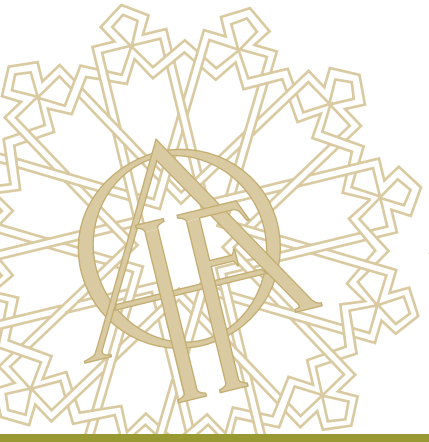
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AnIsl 18 (1982), p. 79-94

Annette Ittig

A Talismanic Bowl [avec 6 planches].

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A TALISMANIC BOWL *

Annette ITTIG

The Islamic concept of magic, *siḥr,* (lit., « glamour, bewilderment »), is understood to mean power over the natural world through the aid and employment of supernatural forces. According to the Qur'ān, magic was originally known only in the world of the spirits, and had been revealed to Mankind by the two angels of Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt [1]. From its beginnings, Islam recognized the existence of magic as a real force in the world of men [2]. According to the traditions compiled by Muslim [3], a distinction was made between the normal or legitimate spell and that which would be condemned by the orthodox. The employment of charms for the treatment of disease was sanctioned : those who exploited Qur'ānic texts for this purpose might even charge a fee out of which the Prophet would accept a royalty [4].

To this category of legitimate magic belong various talismanic bowls used in curative medicine. This article will focus on one such « magic bowl » currently on long term loan to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, from the Minarovitch collection (Pl. II). Five

* I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Golombek of the West Asian Department, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto for providing the photographs which accompany this article. Grateful acknowledgement is also due to the World of Islam Festival Trust for financial support for 1979-80, during which time the final draft of this article was written.

[1] Sūr. ii : 102 : « ... Solomon disbelieved not, but the Satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery, and that which was sent down upon Babylon's two angels, Hārūt and Marūt, they taught not any man, without they said, 'We are but a temptation, so do not disbelieve...' ». For discussion of the two fallen angels who mastered the magic arts, see G. Vajda, « Hārūt wa Mārūt », *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1971), vol. III, pp. 236-7.

[2] In sūr. cxiii : 4, the « ... evil of blowers (feminine) upon knots... » refers to a form of sorcery common in the Middle East in which knots are tied in a cord and blown upon with an imprecation.

[3] D.B. MacDonald, « Siḥr », *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1936), vol. IV, p. 411, refers to the *Saḥīḥ* of Muslim (*Kitāb al-Salām*), pt. vii, pp. 13-14.

[4] H. Henry Spoer, « Arab Magic Medicinal Bowls », *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 55 (1935), p. 256, n. 56, cites Bokhari's reference to a *ḥadīṯ* reported by Abū Sa'īd al-Ḫuḍrī.

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analogous bowls from other collections will be used as comparative material. The following constitute the six bowls to be considered in this study :

1. Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum n° L 976.34. Bronze. Hemispherical. H. 3.4 cm., D. 10.5 cm. Engraved decoration. Beneath the exterior rim is an inscription in Nasḫī script. In the interior of the bowl are three inscriptions, one of which is spiral. Two squares of 3 × 3 cells appear on either side of one inscription. In the centre are the figures of a quadruped, a serpent, a scorpion and two interlaced confronting dragons. To the left of the animal figures are two intersecting circles with ciphers and a sign composed of seven elements.
2. Bombay, formerly in the collection of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society [1]. Brass. Hemispherical. H. 3 cm., D. 8.1 cm. Engraved decoration. Nasḫī inscription below rim. Interior has three inscriptions, squares, animal figures, circles and signs similar to bowl n° 1.
3. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte n° 112103/1141 [2]. Bronze. Hemispherical. H. 3 cm., D. 11 cm. Engraved decoration. Interior includes inscriptions, squares, animal figures, circles and signs similar to bowl n° 1.
4. Paris, formerly in the collections of M. le duc de Sully [3] and M. l'Abbé de Tersan [4]. Bronze. Hemispherical. No dimensions given. Engraved decoration. Inscription below rim. Interior has animal figures, inscriptions, squares, circles and signs similar to bowl n° 1.
5. Cairo, Musée Arabe n° 3897 [5]. Bronze. Hemispherical. H. 5 cm., D. 19 cm. Engraved decoration. Nasḫī inscription below rim. Interior has squares, animal figures, circles, inscriptions and signs similar to bowl n° 1. In composition, it is identical to the Naples bowl, although the figures have been less carefully executed.

[1] E. Rehatsek, « Examples and Facsimiles of Eight Arab Talismanic Medicinal Cups », *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. X (1874), p. 150; E. Rehatsek, « Facsimile of the Inside of an Arabic Talismanic Medicine Cup », *Indian Antiquity*, vol. III (1874), pp. 12-14. This bowl was later reported missing from the collection : M. Ismail, « Two Arabic Medicine Cups », *JBBRAS*, vol. XXVI (1921-23), p. 173.

[2] J.G. Adler, *Museum Cuficum Borgianum* (Rome, 1782), vol. I, p. 27, n. 47, U. Scerrato, *Catalogo di Arte Islamica a Napoli* (Naples, 1967), p. 35, n° 41 and fig. 21.

[3] D. Martin, *Explication de divers monuments singuliers* (Paris, 1739), p. 427 ff. and plate XII.

[4] J.T. Reinaud, *Description des monuments arabes du cabinet de M. le duc du Blacas* (Paris, 1828), vol. II, p. 354.

[5] G. Wiet, *Catalogue du Musée Arabe du Caire : Objets, Mobiliers en Cuivre et en Bronze* (Cairo, 1932), p. 95 and plate LXIII.

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6. Paris, formerly in the collection of Henri René d'Allemagne [1]. Bronze. Hemispherical. No dimensions given. Engraved decoration. Interior has animal figures, inscriptions, squares, circles and signs similar to bowl n° 1.

EXTERIOR INSCRIPTION

The following inscription encircles the exterior rim of the Toronto bowl :

تنفع هـــذه الطاسة المباركة للسعة الحية والعقرب ولعضة للكلب الكلبي ولعسر الولد ولقطع الرعاف والمغـــل وللقولنج يشرب بها الملسوع او رسوله ثلاث مرات يبرأ باذن الله ولعسر و الولد مأوز غفران ولقطع الرعاف والمغل ينشق بالماجنه والقولنج ينجرع منه ماء حار محيح مجرب عمل الفقير محمد بن يونس رحمه الله .

