

## JIHĀD AND ISLAMIC ARMS AND ARMOUR

POR

DAVID ALEXANDER

### ABSTRACT - RESUMEN

This article studies the islamic concept of *Jihad* or Holy war and its different implications on the decoration of arms and armour.

Este artículo trata el concepto islámico de *Jihad* o Guerra Santa y sus diversas implicaciones trasladadas a la decoración de las armas y armaduras.

### KEY WORDS - PALABRAS CLAVE

Islam. Arms and armour. koran. Holy War. Jihad. Simbology. Ceremonial. Mentalities.

Islam. Armas y armaduras. Corán. Guerra Santa. Jihad. Simbología. Ceremonial. Mentalidades.

«And fight them on until there is no more tumult and oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah...»

«When there was an armistice and war was abolished and unmet men met in safety and consulted together none talked about Islam intelligently without entering it. In those years double as many more than double as many entered Islam as ever before»<sup>1</sup>.

Islam's success was not based solely on military prowess, but grew from the strength and beauty of its underlying spiritual concept and it was this, especially during the early Islamic period, that inspired countless warriors to strive for victory in war. The message preached by the Prophet Muḥammad was simple and straightforward. Man must submit to the will of God and follow His laws. Indeed, the word *Islam* means submission to the will of God; and the word *Muslim*, which derives from it, means one who submits. The code of conduct required by this involved five major points; belief in one God and the Last Day, regular prayer and charity, fasting during the month of Ramaḍān, and making the *Hajj*, pilgrimage, all requisite obligations for the believer; such duties are stressed throughout the Qurʾān, for example 2:177:

... it is righteousness - to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels; and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and give *zakat* (practice regular charity); to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing.

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<sup>1</sup> Qurʾān 2:193. and Ibn isḥāq 1982, pp. 504-07

During the early years of his mission Muḥammad quickly began to win others to this cause, but in so doing he aroused the anger of the most powerful people in his city, and in the year 1/622 to escape persecution he and his followers left Mecca for Medina. Until then the new movement had been peaceful, often in the face of insult, ridicule, and even violence; new revelations now commanded that the fledgling community fight for its survival. This fight in the cause of religion is known as the *jihād*, Holy War, and *jihād* became a virtual sixth pillar of the faith. *jihād* should be distinguished from *ḥarb*, war, for it is forbidden for a Muslim to kill another Muslim, and *jihād* represents the only type of war that can have religious sanction. The concept of the *jihād* is also connected with the Prophetic *ḥadīth* tradition that with the advent of Islam the world was divided into the *dār al-ḥarb*, the Land of War and the *dār al-islām*, the Land of Peace. The former term designates that part of the world that has not accepted Islam and which therefore lives in a near permanent condition of strife and turmoil; the latter term designates that part of the world that lives according to Islamic law.<sup>2</sup> The *jihād* consequently designates war against unbelievers and its goal was to defend and constantly expand the Muslim community.

Like the other duties mentioned above *jihād* was obligatory for every able-bodied adult male in the community. According to the scholar Abū'l-Walīd Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes (520-95/1126-98), the Qur'ānic passage most frequently cited by scholars to demonstrate this was 2:216:<sup>3</sup>

Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you.

Another passage often cited in this regard is sometimes called the «verse of the sword:»

Then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and pay *zakat*, then open the way for them.<sup>4</sup>

An exception, however, was made for the «People of the Book,» those who had accepted earlier revelations - the *tawrāt*, the Torah; the *zabūr*, the Psalms; and the *inḡīl*, the four Gospels.

Fight...the People of the Book, until they pay *jizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.<sup>5</sup>

A call to the *jihād* could be issued solely by the leader of the community and following the Qur'ānic precept (17:15), was always preceded by an invitation to accept Islam:

Nor would We punish until We had sent a messenger (to give warning).

Many *ḥadīth*, traditions, stress the importance of the *jihād*, and indeed entire sections of the collections of *ḥadīth* are devoted to this issue. A well known example recorded by the scholar and traditionalist Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-70) states that the Prophet said:

<sup>2</sup> See Abel, 1965, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Rushd's chapter on the *jihād* from the *Bidayat al-Mudjītahid*, in Peters 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 9:5, other Qur'ānic passages emphasize and elaborate upon this, for example: «Allah hath purchased of the Believers and their persons and their goods; for (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain (9:111). Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance from their Lord.(3:169) Say: «Can you expect for us (any fate) other than one of two glorious things - (martyrdom or victory)?» (9:52) Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors. (2:190)

<sup>5</sup> 9:29.

Paradise is under the swords.<sup>6</sup>

And in another *ḥadīth* Bukhārī records that when one of the Prophet's companions asked what qualified as the best deed a Muslim could do, Muḥammad replied:

To offer prayers at their early stated fixed times'; (the companions then) asked; 'What is next in goodness?' (Muḥammad) replied 'To be good and dutiful to your parents;' (The companion) further asked, 'What is next in goodness,' (Muḥammad) replied, 'To participate in *jihād* in Allah's cause.'<sup>7</sup>

Other matters dealt with in *ḥadīth* range from generalisations to specific details; from the obligation upon the Muslim to participate in the *jihād*, the qualities of a good warrior, and questions of bravery and cowardice, to the use of horses and perfume, the sharing of booty, the role of women, spying, the treatment of prisoners, the proper duration of a peace treaty, and the killing of women and children (disapproved of). Yet other particulars included instruction concerning ransom, deceit and trickery in war, fear and the treatment of wounds, the killing of captives, the reception of returning warriors, and even such issues as when to wash off dust after a battle and the merits of certain types of weapons and armour.

The attention to detail recorded in *ḥadīth* is exemplified by those dealing with horses and their importance in the *jihād*. The animal played a major role in the establishment of Islam and in its rapid spread throughout the Near East.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps why Muḥammad awarded a double portion of booty to a horse used in the *jihād*:

two shares for the horse and one share for its rider<sup>9</sup>

and to state that:

There is always goodness in horses till the Day of Resurrection...A horse may be kept for one of three purposes: for a man it may be a source of reward; for another it may be a means of living; and for a third it may be a burden (a source of committing sins). As for the one for whom it is a source of reward, he is the one who keeps his horse for the sake of *jihād* in Allāh's Cause.<sup>10</sup>

The Prophet and his first followers were not always mounted on fine Arabian horses, they were expensive to buy and keep, and the early Muslims generally had fewer horses than their adversaries.<sup>11</sup> This was true for the raid against the Byzantine stronghold at Tabūk in 9/630, when those warriors who could not be mounted cried in despair:

<sup>6</sup> Bukhārī, 1987 IV, p. 55

<sup>7</sup> Bukhārī, 1987, vol. 4, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Horses are mentioned in several Qur'ānic passages, for example, *sūra* 38:30–32: To David We gave Solomon (for a son), how excellent in Our service! ever did he turn (to Us)! behold, there were brought before him, at eventide, coursers of the highest breeding, and swift of foot; and he said, 'Truly do I love the love of Good, with a view to the glory of my Lord,' until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night): 'Bring them back to me.' Then began he to pass his hand over (their) legs and their necks. Commenting on this al-Ṭabarī wrote that two things beloved by all prophets, were weapons and horses, as both were essential in protecting and spreading the faith, Ṭabarī 1980-84 vol. 3, pp. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Bukhārī, 1987, vol. 4, p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Bukhārī 1984, vol. 4, p. 536, nos. 837-39. During his lifetime Muḥammad owned seven horses, *sakb*, *Lizāz*, *al-ṣarīb*, *al-Lukhayf*, *al-ward*, *al-ya'sūb* and *mutajiz*, and a white mule called *Duldul*, Ṭabarī 1980-84, vol. 3, p. 334. Ṭabarī 1908 pp. 182-83, a slightly different list is given in the French translation, Ṭabarī 1980-84, vol. 3, p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> At the Battle of Badr the Meccans had seven hundred camels and one hundred horses whilst the Muslims had only a few horses and seventy camels that they rode in turn, Ibn Ishāq, 1982, pp. 292-93 makes no mention of horses, but Ibn Hishām in his note on this says the Muslims had three named *al-Sabal*, *Ba'zaja* and *al-Ya'sūb*. At the battle of Uḥud the Meccans fielded three thousand men, including two hundred cavalry, against the Muslims, who had one thousand men and two horses, Rodinson, 1980, p. 179, for further discussion see Riyadh 1996, Vol. 2, chapter 7.



Fig. 1. Preacher carrying a sword on the minbar, From a *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī, Syria, ca. 1300, The British Museum, London, Add. 22.114, folio 94 recto.

Nor (is there blame) on those who came to thee to be provided with mounts, and when thou saidst, 'I can find no mounts for you,' they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief that they had no resources wherewith to provide the expenses.(9:92)

On an eschatological level the Arabs shared the classical and Biblical traditions which associated horses, particularly winged horses, with victory. Early accounts of some of the crucial battles fought by the Prophet claim that the Muslims were assisted in their victories heavenly horsemen. At Badr for instance there were many reports that the Muslims were helped by heavenly riders. One *ḥadīth* records that during the battle the Prophet had a vision

in which he saw Gabriel leading a horse by its reins while two onlookers reported that they saw a cloud from which came the sound of neighing horses and a voice calling out the name of Gabriel's horse or hippogriff, repeating 'forward Ḥayzum'.<sup>12</sup> The nephew of the Prophet's enemy Abū Lahab reported that:

We met men in white on piebald horses between heaven and earth, and by God they spared nothing and none could withstand them.<sup>13</sup>

If any single image clarifies the importance of the *jihād* it is that of a preacher in a mosque standing on the *minbar*, pulpit and holding a sword (Fig. 1). In this miniature painting religion and war are united in a way that is often difficult for non-Muslims to comprehend. But an understanding of the *jihād* is necessary not only for understanding Islam but for demonstrating that Islamic arms and armour are a far more important category of objects than has usually been imagined by many scholars and art historians. They are objects designed to be used in a holy struggle, and as such have a religious significance and function. This explains why so many pieces bear inscriptions which would seem to have nothing to do with warfare, why, for instance, a horse armour would be covered with inscriptions listing the names of God (Fig. 2)<sup>14</sup> or why a sabre would be engraved with a series of seemingly diverse verses from the Qur'ān (Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> The verses on this sabre are worth reading in full for they underline several related themes, specifically, the importance of fighting especially when evicted from one's home, the necessity of sacrifice and martyrdom and the punishment of sinners:

