**The Cultural Biography of Swords in Early Islam: Instruments of Warfare and Socio-Cultural Artifacts**

1. **Introduction**

The material arts are embodied practices that have left their traces in documents and objects (Chau, 2023: xiii). The concept of artifact biography provides a theoretical framework for understanding the life-history of artifacts not as static objects but dynamic entities that accumulate meaning and significance through their interactions with people and contexts over time. This study uses two key elements of artifact biography to analyze the culture of Islamic swords. Firstly, it analyzes the various owners of the artifact throughout its existence, exploring how different ownerships affect the artifact’s social and cultural significance. Secondly, it investigates both the practical and symbolic uses of the artifact, including its employment in daily life, rituals, combat, and how these evolve over time.

Artifact biography is an approach derived from anthropology that considers the life-history of an artifact as crucial to its meaning. Studying the cultural biographies of artifacts allows researchers to explore and reconstruct their histories and the human experiences they reflect, providing a deeper comprehension of past cultural practices and changes in societal values and structures (Greco, 2019: 7). It is also essential for revealing how artifacts’ significance evolves over time through human and environmental interaction. Understanding an artifact’s uses in daily life, rituals, and combat allows us to understand its practical and symbolic roles, while understanding its ownership history provides insights into prevalent social hierarchies, wealth, and cultural values over time. The exchange of artifacts is also often indicative of broader economic and social networks (Gosden and Marshall, 1999: 169–78; Joy, 2009: 540–56; Hahn and Weiss, 2013: 1–14).

Artifact biography enriches our understanding of swords by tracing their journey through time, revealing how they were crafted, used, valued, and remembered within different cultural and historical contexts. The theoretical background of the research delves into the multifaceted significance of the medieval sword, drawing on various historical, cultural, and anthropological perspectives. Although the primary approach is text-based research, an interdisciplinary approach is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of medieval Islamic swords. This approach integrates existing scholarship on medieval swords in different cultural contexts, focusing on typology, production, distribution, social significance, and the concept of “living swords” (Jones, 2023; Brunning, 2013). This multi-layered methodological approach facilitates a balanced synthesis of various types of evidence, facilitating in turn a nuanced exploration of the cultural significance of swords. The notion of “living swords” perceived as possessing personalities and agency is key to understanding their cultural significance. Swords often have rich biographies due to their association with significant events, high-status individuals, and important cultural rituals. They are frequently named, adorned with inscriptions, and passed down through generations, making them prime subjects for artifact biographies. Medieval Islamic literature and historical accounts, in which swords are attributed with names, histories, and symbolic meanings, may reveal similar dynamics.

Swords even since pre-Islamic times have enjoyed the highest prestige among weapons of war in the Arab world and, as tools designed to threaten and/or apply force, have played crucial roles in Arabic-Islamic culture just as in virtually every other. The use of weapons in Arabic-Islamic culture was often formalized and idealized, reflecting their cultural significance (Torlakova, 2008: 129). During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabs and the early Muslims primarily used swords as symbols of military power, royal and communal authority, religion, and mysticism. The sword was an object of reverence, aestheticism, status, and embodiment (Furat, 1998: 319–30.). **The word** *sayf* (“sword”) relates to a multifaceted symbol of military power and authority (Muehlhaeusler and Hoyland, 2012: 39) and there are approximately 300 synonyms for it in Arabic, probably more than any other language (al-Suyuti, 2010). Alongside with the camel and the desert, the sword remains a key symbol of Arab culture to this day (Mumtaz and Muhammed, 2015: 290).

1. **Study Aims**

This article examines the multifaceted roles and significance of the sword in medieval Islam, contextualizing this culturally and historically. This study examines the sword beyond its functional role as a mere tool for killing to considering it a cultural artifact with a broader meaning and significance for its bearer and his community.

