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The Semantic Network of Magic: A Structural Re-reading of the Qur'an in the Horizon of Jewish Texts



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Abstract

Magic represents a complex, multilayered concept in the Holy Qur'an. Semantic analysis reveals that, along the paradigmatic axis, Magic appears alongside concepts such as "Book," "Wisdom," "Qur'an," "Torah," and "Gospel." Concurrently, at the agentive level, it is associated with clusters including "The Disbelievers," "The Wrongdoers," and "The Criminals." However, intra-textual analysis alone does not elucidate the rationale for these semantic substitutions. Therefore, this article employs an inter-textual approach to Jewish texts, including the Torah, the Talmud, and inter-testament literature, to reconstruct the cultural and religious context in which the Qur'an engages with earlier traditions. By employing structural semantics in the analysis of the Qur'anic text and thematic analysis of Jewish sources, this study contends that Magic in both traditions is not an isolated term but is situated within a shared semantic network comprising three components: "Empowerment," "Wonder-production," and "Learnability." These components account for

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the Qur'an's placement of Magic alongside the Book, Wisdom, and other forms of divine knowledge on the paradigmatic axis, despite its opposing evaluative status. The primary distinguishing factor within this network is the "Source of Knowledge": revelation, the Book, and prophethood originate from God and the obedient "heavenly group," whereas the Qur'an attributes magic and divination to devils, and Jewish texts to rebellious angels and demons. Accordingly, this article shows that considering Jewish inter-texts clarifies the logic behind Qur'anic semantic substitutions. While the Qur'an shares a semantic structure with the Jewish tradition in distinguishing magic from miracles, it offers a critical, monotheistic reinterpretation by defining Magic as "Non-divine, competing knowledge that confers power."

Keywords: Magic, Qur'anic Semantics, Structural Semantics, Jewish Texts, Revelation, Miracle.

Introduction

The term Magic in the Holy Qur'an signifies more than a supernatural act or peripheral technique; it occupies a central position within a network of religious and epistemological concepts. The initial phase of this study analyzes the position of Magic within the Qur'anic lexical system through the structural-semantic method. This approach reveals that, along the paradigmatic axis, Magic appears alongside concepts such as "Book, Wisdom, Qur'an, Torah, and Gospel." At the functional level, it also shares a semantic field with clusters such as "The magicians, the disbelievers, the wrongdoers, and the criminals." These findings elucidate the structural relationships of Magic. However, this analysis raises a fundamental question: 'Why does the Qur'an's lexical structure place concept opposed in value and theology along the same paradigmatic axis?' Specifically, 'What cultural and epistemological logic leads the Qur'an to place Magic alongside divine forms

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of knowledge at the linguistic and structural level, while rejecting and condemning it at the evaluative level?'

The Holy Qur'an emerged within a milieu deeply influenced by Jewish and Christian traditions, drawing upon a body of knowledge familiar to its initial audience. Consequently, understanding the verses, including the meaning of Magic, requires examination of inter-textual connections with the Torah, the Gospel, and rabbinic literature, thereby clarifying the horizon of dialogue and the Qur'anic redefinition of these concepts (Sinai, 2017: 69-79).

Accordingly, the second phase of this study adopts an inter-textual approach to elucidate this phenomenon. By analyzing conceptions of magic in Jewish texts, including the Torah, the Talmud, and inter-testament literature, this study examines the semantic relationships surrounding Magic within the Jewish tradition. This analysis clarifies the context in which the Qur'an engages in dialogue with these traditions and redefines the meaning of Magic. The present study's examination of inter-textually does not aim to establish the Qur'an's direct dependence on Jewish texts or to reduce the meaning of Qur'anic concepts to those found in earlier sources. Shared narrative motifs, terms, or conceptual structures do not, by themselves, indicate borrowing, as such similarities may arise from a common cultural and religious milieu in Late Antiquity, oral transmission of narratives, or proximity and critical engagement with earlier traditions. Therefore, Jewish texts are analyzed within a comparable historical and cultural context.

On this basis, the analysis always begins with the Qur'an's intra-textual data: "The occurrences of the term Magic, its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, and the verses' narrative contexts." The findings derived from the Torah, inter-testament literature, and rabbinic texts are then used solely to

explain possible semantic horizons and to assess points of similarity and difference. Therefore, whenever a connection between the Qur'an and the Jewish tradition is discussed, the claim primarily concerns semantic alignment, dialogue, rereading, or conceptual boundary-setting, rather than textual dependence or direct borrowing.

1. Research Background

Iranian studies addressing Jewish material concerning magic are quite limited and have generally confined themselves to comparing the perspectives of the Qur'an and the Old Testament. In a study entitled "Magic in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments," the author presents magic as a phenomenon with a hidden origin associated with the devils and refers to the influence of Kabbalistic mysticism on Jewish beliefs (Saeedi, 2019 AD/1398 SH). Another study, entitled "An Examination and Comparison of the Concept of Magic and Sorcery in the Qur'an and the Old Testament," examines the lexical and terminological meanings of magic and emphasizes the prohibition of its use in both Islam and Judaism (Eslami, 2016 AD/1395 SH). In another study, entitled "The Islamic and Jewish Perspectives on Magic," the researchers identify various forms of magic and provide an initial comparison between Islamic and Jewish perspectives (Khalatbari & Rahmani, 2014 AD/1393 SH).

In Western scholarship, works such as Key Terms of the Qur'an likewise demonstrate, through detailed analysis, the similarities and differences between conceptions of magic in the Holy Qur'an and in Jewish and Christian texts.

