THE PREVALENCE OF MAGIC, CHARLATANISM, SORCERY, (1517 - 1805 AD) AND SUPERSTITION IN OTTOMAN EGYPT (INSIGHTS FROM THE WRITINGS AND OBSERVATIONS OF HISTORIANS AND TRAVELERS)

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ABSTRACT

Throughout its historical eras, Egypt has experienced numerous calamities and collapses, whether due to succumbing to the yoke of occupation at times, or its repeated exposure to natural disasters such as the spread of epidemics, earthquakes, and droughts. These adversities were often accompanied by a breakdown in the societal, health, and educational infrastructure, which paved the way for the emergence of various manifestations of belief in hidden forces, including charlatanism, sorcery, and the proliferation of magic, superstitions, and astrology, and even claims of prophecy, miracles, and sainthood on occasion, as a means to resolve or overcome obstacles and matters incomprehensible to the general populace. This had a negative impact on the scientific and social life in Egypt.

KEYWORDS: Ottoman, Magic, Witchcraft, Superstition, Charlatanism, Claiming Prophecy, Astrology, Conjurers**.**

INTRODUCTION

This study will address the economic conditions that the country witnessed under Ottoman rule, which commenced in 923 AH / 1517 CE, and the accompanying challenges and obstacles that necessitated a recourse to various forms of charlatanism and deception, as well as the proliferation of superstitions fueled by the prevailing ignorance of that era, thereby contributing to the dissemination of these practices. This will be followed by an attempt at conceptual differentiation among the diverse terms used to express these phenomena. Subsequently, the research will proceed to examine the manifestations of charlatanism, deception, and superstitions in

the lives of the common populace, commencing with the birth of a child, moving through marriage and the stages of pregnancy and childbirth, and culminating in the realm of illness. Furthermore, certain superstitious beliefs or expressions of seeking blessings prevalent during that period will be discussed, drawing upon the records of historians and the accounts of travelers who traversed or visited Egypt during that time. In conclusion, some manifestations of superstition, deception, and magic, such as talismanic practices, amulets, and astrology, will be examined, with reference to certain events and narratives that substantiate the occurrence of these acts.

Egypt, during the Ottoman period, witnessed a widespread proliferation of superstitious manifestations, charlatanism, sorcery, astrology, and magic, alongside the practice of seeking blessings from tombs. A significant segment of the Egyptian populace resorted to these practices. Furthermore, individuals aspiring to attain status or influence emerged, claiming sainthood or the role of the Mahdi, with instances even escalating to claims of prophet hood. This study has also addressed certain manifestations of magic and communication with jinn. While the Ottomans were not the direct origin or primary cause of the prevalence of superstitions, charlatanism, and sorcery – which had already been deeply ingrained in the Egyptian popular consciousness for millennia – the suffering endured by Egyptians during that era, encompassing poverty, disease, ignorance, and economic collapse, particularly during periods of Nile flood deficit and the consequent sharp price increases and food shortages, significantly contributed to the exacerbation of these phenomena. The populace also suffered considerably from the internal strife among Mamluk factions, or between the Ottoman governor and these Mamluks, and even among the Ottoman military units themselves, especially with the scarcity of salaries and endowments granted by the Pasha, leading to their descent into markets and the confiscation of people's property, and, on occasion, the abduction of women and youths. Moreover, the Egyptian people were not spared the recurrent incursions of Bedouin Arabs upon their lands or caravans, including even those of pilgrims. All these factors contributed to the amplification and spread of these phenomena, wherein Egyptians found a perceived sanctuary to confront life's hardships or overcome certain dangers and calamities.

Therefore, it is essential to first clarify the meanings of these terms and concepts, which are often confused by the general public and used interchangeably, as follows:

- Superstition: is a set of irrational ideas, practices, and customs that have no scientific basis, do not align with reality, and may even contradict it[1].
- Witchcraft: means swiftness, referring to actions performed with speed and sleight of hand that the eyes of the general public cannot keep up with. It involves the use of illusion to deceive and convince people of what the sorcerer desires, similar to conjurers[2].
- Magic: is any act that involves assistance from the devil, relying on jinn[3]. It is also said to be the presentation of falsehood in the guise of truth[4].

When studying superstition, magic, and witchcraft , we notice their strong connection to the lives of Egyptians, especially the general public, from birth through various stages of life, including marriage, childbirth, illness, and even death. Additionally, many people held a deep belief in certain mystics who resided near Shrines-Mausoleums, particularly those of the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) or revered *Walis*, whether these Shrines-Mausoleums were actual tombs or merely visionary sites. Furthermore, the public sometimes accepted claims of prophet hood, *Wilayah*, or Mahdism, and ideas that, in some cases, had to be confronted firmly to prevent a great sedition.
These phenomena particularly caught the attention of travelers who visited Egypt during that era, as well as the scholars who accompanied the French expedition, who observed the widespread nature of these beliefs among Egyptians. However, for the people themselves, such practices had become deeply ingrained traditions. One of the most notable figures to document these observations was the British orientalist Edward William Lane, who, during his visit to Egypt, described its people as the most superstitious among the Arab nations[5].
"This study will draw upon the writings of contemporary historians of that period, such as Ibn Iyas and al-Jabarti, as well as the accounts of travelers who visited Egypt during that time, including al-Ayyashi, William Lane,

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[1] -Sulaiman, S. M. (2011). *Al-Khurafāt wa al-Siḥr wa al-Sha'wadhah bayna al-Sa'ādah wa al-Wifāq wa al-Ya's wa al-Shiqāq* (1st ed.). Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub. p. 27.

[2] -Gohary, M. (2011). *Al-Mu'taqadāt wa al-Ma'ārif al-Sha'biyyah* (Vol. 5). Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-'Āmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah. p. 319.

[3] -Al-Farāhīdī, A. '. (170 AH). *Kitāb al-'Ayn* (M. al-Makhzūmī, Ed.). Maktabat al-Hilāl. p. 135 / Al-Harawī, M. A. ibn al-Azharī. (2001). *Tahdhīb al-Lughah* (M. 'A. Mur'ib, Ed., 1st ed., Vol. 4). Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī. p. 169.

[4] -Al-Fārābī, A. I. Isḥāq ibn al-Ḥusayn. (2003). *Mu'jam Dīwān al-Adab* (A. Mukhtār, Ed., Vol. 2). Dār al-Sha'b. p. 202. For more definitions of magic, see:
- Lewis, B. A. (2015). *Marawiyāt al-Fikr al-Ghaybī fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah*. *Majallat al-Turāth al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī*, 2, p. 262.

[5] -Lane, E. W. (1999). *'Ādāt al-Miṣriyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdhum* (S. Dasūm, Trans., 2nd ed.). Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī. p. 227.

Gérard de Nerval, and Evliya Çelebi, in addition to the scholars accompanying the French Campaign."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I have used the inductive and analytical methods in addressing the research elements by narrating and analyzing certain events to understand the ideas discussed in the study.

RESEARCH BODY

It is noticeable that when studying the lives of Egyptians during this period, the population did not exceed two million people under any circumstances[1]. This was attributed to the spread of epidemics and diseases that ravaged the Egyptian people[2], especially in the absence of advancements in medicine, pharmacy, and other sciences. Consequently, reliance on witchcraft and superstition as means of curing illnesses increased[3].

THE BELIEF IN THE EVIL EYE AND HOW TO CONFRONT IT

The common people resorted to incantations as a remedy for all diseases, believing that envy (the evil eye) was one of the main causes of illness. This belief held great significance in their minds[4]. One manifestation of this belief was that if someone feared that their child had been affected by the evil eye, they would take a piece of the child's clothing, burn it with a little salt, and then use the smoke to incense the child. The remaining ashes would be sprinkled on the child, and this had to be done before sunset[5].

