



Rajah: Islamic Talisman for Overcoming Disease

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Abstract: The coronavirus disease has been a terrible disaster around since 2019. Various fields of science have contributed to fighting the pandemic. Traditional medicine, multiple therapies, patience, and so on are kinds of contributions from Islam. Talisman or rajah is one of the Islamic traditions. There are many rajahs to prevent or fight the plague. Al-Bulqini's rajah is the focus of this research. Talisman in Islamic culture, moreover in Indonesia, will be discussed in this article. The practice of using talismans to overcome disease is a topic that has been discussed previously. Unfortunately, the practice of using amulets has become less because many Muslims tend to seek more reasonable methods to overcome and fight the disease. Whether the talisman, the Muslim who makes the talisman, or the Muslim belief in the talisman is still questionable. This research studies and elaborates on the culture of making talismans, especially to fight the plague with COVID-19 as a focus.

Contribution: This study is essential in contributing to the fact that dealing with the plague can be done in various ways, including from a religious perspective, namely the use of the Rajah, which is common among Muslims. So, treatment can be made not only by a medical approach but also by a religious one.

Keywords: *rajah*; pandemic; COVID-19; talisman; amulet

Introduction

The Covid-19 plague, a global pandemic at the end of 2019, has claimed numerous victims. Scientists have been searching for drugs and vaccines to free humans from the virus. Various kinds of research in the social field are also widely carried out, one of which is in religion. This paper discusses Islamic approaches to fighting the plague, among many other traditions. The Islamic approach in dealing with pandemics is not popular because it is still inferior to the dominance of the medical and other scientific methods in dealing with pandemics, even though this culture has long been used by Muslims when dealing with pandemics.

There are quite abundant Islamic traditions in fighting pandemics. The spiritual approach has also been a choice apart from medical intervention. This is evident when Islam triumphed in the Andalusia, Ottoman and other eras, including in Indonesia in historical records. A spiritual approach to fighting the plague is the first choice, not even an option. Several researches are showing how Muslims are trying to cope with the virus with spiritual intervention. Some are for curing, and some are for preventing the plague. For example, the chanting "*li khomsatun*" is a regular prayer for some Muslim community. *Li khomsatun* originally comes from *Shadziliyah tariqa*. People of Sapudi Island in Madura use that chanting to draw closer to God and, to avoid disasters and calamities, close the relations with the environment and the community. They feel that they have reached the meaning of life by doing the relationship between humans, God, and its surroundings.¹ The people of Pojok Village in Blitar are reciting the same chanting, too.² Reading *Qasida Burdah* is also believed to cure disease or plague.³ It also embodies religious assimilation to protect people from the plague.⁴

¹ Samsul Arifin et al., "Penguatan Lcoal Wisdom Masyarakat Kepulauan Dalam Mencegah Wabah Melalui KKN-DR," *As-Sidanah: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 3, no. 1 (April 19, 2021): 111–38, <https://doi.org/10.35316/assidanah.v3i1.1238>.

² Izza Amalia Rahman and Mercy Aprilia Dyah Arini, "Respon Positif Masyarakat Ahlussunah Wal-Jama'ah Terhadap Pandemi COVID-19 Menurut Maqoshid Syari'ah," *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 5, no. 1 (2021): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalnu.v5i1.232>.

³ Ahmad Faidi, "Qashidah Burdah Sebagai Media Pengobatan Magis-Ekonomis," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (June 15, 2016): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v1i1.61-79>.

⁴ Sri Suhandjati and Ahawan Fanani, "Pandemic Mitigation in Javanese Culture," in *ICON-ISHIC 2020: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Islamic History*

There are various religious and quasi-religious objects which offer support in dealing with anxiety and stress. Hence, objects can support humans in praying, focusing, or bringing the mind to specific people or moments from life memories. Among these are lucky charms, physical objects associated with a realm spiritually. The widespread belief in talismans, amulets, or *rajah* spans modern and pre-modern traditions. Few of them are unrelated to particular religious practices that were initially a case of the talisman, which was described earlier in this conversation.⁵ The talisman arguably represents a kind of antidote psychologically toward anxiety to the coronavirus. Nonetheless, the most fascinating issue of this topic, according to Rappaport, is creating a unique approach to the talisman. That creation signified preserving a culture or religious tradition and community affiliation with people, even when these talismans were isolated.⁶

This study raises one of the interventions of spirituality in combating the disease with the *rajah* technique. This paper focuses more on the *rajah* of al-Bulqini as written in the book *Hāshiyat Jamāl Alā Sharh al-Minhāj*, although there are many other *rajahs* for fighting the plague found in other literature.

