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Article

A Manifold Heritage: Glimpses of a Family Collection of Arabic Manuscripts in Ilorin (Nigeria) and Its Transregional Links

Stefan Reichmuth | Bochum

1. Introduction

The study of West African Arabic manuscripts has seen a remarkable increase over the last twenty years.¹ A growing corpus of documented manuscripts and inscriptions² from different parts of the region has stimulated research on epigraphy, codicology and the textual range of the Arabic scriptural and literary heritage of Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa as well as boosting research on its relationship to the wider Arab and Islamic world. After Mauritania, where several surveys of private manuscript collections have been undertaken since the 1980s,³ it was the region of Timbuktu that subsequently gained the lion's share of interest. This was largely due to the spectacular recovery and rescue of Timbuktu's manuscript collections around the year 2000, which is, in fact, still continuing at the moment.⁴ Digitisation of individual manuscripts and even of entire regional library collections like the documentation of Mauritanian libraries (Tübingen)⁵ and the large Ségou library kept by al-Ḥājj 'Umar (d. 1864) and his son Aḥmad al-Kabīr (d. 1897), now

in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris,⁶ has given a boost to comparative research on the regional traditions of Arabic writing and penmanship and on the heritage of local literature written in Arabic script.

Apart from Timbuktu and the Niger Belt, another focus of researchers' interest in the Arabic scriptural tradition south of the Sahara has also developed: the region of the old Kanem-Bornu empire and its sphere of cultural influence, which included large parts of present-day northern Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and western Chad, and the adjacent Saharan regions. The typology of West African scripts developed in the context of the work on the Timbuktu corpus has distinguished three major types of manuscripts produced in West Africa. These are (a) a 'Saharan' (*Ṣaḥrāwī*) type identifiable in the Western Sahara and radiating into the sub-Saharan region, (b) the *Sūqī* attributed to the Tuareg scholars of the Kel Es Sūq and other Saharan regions of Mali and Niger, and a residual category, (c), a 'Sudanese' (*Sūdānī*) script common in the sub-Saharan regions of western and central Sudan.⁷

Further research on the widely acknowledged role of Bornu as a centre of Qur'ānic learning and writing and on its far-reaching influence⁸ has recently resulted in closely argued

¹ For an overview of the cataloguing and microfilming activities of recent decades, see Nobili 2012/13. I am grateful to Mauro Nobili for his critical remarks on an earlier version of this article.

² See de Moraes Farias 2003.

³ Rebstock, Obwald, and 'Abdalqādir 1988; Rebstock 1989; Ahmad Ould M. Yahaya (prep.), Rebstock 1997; Yahaya, Rebstock, and Chabbuh 2003; and finally Stewart, Salim et al. 2015.

⁴ See especially Ely, Johansen et al. 1995–1998; Haidara and Sayyid 2000; for general publications related to the Timbuktu project, see Jeppie and Diagne 2008; Meltzer, Hooper and Klinkhardt 2008; *Rescue of the Manuscripts of Timbuktu – Sauvegarde des manuscrits de Tombouctou – Safeguarding the Manuscripts of Timbuktu*, ed. by CSMC 2017; and the websites *Tombouctou Manuscripts Project*, <<http://www.tombouctoumanuscripts.org/>> and *SAMATIMBUKTU, International Project Safeguarding the Manuscripts of Timbuktu*, <https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index_e.html> (last accessed 31 July 2017).

⁵ University of Freiburg, *Oriental Manuscript Resource (OMAR)*,

Datenbank, <<http://omar.ub.uni-freiburg.de/index.php?id=datenbank>> (last accessed 31 July 2017).

⁶ See the catalogue prepared during the 1980s by Ghali, Mahibou, and Brenner 1985; manuscripts can be accessed by entering their catalogue numbers on <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>> (last accessed 31 July 2017).

⁷ Nobili 2011; Nobili 2012; Brigaglia and Nobili 2013, with further references; for more samples from the Timbuktu Project, see Youbba 2008, 294f.; Meltzer, Hooper and Klinkhardt 2008.

⁸ Research on this topic was initiated by Bivar 1959, 1960, and 1968. A thorough codicological study of a Qur'ānic manuscript from Hausaland was

attempts to establish *Barnāwī* as a distinct calligraphic style of its own, with its modern derivations in central Sudan, especially in Kano and Hausaland.⁹ This novel approach goes along with a more general revision of the history of Arabic writing in the Western Sahara as well as in western and central Sudanic Africa, and it tries to open the field for fresh insights into the development of the different scriptural traditions. Seen in this light, the still current assumption of a monolithic *Sūdānī* branch of Maghribī writing does, indeed, seem highly questionable.

The challenge posed to further in-depth research on the West African scriptural tradition of Arabic is still great, due to the scarcity of dated manuscripts for the period before the thirteenth century H./nineteenth century CE and particularly to a very uneven coverage and documentation of Qur'ānic and non-Qur'ānic styles, registers and genres of writing. These still lack a convincing typology, and the amount of variation identifiable in the larger centres of Islamic learning and sometimes even within individual manuscripts still strains any assumptions concerning the differences between the major regional styles of Arabic script and their intermingling and reshaping in the course of time.

One way out of this dilemma might be by identifying and scrutinising individual owners' personal libraries of manuscripts. These presumably provide a clearer picture of the scriptural variation related to the different literary genres represented in such collections and also to their intake of manuscripts of different origins, which possibly exerted some influence on the scriptural habits of their readers. We are still a long way from having any clear idea of how such personal collections of manuscripts might have affected the reading and writing habits and intellectual outlook of their owners, and of knowing what impact such collections had on the owners' children or students and friends with whom they shared them.

undertaken by Brockett 1987. Research on the Bornu Qur'āns was resumed by a British AHRC project entitled 'Early Nigerian Qur'ānic Manuscripts' (2005–2008), conducted at SOAS (London) by Philip J. Jaggar, A. D. H. Bivar, Rosemary Seton, Dmitry Bondarev et al. <<https://www.soas.ac.uk/africa/research/kanuri/>>; Bondarev 2006. It was continued by Bondarev in an AHRC/DFG project, 'A study of Old Kanembu in early West African Qur'ānic manuscripts and Islamic recitations (Tarjumo) in the light of Kanuri-Kanembu dialects spoken around Lake Chad' (2009–2011) <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/africa/research/oldkanembu/>>, with a database of regional manuscripts established as a SOAS Digital Library, 'Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts' <<http://digital.soas.ac.uk/okim/>>; more recent contributions by Nobili 2011, Brigaglia 2011; Nobili and Brigaglia 2013.

⁹ Nobili 2011; Brigaglia 2011; Nobili and Brigaglia 2013.

The following is an attempt at finding some clues to scriptural variation at a local level in West Africa. It will offer some glimpses of a family collection of Arabic manuscripts from Ilorin (Nigeria), which was documented during two research stays in this city in 1987 and 1989, with further information being obtained during a short visit in 2012. It aims to provide material for the reconstruction of a local textual heritage and its scriptural development in the nineteenth century, focusing on samples which could be ascribed with some confidence to the pre-colonial period, which lasted until 1897 in Ilorin.

