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6 An Ingestible Scripture

Qur'ānic Erasure and the Limits of "Popular" Religion

Travis Zadeh

From a comparative perspective, the Qur'ān plays a particularly unique role within the devotional lives of Muslims. As the very uncreated and eternal word of God, both the written and oral manifestations of Qur'ānic scripture are theologically imbued with a transcendental sacrality. The centrality of the Qur'ān can be felt throughout various practices of devotion, from the somatic performance of ritual recitation to the calligraphic inscriptions in architectural regimes of sacred space. Several scholars have argued that the theological status of the Qur'ān as the eternal speech of God is analogous to the sacramental person of Christ as uncreated Divine Logos (Söderblom 1933: 326–27; Smith 1981: 37; cf. Ess 1996: 193). Admittedly, such analogies have their limitations, particularly with respect to analyzing the forms of ritual performance in which the Qur'ān is enacted as a sacred scripture. Following a similar line of thought, William Graham (1987: 87–88, cf. 217) saw in the daily performance of the ritual recitation of the Qur'ān theological parallels to the sacramental consumption of the body of Christ transubstantiated in the Eucharist.

Yet the corporeality implicated in the two ritual activities is quite distinct, both on the part of God and the consuming devotee. The diverse practices of actually ingesting the Qur'ān would seem much closer to the eucharistic act of physically absorbing the divine, living presence of God. The tradition of reciting verses from the Qur'ān and then blowing (*nafth*) the verses, generally with the projection of saliva, over water, preferably from the sacred Zamzam spring in Mecca, is a nearly ubiquitous curative practice found throughout a range of Muslim societies, as is the custom of writing verses on paper and dissolving the paper in water to be ingested. Other forms of administering the Qur'ān through a material medium abound, in drinking vessels, the preparation of food goods marked with Qur'ānic material, and verses written on boards and washed with water.

Needless to say, Qur'ānic consumption has never been sacramental, as is the case with the ritual recitation of the Qur'ān, or as is patently so with the ingestion at Mass of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. The ingestion of the Qurʾān, in contrast, has not formed part of a defined or systematized set of ritual obligations. Nonetheless, the strong connection between healing and ingesting certainly follows both acts of corporeal transformation, as the long history of deploying the Eucharist for its curative power (Porterfield 2005: 87–88) parallels rather succinctly the

motivations guiding the practices of Qur'ānic ingestion. Likewise, the act of consuming the Qur'ān, though evidently quite widespread, has elicited a fair amount of juridical concern. However, unlike the clerical control traditionally placed over the presentation and delivery of the Eucharist, which sets limits on the laity and their consumption of sacred matter (Bynum 2007: 7–9), the various forms of Qur'ānic consumption have historically crossed beyond the boundaries of a priestly elite. This has as much to do with the notable absence of institutionalized ecclesiastical structures in Islamic history as it does with the very nature of the activity itself, which has been located at the cusp of various discourses and domains.

For modern scholarship, this indeterminacy of the appropriate use and constitution of sacred matter often results in a rather distorted presentation and assessment of the topic. The various forms of Qur'ānic ingestion certainly fit into a broader fabric of lived religion. However, beyond ethnographic curiosities, the scholarly treatment of the subject has generally not examined the relation between consuming the Qur'ān and discourses of Islamic law or theology. There is an overwhelming sense that these practices are located on the margins of orthodoxy and are interconnected with so-called folk traditions derived from local, popular expressions of devotion and belief (e.g., Donaldson 1938: 26, 133, 137; al-Issa and al-Subaie 2004: 346; Steinforth 2009: 87–88, 90). For example, one anthropological study on Sudanese traditions of ingesting the Qur'ān argues that the practice originated in and is confined to the "periphery of the Islamic world" (El-Tom 1985: 415, 429). Such an analysis is entirely consistent with the anthropologist James Frazer's (1918: 413) claim that the diverse forms of ingesting charms were manifestations of widespread popular superstition. This parallels a long tradition in Western scholarship on Islam of viewing various medicinal and ritual practices as reflections of superstitious folk tradition (e.g., Lane 1836: 305, 347–48; Zwemer 1920: 168, 179–85; Budge 1930; Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1960–1962).

There is much to suggest that a privileged discourse developed in the earliest written sources of Islamic intellectual history, and this discourse promoted the consumption of the Qur'ān as a rationalized form of healing, regulated within legal and theological boundaries. Qur'ānic ingestion, the blowing of verses, and the use of amulets with Qur'ānic material all intersect with early medicinal (i.e., *ṭibb*) discourses on the nature of the body and the power of scripture, in prophylactic and curative terms. Likewise, these traditions are conceptually linked to practices of divination and the apotropaic and talismanic properties (*khawāṣṣ*) of the Qur'ān, which resonate in theurgical spheres of licit magic (Robson 1934; Hamès 2001). Admittedly, the problem with the category of magic is that it evokes a set of heterodox and irrational behaviors, while these expressions of Qur'ānic intercession have historically been conceived of as normative uses of scripture, grounded in the religious authority of law, theology, and prophetic tradition.

There is much to suggest that the various forms of Qur'ānic medicine and theurgy are indeed "popular" in the sense of being widely practiced among differing social classes and in a variety of geographical and historical contexts. The sheer ubiquity of such practices is certainly a testament to this. Yet, it would be overly reductive to identify Qur'ānic ingestion as an expression of "popular" religion, if this is meant to

contrast with normativity or orthodoxy. In the field of Islamic studies, with its own intellectual history rooted in Orientalism and in the Enlightenment, the sociological category of "popular" Islam has often been deployed to reflect derivative folk traditions on the periphery of Islamic civilization. These stand in contrast to "normative" or "official" Islam, as represented by legalistic literalism (Gaffney 1992: 43). This etic categorization usually creates the space for separating "popular" and/or "mystical" currents as deviations from an orthodox core of practices and beliefs, as articulated by the religious elite (e.g., El-Zein 2009: xix–xx).

There are several difficulties with such demarcations. Foremost, they make it much harder to understand how or why religious authorities have historically participated in what modern scholarship identifies as popular or mystical practices. Furthermore, rather than offering a neutral sociological category, the popular (i.e., *ʿāmm*), as a deviant expression of doctrine or religious behavior, has historically played an important role in Islamic discourses of authority. Thus, recourse to the popular in modern scholarship risks conflating a descriptive definition with a normative one. The propensity toward reification governing these categories also makes it much more difficult to understand how popular Islam appears at times so wedded to orthodoxy (e.g., Sengers 2003: 21).

By identifying such activities as tomb visitation or Qur'ānic ingestion as reflections of popular or mystic Islam, in the sense of heterodox or derivative (e.g., Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich 1960–1962 1: 6; Binsbergen 1980: 71–72), we obscure the complex maneuvering over religious authority in the push and pull for orthodoxy. In the modern period, this pattern of demarcation is further complicated by the various autochthonous reform movements that have sought to assert their own orthodox authority and to define themselves against putatively "popular" deviations of Islam (Hermansen 2005: 408; cf. Robson 1934: 60). Accepting these categories thus means that we become participants in a contest to define "true" Islam. However, it is not enough to just recognize the limits of such frameworks; we should also seek to understand how they discursively form, often in a dialectical fashion, distinct spheres of normativity.

