

# El Prezente

## Studies in Sephardic Culture

### Magic and Folk Medicine

Editors: Tamar Alexander • Yaakov Bentolila • Eliezer Papo  
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# Table of Contents

## Part I: English, Spanish, French

<b>English Preface</b>	1
<b>Tamar Alexander, Eliezer Papo</b> El enkanto de la majia – Research into Sephardic Magic: History, Trends and Topics	9
<b><i>History &amp; Society:</i></b>	33
<b>Meritxell Blasco Orellana</b> Magia médica o medicina mágica en los manuscritos hebreos medievales	35
<b>Gérard Nahon</b> De Safed à Amsterdam, <i>Nishmat Hayyim</i> de Menasseh ben Israël (1651)	55
<b>José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim</b> “Murdering Doctors” in Portugal (XVI-XVII Centuries): The Accusation of a Revenge	81
<b><i>Literature:</i></b>	101
<b>Peter Sh. Lehnardt</b> A Scent of an Apple and the Spirit of Andalusian Judaism A Reevaluation of the Cataluniyan connection in the transmission of the pseudo-Aristotelian tractate De pomo	103
<b>Yitzhak Ben-Mordechai</b> The Magic of Inner Healing in Aaron Appelfeld’s <i>And the Rage Is Not Yet Over</i>	127
<b>Rachel Ben-Cnaan, Ravit Raufman</b> Cursed by Magic Spell, Cured by Silence: a Discussion on the Functions of Speech and Silence in the Sephardic Version “The Sister Who Turned Her Brothers into Goats” and Its Grimm Parallel “The Twelve Brothers”	139

<b><i>Material Culture:</i></b>	159
<b>Vuk Dautović</b>	
Unknown Collection of Amulets from Belgrade	161
List of Participants	187
Guidelines for preparing a Manuscript for Publication	193
<b>Part II: Hebrew</b>	
<b>Hebrew Preface</b>	5*
<b>Yuval Harari</b>	
Jewish Magic: An Annotated Overview	13*
<b><i>History &amp; Society:</i></b>	33*
<b>Alisa Meyuhas Ginio</b>	
The Jewish-Spanish physician according to the <i>Fortalitium fidei</i> (Fortress of Faith) by Alonso de Espina (c. 1458-1464)	89*
<b><i>Literature:</i></b>	101*
<b>Haviva Ishay</b>	
The Practice of Lovesickness and its Representations in Medieval Hebrew Poetry	103*
<b>Rachel Saba-Wolfe</b>	
“Un ruah ke entro en una mosa”: Povertry and Morality in Spirit Tales by Rabbi Eliyahu Ha-Cohen Ha-Itamari	121*
<b>Eli Shai</b>	
Reflections of the Magical – Concerning the Humble Magic Book: Between the Lines and Between the Generations, on the distance between Yaakov and Abraham B. Yehoshua	161*
<b><i>Material Culture:</i></b>	183*
<b>Naama Vilozny</b>	
Bound you should be forever: Binding Imagery of Jewish Incantation Bowls from Babylonia	185*

# Unknown Collection of Amulets from Belgrade

Vuk Dautović

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

The core of the contemporary collection of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade consists of Hinko Lederer's legacy. Among various artifacts he donated, there were amulets of gold, silver, and other materials, which were shown at the exhibition that opened Lederer's memorial room for museum visitors in May 1976.<sup>1</sup> The collection was catalogued soon afterwards<sup>2</sup> and on that occasion amulets were classified as applied art. Silver and golden amulets were given numbers 35 to 48 in that section, while those of semi-precious gems and iron were listed from 50 to 55, making the overall total count twenty amulets. Later on, five artifacts were added to this collection, namely, one Yemenite *kutub* containing a parchment scroll, as well as three other *kutubs* and one little *yad*. The pieces noted represent the collection of amulets in the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

Artifacts from this collection can be classified into three groups. The first is made up of artistically engraved and ornamented amulet lockets, known as "*kutubs*", into which inscribed parchments are inserted. One of them contains a very valuable parchment with a previously unpublished text. The second consists of plates with Hebrew inscriptions, in the form of jewelry. The remaining artifacts in the collection are decorative objects whose symbolic form may include prophylactic features. Since they were previously included in the collection of amulets, they are not omitted in this article.

- 1 *The Jewish Review* 27 no. 5-6 (May-June 1976), Belgrade, pp. 21-24. (*Jevrejski Pregled* 27, Br. 5-6 (God. Maj-Jun 1976), Beograd.
- 2 Hedviga Boshkovich, *The Legacy of Hinko Lederer, Habilitation Work*, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade 1978 (Hedviga Bošković, *Legat Hinka Lederera, Habilitacioni Rad*, Jevrejski Istorijski muzej, Beograd 1978).

First of all, the group of *kutubs* will be described together with the inscribed parchment, which is the only amulet written on parchment. Secondly, amulets in the form of jewelry will be described. They all contain Hebrew inscriptions, which was a sufficient reason in the view of previous studies to consider these artifacts prophylactic, although some of them bear completely profane and private texts. These will be followed by two ovoid platelets intended to protect the household. Finally, there will be a few words about the artifacts made of stone and amber, and the study will end with two symbolic pendants.

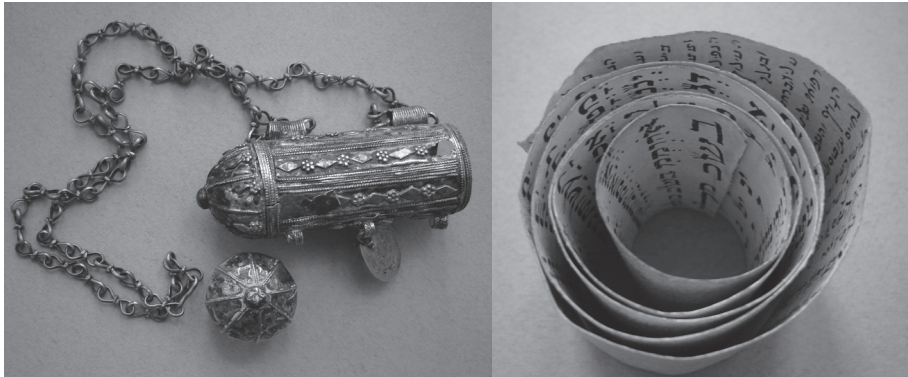
This collection stemmed from Hinko Lederer's passion for collecting and the efforts of Jewish Historical Museum to gather artifacts which reflect the culture of Belgrade Jewry in an appropriate and representative way. For many of these artifacts, origin and history are unknown. Still, it is clear at first glance that this collection of amulets fails to fill in many of the gaps in Jewish studies of the Balkan region, since it remains silent about many details of habits and customs of Balkan Jewry. This material, however, is in many ways heterogeneous, and it has been in the focus of public interest ever since the museum was established because of its unfamiliar and exotic character.

