



PROJECT MUSE®

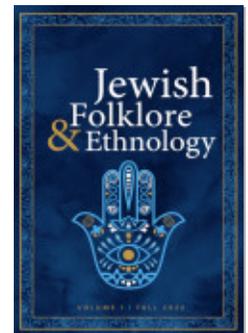
"They Have Countless Books of This Craft": Folklore and
Folkloristics of Yemeni Jewish Amulets

Tom Fogel

Jewish Folklore and Ethnology, Volume 1, Fall 2022, pp. 46-64 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jfe.2022.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/884268>



“They Have Countless Books of This Craft”: Folklore and Folkloristics of Yemeni Jewish Amulets

TOM FOGEL

The nineteenth-century voyager Yaakov Sapir published accounts of Yemeni Jewish amulets that provide significant historical and ethnographic sources for a study of Yemeni Jewish occult practices and the perception of them by non-Jews. The combination of blurred religious boundaries characterizing occult traditions, the prominent place of the Judeo Arabic language, and Arabic or pseudo-Arabic magical scripts constructed occult traditions as an essential social and cultural role for the Jewish minority, and simultaneously made these traditions the center of a polemical discourse.

According to anthropologist Harvey Goldberg, scholarship of nineteenth-century encounters between Jews from Muslim lands and Jews from the West reflected orientalist bias (Goldberg 2004). Describing Yemeni Jewry simultaneously as a “living fossil” of biblical times and a manifestation of the undeveloped or degraded Orient, European scholars typically expressed a paternalistic and romanticized perspective in their scholarship (Goitein 1983, 267; Yavneeli 1952, 63). Noting the group’s folklife, Western scholars characterized Yemeni Jews as irrational because of the prominence of occult traditions in Yemeni society (Gerber 2013, 10–12). This discourse is also present in the writings of non-Western scholars such as David Sassoon,

Jewish Folklore and Ethnology, 1, Fall 2022, pp. 46–64.

Copyright © 2023 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan 48201-1309.

whose early works display a critical view of occult practices in Iraq and Yemen (Sassoon 1906, 162).¹

The occult's social and historical aspects in Jewish societies are documented across a broad swath of historical times and places (see Ben Naeh 2000; Bohak 2022; Wasserstrom 2005; Zinger 2017). Indeed, the significance of occult traditions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yemen, manifested in practices of healing or protection, and performed by Jews and Muslims alike, is well documented (Iraqi Klorman 2009; Gingrich 1995; Regourd 2011, 2022). Although manuscripts of medicinal occult books are a treasure trove of Yemeni Jewish occult traditions, in the Jewish context only a few studies addressed this genre of Yemeni folk literature (Abdar 2019; Tobi 1989). This paucity of research is shared by Judeo-Arab traditions of the occult in early modern and modern times, in contradistinction to the study of ancient and medieval Jewish magic (Shaked 2000). In the parallel Muslim context, recent scholarship of Islamic occult culture utilized critical Orientalism to reexamine occult scholarship (Melvin-Koushki 2017, 288; Moore 2020).

Much can be learned about the various contexts of Yemeni Jewish occult traditions by considering the history of ethnographic writing and addressing its multiple manifestations. In that respect, the question of origin that is sometimes at the center of textual studies of magic is secondary in this present essay. In other words, I suggest that to study these traditions, one must first look into the oriental prism in which they were and are represented. The first step of this process reexamines ethnographic moments of the past in ethno-historical research (Denning 1992, 195). This approach, a derivative of folklore studies, asks not to what extent ethnographic representations were correct or realistic but rather what were the dynamics through which representation took place (Noy 2017, 19). I argue that ethno-historical research could be further developed to help articulate the role of the occult in the relations between Yemeni Jews and Zionism and the occurrence of these practices in present-day Israeli society.

The discipline of folklore studies suggests an application of ethnographic methods usually reserved for field observation to the study of textual and archival sources. In this ethnography of archives and manuscripts, I not only ask what is found in the archives but also how I found it (Chernyavska 2018, 28). While

reading occult manuscripts, one must consider that they would most likely be unavailable for research if found in their original cultural context.² Long kept hidden from inquisitive eyes by their Yemeni Jewish owners, now easily accessible occult manuscripts require a reflexive look that addresses the history of philological research in Yemen (Gerber 2013, 52). This consideration becomes even more evident when studying occult practices through ethnographic surveys and confronting the complexity of studying a practice based on “hidden” knowledge.

I reexamine the process of ethnographic representation of Yemeni Jewish occult traditions by addressing the work of the twentieth-century voyager Yaakov Sapir (also rendered in English as Jacob Saphir). I discuss Sapir’s writing in light of an investigation of Yemeni Jewish occult manuscripts. After a preliminary survey of manuscripts found in the National Library of Israel and the private collection of the collector Sagiv Mahfud, I have focused on two primary manuscripts. Both were scribed in central Yemen, date to the nineteenth century, and are found in the Gross Family Collection, Tel Aviv.³

I begin with Yaakov Sapir’s experiences in Yemen regarding local occult traditions. Then I will present a description of the tradition of making and wearing Yemeni Jewish amulets based on the manuscripts I have studied and additional sources. Finally, Sapir’s disenchantment with Yemeni Jewish occult traditions will be discussed, along with its connection to the formation of polemical discourse regarding Jewish occult traditions in the Muslim world.