MODERN CONTOURS

If we are to take the modern Ḥanbalī religious elite of Saudi Arabia at their own word, as bastions of Sunnī orthodoxy, then various forms of ingesting the Qur'ān may be seen as a normative activity. The state governing agency for issuing legal opinions (*fatāwā*) in Saudi Arabia, al-Lajna al-Dā'ima li'l-Buḥūth al-ʿIlmiyya wa-l-Iftā' (Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Issuing Legal Rulings), has treated a range of issues concerning the permissibility of incantations and various talismanic uses of the Qur'ān, including writing verses on paper and dissolving them in water to be ingested (Juraysī 1996: 60–61, 89, 97, 102–3). Much of this builds upon the legal precedent of the grand mufti and supreme judge of Saudi Arabia, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (d. 1969), a descendent of the Ḥanbalī reformer Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792).

In his collection of early legal opinions, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm rules in favor of Qur'ānic erasure (*maḥw*), that is, writing Qur'ānic verses, dissolving them in water, and then ingesting them. In support of this, he turns to the precedent of the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and other early jurists, Abū Qilāba (d. ca. 104/722) and Mujāhid (d. 104/722), who saw no harm in the practice. He also cites the example of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687–688), who prescribed verses of the Qur'ān to be ingested by women who had difficulty during childbirth (Āl al-Shaykh 1978–1979, 1: 93–94). This permission also extends to the oral recitation of Qur'ānic verses and the blowing over water to be ingested for its curative powers.

In contrast to Qur'ānic erasure and blowing, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm rules against the use of amulets (*tamā'im*), regardless of whether or not they contain Qur'ānic verses. Although he acknowledges that there exists a divergence among the early religious authorities concerning the lawfulness of Qur'ānic amulets, he reasons that if one were to permit the use of the Qur'ān in such a fashion, it would open the door to illicit practices of fashioning amulets out of non-Qur'ānic material. Also on his list of reasons for banning amulets is the danger of polluting the Qur'ān by attaching (*taʿlīq*) it to the body, which is itself in a state of flux between the poles of ritual purity and impurity. Thus, he concludes that people should be forbidden from using and selling such amulets, reasoning that this is even more the case for the vast majority of the people from the south (*al-junūb*), who, he argues, are ignorant of the principles of religious law and the true meaning of monotheism (*uṣūl al-sharīʿa wa-taḥqīq al-tawḥīd*; Āl al-Shaykh 1978–1979, 1.96–98).

In the contemporary development of Saudi Salafī juridical discourse, these positions continue with Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm's student and successor, the famed grand mufti of Saudi Arabia ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Bāz (d. 1999), who also found Qur'ānic erasure and blowing to be lawful, but the use of written amulets to be illicit (Ibn Bāz 2002, 1.51–52, 4.333). A similar line is taken by the student of Ibn Bāz, Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿUthaymīn (d. 2001), who, in addition to forbidding Qur'ānic amulets, ruled against the practice of wearing clothing marked with verses of the Qur'ān as a means of curing various diseases (Ibn ʿUthaymīn 1989, 1.105–8, 110, cf. 109). These juridical rulings appear to privilege blowing verses into water or over the body as representing a direct (*mubāshiratan*) transference of the Qur'ān without the material intermediary of the written word. Also noticeable is the resistance to any corporeal intercession (*tawassul*) that the amulets represent. Within the framework of Salafī theology, Qur'ānic erasure or blowing ultimately leaves no physical trace, whereas the physicality of amulets creates room for polytheistic associationism (*shirk*). It is this strong ambivalence and even suspicion toward the material world as an intercessory force for divine charisma that also undergirds the Salafī resistance toward the veneration of shrines. The modern phenomenon of the Salafī desecration of the tombs of prophets and saints fits into this specific theological framework (see Beranek and Tupek 2009).

Particularly telling is how Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm justifies his ban on Qur'ānic amulets by turning to what he terms the ignorant predilection of the Muslims

in the south toward polytheism (Āl al-Shaykh 1978–1979, 1.98). The reference, while admittedly ambiguous, appears to refer to African Muslims. It must be said that amulets marked with Qur'ānic material, historically and even today, are ubiquitous and not unique to any given region or culture. The juridical basis for defining "lawful incantations" (*al-ruqā 'l-sharīʿa*), itself an entirely modern category, emerges out of an attempt to delineate the lawfulness of various traditions of healing. We may find certain parallels in classical Islamic legal history regarding this move to define particular practices as falling within the domain of illicit magic (*siḥr*) or polytheism (*shirk*), while elevating other regimes of charisma and healing as salubrious and divinely sanctioned. As with the classical sources, the modern Salafī juridical discourse readily affirms that the physical world is in some basic sense enchanted, easily taken under the influence of jinn, where human bodies are susceptible to demon possession, the influences of magic, and the evil eye (see Juraysī 1996; Hentschel 1997; Sengers 2003; cf. Kruk 2005).

Whether "popular" religion, as the sociologist Max Weber would have it, sheds light on such a situation remains to be seen (cf. Weber 1963: 103, 205), for the term, at least in the context of Islamic intellectual history, does not offer a neutral description of reality, but fits into a defined set of assumptions and values. For Weber, popular religion is bound to an entire array of magical practices that resist any tendency to rationalization (see Berlinerblau 2001: 611–12; Mejido 2002: 304). However, what is magical and what is rational is part of the problem, as the category of magic is itself also socially contingent and relational (Styers 2003).

The ideal types of "normative" versus "popular" Islam as advanced by the likes of Jacques Waardenburg too readily mistake competing discursive claims over legitimacy as reflections of actual intellectual and cultural stratification. Thus, for instance, Waardenburg (1979; 2002: 67, cf. 85–105) argues that in normative Islam "the separation between the human and the divine is stressed," while in popular Islam "the miraculous, the 'realities beyond' have come within human reach, largely through the mediation of holy men, often Sūfī sheykhs." Forcing such a demarcation onto the course of Islamic intellectual and cultural history would mean losing any meaningful way to account for the privileged intercessory practices promoted by the religious elite across sectarian commitments and pietistic divides.

For such religious authorities as Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, the "popular" would reflect the *ʿawāmm*, the unlearned masses, who are easily led astray by their ignorance into heretical beliefs and practices that fall into the domain of magical superstitions. However, what the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia identifies as a deviant innovation does not, in itself, make it so in the eyes of all Muslims, or in the fabric of Islamic history (see Denny 1985: 64–65, 77). Such discursive maneuverings are relational in nature and reflect a process of boundary formation. In the context of Islamic reform movements, it has too often been the case that modern scholars turn to Salafī orthodoxy as representing normative or official Islam. Such a framework oversimplifies and flattens the diverse and competing discourses of the *ʿulamāʾ* into a homogenous orthodoxy, while identifying various pietistic and/or mystical practices, such as shrine veneration, ubiquitous throughout Islamic intellectual and

cultural history, as unofficial or heterodox. This dichotomy also produces a cognitive dissonance: Why would the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia support such putatively popular practices as ingesting the Qur'ān, while banning the veneration of tombs? Still lingering in this configuration of the popular is the Enlightenment critique of ritual and magic; it would be too simplistic to assume that, in the competing frameworks of orthodoxy, such intercessory engagements with material culture reflect only popular superstition or folk beliefs. While Muslim jurists indeed draw similar lines with such rhetorical turns toward the "ignorant masses," on the whole, the boundaries that demarcate the official and the popular are much more porous than they might appear on first glance. Often this rhetoric is not concerned with a sphere of popular praxis or piety as such, but is deployed in explicitly sectarian polemics that cut across competing discourses of religious authority.

