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Materialized Beliefs: 'Industrialized' Islamic Amulets

Abstract

Amulets are one of the founding stones of traditional healing, manifested in various cultures for thousands of years. While anthropologists and folklorists delved into this unique world, an inter-disciplinary viewpoint of this phenomenon may be of further use. We wish to describe Islamic amulets from a material culture perspective, combining socio-cultural and material elements. Analyzing a particular amulet, prepared by a traditional Arab woman healer in Israel, we claim that today, some amulets are imbued with agentic abilities, rendering their material aspects irrelevant. This observation, in light of current literature, point to a dual process of industrialization and abstraction Islamic amulets undergo in recent years. This viewpoint will benefit, in our eyes, researchers in various fields from archaeology to design studies. It will contribute, specifically, to the way materials are being perceived in a spiritual context such as ritual, healing and belief.

Keywords

Traditional healing, Islam, amulet, material culture, agency

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Prologue

Much like sex during the Victorian period, objects are nowhere to be said and everywhere to be felt. They exist, naturally, but they are never given a thought, a social thought. Like humble servants, they live on the margins of the social world, doing most of the work but never allowed to be represented as such.

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory*

Amulets are one of the founding stones of traditional healing, manifested in various cultures for thousands of years. The present manuscript focuses on amulets used by traditional Arab women healers in Israel and its material implications. Despite recent and renewed interest in material culture in general (Skuse, 2005; Poulter, 2011; Douny, 2011) and the interest in amulets in particular (Hill, 2007), researches dealing directly with the amulet's materiality (e.g. the use of paper, ink etc.) in relation to contemporary religion and culture, are rare.

Wards against the evil eye, as casings for psalms or as purifying vessels, amulets are well-known in different cultures. A classic differentiation between two basic sorts of amulets draws the line between textual and non-textual amulets. While the textual amulet's center is a written proverb, a person's name or a number of sacred words, the non-verbal amulet's strength lies in its materials. Another difference lies in the materials comprising the amulet (Dundes, 1992). In various cultures, amulets are made from organic materials, such as plants, herbs, roots, feathers etc., hence deriving their power straight from these materials (Miller et al., 2000).

In the past, anthropologists, folklorists and other socio-cultural researchers delved into the world of amulets from a myriad array of perspectives. The folklorist Dundes (1992) describes amulets as a counter measure against the popular belief in the "evil eye". Anthropologists Lambek (1993) and Sered (1992), for example, though working in different fields, depict amulets as part of popular culture and a means of traditional healing. Hill (2007) analyzes British amulets presented in the museum as reappraising the relationship between magic, authority and modernity.

In these and other researches, relatively little interest is accorded to the materials comprising the amulet. In a research conducted in Thailand by Stanley Tambiah in 1984, for example, the

informants described the amulet's power as deriving not from its materiality but from other three different sources: "the age of the amulet, the fame of the monk who sacralized it and the power it has given to previous owners" (Preucel, 2010:84). The amulet's importance, in this case, does not derive from its materiality, but rather from the monk's abilities to sanctify it, reciting holy verses and sprinkling it with holy water.

While the socio-cultural aspects of the amulet, along with its projection on beliefs are well discussed in the literature, we wish to tread a different path. It is our intention to focus on the different dimensions of anthropology, religion and material culture, in the context of amulets used by Muslim-Arab healers in Israel. In this article we will highlight the complex connection between the amulet's material attributes and its cultural meaning. Combining anthropology of religion with material culture and design studies will help us better understand the importance of material objects in our lives and beliefs.

In this article we present an amulet, used by Muslim-Arab healers in Israel, as a case study of religious material culture. We will show that this material text is not just a metaphor reflecting needs, interests and values, but is also the material manifestation itself reflecting the complex relationship between the healer and the patient. By using various viewpoints – material culture, anthropology and religious healing – we will paint a broader and more complex depiction of this unique phenomenon.