Method

This research adheres to ethical guidelines in dealing with the public, respecting cultural beliefs, and ensuring confidentiality in interviews. Data collected from literature reviews, historical analysis, field studies and interviews were analysed using qualitative methods. Themes, styles, and differences in cultural practices of talisman-making are identified. This research aims to study and clarify the cultural practice of making amulets, focusing on the role of amulets in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in the Islamic tradition. This research aims to explain the historical context, cultural significance and contemporary perspectives surrounding the use of amulets, especially the kings associated with Bulqini. A comprehensive review of Islamic literature, historical records, and scientific works related to epidemics, Islamic disease control approaches, and amulets was conducted. This literature review serves as

and Civilization, ICON-ISHIC 2020, 14 October, Semarang, Indonesia (European Alliance for Innovation, 2020), 99.

⁵ Margaret Boone Rappaport et al., "Science and Religion Shift in the First Three Months of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Studia Humana* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.2478/sh-2021-0001>.

⁶ Rappaport et al.

a basis for understanding the cultural and religious context surrounding the practice of amulet-making. This research narrows its focus to a particular amulet known as rajah, focusing on Rajah al-Balqini mentioned in the book *Hāshiyat Jamāl Alā Sharh al-Minhāj*. This selection was made based on the excellence of Al-Balqini's work and its relevance to eliminating the Covid-19 pandemic. This study analyses historical records of epidemics in Islamic societies, examining the writings of Muslim scholars, societal responses, and evolving perspectives on the disease and its metaphysical implications. Special attention is paid to how amulets, including Rajah al-Bulqini, were used in different historical periods. This research discusses Rajah Al-Balqini through an in-depth study of the text of Jamal's footnotes to Sharh Al-Minhaj. The analysis includes linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions to understand these amulets' purpose, content, and intended effects. Field studies include interactions with individuals and communities who practice amulet making and use, especially those from traditional Islamic backgrounds. Interviews with scholars, practitioners, and individuals with expertise in Islamic Sufism contribute to a qualitative understanding of contemporary views on amulets.

This research concludes by compiling the findings and providing insight into the role of amulets, especially rajah al-Bulqini, in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Recommendations for further research may be made or considered in Public Health Communications. Using an interdisciplinary approach that includes historical, cultural and religious perspectives, this research aims to contribute to a differentiated understanding of the role of amulets in the broader context of pandemic response in the Islamic tradition.

Results and Discussion

The Plague and Islam

It is found as evidence that plagues have occurred based on the writings of Muslim scholars in the form of books and treatises, especially in the Middle Ages. Muslim scholars are interested in recording them to provide Islamic guidance to combat the plague or as a historical event, such as the Black Death pandemic that hit Andalusia. This record of Muslim context and Christian context makes Steams criticised Michael Dols's misdiagnosis, who stated that referring to the tradition of Christianity, the plague was a torment for human mistakes because Andalusia was a region inhabited by both Islam and

Christianity.⁷ Meanwhile, the plague is God's destiny, according to Islamic tradition. Moreover, a person who died due to the plague is considered a martyr, according to hadith. Islam does not believe in the contagious of plague but still prevents the transmission of the plague to people. Furthermore, according to Christians, the plague was a personal test for them. Meanwhile, Muslims who are infected by the plague to death are pleased by being martyrs. In short, Muslims are more fatalistic to the plague. Therefore, according to Islam, pandemics are generally a punishment from Allah; Stearns does not support Dols's opinion.⁸

Meanwhile, in hopes of ending the outbreak of the pandemic, Muslim cultures around the Middle East are withdrawing from their hometown to pray and fast collectively. They usually do it when natural disasters occur, such as plague or drought season. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalāni (d.1448), who states that believing in God's destiny could not be seen as restraining from consuming medicine to heal the plague and disease is another such disease in this sense, this is agreed upon by the discourse which chooses that the disease causes martyred. Some Muslims tend to prefer to multiply the deeds of repentance and worship by listening and attending the reading of the Qur'an and also the prophet's hadith, Sahih al-Bukhāri, in particular.⁹ Apart from listening to sermons, reciting that book is considered one of the spiritual efforts to fight the plague.