Yaakov Sapir Journeys to Yemen

The nineteenth-century voyager Yaakov Sapir (1822–1885) wrote what is often considered by many to be the first ethnographic publication about Jews in Yemen. Sapir, born in present-day Belarus and later a member of the Jewish community of Jerusalem, traveled to Yemen in the course of a long journey as a rabbinical messenger. In his report describing his time in Yemen, he wrote about his initial fascination with Yemeni occult practitioners (Sapir 1945). Yemeni Jews presented him with their practices and manuscripts involving magic at his request. He was initially keen on learning how to practice these traditions himself. He began

collecting and purchasing manuscripts that presented incantations and amulet prescriptions. He also found a trained practitioner of the occult arts as a teacher who was also considered a *hakham*, or Jewish "wise man" knowledgeable in Torah.

However, after this short experiment in "going native" (Gerber 2013, 45), Sapir eventually assumed a different approach to Yemeni occult traditions, as expressed in his published account:

There are no doctors in this land . . . the Yemenis attribute every illness or sickness to witchcraft, caused by demons or sorcery . . . and thus they wish to remove the illness by magicians or witches and by charms, incantations, and amulets. They say that drought is caused by sorcery, against which they have spells. The most learned and skillful in this craft are the Jews, and even the Muslims come and ask for their aid. And the Jews' wisdom (or mischief) helps them fool the innocents into believing in nonsense. And they have countless books of this craft. (Sapir 1945, 81; translated from Hebrew by the author)

This passage reveals several factors that will form the basis for the following discussion. First, it depicts the prevalence of occult practices in nineteenth-century Yemen and that this knowledge was partially kept in books. Second, it suggests the high social status of skilled persons in occult practices from which we learn that, apparently, the Jewish minority was well trained. Third, Sapir reveals his judgment of these practices, framing occult Yemeni traditions as primitive and a reason or proof of spiritual degradation. I will first develop the first two points and discuss Yemeni Jewish occult tradition in its cultural context. In the final part of the paper, Sapir's disenchantment will be addressed.

Making Jewish Amulets in Muslim Yemen

The Jewish minority in nineteenth-century Yemen was scattered over a thousand small settlements. Jews were mainly craftworkers, including silversmiths, potters, and weavers. Strict religious boundaries separated the Muslim and Jewish

communities. These borders were crossed in the realm of magic, especially in rural communities (Eraqi Klorman 2009, 134–135). Each rural community had its own healer or wise man, usually named Poteach Sefer or Ba'al Chefetz, both soubriquets indicating the use of an occult book. His was the address for people who sought advice and aid, for he could practice divination, write amulets for various purposes, provide protection from the evil eye, invoke spells to evoke love or hate, and even prevent locusts from harming the village's crops (Goitein 1974, 189).

This social reality pitted Muslim and Jewish amulet writers in competition with one another (Gamlieli 1980, 145–46). To whom should one turn in time of need? Whose amulet will work? A successful occultist would gain an influential social status, and in the case of the Jewish minority, this status would imply significant agency. One such hidden competition between Jewish and Muslim wise men can be seen in the Ḥugariyya district in Lower Yemen, where both religious communities performed exorcism ceremonies. Alongside a shared tradition, there were distinct differences in practices (Fogel 2022). In the village of Jirwāḥ in central Yemen, Sapir wrote about a rabbi who was known among the local Muslim rulers for his occult knowledge:

He is well trained in incantations, amulets, and fortune-telling, so even the gentiles come and ask for his advice. They request his help and amulets, because he also knows Arabic script. He is famous in all the land, and his name is also praised by the king's lords and servants. (Sapir 1945, 56; translated from Hebrew by the author)

This description is reinforced by later studies and personal accounts of Yemeni Jewish informants (Gamlieli 1980, 64–68; Garamé 1997, 19). These sources make it clear that a Jewish wise man who had acquired a reputation as a healer in rural Yemen served Jews and Muslims alike. The scope of this phenomenon is evident in occult manuscripts that present specific amulets for Muslims, usually stating, “This is an amulet for the gentiles,” accompanied by a magical script.