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[1]- Although there was no official census, Jomard, one of the scholars of the French campaign that came to Egypt between 1799 and 1801, estimated the population of Egypt at approximately 2.5 million people. It is noteworthy that this figure does not include the Bedouins and desert inhabitants, as they were difficult to count. However, their number was estimated at around 130,000 people. This estimate aligns with what Edward William Lane recorded during his journey to Egypt between 1833 and 1835.
- 'Ulamā' al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. (1992). *Waṣf Miṣr* (Z. al-Shāyib, Trans., 3rd ed., Vol. 1, Al-Miṣriyūn al-Muḥaddathūn). Dār al-Shāyib li-l-Nashr. pp. 23–24.
-Lane, E. W. (1999). *'Ādāt al-Miṣriyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdhum*. p. 34.

[2]- The scholars of the French expedition mentioned many diseases that were widespread in Egypt, such as plague, dysentery, smallpox, hernia, and boils.
-'Ulamā' al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. *Mawsū'ah Waṣf Miṣr* (Vol. 1). p. 54 and following.

[3] -'Ulamā' al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. *Mawsū'ah Waṣf Miṣr* (Vol. 1). p. 57

[4]-Ibid**.** (Vol. 1), p. 50.

[5]- Lane, E. W. (1999). *'Ādāt al-Miṣriyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdhum*. p. 257

Egyptians also practiced fumigation with alum stone, while reciting (Al-Mu'awwidhatayn) and Surah Al-Fatiha, believing that the shape of the stone's ashes would reveal the identity of the envious person. The ashes were then fed to a black dog. Additionally, they created paper dolls, piercing them multiple times with a needle while mentioning the names of those suspected of casting the evil eye, before burning the paper completely. These practices were not limited to humans alone but extended to animals as well, as they would hang amulets made of seashells or cowrie shells around the necks of animals to protect them from envy[1].

RITUALS ENACTED AT THE TIME OF BIRTH

By observing the lives of the common people, it can be said that the reliance on certain beliefs involving witchcraft and superstition begins at the moment of a child's birth. This is evident in the popular belief that a newborn should be wrapped in the cloth of a righteous person to receive blessings. Additionally, it was believed that to protect the infant from demons and their whispers, the knife used to cut the umbilical cord should be placed near the child's head while sleeping to prevent harm from jinn[2].

Moreover, it was essential to hold a "*Sebou*'" ceremony on the seventh night after the child's birth, a tradition meticulously described by the scholars of the French campaign during their time in Egypt. One of the key features of this celebration was lighting candles corresponding to the number of women attending, and scattering seven types of grains: barley, wheat, lentils, beans, rice, sea salt, and incense[3]. Large amounts of incense were also burned, as it was believed to ward off envy and jinn[4]. It was common practice to adorn

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[1]- Lane, E. W. (1999). *ʻĀdāt al-Miṣriyīn*. pp. 357–358.

[2] -Al-Dubaykī, S. Ṣ. (2019). *Al-Khurāfah wa al-Shaʻwadhah fī al-Mujtamaʻ al-Miṣrī ʻAṣr Salātīn al-Mamlūk* (1st ed.). Cairo: Dār ʻAyn li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth al-Insānīyah wa-l-Ijtimāʻīyah. pp. 22–23.

[3]- For a full description of the *Sebou'* ceremony, see:

-ʻUlamāʼ al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. *Mawsūʻah Waṣf Miṣr* (Vol. 1). pp. 293–294.

- There are many strange customs and rituals performed during the *Sebou'* ceremony. For more details, see:

-Ibn Manakilī, M. (1993). *Anas al-Malā Būḥash al-Falā* (M. ʻĪsā Ṣāliḥīah, Ed.). Cairo: Dār al-Bashīr li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʻ. p. 119. /Ibn al-Ḥāj, Abū ʻAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-ʻAbdrī. (737 AH). *Al-Madkhal ilā al-Sharʻ al-Sharīf* (A. Farīd al-Mazīdī, Ed., Vol. 3). Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Tawfīqīyah. pp. 282–283. / ʻĀshūr, S. (n.d.). *Al-Mujtamaʻ al-Miṣrī*. p. 137. /Ibrāhīm, S. S. (2014). *Tarbīyah al-ʻAṭfāl fī ʻAṣr Salātīn al-Mamlūk* (2nd ed.). Cairo: Dār al-ʻAyn. p. 6. /Al-Shāfiʻī, M. Ḥ. (T.M.). *Al-Usrah al-Miṣriyah fī ʻAṣr Salātīn al-Mamlūk (648-923 AH / 1250-1517 CE)*. p. 108. / Ibrāhīm, M. ʻA. *Al-Injāb wa-l-Mā'thūrāt al-Shaʻbiyyah*. p. 64.

[4]- Al-Wahrānī. (1986). *Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuhu wa Rasā'iluhu* (I. Shaʻlān, Ed.). Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʻArabī. p. 96./ Ibn al-Ḥāj. (737 AH). *Al-*

the child with a silver earring, regardless of gender, and to spread a rumor that the newborn was a girl as a protective measure against the evil eye[1].

PRACTICES RELATED TO THE DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE

Many customs and practices related to marriage are based on superstition, witchcraft, and folk beliefs. Among these traditions, women used to seek blessings from a tree known as "Al-Ihlija" inside Mahmoud Mosque at the foot of Mokattam, believing that it could help them get married[2].

One of the strangest examples of witchcraft and superstition in Egypt-despite being the land of Al-Azhar and Islam-is the emergence of an unusual practice: the establishment of a Shrine-Mausoleum dedicated to a type of snake in Upper Egypt known as "Sheikh Haridi." Women seeking marriage or childbirth would visit this Shrine-Mausoleum, offering sacrifices and slaughtering animals at its entrance before spending the night inside. According to legends, this Shrine-Mausoleum was originally the residence of a revered sheikh named "Sheikh Haridi." After his death, he was said to have reappeared in the form of a snake, fulfilling the wishes of women[3].

In wedding celebrations, many superstitious practices have also been prevalent. For instance, people would scatter salt over the bride and groom to protect them from the evil eye[4]. The groom would present his bride with a candy doll for the same purpose[5]. Additionally, it was believed that attaching a piece of electric catfish (a type of fish) to the bride's chest could prevent divorce or separation[6]. Some even thought that placing a piece of this fish's

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Madkhal (Vol. 3). p. 282. / Lane, E. W. (1999). *'Ādāt al-Miṣriyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdhum* (Vol. 3). p.178.

[1]- Blackman, W. (1995). *Al-Nās fī Ṣa'īd Miṣr* (1st ed.). Cairo: Dār al-'Ayn li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth al-Insānīyah wa-l-Ijtimā'īyah. p. 42.

[2]- Al-Tilimsānī. (2001). *Sakardān al-Sulṭān* (A. Muḥammad 'Umar, Ed., 1st ed.). Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī. p. 194.

[3]-'Ulamā' al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. *Mawsū'ah Waṣf Miṣr* (Vol. 1). pp. 300–301.

[4] -This was a common practice until recently, especially in villages and popular neighborhoods.

- Al-Shirbīnī, ibn Muḥammad Yūsuf. *Hazz al-Quḥūf bi-Sharḥ Qaṣīd Abī Shādūf* (H. Davies, Ed.). Al-Maktabah al-'Arabīyah. p. 21. /'Āshūr, S. *Al-Mujtama' al-Miṣrī*. p. 136.

[5]Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā. (d. 360 AH). *Kitāb Tadbīr al-Ḥabālā wa al-Aṭfāl wa al-Ṣibyān* (Manuscript No. 3834 Ṭibb). Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah. p. 109.-

[6] -Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān. (2002). *Kawkab al-Rawḍah fī Tārīkh al-Nīl wa Jazīrat al-Rawḍah* (M. al-Shishtāwī, Ed., 2nd ed.). Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-'Arabīyah. p. 7. /Al-Dubaykī, S. Ṣ. (2019). *Al-Khurāfah wa al-Sha'wadhah fī al-Mujtama' al-Miṣrī 'Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk*. p. 20.

flesh near the couple would make them love each other eternally and never part.[1]

Another widespread tradition is the use of henna, with women staining their hands and feet to ward off the evil eye[2]. It is evident that most of these beliefs have been passed down through generations, and some of them still exist today, especially in rural villages and certain urban neighborhoods.

