



Global Advanced Research Journal of Medicine and Medical Science (ISSN: 2315-5159) Vol. 4(2) pp. 071-077, February, 2015
Available online <http://garj.org/garjmms/index.htm>
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Full Length Research Paper

The Mystical Power of Saliva in the Middle East and Islamic Cultures

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Accepted 25 November, 2014

Traditional Arabic medicine had been influenced by many ancient cultures and civilizations. Contact between Arab civilization and other civilizations included commerce and trade, political, military, religious activities, literacy, health and hygiene issues, as well as medical practices. At the same time, the Arab medical system also grew out of the work of physicians who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (571-632 AD). The sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad on health and illness were systemized and became known as Medicine of the Prophet (al-Tibb al-Nabawi). The main purpose of this paper is to explore the mystical power of saliva in the context of beliefs and customs in Middle Eastern culture and to describe its therapeutic powers in sacred as well as secular situations, in peace, war, and judicial circumstances. This paper is based on a review of published and unpublished archival and documentary materials as well as interviews with traditional healers and patients. Unstructured interviews and the observation of participants were carried out in the informants' homes (men and women), as well as in the homes of traditional healers (men and women). Most of the healers were in the age range of forty to eighty years old. All the informants were married and over thirty years old. All the material was recorded in field logs, and some was tape-recorded.

Keywords: Saliva; Arabic medicine; Islamic medicine

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand traditional Arabic medicine in the twenty-first century, one must understand ancient Arabic medicine in the pre-and early Islamic periods. It is generally assumed that traditional Arabic medicine was influenced by many ancient cultures and civilizations. Contact between Arab civilization and other civilizations often came in the form of commerce and trade, political, military, and religious activities (in the case of Judaism and Christianity), and involved the sharing of notions of health and hygiene as well as medical practices (Amin 1969:1–35; Hitti 1951: 23–25; Al-Najjar 1994: 2–53). The Arab medical system was also influenced by the work of physicians who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (571–632 AD), including al-Harith b. Kilda

and Ibn Abi Rimtha. The *hadith* (sayings and actions) of the Prophet Muhammad on health and illness were systemized and became known as *al-Tibb al-Nabawi* (Medicine of the Prophet) (Hawting 1989:127–137; Savage-Smith 1996: 903-980).

In the early period of Islam, physicians and traditional healers administered medical treatments throughout the Arab region (Al-Labadi 1992: 80–81). During the Umayyad rule (from 661–750 in the East), ancient medical works were translated into Arabic. For over five centuries (750–1258), the Abbasids dominated the sociopolitical life of the greater part of the Muslim world and the ten caliphs of this period were generous in their promotion of knowledge and medicine. Al-Mansur (r.

754–775), Harun al-Rashid (r.786–802), and al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833) are particularly notable in this regard. A hospital was built in 830 and became the cradle of the Baghdad School of Medicine. Countless manuscripts, particularly those written in Greek, were collected and stored in *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom, established in Baghdad in 830 by Caliph al-Ma'mun), where scholars labored at translating them into Arabic. One of the greatest and most renowned Islamic physicians of this period was Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna (980–1037) (al-Shatti 1970). Another leading Arab philosopher/physician was al-Razi (Rhazes 865–923). The works of Ibn Sina and al-Razi were both later translated into Latin and continued to influence the field of medicine well into the eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries (Al-Said 1997:695-698; Murad 1966:47-70). During the medieval Arabic period, the main achievements of Islamic medicine lay in five areas: systematization, the establishment of hospitals, pharmacology, and the advancement of surgery and ophthalmology. The development of Arabic medical literature also helped to reshape and rearrange Greek heritage by shortening, broadening, commenting on, and systematizing ancient source material on medicine and health (Meyerhof 1931: 311–355).

The Islamic medical tradition established by the *Medicine of the Prophet* in the seventh century was molded in the tenth century, developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, reached its peak in the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and later declined in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Hamarnah 1991:27-36; Lev 2002:177; Mursi 1966: 2–39). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, medical literature and healing methods that had been at the focus of traditional medicine for over a thousand years were marginalized by the advent of Western medicine, and today have become the exclusive domain of traditional medicine and folk healers (Lev and Amar 2000: 191–205).