What was involved in making an amulet in Yemen? The amulet parchments were usually kept in silver cases. The amulet's protective power derived first from



Figure 1. An amulet case (*kitāb, ħirz* in Arabic), twentieth-century Yemen. Courtesy of The Association for Society and Culture—Yemenite Jewish Tradition, and Carmela Abdar. Photograph by Yair Hobav.

the materiality of the pendant that repelled demons or the evil eye.⁴ The use of silver and other metals, the fashioning of shiny round surfaces called *lumāh*, and *danādil* in Arabic, or the sound of silver bells contributed to the perception of the pendant as an amulet (Abdar 2019, 96–97). Indeed, many craftworkers made their amulet cases sealed and without intention of enclosing a parchment (figure 1). The Jewish artisan would make the amulet case, while the wise man would inscribe the amuletic charm. If the amulet was a silver plaque, these two roles were sometimes carried out by one person (Abdar 2019, 36). In both cases, the materiality of the amulet case was mediated by Jews who were usually the only ones practicing silversmithing.⁵

While not many amulet parchments survived or are available for research, amulet incantations are found in Yemeni manuscripts known as amulet guide books.⁶ These “countless books” mentioned by Sapir are now stored in many libraries worldwide (Tobi 1989, 116). Such Jewish amulet guidebooks were known

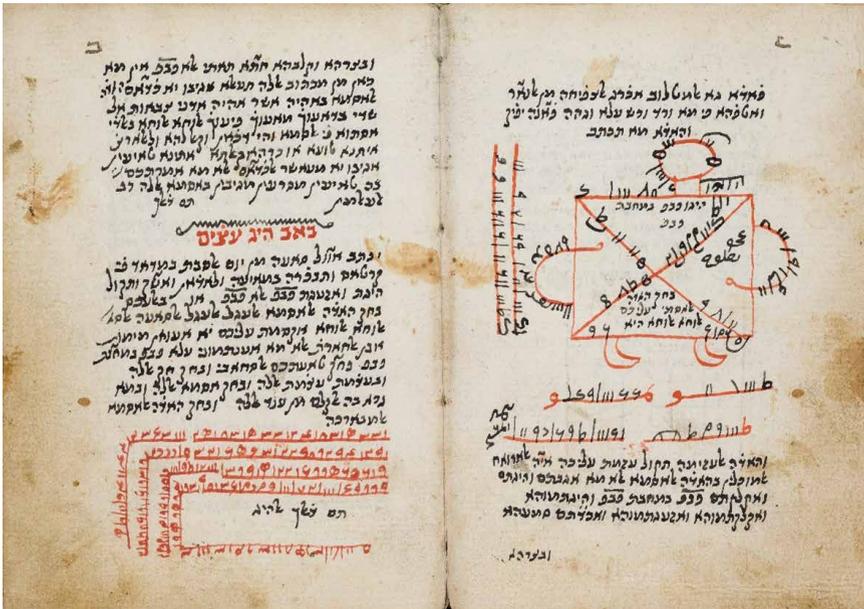


Figure 2. A script for a love spell amulet. The sketch presents a spiritual entity, a spirit, and the instructions in Judeo-Arabic in black. On the left in red is "string letter" script, nineteenth-century Yemen. The Gross Family Collection, Tel Aviv, YM.011.014.

as *ḥefetz*, the Hebrew word for “object,” used in Yemen as a general word for books and specifically occult books. These books were attributed protective powers, even without utilizing the knowledge they contained. The ownership of such occult manuscripts was a main factor in becoming an amulet writer, as expressed in the title of a person who writes amulets: *ba’al ḥefetz* in Hebrew or *ṣāḥīb kitāb* in Arabic, meaning the owner of the book.⁷

The first impression from looking at amulet guidebooks is that the act of writing amulets required well-developed calligraphic abilities and mastery of several magic scripts. Writing ability merited considerable power in pre-printing press Yemen until the twentieth century in Muslim and Jewish communities alike.⁸ Nevertheless, writing was much more common among Jewish men than Muslim men or Muslim or Jewish women. Apparently, literacy was an important factor in the skillfulness of Jewish men’s practice of occult knowledge. That said, and as seen in

various manuscripts, calligraphic skills were not shared by all scribes, and while some manuscripts display skillful scribal work, others are far less elaborated.

Two prominent magical scripts categorized by scholars as Angelic Alphabet and String Letters can be found in Yemeni Jewish manuscripts (Bohak 2011). The Angelic Alphabet relates to signs that can sometimes resemble Hebrew letters, usually with small circles attached to their ends. String Letters relate to a sequence of signs often resembling Arabic letters or numbers written along a "string" on their base as shown in figure 2 (Porter, Saif, and Savage-Smith 2017). Both kinds of script are found in various forms, expressing the scribe's local tradition and calligraphic abilities. While neither of these scripts has meaning that we can now detect, the Yemeni Jewish scribes of occult manuscripts surrounded them with layers of meaning. Scripts, called *qulmus* in Hebrew or *khaṭ* in Arabic, were attributed origins and meanings. Some were related to specific angels, such as Gabriel or Metatron. Certain kinds of scripts were linked to Ḥimiyari engravings found in archeological sites in Yemen, echoing the popular belief in Yemen regarding the occult powers these engraved stones possess (Ḥabshush 1939, 6, 71). Lists of different kinds of scripts and their Hebrew or Arabic parallels suggest that scribes made efforts to bestow meaning to them.⁹ These scripts were then used to create seals called *hotam* (Hebrew) or *khātim* (Arabic) for protection against negative spiritual entities or summon positive ones for help. Mastering these scripts demanded elaborate calligraphic ability, and their similarity to Hebrew, Arabic, or even Ḥimiyari letters enabled scribes to write amulets for Muslims as well as for Jews, as Sapir noted.

