worn by a spirit during a ceremony: before and after the ceremony they may remain in the custody of the ritual specialist,[411]

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403 And, of course, their clothing. Many costuming elements exist that serve to identify and express the presence of a particular spirit.

404 'Abd er-Rasoul 1955, p. 6.

405 A few Egyptian *zār* garments and headdresses are also present in the Musee Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/explorer-les-collections/ , accessed on May 3rd, 2023 with search term 'zar'.

406 Private collection, no inventory numbers.

407 Indiana University Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, inventory number DB-2149.

408 Le Brun 1902, p. 285 describes a silver-topped cane with bells being held by the possessed person.

409 Weltmuseum Vienna, inventory number 164462.

410 Le Brun 1902, p. 287.

411 Zvenkovsky 1950, p. 68 mentions that in Sudan these items are to be provided for by the client, which attributes greatly to the cost of the event. He explicitly notes that these can never be lent and that none of these items (including ornaments) can be sold or given away as long as the owner lives. Kenyon 2012, p.87 describes how most Sudanese women could not afford these items, and that they were part of the collection of the ritual specialist instead. For Egypt, Fakhouri 1972, p.94 describes how the participants arrive wearing a dress in the colour prescribed by the specialist underneath their regular black dress.

Figure 4.12. Beaded pendant with abstract rendering of lines (collection Museum fur Völkerkunde, Dresden, inv. no. 86878, photo S. van Roode) and a silver pendant with lines of text (collection S. van Roode). The colours of the beaded ornament correspond to particular spirits, and the general design mirrors that of a powerful object in silver when worn. Not to scale.

but more as a collection of props than as 'loaded' objects. Simply having these objects nearby does not summon spirits. However, when spirits are invited by drumming their beat, singing their song and burning their incense they will have a need for these things to manifest themselves. The jewellery itself is, along with the clothing, obtained from a specialised dealer in *zār* necessities.[412] Like the silversmiths, this dealer is part of the business network, but remains an outsider to *zār* itself.

Role 3: Contracts

The third role of jewellery items is that of a contract. This is a role fulfilled by coins or coin jewellery. The preferred coin is the pillar dollar, of which Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich state that imitations were specifically produced for *zār*.[413] The explicit use of coins in both diagnosis and the establishing of a contract or '*aqd* between patient and spirit was described as early as 1911,[414] and remains in use until more recently.[415] To affirm the contract, the coin is put in blood.[416]

Coins are usually regarded as part of a jewellery piece, and it is this piece in its entirety that is then associated with *zār*. For example, twelve of the southern-style *kirdans* carry a coin as pendant below the crescent, resulting in the complete necklace

412 Kriss & Kriss-Heninrich 1962, p. 159 mention the store of one Tāhā Laqqānī as the easiest place to obtain these. In the acquisition notes of Peter Schienerl, beaded jewellery, decorated fezzes and beaded staves collected in the 1980's all came from one or more unnamed 'Zar-Händler'.

413 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1962, p. 161.

414 Sidqi 1911, as published by Littman 1950.

415 Nabhan 1994, p. 177.

416 Sengers 2003, p. 100; Nabhan 1994, p. 177.

being ascribed to *zār*. However, the coin itself may have a far more important role than previously assumed. It could represent a material affirmation of a form of social contract, presenting itself in the form of jewellery.

Since coins also serve as general amulets, with this particular role of jewellery attributions begin to be more fluid: *zār* is not the only possession ritual to make use of coins, not every coin in jewellery was used in either *zār* or other ways of dealing with possession, but all coin pendants potentially may have been. As such, these items are commodities, unless they have been put in blood: they then become a singularity.