Amulets have been displayed many times throughout Yugoslavia, but no attempts to decipher them have been made, neither in a catalogue nor in other publications dedicated to Jewish heritage.<sup>3</sup> The usual note concerning them was only that they contain inscriptions with unknown meaning. Therefore, a survey of this material, offered to the scientific public for the first time, will reveal the actual character of the Jewish museum collection. It is to be hoped that this will open the door to further research which can lead to a better and more detailed presentation of this valuable material.<sup>4</sup>

(Photo No. 1) The most precious of all amulet cases is a *kutub* which belongs to Yemenite tradition, reliably identified as an example of *Baddihy* style, named after a family that created and practiced it. Characteristic of this style is application of filigree decorations in the shape of flowers, circles, squares, and granules on a

3 *Jews on the Yugoslavian soil*, "Museum space", Zagreb, 1988, exhibition catalogue (*Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije*, grupa autora, Muzejski prostor, Zagreb, 1988, katalog izložbe).

4 I owe an immense gratitude to dr Eliezer Papo, without whose help and patience translation and deciphering wouldn't be possible, as well as to dr Mirijam Rajner for help with collecting the needed bibliography.



Pho. No. 1: A Kutub in Baddihy style of Yemenite origin from XIX century and its parchment

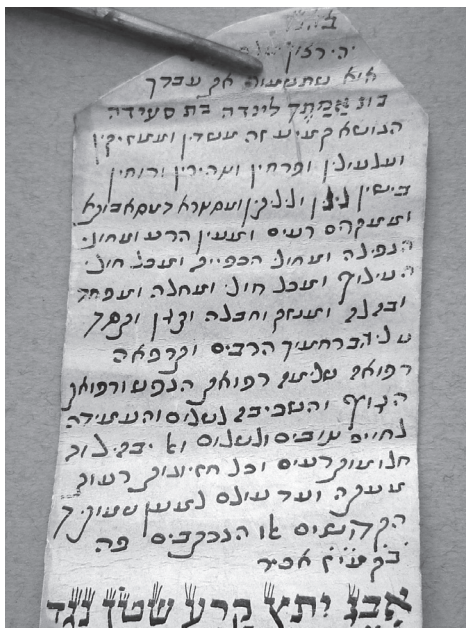
smooth silver background. The sign embedded into its surface is the usual one used by Jewish jewelers in Yemen.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Esther Van Praag described a *kutub* of the same kind in her survey about Yemenite goldsmith works. How this artifact reached the Jewish Historical museum is unknown, but it is very important to stress that it contains a parchment with a prophylactic text.<sup>6</sup>

(Photo No. 2) The text is divided in two parts. The first one is written in *Solitreo* or *Haci Kulmus* script, in 19 lines. The translation of the text follows:

Thy will be done before Thy face our God and God of our fathers to help your servant daughter of your servant Linda daughter of Saida who wears this amulet against evil spirits and those who do evil, against fears, myriads of lilin and lilitin, evil visits, against impurities, malignant events and evil eye, against every illness and pests and against fear and panic, any harm or damage, protect her and spread above her the tent of Thy great mercy and heal her with a complete healing of soul and healing of body and let her lie in peace and place her on her feet on a good life and peace and do not let her be disturbed by nightmares and various evil visions from now unto forever in the power of these Thy holy names which are written in this amulet Amen let Thy will so be done.

5 Esther van Praag, "Introduction to Jewish Silversmiths in Yemen before Operation 'On Eagles Wings'", *Tema* 10 (2007); and Esther van Praag, *Introduction to the world of old silver jewellery from the Land of the Queen of Sheba*, [http://www.organicafrikanredtea.com/images/yemen\\_jewel\\_en.pdf](http://www.organicafrikanredtea.com/images/yemen_jewel_en.pdf), p. 17; p. 34.

6 It was registered under inventory number: JIM 79. The strip of the parchment is in 64.5 x 4.8 cm format.



Pho. No. 2: The devotional text from the parchment Inv. No. 79. Jewish Historical museum, Belgrade

The second part of the text is written in *Stam* script and contains 62 lines. The prophylactic text from which the protective power stems traditionally contains the names of God, notarikons of certain Psalms as well as names of archangels and angels and special kabbalistic formulae.

Written in the first, second, and third line through to its last word, *Anaqtam*, is God's name consisting of 42 letters. This name was first recorded as early as the first century and it is very old. It consists of seven groups of letters with six letters in each of them. A well-known mystic from the first century, Rabbi Nehunyah ben Hakana, linked this name with the composition of the prayer *Ana beKo'ah*, which consists of 42 words from whose initial letters—using a cabbalistic method of notarikon—the 42-letter Name was produced. This name has been known since the tannaitic period, and it was mentioned in the Talmud (Kiddushin 71a) and in Rashi's commentary to it.<sup>7</sup> Along with the name of *Anaktam*, from the previous line, three more names are given in the fourth line: *Pastam*, *Paspasim*, *Deyonisim*, which compose the 22-Letter

7 Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets, Their Decipherment and Interpretation*, New York 1982, pp. 97-98.