Beliefs and Therapies

In the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs practiced preventive and curative medicine learned from neighbors and nations with whom they came into contact. Among their treatment methods were *sahr* (divination), *sha'wadha* (magic), *talsim* (talismans), and *tanjim* (astrology). Medical treatments in pre-Islamic times were administered either by people themselves, who used herbal medicines and drinks prepared from plants and minerals, or by diviners and fortune tellers whose armamentaria included *kayy* or *kaii* (cauterizing), *hijama* (cupping), and *fasd* (bleeding). They believed that it was useful to wear rings set with precious stones, which were thought to have magical powers of healing, preventing diseases, and bringing good omens (Al-Najjar 1994: 52–53; Al-Shatti 1970:5-36). Over time, medicine came to be

practiced mainly by folk healers, most of whom learned from their fathers or mothers who also practiced in the healing trade. There are no minimum time prerequisites for acquiring the profession, but many well known healers have served as apprentices for ten years or more.

In the Middle East, the healer's role is perceived as a religious skill related to proximity to saints, which enables the healer to fight the forces of evil that cause illness. Closeness to saints can be attained more easily within a family blessed with many religious healers dervishes (*darawish*), who treat mental and physical illnesses using a variety of religious and cultural rituals. Men and women usually become dervishes by virtue of having received a *baraka*—the gift of a blessing from God (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1997: 213) or by virtue of birthright (passed down from father or mother) and family members renowned as wise or righteous people, or who are purported to have special visionary powers.

Literature Survey

In traditional Arab medicine, methods of healing and preventing harm from impure spirits and various illnesses encompass four humors found in the human body (warm, moist, dry, and cold) which, according to humoral medical theory, correspond with the four elements: fire, water, air, and earth. According to this theory, a balanced mixture of these humors is required for good health (Ullmann 1978: 55–62; Khan 1986:37–50). Life depends upon liquid, and water is the basis of semen, milk, blood, bile, saliva, and the like. Here, the principle is that liquid means life, while loss of liquid means death. Saliva is defined from the medical perspective as a clear, tasteless, odorless, slightly acid, viscid fluid, consisting of the secretion from the parotid, sublingual, and submandibular salivary glands and the mucous glands of the oral cavity; its function is to keep the mucous membrane of the mouth moist, to lubricate the food during mastication, and, in a measure, to convert starch into maltose, the latter action being effected by a diastatic enzyme, ptyalin. (Stedman 2000:1589)

Whether the liquid is semen or saliva, it provides proof that the victim's supply of life force is undiminished. It makes sense that saliva seems to contain the element of life and can also be symbolically equivalent to semen. In Arab culture, it is believed that the essence of a holy person can be communicated to others by spitting and touching. Saliva from the mouth of someone who is at prayer can have curative and magical powers, in the same way that saliva from the mouth of a holy man is thought to be imbued with the essence of God, who created both diseases and their cures. Sometimes the spittle of persons in key positions is used to impart blessings (Douglas 1979: 120).

Among Palestinians, the sanctity as well as the curative action of saliva is said to be derived from saints. It is

believed that Jesus sent the blind man who he healed to a place where the earth was moistened with spittle (John 9:6) or 'Ein umm al-Lozeh (near Bir Ayub) to wash his eyes. Some Christian women believe that this water still has the power to cure inflamed eyes. Palestinians believe that kissing the mouth of a baby increases salivation in the baby (Canaan 1920–21: 153–170; Canaan 1927a: 65–66, 165). In addition, the Palestinians believe that the evil eye, the disastrous power of demons that radiates through the eye, and the evil soul are both transmitted by way of moist breath (Canaan 1927b:182). Thus, if a precocious child does something intelligent or amusing, the mother will spit on it. Spitting is believed to overcome the evil consequences of admiration, and is often used against the evil eye. If someone is afflicted by the evil eye and it is unknown who caused the misfortune, someone representing the victim, usually a small boy, stands in a public area, for example, outside a mosque, with a small bowl half filled with water and asks each male passerby to spit into it. The container is then taken to the victim, whose body is anointed with its contents.