Role 4: Amulets

The fourth role that jewellery can have, is that of amulets. This role allows for bricolage, where anything with apotropaic capacities may be used in *zār*. The sample collection holds a variety of general amulets which are worn in everyday life. These include pendants with 'Allah', 'Bismillah', 'Mashallah' and 'There is no god but God': of the 297 pendants that are similar in shape to the power objects, 229 carry such texts. As we have seen in chapter 2, infertility and child mortality are the greatest concerns for women. These concerns are reflected in the large number of amulets to prevent them. The presence of women of all ages, some of which might be pregnant, some of which might be young mothers, creates an ideal hunting ground for a most notorious spirit known as the Qarina. This malevolent female spirit is intent on killing young children, causing constant worry among their mothers. As we have seen, two specific types of jewellery are as helpful against the Qarina in these circumstances: iron ankle rings[417] and an amulet called *zur'a*, mentioned by Sidqi.

Role 5: Jewellery requested by the spirit

The last category is the most fluid category. It encompasses the jewellery that the spirit requests be bought, and as such, it potentially includes any and all jewellery. For example, in 2011, the following items were presented as '*zār* amulets': bracelets, *khulkhals*[418], pendants and arm ornaments.[419] This jewellery is provided for by the patient upon the advice of the ritual specialist. Before the ceremony, the jewellery is no different from regular jewellery. Afterwards, the jewellery has become a solid part of the agreement with the possessing spirit. This position has consequences for the household economy, as I will address in the next chapter. Since these jewellery items are regular jewellery pieces, they are not present in the sample collection: they cannot be identified based on visual characteristics only and their role in *zār* has gone unrecognised. I believe this to be a feasible explanation for the jewellery mentioned by Kahle, as we have seen in above 4.1.3: jewellery of a general type, such as the Ottoman-style amulet cases that Kahle refers to (if I interpret his reference to Lane correctly), may very well have been produced at the request of a spirit, to be presented to it during the ritual. As his experience with *zār* was a staged event, the explanations provided to him may have lost significant parts of their meaning.

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417 Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich, p. 149; see also Soliman 1970, p. 134. Iron ankle rings are present in the collection of Winifred Blackman, Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.1775 and 1985.54.1780, collected in 1929.

418 Ankle rings.

419 Ejibadze 2011, p. 140.

4.2.5 Converging worlds

The roles jewellery may have in ritual clarify how we may understand the pieces themselves. However, when we consider their roles in the wider world of spirit engagement and accept the agency of the pieces with spirit images to be that of power objects, new questions arise. These questions relate to the use of contracts, which take a material form in coins, and the position of blood-stained jewellery within the broader context of spirit engagement in Egypt. Both points in my view reflect how an African cult merged with existing Egyptian practices, and I will address both next.

The point of contracts

Why do contracts in *zār* exist? After all, the powerful object itself already cements the bond between human, spirit and object: another material form of contract is, strictly taken, not necessary, but is present nonetheless. It is worth noting that the use of contracts with a spirit also is attested for non-*zār* possession cases.[420] In chapter 2 I touched upon the *ṣulḥ*, the Arab method of settling disputes, in relation to settling disputes with jinn of one's own *qarin*. This shows strong similarities to an element of *zār*: a dispute needs to be settled through intervention of an intermediary, and when a successful agreement has been reached a communal meal is held, involving the slaughter of animals.[421] A *ṣulḥ* is closely related to an '*aqd*: the agreement reached during a *ṣulḥ* is binding. As we have seen in chapter 2, opinions on the relationship between *zār* and *ṣulḥ* diverge. Some authors see the *ṣulḥ* as a different event altogether[422], another view is that *ṣulḥ* is the animal sacrifice in *zār* in particular[423], or consider the entire initiation into *zār* an '*aqd*.[424] In my view, the challenge of distinguishing between *zār* and *ṣulḥ* arises from their shared objective of reconciliation and their outward similarity, which extends up to the point of animal sacrifice. But in that last aspect, the two methods are different. In a *ṣulḥ*, animals are slaughtered to prepare a formal meal and honour the other party. In *zār*, the sacrifice is made to bond human, spirit and object through blood. As both methods make use of similar activities, they have become so closely interwoven that they are practically indistinguishable and have become one and the same. It is through the presence of objects related to both methods that I feel we may learn of two different systems converging.

