Encyclopædia Iranica

Published: December 15, 1991
Last Updated: June 10, 2013

CHARMS

CHARMS (< Lat. *carmen* “song, verse, incantation”; Pers. *afsūn*, “incantation,” *damdam* < Ar. *damdama* “disturbance”; Pers. and Ar. *doʿā* “prayer,” *taʿwīḏ* “charm, amulet,” *ḥerz* “protection,” *verd* [a section of the Qurʾān or other spoken charm], *ṭelesm* < Gk. *telesma* “talisman”), originally verbal formulas recited to prevent or ward off potential harm by magical power but now also denoting written and even talismanic magic (Christensen). Individuals who know how to write them are called *doʿānevīs*. In the study of folklore “charm” is defined as “a belief-rhyme that is regarded as having magical power” (Brunvand, p. 77), ultimately the magical power of the spoken word (Krappe, p. 189; Budge, 1978, p. 26; idem, 1899, pp. xi, 170-71; Thorndike, I, p. 10). Sometimes the spoken word is considered to activate the force inherent in a magically charged object or amulet (Budge, 1978, p. 26). To be effective, however, charms should be uttered in proper fashion by qualified individuals or written on suitable objects (Thorndike, I, p. 10; Budge, 1899, p. 4). Both meaningless and meaningful words and names, as well as numbers, vowels, and certain phrases recited backward have been viewed as magically powerful (Budge, 1978, p. 39; Penzer, VI, p. 149 n.; Thorndike, I, pp. 370-71; cf. Homāʾī).

Although, strictly speaking, charms are intended to prevent or ward off harm from evil influences, they may also be used to cure disease by driving away the demons that caused it or to obtain favors from higher forces—for example, ending the rains or a drought or hastening the return of an absent beloved (Yoder, pp. 192, 203; cf. Krappe, p. 190; Puckett, p. 207). The preventive and

curative charms work by transferring the harm or illness to an object or to another person (cf. Hand, 1965, pp. 83-105). In Bīrjand, for example, malarial fever (*tab-e nawba*, lit. "intermittent fever") is cured by putting a cup of tea in the sun and placing an iron nail in front of the patient, who says, "I give my fever to this nail." The nail is then inserted into the ground, a bit of tea is poured over it, and the patient is made to drink the rest of the tea (Aḥmadī). This kind of exorcism is quite different from black magic (*seḥr-e ḥarām*), which is intended to inflict harm upon a specific enemy or enemies.

Pre-Islamic Persia. A great many charms, spells, and magical incantations were used in ancient Persia. The earliest known example is found in *Bahrām yašt* (*Yt.* 14.34-40), where Ahura Mazdā explains to Zarathustra the magical power of the feather of the Vārənjina bird: By rubbing it against his body he can counter the effects of evil spells cast on him. Whoever carries such a feather cannot be killed or driven away; he is honored by everyone, and his enemies tremble before him (cf. Frachtenberg, p. 436). Darmesteter (*Avesta*, tr. Darmesteter, II, p. 571 n. 51) was incorrect in assuming that similar beliefs are referred to in the passage from the *Šāh-nāma* (completed 400/1010) in which the Sīmorḡ gives Zāl one of her feathers so that he may summon her in time of danger. The feather is, however, used as a curing charm for Rūdāba after she has given birth to Rostam by Caesarian section (ed. Moscow, II, p. 236 l. 1478) and later for Rostam and his horse Rakš after they have received deadly wounds from Esfandīār (ed. Moscow, VI, p. 294 ll. 1239-40).

Later Avestan texts contain many references to the magical power of the names of Ahura Mazdā (*Yt.* 1.5-6, 10-11) and the holy prayers (*Yt.* 3; cf. Frachtenberg, pp. 417-18, 436). A single occurrence of the Avestan word *yātuxti* "wizard's spell" is preserved in the Avestan-Middle Persian glossary *Frahang ī oīm*, where it is rendered in Pahlavi as *ǰādūg-gōwišnīhā* "wizards' utterances" (*Air. Wb.*, col. 1284). Such wizards' spells are also mentioned in the Pahlavi literature, for instance, in the summary of the Avesta preserved in the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, II, p. 696.5; tr. West, p. 42, 8.17.6; cf. Frachtenberg, p. 406). In the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* a woman who made charmed potions is said to be suffering excruciating punishment in hell (84.3). According to the *Ṣad dar-e naṯr* (ed. Dhabhar, chap. 14, pp. 13-14), prayers should be recited over clipped nails, which should then be buried, in order to guard against their use in black magic; this ancient practice is still extant in Persian folk magic (cf. Massé, p. 314; Šakūrzāda, p. 326). Other spells and charms mentioned in the Zoroastrian literature include those against harm to humans, animals, and crops by

demons, noxious creatures, and evil men (Frachtenberg, pp. 444-48). References to such charms and spells are also found in some manuscripts of the *Šāh-nāma*: Charms (*afsūn*) are used against demons (*dīv*s) and Ahrīman (ed. Borūḵīm, I, pp. 37 l. 27, 38 l. 37, 129 l. 13); Sorūš teaches Farēdūn the art of using them (ed. Borūḵīm, I, p. 50 l. 304-06); Farēdūn stops a falling boulder by using a charm (ed. Borūḵīm, I, p. 51 l. 319); and both a gem and a verbal charm are used for healing wounds (ed. Borūḵīm, V, p. 233 ll. 2496-2500, 2502).