« *This holy bowl is useful for the sting of a scorpion and of a snake and the bite of a mad dog, for difficulty in childbirth, nosebleed, stomacheache and colic. The afflicted person or his agent is to drink from it three times. By the grace of God he will recover. For difficult labor drink saffron water. For stopping nosebleed and abdominal pain, snuff water from it. For colic, gulp down hot water. This has been proven by experience. The work of Muḥammad ibn Yūnus — May God have mercy on him* ».

Although there is no inscription given for the Allemagne bowl, the other four bowls studied bear characteristic inscriptions describing their curative properties. Therapeutic formulae identical to the Toronto bowl are seen on the Bombay and Tersan bowls. Each of the exterior inscriptions mention effectiveness against colic, rabies, snake bite and scorpion stings. In the Naples bowl, rheumatism and tracoma are among other ailments mentioned. Similar formulae are seen on the so-called « poison cups », a group of talismanic objects dating from the twelfth to the fourteenth century A.D. [2].

[1] H.R. d'Allemagne, *Du Khorassan au Pays Bakhtiari* (Paris, 1911), vol. II, p. 27.

[2] E.g. E. Rehatsek, « Magic », *JBBRAS*, vol. XIV (1878-80), pp. 204-5 describes a « talismanic medicine cup » bearing the name of Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Zangī b. Qašqar and the year 543/1148 : السلطان الملك العادل محمود ابن زنكى بن قشقر نور الدين فى سنة ج س ث

(Rehatsek's reading of the date as ج س ث cannot be considered correct as the Zangids did not achieve prominence until 521/1127 with the appointment of ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī to the governorship of Irak. The date 543/1148 coincides with Nūr al-Dīn's rule in Syria). See also Wiet, *op. cit.*, n° 4431, plate LX for a bowl with the name of the Mamlūk Sulṭān al-Malik al-Muʿizz ʿIzz al-dunyā wal-dīn Aybak (d. 655/1257) :

السلطان الملك المعز عز الدنيا والدين أيبك

ibid., p. 176, n° 60 cites Sulṭān al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars and the date 650/1252 :

... سنة خمسين وستمائة برسم السلطان الملك الظاهر بيبرس ...

In addition to their usefulness in treatment of the

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According to the inscription of the Toronto bowl, it is not necessary for the afflicted person to drink from the bowl; treatment will be as effective should the patient's agent drink from it in his stead. The inscriptions of the Bombay, Cairo and Tersan bowls also mention that the substitution of an agent for the sick person is permissible. The manner in which the cure was transferred from the agent to the patient is not described in any of the texts.

The name of the maker of the Toronto bowl appears also on the Naples bowl [1]. It is also found on a bowl from the collection of Tewfik Canaan, Jerusalem [2]. However, it is suggested that the signature on the Canaan bowl may be spurious as it is less carefully executed than the rest of the inscription. Perhaps Muḥammad ibn Yūnus was so renowned for his production of « magic bowls » that a forgery of his signature on another bowl would have substantially increased its value.

Although the Tersan bowl is not signed, the last part of its therapeutic inscription states that it « ... was copied from (an example in) the celebrated Treasury of the Fortress of Damascus, the protected (city) » [3].

Inside the Toronto bowl, to the right of the serpent figure, is the following inscription :

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم اذا السماء انشقت واذنت لربها ودقت واذا الارض مدت والقت ما فيها كذلك
تلقى الحامل الجنين سالما باذن الله والله يخرجكم إخراجاً فان مع العسر يسراً ان مع العسر يسراً النصرن
أيها القولنج يانوخ تنوخ كلوخ كلخ الم المر الرح م ع س ق ك ه ى ع ص ط ه ط س م ى س ن

« *In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate! When the heaven is split asunder and attentive to her Lord in fear, when the earth is spread out and casts out all that was in her.* (sūr. lxxxiv : 1-4)

aforementioned ailments, poison cup inscriptions also mention their effectiveness against all poisons, e.g., Wiet, *op. cit.*, p. 176, n° 60 :

هذه الطاسة المباركة تقاوم السموم كلها

There is undoubtedly a connection between the discovery of an alloy that would react in the presence of arsenic and the production of poison cups : Allemagne, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 65. Although poison cups seem to have been produced for particular patrons, it is specifically in their inscriptions that their beneficial effects could be enjoyed by any Muslim, e.g. Weit, p. 176, n° 60 :

اتفقت أئمة الدين والخلفاء الراشدين لمنافع المسلمين

[1] Although he does not give the Arabic Text, Scerrato, p. 35, transliterates part of the Nasḫi inscription around the outer rim as « ... *min 'amāl al-faḡīr Muḥammad ibn Yūnus raḥamahu Allah* », « ... work of Muḥammad ibn Yūnus, may God have mercy upon him ».

[2] T. Canaan, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, vol. XVI, (1936), p. 105 :

من الذخائر المنصورية عمل محمد يونس

« ... from the treasures of al-Manṣūrīyya, work of Muḥammad Yūnus ».

[3] Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 427 :

نقلت من الخزانة بقلعة دمشق المحروسة

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« *Like this a pregnant woman will expel the embryo safely by God's grace* ...
« *And He will deliver you with a deliverance* (sūr. lxxi : 18)
« *But lo! with hardship goeth ease, with hardship goeth ease* ... (sūr. xciv : 5-6)
« *Depart Colic, by Ānūḫ, Tanūḫ, Kalūḫ, Kalḫ.*
« *ALM. ALMR. ALR. ḤMʿSQ. KHĪʿṢ. ṬH. ṬSM. ĪS. N.* »

This same inscription is seen on each of the other five bowls studied.

The presence of various *sūrat* on these bowls is not surprising, as their healing power is mentioned in the Qur'ān itself [1]. Various *ḥadīṯ* also attribute therapeutic qualities to Qur'ānic verses [2]. The appearance of *sūrat* lxxxiv and lxxi, respectively known as *al-inšiqāq*, « The Rending », and *Nūḥ*, « Noah », seems particularly appropriate on these bowls in view of their claim to offer relief from labour pains. Sūr. xciv, which is also referred to as *al-inširāḥ*, or « solace », was probably included in this inscription to encourage a lessening of the anxiety accompanying, or precipitating, certain afflictions.

One means by which specific magical powers were attributed to Qur'ānic verses was through the science of letters. The science of letters is based on the theory that letters contain the primal secrets of creation [3].

Accordingly, the first nineteen letters of sūr. xxxiv, the *bismallah*, were designated as one of the « verses of guarding » by virtue of the magical powers ascribed to them. It is believed that these letters correspond to the nineteen spirits guarding the gates of Hell; recitation of them provides security from damnation [4]. The *bismallah* is commonly found on various amulets and charms because of these and other various powers credited to it.

