

## The Scorpion

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**Abstract.** The phenomenon of pilgrimage to Ta‘izz, south west Yemen, to the grave of the Jewish and Yemeni poet Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi (1619–1680†) is well known. However, the scorpion in that context has been less scrutinized.

I wish to focus on the phenomenon of pilgrimage to his grave, by Jews and Muslims, from the point of view of art history. The target is to shed light on the scorpion as a symbol of fertility. The basis is the belief that visiting his grave will cure infertility. While being there, the appearance of an alive scorpion was considered a sign of cure.

The scorpion will be shown in four new types of Jewish jewellery from Ḳan‘ā from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, as well as, its origin in Jewish and Islamic art and belief.

*[Yemen, Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi, jewellery, scorpion, fertility]*

### Introduction

From 1882 till 1950 Jews of Yemen made *Alia* (come back) to Israel. This had turned Israel to the only place in the world to research phenomena of Jews of Yemen in real time of its still happening in Yemen, including jewellery.<sup>1</sup>

The scorpion is the main iconography of four types of jewellery brought into Israel, as well as, existed in Ḳan‘ā in the Jewish community in parallel time: *Labbah* (s.), *Lazem* (s.), *Khoratah* (s.) and *Aqrabe* (s.).<sup>2</sup> All the four are new types dated to nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not known in the eighteenth century in Ḳan‘ā (Berger 1987; Berger 2005). There is no scorpion at all in Jewish iconography in the Jewish community in Ḳan‘ā in the eighteenth century, except only from one type of jewellery dated from the end of the eighteenth century/the beginning of the nineteenth century, of which I named *Humat al-aqrab*(s.) – “Scorpion’s Venom”, from the reasons explained below (<http://www.orberger.co.il/phd/>).

This paper is concerned with the scorpion in the above mentioned new types of Jewish jewellery in Ḳan‘ā in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the essence of its existence lie three questions. First, whose scorpion is it? Second, is the scorpion a new iconography in Yemen? Third, what is the art formula of the scorpion and what can we conclude out of that?

1 The four founders of the research on Jews of Yemen in Israel at the time are Erich Brauer, Simon Gridi, Prof. Boris Schatz and Mordechai Narkiss. Erich Brauer focused on the Jewish women, Simon Gridi on jewellery, Boris Schatz on acquiring Yemenite art to The Jewish National Museum Bezalel which was at the time part of Bezalel Academy of Art (established 1906, Jerusalem) and Mordechai Narkiss on Jewish art. For the M.A. thesis of Simon

### The Scorpion and Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi

One of the first phenomena that had been researched in Israel is the pilgrimage to Ta‘izz to the grave of the Jewish poet Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi (1619–1680†). Erich Brauer had conducted the research as a field work among Jews of Yemen in Israel at the first years of the twentieth century (Brauer 1935: 65–169).

One of his conclusions shows the scorpion as a symbol of fertility. The basis is the popular belief that visiting al-Shabazi’s grave will cure infertility. While being there, the appearance of an alive scorpion was considered as a sign of cure. The alive scorpion was taken confidentially. The phenomenon was wide and was common to Jews and Muslim women (Brauer 1935: 168).

Earlier information on that phenomenon and its wide popularity among Jews and Muslims was provided by Yaakov Saphir, an emissary from Israel to Yemen in 1859

(Yaari 1951: 135). That puts the peak of this phenomenon in the middle of the nineteenth century, and its beginning sometime between al-Shabazi's death (1680 †) and Saphir's visit of 1859.

Tobi shows, on the basis of earlier Islamic sources, that pilgrimage was natural to Jews who were condemned for that by the Prophet. However, in the last centuries that habit hardly kept by Jews of Yemen, except two pilgrimages, of which that to Ta'izz is the most famous (Tobi 1964: 81, n. 7). Al-Shabazi's pilgrimage was so popular that when Jews of Ṣan'ā, who were not allowed to arrive to Aden for the come back to Israel, said they are going to Ta'izz to visit the grave of al-Shabazi, they were allowed to pass (Nadaf 1929: 333).

The point that emerges from this, is the direct connection between the scorpion as a fertility symbol of al-Shabazi's pilgrimage and the new appearance of the scorpion, simultaneously, in *Labbah*, *Lazem*, *Khoratah* and *Aqrabe* as new types of Jewish jewellery in Ṣan'ā. Thus, on the background of the absence of the scorpion in Jewish iconography in Ṣan'ā in the eighteenth century.

## Ṣan'ā and the scorpion

### *Labbah* (choker)

Unfortunately, one of the rarest images of the scorpion is existing only as a photographed version (Fig. 1). As far as I know, it is the earliest known image of the scorpion in Jewish jewel from the nineteenth century in Ṣan'ā. The image of the scorpion here is a hammered relief in the center of each of *Tatarif* (pl.), which are the two triangular box-construction finials comprising the locker of *Labbah*.

This *Labbah* was brought into the studio in the home of a Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā, in 1937, to be melt for its heavy silver as an old Jewish piece of solid silver. It is a very heavy piece, as that specific *Labbah* is comprised out of plenty box-construction units, each made of solid silver three-dimensional box-construction. This *Labbah* had been photographed there by Carl Rathjens from the Hamburg Museum of Ethnography to his request, just before its melting, as a honor gesture of the Jewish silversmith, whose name is not known yet.<sup>3</sup>

The art formula of the scorpion here is very clear. It is an "up to down" view on a real scorpion. It should be emphasized that an "up to down" view on an object was the most common artistic way of presentation in Yemen, no matter in what medium. Hence, that is not unique, neither to Jewish silversmith, nor to the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries Jewish art in Ṣan'ā. As for example, an "up to down" presentation of varied objects is shown in 'carpet pages' (full illuminated pages) of Hebrew illuminated bibles from Yemen from the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries.

However, in our case here, the "up to down" view of the scorpion is in little scale and the body looks as it is eliminated and merged with the tail into a long and narrow hammered line. In addition, the poison gland – the most dominant feature of the scorpion – is emphasized as a round hammered bulge at the end of the tail. Also, the four couples of legs, typical to the scorpion, are hammered as short straight eight lines.

If we look on this specific image of the scorpion in the eyes of the Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā in the nineteenth century, we may see something else. The two silver triangular *Tatarif*, as well as, the hammered scorpion on each, is also the way of the silversmith to present "Angles Script" from the Hebrew Kabbalistic manuscript known as *Raziel the Angle*. i.e., instead of writing an amulet on paper or parchment, the silversmith had executed a silver amulet as the locker of this *Labbah*.

*Raziel the Angle* is a very well known manuscript among Jewish silversmith in Yemen and some had brought it into Israel. As for example, in 1975, in the State of Israel, Sima

Gridi, see Gridi 1937. For jewellery as acquired by Prof. Boris Schatz and Mordechai Narkiss to The Jewish National Museum Bezalel, Jerusalem, see Narkiss 1941. The stories of the Yemenite jewellery that had brought to Israel are varied. Some stayed with the families. Others found a way outside Israel. Some were acquired for Bezalel and later on had turned to the jewellery core of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Some were acquired, much later on, by The Israel Museum. Two of the jewels shown here belong to the last two sources (Figs. 2, 5–6).

2 The Jewish *Manage* and jewels made for Muslim women in Ṣan'ā in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not discussed here.

3 I would like to thank Dr. Rüdiger Vassen and Gertrud Schier for the photo (forth travel of Carl Rathjens to Ṣan'ā 1937–1938).

4 I would like to thank Sima Golan and Ofra Brono for giving me their Seminar. For reconstruction of some "Angles Script" see Budge E. A. 1930: 440. The scorpion is in example no. 3 (third line right). The triangle is in example no. 2 (second line right).

5 The controversy first came to the open in the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in Ṣan'ā in other matters. For the dispute in the open, known among Jews of Yemen as the *'Igshim and Darda'im* dispute see Nini 1975.

6 For photos of the Jewish bride adorned with *Labbah*, photographed by Carl Rathjens in Ṣan'ā in 1934 see Berger 1987: 17–18, figs. XX.1–XX.2. I would like to thank Dr. Rüdiger Vassen and Gertrud Schier for the photos. For photos of the Jewish bride adorned with *Labbah* photographed by Yihye Haybi

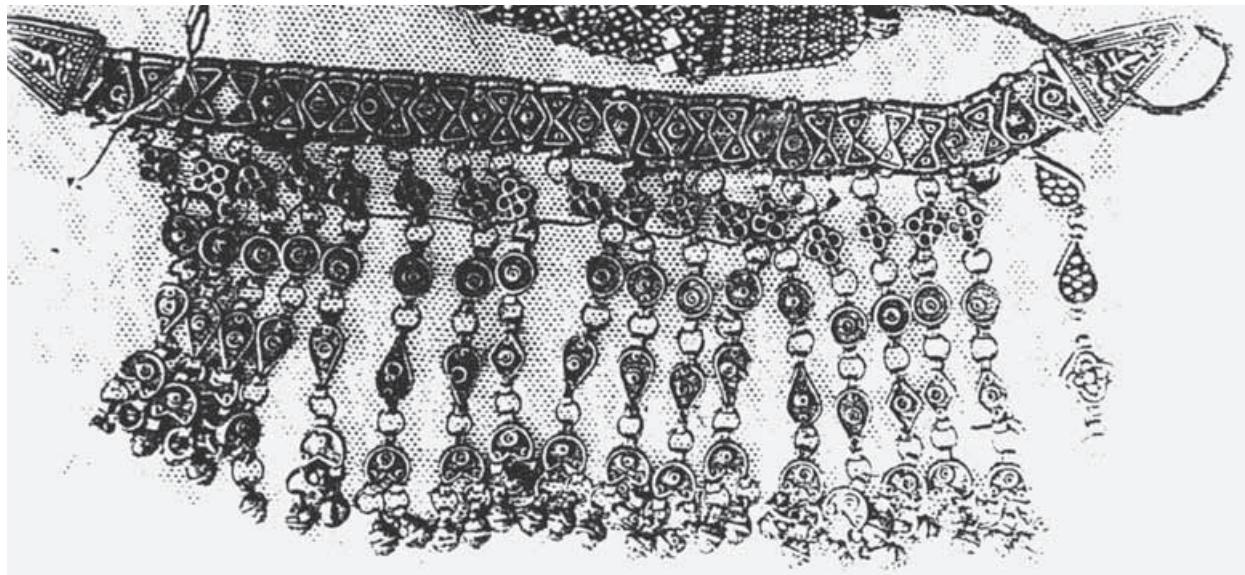


Fig. 1 Scorpion.