2. Ilorin and its tradition of Arabic and Islamic scholarship

For an assessment of the interaction of different styles and traditions of Arabic writing originating from central and western Sudan, Ilorin seems to be particularly well suited as a place of research. The town emerged as a centre of Arabic learning and education in the course of its establishment as a hub of migration for Muslims from the Oyo Empire and from other regions of central and western Sudan in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Its mixed population of warriors, scholars, traders, craftsmen and slaves of highly different origins provided the basis for an Islamic community which became attached to the Sokoto Caliphate as an Islamic emirate after the overthrow of its non-Muslim Yoruba ruler Afonja (c.1824) and a civil war, which had come to an end by around 1828/9.¹⁰

The early scholarly community of the town was strikingly cosmopolitan. Along with the Yoruba population, which made up the majority of the inhabitants and also became strongly committed to Arabic and Islamic learning, there were migrant representatives of older scholarly traditions from adjacent regions, scholars of Fulbe, Hausa and Nupe origin, and also early migrants from western Sudan (the Niger Belt and Futa Jallon), from the central Sudanic regions further east (Bornu and Agades) and even from eastern Sudan.¹¹

The educational practice and the literary culture which came to be established in the town reflected these diverse origins, especially in the ways of studying and teaching the Qur'ān, and also in the traditions of Arabic writing and calligraphy that made themselves felt in the course of the nineteenth century.

¹⁰ For overviews of the history of Ilorin and its role as a centre of an Islamic polity and Islamic learning in the nineteenth century, see Danmole 1980; O'Hear 1983; also see O'Hear 1997; Reichmuth 1998; Reichmuth and Abubakre 1995b.

¹¹ Reichmuth 1998, 17–64, 148–170; see also Reichmuth 1995 and 2011.



Map 1: City centre of Ilorin: Emir's Palace (Afin) and Gbodofu quarter have been marked by frames. Taken from Reichmuth 1998, detail from map 4.

3. Notes on the Gbodofu family and its position in the Nupe community in Ilorin

The manuscript material which forms the basis of this study was provided by members of the Gbodofu family of Nupe origin.¹² They still live in or are attached to their old family compound in the Balogun Fulani quarter of Ilorin called Ile Tapa Gbodofu (see Map 1).

The Nupe have played a special role in the ethno-religious make-up of the town ever since their involvement in the struggles of the early nineteenth century, when they became part of the Gambari community in the town, which included many Hausa and Gobirawa, but also Nupe and Kanneke (Kanuri) elements. The first warlord (*balogun*) of the Gambari (a man named Dose) is sometimes said to have been of Nupe origin.¹³ Some of the leading scholars of the town were Nupe, and the important office of the imam of the Gambari quarter (Imam Gambari), the third imam in the hierarchy of imams in Ilorin, has always been held by a member of a Nupe family. In the twentieth century, the

family provided the community with a number of prominent judges and Sufi leaders. The connection with the Qādiriyya is particularly strong among them. The Gbodofu family still maintains an old mosque and a Qur'ānic school of the round *zaure* type (Fig. 1), which apparently was still common among the scholarly Nupe families in the town in the 1980s. The Gbodofu family has the reputation of being the oldest Nupe family in Ilorin: their ancestors are said to have hosted Idrisu, the Nupe king who took refuge there¹⁴ around 1820 and then fought and defeated his rivals in a battle near the town together with his allies from Ilorin. The family's compound apparently served as a kind of court where the Nupe families could settle their own disputes.¹⁵ Their solitary residence in the Balogun Fulani quarter, and not among the other Nupe groups under the Balogun Gambari, would lend credit to their claim of having an ancient and unusual position. The family still has to be consulted before a new Imam Gambari is elected. Most of the other leading Nupe families are related to it by marriage or by long-standing teacher–student relationships. The members of the Gbodofu family also share an adherence to the Qādiriyya with the others, although some of their ancestors are said to have belonged to the Tijāniyya before they became Qādirīs. This is also confirmed by the existence of an old manuscript of a Tijāniyya poem, the *Munyat al-murīd*, in their manuscript collection.¹⁶ Along with the tradition of Islamic learning and with the religious and teaching offices connected with the mosque and the school, the family has come to share the normal range of professions like weaving, tailoring and other urban crafts with the commoners of the town. Some of their members have joined the public Arabic and Islamic teaching profession up to university level, which has been developing in Ilorin ever since the 1980s.¹⁷

The family traced its origins to a scholarly ancestor called al-Ḥasan, who was said to have arrived in the days of Alfa Ālimī, the Fulani scholar and preacher who

¹² I wish to express my gratitude to Abdullahi Jibril Gbodofu and Ndagi Saliu Gbodofu (d. 2012), who kindly provided information and manuscripts to me during my research stays in the town in 1987 and 1989, and to Dr Khalil Gbodofu, who was my host at the family compound during a short visit in 2012. The information I will provide in the following is mainly based on their accounts of the Nupe families in Ilorin; also see Saliu 1980, 67f. For a general history of Nupe and the Nupe Emirate of Bida in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Nadel 1942; Mason 1981.

¹³ Interview with Jimoh Balogun Gambari, Balogun Gambari Compound, Ilorin, 31 August 1987; Mallam Yakubu Gananga, Sarkin Gambari, together with Alhaji Adamu, a member of the Sarkin Gambari family, Oke Oyi, 30 August 1987. The descendants of Dose themselves trace their ancestors to Katsina (northern Hausaland); interview at their family compound, Ile Eḷeru, Magajin Aṣe Ward, Ilorin, 27 August 1998.

¹⁴ Jimoh Balogun Gambari, Balogun Gambari Compound, 31 August 1987.

¹⁵ Saliu 1980, 67.

¹⁶ Aḥmad b. Bābā al-'Alawī al-Shinqīfī al-Tijānī (d. after 1260 H./1844 CE), *Munyat al-Murīd*; on the author and text, see Rebstock 2011, vol. 1, 268ff. (no. 777, 4); on manuscripts in Ségou, see Ghali et al. 1985, 302, 395 (BnF 5734, 15a–22b); for the Gbodofu manuscript, see Reichmuth 1998, 373, where watermarks of the *tre lune* type, also with moon faces, and with the letters 'GLS' are mentioned.

¹⁷ Reichmuth 1998, 260–290, 308–320; Alabi 2015.



Fig. 1: Gbodofu family school (*zaure*).

came to Ilorin around 1817 and took over leadership of its Muslim community. *Álimi*'s sons became the first emirs after him. To al-Ḥasan reverential titles like *Shehu Imām al-A'zam* ('The Greatest Shaykh and Imam')¹⁸ and even *Wolyyi* ('Saint') were attributed, which confirms the considerable religious reputation this man and his family enjoyed.¹⁹ Ndagi Saliu Gbodofu (d. 2012), the owner of one of the one-volume manuscript collections discussed in this study, traced his own roots to al-Ḥasan via a chain of four ancestors.²⁰ He also mentioned that al-Ḥasan was of Arab origin – he was 'from Badari [Badr?] in Saudi Arabia' and is said to have migrated from the Arab lands to the Nupe region.²¹ The family name may also be related to Kpotofu-

Taiyenchi, a Nupe settlement south of the Niger deserted in the Nupe wars around 1820.²²

4. Overview of the manuscripts: observations on texts and papers

Apparently, the manuscripts had initially been owned by Imam Gbodofu Aḥmad (d. 1986). They are now in the possession of his sons Jibrīl Tunde and Ndagi Saliu (d. 2012), each of whom had inherited one of these one-volume libraries from their father. Both volumes are manuscript collections (composite manuscripts). They had been tied together between two thick cardboard covers, and they contained a large number of folios in *quarto* format (largely between 23 cm × 16 cm and 20 cm × 15 cm). One of the covers of the first collection had a grid of strings (Ar. *maṣṭara*, see n. 34) stitched to its inner side, which in earlier times had served to provide lines and margins for the text block of the copy by pressing the paper against this grid. Both volumes were kindly handed over to me on loan for some time during my research stays in Ilorin in 1987 (by Jibrīl Tunde G.) and 1989

¹⁸ Jibril Tunde Gbodofu, 23 August 1987.

¹⁹ Jimoh Balogun Gambari, Balogun Gambari Compound, 31 August 1987.