The primary objective is to investigate the dynamic relationship between people and swords in medieval Muslim societies, to analyze the significance of swords and decipher their symbolic and socio-cultural meaning derived from their multiple functions within medieval Muslim societies. The study emphasizes the interplay between the form of the object and its social and cultural significance (Jones, 2023: 8).

The study only briefly refers to trade networks for raw materials, manufacturing centers, and swords makers, if at all. These aspects will be referenced in passing or as areas for further research, ensuring that the primary focus remains on the symbolic and socio-cultural dimensions of swords.

1. **Sources**

Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) systematically addresses all aspects of human existence, providing comprehensive guidance for believers.[[1]](#footnote-1) Talal asserts that the “*shari’a* is an exemplar of practical programs for the cultivation of moral virtue” (2003: 241). Muslims rely on jurisprudence (*fiqh*), a corpus of literature that aims to relate often abstract legal principles to practical needs, aspirations, and changes, as well developments in the community. A basic methodological question arises concerning the nature of these sources: Do they predominantly embody theoretical and/or hypothetical discussions or are they grounded in reality? (Maghen, 1999a: 351–54; Maghen, 2005b: 281–83; Rispler, 2007: 15; al-Azmeh, 1988: 251; Schacht, 1986: 886–91). Initially, it is presumed that these sources are a synthesis of theory and practice, making it challenging to disentangle one from the other. This synthesis establishes moral boundaries through processes of socialization, allowing room for interpretations and adaptations to be made according to contexts of time and place (Maghen, 2011c: 232–34).

The *ḥadīth* literature—collections of traditions on what the Prophet said, did, or tacitly approved of—is also considered in the study. These traditions, whether authentic, fabricated, or a mixture of both, reflect, at least to some extent, the reality of Muslim urban communities during the first centuries of Islam (Robson, 1956–64: 401–35; Juynboll, 2001–06: 376–96).

Another legal source drawn on here is the *ḥisba* literature that guided the *muḥtasib*, the overseer of markets and public morality (Moukheiber, 2017: 349–72). The *muḥtasib* was involved in all material and spiritual aspects of the city’s life, with authority encompassing all daily religious and secular matters, not just those pertinent to the market’s confines. The *muḥtasib* was also responsible for enforcing discriminatory laws against *ahl al-dhimma*, including those governing dress codes and weapons. Appointed by the governor or the *qādī*, the *muḥtasib* was known for his morality and knowledge of law (Buckley, 1992: 101, 104–06). Most of the available information about *ḥisba* was written by *muḥtasibs* to serve as guides for others assuming this office (Ghaben, 2000: 486). This study draws on several *ḥisba* books, such as: The works of Ibn Bassam (d. 1174), who is believed to have worked in Egypt; al-Shayzari (d. 1174), who worked in the Syrian region; and Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (d. 1329), who relied on his Syrian predecessor but adapted his work to the circumstances of his residence in Egypt.

Another source is Muslim historiography, premodern Arabic historical texts with multiple layers of meaning, with their Muslim authors interpreting the narratives prevalent in their own societies (Hirschler, 2006: 2). However, these texts must be examined critically by taking into account factors such as the timelapse between the historical events and their recording, the challenges posed by oral transmission, bias and prejudice, authenticity, and political influences. Muslim historiography is characterized by a mixture of literary and oral historical traditions, contributing to its intricate nature in comprehending motivations, purposes, and interpretations. During the early Abbasid period, Islamic historiography developed into a mature genre that broadened its interests beyond antiquarianism.

The paper also draws al-Kindi’s treatise on swords. Al-Kindi (d. 873), renown ed as a philosopher, was interested in most everyday phenomena. It is not surprising that al-Muʿtasim (d. 842), the eighth Abbasid caliph, chose him to write a treatise on swords. It is the most important surviving work devoted to swords in Islam, discussing swordsmiths, raw materials, origins, although these particular topics will not be discussed here (Hyland and Gilmour, 2012).