The writing of amulets was not limited to a magical script. It included intertwined Muslim and Jewish occult sources. Corresponding to its purpose, an amulet was usually based on a magic square (*wifq* in Arabic) used to evoke a spiritual force for aid. In its basic form, a three-by-three array of numbers adds up to equal sums in every row or column. By coupling numerical values to letters in Jewish Gematria or Muslim *Abjad* systems, the square can express words or even sentences with protective power.¹⁰ Along with basic formulae of Hebrew letters combinations that are found also in other Jewish communities, magic squares in the Yemeni Jewish manuscripts are influenced by the popular Muslim amulet book

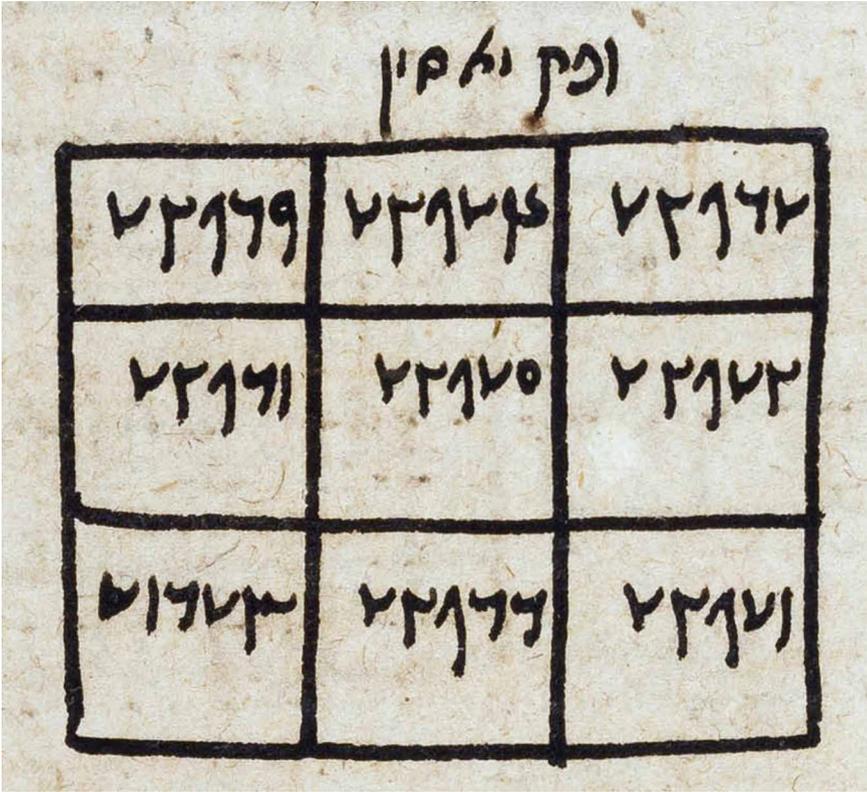


Figure 3. A magic square expressing the phrase *yā sīn* (*wifq yā sīn*), 19th century Yemen. The Gross Family Collection, Tel Aviv, YM.011.014.

Šams al-māʾarif, attributed to Ahmad al-Buni.¹¹ The Yemeni versions resemble al-Buni’s in the expression of the Muslim names of God, for example, *ya karīm* or *ya razāq*, names of angels and astrological signs, or even express the phrase *yā sīn* (figure 3).¹² Yet a preliminary examination of manuscripts indicates that Yemeni Jewish manuscripts do not present squares that express the name of Muhammad or are meant to address demons.¹³ These elements probably were not simply copied from parallel Muslim occult writings but instead selected according to their content.

The two components of Yemeni Jewish amulets I have described represent

selection processes that adopt elements from Muslim occult traditions, as long as they do not express notions that Jewish scribes found contradictory to Jewish law. However, Yemeni Jewish manuscripts contain other patterns that present a more fluid approach. One such element is an incantation, called *qasam* or *‘azīmah* in Arabic, that turns to whatever power or prophet it could summon for aid. This is based on the belief that spiritual entities have a religious identity. Yemeni Jewish amulet writers attributed Jewishness to some demons, so much so that demons were believed to know how to recite the Torah.¹⁴ Yet studies show that the perception of diverse religious identities in the demonic world is not a new notion. Texts that address Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or even Zoroastrian spirits are found in magic bowls from antiquity (Shaked 1999). In the Yemeni Jewish manuscripts, a Muslim demon will be repelled by mentioning the name of the prophet Muhammad, while a Christian demon will require mentioning the name of Jesus and the Evangelists, a practice unheard of in daily religious norms. This pattern indicates that while Yemeni Jewish scribes processed and selected the content of occult manuscripts, some chose to copy these spells, suggesting that the need for protection against evil forces resulted in the blurring of religious boundaries.