²⁰ 1. al-Ḥasan > 2. 'Abd al-Qādir > 3. Qāsim (Kasumu, d. 1956) > 4. Imam Aḥmad (d. 1986) > Ndagi Saliu (Ṣāliḥ) Gbodofu.

²¹ For a general claim to Arabic origin for the Nupe, expressed in a nineteenth-century Arabic poem written by Muḥammad al-Tākuntī, a Nupe scholar in Ilorin, see al-Ilūrī 1982, 28.

²² Elphinstone 1921, 24f., 28f. Most of its inhabitants settled in Sharagi (Tsaragi), now Edu Local Govt. Area, Kwara State, Nigeria.

(by Ndagi G.). Ndagi also showed me a collection of some prayers and magical recipes in *octavo* (the normal format for such items), some of which were obviously quite old as well and equally belonged to his heirlooms. During a short visit in 2012, an old family Qur'ān was shown to me at the family compound by Dr Khalil Gbodofu (Department of Religions, University of Ilorin).

50 texts were included in the *quarto* volume from Jibril Tunde G. and 28 in the one from Ndagi Saliu G. The works were of highly diverse lengths, which ranged between one and 20 sheets. A good number of them were incomplete, with only single folios surviving, which made identification of their titles a protracted affair. A wide range of topics and disciplines was covered, with certain fields clearly standing out: short texts and poems related to the basic doctrine of faith (*'aqīda*) were quite frequent in the first collection, for example (nine texts compared to only one in the second). The largest fields, which were almost equally shared between the two, were prose texts and poems on ethics and admonition (*wa'z*, 18 texts), with the few works on prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) (4 texts) and a number of Sufi texts (2) also largely falling into this category. Arabic poetry – pre-Islamic poems as well as poems in praise of the Prophet and Sufi poetry – also stands out in this corpus: there are 17 texts of this kind altogether, including two pieces by 'Abdullāhi b. Fodiye (d. 1829), brother of 'Uthmān b. Fodiye and one of the leading scholars of the Jihād movement in northern Nigeria who became the first Emir of Gwandu. Certain areas were less well represented: general didactics (3 texts), Islamic law (5 texts), arithmetic and numerology (3 texts), prayers and texts on special qualities (*khawāṣṣ*) of certain sūras of the Qur'ān (4 texts), and even grammar (1 text only). The collection thus shows a profile dominated by *wa'z* texts, combined with a strong interest in *'aqīda* and Arabic poetry. The number of shorter creeds reflects an outlook of scholarship which seems to go back to the eighteenth century and to the early period of the Jihād Movement. The strong literary and ethical orientation, on the other hand, falls in line with the general profile of Arabic and Islamic learning which emerged in nineteenth-century Ilorin out of the various scholarly traditions of its Muslim inhabitants.²³ Some of the texts included glosses and comments in Arabic and Hausa. What seems to be a nineteenth-century manuscript of a four-page Nupe poem in *octavo* format (entitled 'Shaykh 'Uthmān' in

²³ See Reichmuth 1998, 116–144.

the colophon), which was also found in Ndagi's collection, is yet to be edited and translated. Hopefully, it will then provide an addition to the Nupe texts in Arabic script which have recently received some attention by researchers in Nigeria.²⁴

The watermarks on the European (mostly Italian) paper found in the Gbodofu manuscripts can function as a *terminus post quem* for dating some of the texts that might well go back to the early nineteenth century.²⁵ The precise dating remains a challenge since most of the manuscripts do not include any dates in their colophons, and the watermarks and quality of the paper thus provide the most important clues for qualified guesses in this respect. The great number of variants of the 'three crescents' (*tre lune*) with or without faces, which are most common among the older manuscripts, still lack sufficient documentation for comparative purposes, and part of the initials of the paper factories found on the paper still have not been identified. Watermarks like those of Valentino Galvani (d. 1810, VG), Giovanni Berti (BG, GB), the crowned coat of arms with grapes, an elliptic coat of arms with a broad diagonal stripe with the initials 'GM' under it,²⁶ and the Venetian pattern of the large 'three hats' (*tre cappelli*), otherwise mostly documented as originating in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, may indicate the oldest group of manuscripts in the collection, although no clear periods of time can be determined without any further comparative research work.²⁷ Terence Walz's observation on *tre lune* variants with moon faces (produced by the Galvanis and by numerous Venetian papermakers), which derived from his study of Egyptian court records, shows that these first appeared in the 1820s and had replaced other moon patterns by the 1840s. This may also be of comparative value

²⁴ Ndagi 2011, with reference to Aboki 1991.

²⁵ On Ilorin, see Reichmuth 2011, 218f. Watermarks in different manuscripts have already been mentioned in conjunction with some of the Gbodofu manuscripts in Reichmuth 1998, 340–379. For a general overview, see Walz 2011, who offers a comprehensive overview of the present state of research

on the paper trade between Egypt, Tripoli and West Africa, also including ample references to the Italian and French paper mills and their watermarks; for a thorough analysis of the paper and watermarks of a nineteenth-century Qur'ān from northern Nigeria, see Brockett 1987.

²⁶ Reichmuth 2011, 218f.

²⁷ Bihar 1959, 332, reports a watermark consisting of 'three top hats' for a letter directed by the ruler of Bornu, 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Kānemī (1835–53, 1854–80) to the Sultan of Sokoto, Mu'ādh b. Muḥammad Bello (1877–1881); this would limit the date of the letter to 1877–1880. He does not indicate whether this is the larger or smaller variant of the hats.



Fig. 2: Gbodofu Qur'ān leather cover.

as a *terminus post quem* for manuscripts in Nigeria, even if variants of the *tre lune* proper were apparently still found there much later.²⁸

5. Bornu influences and scriptural diversity

A first attempt at assessing the character and diversity of the Arabic manuscripts which can be traced to nineteenth-century Ilorin²⁹ already documented a strong Bornu influence on the early stages of the literary culture. The oldest dated Arabic manuscript which could be identified in the town, a copy of Jazūlī's famous prayer book *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, had been written in Bornu's capital Birnin Gazargamo in 1148 H./1736 ce.³⁰ With its tall and angular letters, it provided a good example of the old 'Bornu court hand' described by Bivar and later by Bondarev.³¹ A more rounded and flowing style of Qur'ānic script which was also developed in this tradition was attested by a scholar who was also of Bornu descent (Būṣīrī b. Badr al-Dīn, d. 1915) and whose commitment to the Bornu ways of Qur'ānic learning can be seen in a copy of the Qur'ān that he wrote from memory.³² Another legal

manuscript, an exemplar of Khalīl b. Ishāq's *Mukhtaṣar* with copious glosses taken from different commentaries, which was found in the possession of a family also tracing its origin to Bornu, showed a script which was close to the angular Bornu type, but augmented with Maghribī patterns, something which could also be found in the illustrative parts of the mentioned *Dalā'il* manuscript.³³ This leads us to the conclusion that the writers had different scripts or variants at their disposal, with their choice depending on the character and genre of text or paratext. The diversity of the scriptural culture in nineteenth-century Ilorin with its textual and pictorial elements could also be seen in the other samples of that study.

The Gbodofu collection also includes seemingly old texts and textual fragments which testify to this diversity. In the following, some of them will be presented and discussed with the textual and scriptural history of Arabic literary culture in central Sudan in mind. As research on the collection is still in progress, however, many of the results and conclusions stated here are only preliminary in character.

6. The Bornu model of Qur'ānic calligraphy in Ilorin: a Qur'ān written by different hands

The Qur'ānic manuscript which could be documented during my last visit to the Gbodofu family in 2012 appears to be close to the standard of nineteenth-century Qur'āns which can still be found in Ilorin today, and appears to have been

²⁸ See also Brockett 1987, 49f.; the author also argues on a similar basis for a mid- nineteenth century dating of the Qur'ān he studied.

²⁹ Reichmuth, 2011.