PRACTICES RELATED TO THE DESIRE FOR CONCEPTION (PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH)

As for childbirth, many women resorted to acts of witchcraft and superstition, especially if conception was delayed or if a woman believed she was barren. In such cases, some women turned to various practices, thinking they would help them conceive[3].

Fraudsters and charlatans took advantage of these women's struggles, extorting large sums of money in exchange for tricks and deceptive methods that were claimed to aid in pregnancy, such as drinking a strange mixture made from ivory shavings[4].

On the other hand, some women followed unusual customs, such as visiting cemeteries during Friday prayers and stepping over seven tombs, believing that this would help them conceive[5].

During pregnancy, women avoided looking at unpleasant sights, believing that such exposure could affect the beauty of their newborn. Instead, they were advised to look at beautiful children to ensure the birth of an attractive baby. They also refrained from looking at the dead or attending funerals for fear that it might lead to miscarriage[6].

Women who repeatedly lost their children believed that their spiritual double, who lived underground, was angry and took their babies away. To appease her, they would bury the baby's placenta along with a loaf of bread

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[1] -Çelebi, E. (2010). *Al-Riḥlah ilā Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash 1082–1091 AH / 1672–1680 CE* (Ṣ. A. al-Qaṭṭūrī, Trans., Vol. 3, 1st ed.). Cairo: al-Markaz al-Qawmī lil-Tarjamah. p. 36.

[2]- Al-Waqād, M. (1999). *Al-Yahūd fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah fī Ḍaw' Wathā'iq al-Janīzah*. Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb. p. 313.

[3]-'Ulamā' al-Ḥamlah al-Faransīyah. (1992). *Waṣf Miṣr* (Vol. 1: *Al-Miṣriyyūn al-Muḥaddathūn*). Cairo. p. 65.

[4]- Muḥammad ibn Manakilī. *Anas al-Malā Būḥash al-Falā*. p. 112.

[5]- Al-Jawharī, M. *Al-Mu'taqadāt wa al-Ma'ārif al-Sha'bīyah* (Vol. 5). p. 189.

- It is not uncommon for some women in our time to be asked to sleep inside a tomb or on railway tracks, allowing a train to pass over them, believing that this will help them conceive, despite the extreme fear and serious risks involved.

[6] -Blackman, W. *Al-Nās fī Ṣa'īd Miṣr*. p. 42

and a pound of salt in a covered bowl placed on the floor of their home, believing this ritual would prevent further child loss[1].
The process of childbirth was not free from superstitions and mystical practices. It was believed that easing labor required eating the soft part of bread stuffed with mouse droppings[2], giving birth on eagle feathers, or placing a hyena's paw under the mother's feet during delivery[3].
Among the common fears surrounding childbirth was the belief in "Kabsa" (a harmful spiritual affliction). It was thought to occur if a man who had just shaved his hair or beard entered the delivery room or if a menstruating woman was present, as this was believed to cause the mother's milk to dry up. Conversely, women who did not wish to conceive would eat elephant dung, believing it prevented pregnancy[4].

Another widespread belief was that if a person returning from a funeral entered a postpartum woman's room, she would suffer from "Kabsa," potentially making her infertile[5]. Additionally, a particular type of stone found in the desert of *Sabil* 'Allam was believed to prevent pregnancy. Because of this, prostitutes in the Bab El-Louq district carried these stones to avoid unwanted pregnancies[6].
Similarly, it was believed that the water of Birkat Al-Habash could prevent conception, attracting women of ill repute who sought to avoid pregnancy[7].

PRACTICES CONCERNING THE REMEDY OF DISEASES

People resorted to various forms of blessings, believing in their ability to cure diseases. For example, they believed that leprosy could be treated by eating crocodile meat and wearing the eye of a live crocodile extracted from it around the patient's neck[8].

[1]- Ibid., p. 43.
[2]- Ibn al-Ḥāj, *Al-Madkhal* (Vol. 3). p. 275.
[3] -Al-Abshīhī, Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. (2008). *Al-Mustazraf fī Kull Fann Mustazraf* (M. Khayr Ṭa'mah al-Ḥalabī, Ed., Vol. 2, 5th ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Ma'rifah. p. 117.
[4] -Ibn Manakilī, M.. *Anas al-Malā Būḥash al-Falā*. p. 112.
[5] -Al-Jawharī, Muḥammad. (2011). *Al-Mu'taqadāt wa al-Ma'ārif al-Sha'bīyah* (Vol. 5). p. 59
[6] -Çelebi, E. (2010). *Al-Riḥlah ilā Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash* (Ṣ. A. al-Qaṭṭūrī, Trans., 1st ed., Vol. 3, Mawākib Miṣr wa Iḥtifālātuhā). Cairo: al-Markaz al-Qawmī lil-Tarjamah. p. 241.
[7]- Ibid, Vol. 3. p. 248.
[8] -Ibid., Vol. *3*, p. 37.

MANIFESTATIONS OF SUPERSTITION AND PESSIMISM IN EGYPT UNDER OTTOMAN RULE, SUPPORTED BY ACCOUNTS FROM THAT PERIOD

Beyond their fears of particular days and months, their beliefs extended to certain individuals as well. Seeing a one-eyed person was considered a bad omen[1], they were also superstitious about certain animals and birds, especially the crow[2] and the owl, which was commonly known among the public as "Um Qweiq." They considered it a bad omen, to the extent that someone with bad luck would be described as having an "owl's face."[3]

One of the strangest events reflecting the spread of superstitions and omens in the Ottoman era occurred on Tuesday, the 10th of Rabi' al-Akhir in the year 924 AH. On that day, Khair Bek issued an order in the streets of Cairo, commanding that any dog found should be killed and hung on shop fronts. As a result, more than five hundred dogs were killed in a single day, their bodies displayed on storefronts. The campaign continued as both the Turkmen soldiers and the common people carried out the order, forcing the remaining dogs to flee to cemeteries and deserts. This act was linked to a common belief among the people of Istanbul, who used to kill dogs during the Khamsin days if their numbers increased, thinking that doing so would prevent or reduce the spread of the plague. Over time, this practice became an annual tradition.

Ironically, the cessation of this campaign was also driven by superstition. The market inspector, Zayn al-Din Barakat ibn Musa, ascended to the citadel and advised Khair Bek against harming the dogs. He warned him of the fate of Emir Azbak, the ruler of Azbakiyyah, who had previously ordered the killing of dogs in his district, only to die a year later. Struck by fear, Khair Bek immediately ordered an end to the killings and the release of the remaining dogs. Thus, both the killing and the prevention of killing were rooted in the same superstitions[4].

Among the events that reflect the superstition of the common people regarding the collapse of buildings and their association with the downfall of the ruling power is that on Saturday, the 16th of Rabi' al-Akhir in the year 928 AH, the dome of Al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, which stood atop the iwan, collapsed. The dome was made of wood, covered with lead, and

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[1]- Lane, E. W. (1999). *ʿĀdāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdihim*. p. 270.

[2]- Al-Abshīhī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Al-Mustazraf fī Kull Fann Mustazraf*. p. 117.

[3] -Amīn, A. (2012). *Qāmūs al-ʿĀdāt wa al-Taqālīd wa al-Taʿbīrāt al-Miṣriyah* (1st ed.). Hindāwī Foundation for Education and Culture. p. 81.

[4] -Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī. (1961). *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr* (Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, Ed., 1st ed., Vol. 5). Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyah. pp. 248–249.

adorned with green faience tiles. It had been constructed more than two hundred years earlier. When it fell, people took it as a sign foretelling the end of the rule of Khair Bek, the governor of Egypt at the time[1].

PRACTICES RELATED TO SEEKING BLESSINGS FROM CERTAIN OBJECTS OR PLACES

Just as Egyptians were superstitious about certain things, they also sought blessings from various places, individuals, and beliefs. For example, they regarded Jabal al-Juyushi as a sacred site for healing[2]. Certain ponds in Cairo were also believed to have medicinal properties; it was thought that bathing in the water of Birkat al-Ghassal for forty days could cure leprosy by the will of God, while the water of Birkat al-Dabbaghin was said to heal those suffering from jaundice.