Hammered on two *Tatarif* (pl.) (finials) of a Jewish *Labbah* (s.) (choker).  
Each *Tatrofa* (s.) is a three-dimensional box-construction made of solid silver.

Gā' bīr al-'azab, קָאעַ בִּיר אַלְעָזָב, Ṣan'ā, Yemen.

Second half of the nineteenth century.

Scorpions & *Tatarif* were not seen when this *Labbah* was tied to the throat of the Jewish bride and the married Jewish woman.

Black-white rare photo.

Photographed by Carl Rathjens in 1937 in the workshop in the home of a Jewish silversmith in Gā' bīr al-'azab whilst this *Labbah* was brought into by Jews to be melt as an old piece for its heavy solid silver.

Hamburg, Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde.

Courtesy of the Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg, Germany.

in Ṣan'ā between the years 1927–1944 see Berger 1987: 16–17, fig. XX.10. I would like to thank Ruma Haybi, the photographer's widow for the photo. See Sha'ar 1985: 73, fig. 130, 74, fig. 131, 79, fig. 144. For *Labbah* of the Jewish bride in the years 1875–1880 see Berger 1987: 100–101.

7 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 91.1136. Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891. I would like to thank the Islamic Department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for their kind help, especially to Navina Haidar, Dr. Marilyn Jenkins and Annick Des Roches.

8 For a big *Khoratah* over the chest of a little boy photographed by Hermann Burchardt in Ṣan'ā between the years 1901–

Golan and Ofra Brono had interviewed such silversmith and examined his *Raziel the Angle* manuscript, for centuries in his family (Golan, Brono 1975: 13–19, figs. 39/2–39/4). A copy of some pages is in my possession.<sup>4</sup> Secrecy was always a demand for the book of *Raziel the Angle* and therefore, in the frame of this tradition, I do not wish to publish the pages.

Being an amulet provides the explanation why a lot of thought and work had been invested by the Jewish silversmith in the hidden locker of *Labbah*, not seen at all, when *Labbah* was tied to the throat. *Labbah* did not adorn every women, but, exclusively the Jewish bride and/or the Jewish married woman. At the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries it was tied only to the throat. It should be clear that not every Jewish bride/Jewish married woman had *Labbah* as her personal property, as *Labbah* was a very expensive jewel.

To be hidden is a necessary phase for a Jewish amulet, as in Jewish thought, “The blessing is existing only in something which is hidden from the eye” (Babylonian Talmud: Bava Metzia 42a). However, although *Tatarif* were not seen from the front, every one in the Jewish community knew the scorpion / the amulet is there, just behind the neck of the bride.

After this thought, this rare photographed *Labbah* encodes two levels – that which is revealed and that which is hidden. That which is revealed shows a piece of jewel in its beauty. That which is hidden is the amulet: the scorpion. It contains an information encoded within it, to be decoded only by he who knows “Angles Script” from the Hebrew Kabbalistic manuscript *Raziel the Angle*, or by he who knows the secret of Al-Shabazi’s scorpion (Fig. 1).

It is known that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Jewish jewellery, in Yemen in general and in Ṣan'ā in particular, had been turned to a second name to amulets. However, Jews of Yemen had a dispute regarding amulets long ago. Those who follow Maimonides, reject it. Those who follow *Kabbala* accept it.<sup>5</sup> This photographic rare *Labbah* clearly presents this situation. Its hidden parts present an amulet, whilst, its shown parts present a jewel. "The seen and the hidden" is the most important dominant feature of Jewish jewels in Ṣan'ā at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

The above mentioned photographed silver *Labbah* choker and the scorpion on each of its two silver triangular *Tatarif* is a rare, unique and a very early prototype of *Labbah* in the frame of the nineteenth century (Fig.1). Its little size, its very modest appearance, the hammering technique of the scorpion, the solid silver and the totally absence of filigree technique, are the features of this type of choker at its beginning phase in the nineteenth century and therefore extremely important example for the research of the development of *Labbah*.

Almost no such *Labbah* choker was left, as well as, its visual documentation. Most *Labbāat* (pl.) known today are from the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century and present the peak of the jewel. As the hammering technique had already totally vanished from the Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā at the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century, the image of the scorpion vanished as well from these late *Labbāat*.

Hence, *Labbah* in its peak has no scorpion at all on its *Tatarif*, rather not on any other of its parts. This is the exact case with *Labbah* in the rare photos of the Jewish bride, taken in Ṣan'ā in 1934 by Carl Rathjens, as well as, by Yihye Haybi in 1927–1944 – a member of the Jewish community (Figs. 4, 7).<sup>6</sup> In the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century *Labbah* was tied also to the chin of the Jewish bride and not only to her throat. As clearly shown, *Labbah* of the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century is different from the choker that was tied to the throat of the Jewish bride in the nineteenth century (Figs. 1, 4, 7).

*Labbah* in its peak has no scorpion at all and is made as a filigree work. The vanishing of the scorpion on *Tatarif* initiated a constructional change. As *Tatarif* stopped being the most important part of *Labba* as a result of the absence of the scorpion from the big *Tatarif*, thus, *Tatarif* had turned only to the technical solution to lock the jewel. As a result, the proportions of *Labbah* had changed. The focus was turned from *Tatarif* to the chains in the center. Whilst the size of *Tatarif* was constantly shrunken, the chain units in between were constantly elongated and widened. That direction of the development had turned *Labbah* from one type to another type. From a heavy choker of the nineteenth century it had gradually changed to a light yet big filigree breast plate as known in the third and the fourth decades of the twentieth century.

That change enabled to adorn *Labbah* in its peak, also in a new way – on the chin of the bride (Fig. 4). That had happened only in the religious ceremonies of the wedding in order to combine the most important ceremonies with the most beautiful combination of jewellery, known in Judeo-Yemenite as *Tsbuk Lulu* (s.) (lattice of pearls). However, in the non religious ceremonies *Labbah* in its peak was adorned on the chest of the bride rather tied to her throat. Not necessarily by all the brides, as not all brides had it. The development of *Labbah* shows a phenomenon, in which the name of the jewel is not changed, but the type of the jewel is changed in a slow process, due to the process of the disappearing of the scorpion from it.

### Lazem (breast necklace)

The scorpion on *Tatarif* of *Lazem* (breast necklace) is the same case as the scorpion on *Tatarif* of *Labbah* mentioned above. This specific *Lazem* was brought into Israel at the

1909 see Tamir 1982:10. For a big *Khoratah* over the chest of little children photographed by Yihye Haybi in Ṣan'ā between 1927–1944, including his kids, see Sha'ar 1985: 19, fig.17, 25, fig. 31, 29, fig. 42, 39, fig. 66, 53, fig. 95, 64, fig. 119, 86, figs. 156, 157, 87, fig. 158, 88, fig.161. Also see Berger 1987: 121.

9 In 1981, in the frame of my M.A. thesis, I interviewed Name Badihi who got married in Ṣan'ā in 1902 in the age of tenth years old. She was adorned with one big *Khoratah* and two little *Khorayuth*. The information was supported by more three other women, also in the status of "Girl Bride". I am extremely thankful to all of them. For the "Girl Bride" and her adornment with a big *Khoratah* and two little *Khorayuth* see Berger 1987: 55–57, 68, 121.

10 In 1981, in the frame of my M.A. thesis, I interviewed this bride, named Same Garta, who dated the photo to 1941. I am thankful to her and to Ruma Haybi, the photographer's widow, for the photo. For other grooms adorned with *Khoratah* photographed by Yihye Haybi see Sha'ar 1985: 74, fig. 133, 80, fig.146.

11 For photos showing *Aqarib* (pl.) hanged till the Jewish bride's belly, photographed in Ṣan'ā by Carl Rathjens in 1934, see Berger 1987: figs. XX.1–XX.2. I would like to thank Dr. Rüdiger Vassen and Gertrud Schier for the photos. For photos showing *Aqarib* (pl.) hanged till the Jewish bride's belly, photographed in Ṣan'ā by Yihye Haybi in 1927–1944 see Sha'ar 1985: 73, fig. 130, 77, fig.139, 78, fig. 142, 81, fig.148.

12 For more *Gargush Mizahhar* see Brauer 1934: fig. 3/2; Berger 1987: figs. I–I.11; Christie's Amster-



Fig. 2 Scorpion.

Hammered on two *Tatarif* (pl.) (finials) of a Jewish *Lazem* (s.) (breast necklace).

Three-dimensional box-construction of solid silver.

Gā' bīr al-'azab, קָאע בִּיר אַלְעָזָב, San'ā, Yemen.

Before 1882.

Scorpions & *Tatarif* (pl.) were not seen when this *Lazem* was adorned on the breast of the Jewish bride and the married Jewish woman.

This *Lazem* has few history phases: Made in Gā' bīr al-'azab before 1882. After 1882, brought from Gā' bīr al-'azab into Israel (Jerusalem) as the personal property of a Jewish woman who made *Alia* (come back) to Jerusalem. At the beginning of the twentieth century, acquired in Jerusalem, for The Jewish National Museum Bezalel, which was at the time part of Bezalel Academy of Art (established 1906), Jerusalem. Since 1965, State of Israel, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Schocken Collection.