³⁰ The manuscript was found in Ile Mekabara (Balogun Alanamu Ward, Ilorin) and was described in some detail in Reichmuth 2011, 223–227.

³¹ Bivar 1968, 7; also see Bivar 1959, 328–336, and Bondarev 2006, 122.

³² Reichmuth 2011, 227ff.

³³ Reichmuth 2011, 231ff.



Fig. 3: Beginning of the Gbodofu Qur'an manuscript.

strongly shaped by Bornu tradition (Figs 2–5). The original brown leather wrapper has been preserved, with a fore-edge flap and an envelope flap which apparently had a cord or thong attached to its tip, by which the work was tied together. Its remarkably rich decoration was patterned by punched semicircles, dots and embossed ruled lines. The borders and fore-edge flap were given a black tint, as was the central field on the rear of the cover. The leather was lined with green cloth. This kind of ‘Sudanese binding’ and the form of decoration used here have also been attested elsewhere in Sudanic Africa.³⁴

An initial examination of the manuscript gave me the impression that its pages, in spite of their largely uniform general style, indicate a certain shift from an angular and regular pattern to a more rounded, less regular and rather coarse one, which goes along with widening margins. This becomes especially clear on the page preceding the last few suras. The yellow or brownish *hamza* dots, common in this

tradition of Qur'anic calligraphy, have been abandoned on the later pages for black ones. The first page shows traces of a *tre lune* watermark with a faced moon below it (Fig. 3, right-hand page, left-hand margin). The old layout still prevails in a less regular execution, clearly written by a different hand, on the page before the final one (Fig. 4, right page, already with black *hamza* dots). The final page (Fig. 4, left page), perhaps a later addition or replacement, differs in terms of its layout, having much wider margins (with only 11 lines rather than the 14 used in the rest of the book) and a spaced, angular script which – although without any contrast between thicker and thinner lines – has much in common with Kano models, which became especially popular with the spread of printed texts.³⁵ The paper also changed from a *tre lune* type with a strong surface shaped by the laid lines to a smoother and more absorbent one, which was occasionally also found in other pages and was obviously less resistant to oxidation.

Both the binding and the calligraphy used testify to the special status of the Qur'an in local scriptural practice

³⁴ Brockett 1987, 56, picture 1, sample from the Sudanese Mahdiyya; Déroche 2005, 292; Gacek 2009, 25f., 33, 104; Meltzer, Hoper, and Klinghardt 2008, 78, 84f., 88, 100 (note the grid of strings, called *mastara*), 130.

³⁵ Brigaglia 2011.

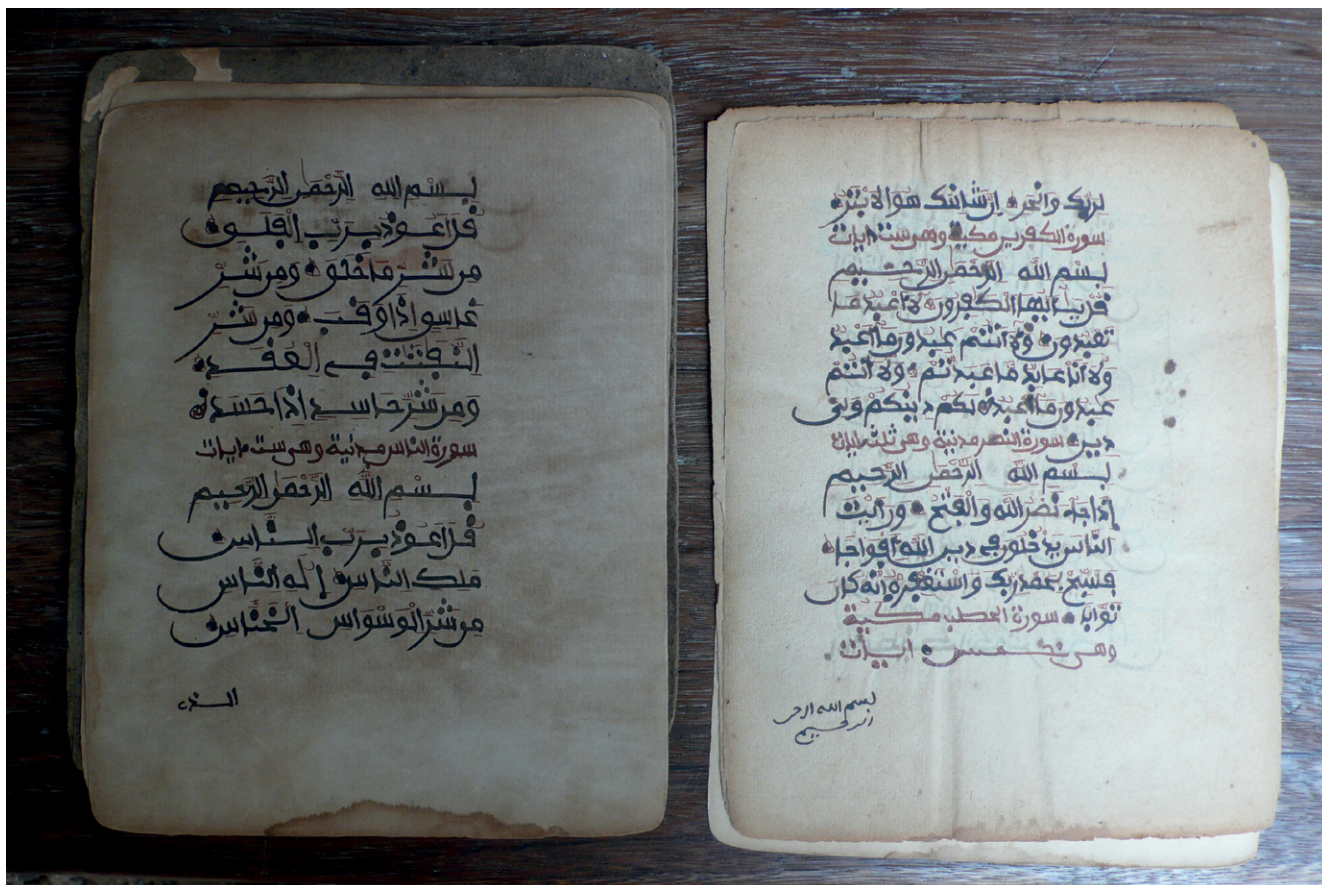


Fig. 4: Final pages of the Gbodofu Qur'an manuscript.

and to a tradition of Qur'an writing which remained fairly consistent since the nineteenth century, but finally underwent a significant change towards a more angular and spaced script. It appears closer to the Kano model, which was to have a strong impact on the development of Arabic printing in the region.

7. Some unusual theological and Sufi texts, with scripts yet to be classified

There are three fragments of theological and Sufi texts in the Gbodofu one-volume libraries which have not been the subject of any research yet despite their impact on central Sudan; indeed, as yet, some of them have not even been attested as manuscripts in this region. Apart from their textual testimony, all of them seem to belong to the oldest stratum of the Ile Tapa Gbodofu collection and stand out on account of their scriptural particularities.

7.1 Abū 'Imrān al-Jawrā'ī's 'Aqīda – an Ash'arite creed criticised by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye

As mentioned above, texts on the Unity of God (*tawhīd*) and the basic theological doctrines of Islam are strongly represented among the older works in the Gbodofu collection. They indicate a theological interest in rational theology (*kalām*) according to Ash'arite doctrine, which was typical of the scholars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in central Sudan and was also pursued with vigour by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d.1817) and his followers.³⁶ This even involved the introduction of texts from authors from other parts of the Islamic world who belonged to different theological schools such as the Māturīdiyya, widespread among scholars of the Ḥanafī school of law in the Ottoman Empire, Central Asia and India. A Māturīdite 'aqīda, the poem *Bad' al-amālī* written by Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ūshī al-Farghānī (d.1173)³⁷ is also represented in our corpus. The reason for 'Uthmān b. Fodiye's

³⁶ Reichmuth 1998, 126; Brenner 1987; van Daalen 2016.