From an early period, the Qur'ān as a written object appears in an array of practices, as with the making of amulets (*tamā'im/taʿāwīdh*), talismans (*ṭalāsim*), magic squares (*wafq*), and divinatory traditions of bibliomancy (*fa'l al-Qur'ān*; see Hamès 2007). The extent to which these practices are normative depends largely upon the particular social and historical contexts in which they are deployed. Such expressions of veneration toward the textual form of the Qur'ān have an ancient pedigree, which builds upon widespread divinatory traditions throughout ancient Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia. The production of bowls marked with magic formulae, for example, has roots in ancient religious practices. The archeological evidence reveals that the widespread use of "magic" bowls with Aramaic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Mandaic inscriptions preceded and continued past the advent of Islam (Yamauchi 1965; Naveh and Shaked 1987; Morony 2003). The adaptation of Qur'ānic material onto drinking vessels and amulets hearkens back to deeply ingrained attitudes toward the cosmic power of writing (Canaan 1936; Spoer 1935, 1938; Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 1.72–105). However, despite the archeological and anthropological documentation, there has been little effort to historicize these materials and practices in relationship to the broader corpus of Islamic legal and theological literature. Rather than a late innovation, traditions of Qur'ānic theurgy can be dated to the earliest record of Islamic intellectual history, and as such, they reveal a good deal about early attitudes toward scripture in its material form.

THE CORPORALITY OF ERASURE

The Iraqi traditionist and historian, Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) addresses the medicinal and talismanic use of the Qur'ān in his *Muṣannaf*, a *ḥadīth* collection that details an array of juridical and historical material transmitted from the Prophet, his Companions, and the successive generations of religious authorities. In assessing the lawfulness of charms (*ruqā*) and amulets (*tamā'im*), Ibn Abī Shayba, in typical fashion, records varying positions from the early community. These accounts explicitly raise a concern with *shirk*, or polytheistic association, which would invest the talismanic objects with divine powers originating in something

other than God. Thus, we read that the Prophet was said to have detested amulets in general, while the Basran jurists Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652–653), and Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. c. 96/714) of Kufa objected to the use of Qur'ānic amulets in particular (Ibn Abī Shayba 2004, 8.13–15).

In one exchange, the blind Kufan transmitter and jurist Abū Hishām Mughīra b. Miqsam (d. c. 134/751) informed Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī that he had attached an amulet on his arm bearing the following Qur'ānic verse, "O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham" (Q. 21:69). In response, Ibrāhīm expresses his disgust with this practice (Ibn Abī Shayba 2004, 8.15). Repeated is the notion that such talismans reflect magical practices that have their origin in the devil. Also of concern for Ibrāhīm is the potential of ritually polluting the Qur'ān in its written form (Abū ʿUbayd 1995: 385).

Despite this noticeable disapproval of such talismans, Ibn Abī Shayba also records the opinions of jurists who supported the intercessory use of Qur'ānic material. Of particular interest is the topic of dissolving Qur'ānic verses in water to be ingested. This is discussed with opinions marshaled both in support and in opposition. Ibn Abī Shayba treats this topic as well as the issue of amulets and other talismanic practices in a larger section of material focusing on medicine (*ṭibb*). An array of jurists and transmitters are involved in the circulation of reports on the matter, highlighting a wide network of religious authorities who set out to regulate the deployment of the Qur'ān within the framework of positive law. The pattern of listing the chain of transmitters (*isnād*), which characterizes the dissemination of these accounts, helps to situate the discourses on the apotropaic and prophylactic use of the Qur'ān in a juridical setting of, primarily, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula (Ḥijāz) during the eighth century.

In the section on medicine, Ibn Abī Shayba showcases the opinions of jurists who permitted writing Qur'ānic verses and then dissolving them in water to be ingested; he follows this with an account of those who detested the practice (Ibn Abī Shayba 2004: 8.23–25). The transmissions of the first five accounts in favor help situate the implied historical context of the material. The opening position [1] ascribed to the early companion Ibn ʿAbbās sets the stage for the ensuing material. The transmission has a clear Iraqi provenance, as all the transmitters are notable religious authorities associated with the garrison city of Kufa. Ibn Abī Shayba receives the account from the Kufan judge of Mosul, ʿAlī b. Mushir (d. 189/805), from the famed Kufan judge Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765), from the renowned Kufan exegete and jurist, Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. c. 95/714), who in turn reported that Ibn ʿAbbās said:

> If a woman is having difficulty during childbirth, write these two verses and phrases (*kalimāt*) on a bowl (*ṣaḥfa*), then wash it and have her drink [the water]: "In the name of God, there is no deity save the Gentle, the Generous" [followed by], "Blessed is God, Lord of the seven heavens, Lord of the mighty throne" (Q. 79:46); [and] "On the Day they see what they had been warned about, it will seem to them that they remained save for an hour of a day" (Q. 46:35).

The first two transmitters of the account to Ibn Abī Shayba served as judges in the ʿAbbāsid imperium; this underscores the particular juridical milieu in which this material traveled. The Kufan provenance is of note, considering that Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, who played such an important role in the development of Kufan legal praxis (*ʿamal*), appears to have detested the use of Qurʾānic incantations and amulets.

The second report [2], this time ascribed to ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678), a wife of the Prophet, likewise intersects with early Kufan transmitters. Ibn Abī Shayba received the account from Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799), a traditionist originally from Khurasan who settled in Baghdad; he relates from the blind jurist of Kufa Mughīra b. Miqsam, from the Kufan transmitter Abū Maʿshar Ziyād b. Kulayb (d. ca. 119/737), who recounts that ʿĀʾisha saw no problem in reciting, over water, Qurʾānic verses seeking God's refuge, and then giving the water to a sick person to drink. This was an application of scripture that is connected to the practice of reciting verses of the Qurʾān onto the body by way of blowing (Abū ʿUbayd 1995: 383; Nawawī 1996: 174). In the emerging corpus of Sunnī orthopraxy, the activity of blowing verses is rooted in what comes to be viewed as the canonical Sunna of the Prophet (see Bukhārī 2000–2001, 3.1187–88). While the transmitters of both these accounts hail from Iraq, Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿĀʾisha represent Hijazi religious authorities. The same is true for the third report [3], although the provenance of this account stems form Basra, the main juridical rival of Kufa during the period. Ibn Abī Shayba quotes Hushaym, from Khālid b. Mihrān al-Ḥadhdhāʾ (d. ca. 141/758), a Basran client (*mawlā*) of the Quraysh, from the famed Basran jurist Abū Qilāba (d. ca. 104/722), who affirms the position of the Medinese *mawlā* Mujāhid (d. 104/722) that there is no problem writing a verse from the Qurʾān and giving it to someone stricken with fear to dissolve in water then to ingest.

Through the transmitters recorded, the first three reports on the topic of ingesting the Qurʾān tacitly suggest that Basran and Kufan jurists drew from Hijazi authorities to grant legitimacy to the practice. This is made more explicit in the fourth account [4], in which Ibn Abī Shayba quotes again from Hushaym citing the Kufan jurist al-Ḥajjāj b. Arṭāt (d. ca. 144/761), who ultimately served as a judge in Basra. Ḥajjāj saw his fellow Kufan jurist Saʿīd b. Jubayr writing out Qurʾānic amulets (*taʿwīdh*) upon request. Presumably, these were also to be ingested given the placement of the account in this particular chapter, although considering the terminology used they may well have been worn as talismans (cf. Abū ʿUbayd 1995: 375). Ḥajjāj inquired as to whether Saʿīd had discussed the matter with his contemporary, the famed Meccan jurist ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. c. 114/732). According to Saʿīd, ʿAṭāʾ had never heard of there being a problem with such a practice, save through his contact with the jurists of Iraq.