Birkat Qarun was believed to bring good fortune and financial prosperity to those who bathed in it for forty days, as it was thought to contain magical inscriptions. Similarly, Birkat Abi al-Shawarib was believed to cure epilepsy if a person bathed in its water for seven days. Another common belief was that Birkat Baybars helped keep washed vegetables fresh for an extended period. Meanwhile, Birkat Ain Shams was considered unique, as it was said to be free of frogs, snakes, rats, or insects.

Another peculiar tradition was the belief that filling a water flask (zamzamiyya) from Birkat al-Hajj before embarking on the pilgrimage to Mecca would preserve the water's taste and freshness for an entire year[3].

Beyond places, people also sought blessings from sacred relics, such as a stone bearing the imprint of two feet, which was believed to mark the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ footprints, as well as another footprint attributed to the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام in the burial site of Sultan Qaitbay. People

[1] - Ibid (Vol. 5). p. 441.

- Indeed, this came to pass. In the month of Dhu al-Qi'dah of the same year, Khayr Bek, the Ottoman deputy ruler of Egypt, fell gravely ill and was bedridden, suffering from severe pain that worsened until he passed away on Sunday, the 14th of Dhu al-Qi'dah, 928 AH. Despite his efforts to perform acts of charity, such as releasing prisoners and donating money to the poor and orphans, his fate remained unchanged. After his death, Sinan Pasha succeeded him as governor, having been one of the Mamluks of Sultan Al-Ashraf Qaitbay.

- Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr* (Vol. 5), p. 478 and following.

[2] -Al-Jabrītī, ʿA. Ḥ. (1997). *ʿAjā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār* (ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Ed., 1st ed.). Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah. Vol. 1, p. 57.

[3] -Çelebi, E. (2010). *Al-Riḥlah ilā Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash* (Vol. 2). p. 247 and following.

would pour rose water over these imprints, dip their hands in the water, and rub it on their bodies, seeking divine blessings[1].

As we mentioned earlier, the traveler Evliya Çelebi recounts a lengthy story about the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed Khan's transfer of the Prophet's ﷺ relic, which was preserved in the mausoleum of Sultan Qaitbay. He details the numerous difficulties the Sultan encountered in moving it to Istanbul. The narrative then describes a vision in which Sultan Qaitbay appeared before the Prophet ﷺ, complaining about the relic's removal, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ instructed Sultan Ahmed Khan to return the relic to its original place. This was indeed done, and the relic was restored to its location, where it remains a site of pilgrimage, as we previously stated[2].

PROTECTIVE PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR LOCATIONS, INCLUDING TALISMANS, SPELLS, AND AMULETS

Additionally, the practice of using amulets and talismans to protect against envy, witchcraft, and other evils became widespread. The most common type of amulet contained verses from the Quran, with people frequently tying a small, wrapped Quran around the right side of their bodies as a source of blessing and protection.

The Golden Amulet (Al-Hirz Al-Dhahabi) was also popular, as it contained certain Quranic surahs and was worn for protection against harm. Similarly, people believed in the power of the Names of Allah and the Prophet ﷺ to ward off illnesses, misfortune, envy, and witchcraft.

Another widely held belief was that writing the Islamic testimony of faith (Shahada) on a piece of paper, then tearing it in half and giving each half to two lovers, would inevitably lead to their reunion, regardless of any attempts to separate them[3].

Furthermore, a specific type of amulet was thought to provide protection, as it bore the names of the People of the Cave (Ahl al-Kahf) and their dog. People often engraved these names onto the tools and objects they used daily[4].

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[1]- Al-'Ayyāshī, A. S. 'A. B. M. (2006). *Al-riḥla al-'Ayyāshiyya bayna sanatī 1661–1663 H.* (Ed. S. Al-Fāḍilī & S. Al-Qurashī, Dār al-Suwaidī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī'. 1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 234–235).

- This is in addition to the Prophet's ﷺ relic housed at the *Tekkiye of Qadam al-Nabi* (the Prophet's Footprint), established by Ibrahim Pasha al-Daftardar in 1074 AH / 1663 CE near the bank of the Nile River."

-Çelebi, A. (n.d.). *Al-riḥla ilā Miṣr wa-l-Sūdān wa-Bilād al-Ḥabash* (Vol. 2, p. 189).

[2] -Ibid, (Vol. 2, pp. 261 ff.).

[3]- Lane, E. W. (1999). *ʿĀdāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥdathīn wa Taqālīdihim*, p. 255.

[4]- Ibid., p. 256.

One of the most well-known manifestations of superstition that spread among the public was the use of talismans, which appeared in many buildings, each serving a specific purpose according to the owner's belief.

Among these talismans, a famous story is told about two adjacent columns located to the left of the entrance from the northern gate of the Amr Ibn Al-As Mosque. People believed that only those pure from sins and transgressions could pass between them. It was also commonly said that a stout person could pass through with ease, while a slender person might fail. This belief led to a great crowd gathering around these columns, especially after the last Friday prayer of Ramadan[1], as people tested themselves by trying to pass between them.

One of the stories linked to these columns tells of a thief who attempted to pass between them but failed. The people present caught him, expelled him from the mosque, and, as soon as he left, he suddenly passed away. His body was washed and buried in the blink of an eye, and thousands attended his funeral.

Additionally, there was a marble column located to the left of the minbar (pulpit), which worshippers used to strike with shoes and sticks after finishing their prayers, believing that it had refused to join the other columns that were brought to construct the mosque during the Islamic conquest[2].

The belief in talismans was widespread among people, and one such claim was associated with Al-Azhar Mosque, where it was said to contain a talisman that prevented birds, such as pigeons, doves, and sparrows, from nesting or breeding inside. Another common belief surrounded Al-Ghuri Mosque in the Al-Ghuriya district, where it was thought to be protected by a talisman that prevented flies and insects from entering.

The traveler Evliya Çelebi documented various talismans that were allegedly present in Saladin's Citadel, which were said to protect its inhabitants from scorpions, snakes, and other venomous creatures, including the centipede. Talismans were not only believed to ward off harmful creatures but also to cure diseases such as fever, colic, and even the plague. According to some accounts, a person suffering from fever would recover if they stayed in the citadel for three days, thanks to the so-called "Talisman of Fever."

Other reported talismans included those meant to prevent slaves from escaping, stop thieves from stealing, protect against fires, summon rainfall, and safeguard people’s eyes from infections such as conjunctivitis. It is said that some Moroccan and Indian travelers removed these talismans, believing

[1]- Mubārak, ʿAlī. (1306 AH). *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah al-Jadīdah li-Miṣr al-Qāhirah wa Muduniha wa Bilādiha al-Qadīmah wa al-Shahīrah* (Vol. 4). Būlāq, Miṣr: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubrá al-Amīriyyah. p. 9.

[2] -Ibid, p. 9.

they marked the locations of buried treasures. According to these superstitions, this act led to the outbreak of diseases in Egypt[1].

One particularly well-known talisman was the "Dog Talisman," referring to a statue of two fighting dogs that was discovered during the construction of a public bathhouse, later named "Hammam Al-Kalb" (The Dog Bathhouse). People believed this talisman was the reason behind the absence of rabies in Egypt[2].

Additionally, it was claimed that Sultan Al-Ghuri Mosque and its dome, located on Al-Mu'izz Street, contained a talisman that prevented mosquitoes, flies, bedbugs, and fleas from entering. It was even said that if someone carrying these insects entered the mosque, they would immediately get rid of them upon stepping inside[3].

One of the observations recorded by some scholars of the French campaign was the widespread presence of charlatans who were said to have the ability to immunize people against reptiles and venomous insects. Their method involved giving a person a drink made of a mixture of water, sugar, and oil, after the charlatan recited certain incantations and spat into the mixture. The person was then instructed to drink it. After consuming the potion, two large snakes were hung from his ears by their fangs for fifteen minutes before the charlatan dismissed him, declaring that he was now immune to any harm from snakes.

