

The Arabic Numerology Manuscript of Shaykh
Muhammad'aman Hadāga
of Arsi

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PHILOLOGY

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Abstract

This is a thesis on Arsi-Arabic literature with specific reference to Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga and his manuscript on 'awfāq or numerology. The manuscript was written in Arabic in 1383 A.H. (1956 A.D.) under the title *Miftāḥ al-Mighlāq Šarḥ Sullam al-Marāq fī 'Ilm al-'awfāq*, مفتاح المغلاق شرح سلم المراق في علم الأوفاق "The Key to the Lock: An Elaboration of the Ladder of Ascension in the Science of 'awfāq".

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first is an introduction where I state the problem, review related literature, outline the historical background and highlight the research area.

Numerology is just one small part of the broader field of occultism, and is intertwined with other branches of occultism (e.g. astrology, geomancy etc.). Hence, in the second chapter, I give an introduction to occultism and issues related thereto: first a general introduction to occultism, followed by an overview of Arabic-Islamic occult traditions and finally looking into Ethiopian occultism.

Chapter three provides a biography of Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga (1873-1959 A.D.) After the early tragic death of his father and elder brother he lived alone with his mother among a tribe other than his father's. This sense of social isolation developed in him an attitude of independence and advocacy for disadvantaged groups and was to have great impact on his personality: he was a distinguished scholar and social figure.

It is an interesting to find an original work on occult tradition by an Ethiopian scholar. I describe and examine this work in the fourth chapter. According to informants, it is the only work of its kind by an Arsi scholar. Shaykh Muhammad'aman followed the conventional

practice of Muslim scholars by producing his work in the form of a poem and then writing an authoritative commentary on it. I present excerpts from the poem and the commentary, with philological and content-oriented discussion.

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It was not an easy time for my family, especially my wife. Many thanks for their support and encouragement. And last but not least, thanks to my father who instilled in me a love for higher learning.

Preface

Occultism and the traditions of study of the nature of the "thing-in-itself" (inner nature of things), although regarded by modern scholars as non-scientific, have been part of human discourse throughout history.

In Islamic Orthodoxy the knowledge of the hidden and supernatural world is reserved to Allah, and therefore nobody including men, angels and Jinn can have access to this secret world except to the extent revealed by Allah. In Islam, occultism has been either recognized and organized, or condemned and criminalized.

Islamic occult traditions comprise several related and interlinked disciplines. These include but are not restricted to alchemy, astrology, geomancy and numerology.

In this thesis I discuss and analyze the contribution of Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga, an Arsi scholar and occultist (d. 1959 A.D.), to Arsi-Arabic literature with particular reference to his manuscript on *'awfāq*, numerology.

The MS under consideration contains two parts. One is a poem of 99 verses by Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga in short rhyming couplets on the arts and traditions of *'awfāq*. The second part of the MS is an authoritative and extensive exegesis by the Shaykh of the verses. This thesis will examine both parts.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first is an introductory chapter where I state the problem, review related literature, outline the historical background and highlight the research area. Issues related to occult traditions are dealt with in the second chapter: first a general

introduction to occultism, followed by an overview of Arabic-Islamic occult traditions and finally looking into Ethiopian occultism.

The third and fourth chapters are dedicated respectively to the biography of Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga and philological description of his work. The last chapter is a conclusion where I include my findings and suggestions.

Glossary of Terms

‘Ajami: Literally, non-Arabic. In Ethio-Arabic literature it means using Arabic script for local languages.

‘Ālim: Muslim scholar.

‘Awamumma (Oromo): Derived from Arabic *‘awāmm* (the ordinary, common people), initially referred to pagan religious practices in Arsi; after consolidation of Islam in Arsi, the word was given the meaning of uncivilized.¹

Baraka, Karāma: Blessing, divine power or miracle to bind and loosen, to heal. It is a quality one possesses rather than a category of activity. In Islamic sources, the source of *baraka* is solely from Allah; it is Allah’s direct blessing and intervention conferred upon special, pious Muslims.²

Exorcism: To force evil spirits to leave a place or someone’s body by using special spells, rituals and ceremonies.

Fatwā: Religious decree issued by Muslim scholars.

Fiqh: Islamic law and jurisprudence.

Gabber: The feudal system of land administration introduced to Arsi after the Shawan conquest.

¹ Hassen Muhammad Kawo 2008.

² Westermarck 1926.

Ḥadīth: The record of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), revered as a major source of religious law and moral guidance after the Qur'an.

Horoscope: A description, usually by an astrologer or magical practitioner, about a person's character and things that will happen to him in the future based on the position of the stars and planets in relation to the sign of the zodiac at the moment when the person was born.

'Iblīs (Iblis): Name for the Devil in the Qur'an.

'Ijāza: Authorization given by a scholar to teach his own book or a book for which he himself already has an *'ijāza*.

'Ilm: Knowledge, science.

Incantations: The saying of words and spells used in exorcism and magical practices.

Jinn(s) (genies): In Arab and Muslim folklore Jinn are ugly and evil demons having supernatural powers which they can bestow on persons having the power to call them up. The highest of the Jinn is Iblis, formerly called Azazel, the prince of darkness, or the Devil. The Jinn were thought by some to be spirits that are lower than angels because they are made of fire and are not immortal. They can take on human and animal shapes to influence men to do good or evil. They are quick to punish those indebted to them who do not follow their many rules.³

³ Hefner, *Encyclopedia Mythica*. <<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/jinn.html>> . retrieved on Aug. 14, 2008.

Kabbalah (Kabalah, Cabala and Qabalah): A Jewish system of mysticism.⁴

Karāma: See Baraka.

Magic Square: See *Wafq*.

Muuda [Oromo]: Pilgrimage to sacred sanctuaries and shrines of Muslim saints.

Mysticism: The pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, or insight.

pbuh: Peace be upon him: a prayer for the prophet Muhammad by his followers.

Qibla: Direction of the Holy Mosque in Mecca.

Ramadan: Muslim fasting month.

Ruqya: Short form of *ruqya shar'iyya*. It involves reciting verses from the Qur'an or praying to Allah in supplication for the purpose of curing someone's ailment, or one's own ailment. It is an Islamic form of exorcism.⁵

Shaman: A primitive occult practitioner. The term originated in Siberia and originally meant 'to excite oneself'.⁶

Tafsīr: Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an.

⁴ *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*.

⁵ *Islamedia. the Islamic Encyclopedia*, <http://islamedia.ws/Ruqya_Verses>, retrieved on May 20, 2008

⁶ Saliba 2008.

Talisman: An object, or its drawing, which is believed to have magic powers of protection or harm.⁷

Wafq: Magic Square: a square in which the sum of each row and column and the two diagonals is the same, with no repetition of a numerical value.⁸

Walis (saints): Shaykhs, or other persons, claim to be blessed with 'Karāma', i.e. the gift of power or miracle to bind and loosen, to heal. After their death their graves become centers of pilgrimage where visitors offer prayers and gifts, asking for intercession or assistance.

Waqeffataa [Oromo]: Oromo pagan religion.

⁷ Talisman. Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation. 2008.

⁸ Islamic Medical Manuscripts <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/glossary.html#magic>>

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

1.1 General Background

1.1.1 Statement of Problem

The influence of Arabic over Ethiopian languages is a historically well-known fact. The role of Islamic traditions and Arabic literature is confirmed in both Muslim and Christian Ethiopia due to strong historical relations and contacts between Ethiopia and Arabia. This acquired a new dimension after the emergence of Islam and its early contact with Ethiopia.¹

From the earliest days, Ethiopian Islamic education and culture have been dominated by the Arabic language. Over the centuries Ethiopia has produced many Muslim scholars whose intellectual achievement was impressive.

Many Arsi scholars studied the Arabic language and acquired knowledge in many fields of study, which enabled them to speak and write the language, to produce many works in Arabic, and thus to preserve and transmit their knowledge to coming generations.

Although not to the extent of Arabic, local native languages have also played a significant role in the adoption of Islamic tradition and Arabic culture in Arsi. The phenomenon of *'ajami* (using Arabic script for a non-Arabic language) is the main manifestation of this.²

The achievements of these scholars cover all disciplines. The scholars had sound knowledge of grammar and classical literature, law, philosophy, theology, history, astrology and mystical traditions.

¹ Drewes 1976.

² Hassen Muhammad Kawo 2008.

Arsi Muslim scholars produced many literary works; their manuscripts are found in private collections. Some of these are original works, while others are copies of classical Islamic works.³ In both cases these manuscript traditions were predominately written in Arabic, but we find also many in *'ajami*.

Unfortunately, Arsi region, its scholars and their literary works have not yet been the subject of intensive study. For many reasons, this rich heritage has not attracted much academic interest. Although master's students in the Department of Linguistics and Philology at Addis Ababa University have recently undertaken studies that shed light on the literary production of some Arsi scholars, the area still awaits further investigation.

I took up this thesis to make my contribution to the study of Arsi-Arabic literature with specific reference to Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga and his MS on numerology.

³ Gori 2005.

1.1.2 Review of Literature

There are very few written sources on Ethiopian occult traditions. The Ethiopian astrological and magical book *Awada Nägäst* was studied by Aemere Hagos and is the only research on Ethiopian occultism that I have come across. Abraham Damoz noted the influence of Arabic literature on Ethiopic magical traditions.⁴ In a paper read at the second international symposium on Ethiopian philology (2006), Baye Yimam gave some notes on Ethiopian demonological writings.⁵

Despite this clear scarcity of written sources on Ethiopian occult traditions there are plenty of oral traditions on the subject. Greater efforts must be made to collect and study them.

As for literature related to the study of Islam and Muslim culture in Ethiopia, which provides background for Arsi-Arabic studies, the pioneer in Islamic studies was Enrico Cerulli, whose rich scholarly efforts inspired others.⁶ *Islam in Ethiopia* by Trimingham is considered by many as the standard opus on the subject.

Regarding the history of Islam in south and southeastern Ethiopia there are several works, both published and unpublished, by Braukämper (2002), Abbas Haji (1982), Tamam Haj Adem (2002), Andrzejewski (1974), Tere Østebo (2005), Aman Seifadin (1987) and others. Although these works are not directly related to texts or manuscripts, they provide useful background for philological studies.

As regards the philological aspect, though the field of Ethiopian Arabic literature has only recently been introduced into Ethiopian studies, some preliminary works have been done. Gori wrote an account of Arabic manuscripts collected, published and catalogued until 2005.

⁴ Abraham Damoz 1972.

⁵ Baye 2006.

⁶ Braukämper 2002.

According to him there are valuable collections of Arabic manuscripts in private hands and public institutions all over the country waiting for systematic collecting and microfilming.⁷

Several MA theses have also been produced by students of Addis Ababa University. These theses provide useful studies on MSS produced by Ethiopian Muslim scholars.

In Italy the Ethiopian Arabic Islamic manuscripts are kept in the Cerulli collection at the Vatican Library, and most of them have been published in a series of articles. Four of them were catalogued by Levi della Vida. The Arabic manuscripts from Harar were catalogued by Ronato Traini and are kept in the Civic Library of Pavia.⁸

The German scholar Hans Martin Schlobies, who visited Ethiopia from 1925 to 1928, collected a great number of manuscripts which are now found in Berlin. Another German scholar, Ewald Wagner, collected some manuscripts from Harar and published most of them.

The Dutch scholar A.J. Drewes (1976) acquired manuscripts which were kept in his private library. Furthermore, the Russian traveler Nikolay Gumilev acquired Arabic manuscripts from Ethiopia and kept them in the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.⁹

There have been some works on the hagiographies of saints based on manuscripts and fieldwork by Hussein (1989), Gori (1996) and Ishihara (1997).

⁷ Gori 2005.

⁸ Hassen Muhammad Kawo 2008.

⁹ Gori 2005.

1.1.3 Objectives

The general objective of my research is to highlight and assess the contribution of the Arsi Muslim scholar, Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga, to the development of Arsi-Arabic literature with particular reference to his work on occult traditions. Specifically, this thesis provides a biographical account of the life of the Shaykh, analyzes the literary and philological significance of his work, and describes his manuscript on numerology.

To provide a better understanding of the MS and its subject, the thesis provides historical background and introduction to occultism in general.

1.1.4 Limitations

In Islamic Orthodoxy the knowledge of the hidden and supernatural world belongs to Allah only. Therefore nobody has access to this secret world. Occultism and its folk practices such as fortune telling and magic are strongly condemned in Islamic orthodoxy. For this reason, many informants who are acquainted with occult traditions are reluctant to discuss the whole issue. Due to this situation, it was a challenge for me to win the trust of some informants and get the relevant information on the subject.

The other limitation is the scarcity of written sources in the local libraries. This can be attributed to the fact that unorthodox religious and philosophical traditions are defined as 'occult' and have been undermined by the triumph of the sciences. However, the old tradition has reappeared strongly during the twentieth century, and much literature has been produced. Unfortunately, our local libraries have little to offer in the area of occult tradition. Many recent works are not available. To partially overcome this limitation I resorted to some on-line publications and journals.

1.2 Historical Background

1.2.1 Islam in Arsi

The first contact of Islam outside Arabia was with Ethiopia. The flight of the Prophet Muhammad's followers to the Aksumite Kingdom is well known in both Arab and Ethiopian tradition. Despite this early contact between Islam and Ethiopia, our knowledge about the introduction of Islam to the southern parts of Ethiopia, specifically to today's Arsi area, is still fragmentary.¹⁰

However, scholars believe that present-day Arsi was the territory of early Islamic principalities including Dawaro, Sharkha, Arbabini, Hadiya and Daro.¹¹ According to Arab writers who documented their history, these and other principalities of southeast Ethiopia existed from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.¹² Despite the complexity of political and ethnical composition of those principalities scholars believe that their populations constituted the base for the later Islamization of Arsi.¹³

According to oral traditions Islam was originally introduced to Arsi around 300 A.H. (912 A.D.).¹⁴ They maintain that Islam was introduced to Gasgar in the eastern part of Arsi by al-Haj Bashir Shakmara and Shaykh Dawud Farzana. Both scholars were from Sēru district and acquired further education at Bayt al-Zabid in Yemen. When they went to Yemen they divorced their wives, thinking that they might not return, but remarried them after their return. They also introduced handwritten books to Arsi.

¹⁰ Braukämper 2002.

¹¹ Temam 2002.

¹² Al-Maqrizi 291-321 A.H. was the first to write about these principalities. There are also al-'Ummari (d. 1349), al-Qalqaşandi and Ibn Baṭūta.

¹³ Braukämper 2002.

¹⁴ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, May 14 2008, Hadāga.

Assuming that east and southeast Arsi can be seen as an extension of eastern Shawa, the traditions proposing the early introduction of Islam to the Arsi may be further confirmed by written sources confirming eastern Shawa as the seat of an Islamic principality under the Makhzūmī dynasty starting from 283 A.H. (A.D. 896/7).¹⁵

Oromo expansion in the sixteenth century led to the isolation of Arsi from Muslim centers in the east and the north and consequently to a decline of institutional Islam and general prevalence of *Awamumma* (paganism); but Islam did not completely vanish.¹⁶

Many oral traditions indicate that Islam was introduced to Arsi at an early stage and began to get a strong foothold in the tenth to thirteenth century. Waves of *Awamumma* prevailed until the almost total Islamization of Arsi during the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Remnants of some Islamic elements among Arsi and Borana pagans (*Waqeffataa*) are cited as one main piece of evidence for such an early introduction of Islam to the area. Also mentioned as indicators of early contact between Islam and Arsi are genealogies of Arsi tribes, which include Arabic names for the first 3 to 5 generations, followed by some Oromo names in the middle period and then finally end again with Arabic names.

The renovation and reconstruction of Shaykh Husayn's shrine and dispatch of preachers from there played a significant role in the continuing Islamization of Arsi in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Both written sources and oral traditions testify to the presence of competition between two cultural tendencies in Arsi society from its early days, paganism and Islam.¹⁸ Some elements of paganism are still observable in Arsi Islam even today, centuries after Islamization. These

¹⁵ Braukämper 2002.

¹⁶ Trimingham 1952.

¹⁷ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, May 14, 2008, Hadāga.

¹⁸ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, May 14, 2008, Hadāga.

include the pilgrimage to sacred mountains, veneration of the sacred enclosure *hujuba* around springs, and retention of magical beliefs and practices.¹⁹

These and other features of paganism have been declining in recent decades, especially after the introduction of the *Salafi* movement in the late 1940s,²⁰ which emphasizes the absolute oneness of Allah and avoidance of unorthodox Islamic practices.

When Minilik began his campaign in Arsi in the 1880s most of the Arsi Oromo had already been Islamized. On the eve of the conquest Islam had gained a firm hold in the heart and minds of the Arsi Oromo and provided an ideology of protest and resistance to Shawan advance.

The Shawan conquest and its aftermath introduced the *gabber* system; this forced the Arsi Oromo to resort to spiritual and cultural resistance through adherence to Islam as the religion and unifying symbol of the indigenous people, while orthodox Christianity was associated with the conquerors.²¹

Iyasu's short reign (1913-16) revived the hope of getting rid of the oppressive social and political system introduced by the Shawans. It was characterized by two developments that consolidated Islam as a religion and culture: the development of social movements led by prominent personalities who claimed to have been blessed by Allah,²² and a greater mobility in and out of Arsi in the early decades of the 20th century as a result of greater stability, leading to increased contact with other Oromo areas, especially Jimma, where many Arsi

¹⁹ Braukämper 2002.

²⁰ Terje Østebø 2007.

²¹ Temam 2002.