Ritual Practices of Spitting among Non-Arabs

Ritual practices of spitting and the importance attributed to saliva are found in many non-Arab cultures. Among some Jews in Israel, the mother kisses a child who has been looked at three times, spitting after each kiss against the evil eye. In the past, among the Jews in Poland, mothers counteracted this spell by licking the head of the child three times, and spitting several times, repeating the following formula: "Neither mountain nor forest, nor barley nor oats." Another practice Polish Jews used to counteract the influence of the evil eye consisted of spitting three times on the fingertips, making a quick movement with the hands in the air each time (Brav 1981: 53).

In northern Africa in the nineteenth century, it was believed that bad luck would befall a child for whom a stranger expresses particular admiration. In order to avert this misfortune, a finger, wet with saliva, was wiped over the child (Lyon 1821: 52). Similarly, in nineteenth century Turkey, it was customary not to exhibit feminine curiosity and interest in babies too strongly. Here the *hanums* (ladies) concealed their admiration of a baby behind disparaging remarks, such as 'Nasty, ugly little thing!' but then spitting on the child to show that they bear it no malice (Garnett 1893: 475). Very little notice was taken of Turkish babies following their birth and even then only disapproving remarks were made about it, both by relatives and guests, who call the baby dirty, ugly, or naughty. If the baby was looked at, it was immediately spat upon, and then left to slumber in innocent unconsciousness of the undeserved abuse it had received.

In some Western cultures, saliva was once believed to have qualities similar to those attributed to it in Arab culture. In Scotland, for example, saliva was employed as a protection against praise. The Scots believed that the act of praising might accidentally guide the evil eye and harm the object of the praise. Maclagan reports that a Scottish woman was alarmed when a visitor remarked to her: "You have a pretty, dear boy there." Immediately, the mother turned the child's face to her and began to spit into it as hard as she could to prevent any bad effect from the other woman's evil eye (Maclagan 1902: 126). As a preventive method, it was customary to say to the person making the complimentary remarks: "wet your eye." Wetting the eye was generally performed by moistening the tip of the finger with saliva and moistening the eye with it (Henderson 1911: 27–28). Similarly, in the New Mexican Spanish tradition, when a jealous or designing person praised a child excessively, the child's mother or anyone nearby would customarily spit upon the child to prevent the effects of the evil eye (Moya 1940: 34). In some cultures, spitting can also be considered an act of insult, and it is quite likely that while spitting is used to counteract the evil eye, in some way, it also represents a devaluation of the victim (Dundes 1981: 266–276). However, spitting can also be used to insult the evil forces that cause any number of health problems.

In many societies, saliva is believed to have medical uses as well. For example, Moroccan Jews place raisins on a copper tray, then go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and give them to worshippers to chew and subsequently return to the tray. They then place the raisins, full of saliva, in a glass of water and give it to sick people to drink in order to cure them (Ben Simhon 1991: 233-245).

Ritual Practices of Spitting among Arabs and Muslims

Among the Arabs, the saliva of a holy man may be applied to any troubled organ of the body (Shiloh 1961: 285). Among the tribal Bedouin of the Negev and Sinai, when a person was afflicted with *abu al-wjough* (facial paralysis) the following ritual took place:

The dervish brought a porcelain dish, wrote secret verses inside it with red ink and filled it with hot water. He dipped his hands in this water and massaged the patient's face, taking one of the man's shoes and lightly stroking his face with it. He then spat on the patient's face, read verses from the Quran and other verses, the meaning of which only he knew. The shoe is considered unclean, and with its help the devils will be exorcised. Spitting in the face is intended to humiliate the devils and drive them out. What seems a curse to one may be a blessing to another (Abu-Rabia 1994:215-218).