Materialized beliefs: Material culture and anthropological perspective

While contemporary researchers accentuate material objects' various attributes, their social importance and ability to become a central part of their owner's biography (Doy, 2005; Turkle, 2007), anthropology neglected material culture for decades, focusing instead on meanings, theoretical concepts and metaphors. Classic anthropologists, such as Malinowski, Mead, Evans-Prichard, Boas and others focused their research on material artefacts, and yet from the 1950s anthropology as a discipline left material culture for more theoretical pasture (Hall, 1980). Even today, when anthropology acknowledges the importance of material artifact, this concept has not yet been imbued in its methodologies (Henare, 2008). In light of the growing dependence in material objects and the thirst for designed products, this neglect of material culture is premature. In current reality, material objects attest not only to society's technological abilities, but also to its use of materials, ethics and norms (Dant, 1999).

Historically, anthropology embraced material culture in its early days. Ethnographers in the dawn of modern anthropological thought used material artifacts to better understand cultures' ways of life. Franz Boas was one of the first to realize material objects' complex attributes. In his view, objects are not always functional, hence their abilities to give enjoyment to their owners (Boas, 1955[1927]). But even in his groundbreaking researches, Boas failed to acknowledge the dual connection between technology and culture (Pfaffenberger, 1988). Malinowski (2003[1922]), Radcliff-Brown (1948), Evans-Pritchard (1956), Mauss (2002[1923]) and Mead (1956), following his lead, were among the famous anthropologists treating material objects as the backbone of any culture.

The focus of these aforementioned studies was mainly the cataloguing of weapons, jewelry and other ethnic artifacts (Steadman, 1979; Sayce, 2008[1963]), or the technological ways of their manufacture (Sahlins, 1972). However, in this early stage, objects symbolized typically their material existence rather than any hidden theoretical insights and concepts (Miller, 1987;

Lemonier, 1986; Keurs, 2006). At the following period, mostly during the second half of the 20's century, anthropologists, as other social science researchers, abandoned material culture in favor of more theoretical, symbolic and conceptual knowledge (Henare, 2008).

The growing use of plastic and other modern, technological and artificial materials (which are not perceived as carrying significant spiritual qualities) seem to hinder the material object's complexity, uniqueness and multi-layered experience. Gradually, researchers distanced themselves from the material meanings of things. Even when dealing directly with material objects, researchers tend, even today, to prefer a more metaphorical or semiotic route.

The amulet, both as an artifact and as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon, presents a distinctive case-study for highlighting this complex connection between man and his material socio-cultural possessions; an innovative research trend which follows, among other, Craig's study of poetry books (2011) and Hill's study of English amulets (2007). Aside from its obvious religious-cultural attributes, the amulet is first and foremost a material object, a product of technology, knowledge, art and craft. Furthermore, the amulet is a member of a specific group of material objects deriving their importance not only from their content or material selection, but also from their mobility (Craig, 2011). It is our intent to go back to anthropology's earlier interest and depict a panoramic picture of amulets in contemporary society, both as religious artifacts and as material objects. In this view we will analyze the amulet as a material vortex standing in the midst of religio-cultural-economic dimensions.

Traditional Healing among Arabs in Israel

Traditional Arab healing in Israel, despite the flow of modernization and acculturation, still thrives in rural communities, as well as in mixed (Arab-Jewish) urban environments (Popper-Giveon, 2009). As a rule, one may identify two separate traditions – folk as well as religious – among traditional Arab healers (Popper-Giveon, 2012). The first tradition includes healers using medicinal herbs, massage, incisions and burns. These healers help with uncomplicated problems, such as child diseases, or problems with which conventional bio-medicine is at a disadvantage, such as chronic diseases, pains and psychosomatic ailments.

Folk healers often follow the principles of classic Arabic medicine. This tradition (*a-tab al-arabi al-quadim*) was at its highest between the 9th and the 14th centuries, during the golden age of the Arab empire (Dols, 1992). Arabic medicine stemmed from secular Greek writings, and mainly from Galenus' and Hipocrates' writings. Muslims translated these writings to Arabic during the 8th and 9th centuries and Arab philosophers and physicians, such as Al Razi (841-926) and Ibn Sina (980-1037), manifested a perception of the human body as a dynamic mechanism influenced by the balance between the different bodily fluids – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – and other various qualities (Ulmann, 1978). From the 18th century, classic Arabic medicine gradually declined. It migrated to rural peasantry, transformed from a written to an oral tradition, lost its secular characteristic and became a part of the protest striving to uphold local traditions in face of Western colonialist control (Adib, 2004).