³⁷ The Gbodofu manuscript of this creed has already been presented and discussed by Daub 2014.

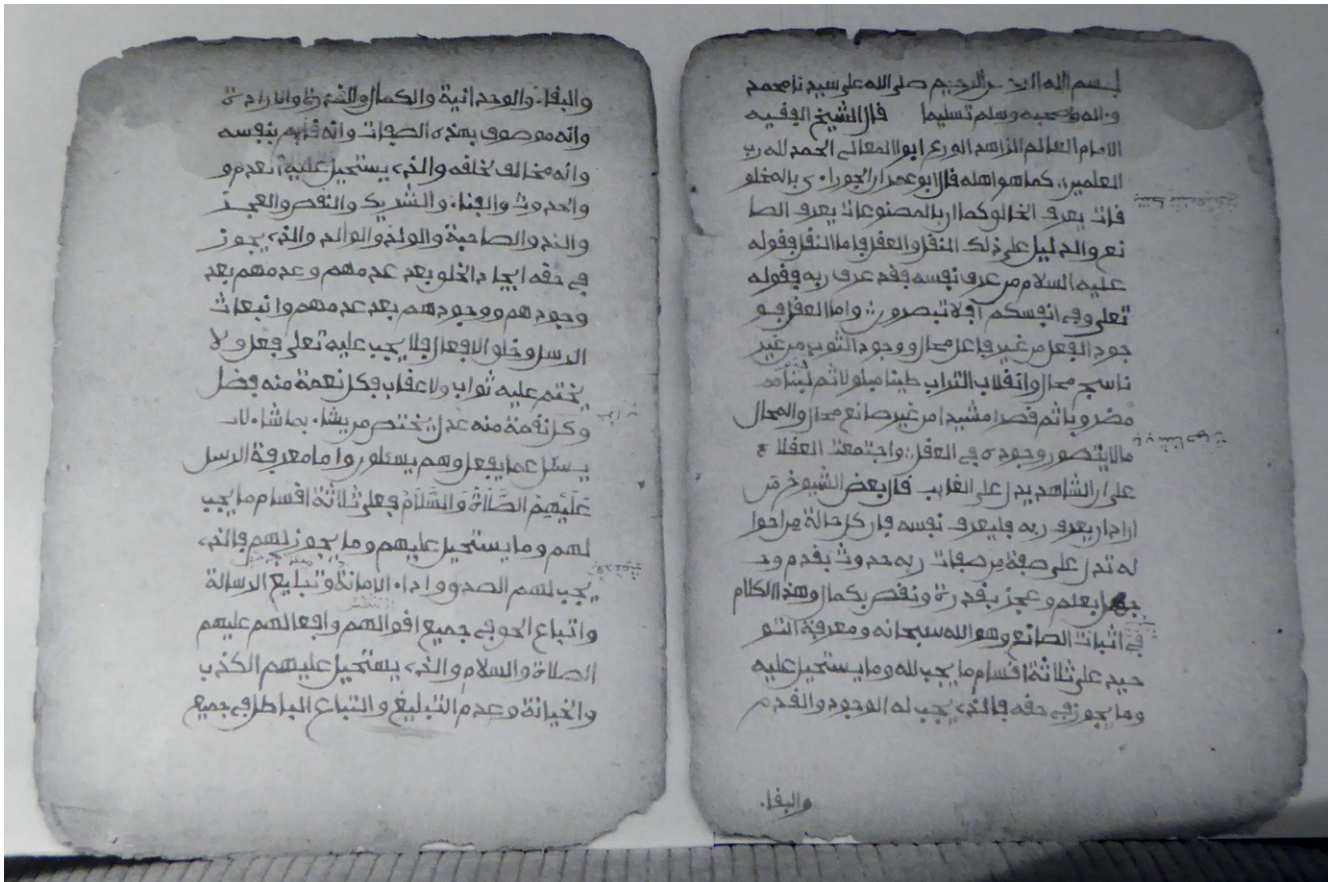


Fig. 5: Gbodofu copy of al-Jawrā'ī's Kalām text 'Aqīdat al-muwaḥḥidīn.

strong interest in theological doctrinal texts can be related at least partly to the intensely discussed question of the 'faith of the imitator' (*īmān al-muqallid*), i.e. the religious status of unreflected acceptance of religious authority in questions of doctrine. This had been widely discussed in different parts of the Muslim world since the seventeenth century. The radical position of the North African Ash'arite theologian Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d.892 H./1486 CE) had also gained predominance in West Africa; he regarded all imitation (*taqlīd*) in questions of the creed as amounting to unbelief.³⁸ The issue was of great relevance for 'Uthmān b. Fodiye's religious movement as well, which relied to a large extent on the support and religious mobilisation of ordinary believers. One of 'Uthmān's polemical writings, 'The Fortress of Understanding' (*Hiṣn al-afḥām*), challenged this radical opinion and tried to refute it at length. The aforementioned

Māturīdite poem *Bad' al-amālī* also explicitly supports the acceptability of the *īmān al-muqallid*.³⁹

Among the theological authors strongly criticised by Ibn Fodiye was a scholar named Abū 'Imrān al-Jawrā'ī (Jūrā'ī?), whom he quoted in his *Hiṣn al-afḥām*⁴⁰ with a text entitled 'The Doctrine of the Believers in the Unity (of God)' (*'Aqīdat al-muwaḥḥidīn*) (Fig. 5). Al-Jawrā'ī expressed his strong opinions about the priority of rational understanding of God's existence and other matters of belief over the devotional acts, and about the spiritual danger of blind imitation in questions of the creed. The author is probably identical with a scholar from Fās of the same name who is mentioned in some biographical works as being the teacher of two prominent Mālikite jurists of the earlier eighth H./

³⁸ El-Rouayheb 2015, 173–203; Reichmuth 2004, 150f.

³⁹ See the text in *Majmū' muḥimmāt al-mutūn* 1369/1949, 21, line 16. A theological manuscript from the Timbuktu region documented in Meltzer, Hooper, and Klinkhardt 2008, 70f., also discusses the question of the *īmān al-muqallid*.

⁴⁰ Siddiqi 1989, 89ff.; Arabic text, 79ff.

fourteenth century CE.⁴¹ His lifetime would thus fall into the period around 700 H./1300 CE. On the grounds of his strict Ash‘arite positions, he could be regarded as a theological predecessor of Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī.

Five other copies of this once apparently popular but long discarded text are extant in the Ségou library in Paris,⁴² while others are in the Centre Ahmad Baba in Timbuktu⁴³ and in the Data Record Centre of the Bayero University Library, Kano.⁴⁴ Another one was mentioned by Brockelmann for the Escorial.⁴⁵ The name of the author, which is spelt differently in the manuscripts and sources, still has to be clarified; *Jawrā’ī* (or *Jūrā’ī*) seems to be the most widespread version. The title of the text is not absolutely clear either.

