

MAGIC AND POPULAR MEDICINE IN SPANISH ALJAMIADO-TEXTS

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Introduction

In the following paper some parts of Aljamiado-manuscripts from Spain will be presented that deal with magic and popular medicine. These Aljamiado-texts were written down by the Moriscos, the last Muslims who stayed in Spain after the Reconquista of 1492.

What is so special about these texts is the fact that they were written in Arabic characters, but mostly not in the Arabic language. The language used in the texts is *Aljamía*, Arabic *al-ʿaǧamiyya*, that is the non-Arabic language of Spain, Spanish.

This kind of text is also known from other non-Arabic-speaking Islamic regions. In Bosnia for example, there are also so-called "Alhamijado"-texts. I was also told that we can find texts of this kind in Indonesia.

By these texts we know that the Moriscos were bilingual, *i.e.* they knew Arabic and Spanish. I will even go so far as to say that they were living not only in a bilingual situation but in a bi-cultural world. The world around them was marked by European Christianity, their own tradition, however, was Islamic.

The religious situation of the Moriscos in Spain after the Reconquista became increasingly critical. In the beginning of the 16th century, they were promised a relatively free religious practice, but soon the reality became different. In the course of the 16th century first the restriction of the religious practice of Islam became increasingly serious; Islam had to be practised privately. Later, the Islamic religion was forbidden completely and the Muslims either had to emigrate or they had to convert to Christianity. As a result, some of them emigrated from Spain, others stayed there and became, at least officially, Christians, so-called "*cristianos nuevos*", that meant: second-class Christians. Outwardly, many Moriscos became Christians, but in secret they continued preserving their old faith. Books concerning Islam were forbidden, that is why it was necessary to hide those books. They have been, and are still going on to be discovered in hiding places in old houses sometimes walled in.

In nearly all the manuscripts there are also passages in Arabic, apart from the Spanish text. But here we can often realise that the Moriscos in Spain of that time have already been re-educated successfully. There are lots of mistakes in the Arabic parts of the texts, similar sounds are mixed up. So the reading of the manuscripts is sometimes difficult (Kontzi 1974: I, 8).

As for the content of the Aljamiado-manuscripts, they treat very different subjects such as literary texts like the tale of Paris and Viana, interlinear translations of parts of the Koran, instructions about how a Muslim has to behave correctly, but there are also some texts which deal with magic and give recipes for the treatment of illnesses. Some small parts of these last mentioned manuscripts (those which are about magic and recipes) will be shown here. Then I shall examine some of the forms we can find there and the fields of application. And, above all, I shall try to find out whether the bi-cultural situation of the Moriscos is also reflected in the magic texts, that is, whether they have a Christian European tradition or a North African Islamic tradition.

The magic in the Aljamiado-texts has very different aims and presents itself to us in very different forms. Apart from the treatment of illnesses, which will be called here "curative aims", we find also ways of affecting other persons, whether to awake love or aversion between two persons, or to be warmly received during an audience of the king or another high-ranking personality. As we will see, a great part of the magic of the Moriscos is based on various signs, which look more or less like characters or letters.

The shapes of magic in Aljamiado-texts

1. Amulets

The most frequent form of magic in the Aljamiado-manuscripts is the written form, namely the amulets. An amulet is not just a piece of jewellery. Generally, it is a written form of magic. The word used for it in the texts is *alḥerz(e)* / *alḥirz* (Arabic *ḥirz*). A characteristic feature of the Aljamiado-texts is, besides the fact that most of them are written in Spanish using Arabic characters, the common usage of arabisms¹; certain words like Allah or *an-nabī* are found only in this Arabic form, they are never translated to Spanish. The same applies to the term for amulet, which we can only find in this corrupt Arabic form *alḥerz*. I did not find a Spanish word for it.