A distinguishing feature of this study is its initial reliance on structural

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semantics, rather than solely on textual content, to deepen understanding of Magic in Islamic texts. This approach uncovers latent relationships among concepts. Subsequently, Jewish inter-texts are used to clarify these concepts and explain the semantic substitutions associated with Magic.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a comparative approach and employs two complementary methods: structural semantics¹ to analyze the term Magic in the Holy Qur'an, and thematic analysis to identify inter-texts and semantic patterns associated with magic in Jewish texts. In the first stage, the linguistic corpus of the study consists of all verses in which the root (*s-h-r*) and its derivatives occur. The analysis proceeded through four stages:

- 1) Extraction of the relevant verses and recording of their syntactic and semantic contexts;
- 2) Syntagmatic analysis to identify the words accompanying Magic, such as magician, diviner, possessed, warner, and will not prosper, and to formulate the syntactic relationships among them;
- 3) Paradigmatic analysis to identify the lexical items that occupy the position of Magic in similar syntactic structures, including "Book, Wisdom, Qur'an, what you did not know, the disbelievers, the wrongdoers, and others";

¹. To apply the structural-semantic method to the Qur'an, we drew on the model developed in the thesis entitled "The Semantics of Tadabbur in the Qur'an through Three Approaches: Structuralism, Etymology, and the History of Ideas."

- 4) Integration of the findings from the two axes to extract the semantic pattern and determine the position of the term within the Qur'anic epistemological system.

In this method, Magic is not analyzed as an isolated word; rather, it is examined within a lexical network. In other words, instead of defining Magic solely through the "Word Itself," we uncover a network of relationships within which the meaning of Magic takes shape. In the second stage, we use thematic analysis to uncover Jewish texts' perspective on magic. The following procedure was used for the thematic analysis:

- 1) Collection of all statements related to magic and sorcery in the Torah, the Talmud, and inter-testament books;
- 2) Open coding and conversion of the data into semantic units;
- 3) Axial coding and extraction of the principal themes; and
- 4) Identification of inter-texts, that is, shared or structurally analogous patterns that explain the logic underlying the paradigmatic substitutions and oppositions associated with Magic in the Qur'an. Thus, the combined research methodology enables us to analyze Magic both as a Qur'anic lexical item and as a phenomenon situated within the intellectual context of Late Antiquity.

3. Structural Semantics of Magic in the Holy Qur'an

Before proceeding to the inter-textual analysis, it is necessary to reconstruct the intra-textual network of the term Magic in the Holy Qur'an. This section uses structural semantics, which seeks a word's meaning within a network of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. In structural semantics, two complementary axes constitute the semantic system: the syntagmatic axis,

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which encompasses adjacent words within the syntactic structure and provides a pathway to the semantic network; and the paradigmatic axis, which determines the semantic domain of a word and includes lexical items that can substitute for the target word within the same syntactic context. A fundamental methodological point is that paradigmatic substitution is not a homogeneous relationship. It can be traced at distinct levels, with each level revealing a different layer of meaning. In the present analysis, three levels of substitution are distinguished: "The discursive level (substitution within the syntactic pattern of restriction), the agent-identity level (substitution involving human representatives), and the teachable-knowledge level (substitution in the object position of the verb *'Allama*, "to teach")."

3.1. The Discursive Level: Distributional Analysis of the Restrictive Pattern

The point of departure for the analysis is the most frequent collocate of Magic, namely the adjective "Clear," which occurs as an attributive adjective modifying Magic in the syntactic pattern "This is nothing but clear magic." (al-An'ām:7; Šāffāt:15; Saba':43) The adjective "Clear" occurs in the Qur'an with numerous modified nouns, including *Ḍalāl* (misguidance), *Kitāb* (Book), *Sulṭān* (authority), *Imam* (leader), *Nūr* (light), *Nadhīr* (warner), and others. From the perspective of distributional analysis, however, what matters is the identity of the syntactic form, rather than merely the sharing of the same modifying adjective.

The only modified noun that appears in precisely the same restrictive construction, "in + pronoun + illā + X + mubīn," is *nadhīr*: "in huwa illā nadhīrun mubīn" (He is nothing but a clear warner) (al-A'rāf:184). A similar

pattern is repeated in the broader family of restrictive constructions involving *Nadhīr* ('Ankabūt:50; al-Aḥqāf:9).

An analysis of the contexts of the verses concerning the *Nadhīr* shows that this concept emerges in contexts closely associated with speech and extraordinary acts. The reactions of the opponents in these contexts, including accusations of possession and fantasy (al-A'rāf:184; Yāsīn:69), requests for tangible miracles (al-'Ankabūt:50), and questions concerning the precise time of the Resurrection (al-Aḥqāf:26), all indicate that the Prophet's message appeared astonishing and extraordinary to them.

It is precisely within this context of wonder and in response to such demands that the position of *Nadhīr* emerges in contrast to *Sāḥir* (magician). Through this framing, the Qur'an makes clear that although the Prophet's work is extraordinary, it does not derive from magic, deception, a claim to intrinsic knowledge of the unseen, or independent human power. Rather, he is merely a messenger and warner whose extraordinary reports and acts are entirely dependent upon a divine source and revelation. Thus, this substitution occurs in the context of acts that lie beyond ordinary human capacities. Naturally, performing extraordinary acts confers power and increases an individual's social capital.

3.2. The Agent-Identity Level: The *Sāḥir-Majnūn* Construction and the Verb *Lā Yufliḥ*

The second level of substitution concerns the identity of the human representatives of *Magic* and can be traced through two syntactic pathways. The first is the coordinate construction "A magician or one possessed." (al-Ṭūr:39) An analysis of the collocations of *Majnūn* shows that this adjective is coordinated with *Kāhin* (diviner) in other contexts: "For you are not, by the

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grace of your Lord, a diviner or one possessed." (al-Ṭūr:29) Thus, diviner occupies a shared semantic domain with magician within the Qur'anic semantic network, and both are defined in opposition to "Messenger."

