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MUḤAMMAD THE EXORCIST: ASPECTS OF ISLAMIC-JEWISH POLEMICS

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A prominent aspect of the cultural tension between Islam, on the one hand, and Judaism and Christianity on the other, was the competition between the Israelite and the Islamic prophets. While the Jewish and the Christian polemicists rejected the authenticity of Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, the Muslims appropriated the Jewish and Christian prophetic models and applied them to the prophet Muḥammad. In so doing, they managed to produce for themselves a prophet who continued the prophetic enterprise of his Israelite predecessors, and, at the same time, surpassed them all.

The history of the evolution of Muḥammad's prophetic image can be traced in the *ḥadīth* literature. This term stands for collections of oral traditions that were committed to writing during the early Islamic era, and recorded Muḥammad's remembered sayings and acts. By "remembered" I am not referring to a historical remembrance, because memory, and especially a collective one, is the product of many factors which cause the memory to change constantly according to contemporary conditions projected back into the remembered past. Therefore Muḥammad's prophetic image which is available for scientific research is not that of the historical Muḥammad, but only of the literary Muḥammad as portrayed in the available Islamic sources. None of the sources stem from Muḥammad's own time, and most of them came into being during the first century AH. Therefore, the literary manifestation of Muḥammad's prophetic image reflects on the Islamic community of that era, which turned Muḥammad into a model of its own religious concepts.

Bearing this in mind, I shall examine one aspect of Muḥammad's "remembered" prophetic charisma, which has been almost entirely neglected in modern scholarship. It falls within the sphere of Muḥammad's image as source of divine blessing, and more specifically, within the realm of his healing powers. As a healer, the Prophet is said to have dealt with some cases of demonic possession, which he cured by acts of exorcism. Of course, Muḥammad is not the only one who is endowed with divine charisma, and the Shi'īs have attributed to their own imāms similar heal-

ing powers, as noted by Etan Kohlberg in a recent article.[1] Claimants to prophethood like Musaylima also claimed to be in possession of such powers, as can be seen in Kister's most recent article.[2]

1 State of research

Muḥammad's function as an exorcist has not yet been properly studied in modern scholarship. The classical study of Muḥammad's prophetic image is still that published in 1917 by Tor Andræ.[3] In his discussion of Muḥammad's healing powers as described in the available traditions, Andræ declares that in spite of the numerous legendary stories that were circulated, the theme of exorcism, so fully developed in late antiquity, has remained entirely unknown to Islamic tradition. Andræ argues that Muḥammad had no anti-demonic powers, and nowhere in the legendary sources of his biography does he cure a possessed patient by means of an act of exorcism. Andræ concludes that the fear of demons so deeply rooted in the world of late antiquity, remained totally alien to Islam.[4] Later works on Muḥammad's prophetic image support this perception. At least this is the impression one gets from the fact that exorcism is not mentioned as a function of Muḥammad in these works, for example in Rudolf Sellheim's monumental essay on the early biographies of Muḥammad.[5] The absence of exorcism is especially conspicuous in the article "Shayṭān" in the New Edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam,[6] which is supposed to cover the subject of Satan in Islam. In fact, Andræ's observation has been repeated in the most recent monograph on demonic possession in Islam by Michael Dols.[7] Dols contends that exorcism assumed no major role in the life of Muḥammad (unlike that of Jesus),[8] and elsewhere he refers to the "fact that Muḥammad is not depicted as an exorcist in the Qur'ān or later traditions..."[9] Yet, Dols

[1] Etan Kohlberg, "Vision and the Imams", in É. Chaumont (ed.), *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret* (Peeters, 2003), pp. 125–57.

[2] M.J. Kister, "The struggle against Musaylima and the conquest of Yamāma," *JSAI* 27 (2002): 1–56.

[3] Tor Andræ, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Uppsala, 1917).

[4] Andræ, *Person*, p. 49.

[5] Rudolf Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte", *Oriens* 18–19 (1965–66): 33–91.

[6] T. Fahd and A. Rippin, *EI*^{2}, s.v.

[7] Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: the Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*. Diana E. Immisch (ed.) (Oxford, 1992).