In medieval Persia. After the Muslim conquest of Persia, which was largely complete by 31/651, the Qurʾān replaced Zoroastrian texts as the chief source of charms and spells. In the Qurʾān itself there are several references to magic and charms: Magic can cause hostility between man and wife (2:102); and Solaymān (Solomon) was served by the *jenn* (supernatural beings; 27:17-18, 39; 34:12; cf. Bāqellānī, pp. 91-97). According to a particularly famous tradition (*ḥadīṯ*), the Prophet Moḥammad was bewitched by one of his enemies, and the manner of his cure was related (Ebn Māja, II, p. 1173 no. 3545; Qorṭobī, II, pp. 965-67). He was also reported to have used unspecified, probably verbal charms to protect members of his own family against harm before the revelation of suras (sections) 113 and 114 of the Qurʾān, called *al-moʿawwedatān* (lit. “the two protectors”; Nasāʾī, p. 40, cf. pp. 69-70; Marṣafī, p. 174; Termeḏī, VI, pp. 252 no. 2059, 254 no. 2061; Ebn Māja, II, p. 1161 no. 3511) because each begins with the words *qol aʿūḏ be-rabb* (“Say “I take refuge with the Lord””). He subsequently declared, “the Qurʾān is the best medicine” (Ebn Māja, II, p. 1169 no. 3533), according to a *ḥadīṯ* attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb (d. 40/61). He was reported to have cured a man’s sickness by reciting verses from the Qurʾān (Salīm, p. 99) and to have approved of charms against the evil eye, the poison of noxious creatures, and abscesses on the skin (Termeḏī, nos. 2059, 2064, 2067; Ebn Māja, II, pp. 1160-61 nos. 3510-13, 3515-16; Marṣafī, p. 168). Belief in the efficacy of the Koranic text as a potent charm against witchcraft and illness was reinforced by such traditions, and specific passages were often recommended (cf. Marṣafī, pp. 164-65; Ebn Māja, II, p. 729 no. 2156; Qorṭobī, II, pp. 970-71). Suras 113 and 114 and verses from suras 2 and 3, called *al-zahrāwān* (“the two shining ones”), were considered especially suitable (Nasāʾī, pp. 16-19; Marṣafī, pp. 162-63). Already at an early period books of the genre *ḵawāṣṣ al-āyāt* (properties of Koranic verses) began to appear (Fahd; Christensen). Scholars, theologians, and physicians acknowledged the existence of black magic and the efficacy of charms in combating it. The opinions of medieval Muslim jurists on charms can be classified in three general categories: those used in the pre-Islamic period or in which obscure

words appeared, which were to be avoided (*ejtenāb*); those uttered or written in the name of God or incorporating verses from the Qurʾān, which were permissible (*mostaḥabb*); and those incorporating the names of angels or saints, which, though not *ḥarām*, were best avoided (*tark*; Marṣafī, pp. 170, 182; Salīm, p. 97). On the other hand, in his commentary on the Qurʾān the Shiʿite scholar Abuʾl-Fotūḥ Rāzī (d. 538/1144), who was noted for Muʿtazilite tendencies rooted in Greek philosophy, expressed doubt of the efficacy of words and formulas used in charms (cited in Salīm, p. 45).

Written charms to arouse someone's affection or abort an unwanted pregnancy are attested in classical Arabic sources (Ebn al-Jawzī, pp. 400-01). An ancient stone lion near Hamadān was supposed to be a charm against cold weather (Ebn al-Faqīh, pp. 221, 244, cf. pp. 252-54), a belief that continued for centuries (see, e.g., Fozūnī Astarābādī, p. 548, cf. pp. 328-39, 546). In one early Persian manuscript of indeterminate date, incorrectly attributed to Ebn Sīnā (d. 428/1037; see avicenna xi. persian works), the term *ʿazīma* (plur. *ʿazāʾem*) referred to verbal charms; the practitioner of *ʿazīma* was called *moʿazzem*, *ʿazīma-/ʿazāʾemḵᵛān*, *afsūngar*, *afsūndam*, *afsūnḵᵛān*, part an "fairy enchanter," *mārafsāy* "snake charmer," and *každomafsāy* "scorpion charmer" (Homāʾī, pp. 70-71). The words for this kind of charm were supplicating in tone and were intended to stir inanimate objects to action, summon ghosts, and control fairies, elements, heavenly bodies, or noxious creatures. The medieval Persian *komāha* "amulet worn on the arm" and the Arabic and Persian terms *ʿūḏa* "amulet," *ḥerz*, and *taʿwīḏ*, though literally referring to objects carried as protection against evil or harm, were used interchangeably for verbal and talismanic charms (see Homāʾī, pp. 70-97; Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, p. 294; cf. Dehḵodā, s.vv.). In Mughal India, in order to ensure the return or recapture of an escaped slave, a kind of written charm called *gerd-nāma* (lit. "collar inscription") was transcribed around the edges of a piece of paper. The slave's name was then written in the center and the paper either placed under a stone, buried, attached to a column in the house, or placed in the Qurʾān among the pages of the sura of Yūsof (sura 12; Enjū Šīrāzī, I, p. 1127).

