

From Prayer to Protection: Amulets and Talismans in the Islamic World

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The enduring search for spiritual blessing and physical protection has yielded a wide range of artworks and objects in Muslim cultures from the seventh century to the present day. Since God and the Qur'an are considered the best of guardians, a devotee may recite prayers, litanies, and Qur'anic verses in order to interact with, and invoke security from, the realm of the sacred. Although such supernatural forces remain intangible and unseen, the belief in their existence and efficacy has produced a significant corpus of artefacts that function as material intermediaries between the visible and invisible worlds. Generally known as amulets and talismans, the primary purposes of these objects include fending off disease, danger, and the evil eye, as well as directing positive energies – for instance inspiring love, devotion, and desire in another individual. Made from a variety of materials and comprising a range of inscriptions, signs, and symbols, amulets and talismans have creatively contributed to the practice of religious life and occult arts in many Islamic traditions across the globe.¹

While amulets and talismans tend to be consigned to the domain of superstition, especially today, they nevertheless play important roles within practices of 'permitted magic', which is often tinged with, and thus legitimated by, pietistic sentiments and behaviour.² Used in daily affairs, these protective and directive devices are carried and worn in various ways, as reflected in the terms that describe them. For instance, an amulet or talisman may be referred to by the Arabic word *tamima*, whose triliteral root (t-m-m) means to complete and perfect. Originally related to a pagan Arab practice of threading a stone on a thong or cord and wearing it around the neck to ward off danger, this type of amulet was rendered more acceptable with the addition of Qur'anic verses and other Islamic prayers and religious expressions (cats 75, 81–2, 93, 95–102). Thus, even though *tamima* are at times censured in the *hadith* literature, a wearer is still understood to be placing himself 'under the protection of God' or *ta'widh*, another common term for an amulet or talisman.³ As a conduit for divine protection, an amulet or talisman is also called a *hafiz*, or protector, as well as a *himala* (pendant), often affixed to or suspended from the body – for example as a necklace, ring, bracelet, coin-amulet, armband, or talismanic shirt (cats 48–50, 75–82, 85–7,

101–3). Often these suspendable items are carried in containers, including small bags, locketts, boxes, and purses (cats 93, 95–100, 101–4).

Although largely used interchangeably, the terms for amulets and talismans also convey a number of distinctions, some of which are fine but not mutually exclusive. An amulet is most often defined as a small object made of a durable material (such as metal or bone), whereas a talisman comprises less resilient materials (such as paper or parchment).⁴ An amulet also tends to be worn on the body for protective purposes, while a talisman (*tilsam*) is often thought to include a greater density of magic inscriptions, signs, and symbols. For these reasons, an amulet is often referred to as a barrier or screen (*hijab*) as well as a sanctuary or refuge (*hirz*) against malignant forces. It functions as a kind of defence system – a symbolic fortification for body and soul. In embodying the spiritual seeking for guidance and safety in God, it also provides a semblance of the desired refuge, albeit in object form.

Both amulets and talismans are interacted with in many diverse ways, including kissing and rubbing. Other objects known as 'philters', however, were meant to be ingested. In its capacity as a potion or drug, the philter is often made up of potent words inscribed on parchment, paper, metal, bone, or stone (fig. 14). These words are dissolved (if written on a paper surface) or 'activated' (if inscribed on metal, bone, or stone) by means of a contact liquid that is consumed by the individual seeking protection or cure, sometimes while a folk doctor utters invocations (cats 52–58). By combining prayerful supplications and protective paraphernalia, these many oral, physical, and material practices ultimately seek to harness and guide the spiritual forces believed to inhabit and animate both earthly and heavenly realms.

Amulets and talismans display great richness in their contents, functions, and perceived powers. Their diverse media and designs may endow them with varying apotropaic potential, the power to deflect bad luck or evil, as may their size: large items can convey a sense of overpowering awe while smaller ones evoke an intimacy between the physical and the spiritual. Beyond these formal attributes, the frequent inclusion of letters, words, and phrases attests to the vital importance of writing and reading within Islamic

Fig.14 | Magico-Medicinal Cup, Deccan (India), 1014 AH / 1606, agate, engraved, 7.8 cm.

Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (TLS6) · cat.57

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While the use of specific semi-precious stones for small amulets is broadly attested in the Islamic tradition, the use of agate for magico-medicinal vessels is unique to this example. Inscribed with a combination of invocations and Qur'anic



passages proclaiming God as the ultimate refuge and source of assistance, this small cup is likely to have functioned as a provider of protection similar to its more common metal equivalents. Any liquid that touched the sacred words would transfer their blessing to the drinker.

Fig.15 | Amulet, possibly Turkey, 19th century, gold, stamped, 6.4 cm. The British Museum, London, bequeathed by Edward Gilbertson (1994,0915.888) · cat.86

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talismanic arts – even though a number of textual elements may be written in pseudo-Arabic script or remain enigmatic in various ways. The legible therefore exists along with the cryptic, although the latter is regularly transcended by strategies of decipherment which enable clarity.⁵ Last but not least, some amulets and talismans are intended for open display, while others are meant to remain essentially hidden from view – rolled up, folded in upon themselves, or tucked within a satchel or box. The protective powers of these amulets are enhanced through the sense of mystery engendered by concealing their material presence and magical contents.

An amulet or talisman is largely conceived as a broker enabling human agents to negotiate and steer imperceptible yet energetic forces. As a material channel (*wasila*) and intermediary (*wasita*), these protective objects fulfil mediating roles that echo Muhammad's own position as chief intercessor (*shafi*) for his community of believers. Both the talismanic arts and the Prophet therefore act as ideal

go-betweens, capable of traversing the physical and spiritual realms. As a consequence Muhammad's many names (*asma' al-nabi*), the verbal description of his physical and moral characteristics (*hilya*), and his personal accoutrements and traces (*athar*) stand out as key motifs in the occult arts of Islam – together with Qur'anic verses, prayer formulas, the names of God, angels, magic squares, letters, animals, and seals (cats 42, 44, 46, 50, 59–64, 85, 90, 107–8 and 110).⁶ Ultimately the goal of these amuletic objects is to secure intercessory protection and prophetic blessing (*baraka*) for their viewers and wearers, who quite often perceive talismanic practices not as blameworthy innovations – as they may be defined at certain times and places – but rather as constituting and sustaining aspects of the Islamic faith.