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

does mention at least one tradition in which Muḥammad performs exorcism, but he does not seem to appreciate its significance. All he has to say about it is that it reflects an attempt to provide a precedent to later Islamic exorcism, and mainly to the procedure in which the demon is expelled by a command given to it in the name of God.[10]

This approach is not confined to exorcism. Modern scholars perceive the entire corpus of medical traditions attributed to the Prophet (*ṭibb nabawī*) as a back projection designed to make a point in later discussions on the status of medicine in relation to the religious tenets of Islam.[11]

2 The prophetic context of exorcism: Jesus and Muḥammad

That traditions labelled as *ṭibb nabawī* were designed to assert the legal status of medicine is only partially true. As far as exorcism is concerned, other motives determined the shaping of traditions about Muḥammad, which go beyond the issue of legitimacy. Exorcism was an important feature which demonstrated the power of divine blessing emanating from Muḥammad's person, and as such this theme has been treated in traditions that gained access into compilations of *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* ("proofs of prophethood"). Such compilations were composed with a clear polemical end: to provide the proofs that, in spite of Jewish and Christian claims to the contrary, Muḥammad was indeed a genuine messenger of God. This is the appropriate context in which Muḥammad's exorcism should be studied.

To begin with, it must be observed that every religion aspires to provide its believers with protection against the most fundamental fears of the unknown, and the charisma of prophets therefore revolves around their ability to guarantee such protection. The fear of the unknown is usually formulated as the fear of the evil eye or of Satan. Various means are provided in every human society against such fears, mainly incantations and amulets. Prophets also claim to possess their own anti-demonic powers which enable them to adjure and exorcise the demons and to ward off the curse of illness that comes from Satan.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

[11] E.g., Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Arab-Islamic Medical Tradition", in *idem* et al., *The Western Medical Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 124–25; *idem*, s.v. "Medicine", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* [Oxford, 1995], vol. 3, p. 87). More specifically, it was argued that the *ṭibb nabawī* traditions were "intended as an alternative to the exclusively Greek-based medical systems." (Emilie Savage-Smith, "Ṭibb", *EI*^{2}, s.v.).

Islamic tradition has attributed such powers to Muḥammad, and in this respect he is much like Jesus, with whom he shares various healing powers.[12] In fact, both of them have a similar relationship with the demons. On the one hand, they are denounced by their foes as being possessed by demons, and on the other, they are endowed with anti-demonic energy that enables them to perform exorcism.

As for Jesus, his foes are mainly the Jews who, in the New Testament say about him that he "has a demon and is out of his mind". His supporters, on the other hand, say: "These are not the words of one who has a demon; can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"[13] Moreover, in other chapters of the New Testament Jesus is described as explicitly casting out demons, thus curing the possessed.[14]

As for Muḥammad, his rejection as a possessed person is implied in the Qur'ān where efforts are repeatedly made to refute the accusation that he is a madman (*majnūn*).[15] This accusation is made by anonymous foes whom the commentators identify as Meccan Arab polytheists; the Jews also play some role here, which emerges in extra-Qur'ānic *ḥadīth* sources. In these sources the Jews appear as practitioners of magic and witchcraft, and at least on one occasion they are said to have succeeded in bewitching the Prophet, causing him a serious illness, which one may consider as demonic possession. The illness consisted of temporary impotence and was cured by a counter spell of divine origin, which was uttered over the ailing Prophet by none other than the angel Gabriel. Sūra 113, which is an anti-demonic chant, is said to have been revealed following these events.[16] The close association of the Jews with demonic afflictions also emerges in the commentaries on other Qur'ānic verses. For example, Qur'ān 2:14 speaks about "devils" (*shayāṭīn*) with whom some unbelievers conspire against the Muslims. Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768) identifies the "devils" as the Jewish rabbis of Medina, and the unbelievers who conspire with them as the Medinan Arab hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*).[17] However, much like Jesus, Muḥammad also has his own anti-demonic abilities, of which the clearest manifestation is provided in his acts of exorcism. The mere fact that he was depicted as an exorcist means that for Muslims, as well as for Jews and Christians, the notion of a demon

[12]Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien)*, S.M. Stern and C.R. Barber (eds. and trans.) (2 vols., London, 1967–71), vol. 2, p. 347.

[13]John 10:20.

[14]For the details on Jesus see Dols, *Majnūn*, pp. 185–89.

[15]E.g., Qur'ān 68:2; 81:22.

[16]Cf. Michael Lecker, "The Bewitching of the Prophet Muḥammad By the Jews: a Note apropos ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb's *Mukhtaṣar fī l-Ṭibb*", *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992): 561–69; David Cook, "The Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī and the Commentaries to Sūra 113", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45 (2000): 323–45.