Polemics of Tradition

Incantations that mention the names of Muhammad and Jesus were what made Sapir abandon his wish to learn the practice of Yemeni Jewish occult tradition and denounce it. As he wrote in his account, he was reading his Yemeni teacher's occult book and found "one long and great incantation written in Arabic," and when he saw the name of Christ, he stated, "I was shocked, . . . and since then I threw away these demonic books and cast this evil craft to hell" (Sapir 1945, 83). Sapir's Yemeni teacher, however, replied that he copied the incantation from a Muslim book and did not pay attention to its meaning. Yet the Jewish wise man also added that "we know nothing of this faith here," referring to the fact that there was no native Christian community in Yemen at that time. Unlike his Yemeni teacher, Sapir was well acquainted with Christian missionaries and had lived in a monastery for a short time in his early days in Jerusalem (Gerber 2013, 28). One could

speculate that in light of his history in the monastery, Sapir was horror-struck by the possibility that he might again turn to a foreign belief.

But what of Sapir's Yemeni teacher? What did the name *Īsā ibn Maryam* or *Injil' Īsā* in Arabic mean for a Yemeni Jewish wise man? Yemeni Jews were familiar with the text "Toledot Yeshu" (Life of Jesus), which contains a parodic description of Jesus and depicts him as a magician that performed his miracles by uttering incantations of God's secret name (Shem Hameforsh).¹⁵ By explaining Jesus's miracles as the work of witchcraft, "Toledot Yeshu" refuted prophecy. Moreover, this connection between Jesus and magic might have been an explanation of his name entering the Yemeni Jewish codex of incantations with no criticism by occult practitioners.

Incantations addressing Jesus, Muhammad, and other non-Jewish figures and forces are found not only in Yemen. They are shared throughout occult Jewish culture. Nevertheless, it seems that when Sapir read this incantation, it was not something ordinary in daily occult practice outside of Yemen. An Aleppo-born Jew Avraham Hamuy (1838–1886), another traveler who followed Sapir, was especially interested in the occult and was well acquainted with Jewish occult traditions across the Jewish diaspora (Bohak 2019, 23; Ḥamuy 1972). He collected manuscripts and wrote down occult traditions that he found interesting in his numerous travels. Ḥamuy's travel to Yemen was compelled by Sapir's description of the Jesus incantation. After reading Sapir's account, Ḥamuy stated that "I did not rest until I traveled to the cities of Yemen to inquire about this" (Ratzabi 1999, 441). Even if his travel to Yemen was also driven by his wish to obtain occult manuscripts, his statement makes it reasonable to assume that he was not familiar with the Jesus incantation. Eventually Ḥamuy criticized Sapir and explained the use of non-Jewish names or forces deriving from the religious identity of demons. He also stated that the harsh political and social reality in Yemen made the Jewish population turn to these forces for aid.

Sapir's book was the opening expression of the polemic that Ḥamuy's writing came to exemplify. However, Sapir was only one of several voyagers that visited Yemen and encountered its occult traditions. In many ways, these encounters affected not only external scholarship about Yemen but also intra-Yemeni

discourse regarding occult traditions and amulets in particular. This is the case of Rabbi Yiḥye Qāfiḥ and Ḥayyim Ḥabshush, who after becoming acquainted with Western scholars such as Joseph Halevy (who travelled Yemen in 1869–1870) and Edward Glaser (who travelled Yemen several times between 1882 and 1894), established a religious reformation movement that denounced Jewish Kabbalah, along with Yemeni occult traditions (Anzi 2020; Eraqi Klorman 2014). While this well-known controversy reflected a Yemeni, Jewish, and Muslim discourse regarding magic, it also marked a new skeptical approach to the tradition of amulet making.

This controversy did not end in Yemen. A century after Sapir's travel diary was published, two of the leading rabbinical figures in the Yemeni community in Israel, Rabbi Yosef Qāfiḥ, grandson and successor of Yiḥye Qāfiḥ, and Rabbi Yosef Şubēri, continued the debate on amulets amid questions of an "authentic" Yemeni Jewish identity in 1960s Israel. Qāfiḥ was a world-renowned expert in the writings of Maimonides, who was outspoken in his objection to amulets and other magical practices (Schwartz 1998). In his ethnographic book, *Halikhot Teman* (Jewish life in Sanà), Qāfiḥ denounced the magical practice as nonsense and a foreign Arab influence. In his view, it therefore did not represent a "true" or "authentic" Yemeni Jewish identity:

Unfortunately, one can find among Jews, as with Arabs, witch-doctors, that used amulets they made, and spells and all sorts of incantations . . . they made up nonsense for the ignorant masses. . . . It is possible that they learned some of those "names" and even this entire "craft" from Muslims. (Qāfiḥ 1978, 269; translated from Hebrew by the author)

Şubēri, in response to Qāfiḥ, wrote his own book aiming to prove the amulet's Jewishness. Although Şubēri was said to have stopped writing amulets after immigrating to Israel in 1949, he expressed a wider view of many amulet writers across the Jewish world who continued to practice it in twentieth century Israel (Bohak 2019). For example, he explained why it is permissible to use a *wifq* (Arabic), a magic square that expresses the Muslim phrase in Arabic *yā sin* (Şubēri 2002, 25). He also mentioned Qāfiḥ:

Some people ridicule our holy ancestors, saying that these are “superstitions” and nonsense, God forbid, or that they learned these names from their Arab neighbors. . . . I wonder how the author of *Halikhot Teman* decided to call these names “superstitions” and nonsense. . . . For he has done so without knowing their origins and doings, for [these names] were passed on to us by holy men. (Şubēri 2002, 1; translated from Hebrew by the author)

Both Qāfiḥ and Şubēri claimed to fight for what they saw as the genuine Yemeni Jewish identity, as did other rabbinical figures such as Rabbi Yitşāq Raşābī, whose writings cite Avraham Ḥamuy for justifying the use of amulets (Raşābī 1999, 442). One can assume that they all had in mind not only the self-identity of their Yemeni communities but also the perception of their community by non-Yemeni Israelis. Yemeni Jewish occult traditions incorporated themes that threatened the “Western” image that Zionism sought to cultivate and expressed fluidity between Jewish and Muslim cultures. In that respect, while the Arabness of Yemeni Jewish occult traditions was what made it so prevalent and important in the Jewish minority daily life in Yemen, this mosaic of Jewish and Muslim sources also made this knowledge a target of criticism.

Conclusion

Since the nineteenth century, a growing polemic focused on Yemeni Jewish occult traditions while at the same time those very traditions remained an important part of Jewish life in Yemen. Yaacov Sapir in *Even Sapir* presented these traditions initially as proof of Yemen’s spiritual degradation. However, these traditions were well rooted in Yemen’s social and cultural life, having medicinal, economic, and even political importance for the Jewish minority. Noteworthy was that the traditions were associated with silversmithing in Yemen, which was dominated by literate Jewish men. Moreover, the intertwined matrix of Jewish and Muslim sources found in occult manuscripts helped establish amulet making as a popular craft among Jews. The blurred religious boundaries that characterize occult traditions,

the prominent place of Judeo-Arabic language, and Arabic or pseudo-Arabic magical scripts all made Yemeni Jewish occult traditions the target of criticism by Jewish rabbinical observers.

Frequently attributed to the foreign "other," magic has been a locus of encounter for cultures and religions. Although the encounters presented in ethnographies occurred in Yemen, they bear wider significant implications beyond the region in a broader context of Jewish magic in modern-day Israel (Bilu 1977, 1980; Harari 2007, 2018; Sabar 2010). Yemeni silver amulet cases have been popular among Yemeni-Israelis through the twenty-first century as traditional jewelry. Yemeni Jewish occult traditions are practiced by various amulet writers; some continue traditional methods while others display a new Israeli tradition. In continuation of Avraham Hamuy's interest in Yemeni occult manuscripts, and the image of Yemeni Jews as a living relic of ancient times, Yemeni traditions have been adopted by occultists from other Jewish communities. The debate among Yemeni Jewish religious leaders concerning these issues has not subsided but instead expanded to the broader context of Mizrahi identity (broadly the descendants of Jews who had lived in Middle Eastern countries), influencing Israeli society and politics.

Acknowledgments

This study was conducted while I was a Fellow at the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. An earlier version of this paper was presented in a joint workshop, "The Role and Function of Material Forms and Objects in the Abrahamic Religions," University of Oxford and Ben Gurion University. I wish to thank the members of the Center and especially Professor Daniella Talmon-Heller and Professor Ephraim Shoham-Steiner for their insights, and enriching, fascinating discussions. Additional support for the project was provided by the Ephraim E. Urbach Post-Doctoral Fellowship, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Folklore Research Center at the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Notes

1. Sassoon's writing on the Jews of the Orient changed over the course of his career. While in his early years as a scholar he expressed a critical approach towards occult practices, in a later stage he was apologetic for his previous views.

2. S. D. Goitein, in his ethnographic work on the Jews of al-Gades in Lower Yemen, mentioned that his informants were reluctant to show him their books dealing with "practical Kabbala." See Goitein (1974: 189).

3. I wish to thank Mr. Sagiv Mahfud for his kind hospitality with his archive of Yemeni Jewish manuscripts and for sharing his insights on the materials I examined there. The manuscripts from the Gross Family Collection, Tel Aviv are YM.011.080 and YM.011.014. I wish to thank Mr. William Gross for generously sharing his manuscripts with me for this research.

4. Material aspects of magical protection in the Yemeni Jewish community have been thoroughly studied. See Abdar (2008, 2013, 2019) and Muchawsky-Schnapper (1988, 2000).

5. Other groups practicing silversmithing in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yemen were notably Hindu traders from India called Banyans in Arabic. A small number of Muslims also practiced silversmithing and related crafts, and their numbers increased after the vast immigration of Jews from Yemen in 1949 (Ransom 2014).

6. One reason for the relative difficulty in studying amulet parchments is the belief that once opened, the amulet's protective power will end. An analysis of such amulet parchments is found in Abdar (2019, 103–4).

7. A person practicing occult knowledge, especially divination, is also known as *Poteaḥ Sefer* in Hebrew, literally a man who opens a book. The term indicates the vital role of the occult book in the work of amulet writers.

8. The relations between written and oral religious traditions in Muslim Yemeni society have been discussed in Messik (1996).