1. **The Prophet’s Swords**

The use of swords by the Arabs during the time of the Prophet Muhammad was both practical, in relation to defense and warfare, and symbolic in representing authority and divine mission (Elgood, 1979). Swords were also wielded against evils, corruption, injustice, and wrongdoing (Mumtaz and Muneer, 2015: 293). An indispensable object in Arabian life, the sword was an inevitable item in the Prophet’s life (Alexander, 2001a: 199; Ibn Anas, 1992: 91). The Prophet Muhammad owned nine swords, each with unique names, features, and historical significance, often carrying a sword, as was customary among the Arabs, not necessarily for violence (Mumtaz and Muneer, 2015: 291). The individuation of the Prophet’s swords by distinct names and personified attributes emphasized their cultural and symbolic significance within Islamic tradition.[[2]](#footnote-2) This process, through which the Prophet’s swords were elevated in status above others, highlights the unique characteristics and spiritual legacy associated with them, distinguishing them from other weapons. This phenomenon reflects the broader cultural practice of imbuing physical objects with profoundly symbolic meanings, transforming them into tangible representations of the spiritual and ethical virtues embodied by the Prophet Muhammad.

Each sword is described in the sources in specific detail, its name, unique features, historical significance, raw materials, and use in battles, for example, being stated. Both their practical use in warfare and their symbolic representation of authority and divine mission underscores their importance and recognition. *Muʿjam al-Buldān*mentions **the sword of the Prophet (*sayf al-nabī*)** in a poetic context and praises its uniqueness and its being the conqueror of both plains and mountains (al-Hamawi, 1990: 174).

The swords of Prophet Muhammad are rich in symbolic and historical significance. Each sword, with its unique name, features, and historical context, reflects the socio-cultural values of the time. The symbolic meanings attached to these swords emphasize their roles in warfare, their representation of divine support, and their importance in early Islamic society. The following analysis is a structured overview of the symbolic and historical significance of some of the Prophet’s swords.

Among the nine swords owned by the Prophet, the one called *Dhu-l-Faqar* was the most prominent and **important. It was** obtained as booty from the Battle of Badr (Ibn Maja, 1972: 60; al-Tirmidhi, 1988: 32; Ibn ʿAsakir, 1990: 12). Some reports state that it was a gift from Balqis, the Queen of Sheba, to Solomon, others that it was made out of an iron bar buried in the *Kaʿba*, and still others that ʿAli found it in the idol of al-Fuls, and some combine elements of these origin stories (Bellino, 2012: 77). *Dhu-l-Faqar* is often translated as ‘the possessor of many ridges,” referring to the narrow grooves and cavities on its blade or to a single long groove in the middle of the blade that resembled a vertebra. Burton explains that these features were designed to lighten the sword’s weight while increasing its flexibility and strength (1884: 38).

Muḥammad praised *Dhu-l-Faqar* as the most famous sword in Islamic military history. David Alexander states that *Dhu-l-Faqar* has become a semi-legendary sword in Muslim heritage due to the many miracles attributed to it. (2001a: 200). The Prophet Muhammad approved the name *Dhu-l-Faqar* after appraising it out of the spoils of the Battle of Badr and it became his favorite sword, accompanying him on all his campaigns. Often associated with ʿAli Ibn Abi Talib, it is surrounded by various myths, including its miraculous powers (al-Balathuri, 1987: 85, 109). For example, the Prophet Muhammad saw a vision involving *Dhu-l-Faqar* before the Battle of Uhud, which he interpreted as a sign of what was to happen (al-Baghdadi, 2002: 89). The Prophet is described as using it in various illustrated manuscripts of ʿAli, (Elassal, 2018: 1–9). It is unclear who inherited *Dhu-l-Faqar* after the Prophet’s death, making it a controversial symbolic matter among the caliphs and leaders that followed. Some accounts state that Ab**u** Bakr had possession of the Prophet’s sword until his own death (**Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 93), while others claim it was passed onto Imam ʿAli, hence gaining a great importance in Shiʿite tradition.