[17]Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 2, p. 179.

taking possession of the human body was an accepted fact, especially in cases of epileptic fits. Rational sections of Islamic society, and the Mu'tazilites in particular, denied the possibility of demonic possession, and held that demons do not dwell in the epileptic's body.[18] However, Sunnī Islam adheres to the idea of demonic possession, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/856), for example, reportedly defended it strongly.[19] The idea was also corroborated by means of a Qur'ānic verse, which was perceived as an allusion to demonic possession of the epileptic. The verse that was adduced is 2:275 in which the simile of a person touched by the devil is used to describe the punishment awaiting those who take usury.[20]

3 Acts of exorcism

Demonic possession appears in the available traditions in a clinical form, mainly as madness and epilepsy.[21] It is usually encountered in children or in women, i.e., weak persons whose vulnerability to demonic possession is considered greater than that of adult men. This implies that demonic possession is not perceived here as a divine punishment inflicted on sinners, but rather as a misfortune of the unprotected. A case of a possessed child who is brought by his Bedouin mother to the Prophet for treatment is described in many traditions. The mother provides the Prophet with the information about the state of the child, using various terms denoting "madness", such as *junūn* and *lamam* ("diabolic possession"). The Prophet performs a stereotyped ritual in which he uses his own hand as an instrument of blessedness and remedy. He places it on the patient's chest or head, the zones in which it is most likely for the demon to reside. On occasion, the Prophet also uses a substance of anti-demonic powers, namely, his own saliva, which he spits on his hands and then strokes the patient with. At one instance, the material is administered directly into the patient's body by expectorating into his mouth. The belief in the anti-demonic powers of human saliva is known from non-Islamic magic, but here it has become a prerogative of Muḥammad. The most crucial element in the ritual is not the instrument or the substance but rather the verbal formula that the Prophet utters in order to have the demon exorcised. The formula is more or

[18] Suyūṭī, *Jānn*, p. 79.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] On the relation between epilepsy, demonic possession, and madness see Dols, *Majnūn*, pp. 219, 278, 286.

less the same in all the parallel versions: "Get out (*ukhruj*)/Go away (*ikhsa'*), O enemy of God; I am the messenger of God". This formula consists of a direct command to depart from the possessed body and a statement of the identity of the person issuing the adjuration. The idea is that since the messenger of God ranks higher than the devil, the latter must obey the instructions of the former. Everything is therefore based on the elevated position of the Prophet as a messenger of God. The earliest versions about the possessed child are recorded in a compilation of Yūnus b. Bukayr (d. 199/815), in a chapter entitled "Signs of Prophethood" (*A'lām al-nubuwwa*). One of them recounts a series of miracles witnessed by a well-known Companion of the Prophet, the Medinan Jābir b. 'Abdallāh. The miracles take place during a campaign, and one of them is the miracle of the possessed child. Jābir relates that as they were riding, a woman came along with a child in her arms. She told the Prophet that a devil (*shayṭān*) was seizing her son three times a day. The Prophet placed the child on the saddle in front of him, and said three times: "Go away (*ikhsa'*), enemy of God! I am the messenger of God". He then returned the boy to the mother and the devil never came to him again, and his mother rewarded the Prophet with one sheep.[22] In another version, Jābir reports that the campaign during which the event of the possessed child took place was that of Dhāt al-Riqā', and the rite contained not only the verbal adjuration but also expectoration: the Prophet spat into the patient's mouth.[23]

Another Companion relating the story of the possessed child is Ya'lā b. Murra, and his account is also recorded in Ibn Bukayr's compilation.[24] The child suffers from diabolic possession (*lamam*) twice a day, and the rite consists again of verbal adjuration ("Get out..."), as well as expectoration into the child's mouth. The latter act is however not reported in all the versions of this account, as recorded in sources other than Ibn Bukayr.[25] Sometimes only the expectoration is mentioned without the verbal adjuration;[26] at other times, the child's problem is defined as "affliction" (*balā'*), several times a day.[27] In one version, the child suffers from "madness" (*jinna*), and the Prophet utters the adjuration while holding the child's nose (*mankhar*).[28] This may imply that the demon is supposed to get out through the nostrils.

[22]Ibn Bukayr, *Kitāb al-siyar*, p. 278.

[23]Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ*, vol. 10, no. 9108.

[24]Ibn Bukayr, *Kitāb al-siyar*, p. 277. This is the version of al-Minhāl b. 'Amr Ya'lā.

[25]E.g., Aḥmad, *Musnad*, vol. 4, pp. 171, 172.

[26]Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. 7, no. 3616 ('Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al'Azīz Ya'lā).

[27]*Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 3641; vol. 11, no. 11802.

[28]This is the version of 'Abdallāh b. Ḥafṣ ← Ya'lā. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, p. 173.