Hast thou not turned thy vision to the chiefs of the Children of Israel after the time of Moses? They said to a Prophet that was among them: «Appoint for us a King, that we may fight in the cause of Allah.» He said «it is not possible, if ye were commanded to fight, that ye will not fight?» They said «How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah, seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?» But when they were commanded to fight, they turned back, except a small band among them. But Allah has full knowledge of those who do wrong (2:246). Allah hath heard the taunt of those who say: «Truly Allah is indigent and we are rich!» - We shall certainly record their word and their act of slaying the Prophets in defiance of right, and We shall say «Taste ye the penalty of the scorching fire! (3:181). Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! they each presented a sacrifice to Allah: It was accepted from one, but not from the other. Said the latter: «Be sure I will slay thee.» «Surely,» said the former, «Allah doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous (5:27). Hast thou not turned thy vision to those who were told to hold back their hands from fight, but establish regular prayers and spend in regular charity? When at length the order for fighting was issued to them, behold! a section of them feared men as- or even more than they should have feared Allah: They said: «Our Lord! why hast Thou ordered us to fight? Wouldst thou not grant us respite to our natural term, near enough?» Say: Short is the enjoyment of this world: The hereafter is the best for those who do right; Never will ye be dealt with unjustly in the very least! (4:77). Thy Lord doth know that thou standest forth to prayer nigh two-thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night, and so doth a party of those with thee. But Allah doth appoint night and day in due measure. He knoweth that thou are unable to keep count thereof. So He hath turned to you in mercy: read ye therefore, of the Qur'an as much as may be easy for you. He knoweth that there may be some among you in ill-health; others travelling through the land, seeking of Allah's bounty; yet others fighting in Allah's Cause. Read ye, therefore, as much of the Qur'an as may be easy for you and establish regular prayer and give regular charity; and loan to Allah a beautiful loan. And whatever good ye send forth for your souls, ye shall find it in Allah's presence- yea, better and greater, in reward, and seek ye the grace of Allah: for Allah is oft forgiving, most merciful (73:20).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, pp. 300-03; this is also depicted in miniature painting, e.g. angels assisting in the Battle of Badr, Freer Gallery, inv. no. 57. 16, folio 182a. Gabriel's mount is sometimes represented as a hippogriff as on the frontispiece to the so-called, *Kitāb fi'ilm siyāsat al-khayl*, see Bittar 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 310.

<sup>14</sup> Stibbert Museum, Florence, inv. no. 3520, see Riyadh 1996, vol. 2, cat. no. 80

<sup>15</sup> For example a sabre in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.25.1297 and a sword hilt in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London, inv. no. MTW 1142, see Alexander 1992, no. 131.d.

<sup>16</sup> Another sword in the Wallace Collection, London, inv. no. OA-1785 is inscribed with a verse stating that: «God the provider made the warriors of the faith to curse the perfidious and the sword to cut the vertebrae of the infidels».

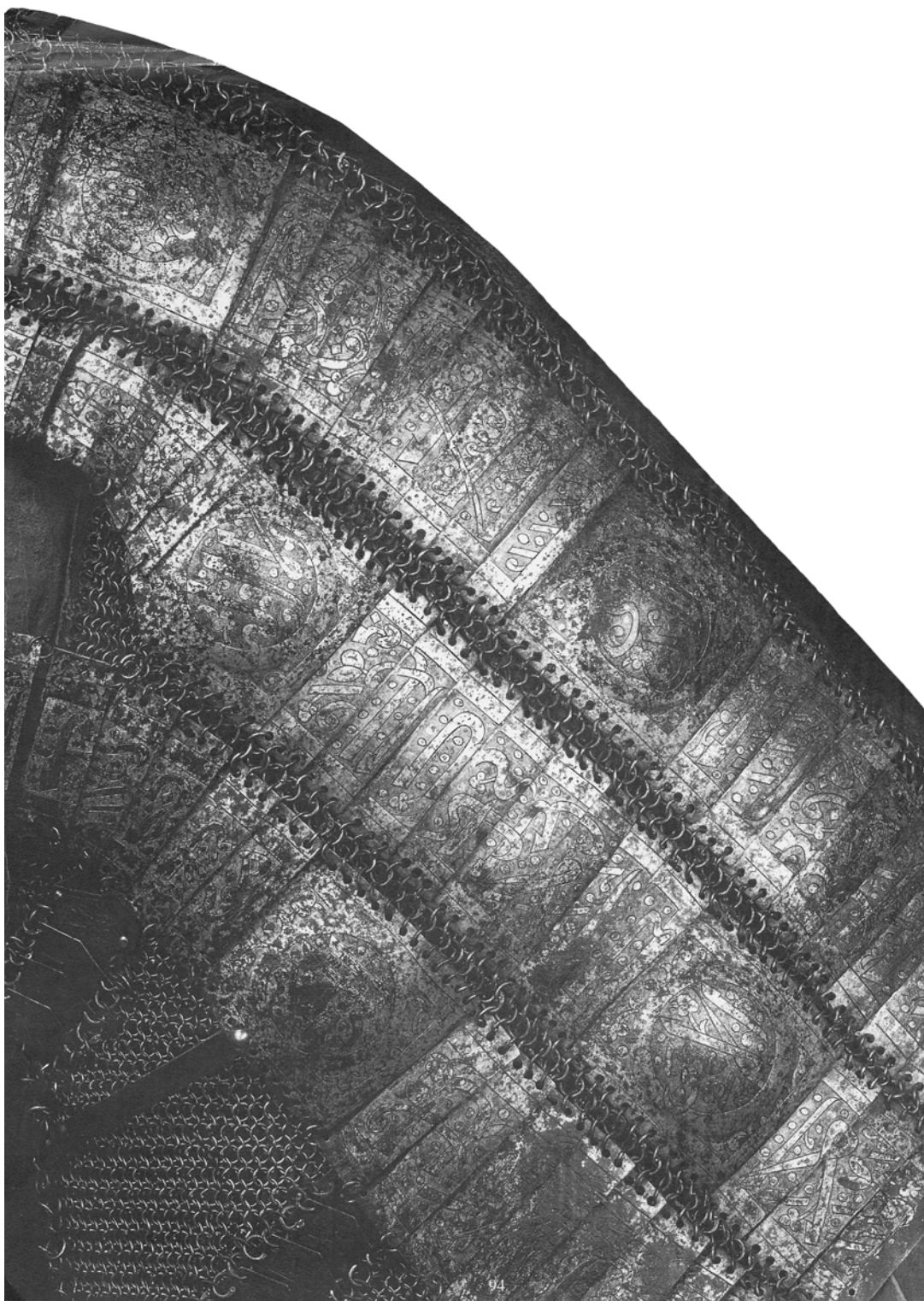


Fig. 2. Section of horse armour inscribed with some of the 99 names of God, Ottoman, 16th century, Stibbert Museum, Florence, inv. no. 3520.

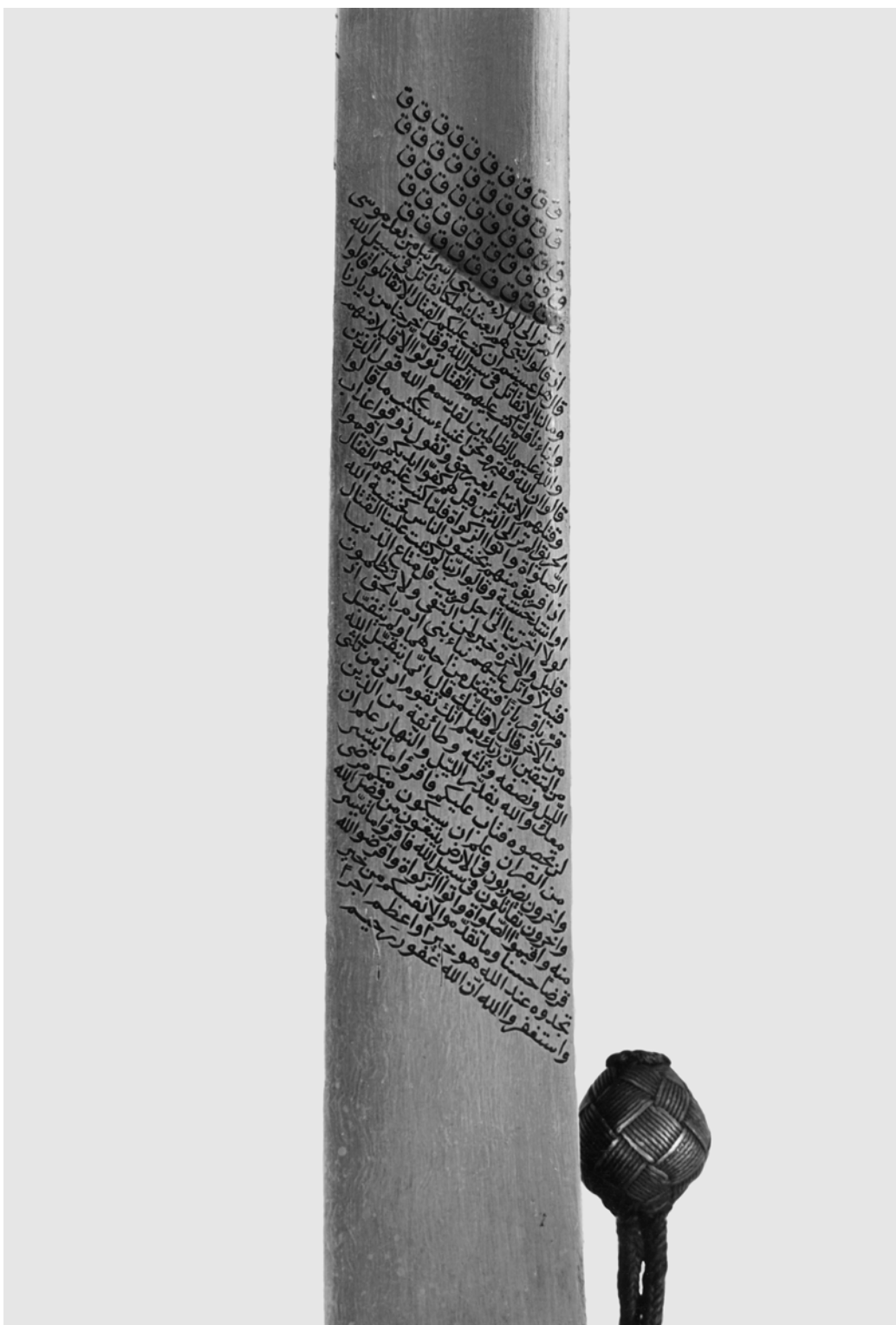


Fig. 3. Sabre with Quṛānic verses, Ottoman, 18th century, The Wallace Collection, London, no. 1956.