Name of God whose origin is unknown. It is also mentioned in the New Year's Eve service during the reciting of the Priestly Blessing, *Birkat Kohanim*. Rabbi Moses Cordovero (1522-1570) believed that the 22-letter Name was created from the initial twenty-two letters of the Priestly Blessing by using five different methods of the Kabbalistic discipline Temurah with which he successfully derived and proved their transformation.<sup>8</sup>

Written from the fifth to the twenty-first line was the 72-letter Name of God, which consists of seventy-two syllables, with each syllable containing three letters. The origin of this name is well-known. It was derived from the Torah, from the Exodus 14:19-21. Every one of these three verses consists of seventy-two letters. The first letter of the first verse, the last of the second verse and the first letter of the third verse constitute the first syllable of the name. The second letter of the first verse, the next to last of the second verse, and the second letter of the third verse constitute the second syllable of the name, and in the same manner the rest of the syllables up to the seventy-second syllable of the Holy Name were derived. With each syllable consisting of three letters, there are a total 216 letter. This name was not used frequently, especially because of its length, and was used for any simple application. In mystical books it was usually called *Shem Vayissa Vayet*.<sup>9</sup> After the invocation of the 42-letter, 22-letter, and 72-letter Names of God, a confirmation follows *BSHKMLV* through a notarikon of the passage: *Barux shem kevodo malxuto le'olam va'ed* (Blessed be His glorious sovereign Name, forever and ever).<sup>10</sup> This passage is recited silently after the prayer *Ana beKo'ah* and after it the name *Axazharirion* follows. Line 23 contains a notarikon *XTZ MShTDTYR ShWDNY*, and in the following line are the initials of the verses of Psalm 91:10, used against epilepsy.<sup>11</sup> The third word is a notarikon of the last words of eleventh verse of Psalm 91.<sup>12</sup> *For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*

8 Ibid., p. 97.

9 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, pp. 98-99.

10 Rabbi Isak Asijel, *Sidur; Prayer book, Children of Zion's Prayer*, Belgrade, 5765 [2005], p. 405 (Rabin Isak Asijel, *Sidur; Molitvenik, Molitva dece Siona*, Beograd, godina 5765 [2005]).

11 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 133.

12 E. Davis and D. A. Frankel, 1995, p. 189, citation according to the article by Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three Amulets in Copenhagen*, *Verbum et Calamus*, Helsinki 2004.

In line 25, a name *Metatron nortateM* is written, the name of an angel and the mirror reflection of the same name. He is one of the first angels and according to his importance only Sandalphon can match him. When Enoch was transported to heaven he became one of the archangels, Metatron. He is the guardian angel of Israel and there are seventy more names recorded by Rabbi Akiva, in his work *Otiot*.<sup>13</sup> According to the Talmud and Targum, Metatron connects the human and the divine. Kabbalists believe that he led the people of Israel through the desert after the exodus from Egypt. His name is a Jewish metonymy for the expression “little JHVH” as H. Odenberg believes. In the *Zohar*, he was mentioned as the staff of Moses whose one side gives life and the other death.<sup>14</sup> In line 26, there is first *JNNGPT*, and after the word *Mešamšit* follows, which stems from the Lurian Kabbala and the teaching of containment according to which God is All-pervasive so the existence of any creature or thing is possible only if the space for it was created by the Almighty. That was accomplished by containment, *Šimšum*, the word from which *Mešamšit* was derived. The next line, the twenty-seventh, starts with the unreadable abbreviation *DGZ BNT Qastiel*, and after that the name of the angel *Qastiel* (Castiel), who is mentioned as the angel ruling Thursday.<sup>15</sup> In the next line there is mention of the angels Ahaviel and Samṭuria. After that written in line 29 is *Lahaviel*, *N<sup>c</sup>URYRON*, Lahabiel is mentioned as an angel of fire in Schrire’s work, too. Lahabiel is an angel who is summoned to dispel evil spirits together with Faniel, Rahabiel, Ariel, and others. His name is found on amulets.<sup>16</sup>

Line 30 starts with the name of the angel *Ṭaṭṭafyah* and ends with the abbreviation *RHŠ TMF*. *Ṭaṭṭafyah* is one of the seventeen names for the angel Metatron which appear in fourth-century literature. His name consists of the first two letters of sixty-ninth, seventieth, and seventy-sixth verses of Psalm 119.<sup>17</sup>

In line 31 first come *Roṭa* and then the notarikon *BWXW* and at the end *Šurṭaq*. *Rota* is used as a name of a plant which protects against plague and was used for protective

13 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 109.

14 Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Angels*, Belgrade 1996, pp. 206-208 (Gustav Dejvidson, *Rečnik anđela*, Beograd 1996).

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 245-248.

16 Reginald Campbell Thompson, *Semitic Magic, Its Origins and Development*, London 1908, p. 161.

17 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 109.

purposes in general.<sup>18</sup> The notarikon *BWXW* can be derived from the 42-letter Name of God or from Genesis 9:13.<sup>19</sup>

Line 32 consists of the words *Azbogah* and *AGLA*, the first name being ancient, mentioned in fourth-century literature. *Azbogah* consists of six letters grouped in three pairs with each of them having the numerical value of eight. According to some, it is the wrapper of the seventh heaven and thus it represents the eighth. *Sefer Raziel* lists it as one of the God's Names. It is related to *Shem ha-Sheminiut* and is also found in *Heikhalot* literature. The name is mentioned during the New Year's Eve synagogue service. *AGLA* is a notarikon of the words *Ata Gibor Leolam Adonai* (You are forever powerful, O Lord). This phrase appears in the second blessing of the *Amidah*. Moreover, in German cities during medieval times this word was considered to be a protection from fire and it was translated as: *Almach-tiger Gott Losch Aus*.<sup>20</sup>

After this in line 33 it is written *Asya Rafael ANRNL*, the last word being a notarikon from the Numbers 12:13.<sup>21</sup> This line states: *Asja, Rafael, And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee*.<sup>22</sup> Rafael is an archangel savior; he gave *Sefer Raziel* to Adam but later retrieved it and gave it to Noah. He has a healing role; he is a redeemer from illness who banished demons from Earth. He healed Abraham and lessened his pain after the circumcision and later he healed Jacob's wounded leg.<sup>23</sup> In the First Book of Enoch, Rafael is a guide to Sheol as well as one of the four angels of presence under whose jurisdiction are all illnesses and all injuries to men and children. According to Zohar I, Rabbi Aba says that Rafael is in charge of renewing the earth so as to enable men to live on it; also he heals from every illness.<sup>24</sup>

Line 34 is unreadable, *TX TT GWT TT KŞ*. In line 35 of the text there is mention of Itiel as the name of an angel and after it *ATLT*—a shortened form of the notarikon,

18 E. Davis & D. A. Frankel 1995. p. 46., citation according to the article by Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three amulets in Copenhagen*.

19 Theodor Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 176.

20 Theodor Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 121.

21 E. Davis & D. A. Frankel 1995. p. 174. citation according to the article by Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three amulets in Copenhagen*.

22 *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, introduction and notes Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, New York, 2008.