These practices did not stop there but extended to some charlatans claiming the ability to handle and even summon reptiles and venomous insects from crevices. This was witnessed firsthand by the French in a monastery in Tahta, Upper Egypt, where a snake charmer produced three snakes of varying sizes after chanting some incantations. These events sparked debates among observers about whether they were acts of witchcraft relying on hidden forces or simply tricks and illusions. Despite taking all precautions to detect any deception, including forcing the charmer to remove his clothes to ensure he was not hiding anything, they failed to uncover any trickery[4].

Snake charmers used to showcase their skills before the public in astonishing ways, such as pulling out unseasonal fruits from people's pockets, extracting venomous creatures like snakes and scorpions, or even making water flow from their garments and turbans or producing fire from them. The Ottoman governor, Ibrahim Pasha, was particularly fond of watching these performances[5].

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[1] -Çelebi, A. *Al-Riḥlah ilá Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash*, Vol. 2, pp. 64–68.
[2] -Çelebi, A. *Al-Riḥlah ilá Miṣr wa al-Sūdān*, Vol. 2, p. 196.
[3] -Ibid, Vol. 2, pp. 119–120.
[4] -ʿUlamāʾ al-Ḥamla al-Fransīyah, *Mawsūʿat Waṣf Miṣr*, Vol. 1, pp. 296–299.
[5] -Çelebi, A., *Al-Riḥlah ilá Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash*, Vol. 3, p. 243.

Most of those who practiced such feats were followers of the Rifaiyya Sufi order, who were known for swallowing fire, inserting skewers and swords into their bodies without injury, carrying flaming tree trunks without being burned, and even consuming snakes. They also had rituals where they stabbed or burned themselves without causing any apparent wounds or injuries[1].

Another Sufi order, the Sa'diyya, which branched off from the Rifaiyya, was known for a peculiar ritual called "*Dousa*" (the trampling). In this practice, the leader of the order would ride his horse over his disciples, trampling them without them feeling any pain-at least according to their beliefs[2].

CLAIMS OF RIGHTEOUS VISIONS, KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNSEEN, AND ASTROLOGY

Among the popular beliefs that spread among the masses was faith in righteous visions, which included seeing the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Companions, or saintly figures in dreams. However, some individuals exploited these beliefs for personal gain, falsely claiming to have experienced such visions.

One such person was a man named Hussein, an elderly servant at the Sultan al-Ghuri's washhouse. On Wednesday, 21 Jumada al-Thani 924 AH, he claimed to have seen the Prophet ﷺ in a dream, commanding him to inform the Ottoman Sultan Selim I to return to his homeland and cease fighting Muslims-referring to Ismail Safavi, the ruler of Iran. He also claimed to have foreseen dreadful events that would occur at the end of that year. Fearing the spread of sedition, Khayr Bey ordered his execution. Despite the fact that the year saw a drop in the Nile's water levels and high food prices-phenomena familiar to Egyptians-no great calamities occurred as he had predicted[3].

Another claimant was Sheikh Mustafa ibn Kamal al-Din, who alleged that he frequently saw the Prophet ﷺ and communicated with al-Khidr. He even claimed that he was offered the title of "*Qutb* of the East" but declined it. People held him in such high regard that they believed he could communicate with jinn and make pacts with them. He passed away on 12

[1] -Lane, E. W.. *ʿĀdāt al-Miṣriyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa Taqālīdim*, p. 248.
- The traveler Evliya Çelebi elaborated on the methods of capturing and transporting snakes, as well as extracting their venom for medicinal purposes. He also mentioned the consumption of snake meat as a general tonic for the body. Additionally, he did not overlook the performances of snake charmers, describing their skills in handling snakes and making them perform dance-like movements in shows that fascinated and amazed spectators. For more, see:
- Çelebi, A. (n.d.). *Al-Riḥlah ilá Miṣr wa al-Sūdān*, Vol. 2, pp. 204–et seq.

[2]- Lane, E. W., *ʿĀdāt al-Miṣriyīn*, p. 248 et seq.

[3] -Ibn Iyās. (n.d.). *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*, Vol. 5, pp. 259–260.

Rabi‘al-Thani 1162 AH (1749 AD) and was buried in the al-Mujawireen cemetery[1].

Evliya Çelebi narrated the story of a man named Kurtbay, who carried out a daring assassination attempt at the palace of Caliph al-Ma’mun in Umm al-Qiyas on Rawda Island, aiming to kill Sultan Selim I. According to the account, Kurtbay managed to infiltrate the Sultan’s tent while his guards were asleep, but he failed to carry out his plan, as he was overcome with shock and fled in terror.

The story attributes his failure to a mystical vision, claiming that the Prophet appeared in a dream to the Sultan’s guards, instructing them to sleep while assuring them that he himself would protect the Sultan. It is also said that he appeared to Sultan Selim, informing him that he was divinely protected for life, and to the would-be assassin, warning him that he would not be able to kill the Sultan[2].

Despite its supernatural nature, this story can be interpreted as a form of political propaganda for Sultan Selim I, exploiting people’s belief in divine visions to reinforce his legitimacy and convince them that he was under the protection of God and the Prophet.

Astrologers and fortune-tellers did not hesitate to weigh in on this matter, despite the fact that most of their statements and predictions were mere claims lacking any basis in reality. One of their most famous prophecies was about the Ottoman Sultan Selim I. They claimed that after setting out to annex Egypt and the Levant and overthrowing the rule of the Mamluks and Safavids, he would die on his way back to his capital before reaching Istanbul. However, this prediction proved false, as the sultan successfully entered Istanbul and resided there for a period before traveling to the city of Edirne. In response to their falsehoods, he is said to have composed verses of poetry, refuting their claims.

"Do not seek the stars for what you pursue,
For fate is God's, not yours to construe.
With happiness, the stars hold no sway;
Neither Mars nor Saturn can lead you astray[3]".

Astrology had a significant impact on people's minds, as exemplified by an incident that took place on Thursday, the 7th of Rabi’ al-Akhir in the year 928 AH. On that day, an astrologer spread a rumor that Friday would witness violent winds and severe storms, followed by a massive earthquake that would destroy houses and claim lives during the Friday prayer. This

[1] -al-Jabartī, ʿA. Ḥ. (1997). *ʿAjāʾib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār*, pp. 281–282.

[2]- Çelebi, A.. *Al-Riḥlah ilá Miṣr wa al-Sūdān wa Bilād al-Ḥabash*, Vol. 1, pp. 350–353.

[3] -Ibn Iyās. *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*, Vol. 5, pp. 272–273.

prophecy caused panic among the people of Cairo; they spent the night bidding farewell to one another and performed the prayer in a state of anxiety and fear. However, when the prayer ended without any calamity, they congratulated each other on their survival, as if they had been granted a new lease on life. This incident was merely one of many prophecies that circulated during that era[1].

Another famous prediction was the widespread belief that the Day of Judgment would occur on Friday, the 26th of Dhu al-Hijjah in the year 1147 AH (1735 AD). Fear gripped the people; some turned to supplication and prayer, while others indulged in sins, believing that repentance would be futile. When the day passed without any catastrophic event, a new rumor spread, claiming that righteous *Walis*-such as Imam Al-Shafi'i, Sayyid al-Badawi, and Abu al-Dusuqi-had interceded to postpone the Day of Judgment, and that God had accepted their plea[2].

These incidents reflect the extent to which people of that time were willing to believe in prophecies and superstitions, whether they materialized or not. Even when predictions failed to come true, they always found explanations to justify their inaccuracy.

It seems that some individuals took advantage of people's gullibility and willingness to believe in superstitions and charlatanism for personal financial gain. One of the most notable incidents of this kind was carried out by a man named Sheikh Abd al-Latif, the chief servant of the Al-Nafisi Shrine-Mausoleum, in the year 1173 AH / 1759-1760 AD. He claimed that a "blessed" goat had been found near the Shrine-Mausoleum of Sayyida Nafisa, with some saying it was discovered near the minaret. He went further to assert that Sayyida Nafisa herself had entrusted him with its care and even claimed that the goat could speak!