The Qur'ānic passages on this blade are preceded by a repetition of the letter *qaf*; a letter with mystical significance for it is said to represent the Mountain Qaf which in medieval Muslim cosmology encircles the world; and on which lives the Sīmurgh - a mythical bird - that in ṣūfī thought stands for God.<sup>17</sup> The other side of the blade is inscribed with the *A'ūyā al-Kursī*, the «Throne» verse, 2:255-56 (see below) and bears the spurious signature of the swordsmith Hajī Sunqur and the date 957/1550. The quillon block is from the imperial Ottoman workshops and can be dated to the 18th century as is the blade.<sup>18</sup>

In the community established by the Prophet all men were considered to be part of the army of God; later, with the expansion of Islam and as the distance to the frontier greatly increased, the idea of all males marching to fight at the borders became impractical. Finally, with the establishment of royal power, standing armies frequently based on the *mamlūk* or slave warriors system became prevalent.

For those who were determined to wage *jihād* until the entire world adopted Islam, there was an alternative, and during the first centuries of Islam and the theoretical division of the world into the *dār al-ḥarb*, and the *dār al-islām*, such men organised themselves into warrior communities and built *ribāt*, frontier fortresses. There they lived simple lives, studying the Qur'ān, fasting, praying, and fighting;<sup>19</sup> These warriors, *ghāzī*, often followed pre-Islamic Arab and Bedouin raiding traditions which continued until modern times.<sup>20</sup> In the days of the Prophet, who made nineteen raids,<sup>21</sup> the small community of believers launched frequent forays upon their neighbours near and far, such as the Prophet's attacks on Buwat, al-ʿUshayra, Bajilis, Yaman, and Tabūk, all expeditions extolled in *hadīth*.<sup>22</sup>

In later periods not only groups of people but whole tribes adopted this way of life, and it was, for example, in this context that the Ottomans began their rise to supremacy.<sup>23</sup> Originally frontier warriors, the Ottomans gradually carved out a new state in Anatolia and the Balkans. An Ottoman *ghāzī* was described by the poet Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmadī (ca. 735-816/1334-1413) as:

...a servant of God who cleans the earth from the defilement of polytheism; a *ghāzī* is the sword of God; he is the protector and the refuge of believers, if he becomes martyr while following the paths of God, do not think him dead. He lives with God as one of the blessed, he has eternal life.<sup>24</sup>

The word *ghāzī* carried such powerful connotations of religious service that it became a title used by the Danishmend, the Saljūqs, and the Ottomans.

The example set by the communities of young warriors living solely for worship and *jihād* in *ribāt*, on the frontiers was also adapted by religious leaders, especially ṣūfīs as an educational tool in the proper training of the young. Such ideals were adopted by the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 576-622/1180-1225), who aided by the ṣūfī Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar, organised an order, *futuwwa*, that traced its spiritual lineage to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī. This Islamic order has been compared to European knightly orders; and there are many common points, especially those involving the investiture ceremony, which for the *futuwwa*, entailed girding with a belt, the bestowal of trousers (the garb of a mounted warrior), and a

<sup>17</sup> Schimmel 1986, pp. 421-22, in reference to the work by the poet ʿAṭṭār; see also Streck and Miquel 1978, pp. 401-02.

<sup>18</sup> The smith Hajī Sunqur is said to have worked for the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I, but no documentary evidence supports this. At least forty blades are attributed to him, most have a shallow groove with a thumb-print-like indentation at its beginning. As they range in date from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries most are obviously spurious, see Mayer 1962, pp. 74-75, and Yücel 1965. An 18th century sabre signed by him is in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 36.25.1292.

<sup>19</sup> Such communities were perhaps the inspiration for the organization of the Knights of Templar.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Hitti 1977, pp. 23-29.

<sup>21</sup> Bukhārī 1987, vol. 5, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> A twentieth-century account still speaks of «Arabs and Bedouin raiding each other and living on what we get from each other.» Faysal al-Dawish, in a letter to Ibn-Saʿūd in Habib 1978, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> See also Tynan 1965, pp. 538-40.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Melikoff 1965, p. 1044.



drink from a cup. These ideals were eventually absorbed by the more militant dervish sects, particularly the Bektashi, who were a major influence on the Janissary troops of the Ottoman empire.<sup>25</sup> An example of the connection between the Bektashi and the *jihād* is their use of broad axes with crescent-shaped blades, often described as «dervish axes.» and according to Birge, were carried by the Bektashī in memory of warriors like Sayyid ʿAlī Sulṭān, one of the forty legendary heroes who fought for the Ottoman ruler Orhān Ghāzī (r. 726-61/1326-60).<sup>26</sup>

An insight into the way these *ghāzī* communities functioned can be found in a modern example, the Ikhwan (religious brotherhood) of Najd, who were one of the key factors in the rise to power of Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saʿud (ca. 1298-1373/1880-1953) in the Arabian Peninsula. The Ikhwan, drawn mostly from the nomadic Bedouin, were fired with religious zeal by puritanical Wahhābī preachers and under the direction of Abd al-Aziz, began to establish fortified camps throughout the peninsula, where they lived frugal and pious lives and devoted themselves to *jihād*. Their first «settlement» camp, *hujar*, at al-Irtawiyyah, has been described as being:

Built on the basic plan of a wheel with the mosque and the village square forming the center of town.... horse stables and fodder bins were located conspicuously in the center of town near the square. it was at the square that the Ikhwan war banner, *bayrag*, was raised as a sign that a raiding call had been issued...These warriors were always prepared for war...When the call went out for war; any person who carried arms was expected to respond, and none remained behind unless he was physically confined to a sick bed or for any other legal reasons for which the person was individually excused.<sup>27</sup>

The Ikhwan, like the *ghāzī* before them, carried little when they went to war. Abd al-Aziz emphasized this when he said:

During war each one gets a cartridge, runs to his rifle, then rides his camel to war, taking with him a little money and a few dates....A little with us takes the place of much with others...We used to march for three days without food.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE MUJAHIDIN, FIGHTERS FOR THE FAITH.

«Paradise,» said the Prophet, «has one hundred gates which Allāh has reserved for the mujahidin who fight His cause.»<sup>29</sup>

The word *mujahidin* derives from the word *jihād* and literally means «one who strives» and is generally taken as meaning «one who fights for the faith.» By examining the qualities ascribed to some early exceptional *mujahidin* it is possible to understand more clearly the way in which Muslims perceived the *jihād* and acted to follow its dictates.

The Muslim hero was one ready to abandon all worldly concern - money, social position, family - to struggle in the *jihād*, even to his death.<sup>30</sup> The noble qualities attributed to such individuals included purity of spirit, loyalty and obedience, manly conduct, vigour, generosity, courage in battle, and deep spirituality. The countless martyrs of the turbulent early Islamic period were sometimes described as the young heroes, *fiṭyān*, of the *jihād*, those who:

strives his utmost in Allāh's cause with his life and property.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See especially Taeschner 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Askeri Museum, Istanbul, inv. no. 15723, see Alexander 1984, fig. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Habib 1978, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Habib 1978, pp. 53-68.

<sup>29</sup> Bukhārī 1987, pp. 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> Such as the *anṣār*, the helpers, of Medina who helped the Prophet and his companions, *muhājirūn*, after the emigration from Mecca who have «...sworn allegiance to Muḥammad for the *jihād* (forever) as long as we live», Bukhārī 1987, vol. 4, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Qurʾān 6:10-12 and 9:111-12; Bukhārī 1987, vol. 4, p. 37.



Fig. 4. Ḥamza leading the fight against the Banū Qaynuqā, from a *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* of Rashīd al-Dīn, Tabriz, 714/1314-15, Nour Collection, London, folio 8r.



Fig. 5. Muḥammad addresses ‘Alī and Ḥamza before the battle of Badr, from a *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* of Rashīd al-Dīn, Tabriz, 714/1314-15, Nour Collection, London, folio 7r.

Martyrdom became so highly regarded that the Prophet said that if any martyr was given the chance to return to this world and was offered anything he might want, he would return only so that he could fight for God and be killed a second time.<sup>32</sup>

The *sīra*, biography, of the Prophet by Ibn Ishāq (85-150/704-67) is replete with descriptions of heroic behaviour of Muḥammad and his companions. The former, both Prophet and military leader did not, despite his advanced age, hesitate to lead his followers into battle. Among his companions Ḥamza b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib his paternal uncle and his cousins Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib and ʿAlī are often singled out as prototypical Islamic heroes. There are numerous *ḥadīth* in their praise. The Prophet called Ḥamza his lion, and ʿAlī his falcon and Jaʿfar became known as al-Ṭayyar because after his heroic death at the battle of Muʿta in 8/629 the Prophet dreamt he saw him flying on two bloody wings with the angels in Paradise<sup>33</sup>.

Ḥamza was noted for his immense strength, loyalty, and bravery and was especially renowned for his prowess in single combat. He won renown in many battles including those against the Banū Qaynuqā, (Fig. 4), and at Badr on 19 Ramaḍān 2/15 March 624. He remained an undefeated champion until he was killed, at the battle of Uḥud (which began on 7 Shawwāl 3/23 March 625) by a spear thrown from ambush by the Abyssinian slave Waḥshī. His nose and ears were cut off and his liver was torn from his body and eaten by Hind bint ʿUṭaba, the wife of the Qurayshī leader, Abū Sufyān. Ḥamza was one of sixty-five Muslims to lose his life in that battle, the poet Kaʿb, who was present described the efforts of those who died:

All of them died unflinchingly in God's religion, like Hamza turned not from the truth until his spirit passed to a mansion resplendent in gold.<sup>34</sup>

In a lamentation on Ḥamza's death, another contemporary poet, Ḥasan ibn Thābit, called Ḥamza:

a refuge of orphans and guests and the widow...our great defender...the lion of the apostle...High above the leaders, generous, white, shining; Nor frivolous, poor spirited, nor grumbling at life's burdens. A sea of generosity...<sup>35</sup>

From these beginnings grew a large body of romantic literature embellishing Ḥamza's feats. In these he was credited with incredible exploits, such as the defeat of various monsters and jinns in single combat.

