Migration and Religion: A Case of Healing Arabic Amulets among Syriac Orthodox Immigrants in Canada

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Abstract

Religious beliefs and customs migrate transnationally with the immigrants who carry them from their countries of origin into their new countries of settlement. Among these religious beliefs are those that concern health and sickness, and more specifically, preventatives and cures. This article presents a case study of medical beliefs within the Christian Syriac Community of Sherbrooke in Canada, as witnessed through two amulets that contain two Psalmic invocations handwritten in Arabic, which were kept as heirlooms of the Batrie family. This article explores the way first generation immigrants transplanted homeland religious beliefs and practices in a new social environment, with the use of amulets as a conduit between man and the supernatural, and, more pragmatically, the use of Psalmic verses as healing medium with miraculous power.

Keywords: Syriac Orthodox Christian, Psalms, Arabic, Amulets, Immigration, Religion.

Introduction

A hand embroidered pouch containing two handwritten Arabic amulets were kept among the heirloom of the Batrie family of Sherbrook, Québec, Canada. The amulets were made, according to the name mentioned in one of them, for Norman -- son of Yacoub (Jacob) Batrie (1890-1969) who migrated to Canada in 1907 and Jamilla Abdalla (1903-1974). Yacoub and Jamilla were married in Canada in August 1923. Norman was born on November 9, 1924; he seems to have been ill enough as a child that his parents had healing amulets made in his name.

First generation immigrant families carry with them their religious and cultural beliefs, as well as their practices, and they tend to rely on practices of belief and healing that invoke the power of the supernatural as they were taught to in their places of origin. At this time and place, it wasn't unusual

that "deep religious convictions and belief in the power of God often coincided with a fear of witches and evil spirits committed to carrying out the Devil's work. Magical practices offered a means to exert some control of the unknown and assuage their fears" (Rouse, 2017, p.21). The pressure to fall back on traditional medicine was no doubt amplified by problems in seeking medical assistance in the counties to which they migrated, where language and cultural barriers, cost of treatments, accessibility to healthcare providers, lack of awareness of healthcare services, and discrimination or racism often formed barriers to accessing other forms of therapy (Vaughn, 2009, p.67).

The two amulets subject of this article was discovered by the author in 2000 during a visit to the Batrie family in Sherbrook, Canada. Pauline Batrie (1930-2016), Norman's sister brought out a box filled with family heirlooms and told the author that there were also letters and documents in Arabic that neither she nor her siblings could read, since none of them had been taught to read Arabic.

Preserved among other inherited material – a Bible, Ottoman identification cards, marriage affidavits and baptism certificates, the objects remained a puzzling mystery until the author unfolded and read its contents. From inquiries about Norman, the author estimated that the amulets were made somewhere between 1924 and 1928, the critical years of his infancy and early childhood. None of Norman's siblings remembered any mention being made by their parents of some grave childhood sickness in his case, nor had it been mentioned by either his brother Roger (1927-1989) or his sisters Pauline, or Patricia (1943-2012). Norman died on his birthday, November 9, 1998, of cardiac problems related to sugar diabetes as his death certificate indicates.

In their spiritual purpose and physical characteristics, the Batrie amulets are typical of those that have been in use for centuries among the Christians of the East. In fact, such written amulets are indigenous to all Eastern Mediterranean cultures; their use was widespread throughout the prehistoric, primitive, and Jewish traditions and continued into Christianity with the adaptation of Christian inscriptions and symbols. Other cultures have also commonly sought out the use of amulets or objects "which [they] considered holy or otherwise potent" to protect themselves against hostile natural and supernatural forces, unexplainable and painful situations, unforeseeable powers, or the malice of enemies (Encyclopedia Judaica, 2007, p.121).

An amulet is only one type of apotropaic; it is by definition "any object which by its contact or its close proximity to the person who owns it, or to any possession of his, exerts power for his good, either by keeping evil from him and his property or by endowing him with positive advantages" (Bonner, 1950, p.2). Among common amulets in the Eastern Mediterranean are "pieces of paper, parchment, or metal discs inscribed with various formulae which

would protect the bearer from sickness, the "evil eye," and other troubles" (Encyclopedia Judaica, 2007, p.121).