23 Theodor Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 110.

24 Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, pp. 245-248.

from Psalm 71:9:<sup>25</sup> “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth”.<sup>26</sup> Line 36 cannot be deciphered either, *WWŠ YLY MKS AQNB*. In line 37 the following is written: *Ben porat ʿale šor*. The first two and the last two verses were taken from the Jacob’s blessing to Joseph from Genesis 49:22; they were presented in mirror-writing. This verse is considered a protection from the evil eye.<sup>27</sup>

Line 38 begins with letters *NGF*, followed by *Sanwai*, *Sansanwai* and the first word in line 39 is *Semanglof*. These three angels are mentioned and written together as a protection from Lilith.<sup>28</sup> These angels were sent together to return Lilith, who ran away from Adam, to the shores of the Red Sea where she was disporting herself in the company of demons who wanted to pollute the waters and to whose children she gave birth by the thousands daily. She refused to obey these angels, but finally the Prophet Elijah and the Archangel Sandalphon made her return when, as a punishment, she had to accept that the names of these three angels written on a cradle or near a mother and a child become a complete protection against her maleficent intentions and thrusts. This mandate is valid even today and the names *Sanwai*, *Sansanwai* and *Semanglof* are often used in amulets which are meant to protect a mother and a child.<sup>29</sup> Syllables after the name of the angel *Semanglof* from line 39 to the end of line 44 represent a notarikon of the verses 1 to 9 in t Psalm 91. The four following lines, 45–49, are unrecognizable—45. *OŠML TAR WLYB*; 46. *KMyL LBD OK PTB*; 47. *RCŠWTT KWK*; 48. *AKYŠ YWCABA*; 49. *WAYAWB AKYR*, the last four letters are a notarikon of *Amen*, so *Thy will be done!* The next four lines, from line 50 to line 53, represent a magical square whose base is number 40, according to the numerical value of the letters. This is the number of days during which a woman has a status of *niddah* after she gives birth to a male child, which can be meaningful in making and using amulets for child protection.<sup>30</sup>

25 E. Davis & D. A. Frankel 1995. p. 175. citation according to the article by Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three amulets in Copenhagen*.

26 *The Bible*, introduction and notes Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, New York, 2008.

27 *The Bible*, Robert Carroll, Stephen Prickett, New York, 2008.

28 For more about the demon Lilith, see Jacques Bril, *Lilith ou la mere obscure*, Paris, 1984; see also: Raphael Patai, “Lilith”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 77, no. 306 (Oct.-Dec. 1964), pp. 295-314.

29 Theodor Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 118.

30 Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three Amulets in Copenhagen*, p. 94.

Line 54 line begins with the verses from Numbers 10:35, 36, which continue up to line 59. This citation from the Torah is written between two *Nun* letters facing each other, used here as brackets, and that is how the idea about a separate book inside the fourth book was developed. Thus, this section was independently named by some rabbinic authorities The Fifth Book of Moses. This is so because it is the only section in the Torah separated by brackets from the rest of the text and it is considered distinct, which makes it a special object of interest and interpretation of Torah scholars.<sup>31</sup> The following line 60 cannot be deciphered *YAYAWMMYWBHHWMQWYW*, and in line 61 there is *ATWMM* followed by *BŠKMLW*- a notariqon of the expression: Blessed be His glorious sovereign Name, forever and ever.

Helpful for the deciphering of this amulet was another scroll, which is held in the collection of Royal Library in Copenhagen, under the number of Cod. Heb. Add. 103. This amulet is of smaller dimensions than the Belgrade example (4.9 x 50 cm), which makes its text shorter, no more than 50 rows.<sup>32</sup> The scroll was published by E. M. Jansson, in *Three Amulets in Copenhagen*, Verbum et Calamus 99 (Helsinki 2004). Despite the different lengths, the Belgrade and Copenhagen texts are of similar content, which helps in revealing the origin of the Royal Library scroll. The parchment in the Jewish Historical Museum is preserved along with its original case, the *kutub*, thus enabling researchers to identify it as a product of a Yemenite *Baddihy* workshop from the end the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Since the Copenhagen parchment's *kutub* is lost, up to now it had only been presumed that it originated from the Eastern Mediterranean, without the possibility to determine a more precise location.<sup>34</sup> In the light of discovery of similarities between the two parchments, we can be sure that Copenhagen scroll also belongs to the Yemenite tradition noted from a similar period.

(Photo No. 3) Another interesting amulet from the Belgrade collection is a *kutub*, belonging to Ottoman cultural heritage, in the form of hexagonal cylinder. Both ends are cone-shaped, divided into six chunks, decorated by geometric ornamentation. Five of the six segments of this *kutub* are covered by Arabic inscriptions, while the sixth

31 This interpretation of a separate book was pinpointed by Dr. Eliezer Papo.

32 The scrolls were published by Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three amulets in Copenhagen*, Verbum et Calamus 99 (Helsinki 2004), pp. 94-98, 105.

33 Ron Garner, "The Maker's Mark in Yemeni Jewelry", *Ornament* 26, no. 4 (2003) pp. 38-41.

34 Eva-Maria Jansson, *Three Amulets in Copenhagen*, p. 94.



Pho. No. 3: An Ottoman XIX century amulet case, with the Quranic surah 112 (The Unity, Sincerity)

contains floral decorations and three rings. A very similar *kutub* appears in number 20 of T. Schrire's *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, and it repeats the form of the Belgrade amulet.

The Arabic inscription on the Belgrade example represents surah 112 of the Qur'an that concerns the Unity of God. It is believed that by repeating this surah by heart, a person gains equal merit as if he had read the third part of the whole Qur'an. This surah, along with 114 named "People", was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad simultaneously by Archangel Jibril. They are considered as one whole and were used by the Prophet on specific occasions.<sup>35</sup>

According to a legend, a Jew named Lubaid with the help of his daughters, charmed Muhammad by tying eleven knots, which Lubaid concealed in the well. The Prophet fell seriously, deathly ill, after which God sent a savior archangel to teach him aforementioned surahs and to reveal the place where magical rope was hidden.

35 Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, Belgrade 1988, pp. 82-84 (E. A. Волис Баџ, *Амајлије и Талисмани*, Београд 1988).



Muhammad sent Ali for a rope, and after it was brought, he spoke eleven verses—one above each knot—which is precisely the number of verses in both surahs. One by one, knots were magically untied, and the Prophet was cured.<sup>36</sup> The legend concerning the origin of the two surahs shows the strength of belief in the magical and irrational. It also testifies about the contemporary need to prove that magic of a new religion such as Islam, is superior and more efficient compared to Judaism and its ancient traditions on Middle Eastern soil.