ʿAlī's heroism (Fig. 5) is acknowledged not only by his partisans, the Shīʿa but also by the Sunnī and is stressed in the early histories, such as in the account reported by Ibn Hishām:

on the day of the battle of Uḥud one of the companions of Muḥammad said in a loud voice 'There is no better sword than *dhūʿl-faqār* and no better hero *fata* than ʿAlī.'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 400.

<sup>33</sup> Vaglieri 1965, p. 372. Topkapı Sarayı no. 2/143.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 410.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 417.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Hishām 1955, part 3, p. 40, in Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 756 ʿAlī is described by the word, *fata*, (lit. «young man») designating the ideal qualities of a young man: nobility of spirit, chivalrous conduct, vigor, generosity, courage in battle, and a deep sense of the spiritual. In Qurʾān 18:10 the word is used in reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, paradigms for heroic faith and loyalty. The connection between ʿAlī and the sword *dhūʿl-faqār* was an important element in Shīʿa propaganda, intended to demonstrate ʿAlī's heroism and to show that by inheriting the Prophet's sword, the sword of victory, ʿAlī had also inherited the caliphate, see Alexander 1999.

Even the angels are said to have praised him, and according to Shī'ā histories during the battle of Uḥud the angel Gabriel appeared at the critical moment and told Muḥammad to recite the so called intercessory prayer to 'Alī, the *nadī 'Alī*:

Call upon 'Alī the revealer of miracles, you will find him a comfort to you in crisis. Every care and every sorrow will pass through your trusteeship. Trust in God, O 'Alī, O 'Alī, O 'Alī.<sup>37</sup>

Immediately thereafter 'Alī appeared brandishing *dhu'l-faḳār* and routed the enemy. Many objects and weapons are inscribed with this verse, including a shirt of butted mail in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 6).<sup>38</sup>

'Alī's son Ḥusayn (4-61/626-680) was noted for his bravery and led an open revolt against the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya whom he accused of having abandoned the precepts of Islam in preference to aiding the rich and powerful. Ḥusayn, his family, and a small group of followers were intercepted at Karbala in Iraq on 10th Muḥarram 61/October 680; after seeing his companions and family die, he was cut down and beheaded. This battle became a central event in Shī'ā thought and Ḥusayn, one of the most important Shī'ā martyrs, has been called «the golden link between God and Man.»<sup>39</sup> Indeed, so many of the family and descendants of 'Alī met with violent deaths that many Shī'ā seem to have regarded suffering and misery as the natural lot of the true believer. Many of the verses dealing with «watered steel» and the «waters of paradise» inscribed on Islamic sword and dagger blades can be connected to the story of Ḥusayn, bleeding to death, denied water, and instead given a drink of watered steel.<sup>40</sup>

Death was on occasion even sought after, such as in the case of 'Umar ibn al-Ḥumām, who on the day of the battle of Badr heard the Prophet say:

no man will be slain this day fighting against them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise.»<sup>41</sup>

'Umar jumped up, grabbed his sword and charged the enemy whom he said stood between him and Paradise, and then fought until he was killed.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Ishāq also notes that 'Auf b. Ḥārith was so enraptured by the Prophet's description of Paradise that he threw off his coat of mail and fought unprotected until slain.

The unquestioning commitment of such warriors fuelled the rapid expansion of the Islam. The earliest Islamic heroes were, of course, mostly Arabs, and the prototypical Islamic heroes were of course the Prophet and his early followers. Yet the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* also stress that the biblical prophets, especially Moses, David, and Solomon and such early Arab prophets as Hūd also fought and struggled in the cause of God and should also be regarded as *mujahidin*.

As Islam spread through the territories formerly controlled by Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, heroes from those cultures were re-cast in an Islamic mold. In the case of Alexander the Great, this was easy as he is mentioned in the Qur'ān<sup>43</sup> where he is described as a prophetic believer warning of God's punishment, and as a virtually invincible warrior who built an impregnable wall of iron and brass to keep out the wild tribes known as Gog and Magog. A

<sup>37</sup> Birge 1937, pp. 138-39. Linda Komaroff has argued that the use of this prayer on metalwork does not seem to predate the Timurid period, Komaroff 1979-80, pp. 11-20. The prayer is inscribed as a talisman on many objects, especially swords, for example, The Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 36.25.1306.

<sup>38</sup> For the full text of the inscription see Alexander 1985b.

<sup>39</sup> Goldziher, 1981, p. 188.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, 1983, p. 105.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 300.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 300.

<sup>43</sup> Qur'ān 18:10.



Fig. 6. Mail shirt inscribed with the prayer to 'Alī, Iran, dated 1232/1816-17 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of George C. Stone, acc. no. 36.25.57.

large body of literature developed around the theme of his exploits, and as many of these books were illustrated with paintings there is a copious visual record of his legend.

In other instances, such as the pantheon of ancient Iranian heroes, assimilation required the syncretic efforts of scholars, historians, and poets, who in their works showed that individuals such as Rustam, Bahrām Gur, and Ferīdūn should also be regarded as prototypical Islamic. All were regarded as believers and praised for their courage, bravery, wisdom, and loyalty.

Rustam, for example, was widely regarded as one of the most noble, courageous, loyal, and valiant of warriors. He is described in the *Shāhnāma* as a paradigm for truthfulness, following it wherever it might lead, even when this placed him in conflict with his earthly masters. He fought in the service of the Sasanian kings and defeated not only their Turanian enemies but also such fearsome beasts as lions and dragons. In addition, military objects were sometimes inlaid with inscriptions referring to him. A number of weapons are inscribed with verses commemorating him or are crafted in imitation of his helmet and mace.<sup>44</sup> or were decorated with designs that referred to incidents mentioned in the legend surrounding him.

#### THE USE OF WEAPONS IN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES AND AS TROPHIES

The appearance or use of weapons in a religious context is not limited to the Islamic period. Ibn Ishāq for example, relates a story in which Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib was digging the well at Zamzam and found some swords and a coat of mail (from Qal'a) and used the swords to make a door for the Ka'ba.<sup>45</sup> In another story Ibn Ishāq records that swords were even displayed within the Ka'ba.<sup>46</sup> At this time weapons were often associated with idols, the scholar Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥishām (d. ca. 218/833) and the historian Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (208-311/823-923) both note that there was a sacred palm tree in Najrān to which weapons were offered and then hung in its branches.<sup>47</sup> According to Ibn Ishāq, swords were also used to adorn such pre-Islamic idols as Manat, which was later defaced and destroyed by Muḥammad's companions.<sup>48</sup>

Nothing underlines the symbolic importance of weapons during the Islamic period as strongly as their use during Friday prayer. The traveller and geographer Shams al-Dīn Ibn Baṭṭūṭā (703-ca.779/1304-ca.1347), describing the Friday prayer in the mosque at Mecca, wrote:

On Fridays...the blessed pulpit is set up against the wall of the illustrious Ka'ba...the preacher...kisses the black stone...moves towards the pulpit preceded by the chief of the muezzins, dressed in black and with a sword across his shoulder and held by his hand... as the preacher ascends the first of the pulpit steps the muezzin girds him with the sword. He then strikes with the point of the sword, a blow upon the step loud enough to be heard by those present, and subsequently strikes another blow upon the second step and yet another on the third. When he stands erect on the topmost step, he strikes a fourth blow.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Rustam is often depicted wearing a tiger skin helmet and carrying an ox-headed mace. The iconography behind Iranian horned helmets derives from Zoroastrian ideas recast in an Islamic context in Firdawsī's *Shāh-nāma*. In the *Shāh-nāma*, Ahriman (the god of darkness) killed the cow who nursed the hero Bahrām. As a memorial the blacksmith Kavad fashioned a cow-headed mace that became an emblem of good, or light. This horned mace was subsequently inherited by a succession of heroes, most notably Rustam. It was prophesied that during the final battle between the forces of good and evil it would be used to destroy the forces of darkness, just as in Islamic eschatology the two-pointed sword *dhu'l-faqr* would be used to destroy the forces of evil. A helmet in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 96.5.125, refers to Rustam and Bahrām and also compares the helmet to a vessel swimming on a green sea, making use of a convention that can be traced to Ibn al-Arabī who likened the divine essence to a green ocean in which various misty, short-lived forms appear and vanish see Schimmel 1986, p. 284ff. For the «Islamization» of Rustam see Chelkowski 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, p. 292.

<sup>47</sup> Hitti 1977, p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, pp. 207-208.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭā 1958-71, vol. 1, pp. 231-32.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭā also mentions that a sword figured in the ceremonies practiced at the beginning of each month. At this time the amīr of Mecca came out in state, dressed in white, turbaned, and girded with a sword; he then kissed the black stone, circumambulated the Ka'ba, and led the prayers.<sup>50</sup>

Carrying a sword on the pulpit is based on a tradition ascribed to the Prophet.<sup>51</sup> The custom continued throughout the Middle Ages and is even depicted in miniature painting. (Fig. 1) In nineteenth century Egypt the *imām* often used a wooden sword,<sup>52</sup> while in modern times *imāms* sometimes appear on the pulpit carrying semi-automatic rifles, the contemporary equivalent of a sword. The use of swords in this context is not only a marked reference to the *jihād* but also a symbol, personified by the *imām*, of the union of the two usually separate domains of public authority, the pen and the sword.<sup>53</sup>

The veneration of weapons, as instruments of the *jihād*, continued throughout the Islamic period. One of the best-known examples of this is the inclusion of the sword *dhū l-fāqar* as part of the «legacy of the Prophet» and its subsequent use by the caliphs as a symbol of authority. Ibn Baṭṭūṭā records that weapons were associated with two of the most important religious buildings in the Islamic world, the *Qubbat al-Ṣakhra*, Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem, where he saw a huge shield, said to be that of Ḥamza, suspended beside the rock,<sup>54</sup> and the Great Mosque of Damascus, above whose southern door he saw the remains of a lance and flag said to be those of the great general Khālīd ibn al-Walīd (d. 22/642) known as *sayf Allāh*, sword of God, Arab conqueror of the city.<sup>55</sup>