As part of "the spell," the amulet pouches or compacts contained organic material, from the ordinary to the bizarre. Most of the amulets of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, for example, contain "simple, organic materials – animal skins, or other animal parts, pottery bits or shells, and plant matter…." In China, amulet contents include a tiger's claw; in Nepal, teeth; in El Salvador, cowrie shells; in Lithuania, amber; in Egypt and Palestine, green beads….[1] Other types of amulets contain charms and incantations written on a small piece of papyrus or paper, which is then rolled or folded and placed in a compact or pouch of some sort and bound to or hung on the person (Bonner, 1950, p.2).

It is worth noting that since Hermann Gollancz presented his paper, "A Selection of Charms from Syriac Manuscripts," at the Eleventh International Congress of Orientalists in Paris in 1897 and it was published in the *Actes du Onzième Congrès International des Orientalistes* interest in this field considerably increased, resulting in the publication of a good number of articles and books on the subject.

There are many examples of Christian amulets that use Biblical quotations – Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, God or Christ's name, and verses from the Bible -- for healing and protection. In his book *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power,* Meyer and Smith provide ample models of these amulets: Oxyrhynchus 1077 uses the Gospel of Matthew, Egyptian Museum 10263 invokes the name of Christ, and Amulet Ianda 14 employs the Lord's prayer. The Berlin 9096 invokes texts from Psalm 91:1; Psalm 118:6-7; Psalm 18:2 and several New Testament texts to protect and heal (Meyer and Smith, 1999, pp.34-35)

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia *New Advent*, "The reliance placed upon amulets, like other forms of superstition, grew out of popular ignorance and fear. With the coming of the Christian religion therefore, it was destined to disappear. It would have been too much, however, to have expected the victory of Christianity in this matter to have been an easy and instantaneous one" (Delany, 1907, n.p.). The new converts continued the use of amulets using Christian creeds and symbols instead of heathen ones. Crow posited that "the Church Fathers and intellectuals made the distinction between the miracle of the relics and sacred words of the Bible, *verba sacra*, versus condemned amulets labeled as superstitious magic, a term used to delegitimize their use and imply demonic association" (Crow, 2009, p.97).

1 Examples of written amulets are available at places such as the Bodleian Library in Oxford University and the Hourghton Library of Harvard University. Amulets that contain organic material can be found for instance at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan in Detroit.

Crow also states that "during the Middle Ages, only members of the clergy were educated enough to make the amulets and thus, were the primary supplier of them to their parishioners—although there were non-clergy who sold them too." Furthermore, to Crow, "to the illiterate and uneducated, the distinctions between magic amulets and church-approved amulets were hardly discernable (Crow, 2009, p.98).

Babies and children were considered especially vulnerable to the evil eye. Newborn, beautiful or healthy babies were believed to be at higher risk because they seem to be particularly vulnerable to the effects of the evil eye" (Lykiardopoulos, 1981, p.224). Fear of envy and its consequences led people to "use symbolic and non symbolic cultural forms whose function is to neutralize, or reduce, or otherwise control the dangers they see stemming from envy, and especially their fear of envy (Foster, 1972, p.165).

Apotropaic symbols were made of various materials – wood, metal, papyrus, parchment, stones, bones, precious gems, and leather. They were inscribed with written expressions, incantations, words, cryptic phrases, signs, magical formulas, numeric combinations, symbols, anagrams or geometrical designs. They were carried by or pinned to the person as a sign of devotion; as a remedy for sickness or as protection against the evil eye (Kontansky, 1991, p.107).

As part of "the spell," the amulet pouches or compacts often contained organic material, from the ordinary to the bizarre. Examples of written amulets are available at places such as the Bodleian Library in Oxford University, the University of Michigan Papyrology Collection, and the Houghton Library of Harvard University. Amulets that contain organic material can be found for instance at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan in Detroit.