Another shape is the so-called *anušra* / *nušra*. It is used in the manuscripts both as a written form of magic and as a potion. The multiple meanings of *anušra* points to the fact, that it is a sort of generic term for a magical application.

a) The characters written on a continuous line (without meaning)

The following amulet that serves to alleviate cold and fever is a good example for it. It is from a manuscript of the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (BN 4937 Fo. 15r)

Enuxra para cortar frío i fiebre. Escrebirás en tres mañanas cada mañana ésto:



¹ See Kontzi 1974: I, 67-160.

The introductory text to this amulet is in Spanish and says: «Magic leaflet against cold and fever. Write on three mornings every morning the following:»

The signs we see in that amulet can be mostly recognised as Arabic characters. They will be called here “characters written on a continuous line”. But these characters don’t form a known Arabic word or sentence. Everyone who knows Arabic writing will see a special sort of “word” in it. On the one hand, we have here the familiar part of the Arabic characters. And on the other hand this collection of characters does not make sense. Something magical is caused by using known parts to form something new, something special, something unusual. The Arabic characters are used for writing in a special language, perhaps the language of the demons, in order to get in touch with just these demons, and then to bring them - in this example - to cure a sick person of cold and fever. Anyway, on this magical leaflet we can already find two very important factors for the magic: On the one hand it is conspicuous, something very special, on the other hand it is mysterious because we are not able to understand what is written on it.

In the magic of the Moriscos, Arabic characters are often used as known elements.

b) The characters written on a continuous line (with meaning)

We can find another example of using Arabic characters in the same manuscript, in an amulet that is meant for destroying the love between two persons: (BN 4937 Fo. 23r)

Alherz para aborrençia a quien querrás. Escribirás estos alḥawetimes en-una caña i crebarás la caña en la casa que tienen amor. Pues no se ajuntarán más. A se d-escrebir día de miércoles:



Translation of the introductory text: “Amulet for aversion, effective on everyone you want. Write these seals on a cane and break the cane inside the house where they are in love. Then they will never meet again. You have to write it on Wednesday.”

Here we get to know other components of the Morisco magic. The aim of this amulet is not to cure an illness but it aims at influencing the behaviour and even the feelings of other persons. The love between two human beings is to be destroyed. We can only suspect the reason for it: it could be jealousy, but it could also be the plans of a father who has someone else in mind to be the husband of his daughter (Kontzi 1984: 187).

In this example we also find that the amulet - *alherz* - is, so to speak, the external form of magic. The content however consists of so-called *alḥawetimes*. Here is one of the common spelling mistakes in the Aljamiado-manuscripts. This word is the plural form of the Arabic *ḥātim* - *ḥawātim* that means “seal”. Here we find once again the use of an Arabic word but in this case the usage is not an exclusive one. Be-

sides *alḥawetim* the writers of the manuscripts also used the Spanish “*sillo*” as we will see soon.

In comparison with the first example, the action has been extended. It is no longer enough to write the seals. They must be written on a special object and then a symbolic action has to be carried out with this object: the love shall break as well as the cane in this amulet.

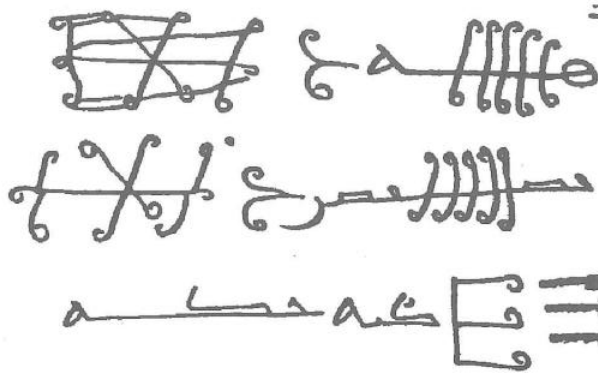
Unlike the first example, there has been found a meaning in the characters written on a continuous line in this case (Kontzi 1984:187): If we put a point below the first character, we get the Maghrebi way to write the Arabic letter *fā'*. Now we can read: *fa-kassiḥu*: “So, give him a kick in the bottom!” This meaning goes also with the content of the amulet, which aims at destroying the love between a woman and a man. It is like a reinforcement of the symbolic action of destroying the cane.