This line of Hijazi authorities is further supported in the following report [5], which has a noticeable Basran transmission. Ibn Abī Shayba quotes the Kufan Abū Usāma (d. 201/817) citing the Basran jurists Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) and Qatāda (d. ca. 117/735), who state that the Medinese jurist Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab (d. ca. 94/712) was in favor of *nushra*, a charm or spell, which in this context is generally interpreted as either reciting verses of the Qurʾān over water

for ingestion, synonymous with *nafth*, or writing them on paper to be dissolved and then ingested (Ibn Abī Shayba 2004, 8.23; see Qurṭubī 2002–2003, 10.318; cf. Ibn Manẓūr 1956, 5.209).

With no apparent intention to resolve the tension, Ibn Abī Shayba contrasts these supporting views with an opposing series of juridical accounts, all of which evince an Iraqi origin. Thus, for instance, the Basran transmitter ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAwn (d. 132/750) reports that the Kufan jurist Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, when presented with a man in Kufa who wrote verses of the Qur'ān and ingested them to subdue fear, condemned the practice. Likewise, Ibn Abī Shayba reports that Ibrāhīm's contemporary Ḥasan al-Baṣrī claimed the practice of *nushra* was magic (*siḥr*) derived from the devil. A similar resistance to Qur'ānic amulets can be traced back to the Kufan jurist and Qur'ān reciter Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652–653), who stood in opposition to such talismanic use of the Qur'ān. This is a sentiment furthered by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who argued that these practices risked reducing the Qur'ān to a mere series of incantations (*a-jaʿaltum kitāba 'llāhi ruqan*?) (Abū ʿUbayd 1995: 382).

As the question of authenticity plagues much of this material, the extent to which Ibn Abī Shayba's record of the matter corresponds to an actual set of historical divergences between the regional traditions of jurisprudence remains to be seen. The presentation of the information, though, is clearly designed to root the practice of Qur'ānic ingestion in the Hijaz and locate the opposition to it in Iraq. It should be noted that accounts in favor of these practices are related overwhelmingly by Iraqi authorities, highlighting how the point of contestation over the matter may well have been entirely focused in Iraq and that the early Hijazi authorities, such as the Companions Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿĀ'isha and the followers from the second generation, ʿAṭā', Mujāhid, and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, are deployed by Iraqi jurists precisely to counter the authority of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī.

The origin of the dispute itself is perhaps not as significant as how the memory of these positions played out in the ensuing generations of juridical and exegetical scholarship. Thus, for instance, the Mālikī exegete, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), writes in his commentary of the Qur'ān in favor of Qur'ānic ingestion, quoting Mujāhid and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib as giving license to the practice (Qurṭubī 2002–2003, 10.316–17, 318). Likewise, the Shāfiʿī jurist Muḥyī'l-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā' al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) records that Mujāhid and Abū Qilāba supported Qur'ānic ingestion, a position he further advances through the favorable ruling by the Syrian jurist Abū ʿAmr ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/774). However, also on Nawawī's list of proponents of Qur'ānic ingestion is Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, an inclusion which does not harmonize well with Ibn Abī Shayba's portrayal of the matter or with accounts from other collections (Nawawī 1996: 171–72; 2006, 2.197). Nonetheless, Nawawī also singles out Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī as detesting the practice, a memory that clearly extended beyond the dissemination of Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf*.

The early anxiety accompanying Qur'ānic ingestion intersects not only with the question of illicit magic, but also with the very contested nature, during this period, of the status of the Qur'ān in its material form as a written text. There

is much to suggest that many early jurists privileged an oral transmission of the Qur'ān and looked at the written forms of the text in ritual or symbolic terms with a certain degree of caution. The resistance to performing the prayer by reading from the physical codex (*muṣḥaf*) rather than from memory is one indication of this. As with several other early jurists, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), for instance, was adamant about the necessity of reciting the Qur'ān from memory during ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) and not from a physical text, while a generation later, his disciples, Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) and Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), merely discouraged the practice of reciting from the physical text for ritual performance (Jaṣṣāṣ 1995, 1.207). Likewise, Mujāhid from Mecca, Saʿd b. al-Musayyab from Medina, Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī from Kufa, and Qatāda from Basra expressed distaste with imams leading the prayer services or the night recitations during Ramadan by reading from Qur'ānic codices (Ibn Abī Dāwūd 2002, 2.651–61). Equally numerous are the objections to placing a *muṣḥaf* in the *miḥrāb*, the niche of a mosque, which marks the direction of prayer in a mosque (Ibn Abī Dāwūd 2002, 2.618–21).

Similarly, the famed jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) of Medina objected to the appearance of what were evidently Qur'ānic inscriptions in the *miḥrāb* of the mosque of Medina, which originally had no form of decoration (*tazwīq*). Mālik relates that when the inscriptions were added, people complained, as it distracted them during their prayers. It is of note that Mālik, as with many other jurists of the period, did not approve of the practice of intentionally placing the *muṣḥaf* in the *miḥrāb* so as to perform ritual prayer before it (Saḥnūn 2000, 1.286–87, cf. Jahdani 2006: 73–77). For jurists, the public display of the written text of the Qur'ān posed a serious problem, as many were quick to equate the veneration of the physical text to the scriptural practices of the Jews and Christians (*ahl al-kitāb*; ʿAbd al-Razzāq 1989, 2.236–38; Sarakhsī 2001, 1.360–61). The use of Qur'ānic verses on tombstones and on coins was also a topic of juridical dispute; these debates nonetheless are largely concomitant with the dated appearance, in the late seventh century, of Qur'ānic verses in graveyards and minting houses (Halevi 2004; Zadeh 2009: 454–55).

A similar pattern can be found in the early juridical resistance to adding diacritical marks to distinguish ambiguous graphemes or marking the vowels on the consonants in Qur'ānic codices. Without a fully pointed script, the text of the Qur'ān could only come to life, as it were, through a recitation that properly vocalized the verses. A strong current running through this juridical opposition is the notion that the written word could not replace the accompanying oral recitation or obviate the need for a trained Qur'ānic reciter (*qāriʿ*) to transmit the vocalization of the Qur'ān (Kister 1998: 133). Needless to say, these juridical tensions emerge against a backdrop of evolving codiciological practices and orthographic transformations that point to a process of sanctifying the written word as a charismatic expression of revelation. Furthermore, the early insistence on delimiting the various forms and functions of the Qur'ān as a physical object would appear to suggest that the materiality of the written word, from its very origin as scripture, already carried sacred power (see Ibn Abī Dāwūd 2002, 2.537–49, 656–61).

THE DANGERS OF DIGESTION

From the juridical debates of the eighth century, one may conclude that, in the earliest moments of Islamic history, the Qur'ān was deployed in a variety of medicinal and talismanic spheres that were designed to draw on the already existing power associated with the written text. This attitude finds expression in the early *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* literature, which promotes the excellent virtues or benefits to be gained from the Qur'ān and places a strong focus on the soteriological power of scripture in its written and recited forms. According to the Baghdadi bibliophile Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), the *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* by the judge and man of letters of Khurasan Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838) was one of the earliest in the field of a growing collection of works promoting the charismatic centrality of the Qur'ān (Ibn al-Nadīm 2009, 1.90, 214–17).