AMULETIC MATERIALS AND DESIGNS

The aesthetic appeal of amulets and talismans derives from the materials from which they are made, as well as from the designs that they deploy. The forces

Fig.16 | Gemstone from a Pendant, probably Iran, 17th–19th century, cornelian, engraved, 3.5 × 5.15 cm. Gift of J. B. Elliott, 1859, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, on loan to the Ashmolean Museum (L1008.46) cat.75

© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The central field of the stone is engraved with a tree-shaped motif carrying a series of protective inscriptions:

ya rafi' al-darajat ('O Exalter of Ranks'), *ya mujib al-du'awat* ('O Thou Who Answers Prayers'), *ya qadi al-hajat* ('O Judge of Necessities'), and *ya qafi al-muhammat* ('O Sufficient in Difficulties'). Coupled with *ayat al-kursi* and the phrase 'victory is from God and conquest is near' (Qur. 6:113), these inscriptions indicate the object's sphere of use: warfare. Furthermore the stone on which these formulas are inscribed is a type of cornelian known as *rutabi* (yellow-red in colour), which medieval sources believed to be capable of controlling fear and anger in battle.



believed to be extracted by or expelled from amulets likewise depend upon both an object's material make-up and graphic content. From the most minute of amulets carved of precious stone to oversize talismanic charts on gazelle skin, both medium and form act as prime signifiers and carriers of meaning for artists and owners alike.

In the Islamic world amulet makers work with a number of preferred materials. The 'intrinsic' protective values of such materials largely hinge upon their natural rarity, monetary value, and symbolic connotations. Among them gold – whose high cost makes its use in amulets relatively scarce – emits a sun-like radiance that produces a shimmering, almost thermal effect. A number of coin-shaped amulets made in Ottoman lands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries make use of gold (fig.15).⁷ Shaped as disks

and pierced in the upper protrusion, these amulets resemble gold dinars, even though they were clearly meant to be affixed to the body or sewn on to clothing. Placed on vestments, these coin-amulets created encrusted garments that recall Ottoman talismanic shirts decorated with inscriptions and designs inked in gold pigment.⁸ Both pierced amulets and talismanic shirts speak clearly of an individual's urge for physical contact with such protective objects – a corporeal intimacy that symbolically provides a secondary, armoured skin.

Amuletic inscriptions and designs often reinforce the material's efficacy while simultaneously directing an individual's attention to the proper use of occult arts, whose effectiveness is based upon God's all-encompassing power. Therefore inscriptions, such as those on the Ottoman coin-amulets, often praise God

Fig.19 | Amulet, India, late 17th–early 18th century, cornelian, inscribed and jade, inlaid with gold and inset with emeralds and rubies, 3.2 × 4.1 cm.

Presented by J. B. Elliott, 1859, Ashmolean Museum (EA2009.5) cat.78

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as the ultimate bestower of safety and strength, the provider of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, and the deliverer on the Day of Judgement. Desires and destinies may be mediated by amulets, but only if 'God wills it' (*mashallah*). Significantly this pivotal expression of Islamic faith is centrally placed on the coin-amulets. Moreover, the expression *mashallah* can be encircled by a six-pointed star reminiscent of the seal of Solomon; in the coin-amulet its points fan out to spell the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and their dog Qitmir. Both the pointed star and the Seven Sleepers are key protective designs found in Islamic occult arts.⁹ Thus, while gold may symbolise divine imperishability, these graphic devices further inscribe control over invisible spirits and forces both on land and at sea (cat.105, previous pages).

Although gold and silver jewellery are at times frowned upon and denigrated as 'made of Hellfire' in Islamic textual sources, many amulets employ these and other precious and semi-precious materials (cats 76–7, 81, 83, 85–6 and cat.73, overleaf).¹⁰ Among the latter cornelian (*'aqiq*) is a preferred material because it is considered the stone of the Prophet Muhammad (fig.16).¹¹ Intriguingly, the brownish-red colour of cornelian resembles blood, the God-given genesis of all human life as praised in the Qur'an (Qur. 96:2). Besides cornelian and agate, jade and jasper have long been considered to carry protective and medicinal properties, including securing victory in combat and curing ailments of the internal organs (fig.19).¹²

In addition to inscriptions, seals, and star-shaped designs, amulets often display magic squares known as *wafq*, *murabba'*, or *buduh*.¹³ Magic squares are divided into cells whose number is equal along both horizontal and vertical axes, thereby creating a chequerboard pattern. The most popular in the Islamic world is the 3 × 3 magic square, also known as Plato's Square.¹⁴ Although some cells may be left blank, a number of words, letters, and numbers typically appear. Most often their alphanumerical results remain consistent across the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines – a computational equilibrium that seeks to represent the harmony of the cosmos.

At times only one magic square may be included, while at others a great number of magic squares dominate. This is the case on a large-scale talismanic chart inscribed on gazelle skin, most likely made in

This small but dazzling bezel-shaped object combines both cornelian and jade for a doubly protective effect. The two precious stones are suggestive of verdant fertility and embryonic creation. These materials also provide an ideal vehicle for one of the most frequently recurring protective Qur'anic verses – namely the 'Throne Verse' or *ayat al-kursi* (Qur. 2:255), finely inscribed on the central field.