Both examples of the characters written on a continuous line are based on the usage of Arabic letters. It would appear that this points to an Arabic origin. And we really find again this sort of sign if we take a look at pictures of amulets from the Arab areas².

c) Spectacle characters

We are offered a new variation of the appearance of the seals in the next example that is against fear and all evil: (BN 4937 Fo. 43v)

Bebo. Para miedo i-a todo mal, escrebirás estos sillos:



The new elements in this seal are the so-called spectacle characters. These are the signs made by a line with circles at each end of the lines. If we look at only one of these lines with the two circles at the end, we can realise that they look like spectacles. So they were called spectacle characters. There are various theories about

² Like Kriss and Kriss 1960-62: II, picture 20 and Winkler 1930: plate 1 pict. 5 and 6 below.

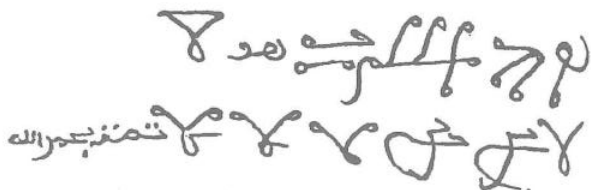
the interpretation of these characters. The most frequent interpretation is that they are originally based on cuneiform script. As time went on, the knowledge of the cuneiform characters was increasingly lost, and so there have been created more or less imaginative shapes. But I think that another aspect is also important. We can find the hint of it in the term spectacle characters. The circles at the end of the lines look very much like eyes. Here we should remember of the importance of the evil eye in the Islamic world.

Once again it is important to mention here that the characters in this amulet are not everyday characters, they are unknown and something special. That's why the Morisco expects a magical effect. But the spectacle characters that we see in this example are also decorated with Arabic letters. At the beginning of the first line (on the right) we find a character that looks like a *hā'* and another one at the end of line. The whole figure looks - in my opinion - like a fish or a scorpion, also an important part of Islamic magic. At the beginning of the second line, we see a *fā'* or a *qāf* without dotting, then a *ṣād* and the spectacle characters and then once again the Arabic letters *ʿayn*, *ṣād* and *rā'*.

In all, we can say that we have here once again the combination of known signs (the Arabic letters) together with the unknown, the fantastic (the spectacle characters).

Another example of the spectacle characters from the same manuscript helps worm-infested animals: (BN 4937 Fo. 15r)

Para los gusanos cuando caen en-el animal. Escribirás estos alḥawetimes i cuélgalos o mételos donde están los gusanos:



Translation: "For the worms when they infest an animal. Write these seals and hang it up where the worms are or put it there."

At the beginning of the second line, we can see a character that looks like the ligature of *lām-alif*, the third, fourth and fifth sign in this line give the same basic form, but here we have spectacle characters. As we can see, many magical signs follow the letters known by a common language, the Arabic language. Some parts are added and then we have a magical sign. The magical action, too, is enlarged. It is not sufficient any more to write the seals; the written leaflet has to be hung up in the stable, near by the animals that are infested by the worms. The magical signs have to be at the same place where they are supposed to be effective.

The spectacle characters as well can be found in Arabic works about magic, such like al-Būnī's *Šams* and at-Tilimsānī's *Šumūs*.

d) Religious elements

Healing effects are not only attached to magical signs, we can also find religious elements to cure illnesses or to reach an objective. I have an example for the religious elements, where the first *sūra* of the Koran, the *Fātiḥa*, is used as remedy against warts: (BN 5267 Fo. 71v)

Translation: "It is the following (you have to write the following) in order to remove the warts:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful.) Sovereign of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom you have favoured, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray."

Then it goes on:

B-ism Allah al-raḥmān al-raḥīm. {Fal} yā ayyuhā an-na ātu al-man <bū> tu fi ġildi <-hi>. yamūtu mayyit bi-qudrati Allāh al-ḥayyu al-qayyūmu alladī lā yamūtu.