News of this so-called miraculous goat quickly spread, and people flocked in droves to seek blessings from it. Women adorned it with golden gifts and offered it votive offerings. To add to the mystique, Sheikh Abd al-Latif declared that the goat would only eat pistachio kernels and almonds and would drink nothing but rose water and refined sugar. The public became infatuated with it, and donations poured in from nobles, officials, and commoners alike.

However, the ruse did not go unnoticed by Prince Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, who ordered Sheikh Abd al-Latif to present himself along with the goat. The sheikh complied, arriving on a mule while carrying the goat, accompanied by the sound of drums and flutes, and followed by a large crowd of clerics and townspeople. When he reached the prince's court, where a number of

[1] -Ibid., Vol. 5, pp. 440–441

[2] -al-Jabartī, ʿA. Ḥ. *ʿAjāʾib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār*, Vol. 1, pp. 252–253.

dignitaries were gathered, the prince informed him that the goat would be taken so that women could receive its blessings.
Secretly, the servants slaughtered the goat and prepared a feast from its meat, which they then served to Sheikh Abd al-Latif without his knowledge. After he had eaten and was about to leave, the prince revealed the truth, informing him that he had just consumed the very goat he had used to deceive the people. The prince then rebuked him harshly for his fraud and trickery and ordered him to leave. But he didn't stop there; he also decreed that the sheikh be publicly humiliated by placing the goat's skin on his turban so that the vast crowd accompanying him would witness his disgrace and realize the extent of his deception and charlatanism.[1].

CLAIMANTS OF SAINTHOOD (WILAYAH), QUTBSHIP (THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL RANK IN SUFISM), MAHDI-SHIP, AND PROPHETHOOD

These figures were linked to many tales that reinforced popular belief in the miraculous powers of saints, leading to the continued spread of superstitions and Sufi practices that prevailed in that era "Numerous individuals claimed prophet hood, Mahdi-ship, and sainthood (*Wilayah*) to exploit the simplicity of the people and their love for anything that would bring them closer to God, leading them to follow any claimant. Alongside these, there were those who did not claim sainthood, but the people believed in their saintliness and knew them as the *'Majazib*,' meaning those drawn to God."
One of the most famous *majdhūbs* (spiritually ecstatic figures) of that period was Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Dashtuti, who followed the Shafi'i Madhhab (Islamic school of thought) and was known as a conscious majdhūb. He wore a rough woolen robe, never had a home, wife, or children, and was known for his minimal food intake. Despite this, he was highly revered by kings and sultans. Upon his death, his funeral was attended by a large number of high-ranking officials, including the governor of Egypt, Prince Khair Bek. He passed away at the age of 88 and received substantial financial gifts from Egypt's elites, which he used to construct mosques and religious schools. He was buried in his madrasa near Hadarat Al-Foul, opposite the zawiya (religious lodge) of Yahya Al-Balkhi, which was completed on Friday, 13 Shawwal 925 AH. He himself passed away on the 9th of Sha'ban 924 AH[2].
Among other well-known *majdhūbs* of that era was Sheikh Ali Al-Jabarti, who was believed to have a radiant light surrounding his grave, resembling the glow of a lantern. It was said that any belongings left at his grave would remain untouched, as thieves feared that attempting to steal them would

[1] -al-Jabartī, *ʿAjāʾib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār.*, Vol. 1, pp. 567–568.
[2] -Ibn Iyās, A. *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhur fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr* Vol. 5, pp. 267–268.

cause them to become paralyzed and stiffen on the spot.Another notable figure was Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Kurdi Al-Khalwati, who repeatedly claimed to have seen God, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, and Al-Khidr in his dreams. He was famous for saying, "Whoever loves me will enter paradise." Many miraculous feats were attributed to him, much like other *majdhūbs*, whose extraordinary acts, visions, and wonders have been documented in various writings[1].

Most of these "*majdhūbs*" (ecstatic mystics) used to wander the streets naked, as people believed in their sainthood, sought their blessings, and even followed them. A person who was mentally disturbed, naive, or of limited intelligence was called a "majdhūb" (ecstatic), and sometimes referred to as a "maslūb" (deprived). However, if they were not seen as mentally impaired, they were simply called a "*walī*"[2].

One of the most famous incidents related to these *majdhūbs* involved a woman who became attached to an ecstatic mystic named ʿAlī al-Bakrī, who used to walk naked and barefoot, with the common people believing in his sainthood. The woman disguised herself as a man, wore men's clothing, unveiled her face, and began speaking obscenely in both Arabic and Turkish. As a result, she and al-Bakrī attracted a crowd of commoners and riffraff, who followed and imitated them wherever they went. This created such a commotion that markets became congested with spectators eager to witness the spectacle.

To restore order, a soldier named Jaʿfar Kāshif intervened, arrested them, and punished the crowd with beatings. This led the people to renounce their allegiance to the majdhūb and promise not to follow him again. Consequently, they were released, but the woman, whose name was Amūna, was committed to the "māristān" (mental hospital). As for Shaykh ʿAlī, he was set free, as people continued to venerate him, kissing his hands. He was often seen walking unclothed, carrying a long staff.

As his fame grew, his brother exploited the situation by imprisoning him and collecting donations, offerings, and gifts in his name. This was a clear example of how some individuals capitalized on public belief in a certain figure to gain financial benefits, even fabricating miracles and spreading falsehoods to strengthen his reputation[3].

ʿAlī al-Bakrī passed away in the year 1207 AH / 1793 AD and was buried in the al-Sharāybī Mosque near the al-Ruwayʿī Mosque[4]. After his death, a

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[1] -Al-Jabartī, ‘A. *‘Ajā’ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 2, pp. 88 ff.

[2]-Lane, E. W. *‘Ādāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa-Taqālīduhum* ,p. 234

[3] -Winter, M. (2001). *Al-Mujtamaʿ al-Miṣrī taḥta al-Ḥukm al-ʿUthmānī* (Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, Trans.). Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, p. 260.

[4]- Al-Jabartī, ‘A. *‘Ajā’ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 2, pp. 375–376.

festival (mawlid) was established in his honor, with commemorative nights held at his tomb. During the French occupation of Egypt, the French insisted on organizing his mawlid on the 20th of Rabīʿ al-Thānī in the year 1214 AH / 1799 AD[1].

The emirs and high-ranking officials of the state sought blessings from these *majdhūbs* (ecstatic mystics). Among them was Mustafa Pasha, the ruler of Egypt, who was a devotee of Sheikh ʿAlī al-Bayūmī. When the sheikh's prophecy that the pasha would become Grand Vizier came true, Mustafa Pasha built a mosque in the Ḥusaynīyah district in his honor. He also added a public water fountain (*sabil*) and a school (*kuttab*) to the complex and constructed a domed tomb where the sheikh was buried upon his death in 1183 AH / 1769 AD.

Similarly, Ṭāhir Pasha, who ruled Egypt for only 26 days in 1804 AD, held these *majdhūbs* in high regard. He even established a private retreat (khalwa) for himself in al-Shaykhūniyyah, where he participated in *dhikr* (remembrance rituals) alongside Sheikh ʿAbd Allāh al-Kurdī. They would ascend to the rooftop to engage in Sufi ceremonies. When news of this spread among the public, commoners began imitating the dervishes-donning tall hats (ṭarāṭīr), carrying dyed staffs adorned with bells and tassels, beating drums, and chanting strange phrases, mimicking the ecstatic states of the Sufi mystics[2].

During the first half of the seventeenth century, the presence of mad dervishes (*majādhīb*) became increasingly widespread, turning into a notable phenomenon due to their large numbers and the public's belief in their sanctity. As a result, the French commander-in-chief (Sari Askar) sent an inquiry to the religious scholars (*mashāyikh*), asking about these individuals who roamed the markets, exposing their bodies, shouting and screaming, and claiming to be saints, while the common people revered them. He also inquired whether such behavior was permissible in Islam.