One of the books believed to have the spiritual power to resist the plague is Sahih al-Bukhāri. There was a plague of *tha'un* in Cairo back in 881 AH. The Al-Azhar Cairo mosque held the recitation of Sahih al-Bukhāri, the book of Al-Syifa in Sahih Muslim, by order of the Sultan, followed by clerics and then their disciples. After that ritual, they prayed that Allah would prevent disaster and the plague against them. Al-Jabaruti stated that this action violates the true Islamic tradition or is considered heresy (*bid'ah*). There was also a pandemic that occurred in Cairo back in 1202 AH. The recitation of some hadith from the book Sahih al-Bukhāri was also held out.¹⁰ The plague occurred again in 1228 AH in several cities, specifically Alexandria. Sultan immediately quarantined at

⁷ Justin K Stearns, *Infectious Ideas: Contagion in Pre-modern Islamic and Christian Thought in the Western Mediterranean* (Maryland: JHU Press, 2011).

⁸ Stearns.

⁹ Stearns.

¹⁰ Abdurrahman bin Hasan Al-Jabaruti, *'Ajaib Al-Atsar Fi Al-Tarajim Wa Al-Akhbar* (Cairo: Mathba'ah Dar al-Kutub al-Mishriyah, 1997).

ports such as Dimyath and prevented land travel. The recitation of Sahih al-Bukhāri be held at the Al-Azhar Mosque was requested by The Sultan. Unfortunately, the recitation only lasted three days, and they suddenly became tired and stopped it.¹¹

The Ottoman dynasty, considered one of the most outstanding recorded histories in the Islamic world, had some experience when a disease outbreak happened. Late medieval Ottoman theology of their understanding of the plague in the sixteenth century underwent significant changes. These changes can be studied here in three distinct but simultaneous stages: naturalisation, medicalisation, and canonisation. Ottoman naturalisation explained that the plague was a destiny from God, a sign of the apocalypse, and God's punishment for the sinners. Meanwhile, the Ottomans' treatment process can be observed through three methods: the emergence of knowledge and various interpretations of the plague, the crystallisation and institutionalisation of wisdom by the Ottoman rulers, and changes in power and experience. He turned the plague from the realm of saints and mystics into a state institution.¹² In the final stages of this transformation, the saints and mystics gradually lost their right to predict or heal the catastrophe they claimed to have wrought in the late Middle Ages. Some of this power was transferred to the emerging Ottoman Empire, with its new claims to monitor the health of its urban population beginning in the 16th century. Sanctification is understanding a pandemic that is no longer supernatural but catastrophic. During the 16th century, Ottoman treatises struggled to fulfil Islam's religious principles and traditions with plague wisdom from their experiences. This effort peaked after the mid-sixteenth century when legal orthodoxy was passed on proper behaviour during the pandemic. The formulation of orthodoxy continued into the post-1600 era as Ottoman law. A recall of Frazer's theory of religious evolution: The Ottomans evolved religion from a spiritual one to a more scientific one. However, compared to certain religious phenomena in Indonesia, more specifically in Java, the Frazer theory needs to be corrected and can even be debated. In the context of the plurality of

¹¹ Al-Jabaruti.

¹² Nükhet Varlik, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Javanese society, the belief system referred to by Frazer operates in an integral and parallel way in modern Javanese culture.¹³

Before the colonialist development of European and Middle Eastern merchant states, the authors of the Muslim plague treatises were very similar. Muslim writers, ranging from 14th-century Andalusian like Al-Khatimah and Al-Khatib to 15th and 16th century Ottoman writers such as Al-Yahudi and Bitlisi, were as responsive to innovation and infectious thinking as their European counterparts. The conflict between contagious and anti-infectious thinking still resembles the earlier controversy but has a more subtle process of social construction. The only quarantines in the Ottomans were carried out by immigrants from Europe and the Greek minority, who also appeared to see economic benefits from the establishment. Quarantine was also a proper ideological function for these groups: that is, as a sign to distinguish themselves from murderers, barbarians, and the Ottomans themselves. Orientalist discourse proved formidable in the early nineteenth-century era of European colonisation.¹⁴