Relevant traditions appear also in other sources. The Companion Usāma b. Zayd reportedly accompanied Muḥammad on a pilgrimage to Mecca; on their way they met a woman carrying a child who had been unconscious since his birth. The rite of exorcism which the Prophet performs on him consists again of verbal adjuration and expectoration into the child's mouth.[29] The Companions ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd[30] and Ghaylān b. Salama relate similar stories.[31] Of special interest is the version of Ibn ʿAbbās in which the Prophet's victory is visible. As soon as he strokes the child's chest (who suffers here from *junūn* or *lamam*) with his hand and prays for him, a black cub pops out of the child's mouth and runs away.[32] This reflects the well-known notion that devils or demons may appear to humans in the form of various animals, such as black dogs, but mainly as serpents and scorpions. There is only one tradition in which a father brings his possessed child to the Prophet. He is a member of the tribe of ʿAbd Qays, and his name is al-Zāriʿ. His encounter with the Prophet took place when he came to Medina with a delegation of his tribe. His son was mad (*majnūn*) and he took him along. The Prophet pulled up the child's shirt and started to strike his back, saying: "Get out, O enemy of God". He also wiped the child's face with water and prayed for him; thereupon the insane expression disappeared from the child's face, and he recovered completely.[33]

4 The disappearance of exorcism

Most of the above traditions about Muḥammad's exorcisms appear only in non-canonical *ḥadīth* compilations, which at first glance seems somewhat strange. After all, Muḥammad's idealised image is shaped in these stories in a most clear and straightforward manner, which puts him on a par with Jesus, so that no dogmatic problem should arise from them. It seems however that the problem which denied these traditions entry into authorised compilations, like that of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, lies not in what they contain but rather in what is missing from them. Although the devil is successfully exorcised, which demonstrates the superior anti-demonic powers of Muḥammad, the entire ritual is not essentially different from the work of any magician or a professional exorcist known

[29] Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 6, pp. 24–25.
[30] Qiwām al-Sunna, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 3, no. 180.
[31] Ibn ʿAsākir (*Mukhtaṣar*), vol. 20, p. 223.
[32] Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, no. 3632. Cf. Dols, *Majnūn*, p. 218 n. 40.
[33] Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr*, vol. 5, no. 5314.

from non-Islamic cultures, as well as from Islam itself.[34] The fact that Muḥammad is paid for his services in some of the above versions added to his image a "professional" touch. In this respect, he is even less than Jesus, who is not paid for his exorcisms.[35]

That the lack of Prophetic distinction, or dignity, was probably the main problem with these versions, is corroborated in other versions of the above cases of demonic possession. These are somewhat refined versions, which place the Prophet on a higher level than that of an ordinary exorcist. His treatment of the possessed is no longer exorcism proper, but something else. Thus in one of the versions (of Umm Jundab) about the possessed child, who in this case suffers from "affliction" (*balā'*), and is unable to talk, exorcism has disappeared. Instead, the Prophet provides the mother (a woman of the tribe of Khath'am) with water which he previously used for rinsing his own mouth and for washing his hands. The Prophet instructs the mother to administer the water to the boy, to sprinkle it on him, and to pray to God for his recovery. Consequently, the child grows up to be a remarkably intelligent man. This particular version was recorded by Ibn Māja (d. 275/889), a distinguished *ḥadīth* scholar.[36] This is evidently a modified version, in which the story is centred on the blessedness of the Prophet's saliva, and the woman's own prayer has replaced the direct exorcism. The problem has become a medical one, although dumbness may have originally been considered a form of possession requiring exorcism.[37] In a similar case of a child suffering from dumbness, once again the treatment is not exorcism proper. The Prophet asks the child: "Who am I?", and the latter answers: "You are God's messenger". The compelling position of Muḥammad as a messenger of God has this time cured the boy who cannot but start speaking in recognition of the Prophet's greatness.[38]

In one of the versions of Ya'lā b. Murra about the possessed child, direct exorcism does not take place either. The Prophet merely suggests to the mother that he pray for the boy's health, and the boy recovers.[39] The unique force of Muḥammad's prayer has replaced exorcism.

In some other refined versions, the Prophet extends no treatment at all to the possessed, not even a prayer. The idea is that people possessed, and mainly those suffering from insanity, should better be left alone to

[34] On the activity of Muslim exorcists see Dols, *Majnūn*, pp. 252–53, 266–67, 276–78, 283–84.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[36] Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, no. 3532 (31:40).

[37] For a dumb person being cured by Jesus in a process described as exorcism, see Matt. 12:22–29; Luke, 11:14–22.

[38] Ibn Bukayr, *Kitāb al-siyar*, p. 278. The tradition is of Shimr b. 'Aṭiyya (Kūfan).