The second pathway is the verb "Does not prosper," whose subject in some contexts is "The magicians": "And the magicians will not prosper" (Yūnus:77); "And the magician will not prosper, wherever he may go." (Ṭāhā:69) Tracing the other subjects of the same verb leads to the substitutions "The wrongdoers," (al-An'ām:21, 135) "The disbelievers," (Mu'minūn:117) and "The criminals." (Yūnus:17) This overlap at the level of grammatical subject establishes these three groups as value-based substitutes for magician, that is, labels that the Qur'an applies to representatives of the pole of Magic. Since these groups' relationship to Magic is clear at the level of evaluative judgment and does not carry independent inter-textual significance for the present discussion, we refrain from analyzing them in detail.

3.3. The Teachable-Knowledge Level: The Paradigmatic Axis of the Verb *Allama*

The third and most important level of substitution is derived from the syntactic position of Magic as the object of the verb *Allama* (to teach): "They teach people magic." (al-Baqarah:102) Tracing the other objects of *Allama* leads to a set of concepts, the most frequent of which are "The Book" and "Wisdom," (al-Baqarah:151; Āli 'Imrān:164; al-Jumu'ah:2) followed by *al-Qur'ān* (al-Raḥmān:2), "The Torah" and "The Gospel," (al-Mā'idah:110) and "What you did not know." (al-Nisā':113) Alongside these, single occurrences such as "The names" (al-Ma'arah:31) and "The speech of the birds" (al-Naml:16) also occupy the same syntactic position. This distribution

demonstrates that, at the structural level, Magic is placed among teachable things, that is, things transmitted to a human agent through a process of instruction.

About "*Mantiq al-tayr*," it should be emphasized that, as a single occurrence, it does not have sufficient statistical value for generalization, but it does have illustrative value. It demonstrates that even ability apparently unrelated to magic, such as understanding the language of birds, when it originates in divine grace, is formulated within the same framework of extraordinary, empowering instruction. Prophet Solomon himself calls this knowledge "Manifest Bounty" and regards it as a source of his superiority and authority.

4. Semantic Components of *Magic*: A Componential Analysis

By bringing together the findings from the three levels, the semantic domain of *Magic* can be represented through componential analysis. Three components are shared by all the lexical items within this domain: "Empowerment," (the creation of a particular capacity in the human agent) "Wonder-production," (being extraordinary in relation to ordinary experience) and "Learnability." (the possibility of being taught and transmitted) This unified domain is divided into two poles by the "Source of knowledge" and the ethical-discursive function that arises from it.

Substitute	Empowerment	Wonder- Production	Learnability	Divine Origin
Magic (Magic)	+	+	+	—

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Kihānah (Divination)	+	+	+	—
Nadhīr (Prophetic Warning)	+	+	+	+
al-Kitāb / al- Ḥikmah (the Book / Wisdom)	+	+	+	+
al-Qur'ān	+	+	+	+
al-Asmā' (the Names)	+	+	+	+
Manṭiq al-Ṭayr (the Speech of the Birds)	+	+	+	+

Table 1. Semantic components of the domain of Magic in the Holy Qur'an

The table demonstrates a structural fact: "The first three components are shared by both poles, while only the final column establishes a distinction. At the divine pole, God is the true teacher; the objects of instruction are the Book, Wisdom, and the Qur'an; their bearers are the prophets; and their outcome is guidance and prosperity. At the non-divine pole, however, the initial teachers are the angels of trial (*Hārūt* and *Mārūt*), followed by the devils and human beings; their bearers are magicians and diviners and, at a broader level,

wrongdoers, disbelievers, and criminals; and their consequences are temptation, polytheism, and lack of prosperity."

Thus, Magic and revelation are not two unrelated phenomena. Rather, they are two forms within a shared semantic domain, distinguished by their source.

5. Transition to the Jewish Inter-text: A Methodological Necessity

The analysis of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations showed that Magic and divine forms of knowledge share three components and differ only in their source. At this point, however, intra-textual semantics reaches its limit. The Qur'anic text takes this structural similarity for granted and does not explain it explicitly. In other words, the Qur'an addresses an audience for whom it was apparently self-evident why knowledge derived from the Book and Wisdom should, like Magic, be empowering and wondrous, and why the two should occupy positions within a single syntactic network.

This presupposed obviousness is precisely where intra-textual analysis cannot answer, because the answer lies within the discursive horizon in which this similarity formed and was self-evident to the initial audience. Therefore, moving from semantics to inter-textual analysis is a methodological necessity: "To explain what the Qur'an presupposes, we must turn to the contemporary tradition in which the relationship between magic and the Book, Wisdom, and the divine Names was conceptualized. The next section addresses this issue from the perspective of Jewish inter-texts."

5.1. Empowerment

In Jewish texts, the magician uses his skill to summon spirits to consult them about various matters, including the spirits of wise individuals who are no longer alive (Sanhedrin 67b; Sanhedrin 65a:1; Keritot 3b:29; Jerusalem

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Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:10:10; Jeremiah 27; 1 Samuel 28; 2 Kings 21:6). Another individual uses magic to transform objects into one another, something that, according to the laws of nature, lies beyond human capacity. A person encounters various animals and uses magic to gather them at a particular location (Sanhedrin 67b; Pesachim 109b:4; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:2; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:7; Sanhedrin 65a:1). Some resort to magic to produce sensory illusions (Pesachim 109b:4; Sanhedrin 67b; Sanhedrin 17a:21; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:2; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:7). Magic also empowers the magician in economic life: with the aid of magic, he gathers cucumbers and gourds (Pesachim 109b:4; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:7, 2; Sanhedrin 67b; Sanhedrin 17a:21) and can either heal or inflict a wound through a particular incantation (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:1:54). Thus, within this tradition, magic is a means of intervening in the realm of nature and even in supernatural affairs. This is precisely the characteristic of "Empowerment" associated with Magic that we also find in the Qur'an: magic constitutes a competing form of power through which the magician confronts the miracles of the prophets. But are magicians the only ones who possess such distinctive abilities?