In a broader context, numerous additional examples can be cited. One of the great gates to the city of Cairo, the *Bāb al-Naṣr*, Gate of Victory, built in 480/1087 is decorated with sculpted swords and shields. When Nūr al-Dīn conquered Aleppo in 553/1158, he had the city walls completely decorated with captured shields, swords, kettledrums, flags and trumpets, etc., and left them there for seven days so that the people could admire the spectacle.<sup>56</sup>

Such traditions were continued by the great medieval dynasties, such as the Mamluks, Saljūqs, Ottomans, and Safavids. Many records survive from these years documenting the use and display of weapons as sacred trophies. The Mamluks, for example, kept large numbers of European weapons in their arsenal at Alexandria. The quasi-religious significance of this act is made clear by the inscriptions with which these weapons are engraved, stating that they are *waqf*, pious donations.<sup>57</sup> The Ottomans also stored captured weapons with ancient religious connotations. The French jeweller and traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1013-1100/1605-89) described this practice during the seventeenth century; many of the objects he saw are today housed in the Treasury of the Prophet in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul. Tavernier wrote:

le premier tresor...contient une grand quantité d'arcs, de flèches, d'arbalestes de mousquets, de fusils, de sabres, et d'autres armes de cette nature....Du tresor Secret Grand épargne...on voit...un coutelas fort grossier pendu à la muraille, proche de l'endroit où l'on conserve le cachet et la robe du prophète, le fourreau est de drap vert et l'on tient que c'est le coutelas d'Omer l'un des quatre compagnons de Mahomet...proche du coutelas on voit encore une manière d'espadaon, pour lequel ils ont aussi beaucoup de ve-

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭā 1958-71, vol. 1, p. 233.

<sup>51</sup> See Alexander 1999; Ṭabarī 1989, pp. 152-53 reporting the revolt of the Shī'ā under Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Ṣāhib Fakhkh in 169/786 says that immediately before the rebellion Al-Ḥusayn went up to the *minbar* of God's messenger... and sat down. He had on a white tunic... and placed a drawn sword between his knees...»

<sup>52</sup> Lane 1863-93.

<sup>53</sup> For these two distinct administrative functions, see Ibn Khaldun 1970, p. 189ff. The *imām*, by carrying a sword to the pulpit, represents both the pen (the word) and justice (the sword).

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭā, vol. 1, 1958-71, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭā, vol. 1, 1958-71, p. 129.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-Qalānīsī 1967, p. 329.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander 1985, and Kalus 1990.



nertaion, parce qu'ils croyent que c'est l'épée d'un certain Ebu-Nislum, avec laquelle il tailla en pieces ceux qui avoient semé une heresie dans la loi de Mahomet.<sup>58</sup>

From the fifteenth century onward firearms became ever more important in warfare. The Ottomans, for example, used field guns at Varna in 847/1444 and at Kosovo in 851/1448; and in 857/1453 Mehmed II (836-86/1432-81) relied in large part on the use of cannon for the conquest of Constantinople. Several of the cannon used in his campaigns have survived and illustrate the extraordinary skill of Ottoman cannon founders of the fifteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Among the surviving examples of these cannon is one now in the Tower of London, cast by Munir 'Alī and dated 869/1464. It is remarkable for its length of seventeen feet, its weight of sixteen tons sixteen *cwt* (hundred weight), and its intricate decoration.<sup>60</sup> Another fine example decorated with arabesques and with the image of a dragon is in the Askeri Museum.<sup>61</sup> These monumental cannon were often named, such as *ezhder-dihan*, dragon-mouthed.<sup>62</sup>

Because such weapons were made for *jihād*, merged to be sure with dreams of imperial expansion, and there was considerable ritual involved in their production. Fortunately, an account of the founding of cannon in the Top-hāna, the imperial cannon foundry, during the Ottoman period has survived; it not only describes in detail the technical aspects of cannon founding but also underlines the religious fervour that accompanied this process.

The traveller and historian Evliya Çelebi began his description of cannon production by explaining that Sultan Süleyman II (r. 1098-1102/1687-91) had been engaged in a long war with the Germans [Austrians?]:

a race of strong, warlike, cunning, devilish, coarse infidels whom, excelling as they did in artillery, Sultan Süleyman endeavored to get equal with them recruiting gunners and artillerymen from all countries with the offer of rich rewards.

Süleyman rebuilt the cannon foundry established by Mehmed II, and it was of this foundry that Çelebi wrote:

On the day when cannon are to be cast, the masters, foremen and founders, together with the Grand Master of the Artillery, the Chief Overseer, Imam, Muessin and timekeeper, all assemble to their cries of «Allah! Allah!» ... after the fire has been alight in the furnaces twenty-four hours... the Vezirs, the Mufti and Sheikhs are summoned; only forty persons, beside the personnel of the foundry, are admitted all told. The rest of the attendants are shut out, because the metal, when in fusion, will not suffer to be looked at by evil eyes. The masters then desire the Vezirs and Sheikhs... to repeat unceasingly the words «There is no power and strength save in Allah!» Thereupon the master-workmen with wooden shovels throw several hundredweight of tin into the sea of molten brass, and the head-founder says to the Grand Vizier, Viziers and Sheikhs: «Throw some gold and silver coins into the brazen sea as alms, in the name of the True Faith!».... The almoner recites the accustomed prayers, and the whole assembly cry aloud: «Amen.» All are very fervent and zealous in their prayers, for it is a most dangerous business and one in which many master-workmen and vezirs have lost their lives.... The time-limit having expired and been announced by the timekeeper, the head-founder and master-workmen... open the mouth of the furnace... exclaiming «Allah! Allah!»... The Vezirs and sheikhs donning white shirts, sacrifice sheep on either side of the fur-

<sup>58</sup> Tavernier 1675, ch. XV, p. 215.

<sup>59</sup> The Ottomans learned much about firearms from Balkan and Hungarian engineers and craftsmen, Inalcik 1975, p. 210. For the early use of firearms by the Ottomans, and the importance of Balkan gunmakers see Elgood 1995, esp. ch.3. In 856/1452 Mehmed employed a cannon founder named Urban, probably a Transylvanian deserter from Byzantium who promised to make a cannon «which no wall in either Byzantium or Babylon could resist» and constructed a huge weapon (named *bogaz kesen*, the throat cutter) for the fortress of Rumeli Hisari. Cannon fire from this fortress terrified Venetian and Genoese merchant shipping, the Turks were able to disrupt trade between Byzantium and the West. Babinger 1978, pp. 78-96.

<sup>60</sup> Blackmore 1976, no. 242.

<sup>61</sup> Made for Mehmed II, ca. 857-68/1453-64, Askeri Museum, Istanbul, see Eralp 1993. esp. ills. 41,42,44.

<sup>62</sup> Parry 1960, p. 1062.

nace... Prayers are said once again and so on till the end, when seventy robes of honour are distributed and increases of pay granted.<sup>63</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS AS «ICONOGRAPHY» OF THE *JIHĀD*.

A considerable amount of arms and armour bear inscriptions making use of titles garnered from the vocabulary of the *jihād* and portraying the owner as a warrior in the holy cause. Frequently, such inscriptions appear on sword and sabre blades, such as on a sabre, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Fig. 7), made for one of the last Mamluk sultāns, Tūmānbāy (r. 906/1501), which bears the titulature:

...sultān of Islam and all Muslims, father of the poor and miserable, killer of the unbelievers and polytheists, reviver of justice among all, may God prolong his kingdom and may his victory be glorious<sup>64</sup>

Titles such as these are traceable to the Qurʾānic passages quoted above, especially those which call the sultan «slayer of unbelievers and polytheists and reviver of justice.» Similar titles were also used by the Ottomans. On a sabre (Fig. 8) now in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, Mehmed II is called the «sultān of warriors for the faith» and the blade itself is described as:

the sword of God unsheathed in the *jihād*, Sultān Mehmed Sultān Ibn Murad Khān, let God make the necks of all those who are against Islam into scabbards for his swords...<sup>65</sup>

The Term *sayf Allāh*, sword of God, is a multi-layered reference, evoking not only the Prophet's sword *dhū'l-fāqar*, but also honorifics and proper names such as *sayf al-Islam*, Sword of Islam, and *sayf al-Dīn*, Sword of Religion. Countless sword and sabre blades are inscribed with verses referring to the Prophet's sword, all of which thus relate to the *jihād*. In addition, an entire group of Ottoman blades seem to have been crafted exclusively as royal gifts for warriors who fought in the *jihād*. These blades are decorated with an image of combat between a dragon and a phoenix, and several include the inscription «for the warrior in the *jihād* in the path of God.»<sup>66</sup>

Only a few pieces of Islamic arms and armour have been preserved from earlier periods, and the majority of the surviving pieces are from the fifteenth century and later. On these by far the most common and significant «decoration» or «iconography» are inscriptions composed of Qurʾānic passages, pious phrases, religious and mystical verses, especially one from the famous poem about the Prophet's cloak *al-burda* (Fig. 9),<sup>67</sup> the names of God, and talismans. The latter include *wafk*, «magic» squares, and *buduh*, a derivation of the «magic» square.

The most frequently occurring Qurʾānic verses are the *Aūyā al-Kursī*, 2:255-56; the first lines from *Sūra al-fath*, the «Victory» *sūra* 48:1; *sūra* 112 *al-ikhlas*, the «verse of purity;» and *sūra* 61:13, which proclaims an imminent victory for the faithful. Foremost among the pious phrases found on the blades is the *shahāda*, or testimony of the faith:

There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is the messenger of God.

<sup>63</sup> Çelibi 1951, pp. 90-91.

<sup>64</sup> Washington 1981, no. 42.

<sup>65</sup> Topkapı Sarayı inv. no. 1/90, Yücel 1988, cat. no. 87.

<sup>66</sup> This inscription is also found on an Ottoman helmet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1993.14. A presentation yatagan of this type is illustrated in Melbourne 1990 cat. no. 50 and Washington 1991, cat. no. 89.

<sup>67</sup> The poem was written by Sharaf al-Din Muhammad al-Busiṛī; according to Hitti this is the most widely read Arabic poem ever written, see Alexander 1985b, p.30.



Fig. 7. Sabre blade inscribed with the name and titles of the Mamluk sultan Tumanbay, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. no. 5267.

