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TĀSIT ER-RADJFEH (FEAR CUP)

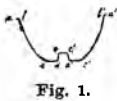
T. CANAAN (Dr. Med.)

(JERUSALEM)

TO the best of my knowledge, this very interesting subject has not as yet been described by any but the writer in his *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel*.¹ But as the size of that book did not allow a minute description, I take this opportunity to make a thorough study of this form of Oriental superstition. It really needs a good deal of hard work and investigation to understand every superstitious detail connected with the fear-cup, *tāsit er-radjfeh*, for it is interwoven with all sorts of ideas.

Let us first consider the external form of the cup. It is generally made of copper, very seldom of silver. The latter metal I have seen only in one case out of the 25 cups that I have examined. The study of these 25 forms the basis of this study. The new cups have a yellow colour, while the old ones are blackish with a slight red tinge.

Most of these bowls have the form of a cup with a round elevation in the bottom.² Fig. 1. illustrates a transverse section of the usual form, where *a-b* and *a'-b'* represent the projecting rim, found in 21 out of the 25 samples. The widest rim measured 9 mm, while the smallest was 1 mm. From a study of the various rims I derive the following two conclusions:



1. The larger the vessel, the smaller the rim
2. The newly manufactured cups possess comparatively wide rims. Only in one case have I noticed that the rim was turned in.

¹ Hamburg (Friedrichsen), 1914, pp. XII and 153 (see pp. 66 and 67).

² It very much resembles *al-kās*, which lies between *el-Aqsā* and the mosque of Omar.

The width of the cup at its mouth, i. e., $a-a'$ was in the new cases 13, 25—15 cm and in the old vessels 16, 25—20,25 cm.

The curve of $b-c$ (and $b'-c'$), running obliquely inward and downward, makes the depth of the cup. This is generally 3—5 cm. In some vessels we observe that it is made of two elements, the upper part perpendicular to half the depth and the lower part a curve with its concave side inward.

There is a space $c-d$ ($c'-d'$) in most cases. We rarely find that c coincides with d (c' with d') depriving the cup of its broad bottom. In some cases, especially in the old ones, c projects inwards in a continuous ridge.

The elevation $d-e$ ($d'-e'$) which is found in all cases, may be at times rudimentary. The highest measured 4,30 cm, i. e. only 0,7 cm below the rim. Generally there is on the summit of this small elevation a circular plane $e-e'$, which is rarely transformed into a cone.

In most of the new examples of this magic cup we find a small shallow vessel screwed on top of this small elevation; the rim of this rudimentary cup is broad and has many holes, from which small elongated metal pieces hang down. The screw holding both together projects to some height, cf. Fig. 2. In modern vessels where this second cup is not found, the metal pieces hang down in one bunch from the rim $a-b$. It is curious that these pieces are met with only in the new forms.



Fig. 2.

Beside this form we meet with others, which resemble wide shallow tea-cups or plates.¹ These forms are met only in the old examples.

Turning to the inscriptions we must study: (1) the places where they are found; and (2) the meaning of the writing. The inner walls of all cups and the outer ones of the old type are covered with engravings. The second small cup is devoid of all such signs. In most cases where the cup had the usual form nothing was engraved on the lower surface $c-d-e$ — $c'-d'-e'$, even when the outer side $a-b-c$ and $a'-b'-c'$ were inscribed. The small metal pieces which hang down from the newer cups show scratches which imitate writing.

¹ The plate forms are the older ones. Although they are pretty shallow they have been used.

These writings or figures run in lines or are inscribed in cartouches.¹ The last are quadrangular, triangular, circular or



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

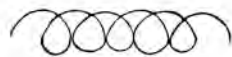


Fig. 7.

have some other outline. The cartouches in Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 are typical in design.

As the writing is composed of so many characteristic elements, I think it better to try to describe each category according to the following classification:

1. Legible writing, which is composed of
 - a) Well connected sentences
 - b) Single words.
2. Magic formulas, made of
 - a) Well-known magic symbols
 - b) Inexplicable signs
 - c) Letters
 - d) Numbers.
3. Pictures.