Photo after: Narkiss, 1941. Plate 6/12.

dam 1985: 48/84 [photo on front cover]; Sotheby's Jerusalem 1985: 234; Muchawsky-Schnapper 2000: 88.

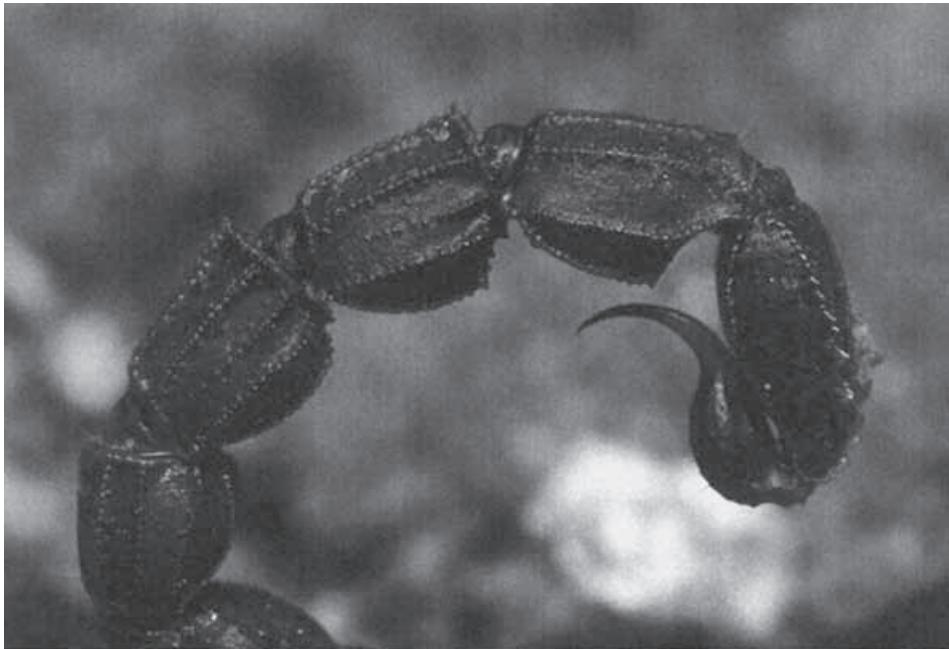
13 In 1981, in the frame of my M.A. thesis, I interviewed this "bride of the year" תְּמִימָה אַסְמָה named Ruma Haybi, the sister of the Jewish photographer Yihye Haybi, who took the photo. She dated the photo to 1936. I am thankful to her and to Ruma Haybi, the photographer's widow for the photo. The term "bride of the year" תְּמִימָה אַסְמָה was unique to a married woman only in the first year of her marriage. One of the benefits she got is to be adorned with the opulent combination of jewellery known as *Tsbuk Lulu* in some social ceremonies in the weddings of

second half of the nineteenth century (Fig. 2). Here, it was acquired for The Jewish National Museum Bezalel, which was at the time part of Bezalel Academy of Art (established 1906, Jerusalem) and was part of its collection. Nowadays, it is in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. A similar unpublished scorpion on *Tatarif* of *Lazem* is in The Metropolitan Museum, New York.<sup>7</sup>

The Art formula of the scorpion here differs only by the legs. The four hammered legs are curved and longer. Alleged, a technical point, or a different hand, or a different studio, but, the same *Raziel the Angle* manuscript mentioned above, shows that option as well (Golan, Brono 1975: 13–19, figs. 39/2–39/4). Therefore it can be considered as a variation.

### ***Khoratah***

*Khoratah* shows a total different story. The story of Jewish entrepreneur women in San'ā in jewellery. At the second half of the nineteenth century we find the phenomenon of Jewish jewellery designer women in San'ā. Not instead of the Jewish silversmiths, but as a unique phenomenon beside them. In the frame of this phenomenon, special Jewish jewellery designer women in the Jewish community in San'ā had invented a very big "soft scorpion" pendant amulet on the chest. Intentionally, they named it *Khoratah*, meaning in Judeo-Yemenite a cone, after the cone shape of the scorpion venom gland (Berger 1987: 50, 118) (Fig. 3). The front and the back view of *Khoratah* shows a big three-dimensional triangle/cone made of the expensive yellow brocade material known in Judeo-Yemenite as *Mizahhar* (shining).



**Fig. 3** Scorpion's poison gland in nature – A detail.

The sting at the end of the three-dimensional scorpion's poison gland at the end of the raised up tail is ready to sting. State of Israel. Photographed by Ofir Abrahamov.

Though the art formula of *Khoratah* is based on the naturalistic cone shape of the poison gland of the scorpion, the Jewish jewellery designer women took it a step further, as they had focused only on it. In order to do that, they had enormously exaggerated the size of the cone shape and did not show anything else from the scorpion. In terms of Modern Art, even though that term did not exist in Yemen at the time, the art formula of *Khoratah* is conceptual – the name is the jewel.

Didn't they know that a jewel which is also an amulet must encode within it two levels – that which is revealed and that which is hidden? They perfectly knew that, however, their choice was to promote women agenda, the agenda of al-Shabazi's scorpion in the context of curing infertility. They wish al-Shabazi's blessing and cure to be equal to every bride and groom in the Jewish community. Thus, without the stipulation of the actual pilgrimage to al-Shabazi's grave in Ta'izz. Thus, without the stipulation of the personally bringing of an alive scorpion from his grave. They perfectly knew what they were doing, as though, al-Shabazi's pilgrimage was very popular, not every one in Ḫan'ā, could make the trek.

In modern terms, the Jewish jewellery designer women in Ḫan'ā had conducted an advertising campaign to promote al-Shabazi's scorpion as a sign for curing infertility. Jewellery was the medium and *Khoratah* was one out of two presentations of the scorpion via jewellery which they had run. A lot of brave was needed to bring the secrecy of al-Shabazi's scorpion into the open and these women succeeded in doing that.

The innovation was, first of all, by turning the hidden alive scorpion out of al-Shabazi grave to be revealed and shown in the open. They presented the idea of "al-Shabazi's scorpion" as a cure sign via *Khorataha*. Their other innovation was that it was for every one. They had created an access to "al-Shabazi's scorpion" to every one in Ḫan'ā, mainly by those who could not make the pilgrimage to his grave in Ta'izz. From theirs point of view, they wished equal opportunity to al-Shabazi's potential to cure. That was a daring move in the absence of modern medicine in Yemen and in the absence of cure for infertility there.

Their conceptual art formula is not surprising, as Jewish women in Ḫan'ā were experts in practical medicine. As so, they also stuffed *Khorataha* with a long list of ingredients known in Yemen in use in practical medicine, as well as, considered to protect

other brides. Ruma Haybi is shown here as "bride of the year" נסיך היין. She is the only one to be photographed as so and there are only two photos of her in this status. The other one shows her alone in the traditional way of siting of the Jewish bride in the twentieth century, as a cone/triangle composition (Fig. 4).

14 Nowadays, in museums, each *Gargush Mizahhar* is shown uncovered, not as it was adorned, in order to show the many jewels on it (Fig. 6). However, not each *Gargush Mizahhar* has so many jewels. The Jewish women always covered her *Gargush Mizahhar* with a special scarf in order not to show the jewels – her dowry. That can be seen in the photos mentioned in note



Fig. 4 *Khoratah* (cone).

Gā' bīr al-'azab, קָאע בִּיר אַלְעָזָב, Ṣan'ā, Yemen.  
1941.

Black-white rare photo.

Taken in Gā' bīr al-'azab during the Jewish weeding of Simon and Same Garta just after the Jewish religious ceremony *kidosh*, after which the bride and the groom are married.

The big and lavish *Mizahhar* (yellow brocade) *Khoratah* is hanged down from a big *Tawq* (s.) (round iron hoop) over the chest of the groom. Attached to its front are: *Riyalat* (pl.) (Maria Theresa gilded silver coins) & *Salseh Sufra* (s.) (Yellow Chain).

Photographed by Yihye Haybi, a member of the Jewish community in Gā' bīr al-'azab.  
Courtesy of Ruma Haybi, the widow of the Photographer, State of Israel, Bney-Brak.

against the evil eye. By doing that, they encoded within *Khorataha* the hidden level, which is needed for an amulet in Jewish thought. Every one in the Jewish community in Ṣan'ā knew what ingredients *Khorataha* is stuffed with and why is that.

*Khoratah* had started as an amulet to protect little children (Berger 1987: 119–120). That is demonstrated by the few rare photos of little children adorned with *Khoratah* on the chest taken in the Jewish community in Ṣan'ā.<sup>8</sup> However, from the second half of the nineteenth century on, the use of *Khoratah* was expanded to the “Girl Bride” – a little girl, between eleven years old to thirteen years old, already a bride. Those who were even younger, between nine and eleven years old, were adorned with one big *Khoratah* and with two little *Khorayuth* (pl.).<sup>9</sup>

More than that, in the twentieth century, *Khoratah* was expanded also to the adornment of the young groom, between seventeen to twenty years old. In 1941 Yihye Haybi had photographed the just married couple, Simon and Same Garta, and the young groom is shown adorned with a lavish big *Mizahhar* (brocade) *Khoratah* (Fig. 4).<sup>10</sup>

*Khoratah* for the bride and the groom was unisex and a collective jewel. It was the property of the Jewish jewellery designer women who had made it. It was borrowed especially for the wedding by request of the mother of the bride or the groom and has at its reverse more little *khorayuth* to increase the protection (Berger 1987: 62, 121, fig. II) (Figs. 8 left, 9).