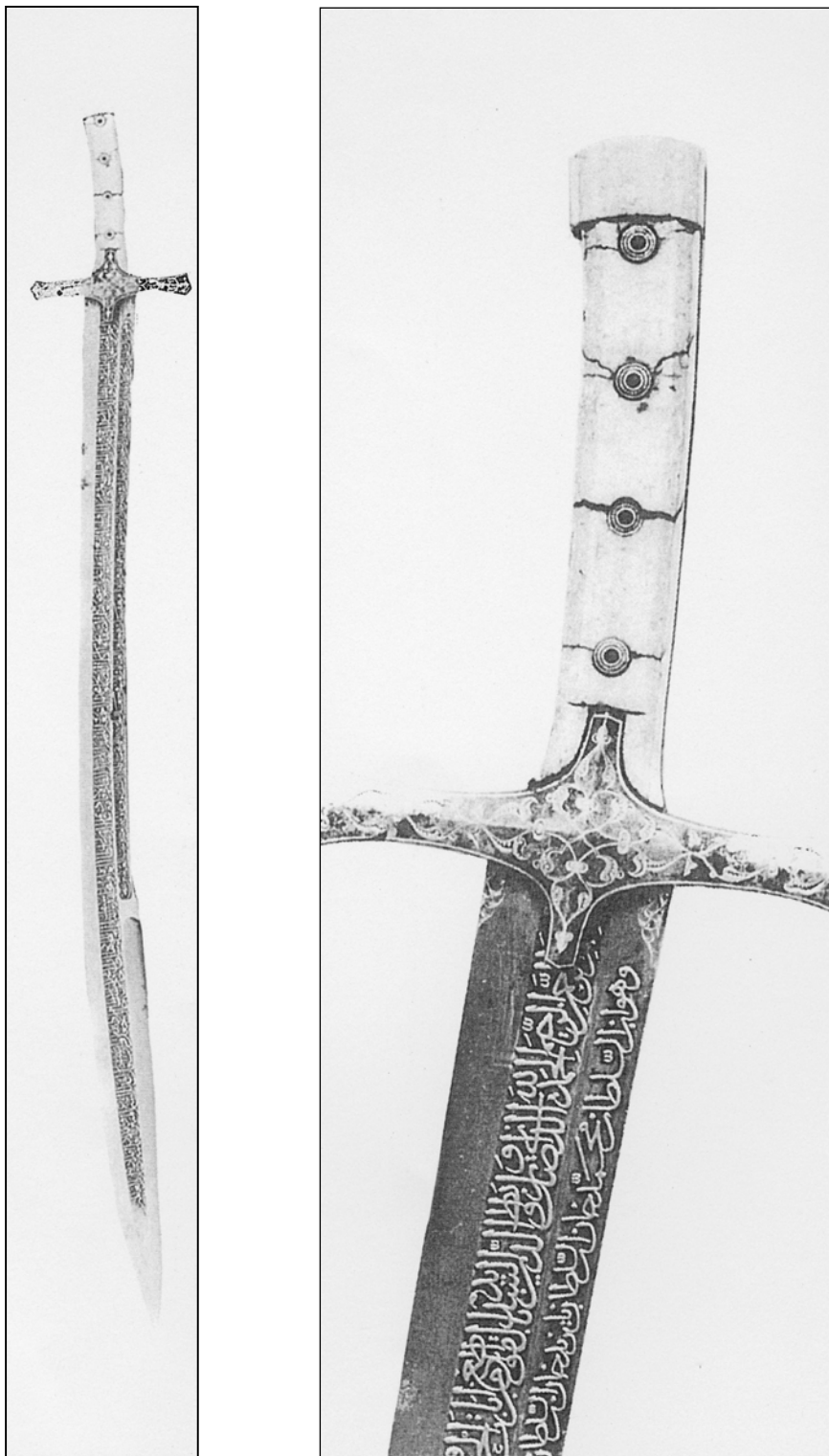


Fig. 8. Sabre of Mehmed II described as «the sword of God unsheathed in the *jihād*,» Ottoman 15th century, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/90.

Such expressions as *bismallāh al rahmān al rahīm*, «In the name of Allāh, Most Gracious, Most Merciful»; *tawakkaltu*, «I trust in God»; and *mashalla*, «Whatever God wills.» occur repeatedly. Other religious verses commonly found, especially on Iranian weapons, include the *nadi ʿAlī*.

The *Aʿyā al-Kursī*, the verse of the Throne is found on a variety of arms and armour including helmets, shields, sabre blades and body armour, (Fig. 10), especially those from the Ottoman period, in translation it reads:

Allāh! There is no god But He, - the Living, The Self-subsisting, Supporter of all. No slumber can seize Him, nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is thee can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures As) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend Over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them, for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory). (2:255)

According to verse 69:17 on the Day of Judgement the throne of God will be carried aloft by eight angels. And according to a tradition repeated by the philosopher Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111), the Prophet said that on the Day of Resurrection the friends of God, «who love one another in God.» will sit around the throne «clothed in light.» their faces shining like the full moon.<sup>68</sup> In another *ḥadīth* recorded by the scholar Abū ʿĒsā al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 279/892) the Prophet called this verse the lord of all the verses in the Qurʾān.<sup>69</sup> The *Aʿyā al-kursī* therefore makes a definitive statement about the nature of God, creation, and the divine order. When a warrior went into battle carrying arms or wearing armour inscribed with it, he could see himself as fighting for order and justice.

Another verse commonly found on arms and armour are the opening lines from the *sūra al-fath*:

Verily We have granted thee a manifest Victory: That Allāh may forgive thee thy faults of the past and those to follow; fulfil His favour to thee; and guide thee on the Straight Way; and that Allāh may help thee with powerful help. 48:1-3

The use of this verse on arms and armour is significant for according to a *ḥadīth* recorded by Ibn Ishāq the *sūra* was revealed to Muḥammad under the following circumstances. In 7/628, six years after the emigration of the Muslims to Medina and after many bloody battles, including those at Badr, Uhud and the Battle of the Trench on 8 Dhu'l-Qa'da 5/31 March 627, Muḥammad announced that he intended to make the *ʿumra*, pilgrimage, to Mecca. He further proclaimed that the pilgrimage was to be peaceful and set off with a large number of men and four women. The pilgrims eventually reached a place called Ḥudaybiya where their advance was blocked by the Meccan cavalry. The Meccans, however, were divided about whether to attack and eventually sent out a party of negotiators. The discussion was laborious but ultimately there was no violence and a peace treaty was agreed upon, written, and signed.

Under its terms the two sides agreed to a ten year truce, and, although the Muslims were denied immediate entry into Mecca, it was agreed that in the following year they could enter the city and pray at the Ka'ba. The sole conditions were that they stay for no more than three nights, the traditional period of hospitality, and carry only a rider's weapons - «the swords in their sheaths.» The treaty marked the victory of Islam in Arabia, after its real resistance crumbled, and

<sup>68</sup> From the *Iḥyā' ʿlūm al-dīn*, quoted in Smith 1944, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> The theologian Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (d. 709/1309) claimed it has a special mystical power and provided a unique reference to God's infinite essence, and that every other Qurʾānic verse was a tributary of it. He regarded it as analogous to the relationship between the Prophet and other men, saying that the Prophet was lord of all Adam's children, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1981, pp. 149-52, see also Huart 1986, p. 509.

by 20 Ramaḍān 8/630 the Muslims were in possession of Mecca. At the conclusion of this treaty the Prophet shaved and cut his long hair, as reflected in the final verses of the *sūra*:

Ye shall enter the Sacred Mosque, if God wills, with minds secure, heads shaved, hair cut short, and without fear (48:27).

The *sūra*, as revealed at the time of Ḥudaybiya, is not as it might at first sound, an invocation to battle. It is rather an elegy to a victory achieved, for at this time Muḥammad seems to have known that Meccan resistance would ultimately crumble. The terrible battles of the earlier years for the very survival of the community seemed to be at an end, and a certainty that they would prevail entered the consciousness of the believers:

It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the Believers (48:4).

Ibn Ishāq summed up the situation when he wrote:

No previous victory in Islam was greater than this. There was nothing but battle when men met; but when there was an armistice and war was abolished and men met in safety and consulted together none talked about Islam intelligently without entering it. In those years double as many or more than double as many entered Islam as ever before.<sup>70</sup>

The phrase *tawakkaltu*, «I trust in God.» appears with great frequency on Islamic arms and armour, especially on sword and sabre blades. It occurs fifty-eight times in the Qurʾān and from a very early period was commented on in religious texts. Its meaning was clearly expressed by al-Ghazālī who wrote that trust in God, involves the recognition that:

there is not in possibility anything more excellent, more complete, or more perfect than it is

that this world is perfect in all respects, and that absolutely nothing in it, not even the «wings of a gnat», is unnecessary. Al-Ghazālī maintained that trust in God was the only rational stance for living in a world of often un-fathomable perfection, and as a way of expressing in one's life the central concept of Islam, submission and obedience to the will of God.<sup>71</sup>

The beautiful names of God, *al-asmā*, *al-ḥusnā*, of which there are generally considered to be ninety-nine,<sup>72</sup> were frequently inscribed on Islamic arms and armour, particularly on sword and sabre blades.<sup>73</sup> The significance of one of the most highly regarded patterns of watered steel used for sword and sabre blades, Muḥammad's Ladder, should also be understood as an allusion to these names. Their importance is stressed in Qurʾān 20:8:

Allāh! there is no god but He! To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.

The names occur throughout the Qurʾān, and, indeed, the entire revelation may be regarded as one great, virtually endless name. Theologians and mystics speculated that God created the universe through the power of His names. According to an *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhārī:

<sup>70</sup> Ibn Ishāq 1982, pp. 504-507. The word translated as «tranquillity» is in Arabic *sakina*, cf. Hebrew *shekinah* and Greek *sophia*. All refer to the divine wisdom or presence and are often regarded by mystics as the mechanism of God's creation and the way in which he makes His presence directly felt in the world.

<sup>71</sup> Orms 1984, pp. 38-41. This attitude has also been described as producing an outlook that sees into the very nature of reality and likened to «the sword of God on earth [because] it cuts everything that it touches see Smith 1944, p. 167.

<sup>72</sup> Gardet 1960, pp. 714-17; Bukhārī 1987, vol. 9, p. 363; Gimaert 1988, p. 51.

<sup>73</sup> In some instances just one or two of the names are given, although in one case sixty-four are used, such as on a cuirass in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 36.25.18.