If a person who is considered to be a source of the evil eye suddenly appears in front of you by chance, walks towards you, or crosses your path, his evil eye can bring you bad luck and a bad day, particularly if the encounter occurs in the morning. When you see him, you should say "*Alla ya'ardh lak*" ("God causes damage to you," "God protects me from your havoc"). Sometimes you may spit in his direction, on the condition that he does not notice you. His spirit is considered to be impure, dangerous, contaminated, and contagious (Abu-Rabia 2005:241-254). Among the Sinai Bedouin, the saliva of a jealous person is boiled in water, causing it to evaporate, and thus cancelling out the action of the jealous person (Levi 1978: 52). The author found that special magical and religious powers are also attributed to the saliva of *darawish* (healers or righteous men) in Negev Bedouin society, such as those from the tribe of Hasanat Bin Sabbah, who belong to the Jubarat clan, or from the al-'Aayadih of the al-Sawarkih clan. The healer spits on the person afflicted with jinni, paralysis, or the evil eye in order to effect an instantaneous cure. The saliva of a man cures men, while that of a woman cures women; similarly, a boy's saliva cures boys and a girl's cures girls.

Among the Negev Bedouin, during a boy baby's first months, ideally between the ages of four and six months, his mother or one of his older siblings takes him carefully in their arms to one of the older relatives of the extended family, usually the paternal grandfather or one of the uncles. This relative must be known as a righteous, respected, generous, heroic person, and be gifted with many special qualities. The relative takes the child in his arms and says: "*Issem Allah 'alyk* (God will protect you)," then opens the baby's mouth, spits into it, and wishes him a long and good life. He then returns the baby to whoever brought him, and they thank the righteous man and take the baby home. This ritual is referred to as *tariyq*, from the root *rayq* (saliva). The Bedouins believe that the special qualities of the righteous man will be passed through the saliva to the baby, and that when the baby grows to adulthood, he will take on the qualities of the righteous man. There are a number of variations of this ritual among different tribes in the Negev and northern Sinai.

In a similar vein, in Upper Egypt, a plate of candy-sugar was sent to the Qadi or some other religious person; he sucked on it, let the sweet fluid trickle from his consecrated mouth into the child's mouth, and named the child (Morgenstern 1966: 10). Placing some of the saliva of a highly respected man into a child's mouth is also a part of numerous folk ceremonies. Among the Bedouin of Sinai, young children were allowed to lick the saliva of a hero from the edge of a sword or directly from his mouth (Shuqayr 1916: 369). In north central Saudi Arabia, the inhabitants of Medina brought their newborn children to the Prophet Muhammad so he would perform a sacred rite over them. He would spit into their mouths, so that his saliva would be the first thing to enter their stomachs, and

then he would place chewed dates into their mouths (Morgenstern 1966: 34). The first food or object to pass the child's lips seems to have played a role of considerable importance in that it was thought to impart to the child certain qualities or powers that endured throughout life (Morgenstern 1966: 207). It is also believed that the water in al-Medina cistern became sweet through the Prophet's spittle/saliva (Goldziher 1971: 281).

Among the Rwala tribes in northern Arabia (Musil 1928: 400–403), seers were believed to know and see hidden things that were invisible to others, and thus were able to heal the sick, discover hidden objects, and foretell the future, among other extraordinary powers. They were called *ahl al-sirr*, which means owners of secrets. Alois Musil documented the events that occurred when a six-year-old boy became gravely ill. His father called a seer to treat his son (Musil 1928: 403). The seer came with his wife, and the first thing they did was to lay the boy down with his head facing south and his feet facing north. The woman began to play a musical instrument while the seer bent down to the fire, waiting for the ecstasy to take hold of him. Then he jumped up, danced, lay on the boy, covering him with his body, and breathed with spittle onto his cheeks. While this was happening, the woman beat a little drum and danced. At the end of this ritual, the boy recovered. In another example, a tribal man who had suffered from gout was unable to walk recovered after a healer remained with him for seven days, played music over him every evening, daubed him with spittle and spat on him. In another case, a tribal man called Na'us, to whom many misfortunes were attributed, was thought to have bewitched a pretty young girl with a beautiful figure. The girl began to stagger and finally fainted. The girl's brothers brought Na'us to her bed, where she lay unconscious. Na'us wet three of his fingers with saliva and smeared the girl's throat and neck with it, then walked round her seven times, after which the girl awoke as healthy as she had been before (Musil 1928: 408–409).