*Khoratah* is the Jewish jewellery designer women advertising to al-Shabazi's scorpion as a sign for curing infertility, as well as, their response to the gradual disappearing of the scorpion from the silver jewels made by the Jewish silversmiths in Ṣan'ā from the

11 up. Only the scorpions were shown.

15 The “Mawz'a Exile” (1678–1680) was a decree of transferring all Jews of Yemen to Mawz'a in the Tihama in south west Yemen. It is known by Jews of Yemen, in Judeo-Yemenite, as “Sarchat Mawz'a” (The walk to Mawz'a). As it is not our subject here, only two sources are mentioned out of the many on this subject: Qorach 1954: 9–12; Shavit, Lockwood & Serjeant 1983: 392b.

16 The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, L104. I want to thank The Rare Books Library in The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, that has been especially generous and helpful in sharing their knowledge and infor-

second half of the nineteenth century on. It should be mentioned that the Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā was under a constant change from the beginning of the nineteenth century on. The Jewish jewellery designer women used that phenomenon in order to push themselves to this art. As already said, not as silversmiths, but rather as jewellery designers, as we understand this term nowadays.

Another turn point in silversmith of which the Jewish jewellery designer women utilized for their benefit was the cut in creating “one piece jewel”, i.e., a jewel made of one/two big pieces of hammered solid heavy silver, done by one silversmith in the eighteenth century. As for example: tube bracelets, tube anklets *כְּלָאֵל Khālakīl* and very long and heavy hips belts *מַלְאָכָת al-marābit*. From the second half of the nineteenth century on, most jewels were new types and were done differently – out of plenty of little pieces, much of it in the filigree technique. As a result, in most cases, the Jewish woman who had ordered a jewel, got from the silversmith a little package of lots of separated filigree units instead of “one piece jewel” as it was in the eighteenth century. Therefore, she had to combine the many units by herself, or ask the help of the Jewish jewellery designer women to do that. In that situation, many of the Jewish silversmiths had turned to be specialized in preparing specific model unit pieces, rather than a complete jewel.

The attitude of the Jewish jewellery designer women, as a whole, was very modern. They considered the different little silver pieces as “ready made”. They bought those “ready made” that suit their new types of jewels and used it differently. Mainly, they had created new types of jewellery made of brocade, a material that Jewish silversmiths did not touch at all. As a rule, they had attached the bought “ready made” silver pieces to the basic brocade jewel. Each brocade jewel was a unique one. In the case of *Khoratah*, for example, the silver “ready made” units were attached in order to hide the sewing stitches of the three-dimensional brocade big cone. Always, the round hoop on which the *Khoratah* was hanged was made of iron, a known material in Yemen in use to protect against evil eye and in long use to protect little children much before *Khoratah*.

Al-Shabazi's scorpion, of which the Jewish silversmiths were forced to neglect in the process of changes in the Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā, was adopted by these women, who not only exaggerated its size, but also and mainly used it in the open – on the chest. From their original point of view, al-Shabazi's blessing is already in *Khoratah*, after the pilgrimage that already have been made by other Jews to his grave to cure infertility. By using *Khoratah* in the open they promoted and took one step further the idea that each Jewish bride and groom are protected by al-Shabazi's blessing as reflected in “his scorpion” and are fertile.

### *Aqrabe*

The most conceptual art formula of the scorpion is *Aqrabe*. At the second half of the nineteenth century, it was designed, by special Jewish jewellery designer women in the Jewish community in Ṣan'ā, as a little, but extremely long and dominant couplet of pendants, known as *Aqarib* (pl.). Intentionally, they named each of the two pendants *Aqrabe*, meaning in Judeo-Yemenite a scorpion (Berger 1987: 47–48) (Fig. 5). A couplet of *Aqarib* can be seen reached up till the bride's belly in the few rare photos of the Jewish bride taken in Ṣan'ā by Carl Rathjens in 1934 and by Yihye Haybi in 1927–1944.<sup>11</sup>

The art formula of this scorpion shows a new concept. The Jewish jewellery designer women detached the naturalistic image of the scorpion and redesigned it according to the “ready made” silver units they could order from the Jewish silversmiths (Berger 1987: 61). As the name *Aqrabe* is the jewel, every one knew this is the scorpion and naturalism was not concerned here at all.

mation with me. Most of all I want to give special thanks to Dr. Jay Rovner, the chief manuscript bibliographer of its library, Sharon Lieberman Mintz the curator of Jewish Art and David Sclar.

17 Almost identical six pointed star is reproduced by Budge E.A., with some explanations, mentioned as from *Raziel the Angle* manuscript. See Budge E.A. 1930: 226.

18 I would like to thank Dr. Vesta Curtis, Curator, Department Coins & medals, British Museum, London and all her team for their kind help while examining Ayyubid coins in the Department.

19 Victoria & Albert Museum, London C153-1936, Buckley Gift. I would like to thank Tim Stanley, Senior Curator, Middle East, Asian Department, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, as well as, Dr. Richard Edgcumbe, Curator, Department of Sculpture, metalwork, ceramics & glass, for their kind help. The vessel is in display in the Islamic Gallery. For a discussion whether emblem or pattern, see Porter 1998b: 92b, 93, 166, fig. 10.I. For triangles on another glass vessel of the same sultan see ibid. 97, fig. 21.I. For a discussion on the function of the vessel see Porter 1998b: 92b; Carboni, Whitehouse 2001: 263b–264.

20 See Porter 1988a; Porter 1998b; Sadek 1990: 21, 24–25; Al-Radi 1997: 21.

21 For the astrolabe made in 1291 by the Rasulid prince al-Ashraf Umar, later, Sultan of Yemen (r. 1295–1296), now, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, see Porter 1988a: 234b; Carboni 1995: 10–11. For Astronomy in Medieval Yemen see King 1988.

22 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1891 (91.1.605), Edward C. Moore Collection,



Fig. 5 *Aqrab* (pl.) (scorpions).

A detail belonging to Fig. 6.

Each *Aqrabe* (s.) (scorpion) is made of the following gilded silver “ready made” units: *Zanabil* (s.) (basket) made of filigree. 1 meter long of *Salseh Sufra* (yellow chain) or *Salseh Methmman* (s.) (Octagonal chain). Couplets of *Azrar Shabk* (pl.) filigree buttons.

Here is the inventory list of the “ready made” silver units they had combined together to invent such *Aqrabe*:

For the extraordinary 1 meter long tail, yet very narrow, they used the *Salseh Sufra* (yellow chain) or *Salseh Methmman* (octagonal chain). Both, silver gilded type of chains which were forced on Jewish silversmith in Şan'ā at 1872 by the second Ottoman rule over Şan'ā who imposed such machine quick wire chains, instead of the slow solid silver hand work used before. The very disproportional tail had turned the “ready made” scorpion to almost a surrealistic one, hanged upside down by its very long unrealistic tail from the end of the yellow brocade headgear of the Jewish bride. As it was very light it always was kinetic and moved and therefore gained lot of attention.

For the the poison gland – the most dominant feature of the scorpion [that which was emphasized as a round hammered bulge at the end of the tail of the scorpion on the above mentioned *Labbah & Lazem* (Figs. 1, 2)], they used the three-dimensional filigree silver gilded *Zanabil* (s.) (basket). The fluffy, yet very light *Zanabil* was attached to the end of the long tail with a tiny silver wire and turned around itself constantly.

Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891. I would like to thank the Islamic Department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for their kind help, especially to Navina Haidar, Dr. Stefano Carboni, Warren Bennett and Annick Des Roches. See Porter 1988a: 235a, 257a/17; Carboni 1995: 12–13.

23 Goitein S.D. 1975; Qāfih 1975.

24 Goitein S.D. 1967, iv: 203–204, 420/379; Goitein S.D. 1975: 9.



**Fig. 6** *Gargush Mizahhar* (s.) (yellow brocade headgear) & *Aqarib* (pl.) (scorpions).

Gā' bīr al-'azab, קָאע בִּיר אַלְעָב, Ṣan'ā, Yemen.

Third decade of the twentieth century.

This *Gargush Mizahhar* has few history phases: Made in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the third decade of the twentieth century by a Jewish jewellery designer woman. In ca. 1950, brought from Gā' bīr al-'azab into the State of Israel as the personal property of a Jewish woman who made *Alia* (come back) to Israel. After 1965, bought in the State of Israel by the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. L. 87. 80.

Photographed by Reuven Milon.

Courtesy of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, State of Israel.

For the two eyes of the scorpion, which never got any attention before by the Jewish silversmith in Ṣan'ā, they used a couplet of silver filigree buttons from the type known *Azrar Shabk* (pl.). *Azrar Shabk* were filigree hemispheres of the sort Jewish women were used to attach along the front of their dress (Fig. 5 left). The couplet of the *Azrar Shabk* were attached to the end of the *Salseh Sufra* or *Salseh Methmman* exactly as the *Zanabil*, and so in constant movement.

Basically, the new scorpion was designed and executed out of three or four silver gilded "ready made": *Salseh Sufra* or *Salseh Methmman*, or both, *Zanabil* and *Azrar Shabk*. Some variations had a round filigree oblong in addition (Fig. 5 left). A constant movement was a very important part of this jewel. In modern terms it was a kinetic scorpion jewel.

25 Goitein S.D. 1967, iv: 200, 418 / 359–361.

26 For gold "Scorpion's Venom" bracelets see Jenkins 1983: 65; Hasson 1987: 66/74; Vrieze 1999: 268c–269a / 259, 273c / 269, 273c / 269. For silver "Scorpion's Venom" bracelets see Hasson 1987: 64–67/72. 66–67/73–77.



**Fig. 7** *Aqarib* (pl.) (scorpions).

*Aqarib* (pl.) (scorpions) hanged from three *Garagish Gadifa* (velvet) (pl.), belonging to Ruma Haybi (the wife of the photographer) and his sisters.