(Photo No. 4) In addition, the Belgrade collection includes two cylindrical *kutubs* of Ottoman origin. The first one is attached to the chain adorned with coins. The locket is embossed with the motifs of vases, flowers, and shells, and reflects the influence of Turkish baroque. It does not contain parchment, a stamp or a sign, or any other symbol



Pho. No. 4: An amulet case with sheet metal coins, Ottoman Empire, XIX century

36 Ibid.



Pho. No. 5: A small kutub with pendants, Ottoman empire XIX century

which would clearly connect this artifact with Judaica. (Photo No. 5) The second *kutub* is of very small dimensions, with pendants attached and stamped with Arabic signs; it probably originates from the vast soil of the Ottoman Empire.

The coins which are found on amulets or *kutubs* were not just aimed at emphasizing the material well-being of those who wore them, but they also had a special status as talismans which have the ability to protect and preserve properties.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes they were just added but more often they were additionally reinforced and ornamented and then applied to the *kutubs*.<sup>38</sup>

An empty square casket ornamented with a Magen David is also part of the Jewish Museum's collection of amulets. Since the hexagram, either as a Magen David or as "The Seal of Solomon", was widespread, it is possible that this amulet casket was in use by a devotee of any of the three Abrahamic religions. Throughout the Balkans, Muslims and Jews carried written parchments in such boxes, while Christians could also insert into it other prophylactic material connected to local saints and their cults.

The hexagram which appears here is consensually related to King David and named after him; it is a symbol associated with Jewry in the last few hundreds of years and for the first time recorded as a symbol of Jews in 1527 on a tombstone in

37 Henry P. Maguire, *Approaches to Early Medieval Art*, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, "Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages", pp. 79-96.

38 Van Praag, *Introduction to the world of old silver jewellery*, p. 39.



Prague. There are no archeological or historical data that would relate the hexagram to David.<sup>39</sup> As a symbol which protects from demons, it can command spirits and has magical properties; it was associated with King Solomon and it is also called the Seal of Solomon.<sup>40</sup> The belief in its supernatural powers was spread through Europe via *Clavicula Solomonis Regis* writings that provided instructions for performing different operations by means of the Seal of Solomon.<sup>41</sup>

The purpose of these boxes, apart from protecting a parchment or a scroll from physical damage and defilement, was to keep them away from eyes of evil spirits, demons as well as men and women with the evil eye. It was often considered good that these boxes be in direct contact with skin, hence the form of a necklace or a pendant. The sound that the pendants produce also deters evil spirits.<sup>42</sup>

Amulets in the form of jewelry follow different patterns and originate from various periods, including the twentieth century. The most outstanding examples of this group are two pendants with the Name of God—*Shaddai*. The older one is in the shape of a leaf (Photo No. 6). On its front side it is decorated by floral ornaments, which surround a circle with a dot in the middle, flanked by 12 smaller circles. The entire pendant is divided into two symmetrical sides. Along the axis of division there are three flowers in the lower part, two in the middle on both sides of line, and two flanking the upper side. On the smooth back of the amulet there are two lines of text, one above the other, following a zigzag shape, representing the name of God—*Shaddai*. The semi-precious stones used on this amulet also carry a certain symbolism. Amber, *hashmal* in Hebrew, is mentioned three times in the Book of Ezekiel (Ezekiel, 1:4; 27; 8:2) and represents resplendent lights. According to some talmudic comments, the name of this stone is actually a notarikon of the sentence “The beast which casts fire”.<sup>43</sup> Coral, which is also used on this amulet, could have been chosen because its Hebrew name is derived from the root for the verb “to grow, to develop”. It is also mentioned in the Bible in the Book of Job.<sup>44</sup> Due to its red color, it was believed that it helps

39 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, pp. 60; 68.

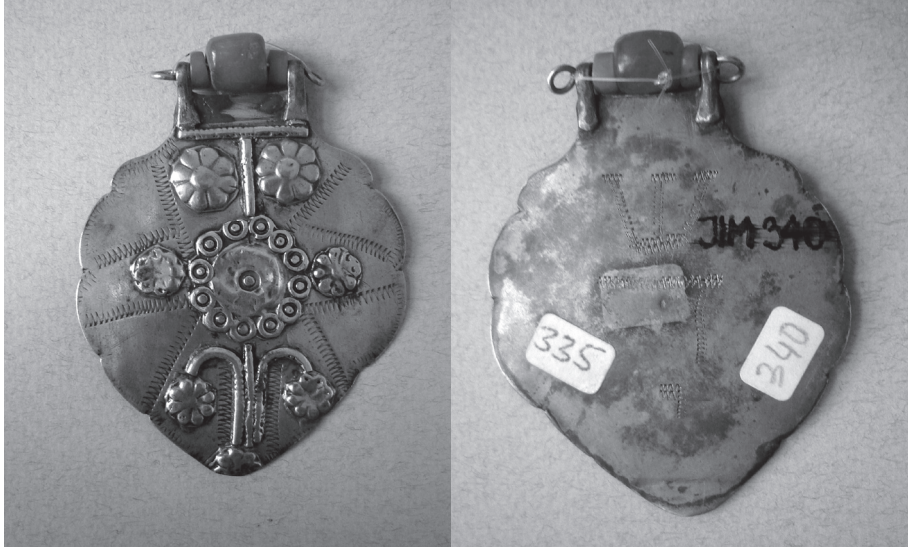
40 Sarah L. Schwartz, “Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon”, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 16, no. 3 (2007), pp. 203-237.

41 Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *The Key of Solomon the King*, Boston 2000.

42 Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, Belgrade 1988, p. 57 (E. A. Волис Бац, *Амајлије и талисмани*, Београд 1988).

43 G. B. Levi, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, 1901-1906, p. 487.

44 E. G. Hirsch, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, 1901-1906, p. 261.



Pho. No. 6: A pendant with Shaday inscription on the back side, silver, XIX century

coagulation of women's blood after giving birth.<sup>45</sup> On the back of this pendant the text "*Shaddai*" is also inscribed and turned towards the body of the pendant wearer, hidden from the eyes of others. The second pendant from this group is in filigree fashion, made in recent times, with the name of God, *Shaddai*, on its front.