The birth of a male heir in Middle Eastern culture is eagerly awaited, with the heir being responsible for carrying on the family name. The more valuable the child, the more susceptible it is to the evil eye, and the more necessary it is to employ a contravening power, as well as a set of protective behaviors. Parents and/or family members use amulets to enable a child to shield himself from visible and invisible antagonists, especially the Evil Eye. Naff's research on belief in the evil eye among the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in the US found that "a prayer sealed in leather or wax may also be worn or carried in the manner of phylactery as a shield against the evil eye"(Naff, 1965, p.49).

Origin of the Batrie Family and the Journey to Canada

The town of Mardin in the 19th century, from whence the Batrie family came, is located in present day Turkey. Mardin was Christianized in 300 AD and became part of the region that "played an exceptionally important part in

the development of Eastern Christianity" (Bosworth, 1989, p.542).

Between 1914 and 1918, the Young Turks which governed Turkey following the demise of the Ottoman Empire fought against Christian minorities under the banner of 'radical ideology of ethnic exclusivity', 'ethnic-national independence', and 'consolidate the existence of the empire' (Bloxham, 2003, .p.142). This led to a violent act of historic proportions: the genocide of the Armenians, the Syriac Orthodox and others. Those who survived the massacres headed to nearby Lebanon and Syria and from there a high percentage of them migrated to Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, and Australia.

In his four-page unpublished memoirs, Carim Jarjour writes about his family's journey from Mardin to Canada,[2] a typical journey for those who hailed from the same area. Carim's mother, his brother Elias, his married sister Selma Bogos, his maternal grandmother Mary Anto, and the bride-to-be to his brother George Nazlie Abdalla left Mardin in 1902, intending ultimately to reach Canada. Oral history of the community has it that George Jarjour, Carim's brother, was the first Syriac Orthodox to arrive in Canada. He settled in the Dominion in 1895.

Here is what Carim wrote:

"The trip from Mardin to Aleppo took 10 days by horseback, and the remainder of the trip was done by carriage and train to Beirut. […] the voyage by boat from Beirut to Marseilles, France took six days. [There] they were met by a travel agent who took them to a tourist hotel. From Marseilles, they crossed France to Calais, across the English Channel to Dover and then to Liverpool, England. Early in November 1902, they sailed from Liverpool on the SS Victorian of the Allan Lines and reached Halifax in six days. They then took a train to Montreal where they were met by George..."

Based on an entry in the family Bible, Aziz, Yacoub, and Georges Batrie migrated to Canada in 1905, 1907, and 1911 respectively. Their parents Hanna Batrie and his wife Prima Selmo (1861-1961), had migrated with other members of their family from Mardin, Turkey to Québec to join their sons; they arrived in Canada on August 7, 1925, aboard the SS Malta.

The Batries joined their kin in the burgeoning city of Sherbrooke, where the Syriac Orthodox immigrants had settled and spread out in the environs, finding residences in villages such as Magog, Disraeli, East Angus, Victoriaville, Lac Mégantic and Thedford Mines. According to Pauline, the region offered work opportunities due to its extensive infrastructure development (e.g. rail and electricity), and the flourishing economy that centered on the booming timber industry. Pauline added that to further lure

2 The author was granted permission by the Jarjour family to cite the memoirs.

businesses and settlers, the government of Sherbrooke gave attractive incentives such as tax exemptions, reductions in electricity costs, and allotting land lots cheaply to new industries.

Sherbrooke and its environs, rural and urban, presented a good base for the Syriac Orthodox people. Although, as Pauline put it, they were merchants, masons, tanners, and farmers by trade when they arrived, they all became peddlers in Canada. It is in the midst of these larger, macro social and economic changes that we find a continuing belief in amulets.

The Batrie Amulets

Characteristics of the Batrie Amulets

The Batrie amulets are written prayers which were carefully and tightly folded in squares and placed in a pouch similar to a rosary sack (see photograph A). The pouch itself is made of a blue gabardine textile lined with a red satin fabric. The two sides of the pouch are decorated with a flower symbol that is hand-embroidered in golden threads, and three of its outside edges are adorned with hand-crocheted red festoons; the pouch, which is approximately three centimeters in width and four centimeters in length, served as a holster within which the amulets were enclosed.