A second healing tradition apparent today among Arabs in Israel is religious healing, being given, mainly, by the hands of male healers. They treat problems deriving from metaphysical causes - evil eye, witchcraft and demons - along the guidelines of "the Prophetic medicine" (*a-tab a-nabwi*), which flourished at the 9th century as a protest against the rapidly spreading classic Arabic medicine. The "Prophetic medicine" emphasizes the disease's spiritual causes. It

highlights the Arab authenticity in face of foreign influences, and religion's authority versus secular tendencies. It was formed to supply the masses with a popular medical knowledge and to bring back the art of healing to the welcoming arms of Islam (Rahman, 1998). Religious healers (known among Arabs in Israel as *sheikh*, *darvish* or *moalij bel Koran*) preach for spiritual healing through the reading of Quran verses and using the power of these holy words and letters.

In reality, the two traditions - the folk and religious - are dually manifested in both diagnosis and treatment practices administered today by traditional Arab healers – men as well as women – in Israel (Al-Krenawi, 2000; Masalha and Baron, 1994; Gorkin and Othman, 1994; Popper-Giveon, 2012; Rothenberg, 2004). Diagnostics, as well as treatments, are numerous and varied. Healers tend to use medicinal herbs, read from the Quran, prepare magical potions and massage the patient in order to treat physical and mental problems, as well as life hardships, derived from spiritual causes. More than any other treatment method, they use amulets to cure the patient's body and spirit.

A Prescribed Amulet

Traditional Arab women healers in Israel are known by various names, such as *sheikhab*, *darvishab*, *hajjab* or *fattaba*. These healers are mainly approached by Muslim women at the ages of 18-50. The women patients seek remedies for common child diseases (such as ear infections and stomach aches), problems modern medicine cannot properly cure (such as infertility, chronic pain and diabetes), emotional pains and problems stemming from daily hardships, such as bachelorhood and poverty (Popper-Giveon, 2012).

At times, the healers diagnose the patient's pain as stemming from natural causes (heat, cold, nutrition or hygiene) a remnant of classic Arabic medicine. However, in most cases, they diagnose the patient's suffering as stemming from supernatural causes, such as the influence of the evil eye or witchcraft. Thus, not only has the ambiguity of diagnosis blurred the difference between the two traditions – the classic Arabic medicine and the Prophetic medicine - but so did also the varied treatment methods. Traditional Arab women healers in Israel, hence, combine in their treatment practices, among others, medicinal herbs, incisions, Quran verses, prayers and amulets.

Following the expanding of the Islamic movement among Palestinians in Israel (Abu Ramadan, 2005) and the growing percentages of literacy, the amulet (*hijab*) has become the most common treatment method among traditional Arab healers in Israel. It is used mainly for ailments caused by the evil eye or witchcraft, such as anxiety, pain, sterility, prolonged singleness and financial hardship. From a material perspective, the amulet usually includes a piece of paper on which the patient's and his mother's names are written, along with a combination of letters, geometrical structures, symbols and Quran verses, using at times a unique solutions of herbs. The prepared amulet, to which in some cases, fresh or dried herbs are added, is wrapped in leather or cloth, and hung on the patient's body, his bag or bed, and is sometimes burned and inhaled. In other cases, the amulet is dissolved in water and drunk by the patient or sprayed on his wounds, hence allowing the written words and symbols to penetrate his body.