Various accounts describe the sword as being made of silver with ornate decorations, including silver rings and a pommel adorned with gold or silver (al-Nasaʾi, 1988: 12; **Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 39; al-Tirmidhi, 1988: 11). *Dhu-l-Faqar* was renowned for its distinctive notched or bifurcated blade. This design was not just functional but also carried symbolic significance, often associated with divine intervention and justice. The hilt, decorated with intricate carvings and possibly inlaid with precious metals or stones, could have featured Qurʾanic verses, invocations, or the names of God, intended to invoke divine protection and blessings. The crossguard separating the blade from the hilt may have featured elaborate designs, perhaps incorporating Islamic geometric patterns or floral motifs. The pommel might have been adorned with symbols of power or faith, such as crescents or stars. It could also have included precious stones or intricate metalwork to signify the sword’s importance.

The decorations on *Dhu-l-Faqar* are deeply symbolic. The notched blade itself is often interpreted as a sign of divine power and justice, with legends stating it was given to the Prophet by the angel Jibril. Inscriptions on the sword would enhance its spiritual significance, serving as a constant reminder of the divine support and guidance for the wielder. The specific designs and decorations reflected the artistic and cultural influences of the time, incorporating traditional Islamic art and symbolism. This includes the use of arabesque patterns, calligraphy, and geometric designs, all of which carry deeper meanings related to infinity, unity, and the divine nature of creation.

*Al-maʿthūr* was a sword the Prophet owned before the first revelations, having inherited it from his father.Ibn ʿAsākir mentions that the Prophet entered Madina with his father’s sword, emphasizing its personal and familial significance. (1990: 214–15).

***Al-ʿaḍab* was a sword** noted for its sharpness and strength, representing power and effectiveness in battle and signifying the Prophet’s prowess.

***Al-mikhdam* was a sword is** noted for its craftsmanship, exemplifying superior quality and the importance of skill in sword-making.

***Rasūb* wa**s a sword renowned for its durability and effectiveness in battle and associated with legends about its invincibility and resilience.

***Al-qalaʿī* was a sword re**nowned for its origins and the quality of its metal, highlighting the importance of material quality and sword craftsmanship.

***Al-baṭṭār* was a sword** inscribed with the names of prophets, emphasizing its sacred nature and representing the continuity of prophetic missions and divine favor.

1. **The Multifaceted Roles of Swords**

Swords have a dual nature, serving both as practical instruments of warfare and profound symbols of various abstract ideas. This duality highlights the complexity of their roles, functioning simultaneously as tools of violence and emblems of intellectual, mystical, historical, and social significance. The rich symbolism surrounding swords is multifaceted, incorporating metaphorical, gendered, and aesthetic aspects. This multifaced role reflects a balance between practical utilities and symbolic meaning, influenced significantly by the attitudes toward their creators or possessors (Lobach, 2018: 779). These facets are described in seven categories below.

1. *Symbolic Significance*: This can be in the form of being the following:

* Nicknames: Swords often serve as metaphors for praise and admiration. For instance, al-Tabari describes the *ansār* as the “sword of God,” attributing divine favor and martial excellence to them (1968: 87). According to Muslim, it was a nickname given as a compliment of power and piety (1990: 69). Similarly, the Prophet referred to Halid bin Walid as “the sword of God,” expressing his power and piety metaphorically (Ibn Qud**a**ma, 1972: 203).
* Idioms: Swords were used in idiomatic expressions to describe true believers and the Prophet, highlighting their defense of the faith, strength, and courage (al-Tirmidhi, 1988: 91). According to al-Tirmidhi, “the gates of heaven are under the shadow of swords,” a symbolic expression of power and victory. A true believer is described as one of the swords of God, a representation of pious devotion (1988: 182). **Abu** Daʾud states that internal disputes between Muslims is severer than a sword, highlighting the fear of disunity within the *umma* and advocating solidarity (1988: 103).
* **Sharpness of Intellect:** Swords frequently symbolize intellectual sharpness, paralleling the physical sharpness of a sword with the acuity of the mind. This metaphor underscores the sword’s use to represent keen mental faculties and analytical prowess.
* **Heirlooms:** Swords such as *al-maʿthūr* are significant cultural artifacts often passed down as heirlooms (Ibn ʿAsakir, 1990: 214–15). This practice signifies continuity of familial heritage and preservation of historical legacy. Swords, laden with special powers, symbolize unity and the transmission of values across time. The controversy over who inherited of the Prophet’s sword reflects its symbolic power and religious significance (al- Bukhari, 1985: 55).
* **Warriors and combat:** Swords represent conquest, domination, and victory and the bravery and skill of warriors (al-Tabari, 1968: 1). They embody martial prowess and the honor associated with combat. Their both offensive and defensive roles in warfare indicate their multifaceted nature, serving as tools of both aggression and protection.

1. *Authority and Leadership:* Swords serve as symbols of authority, commitment, spiritual leadership, and inspiration. They signify a leader’s readiness for action and authority, indicating the social importance and recognition of that (Ibn Anas, 1992: 83). The possession of swords also legitimized rulers, as exemplified in the case of Hisham ibn ʿAbd-al-Malik (al-Tabari, 1968: 48).
2. *Warfare and Conflict:* Swords carried by warriors symbolized their readiness for action and their commitment to defending the faith and participating actively in religious warfare. The possession and display of swords were signs of warriors' victories and social status, symbolizing human power and respect (Ibn Maja, 1972: 93; Muslim, 1990: 54; **Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 205; al- Bukhari, 1985: 69; al-Masʿudi, 1997: 80). They marked honor and prestige, underscoring their military success, conquest and esteem (Sizgorich, 2007: 993–1015). Warriors waging *jihād* with their swords exemplified and symbolized their active participation in religious war (al-Tabari, 1968: 27). Swords also played roles in internal conflicts among Muslims, reflecting the power dynamics and the potential for strife within the community (**Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 13; al-Bukhari, 1985: 30; Muslim, 1990: 12). They served as visual testimonies to the sacrifices of martyrs (*shuhadāʾ*) with the glint of their swords symbolizing ultimate devotion and ensuring they would not be quested in their graves (al-Tirmidhi, 1988: 159). Suspending swords from olive trees historically symbolized surrender (**Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 91). When the Prophet sought to enter the *Kaʿba* before it was conquered, the Meccans allowed believers to enter only with their swords sheathed (Muslim, 1990: 81). Tribes coming to the Prophet with their swords hanging around their necks used this to symbolize their submission and surrender to his authority (**Abu** Daʾud, 1988: 79).
3. *Piety, Justice, and Judgment:* Swords were instruments of divine justice and judgment used to punish those deemed guilty (Ibn Maja, 1972: 80; al-Tabari, 1968: 139). They symbolized resistance against tyranny and the quest for freedom (al-Tabari, 1968: 213). Incidents, such as when the Prophet’s sword was stolen but he decided to not punish the thief, underscored belief in God’s protection and power (Muslim, 1990: 67; al-Bukhari, 1985: 25). Swords appeared in prophetic dreams, with a broken sword symbolizing defeat and a restored swords symbolizing future victories granted by God (al-Bukhari, 1985: 40).
4. *Socio-Economic Status:* Swords were part of the personal appearance of noble men, signifying the wealthy elite who could afford high quality craftsmanship, artistry and materials (al-Tabari, 1968: 167; Ibn Maja, 1972: 89). A slave, for example, due to his socio-economic and symbolic status, would receive a sword from war spoils (Ibn Maja, 1972: 73). Swords had significant economic value, often as part of war spoils or inherited items, and their reuse underscored their material worth (Ibn Maja, 1972: 78). Ibn Anas mentions the option to exchange or sell silver swords based on their economic value (1992: 78).
5. *Education and Norms:* The use of swords in educational contexts emphasized peaceful problem-solving over confrontation (Muslim, 1990: 200; al-Nasaʾi, 1988: 92). The raising of swords between Muslims was condemned, with unity and the peaceful resolution of disputes lauded (al-Bukhari, 1985: 91). Muslims confronting each other with their swords were seen as doomed to Hell (Muslim, 1990: 45).
6. *Religious Differentiation:* Swords delineated religious boundaries, with Jews and Christians forbidden from carrying them in Muslim lands in accordance with *ḥisba* manuals. This prohibition reinforced the distinct identity of and privileges enjoyed by the Muslim community over the other religious communities they governed (Ibn al-Ukh**uw**wa, 1939: 95; al-Shayzari, 1969: 207).
7. **Decorative Techniques with Swords and Their Artistic Significance**
8. *Preamble*