The pouch which held the two amulets

No cord or similar hanging device has been passed down to us; but based on knowledge of traditional practices, we can assume that the pouch was either attached to the child's clothing or tucked under his pillow. The choice of the colors blue and red was determined by the symbolic meaning of the pouch. Both colors are traditionally used as protection against the evil eye in the Near East. It is believed that blue and red will deflect the glance of the evil eye and thus deter or blight it (Abbasi, 2017, pp. 137-140).

Both amulets are hand-inscribed with black ink on parchment paper. Amulet A is inscribed with a personal supplication and with a Psalmic prayer, while amulet B contains only a Psalmic prayer. Neither of the amulets contains symbols, numbers or magical formulas. The supplication in Amulet A makes it clear that both amulets are intercessions for the cure and protection of an infant named Norman. Amulets are worn to bring about either preventive or counteractive intervention. In the case of Norman, it was both, although the emphasis is on the counteractive, since the amulet was made to drive away the child's illness.

Amulets inscribed with or containing manuscripts with written words are very common. The use of words emanates from "a belief in early times in the holiness and the power of words" (Encyclopedia Judaica, 2007, p.121). The value of the words is considered more effective if it emanates from a holy source, such as passages from the Scriptures, special prayers, Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, or special supplications to saints (Encyclopedia of the Early Church, 1992, p.32). The oldest surviving Christian amulets are those which were written on papyrus in the sixth and seventh centuries (Wessely, 1924, pp. 399-400). These amulets from the 20th century often cite the same passages.

The Batrie amulets are clearly Christian objects. Amulet A invokes the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and both amulets A and B use Psalm 51 and 61 respectively.

There is no indication of who made the amulets or when the writing took place, although they were probably made during the first four years of Norman's life, i.e., between 1924 and 1928. The writers or scribes could have been members of the Syriac Orthodox ecclesiastical corps. In her book, *Assyrian Church Customs and the Murder of Mar Shimun*, which was published in London in 1920, Surma d'Bait Mar Shimun clearly records that the clergy in Nestorian communities, particularly in the Hakkari region of Turkish Kurdistan, administered amulets to the people. Reverend Justin Perkins, an American missionary who lived among the Nestorians in Persia for eight years, recounted the following incident which he witnessed: "A Moslem villager came asking for a remedy to cure his sick cow. Without further ado, the priest (Mar Yohanna, a Nestorian priest) wrote an amulet on the spot…" (Hunter, 1995, p. 25). In rudimentary societies, physicians were not readily available and if they were, not many people could afford them, and priests often assumed the role of "physicians" (Hunter, 1995, p. 25).

The Batrie amulets are of a personal nature, meaning that they were written for a specific person – in this case, for Norman Batrie, although no doubt on the orders of Norman's parents, Yacoub and Jamilla. It is not often that such amulets can be found or obtained outside of the families which own them, where they are considered "sacred" and are treasured by the family as part of its heritage. For many reasons – fear, for instance, of being thought

'ignorant' or 'superstitious' – many people would be reluctant to show these objects to strangers, let alone part with them. For this reason, the author is extremely grateful to Pauline and Patricia Batrie, the present owners of the amulets, for sharing their revered family heirloom and allowing the publication of this study.

Psalms 51 and 61, which are invoked in the Batrie amulets, are considered as the lamentation genre of the Psalms, nevertheless with a prevailing theme of trust in God's deliverance.

The scribes of Amulets among the Christian immigrants from the Eastern Mediterranean were mainly priests, either the parish priests (if there was a parish) or itinerant priests who used to travel around the provinces to provide services to the members of a given ethnoreligious group, or to respond to requests by a member of the group for a service. These itinerant priests performed a variety of ritual services. During their journey to a community, they carried sacramental elements and chrism for anointing baptized infants, the sick, and the dying. They heard confessions and pronounced absolution; they celebrated mass at one of the member's home, preached a sermon, catechized the children, performed requiem services, and officiated at Holy Matrimony.