Modern Persian folklore. A vast number of charms, spells, and incantations are in use in Persia today. Charms may be specific to certain ailments; for instance, in Khorasan whooping cough is cured by taking an empty brass mortar (*hāvan*) to the roof of the house and, while pounding it, reciting the following verse: *Jīng o jīng o setara/šorfe kebūd meḵa bera/karjī rāhom nedara/karjīša beden tā zūd bera* "Zing zing the star! The whooping (lit. "blue")

cough wants to leave; it does not have enough money (or provisions) for [its] journey; give it money so that it can leave soon!" (Šakūrzāda, p. 260). Verbal charms for protection against the scorpion's sting arc used in Khorasan and many other parts of Persia (Šakūrzāda, pp. 299-300, 299 nn. 2-3; Hedāyat, p. 148; Faqīhī, p. 759). A famous formula for hastening the return of an absent person is *Allesūn o ballesūn*/[name] *rā beresūn/age nešasse pāšūn-eš/age pā šode bedovūn-eš/felfel o felfel-dūne* (or, in Fars, *qand-eš kon o rājūne)/zūd beresūn-eš ḵūne "Allesūn o ballesūn*/make [name] come! If he is sitting make him stand; if he is standing make him run! Pepper and peppercorn (or "make him sugar and aniseed"), make him come home soon!" (Hedāyat, p. 52; cf. Massé, p. 294). Other charms are used to bring or stop rain or wind (Šakūrzāda, pp. 311, 347), find lost objects (Massé, p. 303), or inspire affection in someone (Massé, pp. 307-10; Katīrāʾī, p. 329). Earlier in this century God's great name (*esm-e aʿẓam*) was considered a particularly potent charm against evil and for achieving any purpose; of the supposed 40,000 names of God, only the single "great name" was believed to be unknown. In order to learn it, it was necessary to burn a copy of the Quran; this name alone would survive, and it could then be used in charms and spells (Massé, p. 296). Sometimes Koranic verses are put in a bowl and water poured in to dissolve the writing. The concoction is then drunk as a cure. This practice is called *ḵᵛordan-e āb-e doʿā* "drinking the water of a charm" (Massé, *Croyances*, p. 296).

Some charms are effective only at certain times, and may contain elements of sympathetic magic. In Khorasan girls who want to grow long hair go into the fields when a rainbow is visible in the sky and recite the following charm three times while ruffling their hair with their hands: *Ey tīr-kamūn ey tīr-kamūn/gīsam beše qadd-e kamūn* "Oh [rain]bow, Oh [rain]bow, may my hair grow as long as a [rain]bow!" (Šakūrzāda, p. 344). Not all verbal charms in Persia are rhymed, however. In the same province one who suffers from earache goes into a field at sundown, faces Mecca, gazes at the sun, and, while casting seven pebbles behind his or her back, recites: *Ey āftāb dard-e man-o bā ḵᵛod-at be kūh bebar* "Oh sun, take my pain to the mountain with you" (Šakūrzāda, p. 623). An unrhymed saying (*pāy-am be-kūn-e mard-e do-zone* "my foot up the arse of the man with two wives") has been reported as a cure for a benumbed foot (Massé, p. 310). In Khorasan the verse *pām be kūn-e mard-e she zanah/zan morda o zan ṭalāq o zan dar ḵāna* (my foot up the arse of the man with three wives/a dead wife, a divorced wife, and a wife at home), followed by the words *elāhī mū ḵorak-e man ḵūb šavad o saram mū dar bīāvarad* (I pray to God that my split ends be cured and that I grow a [good] head of hair), is

used to counter loss of hair caused by split ends (Šakūrzāda, p. 270). Some charms are effective only when recited in association with certain actions. To find a lost object, for example, one was supposed to tie a knot in a woman's *čādor* while reciting *al-ḥamdo leʾllāh* (praise be to God). When the object was found the knot was untied as *Qol howa ʾllāh* ("Say "He is God"") was pronounced (Massé, p. 304). Objects called *taʿwīḏ* or *ḥerz* are still worn on the person as protection against evil or harm (cf. Adams, p. 447); especially if made by learned men, they can be effective against bad weather, damage to crops, and evil beings.

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