²² The first of these movements was led by Sayyid Roba Garbi, who renovated shrines and thereby intensified pilgrimages (*Muuda*) to them. The second movement was led by al-Haj 'Uthman Sura. He was a reformist who called on the Arsi to marry their daughters without demanding a dowry and criticized the long-established *Muuda* system of pagan pilgrimages as a non-Islamic practice.

scholars received further education.²³ The Italian occupation and its exploitive approach raised the hope of Arsi Muslim scholars to institutionalize Islam by incorporating its legal traditions into the legal system. To win the trust of Muslims, the Italians appointed many Arsi Muslim scholars to judicial and administrative positions.²⁴

1.2.2 Arsi Oral Traditions

Over history, oral traditions have been used by human societies to preserve their collective social memory.²⁵ Some African societies used oral traditions to maintain and invent royal genealogy. The legend of the Queen of Sheba in the political culture of Ethiopia is a good example. It was “canonized” in the *Kebrā Nagast* (The Glory of the Kings) in the 13th century. Henceforth, the legend constituted “the ideological linchpin of the ancient regime in Ethiopia”.²⁶

In the past the Oromo did not have a written literature. In Oromo societies oral traditions have thus played a decisive role in preserving their political and social history. The value of the Oromo oral traditions for historical reconstruction has been proved by many writers. Legesse’s (1973) ethnographic work is based on the people’s oral tradition. According to Sumner (1996) the Oromo are an ideal group for a study based on oral literature.²⁷

The oral traditions of the Arsi people comprise a variety of genres including but not restricted to songs (*sirba*), narrative stories, proverbs (*mamaaka*), cradlesongs (*weeddu*), eulogies (*ilaali*), Islamic hymns (*manzuuma*, *zeekara*, *baaro*) and dirges. Of these terms,

²³ Temam 2002.

²⁴ Ahmad Muhammad’man, informant.

²⁵ Jeylan W. Hussen 2005.

²⁶ Behru Zewde 1994.

²⁷ Jeylan W. Hussen 2005.

sirba, mamaaka, weeddu, ilaali and baaro are pure Oromo, while *manzuuma* and *zeekara* are Arabic terms that have been Oromicized.

These rich traditions inform us about the culture and the history of the people. The following are some of the aspects of Arsi society that have been preserved in the people's memory.

1.2.2.1 Economy

The Arsi Oromo are basically a pastoral society. They place high importance on their cattle, and cattle are an integral part of their life. The *faaruu loonii* (cattle praise songs) show how much the Arsi respect cattle and consider them part of their life. In the following verse, the cattle are personified in terms of human experiences and feelings.

Ana haa lolanii, loon malee hin tolani

Oh, may I suffer on your behalf! No one can do well without cattle.

This indicates that an Arsi's life without cattle is meaningless.²⁸

The following poem describes the significance of the prickly Indian fig as a food for the poor.

Habashatti shookaa

Arabatti tiini

Biya Heero jira

*Quut al-Masaakiini*²⁹

In Abyssinia it is *shookaa* [thorny fig]

In Arabia it is *tīn* [fig]

Found in Heero

Food for the poor

²⁸ Jeylan W. Hussen.

²⁹ Fadil Ibrahim Sado. Informant, Jan. 2009, Addis Ababa.

The verses below describe the feeling and attitude of a suitor toward his fiancée and in-laws while he is courting. During this period, the suitor is very kind and respectful to the family of his fiancée, especially his mother-in-law (*soddaatii*), because she is the person with the most influence on her daughter, the fiancée.

According to tradition, things change after the wedding. The man, who had been showing the utmost respect, changes his attitude toward his wife's family, especially her mother. As for the fiancée, who was, during the courtship, a beautiful and God-blessed girl, after marriage real life begins and his attitude towards her changes as well.

Innaa kadhatu aayyitti jedha

Harkaan gayatu taalitti jedha

It means:

A man when courting, he calls his mother-in-law Oh mama!

Once married, he calls her swindler!

Inna kadhatu badhatu jedha

Harrkaan gahatu dhammaatu jeda

When courting he says about his fiancée, God-blessed

Once they are married, he calls her feeble-minded!

1.2.2.3 Social Values and Norms

Arsi social tradition is rich in proverbs and poems which codify socially accepted values and norms covering all aspect of social life. For example:

Laafaan qabanaan tirata

Waan dhufeeṭi abbamattu himataa

*Maa dhufteen gaddaa tana dhufte.*³²

A feeble person travels when the weather is moderate

A guest shall tell why he came

Asking a guest why he came is the norm of the current age.

According to Arsi social rules, when a guest comes to your home you welcome him and offer your hospitality. You never ask him why he came; it is up to him to explain the purpose of his visit. Thus the last verse is a comment on the degeneration of behavior in the current age.

1.2.3 Historical Overview of Islamic Education

The ‘Golden Age’ of Islamic civilization ended in the 13th century. In the Islamic world, the era following the Mongol invasion in 1258 (A.D.) of Baghdad, the Abbasid capital and intellectual center, was characterized by conservatism, as Muslim leaders tried to preserve what remained of Islamic civilization. The Arabic scholarship of the Mamlūk period (1250-1517 A.D.) was outstanding in quantity, not quality.³³ At the dawn of the sixteenth century, while the arts and learning were beginning to thrive in the West based in part on what had been borrowed from Islamic civilization in previous centuries, Islamic civilization itself was in decline.³⁴

During this time innovative and original ideas were not welcomed, and rigidity and imitation of original works of earlier periods became the salient feature of Arabic-Islamic literature. All over the Muslim world, priority was given to “applied” disciplines such as *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and the Arabic language.

³² Fadil Ibrahim Sado, informant.

³³ Bosworth 1976.

³⁴ Jasim Muhammad Sultan 2007.

Fiqh was considered the most prestigious field of study and was given the most attention by scholars and students. Arabic language and literature were seen as the only means through which one could receive Islamic knowledge. Other areas of Islamic studies, such as *Ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr*, were given less attention. Philosophy, sciences and logic suffered from total stagnation.

Mysticism, occultism and divinatory traditions flourished during the Middle Ages. Many Muslim astrologers, alchemists, mystics and occultists produced treatises from the 13th to the 16th century.

1.2.4 Overview of Islamic Education in Arsi

The system of Islamic education in Arsi represents the heritage of the traditional systems described in the previous section. Though Islamic education in the Arab world has often modernized and changed, in rural Arsi little change is in evidence even today.

According to an informant the study of *Ḥadīth* was not introduced into Arsi until the early 19th century, by Shaykh ‘Abdullah Wolenso.³⁵ Most of the narration chains (*‘Asānīd*) of *Ḥadīth* that are known to Arsi and Harar scholars were acquired through Shaykh ‘Abdullah Wolenso.³⁶

Arsi oral traditions relate that the expansion of Islamic education in Arsi was the result of the efforts of Shaykh Nūr Husayn (13th century), who had a very large number of students. The anonymous writers of his three hagiographies mention Anajina (the site of Shaykh Husayn’s shrine) as a well-established center of Islamic education, as it still was in the 20th century.³⁷

³⁵ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad’aman, informant, 2008, Hadāga, Balē district.

³⁶ Muhammad Husen Abdulqadir, informant, March 8, 2009, Addis Ababa.

³⁷ Hassen Muhammad Kawo 2008.

There are traditions that many Arsi scholars went to Harar for further education. Outside Ethiopia, Bayt al-Zabid in Yemen and Mecca were the main centers of advanced education.³⁸ The settlement of Wallo scholars in Arsi in the 19th century enhanced Islamic education in the region. In the late 19th and early 20th century Islamic education in Arsi was well developed. *Fiqh*, Islamic law and jurisprudence, *Naḥw* (Arabic grammar), Arabic literature and logic were the main fields of Islamic education in Arsi. These are mainly practical fields of Islamic learning. Other fields such as *Hadith* and *Tafsir* were introduced only in the 1940s with the introduction of the *Salafī* movement to Ethiopia, which lays emphasis on the basic sources of Islamic learning.³⁹

As for the curriculum, students learned and still learn to read the Qur'an under the *Kabīra*, teacher of basic Islamic education and Arabic language. At the second level students attend sessions (*ḥalqa*) organized by a scholar (*'ālim*). This level has two sub-levels. At the first sub-level students acquire basic knowledge of Islamic law and Arabic language by studying summaries (*mukhtaṣarāt*). Then they move on to the second sub-level where they receive higher education by studying authoritative reference books (*'ummahāt al-kutub*) on a particular discipline. Upon successful completion, students receive authorization to teach (*'ijāza*), usually in written form but also sometimes orally.⁴⁰

³⁸ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman.

³⁹ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman.

⁴⁰ Shaykh Aman Marfo, informant, Mar. 14, 2009, Adama.

1.2.5 Geographical Overview of Research Area

Geographically, the area of this research is confined to Sēru district of Arsi zone, Oromia National Regional State. Sēru was the southeastern part of the previous Arsi province during the era of Emperor Haile Selassie, or of the Techo Awraja of the Derg regime. The district is bounded by Amegna in the north and northwest, Robe in the west and southwest, Bale in the south and southeast, and west Harage in the east. Sēru is the capital of the district. ‘Abalqāsīm mountain is the highest peak, and Wabe valley is the lowest place in the district.⁴¹

Historically, the southeastern Arsi region, including present districts such as Robe, Amigna, and Sude, was under the Sēru administration and was known as Gasgār.⁴²

The historical significance of the district lies in its proximity to Anajina, the center of Islamic learning in southeastern Ethiopia in the 19th century. Sēru is on the route to Bale zone and to the shrine of Shaykh Husayn at Anajina. Pilgrims and students traveled through this district. The proximity of Sēru to Anajina, and its remoteness from the conflict area in eastern Shawa and adjacent Arsi land, gave the district an opportunity to be a home to many Arsi and non-Arsi Ethiopian Muslim scholars such as Shaykh Ahmed Wallo, who left Wallo in the 1850s to live in Sēru and then in Bale.⁴³

There are also some archaeological sites, such as the ‘*umarā*’ mosque which dates back to the 16th century. The mosque is located in Arolij, a locality named by the Shawans after an Arab missionary; hence it is proposed that the proper pronunciation should be ‘Arab Lij.’⁴⁴

⁴¹ Council of Regional State of Oromia, Bureau of Planning and Economic Development.

⁴² Shaykh Aman Marfo, informant, May 2, 2009, Adama.

⁴³ Muhammed Husen, informant, April 14, 2009, Addis Ababa.

⁴⁴ Abdulhaq Shaykh Muhammed Ta’o, informant, Mar. 12, 2009, Addis Ababa.

The economic and social benefits associated with pilgrimages traveling to Anajina through Sēru led to the establishment of several shrines in the district, the most popular of which are Sakīnā and ʿAbalqāsim. These relatively minor shrines are visited by pilgrimages on their way to Anajina, or by those who cannot reach Anajina due to physical disability or economic constraints.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Muhammed Husen, informant, April 14, 2009, Addis Ababa.

CHAPTER II

OCCULT TRADITIONS

Numerology, the focus of this thesis, is just one small part of the broader field of occultism, and is intertwined with other branches of occultism (e.g. astrology). Hence it is appropriate to begin with a general discussion of occultism, in particular as manifest in Islam.

2.1 What is Occultism?

The word “occult” comes from the Latin word *occultus* (clandestine, hidden, secret) referring to knowledge of the hidden. In its medical sense it is used to refer to a structure or process that is hidden, e.g. an “occult bleed”. The word has many meanings in the English language: predominantly it refers to knowledge of the paranormal as opposed to knowledge of the measurable, usually referred to as science. Popularly it means “special” knowledge meant only for certain people or knowledge that must be kept hidden.¹

The word “occult” is somewhat generic in that almost anything that is not claimed by one of the major religions can be considered occult. Even religious scholars face great difficulty in identifying exactly what is occultism.²

A broad definition of occultism is provided by Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke:

Occultism has its basis in a religious way of thinking, the roots of which stretch back into antiquity and which may be described as the Western esoteric tradition. Its principal ingredients have been identified as Gnosticism, the Hermetic treatises on alchemy and

¹ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 444.

² *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occultism#Occultism>>

magic, Neo-Platonism, and the Kabbalah,³ all originating in the eastern Mediterranean area during the first few centuries AD.⁴

According to Louis Stewart,

Occultism does not claim to be a system of beliefs. It is a system of knowledge. The distinction is important, since it lets us rule out religion on the one hand and mysticism on the other. Religions, though they are codified to some extent, ultimately rest on faith. Mysticism, though it claims direct knowledge of the Divine, is not systematic. Occultism alone claims to give a detailed, verifiable map of the absolute. It is a spiritual science.⁵

The term occult is also used in reference to magical organizations or orders. Occult practitioners, however, deny the use of the term to refer to magical orders, and highly condemn the exploitation of spiritual power and knowledge for magical ends. According to H. P. Blavatsky (1813-1891), “Occultism differs from magic and other secret sciences as the glorious sun does from a rush-light, as the immutable and immortal spirit of man—the reflection of the absolute, causeless and unknowable All—differs from the mortal clay—the human body”.⁶

According to most practicing occultists, occultism is simply the study of a deeper spiritual reality and divine wisdom that extends beyond pure reason and the physical sciences.⁷ In this sense the term extends to a large body of spiritual and philosophical literature, including but not restricted to alchemy, astrology, theosophy, anthroposophy, dream interpretation and

³ The Kabbalah is a repository of Jewish occult and mystical knowledge. It is based on an interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures as containing hidden meanings.

⁴ Goodrich-Clarke 2004. Referred to by *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*.

⁵ Louis Stewart 1980.

⁶ H.P. Blavatsky 1897.

⁷ H.P. Blavatsky 1897.

spiritualism.⁸ The terms esoteric and arcane can have a similar meaning and the three terms are often interchangeable.⁹

Occult practices are centered on the presumed ability of the practitioner to manipulate natural laws for his own or his client's benefit.¹⁰

2.2 Historical Overview

In all human societies various theories and practices involving a belief in and knowledge or use of supernatural forces or beings have existed throughout recorded history. Spells, charms and amulets have been used for protection against negative influences from the world of spirits.

Over this long history, occult practices and beliefs have varied in their nature and in the attitude of societies toward them.

The oldest form of occult belief took the form of nature-based, sympathetic magic, the belief that like affects like. Shamans claim to be in contact with the spirit world in order to pacify or even manipulate spirits with their magic.¹¹

In ancient Mesopotamia the Babylonians and Assyrians held many beliefs that became central to occultism. The idea that knowing the name of an entity gave one control over that entity, the use of drugs to contact the spirits, and the use of wax voodoo dolls to harm one's enemies were some well-established beliefs in ancient Mesopotamia. Spells, incense, holy water and amulets were used. Divination or foretelling the future through reading of the stars – astrology – was also practiced.¹²

⁸ Crow 1972.

⁹ *The American Heritage College Thesaurus* 2004.

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <[http; WWW.Britannica.Com/EBCHECKED/TOPIC/424235/occultism](http://WWW.Britannica.Com/EBCHECKED/TOPIC/424235/occultism) retrieved on May 18, 2008.

¹¹ W. B. Crow 1972.

¹² W. B. Crow 1972.

In ancient Greece the priests and prophets of various oracles were important religious figures. The best-known oracles were at Delphi, Eleusis, Dodona, and Epidaurus. At Delphi, where the Temple of Apollo and the Delphic oracle are found, the oracle spoke through a priestess called the Pythia, named after the sacred snake, the python. Snakes were part of the earlier Great Mother religions.¹³

Although Egyptian magic was mixed with religion, it was practiced as a precise and organized activity. The Egyptians had a systematic approach to the occult with subdivisions based on subjects. The *Book of the Dead* exists in several recensions at Heliopolis, Thebes and Sais. There are separate texts on astrology, alchemy, formulas for incantations, spells and charms for daily use.¹⁴

While certain occult practices are found within mainstream religions, religious orthodoxy is generally not in conformity with deterministic occult perceptions.¹⁵

In Judaism, the mystical text of the Kabbalah has been studied and practiced by a minority of Jews (rabbis and their chosen students), who consider it an essential part of the study of Torah. According to the Zohar, generally considered the foremost Kabbalistic text, study of Torah involves four levels of interpretation (exegesis) of its text: Peshat (simple), the direct meaning; Remez (hint), the allegorical meaning (through allusion); Derash (from Heb. *darash* "inquire, seek"); midrashic (Rabbinic) or comparative meaning; and Sod (secret): the inner meaning. This last level of interpretation is the foundation of the Kabbalah. During the Middle Ages the Kabbalah had a tremendous influence on both theologians and magicians, Jewish, Christian,

¹³ Ilil Arbel, *Encyclopedia Mythica*, <[http:// WWW.pantheon.org/areas/featured_witchcraft/chapter2-.html](http://WWW.pantheon.org/areas/featured_witchcraft/chapter2-.html)>, retrieved on Oct. 01, 2008.

¹⁴ Crow 1972: 82-86.

¹⁵ Ellwood 2009.

and Muslim. But Kabbalah is rejected by orthodox Jews. According to them it is heretical and antithetical to Judaism.¹⁶

Certain types of esoteric Christianity practice divination, blessings or appealing to angels for intervention, often supported textually by reference to the Bible.¹⁷

Occult folk practices such as divination and magic are highly condemned in both Jewish and Christian theology. The Bible says:

Let no one be found among you who... practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium of spirits. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.¹⁸

From the 13th century, the Jewish Kabbalah exerted influence on Christian occultism. Medieval societies showed great fascination for these arts and the study of the occult remained intellectually respectable until the 17th century. There was great uncertainty in distinguishing between practices of vain superstition, blasphemous occultism, and perfectly sound scientific discourse.¹⁹

From the 17th century onward, belief-based ideas went into eclipse with the triumph of empirical science in the seventeenth century and its aftermath, the industrial revolution.²⁰

During the eighteenth century such unorthodox religious and philosophical concerns were defined as occult. They were no longer accepted as knowledge. However, these traditions were

¹⁶ Crow 1972.