Saliva is also traditionally connected to fire-licking, a particularly common practice among Bedouin in the Middle East (Ginat 2009: 129–139). Throughout the ages, the Bedouin have used fire to prove or disprove veracity/truthfulness. There are many theories regarding the efficacy of the ordeal by fire in establishing the credibility of witnesses. One of these, a mixture of psychology and physiology, is the belief that the mouth of an innocent man will be moist with saliva, whereas a guilty man's mouth will be dry due to anxiety and fear. The mouth that is moist with saliva will not be harmed or blistered, but the dry mouth is less heat-resistant, and the tongue is more easily burned (Al-'Aref 1933: 95–101). Arab *fellahin* (peasants) attribute the ability of innocent people to endure the ordeal without their tongues being burned to an absence of fear, which allows their saliva flow to remain intact, as opposed to the guilty ones,

whose dry tongues stick to the hot pan when they lick it. But the Bedouin believe in the inherent ability of the hot pan, or the *bish'a* (ordeal by fire) spirit that it embodies, to detect guilt (Bailey 2009: 204).

Spitting and saliva also have central places in Bedouin medicine. The Bedouin spit against malicious jinn (Doughty 1979:576–577). Saliva may be part of the treatment for crying babies. A baby who cries during the night or day is treated by letting him smell incense or by placing a Qur'an under his pillow. In cases where the crying is persistent, the baby is taken to visit a dervish, who reads holy phrases over his head, and smears his saliva on the baby's forehead (Sheikh Mahmud Muhammad Abu-Badr 1975, personal communication). In Bedouin society, saliva is also used to treat *thawalil* (warts) by placing a *sayf rabna* (praying mantis) on the wart and letting it lick the wart, depositing its saliva. The forelegs of the praying mantis, raised and folded at rest, as if in prayer (Amitai 1987: 54–58), gave rise to the Bedouin belief that God blessed its saliva with medicinal qualities. During my work and interviews with the dervish Sheikh 'Isa Hamd, I saw him treat numerous cases of tonsillitis. He would take a large tent needle and heat it in the embers of the fire. He would then place some of his saliva at the center of the patient's head, the *fatilat al-ras* (scalp whorl) and cauterize the patient twice in the shape of an X. Another treatment involves the saint, who possesses a *baraka* (blessing), spitting on his/her hands and massaging the patient's neck, in order to "bring back" the tonsils and thus cure the tonsillitis.

Various animal and insect bites and stings may also be treated with saliva. Saliva is used, for example, in treating snakebite. I witnessed Sheikh 'Isa Hamd treat numerous cases of scorpion stings and snakebites. He would shout and chant verses from the Qur'an in treating the victims as he spat on the wound. When a dervish, functioning as a *hawi* (healer of snakebites, scorpion stings, and spider bites), is called in to treat a scorpion or snakebite, he drinks olive oil and also gives some to the stricken person to drink. He makes a cut near the bite with a razor that has been heated in a fire, sucks out the blood, which the Bedouin believe is the poison, and spits it out. In addition, the Bedouin use different methods to vaccinate themselves against poisonous stings and bites. The *hawi* (who is immune), places sugar in his mouth, moistens it with his saliva, then places it in the baby's mouth (usually during his first six months of life). This practice is supposed to protect the baby from the stings of scorpions, hornets, and wasps, as well as from snake and spider bites. The Bedouin of Jabaliya in Santa Catharina-Sinai (Ben-David 1981:126) treat scorpion stings/snake bites with the saliva of a *hawi*. The *hawi* has the ability to suck poison from scorpion stings, snakebites, and this ability is transferred via the *hawi's* mouth and called *hwaya* (Bailey 1982: 84).