The three *Garagish Gadifa* are covered and only the *Aqarib* (scorpions) are shown hanged from the end of the *Garagish Gadifa* up till theirs belly.

GA' bīr al-'azab bīr al-'azab, Ṣan'ā, Yemen.

1936.

Black-white rare photo.

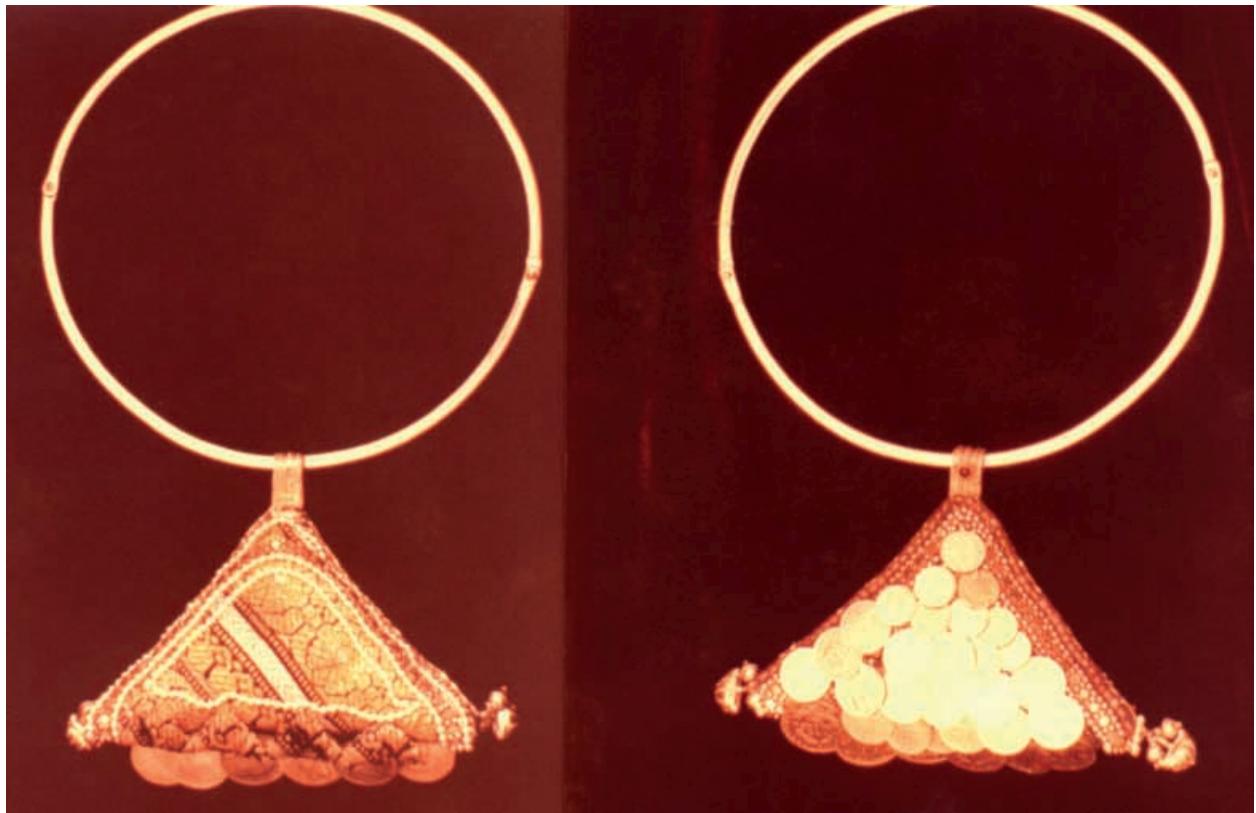
Photographed in GA' bīr al-'azab during a Jewish weeding by Yihye Haybi.

The woman adorned with the opulent *Tsbuk Lulu* is Ruma Haybi, the sister of the photographer. She is not the bride. As the bride changed her mind and refused to be photographed, Yihye Haybi took shoots of his sister who was then in the status of "The bride of the year" חַרְיוּת אִסְנָה, enabling her to be adorned with *Tsbuk Lulu* in some social ceremonies of the wedding.

Courtesy of Ruma Haybi, the widow of the Photographer (shown at the left), State of Israel, Bney-Brak.

In contrast to *Labbah* and *Lazem* mentioned above, and like the *Khoratah*, the new *Aqarib* were intentionally installed just in the front of the body of the bride and / or the married Jewish women. Such direct propaganda in favor of the scorpion was possible only with the cooperation of the women as a whole in the Jewish community. That was also the women collaboration with the Jewish jewellery designer women to promote feminine agenda in the Jewish community.

*Aqarib* were hanged in pairs from the end of *Gargush Mizahhar* (s.) – a new brocade very big jewel of the bride in the second half of the nineteenth century in the function of a headdress.<sup>12</sup> *Gargush Mizahhar* had been prepared by the Jewish jewellery designer women only for the bride as her dowry and private property, and it was never borrowed (Berger 1987: 83–84, 87) (Fig. 6). *Aqrabe* was also expanded to *Gargush Gadifa* (s.) (velvet), a black velvet headgear which was worn by Jewish women in holidays (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> As being very long, but very light, the gilded *Aqrabe* of *Gargush Mizahhar* and *Gargush Gadifa* were always kinetic and flashing and in terms of modern art, a sort of two little mobiles, or kinetic little sculptures, or banners that jump constantly in the eyes in order to gain attention.



**Fig. 8** *Khoratah* (cone) – A reconstruction.

Front (right) & back (left).

State of Israel – Tel-Aviv.

After 1956.

Reconstruction made by Shosana Gispan-Cornfield (Same Gispan-Megori in Şan'ā).

Made of: *Mizahhar* (yellow brocade), *Tawq* (s.) (round iron hoop), *Zanabil* (s.) (basket), gilded *Riyalat* (pl.) (Maria Theresa silver coins), *Salseh Sufra* (s.) (Yellow Chain), *Lulu* (pl.) (pearls) & *Mirjan* (pl.) (red corals). Stuffed with traditional ingredients used against the evil eye in *Gā' bīr al-'azab*.

Shosana Gispan-Cornfield is the first to reconstruct, in 1956 in the State of Israel, *Tsbuk Lulu*, of which her mother, the famous Habibe Gispan-Megori had invented at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century in *Gā' bīr al-'azab*, Şan'ā.

Photographed by Ora Berger, 1981.

Courtesy of Shosana Gispan-Cornfield. Tel-Aviv, State of Israel.

Another very important feature of *Agrabe* was that it was the only permanent shown jewel out of the many jewels used to be attached on *Gargush Mizahhar*. The shown couplet of *Aqarib* is the common denominator of all *Garagish Mizahhar* (pl.) in the Jewish community in Şan'ā. All the other jewels attached on *Garagish Mizahhar* differed from one bride to another and were hidden by the bride by being always covered with a special scarf.<sup>14</sup> There were brides who had none except only such couplet of *Aqarib*. Therefore, we can safely conclude that from the point of view of the Jewish woman in Şan'ā, the “ready made” scorpions of *Gargush Mizahhar* and *Gargush Gadifa* had been chosen to be the “signature” of the status of the Jewish bride and the married woman. Thus, after al-Shabazi's scorpion, as well as, the idea of fertility that had been incorporated in the jewel by the women themselves.

As being the “signature” of the status of the Jewish bride in Şan'ā, at the third and the forth decades of the twentieth century, a couplet of *Aqarib* had been expanded and therefore had been attached to the two corners of some of the impressive *Khoratah* in the Jewish community. None has survived. A reconstruction was made by Shosana



**Fig. 9** *Khorayuth* (pl.) (cones)

A detail belonging to the back side of *Khoratah* (s.) in Fig. 8 (left).

Gispan-Cornfield (Same Gispan-Megori in Ṣan'ā) (Figs. 8, 9). She is famous as being the first to reconstruct in the State of Israel in 1956, the most opulent combination of jewellery of which her mother, the famous Habibe Gispan-Megori, had invented in Ṣan'ā at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century and which had been photographed there by Yihye Haybi during the years 1927–1944 – the *Tsbuk Lulu* (Figs. 4, 7).

The upgrading of *Khoratah* with *Aqarib* shows “al-Shabazi’s scorpion” as the dominant Jewish feminine brand in Ṣan'ā over a century. It is also a test-case showing how women cooperated to fight the problem of infertility in absence of modern medicine in Yemen. Nowadays, we know how hard it is to solve infertility even with modern medicine. These women should be adored for doing everything in their power at the time. That does not mean that Islamic women in Ṣan'ā were less courageous. The only thing it means is that the information is beyond my knowledge, as since the end of the seventeenth century the Jewish community run its life separately as explained beneath.

### Ta'izz and the scorpion

#### The “signature” of Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi

It is totally clear that the Hebrew Illuminated Pentateuch Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi had scribed and painted in Ta'izz in 1678 during “Mawz'a Exile” is his artistic “signature”.<sup>15</sup> The repeated six pointed star is the main illumination of his Pentateuch. By painting the six pointed star at the beginning of each new section (*Parashah*) he shows the six pointed star as his artistic choice (Fig. 10). As result, the six pointed star repeats



Fig. 10 Six pointed star.

Hebrew Illuminated Pentateuch.

1678.

Scribed and painted by Shalom al-Shabazi during “Mawz‘a Exile”.  
Mawz‘a, Tihama, south west Yemen.

New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, L104, Fol. 256r.

Paper. Black, Red Ink.

Long: 29.5 cm. Wide: 20.5 cm.

Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

all along the Pentateuch. Al-Shabazi’s Pentateuch is nowadays in The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.<sup>16</sup>

Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi is not only a great Jewish and Yemeni poet, but also the most important Kabbala personality in Yemen (Nini 1975: 6). His origin is in Sharab district, a very important Kabbala center in south east Yemen, and later on he moved to Ta‘izz, also in south west Yemen (Nadaf 1929: 331). His painted six pointed star is presented here in the context of Kabbala, the Art of Ta‘izz and as a Yemeni agenda.