¹⁷ For instance, claiming that the old commandment against divination was superseded by Christ's birth and noting that the Magi used astrology to locate Bethlehem.

¹⁸ Deut. 18: 10-12.

¹⁹ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_paranormal>.

²⁰ Goodrich-Clarke 2004.

preserved by a few antiquarians and mystics till the desire for medieval mystical enlightenment reemerged around the late 18th century.²¹

The growth of religious skepticism in the 19th century led to an increased rejection of orthodox religion by the educated, and consequently a search for salvation by other means, including occultism, began. In the twentieth century the old discipline reappeared (among other guises) in the form of a series of books published from 1911 to 1917 by L. Dow Balliett and in the 1930s by Florence Campbell and H.P. Blavatsky. In the next few decades a wealth of literature became available to the public. As Michael McClain says regarding the past 90 years, it would seem that the discipline has moved very rapidly. But very likely all of this occult knowledge was known at a much earlier time, and it was just hiding from us for a while.²²

Despite its revival, occultism failed to gain acceptance in academic circles, though it occasionally influenced the work of major cultural figures such as the poet William Butler Yeats and the painter Wassily Kandinsky, and occultism in Europe and North America was destined to remain the province of popular culture.²³

2.3 Occult Traditions in Islam

Arabic-Islamic occult traditions comprise a family of arts and traditions including topics such as alchemy, astrology, geomancy and numerology. The following are some of these traditions:²⁴

1. *'ilm al-'a'dād*, the science of numbers; the study of the divinatory power of digits

²¹Michael McClain, *Introduction to Astrology*. < <http://www.astrology-numerology.com/astrology.html> > .
retrieved on May 14, 2009.

²² Michael McClain, *Introduction to Astrology*.

²³ Michael McClain, *Introduction to Astrology*.

²⁴ 'Abu al-'Abbas al-Buni, d. 622 (A.H). *Manba' 'Usūl al-Hikma*.

2. *'ilm al-`awlāq*, numerology; the art of harmonizing numbers and letters in order to arrive at the special revelatory number
3. *'ilm al-ḥurūf*, the science of letters; the study of the divinatory power of letters
4. *'ilm al-ṭab'*, the study of the soul and instincts
5. *'ilm al-kawākib*, *'ilm al-nujūm*, astrology
6. *'ilm al-'asmā'*, the science of names
7. *'ilm al-ruqya*, the science of exorcism
8. *'ilm al-raml*, the science of sand: geomancy

2.3.1 Astrology (*'ilm al-nujūm*)

Astrology can be defined as the study of the position of the celestial bodies in the belief that their movements influence life on earth or correspond somehow to events experienced in human affairs.²⁵

Many mystic or esoteric traditions have links to astrology. Occult practices involve the incorporation of astrological elements and beliefs. Likewise horoscope astrology has incorporated esoteric traditions.

Astrological divination as conceived by the Babylonians was confined to issues of eclipses and general prophecies concerning kings and realms.²⁶

Most modern astrologers no longer try to forecast actual events, but focus instead on general trends and developments. This allows astrologers to avoid making unverifiable predictions, while still maintaining the ability to attach significance to arbitrary and unrelated events.

²⁵ Shaykh Abdulla Idris, informant.

²⁶ Wedel 1919.

Astrology was introduced to Muslim scholars at the time of Caliph al-Mansur, who employed the Jewish scholar Jacob ben Tarik and founded a major school of the mathematical sciences at Baghdad. It was from this school that the great Arab astrologer Albumasar (805-885) received his education. His introduction to astrology/astronomy was the first work of Arab astrology to be translated into European languages in the early Middle Ages.²⁷ The treatise was highly influential in the revival of astrology in the West.²⁸

In Arabic, *'ilm al-nujūm* (science of the stars) is the study of the position and aspects of celestial bodies in the belief that they have an influence on natural occurrences in earthly human affairs. *'Ilm al-falak* (science of the celestial orbs, i.e. astronomy) is the name more narrowly given to the study of the movements of the celestial bodies and the reducing of observation to mathematical order.

In early Arabic sources, *'ilm al-nujūm* was used to refer to both astrology and astronomy. The first semantic distinction between astrology and astronomy was made by the Persian astronomer and astrologer Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (1000 A.D.).²⁹

Islamic jurisprudence makes a clear distinction between *'ilm al-nujūm* 'horoscope astrology' and *'ilm al-falak* 'astronomy'.

According to Muslim jurists the study of astronomy is lawful, since it is based on reasoning and natural law and mathematics. It is useful in predicting the beginning of months and seasons, and determining the direction of the *Qibla* and in navigation. As for astrology, it is considered by many Islamic scholars as unlawful, since knowledge of the hidden is available only to Allah. Allah says in the Quran: "Say (O Muhammad): None in the heavens and the

²⁷ Wedel 1919.

²⁸ Parker, Derek & Julia 1971.

²⁹ Pines 1964.

earth knows the *ghayb* (unseen) save Allah: nor can they perceive when they shall be resurrected”.³⁰

Both Muslim astronomers and religious scholars reject the prophecies of astrologists. According to Shaykh Muhammad bin ‘Uthaymīn, a Saudi scholar, “astrology is a kind of sorcery and fortune-telling. It is forbidden because it is based on illusion, not on concrete facts. There is no relation between the movements of celestial bodies and what takes place on the earth”.³¹ In a *Hadith* reported by ‘Abu Hurayra, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: “He who goes to a soothsayer or a fortuneteller and believes what he says exhibits disbelief in what has been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad”.³²

In the pre-Islamic period, people believed that the sun and moon might eclipse when a great figure died. During Muhammad’s lifetime, it happened that the sun eclipsed on the very day that Muhammad’s son Ibrahim died. The people then thought that it had eclipsed because of Muhammad’s son’s death. On learning this, Muhammad led them in the special Eclipse Prayer and then delivered a speech saying: “The sun and moon are but signs of Allah; they do not eclipse because so-and-so died or was born”.³³

2.3.2 Numerology (‘ilm al-’awfāq)

In Western and non-Islamic traditions, numerology is a tradition of belief in the mystical or esoteric relationship between numbers and physical objects or living things.³⁴ In the wider sense of the term, numerology can also be used in reference to those who place excessive faith in

³⁰ Qur’an 27:65.

³¹ Fatawā ibn ‘Uthaymīn. <Islamoline.com>, retrieved on May 20, 2008.

³² This tradition (*hadith*) is authenticated by al-‘Albānī in *Sahīh al-Tarḡīb wa-l-Tarhīb*. Vol. 3, p. 172.

³³ Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah.

³⁴ [http://www.starlightnumerology.com/number table.htm](http://www.starlightnumerology.com/number%20table.htm), retrieved on May 20, 2008.

numerical patterns, even if those people do not practice traditional numerology.³⁵ According to the Swedish philologist Gunnar Qvarnström, numerology can be seen as the semantics of number.³⁶ Shaykh Muhammad'aman expresses essentially the same idea beautifully [ms p. 6]:

الأعداد أرواح الحروف والحروف أجساد الأسماء والآيات والأجساد لا تقوم بغير أرواح

Transliteration:

al-'a'dādu 'arwāḥ al-ḥurūf wa-l-ḥurūf 'ajsād al-'asmā' wa-l-'āyāt wa-l-'ajsādu lā taqūmu bi-ghayri 'arwāḥ.

It means:

The digits are the spirit of the letters, and the letters are the body of the names, and the verses [of the Qur'an] and the bodies do not exist without the spirit.

Numerology teaches how to change the letters in your name into numbers, which purportedly reveal much about your personality and potential.³⁷ Numerologists claim that one's number provides insight into one's character, purpose in life, obstacles, motivations, emotional reactions and other clues to his inner instincts.³⁸ They use numerology along with other occult traditions and divinatory arts such as astrology to determine the best time for one's major moves and activities in life.

Pythagoras, the Greek mathematician (582-497 B.C.), is said by many to have been the originator of much of what is today called numerology. Others claim its origins to lie in the Gematria, a much later branch of Kabbalistic science which posits that the letters of the

³⁵ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*: Numerology.

³⁶ Surles 1993.

³⁷ Each letter has a numerical value that provides a related cosmic vibration. In numerology, all numbers are reduced to single digits 1 through 9 except the special master numbers 11 and 22. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 22 represent the major vibration rates associated with peoples' characters.

³⁸ One's number is the sum of the numbers in his birth date and the sum of the value derived from the letters in his name and the position of the sign of the zodiac and the planets on his birth date.

Hebrew alphabet correspond with numbers.³⁹ According to Robert L. Surles, numerology is a tradition that is as old as Greco-Roman classicism and the Germanic runes.⁴⁰

In the Middle Ages, numerology had great influence on western thought and literature. The great majority of numerological usage was based on Christian interpretations of Pythagoreanism. The question, however, as asked by Lawrence P. Schrenk, is: why did philosophers attempt either to reduce the world to numbers or to understand the world in terms of them? The answer suggested by many thinkers is that, because of the level of certainty associated with numbers and mathematics, numbers were central to the attempt of medieval philosophers to render the world intelligible to the human mind.⁴¹

In Arabic-Islamic traditions, numerology is called *'ilm al-'awfāq*. Literally the word *'awfāq* comes from *waffāqa*, which means 'harmonize, reconcile, agree'.

'Ilm al-'awfāq is the science of numeric reconciliation, normalization, and harmonization. It is based on harmonizing the sums of numbers and letters with celestial bodies, heavenly angels and earthly spirits.

Following the order of the Hebrew alphabet, the letters of the Arabic alphabet have corresponding numerical values. As shown in table 2.1, there are two systems of assigning numeric values to the Arabic alphabet; both are used in the ms. The first system is based on the decades: each letter after 'ي = 10' is given a decade number (20-90), then (100-1000). The second system is an incremental counting system in which the letters are valued straightforwardly (1-28), each letter being one greater than its predecessor. It is noteworthy that in the manuscript under study the Shaykh uses both systems at different places.

³⁹ Crow 1972.

⁴⁰ Surles 1993: vii.

⁴¹ Lawrence 1993.

The Arabic alphabet can be reduced to mnemonic words in order to make it easier to remember the numerical order.⁴²

أبجد، هوز، حطي، كلمن، سعفص، قرشت، ثخذ، ضطغ

'abjad, hawaz, ḥuṭī, kaliman, sa'faṣ, qaraṣat, taḥḍ, ḍaḏağ

Table 2.1: Arabic letters and their numerical values according to decade and incremental systems

Arabic Letter	Decade Value	Incremental Value	Arabic Letter	Decade Value	Incremental Value	Arabic Letter	Decade Value	Incremental Value
أ	1	1	ك	20	11	ش	300	21
ب	2	2	ل	30	12	ت	400	22
ج	3	3	م	40	13	ث	500	23
د	4	4	ن	50	14	خ	600	24
هـ	5	5	س	60	15	ذ	700	25
و	6	6	ع	70	16	ض	800	26
ز	7	7	ف	80	17	ظ	900	27
ح	8	8	ص	90	18	غ	1000	28
ط	9	9	ق	100	19			
ي	10	10	ر	200	20			

⁴² Wright 1975: I: 1-2, 28.

In Arabic numerology the numerical values of the letters are used in the calculation and configuration of a *walq* 'magic square'. The magic square, which is thought to be of Chinese origin, first appeared in Islamic literature in the writings attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan, generally thought to have been compiled at the end of the 9th or early 10th century A.D. Originally the square consisted of nine cells with the numbers 1 to 9 arranged with 5 in the center so that the sum of each row, column and the two diagonals was 15. In subsequent years, Islamic writers developed a variety of methods for forming larger magic squares; squares with cells 4x4 or 6x6 or 7x7 were particularly popular. By the 13th century 10x10 squares were produced; by the 19th century 100x100 squares, with 10.000 individual cells, were being produced.⁴³

Almost the same definition of *walq* is provided by the Shaykh [ms p. 6]:

الأوفاق علم يوفق به إلى توفيق الأعداد واستوائها في الأضلاع والأقطار وعدم التكرار

Transliteration:

al-'awfāqu 'ilmun yuwaffaḡ bihi 'ilā tawfiq al-'a'dād wa-istiwā'ihā fī al-'aḡlā' wa-l-'aḡṡār wa-'adam al-tikrār

It means:

'*awfāq* is the science of harmonizing the numbers [of a magic square] so as to make them equal in all their sides and diagonals with no repetition.

2.3.4 Geomancy

Islamic geomancy is called '*ilm al-raml* (the science of sand). It is characterized by random generators that produce 16 different configurations in sand or earth (cf. fig. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3) by the

⁴³ Islamic Medical Manuscripts <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/glossary.html#magic>>

construction of four horizontal rows, each row consisting of one or two dots. There are four basic tetragram configurations (fig. 2.1), called the four mothers. The remaining twelve configurations (four daughters, four nephews, two witnesses and two judges) are constructed by manipulation of the basic tetragrams.⁴⁴



Fig. 2.1 Basic tetragram configurations (the four mothers) of classical Arabic geomancy

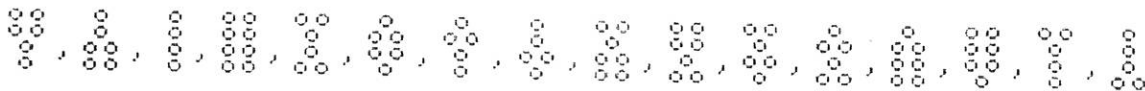


Fig. 2.2 Stand-alone dot representation of the sixteen configurations of classical Arabic geomancy



Fig. 2.3 Connected dot representation of the sixteen configurations of classical Arabic geomancy

According to al-Zanāṭī, the creation of geomancy is attributed to Idris and it was handed down from him over the generations. All creatures consist of the four elements: Fire, Air, Water and Earth, yielding four combinations: hot, cold, moist and dry; and four directions: east, west, south, and north. The traditional geomancers (al-Zanāṭī continues) examined people's activities, finding that there are four of them: weighing, counting, planting, and farming. The name Allah has four letters, 'Īsa (عيسى) "Jesus" has four letters, and Muhammad (محمد) has four letters, and each house must have four corners. Thus everything is established on the basis of four corners, four figures, four extremities (of the human body) and four elements. The geomancers built up configurations from these basic four, designating them (the 12 configurations) 'mothers of the houses (of the zodiac?)'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Van Binsbergen 1996.

⁴⁵ Van Binsbergen 1996. Translation from Muhammad al-Zanāṭī.

2.4 Occultism in Islam

In Islamic Orthodoxy the knowledge of the hidden and supernatural world is reserved to Allah. Nobody, including humankind, angels and Jinn, can have access to this secret world except by the will of Allah.

According to Islamic metaphysics, the whole universe is within Allah's province. Allah is the creator of all things and nothing comes into being without His will.⁴⁶ Blasphemous occult practices such as divination, horoscopes, witchcraft and sorcery are highly condemned and sometimes criminalized in Islamic theology.

Islamic and Arabic occult traditions say that "Truth/Wisdom" is hidden within the names and attributes of Allah, which comprehend all beings and the entire universe. They are the origin of all divinatory inspiration. In the quest for truth and wisdom one should reach to the secrets of these names and to the greatest name (اسم الله الأعظم) from among them.⁴⁷

In Islamic orthodoxy, occultism is either recognized and Islamized or condemned and criminalized. It is accommodated if it conforms to what is laid out and approved by the original sources, Qur'an and *Hadith*. This includes practices such as exorcism (*ruqya*).

Islamic original sources recognize the existence of the hidden world of spirits (Jinn), Satan and demons and their effects on the physical world. Man cannot see the Jinn despite the fact that the Jinn can see and influence man.

We created man from clay, from mud molded into shape; and the Jinn We had created before from the smokeless fire.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Shanavas 2002.

⁴⁷ Abu al-'Abbas al-Buni, *Manba' 'Usūl al-Hikma*.

⁴⁸ Qur'an 15:26.

In a *Hadith* narrated by ‘A’isha, the youngest wife of Muhammad, the Prophet (pbuh) said that the angels were created from light, the Jinn from fire, and mankind from “what you know”, i.e. clay.⁴⁹

According to Islamic traditions, when Allah ordered the angels to bow down to the newly-created man Adam, Iblis (the devil) refused to do so because he, being made of fire, thought himself superior to a creature made of earth. Iblis continued tempting humans, especially through whispers (*waswas*) and false suggestions. In the end, it is believed, he will be cast into Jahannam (Hell).⁵⁰

Behold! We said to the angels “Bow down to Adam”; they bowed down except Iblis. He (Iblis) was one of the Jinn and he broke the command of his Lord. Will you then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me, when they are enemies to you? Evil would be the exchange for the wrongdoers!⁵¹

He (Iblis) said: “Because Thou (Allah) hast thrown me out of the way, lo! I will lie in wait for them (mankind) on Thy straight way. Then will I assault them from before them and behind them, and from their right and their left: nor wilt Thou find in most of them gratitude (for Thy mercies)”.⁵²

The Holy Qur’an gives an explanation for the introduction of magic into the world as follows:

They followed what the devils gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon: Solomon did not disbelieve but the devils, teaching men magic, and such things as were revealed at Babylon to the two angels, Harut and Marut. But neither of these taught anyone (such things) till they said: “We are only for trial; so do not blaspheme”. And

⁴⁹ Reported by Muslim and Ahmad.