During the late sixteenth and seventh centuries, the impact of print culture and the political, religious and commercial developments in London could explain why the British and Ottomans rose and spread the pandemic treatises.¹⁵ The intellectual Ottoman elite started to develop occultism and the use of talismans for a long time. Astrology and spirituality still impact the authors of treatises on pandemics as agents of ideology. Ayalon also said that using talismans affixed to doors or windows was practised in common, with some chanting.¹⁶ Hence, *rajah* or amulet can be considered a form of magic.¹⁷

¹³ Muhammad Rikza Muqtada, "Menyoal Kembali Teori Evolusi Agama J.G. Frazer Dalam Keberagaman Masyarakat Jawa," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (June 15, 2016): 41–60, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v1i1.41-60>.

¹⁴ Birsan Bulmus, *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Bulmus.

¹⁶ Yaron Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine, and Other Misfortunes* (Indiana: Ball State University, 2014).

¹⁷ Michael W. Dols, "Leprosy in Medieval Arabic Medicine," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* XXXIV, no. 3 (1979): 314–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/XXXIV.3.314>; Michael W Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

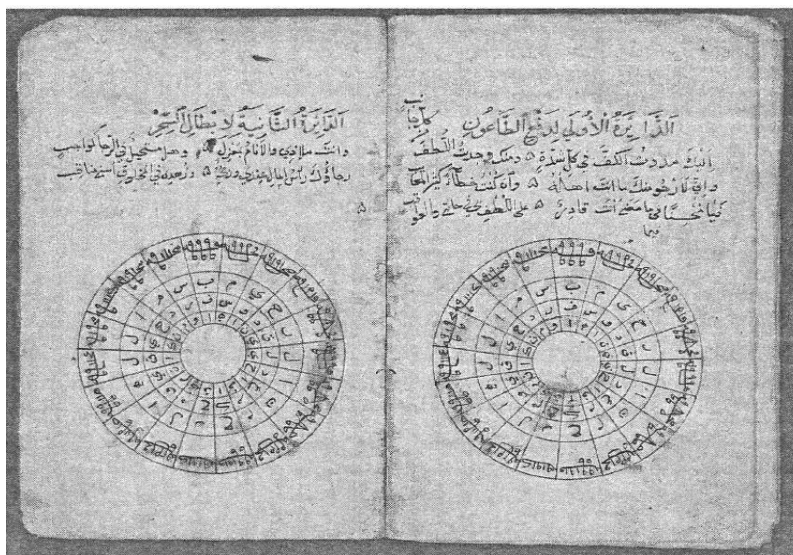


Figure 1: Al-Ghazali's *rajah* left one to prevent witchcraft and the right one to prevent plague.¹⁸

Islam and Magic

Magic is a discussion that has exceptional attention in religious studies. Many experts from the West have researched magic in Islam with various approaches, not only from the approach to religious studies. Anthropological approaches, comparative sociology, and regional studies focusing on lay people's contextual practices at the expense of religious experience and "ideas" can be used to study magical and religious phenomena.¹⁹ The glasses used by experts from the West can be used to analyse the magic phenomenon in Islam and other religions academically.

Does magic exist in Islamic tradition? The primary sources of Islam (Qur'an, Hadith) and Muslim sources all confirm the use of magic. Two of the most frequently quoted Qur'an verses are about Prophet Solomon, where two angels are said to have taught people witchcraft, and another about the battle between Prophet Musa and Pharaoh the magician. Regarding the use of evil forces, Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century Arab Muslim philosopher and historian, stated it should be noted that not a great scholar doubted the existence of magic. However, the ethical and moral status of magic is highly

¹⁸ Bulmus, *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire*.

¹⁹ J Kahn, *Asia, Modernity and the Pursuit of the Sacred* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

suspicious. Both the Qur'an and Hadith refer to magic with witchcraft, heresy and unbelief. The two most respected authorities, Bukhari and Muslim, narrated a hadith which mentions the activities of witchcraft and sorcery as one of the seven significant sins which lead the perpetrator to curse.