The Hebrew Kabbalistic manuscript *Raziel the Angle*, mentioned above, shows the six pointed star as an amulet (Golan, Brono 1975: fig. 39/5). It is important to mention that the six pointed star is painted in the *Raziel the Angle* manuscript and in al-Shabazi’s

Pentateuch in the same style – a double lined black ink star.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the six pointed star is a known emblem in Ta‘izz after the Ayyubid who had ruled Yemen from Ta‘izz (r. 1173–1229). The six pointed star is on Ayyubid coins and circulated in Ta‘izz at the time.<sup>18</sup> On Ayyubid coins the six pointed star is double lined and therefore we may safely assume it is the prototype of south Yemen. However, it should be mentioned that the six pointed star is already on Fatimid coins, as well as, in the Jewish classical Cairo Geniza community (ninth–twelfth centuries) records and art, including “Angles Script” and carpet pages of Hebrew illuminated bibles. Hence the six pointed star in Islamic art is definitely earlier to the Ayyubid six pointed star. It might be known in Aden and in south Yemen before the Ayyubid via the east-west trade of which Aden was a very important port.

The Rasulid, the successors of the Ayyubid in Yemen, also ruled Yemen from Ta‘izz (r. 1229–1454). One of their earlier emblem shows a big circle comprising painted triangles in a very sharp contrasted colors. The emblem is shown on a glass vessel with the name of the Rasulid Sultan al-Ashraf Umar (r. 1295–1296), now in Victoria & Albert Museum, London.<sup>19</sup> The six pointed star of Shalom al-Shabazi is an echo to that feature. He had created the Rasulid effect, by painting the four triangles full with black ink, yet leaving the other two in the natural color of the paper (Fig. 10).

Three points emerge from this. First, Ayyubid and Rasulid art models were still dominant in Ta‘izz in 1678. Second, it is hard to draw the line between Jewish art and Islamic art at the time in Ta‘izz. Third, the triangle was a dominant art formula in Ta‘izz.

### The Rasulid scorpion

The research shows the Rasulid art as a “Renaissance” in Yemen, based on imported art and artists, but not entirely.<sup>20</sup> Astronomy was a favored science and an important subject in art under their rule.<sup>21</sup> Astronomy is the subject of the large brass tray made for the Rasulid Sultan Muayyad Dawud (r. 1296–1321), now, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. On this brass tray, the scorpion is shown as the well known Zodiac sign of the scorpion.<sup>22</sup>

As a zodiac sign, the scorpion is defined and presented on this tray encircled with a round medallion and as such presented as a blazon (Fig. 11). Originally, it had been executed as silver foils inlay in the brass. Nowadays the silver foils are off and only the preparation work in the brass, which had been done at the time in order to fix the foils into the brass, shows the Rasulid art formula. Being a Zodiac sign, the scorpion must have been easily recognized and therefore some naturalism had to be kept.

However, the dominant feature of the Rasulid scorpion, here, is its presentation as a triangle composition. Its erected tail is emphasized here by its well known triangular poison gland at the end of the jointed tail (Figs. 11, 3). The body and the four pairs of legs create a very big triangle composition, over half of the size of the medallion. This triangular composition looks as intentionally exaggerated. Probably, as the tray was functional and was seen from some distance, i.e., the scorpion is shown here in shortened wag. That indicates that the designer was an expert who perfectly understood not only the function of this tray, but also the traditional way to present the astronomy subject, including shortening. The focus on the triangle and its big size regarding the distance from which it would be actually seen, is not surprising, as geometry was dominant in Islamic art since the ninth century, as result of science – art relationships (Livio 2003: 98–101). The Rasulid scorpion clearly shows that.

The questions which arise are: How important is the triangle as art formula of the scorpion in jewellery in medieval Yemen? Was it an artistic traditional representation? Or, was it a random presentation only?



**Fig. 11** Scorpion as a zodiac sign – a detail.

Brass tray inlaid with silver.

Inscribed with the name of the Rasulid Sultan of Yemen Muayyad Dawud (r. 1296–1321).

This scorpion is from the central roundel of the tray containing representations of the seven planets and the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 891(91.1.605). Diameter: 70 cm.

Condition: Nowadays, the silver of the scorpion is off. Only the chiseled preparations work in the brass for the silver foils is shown and present the scorpion.

Photographed by Warren Bennett.

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

### *Humat al-aqrab* – Scorpion’s Venom

The Judeo-Arabic documents of the Jewish Classical Cairo Geniza Community (ninth–twelfth centuries) are an important source of information for Fatimid and Ayyubid jewellery (Jenkins 1997: 418c–421a). The connections between Jews of Yemen and the Cairo Geniza Community are well known, on the background of the east-west trade, religious connections and Yemen as a favored place for Jews to live at the time.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Jew from Tunis, Abraham ben Yijū, who had established and run a factory for bronze in India (1132–1149), stayed in Yemen for some years.

Our interest is in the *Aswira* (pl.) bracelets mentioned in the dowry he had prepared to his daughter.<sup>24</sup> The reason for that is that another document described *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom” as a *Siwar* (s.) bracelet.<sup>25</sup> It was a gold *Siwar*, weighed around 230 grams and worth 43 gold dinars. That means that – “Scorpion’s Venom” was a dominant and very expensive type of bracelet that one can not ignore. On that basis we may assume that *Aswira* were common in both Yemen and the Cairo Geniza community, not only as a dowry item, but also in the frame of practice medicine and/or

sympathetic magic to cure scorpion stings. Such practice is well known in Islamic jewellery (Hasson 1987: 9 n.19).

Nowadays, the main problem is how to recognize this type of “Scorpion’s Venom” bracelet out of bracelets that had survived from the time? I tried to conduct such research, on the basis of the art formula of the Rasulid scorpion mentioned above. To the best of my judgment, I find it to be a combination of a big triangle or a pair of triangles to present the venom gland and / or the body of the scorpion and a round hollow tube and / or a jointed tube to present its erected tail, as well as, the bracelet itself (Figs. 11, 3). Indeed, such type exists (Figs. 12–14). I found, at least, six variations of the type in gold and silver, most of them in museums. As for example, in The L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, Jerusalem, State of Israel, which has few in gold and few in silver in varied techniques.<sup>26</sup> The similarity, but yet variety, indicates that *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom” whose feature is the big triangular couplet on the top, was a very well known type of bracelet at the time in the milieu of Islamic hollow tube bracelet among Jews and Muslim as well.

On this background, it is important to know that *Asawir* are mentioned in *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law*, which is the legal document that had fixed all the rules at the silver market (*suq al-fiddah*) in the *suq* in Ṣan’ā that the Zaydi Imams had installed at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Serjeant R.B., al-Akwa 1983: 184a, n. 63). It is therefore clear that the scorpion bracelets were in use in Yemen in the past and the Zaydi Imams had continued that type in *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law*, as it was known and popular. The fact that *Asawir* are mentioned in *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law*, means that the scorpion bracelets were officially produced in *suq al-fiddah* (the silver market) in Ṣan’ā at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is therefore surprising, that the name *Asawir* is not mentioned in Jewish records that survived from the eighteenth century. Also, that Jewish tube bracelets that survived from Ṣan’ā from the eighteenth century do not have any triangle plaque or a couplet of such (Berger 2005: 107–111, 117–122). Some explanation is needed, therefore, on the relationship between the Jewish silversmith and *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law* (Chapter one in <http://www.orberger.co.il/phd/>).

The focus of *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law* was law and economy. No limitations were made on Jewish silversmiths regarding art models. That was valid for Jewish silversmiths working in Gā’ bīr al-‘azab for Jews exclusively, as well as, for Jewish silversmiths working for Muslims in *suq al-fiddah* in the *suq* in Ṣan’ā. It should be emphasized that *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law* was more flexible than the Ottoman Law, which was the law before the Zaydi Law. The Ottoman controlled Yemen from Ṣan’ā for a hundred years (1538/9–1629) and forced the Ottoman Law on Yemen. As part of that law they had limited silversmiths work only in the market (*suq*). That was for the sake of supervision on the precious metals – gold and silver – as it is known from such law in the goldsmiths market in Jerusalem under their control (Cohen 1982).

However, as *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law* – the new law of the Zaydi imams – had no restrictions neither on the work place, nor on art models, Jewish silversmiths were free to use any art sources they wished. Therefore it is clear that, as Jews were not permitted to live in towns in Yemen from 1680 on, as a decree going with the “reverse” of “Mawz’ā Exile” decree, and therefore had to established themselves in Gā’ bīr al-‘azab outside Ṣan’ā, *suq al-fiddah* in Ṣan’ā was not attractive for them any more, neither for work purposes nor to buy jewellery (Fig. 15). Only the trip from Gā’ bīr al-‘azab to *suq al-fiddah* and back took about four hours walking. In addition, as Ṣan’ā was a commercial town, money had to be paid in order to enter the gates, each time.

As *Qānūn Ṣan’ā Law* did not limit silversmiths to *suq al-fiddah* only, there was no limitation on Jewish silversmiths to work in Gā’ bīr al-‘azab in theirs homes. Gradually, Gā’ bīr al-‘azab had turned out to be the exclusive place of business for Jewish silversmiths regarding Jewish needs. Gā’ bīr al-‘azab had started in 1680 with about 1,000



**Fig. 12** *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom”.

Solid silver tube bracelets (hollow pair & niellow).

Two big triangular plaques on the top represent the venom gland of the scorpion.

Fatimid. Syria or Egypt. Eleventh century.

Diameter: 5 cm.

State of Israel. L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem. Harari Collection, J204 & J205.

Courtesy of L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem.