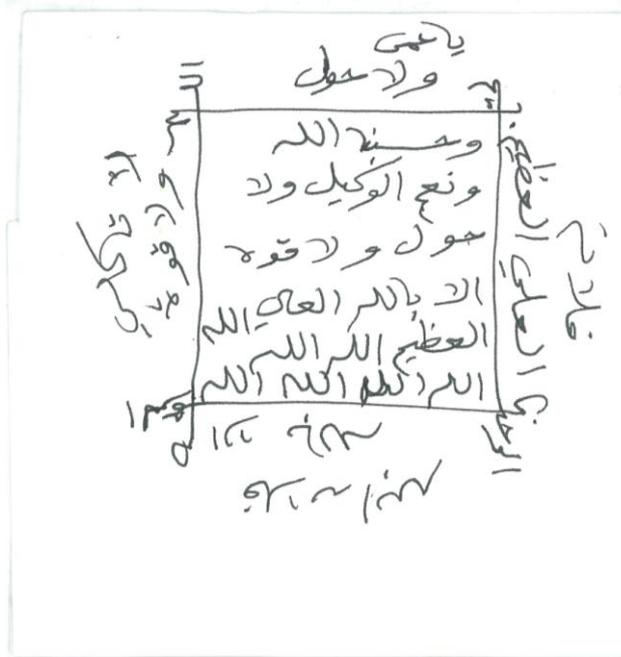


Photo 1

The amulet which stands at the core of this article – made by the traditional healer Rabiha (photo 1), living in a mix (Arab and Jewish) city in Israel's center, was written on a standard white paper, the size of five square centimeters. The paper was taken from an ordinary stationary notebook and the text was written using an ordinary ball pen's blue ink. The words at the seams may seem meaningless, yet, the text at the center of the page translates as follows:

*We ask Allah to keep us safe
 He who is the benevolent shield
 There is neither shield nor force
 But God*

Photo 1 Rabiha's amulet

The amulet made by Rabiha, almost off-handedly, brings to mind more than a few questions. While Muslim amulets are usually made by men, written calligraphically in a valuable ink made from herbs' solutions (occasionally, from saffron), shrouded in a cloud of rarity, exclusiveness and dedication (Doumato, 2000; Rasmussen, 2006), Rabiha's amulet was blatantly standard. It was written on standard and common paper, and even the ink was the same used by any student. Furthermore, the writing itself seems scribbled off-hand, a long way from the exquisite Arab calligraphy, mostly associated with amulets made by men (Lambeck, 1993). Finally, the amulet was carelessly folded and handed over without a protective case or a satchel (as, for example, in photo 2).



Photo 2 An Amulet to guard the house from demons

Amulets are usually described in research literature as mystical and unique objects (Dundes, 1992; Skemer, 2006; Hill, 2007). In the same way, the power of Muslim amulets, particularly those made by religious men healers and involved Quranic texts, usually lies in its uniqueness. The artisan's work – which may be described in some cases as a calligraphic masterpiece – is one of a kind, a quality strengthening it in the fight against demons and the evil eye. In the amulet we present in this paper, however, an opposite picture arises: hand-made efforts and the aspiration to create a unique masterpiece are replaced by Rabiha's nonchalant act. Instead of a one of a kind artifact, made from stationery, parchment and specific herbal solution, we find a standard notebook page written with a regular ball pen. The complex calligraphy and illustrations are blurred, with the perplexing presence of gibberish text surrounding the religious text in the middle. Hence, the amulet is reduced to its bare and minimal function – healing and protection.

What, then, metamorphoses this ordinary sheet of paper into an amulet? Is it its religious attributes, the sacred wards at its core? Or, perhaps it is the healing experience - deriving from the special patient-healer relationship - giving the patients something more than a material solution to their problems? In somewhat similar fashion to holy water placed upon sacred tombs to absorb their power (Canaan, 1980[1927]), the amulet may receive its potency from its physical contact with the healer's sacred abilities. In other words, it is not the materials the amulet is made from (plain paper and common blue ink in this case) but rather the healer, who gives the amulet its sacred attributes and authority. The healer, consequently, is

perceived as the force transforming the piece of paper into something metaphysically higher. Hence, parts of the amulet may be written in gibberish, as we can see in the amulet presented here. This gibberish can attest to the woman healer's personal relationship with the patient, who places trust in her abilities. The writing in gibberish can, as in other conventional professions (such as doctors' illegible handwriting), attest to a high degree of professional authority. Conversely, hand-written gibberish indicates personal, metaphysical and magical knowledge, which the patient cannot and should not apprehend.

The amulet as material mediator

In contrast with earlier anthropologists and cultural theorists, Appadurai (1986) focused on the importance of consuming products in modern society. As opposed to classic Marxism, which claims any product becomes merchandized or commodified when targeted for commerce, Appadurai defines a product as "commodity situation", meaning, that a product can be commercialized in one setting and not another. A dedicated book, for example, bought at a store and given by a friend ceases to be a commodity and becomes an intimate object, a gift, a memory. This exchangeability may be seen as an attribute in which socio-cultural dimensions influence the material object.