In this collection, Abū ʿUbayd treats the matter of Qur'ānic charms, amulets, and practices of Qur'ānic ingestion; he records many of the same accounts collected a generation later by Ibn Abī Shayba, detailing similar chains of transmission. In addition to Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū ʿUbayd identifies the Basran jurist Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728–729) as also objecting to the writing of verses from the Qur'ān, dissolving them in water, and administering them to a sick person to be ingested for their medicinal power. Abū ʿUbayd refers to this group of early Iraqi jurists as representing the position of those who disapproved of the practice (*madhhab al-karāha*); however, he argues that there are accounts (*aḥādīth*) that support using the Qur'ān for medicinal purposes and seeking out its charismatic power (*al-istishfā' bi'l-Qur'ān wa-iltimās bi-barakatihi*) and that these carry more authority (Abū ʿUbayd 1995: 382).

The question of whether or not this dispute actually reflects regional differences becomes largely irrelevant in the ensuing transmission of the *ḥadīth* corpus, which consistently advances the Qur'ān as a sanctified text with intercessory powers in both written and oral forms. In the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, it is quite common to see the promotion of the charismatic power of the physical Qur'ān as based upon the authority of the Prophet and the early community. There are several prophetic *ḥadīth*s that affirm the practice of Qur'ānic ingestion. Many of these accompany the *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* genre and can also be found in Qur'ān commentaries, as well as in the more esoteric collections on Qur'ānic magic, which are usually classified as treating the *khawāṣṣ,* the special properties of the Qur'ān.

By tracing the early transmission of this material, we can gain a better understanding of how practices of Qur'ānic ingestion were institutionalized in diverse historical and geographical contexts. An account preserved in the *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* by the Ḥanafī jurist and *ḥadīth* scholar from the Central Asian city of Nasaf, Abū'l-ʿAbbās Jaʿfar al-Mustaghfirī (d. 432/1041), is particularly instructive. In addition to collecting material on the miraculous power of the Qur'ān, Mustaghfirī details a host of judicial matters pertaining to the production and dissemination of Qur'ānic codices. This collection survives in a fragmentary unicum manuscript, which was copied in 486/1093. The manuscript is divided

into sections, each of which contain certifications of audition (*samāʿāt*), detailing the names of the scholars who heard the work transmitted and were granted permission (*ijāza*) to transmit the text on their own. The entire transmission occurred in the city of Samarqand and was related to a group of Ḥanafī religious authorities (Mustaghfirī 2006, 1.101–5).

As with Abū ʿUbayd's *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, Mustaghfirī's collection promotes the lawfulness of Qur'ānic amulets and charms. The topic of Qur'ānic ingestion is also treated. A particular prophetic account that makes its way into a variety of collections gives a good indication of the manner in which such talismanic practices gained authority in the codification and dissemination of the *ḥadīth* corpus. Mustaghfirī reports the miraculous qualities associated with various Qur'ānic chapters and verses; it is in this context that he records the following prophetic tradition on the power of Sūrat Yā-sīn (Q. 36). In addition to various benefits gained by reciting the *sūra*, the Prophet relates, "whoever writes it and then drinks it (*man katabahā thumma sharabahā*), [the *sūra*] puts inside his belly (*adkhalat jawfahu*) a thousand remedies (*dawā'*), a thousand lights (*nūr*), a thousand assurances (*yaqīn*), a thousand blessings (*baraka*), and a thousand mercies (*raḥma*), and it removes from him every corruption and malady (*kull ghashsh wa-dā'*)" (Mustaghfirī 2006, 2.597). This prescription makes quite literal the commonly recorded prophetic saying, "a man without any bit of the Qur'ān in his belly (*jawf*) is like a broken-down house" (Ibn Ḥanbal 1993–2001, 3.417). Such sayings build upon a notion of the curative power of the revelation to Muḥammad, which is rooted in the Qur'ān itself: "We reveal from the Qur'ān that which is a healing and a mercy for the faithful (*wa-nunazzilu mina'l-qur'āni mā huwa shifā'un wa-raḥmatun li'l-mu'minīn*)" (Q. 17:82; cf. Q. 10:57; 41:44).

For this particular prophetic support of Qur'ānic ingestion, Mustaghfirī lists five different transmissions and records two sets of variants, all of which pass through the traditionist, Qur'ān scholar and nephew of Mālik b. Anas, Ismāʿīl b. Abī Uways (d. ca. 227/842), who in turn related the report from the Hijazi transmitter Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Judʿānī (d. ca. 180/797). The *ḥadīth* ultimately comes from the first caliph Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), who is said to have heard it directly from the Prophet Muḥammad. Among the transmissions that Mustaghfirī records is one that leads from Ismāʿīl b. Abī Uways to Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, who reported the account to the primary transmitter of his works, the Khursānī traditionist ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Marzubān al-Baghawī (d. 287/900); the account then was related to ʿAlī b. Muḥtāj b. Ḥamuwayh (d. 351/962), who was originally from the town of Kushāniya in Sogdia. Mustaghfirī recounts that the *ḥadīth* in question was then transmitted to Abū Naṣr Aḥmad (d. 400/1010), from the village of Shīrkath, outside the city of Nasaf, and that it was in Shīrkath that Mustaghfirī heard the account from Abū Naṣr. While Mustaghfirī uses this particular *isnād* to access the *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* of Abū ʿUbayd, this *ḥadīth* does not appear in the surviving manuscript recensions of Abū ʿUbayd's collection, though, as noted above, the topic is discussed with approval there also.

Through the circulation of prophetic accounts across a variety of discursive fields, the explicit promotion of Qur'ānic ingestion as meritorious fits into

a process of legitimizing the practice in the authority of the Sunna. The *ḥadīth* related by Mustaghfirī also appears in several other sources, generally in the context of treating the miraculous qualities of the Qur'ān. Thus, for instance, the Nishaburi exegete Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) relates this report in his Arabic Qur'ānic commentary, the *Kashf al-bayān*. He does this as part of the *faḍā'il* of each *sūra* (Thaʿlabī 2002, 8.118–19), as does Abū'l-Faḍl Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (fl. 520/1126) in his Persian mystical commentary, the *Kashf al-asrār* (Maybudī 1952–1960, 8.198). Thaʿlabī, for his part, details two lines of transmission that, as with Mustaghfirī, intersect with Ismāʿīl b. Abī Uways; the first passes through Abū'l-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad Qūhiyār (d. 332/943), while Thaʿlabī quotes the other directly from the ascetic and exegete Aḥmad b. Abī'l-Furātī (fl. 400/1010). Both of these transmitters are from Nishapur, further reflecting the regional dissemination and generational re-inscription of the *ḥadīth* corpus in general and Qur'ānic ingestion in particular.