In many Middle Eastern societies, saliva is considered to have other mystical and healing properties. In

Morocco, at weddings among the Ulad Bu'aziz, people who want offspring or who suffer from illness ask the scribes for the particular dates that they should receive the bridegroom's mother. The scribes write this date and then spit on them and give them away with a blessing. Once, when swarms of locusts ravaged the gardens of Tangier, Sidi I-Haj 'Abdsslam of Wazzan expelled the insects by spitting into the mouth of one of them. In Andjra, a person who feels pain in his chest smears it with spittle seven times in the morning before breakfast. Placing four matches between the toes and a little spittle above each toe is a remedy for a foot that has fallen asleep. In North Africa, saliva is used as a means of warding off various kinds of evil influences. An Atlas Berber may spit on a coin received for a service from a stranger, believing that this action will bring him good luck and more money. There may also be *baraka* in the spittle of an animal, and the *baraka* of an animal, like that of a holy person, is believed to be particularly seated in the spittle. If you sell a horse you should always keep its bridle, because to keep its spittle is to keep its *baraka* (Westermarck 1968, Vol.I: 93–96). It is mentioned that near the passage adjacent to Mulai 'Abdsslam's shrine, there is a cave containing the mark of a snake that was petrified by the saint when it wanted to bite him. If a person has been bitten by a snake, he may cure himself by spitting on the wound and rubbing it with earth from that cave (Westermarck 1968: 71). A saint sometimes transfers *baraka* to his *khdim* (servant) by spitting into his mouth. This action demonstrates that he must be a very holy man, because he is able to part with his saliva without losing his *baraka* (Westermarck 1968, Vol.I: 41, 93).

In Morocco, the sheikh Al-Darqawi received, in addition to the *baraka* he received from his master, sheikh 'Ali Al-Jamal, *baraka* from an aged saint at the point of death who made him his spiritual heir by the ritually unprecedented, yet highly significant act of placing his tongue in sheikh Al-Darqawi's mouth and instructing him to suck it (Ling 1971: 71). The transmission of *baraka* (at Moroccan Sufi orders) occurs through channels such as teachings, silent or chanted incantations, dancing and trance states, food sharing, contact with the master's hands, garments, or other possessions, fainting, screaming, and even neighing. The master may spit into the disciple's mouth or place his tongue in it and order the disciple to suck it (Hammoudi 1997: 138–139; Crapanzano 1973: 49).

Saliva and the Prophet's Medicine

The rituals and beliefs relating to spitting and saliva as presented in this paper find their most concise expression in a verse of the Qur'an and one from the *Hadith*. The Qur'an states: "Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our Protector: and in Allah

let the Believers put their trust" (Qur'an 9:51). In the *Hadith*, regarding *The Medicine of the Prophet*, we find that the Prophet said: "No disease Allah created, but that He created its treatment" (Al-Bukhari 1974: 395).

The Prophet permitted incantation (*ruqya*) for the treatment of evil eye, and the bites of poisonous snakes. Incantations include reciting spells and phrases from the Qur'an (Qur'an:113, 114). Sometimes the healer spat on the person who had been stung while reciting Quran verses. The effect does not depend on physical contact alone, sometimes on sight, sometimes on prayers and incantations and on seeking the aid and protection of God (al-Jawziyya 1998: 126, 133). The incantations come from the heart and the mouth of the healer, and when he includes something from within himself, such as saliva, air, and breath, the effect of the incantations becomes stronger and more influential (al-Jawziyya 1998: 135).

Saliva and incantations may be used for pain, as was explained to 'A'ishah (the wife of Muhammad): "When anyone complained of pain or suffered from ulceration or wounds, the Prophet would put his finger on the ground, saying: in the Name of God, the soil of our land, with our saliva, that our patient may be cured, by the permission of our Lord" (Al-Bukhari 1974:642). There is no doubt that some kinds of soil possessed special properties beneficial to sufferers of numerous diseases, and could heal serious illnesses, especially when mixed with the saliva of the Prophet (al-Jawziyya 1998: 140).