⁵⁰ Hefner, *Encyclopedia Mythica*™, <<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/iblis.html>>

⁵¹ Qur’an 18:50.

⁵² Qur’an 7:16-17.

from these two angels people learn means of separation between man and wife. But they could not thus harm anyone except by Allah's permission. And they learn what harms them, not what profits them. And they knew that the buyers of magic would have no share in (the happiness of) the Hereafter. And vile was the price for which they did sell their souls, if they but knew!⁵³

According to Islamic sources King Solomon, David's son, was the wisest man of his generation. God gave him power and knowledge of science and the occult. He was given power over demons and the winds.

And to Sulaiman (Solomon) we subjected the wind, its morning course (from sunrise till noon) was a month's journey, and its afternoon course (from the midday decline of the sun to sunset) was a month's journey (i.e. in a single day he could travel two months' journey). And we caused a fount of (molten) brass to flow for him, and there were Jinn that worked before him (subjected to him) by permission of his Lord, and whosoever of them deviate from our command, we shall cause him to taste the torment of the blazing fire. They made for him what he desired, places of worship, images, basins like reservoirs, and cauldrons fixed in their places. Work you, O family of Dawud (David), with thanks. But few of My servants are grateful.⁵⁴

Despite the ability of human beings to have some control over the Jinn (*ruqya*, etc.), neither Jinn nor humans can know the unseen (*ghayb*), which is known only to Allah.

Then when We decreed death for him (Solomon), nothing informed them (the Jinn) of his death except a creeping (termite) of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his stick, so when he fell down, the Jinn saw clearly that if they had known the unseen,

⁵³ Qur'an 2:102.

⁵⁴ Qur'an 34:12-13.

they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment (waiting long years in front of Solomon expecting him to be still alive).⁵⁵

Though magical practices are strictly forbidden by Islamic law, this has not prevented the practice of magic in Muslim cultures and societies. Today *sihr* (magic) is a fully developed practice in many Muslim societies.

According to Islamic occult traditions it is believed that every Arabic letter, word, verse and chapter in the Qur'an, every month, day, time and name was created by Allah and each has its own angel and Jinn servant. Through the knowledge of the names of these servants the practitioner is able to control the angel and Jinn, and thus achieve his or his client's purposes.⁵⁶

Occult traditions and magical practices are based on the obedience of spirits to the practitioner. How this obedience is attained depends upon the benevolent or malevolent nature of the given practice. Malevolent magicians operate by enslaving spirits through offerings and deeds displeasing to Allah. Benevolent magicians, by contrast, obey and appease Allah so that Allah enforces his will upon the spirits.

Al-Buni (d. 622 A.H., 1225 A.D.) describes the process by which this practice occurs:

- First: the practitioner must be utterly clean both inwardly (the soul) and outwardly (the body and clothing).
- Second: when the proper angel is contacted, this angel will first get permission from Allah to go to the aid of the person who summoned him.
- Third: the practitioner must not apply the power conferred upon him by Allah except to that which would please Him.

⁵⁵ Qur'an 34:14.

⁵⁶ There is also a subcategory of Muslim magic called *sīmiya*, often translated as "natural magic". For a complete discussion of *sīmiya*, see Ibn Khaldun 1967: 171-227.

To acquire this tradition one must pay the utmost attention to cleanliness, be trustworthy, and not use the tradition for bad and wrong deeds, but only to help people possessed by evil spirits.⁵⁷

The Sunna and Shi'a sects of Islam typically forbid all use of occult folk traditions and magical practices. Under the influence of mystical thought, however, especially the concepts of *baraka* and *karāma*, the Sūfi orders of both sects are ambiguous and sometimes tolerant regarding folk occult traditions and magical practices.⁵⁸

Especially within the Isma'ili Shi'a tradition, the association of mystical philosophy and occult traditions with the prophet's family is strong. Two outside philosophical elements, Hermeticism and Pythagoreanism, were integrated into Islamic mystical thought by alchemists as well as philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), who had knowledge of certain Hermetic texts such as Poimandres, and the Sūfi Ibn al-'Arabi, who displayed vast knowledge of Hermeticism in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Inspirations).⁵⁹

Occult folk traditions and practices are condemned and sometimes criminalized in Islamic orthodoxy because these practices and traditions contravene the basic doctrine of Islam, the oneness of Allah. They are based, according to Islamic thought, on an infringement of Allah's authority by claiming knowledge of hidden things and manipulation of natural law.

However, Islamic folk practices do mix authentic Islamic prayers and occult folk practices. Across Muslim societies some Shaykhs, Hajjis, Walis or Imams act as shamans. They may use various amulets and cast spells in the name of Allah. Shaykhs who are considered powerful are

⁵⁷ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant.

⁵⁸ Westermarck 1926: 35.

⁵⁹ Corbin 1972 *En islam iranien* (Iranian Islam). Paris: Gallimard, referred to by *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*.

often consulted even after their death, especially among the so-called 'grave worshippers'.⁶⁰ They claim to have the power to heal, speak and read thoughts, cast horoscopes, tell fortunes, interpret dreams and manipulate natural law. They attribute such paranormal abilities to the recitation of the names or attributes of Allah. This constitutes "white" magic, i.e. the practice of witchcraft in the name of Allah. In Islamic orthodoxy these practices are considered demonology, and such practitioners are believed to attain any such supernatural ability through association with and use of Satan and his demons.

Muslim jurists oppose occult traditions not because there is no occultism in Islamic original sources, but because occult practitioners, in most cases, deviate from orthodox Islamic teachings by resorting to folk practices. If practiced according to Islamic teachings, occultism can be of good value to the society. Islamic remedies provided by occult practitioners for psychic and spiritual problems, through exorcism, incantation and other occult practices, are practical manifestations of the value of the traditions.⁶¹

2.4.1. Islamic Exorcism

Islamic sources not only recognize the existence of spirits and their influence on the natural world but also provide remedies for dealing with them. These remedies are based on the healing power of the Holy Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad's traditions and spells. *Ruqya* (exorcism) was performed and approved by Muhammad (pbuh) according to several *Hadiths* and other sources. In these sources religious prayers, spells, and practices are defined for exorcism, incantation and invocation.

⁶⁰ This is one of the major differences between Salafis (Wahhābis) and Sūfis. The former hold that seeking the blessing of a dead person by visiting his grave is *širk*, i.e. associating other gods with Allah, and they call such people "grave worshippers". By contrast, the latter see it as an act of salvation.

⁶¹ Shaykh Abdullah Idris, informant.

‘A’isha reported that when any member of her family fell ill, Allah’s messenger (Muhammad) used to blow upon him while reciting the *Mu’awwidatān*,⁶² and when Muhammad himself was suffering from his fatal illness, ‘A’isha used to blow upon him and rub his body with his own hand, for his hand had greater power than hers.⁶³

It is a belief of Muslims that the healing power of the Holy Qur’an is effective not only for psychic and spiritual problems, but also for physical defects and illnesses.

This practice of *ruqya* is recommended as long as it meets specific conditions so as to ensure avoidance of any kind of association of any other being with Allah. These conditions are:

1. The invocation must be performed by a Muslim who is in a state of cleanness (*wudū’*). He places his right hand on the spot of the ailment, or on the subject’s forehead.
2. The invocation must not contain incomprehensible words from any other occult traditions. It must use only spells and prayers from the Holy Qur’an and/or *ḥadīth*. Talismans, magical spells and other occult folk practices are strongly condemned.
3. All prayers must be directed only to Allah. The person performing the invocation and the subject must both believe with certainty that healing comes from Allah, not from the person making the invocation or from the invocation itself.⁶⁴

Any violation of these rules renders the invocation an act of sorcery and/or blasphemous occultism, both of which are greatly condemned in Islam.

⁶² These are suras 29 and 30 of the Qur’an.

⁶³ Sahih Muslim III.

⁶⁴ Islamedia, the Islamic Encyclopedia.

2.5 Ethiopian Occultism

As in all human societies occult traditions and practices have existed throughout Ethiopian history. In all parts of the country people express their fear of evil spirits, demons and other hidden objects.

Words and phrases like *Ayn Nas*, *Eja* and *Buda* are common expressions of the harmful effect of the evil eye.

Many stories are reported in Ethiopia about the presence of Jinn at particular places such as remote mountains, rivers and lakes. These stories mention the effects, disabilities and disappearance sustained by people, usually women and children, and they are attributed to Jinn or evil spirits.

People believe in bad and good omens particularly in rural areas. The presence of these beliefs and practices is noticeable among urban dwellers as well.

In a desperate search for remedy to the troubles of life, the people turn to folk magical practitioners, diviners, and religious figures who practice exorcism, invocation and incantation. These figures are consulted on matters related to matrimonial arrangements, fortunes and various aspects of life.

In Christian Ethiopia divination is practiced by *dabtaras* based on the book of *Awdä Nägäst*, a divination treatise based on the association of letters of the alphabet with the numerical values attached to each of them, and their relation to the movement of celestial bodies.⁶⁵ The names of the 12 signs of the zodiac found in the *Awdä Nägäst* are Arabic loanwords.⁶⁶ Likewise, many

⁶⁵ Baye Yimam 2006.

⁶⁶ Leslau 1990: 70-71.

spells of magical Christian writings are either proper Arabic prayers or spells resulting from the manipulation of Arabic prayers.⁶⁷

In Ethiopia a popular practice is the use of *'asmā'*, found among both Muslims and Christians. In Arabic, *'asmā'* (Ethiopian *'asmāṭ*) is the plural form of *'ism* (اسم), which means 'name'. *'Asmā'* refers here to an amulet containing a text of names the knowledge of which is believed to help one acquire power over the spirit that has control over the name.⁶⁸ These names, along with other magical texts such as talismans, are written on a piece of paper which is usually folded and wrapped up in parchment and put around the neck or elsewhere, in the belief that the texts will protect one from the evil eye.

According to Islamic occult traditions, the words that are written in *'asmā'* are Allah's names and attributes, which are believed to comprehend all truth, wisdom and power. By acquiring their divine knowledge one will acquire power and can use it for his own benefit or for others.

According to an informant, Ethiopian Muslims adopted occult traditions from the Sudan. The Sudan received it from West Africa, especially Nigeria. Islamic occult traditions are traced further to Northwest Africa, particularly Morocco and Mauritania, which both hosted the remnant of the Arabic-Islamic civilization of Andalus (Spain).⁶⁹

In the early 20th century the tradition was introduced to Wallo by Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, who was originally from Mauritania and came to Ethiopia through Sudan and stayed in Worra Babu in Wallo. Currently Shaykh Muhammad Nuguse of Worra Babu is said to be the most prominent occultist in Wallo.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Abraham Damoz 1972.

⁶⁸ Baye Yimam 2006.

⁶⁹ Shaykh Abdullah Idris, informant, August 2008, Addis Ababa.

⁷⁰ Shaykh Abdullah Idris.

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHY OF MUHAMMAD'AMAN

3.1 Family Background and Early Childhood

* According to informants, before Muhammad'aman was born his father Adam was visited by Shaykh Ahmad Wallo. The Shaykh was offered great hospitality, especially by Muhammad'aman's mother Makko. She slaughtered a barren cow in honor of the great visitor. Traditionally it was unusual to slaughter an unproductive cow, so she explained to the visiting Shaykh the reason. "O Shaykh, I slaughtered for you the unproductive cow to show you my plight as a woman with no children for so many years. O Shaykh, we believe in your blessings, so pray for me to have babies". Shaykh Ahmad offered his prayers and she conceived and gave birth to her only two children, first Ali and then Muhammad'aman.

Muhammad'aman was born at Hamāllama, at a locality called Werse in Sēru district. His mother was Makko Isma'il, of the Hamāllama tribe. There is no written source reporting his date of birth, but according to calculation based on oral traditions, he must have been born around 1300 A.H. (1873 A.D.). His full name is Muhammad'aman Adam ibn Isma'il ibn Gadro. In his manuscript, he links his genealogy to Ibn Ishāq al-'Aqīli, a noble Arab from the Prophet's family. We are not in a position to either confirm or disconfirm this on the basis of written sources.

He was of the Hadāga clan, a clan which is part of the larger tribe known as Hingoyye. The Hadāga were originally from Bale zone and moved to their present area (Hadāga) in Arsi, where they are now one of the prominent tribes in Sēru district.¹

¹ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, May 14, 2008, Hadāga.

His father Adam died during the famine of the 1880s. His brother Ali also died in a tragic accident at the age of 5-6. His mother sent him with a neighbor lady to fetch some water from a nearby stream. The neighbor took the water and went away, expecting that little Ali would follow her. By the time she looked back it was too late: the child had been attacked and eaten by a lion.

After the death of his father and his brother, Muhammad'aman lived alone with his mother among a tribe other than his father's. So, for him, there was neither a family to depend on nor a clan to support him. This sense of isolation developed in him an attitude of independence and advocacy for disadvantaged groups and individuals, and was to have a great impact on his personality.²

His mother encouraged him to develop economic self-reliance, reminding him that he was not living among his own clan and there was nobody he could turn to for help. But for Muhammad'aman, economic self-sufficiency was not everything. For him education was also important. He showed his interest in education from early childhood. He divided his time between learning and working; he would join study sessions in the morning while working on developing apicultural stations in the afternoon.

When Minilik started his campaign to Arsi in 1882, Muhammad'aman was a teenager and like all Arsi youth of his time he took part in the resistance movement against the Shawan advance.³ He married Zira Isma'il, but had no children from her for about 30 years. Then after being blessed by Shaykh Ali Shaykh Ahmad Wallo, she finally bore him several children. He maintained the Arsi custom of polygamy, and married six women during his lifetime, while

² Jaylan Muhammad'aman, informant, May 1, 2009. Adama.

³ Abdulhaq Muhammad Ali Ta'o, informant, Addis Ababa, March 2009.

preserving the Islamic rule that prohibits marrying more than four wives at a time. From the six wives he had about 54 children, of whom 34 are living today.⁴

In 1370 (A.H.)/1940 (A.D.), he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, accompanied by his oldest son and ten other Arsi men. In 1956 he composed his poem on numerology and his commentary on it. Three years later, in 1959, he died, and was buried at Hadāga, Sēru district, Arsi Zone.

3.2 Education

Shaykh Muhammad'aman grew up in an area which was home to many Arsi and non-Arsi Muslim scholars. This can be attributed to the remote location of Sēru district, relatively far from the central Arsi area that had suffered from continuous conflict with the Shawans.

At an early age he acquired a Qur'anic and basic Islamic education under *Kabir* Adam Gisha, who played a significant role in the expansion of Islam in the former Arba Guggu district.⁵

The principal teacher of Muhammad'aman was al-Haj Muhammad Thāni Wādā, who appeared on the scene in the 1840s. Muhammad Thāni was born in the early 19th century in Sēru district and went to Harar for further education. Then he traveled to the Sudan, Egypt, Algeria and Iran where he acquired an education in mysticism.⁶

Informants confirm that al-Haj Muhammad Thāni Wādā, in turn, was a student and companion of Shaykh Ahmad Wallo, who came to Sēru district of Arsi from Daway of Wallo. It is reported that Shaykh Ahmad Wallo asked his student al-Haj Muhammad Thāni Wādā to stay with him until his death.⁷ Traditions indicate the great role of Shaykh Ahmad Wallo in teaching

⁴ Jaylan Muhammad'aman.

⁵ Temam 2002.

⁶ Temam 2002.

⁷ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman.

Arsi scholars in the 1840-50s. A tradition relates that he moved to Sarar, on the border between Bale zone and Somalia, where he died during the famine.

So al-Haj Muhammad Thāni Wādā, a student and companion of Shaykh Ahmad Wallo, was the principal teacher of Muhammad'aman. He acquired from him a sound knowledge of Islamic law and the Arabic language. He also acquired a knowledge of Arabic literature from al-Haj Hulula; al-Haj Hulula in turn studied with al-Haj Sharif Abbalti, who died in Sude district of southeast Arsi during the Italian occupation. During the occupation Muhammad'aman moved to the Ogaden area with al-Haj Ishaq Dadhi Tare. There he studied 'awfāq for three months with Shaykh Abunnur al-'Uthmani.⁸ He also acquired some knowledge of occult traditions from Shaykh Muhammad al-Harari.⁹ When he had mastered the field, he authored his only work, *Miftāḥ al-Mighlāq Šarḥ Sullam al-Marāq fi 'Ilm al-'Awfāq*.

Except for his journey to Ogaden and Harar, Muhammad'aman did not travel anywhere in Ethiopia to study. This can be attributed in part to the turmoil prevailing at the time in Arsi and other parts of southeastern Ethiopia due to the violent upheavals involved in Minilik's creation of modern Ethiopia.

1.3 Teaching Career

Shaykh Muhammad'aman started his teaching career at an early age, even before getting married. He was a teacher of *Fiqh* and Arabic language. He spent five years in Anajina, teaching Islamic law and the Arabic language. According to an informant, there is no prominent scholar from Bale and Dida'a who did not study under the Shaykh.¹⁰ This could well be true, if we take into account the prevailing situation at the time he started teaching. The

⁸ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman.

⁹ Shaykh Muhammad'aman, *Miftāḥ al-Mighlāq Šarḥ Sullam al-Marāq fi 'Ilm al-'Awfāq*.