The exorcism of colic in the Toronto inscription is noteworthy. According to Middle Eastern oral traditions, when the human body suffers a severe shock or fright, its resistance to disease was lowered. Malevolent *ǧinn* might then enter the body, and create diverse disorders. In order to cure the afflicted person, it was necessary to induce a second shock to the body, and thereby exorcise the *ǧinn*. This concept of disease as a malevolent spirit had existed in the pre-Islamic Middle East. It can be seen in the incantation texts of Mandean and Aramaic ceramic bowls dated from the first to the sixth

[1] Sūr. xvii : 8.

[2] Canaan, p. 122, refers to the following *ḥadiṯ* : « The first surah is a cure to everything except *es-sam*, and *es-sam* is death ».

[3] D.B. Mac Donald, « Simiya », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, p. 425, refers to the *Kitāb Šams al-Maʿārif* of al-Būnī : « ... The Divine Names and Allocutions are produced from letters; therefore, the elemental world and the *'akwān* in it can be controlled ... when (the science of letters is) used by spiritual souls ».

[4] Canaan, p. 85.

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centuries of the Christian era [1]. The personification of diseases is also found in Egyptian magic [2]. The exorcism of personified illnesses seems to have been incorporated into Islamic talismans from these older magical practices.

The name « Ānūḫ », given in the Toronto inscription appears on other amulets. Doutté cites an incantation for the relief of epilepsy in which the medico-sorceror appeals to Ānūḫ as one of the « troupe des (génies) serviteurs » [3]. Ṭanūḫ, probably a variant of Tanūḫ, is addressed in a similar fashion in a seal formerly in the Blacas collection [4]. Kalūḫ and Kalḫ may refer to other supernatural powers whose aid was invoked to exorcise the colic. The rhymed pairing of the four words is reminiscent of Gog and Magog, Hārūt and Mārūt.

The « letters of light » constitute the last part of this inscription. These letters are referred to as the « crowning words » of the Qur'ān, as they form the initial part of the following *sūrat :*

ALM	(ii, iii, xxix, xxx, xxxi, xxxii)
ALMR	(xiii)
ALR	(x, xi, xii, xiv, xv)
ḤMʿSQ	(xlii)
ṬSM	(xxvi, xxviii)
ĪS	(xxxvi)
KHĪʿṢ	(xix)
ṬH	(xx)
N	(lxviii)

It is believed that each one of these *sūrat,* and by extension the « crowning letters » representing them, had some particular healing virtue. For example, sūr. ii was believed to cure fever and epilepsy [5]. Other magical powers attributed to the crowning

[1] J.A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), p. 93, lists the various Demons of Disease commonly exorcised in the incantation texts : fevers and consumption, eye disease, palsy and ' feminine ' complaints.

[2] E.A.W. Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London, 1932), p. 132, refers to the exorcism of a scorpion spirit from a bitten person : « Come Tefen (a scorpion), appear up on the ground, depart hence, come not night ... Turn away, get away, retreat O Poison ».

[3] E. Doutté, *Magie dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1910), p. 222; see also p. 228 where Ānūḫ is involved in a remedy for headache, and p. 123 for aid in treasure-hunting. Canaan, p. 102, describes « ... a characteristic poison cup bought in Aleppo» in which the name Anūḫ is repeated three times.

[4] Reinaud, *op. cit.,* vol. II, p. 245, n° 102 : يا طنوخ يا ططنوخ

[5] A. Christensen, « Xavass-i-Ayat », *Kongelige Danske Vedenskabernes Selskab,* vol. III (1920), p. 29.

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words of the Qur'ān include their usefulness in finding a husband or employment [1]. On the bowls in this study, these letters then constitute a type of talismanic shorthand, symbolizing the healing powers inherent in the Qur'ān.

Seal of the ineffable name

Beneath the intersecting circles of the Toronto bowl is a sign composed of seven elements (Pl. III, A) : a five-pointed star; three perpendicular strokes; the letter *mīm*; a ladder with three cross bars; four perpendicular strokes; a second five-pointed star; and the letter *wāw* upside down with its tail prolonged over the top of the group, breaking only over the ladder. An identical sign appears in the Naples bowl. In the Tersan bowl this sign also appears, but a six-pointed star is substituted for the one with five points. In the Bombay bowl, the first symbol is depicted as a six-pointed star and the sixth symbol as the letter *hā*. In the Allemagne bowl there are only five elements in the sign, as no stars are depicted. In the Cairo bowl six-pointed rather that five-pointed stars appear, and there is an extra *mīm* following the second group of perpendicular strokes.

These signs are variations of a combination of elements often referred to as « The Most Exalted Name of Seven Symbols ». The symbols most commonly depicted are a six-pointed star; three perpendicular strokes; the letter *mīm;* a ladder with three cross bars; four perpendicular strokes; the letter *hā* and the letter *wāw* upside down [2]. This « Seal of Seven Elements » was believed to contain the Ineffable Name of God, and it was credited with absolute magical virtue. It was thought to have been revealed only to the prophets. This Islamic concept of an Ineffable Name is clearly related to the Jewish custom of refusing to utter the name of Jehovah.

As a further explanation of the Seal, al-Būnī states that its seven elements were drawn from the Torah, the Gospels and the Qur'ān [3] :

from the Torah : 

from the Gospels : 

from the Qur'ān : 

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 31; also Reinaud, vol. II, p. 238.

[2] Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Būnī, *Kitāb Šams al-Maʿārif al-Kubra* (Bombay, 1322-24/1904-6), vol. I, pp. 68-72.

[3] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 69.

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Of the bowls studied, only the Bombay one exhibits the seven symbols of the Seal as described by al-Būnī. In the remaining five bowls, variations of the first and sixth components of the Seal are seen. The first element of the Seal, the so-called « Seal of Sulayman », commonly written as a star with six points, is believed to have been the symbol inscribed on the ring of Sulayman which endowed its owner with power over both terrestial and supernatural beings. In the *Kitāb Šams al-Maʿārif,* however, al-Būnī, — or the copist, — uses five and six pointed stars interchangeably [1]. Similarly, the first element of the Seal in the Toronto and Naples bowls is depicted as a pentagram, rather than a hexagram. The sixth sign of the Seal, usually represented as *hā,* appears as a five-pointed star in these two bowls. In one section of al-Būnī's work, the pentagram is associated with the final *hā* of Allah, the numerical equivalent of *hā* being five [2]. It appears then that no differentiation was made between these two symbols, or between the pentagram and hexagram figures. Considering the importance attached to the number seven in the Qur'ān [3], the primary consideration in executing the Seal seems to have been that it contain seven elements.