The incomplete Gbodofu manuscript has seven pages.⁴⁶ It begins with an initial saying of a ‘Shaykh Abū al-Ma’ālī’, which obviously refers to the famous Ash‘arite theologian Abū l-Ma’ālī ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d.478 H./1085 CE), who might appear to be the author at first sight. But the text immediately continues with a quotation from al-Jawrā’ī, and a comparison with a seventeenth-century copy in Paris⁴⁷ shows that the initial reference to al-Juwaynī is missing there. Al-Jawrā’ī’s authorship can thus be established for the Gbodofu version as well. The comparison equally shows that only the final page is missing from the manuscript. The extant text also includes the quotations found in Ibn Fodiye’s *Ḥiṣn al-afhām*.⁴⁸ The paper appears to be quite old and does not have any watermarks. The bold and angular handwriting

exhibits some remarkable features: its strongly angular letters *rā’*, *hā’* and *wāw*, the independent *hā’* with an upward stroke to the right, the sharply hooked *dāl* and the vertical orientation of the *alifs* bear some resemblance to the *sūqī* type of script which was developed by the Kel Essuq Tuareg scholars in Mali.⁴⁹ A Sufi manuscript from neighbouring Aïr (Niger) which was published by H. T. Norris and whose first folios are markedly different from and older than the rest⁵⁰ also comes in for a comparison. The strongly indented *sīn* and *shīn* differ from both, however, and draw the text closer to the Bornu court script, especially to the samples of the diplomatic letters of the Shehus of Bornu dating from the nineteenth century, which were presented and analysed by Bivar.⁵¹ It might therefore be regarded as another derivative of the older Bornu patterns, leading in a direction that still needs to be followed up by further research. A few notes in Hausa can be found on the margins of this remarkable text, which testifies to the calligraphic taste and strong theological interests of its writer and early owners.

7.2 Fragment of a Shādhilī handbook of Sufi ethics (Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Sikandarī, d.1309, Tāj al-‘arūs wa-uns al-nufūs): a local copyist taking over from a foreign one

Although the Shādhiliyya Sufi *ṭarīqa* did not develop a significant and lasting presence in Central Sudanic Africa, the writings of some Shādhilī authors like Aḥmad Zarrūq (d.1494) and especially al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī (d.1691) enjoyed considerable popularity in Sufi and scholarly circles. Works by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Sikandarī (d.1309), head of the Alexandrian Shādhilīs of his time and especially famous for his collection of Sufi aphorisms (*ḥikam*) and his influential Sufi manuals,⁵² have not been attested much in that region up until now. The Gbodofu manuscripts (Figs 6 and 7) include a folio which could be identified as part of his handbook of Sufi ethics entitled ‘The Bridal Crown and the Intimacy of the Souls’ (*Tāj al-‘arūs wa-uns al-nufūs*).⁵³ The text of the fragment calls for active self-education in the love of

⁴¹ al-Qāḍī al-Miknāsī 1973, 2, 402 (Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Affān al-Jazūlī, d. 741 H./1340 CE); al-Kattānī 1425 H./2004 CE, vol. 3, 180 (Abū l-Ḥasan al-Zarwīlī (d.719 H./1319 CE).

⁴² Ghali, Mahibou, and Brenner 1985, 342: BN 5500, 134b–147a; 5566, 140a–144b; entitled *Aqīda jayyida fī l-tawḥīd*; without a title: BN 5340, 9–11 (1048 H./1638 CE) ‘al-Jarā’ī’; 5437, 235–238; 5650, 56a–b, author as ‘al-Jurādī’.

⁴³ Ould Ely, Johansen et al., 1995–1998, vol. 1, 188 no. 634 (author stated as ‘al-Jūrādī’).

⁴⁴ Siddiqi 1989, 180, n. 181; Ar. text, 79, n. 2; 81, n. 1.

⁴⁵ GAL S II, 992, also stated as ‘al-Ḥurādī’.

⁴⁶ See Reichmuth 1998, 359: its format is 22 cm x 16.5 cm and the initial page contains 19 lines, while the others only have 17 lines.

⁴⁷ BnF Ms. 5340, ff. 9–12. The name *Jurādī*, given by Ghali, Mahibou, and Brenner 1985, 19 (presumably based on other manuscripts), does not match the one given in the headline, which – at least on the scan available in the internet – reads *Jarā’ī*.

⁴⁸ Ms. Gbodofu, p. 5f.; cf. Siddiqi 1989, 79ff., transl. 89ff.

⁴⁹ As described by Nobili 2011, 126–131. A *sūqī* text from the nineteenth century can be found in Norris 1990, 10f.

⁵⁰ Norris 1990, 21, 26–29.

⁵¹ Bivar 1959, Letters I–III, 328–336.

⁵² Nwyia 1986.

⁵³ Format: 22 cm × 16 cm, 16 lines; text in al-Sikandarī [2006], 32, line 1 and lines 14–35.



Fig. 6: Fragment of *Shādhilī* handbook of Sufi ethics by Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, p. 1.



Fig. 7: Fragment of *Shādhilī* handbook of Sufi ethics by Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, p. 2.

God and stresses the necessary assistance of the Prophets (*anbiyā'*), saints (*awliyā'*) and the pious (*ṣāliḥīn*) for this endeavour. Love of God can be measured by the emotional eagerness to pray and to ask for His forgiveness, and by the avoidance of doubt in Him.

This manuscript is also unusual because of its handwriting: most of it shows a well-trained hand with a script that has some striking peculiarities like the very short denticles of the letters *bā'*, *tā'*, *thā'*, *yā'* and *sīn*; and a final *yā'* which is often written with a short downward stroke to the left. *Hamza* and isolated final *yā'* often look the same, like rounded hooks opening towards the right. A curved *rā'* equally occurs as a variant, as does the v-shaped *hā'* in middle position, otherwise common in Western Sudan. Red ink is used for the highlighting of certain words, names and phrases. A floridly decorated pause mark (*mawqif*) can be found in the left-hand margin of the first page. The last eight lines have been written by a local hand which appears less sophisticated and much coarser, with larger letters that are also more angular. A comparison with the printed text reveals many mistakes made by the second copyist. The manuscript version has different types of *tre lune* watermarks with and without moon faces.

The very angular and regular script of the first hand still remains without any attested parallels. Some basic Central Sudanic elements, like the vertical strokes of *tā'* and *zā'*,

are recognisable. The script may also be related to the wider sphere of Central Sudan, showing influences which still have to be traced and which – for the time being, at least – make the manuscript as unique for the region as the text itself.

7.3 'The Ḥadīth about the Preventing by the Preventers' (*Ḥadīth nahy al-nāhīn*) – Sufi admonitory stories written by a Western Sudanese hand?

This *wa'z* text, which has so far only been attested by a printed edition produced by a Yoruba scholar from Ikirun (western Nigeria) and published in Egypt in 1948,⁵⁴ is represented by its first page among the Gbodofu manuscripts (Fig. 8).⁵⁵ It is a collection of stories illustrating the seven major unforgivable sins, related by the Prophet Muḥammad as told by Moses (Mūsā b. 'Imrān) to Joshua (Yūsha' b. Nūn), and augmented with other *wa'z* material. The origin and textual history of the various stories in the compilation have yet to be verified.

⁵⁴ al-Mukhtār 1948; the text of the manuscript page is on p. 7ff.; Reichmuth and Abubakre 1995a, 493–449; Ogunbiyi, 1999, 122f.; al-Mukhtār's edition has been included in 'Abd al-Jawād 2010, 446-476.

⁵⁵ The format of this manuscript is 21 cm × 16 cm, 21 lines. There are no watermarks, and laid lines are visible.