When dealing with commodities, including religious, magical or ritual artifacts, we therefore have to take into account the various socio-cultural factors involved. Griswold (1994) presents a model to analyze the wider context of material objects, comprising of four elements: first, the creator of the object, which in our case is the woman healer. Second, the user/consumer which is the patient in need of help. Third, the socio-cultural context, which is the Muslim-Arab-Palestinian complex, including its unique socio-political atmosphere (the Palestinians being an excluded and discriminated minority in the Jewish state of Israel). Last, the object itself, which in our case is the textual amulet.

In the present article, as we have seen, a piece of paper and some ounces of ink are transformed into a religious product. In other words, the situation in which the amulet is created, and the relationship formed between the healer and the patient, transforms it from a mere piece of paper into a magically created artifact. However, following Appadurai's theory, the amulet is also a commodity. The patient pays money (dozens, hundreds and even thousands of NIS) to the healer, in return for her services. The amulet is therefore both a religious artifact and an article of trade. Yet, although this relationship between religion and commerce is well known (e.g. Kaell, 2012), the amulet presents a more perplexing phenomenon. In contrast to classic Catholic relics, gaining strength from their authenticity and embalmed in cases of gold and precious gems (Cruz, 1984; Quigley, 2001), the amulet we brought to light presents its most minimal of functions – the strength of belief as is shown through the bond between the healer and the patient. I.e. the amulet, as a material object, is the connection between the healer and the patient, and *the material contestation* of her belief.

The material focal point of this patient-healer interaction lies in the amulet. And indeed, In order to better understand the complex role of an 'abstract' amulet as presented here, we wish to turn to two theorists dealing directly with the material object as a "sui-generis" and "agentic" (agency-imbued) entity: Alfred Gell (1998) and Bruno Latour (2005).

Alfred Gell (1998) claims, in his ground-breaking book *Art and Agency*, that material objects possess agentic abilities and indexes of personhood. As such, material objects become a

manifestation of their creator's abilities. However, not only material objects, but also graffiti paintings, according to Schacter (2008) are agentic creations, attesting to their creator's abilities throughout the urban surroundings. Another example for an object's agency is the Hijab, according to Tarlo (2007), serving as a material symbol in the complex multi-cultural streets of London. As in Latour's (1993) perception in which the separation between people and objects is rapidly crumbling, so does Gell accentuates the similarities between visual creations, material objects and persons.

In Latour's (2005) famous ANT thesis (Actor Network Theory), the central question is "how does social-material-semiotic networks exist in a holistic manner?". In order for a complex social network to function, according to this theory, various players in each network have to play their role accordingly (e.g., an insurance clerk has to play his part, but even more importantly, without his computer doing the same, his actions would not prevail) (Ritzer, 2005). In every social network one can find players acting as mediators transferring meaning between other players. Latour brought these mediators to the front stage, giving them a central role in this complex social exchange. In the world of industrial design, for example, wood serves a central socio-cultural role, separating it from MDF (medium-density fiberboard). Latour stresses the notion that sociology and anthropology tended to ignore material objects which lack active and dynamic abilities. Objects (which are called by Latour "non humans"), according to this classic interpretation, are active participants in every person's agentic abilities as a central part of the social network in which he lives. Latour stresses his notion that objects are not symmetrically important or influential as humans, and yet, we cannot ignore their central importance.

In order to bridge this gap, Latour calls researchers to view objects' centrality along several arenas (Latour, 2005:80-1):

1. In the artist's innovative approach – by viewing the artist's workshop we can better understand the values guiding him in his creation.
2. Consumer products become mediators when they are new, or when we try to understand their deeper meanings. After this understanding, the object returns to its transparent existence.
3. When an object ceases to function, then we suddenly understand its significance in our lives.
4. When an object ceases to work or is being replaced by a newer version we treat it differently, or even place it in a museum. The chronologic distance bestows the object with new meaning.

As Latour ascertains, we must not fall to the trap in which we treat objects separated from the social relations, semiotic meanings or cultural dimensions attributed to the object. I.e. following Latour's premises, the object serves as more than a metaphor or a symbol, but rather as the embodiment of the relationship between the social agents involved in an interaction. Conversely, the amulet in this article, serves as a material presence of the relationship between the healer and the patient. In other words, the amulet is the relationship, what makes precious materials or calligraphy irrelevant or redundant.