Ad 1. Most of the sentences with which I met were verses from the *Qorân*. The following verses were used: *Sûrah XXXVII*, 1—7; *S. II*, 250; *S. LXXXIV*, 1—4; *Sûrahs I*, *CXIII* and *CXIV*. In analyzing the text of the different verses I found that they belong to one of the following categories:

1. Praise of the almighty, omniscient God
2. Pleading for help (*S. LXXXIV*, *CXIII* and *CXIV*).

The *âyatu 'l-kursî* (*II*, 250)² plays, as in many other *hidjâbat*, a

¹ I have been unable to find any explanation for the cartouches, so I think they have more ornamental than superstitious character.

² *Sûrah II*, 250: God! there is no God but him, the living, the self-subsisting; neither sleep nor slumber seizeth him; to him belongeth whatsoever is in heaven, and on earth. Who is he that can intercede with him, but through his good pleasure? He knoweth what is past, and that which is to come unto them. and they shall not comprehend anything of his knowledge, but so far as he pleaseth. His throne is extended over heaven and earth and the preservation of both is no burden unto him.

The other passages run as follows:

S. XXXVII, 1—7: In the name of the most merciful God! By the angels who rank themselves in order; and by those who drive forward and dispel

great rôle, and is believed to possess special power in curing disease. But aside from these verses of the Holy Book we find in a few (so in no. 25) the description of all diseases which are cured by this cup. Thus we read in one: "With God's permission this rare cup will cure from all poisons, and it contains many approved virtues. It is (good) for bites of the serpent, the scorpion, for fever . . . , for a women in labour, a stubborn horse, rabies, colic, abdominal pain, *šaqîqah*,¹ enlarged spleen, strength, . . . blood, to counteract charms, evil eye, (good) sight, conjunctivitis, inflammations, gases, (bad) spirits, haemorrhoids and all other ailments."²

the clouds; and by those who read the *Qorân* for an admonition; verily your God is one: the Lord of heaven and earth and of whatever is between them, and the Lord of the east. We have adorned the lower heaven with the ornament of the stars, and we have placed therein a guard, against every rebellious devil.

- S. LXXXIV, 1—4: In the name . . . when the heaven shall be rent asunder and shall obey its Lord, and shall be capable thereof, and when the earth shall be stretched out, and shall cast forth that which is therein and shall remain empty, and shall obey its Lord.
- S. I. In the . . . Praise be to God the Lord of all creatures, the most merciful, the king of the day of judgement. Thee do we worship and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious, not of those against thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray.
- S. CXIII In the . . . Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the daybreak, that he may deliver me from the mischief of those things which he has created; and from the mischief of the night when it cometh on; and from the mischief of women blowing on knots; and from the mischief of the envious, when he envieth.
- S. CXIV: Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of men, the king of men, the God of men, that he may deliver me from the mischief of the whisperer who slyly withdraweth, who whispereth evil suggestions into the breasts of men; from genii and men.

All translations of these verses are taken from *Salé*.

¹ The better known name of this female demon is *qarîneh*.

² وبإذن الله تعالى تشفي هذه الطاسة النادرة من السموم كلها وقد جمع فيها منافع صعبة وهي للسعة الحية والعقرب والحما . . . للملقة والغرس المعلقة للكلب وللمغص وللقولنج للشقيقة للطحال والقوة . . . الدم ولابطال السحر والمعين والنظر والمرمد والنزلة والرياح والارواح والبواسير للخلط البارد ولسائر العلل.

In the place of the dots were words which could not be deciphered since they were effaced.

Representing the second part of this category, single words having no connection with each other, we meet:

1. The names of the Holy Mohammedan Family
2. The names of angels
3. Some of the beautiful names of God.

By the names of the Holy Mohammedan Family,¹ an expression which I have coined, I mean the five members of the Prophet's family, which are always combined with the name of God. This combination of the Prophet (called also *al-muṣṭafā*, i. e. "the chosen"), his son-in-law 'Alī (called also *al-murṭadā*, "the one with whom God is pleased"), his wife *Fāṭmeh* (the daughter of Mohammed) and her two sons (*Hasan* and *Husēn*) comes very often in magic formulas, and it is beautifully expressed in the following verse, which may be seen hanging in many a Mohammedan house: "I have five with which to quench the heat of pestilence — the Chosen, the Pleased, their two sons and *Fāṭimah*".²

Among the angel names those of the four angels of praise: *Djubrā'il*, *Mihā'il*, *Isrāf'il* and *'Uzrā'il* are mostly used. These four angels play a very important rôle in Palestinian superstition.³

Beside the name of God, *Allah*, which is used very frequently, we meet with some of the beautiful names of God (*asāmī Allāh el-husnā*), such as: O Judge (*yâ daiyân*), O Proof — (*yâ burhân*), O Benefactor (*yâ mannân*), O Merciful (*yâ ḥannân*), etc.⁴

In very exceptional cases one may find other words, such as *'idjil*, "calf"; *nâr*, "fire," etc, as will be explained later on.⁵ In one vessel the word *as-sâ'ah*, "the hour" is repeated very often. This word is used by every sorcerer when trying to drive a demon from a suffering patient. He is generally heard saying, while he is massaging or beating the affected parts of the body of the patient,

¹ This name was already used in *Aberglaube*, p. 66, note 2.