[39] Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 6, pp. 22–23.

endure their misfortune, and they will be rewarded in the next world by all their sins being forgiven. This is the basic message of a series of traditions about a crazy woman suffering from epileptic fits, who in some versions is said to have been black. The Prophet offers her the choice between immediate recovery (by means of his prayer for her), or enduring until the next world; she chooses the latter. One of these versions is of Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān (Yemeni d. 101/720),[40] another is of the Companion Abū Hurayra,[41] and yet another is of Ibn ʿAbbās. In this last version, when the Prophet offers her the two options, she chooses to endure, and only asks of the Prophet to pray for her that she might not be indecently exposed during her epileptic attacks.[42] This version is the one which was included in several authoritative *ḥadīth* compilations, including that of al-Bukhārī.[43] A tradition recorded by al-Bukhārī following this version (of ʿAṭāʾ) implies that the woman's name was Umm Zufar.[44] In other versions she is called Suʿayra or Suʿayda.[45]

In one version, exorcism has survived, but it is not the Prophet who performs it, but rather the woman herself. This time she is one of the Anṣār, and she agrees to endure her demonic fits, as in the other versions. However, whenever she feels the signs of a new attack approaching, she comes to the Kaʿba and says: "Go away (*ikhsaʾ*)", upon which she recovers.[46] In one unique version, the reason why the woman is not cured in this world is not that she has chosen to endure, but simply because the Prophet fails to have her demon exorcised. This version, again of Ṭāwūs, begins with the statement that it was the custom to introduce the madmen (*al-majānīn*) to the Prophet, and he would strike the chest of each, and they would all be cured. Once a crazy woman called Umm Zufar was brought to him, and although he struck her chest, she did not recover, and her devil remained in her. The Prophet said: "The devil affects her in this world, but she will be blessed in the next."[47] This version gained only a very limited circulation because Satan withstands the Prophet here. However, the tradition does not seem to have originally

[40] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Istīʿāb*, vol. 4, p. 1938 (no. 4153); Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 8, p. 211.

[41] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 441.

[42] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 346–47. Cf. Dols, *Majnūn*, p. 251.

[43] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, pp. 150–51 (75:6); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 8, p. 16 (45, *Bāb thawāb al-muʾmin fī mā yuṣībuhu min maraḍ...*); Nasāʾī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, no. 7490 (70:7).

[44] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, p. 151 (75:6). See also *idem*, *Adab*, vol. 1, no. 506.

[45] Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 7, p. 700; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, vol. 4, p. 129 (on 16:92. From Ibn Mardawayhi).

[46] Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 6, pp. 159–60 (Bazzār).

[47] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Istīʿāb*, vol. 4, p. 1938 (no. 4153); Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 8, p. 211 (from ʿAbd al-Razzāq).

meant to diminish the Prophet's powers, only to show that exorcism may not always be the best solution for the insane.

5 The appearance of the Qur'ān

Leaving the possessed untreated in this world never became the prevailing option. A monotheistic community with a highly developed sense of pride, like the Islamic one, could not give up the effective anti-demonic instruments provided by its own religious assets, and mainly by its sacred scripture, the Qur'ān, the ultimate Word of God. The Qur'ān emerges as an anti-demonic power in versions which, unlike the previous ones, gained wide circulation in the authoritative *ḥadīth* collections. In these versions scripture replaces exorcism as a treatment for the possessed, but Muḥammad remains the one who recites the Qur'ānic verses, i.e., his personal charisma is still part of the healing process.

The verses from scripture that are used against Satan are mainly those devoted to God's greatness, which implies God's victory over Satan. The Prophet recites to the possessed such passages from scripture and the sick person recovers. Thus, the simple act of exorcism has been transformed into a distinctively Islamic ritual that indicates the special features of Muḥammad's prophetic revelation.

Among the Qur'ānic passages that are most often recited to the possessed, i.e., madmen, one finds the Fātiḥa, which praises God, "the Lord of all being, the All-merciful, the All-Compassionate, the Master of the Day of Doom." Also used for the same purpose are the two final Sūras (113–14), which are known as *al-Muʿawwidhatān*.[48] This dual form is derived form the root *ʿ.w.dh.* which denotes "refuge", "shelter", so that the title *Muʿawwidhatān* means the pair of Sūras that provide shelter from Satan. They gained this title because they contain a formula designed to protect one from Satan. The formula opens with the words *aʿūdhu bi-...*: "I seek shelter in [God]". As seen above, one of these chapters (113) is said to have been revealed to dispel the witchcraft of Muḥammad's Jewish foes. Sometimes Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (112), which provides a formula asserting the unity and greatness of God, is also joined to this anti-demonic group, in which case all three are called by the plural form: *Muʿawwidhāt*.

These, as well as some additional passages, are recited by the Prophet in a tradition of the Kūfan Successor ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā al-

[48] See "al-Muʿawwidhatān," *EI*^{2}, s.v.