Iran during the nineteenth century (fig.20).¹⁵ On this rather translucent parchment, which shows signs of having been folded and was perhaps habitually carried by its owner, are inscribed a number of Qur'anic verses, the beautiful names of God (*al-asma' al-husna*), Shi'i supplications to 'Ali, and many supererogatory prayers or *du'as*. The majority of these prayers have their merits or virtues computed, while a magic square that includes a 'prayer of washing' (*du'a-i ghasilat*) may have been intended to purify the believer during ablutions or to protect the deceased upon burial. Indeed, like other oversize talismans that were either folded or affixed to walls, this chart uses both text and pattern to petition God to safeguard its owner from misfortunes, diseases, the evil eye, and the accursed devil.¹⁶ As a consequence these amulets – ranging in size from the miniature to the monumental and in materials from precious gems to cured skin – clearly place Islamic occult arts within a larger landscape of devout Muslim practices.

PORTABLE TALISMANS AND THEIR CASES

Like their owners, amulets tend to enjoy peripatetic lives: they are carried in the hand, nestled in a pocket, sewn on to a robe, dangled around the neck, and

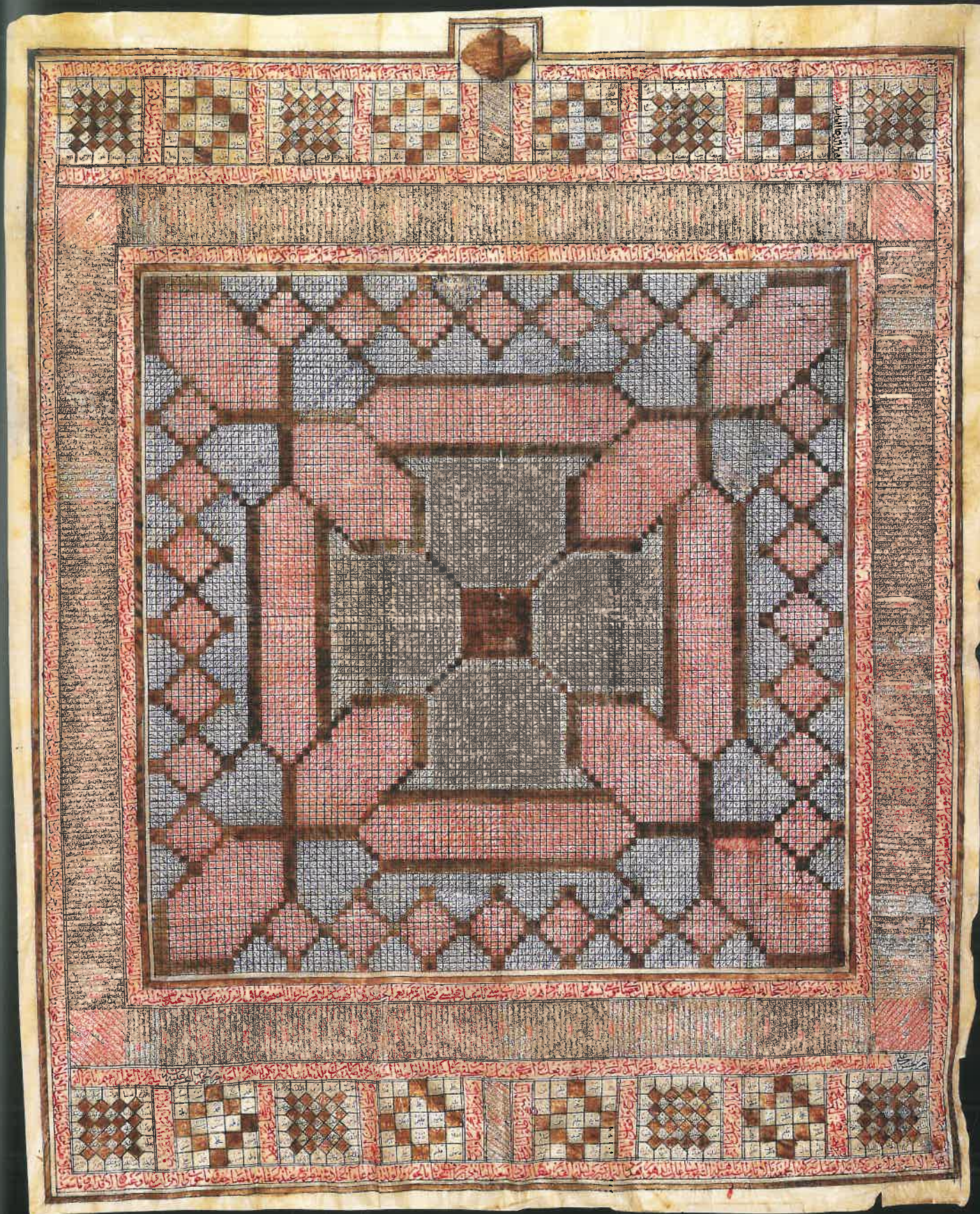
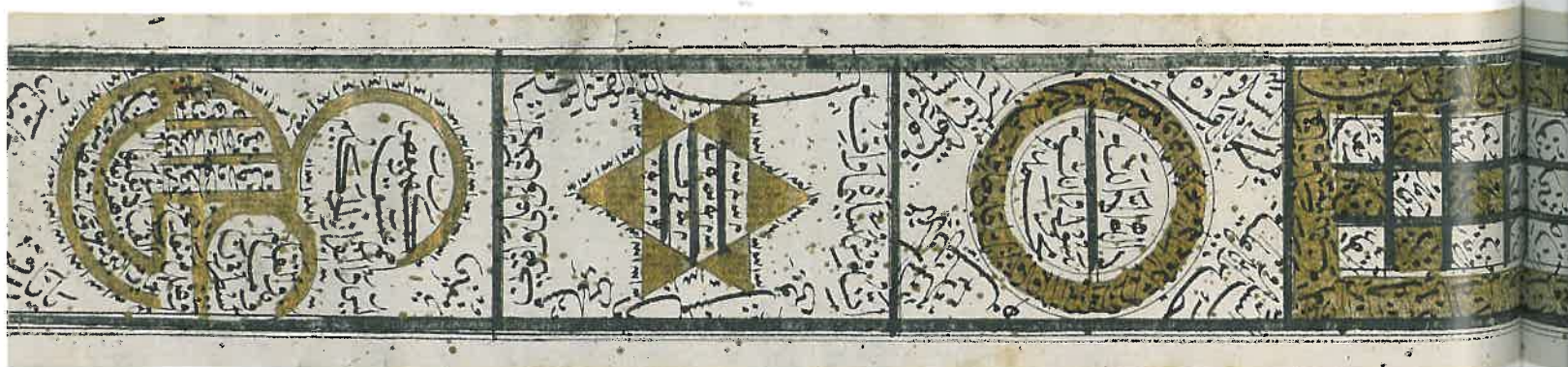
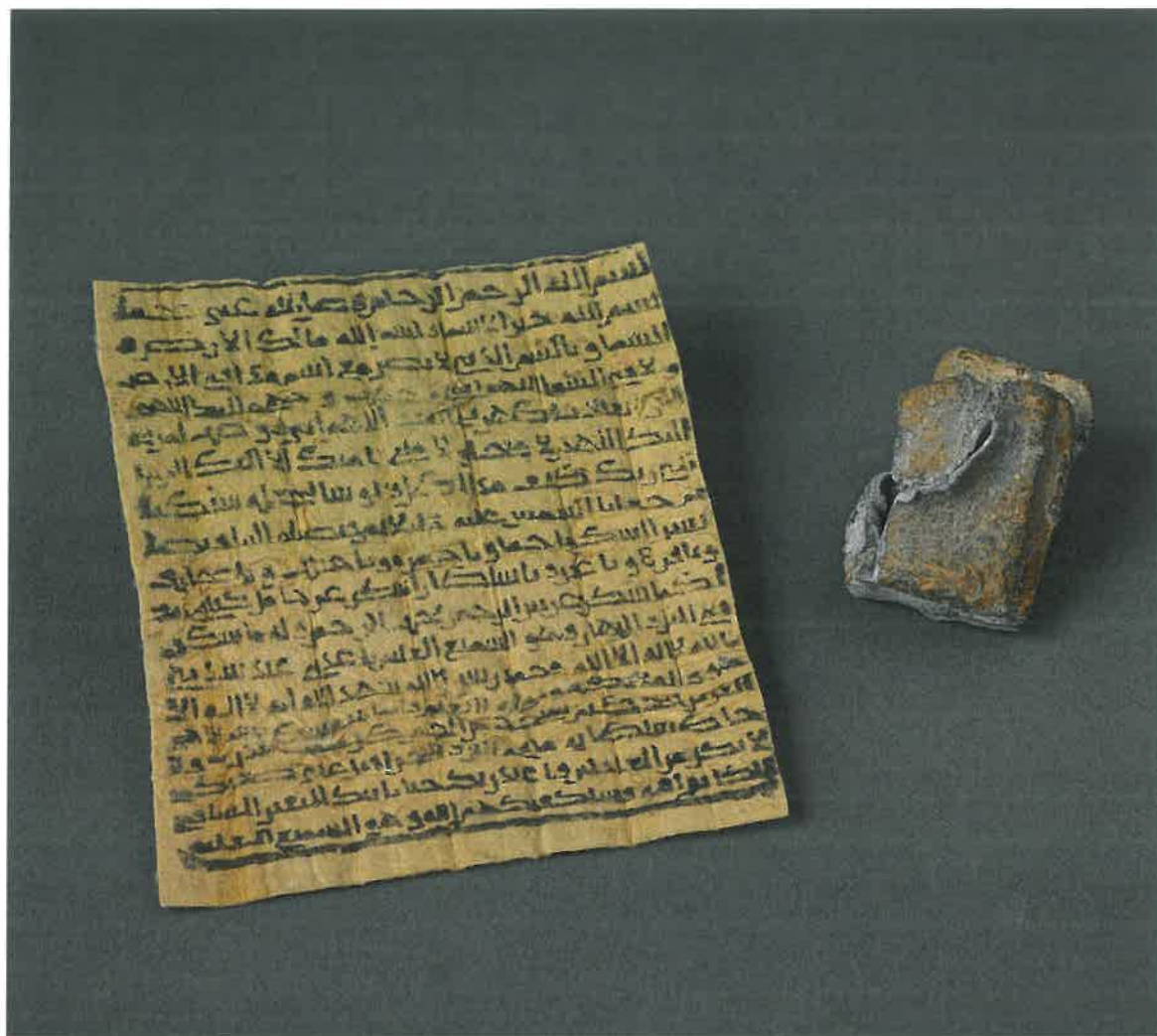