In response, the scholars declared that these actions were contrary to the teachings of Islam, the principles of Sharia, and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. Consequently, the ruler issued an order to prohibit such behavior and arrest anyone found engaging in these acts. If it was determined that the individual was suffering from insanity, he would be confined to the maristan (mental hospital). However, if he was not insane and returned to his senses, he would be released. If he persisted in his actions, he would be expelled from the country[3].

[1] -Ibid, Vol. 2, pp. 137–138.
[2] -Ibid ,Vol. 2, p. 391.
[3] -Al-Jabartī, ʻA. *ʻAjā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 2, p.231.

The Egyptians believed in the existence of what is known as the "*Qutb*" (Pole), a spiritual figure believed to oversee the affairs of the world. It is said that he has four deputies, each representing one of the four Sufi orders: the Rifaiyya, Qadiriyya, Ahmadiyya, and Ibrahimiyya. Some believe that these deputies operate under the authority of the supreme *Qutb*, who is thought to reside above the Kaaba. One of the most revered places associated with him in Egypt is Bab Zuweila, which led the common people to call it the "Gate of the Mutawalli" (Guardian). This belief became deeply ingrained in popular culture, to the extent that people would recite Surah Al-Fatiha when passing through Bab Zuweila and give alms to a beggar sitting at the gate, believing him to be one of the *Qutb's* servants. Those suffering from headaches or toothaches would attach a tooth or a nail to the gate, hoping for healing. Similarly, individuals with personal requests would tie a cloth to the gate and state their wish; if they later found the cloth missing, they took it as a sign that the *Qutb* had accepted their plea.There were also several locations believed to be visited by the *Qutb*, the most notable being the shrine of Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi in Tanta. Upon the death of a *Qutb*, it was believed that another would take his place. It is also said that the first *Qutb* was the prophet Al-Khidr, who was believed to have granted authority to the successive *Qutbs* who followed him[1].

One of the significant incidents that reflect the rejection of such superstitions by some religious scholars occurred when a Roman preacher arrived at Al-Muayyad Mosque. He strongly criticized the widespread practices in Egypt, which he considered as heretical innovations, deception, and sorcery. These included seeking blessings by visiting shrines, kissing thresholds, lighting candles and lanterns at tombs, and constructing domes over them. He also opposed the belief that saints had access to the Preserved Tablet and the notion of the "*Qutb*" (spiritual pole) at Bab Zuweila. This preacher gained a following among many people who supported his views. However, he also faced fierce opposition from others who accused him of heresy, claiming that he had shown disrespect to the saints. His opponents referred to a fatwa issued by some scholars of Al-Azhar, which stated that the miracles of saints do not cease after their death. When the preacher demanded a debate with these scholars, a major conflict erupted, ultimately leading to an order from the governor to exile him and his followers[2].

Belief in *Walis* and their miracles was not limited to mere reverence; rather, it extended to some individuals claiming sainthood and Mahdism. This even escalated to extreme levels of superstition and deceit, with some claiming

[1] -Lane, E. W. *'Ādāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa-Taqālīduhum* pp. 236–237.

[2] -For more on this strife, see:

- Al-Jabartī, 'A. *'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 1, pp. 92 ff.

prophet hood. Among those who claimed sainthood was a man named Al-'Alimi from Fayoum, who arrived in Cairo in late Jumada al-Akhirah 1110 AH / 1699 AD. Crowds of common people gathered around him, and men and women mingled, leading to widespread corruption. As a result, the military intervened, arrested him, and executed him at the Citadel, after which he was buried near the shrine of Sayyida Nafisa[1]. Additionally, some individuals claimed to possess supernatural powers and perform extraordinary feats, including Sheikh Ahmed bin Isa Taqi al-Din[2] and Sheikh al-Majzoub Mohammed bin Abi Bakr al-Maghribi al-Trabalsi[3].

Many individuals have claimed to be the Mahdi, asserting that they were the awaited savior to appear at the end of times. Among them was Sheikh Abu al-Fayd Sayyid Muhammad, known as Murtada al-Husseini[4], as well as Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Hafiz al-Khalwati al-Hanafi, who was believed to be served by jinn. He was known for raising a large number of cats and identifying them by their lineage[5].

In Dhul-Hijjah 1213 AH / 1799 AD, a Moroccan man emerged, claiming to be the Mahdi and asserting that he had come to liberate Egypt from the French occupation[6]. He called upon the people to wage jihad in Sharqia province and its surroundings. However, when the French forces confronted him, his claims proved to be false.

Several others also made similar claims, including an elderly man of very short stature who arrived in Cairo, claiming that he had resided in Mecca for a time and had been foretold there that he was the awaited Mahdi. When Khayr Bek, the governor of Egypt, learned of his claims, he summoned him to the Citadel and questioned him about the knowledge of the end times. Finding him ignorant on the subject, he ordered his confinement in the Bimaristan (Hospital) but later granted him clemency[7].

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[1] -Al-Jabartī, ʻA. *ʻAjā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 1, p. 54.

[2] -Ibid ,Vol. 2, p. 191.

[3]- Ibid , Vol. 2, pp. 226–227.

[4] -Ibid , Vol. 2, pp. 303–321.

[5] -Ibid , Vol. 2, p. 373.

[6] -Ibid ,Vol. 3, pp. 98–99.

[7] -Ibn Iyās, A. *Badā'iʻ al-Zuhur fī Waqā'iʻ al-Duhūr* Vol. 5, pp. 472–473.

- Evliya Çelebi visited Qalawun Bimaristan and noted that it housed 306 patients, including those suffering from various illnesses and the mentally ill. He mentioned that no one was allowed to enter unless they were first presented to the Pasha, who would then issue an order for their treatment in the Bimaristan, where each patient was allocated a daily expense of one qirsh. He also highlighted that the Bimaristan had specialized doctors who oversaw patient care, providing them with medications and proper nutrition. Additionally, he praised the skill of the physicians and their efficiency in treating patients, emphasizing the remarkable proficiency of this medical institution.

- Ibn Iyās, A. *Badā'iʻ al-Zuhur fī Waqā'iʻ al-Duhūr* Vol. 2, pp. 302 ff.

We conclude our discussion on those who falsely claimed prophet hood. In the year 1110 AH / 1698 AD, a man from Fayoum declared himself a prophet and was subsequently executed, which was the usual punishment for such claims[1].

In early Ramadan of 1147 AH / 1735 AD, a Takruri man from West Africa appeared in Al-Azhar, claiming that he was a divinely sent prophet. He alleged that Gabriel had descended upon him, taken him to the heavens on the night of the 27th of Rajab, where he led the angels in a two-unit prayer, with Gabriel himself calling the call to prayer. He further claimed that Gabriel handed him a written decree affirming his prophethood and commanded him to deliver his message and manifest his miracles. Upon hearing of this claim, scholars and the Katkhuda summoned him and questioned whether he suffered from madness, but he denied it, insisting that he was a true prophet. As a result, he was sent to the Bimaristan (hospital), yet some people still believed in him. Later, the Pasha ordered his presence and convened a meeting with scholars in mid-Ramadan to persuade him to repent. However, he refused to retract his claims. Fearing the spread of his influence, the Pasha ordered his execution, which was carried out in Hosh Al-Diwan[2].

THE PRACTICE OF MAGIC AND COMMUNICATION WITH JINN

In an era of widespread superstition, the practice of magic flourished, and the number of sorcerers in Egypt increased. Magic was divided into two types: celestial magic used for protection and practiced by men believed to be righteous and infernal magic, employed by charlatans who sought the aid of spirits and demons, making it a harmful and dangerous practice.

Additionally, various forms of sorcery became widespread, including scrying (mandal), astrology, sand divination[3], the preparation of incantations and talismans, spirit summoning, enchantments, amulet-making, fortune-telling, palmistry, casting pebbles, and scrying (mandal)[4] Gypsy women were particularly known for fortune-telling, carrying a leather bag filled with the tools of their trade as they roamed the streets[5].

[1] -Winter, M. *Al-Mujtama‘ al-Miṣrī taḥt al-Ḥukm al-‘Uthmānī* (p. 259).

[2] -Al-Jabartī, ‘A. *‘Ajā’ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 1, p. 252.