Anṣārī (d. 82/701), to a person suffering from *lamam*: as soon as the recitation is completed, he is cured.[49]

6 Delegation of power: the role of the Companions

The charisma of the prophet is "endemic", in the sense that it can be delegated to other persons who stand in close relationship to the Prophet. Just as Jesus delegated his powers to his Apostles, saying: "In my name shall they cast out devils",[50] Muḥammad's Companions also appear in the sources as inspired by Muḥammad. They recite Qur'ānic verses to cure the possessed while the Prophet is not present at the scene, but he is not entirely absent either. Afterwards the Companions inform him about the case and he grants them his retrospective blessing.

One of the Companions who cures the possessed by means of Qur'ānic verses is the Medinan/Kūfan ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652). He is said to have come across a person "afflicted" (*mubtalā*), i.e., in an epileptic fit, and to have recited in his ear the closing section of Sūrat al-Mu'minūn (23). The man recovered immediately. These particular verses (23:115–18) were chosen due to the fact that they praise God, "the King the True", etc. Ibn Masʿūd told this to the Prophet and the latter stated: "If these verses were recited to a mountain, it would surely crash".[51]

But in spite of the fact that Muḥammad endorses the act of Ibn Masʿūd, i.e., the latter acts with the Prophet's power that was delegated to him, it is clear that Muḥammad's role in the process has been overshadowed by that of the Qur'ān. The scripture has become an independent origin of anti-demonic powers, and this is the reason why persons other than the Prophet can employ it successfully. In fact, the Successors also appear as using the anti-demonic energy of the Qur'ān. Among them is Saʿīd b. Jubayr (Kūfan d. 95/713) who reportedly cured a *majnūn* by reciting Sūrat Yāsīn (36) to him.[52]

7 The polemical background: *ruqya*

In some further versions about the employment of the Qur'ān for exorcism, a clear polemical aspect emerges. These are versions in which the

[49]Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p. 128.
[50]Mark 16:17.
[51]Abū Yaʿlā, *Musnad*, vol. 8, no. 5045.
[52]Suyūṭī, *Jānn*, p. 95 (from Ibn al-Ḍurays).

treatment of the patient is described by the verb *raqā* from the root *r.q.y.* This verb means to charm someone by uttering magical incantations to him. From this root the term *ruqya* is derived,[53] which, according to Lane's definition,[54] is "a charm, or spell, either uttered or written, by which a person having an evil affection, such as fever and epilepsy, etc., is charmed."

In our traditions, the *ruqya*s are based on Qur'ānic patterns. Thus it is related that a Companion (whose name is not given) once told the Prophet that he had treated a person suffering from madness (*junūn*) by uttering over him a *ruqya* based on the Qur'ān. The Prophet approved of his deed, saying that his *ruqya* was based on the truth (*ruqyat ḥaqq*), and not on futility (*ruqyat bāṭil*).[55]

The differentiation between legitimate (i.e., Qur'ānic) and illegitimate (i.e., non-Qur'ānic) *ruqya*s indicates the tension between those incantations considered Islamic and those considered non-Islamic. The latter were regarded as mere magic or witchcraft, while the former, being Qur'ānic, were perceived as emanating from God Himself.

As for the false *ruqya*s, non-Arabs circulated them among Muslims, and there is evidence that the believers did not refrain from seeking therapeutic help by making use of them. For instance, in one tradition, a Berber *ruqya*-man is described as uttering his incantation over the inflamed leg of the famous Muslim scholar ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar.[56] It is also related about the same Ibn ʿUmar that he was once bitten by a scorpion, and asked for a Persian *ruqya* as a remedy.[57] Similarly, the Kūfan Companion al-Aswad b. Yazīd b. Qays al-Nakhaʿī reportedly used to utter *ruqya*s in the language of Ḥimyar.[58] This has to do with the fact that he came from a Yemenite tribe (al-Nakhaʿ).[59]

These stories illuminate the polemical background of the traditions in which only Qur'ānic *ruqya*s are accepted as legitimate. The latter traditions were designed to turn the Qur'ān into the sole origin of anti-demonic powers, and thus diminish the reliance of the believers on the non-Islamic legacy of magic. The efforts to establish the status of the

[53]See T. Fahd, "Ruḳya", *EI*^{2}, s.v.

[54]Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. "r.q.y."

[55]The tradition is of Qays b. Abī Ḥāzim (Kūfan d. ca. 90/709). See Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, no. 3640; Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, p. 232 (no. 7).

[56]ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 19775.

[57]Ibn Wahb, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, no. 705.

[58]Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, no. 3605.