Al-Būnī assures the reader that whosoever masters the different names of the beings associated with the Seal will be able to control the world of nature :

« *In their entirely, they* (*the signs of the Seal*) *are useful for every creature, eloquent and dumb. Do not fear snake, nor be afraid of a scorpion, nor of a lion that cometh towards thee roaring* » [4].

Al-Būnī warns that these symbols will be effective only in enterprises of a benevolent nature. Should one desire to practice « black » magic, it is necessary to resort to a different set of symbols.

Because this Seal is accredited with such potent influence upon the affairs of men, it is commonly found on Islamic amulets. In the Toronto bowl, then, the Seal appears to invoke the aid of God and other celestial beings, in order to give its user power over the natural world.

The Seal may be more specifically related to the inscription beneath it :

بلنوشه برخشیا

« (*for*) *the recovery of the anxious* (*from*) *the sweating* (lit., *'moisture'*) *of the fever* ».

[1] al-Būnī, vol. I, p. 69, 71.

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 71.

[3] For example, references to the seven heavens in sūr. lxxviii : 12; the seven earths in sūr. lxv : 12, etc.

[4] al-Būnī, vol. I, p. 69.

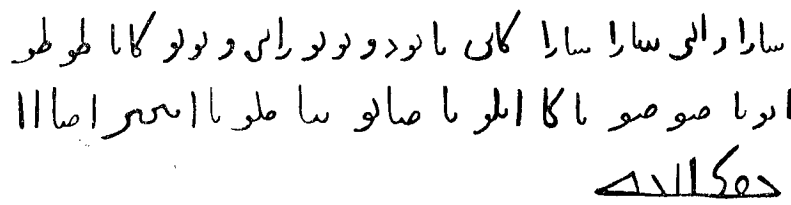
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Identical inscriptions are found on the Naples, Bombay, Tersan and Cairo bowls. It is not seen in the Allemagne bowl.

This inscription seems to be yet another reference to the relation between psychological trauma and disease.

Spiral inscription

In the Toronto bowl, below the Seal of the Ineffable Name, appears a spiral inscription written with unpointed letters [1] (Pl. III, B) :



Unpointed spiral inscriptions appear to be among the usual iconographic elements found in this type of bowl, as identical spiral inscriptions are found on each of the five other bowls studied.

Spiral inscriptions formed an intrinsic part of the invocation of spirits in earlier Mandean and Aramaic magic bowls [2]. Noting this similarity, the spiral inscription of the Toronto bowl may then be an invocation of some supernatural power(s). The « *ṭū ṭū ... ṣū ṣū* » section of this inscription may be part of an « abracadabra » formula necessary to bind the spirit to the medico-sorceror. The benevolent nature of any spirit so conjured is assured in so far as the invocation has been made in the name of Allah.

Noting that is not uncommon for letters of words in inscriptions on amulets to be deliberately mixed, i.e., ال ال رم ف ف یر ت ب د ر for الرفیب المفتـــدر [3] it is suggested that *ḥmk* may be read as *ḥkm* or « judgement » of God.

A similar inscription, the first part of which has also been written with unpointed letters, appears between the two 3 × 3 square in the Toronto bowl (Pl. IV) :

سارا سارا رامی سارا سارا کا

[1] E. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London, 1926), vol. II, p. 328 : « The letter must be written without dots, lest the *jnūn* should strike the scribe who writes them, ' for the dots are the children of the *jnūn* ' ».

[2] Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[3] Reinaud, vol. II, pp. 337-39, Canaan, pp. 124-125, Allemagne, vol. II, p. 66.

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را بو د بو د و بو لی باس باما
ارصا ا صاد با طو طو طو طو
کا طو صا مورب ابلمر س
با سو کانی کا بحس طو طو
ابلهو سر کابا و بو دا س
ومن يتوكل علي الله فهو حسبه
ان الله بالغ امره والصلا والسلام
علي سيدنا محمد واله الطاهرين

Identical formulae appear on each of the other five bowls. Noting its similarity to the spiral formula (Pl. III, B), the unpointed section of this inscription may also be an invocation to some supernatural power.

The second part of this inscription, which has been pointed, reads :

« *Whoever trusts in God, He will be his sufficient support; for God will truly cause him to achieve his object* (sūr. lxv : 3).

« *Prayer and peace be upon our Lord Muḥammad and upon his sanctified people* ».

In accordance with the belief in the restorative quality of the verses of the Qur'ān, sūr. lxv : 3 is known as one of the « verses of preservation ». Its inclusion in the bowl emphasizes the importance of faith on the user's part in the cure.

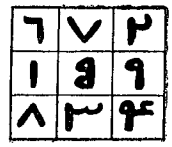
The last line of this inscription is broad enough to be acceptable to both the Šī'ā and the Sunnī Muslim. In this respect, it is reminiscent of the aforementioned « poison cups » which were prepared « ... in accordance with the Imāms of religion and the orthodox Caliphs for the benefit of Muslims ... » [1]. It suggests that these bowls were intended to be used by a wide clientele.

To either side of the « sara ... sara » inscription of the Toronto bowl (Pl. IV) is a square of 3 × 3 cells. In the square to the right of the inscription the numbers are arranged in such a way that their sum in any direction equals fifteen (Pl. V, A). The numbers in the square to the left of the inscription (Pl. V, B) are grouped differently. The sum of fifteen is found only by combining the top three numbers horizontally, and the figure « ٣ » has been written backwards. In both squares, the number five has been executed as a double loop figure.

[1] See *supra*, note 2, p. 81.

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Squares identical in composition to plates V, A-B appear in the Tersan, Naples, Allemagne and Cairo bowls. In the Bombay bowl, the square to the right of the inscription duplicates plate V, A, but the arrangement of the other square is :



The execution of the number five in these squares is noteworthy. This double loop figure is also seen in poison cups dated to the 6th/12th - 7th/13th centuries. In a comparison of the double loop five, and the other numbers in the Toronto bowl, with Arabic numerals from the eleven dated manuscripts discussed by Irani [1], shows them to be almost identical to the figures depicted in a manuscript dated 687/1288 [2]. The appearance of the double looped five on ceramic ware dated to the 7th/13th - 8th/14th centuries has been noted by Watson [3] and Ettinghausen [4]. The depiction of the number five as a double loop figure therefore appears to have been customary during medieval times [5].