The use of talismans is a magical activity, although many Muslims also deny it. Prophet Muhammad is also believed to have believed in the 'evil eye'. In addition to being read, the Quran is sometimes used as a talisman, or the contents are copied for amulets, Christians, and Jews from their book.²⁰ Muslims often use Surah Al-Falaq, An-Nas, or the *Ayat Kursi* to fight magic. This is one example of using religious attributes to use or go against magic. And it is also recorded as advice from the prophet Muhammad to his people when they want to take refuge from curses or magic attacks. Muslims are more confident if it is recorded in the hadith of the prophet Muhammad.

Before Prophet Muhammad, other Prophets also had miracles. As stated in the Qur'an, Prophet Sulaiman had power over the wind to speak to animals and spirits. The devil also had time to ask God for permission to test Sulaiman. Satan and his group wrote several books of magic and hid them under the throne of the prophet Sulaiman. When he died, they told the leaders among the Jews that if they wanted to ascertain how Prophet Sulaiman obtained his absolute dominion over humanity.²¹ It is believed that the source of magic is from the time of the prophet Sulaiman.

In general, Muslims separate between white magic and black magic. White magic is an attempt to hope for a miracle with religious rituals such as *dhikr* (Islamic chanting) for a good cause. Black magic is an attempt to expect miracles with magic or rituals not found in religion for evil purposes.²² This is intriguing because a purpose is a moral thing.

There are three types of magic, according to Ibn al-Nadim's analysis.²³ Medieval Muslims used to use these three things. The first is to use demons, jinn, or spirits for specific purposes, as Sulaiman practises. The second is forbidden magic, which is doing things ordered or offered to demons, jinn, or

²⁰ Tewfik Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Routledge, 2021), 125–77.

²¹ J Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, vol. 2 (Michigan: Gale Group, 2001).

²² Herbert E E Hayes, "Islam and Magic in Egypt," *The Muslim World* 4, no. 4 (October 3, 1914): 396–406, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1914.tb02265.x>.

²³ Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (Basingstoke, UK: Springer, 2015).

spirits. Next is amulets, which, according to Ibn al-Nadim, are commonly used by philosophers or astronomers who have a specific relationship with happiness, luck, or misfortune.

Ibn Khaldun has discussed talismans and magic as a scientific discourse and has been addressed in many Islamic worlds. He departs from a very intriguing discussion in the tradition of Islam and magic thought.²⁴ The shift, which emphasises magical theory derived from natural philosophy to a foundation based on religious mysticism, occurred in the third and fourteenth centuries. The current development of Sufism makes most of the magical works within the framework of pure mystical cosmology and mixed with religious elements such as prayer, reading the Qur'an, and *dhikr* on the holy names of God. It creates a magical impact that occurs with subjective mystical experiences. However, Ibn Khaldun condemned all kinds of magic, although Ibn al-Nadim showed a more objective attitude and often refrained from giving legitimacy to magic.²⁵ Ibn Khaldun wrote that astral magic involves directing a person to the macrocosm, skies, and higher realms through worship and submission to jinn, devils, or demons.

Among the Judaism and Islam traditions, magic can be dualistic; it is a gift from God; on the one hand, it is polytheism that opposes God. Magic can be interpreted as a human search for spiritual perfection through symbiosis with the other world, and morality has a significant role in reconciling and regulating this process.²⁶ Therefore, accusing a performer of magic as a disbeliever is improper as they might be using it for a good purpose or by prophet's instruction. Unfortunately, no specific and detailed guides distinguish this dualistic problem.

Islam and Rajah

Rajah is usually written or marked on the surface of objects. It can be through ink or the stroke of a knife. Rajah can be categorised according to the kind of object which is used to write the rajah. In Javanese culture, rajah is commonly used as an essential talisman. Writing rajah is not just writing; when someone writes a rajah, he transfers the spiritual energy contained in it to the writing so that he has the power to write and so that there is power after the

²⁴ Saif.

²⁵ Saif.