¹⁰ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, 14 May, 2008, Hadāga.

situation was not conducive to traveling out of Arsi for further education (or for any reason) due to the ongoing conflict between the Shawans and the Arsi resistance. The following Arsi scholars were some of his students who learned from him *Fiqh* and Arabic: Shaykh Ahmed Badwi, Shaykh Taha Ashmira, Shaykh Sultan Gujo, Shaykh Husen Argamonge, Shaykh Haji Shakmara, Shaykh Kamal Ashmira, Shaykh Aman Kolfe and Shaykh Muhammed Ali Ta'o.¹¹ The following Arsi scholars were some of the Shaykh's students who studied *'awfāq* and other divinatory traditions under him: Shaykh 'Abdul-Wahhab Adamtu, Shaykh Kalifa Abbalti, Shaykh Abdallah al-Haj Adam Gisa and Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman.

Despite confirmation by informants of the importance and influence of his teaching career, according to traditions collected from other sources he was more famous for his occult practices and divinatory therapy. Socially he was well-known as a financially independent and hard-working scholar and social figure.¹²

3.4 His Distinctive Personality

As stated above, Shaykh Muhammad'aman lost his father and his only brother at an early age. He grew up on his own in a highly tribal society, with only his mother and among a tribe other than his father's. This helped him realize the plight of a person deprived of any support and marginalized by a dominant group or individuals.

Later, he was well-known for supporting humble and socially disadvantaged people. This brought him into confrontation with individuals who took advantage of their social status to get undeserved rights.

¹¹ Shaykh Aman Marfo, informant.

¹² Shaykh Mahmud Hamid, informant.

An informant reports that when the Shaykh visited any family he used to give the housewife a present in gratitude for her hospitality. When asked about this, he said, “When I come to a house, the housewife does whatever she can for my hospitality, sometimes she may even borrow food from her neighbor, so I have to offer something in return to help her cover the expenses she incurred for my sake”.¹³

In Arsi it was the tradition that students and scholars do not work to support themselves. Instead they devote all their time to study and teaching while depending on the society for their survival. They rely on contributions and alms given by both commoners and rich people. For an Arsi common man, it was an established practice to sponsor a *tālib al-‘ilm* (student) or a Shaykh. This practice, although it surely contributed to the spread of knowledge among the society, also tended to produce a negative image of scholars and students. It marked them as dependents.

According to an informant, Muhammad’aman was strikingly different from other students and scholars of his time. During his childhood, he was simultaneously a hardworking student and a beekeeper. Likewise, when he started teaching, he maintained the practice of self-employment. Thus, contrary to the norms of his time, he was a financially self-supporting scholar. He never expected any support or gifts from rich or socially respected people, as was the case with other scholars (*‘ulamā’*). To the contrary, he extended his own help to the poor. This allowed him to freely and vigorously express his views, especially with regard to the rights of oppressed people. He never gave in to demands by arrogant and self-important individuals, whether a

¹³Shaykh Aman Marfo, informant.

tribal chief, wealthy person or prominent scholar. With all of them, he was of uncompromising character.¹⁴

After marriage to his first wife Shaykh Muhammad'aman moved to Hadāga, where his father's tribe the Hingoyye lived. There he found that the leading individuals perceived him merely as a *Kabira*, a religious person teaching basic Islamic education while seeking alms and donations. He would not accept this perception, but continued to act forthrightly as a prominent scholar and social figure. This brought him into confrontation with dominant individuals who would not accept him as he was. When Awsi Musa, a Hingoyye leader, insisted on a dowry as a precondition for a girl to get married, Shaykh Muhammad'aman rejected this, as he did all other exploitive practices by arrogant figures.¹⁵

It happened that, during the funeral ceremony of Shaykh 'Umer Jidda, an Arsi scholar who died of a disease that damaged his right side, Shaykh Muhammad'aman had a different view from Shaykh Ahmad Dayida, another Arsi scholar and a member of the Wādā tribe, on the positioning of the body of Shaykh 'Umer Jidda in the grave. Shaykh Ahmad Dayida was of the opinion that the body should be laid on its right side, while Shaykh Muhammad'aman felt that it should be laid on its left side. The two scholars agreed to discuss the matter later.

At the request of Shaykh Ahmad Dayida, they discussed the issue in a public meeting that was attended by prominent individuals and tribal leaders from the Wādā and Aymero tribes. In support of his view Shaykh Ahmad Dayida cited a tradition from the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). But according to Shaykh Muhammad'aman the tradition that a corpse should be laid on its right side is not absolute. Other Islamic traditions indicate that a corpse should not be laid on a side which caused pain to the person when he was alive. Shaykh Ahmad Dayida accepted

¹⁴ Jaylan Muhammad'aman, informant.

¹⁵ Abdusalam Muhammad'aman, informant, Adama.

the argument, but his fellow tribesmen from Wādā felt humiliated by Shaykh Muhammad'aman's argument. Ganu Gorgura, one of the Wādā leaders, said, "O Muhammad'aman, do you not know that the Shaykh (Shaykh Ahmad Dayida) is from Wādā?" Shaykh Muhammad'aman, enraged by Ganu Gorgura's presumption, said, "Listen to me. Allah granted me two things: one is highly appreciated by Him, while the other is of no value to Him. Knowledge is a gift from Allah to one whom He loves, and He granted me knowledge in order to share it with scholars like the Shaykh (Shaykh Ahmad Dayida). Wealth and fortune are of no value to Allah, and He may give it to anyone. Allah gave me plenty of wealth to disgrace a hypocritical and arrogant person like you". Then he pulled out his pistol and headed toward Ganu Gorgura. Shaykh Ahmad Dayida intervened, ordering Ganu Gorgura not to interfere in scholarly discussion and to apologize to Shaykh Muhammad'aman. Instead, and to the surprise of everyone, Shaykh Muhammad'aman himself apologized to Shaykh Ahmad Dayida for losing his temper in front of him.¹⁶

3.5 His Contribution to Judicial and Social Affairs

In Muslim Arsi the judicial system before the Shawan conquest was based on Islamic law. Scholars used to issue verdicts on social cases and *fatwa* on religious issues. This was discontinued after the Shawan conquest.

The system was revived and somewhat modernized and incorporated into the legal system by the Italians, in order to attract Muslims by exploiting the grievances of the local Muslims against the Amhara and the Orthodox Church. Many Arsi *'ulamā'* were appointed by the Italians as judges or lawyers at Shari'a courts.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jaylan Muhammad'aman, informant.

¹⁷ Temam 2002.

Shaykh Muhammad'aman took active part in the judicial system as an advocate, both in the private sessions of the *'ulamā'* and at the official courts. In addition, he was active in reconciliation and social work. During the Italian occupation he was an advocate at Asalla court, where Sultan Sude was a judge and governor.¹⁸

The document below was produced in Arabic by the Shaykh in attestation of a reconciliation agreement between Fato Kimo and al-Haj Husayn al-Haj 'Uthmān. According to the informant the story goes as follows:

Fatu Kimo accused al-Haj Husayn 'Uthmān of stealing his cattle. During the reconciliation al-Haj Husayn confessed that he had taken the cattle and cattle and agreed to pay compensation to Fato Kimo. When the document was written, the facts were manipulated so as not to incriminate al-Haj Husayn.¹⁶ The document reads as follows: "I, Fato ibn Kimo al-Garami, testify that I have found my two lost cattle dead in a well, for which I will make no claim against either al-Haj Husayn or anyone else. In witness thereof, Shaykh Muhammad'aman ...etc., and thereto I affix my signature"

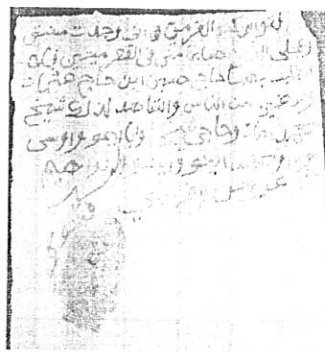


Fig. 3.1 Arabic document produced by Shaykh Muhammad'aman in attestation of reconciliation agreement

In this document, a non-Arabic word occurs in Arabic context: the Italian *firma* فرما meaning signature. The use of the Italian word indicates that the document was written during or after the Italian occupation.

¹⁸ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant.

During Iyasu's reign Shaykh Muhammad Tilmo, an Arsi scholar, was appointed as judge of Gasgar district against the will of the people, who preferred Shaykh Mahmud Mazaza, a reputable scholar of Islamic law from Sēru. Shaykh Muhammad'aman played a leading role in organizing and leading the people against the appointment. The dispute continued until Iyasu's removal from power.

The people of Gasgar used to bring their cases to Shaykh 'Abdullah Wolenso's private court.

In a land demarcation case, Shaykh Adam Eddo sued Abdo 'Ali, who appointed Shaykh Muhammad'aman as his lawyer. Shaykh Muhammad'aman argued that a boundary mark is what is customarily accepted as such, even if not formally instituted.

In a popular story reported by several informants, the wife of a man from a poor tribe was abducted by a man from a larger and stronger tribe. The two tribes disputed over the legitimacy and kinship of the baby the woman gave birth to after the abduction. The case was brought to Shaykh 'Abdullah Wolenso. Shaykh Muhammad'aman was the advocate for the poor tribe; other scholars and prominent individuals were advocating for the stronger tribe. Citing a *Hadith*, Shaykh Muhammad'aman argued that the original husband of the woman must be considered the legitimate father of the child.¹⁹ Shaykh 'Abdullah Wolenso, convinced by the argument of Shaykh Muhammad'aman and supported by the woman's confirmation that she had been abducted, passed a verdict ordering the women to return immediately to her legal husband.

A supporter of the larger tribe, displeased by the verdict against his tribe, said "Oh my ox" in reference to the ox he had slaughtered, apparently to host the judge and his companions but implicitly to solicit the judge's favor. To the shock of Shaykh 'Abdullah Wolenso, the people

¹⁹ The tradition says "a child is for the bed and a stone is for the adulterer" الولد للفراش وللعاهر الحجر. The word "bed" is used figuratively here to mean the husband.

(even including some scholars) requested him to allow the woman to stay for some time at the house of her abductor. Shaykh Abdullah, greatly offended, said, "I shall not stay in a society where an ignorant person [the abducted woman] fears Allah but scholars do not". He then left Bale for Wolenso in Harar.²⁰

According to an informant, Shaykh Muhammad'aman was the first scholar to introduce printed books from Harar to Arsi, especially to Sēru district. He also brought eucalyptus (*bahr zaf*) seedlings from Ankobar.²¹

3.6 His Skills in Occultist Practices

According to an informant the Shaykh helped the common people by providing them with divinatory consultation and therapy for matrimonial problem, exorcism of evil spirits, and incantations. Informants emphasize that the Shaykh's occult practices were strictly benevolent. Al-Haj Abdo Dalacha, a prominent Sēru leader, asked the Shaykh to help a rich and unmarried man who was suffering from sexual impotence. According to established practice in orthodox Muslim occultism, the practitioner must not help someone to regain his sexual ability until he gets married. Helping an unmarried man or women is considered unlawful since it may lead the person to commit adultery.²² Therefore, the Shaykh advised the man to first get married. The man married an old woman, whereupon he received the therapy from the Shaykh.²³

According to an informant the Shaykh believed that he did not have the ethical and spiritual purity to practice the occult traditions in their fullest form. According to him the tradition requires absolute honesty, isolation from the community, and dietary restrictions such as

²⁰ Shaykh Munir al-Haj Ahmad, informant, 2008, Addis Ababa.

²¹ Jaylan Muhammad'aman, informant

²² Shaykh Abdullah Idris, informant, September 16, 2008, Addis Ababa.

²³ Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, informant, May 14, 2008, Hadāga.

CHAPTER IV

PHILOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF HIS MANUSCRIPT

4.1 Introduction

Shaykh Muhammad'aman's only written work was his book on *'awfāq*, numerology.

Before introducing his work, it is reasonable to ask what led the Shaykh to acquire this art and write on it. It is not easy to find out what might have led him to develop an interest in the subject, partly because informants were reluctant to discuss the whole issue of occultism, which is considered by Islamic orthodoxy as un-Islamic.

According to Shaykh Mohammad'aman's eldest living son and the copyist of the manuscript under study, the Shaykh acquired this knowledge essentially out of curiosity and a passion for learning a new art.

Another informant gives a different story according to which the Shaykh went to Harar for further education. There used to be a competition between Harari and Arsi students. The Shaykh was a distinguished student and in consequence he was (non-fatally) poisoned by a jealous Harari student. The Shaykh underwent traditional surgery, and after he improved he started to look into traditional medicine and divinatory therapy to heal him spiritually as well as physically.¹

Although there is no material evidence, his interest in the occult may also be attributed to his master Shaykh Muhammad Thāni Wādā, who had acquired some mystical traditions during his stay in Iran.

As for his writing on this subject, the scarcity of written sources on numerology in Ethiopia motivated him to write his treatise on a theme which, according to him, was a very delicate art.

¹ Jaylan Muhammed'aman, informant, May 14, 2002, Adama.

He said [ms p. 2]:

هذا شرح على منظومة المسماة بسلم المراق في علم الأوفاق يبين سرادها ويتمم مفادها ويفك رموزها ويظهر على غرائب
علم الأوفاق مما يتصل عنها مما يأتي إن شاء الله مما لا يوجد في بلادنا وفي غالب الأمصار

Transliteration:

Hādā šarḥ 'alā manzūma al-musammā bi-sullam al-marāq fi 'ilm al-'awfāq, yubayyinu
murādahā wa-yutammimu mafādahā wa-yafukku rumūzahā wa-yuzḥiru 'alā gharā'ibi
'ilm al-'awfāq wa-mā yattaṣilu 'anhā mimmā ya'ti 'in šā'a 'allāh ta'ālā mimma lā
yūjadu fi bilādinā wa-fi ghālib al-'amṣār.

It means:

This is a commentary on the poem entitled *Ladder of Ascension in the Science of 'Awfāq*, which explains its (the poem's) meaning, completes its purpose, decodes its symbols and clarifies the peculiarities of the science of 'awfāq and what is related thereto, which is not found in our country or (indeed) in most countries.

In the 4th verse of the poem [ms p. 3], he states another reason that impelled him to write on the subject. He was encouraged by the great desire of the people around him to learn this tradition.

ولما رأيت الناس اشتاق جلهم
لمعرفة الأوفاق من جملة الملا
سلكت طرق [طريق]² الوعر صعب سلوكه
ولكن سهلني الذي قد توسل³

Transliteration:

Wa-lammā ra'aytu al-nāsa 'ištāqa julluhum li-ma'rifati al-'awfāq min jumlati al-malā
Salaktu ṭarīq al-wa'r ṣa'bun sulūkuhu wa-lākin sahhalani allāḍi qad tawassalā

² The ms has *ṭarūq*, which must be a mistake.

³ The verb *tawassala* توسل means to seek someone's intercession with Allah so as to gain access or success. In elaborating this verse the Shaykh explains that he seeks intercession with Allah through the Prophet Muhammad's family, companions and good believers. This lies at the heart of Sūfi beliefs, i.e. to seek intercession with Allah through the Prophet and saints.

It means:

When I came to know the longing of most of the people for the knowledge of *'awṭāq*, I set out on a rugged and difficult road. However, my way is eased by the one who has interceded [on my behalf].

In his comment on the above verse [ms p. 5] the Shaykh states two reasons for writing on this subject. He wanted to preserve the tradition by transmitting it to someone who would not lose it. Also, he felt that his health was deteriorating and he had to do something to transmit the tradition to the next generation while he was still able to.

واعلم أن هذا العلم صعب المسالك ولا سيما مثلي، وإنما أدخلت نفسي في هذا لأمرين: أحدهما أن هذا القليل الذي عندي لا يوجد عند أكثرنا، وعلى تقدير وجوده عند الأقل فهو لا يبيحه خوفا مما ذكرنا أو غيره منه على غيره، وعلى كل حال فهو معدوم حتى صار نسيا منسيا، وهذا القليل الذي تحصلت عليه بطلب شديد ومكان بعيد ومال عديد فكيف أضيعه، فإنه إذا لم يكتب يسر ولا سيما إذا لم ينقل مني إلى من لا يضيعها...الثاني أن الدنيا والحمية فانيان وقصدي أن ينفع به المؤمنون الصالحون وأن يحرم الله من لا يتقى الله ويخوض فيما يشاء وكيف يشاء

Transliteration:

Wa-'lam 'anna hādā al-'ilm ṣa'b al-masālik walā siyama mithlī, wa-'innamā 'adkhaltu nafsi fī hādā li-'amrayni: 'aḥaduhumā 'anna hādā al-qalīl alladī 'indī lā yūjadu 'inda 'aktharinā, wa-'alā taqdir wujūdihi 'inda al-'aqqalli fa-huwa lā yubiḥuhu khawfan mim mā ḍakarnā 'aw ghayratan minhu 'alā ghayrihi. Wa-'alā kulli ḥāl fa-huwa ma'dūmun ḥattā ṣāra nasyan mansiyyan. Wa-hādā al-qalīl alladī taḥaṣṣaltu 'alayhi bi-ṭalab ṣadīd wa-makān ba'id wa-māl 'adīd fa-kayfa 'uḍayyi'uhu. Fa-'innahu 'idā lam yuktab yunsa, walā siyama 'idā lam yunqal minnī 'ilā man lā yuḍayyi'uhā. Al-thāni 'anna al-dunyā wa-l-ḥimya fāniyān wa-qaṣdī 'an yanfa'a bihi al-mu'minūn al-ṣālihūn wa-'an yuḥrima 'allāhu man lā yattaqī 'allāh wa-yakhūḍu fī-mā yašā' wa-kayfa yašā'.

It means:

The handwriting style cannot be classified according to traditional Arabic calligraphy; it has characteristic features of both *Naskh* and *Thuluth*.

Catchwords are placed at the end of the verso, in the same (black) color as the main text.