9. Scholarship of ancient Jewish magic refers to such lists as evidence of the loss of the original meaning of the scripts.

10. For more commentary on magic squares in Jewish amulets, see Schrire 1966, 64–68. On magic squares in the early Islamic context, see Hallum 2021.

11. On al-Būnī's writing and its eventual popularity in Islamic occult sciences, see Gardiner 2017. As Myntti mentions, *Shams al Ma'ārif* was the most common amulet book in Lower Yemen in the twentieth century (Myntti 1990).

12. The title of Surah number 36 from the Quran. The Surah takes its name from the two letters of the alphabet with which it begins.

13. Unlike Islamic awfāq found in al-Būnī’s writing (Francis 2017, 77).

14. See Fogel 2022 for a discussion of Jewish and Muslim rituals of exorcism in Lower Yemen.

15. See, for example, in MS. 1990 Michael Krupp collection, p. 185. On Toledot Yeshu in Judeo Arabic, see Goldstein 2010. David Malkiel wrote about the Danish expedition to Yemen (1761–1767) and described an encounter between the Christian members of the expedition and Yemeni Jews from around the city of Taiz, in which the identification of Jesus as a sorcerer was mentioned (Malkiel 2021, 37).

References

- Anzi, Menashe. 2020. “From Biblical Criticism to Criticism of the Kabbalah: Colonialism and Interreligious Interactions in the Indian Ocean and Yemen.” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 10: 91–109.
- Abdar, Carmela, ed. 2008. *Ma’ase Rokem: Dress and Jewelry in the Tradition of the Jews of Yemen*. Tel-Aviv: E’ele Betamar. [Hebrew]
- Abdar, Carmela. 2013. “Magic Dress of Jewish Groom from Radā.” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 28: 415–59. [Hebrew]
- Abdar, Carmela. 2019. “Reflections on Magical Texts on Jewelry and Amulets of Jewish Women and Children from Yemen and Habban.” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 32: 89–149. [Hebrew]
- Ben Naeh, Yaron. 2000. “Magical Beliefs and Practices among Ottoman Jews.” *Pe’amim* 85: 60–82. [Hebrew]
- Bilu, Yoram. 1977. “General characteristics of referrals to traditional healers in Israel.” *Israel Annals of Psychiatry* 15: 245–52.
- Bilu, Yoram. 1980. “The Moroccan Demon in Israel: The Case of ‘Evil Spirit Disease.’” *Ethos* 8: 24–39.
- Bohak, Gideon. 2011. “The Charaktères in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Magic.” *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 48: 25–44.
- Bohak, Gideon. 2019. “How Jewish Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World.” *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 19: 7–37.
- Bohak, Gideon. 2022. “Specimens of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic Magical Texts from the Cairo Genizah.” In *Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context*, edited by Léon Buskens and Nathal M. Dessing, 15–46. Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Chernyavska, Maryna. 2018. “The Contested Identity of Folklore Archives: Folkloristics and Archival Studies at a Crossroads.” In *Visions and Traditions: Knowledge Production and Tradition Archives*, edited by Lauri Harvilahti, Audun Kjus, Clíona O’Carroll,

- Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch, Fredrik Skott, and Rita Treija, 24–40. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Dening, Greg. 1992. *Performances*. Melbourne, ASTL: Melbourne University Press.
- Eraqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. 2009. “Yemen: Religion, Magic, and Jews.” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 39: 125–134.
- Eraqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. 2014. *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience*. Leiden: Brill.
- Fogel, Tom. 2020. “S. D. Goitein’s Yemenite Research.” PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem. [Hebrew]
- Fogel, Tom. 2022. “‘Get Out or I Shall Slaughter You!’: Exorcism in Lower Yemen.” *Yeda-Am: Journal of Jewish Folklore*. [Hebrew]
- Francis, Edgar. 2017. *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad Ibn Ali Al-Buni*. Chicago: Kazi.
- Gamlieli, Nissim B. 1980. *The Amulet: Short Stories from the Yemenite Jewish Life*. Ramla, ISR: N.B. Gamlieli. [Hebrew]
- Garamé, Zohara. 1997. *Yehude al-Agbari she-be-Teman*. Netanya, ISR: Association for Society and Culture. [Hebrew]
- Gardiner, Noah. 2017. “Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī’s Works.” *Arabica* 64: 405–41.
- Gerber, Noah. 2013. *Ourselves or Our Holy Books: The Cultural Discovery of Yemenite Jewry*. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute. [Hebrew]
- Gingrich, Andre. 1995. “Spirits of the Border: Some Remarks on the Connotation of Jinn in North-Western Yemen.” *Quaderni Di Studi Arabi* 13: 199–212.
- Goitein, Shelomo Dov. 1974. *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages*. New York: Schocken.
- Goitein, Shelomo Dov. 1983. “Jewish Education in Yemen as an Archetype of Traditional Jewish Education.” In *The Yemenites*, edited by Menahem Ben Sasson, 241–268. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute.
- Goldberg, Harvey. 2004. “The Oriental and the Orientalist: The Meeting of Mordecai Ha-Cohen and Nahum Slouschz.” *Jewish Culture and History* 7: 1–30.
- Goldstein, Miriam. 2010. “Judeo-Arabic Versions of Toledot Yeshu.” *Ginzei Qedem* 6: 9–42.
- Habshush, Hayyim. 1939. *Masot Habshush*. Tel Aviv: A. J. Stybel.
- Hallum, Bink. 2021. “New Light on Early Arabic awfāq Literature.” In *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, edited by Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya, 57–161. Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Hamuy, Avraham. 1972. *Sefer Nifla'im Maasecha*. Jerusalem: Baqal.
- Harari, Yuval. 2007. “Jewish Incantation Plates in Modern Times: From the Muslim Sphere to Israel.” *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 110: 55–78.