**Fig. 13** *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom”.

Solid silver tube bracelets (hollow pair & granulation).

Two big triangular plaques on the top with granulation represent the venom gland of the scorpion.

Fatimid. Syria or Egypt.

Tenth – eleventh century.

Diameter (inner): 5 cm.

State of Israel. L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem. Inv. nos. J1282 & J283.

Courtesy of L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem.



**Fig. 14** *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom”.

Solid gold tube bracelets (hollow pair & filigree). Granulation.

Two big triangular plaques with filigree and granulation on the top represent the venom gland of the scorpion.

Fatimid. Syria or Egypt. Eleventh century.

Diameter: 9.2 & 8.8 cm, respectively.

Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. London.

Inv. nos. JLY1853 & JLY1854.

Photo after: Vrieze (ed.), 1999. Page 269. Plate 259.

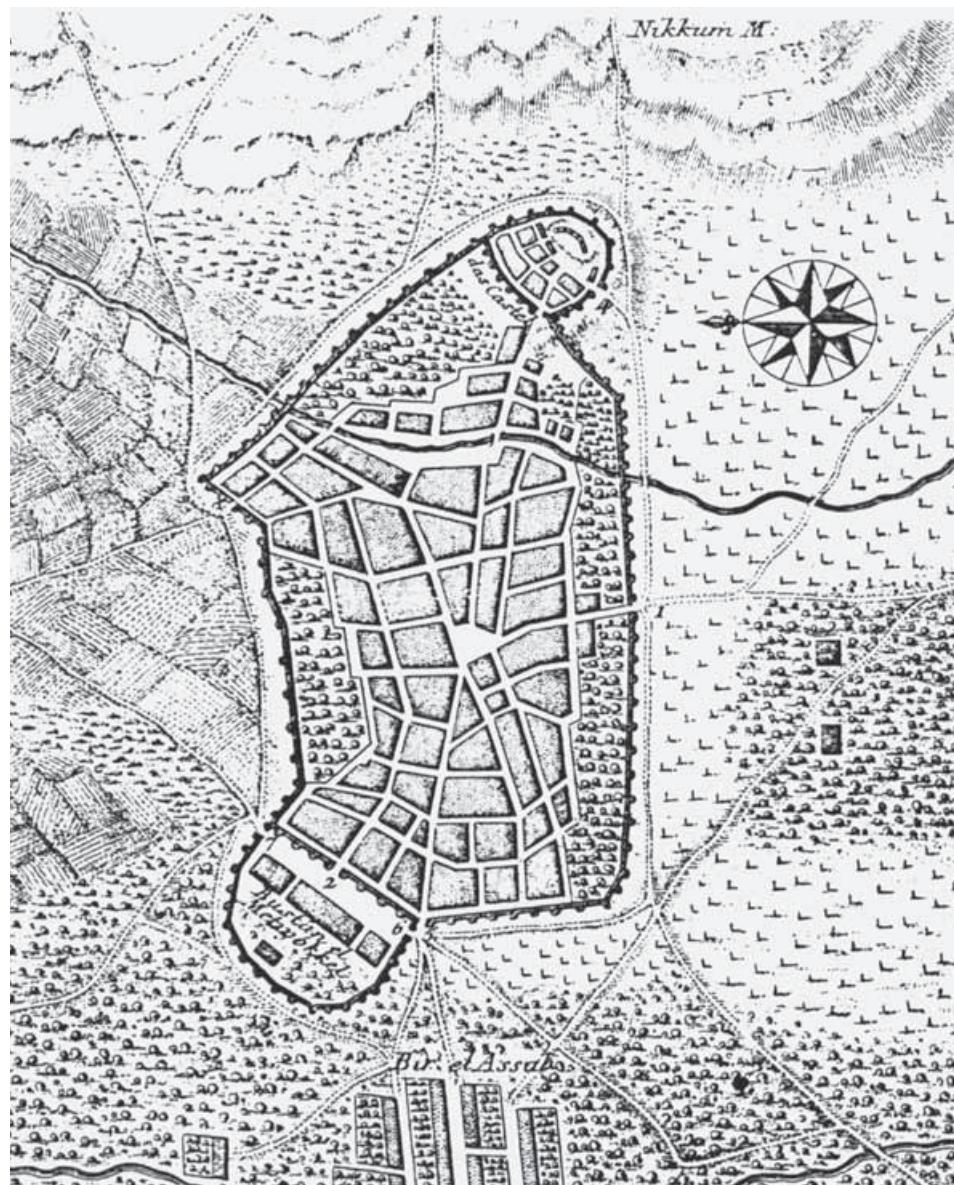


Fig. 15 Gā' bīr al-'azab outside the walls of Ṣan'ā, Yemen.

A map done by Carsten Niebuhr. Gā' bīr al-'azab is shown at the bottom of the map where its name "Bir el Assab" was written.

July 1763.

Gā' bīr al-'azab & Ṣan'ā, Yemen.

Black-white etching.

Map after: Klein-Franke Aviva, Carsten Niebuhr and the First Scientific Expedition to South Arabia. [In Hebrew]. *Fe'amim* 18 (1984): 86. [In Hebrew].

Jews. At the first quarter of the eighteenth century its population was reduced by a series of natural disasters and military attacks, as Jews were easy target to kill, since Gā' bīr al-'azab was an open place, not surrounded by walls as Ṣan'ā was (Fig. 15). In spite of that, the Jewish community at Gā' bīr al-'azab recovered. Carsten Niebuhr had reported that in July 1763, when being there, the Jewish community had 2,000 inhabitants, which meant that since the first half of the eighteenth century, the Jewish community in Gā' bīr al-'azab had gradually become a preferable market segment for Jewish silversmiths.

That was already the actual situation upon the nomination of Rabbi Yihye Zaluh רבי ייחיא צלאלה as the supreme leader of the Jewish Court in Gā' bīr al-'azab in 1758

(known after his death as *MaHaRiTZ*). He set out rules on the issue of the separation of the Jewish silversmith market from the Muslim market segment, here and there by Jewish silversmiths. Not only that he was an extraordinary religious personality, also he was a silversmiths, as in Yemen, public servants in the Jewish community made living from their work, after the ruling of Maimonides.

The target of his ruling was that the separation must be total, to prevent any involvements of any kind by Muslims in silversmith work for Jews. As his ruling was synchronized with *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law, he assured that no Jewish silversmith mistakenly would violate *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law. Such violation meant a collective punishment against the Jewish community, as that was the way of the Zaydi Imams.

As far as I know there is no comparative research juxtaposing *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law (in Yemenite-Arabic script) with the ruling of *MaHaRiTZ* (in Judeo-Yemenite script). His ruling was documented in *al-Mswade* – the documentation of the Jewish Court in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the eighteenth century in Judeo-Yemenite script. His ruling became the law in the Jewish community all over Yemen not only in Gā' bīr al-'azab. His law was the law for all Jews of Yemen all along the two hundred years from 1758 up till the big waves of Jews living Yemen to the State of Israel in ca. 1950. His ruling, of a total separation, shaped the Jewish silversmith in Yemen from 1758 till 1950. Therefore, it is clear that Jewish silversmiths in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the eighteenth century had compiled the techniques mentioned in *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law, but not Islamic iconography. My Ph. D. dissertation had proved the existence of fourteen different types of jewellery owned by the Jewish bride in the eighteenth century in Gā' bīr al-'azab and Radā' (a town south to Ṣan'ā) (<http://www.oraberger.co.il/phd/>). All of them had shown techniques mentioned in *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law. However, the survived jewellery show other techniques not mentioned at all in *Qānūn Ṣan'ā* Law, as well.

From the point of view of Jewish iconography, Jewish tube bracelets in the eighteenth century in Gā' bīr al-'azab gained a new iconography. That had happened as result of the ruling of *MaHaRiTz*, as well as, the influence of Indian tube bracelets, which have no triangle at all. Thus, as result of strong connections between Jews of Gā' bīr al-'azab with the Yemenite Jewish community in India who used the religious services of *MaHaRiTz* (Berger 2005: 247–252).

Four points emerge from this. First, the scorpion had a past in Yemen not only as a Zodiac sign, but also in jewellery. Second, the iconography of the scorpion in Yemen in jewellery was not in the frame of fertility but to cure scorpion stings. Third, the revival of the iconography of the scorpion in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is new, as well as, its switching from curing scorpion stings to cure infertility. Fourth, though the triangle was the dominant Art formula feature of the scorpion, in general and in tube bracelets in particular in the Middle Ages, this feature had been eliminated from Jewish tube bracelets in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the eighteenth century, as result of the ruling of *MaHaRiTZ* and the influence of the Indian tube bracelet type which has no triangle at all.

## Scorpion and Cure

Jewish thinking is very specific in defining the dangerous situations in life that need “Preservation and Strengthening”, *שימול* . In the Jewish Talmud it said that there are three who need “Preservation”. These are:

“who ever is ill, a groom and a bride” (Babylonian Talmud, Blessings, 54b).

This explains, on the background of the pilgrimage to Ta‘izz to al-Shabazi’s grave, why “al-Shabazi’s scorpion” was adopted as a fertility symbol in Yemen and implied in

jewellery in the Jewish community in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It also explains, why "al-Shabazi's scorpion" had replaced the earlier very well known fertility symbol in Jewish thought – a hen and a chicken. The Babylonian Talmud presents the Jewish habit of the Talmud period to present a pair of a hen and a chicken before the bride and the groom, telling them to be fruitful and multiply like a hen and a chicken and fulfill the Jewish commandment to procreate (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin, 57a).

The iconography of a hen and a chicken is corroborated by all the Hebrew illuminated marriage contracts (*Ketubbot*) (pl.) from the eighteenth century in Gā' bīr al-'azab (Berger 2005: 94). The most relevant is the *Ketubah* (s.) of the elite bride Ruma bint Abraham ben Salim al-Sheikh al-Lawi from 1794, now, in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. It shows in the center, a chicken going to be released in front of the bride and the groom (Muchawsky-Schnapper 2000: 178).