(Photo No. 7) A hamsa amulet kept in the Jewish Historical Museum belongs to typically Oriental products. It is made in the shape of a palm, bordered by a zigzag line. Prophylactic Hebrew text is threaded in 9 rows, beginning with "This name contains your supreme power" in the first two rows. The text proceeds in the form of abbreviations and notarikons. Above the ring there is massive amber pearl. The pendant is attached to a chain made of circular links, bound by smaller coils, tucked in three rows. A Magen David is inscribed on the back of the amulet, consisting of a thick zigzag line.

This amulets palm shape is of ancient origin, basically representing the movement of blessing and protection. The original meaning of the palm was forgotten over

45 Esther Van Praag, *Introduction to the world of old silver jewellery from the Land of the Queen of Sheba*, [http://www.organicafrikanredtea.com/images/yemen\\_jewel\\_en.pdf](http://www.organicafrikanredtea.com/images/yemen_jewel_en.pdf), p. 47.



Pho. No. 7: A Hamsa amulet with a prophylactic inscription

centuries since Arabs adopted it making it equal to the Hand of Fatima daughter of Muhammad.<sup>46</sup> This amulet is frequent and respected as the Hand of Fatima in all Arab countries, especially Tunisia. To Muslims it symbolically represents the whole family of Muhammad as well as the whole of Islamic religion with its core principles.<sup>47</sup>

Among the charms and cameos which are given as a present to a child immediately after birth, the most often mentioned ones are open palms with five fingers made of silver and metal which are worn around the neck or near the heart. Their defensive trait was primarily directed towards protection from the evil eye. The very form, however, interfered with the prohibition of displaying any images so it was often stylized and gained the shape of a bud or a flower with six petals. The surface of these palms was covered with ornaments or very often with text and names which were prophylactic.<sup>48</sup>

46 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 56.

47 Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, Belgrade 1988, p. 442 (E. A. Волис Бац, *Амајлије и талисмани*, Београд 1988).

48 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 56.

Because of its color, a piece of amber, like all red and red-related stones—apart from the meaning derived from its name—is related to preventing the flowing of blood out of the body as well as enhancing coagulation.<sup>49</sup>

(Photo No. 8) Another Oriental amulet is a square platelet, ending in the shape of Saracen arch, gradually narrowing towards the top in three wavy segments. The surface of the amulet is smoothly polished and contains Hebrew text in six rows, forming the shape of a fish bone towards the middle axis. It represents a quote from Psalm 30:8 as well as the first three words of verse 9: “I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication; What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?” This psalm is read as the panegyric on the occasion of Hanukkah. Contrary to the usual practice of writing notarikons, the full text is inscribed on the amulet. Psalm 30 or its parts are used with the aim of saving and maintaining life.

The Psalm noted and its verses are used for preserving and saving life and in that sense their prophylactic influence is determined. It also belongs to the group that refer especially to illnesses and suffering and are usually used for their mitigation



Pho. No. 8: An amulet with the 30<sup>th</sup> Psalm for the protection of life

49 Ibid., p. 57.

and cure. Throughout the centuries most of the rabbinic authorities argued about the lawfulness of the use of amulets, but the only situation in which it was not prohibited was precisely for saving and preserving a life.<sup>50</sup>

The collection also contains two amulets in the same shape of a leaf, chiseled on the edges. Both are decorated with the inscription in the square of the motif of a bird standing in front of an olive branch, carrying an etrog in its beak. According to some authors, this image is a symbolical representation of the Community of Israel.<sup>51</sup> However, although the imagery of the platelets is identical, their texts are completely different. The first amulet contains the inscription of Psalm 67, also known as the Psalm of Menorah, which is abbreviated in some places such that certain words are replaced by their first letters.

This psalm and its recitation, as Avudraham writes, symbolically represent the lighting of the Menorah in the temple.<sup>52</sup> It contains seven verses which correspond to the seven prongs of the Menorah and 49 words which represent: 22 goblets, 11 buttons, 9 flowers, and 7 lights which were a part of the shape of Menorah. The first verse has four words which represent two tongs and two ash pans which were used during the service of the Menorah. Because of these symbols, this psalm is called the Psalm of the Menorah.<sup>53</sup>

The text on the second amulet is written in thirteen rows and it follows the form of prayer, but without clear meaning.

One other copper plate amulet which is also included in the collection contains a magical square impossible to decipher in an appropriate way.

Often appearing on amulets is the notarikon of the prayer *Ana beKo'ah* or the Name of God made of 42 letters. This prayer is read in the Sephardic ritual on Sabbath eve, after Psalm 29 and before the prayer *Lexa Dodi*. It is inscribed in the circular silver amulet, overlaid by a Magen David, and on another amulet pendant made of agate, with the text in abbreviated in three rows, containing only the beginning of the prayer (Photo No. 9).

50 Eli Davis, "The Psalms in Hebrew Medical Amulets", *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (1992), pp. 174-175.

51 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 57.

52 Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form and Significance*, Brill, Leiden; Boston; Köln 2001, pp. 121-211.

53 Rabbi Isak Asijel, *Sidur, Prayer book, Children of Zion's Prayer*, p. 111 (Rabin Isak Asijel, *Sidur, Molitvenik, Molitva dece Siona*).





Pho. No. 9: An amulet made of agate with Ana be'koah prayer

Two newer leaf-shaped pendants also have this prayer as the most important motif, in the form of the 42-letter name of God. The first one also contains the names of archangels Michael and Gabriel as well as the monogrammaton *Heh*.

On the amulet names of two archangels are mentioned, Gabriel and Michael. Gabriel is the archangel of Power, who will open the gate of hell when the Messiah comes. He destroyed the army of Assyrians and Babylon and is mentioned as the guardian angel of Israel. It is also said of him that he wrestled Jacob, helped Joseph, and made a bed for Moses before he died. His name and protection are often invoked on amulets.<sup>54</sup> Jewish legends ascribe to him the destruction of the cities of the plains, including Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Babylonian Talmud in Sanhedrinu 95b lists him as the archangel who destroyed Sennacherib's army, with a sharp scythe, ready since the creation of the world. Furthermore, the Talmud says that he prevented Queen Vashti from showing up naked in front of King Ahasuerus and his guests so that Esther could be chosen instead of her. In Daniel 8, the prophet Daniel falls on his face

54 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 108.

before Gabriel who interprets his vision, that is, the clash between the ram and the he-goat. Kabbalists equate him with “the man clothed in linen” in Ezekiel 9. In rabbinic literature Gabriel is a prince of justice. His name is translated as: God is my strength.<sup>55</sup>