Cultural restrictions

In chapter 2, I have argued that the presence of general amulets in *zār* indicates a twofold approach to spirits: where *zār* spirits are invited, others are actively averted. This is because of the high stakes: women can be rendered infertile or end up unmarried because of spirits. But when we consider the general tenets of spirit engagement as explored in the same chapter, we run into another challenge: the incompatibility of *zār* jewellery with cultural restrictions.

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420 The collection of Winifred Blackman holds a piece of cotton in which several coins have been wrapped, which has been dipped in blood. It is used 'for sheikh possession' in general. Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. no. 1985.54.2877, collected in 1929

421 See Pely 2011 and Lang 2002 for a general layout of a *ṣulḥ*; Drieskens 2006b for an example from Cairo.

422 Blackman 1926, p. 198-199 and Morsy 1978, p. 601.

423 Nabhan 1994, p. 211.

424 Hadidi 2006, p. 64.

I would like to recall how a framework of strict rules was in place to protect women who are considered ritually vulnerable after a crisis-event.[425] These cultural restrictions pertain to both the possibility of inadvertently inflicting *kabsa* upon others as well as the risk of contracting *kabsa* oneself. As everything spirit related in Egypt is fluid, the 'rules' to prevent *kabsa* vary. What they do have in common is the avoidance of anything related to blood: a challenging concept, seeing how the use of blood is central to *zār*. In fact, these cultural restrictions, when combined with *zār*, potentially derail virtually every contact between women. As I mentioned in chapter 2, anything bearing a remote resemblance to blood and death is kept away from women during the period in which the risk of contracting *kabsa* is high. This includes for example actual blood (from attending a circumcision event, but also from visiting a butcher[426]), but extends as far as anything that might attract the unwanted presence of spirits, such as gold jewellery and notably that with any form of human portraits, such as coins.[427] This could potentially result in envy, which attracts spirits. Wearing jewellery with spirit images in this context is even more suspect: there is no surer way to bring a spirit to a person in danger of contracting *kabsa* than wearing one around your neck during a visit.

Theoretically, anyone who had attended a *zār* should not be visiting new mothers or brides on account of the presence of blood in which its jewellery had been placed. Given the popularity of *zār*, this would constitute an impossible restriction to maintain. Even worse, how to reconcile the possibility of the possessed and the ritually vulnerable being one and the same person…? Intriguingly, *zār* is not mentioned anywhere as polluting circumstance. How does it manage to escape these rules?

When we look at *zār* again, we see it is held precisely around crisis events: first menstruation, marriage, childbirth, and menopause.[428] Hadidi relates how a possessed woman who had had a *zār* held a second *zār*, this time to protect her unborn child.[429] Yet in 1911, Sidqi states that it is absolutely necessary for a pregnant patient to wear a *zur'a* amulet during the *zār*, or her unborn child will die. Another observation is that children, who are otherwise considered as vulnerable beings that need protecting from jinn, seem to have been present from a very young age. Franke writes that in her opinion 'it is most dangerous for children to attend the Zar exorcisms' (as they are easily impressed and will grow up believing in it), followed by a citation from Le Brun that mothers bring their children along often, and if they fall ill afterwards, they have a *zār* in their own house for the child.[430] Le Brun indeed writes that children are present, and even at such a young age they are still being breast-fed.[431] In fact, *zār* seems to have been so much a part of everyday life that already in 1913 Thompson wrote 'Indeed, in some parts of the city, the little girls have this as a performance in their play in the streets.'[432]

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425 The importance of these restrictions is for example described in Early 1993, p. 180-181; Wickett 2010, p. 67.
426 Inhorn 1994, p. 495.
427 Inhorn 1994, p. 496.
428 Hadidi 2006, p. 113-142.
429 Hadidi 2006, p. 125.
430 Thompson & Franke 1911, p.288.
431 Le Brun 1902, p. 271.
432 Thompson & Franke 1913, p. 275.