The square of three was known as early as the fourth century B.C. in China where it was designated the *Lo-shu* [6]. One of the myriad symbolic meanings attributed to the *Lo-shu* was that it represented the universe, with its middle number signifying the cosmic axis at the center of the world [7]. Such squares first appear in Arabic literature about 900 A.D., in the treatise *Kitāb al-Mawāzīn,* traditionally ascribed to Ǧābir ibn Ḥayyān. In this manuscript, the square of 3 × 3 cells was presented as a charm for easing the pains of childbirth. The author alleged that it came from Apollonius of Tyana (fl. first century A.D.). More probably it was introduced into western Asia by Arab and Persian merchants who had visited Chinese port towns.

By 989 A.D., the 3 × 3 square had been given a religious interpretation in the *Rasā'il,* the encyclopedia of the *Iḫwān al-Ṣafā,* the « Brethren of Purity ». The Brethren developed

[1] R.A.K. Irani, « Arabic Numeral Forms », *Centaurus,* vol. IV, n° 1 (1955), pp. 1-12.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 4, manuscript C : *Kitāb ʿIlal al-Zīǧāt* by ʿAlī ibn Sulayman al-Ḥašimī. Bodleian Library, Oxford, M.S. Seld, A. 11.

[3] O. Watson, « The Masjid-i ʿAlī, Quhrūd : An Architectural and Epigraphic Survey », *Iran,* vol. XIII (1975), pp. 73-4, lists twelve dated Persian luster tiles, five of which exhibit the double loop five.

[4] R. Ettinghausen, « Dated Faience », *Survey of Persian Art,* p. 1677, n. 4.

[5] The date at which the double loop form evolved into the modern circle and heart-shaped fives is as yet undetermined.

[6] S. Cammann, « Islamic and Indian Magic Squares », *History of Religion,* vol. VIII (1968-69), p. 186.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 189.

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continuous squares in which the motion was perpetuated after passing through the middle number. To Sufi mystics, such squares referred to Life in endless flux, constantly being regenerated by a source of energy at the heart of the universal plan. In a desire to confuse the uninitiated and to prevent recopying, the order of the numbers of the square was sometimes varied so that the sums were not always equal to fifteen, e.g., the left square of the Toronto bowl.

A variant of the magic square was produced in which letters were substituted for the numbers. This was accomplished in accordance with the *abǧad* system, whereby the letters of the alphabet are given numerical equivalents [1]. The square of three became known as *budūḥ* because these letters (or their numerical equivalents) are distributed in the four corners of the square.

In conformance with the *abǧad* system, the *budūḥ* square may be interpreted as the symbol of the planet Saturn, *zuḥal :*

$$(z = 7 + ḥ = 8 + l = 30) = 45$$

45 being the sum of the numerical components of the *budūḥ*.

In his *Kitāb al-tafhīm* (*The Elements of Astrology*), al-Bīrūnī (fl. 5th/11th century) classified the humours, or nature, of Saturn as cold and dry [2]. As the Toronto bowl was produced to cure such ills as colic and fever, whose humours were warm and moist, a seal of Saturn is most appropriate : according to the Galean theory of medicine, diseases can only be cured by an application of some substance of an opposite humour. The *budūḥ* square of the Toronto bowl may then signify a type of medico-magical shorthand, which refers to the acceptable therapy for the afflicted party.

In the centre of the Toronto bowl are the figures of an undulating serpent (Pl. V, C), an eight-legged scorpion (Pl. VI, A), a lion (Pl. VI, B) and a pair of interlaced confronting dragons (Pl. VII, A). The serpent, scorpion, lion and dragon figures are also seen in the Tersan and Bombay bowls [3]. Although there is no serpent figure in the Allemagne bowl, an awkwardly executed configuration of lion, scorpion and interlaced dragons appears. In the Naples bowl, the figure of a ram has been substituted for the lion. In the Cairo bowl, the quadruped has been so poorly executed that it is difficult to tell whether it is a lion or a ram, save for its horns.

[1] Al-Bīrūnī, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, trans. R.R. Wright (London, 1934), p. 41, gives the entire table for the order of *ḥurūf al-ǧummal*.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[3] Although Rehatsek has described the quadruped as a dog, its tail is leonine, and there are indications of a name around its neck.

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The interlaced dragon motif has been documented as a reference to the pseudo-planetary nodes of the moon's orbit [1]. These nodes were regard in Islamic folklore as the head and tail of a giant dragon. It has been suggested that the interlaced dragon figure was introduced into Islamic art from Central Asia via the Turkish dynasties [2]. It does not appear in eastern Islamic decoration until the twelfth century [3]. This motif, and other elements from the artistic repertoire of the Jazira, seem not be have been introduced into the Maghrib until Mameluk times, probably by Mosuli craftsmen [4].

According to the oral traditions of the Arabs, the eclipse was a harbinger of great disaster [5]. In keeping with this is the use of entwined dragons in Islamic gate emblems as prophylaxis against the entry of evil spirits [6]. The symbol of the eclipse may therefore have been placed in the Toronto bowl to frighten away the evil *ğinn* which had entered the body of the afflicted party.

Noting the powers ascribed to the « Seal of the Ineffable Name » by al-Būnī (*supra*), it is tempting to interpret the lion, snake and scorpion combination in the Toronto bowl as a reference to the animals to be rendered harmless by the power of the other signs and inscriptions. The belief that noxious animals would be repelled when confronted by representations of themselves is seen in the aforementioned use of the dragon motif in Islamic portals. A comparable pre-Islamic ritual is referred to in the Bible [7].

The serpent-scorpion-lion combination also appears in Islamic talismans such as the « Lion Seal » described by ibn Khaldun [8]. It is notable that the « Lion Seal » was to

[1] W. Hartner, « The Pseudo-planetary Nodes of the Moon's Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies », *Ars Islamica*, vol. V (1938), pp. 114-138, discusses the reliefs of the Tigris bridge of Jazirat ibn 'Umar. In them the astrological system of exaltations is depicted, with the dragon eclipse symbol treated as an eighth planet.

[2] G. Azarpay, « The Eclipse Dragon on an Arabic Frontispiece Miniature », *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 98, n° 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1978), p. 366, n. 20.

[3] L.A. Ibrāhīm, « Dragons on a Cairene Mosque », *AARP*, vol. 10 (Dec., 1976), pp. 15-16.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[5] Reinaud, vol. II, p. 356.

[6] For example, the Raqqa Gate at Baghdad (Hartner, *op. cit.*, fig. 26); the entrance to the Citadel of Aleppo (Ibrahīm, *op. cit.*, fig. 11); the entrance to the Gok Medrese at Sivas (R.A. Jairazbhoy, *An Outline of Islamic Architecture* (London, 1972), pl. 111).

[7] « And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived ». (Numbers 21 : 9).