²⁶ Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Routledge, 2020).

filling process is completed.²⁷ Leather, cloth, paper, and metal are mediums for writing *rajah*. Some animal leather is often used as talismans for specific purposes. *Rajah* is written using Arabic or Javanese font. The cloth can be used as a talisman by writing Arabic or Javanese fonts on the cloth surface. Fabrics are generally chosen because they are relatively flexible, easy to shape into other forms, and can even be used as a cloth. Paper is often used as a talisman if there is a practical reason to carry it. The process of making paper talismans is also relatively easy. The drawback is that the paper crumbles easily if exposed to water or is opened and folded too often. Solid or metal objects also could be used as *rajah* media. Nevertheless, the energy of the *rajah* does not lie in the medium itself but in the power of will.

Rajah has three components: content, objects, and the benefits.²⁸ Content is a spiritual energy which can be a jinn or another. Content has the spiritual power to do many things beyond human logic. Although the nature of the content itself is not permanent, the energy can move from one place to another in an object. This is where the magical power that humans use comes from. Objects are points that store magical power and still have the same physical properties as similar items, even though they do not share magic. The benefit is the power that resides in the magical thing. According to the benefits contained in these objects, humans use these benefits to do what they want.

Moreover, in the Islamic spiritual tradition, wisdom is knowledge of spiritual secrets contained in the Quran, the Most Beautiful Names of God (*asma al-husna*), the Arabic letters, and some prayers or readings which are believed to hold spiritual power so that it can be used to fulfil various spiritual desires and wishes.²⁹ In this context, the works of Abu al-Abbas Ahmad bin Ali al-Buni, such as *Manba'u Usūl al-Hikmah and Shams al-Ma'ārif*, are two popular books of wisdom (*hikmah*) and become references and essential resources for lovers of wisdom science in Islam. In these two books, al-Buni describes various aspects of wisdom, including secrets related to the science of numbers, letters, *wafaq, tabi'ah*, astronomy, *asma, ruqyah*, and specific prayers.

²⁷ Anan Hajid Triyogo, *Orang Jawa, Jimat, Dan Makhluk Halus* (Yogyakarta: NARASI, 2005).

²⁸ Anan Hajid Triyogo, *Benda-Benda Bertuah Masyarakat Jawa* (Yogyakarta: NARASI, 2005).

²⁹ Farouk Yahya, "Calligrams of the Lion of 'Alī in Southeast Asia," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Brill, 2020), 454–526.

Among spiritual scholars, these sciences fall under the umbrella of science, a name of Hebrew origin meaning the name of God. Regarding the emergence of *asmā'* science, Ibn Khaldun explained that the secret science of letters is relatively new; that is, it appears among Sufis who have experienced the revelation of the meaning of *hijab* (cover) and have acquired supernatural abilities (*khāriqul 'adah*) to that are capable of acting in nature. According to Ibn Khaldun, these Sufis held that the manifestation of the perfection of *Asma* resides in the spirit of the stars. At the same time, the characters on the cards and their secrets flow into *Asma* and thus flow out into the universe.³⁰ Meanwhile, regarding the secrecy behind the use of texts, authors have different opinions: some argue that the confidentiality of texts loses its character; Some say that the secret of the letters lies in the four elements of nature present in them; Some say that the secret of letters lies in their numerical value. Ibn Khaldun's further description of the science of *asma* or the secret knowledge of the letter above makes it clear that the spiritual understanding of *asma* and the secret of the letter is the fruit of the spiritual practice of the Sufis in the way of Allah, not the goal of Sufism practice itself. Thus, the fruit of the practice of Sufism experts is accepted by others, studied and practised by following specific procedures, and for that, it is known as the science of wisdom.³¹

On a practical level, they are practising wisdom in the form of prayer and *asma* to satisfy the perpetrator's interests and to meet the needs of others, often through a series of certain rituals, such as fasting and avoiding certain foods, such as foods that contain animal elements. Interestingly, although the prayers and names taught in the wisdom books are not all in Arabic, they also use other Semitic languages, such as Hebrew or Syriac. Also, practical wisdom sometimes uses specific means or values, such as incense, burning fragrances, and *wafaq*. This piece contains certain secrets related to the goals one must achieve by the practitioner or a piece of wisdom, which requires wisdom knowledge services. In terms of form, *wafaq* is written in a rectangular pattern consisting of three columns (*mutsallas*), four columns (*murabba'*), five columns (*mukhammas*), six columns (*musaddas*), seven columns (*musabba'*), eight columns (*mutsaman*), and nine columns (*mutassa'*). Also, in some cases, the *wafaq* script is combined with *the asma al-husna* scripts or Qur'anic verses.