Fig.20 | Talismanic Chart, Iran, 19th century, ink on gazelle skin, 68.5 × 53.5 cm.
Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (AKM536)

© With Permission of the Aga Khan Museum

Fig.23 | Printed Amulet with Box, Egypt, 10th–11th century,
ink on paper, 7.2 × 5.5 cm (amulet), 2.7 × 1.3 cm (case).
Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (AKM 508)
© With Permission of the Aga Khan Museum

Fig.24 | Talismanic Scroll with Qur'anic Quotations,
Prophetic References, and Sacred Symbols, Ottoman
Empire, 18th century or later, black and red ink and gold on
paper, 3.6 × 136 cm.
Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford
(Ms.Arch.Seld.A.72.6 [2])
cat.90
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slipped on to the finger. As portable items their size must remain relatively small and, ideally, they should be protected from wear and tear. The twin goals of portability and preservation prompted amulet-makers to explore a range of creative strategies, chief among them size reduction and encasing. Many amulets and talismans therefore make effective use of miniaturisation, which in turn encourages physical proximity and mobility with the owner (cats 88–95 and 101–2).

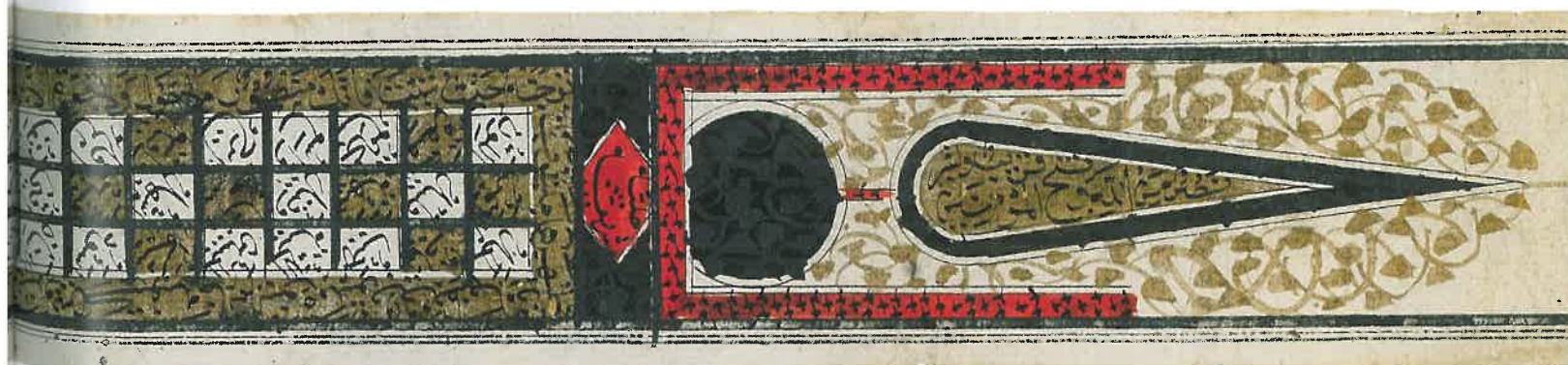
While many talismanic objects made on paper display handwritten texts and symbols, a corpus of diminutive amulets made in the medieval Mediterranean include prayers executed with a block print or die (*tarsh*).¹⁷ These miniature paper amulets are reduced in size even further through the process of folding, the crease lines forming a lattice pattern, as can be seen in a minute, block printed amulet made in Egypt during the tenth or eleventh century (fig. 23).¹⁸ The amulet was originally nestled within a lead case imprinted with *surat al-Ikhlās* (Qur. 112:1–4), a verse that instructs the worshipper to proclaim God's singularity. As attested by similar extant block printed amulets, the lead case most likely included lugs, now lost, which allowed the amulet to be sewn to the owner's shirt or suspended from the body.¹⁹

This tiny 'carry-on package' most likely remained sealed shut, its scripted contents invisible to an owner who perhaps was neither literate nor wealthy enough to purchase a non-serialised, handwritten amulet. Even though it may not have been read, the amulet's text nevertheless includes legible Qur'anic verses and calls to God as the supreme intercessor. Its last line

addresses the owner with a verse from the Qur'an that proclaims: 'So God will safeguard you from them. He is All-Hearing and All-Knowing' (Qur. 1:137).²⁰ Here thrives a tension between imagining God as the ultimate Protector and the amulet as a material item that objectifies this otherwise amorphous divine energy. This tension likewise extends to scripted amulets stored within sealed cases, in which legibility and secrecy conjoin in a dynamic relationship to spark a formidable charge emanating from these diminutive containers.

While some large and small amulets on paper and parchment are placed on full display, or else are folded and secreted away, still others in the shape of scrolls are rolled up and contained in cylindrical tubes suspended horizontally (cats 88–90, 95–100 and 104).²¹ Eschewing the book and single folio format, amulet scrolls recall the structure of the Torah – from which, according to François Déroche, early Qur'anic codices were visually distinguished through the form of the codex (*mushaf*).²² The scroll format makes the retrieval of information a rather unwieldy and onerous task, in effect deterring an individual from unfurling the object in order to read or view its contents. Here again, even though an amuletic text may be wholly lucid in its scripted form, its accessibility, and thus legibility, remains relatively impeded by the amulet's construction.

Block printed and handwritten talismanic scrolls have been popular across the Islamic world from the tenth century onwards.²³ Some contain strictly Qur'anic verses, while others include a greater variety of textual and graphic content. For example,



one colourful amuletic scroll contains an armoury of apotropaic words and devices (fig. 24). Among them appear Qur'anic verses and the declaration that 'victory is from God and conquest is near' (Qur. 61:13), which bears martial connotations, together with a blessed verbal description of the Prophet inscribed in a grid reminiscent of magic squares. A number of seals further amplify this portable treasury of protective designs. The impressions include Muhammad's 'seal of prophethood' (*muhr al-nubuwwa*, fig. 25), the 'seal of Solomon' (*muhr Sulayman*, cat. 64), and the seal of the 'spring' (*'ayn*). While this seal is at times rendered as the 'spring of 'Ali' (*'ayn-i 'Ali*), at others it is identified as the 'eye upon [God]' (*'ayn 'ala [Allah]*), the latter enabling a devotee to place his or her trust in God.²⁴ Intriguingly the Arabic term *'ayn* is doubly suggestive inasmuch as a talismanic scroll functions as a wellspring for, as well as a reassurance of, protection and guidance.

While single-folio amulets may be folded into metal boxes and talismanic scrolls rolled into pendant tubular cases, other protective objects remain fully loyal to the book format. This is particularly the case for miniature Qur'ans, which may contain the entire scripture or else a selection of chapters and verses deemed beneficial in securing protection, health, and victory (cats 91–3). Among them are diminutive Ottoman Qur'ans, known as *'sançak Qur'ans*, famously hung on banners and carried into battle.²⁵ These diminutive versions of the Holy Book are typically contained in protective metal cases (*muhafaza*) which could be opened and closed when required, as well as provided with chains for suspension.