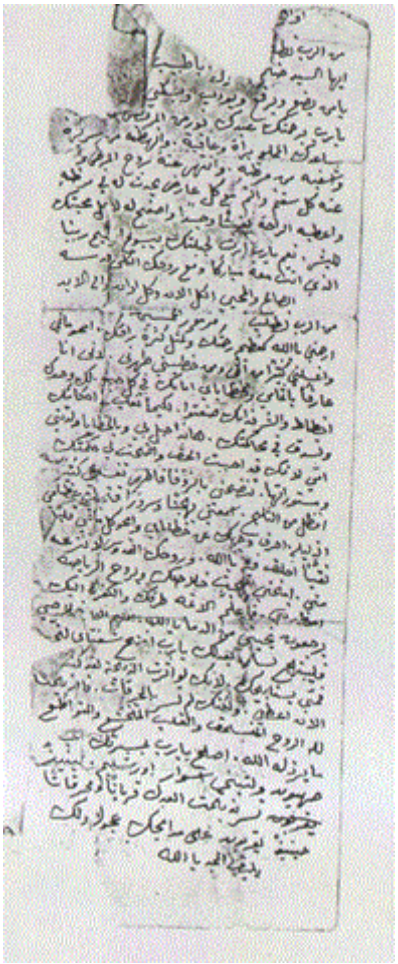
These itinerant priests were mainly priests from the homeland; particularly favored were those from the village, from which the immigrants hailed, or parish priests of a similar congregation in the country or traveling priests who were ordered by the bishop of the congregation to travel to the believers' whereabouts and perform these services. Christian priests and monks functioned as ritual experts to prohibit the use of magic and to intervene in cases where parishioners were found to be using sorcerers and charlatans. For believers, only members of the clergy were qualified enough to make religious amulets and thus, were the primary suppliers of them.

Syriac Orthodox priests from Mardin, Syria, or from the United States, would sporadically visit the Sherbrooke region, which remained without a permanent priest until 1952. According to Pauline Batrie, itinerant priests used to visit members of the coreligionists, which give us a possible provenance for Norman's amulet.

Description and Formulas of the Batrie Amulets

Amulet A

Amulet A measures 20.5 cm (length) and 7 cm (wide) and has been folded at least six times horizontally and two times vertically. It is handwritten in black ink in Arabic script on the verso of a strip of paper, blank on the recto. The bottom and right edges are preserved, but the top edge is torn, and about three lines are partially or completely missing. Otherwise, the manuscript is in good condition. It is composed of 14 lines of personal supplication and 21 lines from Psalm 51. The writing runs up to the left edge. There is hardly any free space above and below the text.



Amulet A

Amulet A has two sections: a personal supplication to God, which could be regarded as a "spell" to help cure Norman of his ailment; and a Psalmic prayer, Psalm 51:1-21. There is an example of a similar two-section inscription in manuscript Vienna K 8302 (Rainer, AN 191) where the text

intends to "provide protection against illness and the power of evil. The first section of the text bases its plea upon the correspondence between Abgar of Edessa[3] and Jesus…. and the second section presents a fairly enigmatic prayer of Elijah the Tishbite[4]…" (Meyer and Smith, 1999, p.113).

Translated Text

Section A (a): The Plea

"[…] *From God, we ask… O Lord …… O Physician… You who raises and abases who punishes and cures… God by Your mercy cure Your servant Norman who is sick…By Your hand which contains cure and health. Raise him from his sick bed. Cure him from his illness, take away the spirit of ailment and … Keep away any sickness and pain in every health crisis he undergoes. Grant him peace, in soul and body, and forgive him for Your love of humanity. Yes, O God have mercy on Your creation in the name of Jesus Christ, our God, with whom You are blessed with Your most Holy Spirit, the Good and the Giver of Life, now and forever. From God we ask*."