In contrast to the magic of the followers of falsehood, the Jewish tradition also contains a form of "Sacred" magic, or a power of creation, associated specifically with the pious and the sages. The texts recognize a form of magic that is acquired through reading and learning the Torah. The sages, particularly in the Babylonian Talmud (Levinson, 2010), derive their extraordinary powers from studying the Torah and practicing piety. This

power does not originate in demonic forces; rather, it derives from proximity to God and participation in divine power. According to this view, a pious person, because there is no veil of sin between him and God, is capable of creating a world (Sanhedrin 17a:21; Sanhedrin 67b). A prominent example of this power is the act of the sages *Hanina* and *Oshaya*, who, every Friday evening, by studying the laws of creation, would create a calf for themselves (Sanhedrin 17a:21; Sanhedrin 67b).

Likewise, the creation of a human being from dust constitutes another example of this particular power, which is available only to pious sages. This ability demonstrates that, within the intellectual system of the sages, supernatural powers do not necessarily originate in evil; rather, the manifestation of sacred power in the sages can also give rise to such abilities.

The wondrous acts of the sages perform, within this tradition, the same function as the miracles of the prophets in the Qur'an. Structurally, this is precisely what the Qur'an opposes to magic: "The interpretive and miraculous power of revelation versus magical power based on spirits and devils. Within this framework, the sacred text itself possesses a kind of "Causal Efficacy." The Torah is a book that, when accompanied by piety and purity, becomes a creative force. Thus, the sacred book is not merely a written repository of divine commandments. A learned person, through piety and mastery of its teachings, is capable of accomplishing things beyond the capacity of ordinary human beings. The Book itself is a source of power."

Given that the Arabs of the early Islamic period were also familiar with these concepts, the paradigmatic substitution of Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel with Magic becomes intelligible. These phenomena share a component of

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power in people's perception, and these books are not ordinary in the modern sense. In the Jewish texts examined, we did not find an account of the Book's power in the sense of the Preserved Tablet; instead, the discussion concerns acquiring power from the Torah and the power the sages themselves possess.

5.2. Learnability

The second shared component within the semantic domain of Magic in the Qur'an is "Learnability." Examining the source and teacher of magic reveals different aspects of the Islamic and Jewish traditions. Magic and divine knowledge are constituted within a teacher-learner relationship: "The Qur'an attributes magic to the devils' instruction, while it attributes Wisdom and the Book to divine instruction. The same verse also refers to the angels, who taught magic to human beings as an instrument of divine testing." (al-Baqarah:102) Human beings also appear in the role of teachers: when the magicians believe in God after their defeat by Moses, Pharaoh says to them, "He is indeed your teacher." (Ṭāhā:71) Given the importance of this issue and the presence of a narrative resembling al-Baqarah:102 in inter-testament texts, it will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections. According to inter-testament texts, Enoch and Jubilees recount that, initially, rebellious angels taught human beings spells, the cutting of roots, and knowledge of plants, angels who had been attracted by the beauty of women (The Book of Enoch, Ch. 3). At the next stage, knowledge is transmitted even through a human teacher. Mastery of magic is a prerequisite for membership in the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court), enabling its members to judge magicians. One recommendation to the sages is that one should not learn magic to practice it, but may learn it to understand and teach it (Sanhedrin

67b; Avodah Zarah 18a:2; Sanhedrin 68a:12; Sanhedrin 68a:6; Menachot 65a:2; Shabbat 75a:3). In other words, magic, like other branches of knowledge, is an object of theoretical instruction, while it is at the practical level that the religious prohibition becomes operative. Thus, in both traditions, magic occupies an intersection involving human beings, angels, spirits, and demons.

5.3. Wonder-Production

The third component is "Strangeness and wonder-production." In the Qur'anic narratives, very few actions are attributed to magic and magicians, and all of them are wondrous. 'Does the appearance of examples of magic and magicians in Jewish texts make this dimension of wonder more explicit?' If we examine examples of magic in Jewish texts, it becomes evident that they are all astonishing.

Talmudic narratives contain numerous accounts of wondrous transformations. Examples include pulling strands of silk from the nose, cutting a camel in two and causing it to rise again, and transforming a plank into a donkey (Sanhedrin 17a:21); the abnormal growth of plants (Avodah Zarah 38b:9) through particular incantations; and the creation of a three-year-old calf (Sanhedrin 17a:21; Sanhedrin 67b).

In contrast to the magic of the followers of falsehood, are the actions of representatives of the divine likewise wondrous?

The Book of Daniel contains a narrative showing that distinguishing a prophet from a non-prophet could be difficult. Daniel and his companions are described as being "Ten times" superior to the "Wise men and magicians" of the royal court (Daniel 1:20). All the court priests, magicians, and astrologers

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are unable to interpret a dream or read the writing on the wall. In contrast, Daniel, whom the people regard as possessing "The spirit of the holy gods," uncovers the mystery. Thus, the prophets performed various acts that, by ordinary standards, were impossible. They regarded themselves as messengers of a transcendent, invisible being; they turned a staff into a serpent and were unparalleled in interpreting dreams. This ability was so pronounced that even the prophet Daniel became chief of the court astrologers and magicians (Daniel 4:10).

The prophets themselves also knew the danger that extraordinary prophetic acts might be mistaken for magic. In the Torah, in the interpretation of Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel, it is explicitly stated that he says "Answer me" twice for two different purposes: "Once for the descent of fire and again so that the Israelites would not say that the fire was an act of magic, but would instead recognize it as a direct response from God." (Berakhot 6b:27; Berakhot 9b:8)

The audiences witnessing miracles have repeatedly found themselves at the boundary between "Miracle" and "Magic." The accusation that prophets were magicians, both in the Qur'an and in the Talmudic narratives we discuss below shows those audiences in both traditions understood magic and miracles as part of the same domain of wonder. In other words, there were groups within these societies who could perform wondrous acts without being connected to God, acts that were inconsistent with the ordinary order of nature. Therefore, when people first encountered an individual whose power derived from God and who produced extraordinary signs, their initial response was to classify that person among the magicians.