When the Shaykh quotes from another author, the quotation (following a common Arabic convention) ends with the abbreviation اهـ, which is short for انتهى *intahā* "ends".

Vertical lines have been drawn at the right and left side of each page to control text alignment.

a. Dimensions

The overall dimensions of the MS are 13.5 cm x 17.5 cm, while the dimensions of the text area are 12 x 14.5 cm.

b. Binding

There is no special hard cover, except that of the exercise book. The MS is covered in plastic to protect it from moisture.

c. Illumination

The MS contains no decorative drawings except what appears on the cover page (Title page).

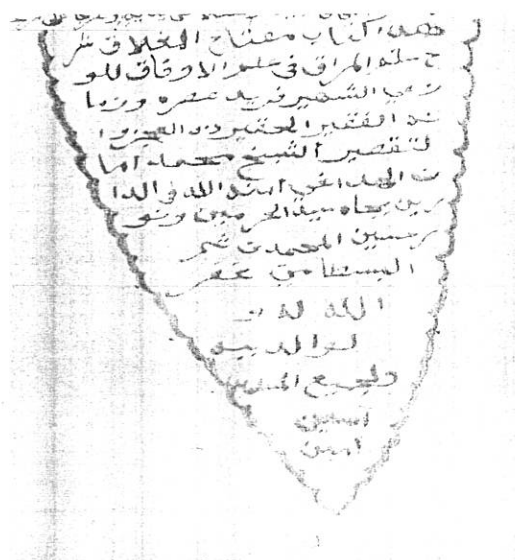


Fig. (4.1) Cover page of the MS with illuminated figure

d. Provenance of the MS

The MS is in the possession of Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, the eldest surviving son of the author, who lives in Hadāga, Balē town, Sēru district of Arsi zone.

4.3 Content Description

4.3.1 Overview of the Organization of the MS

Conceptually the MS contains two themes. One is a poem of 99 verses in short rhyming couplets on the arts and traditions of *'awfāq*. The second part is an authoritative and extensive elaboration and explanation of the verses. Both the poem and the elaboration are by the same author, i.e. Shaykh Muhammad'aman. However, the poem and its explanation are not placed in two separate sections. Rather, the two parts are intermingled in one codex (a block of related verses are quoted and then followed by their elaboration). The poem and the commentary are written in the same color ink, and in the same handwriting. However, the poetic lines can be distinguished by the presence of full vowelizing, and by the use of a separator (3 dots in a triangle ∴) between hemistiches and sometimes at the beginning or end of full lines. Below is a quotation of the first half of the fourth verse and his explanation thereof [ms pp. 3-4]:

Fa-'ilmu 'uṣūli al-wafqi 'ilmun mu'akkadun فعلم أصول الوفاق علم مؤكد

It means:

The science of the principles of *'awfāq* is a confirmed science.

The commentary reads:

والأصول جمع أصل وهو المثلث والمربع والمخمس والسدس والسبع والمثمن والمتسع والمعشر. وأما الأوفاق الباقية كوفق اثني عشر في اثني عشر فهو يقوم من الأولين، لأنه قائم من ضرب ثلاثة في أربعة، ... وهكذا إلى وفق ماء في ماء، ويقال له مربع القاف، وهو الجامع لأسرار جميع الأوفاق لأن أبياته عشرة ألف بيت، فلن يخلو غالبا بيت منه من عدد اسم أو آية

Transliteration:

Wa-l-`uṣūl jam' `aṣl wa-huwa al-muthallath wa-l-murabba' wa-l-mukhammas wa-l-musaddas wa-l-musabba' wa-l-muthamman wa-l-mutassa' wa-l-mu'aššar. Wa-'amma al-'awfāq al-bāqiya ka-wafq `ithnay `ašar fī `ithnay `ašar fa-huwa yaqūmu min al-'awwalayn. li-'annahu qā'im min ḍarb thalātha fī `arba'a ... wa-hākadā `ilā wafq mi'ah fī mi'ah wa-yuqālu lahu murabba' al-qāf wa-huwa al-jāmi' li-'asrār jamī' al-'awfāq li-'anna `abyātahu `ašaratu `alf bayt. Fa-lan yakhlū ghāliban baytun minhu min `adad `ism `aw `āya.

It means:

The bases [of *'awfāq*] are tables with three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten columns and rows. The remaining tables [are products of these basic elements], e.g. the table with twelve columns and rows is a product of three multiplied by four...and similarly until we reach a table with a hundred columns and rows, which is called the square of Qāf [Qāf ق = 100]. It contains the secrets of all the *'awfāq* because it has ten thousand cells, and in general, it will have no cell that does not contain information about the [numerological] number of a name or a Qur'anic verse.

This arrangement of the MS has the effect of integrating two literary productions in one unified book. The fact that it is intended to be a two-in-one work appears also from its very title, *Miftāḥ al-Mighlāq Šarḥ Sullam al-Marāq fī 'Ilm al-'Awfāq*. “The Key to the Lock: An Elaboration of the Ladder of Ascension in the Science of *'Awfāq*”. The “Ladder of Ascension” is the poem, and the “Key to the Lock” is its commentary.

In the Arabic-Islamic tradition, composing scholarly and literary works in the form of a poem is not a new phenomenon. The subjects of the pre-Islamic *Qaṣīda*, the chief literary genre of

ancient Arabic literature, were characterized by lamentation for lost ones, remembrance of homeland and romance. The creation of the vast multicultural Arab-Islamic Empire from the beginning of the 7th century gave the *Qasīda* a new and multidimensional framework. Praise of Allah, admiration for His Prophet Muhammad, love and romance, and the mystic life become some of the many subjects of the *Qasīda*.⁴ The poem was also used as a vehicle for expression of divergent points of view in sectarian rivalries. Most importantly, it served as a medium for coding Islamic traditions and the Arabic language. Scholars and philosophers often wrote their literary works, mainly textbooks, in verse in order to make them concise in form and precise in content, thereby making them easier for students to copy and memorize.

Alfiyat 'Ibn Malik (Ibn Malik's thousand verses) has always been the most popular verse composition which codifies Arabic grammar. It has constituted the main curriculum for advanced study of the Arabic language all over the Muslim world. Islamic Law according to the *Shafi'i* school of thought is presented in the verse composition *Matn al-Zubad*, which in Arsi was the main course for the advanced study of Islamic Law.⁵

Thus *Qasida* was one way of preserving and transferring Islamic traditions and the Arabic language and literature through the generations.

It was the tradition of scholars to write an authoritative elaboration on verses of their own composition, but there were also many cases in which the task of elaboration was left to the scholars' students.

Having said this much about the organization of the MS, I now proceed with the task of looking respectively into the content of the poem and its

⁴ Marmura 1976.

⁵ Shaykh Aman Marfo, informant.

4.3.2. The Poem

The poem consists of 99 monorhyme verses. The meter is essentially *fawīl*, one of the 16 basic meters of classical Arabic poetry: it is based on the pattern [*fā'ūlu mafā'ilun*] (– – – – –).

What we have here, according to Muhammad'aman, is in part a shortened version of this meter, based on the pattern [*fā'ūlu mafā'ilun*] (– – – – –).

The first seven verses [ms. p. 3] are of an introductory nature. The poem commences with the praise of Allah and a prayer for the Prophet Muhammad, his descendants and companions.

ونحمد مولانا ونشكر ربنا على نعم لم يحصها من تحصلا
وبعد صلاة الله ثم سلامه على المصطفى أزكى نبي ومرسلا
وآل وأصحاب كرام أئمة وتابعيهم والتابعين على الوالا

Wa-naḥmadu mawlānā wa-naškuru rabbanā 'ala ni'amin lam yuḥṣihā man taḥaṣṣalā

Wa-ba'du ṣalātu allāhi thumma salāmuḥu 'alā al-muṣṭafā 'azkā nabiyyin wa-mursalā

Wa-'ālin wa-'aṣḥābin kirāmin 'a'immatin wa-tābi'ihim wa-l-tābi'ina 'ala al-wilā

It means:

We praise and thank our Lord for countless blessings

Allah's prayer and peace for the chosen pure Prophet and messenger

And for his family and honored companions and leaders, and their followers and all successive followers.

The 4th verse emphasizes the tradition of *'awfāq* as a key to knowledge of hidden wisdom.

فعلم أصول الوفق علم مؤكد لتعلم سرا كي تنال تفضلا

Fa-'ilmu 'uṣūli al-wafqi 'ilmun mu'akkadun li-ta'lama sirran kay tanāla tafaddulā

It means:

The science of the principles of *'awfāq* is a confirmed science (learning),

Whereby you may learn secrets things and thus be distinguished.

Verses 5-7 [ms p. 3] focus on the motivation which led him to undertake this task.

Verses 8-93 (the bulk of the poem) are dedicated to the subject of *'awfāq*, including the basic tools and application of the tradition and its occult and divinatory implications.

The last six verses [ms pp. 58-59] are the conclusion. In verse 94 [ms p. 58] the author states his name (Muhammad'aman) as the author. Verses 96 and 97 [ms p. 59] are devoted to prayers for the Prophet Muhammad, his descendents, and all scholars and saints. Verse 98 [ms p. 59] is very significant with regard to the documentation of the MS. It states the total number of verses as 99, and the date of composition as 1358 A.H. (1956 A.D.).

فأبياتها عكط وتاريخها غشنج ومن لي بإصلاح بها ما تحملا

Fa-'abyātuhā 'akṭ wa-tārikhuhā ghašnaḥ wa-man li bi-'iṣlāḥin bi-hā mā taḥammalā

It is interesting to note here that the author does not state the date of composition and the number of verses in ordinary language. Rather, he does so by using the art of numerology in which each letter has a numerical value. The “word” he uses for stating the number of verses is *'akṭ* (عكط), which has no meaning in Arabic but whose numerical value is 99 – that is, ع = 70, ك = 20, and ط = 9. Likewise he uses the “word” *ghašnaḥ* غشنج, which is equivalent to 1358 (A.H.) – that is, غ = 1000, ش = 300, ن = 50 and ح = 8.

In the elaboration part, while discussing this verse, he explains the reason for writing his poem in 99 verses. In Islamic tradition there are 99 known Arabic names and attributes of Allah. But there are other additional names and attributes which are not known. According to *'awfāq* traditions, the names of Allah constitute the basic elements on which the whole tradition is built. Each *wafq* is believed to contain an (encrypted) name of Allah, which can be in Arabic or in a language such as Syriac or Hebrew or some other language. Thus the Shaykh thought it a good omen to make his verses 99.

The final verse, the 99th, is a declaration of the completion of the work and thanks to Allah [ms p. 59].

4.3.3. The Commentary

As noted above, this part contains an extensive explanation of the poem. It is not, however, merely a prose analysis of a poetic composition. Rather, this part is a scholarly elaboration of the subject matter. He says about his MS [ms pp. 4-5]:

أيها الأخ المنصف إنك إذا طالعته كتابي هذا صغير الحجم وفهمت ما فيه تجده كثير العلم. وإنك إذا تتبعته كتب الفن المطولات وعجزت عن مسائلها وراجعت كتابي تجده مفتاحاً لخلقهم من العلم الذي تكلمت فيه، فتجد ثمرة تسميتي بمفتاح المغلق.

Transliteration;

'ayyuhā al-'akh al-munṣif 'innaka 'idā ṭala'ta kitābī hādā ṣaghīr al-ḥajm wa-fahimta mā fihī tajidhu kathīr al-'ilm wa-'innaka 'idā tatabba'ta kutub al-fann al-muṭawwalāt wa-'ajazta 'an masā'ilihā wa-rāja'ta kitābī tajiduhu miftāhan li-ghalaqihim min al-'ilm allaḍī takallamtu fihī fa-tajidu thamarata tasmiyatī bi-miftāḥ al-mighlāq

It means:

O my fair brother, if you read my little book and understand what is in it, you will find it to be full of knowledge, and if you pursue heavy tomes on this tradition and fail to understand their issues, and if then you return to my book, you will find it a key to unlock their obscurities. Then you will realize the benefit of my naming it *Miftāḥ al-mighlāq* “The key to the lock”.

According to Muhammad'aman the learning of 'awfāq is significant as a means of gaining access to hidden wisdom and truth. In elaborating the significance of the tradition, he wrote [ms p. 4]:

وإنما أكد علمها ليعلم سرا من أسرار أسماء الله الحسنى، وسر آيات القرآن العظيم، ولكن [ي] ينال فضلا ودرجة عند الله، حيث علمه علم آل بيت النبي

Transliteration:

Wa-`innamā `ukkida `ilmuhā li-ya`lama sirran min `asrāri `asmā`i allāhi al-ḥusnā wa-sirra `āyāt al-qur`an al-`aẓīm wa-li [kay] yanāla faḍlan wa-darajatan `inda `allahi ḥaythu `ilmuhu `ilm `āl bayt al-nabiyyi

It means:

Its learning [of this tradition] is emphasized so that one may know one of the secrets of the good names of Allah, and the secret of the verses of the Holy Qur`an, so that he should have favor and a [high] rank with Allah, since its knowledge is the knowledge of the Prophet's family.

To support his view regarding the significance of the tradition, he quotes other scholars [ms p. 4]:

قال الشيخ يوسف الشريف الهندي في الأسرار الربانية اعلم أيها الأخ الصالح الواقف على كتابي هذا، الطالب للعلم النوراني، الملتمس لهذا الفن الروحاني ... أن البارئ ... لم يخاطب بالأسماء الربانية والأسرار النورانية إلا العقلاء من أهل كل زمان وفطناء أمم الإسلام، لأن هذا العلم هو الرحمة من الله يختص [بها]⁷ من يشاء من عباده

Transliteration:

Qāla al-šaykh yūsuf al-šarīf al-hindī fi al-`asrār al-rabbāniyya `i`lam `ayyuhā al-`akh al-šāliḥ al-wāqif `alā kitābi hādā al-ṭālib li-l-`ilm al-nūrānī al-multamis li-hādā al-fann al-rūḥānī...`anna al-bāri`... lam yukhāṭib bi-l-`asmā` al-rabbāniyya wa-l-`asrār al-nūrāniyya `illā al-`uqalā` min kulli zamān wa-fuṭanā` `umam al-`islām li-`anna hādā al-`ilm huwa al-raḥmatu min `allāh yakhtaṣṣu [bi-hā] man yašā`u min `ibādihi.

⁶ The letter ن, which appears in the ms, should be replaced by ي; not *lākin* but *likay*.

⁷ The word بها is missing in the ms.

It means:

Shaykh Yusuf al-Sharif al-Hindi said in *al-'Asrār al-Rabbaniyya*. "O my good brother who reads my book, a student of this luminous knowledge and a seeker of this spiritual art, know that the Creator did not address divine names and luminous secrets except to the wise men of each era and the brightest of Muslim nations. That is because this knowledge is a grace from Allah and He confers it to whomever He wishes from among His servants".

A significant point regarding his treatise is that it is not about the concrete, specific divinatory properties of the tools of the numerological traditions. It is only about the technical set-up and background of the traditions of *'awfāq*. He left the task of elaborating the talismanic properties of each individual divinatory tool to other scholars, as the following passage indicates [ms pp. 22-23]:

إن كتابي ليس بصدد خواص الأوفاق سوى ما ذكرته في المثلث لغرابته، وإن علماء الفن وإن ذكروا خواصها ما بينوا هكذا كيفية الوضع خوفا من الوقوع في يد قطاع الدين، فإن خواصها سلاح، ومتى وقع هذا السلاح في يديهم فيصير الذي كمن باع السلاح لقطاع الطريق، فهو منهي عنه. فأوضحت الوضع لئلا يجهل هذا العلم، وحذفت الخواص لأنه لا يجدي [و] ⁸ لا يضر بدون خواصه. هذا ولكن من تعلم القانون يستفيد بخواصه إذا تتبع الكتب، والذي لم يعلم القانون وإن رأى ما رأى من الخواص لا يستفيد بتا

Transliteration:

'inna kitābī laysa bi-ṣadad khawāṣṣ al-'awfāq siwā mā ḍakartuhu fī al-muthallath li-gharābatihī wa-'inna 'ulāmā' al-fann wa-'in ḍakarū khawāṣṣahā mā bayyanū hākaḍā kayfīyyata al-waḍ' khawfan min al-wuqū' fī yad quṭṭā' al-dīn. Fa-'inna khawāṣṣahā silāḥun wa-matā waqa'a hāḍā al-silāḥ fī yadayhim fa-yaṣīru allaḍī ka-man bā'a al-silāḥa li-quṭṭā' al-ṭarīq fa-huwa manhiyyun 'anhu. Fa-'awḍaḥtu al-waḍ' li-'allā yujhala hāḍā al-'ilm wa-ḥaḍaftu al-khawāṣṣ li-'annahū lā yujdī [wa-] lā yaḍurru bi-dūni khawāṣṣihī.

⁸ The letter و is missing.

- *Musaddas* (table with six rows and columns)
- *Musabba'* (table with seven rows and columns)
- *Muthamman* (table with eight rows and columns)
- *Mutassa'* (table with nine rows and columns)
- *Mu'aššar* (table with ten rows and columns)

Below are two quotations from the chapters on *Muthallath* and *Murabba'*:

- *muthallath* (table with three rows and columns) [ms p. 7]

واعلم أن المثلث أصل الأوفاق فهو آدم... فوضعه هكذا مثلث الأركان، فنزل من الجنة معه ثم توارث حتى وصل إلى الغزالي فجعله هكذا مربع الأركان مثلث البيوت... فنسب له فقيل مثلث الغزالي، فوقفه [= فوقه] خمس عشر، ففيه دلالة لاسم أمنا حواء، ومساحته خمسة وأربعون ففيه دلالة لاسم أبينا آدم... فهو خمسة وأربعون، وأيضا إلى زحل فهو خمسة وأربعون. فهؤلاء الثلاثة أصول. فعددهم سواء، فكان آدم أصل البشر وزحل أصل الكواكب والمثلث أول الأوفاق.