Fig. 9. Sabre inscribed with the opening lines from the poem *al-burda*, Ottoman 18th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of George C. Stone, acc. no. 36.25.1632.



Fig. 10. Pectoral disc from an armour inscribed with the «Throne sura», Ottoman 16th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of George C. Stone, acc. no. 36.25.345.

Allāh has ninety-nine Names; one hundred less one; and he who memorized them all by heart will enter paradise.<sup>74</sup>

The great power with which the names were invested made them ideal talismans for use on weapons to protect the warrior from harm in this world as well as renew his focus on the eternal.

The names were often considered as steps on which the devout ascend to contemplate the divine majesty. This clarifies the meaning behind blades forged with the pattern called the *Kirk-Narduban*, *Forty Steps*, or *Muḥammad's Ladder*. Many sabre blades are forged with this pattern<sup>75</sup> and they were highly prized, both for their technical virtuosity, and because of the symbolic associations of the ladder pattern:

<sup>74</sup> Bukhārī 1987, vol. 9, p. 363.

<sup>75</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.25.1490.



(Allāh), Lord of the Ways of Ascent. The angels and the spirit ascend unto Him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years» (70:3-4).

The word, *maʿarij*, ladder, conveys the notion of a progressive step-like ascent toward heaven and the divine. Such an ascent is regarded as the highest of mystical experiences, granted only rarely to chosen individuals, such as Jacob, Enoch,<sup>76</sup> and Muḥammad. Tradition differs as to when Muḥammad's, *miʿraj*, ascent, occurred, but it is sometimes said to have been on the nineteenth or the twenty-seventh night of the seventh month (Ramaḍān) in the year A.D. 620. The sleeping Prophet was visited by Gabriel, purified with water from Zamzam the river of Paradise, and mounted upon a winged animal called *Buraq*. Then they flew to Jerusalem, which became the gateway to an ascent through the seven heavens, where Muḥammad met all the previous prophets and, finally, experienced the divine essence. Following this journey *sūra* 17:1 was revealed:

Glory to (Allāh) who did take His Servant for a Journey night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did bless, --in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).

The ṣūfī mystic Muḥyiuddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (560-638/1165-1240) developed this theme and linked it with the beautiful names. He describes the steps leading up to a *minbar* as:

the ladder of the Most Beautiful Names, to climb this ladder--is to be invested with the qualities of the Names.<sup>77</sup>

That certain sword-smiths, or the patrons who commissioned their work, were conscious of the connection between this type of pattern and the Qurʾānic verses associated with *al-asmā*, *al-ḥusnā*, is demonstrated by an Iranian sabre blade that has both a ladder pattern and an inscription from the Qurʾān 59:23-24.<sup>78</sup> Both pattern and verse relate to the names of God and to the mystical ascent to the divine. The association of such blades with the Prophet is doubly emphasised in an example from a private collection (Fig. 11) on which the spaces between the steps are each forged with a flowering-rose form.<sup>79</sup> In Islamic lore it is said that during the Prophet's *miʿraj* a drop of sweat fell from his brow and that from this drop grew the rose. Thus to smell a rose is to inhale the sweet scent of Muḥammad.<sup>80</sup> Almost certainly the rose form added in the centre of the *dhuʿl-faqār* on sixteenth century Ottoman banners is a subtle reference to the Prophet.<sup>81</sup>

Talismans in the form of numbered and lettered squares were often used on sword and sabre blades and on talismanic shirts which were worn underneath armour.<sup>82</sup> They also occur on such military accessories as war standards including one in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 12)<sup>83</sup>. Most numerical talismans are essentially of two types. One is called *wafk*, a square divided into nine (three--three) chessboard-like compartments, each of which contains a number or a letter (every Arabic letter has a numerical equivalent and vice versa); the total of the numbers read in any direction must be the same. The second is called *buduh*, a

<sup>76</sup> Ṭabarī 1980-84, vol. 1, pp. 92-95, for the ascent of Enoch/Idris; Muḥammad is also said to have visited hell and witnessed the tortures inflicted on sinners and unbelievers, for miniature painting depicting this see Seguy 1977.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī 1978, p. 89.

<sup>78</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art acc. no. 23.232.2.

<sup>79</sup> Figiel 1991, fig. 31a, p. 86.

<sup>80</sup> Schimmel 1985, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> See for example the banners illustrated in Denny 1974 and Alexander 1999 fig. 7 and Alexander 1992 cat. no. 59.

<sup>82</sup> Washington 1987 cat. nos. 122-123 and Alexander 1992 cat. nos. 33-34.

<sup>83</sup> Two ceremonial sword blades from the same workshop are preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı, their unsharpened edges suggest that they were intended for ceremonial use rather than for battle, inv. nos. 1/5067 and 1/5069.

square divided into four compartments, each containing a letter that when combined with the others spells out the word *buduh*. This word is formed from the letters which occur in the corners of the three--three square. It was thought to have such power that it was even written alone, without the square and was said to be a name of God.<sup>84</sup>

The significance of these squares is best understood in terms of speculation on the nature of the universe and the importance of letters and their numerical equivalents in its creation and basic construction. From the rich sources of Hebrew, Pythagorean, and Gnostic ideas on letters and numbers as well as indigenous Arab and Qurʾānic traditions, Muslim mystics developed a unique form of numerology. As in the other systems, the letter/numbers were thought to emanate from the Godhead to form the structure of the universe; the letters of the Arabic alphabet were read both individually and in combination as being part of this divine structure. Various combinations of letters were therefore interpreted as some of the names of God. Magic squares were constructed according to these principles, and the numbers in the square usually added up to one of the names of God, making them efficacious talismans.

The most commonly used square, the three--three square with a five at the centre was described by numerologist Abuʿl ʿAbbās al-Būnī (d. 622/1225).<sup>85</sup> This endeavour no doubt bears at least some connection to the fascination with the number five, an awareness of a general mathematical harmony behind the world of appearances, and an appreciation for the way in which the combinations and totals engendered by a numbered square could be used to symbolise the flow of the universe around and through a central axis. The Shīʿā theologian Nāṣir-i-Khusraw described five archangelical manifestations or primary elements of creation.<sup>86</sup> In the *Umm al-Kitāb* mention is made of five eternal lights and colours that are manifestations of a single being of light which appeared on earth as the five companions of the cloak, Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.<sup>87</sup>

In Arabic the number five is the alphabetical equivalent of the letter *ha*, which is the last letter in the name Allāh and which was interpreted al-Būnī, among others, to be the highest name of God.<sup>88</sup> Al-Būnī related the three--three square to the ninety-nine names of God by computing two basic forms of the square, one masculine, the other feminine, which when added formed a new square whose numbers totalled ninety-nine.<sup>89</sup>

$$\begin{array}{rcccl}
 4 & 9 & 2 & & 5 & 10 & 3 & & 9 & 19 & 5 \\
 3 & 5 & 7 & + & 4 & 6 & 8 & = & 7 & 11 & 15 \\
 8 & 1 & 6 & & 9 & 2 & 7 & & 17 & 3 & 13
 \end{array} = 99$$

The sum of all the numbers on a three--three square with five at the centre totals forty-five, which also had a talismanic value. The alphabetical equivalent of the number forty-five

<sup>84</sup> Ruska 1934, pp. 1081-83; Graefe et al. 1965, p. 370. For an example in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 36.25.1292.

<sup>85</sup> Būnī nd., p. 301, the Iranian cosmographer Zakariyyāʾ Ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (ca 600-682/ca. 1203-83) attributed their invention to Archimedes, Kraus 1986, p. 73, n. 1, but it has been argued that such squares originated in China where they were called *Lo-shu*, the Chinese thought the number five provided a model of the universe. They recognized five basic elements, five musical notes, five planets, five colors, and five cardinal points; see Gérardin 1986, pp. 39-40 and Camman 1968-69, pp. 186-89. such squares are thought to have been known in the Islamic world from about 236/850 Canaan 1937, p. 102. In the tenth century a Shīʿā group, the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*, Brethren of Purity, developed a number of squares in various sizes. Ittig 1982, pp. 89-90.

<sup>86</sup> Corbin 1983, p. 36.

<sup>87</sup> Corbin 1983, pp. 168-69 and Corbin 1980 p. 85; Corbin suggests an eighth-century date for the manuscript.

<sup>88</sup> His views parallel those of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, see Winkler 1930, p. 135; Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1981, especially chap. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Gérardin 1986, p. 120. The significance of the number fifteen, the sum of the numbers added in any direction in a three--three square with a central five, is perhaps related to the idea that God, created the universe through the power of *jah* and the numerical equivalent of *jah*, or the projection of the creative power, is fifteen.

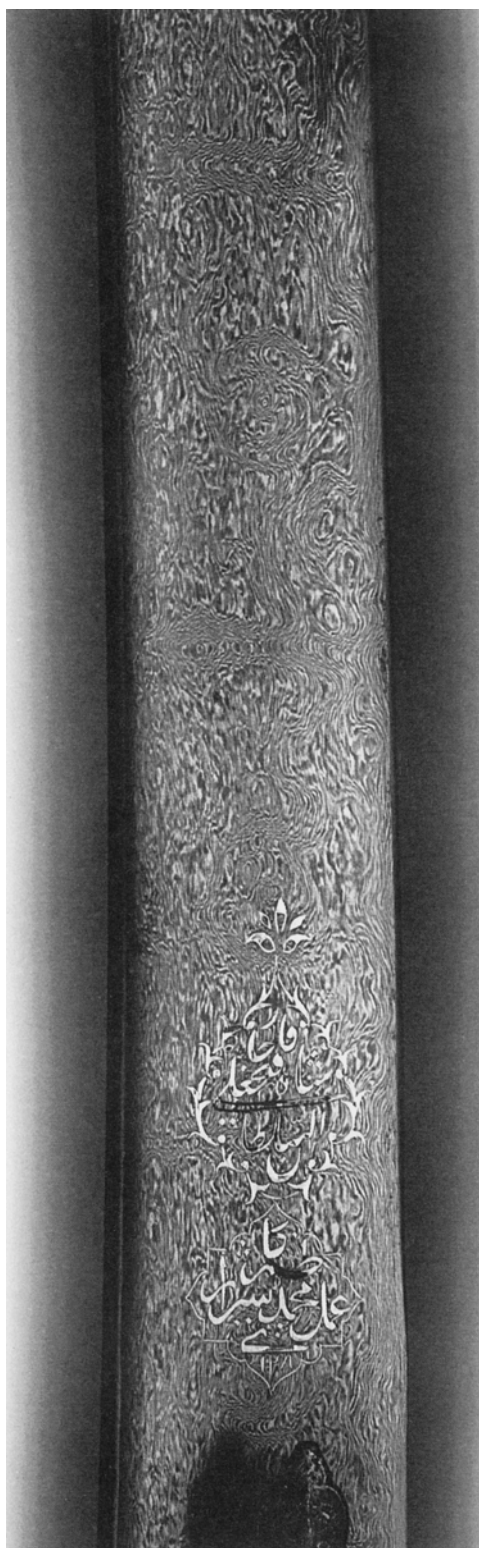


Fig. 11. Sabre blade with Rose and Ladder pattern, Iran 17th century, Private Collection.