The cultural restrictions in place around crisis-events are all aimed at ensuring a woman's fertility, successful pregnancy and healthy children. *Zār* does the same, and so I would suggest that its occurrence around crisis events may indicate its position as a counter measure against *kabsa* such as Inhorn describes, which can be both preventive or therapeutic,[433] rather than as one of the polluting occasions itself. Simultaneously, the large amount of apotropaic jewellery in *zār* does reflect uneasiness over these conflicting views. It points to the existing, and deeply felt need, to protect oneself in the usual manner against jinn and their ill intentions which may result in infertility.

4.3 *ZĀR* JEWELLERY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

4.3.1 Costs

Jewellery also played a practical role in everyday life. It constituted a financial asset and was critical to empowering women financially. However spiritually meaningful *zār* jewellery was, it still had to be purchased. And so, a major aspect of *zār* that has frequently been held against it, already from the first reports on the practice, are the costs. Zwemer, writing in 1920, calls it 'such an expensive bit of heathenism that families have been ruined through its demands'.[434] Blackman calls *zār* 'a baneful belief', providing as reason that *zār* comes with great expenses.[435]

In order to get an idea of just how expensive we should imagine a *zār* to be, I have looked into a case-study from 1913, as described in Thompson & Franke 1913 (see Appendix 1).[436] Based on this case study I have estimated the cost of a personal *zār* for a lower-class woman to amount to approximately LE 60-80, against an annual family income of LE 60. Having this ceremony would therefore constitute a very serious financial imposition. The family income offered little space for saving, which was needed for medical aid and financial setbacks.[437] The high costs of a *zār* could not be settled at once, but were often paid in instalments.[438] Given the difficulties a husband already had in providing the necessary dowry upon his wedding, and the struggle to make ends meet in general, covering another large amount of costs would be near impossible.[439] Spending an annual income or more on *zār* illustrates both the

433 Inhorn 1994, p. 496. If infertility is suspected to be the result of spirit possession, attending a *zār* may lift it according to Van der Most-Van Spijk 1982, p. 46-47; Haverhals-Werkman 1996, p. 16.

434 Zwemer 1920, p. 241.

435 Blackman 1927, p. 200.

436 I have chosen this case-study, even though it provides its own challenges in terms of economic value, instead of the account by Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich who list the costs of their *zār*, as, in addition to the challenges their account poses, I cannot rule out bias against foreign clients which may have resulted in higher expenses. In 2003, a zār might cost between 200 and 300 pounds, according to Sengers 2003, p. 100, 109.

437 See Hoodfar 1999 for a study into household economy, Kholoussy 2005 for the financial imposition a marriage constituted, Van Roode 2017, p. 73 for an introduction of the principles behind income and saving in relation to jewellery. See Yousef 2018 for a case study of poverty in 1913, focusing on a woman whose husband was no longer capable of earning an income as a shoemaker.

438 Comparable to the payment 'in degrees' for the *gallābīya* and golden earrings requested by the spirit in Blackman 1928, p. 187. Nowadays the costs can also be settled in installments, according to Granzow 2008, p. 14.

439 Although it is debatable whether the man or the woman would cover these costs, the entire family income would be stretched as a result of having a *zār*. See Hoodfar 1999, p. 162 for the general division of costs within a household.

importance of the ceremony to the patient and the realistic potential of financial ruin that critics of *zār* warned so vehemently against.

A reasonable thought might be that wealthy people could afford a *zār* more easily than less affluent women. Gordon explains that the poor had to resort to other methods of 'exorcisms', as *zār* was mainly popular by the rich because these could afford the costs.[440] 'Abd er-Rasoul notes that *zār* was mainly practised by 'uncultured rich women who do this for fun and spend a great deal of money on it'.[441] However, the cost of *zār* usually rose with the financial means of the possessed. Instead of a few birds, the sacrificial animals needed by the spirit were more expensive creatures such as cows, sheep, goat or even camels.[442] The necessities for the ritual would also be more elaborate. The jewellery would be in gold instead of silver, as we have seen in Sidqi's account from 1911. Additionally, the ceremony itself could last up to a week. In short, for every stratum in society a personal *zār* would have been an expensive affair. That these costs are indeed meant to be high, is also affirmed in 1911 when Sidqi wrote how a ritual specialist proclaimed that a cheap *zār* would not have the desired effect on the patient.[443] The weekly *zār* ceremonies involved a much smaller sum, but this still had to be provided for.[444] Critics of *zār* therefore often regard it as a shrewd way to shake hard-earned money out of superstitious people, criminally abusing their good faith and trust.[445]