Transliteration:

Wa-‘lam ‘anna al-muthallath ‘aṣl al-‘awfāq fa-huwa li-‘ādam...fa-waḍa‘ahu hākaḍā muthallatha al-arkān fa-nazala min al-jannati ma‘ahu thumma tawāratha ḥattā waṣala ‘ilā al-ghazāli fa-ja‘alahu hākaḍā murabba‘ al-arkān muthallath al-buyūt ... fa-nusibahu fa-qīla muthallath al-ghazāli fa-waqfuhu khamsa ‘ašar fa-fīhi dalāla li-‘ism ‘umminā ḥawā’ wa-misāḥatuhu khamsatun wa-‘arba‘ūna fa-fīhi dalāla li-‘ism ‘abīnā ‘ādam... fa-huwa khamsatun wa-‘arba‘ūna. Wa-‘ayḍan ‘ilā zuḥal fa-huwa khamsatun wa-‘arba‘ūna. Fa-hā‘ulā’ al-thalātha ‘uṣūlun fa-‘adaduhum sawā’. Fa-kāna ‘ādam ‘aṣl al-bašar wa-zuḥal ‘aṣl al-kawākib wa-l-muthallath ‘awwal al-‘awfāq.

It means:

Be informed that *Muthallath* is the base of *‘awfāq*. It is for Adam, who put it in triangle form and it descended from Paradise along with him. Then it was handed down over the

generations till it reached al-Ghazali, who put it in square form with 3x3 cells. Thus it was named after him and called al-Ghazali's *Muthallath*. Its *wafiq* (sum of the numbers of any of its sides) is fifteen, which evokes the name of our mother Eve (حواء) [Eve: ḥawā' = ḥ + w + ā = 8 + 6 + 1 = 15]. The total sum of all the cells (*misāḥa*) is 45, which evokes both the name of our father Adam (آدم) and of the planet Saturn (*zuḥal*) [Adam: 'ādam = ' + d + m = 1 + 4 + 40 = 45; Saturn: zuḥal = z + ḥ + l = 7 + 8 + 30 = 45]. These three (*muthallath*, Adam and Saturn) are the bases (of existence). Their numbers are equal. Thus Adam was the source of mankind, Saturn is the source of the planets, and *muthallath* is the first of the *'awfāq*.

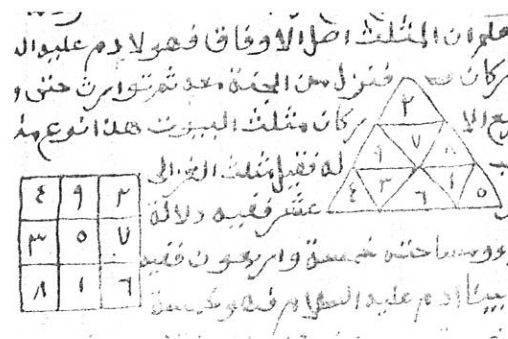


Fig 4.2 Original form of *Wafiq al-Muthallath* (triangle), and al-Ghazali's *Wafiq* (square)

- *Murabba'* (table with four rows and columns) [ms pp. 16-17]

فصل في المربع. وهو أول الأوفاق الحروفية لأن المثلث لا يوفق بالحروف... وهو لإبراهيم... فهو منسوب إلى الخميس والكوكب المشتري

Transliteration:

Faṣl fi-l-murabba' wa-huwa 'awwal al-'awfāq al-ḥurūfiyya li-'anna al-muthallath lā yuwaffaq bi-l-ḥurūf ... wa-huwa li-'ibrāhīm... Fa-huwa mansūb 'ilā al-khamīs wa-l-kawkab al-muštari

It means:

Murabba' is the first chart (*wafq*) with letters: *muthallath* is the chart of digits only.

Murabba' is for Ibrahim, and is affiliated to Thursday and to the planet Jupiter.

In describing a particular type of *murabba'* chart (cf. fig. 4.3), he states its special property as being a tool for subjugation and submission [ms p. 23]:

إذا أردت أن يطيعك أهل البلد التي تدخلها ويذلون لك ويخضعون بيدك فاكتب هذه الأسماء وعلقها على عضدك الأيمن
فإنك ترى عجبا من ذلك ... وهي نوع من المربع

Transliteration

'idā 'aradta 'an yuṭī'aka 'ahlu al-balad allatī tadkhuluhā wa-yuḍillūna laka wa-yakhḍa'ūna
bi-yadika fa-ktub hādīhi al-'asmā' wa-'alliqhā 'alā 'aḍudika al-'ayman fa-'innaka tarā
'ajaban min ḍālika ... wa-hiya naw'un min al-murabba'

It means:

If you want the people of a country you have entered to obey and submit to you and be under your control, write these names (cf. fig. 4.3) and fasten them to your upper right arm. You will see amazing results from this... And this is one type of *Murabba'*.

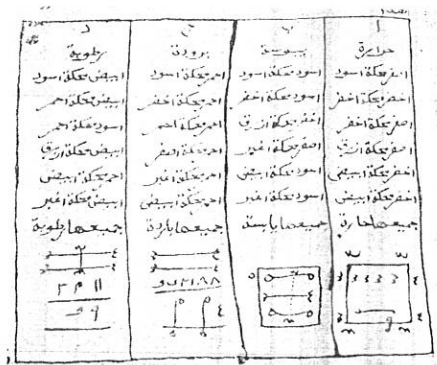


Fig. 4.3 A type of *Wafq* of *Murabba'* with property of bringing people to submission.

The “names” mentioned here are not names in the usual sense, but rather refer to the entire text of the *wafq* in fig. 4.3 above.

- *Mukhammas* (table with five rows and columns)

The above quotations from chapters three and four are related to the writer's introduction to the respective chapters. In this section I now give some quotations regarding his approach to explaining the technical configurations of a square. Several technical terms come up in the quotations below, as they do throughout the MS. Some of these terms (the eight principles of a *wafiq*) are explained at the very end of the MS (see section 4.3.5), while the Shaykh left many other terms without any explanation, as will be pointed out in section 4.4.

In explaining the configuration of *mukhammas* the Shaykh wrote [ms p. 24] the following text. The sense and even the proper vowelizing of the Arabic consonantal text are not always clear to me; the translation is only tentative.

ومعرفة أسه وتنزيله أن تجمع مفطاحه الى مغلقه فيكون 26 فضربها [فاضربها] في نصف ضلعه وهو اثنان ونصف فالجميع 65 وهو أقل عدد ينزل فيه فتسقط منه الضلع [ف] يبقى 60 وهو اسه فإذا أردت تنزيل عدد فيه فتسقط منه اسه وهو 60 وخمس ما بقي فتبدء بخمسه في المفتاح فتزيد واحدا واحدا إلى المغلق او تضرب 5 في 5 وتزيد واحدا على الحاصل فالمجموع 26 فتضربها في نصف ضلعه يحصل 65 وهو أقل عدده واسقاطه أن تنقص من 25 واحدا وتضرب الباقي وهو 24 في 2 ونصف يحصل 60 وهو اسقاطه والباقي 5 عدد الوفق له خمس صحيح وهو الواحد فابدء به في المفتاح ثم واحدا واحدا إلى تمام الوفق فان حصل كسرفأجيره [فأجيره] في مواضعه فان بقي 1 ففي أول الدور الخامس أو 2 ففي أول دور [= الدور] الرابع أو 3 ففي الثالث أو 4 ففي الثاني.

Transliteration:

Wa-ma'rifatu 'ussihi wa-tanzīlihi 'an tajma'a miftāḥahu 'ilā mighlāqīhi fa-yakūnu 26 fa-ḍribhā fī niṣf ḍil'ihi wa-huwa 'ithnān wa-niṣf fa-l-jamī'u 65 wa-huwa 'aqallu 'adad yunzal fīhi fa-tusqit minhu al-ḍil' fa-yabqā 60 wa-huwa 'ussuhu fa-'idā 'aradta tanzila 'adadin fīhi fa-tusqit minhu 'ussahu wa-huwa 60 wa-khammis mā baqiya fa-tabda' bi-khumsīhi fī al-miftāḥ fa-tazīdu wāḥidan wāḥidan 'ilā al-mighlāq 'aw taḍribu 5 fī 5 wa-

tazīdu wāḥidan 'ala al-ḥāṣil fa-l-majmū' 26 fa-taḍribuhā fi niṣf dil'ihī yaḥṣulu 65 wa-huwa 'aḡallu 'adadihi wa-'isqāṭuhu 'an tunqīṣa min 25 wāḥidan wa-taḍribu al-bāqī wa-huwa 24 fi 2 wa-niṣf yaḥṣulu 60 wa-huwa 'isqāṭuhu wa-l-bāqī 5 'adad al-wafq laḥū khumsun ṣaḥīḥ wa-huwa al-wāḥid fa-ibda' bihi fi al-miftāḥ thumma wāḥidan wāḥidan 'ilā tamām al-wafq fa-'in ḥaṣala kasr fa-'jburhu [fa-jburhu] fi mawāḍi'ihī fa-'in baqiya 1 fa-fi 'awwal al-dawr al-khāmis 'aw 2 fa-fi 'awwal al-dawr al-rābi' 'aw 3 fa-fi al-thālith 'aw 4 fa-fi al-thānī

Translation:

Its base (of the *mukhammas*) is gotten by summing its key (*miftāḥ*) and lock (*mighlāq*), giving 26 [= 1 + 25], then multiply this by half of the number of rows, which is two and a half; the total is 65, and this is the lowest number that can be put down in it [i.e. the lowest possible sum of any row or column]. Then drop (subtract) from it the number of rows [5] to get 60 which is its 'uss (base). And if you want to put down some number in it [i.e. as the sum of all rows or columns] then subtract from it the base which is 60 and divide [?] by 5; start with one-fifth of that [i.e. a fifth of a fifth] in the *miftāḥ* and proceed one by one up to the *mighlāq*. Or [you can] multiply 5 by 5 and add one to the product, the total being 26, and multiply this by half of the number of rows [2 ½] to get 65 which is the lowest of its numbers [i.e. the lowest possible sum of rows or columns]. And its (65) projection (*'isqāṭ*) is gotten by subtracting one from 25 and multiplying the remainder, which is 24, by 2 and a half to get 60, and that is its projection. The remainder (from 65) is 5, the number of the *wafq* (*mukhammas*). It has a perfect fifth, which is one [i.e. 5 is perfectly divisible by 5, giving 1]. Start with it (one) in the *miftāḥ* and then (proceed) one by one until completion of the *wafq* [i.e. up

to the *mighlāq*]. If the result were to be a fraction then complete it at its place [i.e. round off]; if the remainder is 1, put it in the first cell of row five; or 2, in the first cell of the fourth row; or 3, in the third (row); or 4, in the second (row).

ا	ب	ت	ث	د
1	2	3	4	5
هـ	و	ز	ح	ط
6	7	8	9	10
ي	ك	ل	م	ن
11	12	13	14	15
ص	ض	ع	ف	غ
16	17	18	19	20
ق	ش	ص	ض	ع
21	22	23	24	25
م	ن	ي	ك	ل
26	27	28	29	30
ز	ح	ط	ق	ش
31	32	33	34	35
ح	ط	ق	ش	ص
36	37	38	39	40
ط	ق	ش	ص	ض
41	42	43	44	45
ق	ش	ص	ض	ع
46	47	48	49	50
ش	ص	ض	ع	ف
51	52	53	54	55
ص	ض	ع	ف	غ
56	57	58	59	60
ض	ع	ف	غ	ق
61	62	63	64	65
ع	ف	غ	ق	ش
66	67	68	69	70
ف	غ	ق	ش	ص
71	72	73	74	75
غ	ق	ش	ص	ض
76	77	78	79	80
ق	ش	ص	ض	ع
81	82	83	84	85
ش	ص	ض	ع	ف
86	87	88	89	90
ص	ض	ع	ف	غ
91	92	93	94	95
ض	ع	ف	غ	ق
96	97	98	99	100

Table 4.1 *al-Mukhammas* Square

Several points should be noted about the above discussion. It seems extremely repetitious, for no obvious reason. The Arabic itself is hard to read; the unvoveled letters خمس can be perhaps *khams* “5”, perhaps *khums* “1/5”, perhaps the verb *khammis*. Pronoun reference is often unclear. The intended meaning of several crucial terms is not clear, e.g. بيت, دور, اسقاط, and especially نزل. And the instruction “one by one” is completely unspecific: which number should go in which cell “one by one”? No answer is given.

In explaining the configuration of a type of *mukhammas* which is called *maqlūb* he wrote [ms pp. 26- 27]:

مقلوب الخمس هذا فالاول [= فالأول] منها للشر مطلقا والثاني لأعمال الخير كذلك وكيفية تعيير الخالي من الخمس أن تأخذ اي اسم أو أسماء أو آية وتحسب عدد نقطه بالجمل مثاله باسمه تعالى [تعالى] رؤف عدده 287 وتضع اعداده أي الخمس في البيوت كلها سوا بيوت الجبر الخمسة وهي إما جادبه... المغربية وتسمى بسير الفيل أو اجهد وهو للمشاركة وتسمى بسير الفرس.

Transliteration:

Wa-maqlūb al-mukhammas hādā fā-l-ʿawwal minhā li-l-šarri muṭlaqan wa-l-thānī li-
ʿaʿmāl al-khayr ka-dālika. Wa-kayfiyyat taʿmīr al-khāli min al-mukhammas ʿan
taʿkhuda ʿayya ʿismin ʿaw ʿasmāʿin ʿaw ʿāyatin wa-taḥsub ʿadada nuqaṭihi bi-l-jumal.
Mithāluhu bi-smihi taʿālā **raʿūf** ʿadaduhu 287 wa-taḍaʿ ʿaʿdādahu ʿay al-mukhammas
fī al-buyūt kullihā siwā buyūt al-jabr al-khamisa wa-hiya ʿimmā Jaʿadbah...al-
maghribiyyah wa-tusammā bi-sayr al-fil ʿaw ʿAjhabad wa-huwa li-l-mašāriqa wa-
tusammā bi-sayr al-fāras.

Translation:

This is *maqlūb* [inversion] of *al-mukhammas*. The first such chart is absolutely for evil and the second is for good deeds. How to construct the empty *mukhammas* [i.e. with an empty middle cell] is to take any name or names (of Allah) or a verse (from the Qurʿan) and calculate the number corresponding to its letters [lit. “points”]. For example, *bi-smihi taʿālā raʿūf* whose number is 287 ($r + ʿ + w + f = 200 + 1 + 6 + 80 = 287$). Put its numbers in all cells except the five cells of *al-jabr* [sense unclear], which [is done] either [by] *Jaʿadbah* according to the western method [North Africa] which is called “elephant’s walk”, or [by] *ʿAjhabad* which is the eastern method and is called “horse’s walk”.

16	10	223	12	26	287
9	21	19	13	225	287
15	233		14	25	287
5	6	23	246	7	287
242	17	22	2	4	287

287 287 287 287 287

Table 4.2 Construction of *maqlūb al-mukhammas* according to the formula of 'Ajhabad

16	10	1	12	248	287
9	21	241	13	3	287
237	11		14	25	287
5	6	23	246	7	287
20	239	22	2	4	287

Table 4.3 Construction of *maqlūb al-mukhammas* according to the formula of *Ja'adbah*

In explaining the above two methods for calculation of *maqlūb al-mukhammas* the Shaykh wrote [ms p. 27]:

وقولي طريق جادبه فالجيم اشارة الى البيت الثالث وهو بيت المفتاح من الضلع الأولى والالف اشارة الى البيت الاولي من الضلع الثاني والداد اشارة الى البيت الرابع من الضلع الثالث والباء اشارة الى البيت الثاني من الضلع الرابع والهاء اشارة الى البيت الخامس منه ويجمعها قولك اجكخر وقولي أجهيد كذلك اشارة فالالف الى البيت الاولي منه والجيم الى الثالث من الثاني والهاء الى الخامس من الثالث والباء الى البيت الثاني من الرابع والداد الى البيت الرابع من الخامس ويجمعها قولك ضقسخف ومعنى قولي يجمعها قولك اجكخر او ضقسخف ان بيوت الجبر بين هذه الأحرف مع رعاية ترتيب الوضع في الاعداد فيقدم الأقل على الأكثر

Transliteration:

Wa-qawli ṭarīq Ja'adbah fa-l-jīm 'išāra 'ilā al-bayti al-thālith wa-huwa bayt al-miftāḥ min al-ḍil' al-'ūlā wa-l-'alif 'išāra 'ilā al-bayti al-'ūlā min al-ḍil' al-thānī wa-l-dāl 'išāra 'ilā al-bayti al-rābi' min al-ḍil' al-thālith wa-l-bā' 'išāra 'ilā al-bayti al-thānī min al-ḍil' al-rābi' wa-l-hā' 'išāra 'ilā al-bayti al-khāmis minhu wa-yajma'uhā qawluka 'ajkakhar. Wa-qawli 'Ajhabad ka-dālika 'išāra fa-l-'alif 'ilā al-bayti al-'ūlā minhu wa-l-jīm 'ilā al-thālith min al-thānī wa-l-hā' 'ilā al-khāmis min al-thālith wa-l-bā' 'ilā al-bayti al-thānī min al-rābi' wa-l-dāl' 'ila al-bayti al-rābi' min al-khāmis wa-yajma'uhā qawluka ḍaqsakhaf. Wa-ma'nā qawli yajma'uhā qawluka 'ajkakhar 'aw ḍaqsakhaf

'anna buyūt al-jabri bayna hādihī al-'aḥruf ma'a ri'āyati tartīb al-waḍ' fī al-'a'dād fa-yaqdumu al-'aḡallu 'alā al-'akthari.