I meterás <tu mano> encima de las verrugas i dirlas as tres vezes.

Translation: "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Oh you, growth, grown on his skin. (It) will die, destroyed by the strength of God, the Living, the Eternal who will not die." The last sentence is in Spanish: "And you have to put your hand on the warts and say it three times."

2. Other forms of Morisco magic - symbolic actions

Other forms of Morisco magic, that are in some cases symbolic, are, for example, fumigation. As we have seen above, it is also possible to hang or tie up the seals.

3. The magical drink

The next form of Morisco magic to be presented here is the magical drink. We find the following text in a manuscript: (BRAH T 13 Fo. 150r)

"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

It has been told that the Prophet - *alayhi s-salām* - said: Anyone who drinks this potion on seven consecutive days, will be cured of every illness he may have in his body."

Unfortunately we are not told how to mix this potion. The next lines in the manuscript give us only a more detailed list of the other cases in which this potion is effective. But we have here, once again, the appeal to the help of God. Without this help of God, there will be no cure.

In the description of another potion (BRAH T 8 Fo. 226v), we are told to dissolve in water the nest of a swallow. This should be drunk by a woman to facilitate giving birth.

Other contents of magical amulets of the Moriscos, besides the spectacle characters and the characters written on a continuous line are: the seven seals and magical quadrates. But we find them rarely.

4. Recipes - popular medicine

A completely different field that is mostly beyond magic is the great collection of recipes in the Aljamiado-manuscripts. There is one group of recipes that are a kind of transition between magic and popular medicine. In this group there are recipes using on the one hand magical elements and on the other hand ingredients of plants. The other group is made up of recipes with more or less medical ingredients like plants, oils and other natural substances.

In the introduction to the chapter of the manuscript containing the recipes, we read that these recipes are a copy from the works of the "wise medical doctors" Galen, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), Hippokrates and Averroes (Ibn Rušd).

The following recipe is against cough and shortness of breath (BN 4937 Fo. 33r): Translation: "Recipe. Marvelous against cough and shortness of breath: Take seed of fennel, ground and strained seed of lavender, one ounce, and stir it all with honey." The patient is supposed to take every morning and evening a ninth of it.

Here we have a recipe made by three components: seed of fennel, seed of lavender and honey. The fennel can still be found today as an expectorant component in cough mixtures and teas against bronchitis. The effective parts are the essential oils of the fennel seeds. The same observation can be applied to the lavender. It is used for illnesses of the respiratory tract. Honey is still applied nowadays in medicine because it is highly nutritious. In this example, cough is treated with remedies that could also be used today in similar cases.

If we can trust in the information given in the manuscript, this knowledge is originated in Graeco-Roman works that have been continued by Arabic scholars. As a result, a great part of this knowledge has entered both European and Arabic popular medicine. By the way, all the recipes in the Aljamiado-manuscripts are written in Spanish. There are only a few Arabic words, such as Allah. It reminds of the fact that the help of God is indispensable for the curing of the sick person.

Conclusion

I wished to draw attention to two essential points in this paper:

1) These Aljamiado-texts from Spain have been created in a bilingual situation. But the Moriscos had better knowledge of Spanish than of Arabic as we can see by the many spelling mistakes in the Arabic parts.

As far as the linguistic part is concerned, we find both Romance and Arabic elements. But, as far as the content is concerned, we realise that the magic we find in the Aljamiado-texts has a pure Arabic origin. For all the forms of Aljamiado-magic that I have shown here, examples can also be found in some of the works of Arabic authors concerning magic (like for example the already mentioned Tilimsānī). We can see other elements of Aljamiado magic on pictures of amulets and lucky charms. Briefly, the magic of the Aljamiado-texts is in the Arabic tradition.

2) The tradition of the recipes is not so obvious. In my opinion, these recipes, as a part of popular medicine, have a common popular origin connected to both the European and the Arabic culture.

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