Thus, the very act of prophethood is wondrous. For ordinary people, understanding it resembles their understanding of magic and magicians. What, then, distinguishes the magician from the prophets? What component separates the two from one another?

6. The Distinguishing Component: The Source of Knowledge

In the Qur'an, an analysis of the contexts in which warner occurs shows that one central axis of the semantic dispute concerns the "Source of knowledge about the unseen and the future." The Prophet is repeatedly introduced in the Qur'an with the expression "I am only a clear warner," making it clear that he is neither a magician nor a diviner, nor the possessor of an independent power. Rather, he is a warner who conveys knowledge of the future based on revelation and the divine Sunnah. By contrast, the magician and diviner likewise claim a form of knowledge of the unseen and the ability to exercise extraordinary influence. Still, the Qur'an attributes its source to satanic insinuations and illegitimate access to the unseen realm. Accordingly, the semantic component that distinguishes prophethood from magic is the source of knowledge and power. Warner and magician/diviner constitute two opposing poles within a shared semantic domain: "Concern the wondrous, prophecy, and extraordinary influence, but one operates within the sphere of revelation and guidance, while the other operates within the sphere of temptation and misguidance."

As discussed in detail in the analysis of the empowerment component, the same logic of distinction also appears in the Jewish tradition. Jewish texts repeatedly distinguish between two forms of access to the unseen and to

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invisible powers: "On the one hand, wisdom and knowledge that derive from the Torah and from a proper relationship with God, whose bearers are the sages and true prophets" (Sanhedrin 17a:21; Sanhedrin 67b); and, on the other hand, knowledge obtained from demons, impure spirits, or rebellious angels, whose bearers are magicians, diviners, and false seers. They attract demons through incense (Sanhedrin 65a:1; Keritot 3b:29), or fast in cemeteries so that spirits will come to them (Sanhedrin 67b). Both groups may operate within the realm of wonder and produce effects in the external world. Thus, as in the Qur'an, the fundamental dispute concerns the source. For this reason, rabbinic texts place the true prophet in opposition to the magician and the false prophet.

7. The Teaching of Magic: *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* and the Rebellious Angels

The Qur'an and Jewish texts contain numerous narratives concerning the teaching and origins of magic. Each will be examined below.

7.1. The Origin of Magic in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, verses 102–103 of Surah *al-Baqarah* present a narrative in which two categories of unseen beings directly transmit magical knowledge. On the one hand, the devils function as teachers who instruct human beings in magic. On the other hand, two angels, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, teach people in Babylon a form of knowledge that belongs to the domain of magic. Yet, they preface their instruction with the explicit warning: "We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve." (al-Baqarah:102-103) In this narrative, magic is explicitly conceptualized as "Teachable Knowledge": knowledge whose origin lies

outside the ordinary realm of human experience. Magic enters the human world from both the realm of angels and the realm of devils, and its predominant function is temptation, misguidance, and the disruption of human relationships. However, all of these effects occur within the bounds of divine permission.

7.2. The Origin of Magic in Jewish Texts

In Jewish inter-testament texts, particularly Enoch and Jubilees, a comparable narrative pattern emerges regarding the origin of magic. In Enoch, the "Watchers" or "Sons of God" become attracted to the beauty of women, descend to earth, and teach human beings a range of supernatural secrets: spells and magical practices, methods of cutting roots and using plants, as well as techniques of adornment, weapons manufacture, and other skills that rapidly lead to violence, chaos, and moral corruption. In this narrative, the knowledge derived from magic is initially "Knowledge taught by rebellious angels." It is knowledge that transcends the human level and descends from "Above," but this descent is not of the same nature as the descent of the Torah or prophetic revelation. Rather, it is a distorted descent that works against human guidance, producing sexual corruption, structural violence, and cosmic disorder as its direct consequences.

As noted above, this angelic origin is further developed at the rabbinic level through demons. The Talmudic narrative therefore operates within the same logic as the Qur'anic conception of "Devils as intermediaries."

7.3. The Difference between the Qur'anic Narrative and Jewish Texts

In the Qur'an, the story of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* constitutes a substantially different reworking of the Jewish narratives: "The angels are no longer

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rebellious or autonomous beings; rather, they are completely obedient to the divine command, and their role is solely to administer a divine test intended to assess human responsibility." The Qur'an omits details about the angels' organization, their collective oath, the widespread transmission of forbidden knowledge, and their independent agency, introducing instead only two angels who descend in Babylon and explicitly warn that their instruction constitutes a test.

Unlike Enoch and Jubilees, which portray corruption as the consequence of the angels' deviation or rebellion, the Qur'an presents human beings as ultimately responsible for their own actions and attributes the true source of misguidance and "Disbelief" associated with magic to the devils rather than to the angels. In this way, by removing angelic autonomy, relocating the narrative to Babylon, and giving the devils a direct role, the Qur'anic account emphasizes monotheism, divine justice, and human moral agency while drawing a clear boundary between divine mission and satanic activity.

Moreover, the Qur'an explicitly places this narrative within the broader framework of the distinction between revelation and satanic insinuation: magic, even at the height of its apparent power, operates within the bounds of divine permission and is rendered powerless in the face of faith and piety. This pattern appears in the Talmud. Jewish texts, through their reworking of the rebellion and fall of the angels, formulate, on the one hand, the heavenly origin of magical knowledge and its relationship with spirits and demons, while, on the other hand, placing this knowledge in opposition to the Torah and prophetic wisdom, just as the Qur'an situates the story of *Hārūt* and

Mārūt within the broader conflict between the Book and magic, revelation and satanic insinuation, and angels and devils.