Fig. 12. Standard with talismanic letter/numbers, Ottoman? 15th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 14.25.466.

is Adam which explains why a tradition of perhaps the eighth century maintains that this seal was engraved on Adam's ring.<sup>90</sup> Alternatively, the number forty-five is the equivalent for *zuḥal*, the planet Saturn ( $z=7 + h=8 + l=30 = 45$ ).<sup>91</sup> Before 1196/1781 Saturn was considered the furthest planet and could therefore be regarded as closest to God; it is little wonder that a talisman carrying such connotations should be regarded as especially good and powerful.

Finally, according to al-Būnī this type of three--three seal was under the power of Azrael, the angel of death<sup>92</sup> who represents the destructive might of God, especially his power to destroy unbelievers and idolaters. Muḥammad Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh (1260-1303/1844-1885), the Sudanese mahdī, reflected this belief when he reported a vision in which the Prophet confirmed he was the Mahdī, girded him with the sword *dhuʿl-faqār* and gave him as:

another sign... a banner of light carried by Azrael . . . who walks before me in time of battle.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps the craftsmen who placed such talismanic seals on sword blades and the owners who commissioned them were aware of these multiple meanings. The magic square, a reminder of God and of the order of the universe, would at the same time protect the warrior and bring destruction to his enemies.

#### INSCRIPTIONS ON BODY ARMOURS OF FOUR PLATES:

One group of armours can be singled out as illustrating the way in which religious inscriptions were used on military objects. These body armours called in Persian; *chār-āʾīna*, four mirrors, are comprised of large rectangular plates for protection of the chest, back, and sides. The type derives from the pectoral disk armours used by the Ottomans<sup>94</sup> discussed above but it is uncertain when or where the style developed. The earliest surviving examples are from Iran and Ottoman turkey, and are dateable to the sixteenth century.<sup>95</sup>

As a group, armours of this type not only are frequently inscribed with mystical verses but also carry the most lengthy Qurʾānic inscriptions found on Islamic armour. Perhaps the reason for this is that such armours, in addition to providing straightforward physical protection, were thought to have a special talismanic quality; as mirrors that could repel evil. Michael Gorelik notes that this idea persisted in Sino-Manchurian armour until the nineteenth century.<sup>96</sup> The presence of both Qurʾānic verses and mystical poetry on such armours seems to support this analysis.

In ṣūfī thought the image of the mirror is often used to describe the way man arrives at self-knowledge and knowledge of God. The mirror is likened to the soul, through which man becomes aware of something inexpressibly greater than himself. This process was described by Ibn al-ʿArabī who said that created man contains the knowledge of God deep within himself and must learn to recognise this divine manifestation. Although it is impossible for man to actually see God within himself, man can see his own true form, which is the «mirror» of God. God is like a mirror in which man sees his true self, and mankind is like a mirror to God

<sup>90</sup> Canaan 1937, p. 102.

<sup>91</sup> Ittig 1982, p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Canaan 1937, p. 103.

<sup>93</sup> Wingate 1891, p. 93.

<sup>94</sup> see also Riyadh 1996 cat. no. 90 for another pectoral disc armour inscribed with the «Throne» verse.

<sup>95</sup> These unpublished armours include one damascened in gold with a typical sixteenth century design of roses and split leaves, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, inv. no. 1/596, another early example is depicted in a *shāhnāma* of about 1028/1618-19 in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore; see Robinson 1967, fig. 20C. The earliest surviving dated example is in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh. It is dated 1114/1702-3 and among its inscriptions are verses by the mystical ṣūfī poet Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Hāfiz (ca. 726-91/1325,26-1389), Elwell-Sutton 1979, pp. 9-12, no. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Gorelik, 1979, p. 38.

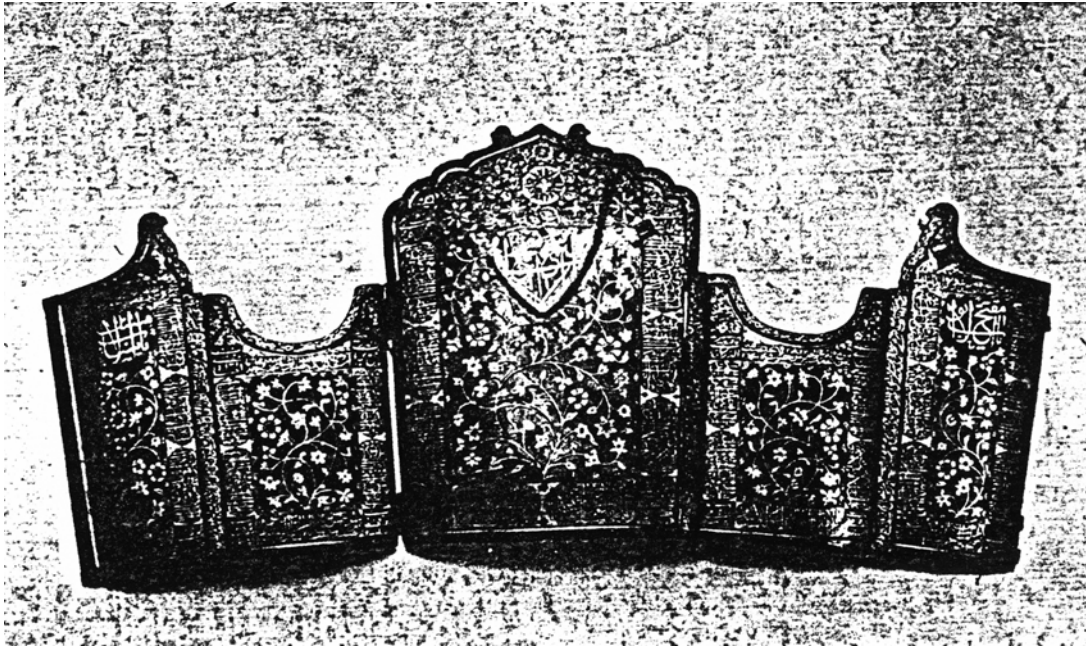


Fig. 13. *chār-ā'īna* inscribed with Qu'rānic and Shī'ā inscriptions, India ca. 1800, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Harry G. Friedman 1948, acc. no. 48.92.1

in which God contemplates his names. This knowledge secreted in man's deepest self is like a «niche of light;»<sup>97</sup> the subject of Qur'ān 24:35, a verse which is inscribed on a *chār-ā'īna* in the Metropolitan Museum's collection (Fig 13).<sup>98</sup>

For the Iranians, especially, armour of this kind evoked associations with the solar imagery of Zoroastrianism, which had been islamized in the *shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. For example, a *chār-ā'īna* in the Historisches Museum, Bern, is inscribed with a Persian poem that begins:

When the King is dressed with the four mirrors, he appears as the rising sun.<sup>99</sup>

This solar imagery reflects the Zoroastrian concept of the «light of glory» that surrounds the hero.<sup>100</sup> The ruler appearing as the rising sun can therefore be seen in an Islamic context as embodying the heavenly light on earth, he becomes the «shadow of God» or «pole or axis of the age.» *Quṭb al-zaman*. This is the idea that at all times there exists an individual intima-

<sup>97</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī 1975, chap. 1. The founder of the Mevlianī order, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī expressed a similar idea «Let go of your worries, and be completely clear hearted, like the face of a mirror that contains no images. If you want a clear mirror, behold yourself, and see the shameless truth which a mirror reflects. If metal can be polished to a mirror-like finish what polishing does the mirror of the heart require? Between the mirror and the heart is this single difference: the heart conceals secrets while the mirror does not» Rūmī 1981, pp. 31-32.

<sup>98</sup> This armour is a virtual compendium of inscriptions that frequently occur on armour and weapons; In addition to the passage from *sūra* 24, it also includes several short *sūras* 109, 112, 113 and 114, and also verses from *sūras* 61:13, 40:44, 3:26-27, 65:2-3 and 7:54-56; this *chār-ā'īna* is clearly Shī'ā and is also inscribed with the prayer to ʿAlī, and the names and *kunyas* of the fourteen luminaries of the Twelver Shī'ā, that is, Muḥammad, Fāṭima, and the twelve Shī'ā *imāms*.

<sup>99</sup> Zeller 1955, p. 46, inv. no. 928.

<sup>100</sup> For the account by Davanī see Minorsky 1978.

tely connected with the divine and who is consequently the best, indeed the only, route by which others can approach God.<sup>101</sup>

The inscription on another *chār-āʿīna* in the Metropolitan Museum<sup>102</sup> includes the phrase, «O God, by the protection of the *nūn* and the *ṣād*.» The letter *nūn* begins *sūra* 68, *al-Qalam* (the Pen) which evokes the idea of the archetypal pen, shaped like the letter *alif* (equally the number one) and said to have been the first thing that God created, when He wrote the secrets of all knowledge on the guarded tablet preserved in heaven (Qurʾān 85:21-22).<sup>103</sup> As Annemarie Schimmel points out, the last three verses of *sūra* 68, which begin with the letter *nūn*, are sometimes used as a protection against the evil eye;<sup>104</sup>

DAVID ALEXANDER

Puycelsi, France

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<sup>101</sup> e.g., Momen 1985, pp. 208-209.

<sup>102</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 29.158.166.

<sup>103</sup> Twenty-nine *sūras* begin with these «mysterious» letters that apparently have no meaning yet perhaps stand for certain divine attributes.

<sup>104</sup> Schimmel 1984, p. 78.

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