Islamic swords transcended their utilitarian function as weapons, embodying intricate artistry that elevated them to the status of fine ornaments. Through the application of sophisticated decorative techniques, these swords became symbols of authority, wealth, and religious devotion. The skillful use of various materials and designs not only enhanced their aesthetic appeal but also imbued them with profound cultural and symbolic meaning, reflecting the excellence of Islamic art and craftsmanship (al-Numayri, 2018: 70–79). The design and presentation of swords often conformed to the aesthetic and symbolic ideals of their time and place, mirroring broader cultural and artistic values. The most commonly decorated parts were the hilt and the blade. On some ceremonial examples, the decoration achieved such sumptuous and impressive effects that the final appearance of the object bore more resemblance to an ornament than a weapon (Mohamed and Abdel Ghany, 2018: 15). The finest swords were crafted by master craftsmen collaborating with leading designers, goldsmiths, and jewelers, whose work transformed military equipment into piece of art (Alexander, 2015b: 10–11).

1. *Common Decorative Techniques*

**Engraving, a prevalent technique,** involved etchings on the sword to create intricate and elaborate designs. **Inlay, the** technique of embedding precious materials such as gold or silver into the blade or hilt, significantly enhanced the sword’s visual appeal. **Gilding**, the application of a thin layer of gold to parts of the sword, added a luxurious finish, reflecting its owner’s wealth and status. **Brass and silver encrusting** produced elaborate and ornate designs, elevating the sword’s aesthetic appeal. Calligraphic texts, often Qurʾanic verses or poetic phrases, were also often meticulously inscribed on the swords, adding layers to their religious and cultural significance (al-Masʿudi, 1997: 366).

1. ***Materials Used*** *for Decoration*

Precious stones such as rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, were set into the hilt or scabbard, serving both decorative and symbolic purposes (Ibn Sida, 1898–1903: 72). Decorative enamel coatings added vibrant color and intricate detail to the swords. **Gold and silver** were utilized not only for their structural properties but also for their decorative potential, highlighting the owner’s wealth and status (Ibn Sida, 1898–1903: 201; al-Bukhari, 1985: 78). The sources note that the Prophet's hilt was adorned with both silver and gold hilt (Ibn Qudama, 1976: 45, 176). **Iron and steel** were chosen for their strength and durability, providing the necessary hardness and flexibility after forging. Wood, bone, and ivory were **often** **crafted into handles and hilts**, sometimes wrapped in leather to improve grip**.**