Accordingly, the story of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* in the Qur'an and the narratives of the rebellious angels in Enoch and related texts constitute two distinct forms of a shared idea. This narrative and ontological structural correspondence places the semantic analysis of Magic in the Qur'an within an inter-textual horizon in which the boundary between revelation and magic is not a boundary between the "Real" and the "Unreal," but rather a boundary between two forms of descent and two types of relationship with God and the "Heavenly Group."

8. Miracle and Magic: "The Discursive Conflict between Two Traditions

In the Qur'an and Jewish texts, "Miracle" and "Magic" are not merely two entirely different phenomena at the level of sensory experience; rather, they represent two theological readings of the supernatural." Magic, in contrast to the miracle, is portrayed as limited, controllable, weaker than divine power, and generally evil. We can trace the signs of this discursive conflict, which demonstrate the opposition to and weakness of magic, at several levels: "In the Torah's narrative of Moses' encounter with the Egyptian magicians; in the Talmudic conceptual definition of magic; in the legal distinction between actual magic and optical illusion; and in narratives concerning piety and sacred time."

In Jewish texts, magic is not an absolute power through which anything whatsoever can be accomplished. It is a real but limited power, quickly

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rendered powerless before divine power and the status of piety (Kiddushin 39b:16). The Talmud explicitly states that magicians cannot create something from nothing; at best, they can manipulate existing beings or produce abnormal phenomena. Magicians are unable to create "Anything smaller than a grain of barley," (Sanhedrin 17a:21) and their activity ultimately consists of limited manipulation of pre-existing beings rather than genuine creation.

The biblical account reflects the same pattern. In the Torah, the Egyptian magicians imitate some of the acts of Moses and Aaron: transforming staffs into serpents and producing frogs (Exodus 7:8–12, 22; Exodus 8:7). But when the time comes to produce "Lice", they are unable to imitate the act and acknowledge: "This is the finger of God." (Exodus 8:18-19) The Talmud regards this scene as the point of rupture between magic and divine action: a point at which the magicians recognize that they are confronted with a type of action that can no longer be explained according to the logic of invisible forces under their control (Sanhedrin 17a:21). Thus, an implicit yet decisive boundary is drawn between the limited power of magic and the creative act of God.

In the Talmudic formulation, this duality is also made explicit at the conceptual level. The sage Yohanan interprets the term "Keshafim" as an acronym meaning "Opposition to the heavenly group." Magic is therefore condemned because it appears to challenge the "Heavenly/legal order" and ostensibly to violate the laws of nature (Sanhedrin 17a:21).

Moreover, magic is existentially dependent on material and environmental conditions: a magician can act only within a particular context and through specific objects and elements, and separation from the physical environment

causes his magical power to disappear (Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:2:6; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 6:6:5).

In addition to this weakness, some of the magicians' acts do not have any actual external realization at all. The Talmud distinguishes between "Real Magic" and "Optical Illusion": "The former is punishable by stoning, whereas the latter, although prohibited, does not entail a fixed punishment." A well-known example is the story of collecting cucumbers or gourds through magic: two people perform apparently identical acts, but one merely creates an illusion, while the other, by employing invisible forces, genuinely produces an effect in the external world. Consequently, only the latter is considered a "Magician" in the legal sense and is subject to punishment (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:7; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7:13:2; Sanhedrin 17a:21; Pesachim 109b:4; Exodus 22). Structurally, this distinction parallels the Qur'anic distinction between "They bewitched the eyes of the people" and Moses' genuine "Sign," which, at the level of reality, alters the natural order by God's command.

One indication that magic operates at a level inferior to divine power is that people can identify it. Rabbinic texts even propose a set of objective tests for detecting magic: bringing the suspicious object into contact with water; examining bodily signs after cutting open a camel, such as the presence or absence of blood and excrement; or carefully observing the movements of the lips while a drink is being offered (Sanhedrin 17a:21). These methods indicate that non-divine forces, although real, operate within an order that is recognizable and controllable, unlike divine power, which is itself the source of order and truth.

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The fundamental weakness of magic becomes fully apparent in its confrontation with the heavenly group. Within this framework, piety plays a crucial role in opposition to magic. Jewish sages maintain that a pious person is protected against magic because divine power safeguards him (Sanhedrin 17a:21; Kiddushin 39b:16). A Talmudic narrative recounts a sage who enters a place filled with demons, while angels protect him from their harm, an illustrative narrative of the direct connection between piety, angelic protection, and the ineffectiveness of magic. Another manifestation of the same logic is the account of the sage *Hanina*, from beneath whose feet people take dust for magical purposes; he remains unconcerned, invoking the verse, "There is none besides Him." (Deuteronomy 4:35) This emphasizes that inner monotheism blocks spells.

Even sacred time helps restrict magic. In some narratives, the Sabbath is presented as a time when sacred authority is at its height, leaving no room for effective magic; acts such as summoning spirits become ineffective on this day, and evil forces are compelled to retreat (Sanhedrin 67b). Thus, sacred time establishes a symbolic and practical boundary between the sacred and magical domains and reinforces the hierarchy of power.

In addition, Deuteronomy 18:9-12 clarifies the theoretical framework of this opposition: "Divination, soothsaying, magic, enchantment, the summoning of spirits, and consulting the dead are all abominations before the Lord, and because of these practices the Canaanite peoples are driven out from before Him." Immediately thereafter, the same text promises that the Lord will raise "A prophet like Moses." (Deuteronomy 18:15) Thus, within a single field of "Communication with the supernatural," one pole, magic and the summoning

of spirits, is categorically prohibited, while the other, prophecy, is established as the legitimate and revelatory form of the same human orientation toward the supernatural.