Some metal cases serve as containers for miniaturised books or sacred excerpts on folded pieces of paper to be affixed to the upper arm. Generally known as *bazuband* – armbands, armlets, or arm amulets – these small Qur'ans and their boxes were made from the eighteenth century onwards in eastern Islamic lands, where they were thought to protect the wearer via their close contact with the body.²⁶ The miniature *mushafs* tend to be beautifully illuminated, while their cases are ornamented with textual and decorative devices. An example of an engraved silver *bazuband* case, made in Iran during the nineteenth century, displays various designs and inscriptions (fig. 26).²⁷ The box includes hinges above and below to open

and close the box as well as side brackets for affixing or sewing it to the sleeve of a robe. The centre of its lid is inscribed with the *bismillah*, whose vertical and horizontal letter elongations form a magic square of sorts. In its inner and outer circles appear a number of Qur'anic verses (Qur. 9:111 and 68:51–2), while its sides proclaim the typically Shi'i invocation to 'Ali, the 'Manifestor of Miracles' (*mazhar al-'aja'ib*) who aids devotees in securing help in adversity.²⁸

In Shi'i sources a sermon attributed to 'Ali stipulates that he is the one who will explicate the Qur'an, what it contains in the science of the future and cures for illnesses.²⁹ The evocation of 'Ali in Iranian armlets, seals, and amulets thus reveals the extent to which talismans reflect and reinforce sectarian world-views, while simultaneously reaffirming the central role of the Holy Book in Islamic practices to foretell the future or effect cures. Along with their participation in ideological discourses, such amulets also display a high level of mobility thanks to their reduction in size and storing in protective containers.

MUHAMMAD AS PROTECTIVE INTERCESSOR

Verbal icons and relics of the Prophet – which display a clear preference for the epigraphic arts over the figurative mode – have proved especially popular in some areas of the Islamic world from the seventeenth century onwards. Indeed, amulets and talismans depicting Muhammad's attributes, effects, and traces have functioned as powerful protective devices in various Muslim cultures up to the present day. The Prophet is praised as the archetypal intercessor, a champion speaking on behalf of believers seeking salvation in the afterlife.³⁰ Moreover, because of his ability to traverse the earthly and celestial realms on his heavenly ascension (*mi'raj*), Muhammad also acts as a channel and go-between – as do amulets. As a result, his spiritual presence permeates Muslim religious life as a 'talismanic force',³¹ while his verbal description and relics provide devotees with contemplative and protective devices (cats 59–64, 85, 90, 94, 107–8).

Verbal icons of the Prophet (*hilya*) are a staple of Ottoman and Persian artistic cultures (cats 107–8).³² Through text rather than image, such icons extoll Muhammad's physical and moral attributes, and from

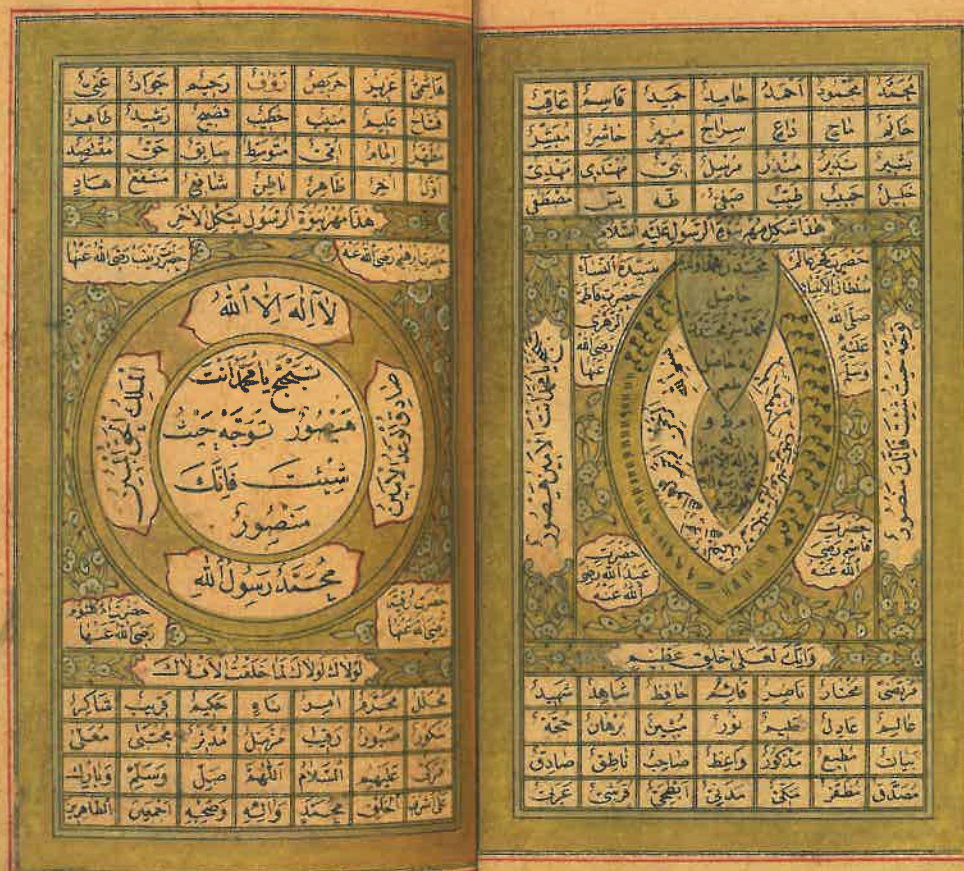


Fig. 25 | Two Versions of the 'Seal of Prophethood' (*muhr al-nubuwwa*) from an illustrated Prayer Book, Turkey, 1212 AH / 1798, ink, colours and gold on paper, 17 x 11 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL T.463, fols 91b-92a) cat.60

© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

Prayer books combining *du'as*, sacred invocations, paintings, and other designs proliferated in the late Ottoman period. Expressions of individual devotion, they also provided portable protective devices that relied on their contents' spiritual power. This page opening presents two versions of the 'seal of prophethood' (*muhr al-nubuwwa*), a mark that Muhammad bore between his shoulders.

the seventeenth century onwards artists mastered their rendition in diagrammatic form. Originally designed by the Ottoman calligrapher Hafiz Osman (d.1698), *hilya* compositions were attached to the walls of Ottoman private homes and other public and private locations, infusing them with prophetic blessing. On occasion the potential of *hilyas* to prevent evil undergoes a process of multiplication, especially when inscriptions and designs expand the icon into a larger protective device.³³ In addition, when the names of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) and the Twelve Imams also appear, as is the case for a nineteenth-century Iranian *hilya* (fig. 27), then champions of the Shi'i faith similarly act as safeguards and guides into the realm of the unseen.

Other *hilyas* of Muhammad do not include talismanic devices, but rather depict the Prophet's personal effects (*al-mukhallafat al-nabawiyya*).³⁴ For instance, a nineteenth-century Ottoman verbal icon includes a variety of scripted and pictorial

representations (fig. 34). Besides the *hilya* text, the many names of God and the Prophet are included. Furthermore, fanning out from Muhammad's name – executed in gold ink in the centre of the composition – appear his numerous relics, including his banners, signet ring, toothbrush, walking stick, scissors, cloak, rosary, boots, comb, sandals, and ablution ewer. Among these material remains, a number of which are preserved in the Ottoman Palace in Istanbul, Muhammad's cloak, footprints, and sandals achieved talismanic status. The cloak (*burda*) was thought to possess healing powers, as described in al-Busiri's (d.c.1294–7) ode of the same name (cat. 61, overleaf).³⁵ While individuals in the Ottoman Palace rubbed and kissed Muhammad's cloak to unleash these properties,³⁶ verses of al-Busiri's *Qasida al-Burda* ('Mantle Ode') were also dissolved in liquid to create curative philters. These were believed to be especially effective against epilepsy, colic, diarrhoea, and haemorrhoids.³⁷ A powerful compendium, this combination

Fig. 26 | Armlet for Amulet (*bazuband*),

Iran, 19th century,

silver, engraved, 6 cm.

Bequeathed by Christopher T. Gandy, 2012,

Ashmolean Museum (EA2012.95)

cat.103

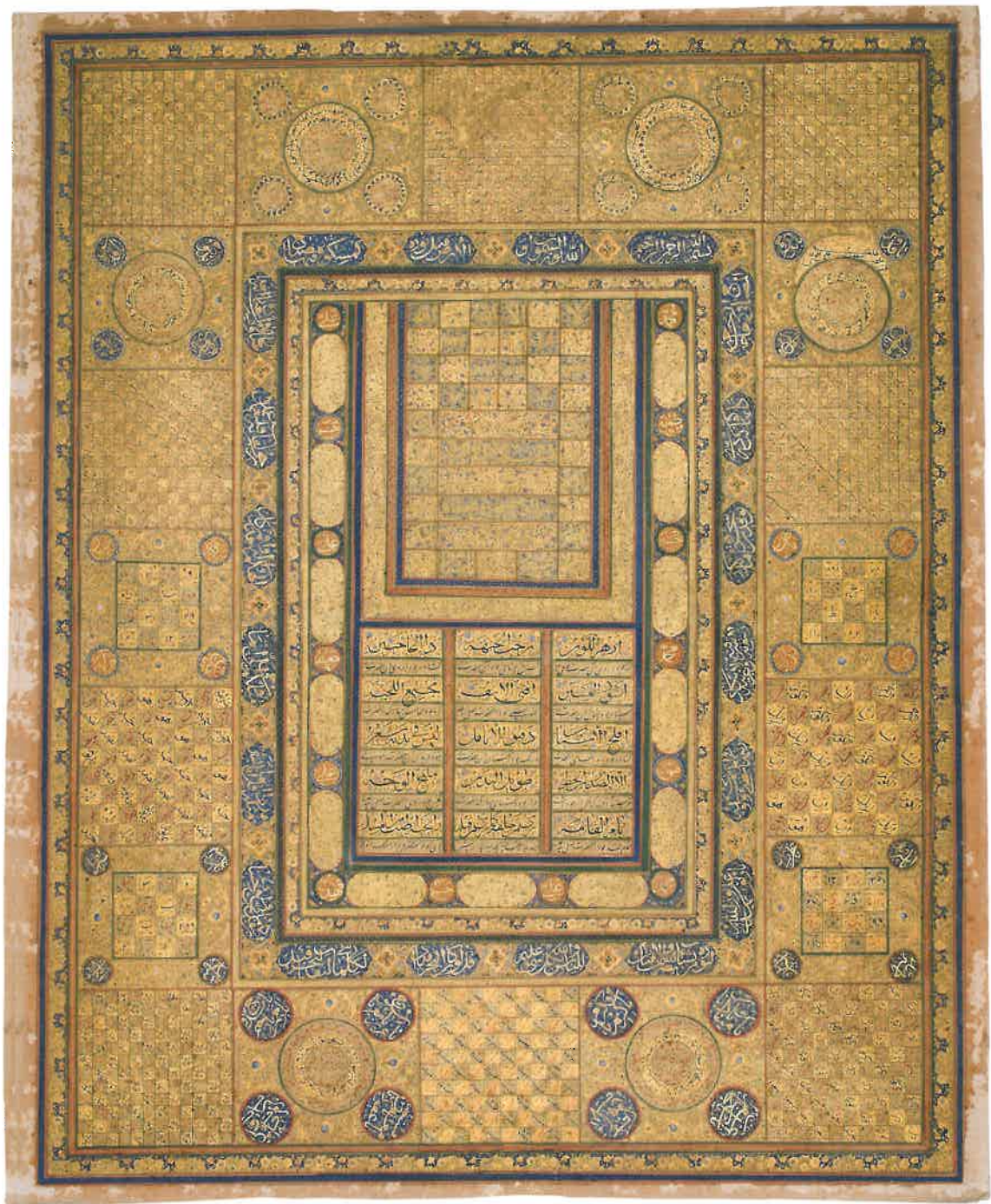
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford



Fig.27 | *Hilya*
Combined with
Magic Squares, Iran,
 19th century, ink,
 colours and gold on
 paper, 61.5 × 50.3 cm.
 Nasser D. Khalili
 Collection, London
 (CAL302) cat.107

© Nour Foundation.
 Courtesy of the Khalili Family
 Trust

Surrounded by
 magic squares and
 amuletic formulas,
 which include the
al-asma' al-husna,
 the *asma' al-nabi*,
 and *ayat al-kursi*,
 this description of
 Muhammad's moral
 qualities transforms a
 device of imaginative
 representation into
 an object that overtly
 embodies protective
 powers.



of *hilya* and relics exponentially enhances the icon's blessing.

To an even greater extent than Muhammad's mantle and footprint, his sandalprints (*na'l* in the singular, *na'layn* for the pair) became the most pervasive amulets of the Prophet in the Islamic world, stretching from North and Sub-Saharan Africa to Iran and China.³⁸ The soles of the Prophet's sandals were believed to have been consecrated through touching the soil of Paradise and the throne of God upon his celestial ascension. Moreover, a sandal

housed in the Ashrafiyya Madrasa in Damascus came to symbolise *hadith* learning and Sunni orthodoxy. During the medieval period this sandal relic stimulated pilgrimage to Damascus by believers seeking the Prophet's intercession via his footwear to remedy problems and cure ills.³⁹ Those unable to visit and view the sandal could request 'exact' paper replicas of the original.⁴⁰ The blessed relic thus catalysed the production of paper calques from the twelfth century onwards. Such visual copies or 'similitudes' of the Prophet's sandal, especially if based on the original

يا ناظرنا نعل النبي

الذي هو خير من الدنيا والآخرة

قبلنا نعل النبي لا مثله



قال النبي
عليه السلام
احسنت في الدار
وعرفت ولا في قافلة فقهيت
ولا في سفينة وعرفت ولا في مال
وفكرت بركة النبي عليه السلام

نار من النبي عليه السلام
اسرع في المثلان بياض
شيب لم اعقد اليه
به قبالا وما حب المثلان

شاق قلبه ولكن
من ليس النعلا
محمد سيد المؤمنين
والثقلين والفريقين
من عرب ومن عجم

تأمر النبي مع روكا ومكبرا

الذي هو خير من الدنيا والآخرة

والشعر مثل نعل النبي لا مثله

Fig.28 | Talismanic Sandalprint from a Pilgrimage Certificate of Maymuna bint Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah al-Zardali, possibly Mecca, 836 AH / 1432.
The British Library, London (Add. 27566)
© The British Library Board

artefact, were believed to form particularly effective talismans (cat.63).⁴¹

Talismanic sandalprint amulets often include texts and poems inviting owners to kiss and rub the image. For example, on a sandal print amulet from a pilgrimage certificate (fig.28), the verses exhort the viewer as follows: 'O beholder of the image of the Prophet's sandal, accept it without pride. Kiss the image of the Prophet's sandal with piety when you have a request or are facing difficulty. Come to the Prophet when you are travelling or when you are old. Come in admiration.' The text further orders the viewer to 'circumambulate and honour it until you wear out your shoes' and then offers a final congratulation: 'Well done to the one who has touched it with his forehead.' This and other prophetic amulets thus intercede, in a similar way to Muhammad, on behalf of the believer. He or she is encouraged to behold humbly, kiss in devotion, rub in admiration, and even walk around the talismanic image in order to activate its latent power and reap its many blessings.

TAKING REFUGE

In popular practice and textual production, talismanic arts are often compared with seeking assistance and cure, and therefore should be considered as an offshoot of prophetic medicine. On this subject, in his *Tibb al-nabi* ('Medicine of the Prophet') the prolific author Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d.1505) offers the following words of wisdom to his readers: 'Know then that the recital of verses and the wearing of amulets are indeed useful if accepted by the patient

and received with his consent as a method of cure.

The recitation of charms and the wearing of amulets are a form of taking refuge with God for the purpose of securing health, just as is done in the case of medicine.⁴² Amulets – whether small or large, displayed or hidden, textual or pictorial – therefore provide devotees with allegorical yet tangible strongholds and safe havens.

The occult and talismanic arts have permeated daily life across the Islamic world, even though the making, wearing, and viewing of amulets remained subject to debate, control, and prohibition. Today shops around pilgrimage sites, such as the Shrine of Eyüp in Istanbul, offer many devotional commodities for sale, including blue beads against the evil eye, necklaces with pendants of Muhammad's sandalprint, and prayer books containing apotropaic formulas. They also sell objects as apparently banal as refrigerator magnets (fig.29). However, some of these magnets function as treasuries of amuletic devices, telescoping an entire range of talismanic devices into one single object. This example includes the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and their dog Qitmir, *ayat al-kursi* transcribed in Arabic script and Turkish translation, depictions of the Prophet's blessed 'seal of prophethood' and sandal, and a graphic rendering of 35 *bismillahs* that centrifugally fan out from the name of God. These historical and contemporary objects materially manifest the protective qualities of prayer, God, and his Messenger, which are sought after by the faithful in their ongoing quest for guidance, healing, and protection.



Fig.29 | Magnet with the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the Throne Verse (*ayat al-kursi*) and Muhammad's 'Seal of Prophethood' (*muhr al-nubuwwa*) and Sandal, Istanbul (Turkey), 2015, laminated paper with magnet backing, 10 x 6.8 cm.
Private collection

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POWER AND PROTECTION

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