Most commentators believe that Sūrah 113 and 114 were revealed during the Makkan period, although some believe that they were revealed in Madinah (IK, R); still others leave the question open due to lack of conclusive evidence (Bḍ, Bg, Z). *Al-Falaq* takes its name from *the daybreak,* by which the Prophet is told to swear in the first verse.

Among those who maintain that Sūrah 113 and 114 are Makkan, many say they were revealed in relation to an incident in which the Prophet was stricken with an illness as a result of a spell put upon him by a sorceress, a practitioner of black magic. The Archangel Gabriel is said to have told him the location of a knotted string upon which the sorceress had whispered her spell and then revealed these two sūrah as a means of undoing the spell. The Prophet sent ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to obtain the string and whisper over it these fourteen verses, which would undo the fourteen-knot spell (Q). Together, the two sūrah are known as *al-Muʾawwidhatān,* “The Two Protectors,” and are used by Muslims to this day for protection from many evils, including the evil eye and the casting of spells.

According to the early accounts, there was some debate among the Companions of the Prophet as to whether these sūrah were part of the Quran or were a special supplication that the Prophet had been given by God apart from the Quran. Regarding this opinion Zirr ibn Hubaysh said, “I asked Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, ‘O Abū al-Mundhir! Your brother Ibn Masʿūd said so-and-so [i.e., “The Two Protectors”] do not belong to the Quran.’ Ubayy said,
'I asked God’s Messenger about them, and he said, “They have been revealed to me, and I have recited them [as a part of the Quran].”’ Then Ubayy added, ‘So we say [of these verses] what God’s Messenger has said.’”

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Say, “I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak from the evil of what He has created, from the evil of darkness when it enshrouds, from the evil of those who blow upon knots, and from the evil of the envier when he envies.”

**Commentary**

1 Say, “I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak

   1 Daybreak translates *falaq*, which indicates “the light of dawn” or “the rising dawn” (Sh). The root verb *falaqa* means “to cleave.” In this context it indicates the manner in which the night appears to be cleaved from the day (Sh). Hence God is described as the Cleaver of the dawn in 6:96. *Falaq* can also be used metaphorically to indicate “the emergence of truth after uncertainty” (*Tāj al-ʿarūs*). Hence this verse can be read as indicating that God is the source of all true understanding, such that to seek refuge in Him is to seek refuge in truth from falsehood, as in 17:81: *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing.* For a discussion of the Quranic symbolism of light, see 24:35c. *Falaq* is also taken by some as a name of Hell, a prison in Hell, or one of the trees or mountains in the Fire (Q, Sh, Ṭ).

3 from the evil of darkness when it enshrouds,

2 This verse can be understood as a reference to Satan and his ilk or to Hellfire; it may also be a general reference to all that is evil (Q) or to all the evil
that is committed or manifested by those whom God has created (Z). It can also be understood as a reference to creation itself, which acts as a veil that both hides the Creator and reveals His Qualities and Attributes.

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3 from the evil of darkness when it enshrouds,

3 Most interpret this verse as a reference to the darkening of the night, but some take the verb waqaba, here translated enshrouds, as a reference to the cooling of the night (Q). In both interpretations, refuge is sought because it is the time when those inclined to evil spread mischief and corruption, as in 4:81 and 4:108, which speak of those who conspire by night (Q). In the present verse, darkness translates ghāsiq, which is also interpreted as a reference to the moon, based upon a ḥadīth in which the Prophet looked to the moon and said to his wife, “O ʿĀʾishah, seek refuge in God from this, for this is al-ghāsiq when it sets (waqaba)” (Q). A minority say that the verse refers to “the Pleiades when it sets,” because of the disease and pestilence believed to become prevalent during the period when this luminous star cluster declines (Q).

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4 from the evil of those who blow upon knots,

4 Those who blow upon knots (naffathāt) refers specifically to those engaged in the practice of tying knots in a string and whispering incantations over them (see the introduction to the sūrah), but can also be taken to indicate all those who engage in black magic. Though the noun is in the feminine plural, it is not necessarily limited to women, but may indicate human beings in general (R, Z). In this sense it could be understood as a reference to general evil as practiced in this specific case by the women who blow on knots.

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5 and from the evil of the envier when he envies.”

5 According to some, the refuge sought in this verse is freedom from the effects of envy. In this vein, the Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-Azīz (r. 717–20) is reported to have said, “I cannot think of any wrongdoer more likely to
be wronged than one who envies another” (Z). From one perspective, envy is the root of all evils, as the first sin to be committed in the celestial realm was Satan’s envy of Adam (see 2:34–36; 7:11–13) and the first sin to be committed on earth was Cain’s envy of Abel (see 5:27–31; Q). It is thus said that those who envy the favor bestowed upon others oppose the blessings of God (Q).