The importance of jewellery in an economic sense associated with *zār* becomes apparent in a remark placed by 'Abd er-Rasoul, who notes that social customs dictated that women brought each other small presents in the form of money on the occasion of marriage, birth or *zār*-ceremonies – and that these were expected to be repaid by the recipient on the next occasion hosted by the donor.[446] This is a well-known and widely practised form of 'crowdfunding' within a community. These small presents can also take the form of jewellery, such as is often the case with weddings, and the obligation to return the gift in kind constitutes the backbone of this informal financial network. Women will contribute to the financial assets of the bride, new mother or *zār* patient, in the knowledge that they, too, will be a beneficiary in due course.

4.3.2 Marriage dynamics

The costs of a *zār* could also be employed as strategy within the marriage. Ensuring that a husband would not have the financial means to take another wife has been given as ground by women to be 'needing' several *zārs*.[447] This concurs with the general trend

440 Gordon 1929, p.154.

441 'Abd er-Rasoul 1955, p. 81, note 1. She reduces *zār* to a party hosted for friends with the specific outcome of receiving gifts like these.

442 Blackman 1928, p. 199, mentions a sheep. See also Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich, p. 163.

443 Littman 1950, p. 6, translating a manuscript by Mahmud Sidqi from 1911.

444 Currently several pounds and increasing; Hadidi 2016, p.44 mentions that public *zār* is costly.

445 Natvig 2014, p. 308 describes how *zār* leaders are looked upon as charlatans and frauds, in these wordings echoing the concerns regarding the expenses of a *zār*. Le Brun 1902, p. 262, notes that a *kōdiya* that connected wealthy and poor patients possessed by the same spirit, also stood to gain from this arrangement, making her skills suspect.

446 'Abd er-Rasoul 1955, p. 81 note 2.

447 Nelson 1971, p. 31; Granzow 2008, p. 14-15, note 24.

of married women preventing their husband from entering a second marriage, as this would stretch the already limited family finances even further.[448]

However, the risks of this strategy backfiring were serious. The possibility of a woman being possessed and in need of a *zār* has been claimed by critics to be leading to divorce or the breaking off of an engagement, due to the significant costs involved.[449] We need to be aware that this consequence is put forward by known critics of *zār* and might thus well be aimed at discouraging participation altogether by targeting one of the most important prospects of a woman's life: getting married. However, when divorce or the breaking off of an engagement would indeed be on the table, it would seem to me that a critical factor in using *zār* as strategy to prevent a second marriage is whether the dowry of the first wife had indeed been paid in full. If it had, divorcing would be the cheaper option on the part of the husband. This would in turn bring shame on the wife and her family, not to mention constitute a serious financial challenge. Had the dowry however not yet been paid in full, and according to Kholoussy it rarely was[450], the '*zār* strategy' had considerably more chances of success: not only his wife, but her entire family would insist he fulfil both his debt and his obligations to his wife before taking a second wife – including financing her *zār*.

The economic aspects of jewellery within the marriage also extended to *zār* jewellery in another way. The dowry jewellery a woman receives upon her wedding is theoretically hers alone.[451] It is meant as financial failsafe in case of divorce or death of the husband (hence the emphasis on the dowry actually being paid), and is not considered part of the household means.[452] However, in reality, the jewellery of the woman is used to cover large and unforeseen expenses, such as hospitalisation or major repairs – it is often the only financial reserve a family has. In this light it is of interest that *zār* jewellery apparently cannot be sold: not just the powerful objects, but also the jewellery requested by the spirit cannot be parted with. As a reason for this, property in the juridical sense is inferred by several authors,[453] but others distinguish between possession and property in their choice of words. Hadidi for example relates how a possessed woman was fine for a while, 'because the mistress (zar spirit) was wearing *my* gold bangles, *my* ankle-bracelets and *my* rings' (italics by the present author).[454]