Designed objects gain their power from their material value, the prestige of their makers or the chain of its users. Conversely, amulets usually gain their power in a similar fashion from

their materials (precious stones, animals organs etc.), from their makers (various religious professionals) or from the quantity and quality of their users. In the amulet depicted in this article, however, the picture is more complex. This amulet's strength does not stem from its materials (a standard sheet of paper and ball pen easily found in any office suppliers), nor does it stem from the strength of a renown religious professional, and even more so, it is newly manufactured, hence, it being a part of a larger chain of users is irrelevant. What then is this amulet's strength and allure? In our opinion, following the theories of Appadurai, Gell and Latour, this amulet is a nutshell of contemporary socio-cultural climate. It is cheaply, easily and rapidly manufactured, parts of the writing are gibberish, and yet these attributes do not hinder its consistency in any manner. What matters in this case is that this amulet is a material entity, not a promise or a prayer, but a piece of material life the user can carry with her on person. Another crucial element for the user is the connection between this material object and any of its untarnished counterparts, and that is the uncontested and direct impact of its creator – the healer. Thus, this cheap and "regular" material object is turned into a socio-cultural agent, with the potency to carry and create meanings and even change reality in the eyes of its users.

Following this line of thought, the amulet created by Rabiha, then, is not perceived by itself, but rather as a part of a more elaborate socio-cultural context. Its healing attributes are conditioned by the four factors – the healer, the patient, the cultural context and the artifact itself. In other words, the amulet is not only a means for transferring a message, but rather the objective itself. Its handling *by* the healer and intended *for* the patient infuses her and it with the healer's powers. The essence, then, of the relationship between the healer and the patient, is the amulet's origin of power and efficacy. Moving from the healer to the patient, it carries with it the former's potency and authority.

The patient is rewarded further by the healing context itself. The warmth, containment, personal empowerment, faith and confidence the healer imbued are all materialized in the form of the amulet. What the patient carries home, then, is not merely material. She places in her private space a materialized manifestation of the healer. Therefore, the physical carrying of the amulet, meddling with it and handling it (burning, drinking the water the amulet was immersed in or hiding it in a cheating husband's bed) is a meaningful addition to the therapeutic experience and the patient's sense of relief. She feels as if an empowered entity comprised of the healer and herself fills her and her home, with a positive healing atmosphere.

As for the amulet itself, one can see a clear example of a commodified object stemming directly from its function, rather than from its other attributes. Hence, the special relationship between the healer and the patient renders the ornate holy object in this context – obsolete. Amulets, like the one made by Rabiha and described above, are especially common among Arab-Muslim women healers in Israel. These healers use ordinary sheets of paper, blue ink and combine some gibberish in the religious text which is at the core of the talisman. Their creation is part of a larger process in which religious treatment practices, which in the past characterized only men healers, trickle their way into women's treatment practices (Popper-Giveon & Ventura, 2009). Women healers, even when analphabets or lacking education, scribble an amulet on a piece of paper, following men healers' example (as the amulet presented in photo 3), in order to win a far greater prestige and authority.