³⁰ Dirjen Pendis Kemenag, *Ensiklopedi Islam Nusantara Edisi Budaya* (Jakarta: Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, 2018).

³¹ Kemenag.

Wafaq writing technique with various styles is also called *asma*, popular in Indonesia, *rajah*.³²

Rajah of Plague

One of the *rajahs* is mentioned in Al-Bulqini's book, *Hāsyiah al-Jamāl ala Syarh Minhāj*: حي صمد باقي وله كنف واقى

The purpose of this talisman is to prevent a pandemic outbreak. This talisman is written on paper and then pasted in the desired place. There are no special rituals such as ablution, facing the Qibla, etc. It is a short, easy and straightforward talisman, if not the simplest. This can be seen in comparison with the plague of Rajah al-Ghazali. In addition, al-Bulqini *rajah* does not contain verses from the Quran and the name of Allah, so this talisman is more flexible to wear and carry everywhere. For Muslims, it is forbidden to bring verses from the Quran or the name of Allah to dirty places such as toilets. In addition, this charm can also be placed anywhere, for example, stored in things that people usually carry everywhere, such as in a wallet or a smartphone bag.

The words of the talisman above mean He is the Most Living, the Most Dependent, the Most Permanent, the Most Possessor of Protection and Preservation. Although these are derived from His beautiful names (*asma al-husna*), because they do not contain any specific particles (*alif lam ma'rifah*), it is safe to say that this word can be carried everywhere.

There have been many campaigns to persuade people, especially people from traditional Islamic backgrounds, to write this talisman, and the source is Hasyiah Jamal. This talisman is less popular because people tend to perform other rituals or chants to prevent plague. The song "*Li khamsatun*" at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia was well received by various groups in mosques or madrasas. Then *Li Khamsatun's* song became one with multiple arrangements and can be seen on YouTube with different singers.

لي خمسة اطفي بها حر الوباء الحاطمة
المصطفى والمرضى وابناهما والفاطمة

This chanting means, "For me, there are five of my lovers; thanks to them, my fever is healed. They are Al-Musthafa (Muhammad SAW), Al-Murtadha (Ali bin Abi Talib), his two sons (Hasan and Hussein) and Fatimah."³³

³² Kemenag.

³³ Fatimah Isyti Karimah, Dadan Rusmana, and Wildan Taufik, "Keteladanan Lima Pribadi Mulia Dalam Syi'ir 'Li Khomsatun': Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes,"

Discussion

Rajah has many terms like amulet, *wafaq*, talisman, etc. Muslim traditional communities in Indonesia generally embrace rajah clothing. It is closely related to the traditional Nahdlatul Ulama or pesantren communities. It can also be found in traditional villages.³⁴ In modern Muslims or those affiliated with Muhammadiyah, the use of the rajah could not be seen. The rajah writing campaign was also promoted on social media platforms with accounts affiliated with the pesantren. Most online talisman campaigns are just a precaution.³⁵ I also saw several Islamic boarding schools in Yogyakarta affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama tradition, pasting stickers with the talisman of al-Bulqini's plague attached.

Interestingly, not all pesantren affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama accept the use of rajah because it is considered strange and challenging to teach *santri* (pesantren students). I asked a friend, she is the daughter of the owner of a pesantren affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, about the use of talismans in her pesantren. She said that her pesantren did not teach talismans to students, especially plague talismans. But when I asked her about a popular talisman كبيكج, she said the students knew it before they even arrived at their boarding school. The popular talisman is كبيكج which usually written on the cover of the book to prevent the book from being eaten by termites. Another talisman who is also considered popular is الفاروق. This talisman is usually written on the door to prevent black magic from entering the house or room through that door. Although many people address the use of this kind of magic or talisman as a *shirk* or heretic, the pesantren community has its proof and argumentation from their primary sources, the Quran and Hadith or other Islamic literature.³⁶

The question is, is the use of talismans reduced? There are different perceptions about talismans for small or big things. Using talismans for minor

SEMIOTIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra Dan Linguistik 23, no. 1 (February 7, 2022): 75–90, <https://doi.org/10.19184/semiotika.v23i1.24491>.