I believe the inhibition on parting with *zār* jewellery is to be regarded in this light as well. Apart from its association with the possessing spirit, the jewellery needed in *zār* did add to the collection of jewellery, the savings' account, of the patient. *Zār* was one of the methods a woman would resort to in case of infertility. Having no children could be grounds for divorce – and with possible divorce looming on the horizon, adding to her personal assets might have been the savvy thing to do. That certainly does not replace or diminish the spiritual meaning attached to this jewellery, as that

448 Hoodfar 1999, p.75, describing how women feel they must manipulate their men to prevent another marriage.

449 Zwemer 1920, p. 241; Snouck Hurgronje as quoted by Thompson & Franke 1913, p. 285.

450 Kholoussy 2010, pp. 29, 69.

451 Bakker & McKeown 2021, p. 195-196.

452 See Tucker 1985, p. 45-46 for 19th century Egypt where court cases show the right of a woman to her dowry was consistently upheld.

453 Blackman 1926 p. 199 identifies the five piaster piece a present to the possessing spirit; Boddy 1989 p. 325 makes the same distinction between object possession by the host and ownership by the spirit.

454 Hadidi 2006, p. 121.

is one of its fundamental qualities, but it does provide another angle from which to understand these pieces.

4.3.3 *Zār* as integral part of life

Zār created communities. Specialists and attendees formed their own close-knit circle on a local level, and as Hadidi has extensively shown, on a larger scale anyone in the *zār* 'guild', including musicians, silversmiths and traders in all sorts of *zār* paraphernalia, contributed to the creating of the *zār* community.[455] But that community stretched well beyond the cult members itself.

Going by the indication of Hadidi, as quoted above, that roughly 60% of the production and sale of silver jewellery in Sohag governorate in the 1960s and 1970s consisted of *zār* jewellery, that not only indicates the popularity of *zār*, but it also means its material culture must have permeated everyday life. *Zār* jewellery was visible widely in silver shops: a divination of the type Hadidi describes cannot take place if the jewellery is not visible in the first place, and apparently going into trance in a store where other customers are present is accepted behaviour. The silversmiths themselves were Christians and Jews[456]: as we have seen, *zār* was practised by the three main religions, and the *zār* business extended into these worlds as well.

In addition to silver, the garments and beaded jewellery created specifically for *zār* were available for purchase as well. Where silversmiths combined their workshop with a store, the designated dealers in *zār* supplies acquired their stock from elsewhere. The making of embellished garments involved home labour by women, as Chalcraft explores: in the early 20th century, decorating textiles such as the famous silver-worked Assyut shawls, was a home-job, and one that paid very little.[457] Decorating the sequined *zār* garments and *tarbushes* or creating the many beaded pieces of jewellery is a comparable activity that would have been regarded as fitting for women, working as seamstresses.[458]

It is very well feasible that *zār*, in one way or another, was present in many homes: either because its residents practised *zār*, or because they were involved in purveying its supplies. *Zār* was integral to everyday life, not just in a spiritual sense, but also from an economic point of view. When we observe the jewellery spirit images as a historic source, they may provide us with glimpses of that everyday life, and tell us more about that wider community itself.

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455 Hadidi 2006, passim, but notably p. 77-112.

456 Schienerl 1976, p. 129; Hadidi 2016, p. 20.

457 Chalcraft 2005, pp. 112-113.

458 Remarkably little is known about the beaded jewellery market or indeed the use of beaded jewellery in general. Fahmy 2007, p. 192 writes that stringing of beaded necklaces was done by women themselves. Weeks 1986, p. 19 already noted that 'a study of the many beads... in Egyptian women's jewelry would merit a volume of its own' and mentions how women would make intricate beaded pieces themselves (p. 22). Mehrez 2023, p. 95 mentions seamstresses as responsible for the beading of traditional dresses in some cases, and in other cases the client had to bring the beads (p. 107).