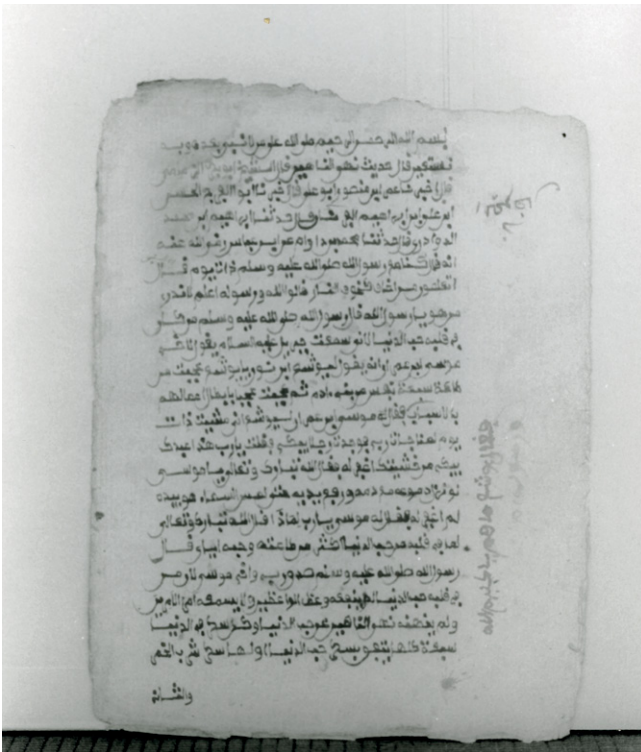


Fig. 8: Gbodofu manuscript, *Ḥadīth Nahy an-nahin*.

The script of this text, although clearly related to Central Sudanic models (e.g. with the indented *sīn*, the shape of the *hā'* and the vertical stroke of the *tā'*), shows some peculiarities which tend to create an overall impression of the page which evokes Western Sudanese or even Maghribī patterns. There are a number of features which contribute to this impression:

- a) the strong regularity of the lines and the fairly large number of them (21 altogether),
- b) large and bold final bends of a number of letters (*sīn*, *qāf*, *lām*, *nūn*, *wāw*), which help to create a vivid and florid impression of the whole page,
- c) *alif* often slightly curved,
- c) strongly curved *rā'*, sometimes placed under the preceding letter,
- d) *kāf* sometimes written with a strongly curved and rounded upper part,
- e) final *yā'* sometimes written as a downward stroke or as a small curved hook on the line.

Although the paper used for the manuscript is without any watermarks, the character of the script (for which no later parallels have been identified up until now) lends weight to the assumption that it was produced sometime in the early

nineteenth century. The general impression would seem to indicate a strong Western Sudanic influence on the copyist's handwriting. Bivar⁵⁶ records the transcript of a letter from the Pasha of Tripoli to Muḥammad Bello, Sultan of Sokoto, in the Sultan's Library (Sokoto), the script of which he describes as 'an elegant and unusual Maghribi hand'. The photographs of this letter show a very specific merging of North African and Central Sudanic scriptural traits, where, contrary to North African practice, the vertical stroke of the *tā'* is also preserved. As with the *Nahy al-nahīn* manuscript sheet (Fig. 8), the origin of the copyist remains unclear. The two cases may serve to illustrate the diverse range of scripts which fed into the scibal culture of Central Sudan in the nineteenth century, and possibly also the quite unique synthetic ways of handwriting, which would sometimes emerge from contact with different scripts.

8. Imru' al-Qays: a pre-Islamic poet and his *dīwān*

Pre-Islamic poetry has belonged to the literary canon of higher Arabic studies in West Africa for a long time. Fragments of the *dīwāns* of two of the famous Jāhiliyya poets, Imru' al-Qays, the oldest Arabic poet, and 'Antara, are also represented in Ndagi Gbodofu's volume.⁵⁷ Whereas the copy of the second one is apparently of a more recent date (presumably from the colonial period), the *dīwān* of Imru' al-Qays is written on paper with watermarks showing the abbreviation 'VG', which goes back to the paper mill run by Valentino Galvani (d.1810). It also includes *tre lune* marks with faced crescents and a moon in a shield, which Walz attested for Egypt from the 1820s onward.⁵⁸ It may well belong to the first half of the nineteenth century.

The order of the poems in the *dīwān* and also the verse order of the poems themselves largely follow the version established by al-Aṣma'ī (d.831 H.), the famous philologist of the early Abbasid period, which was edited and commented upon by the Andalusian scholar al-A'lam al-Shantamarī (d.1083 H.).⁵⁹ This is also the version which was used for the modern Egyptian edition of the *dīwān* by

⁵⁶ Bivar 1959, 344–349; plate IV.

⁵⁷ Reichmuth 1998, 374.

⁵⁸ Cf. Walz 2011, 87f.

⁵⁹ GAL I, 309, S I 542.



Fig. 9: Gbodofu manuscript of the *dīwān* of Imru' al-Qays, end of *Mu'allaqa*.

Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm.⁶⁰ The twelve folios of the Gbodofu manuscript include the complete texts of the famous *Mu'allaqa* (following the Aṣma'ī version) and of the second poem (with minimally varying order), but only a reduced version of the third one. Only four verses of the fourth poem are extant. The text then sets in again with poem no. 19, following the order of the *dīwān* again up to no. 29, after which it breaks off.⁶¹

The large script is typical of the commentary genre.⁶² The layout leaves ample space for interlinear and marginal glosses. The script itself again shows a Central Sudanic hand with a mixture of Western Sudanic or *Ṣahrāwī* features, especially the final upward bends of *bā'* and *tā'*, the strongly curved *dāl* and the curved variant of *rā'*.

The interlinear and marginal glosses (the latter being arranged clockwise around the text) are mainly of a lexical character. At first glance, they seem to combine different strands of the commentary tradition which grew around Jāhiliyya poetry.⁶³ Some of them are translations in local languages, apparently Nupe and Hausa, often marked as foreign words by the note 'non-Arabic' (*'ajam*). There are abbreviated references to other books and commentaries, which still await identification. At the end of the *Mu'allaqa*, on the sample page (Fig. 9, left-hand margin), the reader is informed by the copyist about a local scholar from whom he obtained his information. He calls him *m-y-s-t-w*, which should probably be read as *Mai-satū*, and seems to refer to a Qur'ānic specialist able to write the Qur'ān from memory (an activity called *sātū* in Hausa).⁶⁴ The names *K-th-y th-w-*

⁶⁰ Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm 1984.

⁶¹ The Gbodofu manuscript thus includes poems 1–2 (both complete), 3–4 (both incomplete) and the shorter pieces of the Ibrāhīm edition, 19–29.

⁶² 11 lines per page (the first three pages have 17 lines). See the example discussed in Reichmuth 2011, 231ff.

⁶³ See e.g. on *saqī* (v. 1): a) *munqaṭi' al-raml* (al-Shantamarī, in Ibrāhīm 1984, 8); b) *mawḍi' mā tasāqaṭa min al-raml* (al-Tibrīzī, d. 1109, Lyall 1894, 1); both can be found among the glosses on f. 1v.

⁶⁴ Bargery 1951, 912: *sātū* 'writing the Qur'ān from memory'. I am grateful to D. Bondarev (Hamburg) and N. Dobronravin (Sankt Petersburg) for their remarks on the language of the notes in this manuscript.



Fig. 10: Gbodofu manuscript, Ibn Fāris, *Mukhtaṣar siyar Rasūl Allāh*.

n-w-ā and the *nisba* (*al-B-s-ā-nī*) are yet to be identified (the latter possibly referring to Bussa, capital of northern Borgu). In another gloss on the initial page, it is stated that the book preceded the Prophet in the world by 600 years!⁶⁵ Should we read this as an indication of the pre-historical aura of the Jāhiliyya poetry within the historical frame of local Islamic scholarship?

9. Aḥmad b. Fāris: all the Muslim needs to know about the life of the Prophet (*sīra*)

The biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet and its sacred and eschatological qualities are widely transmitted and celebrated in West Africa with prayer texts and praise poems. Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) also requires a sound knowledge of his life and the alleged context of the various revelations.