[59]These reports may be added to the Islamic incantations quoted already by Ignaz Goldziher, in which Hebrew names of God (such as *yāhyā shirahyā* = *Ehye asher Ehye*) and angels have been preserved. See Ignaz Goldziher, "Hebräische Elemente in muhammedanischen Zauber-sprüchen", *ZDMG* 48 (1894): 358–60. Reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, III (Hildesheim, 1968), pp. 348–50.

Qur'ān as the only source of legitimate *ruqya*s are reflected in some additional traditions. In one of them, the patient is a madman who is fettered in chains, and the *ruqya* that heals him consists of the Fātiḥa. The treatment contains expectoration as well, and the Companion is rewarded by the patient's tribe. All this is followed by the retrospective endorsement of the Prophet as *ruqyat ḥaqq*. This tradition appears in numerous sources, including canonical ones.[60]

In the most prevalent version of the story of our madman, however, the patient is a tribal leader (*sayyid*), and he is not explicitly a madman, but rather has been bitten by a scorpion (*ʿaqrab*). Since scorpions, as well as serpents (*ḥayya*), were considered metamorphosed demons,[61] it is clear that here too we have a case of demonic possession, but this time it does not take the form of madness, but rather of fatal poisoning. The people of the patient's tribe ask for help from a group of Companions who happen to pass near them, and the *ruqya* of the Fātiḥa, which one of the Companions performs for a fixed price, provides once again the necessary anti-demonic remedy, and the patient soon recovers. When the Prophet is informed about it, he approves of the Qur'ānic *ruqya* as well as of the fee that was paid for it.

This story is contained in a tradition of the Anṣārī Companion, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 65/685), and is available in versions transmitted by various Successors. In some versions the Companion not only utters the Fātiḥa but also expectorates, or alternatively, strokes the patient with his hand.[62] There is also a similar version of Ibn ʿAbbās as circulated by the Meccan Ibn Abī Mulayka (d. 117/735).[63] In some further versions, the Qur'ānic passages that provide the medicament for the poisoned patient are the *Muʿawwidhāt*, and again the Prophet confirms the validity of the *ruqya* based on them.[64] In one version (that of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as quoted by his son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya), the poisoned person is none other than the Prophet himself, who, while being engaged in prayer, is bitten by a scorpion. The Prophet utters the *ruqya* of the *Muʿawwidhāt* on himself and gets well. In this particular case, a physical treatment is added to the verbal *ruqya*: the Prophet dips his bitten finger in salt

[60] The *isnād*: al-Shaʿbī ← Khārija b. al-Ṣalt (Kūfan) ← his uncle. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 5, pp. 210–11, 211; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, no. 3638; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 238 (22:37), 339, 339–40, 340–41 (27:19); Nasāʾī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, no. 7534 (70:34), vol. 6, no. 10871 (81:249). Cf. Dols, *Majnūn*, p. 274.

[61] Abū l-Shaykh, *ʿAẓama*, nos. 1093, 1097, 1099.

[62] E.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 121 (37:16), vol. 6, p. 231 (66:9); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, pp. 19–20 (39, *Bāb jawāz akhdh al-ujra ʿalā l-ruqya bi-l-Qurʾān*); Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 237–38 (22:37), 340 (27:19). In one version the patient is described as the "king" of a town (*qarya*). See Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 64 (no. 246).

[63] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, pp. 170–71 (76:34).

[64] Ibn Wahb, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, nos. 716–17.

water. The Prophet also curses the scorpion saying that it does not fail to sting everyone, ordinary people as well as prophets.[65]

8 Qur'ān and Torah

The main target against which the campaign for Qur'ānic *ruqya*s was aimed were the Jews, for whom the Torah served as a traditional anti-demonic instrument. Some Muslims adopted the Jewish belief in the magical and therapeutic powers of the Torah, and this is indicated in a tradition recorded in the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 180/796). It relates that Abū Bakr once found his daughter ʿĀ'isha ill with a Jewish woman at her bedside, uttering incantations over her. Abū Bakr ordered the woman to use "the Book of God" to cure his daughter.[66] Commenting on this tradition, al-Zurqānī (d. 1122/1710) says that by "the Book of God" Abū Bakr may have meant the Qur'ān, in which case he wished the Jewish woman to become a Muslim. But he could also have meant the Torah, on condition that it was translated into Arabic, and not distorted by the Jews. This tradition caused the Egyptian scholar Ibn Wahb (d. 197/813) to declare that he did not object to incantations administered to Muslims by the People of the Book.[67] Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) showed no objection to Muslims approaching the People of the Book for treatment by incantations, as long as they were using the "known Book of God". He reportedly said this in response to the inquiry of al-Rabīʿ b. Anas (Baṣran, d. 139/756).[68] This again seems to imply that the People of the Book are supposed to use the Arabic version of the undistorted Torah.