Section A (b): The Psalmic Text – Psalm 51

"*Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me. For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me. Against you, you alone have I sinned; I have done such evil in your eyes. So that you are just in your word, and without reproach in your judgment. Behold, I was born guilty, in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom. Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. You will let me hear gladness and joy; the bones you have crushed will rejoice. Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities. A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit. Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit. Restore to me the gladness of your salvation; uphold me with a willing spirit. I will teach the wicked your ways that sinners may return to you. Rescue me from violent bloodshed, God, my saving God, and my tongue will sing joyfully of your justice. Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice or I*

3 Abgar was a common name of the kings of Edessa. Legend has it that Abgard V (9-46 A.D.) corresponded with Jesus. "Eusebius claims to have translated from the archives of Edessa a letter sent by the sick king to Jesus requesting that he come to heal him, and a reply from Jesus explaining that after his ascension he would send a disciple to cure him. According to Eusebius, Thomas sent Thaddeus (Addai) to Edessa [as a disciple]" ("Abgar" (1997), Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, Second Edition, Vol. I, New York London: Garland Publishing, Inc., p. 6).

4 Elijah of Tishbite, a Jewish prophet, who was active in Israel during the reigns of Ahab and Ahaziah in the ninth century B.C. (Encyclopedia Judaica (1982), col. 632, Vol. 6).

would give it; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn. Treat Zion kindly according to your good will; build up the wall of Jerusalem. Then you will desire the sacrifices of the just, burnt offering and whole offerings; then they will offer up young bulls on your altar" (New American Bible, 2008, p.409).

Amulet B

Amulet B measures 16cm (wide) and 9.5cm (long). It is handwritten in black ink in Arabic script on the verso, blank on the recto. All edges are preserved. The manuscript, which is composed of 8 lines, is in good condition. The penmanship of this amulet is different from that of amulet A; it is clearly written by a different person.

Amulet B is a transcription of Psalm 61 "Prayer of the King in Time of Danger." It is "A lament of the king who feels himself at the brink of death (Ps 61:3) and cries out for the strong and saving presence of God (Ps61:3b-5)" (New American Bible, 2008, p.721). This amulet seems to have been made for Norman as a consequence of his deteriorating health with stronger supplication for the intervention of God to save him.

Amulet B

The prayer is Psalm 61: 2-9

Translated Text: The Psalmic Text – Psalm 61

"*For the leader; with stringed instruments by David: Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer! From the ends of the earth I call; my heart grows faint. Raise me up, set me on a rock, for you are my refuge, a tower of strength against the foe. Let me dwell in your tent forever, take refuge in the shelter of your wings. For you, O God, have heard my vows, you have granted me the heritage of those who revere your name. Add days to the life of the king; may*

his years be as from generation to generation. May he reign before God forever; send your love and fidelity prevents him. I will duly sing to your name forever, fulfill my vows day after day" (New American Bible, 2008, pp.721-722).

Amulets and the Psalms

As mentioned earlier, there are many examples of Christian amulets that use Psalmic quotations – Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, God or Christ's name, and verses from the Bible -- for healing and protection (Meyer and Smith, 1999).

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia New Advent, "The reliance placed upon amulets, like other forms of superstition, grew out of popular ignorance and fear. With the coming of the Christian religion, therefore, it was destined to disappear. It would have been too much, however, to have expected the victory of Christianity in this matter to have been an easy and instantaneous one" (Delany, 1907, n.p.). The new converts continued the use of amulets, substituting Christian creeds and symbols for older, heathen writing. Crow posited that "the Church Fathers and intellectuals made the distinction between the miracle of the relics and sacred words of the Bible, *verba sacra*, versus condemned amulets labeled as superstitious magic, a term used to delegitimize their use and imply demonic association" (Crow, 2009, p.97).

Crow also states that "during the Middle Ages, only members of the clergy were educated enough to make the amulets and thus, were the primary supplier of them to their parishioners—although there were non-clergy who sold them too." Furthermore, to Crow, "to the illiterate and uneducated, the distinctions between magic amulets and church-approved amulets were hardly discernable" (Crow, 2009, p.97).