In Jewish thought, the scorpion was used also as an antidote to cure eye illness. The Jewish Talmud gives orders how to use ashes of specific old scorpion in very small doses as a medicine for the eyes, as well as against blindness (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin, 69a). The orders are very specific and lot of care was made on the small and exact proportions, including a warn that an extra doze will make a harm. That was mixed with *Kohl*. Firstly, the one eye was painted with a very little amount. Later on, the second eye was painted. That medicine to cure eye illnesses was very well known in Gā' bīr al-'azab among Jews and still known in the State of Israel, by few old women, originated in Gā' bīr al-'azab, who used it there. Nowadays, the medical value of the venom as antidote is researched in the frame of modern medicine ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorpion\\_toxin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorpion_toxin)).

## Selket

I'll precede and say that there is no intention, what so ever, to make a direct connection between Selket, the scorpion goddess of Ancient Egypt, and "al-Shabazi's scorpion". However, as she holds the iconography of fertility/infertility & curing scorpion's stings & the scorpion is her emblem (placed on her head), she is a cultural prototype to our subject (Fig. 16). As far as I know, only she holds the three and therefore she might shed light on "al-Shabazi's scorpion" as fertility brand, in spite of the huge gape of time between Shalom (Salim)al-Shabazi and Selket.

Selket's qualities in Ancient Egypt are many and here is only four:

1. She was one of the four female goddess – Selket, Isis, Neith and Nephtys – that had a major protective role in the rebirth process of the Pharaoh, as perfectly shown in the tomb of Tutankhamun (1334–1325 B.C.) of the Eightieth Dynasty of the New Kingdom (revealed by Howard Carter in 1922) (Fig. 17).
2. She was chiefly noted for her control of magic and, in particular, for treating scorpion stings by means of magic/medicine. Her priests dealt with medicine/magic – two sides of the same thing at the time.
3. Childbirth and nursing were two human activities with which she was associated. Because of her maternal vigilance, she was often assimilated to the goddess Isis the goddess of fertility and motherhood. On the other hand, as clearly shown by Capel & Markoe, Isis, who is usually shown nursing Osiris the infant, is shown also with the scorpion emblem of Selket placed on her head (Capel & Markoe 1996: 128 /60). On the other hand, some artifacts, as for example a bronze scepter head, shows the scorpion with the well known Isis's face (Fig. 18) .



**Fig. 16** Selket – the Scorpion goddess of Ancient Egypt.

Her emblem – the scorpion – is placed on her head. The scorpion's tail raised up ready to sting with its sting at the end of the venom gland at the end of the tail.

Fresco painting – a detail.  
Green, Red colors. White plaster.  
Photo after: Lmy 1981:56.



**Fig. 17** Selket – the Scorpion goddess of Ancient Egypt.

Her emblem – the scorpion – is placed on her head. Selket is one of the four goddess (Selket, Isis, Neith and Nepthys) who surrounded the shrine containing Tutankhamun's canopic equipment. Here she is shown by herself out of that context.

Wood statue covered with gold foil.  
Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt.  
Photo after: Stoddert & Holt & Hudson 1976. Plate 25.

4. Selkets' children are born in a thin membrane, and when she liberates them they cling on her back where they develop by tripling in volume without taking in any food, other by osmosis (Lmy 1981: 94a).

This quality of her is our interest as it deciphers the fertility iconography associated with Selket. Nowadays, this quality of Selket is proved to be based on actual observations on scorpions circles of life in nature in Ancient Egypt. The modern research in biology shows that her way is the common way to grow up the new born scorpions by the female scorpion, who do that alone, as quoted from Wikipedia and clearly shown in Fig. 19:

“Unlike the majority of arachnid species, scorpions are viviparous. The young are born one by one, and the brood is carried about on its mother's back until the young have undergone at least one molt. Before the first molt, scorpions cannot survive naturally without the mother, since they depend on her for protection and to regulate their moisture levels. Especially in species which display more advanced sociability, the young/mother association can continue for an extended period of time. The size of the litter depends on the species and environmental factors, and can range from two to over a hundred scorpions. The average litter however, consists of around 8 scorpions.



**Fig. 18** The scorpion.

The scorpion with the well known face of the goddess Isis's. Bronze scepter head. Photo after: Lmy 1981. Page 94a.

The young generally resemble their parents. Growth is accomplished by periodic shedding of the exoskeleton (ecdysis). A scorpion's developmental progress is measured in instars (how many moults it has undergone). Scorpions typically require between five and seven moults to reach maturity. Moulting is effected by means of a split in the old exoskeleton which takes place just below the edge of the carapace (at the front of the prosoma). The scorpion then emerges from this split; the pedipalps and legs are first removed from the old exoskeleton, followed eventually by the metasoma. When it emerges, the scorpion's new exoskeleton is soft, making the scorpion highly vulnerable to attack. The scorpion must constantly stretch while the new exoskeleton hardens to ensure that it can move when the hardening is complete. The process of hardening is called sclerotization. The new exoskeleton does not fluoresce; as sclerotization occurs, the fluorescence gradually returns." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorpion>).

The common denominator to Ancient Egypt and Ta'izz is the hot climate which is needed for scorpions. As a rule, scorpions spend the hot hours in shaded places and go out for hunting and mating in nights. Hence, we can safely assume that such observation on scorpions and the knowledge gained of it, as mentioned above, was known in Ta'izz, as well, and was not unique to Ancient Egypt only.

It is therefore now clear, that al-Shabazi's grave and the spring beside it was, and still is, an ideal territory for scorpions. As scorpions need flat and clean stone for mate, the many smooth and clean stones of the spring are ideal to mate (Fig. 20). As the female scorpion bears the just born scorpions on her back permanently, the water prevents dehydration of her and the little ones and provides her food, shade and protection at the same time (Figs. 19, 20). The bottom line is that the modern scientific research shows basic biological facts at the background of Erich Brauer's research and its conclusion showing "al-Shabazi's scorpion" as a symbol of fertility, as presented at the beginning of this article.

Is that so? It looks to me that facts alone are not enough to create a belief. On the other hand, al-Shabazi was known already in his life for curing people, Jews and Muslims. He is noted for practical medicine, Kabbala, and knowledge that was excluded from the Jewish community and common by Muslims. It is therefore clear to me that al-Shabazi's personality and reputation to cure people, had been merged with the knowledge of Ta'izz regarding scorpions and initiated the belief, the symbol and the phenom-



**Fig. 19** Young scorpions on the back of their mother.

“Scorpions are viviparous. The young are born one by one, and the brood is carried about on its mother’s back until the young have undergone at least one molt. Before the first molt, scorpions cannot survive naturally without the mother, since they depend on her for protection and to regulate their moisture levels.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorpion>

enon discussed above as a Yemeni phenomenon. In the light of all that, we may now see and assimilate the abundance granulation at the top of the L.A. Mayer silver bracelet (Fig. 13), as the just born many scorpions on the triangular back of the female scorpion (Fig. 19). If indeed so, we may assume that Ta‘izz was the center for *Humat al-aqrab* – “Scorpion’s Venom” type tube bracelet in Yemen in the past and not Ṣan‘ā. The granulation technique demands silver/gold of very high quality. As Nützel had shown, Ta‘izz was the coinage center of Yemen under the Rasulid who ruled Yemen from Ta‘izz (r. 1229–1454) (Nützel: 1891). That explains why this type of bracelet had survived in Yemen till the beginning of the eighteenth century and appears in *Qānūn Ṣan‘ā Law*, as *Aswira* (pl.), as mentioned above.

### Summing up

In conclusion, therefore, we can say, first, that the scorpion had a past in Yemen. It was not invented by the Jewish silversmiths and/or the Jewish jewellery designer women in the Jewish community in Gā‘ bīr al-‘azab in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but only revived in the new *Labbah*, *Lazem*, *Khoratah* and *Aqrabe*. Second, the revived



Fig. 20 The spring at al-Shabazi's grave.

Ta'izz, south west Yemen.

Photographed by Ester Muchawsky-Schnapper, 1999.

scorpion shows a new iconography – curing infertility. With that iconography it was adopted into the new jewellery of the Jewish bride, groom and the married woman in Gā' bīr al-'azab. Third, the revival of the scorpion at that specific time, draws a direct line to the scorpion of Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi, as it appears in the peak of the phenomenon of the pilgrimage to Ta'izz to his grave, bringing from there an alive scorpion as a sign to cure infertility. Forth, though the triangle is the hard core art formula of the scorpion, the name – “scorpion” – is the most important art formula in the Jewish community in Gā' bīr al-'azab in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The name “scorpion” had been turned to the brand of Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi and that had enabled the women voice easily to be heard via the innovation of “scorpion” jewels by the entrepreneur Jewish jewellery designer women. Fifth, the most interesting art formula of “al-Shabazi's scorpion” is, no doubt, that of “Angles Script” from the Hebrew Kabballistic manuscript *Raziel the Angle*, known by *Shalom (Salim) al-Shabazi* himself.

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In 1981, in the frame of my M.A. thesis in the Department of Art History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I conducted a field work and interviewed, in Israel, old women who got married in Ṣan'ā. Including, some very old women who got married at the end of the nineteenth century and/or the very beginning of the twentieth century, in the

status of “Girl Bride”. Also, I interviewed the brides that had been photographed in Ḡanā'ā by the Jewish photographer Yihye Haybi in the years 1927–1944.

*Labbah, Lazem, Khoratah* and *Aqrabe* mentioned here are in the farm of my M.A. thesis and never published before. I would like to thank all the Yemenite women who shared with me their knowledge. The thesis is dedicated to them.

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