[8] Ibn Ḫaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal (London, 1934), vol. III, p. 163 : « Then there is the 'Lion Seal' which is also called the pebble seal. On a steel thimble, the sorceror engraves the picture of a lion dragging its tail and biting on pebbles which it thus divides into two parts. A snake is represented in front of the lion. It is coiled at the lion's mouth. Upon the lion's back, a crawling scorpion is represented. In

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be engraved when the sun was in Leo. The specific astrological conditions under which other talismanic bowls were engraved is often given in their « therapeutic value » inscriptions [1]. This suggests that the scorpion-lion-serpent combination may have some astrological significance, particularly since it is juxtaposed with a symbol of the eclipse. An interpretation of this combination according to the astrological system of *domicilia* [2] equates the lion with the zodiacal Leo, in which sign the sun finds its « home » [3]. The scorpion, or zodiacal Scorpio, fulfills the same requirement for the planet Mars [4]. In accordance with this astrological interpretation, the serpent figure may refer to a particular constellation, such as Ophiuchus [5].

In the Naples and Cairo bowls, the substitution of a ram for the lion figure suggests a rather different interpretation. According to the astrological system of *exaltatio* [6], the point of maximum power for the sun was in the zodiacal Aries. Aries also corresponds to the point of dejection, or minimal power for Saturn; Scorpion stands in an analogous relation to the moon.

Although a specific sense for the animal combination in the Toronto bowl remains obscure (and may have been equally so to contemporaries [7]), traditional customs and

order to make the engraving (the sorceror) waits for a time when the sun enters the first or third decan of Leo, provided that the two luminaries (the sun and the moon) are well and out of their misfortune ... People assume that the person who holds onto it (the charm) has an indescribable power over rulers and is able to have close contact with them, to serve them, and to use them for his own ends... ».

[1] The exterior inscription of the bronze bowl described by Spoer, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-6, states that it :

ولمدرت ونقشت والقور فى العقرب السلطان الملك
المنصور اسد الدين سركه بسنه خمسمايه وسبعين

« .. *was prepared and carved while the moon was in the Scorpion by the order of Sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr Asad al-Dīn Sirkuh in the year 570/1174-5* ».

For other examples, see Wiet, p. 101, n° 3981 and p. 94, n° 3862.

[2] The Graeco-Roman *domicilia* was one of the two astrological systems depicted in Islamic art. A *domicilium* represents the position of a planet when it is standing in its zodiacal sign.

[3] Hartner, fig. 3, tables the seven planets with their corresponding *domicilia*.

[4] *Ibid.*, fig. 3.

[5] J.M. Rogers, « Aeolipiles Again », *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens in Mem. Jurt Erdmann*, ed. O. Aslanapa and R. Naumann (Istanbul, 1970), p. 156.

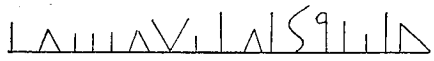
[6] The Babylonian exaltations, the other astrological system represented in Islamic art, refer to the point of maximum power of a planet when standing in a particular zodiac sign. A planet's dejection, or depression, corresponds to its point of minimal power within a certain zodiac sign. See Hartner, p. 117, for the respective exaltations and dejections of the seven planets.

[7] E.g., the twelfth century scholar Maimonides notes that there was no fixed interpretation for « ... those figures which are called *telesmata* and which are ascribed to the stars by the men who made them ... they ascribe many figures to all of the constellations and stars though there is no agreement on it among them... », Harther, p. 150.

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beliefs had attributed sufficient « magical power » to these figures for them to have been regarded as appropriate decoration for bowls used in folk medicine cures.

Beneath the left *budūḥ* of the Toronto are three five-pointed stars round two intersecting circles filled with ciphers (Pl. VII, B). Similar ciphers also appear directly above the right *budūḥ* :



Identical circles and ciphers are seen on the Bombay, Naples, Tersan and Allemagne bowls. There are two intersecting circles in the Cairo bowl, but not all of the aforementioned ciphers have been drawn inside them.

The line of ciphers at the point of intersection of the two circles, and the ciphers above, also occur on the blade of a knife in the collection of the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, in conjunction with seven Kabbalistic signs [1]. Two of these signs are recognized symbols for the « spirits » of the sun and the moon [2]. Perhaps the two cipher combinations also refer to supernatural beings associated with one of the planets.

In Islamic magic, such ciphers, when inserted into circle devices, constitute a type of *ǧadwal,* or « table, plan, seal » [3]. It has been suggested that intersecting circles such as those seen in the Toronto bowl represent two *ǧadawal,* possibly those of the sun and the moon in conjunction, or an eclipse [4]. The intersecting circles would then be analogous to the interlaced dragon motif on the other side of the animal figures in the Toronto bowl (Pl. VII, B). Perhaps the circles and the dragons refer to two different aspects of the eclipse, i.e., its solar and lunar manifestations.

The ciphers within the intersecting circles, which are similar to the two aforementioned combinations, may refer to *ǧinn* bound to the sun and the moon, respectively.

Conclusion

The six bowls included in this study are indicative of the links between religion, medicine and astrology in the Islamic world. The medieval understanding of the psychological effect of Qur'ānic verses, « abracadabra » formulae and zodiacal signs on the healing process is paralleled by Western medicine's comparatively recent

[1] Scerrato, *op. cit.*, n° 42 and fig. 22, Capodimonte n° 112101/1147.

[2] E.A.W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (London, 1930), pp. 391-2.

[3] E. Graefe, « Djadwal », *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1936), vol. I, p. 992. The *ǧadwal* and the *daʿwa,* « conjuration », and often the *kasam,* « oath », form the essential ingredients of the *ḥirz* or amulet.

[4] Reinaud, vol. II, p. 356.

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acknowledgement of the therapeutic efficacity of various placebos. This is not to suggest that the makers of « magic bowls » did not themselves believe in the curative properties of their products. Given the belief in the influence of astrology on health and well-being, perhaps Muḥammad ibn Yūnus, the maker of the Toronto bowl, was a descendant of Ibn Yūnus, the eleventh century Egyptian astrologist [1].

Although the name of the copyist appears only in the Toronto and Naples bowls, the similarity of the Bombay and Tersan bowls suggests that they are from the same workshop. Because of their awkward execution, the Cairo and Allemagne bowls appear to be later copies of the Naples and Toronto pieces, respectively. That none of the inscriptions in these bowls include an owner's name indicates that they were created in high-productivity workshops.