- Harari, Yuval. 2018. "Wonders and Sorceries in Yeruham: A Magical-Political Rashomon." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 31: 69–91.
- Malkiel, David. 2021. *Strangers in Yemen: Travel and Cultural Encounter among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Colonial Era*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Melvin-Koushki, Matthew. 2017. "Introduction: De-orienting the Study of Islamicate Occultism." *Arabica* 64: 287–95.
- Messik, Brinkley. 1996. *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Moore, Taylor M. 2020. "Superstitious Women: Race, Magic, and Medicine in Egypt (1875–1950)." PhD diss., Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey.
- Muchawsky-Schnapper, Ester. 1988. "Symbolic Decorations for a Woman after Childbirth in Saḥā." *Israel Museum Journal* 7: 61–74.
- Muchawsky-Schnapper, Ester. 2000. *The Yemenites: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Culture*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum.
- Myntti, Cynthia. 1990. "Notes on Mystical Healers in the Hugariyyah." *Arabian Studies* 8: 171–76.
- Noy, Amos. 2017. *Experts or Witnesses: Jewish Intelligentsia from Jerusalem and the Levant in the Beginning of the 20th Century*. Tel-Aviv: Resling. [Hebrew]
- Porter, Venetia, Liana Saif, and Emilie Savage-Smith. 2017. "Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans and Magic." In *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, 521–57. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.
- Qāfīḥ, Yosef. 1978. *Halikhot Teman: Hayyey ha-Yehudim be-Sanaa u-bnoteyha (Jewish Life in Saḥā' and its Surroundings)*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute.
- Ransom, Marjorie. 2014. *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni Jewelry*. New York: American University in Cairo Press.
- Raṣābī, Yishaq. 1999. *Shulhan Aruch Hamequtzar: Yore De'ah (Part 1)*. Bnei Brak, ISR.: Peulat Tzadiq.
- Regourd, Anne. 2011. "Images de djinns et exorcisme dans le Mandal al-Sulaimani." In *Images et magie: Picatrix entre Orient et Occident*, edited by Jean-Patrice Boudet, Anna Caiozzo, and Nicolas Weill-Parot, 253–94. Paris: Champion, Sciences, techniques et civilisations du Moyen Âge à l'aube des Lumières.
- Regourd, Anne. 2022. "A Twentieth-Century Manuscript of the Kitāb al-Mandal al-Sulaymānī (Ar. ies 286, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia): Texts on Practices & Texts in Practices." In *Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context*, edited by Léon Buskens and Nathal M. Dessing, 47–77. Leiden: Brill.
- Sabar, Shalom. 2010. "From Sacred Symbol to Key Ring: The Hamsa in Jewish and Israeli Societies." In *Jews at Home: The Domestication of Identity*, edited by Simon J. Bronner, 140–162. Oxford, UK: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

- Sapir, Yaakov. 1945. *Sefer Masa Teman (Even Sapir)*. Tel Aviv: Levin Epstein.
- Sassoon, David S. 1906. "An Autograph Letter of a Pseudo-Messiah." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 19: 162–67.
- Schrire, Theodore. 1966. *Hebrew Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Schwartz, Dov. 1998. "Magic, Experimental Science and Scientific Method in Maimonides' Teachings." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 14: 25–45.
- Shaked, Shaul. 1999. "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '... and By the Name of Jesus ...'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6: 309–19.
- Shaked, Shaul. 2000. "Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam: Theoretical Attitudes and Genres." In *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications and Interactions: Essays in Honor of W. M. Brinner*, edited by Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren, 97–109. Leiden: Brill.
- Suberi, Yosef. 2002. *Sefer Emet ve-Emuna*. Ramat Gan, ISR.
- Tobi, Yosef. 1989. "Medical Books of Yemenite Jewry." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 11: 102–120. [Hebrew]
- Wasserstrom, Steven M. (2005). "The Unwritten Chapter: Notes Towards a Social and Religious History of Geniza Magic." In *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, edited by Shaul Shaked 269–93. Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Yavneeli, Shemuel. 1952. *A Voyage to Yemen*. Tel Aviv: Hapoel Hatzair. [Hebrew]
- Zinger, Nimrod. 2017. *Ba'al Shem and the Doctor: Medicine and Magic Among German Jews in the Early Modern Period*. Haifa, ISR: Haifa University Press. [Hebrew]