Saliva was used in the rites of *tahnik* (to rub the palate). 'A'ishah described this practice to Asma' bint Abi Bakr when Asma' bint Abi Bakr was pregnant with 'Abdullah b. Al-Zubair at the time of migration. When she gave birth to 'Abdullah, she sent him to the Prophet so that he would rub the baby's palate with chewed dates. The Prophet took the child and placed him in his lap and then called for dates, which he chewed. He then put his saliva in the child's mouth. The first thing that entered his stomach was the saliva of the Prophet. Asma' retells: "He then rubbed him and blessed him and gave him the name of 'Abdullah" (Muslim: No. 1236).

In Muslim traditions, saliva also played a role in healing eye diseases. Sahl bin Sa'd, reported that the Prophet asked: "Where is 'Ali b. Abi Talib? The people said: his eyes are sore. The Prophet sent for him and he was brought to him and the Prophet applied saliva to his eyes and invoked blessings and he was cured, as if he had no ailment at all" (Muslim: No. 1385). Saliva was also used in the rituals of funerals. Jabir reported: "The Prophet came to the grave of 'Abdullah bin Ubai, brought him out of it, placed him on his knee, put his saliva in his mouth and shrouded him in his own shirt, and Allah knows best" (Muslim: No. 1584). Saliva had a place in blessing food. Jabir bin 'Abdullah reported that his wife said: "I brought out the kneaded flour and the Prophet put some of his saliva in it and blessed it. He then put saliva in the earthen pot and blessed it and said: call another baker

who can bake with you, and take the soup out of it, but do not remove it from the hearth, and the guests were one thousand. I take an oath by Allah that all of them ate (the food until they were full) until they left it and went away and our earthen pot was brimming over as before, and so was the case with our flour, or as Al-Dahhak [another narrator] said: [the flour] was in the same condition, and loaves had been prepared from it" (Muslim: No.1174). Finally, saliva was also used in blessing water. Abu Musa reported that the Prophet called for a bowl of water and washed his hands and face in it, and put his saliva in it and then said: "Drink out of it and pour it over your faces and over your chest and gladden yourselves." They took hold of the bowl and did as the Prophet had commanded them to do. Thereupon, Um Salamah called from behind the veil: "Spare some water in your vessel for your mother also and they gave some water which had been spared for her" (Muslim: No. 1448).

Saliva may be involved, too, when illness is treated by reciting Qur'an verses either over an afflicted part of the body or into the hands and then wiping them over the afflicted part, or over the whole body, if it is an illness that affects the whole body. This action was supported by the *Hadith*, where it is mentioned that the Prophet would recite suras 112-114 of the Qur'an every night before he went to sleep. He would then blow into his hands with a little saliva (just enough to moisten them) and wipe his face and all the parts of his body that his hands could reach (Al-Bukhari 1974:645). Further evidence is contained in the *Hadith* on the authority of 'Uthman ibn Abu Al-'Aas, where "the Prophet ordered him to put his hand on the place where he felt the pain, and say, '*Bismillaah* [in the name of Allah] three times and '*A'oothu billaahi wa qudratihi min sharri maa ajidu wa uhaathir*' (I seek refuge in the might and omnipotence of Allah from the evil of what I feel and fear seven times" (Islamweb 2014).

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, saliva and rituals of spitting have been an important part of Middle Eastern cultures. The special powers attributed to saliva contributed to its role in a broad range of religious, cultural, and social rites and ceremonies, as well as to its use in medical treatments. This seemingly innocuous fluid is part of the rich and fascinating cultural/ anthropological history of the Middle East, and the study of it within this context sheds light on the beliefs and concerns of the inhabitants of the region. Healers who treat physical and mental illnesses engage in a variety of religious, secular, and cultural practices. The consistent principle is that liquid means life, while loss of liquid means death. Saliva, however, contains the element of life, treatment, purity, and blessing; while in certain situations it is associated with condemnation and cursing. When saliva comes from the mouth of holy

person—the Prophet or a dervish—it is believed to be imbued with the essence of Allah. The traditional uses of saliva and the mutual interaction between healers and laypersons have established a relationship of psychological-therapeutic dependence on the part of the Arabs with regard to their healers. This practice is deeply rooted in their psyches, reinforced, and legitimized by their culture, and strengthened by their religion.

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