The omission of an owner's name, the wide variety of ailments mentioned in the therapeutic inscriptions and the non-sectarian reference to « ... Muḥammad and his Holy Family ... » suggest these bowls were produced for public use. However, permission to employ an agent in the curative process implies that possession of « magic bowls » was not within the reach of everyone, but rather that it was restricted. That the owner of a bowl would have been unwilling to allow it to be borrowed, thereby necessitating the use of an agent for an immobile person, infers a fee-paying situation reminiscent of the *ḥadīṯ* reported by Abū Saʿīd al-Ḫudrī (*supra*). It is not clear whether « magic bowls » were used to generate revenue for government coffers [2] and/or for private individuals such as itinerant folk-doctors.

A provenance for the six « magic bowls » included in this study is proposed by comparison of them to the aforementioned « poison cups » produced for Syrian and Egyptian rulers between the 6th/12th and 8th/14th centuries. In the « magic bowls », employment of a simplified version of the « poison cup » therapeutic formula, as well as depiction of a related but less elaborate iconographic composition, implies that their production was contemporary with, or slightly later than, that of the « poison cups ». While the use of the double loop five also indicates a medieval date, the appearance of interlaced dragons implies that production was not prior to the thirteenth century [3]. It must be emphasized that a thirteenth-fourteenth century Mameluk attribution, in our present state of knowledge, can only be tentative. It is hoped that this study will encourage the publication of related material in other collections.

[1] Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abī Saʿīd ʿAbd'l-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad b. Yūnus, a Cairene astronomer, composed *al-Zīǧ al-Kabīr al-Ḥakimī* (*The Ḥakimite Tables*) in 397/1007.

[2] Martin, p. 458.

[3] See *supra*, note 4, p. 91.

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Interior of magic bowl, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, n° L 976.34.

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A. — Sign of seven elements, Toronto bowl.



B. — Spiral inscription, Toronto bowl.

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« Sārā . . . sārā » inscription, Toronto bowl.