Accordingly, Jewish texts portray magic as a real but limited power. The widespread fear surrounding it is socially understandable, but it can never replace God's absolute power or the power associated with piety. This representation establishes a hierarchy of powers and distinguishes miracles and divine acts from magic; in doing so, it reinforces the spiritual and social status of prophets and sages and legitimizes the religious order.

9. The Accusation of Magic against Prophets: The Magician as a Substitute for the Messenger

In both traditions, the accusation of "Magic" and "Sorcery" can be understood as a discursive strategy. When a society encounters a new prophetic and revelatory message, it seeks to neutralize and reject it by placing it in a familiar, already discredited category. In the late ancient world, one of the most readily available categories was that of the "Magician/sorcerer," a person who communicates with invisible forces but does so outside the framework of revelatory legitimacy. Such a person is understood as having acquired this ability through forbidden forms of knowledge.

10. Pre-Islamic Labels in the Qur'an: Magician and Diviner

In the Qur'an, this strategy is clearly reflected in the accusations of "Magician" and "Diviner" directed against the Prophet. In pre-Islamic Arabian culture, both titles referred to contact with unseen forces: "The

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Diviner was associated with spirits and jinn, while the Magician was associated with spells and mysterious powers. It should be noted that accusations of madness and poetry also occur repeatedly in the verses. However, within a structural-semantic approach, "Madman" and "Poet" were not identified as substitutes for magician. They occur only in verses concerning magic and therefore belong to a different semantic domain. Nevertheless, the belief prevalent among the people at the time of revelation was that the jinn were capable of hearing news from heaven (al-Jinn:8-9), and that a jinn accompanied the poet. In other words, the jinn constituted a focal point connecting poetry with claims of receiving information from heaven. In pre-Qur'anic Arabic, it was sometimes said that a poet conversed with a jinn-like or demonic companion and that poetry arose from non-human inspiration (Goldziher, 1896: 1-44). Although more recent studies emphasize that this conception was limited and in decline (Bauer, 2010: 721, 728-729), this association nevertheless contributed to the use of labels such as "Poet" and "Madman" in religious disputes to discredit the Prophet's speech. The idea of jinn who hear news from heaven appears in both Arab traditions and Jewish inter-texts. For example, the Babylonian Talmud speaks of demons who listen "From behind the curtain" or who, because of their ability to move between earth and heaven, acquire knowledge of certain future events (b. Hag. 16a).

Accordingly, attributing these labels to the Messenger serves two functions. First, it reduces the experience of revelation to experiences familiar and explainable within the existing cultural framework. Second, it strips the Prophet's speech of divine legitimacy and transfers him from the cluster of "Revelation/Book/Wisdom" to the cluster of "Magic/Divination." The

Qur'anic response explicitly rejects these labels and emphasizes the role of the "Warner" and the "Messenger," that is, it redefines the Prophet's identity within a new framework centered on revelation and the Book, rather than magic.

This designation also appears to carry an insulting connotation in Jewish texts. In other words, when a person speaks about content that he himself does not understand and merely repeats it, the implication may be that he is like a magician. One narrative states: "The magician recites an incantation, but he himself does not know what he is saying." (Sotah 22a:11) Thus, when a prophet is called a magician, one possible dimension of the accusation is: You yourself do not understand the things you say; you merely repeat them.

11. Jesus in the Talmud: The Magician versus the Prophet

In Jewish tradition, a prominent example of this mechanism appears in the explicit attribution of magic to Jesus. In a narrative recounting the condemnation and execution of Jesus of Nazareth, one of the central accusations is that "He practiced magic, incited the people to idolatry, and led Israel astray." (Sanhedrin 43a:20; Sotah 47a:14) Here, describing Jesus as a "Magician" is not merely a report of his extraordinary abilities; rather, it is an identity-forming and theological label whose purpose is to shift him from the potentially legitimate status of a prophet/Messiah to that of a "Magician." This labeling functions as a strategic instrument for controlling society, directing collective beliefs, and consolidating the socio-religious order (Bohak, 2008: 398-401), precisely the same function the Meccan polytheists performed when they labeled the Prophet a "Magician."

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12. False Prophets in the Bible: Vision, Prophecy, and Magic

This strategy also applies to "False Claimants" within the Jewish tradition itself. In several passages of the Bible, false prophets are characterized by two principal components: "On the one hand, their use of visions, prophecy, and "Discourse concerning the unseen"; and, on the other hand, their use of magic and sorcery to consolidate their influence." The Torah states that these prophets "Prophesy falsely in my name ... and speak to you through magic, sorcery, and the imagination of their hearts," and that the Lord will destroy both them and their followers because of this misguidance (Jeremiah 14). In Ezekiel, women who present themselves as prophetesses are depicted as using "Charms and enchanted veils" on people's arms and heads, ensnaring them like birds in magical traps and exercising power over their lives and destinies. The Lord promises to tear apart these charms and liberate the people from their domination (Ezekiel 13). In Micah, too, false prophets exercise authority over the people through visions, prophecy, and the receipt of "Payment," until the Lord decrees for them "A night without vision" and "Darkness without prophecy." (Micah 3) From a narrative perspective, these figures use the same verbal instruments, dreams, visions, and prophecy and sometimes magic, still, their trajectory runs from God to idols and from guidance to misguidance. It is from this perspective that the concept of the "Magician" becomes the negative substitute for the Messenger in both discourses. In both traditions, the magician and the prophet share several superficial characteristics: "Both speak of the unseen and the future, both may perform wondrous acts, and both can exert profound influence over a community." At the level of their

relationship to God and truth, however, they occupy opposing poles: "The prophet is the bearer of God's word and an instrument of guidance, whereas the magician either employs impure forces and demons to exert influence or fabricates a claim to prophecy through visions, magic, and sorcery, thereby leading society away from God. Thus, what appears in Qur'anic semantic analysis as the opposition between "Magician/Diviner" and "Warner/Messenger" also appears in the Torah and Talmud as a structured opposition between the "True Prophet" and the "Magician/False Prophet."