1. *Decorative Patterns*

**Geometric patterns** frequently featured due to their aesthetic and symmetrical appeal. Ibn Sida states that decorative elements invoke a sense of sacredness and offered protection (1898–1903, Vol. VI, p. 93). **Flower and plant motifs** symbolized growth, beauty, and life, and contributed to swords’ visual richness. Complex patterns and designs, including arabesques, scrollwork and floral decorations, added visual and symbolic depth to swords, while also showcasing the artists’ creative and technical skills. Representations of animals, such as birds, lions, and horses, conveyed strength, courage, and nobility. **Calligraphic inscriptions—**including Qurʾanic verses, names, and poetic phrases—were intricately inscribed on them and reflected both religious devotion and artistic expression. **These inscriptions not only enhanced the sword’s beauty but also imbued it with profound spiritual and cultural significance.**

1. **Conclusions**

This study of swords in early Islam has illuminated their multifaceted roles as both weapons and socio-cultural artifacts providing insights into the values, practices, and historical contexts of their time. The study has shown how swords were not static but dynamic entities that accumulated meaning through their interactions with people and contexts over time. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, combined with the framework of artifact biography, the study has revealed the complex functions of swords as bearers of both material utility and rich symbolic meaning, leading us to the following conclusions:

ראש הטופס

תחתית הטופס

1. The Importance of the Prophet’s Swords

The Prophet Muhammad’s swords have profound significance in Islamic history, militarily, socially, and culturally. They were not merely relics of the past, but symbolized the strength, leadership, and spiritual authority of the Prophet and provided a window into the social hierarchies and cultural values of early Muslim societies. The intricate descriptions and decorations of these swords further emphasized their importance as cultural artifacts. Their names, inscriptions, and other personalizations reflected the high esteem in which they were held. The Prophet’s swords were personified and singularized through their association with his life and deeds, embodying his virtues and leadership qualities and serving as symbols of divine guidance and protection. The significance of the Prophet’s swords has evolved over time, adapting to changing social and cultural contexts. Initially valued for their practical use in combat, they have become cherished historical artifacts, representing the continuity and resilience of Islamic tradition. Their evolving meaning underscores the dynamic nature of cultural symbols and their ability to resonate across generations.

1. A Taxonomy of Swords’ Significance and Versatility
2. *Combat: A Key Military Tool, Authority, and Restraint*: Swords were central to military endeavors, symbolizing conquest, dominance, victory, authority, and the ability to lead, attack, and protect. They represented not just bravery and physical strength but also the moral and ethical restraint exercised in religious warfare and the righteous use of force to defend the faith of Islam.
3. *Daily Life Objects of Craftsmanship and Prestige:* Beyond their military use, swords were objects of exquisite craftsmanship, reflecting the high level of skill and artistry of the swordsmiths. They were prestigious items, signifying status and honor for those who possessed them. Owning swords was a mark of social distinction and esteem. The artistic significance of swords, through decorative techniques and craftsmanship, highlighted their status as objects of luxury and cultural pride. The integration of art and utility in sword design reflected the broader aesthetic and symbolic ideals of the time.
4. *Socio-Cultural Symbolism:* The passing down of swords as heirlooms down the generations reflected broader social networks and the prestige associated with these objects, particularly with the Prophet’s swords. Swords carried deep socio-cultural symbolism, embodying the values and principles of Islam, familial heritage, and the preservation of historical legacy. They represented bravery, leadership, and the pursuit of justice. These artifacts served as tangible connections to the Prophet and his legacy, inspiring Muslims to uphold his exemplary ethical and moral standards. Furthermore, the symbolic significance of swords was extended to incorporate various abstract ideas, including intellectual acuity, justice, authority, and piety.

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1. For more about the compatibility and obstacles which confront research on a topic in Islamic law, see: Maghen, “Close Encounters: Some Preliminary Observations on the Transmission of Impurity in Early Sunni Jurisprudence”, *Islamic Law and Society*, 6(1999): 351–54; and Mahjabeen, “Cultural Safety in Muslim Aged Care: Taking the Bull by the Horns”, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Ageing*, 30 (2018): 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more on singularization, see: Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process”, in Argun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986): 73–76; Argun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value”, in Argun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986): 3, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)