

The British
Museum

Revealing the mystery of

Amulets

التمائم

In the Islamic world



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Room 3

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Amulets in the Islamic period

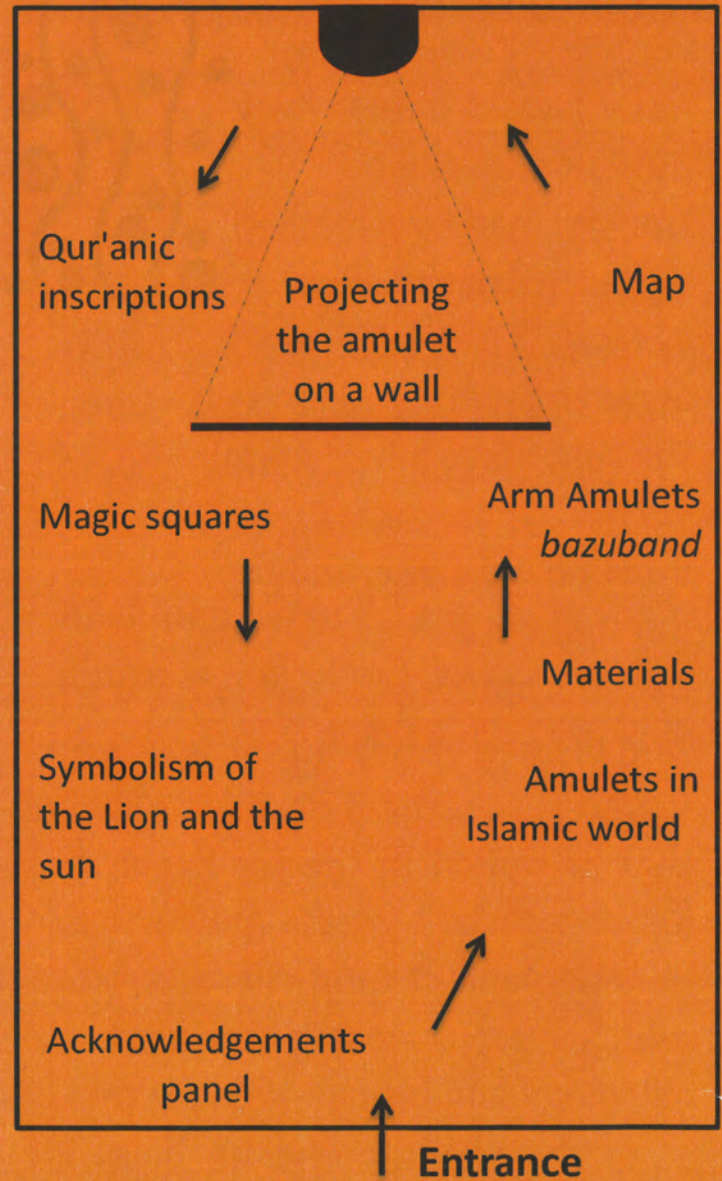
أَمْمِئِرْ فِي الرِّقْ بَئِئِون

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.



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The British
Museum

Revealing the mystery of Amulets in the Islamic world

Symbolism
&
Significance

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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 entrances the eye' to actions affected through recourse to demons.

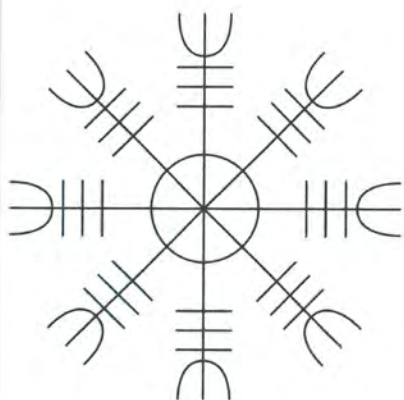
There are two types of magic, white magic which is used in good acts and to resist black magic, which is used in evil acts to harm someone.

Although there are magicians, magic is illegal in Islam.

Magic Squares

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

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



Arm Amulets known as b ā z ū band which are amulets to be worn on the upper arm, are known from Iran and Iraq. Examples in Silver and Brass generally date to the nineteenth century or later.



Bazuband or arm amulet,
silver

Iran or Iraq, 19th century



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