The name of the second archangel mentioned on the amulet, Michael, means: The one who is like God. He is the highest in rank of all the angels who pray for the souls of sinners and the leader of the heavenly choirs. Some identify him with Metatron. Michael is one of the seraphim and with God’s help he destroyed the temple in Jerusalem as well as Babylon. Like Gabriel, he is also a guardian angel of Israel, most often mentioned in invocations and amulets.<sup>56</sup> This archangel is also mentioned with the secret name of Sabatiel. According to the *Midraš Rabba* (Exodus 18), Michael wrote the entire Psalm 85. According to the Talmud, (Berachot 35), in a commentary on Genesis 18:1-10, one of the three strangers or “men” whom Abraham hosted was, as Sarah confessed, Michael. Legend says that he helped four of the other great archangels, Metatron, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel, bury the body of Moses. In Ginzberg’s *Jewish Legends*, Michael is considered to be the precursor of the Shekhinah, then the angel who brought Asenath as a wife to Joseph from Palestine, and the one who saved Daniel’s friends from the fiery furnace. It is believed that when he cries, his tears turn into precious gems.<sup>57</sup>

Written on the bottom of the amulet is a monogrammaton *Heh* which bears a particularly holy status. In West European practice among Jewish communities, this letter itself is the only inscription engraved on metal amulets. In kabbalistic amulets and inscriptions it is written several times in a row, three or five, and it is a substitute for the Name of God.<sup>58</sup>

The second pendant has inscriptions on the obverse. They consist of names of archangels Michael and Gabriel, the angel Nuriel, the Prophet Elijah, and Israel as well as verses from Genesis with which Jacob blessed Joseph. These verses begin with the words “*Ben porat Yosef ben porat, ‘ale ‘ayin*” which were believed to be efficient protection from the evil eye.

The third angel mentioned on this amulet is Nuriel, whose name is translated as “Fire of the Lord”. According to Kabbalistic interpretations, when he comes as a result

55 Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, p. 117-120.

56 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 109.

57 Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, pp. 211-213.

58 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 95.

of Hesed (Mercy), he appears in a form of an eagle, which is the form Uriel takes if he comes as a result of Geburah (Severity). According to Zohar I, Nuriel is the ruler of the zodiac sign Virgo, he is 300 parasangs tall, and 50 myriads of angels “made of water and fire” follow him. The only higher than Nuriel are Erelim, the guards, Ef, Hema, and Metatron, the highest hierarchs in Heaven. In *Jewish Legends* II, Ginzberg states that he is one of the seven angels subordinate to Yehuel the prince of fire.<sup>59</sup> Schrire states that he provides successful protection from the evil eye and that his name is often encountered on eastern charms.

Oval plates with prophylactic texts and imagery in the center are also very interesting. The first such plate, slightly concave and decorated with a triangular floral ornament along the border, contains two circular lines of text, proceeding spirally towards the middle of the plate, from which it is readable. The text encircles the motif of fish in the center of the oval pendant.

(Photo No. 10) On the outer ring is the 42-letter Name of God. In the other inner circle is a notarikon of the expression: “Blessed be His glorious sovereign Name, forever and ever”. Afterwards comes *Shadday* (The Name of) God Almighty, which has a particular effect in repelling magic and spells.<sup>60</sup> Following this, the 22-letter Name appears with God’s name *El* inserted in the middle. *El* is a common suffix used in deriving of angelic names and originates from Syria or Phoenicia.<sup>61</sup> The origin of the 22-letter name is related to the book of the angel Raziel, *Sefer Raziel*, and it is equivalent in terms of gematria to the mighty name *Adiriron*. Even though the name’s origin is unclear, according to Rabbi Moses Cordovero it was derived from the Priestly Blessing by means of Temurah.<sup>62</sup> The number of letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the number of letters of this name were often associated so that in a symbolic way it connects with the mystic and creative power of each of them.<sup>63</sup> On

59 Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, p. 223.

60 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition. A study in Folk Religion*, New York 1939, reprint with Forward by M. Idel, Princeton 2004, p. 158.

61 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 99.

62 *Ibid.*, pp 97-98. More about this Name is found in the interpretation of the scroll JIM 79. lines 3-4. Temurah is one of the three ancient methods used by Kabbalists to rearrange words and sentences in the Bible, in the belief that by this method they can derive the esoteric substratum and deeper spiritual meaning of the words.

63 David R. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: The Merkabah Tradition and the Zoharic Tradition*, New York, 1978, “*Sepher Yetzirah*”, pp. 13-46.





Pho. No. 10: An ovoid amulet with a picture of a fish

this amulet the word *Paspasim* was written without one letter (*Samex*). Therefore, following the 42-letter Name there are six Names of God in a row: *Shadday Anaktam Pastam El Paspasim Deyonisim*.

The image displayed in the center of the amulet of a fish surrounded by the aforementioned Names can be associated with the belief that the gaze of the evil eye cannot reach these animals because they live deep in water and cannot be affected by its destructive influence. Hence, the fish can mediate in a protective role related to fertility which is believed to be the consequence of precisely the fact that they elude the evil eye.<sup>64</sup> This kind of belief, which links the properties of the fish through its image and then the protective names which mediate for the amulet bearer, can be explained by principles of sympathetic magic which is based on the idea that similar produces similar or that the consequence seems similar to its cause. More explicitly, this therefore includes imitative magic which, apart from written words for

64 E. G. Hirsch, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, 1901-1906, pp. 403-404.

its mediation, uses images as well.<sup>65</sup> In this sense this amulet represents an interesting combination of the traditional use of the Holy Names with mediating images, putting it beyond the canonical frame of Judaism.