³⁴ Masri Mansoer, Lilik Umami Kaltsum, and Yadi Mulyadi, "The Qur'an and Indonesian Community Culture: The Qur'an as an Amulet Among Indigenous People," in *International Conference on Qur'an and Hadith Studies (ICQHS 2017)* (Atlantis Press, 2017), 249–55.

³⁵ Syafi'ul Huda and Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, "Kontestasi Hadis Azimat Di Masyarakat Online," *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 6, no. 2 (2019): 306–27, <https://doi.org/0.33650/at-turas.v6i2.892>.

³⁶ Hasyim Muhammad et al., "The Qur'anic Mantras Recited by Shamanic Santri in Java, Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (December 17, 2021): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.7059>.

issues, such as preventing insects from eating manuscripts or keeping black magic from entering a room, is also considered a talisman. Meanwhile, overcoming the pandemic of COVID-19, which is a serious and universal problem in the world, cannot be recovered with talismans because society needs more extensive answers, such as drugs or more prominent rituals. In addition, promoting talismans to prohibit a pandemic could lead to hoaxes and fake news, leading society to evade medical or scientific approaches toward preventing and curing viruses. It can be said that there are a lot of frauds and fake news that lead to the sentence.

However, using this Rajah plague is relatively easy as a precaution for those who believe. Is it powerful enough to encounter the disease? There is no evidence yet. But writing such short talismans on paper and placing them could give confidence to the person as long as they keep specific protocols. They can put it on the door or in his pocket and carry it everywhere. Teaching others while doing particular things, such as vaccination and physical distancing, is also easy.

In this case, *rajah* is considered white magic because this amulet's purpose is to prevent the plague, not to curse others. It also does not conduct any ritual related to *jinn* or satan. The example of this rajah can be traced to al-Ghazali's work, as he is one of the most prominent scholars in Islamic tradition. It can also be traced back to the prophet Muhammad, who taught several things to prevent magic. Back before, the prophet Sulaiman also had a lot of magical stories.

There is no adequate technology to find the energy behind a piece of paper containing the *rajah* word. The closest approach to analysing the use of *rajah* is using a psychology or anthropology perspective, where the use of *rajah* might increase the self-esteem of the carriers to prevent themselves from the pandemic.

Conclusion

The discussion concludes that the use of *rajah* in Islamic culture could be found in the history of the Umayyad Empire.³⁷ and Ottoman Empire.³⁸ Meanwhile, the use of talismans in Indonesia is decreasing, especially during

³⁷ Michael W Dols, "Plague in Early Islamic History," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 3 (July 1974): 371–83, <https://doi.org/10.2307/600071>.

³⁸ Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine, and Other Misfortunes*; Bulmus, *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire*.

the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear of misleading people or spreading fake news to fight the pandemic is also a problem. Many people don't avoid talismans. They still use certain amulets but not talismans to fight the pandemic. Particular research is needed to measure the number of pensioners with talismans and COVID-19 patients.

Discussion about amulets in Islamic literature needs to be improved to explore or pull the interest of researchers. Moreover, writing about the COVID-19 disease talks little about local wisdom, especially using talismans to prevent a pandemic. Therefore, there is a need to explore understanding and research in this area further. The account of Islamic talismans in various manuscripts is also fascinating to elaborate on and question how it is living in society during the pandemic.

Further expand, where will the path of research in Islam and magic lead? It does not end with historical and descriptive analysis. With the help of science and technology, magic and technology could inspire and even complement each other to help solve human problems. The next step for researchers to study this theme is to no longer dwell on judging the use of magic in human life. If necessary, there needs to be absolute basic rules to determine which magic is allowed and which is not in the Islamic tradition. If there is magic that is not permitted in Islam, further research should be done on the psychological dimensions of the magician.

What is more important than magic is how it can help solve the problems of human life without harming others, even though it is only a psychological comfort for humans. By linking to Frazer's theory of the evolution of religion, I hope for the future after the shift from spiritual to scientific, then to spiritual science. Therefore, we can perform magic as religious people in the modern world. The unity between sacred science, magic science, and technology is the ultimate way to help humans.

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