Biblical verses were written down on parchment or paper, which allowed people to carry their power on their body. The use of inscription as a means to protect or ward off evil spirits "stemmed from a belief in early times in the holiness and in the power of words" (Encyclopedia Judaica, 2007, p.121). Children amulets are pinned to the children's clothes and are not to be shown. The book of Psalms, in particular, was a source of protective amulets.

In the Batrie amulet A, Psalm 51 is used. This Psalm is known as "The Miserere: Prayer of Repentance." In the same amulet, the first two verses, which are not popularly known, are not included. They are: "1. For the leader; A Psalm of David" and "2. When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba" (New American Bible, 2008, p.714).

Inscribed in Batrie amulet B is Psalm 61, a "Prayer of the King in Time of Danger." The first verse of this Psalm, also commonly deleted, is "1. For the leader; with stringed instruments. Amulet of David." Psalm 61 is submission to the will of God and is invoked when protection from evil is

needed.

Amulet A, Section a, consists of a personal prayer that beseeches God to take action, to banish and heal an illness, and to protect from future sicknesses. The prayer is both a plea for deliverance from the current sickness and for the prevention of future illness. Although it does not tell us what kind of disease or ailment Norman had, its use of imperative words such as “heal,” “lift,” “cure,” “turn away,” and “protect,” suggests the existence of a critical illness.

The supplication invokes the name of God in His essence (God, Lord) and God’s qualities (Abaser, Raiser, Chastiser, Healer, Compassionate/Merciful One, Comforter, and Forgiver). It also employs the Christian image of God as "The Physician," and of the Holy Spirit as "the Giver of life." These names and qualities are very common among amulet inscriptions.

The personal supplication reveals a fellowship with God. It also shows faith; trust in the power of prayers, and certitude in the power of the name of Christ: ""Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (New American Bible, 2008, p.1309) “Ask, and you shall receive” (New American Bible, 2008, p.1459); and “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive” (New American Bible, 2008, p.1336). The personal supplication and the use of the Psalms in both amulets A and B indicate a strong belief by the Batrie family that God exists, hears, and answers.

Commentary

There are many examples of Christian amulets that use Biblical quotations – Psalms, the Lord’s Prayer, God or Christ’s name, and verses from the Bible -- for healing and protection. The Psalms have sacred characters but people who use them for protection believe that they have magic characters as well.

The use of amulets as a conduit between man and the supernatural power and the use of Psalmic verses as healing medium with miraculous power are evident in the use of the Psalmic prayers in the Batrie amulets.

The personal supplication and the use of the Psalms in both amulets, A and B, indicate a strong belief in amulets and their power. The Batrie family, as well as many other immigrants, did not give up the beliefs that they were brought up with in their native land. Health and healthcare beliefs are culturally developed constructs; as such immigrant groups carry with them their own array of notions, superstitions, and practices into territories where there may be other and even contrary healthcare beliefs. Immigrant generations continued to cope with sickness in a strange land and society using their traditional beliefs and practices.

Commonly, the immigrant experience exhibits a generational pattern of assimilation to host country practices and beliefs. First generation immigrants, who maintain their beliefs and customs with little religious transformation, give way to second and third generations, who adapt certain frameworks of belief in their birth country and many no longer, practice the types of beliefs practiced by their parents or grandparents. Acculturation and upward socioeconomic mobility lead to a deeper integration of the Batrie Canada born generation into the normative structures of the hostland.

The use of amulets demonstrates the first generation immigrants' continuity of homeland religious beliefs and practices; but the puzzled reception of these amulets when they were re-discovered, and the evident forgetting of their use among the present day Batries, shows that these practices did not filter down to the Canadian born generations.

Amulets and other religious beliefs, customs and material culture need to be more fully studied from an inter-disciplinary viewpoint and incorporated into our larger historical reconstruction of the experience of first-generation immigrants as they navigated their new home spaces with the religious beliefs and practices they brought with them.

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