13. Magic, Attitudes, and Everyday Life: Its Social-Cultural Function

In Jewish texts, magic is not a "Marginal Belief." Magic is actively present within the social and cultural fabric. In the Talmud, fear of magic and demons permeates even the minutest dimensions of everyday life. The following examples illustrate how magic appears in daily life.

The explicit recommendation to avoid eating and drinking in pairs, particularly during the Passover meal, is directly associated with fear of magic and demons. A person should not eat or drink in pairs, because the concern is that anyone who consumes paired items may expose himself to magic or demons (Pesachim 109b:4). The regulations concerning defecation and touching the anus are structured according to the same logic. If someone violates the prescribed procedure by sitting down first and then touching the area around the anus, "Even if magic is performed in a distant place, such as Spain, it will affect him." The only remedy is to recite an anti-magical incantation (Berakhot 62a). In addition, the sages warned against touching food left unattended in public spaces, because it might have been used for

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magical purposes (Eruvin 64b; Jerusalem Talmud, Demai 3:3:2; Avodah Zarah 38b:9).

Similarly, certain plants and objects acquire protective functions, and people attach anti-magical symbols to their bodies. Rings made from the madder plant, worn around children's necks, are described in a Talmudic narrative as having a therapeutic function and, at a higher level, an anti-magical function, depending on the number of rings: "Three rings restrain illness, five rings heal, and seven rings are also effective against magic." (Shabbat 66b) In another narrative, demons may transmit illness to an individual. Magic is thus closely intertwined with fear of demons and evil spirits. The same logic appears in the story of the bathhouse, a place frequented by demons, from whose harm only a pious person, protected by angels, remains safe (Kiddushin 39b).

These examples demonstrate that, in the rabbinic tradition, magic functions as a mechanism for regulating everyday perception and behavior: "A system of rules and fears that places rituals, interactions with objects, and even movement through public spaces within the sphere of invisible forces. Within this framework, magic is a form of knowledge capable of intervening in the body, nature, and human relationships; for this reason, it generates fear, surveillance, and moral boundary-making within the social sphere."

The Qur'an likewise does not deny the reality of magic's effects. Still, it shifts the center of gravity of fear, reducing magic from an autonomous force to an "Agent operating by divine permission." Thus, everyday life is organized not around fear of demons and spells, but around the human being's monotheistic relationship with God. Al-Baqarah:102 states that magic is used to disrupt the

marital relationship, just as it serves this function in Jewish texts (Jerusalem Talmud, Ketubot 1:1:4). Yet this is immediately situated within a divine-causal framework: no magic, even at the height of its efficacy, can transcend the sphere of "Divine Permission."

On the other hand, the story of Pharaoh's magicians establishes a cognitive distinction between "Magic that constitutes sensory deception" and "Divine Action." In the Qur'an, God describes the magicians' action as bewitching the people's eyes; in other words, they produce an illusion. By contrast, Moses' staff is transformed into a serpent, and the Qur'an explicitly states that this is not magic but "The Truth" that overcomes "Falsehood." (al-A'rāf:118-119; Tāhā:69) At the epistemic level, this narrative framework establishes for the audience the following message: "Magic manipulates sensory perception and produces wonder; yet ontologically, it is neither creative nor autonomous; rather, it is falsehood that collapses when confronted with divine action."

At the emotional level, the Qur'an does not eliminate fear of magic; rather, it relocates it. The emphasis in al-Baqarah:102 on "But they cannot harm anyone through it except by God's permission" effectively transfers the object of fear from the magician's act itself to God's will. That is, the believer learns to fear magic, but not as an autonomous force; rather, it is understood as one channel through which divine testing may occur.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the Qur'an and Jewish religious texts, despite their historical and theological differences, employ a shared semantic

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structure in their representation of magic. In both, magic belongs to a domain of knowledge/power in which extraordinary acts, wondrous forms of knowledge, and the capacity to influence the world and human beings are central. Yet this domain is divided into two opposing poles based on the binary distinction between divine and non-divine origin.

In the Qur'an, magic is formulated alongside the Book, Wisdom, the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Gospel, and in opposition to them. At the same time, the distinguishing component is the "Source of Knowledge." In Jewish texts, too, real magic, spells, and the summoning of spirits are positioned against the Torah, wisdom, and the power of the sages. The Qur'anic narrative of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* and the narrative of the rebellious angels in inter-testament literature represent two forms of a single underlying idea: supernatural knowledge that is teachable, has departed from the sphere of divine guidance, and has become an instrument of temptation and misguidance.

The Qur'anic substitutes for magic, both at the conceptual level, Book, Wisdom, and Qur'an, and at the functional level, warner and Messenger, have clear counterparts in the Jewish tradition: "Torah, wisdom, prophet, and sage." Conversely, both traditions formulate the opposition between miracle and magic through a shared dialectic: People initially interpret prophets' acts within the framework of magic, but the religious text distinguishes miracle from magic by emphasizing its divine origin and its orientation toward guidance.

Finally, in both discourses, magic is not merely a theoretical subject; it is an instrument for shaping attitudes, regulating behavior, and consolidating the socio-religious order. In the Jewish tradition, this occurs through everyday

practices and legal regulations; in the Qur'an, it occurs through redefining the relationship between magic and the Book, Wisdom, and revelation, and by reducing magic to an epistemically inferior and condemned level.

These structural correspondences and differences demonstrate that, in its representation of magic, the Qur'an engages in an implicit and critical dialogue with the Jewish tradition. On the one hand, it shares with that tradition the broader structure of the semantic domain of magic; on the other hand, through its distinctive substitutions and evaluative configurations, it offers a particular representation of the relationship among magic, revelation, power, and ethics.

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