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# TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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## THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS WORLD: VII. TALISMAN, SHIELD, AND SWORD

The fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in the Muslim world were marked by increased confrontation between Islamic states and their enemies, by inspiring military victories and crushing defeats, by the gain and loss of vast territories, by the gradual weakening of Islamic state formations and by the continued successful expansion of Islam as an ideology. These centuries saw the great victories and death of Tīmūr, the victorious conclusion of the reconquista in Spain, the fall of Constantinople and the huge territorial gains of the Ottomans in Europe, the emergence of the Great Moghūl state in India, the disappearance of the Mamlūk state, the victory of the Portuguese and the Turkish siege of Vienna, Russian victories and Ottoman defeats, Napoleon's arrival in Egypt... These events were accompanied by important changes in ideology and religious main streams. In the world of Islam the growing influence and spread of Šūfī teachings were of prime importance.

In the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the role of wandering Turkic *darwīshes* and Central Asian *bābās* underwent exceptional growth in the states of Asia Minor, the advanced post of Islam on the approaches to Europe. The brotherhoods, which endowed battle with religious symbolism and marked additions to their ranks with special formulas of initiation, abetted a significant rise in the number of soldiers on the fronts of the Holy War and heightened the degree of ideological confrontation. Tens of thousands of Šūfīs felt that to sacrifice one's life while defending the path of one's *shaykh* represented only the most paltry degree of dedication. They not only accompanied the army and maintained the morale of warriors, but themselves took part in battles. A great number of them fought, for example, in the last siege of Constantinople in 1453.

The brotherhoods actively participated in armed conflicts between Muslims as well. During an inspection of his troops in 1516, before the decisive encounter with the Mamlūks which would grant the Ottomans centuries of control over Syria and Egypt, Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī was accompanied by the leaders of the Badawīyya, Qādirīyya, and

Rifā'iyya beneath the banners of their respective brotherhoods [1].

From the fifteenth century on, we see the increasing involvement of Šūfī brotherhoods in political processes. The descendants of Šafī al-Dīn al-Ardabīlī (d. 1334), founder of the Šafawīyya brotherhood which gave rise to a powerful religious movement, established control over the main territories of Persia, founded the Šafawid dynasty and proclaimed Twelver Shi'ism the state religion. Ismā'īl I, the founder of the dynasty, transferred his power to the Great Deputy of the head of the order. Members of the Ni'mat-Allāhiyya order, closely connected with the Šafawids, headed a number of provinces in the new state. At practically the same time, the Naqshbandiyya order gained control over significant territories in India, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Brotherhoods professing a mixed Šūfī-Shi'ite doctrine began to play an ever greater role on the enormous territory from the Balkans to Persia. The broad expansion of Shi'ite ideology, state-sponsored in a number of instances, the flourishing of Persian artistic culture, which took place under strengthened Shi'ism, introduced many new elements to Islam. At times these were of revolutionary import both in their content and in the form of their expression.

The success of Šūfī teachings, their transformation into "folk Islam", led in particular to a growth in the role of the magical in everyday life. A world of forebodings, prophecies, dreams and symbols created an atmosphere of *khānagāh*. Rituals, music and singing, specific systems of rhythmic movement, fragrances and narcotic substances were used to attain special states of consciousness. A special role was played by the magic of numbers and words, by colours and smells, incantations and spells.

All of this could not but influence the outward appearance of the Sacred book of Islam, the nature of its use, and the demands placed upon it by the new era. Manuscripts of the Qur'ān were ordered in accordance with new preferences. Literature on the Qur'ān underwent significant changes.

### 1

It was at this time that numerous talismanic Qur'āns appeared [2]. Such, for example, are an oval Qur'ān dated to 1692; a Qur'ānic scroll approximately four meters in

length and 6 cm in width, where the text of the Qur'ān is written into *āyat al-kursīy* (seventeenth century); a somewhat later scroll, where the text of the Qur'ān is already