The Shāfiʿī traditionist Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), who lived out much of his life in Nishabur and was a student of al-Ḥākim Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Nīshāburī (d. 405/1014) also includes this *ḥadīth* in his treatment of the *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*. Yet Bayhaqī reports what much of the *rijāl* literature on the integrity of *ḥadīth* transmitters affirms, namely that Judʿānī, the main transmitter of the account, was not particularly reliable (Bayhaqī 2003, 4.96–97, cf. Baghdādī 2001, 3.673–75). Shortly after relating this *ḥadīth*, Bayhaqī returns to the issue of Qur'ānic ingestion, this time quoting an account transmitted by his master al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī in his *ḥadīth* study, *al-Mustadrak*. This account is transmitted to al-Ḥākim with a defined Kufan provenance, starting with ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sabīʿī (d. 347/958), who related the report from the city of Kufa directly to al-Ḥākim during his extensive travels through Iraq and the Hijaz. The transmission can be traced to the Kufan authorities al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam al-Ḥīra (d. 281/894–895) and al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿArnī (d. ca. 220/835); ultimately it reaches back to the fifth Imām, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Bāqir (d. ca. 117/735), who advises that whoever suffers a pain in the heart should write down the verse "Yā-sīn, by the wise Qur'ān" (Q. 36:1–2) on a bowl (*jām*) in saffron and dissolve the verse in water, which should then be imbibed (Nīshābūrī 1997, 2.504; Bayhaqī 2003, 4.99).

Al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī recounts this *ḥadīth* with no qualifications. However, his student Bayhaqī states that Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī was known to have objected to Qur'ānic ingestion and that there would be no basis to Ibrāhīm's objection were this *ḥadīth* indeed authentic. Bayhaqī notes that there is some doubt concerning the authenticity of the account (*anna fī ṣiḥḥatihi naẓaran*), perhaps alluding to the fact that the Sunnī *rijāl* literature identified several of the account's transmitters as early Shīʿī authorities.

While there was clearly some juridical ambivalence toward Qur'ānic ingestion, it also was advanced as a normative and meritorious practice. Particularly illustrative are Nawawī's remarks in his commentary on the *Muhadhdhab,* a casebook of positive law by the Shāfiʿi jurist and first head of the Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad, Abū Isḥāq al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 476/1083). In his treatment of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), Nawawī discusses whether works of *ḥadīth* or jurisprudence, which

inevitably contain Qur'ānic material, carry the same ritual status as the Qur'ān itself, such that only those in a state of ritual purity should come in direct contact with the written text (cf. Zadeh 2009: 445–48; Q. 56:78–79). This discussion also extends to other physical objects, such as clothing, turbans, coins, and food goods that have been marked with Qur'ānic verses. Fīrūzābādī gives two opinions: The first restricts all forms of Qur'ānic material with the same ritual status as formal Qur'ānic codices; the second does not, arguing that these non-Qur'ānic material objects are not designed to carry the same symbolic meaning (*maʿnā*) as the Qur'ān (Nawawī 2006, 2.77). Siding with this second position, Nawawī argues that such other textual expressions of the Qur'ān do not carry the same importance and thus are not bound to the same ritual restrictions as Qur'ānic codices, for they are not designed to serve as a codex or to take its symbolic meaning (*laysa bi-muṣḥafin wa-lā fī maʿnāhu*). Nawawī ascribes this position, which he favors, to several authorities and he specifically highlights the Shāfiʿī jurists of Khurasan, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) (Nawawī 2006, 2.81).

This move defines the specific ritual status of the codex as markedly distinct from other forms of Qur'ānic inscription. The legal problem with wearing talismanic clothing marked with passages from the Qur'ān is that it directly intersects with the regime of ritual purity that governs the physical human body, as it moves in and out of states of purity in the course of its natural bodily functions. Such a legal separation between different forms of Qur'ānic writing creates a space for various theurgical and medicinal uses of the Qur'ān, which would thus not be implicated in the broader system of ritual purity governing the human body.

This demarcation addresses an earlier argument made by Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), a Shāfiʿī jurist from Baghdad. Māwardī maintained that those in a state of ritual impurity were not allowed to wear clothing embroidered with verses from the Qur'ān, for their intention was to gain blessing from the Qur'ānic material contained on the clothing itself (*al-tabarruk bi-mā ʿalayhā min al-Qur'ān*), and thus, in its function, the material cloth carried the same symbolic value as a Qur'ānic codex (Māwardī 1994, 1.146). This is a point that Nawawī explicitly rejects (Nawawī 1996: 194), as he views the status of the Qur'ān in its extra-codicological forms as ritually distinct from the codex itself.

While Nawawī acknowledges a dispute among the early juridical authorities over the lawfulness of Qur'ānic ingestion, he ultimately sides with such authorities as Baghawī and the renowned Shāfiʿī jurist of Khurasan, the judge Abū ʿAlī'l-Ḥusayn al-Marwarrūdhī (d. 462/1069), in support of the practice, arguing that there is no harm in writing down verses of the Qur'ān on a variety of edible forms, including sweets (*ḥalwā*) that are to be consumed. Ultimately, as the Shāfiʿī exegete Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) highlights, the issue of ingesting Qur'ānic verses raises a discrete set of juridical concerns with respect to the potential of polluting the Qur'ān as it passes through the inner impurity (*al-najāsa al-bāṭina*) of the digestive tract (Suyūṭī 1967, 1.144; Zarkashī 1972, 1.322–23). A juridical means of avoiding this problem was to view the codex as a material manifestation of scripture with a separate set of ritual restrictions that were

fundamentally distinct from the variety of other material forms of engaging with the written text of the Qur'ān.

THREE SIPS

Admittedly, the diverse lines of transmission through which the accounts promoting Qur'ānic ingestion passed cannot fully demonstrate the range of contexts and significatory spaces that such practices actually inhabited. It is nonetheless noteworthy that traditions in support of ingesting the Qur'ān were not isolated to a particular sectarian profession, region, or historical context and appear to have crossed both juridical and theological boundaries. The case of the Karrāmiyya of Khurasan offers a good example of this process. An early renunciant movement, the Karrāmiyya were often characterized, particularly in Ashʿarī heresiographical literature, as standing outside the bounds of Sunnī orthodoxy, although it must be said that the Karrāmiyya maintained close connections to both Ḥanafī and Shāfiʿī jurists and considered themselves to operate well within the circle of normative Sunnī theology and orthodox expressions of piety (Zadeh 2012: 518–19).

We can follow the practice of Qur'ānic ingestion with the example of Abū Muḥammad Ḥāmid b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar b. Basṭām (fl. 429/1038), a Karrāmī Qur'ān scholar and reciter from Nishabur, who is perhaps most well known today for his *Kitāb al-mabānī*, an introduction to the field of Qur'ānic studies (Qummī 2002). The transformative power of scripture is a theme fully explored in Ibn Basṭām's transmission of the *Qawāriʿ al-Qur'ān* (The days of reckoning of the Qur'ān). This collection on the salvific benefits of the Qur'ān was redacted by the Ḥanafī jurist and *ḥadīth* scholar of Nishabur, Abū ʿAmr Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan (d. 427/1035–1036). Like much of the material surrounding the literature on the *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, this collection details the special benefits gained by the believer when reciting specific verses thought to have charismatic or apotropaic powers. A notable feature of the collection is the inclusion of recipes for Qur'ānic incantations (*ruqā*) and instructions for making amulets (*ḥurūz*) (Abū ʿAmr 1989–1990: 99–106).

The collection, which survives in a unique manuscript, was read aloud in Ibn Basṭām's madrasa on two separate sessions during the month of Ramadan of 429/1038. One recipe, transmitted as a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, was said to offer a cure for various skin diseases and ailments of the stomach and lungs. It calls for writing out on a vessel, in saffron, honey, or musk, a set formula invoking God through His beatific names as a protection against the evil eye (*al-ʿayn al-lāmma*) and against other maladies; this is to be accompanied by writing several selections from the Qur'ān, including the Fātiḥa, the final verses (*khawātīm*) of Sūrat al-Baqara (Q. 2:285–86), the Throne verse (Q. 2:255), and the last two *sūra*s of the Qur'ān (Q. 113–14), known as the *muʿawwadhatān*, as they both begin by seeking refuge and protection from God (i.e., *qul*: *aʿūdhu* . . .). The recipe requires that after this has been written on a clean basin, the basin is to be washed so that the writing on it dissolves in the water. Then three sips (*ḥusawāt*) should be taken for the ailment in question, after which the water is to be used to perform ablution;

the water should then be poured over the head, chest, and back, taking care not to waste any of the water itself. This is to be concluded with the performance of ritual prayer. The same procedure is to be followed for three consecutive days.