(Photo No. 11) The second oval plate, also slightly concave, has a wavy border and text in three rows. In the middle of the plate there is an image of Scorpio directing its poisonous tale towards the Evil Eye. The text of this amulet is particularly interesting because it contains Jacob's blessing of Joseph from Genesis 49:22. This verse is considered to represent a particular protection from the evil eye which Jacob passed on to his favorite son Joseph on his death bed, blessing him. This specific meaning was derived from the fact that the word *ʿAyin* signifies a spring, a well, but also an



Pho. No. 11: An ovoid amulet with a scorpion and the eye

65 In the cited work principles of functioning and the approach to sympathetic magic are described in detail: James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion*, New York, 1922, pp. 31-58 (Džems Dž. Frezer, *Zlatna Grana, proučavanje magije i religije*, Beograd 1992).

eye so this blessing, with its hidden meaning, freed Joseph from the possibility of the evil eye influencing him, making him as well as all his descendants resistant to it. This verse, either as a whole or as a notarikon, is very common on amulets especially with Oriental Jews.<sup>66</sup> The verse is followed by Psalm 16:8, and then a notarikon of Psalm 91:11, consisting of the last letters of the words.<sup>67</sup> It continues with the names of angels: Šuriel,<sup>68</sup> whose name is recorded on amulets next to the names of Michael, Gabriel, and other angels, followed by the name of Raḥmiel, who is mentioned in rabbinic literature as the angel of mercy as is apt for the translation of his name (“God is my mercy”). This is one of the 70 angelic amulets which during accouchement chase demons away from the mother and the child and the attendant angel who is invoked during ritual magic. In the work *Ošar Midrašim* II, Raḥmiel is listed among guardian angels of the Gate of the East Wind. He is also called upon to protect from spells.<sup>69</sup> He was also mentioned in *Sefer Raziel*, on a talisman for gaining mercy and favor of people big and small.<sup>70</sup> After Raḥmiel, noted is the angel Bethuel, who is considered as removing evil.<sup>71</sup> The text ends in the third row with the words that mark the beginning of Psalm 91:7.

In the central field there is an image of an eye looking at the tail of the scorpion, both representing a deadly danger, the evil eye<sup>72</sup> and the scorpion alike. They are surrounded and isolated pictograms of the evils and the demonic forces from which this amulet has the ability to protect; they are confined and isolated by Names and prayers so that they cannot reach and harm the owner of the platelet.

Apart from the amulets mentioned so far, the collection contains certain artifacts which were held to be prophylactic but were actually made for other purposes. These are one Decalogue in the form of pendant, inscribed with the Ten Commandments; one little *yad*, also shaped as a pendant; and another fish-shaped pendant whose connection to Jewish culture is questionable.

66 Shrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 114.

67 Ibid., p. 127.

68 He is mentioned in the registry of names in Shrire’s work, p. 129, as well as by G. Davidson, p. 156.

69 Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, p. 249 and Shrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, p. 130.

70 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 140.

71 He is mentioned by Shrire, p. 126, and Davidson, p. 104.

72 According to Rab, JT Shab., 99 out of 100 people die because of the Evil Eye. See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, 1901-1906, p. 280.

(Photo No. 12) Considered an amulet for a long time, one flower-shaped pendant is also included in the collection, and it was catalogued and exhibited in this context. This is, however, a marital gift from a groom to his bride, Esther, which is clearly visible from the text inscribed on the pendant (*Matana lekala išti mazal Ester*). It may, thus, be very interesting for the cultural-historical research on Jewish private life.

At the end, the collection also includes three intaglios: one has an engraving of a menorah; another, made of amber, was the part of a wedding ring; and the third contains the name of the owner and an image of heron.

This is the end of a survey of the collection which was unknown to the academic audience for almost four decades, despite its representing the largest, and maybe even the only collection of this kind in former Yugoslavia.

The exhibited collection is the fruit of Hinko Lederer's collector's zeal and the endeavors of the Jewish Historical Museum to collect over the years objects which will adequately and representatively display a part of the Jewish culture from Serbia and the Balkans. At first glance the deficiency of this collection lies in the inability of the objects' origins to document the life and customs of Jews in the above-mentioned areas and fill in the gaps as needed for the creation of the Balkan Jews' image, their habits and customs.



Pho. No. 12: A flower-shaped pendant, marital gift, with a private devotional inscription

These objects, being used for private purposes and of small dimensions, could have travelled great distances; they could also have been brought or exchanged in trade and thus present in be found in much greater numbers in these areas than is known. The practice of using amulets written on paper or parchment, the manufacture of *kutubs* and cases and also various platelets made of silver and other metals, the use of semi-precious stones as well as the interpersonal exchange of these objects and their circulation in the Balkans was also recorded in the examples of the nineteenth-century Sarajevo.<sup>73</sup>

Owing to the lack of visual material, testimonies of travel writers are precious, such as the ones by E. Evans that mention all these practices in detail, linking the Kabbalistic science of Jews with the practice of Muslim inscription writing and the use of written and printed prayers among Christians, Catholics, and the Orthodox alike.<sup>74</sup> The interpersonal exchange of these objects and amulets was encouraged among the three religions owing to the belief that exactly in that manner their protection against spells and evil was enhanced. This opens a possibility for a more detailed introduction and a linking of action mechanisms of these practices in the Balkans, providing a clearer image about its cultural history through verbal-visual culture. This paper opens the way for further research in many fields. Some of them include technology of amulet production, their visual composition, the ways they were used among Jews, but also intercultural exchange with members of other monotheistic religions in the Balkans, who followed similar methods of protection from evil forces, always based on the unique power of The Book, firstly the Bible, and afterwards the New Testament, and Qur'an, based on the same tradition and using similar stories. Moreover, even though some of the objects from the collection are of recent origin, the significance of

73 H. Kreshevlyakovich, *Selected Works II—Esnafs and crafts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1463-1878)*; *Cities in Bosnia and Hertzegovina*; *Cities as urban and economy areas*, Sarajevo, 1991. (H. Kreševljaković, *Izabrana djela II – Esnafi i obrti u Bosni i Hercegovini (1463-1878)*; *Gradovi u Bosni i Hercegovini*; *Gradovi kao urbana i privredna područja*, Sarajevo 1991).

74 A. J. Evans, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on foot during the insurrection, August and September 1875*; with an historical review of Bosnia and a glimpse at the Croats, Slavonians, and the ancient republic of Ragusa. London, 1876; See also: *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild, Bosnien und Herzegovina*, Wien 1901. p. 303.

researching them as well is highly important.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, studying Jewish magical tradition can be seen as the cornerstone of expertise in many similar practices Europe-wide as well as the necessary precognition for following contemporary currents in this field.

75 The importance of researching contemporary magic practices and production of amulets in modern Israel and the rest of the World was highlighted by Dr. Yuval Harari in his opening lecture: *“What is practical Kabbala”?* – *On the Place of Kabbala in the Tradition of Jewish Magic*, at the 8th International Conference, Social and Cultural History of the Jews on the Eastern Adriatic Coast – “Magic and Medicine”, in Dubrovnik 2010.