Translation:

When I say “method of *Ja'adbah*”, the ‘j’ refers to the third cell, which is the key ‘*miftāh*’ in the first row. The ‘a’ refers to the first cell of the second row; ‘d’ refers to the fourth cell of the third row; ‘b’ refers to the second cell of the fourth row; and ‘h’ refers to the fifth cell of the same (row) [i.e. the fifth row]. These collectively can be referred to as *'ajkakhar*. In saying “*Ajhabah*”, ‘a’ refers to the first cell of the same (row) [i.e. the first row]; ‘j’ to the third (cell) of the second (row); ‘h’ to the fifth (cell) of the third (row); ‘b’ to the second cell of the fourth (row); ‘d’ to the fourth cell of the fifth (row). These collectively can be referred to as *ḡaqsakhaf*. By saying “collectively referred as *'ajkakhar* or *ḡaqsakhaf*” I mean that the cells of *al-jabr* are among these letters, taking into consideration the posting order of the numbers, with smaller preceding larger.

Except for a few parts related to the significance of the tradition of *'awfāq* and some talismanic properties of the basic square (i.e. 3x3), the entire MS is devoted to the explanation of technical configurations of the squares in the form and style quoted above. Any reader might find the above explanations of technical configurations to be opaque. For an outsider, it is, indeed, almost impossible to reduce these techniques to workable formulas without assistance from a numerologist – which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.3.5. Conclusion

After completing the elaboration of the charts of *'awfāq* and their configurations, he concludes with a closing chapter in which he explains the eight main principles upon which every chart (*wafq*) is based and how these charts are configured according to those principles. He also explains how these principles, the numbers calculated accordingly, and the associated heavenly angels and earthly spirits (Jinn) work together to attain the objectives of the actions and numbers indicated by a *wafq* [ms p. 50].

كل وفق له ثمانية أصول، وهي المفتاح والمغلاق والعدل والوفيق والمساحة والضابط والغاية والأصل... فالمفتاح أقل عدد فيه، والمغلاق آخر عدد فيه، والعدل مجموع المفتاح والمغلاق، والوفيق عدد ضلع من أضلاعه، والمساحة مجموع عدد أضلاع الوفاق كلها، والضابط مجموع وفقه مع مساحته. والغاية ضعف الضابط والأصل ضرب الغاية في المغلاق... كل وفق له ثمانية أملاك علوية وثمانية أعوان سفلية تخدم⁹ للعمل والأعداد الموضوعة في كل وفق

Transliteration:

Kull wafq lahū thamāniya 'uṣūl wa-hiya al-miftāh wa-l-mighlāq wa-l-'adl wa-l-wafq wa-l-misāḥa wa-l-ḍābiṭ wa-l-ghāya wa-l-'aṣl...al-miftāh 'aqallu 'adad fīhi wa-l-mighlāq 'ākhiru 'adad fīhi wa-l-'adl majmū' al-miftāh wa-l-mighlāq wa-l-wafq 'adad ḍil'in min 'adlā'ihī wa-l-misāḥa majmū' 'adad 'adlā' al-wafq kullihā wa-l-ḍābiṭ majmū' wafqihi ma'a misāḥatihi wa-l-ghāya ḍil'f al-ḍābiṭ wa-l-'aṣl ḍarb al-ghāya fī al-mighlāq...Kull wafq lahu thamāniya 'amlāk 'ulwiyya wa-thamāniya 'a'wān sufliyya takhdīm li-l-'amal wa-l-'a'dād al-mawḍū'a fī kull wafq.

It means:

Every *wafq* (numeric chart) has eight basic principles. These are: the key (*al-miftāh*), the lock (*al-mighlāq*), the justice (*al-'adl*), the harmony (*al-wafq*), the area (*al-misāḥa*), the controller (*al-ḍābiṭ*), the object (*al-ghāya*) and the basis (*al-'aṣl*)...In a *wafq*, the key

⁹ The letter *m* (م) is missing from the MS, which has *تخدم*.

is the lowest number, and the lock is the highest number. The justice is the sum of the key and the lock, while the harmony is the sum of a side. The area is the sum of all the sides [the intention is “sum of all the rows”]. The controller is the sum of the harmony and the area. The object is twice the controller, and finally the basis is the object multiplied by the lock... Every *wafq* has eight heavenly angels and eight earthly servants who are at the service of the action and the numbers of the *wafq*.

He simplifies the above theory according to table (4.5) below, applying the whole technical theory of the tradition to *wafq al-muthallath*, the chart with three rows and columns (table 4.4).

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Table (4.4) *Wafq al-muthallath*

In table 4.5 below [ms p. 51], the first column from the right represents the numerological value of the given principle, the second is the principle’s name, the third shows the formula to calculate the numerological value, the fourth is the associated angel, while the leftmost column gives the name of the associated earthly servant (Jinn). Following are the principles and their respective values in *wafq al-muthallath*: 1 = the key, the lowest number; 9 = the lock, the highest number; 10 = the justice, the sum of the key and the lock; 15 = the harmony, the sum of a row or a column; 45 = the area, the sum of all the cells; 60 = the controller, the sum of the area and the harmony; 120 = the object, twice the controller; 1080 = the basis, the object multiplied by the lock.

4.4 Overview of Orthography, Morphosyntax, and Rhetorical Organization

Having looked into the content of the MS, I now turn to a closer examination of some issues relating to orthography, morphosyntax, and rhetorical organization.

Generally speaking the Shaykh is a fine writer. Though I do have some concerns to be pointed out in the next section, I can safely say that the Shaykh's command of Arabic was excellent. Each part of the ms is well-organized thematically. In the poem as well as in the commentary, however, he is often so elliptical in style as to render some of the text difficult or impossible to understand, especially for modern Arabic readers.

4.4.1 Orthographical Issues

There are several orthographical issues I came across while I was examining the MS.

According to the conventions of Arabic writing style it is unacceptable to break up a word across two lines. However, in this MS there are a great many instances where words are broken up; on average one can count perhaps 4-5 instances per page. In some cases the word break is so odd that it can make the text incomprehensible except to a careful reader. For instance, there are 8 instances of word breaks on MS page 2. These words are *'asmā'ihī* أسمائه, *al-'awfāq* الأوفاق, *'ālā'ihī* ألانه, *khawfan* خوفا, *al-harariyy* الهري, *'asrār* أسرار, *ghayrihā* غيرها, *al-'asrār* الأسرار. They are broken up as follows: *asmā... 'ihī* (أسما...نه), *al-'a...wfāq* (الأ...وفاق), *'ā...lā'ihī* (آ...لانه), *khaw...fan* (خو...فا), *al-hara...riyy* (الهري...ري), *'asrā...r* (أسرا...ر), *ghayri...hā* (غير...ها), *al-'a...srār* (الأ...سرار). This pattern of breaking up words over line-ends is also noticeable in other works of Arsi scholars, and thus it may be tentatively proposed as a feature of Arsi-Arabic scribal practice.

There are also occasional spelling mistakes; for example, *fā-yaqi* فبقي for *fā-baqiya* فبقي (ms p. 18), *takhd* تخدم for *takhdim* تخدم (ms p. 50), *فوقه* for *فوقه* (ms p. 7).

4.4.2 Morphosyntactic Issues

Grammatically, I found some points of concern that need special attention. Some of these points can probably be ascribed to writing mistakes by the copyist, who (for example) does make occasional spelling mistakes as mentioned above. This seems especially plausible if we take into account the author's reputation as having a fine command of Arabic.¹⁰ Below are four clear examples of grammatical errors that I have found (not a complete list). These are:

- A. *Manzūma al-musammā* (منظومة المسماة) [ms p. 2]. "a poem called X". This shows lack of agreement in definiteness, which is wrong in Arabic. One way to correct this would be *al-manzūma al-musammā* (المنظومة المسماة) "the poem called X". However, a better meaning is conveyed if we presume that the proper reading is (منظومتي المسماة) *manzūmatī al-musammā* "my poem called X".
- B. *Alladī ka-man bā'a* (الذي كمن باع) [ms pp. 22-23]. This example shows a use of two relative pronouns for the same purpose, which is wrong; the correct form would be *ka-alladī bā'a* (كالذي باع) or *ka-man bā'a* (كمن باع) "like one who sold".
- C. *Fa-kayfā 'uḍayyi'u-hu... 'ilā man lā yuḍayyi'u-hā* (فكيف أضيّعه... إلى من لا يضيّعها) [ms p. 5]. This third example shows inconsistency in pronoun gender (*'uḍayyi'u-hu. yuḍayyi'u-hā*), where both object pronouns are coreferential. The correct forms would be *'uḍayyi'u-hu. yuḍayyi'u-hu* (أضيّع... يضيّع).
- D. *Al-bayt al-'ūlā* (البيت الأولى) [ms p. 27 and elsewhere]. This is a gender mistake: " 'ūlā" 'first' can only be used for feminine reference, while he uses it here for masculine, *bayt*. The correct usage is *al-bayt al-'awwal* (البيت الأول). Note that in the preceding text line he

¹⁰ As reported by Shaykh Aman Marfo, Oct. 21, 2009.

correctly uses the masculine form: *al-bayt al-thālith* ‘third’, and thus consistently with every ordinal number except ‘first’.

4.4.3 Rhetorical Organization

The most noteworthy organizational issue is that Muhammad’aman presents a crucial elementary concept of the tradition only at the very end of the MS. The eight principles of a *wafq* are such a basic concept that without them one cannot make even an elementary calculation of a chart. A matter of such importance should be discussed at the beginning. Why he did not do so is not clear to me.

Basic technical terms simply appear in the text, without explanation. To give just a single example, the technical term *mighlāq* مغلاق “lock” is mentioned (e.g.) on p. 19, but no definition or explanation appears until the end of the MS. Other technical terms are used but are never explained at all, e.g. *’uss* أس “base” (p. 12).

Thus it is appropriate to ask, who is the audience for whom he wrote? Is it for beginners, midlevel numerologists or experienced practitioners? In the MS, he says nothing about this.

In his discussion of the technical set-up of the charts he does not present any theoretical distinction among them. Thus, except for the obvious differences between the charts in terms of number of rows and columns, there is nothing that tells why a particular chart is configured in a particular way. For instance, he states that *wafq al-muthallath* contains only digits, but does not explain why.

4.4.4 A Host of Unanswered Questions

Despite its length and its level of detail, the MS leaves many questions unanswered. Some of these have to do with the essence of numerology. For example, according to Muhammad’aman, the purpose of numerology is to know the secrets of the names of Allah and of the verses of the

Holy Qur'an. But how this is attained in practice? Further, he asserts a clear relation between other occult traditions and numerology. Why and how do these relations work?

There are also a host of technical and practical issues which are not mentioned in the treatise.

Why is a particular chart used for a particular purpose? When should one appeal to this chart rather than that chart? When should one use (e.g.) a *mukhammas* and when a *musaddas*? Which particular *mukhammas* or *musaddas*? Are there any restrictions on what can fill the cells of a *wafq*? How exactly does a person calculate his own number? And how is numerology applied in practice?

Any reader might think of these and many similar questions. But this is not the Shaykh's theme in this book. His focus truly is on the technical architecture, the machinery, the "syntax" of numerology – not on how this machinery is to be used.

In fact, even the explanation of the technical set-up and configurations is so sophisticated that one cannot understand it without an instructor of numerology. Indeed this is a book on occultism, and for an outsider like me it is itself an occult work.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to present the contribution of an Arsi scholar, Shaykh Muhammad'aman Hadāga, to Arsi Arabic literature, with particular focus on his work on *'awfāq*.

In the first chapter, after stating the problem and setting the objectives, I discussed the historical background with particular emphasis on the history of Islam in Arsi. It is found that, although it is not easy to determine a particular date on which Islam was introduced to Arsi, one can safely presume an early contact of Islam with the area. A vast amount of oral tradition confirms the introduction of Islam to Arsi around 300 A.H. (912 A.D.). Assuming that Arsi was an extension of Shawa, these oral traditions may be confirmed by the historical evidence that Shawa was the seat of an Islamic principality under the Makhzūmī dynasty.

The question of the ethnic composition of Arsi on the eve of the introduction of Islam is not fully answered and there is need for deeper investigation.

The Oromo are basically an oral society. They have preserved their history and social experience largely through social memory. Nevertheless, a good amount of written literature was produced by many Muslim Oromo scholars, especially in Arsi, Harar, Jimma, and Wallo. Many of these literary productions are commentaries on original works produced outside of Ethiopia, though there are also many original works. Written literature in Arsi was dominated by the Arabic language, although a considerable amount of literature was produced in Afan Oromo using Arabic script, *'ajami*. Since Arabic was the basic medium of education and literary production among Oromo scholars, several questions arise regarding the reason behind the creation of *'ajami*. Why, after all, was it thought necessary by Oromo

scholars to write in Afan Oromo? Was it an attempt to bring Afan Oromo into the literary world? Or was it part of the scholars' efforts to make knowledge accessible to the common people by writing in their own language? These and other issues related to the creation of 'ajami require further study.

Looking into the subject matter of the literary works produced by Arsi scholars, we find much work on the Arabic language and literature, Islamic law, exegesis and logic. Islamic (Sūfi) mysticism, especially *manzūma*, poems praising the prophet Muhammad (pbuh), constitutes one of the major areas of literary work produced by Arsi 'ulamā'. Hagiographies of saints are also a common theme of Arsi writers. These and others Arsi genres are in need of deeper study.

Occult traditions and practices have been present in Arsi throughout its history. Currently these practices can be classified into two main types: Arabic-Islamic traditions and folk practices. Islamic occult practices follow the general theme of Arabic-Islamic occultism, though there are many situations where the occult practitioner resorts to folk occult practices. Folk practices are based on conventional magic and demonology.

In the second chapter I briefly reviewed the history and practices of occultism. I found that occult theories and practices have always been part of human history, though their nature and the attitude of the societies toward them have varied. During the Middle Ages occult traditions were respected and considered as part of scientific discourse. Numerology was considered part of mathematics, astrology as part of astronomy, and alchemy as part of chemistry.

Although occultism is discredited by modern scientists as non-scientific discourse, the belief in occult practices and traditions is still present in modern societies. This presence is not

confined to rural areas or disadvantaged groups. Many economically well-off and well-educated people maintain a strong belief in occultism.

As stated by Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke, "Occultism is based on a religious way of thinking".¹ However, all major religions have condemned deterministic astrology and occult practices such as divination and witchcraft as blasphemous.

Islamic sources recognize the existence of spirits (Jinn) and their harmful effects on human affairs. To avoid such effects, these sources provide special spells. Magic and its effects are a matter of fact in Islamic sources. However, the practice of magic is highly condemned in Islam. Orthodox Muslim jurists do not recognize any distinction between benevolent and malevolent magical practices.

There are few written sources on Ethiopian occult traditions. But there are a great many oral traditions. More studies are required to collect and study these traditions. The social impact of the presence of occult practices and beliefs in Ethiopian societies is another area I suggest for further study. Likewise the influence of Arabic-Islamic occult traditions on Ethiopian Christian occult traditions merits the attention of academic discourse. Though such influence has been noted by some scholars, more studies are required to determine whether these involve borrowing from Ethiopian Islamic occult traditions, or represent a case of direct adoption from written Arabic by Ge'ez.

Most Arsi occult traditions are oral, except the short written texts (spells, etc.) produced by practitioners based on sources from outside Ethiopia. It is noteworthy to find an original work on occult tradition by an Ethiopian scholar, which I have examined and described in the fourth chapter. According to an informant it is the only work of its kind by an Arsi

¹ Goodrich-Clarke 2004.

scholar. Shaykh Muhammad'aman followed the conventional practice of Muslim scholars by producing his work in the form of a poem and then writing his own authoritative commentary on it.

Today, the manuscript is in good condition. But it faces a high risk of decay and loss since its owner, Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman, is in his early eighties and lives in a remote village where there is no significant awareness of the importance of literary products. An effort should be made to acquire the MS by the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. I also recommend that the MS be catalogued and microfilmed for further study.

The research area has been home to numerous Arsi and non-Arsi Muslim scholars, many of whom produced literary works. Few have been studied. The presence of antique literary works such as a portion of the Holy Qur'an written on parchment, and of the archaeological site of an old mosque in Arolij, is confirmed by informants. Furthermore, the research area lies along the route which pilgrims take to Dire Shaykh Husayn in Anajina. The area is also home to several other shrines. The Arsi region would thus be a highly fruitful area for further research and study.

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List of Informants

No.	Name	Location
1	Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad'aman Hadāga	Hadāga, Sēru District, Arsi
2	Jaylan Muhammad'aman Hadāga	Adama
3	Abdussalam Muhammad'aman Hadāga	Adama
4	Shaykh Aman Marfo	Adama
5	Shaykh Munir al-Haj Ahmad	Adama
6	Shaykh Abdulla Idris	Addis Ababa
7	Abdulhaq Muhammad Ali Ta'o	Adama
8	Muhammad Husain Muhammad	Addis Ababa
9	Muhammad Amin	Addis Ababa
10	Fadil Ibrahim Sado	Addis Ababa
11	Shaykh Mahmud Hamid	Addis Ababa