It would be overly simplistic to ascribe a folk or populist origin to this account and to its circulation in the context of Karrāmī madrasa education. What the recipes do suggest, however, is that Karrāmī attitudes toward the Qur'ān's otherworldly power were set within the established parameters laid out in the early *ḥadīth* corpus. As with the case of Mustaghfirī's *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* in the city of Samarqand, the Karrāmī transmission of these recipes in the madrasa of Ibn Basṭām offers a very public example of the promotion of Qur'ānic ingestion.

TOPOGRAPHIES OF SACRED MATTER

As is the nature of the *ḥadīth* corpus, with its porous transmission across regions and generations, versions of this particular recipe can be found in a variety of other sources. For instance, the Iberian scholar Qurṭubī relates a truncated form of the account in his Qur'ānic commentary, drawing on a parallel *isnād*, which passes through the Baghdadi *ḥadīth* transmitter Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Daraquṭnī (d. 385/995) (Qurṭubī 2002–2003, 10.316–17). Qurṭubī situates this *ḥadīth* within a larger juridical divergence (*ikhtilāf*) over the use of Qur'ānic amulets and talismans. He includes in his discussion the issue of Qur'ānic ingestion. Qurṭubī notes that both Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī objected to the practice, and he links Qur'ānic ingestion and Qur'ānic amulets not only to the question of ritual purity but also to the danger of polytheism (*shirk*). Ultimately, however, Qurṭubī views both the ingestion of the Qur'ān and the use of Qur'ānic amulets as licit practices of intercession, as long as they are drawn from scripture and direct one's attention to the power of God (Qurṭubī 2002–2003, 10.318–20).

Not only did the religious elite seek to regulate the various manifestations of Qur'ānic theurgy within the normative bounds of piety and devotion, but they also participated in these very practices as they publicly promoted them. The detailed descriptions contained in the *ḥadīth* corpus on how to make Qur'ānic amulets and prepare recipes for ingesting the Qur'ān suggest as much. The early surviving material record of talismans and magic bowls marked with Qur'ānic material also speaks to the ubiquity of these very practices. Additionally, the juridical record, in its general insistence on justifying the lawfulness of these practices, while seeking to contain them within a normative framework of Qur'ānic performance, points to how the *ʿulamā'* sought to circumscribe the material and oral cultures of the Qur'ān, in all their sundry manifestations, within the rubric of ritual law. The lived reality of the Qur'ān as a medicinal, intercessory force in the daily lives of the religious elite, as well as the unlettered masses, is admittedly harder to trace. However, the archeological record, while fragmentary, certainly speaks to a rich range of contexts that extend beyond the public sphere, into interior domestic spaces, and to the individual life of the human body, with countless examples of Qur'ānic charms and talismans, from elaborate and ornate to rudimentary and

elemental (Budge 1930: 33–81; Silverman 1991; Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 1.117–25, 132–49; Schaefer 2006: 7–20).

Particularly suggestive are reports in the *Masā'il* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, as redacted by his son ʿAbd Allāh (d. 290/903), which give further insight into how these various material and corporal engagements with scripture crossed into a domestic domain. In his treatment of the practice of writing amulets (*kitābat al-taʿwīdha*), ʿAbd Allāh recounts the following:

> I saw my father write amulets (*taʿāwīdh*) for his family and his relatives when someone suffered an injury or had a fever. He would write for women who had difficulty during childbirth the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ʿAbbās on a bowl (*jām*) or on something clean. He would do this only when an affliction occurred (*wuqūʿ al-balā'*) and I never saw him do it before the [actual] occurrence of an affliction. I saw him seek refuge over water and then administer that water to an ill person to drink and he would also pour some of the [remaining] water over the head of [that person].
>
> (ʿAbd Allāh 1981: 447)

Two primary forms of Qur'ānic ingestion appear in this account. The first is the practice of erasure referenced in the famed *ḥadīth* of Ibn ʿAbbās discussed earlier. ʿAbd Allāh goes on to cite the account, reporting that he read it before his father (*qarʿatu ʿalā abī*), thus affirming the proper transmission of the report. The *isnād* moves back from his father, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, to the Kufan traditionist Yaʿlā b. ʿUbayd al-Ṭanāfasī (d. 209/825), who transmits it on the authority of the renowned Kufan jurist Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778). From here, the transmission follows the exact *isnād* detailed above in the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba, with his account of how Ibn ʿAbbās advised the ingestion of the Qur'ān for women who experienced difficulty during childbirth. While the wording of the two reports differs slightly, they both share a defined Kufan transmission; this may well suggest that the *ahl al-ḥadīth* of Iraq marshaled forth an argument in favor of Qur'ānic ingestion that could stand against the objections raised earlier by the likes of Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. In Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's account, the Kufan jurist Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812) claimed that childbirth would soon ensue once this recipe was administered (ʿAbd Allāh 1981: 447–48). The Ḥanbalī reformist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) reports this same *ḥadīth* in his collection of legal rulings (*fatāwā*) and adds that Ibn Ḥanbal also heard this *ḥadīth* with the same transmission from the Damascene traditionist Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aswad b. ʿĀmir (d. 208/823), who resided in Baghdad, suggesting how widespread this particular account in support of Qur'ānic ingestion was throughout the region during this period (Ibn Taymiyya 1961–1967, 19.64).

The second form of Qur'ānic ingestion alluded to in ʿAbd Allāh's autobiographical depiction is the practice of blowing a particular set of Qur'ānic verses over water or other liquids to be imbibed and applied to the body; in this case, the verses appear to have been the *muʿawwadhatān*, the last two *sūra*s of the Qur'ān, which consist of prayers of seeking refuge in God and are commonly used in a

range of apotropaic practices. While both forms of ingestion intersect with the human body, they suggest distinct means of material mediation, one through the direct oral recitation, the power of which is transferred to the water, and the other through the charismatic presence of scripture in its written form, which is physically dissolved as a medicine to be consumed. The practice of blowing verses was evidently quite common, as Ṣāliḥ (d. 265/879), another son of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, described how, whenever he came down with an illness, his father would recite verses from the Qur'ān over a vessel and have him drink from it and wash his face and hands with the water (Dhahabī 1982, 11.209).

The reports of both ʿAbd Allāh and Ṣāliḥ appear to limit Qur'ānic ingestion as a curative activity and not a preventative one. ʿAbd Allāh also describes in this same account that his father would write out amulets to be worn on the body, which, given the context, would have also contained Qur'ānic material, although it is not specified whether or not these served a prophylactic purpose. Such a suggestion may be found with the student of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889), who recounts that he saw a young son of his master wearing a leather amulet (*tamīma*) around his neck. Often parents attached such amulets onto their children as a preventative means of guarding against the evil eye. This is made explicit as Sijistānī follows with a question he put to Ibn Ḥanbal concerning the lawfulness of a charm (*ruqya*) to guard against the evil eye. Ibn Ḥanbal responded that he saw no problem with such a practice. Sijistānī (Sijistānī 1999: 349) also inquires into the practice of Qur'ānic erasure, to which Ibn Ḥanbal replies that there is no problem with either ingesting the Qur'ān dissolved in water or using that water to perform ritual ablution and that he had never heard of there being an issue with this.