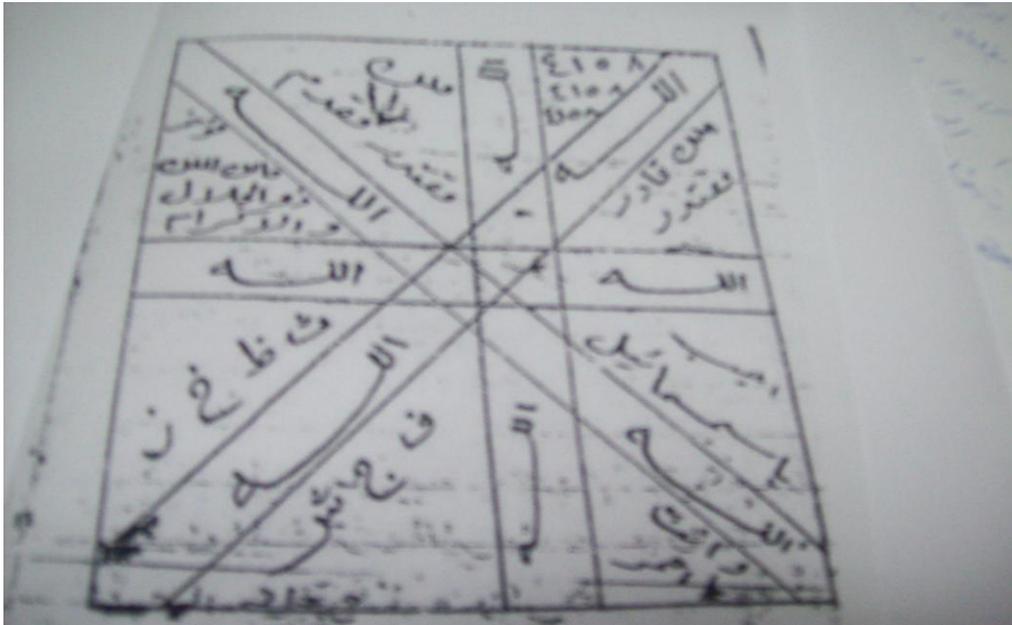


Photo 3 An amulet to provide livelihood

The knowledge of amulet-writing, then, which was highly exclusive to literary men (Lambek, 1993; Rasmussen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004), transformed – with the spread of literacy and the rise of Islamic movements – into a general and accessible knowledge. The spread of this exclusive knowledge and its "lowering" created a regional system in which simple, relatively cheap and standard amulets are highly common and available. We have to stress, though, that these amulets' accessibility did not eliminate the existence of unique and elaborate amulets. Patients can choose between solving a severe problem with an elaborate, expensive and adorned amulet (one in which the materials and design are essential), or using a cheap and schematic amulet for more mundane situations (one in which what gives the amulet its strength is not only its materials and craft techniques, but mainly its context).

In an artisanal market, then, much as in the case of design-art, the amulet's price is valued by its creator (much as an artist or a prized brand name), its rarity and its materials. Furthermore, purchasing such an amulet, or displaying such a rare and expensive designed object is usually kept for special occasions. Rarity causes value. Yet, alongside questions of rareness or costs, global market pressures that result in homogenizing trends (see Armstrong, 2000; Held et al., 1999), creates a more complex material environment. In an industrial market, mass produced objects (or amulets) serve their main function. Hence, we can recognize their "standardized" material-choice, less emphasized aesthetics and reasonable price-tag (as, for example, the printed amulet in photo 4).



Photo 4 A printed amulet against demons

In the case of Rabiha's amulet, similarly, rarity or value of materials is irrelevant. The object's strength stems from its agentic abilities as a mediator of the healer's strength. However, the material entity of the amulet is crucial both for the connection between the healer and the patient and for the object's potency.

Summary

As we have seen, the need for religious material objects is still relevant, however in a different path than in former times. In contemporary Arab-Muslim society in Israel, the religious object – such as Rabiha's amulet – is stripped of its material glorifying attributes in favor of more functional features. Hence, the importance of the amulet lies not in precious materials, but rather in the special bond between patient and healer, which renders the said materials unnecessary and even redundant. However, in relation to Latour or Appadurai, the case of this amulet is more complex. The amulet functions not only as mediator, but rather as the material center of the ritualistic belief. While the patient does not seek special or expensive materials, the authenticity of the amulet and its material existence precedes all other attributes. Therefore, the amulet does not have to be expensive or beautifully crafted, but it has to be created by the hand of the healer itself. The amulet, then, serves as the agentic artifact embodying the relationship between the healer and the patient. I.e. this artifact is the connection.

In light of this article we feel there is a gap in research literature. The "classic" anthropological research venues, such as religion or social ties, lack a more "daily" glance, focusing on the mundane objects which help us live our lives. Focusing on the mundane or material aspect of

religious articles - bridging the gap, following Hill (2007), between modernity and magic, materiality and spirituality - helps us discern the transformations both religion and material culture undergo in modern society. Recent technological, socio-cultural and economic changes sweep throughout and influence our lives in a myriad array of ways. Yet, as Hill (2007) and Meyer and Pels (2003) has shown, magic haunts modernity. It can work as a counterpoint to liberal understandings of modernity's transparency and rational progress.

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