In view of this evidence, it becomes clear that the Jewish legacy of therapeutic magic was widespread in early Islamic society, and gained the support of eminent scholars. Precisely this phenomenon worried other scholars who were anxious to protect Islamic society from all kinds of popular beliefs and practices that came from non-Arabs and especially from the Jews. These scholars considered them a non-Islamic and even a pagan legacy that had to be eliminated. Their attitude is reflected most clearly in some traditions about the Medinan/Kūfan Companion ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652). It is related that once he found out that a Jew used to apply *ruqya*s to his wife's inflamed eye and it would

[65]Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, no. 3604, vol. 10, no. 9850.
[66]Mālik/Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 5, p. 356 (50, *al-Taʿawwudh wa-l-ruqya fī-l-maraḍ*).
[67]Ibn Abī Zayd, *Jāmiʿ*, p. 239.
[68]Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 9, p. 349.

heal. Ibn Masʿūd said that this was merely the work of Satan, and advised his wife to use a formula of the Prophet instead of making recourse to the Jewish one. The Prophet's formula invoked God, the One and Only Provider of health. Ibn Masʿūd also quoted a saying of the Prophet stating that spells, amulets and incantations represented "idolatry" (*shirk*).[69] In another version, the incantations recommended by Ibn Masʿūd to his wife as an alternative to the Jewish one are strictly Qur'ānic. He instructs her to recite the *Muʿawwidhāt*.[70]

The above traditions, too, in which the Qur'ān is suggested as the only remedy for the possessed, reflect the same campaign against the Jewish patterns of incantations. They were designed to diminish the reliance of Muslims on the Jews and their Torah.

9 *Kalimāt*

In fact, not just specific Qur'ānic passages but also "The Accomplished Words of God" (*kalimātu llāhi l-tāmma*) in general appear in the sources as the ultimate anti-demonic weapon used by Muslims for therapeutic purposes and against the evil eye. The idea of "The Accomplished Words of God" is based on a Qur'ānic passage (6:115) which states that no one can change God's accomplished words. The commentators explain that by "God's Accomplished Words" the Qur'ān itself is meant, or more generally, God's unchangeable Will and Judgement.[71]

Islamic tradition contains numerous instances of Muslims uttering incantations in which "God's Accomplished Words" are invoked, and in some cases, they are employed against Jewish witchcraft. For example, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, the famous Jewish convert to Islam, reportedly used an incantation invoking the Accomplished Words of God as protection against some Jews who plotted to transform him into a donkey. The tradition about this has been recorded in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 180/796).[72] However, the idea behind the concept of "The Accomplished Words of God" did not always exclude the Torah from the sphere of legitimate scriptures. There is a further version of the tradition about the same Kaʿb al-Aḥbār in which he utters again an incantation invoking God's "Accomplished Words", but this time he claims to be quoting

[69]Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 381; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 336–37 (27:17), etc.

[70]Ṭabarānī, *Al Muʿjam al-kabīr*, vol. 9, no. 8863.

[71]Cf. also Sara Sviri, "Words of Power and the Power of Words: Mystical Linguistics in the Works of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī", *JSAI* 27 (2002): 204–44.

[72]Mālik/Zurqānī, vol. 5, p. 376 (51:9).

the incantation from the Torah.[73] This demonstrates how thin the line separating the Qur'ān from other monotheistic scriptures representing the Word of God was. This overlap was considered dangerous in the eyes of those who stood behind the above traditions in which the Qur'ān was explicitly introduced as the one and only legitimate origin of *ruqyas*.

10 Conclusion

In conclusion, every element in the charisma of monotheistic prophets like Jesus, for example, reappears in the Islamic image of Muḥammad, and the power to adjure the devil out of the possessed is no exception. Nevertheless, inner Islamic evolution has shifted the focus from Muḥammad's own powers as an exorcist to the anti-demonic effects of his revealed scripture. This occurred not only because of the wish to refine the image of the Prophet and put him above any ordinary witch-doctor, but because unlike the mortal Muḥammad, the Qur'ān has remained forever within the reach of every believer. Its importance lay in the fact that it provided the believers with a handy substitute for the Jewish Torah in their search for anti-demonic protection. It follows that Islam not only appropriated Jewish and Christian patterns which were built into the image of its own prophet, but also aspired to use its own newly produced assets, and mainly the Qur'ān, as a substitute for the non-Islamic legacy.

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[73] Ibn Ḥajar, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, no. 3430; Suyūṭī, *Jānn*, pp. 97–98.

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