In these reports, it is Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, both as a learned religious authority in his own right and also, evidently, in his patriarchal capacity as the *pater familias*, who prepared and officiated over the theurgical presentation of sacred scripture. Noticeably, there is no explicit requirement in any of this early material that specifies who exactly could perform these rituals. This perhaps explains the proliferation of such later works as the *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* by Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) and the *Khawāṣṣ al-Qur'ān* of ʿAbd Allāh b. Asʿad al-Yāfiʿī (d. 768/1367), both of which give guidance in the proper preparation of Qur'ānic amulets, charms, magic squares, and recipes for ingesting the Qur'ān (Robson 1934; Zadeh 2009: 467). The wide transmission of the literature on the *khawāṣṣ al-Qur'ān* certainly increases access to the various formulae of Qur'ānic esoterica. Yet with any premodern discourse requiring both writing and literacy, who exactly could effectuate such rituals of wearing and ingesting the Qur'ān would inevitably be circumscribed by the material and economic realities governing book culture itself. This is clearly not the case with the medicinal ritual of blowing (*nafth*) Qur'ānic verses over water to be ingested; however, it remains to be seen how one could assess the historical prevalence of such oral performances, other than through the surviving textual cultures of the religious elite.

What is apparent from ʿAbd Allāh's description is that his father, a learned traditionist and jurist, served as a family healer trained in using the Qur'ān as a medicinal and intercessory force for healing the human body. As for the

historicity of this portrayal of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, we must keep in mind that the various *masā'il* collections that transmitted the rulings and historical reports of the learned master were redacted by his students and then by subsequent generations of Ḥanbalī jurists, in an attempt to root legal praxis in the authority of the founder of the juridical school. It thus remains to be seen the extent to which this material reflects an actual historical record; although its memorialization is perhaps no less important, as it not only justifies such activities in the development of positive law, but it also reflects the idealized manner in which the early community of Ḥanbalī scholars imagined that these rituals were deployed by the founder of their school.

Privileged throughout is the Qur'ān's charismatic power as an intercessory scripture. This is very much the position of Ibn Taymiyya, who draws on the report of ʿAbd Allāh in support of the practices of Qur'ānic erasure and ingestion (Ibn Taymiyya 1961–1967, 19.64–65). As he argues in one of his rulings on the matter:

> There is no problem if something were written from the Qur'ān or from the *dhikr* formulae [transmitted by the Prophet] on a bowl or a tablet and erased in water (*muḥiya bi'l-mā'*) or some other [liquid] and then imbibed. The authority for this is from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and others. And it has been related from Ibn ʿAbbās that he would write verses from the Qur'ān and *dhikr* and command that they be ingested by someone with an illness.
>
> (Ibn Taymiyya 1961–1967, 12.599)

Ibn Taymiyya explains that the basis of this is rooted in *baraka,* i.e., the charismatic power or blessing that one obtains from the Qur'ān. Such a position locates the erasure of the Qur'ān in the praxis of Ḥanbalī *fiqh* and makes literal the famed prophetic *ḥadīth* that "the Qur'ān is the best medicine," an idea we have seen in the Qur'ān itself (Ibn Māja 2000–2001: 408; Ibn Qayyim 1957: 272–73).

The early insistence on the permissibility of Qur'ānic ingestion by the *ahl al-ḥadīth* may well reflect a theological position of the Qur'ān as the eternal speech of God and thus capable in its material form of drawing divine *baraka* into the corruptible vessel of the human body. The position advanced by many among the *ahl al-ḥadīth* that promotes the veritable eternality of the external linguistic form (*lafẓ*) of the Qur'ān is certainly consonant with this view of the charismatic presence of divine scripture.

In contrast, Nawawī's vision of the *muṣḥaf* as ritually distinct from other textual manifestations of the Qur'ān may well have been an expedient juridical device to solve the problem of how such practices would impinge upon the ritual status of the Qur'ān; it may also be the case that his framework of Ashʿarī theology could make such a distinction possible, where the written and recited forms of the Qur'ān reflect a temporal expression of the indivisible and transcendent form of eternal divine speech (Ess 1996). This is a view of scripture that the Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymiyya, in his stance on the uncreated status of the Qur'ān as the divine speech of God, found to be particularly repugnant (Zadeh 2008: 62). Yet these divergent theological positions over the nature of God's speech did not impede the promotion of the therapeutic uses of the Qur'ān across a range of social and sectarian contexts.

FOR POPULAR CONSUMPTION

By approaching the production of Qur'ānic amulets or recipes of the Qur'ān as representations of folk or popular religion, we risk obviating the complex intersection between jurisprudence, theology, and exegesis that legitimizes these practices. Historically, this discourse has been maintained and organized by the religious elite. While several early religious authorities expressed ambivalence toward the intercessory traditions of touching, wearing, and ingesting the Qur'ān, a largely normative response coalesced, promoting the charismatic corporality of the Qur'ān. Theologically, this may have paralleled the doctrine of Qur'ānic "inlibration" as a physical manifestation, both in written and oral forms of the divine (Wolfson 1976: 263–303); such a theological configuration of divine speech as uncreated presence was itself a historical process rooted in the development of Islamic intellectual history. Yet, the early objections to Qur'ānic ingestion by the likes of Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī point to the already present power of the written word as a charismatic force, harkening back to even earlier cultures of bibliomancy that preceded and paralleled developments in Islamic theology and religious praxis.

As with the physical remains of saints, imams, and prophets, the Qur'ān served as a sacred trace of the divine, which could be called upon for healing and intercession. The example of ʿAbd Allāh's memories of his father, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, ultimately points to how the veneration of the Qur'ān as a physical object was woven into a broader topography of sacred matter, which also intersected with the veneration of tombs (see ʿAbd Allāh 1981: 447; Ibn Ḥanbal 2001, 2.492). However, in the case of such later Ḥanbalī reformists as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim, along with their modern Salafī followers, the intercessory power of the Qur'ān as a sacred object is categorically distinct from the vast network of relics and tombs that populated Islamic cosmography (Taylor 1999: 171ff). It would be hard to argue, nonetheless, that such a distinction was formed by a division between popular versus official forms of religious behavior.

While there is much work to be done on the binary opposition between the elite and the masses in Islamic religious discourse, it would be an oversimplification to claim that the manifestations of Qur'ānic medicine and theurgy were historically fixed to any one of these poles in the contest for normativity. One can be sure that the practices of fashioning verses from the Qur'ān into amulets to be worn and recipes to be consumed have been staged across a broad spectrum of societies, inevitably crossing beyond the privileged discourse of the religious elite, transforming in and adapting to various vernacular contexts. Such performances, by their very nature, would have implicated domestic spheres of religiosity in the diverse individual and social lives of the scriptural community (see J. Z. Smith 2003: 24–27). One should not assume that the religious elite was establishing such practices in a hierarchical top-down discursive formation. The very impetus behind the juridical consideration of these issues is rooted in a reaction to actual ritual engagements with the charismatic presence of the Qur'ān. Yet, it is also apparent that the juridical discourse was designed to set these practices in

a normative framework that would routinize and circumscribe them within the sanctioned sphere of positive law.

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