[3] -Lane, E. W. *‘Ādāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa-Taqālīduhum* p. 272.

[4] - For more on the types of magic, see.

-‘Idān, B. L. (n.d.). *Riwayāt al-Fikr al-Ghaybī fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkiyya* p. 264 ff.

[5]- Nerval, G. D. (1969). *Riḥla ilā al-Sharq* (K. ‘A. Al-Buḥayrī, Trans.; 1st ed., Vol. 3, p. 257). Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr.

- For more on the Gypsies and their beliefs, see..

Among the most renowned sorcerers in Ottoman-era Egypt were:

- **Ismail Abu Al-Ru'ous**, rumored to be either married to a jinni or served by one. Many stories and speculations surrounded him, eventually leading to his expulsion from Egypt.
- **Another sorcerer**, who cast a spell on a Muslim girl, making her fall in love with and marry a Copt., as punishment, he was exiled from the country[1].
- **Sheikh** Ahmed **Sadouma**, who gained great fame for his expertise in spiritual practices, animating inanimate objects, the esoteric science of letters (simiya), and communication with spirits, However, his fate was tragic—Prince Yusuf Al-Kabir, a high-ranking commander under Muhammad Bey Abu Al-Dhahab and his brother-in-law, ordered his execution after discovering a talisman inscribed on the private parts of his concubine. Upon questioning her, she admitted that it was crafted by Sheikh Sadouma to deepen her master's love for her. Enraged, the prince ordered his immediate execution[2].

Furthermore, the traveler William Lane wrote extensively about the Moroccan sorcerer Sheikh Abdel Qader Al-Maghribi, attributing to him extraordinary abilities such as retrieving stolen goods, communicating with the dead, and other supernatural feats, providing detailed accounts of his remarkable powers[3].

Superstitions and sorcery associated with jinn were widely believed among Egyptians. They thought that jinn inhabited wells, latrines, baths, and ovens. Therefore, before entering a latrine, drawing water from a well, or lighting a fire, it was customary for a person to say, *"Pardon, O Blessed One"* or *"Permission"*, as if seeking consent from the jinn believed to reside in those places[4].

It was also commonly believed that jinn could take the form of black cats, dogs, and other animals. Many stories were passed down about such occurrences, but they remain folk tales that cannot be taken seriously, especially since their origins are unknown. These tales were simply exchanged among the public until they became widely accepted as truth[5].

- Kaḥīla, ʻA. (2007). *Al-Ghajar fī Miṣr fī al-ʻAṣrayn al-Mamlūkī wa-l-ʻUthmānī*. In Majmūʻat Buḥūth: al-Mujtamaʻ al-Miṣrī fī al-ʻAṣrayn al-Mamlūkī wa-l-ʻUthmānī. al-Majlis al-Aʻlā li-l-Thaqāfa. pp. 243 ff.

[1] -Lane, E. W. *ʻĀdāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa-Taqālīduhum* p. 274.

[2] -Al-Jabartī, ʻA. *ʻAjā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa-l-Akhbār* Vol. 2, pp. 26–27.

[3] -Lane, E. W. *ʻĀdāt al-Miṣriyyīn al-Muḥaddathīn wa-Taqālīduhum* pp. 275 ff.

[4] -Ibid, p. 228.

[5] -Ibid, p. 228.

Additionally, Egyptians believed in the return of the spirits of the dead, referring to them as *"afrit"*[1] (phantoms or spirits). They also believed in the existence of *ghouls*, which were said to be a type of jinn that inhabited cemeteries and abandoned places, feeding on the corpses of the dead or attacking anyone who wandered into these places at night[2].

Finally, many terms and beliefs became widely accepted among the common people, including:

- **Abu Rigl** Masloukha **(The Flayed-Legged Man)**: A mythical creature believed to be a half-human, half-donkey figure with a tail and flayed thighs, exposing raw flesh[3].
- The **Ghoul, Salawa, Umm Al-Shoor, and Al-Mazira**: All were legendary beings thought to be demons, often appearing in the form of a woman dressed in white.
- **The Marada (Plural of Marid)**: Considered one of the most dangerous and malevolent types of jinn. Fear of these beings was widespread among Egyptians, particularly of the *Marada*. When the Arnaut (Albanian troops) arrived in Egypt, they exploited this fear by wearing white garments, wrapping their sticks in white gauze, and wandering at night to terrify Egyptians and keep them indoors[4].
- **The Boogeyman (Al-Bab'a)**: A frightening mythical creature used to scare children. It was believed to be the name of an ancient Egyptian demon and was a source of terror and cowardice among youngsters[5].
- **Zar Rituals and the Fright Bowl (Tassat Al-Khadda)**: These were commonly used by the public to treat individuals suffering from sudden shock leading to nervous illness. It was believed that healing could be achieved through *Tassat Al-Khadda*, a copper bowl engraved with images of birds and indistinct inscriptions. Water was placed inside it and left overnight to absorb the dew before being consumed by the afflicted person as a supposed cure. The bowl was surrounded by forty metal pieces, and it was said that if any of them were lost, the bowl would lose its effectiveness[6].

[1] -Ibid, p. 232.
[2] -Ibid, p. 232.
[3] - Amin, A. (2012). *Qāmūs al-'Ādāt wa-l-Taqālīd wa-l-Ta'bīr al-Miṣrī* p. 28.
[4]- Amin, A. (2012). *Qāmūs al-'Ādāt wa-l-Taqālīd wa-l-Ta'bīr al-Miṣrī* p. 333.
[5]- Amin, A. (2012). *Qāmūs al-'Ādāt wa-l-Taqālīd wa-l-Ta'bīr al-Miṣrī*, p. 101.
[6]- Ibid, p. 267.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Addressing the most significant manifestations of superstitions, charlatanry, and sorcery that spread in Egyptian society during the Ottoman era in Egypt, particularly among the general public.
- Studying an important social aspect that illustrates the life of Egyptians during this era.
- Clarifying the distinctions between some of the terms used by the people to denote occult matters, such as charlatanry, sorcery, magic, astrology, and others.
- Highlighting the role of some followers of Sufi orders in immersing Egyptian society in such ideas and the distancing of most of their followers from the correct teachings of religion.
- Revealing the weak role of religious and social institutions in confronting such phenomena.
- Affirming the extent of the correlation between these phenomena and their occurrence with the increase of poverty, ignorance, and disease.
- Demonstrating the role of the Ottoman state in the spread of these manifestations of sorcery, magic, and charlatanry to facilitate the rule of the country. They did not impose strict or deterrent penalties except when public unrest occurred. Here, it becomes clear that there were limits to the tolerance of these *Majazib* (those drawn to God), claimants, and sorcerers, until they created agitation or social disorder or challenged the principles of Islam, at which point the authorities would intervene to stop them.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the manifestations of superstition, charlatanism, and sorcery that prevailed in Egyptian society during the Ottoman era (1517–1805 AD) were not merely marginal phenomena, but rather reflections of deeper social, cultural, and religious dimensions of daily life at the time. The research has revealed how such beliefs became deeply rooted among the general populace, especially in an environment characterized by widespread poverty, ignorance, and disease, and in the absence of effective intervention from religious and social institutions. It further highlighted the role played by some followers of Sufi orders in reinforcing these beliefs, which contributed to the deviation of many from the true teachings of Islam.

The study also showed the ambivalent stance of the Ottoman state towards these practices; while often tolerant, the authorities intervened only when

such phenomena posed a threat to public order or religious orthodoxy. The research explored a range of superstitious practices that permeated daily life, such as belief in the evil eye, birth-related rituals, customs tied to marriage and conception, methods of healing, the seeking of blessings from objects and places, and the use of talismans and incantations. It also addressed claims of visions, knowledge of the unseen, astrology, sainthood (wilāyah), qutbship, mahdiship, and even prophethood, in addition to the practice of magic and communication with jinn, all of which constituted key elements in the popular religious and mystical culture of Ottoman Egypt.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of an essential aspect of Egyptian social history and sheds light on the roots of certain enduring beliefs and practices—thus offering a valuable foundation for further anthropological and critical studies in this field.

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