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Exhibition Projects

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"REVEALING THE MYSTERY OF AMULETS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD"

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Revealing the mystery of Amulets

In the Islamic world

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Room 3

Sponsored by
The Barakat Trust
Revealing the mystery of
Amulets
التمائم
In the Islamic world
Amulets in the Islamic period

An amulet is any object which is intended to be worn to ensure protection and well-being. Because of its shape, material or even just its colour, the amulet is believed to endow its wearer by magical means with certain powers or capabilities to fend off evil and harm, and protect from envy and black magic.

In Arabic there are different terms for amulets, and a variety is found in different parts of the Middle East and North Africa. This includes hirz in Maghreb, used largely for a written charm; the term hijab is used in Egypt; tilsam, which derives from the Greek, is common in Iran and elsewhere.

The wearing of amulets as protection or for warding off the evil eye or for medical purposes entered the life of the early Muslims as one of a number of pre-Islamic practices absorbed into Muslim culture. It is tolerated in Islamic theology and these beliefs still exist today in some countries.
Materials and their relationships to protection and medical purposes

Amulets are made from different materials, which were believed to enhance their magical properties.

Metals like gold, if hung on a child’s neck, were believed to prevent panic, strengthen the ability of vision and bring pleasure.

Silver was also associated with popular beliefs and magic, thoughts to have the ability to expel demons.

Brass was one of the most important magical materials, also thought to have magical properties in ancient Egypt.

It was also believed that rock crystal had a lot of medical characteristics, and anyone who ate or drank from vessels made from this stone would be cured of all diseased.
Qur’anic, claiming inscriptions and names of Allah

The Quran is regarded as the highest form of protection for Muslims and the most esteemed of all hijabs or charms is a mus-haf (copy of the Quran).

The Quran has been described as a vast reservoir of power that can be channeled to satisfy every human need. Particular verses have special powers in particular situations. The verse that appears the most frequently on amulets is the ‘throne verse’. Also common are the last two suras in the Quran which are known as al-mu’awwidhatan (the verses of seeking refuge from evil). These verses were particularly favoured among Shi’a, perhaps stemming from the fact that Imam Husayn was said to have worn these two suras around his neck before he was martyred.

There are also some claiming words used on the amulets for protective purposes just like Ma Sha’ Allah (Allah has willed it).

The names of Allah also appear frequently on amulets. Some are more popular than others such as hafiz (guardian), which is often employed as a written preservative against every kind of danger. Each name also has a numerical value which is used frequently in referring to them in magic squares.
The lion and the sun was one of the main emblems of Iran, and was an element in Iran's national flag between 1846 and 1980. The motif, which illustrates ancient and modern Iranian traditions, became a popular symbol in the 12th century. The symbol is based largely on astronomical and astrological configurations: the ancient sign of the sun in the house of Leo.

It had many historical meanings. Originally, like it is mentioned it was an astrological and zodiac symbol. Then, under the Safavid and the first Qajar kings, it became associated with Shia Islam. During the Safavid era, the lion and sun stood for the two pillars of society, the state and the Islamic religion, and it became a national emblem during the Qajar era where the lion often brandishes the split sword of Imam Ali.

In the 19th century European visitors to the Qajar court attributed the lion and sun to remote antiquity. Since then, it has acquired a nationalistic interpretation. The design also appears in other cultures such as in Ottoman Turkey.

The meaning of the symbol changed several times between the Qajar era and the 1979 revolution. The lion could be interpreted as a metaphor for Ali, for the heroes of Iran who are ready to protect the country against enemies, or for its ancient meaning as the symbol of kingship. The Sun has alternately been interpreted as symbol of the king, Jamshid, the mythical king of Iran, and the motherland.
Magic Squares

Magic squares are known in Arabic as wefq. They are squares divided into a number of cells, each of them containing a number or letter (which stands for a number and can be transformed by a method that is called abjad system). The numbers are arranged in the cells in which the sum of each horizontal, vertical or diagonal line must be the same, and the numbers in these cells must be different.

The first appearance of magical squares is in Chinese writings. They appeared in Arabic writings in the 8th century AD, in India in the 11th century AD, and in the Western world in 15th century AD. When the system was adopted in the Arabic world, it was expanded greatly and forms that included many cells – not just the standard nine-cell wefq – appeared.

The secret behind the interest in magical squares lies in the belief that prevailed in the medieval ages about their great effect and benefits, and cryptic characteristics which are closely related to astrology and human life in terms of health, luck and so on. From this time there arose the belief that the magic square provides protection from harm, and so can be found on medication cups bowls and on amulets of the kind shown here.
Introduction

In this exhibition, the mystery of amulets in Islamic world will be revealed to you. And you can start first by knowing what amulets are?!

An amulet is any object which is intended to be worn to ensure protection and well-being.

It is believed that because of its shape, the material from which it is made or even just its colour, it can endow its wearer by magical means with certain powers or capabilities to fend off evil and harms and protect from envy and black magic.

But you may find a question that jumps into your mind, Are these thoughts part of the Islamic world?!

Yes, some people in Islamic countries use amulets and magic beliefs for protection, Amulets entered the life of the early Muslims as one of a number of pre-Islamic practices absorbed into Muslim culture, and is tolerated in Islamic theology. These beliefs still existing today in some countries.

Did you know...?

The material from which amulets are made relates to their function and purpose.

For instance, metals like gold are believed to have certain characteristics. For example, if a gold amulet is hung on a child's neck then it will prevent panic, strengthen the ability of vision and bring pleasure to him.
Qur'anic Inscriptions

The Quran is regarded as the highest form of protection for Muslims; the most esteemed of all hijabs or charms is a mus-haf (copy of the Quran).

The Quran has been described as a vast reservoir of power that can be channeled to satisfy every human need. Particular verses have special powers in particular situations. The verse that appears the most frequently on amulets is the ‘throne verse’. The last two suras in the Quran, which are known as al-mu'awwidhatan (the verses of seeking refuge from evil), are also common. These verses were particularly favoured among Shi'a, perhaps stemming from their tradition that Imam Husayn apparently wore these two suras around his neck before he was martyred.

Names of Allah

The names of Allah appear a lot on the amulets. Some are more popular than others such as hafiz (guardian), which is often employed as a written preservative against every kind of danger. Each name also has a numerical value which is used frequently in referring to them in magic squares.
**Magic**

Magic in Arabic means *sihr*, and magic has a variety of connotations from 'that which enters the eye' to actions affected through recourse to demons.

There are two types of magic, white magic which is used in good acts and to resist black magic, which is used in evil acts to harm someone.

Although there are magicians, magic is illegal in Islam.

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And the secret behind the interest in magical squares lies in the belief that prevailed in the medieval ages about their great power and benefits, and cryptic characteristics, which are closely related to astrology and human life in terms of health, luck... etc.