The classical *sīra* books like those of Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hishām are only rarely attested for West Africa, however.⁶⁶

The demand for general knowledge of the Prophet's life is met in this collection by an old *sīra* abridgement which summarises important information concerning the genealogy and life of the Prophet, including his marriages, his *hijra* and the dates of his military campaigns up to his death, his weapons, horses and property, etc. It goes back to the Iranian lexicographer Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Fāris (d.1005 CE) and runs under titles like 'Abridged Biography of the Messenger of God' (*Mukhtaṣar siyar Rasūl Allāh*) and 'Abridgement of the Genealogy of the Prophet, His Birth, Upbringing and Mission [...] (*Mukhtaṣar fī nasab al-nabī wa-mawlidihī wa-mansha'ihī wa-mab'athihi [...]*).⁶⁷ The title of the complete manuscript in the Gbodofu collection (Fig. 10) stresses the duty of the male Muslim to know these facts by heart (*Dhikr mā yajib 'alā al-mar'*

⁶⁵ Fol. 1^v: right-hand margin: *hādihā l-kitāb sabaqa l-nabī ṣ-l- 'm fī l-dunyā bi-sitti mi'ati sana*. The common account of Imru' al-Qays' life and death would, of course, locate him in the sixth century CE.

⁶⁶ An incomplete copy of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* can be found in the Ségou collection, BnF Ms. 5641, 1a-156b; Ghali, *Inventaire*, 187.

⁶⁷ GAL I, 130, SI 197f., no. 6.

al-muslim ḥifzuhu min nasab rasūli Llāh wa-mawliidihi wa-mansha`ihi [...]). Other West African manuscripts of this text are yet to be identified. *Tre lune* and *tre cappelli* watermarks with the letters ‘BG’ (probably standing for ‘Giovanni Berti’)⁶⁸ suggest a date around the middle of the nineteenth century or perhaps earlier. Glosses in the margin of the sample page (with passages on the Prophet’s horses) refer to the famous ‘Life of the Animals’ (*Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*) by al-Damīrī (d.1405).⁶⁹

The script appears very bold, written with a pen with a rather broad nib, which gave the strokes a width that was almost constant throughout. The handwriting resembles other writing I was able to view during my research in the town in other manuscripts by Nupe scholars and in photocopies from the Nupe area. It remains to be seen whether it follows a regional pattern.

The manuscript is unusual because of its text (which has still not been attested yet in West Africa), and its bold type of script which might have been cherished by Nupe scholars, but which, in one form or another, also seems to represent one of the calligraphic options more generally available in Central Sudan.

10. Concluding remarks

The collection of Arabic manuscripts from Ilorin, which was documented at the end of the 1980s and has been presented here, still needs to be fully assessed and described. With the kind permission of the Gbodofu family, an annotated web publication of the photographic material is now in preparation. The preliminary results show the library of an old family of Nupe scholars from Ilorin that had been active in the town since the early nineteenth century. Its content still retains much of the older scholarly profile which reaches back into that period with a diversity that shows the far-reaching contacts of the scholarly community of Ilorin, and a local literary canon that was still in the making. The old interest in Ash‘arite theology comes out as clearly as a strong ethical and Sufi orientation combined with a solid grounding in Arabic poetry. Ethical and literary interests were to gain special importance for the preaching activities and the educational reform movements of the twentieth century, which have shaped the socio-cultural history of Ilorin ever since the colonial period.

⁶⁸ Walz 2011, 100.

⁶⁹ A nineteenth-century copy of this mediaeval Arabic zoology (dated 1247 H./ 1831 CE) is extant in the Ségou Library (BN 5369, 1–158; Ghali, Mahibou, and Brenner 1985, 28.

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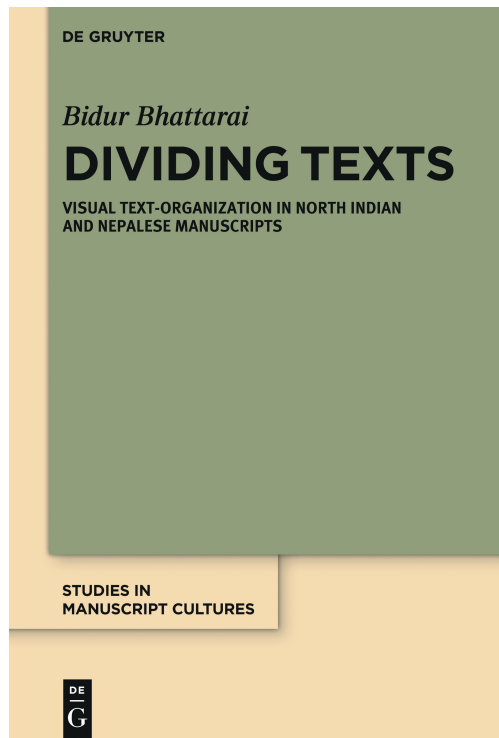
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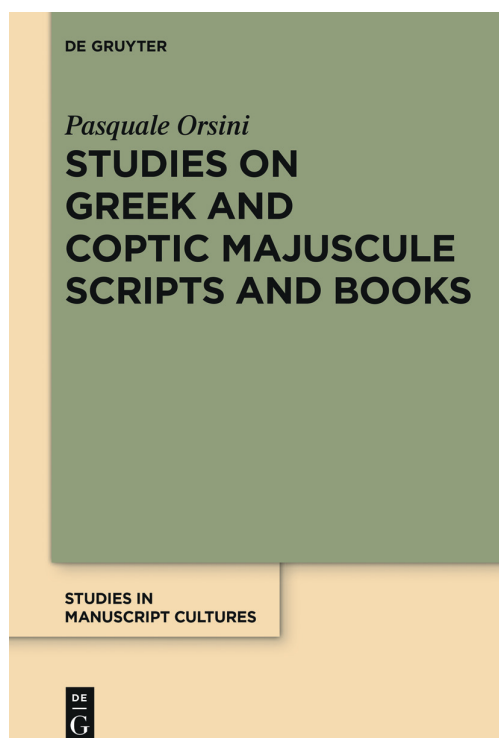
Forthcoming



10 - Dividing Texts: Visual Text-Organization in North Indian and Nepalese Manuscripts by Bidur Bhattarai

The number of manuscripts produced in the Indian sub-continent is astounding and is the result of a massive enterprise that was carried out over a vast geographical area and over a vast stretch of time. Focusing on areas of Northern India and Nepal between 800 to 1300 ^{ce} and on manuscripts containing Sanskrit texts, the present study investigates a fundamental and so far rarely studied aspect of manuscript production: visual organization. Scribes adopted a variety of visual strategies to distinguish one text from another and to differentiate the various sections within a single text (chapters, sub-chapters, etc.). Their repertoire includes the use of space(s) on the folio, the adoption of different writing styles, the inclusion of symbols of various kind, the application of colors (rubrication), or a combination of all these. This study includes a description of these various strategies and an analysis of their different implementations across the selected geographical areas. It sheds light on how manuscripts were produced, as well as on some aspects of their employment in ritual contexts, in different areas of India and Nepal.

Forthcoming



15 - Studies on Greek and Coptic Majuscule Scripts and Books by Pasquale Orsini

The volume contains a critical review of data, results and open problems concerning the principal Greek and Coptic majuscule bookhands, based on previous research of the author, revised and updated to offer an overview of the different graphic phenomena. Although the various chapters address the history of different types of scripts (i.e. biblical majuscule, sloping poitend majuscule, liturgical majuscule, epigraphic and monumental scripts), their juxtaposition allows us to identify common issues of the comparative method of palaeography. From an overall critical assessment of these aspects the impossibility of applying a unique historical paradigm to interpret the formal expressions and the history of the different bookhands comes up, due to the fact that each script follows different paths. Particular attention is also devoted to the use of Greek majuscules in the writing of ancient Christian books. A modern and critical awareness of palaeographic method may help to place the individual witnesses in the context of the main graphic trends, in the social and cultural environments in which they developed, and in a more accurate chronological framework.

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