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Pl. V



A. — Right *budūḥ* squąre, Toronto bowl.

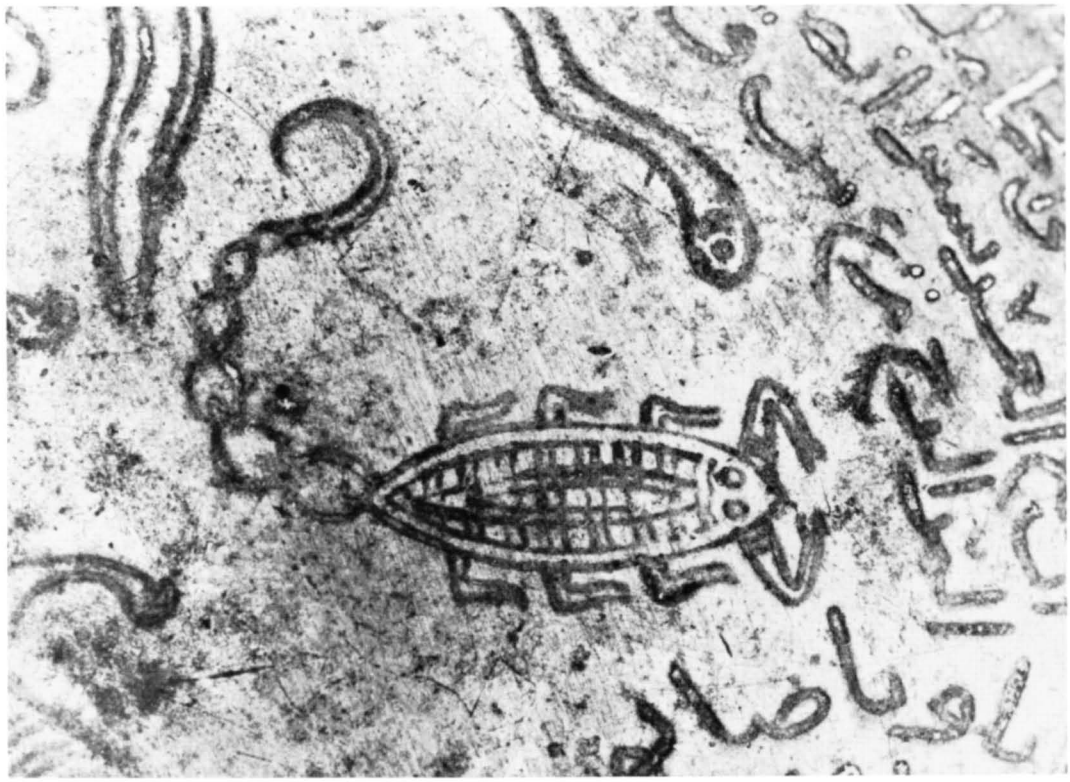


B. — Left *budūḥ* square, Toronto bowl.

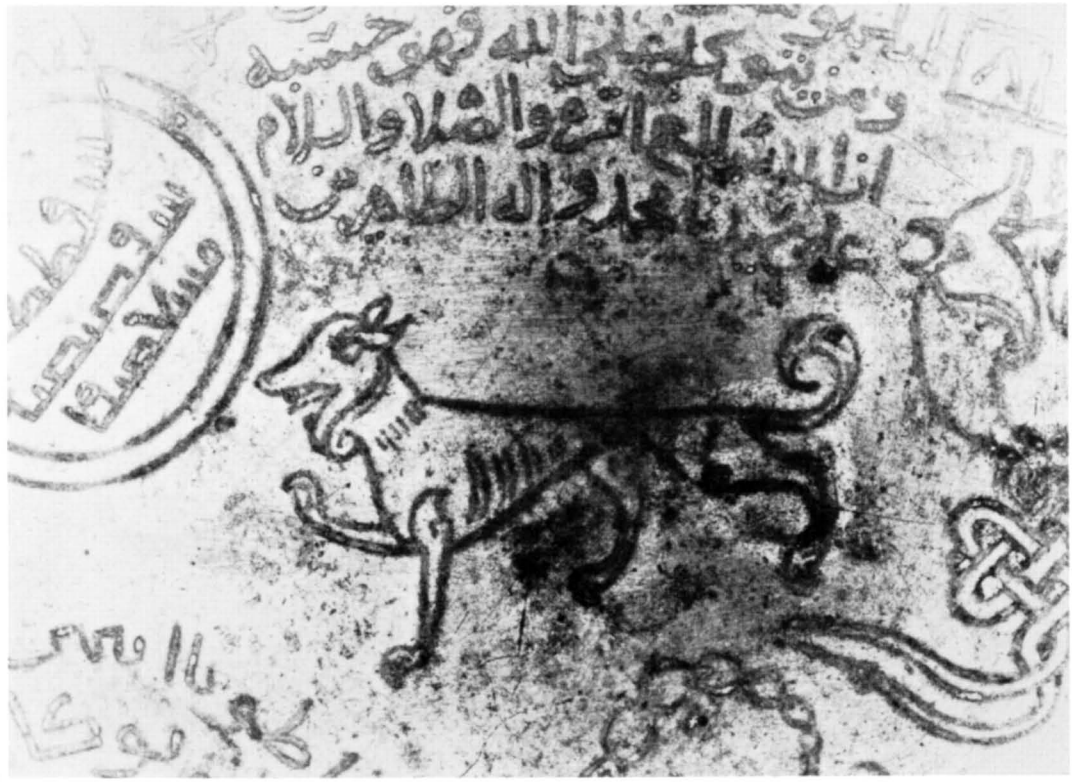


C. — Serpent, Toronto bowl.

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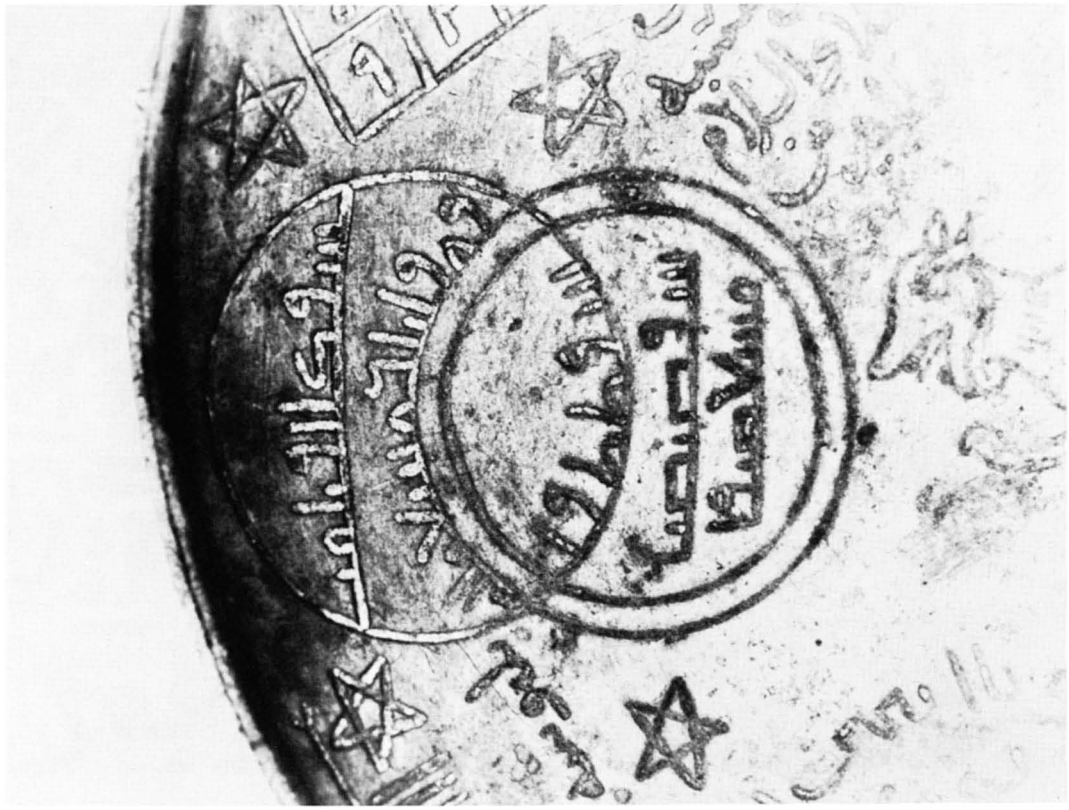


A. — Scorpion, Toronto bowl.

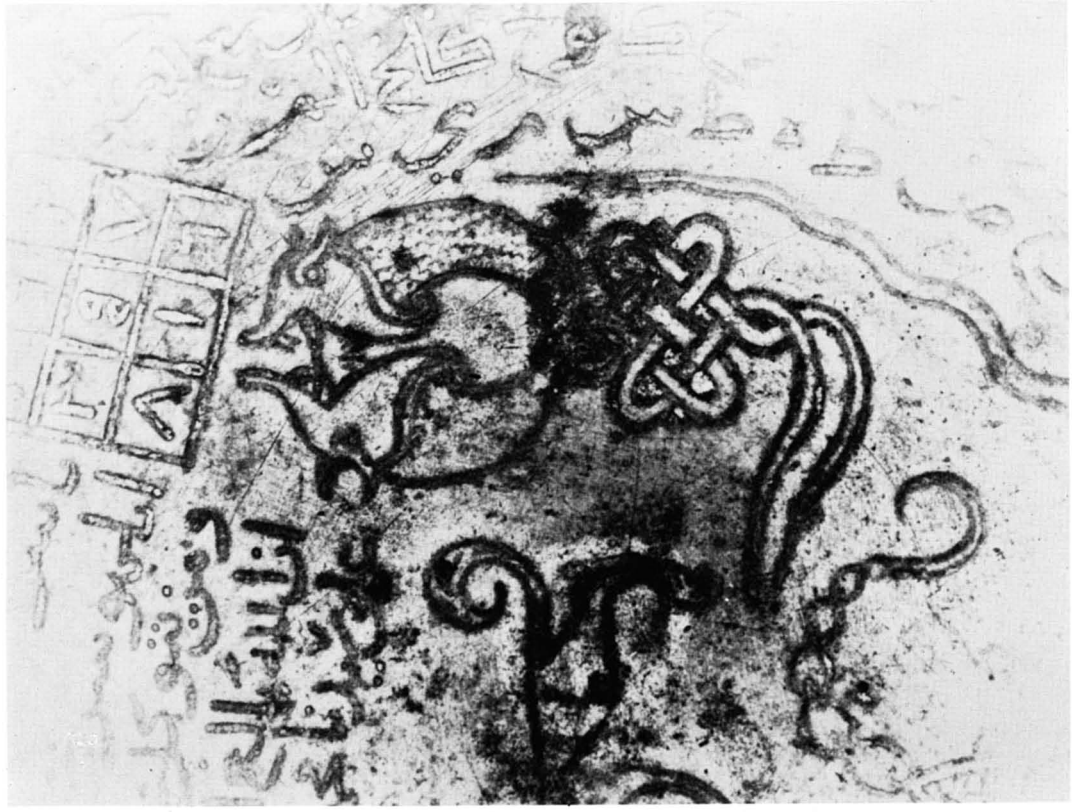


B. — Lion, Toronto bowl.

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B. — Intersecting circles, Toronto bowl.



A. — Dragons, Toronto bowl.

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