² *Lî ḥamsatun atfi bihâ ḥarra l-wabâ'i l-ḥāṭimah al-murṭadā wal-muṣṭafā wabnāhumā wal-fāṭimah.*

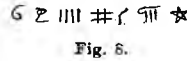
³ These angels play a very important rôle in magic and in talismans.

⁴ In different places of the Qorân we meet with the expression *al-asmâ' ul-husnâ* (or *asāmī Allāh 'l-husnâ*). These names are well-known and it is said that they are 99. They represent the honorific adjectives. Doutté gives in his book *Magie et Religion* two lists, one with 102 and the other with 99 names. During a funeral we hear the sheiks repeat these names.

⁵ I have not met these expressions in other formulas.

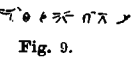
“Go out (i. e. the demon) from his hand this hour, this hour, this hour.”¹

Ad 2. Every magic formula and figure which may be met with in the *hidjābāt* may be found in these cups. Many a figure or sign can not be deciphered, while others are well known and have already been described by me in *Aberglaube*. To the latter belong certain signs which may be found together or scattered singly here and there (Fig. 8).

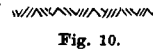


A square, subdivided into 64 small squares, where every small one contains one of these signs (which in turn are repeated 8 times) is known as the “seal of God” and is believed to be one of the most effective formulas.

In *tāsīt er-radjfeh* we never meet with this complete seal. Only one line is generally found. At the same time every one of these signs has its own meaning. Some signs which I can not explain are grouped in Fig. 9.



It is curious to see how often nothing but scratches of parallel and oblique lines are engraved (Fig. 10).



The following were the most common letters:

الم · الر · المر · ح · ص · ق · ك ه ي ع ص · ط · ط · س · م · ي · س · ن

All these letters are taken from the Qorân. They head 29 sūrahs, and are taken from *al-hurūf en-nūrānīyeh* (the letters of light, as opp. to *al-hurūf ez-ḡulmānīyeh*, the letters of darkness).²

We find that:

- ص · ق · ن head three sūrahs
- ح · م · ط · س · ي · س are composed of two letters
- الم · الر · ط · س · م are composed of three letters
- المر is composed of four letters
- ك ه ي ع ص is composed of five letters.

The words are generally written with disconnected letters. These mysterious letters and words, which are believed to conceal profound mysteries, the certain understanding of which has not been

¹ *Uhrudj min yadihi hadihi 's-sā'ah, as-sā'ah, as-sā'ah.*

² A thorough understanding of the powers, classification, meaning and use of the letters is very difficult. In *Aberglaube* and *Magie et Religion* an attempt to classify them is made.

communicated to any mortal, the Prophet excepted, are much used in magic.

Many a cup contains numbers which are believed to have a special magic power. In most cases it is difficult to read or to explain these numbers, as they stand directly after each other, so that it is impossible to say which belong together. In one case I saw two squares divided through two horizontal and two parallel vertical lines into nine



Fig. 11. small squares, each containing a number from one to nine (Fig. 11). I could not find the exact meaning of this seal (*hâtim*). Last but not least we come across figures belonging to one of the following classes:

1. Geometrical figures
2. Representations of animals
3. Representations of human beings.

1. I do not intend to describe the cartouches already mentioned, nor the figures used directly for magical purposes, but only such as have partly originated from the latter and show at present a comp-



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

licated form, and such as may be the corruption of animal representations. One cup showed at *e-é* a six-pointed star¹ in which every two parallel lines were prolonged and then joined again by two oblique lines (Fig. 12). No inscription was found in this figure. Other figures may be seen in Figs. 13 and 14.

