Magic, Traditional Medicine and Theurgy in Arabo-Islamic Manuscripts of the Horn of Africa

*Classification and description*

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Hamburg, 19 July 2014
Dias 1
Multiple-text Manuscript Description
Identification of text levels

- the main text or texts consisting of one or more codicological units, sometimes related one to the other (comments, translations, glosses etc.)
- notes related to the codex history and/or to the text transmission (colophon, ownership notes, waqf certificates, reading notes, iğaza etc.)
- notes completely independent from the main texts and from their material expression
Bab llet-ta'awun wal-jadari taktib wa'tlaq'a 'alai 'usadik al-yamni wa'adu ktabitha wa'alahtah fa biitik fa'a 'ajib fa'alin thilak... sulmustul'ul'am musamukhhasam mul'amma

"On the plague and smallpox: write and hang on your right arm and if you write it and hang it in your house, it [the plague] will never approach that house... [invocation]"

Ms Addis Abeba, IES 266, f. 53r
“If you write these names on a paper and you put it under the pillow of the man who doesn't sleep, then he will sleep; and here they are: [invocation]”
“Text levels”

Literary works, for example

IES 00272 [Harar 36], dated 15 šawwāl 1210 A.H.-23/04/1796 [f. 111r]; multiple-text ms.

- ff. 1r-8r: كتاب بهجة الطرف في علم الحرف (The book of the joy of the glance into the science of the letters) by Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn Qurqmās (d. 1477).
- ff. 8v-10r: كتاب في علم الأرقام والاطفاق, anonymous text on numerology and magical squares.
- ff. 13r-112r: النور الاسنا في شرح الاسما الحسنى (The most brilliant light on the explanation of the most beautiful Names of God) by Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 1225).

IES 280, XIX century; multiple-text ms, main text:

- ff. 7r–30v: الجوشن الكبير (The invocation called The Big Shield) ascribed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.
“Text levels”

- notes which are scattered throughout the codices and have nothing to do with the subject of the main texts they transmit. They are usually explicit textual indications about what to do or say to obtain something with typical syntactic structures.

- the object or realization of these prescriptions, that is written amulets and talismans (ḥirz, ṭilasm, ḥiğāb)
“Amulet protection to whom who carry [it] against the evil of ğinn, men and devils; it prevents magic (سحر) and makes happy with a strong feeling of love who saw it by the truth of the basmala [...]

Ms Addis Ababa, IES 647
“The name of God the Greater. It's a cure against every illness and a protection for every anemy, for the satisfaction of the need and the venerableness that people love, and of the sustenance, of the commerce and all the treasures, God willing, [invocation]”

Ms Addis Ababa, IES 280, ff. 66v-67r and IES 247, *incipit.*
al-Būnī classification of spiritual sciences:

- numerology
- science of the magic squares
- science of the alphabetical letters
- science of the four nature
- astrological science
- science of the astral determinations
- science of the names of God and of invocations
Talismanic inscriptions:

structured like prayers and addressed to God; excerpts from the Coran in accordance with the theme of the request. To this category refers also the رقية, Coranic salmodies with therapeutic and exorcising effects used also by the Prophet; it's usually performed in case of bites, against poisons, fever, evil eye.

adjuratory inscriptions, that implies certain spirit mediation in which the name of the person is an essential element and is subjected to cryptographic procedures.

*A. Rahal, La tradition talismanique en Tunisie, 2007
Ms Montréal, McGill’s Osler Library of the History of Medicine, f. 277r, mid-thirteenth-century fragment of the Kitāb al-adawiya al-mufrada by Abū Ḥaḍrāt Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḡāfiqi (d. 1165).

Ranunculus ficaria, L.
Ms Addis Ababa, IES 1853, ff. 3r, 6r, *Iḥtiyārāt al-ayām wa-l-šuhūr* ascribed to Ḥāfar al-Ṣādiq

Hamburg, 19 July 2014
Dias 13
Thank you for your attention

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Florence, 19 July 2014
Dias 14