2. Figures representing animals are either such as stand for the signs of the zodiac, or which portray venomous animals. A beautiful example of the first, which is in my possession, shows the twelve signs of the zodiac, well finished. They are engraved on the broad margin of the shallow plate—as in the case of the *tâseh*. Representations of the second class show generally a serpent or a scorpion.

3. In two cases only out of the 25 which I have analyzed have

¹ The six-pointed star may also be found with five points. It is supposed to be the magic seal of King Solomon.

I found human figures engraved upon them. They were scratched in a very primitive way. Both cases were of the plate form.

Three cups which belong to the same category and show very curious combinations have a special interest and deserve to be described. Two of them have the plate, the third the cup form. All three have twelve circles on the inner side, and all exhibit the same idea. The cup which shows this best has in these circles the figures of the signs of the zodiac. These figures were beautifully engraved, and can be still well distinguished. The second plate shows magical formulas in these circles, while in the third, Qorânic verses fill the spaces. In the first two, two human figures can be seen in the middle of each plate. They are very badly represented, and it took time and study to discover what they meant. In the second plate one of these figures was signed with *al-'idjil* (the calf) written twice in the figure itself, the other representation was marked also twice with the word *an-nâr* (the fire). These two words gave me the clue to the explanation, which was afterwards verified by several authorities. "Calf" stands for the moon, and "fire" for the sun. *Al-'idjil* and *al-qamar* (the moon) are both masculine in the Arabic language, and the human figure on which *al-'idjil* is written, is represented with bushy hair. *An-nâr* and *aš-šams* are both feminine and the figure has no hair.

Beside these engravings very little can be deciphered. The word "calf" is repeated on the second plate nine times, while the word "fire" is mentioned only twice.

The explanation of these bowls leads us to the astrological belief in the stars which plays so important a rôle in Oriental life. It is thought that every one has a special constellation—the one which governed the month when he was born—which rules his life. The conjunction of this with other signs or planets brings him good or bad times. One must always know his own stars. But as this is difficult, he drinks in case of sickness or fright from this cup, which has the twelve signs, among which his constellation is surely found. But at the same time the water comes in contact with the two most important planets, sun and moon. This belief in the stars explains different expressions used in the Palestinian dialect; *nidjmuh d'if* (his star is weak) or *tal'uh d'if* (his ascension is weak) are used for people who are easily frightened, or who have many misfortunes.

In conclusion we must still ask ourselves:

1. What is the origin of this cup?
2. How is it used?
3. For what ailments is it used?

A legend tells us the following charming fairy tale about the origin of this wonderful cup. The good djinn were in the habit of using it when taking their bath. Once upon a time they forgot it on the side of a spring. A human being who chanced to pass the way happened to find it. In a short time the wonderful properties of this vessel were discovered. Many duplicates were made and every one manifested the same properties.

This fable shows that it is not the metal itself, but the writing thereupon which has the powerful effect. This is a fundamental element in Oriental superstition. The cure comes from the Qorân verses, names of God and the angels, from the planets, stars and magic formulas. This is the reason why the vessel is held in honour and is handled with reverence. The *tâsit er-radjfeh* used never to be touched except by ritually clean persons. If it is needed at once and the person has no time to undergo the prescribed washings a clean piece of cloth is wrapped about the hand and the vessel is thus handled. Some believe that such a cup will lose some of its power if exposed to the bright sunshine. The greater number of the new cups are brought by the pilgrims from Mekka; the present of one of them is considered a very valuable gift and is much appreciated.

Our bowl is used in the first place, as its name denotes, against the effects of fear. The Arabic names for "fear" are *hêfeh*, *haddah* and *radjfeh*, but the cup bears only the name of the last. It is a wide spread belief that fear—especially a sudden shock—is followed by evil after-effects: fever, nervous fits, etc. This is explained by the sudden change of the blood circulation. If a person needs this wonderful bowl and does not possess it, he tries to get it from a friend or a neighbour. Generally nobody lends his vessel without a mortgage, which is usually not less than one pound, or a piece of jewellery of this value.

This wonderful cup used to be employed also against other diseases, especially against the bites of venomous animals. At present this custom has nearly died out.

The frightened person must drink water from this vessel, which cures him through the power of the holy writings. Therefore all water which is not drunk, is thrown in a clean place. The belief in this *tāseh* is deeply rooted among the Palestinians, mainly among the Mohamedans of the cities. But I have found many Christians who believe in it, and more than one cup which was examined by me came from a Christian home.